

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE KHOREZM EPIC TRADITION AND ITS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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Abstract:

This article examines the historical roots of musical culture in the Khorezm oasis based on scientific sources and oral folk traditions. The study analyzes the ancient traditions of professional musical performance in Khorezm through the wall paintings of Tuproqqal’a, the palace culture of the Khorezmshahs period, and the activities of musicians and performers. Particular attention is paid to the origin of the rubab instrument, its role in the musical environment of Khorezm, and its connection with the musical culture of the East, as interpreted in the works of such thinkers as Abu Nasr Farabi, Darvesh Ali, Fitrat, and Jalaliddin Rumi. The article also highlights the interrelation between the double-bodied rubab, the tar instrument, and the traditions of Khorezm epic performance, as well as the musical and stylistic features of dastan performance practices. The research concludes that the musical culture of Khorezm represents one of the most ancient and unique layers of Uzbek national art and demonstrates its close connection with the broader musical heritage of Eastern peoples.

Keywords: Khorezm musical culture, rubab, double-bodied rubab, tar, baxshi tradition, epic performance, Khorezmshahs, maqom, folk music, Eastern musical heritage.

Аннотация: В данной статье анализируются исторические корни формирования и развития музыкальной культуры Хорезмского оазиса на основе научных источников и устных народных преданий. В исследовании освещаются древние традиции профессионального музыкального исполнительства в Хорезме через настенные росписи Топраккалы, придворную культуру периода Хорезмшахов, а также деятельность музыкантов и исполнителей. Особое внимание уделяется происхождению инструмента рубоб, его роли в музыкальной среде Хорезма и его взаимосвязи с музыкальной культурой Востока на основе взглядов таких мыслителей, как Абу Наср аль-Фараби, Дарвеш Али, Фитрат и Джалалиддин Руми. Также в статье научно рассматриваются взаимосвязь двухкорпусного рубоба, инструмента тар и

традиций хорезмского бакшичества, а также музыкально-стилистические особенности исполнения дастанов. В результате исследования обосновывается, что музыкальная культура Хорезма является одним из древнейших и уникальных пластов узбекского национального искусства и неразрывно связана с музыкальным наследием народов Востока.

Ключевые слова: музыкальная культура Хорезма, рубоб, двухкорпусный рубоб, тар, бакшичилик, дастан, Хорезмшахи, маком, народная музыка, восточное музыкальное наследие.

The historical roots of musical culture in the Khorezm oasis are extremely ancient, having developed in close connection with the region's centuries-old socio-cultural progress, the spiritual life of its people, and their aesthetic worldview. The wall paintings of the Tuproqqal'a palace, which served as the capital of the Khorezm state during the 1th - 4th centuries CE, clearly confirm the ancient origins of musical art in the region. Among these murals, particular attention should be paid to the depictions of women picking fruit, semi-nude female dancers, as well as a woman playing the harp and a man performing on double drums [1, p.48]. These images indicate that musical performance practices and the use of musical instruments in the territory of Khorezm had already emerged and developed from pre-Christian times and the early centuries of our era.

Particularly by the 10th -11th centuries, the large number of court musicians, instrumentalists, and performers in the palace of the Khorezmshahs demonstrates the significant role of musical art within court culture. During this period, the traditions of professional musical performance reached a high level of development, creating a solid foundation for the further advancement of Khorezm musical culture.

“In the prosperous and flourishing times of the capital city of Khorezm, Old Urgench, before the campaigns of Genghis Khan, the majority of the city's inhabitants adopted music as their craft and profession. Through this occupation, they provided for the well-being of their families. According to some exaggerated accounts found in certain sources, even in Old Urgench alone, the number of people who earned their livelihood by carving and selling dutor bridges (kharraks) reached one thousand” [2, p.7]. Although this information may appear legendary or exaggerated, it nevertheless contains a certain degree of historical truth.

The image of the woman playing the harp, mentioned above, also indicates the extremely ancient origins of musical instruments in Khorezm.

Fitrat writes the following about Uzbek classical music: “In an anonymous ‘history of music,’ it is stated that the rubab appeared in Khorezm during the reign of Sultan Muhammadshah. When I first saw this book, I also believed it. However, in the 1920s, I was surprised by the remarkable similarity between the rubab and an instrument called ‘Sorang,’ which I had brought from India. Later,

in Darvesh Ali's *Risola-yi Musiqiy* ('Treatise on Music'), I found that this instrument had been made in Balkh and later flourished in Khorezm during the time of Muhammad Khorezmshah" [3, p.29].

Indeed, historical and cultural sources make it possible to assert that by the 10th century the rubab had become widely used in musical performance practice within the territory of Khorezm. This type of instrument possesses ancient traditions in Eastern musical culture, and its formation and development were the result of a long historical process. In particular, the great thinker and musicologist Abu Nasr al-Farabi, in his famous work *Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir* ("The Great Book of Music") [4, p.61], provides detailed information about the system of stringed musical instruments and gives special attention to the structure, sound-producing capabilities, and performance characteristics of instruments closely related to the rubab.

