

The Ottoman Tanbûr

The Long-Necked Lute of Ottoman Art Music

Hans de Zeeuw

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Cover: Ottoman *tanbûr*, miniature painting from the *Tefhîmü'l-Makamat fi Tevlîdi'n-Nağamât* by Hızır Ağa (c. 1750).

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In Memory of Tanbûrî Cemil Bey (1871-1916)

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The instrument called *tanbûr* is the most perfect and complete instrument which we know or have seen because it performs completely and without fault all the sounds and melodies which appear by the means of the breath of men.

Dimitrie Cantemir, *Kitâb-i 'İlmü'l-Mûsîkî 'ala Vechi'l-Hurûfât*

It's an amazing instrument. The Turks should be proud of it. They should be proud of having and having created such an instrument.

Yehudi Menuhin cited by Necdet Yaşar

Yet when I wrote, the full facts were not at my disposal. The picture I drew was a provisional one – like the picture of a lost civilization deduced from a few fragmented vases, an inscribed tablet, an amulet, some human bones, a gold smiling death mask.

The Alexandria Quartet, Lawrence Durrell

Preface and Acknowledgements

The origin of this book about the long-necked lute of *Ottoman art music*, the Ottoman *tanbûr*, is an article, *The Ottoman Tanbûr. Introducing the Long-Necked Lute of Ottoman Art Music*, published in 2018 in *Expedition*, a magazine of the University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, U.S.A. The Ottoman *tanbûr* was also discussed in *Tanbûr Long-Necked Lutes along the Silk Road and beyond*, published by the Archaeopress in England in 2019.¹

The cultural-historical conditions that contributed to the development of Ottoman art music (*Osmanlı san'at mûsikîsi*)² and the Ottoman *tanbûr* are explored and discussed in Chapter 1 *The Turko-Persian Culture*, Chapter 2 *The Rise of Ottoman Art Music and Ottoman Tanbûr*, and Chapter 3 *The Negligence, Exclusion, and Revival of Ottoman Art Music*. The construction, including fret and string tuning, is discussed in Chapter 4 *Construction*, the playing technique in Chapter 5 *Playing Technique*. In addition, Appendix 1 *Ottoman Tanbûr - Charles Fonton*, Appendix 2 *Ottoman Tanbûr - Guillaume-André Villoteau*, and Appendix 3 *Ottoman Tanbûr - Râuf Yektâ* are included. The book concludes with a *Glossary*, *Discography*, *Bibliography*, *Illustration Credits*, and an *Index*.

This study benefited from the work of many scientists in various scientific disciplines, as shown in the footnotes and *Bibliography*. I especially want to acknowledge the work of Henry George Farmer (1882-1965), Ismail Hakki Uzunçarşılı (1888-1977), Cafer Açın (1939-2012), Laurence Picken (1909-2007), Jean During, Richard Campbell, Tamila Djani-Zade, Cem Behar, Bülent Aksoy, Ersu Pekin, Jeremy Montagu (1927-2020), Walter Feldman, and Karim Othman-Hassan. For the broader background of this study have benefited from the work of numerous historians such as Marshall Hodgson (1922-1968), Robert Canfield, Erik Jan Zürcher, and Halil Inalcık (1916-2016), and art historians such as Stuart Cary Welch (1928-2008), Walter Denny, Banu Mahir, and Filiz Çağman.

Of great importance for the origin and early history of the Ottoman *tanbûr* is the work of 17th and 18th century scholars, artists, and travellers such as Evliyâ Çelebi, Wojciech Bobowski, Dimitrie Cantemir, Levnî (Levnî Abdülcelil Çelebi), Charles Fonton, Tanbûrî Küçük Artin, Hızır Ağa, Giambatista Toderini, and Guillaume-André Villoteau in the early 19th century.

