



"External" music in Constantinople

Summary :

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries in Greek musical terminology the lay music of the Ottoman court or the secular art music which prevailed in the urban space of the Ottoman Empire was designated as the “external” music (*exoteriki mousiki*). As religion was one of the most crucial categories of belonging, the secular music was defined as opposed to the ecclesiastical music, which was conceptualized as “internal” music.

Date

18th-19th c.

Geographical Location

Constantinople (Istanbul)

1. Basic Musicological Features and a Brief History of the “External” Music

There are two basic concepts which underlie the so called “external” (as it was called by the Greek musicians) music or the Ottoman urban secular music. First is, the *makam* (mode) shared by all the Middle Eastern and Eastern Mediterranean music. Second is, the *seyir* (melodic progression) which distinguishes the Ottoman court music from other Oriental styles of music. The *seyir* is vital to the concept of *makam* and as Walter Feldman points out, according to the current theory, styles are distinguished not only by the intervallic structure and by their position on the general scale but also by specific melodic progressions. The latter involves a tone which is the point of entry (*giriş*), the same tone or another may be the finalis (*karar*), another tone will be predominant (*güçlü*) and others will have important functions as resting points. For instance, modern Iranian music shares some basic scales with Turco-Arabian music but not the conception of melodic progression within an octave scale.¹

Until the end of the 16th century, the music of the Ottoman court bore a strong resemblance to the music of the Timurid court. Feldman argues that in the 17th century a new complex of events in the social background and the performance of music, e.g. the emergence of new patterns of professionalism, a new series of musical genres, new mode structures etc., resulted in the formation of a proper mode of Ottoman Turkish music. This is also attested by the fact that both the oral tradition of the vocal repertoire and the notated sources of instrumental repertoire take the early 17th century as their significant starting point. We should also note that the development of a distinctively Ottoman form of *makam* or “Oriental” art music evolved parallel to the secularization of the Ottoman high culture which began at the end of the 17th century.²

By the second half of the 17th century, several non-Muslim performers and composers of instrumental music had become well known. For instance, the Jew Harun (Aron Hamon), the Greek tanbur (long-necked lute) player, Angelos and later in the 18th century the tanbur players Rabbi Musi and the Armenian Harutin. However, from the beginning of the second half of the 18th century, non-Muslim musicians appear also as composers of vocal pieces for the *fasıl* (the concert cycle). One of the best known examples are the *beste* and *ağır semai* (vocal genres) of the Greek-Orthodox musician Zakharia. Zakharia lived in Constantinople (Istanbul) in the late 17th and early 18th century. He came from a very wealthy family that was involved in the fur trade. The title *hanende* (singer) attributed to him shows that he was probably an exceptional singer. Besides his great fame as a secular composer, Zakharia is also known as the creator of *kalophonic heirmos* (καλοφωνικός εἰρμός), a genre of the ecclesiastical chant. According to Kyriakos Kalaitzidis, the character and the style of his secular compositions have been influenced by his ecclesiastical musical learning.³

In the 19th century, the introduction of the western types of entertainment and of the western music genres resulted in the westernization of the Ottoman lay music e.g. the use of the 3/4 waltz rhythm or the predominance of the *makams* like *nihavend*, whose tonal qualities resembled the major and the minor scales of the European music. This also brought the dominance of the *şarkı* form (artful song) in the repertoire and also the formation of hybrid genres like, for instance, *kanto*.



