

TRADITIONS

Sasak Music in Lombok

by David Harnish

Lombok is a small island to the east of Bali's southern tip. The Sasak people are the native inhabitants of Lombok and have resided there at least 2,000 years. Throughout history many kingdoms rose and vanished on Lombok (some established by Javanese princes), and the island endured both an extensive Balinese colonization (1740-1894) and an oppressive Dutch colonization (1894-1942).

Elements of the early Sasak religion, which was animistic and included ancestor worship, are very similar to the animist and ancestral elements still found in the Bali Hindu religion on the island of Bali. This religion, which mixed first with Hindu and Buddhist elements from Java and later with Islam, prescribed a number of agricultural rites, shrine ceremonies and family ceremonies which usually involved music and dance. The performing arts served two purposes: to honor ancestral and/or animistic deities, and to entertain the human community.

The religion became a heterodoxy of sorts and the people who followed it were "syncretists": those who accepted Muhammad as God's prophet, yet who also believed in ancestral and natural deities. These syncretists engaged in ceremonies (even some considered Islamic) that incorporated Hindu-Buddhist elements. This article will refer to this group as the syncretist Muslims, in contrast to the fundamentalist Muslims, the other major religious group.

Historically, the performing arts of Lombok were influenced by Bali; this is evident in the areas of dance movements, instrumental technique, and *kayak*, a theatre form. *Kayak* includes heralds and kings styled after those in Balinese theatre. The kings and refined characters speak Old Javanese, as in the Balinese theatre forms *Gambuh* and *Arja*. The most popular story is "Cupak/Grantang," from the *Arja* repertoire.

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The Sasak, however, also influenced Balinese arts in West Lombok and, to some degree, in East Bali. Before WWII *wayang Sasak* (the Sasak shadow play) was more popular in East Bali than Balinese *wayang kulit*. As a result of contact between these two areas, several hybrid musical forms developed on Lombok that contained elements of both Sasak and Balinese traditions.

The rise of orthodox Sunni Islam among the Sasak in the late 17th century resulted in a decline of traditional music, particularly in the East and Central Lombok areas. A rapid growth of fundamentalism in this century has suppressed some of the music and dance forms associated with syncretist Islam. The syncretist population continues some earlier traditions, but the ceremonies are becoming more and more rare; overall, the population is becoming more Islamic in character.

The fundamentalist Muslims, however, have contributed to the performing arts by creating some new music and dance forms, as well as by supporting the shadow play, *wayang Sasak*, as a tool for conversion and entertainment. Two of the music forms established by the fundamentalists are *rudat* and *burdah*. *Rudat* is a song and dance form performed by young men in pseudo-military outfits. The men execute choreographed martial movements while singing, and some of them tap out rhythms on frame drums. *Burdah* is performed by *haji* (those who have made the pilgrimage to Mecca) who sing while sitting and playing large *rebana* drums; they wear white robes and headpieces. Both *rudat* and *burdah* are sung in Arabic, although now many *rudat* texts are in Indonesian.

The pre-Islamic performing arts of the Sasak people in Lombok have prescribed contexts and uses. There is specific dance, music and poetry (indigenous but similar to the Javanese-Balinese *kidung*) performed only before the altars in shrine ceremonies; music played for harvest festivals and family ceremonies; and other music and dances primarily for entertainment and social purposes. The performances have different levels of sacredness which are roughly equivalent to the Balinese context levels called *wali* (sacred), *bebali* (semi-sacred), and *bali balihan* (secular). Balinese and Sasak syncretist Muslims living in

West Lombok engage in several annual ceremonies together which include performances at these stratified levels.

Many villages on Lombok have unique music or dance traditions. For example, the *gamelan tambur*, consisting of a single drum and hanging gong, and the *batek baris*, a dance similar to Balinese ceremonial dances, are Sasak traditions of the village of Lingsar. They are presented only once a year at the Lingsar temple festival. There are other traditions restricted to single villages or to small groups of villages on Lombok. These include Sasak *wayang wong* (masked dance drama), jaws harp ensembles, the Islamic *burdah*, trance dance, and an Arabic theatre of female impersonators. This phenomenon of isolated traditions is present on Bali as well. Examples include the *gong dasa* in Bugbug, the "gamelan manolin" of inner Amplapura, and the preret accompaniment of kidung in Ababi.

