



RAST MÜZİKOLojİ DERGİSİ

Uluslararası Müzikoloji Dergisi

www.rastmd.com



## MUSIC SOCIETIES THAT BELONGED TO THE MINORITIES IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

Assoc. Prof. Erhan Ozden<sup>1</sup>

Ahmet Bülbül<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

There were a number of non-muslim musical societies primarily established around churches and synagogues in the last period of the Ottoman Empire. These societies were established to teach their national music to their congregation in a more comfortable and free environment. The board of directors and teachers of these societies mainly included beadles or the competent musicians in their congregations. However, these associations and societies whose initial objective was music education began to launch secret activities during the war years. Several associations and societies that promoted the Greek and Bulgarian states' propaganda had to close its doors after the Turkish Independence. This article gives valuable information on these societies in light of historical documents and is a starting point for further research on this issue.

**Keywords:** Minorities in the Ottoman Empire, Music Society, Church, Ottoman Ministry of Education, the Ottoman Education Law of 1869

## OSMANLI'NIN GAYRİMÜSLİM MÜSİKİ CEMİYETLERİ

### ÖZET

Osmanlı'nın son döneminde özellikle kilise ve havra gibi mabedlerin çevresinde kurulmuş pek çok gayrimüslim müzik cemiyeti bulunmaktadır. Bu cemiyetler milli müziklerini cemaatlerine daha rahat ve özgür bir ortamda öğretebilmek için kurulmuşlardır. İdare heyeti ve hocaları genellikle kilise görevlilerinden ya da cemaat içindeki ehil musikişinaslardan oluşmaktadır. Başlangıçta amaçları sadece müzik eğitimi olan bu dernek ve cemiyetler savaş yıllarında gizli örgütlenme faaliyetlerine girişmişlerdir. Özellikle Yunan ve Bulgar devletinin propagandaları için çalışan pek çok dernek ve cemiyet Milli Mücadele yıllarının ardından kapılarını kapatmak zorunda kalmışlardır. Elimizde bulunan belgeler ışığında aşağıda adı geçen cemiyetlere dair bilgiler verdiğimiz bu makale ileride yapılacak çalışmalar için bir başlangıç niteliği taşımaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Müzik Cemiyeti, Kilise, Dahiliye Nezareti, Cemiyet Azası.

<sup>1</sup> Istanbul University Department of Islamic History and Arts.

<sup>2</sup> Istanbul University Department of Islamic History and Arts (Postgraduate)

## INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman Empire was an empire within which diverse ethnic and religious groups were intermingled in every part of the society. This diversity brought ethnic groups like Armenians, Greeks, Bosnians, Georgians, Kurds, Laz and Circassian peoples, all of whom adhered different Abrahamic religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam, together with Muslim Turks to form the Ottoman society for several centuries. The non-Muslim people living in the empire were named “minorities”. Yet it would be wrong to consider that these people were seen inferior to Muslims in the empire as they were never treated as second-class citizens before the Muslim community. On the contrary, they were exempted from military service; their religious rights, along with their security of life and property, were protected by the law. This was done in accordance with the Islamic law on non-Muslim minorities living among Muslims. (Zengin, 2007, p. 613)

Beside religious rights, Ottoman minorities also enjoyed social and cultural rights in any kind within the borders of the empire. In their towns, they could build churches and synagogues, some of which are still open in modern-day Turkey. This free atmosphere, incomparable with other countries in Europe and the world at that time, was thanks to the Ottoman judiciary system. Minorities enjoyed even extended socio-cultural rights during the reign of Abdulaziz (1861-1876). New regulations passed in the Reform Edict of 1856 (The Imperial Islahat Firman) made it even easier for minorities to establish all kinds of clubs and associations. There is no doubt that great world wars and other political agendas have an impact on the mutual tolerance and trust among the states. These issues also shapes the religious biases.

