



Ensemble Marâghî

Sounds from the *Seray*

The Young Bobowski at the Ottoman Court in 17th Century

Cover Caption: Gentile Bellini (Venice, 1429-1507) ‘Seated Scribe’ probably painted in Constantinople between 1479 and 1480. On the right an inscription in Persian declares: ‘*amal-i ibn-i Mu‘azzin ki az ustâdân-i mashhûr-i firang-ast*’ (‘The work of ibn-i Mu‘azzin, who is among the well-known masters of Europe’). In our very personal interpretation, this image depicts the young Bobowski transcribing the melodies he was listening to at the *Seray*.

All tracks by Unknown composers, transcribed from a manuscript held at the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale (F BnF Turc 292).

Ensemble Marâghî

Stefano Albarello: plucked zithers *qânûn*, *cânon*; long necked lutes *tanbûr*, *setâr*, *cura saz*

Giovanni De Zorzi: flute *ney*

Fabio Tricomi: frame drums *daf*, *zilli def*, *bendir*; goblet drum *zarb* or *tombak*; tympani *kûdûm*; cymbals *zil*

Recorded in Bologna and Monghidoro (BO) between 2018 and 2020.

Recording producer, editing and mastering: Stefano Albarello.

This recording presents a selection from a manuscript that Bobowski, toward the end of his life, dispatched with an embassy from Constantinople to Paris, nowadays conserved at the Paris Bibliothèque Nationale (F BnF Turc 292). The manuscript is mostly made of musical compositions that the young Bobowski learned and transcribed in Western notation, as a memory aid, when he was serving as a music pageboy (*içoğlan*) at the Ottoman court, the *Seray*, in the second half of 17th century.

These succinct lines conceals an adventurous history: Wojchiech Bobowski (1610? – ca. 1675) *alias* Albertus Bobovius Leopopolitanus *alias* ‘Ali Ufukî Bey *alias* ‘Ali Beg el-santûrî cymbalista is a multi-faceted author born in Bobowa, not far from the bigger and better known city of L’viv/Lwów (Leopolis), which in his day were both part of the vast Ottoman empire. According to his scarce biographical news, in his youth he was allegedly taken prisoner by Tatar marauds and sold at the slave market in Constantinople, the capital of the empire. Here he was ‘purchased’ by the Ottoman court and took at the Palace (*seray*) where he served for some years as a pageboy (*içoğlan*) ‘with the office of music’, as he wrote later, probably as a player of the hammered zither *santûr*, as we can assume from the signature ‘Ali Beg el-santûrî cymbalista on the first page of another manuscript, the Sloane 3114 held in London (see further).

Having left the *seray*, he then made a brilliant career as a writer and official translator (dragoman, from the Ottoman *tercuman*) rather than as a musician: in this sense his considerable knowledge of languages (Latin, Arabic, Polish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian and Ottoman-Turkish) made him a cultural bridge between European capitals and Constantinople, as well as between the Ottoman court and the many foreign embassies in the city. His first work, the *seray-i enderûn* (‘The inner parts of the Palace’) was a sort of a bestseller translated in many European languages, because he shared light, for the first time, on the life at the Ottoman Court for the curious Western readers. This first work opened a long list of works that he wrote himself or translated. Among the latter stands out a translation of the Bible into the Ottoman language, of reference until recent times, as well as the adaptation of the Calvinist choral Psalms according to the Ottoman art music (*maqâm*) in that particular work that is the *mezamir*, or, in Ottoman, the *mezâmîrlar*, studied today as the oldest record of the Geneva Psalter.

After such a career, towards the end of his life he entrusted ambassadors with the only two copies of his precious musical notebooks composed in his youth in different inks and languages. The two small books reached safely their destination and are still preserved today in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (F BnF Turc 292), our source for this recording, and in the British Library in London (GB Lbl Sloane 3114) under the title of *mecmû 'a-i saz ü söz* ('Miscellaneous Collection of instrumental and Vocal Pieces'). The two manuscripts differ slightly from each other and at this point, after many words, we can point out that we recorded the *unica*, i.e. the compositions that we find *only* in the Paris manuscript and that are absent from the London one. The compositions were transposed into modern Western staff notation by Stefano Albarello and, as far as we know, were never recorded before: in this reside, dear reader, the precious value of this recording.

