

Book Review

An analysis of the book titled *Avrupalı Gezginlerin Gözüyle Osmanlılarda Musiki* (Music in the Ottoman Court through the Eyes of European Travelers) in terms of Mevlevi music

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Abstract

"Avrupalı Gezginlerin Gözüyle Osmanlılarda Musiki" (Music in the Eyes of European Travelers in the Ottoman Court) titled book consists of seven chapters. The book covers a period of four centuries, from the fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, during which European travelers made cultural journeys to cities governed by the Ottoman Empire. These journeys resulted in the production of memoirs, diaries, travel notes, and letters. It is understood that these travelers were at a certain cultural and intellectual level. What particularly caught my attention in this book is the simplistic descriptions of the Mevlevi ceremonies, music, and instruments by foreign travelers. It is important that the book addresses these aspects. The introduction of the concept of Mevlevi Music in the examination of the Sema ceremonies is also an important issue. I have provided a roadmap for researchers by examining all the chapters of the book from the perspective of Mevlevi Music. I specifically included examples. I recommend it as a source that Mevlevi music researchers can benefit from.

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Author(s): Bülent Aksoy
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The reason for reviewing this book is that the music played during the Sema ceremonies, along with the instruments and compositions, is presented by foreign travelers in a straightforward manner, providing not only an account but also a transfer of knowledge. Due to its emergence in the Sema ceremonies, it is referred to as Mevlevi music.

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The book titled "Music in the Eyes of European Travelers in the Ottoman Court" contains memoirs, diaries, letters, and travel notes shared by European travelers about their journeys in Ottoman lands over a period of four centuries, from the fifteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. In this book, Aksoy shares the information obtained from sources published in Europe.

Europeans, starting with the administration of the Ottoman state, followed with great interest the history of the Turks, their military system, state governance, societal structure, and understanding of law. In addition, they also explored Turkish customs, language, and cultural structures. They particularly investigated Turkish music, which they found to be distinct. Travelers who visited Istanbul and other major cities made a concerted effort to understand musical examples, especially Sufism and Mevlevi music, and aimed to document them in their memoirs, travel accounts, and observations, ensuring they could be understood in their home countries as well.

Chapter I. Early Observations: Fifteenth – Sixteenth Century Travelogues (Pages 26-53)

Early observations are composed of selected excerpts from fifteenth and sixteenth-century travelogues. The relations between Europeans and Turks and Muslims began with the Crusades and were documented over centuries in travel accounts. The information collected from these travelers did not reveal notable works regarding the Turks. Travelers going to Palestine through Anatolia did not make any significant efforts to explore this country. The reason for this indifference was that their main interests were focused on the Holy Land.

In the subheading for the fifteenth century, information about Turkish music was found from two travelers. The first European book to mention Turkish music, published in 1982, is *La Voyage d'Outremer* by Charles Schefer. The author, Bertrandon de la Brocquière (1459), was a diplomat sent to the Ottoman Empire, and his writings reflect impressions from 1433.

In the section on the sixteenth century, *mehter* (Ottoman military band): Geuffroy, Menavino, and Dernschwam, it is noted that many sixteenth-century travelogues mention Turkish music and the instruments used. The Mehter team in the palace is also described. Information from this period also mentions the Mehter team's drumming. Dernschwam's travelogue is the first to describe all the instruments in the Mehter band.

In the section titled *chango, tambura, and gayda* from the sixteenth century, the oldest travelogue from this period is Guillaume Postel's *De la Republique des Turcs* from the 1530s. Postel describes how girls dance to the music of the chango band. Another important sixteenth-century travelogue about Turkish music is by Pierre Belon du Mans. Belon describes in detail the *misqal, ney, rebab, zurna, daf, cymbals*, and various string instruments he saw and heard. He also mentions that the string instruments used in these instruments had *kirish* (gut) strings. It is also noted that during the reign of Sultan Süleyman (Kanuni), a short period of music prohibition was imposed, which we learn from the letters of the Austrian ambassador Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, who was in Istanbul between 1554-1562.

Although the reason is unclear, European travelers in the sixteenth century did not mention Mevlevi music in their travelogues.

