

Traditional Songs and Music of the Korçë Region of Albania

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By

Eno Koço

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To my aunt Evangjelia

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FOREWORD

Kënga Karakteristike Korçare (Korçare Distinctive Song) is the cradle that has rocked the lyrical soul of the aristocratic city of Korçë. This song remains a treasure and it is impossible to misuse. The only way to make the song belong to you is to absorb it by singing it.

Then, inside you the love waters will bubble and the pride will glow for this city. Korça gives the country's cultural life a dimension of solidity and civilisation.

The study of the Korçare Distinctive Song is a worthy mission.

Teodor Laço

Writer

2003

*Kënga karakteristike korçare është djepi që ka
përkyndur shpirtin lirik të këtij qyteti aristokrat.*

*Ajo mbetet një thesar që është e pamundur të dypëndo-
rosh. Në vetmja mënyrë e vërtetimit të saj, është të bësh
promën tënde, duke e kënduar.*

*Atëherë, brenda teje do të gurgullojnë ujrat e dashurisë
dhe do të ndërrojnë tonet për qytetin që i jep kulturës
si rendit një përmasë soliditeti dhe qyteterimi.*

Studimi i saj është një mision fisnik.

*Teodor Laço
Shkruar.*

PREFACE

This book is concerned with the repertory of traditional urban song and music of the Korçë area in general, and the *karakteristike* (characteristic) or ‘distinctive’ song of the city of Korçë, Albania, in particular.

The urban song is, in fact, the popular music of the town; however, among the other urban song areas of Albania, the Korçë area is known to be musically distinctive solely because of this specific style of song which will be discussed later in the book. I would like to point out that when I was writing this material as part of my dissertation in the 1990s, the *Kënga Karakteristike Korçare* (Korçare Distinctive Song)¹ had been little studied as a subject in its own right either by Albanian or foreign musicologists or ethnomusicologists, though it is one of the most popular phenomena of Albanian musical culture.

The first half of the 20th century marked the climax of an evolution which started in the 19th century with the oral tradition of urban song in Korçë, and in the course of its development it acquired a new branch, namely, *karakteristike*, the ‘characteristic’ or ‘distinctive’ song. Admittedly the translation of *Kënga Karakteristike Korçare* into Korçare Distinctive Song seems to be an odd name for a genre. It is, however, a translation as close as possible to the original Albanian, denoting the *characteristic* songs of Korçë (or the *characteristic* choir/group of Korçë, which sings them). The term *characteristic* connotes ‘peculiar’ or ‘specific’: songs which are not only different to the traditional urban songs of Korçë, but set apart from any kind of song, whether folk, popular and traditional urban or art song, composed and performed among the Korçë people. The English translation ‘Korçare Distinctive Song’ is cumbersome, and throughout this book I prefer to use an alternative, the Albanian original, *Kënga Karakteristike Korçare*, (KKK).

In Albania the term *popullore* (popular), which is close to the Italian *popolare* or the Russian *narodnaya*, than to the English ‘popular’, is used in a somewhat wider sense to encompass the music that, with the growth

¹ Both forms will be used throughout the book: *Korçare*, as an adjective, which means (music) of or from *Korçë*, and the latter, the town of Korçë, as a noun. Furthermore, the Albanian word ‘kënga’ (song), a singular noun, will be also used as ‘këngët’ (songs), a plural noun.

of towns, began to develop distinctive characteristics which tended to be accepted by most Albanians. The repertoires covered by *popullore* songs embrace not only urban and folk songs, but also Saze music and are sometimes elaborated folk and urban music (urban lyric), however, this is not the case with *Kënga Karakteristike Korçare*, KKK (Korçare Distinctive Song). If the latter music tradition is restricted to its immediate area, the *popullore* songs or music cover the whole Albania. If a great part of *popullore* music inclines towards Middle Eastern inspiration (melodic, emotional and modal), the KKK and Nassi's songs show a significant move towards a Western concept (Westernised harmonic layers, tempered intonation and, to a certain degree, the art music conception of phrasing). Korçare traditional urban music and songs and the KKK since the mid-19th century, are classified into two separate categories; the first is sung by traditional urban and rural solo singers, the second by the amateur group singers of the Korçë area.

This book also aims to provide answers to some basic questions about KKK (Korçare Distinctive Songs), such as: What is unusual about this type of song? Does the genre represent a unique phenomenon within Albanian music? What sources did its first musicians make use of? Who sang it initially? What aspects, if any, does this genre share with kindred southwest Balkan songs or songs from further afield, and what distinguishes it from them?

