SURVIVALS OF TURKISH CHARACTERISTICS IN
ROMANIAN MUSICA LAUTAREASCA

by Robert Garfias

Turkish political influence in Romania from the 16th Century until
1881 is well documented. Historical records also provide numerous
references to Turkish music in Romania, which together with certain
survivals in the form of instruments and musical forms serve to delineate
the broader outlines of the potential area of influence of Turkish music
on certain Romanian musical practices. In this presentation I shall
attempt to gather together some of the surviving historical evidence for
Turkish influence in Romania and subsequently to describe some
previously undocumented surviving musical practices.

The most tangible evidence of Turkish musical adaptation is to be
found in the life and work of the Romanian prince and scholar, Dimitrie
Cantemir who was Voievod of Moldavia under Turkish influence in 1710
and 1711. As a boy, Dimitrie Cantemir was sent to Constantinople
where he lived from 1688 to 1710 and studied, among other things, the
art music of the Ottoman Court. He became adept in the performance
of Turkish art music, composing several pieces in this genre and writing on
Turkish musical theory. His theoretical treatise as well as his composi-
tions are even today highly regarded by Turkish musicians.

There is no concrete evidence indicating how Cantemir's knowledge of
Turkish music may have been used in his Moldavian Court. We do know
that the Turkish ceremonial and quasi-military ensemble, the
metherhanea, also known as the tabulhanea or daulhanea, were in regular
use there before Cantemir's reign. In addition, the use of several instru-
ments bearing Turkish names, some even in use today in Romania, are
evidence of the continuity of this influence. Included among these instru-
ments are the caval, nei, saz, tambur, and cobza or láută.¹

Although there is no evidence that Cantemir's knowledge of the theory
and practice of Turkish music was transmitted to others in Romania,
certain practices did survive. Cantemir's work may, therefore, have been
only one part of the larger context of Turkish influence in Romania. A
couple very specific Turkish terms are still in current usage in Romania.
Caval refers to a long rim blown flute used traditionally by shepherds.
Taksim (Turkish: Taksim) is used to refer to the improvised instrumental
introduction to the recitation of the epic ballads, called balade or cintec
bâtrîneste. The word taraf is used to describe a small band of Gypsy
musicians.

In addition to the terms in current usage, there are a few additional
terms which were in use until fairly recent times. The term taikim
(Turkish: Takim) was used to describe the small Gypsy band, tradition-
ally consisting of violin; cobza, a small plucked lute; and nai, the pan
pipes. Nai is probably also a Turkish term adapted from 
*nay* or *ney*, a term used to describe the end blown flute. There is evidence however that formerly the word *moscal* or *muscal*, or earlier *fluerar* or *flueraniu*, from the Turkish *mskal*, the more correct term for the pan pipes, was in use. Moreover, there are a number of names of asymmetric dance rhythms which still bear Turkish names, such as the *Geampa(ua)* in seven beats and the *Cadin(easca)* in nine beats. These dance types are found primarily in the Danube Plains areas and in Dobrogea on the Black Sea, where Turkish cultural influence appears to have been strong, as well as Southern Moldavia.

Gypsy musicians have played a particularly important role in the preservation of surviving Turkish elements in Romanian music. Perhaps the earliest evidence documenting the existence of Gypsies in Romania is found in the monastery of Tismana, in the Gorj region of Oltenia. It is recorded here that in 1385 “40 households of Ațigani” (Gypsies) were given to the monastery. Although it is not clear exactly when the practice began, by the 16th Century Gypsies began to take up music as a profession, and were attached to the monasteries and to the courts of the Voievods and Boiers, the princes and landlords who ruled under Turkish authority. The Voievods as ruling heads of their principalities, modeled their court procedures and rituals under Byzantine as well as Turkish influence. It may be thus that knowledge of Turkish musical practices such as those associated with the *meterhanea* and *tabulhane* was absorbed by these Gypsy musicians. Many of these princes and landlords also prided themselves on their knowledge of Western manners and many began to introduce Western music or “German Music” into their courts. Gypsy slave musicians were responsible for the performance of both Turkish music, and later, European music. As the power of the Voievods and Boiers waned, and after the liberation of the Gypsies from their positions as slaves, these musicians went out among the peasants and began to adapt their music to the dances of the Romanian countryside.

