

## PERMEABLE-IMPENETRABLE CONFINES; FROM MUSICAL/ARTIFACTUAL COINCIDENCES TO INTERCULTURAL DYNAMICS

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*Abstract: The evolution of the research on acculturation and cultural interpenetration in the last century brought out particularities of some cultural areas, whose confines are showing a greater availability for exchange or reciprocal influences than others. Not only the spatial (geographical) circumstances are defining the intercultural dynamics, but also the historical epochs, more or less opened to external influences. We tried to carry further some previous studies about (possible) pre-existing features, which are favouring, or not, cultural meeting, cultural contamination or acculturation.*

*As the musical culture is concerned, since the outstanding discovery made by Bartok in 1913 regarding the ambiguity of the musical frontiers, which are not entirely coinciding with the geographical or linguistic ones, several tunes, instruments and even surrounding rituals have been discovered in remote places, which set a common musical realm, regardless the physical distance. The musical flow is a part from a wider cultural sphere that involves mentalities, social rituals and specific ways of preservation and communication.*

*A discussion starting from some unexplainable coincidences might open a perspective on cultural change, thresholds and non-geographical realms. Hence, we could sketch a possible projection of an art item on a broaden sphere, which implies cultural mentality and communication.*

*Keywords: resemblances, musical confines, acculturation, written-oral cultures, rituals, permeability*

### Unexplainable coincidences

Anthropology and Ethnology researches often pointed out unexplainable similarities or coincidences between cultures that cannot be attributed to direct contamination. We are referring as well to similar artefacts as to analogous traditions implying unfolding in time. Indeed similar or even identical objects, buildings or ornaments can be found in remote places, arousing amazement. The Romanian literary historian, Nicolae Manolescu described such unaccountable similarities between the Japanese and Romanian traditional art: „The premises of the Neamț Monastery seemed teleported to 10,000 kilometres toward East [...]. The cells and the wood fences, the beams, the pillars, the porches [...]. The wood civilization rely Romania to Japan in an unaccountable and unexplained way. [...] Many symbols are striking alike: the solar disk, the knitted chain...”<sup>1</sup> The similarities that have astonished Manolescu can be seen especially in wood objects, cottages’ porches or pillars, but also in numerous ornamental details of the religious monuments, made of wood or stone.

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<sup>1</sup>Nicolae Manolescu, “My Japan”, in: *Secolul XX*, No. 404-405, 1998, resumed also in the Preface of the Romanian version (Ed. Niponica 1998) of Shuichi Kato’s *History of the Japanese Literature* (1979)

The resemblance of “objects” (i.e. tools, clothes, ornaments) can be easily attributed to objective factors. For instance, the preference for a specific material is evidently related to its natural prevalence. Likewise, a specific ornamental style might also depend on the easiness of material processing. No wonder that the bags of wool of the Andean handicraft are almost identical to those of Romanian shepherds, if we realise that they are produced in similar natural and occupational environments and that they are using the specific fabric and vegetal dyestuff, which can be found in upland areas. In other words, the coincident visual forms or the similar objects are not necessarily demonstrating either a fundamental cultural compatibility, or a reciprocal influence. If we consider that the main differences between cultures are created by the story inside the image and not by the image itself, we conclude that the art object is the final frozen extremity of a long lasting itinerary of substantial changing that defined and refined a culture<sup>2</sup>.

An interesting issue comes from two quasi-similar engraved objects: the *Phaistos Disks* and the *Churingas*, which are belonging to cultural worlds significantly distant in time and space. The *Phaistos Disks* are representing a petrified history of festivals, ceremonials, songs 2000 years ago in the ancient Cyprus. It seems that also the *Churingas*’ ornaments of the Australian Aborigines are similarly symbolizing some lost temporal rituals<sup>3</sup>. André Leroi-Gourhan considered that those designs may be plausibly envisaged as encompassing “a rhythmic system of an incantatory or declamatory nature”<sup>4</sup>. Of late years, some more abstract drawings found in prehistoric settlements are supposed to represent dance or music trajectories. Even the banal, globally spread hopscotch-game is considered as remaining of some ancestral initiatory labyrinths. The similarity of the chalk drawing all over the world pleads for a common origin, though it did not disclose the original content or qualitative differentiations.

