

The Transformation of the Ağva Epic, a Historical Event, into a Turkish Folk Song

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to introduce and analyze the folk song "Ağva Destanı" (The Epic of Ağva), which recounts heroic poetry of a true story in the Mediterranean region around the Kaş and Kemer districts of Antalya during World War I. The folk song tells the story of the naval victory of the Sericebel Corps, which sank a British and two French Allied ships attempting to blockade the coast of Antalya in the Mediterranean after the Battle of Gallipoli in 1917, using land-based artillery fire. The folk song was composed by First Gunner Sergeant Halil İbrahim Günaydın of Burdur, one of the heroes of this historical event. An example of oral history, this folk song played a significant role in folk poetry, representing the tradition of folk song-making and epic-telling. This study provides information about and analyzes the historical events surrounding the creation of the Ağva Destanı.

In terms of its subject matter and theme, the folk song falls into the category of heroic and heroic songs. In terms of structure, it is a folk song with three stanzas and two-line connections. The epic folk song, as originally written, consists of six triplets and six doublets. It is sung in the 11-syllable (6+5) pattern, a common pattern in folk poetry. In terms of melody, it falls within the category of rhythmic folk songs with a well-defined melody and rhythm.

Folk songs are known to play an important role in cultural transmission, and this folk song, sung at national victory day celebrations and ceremonies, as well as traditional ceremonies, can be said to support the preservation and protection of religious, national, and spiritual values. It also protests the attempted occupation of our homeland. This epic folk song, which offers a snapshot of our recent history, is considered significant because it is a historical document and, therefore, an intangible cultural heritage product.

KEY WORDS: World war I, The victory of Antalya, Halil İbrahim Günaydın, captain Mustafa Ertuğrul Aker

Introduction:

Since the day humankind was created, it has sustained its existence in the world by transmitting the culture formed by the society in which it lives through traditions. Culture, which carries the experiences and accumulated knowledge of people, is defined by anthropologists Lavenda and Schultz as “the learned set of behaviors and ideas acquired by humans as members of society” (Lavenda & Schultz, 2018: 41).

Yıldırım notes that the enduring structures within the life of a nation are referred to as traditions, and that these traditions constitute culture. He defines culture as follows: “Regardless of their number, characteristics, or functions, all the traditions that occupy a place in the life of a nation form that nation’s culture” (pp. 81–82). Yıldırım groups the traditions that constitute culture into two categories, oral culture and written culture, based on the medium of tradition in which they are transmitted, either orally or in written form (1998: 38). Among these, oral culture consists of elements that originate in the oral tradition, including those transmitted orally, partially orally, or entirely nonverbally, yet circulate among individuals or are passed from generation to generation through oral transmission and communication (Yıldırım, 1998: 39).

Oral culture emerges through the shaping of shared communal patterns in ways that reinforce collective experience. Lacking a fixed written text, it develops and endures for centuries within the memory of the community, sustaining its presence by embedding itself in the consciousness of the people (Ong, pp. 50–52). All kinds of social, political, economic, and human events, ranging from the most ordinary occurrences of daily life to the most extraordinary incidents, whether formally recorded in history or preserved only in collective memory, take place within the realm of oral culture (Ersoy, p. 146).

One of the products of oral culture is the *türkü*, a form of folk poetry sung with melody. There are various views regarding the origin of the term, which traces back to very early periods. One widely accepted explanation is that the word *türkü* developed from *türkî*, formed by adding the nisba suffix *-î* to the word *Türk*. According to Çobanoğlu, the term *türkü* evolved from *Türk küyü*, meaning “Turkish melodies” (2018: 5).

Numerous definitions have been offered regarding what a *türkü* is, what it expresses, when and where it emerged, by whom it was composed, and how it is performed. The earliest of these definitions belongs to Ali Shîr Navā’î. In his work *Mizânu’l-Evzân* (*The Balance of Centroids*), Navā’î defines the term *türkî* as follows:

“Again, there is a type of song that is called *türkî*, and this term has become its distinguishing name. It is a highly esteemed kind of song that brings relief to the soul, appeals to those devoted to pleasure and delight, and enhances social gatherings. Those who are skilled in performing this genre are supported by sultans and are renowned by the epithet *türkî-gûy*. It is composed in the measure *remel-i müsemmen-i mahzûf*” (1993: 118).

Cahit Öztelli, on the other hand, emphasizes the central role of *türkü* in reflecting the inner world of the people, noting that: “The most noteworthy literary works are the *türküs*, which sustain the true inner realm of the folk and encompass their entire way of life from cradle to grave... Although the artistic aspect may at times be weak, the significance of our folk *türküs*, whose ‘human’ and ‘national’ dimensions are strong, lies primarily in their melodies” (Öztelli, 1969: 3).

In his book *Halk Şiiri’nde Türkü*, Ali Yakıcı (2007) offers an extensive definition of the *türkü*. He describes it as a poetic form that conveys all events experienced by individuals or communities from birth to death, events that leave a lasting impression on both the person and society. Typically performed by *ozans* or by those who compose *türküs*, it becomes anonymous over time, regardless of the literary branch, type, or form to which it originally belongs, and is recited in various settings with a distinctive melody unique to its tradition (p. 44).

Çetindağ likewise emphasizes that *türküs* reflect the Turkish nation in its entirety, noting that they embody the nation’s oral culture, history, popular figures, and, more broadly, its material and spiritual values (2005).

As emphasized in the definitions above, social, historical, political, and cultural events have played a significant role in the emergence of *türküs*. Throughout history, the Turkish nation has expressed the excitement and enthusiasm of its victories in war, as well as the sorrow felt in times of defeat, through *türküs*. Several scholars have highlighted the distinctive features of this tradition. Austrian Turkologist and historian Herbert Jansky, for instance, notes in his definition that some *türküs* possess the qualities of “historical documents” (Jansky, 1977).

