

# Is an Echo of Seljuk Music Audible? A Methodological Research

*Recep Uslu*

It is impossible to consider Ottoman music history independent from Ottoman political history. Today, everything has begun to be questioned, from formal history discourses that the historians of our day are querying, to the theories of political history. As a result of these questionings old truths as well as new understanding and writing of history will remain. Approaches that need to change will be examined and new theories will emerge.

Obviously it is necessary to re-examine Ottoman political history with a new perspective, as historians of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (Mustafa Armağan, İlber Ortaylı, Ahmet Akgündüz etc.) have discussed in their works. The same is true for the issue of Ottoman/Turkish music history. However, is there any book that we can call “Ottoman Music History” in Turkey or even in the world? I think this is the first question that we need to answer. Since no such book exists as yet, here the real problem leads to these questions: “Why has an Ottoman music history not been written? Why has writing the Ottoman music history been so delayed?”

## *Music in the Territory of the Great Seljuk Empire*

Before writing an Ottoman music history, we first need to bring the pre-Ottoman period into focus. In this article, we are going to concentrate on the sounds of the music of the countries before the Ottoman Empire, the Anatolian *beyliks* and the Seljuk Empire. Before I studied the music of the Great Seljuk Empire, the Turkish Seljuk dynasty and Anatolian *beyliks* I was occupied with the music history of the era of Mehmet II the Conqueror.

My answer to the question “Why this era?” was: Ottoman music history must have started in the area of Sultan Mehmed II. Besides, I considered that there are not enough sources to fill a book on the period between Osman I and Mehmet II. However, during my research on the time of Mehmet II problems emerged that pointed out a need to investigate the music of the Great Seljuk Empire and Turkish Seljuk dynasty period.

Among the musical findings of the era of Mehmet II I considered *makams* and *usûls* as most important. However, in the music theory books of the era there are several points missing. Trying to complete the missing information made me think of the necessity to study the music of the Seljuk era.

The latter is as important to Turkish music history as Ottoman music history is. The most important reason for this is the fact that the *Mevlevi* music that later be-

came important in the emergence of Ottoman music was deemed central. However, it seems impossible to talk about just one Seljuk music. Within the frame of the sources, the issue extends from Turkish music to Ilkhanate music and from Ilkhanate music to Abbasid music. When we think about the Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Rûm and Assyrian communities who lived in the territory of the Seljuks and in addition to those living in Middle Asia, Mesopotamia and the Anatolian territories, could this music be pure “Persian” or “Arabic music”? The situation during the Abbasid Caliphate is similar. While we were thinking about a solution to this problem, the notion of “Seljuk music” necessarily turned into “Music in the Seljuq Empire territory” (Uslu, 2011:12)<sup>1</sup>. I think this is a better, even more realistic and scientific approach, than to speak about “Persian” or “Arabic” music theory, as some writers do. In this context, the first problem is to name an era correctly.

Some of the methods used by musicology are similar to those of historiography. Serious researches were already conducted on the political history of the Seljuk Empire era which I concerned myself with. *The History of the Seljuk Empire* by Osman Turan was the first of these important research works. Turan’s book also includes a section (albeit a short one) on music. Later historians left the music of the Seljuk era to musicologists and never handled the subject or even touched on it. This is a reasonable choice, since otherwise we come across many mistakes in interpretations and information. Examples include the designation of Abbasid music as “Arabic music”, or the interpretation of the music represented in Kutbuddîn Şirazî’s book as “Persian music”, simply because the book is written in Persian. In fact it is known that even though he was from Shiraz, Kutbuddîn Şirazî wrote his book in Tabriz which was densely inhabited by Turkish people. Before that he travelled to Iran, Anatolia, and Damascus where different people lived, and spent time with musicians in these regions (Uslu 2011:178). Additionally, the source that he based the songs on is Safî al-Dîn’s *eş-Şerefiyye*. Marâghî calls him the “Translator of the *Şerefiyye*” (*Tercüme-i Şerefiyye*). In that case, how can one suppose that his book represents solely “Persian music”<sup>2</sup>?

### *Lost Musics*

Bülent Aksoy discusses the compositions of ‘Abd al-Qâdir Marâghî in his article “*Kayıp Musikiler*” (Lost Musics), stating that Marâghî’s compositions “were composed by 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman composers, but under the influence of ‘Abd al-Qâdir and other pre-Ottoman compositions.” He characterises this type of re-

<sup>1</sup> The title *Selçuk Topraklarında Müzik* (Music in the Seljuq Empire Territory) is discussed in the book itself.