Chapter II. Initial Materials: Seventeenth Century (Pages 54-85)

In the seventeenth century, the familiarity of Europeans with Turkish music can be observed. In the memoirs of this period's travelers, criticisms of the monophonic performance of the Mehter (Ottoman military band) and other instrumental groups in Turkish music are noted. While Mevlevi music was not mentioned in the sixteenth-century travelogues, it occupies a prominent place in the seventeenth-century travelogues. At the beginning of this century, travelers who wrote about Mevlevi music include Thomas Coryate in 1613 and Pietro Della Valle in 1614, who both mention listening to music at the Galata Mevlevihanesi in their travelogues. Apart from Della Valle, Du Loir, in his letters published in 1645, writes about the instruments played in the Mevlevi ceremony and the whirling dervishes, and also notes the music for the third section of the Sema ceremony (Page 61). These notes are presented in the documents section of Aksoy's book (on Page 381). Dr. Covell, an English diplomat, and James Dallaway, in their memoirs, describe the instruments played in the Mevlevi tekkes, including the metal-stringed tambur, santur, rebab, and ney (Page 72).

Observers such as Paul Rycaut also wrote about Mevlevi music, providing valuable information on the Sema ceremony and contributing to documentation on the subject. This chapter mentions the Mevlevi ceremony observed

by Du Loir. In his letters, Du Loir also provides a detailed description of the tambur. He also mentions the kemençe (a string instrument) in his travelogues. This section also includes the travelogues of Nicolas Rolamb and Ali Ufki.

In this chapter, Aksoy directly quotes Abdülbâkî Gölpınarlı's words on Mevlana (Pages 77-78). Gölpınarlı, who made valuable observations on Mevlana, is quoted as follows in the book:

“Mevlevis have not studied Mevlana's personality, tastes, human side, way of life, and most naturally, his works, which would indicate these qualities. This is quite natural because they only emphasized etiquette, customs, and in this context, music, and saw Mevlana through a mystical perspective. In fact, they did not see the real Mevlana but the one they created in their imagination. Even the commentators who attempted to explain masterpieces like the *Mesnevi*, a pinnacle of world literature, did not feel the need to read Mevlana's other works” (Aksoy, 2003, Pages 77-78).

It would be accurate to consider that Aksoy also addresses Mevlana in this context.

Chapter III. Eighteenth Century: Towards Turkish Music (Pages 86-193)

In the seventeenth century, travelers found Mevlevi music more listenable than Mehter (the Ottoman military band). In the eighteenth century, Turkish music became quite intriguing to travelers, Orientalists, and music researchers. In this century, Mevlevi music and the instruments used to perform it were taken very seriously.

This period marked a time when Europeans researched Turkish music in detail. We also see that they found Turkish music enjoyable and made comments about it. This century was also a time when music developed. Many of the quintessential examples of Ottoman-Turkish style were written during this period. It is worth noting that this century was also a time of development for European music. The French jurist M. Guer speaks very highly of Mehter. Toderini finds Mehter very magnificent. In sources from the eighteenth century, the engravings compiled by Filippo Bonanni also include instruments used in Turkish music. In addition to Bonanni, Ferriol and Charles Fanton also contributed influential engravings, paintings, and information on Turkish instruments. Charles Fonton is one of the European observers most interested in Turkish music. Fonton's manuscript study titled *An Essay on Eastern Music in Comparison with European Music* was written in 1751. In this serious research, Fonton provides significant information about Turkish music scales, rhythms, the construction technique, materials, and tunings of the instruments.

Particularly, Fonton included illustrations of the instruments along with Turkish music pitch tables. Additionally, he wrote the musical notes of the works played.

Poul Rycout, in a painting published during this period titled *Mevlevi Musicians* (Picture 14, Page 63), shows images of musicians playing the ney (reed flute) and bendir (frame drum) (Page 97).

In the last notes of this century, there is a brief anecdote titled *Music in the Palace and Mevlevihanes* (Mevlevi lodges). In this anecdote, it is mentioned that Mevlevi dervishes would wait for musicians in their individual cells at the Mevlevihanes and hold musical meetings.

Chapter IV. Nineteenth Century: The Blockage of the Path

This century marked a period when Orientalism developed and established itself as a new field of study. European Orientalism was seen as a scientific discipline aimed at researching the histories, languages, thoughts, and cultures of Eastern countries. Some researchers have noted the use of Turkish instruments in Egypt. During this period, Turkish instruments were again discussed. This time, the instruments were analyzed in a scientific manner. Works appeared that discussed the tuning systems, notes, and characteristics of the instruments in detail. This period also marked a time when the lyrics, modes, and notes of the Mevlevi ceremonies were taken seriously.

