

AHMED ADNAN SAYGUN AND FOLK MUSIC RESEARCHES IN TURKEY

Ahmet Adnan Saygun ve Türkiye’de Halk Müziği Araştırmaları

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Öz: Muhtemelen en üretken ve çok yönlü Türk bestecilerinden biri olan Ahmed Adnan Saygun Türk tarihinin belki de en köklü değişimlerine yön veren dönüm noktalarından birine tanık oldu. Bu nedenle onun titizlikle ortaya çıkardığı ve Türkiye Cumhuriyeti’nin modernleşme süreciyle paralel ilerleyen eser ve çalışmalarının vatansever dürtülerin gölgesinden sıyrılmış objektif yaklaşımlarla değerlendirilmesi ironik şekilde Saygun’un çalışmalarının asıl değerinin hissedilmesi açısından bir hayli önemli görünmektedir. Bu makale Ahmed Adnan Saygun’un müzikoloji ve özellikle Macar besteci ve etnomüzikolog Béla Bartók’la birlikte etnomüzikoloji alanında gösterdiği kişisel entelektüel çabaları yeni Türk devletinin kültürel devriminden hariç tutmadan değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Ahmed Adnan Saygun, etnomüzikoloji, müzikoloji, Béla Bartók, halk müziği.

Abstract: Ahmed Adnan Saygun, possibly one of the most versatile and prolific Turkish composers, and his meticulous works that run parallel to the modernization of the Turkish Republic may require some objective consideration without the impetus of patriotic approaches because Saygun witnessed to one of the most important turning points and momentous changes in the Turkish history. This article seeks to acknowledge his personal intellectual efforts made particularly in the field of musicology and ethnomusicology without excluding the Cultural Revolution of the new Turkish State from his works, since Saygun was mainly encouraged by Turkish revolutionary movement.

Keywords: Ahmed Adnan Saygun, ethnomusicology, musicology, Béla Bartók, folk music.

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INTRODUCTION

So much has been written and surveyed — even though a large portion of it is in Turkish Language — about one of the most versatile and prolific Turkish composers Ahmed Adnan Saygun and his extraordinary career that to add it may seem somewhat unnecessary. However, Saygun’s meticulous studies that run parallel to the modernization of the Turkish Republic may require some objective consideration without the impetus of patriotic approaches. My purpose is not to exclude the Cultural Revolution of the new Turkish State from Saygun’s works — since Saygun was mainly encouraged by Turkish revolutionary movement — but to acknowledge his personal intellectual efforts made particularly in the field of musicology and ethnomusicology.

Because Saygun witnessed to one of the most important turning points and momentous changes in the Turkish history, it would be helpful to look over his biography — at least until the beginning of his ethnomusicological studies — and the conditions in which he was born, raised and trained before focusing on the main discussion point of the paper.

Saygun and the New Turkish State

Ahmed Adnan Saygun was born in 1907 in İzmir (Smyrna), a city notable for its rich cultural life, Greek minority, and Western musical tradition, Turkey. Saygun was highly influenced by the musical life of his native city where various Western chamber music and Ottoman military band performances were frequently taken place. Saygun took his first music lessons in elementary school by studying the oud, the Ottoman short-necked lute, and piano with Rosati, and before very long, he started to compose music on his own by his self-taught harmony and counterpoint knowledge. It has been suggested, according to his unpublished letters, that Saygun “had already decided to become a composer at the age of fourteen, at first writing short pieces for the piano, in the genres of marches and polkas” (Aracı, 1997: 12). Saygun’s father, a teacher of mathematics and a scholar of religions and literature, also had a huge influence over his education. Saygun was taught English, French and world religions by his father.

