

# Traditional Wrestling of Gagauz Turks And its Role in Strengthening of Nation's Cultural Traditions

Mehmet TÜRKMEN<sup>1A</sup>, Orhan Ahmet ŞENER<sup>2B</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Muş Alparslan University & Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University

<sup>2</sup>Selcuk University, Faculty of Sport Sciences, Konya/TURKEY.

Address Correspondence to M. Türkmen: e-mail: dr.turkmenmehmet@gmail.com

(Received): 10/09/2020/ (Accepted):31.12.2020

A:Orcid ID: 0000-0002-5926-7522- B:Orcid ID: 0000-0002-3580-4362

## Abstract

This article is about one of the unique and rarest fragments of the cultural heritage of the Gagauz Turks people - national "Güreş" wrestling, information about which is partially preserved and has survived till nowadays. Published materials give information about national "Güreş" wrestling and its role in historical, cultural and socially significant processes of modern society development. Method: in the study conducted with observation and literature review, descriptive research method was used. While writing the article, authors came to the conclusion that the preservation, popularization and further development of traditional sports in Gagauzia contribute to the development of both national and modern sports in Gagauzia and out. It also will contribute to the unity of people based on the interest to know their national and ethnic roots, national and unique traditions and customs of other peoples, increase a sense of national dignity, social justice, patriotism and responsibility for the future of the country. Presented material is the result of expeditions and long-time scientific research in archives, first published outside of the Republic of Moldova. Such researches are relevant in the context of preserving the cultural heritage and supporting unique national development of not only Gagauz people, but also all small nations of the world.

**Keywords:** National Güreş (wrestling), Gagauz people and culture, pelivan (hero, athlete).

## INTRODUCTION

Every nation has many games, Gagauz people also have many of them. They say us about traditions and customs of the people. Since antiquity, people's games have clearly reflected the way of people's life, their mode of life, their work, national principles, ideas about honor, courage, bravery, desire to have strength, skills, endurance, speed and beauty of movements, to show ingenuity, endurance, creative invention abilities, resourcefulness, the will and desire for victory. Every nation has an understanding of sports culture that comes from the past, originates from social structure and life, and includes partially geographical features. Wrestling has been practiced throughout history as a sport that requires the

coexistence of various physiological and motoric features (19,20).

Gagauz enlighteners and scientists M. Cheakir (1), D. Kara Choban (3), M. Marunovich (12), S. Kuroglo (10) were caring about preservation of national culture, they demanded to collect and describe folk games for transmitting to the descendant's national customs, original style of self-expression of Gagauz people. Since the XIXth century, ethnographic studies have been carried out with the purpose of preserving and systematizing folklore material. Russian ethnographer and scientist V.A. Moshkov have preserved original samples of Gagauz folk art for the world culture (13).

Folklore and literary sources say about the many Gagauz national outdoor games: about wrestlers, strong men, participating in various fights

and performing heroic acts. There is a mythological hero «Gözal Yuvan» in Gagauz folklore, who fought with the snake. This is how the fight is described: «They started to fight, the snake hit «Gözal Yuvan» on the ground and drove him down till the throat into the ground». Another «Çocuk» tale tells about a guy with a bear power who could lift huge stones and perform heroic acts (13). «Üç pelivan / Three wrestlers» tale tells about three mythological heroes «Aaç kıran», «Ayı kulak», «Gürgen kıvradan», who compete in various strength exercises (1).

Nowadays, in Gagauz Autonomy of the Republic of Moldova are being revived and practiced many national outdoor games, as well as games based on dexterity and ingenuity, among which there are: national wrestling «Güreş»; ancient dice game «Aşık», which has variants like - «Beşka», «Kaytuş», «Ataklan»; the ancient game «Kuran», which is close to chess by form; horse racing «Koşu»; donkey races «Eşeklerlen yarışma»; weightlifting competitions «Pelivan»; «Pırıldak» dexterity game as well as the old-time entertainment «Dönecek» - riding on a special device made of the cartwheel and drawbar, and a number of others.

By content, Gagauz folk games are brief and expressive. They express the active work of thought, help broadening the horizons, clarifying ideas about the world, improving all psychological processes in the minds of young people. Having cheated on children, participants in folk games reflect their life impressions and experiences in a conditionally game form. Already in the child ages, folk games participants reflect their life impressions and experiences in the fictional game form.

