



THE BLACK PEARL OF THE BEYLERBEYI PALACE: M. F. RACHALS GRAND AUTO PIANO OF SULTAN ABDULHAMID II*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to provide the results of a comprehensive archival and field study conducted on the grand auto piano of Sultan Abdulhamid II, which has been known as lost or vanished. The grand auto piano of Sultan Abdulhamid II is an important musical instrument for the history of Ottoman modern music as well as an important source of information on the popular operas, composers, and music pieces in the Yıldız Palace. This study evaluates the known and unknown details of the true story of the Sultan's grand auto piano based on the documents in the Ottoman Archives and the findings of the field research conducted in the Beylerbeyi Palace. The most important contributions of this study to the literature are not only the discovery of the grand auto piano in the Beylerbeyi Palace where the deposed Sultan Abdulhamid II lived during the last six years of his life under house arrest but also correcting the misleading interpretations of the information in the archival documents on the manufacturer of the unique grand auto piano of the Sultan.

Keywords: Ottoman Modern Music, Piano, Auto Piano, Abdulhamid II, Beylerbeyi Palace, Kastner & Co., M. F. Rachals & Co., Salih Munir Pasha, Stefanaki Musurus Pasha

BEYLERBEYİ SARAYI'NIN SİYAH İNCİSİ:

SULTAN II. ABDÜLHAMİD'İN M. F. RACHALS MARKA KUYRUKLU OTO PİYANOSU

Özet

Bu makale, Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in kayıp ya da tahrip edilmiş olarak bilinen kuyruklu oto piyanosu hakkında arşiv belgelerinin incelenmesi ve saha araştırması olarak yürütülmüş kapsamlı bir çalışmanın sonuçlarını sunmaktadır. Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in Beylerbeyi Sarayı'ndaki kuyruklu oto piyanosu, Osmanlı modernleşme dönemi müzik tarihi açısından önemli bir enstrüman olması yanında, bu dönemde Yıldız Sarayı'nda popüler olan operalar, besteciler ve müzik eserleri hakkındaki değerlendirmelere referans olacak değerli bir bilgi kaynağı ve önemli bir keşiftir. Bu araştırma, Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in kuyruklu oto piyanosu hakkında bilinen ve bilinmeyen detayları Osmanlı Arşivi belgelerinin ve Beylerbeyi Sarayı'nda yapılan saha çalışmasının verileri ışığında inceleyerek bu eşsiz oto piyanonun gerçek hikâyesini yazmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın literatüre yaptığı en önemli katkılar arasında, kayıp olduğu sanılan kuyruklu oto piyanoyu Sultan II. Abdülhamid'in hayatının son yıllarını ev hapsinde geçirdiği Beylerbeyi Sarayı'nda bulmak ve piyanonun üretim yeri ve fabrika bilgileri ile ilgili arşiv belgelerindeki bilgilerin yanlış yorumlanmasından doğan hataları düzelterek bilgileri gün ışığına çıkarması sayılabilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Osmanlı Modern Müziği, Piyano, Oto Piyano, II. Abdülhamid, Beylerbeyi Sarayı, Kastner & Co., M. F. Rachals & Co., Salih Münir Paşa, Stefanaki Musurus Paşa

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Introduction

Music was the first important step of the Ottoman modernization, and the Ottoman sultans, princes, and princesses were the pioneers for the modernization of Ottoman music since the reign of Sultan Selim III (r. 1789-1807). In the last quarter of the 19th century, Western music became a part of the education, culture, and daily life of the Ottoman society. Piano classes were a part of the curriculum at public schools in Istanbul and even it was a matter of discussion in 1908 to make piano classes not an elective but a compulsory course.

During the thirty-three years-long reign, Sultan Abdulhamid II became one of the most important monarchs of his age providing patronage for composers in the world and documents in the Ottoman Archives indicate that composers all around Europe dedicated many music pieces to Sultan Abdulhamid II. The Sultan's deep interest in Western musical instruments, especially piano, led him to follow the technological developments about auto pianos and the other automatic instruments. The only grand auto piano known as lost or vanished now, came to the Ottoman palace in the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II.

