



## COURTIER MINSTRELS

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### ABSTRACT

The changes in the court life that had occurred after the Ottoman Dynasty was relocated in Dolmabahçe Palace during the second half of the 19th century had a certain effect on musical life in the court as well. The institutions in service of the court residents were transformed in accordance with the standards of the new court resulting in a fundamentally different organizational structure than that of the previous periods. In this structure, new ensembles performing various musical genres were founded and served under Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn. This study focuses on one of these new ensembles that was commissioned to perform minstrel music (âşık mûsikîsi) namely, the Şâirân-ı Hâssa of which, in this article, we provide information regarding its structure (faculties) and staff based on relevant archive documents. This study has also unearthed some documents from the Ottoman Archives of Turkish Prime Ministry about the members of the said ensemble. In conclusion, this study aims to inform the reader on the performance style of the Şâirân-ı Hâssa using the limited amount of reference material.

**Keywords:** Minstrel Music (Âşık Mûsikîsi), Minstrel (Folk) Poet (Saz Şâiri), Ottoman Court, Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn, Mâbeyn-i Hümâyûn.

## ŞÂİRAN-I HÂSSA<sup>1</sup>

### ÖZET

19. yüzyılın ikinci yarısında, Osmanlı hânedânının Dolmabahçe Sarayı'nda ikâmet etmeye başlamasının ardından, değişen saray yaşantısı, bu mekândaki mûsikî hayatını da etkilemiştir. Yeni sarayın şartlarına göre sarayda hizmet eden kurumlar da şekil değiştirmiş ve diğer dönemlerden çok farklı bir kurumsal yapı meydana gelmiştir. Bu yeni sistemde her biri farklı mûsikî türleri icrâ eden topluluklar kurulmuş ve Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn'a bağlı olarak hizmet vermişlerdir. Çalışmamız bu topluluklar arasında yer alan ve sarayda âşık mûsikîsi icrâ etmekle görevli olan Şâiran-ı Hâssa hakkında bilgiler vermektedir. Makalemizde bu topluluğun kurumsal yapısı ve mevcûdu hakkında arşiv belgelerine dayalı olarak sunulan bilgiler yer almaktadır. Ayrıca bu çalışmamızla Şâiran-ı Hâssa mensupları ile alâkalı "Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi'nde" bulunan bazı belgeler gün yüzüne çıkarılmıştır. Son olarak Şâiran-ı Hâssa'nın icrâ şekli hakkında elde bulunan mahdûd sayıdaki kaynaklardan yararlanılarak bilgiler verilmeye çalışılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Âşık Mûsikîsi, Saz Şâirleri, Osmanlı Sarayı, Türk Halk Müziği, Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn, Mâbeyn-i Hümâyûn.

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## INTRODUCTION

It is possible to trace some information in a few sources regarding Minstrels, one of the most important figures of Turkish literature and music history, and their existence in the Ottoman court. This study focuses on Şâiran-ı Hâssa (Courtier Minstrels), one of the bodies in the new organizational structure in court that was formed after the Ottoman Dynasty was relocated to Dolmabahçe Palace from Topkapı Palace during the second half of the 19th century.

Students were to be placed in designated chambers linked to Enderûn<sup>2</sup> to be educated by masters of certain art branches and those who could live up to the certain level of achievement would start performing their arts in the court, that was then Topkapı Palace. This operation that was carried out in various chambers in the early years of Enderûn had been predominantly conducted in the Seferli Chamber after it was instituted by Murad IV (Uzunçarşılı, 1977, p. 80).

After Dolmabahçe Palace had become functional and this chamber-based structure had to be abandoned, a new organizational structure which all musical ensembles in court were to be gathered under the same roof of Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyun seemed appealing. However, while these ensembles had appeared to be operating under Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyun, they were actually operating under Mâbeyn-i Hümâyun<sup>3</sup> the organizational structure of these institutions is shown below:

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<sup>2</sup> Enderun: Private schools located in the court responsible for educating the talented youth in the fields of bureaucracy, arts and warfare

<sup>3</sup> Mâbeyn-i Hümâyûn: Institution responsible for internal and personnel affairs of the court.

Table 1: The Organizational Structure of Musikâ-yı Hümâyûn



Our study focuses on one of those institutions named Şâirân-ı Hâssa (Courtier Minstrels) and is based on detailed archive and literature research which we have conducted in Ottoman Archives of Prime Ministry. This study aims to discover concrete data about Şâirân-ı Hâssa and its organizational structure and thus the key positions occupied by the Minstrels in the Ottoman court (Toker, 2012, p. 38-141).

