

Modality in Klezmer Music: Echoes of an Ottoman Legacy

In Dialogue with Moyshe Beregovski and Rauf Yektâ Bey

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Abstract

This thesis revisits the question of modality in klezmer music and situates it within the research discourse dealing with the legacy of Ottoman music culture. Building on Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope and Gadamer's hermeneutics, I construct an analytical framework to examine this largely orally transmitted musical tradition and introduce the term *modal literacy* to describe its more complex contemporary phase.

To explore how this modal literacy can be fostered today, I conduct a hermeneutic reading of texts by the klezmer musicologist Moyshe Beregovski (1892–1961), alongside the writings of the makam musicologist Rauf Yektâ Bey (1871–1935).

As an outcome of this research, I propose an adaptation of the Ottoman makam-based concept of *seyir* as a productive lens for deepening contextual modal understanding among performers, educators, and researchers engaged with the Eastern European klezmer repertoire.

Keywords: modality, klezmer, Rauf Yektâ, Moyshe Beregovski, modal literacy

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1 Introduction

In 1922, the renowned musicologist Rauf Yektâ Bey wrote a fierce monograph in the French Encyclopedia criticizing the hegemony of the European musico-theoretical framework of tonal harmony. The main issue he pointed out was how this framework distorted the so-called Turkish modes. What Yektâ was referring to was actually the Ottoman classical music tradition, rebranded as “Turkish Classical Music” in a nationalisation project. The concept of modality, according to Yektâ, was to be expanded to include all modes and their beautiful pathways, not only major and minor. (Yektâ 1922)

Up until today, the question still remains. In the musicological discourse, there is a difficulty of defining modality within various musical traditions, and in the case of klezmer music there is a confusion around the concept of modality caused by the application of European terminology and framework of tonal harmony. This causes difficulties both in musical practice and research. (Khazdan 2006)

This thesis explores the concept of modality in *klezmer* music within the larger Ottoman musico-cultural context.

In the sixteenth century a distinct form of professional instrumental music started developing in the Ashkenazi Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. The musicians who played at weddings and communal festivities were known as *klezmerim*, the plural of *klezmer* (כלי זמר meaning ‘tool of music’ in Hebrew). These professionals were an integral part of the musical landscape of a territory stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea well into the nineteenth century.

Today, the term *klezmer music* includes centuries of developed repertoire over a vast geographical territory. While the core repertoire is broadly considered modal to its character, specifics of its ‘anatomy’ remain vague, and appropriate terminology is lacking. The main influences shaping this modality are considered to be the Ashkenazi synagogal tradition of *nussah*¹, *davenen*² and various styles of Ottoman music.

This study focuses specifically on the latter and explores what new insights can be gained by examining modality in klezmer music in relation to the Ottoman musical landscape. I have

¹ **nussah:** the modal framework of Jewish liturgy

² **davenen:** prayer practice, individual and communal

chosen this specific area of focus as the topic has been largely neglected to date. I thereby situate this thesis as a part of the larger research field dealing with the aftermath of the Ottoman musical culture in various musical traditions today.

I conduct this research through a dialogue with the texts of Beregovski and Yektâ. Both authors were prominent and innovative scholars in their fields of musicology, contextualising largely oral musical traditions within the framework of contemporaneous academia: Beregovski the klezmer repertoire and Yekta Ottoman court music.

Beregovski and Yektâ lived almost contemporary lives, and their writings continue to influence research in the fields of Ottoman and klezmer music today. However, the texts of these two authors have to my knowledge not been situated in relation to one another yet.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the concept of modality in *klezmer* music in the writings of Moyshe Beregovski through a hermeneuting reading alongside the texts of Rauf Yekta Bey.

I also present a short historical overview of Ashkenazi musicians living on the territories of direct Ottoman cultural and musical influence. As an outcome of the study, I offer new tools that can be applied in the analysis of data that emerged from quantitative research and used by performers and educators to develop *modal literacy* (see definition in the chapter “Modal Literacy”) in institutional and non-institutional settings.

1.1 Historical Background

Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, the music of the klezmerim was played mainly at weddings and community celebrations (Beregovski 1941/1987, Feldman 2016). The repertoire was passed down from father to son and orally transmitted for the most part. Apart from the education in the family home, the orchestra — or as it is called in Yiddish, the *kapelye* — and the klezmer guild, a big part of Ashkenazic life was filled with *davenen* — praying. This Eastern European tradition of *davenen* consisted of recitation in small modal

nuclei (Frigyesi 2022). The cantorial musical tradition of the synagogue, modal to its character, was also ever prevalent in the life of a klezmer.

To expand further on the musical surroundings of a klezmer living within or near the borders of the Ottoman Empire, I want to emphasise that a musician located in or visiting Crimea, Bessarabia, Moldova, Wallachia, or Istanbul would, on a daily basis, be exposed to different styles of modal music under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. These could be the janissary repertoire of the *mehter* band, the *ezan* (call for prayer) recited five times a day, urban music of the *cafe hanes*, and the musical traditions of Roma, Greek, Armenian, and Crimean Tatar communities, to name a few. Research shows that in this region, due to the specific sociopolitical circumstances, an especially rich process of musical amalgamation was ongoing as a result of the cultural interaction among musicians for centuries (Garfias 1981; Pennanen 1999; Bunea 2010; Feldman 2016; Andrikos 2020; Delegos 2024). A more integral overview of Ashkenazi musicians living in the territories under Ottoman rule will be found in the chapter “Deepened Historical Context”.

Within the Jewish community, ideas of modality under influence of the Ottoman tradition were stretching far beyond the scope of the empire itself, for example, in the compositions of cantor Aaron Beer (1739–1821) in Berlin and Dubno-born cantor Hirsch Weintraub (1811–1881) who worked in Königsburg. These cantors employed features of modality, rhythm, and form fashionable in Ottoman music at the time. This points to an awareness of Ottoman musical customs among the klezmerim and cantors as far away as Polish and Prussian territories (Feldman 2022). All circumstances above indicate a rich modal environment in which the klezmerim in South-eastern Europe were living and working.

However, with the changes in social life, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the decrease of wedding ceremonies, large emigrations to America, the collapse of the Empires and rise of nation-states in Europe, followed by the Shoah³, the repertoire of the klezmerim went through radical changes.

³ **Shoah** (שואה) is Hebrew and means “catastrophe” or “ruin”. The term specifically refers to the genocide of Jews, in comparison to the term *Holocaust* which includes other groups as well.

The systems of oral transmission among the klezmerim began to fade in Europe. However, the timing correlated with the invention of audio recording and an interest in the topic of klezmer music in the field of academic study. Parts of the repertoire were captured, and the educational methods and tools of transmission changed.

The musicologist Moyshe Beregovski remains the most significant authority in klezmer research up until this day for his scholarship and vast collection of material. In 1937, Beregovski called for communal efforts in documenting the fleeing musical language and culture by sending out questionnaires to ordinary people with instructions on how to carry out interviews (Beregovski 1962). In his dissertation *Jewish Instrumental Folk Music* written around 1941 he described a vanishing repertoire. Alongside the documented material, Beregovski wrote of outdated and forgotten dance and music genres. This shift in repertoire and musical priorities reflects how klezmerim in the USSR during the first half of the twentieth century were adapting to rapid political changes and the needs of their listeners. The dissertation was published only after Beregovski's death (Beregovski 1941/1987).

In America, the Jewish diaspora lived in a new sociopolitical and musical environment. The practice of davenen vanished within the large secular Jewish communities (Frigyesi 2022), and the wedding ceremonies became shorter in the New World.

A fascinating cultural mix flourished in New York with new forms of musical fusion being created among the Greek, Armenian, Jewish, and Turkish diasporas, catering to the tastes of the immigrant audiences in America. Musicians arriving from Europe such as Joseph Moscovitz, Naftule Brandwein, Alex Fiedel and many more recorded vast quantities of repertoire for commercial purposes. Recordings from this period remain the largest source of reference for practicing klezmer musicians today. New understandings and expressions of modality developed (Graziosi 2018). This development, however, falls out of the scope of this research, as I will focus on *modality in klezmer music in the light of an Ottoman legacy through a dialogue with Moyshe Beregovski and Rauf Yektâ*.

1.2 Perspective of Interpretation and Positioning

The histories tell us a great deal about their authors, and more widely, about the time and place in which they were written. (Samson 2009, p. 19)

In this section, I will position myself as an interpreter and researcher to explicate my prejudice and horizon of understanding in accordance with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory presented in the methodology chapter. From a hermeneutic standpoint, research cannot be conducted objectively, as the questions we ask and conclusions we draw are inevitably tied to the tradition we grew up and live in. It is therefore crucial to situate yourself as a researcher, to aim for transparency rather than to claim objectivity. I will go over the understanding of modality in klezmer repertoire and beyond as well as the analytical references with which I entered the hermeneutic circle (see chapter on Gadamer's Hermeneutics), as far as I can point out and recognise them.

I was born in 1998 and come from a family line of writers and historians (Parland 1991). The Finnish school of semiotics, led by musicologist Eero Tarasti, developed in close collaboration with my great-grandfather, Oscar Parland. Tarasti studied under Algirdas Greimas, who had studied with the philosopher Vasily (Wilhelm) Sesemann at Kaunas University – Sesemann was Parland's uncle (Tarasti 2006) and known to me as uncle Tutti. Discussions around the dinner table, seminars, and the reading of each other's texts have been habits of the family for at least six generations (Semenova-Tian-Shanskaia 2013). A style of analysis with a strong emphasis on context is part of the family culture and has inevitably influenced me.

I grew up in a musical environment dominated by tonal harmony. My early musical education included lessons in European music history, theory, and trumpet classes.

As a child, I also spent time in the Finnish Orthodox Church. The liturgy of the Finnish Orthodox Church, which is predominantly recited or sung, is based on the tradition of *znamenny* which consists of modal nuclei (Kasanko 1938). In this way, recitation, heterophony, and a kind of modality were part of my early musical vocabulary.

At the age of 13, I was recruited by the local klezmer kapelye in Helsinki. I learned to play by ear at jam sessions, camps, and festivals. Evgenia Khazdan described the present-day educational praxes in the international klezmer community in her article (2006, p. 85):

The training of a “beginning klezmer” starts with an introduction to “Jewish modes,” and in some classes at representative seminars (e.g., “KlezKanada”), participants are given sheets with written-out sound rows. As a rule, these are Freygish (“altered

Phrygian”, it may also be called “Aava Raba”), Doyrish (“altered Dorian” - “Mi Shebrah”), major, and harmonic minor. No one is surprised by the juxtaposition of exotic terminology with concepts familiar to European academic musicians, nor by the assignment of several names to a single sound row, nor by the appearance of altered harmonies in the absence of their basic types (Phrygian, Dorian, and natural minor). The lessons resemble a training of ‘advanced user’: a brief historical overview, some theoretical information about the subject (translation of the word ‘klezmer’, the area of Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe, a mention of the connection between klezmer music and synagogue music, and its place in the wedding ritual). The main time is devoted to playing. In the end, everything is reduced to learning popular melodies, so the question of why one should know the names of the sound rows and their structure remains open.⁴

The situation described by Khazdan reflects my own learning experience and theoretical understanding well. Later on, I got a university degree in Global Music from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. The department provided freedom to shape the studies according to the students’ own needs and wishes with an emphasis on performance, research, and pedagogy. I continued studying klezmer music over the years to come within the structure that the department provided. In a wish to develop a better analytical and theoretical comprehension of modality, I moved to Istanbul to study Ottoman music theory at the Turkish State Music Conservatory. This move seemed like the most reasonable step from a theoretical and historical point of view to me.⁵

After two years of studies, I was able to play and formulate musical ideas with a new sharpness. The musicologist Rauf Yektâ’s theories lay the ground for the education in *makam*⁶ theory which is currently practised at the Turkish Music State Conservatory. After a fellowship at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul I began to write my master's thesis, contextualising modality in klezmer music as a phenomenon developed under Ottoman musico-cultural influence.

