

**Ottoman Music within the Makam Traditions of Middle-Eastern art  
Music: An Overview**

Istanbul has been a musical centre in several different musical genres and traditions since the ninth century. Beginning from Byzantine times the city maintained its central role in music both during the Ottoman period and during the Westernisation process of modern Turkey. Having been the administrative and the cultural centre of two empires, the city has attracted musicians throughout many centuries. Masters of music active in Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) produced new musical genres and styles and introduced them into other parts of the land.

According to the historians of Byzantine music, at the latest in the ninth century the centre of Byzantine liturgical music shifted to Constantinople from Syria (especially from Antioch and Damascus), and Palestine. The city maintained its controlling position until the end of the fifteenth century.

The conquest of Istanbul in the fifteenth century made the city a centre of attraction for the musicians active in the leading Islamic cultural centres of the Middle East, and the reorganised Istanbul undertook this role. Along side the Turks, the Ottoman Jews and Armenians subsequently established their musical centres in Istanbul, too.

Here I shall describe very briefly Istanbul's position in the classical music of the Middle Eastern peoples; how it came into existence, how it established its institutions, and how it maintained the tradition.

In the fifteenth century Istanbul became the new centre of Islamic music. The fact that Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi (?-1435), the last of the greatest theorists of

the pre-Ottoman Islamic tradition, dedicated his celebrated book *Makasıdu'l-Elhan* to Ottoman Sultan Murad II and sent it from Samarkand to Edirne may be regarded as a significant sign of this in anticipation.

The mehter, the janissary band, was founded in the fourteenth century, hence it is old as the Empire.

Even before the Conquest, the fact that books on music had been written for the Ottoman court during the reign of Murad II is significant in that it reflects the court's high level of interest in music. *Risale Min Ilmu'l Edvar*, Ahmedoglu Shukrullah's translation of *Kitabu'l-Edvar* (Book of Music) in the fourteenth century from Safi-ed-din Ormevi, which is the first translation of this celebrated book in any language, Hızır bin Abdullah's *Edvar-i Musiki, Nakaavetu'l-Edvar* by Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi's son Abdulaziz, Fethullah es-Shirvani's *Mecelle fi'l-Musiki*, dedicated to Mehmed II, in the fifteenth century are clear indications showing the musical preference of the state and that classical Islamic sources have been evaluated for the formation of Ottoman musical culture.

The court, due to its central position in the social and political system, was the leading patron of the arts. Apart from their functions in the administration, the Ottoman sultans took a great deal of interest in arts such as poetry, calligraphy, and music. Calligraphy and music had always been included in the education they received in their princehood. As well as the sultans, and the princes who were the candidates for the throne, other members of the imperial family had the same kind of education. The fact that fine arts had been an inseparable part of the ruler's education and that this approach towards education had become a tradition, contributed much to musical practice. Murad II, Bayezid II, İbrahim, Murad IV, Mehmed IV, Mahmud I, Selim III, and Mahmud II were either composers or great lovers of music, and their deep involvement in this art during their reign goes much beyond an official interest. Music was given priority from the very beginning of the court's organisation. This situation was not only because of the sultans' interest in music but also

because of having professional musicians and instrument makers who receive a salary in court. Music was taught and practised in the *Enderun*, the imperial school. Musicians in this school had two functions: performing music in imperial concerts and training young people who had musical talent.

Yet it would be erroneous to describe this music exclusively as court music. Ottoman music had established its institutions throughout Istanbul, which made it a deep-rooted tradition. Furthermore, it developed not only in Istanbul but in Edirne, Bursa, Izmir, Selanik (Thessalonika), Aleppo, Damascus and other such urban areas. On the other hand, although the court was a strong supporter of music, it should also be considered that not all the sultans were music lovers. Let alone supporting music, there have been sultans who were antipathetical to music, and during their reign musical performance in the court ceased. Even in such times musical activities in the city were not interrupted.

In many countries "traditional music" simply means either the rural or the urban folk music. In Turkey this concept represents two different genres: folk music and Ottoman classical music. These two genres existed together in the Ottoman society, influencing each other from time to time. The former was the local music of the rural areas, and since it was local it did not represent the whole society. The latter genre was urban music including both the classical music and the urban light music, which developed in the main urban centres of the empire. If considered in quantitative terms, it did not represent the taste of the majority either, but in qualitative terms, since the tradition was open to all social sections including the non-Muslim communities, it was sweeping in this sense. Having embraced and synthesized many subcultural conventions it created an higher level to represent the musical culture and taste of diverse social elements. In no other Ottoman fine art do we find such a representative quality.

