

Buhurizade Mustafa Itri

Rezumat

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Buhurizade Mustafa Itri (d. cca. 1712) își păstrează până în prezent faima unuia dintre cei mai mari compozitori otomani. Din cauza faptului că a trăit înainte de secolul al XIX-lea, atunci când notația muzicală a devenit mult mai frecventă în Turcia, partituri muzicale autentice, precum și date despre viața lui, sunt foarte puține. Este cunoscut faptul că Itri a fost pentru principele D. Cantemir una dintre sursele muzicale majore. Acest articol încearcă să evalueze rolul lui Itri în cadrul tradiției muzicale otomane.

Cuvinte-cheie: otoman, compozitor, Mevlevi.

Summary

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Buhurizade Mustafa Itri (d. ca. 1712) retains his fame until today as one of the very greatest Ottoman composers. But due to the fact that he lived prior to the 19th century—when musical notation became more common in Turkey—authentic musical scores as well as facts about his life are very few. It is known that Itri was one of Prince Cantemir's major musical sources. This short article attempts to assess Itri's significance within the Ottoman musical canon.

Keywords: ottoman, composer, Mevlevi.

Modern sources on Ottoman or „Turkish Classical” music invariably list two composers as the „greatest” of this music Hammamizade Ismail Dede Efendi (d. 1846) in the 19th century and Buhurizade Mustafa Itri (d. ca. 1712) in the later 17th century. For all practical purposes however it is Ismail Dede who holds this position today his compositions are performed frequently in public, they are taught, recorded and published. There is also a certain amount of biographical material available on Ismail Dede, written both by scholars and by popularizers, including Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar's eloquent assessment in his book *Five Cities* (1946). Ismail Dede's relative accessibility is caused by the proximity of his musical style to the living tradition of Turkish classical music, by the survival of almost half of his large musical oeuvre, and by the much greater cultural understanding of his era by the people of modern Turkey. Itri, on the other hand, is far more of a mystery. Despite the fact that only 42 out of his many hundreds of compositions survive today, and that even these 42 may contain incorrect attributions and in any case have undergone extensive changes in the course of a long oral transmission, Itri's position as the major figure of this music prior to the advent of Ismail Dede is secure. If the Ottoman musical culture had been content to rely on a relatively straightforward oral transmission from master to pupil alone, probably the classical music of today would begin in the time of Selim III (1789-1808), when Ismail Dede's career began, and would have left Itri as a sacred name, a mysterious medieval figure like Ibn Sina or al-Farabi, about whose music nothing concrete can be known. Yahya Kemal Beyatlı's (1884-1958) poem about Itri could then be taken as a pious hymn about the sacred founder of

Turkish music as he says „*öz musikimizin piri*” („*the patron of our music*”). But despite the absence of notated documents dating closer than two centuries to the death of the great musician, it is clear that Yahya Kemal's wonderful poem is inspired by a real familiarity with and a musical and poetic response to an actual corpus of music. Yahya Kemal, like his musical mentors, was not acting entirely in a vacuum the 42 surviving compositions of Itri constituted a musical statement that was able to secure the reputation of their supposed creator well into the 20th century, over two centuries after his death. How can we approach the significance of this highly positive evaluation for the history of Ottoman Turkish culture?

While the surviving corpus of Itri's work is relatively small, it is certainly significant for a 17th century Ottoman composer. It has never been subjected to systematic musicological scrutiny although it is clear that the connoisseurs of this music, up until the past twenty or thirty years, knew this corpus intimately. In addition to the danger of outright misattributions, it is clear that many if not most of the pieces attributed to Itri have been modernized in several ways in the course of their two centuries of oral transmission. Without a serious and thorough study of this existing corpus any musical judgment of Itri must be limited in scope. Nevertheless it may be possible to adduce certain known facts that may help to explain the role that Itri has held uninterruptedly in Ottoman Turkish music.

Itri's Life and Cultural Environment

Little though it is, more is known of the biography of Mustafa Itri than most other composers of

the 17th century. This is largely due to the fact that he lived his life in a variety of elite social circles, mainly, but not exclusively in Istanbul, all of which left a few remarks about him. These sparse documents do reveal a figure of great personal talent who made use of virtually all of the cultural possibilities open to him. Looking at these different sources, İtri emerges as a quintessential summation of the culture of the Ottoman capital as it reached a strikingly novel form in the second half of the 17th century.