⁴ author’s translation

⁵ it may also be that the Finnish Orthodox Church being under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople had an effect on me and that I, unconsciously, perceived this to be the center of historical cultural influence.

⁶ modal practice stemming from the Ottoman context

I constructed the research as a hermeneutic reading of the texts on modality of Rauf Yektâ and Moyshe Beregovski. My thesis was that the transmission of modal understanding among klezmerim must have gotten lost in the switch from being an oral musical tradition to being integrated into the field of academia.

These were my articles of choice:

1. Moyshe Beregovski, “Klezmer modes” (*Лады еврейской народной инструментальной музыки*, 1937–1941/1987, pp. 40–45).
2. Moyshe Beregovski, “The altered Dorian scale in Jewish folk music” (*Изменённый дорийский лад в еврейской народной музыке*, 1946/2000, pp. 549–568).
3. Rauf Yektâ, “La musique turque: Le mode turque” (1922).

1.3 Urgency/Relevancy

There is a desire and wish to bring in oral musical traditions into the academic space through, for example, the establishment of departments such as the Global Music Department of the Sibelius Academy, at which this thesis will be published. The dynamic and evolving nature of these disciplines provides an opportunity to reconsider how historically orally transmitted traditions are taught on a practical level, researched, and framed within academia. This question has a philosophical and ethical dimension to it, apart from the sociological and musico-theoretical.

To produce informed, complex scholarship and insightful education, there is a need to part away from the framework of post-colonial binarisms of East versus West, colonizer versus colonized, victim versus perpetrator, and enter a more multilayered discussion of how power dynamics in complex ways influence and determine discourse (Olley 2023). There is a need for theoretical stances that go beyond national, essentialist, and ideologically charged notions in the field of music studies (Delegos 2024). This will also bring new clarity to the discussion surrounding klezmer music and its ‘anatomy’. In an aim to address these needs I bring hermeneutics to the discussion, emphasising the effect of historical proximity on interpretation, musical comprehension, and expression.

1.4 Research Questions

If we want to find out, for example, how the klezmer trained himself, how and where he learned to play, or how he acquired the necessary repertoire, we know scarcely anything! (Beregovski 1946/2000, p. 530)

We can only speculate about how exactly the systems of oral education functioned in the klezmer guilds before the twentieth century. We know solely that if an amateur musician wanted to play, he went to study with the local klezmer (Beregovski 1962). We are now left in a situation where the previous pedagogical practices, musical and social environments are lost. The consciousness and conceptual tools needed to analyze and relate to the repertoire have neither been developed yet. To address this gap in research and practice, I introduce the term *modal literacy*, as the skill of modal comprehension in a contemporary context, as a combination of oral and literal competence. I define modal literacy as the ability to navigate musical meaning, do abstract analysis⁷ paired with a developed intuition for musical agency⁸ within the modal framework. The term will be presented in depth further down in the text.

In this study, I aim to answer the following questions:

Can modality in klezmer music be seen as an Ottoman legacy through a dialogue with Beregovski and Yektâ? How can modal literacy in klezmer music be fostered among researchers and performers today?

1.5 Literary Review

The discussion around modality within the Ashkenazi musical tradition has been masterfully summarized by musicologist Edwin Seroussi. In his 2009 article, “Music: The ‘Jew’ of Jewish Studies”, Seroussi shows how racial and political ideologies have inherently coloured the academic discussion concerning the so-called Jewish music and its theory since the beginning of its entry into the field of musicology.

⁷ abstract analysis in this case means the ability to identify and theoretically conceptualize underlying modal structure

⁸ musical agency meaning the ability to create

To summarise this process, the documentation of Ashkenazi music started under the influence of the Haskalah movement⁹ in the 19th century within the field of cantorial repertoire.

Leading protagonists included the Austrian cantor-composer Salomon Sulzer (1804–1890), the Parisian choirmaster Samuel Naumbourg (1815–1880), Berlin’s Louis Lewandowski (1821–1894), the Gothenburg cantor-scholar Abraham Baer (1834–1894), Viennese Joseph Singer (1840–1911), and Eduard Birnbaum (1855–1920). There was a desire to develop an academic educational theoretical system and to include “Jewish music” into a common European heritage. The “ancient roots” of European Christian music were sought in Jewish liturgical music as part of this ideological endeavour.

In an effort to categorise the cantorial tradition, Joseph Signer wrote his monograph called *Die Tonarten des traditionellen Synagogengesanges (Steiger): ihr Verhältnis zu den Kirchentonarten und den Tonarten der vorchristlichen Musikperiode; erläutert und durch Notenbeispiele erklärt*¹⁰ (Signer 1886). The modes were presented as scales, and for describing them, the term *steiger*¹¹ was introduced. The word can be translated from Yiddish as ‘manner’, ‘style’, or ‘way’ and was used within the cantorial community prior to the nineteenth century (Tarsi 2013). Boaz Tarsi writes of this term:

Consequently, in nineteenth-century theoretical discourse and onwards, *steiger* serves as the primary designation of an approximation of the basic unit in a modal system of sorts (i.e., an equivalent of sorts, of what may be considered a “mode”). But in the discourse of insiders, *Steiger* comprised what an insider knew about how to perform a given musical section according to the given tradition. [...] Today, one of the principal challenges for researchers is defining fully what “mode” in the modern sense really means in the context of Ashkenazi prayer music. (Tarsi 2013, p. 63)

In this way, a discrepancy between theory and practice developed. While the musical practice of the insiders was one, theory was written to suit the ideological needs and academic

⁹ **Haskalah:** (c. 1770s–1880s) arose as a movement for social change in the European Jewish community influenced by the Enlightenment. The advocates of the Haskalah—figures such as Moses Mendelssohn—promoted secular education, vernacular culture, and the demonstration of Judaism’s contributions to European civilization.

¹⁰ *The Modes of Traditional Synagogue Chant (Steiger): Their Relation to the Church Modes and to the Modes of the Pre-Christian Music Period, Explained and Clarified With Musical Examples*

¹¹ *steiger/steiger:* differences in transliteration of Yiddish

discourse of the time. The newly coined Steyer system by Signer was referencing the Gregorian and pseudo-Greek modes *Aeolian*, *Dorian*, *Phrygian*, etc., as these were considered evidence of antiquity. Of course, it is impossible to know how these modes were practised 2000 years ago, and this alleged lineage favoured by the cantors was an ideological statement rather than a historically supported one (Seroussi 2009).

Along these lines, cantors worked on presenting theories that would fit Ashkenazi liturgical repertoire into the politically endorsed musicological narrative and support its legitimacy (Seroussi 2009). Tarsi summarises the outcomes of these efforts aptly:

The product of the first attempts to describe the various musical settings used in Ashkenazi liturgical practice was a scale system, a bit vaguely defined in some parts and not completely consistent in others, that contained three types of scales:

- I. Scales corresponding to pseudo-Greek modes. In some cases, modes were slightly adjusted to match the scales used in particular musical settings.
2. Scales corresponding to the minor and major modes of Western common practice.
3. Scales identified by their traditional Hebrew or Yiddish names. Many of these scales were unique to the Ashkenazi liturgical repertoire. Others had been assimilated into the repertoire and given their own particular Hebrew or Yiddish names.

This system was strongly influenced, directly or indirectly, by contemporary Western music theory, and its adoption marks a conceptual gap between insiders' intuitions about how the Ashkenazi system worked and the academic or scholarly articulation of the system. (Tarsi 2013, p. 12)

With time, the scholarly interest in Ashkenazi music expanded and came to include the non-religious repertoire as well. The first extended writing about modality within the repertoire of the klezmerim was done by the groundbreaking musicologist Moyshe Beregovski as a part of his doctoral dissertation in the chapter *Klezmer Modes*.

Working in the Soviet Union, Beregovski's focus lay on Jewish folk music instead of the previously commonly favoured cantorial repertoire. His dissertation (1941) was the first

extensive academic work on the Eastern European Jewish Instrumental repertoire. The published works of Beregovski (1962, 1941/1987, 1946/2000) are frequently cited, and he remains the leading authority in the field of klezmer music. Beregovski was working in an aggressively anti-religious political environment in the USSR and repeatedly denied any influence of Ashkenazi religious music on the repertoire of the klezmerim. Beregovski had, however, himself grown up singing in the synagogue choir and was informed of the theoretical writings of the cantors of the previous century (Khazdan 2022). In his system of modal categorisation, building on preceding generations of writing, Beregovski used the term *freygish* or altered Phrygian, and proposed *doyrish* as altered Dorian in combination with minor and major, emphasising these as working terms rather than defined ones.

The klezmer revitalisation movement adapted Beregovski's work, and his modal categorisation system is in active use among klezmer performers and researchers today (Khazdan 2006; Malin 2025, Horowitz 1999; Saitanov, Khazdan, & Vlasova 2021). Most frequently, we find four main modes being outlined: *freygish*, *doyrish*, minor, and major. At times, these are used interchangeably with the cantorial names Ahava Rabbah (*freygish*), Misheberakh (*doyrish*), Mogen Ovot (minor), and Adonoi Molokh (mixolydian major). As Khazdan mentions, there is a lot of confusion surrounding this system (Khazdan 2006).

In this thesis, I work in depth with Beregovski's writings on modality to gain more clarity.

Contemporary with Beregovski was the researcher, musicologist, and composer Abraham Zevi Idelsohn (1882-1938). Idelsohn did extensive work documenting various traditions of Jewish music from all over the world, especially in Palestine. The legacy of his work remains complicated but crucial to the study of so-called Jewish music today (Khazdan 2020).

Heavily involved in the Zionist movement, Idelsohn proposed his theory, which aimed to find the common, authentic, national traits of a pan-Jewish Music that stems from the Middle East. Moyshe Beregovski was well aware of the scholarship of Idelsohn and wrote lengthy, thorough critiques of the publications of the latter (Khazdan 2020). Specialising in the works of Beregovski, Khazdan points out that this type of extensive disapproval was the only way a researcher in the Soviet Union at the time could reference a scholar from a non-communist country without compromising their own safety. It is therefore hard to know exactly what the thoughts of Beregovski on Idelsohn's theories were, but we know for sure that there he was well informed of them (Khazdan 2020).

Among more recent scholarship on modality in the liturgical Ashkenazi repertoire, Judit Frigyesi has done extensive work on the Eastern European tradition of davenen. Frigyesi proposes that davenen in its core consists of modal nuclei which she chooses to analyse borrowing from the framework of Ottoman makam theory, with the reasoning that this modal framework was geographically and historically closer to the development of Ashkenazi repertoire than the Arabic *maqam* system, which Idelsohn proposed (Frigyesi 1982).