Before becoming the symbol of a song, any kind of writing contains the living process of singing, which comes together with its temporal interference with a specific spirituality. In spite of their apparent resemblances, the Australian *Churingas* and the Greek *Phaistos Disks* are concealing plausibly different histories.

Therefore, we need to point out that, beneath any visual kinship, there are still main differences created by the story inside the image, the myth hidden behind the symbol. And this specific story is that which is defining a cultural particularity.

On the other hand, we meet also similarities between remote cultures whose direct contact was not geographical impossible formerly, by the Euro-Asiatic platform or by the ice bridge which linked North America with Asia some 10,000 years ago<sup>5</sup>. The migrations on the Euro-Asiatic continent, for instance, might explain some striking similarities between the traditional commemoration of the dead in Korea and some Romanian associated funeral rituals, which can be observed in gestures, props and habits, as: alms, fumigation, writing of names on scraps of paper, food offering and even commemoration calendar. Migration seems to be the sole

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<sup>2</sup>Michel Imberty, “Aspects of Time in Musical Creation” in: *Musicae Scientiae, The Journal of the European Society for the Cognitive Sciences of Music*, Volume 8, No. 2, (2004) Fall, p. 9

<sup>3</sup> The customary dictionary definition is: “an object of wood or stone that is considered sacred by various aboriginal tribes of Central Australia and that is often elliptical in shape, bears incised designs, is believed to represent either the spiritual double of a living native or the embodiment of the spirit of a totemic ancestor, and is generally regarded as secret”.

<sup>4</sup>André Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech*, Paris: M. Albin Eds., p. 188

<sup>5</sup> Recent theories, confirmed by DNA studies are assuming that the Native Americans have West Eurasian origins. They descended from prehistoric hunters who walked from northeast Asia across the ancient land bridge from Asia to Alaska (location of the present-day Bering Strait), which was formed at the end of the Ice Age, some 12,000-17,000 years ago. E.g.: David L. Meltzer, *First Peoples in a New World: Colonizing Ice Age America*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2009.

valuable cause also for a common linguistic pillar: the Ural-Altaic languages, which link remote places, from Japan until Hungary.

The most widespread theories on cultural contamination fall within the diffusion-model of cultural development. This conception is necessarily involving a direct contact. Thor Heyerdahl, one of the most spectacular representatives of this conception has initiated, starting from 1947, a disputable series of expeditions, to demonstrate the plausibility of a direct contact between Egyptians and Maya. He intended to remake hypothetical voyages across the Atlantic of the Ancient Egypt fleet, aiming at demonstrating a possible meeting between Egyptian and Pre-Columbian cultures. Heyerdahl considered that only a direct contact could be the logical explanation for some noteworthy resemblances between those remote civilizations, not to mention but the pyramids.

His hypothesis was relying on the grounds that several ancient or primitive people yet had the technical capability to undertake long sea voyages. Heyerdahl attempted to cross the Atlantic Ocean, using watercrafts exclusively made of materials used by the antic Egyptians. The expeditions *Ra I* and *Ra II* (1969, 1970) remained notable, as original cultural happening, yet insufficiently relevant for demonstrating a real meeting, to be eventually interpreted as a basis for a process of cultural contamination.

### **Rejection of the closer neighbour**

The idea of a direct contact as fundamental premise of cultural contamination can be found in the writings of many scholars. This perspective has influenced also the researchers who did not look for meetings, but, at the contrary, searched isolated areas, as mandatory precondition for the discovery of the genuine roots of a cultural display. Béla Bartók, for instance, was looking for authentic musical folklore mostly in deeply isolated areas, precisely to avoid any risk of border contamination. A more nuanced approach is Giovanni Sartori's, who, while admitting neighbourhood as starting point for intercultural contamination, yet drew attention to the line of demarcation between traditions as an absolute condition of cultural identity: "One cannot conceive an 'us' that is not surrounded by a 'them'"<sup>6</sup>.

