

# A Historical Look at the Development of Methods of Turkish Music Education (Transfer) in the History of World Music

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**Abstract.** The traditional method of teaching and training in Turkish music has been the system of meshk, or modeling/practicing. This system is based on the principle of repeating the performance of the teacher by the student. Teaching of religious and non-religious music has been performed through this method. In other words, the studies that have been conducted are on a practical basis and theoretical and written sources have not been used.

Traditional education and transfer method of Turkish music was effectively used until the 19.th century. Oral and instrumental works of Turkish music were memorized and they were repeated to memorize through this method (meshk). Thus, the musical works that are transferred from one generation to the other densely started to be notated from the beginning of the 18.th century.

In this study, we aimed to give information about the method of meshk which is the education and transfer method of the old samples of Turkish music and its application method in the historical process.

**Keywords:** Ottoman Music, Turkish Music, Meshk System, Education.

## 1. Introduction

The education and transfer method of Turkish music from the past to the present is the meshk system. This system is based on the principle of repeating the performance of the teacher by the student. Through this method, religious and non-religious music pieces were taught and performed. In other words, the studies related to this topic were mostly in the applications levels and no theoretical or written sources were used.

Besides music education was colloquially given in the mosques and Koran courses through the traditional methods during their Koran education, people and dervishes also learned music during and after the meeting of zikr, in the pubs and homes; music education could take place both under the control of the musicians out of the palace and those who were trained within the borders of the palace. Apart from those, some groups were traditionally famous for being musicians (abdals- a group gypsies and gypsies etc.,). Beside nomads and urban people who were trained through meshk, some slaves who are in the palace were preferred and kept in the palace since they have ability for music and dance. (Uslu 2010)

At the early and middle stages of Ottoman period, Turkish education system based on religion except some specific cases; during the final stage, it is parallel to it but mostly depends on a secular = modern education system. Thus, there was a double headed education system including a traditional and a modern one. Within the traditional education system; the education was mostly religious, indirect and traditional except military music education and civil music education institution in the palace. As for the new education system, the music education is more secular, direct and modern. In the both education system, a general, volunteer and vocational music education were given in the musical institutions and activities. (Uçan 2005)

## 2. The Method

In this study, we aimed to present information about meshk, the method to teach and transfer the old samples of Turkish music that to the present, and its application method in the historical process.

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### 3. Findings and their Interpretation

Music education is one of the topics that are frequently mentioned in different works. Music education had been given with traditional methods which is called “the meshk method” and is a form transfers from the masters to the apprentices. (Uslu 2010)

For about four hundred years, the education and applications in Turkish music were performed in accordance with the meshk system. The aim of the meshk is to transfer the music vocabulary and its transition to the next generations. In this system, there is no note based education. There isn't any note system. The method has crucial importance in the product's sticking in the mind. The meshk system is so effective and dominant that none of those systems could carve out a niche for themselves although numerous notating systems were tried throughout the history. Because, no tool or the systems could take place of meshk and memory from the point of the applicators. Music could be learned only after suffering from numerous problems for a long time. Nearly all the pieces of Turkish music were notated during the last 90-100 years. (Gerçek 2008)

Meshk is a term that the music world borrowed from the world of calligraphy and it means “the sample of writing”, “writing exercise” or “jotting down”. (Behar 1998)

Since the meshk has developed though imitating and modeling is based on the repetition (proposal), it has been effective in the transfer of music culture besides being an education system. (Pekin 1999)

Meshk is an activity that can be obtained and maintained through the relationship between “master-apprentice”. (Gedikli 1998)

Meshk is basely depended on the tradition of Ottoman-Turkish music and it occurs through “memory” rather than the existence of written documents as seen in other eastern societies. Since the Ottoman-Turkish music is basically oral due to its structure; rhythmical structure and lyrics are generally an important supplementary of the melody. (Beşiroğlu 2006)

However, (Behar) there are two main elements of meshk which are criticized today. The most important one is the problems that are encountered during the transmission/transfer of them while the other is pedagogical deficiencies. When the pedagogy is considered, it is criticized for not distinguishing repertory and technical matters. Dependency of instrumental performance to the oral works is another topic of criticism. (Behar 1998)

The meshk system has been useful in maintaining a process in education however it caused many works not being transferred to the present. It will be enough to go the place where a work is located to see it in other visual arts, but the music has an auditory aspect, this requires the written expression of any musical work. (Coşkun 2001)

Indeed, meshk is a musical learning methods which is rather easy to execute. The student is made the lyrics to be students write or a written or published magazine is used. If it is necessary, this tempo is repeated for a few times before the performance begins. Then tempo is done altogether and the teacher sings the song, the students repeat it. This continues until the hesitations and mistakes of the students are abolished. The final aim is to commit the studied song to the memories of the students. (Behar 1998)