Gamelan Oncer

Gamelan, a relatively new term on Lombok, is now used to identify all ensembles. The primary pre-Islamic ensemble of the Sasak is called *gamelan oncer*, although it is also known by other regional names. The term *oncer* has its basis in a movement (*betok ngoncer*) of a dance called *tari oncer* or *kendang belek* (Team Proyek 1978:85). The tuning of traditional ensembles is nearly always pelog-like and there are usually five or four tones. In general, bronze instruments are not as common in Lombok as in Bali or Java; a limited bronzesmith industry has only recently

developed (Harnish 1985:29-31).

The instruments of *gamelan oncer* are two *kendang belek*, very large two-headed drums of almost cylindrical shape; a smaller *kendang*; one vertically-suspended gong (sometimes also one or more small, flat vertical gongs called *oncer*), a *reong* (gong chime of varying numbers of kettles, played in interlocking parts), *ceng-ceng* and/or *rincik* (small upturned cymbals mounted on a wooden base and struck with counterpart cymbals), usually a *petuk* (time-keeping gong kettle), and often *suling* (bamboo flute) (Seebass et al. 1976:29-34). Singers sometimes join the group. For the *kendang belek* dance, two drummers strap on the big drums, stand up, and begin dancing while striking the drums with long mallets. During instrumental pieces, however, the *kendang belek* are rarely played.

Gamelan oncer is played at family celebrations such as circumcisions and weddings. It also appears as accompaniment for the *kayak* theatre, and in performances for tourists and visitors. There are other contexts that have included *gamelan oncer*, but these now rarely occur: toothfilings, exorcisms, fertility rites and shrine ceremonies. The *gamelan* and dance were historically used also during times of war, to inspire the military forces and instill battle fever.