Indeed, the immediate neighbourhood is rather favouring the accentuation of differences. Such delimitation can be substantially seen in the rural Romania, as reflected in literature and reality. In literature, Ion Creangă, at the end of the *Childhood Memories* expressed the displeasure and contempt of the young seminarian, coming from the mountains, which were stirred by the plains' inhabitants. More subtle, Mihail Sadoveanu is also mentioning latent conflicts between the inhabitants from the Upland Moldavians and the Lowlanders.

But this behavioural pattern is present until nowadays in the real life. For instance, some close villages in Dolj County are severely differing in several basic traditions, such as nuptial and funeral habits. These differences put serious problems regarding the inter-human relations and jeopardize any possible friendship or kinship between neighbours. Across the country, every year takes place a scuffle between the inhabitants from the hill side and the valley side of the same Moldavian village. The isolation from the other's traditions, with or without violent rejection is reactivating the primary endeavour for cultural identity. We could imagine the primitive man's gesture to mark his territory with an object exclusively meant to represent a specific identity. During the times, this hypothetical object got more and more elements, able to

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<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *Pluralism, Multiculturalism and the Foreigners*, Ed. Humanitas, Bucharest, 2007, p. 41

better represent that concerned identity, as kept in the memory. In the human development, the process from a geographical landmark to a confined history symbolizes the beginning of the cultural building of a community.

The rejection reflex of the closer neighbour seems to be deeply rooted in the peoples' behaviour, going together with the quest for identity, including the cultural one. We could imagine the consternation of the Antique peoples facing the early Christian doctrine, which promoted acceptance and tolerance for the foreigner (the Samaritan woman, for instance). Such opening went against a fundamental reflex to affirm the identity by demarcation undertakings.

And yet, even the most isolated communities could receive not only borrowings, but also contamination from the foreigners. We should nevertheless mention an accompanying circumstance, which might be difficult to reduce to a mere coincidence: the peoples' displacement. The Hebrews led by Moses began to worship pagans' idols during the long-lasting exodus, even if they refused formerly to interfere with the Egyptians' culture during their exile. The Eurasian continent could provide cradles for inter-cultural exchange, which are lasting in languages, mystic habits, music and the list may be expanded in those times, when most of the inhabitants were roaming toward all horizons. The sedentary communities in the Romanian Lands kept unmingled their cultural features for centuries, until a major development of the routes and, more important, until the increasing of the influence of the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples (Gypsies and Jews)<sup>7</sup>.

A first conclusion is that vicinity is not a sufficient prerequisite for all the circumstances in order to favour cultural meeting and collaboration. Conversely, one cannot overlook the cultural similarities between remote areas, which made impossible a direct contact. We could presume that similarities might be due as well to environmental likeness as to a same phase in the human development, if we agree the idea of a common cultural structure. Gilbert Durand's theories<sup>8</sup> on the basic energetic trajectories, which can be disclosed in cultural gestures and revealed in basic imaginary structures all over the world, brings a weighty argument for such theory. Besides, even a plausible cultural interference through migration paths does not eliminate entirely the seductive assumption of a common human ancestral mechanism, which, later, could have evolved in both similar and dissimilar structures.

### **Musical permeability**

If the sameness between objects which are bounded in space can be due to several raisons, among which even the mere coincidence should not necessarily be rejected, the processes which are unfold in time, as music, dance, or rituals call for a more nuanced approach. Béla Bartók was one the first musicologists (if not the first) who signalled unexplainable resemblances between tunes from distant locations. In our turn, we also found more than one definite similarities between the Romanian old folklore and the music of the Korean Shamans' rituals. We have often referred to both Bartók's discovery and our own findings and we believe that such coincidences, which do not rely on direct contact, are much numerous<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>**Veronica Gaspar**, "National Minorities – Musical Minorities in the Past and Present Romanian Culture" in: *Communication, Context, Interdisciplinarity* – 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Iulian Boldea (Ed.) The Alpha Institute for Multicultural Studies, Târgu Mureş: Arhipelag XXI, 2014, pp. 127-131 (Among several other studies treating the influence of the nomadic minorities on musical acculturation in the Romanian Principalities)

<sup>8</sup>**Gilbert Durand**, *The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963

<sup>9</sup>**Veronica Gaspar**, "Béla Bartók and the Romanian Musical Culture: Intercultural and Intra-cultural Perspective" in: *LDMD II*, The Alpha Institute for Multicultural Studies, Târgu-Mureş: Arhipelag XXI, 2014, pp. 32-33

Here, the arguments that evoke the pragmatic/environmental sphere are not impossible, though rather hard to demonstrate. However, we ought to mention also casual circumstances, which might be related to natural environment, or similar developmental phases. For instance, a natural milieu based on sand, clay and shells, if comparing with another based on wood, is reasonably supposed to influence not just technologies, but also life style and spirituality.