The fact that mosques, churches and synagogues in the same vicinities called people to prayer together is very important. After the conquest of Istanbul, beside their religious rights, non-Muslim citizens of the empire were also given the right to get education in their own languages. Armenians, Jews and especially the Greek founded several schools for their congregations. These schools, whose initial objective was to train religious officials, were mainly founded around temples. The "Tanzimat" edict introduced some improvements in the rights of the minorities. "Islahat" edict seems to be somewhat written specifically on the rights and freedom of the minorities because the regulations on the education of minorities and foreigners stand out dramatically in the content of the document. This free and cosmopolitan lifestyle is undoubtedly among the most important parts of the Ottoman heritage. The Public Education Law of 1869 Article 129 is a good example to show the regulations on the schools of minorities and foreigners. It was as follows:

*“Private schools are paid or free schools which are established in some districts by communities or by individuals among both the Sublime State and non-Muslim communities and whose costs and shares are controlled and administered by either their founders or the institutions they are affiliated to. Establishment of this kinds of schools in the Imperial Domains are officially approved by either the Ministry of Education in the capital or by educational administrators and governors of the provinces on conditions of firstly the possession of teaching certificates by the teachers, which are approved by either the ministry of education or educational administrators of the provinces; and second the submission of the curriculum of the classes to be given and the books for the inspection by the ministry of education or the local educational administration. Unless these three conditions are completely fulfilled, no permit will be granted to private schools to open or to continue giving education; and any contrary action is prohibited and will be stopped. The teachers employed*

*by the private schools are required to have their diplomas in hand approved by the Ottoman educational administration.” (Tozlu, 1991, p. 26)*

Among the records of the Ottoman ministry of education, there are few documents on music societies that belonged to the Turks. There are more records on music societies owned by minorities. That’s probably because the minority associations and societies were constantly and thoroughly kept under control by the Ottoman state. Due to the strict state control, especially during the reign of Abdulhamid II on minority schools, temples and societies, these societies had to inform the Ministry of Interior about their activities, regulations and other missions. In addition, due to the fact that teaching records are checked by the ministry of education as well, records of both the ministry of interior and education contain documents on societies of the Ottoman minorities.

#### **Italiano Music Society**

The Ottoman minorities had a great number of associations and clubs in Istanbul. One of these associations we have seen fit to mention was “Italiano Music Society”, which operated in a place called “Sosyete Operası” on Latin street, Caddeyi Kebir (Istiklal Avenue), Beyoglu. The club started its work under the leadership of a man called Şapkacı (the Hatter) Baltazar. In the application document sent to the ministry of interior, it is stated that musical instruments were bought for two liras and the club would operate at the opera building. Reports on where the funds collected for the club were spent appear in many document like this one. The application is dated 1896.<sup>3</sup> From the document we understand that there was also a club that belonged to Germans. However, there is no further information about it.

#### **Fazilet Music Society**

There was also a music society founded by the Greek in Serres, which was called Fazilet Music Society. This society was led by two persons, Doctor Vasilaki and Kostaki. This document is dated 1909. There is also a detailed list of regulations for the society. The regulations contain information on the nature and the activities on the society such as the education was addressed to the youth; a coffee house was rent for rehearsals; and the European music was practiced with European instruments. This list of instructions written during the foundation process gives valuable information about the musical atmosphere of the time. The important points in the regulations are listed below:

- 1- Every orthodox Christian who registered is to pay six *kuruş*. Those who do not pay will be deleted from the book. (for members)
- 2- Students showing disruptive behaviors will be dismissed from the society and they will have no objection rights.
- 3- If a member violates a rule, he will be fined five *kuruş* immediately.
- 4- Those who sing songs violating the moral code of the club will face temporary suspension.
- 5- The club fee may change between minimum one and maximum three Ottoman liras.
- 6- The administration consists of one chairman, one clerk, one government treasurer and four members
- 7- This committee will meet every fifteen days or anytime in case of a demand from at least two members. In addition, council debates are held every two months.

