

## CONCEIVING THE MEDIEVAL OTTOMAN MUSIC CULTURE THROUGH LEGENDARY NARRATIVES\*

Orta Çağ Osmanlı Müzik Kültürünü Menakıpnâmeler Aracılığıyla Tahayyül Etmek

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### Abstract

Most of the studies about the Medieval Ottoman Music Culture have been concentrated on the rich theoretical sources of the period, but the music researchers usually have not paid enough attention to the “musical symbolism” that can be found in the “legendary narratives” of the Medieval Ottoman period. However, these sources that have parallelism with the theoretical sources of the period in terms of sharing a wisdom based perception of “nature-God-humanity” through “Ahi, Bayrami, Vefai and Kalenderi” belief systems, act as main sources to represent the “Khorasan-based wisdom” that had a constructive power for the Ottoman culture through a very strong symbolism that can be easily related with musical culture. These resources, together with some narratives, chronicles, literature sources, religious texts and travellers’ notes also carry some important and critical knowledge about the religious practices of the 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> century Anatolia such as *sema* and *semah* applications. These examples notify the importance of religious music and dance in the *zikir* practices of Medieval Anatolia and present the details of how the people were perceiving the cosmos through music and dance. Moreover based on these sources, it is possible to gain an insight about the transmission of this perception of life until today, through the philosophic foundations like “Ahi” and “Abdal” cultures. In this paper, various sources of the 15<sup>th</sup> century will be examined including various legendary narratives, narratives about the saints, literature sources, religious texts and travellers’ notes to detect the “symbolic musical details” and “music originated belief details” in these writings.

**Keywords:** Legendary narratives, Abdal, Ahi, Medieval Ottoman music culture, Khorasan based wisdom

### Öz

Orta Çağ Osmanlı Müzik Kültürü ile ilgili çalışmaların çoğu dönemin zengin kuramsal kaynaklarına odaklanmış, ancak müzik araştırmacıları genellikle Orta Çağ Osmanlı döneminin “efsanevi anlatı” ve “menakıpnâmelerinde” yer alan “müzikal sembolizme” yoğunlaşmamıştır. Ancak bu kaynaklar, “Ahi, Bayrami, Vefai ve Kalenderi” inanç sistemleri aracılığıyla “doğa-Tanrı-insanlık” algısının irfan temelli bir algıyı paylaşması açısından dönemin kuramsal kaynaklarıyla paralellik içinde olup müzik kültürüyle kolayca ilişkilendirilebilen çok güçlü bir sembolizmle Osmanlı kültürü için yapıcı bir güce sahip olan “Horasan temelli irfani” temsil eden ana kaynak olma özelliği taşır. Bunun yanında söz konusu kaynaklar, içlerinde Orta Çağ Anadolu’sunun erken dönem zikir geleneklerini taşımalarıyla ayrı bir önem arz etmektedir. Bu bağlamda söz konusu efsanevi anlatı ve menakıpnâmelerin yanında tarihsel kayıtlar, gezi notları, edebiyat ve din kaynakları, semah ve sema gibi önemli zikir uygulamaları ile ilgili erken dönem bilgilerini yansıtabilmektedir. Dolayısıyla bu kaynaklar aracılığıyla Anadolu insanının Orta Çağ Dönemi’nde müzik ve dans aracılığıyla oluşturdukları evren algısı ile ilgili de kıymetli örneklerle rastlamak mümkündür. Bu algının “Ahilik” ve “Abdallık” gibi felsefi sistemler aracılığıyla Anadolu’da bugüne kadar taşınmış bir irfan geleneğini oluşturma yollarına da bu metinler

\* Geliş Tarihi/Date of Submission: 12.09.2020, Kabul Tarihi/Date of Acceptance: 11.10.2020.

DOI: 10.34189/hbv.96.002

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aracılığıyla ulaşabilmek mümkündür. Bu çalışmada, “sembolik müzikal detayları” ve “müzikten kaynaklı inançsal öğeleri” tespit etmek için menakıpnameler, evliyalar hakkındaki anlatılar, edebiyat kaynaklar, dini metinler ve gezgin notları da dâhil olmak üzere 15. Yüzyıla ait çeşitli kaynaklar incelenecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Menakıpnameler, Orta Çağ Osmanlı müzik kültürü, Horasan irfanı, Ahilik, Abdallık.

## 1. Introduction: The Medieval Ottoman Period in Anatolia and the Music Culture

Unfortunately, we do not have enough evidence to assess the characteristic of music in Anatolia during the Medieval Ottoman period regarding the “variety of forms”, “art of composition”, or “performance”. The evidences about the music in Medieval Ottoman Period come from; a strong collection of theory manuscripts that mainly prefers to describe music as a cosmic phenomenon, a limited number of musical details coming from non-musical sources such as historical records and some symbolic expressions of music arriving from “legendary tales”, “minstrel poetry” and “mythological symbols” strained through religious and philosophical sources. However, the Medieval Ottoman period should be identified as a philosophically “fruitful” period, by means of placing a musical based comprehension at the centre of the cosmic perception and creating the fundamental cultural habitat that enabled the growth of the Ottoman music culture in this direction.

“Legendary tales” or *menakıpnames* can be accepted as significant historical sources, which includes the mystical and religious side of the music culture in that period. Generally, those narratives include related information of the miraculous events and historical lives of sufis or saints such as Hacı Bektash and Othman Baba. *Menakıpnames*, generally recorded by the followers or dervishes of the sufi order, also give notable information of the perception of God by means of worship with music. However, to understand the belief motifs, philosophy, and musical relationship in these sources, it is necessary to evaluate these belief systems basing on Khorasan-based wisdom in their historical context.