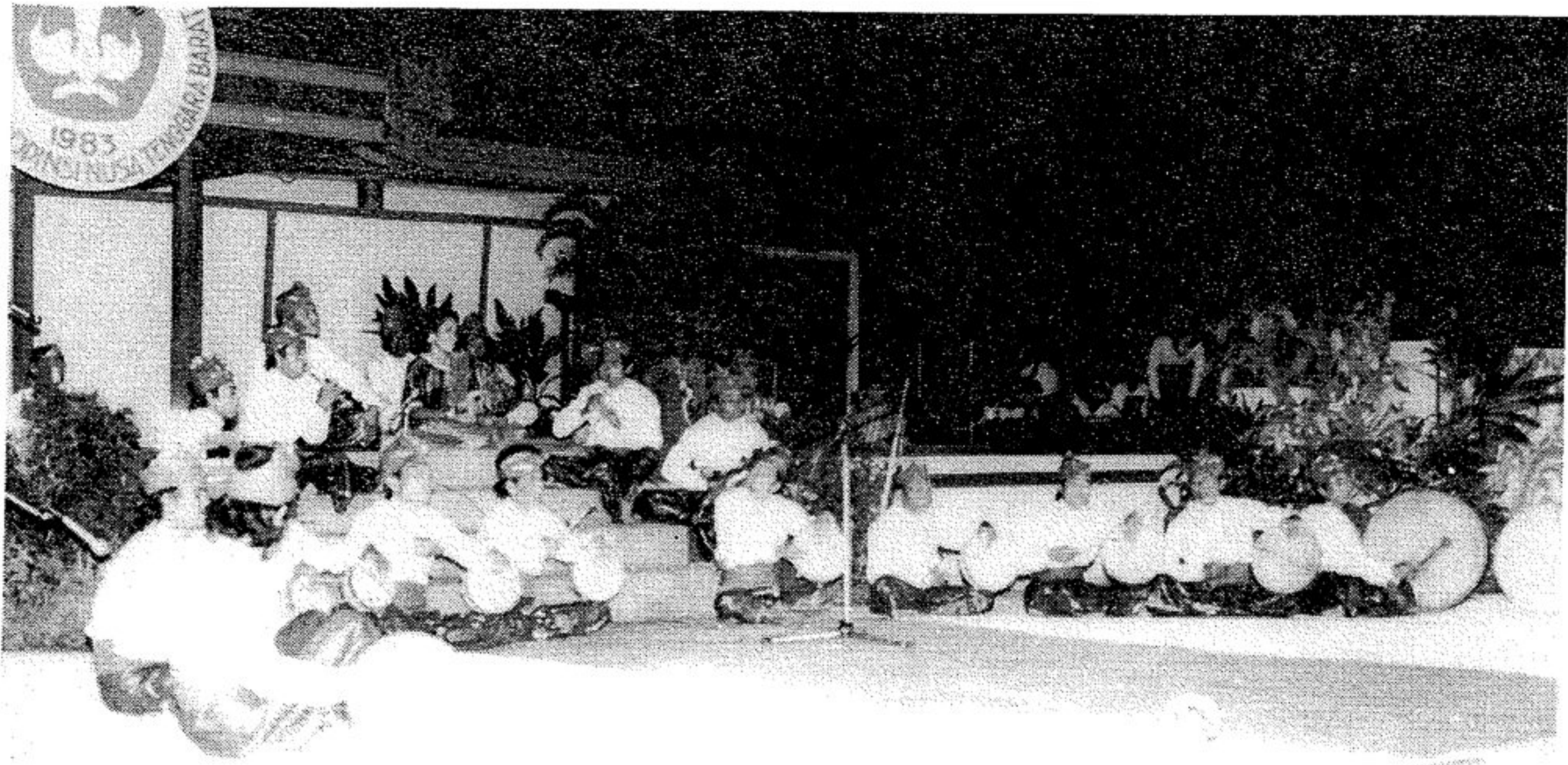
Other Sasak ensembles

Many other Sasak ensembles are variations of the

Instruments	gong	kempul	kemong/kenot	petuk	kajar	klentang	metallophone	reong	ceng2/rincik	kendang	rebana	suling	preret	rebab	gambus	viola	vocalist
oncer	X	O*		X		X	X	X	X	R						R	
tawa-tawa	X	X*					X	X	X								
wayang Sasak		X	X		X				X	X			X	R	R		X (Dalang)
gong Sasak	X	X*		X		X	X	X	X			R					
kamput		R		X				X	X	O[2]	X	X					
preret		X		X				X	X			O	X				R
cepung												X		X			X
rebana								X		X	R						
klentang		O*		O	X			X	R		R						
kecimol								O		X	X	O			O	O	X
çiloka								X		X	X	O			O	X	X

X = standard O = optional R = rare *a smaller gong, not referred to as kempul [2] called *jedur*

Table 1.



A large gamelan rebana in performance. In addition to the several sizes of rebana drums are two suling, rincik, and female vocalist. The suling and vocalist were added for this performance to "sweeten" the sound of the standard rebana ensemble.

gamelan oncer. Table 1 shows the instrumentation of several of these. There are smaller ensembles, some used specifically for processions. The most remarkable among these is the *tawa-tawa*, an ensemble composed primarily of reong kettles and ceng-ceng affixed to large lances. The lances are decorated with tassles and stand as high as six feet. They have ceng-ceng cymbals laced to them, which are played in rapid interlocking parts while the gamelan is moving in procession, creating an impressive visual choreography.

Some ensembles are more distinct from the oncer instrumentation. The *gamelan rebana*, considered



Two clowns in teater kayak.

acceptable by fundamentalist Muslims, consists entirely of different sizes of tuned rebana drums and one or two *rincik*. The various drums duplicate the functions of different gamelan instruments: *gong*, *kempul*, *petuk*, *kendang*, and *reong*. The *gamelan klentang* is also comprised of different sizes of one instrument, *klentang* (a sort of hybrid gong kettle and metallophone and iron).