A look at the traditional music of Korçë in the mid-19th and early 20th centuries requires tracing both its roots and the conditions which led to the emergence of KKK. A considerable number of recordings made by amateur groups after WWII, as well as recordings by other 'serenata' singers of the same period, demonstrate that its first impact on Korçare music was more vividly felt during the first half of the 20th century. Those early *karakteristike* (distinctive) songs were inspired by the local, everyday life environment, as well as by social and historical events; they were beautifully shaped, and rich in emotional expression.

Doris and Erich Stockman felt that, before the second half of the 20th century, 'the entire musical life of Albania was determined by folk music' (Stockmanns 1980, 197). However, urban lyric songs and KKK show that, while Albania's musical life may have been heavily influenced by folk music during the first half of the 20th century, by the beginning of the same century that influence was no longer strong enough to dominate it entirely. It is also often implied that the KKK were not as genuinely national as the traditional urban music of the towns, as well as that of the mountains and countryside. Yet it is no less part of the country's musical history, particularly in the 20th century, and equally, is an expression of the

Korçare local spirit and culture; it has been, and is still today a necessary part of Albanian daily life.

Since the beginning of the 16th century, Turkish influence pervaded all aspects of Albanian life, not least music, but by the beginning of the 20th century attempts were made to avoid some emblematic Middle Eastern features in urban song and to inject more typical southwest Balkan and Western elements. With the growth of a nationalistic awakening (particularly after the League of Prizren, 1878)—and later, after the independence of Albania in 1912—the *karakteristike* (distinctive) songs, composed or adopted initially on the extreme western edge of the Ottoman Empire, represented a fashionable version of the local urban song. The new type of song, the KKK, aimed to represent, more or less, a north Mediterranean musical culture, and a distinctly recognisable southwest Balkan regional character.

As it is known, it was difficult for Turkish monophonic music to influence the traditional and folk music of south Albania, because of the predominance of multipart pentatonic unaccompanied or accompanied music in that region. However, this book also aims to briefly introduce the Korçare urban song and urban lyric song, which were based on practical use of the Turkish modes in Albania and were introduced during the Ottoman occupation of the Balkans. The urban song of Middle Eastern modal inclination not only adopted many elements from Ottoman modal scales but also borrowed elements from the local traditional urban and rural song. This coexistence of a typically urban traditional and rural music and the new urban professional lyric songs of the same area created a unique type of Korçare urban song which had a distinctly recognisable regional character. The newer generations of composers deliberately attempted to purge the urban songs of ‘external’ elements and to give them a marked local character. Thus, in spite of the Ottoman legacy or Greek affiliation, the entire process of transforming the urban song into a Korçare entity and identity is clearly seen in the way the Middle Eastern as well as Kefalonian *kantadha* style melodies were adapted to the Korçare ethos.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, choral melodies were introduced as a new musical trend, which evolved throughout the Korçë area, gathering up sounds that worked nicely together and did so in a way that was remarkably well-loved. This new wave music genre was characterised by predominantly choral styles of tonal harmony. The people of Korçë at one time used to emigrate to Romania, Bulgaria, Egypt, the United States and other countries, and on their return they would bring back in their minds all manner of songs and tunes. The French Lycée at Korçë was

another source of enrichment of the city's musical life in the 1920s and 1930s; the French members of staff introduced works from the Western repertoire played on classical instruments.²

On the other hand, the *kantadhes* (pl.), as they were originally called in Korçë, became increasingly popular. *Kantadha*, from the Greek *καντάδα*, is a term which is close to 'serenade' (an urban serenade song) and probably comes from Italian (Venetian) *cantare* or *cantatas*.³ Thus, choral songs of different origins mingled together to produce a Korçë identity.

Traditional instruments, both local and borrowed, continued to play a significant role in the acclimatisation of the Turkish style Saze instrumental group performance (mainly at weddings and other festivities, as well as at funerals). Instruments of Middle Eastern or Western origin mingled with local ones and were gradually assimilated, until they came to sound natural and familiar. Among the elements of this interchange it may be added that the regional musical language, through the human voice and the instrumental sound, took either Eastern features and adapted them to its own use, or Western features, such as in the case of patriotic choral songs of the *kantadha* types accompanied by mandolins. The mandolin had a relatively long tradition in the Ionian Islands and it was common to accompany choirs with *mandolinatas* (a group of mandolin players). The expansion of the joint repertoire for choir and mandolin had started during the Venetian rule over the islands, and should have gradually reached Korçë around the second half of the 19th century.

