

## **Come years, come time, it will be ours once more... Cultural intimacy and the construction of difference across the Aegean**

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The region of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans is one where Muslim and Christian cultures have historically co-existed and interacted. In the Ottoman context we find communication and cross-fertilization between the musical idioms of Greek orthodox chant, Mevlevi Sufism and the Ottoman court tradition, which in turn suggests a high degree of stylistic similarity among them, differences notwithstanding.

My paper traces the reception of this largely shared Ottoman musical culture in the modern Greek and Turkish contexts. Firstly, I briefly examine the discourse of purification and 'Hellenization'/'Turkicization' vs 'Eastern-ness' as it was articulated respectively by the Greek and Turkish states and their cultural ideologues in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, I trace some of a series of successive (re-)appropriations of repertoires, instruments and stylistic elements across the Aegean, and their respective meanings. My perspective is diachronic, but particular emphasis is given to developments during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Greek revival of *paradhosiaka* (traditional) signalled the latest phase in the process of re-evaluation of Self and Other, also bringing about contacts between musicians across the Aegean unprecedented in the modern history of the two states.

At a theoretical level, my interest is in investigating the role of music in the construction of national identity. At the same time, I explore processes of 'indigenization', looking at how Ottoman culture was drawn into official and popular discourses of 'Greekness' and 'Turkishness', and how it provided in turn a site for both the elaboration and the smudging of the distinction between 'Greek' and 'Turkish'. The comparison between Greece and Turkey reveals a number of similarities and differences and provides cross-cultural insights to supplement nation-bounded analyses.

The Turkish Republic, founded by Kemal Atatürk after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, pronounced a simple and straightforwardly negative verdict upon Ottoman culture – whether music, language, or religious practice. As envisioned by the regime's principal cultural engineer, sociologist Ziya Gökalp, in his "Principles of Turkism",<sup>1</sup> Turkish national identity was to be fashioned out of a synthesis of materials symbolizing the Turkish folk (the pure national soul) and Western modernity (towards which the nation should strive). In music, Turkish civilization would be born out of the synthesis of Western art music and Turkish folk music. As state-sponsored scholars

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<sup>1</sup> Gökalp, Z. (1968) (*Türkçülügün Esasları*) *The Principles of Turkism*. Translated and annotated by Robert Devereux (Leiden: E.J.Brill).

On the ideological and aesthetic developments in Ottoman art music during the Republican period see: Stokes, M. (1992) *The Arabesk Debate: Music and Musicians in Modern Turkey* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), and Tekelioğlu, O. (1996) "The Rise of a Spontaneous Synthesis: the Historical Background of Turkish Popular Music", in *Middle Eastern Studies* 32(2):194-215.

roamed the countryside to unearth, classify, store and restore folk songs as part of a national musical canon, Ottoman court music, to which – ironically – the Father of the Turks himself was said to be particularly partial, was being banned from the airwaves and the State Conservatoire.

After a brief complete ban, Ottoman music slowly found its way into state institutions. To combat state cultural policy, its exponents sought to redefine themselves within the Kemalist discourse by adopting its terms, resulting in a process of classicization and standardization of the genre, thereby legitimizing it within the new institutional framework. In the theoretical field, Rauf Yekta Bey set out to defend Ottoman art music to a European audience in his famous entry for the Lavignac Encyclopedia (the first substantial modern account of Ottoman music in a European language), while his successors Sadettin Arel and Dr Suphi Ezgi produced what has become a standard model still viewed as valid today, working mainly towards systematizing the style's modal and rhythmic principles and supplying an authoritative transcribed version of the repertoire.

Although in Greece constructing a national musical canon was not the grand scale state-sponsored project that it was in Turkey, we find a number of interesting ideological and musical parallels.

The theme of national identity has dominated much of Greece's modern history of ideas.<sup>2</sup> At the time of Independence and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it revolved around the question of cultural origins and continuity with classical Greece – a cultural link vital for the political survival of the newly-founded state. To the exponents of this Hellenic/Western ideal, the Byzantine and subsequently Ottoman Greek past – which was interposed culturally and temporally between modern and classical Greece – looked suspiciously 'Eastern' and was initially ousted, only to be reinstated subsequently within official constructions of the 'national', linking the two in a cultural continuum. Although the doctrine of cultural continuity was thus expanded to include also Byzantine Greek culture (with which the indigenous popular masses identified much more), the process of legitimation and incorporation of the Byzantine within the dominant Western-oriented paradigm has been uneasy and often contested, and the ideological confrontation between the exponents of Western culture and those of the indigenous one has been played out over the entire range of social and cultural life throughout most of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. In this light, the 'Greekness' of indigenous cultural practices which are associated with Ottoman/post-Byzantine culture and the geographical space of Asia Minor or which draw significantly upon Eastern traditions, such as the *café-aman*, the Greek shadow theatre, and later on the *rebetiko*, have been continuously called into question.