Yıldırım, in his provisional classification¹ of sources belonging to the oral tradition, notes that *türküs* and epics, which he includes under the category of “recitational weavings” (*söylemelik dokumalar*), may acquire the status of historical documents, provided that the historical information they contain concerning the period in which they were narrated, or earlier periods,

can be verified as accurate (1998: 101–102). Mirzaoglu (2015) likewise states that *türkü* texts constitute an expression of historical reality, noting that historical *türküs* were composed either by individuals directly involved in the events or by those who witnessed them (p. 187).

As throughout history, wars in our more recent past, such as the First World War, the Gallipoli Campaign, the War of Independence, and the Cyprus Peace Operation, have given rise to epics, *türküs*, and poems that convey historical reality and shape the collective memory of the nation (Yakıcı & Erdoğan, 2021, p. 2). Yakıcı (1994) also draws attention to the presence of an oral culture and literary tradition that emerged around the Gallipoli battles:

“With the faith and fervor that carried them to Gallipoli, a truly unforgettable epic was written there, a legend the world will never forget. Moreover, *türküs* were sung, memories were recounted, legends and hagiographic tales took shape, and a body of folklore emerged that united our people around the belief and strength symbolized by Gallipoli” (1994, p. 600).

Şimşek (2022) likewise notes that wars have influenced both written and oral literature, and that the struggles undertaken for the homeland have become subjects of various literary forms. He states that “wars that left deep marks on the history of the Turks did not remain confined to history books; they also influenced written and oral literature in various ways and led to the creation of numerous works. In this respect, acts of heroism and struggles for the homeland, which became poetry on the tongues of *âşiks*, have also found expression in epics, *türküs*, laments, and legends” (2022, p. 41).

As is well known, the Gallipoli battles and the ensuing victory have inspired a considerable body of works in Turkish literature² both in written forms (novels, poems, short stories, plays) and in oral culture/literature (legends/memorates, epics, laments, *türküs*, *âşık* poetry, etc.). Numerous poems have been composed on the subject, most notably Mehmed Âkif Ersoy’s celebrated “Çanakkale Şehidlerine.” Within the oral tradition and the *âşık* style of poetry as well, a substantial number of poems were recited, epics were composed, and *türküs* were created.

Among the many works produced on the subject are *Çanakkale Türküsü*; Boyabatlı Ömeroğlu Mustafa’s *Çanakkale Destanı*; Eyüplü Mustafa Şükrü’s *Çanakkale Bombardımanı* and *Şanlı Askerler Destanı*; Kazım Nami’s *Tosun Onbaşı’nın Çanakkale Destanı*, *Çanakkale Şarkısı*, and *Çanakkale Kabatepe Muzafferiyat Destanı*; Abdülgaâffar Kemâli’s *Çanakkale*

Önünde Düşmana Kan Kuseduran Arslan Yürekli Kahraman Mehmed Çavuşun Müdafaa-i Vatan Destanı; as well as the anonymous *Çanakkale Destanı* (Güzel, 2015). The *Ağva Destanı* can likewise be regarded as one of the *türkü*s that emerged in connection with the Gallipoli battles, given the time period it reflects and the themes it addresses.

1. Ağva Epic

The *Ağva Destanı*³ is an example of twentieth-century *Turkish oral poetry*⁴. It is an epic *türkü* that recounts the military struggle undertaken to defend the Mediterranean and the coasts of Antalya during the First World War, as well as the victory achieved there. Yıldırım notes that Turkish oral poetic tradition has roots extending deep into the past; after highlighting the development of heroic poetic forms among the early Turks, he states that those who recited these poems, composed laments, created and performed them, were the representatives of Turkish oral poetic art (1998, p. 182). For this reason, Halil İbrahim Günaydın⁵, the performer of the heroic poem *Ağva Destanı*, may be regarded as a twentieth-century representative of this Turkish oral poetic tradition. Günaydın is both the creator and the source informant of this epic/*türkü*, and because he performed it throughout his lifetime in every setting he entered, he is also its principal narrator.

The epic/*türkü* was composed by Artillery Sergeant Halil İbrahim Günaydın after the French ships *Paris II* (1917) and *Alexandra* (1918) were sunk by the Sericebel battery near the Ağva promontory (Koca Burun) in Kemer. With this single poem, Sergeant Halil İbrahim immortalized the victory at Ağva and performed it on various occasions, both professionally and in private gatherings. In time, the epic composed in 1918 gradually transformed into a *türkü* as it continued to be sung with melody. For this reason, the earliest written version of the *Ağva Türküsü* differs slightly from the form known today.

The *türkü* did not spread widely beyond Antalya and Burdur, the regions where its creator lived and where it was primarily sung. Nevertheless, the original text has been preserved and was also recorded in Günaydın's own voice. Today, the *türkü* has been transferred from the oral and written cultural spheres into the domain of electronic culture. Although once known only within a limited local context, it gained significant attention and became more widely recognized after the story of Captain Mustafa Ertuğrul and the Sericebel Battery came to light. It has since been

reinterpreted by various individuals and musical ensembles and shared with wider audiences in different settings. The *türkü* is now circulated in digital media and on social-media platforms such as blogs, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Below is the final version of the epic that gradually transformed into a *türkü*:

AĞVA DESTANI

“Sericebel emir aldı Ağva’ya
Az galdı pek şiddetli hevaya
Antalyalı hazır olsun duaya
Maşallah deyin kumanda verin dillere
Maşallah deyin mermi süren ellere/ kollara
Adrasanda çifte vapur parlıyor
Seri Cebel top kamalarını yağlıyor
Mesafeyi bin elliye bağlıyor
Maşallah deyin nişan da alan gözlere
Maşallah deyin yol yürüyen dizlere
Ağva limanı’na geldi büküldü
İlk vuruşta koca gemi yıkıldı
Fransızlar hep denize döküldü
Maşallah deyin kumanda veren dillere
Maşallah deyin tetik çeken ellere, kollara.”