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2. Compositional Forms and Instruments

The *fasıl* (concert-cycle) took on its classical form around the 17th century. The most important characteristic of this cyclic concept is that vocal and instrumental compositions composed in the same *makam*, are performed in a certain order. According to Feldman, the *fasıl* had the following structure in the late 17th century: The instrumentalists began with a *taksim*, an instrumental rhythm-free improvisation preparing the audience for the sounds of the coming pieces, which was followed by one or two *peşrevs* (Persian instrumental genre), a vocal improvisation, a *beste*, a *nakş*, a *kâr*, a *semaî* (vocal forms), followed by an instrumental *semaî*, to be ended with a vocal *taksim*. The musicologist claims that while *kâr* and *nakş* had developed in Iran or Transoxiana in the 15th century, the predominant vocal forms in the *beste* and *semaî* were created in Turkey, possibly, in the late 16th-early 17th century.⁴

The array of compositions follows an order of rhythmic structures that goes from complex to simple. For instance, while typically a *beste* could be composed in a rhythmic structure with 120 beats, *yürüksemaî* is a simpler composition form with 6 beats which corresponds to the 6/8 of the Western music. By the end of the 19th century, the *fasıl* acquired new characteristics. It almost lost the classical genre *kâr*, the *şarkı* form became dominant, and also several popular vocal forms like *köçekçe* (a lively dance tune), and new dance tunes e.g. *longa* and *sirto*, were integrated into its body.

French orientalist Charles Fonton provides us with crucial information about the technical qualities of the instruments which were used in the secular music of Constantinople in the 1750s, during which he worked as a *jeune de langue* (translator) in the Ottoman capital. These instruments which should be regarded as the most prevailing and, as the established instruments that were employed in the 18th century secular music, are the *ney* (flute), the *tanbur* (long-necked lute), the *miskal* (which resembles the ancient pan-flute) and the *rebap* (oriental violin).⁵ In the 19th century, while the *ney* and the *tanbur* remained as the classical instruments, *rebap* was replaced by the *lyra* and the *violin*, and new instruments e.g. the *kanun* (zither) and the *oud* became part of the music ensemble.

3. The Instruction of the “External” Music and the Transmission of the Repertoire

The use of any system of musical notation was limited in the teaching of the external music until the late nineteenth century. However, we have to mention two collections of vocal and instrumental works that survived from the 17th century. The first collection, *Mecmua-yı Saz u Söz* (The Collection of Instruments and Words) written by a Polish convert, Wojciech Bobowski (Ali Ufkî Bey) (d. ca. 1675), contains the lyrics and the scores of more than five hundred vocal (religious and secular) and instrumental works from the 16th and 17th centuries.⁶ The second treatise, which belongs to the Moldavian prince Dimitrie Cantemir, is entitled *Kitâbu 'Ilmi'l-Mûsikî alâ Vechi'l-Hurûfât* (The Book of the Science of Music through Letters). This book, which was written in 1693, contains the scores of 350 works composed during and before the time of the author, as well as his own, in an alphabetical notation system that he invented.⁷

Even though there were attempts at inventing a notation system in the following centuries, the “external” music was predominantly instructed with the system of *meşk*. In *meşk*, the melody of a piece is transmitted from the teacher to the student by employing the rhythmic mode of the piece as a mnemonic device. Historical sources show that music instruction was never reserved for the members of a wealthy class. Even though learning – acquiring the music repertoire - required a long time, many musicians earned their living doing other occupations. Until the end of the 19th century, *meşk* lessons were not generally offered in return for money. Cem Behar draws our attention to the fact that even in the 17th century *meşk* was not limited to the imperial *meşkhane* (the room in the Ottoman Palace reserved for music lessons). Music instruction and repertoire performance could take place at the houses of musicians, *dervish* lodges (*tekke*), and *coffeehouses*.⁸ Even though the prevailing instruction system *meşk* remained unchallenged, the music notation invented by Hampartsoum Limondjian (1768-1839) gained greater popularity in comparison to the previous and to other contemporary notation systems. The notation system introduced by the precentor (first singer) of the [Armenian Church](#) used symbols derived from an older notation called *khaz* used by the Armenian Church. However, with the adoption of western European music as the ceremonial music of the military corps in 1826, the European notation started to coexist with the traditional *meşk* system and the Hampartsoum notation. The first European notation scores of the concert-cycle pieces were published by Notacı Hacı Emin Efendi in 1876. He also published, in 1885, a book on the instruction of the European notation.⁹



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4. The Contribution of the Greek-Orthodox Musicians to the "External" Music

