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SUGGESTIONS FOR TRANSCRIBING EXOTIC MELODIES - A cornerstone in the Babel tower of ethnomusicological methodology¹ -

Abstract: The occasion for the first targeted discourse on Hornbostel's and Abraham's *Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien* in Serbia is the hundredth anniversary of its publishing in Germany. Its groundbreaking significance for the development of ethnomusicological methodology, confirmed time and again in the works of foreign colleagues, is not only historical, because the launched methodological guidelines are still actually used by some schools of ethnomusicology, while elsewhere their impressive traces are clearly recognized. This report focuses at the basic starting points of the text, its destiny during the great methodological turnarounds after the Second World War, and its influence on the ethnomusicological methodology in Serbia.

Key words: Erich M. von Hornbostel, Otto Abraham, transcription, notation, 'exotic melodies', methodological guidelines, ethnomusicological methodology, ethnomusicology in Serbia.

Constant, lively and expansive changing has been a characteristic of ethnomusicology during all 125 years of its existence so far. There are few examples of sci-

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ences which experienced such huge turnarounds regarding its name, subject of study, definition, interdisciplinary connections or opening new directions.² Even what in ethnomusicology endures as a characteristic three-part methodological framework (field research – transcription and tonometry – analysis of the musical style) has been subjected to countless debates, imaginative experimentations and displays of decided individuality – by regional schools and by individuals alike.³ However, the natural tendency of this science, particularly in the field of its methodology, has been the one towards unification, so that its representatives could speak the same language and share the common basis for general theoretical postulates. Among many such attempts, one of the most successful originated in the Berlin school exactly one hundred years ago, by hands of the great Erich Moritz von Hornbostel and his frequent collaborator Otto Abraham. It was published in the magazine *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* in the double issue for 1909/10, under the title ‘Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien’ (‘Suggestions for Transcribing Exotic Melodies’).⁴ The text immediately met wide acceptance and firmly incorporated itself into the methodological foundation of ethnomusicology, where it has remained, for the most part, to this day.

Abraham’s and Hornbostel’s methodological suggestions – sometimes denoted as ‘Hornbostel’s paradigm’⁵ – comprise mere 25 pages, divided into five small chapters: I Choice of notation, II Technique of written recording, III Measuring, IV Calculation and V Tables of note scales. Their content, and to an extent the very titles, reveal to the reader that the authors took a broader semantic field for the term ‘transcription’ than the one it usually has today,⁶ since in their text, besides melography, they dealt with tonometry⁷ and, to a lesser degree, analysis and systemati-

2 An excellent coverage of this problem area, which is the most perseveringly followed by the exponents of the Anglo-American school, is given in the following studies: Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology (Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts)*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1983; Helen Myers (ed.), *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction, The Norton/Grove Handbooks of Music*, New York – London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1992; Helen Myers (ed.), *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies, The Norton/Grove Handbooks of Music*, New York – London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1993.

3 Cf. *Ibid.*

4 Cf. Otto Abraham und Erich M. von Hornbostel, ‘Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien’, *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft* (Berlin), Jg. 11, 1909/10, 1–25.

5 Cf. Bruno Nettl, *op. cit.*, 82–103; Ter Ellingson, ‘Transcription’, in: Helen Myers (ed.), *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*, 110–152. This terminological solution leaves out Abraham’s name, even though it was mentioned first above the title of the original work. Therefore the term ‘Hornbostel’s paradigm’ cannot be considered adequate and it will not be used here.

6 In its modern meaning, the term ‘transcription’ is primarily used for the very process of melography, and in our midst it also denotes the product of the process, i.e. the written record.