The hypothesis of coincidental similarities is less convincing for the musical field, bearing in mind, as objective reality, the fact that any musical outcome is always surrounded by a larger context. Therefore, music never came alone, but together with social or healing rituals, sharing in a same context accompanying artefacts, time organization and even modalities of transmission. Especially in traditional societies, the behavioural aspects are closely linked to the musical process itself<sup>10</sup>. The particularities of cultural contexts underlie the associative, or more appropriately “the culturally enactive dimension of musical meaning, which is deriving from enculturative, formal and personal learning processes”<sup>11</sup>. Hence, the musical meaning is related to (and is revealed inside) a particular cultural consensus, namely, the “socio-intentional dimension” of the musical flow<sup>12</sup>. The fortuitous encounters between a musical product and a foreign audience offer just the musical flow, but not the attributed meanings, no matter how significant they could be for an advised audience. In other words, a musical representation might be shared through energetic compatibility, but to a much lesser extent the musical meaning<sup>13</sup>, which involves a personal feeling, as reaction to social enculturation. A music deprived of its signification, can be, or not, agreeable for foreigners, or can be understood according to the listener’s cultural lenses, but a real musical meeting implies also the sharing of the cultural envelopment.

The most frequent circumstances of musical inter-penetration assumes whether a direct contact or an intermediation through a nomadic or semi-nomadic people. The cause-effect connections: mobility-opening and sedentarism-non-permeability we have referred above, unambiguously reflected by the Romanian traditional musical culture, can be observed also in other locations or epochs. Therefore, the nomadic minorities from past and present, as well as the ancient migratory peoples are important catalysts for musical transmission and contamination.

And yet, what could determine musical contamination, when and where it occurs, whereas the mere vicinity is not sufficient? We believe that the answer might be sought in two directions: broadening of social framework, which entails modifications in the cultural behaviour too; but also the probability of pre-existent fortuitous similarities, which might constitute a plausible nexus. The objective features of the musical discourse seem to be related to its motoric part, namely the part activating the human gesture and less the often claimed semantic compatibility. The semantic compatibility cannot be evoked out of a similar or compatible cultural environment. Beyond some inevitable fortuitous similarities, the physiological traits or the environment are influencing perception and signification, no matter the particular cultural milieu. The debit, design of pitches, pace, intensity, asymmetry, tempo-rate etc. are expressing a similar kind of emotional tension.

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<sup>10</sup>William F. Thompson, & Laura-Lee Balkwill, "Cross-cultural similarities and differences", In: Juslin, Patrik & Sloboda, John (Eds.) *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications* (Chapter 27), Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 757

<sup>11</sup>Ian Cross, “Musicality and the human capacity for culture”, in: *Musicae Scientiae – Special Issue 2009-2010*, p.186

<sup>12</sup>Leonard Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, The University of Chicago Press, 1961, p. 37

<sup>13</sup>We also consider the conceptual couple *Tonvorstellung* (representation of sound) and *Tonempfindung* (feeling of sound) which was structured for the musical thought by the famous German musicologist Hugo Riemann in 1916: Hugo, Riemann, “Neue Beiträge zu einer Lehre von den Tonvorstellungen” (“New contributions to a doctrine of tonal ideas”). *Jahrbuch der Musikbibliothek* 1916/ 23, Leipzig: Peters, pp. 1-21

About the relation with the general context, the history of musical culture in the Romanian provinces offers more than one conclusive example<sup>14</sup>. We should admit that, besides the role played by the nomadic minorities in confines' permeation, a propitious time for cultural contamination never occurs out of a more comprehensive change of the society. During several centuries, in the Medieval Moldova the musical tradition of the Catholic communities did not influence in any way the music of the surrounding majority population. However, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a same musical structure, videlicet the Western music, succeeded to contaminate the whole musical life, even getting to endanger the vernacular tradition. Obviously, any confinement of the art forms in a more structured cultural context (in this case, the religion) would favour their isolation. Yet, under the circumstances of the great Western-style contamination, the traditional religious music was not only inefficient as shield, but even it was substantially modified.