Building on Frigyesi's and Baruch Cohon's contributions (1950), Boaz Tarsi (2001a; 2001b; 2002; 2013) is working on a deepened understanding of the cantorial modes in the modern American Ashkenazi tradition. Rebecca Small preliminarily investigated the connection between liturgical and klezmer modality in her master's thesis (2010). This is a highly relevant topic, the research of which will reveal critical information about the formation of the repertoire of the klezmerim and its modality. The important study of Smalls unfortunately suffers from heavy essentialism by, for example, speaking of "Jewish- and Christian liturgical music" without defining which denomination, time period, and geographical location is meant, as well as uncritically referencing concepts of "ancient musical traditions" which stem from the previously described cantorial discourse of the nineteenth century. The work is, however, a crucial beginning in the field of research despite the outdated ideological lens. The influence of Ashkenazi liturgical music on klezmer modality is a topic that deserves extensive research but falls beyond the scope of this thesis, as my focus lies on the Ottoman cultural legacy in the repertoire, which remains an area neglected at large.

Known for his extensive work on klezmer music, musicologist Walter Zev Feldman proposes a scheme of analysing the surviving klezmer repertoire as consisting of four building blocks: (a) early Renaissance dance, (b) baroque music, (c) davenen/nussah (liturgical), (d) Ottoman music of different kinds (Feldman 2016).

Beregovski also notes the influence of Ottoman music but concludes that he has no access to research in the field of Turkish musicology. However, he encourages the study of nearby musical cultures with the assurance that advancements in these studies will bring more clarity to klezmer music research as well (Beregovski 1962). Feldman has done a great work of shedding light on the historical connections of klezmerim and other musicians in the regions of Moldavia, Wallachia, Bessarabia and beyond. As one of the leading scholars within the field of Ottoman court music, Feldman is in a privileged position to see connections among

these musical traditions and approaches the subject from a perspective of historical ethnomusicology. Feldman's pivotal work serves as a solid basis for my research.

As one of the greatest authorities on the writings of Beregovski, Evgenia Khazdan (2023) has sharply pointed out the inefficiency of comparative musicology when researching Eastern European Jewish Instrumental repertoire in general. Through her research, Khazdan shows that the comparative musicology method lacks the breadth to comprehend the Ashkenazi musical tradition as a whole and that significant questions around modality remain unanswered due to the distortion of the material through the academic lens. A few problems she outlines are (a) the categorisation of what counts as music that has now expanded to include, for example, the recitation of sacred texts; (b) the shifting definition of musical instruments, with for example the *shofar*¹² now classified as a sound-producing object; (c) a broader range of musical cultures being studied, showing that the parameters developed for European classical (and a handful of other European) traditions are not applicable to many others; and (d) our understanding of how musical cultures develop and interact has deepened.¹³

Most interestingly, Khazdan points out that in comparative musicology, while investigating a variety of phenomena, the notion of time is left in brackets (Khazdan 2023). Khazdan calls for new methods in musicology to comprehend modality in the klezmer repertoire (Khazdan 2008). The notion of time will be central to this study. The conclusions of Khazdan echoes Seroussi's statement that a new musicology of the Jewish needs to be developed, as current "Jewish Musicology" is primarily based on misconceptions stemming from the German field of Musicology and Ethnomusicology.

Due to the practice of transmission being mainly oral, it is challenging to conduct chronological research on the development of klezmer music. Neither has a comprehensive theoretical framework been established for teaching and discussing this music; however, an active academic and practical dialogue is ongoing (Horowitz 1999; Rubin 2001; Saitanov, Khazdan, & Vlasova 2021; Small 2010; Malin & Shanahan 2025).

¹² **shofar**: ritual musical instrument made of ram's horn used in Jewish religious ceremony

¹³ following Khazdan's last point, I propose, for instance, considering Delegos (2024) on musico-cultural heterotopias in rebetiko music.

In an attempt to answer these calls for new lenses, methodologies, and perspectives, I propose new analytical frameworks and tools, basing my choices on Khazdan's suggestion (2023) to incorporate hermeneutics. The aim is to fill the identified gap in the field of klezmer research and find out how contextualising modality in klezmer music as a phenomenon developed under Ottoman musico-cultural influence can enrich our understanding of it and how *modal literacy* can be fostered among klezmer practitioners today.

2 Theoretical Frameworks

Behind all knowledge (*savoir*), behind all attainment of knowledge (*connaissance*), what is involved is a struggle for power. Political power is not absent from knowledge; it is woven together with it. (Foucault 2019, p. 32)

In this chapter, I present my theoretical frameworks and the concepts I focus on. I will start by presenting Gadamerian hermeneutics and then move over to Bakhtin's chronotope.

2.1 Gadamer's Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the theory and methodology of text interpretation which I will be working with. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, all our understanding is shaped by presuppositions and prejudices developed from the effects of tradition. We are, therefore, in our understanding and interpretations, inevitably tied to history and the tradition in which we grow up and exist. Prejudice shapes the questions we ask, the methods of research we use, and the interpretations we make. These prejudices, these references, help us assign meaning to the world. We can never step outside of our tradition. All we can do is try to understand it better. Through broadening our horizons and forming new presuppositions, we can acquire new knowledge and reshape our prejudices (Gadamer 2013).

To broaden our horizons of understanding, Gadamer proposes to work with the hermeneutic circle of interpretation. To enter the hermeneutic circle one shall start by asking a question, as Gadamer's teacher Heidegger famously stated. Having entered the circle successfully, one must constantly re-evaluate one's pre-understanding by measuring one's understanding of the part in relation to the whole and the whole in relation to the part. After a re-evaluation of the whole, a new reading of the part is done.

In this thesis, I use the hermeneutic circle following the methodology of historical text analysis of Chris Pedersen at Columbia University (2017). This theoretical framework will guide my research approach to the chosen texts of Moyshe Beregovski and Rauf Yektâ.

I will also employ this to investigate how the interpretation of music is guided by the listener's horizon of understanding, i.e., musical erudition, and how these processes relate to *modal literacy* regarding klezmer music in a contemporary setting.

2.2 Bakhtin's Chronotope

To interpret, be it text or music, there is a need to outline how expression arises.

Coined as part of Albert Einstein's theory of relativity in physics, the concept of the chronotope later found application in literary theory. Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) borrowed the term as a metaphor for the inseparability and interconnectedness of time and space.

This is how Bakhtin describes it:

Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically viable; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of the axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (Bakhtin 1981, p. 84)

The creativity of the artist and the creation of meaning are, for Bakhtin, inevitably tied to time and space. It is in their intersection and friction that artistic expression arises. The artist creates in the moment, and once the moment is gone, the meaning is changed.

Musicologist Ramilya Yarmukhametova (2020) transfers the concept of chronotope from literary analysis into musicology by summarising a few main points:

- music is an eidetic art, rich in content and meaning
- music is a distinct kind of social consciousness (thinking)
- music constitutes a distinct field of sociology as a means of communication;
- as a form of communication, music is related to speech and has its own syntactic and grammatical structures
- the content of music is revealed through *intonatsii*¹⁴ – special semantic cells of music
- the perception and interpretation of musical *intonatsii* depend on the musical erudition of the subject
- the *eidos* (meaning) of musical-semantic figures is revealed in context
- each historical era forms its type of musical *intonatsia*, which characterises a particular worldview and chronotope

¹⁴ **intonatsia** (Russian *интонация*; *pl. intonatsii*): a term coined by Boris Asaf'ev, widely used in the Russian school of musicology and employed by Beregovski. The term encompasses musical rhetorics and specific stylistic choices made by the player which distinguishes a style specific to a certain time and space. *Intonatsia* should not be conflated with the concept of intonation in English.

According to Yarmukhametova, musical meaning is encapsulated in chronotopes that arise in a specific intersection of time and space. This means that when music is not communicated instantly, but through recordings and notation, the creator and the interpreter are separated by a historical temporal distance (see the chapter on Methodology). The bigger the distance that separates the interpreter (listener, performer, or researcher) from the documented musical repertoire grows, the more tradition in the sense of Gadamer accumulates between them.

In my analysis, I will employ the concept of chronotope in relation to both text and music.

3 Methodology

To work with the interpretation of chosen historical musicological texts, I adapted the hermeneutic methodology developed by Pedersen (2017).

Drawing on Gadamer's theory, Pedersen states that conducting a hermeneutic reading of a text in the history classroom means entering into a dialogue with the text. The dialogue happens through temporal historical distance. This historical distance encompasses all the tradition that has developed between the time of the text creation and the interpreter's encounter with the text. It carries in it a possibility for the interpreter to revise their prejudice and reshape their understanding of the past and the present.

The meaning of a text is "exiled" the instant it is written down, and only by bridging that temporal distance can the interpreter end this "alienation," make the text speak, and reveal its meaning. This is accomplished by posing an open-ended question, which initiates a dialogue between the text and the interpreter. An open-ended question raises further questions, whereas a closed-ended question elicits simple "correct" or "incorrect" answers.

As an example of a non-dialogical question, Pedersen asks, "How many Canadian soldiers were sent overseas and returned in WWI and WWII?". By contrast, a dialogical question might be, "Although the two wars invite comparison, they have been memorialized in Canada in very different ways—WWI is commemorated widely and visibly, whereas WWII is remembered far less. Why?"

This methodology allows us to look for a deeper understanding and broaden our horizons when working with historical texts (Pedersen 2017). The hermeneutic reading of crucial texts in this study is an adaptation of Pedersen's classroom-based method to a musicological context. I aim to broaden my horizon of understanding modality by entering into dialogue with the chosen texts of Beregovski and Yektâ. My chosen open-ended question is:

How can modal literacy in klezmer music, seen as a post-Ottoman legacy, be fostered among researchers and performers today?

To analyse the texts, I will situate them within an interpretation of the historical context in which they arose (see the chapter "Deepened Historical Context") and within the discourse of their time, engaging with the whole of the hermeneutic circle. My pre-understanding of the

chosen texts as the interpreter is the starting point of the analysis and will be followed up as the interpretations change and my horizons of understanding broaden.

4 Deepened Historical Context

Only through understanding the whole are we able to understand the part in the hermeneutic circle. This chapter is therefore dedicated to an overview of klezmerim living on the territories under Ottoman rule. It lays the ground for an understanding of the bigger modal framework within which at least parts of the surviving klezmer repertoire developed.

When we turn to earlier periods, we can rather easily succumb to what some philosophers call retrospective fallacy. By that I mean that we assign national labels to composers and repertoires as though present-day political borders had some kind of permanent meaning (Samson 2009, p.16)

The retrospective fallacy that Samson describes is common in the field of musicology too. To do a hermeneutic analysis of the material, I first present the historical background of Ottoman musical influence in the vassal states Wallachia and Moldova, and through that on the broader Eastern European Jewish community from the early eighteenth until the early twentieth century. By doing this, I try to resist the tendency to think of history in terms of nation-states whose borders were only drawn at the turn of the last century in the way that Samson describes. At the end of the chapter, I also briefly present the authors whose texts I have chosen to work with.

4.1 The Emergence of a Distinct Professional Instrumental Music in the Jewish Community of Eastern Europe

The first guild of professional Ashkenazi musicians was recorded in Prague in the sixteenth century. Around the same time, in Prague (1532) and Kraków (ca. 1534), the first known written sources of Yiddish in so-called Slavic countries were noted (Beider 2018). By the seventeenth century and onwards, Yiddish was spoken on a vast territory in Eastern Europe. Over time, this included the territories of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Russian, Habsburgian, and Ottoman Empires. The repertoire of the professional musicians, known as klezmerim, came to be an integral part of what we call Yiddish culture.

