

## Dance Research Report: Trabzon & Artvin 2018

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### ABSTRACT

Anatolia has a profound dance tradition. Turks who migrated from Central Asia established a new civilization in Anatolia, thereby adding to the cultural characteristics of civilizations from ancient times. The acceptance of Islam also plays an important role in the establishment of this civilization. Dance is an important expression of identity and one of the cultural components of Anatolia. The concept of traditional Turkish folk dances today has been the focus of attention of many researchers both from Türkiye and abroad. The joint work of Turkish and Serbian dance researchers, which started in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was interrupted for many years. With the encouragement of Selena Rakočević, one of the important dance researchers, Daniela Ivanova-Nyberg, Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin and İdris Ersan Küçük came together, and international research was carried out in the Black Sea region many years later. The research that they carried out is reported in this article.

**Keywords:** Trabzon, Artvin, ethnochoreology

**Submitted/Başvuru :** 14.03.2023

**Accepted/Kabul :** 06.04.2023



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## Introduction

The academicians gathered in Trabzon for the III. International Music and Dance Studies Symposium organized by Trabzon University State Conservatory between 17–20 October 2018. At the end of the symposium, a plan was created to conduct research in traditional dance environments in Trabzon and Artvin. A group, which provides traditional dance training in the center of Trabzon, was chosen as the research object to visit on October 19, 2018. The community, whose full name is Trabzon Youth Sports Club Association (*Trabzon İmece, Gençlik Spor Kulübü Derneği*) still meets in an apartment near Ganita and it is known as the *İmece Association* for short. A visit was made to the association building on the Tabakhane slope, where the study was carried out, with a group of researchers consisting of Selena Rakočević, Daniela Ivanova-Nyberg, Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin and İdris Ersan Küçük.

Interviews and rehearsal shootings were held in the training hall of the *İmece Association*. A team of 13 girls and another of 13 boys each rehearsed their show. Then the same teams performed again with their teachers, while the names of the dances were called out for the camera during the shooting. The girls' team was accompanied by Çağatay Tahmaz and the boys' team was accompanied by Tolga Şamlı. The age group of both groups was between 12 and 17. The girls' team performed the *horon kurma*, *Haçka atlaması*, *düz horon*, *Sürmene sallaması* and *Maçka izme horonu*, while the boys' team performed the *horon kurma*, *sallama* and *sıksara*, respectively. Then, interviews were held with *kemençe* player Selim Seyis and trainers Çağatay Tahmaz and Tolga Şamlı who accompanied both groups. In this interview, Selena Rakočević was asked by whom the girls' movements were created. Çağatay Tahmaz stated that the arrangement of these girls' dances was carried out by his father Hüseyin Tahmaz<sup>1</sup> in the early 2000s in the light of the information received from Ömer Parlak who is a *zurna* and *kaval* player from the Sürmene district of Trabzon.

Another one-on-one meeting with Selim Seyis took place. The subject of this meeting was about the performance of the *kemençe*. First, a *yol havası* sample was recorded and then Selim was asked how he started playing the *kemençe*. It turned out that playing the *kemençe* had been his father's<sup>2</sup> profession, so Selim started playing when he was a child, first by copying the movements with bean sticks and by singing from his mouth. Information was given about the *yol havası* that had been played at the beginning of the visit, particularly regarding the typical occasions when it would be played. The researchers were told that it was performed during the journey from the village to the hamlet and from the hamlet to the plateau during transhumance (Gedikoğlu, 2016, p. 386). The transhumance is a tradition in which the *horon* and *kemençe* find their natural environment. This tradition covers the summer months and festivals are held in the middle of this period. The main aim of transhumance is for the benefit of livestock, but in recent years it has also become a touristic feature. Festivals are held in the middle of the transhumance period and a very productive atmosphere is created for dance in the high plateaus (Duman, 2011, pp. 489–493). This atmosphere was re-enacted for us with the *kemençe* performance of Selim Seyis and *horon* performances of İbrahim Aydın, Tolga Şamlı, İdris Ersan Küçük and Çağatay Tahmaz. This started with a short *horon* consisting of the *horon kurma*, *sallama* and *sıksara* series. Finally, Tolga Şamlı played the *zurna* and İbrahim Aydın played the *davul* (drums) and provided a sample of the melodies accompanying this series of dances. The *davul* and *zurna* are very suitable instruments for outdoor performances of the *horon*. These instruments are capable of raising crowded circles with their high decibel volume in the high plateaus (Selimoğlu, 1997, pp. 104–108).