Although it is not clear when the division actually began to evolve, by the early 19th Century, two distinct types of Gypsies were recognized in Romania; *nomazi*, or nomadic Gypsies; and *vătrași*, or town Gypsies. The *vătrași* were descended from the Gypsy slaves or serfs, *robi*, who were attached either to monasteries or landlords. The nomadic Gypsies continue even today to maintain traditions quite separate from the town Gypsies. These nomadic groups speak Romany rather than Romanian and have a musical tradition which bears greater similarity to the nomadic Gypsy styles of Hungary and Czechoslovakia than to the music of the urban Gypsies of Romania.

It was from the ranks of the *vătrași* or town Gypsies that the musicians who performed Turkish music in the provincial court, and who later were exposed to and adopted Western European music, came. With the waning power of the courts, these musicians saw their means of support shift to the villages and towns. They skillfully adapted their knowledge of both Turkish and Western music to the flute and bagpipe music used
for the village dances. They gradually began to replace the village pipers and flute players in providing music for village dances. The combination of Western European, Turkish, and Romanian peasant elements is what eventually evolved into the various regional folk music styles of Romania today. In addition to the regional folk music styles, Gypsy musicians, primarily in the larger urban centers like Bucharest and Craiova, began to evolve an urban Gypsy style. While drawing heavily on the local regional folk forms, this urban Gypsy music nevertheless had many unique characteristics, such as more personally expressive melismatic character, microtonal pitch modifications and frequently an intense sense of drive. This genre is generally known as muzică lăutarească, music of the lăutari. Although the term lăutar originally meant a player of the lăută or cobză, it has today come to mean essentially a violinist; and by extension Gypsy musicians, generally.

It is in the playing style of the lăutar that the greatest number of Turkish musical practices survive. A few specific Turkish theoretical terms survive in practice. In addition to the music for village dances, Lăutars were also frequently called upon to perform the cintece bătrinești or the epic ballads. It is in connection with the performance of these epics that the use of the term and concept of taxım survived as a specific Turkish form. In the year 1862, Nicolae Filimon notes that Gypsy Lăutars still referred to the pitches of the violin and cobza strings by Turkish names, Rast for G, Neva for D, Saba for A, and Neva for E.3 One further tangible bit of evidence survives exclusively in the realm of urban Gypsy music, this is the song/dance form known as maneă by Romanian Gypsies, literally “the mane,” which is derived from the Turkish form, mani. In origin, the Turkish mani is a vendor’s cry which can be mixed with words of praise for the potential buyers of the wares. It subsequently became an Anatolian folksong which was later adopted as a light classical form in Turkish music, beginning with an elaborate text, no longer related to the vendor’s text, sung in free rhythm, and followed by a continuation of the song in Duyek rhythm. The Duyek rhythm is recognized in Turkey as one frequently associated with women’s dances. Under the name Chifti-telli (Turkish: Çiftetelli) this same rhythm is associated with dances in the Balkans and, among the Gypsies in particular, as a women’s dance. Among the Gypsies of Romania, this form is referred to only as maneă and is characteristically a women’s dance, even in the modern urban context of the Gypsies of Bucharest.

From these varied bits of evidence we may piece together some aspects of the context in which Turkish music appears to have survived in Romania. The existence on Romanian soil of Turkish music such as the meterhanea as well as the existence of persons knowledgeable in the art of Turkish classical music such as Dimitrie Cantemir indicate that Turkish classical musical traditions did exist in Romania. Furthermore, the existence, until recent times, of the traditional taxım ensemble of violin, cobză and nai; the use of the taxım in the epic ballads; the use of Turkish names for the violin and cobză strings documented in the last
century; and the survival of the *manea* in the present day, are all indications that some unmistakably Turkish elements have indeed survived until very recent times. These elements serve to delineate the scope of the heterogeneous cultural context in which more intrinsic musical practices may have existed.

It is also my belief that the historically documented supporting evidence suggests that those elements of musical practice common to Romania and Turkey are more than likely of Turkish origin. It is important to stress this body of supportive evidence because, in my view, the Turkish origins of many of the elements in Romanian music have been too long overlooked.

The most conclusive confirmation of the survival of Turkish influence lies in the existing musical practices of the professional Gypsy musicians of Romania. The strongest evidence of Turkish classical music elements is to be found in the practice of techniques where are not consciously described by them as Turkish; in particular, the use of the Turkish *makam* system. For purposes of this study, fifty recorded examples were examined in order to determine modal practice. Most of the examples used in this sample were of the type known as *muzică lăutarească*. In addition, a few examples of Romanian folk music played by professional Gypsy musicians and a small number of examples of Romanian folk music played by non-Gypsies were also included. The identification of modal types suggestive of Turkish *makam* was then checked with Mr. Necdet Yaşar, a highly respected Turkish classical musician attached to the Istanbul Conservatory, and a musician recognized in Turkey for his profound knowledge of the subtleties and complexities of the Turkish *makam* system.