The klezmerim provided music mainly for the wedding ritual and sometimes other festivities of the Jewish community. At times, musicians were also hired to play for non-Jewish audiences and occasions. A *kapelye*, the Yiddish word for orchestra, consisted of three to five

musicians until the middle of the nineteenth century, after which the orchestras started growing. (Beregovski 1941/1987) The instrumentation as we know it from the later nineteenth century could consist of violins, cellos, tsimbl, clarinets, flutes, bass or tuba, trumpets, valve trombones, and poyk (drum) in varying combinations. Music was passed on orally, and often the profession would go from father to son. To my knowledge, no research on the involvement of female instrumentalists has yet been done¹⁵.

4.2 Ashkenazi Musicians Living in the Territories Under Ottoman Rule

The vassal states Moldavia and Wallachia were, despite being geographically located at the outskirts of the Ottoman Empire, closely tied to the capital starting already from the fifteenth century. Cattle and wheat from the regions were highly desired in Istanbul and brought through trade routes from Jassy and Bucharest.

Before 1711, the region's Jewish population was predominantly Sephardic, although scattered Ashkenazi communities are also documented. A study by Bulent Şenay on Jews employed by the Ottoman Foreign Department in Moldavia and Wallachia, and later on Romania, as well as being hired for financial and other judicial tasks by the Moldovan and Wallachian princes, shows a presence of both a Sephardic and Ashkenazi upper class in the region in various amounts already from the sixteenth century (Şenay 2020). The significant influx of Ashkenazim began after 1711, when Prince Dimitrie Cantemir was deposed and Phanariot¹⁶ Greek princes took over Moldavia (Cernovodeanu 2005). Seeking to improve relations with Western Europe, the Ottoman authorities invited Jewish merchants to settle down in the region. Ashkenazi migration grew from the Polish and Czech lands, the Russian Empire, and other parts of Eastern Europe. In Moldavia, the Jewish population went from 11,732 in 1803 to 79,164 in 1838, and over the years, the influx of Ashkenazim continued growing steadily.

¹⁵ studies in related fields of music reveal that female instrumentalists in male-dominated areas often are portrayed as the *first ones* and the *only ones*. This not only distorts the historical reality, but isolates the musician, reinforcing false narratives resulting in social repercussions (Nenić 2019; Holman 2019; Peković 2022). An investigation of this subject in relation to the klezmer field is needed.

¹⁶ the Phanariot community was the upper class of Rum (Byzantine Greek) of the neighborhood Fener in Istanbul. For more interesting research on this, see Christine Philliou's *Biography of an Empire: Governing Ottomans in an Age of Revolution*, 2010

Ladislau Gyémánt writes of this:

By 1848, over 60 smaller towns and villages had been set up with Jewish majority population. If we also add the natural increase due to early marriages, ritual sanitary and dietary prescriptions, and the low mortality due to abstinence and stable family life, one has now all the main causes of the growth of the Jewish population until 1859-1860 to 134,100 persons, of which 124,897 in Moldavia and only 9,234 in Wallachia. In the same period (1856), the Jewish population in Basarabia, which had been integrated into the Russian Empire in 1812, reached the number of 78,751. (Gyémánt 2002, p. 89).

The klezmerim of the region collaborated with the local prominent but enslaved musicians – the *lautars* (Feldman 2023). We know that many *lautars* learned to speak Yiddish, and up until today, some *lautars* of the region speak of themselves as klezmerim. Feldman writes:

Geographically remote Moldova held significance to the musical life of Istanbul through the personality of the great Ottoman musician Prince Demetrius Cantemir (d. 1723), the late 18th century violinist Kemani Miron, and the popular dance music antecedent to the *kasap/sîrba* and the *longa* [...] Between 1711 and 1812 even provincial Bessarabia was drawn closer into the orbit of the Ottoman capital, as the Empire invested both in its defence against Russia and Poland, and in its overall economy (which was led principally by Greeks, and by Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews speaking Ladino and Yiddish respectively). (Feldman 2020)

Feldman shows that not only was the capital culturally important to the regions, but the regions also influenced the culture of the capital. The Ottoman Empire was a highly multicultural sphere, and so was the music of the Ottoman court. Both minorities and immigrants contributed throughout the years to the art of Ottoman classical music. (Jackson 2013; Haug 2013; Kalaitzidis 2015; Feldman 2023)

Up until the 20th century, the Mevlevi order also had a crucial role in the development of the secular Ottoman music repertoire in addition to their *ayin* ceremony. Music was highly regarded and practised within the Sufi order.

The Mevlevihanes were centres for music practice and *meşk*, the tradition of oral transmission and pedagogy. These were inter-religiously active and culturally important institutions providing regions with the musical culture of the capital. (Feldman 2022)

In addition to this, the mehter ensembles of military music would perform *peşrevs* and other popular/mehter repertoire from a tower in each bigger city of the empire five times a day prior to the ezan. The Phanariot princes of the vassal states of Moldova and Wallachia also had their own mehter ensembles, a sign of political power within the Empire, that would perform for formal events. (Rusu 2020)

Of the Phanariot influence on klezmer repertoire, Feldman writes:

It would appear that a Greco-Ottoman musical component had been fundamental to the formation of the professional klezmer repertoire since the 17th century, and is documented in musical notation as far West as Berlin by the middle of the 18th century in the manuscript of Aaron Beer (Feldman 2016, p. 17).

Ottoman music (both of dance and mehter/military nature) was mentioned in other accounts in both Poland and Bohemia at the same period (Feldman 2020). The eighteenth century is known as that of greater Ottoman influence in Europe in general, for example, in the music of Mozart (Bellman 1998). This influence could be seen especially in the musical and cultural landscapes of Moldavia and Wallachia, with their close cultural and political ties to Istanbul.

It seems that the klezmerim of the region were an integral part of its musical life. We have accounts of Wallachian Jewish musicians performing at the shores of the Bosphorus (Pardoe 1855?), Ashkenazi musicians being employed at the court, etc.

However, on a larger scale, Jewish presence in Moldavia, Wallachia, and later Romania is not a historical theme that has been favoured by historians, musicologists, and other researchers.

Garfias (1981) writes in his article on the musical genre of *doina*¹⁷ about the development of the genre into the style of *Cantec de pahar*. Garfias does not, in his article, mention Jewish musicians at all, apart from noting that:

¹⁷ **doina**: a specific improvisational non-metric musical form which seems to have appeared in the discussed region, similar to the *skaros* popular among the musicians of Epirus

However, under recent Romanian Socialist State policy the words Gypsy, or Rom were forbidden - officially there were no Gypsies in Romania, although there are officially recognized groups of Saxons, Swabians and Hungarians - so in any document approved by the State, even for example, a record jacket, the terms *Rom* or *Gypsy* were avoided. It is interesting that neither the sizable communities of Turks and Tatars or Jews living in Romania were recognized either. (Garfias 2017)

Garfias also includes a klezmer doina in a stylistic overview of the genre. There is, however, no explanation for where this type of klezmer doina appears¹⁸.

The lautar musicians were, due to their enslavement, vigorously notated by the authorities both by name and the instrument they played. This documentation of the lowest strata of society was done in economic interests. The archives make it easy for us to track the presence of Roma musicians in the region (Marushiakova & Popov 2009). The case was different with the Jewish musicians, who were free people of low social strata and thus not documented similarly. Yet, numerous accounts of Ashkenazi musicians sending money from Istanbul home to their families in Jassy and Bucharest exist. This is how Miss Julia Parode described her encounters at the shores of the Bosphorus in ca. 1838-55:

Wallachan and Jewish musicians are common; and the extraordinary length of time during which they will dwell upon a single note, with their heads thrown back, their mouths open, and their eyes fixed, and then follow it up with a whole sentence, rapidly and energetically uttered, is most singular [...] and a musician, whose talent is known and acknowledged, seldom fails to pass a very profitable day at the Asian Sweet Waters on every occasion and festival. (Parode 1855?, p. 56)

Klezmorim continued traveling to and performing in Istanbul up until the expulsion of the Sultan and the establishment of the Turkish Republic. This was, for example, the case with tsimbalist Joseph Moskowitz and the Goldberg orchestra, whose recordings from the turn of the century give us an idea of those last years of a cultural era coming to its end.

¹⁸ Feldman on the other hand argues that the genre Cantec de pahar is strongly influenced by the music of the klezmorim (Feldman 2020)

4.3 Moyshe Beregovski

Moyshe Beregovski was born in the Russian Empire, Termakhivka, Ukraine, in 1892. He grew up singing in the local synagogue choir. Later on, he became a researcher and ethnomusicologist, dedicating his life to the study of Eastern European Jewish folk music. He died in Kyiv in 1961, leaving a large amount of unpublished work behind. This work was to become methodically studied by the klezmer revivalist movement about 40 years later.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Eastern European Jewish Professional Instrumental music, branded as a type of folk music in an attempt to align with the proletarian ideology, was entering the field of academic Musicology in the USSR in a project headed by Moyshe Beregovski and colleagues. Most of Beregovski's research was carried out in Southern Ukraine, not far from the regions of historical Moldavia, Wallachia and including parts of Bessarabia. At the time, the majority of these territories were part of the Kingdom of Romania, and portions would later become part of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Beregovski was working in a politically tense environment and, as Khazdan has shown, it is misleading to read his texts without understanding the political context in which they were produced. Most and foremost, he positioned his research as a study of folklore and klezmer music as an expression of the working-class people. Secondly, he denounced all links to the Ashkenazi liturgical repertoire. Working in an increasingly antisemitic environment, Beregovski ended up getting deported and serving in Stalin's work camps for five years. After being released in 1955, he continued his work, if even on a smaller scale, until he died in 1961 (Khazdan 2022).

Beregovski's texts re-emerged in the public in the 1990s-2000s (Khazdan 2022), and many of his unpublished works were published. English translations were made by Mark Slobin. Beregovski remains a great authority in the field of klezmer music for both researchers and musicians.

Starting from the 1970s, the klezmer revitalisation movement began in the United States and spread to Europe. Due to this, musicians like myself, who grew up in the 2000s and afterwards, have had the opportunity to organically emerge in a musical culture where the repertoire is primarily taught by ear, through festivals, camps, and jam sessions. No institution for a complete academic education in klezmer music has yet been established. In

this sense, Eastern European Jewish instrumental music has in recent years been reestablished as an orally practiced tradition to a certain extent. This being said, the gap between the oral transmission that flourished until the early twentieth century and today is remarkable. Teaching methods and concepts have been replaced with new ones, and the 70-year-long decrease in practitioners has left its mark on our understanding of the music and the repertoire.

In his chapter “Klezmer Modes” (Beregovski 1941/1987) and “The Altered Dorian or Ukrainian Mode” (Beregovski, 1946/2000), Beregovski attempts to explicate the core concepts of modality in klezmer tradition placing it within the framework of contemporary academia.

4.4 Rauf Yektâ Bey

The last *neyzen*¹⁹ of the Yenikapı Mevlevihane was born in 1871 in the Aksaray area of Istanbul. Rauf Yektâ became renowned for his work as a musicologist, educator, and composer. He lived and worked until 1935 and was buried in Istanbul.