2. The Ağva Türküsü and History

Antalya, with its deep-rooted history, natural landscape, and cultural heritage, has at times been the setting for significant historical events. The First World War was among the major historical developments that affected the region. The story of this *türkü* begins with the assignment of the 27th Regiment to defend the Mediterranean coast. During the First World War, as in the rest of Ottoman territory, the Sanjak of Antalya, with its extensive coastline, came under threat, and because the Ottoman navy was unable to leave the Dardanelles, the region had to rely solely on defensive measures taken from the land (Ortak, 2007).

Unable to achieve their objectives at Gallipoli, the Allied Powers sought to open a new front in Anatolia through alternative routes. With the closure of the Gallipoli front, several ships belonging to the British and French naval forces assigned to that theater were redirected to the

Eastern Mediterranean region (Ortak, 2007, pp. 94–98; cited in Temel 2009, pp. 124–134; Akgül, 1919).

The Ottoman Ministry of War, recognizing the destructive impact of these Allied vessels, which, along the entire coastline, and particularly off Antalya, prevented the movement of Turkish ships and bombarded various factories and military sites, decided, in coordination with its German ally, to intervene in the increasing military activity in the Antalya region and to implement certain countermeasures. As French, British, and Italian forces were heavily concentrated on the island of Kastellorizo (Meis), which they used as a military base, a defensive plan for the Mediterranean region was drawn up, proposing an amphibious operation to seize the island; corresponding assignments were made accordingly (Akgül, 1919, 1922).

A plan was devised to capture Kastellorizo (Meis) through a surprise assault. For the operation, Mustafa Ertuğrul was appointed as the commander of the artillery battery; Gendarmerie Lieutenant Muhittin Efendi was assigned to lead the landing force; and two German officers were tasked with overseeing the German howitzers and batteries. Together with an infantry detachment of 120 soldiers, they were dispatched to Kaş from four different locations (Akgül, 2024: 1923).

Upon reaching Kaş, the Sericebel battery and its soldiers carried out a sudden assault and sank the British warship *Ben My Chree* stationed at Kastellorizo (Meis). Approximately three to four months later, the unit returned to Antalya, and in order to put an end to the raids, bombardments, plunder, and destruction carried out by British and French ships in and around the region, they launched another operation, during which they sank two French vessels, *Paris II* and *Alexandra*.

The historical background of *Ağva Destanı*, one of the illustrious epics of the Turkish soldier, is documented in both domestic and foreign sources⁶. The earliest domestic source is the memoirs of Artillery Captain Mustafa Ertuğrul Aker⁷ (1892–1968), commander of the battery and known in the history of the First World War as “the hero who sank an aircraft carrier from land with artillery fire.” Written in the form of personal recollections, these memoirs record the events as experienced by Aker himself and therefore constitute the primary written document related to *Ağva Destanı*. In this notebook, he recounts firsthand the events that took place from

1916, when the Sericebel Battery was assigned to protect and defend the Mediterranean coast, up to March 1918.

In 1995, with the discovery of the *Paris II* wreck off the coast of Kemer by master diver Mustafa Aydemir, the heroic event that had given rise to this epic was remembered once again with great excitement and pride. A documentary film was produced; the story became the subject of various radio and television programs; introductory articles appeared in newspapers and magazines; and it was covered widely in both local and national media. Although the historical event was recounted in different forms, none of these sources made any reference to the epic/*türkü* itself.

Based on Mustafa Ertuğrul's memoir, a summary of the historical event will be presented under the following headings:

First Meis Assault (27 Aralık 1916):

The unit, having reached Kaş by traversing difficult mountain routes, planned to land on the island with eight sailing boats ten days later, provided weather conditions permitted, and seize Kastellorizo (Meis). However, realizing that the plan was not feasible, Captain Mustafa Ertuğrul observed that the enemy vessels were only four to five kilometers away and within the range of the artillery batteries. Noting that it was a Sunday and thus an opportune moment for action, he anticipated that they could sink the large cruiser through a sudden assault. He shared this assessment with the German major, and upon receiving his approval, they immediately mobilized. The Turkish batteries launched a rapid artillery strike; the initial attack lasted thirty-six minutes and resulted in a significant victory.

In this assault, the British warship *Ben My Chree*⁸ (Benamikrea), capable of carrying four aircraft and known for inflicting heavy losses on the Turks during the Gallipoli Campaign, was sunk, along with approximately two hundred sailing vessels and boats; one torpedo boat was disabled, and the wireless station, gasworks, and numerous suspicious buildings were destroyed, rendering the enemy ineffective (Aydemir, 2007, pp. 61–71).

Second Meis Assault (7 Ocak 1917):

The second Meis assault (7 January 1917), commanded by German princes and officers and described by Mustafa Ertuğrul as “an ill-conceived and fatally flawed operation beyond

comprehension,” ended in failure, resulting in the martyrdom of 36 Turkish soldiers. Following this unsuccessful second assault, plans for a third attack were abandoned; all German officers were withdrawn first, and a week later the howitzer battery was also recalled. However, Mustafa Ertuğrul’s battery remained in the same location, without infantry support or guards, until the end of March 1917. The unit endured severe deprivation and suffering in this rugged and arid terrain; under harsh conditions and lacking proper clothing, the soldiers contracted deadly diseases such as typhus and malignant malaria. Only at the end of March did they receive orders to proceed to Antalya to be placed under the command of the 57th Division (Aydemir, 2007, pp. 84–92).

