

warrior women in *Sirat Baybars*, most of whom appear in the narrative only to recede into the background. Chapter 10 focuses on the exception, a foreign queen who retains her authority and independence. Chapters 11, 12 and 13 examine the female characters of *Sirat Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan*. Kruk is most interested in sharing these characters' stories, and in measuring their degrees of independence and authority within the narrative context.

In chapter 14 Kruk analyses the tales briefly, recommending further research on gender in Arabic literature. She astutely explains how the presence of women in epic connects to gender issues in their societies of origin: "the martial women do not represent the female angle in a male discourse, but embody the perceptions, anxieties and desires of men" (p. 225). Such anxieties include: the social stigma of having only daughters, anxieties and risks of marriage and sexuality, and the fascination with the (sometimes sexual) appeal of domination and dominant women. This analysis complements and applies to many other literary contexts, including female characters in popular Arabic poetry or in Classical Arabic literature, not to mention female characters in many non-Arabic sources.

The only weakness in this book is the brevity of analysis, but this is also its strength, offering accessibility to a broad audience. The book contains an extensive bibliography. This highly informative book represents the culmination of more than twenty years of research, providing a great contribution to *sira* scholarship, gender studies, Arabic studies, literary studies and cultural studies.

**Melanie Magidow**

JOHN MORGAN O'CONNELL:

*Alaturka: Style in Turkish Music (1923–1938)*.

(SOAS Musicology Series.) xviii, 287 pp. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013. £70. ISBN 978 1 4094 4741 2.

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The early Republican era in Turkey has generated a wealth of scholarship dealing with the political aspects of the transition from Ottoman Empire to Turkish nation state, but less in the way of cultural or artistic studies. This book, which explores contested historical narratives through debates about musical style, is therefore a welcome addition to the literature. O'Connell brings together a wide range of materials including interviews, ethnographic research, archival documents, sound recordings and record catalogues to provide a richly textured account of early Republican musical life. The central argument of the book concerns the emergence of a binary discourse about "east" and "west", in which different musical styles reflect a wider division between what were perceived as regressive and progressive world views. The key terms of this discourse, *alaturka* and *alafiranga*, provide a locus for discussing musical reforms in the context of politicized interpretations of the past as propagated by ideologues such as Ziya Gökalp. In O'Connell's view, the *alaturka-alafiranga* divide was skilfully negotiated by proponents of *alaturka* music in order to maintain their cultural prestige and economic position in the face of the Republican elite's support for *alafiranga*-style reforms. Pre-eminent amongst them was vocalist Münir Nurettin Selçuk (1899–1981), who acted as a bridge between tradition and modernity by introducing Western performance practices (ranging from stage manner to voice production) into what was increasingly referred to as "Turkish classical music". In this manner, Selçuk "was able both to

address the modernist aspirations of the national present and at the same time to preserve the conservative traditions of an imperial past” (p. 2).

There is much to recommend this book, not least the fact that it is the only monograph in English devoted to this period of Turkish music history; moreover, as O’Connell notes, Selçuk’s importance as a performer and innovator has long demanded serious treatment from musicologists. The book is meticulously researched, and detailed information about Selçuk’s professional earnings, concert programmes and recording contracts – much of it gleaned from the singer’s personal archive – gives a revealing picture of performing life in early twentieth-century Istanbul. Likewise, the interweaving of commercial and artistic concerns is well illustrated by the portrayal of Selçuk’s partnership with foreign record companies (his recorded output is usefully listed in two appendices). O’Connell redresses some common misconceptions about Selçuk – e.g. that he studied at the Paris conservatoire for two years (in fact it was only three months) – while at the same time arguing that they maintained the narrative of Selçuk as a mediator between east and west. The author also explores the way in which various commentators adapted Atatürk’s pronouncements on music to suit their own ideological positions, and narrates Selçuk’s experiences as a performer at private gatherings for the president. A conspicuous feature of these events was the consumption of alcohol, and the subject is taken up again in one of the most interesting sections of the book, where the *alaturka-alafranga* debate is extended to include questions of social status and morality.