One of the most significant events of this century was when the German translator at the Ottoman embassy in Istanbul, Hr. Von Hussard, memorized the *Mesnevi* of Mevlana Celaleddin. Later, this *Mesnevi* was translated into German and notated by the Austrian priest Maximilian Stadler and published in 1822. The works Stadler transcribed are found in the documents section, on pages 406-410. The works transcribed include a section from the *Hicaz Mevlevi Sema*, a section from the *Nihavend Mevlevi Sema*, a section from the *Acem Buselik Mevlevi Sema*, a section from the *Pençgah Mevlevi Sema*, a section from the *Bayati Mevlevi Sema*, and a section from three different *Hicaz Mevlevi Sema* ceremonies. Also, in this section, there is an illustration on page 238, image 72, showing Kanuni (Suleiman the Magnificent), neyzen (reed flutist), and semazen (whirling dervishes), painted by William J. J. Spry.

In the nineteenth century, in the section titled *Mevlevi Ceremony*, John P. Brown, a clerk and translator at the American Embassy in Istanbul, elaborately described the Mevlevi Sema ceremony. This document serves as a reference for the organization of the Mevlevi ceremony.

Chapter V. A Few Observations on the Place of Music in Everyday Life in Ottoman Society

In this section, the author examines the role of music in Ottoman society in light of the gathered information: Who performed music? Who listened to it? Where was music performed and listened to? What were the Ottomans' attitudes toward music? The social aspects and culture of music are discussed.

Chapter VI. Reception of Music and Conclusions

The author has produced this work by scanning Western sources that are the result of observations in the travelogues from four centuries. In this study, the author presents their work in a vertical chronological order so that the selected data can be traced within the historical course of the changes in music, both from the perspectives of European travelers and other observers.

As a result, the sources based on observation until the late eighteenth century contain a vast amount of material on Turkish music. However, the author's opinion is that these views have not been adequately addressed by music historians, musicologists, and Orientalists working on the nineteenth century. It is believed that the importance of travel literature was only understood in the twentieth century.

Chapter VII. Documents

A. Selected Texts

B. Tables

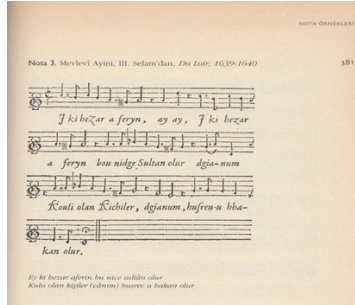
C. Musical Notations

This chapter consists of the selected texts, documents, and musical notations explained above.

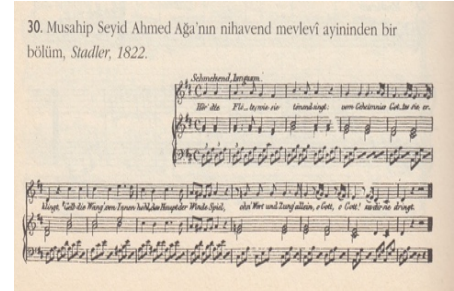
Examples related to the visuals and notations in the book



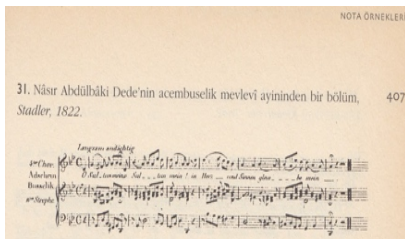
Depiction of the person playing the ney and bendir. Page 63



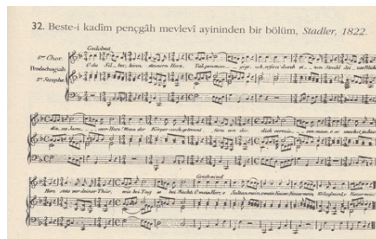
Musical notations of the work transcribed by Du Loir. Page 381.



Some of the musical notations of the Mevlevi Sema works transcribed by Stadler. A section from the Nihavend Mevlevi Sema by Muhasip Seyd Ahmed Aga. Page 406



A section from the Acem Buselik Mevlevi Sema. Page 407



A section from the Pengâh Mevlevi Sema. Page 407



A section from the Bayatî Mevlevi Sema. Page 407

References

Aksoy, B. (2023). *Avrupalı Gezginlerin Gözüyle Osmanlılarda Musiki (Music in the Ottoman Court through the Eyes of European Travelers) (2nd Ed)*. Pan