



Greek modes and Turkish sounds. Music as a means of intercultural exchange between Orthodox Christians and Muslims in the Ottoman Empire

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to show how the traditions of modal music in the Byzantine and Turkish contexts shared a common history over several centuries, as it is well exemplified by figure and the role of the Greek cantor and composer Petros Peloponnesios. As the work will display, the common history of Byzantine and Turkish music emerged thanks to various contacts within different types of environment, ranging from the Ottoman court to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul, and involving a wide range of musical genres, from Christian Orthodox religious music to Ottoman Classical Music. The contacts resulted in promoting the dialogue between the coexisting Orthodox Christian and Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire.

Keywords: Byzantine music – Ottoman Empire – Makam – Petros Peloponnesios

Parole chiave: Musica bizantina – Impero Ottomano – Makam – Petros Peloponnesios

INTRODUCTION: THE CONCEPT OF MODAL MUSIC

Regarding musical traditions emerged in Anatolian region during centuries, the Turkish musicologist Recep Uslu notes that the communities coexisting in the area (Greek, Turks, Arabs, Persians, Jewish, Armenians) developed similar music styles¹. The aim of this study is to show, through an analysis of historical sources, how the traditions of modal music in the Byzantine and Turkish contexts shared a common history until the 20th century, when the multi-ethnic and multicultural character of Ottoman music has often been forgotten following the foundation of the Turkish Republic. This voluntary amnesia is due to a political agenda that- in order to create a national identity among Turks- gave more emphasis to

¹ Uslu, Recep (2015): “Is An Echo of Seljuk Music Audible? A Methodological Research”, in Greve, Martin (ed.). *Writing the History of Ottoman Music*. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 242.



Anatolian Turkish folk music rather than Ottoman classical music², where the similarities and the collaborations with other musical traditions, such as the Byzantine one, are more evident. It is only at the end of the 20th century that scholars such as Balta (1998) and Iğsız (2001) started to focus on the multicultural reality of Ottoman music and on what Melih Erol (2015: 25) defines as a ‘musical dialogue’ between Greece and Turkey. As the work will show, this dialogue was built on various contacts within different types of environment, ranging from the Ottoman court to the Orthodox Patriarchate of Istanbul, and involving different musical genres, from Byzantine Orthodox hymns to Classical Turkish music, which comprehends the music performed in the context of the Mevlevi Sufi lodge in Istanbul. A crucial point in this dialogue is represented by the work of musicians such as Petros Peloponnesios (18th century) and the Archbishop Chrisanthos of Madytos who, in the 19th century, conceived a musical system suitable both for the composition of Greek Ecclesiastical and Ottoman Classical music.

In order to understand how was possible for Ottoman and Byzantine modal music traditions to be in such a close contact, it is necessary to give few information on modal music itself. In the composition of modal music there is always a note, which is considered the centre, or the tonic note, that structures the whole composition.³ Moreover, the concept of melody is fundamental, for it is the principle on which the whole composition is structured. A modal music composition is in fact structured on melodic formulas that can be made of few or more notes. Among the most known modal music examples, along with the Arabic and Persian *makam* it is possible to cite the Byzantine system of the *octoechos*⁴ and the *makam* mode, as it has been conceived within the Turkish Islamic tradition. These latter developed both in the Mediterranean area, sharing common features (intervals, the relevance given to the fundamental scale, melodic nuances)⁵ as well as strong cultural relations.

This work does not intend to give a full account of the similarities shared by Turkish and Byzantine music neither of the complex relations between Orthodox and Muslims, it rather aims to shed light on the importance of music as means of intercultural relation between the two communities.

² For more information concerning the Kemalist views on Turkish music see Balkılıç, Özgür. 2005. "Kemalist Views and Works on Turkish Folk Music During the Early Republican Period", Master Thesis, Middle East Technical University.

³ See Sachs, Curt. 1962. *The Wellsprings of Music*. Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 168.