---

<sup>3</sup> BOA, DH. MKT, 126/11

The regulations made up of 37 items in total generally talks about the administration of the society and explains the rules to be complied with in detail. There appears to be only one item about music, which is, as stated above, about singing songs violating the moral code of the society. A list of registered members is also given in this document. The names of some members are as follows:

Pastor Petros Tirosiki	Hristos Yerirez	Yorgi Yanko
Kostaniyos Hibayrasi	Yuanni Gereyanidas	Hristo Ködorasi
Yuanni Cakirasi	Dimitri Sektasi	Dimitri Somarasi
Nikola Kasyakona	Vasili Nasko	Yorgi Kondorasi
Kostazi Kodora	Piraki Papa Kostaniniye	Kostokor Frankri

#### Members of Fazilet Music Society

In this document, two Greek music societies named Ahot and Evangelisyon are also mentioned with no detailed information.<sup>4</sup>

#### Çamlıca Greek Music Society

We see that another music society belonging to the Greek was active in Çamlıca. Founded in Çamlıca Greek district, this society was led by a man called Emanuel (Lirkosi?). It is stated that the inspection of the society was undertaken by the ministry of education although it was opened in accordance with the permission of the ministry of interior. There is also a regulation list of this society among the documents. Similar to the one for the Fazilet Music Society, this regulation list gives several details about this society, as well. The executive board and the teachers of the society were mainly from the Çamlıca Greek School. As a matter of fact, when we look at the names in the document, we see that the society was a music school affiliated to the Greek School:

- 1) President: Emanuel Lirkosi, the principal of the Greek School
- 2) Vice President: Çamlıca (Sandık Emini?) Karagulmez Efendi
- 3) Sandık Emini??: Dimitri (Margariti??), student in Çamlıca Idadi School
- 4) Clerk: Kosda Efendi, teacher in Çamlıca Greek School
- 5) First Member: Aleko Petro Pavlo, teacher in Çamlıca Idadi School
- 6) Second Member: Zafri Todosyo, student in Çamlıca Idadi School
- 7) Third Member: Sotiri Vasiliyadi, student in Çamlıca Idadi School

Çamlıca Greek Music Society had a coat of arms, as well. The year 1910 was engraved on the arms and it bore a figure of a lyre. Financial issues have a weight in the regulations, just like in the regulations of Fazilet Music Society. Costs and needs are listed under certain titles in detail. Teachers, equipment, club building and the needs of classrooms are given in detail. The regulations consist of 56 items, some primary of which are as follows:

- 1) The fees collected for the society will be spend for the building, teacher wages, hall appliances and other needs.
- 2) Members pay two *kurus* to the club every week.
- 3) The committee is made up of seven people.
- 4) Absentees are expelled definitively.
- 5) The society has a flag and a seal bearing the figure of a violinist.

One statement in the document is quite interesting. It says the societies founded in the capital will operate under the charge of the ministry of interior, while the ones founded in rural

<sup>4</sup> BOA, TFR. 1.A, 8/38.

areas will be under the charge of the highest administrative chief of the province they are located in.<sup>5</sup>

### **Fener Greek Music Society**

In addition to these, there was an application to the ministry of education in order to open another Greek music society in Fener. However, after the inquiry by the ministry, it was not allowed.<sup>6</sup> In another document, it is stated that this society was active. The society gave education under the auspices of the Greek Church. It was led by a church priest, Devilo. (دويلو) There was a commemoration held for the priest who, as stated in the document, died after a while. In the document, there is also information about a Greek newspaper which published some news about the society. The first document shows that the permission is not given to the society. After Devilo's appeal to the Greek embassy, the permission seems to be finally given. A possible reason for the reluctance of giving permission was the nationalistic movements of the Greeks in the final years of the Empire as in both documents, the weight of the Greek embassy on the society is emphasized. The document is dated 1891.<sup>7</sup>

### **Ayvalik Music Society**

In Ayvalik, there opened two societies that gave music training. These societies started their education with the permission of the district governor Muharrem Bey, after the correspondence with the ministry of interior. The ministry initially requested the curriculum and the name book in which the members and the administration were written. The societies operated in houses they rented in the town. We have no further information on these two minority societies. No names are mentioned in the documents. The documents are dated 1897.<sup>8</sup> We have come across no other documents on these societies. As can be seen in the registrations of other societies, the permissions of the ministry of education and the ministry of interior are required for the curricula and other official matters respectively. Although the societies outside the capital were opened with the permission of the administrative chiefs of the districts they were located in, the final decision makers were the ministries of education and interior.