İtri appears in Es'ad Efendi's *Atrabul Asar* (ca. 1725), in all of the major poetic tezkires of the 18th century (that of Safayi, Salim and Şeyhi) in the *History* and in the *Edvar* of Prince Cantemir (Kantemiroğlu), in the *mecmua* of Hafız Post, and many later *mecmua* anthologies. There is a probable reference to him in the *Seyahatname* of Evliya Çelebi, and a clear reference to him in the *Crimean history* „*El-Seb'a Seyyar fi Ahval-i Muluk-i Tatar*”. Court records relevant to İtri have not been discovered. A typical glowing evaluation of his artistic life was written in 1720 by the biographer Safayi, roughly a decade after his death (which occurred in 1710, 1711 or 1712 according to the source). Under the poetic mahlas „İtri” he writes:

„His name was Mustafa. He achieved his fame in Istanbul as Buhurizade. He was one of the sweet-speaking poets of the age and in the theory of music he was the Second Teacher. In the art of music he was like Ghulam-i Şadi and with the wailing of his voice he flew across Iraq and the Hijaz and with his tones he went through all of Persia and Isfahan. Because he also achieved great fame as a writer of muamma (enigmas) he entered the Imperial Assembly (meclis-i humayun) of the exalted Sultan Mehmed the Fourth. Since his knowledge was cherished by the Emperor, upon his request he was granted the stewardship of the slave-market of Istanbul and he continued in this position until his death”.

From this brief description the distinctive pattern of İtri's life emerges. He was a native of Istanbul, coming from a merchant or possibly artisanal background (*buhuri* may mean either the spice dealer or the spice-mixer). He was not the product of the Court School (Enderun) nor did he enter any bureaucracy. He is praised as both a singer and as a composer, as well as an expert in musical theory—which was an extremely rare specialization in his period. But he was also a poet—which was the reason for his inclusion in Safayi's tezkire and his poetry seems to have been the immediate agent for his entry into the court of Mehmed IV. While the tezkire writer Salim (1722) claimed that İtri's poems had been collected into a *divan*, no trace of this survives. Several of his poems exist in scattered *mecmuas*, while several of the lyrics for his musical compositions may be his own. Thus any judgment on İtri's status as a poet is now impossible.

During the reign of Mehmed IV (1648-1687) the imperial bureaucracies became increasingly closed and hereditary while poetry had long been a virtual monopoly of the clerical bureaucracy (*ulema*). İtri's talent as a poet and as a musician/com-

poser/theorist must have allowed him to enter the sultan's assembly while bypassing all official channels. In the end this intimacy and high artistic reputation allowed him to attain an extremely lucrative sinecure in the guild structure of the city, which he was able to keep long after the deposition of the sultan Mehmed IV in 1687. According to Es'ad Efendi the sultan in question was not Mehmed IV but Mustafa II (r. 1695-1703), which is more likely. According to the *Crimean chronicle* mentioned above this grant was due to the intervention of the Khan Selim Giray (d. 1704), who had invited İtri, Nazim and Kemani Hüseyin to his court, and secured grants for them all: *„Thanks to the power of the Khan they became free of the neediness of parasitism and clear of the iron bow of poverty”*. Since the Crimean Khan was a major supplier of slaves to the Istanbul market his intervention is not unlikely in this case.

A curious clue to the social and musical environment of İtri is supplied by Prince Cantemir in his book of musical theory (*„Kitab-i Ilm-ül Musiki”*), written around 1700. Under the name „*Buhurcioğlu*” İtri appears as a major source of musical theory for the Moldavian prince. In the section on the *makam* Nuhuf, Cantemir details each source for the conflicting descriptions of this mode. He mentions two different theories, given him personally by four instrumentalists and another theory given him by two vocalists - Receb Çelebi the court *hanendebaşı*, and Buhurcioğlu (i.e. Buhurizade İtri). Although Cantemir agrees with one of the theories of the instrumentalists, an analysis of the later Ottoman repertoire in Nuhuf shows that the later tradition continued the theory of İtri and Receb Çelebi. While the social background of İtri is somewhat ambiguous, Receb was described as a *çömlekçi*, a potter clearly an artisanal occupation. Thus these two men are connected in three ways—they were both major vocalists of the later 17th century, their form of this *makam* is the one that was preserved and diffused, and they probably both came from the lower middle class of the city. This may be taken as an indirect proof of the spread of art music to the urban middle class, and even at times to talented members of its lower elements. Only thus can we explain how it was that it was the version of Nuhuf employed by the potter Receb and not the one of Prince Cantemir, or of Tanburi Mehmed Çelebi that became entrenched in later Ottoman music [1].

