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## REGIONAL DIMENSIONS OF UZBEK MAQOM ART: THE FERGANA-TASHKENT PERFORMANCE TRADITION IN CONTEXT

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### Abstract

This study presents a comprehensive examination of the historical evolution and regional differentiation of maqom art within the cultural framework of Uzbekistan. It explores the formation of Uzbek classical music as an orally transmitted tradition and its sustained continuity through the master–apprentice system, which has played a crucial role in preserving and transforming musical knowledge across generations.

Maqom is interpreted as a highly developed artistic system characterized by a complex modal–intonational organization, a structured rhythmic framework (*usul*), and a multi-layered formal and dramaturgical design. The article investigates the processes through which maqom traditions have diversified across regions, resulting in distinct local performance styles.

Adopting a comparative analytical approach, the study highlights the structural integrity and formal discipline of the Bukhara–Samarkand Shashmaqom tradition, the emotionally expressive and timbrally rich performance style of the Khorezm school, and the flexible, lyrically oriented, and improvisation-driven practices of the Fergana–Tashkent tradition. Particular emphasis is placed on the latter as a distinctive performance paradigm, often described as a “free-form” system, as well as on its close relationship with the *katta ashula* genre.

The findings demonstrate that regional performance traditions function not only as localized artistic expressions but also as dynamic factors contributing to the ongoing development and enrichment of Uzbek maqom art.

**Keywords:** *Maqom, Shashmaqom, Khorezm maqoms, Fergana–Tashkent maqoms, regional style, classical music, performance traditions, modal system (lad–parda), intonation, usul, melismatics, pang voice, katta ashula, maqom, master–apprentice school, improvisation*

Uzbek classical music represents a vast cultural heritage that embodies the centuries-old artistic thinking, aesthetic views, and spiritual world of our people. This her-

itage encompasses various musical genres, creative directions, performance schools, as well as rich repertoire examples. Over the centuries, this art form has been carefully

preserved by outstanding composers, singers, and instrumentalists of our people and has mainly developed on the basis of oral tradition (Rajabov, I., 2006, p. 124).

A key feature of oral tradition is that musical knowledge, performance experience, and repertoire are transmitted directly from master to apprentice through practical performance. As a result, each generation, while preserving the creative experience of previous masters, has continued to enrich it with new artistic interpretations.

The master–apprentice system has served as one of the main factors in the development of Uzbek classical music. This system, in addition to teaching technical performance skills, has played an important role in understanding the inner spiritual essence of musical art, shaping musical thinking, and cultivating artistic taste. Therefore, Uzbek classical music traditions are also regarded as a system of musical knowledge and a school of spiritual and aesthetic education. It is not accidental that this art form is valued as an expression of the spiritual world, historical memory, and aesthetic ideals of our people.

It is well known that one of the most perfect and highest artistic examples of Uzbek classical musical heritage is maqom art. Maqoms are distinguished by their complex modal (*lad–parda*) system, melodic development, rhythmic (*usul*) structure, and artistic dramaturgy. This art form has been formed over a long historical process and has been refined through performance practice. Although maqoms were initially created on a common musical basis, in the course of historical development they began to acquire distinct local characteristics under the influence of the cultural environment, social conditions, and performance traditions of different regions.

Thus, local styles have been formed within Uzbek classical musical heritage, reflecting the musical thinking, performance traditions, and aesthetic views of particular regions. The feature of regionality manifests itself not only in maqom cycles but also in many other musical genres and performance forms. The musical traditions of each region are distinguished by their specific melodic structure, rhythmic system, performance style, and repertoire composition. At the

same time, these local styles have developed in close interconnection with the general system of Uzbek classical music.

Alongside the fact that many genres and examples in Uzbek classical music are created on a common conceptual basis, their possession of regional characteristics constitutes an important scientific and aesthetic phenomenon. This process is closely connected with the historical development, lifestyle, cultural environment, and ethnic interactions of our people. As a result, Uzbek classical music has manifested itself in diverse forms across different regions, giving rise to a variety of performance schools and a rich repertoire system.

Thus, while Uzbek classical music has been formed on a common musical foundation, it has been enriched by local traditions throughout its historical development, leading to the emergence of distinct artistic styles in different regions. This clearly demonstrates the richness, diversity, and historical continuity of Uzbek musical culture.

Musicologist R. Abdullayev has provided extensive and detailed information in his research regarding the universal significance of local styles in Uzbek classical music. In particular, he emphasizes the following: “This feature,” writes the author, “emerged in artistic creativity during the process of the formation of the Uzbek nation. At certain historical periods, specific forms and genres, performance styles, and methods developed in Uzbek traditional music, and alongside general Uzbek musical directions, distinct local styles also evolved as a result of socio-cultural interactions with various ethnic groups and peoples. The formation of local musical styles was primarily determined by the following factors:

- geographical environment;
- the lifestyle of the population (sedentary or nomadic);
- cultural context;
- the presence of specific musical genres;
- the regional distribution of musical instruments;
- the formation of a specific musical language and dialect” (Abdullayev, R., 2023, p. 3).