Rauf Yektâ Bey began his work at the dawn of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Discussions of modernisation were entering every field of cultural life, including music (Öztürk 2018; 2021). Makam was perceived as a sign of backwardness and racial inferiority. In much general opinion, the Ottoman makam music was to be replaced with modern, progressive European music (Olley 2023; Erol 2012). Within this discourse, Yektâ aimed to interpret the makam system through the lens of European musicology. In the strongly nationalistic spirit of the early Republican time, the courtly makam tradition was rebranded as “Turkish Classical Music” as part of a nationalisation project, an initiative spearheaded by Yektâ and his colleagues.

However, in the ideologically heated times, the musical tradition associated with the imperial court was perceived as politically suspicious. The Mevlevihanes, which had been culturo-musical strongholds, were shut down and prohibited from continuing any activities in 1925. The following year, the Darüelhan Conservatory, which Yektâ had founded, was also shut down (Feldman 2023). Despite being rebranded as “Turkish Classical”, the music was,

¹⁹ a person who performs on the *ney*, a wind instrument made of bamboo with a long tradition in sufi culture

as part of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's music reforms, delegitimized through official discouragement and dismantling of established institutions, leading to severe restriction. Ayhan Erol (2012) calls this process an example of the 'symbolic violence' that was carried out by the state in the early years of the Republic. The courtly musical tradition lived on in the *gazinos* of Istanbul, in informal gatherings, through the recordings and teachings of individual players, and the culture of the radio station TRT (Poulos 2011).

Similarly with the development of interest in and revitalization of klezmer music, the works of Yektâ became vastly influential starting from the 1970s with the opening of the Turkish Music State Conservatory under Istanbul Technical University. Rauf Yektâ's neo-systematist theories had been further developed by Suphi Ezgi and H. Sadettin Arel, and these theories served as the basis for the academic education in makam theory currently taught at the Conservatory and other similar institutions. In this way, the works of Yektâ and Beregovski remain highly influential today.

In this thesis, I analyze Rauf Yektâ's article *La Musique Turque*, published in 1922 in the *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire* (Yektâ 1922). In the article Yektâ argues, turning to a European audience, for a recognition of the so-called Turkish Classical music and offers a lens to conceptualize its theoretical basis within the tradition of European musicology.

5 Analysis

In this chapter, I do a hermeneutic reading of the chosen texts and proceed to analyse the material.

5.1 Hermeneutic Reading

To enter the hermeneutic circle I started by asking an open-ended question, according to the methodology of Christen Pedersen.

How can modal literacy in klezmer music, seen as a post-Ottoman legacy, be fostered among researchers and performers today?

I searched in the texts and found an excerpt on musical creativity of the folk artist in Beregovski's article on modality:

It is evident that the discussion is not about theoretical realisation, but about an intuitive and practical ability to comprehend the expressive characteristics of artistic elements and their suitability for embodying what the artist seeks. [...] A deeper study of the question assures us that musical elements are chosen not accidentally but with a fixed understanding of the strength and degree of their expressivity and effectiveness. (Beregovski 1946/2000, p. 550)

In this section, I read and understood that the musical and modal choices of the artist are made with accuracy, precision and awareness. To understand better, I looked for a clearer definition of what these musical choices mean in terms of modality. Beregovski wrote;

According to my observations, for a folk musician, both as a creator of new works and as a performer, **a mode is a complex of characteristic intonational turns and melodic lines**, which in combination with a number of other elements of the musical language acquire **a known expressiveness**; in each mode several melodic lines and turns **typical for it specifically** are developed [...] using such typical melodic lines, a folk musician easily **establishes himself in a given mode** or transfers a melody from one mode to another. (Beregovski 1941/1987, p. 42)²⁰

²⁰ author's translation and bolding.

It seems that each mode has its own melodic path of development and set of phrases, which encompass modality for Beregovski. In his writing, he implied wittingly or unwittingly the melodic progression and modulations which occur in a given mode.

I turned to Yektâ to see if there is something similar regarding modality formulated in his text. I found:

Melodic movement and rest play a very important role in the constitution of Turkish modes. The mode that would lack this double vital element would no longer be a mode [...] **It is these elements that allow us to recognise the identity of each mode [...]** What variety of impression, what richness of expression in this well-ordered movement of the voice which, rising from the tonic to the dominant, **and commanded in the artist by instinctive feeling**, gently completes its ascending and descending course, and returns to the natural starting point, to the finale or tonic! **It is the succession and artistic mixture of these two things, movement and rest, which make beautiful melodies, living and speaking melodies**, those which express the most intimate feelings of man.

Each Turkish mode must therefore **have its special melodic movement**, which is called *seyir*, which means promenade, and its rest, which is called *karar*, resolution.²¹ (Yektâ 1992)

According to Yektâ, the musician knowledgeable of the tradition has an instinctive feeling for the melodic development of the mode, much like Beregovski wrote. This development, this accurately constructed path of the mode with all its movements and rests, Yektâ calls *seyir*. The *seyir* is the melodic path of the mode, the consequential development of its progression. A performance of the *seyir*, in other words, requires knowledge of the *modal pathway*²². The rising from the tonic to the dominant, the accurate execution by the artist of ascending and descending lines with a finale on the tonic. In my understanding, the *seyir* is the intentional structuring of the melodic development in accordance with the customs of the oral tradition.

²¹ author's translation and bolding

²² modal pathway or modal progression, meaning the way the melodic line develops within the mode

The concept of modality and the importance of intentional modal development are strikingly similar between the two authors. The difference is that Yektâ emphasised the concept of melodic pathway by employing the term *seyir*. Beregovski, on the other hand, provided examples of typical phrases for beginning, middle and end, and types of modulations characteristic in different modes. Both proceeded to give examples of how the modes typically develop, where they modulate. These examples have no overlap; the modal pathways of the modes described by the authors are different. But in my understanding, they both aimed to structurally outline what can be called the modal pathway.

The finding completely contradicted my pre-understanding of the situation, as I was expecting Beregovski to be far removed from the writings of Yektâ and not articulate modality very clearly. Through this hermeneutic reading, my understanding of the texts deepened, seeing that the authors expressed echoing thoughts despite having had no interaction or access to each other's works (Yektâ was working a few years prior to Beregovski, and Beregovski wrote in his footnotes that he did not have access to Turkish musicology or writings on the topic). The authors must be drawing from a similar point of reference, a broadly similar understanding of modality.

5.2 Analysis of Material

In this part, I investigate whether a deeper understanding of modality can be derived from the texts of Beregovski by placing them next to the ones of Yektâ. I do not aim to equate the two musical traditions or equate modality in the klezmer repertoire with that of the Ottoman court tradition. That would be a ridiculous endeavour as the two are obviously different musical traditions. Nor do I claim to bring out the exact meaning as intended by the author from the texts of Beregovski. I am well aware of the power that I hold by freely quoting and rephrasing his text. Rather, I want to broaden my horizons of understanding modality by engaging in dialogue with the texts as a reader, from the point in time and space where I reside. Working from a temporal historical distance, klezmer music, viewed as a phenomenon of musical amalgamation, can be analysed and understood through a variety of frameworks, and this analysis is only one of many. My aim is to see whether the ways of musical knowledge production and modal expression described by Beregovski and Yektâ are somehow overlapping and what they can reveal for the contemporary context of modal literacy.

5.2.1 Modality as a Concept

The similarities in the articles in the authors' description of modality in the reading above were striking. In his article, Yektâ presented a systematic analysis of the concept through categorising the constitutional elements of a mode into six points.

For my analysis, I first present the structure of Yektâ on its own. Then I will extract the freely formulated thoughts of Beregovski and place them next to the six criteria of modality outlined by Yektâ.

The following six criteria make up a mode according to Yektâ:

1. The constituent elements;
2. The ambitus;
3. The beginning;
4. The dominant;
5. The tonic;
6. Movement and rest.

He specifies, and I present you a shortened version:

1. Each of the modes of Turkish music is usually formed through the combination of a fourth and a fifth. As we have seen above, the fourth and the fifth have different forms; it is obvious that the grouping of these various forms together must produce several modes.
2. In Turkish music, although the ambitus of certain modes is in some way fixed at an octave, there are modes which exceed this ambitus, and others which do not even reach it, we are obliged, consequently, to give for each mode not only the forms of the fourth and the fifth which essentially realise it, but also the other notes which ordinarily contain the ambitus of this mode.
3. The melodic constitution specific to the Turkish modes has obliged our theorists to study this question of the beginning and to deduce from it certain rules which determine the laws governing each of these modes.

4. The dominant of Turkish modes is often the fifth of their tonic, but this does not always happen, and this rule admits exceptions.

There are very characteristic modes whose dominants are the fourth of their tonic, and there are also others which have their dominant on the third of their final note.

5. Each of the modes of Turkish music has its final note, which is fixed. A mode can have only one tonic, and if, during a piece, the melody makes temporary rests on the fifth, fourth, or third of the tonic, the final rest, the one that ends the melody, must be made on the tonic. The tonic of certain modes has, moreover, on its lower side, a note to which the tonic often touches, during the melodic conclusion. This note is called *yeden*, which means complement. In certain modes, it is found one tone, and in the other modes one limma below the tonic. However, for each mode, it is not obligatory to have a complement; its use is optional and left to the taste of the composer.
6. Melodic movement and rest play a very important role in the constitution of Turkish modes. The mode that would lack this double vital element would no longer be a mode; it would be a body without a soul, a juxtaposition of musical molecules with no connection between them, having neither order nor subordination of one to the other. It is these elements that allow us to recognise the identity of each mode.

Each Turkish mode must therefore have its special melodic movement, which is called *seyir*, which means promenade, and its rest, which is called *karar* resolution.²³

Below, I freely summarised an interpretation of the thoughts I derived from the writings of Beregovski against the structure of Yektâ, along with some of my own commentary:

Constituent elements

Beregovski made clear that the modes in klezmer music cannot be defined through the European scale, that the scale of the mode becomes asymmetrical, and includes a variety of additional and altered pitches. He included descriptions of the mode's changing character in his texts. Yet, he continued to use the word scale.

²³ author's translation to English

Of more recent research, Judit Frigyesi proposes to analyse Ashkenazi Eastern European davenen through modal nuclei taking inspiration from the Ottoman music system. Khazdan (2006) also advocates for viewing klezmer modes as consisting of smaller constellations of notes. This study similarly suggests that analysing klezmer repertoire through modal nuclei rather than scales can aid modal analysis and conceptualisation.

The ambitus

The range of the klezmer modes cannot be defined through the octavic scale according to Beregovski. Apart from the notes of the scale, other pitches extending outside the octavic range might be needed in the articulation and establishment of a mode. This is the case with the mode he calls freygish, which extends with a lower trichord from the tonic, thus exceeding octavic range. The musician covers a certain tonal span of expression with specific alterations that defines the mode.

With this in mind, I would argue that while aspects of scalar thinking, as beginning a tune with trichordal runs like A-D-F-A, are present, it is deceiving to perceive the klezmer mode as octavic and scale-based, both in terms of pedagogy and in theoretical discourse.

The beginning

Beregovski wrote that a mode acquires a different character depending on which pitch the musician starts, e.g., tonic or dominant (Beregovski 1946/2000).

According to Yektâ's classification, it could even be defined as two different modes. In present-day so-called Turkish music theory, modes are classified according to the direction of their movement. The three categories are *ascending*, *descending*, and *ascending-descending modes*. An ascending mode will begin in its lower range and work its way upwards, while a descending mode will do the opposite. An ascending-descending mode begins in the mid or lower range and does not do extensive climbs to either range.

