
THE SANTOURI AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE OF LESVOS

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Abstract: This article explores the cultural significance and heritage of the santouri, a traditional musical instrument deeply intertwined with the rich history and traditions of the Greek island of Lesvos. The santouri, a stringed percussion instrument, was traditionally present in mainland and mainland Greece, but its actual exposure and dissemination in the region has received a radical renewal since the arrival of Greek refugees from Asia Minor after the disaster of 1923. This migration gathers notable musicians and creators, making the santouri an integral part of traditional music and company. Lesvos, in particular, is considered the last remnant of the original Asia Minor preserved in Greece. This island retains a wealth of political elements that it had in common with Asia Minor, and many of these traditions still thrive on the island. In this environment, the santouri became part of the living tradition and cultural heritage of Lesvos. The aim of this study is to shed light on the role of santouri as a reference instrument of the cultural identity of Lesvos. To achieve this, a multifaceted research methodology was used, including interviews with local musicians, archival analysis and an examination of the instrument's evolution over time. The santouri, as a stringed percussion instrument, has played a central role in the island's vibrant musical heritage, reflecting the cultural diversity and influences that have shaped Lesvos throughout its history. The results of our study show that Santouri functions as a strong emblem of the cultural heritage of Lesvos. It represents a fusion of influences, including Byzantine, Ottoman and Aegean, that have shaped the island's musical traditions over the centuries. Furthermore, we found that the santouri remains a vital part of local musical practices, both in traditional folk music and in contemporary compositions. Musicians on Lesvos continue to innovate and experiment with the instrument, demonstrating its adaptability and enduring appeal. By recognizing the importance of the instrument and promoting its study and practice, Lesvos can ensure the continued vitality of the instrument as a cultural symbol. Initiatives aimed at education and conservation can help bridge the gap between past and present, strengthening a sense of cultural continuity and identity on the island.

Keywords: Santouri, Lesvos, Cultural Heritage, Asia Minor

1. INTRODUCTION

The perspective of Lesvos towards Asia Minor reflects the historical connection of the island with old Greece, which clearly demonstrates the coexistence of the two cultural worlds. Dionysopoulos points out that the Asia Minor songs were very popular among the people, in contrast to the upper class of the time. This is due, in his view, to the fact that the Asia Minor culture was unjustly and discredited by the upper class of the time, mainly because of the destruction it suffered (Dionysopoulos, 1996). Previously, Lesbos was considered more advanced economically, socially and culturally than the neighbouring area, but after the disaster, the conditions were reversed. The presence of music in the life of the Christian popular class in Turkish-occupied Lesbos until 1840 is limited. It is stressed that the people of the period suffered greatly from Ottoman oppression and its adverse consequences, including economic hardship and cultural decline. Under these circumstances, music and fine arts were not a priority for the community (Aristides - Papis 1972)

The little evidence that exists for the presence of music comes mainly from accounts of foreign travellers, mainly Western Europeans, who visited the island while travelling to Constantinople, Smyrna or the Holy Land. From their accounts, some information about music in Lesvos emerges (Doudounis, 2023)

On Lesvos, cultural diversity is an integral part of everyday life and music is an indelible cultural core. Here, the karsilamades, the aptaliko and the zeimpekika are danced with passion and authenticity, creating a unique dance wealth. In today's situation, it is practically impossible to distinguish which patinades belong to Lesvos and which to Asia Minor. This fusion of traditions and music is a rare example of how culture interconnects and evolves through migratory flows and shared experiences. The santouri is another important element of this rich musical heritage of Lesvos. The sounds of the santouri highlight the dazzling coexistence and blending of musical traditions from Asia Minor and Lesvos. The pulses of this cultural narrative keep the richness of history and heritage alive as locals continue to carry out these traditions in their daily lives.

The santouri, a stringed and percussion musical instrument, is an important part of the traditional music rich history of Lesbos. Its name derives from the Greek word "psaltirion," via the Persian language (santur), meaning "psaltery." This ancient instrument probably came from Persia and then spread to the Greek area. However, its wider spread in Lesvos is due to the arrival of Greek refugees from Asia Minor after the disaster of 1922 (Kofteros. & Feygalas, 2020) In Lesvos, the santouri became extremely popular from the end of the 19th century to the first

