

# THE COLLECTION OF TURKISH FOLK MUSIC AND ITS CURRENT SITUATION

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**Abstract:** The article gives a picture of the folk music life in Turkey. Turkish folk music has undergone drastic change because of the social and cultural development. The country is entering a specially rapid process of industrialization. The expansion of technology, industry and consumer economy enhanced globalization in Turkey. The worldwide uniformity is due to the interaction of economic and cultural phenomena. The source of folk music has not been extinguished, rather people have formed a new kind of music depending on the changing cultural, social and economic conditions.

**Keywords:** folklorism, popular music, Turkish folk music

Turkish folk music is defined as a music which is the common creative power of the people and which can express by simple but sincere melodies, the feelings, thoughts, joys, sorrows, deeds, bravery, love, homesickness and public events of everyday life without any claim for art. Folk music is of two kinds; with words and without words. Melodies with words constitute the majority. Melodies without words are dance music. Thousands of songs without any known composer have survived until today by word of mouth. It is not known when and where Turkish folk music appeared, although there are some exceptions. Most of them, the dates of which are known, are songs and melodies associated with folk singers using their instruments and with historical events.

When we go back to the origins of the minstrels, (folk music singer, playing instruments), we find that they were the public singers who sang to the accompaniment of their instruments with the role of social counsellor seeking a solution for the common feelings of society in the Turkish populations living in Horasan in Central Asia in the 5th century before the Islamic belief. They were called Kam among the Altai Turks, Baksı among the Kırğız Turks, Shaman among the Yakut Turks and Ozan among the Oğuz Turks (HOŞSU 1997: 9). The Turks who immigrated to Anatolia brought their culture and their music which was a part of it. Folk music produced a synthesis in Seljuk and Ottoman civilisations together with the Lydian, Phrygian, Hittite, Hellenistic, Byzantine and Turkish civilizations which were present in Anatolia where the important civilisations existed, forming a rich musical component and resulting in the contemporary Turkish folk music.

Minstrels (folk singers) had an important role in the survival of this music for centuries. Although Turkish folk music which was taught by the master to the ap-

prentice and was learned mostly by word of mouth changed its form, it still maintained its presence. When we look for written examples on this subject, the "deyişler" and songs are the products which shed a light on the periods when these folk singers lived and which were about historical events, the bravery of the people and other social events narrated under their "Mahlas" pseudonyms. Although these works existed in an oral tradition, they appeared in such documents as "cönk"<sup>1</sup>, "şığırdili"<sup>2</sup>, "supara"<sup>3</sup>, "tezkire"<sup>4</sup>, "tarih"<sup>5</sup>, "divan"<sup>6</sup>, "güfte antolojisi"<sup>7</sup>, "seyahatname"<sup>8</sup>, "surname"<sup>9</sup>, "mecmua"<sup>10</sup>, "mektup"<sup>11</sup>, "mesnevi"<sup>12</sup> written during the last three centuries of the Ottoman Period.

The most productive sources of folk music in the Ottoman period are seen in the art of the *minstrels*. The tradition of *minstrels* which occupied an important place in Turkish culture, gives us some information about the times of certain works. The tradition of minstrels which existed before the period of the Ottoman State, has survived to the present time. The word "Aşıklık" sometimes means the minstrel, the one who plays and sings at the same time. "This is a tradition and in that of the minstrel tradition, as in the poem reciting, the master's work becomes dominant. The minstrels perform either their own poems or those of ancient minstrels by placing them into the already existing song form. An apprentice who is devoted to a master learns not only to sing but also the refinement of writing the words with the melody" (ŞENEL 1991: 553).

Historical sources suggest that the art of being a minstrel was practiced not only among the people, but also in the mansions of gentlemen (beys), generals (pachas) and the distinguished intellectual class of the state and even in the palaces (courts) before the sultan (the ruler). "The fact that Murad IV liked Turkish folk literature and even composed some folk songs with the syllable meter for Musa Çelebi has been found in the historical sources" (KÖPRÜLÜ 1989:177).

