

THE  
ANNUAL  
OF THE  
SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF CAUCASIA

NUMBER 2

1990

LAK ORAL POETRY IN TURKEY:  
A TRANS-NATIONAL PHENOMENON

Victor A. Friedman  
*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

The publication of specimens of Lak literature outside the USSR and, since 1940 in an orthography other than Cyrillic, is an extremely rare occurrence. Almost as rare, perhaps, is the legal publication in Turkey of literature in a non-Turkic language of a Moslem minority living in Turkey. To this we can add the fact that the trans-national phenomenon of Daghestanian peoples in Turkey acquires additional significance with today's situation in Eastern Europe and the USSR. Although the popular information/entertainment media often refer to *changes* rather than a *situation*, in fact, from the point of view of national aspirations and tensions what strikes the attention of the experienced observer is precisely the fact that nothing has changed in the past century or two but rather that which was suppressed simply has resurfaced. The Daghestanian peoples in Turkey fled there as refugees from Imperial and Soviet Russia, and current developments have rekindled old hopes. All these facts lend both significance and relevance to a specimen of Lak oral poetry published in *Dağıstan ve Dağıstanlılar* 'Daghestan and the Daghestanians' by Şerafeddin Erel (Istanbul, 1961), and so I have undertaken to bring the poem to the attention of Caucasologists who might otherwise not be aware of its existence.

Erel was born in the Lak aul of Çuvkül I (calçinmur) (Turkish Sukra I, Russian Covkrá I) in the Kkul (Russ. Kulí) region of Daghestan. He participated with Sait Şamil Bey, a grandson of Imam Shamil, in the North Caucasian Republic's war for independence (1918-1920). His book is concerned primarily with the history of Daghestan, with special attention to its importance in the history of the Turkic peoples and to the struggles of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His history of Lakkia and the rest of Daghestan provides a significantly different point of view from that available in Russian sources. The work also has chapters on geography, ethnography, religious and legal institutions, culture (education, language, literature, folklore, art), economy, and a biographical dictionary. The sources cited in the bibliography of almost one hundred items were for the most part published in Turkey before

1945, including many important older manuscripts such as Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname* (written in the seventeenth century), but postwar Turkish, as well as Arabic, Russian, French, German, English, and Dutch items were also utilized.

In the chapter on culture, Erel provides eight specimens of poetry: seven in Turkic (Azeri, Kumyk [Kumuk], and Crimean) and one in Lak. With the exception of a few Kumyk dance song lyrics in the following chapter, all the Turkic poetry is concerned with Shamil, heroism, and Daghestan's struggle for freedom. While the Lak verses are lyric and do not explicitly refer to the foregoing themes, their position squarely in the middle (fourth of seven) of a group of poems that do, and the fact that the poetry samples are placed after a brief discussion of the Russian suppression of the use of Turkish and imposition of the Cyrillic alphabet in Daghestan might indicate that Erel chose this lyric poem because it could be seen as having political resonances (lost freedom, exile, etc.). Erel introduces the poem simply as *Lak lehçesinde söylenmiş birkaç mısra* 'a few lines of oral poetry in the Lak idiom' (pp. 213-214). I give them below exactly as published followed by an Latin transcription of literary Lak orthography with a literal interlinear translation. This is followed by Erel's Turkish translation and my own English rendition, which stays somewhat closer to the Lak original but takes into account Erel's stylistic and grammatical changes in his Turkish version, apparently made for esthetic purposes. (The parenthetical material in the Turkish version is Erel's.) I conclude with some comments on linguistic aspects of the poem. (For abbreviations of grammatical terms, see the end of the article.)

1. Ne levgun bezviyev şulli hiril zumardey
2. Hirivun dehse elmas ttun hal hunssa külniya
3. Vey levgun bikâviyev buhttul zunttal bekürdey
4. Nâk mikirey harf tuti ttun lakınssa külniya
5. Yeluglerçe halhunssar hirivun dehsse elmas
6. Ziya husse ttul ömrü zene kabikânsari
7. Luglerçe lakınssari nâk mikirey harh tuti
8. Vey lavgussa ttul laçin kure kabikânsari

1. na \lavgun \bazivijav \şşjulli \x'x'iril \zumardaj  
I-ABS \ go-PA-GER-1 \ stick-1SG-PRES-COND \ green \  
sea-GEN \ shore-SUP-ESS

