



HISTORICAL-EVOLUTIONARY DEVELOPMENT AND ORGANOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE OUD INSTRUMENT IN EASTERN MUSICAL CULTURE

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ANNOTATION

This article provides a comprehensive study of the historical origins, structure, and cultural significance of the oud — one of the oldest and most prestigious instruments of Eastern music. The article traces the oud's development from the civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt through the Arab Caliphate, Persian, and Central Asian cultures, as well as its influence on the European lute. The contributions of great scholars al-Farabi and Ibn Sina to oud theory, its role in the Uzbek-Tajik Shashmaqom tradition, and contemporary performance schools are examined. The article demonstrates that over its 5,000-year history, the oud has evolved into a universal musical language uniting the cultures of diverse peoples.

Key words: oud, Eastern music, maqam, Shashmaqom, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, lute, Arab Caliphate, Central Asian music, Ziryab, string instruments, music history, barbat, Mesopotamia, musical heritage

The oud is one of the most ancient and historically significant instruments of Eastern music, which has occupied a central place in Arab, Persian, Turkish and Central Asian cultures for thousands of years. This instrument has become not only a means of performing musical works, but also a spiritual and cultural symbol of an entire civilization. The magical structure, rich timbre and multi-octave range of the oud have become the basis for its recognition as the "queen" of Eastern music.

The word oud comes from the Arabic word "al-ud", which means "wood" or "thin wood". Some researchers also argue that this name comes from the Persian word "rub" (plant). In any case, this instrument, like its name, has become naturally and organically integrated into Eastern culture.

The history of the oud dates back at least 5,000 years. Archaeologists have found evidence of its existence in Mesopotamia (in modern Iraq) in the 5th century BC. Small pear-shaped instruments covered with reptile skin dating back to the 3rd millennium BC have been found. These findings indicate that the oud appeared around this time. Stringed instruments called "pantur" or "sintir" were played in the ancient Sumerian and Babylonian civilizations, many of which resemble the immediate predecessors of the oud.

Instruments similar to the oud were also widespread in ancient Egypt. This instrument, which entered Egypt through the Persians, also took strong root in the culture of the Nile Valley. Egyptian wall paintings dating back to the 2nd millennium BC depict musicians playing the pear-shaped, long-necked stringed instrument.

The Persians played an important role in the development of the oud. During the Sassanid Empire (224–651 AD), this instrument, known as the "barbat", occupied a central place in court music. The Sassanid court patronized musicians and instrumentalists, which greatly contributed to the development of the oud. The famous Sassanid musician Borbad (6th–7th centuries) brought the art of playing and composing the oud to a new level, and his style of performance became a source of inspiration for subsequent centuries.

The oud is mentioned many times in Persian literature, in particular in the works of Firdausi, Hafez, and Sa'di. This instrument is described as inextricably linked with lyric poetry, romantic stories, and philosophical reflections. The Persians improved the structure of the oud: they improved the length of the neck, the number of strings, and the tuning system.



During the Islamic Caliphate (7th–13th centuries), the oud entered its golden age. Arab musicians and theorists further developed this instrument, calling it the "sultan of instruments." The great Arab philosopher and musicologist al-Kindi, who lived in the 9th century, studied the oud on a strict theoretical basis and scientifically analyzed its structure, tuning, and theory of maqom. His work "Risala fi al-Lahn wa-n-Nagham" is considered one of the first scientific works devoted to the theory of the oud.

Ziryab (Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Nafi), a genius of Arab-Persian music, who lived in the 10th century, added a fifth string to the oud. Ziryab, who studied in Baghdad and then moved to Andalusia, radically updated the tuning and playing technique of the oud, created new maqoms and musical forms. His music school in Qurtuba (Cordova) made an invaluable contribution to the development of European and Arab music.

The peoples of Central Asia, including the Uzbeks, Tajiks, and other Turkic peoples, have been familiar with the oud since ancient times. During the reign of the Samanids (9th–10th centuries) and later the Timurids (14th–15th centuries), musical art flourished in the cities of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khiva, and the oud was one of the main instruments of the music of this flourishing period. In Central Asia, the oud was also called the barbat. In subsequent centuries, this instrument was studied and played alongside local instruments such as the dutar and tanbur. The great Uzbek scholar and musicologist Abu Nasr al-Farabi (870–950) devoted special chapters to the oud and its theory in his work *The Great Book of Music* (Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir). Farabi studied the complete musical system of the oud, the theory of maqams, and intervals on a scientific basis.

Avicenna (Avicenna, 980–1037) also paid special attention to the theory of music, including the oud, in his work *Kitab al-Shifo*. He analyzed the acoustic properties of the oud, the laws of string vibration, and tuning methods. Ibn Sina's scientific views on music later influenced Western musicology.