7 This is the subject of the third and the fourth chapters, with a description of frequency-measuring devices of the time and the thoroughly explained procedure for calculating cent values.

zation.⁸ However, transcription in a narrower sense, which takes up the greatest amount of space (within the first two chapters), obviously had the central position in their considerations. The authors, namely, thoroughly standardized the starting points, musical orthography and some diacritical markings related to staff systems, clefs, accidentals, undetermined pitches, phrasing, timbre, ornamentation, dynamics, rhythm, tempo, variations and polyphony; besides, they prescribed how the lyrics should be presented and how the titles for sheet music examples should be chosen. Such a great significance they attributed to these seemingly routine matters stemmed from their need to establish a unified procedure in time of intensified revealing of the world's musical diversity (thanks to ever enlarging collections of phonograms), which encouraged a great dissimilarity of approaches to melography.⁹ At the same time, Hornbostel's and Abraham's guidelines were an immediate reaction to a radical solution offered a year earlier (1908) by Benjamin Ives Gilman, an American colleague. This renowned researcher of North American natives' music expanded the staff system from five to incredible 45 lines, intending to place each of the quartertone-apart sounds he registered in Hopi songs at its own line or space.¹⁰ Disapproving the extreme incommunicativeness of such Gilman's written records, Hornbostel and Abraham advocated the standpoint that the right and almost universal solution is in a moderate adaptation of Western notational system,¹¹

8 Functional analysis of scale steps and manners of their presenting are dealt with in the fifth chapter, and a partial formal analysis can be found in the first chapter, which at its very end reaches the issue of criteria for the systematization of the recorded material.

9 Undoubtedly they had a similar motivation regarding some other methodological issues, as can be perceived from the following quotation: „Je umfangreicher das Material wird und je mehr Forscher sich in seine Bearbeitung teilen, um so schwieriger, aber auch um so dringlicher wird die Aufgabe, die Methodik einheitlich zu gestalten. Nur so werden die Ergebnisse der Einzel Forschungen untereinander vergleichbar und geeignet, als Grundlagen allgemeiner Theorien zu dienen. Wenn auch der Versuch, eine wissenschaftliche Methodik auszuarbeiten, bei dem gegenwärtigen Stande der vergleichenden Musikwissenschaft verfrüht erscheinen mag, so ist es doch zweckmäßig, schon jetzt einige Vorschläge zur Diskussion zu stellen, ehe eine zu starke Differenzierung der Arbeitsmethoden eine Einigung unmöglich macht“ [„With the growing volume of the material and the differences between the researchers' methods, it becomes harder, but also ever more important, to form a unified methodology. Only then the results of separate researches can be compared and serve as a basis for general theories. However an attempt at creating a scientific methodology might seem premature at the current state of comparative musicology, it is nevertheless already appropriate to put up some suggestions for discussion, before an even deeper differentiation disables a convergence of views“]. Otto Abraham und Erich M. von Hornbostel, op. cit., 1.

10 Ibid., 3; Ter Ellingson, op. cit., 123–125.

11 Although such a standpoint was afterwards justly criticized (see later), the world's ethnomusicological practice so far has supported it unreservedly, because the greatest portion of all transcriptions ever made has been realized exactly by using diversely adapted Western notation. Cf. Mantle Hood, *The Ethnomusicologist*, Kent, The Kent State University Press, 1982 [second edition], 92.

as well as in a careful compromise between maximal objectivity and readable visual presentation.¹²

The foregoing discrepancy between the written record and the ultimate sound reality was standardized in 'Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien' by some other factors – i.e. not only by what naturally stems from the limitations of the offered notational framework. Namely, the text emphasizes several times that the key for the required balance, at the expense of unselective notating of all the details of a sound document, should be the recorder's skilful assessment of the performer's intention. And that is primarily achieved by comparing the melody's points of variance – i.e. by a procedure adopted from the methodology of philological researches of the time, used to eliminate unclear parts and errors from verbal texts, and which had been partially applied as early as in the studies of Carl Stumpf.¹³ By Ter Ellingson's astute remark, this is exactly how Hornbostel's and Abraham's melographic method legitimized double subjectivity: on one side there is **the performer's intention**, and on the other there is **the recorder's impression**, raised to the level of the main gauge for assessing that intention.¹⁴ But this did not allow the recorder to blend several variants into an invariant,¹⁵ and that was the reason why Hornbostel's and Abraham's suggestions, relying primarily on the use of a phonograph, were an important improvement over Stumpf's approach to transcription.¹⁶

