

***Alla Turca*, the Origin of the Main Percussion Instruments in Symphony Orchestras and the Romanian Principalities**

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Abstract: *Alla turca*, percussion instruments of a symphony orchestra and the Romanian Principalities are, at first glance, a strange and inappropriate combination of words. Yet, if one goes deeper into the subject, one may easily find a silver thread running through them all, which facilitates the understanding of these combinations of words and especially the reason for their combination. In this case, the culture of mobility is extremely visible and interesting. *Alla turca* was a cultural phenomenon specific to Western Europe since the 17th century, which was due to the interest shown by Europeans in the oriental culture gradually brought to Europe by the Ottomans. The increasingly powerful Ottoman Empire, its incursions towards the West and frequent military, diplomatic and cultural contacts piqued the Europeans' interest in the exoticism of the new world with which they came in contact, music being one of the main areas of influence. This is due to Ottoman military music (mehterhane), consisting mainly of percussion musical instruments, which produced extremely loud music accompanying the Ottoman armies on the battlefield and supporting the efforts of the soldiers through its marches. At the same time, the effect of this music on their opponents was the complete opposite, as they were not used to such sonorities and were easily intimidated by it. The effectiveness of Ottoman military music proven on the battlefield and its physical appearance impressed the European monarchs who tried to imitate it in various forms and by various methods and implement it both in their armies and in their ceremonial music, as a symbol of political power, since the mehterhane was also a powerful political symbol in the Ottoman Empire. Starting from here, various European composers, the most important being Mozart, were also influenced by the exotic features of this music and by its novelty and used it in their own creations, at first playing it using Western musical instruments and then gradually adopting in the orchestra instruments specific to mehterhane, the so-called "Turkish drums", thus developing the symphony orchestra to the form in which it is present today. As far as the Romanian Principalities are concerned, their connection with the elements mentioned above consists precisely in the fact that their geo-political location allowed the contact between the West and the East and the occurrence of *alla turca* influences, since the mehterhane had been present in the Romanian Principalities since the 15th century and foreign Western travellers crossing these regions listened to it and described it in their memoirs, making it known to the West, its most important promoter being Franz Joseph Sulzer.

Keywords: *alla turca*; *mehterhane*; percussion instruments; Romanian Principalities; Ottoman Empire.

1. Introduction. What is *alla turca* and how did it manifest itself?

The goal of our research is a historical approach to the *alla turca* phenomenon, which consists of the description of the background against which it occurred, of the history of specific musical instruments used in the West long before *alla turca*, as well as the role played by the Romanian Principalities in its promotion, under particular circumstances.

Alla turca or *turquerie* usually referred to oriental clothing fashion, consumption habits and the oriental way of life, which had reached its peak between the mid-17th century and the mid-18th century. Several wars took place, peace treaties were concluded and many diplomatic and cultural exchanges occurred between Western Europe, especially the Holy Roman Empire of German Nation, and the Ottoman Empire, during all this time. All these events culminated in the Peace of Karlowitz of 1699, when European interest in Oriental and Ottoman culture peaked, with European courts and the political elite adopting Oriental fashion in various aspects and forms¹.

From the musical point of view, *alla turca* meant the attraction of Europeans, from monarchs to musicians, to Ottoman military music, called *mehtherhane*. This music had a very important role in Islam, the whole Muslim world placing great emphasis on percussion instruments, more precisely on certain drums, which make up musical formations, incorporating other instruments, such as aerophones, and gradually coming to suggest and represent the power of the supreme ruler – the caliph – and become a symbol of his political power. However, as things evolved, the caliph eventually empowered each Arab tribal leader by offering them particular signs of power – *insignia* – including the military music band, originally called “*tablkhana*”. This practice was also adopted by the Ottomans, who improved it until the military music band was called “*mehtherhane*”, which was the name of the highest category of servants at the imperial court. It also came to be a sign of the political power of the sultan and his great dignitaries, including the rulers of the Romanian Principalities, by virtue of the political relations between these political entities².

The invasion of Europe by the Ottomans, which a first peak in 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople and their gradual movement towards Central and Western Europe, and with a second peak in 1535, when the

¹ Martin Rempe, Cultural Brokers in Uniform: The Global Rise of Military Musicians and Their Music, in *Itinerario: International Journal on the History of European Expansion and Global Interaction*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2017, p. 330.

² Eduard Rusu, *Muzica și puterea politică în Moldova și Țara Românească, secolele al XV-lea – al XVIII-lea* [Music and political power in Moldavia and Wallachia, 15th-18th centuries], Iași, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, pp. 202-205.