### **İzmir Philharmonic Society**

The Philharmonic society in Izmir wished to give a concert in Ayvalik; but as a result of an inquiry, it was not allowed mainly due to the distrust felt towards the society members. The society which was active in and around Izmir planned to go to Aydin with its 26 Christian members. The document is dated 1886.<sup>9</sup>

### **Athens Music Society**

In another document, a group called Athens Music Society is mentioned. It is stated in the document that they gave a concert in Thessaloniki with the permission of the Greek embassy. After the concert, Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian music societies attempted to give concerts in Istanbul. In the document, it is stated that these requests are going to be declined in a polite manner.<sup>10</sup>

We have been able to find no other information about the societies mentioned above. The political activities through music clubs and societies in the last period of the Ottoman

---

<sup>5</sup> BOA, DH. EUM-KDL, 12/46.

<sup>6</sup> BOA, DH. MKT, 1716/103.

<sup>7</sup> BOA, DH. MKT, 1697/45.

<sup>8</sup> BOA, BEO. 644/48294, 617/ 46258.

<sup>9</sup> BOA, BEO. 598/44785.

<sup>10</sup> BOA, A. MTZ, 2/26.

Empire affected the number of these societies negatively. In a small number of music societies, these political activities also prevented a long lasting music education. Especially the close relationships with embassies forced the ministry of interior to maintain a strict policy in the laws concerning the clubs and societies. This has been the case until today. Documentation requirements to found a club and the sanctions are applied in a very intense procedure. The law of foundations gained a more flexible structure with the regulations following the year 2007.

## CONCLUSION

Like Turkish music societies, the non-Muslim music societies under the control of the Ottoman ministry of education had a foundation-based operational mechanism. The main feature of these societies differentiating them from their Turkish counterparts was that they were run by a religious authority. Ottoman music societies were administered voluntarily by musicians. The administration and the members of the societies that belonged to minorities were chosen among the beadles and the congregation. A strict discipline was applied in these societies under the influence of the church. When we look at the documents about the musical activities, we see that the repertoire consisted mainly of religious music. Church hymns for the rituals and some other classical works were taught; and the talented youngsters were directed to music.