From this analysis, it is possible to conclude that there is a distinct and pronounced usage of the *makams* of Turkish music in Romanian music. Those *makams* most frequently encountered are Hijaz, Nikriz, and Segah. There were also some examples in this usage sampling of the *makams*: Rast, Pençgah, Karciğer, Sabă, and Hijazkâr. However, *makams* in this second group appeared with more limited frequency. In order to best consider the manner in which Turkish *makams* have been adopted into the *muzică lăutarească* style, it will be necessary to describe this genre in more detail.

It is today difficult to know with any degree of certitude what constituted the repertoire of the professional Gypsy musician of 100 years ago. We assume that they retained a knowledge of Turkish classical music along with some understanding of Western European music because the performance of these musics was a requirement at the courts of the Romanian princes and landlords. When they began to perform for the Romanian villagers, they adapted this knowledge to the regional folk music, and it is from this combination of elements that the *muzică lăutarească* evolved. Traditional Romanian folk music is characterized by a distinction between vocal and instrumental repertoires. The vocal tradition consisted largely of a lyric song form in free rhythm called *doina* (plural *doine*) and the epic ballads. The instrumental forms
were dance pieces, which varied from one region to another. In Muntenia, Oltenia, and Moldavia the most frequently encountered forms are the hora, sirba, briul, and bătuta. It is from the folk forms of these southern and eastern regions of Romania that the muzică lăutarească draws most heavily.

The spontaneous nature of Romanian village dances required that village folk musicians be prepared to extend a particular dance should the villagers desire it. This led to an informal practice of stringing together melodies of a common dance type when needed. Because of the method of oral transmission of the repertoire, some of these temporal combinations of dance melodies have, in some instances, come to be indistinguishable from those which were originally discrete melodies. This combination of different melodies in varying tonalities may have paved the way for the common practice of dance melodies to include contrasts in tonality, mode, and makam from one section to another within the single performance. This usage of contrasting tonality, mode and makam was then subsequently incorporated into the muzică lăutarească genre.

Although it is difficult to document precisely the process, the constituency of the Gypsy ensemble, or taraf, was gradually changed and modified. From the old Gypsy tacim with the violin, nai, and cobza, the taraf expanded to include the cymbalom, called tambal in Romanian, and more recently the accordion and string bass. Vocal music came to be included in the muzică lăutarească with this same ensemble being used to accompany the voice. The Romanian folk form, the doina, was modified in the music of these tarafs, but in a distinctive manner. The vocal line continued to be sung in free rhythm, but in the muzică lăutarească style, the ensemble provided an accompaniment in a fixed rhythm, usually that of a rapid hora. Many such songs could then be performed instrumentally as well, with the violin or nai taking the melodic line and with the string bass, accordion, and tambal providing the accompaniment. The cobza has virtually disappeared from the ensemble, its function being now replaced by the tambal and accordion.

The music played by the tarafs included a large number of dance pieces consisting largely of horas in a wide range of tempos, and sirbas. Many of these horas are in very rapid tempos, while others are set in the slow expressive tîitura de of, a characteristic Gypsy tempo which derives its name from the word of, an expletive sigh of anguish or sorrow frequently encountered in Gypsy songs. Although all horas are theoretically conceptualized as being in duple meter, in the tîitura de of the duple pattern is staggered in a slightly irregular pattern, ranging from 5 plus 4 to about 11 plus 9, rather than 4 plus 4. This pattern is difficult to count exactly since the subdivisions between the main pulses are not metrically subdivided. Instead the only activity between the pulses is that of melodic line in free rhythm.

One other characteristic use of the hora in the muzică lăutarească is in the medium and faster tempos. This type is known by no particular name, although it may sometimes be called hora lăutarească or hora
(iganeasca), either of which implies a hora in Gypsy style. In this type, the duple meter of the accompanying pulse is clear and fixed. The melodic line and the subdivisions of the accompaniment, however, rather than being strictly duple, that is, permutations of 8 beats or 16 beats, are in permutations of 12 beats. The effect of this rhythmic structure reminds one of the use of similar rhythmic structures in certain types of American jazz.