### **A Glance at the Minstrels in Turkish Courts from Pre-Islamic Period to 19th Century**

The word Bahşı which is the corresponding word for saz-şâiri (Minstrel) used amongst Eastern Turks was derived from the words Baksı and Baksa. The word “Âşık” was used by Anatolian Turks; instead the word “Bahşı” (Ögel, 2006, p. 6). It has been known that “Baksa”s had told sagas with a kemenche embellished with cymbals on its contours called kobuz in order to cure ailments (Ögel, 2006, p. 7) Then, as stated above, the Minstrels called “bahşı” have always been a part of all Turkic societies.

It can be noted from the historical sources that minstrels had a place in Seljukian court which is the prototype of the court life of Ottoman Empire. It is pointed out in Rahâtu’s Sudûr, a book dedicated to Seljukian Emperor Kılıçarslan, that sultans must spend quality time with the poets and nedims (courtier) so they would leave a good legacy after death which tells us that poets had held an important positions in Seljukian courts (Karaismailoğlu, 1996, p. 134).

It has been pointed out in Halil İnalçık's book *Has-bağçede 'Ayş u Tarab* that Minstrels had given performances in "toy"s which were festivities organized by the Seljukian emperors. İnalçık has stated that in İbn-i Bibi's book *Muhtasar*, it is mentioned the Minstrels with "kopuz"s had told myths (epics) after military victories (İnalçık, 2010, p. 62).

It is a known fact that there were several poets serving under the Seljukian Emperor Sencer and also Toğan Şah had noted honoured poets and there were some poets in their courtiers (nedims). Apart from these, it is possible to find references in sources that poems had been recited before the emperors and poets had been under auspices of Seljukian sultans (Karaismailoğlu, 1996, p. 137). There is no concrete evidence that there were minstrels among these favoured poets but considering the Minstrels had frequently given performances in front of Ottoman sultans in early years of the empire which was founded right after Seljukian Empire had collapsed, it could be safe to say that there actually were Minstrels amongst the group of poets mentioned above.

With the foundation of the Ottoman Empire, artists had undertaken an active role in court life. İsmail Hakkı Uzunçarşılı states that there had been interruptions in musical life in court caused by wars and governmental disturbances during the early years of the empire and could not increase the importance of musical life in court until the reign of Murad II. Same goes for the Minstrels (Uzunçarşılı, 1977, p. 80) Bülent Aksoy notes Bertrandon Brocquiere, in his memoire, writes that Murad II. had listened to two Minstrels telling heroic tales during one of the feasts he participated (Aksoy, 2003, p. 46).

We see that Bülent Aksoy informs the reader about the important positions held by Minstrels in Ottoman cultural life, via his book where he presents observations of European travellers. For example, Bartholemous Georgievitz who had authored a book about Ottoman life in 16th century notes that "Turks are incompetent when it comes to instrumental music yet they are fairly talented in poems and their poets are called âşık" (Aksoy, 2003, p. 46).

There is a lot of information in numerous sources in which we can read about the positions in Ottoman life occupied by the Minstrels. It has been pointed out in Fuad Köprülü's book titled "Aşık Tarzının Menşei ve Tekâmülü" that Ottoman people had liked poems that were composed in minstrel's form more than those composed in the classical form. (Köprülüzâde Mehmet Fuad, 1331, p. 15) Additionally Köprülü says that poems written in minstrel's form not only were liked by the public but also the Ottoman elite. (Köprülüzâde

Mehmet Fuad, 1331, p. 16) Köprülü gives a particular example for this situation in which he mentions a poem titled “Bana Hayf Değil mi Sultan Mehmed?” written by Afife Sultan who was one of the wives of Mehmet IV. after her husband was removed from the Ottoman throne. (Köprülüzâde Mehmet Fuad, 1331, p. 24)