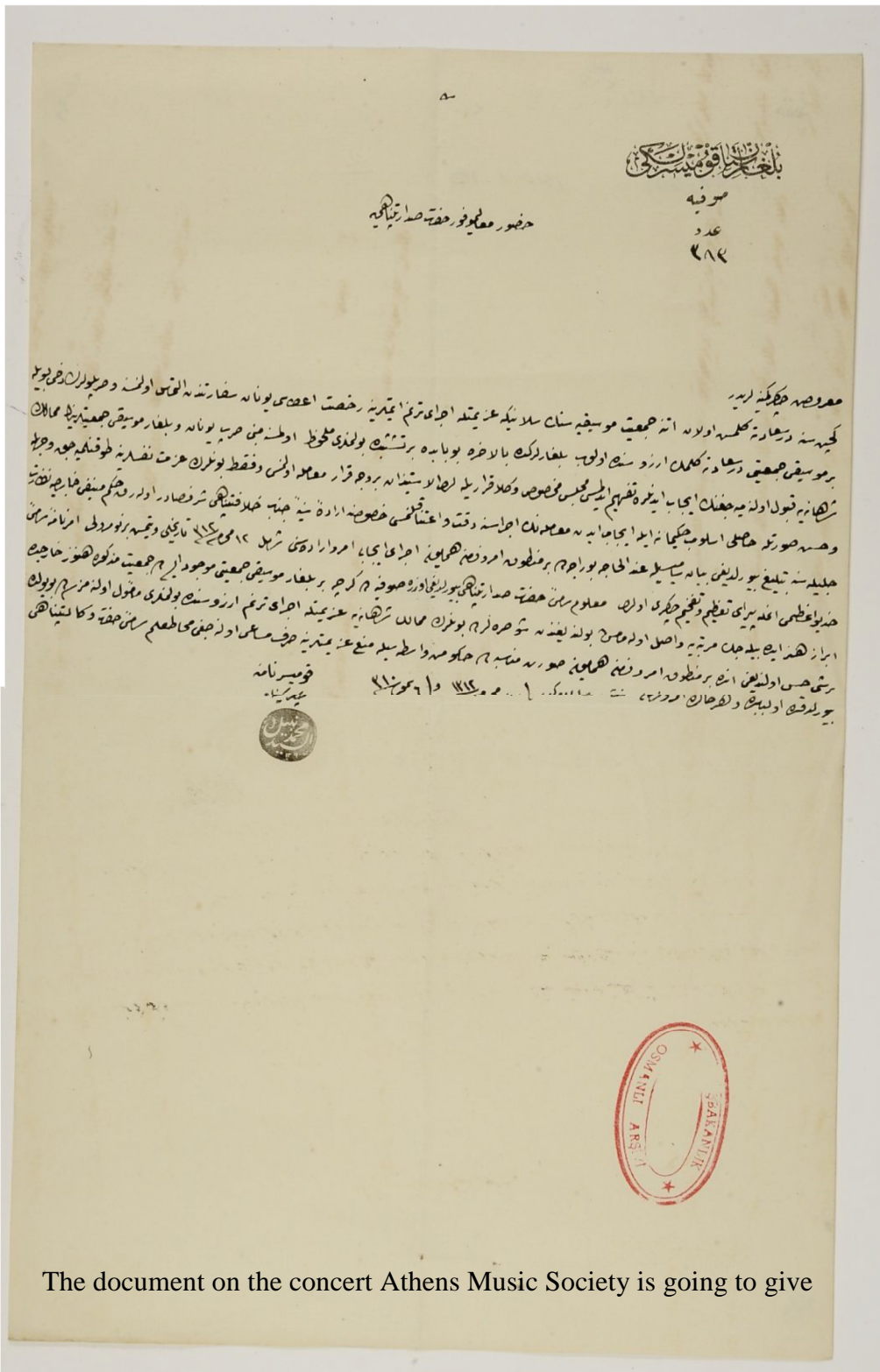
## REFERENCES

- Kütükoğlu, M. S. (1994). *Osmanlı Belgelerinin Dili (Diplomatik)*. İstanbul: Kubbealtı Neşriyatı.
- Ortaylı, İ. (1994). *II. Abdülhamid Devrinde Taşra Bürokrasisinde Gayrimüslimler. Sultân II. Abdülhamid ve Devri Semineri*. İstanbul: İstanbul Uni. Faculty of Literature Publishing.
- Tozlu, Necmettin, *Kültür ve Eğitim Tarihimizde Yabancı Okullar*, Akçağ Yayınları, Ankara 1991.
- Zengin, Z. S. (2007). *II. Abdülhamit Döneminde Yabancı ve Azınlık Mekteplerinin Faaliyetleri. Belleten (Turkish Historical Society Publishing)*, 71 (261), 613-652.

## ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS

- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi. Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, 126/11.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Rumeli Müfettişliği Sadaret ve Başkitabet Evrakı, 8/38.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Emniyet-i Umumiye Kısım-ı Adli Kalemi, 12/46.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi. Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, 1697/45.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi. Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, 1716/103.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi. Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, 1697/45.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi. Dahiliye Nezareti, Mektubi Kalemi, 1716/103.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Bâb-ı Âli Evrak Odası, 598/44785.
- Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Sadaret Eyalet-i Mümtaze, 2/26.