King of France Francis I made an alliance with Süleyman the Magnificent to escape the Habsburgs, facilitated political, military and cultural relations between the two worlds. In this context, the East, through the Ottoman Empire, began to be discovered by Europeans and even became a strong point of attraction in the 17th century, due to its exoticism, to the different way of life of its people, to their clothes, fabulous stories and last but not least to its music, especially military music. Military music was “introduced” to Europe primarily through armed confrontations, since it was actually part of the military contingents. Second, it was noticed by Europeans during their diplomatic exchanges, as every high-ranking Ottoman dignitary had a mehterhane as a sign of political power, which accompanied him permanently. Third, Ottoman music penetrated the European world as a result of the alliances concluded with various European monarchs, as a “gift” from the sultans, a gift that was actually a sign of the political power of the sultan and his influence over the one with whom he concluded the alliance. For instance, in all three Romanian Principalities, especially in Moldavia and Wallachia, both the investiture of the new ruler of the principality and the conclusion of any peace treaty or alliance were sealed with the sending of symbols of Ottoman political power, among which there was always a mehterhane. This is the general background against which the occurrence of the “concept” *alla turca* is set, which represents the Ottoman musical influence, represented by the mehterhane, first on the European military music and then on art music, as the Ottoman military music represented a desideratum of various composers in their various artistic compositions, due precisely to the exoticism and degree of novelty brought by its percussion instruments. The *alla turca* style is in music one of the many versions of “Turkishness” penetrating European culture and it is obvious that the version chosen has more to do with European interests in the subject than with anything intrinsic to the Ottomans or Ottoman music³.

Starting from here, the Ottoman troops, always in search of jihad, exerted a great deal of pressure on Europe, from the South-East and East to the West, which meant that Europeans collided with the army of the Ottoman Empire and implicitly with its military music, which was always present on the battlefield its very important role being the support of the morale of the Ottomans or the destabilization of their opponents, who were terrorized with this loud and unfamiliar music.

Due to its musical performances, mehterhane music gradually became fashionable in the European courts, where the sovereigns began to

³ Mary Hunter, *The Alla Turca Style in the late Eighteenth Century: Race and Gender in the Symphony and the Seraglio*, in Jonathan Bellman, *The Exotic in Western Music*, Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1998, p. 44.

adopt and imitate in their own music specific elements of Ottoman martial music and use them in their court festivities, such as coronations, weddings and baptisms. In the West, this “trend” began in the states of central and northern Germany, which rejected the Catholic restoration of the early 17th century and where court musicians adopted Ottoman clothing and began to imitate their music⁴. In all likelihood, the first genuine Ottoman military music was played in Western Europe in 1672, at the coronation of Sweden’s King Charles XI. A year later, similar music seems to have been used by Jan Sobieski during the military events of Hotin, in northern Moldavia, for his triumphal entry in Warsaw. The King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, Augustus II (1694-1733), was the first European sovereign to have a genuine mehterhane at his court, received as a gift from the Sultan, who had attended the festivities of his son’s wedding, in 1719, the band having 27 members⁵. The same monarch came dressed as a sultan to the christening of the future elector and the musicians who accompanied him also adopted Ottoman clothing and fashion, precisely to emphasize his power and pomp. The inclusion of the mehterhane into the festivities of the European monarchs perfectly imitated the original model of their contemporaries, the Ottomans⁶.

Interestingly enough, not only Turkish (Ottoman) musicians were in high demand in Europe, but also black ones. Frederick Wilhelm I of Prussia (1700-1740) had at his court approximately 30 flautists and drummers from Africa, who had a privileged position and were considered throughout the empire as “janissaries”, the famous Ottoman infantrymen, whose music military was that of the mehterhane⁷.

While in contact with the Ottomans, Europeans absorbed and reproduced the dual role of the mehterhane, both military and ceremonial. The military confrontations, mutual diplomatic and cultural exchanges between Western Europe and the Ottoman Empire allowed Westerners to borrow the characteristics of mehterhane music. This oriental influence had great impact on Viennese culture, for example, becoming a trend in Vienna.

⁴ Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

⁵ Eve R. Meyer, *Turquerie and Eighteenth-Century Music*, in “Eighteenth-Century Studies”, Vol. 7, No. 4, Summer, 1974, p. 485; Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

⁶ Alexander Bevilacqua, Helen Pfifer, *Tourquerie: Culture in Motion, 1650-1750*, in “Past and Present”, No. 221 (Nov. 2013), p. 99.

⁷ Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

2. *Alla turca* and western military music

Percussion played a very important role in several styles of music, the most important of which was military music, as it supported the rhythm of marches, of attacks and, along with trumpets, announced various manoeuvres on the battlefield.

Ottoman military music and especially its characteristics were quickly adopted in Europe, due to its warlike nature and loud sounds, specific to such music, which had to be obvious and heard. The first European army to organize its military music on the model of the Ottoman one, borrowing some of its characteristics, was that of the Poles. They were followed by the Austrians, the Russians, the Germans and the French, and by the year 1770 military music based on the Ottoman model had become a standard of European military musical bands⁸.

