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Gezek Tradition in Bursa and its Historical Background

Abstract

Gezek, which is a foundation of music and solidarity founded at Turkey's fifth largest county many centuries ago, affording to exist with musical elements intact nowadays. Gezek, is a musical activity carried out by gathering at the homes of the members per week. The foundation, which has benefits such as keeping Turkish Art Music (Türk Sanat Müziği) alive, doing its performing and raising musicians of this genre, is also helping the cooperation between members and people who require support. Gezek, which is not solely an amusement culture, is a solidarity foundation that helps orphans and to who are in need of money. When we analyse some of the traditional values of it, we understand that it's a very old custom.

When we analyse some of the traditional values of it, we understand that it's a very old custom. In this study, starting from the similar aspects of Gezek and guilds and akhis which are the institutions embellished by Ottoman characteristics, will be introduced. Firstly, some general information about akhis and lonca is given. Membership conditions and properties of Inner Gezek and Outer Gezek properties has been determined and reached at the first place. Information on Gezek's various activities, such as foods that have been treated and games that have been played were tried to be given. The purpose of the practice is to exhibit Gezek's, the foundation which has members from all social layers, activities in Bursa, the 5th largest county of Turkey.

Key Terms

Gezek, Bursa, Turkey, akhis, Ottoman guild system.

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Bursa’da Gezek Geleneği ve Tarihsel Arkapları

Özet

Türkiye’nin beşinci büyük ili Bursa’da yüzyıllardır süren bir müzik ve dayanışma kurumu olan Gezek, bugün de kültürel öğelerini sürdürerek yaşamaya çalışmaktadır. Gezek, üyelerin evlerinde haftada bir kere toplanarak gerçekleştirilen bir müzik faaliyetidir. Türk Sanat Müziğini diri tutmak, icrasını yapmak, müzik adamları yetiştirmek gibi faydaları olan bu kurum, aynı zamanda üyeler ve ihtiyaç sahipleri arasındaki dayanışmayı da sağlamaktadır. Sadece bir eğlence kültürü olmayan Gezek, paraya ihtiyacı olan kişilere, yetim ve öksüzlere yardımlarda bulunan bir dayanışma kurumudur. İçinde barındırdığı bir takım geleneksel değerlere bakıldığında geçmişinin çok eskilere dayandığı anlaşılmaktadır.

Bu çalışmada, benzer özelliklerinden yola çıkarak Gezek geleneği ile Osmanlı’nın kendine has özellikleriyle donattığı bir kurum olan ahilik ve lonca tanıtılacaktır. Öncelikle ahilik kavramı ve loncalar hakkında genel bir bilgi verilmiştir. Gezek’e üye olma şartları belirlenerek, İç Gezek ve Dış Gezek’in özellikleri tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca Gezek’in çeşitli faaliyetlerine, ikram edilen yiyeceklere ve oynanan oyunlara kadar bilgiler verilmeye çalışılmıştır. Makalenin amacı, yüzyıllardır Türkiye’nin beşinci büyük ili Bursa’da, her kesimden üyeleri bulunan Gezek’teki faaliyetleri ortaya koymaktır.

Anahtar Terimler

Gezek, Bursa, Türkiye, ahilik, lonca.

1. *Akhis* as the Origins of the Ottoman Guild System

Among the members of the Akhi institution, which originates from the Arabic word ‘ahi’ (my brother) fraternity and solidarity played a great part. The institution, which served as the agent of transition from nomadic to urban culture in Anatolia, articulated itself into the moral values adopted by both cultures (Sarıkaya 1999: 393-5). Although Akhis were an occupational or craft union, their religious, social, and political values seem to have outlined their economic qualities. They came to be known for their non-economic qualities and values such as generosity, helping the needy, and protecting the victims of atrocity and oppression (Ülgener 1951).

The *akhis*, who became visible in Anatolia as a religious and social institution during the 12th century, played important roles also in the foundation process of the Ottoman state. By maintaining security and order in Anatolia they shared the administrative burden of the Ottoman rulers especially when the latter had to concern themselves largely with external problems (Tabakoğlu 1999). Following the foundation phase of the empire, the *akhis* whose administrative and security roles were not needed

anymore began to undertake social functions becoming exclusively charitable trade and craft guilds.

