

# Thoughts and Suggestions on Writing Turkish Music History

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## *Overview*

The endeavours to systematically write Turkish music history began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We can see that these struggles became more and more evident as empires disappeared from history, thereby ceding the way to nationalism and the establishment of nation-states. This is particularly the case given the political and socio-cultural transformations and developments of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the gradual dissolution of the Ottoman Empire under the influence of European imperialism assumed a distinctive and dominant role.

It is possible to categorize these political and socio-cultural transformations and developments into two issues: echoes of the struggles to weaken or destroy Ottoman-Turkish culture in North African countries that emerged in the course of British and French colonization can be seen in the works of writers such as Hatherly, Kiesewetter, Voilloteau and Baron d'Erlanger in their contributions to musical theory and history. The common ground for all these works is that they emphasized Arab and other nationalisms in their musicological approach (among other techniques) over the Ottoman Empire, thereby excluding and ignoring the existence of Turkish music. The adoption of this and other Western approaches and perspectives led to the result that today in the contents of musical history books among subtitles such as "Music of the Far East", "Oceania", "South America", "Africa", "the Middle East" and so forth, it is almost impossible to find information about Turkish countries and dynasties and their music – in other words Turkish music – that dominated Asia, the Middle East, North Africa and Europe for centuries.

On the other hand, as a result of the Europeanization taking place around the same time (to be concise, in 1826, during the reign of Mahmud II), a "East-West" binary opposition was engendered, with a notion of "degradation by Turkish hands" whose implications are still evident today. This development has delayed the emergence of pioneering work on Turkish music.

Pioneers of the re-establishing of Turkish musicology include Rauf Yektâ Bey, Sadettin Arel, Subhi Ezgi, Muallim İsmail Hakkı Bey, Ali Rifat Çağatay and Mahmut Ragıp Gazimihal. Their works on theory, musicology and history are the first national examples of a modern approach to musicology. The works in this field were affected by multi-faceted and multi-dimensional scientific issues and coincided with a socio-political period of turmoil during which the Ottoman

Empire dissolved and the Republic of Turkey was established. The fact that the government's preference favoured Western music, in both the Republican period as well as during the Ottoman Empire, has caused an interruption of tradition and thus the latter's destruction.

The basic cultural preferences of the Turkish Republic (1923) and the resultant approach to the educational system that excluded all issues of Turkish music as well as its teaching, has remained an unresolved problem to this day.

### *Issues and their Practical Perspectives*

The issues experienced in writing a qualified Turkish music history can be categorized under these headings:

#### *Terms, Definitions and Terminology Issues Associated with Periodization*

##### *a) Nomenclature*

Designations like Ottoman, Seljuk, Ilkhanat, Gaznavids etc. are the proper names of the dynasties that established a specific government, hence they imply a limited periodisation when these dynasties appeared on the scene of history. Hence, a nomenclature based on using their names cannot be regarded as true in terms of historical authenticity. The attribution "Ottoman Music" only encompasses 622 years between 1300 and 1922. If the goal is to write a Turkish music history, it must also include the time before and after that period (correct example: "Music in the Land of the Seljuks" [Uslu 2010]). The main drawback of the nomenclature is the result of the founders of the Turkish Republic's ideological rejectionist approach which was cautious about the distinction between "Pan-Turkism" and "Ottomanism". In particular, during the last 30 years writers who think of themselves as "left-wing" or "liberal left-wing" perceived and promoted the attribution of something being "Turkish" as an extension of a chauvinist nationalism. This does not mean anything other than the attempt to overshadow the scientific field with political and ideological concerns. The only ideological principle of every scientific endeavour including the science of history is "rationalism." Apart from that, the general designation "Turkish music," refers to an elite cultural designation such as "Russian novel", "French cuisine", and "American cinema." Similar attempts to establish a nomenclature emerged after the first years of the Republic. However, consistently avoiding the term "Turkish," they instead used terms such as "Music of the Divan poetry" (*divan müsikisi, divan külli*), "Music of the theoretical treatises" (*edvâr müsikî*), "Alaturka music" (*alaturka müsiki*), "traditional music" (*geleneksel müzik*), and lastly "Ottoman music" (excluding folk music sub-distinctions in an incomprehensible or slightly incomprehensible way), and espe-

cially *makam*-based Turkish music (*makam temelli türk müsikisi*). On the other hand, there are no acceptable scientific arguments for the insistent use of a designation such as “Ottoman music”. Comparable examples include “History of Turkish art”; “History of Turkish literature”; “Turkish architecture”; “Turkish calligraphy” etc.)

### *b) Definitions*

Defining an area, a topic or a problem is only possible with a correct designation. Incorrect or missing designations are the most important obstacles before correct identifications of the area/topic/problem. From an outside perspective, a definition is a form of description that is a direct result of a “correct identification” and thus helps to generate a correct perception. Evident examples are Tanbûri Cemil Bey and Selim III who are mistaken for Arab musicians in Baron d’Erlanger’s *La Musique Arabe* (1930-1959). The correct title of the work should have been *La Musique d’Orient*. Other examples are the connection between Sumerian Music and Turkish Music, or the Systematist Tradition and their representatives, etc.

Correct nomenclature: subsections of the general *Eastern Music* should be “Turkish Music of the Seljuk Empire period”; “Turkish Music of the Ottoman Empire period”; “Turkish Music of the Republic of Turkey”. Definitions should be made accordingly.

### *c) Issues of Periodisation*

Specifically some recent writers on music made efforts to apply such Western academic musical distinctions as classical, romantic, and modern to Turkish music, and imitating these categories by resorting to a periodization of Turkish music such as the “early classical”, “late classical”, “romantic” and “reform” eras, all of which are based upon presumptions without scientific criteria. These concepts have been turned into encyclopaedic knowledge and included in the educational system. Designations related to this periodisation are imitative; the definitions are unscientific, even ridiculous.