The Ottoman *tanbûr* has been subject or part of several books and articles such as of Cafer Açın, *Tanbûr Yapım sanatı ve sanatçıları*, Bülent Aksoy, *Avrupalı gezginlerin gözüyle Osmanlılarda musikî*, and Cem Behar, *Kan Dolaşımı, Ameliyat ve Musikî Makamları. Kantemiroğlu (1673-1723) ve Edvâr'ının sıra dışı müzikal serüveni*; two theses, one by Özer Özel, *Tanbur Tekniği Üzerine bir Deneme* (An Essay on the Tanbur Technique) in and another one by Mustafa Aydın Öksüz, *Türk Musikisinde Tanbur Sazının Gelişme* (The Development of the Tanbur in Turkish Music), as well as in articles about acoustics and pitch frequency Cumhuriyet Erkut, Tero Tolonen, Matti Karjalainen, and Vesa Välimäki, *Acoustical analysis of Tanbur, a Turkish long-necked lute* and Ali Gedik, Barış Bozkurt,

¹ See Zeeuw, J. de. *The Ottoman Tanbûr. Introducing the Long-Necked Lute of Ottoman Classical Music*; Zeeuw, J. de. *Tanbûr Long-Necked Lutes along the Silk Road and beyond*.

² In this study Ottoman art music (*Osmanlı san'at mûsikîsi*) will be used instead of Turkish art music (*Türk san'at mûsikîsi*) or Turkish classical music (*Türk klâsik müziği*) to underline the important role Turks, Greeks, Armenians, Jews, as well as Europeans played in its development and transmission. See Feldman, W. *Music of the Ottoman court*: 18.

and Cem Çırak, *A computational study on divergence between theory and practice of tanbur fretting*. The Ottoman *tanbûr* is also discussed by Walter Feldman in *Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire*. An author with a long-term interest in the Ottoman *tanbûr* is Ersu Pekin such as in his article *Surname'nin müziği 2: 18. yüzyıl başlarında İstanbul'da müzik* (Music in the Surname 2: Music in Istanbul in the Early 18th Century).

Many people contributed to this study. I'm deeply indebted to Dr Saskia Willaert of the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) in Brussels for reading and commenting the first three chapters exploring and discussing the cultural-historical background of the Ottoman *tanbûr*. In Turkey, I'm grateful to the luthier Engin Topuzkanamış (Izmir) for reading and commenting Chapter 3 Construction, the luthier Elif Kızılhan (Istanbul) for sharing her knowledge and images, photographed by her brother Ahmed Kızılhan, of the making of the Ottoman *tanbûr*, and the Ottoman *tanbûr* player Murat Aydemir (Istanbul) for reading and commenting Chapter 4 Playing Technique.

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In France I thank Dr Alexandre Girard-Muscagorry of the Cité de la Musique – Philharmonie de Paris for his suggestions regarding the whereabouts of Guillaume-André Villoteau's Ottoman *tanbûr* (*tambour kébyr tourky*). Dr Boris Dubois and the L'equipe des Archives de Paris for sending me the auction results of the sale of the instrument collection of Adolphe Sax in Hôtel Drouot in 1877. One of the auctioned instruments was the *tambour kébyr tourky* of Guillaume-André Villoteau, acquired by Adolphe Sax from the collection of Edme-François Jomard. Although the person who purchased this instrument is known, I have not been able to trace the whereabouts of Villoteau's *tambour kébyr tourky* before the publication of this study.⁴

In America, I'm indebted to Professor Walter Feldman for generously sharing with me his view on the Ottoman *tanbûr* and Professor Walter Denny for drawing my attention to and sending me a digital image of an 18th-century Ottoman copy of an early 16th-century Safavid miniature painting of a *şeştâr*.⁵ I thank Karim Othman-Hassan for generously permitting me to use images from *The Awakening of a Tanbur: Report of Restoration and Research Into the 18th Century Tanbur Belonging to His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Abdullah Al Thani*.

³ See Bülent, B. Avrupalı Gezginlerin Gözüyle Osmanlılarda Musiki, especially the sub-chapter Onyedinci yüzyılda *tanbûr*: 63-70.