And yet, the emotional responses to a specific stimulus are always similar? "Are there general principles that might account for the connection between music and emotion in all (or most) cultures, or is that connection unique to each culture, and perhaps non-existent in some cultures?"<sup>15</sup> In other words: at what extent a people's cultural specificity, which had been generated by a cultural experience is able to influence emotion? Regarding the hypothesis of pre-existent common points, it could bring observable arguments for the theories on symbolic anthropology, based on a primordial unity of human culture, as, for instance, Gilbert Durands' theses on the transfer of basic human energetic gestures in the imaginary sphere. The musical field convincingly reflects this intuition, especially as musical perception is concerned. Besides these verisimilar common energetic mechanisms, we ought to take into consideration also the casual circumstances, we refer above to. We strongly believe that the fast and plenary reception of the European music in Japan, which occurred not only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century together with a broaden modernization, but also in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, cannot overlook some significant coincidental similarities between European and (traditional) Japanese music<sup>16</sup>. Nevertheless, for the people who built their musical perception in within a specific cultural environment, the connection between a musical impulse and a consolidated signification is as strong as it would be an objective part of the musical flow. Hence raise the universal confusion between music and its semantic cover, which was, and still is, influencing the musical thought.

### **Musical "maps"**

During our research-study concerning the minorities' music, we observed a connection, which might be significant between the area where Gypsies were free to roam and to display their culture and a particular structure of music. This area is rather large, including Arabic Peninsula, Turkey, Northern Africa and Balkans and the vernacular inhabitants differ by culture, social structure, language and ethnical group. Trying to avoid a specialized terminology, we should note here just some musical peculiarities of the mentioned area that can be observed by anyone, as: monodic (one-voiced) and melismatic structure of melody, chromatic modes (in opposition to the dyatonism, characteristic for Central/Western Europe and Northern Asia) and

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<sup>14</sup> See note 6

<sup>15</sup> **W.Thomson, L. Balkwill**, *Cross-cultural similarities...* p. 755

<sup>16</sup> **Veronica Gaspar**, "History of a Cultural Conquest: The Piano in Japan" in: *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia* No. 27, Warsaw: ASKON Publishers, 2014, p. 96

rhythmical irregularity. Precisely inside this broaden zone, Bartók found those bizarre similarities between musical features coming from Romania, Algeria and Turkey.

So far, we have just to ascertain the coincidence, because is hard to determine a cause-effect relation. A more veridical hypothesis presumes that the Gypsies were, at least, the spreaders of this musical style, if not its origin. Yet, this premise is hard to sustain, taking into consideration the dimension of the area as well as the important capacity to undergo musical influences of this people.

The opposite standpoint, supposing that Gypsies' music was effect, and not cause, of influence is evenless plausible. We can assume that some areas, which have a peculiar cultural style, including the musical one, might have also a peculiar tolerance for the roaming foreigners, in opposition to Western Europe. Indeed the countries which underwent Islamic influence during the 16<sup>th</sup> 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were more tolerant to Jews and Gypsies than most of the Christian countries. But a causal relation between tolerance and concrete musical features goes far out of any ordinary logic. Besides, the dimension of the area is thwarting as well this premise. What can be arguable is the fact that the middle-oriental musical style faded, as Gypsies' freedom of movement was hindered.

Another interesting communality, which unifies a huge geographic space, occurred around the beginning of the A.D. millennium, concerning the structure of the musical culture. Then, an imaginary frontier could separate the Northern part of both Europe and Asia, from the Southern areas. The music of Antique China, India and Greece had common characteristics. The musical culture from each of these civilizations was cultured, structured, transmitted by schools and written documents and thoroughly approached. Each feature concerning music, from intrinsic structure, ways to perform, codes of significations, ethos of means (e.g. instruments and techniques) and timing was analyzed and classified accordingly.