Until the age of sixteen, Saygun both observed the collapse of Ottoman Empire in which he was born and the foundation of the new Turkish state as a result of a violent independence war that lasted more than three years. The new social and cultural policies, pioneered by Mustafa Kemal, of the new, secular Turkish State were based on the establishment of “an integrated society that blended basic Turkish values with an overlay of Western civilization” (Spencer as cited by Markoff, 1991: 129). The most important figure in the development of these social and cultural reforms was the sociologist, writer, and poet Ziya Gökalp. Therefore, it is very likely that the revolutionary concepts of the

new Turkish Republic constituted essential inspiration for Saygun's ethnomusicological and musicological studies taken place after 1930s as well as development of his musical language. Markoff's following words, uttered by an objective voice, not only depict the environment in which Saygun's major thoughts was shaped up but also provide an important picture for the political and social atmosphere of those years: "In defiance of the Arabic and Persian influenced high art literature and music much loved by the Ottoman ruling class, Gökalp and his entourage of young nationalist intellectuals, the Young Turks, believed that one of the first steps in creating a new national culture was to tap the roots of unspoiled Turkish folk culture, its legends, proverbs, epics, and poetry. A primary source for such expressive culture was to be found in the minstrels of Anatolia." (1991: 129)

Western civilization, on the other hand, was considered to be the most advanced model in establishing the true and highly-developed national culture and art for the Turkish Republic. Gökalp describes how to employ European principles and techniques and incorporate them into Turkish modernization in terms of musical development: "We shall not copy the compositions of European composers, but learn the methods and the techniques of modern music by which we shall harmonise the melodies sung by our people. The aim, therefore, is to arrange our national melodies on the basis of the techniques of modern music and produce our own modern national works of music." (1981: 268)

As stated earlier, Saygun's high school years coincide with the fall of Ottoman Empire, the Turkish war of independence and the foundation of the Turkish Republic respectively. After he graduated from high school, Saygun became a music teacher of the newly-founded Turkish State and after teaching music in primary schools for two years, he was appointed as a music teacher of the High School of İzmir. Under the national cultural policy of Turkish Republic, Saygun, with his achievement in a state competition in 1928, was sent to study abroad on a state scholarship. He studied three years in Paris where he was introduced to the late-romantic period of European music and to French impressionism. Saygun studied harmony and counterpoint with Eugène Borrel at the Paris Conservatoire and later he attended Vincent d'Indy's composition classes at the Schola Cantorum.

In 1931, Saygun returned to Turkey and was appointed as a music teacher at the newly-established Music Teacher Training College in Ankara, which aimed at training music teachers under the new cultural policy of the Turkish Republic, and he began to teach counterpoint. He conducted the Presidential Symphony Orchestra in 1934, and then moved to Istanbul in 1936 to teach at the Istanbul Municipal Conservatory.

In 1939 he was appointed as the inspector of Halkevleri (Community centers or with literal translation "People's House"), cultural institutions established as a part of the Cultural Revolution, and this assignment allowed him to travel for the purpose of conducting research on Turkish folk music (Yener and Beken, 2001), yet his

ethnomusicology studies had already started beforehand.

Saygun and His Ethnomusicology Studies

Saygun's first comprehensive study in the field of ethnomusicology was reflected in *Türk Halk Musikisinde Pentatonizm* (Pentatonicism in Turkish Folk Music) published in 1936. In this study, Saygun analyzed the pentatonic tendency in Turkish folk music and attempted to reveal close affinities between Turkish folk music and its Middle Asia origins. He basically postulates that five-tone system, which is originally Middle Asian, came through Eastern Europe to Scandinavia, through Middle Europe to Scotland, through Hungary to the Balkan, Asia Minor and Northern Africa, through Arabia to Middle Africa, through Indonesia and Australia to South America, through China to Japan and through Siberia to Northern America. This theory was both acknowledged and criticized by Hungarian musicologist Szabolcsi. He suggests that "In this theory there may be much valid, but it leaves wholly inexplicated, why we do find along the mentioned route- lines pentatonias quite differently developed and connected with different melody-forms" (1943: 32).