⁴ Catalogue du musée instrumental de M. Adolphe Sax [Texte imprimé]: collection unique d'instruments de musique de tous temps et de tous pays: [vente à Paris. Hôtel des ventes mobilières, salle 3, 4-6 décembre 1877, Me Gustave Carré, commissaire-priseur].

⁵ See Feldman, W. Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire, especially The *tanbûr*, The Origin of the Ottoman *tanbûr*, and The Ottoman *tanbûr* in the 18th century: 142-153.

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Finally, I thank my wife Hülya for her loving support.

Far from being the definitive study of the Ottoman *tanbûr*, its shortcomings and lacunae aim to initiate further research into the cultural-historical background of this exceptional instrument of the so-called *tanbûr* family, a group of long-necked lutes which evolved since ancient times over a vast geographical area in a cross-cultural exchange across political and cultural boundaries.⁶

Istanbul, February 2022

⁶ See for further reading and discussion Greve, M. Introduction, in M. Greve (ed) Writing the History of "Ottoman Music": 7-11; Aksoy, B. Preliminary Notes on the Possibility (or Impossibility) of Writing Ottoman Musical History, in M. Greve (ed) Writing the History of "Ottoman Music": 15-31; Zeeuw, J. Tanbûr Long-Necked Lutes along the Silk Road and beyond.

General Introduction

Since their appearance in Mesopotamia towards the end of the 3rd century BC, lutes belong to the most common group of musical instruments. According to their design we can distinguish two types of ancient lutes: the *spike lute* and the necked lute. The *spike lute* has a rod-shaped neck which ends in or passes diametrically through a tortoise shell resonator or carved-out wooden bowl serving as soundbox.¹ The necked lute has a neck and bowl carved from a single block of wood (one-piece design) and in a later stage also composed of a bowl and a neck (composite design). The long-necked *tunbûr* appeared among numerous instruments played at the Persian Sâsânian court. Since many of them are known only by name, iconographic sources provide more reliable information about these instruments. Literary and Iconographical sources giving evidence of long-necked lutes predating the Sâsânian era (c. AD 224-651) are virtually absent.²

The originally two-stringed *tunbûr*, modified into *tanbûr* by the Arabs, diffused from the Persian realm³ into the musical traditions along the Silk Road and beyond resulting in a variety of closely or distantly related *tanbûrs*. *Tanbûrs* are characterized by an oval-, pear- or round-shaped bowl and a long, narrow, and generally fretted neck, with two or more, occasionally doubled or tripled courses, each having its own characteristic sound, playing technique, and repertory.⁴

The development of *tanbûrs* was not just an evolution from simple to more sophisticated. Originally, two-stringed *tanbûrs* were strummed with the fingers of the right hand. Their simple construction masks the great difficulty of the virtuoso finger technique which evolved on the two-stringed *tanbûrs* of Persia and Central Asia, such as the Kurdish *tanbûr*, the *dotâr* and the *dutâr*, and the *dömbra*. On some *tanbûrs*, however, such as the Turkish and Azerbaijani *saz*, and the Uyghur, Tajik, Uzbek, and Afghan *tanbûr*, a plectrum is used.⁵

Tanbûrs are played in the art, Sûfi, folk, and popular musical traditions along the Silk Road and beyond. In Turkey, the name *tanbûr* mainly refers to the long-necked *tanbûr* of Ottoman art music, the Ottoman *tanbûr*, a distant relative of the long-necked lutes of the *tanbûr* family.⁶ The Ottoman *tanbûr* plays, according to the music theorist Raûf Yektâ (1871-1935), the same role as the piano for Western composers. Most composers of Ottoman art music therefore play this

¹ The finding of two spike bowl lutes from Abusir el-Meleq, c. 8th century BC, demonstrates that the ancient Egyptians knew their way around carving out wooden bowls from a block of wood. The processing quality of the bowls also shows that the craftsmen had experience in processing wood.

