



**SHASHMAQOM IN THE MODERN CULTURAL SPACE: ISSUES OF PRESERVATION  
AND MODERNIZATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article analyzes the current state of the Shashmaqom tradition, the most unique layer of the cultural heritage of Uzbekistan and Central Asia as a whole, the factors threatening it, and the ways to preserve it from a scientific and critical perspective. In the course of the research, such pressing issues as systemic problems in the traditional music education system, the impact of globalization and digital technologies, the qualitative changes observed in maqom performance, and the decline in the audience among young people are considered. The article proposes comprehensive solutions based on the experience of UNESCO and international organizations in protecting intangible cultural heritage.

**Key words:** Shashmaqom, maqom tradition, intangible cultural heritage, music education, globalization, music identification, transformation.

Shashmaqom is a unique art system that has become the highest expression of Central Asian musical thought for more than ten centuries. This term, meaning "six maqoms", expresses not only a specific set of melodies, but also a unique philosophical and aesthetic paradigm of understanding the world. Shashmaqom is a living document, passed down orally from generation to generation in the schools of Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva, reflecting the creativity of poets and musicians, the philosophy of Sufism, and national history. In 2003, UNESCO included Shashmaqom in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This international recognition, on the one hand, confirmed the uniqueness of this heritage, and on the other hand, indicated that it was under threat of extinction. More than twenty years have passed. Today we must leave open the following question: Does the Shashmaqom tradition really continue, or are we simply witnessing the process of its formalized "museumization"?

The purpose of this article is to comprehensively analyze the current state of the Shashmaqom tradition, clarify real threats to it, and propose scientifically based solutions. The study is based on Uzbek, Tajik, and international musicological sources, stage observations, and the opinions of experts in the field of music education.

It would be a big mistake to evaluate Shashmaqom as a simple collection of musical works. It is, first of all, a holistic epistemic system: in it, every chord, every rhythm, every word combination has a meaning. Maqoms are associated with a cosmological order: Rost, Nav, Dugoh, Segoh, Chorgoh, and Iraq - these names are not just musical melodies, but also musical models of human mental states, natural phenomena, and the divine order.

Historically, the Shashmaqom tradition lived through the teacher-student system. The teacher taught not only the melodies, but also their inner meaning, the philosophy of performance, and even the art of improvisation in unexpected situations. Studying in this system lasted for years, sometimes decades. The student was formed in the home and creative environment of the teacher, living with music. This model of education preserved "living knowledge" - tacit knowledge - between generations, which could not be fully transmitted through any textbook. At the beginning of the 20th century, Soviet cultural policy also tried to change this system. Shashmaqom was first recorded in notation and brought into the sphere of academic schools. On the one hand, this step can be considered a contribution to the preservation of the heritage. However, on the other hand, in the process of recording it in notation, the living, changing nature of the maqams was frozen, the spaces for



improvisation were reduced, and important parts of the traditional repertoire were ignored as “informal”.

Today, Uzbekistan's music education system has official programs for teaching Shashmaqom. However, the actual implementation of these programs is sharply criticized by experts. The problem is multifaceted: first of all, there is a shortage of qualified teachers. The number of real maqom masters is decreasing significantly every decade. After 60-70-year-old masters retire, there are not enough specialists to replace them. The number of maqom departments in conservatories and specialized music schools has been reduced, and sometimes combined with other disciplines.

The second problem is the outdated curriculum and methodology. In many cases, teaching is still carried out on the basis of programs developed during the Soviet era. The achievements of modern ethnomusicology, various regional variants of maqoms, or international experience are not reflected in textbooks.

The third problem is the weakness of the financial incentive system. The salary of a maqom teacher is lower than that of pop music specialists, which is driving talented young people away from this field.

The process of globalization has a twofold impact on national musical traditions: on the one hand, the opportunity to promote Shashmaqom on a global scale has expanded - the number of listeners of Uzbek maqom performances on YouTube, Spotify and other platforms has increased. However, at the same time, globalization also serves to fragment the uniqueness of the national musical tradition. The algorithmic system on streaming platforms promotes short, interesting, quickly perceived content. The long, meditative, deep-focus nature of Shashmaqom contradicts the logic of this platform.

The digital age has brought another new problem: the use of maqom elements as "samples" in pop music products has increased. This is not a bad phenomenon in itself, but maqom elements are often removed from their context, philosophy, and meaning, and used only as exotic sounds. As a result, the listener is given a superficial and distorted perception of Shashmaqom.