As far as art singing interpretation of the traditional urban songs is concerned, it needed to be notated. The interpretation of the urban lyric songs depended upon their being scored, but the signs which the composer-arrangers marked down on paper, however, were mere symbols.

² 'The maestro of the *Banda e Lirisë* [The Freedom Band] and the composer of some national songs written during the time of Ottoman suzerainty, Annibale de Paskal, was recalled from Egypt'; Vasil Ballauri, *A Window on the Musical History of Korçë, 1800–1940*, Korçë, 1994 (*Një dritare në Historinë e Muzikës së Korçës, 1800–1940*). Another comment, written by Ø. V. Mborja (in 1916?), on De Paskal's activity in Korçë, stated: 'Mr. Annibale de Paskal, apart from his services to music and his good and impeccable behaviour, has published two beautifully notated marches: "The Freedom Band" (*Band' e Lirisë*) and "The Congress of Elbasan" (Kongres' i Elbasanit)'.

³ It is named after the island of Kefalonia or Cephalonia (Greek: Κεφαλονιά), Kefallinia (Κεφαλληνία), which had been colonised by Venice. The Ionian Islands were a maritime and overseas possession of the Republic of Venice from the mid-14th century until the late 18th century. The conquest of the islands took place gradually.

By tracing the historical process through which the urban music (traditional, lyric and KKK) of Korçë emerged, and by demonstrating their styles and features, their types, the structures which those songs represent and the sentiments they convey, this book aims to reveal their inclination, transformation, sociological and historical dimensions and importance.

My main source of information for interpretation of the KKK (Korçare Distinctive Song), along with traditional urban, urban lyric song and Saze music of the same region, was existing recordings made by amateur groups, in addition to solo amateur and trained singers of the second half of the 20th century, to which I had sufficient access.

I hope that this book will appeal to a wide readership of those interested in Korçare music as a separate branch of Albanian urban music. ‘Korçare’ music is a phenomenon of regional versus national identity, that is, of a genre which has been constructed as ‘regional’ rather than ‘national’.

The book also provides a close examination of this genre of song, which may be of greater interest to specialists in music of the region. In this regard I will be using terminology which will be readily intelligible to readers trained in the notated traditions of Western Art Music.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Emeritus Professor of Music (University of Leeds) Julian Rushton, who has always been my mentor on the field of musicology. I received my PhD in 1998 under his guidance, and over the last two decades or more he has continued to advise me on my scholarship, during which time his comments have been precious to me.

As far as the present study is concerned, Julian made useful suggestions on the structure of the book as well as editing several pieces of text. I highly valued his insightful advice.

Thank you, Julian.

PART I—

**INTRODUCTION TO THE TRADITIONAL
MUSIC OF KORÇË**

MUSIC IN ALBANIAN HISTORY

Albanians belong to the Mediterranean world; in culture and religion they incline either to the West or to the East, or sometimes they show both Western and Eastern inclinations. The existence of early music in Albania has been verified by archaeologists, who unearthed figures of people playing musical instruments, singing or dancing. As in many parts of the world, such figures have been depicted in mosaics or engraved in pottery and stone. However, these antique figures do not necessarily reflect the indigenous culture of their time, since the remains of Greek and Roman amphitheatres are clear evidence of the presence of successful foreign civilisations. Possibly the earliest music that can be traced in the Illyrian territory was composed by Nicetas, often known as Nicetas Dardáni, a bishop in the city of Remesia in Dardania, a region of Dacia, who was the author of the *Te Deum Laudamus* (We praise Thee, O God).

Jan Koukouzel, a distinguished composer of the 14th century became famous in the imperial court of Constantinople for his remarkable voice, a gift which made him a favourite of the Byzantine emperor and won for him the sobriquet *angelophonos* ('angel-voice') ... Koukouzel appears as an innovator at the beginning of the 14th century, perhaps the first to abandon an older, more conservative manner of composing for new melodic invention (Williams 1980, 218–219).

Koukouzel was born in Durrës (Dyrrachium), Albania, in the 13th century and was brought up in the same town. His nationality is disputed, but it is agreed that Durrës (Dyrrachium), his birthplace, was an important centre of Byzantine music for generations.

During the turbulent history of the region, Albanians were successful in retaining their national tradition in spite of the many waves of cultural invasion they had to face, particularly Greek, Roman and Slavonic. Although the Balkans fell to the Turks in the 15th century, the Albanian national hero, Scanderbeg (1412–1468) 'led his countrymen in wars against the Ottomans in defence of their country and of Christianity ... Pope Nicholas V called him 'Champion of Christendom', a title which was confirmed by three of his successors' (Skendi 1967, 4). Scanderbeg also attracted European artists, such as Voltaire, the poet Longfellow and several operatic composers, including Vivaldi (Sadie 1980, 44, 793, 345).