² Eichmann, R., P. Pâffgen and N. Beyer. Lauten, in L. Finscher (ed.) Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik 5: 942-994; Hassan, S.Q., R. Conway Morris, J. Baily and J. During. Tanbûr, in S. Sadie (ed.) New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians 25: 61-62; Lawergren, B., H. Farhat and S. Blum. Iran, in S. Sadie (ed.) New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians 12: 528; See for further reading Zeeuw, J. de. Tanbûr Long-Necked Lutes along the Silk Road and beyond: 6-11.

³ In this study 'Persia' is generally used to distinguish the 'Greater Iran' from the Iran as we know it today. See furthermore Garthwaite, G.R. The Persians: 1-3.

⁴ Nowadays, music and musical Instruments have become globally in transnational networks of musicians on a scale which did not exist before blending with a wide range of musical traditions.

⁵ Djani-Zade, T. Die organologische und ikonographische Gestalt der türkischen Lauten. Über das historische Zupfinstrument qâpâz-i ôz: 71; See also Zeeuw, J. de. Tanbûr Long-Necked Lutes along the Silk Road and beyond: 6-60.

⁶ In many Turkish publications, *tanbûrs* are still related to Mesopotamian and Hittite *spike lutes*; See also Hassan, S.G., M. Conway, J. Baily and J. During. Tanbûr: 61; Yekta, R. La Musique Turque; See for further Zeeuw, J. de. Tanbûr Long-Necked Lutes along the Silk Road and beyond.

instrument.⁷ Moreover, the Ottoman *tanbûr* has been a source of inspiration for many writers and poets such as the novelist Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889-1956) and the poet Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (Ahmed Ağâh, 1884-1958).⁸

Music played an important role at the Ottoman courts in Istanbul and Anatolia during the 15th and 16th centuries when the Ottoman sultans and princes modelled their courts on those of the Tîmûrids, a Turko-Mongol dynasty (c. 1370-1507), and the Safavids, a Persian dynasty (1501-1722). The music performed at these Ottoman courts was not distinctly Ottoman, but reflected a wider regional, so-called Turko-Persian musical tradition. Since the Tîmûrid era until the end of the 16th century, a mixture of several basic instruments, among which various *tanbûrs*, were known to most musical traditions in an area stretching from Transoxiana to Anatolia.⁹

Tanbûrs are mentioned among the instruments of the Ottoman court ensemble in 15th-century literary sources. However, according to 16th-century sources, the *tanbûr* seems to have been excluded from the Safavid and Ottoman court ensemble and ‘downgraded’ to a private environment. The instruments mentioned in the *Cema’at-i mutribân* of 1525, an Ottoman document reporting the salaries of court musicians, mentions the *kemânçe*, ‘*ûd*, *ney*, Ottoman *kopuz*, *çeng*, and *kanûn*. The absence of the *tanbûr* suggests that it had a secondary status until the rise of Ottoman art music and Ottoman *tanbûr* in the 2nd half of the 17th century.¹⁰

After a period of neglect and stagnation of Turko-Persian art music since the 2nd half of the 16th century, a more favourable climate emerged in Istanbul in the 2nd half of the 17th century, initiating the development of a distinctive Ottoman art music, moving away from the Turco-Persian art musical tradition, alongside which the Ottoman *tanbûr* evolved into an iconic instrument of Ottoman art music. The Ottoman *tanbûr* became part of the Ottoman court and Mevlevî *âyîn* ensemble and the instrument of composers and theorists to demonstrate and research the *makams*, the melodic basis of Ottoman art music.¹¹ The Ottoman *tanbûr* drove the ‘*ûd*, which occupied a central position in the Ottoman court ensemble until the middle of the 17th century, out of favour during the 18th and part of the 19th century. Despite the revival of the ‘*ûd* since the 19th century, the Ottoman *tanbûr* remained the favourite instrument of Ottoman art music, composers, and theorists.¹²

⁷ “Le Tanbour est l’instrument favori des Turcs. Les anciens auteurs arabes et persans considèrent l’Oude comme l’instrument le plus parfait; mais les auteurs turcs réservent cette place d’honneur plutôt au Tanbour. Si on veut faire une comparaison, on peut dire que le Tanbour joue le même rôle que le piano pour les compositeurs occidentaux. En effet, la plupart des compositeurs turcs sont des joueurs de cet instrument”. Yektâ, R. La musique Turc, in A. Lavignac (ed.) L’Encyclopédie de la Musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire: 3016-3018.