Considering the great popularity of the mehterhane at the European monarchical courts, it should not be surprising that its music began to be adopted and practiced by the native military music as well, becoming to a certain extent a European military music. The statement of the Swiss Joseph Franz Sulzer, who was contemporary with the *alla turca* phenomenon, is extremely important in this sense:

One should not consider as genuine the Janissary music that has recently been introduced in most regiments of the Roman-Imperial Austrian army, which sees daily new pieces from German composers. The difference between them is huge. Our German-Turkish war music cannot even boast the same instruments, much less the same manner, striving in vain to imitate it with European measures and German ears.⁹

Nevertheless, the Ottoman influence continued to manifest itself leading to the creation within the standing European armies of distinct bodies of musicians who performed music played on instruments such as cymbals, Chinese pavilion (Turkish crescent), nagara and davul drums (the big and small drums, both having the same origin). The musicians of these bands were included in the army budget for the first time by Austria in 1800, and by Prussia in 1806¹⁰.

Although, at first, the impact of the integration of percussion musical instruments in European military music was minor, military music gradually changed its character so much that at the end of the 18th century it was

⁸ Catherine Schmidt-Jones, *Janissary Music and Turkish Influences on Western Music*, “OpenStax-CNX module: m15861”, retrieved from <http://cnx.org/content/m15861/1.2/>, p. 6.

⁹ Gemma Zinveliu (Ed.), *Fr. J. Sulzer în Dacia cisalpină și transalpină*, translated and adapted by Gemma Zinveliu, București, Editura Muzicală, 1995, p. 155.

¹⁰ Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

divided into two: harmonic music (*harmonie musik*) or field music and Turkish (Ottoman) music. These two were different not only in terms of instrumentation but also as concerns their function. Harmonic or field music was composed for musical instruments such as: oboes, clarinets, horns, trumpets and bassoons, while Ottoman music was mainly dominated by percussion instruments¹¹.

Field music was played on the occasion of the deployment of the main guards and of the castle guards, while Ottoman music was used on Monday evenings in front of the barracks and sometimes in front of the main guard (the military leader of the garrison or military detachment), when the weather was nice¹². Interestingly enough, Ottoman music was used at the same times as in the Ottoman Empire, in the evening, at sunset, during peacetime. In wartime it was always present on the battlefield for the soldiers, and it was played in front of the sultan's tent, if he was present, or in front of the tents of the main leaders, as we have noted here.

The same happened in Wallachia and Moldavia, but with more nuances. Except for military music, composed according to the Western model, the court of these principalities also had a mehterhane. The mehterhane here was a genuine one, given the political connection between these countries and the Ottoman Empire and the political symbolism of this band.

Around 1770 most European armies had already appropriated their new style of military music, which in most cases adopted the (small or military) drum, timpani, cymbals, triangle, tambourines and jingling Johnnie, becoming the music known on the continent under the name "harmonie music"¹³.

Although the "Turkish drums" were a sign of exoticism, they were quickly adopted into military music or military-style music with some obvious exotic aspects. Ottoman marches quickly became indistinguishable in the current repertoire of European military music in the second half of the 18th and early 19th centuries. For example, the British trend of the drum band costumes, those leopard-skin aprons, and performing tricks with drumsticks, are reminiscent – even when the music is not associated with exoticism – of the Ottoman Oriental influence, which sometimes required that the drummers of the martial music be black people from Africa, dressed traditionally,

¹¹ Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

¹² Matthew Head, *Orientalism, Masquerade and Mozart's Turkish Music*, London•New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2000, p. 58; Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 331; Chaterine Schmidt-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹³ Henry G. Farmer, *Oriental Influences on Occidental Military Music*, "Islamic Culture", Vol. XV, No. 2, April, 1941, p. 239.

precisely for their exoticism, performing certain tricks with their drumsticks¹⁴.

3. *Alla turca* and Western composers

Alla turca occurred in European music when composers wished to use new sounds and musical instruments in their creations, with the aim of attracting the audience and innovating, the allure of the oriental world being well-known¹⁵. The influence of Ottoman music on French music in the period 1625-1700, for example, materialized in the enrichment of music in general, a secondary contribution to the basic musical structure¹⁶.

After Ottoman musical instruments had been adopted, additional European instruments, such as the triangle and piccolo, were used to reproduce the sonority of Ottoman military music, complementing and enriching its sonority, as this is how European composers thought that this exotic music should sound¹⁷. The *alla turca* style was first considered an imitation of original Ottoman music and a translation of perception of the original¹⁸.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was one of the first to implement the *alla turca* style in their music. Thus, he adopted two distinct elements or influences of the *alla turca* “current” in his operas; first, he used unusual musical instruments such as piccolo, triangle, cymbals and big/small drum, trying to imitate the specific mehterhane instruments, and especially its sonorities, and, second, he used stories, settings and characters specific to the oriental world, in particular the Ottoman world¹⁹.

Mozart used the term *alla turca* to designate the Turkish style in the absence of instruments specific to Turkish music. *Alla turca* broadens its meaning to a stylized representation of national specificity, such as *alla pollaca* and *alla tedesca*, and includes melodic, rhythmic and harmonic elements²⁰. This mixture of instrumental integration and tonal imitation even left its mark on piano music. Therefore, piano manufacturers introduced, in the early 18th century, the so-called “janissary pedal”, which was a

¹⁴ Mary Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

¹⁵ D. Doran Bugg, *The Role of Turkish Percussion in the History and Development of the Orchestral Percussion Section*, LSU Major Papers, vol. 27, 2003, p. 22.