The First Antalya (Ağva) Victory (13 December 1917):

Upon reaching Antalya, twenty soldiers from the unit, along with their commander Mustafa Ertuğrul, were hospitalized due to illnesses such as typhus and malignant malaria. After two months of severe illness and recovery in the hospital, they gradually regained their strength. During this period, Mustafa Ertuğrul learned that prior to the arrival of the Sericebel Battery in Antalya, the French fleet, which had blockaded the coastline from İzmir to Mersin, had entered the Gulf of Antalya, destroyed four large flour factories, and periodically shelled the city upon entering the harbor, forcing the population to flee into the mountains and surrounding villages. He also learned that the French vessels had destroyed and seized the sailing boats carrying provisions to Ottoman soldiers, and that most recently, a sailing boat transporting supplies to the outpost at Ağva had been captured and destroyed by a French ship while moored at the Ağva pier, followed by a bombardment of the village.

In response, Mustafa Ertuğrul resolved to sink the French ships. He formulated his plan: he would proceed to the Ağva harbor and, using a sailing boat as bait, lure the French vessels into range and destroy them. First, he persuaded the acting commander of the 57th Division and the commander of the 135th Infantry Regiment, from whom he secured permission. Within two days, he completed all preparations and departed Antalya with the unit assigned to him on 5 December 1917. By 7 December 1917, they had positioned themselves on the dominant promontory south of Ağva and tied the sailing boat to the Ağva pier. To attract the enemy’s attention, they placed oranges, chickens, and similar items inside the boat. Meanwhile, they took advantage of the gendarmerie telephone line extending to Finike and stationed lookouts at Finike and Cape Gelidonya.

On the morning of 13 December 1917, they received successive reports from the lookouts at Finike and Cape Gelidonya that enemy vessels were moving in the direction of Adrasan. The soldiers, already stationed at their positions, immediately manned the artillery. At 11:05, the French ships *Paris II* and *Alexandra*, upon spotting the sailing boat in the harbor, approached as they had done on previous occasions. Aker recounts the events that followed:

“The distance between us and the Paris II was 800 meters. We found ourselves face to face with the ships in this astonishing scene. Our excitement was immense. To prevent being overheard by the ships, I was compelled to give the initial commands silently and by hand signal. Under camouflage, we roughly set our sights on the Paris II.” (Aydemir, 2007, p. 96)

When the French ceased firing, it was the Turks’ turn. The soldiers began rapid fire, and after an eighteen-minute engagement, the ammunition depot of *Paris II* exploded, causing the ship to capsize and sink.

Following the sinking of *Paris II*, the Turkish soldiers attempted to rescue the enemy sailors who had fallen into the sea. However, because none of the battery’s soldiers were swimmers and the wreck lay far from the shore, rescue efforts proved difficult. Some of the sailors thrown into the water from the cruiser (*Paris II*) drowned, unwilling to surrender as they were uncertain how the Turks would treat them; some were saved by a fisherman from the village of Ağva; and after those who reached the shore observed the safety of the situation and called out to their comrades, an additional twenty men swam ashore. The Turkish soldiers treated the rescued French sailors with great kindness: they removed their own overcoats to clothe those who were naked, bandaged the wounded, and carried them in their arms or on their backs to the village of Ağva (Aydemir, 2007, pp. 96–98).

Out of respect for the suffering of the wounded prisoners, the Turkish soldiers did not openly celebrate their victory; they refrained from expressing joy and instead endeavored to ease the captives’ pain and distress. The commander of the *Paris II*, French Captain Rolen⁹, expressed his admiration for the conduct and compassion of the Turkish soldiers with the following words:

“The most noble and gallant nation in the world—yes, Pierre Loti always told me so. I admired this noble nation from afar, and now I stand before them face to face. I do not know how to thank you.” (p. 98)

The Second Antalya (Ağva) Victory (8 March 1918):

The third success of the Sericebel Battery was the sinking of the *Alexandra*, the vessel that had escaped during the Ağva assault. After the destruction of *Paris II*, the cruiser *Alexandra* began patrolling more cautiously yet with increased aggression. Artillery Captain Mustafa Ertuğrul devised another plan: as this ship frequently harassed Turkish sailing boats, he intended once again to lure it into range using a sailboat. He explained his idea to Lieutenant İbrahim Bey, and with the approval of the Division Commander, Colonel Şefik (1877–1946), they put their jointly prepared plan into action. Taking a sailing boat and a sufficient amount of dynamite, they returned to their former position with the battery on 28 February 1918. They placed 75 kilograms of dynamite between the ribs of the sailing boat and concealed it beneath four or five crates of oranges.

To draw the *Alexandra* toward their position, the prepared boat was taken two to three kilometers offshore every morning and left there to wait. After a week of surveillance, on the morning of 8 March, the lookout at Cape Chelidonia/Gelidonya reported that the *Alexandra* was approaching. The brave soldiers inside the sailing boat (Hasan from Antalya and his companion) waited until the warship drew close. At full speed, the *Alexandra* attempted first to sink the Turkish sailing boat, which appeared to be fleeing. It then approached and began loading the crates of oranges onto the ship. When the final crate was lifted, the *Alexandra* exploded (Aydemir, pp. 137–143; Özbek & Özbek, n.d., pp. 51–54).

Thus, the *Ağva Destanı*, the *türkü* bearing that name, recounts the oral history of this entire struggle.

3. Findings

The following findings have been obtained regarding the *türkü* under examination: *Ağva Destanı*, a heroic *türkü*, was composed and shaped within the oral cultural milieu. The *türkü* recounts the attacks carried out by British and French ships along the Mediterranean coasts of Antalya, particularly at the Ağva promontory in Kemer during the First World War, as well as the offensive and defensive actions of the Turkish military unit known as the Sericebel Battery. Initially performed as an epic (*destan*), it later became a *türkü* as it was set to music and sung with melody. Because it was recorded both in written and oral form and was created in a relatively recent period, its author is known. Thus, *Ağva Destanı* belongs to the category of *türkü*s with identifiable creators.