This demonstrates that the rubab was not only scientifically classified in theoretical terms, but also occupied an important place in the musical practice of that period. The widespread use of the rubab within the musical environment of Khorezm indicates the high level of development of professional performance culture in the region, as well as the close connection between local musical traditions and the broader musical thought of the East. From this perspective, the rubab should be regarded as an important component of the musical and cultural heritage of Khorezm.

The information presented in I. Timofeev's monograph *Beruni* [5, p.167] confirms the significant role of the rubab in the court culture of Khorezm. According to the author, during the banquets organized at the court of Abu al-Abbas Ma'mun in 1009, singers performed ghazals by Shahid Balkhi and Rudaki accompanied by the rubab. This indicates that the rubab functioned not only as a musical instrument, but also as a principal accompanying instrument in poetic and musical creativity. Furthermore, the monograph contains information about other musical instruments, such as the chang and nay, as well as theatrical performances and puppet art, demonstrating that various forms of art developed harmoniously within the cultural environment of the Khorezm court.

In the creative heritage of the great mystic poet Jalal al-Din Rumi (13th century), the rubab also holds a distinct artistic and aesthetic significance. Historical and literary sources note that Rumi used to perform his poetry accompanied by the rubab, and this instrument is interpreted as an important medium for expressing his Sufi worldview and inner spiritual experiences. Through the sounds of the rubab, the poet conveyed not only intellectual perception but also the harmony between spiritual and physical states, artistically expressing the idea of unity between human beings and the universe. Therefore, in Rumi's work, the rubab appears not merely as a musical instrument, but as a symbol of spiritual perfection and contemplative reflection [6, p.58].

The rubab is considered a more complex musical instrument compared to the dutor. For this reason, it can be assumed that in the place where it emerged, the science of music must have reached

a high level of development. One such place was Khorezm. Accordingly, it can be argued that the original homeland of maqams is also Khorezm. From this perspective, terms such as tarona and suvora (asp ros) trace their roots back to the customs and traditions of the Avestan period [7, p.49].

Fitrat expresses skepticism about the idea that this instrument originated in Khorezm. However, there are many arguments that can be presented which themselves cast doubt on his skepticism. Let us briefly examine the historical processes in order to ground these doubts.

When Alexander the Great sent the “Avesta” to Greece, the Khorezm ruler Farazman, angered by this act, dispatched 500 loyal soldiers after them. The soldiers pursued the Greek forces through a narrow gorge near Lake Van in Turkey, defeated them in battle, seized the “Avesta” manuscript, and then traveled to Bombay in India, a land beyond Alexander’s reach, where they settled permanently. These Khorezmians, who called themselves “Parsis,” now number more than two hundred and fifty thousand people and live as a distinct community in Bombay. One of their well-known representatives, the famous film director Raj Kapoor, reportedly mentioned during his visit to Tashkent in the 1970s that his ancestors originated from Khorezm.

Looking at the essence of these historical events, it is not unlikely that certain musical instruments and dance traditions of Khorezm may have reached India through those people. The similarities between Khorezmian music and dance and those of Indian musical and choreographic traditions may also be connected to this phenomenon. It is even possible that the rubab, too, might have reached the Indian lands together with those “Avesta” defenders and later transformed into the instrument known as “Sorang.”

Turning to the issue of Balkh, it is well known from history that this city experienced significant development in the fields of art and literature. It is not coincidental that Jalal al-Din Rumi, who is known to have sung his poetry accompanied by the rubab, was also born in this city. After the Ghaznavid state came to power, handicrafts flourished in Balkh, turning it into one of the most influential cities of the East [8, p.54].

At this point, it is necessary to clarify another issue: what form the rubab, famous in the court of the Khorezmshahs, actually had. Fitrat describes it in his previously mentioned work as follows:

“The body of this instrument can be divided into four main parts: the belly, the chest, the neck, and the head. The belly, chest, and neck are made from a single piece of mulberry wood using a carved (hollowing) technique. The belly of the rubab resembles two deep vessels connected to each other... It has five strings made of gut, differing in thickness. In addition to these, there are twelve auxiliary ‘under-strings.’ When the musician plays the rubab, these are not plucked directly; their function is to vibrate through the impact of the main strings and add a soft, trembling, melancholic tone to the sound of the primary strings” [9, p.67].

Fitrat's description of the instrument, based on Darvesh Ali, is correctly identified by Komil Avaz as the double-bodied rubab (tar) [10, p.32]. This means that this instrument was already in use at the court of the Khorezmshahs during that period. The term "tar" is rarely used among the general population; it is more commonly employed by professional musicologists, whereas in popular usage, the term "rubab" is generally understood to refer to the tar. Of course, the rubab of that period differed significantly from its modern form.

It is also necessary to draw attention to another point. As is known, every musical instrument is, in one way or another, connected to the religion and customs of the people who created it. According to researchers from Bukhara, the horns on the Kashgar rubab are symbolically related to the cultural and mythological imagery found in the ancient religious traditions of the Chinese people [11, pp.38-40].

