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## THE MASTER–DISCIPLE TRADITION IN THE BUKHARA MAQAM SCHOOL AND ITS CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT

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### Abstract

This study explores the theoretical foundations of the maqam and mode systems that have shaped Eastern musical traditions for centuries. By comparing historical and modern perspectives, it aims to analyze the modal structures, tonal hierarchies, and the spiritual-philosophical essence of maqam as a reflection of cultural identity. Drawing upon the works of both classical theorists and contemporary researchers, the research demonstrates that maqam represents not only a musical structure but also a complete aesthetic worldview integrating melody, emotion, and ethics. The paper also highlights the pedagogical importance of maqam theory in modern conservatory education and its relevance in preserving intangible cultural heritage in Central Asia and the Middle East.

**Keywords:** Maqam, mode, modal system, Eastern music, musical theory, cultural identity, pedagogy.

### Introduction

The maqam system, deeply rooted in the spiritual and cultural traditions of the East, remains one of the most sophisticated theoretical frameworks in world music. It is a system that transcends mere tonal organization; rather, it embodies the aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical principles of entire civilizations. The concept of maqam originated in the ancient Middle Eastern and Central Asian regions, gradually evolving through centuries of oral transmission, scholarly refinement, and regional adaptation.

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Historically, the earliest traces of maqam-like structures can be found in ancient Mesopotamian and Persian musical theories, where specific melodic modes were associated with emotional states and ritual functions. The Arabic term maqam (plural: maqamat) refers to “a place” or “a station,” symbolizing not only a tonal position but also a spiritual station within a musician’s expressive journey. The theoretical system of maqam later expanded to Ottoman, Persian, and Turkic cultures, influencing musical education and composition throughout the Islamic Golden Age.

“In the process of development and dissemination of the art of maqom, the role of national and universal values is of great importance, since these values enhance not only the aesthetic, but also the educational, spiritual, and moral influence of music.” [3.10-b.]

In the modern academic context, maqam is often compared to the Western mode system; however, the two differ significantly in their conceptual depth and usage. Whereas Western modes are defined primarily by pitch and scale patterns, the Eastern maqam incorporates microtonal intervals, characteristic melodic movements, rhythmic cycles (*usul*), and affective expression known as *hal* (state of emotion). According to U.U. Rasulov (2022), “The maqam is not merely a theoretical construct but a living manifestation of cultural memory, preserved and transmitted through sound, performance, and pedagogy.”

The continuity of maqam knowledge within oral and written traditions has contributed to its resilience across centuries. Scholars such as Abdinabiyevna (2021) emphasize that maqam practice in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan, exemplifies a synthesis of ancient modal logic with modern interpretative creativity. These approaches reflect a dialogue between tradition and innovation—one that defines the survival of Eastern musical thought in a globalized world.

## Research Methodology

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The research is based on a qualitative analytical approach, combining historical musicology, ethnographic observation, and comparative modal analysis. Primary data were collected through the examination of classical treatises such as *Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir* by al-Farabi and *Risala fi al-Musiqā* by Safi al-Din al-Urmawi, along with modern Central Asian sources preserved in the archives of the Yunus Rajabiy Institute of Maqam Art in Tashkent.

Secondary data were derived from contemporary scholarly works discussing modal theory, performance practice, and pedagogy in the Eastern musical context. The study of the maqam and modal systems in Eastern music requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines historical analysis, theoretical interpretation, field research, and performance practice. Since the maqam tradition is both an intellectual theory and a living art form, the methodology of this research integrates musicology, ethnography, and pedagogy to understand its evolution, inner logic, and educational value.

“Music is a form of universal art, playing a large role in the development of connections between different cultures. Like the art of maqom, music with its own unique and deep spiritual layers serves as a bridge in intercultural communication.” [3.11-b.]

The research begins with a historical–analytical review of written sources and oral traditions. Treatises by scholars such as Abu Nasr al-Farabi (*Kitab al-Musiqā al-Kabir*), Safi al-Din al-Urmawi (*Kitab al-Adwar*), and Abdulqadir Maraghi (*Jami al-Alhan*) provide the theoretical foundation for understanding the ancient modal systems that shaped later maqam frameworks. These classical works are examined to trace how pitch organization, modal hierarchy, and rhythmic principles evolved over time.

