In the Wake of Bartók – Common Musical Layers in Europe and Asia

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Béla Bartók joined the Congress of Arab Music held in Cairo in 1932. In his report on the congress he had sketched out connections between far away areas, and gave the ethnomusicologists a riddle unsolved till our days: “The music of the musician from Iraq remembers me very much to melodies I collected among Arabs in Djelfa (Algeria), and partly to Ukrainian "Dumy" melodies. Ukraine-Iraq-Djelfa are on the vertexes of a triangle, many thousands kilometer distances from each other. Here we can suspect a remarkable chain of influences and interactions extending over deserts, alps and seas. Unfortunately we know only the first links of the chains; how important it would be to search for the missing links and find them.”

Though the newest trends of ethnomusicology have been pushing folk music research from comparative analysis toward social and cultural anthropology, the analytical folk music research is very much on the agenda even in our days.

One reason for this is that if we want to explore the particular and general features in our folk music, it is imperative to get acquainted with the music of our neighbors and language relatives - and in fact with as many folk music as possible. What is more, comparative examination is usually much more informative and revelatory than the separate examination of different folk musics. And another aspect what makes the comparative and analytical music research important: besides well explored areas there are huge unbroken lands, the music of which we hardly know anything.

That is why Bartók had collected and analyzed not only Hungarian but Rumanian, Slovakian, Turkish and Arab folk music as well. This research series was followed later by László Vikár, who made intensive collecting work among Finno-Ugrian and Turkish people living in the Volga-Kama region.

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1 BOI, p. 563
I have been following this work for twenty years now. In 1987 I started my research where Bartók finished his - in the vicinity of Adana in South Turkey, and later I gradually extended the area of my field work beyond Anatolian territory. Up until the present day, I have collected more than 7000 melodies in Anatolia, Thrace, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, among Mongolian Kazakhs, among Karachays living in the Caucasus and in Turkey, and among American Indians. Now I will show an example of the results of this comparative research, starting from a melody type of the Bektashi community living in Thrace, and following it to other Asian and European areas.
Since 1999, my wife and I collected more than 1100 melodies from women and men of the Bektashi faith, whose grandparents migrated from the Bulgaria to the European part of Turkey. By now it seems so that we had reached our goal, and recorded the majority of their religious and secular songs.  

Who are these people, what are their ceremonies like, where and how they dance their dances and sing their songs? The nomadic and semi-nomadic Turks did not become Muslims at any one time but rather gradually over centuries. They adopted some Sunni, Shiite and mystic elements of Islam while continuing to cling to their traditional shamanistic beliefs and practices.

We recorded songs in the following places. 1999: Çorlu, Musulça, Tekirdağ, Kilavuzlu, Karacakilavuz and Istanbul (170 melodies); 2001: İzmir and Özdere (18 melodies); 2002: Tekirdağ, Kilavuzlu, Yeni Bedir, Çeşme, Kırklareli, Karmak, Kızılçıkderesi, Lüleburgaz and Istanbul (208 melodies); 2003 spring: Kırklareli, Kızılçıkderesi, Devletliçikderesi, Ahmetler (235 melodies); 2003 summer: Kırklareli, Topçular, Devletliçikderesi, Enez, Ormankent and Zeytinburnu (Istanbul) (250 melodies). Besides we got lots of recordings from other people.

Similarly to American Indians or some Turkic people in Asia.
Bektashism is a syncretistic folk religion connected to nature; they worship mountains, trees and heaven. Over the centuries this religion was influenced by other religions including Neo-Platonism, Judaism and Christianity. Bektashi faith is different from the majority Sunni religion; we can consider it a Turkish form of Shiite religion mixed with Sufism. Bektashis follow their path; in their self-definition first is the Turkish nationality, second the fidelity to the Islam and third is the belonging to the Bektashi faith. This faith began to spread in the Balkan Peninsula in the 13th-14th century. In the 16th century the Kızılbaş who supported the Iranian Safavids were exiled from Anatolia and at this time several Bektashi groups migrated to the Balkan.

In Anatolia the Christianity was present since the 1st century. The early Christians escaped from persecution into the Ihlara valleys and the caves in Cappadocia where they had built underground cities. There was a large number of Christian in Seljuk era and from the 13th century too. This time there was a strict connection between the Islam and the Christianity. The Manichaeism had influence to the Bektashism too.

Though Bektashis accept the basic Shiite principles, they have a special conception of the Holy Trinity. According to them the only existing God manifests itself in Mohammed and Ali. That is why their prayers begin with Bism-i Şah „in the name of the king Ali” instead of the usual Muslim Bism-i İllah „in the name of God”. It is characteristic that the Shiite Iranians consider the Bektashis Sunni. Mélikoff (1993: 55).