Readers who are interested in the career of a prominent Turkish artist and the powerful ideologies which shaped his approach to musical performance will not be disappointed. However, those hoping for a new perspective on this period of Turkish history may be less satisfied. While the *alaturka-alafranga* debate certainly represents a common discourse amongst late Ottoman and republican intellectuals, as a historiographical tool it inevitably reduces complex, multi-layered developments to a set of simple dualisms. Moreover, the book tends to view the Ottoman era from a Republican perspective, which sometimes results in an inadvertent endorsement of nationalist sentiments. For instance, it is surprising that the reader is not alerted to the fact that the term “Turkish music”, as a product of Republican nationalism, is itself still deeply contested, and those who are sensitive to such issues may wince when they see the Ottoman-Armenian Balian family described as “Turkish architects” (p. 75). Similarly, while the book offers a theoretically sophisticated treatment of the concept of a national Turkish music, it does not confront the political violence which underlay such ideologies, and which was central to the founding of the Republic. The book would also have benefited from references to recent literature in Turkish studies – for example, work by Michael Meeker – which emphasizes the continuities between the Ottoman and Republican periods, and is thus highly relevant to O’Connell’s description of the way that music mediates between past and present.

The musical analyses, which are found in chapter 1 and the epilogue (further transcriptions are included in an appendix), are a strong point of the book. Great attention to detail and insightful commentaries illustrate how Selçuk blended a traditional approach to musical texts with an innovative vocal technique. However, an otherwise laudable commitment to what is termed a “native discourse about musical style” sometimes leads the author to reproduce – rather than critique or explain – the aesthetic judgements of Turkish classical music aficionados. A comparison of a recording by the nightclub singer Zeki Müren with an earlier version by Selçuk, for example, is rather disparaging towards the former artist (pp. 244–6). But it would seem more useful to approach such exchanges as part of a musical

“conversation” – albeit an acrimonious one – as Martin Stokes has recently argued in *The Republic of Love: Cultural Intimacy in Turkish Popular Music* (Chicago, 2010). Lastly, although the book is well presented, the editing process has not prevented a number of mistakes (e.g. the second Tanzimat reform was enacted in 1856, not 1876; *kürdili* is spelt *kürdili* throughout) from entering the published version. Nonetheless, these do not affect O’Connell’s main argument, and *Alaturka* remains an impressive work of scholarship which deals with important issues both in modern Turkish history and musicology in a convincing way. It will appeal to specialists in ethnomusicology or Turkish studies, and to readers seeking a serious introduction to the topics of music and nationhood in the Middle East.

**Jacob Olley**  
King’s College London

HELEN LACKNER (ed.):

*Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition.*

(SOAS Middle East Studies.) xviii, 334 pp. London: Saqi Books, in association with the British Yemeni Society and London Middle East Institute, SOAS, 2014. £21.99. ISBN 978 0 86356 777 3.

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For those who are not aware of how much Yemen matters in the current maelstrom of Middle East politics, this book makes a convincing case. As the subtitle notes, Yemen is a society in transition following the forced resignation in 2011 of strong man ‘Ali Abdullah Salih after 33 years in power. The chief value of the volume is that it highlights the context in which Yemen entered the recent turmoil within and without the country; the main drawback is that the current process of rebuilding the state is ongoing and unpredictable. Yemen matters for a variety of reasons, including its strategic location in the volatile Horn of Africa, its recent history following unification of a socialist south and a republican north in 1990, the continuing relevance of tribalism as the main civil society in much of the country, the perceived role of terrorism, the relative ineffectiveness of four decades of development aid, the poverty and dismal health indicators, and the mere fact that Yemen is seldom mentioned in the media except in relation to terrorism.

As is common with most collected papers from a conference, the volume lacks consistency in the sixteen separate articles, at times citing different statistics and at others reading more like a development report than a readable book chapter. Yet the sheer variety of information on Yemen’s political, economic and development context make it well worthwhile reading as a whole. Considering that the conference was held in 2013, this is a timely turn around and much of the information is up-to-date. The best part of the volume is Helen Lackner’s succinct and informative introduction (pp. 1–26). Here she addresses the relation of Yemen to the outside world, a brief overview of history and politics of the former People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and Yemen Arab Republic (YAR), as well as the post-unification Republic of Yemen (ROY), the socio-economics of poverty, the declining natural resource base of water and oil, the economy of a state formerly heavily dependent on remittance income, a social structure which combines traditional group allegiances with the impact of nationalism, and major differences in wealth accumulation.