¹⁶ Mary Rowen Obelkevich, *Turkish Affect in the Land of the Sun King*, “The Musical Quarterly”, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Jul. 1977), p. 378.

¹⁷ Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

¹⁸ Mary Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹⁹ ***, *East meets West: The influence of alla turca style in Mozart and Haydn’s music*, “MUS 663-Term Paper”, retrieved from

https://www.academia.edu/23434836/East_meets_West_The_influence_of_alla_turca_style_in_Mozart_and_Haydn_s_music_MUS_663_Music_in_Gallant_period_Term_Paper, p. 7.

²⁰ Matthew Head, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

mechanism that made the sound of bells, cymbals and drums²¹. In 1710, in Salisbury Cathedral, a percussion pedal was added to an organ to imitate the dark sound of the drum. The same thing happened to the Weingarten Cathedral organ, to which a “cymbalstern” was added to imitate the sound of the Chinese pavilion²². The novelty was adopted by some composers in their piano pieces at the end of the 18th century, which increased the popularity of Ottoman music in Europe, leaving a visible mark on the European music of that period²³. The musicians’ fascination with these instruments is the result of their desire to ‘obtain’ the sound of Ottoman music, which was “found” in musical ensembles that had nothing to do with a symphony orchestra.

Turkish or Ottoman music refers to that music that contains certain percussion instruments, while *alla turca* refers to melodic, harmonic and rhythmic elements, able to imitate Ottoman music. The *alla turca* influence was most visible during Western musical classicism, but was limited in scope, while Ottoman music, which was particularly influential in Western military music, was deeper and more lasting, even if less known than *alla turca*²⁴.

Two distinct categories of imitation of Ottoman music may be distinguished in European instrumental music at the end of the 18th century, which occurred either together or separately, each with different stories, but both reflecting the tension of assimilation or distance from this musical phenomenon²⁵. The first effect of this influence was an instrumental one, especially through the use of percussion instruments such as the cymbal, which brought a certain colour to this music, but also the drum or the tambourine, which originates in classical Ottoman music and not in military music²⁶, that of the Chinese pavilion. The triangle was also introduced, although it was not specific to Ottoman music, regardless of its nature, but goal being precisely to imitate the sound produced by the Chinese pavilion²⁷.

The second category of effects derived from the influence of Ottoman military music involves melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and phraseological techniques, without any particular timbral association. These musical characteristics, beyond the use of “Ottoman percussion”, remained exotic until the late 18th century. From a melodic point of view, *alla turca* includes elements of specific musical language, taken from the melody of Ottoman

²¹ Martin Rempe, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

²² D. Doran Bugg, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Chaterine Schmidt-Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²⁵ Mary Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

²⁶ Eduard Rusu, *Muzica și puterea politică... [Music and political power...]*, *op. cit.*, pp. 321-330.

²⁷ Mary Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

military music, as for instance in the overture of the opera *L'incontro improvviso* by Haydn. In terms of rhythm in the *alla turca* style, it is almost always in duple meter, the first measure is stressed and the second is unstressed, thus imitating the mehters' technique of striking the drum with a larger stick with the right hand and with a smaller lighter one with their left hand. In terms of harmonics, this style is often static, keeping the same chords for several measures and switching abruptly from one chord to another²⁸.

The drum, cymbals and triangle were adopted into orchestras as a homogeneous group, as they produced a specific colour when used simultaneously. This new section of percussion instruments was used quite independently of the timpani, which had already found a place in orchestras due to their proven popularity in European military music starting with the 15th century²⁹.

The big drum was introduced in symphony orchestras by Michael Haydn in 1777, in his composition called the *Turkish Suite*, and then by Joseph Haydn, in the *Symphony no. 100 (Military)*, composed in 1794, also used this drum. Other well-known symphonic creations in which the drum was used and played an important role are *Symphony no. 4* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, *Polovtsian Dances* in the opera *Prince Igor*, composed by Alexander Borodin and *Symphony no. 9* by Ludwig van Beethoven³⁰. There are also several creations that used the *alla turca* style³¹.

The size and depth of the pit in which the orchestra played influenced the layout of the instruments, as there are drawings of these pits, such as the one at *La Scala* in Milan, from 1825, which shows that Turkish-style percussion instruments were placed at the back of the orchestra, at opposite ends³². The 19th century and the beginning of the following one was the period of 'maturation' of the Turkish percussion instruments introduced in symphony orchestras. Each of the standard percussion instruments were transformed according to the new requirements and sonorities, which enhances their autonomy in the composers' mind, who reserved them solos and gave them a certain degree of freedom that allowed their association with other instruments in symphony orchestras³³.