⁴ This system, described in the *Hagiopolites* (probably written in the 7th century and attributed to Saint John of Damascus), is called Octoechos and is based on eight music modes consisting of a set of four octaves. Since the Middle Ages the Octoechos has become the modal system used to compose and perform liturgical music in the Orthodox Church. For a more detailed history concerning the Octoechos and Byzantine music see Wellesz, Egon (1958). *A History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*. At the Clarendon Press, Oxford.

⁵ For a more detailed analysis see Skoulios, Markos (2003): “A comparison of the modal and notational systems of Ottoman- Turkish classical and Byzantine chanting music traditions”, in Feldman, W., Guettat, M., Kerbage, T. (eds.), *Music in the Meditteranea, Modal classical traditions*, vol.2 Theory and Practice, 435-442.



GREEK MUSICIANS AND OTTOMAN MUSIC

Historical sources are filled with accounts of Greek musicians composing Turkish music or working as singers at the Ottoman court. The first document reporting about the presence of Greek musicians at the Ottoman Court is the *Ekthesis Chronica*⁶ of 1584, which reports that Fatih Sultan Mehmet (1432- 1481), after hearing that the Greeks had invented a notation system which allowed any sound to be transcribed and reproduced, invited two Greek musicians, Georgios and Yerasimos, to the Ottoman court. The sultan asked them to transcribe a ballad, sung in real time by Persian musicians. From the anecdote, it seems that the two Greek singers were able to transcribe the composition⁷ and sing it in front of the sultan, who was amused by their ability.⁸ The contacts between Greeks and Turks in music became stronger in the following centuries, as proven by the case of the musician Hanendeh Zacharia, who lived between the 17th and the 18th century. Zacharia's known liturgical compositions are very few, whereas at least twenty-one secular pieces are ascribed to him in Ottoman music. Examples of his ability to compose music in Byzantine and Ottoman style are his *Hüseynî Ağır Semâî*, composed in *makam hüseyinî*⁹ and the *usul aksak semâî*¹⁰. The melody and the ascending- descending character of the *makam hüseyinî* make the composition sound like a Vesper hymn composed in the first mode of the *octoechos* by Zacharia for the Orthodox Church, with the title *Ten Pagkosmion Doxan*, which is more ascending. The same character is also a feature of another Orthodox hymn by Hanende Zacharia entitled *Hoe Tes Khaldaas Kaminou*, composed in the first plagal mode and similar to the *makam uzzal*, which is a progressively ascending mode. The same characteristic is found in another of Zacharia's *makam* compositions, the *Uzzal Yürük Semai*.

Along with Hanendeh Zacharia, there was another composer which played a crucial role in the relations between the Greek and the Turkish musical contexts: his name was Petros Peloponnesios and he is nowadays recognised as one of the most important musicians active in the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century.

PETROS PELOPONNESIOS

From an artistic point of view, in the second half of the 18th century there was an increasing of collaboration between non-Muslim personalities and the Ottoman court; a notable case was that of Greek musicians composing and

⁶ A chronological exposition of facts and events occurred in a limited period of time.

⁷ Since in 16th century the *octoechos* modes were already applied for the composition of Byzantine ecclesiastical music, it can be assumed that the music performed by Georgios and Yerasimos was based on that system.

⁸ On the same anecdote Papadopoulos, Giorgios. 1904. *Ιστορική επισκόπησης της βυζαντινής εκκλησιαστικής μουσικής από των αποστολικών χρόνων μέχρι των καθ' ημάς, 1-1900 μ.Χ.* Τύποις Πραξιτέλους, Athens.

⁹ Simple *makam* used in Turkish Classical music.

¹⁰ Ten- beat minor *usûl* used in Turkish Classical music.



performing music for the Ottoman court. The most known example of this phenomenon is represented by the case of Peter Peloponnesios (Peter the Peloponnesian) (1730-1788). Very little is known about his life before 1764, the year during which the Peloponnesios moved to Constantinople, where he became one of the most important composers of Byzantine liturgical music. At the same time, he used to write Ottoman music as well such as *taksim*, *saz semâ'î*, *peşrev*.¹¹ Among works in *makam* modes that he wrote with the pseudonym of Petraki, there are two classical music compositions, a *Peyk-i Safa Saz Semai*, composed *makam peyk-i safa*¹² and in *usul aksak semai*, and a *peşrev* in ascending-descending *makam* called *nihâvend*.