Halil İnalçık states that poets who composed their poems with syllabic meter (hece vezni) are, most of the time, not included in the biography collection of poets (Şuarâ Tezkîreleri) which are the most important source of our literature and music history. However we suspect that some of the poets were able to enter into these biography collections because they had composed their poems in terms of folk poetry as well as divan (classical) poetry and consequently that is why we would like to lean towards the Janissary poets mentioned in certain biography collection of poets.(İnalçık, 2003, p. 52) In the biography collection named Beyânî it is mentioned that a Minstrel with a pseudonym Âşıkî was actually a janissary (Beyânî Mustafa bin Cârullah,1997, p.147). In one of the most important biography collection named Latîfî, we find that there is a janissary poet with a pseudonym Hüdai. ( Latîfî, 2000, p. 245) Fuat Köprülü, the renowned researcher in the field of literature history, notes that a Minstrel named Öksüz Dede who lived during the 10th century (hijri – muslim calendar) was actually a janissary. (Köprülüzâde Mehmet Fuad, 1927 p. 385) There are several sources where it is pointed out that, in 11th century (hijri – muslim calendar) in which folk poetry was in great demand, some pieces of literature composed by “âşık”s trained in the janissary schools of marine and cavalry (levend ve sipahi ocakları) were able to spread throughout the country. (Ülkütaşır, Aşık , 1941 , p. 591)

Süleyman Şenel pointed out that minstrels were classified with various names one of which was Janissary minstrel (Yeniçeri Âşıkları) (Şenel, 2007, p. 9). Evliya Çelebi noted that Çöğür was an instrument mostly played among janissaries. (Evliya Çelebi, 1999, vol. I, p. 640) Furthermore Evliya Çelebi pointed out that 12 janissary minstrels who also played çöğür had attended to the fest which was in honour of the İpşir Paşa’s promotion to grand viziership.<sup>4</sup> (Evliya Çelebi, 1999, vol. 3, p. 281) These findings indicate that there is significant number of Minstrels among the janissaries.

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<sup>4</sup> İpşir Paşa was one of the grand viziers of Murat IV.

Erman Artun points out that aşık literature that had come out after Turks' conversion to Islam is a different form of literature from the ozan-baksı tradition. Artun states that Janissary Minstrels also known as Army poets who are of Bektâşî order along with the poets of other orders had significant contributions in shaping this particular literary form. (Artun, 2001, p. 34)

Our goal with the data that has so far been presented is to show that Minstrels had held an important position in Ottoman Empire. We also mentioned that Minstrels had played an active role in the early years of the empire. But now we have to ask this question: "Based on this data, can we say these Minstrels had permanent positions in Ottoman court life?"

In order to find an answer to this question regarding this historical process, some documents would be of use to the point which we can assert that although Minstrels might not have had a solid organizational structure in the strictest sense, we can say that they certainly had given performances from time to time. Now let us elaborate on these documents: On a document regarding the officials who received salaries from Mâbeyn-i Hümâyün; three names, Mâi, Şefî and Hayâlî, were given under the item titled "astrologers and poets in the court" dated the year Hijri 973 (1565-1566) (BOA, HH.d, 10141)

On another document from sultan's treasury regarding the expenditures, it is stated that two çöğür playing poets were granted payments. (BOA, HH.d, 84) 5

Fuad Köprülü noted that "çöğürücü (çöğür player)" is used as the correspondent word for "âşık". Thus it is conceivable that çöğür players in the court were most likely minstrels. In file classification titled İE.SM, the voucher (makbuz) showing the payment (vazife akçesi) made to Çöğürücü (Çöğür player) Ahmet Çelebi could be presented as evidence of minstrels' existence in court. (BOA, İE. SM, 13/1332)

We come across more data regarding minstrels in other sources as well. Fuad Köprülü, in his study about the minstrels of 18th century, noted that famous nakkaş (muralist and miniaturist) Levnî was also a minstrel. Further in the same study, it is stated that Levnî did a miniature of well-known minstrel named Âşık Ömer which tells us that Âşık Ömer was an artist celebrated by the Ottoman elite. (Köprülü M., 1962, p. 395) Evliya Çelebi pointed out

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<sup>5</sup> The date of this document is 1163 ( 1749-1750)

that the minstrel with pseudonym İtaki had been brought from Uşşak by Celali Hasan Paşa, was forgiven by Mehmet IV. during the execution of Hasan Paşa and his attendants because of rebellion that was led by Hasan Paşa. Evliya Çelebi additionally noted that İtaki was an exceptional çöğür player. (Evliya Çelebi, 1999, vol.V, p.143) Biography collections of poets (Şuarâ Tezkîreleri) and various sources mention that there were many poets in the court who served sultans for different tasks. We also see that şehzâde (princes) and high-level officials had poets under their command some of whom were probably minstrels.

