

## Byzantine Music as an Expression of Eastern Liturgy

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### **1. Introduction**

Byzantine Music and its natural precursor “the concept of melody construction or melody organization” reflect the general attitude of Byzantine Culture towards artistic productions. Taking its conception basing on the Platonic and Neoplatonic thoughts, keeping their roots in Ancient Greek Culture; the Byzantine art can be identified as a mirror used for reflecting the “Divine Beauty” to inspire the “inhabitants” of the world by enabling them to meet with the celestial signs. Thus, an artist could follow his own imagination only up to an extent during the artistic works; because he had to construct his work basing on the previously designed patterns of the immutable visual and audio features assigned by the higher ranks of celestial hierarchy. In spite of the thoughts of many authors, identifying this situation of artistic work as a sign of lack of imagination or of creative sterility; this can also be identified as an eastern style of melody production based on the melodic patterns reflecting the cultural characteristics of a specific geography. These melodic patterns or formulas are called as “*echos*” in Byzantine Liturgy and they are very parallel to the initial building blocks of “*makam theory*” in Anatolian Music Culture, which stands as the main melody production tool in this geography. As an addition to this musical connection of Byzantine Culture to the Anatolian Culture, there are also undeniable resemblances in the side of the belief theory of Byzantine World and the Islamic Heterodoxy. Despite of all the discussions about the religious permissibility of arts and music through the world of medieval Islamic Orthodoxy, Islamic Heterodoxy, configured music as one of the bases for its liturgy system. “Tasavvuf Beliefs” constructing the basic framework of Islamic Heterodoxy puts very strong emphasis on the aspect of “Divine Beauty”; deriving from Platonic and Neoplatonic theories of Ancient Greece; similar to the Byzantine Liturgy. The Divine Beauty; is reflected and viewed by the souls in a way that its virtue can neither be reasoned by the human thoughts and nor be identified by the human intelligence. The human thoughts which are authorized to carry out deductions through the material based

world can not find a pathway to reach to the spiritual world and thus misses to obtain the possible opportunities to search for the secrets of this divine land. The lovers who are viewing the transfiguration of this divine beauty deserve spiritual ecstasy and *sema*<sup>563</sup> with respect to their celestial ranks. Every beauty and every beloved creature carries signs from the God's magnificent beauty and grace and also drops from the sea of generosity of God. This approach coincides perfectly with the mission of Islam and especially Anatolian Tasavvuf of searching for the Beauty of God in every tiny space of the nature and in every created living organism. So this study will concentrate on two genres of Anatolian based religious music which had experienced a similar way of theological motivation of manifest based on the belief of "Divine Beauty" and sharing the mission of identifying music as the premier organization to confront this "Divine Beauty" with the creatures of the world, in a differentiable extent changing with respect to the celestial ranking of the creature. This common theological background is even more supported with the traditional melody production tools of these cultures namely echos and makams which are very parallel and complementary in theory, history and function reflecting the common cultural choices of Anatolian Culture.

## **2. Byzantine Music as a Function of Byzantine Art Concept**

From today's point of view, according to many scholars; two main identifying characteristics can be assigned to the Byzantine Music. First of all it is a medieval religious music that should be researched as a traditional music that is produced through the use of some definite structures and transmitted until today mainly based on memory culture with the assistance of written material and second it is a cultural identity belonging to "eastern culture" just as Byzantine Culture itself and thus should be researched, identified and classified within the norms of the eastern music culture. So very naturally, lack of consideration of these two characteristics lead to two important common biases during the studies about Byzantine Music; approaching the case using current aesthetic norms and a western point of view(Wellezs, 1947). In order to analyze

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<sup>563</sup> Sema is based on the thought of perceiving the inner meanings of all the creatures through a reasoning system based on music and dance as the main expressional and sensational structures (Uludağ, 2004).

the Byzantine Music within the required depth and scope, the research should be initiated with a look to the concept of “art” in Byzantine period. As Wellezs stated (1947):

“The Byzantine conception of art is based upon the Platonic and Neoplatonic thoughts adapted to Orthodox Theology by Denys the Areopagite. According to this conception, the work of art belongs to the world of appearances. It is a projection of the Reality which is audible and visible only to the higher ranks of the celestial hierarchy. But through them the reflection of the Divine Beauty is transmitted to the lower ranks and from them to the prophets, the saints and the inspired artists, who, in a state of vision, paint an icon or compose a hymn.”