Philological influence¹⁷ on Hornbostel's and Abraham's joint work can be also perceived from their advice that a written record should be subsequently checked for correctness, by the same melographer or another,¹⁸ or the advice regarding

12 Hornbostel's and Abraham's text decidedly states that 'die wissenschaftliche Verwertbarkeit der Notationen kann nur durch ein Kompromiß zwischen Übersichtlichkeit und objektiver Genauigkeit gesichert werden' ['the scientific usability of a written record can be guaranteed only by a compromise between a clear layout and objective precision']. Otto Abraham und Erich M. von Hornbostel, op. cit., 2.

13 Taken from: Ter Ellingson, op. cit., 120, 125.

14 Ibid., 125.

15 'Ganz zu vermeiden sind Konstruktionen eines Melodietypus, die aus Teilen verschiedener Varianten (etwa den frequentesten) zusammengeflickt würden' ['Construction of such a melodic type which would be a patch-up of the parts of different variants (e.g. the most frequent ones) is to be avoided altogether']. Otto Abraham und Erich M. von Hornbostel, op. cit., 13.

16 While writing down Bella Coola tribe's music during their tour in Halle in mid-1880's, Stumpf, who could not use a phonograph, was forced to count on infinite patience of his informants. They performed certain musical numbers for him countless times, varying them over and over; hence Stumpf decided that his records should represent an 'average' of several variable interpretations. Taken from: Bruno Nettl, op. cit., 70-71.

17 Philology strongly directed the early development of comparative ethnomusicology in several ways, most of all through Alexander John Ellis, Franz Boas and Stumpf. Cf. Ter Ellingson, op. cit., 118-121, 125-126.

18 Cf. Otto Abraham und Erich M. von Hornbostel, op. cit., 13, 17.

writing down the lyrics sung,¹⁹ and indirectly from the correct opinion that the musical aspect of a song is multilaterally dependent on the content and structural particulars of its textual matrix.²⁰ Finally, in the second chapter, which contains practical guidelines regarding the very process of transcribing, the two comparative musicologists gave a recommendation for the occasions when a field research had to be performed without a phonograph. For such situations they advised 'Erlernungsmethode' ['the method of learning']: 'Wo phonographische Aufnahmen aus irgend einem Grunde unmöglich sind, muß man sich mit Aufzeichnungen nach dem Gehör behelfen. Auch diese Methode hat u. U. ihre Vorzüge und ist keineswegs ganz zu verwerfen, wenn sie mit der nötigen Vorsicht und Sorgfalt gehandhabt wird. Am besten ist es, wenn der Forscher selbst die Gesänge oder Instrumentalstücke so erlernt, daß er sie zur Zufriedenheit der Eingeborenen wiedergeben kann. Als Kritiker muß man sich musikalisch besonders Begabte – (wieder nach dem Urteil ihrer Landsleute) – wählen und auch die Sicherheit haben, daß die Zustimmung nicht nur aus Höflichkeit oder aus Interesslosigkeit erfolgt. So wird man am sichersten beurteilen können, was den Eingeborenen selbst das Wesentlichste an ihrer Musik ist (...). Die Erlernungsmethode kann auch **neben** der phonographischen Methode sehr instruktiv sein, namentlich bei komplizierter Instrumentaltechnik (...), deren Eigentümlichkeiten und Beziehungen zur Konstruktion des Instruments und zur Melodik nur so zu ermitteln sind.' ['If the phonographic recordings are not available for any reason, we must rely on recording by ear. This method has its merits and it definitely must not be dismissed, but its use requires caution and care. It is best if the researcher learns all the songs and instrumental pieces so well that the natives are satisfied with his performance. As a critic, one must choose an individual with an unmistakable talent for music (again, by opinions of his peers), making sure that the choice is not governed by politeness or indifference. Thus it will be possible to judge reliably what is essential in the natives' music (...) The method of learning **in addition** to the phonographic method can be very instructive, especially with complex instrumental techniques (...), whose particulars, as well as the relationship between an instrument's construction and a melody, can be fathomed in no other way'].²¹ One cannot help feeling that exactly these lucid ideas partly inspired the renowned