### **Şâiran-ı Hâssa (Courtier Minstrels)**

#### **Minstrelship in 19th Century:**

Several important researchers have mentioned that the performance styles of minstrels and the venues where they perform had undergone a change in the 19th century. Süleyman Şenel who is an expert on Âşık Music (Âşık Musikîsi) notes that minstrels that had gotten close to the court and the ruling elite had adopted a poetic style similar to the divan (classical) poetry. (Şenel, 1991, vol. III, p. 554) This tendency that was beginning to be influential 17th century became rather dominant in 19th century. On this particular subject, Fuad Köprülü states that minstrels had developed a keenness for composing poems in aruz meter (aruz vezni) and using non-turkish (Arabic or Farsi) words in their poems in order to compete with classical divan poets (kalem şairleri). Köprülü also states that the more the minstrels were favoured by the elite circles and the court, more estranged they had become in the eyes of the public. (Köprülü M. F., 1964, p. 525-526)

It is a known fact that minstrels had occupied important positions in big cities. Several sources have noted that, especially in Istanbul, the “âşık”s had a strong organization served under a guild run by an official titled “âşıklar kahyası (chamberlain of âşiks)”. (Köprülü M. F., 1964, p. 526) And “âşık”s were known to be the regulars of “semâî coffeehouses” which were opening up in Istanbul during this century. M. Halid Bayrı points out that it would be appropriate to call the poems that were composed in these location as “meydan (arena-stage) poems” and poets who composed them are called “meydan (arena-stage) poets”. He goes on to give the names of these poets who had performed in these semai coffeehouses during the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz and Abdülhamid II. Further in this study, we will be talking about one of these poets named Gedâyî in detail. (Bayrı, 1972, p. 85)



Fuad Köprülü states that the most famous of these semai coffeehouses was the one located in Tavuk Pazarı which also functioned as the headquarter where “âşıklar kahyası-chamberlain of âşiks” run the said guild. (Köprülü M. F., 1964, p. 527)

We have limited sources about the performance styles made in these coffeehouses. One of the most detailed source is “Semai Coffeehouses” written by Cemal Kaygılı (1890-1945). We think it would be suitable to include the quotation of the author since it is obvious that the performances given by Courtier Minstrels would be similar to the ones given in semai coffeehouses:

“They dance either during intermission from musical acts (fasıl) like mâni, koşma, kalenderî, divan, yıldız or after all the performances had been completed. As we all know, these dances are zeybek dances such as Çiftetelli, Köçek. Ağır lama, Kasap, Düğün Havası, Helvazı which could be considered as allaturca polka dances. One of these dances called Bıçak was best played by Halit Hoca of Unkapanı.

I have mentioned above musical acts such as Divan and Yıldız while I was talking about mâni, semâî, etc. These genres are written either like koşma in 6-5 syllabic meter (hece vezni) or aruz meter. Not everyone can sing Yıldız, because its makam was utterly different from others. (Kaygılı, 1937, p.10)

Kaygılı, later in his book, informs the reader about the way the acts were performed in semâî coffeehouses and according to the book the performances were made in the order stated below:

Performances would start with mâni.

Before mâni, koşma, semai acts were performed, an orchestra called çalgılı kahve muzikası (coffeehouse band) composed of a clarinet, çığırtma, düdük, a pair of nâra, a drum (darbuka), a pair of tongs with cymbals (zilli maşa) would start with a marching music, then a couple of polka or polka-like pieces, followed by a few european-esque pieces and folkloric pieces called oyun havası and folk songs called türkü.

Then they would go on to perform mâni faslı (act) which took about 30 minutes to an hour. Then koşma, semâî, divan, yıldız and destan kalenderî would be performed respectively. (Kaygılı, 1937, p. 21) Apart from the information stated above, Mehmet Halid Bayrı, about

the performances made in these semâî coffeehouses, informs the reader about the sing off acts (atışma) in Ramadan which we thought would be appropriate for our research:

*“...after all the preparations are completed, the owner of the coffeehouse would have a recourse to one of the arena poets to compose a riddle (muamma) to the best of his ability. This riddle would be written legibly on the outsides of a box and hang on the door space reserved for performers. The poet who composes the riddle was called “çığırtkan (promoter)”.*

When two arena poets got together, promoter would open the “arena” and his main duty was to prevent any outbreaks of arguments or fights between the poets and their fans in case of a defeat.

These entertainment activities would go on until the end of winter or Ramadan. On the last night, if other arena poets had not succeeded, promoter would solve the riddle that he composed and get paid by the owner of the coffeehouse and receive a gift package that is usually a set of undergarments and close the arena by praising the coffeehouse and its customers.

