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THE GREAT SILK ROAD AND ORGAN ART: HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL PREREQUISITES FOR THE PERCEPTION OF EUROPEAN SOUND IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract

This article advances the hypothesis that the emergence of organ music in Uzbekistan, despite its relatively recent introduction, represents a logical continuation of the region's historical spiritual and cultural openness, rooted in antiquity. The primary aim of the study is to explore how long-standing intercultural exchange along the Great Silk Road contributed to the perception and acceptance of organ music in the region. The author argues that the region was, at a deep cultural and intellectual level, historically predisposed to the perception of organ music due to its enduring tradition of intercultural dialogue and theoretical engagement with music.
Keywords: *organ music, Uzbekistan, Great Silk Road, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, al-Maraghi, musical philosophy, maqam, intercultural exchange, sonic culture, music perception, organ in the Islamic world*

The organ as a musical instrument is a phenomenon that is firmly rooted in the Western European musical tradition. As the embodiment of the culmination of European engineering and musical thought, it has become the main symbol of the sacred space of the West. However, in the 20th century, it also found its place in Central Asia, a region seemingly far removed from Christian liturgy, Gothic cathedrals, and the tradition of polyphony. A natural question arises: how was such an instrument, so alien in origin, perceived and accepted in a region with different aesthetic and spiritual attitudes? The amazingly organic perception of the organ in Central Asia in the 20th century necessitates a rethinking: was it really a simple borrowing, or are there deeper, historically conditioned mechanisms embedded in this phenomenon? The answer lies in the historical and cultural readiness of Central Asia to perceive complex forms of musical expression, especially such as organ art. This preparedness has been formed over the centuries, mainly under the influence of the phenomenon of the Great Silk Road – one of the most significant channels of inter-civilizational dialogue in the history of mankind.

The history of the organ in Uzbekistan is a fascinating story of cultural dialogue between East and West. The Great Silk Road connected East and West for centuries, form-

ing a unique space of cultural circulation. Not only goods and religions but also musical practices, including instruments and principles of their use, were distributed along this route. Although the organ, an instrument of the Western European church tradition, appeared in Central Asia only in the 20th century, its survival and integration into the musical culture of the region can be understood as a result of a historically established cultural polylogue dating back to the era of the Silk Road. The caravan route became a space for the formation of a tolerant attitude towards foreign cultures.

The Great Silk Road was not just a trade route linking East and West. It was a centuries-old infrastructure of cultural exchange spanning China, India, Iran, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. Along with goods and technologies, ideas, religions, philosophical systems and art forms were also spreading. Central Asia played the role of a full-fledged participant in this process rather than a transit territory. Cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Merv, Khiva and Tashkent became centres of attraction for scholars, artisans, poets, philosophers and musicians. Not only were works of art exchanged here, but they were also locally adapted and rethought. Musical culture, as one of the forms of intangible heritage, was also at the epicentre of these processes. Byzantine, Arab-Persian, Indian and Chinese musical traditions each interacted to varying degrees with the musical landscape of the region, enriching it with modal structure, instrumentation, modal principles and sound philosophy.

Historians emphasize that the Great Silk Road from the 3rd century BC to the 15th century was not so much a trade route as a channel for civilizational exchange (Frankopan P., 2015, 27). Among the items of exchange were not only fabrics, spices or paper, but also musical instruments, such as the santur, rabab, harp, early forms of organ, as well as musical-theoretical ideas. Already in the 9th–10th centuries, works on the relationship of intervals, the modal system, acoustics and aesthetics of sound were taught in Central Asian madrasahs.

Although there is no archaeological evidence of organs in medieval Central Asia, the idea of diverse timbres, architectural musicality and ritual function of musical instruments echoed the function of the organ in Europe. One of the most important features of the musical culture of the East is its mystical and philosophical content. In the Islamic tradition – as in the pre-Islamic beliefs of the region – sound was considered a manifestation of the divine order. Music could be perceived as a form of meditation, a path to knowledge of the "truth" (al-haqq) and contact with the transcendent.

In Persian and Sufi practices that spread to Central Asia, music played an important role in rituals of spiritual purification. Instruments such as the rabab, santur, and tanbur had not only an aesthetic but also a sacred function. Here a special perception of musical space as a spherical, volumetric, even "inner" experience was born. It is this experience that can be recognized as a deep prerequisite for the perception of organ sound. The organ, by its nature, creates a spatial, enveloping sound atmosphere, similar to how sacred sound is perceived in Eastern mysticism.

Another important factor is architectural readiness. Many architectural structures in Central Asia – mosques, mausoleums, madrassas – were built taking into account acoustic effects: echo, reverberation, resonance. The resonance of mosques and madrassas, for example, Gur-Emir, was designed taking into account the acoustics of reading the Koran – similar to calculating the church reverberation for an organ. Domed halls created a special sound environment that facilitated the meditative perception of a voice or instrument. For example, the treatise of Abdulkadir Maragha (14th century) describes experiments with the placement of musicians in domed rooms to amplify the sound – a principle close to organ avenues. The karnay and surnay ensembles on the squares of Samarkand or Bukhara created a "stereophonic" effect comparable to the sound of an organ's reed registers.

The Byzantine organ (hydraulis) was known since ancient times and is mentioned in Arabic treatises as "al-mizmar al-rumi" – the Roman flute, as the organ was called in the Arab-Islamic tradition, was known to Eastern scholars as one of the musical instruments that came from the West, and was considered mainly as a subject of scientific

analysis, but rarely as part of its own musical culture). It was through Byzantium that organettas (An organetta (from Latin organum + Italian diminutive suffix-etta) is a small portable organ with a hand-operated bellows, which can be played with one hand (on the keyboard) and with the other hand pumping air into the bellows. An organetta is a portable type of organ, common in Europe in the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance (13th–16th centuries). It usually has one row of pipes (metal or wood), a limited range (about 2 octaves).) and portable organs could be known in the Islamic East as curiosities or diplomatic gifts.