The Chinese musical culture offers a first example of a "classical" (cultured) music entirely forged by specialists<sup>17</sup>. The Indian music was also monitored by a long-lasting school system. Both Chinese and Indian music had several common features. During the history they had a lot of encounters and they share common fundamental principles, even if, eventually, they evaluated in different way<sup>18</sup>. The neighbourhood argument remains still inconclusive, if we take into consideration more important similarities between cultures enough remote in time and space to presume any possible contact. One important example is given by the Chinese and the Ancient Greek cultures. "As well Chinese as Greeks believed that music is the perceptual representation of the imperceptible ratios, which are unifying the elements of the manifest world"<sup>19</sup>. The musical system of signification considered the structure of musical scales in China and Greece, while the Indian system went even farther, at the level of sounds' intervals.

Neither the educational structure, nor the analytical approach of these Southern musical structures could be found northward. In Korea, Japan, or Celtic realm music was predominately oral, sand tidily related to living recitation. Here, as in all traditional cultures, music had semantic correspondences too, but the approach was global and not detailed until the smallest perceptible unity. The role of the music was parted between social rituals, related to wars, healing or communitarian events and free entertainment.

All the information about Korea, Japan on one hand and the Celts on the other came from Chinese, respectively Greek sources. The cultural influence of the Chinese in the North-Eastern

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<sup>17</sup>Alain Daniélou: *Treaty of comparative musicology* pp. 69-70

<sup>18</sup>*Ibidem* p. 69

<sup>19</sup>*Ibidem*

Asia began in the 4-5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. It covered almost all the spiritual realm, from religion until writing. Obviously, the Chinese thought exerted a major influence on the cultured music too, yet it was a kind of intellectual exercise confined just for a thin layer of advised scholars, while the majority of people preserved the popular tradition. Music was seen as part of a broader feast meant to attract the attention of the Gods.

For the Northern peoples the musical detailing was quite inexistent. At the beginning of the Christian era, unlike the Southern musical cultures, neither Europeans nor Asians show some preoccupation for systematic approaches. In Japan, for instance, the symbolism issued from Chinese influence was formal and does not particularly exert hegemony on the average musical language. Even if the presence of written texts seems to be a reasonable premise for a “school” in the full sense of the term, the borrowed written symbols had just a mnemonic role. They were laconically suggesting a particular manner, scale and pitch contour. “The rest” (meaning: the essential) of a musical discourse was for a long time kept through oral tradition.

Going westward, all the inhabitants of the Eurasian continent, be they nomads or sedentary maintained their musical tradition orally and linked to the average events of life, during centuries. The Celts roamed in Europe since the Iron epoch and were contributors of the peoples born after the decline of the Roman Empire. Only recently, the Celts’ music has aroused a broaden interest, beyond the sporadic studies of some isolated scholars. The first sources about the culture of this people are coming from Greek and Hellenistic tradition, so they can be contaminated accordingly. Their tradition and even an embryonic writing had been kept, but there are no proves that music was spread otherwise than orally. The beginning of a musical school as such occurs gradually after the Christian acculturation, along the first Millennium.

The imaginary confine-line parting North Eurasia from Southern civilizations began to fade as the Western music and, respectively the Chinese has penetrated northward. It remains also a relative extended area out of these influences, thus out of a cultured school system: from the Carpathians Arch, until Eastern Siberia. Through this breach, the Byzantine musical culture found place to spread and, eventually, to form a specific religious and art school system, which lasted until the great Western acculturation in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

The musical “maps”, no matter how paradoxical can they be, are showing besides musical similitude, also other cultural compatibilities, including as well rituals as mentalities. Such phenomenon is illustrated even today: in our global society, where the geographical confines are no more hindering communication, it still persist a very strong demarcation line, splitting popular culture from the higher culture with its art forms. Chopin, Madonna, Bruno Mars, Stravinsky... have audience all over the world, but this audience is severely separated by an invisible frontier which defines a more extended cultural behavior and mentality.

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