The tempo isn't just a rhythm. It is not an indicator of a speed or tempo. The same tempo can be performed at different speeds, tempos (“degrees” in technical terms), faster or more slowly. Thus, the most important condition of memorize and remember the studied song was making meshk through beating time. (Behar 1998)

In the Ottoman world, the first recordings of meshk are seen at the beginning of the seventeenth century. For example, Evliya Çelebi who started learning music in the Palace in 1635 mentions about a nearly institutionalized system related to learning music when he tells about his life of art in the palace. According to Evliya, the Seferli Room in the Topkapı Palace where the pageboys in the palace are trained and they are given music education had the characteristics of the room for meshk. (Behar 1998)

Musical education in Enderun was carried out in great care, the youth with talent for music was determined and then they were sent to the meshk room as instrument players and vocal artists. The meshk

room was a place for musical rehearsing, it was open until evening, music including mehter music was taught by the masters using meshk. (Akdeniz 2003)

In his book called “Esatiz-i Elhan”, moreover, Rauf Yekta Bey stated that meshk and musical lessons were carried out in open places and coffee houses during the summer months with fine weather. (Yekta, 1900)

According to the information we obtained from Ali Ufki (1610?-1675), masters and pageboys of the palace sat opposite to each other in the meshk room which is open all day and performed music through beating rhythm. He also states that the members of mehter band, players of folk-songs and male dancers studied in the same meshk room. (Behar 1998)

In order to make the students store a definite repertory in a level enough to transfer to the future generations, this education process had to take long period and an artist could become a “master” only after such a long education process. Then he could start to produce his own works and perform them with accumulation that this education provides. (Beşiroğlu 1998)

During meshk, personal skill, inclination, spiritual status, and power of application of the performer has an important place. Besides, the performance may change according to the social status of the audiences or their instant demands. In other words, the product is recreated during every performance. Moreover, inclinations and the perceptions related to the basic principles of musical aesthetic change so long as the periods change. The meshk chains that provide products through harmonizing these changing inclinations may necessarily unites. Besides, all the notes available today were written with the music perception of 19.th and 20.th centuries. For that reason, no origin analysis developed in Turkish music during the mentioned period. (Kaygusuz 1999)

The Ottoman who doesn't rely on notes learned and taught the songs based on the memory and in accordance with tempo beats. After the Divan meeting, the musicians came and sat in the meshk room; pageboys also came and sat opposite the musicians. Musical works were taught through beating accompanied by the instruments or without any instruments. This room which includes numerous vocal musicians and instrument players was conducted by a chief called sazende başı (the head of musicians). (Behar 1990)

The religious music education was given in the classes of mevlevi lodges called the cells and sema room where the reciprocation is performed. (Başer 2006)

In the traditional music education, general music education was given in Sıbyan Mektepleri (primary schools) and general Medrasahs and Enderun School; volunteer music education was given in the palace, definite lodges and vocal groups or transition groups and definite mansions and in the associations during the late periods; vocational music education was given in the house for the janissary band Enderun Music School of Enderun Schools that works as a “conservatory” and Darülhüffaz and Darülkurra, in addition to definite lodges and small monasteries. (Uçan 2005)

In the New=Modern education system, the general music education was given mostly in the Junior High Schools for girls and boys teacher's training schools for girls and boys in accordance with the regulations that becomes more evident with Maarif-i Umumiye Nizamnamesi (General Legislations for Music) and in definite primary schools later on; volunteer music education was given in the mansions, music courses, and private music lessons and definite vocalizing teams; vocational music education was mostly given in Muzika-i Humayun and Darülelhan and some definite vocalizing teams and definite private music lessons. Besides, expert music trainers were invited from Europe and sending students abroad for music education were other methods. As a result of the first effort of Selim the III'rd in 1794, the first essential movements of Mahmut the II'nd in 1826 and the new regulations and applications that the later generations executed, in the whole of modernizing oriented music education and three main music types formed a significant accumulation to transfer to the Republic period. (Uçan 2005)

Within the reconstruction process just after the declaration of the Republic (1923), it was too difficult to catch the new developments in education-teaching methods for Turkish Classical Music in the official education institutions until 53 years later in 1976. Even partly, different teaching methods were seen besides the maintaining meshk system. (Kaçar 2003)

## 4. Conclusion

The education and transfer of Turkish music was mostly application based and carried out from the memory.

Since the works has been studied in the memorizing environment, written sources or documents have rarely been used.

The activities carried out related to the methodological studies for teaching method of Turkish music are also limited.

Due to the pedagogical and methodological deficiencies of the meshk system, numerous compositions of Turkish music from the past periods vanished out. The existence of those works is mentioned in the written sources, their lyrics and the life stories of their composers are mentioned but only a few of the works of that time survived since they don't have notes. In this manner, the works of many composers haven't reached to the present. This can be qualified as a lost when the lacking in the maintenance of musical structure, composition and style perception of Turkish music for the previous periods are considered.

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