There exist several methodological approaches to the study of *türkü*s (Kaplan & Yakıcı, 2007, p. 45; Çobanoğlu, 2000; Ekici, 2013, pp. 43–49; Aktaş, 2000, etc.). Ali Yakıcı (2007, p. 45), a scholar working on *türkü*s within the field of folk poetry, notes the following regarding methods of analysis: “From the standpoint of methodology, it is necessary to use the term *folk poetry*. We are obliged to examine the works produced from the beginning until today as an integrated whole. Turkish literature is a unified body, and the method of analysis must be consistent with this unity. This is the approach followed in literary history research.”

In this study, a method proposed by Ekici for the analysis of *türkü*s will be adopted. In his paper “A Review of Methodology in *Türkü* Studies,” Ekici (2013, pp. 43–49) observes that, in analyzing *türkü*s, which are formed through the union of words and melody scholars from literary and musical backgrounds have tended to employ different approaches: researchers in folk literature generally focus only on the verbal component, whereas those from the field of folk music prefer music-centered evaluations. Ekici emphasizes that although *türkü*s may be considered to possess two distinct layers, those of folk poetry and folk music, they should ultimately be examined through a holistic approach (2013, p. 47).

Ekici states that *türkü*s may suitably be analyzed in terms of their (1) creation and performance features, (2) melodic characteristics, (3) formal and structural properties, (4) thematic-content features, and (5) functional aspects (p. 47). Accordingly, *Ağva Destanı* may be examined under the following headings derived from Ekici’s holistic framework:

3.I. In Terms of Creation and Performance Features:

According to Ersoy, historical events leave various effects on the societies in which they occur. The impact of such events constitutes a natural process that prepares the ground for the emergence of oral cultural products. For instance, epics formed in the aftermath of long-lasting wars and migrations that brought great suffering; laments composed in response to tragic deaths; and *türkü*s that recount social and political events or the heroes associated with them all arise from this process (Ersoy, 2021, p. 146).

As noted above, *Ağva Destanı* was performed by Artillery Sergeant Halil İbrahim Günaydın after the French ships *Paris II* and *Alexandra* were sunk at the Ağva promontory in Kemer, Antalya in 1917. The courage, success, and valor demonstrated by the commander and soldiers of the Sericebel Battery¹⁰ during the Antalya victory were recounted through the voice of Halil

İbrahim Günaydın. The epic-*türkü* was transmitted and performed within the military units where its performer served, especially the Sericebel Battery, and later, following his military service, in the social environments in which he worked or participated, such as *mevlid* ceremonies, weddings, engagements, marriage rituals, communal gatherings, Ramadan nights, and national or religious holidays. It was performed at different times of day, morning and evening, day and night, and in various venues such as homes, meeting halls, and mosques, and it reached listeners of almost all ages and genders, though predominantly adult men. Today, it can be said that the epic-*türkü* reaches audiences of all ages through social media.

In terms of melodic characteristics, the *türkü* belongs to the category of *usullü türküler*, melodic pieces with identifiable rhythm and pattern. Based on Çobanoğlu's (2000, p. 18) "Schema of Syllabic Poetic Forms," which classifies the syllabic types of the *âşık* tradition, the piece may be defined as having the qualities of a *koçaklama havası*, as its subject matter centers on bravery and heroism.

The aesthetic harmony of the *türkü* is achieved through syllabic meter, rhyme, refrain, and repetitive structures. Repetition in the refrain is employed extensively to enrich the expression and reinforce the meaning.

4. II. In Terms of Form and Structural Features:

The *türkü*, in terms of structure, belongs to the group of songs composed of stanzas consisting of three lines and refrains consisting of two lines. In its earliest recorded form, the epic-*türkü* is composed of six tercets and six couplets. It is written in the 11-syllable (6+5) meter, which is widely used in folk poetry. The rhyme scheme follows the pattern *aaa bb ccc bb ddd bb*. Each unit of the *türkü* is semantically connected to the others, and the text narrates what happened when the enemy ships approached the Ağva promontory and how they were confronted, thereby describing the course of the battle.

In the first unit, the initial Ağva assault is referenced. The narrative conveys that the Sericebel Battery received orders to move to the Kemer–Ağva coastline, where enemy ships frequently launched attacks, and that a fierce confrontation was expected. The emotional tension of the approaching conflict is expressed, and the people of Antalya are urged to pray for victory against the enemy. The phrase "Let the people of Antalya be ready in prayer" highlights religious and spiritual values while simultaneously emphasizing unity, solidarity, and support for the soldiers risking their lives for the homeland.

In the second unit, the arrival of the two enemy ships (*Paris II* and *Alexandra*) is described through the image "A double steamer shines in Adrasan," indicating their movement from Kaş

toward Adrasan, that is, toward Ağva (Kemer). The soldiers of the Sericebel Battery are shown preparing eagerly to destroy the ships, oiling the breechblocks of their cannons. The third line notes that *Paris II* was hit from a distance of 1,050 meters.

The third unit recounts how the historical event unfolded: the arrival of *Paris II* at the Ağva harbor, the artillery unit's precise strikes that caused the massive ship to sink, and the French sailors falling into the sea. Because of its size, *Paris II* is described with phrases such as "the great pilot," "the great ship," and "the great Parido." The line "The French were cast into the sea" both denounces the French forces attempting to invade the homeland and announces the Turkish victory.

The fourth unit describes the preparations undertaken before the sinking of the second ship, *Alexandra*, which constitutes the second Antalya (Ağva) Victory. As Mustafa Ertuğrul recounts in his memoirs, after the sinking of *Paris II*, *Alexandra* patrolled the coastline in a more fearful and aggressive manner, shelling empty positions, sinking captured sailing vessels, and bombarding the Ağva hills. The local people had grown weary of these attacks (Aydemir, 2007, p. 137). Günaydın captures this sentiment in the lines "Once a week you visit Ağva's harbor, hacking down pines with your shells, and you will share the same fate as Parido."