Akhis, who were organized into various groups in large cities, had a dervish lodge for each group. In small towns, on the other hand, different professional groups could constitute a single union. Through these organizations, they dealt with the problems of their professions and ran their relations with the state. Activities such as product and quality control, assignment of prices were among the chief duties of these unions. The *Akhi* institution, which spread in Anatolia as far as to the villages, brought together many state officials, members of the military class, qadis and medresse teachers, and the sheikhs of religious brotherhoods under its roof. The institution continued to survive with these structural, titular and functional elements until the 14th century. From then on, the *Akhis* changed into organized professional unions under the name of *lonca* (trade or craft guild), and their economic activities began to occupy the forefront (Kazıcı: 541).

The *Akhi* institution, which became dysfunctional, obsolete and alienated in light of new developments and governmental policies, was replaced by a new institution from the 14th century onwards. This new institution was the *lonca* (guild). The concept of *lonca* signified the unity and order established by trades and crafts people as well as the location (room) where they met to talk their problems. The *lonca* institution neither imposed strict rules for entry to and promotion in the professions to the same extent implemented by dervish lodges and convents, nor bounded itself up with religious and sectarian principles (Özkaya 1985).

The guilds, like their counterparts in Europe, established fund boxes for solidarity among members and their families to cope with the important risks and events of social life such as illness, marriage, birth, launching up a business, unemployment and death by supplying assistance in cash or in kind. Each guild conducted charity works by establishing and running charity boxes called *orta sandığı* (common box) or *teavün sandığı* (box for mutual assistance). The sources of revenue constituting the capital of these boxes were quite varied. They included, among other sources, the membership fees collected from the guild members weekly or monthly on the basis of the employers' and employees' revenues (one percent of each member's income), donations, fees collected from those who promote from apprenticeship to journeymanship and from this status to full mastery, and other amounts rendered by the well-to-do members, especially masters during special occasions and ceremonies (Talas 1972). Guild administrators were authorized to remit some of the funds at their disposal to the masters who wished to expand their trades or workshops but were unable to find the necessary capital. The masters had to repay the loans they received after a plausible period of time, adding a one-percent-interest to the original debt. When a guild member died, if his family did not have enough money, these funds were also used to meet the burial expenses. It would thus be fairly correct to say that these boxes used to serve as a full-fledged mechanism of mutual help and solidarity as well as an effective social insurance system covering the risks of illness, unemployment, and poverty (Mantran 1990).

Ottoman craft guilds had entertains when met. At the meeting place, members used to read some parts from the Qur'an, or tell the stories of saintly people, and of the

prophets. At some of the *sohbets*, people were dancing (Breebaart). Music and dancing played considerable roles in the ceremonies at the beginning. Nasiri praised *sema*, whirling dance, on a higher level by saying that wind brought the song of the angels. Probably later on, when the ulema's influence throughout the Empire increased, music and dancing lost their significance.¹

The guild festivals made up an important and regular part of ceremonial life in big cities, especially in Istanbul. Each guild used to hold periodic festivals, often annually but sometimes once in two or three years at special excursion spots such as the *Kağthane Çayırı* (Sweet Waters of Europe at the tip of the Golden Horn) or *Ağa Çayırı* on the Anatolian side of the Bosphorus. These festivals had religious origins. Some of them used to last one or two days while others a full week. In his travel accounts, Evliya Çelebi talks about the festivals of the jewelry guild. The jewelers held an annual entertainment that lasted a couple of days. However, they used to hold a large festival once in every twenty years which lasted ten days and ten nights. A number of varied motivations underscored these festivals. Consolidation of organizational structure, strengthening the mutual relations among members, entertainment, and expectation of commercial gains were but a few of such motivations. The guildsmen were able to introduce their products to potential customers on these occasions. It was highly difficult and costly to organize such whole-scale festivals. That is why the generous support of the guild masters and of state authorities was of paramount importance for the realization of these massive festive events. More importantly, the guilds used to hold ceremonies, parades, and processions to celebrate and accompany imperial events of vital importance such as the ascendance of the sultan to the throne, his marriage, circumcision of the princes, and seeing the imperial army off for a campaign. During these activities, each guild used to give their best products to the sultan and other top state officials as gifts. They were no doubt given in return valuable presents as the elements of social presentation. The guilds also used to give some products gratis to common people from their special vehicles prepared for the processions, and perform highly interesting shows (Evren 1997).