⁸ Açın, C. Enstruman Bilimi (Organoloji): 119.

⁹ Feldman, W. Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire: 105; See for further reading and discussion Feldman, W. The Musical ‘Renaissance’ of Late Seventeenth Century Ottoman Turkey: Reflections on the Musical Materials of Ali Ufki Bey (ca. 1610-1675), Hafiz Post (d. 1694) and the ‘Marâghî’ Repertoire: 87-138.

¹⁰ Feldman, W. Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire: 110, 145-146.

¹¹ Feldman, W. Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire: 146; See for further reading Feldman, W. The Musical ‘Renaissance’ of Late Seventeenth Century Ottoman Turkey: Reflections on the Musical Materials of Ali Ufki Bey (ca. 1610-1675), Hafiz Post (d. 1694) and the ‘Marâghî’ Repertoire: 87-138.

¹² See also Feldman, W. Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire: 114.

Notwithstanding its importance, the origin and early development of the Ottoman *tanbûr* is still unknown or not fully understood due to the absence or scarcity of literary and iconographic sources as well as surviving Ottoman *tanbûrs*.¹³ Only during the 18th century literary and especially iconographic sources documenting the development of the Ottoman *tanbûr* became increasingly available. The visual evidence consists of indigenous sources being illustrations of literary texts, visual records of specific events, album paintings commissioned by Europeans of the Ottoman court, and a rich corpus of European paintings and drawings. Surviving instruments date only from the 19th century, except for two mid-18th-century Ottoman *tanbûrs*, one in the collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, and one, recently restored by Karim Othman-Hassan, in the collection of Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani in Qatar.

Tanbûrs prior to the depiction of Ottoman *tanbûrs* by Levnî in the *Sûrnâme-i Vehbî* (Festival Book of Vehbî, 1729/30), are mentioned or discussed in three important 17th-century sources, the *Seyahatnâme* (Book of Travels, published posthumously in 1896) of Evliyâ Çelebi (1611-1685), the *Sarây-ı Enderûn* (Topkapı Palace's Inner Court, 1665) of Wojciech Bobowski (Ali Ufkî Bey, 1610-1675), and the *Kitâb-i 'İlmü'l-Mûsikî 'ala Vechi'l-Hurûfât* (The Book of the Knowledge of Music through Letters of Alphabet, c. 1700) of Dimitrie Cantemir (1673-1723).

Çelebi's *Seyahatnâme* and Bobowski's *Saray-ı Enderûn* include, unfortunately, no images of *tanbûrs*. Only Cantemir's treatise has an image of a *tanbûr* which is considered in this study to be an early form of the Ottoman *tanbûr*, thus dating the origin of the Ottoman *tanbûr* before 1700, that is in the 2nd half of the 17th century. Levnî's depictions of various Ottoman *tanbûrs* in the *Sûrnâme-i Vehbî* situate its further development, being part of the fundamental change of the instrumentation of Ottoman art music between 1650 and 1750, in the 1st half of the 18th century. The images of Ottoman *tanbûrs* in the work of Jean-Étienne Liotard, Charles Fonton, Hızır Ağa, and, in the early 19th century, of Guillaume-André Villoteau show the Ottoman *tanbûr* already in its present form. Its present form is also shown by the two aforementioned surviving mid-18th-century Ottoman *tanbûrs* of the Victoria & Albert Museum and Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani.¹⁴

After an interruption under Sultan Osman III (r. 1754-1754) and Sultan Mustafa III (r. 1757-1774), music became an important part of the Ottoman court again during the reign of the music-loving Sultan Selim III (r. 1789-1807). The death of Sultan Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839), the last sultan to support Ottoman art music, marked a turning point in the history of Ottoman art music. His successor Sultan Abdülmecid was the first sultan to support Western music at the Ottoman court. From that moment on, Ottoman art music and the Ottoman *tanbûr* suffered from official neglect and even rejection after the founding of the Republic of Turkey (*Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*) in 1923. This situation only changed after the foundation of the first Turkish music conservatory in 1975 at the Istanbul Teknik Üniversitesi (İTÜ) and the revival of Ottoman art music and Ottoman *tanbûr* since the late 1980s.

