

# A Review on the Robert Garfias' Lecture on Ottoman Art Music

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In this study, I reviewed Prof. Robert Garfias' lecture on Ottoman art music that it was on October 8, 2010 in Dilek Sabancı State Conservatory, Selçuk University, Konya<sup>1</sup>. He is one of the first ethnomusicologists in USA, and he is lecturer in Department of Anthropology, University of California-Irvine (UCI). He has studied on Japanese, African, Ottoman, Romanian and Asian musics and lectured them.

His lecture in Konya was mainly on the roots of Ottoman art music in Asia. Firstly, he compared to *Kopuz*<sup>2</sup> with *Oud (Ud)*<sup>3</sup>, so he tried to associate two different instruments and tried to show the roots of Ottoman art music in Asia. As well as, he was listened some of the pieces of Central Asia music. But, he did not contact between Asian and Ottoman musics. These could not be understood by participants, who are the students and the teachers of Ottoman art music, in the lecture.

In fact, there are not the roots of Ottoman art music in Central Asia music. Because, Asians and Turks were polytheistic before the ninth century. They have adopted the Islamic religion since ninth century. So Turks passed from the culture of Asia to the culture of Middle East, and they socialized with the cultures of Arab and Persia. Al-Kindi and Al-Farabi, who were Persian philosophers, begun to studied on maqam music in ninth century. Folk

music was being created by Turk and Asian musicians, as for art music was created by Arab and Persian musicians in Seljuk Empire before Ottoman Empire<sup>4-5</sup>.

Ottoman Empire was founded in the thirteenth century, and at that time it included Rome, Turk, Arab, Persia, Armenia, Greek, Jewish cultures. That is, it was a multicultural empire. So representation of Central Asian music are not clear in Ottoman art music. Therefore, the information, given by Garfias on Ottoman art music, was not based on evidence.

Secondly, he said that “Western art music was not without influences of Ottoman art music”. I think his words are a great claim. However, he tried to explained his words by some examples: According to him, the stringed instruments like violin in Western art music derived from that of Ottoman art music like *kemençe*<sup>6</sup> or *rebab*<sup>7</sup>. In another example, he compared to *çevgan*<sup>8</sup> in Mehter music with *baton*<sup>9</sup>, used by conductors, and he said that baton derived from *çevgan*. But, while he compared them, he showed no evidence about these.

He said that he had learned the information of Ottoman art music from some of the Turkish musicians like Necdet Yaşar, but he did not know that Turkish musicians of Ottoman art music have nationalist and conservative ideas. So they have talked in their ethnocentric feelings on Ottoman/Turk musics. That is, they could not evaluate music objectively.

All cultures in the world affected by a variety of relationships such as wars, trade, but all of these influences can not be proved clearly. So no one should be claimed about abstract and difficult subjects such as music. Because these ideas are not suitable for ethnomusicology.

When I considered all of his lecture, the information, by him on Ottoman music, was not completely wrong or missing, but it was inadequate, controversial and ordinary. That is, he could not emerged new information or knowledge on the topic. So we can see that his approach is not scientific, it can be only humanistic and interpretive<sup>10</sup>. He has lectured on Asian and Ottoman musics in UCI, I hope that he has not lectured to unproven information in there.

As a result, if ethnomusicologists want to research on Ottoman and Anatolian musics, they should be careful about Turkish musicians' nationalist, conservative and ethnocentric approaches. Eventually, the participants of the lecture were influenced from Garfias' words on Ottoman music as ethnocentrism.

However, if Garfias or other ethnomusicologists want to study on Ottoman music cultural, they should research a lot of the documents about the topic. But, the documents should be chosen carefully, because I examined Garfias' article, "Survivals of Turkish Characteristics in Romanian Musica Lautareasca"<sup>11</sup>, he had used Signell's book, *Makam: Modal Practice in Turkish Art Music*<sup>12</sup>, in his article. But, Signell collected information in his book by observation, interview and documents with field research in Istanbul. We can see that it is the first book on the makam music in English, but it is controversial about the maqam theory. Unfortunately, the documents are few on Ottoman and Anatolian musics in Turkish or in English.

Although Garfias have a lot of experience on ethnomusicology, I wanted to criticize him in this review article. Because his information on Ottoman art music was very poor. Also, his lecture included a comparative approach that this approach is already a violation against the scope and the formation of ethnomusicology. I see that some ethnomusicologists has not researched adequately on Ottoman and maqam music. So I hope that my assessments and suggestions are useful for ethnomusicologists.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Garfias, Robert. "On the Roots of Ottoman Music." *A lecture in Selçuk University, Dilek Sabancı State Conservatory* (October 8, 2010), Konya.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.kopuzsazevi.com/kopuz.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cankayamuzikevi.com/framesett.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Uçan, Ali. *Türk Müzik Kültürü* [Turc Music Culture]. Ankara: Evrensel Müzikevi, 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Yöre, Seyit. "Levantine Musicians in Music Culture of Ottoman/Turc." *Selçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 24 (2008): 413-437.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.kemenceviler.com/foto\\_kemence\\_1.aspx](http://www.kemenceviler.com/foto_kemence_1.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.rebab.name/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.mehterosmanli.com/cevgan.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.mollard.com/core/homepage.htm>

<sup>10</sup> See, Peoples, James and Garrick Bailey (2009). *Humanity: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology With Infotrac*. Ninth edition. USA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning.

<sup>11</sup> Garfias, Robert. "Survivals of Turkish Characteristics in Romanian Musica Lautareasca."

*Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13 (1981): 97-107.

<sup>12</sup> Signell, Karl (2004). *Makam: Modal Practice in Turkish Art Music*. USA: Da Capo Press.