Modern Uzbek scholars, including U. U. Rasulov (2022), emphasize that the continuity between medieval modal theories and the Central Asian maqam system demonstrates a deep philosophical lineage rather than mere stylistic inheritance. The comparison of these sources allows for identifying how ancient Persian–Arab theoretical categories like *ajnas*, *darajat*, and *usul* were transformed into distinctly regional interpretations within the *Shashmaqom* tradition of Bukhara and Khorezm.

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To interpret the modal structures of maqam, the research applies comparative analysis between Eastern and Western systems. This involves examining the similarities and distinctions between maqam and the Western mode, especially regarding intervallic organization, tonal centers, and modal emotion (hal). While the Western system is largely based on the division of the octave into equal semitones, the maqam relies on microtonal nuances—quarter tones and three-quarter tones—that produce unique melodic colorations. According to M. Karimova (2023), “These microtonal shifts are not arbitrary technicalities; they are cultural expressions embedded in the identity of each maqam, shaping the listener’s spiritual response.”

The structural analysis also includes notational transcriptions of several maqamat, focusing on melodic movement, modal modulation (sayr), and rhythmic cycles (usul). Comparative models developed by ethnomusicologists such as H. Farmer and J. During are used to contextualize Central Asian maqam within the broader family of Eastern modal systems.

Field research is an essential component of the methodology. The author conducted observational studies and interviews with master performers and educators at the Yunus Rajabi Uzbek State Institute of Music and regional maqam ensembles in Bukhara and Khiva. These sessions provided firsthand insights into the pedagogical processes of ustoz–shogird (master–disciple) learning.

Discussions with practitioners revealed that oral transmission remains the most powerful tool in maqam education. Students acquire not only technical mastery but also ethical and emotional understanding through the teacher’s personal guidance. As Abdinabiyevna (2021) observes, “The maqam performer learns to feel the emotional states hidden behind each melodic phrase; this is knowledge that no notation can fully transmit.”

Such ethnographic data complement the theoretical study, offering a holistic view of how maqam theory operates in real-life teaching and performance contexts. Recordings of live sessions were analyzed to identify pedagogical patterns, improvisational strategies, and expressive nuances.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the methodology draws upon cognitive and experiential learning theories. The maqam system is viewed as a model of



integrated education where theory, emotion, and morality coexist. Teachers guide students not only through memorization of compositions but also through cultivating listening sensitivity, memory, and introspection.

Following the framework proposed by Ulasheva (2022), this study considers maqam pedagogy a dialogue between the rational and intuitive dimensions of human cognition. The analysis focuses on how learners internalize modal structures through repeated vocal or instrumental practice, imitation of the master's phrasing, and gradual development of interpretive independence.

To explore cognitive aspects, selected students were observed during maqam interpretation lessons. The findings suggest that learners process modal understanding through three interrelated stages:

1. Perceptual phase – recognizing intervals, tonal centers, and rhythmic cycles;
2. Analytical phase – understanding structural logic and emotional contrast;

This tripartite model supports the argument that maqam education strengthens both musical intelligence and emotional intelligence.

Another key dimension of the research involves the use of digital resources in maqam preservation and analysis. With the growing availability of online archives and analytical software, traditional musicology can now be complemented by computational approaches.

In collaboration with the “Maqom Digital Archive” project (2024), several performances were digitized and analyzed through spectral visualization to study microtonal inflections and rhythmic precision. These technologies not only aid in documentation but also create new opportunities for remote learning and international exchange.

Nevertheless, as Rasulov (2024) notes, digitalization must not replace the human essence of maqam learning: “Technology can preserve sound, but it cannot transmit spirit. The true maqam is born only in the dialogue between teacher and student.”

Finally, all methodological findings are synthesized to form an integrated model that combines historical theory, structural analysis, ethnographic observation, and pedagogical practice. This holistic methodology ensures that the study of maqam

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remains faithful to its multidimensional character—as both science and art, tradition and innovation.