The Islamic culture had been carried to Anatolia by the migration of Turkic communities whose effects were increased during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Güray & Karadeniz, 2019:77-78). During this period, the inhabitation of these communities in Anatolia was led by “heterodox Islamic groups” who had established a four folded social organization based on “guilds of Ahi communities<sup>1</sup> of Anatolia (*Ahiyan-ı Rum*)<sup>2</sup>”, “soldiers of holy war of Anatolia (*Gaziyan-ı Rum*)<sup>3</sup>”, “women of Anatolia (*Bacıyan-ı Rum*)” and “dervishes of Anatolia (*Abdalan-ı Rum*)” as reported in the Aşık Paşazade Chronicle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Barkan, 2008:147). During the 11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries this cultural background created a “nature” oriented belief practice that had connected the “old Turkish religious beliefs” with the “Sufism” based movements of the Islamic era that had developed a “cyclic” perception of the cosmos summarizing

the “cyclic” journey for the eternal lives of the human souls. This cyclic logic is the key concept in the eternal lives of the “human souls” belonging to symbolic existence of God. These souls would return back to and from His existence in a continuous and eternal cycle. This cyclic perception regarding the cosmos had been extensively developed into a major theory called “the theory of the cycles” whose traces can be observed on the majority of the scientific and artistic creations in Medieval Ottoman Anatolia (Güray, 2012:28-37). The mystical ideas basing on the philosophical background established by the “theory of cycles” had been the initiative power to have a bunch of written manuscripts developed to combine the scientific and the philosophical backgrounds of many different disciplines like music theory, astrology, astronomy, mathematics and literary aspects around this significant theory. The details around these mystical ideas regarding the universe can also be observed in the aforementioned “Menakıpnames” taking their base on the legendary tales about the lives of the saints and ‘holy’ personalities entitled as “veli, abdal, dede” and so on. These personalities are usually addressing to the “legendary” spiritual and sometimes ‘military’ leaders of a social-religious group that took part in the social organization of Anatolia that had initiated the main organization scheme of the Ottoman system in Anatolia and the Balkan Geography after the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In the Late Medieval Anatolia, these leaders and the related sheiks and dervishes of various orders have been perceived as important spiritual personalities with extraordinary powers such as curing diseases and helping make wishes come true, and a cult has begun to form around each (Ocak, 2016a:43-44). The events and the narratives about these events that take shape around the lives of important representatives of Sufism in Anatolia also offer important clues about the musical practices of the Medieval Islamic world. *Dediği Sultan Menakıbı, Elvan Çelebi’s Menakıbı, Hacı Bektas Veli Vilayetnamesi, Othman Baba Vilayetnamesi* are among the important sources which give information about music practices and *sema/semah* applications until the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. Dervish movements and the appearance of Islamic orders in Anatolia also show parallelism with the emergence of such manuscripts, or narratives.

## **2. The Mystical Dervish Movements of the 13<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> Centuries of the Ottoman Anatolia and the Musical Outcomes**

During the Medieval Ottoman Period the traditional music structures in Anatolia were in constant interaction with the “memory based” music cultures like “the orally transmitted minstrel tradition” and “folk dance culture” that can be addicted as “rural music traditions.” Those music traditions survived with little or no change after the “closed community” and “geographical isolation” and they influenced urban music structures to a great extent (Cenk Güray & Tekin:2016, s. 19). Those mutual interactions between the “urban” and the “rural” traditions taking “the religious music cultures” into the centre should be considered as a prominent factor in shaping the

Medieval Ottoman Music traditions. Therefore, the various Sufi lodges of the “11<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup>” centuries could be observed as the emanating points for the initiation of the related music traditions initiating from a ‘zikir’ tradition based on music and dance.

It would not be wrong to express the minstrel (*aşık*) poetry and music in Anatolia as the continuation of the “ozan” tradition of Central Asia, which were assumed to be rooted from the Khorasan culture during the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Yardımcı, 2014). Probably there were *ozans* who brought their ancient tradition to Anatolia during the Seljuk period. Uslu mentions “âşiks” next to sultans with their instrument in their hands among soldiers, singing epics and songs while wandering, in miniatures of Seljuk period besides the information provided by Meragî (2011:77).

It can be seen that those minstrels who continued their activities in Anatolia in the 14<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were also invited to royal musical events in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Aksoy refers to the performance of those musicians and minstrels in the presence of the Sultan in the Ottoman court in the 15<sup>th</sup> century according to the reports of the European travellers. Bertrandon de al Brocquière (d. 1459) who was sent to Edirne for diplomatic purposes writes about “zikir” ceremonies and minstrels in his memories. It can also be observed from the same text that, a band that was formed through a number of musicians was accompanying the minstrels. According to this text, there exists one horn (*nefir*), one big drum, at least eight pairs of small drums (*nakkare*) and two minstrels in the bands comprised of 12-14 people. Also there is information about the compositions based on “epic poems” being sung during a feast in Sultan Murat the 2<sup>nd</sup>'s palace (Aksoy, 2003:29). Zikir ceremonies and minstrels seem to be the most important points here. The traces of ancient Turkish traditions like singing “melodic epic poems” or “hymns” with “bağlama (saz)-a kind of long necked lute-that has appeared as the main folk instrument of Anatolia” were still visible in that period through the performances of the minstrels. Because of the Turkic migration to Anatolia, the interaction between the old belief systems of the immigrants from Khorasan, Iran and Azerbaijan with Islam and the older Anatolian belief systems enabled the emerging of many Sufi orders in this land (Güray et. al., 2016:22). Consecutively during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Sufi lodges/orders had been dominating the process of “conversion to Islam” for the inhabitants of Anatolia through a syncretism-based organization (Kafadar, 2019:45). After the emergence of lodges and the spread of Sufi movements among the public, almost all the “ozans” joined a Sufi lodge and a sheikh (*pîr*) and added the symbolic knowledge of the Islamic philosophy into their pieces, harmonizing the old and the new. The minstrels following these orders were carrying out a kind of symbolic musical invitation to these specific orders using their songs. The minstrels were performing this duty by unifying the Ancient Turkic traditions and the cultural symbols of the Ancient Anatolia with the specific Sufi influences. Respectively, the name “ozan” carrying the memories of Turks in Central Asia was replaced by the name *âşık*, meaning Sufi-poet. In that sense, it would not be wrong to evaluate the sufi-poet Yunus Emre of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries as the most influential master of literature in the Medieval Anatolia.