19 Ibid., 13–14.

20 Following sentences can provide an illustration: „Bei Sprachen mit Tonhöhenakzenten (...), bei denen die Wortbedeutung zum Teil von den Tonhöhen der Silben abhängig ist (...), bildet das Verhältnis der sprachlichen zu den musikalischen Tonhöhen ein spezielles Untersuchungsproblem. Die Bildung melodischer Motive wird vielfach durch den Text mitbedingt sein. Über das musikalische Ethos wird man außer durch den Text schwerlich irgendwelchen Aufschluß erlangen können“ [„In the languages with melodic stress (...), those where the meaning of a word partly depends on the pitch of the syllable (...), the relationship between the linguistic and the musical pitch is a special research problem. Formation of a melodic motive is multilaterally conditioned by the text. Explaining the musical ethos otherwise, instead through the text, can become very difficult“]. Ibid.

21 Ibid., 15.

concept of bi-musicality – learning other people’s musical language through a prolonged field sojourn, so that the researcher would get closer to the insiders’ standpoints – which Mantle Hood would develop half a century later, within the Anglo-American school.²²

Hornbostel’s and Abraham’s suggestions remained firmly positioned in the methodological foundation of comparative musicology up to the mid-20th century. But right after that – following the expansive evolution of this science which took place after the Second World War and which, among other things, caused the change in its name – numerous older concepts fell under the scrutiny of meticulous critical re-examinations, a process in which the ethnomusicologists from the USA took the leading role. According to a report by Bruno Nettl, controversies from the domain of melodic transcription in the debates from 1950’s to 1970’s can be summed up thus: 1. contrast between a prescriptive and a descriptive written record;²³ 2. the nature of a song or an instrumental piece as a ‘unit of musical thinking’ in a certain culture; 3. relationship between a transcription as an outsider’s description and the written record as a certain culture’s way to express its understanding of its own music; 4. roles of human beings and machines; and 5. transcription as a unified ethnomusicological technique as opposed to developing special notation techniques as a basis for making special insights.²⁴ All these points concerned the basic principles of Hornbostel’s and Abraham’s method, which were forcefully shaken by other circumstances too. As a matter of fact, it was discovered that some cultures had no notion of a ‘scale’ as a sequence of discrete and/or completely fixed tonal steps.²⁵ Also, the awareness of an inevitable dose of the recorder’s subjectivity while assessing various points had grown.²⁶ On the top of everything, what emerged as one of the key problems was the fact that Hornbostel’s and Abraham’s method did not originate from what would be immanent

22 Cf. Mantle Hood, *op. cit.*

23 The terms were introduced by Charles Seeger. Prescriptive written record is meant for the insider, to perform the piece, and the descriptive one for the outsider, to analyze it. Prescriptive transcription is not burdened with all the details existing in the sound record, because it is taken for granted that the fine points of style – which are otherwise difficult or impossible to notate and which are sometimes hard to differentiate from random occurrences – are well known to the insider. On the other hand, descriptive written record strives for a detailed and objective visual presentation, for only then a valid analysis can result in ascertaining stylistic particulars – which is comparable to a phonetic record in a language. Hence prescriptive and descriptive transcription also correspond with the terms ‘phonemic’ and ‘phonetic’, i.e. in a shorter form ‘emic’ and ‘etic’, and Nettl also suggested ‘cultural’ and ‘analytical’. Bruno Nettl, *op. cit.*, 67–68.

24 *Ibid.*, 69.

25 Such is the case e.g. with the music of North American native tribes (which Hornbostel personally witnessed in his time), or with Javanese slendro scale. Ter Ellingson, *op. cit.*, 137–138.