The *amanes*, an improvised vocal genre originating in the popular Ottoman café music tradition and invigorated in Greece through the arrival of the refugees in the 1920s (with the compulsory exchange of populations based on religion that followed the Greek-Turkish war) is an eloquent example of how similar ideological concerns were mirrored and refracted across the Aegean, coloured also with a sense of urgency over which of the two neighbouring states would first shed its Oriental traces and dress in 'Western' gear. Following rumours that the Kemalist regime was about to ban the

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview see Herzfeld, M. (1982) *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the making of Modern Greece* (Texas U.P.: Austin), and Danforth, L. M. (1984) "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture", in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 2(1):53-87.

*amanes* as Ottoman or Oriental, a columnist in a Greek newspaper in the 1930s expressed strong concern that 50% of the gramophone records sold in Athens contain Eastern melodies, and – after describing how the *amanes*, the “last bastion of Islam”, out of whose melody surged “all the quintessence of the yearnings of the fiery East”, is about to follow in Turkey the fate of the *fez*, the script and the Dervishes’ *tekkes* – added sarcastically:

*"Amanes is dead. Long live amanes! Although he is buried today in his birthplace, a glorious new era has dawned for him. He, too, could be exchanged, the last refugee coming to us from the East, to carry on under the shadow of the Acropolis his interrupted lament. An old acquaintance of ours, he will be received with all the honours his pain warrants. The ground has been so well prepared that there is no concern about his full and permanent restoration in his second home."*<sup>3</sup>

As in the case of Turkey, the rehabilitation of Greek Oriental culture was slow and hard. The eventual acceptance, for instance, of *rebetiko* as a legitimate part of Greek popular culture during the 1970s, presupposed a process of gradual ‘hellenization’, whereby on the ideological level the style’s origins were traced to Byzantine, even classical Greece and on the musical level a number of its ‘Oriental’ features (especially instruments, themes, and aspects of style) were substantially watered down or eventually replaced by mainland ones.

To sum up my discussion so far: in both cases the Ottoman legacy played an important role in the construction of national identity, by defining what the latter was *not*. Ethnomusicological literature theorizing the relationship between music, identity and place, has pointed out the importance of Difference in the constitution of Self: defining our Selves always entails defining ourselves against Others. In his discussion of the musical construction of place Stokes notes that “music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities and places, and the boundaries which separate them”.<sup>4</sup> Here, there is a dual, paradoxical process at work: on the one hand both Greek and Turkish national identities are defined against an Oriental past, but on the other hand they are defined against one another by attributing to the other that ‘Oriental-ity’ which both are striving to disown.

Further, although the two states chose local ingredients to symbolize the ‘national soul’, the second part in the equation was the same: both nations attempted a synthesis of Folk and West, striving towards the Western ideal and with the aim of becoming members of the Western/European community.

Interestingly, the specific modalities and content of national identity were reproduced also by those who took up the ideological defense of the Greek/Turkish Ottoman culture. In their ideological formulations they resorted to the ideals that their respective state also put forward: Hellenic/Byzantine roots in the Greek case, emulation of Western values in the Turkish case.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Paleologhos 1934, cited in Panayotou Y. A. (1983) “The *Amanes*”, in *Defi* 4:34-37.

<sup>4</sup> Stokes M. (1994) “Introduction”, in *Identity, Ethnicity and Music. The Musical Construction of Place*, edited by M. Stokes, pp.1-27 (Oxford: Berg), p.5.

For the second part of this presentation I turn to more recent developments. My aim is to indicate a few among the many uses to which styles associated with Ottoman culture have been put in Greece and Turkey. Within the context of nation-building, the same styles provided opportunities for the contestation of nationalistic paradigms and arguably for the exploration and negotiation of cultural boundaries. Often, they became a space of cultural intimacy in which could be articulated a sense of common Eastern Mediterranean identity in order variously to amplify, complement or contest Western identity.

In Turkey, the endeavour to defend Turkish classical music on the grounds of its compatibility with Western ideals/values, combined with developments in the field of state education which saw the establishment of an official recruitment and training system for classical musicians, had led the way to the formation from the '50s, but especially the '70s onwards, of big choruses and orchestras performing normatively very much in the style of Western symphonic orchestras.<sup>5</sup> While some scholars during that period voiced concerns about the moribund state of the style, and even about its future survival, a new generation of proficient musicians was emerging from state conservatoires sustained by a solid following, albeit largely self-enclosed and confined to the urban centres.

In Greece, the '70s saw an urban musical movement emerge out of a renewed interest among Athenian youth in exploring and drawing upon various musical traditions associated with the Ottoman period of Greek history.<sup>6</sup> Central to this 'revival' movement (sometimes termed *paradhosiaka*) was the importation and appropriation of a number of Eastern instruments at the time found mainly in Turkey, notably the *ud*, *kanun*, *saz*, and subsequently the *kemenche* and the *ney*. This transmigration of instruments and sounds subsequently led to the formation of a syncretic musical idiom which draws from a variety of folk and urban regional styles and repertoires of Greece and Turkey and also incorporates new compositions and styles of improvisation.