<sup>2</sup> The title of the book of Owen Wright (1978) is *The Modal System of Arab and Persian Music, A.D. 1250-1300*.

created songs as “both lost and not lost” (Aksoy, 2008:231). In the same book, Aksoy interprets the efforts of Fikret Karakaya, founder and musical director of the ensemble *Bezmarra*, to revitalize lost instruments as “first and positive efforts.”

On this point, it is necessary to examine the music of the Anatolian *beyliks* and the Seljuk Empire to a greater extent in order to understand better the history of “Ottoman music” or – as for me – “Classical Turkish music”. In fact, when I came to this conclusion after my research on the music of the era of Mehmet the Conqueror, Bülent Aksoy’s book was not yet published. It was even a difficult task to compile information on Seljuq music from reference books. Almost no history book had a separate section devoted to music. One needed to bring together a lot of scattered information on music, by scanning the sources line by line. Even more important than that, in the music theory books there were missing pieces of information that cannot be explained using the perspective of our day. In fact when I began to study the Seljuk Empire era, the first pieces of information were those that shed more light on the music of the era of Mehmet the Conqueror, and my monograph on this issue was already in print (Uslu 2007). Immediately I stopped the print and made additions to the book. For the publisher this was a difficult situation, since everything had to be done anew. The layout was changed and for the publisher that meant an increase of the costs.

The starting point in writing my book *Music in the Seljuk Empire Territory (Selçuklu Topraklarında Müzik)* was the same idea as Bülent Aksoy’s. The question was if there was a possibility to find the lost music of the people that lived during the Seljuq period. As a first step it was certainly necessary to bring together information from history books. An article that emerged out of this process was first presented to musicologists during a symposium in Konya.<sup>3</sup>

The head of the Cultural Affairs Department of the governor of Konya, Dr. Mustafa Çıpan, who had invited me to the symposium, encouraged the investigation of the issue and the efforts to revitalize the music. Given that, the information gained from history books and also from music theory works was examined. There was an attempt to update information that had remained unclear, and I tried to develop a methodological approach. After writing a music history of the Seljuk Empire, however, I re-considered how the problem was framed: Would an echo of Seljuk music be audible at the end of a method to be pursued in order to re-create the music?

### *Is an Echo of Seljuk Music Audible?*

While the music in the Seljuk territory was being investigated, during the first phase Turkish history sources were examined. Secondly, information about the

<sup>3</sup> The article on the issue was published in *Türkler* (Uslu 2002b) and following that it was presented during the symposium on Seljuk held in Konya in 2008.

music of the transitional period from Anatolian *beyliks* to the Ottoman Empire was sought in music theory writings. Information about the basic elements of music, instruments, *makams* and *usûls* was compiled from music theories and historical sources. Following that, the question was asked regarding what kind of method could revitalize this music. The answer was based on the following five basic concepts:

1. People of that time were the same as people of our time, only the pronunciation of the language was different. In order to apply this observation to the music of the Seljuk period, Turkish poems which are the closest to that period, as well as Persian poems which are known to have been composed then, were chosen. A music repertoire was created out of poems from the *Divân-ı Lugat al-Türk* by Mahmud Kaşgari, the *Divan* of Yunus Emre and some Persian lyrics from the *Mecmû'â-i Güfte* (Uslu 2007a; 2011: 248-259) which were known to have been composed during the period.<sup>4</sup>

2. The understanding of *makam* which reflects the musical taste of the people of that time is explained in theory books. For the revitalization of music these *makams* were taken into consideration. Dissertations were written on the transformation of *makams* from the music theory book by Safi al-Dîn which was composed in the period of the Seljuk Empire, to the theory book of Yusuf Kırşehrî which belongs to the Anatolian *beyliks* era. Arguments which were put forward in these dissertations were reviewed. One of these arguments was that “during the period from Safi al-Dîn to the 15<sup>th</sup> century both the theoretical framework and the principles which were mostly set by Safi al-Dîn, as well as some *makams* like *rast* stayed the same”.<sup>5</sup> Starting from theoretical works, *makams* whose definitions had not changed since the 13<sup>th</sup> century were identified, e.g. *çargâh* (old), *hisar*, *büseynî*, *ırak*, *ısfahan*, *muhayyer*, *niriz* and *rast* (Uslu 2011:122). Hence the positions of the notes, mentioned in explanations of *makams*, presumably remained the same (according to the system with 17 notes per octave), even if their names changed (Doğrusöz-Dişiaçık 2007a:13). In addition new *makams* which emerged during the Seljuk era were identified, e.g. *‘acem*, *bayâti*, *mabûr*, *müberka*, *müstear*, *türkihicâz* (Uslu 2011:122).

