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## COMMUNICATION

I have just read a splendid article, “*Mehter: Western Perceptions and Imitations*” by Harrison Powley (this JOURNAL vol. xxxix [2013]). As there are many detailed explanations how “Janissary music” or “Turkish music” influenced western culture in the last few centuries, it misses one important link. Poland maintained an eastern border between Turkish expansion and Central Europe and had fought many battles with the Ottoman Empire during the seventeenth century. Maybe this is why eastern culture was very influential and popular here. Already in 1651 the last will of the duke and famous military commander Jeremi Wiśniowiecki listed Turkish military bands in two of his regiments. But it was most of all Polish magnate and warrior Jan Sobieski who, during his long career as the king’s envoy in Istanbul and military commander, learned not only the Turkish language but also military traditions and tactics. In the battle of Podhajce in 1667, he captured 3,000 Turkish soldiers (including a military band with “long trumpets and big brass drums”) from whom he formed his own one hundred-person Janissary unit, probably with its own music band.<sup>1</sup> Known as an outstanding leader, he added yet another major victory during the Polish-Ottoman War (1672–76), defeating the Turks in the battle of Chocim on November 11, 1673. The next year, after the death of king Michael I (son of Jeremi Wiśniowiecki), already the highest ranking official in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the most successful warrior, Sobieski was elected the next king. In Chocim, he captured the fortress and several thousand Turkish soldiers, including a military orchestra. Based on them, he formed Janissary military formations and Janissary bands in the Polish and Lithuanian armies. Soon the fashion of such orchestras spread through the whole of Europe. Sobieski had been commander in chief of the allied Polish, Austrian, and German troops in the battle of Vienna (battle of Khlenberg) on September 12, 1683. He was called the “Lion of Lechistan” (Poland) by Turks and the “Savior of Vienna and Western European civilization” by Pope Innocent XI.

The Jannisary formations (Polish, *Janczary*) and Janissary bands were still in use in the Polish army during the eighteenth century. One can

1. Zbigniew Chaniecki, “Kapele janczarskie jako przejaw sarmatyzmu w polskiej kulturze muzycznej” [Janissary bands as a manifestation of Sarmatianism in Polish musical culture], *Muzyka* vol. XVI no. 2 (1971): 50.

find detailed descriptions of two such Janissary regiments still existing in the Polish army throughout the reign of August III (also Elector of Saxony), including descriptions of the uniforms, armor, and organization.<sup>2</sup> There are also descriptions of their Janissary bands, consisting of six to eight *zurna* players, six drummers (playing *davul* with large and small beaters), two kettledrummers (with pairs of kettledrums), and two cymbalists. It was a rather small *mehter* but still playing in Turkish military style: first introductory melody on one *zurna*, followed by all instruments, ending with only *zurnas* and kettledrums. According to descriptions, *davul* drums were twice as big as drums used by other military formations.

Unfortunately, there had been many fights and feuds between *zurna* players and trumpeters from other military bands that ended in abolition of Janissary bands in the Polish army during the eighteenth century. However, echoes of those bands live long in Polish historic memory, poetry, and so on. *Zurna* became “surma,” sometimes called “combat surma,” and often interpreted wrongly, even today, as combat trumpet. Such a term was used in many patriotic poems and songs during the last three centuries, even during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944. The Polish national anthem, a patriotic song from 1797, mentions a military drum *taraban* – named after large military drums called in Turkish *daraban* or *baraban* (the last one used also in Russian as the name of a drum). In the same way, the Janissary large kettledrum (*kös*) is known in Polish patriotic poetry as “*tolumbas*.”

Finally, I am highly recommending visiting the Military Museum in Istanbul, Turkey, one of the largest and richest in the world. There one can see not only the typical Janissary band instruments but also watch and listen to the original *mehter*, still continuing the military music tradition since the thirteenth century.<sup>3</sup> It performs at the Museum every visiting day at 3:00 p.m.

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2. Jędrzej Kitowicz (1728–1804), “Opis obyczajów za panowania Augusta III” [Description of Customs during the reign of August III] (Poznań: A. Woykowski, 1840; Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1951), 328–332.

3. See [http://www.tsk.tr/ing/2\\_general\\_issues/2\\_1\\_military\\_museum/military\\_museum.htm](http://www.tsk.tr/ing/2_general_issues/2_1_military_museum/military_museum.htm); [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0Fyf63qI\\_E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D0Fyf63qI_E); 20/04/2014.