The work *Contributions to the History of our own Church Music and the most Prominent Composers prospered from the Apostolic Times till our Days*, written by the Greek historian Giorgios Papadopoulos in the 19th century, mentions an anecdote concerning the relations between Peloponnesios and the Turks. The narrated facts take place during the sultanate of Mustafa III, who ruled the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. In the anecdote Petros goes to pay a visit to the muezzin of the mosque of Eminönü. The two have dinner together and they start to speak about the selak (recitation) which has to be executed on a certain makam. In the early morning, the muezzin obliges the Peloponnesios to sing the melody from the minaret. As soon as the Sultan knows who the singer of the selak is, he orders the arrest of the Peloponnesios who is sent to the national psychiatric asylum at Egri-Kapi, where he stays for more than a month after going back to his duties¹³. The episode shows the close relation between Greek and Turks in Ottoman society of the period, which interested not only the contacts in everyday life but among institutions as well (Petros, as Lambadarios of the Patriarchate, goes to visit the muezzin of the mosque). At the same time this story shows the ability to perform following *makam* mode that the Peloponnesios had and how common this ability was among Greek musicians of his time. Considering this example, it is possible to understand that Greek musicians had a double task, as they used to compose religious music for the Orthodox Church while writing secular melodies for the Ottoman establishment. Other mentioned sources suggest that, because of their outstanding performative abilities, Greek musicians were most probably committed in the performance of religious songs as well, as shown by few anecdotes concerning the relation between Petros Peloponnesios and the Mevlevi lodge of Istanbul from a Greek historical source, the Papadopoulos' *Contributions* to the history of Orthodox Church music, that seem

¹¹ *Taksim* in Turkish music is a musical improvisation that precedes the performance of a composition. The term *saz semâ'î* indicates an instrumental form of Turkish Classical music, which was performed at the end of a suite, while *peşrev* is the word used for the first piece of music played at the beginning of the suite.

¹² A compound makam of Turkish Classical music.

¹³ See Papadopoulos, Giorgios I. 1890. *Συμβολαί εις την ιστορίαν της παρ' ημίν εκκλησιαστικής μουσικής και οι από των αποστολικών χρόνων άχρι των ημερών ημών ακμάσαντες επιφανέστεροι μελωδοί, νηνογράφοι, μουσικοί και μουσικολόγοι, Τυπογραφείον και Βιβλιοπωλείον Κουσουλίνου & Αθανασιάδου. (Contributions to the History of our own Church Music and the most Prominent Composers prospered from the Apostolic Times till our Days). Athens, 322.*



to suggest the presence of Greeks during the performance of Islamic sacred hymns. In other words, the role of the Peloponnesios as musician was also important in encouraging the relations between Christian and Muslim communities.

PETROS PELOPONNESIOS AND ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS MUSIC: THE CASE OF THE MEVLEVI SUFI LODGE IN ISTANBUL

Relations between the Mevlevi order and the Greek community in Anatolia date back to the 13th century, when the Seljuks entered Anatolia and established the capital city in Konya, where the poet and theologian Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī established the Mevlevi order. The relations between the Greek community and the Sufi order became significant centuries later. In the history of the Ottoman Empire there have been some examples of people from the Greek community being related with the Mevlevi order, especially from the 18th century onward.¹⁴ During their ceremonies, in fact, the dervishes used to dance until they reached a state of mystical trance, while chanting hymns accompanied by music played by Muslim or non-Islamic professional musicians.