Türk Halk Musikisinde Pentatonizm, in addition, led to another significant ethnomusicological study, which could be considered an important milestone in Saygun's ethnomusicology studies, in 1936. In November, the prominent Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók visited Turkey and conducted a field research with Saygun to collect and transcribe folk songs from the yürük nomadic tribes around Adana and Osmaniye. It should be noted that they collected some songs in the district of Ankara before they set off for Adana and Osmaniye as well. In his article, published fifteen years after the visit of Bartók, Saygun elucidated what had prompted him to publish *Türk Halk Musikisinde Pentatonizm* and how it had been connected to Bartók's interest in doing research on the folk music of Anatolia. In his words: "One day in May of 1936 I talked with my friend, the Turkish musicologist Mahmud R. Gazimihal, about the means of setting forth the true character of the folk music of Anatolia, hitherto unknown to folklorists. Our train of thought had been started by a monograph, in Hungarian, containing a map of folklore areas in which the Anatolian peninsula had been indicated as belonging to the Arabo-Persian region. We decided to publish, each of us individually, a booklet, with the end in view of correcting the error and showing the ties that bound Anatolia on the one hand with Asia and on the other with Hungary, Ireland, etc. We did so without delay, and did not neglect to send copies to the author of the monograph mentioned. . . . Thus Bartók became interested in the folk music of Turkey and expressed a desire to undertake a trip through Anatolia." (Saygun, 1951a: 5)

It is quite clear that Saygun was bothered by the general ignorance about the folk music of Anatolia. On the other hand, and maybe more importantly, his intention of digging into the folk music of Anatolia was triggered by the Hungarian monograph, which contradicted the main policy of new Turkish Republic, indicating Anatolia as a

part of Arabo-Persian region. As Talat Sait Halman (1980) clarifies, “Ataturk’s Republic formulated the policy of ending the domination of Islamic Arabo-Persian cultural values which it sought to replace with European norms, pre-Islamic mythology, and the Turkic arts of Anatolia” (127). One can say quite explicitly that endeavors for creating a new national culture sensed throughout the country gave a strong impetus to Saygun’s ethnomusicology studies.

As a twenty nine-year-old young composer with his huge interest in folk music research, Saygun gained crucial experience and knowledge from his expedition with Bartók. It can be understood from his paper “Bartók in Turkey” that Bartók’s spirit, which he compared to a child’s, enthusiasm and meticulous observations had a great influence on him (Saygun 1951a: 6). During their trip, which lasted only ten days, they collected and transcribed 93 folk songs and Saygun was in charge of collecting the data about performances and transcriptions of the text. Saygun offers a more detailed description of his responsibility: “Bartok had assigned to me the phonetic transcription of the text; I took down this text only during the singing. For his part, he tried to write down as exactly as possible the melody itself. If I happened to finish with the text before he had completed his notation of the melody, I was to set to work writing down the melody also, for later comparison with his version. Of course, I jotted down on my piece of paper the necessary data about the singer, the place where the song was collected, etc.” (1951a: 6)

Subsequently, these folk songs, collected by Saygun and Bartók from Anatolia, were thoroughly analyzed according to their melodic and textual structures by Bartók. Although Bartók was not able to get this study published in his lifetime, it was published by Princeton University Press in 1976 with the title of *Turkish Folk Music from Asia Minor*, edited by Benjamin Suchoff, the curator of the Bartok Archive from 1953 to 1968 (Gedikli, 1987). Apart from Bartók’s original manuscripts of the songs and their analyses and observations, *Turkish Folk Music from Asia Minor* includes English translations of the lyrics, provided by G. Kresz — Her translation has kindly been criticized by Talat Halman in his review — and an afterword of the German ethnomusicologist Kurt Reinhard.

Saygun, on the other hand, continued to work on a similar project on his own and produced his one of the most important studies in the field of ethnomusicology. He reexamined the collected folk songs and documents and conducted additional field researches around the same area. In addition, he carried out some critical researches into the documents left by Bartók in Budapest, Hungary (Gedikli, 1987). As a result, Saygun provided a comprehensive work, which also includes Bartók’s manuscripts, written in French. This remarkable work of him was translated into English by Samira B. Byron and published by Hungarian Academy of Sciences with the title of *Béla Bartók's Folk Music Research in Turkey in Hungary*. Halman’s following words acknowledge Saygun’s contribution and clarify how Bartók’s *Turkish Folk Music from Asia Minor*

would have been a better work if Bartók and Suchoff had appreciated Saygun's researches: "Saygun's expertise, so impressive in his critical analysis published in Béla Bartók's Folk Music Research in Turkey, would have enabled Bartók to avoid technical errors and judgmental pitfalls. . . . It is unfortunate that Dr. Suchoff had no access to the Hungarian book and presumably never sought Saygun's contribution. With some of the material that went into Béla Bartók's Folk Music Research in Turkey, Dr. Suchoff would have been able to give us a more comprehensive and certainly more enlightening book." (1980: 129)