In Albania proper he was celebrated mostly in language and literature, and was considered an important factor in the preservation of the Albanians' common roots and links with Europe.

The most significant mark of Ottoman cultural influence upon Albania was reflected, probably more than in any other field, in urban traditional music. The performance of this new type of music began to take on two distinct patterns: firstly, there were the bands of musicians, playing what became known in the West as Janissary music or *mehter*; secondly, came the *Aheng* ensembles, who included Turkish and local music in their repertoires, and later adopted the *makam* system (introduced by the professional or semi-professional musicians). The period of national affirmation (the late 19th and early 20th centuries), when the Ottoman Empire was in total decline and the Albanian national movement was reaching its peak, gave great impetus to the revival of traditional culture and music. Music was a strong ally in the rousing of the national spirit during the struggle for independence, and it had an almost entirely identifiable national character. Thanks to the foundation of the new bands (which initially included Western hymns, marches, waltzes and other instrumental dances in their repertoires) and increasing numbers of cultural and artistic societies of that period,⁴ on the one hand, patriotic songs were introduced, while, on the other, urban songs and particularly love songs continued in their progress. The former were guided by patriotic societies of the period (setting up the first instrumental bands and choral groups) while the latter were led by urban ensembles of the *Aheng* and *Saze* type.

There were two main cities where the earliest art music was first cultivated on Albanian soil, Shkodër and Korçë. In the churches of Shkodër, because of the historically strong support not only of the Vatican, but also of Venice and later Austria, the Roman Catholic liturgy was practised and, of course, classical organ and choral music was also performed. Shkodër, which has historically been one of the main centres not only for north Albania but for the whole Balkan region which surrounds it, has always been coveted by its foreign neighbours.⁵ In this

⁴ The newly founded cultural and artistic societies throughout Albania, inspired by the nationalistic movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, acted strongly as a heartening support of the musical movement.

⁵ 'Among the Catholics of the north the question of schools had found a certain solution through the Austrian *Kultusprotektorat*. This represented the privileges accorded by Turkey to Austria some three centuries back in the Treaty of Vienna (1616), and renewed and expanded by later treaties and decrees, which in the case of Albania meant the building and reparation of Catholic churches, religious

ardent period of national and cultural affirmation (around 1870s onwards), notable musical figures emerged who were art composers. They were inspired by the same national ideal as their counterparts in different fields. The deeds of Scanderbeg, glorified and enhanced in folk-memory, became their idolised source of inspiration. Martin Gjoka from Shkodër and Fan S. Noli, who represented the southern thinking, composed a symphony and a tone-poem, respectively, on the subject of Scanderbeg. It is true that works of art music could not go into and be assimilated by the people with the same facility as literature or other branches of art because it needed, for example, either orchestras to be performed or they were composed abroad. However, the fact that several worthy works of art music were composed at the same time as their literature counterparts or other forms of art (sculpture, painting)—and with no less of an artistic value—shows that this music was an equally vital element of Albania's period of awakening.

Cultural and Musical Affirmation—Literature was the principal factor in the growth of Albanian nationalism from the 1870s onwards. Albanian writers and philosophers, mostly living abroad, had an instinctive feeling that their creative efforts should be strongly focused on national awakening. Their writings were in both dialects, Gegë and Toskë. The programme of the League of Prizren (1878)⁶ exercised an enormous influence on Albanian patriotic thought. In the 19th century, the Albanians experienced the same nationalistic awakening as did the Greeks and the southern Slavs, but with evident differences.⁷ In Albania proper it was difficult to create and develop a true national culture, because Turkish rule had to a certain extent changed the self-image of the country and its people. The literature of the pre-independence period was patriotic in tendency and romantic in sentiment. In the visual arts the emphasis was on the realistic representation of Albanian history, very often involving the

institutions and schools'. Swire, *Albania, the Rise of a Kingdom*, 129–130; 'It is interesting the fact that the Austro-Hungarians did not attempt to introduce German, but taught Albanian, and even, at first, Italian'. Swire, *Albania, the Rise of a Kingdom*, 66.

⁶ 'For the first time in four centuries Albanians from Janina to Scutari were united for one purpose—the preservation of their country.' Swire, *Albania, the Rise of a Kingdom*, 52.