On the basis of these factors, local (regional) performance traditions have emerged

within Uzbek classical musical heritage. These traditions are of particular importance as they embody the spirituality, aesthetic views, and cultural values of the people.

In classical musical heritage, the existence of four main regions possessing local characteristics is identified. These are:

- Bukhara–Samarkand;
- Khorezm;
- Fergana–Tashkent;
- Kashkadarya–Surkhandarya.

In three of these regions, major maqom cycles have been formed, which are known in practice as:

- Bukhara Shashmaqom;
- Khorezm Six-and-a-Half Maqoms;
- Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths.

Although the musical traditions of each region are closely interconnected within the general maqom system, they differ significantly in performance style, genre composition, the structure of instrumental ensembles, and methods of musical interpretation. These differences are primarily related to the historical and cultural environment of each region, lifestyle, linguistic features, and the formation of performance schools. As a result, each region has developed its own distinctive system of musical traditions, reflecting the diversity of Uzbek classical music culture.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Uzbek maqom art entered a new stage of development. During this period, the local forms of maqoms further evolved, and independent maqom cycles began to take shape. As a result, new maqom directions emerged within Uzbek classical music culture. According to musicologist R. Yunusov, national maqom schools gradually developed on the basis of the “Twelve Maqom” system present in the musical culture of Eastern peoples. By the mid-eighteenth century, a new cyclical form of maqoms appeared in Bukhara. As a result of the creative practice of composers, singers, and instrumentalists, six main maqoms were unified into a single cycle and came to be known as Shashmaqom (Yunusov, R., 2018, p. 14).

This cycle later came to be known as the Bukhara maqoms or Bukhara Shashmaqom. Alongside the Bukhara maqoms, Khorezm maqoms were formed in the Khorezm oasis, while in the Fergana Valley and Tashkent

region the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths developed. These maqom systems have been widely applied both in scholarly research and in performance practice.

At the same time, in certain regions, specific performance directions closely related to maqom have also emerged. For example:

- in Khorezm – Khorezm dutor maqoms and the *suvara* cycles;
- in the Fergana–Tashkent region – *yovvoyi maqom*, *katta ashula*, and *sur-nay maqom* paths.

These directions have taken shape as regional manifestations of the development of maqom art and have further enriched the rich heritage of Uzbek musical culture.

For instance, the maqom performance traditions formed in the Bukhara–Samarkand oasis are distinguished by their highly systematized structure, strict adherence to internal principles, and the conceptual integrity of the Shashmaqom cycle. Since maqom art in this region historically developed within courtly and intellectual environments, it is characterized by a high level of performance discipline and carefully elaborated aesthetic norms.

In performance practice, the *tanbur*, as the leading instrument, expresses the modal-intonational foundation of maqom and determines the step-by-step development of the melody, while the *doira* ensures the rhythmic stability of the complex *usul* system and maintains the overall dramaturgical structure as a unified whole. Particularly, the art of vocal performance (*hofizlik*) has reached an exceptionally high level in this school, requiring from the performer not only perfect vocal technique but also a deep knowledge of the principles of the *aruz* system, the ability to interpret classical poetic texts correctly both phonetically and semantically, and the skill to maintain the internal balance between melody and text.

At the same time, the consistency of melodic development, the logical justification of climactic points, the precision of artistic interpretation, and the sustained internal dramatic coherence during performance constitute the main aesthetic criteria of the Bukhara maqom school.

The maqom performance traditions established in the Khorezm oasis are distinguished by their diverse instrumental com-

position, distinctive vocal performance style, and strong emotional-expressive orientation. In this region, the active use of national instruments such as *dutor*, *doira*, *bulamon*, *gijjak*, and *tor*, and later the inclusion of the accordion into performance practice, led to the formation of a timbrally rich and dynamically vibrant ensemble environment.

A characteristic feature of Khorezm singers' performance style is the vocal type known as "pang voice," distinguished by its strong and resonant timbre based on palatal and nasal resonance, which serves as one of the defining features of this performance school. In addition, the preservation of local dialect elements in performance, the enrichment of melody through *nola*, *kash*, and other melismatic ornaments, as well as the combination of natural vocal power with emotional expressiveness, contribute to achieving a high level of artistic impact. The above descriptions and analyses clearly demonstrate the distinctive nature of Khorezm performance art.

The performance traditions formed in the Fergana–Tashkent region are distinguished from other regions by their relative freedom and lyricism-rich style. In this region, the genre of *katta ashula* is especially well developed, characterized by its open and wide vocal range, the absence of strictly step-by-step formal development typical of maqom songs, and the strong emotional expressive power of the text.