Game situation captivates young people's attention and educates them, actions and dialogues directly characterize characters and their actions, which must be skillfully emphasized in the image, which requires folk games participants to have active mental activity and team unity. Games which have no plot and are built only on certain game tasks, also have much cognitive material that helps to broaden thinking and independence of actions. Game rules have educational value - they determine the entire course of the game, regulate the actions and behavior of game participants.

There is much competitive enthusiasm in folk games, movements are precise and figurative, very often they are accompanied by unexpectedly funny moments that keep their artistic charm, make up unique game folklore. For participants of popular outdoor games, physical victory is combined with spiritual fulfillment. Young people are forming a

stable, interested, respectful attitude to the culture of their people, creating an emotionally positive basis for patriotic feelings, love and loyalty to their Homeland.

Unfortunately, nowadays, many Gagauz folk games are not held and are undeservedly forgotten. However, thanks to such an outstanding researcher of the Gagauz folk culture as V.A. Moshkov, who recorded Gagauz folk games at the end of the XIXth century, we have the opportunity to restore this imperishable national heritage. In his «Bendery County Gagauzes» book V.A. Moshkov listed and described in details 50 folk games of Bessarabia Gagauz people.

We list some of them: «Kör Çepiş / The Blind Chepish», «Piliç-piliç / Chick», «Sopa kavramaycä / Grippped stick», «Çelik / Chock », «Kaymak çelik / Sour Cream Chock», «Tava tencera / Frying pan», «Topu kapmayıncä / Without grabbing the ball», «Kuü pitalamayıncä», «Buza alamayıncä / Take calves », «Harman topu / Threshing ball », «Aşık / Dice / Talus », «Cengä», «Kuü geçmeyıncä», «Kuran / A kind of mind game» etc (13).

Bulgarian scientist Atanas Manov lists favorite games of Gagauz people of Bulgaria: «Aşek», «Omada», «Esir almaca / Capture the slave», «Uzun eşek / Long donkey» (11). There is also mentioned «Tavşam oyunu / Rabbit game» (6,7).

Traditionally, Gagauz wrestling «Güreş» is one of the most entertaining and that's why most beloved sports among the people. «Güreş» is national kind of wrestling, which is not only an element of national culture, but also has an important meaning for developing and enriching national system of physical education. During the wrestling, «Güreş havası» melody (wrestling melody) is being performed on the ancient musical instrument «Gayda». Gagauz strongmen were called with word «Pelivan». Such a «Pelivan» man of heroic power was Uzunov Semyon Panteleimonovich. A strong man, a wrestler, a man of tremendous physical strength, and at the same time kind and cultured man. During his short life, he managed to become famous for his heroic abilities. He could lift up 18 pounds (288 kg) with one hand. Once he lifted up a 600 liters barrel with wine (8).

There is a story how S.P. Uzunov won the dispute against the wealthy fellow villager, who suggested that he test his strength and lift a cart loaded with bags of grain. Uzunov crawled under the cart, and lifted it with his back, twisting with it around him clockwise, lowered into place and

received this cart with grain as a prize. Fame about Uzunov strongman reached St. Petersburg and he was soon invited to participate in international wrestling competitions, where he many times became the champion. The great Gagauz strongman Uzunov Semyon Panteleimonovich (1883-1908) was born in Kotlovina village, Reni district of Ukraine Odessa region (former Bessarabia).

In Gagauzia, many villages had their own strong men. In Chishmikoy village lived the strongman Ilya Khristev, with whom G.I. Kotovsky (a famous strongman and hero) himself wrestled. There was a strongman «Pelivan» Demirchu Kel in Cazaclia village (9), who could fight with several opponents at the same time. Among the Greek Gagauzes there is a famous «Yaalı güreş» wrestler in the Balkans - Georgios Christu, who had about 300 fights, most of them he won (4). For many centuries, the Gagauz people have kept the techniques used by wrestlers during the fight, like: «yan serpisi» (thigh throw), «kırmık» (hook), «çengel» (throw with a leg entwined from the inside with arm and belt grip) and others. Russian ethnographer V.A. Moshkov described in detail one wrestlers fight in Kongaz village, which took place on Easter in 1895 (13). Thus, the descriptions of the main folk games for science and modern culture both have been preserved.

«Pelivan / Weight lifting»: Gagauz people had a tradition of identifying the most powerful men of the region. By agreement, initiated by wealthy philanthropists, strongmen gathered in one of the villages where «Pelivan» strongmen competed in weightlifting. For example, they were lifting a cart loaded with bags of grain. Another way was to place three bags of grain on the back of the strongman, which the strongman would have to carry around. There was also lifting up big stones by a strongman. The winner received cash money prize (21).