3. The other feature of the music in the Seljuq territory is *usûls*. Music theory books provided information about *usûls*, however, it did not make enough sense to contemporary readers. The question thus arose: How should one understand those *usûls*, in order to revitalize the music? This question has been a challenge to the musicologists of our time, without coming to a sufficient explanation. It was

<sup>4</sup> Two song collections have been considered important to shed a light on the issue: Uslu 2007; Şems-i Rumi, *Mecmû'â-i Güfte* (see: Uslu 2007a:121ff).

<sup>5</sup> Levendoğlu 2002: 211; Levendoğlu 2004:131-138; Çelik 2001:302; Doğrusöz-Dişiaçık, 2007:161

necessary to develop a new method, and to interpret the *usûls* of that period. In order to understand this issue I took lessons in *usûl*.<sup>6</sup>

An article that I wrote to explain how one needs to interpret *usûls* was published in the journal *Musikişinas* (Uslu 2010:177-206; 2011:131-135). *Usûls* were interpreted with this method, by comparing them with present *usûls*. The *usûls hafıfsakil* and *türkiseri* can be interpreted as *nımsofyan*, while *amel*, *sedarb*, *muzaa-fremel* can be interpreted as *semâ'î* (Uslu 2011:126-164).

4. For the sound of the instruments which were used in revitalizing the music, the ones that belong to that period were used as much as possible, e.g. *çenk*, *şâbrûd* (ibid. 57-74).<sup>7</sup>

5. After all these articles, the only thing left was to address the taste of people of the period. Theoretically, the notes, *usûls*, *makams* as well as forms and lyrics of the theory books were used (ibid. s. 79-101, 222-238). The revitalization of the “audible lost music” which people of that period could have listened to was made possible with the help of the compositional talent of Asst. Prof. Emrah Hatipoğlu, *ud* player and academic member of Gazi University; and of *ney* player Dr. Ali Tan, academic member of the ITU conservatory, as well as with anonymous music. An “audible music that reflects this time” was favoured more than an “artful music”. The musical works on the CD attached to my book (Uslu 2011) are not the musical taste of the Seljuk era. Here we have the final question concerning this issue, which is “How can we find out the musical taste of that time?” The answer is that this will only be possible when we invent an instrument to record the sound that has not been lost in the air.

You might hear different aspects of *makams* when you listen to this CD. A musical form different from the ones that exist today, the *amel* is both a music genre and an *usûl*. In addition to the genre and the *usûl amel*, other examples have been performed on CD, such as new created military music, hajj music, religious music or music for amusement.<sup>8</sup> Another different music genre in those days was *nevbet-i müretteb*, a verbal art which was frequently performed by Turkish Seljuk people and Anatolian *beyliks*. However, efforts to revitalize this music genre still continue.

<sup>6</sup> I thank Demet Uruş informing me on *usûls*. For their supports during the process of developing a method to interpret *usûls*, I thank the rhythmic teacher of the ITU conservatory Engin Baykal; academic teacher and *ney* player Dr. Ali Tan; Assist. Prof. Sibel Karaman, rhythm teacher at the Selçuklu University; researcher Ömer Tulgan; Timuçin Çevikoğlu, artist and researcher.

<sup>7</sup> My thanks to Fikret Karakaya for his help on this issue.

<sup>8</sup> Remarkable pieces on the CD (Uslu 2011) include, for example, track 2: *sedarbkasir gaza* song (Middle Asia military music); track 3: *evsatsagır bikmet-i ilabi* (Middle Asian religious music); track 5: *Parça neva semai eğlence* (Middle Asian entertainment/folk music); track 10: *rast amel* (art music); track 12: *bikmet-i ilabi* (Anatolian religious music); track 19: *çargab-saba bazı uğurlama* (Anatolian pilgrimage music).

### *Conclusion*

Finding this lost music was more difficult than the reconstruction of the music of Ali Ufkî and Cantemir, which at least existed in written form. Therefore, with this project we tried to develop a method and to draw a route for prospective music researches. This might be seen either as a method or a dream. At least we might clearly state that we strove to write the music history of the Seljuk territory and searched for the music of the Seljuk period. Inferring from that, I believe that we can at least hear the echoes of Seljuk music.