Birge (1937: 51)

They settled down in relatively distant places: Deli Orman, Dobrudja, Gerlova, Stana Zagara and Haskovo. Based on his field work Babinger (1922) says that these groups are the descendant of the Kızılbaş. De Jong (1985: 30-32) worked among them at the beginning of the 1980 years. He thinks that the ceremony of the Bulgarian Kızılbaş sect shows strong similarities to that of the Turkish Tahtacı. In general the term Kızılbaş is used loosely to denote a wide variety of extremist Shiite sects which flourished in Anatolia and Kurdistan from the late 13th century onwards. (R. M. Savory, In E.I. Kızılbaş).
Let us concentrate now on the music, first and let us overview the main musical forms of this community. The mound shaped or descending sections give the majority of these songs a common stylistic base. What connect them together even tighter is the conjunct melodic movement, that is inside the sections the melody proceeds with prime or second steps without wide intervals, and the compass of the neighboring sections overlap.\(^5\) We handle the hymns and the folksongs together, because most of the religious songs have folksong parallels and vice versa. The only difference is that hymns are to be found among the more developed forms, while the simplest melodies are almost exclusively folksongs.\(^9\) Every section of the simplest melodies descends to the final tone (ex.1a-b). A little more complex are the periods, here the end of the short sections are different (ex.1c-d).\(^10\) There are lots of melodies built up of two different short sections as well: here the first phrases are usually mound shaped or descending, and the second ones move between D and G descending or undulating (ex.1e-g).\(^11\)

<= Example 1. Bektashi melodies built up of one or two sections and their variant. a-b) Major and minor melodies with sections descending to A, c-d) melodies with A^A form, e-g) three sectioned melodies.

\(^8\) Based on these common features we can classify the majority of the songs according to a single principle: the form. Different are the melodies built up of motifs rotating around the middle tone of the G-A-H(b) trichord and ending there, or the religious melodies with low moving first and closing sections and higher middle sections.

\(^9\) The religious zikr melodies are usually very simple, but they can be counted to the dancing melodies because they are sung while turning the zikr.

\(^10\) Despite of the small compass and simple forms inside these groups several melodies belong to different musical words.

\(^11\) Naturally now I can introduce only a few characteristic forms. The detailed analysis will be published in my book "Psalms and Folksongs of the Bektashis in Thrace".
The other half of the melodies has a quadripartite, descending structure. According to the character of the descent we may arrange them melodies into three groups.

The melodies of the 1st group have two long sections with $\text{dd} | \text{dd}$ rhythm scheme. The higher tones in the middle and at the end of the first half of the melodies give it a stagnant, sometimes even ascending character (ex.2a).

The 2nd group contains the most balanced forms; here a higher section is followed by two sections moving in medium register and the melodies close with a section descending from E to A. The rhythm of the sections can be traced back to the $\text{dd} | \text{dd}$ scheme (ex.2b).

The distinctive feature of the 3rd group is that the sections of its melodies follow each other in descending second sequences. Here the typical rhythm scheme is $\text{dd} | \text{dd}$ or $\text{dd} | \text{dd}$ (ex.2c).\textsuperscript{14}

\textbf{Example 2.} Four-sectioned Bektashi melodies.  
a) 1st group, b) 2nd group, c) 3rd group.

\textsuperscript{12} Different is a domed form, with low beginning and closing lines and higher middle sections.  
\textsuperscript{13} The third section usually descends to A.  
\textsuperscript{14} The characteristic feature of the 1st group is the $\text{dd} @ @ \text{dd} @$ rhythm scheme and the $\text{b3-4-x}, \text{4-4-x}$ 2 cadences, that of the 2nd group is the $\text{dd} \text{vdd} \text{vdd} \text{vdd}$ rhythm scheme and the $\text{4-b3-b3/1}$ or $\text{5-b3-b3/1}$ 4 cadences. Although we see sequential phenomenon in the melodies of the 2nd group, the melodies with sections following each other descending sequentially belongs to the 3rd group.
Now let us follow the melodies of the second group, whether they can be found in the folk music of other people as well.

As we saw these melodies have a simple, easy to survey, quadripartite, descending form with a C-D-E nucleus in the center. This form does not seem to be too special, and we might presuppose the existence of similar melodies in more than one folk music. At the same time this form is well developed and specific enough not to appear in every folk music.

Let us have a closer look at the central forms of this melody group. The greatest difference between the main types manifests itself at the opening. Some melodies move on the C-D-E trichord till the end (ex.3a), while others use higher tones in the 1st or the 2nd sections (ex.3c). There are similar melodies beginning higher but then descending to the C-D-E range as we see in ex.3d. The majority of the melodies move on scales with a minor third, but there are some with major-like scales as well (ex.3b).