The primary Sasak ensemble recently developed is the *gong Sasak*, a combination of the gamelan oncer and the Balinese gong kebyar. It is one of only a few recent forms not associated with Islam and its use is mostly recreational. The instrumentation includes reong, kendang, metallophones, ceng-ceng, petuk, and various hanging gongs. Repertoire consists of both newly created pieces and gong kebyar pieces; in the latter only the last section, called *pengecet*, is played, and it is repeated over and over again.

Wayang Sasak

Wayang Sasak is an art form unique to Lombok. Though introduced from Java in the 17th century (Team Penyusun 1977:15), the Lombok shadow play developed its own language structure and musical accompaniment. In the *serat menak* Amir Hamza stories of wayang Sasak, the refined characters speak Middle Javanese; this is translated by retainers and clowns into common Sasak. Lurah, a clown on the left, non-Islamic side of the wayang screen, speaks Balinese. The right side of the screen includes Amir Hamza (the emissary sent to Earth to prepare the way for Muhammad) and the forces for Islam. The geographic settings of the plays are more or less



A Balinese man playing the preret.

world-wide and there is a number of colorful characters. Due to the Islamic content of the stories, wayang Sasak has often been manipulated as a tool for converting Sasak people to Islam. Ardent fundamentalists, however, do not approve of wayang Sasak's use of human figures and its roots in pre-Islamic Lombok.

The melodic leading instrument of the ensemble is the *suling pewayangan*, a bamboo flute nearly a meter long that resembles the Balinese *suling gambuh*. Other instruments are two *kendang*, a *kemong* or *kenot*, *kajar*, *kempul*, and *rincik*. *Rebab* (a bowed lute, also called *redeb*), and *preret*, a wooden shawm [double-reed woodwind] can be added. The melodic component of the music seems to be of secondary prominence to the percussion. The tuning is a five-tone pelog-like scale, not *slendro* as found in many other shadow plays in Indonesia.

A performance of wayang Sasak runs from five to eight hours, although today there are condensed versions of two or three hours. Wayang are performed for family ceremonies and feasts commissioned by aristocracy; national holidays and agricultural rites are infrequent contexts.

The Preret

Prominent in many other Sasak ensembles is the preret, a wooden shawm with one thumbhole and seven fingerholes. There are two types: one with an attached bell, and one with a straight, tubular end. The preret is regarded as both a pre-Islamic instrument and as one associated with Islam, and it is found in both pre-Islamic and Islamic-inspired ensembles. In addition, the preret accompanies sung poetry at traditional shrine ceremonies and agricultural rites.

The preret is prominent most notably in the ensembles *gamelan kambut* and *gamelan preret*. It often is included in ensembles which accompany the dances *gandrung* and *joget*, or *joged* (which are more similar today to the dances of Banyuwangi, East Java than those of Bali). Two Islamic-inspired ensembles that use preret are *kecimol* and *ciloka*; these also use rebana drums instead of *kendang* and often include *gambus* (a plucked lute of probable Arabic origin) and *viola* or *biola* (violins).

There is no indigenous notation system for Sasak music and most of the poetry is not written down. One notable exception is the *Monyeh lontar* used in the song and dance form, *cepung*. The *lontar* features Prince Panji and the *malat* stories, and it is written in *macapat* form in the *jejewan* Sasak script. A male singer and translator tell the stories, accompanied by the *suling cepung* (flute) and/or the *rebab* in *rubato* style. A *pantun* song form begins later, and, as the performance picks up energy, a group of men onomatopoeically vocalize the different gamelan instruments and their various functions. Fundamentalist



Two Sasak preret players in procession at a Sasak-Balinese animist ritual. They are followed by the sacred gamelan *tambur*, consisting of drum and gong, in its annual procession around the shrine at Lingsar, West Lombok.