Abu Nasr al-Farabi (872–950), a native of Farab, in his work "The Great Book of Music" (Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr) substantiates the connection of sound with metaphysics. Music, according to Farabi, structures the soul, and intervallic relations reflect the order of the cosmos (Al-Farabi. 2000, 112–137).

In wind instruments, he writes about the importance of "air pressure in pipes," and although the organ as such is unknown to him, his thinking anticipates the perception of complex polyphonic structures.

"Sound is the movement of air enclosed in a volume. And all harmonious music controls this movement according to number" (Al-Farabi. 2000, 134). This position is close to the concept of the organ as an architectural instrument that controls "air" in a precise numerical ratio.

Abu Ali ibn Sina (980–1037), known in Europe as Avicenna, wrote about the influence of music on the physiological and spiritual health of a person in his treatise "The Book of Healing" (Kitāb al-Šifāʾ) and "The Canon of Medicine" (al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb). He singled out "deep sounds" as having a calming effect on the nervous system and the spirit, close to a state of "inner order". These are the sounds that the organ creates – its timbre, duration and overtones form the acoustic environment that Ibn Sina wrote about as therapeutic.

"Music heals discord in the spirit, for it contains number and order corresponding to the harmony of the heavens" (Ibn Sina. 1967, 211).

Thus, the perception of organ sound, associated with meditation and an elevated state, had prepared ground in the teachings of Ibn Sina.

Safiuddin Abdulmu'min ibn Yusuf al-Maraghi (13th century) is one of the greatest musical theorists of the Muslim world. In his treatise "Books on the Foundations of Musical Sciences" (Kitāb al-Adwār) he systematizes the modal system of maqams and considers them as complex sound fields containing the potential for polyphonic thinking.

Some maqams (for example, rast, bayati, navo) are based on the movement between intervals using microtones, but in their structural rigor they are comparable to Western polyphony. Modern researchers note that maqam improvisations can be perceived as an analogue of organ preludes and fantasies (Al-Maragi. 1413, 67–75).

Thus, when local composers came into contact with the organ in the 20th century, they already had principles of musical thinking akin to the complex structure of organ works. The organ, known in Arabic sources as al-urganun or mizmar al-faranj ("instrument of the Franks"), was already familiar to the Islamic scientific world from the 8th–9th centuries thanks to the translation of ancient treatises. However, despite technical knowledge and interest in the principles of its operation, the organ was not accepted into Islamic musical practice and did not spread to Central Asia. The reasons for this are both theoretical and cultural-religious in nature.

Abu Nasr al-Farabi (10th century), one of the greatest philosophers and theorists of music in the Islamic world, describes the structure of wind instruments, including a variety of the urganun, in his famous "Great Book of Music" (Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr). He mentions the organ as a complex system of pipes driven by air, but criticizes it for its limitations in the performance of eastern modes: "The organun is capable of reproducing only fixed tones and does not allow for the flexible intervals necessary for the performance of maqam. It is convenient only in European music" (Al-Farabi. 2000, 178–181). Thus, already in the treatises of Al-Farabi, the organ is relegated to the place of a technical curiosity that does not correspond to the spirit of the eastern musical system, in which melodic freedom and microtonality dominated.

Avicenna (Ibn Sina, 11th century), in his encyclopedic work "The Book of Healing" (Kitāb al-Shifā'), examines the physics of sound and the structure of musical instruments. He pays attention to the classification of wind and string instruments, including references to the urganun as a device of European origin, but does not consider it among the recommended instruments for practice: "The organun, although it has harmony, cannot flexibly follow the movement of the voice" (Ibn Sina. 1967, 243).

Here again the main reason for the alienation of the organ is evident: its inability to be organically integrated into the maqam intonation system. The Persian-Turkish scholar Abdulkadir ibn Gaibi Maraghi (14th century) in his treatise "Collection of Melodies" (Jawam al-alhan) paid considerable attention to the analysis of the scale and acoustics of pipes, but the organ is also absent from the list of musical instruments recommended for performing oriental music. His research focuses on precise pitches, rhythm and modality, but the organun instrument itself is perceived as a curiosity, incapable of expressing the nuances of Islamic melody (Al-Maragi. 1413).

Despite intellectual knowledge and even respect for the technical complexity of the organ, the organ disappears from the field of practice; it did not enter the musical life of Islamic countries, including Central Asia. The following factors contributed to this: the religious symbolism of the organ, which was originally an instrument of the Christian church tradition. In the Islamic world, especially in the post-Abbasid era, music itself became a subject of debate between theologians and philosophers, and instruments associated with the religious ritual of another faith caused especially strong rejection. The organ was associated with the church and, in the eyes of Muslim theologians, was not suitable for either meditation or celebrations. Islamic musical culture was based on a monodic system with developed improvisation, a complex modal structure (maqom, shavk, dastgokh). The organ is an instrument of fixed pitches, oriented towards polyphony and harmonic thinking, which made it unsuitable for performing maqoms. At the same time, the organ required a specific architectural and acoustic space. In Central Asia, chamber forms of music performance prevailed, often outdoors or in small rooms, which also did not contribute to the inclusion of the organ in the tradition.

Thus, the organ was known to the Islamic East as a technical device, but remained outside of living musical practice. Its revival in Central Asia occurred only centuries later – in the context of the modernization of musical education.

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