When Istanbul was conquered there was no considerable musical tradition to be inherited. The new capital built its tradition by drawing musicians from the

Anatolian provinces and recently conquered cities. Within this process, musicians from the art centres of Persia, Azerbaijan, Transoxania, and Anatolia came to Istanbul. The music they introduced to the court and the city was most probably part of the tradition cherished in the Timurid and Safavid courts, which was also appreciated in a wider Middle Eastern tradition. The repertoire of this music consisted of songs whose words were largely based on Persian texts (and to some extent Arabic), composed and sung by musicians who may have come from Persia, Egypt, and Ottoman towns and active in various courts of the region.

The leading representative of this genre was the Azerbaijani composer Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi, who also made music for the Timurid courts. This tradition was introduced firsthand to Istanbul by Abdulaziz, his youngest son. He was active as a composer, performer, and a writer on music during the reign of Mehmed II (1451-1481). He was followed by his son, Mahmud, who was still active in the court of Süleyman I (1520-1566). Mahmud's absence marks a definite break within the flow of the pre-Ottoman Islamic tradition. The repertoire of this genre disappeared in the second half of the sixteenth century, and its absence caused the Ottoman masters to take over the tradition and cherish this music, treating it according to local taste. As Owen Wright has shown, it was time towards the end of the sixteenth century, or at the latest at the beginning of the seventeenth century, to speak of a distinct Ottoman style developed in Istanbul. Using Turkish song texts instead of Persian and Arabic ones, apparent changes in the use of makams (modes), usuls (rhythmic cycles), compositional forms and musical instruments reveal various aspects of this transformation.

When the makams used by the Ottoman composers are compared with those described by Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi obvious discrepancies arise, marking the existence of rupture within the tradition. Compositions of the seventeenth century Ottoman musicians represent the earliest products of this transforming

tradition. This new style soon developed into several genres: secular / classical music, military music, religious music, urban light music, and instrumental music. There had been several musical centres at various times in the Islamic world such as Herat, Samarkand, Baghdad, and Cairo. This music has not survived. What we can hear now in the Iran and Arab area is the “new” Persian and Arab music. Istanbul was the last major stage in the development of this historical music.

Ottoman tradition is the direct inheritor of the most distinguished musical school in the world of Islam. This is evident in the earliest writings of Ottoman-Turkish music. Safi-ed-din has always been remembered as the master who founded the theory of music. Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi, his most eminent follower, has reintroduced the same theory into the Ottoman world through his books.

Throughout the centuries Safi-ed-din's authority in theory has never receded. When modern studies commenced in the twentieth century the name of Safi-ed-din once again was brought onto the musical agenda of Turkey, and his theory became accessible to a larger circle of musicians and lovers of music perpetuating his fame. A most significant aspect of the modern studies in Turkish music in the last century may be understood as an endeavour to read Safi-ed-din's theory in the light of the practice of the five-century old Turkish music. That Safi-ed-din is still studied by Turks has a special meaning. His theory is not solely discussed for academic purposes but within a broader and more significant context: going back to the roots in order to understand the meaning of Turkish musical culture.

For almost a hundred years, the problem of the tonal system of Turkish music has given rise to hot debates. Reading these debates one immediately notices that the participants who referred to Safi-ed-din, Abd al-Qadir and others have used such a polemical and even acrimonious language that one might find strange in academic discourse. The intensity of feelings shows that the participants felt that they were dealing not with that ages-old dead theory but a current one! The

process of settling accounts with this theory has not been completed yet in Turkish music.

Today both Turkish and non-Turkish researchers who study Ottoman music have turned their eyes to its historical development. In the first half of the twentieth century Turkish musicologists Rauf Yekta, Suphi Ezgi, Sadettin Arel and others studied the Systematists primarily from the viewpoint of the problem of the tonal system of Turkish music. Today a group of new musicologists who began researching in the 1970s, 1980s and even in the 1990s are once again taking those old treatises (written both in Turkish and Persian / Arabic) out of the dusty shelves and trying to bring them to new light with different perspectives. Today's predominant interest is in the process of historical change that the Ottoman music underwent throughout its various phases. But the greatest question in this sphere is the relationship between the pre-Ottoman and Ottoman practice in makam music. This subject will occupy the most important chapter of the history of Ottoman music / makam music. Studies which will shed light on the process in which the "international" style of makam music became disintegrated and changed into something else under the influence of local traditions in the Ottoman geography will also assess the Ottoman share in the history of makam music.