Overall, the two Paris and London manuscripts are a precious source of information about the music of the epoch and, in a sense, of the period between the end of the 16th and first half of the 17th century itself, since they collect pieces that were already considered 'classics' at the time. Unlike successive collections dedicated *only* to Art music made by authors as Dimitrie Cantemir, between 1700 and 1703, Kevserî, between 1720 and 1740, Hampartzum Limonciyan, at the beginning of 19th century, Bobowski didn't made a 'selection' of Art music pieces but, rather, transcribed *all* the musical compositions he listened to: religious genres, such as calls to prayer (*ezan*) and dervishes' repertoires (*ilâhi, tevşih*), folk songs (*türku*) and light urban or dance genres, in a sort of an 'open approach' of an *ante litteram* ethnomusicologist. Moreover, the Paris manuscript goes beyond mere Ottoman music and comprises many other 'genres', as cooking recipes, herbal remedies for diseases, *cantate* by Heinrich Albert (1604-1651), two compositions in French and English, lute and guitar tablatures or poetical texts (mainly from Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme Liberata*) in different papers, inks and handwritings that still constitute a mystery and, therefore, continue to draw us towards the manuscript itself and its author, the mysterious, elusive and fascinating Bobowski.

Notes from the *Seray-i Enderûn*

The young Bobowski, in its first work, the *Seray-i Enderûn* (1665), soon translated into the major European languages, describes his working environment and gives us the opportunity to reflect on some valuable terms and concepts:

Mescanè is properly the chamber for the practice of music; it is open during the day until the evening, in this chamber musicians practice (...): once the Diuan is over, the masters come and sit in the Mescanè; the pages also come from various chambers and sit in front of their masters, now in solo voice, now in company: the most grateful music for them is the *ripiena*.¹

Every Tuesday, when the Great Lord shaves his head, the musicians of the chamber sing in his presence, and sometimes the Great Lord has Dames into his room. At this time, the musicians wrap a cloth around their heads, so that they remain without light, and so blindfolded they sing and play, even more so with their heads bowed, and if any one shows his head raised, the Eunuchs give him a punch on the neck, two of them standing with their bows outstretched in the act of shooting in case anyone should want to aim at the aforesaid Ladies.²

All music is learnt by mind, and it is miraculous for them to write it down: when I had my lessons I wrote them down so as not to forget them; the Turkish masters seeing that virtue in me, regarded me highly: I was made *herbasci*, master of the choir, the other pages, who easily forgot, came to beg me to refresh their memories of the sonatas and

¹ I translate into English from Cornelio Magni, *Quanto di più curioso e vago ha potuto raccorre Cornelio Magni nel primo biennio da esso consumato in viaggi e dimore per la Turchia. Resta distribuito in questa Prima parte in varie lettere scritte in Italia, le quali principalmente includono l'esame della metropoli di Costantinopoli, de' luoghi soggiacenti e dell'esercito Ottomano, sì in marcia, come in campo. Dedicata all'inclita città di Parma sua patria. Aggiuntavi la relazione del Serraglio del Gran Signore, e delle parti più recondite di esso, distesa da Alberto Bobouio Leopolitano trattenutosi con nome di Bey in qualità di paggio*, Parma, Rosati, 1679: 550-551.

² Magni, 1679: 554.

cantatas, which they thanked me for doing, or rather they wanted me to teach them the way of writing, excusing myself by saying that it was a long and difficult art; I aspired to nothing else but freedom, so I tried to avoid all delays.³

It remains a mystery whether Bobowski studied music as a child, before being taken prisoner by the Tatars and sold at the Constantinople slave market, as in the current scholar's theories, or whether he was trained by a mysterious Genoese present at the Seraglio, as might be implied by the hint *a tempo mio il mastro fù Genoese rinegato* ('in my time the master was Genoese renegade').⁴ This is certainly not the only mystery of our fascinating Bobowski/Bobovius/'Ali ufukî.

On our 'Nor Eastern, nor Western' musical interpretation

In a beautiful and very famous *ghazal* from his *Divân-i Shams-i Tabrîz*, Mevlânâ Jalâl ud-Dîn Rûmî (1207-1273), in Reynold A. Nicholson English translations, sings: *I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea (...) I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of Saqsîn*. Similarly, our musical interpretation: we *are not* playing as nowadays Turk musicians would do; Bobowski for each title indicate the *maqâm* but he marks the notes with the Western alterations in flat (*b*) and sharp (*#*) not using, of course, modern Turkish music alterations. In our interpretation we are trying to combine *maqâm* with a musical temperament 'nor Eastern, nor Western', which should reflect the performance practice of his times. In this sense our cover image, made by a Venetian painter during his residence in Constantinople, reflects our approach.

³ Magni, 1679: 551-552.

⁴ Magni, 1679: 550.