After the proceedings in Trabzon came to an end, İdris Ersan Küçük, Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin and Selena Rakočević set off on 20 October 2018 for the town of Borçka in Artvin with a private vehicle. The research group, which participated in a wedding held at the *Harika* Wedding Hall in the Arhavi district of Artvin while on route, made various recordings and observations here. This wedding hall is a large venue suitable for dancing, built with today's architecture. The show was performed at the wedding by a team organized by folk dance teacher Ersin Altın for income, and the stages of the wedding were all caught on camera as part of the research. First, the bride and groom came into the middle of the hall with slow steps walking between sparklers and performed the couple dance, called the 'first dance', accompanied by dim lights and romantic Turkish pop music. As is well known, the word 'romantic', which was translated into Turkish from the word 'Romance', meaning poetic in old French, has the feature of adding emotional meanings such as love and melancholy to the word that comes before it (Say, 2008, p. 86). Romantic Turkish pop music usually consists of love-themed songs using Latin instruments played in bolero or rumba rhythm. The popular feature of songs in this style can be explained by the fact that they gain the forefront in a short time and are forgotten as quickly as possible (Erol, 2017, p. 79). After the couple had danced, the official wedding ceremony was held in the presence of the witnesses by the couple answering 'yes' into a microphone. This was followed by a cake ceremony and gifting ceremony. At

<sup>1</sup> Hüseyin Tahmaz is one of the pioneers of Trabzon and Giresun region's *horon* masters. Especially his choreographic works on women dances are well known around the conservatories and folk dance associations. He is retired from Karadeniz Technical University as a folk dance teacher.

<sup>2</sup> Hasan Seyis is a famous *kemençe* player of Akçaabat district of Trabzon and he is father of *kemençe* player Selim Seyis.

the wedding of the young couple the Artvin folk dance team, composed of 6 girls and 6 boys, took the stage and performed a dance choreographed by folk dance teacher Ersin Altın. The girls in the team also took part in the henna party. Afterwards, *Roman* dances were performed by 6 girls. The team performed *Atabarı*, *kız horon*, *Acara horon*, *deli horon*, and finally *Hemşin (Ĝtom)*<sup>3</sup>, accompanied by playback music. While the *Roman* dance and Artvin folk dance is typically performed in the form of a stage for the bride and groom to watch, the *Hemşin horon* at the end of the show, where the live performance is performed with the *tulum*, is attended by all the guests. The *tulum* instrument is known as a military tool according to Turkish written sources in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and in archaeological findings from the Assyrian period (Küçük, 2023, p. 27). Today, the *tulum* accompanies the dances in the region in which easy movement sentences are performed based on long repetitions in the form of a circle. An important point that researchers agree on is the need to see the dance in the natural habitat in which it is typically performed. This wedding was an example of the commercialization of dance and reflected the practices of city life. According to research about 35 years ago, weddings in Artvin last 3 days. On the first day, there is a henna night, the next day is a wedding procession, and then there are two days of entertainment, which continues with the tradition of the *makar* table. Relatives of the groom request various gifts accompanied by rhymes at the wedding house, and the leading person who sings these rhymes is called a *makar* (Akman, 2002, p. 19). In this research, in contrast to what happened in the past, a performance of a *Roman* dance was seen. Thus, Selena's attention was drawn at this wedding to the sight of the *Roman* dance that she had previously observed in the Balkans. Although the *Roman* dance is not performed as a representation of local culture in Arhavi, it has found audiences in the context of the stage. As a result of this research, it was observed that the *Roman* dance is performed in a wide environment stretching from Serbia to Türkiye's Georgia border. Undoubtedly, Selena draws attention to the subject from an outside perspective that provides this awareness. At this point, it is necessary to mention the 'Lom's, the Black Sea gypsies living in Artvin, but there is no data that the *Roman* dance identified in this study is related to the dance culture of the Loms. This is because the Lom population in Artvin does not resemble the gypsy dance culture found in the Balkans. It is thought that the Loms were a group that moved to the north in the gypsy migration from India to the West (Chiladze, 2018, p. 6). For other Turkish researchers with an insider view, the other dances performed at the wedding, apart from the Artvin folk dances, were stage shows like Anatolian fire as part of the culture industry which is a theory of Frankfurt School (Adorno, 2021).