Peter Peloponnesios is one of the first and probably most known Greek musicians taking part to Mevlevi rituals. He was registered by the order as ‘master of music’ (Plemmenos, 2012: 161). From the anecdotes collected by the Greek historian Georgios Papadopoulos possible to deduce that the Peloponnesios was treated with great respect by the dervishes and even mentioned in the golden book of the Sufi lodge of Pera, in Istanbul. One of the most significant episodes concerning the relations between him and the dervishes is recalled in the *Contributions* by Georgios Papadopoulos. In the anecdote three hanendes (singers) from Persia come to Istanbul with a composition they intended to play for the Sultan. This event causes a stir among the community of musicians living in Istanbul and the dervishes decide to consult Peloponnesios to understand what to do. As the singers start to play a new composition at the presence of the dervishes, the Peloponnesios is secretly hidden and records the song and arranges it as an instrumental piece for a tambur. When joining the banquet, Peoloponnesios pretends to recognise the song as one of his compositions, probably taught to the singers by one of his students in Arabia or Persia and he starts to play it with a *tambur*. The Persian singers are expelled from the city as charlatans¹⁵. It is significant that in the anecdote the Mevlevi dervishes call Peloponnesios *hoca* (master), showing great respect to him.

¹⁴ Much of the music for religious hymns has been composed during the 18th century. This element could suggest that maybe Greek musicians had an active role in the composition of music for hymns.

¹⁵ See Papadopoulos, Giorgios I. 1890. *Συμβολαί εις την ιστορίαν της παρ’ ημών εκκλησιαστικής μουσικής και οι από των αποστολικών χρόνων άχρι των ημερών ημών ακμάσαντες επιφανέστεροι μελωδοί, υμνογράφοι, μουσικοί και μουσικολόγοι* (Contributions to the History of our own Church Music and the most Prominent Composers prospered from the Apostolic Times till our Days). Τυπογραφείον και Βιβλιοπωλείον Κουσουλίνου & Αθανασιάδου, Athens, 320-21.



At the same time, the episode responsible for the argument between the Persians and the Peloponnesios, who accused them of having copied his composition, is significative of how close and interchangeable could sound *makam* (the Persian composition) and *octoechos* based (Peloponnesios' one) compositions. The fact that Peloponnesios was considered an authority by the dervishes is proven also by a story related to his death. When he died, many dervishes attended his funeral asking to the Patriarch if they could place a *ney* flute in his arms saying: «Oh our blessed teacher, accept this gift from us, your orphan students, so that you may play with the angels in heaven!». The Patriarch replied: “I empathise with your great sorrow caused by the death of the late master; so, I don't mean to reject your request, but, in order not to offend the Sublime Porte, I beg all of you to follow the procession in silence, and pay your respects on the grave». The three anecdotes concerning the Peloponnesios (the first one about the psychiatric asylum, the second with the singers from Persia and the latter from his funeral) prove the active role of Petros in late Ottoman society as well as in the Dervish community. Moreover, the relation between Greek musicians and the Mevlevi order should not be understood univocally. Regarding this topic, the historian Merih Erol (2015: 61) mentions two cases of Orthodox cantors who had Sufi musicians as masters. The first example is represented by the first cantor of the Church of Panagia in Pera¹⁶, and the second by Evstratios G. Papadopoulos, who was educated at the Ottoman court by one of the most important Sufi musicians of that time, Hammamizade Ismail Dede, who was also the teacher of Giorgios Protopsaltes, a Greek musician that, after learning Turkish, became one of his students.

Furthermore, it is interesting to notice that these collaborations and exchanges both in secular and religious contexts may have played an important role in determining some changes in the theory of Byzantine music, which started to take always more and more in account the theory of Ottoman music as well from the first half of the 19th century. These changes and the strengthened collaboration between the Greek Orthodox and the Muslim Turkish community will emerge also thanks to the process of reform and modernisation started in the Ottoman Empire after 1839 with the *Tanzimat* reform.¹⁷

¹⁶ A district of Beyoğlu, Istanbul.

¹⁷ A period of administrative, political and cultural reform in the Ottoman Empire. This period is marked by an intense process of modernization and in Westernization attempts in areas such as reform of educational system, adoption of a new concept of citizenship which aimed to include all the inhabitants of the Empire (in spite of their cultural and religious differences), as well as the legislative system. For more information see Inalcık, Halil (2011). *Tanzimat. Değişim Sürecinde Osmanlı İmparatorluğu*. İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, Istanbul.