Muslims do not approve of *ceprung*, not only because the stories are not Islamic, but also because offerings and *tuak* (palm wine) drinking usually accompany the performance.

Sasak Poetry: a comparison of vocal and preret melodies

The indigenous Sasak poetry is sometimes called *badéde*. An example of this repertoire is the poem "Turun Daun" [slowly, gently slope]. The melody is comprised of four equal melodic phrases which span two lines of poetry. The scale used has five tones and is *pelog*-like.

Figure 1 shows a portion of the preret and vocal melodies. The small marks indicate ornaments. Similar contour, ornamentation and tuning can be seen in both versions. The preret, played with a circular breathing technique, has far more melodic possibilities than the human voice, particularly in the case of these examples. The singers were very old at the time of the recording (one was nearly 80 years old), and their voices could not sustain a tone for more than six or seven seconds. The performers recorded are all Balinese living on Lombok, and the preret player never met, nor did he live near, the vocalists.

The Balinese perform some of the Sasak sacred pieces at temple festivals, when requests for safety and prosperity are made to local deities. It can be said that Balinese musicians are currently maintaining this tradition more actively than the Sasak performers. Very few musicians now know the texts of these songs.

The Future of Sasak Music

Most Islamic leaders have called for an end to pre-Islamic beliefs and pre-Islamic music. Some have even proposed a local Islamic law forbidding the use of bronze instruments, since they are associated with indigenous and therefore "pagan" beliefs.

Although fundamentalist Muslims may someday manage to eliminate the traditional music, new styles of music are developing that still bear the stamp of Sasak identity. Except for Islamic hymn singing, *burdah*, the melodies and instrumental functions in the new ensembles are of purely Sasak origin. Much of the new music, furthermore, is a direct transference of pre-Islam music into a new form (eg. *gamelan rebana*).

The Sasak now have many crucial decisions to make regarding their cultural identity and their future. The Islamic fundamentalists would like all Sasak people to become orthodox, the syncretists would like to remain true to the ancestors and local deities, and the national government wants to incorporate Lombok into a unified Indonesia. The Indonesian government favors the

Turun daun si gedong sari
Mumbul katon swarga mulia
Langan desidé nurunang sari
Sarin merta sarin sedana.

Kukus katon si putih jati
Margin desidé micayang
Kaji ngaturang pangebakti
Si ketek parek le desidé.

Pelan-pelan landai rumah yang sangat indah
Nampak kelihatan sorga yang mulia
Jalan yang maha kuasa menurunkan wahyunya
kesucian dan rejeki.

Awan kelihatan putih cemerlang
Jalan yang mahakuasa memberikan
Hamba memberikan penghormatan
Yang datang kepada Tuhan.

Slowly, gently slope, a dwelling of beauty
A clear vision of majestic heaven
The path of omnipotence brings diving revelation
Purity and sustenance.

An appearance of white sparkling clouds
The path of omnipotence gives
Followers pay homage
Before God.

Original text in Sasak, translated into Indonesian by I Wayan Kartawirya. English translation by the author.

fundamentalists because of their organizational capabilities and their acceptance of the institutions of modernization, like communication systems and organized public education. The government, however, also limits the local political power of the fundamentalists to prevent them from challenging national policy or oppressing the non-Sasak populace of Lombok. The rise of fundamentalism and the challenge of modernization will probably someday overwhelm the syncretists. The pre-Islamic music may then appear only in local music competitions, maintained more or less as museum pieces. ▀