2. x'x'irivun \dahssa \almas \ttun \xxal \x'unssa \külñija  
sea-IN-LAT \ fall-PRES-PTPL-4 \ diamond-ABS \ I-DAT \  
see-ROOT \ become-FUT-PTPL \ know-be-COND
3. vajlavgun \ bikâvijav \ bjuxtul \ zuntul \ bakurdij  
woe-ROOT-go-PA-GER-1 \ be-1SG-PRES-COND \ high \  
mountain-GEN \ head-PL-SUP-ESS
4. njak \ mikiraj \ xxjarxx \ tuți \ ttun \ ljaqqinssa \ külñija  
azure \ ice-SUP-ESS \ grow-PA-ROOT-4 \ flower-ABS \ I-DAT \  
find-FUT-PTPL \ know-be-COND
5. jaluhtarça \ xxal \ x'unssar \ x'x'irivun \ dahssa \ almas  
search-ITER-PRES-COND-PTPL \ see-ROOT \  
become-3SG-FUT \ sea-IN-LAT \ fall-PRES-PTPL-4 \  
diamond-ABS
6. zija \ x'ussa \ ttul \ o'rmu \ zana \ qqabikânsar  
ruin-ROOT \ become-PRES-PTPL \ I-GEN \ life-ABS \  
come-back-ROOT \ not-be-3SG-FUT
7. Luglarça \ ljaqqinssar \ njak \ mikiraj \ xxjarxx \ tuți  
seek-ITER-PRES-COND-PTPL \ find-3SG-FUT \ azure \  
ice-SUP-ESS \ grow-PA-ROOT-4 \ flower-ABS
8. vajlavgussa \ ttul \ laçin \ kura \ qqabikânsar  
woe-ROOT-go-PA-PTPL-3 \ I-GEN \ falcon-ABS \ return-ROOT  
\ not-be-3SG-FUT

Ben yeşil denizin kıyılarında dururdum, (ömrümü geçirdim)  
Denize düşen elması bulacağımı bilseydim.

Ben yüksek dağların doruklarında perişan bir halde dolaşmak  
isterdim

Mavi buz üstünde biten güle rastlayacağımı bilseydim.

Uzun aramalar sonunda denize düşen elmas belki görülebilir

Ama akıp giden ömrümün dönmesine imkân yok.

Aramakla buz üzerinde biten gül belki bulunabilir

Lâkin uçup giden Laçinimin (bir kuş) dönüp gelmesine ihtimal  
yok!

I would have stayed on green sea shores

If I had known I would see a diamond falling into the sea.

I would have wandered woebegone on high mountain peaks

If I had known I would find a rose growing on blue ice.

Searching long and hard one might see a diamond falling into the  
sea

But my futile life will not return.  
 Seeking diligently one might find a rose growing on ice  
 But my woebegone Falcon will not come back.

The Çuvkül-I dialect belongs to the A'sttikkul-Vix'ul (A'sttikuli-Vixli) dialect group, and is characterized by the shift of both labialized and non-labialized palatals to dentals (č > c, š > s, etc.) except in some loans and a small number of native words (Xajdakov, S. M. *Očerki po lakskoj dialektologii*, Moscow, 1966, pp. 102-106). The poem does not reflect these features, which could be attributed to orthographic or phonological influence from Turkish in the case of affricates, but not in the case of fricatives.

**On the Literary Lak version.** The form *harf* [4] was clearly a typographical error. Erel's Turkish orthography does not usually distinguish the various velar and post-velar stops and fricatives of Lak, although he does indicate glottalized [k̚] by means of a circumflex on the preceding or following vowel in seven out of ten occurrences. Moreover, the use of dotless <i> after <k> in lines 4 and 7 as opposed to <i> elsewhere is intended to indicate that the preceding <k> stands for a post-velar, in this case [q̚]. This is in line with Turkish practice, according to which a plain velar (Arabic *kaf*) would usually be followed by a front vowel (*i*) and a post-velar (Arabic *qaf*) by a back vowel (*ı*). Erel uses the same convention as literary Lak for the other so-called geminates, and the only instances of differences from the literary norm in this respect in prevelar consonants are *şulli* for *ššjulli* [1], which might reflect some sort of interference from the Çuvkül I dialect, and *dehse* for *dahssa*. Erel's use of <e> where literary orthography has <a> or <i> and the vacillation between <v> and <u> (e.g. *leugun* [1] but *levgun* [3]) represent renditions of Lak pronunciation. Erel does not distinguish the pharyngealized vowels (orthographic <ja, ju> after consonants, <a', o'> elsewhere), and his spelling of *ömru* for Literary Lak *o'rmu* 'life' must be taken as the influence of Turkish (nominative *ömr* or *ömür* 'life,' definite accusative *ömrü*).

In the literary Lak version, my spelling two words as one or one word as two [3, 5, 8], the insertion of the infinitive vowel in *bazivjavu* [1], the spelling *o'rmu* [6], the dropping of *-i* in the third person future in *-ssar* [6, 7, 8, 9], and the dropping of the infinitive vowel in the past participle *lavgssa* [8], as well as the other

differences mentioned above, are all in accordance with the latest edition of *Lakku mazral orfografijalul slovar'* (Orthographic dictionary of the Lak language) (H. B. Murqqilinskij, Maxačkala, 1989).

## ABBREVIATIONS OF GRAMMATICAL TERMS

ABS	absolute
COND	conditional
DAT	dative
ESS	-essive
FUT	future (all finite futures are unmarked; Lak also has a marked assertive or categorical future, which does not occur in this poem)
GEN	genitive
GER	gerund
IN	in-
ITER	iterative
LAT	-lative
PA	past
PL	plural
PRES	present
PTPL	participle
ROOT	root (unsuffixed words or morphemes acting as modifiers, usually followed by finite verbs with which they form lexical units; orthographic practice varies: they may be written together with or separate from the verb)
SG	singular
SUP	super-

Arabic numerals in final position refer to grammatical class, otherwise, i.e., when followed by SG, they refer to person