

Representations of Usûl in the Manuscripts of 'Alî Ufukî (17th c.)

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When 'Alî Ufukî (c.1610 - c.1675) decided to secure in writing the repertoire he was being taught orally during his apprenticeship as a court musician, he was faced with a number of considerable difficulties arising from the differences between the European and Ottoman musics. Among these, usûl, as opposed to European notions of measure, proportion, tempo and accentuation, is of course a fundamental issue.

The early 17th century, when 'Alî Ufukî acquired the foundations on which he would eventually build his system, was a period of transition in Europe. Older concepts of mensural rhythm were gradually abandoned in favor of the pulse-group measure that informs European notions of rhythm and rhythmical grouping until the present day. Thus it must be taken into account that 'Alî Ufukî was well aware of mensural theory.

The first part of the paper will deal with the question of how 'Alî Ufukî writes about usûl, which strategies he employs to demonstrate usûl. In the Paris manuscript (F-Pbn Suppl. Turc 292), the older, much more personal and spontaneous one of his two large collections of notations, he gives information about usûl practice. Interestingly, he presents rhythmical entities in a number of different ways, e.g. Arabic-style syllables or European-style note heads with stems up and down.

The second part is dedicated to the analysis of 'Alî Ufukî's symbols for usûller, their development and their employment, both in the Paris manuscript and the second source in London (GB-Lbl Sloane 3114). As important as the signs are the headings of pieces in which he sometimes states the usûl instead of or complementary to a symbol. A primary aim here is to interpret how certain usûller were understood and performed in mid-seventeenth-century İstanbul.