²⁸ Mary Hunter, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁹ D. Doran Bugg, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁰ E. Bachhus, *The universal drum and other percussion musical instruments*, "Cape Librarian", March/April, vol. 54, no. 3, 2010, p. 21.

³¹ D. Doran Bugg, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

³² *Idem*, p. 24.

³³ *Idem*, p. 44.

4. Origin of the main percussion instruments in symphony orchestras and their classification

It is very interesting to note that, although *alla turca* manifested itself concretely in music in the 18th century, both in military music and in cult music, musical instruments specific to *alla turca* were already in use by Europeans, after they had penetrated by the oriental channel. However, they were used separately, depending on the specificity and destination of each of them.

Timpani

Among the percussion instruments introduced in symphony orchestras, the timpani were the first³⁴. This was due to the fact that they had been known and used in Europe since the time of the Crusades, when they had been adopted from the Arabs. Most likely, they were first used in court music, which was very diverse, and were present in miniatures as early as the 13th century, in the *Cántigas de Santa Maria* manuscript, in 1280, where reference was made to the siege of the Tortose (Tartus) fortress in Syria by the Crusaders³⁵. However, not long after, the timpani were out of sight, for reasons still unknown, and were no longer used on a large scale until the 15th century, when they reappeared in the military music played by Hungarians and even Romanians, who, in their turn, adopted them from Ottoman armies on the occasion of their frequent contacts up to the 15th century³⁶. In particular, according to the testimony of a French clergyman named Benoît, in 1457, the Hungarian king Ladislaus Posthumuos sent a messenger to France to request the hand of Princess Madeleine, the daughter of King Charles VII. The messenger was accompanied by very large timpani, never before seen in the West, carried on the backs of horses. From there on, timpani of this shape began being used in this manner throughout Western Europe³⁷. The timpani were quickly adopted as military music by the Germans as well³⁸ (Fig. 1).

³⁴ Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Percussion*, New Haven•London, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 73.

³⁵ *Idem*, *Origins and Development of Musical Instruments*, Lanham, Maryland•Toronto•Plymouth, Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2007, p. 33.

³⁶ Henry G. Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

³⁷ Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company Inc. Publishers, 1940, p. 329; Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Percussion*, pp. 42-43.

³⁸ Curt Sachs, *op. cit.*, p. 329.



Fig. 1 The military music of Rudolf I of Habsburg, according to the chronicle of Diebold Schilling the Elder, 1484-1485

They were also adopted by the French, their existence being mentioned in 1471 at the court of René of Anjou³⁹. In 1542, King Henry VIII of England sent his representatives to Vienna and Buda to purchase timpani that could be used on the backs of horses, following the Hungarian model⁴⁰. His attempt seems not to have materialized, as there is no record or testimony indicating the presence of timpani at the court of England in those times⁴¹. Interestingly enough, Germany had a good tradition in the use of timpani since the 14th century – before large timpani carried on the backs of horses appeared in Europe – as Duke Philip of Burgundy sent his drummers to Germany to learn

³⁹ Jeremy Montagu, *Origins and Development of Musical Instruments*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ Henry G. Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

⁴¹ Jeremy Montagu, *Origins and Development of Musical Instruments*, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

there the art of playing the drums. Therefore, the timpani were later considered a typical German instrument⁴².

The penetration of timpani in Europe is very important for us, where they were adopted from the East, from the military practice of the countries here. This happened precisely because of the geopolitical context, the Kingdom of Hungary and the Romanian Principalities being the first to face the Ottoman armies, after they had subjugated the Balkans and reached the Danube. It is extremely important that this drum model, which went a long way in Western military music, originated precisely here. Moreover, timpani appear in our churches' frescoes almost half a century before their penetration into the West, at the end of the 14th century, namely at the Cozia Monastery, founded by Mircea the Elder (Fig. 2). Also, at the end of the 15th century and even during the reign of Stephen the Great, timpani were painted in the frescoes of the Bălinești and Arbore Monasteries (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4).



Fig. 2 The “Mocking of Christ” Scene, Cozia Monastery, Vâlcea

⁴² Curt Sachs, *op. cit.*, p. 329.



Fig. 3 The “Mocking of Christ” Scene, Bălinești Monastery, Suceava



Fig. 4 The “Mocking of Christ” Scene, Arbore Monastery, Suceava

Timpani were used alongside trumpets only in military music and in certain ceremonies, the sovereign being the only one who had the right to

own such music. For this reason, they were not used in “free” music until the end of the 18th century, when this kind of music became accessible to other categories of people, under certain circumstances and after a certain evolution. It seems that timpani were first used by Joseph Haydn in his creations⁴³.