Although it is not the same as lonca and ahilik which are organising trade activities and provide solidarity between the traders in Ottoman Age, it is similar to them. This institution is a group which aims to practice and introduce Turkish Art Music besides trying to create solidarity and friendship in its age.

The spirit of solidarity that gezek consists and the ideal of collaboration that lonca consists have similar aspects. Because the members of Gezek help people, who want to buy their own house and marry their children, who have some health problems or difficulties and orphans in the city. Moreover the practices such as dances and discussions made by ahis have some similarities with the practices of the members of gezek.

¹ "Zevk ve neş'e her adama layık değildir. Raks etmek âriflere bir gösteriş sayılmaz." (Turna 2001: 33-4).

2. Features of Gezek

Gezek is a traditional assembly of Turkish Art Music performing² which is regularly held by only male members of Gezek in their homes. Furthermore, Gezek is a foundation founded after Bursa being the capital of the Ottoman in the date of 1335 with the purpose of advancing Turkish Classical Music, increasing social welfare and solidarity. The name “Gezek” has been formed by adding “-ek” “verb to noun affix” to “gez-” verb due to their house to house visits.

Gezek has three aspects: First one musical improvement, secondly establishing cooperation between members and people who require support, thirdly offering traditional treats during Gezek activities.

There are eight Gezeks still living in Bursa country. Gezeks has got shaped according to the communal social and legal properties with transition of Ottoman to today’s community and passed beyond being a tradition that is existent in the public to work like a formal establishment which has its own code. Gezek’s constitution is laid out according to this code.

Candidates must fulfill obvious conditions to be a member of such social foundation. With the conditions of being a Republic of Turkey citizen, being able to use given civil rights, displaying behaviors set by the code, not being expelled from such social foundations, being a citizen respectable to Republic of Turkey’s laws and not having harmful addictions such as alcohol, drugs met, any candidate can apply to the with a petition must point out guarantor members and state that he has accepted inner and outer Gezek codes. Person who is accepted into membership by Board of Director’s majority decision continues Gezek under the custody of the guarantor person for one year. Real membership is achieved by collecting 2\3 vote at the first gathering of the first Board of Directors.

Every member has a member card that contains his Gezek title, name and surname, registration number, job and residence address and registration date. Gezek members have the same equal rights and duties. They can cast votes and join the plenary session and have right to choose and be chosen. They can benefit from all kinds of arrangements. Furthermore, they have to pay their membership fees regularly and not act against other members or the general serenity.

Members can be expelled from membership by losing Gezek’s entrance conditions or don’t doing their rights and duties by Board of Directors 2\3 majority decision. In addition to that, members can leave Gezek with their own will by applying with a petition to Board of Directors. If the member deceased, dues he paid in the last Gezek period will be paid back to his legal heritors in 15 days.

“Bursa Dostlar Gezeği”s, which is a Gezek of eight Gezeks of Bursa, profile can be given as an example of Gezek members’ age and occupations if giving examples are needed. When “Bursa Dostlar Gezeği” members’ job classifications are inspected, aside from a few retired, architects and lawyers, all members are tradesman as can be noticed. Members’ jobs, date of births and ages in 2004-2005 seasons are below:

² Turkish Art Music is the Classical Turkish Music that starts from Ottoman age and houses tunes such as Hicaz, Hüzam, Acemaşiran, Uşsak, Rast, Segah.