Gypsy musicians are quick to recognize the performances of other Gypsy musicians. They frequently comment that the expressiveness in the performance of Gypsy musicians is what most easily identifies the style. Specifically, however, some musicians point to the characteristic usage of a rich expressive vibrato not employed by non-Gypsy musicians as the main identifying quality. Since both the expressive rhythmic undulating of the voice and the use of permutations of 12 beat patterns in the dance music are to be noted in the music of the nomadic Gypsies of Romania as well as of Hungary and Czechoslovakia it may be that these are old Gypsy qualities which have been retained and integrated into the muzica lalatereasca genre.

Although much of the muzica lalatereasca repertoire of the taraf is based on the Western European major and minor, a sizeable portion draws on Turkish modal concepts. The Turkish makam system is subtle and complex and depends for its most developed manifestation on certain concepts and practices not found in European music. Like other related modal systems of India and the Middle East, the makam is defined not merely by the use of a particular scale or interval structure, but by a codification of the relationships and hierarchies between individual pitches in any given makam. Furthermore, the makam is conceptualized in Turkish theory as being made up of tetracords and pentacords and even tricords. These nuclear units help to define basic melodic direction and delineate tones to be given major emphasis. Thus, for example, it is possible to find two makams of identical interval structure, in which the first may be thought of as a structure with a lower pentacord and an upper tetracord, while the second makam invents them. In the first makam the fifth degree might be given emphasis, while in the second makam the fourth degree would receive emphasis. In this way the difference in tetracord-pentacord structure will give a different nuclear melodic character to each. While such differences do occur in the practice of European music, in the Turkish system the distinction between these two similar scale structures is important enough to warrant systematizing each into a distinct makam.

Makams may therefore best be thought of as systems in which common melodic types are formalized as units, rather than only as unique scale structures. Turkish musicians recognize, to a very minute degree, the tendency of certain pitches in makam to move in one direction or another. In this regard the Turkish system evolved the precise use of microtonal adjustments of pitch to more subtly emphasize these melodic tendencies. This practice consequently gave rise to additional makams. Thus the Turkish theoretical system requires the use
of three distinct types of sharp and three of flat. Professional musicians state that for certain makams further gradations of pitch should regularly be used.

Such microtonal gradations can find no comfortable adjustment within European traditions; and although the recognition of different pitch values and tetracord structures is, in theory, possible in the European tradition, they do not exist in a formalized or conscious system. The intriguing problem faced by the Romanian Gypsy musicians of perhaps some two hundred years ago would have been to reconcile these contrasting aesthetic value systems. It is not possible to identify in the muzică lăutarească of today examples of performances which would meet all the criteria of excellence from the perspective of the Turkish classical music system. Yet many of the elements of the Romanian tradition clearly owe their inspiration to the makam concept. In the process of developing this new genre, these Romanian musicians either gradually simplified some of the exacting requirements of the makam system, or never adopted them.

Hijaz is the makam type most frequently encountered in the muzică lăutarească. It is noteworthy that among Turkish musicians hijaz is often referred to as the Gypsy makam. Romanian musicians make no use of the word hijaz, nor for that matter, the names of any of the other makams.

In the Turkish system there are, in fact, four different types of hijaz. These are hijaz, hümayun, uzzal, and zirgiile. (See Example One). All four of these variants of hijaz are frequently encountered in the muzică lăutarească. Because of the requirement of playing this music on instruments, some of which are tuned to European scale, all those pitches either four commas sharp or flat in the Turkish intonation are substituted by the tempered sharp and flat equivalents. In some performances the melody in the Romanian music may move from one hijaz type to another. One example of this will suffice to illustrate the use of hijaz. (See Example Two, Hora de dimineața: as played by Ilie Udila).

Nikriz appears almost as frequently as do makams of the hijaz type. Nikriz, like hijaz, tends to be employed as a scale type without use of any characteristic Turkish melodic patterns. However, certain makams used in Romanian music suggest that more than the scale structure of the Turkish form has been retained. This can be noted in the use of makams which are composites of more than one original makam. Segah, a frequently used makam, can be modified by the addition of a cadence or finalis pattern on Rast. This combination of the use of Segah with the cadential pattern of Rast is recognized as a new makam in the Turkish system and is known as Sazkâr (See Example Three). Romanian examples which follow the basic principle of Sazkâr occur in sufficiently clear practice to suggest that they were not the result of accident (See Example Four: Hora lui Boldenilor, as played by Florea Cioaca). The precise use of pitch in minute subdivisions is an important aspect of the Turkish system. Yet, the muzică lăutarească style is firmly based in the Western tempered system. The accordion and tambal are tuned to
Example One. Hijaz Makam.