The representatives of the art of minstrels who are now gradually decreasing in numbers were found in every part of the Ottoman Empire as an important occupational group until the beginning of the 20th century and even after the Tanzimat Period. Köprülü who has done research on minstrels in the period of the Ottoman State has studied tens of those minstrels during the 16th, 17th, 18th, and 19th centu-

<sup>1</sup> A leather-bound book, opening longitudinally, in which minstrels collected their own poems and those of others.

<sup>2</sup> A book opening longitudinally where minstrels wrote their poems.

<sup>3</sup> The general term given to school books in the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>4</sup> The work in which there are some information about the lives and songs of the poets.

<sup>5</sup> The date.

<sup>6</sup> The work in which the poets of Divan literature collected their poems.

<sup>7</sup> An anthology in which the written texts of musical works are found.

<sup>8</sup> Travelogue, Book of travel.

<sup>9</sup> The works that describe the weddings of Sultans and their children.

<sup>10</sup> Journal.

<sup>11</sup> A mailed letter.

<sup>12</sup> 1. A form of poem in the Divan literature with different rhymes for every double line. 2. General term given to this kind of work.

ries one by one (KÖPRÜLÜ 1989). Again in the same centuries the Ağıts (laments) sung by these minstrels were handled as a different subject of study (BALI 1997).

We know that some of the minstrels lived during the reign of *Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror* from the records in such sources as *Mecmua'ün Nezair* and *Cami'ün Nezair*. As it was documented in later periods, these sources provided some information about the art of minstrels of the *Mehmed the Conqueror* period with the statement that these minstrels probably played their instruments and sang songs during *Bayram* and *Ramadan* in the family and wedding gatherings in Istanbul and Anatolia (KARAHASANOĞLU 1999: 736).

The oldest work on music which is evidence of the art of minstrels in a written document is a *deyiş* (song) encountered in the travelogues (book of travels) of *Bartholomeus Georgievitz* who lived with Turks for 13 years after being taken prisoner by Turks in Hungary and died in 1560. *Bartholomeus Georgievitz*, in his "Memoirs" after noting that "the poets of the Turks were called Minstrels and their poems were constructed by lines with 11 syllables" gave some examples of quatrains. In a handwritten work composed by an anonymous Spanish person and dedicated to the *Spanish King Felipe* in 1557, the same quatrain was found as "*Poem and Song*". It has been suggested that the same song appearing in both works belonged to the period of *Kanuni Süleyman* (AKSOY 1994: 29).

In the monograph titled "*Çöğür Şairi Armutlu*" about Armutlu of 17th century minstrels some musical examples of his are mentioned from the manuscript of Ali Ufki titled "*Mecmua-i Saz u Söz*" (Collection of instruments and songs) (Ali Ufki 1976). It has been assumed that Ali Ufki of Polish origin who has an important place in the history of Turkish music entered the palace. (This date of entry to the palace may be between the years 1632–1639 and his date of leaving the palace may be between the years 1651–1657) (BEHAR 1990: 14). During this period, Ufki – besides many activities in the Sultan's Palace – wrote a lot of information about Turkish classical and folk music and transcribed many songs. There are examples of minstrel's music among these transcriptions.

Üngör, mentioning a document he found among the archives about *Çöğürî Osman* who lived during the reign of *Mehmed IV* (1685) and who was appointed as a music teacher for the girls in the Harem, has shed some light on the history. In the same work, there is a song prohibited by *Sultan Murat* (1623–1640) taken from the travelogue of *Evliya Çelebi* and also a song about the Naval Victory of *Preveze* (1538) (ÜNGÖR: unpublished work).

When we consider the examples of folk music, apart from the songs performed by minstrels, the oldest text of these songs which were found by *Hamdi Hasan* who conducted research on the manuscripts in libraries in *Saraybosna*, one of the most important Turkish settlement regions of the Ottoman period, and who published his findings in a book, was related to the "*Sarajevo Disaster*" occurring in 1697. *Hamdi Hasan* included a total of 372 songs in his book, which he had identified among the manuscripts (and papers) (HASAN 1987: 7). Moreover, we find song samples in the "*Mustafa Ağa Güfte Mecmuası*" dated 1732 (USLU: unpublished work). Folk music was also the origin of the *Mehter* music<sup>13</sup> during the Ottoman period. "In a record

which dated from the latest years of *Klasik Mehterhane* until the year 1826, it was found that folk music works such as “*Türkü*”<sup>14</sup>, “*Ezgi*”<sup>15</sup> and “*Kalenderi*”<sup>16</sup> were included in its repertory (SANAL 1981: 8).