	NAME - SURNAME	DATE OF BIRTH	AGE OF MEMBER	JOBS
1	MERİH AKDEN	15.06.1929	78	RETIRED
2	ŞABAN AYŞİM	26.02.1934	73	RETIRED
3	ŞİNASİ BAŞAK	19.08.1940	67	SPA. AUTO. PARTS
4	ORHAN GÖKGÖZ	01.01.1941	66	RETIRED
5	MÜMTAZ DOĞAN	24.03.1942	65	CER. ARCHITECT
6	CELAL CUMURCUL	14.07.1942	65	TOURISM
7	MEHMET İLHAN	19.04.1944	63	INSURER
8	SÜLEYMAN OKUROĞLU	20.01.1945	62	JEWELER
9	İSMAİL HAKKI ŞİPAL	06.03.1945	62	VENDOR OWNER
10	ENGİN PARSEKER	11.06.1945	62	DRIVER INSTRUCTOR
11	RAMİZ HARMANLI	03.08.1945	62	TRADESMAN
12	İBRAHİM GÜNEL	16.09.1945	62	MACHINE PROD..
13	GÜNDOĞDU SAYMAN	01.05.1946	61	CER. ELEC. ENG.
14	SUAT SUNGUN	01.01.1947	60	MANUFACTURER
15	MUSTAFA GÜLEÇ	21.03.1947	60	LAWYER
16	HÜSNÜ TUNÇSÖKEN	16.02.1949	58	ELEC. PROD. SALE
17	ASAF OTUZ	10.04.1949	58	MANAGER
18	HASAN BİLGE	06.10.1949	58	MERCHANT
19	AHMET ŞENTÜRK	22.10.1950	57	FOOD WHOSESEL.
20	MEHMET ADİL AKSEVEN	04.03.1951	56	TEXTILE
21	ÇETİN GÖKGÖZ	27.07.1951	55	LAWYER
22	SEDAT URAS	09.04.1952	55	TEXTILE
23	MEHMET ÖZEL	08.04.1953	54	COM-ST.GOOD. SALE.
24	MUSTAFA ULUÇAY	11.04.1953	54	GROCERY OWNER
25	RECEP KANCEVİZOĞLU	18.02.1954	53	LATHEMAN
26	HÜSEYİN BALO	21.03.1955	52	TRADESMAN
27	MURAT ARSLAN	01.07.1958	49	TEXTILE
28	DURGUT AYDIN	06.01.1959	48	RETIRED
29	ŞEKİP DOĞANCI	15.03.1959	48	RETIRED
30	İSMAİL GENÇBAYRAKTAR	12.01.1963	44	RETIRED

Gezek activities are divided into three: A. Inner Gezek. B. Outer Gezek. C. Other Activities.

A. Inner Gezek:

Inner gezek is the “male only” activity held in members’ homes. Inner gezek’s schedule is set by Board of Directors concerning Ramadan months, holy nights and members’ special wishes. Usually begins in September, when the holiday months finish, and ends with June, when the schools are closed finishing the term. This schedule must be obeyed by every member.

Members come together in a member’s home at a certain hour and a day. The Gezek house, no matter how many times visited before, gets dressed up by oil lamps which are hanged to the door or window. The oil lamp which has various colors on it signals people that a Gezek will be held in that house.

After being greeted at the door of the house and placed into suitable places, music performing starts with the chiefs company, when people are sure that everybody has come, in a tune like Nihavend, Uşşah or Hüzam. Every chant that is sung must be from that chosen tune. Instruments and audio system is ready before the performing. At least one zither, violin, flute, clarinet and tomtom are used in musical performances.³

Songs determined from that days chosen tune are sang by participation by pieces set before and all members following “Word ends when music starts.” mentality. Meantime, host’s wife and her relatives are busy preparing the treats because treats must be offered just as the songs finish. Treats offered are divided into two as sweet and salty. This treats offered are salty and sweet pastries such as cheesed bundle pie, hazelnutted cookie and dinners such as stuffed meat pilaf, chicken meat pilaf are served between the main of the music and the solo part.⁴

Speakers from that days important subjects like health, economic, social and cultural take place between groups performed music and solo. Members are informed about an actual disease or an actual activity at these sessions that resembles mini conferences. Thus experts and members meet and a cultural information exchange occurs.

Gezek host is obligated to sing an opus at the beginning of the solo part. If the member has no valid reasons for disobeying that rule, a donation fine will be set by the

³ Zither, played by all fingers; ud is a stringed instrument played with a plectrum. Violin is an instrument which took place in Turkish Art Music as well as Western music. Clarinet, a blown instrument made from ebony tree; tomtom is a percussion instrument.

⁴ Cheesed Bundle Patty: A dough made with milk, oil, egg, salt and flour, containing cheese and parsley and shaped into a bundle shape.