In the fifth unit, the sinking of *Alexandra*, which had fallen into the orange-crate trap described in the *türkü's* narrative, is depicted. The verses express the confident tone of a victorious unit. The lines "With your permission, great Parida, stay here / Sericebel takes the French captive" deliver a clear message to the enemy.

The sixth unit describes the sinking of the second French warship, *Alexandra*. The line "Long is the mast of Alexandra" both identifies the ship and employs a formulaic expression commonly found in *türkü's*. It is noted that the shells fired in the initial round struck the target, and that the ship's captain died of fright. The ship's speed is given as 30 miles.

The refrain expresses the joy and exhilaration felt upon the victories. The refrain lines portray the unity of the battery as a single body: "to the tongues that command, the hands that load the shells, the arms that pull the trigger, the eyes that take aim, the knees that carry the way." These expressions convey that each soldier performed his duty admirably and that all deserved praise, signaled by the expression *mâşallah*. In Turkish culture, *mâşallah* is a religious expression used to acknowledge beauty, goodness, and success while warding off misfortune. In the refrain, the repeated call "Say mâşallah..." expresses admiration for the bravery, fortitude, courage, determination, and sacrifice shown by the battery commander and soldiers, urging the listeners likewise to honor these qualities.

The language of the *türkü* is natural and plain. Emotions characteristic of wartime, courage, heroism, enthusiasm, are vividly expressed. Everyday vernacular is used to depict the wartime atmosphere: “Az galdı pek şiddetli hevaya,” “Sericebel top kamalarını yağlıyor,” “Sericebel emir aldı Ağva’ya,” “Sericebel Fransız’ı esir al.” Since the soldier who composed the *türkü* was from Burdur, features of the Burdur dialect appear in the original performance, such as *galdı*, *gelme*, *gitme*, *hevaya*, etc.

3. III. In Terms of Thematic (Content) Features:

From the earliest examples of Turkish oral poetic tradition to the present day, thousands of poems, epics, laments, *türkü*s, and others, have been composed within the theme of heroism. This epic-*türkü* is one such work; in terms of subject matter, it belongs to the category of “event *türkü*s,” and its central theme is valor and heroism. The *türkü* takes its name from the Ağva promontory in the Kemer district of Antalya, where the historical event occurred. Depicting a naval victory achieved through artillery fire from land, this epic-*türkü* falls within the category of “Military Epics,” and more specifically within the subgroup “Epics Concerning Ongoing and Victorious Battles” (Çobanoğlu, 2000, pp. 71–72).

The *türkü* was composed immediately after the historical event took place, at a moment when the excitement of battle and the joy, pride, and exhilaration of victory were still being felt. The theme is directly connected to the event that gave rise to it. This is because the individual who composed the *türkü* was himself one of the heroes of the event, seeking to convey the message of heroism he had personally experienced and witnessed. As is well known, “*Türkü* texts are a particular form of expression of historical reality. Alongside the recounting of lived events, they also contain an evaluative dimension. As V. Propp notes, the defining feature of historical *türkü*s is that they are created by those who participated in, or witnessed, the events themselves...” (Mirzaoglu, 2015, p. 187). The composer of this *türkü* was likewise one of the protagonists of the event, wishing to narrate the heroic actions he had lived through and observed.

Within the text, the narrator aims to convey the enthusiasm of the Sericebel Battery commander and soldiers; to communicate their sense of success, pride, confidence, unity, solidarity, and patriotism to listeners and readers; in short, to record the event for posterity.

In Terms of Functional Features:

Researchers have proposed various perspectives on the functions of *türkü*s (Seeger, 1950; Herzog, 1958; Lomax, 1959; Başgöz, 2008; Mirzaoglu, 2001; Ekici, 2013, etc.). According to Lomax, the function of music within culture is to reinforce listeners' emotional attachment to their homeland and their society, thereby creating a sense of security (cited in Mirzaoglu, 2015, pp. 14–15). As Başgöz expresses, “A *türkü*, above all, is a cultural element composed of thoroughly local characteristics and represents the voice of an entire nation. Indeed, in Herder's (1744–1803) conception, the highest function of *türkü*s (folk songs) in all nations or cultures is to constitute the ‘collective spirit’ of the nation to which they belong” (Başgöz, 1992, p. 7).

The functions of folk *türkü*s/folk music overlap with the basic functions of folklore. The functions identified by William Bascom in his well-known classification “The Four Functions of Folklore” (1954, pp. 333–349; 1965, pp. 279–298) correspond closely to the observations of folk music scholars who examine music–culture relationships (Mirzaoglu, 2001, p. 15). Summarized broadly, Bascom's functions include providing entertainment and amusement; supporting societal values, institutions, and customs; education or the transmission of culture to future generations; and enabling release from social and personal pressures, thereby contributing to social control (Bascom, 1963). Within this framework, the functions of the present *türkü* may be described as follows:

The *türkü* is performed on national and official holidays such as Victory Day (30 August), Republic Day (29 October), and Democracy and National Unity Day (15 July), as well as at religious celebrations such as Ramadan and Eid al-Adha, and during *mevlid* ceremonies held for various purposes. In these settings, the *türkü* facilitates the realization of multiple folkloric functions: it provides entertainment and joy; it allows people to relive and take pride in past events, their ancestors, their army, and their soldiers; and it conveys communal values while supporting cultural institutions. As Bascom emphasizes (1965, p. 290), *türkü*s, like other expressive forms of folklore, are far more than simple entertainment; they reflect numerous details of culture. Başgöz likewise stresses their value-bearing function: “A *türkü* is undoubtedly a carrier of values. It transmits our personal and social values from person to person, from generation to generation. It openly or indirectly supports or opposes these values” (Başgöz, 2008, p. 144). In the first stanza, the invocation “People of Antalya, pray” foregrounds religious, national, and moral values while offering spiritual support to the soldiers risking their lives for the homeland.