Although Turkish classical music played an important role in the Greek revival, providing musical inspiration and even a concrete source for teachers, instruments and recorded material, the beginnings of the revival had also clearly nationalistic, and thereby anti-Turkish undertones. Unlike what happened in Kemalist Turkey, where Mevlevism was proscribed, with lasting repercussions for its role as patron of the *makam* tradition, in the case of Greece the 1970s revival was infused with a religious component, as many of its originators were linked to the musical and ideological milieu of the Greek Orthodox Church. Even if other un-related or opposed trends evolved in parallel and subsequently marginalized the original input of such people, elements of the Church ideology (especially an interest in marking out the Greek contribution in the Ottoman context and in reading Ottoman music as a re-formulation of Byzantine music) linger on even today.

The group *Dhinamis tou Egheou*, which played a key role in the revival, is a good example of the use of the Eastern instruments to reference a specifically Christian

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<sup>5</sup> See Poulos, P. (2005) "Inheriting Innovation: a Study of Taksim within a 20<sup>th</sup>c. Turkish Tanbur Lineage" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London).

<sup>6</sup> A more comprehensive account of the revival is given in Kallimopoulou, E. (2006) "Music, meaning and identity in a contemporary Greek urban movement: the *paradhosiaka* phenomenon" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London).

Orthodox spirituality, by combining them variously with vocal drones evoking Byzantine chant, with sonic elements of monastic life, or with lyrics referring to Orthodox tradition. In a piece set to a poem by D. Yalamas on Alexandros Papadiamantis,<sup>7</sup> a late 19<sup>th</sup> c. writer whose stories centre on historical and ethnographic themes and are suffused with nostalgia for the Greek Orthodox tradition, the poet revisits with a sense of loss the era of Papadiamantis, evoking chant, Orthodox monasteries, and the “sweet *nai*”. The song is introduced by a lengthy improvisation on the *ney*, with a second *ney* droning on tonic, and a third droning successively on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> above the tonic. Gradually we hear the sound of *talado* (a long and narrow piece of wood or metal struck rhythmically with a stick to sound the time for morning prayer, vespers, etc, in Orthodox monasteries), providing the rhythmic accompaniment throughout the piece. The *ney* – and the *yağlı tanbur* and violin heard in the background – here becomes a symbol not of Mevlevi but of Christian Orthodox mysticism.

In the same context, Anatolian traditions were often associated with the Greek historical experience of diaspora and with aspirations – at least at a symbolic level – to revive the popular prophecy about taking back the City (Istanbul), voiced thus in a Greek popular song: “come years, come time, it will be ours once more”. Ottoman *Rum* composers (i.e. of the Christian Greek-speaking community) were ‘nationalized’, their compositions used as the musical backdrop to a collective, Greek recollection of the City, the symbolic center of Greek Orthodoxy.<sup>8</sup>

Not surprisingly, nationalist readings of what used to be a multi-ethnic cultural tradition were not confined to Greece. In Turkey there was a tendency to read the Ottoman legacy as a principally Turkish achievement. This was a *sine qua non* in building a solid ideological justification within the Kemalist context, where anything related to the Ottoman cosmopolitan heritage was automatically suspicious as backward and impure. It was only in the '90s that a strong interest emerged in revisiting the 20<sup>th</sup> century classical canon and exploring the contribution of so-called ‘minority’ communities. Leading this trend has been the record company Kalan, which re-issued a substantial body of historical recordings as well as theme-records featuring variously Armenian, Rum and Jewish composers. Kalan’s activity was only possible due to wider trends in Turkey towards democratization and plurality, following the deregulation of the media in the early 1990s. But this interest was arguably also not unrelated to developments in Greece, where from the late '70s in the context of the aforementioned *paradhosiaka* revival many Greeks started traveling to Turkey in search of instruments, teachers, and later on music collaborators, as a result building an ever widening network across the Aegean.

The increasing interest in establishing such links suggests that the exploration of the common Ottoman legacy in Greece and Turkey was not only about drawing boundaries but, perhaps even more so, about acknowledging and exploring cultural closeness. The recent musical contact has been unprecedented in the modern history of the two states, and musicians from the field of *paradhosiaka* and Turkish *makam* music have led the way.

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<sup>7</sup> The piece is titled “On Papadiamantis”, it is composed by *Dhinamis tou Egheou* and included in their CD *Anatoliko Parathyro* (1990, Sirios SMH89004-2).

<sup>8</sup> See also Pennanen, R. P. (2004) "The Nationalization of Ottoman Popular Music in Greece", *Ethnomusicology* 48(1):1-25.

My account is, inevitably, partial and fragmented. But perhaps one point worthy of note is the way in which the same cultural heritage has provided an arena where over time different and often clashing discourses and perceptions of locality, nationhood, selfhood and otherness have been played out. In both countries, the style has been drawn into a number of monolithic discourses: about Greek or Turkish culture and its position along a West – East axis; about ‘tradition’ and ‘authenticity’; being also implicated as key symbol in official representations of what is or is not Greek and Turkish ‘national’ music.

At the same time, the style has provided a field for the contestation of such ideas and the articulation of more composite identities, a field where cultural proximity can also be experienced and performed. Many actors today do not feel the need to mark out ‘Greek’ from ‘Turkish’ and vice versa. What is consistently emerging is a plurality of uses.