Albanian Patty: A dough based food made up from putting either tomato, leek or minced meat into 13 folds of phyllo.

Inner Pilaf: A pilaf made with pine kernel, lamb lung, onion, bird grape, crushed almond and cinnamon.

Chicken Pilaf: A pilaf made by chipping potato, chicken meat and pistacho into rice.

board of directors. Any member or a relative of the host can join the solo part by singing an opus

Second treat offerings as serving sweets take place after host's solo. Then various subjects are discussed recalling the Turkish proverb "(Let's) eat sweet, talk nice". Speaking in such furious debate matter subjects as politics and sports are forbidden. And gossip is not an appreciated thing. Traditional desert such as rice pudding, milk pudding, halvah, baklava are offered at that while.⁵

A lottery takes place after desserts phase in order to cover Gezek spending. Every member must buy a lottery ticket. Gifts to be distributed in the lottery (various kitchen tools, bibles etc.) are obtained by the Gezek host.

Though not occurring anymore, games of farce (Ortaoyunu)⁶, meddah⁷, blindman's buff (Körebe)⁸ are another feature of Gezek. Besides all that, nowadays occasionally played games are thus:

Prostration Prank (Secde Etme Oyunu): One of old members of Gezek disguises in imam's appearance. Wears a black topcoat or overcoat instead of normal robe and a scarf made headgear instead of the turban. The imam being introduced enters the room. Sits on bended knees to the blanket outspread instead of the prayer rug. Then four members are called and bend knees on the blanket and prostrate one by one in front of the imam. Meanwhile, these four members tightly clasp all four corners of the rug with the instruction the imam whisper to a member. Then comes the turn of calling the person, who is a guest of this evening and not knowing about the game played. Just as when the person called with his name prostrates and waits the imam whisper something

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- ⁵ Semolina Halvah: A sweetmeat prepared by roasting semolina, pine kernel and milk.
Rice Pudding: A dessert prepared with milk and rice and served by cinnamon powder.
Milk Pudding: A dessert that is prepared by cooking milk and rice flour.
Baklava: A baked dessert with folds of phyllo furnished with walnut or pistachio and poured sugared sherbet.
- ⁶ Ortaoyunu (Farce): The leading traditional Turkish play that is spectacted. A dance show with dancing young men and women with the accompany of musicians were performed at the beginning of each show. It is a spectacle with improvisation and sitcom and based upon actual events.
- ⁷ Meddahlık (being a public storyteller): Meddah, benefits from animation and imitation while telling his story. Makes imitations of various ethnically different people, people of various ages and types, animals, machines and events of nature. Does the show sitting in rather high spots at roofed places. Has a stick at his hand and a huge handkerchief on his shoulder. He hits the ground with the stick to gather attention of watchers and to declare that the show is about to begin. Uses the stick as a accessory resembling a rifle, a broom e.g. Imitates various ethnic groups and occupations, headkerchief of women with the handkerchief. Another function of the handkerchief is that it helps Meddah to give out various sounds. Meddah emphasizes on the results to deducted, apologies with his fixed words by leaving the responsibility to the source and finishes the show by stating when and where is the next one.
- ⁸ Körebe (Blindman's Buff): "It" becomes blind after getting his eyes shut with a scarf or something like that at the game named "Blindman's Buff". Other players move around the blind and touch. "It" tires to catch them. Blind must immediately tell the name of the person he catches. Blind will stay blind and the game will restart if he tells a wrong name. But the one caught will be blinded if he correctly tells the name.

to his ear, imam shouts “Sallûû”⁹ and four members of Gezek toss the rug up high and dumbfound the guest.

Then after the place settles down, the same imam takes his place for a second prank like the first. Four people around him take their places at the four corners of the prayer rug and prostrates again. Then comes the turn of another guest. New guest, for he has learned something from the previous game, prostrates and clasps the rug tightly. But then the imam lowers his head and empties the water filled pot hidden in his handmade headgear on the guest.

Eye Closing Prank (Göz Kapama Oyunu): While chatting, a veteran member of the Gezek states that he is uncomfortable from the glances of guests and tells that these members eyes must be closed, then gestures and people located in backsides of the guests close their eyes with their hands. Then their eyes are opened after the direction of “We can open their eyes.” However, because of the chalk dusted hands of Gezek members who shut guests eyes, victim’s eyes and faces become coal black.