It is well known that one of the central functions of *türküs* is education—transmitting existing cultural knowledge to future generations. A *türkü* may convey cultural transmission by reflecting regional characteristics, recounting historical events, or introducing important individuals, as well as by expressing smaller motifs such as love, affection, tolerance, enthusiasm, and valor that characterize the Turkish people (Ekici, 2011, pp. 48–49). Ersoy similarly emphasizes this point: “Through folk songs and *türküs*, individuals sustain contact with the roots of their own culture at both conscious and unconscious levels” (2021, p. 230).

The *türkü* transmits cultural knowledge by narrating the dangers faced by Antalya during the First World War in 1917 and the efforts made to defend these lands, thereby fulfilling an educational function. Because it provides information about how the Sericebel Battery commander and soldiers sank two French warships off the Ağva promontory, it may also be regarded as a historical document. For this reason, it may likewise be evaluated within the context of Intangible Cultural Heritage. According to the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, oral traditions and expressions—classified under B.I Oral Traditions and Expressions, and including “Folk Poetry,” with subcategories 15c *Türküs* and 15d Epics (Oğuz, 2013, pp. 153–156)—serve as carriers of intangible heritage.

Mirzaoglu emphasizes that folk *türküs* are valuable sources for cultural history: “Folk *türküs* are the most widespread poetic and musical form within a society. They serve as an artistic medium that has preserved its social functions from past to present. Their most fundamental function is the transmission of culture from generation to generation. Folk *türküs* are also a rich reservoir of cultural knowledge and contain significant accumulated information. In this regard, they constitute an important source for cultural history” (2015, p. 36). In this sense, it is noteworthy that *Ağva*, a historical place name, has been given as the title of this epic-*türkü*.

Bascom’s fourth function is the creation of a mechanism of escape from pressures and distress. This heroic and victorious *türkü* may relieve its performers and listeners from personal and societal anxieties and fears, instilling a sense of confidence. Individuals may express their feelings of courage and heroism through the *türkü*. A person who reads, performs, or listens to it may release social pressure associated with militaristic or wartime experiences.

The lines “The French were cast into the sea” and “Sericebel takes the French captive” articulate protest against the attempted occupation of the homeland. The *türkü* also illustrates what may be considered a fifth function of folklore¹¹.

Conclusion:

The aim of this study is to introduce the *türkü Ağva Destanı*, which recounts the great heroic events that took place near the Ağva promontory in the Kemer district of Antalya in 1917–1918. The *türkü* was performed by Artillery Sergeant Halil İbrahim Günaydın, a member of the Sericebel unit, following the sinking of two French warships (*Paris II* and *Alexandra*) during the First and Second Antalya victories. In line with the aim of the study, the text of the *türkü* has been subjected to detailed analysis. Because it was composed relatively recently, recorded electronically, and frequently performed by its creator within a limited local community, the *türkü* has survived to the present day without becoming anonymous.

In terms of subject matter, the *türkü* belongs to the category of heroic “event *türkü*s” that narrate historical incidents. Its theme is consistent with the period in which it emerged—the era of the First World War. Melodically, it falls within the group of *usullü türkü*s, that is, songs with identifiable rhythmic and melodic patterns. Harmony within the *türkü* is achieved through syllabic meter, rhyme, repeated suffixes, and refrains; the repetition in the refrain enriches expression and reinforces meaning.

The analysis indicates that the *türkü* reflects the period it represents in terms of theme, structure, subject, language, rhythm, and worldview. Emotions characteristic of wartime—courage, heroism, and enthusiasm—are expressed sincerely and in a simple, direct language.

It is well established that *türkü*s play an important role in cultural transmission. Because this is a heroic *türkü*, it is performed on national victory days, national and religious holidays, and during official and traditional ceremonies. In doing so, it contributes to the preservation and revitalization of religious, national, and moral values and supports social institutions. Such ceremonies also provide opportunities for entertainment and communal enjoyment.

The most fundamental function of *türkü*s is to transmit culture from one generation to the next. Since this *türkü* recounts the struggle to defend the Antalya coasts—which were blockaded by British and French forces during the First World War—it serves an important

function in cultural transmission and education for future generations. It conveys the patriotism, sacrifice, and courage of Turkish soldiers and narrates the great efforts undertaken to protect the homeland.

Given that this epic/*türkü* bears witness to historical events, and considering that under the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage it falls within “oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural transmission,” it may be regarded as an element of intangible cultural heritage due to its qualities as a historical document.

Notes:

1. In his study *Tarih Yazımı ve Sözlü Ortam Kaynakları* (Historiography and Oral Sources), Yıldırım explains what constitutes oral-source materials in historiography, why these materials are significant for Turkish historical writing, and, in order to clarify precisely which sources he refers to in interdisciplinary contexts, he presents a draft classification outlining these oral-source categories (Yıldırım, 1998, pp. 87–101).
2. For more extensive information regarding Çanakkale in Turkish literature, see: Güzel, A. (2015). *Yaşayanların ve Savaş Meydanlarını Görenlerin Kaleminden Çanakkale*, Keçiören Municipality, 100th Anniversary Gift of the Çanakkale Victory.
3. The copyright of the *Ağva Destanı* has been purchased by the Antalya Türkocağı. Permission for the use of the work was obtained from Abdullah Uysal, president of the Antalya Türkocağı.
4. For Turkish oral poetry, see: Yıldırım, D. (1999). “Dede Korkut’tan Ozan Barış’a Dönüşüm,” *Türk Dili*, no. 570, pp. 505–530.
5. Halil İbrahim Çavuş (1898–1995) was from the village of Arvalı (Bağsaray) in the Çeltikçi district of Burdur. After completing primary school, he studied at the Arvalı Madrasa and was conscripted at age seventeen when general mobilization was declared prior to the First World War. He served as First Artillery Sergeant in the 7.7-cm Ehrhardt mountain battery commanded by Mustafa Ertuğrul. He was awarded the Independence Medal by the Grand National Assembly of Turkey. He composed the epic *Ağva Destanı* immediately after the sinking of the *Paris II*, inspired by the excitement of victory, and performed it throughout his life at various gatherings (Osman Günaydın, personal communication, 14 January 2024).
6. For these sources, see:
 - Macit Selekler, *Yarım Asrın Arkasından*, İstanbul, 1960.
 - Liman von Sanders, *Bir Alman Paşasının Çanakkale ve Filistin Hatıraları – Türkiye’de Beş Sene*, Turkish General Staff Military History Commission Translation Committee (trans.), ed. Muzaffer Albayrak, Yeditepe Yayınları, 3rd ed., İstanbul, 2007.
 - Pierre Loti, “*Idama Mahkumlar Hakkında Son Müdafâ*,” *Le Figaro* (Turkish translation published in *Anadolu Gazetesi*, 12–13 April 1335, issues 2235 and 2276).
7. Artillery Captain Mustafa Ertuğrul Aker (1892–1968) began writing his memoirs in 1933 upon the recommendation of Marshal Fevzi Çakmak and Fahrettin Altay, who visited him at his home in Antalya. He completed in 1934 the notebook in which he drew the operational plans and diagrams of the ships he had sunk. It was first published in 1934 under the title “*How I Sank the British Aircraft-Carrier Benami-Krea (Ben My Chree) at the Port of Meis Island, and the French Cruisers Paris II and Alexandra at the Port of Antalya’s Ava (Ağva)*” (Aydemir, 2007, p. 49; Korkmaz, pp. 123–124). In 2007, following the discovery of the *Paris II* wreck in Kemer in 1995, Mustafa Aydemir republished the memoir under the title “*Ben Bir Türk Zabitiyim: Batıktan Çıkan Kahraman Topçu Yüzbaşı Mustafa Ertuğrul*” (Korkmaz, 2024, pp. 123–124).
 - For Artillery Captain Mustafa Ertuğrul Aker’s military biography, see Akgül, *op. cit.*, pp. 1933–1935; for his life story, see Korkmaz (2024), pp. 127–141.
8. *Ben My Chree* (“Woman of My Heart”), used by the Allied Powers during the Gallipoli Campaign of the First World War, was deployed to the Eastern Mediterranean after the Allied evacuation from Çanakkale. In January 1917, it was sunk off Meis Island by a Turkish artillery unit. It was the first aircraft carrier in the world to be sunk by artillery fire. The ship remained submerged off Meis until

- 1920, when it was salvaged and subsequently scrapped (Aydemir, 2007, pp. 68–69; Akgül, 2024, p. 1927; Korkmaz, 2024, pp. 125–126).
9. Captain Rolén, commander of the *Paris II*, was the nephew of Pierre Loti, a member of the French Academy. He wrote a long letter describing the humane treatment shown by the Turkish soldiers. Pierre Loti refers to this letter and the humane behavior of the Turks toward the captured French soldiers near the end of his article “*Idama Mahkumlar Hakkında Son Müdafâ*,” published in *Le Figaro*: “...The Turks, instead of greeting us with machine guns as the Germans would, showed us where to come ashore. Lacking boats to send, they themselves jumped into the sea to rescue us” (Özbek & Özbek, n.d., p. 57; Aydemir, 2007, p. 104).
 10. Sericebel was a highly mobile unit responsible for protecting the Mediterranean coasts during the Gallipoli campaign. The Sericebel Battery consisted of 82 soldiers and four mountain guns.
 11. For the protest function of folklore, see: İlhan Başgöz, “*Protesto: Folklorun Beşinci İşlevi*,” in *Folkloristik: Prof. Dr. Umay Günay Armağanı*, Ankara, 1996, pp. 1–4.

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Resource Person:

RP.1: Osman Günaydın (1940), university graduate / history teacher, retired, interview place and date: 14 January 2024 / Antalya

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Appendix:

The first written version of the work is given below.

Ağva Destanı

Sericebel emir aldı Ağva'ya

Maruz kaldı pek şiddetli havaya havaya

Antalyalı hazır olsun duaya

Maşallah de kumanda veren dillere dillere

Maşallah de mermi süren ellere kollara

Adrasan'da çifte vapur parlıyor

Seri cebel top kamalarını yağıyor yağıyor

Mesafeyi 1050'ye bağlıyor bağlıyor

Maşallah de nişan alan gözlere gözlere maşallah deyin

Yol yürüyen dizlere dizlere dizlere

Ağva limanına geldi büküldü

İlk grupta koca kılavuz yıkıldı yıkıldı yıkıldı

Fransızlar hep denize döküldü döküldü

Maşallah de kumanda veren dillere dillere

Maşallah deyin tetik çeken ellere ellere kollara

Haftada bir Ağva limanına uğrarsın

Çam bırakmaz mermilerle doğrarsın doğrarsın

Parıdo'nun darısına uğrarsın uğrarsın

Maşallah de nişan alan gözlere gözlere

Maşallah de yol yürüyen dizlere dizlere dizlere

Ağva limanında yemek istediğin portakal

Koca Parıdo müsadence burada kal burada kal

Sericebel Fransız'ı esir al esir al

Maşallah deyin kumanda veren dillere dillere

Maşallah deyin mermi süren ellere ellere kollara

Uzun olur Alexandra'nın direği direği

İlk grupta/vuruşta patladı kaptan yüzbaşının yüreği yüreği

30 mildir Parıdo'nun süreği süreği/sürati

Maşallah deyin nişan alan gözlere gözlere

Maşallah deyin yol yürüyen dizlere dizlere