Süleyman Şenel, in his work titled “Kastamonu Âşık Fasılları” (minstrel acts in Kastamonu) published in İkdâm journal in 1914, summarizes the series of articles that were written accordingly to the data acquired by M. Fuad Köprülü from Âşık Fevzi Efendi of Kastamonu on the style of âşık musical acts (fasıl) performed in the district called Tavukpazarı İstanbul.

## **STYLES, TYPES AND REPERTOIRE PIECES OF THREE-PART ÂŞIK MUSICAL ACT ACCORDING TO ÂŞIK FEVZİ EFENDİ OF KASTAMONU:**

### **FIRST PART (Respectively)**

Pişrev: (Pişrev by Çukacıoğlu Ali Paşa) Begins with makam Karciğâr and roams the melodies in makam Hicaz during meyâne (high-pitched section)

Taksim: Lead-in to Fasıl (Musical Act) (done by Head of Âşıks) is performed in mixture of makams Hüseyinî, Hicaz, Sabâ, Evç, Rast or Kürdî-Hüseyinî; cadence (karar) and miyân is performed without digression from makams’ original note scale.

Gazel: (performed by Head of Âşıks) Lead-in with chants such as “Ya Dost” or “Ya Hû” Beyt-i Müfred (Single Verse): (performed by Head of Âşıks)

Divan: Every âşık performs plays with instrument and sings.

Âşıklar Atışması (Sing-off of Âşıks): (performed by Head of Âşıks), Taşlama (Satire): (Lead-in to Sing-off) speaking in satirical manner; satire by other Âşıks: (Reciprocative in style of Q&A)

Yanık Kerem: It is performed with syllabic meter and national poems in makam Karciğâr. Garip: Performed in makam Hicaz.

**INTERMISSION: Lasts about an hour on account of night (isha) prayer.**

**SECOND PART:**

Taksim + Gazel: (performed by Head of Âşıks) in makam Sabâ.

Kalenderi: (performed by Head of Âşıks) in makam Sabâ

Semai: (performed by Head of Âşıks) in makam Evç or İsfelhân in 6 parts (müseddes) or 5 parts (muhammes)

Destan: (performed by Head of Âşıks) epics about war and moral values and in humorous manner. Examples of famous epics: Kerbelâ Epic by Nevâî, İbrahim Epic by Perverî.

**THE END OF SECOND PART (with one, two, three âşıks):**

Bülbül Koşması: (in makam Dağî) and/or in makam Müstezâd (Acemaşiran) and/or Dü-beyt and/or Kalenderî of Püskük or Perçem and/or Kalenderi (by Âşık Emrah of Erzurum) and/or Makam Tâhir Zühre and/or Köroğlu and/or Genç Osman and/or Sivastapol and/or Yemen Epic and/or Mısır Epic.

**THIRD PART: Muammâ (Riddle)(Şenel, 2007, vol. I, p. 27)**

We know that these semâî coffeehouses were located in many cities especially in the 19th century. One of the most important functions of these establishments was to provide opportunity for âşıks to be famous throughout the empire once they would become popular via these coffeehouses which we know for a fact that there were âşıks who made so good names for themselves that they had gotten to serve in the court. The ensemble consisted of these minstrels had served in the court under the title of “Courtier Minstrels (Şâiran-ı Hâssa)” about which we would like to inform you now:

## **About the Staff of Courtier Minstrels**

There is a great deal of data in many studies regarding the fact that some âşiks had been hired to perform in Ottoman court during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II and had been abolished after the demise of Sultan Abdülaziz. Here are some examples of those datas:

M. Fuad Köprülü states that there were about 20 to 30 minstrels that were paid by the court during the reigns of Sultan Mahmud II, Sultan Abdülmecid and Sultan Abdülaziz and they would perform musical acts for the Sultan. (Köprülü M. F., 1964, p. 526)

Emre Artun notes that minstrels had been hired to perform in Ottoman court during the reign of Sultan Mahmud II and they had had an organized structure until the end of Sultan Abdülaziz's reign. Artun points out that interest shown for the minstrels in city circles had diminished after the end of Sultan Abdülaziz's reign. (Artun, 2001, p. 42-43)

Saadettin Nüzhet Ergun, in his book *Beşiktaşlı Gedâyî*, notes that Gedâyî who was one of the most prominent minstrel in 19th century had conducted the âşık musical acts before Sultan (Ergun, Undated, p. IX). Yahya Muhtar Dağlı, another author who wrote about Gedâyî, states that âşık musical acts had been performed in the court and Gedâyî was the one who had conducted these performances throughout the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz. (Dağlı M. Y., 1943, p. 15)

References stated so far aims to inform the reader that there are tenured minstrels in court between the reigns of Sultan Mahmûd II and Sultan Abdülhamid II. However, there is no exact information as to whether or not this ensemble consisting of minstrels had proper organizational structure, official title or their number of staff. There is no doubt that archive documents are the most accurate information source. Now we would like to inform you about the institutional structure of Courtier Minstrels (*Şairan-ı Hassa*) using documents at hand and other sources.