⁷ 'Among Albania's Balkan neighbours, religion and nationality coincided. Since this was not true for the Albanians, their leaders tried to develop those aspects of national culture which were of a non-religious nature, for only in this way could union be achieved. Consequently, emphasis was placed on the common language, which could serve as a link among the various regional and religious groups'. Skendi, *The Albanian National Awakening*, 111.

resistance of Scanderbeg. Islamic art left its traces mainly in fields such as architecture and the decorative arts, carpets and embroideries, metalwork and jewellery, but in the Muslim community too, where social and religious places, it is assumed, the secular music, hymns set to mystical texts and *makam* practices were taught.

Art music, in general, was introduced later than the above-mentioned forms of art. Its initial developments belong to the mid-19th and the first half of the 20th century. In Shkodër, Kurti started his creative life by composing and arranging for his band pieces similar to European classical music. This performance music was connected with the formation of the wind bands, initially in Shkodër (1878) and then in Korçë, Elbasan and other towns. When the founding of cultural societies (in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th) spread from Shkodër to other Albanian towns, choirs became active. Patriotic or light late Romantic songs, with music adapted from foreign composers, were sung in a way that evoked the spirit of Albania.⁸ 40 years later (in the 1920s), the *Vatra* Band and its conductor, Thoma Nassi, who arrived from America as volunteers to help Albania, significantly enriched musical activities in Korçë.⁹ The creation of bands and choruses suggested the possibility that the Albanian cultivated music could also be written down.

The evolution of art music in Albania was not sporadic. It started gradually and was concentrated initially in the bigger centres, such as Shkodër and Korçë, and then spread to other parts of Albania; it was a spontaneous beginning and its specific characteristics came as a result of the cultural growth of the towns. It should be said that, in spite of their modest achievements, these first compositions tend to retain the local characteristics of their creators and to evoke certain nostalgia for the town, the countryside, or for Albania itself.

⁸ Such are the south Albanian patriotic popular song texts, written by Mihal Grameno, Dhimitri Mole etc., and a few songs by Thanas Floqi and later by Thoma Nassi and others.

⁹ 'I remember our first Christmas in Albania and our abbreviated presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. There was no sheet music to be obtained anywhere except for my personal score, so I hastily translated the text into the Albanian language and assembled a chorus of sixty voices. The band would play the orchestral parts. This was the first performance of an oratorio in Albania. The chorus learned its parts in record time, and the audience in the *Kopshtore e Mitropolisë* begged for every number to be repeated'. Speech given by Thoma Nassi in 1960 to an Albanian-American Student Organization at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts (in *Frosina Foundation*, Internet, edited by Van Christo for publication purposes, 12th August 2002). <http://www.frosina.org/speeches/vatra.shtml>.

THE URBAN SONG TRADITION OF KORÇË

In the early 20th century, Albania was still fundamentally a rural country, albeit with some important towns. Traditional singer-composers grew up in an environment in which all music-making was part of one vast landscape; music was an important part of their everyday lives and it rarely travelled far from its immediate area in which it was played. The local traditional urban songs circulated for generations around the areas in which they originated, and sometimes further afield. When the urban songs of *makam* practices were brought to Albania during the Ottoman occupation, their influence on the traditional urban songs of northern and central Albania was obvious. The regions of southern Albania in general, and the Korçë area in particular, were inclined to retain to a greater extent the pentatonic usage (or the 'diatonicised' pentatonic), i.e. the rural aspect, of the music. The latter practice, which over the centuries had been well consolidated, was particularly resistant to the new Middle Eastern influences. However, whoever may have introduced Ottoman music into Albania, the later outcome was a product of the local, south Albanian, urban singer-composers' creation.

Many foreign travellers have described the Lower Albania wedding ceremonies and other musical events in their books, where south Albanian and Epirotic drone-based music was performed. 'They finished our entertainment by singing some songs both in Albanian and Modern Greek. One man, sang or rather repeated, in loud recitative, and was joined in the burthen of the song by the whole party ... They also dwelt a considerable time on the last note (as long as their breath would last), like the musicians of a country church' (Lord Broughton 1855, 28–29).

The fact that urban songs were mainly transmitted orally until the 1930s, and that only after this period were they written down, does not mean that their former existence went undocumented. One cannot rely only on notated examples to draw the conclusion that only a written song would have been a real historical fact of the Albanian written music. Albanian survived until almost 500 years ago as an unwritten language; Albanian songs, ballads or legends had the privilege of surviving and evolving without being written down, as literature or art music had to be; urban songs were born to live, die out or survive in their own way, during the course of Albanian history.