«National wrestling / Güreş»: Güreş, wrestling appearance time is not exactly known. This is an independent sport and a way of physical education of the young generation. Guresh («wrestling», «fight») – traditional wrestling of Gagauz people – this nation lives now, mostly in the south of modern Moldova and Ukraine, as well as in Russia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Bulgaria, Greece and other countries of the world. According to the tradition that existed among the Gagauz people of Bessarabia, in each village there were competitions in national wrestling «Güreş», during which the winner of «Güreş» wrestling was being determined in each village.

Competitions began on the second day of Easter, and the next ones were held every Sunday, and so on until Hıdır-ellez (St. George's Day), when there is the last «Güreş» competition of the year.

Competitions were held on the square in the presence of the entire male population of the village, presence of village women and girls was prohibited. Specially appointed old men with the stick in their hands made a circle called «Geniş alan».

A respected person was the judge at the competition, «he observed the wrestling to be conducted according to all the rules of art». Wrestlers «they took off their shoes and top dress, remaining in shirts and trousers tied with red cummerbund. During the wrestling, they were pulling their cummerbunds several times and each their move moved the crowd». During the fight, the wrestlers used various techniques, but, as a rule, one of them had to throw the opponent on the ground. Here is how the Russian ethnographer V. Moshkov describes the end of the fight: «Finally, the wrestling ended when one of the wrestlers lifted another up to the air and threw him on the ground, then the crowd was furious, and sticks of home-grown police could not control it. For a long time after that, the crowd was still worried talking and arguing about today's fight» (13).

Today «Güreş» exists in two main kinds: kaishtan (from kaish – «belt», «cummerbund») – wrestling «on belts» and actually «guresh» – free style wrestling. In the first kind of wrestling, wrestlers (Gureschi or Gureshiji) went to the alai - the place where the fights took place - and gripped each other's belts with both hands. They were holding this wrestling grip until the end of the fight, until the winner was determined. The fight was carried out only in the wrestling stance - without using techniques to impact to opponent's legs. But they widely used such techniques as throwing through the thigh (almajaa almaa), deflection throwing (kabak atmaa), back pressure, etc. For winning, it was necessary to turn (throw) the opponent on the ground.

The famous Turkologist, ethnographer and historian V.A. Moshkov, who observed kaishtan at the end of the XIXth century. in Congaz village of Izmail district, where Gagauz people live, writes the following about it: «...the organizer of the competition, was always near by the wrestlers, encouraging either one of them or another, he watched the wrestling to be held according to all the rules of art, without steps and without any tricks

which are not allowed by the rules of the fight. The wrestlers took off their hats, shoes and top dress, remaining in shirts and harem pants girded with the red cummerbund. During the fight, they were pulling out cummerbunds from each other several times... the fight finally ended when one of the fighters lifted up another one to the air and threw him on the ground» (14).

In the second kind of wrestling, opponents were coming to wrestle naked to the waist and always without shoes. The wrestling was carried out with any possible grip of opponent's clothing and body both above and below the belt, using various throws with legs and foot sweeps. Actually, its technique and rules are not much different from Yaali Gyuresh - "oil wrestling", which is popular in Turkey today. In fact, this is not surprising, because nomadic Turks were the ethnic base for both Turks and Gagauzes in ancient times, and at the certain historical stage both nations had very close mutual contacts.

Wrestling competitions usually were taking place being accompanied by musicians who performed special wrestling melodies - Guresh Avasi. Competitions were usually held during various traditional holidays; wrestlers were preparing to this competition long before. Ethnographer E. Kvilinkova, who studies the traditional Gagauz culture, in one of her publications notes: «Another kind of national sport was wrestling competitions, which were held mainly in the spring season, starting from the second day of Easter, and every Sunday. The main winner was determined at the Hederlez holiday. Here is manifested the connection of this sport with cattle breeding ritual, because Hederlez holiday (Hederlez or «Ay Yorgi», «Ay Yorgi» - is a holiday in honor of St. George – Authors note) was the beginning of a new cattle breeding season and was dedicated to sending sheep to summer pastures. It is interesting to note that among the Mongols, such competitions were held after driving flocks to summer pastures.