My observations suggest—offered here solely as a hypothesis—that klezmer melodies in the so-called freygish mode usually begin around the tonic, move in the lower register, and only afterwards work their way up. At the same time, melodies in the so-called doyrish or Altered Dorian mode often begin around the fifth degree and work their way up before making a full

cadence on the tonic. There are, however, many exceptions. This topic would need more research.

The question of whether the initial modes presented by Beregovski based on scales with alterations could be understood as variations depending on their modal characteristics is beyond the scope of this thesis and deserves research. It is, however, obvious that this aspect of ‘the beginning’ carries a significance in the development of the klezmer modes.

The dominant

The dominant is present in Beregovski’s text, outlined as the fourth or the fifth of the mode. Beregovski also talked about ‘stable and unstable pitches’, thereby stating that a tonal hierarchy exists within the mode.

In my interpretation, this refers to which pitches the performer chooses to make a rest on, and the emphasis of which pitch might lead to a half or full modulation to a different mode.

For example, in the so-called mode of doyrish or Altered Dorian, the dominant is on the fifth—a stable pitch. If the performer, however, rests too long on the second degree during an improvisation, it will be perceived as a modulation to so-called freygish by the audience and the accompanying musicians. A musician skilled in this hierarchy of pitches within each mode is sensitive to the different possibilities each pitch proposes, and in which order these possibilities might be utilised. Here, the set of typical phrases and melodic turns which Beregovski described and presented examples of is utilised by the performer.

The tonic

The importance of the tonic is emphasised again and again throughout the texts. Beregovski also described the supplementary notes a half or a full step below the tonic, depending on the mode, which may be utilised as a passing tone by the composer or performer when concluding a piece.

Movement and rest

Beregovski stressed that the progression of the mode is of utmost importance. The melodic turns, phrases, and their sequence carry meaning for the performer—they are consciously and carefully calculated by the artist. According to Beregovski, each mode encompasses its own

characteristic phrases and sequences; without these sequences, the mode will not be identifiable.

5.2.2. *Deepened Analysis*

Both authors proceeded by giving examples of how the modes develop. Beregovski did so through words, describing typical modulation and phrases which he calls *half cadences* and *full cadences*. This type of verbalised explanation is similar to earlier documentation of the seyir, for example, in the writings of Dimirie Cantemir (Popescu-Judetzu 1999). This concept of half and full modal cadences is in modern so-called Turkish music theory called *asma karar* and *tam karar* and constitutes part of the seyir (Signell 2008).

Yektâ, on the other hand, presented a notated composition for each mode that demonstrates the seyir of the given mode. In a highly pedagogical approach, Yektâ encouraged the person seeking to study the modes to memorise these compositions and their melodic turns until the melodic path becomes part of the musician's vocabulary. However, simply memorising one melody will not be enough, as a variation of phrases is needed to build up vocabulary, which explains the approach that Beregovski chose. Both authors' texts explicate and open up the concept of modal pathway to their reader. However, the examples provided by the authors show that the modal pathways of these two musical traditions are vastly different. This means that the modal pathway described by one author cannot simply be applied to the execution of a mode with similar constitutional elements described by the other author. As an example, the makam Nikriz and the so-called doyrish mode have different modal pathways, despite overlapping constitutional elements.

According to my reading, the structural concept of modality is, at large, shared by the authors. Both highlighted similar theoretical ideas and found similar points important to emphasise and explain, which I have extracted and placed next to each other. The choices of the authors are made within the framework of European music theory. Beregovski also attempted to research modal semantics by connecting lyrics to melodic movement and searching for meaning in these findings (Beregovski 1946/2000). Yektâ focused exclusively on instrumental music in his chapter on modality without addressing lyrics or vocal repertoire. In the same article Yektâ aimed to define the Ottoman pitch system through mathematical theories of thirteenth-century scientists. In general, his research approach is more positivistic.

The difference in the scope and status of these two musical traditions is of determining weight. Yektâ described the music of the Ottoman court—a grand institution!—and built on a rich tradition of previous theorisation with more musical resources at hand. Consequently, the systematisation of the musical tradition of the Ottoman court would be more precise, standardised, and institutionalised than traditions developed without a centralised establishment and with less material and institutional resources, as the music of the Eastern European Jewish communities. The expressivity of the music is affected by both geography and time, and far from all surviving klezmer repertoire will offer the modal articulation described above. The klezmerim also played mazurkas and polkas.

It is therefore impossible to speak of a strictly unified or standardised musical tradition. Following the idea of cultural transfer, the aim of this study is not to find the root of a musical phenomenon and determine which culture has appropriated it from which, or simply compare them. It is rather to study the circulation of phenomena between and among cultures, and the transformation and adaptation of the phenomenon to the circumstances of time, space, and context. The outcome of this analysis shows that there was a shared structural understanding of music that circulated in the Ottoman musico-cultural landscape. As stated before, Beregovski's description of each mode is not as detailed as Yektâ's nor does it overlap in terms of modal pathways or their complexity. Most probably, this is because the approach among the musicians and their informants has been less systematic. However, through reading the two scholars next to each other, I was able to grasp the writings of Beregovski with new clarity. There appears to be a system of modal progression whose logic has diverged over time. As we do not know much of the pedagogy and oral methods of teaching used in the klezmer guilds, there is a need for developing new concepts and tools to speak of modality in a present-day context and to shed light on the musical aspects that make the klezmer repertoire unique.

The recently published article by Yonatan Malin on the Klezmer Archive's blog based on quantitative data, focuses explicitly on modal pathways. There are a few examples of regional differences in modal pathways presented in the article, and a preliminary outlining of modal tendencies based on data analysis from the modally focused database. The findings of this study suggest that the concept of modal pathway should be viewed in relation to the other aspects of modality outlined above. This subject will be discussed in depth further down in the text. The question of establishing relevant terminology is crucial.

5.2.2 *Transmission*

Yektâ's work is considered the first full description of the seyir using the so-called Western notation and marks the transition towards and in-between orality of musical transmission which developed in the Turkish Republic²⁴. However, Yektâ complained that the seyir is the concept *least* studied and appreciated among his contemporary Turkish musicians (1922). The political discourse in the late Ottoman Empire highly favoured European classical and popular music traditions as a sign of modernity and progress, with both musicians and audiences being eager to replace the makam system (Olley 2023). In this light, it is easy to understand Yektâ's complaint.

Beregovski, on the other hand, noted that the so-called Altered Dorian mode completely disappeared in compositions of Jewish workers' songs in the Soviet Union, but reappeared in the compositions from German concentration camps in Transnistria²⁵ (Beregovski 1962). Further on, Beregovski wrote that the older musicians among his informants were able to perform the genre of *taksim*. Below follows a discussion of the genre.

The taksim appeared in Ottoman texts at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The genre developed to become a type of structured improvisation within the makam practice, where the musician displays their knowledge by skilfully performing an extended seyir with the possibility of further modulation over a free meter (Feldman 2023, p. 280-295). Prince Cantermir describes the taksim in the following way:

[...] the melody of the taksim manifests only the power of the musician [as opposed to other genres which highlight the skill of the composer]. Thus, through the exercise of the power of his knowledge he may create charming *terkibs*²⁶, and through the beauty of his arrangement he may connect one makam with another, and bring about agreement among conflicting makams, so that he may create melodies which are

²⁴ the phenomenon of in-between orality will be discussed further in the chapter below

²⁵ could it be so, that in the context of the Soviet Union, modality became unfavored by the Jewish community seeking to integrate and assimilate through communist worker songs? And that in the German concentration camps on the other hand, this distinct musical expression served as a way of musical-epistemological resistance?

²⁶ *tekrib*: A secondary modal structure, subordinate to a makam or discrete section of a composition (Feldman 2023, p. 499)

brand new and entirely his own (Cantemir, ca. 1700, as cited in Feldman, 2023, p. 291)

The crucial element of the genre is, up until today, as described by Cantemir three hundred years ago, the innovation and spontaneity of the moment. The taksim should be performed as a novelty by the musician. In other words, it is a form of artistic expression in the immediate intersection of time and space. This makes the performance of taksim a highly vivid example of the musical chronotope where modal consciousness and mastery of the makam system guide the musician.

Reading these lines about the taksim of Beregovski, I suppose that some type of modal knowledge was present among the older generation of klezmerim that practiced the genre. To what extent, and how similar the taksims of the klezmerim were to the ones played at the court in Istanbul is hard to know as there is not sufficient documentation. Garfias also mentions the taksim in addition to some Ottoman terminology in his article on remaining so-called Turkish musical characteristics in Romania:

It is in the playing style of the lautar that the greatest part of Turkish musical practices survives. A few specific Turkish theoretical terms survive in practice. In addition to the music for village dances, the lautars were also frequently called upon to perform *cintece batrinesti* or the epic ballads. It is in connection with the performance of these epics that the use of the term and concept of taxim survived as a specific Turkish form. In the year 1862, Nicolae Filimon notes that Gypsy Lautars still referred to the pitches of the violin and cobza strings by Turkish names, Rast for G, Neva for D, Saba for A [...] (Garfias 1981, p. 99)

It is known that the klezmerim and lautars were actively collaborating in the region. The situation described by Garfias can be understood as part of the broader phenomenon of historical Ottoman influence, as well as the gradual epistemological shift and erasure that have occurred in the region— a shift largely driven by the modern nation state projects. (Garfias 1981; Pennanen 2008; Delegos 2024).

Beregovski writes that he lacks knowledge and access to the Turkish music tradition and is thus not able to write any further analysis on the taksim form (Beregovski 1941/1987, p. 37). He also notes that the younger generation among his interviewees is unable to recognise or

perform *taksims* and has replaced them with *doinas*. Feldman calls this inability among the younger klezmerim a decline of musical standards (Feldman 2015). In Beregovski's own definition of the *taksim*, he does not outline its core concept of the modal pathway very clearly. Instead, he emphasises rhythmic patterns. Sharply pointing out the limitations of his research, Beregovski writes: "This scale [the altered Dorian] is not specific to Jewish folk music /.../ thus we feel that the conclusions reached based on researching the Jewish materials will be confirmed in the folk music of other peoples" (Beregovski 1946/2000, p. 551)

In conclusion, the concepts of modality and its transmission in the texts of Yektâ and Beregovski appeared to be a lot closer to one another than I expected. The reading revealed that without access to each other's works, the authors communicated strikingly similar structural ideas. By reading the texts, I deepened my own modal consciousness and perception of modality as an Ottoman legacy. Working through the temporal historical distance (see the chapter on Gadamer's Hermeneutics), I gained a new understanding of the role of oral transmission and the consequences of its weakening.

In the next chapters, I will address the question of orality and literacy and then present the term *modal literacy* in depth. Inspired by the new insights, I will then discuss the results of my research and present a few strategies and tools for fostering modal literacy in klezmer performance and research today.

5.2.3 *Modal Literacy*

In contemporary popular discourse, literacy is represented as an unqualified good, a mark of progress and happiness. The opposing value of "illiteracy", in contrast, is associated with ignorance, incompetence, and darkness. (Graff 2010, p. 21)

The term *literacy* is far from neutral, and I use it with full awareness of its connotations. At first sight, the phrase modal literacy seems paradoxical — the literacy of an oral tradition. However, binary thinking is seldom helpful in the long run, and many traditions exist in the intersection between being recorded and orally transmitted, a type of in-between orality as described by Poulos (2011) regarding contemporary so-called Turkish classical music practice. This is the case with klezmer music practice today as well. Musicians learn by ear from each other in face-to-face situations, from musical notations, and by studying

recordings. The function of notation can serve the musician in a myriad of different ways. Literacy must therefore be defined.