Most of the time, the urban songs were performed at private and religious gatherings by some well-known semi-professional musicians and in the outer courtyards of the Albanian *paşalik*, such as that of Ali Pasha of Tepelena. Some songs popularly known as Korçare songs originated, in my estimation, in Ali Pasha's *seraglio* in Janina and were probably composed by Muço, his court-musician. Muço is known to have created some *galant* types of urban song, based on countless improvisations and reworkings handed down by anonymous bard-poets. His 'drawing-room' song styles reflect joy, melancholy and many more of the emotions to which the Lower Albanian character is heir. There are in Muço's songs fragments of rural and urban motifs that embody the sound that evokes 'Korçë' in the minds of many practitioners. Kristo Floqi, a playwright, politician and lawyer from Korçë, would write in the 'Diana' magazine on 24th December 1935:

The enthusiasm of the people reached its climax when Miss Tefta sang the moving and very well-known Albanian song of the poor Muço, 'The Nightingale, O You Poor Nightingale'... It would have been nice if she could have sung some more songs of the immortal Muço, the cantor of Ali Pasha of Tepelena, but it would have needed preparation to do that. There are five or six more very popular songs (particularly in Korçë and around it) of the same type, which, I am quite sure suggest a tune of Albanian origin. These songs have made immortal Muço-Korçari.

There were other song-writers too, who occupied a sort of no-man's-land and whose names gradually became forgotten. It was a natural process that the authorship of only a few songs could survive. However, more and more composers continued to produce new songs firmly rooted in their local idioms, which gradually became absorbed into tradition and subject to the changes of the urban process.

The melodic characters of the urban song tradition of Korçë in general, closely connected to their poetical content, were various: some were deeply sentimental, some suggested birds singing (*bilbil*/nightingale), while others transmitted cheerful and joyous emotions, and so on. These songs were created by local composers and were intended for local people. As far as the transmission of the urban songs is concerned, this was an entirely oral transmission. All urban songs, firmly rooted in the urban idiom, were at one time composed by someone (even if we do not know by whom) but, as time passed, the most prominent of the orally-transmitted songs were absorbed into the tradition and subjected to the changes of the urban music process. Urban songs existed only very rarely in a notated form in the first half of the 20th century.

Love songs, the predominant category of urban songs, are widespread throughout Albania. The different circumstances under which the love songs were written represent different environments, concepts and epochs. The spoken dialect or ‘musical dialect’ plays an enormous role in defining the different musical temperaments in the south, central and northern regions. Thus, love songs represent regional musical idioms which are highly distinctive and are also guarded with a fanatical devotion by the local people. The strong question which emerges when analysing the urban song is why the love-song is so predominant. Was it because Albanians, being Mediterranean people, considered love to be one of the most inspiring or exciting themes of their everyday lives? Or was it, more probably, because love was a forbidden subject due to the social pressures of the provincial mentality? The second factor was probably the reason for their popularity. The feudal mentality persisted down to the 20th century, and regional musical idioms were preserved along with it.

The texts of the majority of urban songs are love-poems.¹⁰ These texts, with rare exceptions, express desperation, sorrow or anxiety, but the music does not always match the mood of the words. In spite of the dominance in urban songs of minor keys or anguished words, their tunes convey, in the most thoughtful and inspired examples, a generous message, and a pleasant atmosphere. Their principal themes refer to the disappointment of love which often resulted from the rigidity of Albanian society. The composer-singers who created the love songs were primarily men. Women did not appear either as creators or as singers in public; they sang mainly indoors—hence the allusions to ‘the poor nightingale’. Men, however, could sing at general gatherings, for example in the traditional coffee houses or, even more importantly, at urban festivities, among which the *dasma* (wedding) was the most significant. Almost the whole of Albanian life, particularly in the towns, was strongly influenced by the Turkish mode of thought and activity. The foreign elements of the culture such as houses, food, dress and decorative art were Middle Eastern, and these impinged on the lives of the majority of people in the towns and also in the villages around them. The songs were inspired by, and originated in, this environment. Of a specific local inspiration and sentiment are the love songs from the area between the lower Shkumbin and Vjosa rivers, and

¹⁰ The *environmental* texts, which simply describe nature (scenery, landscape), play a less important role among the urban songs; nevertheless, they show another source of inspiration and the way it was transmitted. Most of the texts are concerned with regional scenes (towns, trees, mountains, rivers and so on) and are conveyed to the local people through the imaginative use of oral tradition, with its legends, prejudices, historical events, religious concepts and myths.

there are even closer similarities between those from Janina and Korçë. These songs differ from those which arise from a direct Middle Eastern influence, and most of them have many elements in common with the Eastern element in Epirotic songs or the Western element in *Kefalonian* songs.