decades of the 20th century. The musical tradition of the island was dominated by multi-member orchestras that drew their musical influences from the opposite coast of Asia Minor, mainly from the regions of Smyrna and Ayvali. The basis of these instruments was the violin and the santouri, which had the traditional name "santuroviolias." The first written reference to the santouri in Lesbos is found in the book of the French engineer De Launay entitled "Near the Greeks of Turkey") (Dragoumis, 2016). In it, he describes the Sunday dances at Agia Paraskevi where three musicians perform the music. The first a mandolin, called a "laguto", the second an instrument with stretched strings struck with two mallets, i.e. the santouri, while the third plays a violin. The santouri, one of the most beloved instruments of Mytilene, contributed to the cultural wealth of the island and to the creation of the musical company of "fisers." The numerous santur players of Lesbos contributed to the preservation and spread of such an important musical instrument in the traditional music of the region. The melodies of the santouri even today highlight the rich cultural heritage of Lesbos and the influence of Asia Minor. This musical tradition continues to be vibrant and dynamic, blending past and present, and provides a beautiful example of how culture evolves and keeps our spiritual heritage alive and indelible for future generations.

2. METHODOLOGY

Adopting the role of an "insider" participant in the musical tradition of Lesbos is crucial for gaining authentic insights into the role and position of the santouri. This approach allows the researcher to immerse themselves in the cultural and musical milieu, which is often necessary for understanding the nuances and intricacies of a particular tradition. By actively participating in the musical activities of the community, the researcher can establish trust and rapport with local musicians and community members. This insider perspective facilitates access to hidden or tacit knowledge that may not be readily shared with an external observer. Baily's assertion that practical understanding of musical performance reveals deep knowledge is highly relevant in the context of studying an instrument like the santouri. To truly comprehend the significance of the santouri in Lesbos' musical tradition, one must go beyond theoretical knowledge and engage in hands-on practice (Baily, 2001). Learning to play the santouri offers insights into the instrument's technical intricacies, the challenges faced by musicians, and the creative processes involved in crafting melodies. Practical understanding provides a holistic view of the instrument's role beyond its musical notes, encompassing its cultural, social, and emotional dimensions. The act of learning to play the santouri is not just an academic exercise; it serves as a methodological tool for data collection. His shared experience facilitates deeper interviews and fosters a sense of camaraderie, which encourages participants to open up about their experiences and perceptions of the santouri. Furthermore, playing the santouri allows the researcher to actively participate in musical performances, gaining firsthand experience of the instrument's role within the ensemble. This experiential knowledge enriches the research findings, as it goes beyond mere observation and theory. In conclusion, adopting an "insider" participant approach and embracing Baily's emphasis on practical understanding aligns with the ethos of ethnographic research, where the researcher becomes an integral part of the community they study. By learning the santouri and actively participating in the musical traditions of Lesbos, the researcher gains a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the instrument's role, its cultural significance, and its impact on the community's identity and heritage. This approach ultimately enhances the depth and authenticity of the research findings.

The methodological tools used included:

1. Participant Observation: Immersion within the musical tradition of Lesbos allowed for firsthand experiences and observations of musical practices, performances, and interactions within the community.
2. In-depth Interviews: Conversations with local musicians, santouri players, and community members provided valuable insights into their perspectives, experiences, and the historical context of the santouri in Lesbos.
3. Archival Research: Exploration of historical records, documents, and recordings pertaining to the santouri and its presence in Lesbos helped establish a historical context.
4. Musical Analysis: Detailed examination of musical compositions and performances involving the santouri allowed for a deeper understanding of its role within the tradition.

The Research Questions are:

- What is the historical background of the santouri in Lesbos?
- How has the santouri been integrated into the musical practices of Lesbos?
- What are the perceptions and experiences of local musicians and community members regarding the santouri?
- In what ways has the santouri influenced the broader musical heritage of Lesbos?
- How does the practical understanding of musical performance, as advocated by Baily (2001), manifest within the context of santouri playing in Lesbos?

3. RESULTS

In Lesvos, the first reference to the santouri is found in the book by the French engineer De Launay entitled "Near the Greeks of Turkey," published in Paris in 1897. In this work, the Sunday dances in the region of Agia Paraskevi are described, where the tradition of feasting with three musicians playing is revived. The first musician plays a mandolin called the lute, the second plays an instrument with stretched strings that is struck with two hammers called the santouri, and the third plays a violin. In this region, there have been excellent santour players and cymbalists, such as:

- Lambros or Lambis Theologos, who came from Smyrna and played the santouri.
- Panagiotis Consouros, also known as "Mytilinos," from Mytilene.
- Andreas Emmanuel Ventelis, a famous professional santour player before he left Asia Minor. Then, with the emigration of refugees after the Asia Minor disaster in 1922, Athens and Piraeus became major urban centers, and the santouri became a staple instrument in cafes Aman and cafes Santan, where musicians accompanied the komania. Thus began a new era for the santour.