Cantemir's mention of İtri in his *History* occurs in connection with Osman Efendi, the „*noble Constantinopolitan*”, known in Turkish sources as Kasımpaşalı Koca Osman who was regarded as the major source of musical theory and pedagogy in the mid-17th century. According to Cantemir the „*art of music almost forgot, not only revived but was rendered more perfect*” by him. Among his pupils were Hafız Kömür, Buhurcioğlu, Memiş Ağa, Küçük müezzın and Despihçi (Tesbihçi) Emir. According to Es'ad Efendi, Osman flourished in the reign of Murad IV (d. 1640), although he might well have lived on into the reign of Mehmed IV, as Cantemir

suggests, for it is likely that Itri was only born in the 1640s. He may have begun his studies very young, for he continued as a student of Hafız Post (d. 1696), presumably after the death of Koca Osman. Only one piece in the surviving repertoire is attributed to Koca Osman (a semai in Segâh), but it reveals both a great musical talent and a much simpler musical structure than the Ottoman vocal repertoire of the succeeding generation. An analysis of the vocal repertoire in the "Mecmua-i Saz u Söz" of Ali Ufki Bey (ca. 1650) shows that much of the vocal repertoire of the court still had a simplicity reminiscent of the one semai of Koca Osman, and still retained many links to Turkish folklore. Thus Cantemir's high praise for Osman would suggest that he had been crucial in codifying the theory of Ottoman music and preparing the groundwork for the notable advance in structure visible in the following generation of composers, such as Hafız Post and most especially in Itri himself.

The information on Itri as a performing artist seems unclear. To Cantemir he was a vocalist, and Evliya mentions him as a hafız who was also „sahib-i beste" and „ustad-i kamil" thus a composer and a theorist. He appeared apparently as a singer at the court of the Crimean khan. Yet Es'ad Efendi likens his voice to a rusty out of tune harp ("misal-i ceng-i pür jeng etvar bi-aheng ve bi-erde vu bi-karar"), but this probably means that he had heard him only as an old man.

Another aspect of Itri's cultural life was formed in the Yenikapı Mevlevihane, where he „took the hand" of the Şeyh Cami Ahmed Dede (d.1667). It is likely that Itri's skill in *ta'lik* calligraphy (mentioned in the tezkires) and in the Persian language was acquired there. Two of Itri's greatest compositions were composed for this Mevlevihane his Rast Na'at-i Peygamberi and his Segâh Ayin. Since the ayin was prohibited from 1666 to 1679 they were probably performed first after the latter date. It is likely that the Melami-Bektaşî orientation of the Yenikapı Tekke at this time encouraged Itri's broad involvement with many religious and secular musical genres. In addition to his famous Tekbir, Sallat-i

Ummiye and his Salat ve Selam (in Dilkeş-Haveran), Itri composed many şarkıs, türküs and other light, folkloric pieces, which have all been lost. This broad freedom was remarkable in his time and until the later 18th century, during which period all known Mevlevi ayins were created by Mevlevi şeyhs. Itri remained a muhibb, and hence a secular figure despite his attachment to the Mevleviye-yet his Mevlevi compositions were performed by the dervishes. This combination of secular, religious and mystical musical styles with a parallel emphasis on secular poetry was a unique feature of the Ottoman post-classical age, especially in the 17th century when the Mevlevi Order became a major element in the culture of Istanbul.

There is yet another remarkable feature of some of Itri's compositions-especially his Na'at and his kâr in Neva. Both contain compositional elements more typical of the Post-Byzantine church music than of the earlier Ottoman music. This is seen throughout the Na'at and in the terennüm section of the kâr (but not in his Segâh ayin). This movement (which cannot be discussed in detail here) seems to be the beginning of the mutual interaction of Post-Byzantine and Ottoman art music that reached its climax in the middle of the 18th century. This willingness to create a shared musical space with the other great religious tradition of Istanbul may also be a legacy of the antinomian Melami spirit of Yenikapı.

This brief survey cannot suggest the high musical quality of Itri's compositions that entranced the Turkish musical world for two and a half centuries. The fragment of his oeuvre that survives, even in its modernized form, conveys something of the great power of this composer, and constitute a musical corpus that still has much to offer a modern listener. As a student of both Hafız Post and Koca Osman, Itri strove to develop Ottoman vocal music out of the quasi-folkloric form in which it had existed in the first half of the 17th century. His genius enabled him to succeed in creating a classic form that would be the basis for further development in the course of the 18th century.

Works cited:

1. See Feldman, Walter. *Music of the Ottoman Court: Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman Instrumental Repertoire*. Berlin, VWB, 1996, pp. 245, 292, 304, 371, 391.