The Single Tracks

01. Nevruz Acem Peşrevi (Newruz agem peshrewi, ms Turc 292 f 284r)*

Our journey begins with a prelude composed in the musical mode (*maqâm*) *acem* and in rhythmic cycle (*usûl*) *bereşan* in 16/4. The Persian term *pishrow* means ‘prelude, preamble’ and we can infer from its meaning that its original function was the ‘opening’ of a suite. The term *Nevruz* indicates the Spring Equinox, which is the beginning of the New Year according to Persian calendar.

02. Semâ’î Nevâ (Semay newa ms Turc 292 f 234v)*

The term *semâ’î* indicates a whole family of rhythms mostly in 6/4, 6/8, as in our case, or 10/8 always connected to the dance. The genre may be purely instrumental or vocal and instrumental. According to musicologist Walter Feldman, the term evoke dervishes *samâ’* (‘listening, spiritual concert’) and their ecstatic whirling movements.

03. Peşrev Lâl Pâre maqâm nîkrîz, usûl bereşan (Peşrev Lâl pâre makam nîkriz usûl bereşan ms Turc 292, f 282r)*

Another prelude, in this case composed in the musical mode (*maqâm*) *nîkrîz* and in rhythmic cycle (*usûl*) *bereşan* in 16/4. The particular term *lal pâre* means ‘garnet fragment’ hence, maybe, the preciousness of this tune.

04. Semâ’î Nîkrîz (Semai Nigris, f 288)*

Another dancing tune in 6/8, this time in *maqâm nîkrîz*. Worthy of note the traces of polyphonic voicing (far from Ottoman standards, and near to European ones) we find in the refrain.

05. Şehriyârî usûl darbeyn sakil ve düyek (Şehriyâri darbayen sakil ve düyek, ms Turc 292 f 234v)*

The title of this tune means, enigmatically, ‘regal, royal’ but its peculiarity is the shifting of its rhythmic cycles (*usûl darbeyn*) from the initial *sakil*, in 8/4, to the following *düyek* in 8/8. In this sense this tune belongs to the genre of the so-called *değişmeli* (‘changeable’) compositions that may change modes and/or rhythmic cycles.

06. Nişabur Semâ'î (Nişabur semai, ms Turc 292, f 234v)*

Again a dancing tune in 6/8. The name of this mode came from the Persian city of Nişapur, in nowadays North Western Iran, which was an important cultural centre from 11th century onwards.

07. Peşrev Ramâzânî usûl-i muhammes (Peşrev Ramazâni usûl-i muhammes, ms Turc 292 f 134r)*

Another prelude, this time in rhythmic cycle *muhammes* (32/4). The name *Ramâzânî* may suggest that it was performed during the Islamic lunar month of *ramadhan*, marked by the fasting of the Islamic community. Hence its character (*ethos*) austere but poetical and fascinating.

08. Semâ'î (Semai, ms Turc 292 f 285v)*

Another light and dancing *semâ'î* this time marked explicitly as a Yürük Semâ'î (6/8). In our arrangement we created a rhythmic/melodic pattern in *ostinato* for a brief central (*ara*) *taksîm* ('improvisation') by the flute *ney ad libitum*.

09. Pençgâh düyek (Pencigia duwek, ms Turc 292 f 224v)*

A composition in the ancient mode Pençgâh, as it suggests its Persian name literally meaning 'fifth position'. The structure is one of the more symmetrical of this recording: first *stanza* (*hâne*), refrain (*mîlazime*); second *stanza*, refrain; third *stanza*, refrain; fourth *stanza* and last, closing, refrain.

10. Untitled in 5/4 (ms Turc 292 ff. 74v – 75r)

We arrive here to the strangest tunes of our recording, untitled, and in rhythmic cycle *zefer*. Its very dynamic character and some of its melodic phrases suggests a Folk (*halk*) dance tune from the Anatolian area.

11. Semâ'î Rast Pençgâh (Semai rast pençgâh, ms Turc 292 f 293v)*

A light and poetical *semâ'î* composed in the not so common musical mode of *rast pençgâh*. The structure is: first *stanza* (*hâne*), refrain (*mîlazime*); second *stanza*, refrain; third *stanza*, refrain.

12. Peşrev-i sakil (Peshrew-i Sakil, ms Turc 292 ff 2r – 3v)

A long and slow *peşrev* in musical mode *segâh*, a mode well known for its austere character, on the slow and ancient rhythmic cycle *sakil*, already described by al-Fârâbî in 10th century. Bobowski placed at the beginning an indication in Italian language: *qui in più luoghi ogni dodece battute cadenza maggior*, ‘here every twelve bars (make) a music cadenza’. This indication made us wonder if in 17th century it was common to insert improvised cadences in a genre that, nowadays, is considered a serious and ‘closed’ form to be performed from the beginning to the end without improvised insertions.