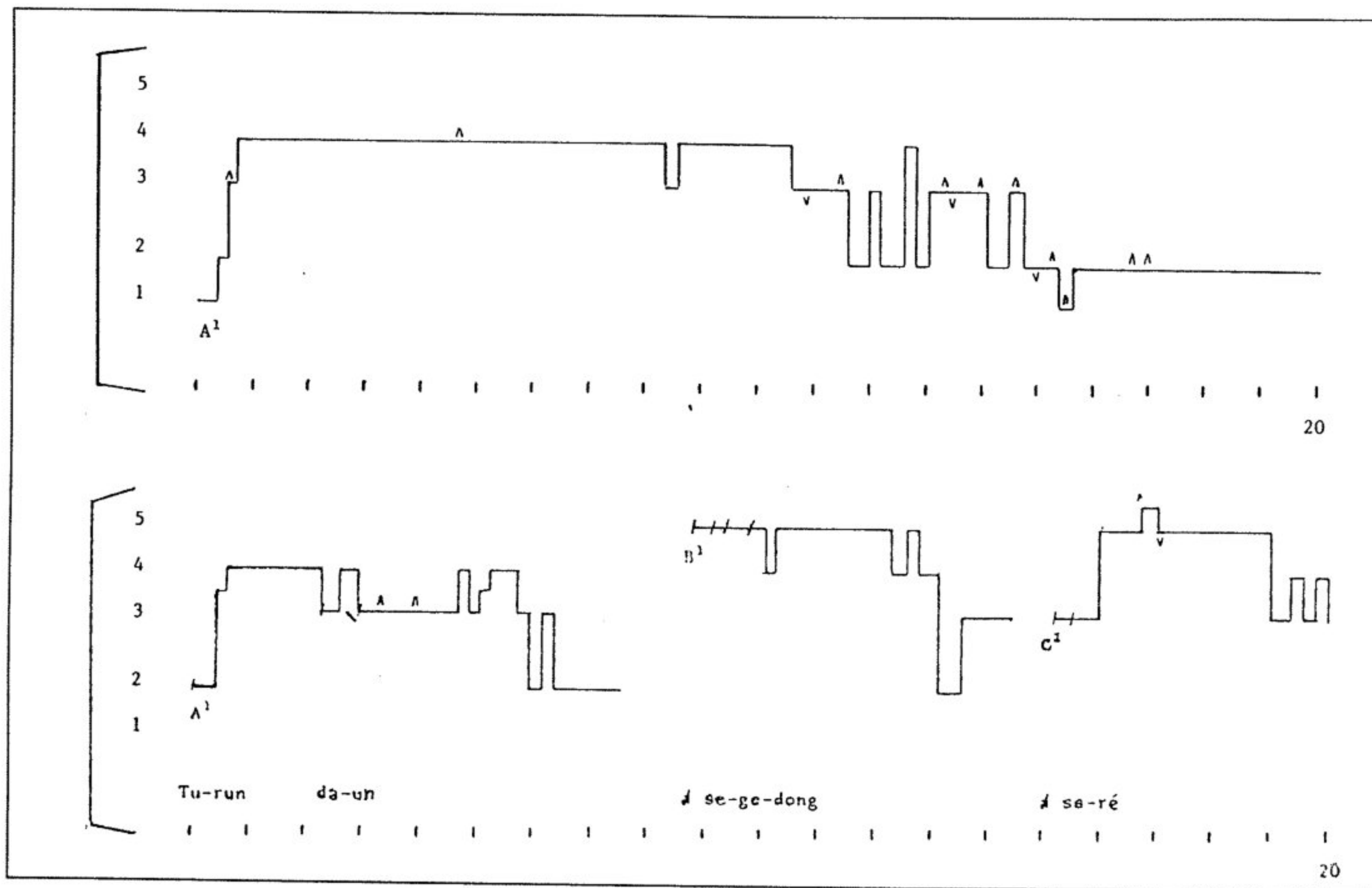


Figure 1. Preret (top) and vocal (bottom) melodies in Turun Daun follow completely different pitch contours.

Preret tuning		
pitch	value	intervals
5	e#"-25c	
4	d"+38c	=137c
3	c"+39c	=199c
2	a'-35c	=374c
1	g'+39c	=126c
range		836c
Vocal tuning		
5	g+40c	
4	f#+23c	117c
3a	f+26c	97c
3b	e+27c	99c (196c)
2	c#+23c	304c
1	B+5c	218c
range		835c

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Pitch and ranges of preret and voice.