Example 3. a-d) characteristic forms of four-sectioned Thracian melodies of the 2nd group
As we see on ex.3e-g the first three melodies in the first melody class of Bartók’s "The Hungarian Folksong" representing old and important layers of the Hungarian folk-songs are very similar to the melodies introduced above.

Whether similar melodies can be found in the music of other Turkic peoples, and if it can, how broad musical layer represents them?

In many part of Anatolia we hear similar melodies; and almost every representative of the Hungarian style has Anatolian parallels. It was not an accident then, that Bartók had found relatively many tunes of this type during his Anatolian field work in 1936. On the next example I show one of these tunes (ex.4b) and its Hungarian parallel (ex. 4a).

15 These melodies are wide spread and popular in Turkey. As I have discussed the similarity of Hungarian and Anatolian musical styles and their international relations as well, I will not deal with it now (Sipos 1994, 2000a).
Example 4. Analogous Hungarian and Turkish tunes

Video 2 - An Anatolian uzun hava melody.
Click in the window to play the video inside.
Requires Adobe Reader 6 and +
On my Azeri expeditions, I did not come across Azeri tunes of this character but some species appear sporadically in more or less reliable Azeri publications (ex.5a). However the predominant Azeri musical style contains mainly trichordal-tetrachordal tunes of two short sections.

Among Aday Kazaks living in Mangishlak on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea this type of melody is fairly popular. This musical form is represented here more massively than among Azeri people but less than in Anatolia or Hungary (ex.5b).

My Kyrgyz collection and other Kyrgyz publications tend to prove that in Kyrgyz folk music (predominantly of major character) these tunes do not play a significant role. One of the few examples is shown in ex.5c.

There is a group of tunes in Karachay-Balkar folk music that displays similarities with certain simple type of these tunes (ex.5d). Ex.5d shows a Karachay tune that resembles the simplest tunes of the examined musical style in embryonic form.

By contrast, lots of similar musical solutions can be found in the folk music of the Avars living in northern Azerbaijan and Dagestan. (ex.5e) It is, however, noteworthy that the Avar (and the above mentioned) tunes display only similarities, and not identity, with the Hungarian and Anatolian melodies, e.g. the four-sectioned structure is rare here.

In Tuvanian folk music only a few tunes show some similarities to the melodies examined now. One of them is shown in ex.5f. The pentatonic folk music of the Mongolians, the Mongolian Kazaks, the Tatars, Bashkirs, Chuvashs and Cheremis is devoid of this musical formula.
Example 5. Psalmody tunes of different Turkic people
Searching through our large digital European collections, the computer aided examination gave the following results. A few sparse melodies can be found in the Finish and the Appalachian collections; a few melodies in major character are in the German, French, Votyak and Cheremis material; and many more or less similar major melodies are in the Slovakian material. And what is most important: several similar melodies can be found in the Spanish, Sicilian, Morvinian and Romanian material.

To sum up…

This melody type, or at least some of its sub-types, occurs in the folk music of several peoples. In the Anatolian and in the Hungarian folk music we found every representative of this musical style in great quantity and variety. The recently found examples have stretched the area of this melody type towards the Balkans, Asia Minor and the Caucasus, though its weight in the folk music of different peoples, and its form may vary considerably. In the folk music of Central Asia characterized by pentatonic scales one can hardly find similar strata, as they tend to be predominated by motivic and disjunctive melody construction. By contrast, this kind of melody constitutes a significant stratum in the music of the Caucasian Avars and that of the Ady Kazaks. At the same time on the eastern shore of the Caspian one finds sporadic specimens of the style in Azeri folk music.

We knew these melodies abundantly among Hebrew and Gregorian and Romanian tunes as well. According to the latest computer examinations similar forms can be found in Spanish, Sicilian and Moravian folk music. The research should be extended to other folk music as well.

The first step of the comparative research could only call our attention to the existence of similar forms. Here begins an even more important role of the comparative research: to analyze the character and the importance of the similarities, and establish the historical and cultural relations as well.

22 Kodály (1979: 35-36) called the Attention to the Cheremis example too.
23 Almost every Hungarian folk music style has parallel in the folk music of the Rumanian living in Transylvania. This is more then understandable after so long coexistence.
24 However the Hungarian tunes can only be found in Transylvania and its border areas, and it may perhaps be tied to the Seklers (with the strongest traces of Turkic origin).
25 There are lots of similar but major melodies in the Slovakian material.
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