In recent years, the term *literacy* has gained new momentum and expanded to mean more than just the ability to read text. For example, one concept among the many that have developed is that of *ecological literacy*. The foundation of ecological literacy is built on the understanding that environmental knowledge is crucial for informed decision-making. This framework highlights the significance of ecological awareness, critical thinking, and scientific inquiry. An ecologically literate individual accurately identifies the cause-and-effect relationships within natural systems. The concept of ecological literacy includes the capacity to grasp complex system interactions and embodies the agency, will, and courage to take action. (Orr 1992)

The use of the term *literacy* with all its connotations is a means of asserting authority for the cause of ecological awareness within the field of academia. It is a nod to the desirability of literacy as a marker of *progress* and *happiness*. An investigation of indigenous societies would probably come to the conclusion that high ‘ecological literacy’ or similar, more fine-tuned skillsets are present, although named and conceptualised differently. The term *ecological literacy* was developed as a response to the processes and ideologies of the so-called Western framework.

Similarly, a musician who goes through an oral training and lives in an eco-system of modality, a modally rich environment, as klezmerim in the Danubian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia, will inevitably, in one way or another, develop a sensitivity to modality. We cannot fully reconstruct the old methods of oral transmission, but we can adapt the tools at hand and develop new ones. I therefore propose the term modal literacy, while modal *illiteracy* is consequently the inability to comprehend modality and an insensitivity to modal pathway, a concept which this study has shown is crucial.

Feldman describes the challenges that arise for present-day practitioners of klezmer music in regards of modal comprehension:

Even for Western-trained students and performers of klezmer music familiar with so-called klezmer “modes”, it can be difficult to separate the underlying mode and modulation of a given melody from its implied harmonic accompaniment, which can

lead to reliance on following the “chord progression” rather than an understanding of the relationship of modal units within the piece. (Feldman 2016, p. 377)

Feldman highlights that a sensitivity to the internal relationship of modal units is weak among present day practitioners who receive their training within the available framework of education. Modal literacy is a theoretical tool developed as a response to the hegemony of tonal harmony in musicology and music practice in my case. In this study, I dissolve the traditional juxtaposition of literacy versus orality as presented, for example, by Ong (1982). Instead of using literacy to signify the ability to read written text or musical notation, I define modal literacy as the ability to do abstract analysis, understand the relationship of modal units, develop musical intuition and execute modal pathway in a contemporary setting. The term modal literacy carries the urgency of modal education in it. It centres the musician as the subject with an agency equipped for action.

Yektâ and Beregovski describe the carrier of the oral tradition as an individual guided by intuition when constructing the phrases in order to establish the mode. However, both point out that each choice is made by the musician with a sensitivity to the meaning and weight that the musical phrases carry. Intuition is therefore paired with awareness of decision and understanding of context.

In the Ottoman musical tradition, the practice of seyir was and is today used to develop innovative skill and ability to improvise within the framework of a given makam. The musician consciously constructs the modal pathway, referencing shared semiospheres and creating meaning. Modal pathway arises as an artistic expression, caught at the particular intersection of time and space—in a chronotope. By studying the seyir, the musician develops a sensitivity to the modal pathway and masters the modal chronotope.

According to Bakhtin, a literary work is filled with various chronotopes of different times and spaces, which are in dialogue with each other. This might well be true for a multilayered musical language as well. The knowledge of a musical tradition encompasses the contextual understanding of it, an ability to reference neighbouring or related musical traditions, or older means of expression. In terms of the modal pathway, this might mean a sensitivity to variation. Musical tradition is not shaped in a vacuum, but within the sphere of reference of the performer and the listener.

6 Discussion and the Way Forward

In this chapter, I will discuss the results of my research and propose a way forward in the understanding and conceptualisation of modal literacy and practical tools for fostering it.

I suggest that a musical system consists of phrases that possess negotiated sets of emotional and eidetic meaning that arise in the intersection of time and space. These phrases in turn constitute larger logical trajectories and non-verbal narratives.

In her much-debated book *Feminine Endings*, musicologist Susan McClary (1991) argues that all musical works consist of non-verbal story lines. The listener is able to pick up on these story lines because of shared cultural references. When analysing musical works in the European classical tradition, McClary points out that harmonic resolution comes to symbolise order, good, and reason. In contrast, chromaticism—or an “oriental” scale with a diminished second and augmented third degree—comes to symbolise otherness, chaos, evil, and danger. Oftentimes, the listener is made to wait and long for a resolution—the triumph of good over evil, masculine over feminine, harmony over chaos. According to McClary, this emotional effect can be much stronger and more powerful than one evoked through words, as it is rarely analysed and goes unnoticed.

Continuing on McClary’s thought, I propose that the knowledge of a musical tradition can be understood as the fluency in the tradition’s semiosphere and narrative construction.

This is for example vivid in the *kale bazetsn* in the klezmer tradition where the musician's task is to make the bride cry during the wedding ceremony (Alpert 1996). However, this process of desired emotional effect requires the audience and other musicians to be knowledgeable in the musical language of the performer, to understand its logic, and share a similar idea of non-verbal references. Each tradition is created and negotiated within a certain community within a certain period of time and space. Countless are the examples of European travellers arriving in Istanbul during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and hearing the local musicians perform.

Théophile Gautier described his travel to Istanbul in 1852:

[...] we crossed the courtyard and the garden of a mosque whose name I forget, while the sound of shrill, barbarous music emerging from a wooden enclosure indicated to

us that we were on the right path. This indeed was the place. We seated ourselves on those four-inch stools four inches in height, coffee and pipes were brought [...]
(Gautier 2025, pp. 121-122)

The music seems monotonous and irrelevant to these travellers, unintelligible.

Yarmukhametova ascribes the propensity to interpret music to the musical erudition of the subject. From a hermeneutic perspective, it can be called the horizon of understanding shaped by tradition.

This further supports the notion that music is inevitably linked to time and space, and that any form of music is part of a whole and depends on its context. Musical meaning can never be seen as fixed and stable. It is fluid and depends on the performer and the audience. This is why a good klezmer, as Feldman (2020) writes, was able to perform music to the tastes and desires of the customer.

The switch in modal fluency among klezmerim seems to have happened gradually, and it is rather the temporal historical distance separating the klezmer revitalisation movement from the writings of Beregovski and the weakening of the oral system of education that has caused this confusion around modality than the writing and textual choices of Beregovski. In Turkish music education, a method of fostering modal literacy in the style of the meşk tradition through seyir has been adapted to the academic context to prevent this gap (Özgelen 2022).

Could the reason for this difference in the course of education be the epistemological alienation in the musicological discourse that developed as a result of the nationalisation of musical traditions that occurred all over Europe during the last century? According to Seroussi, the field of academic musicology in its very core carries the idea of Orient versus Occident, enlightenment, and nationalism. This might be one of the problems of pre-understanding that shapes our knowledge production around klezmer music today and interferes with attempts of theoretisation. There is a need to ideologically deconstruct the framework within which we discuss and practice music. On a personal level I notice that my playing has become more modally conscious after having studied at the Turkish Music State Conservatory, and that I have developed a more structured understanding of modality through the practice of seyir.

6.1 Seyir as an Analytical and Pedagogical Tool

The issue that Turkish makam music masters, regardless of whether it is old or new, agree on is that this music can be learned from the ‘fem'i muhsin’, that is, from the beautiful mouth. The building block that forms this learning method is undoubtedly the seyir, and secondly, the musical works. We can attribute the reason for the priority given to seyir to the fact that Eastern societies transferred their knowledge to future generations orally, that is, by word of mouth or by ear, rather than from written sources. The name of this teaching system is called ‘meşk’. Something that is not learned from the beautiful mouth can also be wrong (Özgelen 2022).

The seyir is, as stated, while being a theoretical term, also a **method of education** that has been used for decades in the meşk tradition of Ottoman classical music to teach makam. It has been present in edvars²⁷ using the names of frets in combination with other terminology to describe modal progression since the seventeenth century. (Özgelen 2022)

The findings of this study point to the significance of modal progression in the klezmer repertoire described by Beregovski. While not as elaborated as in the so-called Turkish classical music described by Yektâ, Beregovski stressed the importance of the melodic progression of a mode, its melodic turns, and phrases.

Güvençoğlu and Özgelen (2020) suggest that the study of seyir can be structured through oral learning, as well as by composing and learning pieces in each makam following the rules of the seyir. The method of Güvençoğlu and Özgelen allows the researcher or student to derive the seyir of a desired makam by analysing relevant compositions.

Oral training is realised at the Turkish Music State Conservatory through students repeating musical phrases performed by the teacher, communal performance, and individually guided improvisation according to the structure of seyir in the classroom. In this way modal pathway is taught. Analysis is done by listening and identifying modulations instantly, as well as with paper and pen on notated scores to visually see the modal development and the various *çeşni*

²⁷ **edvar**: a book on makam theory

of modal nuclei which appear in the mode²⁸. This training aims to perfect the musician in improvised and analytical artistic expression within the framework of makam.

This type of structured improvisation²⁹ within the modal framework is a vivid example of the musical chronotope described by Yarkukhametova employing the terminology of Bakhtin. While performing the seyir, the musician's choices are embodied in the chronotope.

When mastered, the practice of seyir is an artistic expression guided by intuition, informed by tradition, with a sensitivity to the surrounding modal ecosystem. From a hermeneutic point of view, an understanding of context and consideration of tradition is crucial to the process of interpretation. Yarmukhametova accounts for this understanding and ability to interpret the musical erudition of the subject. The practice of seyir musically erodes the subject, developing a sensitivity to the pathway and tonal centers of each makam. This type of extensive pedagogical practice is an effective way of acquiring what I call modal literacy.

I therefore propose to do an adaptation of this pedagogical tool for a contemporary klezmer music context. Highly relevant is the earlier-mentioned project on Modes in Klezmer Music³⁰ carried out by Yonatan Malin and Daniel Shanahan. The project is the first long-overdue, extensive modal catalogisation of klezmer repertoire, and the database will be a significant resource for further studies.

In future research, additional attention needs to be given to the modal nuclei constituting the klezmer modes and other characteristics typical of klezmer repertoire which have not been identified in this thesis. This study proposes that data should furthermore be derived according to the six constitutional elements of a mode as outlined by Yektâ and emphasized above. Education can then be structured following the method of Güvençoğlu and Özgelen (2020), through systematic oral training and musical work analysis.

²⁸ the term *çeşni* is a key concept in Ottoman classical music theory commonly translated as 'flavor' referencing the flavors of modal nuclei. Further research is needed regarding the possibility of a conceptual link to the Yiddish term *gust* used by the cantorial community in the process of oral transmission of the modal repertoire and similarly translates as 'flavor' or 'taste'. (Avenary 1960; Tarsi 2013, p. 60)

²⁹ see also the genre of taksim mentioned in the chapter Transmission.

³⁰ https://shanahdt.github.io/mode_in_klezmer/

Most importantly, analysis, structured education, and transmission will result in new musical expression and environmentally conscious choices among musicians, opening up for alternative narratives and ways of creatively using modality as a type of artistic expression while being aware of the musical, cultural and historical context.