## **The Organizational Structure of Courtier Minstrels:**

We see that term “*Şairan-ı Hâssa* (Courtier Minstrels)” meaning poets who were at Sultan's service is the correspondent word for minstrel ensemble in the court in many archive documents. But we have to specify that this term is generally used in the periods of Sultan Abdülmecid and Sultan Abdülaziz. The term “*Şairan-ı Hâssa*” is used for minstrel ensemble

in almost all the documents in especially Sultan Abdülaziz period. We also see that the term “Mabeyn-Poets” was used as well to describe minstrel ensemble.

Many sources tell us that minstrels had first been hired by Sultan Mahmûd II which is also confirmed by some of the documents that we have. Some of the names of musicians who were hired by the court are seen in records during the last days of Sultan Mahmud II's reign. Here are some of the names:

Haşimî	Rıfkî	Ferâhî
Küşâdi	Selimî	Kalbî

(BOA, M-ad, 8176, vrk. 14.)

We come across additional data on the employment of minstrels by the court during the period of Sultan Mahmûd II in other documents of following years. In a payroll table for the period of Sultan Abdülaziz, we see that Ferâhî whose name is written in the table above had received 200 kuruş monthly salary from Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn and additional 100 kuruş from Sultan Mahmûd II himself.( BOA, MB, 113/ 43.)

As it is understood from the data above, minstrels had served in the court during the reign of Sultan Mahmûd II and his two succeeding sons. And we learn from archive documents that minstrels were led by a head-poet (ser-şair) who was responsible for hiring, education and performance of the musician staff just like in any other ensembles that had functioned under Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn.

We stumble upon the names of two head-poets in the documents, first of which is Poet Selim and the second of which is Gedâyî who was the head-poet throughout the reign of Sultan Abdülaziz. We have discovered the fact that Poet Selim was the head-poet from the salary records of the years 1278-1279 (1861-1863). (BOA, HH.MH, 881/6.) On the other hand, Gedâyî are mentioned as the head-poet in many sources. In the following paragraphs you will see that a person named Ahmet bin Mehmet (meaning Ahmed who is the son of Mehmed) was the head-poet who could most probably be Gedâyî himself according to the archive documents noting that Gedâyî's given name was Ahmed and his father's name was Mehmed. (BOA, MB, 153/ 121.)

It is emphasized in numerous sources that there were 20 to 30 Courtier Minstrels whereas in our sources, the number is 5 or 6. Now let us focus on the number of Courtier Minstrels according to the documents that we have:

We see that staff of Courtier Minstrels had consisted of 6 minstrels on the document showing the member list of Poets during the reign of Mahmûd II or soon after it. We do not have an overall salary records for the period of Sultan Abdûlmecid, but we do have a few documents on some of the members in our archives which will be presented to you in our section dedicated to the ensemble members. One particular document in the records of Sultan's Treasury, folder classification dated 1265 Teşrinisânî (November-December 1849) helps us to have an idea regarding the number of Courtier Minstrels in which it notes that the members of Mâbeyn Poets were paid 430 kuruş monthly salary. (BOA, HH.d, 932.)

We have some documents showing the number of Courtier Minstrels during the reign of Sultan Abdûlaziz some of which you can find below:

Members of Courtier Minstrels in 1278 and 1279 (1861- 1863):

Head-poet Selim Ağa	Âşık Mehmed	Ferâhî
İsmail Ağa	Aşık Hasan (BOA, MB, 133/ 73.)	

Members of Courtier Minstrels between 1284 and 1286 (1868/1871):

Şâir Selimî Baba	Şâir Adnî Efendi	Şâir İsmail
Şâir Hasbî	Şâir Fehmî Efendi	Şâir Gedâyî
Şâir Gülşenî <sup>6</sup> (BOA, HH.d,		

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<sup>6</sup> These names are taken from salary book dated 1284-1286

## Members of Courtier Minstrels in 1287 (1871/1872)

Ser- Şâir Selimî Efendi	Şâir Adnî Efendi	Şâir Hasbî
Fehmî Efendi	Şâir Gedâyî Efendi. <sup>7</sup> (BOA. HH.d, 18924.)	