It is also important to note that for many centuries, Gagauz people have preserved the techniques used by wrestlers during the fight, like: «yan serpisi» (thigh throw), «kırnik» (hook), «çengel» (throw with a leg entwined from the inside with arm and belt grip) and others. During the wrestling, certain rules were strictly observed. However, it was conducted without certain weight categories. The prize for the winners (usually a ram

or money) was awarded by the rural rich man, and sometimes by the priest (15).

The most famous were wrestling competitions in Congaz village, there were gathering people from many villages. A specific feature of wrestling fights, unlike other traditional types of competitions, such as horse racing «kushiyya», «koshu» or «at yaryshlary» was the absence of women and girls among the viewers. As noted by V. Moshkov, already mentioned, «Not a single fellow will decides to fight in their presence, being afraid to be defeated and to be disgraced in front of them» (15).

Based on the foregoing, we can say that traditional Gagauz wrestling «Güreş» is one of the most entertaining and that's why most beloved sports in the nation. «Güreş» is national kind of wrestling, which is not only an element of national culture, but also has an important meaning for developing and enriching national system of physical education (16). Eventually, it got the character of a multifunctional action, as competitive martial arts, game entertainment, a traditional-ritual act, and it is also an effective way to do physical and military training of the younger generation among the male population of Gagauz villages (21).

In fact, new things often are well-forgotten old things. And the tasks of national and cultural education, which were at a time when guresh was so relevant that ancestors of modern Gagauz people could not imagine their very existence without it, and it is relevant for the Gagauz national community today as well. Here we have great opportunity to adapt our ancestors' positive experience and traditions to modern civilization realities and challenges of the time, exploring, reviving and multiplying them for the benefit of society, for the sake of future generations (19).

During the last years, many events have been held in Gagauzia Aautonomy to promote the preservation of traditional culture and national sports. Every year, General Department of Youth and Sports of Gagauzia organizes events such as: opened championship of Gagauzia in freestyle wrestling among school age children, opened championship of Gagauzia in weightlifting, freestyle wrestling tournament in memory of N. Orlioglo, national freestyle wrestling tournament in memory of coach V. Tauci, freestyle wrestling tournament in memory of international warrior H. Bezhenar, international freestyle wrestling tournament in memory of coach P. Tulu, freestyle wrestling tournament in memory of Kioroglo (18).

## RESULT AND SUGGESTIONS

In this context, the following conclusions can be drawn: Wrestling with Gagauz Turks of Central Asia and even the perception of Turkey was found to be the same with Turkey. In this context, it is stated that there is a symbiosis relationship between language and culture; however, it is understood that there is no same relation between religion and minority. Because they'd of orthodox Christian religious Gagauz Turks, the Turks in Turkey are Muslims. However, sports cultures overlap with each other. Thus, it is understood that religions are privileged over cultures.

These athletes are the pride of the Republic of Moldova and of Gagauzia Autonomy: Nikolai Grahmez – won silver medal of the European Championship and bronze medal of the World Championship in freestyle wrestling among youth; Karaseni Petr - won bronze medal of the European Championship in freestyle wrestling among youth; Nedialko Eugenii – is the participant of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro in freestyle wrestling; Romanov Alexander - won bronze medal of the World Championship among students and bronze medal of the World Championship in freestyle wrestling among adults; Zamfirov Ivan - won the medal of the European Championship in freestyle wrestling; Petr Yanulov - won silver medal of the European Championship in freestyle wrestling, won the medal of the 1st European Olympic Games, multiple champion of the Republic of Moldova in freestyle wrestling; Duvenji Gennady - won bronze medal of the European Championship in freestyle wrestling among cadets; Kylchik Elena - won bronze medal of the European Championship in weightlifting among youth.

Development of national sports in Gagauzia performs these tasks:

- Popularization and further development of folk and national sports; education of younger generation based on old traditions of folk culture and national sports; physical education and sports promotion; attracting the population to a healthy lifestyle, increasing the role of physical education and sport in every person's life; improving skills in national sports and folk art; experience exchange in national sports development; consolidation of citizens based on the national and ethnic roots interest unique national traditions and customs of other nations; educating the sense of national dignity, social justice, patriotism and responsibility for the future of the country; cultural heritage preservation of Gagauz people, demonstration of

unity and spiritual culture richness of Gagauz people.