In the performance of *katta ashula*, significant importance is given to the singer's vocal capacity, the breadth and proper control of breathing, performance in an open "direct" vocal manner, and the artistic interpretation achieved through coordinated ensemble singing.

In addition, the classical *yalla* genre and the art of wit (*askiya*) occupy an important place in the Fergana–Tashkent performance tradition. The instrumental ensemble typically includes *tanbur*, *dutor*, *gijjak*, *doira*, and *Qashqar rubab*.

All this demonstrates that although local performance traditions in Uzbek classical musical heritage have developed within the framework of the general maqom system, each regional area is distinguished by its own musical thinking, performance style, and instrumental composition. This process, in

turn, clearly reflects the diversity and richness of Uzbek classical music art. As an example, it can be observed that in certain regions, classical musical genres closely related to the maqom system have also been formed.

In particular:

- in Bukhara and Samarkand – the *Mavrigi* and instrumental (*sozandalik*) art traditions;
- in Khorezm – the *Suvora* genre;
- in the Fergana Valley – the *katta ashula* genre and classical *yalla*.

These genres are closely connected with maqom art in terms of their performance interpretation, musical structure, and artistic content.

In the Fergana Valley, maqom performance traditions have developed with differentiation into specific local zones. This phenomenon is observed not only in maqom paths but also in the performance of other musical genres. As a result, Uzbek classical music has been enriched with numerous local styles and has continued to develop up to the present day.

The Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths are regarded as a performance tradition possessing distinct stylistic characteristics within the Uzbek classical music system. This direction is often described by performers as a "free path." The primary reason lies in the fact that the structural organization of works in the Fergana–Tashkent maqoms is not as strictly and systematically established as in the Bukhara Shashmaqom. Whereas in Shashmaqom each maqom is organized according to a rigid system with clearly defined internal sections, stages of development, and compositional order, such strict regulation is less evident in the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths. Therefore, these maqom paths are distinguished by a greater degree of interpretative freedom in performance practice.

Traditional master instrumentalists and singers sometimes refer to the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths as a "wild path." However, this term does not imply disorder; rather, it reflects the lack of strict subordination to a fixed cyclical system, the broad scope of improvisational possibilities, and the relative freedom of melodic development. At the same time, it expresses region-specific performance approaches, metrorhythmic

flexibility, the relationship to maqom modal structures, the natural unfolding of melody during performance, the predominance of free artistic interpretation, as well as the influence of individual performance schools.

From a formal perspective, the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths are in many respects close to the compositional structure of the *katta ashula* genre. Typically, a composition begins with the *daromad* (introductory section), followed by subsequent stages of melodic development, namely the *dunasr* (development section). This process ensures the dramaturgical progression of the work and allows the performer to gradually expand the melodic material. As a result, the composition acquires internal artistic development and gradually reaches its climactic points.

In terms of rhythm (*usul*), one of the ancient rhythmic systems known as *Zarb-ul qadim*, or the *Sarakhbor* pattern, occupies a leading position in the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths. This pattern serves as a fundamental rhythmic basis in maqom performance, ensuring internal movement, melodic development, and artistic expressiveness. The *Sarakhbor* pattern is distinguished by its stable rhythmic structure and functions as a principal rhythmic criterion in many maqom songs and *katta ashula* examples.

The Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths hold a special place in the development of maqom art in Uzbekistan. This direction represents an important component of Uzbek classical musical heritage and constitutes a significant stage in the regional development of maqom art. Although these maqoms are closely connected with the general maqom system, they differ considerably from other maqom schools in terms of performance style, structural organization, and artistic interpretation.

Firstly, the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths are significant for fostering more folk-oriented and flexible forms of maqom interpretation. In this tradition, maqom compositions are not strictly bound to a rigid compositional system as in the Shashmaqom cycle; instead, performance practice demonstrates broader opportunities for freedom, improvisation, and artistic interpretation. Such a performance style contributes to the natural development of maqom art and its close connection with the musical thinking of the people.

Secondly, the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths have developed in close interrelation with the *katta ashula* tradition. This genre represents a highly developed form of vocal performance in the region, characterized by a wide vocal range, improvisational melodic development, and a deep emotional expression of the poetic text. These features enhance the artistic expressiveness and dramaturgical depth of the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths.

Thirdly, the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths constitute one of the key performance schools reflecting the regional diversity of Uzbek maqom art. Within this tradition, many prominent singers and instrumentalists have emerged, playing an important role in transmitting the rich maqom repertoire across generations.

**In conclusion**, the Fergana–Tashkent maqom paths occupy an important place in the development of Uzbek maqom art due to their free performance traditions, the advancement of vocal art, their close connection with *katta ashula*, and their distinctive rhythmic and compositional features. They not only enrich the regional forms of maqom art but also significantly expand the diversity and artistic richness of Uzbek classical music culture.

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