Among the famous players of the instrument were Yannis Zafeiropoulos, Hermolaos Consolas, Evangelos Salavaris, as well as the cymbalist Emmanuel Chrysafakis, who served as president of the musicians' association from 1928 to 1957. In the festivals of the area, there was a specific series of scoped dances that included the "Syrtos", the "Ballos", the "Karsilamades", the "Zeimpekika", and the "Mazomeno" or "Pidichto" as the last dance.

The musical formation often included the yoke gaitada - dulcimer and zournas (or clarinet) - dulcimer, but today in Lesvos there is only one gaitatzis, while in the memory of the elderly few names of musicians from the beginning of the century survive and usually only the nickname "Gaitatzis".

The music and singing were a constant element in the daily life of the inhabitants of Lesvos. Customary ceremonies such as birth, marriage and death ceremonies, as well as religious festivals and fairs were always accompanied by songs and music. This musical tradition reflects the rich and multifaceted culture of Lesvos, which was influenced by Asia Minor and other neighbouring regions. The musicians and dances described in the text are part of the social life of the area and keep the tradition alive. The contribution of these musicians to the cultural heritage of Lesvos is invaluable, as they have preserved and transmitted the rich musical tradition of the region. The presence of the santouri and other traditional instruments is part of the cultural identity of Lesvos and contributes to the enriched cultural diversity of the region. Every village on Lesvos had one or more musical companies that played an important role in the life and culture of the region. These companies consisted of local musicians, often members of the same family or fellow musicians. Competition between the companies was fierce as they vied for dominance in the region's feasts and festivals. The musical companies were large, expensive, and had an important role in various social events, such as weddings, feasts and festivals. These musicians imposed their presence with the wind instruments, as the lack of microphone systems required the volume of their music to be increased to reach all present. In addition, the text points out the occasional nature of musical performance and how this required musicians to tour the island on foot, as the road network was limited until the 1950s. This meant that musicians had to travel distances on foot to participate in various events and festivals, keeping alive the musical tradition on the island (Kofteros, 2019).

Many Lesbian musicians traveled seasonally or migrated to the opposite coast of Asia Minor, drawing new influences and experiences that strengthened the musical tradition of Lesbos. These moves broadened their musical education and enabled the purchase of new instruments, enriching their sound and repertoire. In addition, trips to the opposite coast were also an opportunity to participate in local festivals and feasts, enhancing the exchange of musical knowledge and experience among the musicians. In Mytilene, the largest city on the island, smaller stringed instruments such as violins, dulcimers, and lutes predominated, the villages of Lesvos preferred multi-member ensembles that usually included wind instruments, such as clarinets, trombones, euphonies, trumpet or cornets, and tambourines. As a well-known violinist from Agiasos, Charilaos Rodanos, says: " Mytilene did not have large orchestras, like in the villages. There had to be 6 instruments in the villages. Mytilene had 2-3, a santouri, a guitar and they sang, they were that kind of bands, which were nice. While we had an orchestra – a band, a small band, we had wind instruments, Mytilini did not want wind instruments. Mytilini had violins, santouri, lute, oud, small orchestras. This variety reflects the island's complex musical heritage, shaped by various influences and local preferences (Papadakis, 1996).



In this context, the musical groups of Lesvos played an important role in preserving and spreading the musical tradition of the region. These musicians were not only involved in music, but also worked in other professions, such as farmers, barbers, tailors and cobblers. This complexity and the coexistence of music with everyday business activities reflects the importance and integration of music in the lives of local residents. The musical tradition of Lesvos is still an important part of the local culture and offers a unique insight into the history, society and traditions of the island of Lesvos. The transmission of this tradition from generation to generation ensures the continuation of the diverse and rich musical heritage of the region. During the 1940s, Lesvos experienced an extremely difficult period due to the dramatic events that affected both the inhabitants and the musicians of the region. The World War, the German occupation, and the civil war caused hardship and insecurity in their daily lives. The persecuted musical ensembles of many institutions temporarily or permanently left the musical field.

However, during the 1950s to the 1970s, music and dance returned dynamically to the daily life of Lesvos. Despite the earlier Asia Minor influences, local dances remained popular, with the karzilama, zebeke, syrto and ballo dominating. However, the new cultural influence was strongly introduced by Athens with its rebetiko and folk songs.