### *Methodological Issues Concerning Identification and Interpretation of Sources*

Writing an accurate music history cannot be achieved without general historical methodological rules. Thus, before anything else, we need to classify the sources, interpret them, organise them chronologically. For these tasks we need an “absolute fidelity to historical methodology” (Togan 1981).

The sources related to Turkish music can be categorized as:

*a) Written Sources*

1. Iconographic sources:

Relics, mural paintings, frescoes, gravures, miniatures and so forth (e.g. *Hümâyûnnâme*, *Van Moure*, *Levnî*).

2. Manuscripts as primary sources:

Author manuscripts or replicated texts specifically related to music (theory manuscripts (*edvâr*, *risâle*), lyric collections (*güfte mecmû'âsı*, *cönk*), notation books, letters, memories, e.g. *Makaasid'ül elbân*, *Hâfız Post Mecmû'âsı*, *Kevserî Mecmû'âsı*, *Hamparsum* notations etc).

3. Manuscripts as secondary sources:

The sources indirectly related to music are in this category (e.g. tax census registers, poetry collections (*dîvans*, *cönks*), histories, biographical dictionaries (*tezkîres*), *menâkıbs*, *vefiyyatnâmes* etc).

4. Printed primary sources

Sources specifically related to music, especially those appearing after the introduction of the printing press (before and after the introduction of Latin script in 1928, e.g. *Hâsim Bey Mecmâası*, the notations of Notacı Haci Emin Efendi (1845-1907), *Esâtîz-i Elbân*, *Hoş Sadâ*, *Türk Mûsîkîsi Antolojisi*, theory books, magazines & musical sheet publications etc.)

5. Printed secondary sources

Again, the sources indirectly related to music which were printed after the introduction of the printing press (before and after the introduction of Latin script in 1928, e.g. the *Seyahatnâme* of Evliya Çelebi, *Atâ Tarîbi*, history of Turkish literature etc).

6. Auditory, visual and communication technology sources

These include phonographs, gramophones, photographs and technological products available after the introduction of motion pictures, which are indirectly/directly related to music.

7. Incorporated here are personal and institutional archives, music sheets included in collections, books, photographs, vinyl records, collections of instruments (e.g. Arel Library, *Dârü'l Elbân* archive, E. Üngör collection etc).

*b) Oral Sources*

Oral histories such as sagas, stories, tales, memoirs of prominent figures, anecdotes, interviews, surveys, video records.

*c) Interdisciplinary Approach Regarding the Comprehension and Interpretation of Sources*

1. Need for a basic musical education: It is necessary to have experts who have graduated from master or PhD programs in musicology and who are familiar with research techniques that can determine the quality of the sources.
2. Need for Languages: Apart from English as the most important language here, the knowledge of a second Western language is necessary, in addition to Turkish, Ottoman, Arabic-Persian, Greek, Armenian, Kurdish, Chinese and Russian.
3. Need for co-operation with experts in relevant fields: Besides music, co-operation with experts in turkology, archaeology, sociology, anthropology, geography, theology etc. is necessary.
4. Need for institutional organization: An international and autonomous “Turkish Music Research Centre” should be established.
5. Need for inventory and information network: An inventory-information network is necessary to make it possible to identify national and international sources and works, especially those bibliographical works which will determine the Turkish music corpus.
6. Need for publications: It is necessary to have publications accepted in international refereed periodicals and non-periodicals.

*d) Problems Caused by Subjective Approaches:*

Information about Turkish music history appears in general as a totality of inferences ridden with subjective opinions and judgments. Beyond information, documents and analytical thinking Turkish music history has been framed by a (sometimes paranoid and largely ideological) perspective which is prone to heroic discourses and narratives, mythologiations, even fictive scenarios where the inferences are not supervised and scientific discourse is uncommon.

“Disloyalty to the document is essential.” A few examples: *rast kâr-i nâtik*; abridgements made for *Mevlevî âyîns* and other compositions; Fârâbi’s *peşrevs*; years of birth and death of some composers; *meşk* chains; Ali Ufki’s *ırak ildâhî* etc.

History is a science based on facts. Scientific writers should have sincerity, honesty, impartiality, and respect for scientific and general ethics (Gökyay 2007; Erdem, 2010).

*Conclusion:  
An “Essay of Contents”*

*Turkish Music History*

Introduction: Information about Turkish music history's place in General Eastern Music, its geography, sources, basic features, similarities and differences regarding the music of other cultures and the influences it has exerted or received.

*First period:*

- A) From its initial periods until the adoption of Islam
- B) From the adoption of Islam until the conquest of Istanbul
- C) From the conquest of Istanbul until 1829 (the founding of *muzika-i hümayun* [the Imperial Military Band])

*Second period:*

- D) From 1829 until today (incl. the Republic Period)

Under these main categories general accounts can be given concerning the sub-categories of folk music, urban music, religious music, military music, educational music.

Further sub-categories include (in accordance with which centuries they belong to):

- theoreticians and their recommended tonal systems, *makams*, *usûls*, forms (for every era);
- composers, lyricists, performers (together with their biographies, works, composing techniques, performance characteristics, regional styles etc.);
- instruments (technical features);
- teaching methods (master-student, *meşk*, musical notes, notation methods, etc.);
- characteristics of style (*tavır*, *üslûp*) (for every era and region);
- educational institutions;
- performance methods and venues;
- bibliography, discography, compilation notes examples etc.

As a result of such categorization, we can achieve a comprehensive work on Turkish music history. Hence, by means of abandoning a subjective perspective on musical history which is determined by an oral tradition, and focusing on sources of a written culture, based only on scientific research, it is certain that we can attain the intended objective result.