There are also legends concerning the origin of the double-bodied rubab created in Khorezm. One of these legends is connected with the activity of the Prophet Noah.

As a result of the flood, Noah's Ark drifted for a long time and eventually came to rest on a high hill. However, no land could yet be seen. Finally, Sam ibn Noah encountered a swan and a pigeon. From a distance, they called out "quvoq, quvoq." When they followed the sound, they discovered dry land. It is said that from the word "quvoq," the name "Khiva" ("Xiva") later emerged. For this reason, Khiva is believed to have been built by Sam ibn Noah, resembling his father's ark [12, p.10].

According to the famous epic storyteller and leading Khorezm baxshi Bola Baxshi Qurbonnazar Abdullaev, during the period when Zoroastrianism was practiced, an instrument was created to perform the melody known as "jon, tana gir." As a result of extensive experimentation and development, the Khorezm double-bodied rubab was eventually formed. Initially, it had the shape of a boat. Later, it evolved into a form resembling two boats with their ends touching each other. Its strings were arranged in two layers: the upper strings were made of gut, while the lower strings were said to be made of pure gold.

There are many elements in Khorezm that are associated with Noah's Ark. For instance, the traditional headwear (papakhs) worn by Khorezm men was also shaped like a boat. This type of headwear remained in use until the 1970s.

The reason for our more detailed discussion of musical instruments and the arts is to shed light on the historical roots of Khorezm epic storytelling traditions. It is important not to overlook the significant influence of epic singing traditions on the development of high artistic culture.

In one of his conversations, Bola Baxshi also spoke about the traditions of bakhshi art and the performance of epic songs, emphasizing another important point. According to him, the art of epic singing had already reached a high level during the Khorezmshahs period. At that time, bakhshi

performers were referred to as “goyandas.” Even then, the double-bodied rubab played a leading role in the performance of epics.

Because the epic melodies performed in the Shirvani style in Khorezm are dynamic and ceremonial in character, the dutor is not sufficiently powerful to fully express them. The fact that the tar - an improved form of the rubab - was introduced into the epic musical ensemble by bakhshi performers in the 20th century further supports this view.

Only in Khorezm did the bakhshi ensemble take shape and, over many centuries, continue to provide spiritual nourishment to the people. This ensemble included the tar, doira, ghijjak, and bulamon. Of course, it is difficult to deny that before the tar, bakhshis also used the dutor and rubab. By the 20th century, the tar, dutor, and harmonium had begun to replace one another in performance practice. For example, Bola Baxshi performed epics playing the tar, Qodir sozchi used the harmonium, and Tursun baxshi performed epic songs on the dutor.

It is also worth noting that the first person to introduce the tar to the stage as a vocal instrument was the Khorezmian artist Komiljon Otaniyozov.

In Khorezm epic storytelling, each poetic passage within a dastan is performed with a specific melody. A single epic is typically sung using 15-20 different melodic sections (nomas), and each tune is identified by its own name. Within the structure of these epics, one can also observe the presence of poetic forms such as murabba’, ghazal, masnavi, mukhammas, musaddas, mustazad, and even tuyughs. The incorporation of these literary genres into epic performance is closely connected with the development of professional artistic culture.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the musical culture of the Khorezm oasis has deep historical roots, and its formation and development have been closely connected with the region’s centuries-long political, social, and spiritual life. The wall paintings of Tuproqqal’a, the court culture of the Khorezmshahs period, and the activities of musicians and performers all confirm that professional musical performance in Khorezm emerged at a very early stage. In particular, the historical development of the rubab and its role in the Khorezm musical environment demonstrate that musical thinking and performance art in this region reached a high level of sophistication.

The historical, literary, and musicological sources analyzed in the article demonstrate that the rubab in the cultural environment of Khorezm was formed not only as a musical instrument, but also as a symbol of spiritual and aesthetic thought. The views of thinkers such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Darvesh Ali, Fitrat, and Rumi, along with information related to the court of the Khorezmshahs, provide a scholarly basis for understanding the significant position of this instrument in the musical culture of the East. At the same time, folk legends, the memories of bakhshi performers, and oral

traditions show that the rubab and the art of epic storytelling are deeply rooted in the spiritual life of the people.

The results of the study also confirm that the double-bodied rubab, and later the tar instrument, played a leading role in the formation of the Khorezm school of epic performance. In particular, traditions of performing epics in the Shirvani style, the system of instruments within the bakhshi ensemble, and the performance of each poetic segment with a specific melody are among the key artistic and aesthetic features that distinguish the Khorezm epic tradition from other regional schools.

Furthermore, the article puts forward scientific hypotheses regarding the historical and cultural connections of Khorezm musical culture with the musical traditions of India and other Eastern peoples, identifying this issue as an important direction for future research. Overall, the musical heritage of Khorezm - especially the traditions of the rubab and epic storytelling - represents one of the most ancient and unique layers of Uzbek national musical culture, and its in-depth study and transmission to future generations remains an important scientific and cultural task.

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