In shows like Anatolian Fire, the main element is the performance by ballet-trained bodies; furthermore it would be more accurate to state that the bodies that did not receive ballet training represent the artificiality of Anatolian Fire mannerism in their performances. Combining traditional dance with ballet is not a new idea, and it is known that this idea has been involved in the art policies of many governments for over half a century. For example, traditional dances are taught by Halil Oğultürk in the ballet department of the Ankara State Conservatory, one of the first ballet organizations in Türkiye. In 1952 the *Kolo* Ensemble from Belgrade performed at the Ankara Opera House. The Minister of National Education of the time, Ahmet Tevfik İleri, admired this group and was inspired by it. The group was led by Olga Skovran, and Halil Oğultürk was later assigned to establish such a group in Türkiye. Over a period of ten months, Halil Oğultürk studied and analyzed the *Kolo* group with Olga Skovran in Belgrade. When he returned to Türkiye, the minister of national education had changed and thus the establishment of a *Kolo*-like community did not take place for bureaucratic reasons (Oğultürk, 2007, pp. 138–140). Of course, Halil Oğultürk's experiences in Belgrade indirectly affected Turkish folk dances. In the light of this information, it is understood that the interaction of Turkish and Serbian dance research dates to the 1950s.

For this reason, it can be thought that this research, which Selena Rakočević encouraged us to conduct, will contribute to the cultural diplomacy between the two countries after many years. This research has not been financially supported by any official institution. The research was carried out with the motivation of professional dedication by some of the dance researchers who united for the purpose of the symposium, and it has been very productive.

Without waiting for the end of the wedding, the researchers moved to Borçka. They were hosted in the house of Türkan and Orhan Küçük, a couple in Borçka, and tasted the delicacies of Borçka's local cuisine. Selena closely observed an example of a secular family structure in Borçka, Türkiye. The next day, the research ended, and the return journey started. To summarize, a group preparing for a folk-dance competition in Trabzon was accompanied to the rehearsals. After this a wedding ceremony was witnessed in Arhavi, where the local culture has been kept alive, and finally, the research ended with an observation of daily life in Borçka. In the preparation of this report, we used camera footage personally taken by Selena Rakočević during the research and shared with İdris Ersan Küçük and Mehmet Öcal Özbilgin.

<sup>3</sup> *Ĝtom* is a Georgian word which means 'jumping' and a moment in the *Hemşin* dance but it is also used instead of name *Hemşin*. This *Hemşin* is different from Borçka *Hemşin* with its 7 time measure feature and is typically performed in Artvin region.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

**Grant Support:** The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

**Hakem Değerlendirmesi:** Dış bağımsız.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

**Finansal Destek:** Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

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### How cite this article

Küçük, İ.E. (2023). Dance Research Report: Trabzon & Artvin 2018. *Konservatoryum – Conservatorium*, 10(Suppl.1), S95–S98. <https://doi.org/10.26650/CONS2023-1264925>