Now, I would like to call attention to two crucial phases in the history of makam music. The links with the pre-Ottoman tradition and Ottoman tradition has not been fixed comfortable certainty. The difficulty arises at two levels: problems within the old musical theory and music as practiced in those days. Was the music described by the Systematists the same as the one practised in those centuries? If it was, we can establish no significant link between the Ottoman music and pre-Ottoman tradition. Most probably, music as described by the Systematists was for the greater part a most theoretical or idealised music. Yet music as practiced in those days reached the Ottoman musical environment. The earliest repertoire of the Ottoman music consisted of compositions by Maraghi and several other composers who had been living outside Istanbul. And it was as late as the early seventeenth

century that an Ottoman style as distinct from the music produced the general music of the world of Islam. The gap between the fourteenth century and seventeenth century is three centuries, a long span of time. Within this period the music that had come from Persia, Azerbaijan, Transoxania, Western India was transformed into a new style: The Ottoman style, which came into being as a result of breaking ties with the past.

The documented examples of this new style of music were given by Ali and Cantemir – music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Mid-eighteenth century and thereafter is still a different period. Differences become apparent when makam practice of the seventeenth century is compared with that of the nineteenth century.

What was the music like at the end of the eighteenth century or at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Let me give just a few headlines:

- \* Many new makams...
- \* Obvious changes in makam structures....
- \* Makam patterns become more complicated. Even the so-called “simple” makams are not uniform, showing more than one scale. New makams demand new microtones or intervals as a result of employing transpositions frequently, which cause apparent scalar changes.
- \* A prominent inclination towards creating “compound” makams...
- \* Also the fundamental octave becomes extended to a fourth from below. For example, at the very beginning the lowest note / tone was *rast* (G). The octave becomes extended to lower notes around the mid-eighteenth century and *yegah* (D; A on the piano) as a result of devising such new makams as

*ferahfeza*, *\_edaraban*, *yegah* and *sultaniyegah* which have *yegah* pitch (Re) as the final tone.

\* Until the beginning of the twentieth century two octaves were inclusive enough to perform all kinds of compositions in the repertoire, which means the highest tone was *neva* (d). In the twentieth century many composers forced these limits and included even higher notes such as *tiz huseyni*, *tiz acem*, *tiz gerdaniye*, and *tiz muhayyer* (e, f, g, a respectively on the third octave).

\* In the old treatises composed by the Systematists only the number of beats are indicated ignoring the types of the same beats. In the theory books written during the Ottoman period indicating the types or values of the beats (*dum*, *tek*, *te-ke*, etc) becomes important in describing the rhythmic patterns. In the late eighteenth century rhythmic cycles undergo an important change, and many of them become doubled. For example, *devr-i kebir* was a cycle of 14 beats in the seventeenth century, at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was a cycle of 28 beats. Such increases in length give rise to “melodic elaboration” and “melodic density” in the music of that century.

\* New compositional forms are developed.

\* New musical instruments, or apparent changes in the older instruments. For example, the *ud* was the most prestigious musical instrument before the mid-seventeenth century. From the mid-seventeenth century onwards, the *tanbur* has become the most prominent musical instrument through whose frets the scale of Turkish music could be shown.

The map of makam music extends from Morocco to Iraq, from Iran to the Balkans, which is a large geographical area. Of the traditions in this area Ottoman tradition obviously is not historically the oldest. Yet as far as

documented music is concerned, Ottoman music seems to be the oldest. It has been able to preserve the repertoire of the last five hundred years.

Within this longer period Ottoman music made an impact on various regions in this area and left significant vestiges. Of course, there are several local styles in the area where makam music has been practised. Yet the oldest recorded composition of these local traditions dates from the late nineteenth century. All these makam traditions become linked to the great tradition, that is to say, that of the Sytematists, inevitably through Ottoman music.

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