¹³ Fires and earthquakes, sometimes lasting for weeks could also have played a role in the destruction and therefore absence of sources. A major earthquake in Istanbul in 1509 lasted for weeks. During Sultan Süleyman I's long reign several fires devastated the city. In 1757 a large fire destroyed half of the city within the city walls.

¹⁴ Othman-Hassan, K. The Awakening of a Tanbur: Report of Restoration and Research Into the 18th Century Tanbur Belonging to His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Abdullah Al Thani; Feldman, W. Music of the Ottoman Court. Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire: 127-128; Zeeuw, J. de. The Ottoman *tanbûr*. Introducing the Long-Necked Lute of Ottoman Classical Music: 24-37.

Meanwhile, the construction of the Ottoman *tanbûr* changed in the 1st half of the 20th century. The bowl composed of thin ribs became less shallow, resulting in a lighter instrument which, in combination with an inward curving (concave) soundboard composed of two ultra-thin wooden plates, increased the sonority and resonance of the instrument. The number of microtonal frets increased further under the influence of the evolving *makam* system.¹⁵

Although the masters of the Ottoman *tanbûr* are mentioned in musical writings since the 17th century, our knowledge of the playing technique of the Ottoman *tanbûr* prior to the gramophone registrations of Tanbûrî Cemil Bey (1871-1916) is almost none. Tanbûrî Cemil Bey inspired prominent Ottoman *tanbûr* players, of which Ercüment Batanay (1927-2004) and Necdet Yaşar (1930-2017) belong to the most important ones influencing younger generations of Ottoman *tanbûr* players such as Murat Aydemir.¹⁶

Like the *ney*, the Ottoman *tanbûr* has survived the negligence and rejection of Ottoman art music since the reign of Sultan Abdülmecid and the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The Ottoman *tanbûr* is, unlike the *ney*, practically unknown outside Turkey.¹⁷ It has always been and still is a highly sophisticated and delicate instrument that only a limited number of musicians mastered in Turkey such as Abdi Coşkun, Murat Aydemir, Murat Sâlim Tokaç, Birol Yayla, Gamze Köprek and Göknil Bişak Özdemir. Outside Turkey the Ottoman *tanbûr* is only mastered by a few musicians such as Niko Andrikos in Greece, Efrén López in Spain, and Gilles Andrieux in France.¹⁸

Although the days of Ottoman art music and the Ottoman *tanbûr* seemed to be numbered after years of negligence and even exclusion, both have seen a significant revival since the late 1980s. The Ottoman *tanbûr* will continue to play an important role in Ottoman art music and has in the meantime also been introduced outside the domain of Ottoman art music.¹⁹

¹⁵ See for further reading Signell, K. Contemporary Turkish Makam Practice, in V. Danielson, S. Marcus and D. Reynolds (eds) *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music. The Middle East Volume 6*: 47-59.

¹⁶ Murat Aydemir. Personal communication; see also Özel, Ö. *Tanbur Tekniği Üzerine bir Deneme (An Essay on the Tanbur Technique)*: 7.

¹⁷ See Zeeuw, J. *The Ottoman tanbûr. Introducing the Long-Necked Lute of Ottoman Classical Music*: 24-37.

¹⁸ See the Ince Saz CD's and Itrî & Bach.

¹⁹ Feldman, W. *The Awakening of a Tanbur. A recording of the 18th Century tanbur belonging to his highness Sheikh Hamad bin Abdullah Al Thani*: 28; Murat Aydenir. Personal communication.