APPENDIX



The document on the concert Athens Music Society is going to give

بدر کمالی

باش کتابت داری

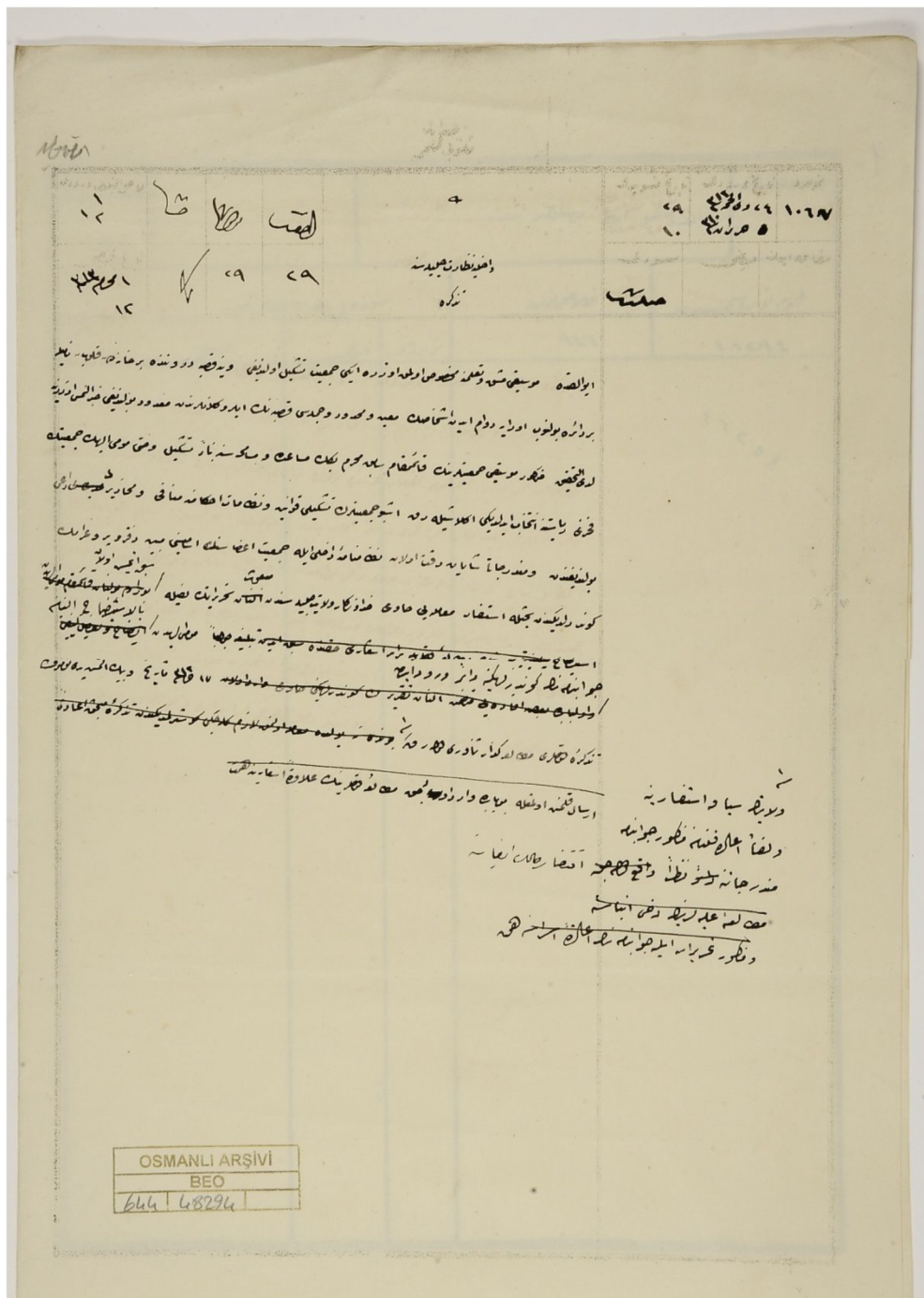
فنا ده موهی کلبی نارتونده ادقی موسیقی جین نید تکلیه جینک ایسی مقصدی  
 فن موسیقی نرسنه خدمت ایدن ادعا اولفقا ایچ اعضا موجود بلدنده دهانیده اومه  
 مقصود اکثری نزه بولنه بوجینک بر مقصد خلقی ریجی جیم ادینی دیوید جینک  
 تا سی و تکلم مطلقا رقصه بجهی منه زلمه لازم کور ایله بریایده معارف نغزجه برکونه  
 نسته و فوجو طدر بقیه معارف نظر بتر صفوی طقدنه اعضا نغز و جینده در بلونه  
 بریلوماتک قبول ایچن در افید نغز جیلد نغز ریجی بویسی نظر دوقه انورق نغز قشای ایلای  
 نینماه اجر نغز حال هوقه جیند صف موسی اومه معلانک اجر ایلدیم باله جیم  
 تا نغز احوالده اولمه اوزده ایچا بویسه ایضه جمعه مذکوره صف نغزک نغز ایلدیم  
 معلانک سجت اجزی شرفصا در اومه اومه سینه صفه فلا قره اوقای طیلنه زلمه  
 اولم اوزده صفه و اولم اوزده ایلدیم ایلدیم ایلدیم ایلدیم ایلدیم ایلدیم