The methodological framework thus serves two purposes:

- Scientific: to analyze and systematize modal structures and theoretical foundations;
- Educational: to enhance contemporary maqam pedagogy through cross-disciplinary and technological integration.

Through this dual perspective, the research contributes to modernizing traditional music education while safeguarding its authenticity and spiritual depth.



**The methodology follows three main steps:**

1. Historical tracing – identifying the origins and evolution of maqam structures through written and oral traditions.
2. Comparative analysis – contrasting Eastern modal systems (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Uzbek) with Western theoretical frameworks.
3. Pedagogical assessment – evaluating how maqam theory is transmitted in modern academic institutions and how it contributes to musical creativity and preservation.

The study also employs the hermeneutic method, emphasizing the interpretation of musical meaning within its cultural and philosophical context. This allows for understanding maqam not merely as a sound system but as a symbolic language that reflects the worldview of its practitioners.

The theoretical foundation of maqam lies in the intricate organization of tonal and microtonal relationships within a scale system known as jins (segment) and ajnas (plural). Each maqam consists of a combination of two or more ajnas, forming a melodic framework that determines permissible pitch movements and emotional character. The interaction of ajnas produces a sense of dynamic progression, leading to the climactic tone or ghammaz.

Unlike the Western diatonic system, where semitone and whole tone intervals dominate, the maqam system utilizes quarter tones and microtonal variations that give rise to subtle expressive nuances. These tonal subtleties correspond to spiritual and emotional states—joy (farah), sadness (huzn), contemplation

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(tafakkur), or devotion (ta'abbud). As Rasulov (2022) explains, “The maqam serves as an aural mirror of the soul, reflecting not only emotion but the moral and metaphysical ideals embedded in Eastern aesthetics.”

Philosophically, the maqam system is connected with the Sufi concept of hal (inner state), where each melodic progression symbolizes an ascent toward spiritual enlightenment. This connection between music and mysticism transforms maqam from a purely artistic form into a medium of self-realization and divine contemplation.

Historically, this understanding was developed through the writings of great theorists such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and later al-Urmawi, who formalized modal theory into systematic models that continue to inform modern scholarship.

The structure of maqam promotes a unique type of musical cognition referred to as modal thinking. It requires performers and listeners to internalize microtonal shifts, melodic gestures, and emotional transitions as part of an integrated experience. Unlike the Western harmonic mindset that prioritizes chordal resolution, Eastern modal thinking relies on tension and release through melodic contour rather than harmonic progression.



Abdinabiyevna (2021) notes that this approach to sound perception “reflects a circular, rather than linear, understanding of time and motion in music, where the journey itself—rather than the destination—defines artistic fulfillment.” Such cyclical motion parallels the mystical idea of spiritual return (ruju‘ ilallah), a recurrent theme in Islamic art and thought.

The analysis in this paper, therefore, considers maqam as a cognitive phenomenon as well as a musical one—linking sound, symbolism, and self-awareness.

Through this lens, the study situates maqam within the broader field of cultural semiotics and phenomenology, opening new perspectives on how Eastern musicians conceptualize meaning through sound.

## Results and Discussion

The comparative and interpretative analysis of maqam and mode systems has revealed several key findings.

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First, the maqam system, despite regional variations, demonstrates a consistent theoretical foundation across the Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Central Asian musical traditions. The structural logic of ajnas and their hierarchical organization around a central tone (tonic) appears universally present, indicating the shared intellectual roots of the Eastern modal tradition.

Second, microtonality—often viewed as a barrier to Western analysis—emerges as the primary source of expressive depth in Eastern music. These micro-intervals serve not only to enrich tonal color but also to encode emotional and symbolic meaning within each maqam.

The findings also reveal that the maqam system embodies both rational and spiritual dimensions of music theory. The rational aspect is represented by strict modal construction rules, while the spiritual aspect emerges through the interpretive freedom of the performer (*mutrib*). This dual nature aligns with the philosophical balance of form (*sura*) and meaning (*ma'na*) in Islamic aesthetics. According to Rasulov (2022), “The maqam functions as a living bridge between structure and inspiration, where theoretical precision supports, rather than restricts, creative expression.”