### 3. Conceiving the Medieval Ottoman Music Culture through Legendary Narratives and Mystical Poetry

Hoca Ahmet Yesevi of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, who is accepted as the first Turkish Sufi Sheikh encouraged his followers to help Islam to be spread by means of “poetry” and “hymns” (Akdoğan, 2008). In this way, the effect of Yesevi had an impact to unify the “music-based worship” of the Ancient Turkic belief systems, with the Sufi theology.

Besides Ahmet Yesevi, it is observed that the Vefai order from Iraq-Syria also spread around Anatolia with the impact of Dede Garkın and Baba Ilyas. Ocak even claims that this order was more influential in Anatolia than Yesevi order (2011:31). Dede Garkın’s caliphate, Baba Ilyas al-Khorasani influenced Turkmen masses and started the Babai revolt during the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Ocak, 2014). The communities identified as Khorasan dervishes by Aşıkpaşazade, moved from Central Asia to Anatolia and realized a historical mission in terms of religious transformation and creating radical social changes in Anatolia (Özköse, 2003; Alşan, 2012: 34). The effects of this movement which can also be named as Babai movement had been observed until the 15<sup>th</sup> century and this movement created a community named *Rum Abdals* (Ocak, 2015:26) who had constructed the mainframe of the post-Medieval belief systems of Anatolia including “Vefai, Haydari, Kalenderi and Malamati” systems that will be transformed to Alawi-Bektashi systems later on. Şeyh Edebali who is supposed to be the master and advisor of Osman Gazi -known as the founder of the Ottoman state- was also a member of the Vefaî order (İnalçık, 2008). One of the oldest texts about the Vefaî Order was written by Elvan Çelebi -a sheikh of the Vefaî Order- after 1359 under the name of *Menkıb’ul-Kudsiyya* (Erünsal & Ocak, 1995:10-11, 19). In his text, Elvan Çelebi underlines the name of Dede Garkın as being a primary role in the transmission of “Vefaî order” through the “Turkic troops” in Anatolia by means of his caliphates like the aforementioned Baba Ilyas and Ayna Dola, Bağdın Hacı, Mihman Hacı, Baba İshak -a disciple of Baba Ilyas. This order together with the “Babai” tradition by Baba Ishak and Ilyas had been scattered efficiently in Anatolia due to its similarity to Yesevi order and its close connections to the “Melameti” perception of the Khorasan and Kalenderi orders. The leaders of the community which are also named as the “colonizing dervishes” (Barkan, 1942), were referred to with names like *baba, dede, abdal* or *sultan* (Güray, 2012:90). Once we consider that many important religious characters of the Medieval Anatolia like Şeyh Edebali, Hacı Bektash Veli, Kaygusuz Abdal, Geyikli Baba and Abdal Kumral (Kulaksız, 2012) were addicted to this order, we can predict that this order was possessing a major role in “collecting” *Abdalan-ı Rum* (dervish orders of Anatolia) around a religious conception that had also built the constructive platform of the Ottoman citizenship and the related social life. Vefaî order had also played a significant role in the transmission of Islam through the Christian community in Anatolia and Balkan regions by taking the Christian saints like Saint Theodore and Saint Georges in the belief system (Erünsal & Ocak, 1995:XXVI-XXVII). Hacı Bektash Veli became well known as an important Sufi master after the 16<sup>th</sup> century; in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the terms Abdal and Bektashi became synonymous (Köprülü O. F., 1988).

*Abdalan-ı Rum* communities created a new religious perception by putting the Sufi lodges into centre where people worship through music and *zikir*. Those dervishes reflected an eclectic religious philosophy system under the influence of many different orders and belief systems they were in touch with (Güray, 2012:91).

#### 4. *Abdal* Community: Touching the Nature Through Music and Dance

It would be interesting to start a new ‘topic’ about the conception of *Abdal* within the written narratives until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Generally, it can be said that within these historical texts the term ‘abdal’ coincides with the term ‘dervish’. Mostly, these troops called ‘abdals’ seem to be representing a more ‘mystic’ or ‘esoteric’ way of belief that is a natural consequence of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Anatolian belief traditions. The oldest narrative in which we face the name “abdal” is *Menakıb’ul Kudsiyya* of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries written by Elvan Çelebi. In this text the “abdals” are reported as having special characters comparable to “hulefa (caliphates)”:

“Hulefa kopdı hem nice abdal  
Görmedi bunların gibi meh ü sal”

The “abdals” together with the “caliphates” are reported as climax points for spiritual maturity:

“Bir ü biş on degül diyem vasfın  
Nice bulmuş bular makam-ı Kemal”

However, in this text the “abdal” community are not reported as “usual” spiritual leaders or sheiks, instead they are presented as “heretic type of believers” with a strong instinctual empathy in coordination with the nature:

“Gerçi Abdal mukteda olmaz  
Mukteda olmayan bula mı visal  
  
İktidaya yaramaz ol mürşid  
Kim şeri’atde dökmeye per ü bal  
  
Budela kim bu yolda kopmuşdur  
Bunlara keşf idi cevap u su’al...  
  
Bunlara hal u kal olmuş-idi  
Bir nefes olmadı bunlara visal”

Similar details can also be observed in *Othman Baba Narrative* of the 15<sup>th</sup> century:

“Pes eger su ‘al itseler kim abdal kimdir ve ne hallü kimsedir? Kim ol kan-ı velayet bu nev’ e kelama geldi. Cevab oldur ki Hazret-i Risalet sırrına Hak Sübhane ve Te’ala buyurmuşdur. Ben Hüda’yam mümessil olam ki beyne ‘ayneyi ula’ ike’l-abdal (there are abdals between the eyes of Him)’. Pes abdal oldur kim mecmu’i masiva’l-lahdan geçüp aşk-ı Hak visalinden bikarar ola ki gayra vücud kılmaya. Dahi kendüyi ve mecmu’ eşyayı hatt-ı ilahi ve şun’ -i şahı bilüp gayr-i idraki Hak’dan ba’id ola. Ve sıfat-ı taklidden za’il olup ‘ayne’l-yakine ire. Ol kimse budala-yı emin ola. El-abdalu mübeddilü’l’-ahvali bu vechledür.” (gölpın et al., 2007:26-27).