This study aims to find if there had been a grand auto piano in the Ottoman palaces matching with the piano in the archival documents and to re-write the true story of the grand auto piano of Sultan Abdulhamid II, which is known as lost or vanished. Also, this study presents the first visual images of the grand auto piano since its coming to Istanbul and placement in the palace.

1. From Automatic Organs to Grand Auto Pianos

“Music is a necessity, one of the fundamental joys of life. The great mass of humanity appreciates music, loves music, and must have music. But to enjoy music to the utmost, it must be constantly available- it must be part of the home.”

At the beginning of the 20th century, it was inevitable to encounter this kind of advertisement in magazines, journals, newspapers, and even on the

billboards on the streets in Europe. Since the last decades of the 19th century, automatic musical instruments had been more and more popular in Europe and North America. Automatic pianos among these automatic musical instruments were one of the most special ornaments of mansions in this era.

The first inspiration for automatic musical instruments was long before the 19th century and the patent license of the first automatic instrument was registered in the 18th century. Justinian Morse invented the first mechanical organ in 1731 and the patent license of the automatic organ defines the invention as: *“... this organ may be made for a much lower price than all others heretofore, and therefore will be very proper to be made use of in churches or chapels, in small parishes that are unable or unwilling to be at the expense of the constant attendance of an organist, or in gentlemen's houses or private families.”*¹

Although nobody had ever seen the automatic organ mentioned in this patent license, records about patent holders of auto pianos in the 19th century indicate the process of technological development of the invention and the evolution of the automatic organ to automatic piano. Justinian Morse, Bain Company in Scotland became the new patent-holder in 1847 after making some tiny alterations on the piano. The patents passed to other holders with very small changes year by year. In 1876 McTammany, in 1881 Merritt Gally, and in 1886 Bishop & Downe became the new patent-holder of the automatic piano. In 1887, Charles A. Kuster became the new patent-holder when he proved that the mechanism of his automatic piano was different from the previous ones.²

In 1880, R. W. Pain designed a 39 musical note piano for Xeedham & Sons. In 1882, he also modified his design for 45 musical notes for Mechanical OrguINETTE Co., and after improving the functionality of this model, he designed a piano with 65

1 Alfred Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, CA: Covina Publishing Company, 1911, 132.

2 Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 136-138.

musical notes for the same company in 1888. All the aforesaid automatic pianos were technical devices working on a certain mechanism like music boxes and it was impossible to use them like typical pianos.

Hundred and sixty years after the first patent license of the automatic organ, Wilcox & White Company applied for a new patent in 1891, and the company manufactured the first auto piano with dual functionality: 1) The auto piano having the keys of the classical pianos and operating like standard pianos. 2) The auto piano performing automatically with perforated papers. White and Parker Company received the patent for the grand auto piano in 1897, but the company did not find the expected demand for the piano and applied for a new patent for portable automatic pianos in 1897. This device was attached to a piano and performed music like a music box with various additional functions.³ The trend for manufacturing auto pianos continued to rise in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, because the increasing demand for automatic pianos in Europe as a 'toy for live music' made these instruments a part of the cultural life and entertainment even in the houses of middle-class families. Thus, live performances of automatic pianos had already become a part of the entertainment in Europe on the eve of the 20th century.

2. Sultan Abdulhamid II and His Deep Interest in Piano

In the 19th century, piano became the most popular European musical instrument in the Ottoman court. During the reign of Sultan Abdulmejid (r. 1839-1861), piano became an important part of the culture and education in the palace. There were special teachers for Western music lessons in the palace and each of the Ottoman princes had a piano in his room. Prince Abdulhamid was one of these princes who took Western music lessons and played piano. Since his early ages, the young prince took Western music lessons from the famous

composers of his time such as Dussap, Guatelli, Donizetti, and Lombardi. When he ascended to the throne in 1876, Sultan Abdulhamid's familiarity with Western music in his childhood had already become a deep interest. The Sultan truly enjoyed Western music and listened to performances in his opera house at Yildiz Palace.

Ottoman archival documents show that during Sultan Abdulhamid's reign, members of the palace community in all ranks and even students in public schools took Western music lessons and played piano. There were piano teachers employed in public schools such as Uskudar Technical School,⁴ Leyli Technical School for Girls,⁵ and Sultan Ahmed Technical School⁶, and even more, there were attempts to make the piano class a compulsory course in the public schools.⁷ These examples and documents in the Ottoman Archives show the popularity of piano in the Hamidian period.