13. Semâ‘î segâh (Semai segâh, ms Turc 292 f 292r)

Such a serious *peşrev* is followed by a lighter and long *semâ‘î* in *maqâm segâh* and in rhythmic cycle *yürük semâ‘î* (6/8).

14. Murabbâ ‘Gel Benim Nazh Yârim Gel’ (Murabba – Gel benim nazh yarim, ms Turc 292 f 298v)*

Introduced by a short descending *ney taksîm*, we arrives here to a *murabbâ*, an ancient term denoting at the same time a musical and a poetical genre. Of course a *murabbâ* is a vocal genre mostly in 4/4 that, due to pandemic, we performed without a singer in a purely instrumental version. The opening verse recite: ‘Come lovely friend, come to me’.

15. Türkî Har Cuy (Turchy har cuy, ms Turc 292 f 74r)

According to our friend turcologist Giampiero Bellingeri, whom we thank for his kind linguistic advice during the writing of this booklet, this title should be translated as: ‘Ubiquitous Turkish Vagabond’ and, in a sense, our journey ends with a wandering and a new beginning in *yürük semâ‘î* (6/8).

* Titles in brackets report the original titles in Turc 292 manuscript which resents of Bobowski multilingualism; the titles are followed by the number of the folio (f), specifying if *recto* (r) or *verso* (v).

Bios

Stefano Albarello deals with Early music and studies 'on the field', in first person, the singing practice as well as the performance practice on historical string instruments, Western and Eastern. During a long career, he performed as a soloist and director of ensembles all over the world. He recorded with many international labels and has published articles and essays on Middle Age and Renaissance music. He is currently an adjunct professor at the University of Parma, while he continues an intense activity of recording producer for many important international labels of classical music.

Giovanni De Zorzi (PhD) is Ethnomusicology professor at the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. He plays the *ney* flute of the Ottoman typology as a soloist or with the *Ensemble Marâghî* he founded in 2008. Among his recordings: *Anwâr. From Samarqand to Constantinople on the Footsteps of Marâghî* (Felmay, 2010) followed by six CD-books of the *Ensemble Bîrûn* directed by his master, Kudsi Erguner. Among his monographs: *Musiche di Turchia. Tradizioni e Transiti tra Oriente ed Occidente* (2010); *maqâm. Percorsi tra le musiche d'arte in area mediorientale e centroasiatica* (2019). *Introduzione alle musiche del mondo islamico* (2021); *samâ'. L'ascolto e il concerto spirituale nella tradizione sufi* (2021).

Fabio Tricomi is a musician and an ethnomusicologist; born in Catania, Sicily, since 1983 he dedicated to the research and documentation of the musical aspects related to the Sicilian tradition. Direct experience with the traditional musicians of his region and, later, to the Middle East and Persian area, led him to deepen the research, both theoretical and practical, of techniques and playing styles on various instruments pertaining to agro-pastoral and Art music. He has published several writings on music from the oral tradition, the Middle Age music and numerous CDs. In parallel he teaches and performs concerts as a soloist and with various ensembles in major festivals.

Giovanni De Zorzi



The *Ensemble Marâghî* in performance at the Teatrino di Palazzo Grassi.
Photo by Michele Crosera, by kind permission of the Foundation Theatre La Fenice ©



The *Ensemble Marâghî* in performance at the Teatrino di Palazzo Grassi seen from afar.
Photo by Michele Crosera, by kind permission of the Foundation Theatre La Fenice ©

233

Handwritten musical score for Semâ'î Nevâ. The score is written on five staves. The top staff contains the title and some introductory text. The second staff contains the main melody, and the subsequent staves contain accompaniment. The score is written in a mix of Arabic and Latin characters.

Handwritten text in Arabic script:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
 يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوْمُ
 يَا دِيْنُ يَا دِيْنُ
 يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوْمُ
 يَا دِيْنُ يَا دِيْنُ
 يَا حَيُّ يَا قَيُّوْمُ
 يَا دِيْنُ يَا دِيْنُ

Handwritten text in Latin script:

Handwritten musical notation on five staves.

The original score of Semâ'î Nevâ (Semay newa ms Turc 292 f 234v)

234

Handwritten musical score for Nevruz Acem Peşrevi. The score is written on five staves. The top staff contains the title and some introductory text. The second staff contains the main melody, and the subsequent staves contain accompaniment. The score is written in a mix of Arabic and Latin characters.

Handwritten text in Arabic script:

Handwritten musical notation on five staves.

The original score of Nevruz Acem Peşrevi (Newruz aqem peshrewi, ms Turc 292 f 284r)