Many experienced musicologists note a decline in the quality of maqom performance today. This phenomenon is due to several reasons. First, the weakening of the traditional teacher-student system has made it difficult to learn the subtle secrets of maqom performance. Second, the pressure to adapt to the stage and entertainment industry is forcing maqom performers to shorten or simplify traditional long forms. Third, modern amplification and microphone technology in some cases makes it unnecessary to learn traditional acoustic performance techniques - although these techniques are an integral part of the aesthetics of Shashmaqom.

Perhaps the most dangerous process is the transformation of Shashmaqom from a living, developing art form into a "national symbol", a decoration of festive events and an "exhibit" for foreign tourists. Performing maqoms only at official ceremonies, separating them from everyday life, and strengthening the consumer character of this tradition is not a "preservation" of the tradition, but its gradual mummification. When a tradition lives only in public performances, it becomes not a living, but a formal ritual.

To understand the relationship between tradition and change, it is first necessary to clarify an important distinction: the boundary between organic transformation and destruction or disappearance. All living traditions are constantly changing — this is a natural process. Shashmaqom has also been formed and enriched differently in different regions over the centuries. The differences between the Bukhara, Samarkand and Khorezm maqom schools are precisely the result of this organic change.

In this sense, one cannot completely deny the attempts of some modern artists to synthesize maqom elements with new genres. For example, some experiments in the harmony of maqom



methods and modern chamber music, or projects on the synthesis of maqom and jazz — these are not the "death" of tradition, but its vital manifestation in new conditions. The problem is not in the transformation itself, but in the absence of quality criteria, eclecticism not based on deep knowledge.

So, the main question is: can the Shashmaqom tradition adapt to new conditions while preserving its internal logic? For this, the transformation process must have a clear epistemic basis, that is, it must be carried out under the guidance of specialists who know the tradition deeply. Both extreme positions, “everything must change” or “nothing must change,” are wrong - the truth is in complexity.

Given the depth of the problems, several strategic recommendations are given below within the framework of a systematic approach:

**Institutional support for the teacher-student system.** A system of special grants, scholarships and social guarantees for experienced maqom teachers should be introduced at the state level. At the same time, formal contracts and financial incentive mechanisms for teacher-student pairs should be developed. This system should work in parallel with the academic circle, complementing it. Creation of a comprehensive digital archive. In accordance with UNESCO standards and modern ethnomusicological methodology, it is necessary to record, annotate and publish for open access all existing maqom performances in high-quality audio and video formats. This archive should cover not only melodies, but also performance techniques, teacher explanations, contextual information. Such an archive would be more complete as a joint international project with Tajikistan.

**Reform of educational programs.** Modern, scientifically based curricula should be developed for maqom departments of conservatories and music schools. These programs should combine traditional knowledge with academic music education, as well as provide sufficient space for improvisation and live teacher-student communication. Regular professional development courses for teachers are also important.

**Strategy for reaching the wider public.** Shashmaqom cannot be left only to specialists - creative ways of reaching a wider audience must be sought. This can be done by introducing maqom elements into school education, its correct interpretation in modern media, and the development of interactive concert formats. It is important to use digital tools when working with young people, making maqom interesting and understandable through applications and multimedia projects.

**Strengthen international cooperation.** It is necessary to raise cooperation with UNESCO and other international organizations to a new level, and to organize joint research and preservation projects with countries such as Tajikistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. This cooperation, while recognizing the transboundary nature of the tradition, should also protect the uniqueness of the Uzbek maqom school.

The shashmaqom tradition is undergoing its most important test today. This test is not only related to external threats - globalization, technology, market forces. The deepest test is internal: in the erosion of the social and cultural environment necessary for transmitting the tradition from generation to generation. The weakening of the teacher-student system, the gradual passing of the generation that knows maqom, and the unpreparedness of the new generation to replace it - this is a sign of a real crisis.

However, this crisis is not yet irreversible. If the state, the academic community, civil society, and international partners join forces; If we maintain a delicate balance between preservation and transformation, and do not abandon either, Shashmaqom will not only be preserved, but can also find its new life in the 21st century.

Shashmaqom is not just a thing of the past. It is one of the musical ways of thinking of humanity, a unique language of understanding the world. The loss of such a language will be an



irreparable loss not only for Uzbekistan, but for all of humanity. Therefore, the fight for its future is our spiritual duty to our generation.

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