



# UNRAVELLING THE STORY ABOUT ORIENTAL CALLS FOR QUAIL

## ABSTRACT

Oriental calls for Quail have an interesting yet unknown history. I am trying to unravel this history. Can you help me?

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I am an ornithologist based in Malta with a keen interest in social history and ethnography. In addition to birds, I also study and write about man-bird relationships and publish findings so that there will be records for posterity of certain things or aspects that can fast disappear from cultures.

A few years back I carried out extensive research about lark mirrors, a kind of gadget that was used to lure larks from the 15<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in various part of Europe and published a book and several papers bout them.

I am currently working on bird calls and came across a reference in a French book about trapping and hunting tools by Edouard Mérite (1942) *Les pièges: Histoire et techniques de piégeage à travers le monde*. The author refers to a peculiar type of bird call used for Quail in parts of Turkey. This call was probably commonly used in Central Asian countries.

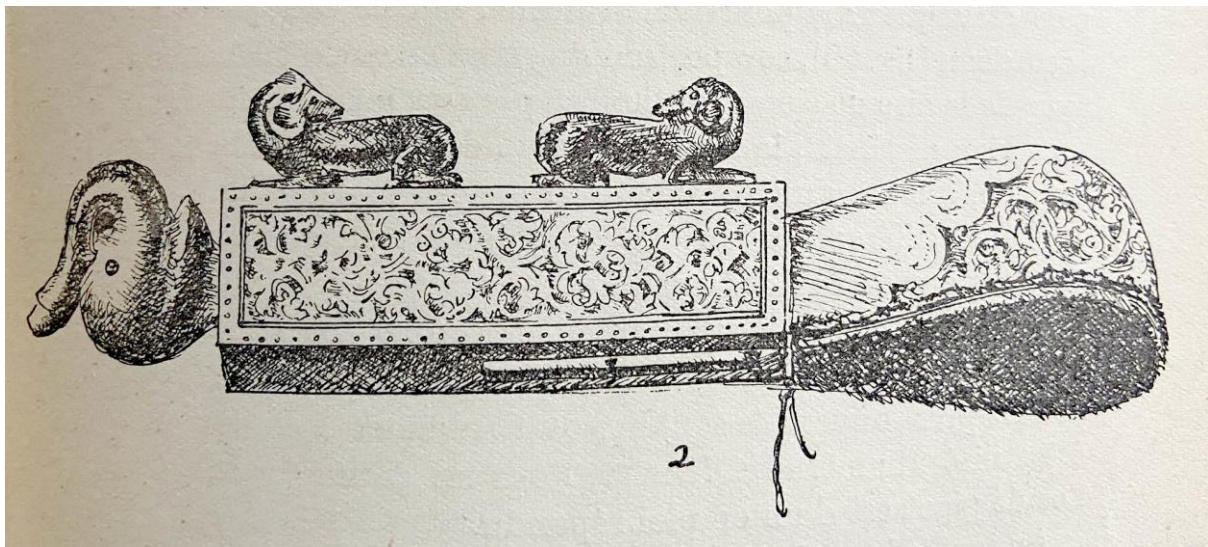


Figure 1 Quail call from Mérite. E. (1942) *Les pièges: Histoire et techniques de piégeage à travers le monde* p. 241

The call is made of a piece of wood, carved like a spoon on one end and they have a groove in which the whistle is stuck, usually by bees' wax. A piece of leather, usually from goat, sheep or rabbit, is tied over the 'spoon' part. It is then starched by hand and when tapped pushes air through the call to make the sound of the female Quail to attract males. Some calls have two spoon-like ends with two calls with a different pitch. From my experience with other European Quail calls, these were used when birds were far or near, lower frequency for more distant birds and the higher pitch when the bird was closer.

I have started to make research about these calls and visited Turkey twice and spoke to antique and folk-art dealers with a view to find information about them. I have managed to find a few pieces and took photos of some others, but information is unfortunately rather scant.

The information I have so far is that they were used in countries such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Calls from different countries different differ a bit in size, type of wood used, the animal skin and the main whistle part which is sometimes made from chicken bone or metal pipe.

On some calls one can sometimes see engraved symbols, usually various type of bird heads and animals as well as Turkmen family symbols. Sometimes some are decorated with inlay pieces of silver, glass beads, ivory. Some have the wooden part dyed by some natural dyes.



I would like to find out more about them, about the symbols, the materials, the people who used them, when they were used and how and such other questions. I have included some comments and questions in the captions under some of the photos below.

I am attaching photos of some calls to show differences that can make a very interesting piece of research before these artefacts fade into oblivion, as cheap electronic bird callers made in China are fast replacing these old tools.



*Figure 2 Decorated all probably from Afghanistan*



*Figure 3b The same call bottom view to show the bone whistle. The leather is missing on this side*



*Figure 4 Decorated call probably from Afghanistan*



*Figure 5 A plain call probably from Afghanistan, with just some carving on the base*





*Figure 6 Old call probably from Afghanistan, with motifs on both sides*



*Figure 7 a call with heavy carving probably from Afghanistan with metal whistle (probably changed recently or restored)*



*Figure 8 An Afghan call with numbers 1354 written which is probably HICRI calendar ca 1940*



*Figure 9 A call with bird and other carved motifs, probably from Afghanistan*



*Figure 10 A 'modern' call from Kyrgyzstan*





Figure 11 A call with a face motif from Tajikistan or Turkmenistan. What is the significance of the face?





Figure 12 A decorated call from Turkmenistan



Figure 13 A call from Turkmenistan with a leaf and other undistinguished motifs. How significant are such motifs?



Figure 14 A call from Turkmenistan decorated with what looks like pieces of silver. Are these common decorative items on other ethnographic pieces from the region?





Figure 15 Calls from Turkmenistan. The top one has what look like animals on the bottom. Can these be deciphered? All calls are decorated with what looks like pieces of silver, and different glass beads. Again, are these common decorative items on other ethnographic pieces from the region? The hollow ones I have seen in works from Georgia.