BYZANTINE AND TURKISH MUSIC: A PARALLEL HISTORY FOR MAKAM AND OCTOECHOS

In 1832 the Archbishop Chrisanthos of Madytos in the third book of the treaty *The Great Theory of Music*, conceived a new notation system for Orthodox music that could be applied to the composition of Ottoman music as well. In the book it is possible to see, in fact, that each echos of the Byzantine music corresponded to a different makam in Ottoman music. In this century, as Greeks became always more part of Ottoman music scene, Greek musicologists started to focus on similarities between Orthodox and Ottoman music as it is proven by works such as a commentary composed by a cantor from Bursa, Panagiotes Kiltzanidis, who tried to explain the system of Ottoman music, and *Ermeneia tes Exoterikes Mousikes*, a treatise written in 1843 by Konstantin, a chanter and psalmist of the Great Church. The same author in 1881 wrote the book *Methodiki Didaskalia Theoritiki te kai Pratiki*, where he explained the theory of Turkish music, as well as different types of *makam*, using Byzantine notation. This interest in Ottoman music by the Byzantines can be seen as a consequence of the cultural revolution started with the Tanzimat era in the second half of the 19th century. When sultan Mahmut II authorised the closing of the Ottoman military band in 1826, sometime after the new imperial orchestra, called *Musika-ı Hümayun*, was founded. The creation of the imperial orchestra marked the beginning of a new era where Turkish music and a more Western- oriented music tradition coexisted in the same spaces, both at the Ottoman court and outside the imperial palace, in places such as coffees and beer houses where musicians from different ethnic origins and religions used to perform (Erol, 2015: 152). Moreover, the edict of Gülhane and the subsequent *Islahat Fermanı* (Reform Edict) of 1856 had important consequences on the status of non- Muslims, considered from that moment juridically equal to Muslim citizens of the empire. Finally, the modernisation process, inaugurated by the *Tanzimat*, started to influence the composition of religious music too, resulting ultimately in the adoption of the notation system conceived by Chrisanthos to write both religious and secular music, as it is proven by the compositions listed in Greek musical reviews containing Turkish songs such as *Evterpi* (1830), *Pandora- II* (1846), *Musikon Apanthisma* (1856).

CONCLUSIONS

Even if it is difficult to prove an effective influence of one musical tradition on another, it is still interesting to notice that the knowledge of musical concepts belonging to different musical worlds was shared among populations of the Mediterranean area. Music played a considerable role in encouraging the relations between Orthodox and Muslim communities, favouring somehow the dialogue among the two. The cases of contacts between personalities of the Orthodox Patriarchate and the Mevlevi Sufi order in Istanbul are particularly



significative of the dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities in the Ottoman Empire. The role played by music in this dialogue is exemplified also by the frequent collaborations by the Ottoman Imperial court and Greek Orthodox musicians, as exemplified by the case of Petros Peloponnesios. These intense collaborations constitute probably one of the most important reasons for the necessity to adopt a system- the reformed *octoechos* by the Archbishop Chrisanthos to invent a musical system which could be functional to the composition of a wide range of musical genres, from holy Christian music to classical Turkish one. Moreover, it is important to notice that the Tanzimat process of modernisation started by the Ottoman administration, as well as the creation of the imperial orchestra played a decisive role in increasing the collaboration between the Orthodox Patriarchate's musicians and the Muslim Turks, which ultimately resulted in the sharing of spaces, sounds and traditions.

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MUSIC

Hüseynî Ağır Semâî, composed by Zakharia Hanende (18th century). (Hanende Zaharya. 'En Chordais Music Ensemble'. Kalan Müzik. Istanbul, 2005.

Hoe Tes Khaldaas Kaminou, composed by Zakharia Hanende (18th century). (Hanende Zaharya. 'En Chordais Music Ensemble'. Kalan Müzik. Istanbul, 2005.

Peyk-i Safa Saz Semai, composed by Petros Peloponnesios (18th century).

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Uzzal Yürük Semai, composed by Zakharia Hanende (18th century). (Hanende Zaharya. 'En Chordais Music Ensemble'. Kalan Müzik. Istanbul, 2005.

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