Then the Gezek ends at a hour set previously and members leave the place dancing “Çifte Telli”¹⁰ and singing ballads such as “Bursa’nın Ufak Tefek Taşları, Setbaşı, Efe ve Yemeni, Keklik, Turna”¹¹ while being careful to respect other people who might be sleeping.

Other members have indispensabilities as well as the Gezek host in Inner Gezek: Members must keep the house clean as that home was their homes, must not drink alcohol, must notify the host and ruling members about guests brought, must not make a noise during the performance and solo, must not join solos, must not excessively speak of politics or sports, must not smoke after their performance and solos. However, hosts can set a place up for smokers.

B. Outer Gezek:

Outer Gezek is activities done in any holiday region with the purpose of enjoying holidays and present Gezek around with their wives and children. Gezek members make trips every year beginning with the last week of June or in the following weekend after primary education schools closed. The region to go and the hotel to stay are chosen by Board of Directors investigation visit according to member’s wishes. Members must join the journey with their wives and act according to Gezek spirit, the codes. Also, members can only bring their own children to the journey. Doing domestic presentations by arranging musical performances (saz) on determined days and nights is the most important qualification of Outer Gezek.

⁹ Sallû: Short saying of Sallâllâhü Tealâ. A prayer said about prophet Hz. Mohammed with the meaning of “May Allah exalt his fame; accept his prayers and wishes; give whatever he wants.”

¹⁰ A very energetic dance with 4-4 beat.

¹¹ Most of the Bursa ballads are sung in “four and a half beat” dance rhythms named “richocet”. “Setbaşı, Efe ve Yemeni, Keklik, Turna and Bursa’nın Ufak Tefek Taşları” are amongst most known ballads.

C. Other Activities:

Including talented vocal, verbal and musical instrument artists into Gezek and giving support, granting scholarship if needed are amongst Gezek's other activities.

Besides recruiting, nights of music in suitable theaters, cultural, artistic, economic solidarity and amusements, journeys, seminars and courses e.g. activities can be in question. Money achieved from these activities is spent to orphan children's needs or members facing economic hardship.

At every Gezek period, a picnic is arranged in April-May months and a fast breaking dinner is given in Ramadan months which members join with their wives. Every member must join these organisations by buying 4 invites. Besides, a lottery is arranged during these dinners and members must buy tickets for both themselves and their wife.

Lastly, Gezeks activities are not activities for solely fun. Maybe the most important quality of these foundations is their factor in raising so precious musicians at Turkish Art Music (Türk Sanat Müziği) such as Burhan Dikencik, Yıldırım Gürses, Recep Birgit, Mustafa Gezeroğlu, Necdet Baştuğ, Abdülkadir Tanaçan, Cahit Bektaş, Cahit Peksayar, Hıfzı Vurtop, Mümin Salman and Erdiñ Çelikkol.

Sources for this strive as follows:**Source 1:**

Name - Surname: Erdiñ Çelikkol

County: Bursa

Age and occupation: 68, Conservatory of Bursa Municipality, TSM Section Chief

Educational Background: High School

Registry date: 4.07.2005

Source 2:

Name - Surname: Ömer Gülnar

County: Bursa

Age and occupation: 67, Retired

Educational Background: High School

Registry date: 04.03.2006

Source 3:

Name - Surname: Ramiz Harmanlı (Deceased.) ilkokul

County: Bursa

Age and occupation: 60, Baby Confection

Educational Background: Primary School

Registry date: 12.02.2005

Source 4:

Name - Surname: Süleyman Okuroğlu

County: Bursa

Age and occupation: 62, Jeweller

Educational Background: Primary School

Registry date: 16.02.2007

Source 5:

Name - Surname: Burhanettin Aşan (Deceased.)

County: Bursa

Age and occupation: 67, Candy Maker

Educational Background: Primary School

Registry date: 16.03.1997

Source 6:

Name - Surname: İbrahim Aker (Deceased.)

County: Bursa

Age and occupation: 79, Candy Maker

Educational Background: High School

Registry date: 06.08.2005

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