3. Sultan Abdulhamid II and the Idea of Having an Auto Piano

There are many documents in the Ottoman Archives about Western musical instruments, especially pianos and violins, in the court of Sultan Abdulhamid II. Among these, the grand auto piano ordered in 1905 and shipped to the Ottoman capital in 1907 has a special place in the history of Ottoman modern music. It is not exactly known when Sultan Abdulhamid's special interest in an auto piano had started but a document in the Ottoman Archives might be the inspiration of this idea in the Sultan's mind. The document is a booklet about a self-playing machine displayed in Paris Exhibition in 1889.⁸

3 Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 144-147.

4 Turkish Presidency State Archives of the Republic of Turkey Ottoman Archives (BOA), BEO. 763/ 57168, (H 25.10.1313/ 9.04. 1896).

5 BOA, MF. IBT, 256/94, (H30.12.1327- 12.01.1910).

6 BOA, MF. MKT, 826/22, (H15.11.1322/21.01.1905).

7 BOA, MF. MKT, 826/22, (H15.11.1322/21.01.1905).

8 BOA, YPRK. TKM, 16/37, (22.05.1307/ 14.01.1890).



1 This image of a self-playing piano, i.e. melotrope designed by J. Carpentier is included in a booklet in the Collection of Yildiz Palace Archives. The melotrope was exhibited and the booklet was distributed in the 1889 Exhibition of Paris.

This machine is a *melotrope*, an automatic perforating machine to be attached to a piano and played music using perforating papers. The French engineer Jules Carpentier designed this machine and exhibited it in the Paris Exhibition in 1889. Sultan Abdulhamid II had the handbook of this machine that was most probably the first inspiration of the idea of having an auto piano in his mind. As we learn from the memories of the Ottoman Ambassador of Paris, Salih Munir Pasha (1896-1908), the Sultan did not wait so long for his desire. The pasha mentions the Sultan's first experience of listening to the performance of a perforating machine in Yildiz Palace which was manufactured by Aeolian Co.⁹

9 Salih Münir Çorlu, "Abdülhamid ve Garp Musikisi", *Akşam*, April 15, 1938, 1.

Aeolian Co. manufactured the piano named "Pianola" in 1897. After an effective advertisement campaign, Pianola was in great demand in the late 19th century. Until 1898, only 65 keys could be used in automatic pianos and there had to be structural modifications to adapt the existing technology to Pianola. A big amount of money was spent on the development of the new technology. Religious and popular music pieces were recorded, and a special catalog was printed for the marketing of Pianola in the world. However, Melville Clark's release of a new piano, named Apollo, with 88 keys became very popular in a short time as being the latest version of the auto piano.¹⁰

When Salih Munir Pasha talked about melotrope, the Sultan was very excited to make music using this new machine. Salih Munir Pasha ordered the machine immediately from Paris and the machine was brought to one of the kiosks in the Yildiz Palace complex. The Sultan was very excited about the self-performing machine, he attached it to a piano in the kiosk and performed music. Although no exact date was given for the coming of the Pianola to the Yildiz Palace, the pasha probably saw the American-made melotrope in Paris Exhibition of 14 April-12 November 1900 and told about the new invention to the Sultan. As a result, probably the Aeolian Co. brought Pianola to the palace at a time in 1900.

4. The Grand Auto Piano in Istanbul

The Sultan's interest in mechanical musical instruments was such deep that Sultan Abdulhamid II paid three hundred gold to buy four auto-pianos operated by electricity from Germany. One of these auto-pianos was in the room of his wife (*Küçük Kadınefendi*) and the three of them were in the rooms of his children in Yildiz Palace.¹¹ However, there was only one grand auto piano arrived in Istanbul for Sultan Abdulhamid II in 1907.