## Members of Courtier Minstrels in 1290 (1874/1875):

Şâir Selimî	Şâir Adnî	Şâir Gedâyî
Şâir Hasbî	Şâir Fehmî <sup>8</sup> (BOA, HH. MH,	

As is understood from the tables above, the number of Poets had never been 20 or 30. Guest âşiks were at times invited for the âşık acts in which case the said numbers could be reached but evidence at hand suggests that number had gone up to no more than seven.

As we have mentioned therein before, we do not have definitive data on the character of the performances, but we are able to say that the performance style of âşık music of the period had existed in the court as well and despite a few minor differences in reference to the space in which the performance occurred, it had been done mainly in the manner we have mentioned earlier in the study.

### Members of Courtier Minstrels and Some Documents We Discovered In Ottoman Archives:

We have some documents on members of the Courtier Minstrels. Lists given above in this study do not contain some of the names mentioned in some of these documents. However, we realize that these names had served in Courtier Minstrels from the documents drawn up in their names.

<sup>7</sup> These names are taken from salary list dated 1287

<sup>8</sup> These names are taken from salary list dated 1290.

On a document from Sultan Abdülmecid period, it reads that the salary that had become vacant by the death of Sâzendegân-ı Hâssa poet Rıfki Ağa will be assigned to another member of Courtier Minstrels Adnî Ağa (BOA, HH.d, 653.) who is mentioned in the documents from the period of Sultan Abdülaziz. There is a petition written by Adnî regarding his salary in the documents from folder classification of Accounting of Sultan's Treasury. Since the lettering on this document had been done in a very poor manner it is obvious that it had not been penned by a clerk (kâtip), there is a strong possibility that the document had been written by non-other than Adnî himself (BOA, HH.MH, 767/39.)

On another document dated 1283 (1866-1867), it states that the 100 kuruş salary paid to Ali Ağa from the zecriye treasury had been assigned to Adnî after poet Ali Ağa's death. (BOA, HH. MH, 71/77. )

Saadettin Nüzhet Ergun in his work titled Beşiktaşlı Gedâyî shows us that Adnî and Gedâyî are contemporaries. (Ergun, Undated, p. IX)

We see that in the article titled "Gedâyî" by Ahmet Şükrü Esen that names of Adnî and many minstrels are mentioned in the epic (destan) written by Gedâyî when he was alive. Adnî is mentioned as is below:

Nimeti, Şefkati, Sâmi, Sadâyî

Azmî, Râhi, Vehbî, Kâmil, Fedâyî

Adnî, Fehmî, Sabri, Dercî, Gedâyî

Gibi ehl-i dilin kıymeti de var. (Koz, 2009, p. 211)

It is seen that the poet Fehmî is mentioned in this epic in which it is possible that names of many Courtier Minstrels would be found. But because the poets are mentioned by their pseudonyms, there is no way for us to precisely know which people registered by their real names in the archive documents are mentioned in this epic.

There is only one document that we could find about Poet Fehmî in which it informs that he had been paid a monthly salary of 600 kuruş by a direct order from Sultan himself. On the same document, it says the poet Hasbî had been paid an additional 200 kuruş salary. Another attribute of this document dated February of 1282 (February-March 1867) is that it shows that Courtier Minstrels had been functioning under Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn. Document



reads that the commander of Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn Osman Paşa has to issue a certificate for assignment of salaries paid to the poets. (BOA, HH. MH, 756/97. )

We come by the same kind of information on another document dated 1287 (1870-1871) in which it states that forfeiture of Poet İsmail's salary is notified by the commander of Mûsikâ-yı Hümâyûn İbrahim Bey. (BOA, HH. MH, 857/72.)

One other document reports a death of a member of Courtier Minstrels who had passed away during the early years in which Sultan Abdülaziz had ruled the empire, namely, Ferâhî. (BOA, MB.İ, 18/57.) Whose half of the salary 50 kuruş is assigned to his son Ahmet. (BOA, A. MKT. MHM, 244/28.) Both documents agree on the year 1279 (1862-1863) as the year of Ferâhî's death.

