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Uzun İnce Bir Yoldayım Gidiyorum Gündüz Gece

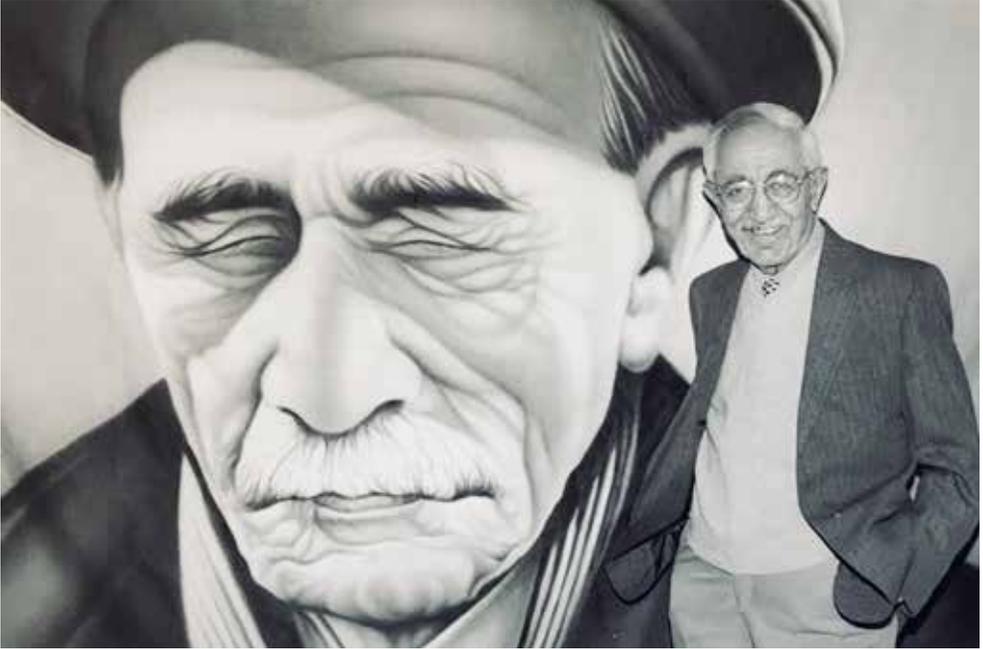
Joyce Deaton*

Unboxing old boxes buried in my upstairs closet I finally found the one marked “Turkey” and started flipping through the many photographs. The Ankara of shopping malls and democratic protests; the bus trips to yayla festivals in eastern Turkey; a tea shop in remote Tunceli; and the pilgrimage to Hajibektaş (*Hacıbektaş*). These images spanned such a variety of culture, from Istanbul to Olympos, Gallipoli (*Gelibolu*) to the Black Sea (*Karadeniz*), veiled and unveiled. Yet a common thread that pulled together the rich diverse patterns of Turkey included not only the carpets and tea shops, but in particular the music that touched every scene, and every generation. As I looked at the many photos of saz players, singers, and dancers, I found myself singing one of the precious *türkü* (Turkish folk song) I learned many years ago when I lived in Turkey: *Uzun ince bir yoldayım, gidiyorum gündüz gece* (I’m on a long narrow road, I walk all day, I walk all night).



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I met İlhan Başgöz in 2000 by chance as we walked on one of the many paths that criss-crossed the Bilkent University campus outside of Ankara. I was a visiting lecturer in the humanities department at Bilkent, and had just completed my MA in Japanese studies in the US with an emphasis on Japanese folklore and modernization. The happy coincidence sparked a friendship and numerous conversations about folklore and music in Turkey. Dr. Başgöz gave me a copy of his book, *Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature* which he kindly signed. I read it immediately and felt deeply honored to have a rare chance to ask questions of this esteemed folklorist and academic. We would meet for tea or coffee; he told me about the *Alevi* and *Âşık Veysel*, and he invited me to parties where I was awe-struck by superb saz players and the singing! These opportunities were priceless treasures from my three years living in Turkey.



Pilgrimage is the theme of my academic work as well as my documentary photography and film making projects. As I learned more about the annual pilgrimage to Hajibektaş I realized that this friendship with Dr. Başgöz was true synchronicity at its best. Before long our conversations seamlessly evolved into a creative collaboration to capture in film the story of Haji Bektaş and Alevi as pilgrimage. I came to realize that the folklore traditions in Turkey possessed not just a particular historical meaning to a single community, but contained a universal significance that so many people, including myself, could identify with, and which ultimately become iconic of Turkish culture.

Taking notes while Dr. Başgöz explained his cinematic vision for this film, I quickly discovered that his incredible academic discipline was matched only by a creative genius for storytelling and an ageless spirit. While the film, “The Doves of Haji Bektaş” was never completed, the experience sparked an unforgettable journey for myself, allowing me to

connect further to the Alevi community at Hajibektash, but also a wide assortment of people, traditions, folklore, song and community in Turkey.

During the summer of 2001 I joined the summer folklore camp at Gure (*Güre*) that Dr. Başgöz established. This gathering of some of the best and brightest young college students and teachers passionate about Turkish folk lore was full of storytelling, laughter, food, and wonderful connection. I am not sure how many men joined our group... but it seemed more like a harem of women who all clustered around *Hoca*, awaiting the next story. I remember the particular musical cadence that was unique to the telling of stories in Turkish, with a vocal rise and fall, always ending with a rising hold of a word at the end of a phrase. I remember how Dr. Başgöz would raise a hand to help hold the phrase. The raised eyebrows and beaming smile would punctuate the end of the story. My Turkish was not good enough to understand all the words, but in my heart I felt the stories. We were in the presence of a master storyteller!



The following year I took a semester off from teaching to travel through Turkey at the time of the *yayla* festivals. I took my DAT recorder and made recordings like an Alan Lomax of Turkey. I visited Dr. Başgöz in Van where he was on faculty. He took us to a tea house where *saz* players would engage in song competition, a rare happening in modern Turkey. On another part of my journey, I was at a *yayla* festival and found myself sitting amongst a group of men on a hill recording a song competition between two *saz* players. After the competition, a friend of mine couldn't wait to explain to me that I became a subject of the impromptu lyrics that these two dueling minstrels were performing.

My pilgrimage through Turkey allowed me a beautiful journey meeting all kinds of people, and their traditions. I remember encountering the high energy dancing set to the *kemenche* in a remote mountain village on the Black Sea; and amazed to see and hear the Turkish bagpipe, the *tulum*; and photographing a gypsy wedding party near Gure. On my many journeys in Turkey, one of my favorite photographs was of a blind female *saz* player near Hajibektash. The passion in which she sang was striking, not to mention her presence. She was not on a main stage at the Hajibektash festival, but just a solitary performer on the outskirts of the big event.



I didn't often see women play the saz, let alone one who was blind, which I identified with the tradition of the ashik. That photo was taken at the end of a long journey to Hajibekdash. I was utterly exhausted from the late nights and carrying the heavy recording equipment. I regret not taking the time to interview this woman to find out her story. And while her personal story may indeed be a mystery that is lost to time, the songs that she performed are a part of a big stream of music that has carried traditions and stories from many generations through Anatolia.

The traditions of story and song have clearly made an indelible mark on the work of İlhan Başgöz, and likewise his attention to preserving and understanding these traditions have rippled out amongst many students who he inspired over the years. The legacy of folklore knowledge is a part of the big stream of stories and songs in Turkey, which I am deeply grateful I had a chance to experience with the help of *Hoca*.