It was quite normal in Albania for the composer to be inspired by a woman or to want to dedicate a song to her, but be restricted from doing so directly. The majority of these songs were dedicated to forbidden love. Because of these restrictions, the songs compensated through the music for emotions which could not be expressed in the words; there are excellent examples of real love expressed in the songs of Korçë. This is how the 'Western ear' and 'mode of thought' would be likely to understand an Albanian description of the perils of love or a description of the lovers, though an Albanian citizen would probably understand the songs in the same way. Gino Massano, an Italian, comments: '[An Albanian woman] should remain a dove at home, a nightingale in the cage, a stirrer of desires; should keep her face chastely covered with a headscarf, lift it only for her lover—of course—but lift it to look at his face, which should be as beautiful as a pomegranate' (Massano 1940, 3). Massano writes in his review, published on the occasion of the issue of Dungu's *Lyra Shqiptare*, in 1940:

There are undeniably Oriental and Balkan influences in these songs, as I have noticed in general in all the *cantilena*-s and laments which I have heard in different parts of the Orient; but for environmental and topographical reasons those influences are less discernible in Albania than in other regions of the luminous East. Here, settlers from different populaces have arrived and pitched their tents. While they have each preserved many of their racial characteristics they have also, most importantly, devoted their efforts, their minds and the brilliance of their emotive poetry to preserving unchanged songs which are the most sincere, and at the same time, the most typical reflection of the sentiments of all the peoples, who are still fundamentally and ingenuously primitive. For this reason, these songs are potentially emotive (Massano 1940, 3).

People living in towns very much liked the themes and episodes of the urban songs. They knew why the composer-singer wrote a particular song, to whom it was dedicated, and who, or what, had inspired it. These stories were hardly ever conveyed directly, but were nearly always presented in the guise of flowers and birds, customs and provincial morals; hence a

stranger would catch only the surface of the story.¹¹ Although oral traditions continued in Albanian settlements, such as those in Italy, Greece, Egypt, or Turkey, the inspiration behind these traditions came from Albania itself, where the songs were born, matured and survived. The term ‘survival’ may also be used to imply this; Albanian urban songs ‘survived’ without being totally assimilated into Middle Eastern music. However, with the growth of towns, more and more Turkish influence penetrated the texture of the indigenous tunes. The rural areas preserved their traditional local modalities for a longer time, although in the last period of Ottoman rule even there (in the villages around important towns) the Middle Eastern mode was able both to penetrate and become absorbed by the local ancestral songs.

In Korçë, the love songs are divided into two different types: one is a type of song based on modal grounds and is a product of the south-western Balkans; this type was conceived in a more gallant way and was delivered in a more ‘reserved’ manner, or a ‘drawing-room’ style. Seeds of another type of song from the Korçë area, *Kënga Karakteristike Korçare*, KKK, (Korçare Distinctive Song), came from outside Albania and when planted in Albanian soil, produced a type of song well-known all over the Albanian world: this unique type is sung at both southern and northern Albanian wedding tables, parties, tours, evening rests and so on (see below *Kënga Karakteristike Korçare*).

The love songs did not derive directly from sociological and historical contexts, that is, they did not project the political situation as did the historic and patriotic songs, but they became the centre around which the urban singers and composer-arrangers orbited, and became a part of cultural life, and the focus of nationalistic feeling—ironically by allowing the people to ‘forget’ the political situation in the pleasure of listening to Albanian urban song as it began its transformation into art-song (see more on this in *Urban Lyric Song of the Korçë Area*).

Poetry, as a fundamental factor in the creation and existence of the urban song, was deeply under the influence of Middle Eastern styles. A great number of the texts of urban songs are of the *bejtexhi* type and many Turkish words, idioms and even methods of prosody which had penetrated

¹¹ The same critic comments: ‘For this, the woman should be beautiful, robust and fresh, tall and graceful like a cypress; and beautiful like a flower, like a fruit, like the spring; she should sing like a nightingale, and be like a carnation—filling the air with her own fragrance. She should be proud of being Albanian, remember it and sing of it; should be dressed like the women of the past, and should not let herself be dragged into the modern fashion which is tasteless and ridiculous’. G. Massano, ‘Passions (Palpitations) and Rural Expressions’, *ibid.* 3.

the Albanian language made this type of poetry fit the urban songs perfectly. This strand of Albanian poetry was characterised by imitating some of the conventional schemes of versification which were a typical feature of Middle Eastern poetry. Religious motifs played a predominant role in the *bejtexhi* poems. There were dozens of other poets who followed the *bejtexhi* style. They chose to write in Albanian, but in a Middle Eastern style, which meant that their inspiration was expressed in a sentimental manner. The use not just of Turkish words but of Turkish emphases of Middle Eastern sensualism, made some urban songs sound like a personal statement of the composer-poet, intended for his own catharsis rather than as a message aimed at a wider audience.