We find out in a document dated 1279 (1862-1863) that an Armenian minstrel named Kirkor had served in the court and he had been paid 200 kuruş monthly salary. (BOA, MB.İ, 18/ 31. )

Mehmet Albayrak, in his book *Alevî Bektâşî Edebiyatında Ermeni Aşıkları*, writes that a Kayseri-born minstrel with a pseudonym "Lîsânî" whose real name is Garabed Kalfayan had served in the court during the period of Sultan Mahmûd II. (Bayrak, 2005, p. 408) But this book does not contain any information about Kirkor, though it contains some information about a minstrel named Kirkor Serveri of Bursa. Documents presented in this study are not adequate to verify that these two are the same person. (Bayrak, 2005, p. 484)

The poet Gedâyî whose name we have quoted a couple of times is the most mentioned poet among the members of Courtier Minstrels in the documents.

According to the data discovered by Yahya Muhtar Dağlı, he was born in Tokat and his father was a timber merchant. (Dağlı M. Y., 1943, p.3) Some documents assert that Gedâyî's real name was Ahmet. One document we have, although not completely certain, appears to be corroborative of this information. This petition to buy coal for the chamber of Mabeyn-i Hümâyûn Poets had been signed and sealed by a person named Head-Poet Ahmed bin Mehmet (BOA, MB, 153/121.) which proves almost indisputably that Gedâyî's real name was Ahmet and his father name was Mehmet.

Gedâyî had been engaged in trade with his father until his 20s. He was taken ill when he fell desperately in love in his early 20s as a result of which his friends had decided to send

him to musician-poet gatherings that were very popular in Anatolia at the time. He had become interested in minstrelship and learnt how to play saz in these musician-poet gatherings and the nickname Gedâyî had been given to him by a Bektâşî Dede that he met in these gatherings. (Dağlı M. Y., 1943, p. 8-9)

Gedâyî had continued to engage in minstrelship in Tokat until he was recruited by the army. He was taken prisoner during one of the battles and after he was released he had settled in İstanbul.

Gedâyî who had become one of the most prominent minstrels in a short period of time opened up two semâî coffehouses in Beşiktaş and Üsküdar. Gedâyî, whose semâî coffehouse in Beşiktaş had become quite a popular destination among dignitaries of the time, attracted significant amount of attention from the Ottoman court and was eventually employed in Courtier Minstrels serving first as a poet and then as the head-poet all throughout the period of Sultan Abdülaziz. After the departure of Sultan Abdülaziz and dissolution of Courtier Minstrels, Gedâyî moved back to Beşiktaş and made a living by being a minstrel and petition-writer until his death in 1317 (1899-1900).

Saadettin Nüzhet Ergun points out that Gedâyî who was a well-read poet had written many forms of literature such as koşma, divan, semâî, yedekli semâî, gazel, mâni. Ergun also states that Gedâyî had dealt with sufistic issues and since he was devoted to Ehl-i Beyt (The family of Prophet Muhammed) he had written 3 elegies (mersiye) for Hz. Hüseyin, the grandson of Prophet Muhammed (SAV) who along with his baby brother Hz. Hasan was brutally murdered in Karbala by the army of Yezid I the Khalif of Omayyad on October 10th 680. (Ergun, Undated, p. XII-XIII)

And what is more is that Ergun claims many of Gedâyî's poems must have been composed but notes that he has seen any. Ergun says his gazel that starts with the verse "Esme ey bâd-ı sabâ bir daha cânan ile" is very famous and the only Gedâyî poem that we were able to confirm to have been composed is the one that starts with the verse "Gönlüm seni sever oldu" by İsmail Demirkıran.

## CONCLUSION

This study aims to display the existence of an ensemble that is composed of minstrels, namely “Courtier Minstrels”, in Ottoman court during the periods of Sultan Mahmûd II, Sultan Abdülmecid and Sultan Abdülaziz for the better part of 19th century and this study also aims to document that Âşık music that is one of the most important branches of folk music had been performed in Ottoman court in 19th century.

One other aspect of our study is the information given about organizational structure and staff of Courtier Minstrels in different periods supported by archive documents. And as a result of the archive search, we have included other documents about the members of the ensemble which makes this study a source of reference for future researches on Courtier Minstrels and its members.

As a result of the literature search, we have failed to attain concrete data about performance style of Courtier Minstrels in court which we have attempted to compensate by giving information on performance style of Courtier Minstrels in urban İstanbul of the time. Lastly, we would like to emphasize the need for the detailed researches regarding the performance style in court.

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