In this narrative, the “spiritual affinity” between the *abdals* and the God is emphasized pointing out that the *abdals* ‘forgets’ about the real life because of the divine love of God deep in their hearts. Even, they feel like they are coalescing with the holy spirit of God.

In Dediği Sultan -another narrative of the 15<sup>th</sup> century- *abdals* query about the possibility of settling for Dediği Sultan to a specific place and receive an answer regarding the “spaceless” perceiving of nature for Dediği Sultan -probably pleasing the *abdals* community on behalf of their leaders:

“Rivayettir bir gün budalalar geldiler  
Gelip sultanı soyladılar  
  
Nice bir dağlar başında yatasın  
Recamız budur bir mesken tutasın  
  
Veliler bu sözü söylemen zinhar  
Demedi mi “limeni’l-mülkü’l-ıyevme lillahi’l-vahidü’l kanhar”  
  
Bu çarhı fanidir bunda gelen gider  
Milkim var diyen davayı kizb eder” (Taşğın, 2013, p. 124)

Say discusses that “abdals” term represents a community of “wise” people-also a religious level for leadership (Say, 2011:26) that were assigned a duty by God for keeping the order (promoting the goodness, recovery of the badness, climate etc.)

of the Universe (Say, 2011). The *abdals* that can be “seven” in number-especially relating to the “seven symbolism” in Balkan Babai system and also in Othman Baba narrative (Say, 2011:49) can be transformed to other holy characters instantly including the prophets or saints and even to some animals representing the power of nature in a symbolic way (Say, 2011:108-109). In fact, the “abdal community” with the symbolic number “7” resembles the concept *Apkallu* in Akkadian mythology and *Abgal* in Sumerian mythology representing seven demi-gods or semi sages (Güray, 2018b:621). The “abgal” or “apkallu” can control the nature by their mystic powers delegated from the Gods especially Enki-also the God of arts and music. These characters can also be transformed to other holy characters as *abdals* do, and the possible transformation of the “abgal” and “apkallu” to some kind of animals (fish etc. representing the water as the origin of life) have a resemblance to the case of *abdals* by means of adopting to the nature.

In the narrative of “Sucaaddin Veli” of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, within the conservations of Sucaaddin Veli with his *abdals*, it can be observed that Sucaaddin Veli can be transformed to Seyyid Battal Gazi -the mythical frontier of the Anatolian *Abdal* troops and even to a deer-another mystical symbol of Anatolian-Khorasan Sufism (Say, 2011:181)

Another character of Anatolian *abdals* community is their close relationships with music as a means of worship that can be observed in many sources. Most probably the system of worship of *abdals* embellished with music can be related to the cosmogony of “seven” envisaged with the similarity of *abdals* and *apkullu* (*abgals*) as a very ancient mystical tradition of Anatolia and Mesopotamia (Güray, 2018b:628).

It is also interesting that according to the *Ahl-i Haq* community in Iran, there is a parallel use of the symbol ‘seven’ just like as the examples in Anatolia. In their belief system, the *holy spirit* who is in charge of transmitting the messages of God to the world has been being transformed to other identities within “seven” different periods. In that way, Havendigar, Murtaza Ali, Şah Hoşin, Sultan Sohak, Kırmızı, Memmed Bey and Han Ateş transfers the “holy spirit” to the next “identity” as the periods were being changed. Being simultaneous to this transformation, the “four” angels who are delegated by them to organize the nature and the life of human beings are being transformed to different identities within the same seven periods (Minorsky, 2013:287).

It is possible that the creation of the “seven” beings by the God and having delegated them the power required for the protection of the world is one of the common sources of “Iran”, “Ezidi” and “Mesopotamian-Anatolian” cosmogony (Kreyenbroek, 2011:49). According to this belief horizon, the intermediate “holy” beings that are assisting the God in the creation and organization of the world is “seven” and these beings are created through the divine light and the wisdom of God (Bozan, 2012:E.26). Within several of the “cyclic worship rituals” like “semah”

experienced in the indicated geography the symbol “seven” represents the “seven” “sacred personality” preferably “priests or sheiks” that are acting as these “holy” beings to make connections between the “divine world” and the “humanely” one (Güray, 2018b:622). The Ezidi semah (Güray, 2018b:623) and “yediler semahı” from Karaşar/Ankara -an old settlement for *Abdalan-ı Rum* community- seem to be the consecutives of this ancient cosmogony reaching to the *Abgal* or *Apkallu* tradition of old Mesopotamia.

Another reflection of the symbol “seven” can be identified in the religious music practices of *Ahi* community that was the main system of social organization in Medieval Ottoman Anatolia. According to Şapolyo in *Ahi* Guilds the music based *zikir* performance were being performances considering the symbolic values of the “seven” planets and “seven” angels. These seven angels associated with seven planets have the power of organizing the world and the specific *maqam* structure that is engaged with a specific planet and a specific angel were being performed in the honour of these planets and angels (Şapolyo, 2006:278-279). Also the theory books of the 15<sup>th</sup> century Anatolia have a tendency to combine the musical symbols with the astrological ones like the combination of the “seven planets” with “seven *avazes* -the secondary type melodic formulas other than *maqam* structures” (Güray, 2020).

## 5. Dervish Lodges of Medieval Anatolia and their Relationships with Music

Besides those belief systems of a higher esoteric tendency, it is also visible that “Sunni-based” orders are also used to combine their worships with music. It is known that Mevlevi, Bayrami, Kubrevi, Yesevi, Kadiri, Rifai and followers of many similar orders perform “whirling” *sema* ceremonies and even being labelled as rebellious for this reason. They were reciting “Qur’an” in their “*avrad* (programmed/planned sequence of rituals planned in a dervish lodge)” and “religious improvisation based compositions” (like *gülbak* and mosque music like *azan* etc.) loudly, sang hymns in *zikir* and used percussion instruments like *def*, *daira* and *kudüm* (Uslu, 2002).