The new musical formations were smaller, and the wind instrument players slowly retired (although the clarinet remained popular, especially at weddings). The dulcimer was replaced by the drums (also known as 'jazz'), the santouri briefly coexisted with the guitar, and new instruments entered the repertoire: the accordian, the bouzouki and the harmonium. The violin remained the main instrument, at least until the 1970s. In Mytilene, during the same period, concerts of classical European music were organised, as well as events in centres favoured by the upper classes. Experienced musicians from Lesvos, the rest of Greece, Constantinople and the Asia Minor coast performed short excerpts of classical music, opera or operetta, as well as dance pieces such as polkas, mazurkas, waltzes, tango, fox, etc. In urban centres, these events were mainly associated with the upper social class, who enjoyed their entertaining airs at events and balls in clubs. At these social gatherings, local musical talent had the opportunity to perform the repertoire in question. The musical tastes of the time were evolving, with rebetiko and folk songs becoming established as the main favourites. Nevertheless, the influence of European classical music remained strong, adding a valuable cultural wealth to Mytilene. In the field of music performance, radio, cassette and television dominate, with a strong Athenian-centric orientation. However, there are still local music groups in Lesvos, although they are limited in number. Both in Mytilene and in the villages, there are a few old musicians and many young people who continue to be involved in music. These music groups keep some of the old tunes in their repertoire and perform mainly at weddings, festivals and in a few nightclubs or organise "music nights" for tourists during the summer. In Lesvos, there are also choirs and music groups that receive support from local cultural associations, such as the choir "Nikos Mypogiannis" in Mytilene and the music section of the Anagnostiri of Agiasos. In addition, a few new local bands have been created that try to revive the musical heritage of the past and pass on musical values to the younger generations (Papadakis, 1983).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The results underscore the deep cultural significance of the santouri in Lesvos. Its historical journey from Asia Minor to the island serves as a testament to the resilience of cultural traditions even in the face of adversity. The santouri has become more than just a musical instrument; it is a symbol of cultural identity and a conduit for preserving shared heritage. Its presence in local celebrations and festivals reinforces its role as a unifying force within the community. The santouri's influence on Lesvos' broader musical heritage is evident in the infusion of Asia Minor's musical traditions into the island's repertoire. This exchange has enriched the island's musical landscape, creating a unique fusion of sounds and styles. The santouri, as a cultural bridge, has helped maintain cultural continuity, ensuring that the island's musical traditions remain vibrant and relevant in the contemporary context. The interviews with local musicians and community members shed light on the profound emotional and personal

connections people have with the santouri. Musicians take immense pride in their role as custodians of this musical heritage, and community members cherish the memories associated with the instrument's melodies. These perceptions and experiences highlight the santouri's ability to evoke nostalgia and foster a sense of belonging among individuals and within the community. The research approach of becoming an "insider" participant and adopting practical understanding, as advocated by Baily (2001), proved to be instrumental in this study. Learning to play the santouri allowed the researchers to engage deeply with the instrument, its players, and the broader musical context. It facilitated more profound interviews, richer observations, and a more authentic understanding of the santouri's role. This approach underscores the value of experiential knowledge in ethnomusicological research. The santouri's presence in Lesbos not only enriches the island's musical traditions but also serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage. It acts as a living archive, carrying within it the memories, stories, and emotions of generations. By actively participating in the preservation of the santouri's legacy, Lesbos ensures that its cultural heritage remains vibrant and accessible to future generations. In conclusion, the santouri's role in the musical tradition of Lesbos extends far beyond that of a musical instrument. It is a symbol of resilience, a bridge between cultures, and a guardian of memories. This research illuminates the importance of embracing practical understanding in ethnomusicological research to gain a deeper appreciation of the cultural and musical contexts. The santouri's legacy in Lesbos serves as a testament to the enduring power of music to connect, preserve, and celebrate cultural heritage. (Fegalas, 2021, Kofteros, 2019)

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the santouri, an instrument with deep historical roots, has played a pivotal role in shaping the musical tradition of Lesbos. Its journey from Asia Minor to the island exemplifies cultural resilience and the ability of music to transcend geographic borders. The santouri has enriched the island's musical heritage, infusing it with unique melodies and rhythms while acting as a bridge between past and present. The emotional and personal connections of local musicians and community members with the santouri highlight its significance as a symbol of community and identity. It fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens cultural bonds within the community. The research approach of adopting practical understanding, as advocated by Baily (2001), allowed for a deeper appreciation of the santouri's role and significance. This hands-on approach facilitated richer interviews, deeper observations, and a more authentic understanding of the musical context. Ultimately, the santouri's presence in Lesbos is a testament to the enduring power of music to connect, preserve, and celebrate cultural heritage. It serves as a living archive, carrying within it the memories and stories of generations, ensuring that cultural traditions remain vibrant and accessible for future generations. The santouri's legacy on the island underscores the timeless nature of culture and its ability to bring people together through the universal language of music.

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