10 Dolge, *Pianos and Their Makers*, 142.

11 Ziya Şakir Soku, *Sultan Hamid'in Son Günleri*, İstanbul: Akıl Fikir Yayınları, 2011, 219.

Ottoman archival documents explain all stages of the transaction of the grand auto piano step by step from the order to the shipment to Istanbul. According to the documents, Stefanaki Musurus Pasha was the bureaucrat responsible for the payment and shipment of the Sultan's auto piano. Stefanaki Musurus Pasha was the son of the famous Ottoman diplomat Kostaki Musurus, the Ottoman ambassador of London from 1851¹² to 1886.¹³ Stefanaki Musurus Pasha was appointed as the ambassador of London in 1903¹⁴ and conducted the cultural relations as well as diplomatic relations between Istanbul and London until the end of his life in 1908. There are two folders in the Ottoman archives dated March 5, 1907 and May 1, 1907 about the auto piano of the Sultan.¹⁵ The archival documents include the piano dealer Kastner & Co.'s shipment receipt, price information, user's guide in English, and a document in Ottoman having the seal of Stefanaki Musurus Pasha. The pasha in his one-page information note dated March 2nd, 1907 summarized the documents in English. According to the document, the piano produced for the Sultan was loaded in Barcelona Ferry and the ferry was shipped from London on the 25th of February, and was expected to arrive in Istanbul on the 15th-20th of March. Also, Musurus Pasha informed that two days after the delivery of the piano, an employee of the factory would come to assemble the piano and the accompanying equipment. Musurus Pasha added that the total amount of payment for the expenses in receipts and the shipment would be 171 English sterling, 11 shillings, and 7 pence.

12 BOA, HR.SFR 3, 11/11, (27.05.1851).

13 BOA, HR.SFR 3, 316/40 (10.03.1886).

14 BOA, HR.SFR 3, 534/3 (18.01.1903).

15 Evren Bilge Kutlay, "A Historical Case of Anglo-Ottoman Musical Interactions: The English Autopiano of Sultan Abdulhamid II," *European History Quarterly* 49, 3 (2019): 397-400; BOA, Y.PRK. ES.,A, 50/18, (H 20.01.1325 / 5 March 1907); BOA, Y.MTV, 298/3, (01.04.1325 / 1 May 1907).

5. Knowns and Unknowns About the Auto Piano of the Sultan

The most important detail in the archival documents which was missed in the previous literature is very significant and one of the new findings of the field research of this study as well. This was not an auto piano produced by Kastner & Co., but a grand auto-piano produced in the factory of a German piano company "M. F. Rachals & Co." in Hamburg.

During the field research of the project team in the Beylerbeyi Palace, the grand auto piano was examined and it's discovered that although the name of the company, Kastner & Co., was written on the front cover of the piano, Kastner & Co. did not manufacture grand auto pianos and the company was only the intermediary firm in this transaction. The name of the manufacturing company of the grand auto piano was written on the inner and front cover of the piano.

Kastner & Co., Ltd.	
THE "AUTOPIANO." THE "TRIUMPH."	
RACHALS PIANOS. ALLISON PIANOS.	
Branch Showroom:—302 REGENT STREET (Near Queen's Hall, W.) (Facing 34, 35, & 36 Margaret Street.)	
1907	
July 22	1st Autogrand £ 152. 0. 0.
	1 Ottoman stool . 2. 15. 0.
	1 Sacking case . 1. 10. 0.
	1 Music rolls . 9. 11. 1.
March 4 th	1 Freight, insurances . 6. 2. 6.
	£ 171 11 7.
"Original"	
Y.PRK.ES.A. 50/18	

2 The sales receipt of the grand auto piano in the Collection of Yildiz Palace Archives which was issued by the intermediary company Kastner & Co. The name of the manufacturer company, Rachels Piano (Company) is written on the receipt, as it is written on the user's manual.



3 Metal inner cover of the grand auto piano where the name of the manufacturer company, Rachals & Co. is written.

Although the name of M. F. Rachals & Co. was written on the receipts and the user's manual, Kastner & Co. was one of the two parties in the transaction and the drawer of all receipts, which makes the archival documents very misleading about the manufacturer of the piano.