It is proper to mention here the Hungarian researcher Ignacz Kunos who collected and published texts of Turkish folk literature of the 1880s. Kunos collected hundreds of song texts and preserved them for the present day in written form (KUNOS 1998). When we study the words of the songs, we find examples that could be alive today although they were composed 400 years ago and recounted historical and social events of the Ottoman period. For example, the song about the Bagdat campaign by Genç Osman (ATILGAN 1998: 5); the song of Murat Reis, which was about Turkish sailors sent to Indian Moslems to be of help during the reign of Sultan Süleyman; the song about the Cretan war between the years 1645–1669; the song about the Belgrade war which began in 1736 and lasted for years, and the song about the Plevne victory (ÖZTELLİ 1972: 686–687). Besides such songs of bravery as Esztergom, Özü and Bender fortress, Sivastapol, Egypt and Genç Osman, the songs about the painful Yemen war which lasted for years and was lost eventually and the Algerian war have survived as a living witness of the events occurring centuries ago.

When compared with the folk studies around the world, it seems that Turkish folk studies began quite late. The consciousness of folk studies began to be formed at the beginning of the 20th century and the systematic studies of folk music have a history of only the last 80 years. In the beginning of the 1920s, Darülelhan, the only music school of the country, began collecting studies and they were carried out by music teachers using questionnaires. As a result of these activities, music teachers sent some 100 scores to Darülelhan and 85 of them were published. At the same time two foreign-educated musicians, the brothers Seyfettin Asaf and Mehmet Sezai were sent to Western Anatolia to collect and write down the scores of folk songs. Of these notes which were collected during these trips made on behalf of the Ministry of National Education, 76 were published in 1926. As a result of these trips, 161 songs were published but because voice recording devices were not used and records were made directly, the mistakes found in these notes become the subject of criticism.

After the experiment in Darülelhan which did not give good results, the idea of working with a phonograph arose. The day after the phonograph was brought to Istanbul from Europe, on 30th July 1926, the groups of musicians went on their first song collecting trip. Then trips were made four years in a row; 670 songs collected during these four excursions were published in 12 notebooks (printed). Musicologist M. Ragıp Gazimihal wrote two books related to these excursions. The fifth collecting

<sup>13</sup> A band charged with the duty of musical performance in the Ottoman Army of 1284–1826.

<sup>14</sup> Folk songs; special kinds of folk poems, they were taken into musical notes.

<sup>15</sup> A kind of Turkish folk poem. It is performed to a special melody.

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trip was made in 1932. Songs collected from the provincial artists were put in the archives of Darülelhan. These songs collected and published in the private collecting studies in the name of Darülelhan, met with great interest in this period and some of them were performed during Turkish classical music performances. Some young artists composed new works based on the folk music and they made the songs polyphonic (ŞENEL 1999: 110).

The invitation of the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók to Turkey was one of the most important events of the 1930s. The arrival of Bartók opened a new horizon for Turkish musicologists and caused important developments related to the country's music policies. The excitement of the first years of the Turkish Republic, "*Türk Tarih Tezi*"<sup>17</sup> and "*Güneş Dil Nazariyesi*"<sup>18</sup> all had their impacts on the invitation of Bartók to Turkey. Bartók held classes for Turkish musicologists and while participating in joint collecting studies, he wanted to contribute to the research on Hungarian history. Bartók eventually gathered the collection of songs and scores in a book (Bartók 1999).

Another important event in these years was the foundation of Ankara State Conservatory. The new conservatory arranged a first collecting trip in 1937. These trips continued for 17 years without interruption with groups in which there were individuals qualified in music and literature of the time. Around 9000 folk songs were collected during these trips. Some of them were written in musical notes and were filed but they came near to being destroyed because of the insufficient preserving conditions.