When the influence of Sufism on rural music is considered together with music education, performance facilities and transmission tools, minstrel lodges (*âşık kahves*) should be placed in a significant level. These places emerged as alternative entertainment institutions for “secular poetry” and “secular music” during the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. With the help of this phenomenon having its bases in ancient “*ozan*” tradition and Sufi poetry, minstrel (*âşık*) tradition was enriched in Anatolia and its existence had been continued. More important than that, these minstrel lodges became centres for minstrel gatherings and transmission of new pieces to new generations. The poetry sung by minstrels was registered in special notebooks named *cönk* and thus the “poems” of *âşık(s)* were transmitted to different regions by the help of these notebooks. The most loyal friends of minstrels who were the important actors of

rural music were their instruments which they never left behind. The *bağlama* (*saz*) for *āşık*s, identified in different Turkish settlements under the names like “tanbura, bozuk, divan, cura, çöğür, şeştar, yunkar, damura, gilbut” acted as a communication tool influencing the whole society. The “*meşk* (traditional art education system in Medieval Anatolia based on a ‘personal communication based’ master-apprentice relation” transmission) experienced in the “court” and “dervish lodges”, were also being used as an education tool in *āşık* tradition (Yardımcı, 2014).

The “cyclic perception” which was considered as the prominent way of cosmic perception for the Medieval Anatolia at the beginning of the text, is an ancient system of thinking for human beings to explain the God-human relationship and to transfer the principles of this relationship to human life (Güray, 2018a:23). The first layer of this system, named as “agricultural cycle” symbolizing the first agricultural communities, was built on the idea that the nature was periodically becoming active to grow up the agricultural products and then getting passive again. The second layer of this system, named as “cosmological cycle”, was generated on the idea that the cyclic characters of all the cosmic elements of the universe and the reflections of these characters to human body and soul were being followed and perceived by the human mind. The final layer of the system concentrated on reaching and internalizing the “divine wisdom” that has created and controlled all the cyclic system of the universe including the agricultural and the cosmological cycles. This final layer of the system can be named as “the cycle of wisdom” (Güray, 2018a:23-24). Throughout the history, religious music and dance has always been utilized as a model to transfer all of these fictive layers to the human consciousness considering the necessary variations of “time and place”. “*Semah* and *sema*” traditions that are among the prominent worship rituals of Anatolia and the neighbouring geographies appear as the application examples reflecting this cyclic perception to human life as a model of faith. In a way, *semah* and *sema* traditions help to unite the celestial and humanly perceptions of “time” by constructing the idea of “cyclic time” in human mind and thus building an idea of faith attributing meaning to the periods of life, before life and after life (Güray, 2018a:23-24).

## 6. Focusing on the Concept of *Sema/Semah* in the Legendary Tales of Medieval Anatolia

The most important pieces of musical data regarding the late Ottoman Medieval Anatolia can be gathered being strongly related the concepts of “*Sema/Semah*” being scattered in many historical sources including the “chronicles”, “legendary tales” and “manuscripts on religion”.

The word of “legend” or *Menakıb* has been generally used to express the wise words and exemplary behaviours of the Islam *sūfī*s (Şahin, 2017:17). *Menakıbnames*, or “legendary tales” includes short stories telling both the historical and extraordinary events related to *sūfī*s or saints since 9<sup>th</sup> century. Those narratives differ from fairy tales or myths in term of events, time and protagonists having real persons like Islamic

heroes and saints as their protagonists. The story of the Saint or *Abdal/sheikh* in such sources might have been written when the Saint was alive or dead (Ocak, 2016a:22, 60-61). Moreover, because these stories are often verbally transmitted, they may also deviate from official history narratives (Hagen, 2009:359). *Menakıpnames*, narratives of Islamic heroes or saints may also include some remarkable clues about rituals containing music and dance practices of Sufi Orders.

These musical instances were being created as an effect of the “zikir” traditions based on music and dance that had been strongly transmitted by the effect of minstrel traditions as been reflected in the previous parts of the text. This “music-based zikir” tradition can be exemplified using some historical records:

12<sup>th</sup> century poetry called “Hikmet(s) (*Words of Wisdom*)” by Ahmed Yesevi (1093-1166) was most probably one of the earliest sources about *sema* (Mirabile, 2015:154) transferred by the “dervish minstrels” of the Yesevi order:

Hikmet XXIV

I

Muhabetni câmin içip raks eyleben  
Dîvâneliğ makâmığa kirdi döstlar  
Aç u tokluk sûd u ziyân hiç bilmegen  
Sermest bolup raks u semâ urdı döstlar

II

Raks u semâ urgenlerge dünyâ harâm  
Ehl ü iyâl hânûmândın kiçti tamâm  
Seher vaktde hakka sığnıp yığlar müdâm  
Andın songra raks u semâ urdı döstlar

IV

Özdin kitmey raks eylese allâh bîzâr  
Sübhân igem anga kılmas îmân  
Atâ tâat kılrsa dillerini kılmas safâ  
Riyâ kılıp raks u semâ urdı dostlar”

These pieces of poetry were very certain examples of a belief system that was placing the “mankind” at the centre of the universe as an “epiphany” of the God and

referring to an “ethical” narrative shaped through the conscience of the humanity.

This “way of perception” had been scattered through Anatolia mostly sourcing from the “caliphates” of Yesevi. One of these was “Dediği Sultan who had constructed a lodge in Konya during the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. In the “menkıbname” about himself the concept of “sema” and the related symbolism can be detected (Taşğın, 2013) denoting that this tradition was being transmitted in all through Anatolia during the 14<sup>th</sup> century:

“Sultan gelip türbeyi tavaf kılar  
Üçler yediler kırklar cem olur  
Türbeye girip ziyaret kıldılar  
Bir zaman içinde semalar kurdular”

“Sultan wanders around the shrine,

The “three”, “seven” and “forty” saints were gathered in a cem (the main ritual of the Alevi-Bektashi order),

They had visited the shrine,

And in time performed sema there”

Within the texts by Ibn-i Battuta (1304-1368) -the important traveller of the 15<sup>th</sup> century- we come across one of the first signs of “sema/semah” traditions in Anatolia within Denizli and Bursa *Ahi* lodges:

“...Yemekten sonra Kur’an okudular ve sema’a ve raksa giriştiler...(After the dinner they have recited Qur’an and performed sema)

...İftar edildi. Kur’an okundu. Fakih ve vaiz Konyalı Mecdüddin de hazır idi. Vaaz etti. Sonra sema ve raks ettiler...(After the fast was broken, they have recited Qur’an. A preacher from Konya named Mecdüddin was ready. He preached. After that they had performed sema...)” (Cevdet, 2015:135-137)

One of the oldest sources referring to the “sema/semah” tradition was the aforementioned manuscript written by *Elvan Çelebi* (d. 1358-1359). It provides information with Vefai belief system that was spreading especially among *Abdalan-ı Rum* communities that were previously mentioned, and its faith leaders were characters such as Baba İlyas, Baba İshak, Dede Garkın (Erünsal & Ocak, 1995).