It is a quite obvious fact that; the thoughts about music proposed by the Islam Philosophers are mostly transferred from previous civilizations sharing the same geography with Islam. The Old Mesopotamian Culture, Egypt Culture and the Ancient Greek Culture are three obvious sources where the Islam had constructed her foundations (Çetinkaya, 2001). As T.J De Boer stated (1960), astrology and the wisdom of the east had brought a considerable amount of material to the Islam Philosophers. But the principle had been acquired from Ancient Greece through the effect of Neo-Platonism basing on Platonism and the thoughts of Pythagoras. The close geographical relation of the Arabs with the Christian belief centers in general and with Christian Nasturi and Yakubi Monasteries of Syria and Iran in specific through conquests, seems to be a main key for understanding such an effect. In these centers the Ancient Greek work of arts that had been adapted to Christianity were being translated to Syriac which is a very similar language to Arabic. So these writings were very close to the Islamic Culture physically and very understandable in linguistics since then. Of course a thing that should not be forgotten is the culture that prepared the mould mixing the Ancient Greek with Christianity and fed it to the geography of the near east: The Byzantine...Byzantine Culture had been basing on two main roots namely as Christianity and Ancient Greece Culture; the latter is taken as an heritage by Islam in shaping “Tasavvuf” beliefs which had formed the floor where the Islamic Heterodoxy had been developed. The

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concentration now will be directed to this heritage interestingly shared between Christian Orthodoxy and Islamic Heterodoxy.

## **2. Tasavvuf and Ancient Greece: The trace of the heritage**

Other than being one of the main sources of Byzantine Art; the Neo-Platonism; a new interpretation of Platonism; seems to be one of the bases of art view of İslam Tasavvuf, which has shaped up Islamic Heterodoxy. According to Platonius (204-270 A.C.), the founder of Neo-Platonism; the lofty source of the universe is a “unity”. This unity is far away from multiplicity, it is neither altered nor transfigured; it is pure and unique. Being above any consciousness, it stands as the object of a longing desire for its purity. According to Platonius, the universe stands as a reflection or a “copy “of this unity. The art has the power of copying, imitating and reflecting the objects, shaping them with its “form” characteristics to introduce the traces of this unity to the universe again. This situation brings us back again to the statement which is used to describe the purpose of the Byzantine Art.

“The Byzantine Art is a pure Christian art and completely functional. All the art structures found in the liturgical level are tools to initiate a spiritual dialogue with the parish by means of effecting and preparing them for the liturgy. Icons make the mediation between the God and the human beings.” (Akyürek, 1997).

The Byzantine Art confronts the holy with the human being, through an abstraction excluding the realism. What is aimed is to share a spiritual reality symbolized by two dimensioned images pointing to infinity in time and space with people (Brown, 2000). This resembles very much to the two dimensioned and non-perspective structure of Islamic Painting (Güray and Gezek, 2003).

Platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophies have especially affected İslam Tasavvuf through *Ihvan-i Safa*, a philosophy school which had interpreted these thoughts through an Islamic point of view (Çetinkaya, 2001). According to *Ihvan-i Safa*, the human being

resembles the creator or the macro cosmos in an extent related to his spiritual power. An act of music creation is a repetition or a model of the “creation process” of the creator. Thus the created object here is also blessed through the reflection of the “real creator and the real act of creation” within this micro organization (Eliade, 1994). This leads us to the manifest that the entire universe is purely a repetition of a creation process initiated through the single creating energy. The inference of this thought on the Anatolian or Turkish-Islamic Tasavvuf taking its roots from the main branch of Islam Tasavvuf and being fed up with early-Turkish and Anatolian belief systems; is to identify the created as a transfiguration of the creator. The last stage of this belief organization classifying the creator and the created within the same unity is the convulsive phrase of “Enelhak” meaning “I am the creator, the only reality... (Başgöz, 2003)”

### **3. Conclusion**

As it should be obvious through out all these discussions that the two Anatolian belief systems; Byzantine Liturgy and Islam-Anatolian Tasavvuf which shaped up the Islamic Heterodoxy to a great extent; are taking their roots from a common cultural heritage. The layers of this cultural heritage go back to Early Mesopotamian Belief Systems, to Ancient Greece and to the early Turkish and Anatolian Belief Systems. Combining and classifying the systems of *Byzantine Liturgy and Islam-Anatolian Tasavvuf* under the heading of “*Eastern Liturgy Systems*” will give the researchers a great chance of examining these common cultural roots. In a land like Anatolia which is deep in history and culturally scattered in geography, trying to search for the common themes will give more valuable and consistent results when compared to the efforts of researching the differences...The themes uniting us are much more and stronger than the themes separating us...

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