Big and small drums

As in the case of timpani, although their direct ancestor is thought to be the davul of the mehterhane, the big drum or the small drum in current symphony orchestras had very close relatives in the West as well, the best known being the single-membrane drum used in the military music played by the infantry. Although, initially, military music consisted only of trumpets and timpani (and cymbals in the East), the modernization of armies and battle tactics and especially the appearance of mercenary troops, saw gradual changes in military music as well. Thus, the infantry troops came to have their own music, not just cavalry troops, as before. Therefore, the musical instrument called in English “tabor-pipe” (Fig. 5), used throughout the West especially in street dance music (also painted in Bălinești, in the mentioned scene), consisting of a small-sized drum hanging from the hand holding a pipe, both instruments being used by the same person, eventually evolved and became two distinct instruments.



Fig. 5 Summary (Ms. Pierpont Morgan Library. M.8)

⁴³ Jeremy Montagu, *Origins and Development of Musical Instruments*, op. cit., p. 34.

The small drum (tabor) became a larger drum, carried on the side of the drummer, who hit the membrane with sticks in both hands, and the whistle (pipe) was replaced by the traversière flute, which then had a sharp sound. Both instruments were introduced, for their sonorous qualities, in the military music of infantry regiments with the aim of keeping the soldier's marching pace. The first European infantrymen who had such music in the Middle Ages were the famous Swiss, who became the guards of the Pope in Rome. They were also the source of the illustrations of such music, at the end of the 15th century (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6 Military music of the infantry, according to the chronicle by Diebold Schilling the Elder, 1484-1485

The oldest side drum preserved to this day is one of Swiss provenance, dating back to 1575⁴⁴. The same drum was also found at the court of King Henry VII of England, in 1491, and the documentary evidence stated that those drummers were Swiss, *i.e.* the ones who had introduced this type of drum into circulation⁴⁵.

As mentioned before, a drum extremely similar to the one that we have described so far is the Turkish *davul*, that double-membrane *mehterhane* drum (Fig. 7), which later became, in the “*alla turca* period”, the drum called “military drum” or “*cassa*”, in its larger version. This type of drum also appeared in some Romanian, Serbian and Macedonian frescoes (Fig. 8), from the mid-14th century, being very similar to the Turkish *davul* and also to the drums generally used by the Arabs⁴⁶. For this reason and considering that these drums also appear in Romanian frescoes, we believe that they were known to Europeans long before the direct musical influence exerted by the Ottomans in the 18th century.



Fig. 7 Turkish *davul* (retrieved from <http://davidvaldespercussion.blogspot.com>)



Fig. 8 Double-membrane drum, “Saint Nicholas” Church, Curtea de Argeș, painted between 1364-1369

⁴⁴ Jeremy Montagu, *Origins and Development of Musical Instruments*, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Side Drums in England in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, in Monika Lustig, Ute Omonsky, Boje E. Hans Schmuhl, *Perkussionsinstrumente in der Kunstmusik vom 16. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Wißner-Verlag, 2010, p. 44.

⁴⁶ *Idem*, *Timpani and Percussion*, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Cymbals

As for cymbals, their use in the West until the influence of the *alla turca*, both in the Middle Ages and during Renaissance, is neither well known nor documented. They appeared in Western Europe only extremely rarely, in undefined contexts, and, moreover, they did not appear in the form of those used in mehterhane or as shown in Romanian mural paintings as of the 14th century, all very similar to those used nowadays in symphony orchestras. Thus, the dilemma arises whether cymbals or other percussion instruments of lesser importance were preserved only in Eastern Europe, which was in permanent contact with the Ottomans, or whether they were also used in the West, but in the music of the lower classes, not of interest to the aristocracy, which is why they do not even appear in the documents. Thus, according to researchers, it seems that these instruments were preserved sporadically in the West, only in the music of ordinary people⁴⁷.



Fig. 9 The “Mocking of Christ” Scene, “Saint Elijah” Monastery, Suceava

As a result, the reason why we see cymbals in our mural paintings, alongside trumpets, representing military music, in Cozia (Fig. 2), the “Saint Elijah” Monastery in Suceava (Fig. 9) or the Voroneț Monastery (Fig. 10), churches founded by Stephen the Great, is precisely the early Ottoman

⁴⁷ Jeremy Montagu, *Timpani and Percussion*, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-31; 50-52.

influence. The martial sound of cymbals – used in military music originally alongside the trumpet until replaced by timpani or even used simultaneously, according to some paintings – was most likely a way of standing out and impressing the opponent, meant to mark differences in status and even to strike fear into opponents on the battlefield, as was the case with mehterhane music. Therefore, also in the case of the use of cymbals, we have a centuries-old precedence over the West, which is another important element of the role played by the Romanian Principalities, enhanced by their geopolitical location, in the penetration of oriental musical influences in the West.