26 Since 1960’s (almost seven decades after Boas and similar pioneering attempts), this has been perceived also through experiments performed at symposia, usually by comparing written records of one and the same musical number, purposefully made by different recorders beforehand. *Ibid.*, 135–137; Bruno Nettl, *op. cit.*, 73–74.

to the researched musical system, but instead it always conformed that system to its own representation logic – thus often obfuscating the musical elements of the utmost importance, yet emphasizing the auxiliary ones.²⁷ During the period in question, Mantle Hood had been standing out as one of the fiercest opponents not only of Hornbostel's and Abraham's way, but of general (non-selective) use of Western notation in ethnomusicological transcription, on the grounds of its certified imperfection, imprecision, inadequacy and implicit ethnocentricity.²⁸

However, not only that Western notation in its various adaptations remained the tool of choice for ethnomusicological melography, even after the foregoing tumult of justified protests, but 'Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien' for the most part have survived as a foundation for educational melographic practice of the generations of ethnomusicologists even to this day – apparently the most in Austria and Germany. The literature contains explicit statements on the subject,²⁹ and a peculiar testimony on the significance of this old text is the fact that in 1994 – not so long ago – its English translation was published in a renowned magazine *Ethnomusicology*.³⁰

The hundredth anniversary of Hornbostel's and Abraham's suggestions gives us an opportunity to finally wonder if they participated in the development of Serbian melography, and how.

A part of the answer can be discerned from some works by Dragoslav Dević, our only ethnomusicologist so far who took notice of Hornbostel's and Abraham's joint text. Besides specifying it at the end of the additional literature list in his *Os-*

27 Ter Ellingson, op. cit., 139–141.

28 Hood envisaged a 'composite solution' to the notation problem, which would develop in three steps. In the first phase, current when he deliberated upon the subject, he opined that one should negotiate and apply, with possible supplements, the notational systems developed in the cultures of the researched communities; if no such notation existed, it was allowed to hold to an adapted Western notation. Hood named this phase 'Hipkins's solution', after Ellis's collaborator Alfred James Hipkins, whose standpoints he considered a vanguard to his suggestion. The second step, still perfected at the time, consisted in relying on the written records obtained by an automatic transcription. He called it 'Seeger's solution', after Charles Seeger, the inventor of melograph, the most perfect device for the purpose. The third step was left for the future, and it meant developing a universal notation by joint efforts of numerous ethnomusicologists. He called it 'Laban's solution', after Rudolf Laban, the author of a sophisticated and widely used system for written recording of dance movements, known as *Labanotation*. Mantle Hood, op. cit., 90–122.

29 Cf. Albrecht Schneider, 'Germany and Austria', in: Helen Myers (ed.), *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies...*, op.cit., 84. In the mid-1990's I had the opportunity to meet Biljana Nešović, then a student of ethnomusicology in Berlin, under the mentorship of Rudolf Brandl. She informed me that she began her melographer's training with Hornbostel's and Abraham's guidelines.

30 Cf. Otto Abraham and Erich M. von Hornbostel, 'Suggested Methods for the Transcription of Exotic Music', *Ethnomusicology* (Illinois), 1994, Vol. 38, No. 3, 425–456.

novna melografska uputstva [Basic Melographic Guidelines] from 1974,³¹ Dević justly related its influence to the melographic opus of Miloje Milojević, and included the title among several Hornbostel's texts, which he assumed Milojević, as a Hornbostel's contemporary and a great admirer, knew well.³² But here we must add that the possible influence died out already in Milojević's time, simply because this author's method was not passed on to the following generations of Serbian ethnomusicologists (and certainly because a large part of his field records became available to the public as late as in 2004).³³

However, we can perceive that Hornbostel's and Abraham's melographic influence had another point of entry to our environment, in the second half of the 20th century. That road is very oblique and hardly conspicuous, and it was opened by famous Bartók method of transcription – most maturely and minutely presented in his and Albert Lord's study on Serbo-Croatian folk songs,³⁴ and which Dragoslav Dević generally strived to instil in the melographic practice of his numerous students.³⁵ However, although there is no objectivity in Dević's assessments that Bartók's thoroughly elaborated transcription method was 'quickly accepted', ['brzo prihvatana'], 'completely adopted' ['potpuno usvojena'], and 'became fully prominent' ['došla do punog izražaja'] in Serbia,³⁶ it is on the other hand beyond question that, by virtue of some of its segments, which nevertheless did take hold in Serbian melography, our midst also contains traces of an older