## Acknowledgement

Kyrgyzstan-Turkey Manas University of Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Ethics and Decision number 2020/410 Date 24/07/2020: Decision No. 2020/318: Our University Research and Application Center of Traditional Games and Sports Prof. Dr. Mehmet TÜRKMEN's qualitative-descriptive research on the field and computer environment of the Faculty Member Research titled "Traditional Wrestling of Gagauz Turks and its Role in Strengthening of Cultural Traditions) was unanimously accepted.

## REFERENCES

1. Baboglu Ni. Gagauz folklore. Chisinau : Pontos, 1966.
2. Chakir Ay Boba Mihail Gagauzlar istoriya, adettlar, dil hem din / Compose. S.S. Bulgar. Chişinău.2007.
3. Choban DK. Bulgar S. Gagauzian writer Dmitry Kara Choban / sketch of creative biography. Comrat. 2016.
4. Christou G. Personal archive of S.S. Bulgar. Informant: Georgios Christou, born 1930, resident of the village of Lepti, district Orestiada, Greece. 1930
5. Dcanuzakov K. – Türkmen M. "Increasing the popularity of traditional ancient history sports: Kyrgyzstan- Turkey Example", Scientific-practical journal, ISSN 1694-6707. №3 (23), УДК 796, 2018, 46-49 pp
6. Doctorov Ch. "Zaeshka igry" at the Gagauzites in Dobrich // Izvestiya na Varnenskoje Archaeological Friendship. Book. 5. Varna. 1912. p. 5-6.
7. Gradeshliev I. Gagauzy (translated from Bulgarian). Odessa.1998
8. General Directorate for Youth and Sports of Gagauzia (2019). Information on freestyle wrestling and weightlifting was provided. By the General Directorate for Youth and Sports of Gagauzia on 10.10.2019.
9. Ilyic KK. Personal archive of S.S. Bulgar. Informant: Kol Konstantin Ilyich, a native of the village. Kazaklia, Ceadir-Lungsky region, Gagauzia, Republic of Moldova. 1929.
10. Kuroglo SS. & Marunevich MV. Socialist transformations in the life and culture of the Gagauz population of the MSSR. Chisinau. 1938.
11. Manov AI. Potekloto on Gagauzite and Tekhnite Obichai and Nervos. Varna. 1938.
12. Marunevich M. Scientist, teacher, public figure / Comp. S. Ya. Romanov. Chisinau,2018.
13. Moshkov VA. Gagauzes of Bendery district (Ethnographic essays and materials). Chisinau.1904.
14. Radlov V. Adverbs of the Turkic tribes. Part I. Samples of folk literature of the Turkic tribes, published by V. Radlov, part X. Dialects of the Bessarabian Gagauz. The texts were collected and translated by V. Moshkov: St. Petersburg.1904.
15. Türkmen M. & Alimov U. "With developmental aspects: cambi shoot in central Asian Turks", The Journal of International Social Research, Volume: 12, Issue (66): 1391-1398 pp. October 2019, Issn: 1307-9581, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2019.3678>.
16. Türkmen M. & Buyar C. "A case from the hunting in the Ottoman state", The Journal of International Social Research,

- October 2019, Issn: 1307-9581, Volume: 12, Issue: (66): 427-432.  
Doi Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2019.3593> .
17. Türkmen M. & Djanuzakov K. "An Old Horse Sports in Central Asian Turkish Communities: Ukuruk Salmaktyy-Qurks- Emdik Uredish", Turkish Studies, 2019,ISSN: 1308-2140, Volume: 14 Issue (7): 4059-4070, DOI: 10.29228/TurkishStudies.30379.
  18. Türkmen M. & Useev N. "Certain ritual games and symbols in Kyrgyz toy" (festival) tradition", European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science,2019a, ISSN: 2501-1235. Volume 5- Issue (12): 145-153. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.3529646.
  19. Türkmen M. & Arstanbekov S. "Kyrgyzs and Kazakhs in forgotten a horses sport: valiant chase", The Journal of International Social Research, 12-(68): 1422-1428, Year: 2019 October 2019, Issn: 1307-9581, Doi Number: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2019.3926>
  20. Türkmen M. Azizbaev S, Tagaev M. "Reflections of modern sports on traditional Turkish sports", Scientific-practical journal, ISSN 1694-6707. №3 (22), YAK 796.01,2018, 55-60 pp.
  21. Uzunova VM. Personal archive of S.S. Bulgar. Informant: Vera Mikhailovna Uzunova, a native of the village. Hollow (formerly Bolboka), Reni district, Odessa region, Ukraine.1938.