Though Yıldız Palace had been the residence of Abdulhamid II during his reign, the auto piano is now in the Beylerbeyi Palace where the Sultan spent his last years under house arrest. But according to the palace inventory records, it's not known when and from where the auto grand piano was brought to the Beylerbeyi Palace. The piano is still on display in the grand hall with the fountain. The field research and examination of the piano confirms that this piano exactly matches with the piano in the user manual of the grand auto piano of the

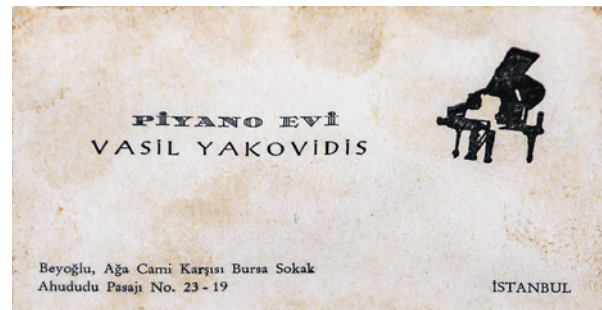
Sultan in the archival documents. So the grand auto piano of Abdulhamid II was manufactured at the factory of M. F. Rachals & Co. in Hamburg by the intermediation of Kastner & Co. in London.

The other finding of the field research in the Beylerbeyi Palace is about the care of the piano in the Republic era. A business card printed after the adoption of the Latin alphabet in 1928 which reads "Piano House of Vasil Yakovidis" was attached to the inner cover of the piano. The address of the piano house in the business card is "Beyoğlu, Ağa Camii Karşısı, Bursa Caddesi, Ahududu Pasajı, No. 23-19" and with the help and the guidance of the local shopkeepers in Galata, the project team talked to Yusuf Öğütücü, the apprentice of Vasil Yakovidis, about the service of the piano house in the Republic era.



4 Front cover of the grand auto piano where the name of the manufacturer company, Rachals & Co. and the name of the intermediary company, Kastner & Co. are written.

According to the memories of Ögütücü, many pianos were brought from the Ottoman palaces to the piano house, but he had never seen a grand auto piano in his master's workshop. Yusuf Ögütücü informed that some pianos were maintained in their places and his master, Vasil Yakovidis went to the palaces to tune and care for them, so the only grand auto piano of the Ottoman Empire must have been one of these pianos.



5 The business card of Vasil Yakovidis inside the M. F. Rachals piano who maintained the periodic care of the grand auto piano in the Republic era

Conclusion

This project is the first study that discovered the grand auto piano of Sultan Abdulhamid II in the Beylerbeyi Palace and proved that the piano in the Ottoman archival documents is not lost or vanished but was shipped to Istanbul and placed in the Ottoman palace. Visual images of the field study conducted in the Beylerbeyi Palace brought the grand auto piano to light for the first time. Also, this study which presents the grand auto piano as the unique cultural heritage of the Ottoman modernization era sheds light on an unknown period of the Ottoman cultural history hidden in the thirty music pieces recorded in the music rolls of the grand auto piano of Sultan Abdulhamid II.

This project started as a research project on pianos in the Ottoman palaces in the 19th century to match the documents in the Ottoman Archives with the pianos in the palaces. After finding the documents of the auto piano of the Sultan known as lost or vanished, the study became the project of the grand auto piano of Sultan Abdulhamid II and the music pieces recorded in its music rolls. The field research of this study gave the project team a new chance to evaluate the information in the documents with a critical approach and discover the details of the true story of the grand auto piano of the Sultan.

Stefanaki Musurus Pasha conducted the transaction process with Kastner & Co. The company was the intermediary company that bought the grand auto piano from the only manufacturer of the grand auto pianos in the early 20th century, M. F. Rachals & Co., and Kastner & Co. sold the grand auto piano to the Ottoman Sultan and shipped it to Istanbul.

It was a great pleasure for the team to discover that the precious grand auto piano of the early 20th century is neither vanished nor lost but in the Beylerbeyi Palace. Also, the field research revealed that the place of the piano was known even in the Republic era and the master of the Yakovidis Piano House, Vasil Yakovidis maintained the care of the piano in the Republic era.

The project team wants to mention special thanks to the Directorate of National Palaces Administration for the permission given for the field research, and also to the personnel of the Beylerbeyi Palace for their guidance and help during the study. The thirty music pieces recorded in the music rolls of the grand auto piano are going to be the topic of the second article of this project to examine and analyze the 19th-century imperial Western music culture in the modernization period of the Ottoman Empire.

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Appendix 1: The grand auto piano of Abdulhamid II in the Beylerbeyi Palace

