BÉLA BARTÓK
EDITED BY BENJAMIN SUCHOFF

Turkish Folk Music from Asia Minor

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Turkish Folk Music
from Asia Minor

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Rumanian Folk Music
  I Instrumental Melodies
  II Vocal Melodies
  III Texts
  IV Carols and Christmas Songs (Colinde)
  V Maramureș County

Turkish Folk Music from Asia Minor

Béla Bartók Essays
TURKISH FOLK MUSIC
FROM ASIA MINOR

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with an afterword by
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Turkish Folk Music
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THE sequence of events which ultimately were to lead Béla Bartók to the writing of his last ethnomusicological study—this publication of his Turkish folk music collection—apparently began in December of 1935. It was on the first day of that month that László Rásonyi, a Hungarian-born philologist and professor at the newly founded University of Ankara, wrote the first of a series of letters to Bartók, in which he extended a preliminary invitation to travel to Ankara for the purposes of lecturing and collecting local musical folklore.¹

Bartók’s exhilaration over the possibility of widening the range of his ethnomusicological studies is hardly concealed in his affirmative and lengthy reply. Indeed, Bartók was also willing to perform in concert without fee, providing that the voyage would not be made at his own expense. With characteristic integrity he questioned the propriety of his lecturing on the relation between Hungarian and Turkish folk music, since knowledge of the latter material—other than previous Turkish editions that were essentially Arabic in character—was lacking in Hungary. On the other hand, he was aware of the assertion made by the Turkish ethnomusicologist Mahmud Raghib Gazimihâl that “the genuine Turk-

¹ D. Dille, ed., Documenta Bartókiana (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1968), 3:179–183 (hereafter cited as DocB 3). Rásonyi asks Bartók to lecture on three questions: (1) the connection between Hungarian and Turkish music, (2) the development of Hungarian music and its apparent state, and (3) how a Turkish national music could develop.
ish folk music includes many pentatonic melodies.” Bartók, however, found this statement “predicated on scanty material which does not permit one to draw broad inferences,” and he asked Rásonyi to send the Turkish folk song publications edited by Gazimihâl and to arrange for his visit to the music folklore center in Istanbul, prior to his lecture in Ankara, “because I shall only be able to give useful hints after having been informed what was done till now and what was neglected.”

The next year, in April, Bartók received an official invitation from the Ankara Halkevi to visit there in May and lecture on “methods for the study of folk music in general, and the principal elements of your School in particular.” Bartók, committed to a series of concert performances in April and May, suggested a postponement until October and offered a five-point “program” for Ankara which would include three lectures, a concert with orchestra, the collecting of Turkish folk music, and “conversations with the competent people on future tasks.”

Bartók availed himself of Rásonyi’s presence in Hungary that summer for help in learning Turkish. He found the undertaking more difficult than he had presumed, particularly “the twisted sentences, contracting in one sentence what is expressed in other languages by ten. Fortunately, this rarely occurs in the texts of the folk songs; now I shall be busy with the pertinent part of the Kûnos collection.”

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4. The designation of the social institutes set up throughout Turkey.
7. *Lev. 3*, p. 413. Bartók brought with him to New York, in 1940, a Turkish primer for the second grade (*Okuma Kitabi*, Istanbul, 1936), which contains his annotations in Hungarian and French. The Kûnos collection of Turkish folk song texts (see the listings in the Bibliography below), published in Budapest, was copied by Bartók in a small notebook, also with Hungarian and French annotations.
In October Bartók completed and mailed to Ankara the promised three lectures, and in a humorous letter to a former pupil residing in Ankara, added this postscript: “I learned a little Turkish and can already make very interesting statements in this language, for example, ‘At deveden çabuk gider’ or ‘Kedi köpekden küçüktür,’ etc.! But I am not as yet on friendly terms with the literary language! They use terribly long expressions and an appalling number of participles!”

Following his stay in Istanbul during the first week in November, Bartók had the opportunity to listen to a number of the sixty-five double-faced records (produced by Columbia and His Master’s Voice, since 1930, on commission from the city) of performers—mostly peasants—who had been brought there for recording purposes. He voiced a number of objections to the collection of almost 130 melodies: (1) since the material was not collected on the spot, it was not possible to determine systematically what should be collected and, subsequently, which pieces should be recorded; (2) the performers were itinerant musicians and, therefore, could not be very authentic sources of village music linked to the site; (3) the recorded melodies had not been notated nor were the texts written down. And, in the latter case, since the performers were no longer available, deficiencies in the recordings could not be corrected. In fact, even the Turks themselves were unable to understand the texts on some of the recordings that were played for Bartók during his Istanbul visit.

During the following week Bartók presented his lectures and a concert in Ankara. A short collecting trip had been planned for him, following these appearances and prior to a repetition of the concert program on 17 November, but illness prevented its realization. After a full recovery and with his obligations met, Bartók

8. Published in Ankara (1936) under the title “Halk müziği Hakkında,” and in Hungarian translation (by László Rásonyi) in Új Zenei Szemle (Budapest, 1954).

9. János Demény, ed., Bartok Béla levelei (Budapest: Művelt nép könyvkiadó, 1951), 2:119–120; hereafter cited as Lev. 2. The translation of Bartók’s Turkish phrases is: The horse is faster than the camel, The cat is smaller than the dog.
had approximately ten days remaining for field work. His companions were the composer A. Adnan Saygun, whose task was the collecting of data from the performers as well as the jotting down of the texts, and two composition teachers from the Ankara Conservatory of Music, who were to witness how musical folklore is collected on the spot.

Having been warned by his Turkish escorts that it would be necessary to fraternize with the peasants for weeks before they finally would be induced to sing, Bartók set out with mixed feelings. As the result of their conversation concerning words common to the Hungarian and Turkish languages, Saygun suggested to Bartók that they construct a sentence that would be almost the same in both tongues. Then, whenever they met peasants who were intimidated by the presence of a stranger, Saygun would say that the Hungarians were only Turks who had settled somewhere else, that they had always spoken Turkish, but that evidently in the course of centuries their accent had become more or less different. Then Bartók was to repeat the sentence that had been concocted. The amusing sentence (in English translation: *In the cotton field are much barley and many apples, camels, tents, axes, boots, and young goats*) was understood by all and provided the researchers with the means to facilitate the collection.

In a summary of the results of his trip Bartók indicated that what had been achieved did not come up to his standards of perfection. One great shortcoming, for example, was his inability to obtain all the relevant information about the collected material: designation of the songs, how they had been handed down, and so