The texts of the urban songs belonging to the *bejtexhi*, urban, or art poetry, preserve the fundamental characteristics of the Albanian language, despite the use of numerous Turkish words. The basic criterion of versification is the transformation of language into Albanian poetry. Typical features, such as their line-length, rhyme-schemes and regular or irregular metre play a significant role in the texts of the urban songs.

Albanian poetry is based on qualitative metrical systems (qualitative stress rather than quantitative length). The types of verse depend upon both regular accentuation patterns and the construction of lines according to the number of verbal syllables. Albanian verse-lines vary in length from three to 16 syllables. The most common verse-lines are six-syllable, eight-syllable (the most familiar) and ten-syllable, and also double lines (6+6). In art poetry, nine-syllable and 11-syllable lines also occur. The rhythmic accents of the sentence usually correspond to tonic accents on the words. The rhythmic or principal accent of the word falls always on the penultimate syllable (rhythmic constant). Within any given line, depending upon the number of syllables, there are one or more syllables which carry the tonic accent, a stronger accent than those preceding or following it. Thus, in a line of four syllables, the third will carry the only regular accent. In a line of five, the fourth will be accented. In a line of six syllables, the fifth will carry the principal accent, but there is normally a secondary accent which might occur on various syllables of the verse-line according to the importance of the word. Thus an eight-syllable line may have several accentual schemes such as 3-7, 1-3-5-7, 2-5-7. In Albanian, the counting of syllables does not create the same problems as in Italian or French, because no elisions occur between words. However, the omission of vowels or the replacement of consonants occur very frequently, for example: *Shqipëri*, *Shqipri*, *Shqipni*, *Shqypni* and *Shkiperi*, all meaning 'Albania'.

The fundamental artistic phenomenon in the urban songs and urban lyric songs was the simultaneous creation of the poetry and music. The

majority of these songs tended to be metrically irregular and sometimes quite free, and thus relied less upon metrical accent than upon rhythmic flexibility. The other correspondence between text and music, although to a much lesser degree, involved the adaptation of the poetic metre to the music. While some attempt has been made to explain these phenomena, the main observation will concentrate on common metres and the metrical relationship of poetry to music.

Declamatory and lyrical elements, syllabic or melismatic, variety of ornamentation and a distinctive way of singing are found in the melodies of the urban songs. A less declamatory style was also used in a recitative-like urban song incorporating elements of melodic ornamental and melismatic passages. Declamatory aspects of the text, given sometimes a cheerful character by the use of an asymmetrical metre and a melismatic melodic style, are sometimes found in the refrain of the songs. The musical articulation within the poem occurs when it is needed for musical reasons, in which case the emphasis on a particular word and/or phrase is produced by elongation.

The important words of the texts are also embellished in quite a delicately ornamental way by inventive musical improvisation. A great number of urban songs have symbolic titles linked with birds and flowers. It has also been mentioned that most of these sorts of titles were allusive, with a flower or a bird representing a human being, an individual episode or another occurrence in a certain mood, time, environment or social milieu. In these cases there was an attempt to stress the general mood of the poetry and to depict individual words or phrases in a gesticulatory manner, explicating the exterior aspect of the text. Tone painting, such as the evocation of running water, the drone of the *gajde* (bagpipe) and bird song, is another way of depicting sounds embodied in the text and of trying to transform them to fit the demands of the music.

Rhythm and Metre—The urban traditional song and music of Albania is distinguished by its *rhythmic* and *metrical* variety. The urban songs use several metrical and rhythmic combinations even within individual songs. The musical metrical structure of the urban songs is a combination of two main types of metre: a) *definite* metre and b) *free-metre*. The definite metres or rhythmic metres occur in two types: as *common* (simple) symmetrical metres, such as: 2/4, 4/4, and less often 3/4 (2/8, 4/8, 3/8), and as *compound* asymmetrical (limping) metres as: 5/8 (2+3 or 3+2) and 7/8 (3+2+2 or 2+2+3). Of the compound metres, 7/8 is the most common throughout the Korçë region. This is divided into three beats in each bar, two equal and the other (usually at the beginning or at the end) extended by an extra half-beat. Songs with changing metre and