I want to conclude this section of the work with a memory from my makam theory classes at the Turkish Music State Conservatory. At the beginning of classes dealing with the seyir of especially complicated makams, many teachers would make sure to close the door of the classroom so that no sound could be heard out in the corridor before laying out their argumentation. If the door was not closed, a different makam teacher passing by could be unsettled. Each teacher had their own perception of how the seyir of the given makam was to be correctly performed. I was only able to comfortably perform the seyir of a makam after listening to a few different teachers, and through that outlining the most important features of the mode for myself. We, the students, were encouraged to consider our audience when performing the seyir, especially during the exam.

The diversity of opinions, opportunity for dialogue, and heated discourse that occur when a musical tradition is orally transmitted are invaluable. This dialectic tradition of musical transmission is heterophonic in a way that permits a multiplicity of interpretation. A melody will be performed slightly differently by each performer, where individuality is part of the shared expression. My wish by proposing tools for analysis of modality and the fostering of modal literacy is not to claim a single truth of interpretation, nor is it to propagate a fully standardised theory of klezmer music. But rather, I hope that vigorous discussions and structured argumentation will arise, and that new intricate meanings and forms of modal expression will be explored.

6.2 Additional Terminology

This study has shown that there was an akin structural explication of modality in the texts of Moyshe Beregovski and Rauf Yektâ. This shows that a somewhat consensual understanding of modality and musical erudition was still present among musicians in the regions under Ottoman musico-cultural influence in the beginning of the twentieth century. Today, the larger research field dealing with an Ottoman musico-cultural legacy is constantly evolving. A variety of terminology relevant to this study has been developed, parts of which I will now introduce in an attempt to bridge the gap between these related disciplines.

I employ selected theoretical concepts from other researchers in the field and offer my interpretations of them. These terms may serve as tools for enriching the discussion around modality and oral transmission in the field of klezmer research.

“Opus-cluster”

This term was coined by Ralf Jäger in his article around documentation, academisation, and historicity within the field of Ottoman musicology (Jäger 2015).

Jäger points out that the concept of a musical composition as we tend to understand it today is one specific to the European classical tradition. According to this school of thought, a musical composition is seen as fixed and concluded after being notated on paper. The composer is the highest authority of the piece, and a performer strives to express as precisely as possible the musical idea of the composer. Of the composer, Jäger writes:

A “composer” in the Ottoman context is not an “original genius” who by himself creates anew. He is rather a person experienced in the musical tradition, who, within certain rules, through the combination of basic elements of form, rhythm and melodic models, creates a new derivation. This derivation passes on to the transmitting community who continue to compose and revise coequally with the composer and adjusts his original “derivation” to ever-changing aesthetic standards. (Jäger 2015, p. 39)

Many tunes attributed to a specific musician were passed down orally among the klezmerim for years before being documented. The concept described by Jäger might therefore be applicable to klezmer repertoire too.

Jäger continues by stating that the idea of a composition appears as an *opus cluster*, a term which he introduces. An opus cluster is a musical idea shaped by a multitude of musicians collectively creating within the frameworks of the musical tradition. A piece of music is assigned authority as the work of a master who enjoys high respect. However, parts may be added over time by other performers. These changes do not affect the validity of the piece. (Jäger 2015)

This is how Jäger summarises the points of the opus-cluster:

1. The opus has in its earliest variant a characteristic, but not an individual basic form.
2. On the foundation of the basic form, many variants arise. The transmitting community, but also composer personalities, take a changing hand in the transmission of the opus. They adjust it to the respective aesthetic demands.
3. The variants may not be arbitrarily performed – even if they are within the limits of the systems of makam and usûl.

In this type of orally transmitted tradition, the mechanics of musical creation are based on a common understanding as well as aesthetic preferences of individual musicians. This term stresses the importance of conceptual knowledge among performers, including the topic of modal progression.

“Modal Heterotopia”

In order to move beyond the West/East-Orient/Occident binary in musical thought, Delegos presents the concept of *modal heterotopia*. The concept of heterotopia is borrowed from Foucault, who uses it to describe a place where the usual social order is represented, challenged, and inverted, offering a different perspective on reality. The modal heterotopia develops as a musical-cultural amalgamation of musical systems, in which these musical systems create a new, wholesome logic that may be analysed as its own language. Delegos views interwar rebetiko as a musico-cultural heterotopia shaped in part by its Ottoman legacy.

Building on the theory of Walter Feldman, I propose to view the klezmer repertoire documented by Beregovski as a modal heterotopia developed through a process of amalgamation encompassing nussah, early renaissance, and baroque music as well as various Ottoman musical styles ³¹ (Feldman 2016).

“Equal Tempered Makam”

There is an idea that modality of the Ottoman tradition can only be performed with microtonality, but building on the research of Risto-Pekka Pennanen (1997), Delegos (2024) shows that in a post-Ottoman landscape, a modal heterotopia of *equal tempered makam* appears.

³¹ this relates only to core-and transitional repertoire, not cosmopolitan or co-territorial repertoire such as mazurkas (see Feldman 2016, p. 205-214 for more).

Delegos demonstrates that the melodic pathway of the makams remained while the microtonality was partially or wholly removed from the repertoire of interwar rebetiko. This switch happened due to a change in instrumentation and as a result of the surrounding political and socio-cultural circumstances. Instead of categorising the melodic system through minor/major due to it being equal tempered and not microtonal, Pennanen and Delegos insist that one must take into account the melodic rules and logic followed in the music, which in the case of interwar rebetiko references the system of Ottoman makam in an idiosyncratic manner (Delegos 2024) rather than the European classical system of tonal vernacular counterpoint harmony.

More research is needed on the use of microtonality in the repertoire of the klezmerim (Beregovski 1962). As for now, I propose to consider equally tempered modality a post-Ottoman phenomenon when analysing klezmer repertoire.

“Idiosyncratic Harmonisation”

Harmony and modality are two concepts that are often juxtaposed within the East-West binary (Delegos 2024). The musical and cultural synthesis that characterized interwar rebetiko resulted in the emergence of a modal heterotopia. To address this, Delegos proposes the term *idiosyncratic harmonisation*. This is a way of using harmony not within the tradition of counterpoint and theory of harmony, but a reinvention of harmonic usage that follows the inner logic of the makam-based melody. Harmony in interwar rebetiko developed as an expression of modal heterotopia and is used to highlight the melodic progression in a musical language pursuing its modal hierarchy of tonality, but openly following the musical preferences of the performer or arranger.

An in-depth study of harmonisation in early recorded klezmer repertoire (approximately 1908-1930) is needed. No study of such a manner has yet been done to my knowledge. It appears, however, that the concept of idiosyncratic harmonisation would be relevant to klezmer repertoire of the beginning of the twentieth century.

6.3 Limitations and Further Research

In this chapter, in a spirit of reflexivity, I endeavour to discuss the limitations and dangers that this study presents.

6.3.1 Regional Variations and Discrepancy in Repertoire

As the term *klezmer music* today contains centuries of repertoire developed over a vast geographical span, it will be impossible to derive a monolithic system applicable to all of it. Feldman divides the repertoire into four categories: core, transitional, co-territorial, and cosmopolitan (Feldman 2016).

As the klezmerim were also surrounded by a musical environment employing tonal harmony, these tendencies are apparent in the repertoire as well. Similarly, some genres have a more elaborated modal language than others, depending on their function and practical application. Pieces need to be studied with a case-by-case approach and special attention given to repertoires documented at different times and different regions.

6.3.2 The Usage of Seyir as a Concept Outside the Ottoman Classical Tradition

By redirecting the term *seyir* into klezmer research and practice, I introduce semantically charged terminology. I propose the use of *seyir* for analytical and not for ideological reasons. But knowledge production is, according to Foucault (2019), never neutral. Since the term *seyir* has a long legacy in the Ottoman court musical tradition, applying it to klezmer practice is, in the best case, rewriting music theory to suit my positionality and, in the worst case, the creation of pseudo-tradition. This process might be similar to the way that the cantors of the nineteenth century used pseudo-Greek modes to make their theoretical concepts support an ideological mission by creating an imagined historical lineage to ancient Greek culture.

Garfias (1981) has shown that some Ottoman terminology was in use among the musicians in the region in the mid-nineteenth century, but there is no further evidence that the term *seyir* would have been practiced or known to the klezmerim. In any case, the term is not used by the klezmer community today. Introducing it is an active choice that might create an illusion of historico-cultural continuity. Alternative terminology might therefore be considered in the context of klezmer music research and practice.

6.3.2. Critique of Yektâ's System

Yektâ's system laid the ground for introducing Ottoman court music into the field of European musicology. However, his theoretical approach was highly colored by nationalistic ideology and progressivist thinking serving the project of the Turkish nation state (Delegos,

2024; Öztürk, 2018, 2021). While both Yektâ and Beregovski remain great authorities today, their work needs to be understood and critically examined in the context they were written. At times, ideological stances influenced the theoretical conclusions of these scholars, resulting in misconceptions or simply incorrect conclusions.

No theoretical system can fully reflect the practice of a musical tradition, especially when it comes to orally transmitted ones. Neither terminology nor theoretical stances can therefore be adapted without careful consideration of both their practical relevancy and ideological weight. Ideological stances reinforcing racially sanctioned power structures may otherwise be further perpetrated through musico-theoretical doctrines.

It is therefore crucial to follow up on contemporary research in the field of critical Ottoman musicology when incorporating ideas and terminology. New findings in the field might reveal further insights that will be highly relevant to the understanding of klezmer repertoire as well.

7 Conclusion

The study shows that Beregovski's and Yektâ's descriptions of modality structurally largely align with each other. This leads to the conclusion that there was a shared conceptual understanding of modality in the territories under Ottoman musico-cultural influence, which included Ashkenazi musicians. These musical ideas were expressed through various *intonatsia* within different communities. Some of the musical phenomena and terminology of the Ottoman musico-cultural landscape was expressed in the repertoire of the klezmerim and can be traced in the writings of Beregovski. Thus, situating relevant klezmer repertoire as a phenomenon under the influence of an Ottoman legacy deepens the cognization of its modal aspects within the broader theoretical discourse.

In his writing, Beregovski implies, wittingly or unwittingly, the melodic progression and modulations that occur in a given mode and provides examples of them. This seems to be one of the determining factors of modality in the klezmer repertoire described by Beregovski. Yektâ similarly emphasises the distinct melodic progression of each mode executed through movement and rest as the 'soul' of the mode in the Ottoman makam music. He calls this melodic pathway *seyir* and offers the concept as a tool for modal education. The modal pathways described by the authors in each mode are different, but the structural organisation of their musical thinking has profuse overlapping aspects, where the concept of modal pathway plays a determining role.

I introduce the term *modal literacy*, analogous to the concept of ecological literacy, encompassing the combination of analytical and practical knowledge and the ability to make conscious musical decisions within the modal framework.

Through my analysis in this study, I show that the methodology of *seyir*, according to Güvençoğlu and Özgelen, can be adapted and utilised as a tool for fostering modal literacy and mastering the modal chronotope among performers and researchers in the field of klezmer music today. The practice of *seyir* trains the musician in intentional structuring of modal progression in accordance with the customs of an oral tradition. Alternative terminology may be considered when employing the *seyir* as an educational and conceptual tool for avoiding the illusion of historico-cultural continuity in the musico-theoretical discourse around klezmer music.

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