Fig. 10 The “Mocking of Christ” Scene, Voroneț Monastery

Triangle (Chinese pavilion)

Western composers resorted to using the triangle, especially in the version with metal rings (Fig. 11), initially to imitate the sound produced by the instrument called the Chinese pavilion, due to its Chinese-style building shape and ornamentation with bells and chains. The history of the use of the triangle in Europe is old, its first mention dating back to the 10th century, being used predominantly in devotional music⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Mark Berry, *From Angels to Orchestra (Part I): An Iconographic History of the Triangle Through the 19th Century*, p. 1, retrieved from https://www.livingsoundtriangles.com/content/PART%20I_from%20Angels%20to%20Orch



Fig. 11 Triangle with metallic rings (M. Berry, *op. cit.*, p. 1)

5. Contribution of the Romanian Principalities to the popularization of *alla turca* in the West

The Romanian Principalities have had an undeniable contribution to the influence of Ottoman military music on the West, as they were at the political and geographical confluence of East and West. Although this has not been discussed before, it is a clear and indisputable fact, especially considering that Romanian rulers were, throughout the centuries, allies or collaborators of the Ottomans, Hungarians, Habsburgs or Russians, or considering the numerous diplomatic contacts with France, England, Italy, Poland and other countries, which meant that many foreign diplomats visited our lands. Diplomatic exchanges and especially the visit of these diplomats to the Romanian Principalities brought the Ottoman influence, the musical one in this case, to the West, even to a small extent. Thus, we need to point out the contribution of personalities such as Del Chiaro, Joseph Franz Sulzer, De la Croix and many others, who made our culture known to the West. All these Western diplomats who resided in the Romanian Principalities for a while wrote in their memoirs about the culture of the Romanians, about their music and inevitably about the rulers' mehterhane, which was of great interest to them, due to its exotic sonority. This was also the case of foreign travellers who arrived in our countries and who reported in their memoirs what they

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saw here. Also, the diplomatic ceremonial itself, in use until the beginning of the 19th century, required Romanian rulers or their representatives to welcome diplomats and important guests with a procession that always included a mehterhane. Thus, since their very first visit to our Principalities, official visitors were welcomed on the sounds of this music⁴⁹. This proper welcome was followed by the official dinner, during which music was played, which also included mehterhane, especially at the time of toasting. The diplomats or the foreign travellers would hear mehterhane daily for as long as they remained in Iași or Bucharest.

Moving from the general framework in which foreigners came into contact with this music due to their presence in the Romanian Principalities, to what they themselves recorded in their reports and memoirs, we see that each of them was at least curious about the music of this band, regardless of whether they were positively or negatively impressed, precisely because of its exoticism and the fact that the music they were hearing was completely new compared to what they were used to. From a chronological point of view, the first diplomat or western traveller who visited the Romanian Principalities and wrote about this music is the Italian Franco Sivori, who described the mehterhane accompanying Petru Cercel to Constantinople, in 1583, to take over the throne of Wallachia, as being a band: “[...] with drums, trumpets, and other instruments common to the Turks, which made great noise”⁵⁰. Then, in 1685, Philippe le Masson du Pont described the military music of the janissaries as follows:

The janissaries’ drums which are twice as long and almost twice as wide compared to ours; they beat on them at both ends; with their right hand they strike with the usual little stick and with their left hand, with a rod, and their arm rests on the drum which they hold much higher than the usual. The drum is accompanied by several kinds of cymbals with two handles on the back to put the hands in; they are made of a metal that has a very vibrant sound. Some youths strike these cymbals against each other in cadence, which, together with the drum, produces a very pleasant martial sound which can be heard from afar.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Eduard Rusu, *Music of the Embassies*, in Iulian Boldea, Cornel Sigmirean, Dumitru Buda (Editors), *Paths of Communication in Postmodernity*, Tîrgu Mureș, Arhipelag XXI Press, 2020, pp. 104-112.

⁵⁰ Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign travellers about Romanian Countries], vol. III, , București, Editura Științifică, 1971, p. 7.

⁵¹ Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign travellers about Romanian Countries], vol. VII, București, Editura Științifică și Pedagogică, 1980, p. 288.

In 1709, the Hungarian diplomats Mihail Teleki and János Pápái described the mehterhane of the pasha in Timișoara as having “eight horn players, six trumpet players, one tambourine player, two drummers with large Turkish drums, four drummers with small drums”⁵².

That same year, when talking about the cymbals that he saw in Moldavia, the Slovak Daniel Karmann said:

Every night the singing of the Turkish sentinels [is] accompanied by some military musical instruments, struck with both hands and making a sound that lasted better than fifteen minutes.⁵³

When describing Iosif Podoski’s messenger in 1759, the Polish Adam Golarowski noted the pasha of Hotin had a music (mehterhane) composed of “trumpets and drums covered with red cloth and bagpipes”, which made “great noise, very unpleasant to ears unaccustomed to such things”⁵⁴.