İ.DH 1184/92629

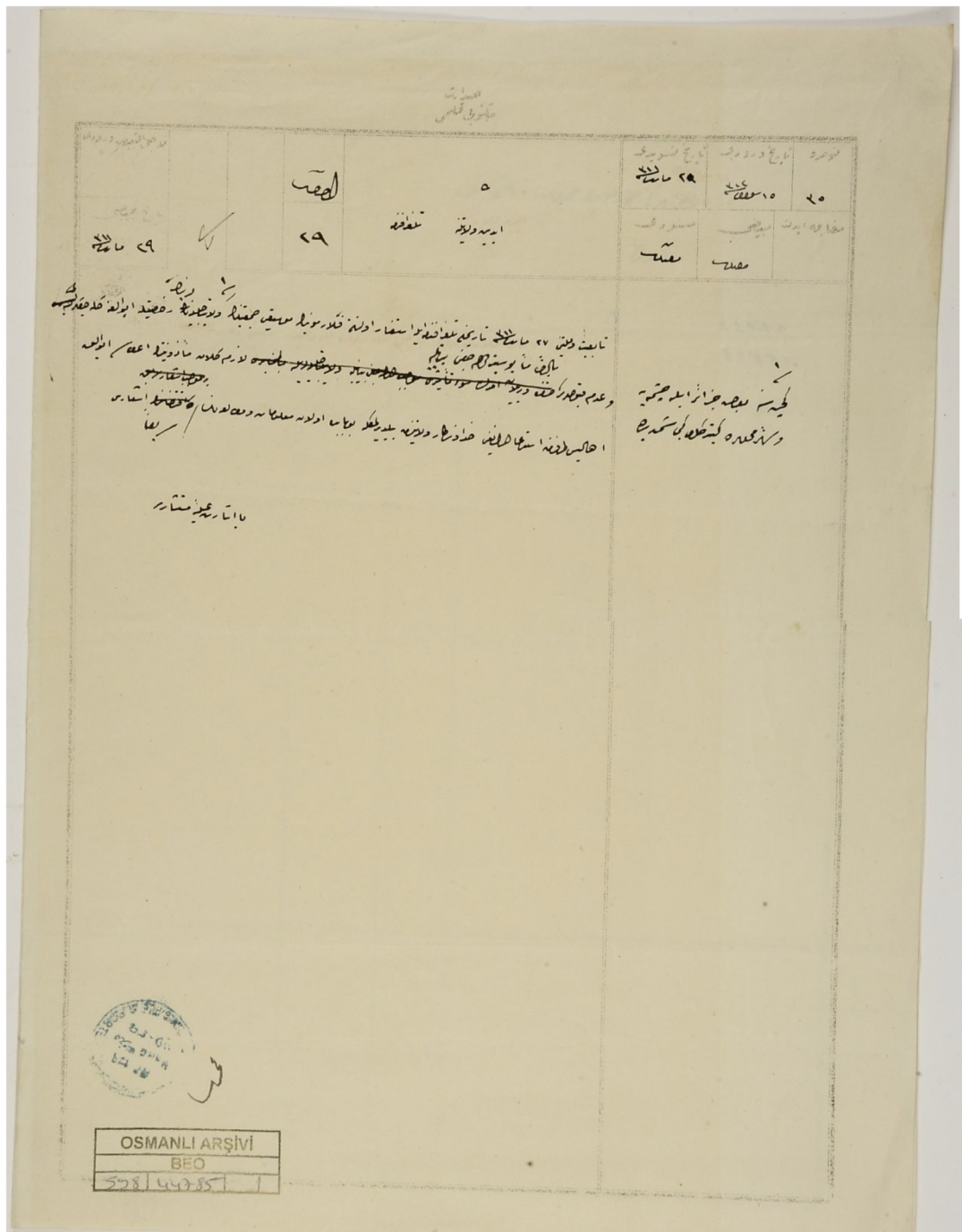
İ.DH.01184

The document on the Fener Greek Music Society





A document on the music societies established in Ayvalik



A document on Philharmonic Music Society