A further result of this study shows that pedagogical approaches to maqam in modern Uzbekistan integrate classical oral instruction (*ustoz-shogird*) with written notation and academic analysis. This hybrid model not only preserves authenticity but also ensures accessibility for new generations of musicians trained in conservatory environments.

The discussion of these findings highlights several significant implications for the understanding and transmission of maqam in contemporary contexts.

From a cultural perspective, the survival of maqam represents the resilience of traditional knowledge systems amid the forces of globalization. In Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan, institutions such as the Yunus Rajabiy State Institute of Maqam Art have played a critical role in formalizing oral traditions into academic curricula, thus preventing their erosion. This institutionalization, however, brings new challenges—balancing authenticity with modernization, and preserving oral spontaneity within written systems. From a pedagogical perspective, teaching maqam demands an integrative methodology that combines

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ear training, theoretical analysis, and spiritual preparation. The ustoz-shogird (master-apprentice) model remains central, emphasizing imitation, emotional resonance, and gradual internalization of the mode’s character. As Abdinabiyevna (2021) observes, “In maqam education, knowledge is not transmitted mechanically but experienced existentially—each student must live the maqam before mastering it.”

Furthermore, the study finds that maqam-based training enhances cognitive flexibility and emotional intelligence in students. The modal framework trains the ear to recognize microtonal nuances, thereby refining musical perception beyond the rigid equal temperament system of Western pedagogy. This unique educational value makes maqam a vital component in the preservation of cultural diversity and artistic identity.

One of the most remarkable findings concerns the interdependence of theory and performance within the maqam tradition. Unlike Western classical music, where theoretical analysis is often separate from practice, the maqam tradition merges both into a single process of musical realization. Theoretical knowledge (ilm) becomes meaningful only through its embodiment in sound (amal). This integration fosters a holistic understanding of music as a moral and spiritual act, not merely an aesthetic performance.

Such a concept resonates with the teachings of Sufi thinkers like al-Ghazali, who viewed music (sama‘) as a medium for inner purification and divine remembrance. In this light, the maqam becomes an ethical as well as artistic discipline—one that cultivates patience, concentration, and emotional balance in both performer and listener.

### **Conclusion**

The study of maqam and mode systems in Eastern music reveals a rich synthesis of theoretical precision, artistic creativity, and spiritual symbolism. Rooted in ancient philosophical and scientific thought, the maqam represents not only a modal system but also a worldview—one that perceives music as a reflection of the universe’s moral and emotional harmony.

Through comparative and historical analysis, this research establishes that the maqam system integrates rational structure (tartib) and intuitive emotion (jazba).



Its theoretical framework—built upon ajnas, tonal centers, and microtonal motion—demonstrates an intellectual sophistication that parallels, and often predates, Western modal theory. Yet unlike the abstract rationalism of Western theory, maqam is inseparable from performance, emotion, and pedagogy. Pedagogically, the ustoz–shogird (master–disciple) tradition remains the most effective means of transmitting this knowledge. It unites scientific analysis with oral experience, ensuring that the inner essence of the maqam is preserved through living performance. As Rasulov (2024) emphasizes, “True mastery in maqam emerges only when theoretical learning transforms into spiritual experience through the sound itself.”

In the modern era, the maqam tradition continues to evolve through institutional support, technological innovation, and international collaboration. Digital archives, online lessons, and research exchanges enable wider access to classical repertoires while maintaining authenticity. However, the essence of maqam—its ability to shape moral character, emotional intelligence, and inner balance—can only be sustained through human mentorship and lived musical experience.

Therefore, the future of maqam education depends on balancing preservation with renewal: maintaining respect for its spiritual roots while engaging creatively with global pedagogical trends. The maqam is not a relic of the past but a dynamic art that continues to inspire scholars, performers, and educators worldwide. Its study reaffirms that music, at its deepest level, remains a bridge between intellect and emotion, tradition and innovation, humanity and the divine.

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