![Hijaz Music Notation]

Humayun

![Humayun Music Notation]

Uzzal

![Uzzal Music Notation]

Zirgule

![Zirgule Music Notation]

Accidentals used for Turkish makams:

One Comma Sharp: ♫  Four Commas Sharp: ♪  Five Commas Sharp: ♫

One Comma Flat: ♪  Four Commas Flat: ♬  Five Commas Flat: ♬


Example Two. Use of Hijaz. (Humayun), Hora de Dimineța, as played by Ilie Udila.

![Phrase One]

Phrase one

![Phrase Two]

Phrase two
Example Three.

Example Four. Sazkār. Hora Lui Boldenilor, as played by Florea Cioaca.

match standard Western pitch; and this then serves to provide the repertoire of pitches available for the other instruments as well. There are, however, a few instances in which, in an apparent attempt to retain the essential characteristics of the original Turkish makam, microtonal variants of Western standard pitch are incorporated into the performance. In these instances, the soloist incorporates the microtonal modification into the melodic line while the accompaniment continues in tempered pitches.

Example Five. Dūgah/Sabā. Cintec La Masa Mare, as played by Aurel Gore.

Dūgah/Sabā at pitch of transcription.
In a piece entitled Cîntec la masă mare, Song for a Wedding Banquet, the violinist, Aurel Gore, executes an example of the makam dügah which is correct even to the occasional use of the second degree played two commas flat (See Example Five: Cîntec la masă mare, Aurel Gore). Examples like this suggest that in spite of the loss of specific makam terminology, Romanian musicians have succeeded in preserving many of the salient characteristics of particular makams even when this has required moving considerably beyond the accepted limits of the European system.

Specific Turkish melodies may yet survive in the Romanian Gypsy tradition, but these are rare. In the recorded performance of Hora lui Băică by Florea Cioacă, the Turkish musician Necdet Yaşar recognized one section as a famous Aranağme, an instrumental interlude in the makam hijazkâr. Others may exist but will present difficulties in identification. The current Romanian practice of obliging musicians to omit the names of composers on recordings of folk music makes it difficult to identify properly the origins of a great body of known traditional compositions. The performing musicians, quite often, know the names of the original composers of a sizeable body of the repertoire, but this information has not been documented in any way.

Equally perplexing is the fact that much of the discussion has tended to suggest that the major source of Turkish influence dates back to the period of Ottoman influence in Romania, yet there is little definitely to preclude the possibility of sporadic but continued contact and influence. The tendency to use makams now associated in Turkey with later light classical forms and such forms as the manea suggest that contact may have, in fact, continued after the Ottoman rule. There may be a continuing practice here: many Gypsy musicians admit to listening to Radio Ankara and even to borrowing current Turkish melodies for adaptation into the muzică lăutarească.

While it may not be accurate to describe the practice of Romanian Gypsy musicians as Turkish in essence, it is clear that we can trace the origin of certain unmistakable performance elements to Turkish practice. These professional Romanian musicians have made a virtue of the necessity for survival and as a result, have successfully forged a musical style which represents a vital and characteristically Romanian amalgam of Western European, Turkish classical, and Romanian folk elements.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


FOOTNOTES

1. Turkish terms used will be given in their Romanian forms throughout this work unless otherwise specified.


6. One example, Cintec La Masa Mare, played by Aurel Gore, was measured by means of a Gentle Electric Pitch Envelope Follower, Model 101 and transcribed on a Gould, 3 Channel Strip Chart recorder, Brush 2400. The results showed a ratio of long to short beat averaging .75 but ranging from .73 to .80 roughly equivalent in range of metric division of from 4 plus 3, 21 plus 16 to 5 plus 4. These ratios are only possible points of reference for approximating the potential metric divisions. In this performance, as in others of this type, there is little to suggest that the rhythm is in fact based on the two lower number ratios. Instead, the metric imbalance shifts slightly, but constantly, and only at times touching on the lower ratios.

7. Turkish theory indicates that the second degree in Dughah or Sabă should be one common flat. Necdet Yaşar, however, insists that most good classical Turkish musicians always correctly play this two commas flat.