31 Cf. Dragoslav Dević, *Osnovna melografska uputstva*, Belgrade, Univerzitet umetnosti u Beogradu, 1974, 83.

32 Miloje Milojević (ed. and foreword by Dragoslav Dević), *Narodne pesme i igre Kosova i Metohije* [Folk Songs and Dances of Kosovo and Metohija], Belgrade, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva; Karić fondacija, 2004, 14–17, 47–49. The decisive spur for Milojević to adopt some of Hornbostel's ideas was probably his studying music in Germany, from 1907 to 1910. *Ibid.*, 48–49.

33 Those are 227 (or 270 with the variants) melodies from Kosovo and Metohija. Cf. *Ibid.* Milojević's manuscript legacy contains almost 600 other unpublished written records from that area and from Macedonia. Cf. *Ibid.*, 45–46.

34 Cf. Béla Bartók – Albert Lord, *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs, Texts and Transcriptions of 75 Folk Songs from the Milman Parry Collection and a Morphology of Serbo-Croatian Folk Melodies*, Yugoslav Folk Music, Vol. 1, New York, State University of New York Press, 1978 [second edition], 3–20, 89–92, 95–244.

35 Cf. Dragoslav Dević, *Osnovna melografska uputstva...*, op.cit.

36 Cf. Dragoslav Dević, 'Bela Bartok i jugoslovenska narodna muzika' ['Béla Bartók and Yugoslav Folk Music'], *Internacionalni časopis za muziku Novi Zvuk*, 6, 1995, 22.

methodological heritage from Hornbostel's and Abraham's 'Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien'.³⁷

The renowned German comparative musicologists' influence to the development of Serbian melography was indeed rather limited, and its ultimate boundaries do not reach further than this point, hence it is no surprise that so far only a marginal attention has been paid to them in these geographical coordinates. And some analogies between the foregoing 'method of learning' and the field work approach practiced by Vladimir Đorđević between the two wars³⁸ should not deceive us. They are mere coincidence, stemming from Đorđević's self-taught resourcefulness in the time when the field work in Serbia still had to be done without phonographs.

Translated by Goran Kapetanović

37 More precisely, Bartók's melographic method for the most part differed drastically from Hornbostel's and Abraham's, sometimes even advocating completely opposite principles (e.g. regarding the functionality of recording the timbre, or by a general approach to melography which was distinctly phonetic, etc.). However, Bartók naturally did keep some elements of his predecessors' methodology, and henceforth they transferred to the practice of Serbian melographers in the latter half of the 20th century (such was the case e.g. with some diacritical markings, notation for points of variance, writing technique etc.). More detailed comparative summary could be the subject of a separate report.

38 In the foreword to the collection of folk melodies from Southern Serbia, Đorđević left a renowned testimony about his method: "I would always make sure there were several singers (...) I wanted them to control, correct and remind each other. I would not write the melody down until I learned to sing it and to play it on the violin. Only when I became able to sing it completely alongside the others, I would write it down (...) Even those melodies, thus written down, I would still check later with other singers in the same settlement". [Svuda sam gledao da bude poviše pevača (...) Želeo sam da uvek jedno drugo kontroliše, popravlja i potseća. Melodiju nisam zabeležio dotle dok je sam nisam naučio pevati i svirati na violini. Tek kad sam mogao da je sa ostalima potpuno otpevam, onda sam je beležio (...) Pa i te tako zabeležene melodije ja sam u istom mestu i dalje proveravao od drugih pevača] Vladimir R. Đorđević (Introduction: Ernest Closson), *Serbian Folk Melodies (Southern Serbia)*, [Srpske narodne melodije (Južna Srbija)] Knjige Skopskog naučnog društva, Vol. I, Skopje, 1928, XVI.