The treatises and books written by the Greek-Orthodox cantors or musicians on the external/secular music can be grouped into two: First, the treatises that dealt with the theory of the external music which tried to explain the secular music in terms of the ecclesiastical music. The second group comprises the song collections which were published between 1830 and 1908. We must cite four works belonging to the first category. The treatise of Panagiotis Chalatzoglou, precentor of the Great Church, which was written in 1728, is known as the first work in which a comparison between the modes of the [Byzantine ecclesiastical music](#) and the Turkish melodic modes of the time was attempted. Later, his student Kyrillos Marmarinos, Archbishop of [Tinos](#), wrote a theoretical work entitled *Eisagogi Mousikis* (Introduction into Music) in 1749. This work presents the verbal explanations of 86 Turkish melodic scales with inserted Byzantine notations of 73 examples, and the descriptions of 22 Turkish rhythmic cycles.¹⁰ In 1843, Constantinos, the precentor of the Great Church, published a theory of external music based more or less on the work of Kyrillos.¹¹ As a basic difference, Constantinos' work incorporates the elements of the new theory of the church music, e.g. interval values and the modified signs of the Byzantine notation, which was invented in 1814 by the so called three teachers (Chrysanthos of Madytos, Gregory the First Cantor, and Chourmouzios the Archivist). The fourth book that should be mentioned is *Methodiki didaskalia theoritiki te kai praktiki pros ekmathisin kai diadosin tou gnisiou exoterikou melous* (Methodical teaching of the theory and practice for the instruction and the dissemination of the genuine external music) by Panagiotis Kiltzanidis of [Prousa](#) (Bursa), written in 1881.¹² The song collections which belong to the second group are namely *Evterpi* by Theodore of Phokaia (Constantinople, 1830), *Pandora* by the same musician (Constantinople, 1843, 1846) *Armonia* by Sotirios Vlachopoulos (Constantinople, 1848) *Kallifonos Seirin* by Panagiotis Kiltzanidis (Constantinople 1859) *Lesbia Sappho* by Nikolaos Vlachakis and Stavrakis Anagnostou (Athens, 1870), *Mousikon Apanthisma* by Ioannis Zografos from Geyve (Constantinople, 1856, 1872) *Asias Lyra* by [Konstantinos Psachos](#) (Constantinople, 1908). These books contain songs with Turkish lyrics, the melodies of which are written in the reformed Byzantine notation. Due to the fact that the lyrics are written in the Greek alphabet, they are considered part of the [karamanli literature](#).¹³ Turkish musicologists consider these books as crucial sources of Ottoman music as they contain the popular songs of their time, therefore, reflecting contemporary music taste.¹⁴

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 3. Kalaitzidis, K., *CD booklet Ζαχαρίας ο Χανεδέζ. Hanende Zaharya "En Chordais" Music Ensemble* (Istanbul 2005), p. 61.
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 5. Fonton, C., *18. Yüzyılda Türk Müziği* (Turkish Music in the 18th Century), translation, introduction and publ. by Cem Behar (Istanbul 1987), pp. 78-91.
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 7. See Popescu-Judet, E., *Prince Dimitrie Cantemir, Theorist and Composer of Turkish Music* (Istanbul 1999).
 8. Behar, C., *Aşk Olmayınca Meşk Olmaz. Geleneksel Osmanlı/Türk Müziğinde Öğretim ve İntikal* (Istanbul 1998), p. 43-52.
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Glossary :

	dervish
A member of one of the religious fraternities of Islam that were characterized by spirituality, a mystical relationship with the divine, and a modest way of life. The most known among the dervish orders in the Ottoman Empire are the Mevlevi and the Bektashi.	
	kanto
The songs which were sung between the acts of the improvisational theater as solos or duets, based on traditional eastern <i>makam</i> but performed on western instruments.	
	makam
Makam (or maqam) is a system of melodic types which provide a complex set of rules for composing. Each makam specifies a unique intervallic structure and a melodic development.	
	tekke
Lodge for the members of a religious order (dervishes).	