In this manuscript, many details were also given about the application and symbolic reflections of “sema” tradition. In one example of the manuscript, ‘cem ritual’ of Dede Garkın and his 400 Khalifas containing ‘semah’ was mentioned (Erünsal & Ocak 1995:10-11, 19):

“Dakı(dahi) bir var semâ’umuz iy yar  
 Her ne kim var meşayih ü ebrar  
 ...  
 Hem dakı (dahi) bir semâ ululardan  
 Rahmetullah ile tolulardan”  
 ...  
 Dört yüzün bir nefesde cem’ kılır  
 Birbiri üzre bırağur oturur  
 ...  
 “Nâgehân bir bölük geyik Hürrem  
 İrişür şeyhe yüz urur ol dem  
 ...  
 Şeyh işaret eder döner onlar  
 Ayna dövleye baş urur bunlar”

Another early example of the sema practices can be seen in the *Saltukname*, which was collected and recorded by *Abu'l Hayr-ı Rumî* at the 15<sup>th</sup> century. (Rûmi, 2013:25). In this narrative, some information was given about Sarı Saltık’s *sema* ritual with his dervishes in his lodge:

“Server [Sarı Saltık], Ak Cami’ye çıktı, Müslümanlara vaaz ve nasihat verdi, zikrullah eylediler. Caminin yakınında Seyyid’in tekkesi vardı, orada olurdu. İçi, fukara ve Müslüman dervişler ile dolu idi. Hayır, hasenat, sadaka, ihsan ve kurban oraya gelirdi. Sema ve safâ daim olurdu. Server Seyyid, şevkinden zaman zaman kalkar divane gibi orada sema ederdi. Her ne zaman ilâhi aşk ortaya çıksa nara atardı (...) Bir süre sonra Dopratah iline ulaştılar. Orada yaşayan Müslümanlarla buluştular, kucaklaştılar, sema ve safâ yaptılar...” (Rûmi, 2013:503-504).

In *Evliya Çelebi’s Travel Book* Sarı Saltık was mentioned as one of the dervishes of Hacı Bektash arrived in *Rum*, or Anatolia with him. In this narration, some instruments carried by Sarı Saltık and his dervishes during their travels also mentioned. Accordingly, Hacı Bektash sent him to the Dobrudja region and gave him to a wooden sword, prayer rug, drum, tambourine, *nakkare*, flag and banner (Çelebi E. , 2008:158). All of these are also reminiscent of the symbols of dominance of the Ottoman Empire.

In the notes of Georgius -a Hungarian captive- who had travelled around Anatolia between 1438-1458, we come across some interesting details about *sema*

during his visit to Seyyid Gazi Monastery near Eskişehir (Telci, 2016:71) that had a central role for the Kalenderi order:

“Following the gathering all the community in the hall, a person who had been named as ‘zakir’ were accompanying the people who had been standing up to participate the semah ritual by using his ‘frame drum [bendir]’ to create some rhythmic expressions. The people were performing this cyclic dance in such an order that no one would differentiate them from a statue. The metronome of the rhythm was getting faster and faster in the ceremony and the hymns written by Yunus Emre (13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Century mystic poet) was sang simultaneously.” (Say, 2006:155).

Bayramiye belief system founded by Hacı Bayram Veli (1352-1430) was a very strong representative of the cyclic perception of the universe. In fact, Bayramiye was strongly engaged with Ahi system and forming the philosophical background of it. ‘Circular zikir’ (Şapolyo, 2006:141) and “sema(semah)” (Şapolyo, 2006:279) very widely applied in Bayrami and *Ahi* belief systems. Most of the poets of Hacı Bayram Veli seem to represent the “cyclic” perception of the universe looking for the symbols of God within the human world, mind and life (Şapolyo, 2006:154):

“Çalabım bir şâr yaratmış iki cihân âresinde

Bakıcak didâr görünür ol şârın kenâresinde

Nâgehân ol şâra vardım ol şârı yapılır gördüm

Ben dahî bile yapıldım taş ü toprak âresinde”

*Abdal* community that had been evolved especially on the Kalenderi branch of the “Abdalan-ı Rum” tradition had established an important source for the transmission of the “sema/semah” based rituals until the present time (Güroy, 2012:109). One of the representatives of the *Abdal* community was Abdal Musa who also known for his transmission of the tradition which had been continuing since Ahmet Yesevi and was given duties in Anatolia by Yesevi. In the text of the legendary narrative of Abdal Musa, there are also some examples of the *sema* practices which have been carried out: “... Sultan cemî fukarasıyla ataşa girdi. Sema tutdı. Ataş mahvoldı. Yirinde çayır bitdi...” (Güzel, 2019:143).

In this narration, there are also some stories related to Kaygusuz Abdal, one of the dervishes of Abdal Musa and a famous Alawi-Bektashi minstrel. These stories also give some insights about *sema* rituals of the period within an “unusual occasion”. According to the story, at the request of his father, Ruler of Teke (*Teke Beyi*), comes to Abdal Musa to take back “his son” Kaygusuz Abdal who is a dervish for Abdal Musa, and builds a fire in front of the lodge. When Abdal Musa sets off with about three hundreds of dervishes by making *sema* or whirling, mountains, trees, and rocks

also walk with them. When dervishes enter the fire by reading “gulbank(s)”, the fire does not burn them, and they extinguish the fire. When Kaygusuz Abdal’s father, becoming a witness to this extraordinary event, he kisses Abdal Musa’s hands and returns. Afterwards, Kaygusuz Abdal served Abdal Musa in the *dergah* for forty years (Alşan, 2012:326). Some verses of the “Abdal Musa Narrative” that are about Kaygusuz Abdal given below, points out the *Abdal community*, Abdal Musa, leading his dervishes, and gives some clues of musical instruments that had been used in this period:

Urum Abdalları gelür döst diyü  
Giydükleri nemed ile post diyü  
Hastalar da gelür dermân isteyü  
Sağlar gelür Sultân Abdal Mûsâ’ya

Tâlib olur pîrün nefesin isteyü  
Pîr oldur tâlibi hatadan saklar  
Çalınur kudümler altun sancaklar  
Tuğlar gelür Sultân Abdal Mûsâ’ya (Güzel, 2019:33)

Additionally, there are some other passages within the “Abdal Musa Narrative” related to *sema* rituals performed right after some “Christians” were converted to Islam: “Kafir iman getürdi. *Müeliman* oldu. Balı çörek ile yidiler. Kalkdılar üç kez *sema* dutdılar” (Güzel, 2019:146).

Simultaneously, during the “Days of Sacrifice (Hacc-ı Ekber, Kurban Bayramı)”, a great gathering was being made in Seyitgazi Lodge by the dervishes of Kalenderi Order coming from the various parts of Anatolia during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The rituals directed by Azam Baba were being ended with a grand ritual of *sema/semah* (Say, 2006:173-175).

Another text reporting about the “Seyitgazi Lodge” is *Meşâiru’ş-Şuārâ* written by Aşık Çelebi (1520-1572). This text underlines the “esoteric” and “heterodox” characters of *Abdal* dervishes that are also called “ışık” (Ayata, 2006:13-14) as well as their relations with music”:

“Vilâyet-i Anatoli’da Seydî Gâzî tekyesi ki bir dâr-ı fisk u dalâl olup her yirden atasın anasın âzârlatmış battâllar, işden kaçup ışık olmuş postunu boklar abdâllar, sâz-ı melâhî gibi dem-sâz, çihreleri hilye-i îmân olan lîhyeden ‘ârî ve alınlarında olan kara yazular ebrûlârının terâşıyla mütevârî idi. Namâzumuz kılınmış ve kefenümüz dikilmiş ü alınmışdur diyü bi’l-küllîyye biş vakte çâr tekbrîr idüp namâza

yumazlar ve mü'ezzine kulak kabartmayup imâma uymazlar idi. Pâdşâhların sadakâtın ve ashâb-ı hasenâtın hayrâtın yirler birkaç gâv şikem-perver harlar idiler. Sultânöni sancağına başka sancak çeküp etrafa akın salarlar, tug ile nakkâre ile begler alayların görseler yûf borusun çalarlar idi. Kudûmlarından kûy u kent halkı mütennebih olsalar Deccâl gibi ardlarına uyarlar, buldukları dilberi soyarlar kendü libaslarına koyarlardı. Dânişmend müderrisine incinse, sipâhi ağasına küsünse, yalın yüzlüler babasına kakısa, kandasın Seydî Gâzî Ocagı diyü varurlar, soyınurlar, kazan kaynadurlar. 'Işıklar anları semâ' ü safâ deyü kendü ezgilerine oynadurlar idi" (Ocak, 1999:183).

Aşık Çelebi also emphasizes the importance of "Seyitgazi Lodge" as a centre for *Abdal* community, and adds "Hüseyin Gazi" and "Yakup Abdal" lodges near Ankara (Köprülü O. F., 1988: 61).

In the legendary narrative about the Saint Othman Baba (15<sup>th</sup> century) -that had a special influence in the Balkan region- written by his disciple Göççük Abdal around 1483; a story about Serez (located in the current Greece borders) regarding the visit of Bayezid Baba to the lodge of Mecnun Derviş (a disciple of him) was being told (Kılıç et al., 2007). In this story both the *sema/semah* ritual was being described and some knowledge about the *cem* ritual were given together with the related rituals like sacrifice and the holy meal (*nimet*): "Ve ol vakit Serez'de Mecnun Derviş derler Bayezid Baba'nın bir dervişi var idi ki anun tekyesine gelüp Bayezid Baba çün dervişlerinle kondı. Ve sema'u şafa eyleyip oturmuşlar idi.' 'Ve gördiler kim ni'met pişmiş ve halk u derviş cem olmağa başlamış." told (Kılıç et al., 2007:64).

One of the early 16<sup>th</sup> manuscripts written by *Vahidi* in 1523, named as *Menâkib-ı Hoca-ı Cihân*, also gives information about the *Abdalan-ı Rum* dervishes, including the members of *Vefai*, *Cami*, *Haydari*, *Bektashi* orders, living in Anatolia. In this *menakıname*, *Vahidi* gives descriptions regarding their unusual appearance with various instruments they carried as well as some descriptions of their *sema* rituals (Karamustafa, 2004):

"Güneş her kaçan verse dehre şu'a'

İder cümle zerrât raqs u semâ

Görelde o mihrûn yüzün bî-niğâb

Düşübdür bize zerre-veş ıztırâb

Girüb raqşa idüb semâ'u şafâ

Ururuz ser-i arza biz püşt-i pâ" (Vahidi, 2015:125)

“İlâha hâmd u şenâ idüb şâhib-hân-kâha du’â eylediler ba’d-ez-ân pirlerin ve piş  
 çademlerin ervâhların yâd idüb şâd kıldılar andan şöıra pirlere karşı sücûda  
 vardılar yine çalkub dâyre vü kudümlerin ellerine alubkadim-i rusümlerince semâ’u  
 şâfâ idüb cüş u huruş gösterüb hâmüş oldılar...” (Vahidî, 2015:145-146)

One of the earliest examples of the *sema* ritual of Kalenderi order can be traced by Barak Baba, the disciple of Sarı Saltık. (Ocak, 2016b:233). Barak Baba and his dervishes are generally described with their unusual appearances and being in a state of “ecstasy”. According to one of those narrations, when Barak Baba arrived in Damascus his outlandish appearance aroused both disgust and amusement. His companions were also similarly dressed and carried bones and bells with them. Barak Baba was dancing, imitating the monkeys and bears (Karamustafa, 2015:78; Encyclopaedia Iranica, 1988).