One gets the impression that Saygun's ethnomusicological researches reach an advanced level of competence after Bartók's visit to Turkey. In 1937, Saygun published his second folk music research *Rize, Artvin ve Kars Havalisi Türkü, Saz ve Oyunları Hakkında Bazı Malumat* (Some Information about Folk Songs, Musical Instruments and Dances of Rize, Artvin and Kars Districts) in which he provided vital information about the music, instruments and dances of three provinces in the northeastern Turkey. Furthermore, he inquires into the origins of the district's popular dance Horon and makes significant comparisons among people's musical acts as well as indicating important facts based on sociological observations (Gedikli, 1987).

The following year, in 1938, Saygun published *Yedi Karadeniz Türküsü ve Bir Horon* (Seven Folk Songs and a Horon from the Black Sea) based on his researches in the archives of the Municipal Conservatory of Istanbul. In this work, which marks Saygun's great advancement in the systematic analysis of folk elements, he attaches a lot of importance to authenticity in folk music. The work both presented an extensive inventory of folk songs collected until that year and provided a criticism of musical notation and transcription method of folk songs. It has been suggested that Saygun made a great effort to deal with authenticity in folk songs by analyzing them according to their instrumental accompaniment, original lyrics, performance styles and tempos (Gedikli, 1987). In addition, he developed a new transcription technique that enables him to write the lyrics with special letters which did not exist in the alphabet and he drew special attention to ornamentations and distinguishing them from the genuineness of the song. All these attempts, in the center of authenticity, bear witness to Saygun's success in following the general tendencies of folk music researches and comparative musicology of late 1930s. The following words of him, found in his paper "Authenticity in Folk Music" stress the priority of his as a folklorist: The folklorist . . . must work on authentic documents in order to reach more objective and less erroneous conclusions. Naturally, every folklorist is, a priori, supposed to be familiar with the peculiarities of the music of his own country. (Saygun, 1951b: 7)

As stated earlier, Saygun became the inspector of Halkevleri and traveled throughout Turkey with less difficulty and explored the music of different districts in Turkey. These studies reflected on numerous further studies such as *La Musique Turque* (Paris, 1960), *La genie de la melodie* (Budapest, 1962) and *Türk ve Macar Müziği*

Üstüne Çalışmalar (Studies on Turkish and Hungarian Music) published in Budapest in 1964.

It has to be noted, on the other hand, that Yükselsin's (2011) article investigating Saygun's scholarly works in an effort to expound on Saygun's contributions to the discipline of ethnomusicology addresses that his focus was mostly on pre-ethnomusicological and nationalism-centered folklore studies based on collection, classification, and documentation of folk music materials rather than on the ethnographical investigation of cultural and anthropological aspects of music.

This paper sought to indicate Saygun's great contributions not only to music of Anatolia but also to discipline of ethnomusicology. As pointed out in the first part of the paper, no doubt the influence of revolution always remained as a powerful incentive on Saygun's artistic and academic endeavors but on the other hand, his scholarly proficiency exposed particularly after 1936, proves that he reached the universal criteria of folkloric researches. In conclusion, I would like to quote a paragraph from Saygun's article to signify his intellectual thinking and to offer a valuable suggestion of him for further studies in the field of ethnomusicology: "In the first place, it (Folklorist's occupation) is "the study of folk music as a spontaneous language of the human race." This is the linguistic phase of folk music. In the second place, it is "the study of folk music as a means of exteriorising unconscious beliefs." This is the sociological phase of folk music. In the third place, it is "the study of folk music as an historical document." This is the archaeological phase. A study with so many phases must be made with great care, and the authenticity of the documents acquires great importance. (1951b: 7)

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