Сања Радиновић

ПРЕДЛОЗИ ЗА ТРАНСКРИПЦИЈУ ЕГЗОТИЧНИХ МЕЛОДИЈА
– угаони камен у вавилонској кули етномузиколошке методологије –

САЖЕТАК

Као и у свакој науци, у етномузикологији је одувек присутна природна тежња за интернационалним методолошким уједначавањем. Њен рани израз далекосежног утицаја оличен је у познатом коауторском тексту Ота Абрахама и Ериха М. фон Хорнбостела 'Vorschläge für die Transkription exotischer Melodien' (Предлози за транскрипцију егзотичних мелодија“), који је пре тачно стотину година објављен у берлинском часопису *Sammelbände der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, у двоброју за 1909/10. годину (Jg. 11, стр. 1-25).

Тај невелики рад подељен је у пет краћих поглавља (I Избор нотног писма, II Техника записивања, III Мерење, IV Прорачунавање и V Табеле лествица), махом посвећених методологији мелографије, нешто мање тонометрији, а најмање питањима анализе и систематизације забележеног материјала. Тако наглашени значај који су аутори придавали овим елементарним и наизглед рутинским стварима проистекао је из њихове потребе да се у тада све интензивнијем откривању светског музичког диверзитета, који је подстицао и веома разнолике приступе мелографији, успостави јединствени начин. Критикујући изразиту некомуникативност извесних екстремних решења, Хорнбостел и Абрахам су заступали становиште да прѣва и готово универзална солуција лежи у умереној адаптацији западњачког нотног писма, као и у пажљиво оствареном компромису између максималне објективности на једној страни и читљивости визуелне презентације на другој. Кључ за тражену равнотежу на рачун неселективног нотирања свих детаља звучног документа требало је да представља записивачева вешта процена намере извођача, што се у првом реду могло постићи упоређивањем варијантних места у мелодији – поступком усвојеним из методологије тадашњих филолошких истраживања.

Чврста позиционираност Хорнбостелових и Абрахамових предлога у методолошким темељима компаративне музикологије опстајала је све до средине 20. века. Али одмах потом, са експанзивним развојем ове науке који је наступио после Другог светског рата, бројни старији концепти стављани су под лупу помних критичких преиспитивања, у чему је водећа улога припала етномузиколозима из САД. Између осталог, истицана је осведочена несавршеност, непрецизност, неадекватност и имплицитни етноцентризам западњачке нотације. А базична начела Хорнбостелове и Абрахамове методе доведена су у питање сагледавањем изразитијег присуства субјективности у мелографији, као и чињеницом да у неким музичким традицијама не постоји уобичајени концепт „лествице“ као низа дискретних и/или потпуно фиксираних тонских корака. Поврх свега, као један од кључних проблема истицано је да Хорнбостелов и Абрахамов начин не полази од онога што би било иманентно неком истраживаном музичком систему, већ га увек саображава својој логици представљања – и тиме често управо заклања музичке елементе који су у њему од примарне важности, а истиче оне од другостепеног значаја.

Па ипак, не само што је западњачко нотно писмо у својим разним прилагођењима остало најчешћи избор при етномузиколошкој мелографији и после поменуте буре основаних негодовања, већ су и „Предлози за транскрипцију егзотичних мелодија“ већим својим делом све до нашег времена опстали као утемељење школске мелографске праксе бројним генерацијама етномузиколога – чини се највише у Аустрији и Немачкој.

Обележавање стогодишњице настанка Хорнбостелових и Абрахамових предлога представља и прилику да се постави питање о томе да ли су они имали икаквог удела у развоју српске мелографије, а одговор гласи да се њихов утицај јасније може сагледати једино у међуратном раздобљу, и то у мелографском опусу Милоја Милојевића.

Кључне речи: Ерих М. фон Хорнбостел, Ото Абрахам, транскрипција, нотација, егзотичне мелодије“, методолошка упутства, етномузиколошка методологија, етномузикологија у Србији.