Another institution to be mentioned here was Turkish Radio Corporation. This corporation which was the official broadcasting organ of the state contributed widely to the studies of folk music. Besides broadcasting folk music programs, it contributed mostly to the collection, research and filing activities. In the archives of the Turkish Radio Corporation (called TRT), there were around 5000 songs written as musical sheets. It now has the most regular archive in the country.

Another institution which conducted research and collection work on folk music specimens was the General Directorate of Research and Promotion of Folk Culture (HAGEM) belonging to the Ministry of Culture. This HAGEM, founded in 1966, as a result of the first collecting trip made in the beginning of 1940, visited 57 provinces and added about 4000 songs and scores to its archives. This institution has begun its second round of collecting trips.

Apart from these leading institutions, Türkiyat Institute, Turkish Folk Science Association, Halkevleri (People's Houses), Folkloric Research Institution, Folk Club of Boğaziçi University, Turkish Folk Science Association of ODTÜ (Middle-East Technical University), and some private associations have rendered great services to our folk music.

<sup>17</sup> Turkish Historical Thesis.

<sup>18</sup> Language of the Sun Theory.

There are very valuable studies carried out by foreigners on Turkish folk music. Among many researchers we may mention the names of the following scholars who deserve an important place on this subject; Béla Bartók, Kurt and Ursula Reinhard, Laurence Picken, Walter Swets, Haruni Kosiba, İrene Markoff, Martin Stokes, Sipos Jason, Sonia Seeman.

However, all these studies carried out in the historically rich Anatolian land prove insufficient. Moreover, the materials gathered are not sufficiently evaluated. This is one side of the problem and the other side is that a rapid process of change has been experienced in our folk music during the last 50 years. The environment which created and sustained our folk music almost without any change during centuries, entered a rapid phase of change starting from the second half of the 20th century and eventually altered its form to the point of breaking away from its identity. There are many causes for this: Among them, we may point out the effect of communications media on the popular culture. While communications media prove useful as a means of reaching many individuals, they also become the cause for various cultures being influenced by each other and eventually becoming uniform. For example, a song from any part of Turkey written in musical notes and broadcast on a national scale, has been adopted by other regions and similar songs begin to appear everywhere.

The songs belonging to particular regions are changed or are being forgotten. Another aspect is that the folk songs which were performed and interpreted differently on every occasion for centuries have lost their dynamism due to the practice of setting them down in writing and moreover, the songs have been sung by urban musicians and broadcasted continually in the same style. A further important cause is the drastic changes occurring in the social and therefore cultural structure of our country which is entering into a specially rapid process of industrialization. Industrialization has brought changes in social life and the consumer economy in its wake. Still another cause is the immigration from the villages into the cities. As a result of these immigrations, the village population is gradually decreasing while the urban population has experienced a rapid increase. The peasant population settled in the cities have brought their tastes and habits together with their cultural life but are confronted with a different culture in the city.

Turkish folk music has a verbal tradition. The people who are accustomed to express their feeling and thoughts by music with a verbal preference maintain this tradition. However, there is a reality which shows itself as a change of form. In this case, shifting the traditional folk values from the village to the city has caused the appearance of a new kind of folk music in the cities. In a period when the Aşık tradition which created the two basic sources of our traditional folk music has almost disappeared and the original people who composed or performed the folk songs are diminishing in number, a kind of folk music has appeared in the ghettos of the big cities and has spread rapidly in the last 30 years. While in the old times, most folk music composers were anonymous, nowadays compositions have been realized in the form and tune of folk music. These new compositions which mostly look alike and have no regional characteristics have brought vulgarity and shallowness with them.

The development of technology, industry and consumer economy have directed people toward some simple music which they can easily enjoy and popular music has been converted into a form where many kinds of music are mixed and there is no trace of identity. Undoubtedly this should be evaluated as a worldwide phenomenon. Globalization has caused a worldwide uniformity due to the interaction of economic and cultural phenomena.

Consequently, if we realise that we live in a cultural environment where everything affects every other thing rapidly and on a large scale, this outcome should be accepted as an ordinary event. The source of folk music has not been extinguished, rather people have formed a new kind of music depending on the changing cultural, social and economic conditions.

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