The report made in 1768 by Nicolaus Ernest Kleemann, a German commercial agent, traveling through Wallachia, Chilia and Crimea, captured the musical atmosphere in the courtyard of the khan of Căușani as follows:

I have never heard anything more godless, more discordant in melody and tone. Ten men were blowing instruments similar to an oboe (zurna), but half the size of an oboe and with a very thick end. Three of them were beating in small cymbals (our note: nagara) that one could not tell what they were made of because of the mud on them. Ten men had large drums hanging from their necks to which patches of red cloth were tied; they beat to the beat with a large and bent stick over the drum and with a smaller one below, very fast. This music was started by ten oboists who blew for several minutes in the same tone; after that one blew a solo and did cadences, fugues, triolets, *fiorituras* until his face turned green, blue and black; after that they would all sing together and a little later the cymbals (our note: nagara) players started their thundering accompanied by the drums. They all played *andante*, but it was absolutely impossible to get a real song out. When a piece was finished, the first oboe would start again and the others would follow it again in the manner described above. At the end, one of the musicians would loudly salute the khan [scopos] and the others ended it with a hoot.⁵⁵

⁵² Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. VIII, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1983, p. 253.

⁵³ *Idem*, p. 257.

⁵⁴ Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dresca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. IX, București, Editura Academiei, 1997, p. 410.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, p. 638.

In 1786, Lady Craven described the mehterhane of the ruler of Wallachia in the following manner:

And then my ears were deafened by the most diabolical noise I had ever heard [...], I saw all kinds of trumpets, brass plates struck one against the other and drums of all sizes – some of them, barely the size of a cup, displayed on the ground and the people who beat them were crouched on the ground to be able to do it. Each musician tried to cover the neighbour’s noise with an even louder noise – if possible.⁵⁶

In 1792, William Hunter described the mehterhane of the ruler of Moldavia, Alexandru Moruzi, as follows:

His military music consisted of drummers and trumpeters and a few cymbal players, whose chief merit consisted in making a lot of noise, for they were not skilled performers and the songs with which they delighted us were only distinguishable by their insipid nature⁵⁷.

Another testimony, belonging to the Englishman Thomas Thornton, from the beginning of the 19th century, shows that the Romanian rulers: “were honoured with flags and mehterhanes and took their oath of faith and allegiance in the presence of the sultan”⁵⁸.

The account of Auguste de Lagarde, who travelled through Wallachia in 1813, shows that the Ottoman music at ruler Caragea’s court consisted of “fifty large drums, as many cymbals (our note: nagaras), three bagpipes and six oboes”⁵⁹, and Ludwig von Strümer provides information about the music that he had heard in 1816 in Wallachia:

The prince has his own music offered to him by the Sultan as a sign of respect, which consists only of Turks. Every evening they play in front of his house, but not to the satisfaction of European ears.⁶⁰

And last but not least, we should mention Joseph Franz Sulzer, who spent a substantial period of time in the Romanian Principalities in the second half of the 18th century, the one who spoke the most and most pertinently, in

⁵⁶ Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign travellers about Romanian Countries], vol. X, part I, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2000, p. 721.

⁵⁷ Maria Holban, M. M. Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru, Paul Cernovodeanu (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române* [Foreign travellers about Romanian Countries], vol. X, part II, București, Editura Academiei Române, 2001, p. 1098.

⁵⁸ Georgeta Filitti, Beatrice Marinescu, Șerban Rădulescu-Zoner, Marian Stroia (Editors), *Călători străini despre Țările Române în secolul al XIX-lea* [Foreign travellers about the Romanian Countries in the 19th century], new series, vol. I (1801-1821), București, Editura Academiei Române, 2004, p. 380.

⁵⁹ *Idem*, p. 568.

⁶⁰ *Idem*, p. 715.

our opinion, about the mehterhanes at the courts of the Romanian rulers. Since he was himself a musician, he knew how to analyse and compare Eastern and Western military music, making pertinent comments, one of which has already been referred to above⁶¹.

6. Conclusions

Alla turca was a cultural phenomenon that somehow went against the natural course of things, since it united what could never be united, at least on the political and religious levels. It was a cultural bridge between two antagonistic worlds, and also proof that art, with all its substitutes, has no boundaries and knows no limits. On a different note, and again against the historical course of events, the Eastern influence prevailed over the Western one and not the other way around, as in most cases, proving once again that these were truly exceptional situations.

Looking at *alla turca* from a musical point of view, one notices that the ‘seedling’ was planted long before, as early as the time of the Crusades, but it did not really sprout until the 18th century, when the ‘soil’ was very fertile and favourable of such ‘culture’. This is primarily due to the fluidization of borders and barriers between the West and the East, enhanced by constant contacts since the 14th century, when the Ottomans reached the Danube.

The fascination exerted on the Westerners by the exotic new world proves a certain tranquillity and stability, in all respects, which urge humans to satisfy their curiosities, always focusing on what is new.

As we have seen, *alla turca* had a musical impact on both military and art Western music, thus creating a new current that brought the two worlds closer together. When analysing this phenomenon, one should not ignore the contribution of the Romanian Principalities to the popularization of oriental influences in the West, starting from the presence of the timpani in mural paintings in Wallachia more than half a century before its penetration into the West. They were adopted by the Hungarians and all the diplomats and foreign travellers who visited our lands and shared accounts of the mehterhanes that they had seen at the court of Romanian rulers.

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⁶¹ Fr. J. Sulzer în *Dacia cisalpină, passim*.

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