The oud is strikingly different from other stringed instruments with its unique "pear" or "half-watermelon"-shaped body. The body is usually 50–65 cm long and 35–40 cm wide, and consists of a thick, ribbed (belt) part. These ribs are often made of olive, oak, rosewood, or sayanad. Each rib is completely handmade by a master craftsman and is the most important part that determines the acoustic quality of the instrument.

The oud's short, curved neck is the most obvious feature that distinguishes it from the guitar and lute. The neck is free of frets (as in most historical ouds), which allows the player to play microtonal intervals and glissandos. It is this feature that makes the oud very suitable for Eastern musical styles and allows it to fully express the subtle sound colors of Eastern music.

The modern oud is usually equipped with 11 strings (5 double strings and 1 single bass string), although historical ouds had 4 or 5 double strings. Arabic ouds often have 10 or 12 strings, and Turkish ouds have 12 or 14 strings. The strings are traditionally made of silk or gut, but modern ouds also widely use nylon or metal strings.

The standard tuning of the Arabic oud is C2, F2, A2, D3, G3, C4, from the lowest daniah to the highest, while the Turkish oud is often tuned differently. Each regional tradition has its own tuning system, which further expands the oud's ability to play different maqams and styles.

The strings of the oud are plucked with a mezzrab called a "rishah" (Arabic for bird feather). Traditional rishas are made from the wing feathers of eagles, falcons, or other large birds, while modern ouds use plastic or hard nylon rishas. The shape, weight, and stiffness of the rishah greatly affect the playing style and sound quality. Some players also play by touching the strings directly with their fingers - a technique called "bi al-asabi".



The oud is the mainstay of the Eastern music system - the maqom tradition. A maqom is not just a scale or melody, but a complex musical system that has its own emotional, spiritual and aesthetic content. Each maqom has its own mood, and usually the time and situation for its performance are also determined.

There are more than 300 maqoms in Arabic music, the main ones of which are Rast, Bayoti, Siko, Chahorgoh, Nawruz and others. In the Uzbek-Tajik maqom tradition, there is a system of "Shashmaqom" (Six maqoms) and "Fergana-Tashkent maqoms". Shashmaqom, created by Bukhara masters - consisting of Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugoh, Segoh and Iraq maqoms - is an invaluable heritage of Central Asian culture.

Playing the oud is not limited to playing the instrument alone. Historically, the oud was a tool for masterful poets and musicians to harmonize poetry and music. In many maqom melodies, examples of oral literature - ghazals, rubai, qasidas - are sung to the accompaniment of the oud. This tradition still lives on today.

With the Arab conquest of Spain in the 8th century, the oud also entered Europe. The Arabic word "al-ud" became the English word "lute" through the Spanish "la ud". In medieval Europe, the lute became the most popular instrument and was recognized as the most important instrument of classical music during the Renaissance (14th–16th centuries).

The European lute became significantly different from the oud: frets appeared, the tuning system changed, and the repertoire developed in a completely different direction. However, the genetic connection and external similarity of the two instruments have been preserved to a considerable extent even today. The French composer Maren Mersenne in the 17th century explained the origin of the lute by linking it to the Arabic oud.

Throughout history, many great musicians have taken the art of playing the oud to new heights. Ziryab (789–857) — a musician who studied in Baghdad and gained fame in Andalusia — is forever remembered for adding new strings to the oud and creating new performance techniques. In addition to being a court musician, he introduced many innovations in music theory, singing, and even fashion.

In modern times, Munir Bashir (1930–1997) — an Iraqi oud master — brought the art of playing the oud to the world stage. He expanded the expressive capabilities of the oud, combining different traditions and styles. Modern performers such as Nasser Shamma, Anouar Brahem, Simon Shaheen, and Marcel Khalife have made an invaluable contribution to the global popularization of oud music.

Today, the oud is actively studied and performed in different parts of the world - in Arab countries, Turkey, Iran and Central Asia, as well as in Europe and America. The number of oud students in various music academies, music schools and online platforms is increasing year by year. The inclusion of Shashmaqom and other Eastern maqom traditions in the list of intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO has given a new impetus to the preservation and development of oud music. In Uzbekistan, state and non-governmental organizations are also currently actively working to promote the art of maqom and oud. Modern performers are exploring new directions that combine traditional maqom music with jazz, classical European music and other genres of world music. This synthesis is recognized as an effective way to bring oud music to a new generation of listeners.

The oud instrument is a symbol of millennia of history, the culture of great civilizations and the boundless love of mankind for the art of music. It has traveled a long and honorable path from the forests of Mesopotamia to the palaces of Andalusia, from the streets of Bukhara to the concert halls of Paris. Along this path, the oud has become not just an instrument, but a universal musical language that unites peoples, transcending languages and borders.



The place of the oud in Uzbek and Central Asian culture is also of particular importance. This instrument, studied in the scientific works of such great scholars as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, played in the palaces of Bukhara, and preserved in the Shashmaqom tradition, is one of the spiritual and cultural treasures of our people. To study it, love it, and pass it on to future generations is not only our musical, but also our national and human duty.

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