One another of the legendary narratives which give information about Hacı Bektash-ı Veli and the events that have developed around him is *Menakıb-ı Hünkâr h Bektash-ı Veli*, recorded by Ali Dervish in 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although the stories told in the *menakıpname* developed around Hacı Bektash Veli, who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, they were recorded at a later date. According to the *Menakıpname*, it is understood that Hacı Bektash Veli is the contemporary of Mevlana and is one of the transmitters of the Horasan wisdom that came to Anatolia as one of the representatives of Ahmet Yesevi (Gölpınarlı, 2014:5). In this narrative, there are many stories about the *sema* rituals of the *Abdals* or dervishes of Hacı Bektash Veli:

“Günlerden bir gün, abdallarıyla Hırkadağı tarafında seyre çıktı (Hacı Bektaş, burada Hünkâr olarak anılmaktadır). Dağın üstüne gelince abdallara, tez varın dedi, bir ateş yakın. Abdallar, etraftan çer-çöp yığdılar, ateşlediler. Hünkâr, ateş yanınca coşup semâ’â girdi. Abdallar da ona uydular. Kırk kere ateşi dolandılar...” (Gölpınarlı, 2014:36).

In the legendary narrative of the Hacı Sultan, written by Dervish Burhan, was being told of Hacı Sultan’s arrival to Anatolia with Hacı Bektash and his activities after being sent to the Germiyan province (Şahin, 2017:24). In his *menakıb*, although there are some stories in which his miracles and worship practices were told, there is no story about *sema* rituals and any clues of music that had been used during the worship. However, in the narrative of Hacı Bektash Veli, there are some stories about Hacı Sultan as well. In one of those stories being told, during Hacı Sultan’s visit to Seyyid Gazi Lodge, indicating the ecstasy of the dervishes which made some of them “pass away”:

Hacım Sultan, bir kudüm çalın, sema' edin, Seyyid'in dergahına gidelim dedi. Kudümler çalındı, sema' başladı. Böylece Seyyid'in dergahına vardılar. Vakit, ikindiydi. Seyyid dergahında da sema' ediliyordu. Hacım Sultan, çarh urarak semâ'a girdi, etekleri hangi dervişe dokunduysa o derviş düştü, öldü, böylece on yedi kişinin öldüğünü söylediler (Gölpınarlı, 2014:84).

Through these examples it can be easily understood that “sema/semah” traditions (so called the models of cyclic worship [Güray, 2018a:23]) can be considered as a primary ritual combining music and dance in Medieval Anatolia. Other than the “heterodox” dervish groups, the aforementioned orders that had close connections with the “Sunni” division of Islam like the “Mevlevi order” had used to apply this model of cyclic worship religious in its rituals (Güray, 2012:16). The order that had been named as “Mevlevilik” after Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (1207-1273) his son Sultan Veled (1226-1312), represent the most remarkable and complex types of *sema* rituals. The Mevlevi ritual that includes parts like “Qur'an recitation”, “Reading through Mesnevi”, “Nat-ı Şerif (a composition type that is used to praise the Prophet Muhammad)” and “sema zikir” performed with a crowded line up of musician and *semazen(s)* (whirling dervishes) can be considered as representing one of the oldest “evrad” traditions of Anatolia. In sema of Mevlevi order instruments, especially “ney” were perceived as a sacred symbol. According to Mevlana “ney” symbolizes the “love” of God and it helps to raise the curtains to let the worshipper to feel and get close to the “eternal- presence of God” that is free of space and time (Güray, 2012:130-131). Most probably, the main factor for Mevlana in creating a perception of the universe based on “sema” should have been Şems'i Tebrizi -a “melami” dervish probably connected to the Kalenderi lodge and who had carried many experience-based practical knowledge on *sema* performance and theory (Say, 2006:130).

## 7. Conclusion

In this paper the music traditions in Anatolia during the Medieval Ottoman period was discussed by taking the “mystic” side of music that was a very common tool for the perception of the cosmos for the people of that period. It can be observed that “semah/sema” applications combining dance and music can be identified as the primary religious ritual for the 15<sup>th</sup> century Anatolian life. The background of this view is strongly supported by the religion and the philosophy of the period being based on “dervish orders” like “Kalenderiyye”, “Babai”, “Mevleviyye”, “Yeseviyye”, “Vefaiyye” and a “mystic oriented” “social” organization called “Ahi system”. Some of these systems like Kalenderi and Babai system were active in the rural areas, whereas the systems like Bayramiyye and Mevleviyye was active in the urban sides of Anatolia. The “cyclic perception” of cosmos and the outcomes of this perception within *sema* and *semah* traditions can be reflected in various manuscripts of the period including “legendary tales or narratives of the Saints”. The physical outcome of the system regarding the rituals was shaped through “sema” and “semah” traditions that

can be identified as “circular ritual models”. The musical side of these circular ritual models was being transmitted by the minstrels connected to different dervish lodges, whereas the “esoterically” strong belief side of this tradition is being transmitted by “Abdal troops” that are among the oldest known dervish groups in Anatolia. The “mystical” cosmic perception of *Abdal* dervishes seems to affect the social-cultural life and religious philosophy of Anatolia until the present time, following the musical tradition followed by the Abdal musicians until today.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Being born in the city “Hoy” of Iran, Şeyh Nasirüddin Mahmüd (ö. 1262)-later re-named as “Ahi Evran” was known to be the founder of the Ahi system. (Topaloğlu, 1988, p. 540).

<sup>2</sup> The term Rumi is directly attributed to Anatolia, through naming the geography that is formerly belonging to Byzantine as “diyar-ı rum” meaning the “the land of Rome”. (Ayverdi, 2005:2602)

<sup>3</sup> This term can be affiliated to the “protective” troops of soldiers called Seymen in the Turkish traditions, Uzunçarşılı discusses the possibility of this genre having a constructive role in the Early Ottoman Army (Uzunçarşılı, 1943:162). Seymen troops have a specific dance and music repertoire reflecting a Turkish culture-based symbolism.

<sup>4</sup> Destekleri için Dr. Ferhat Çaylı ve Dr. İsmet Karadeniz’e teşekkürlerimizle...

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