

UNITY OF FORM AND MELODY IN THE INSTRUMENTAL PARTS OF MAKOMS

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Abstract: This article investigates the intrinsic unity between form and melody in the instrumental sections of Bukhara, Khorezm, and Ferghana-Tashkent maqoms. While previous scholarship has emphasised the differences among these three regional traditions, this study focuses on a fundamental structural principle that unites them. Using comparative analysis of eighteen instrumental sections (six from each tradition), supplemented by interviews with master musicians, the research identifies four key manifestations of form-melody unity: cadential formulas (qaror) that determine formal boundaries; the transition from freely rhythmic sarakhbor to metric tarona as a joint formal-melodic event; variation (tahrir) that simultaneously develops melody and adjusts phrase lengths; and the overarching melodic arch that defines large-scale formal divisions. The results show that form in maqom instrumental music is not a pre-existing container for melody but an emergent property of melodic processes. Regional differences in the width, steepness, and pacing of the melodic arch reflect divergent aesthetic preferences but do not undermine the underlying principle of unity. The article concludes that recognising this form-melody unity has significant implications for maqom theory, pedagogy, and contemporary composition.

Keywords: Maqom instrumental parts, Form-melody unity, Qaror cadence, Sarakhbor and tarona, Melodic variation (tahrir), Bukhara Khorezm Ferghana-Tashkent maqoms

Introduction

The maqom tradition of Central Asia represents one of the world's most sophisticated systems of modal music. Across the territory of modern Uzbekistan, three principal regional schools have historically developed: Bukhara, Khorezm, and Ferghana-Tashkent. Each of these schools possesses its own performance style, aesthetic preferences, and even philosophical underpinnings. Nevertheless, beneath their apparent diversity, these three traditions share deep structural and melodic foundations, particularly in their instrumental sections. While extensive scholarly attention has been devoted to the vocal components of maqoms and to the differences among the regional styles, the question of unity between form and melody within the instrumental parts remains underexplored.

The instrumental sections of maqoms - known variously as mushkilot, cholg'u qismlari, or simply taronas - are not merely preludes or interludes for the vocal parts. They constitute an independent musical universe where abstract melodic development, rhythmic organization, and formal architecture interact according to ancient, unwritten laws. One of the most remarkable features of these instrumental sections is the striking unity between their form (shakl) and melody (ohang). Unlike Western classical music, where form often serves as a predetermined container for melodic content, in the maqom tradition form and melody emerge simultaneously, each shaping the other in real time. This organic relationship is not accidental but reflects a coherent musical logic passed down through generations of master musicians.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the intrinsic unity of form and melody in the instrumental parts of Bukhara, Khorezm, and Ferghana-Tashkent maqoms. Specifically, this study investigates how melodic phrases determine formal boundaries, how rhythmic patterns influence melodic contour, and how the principle of variation serves both formal articulation and melodic development. By analysing selected instrumental sections from all three traditions, this article argues that form and melody in maqom instrumental music are not separate parameters but two dimensions of a single musical phenomenon.

Materials and Methods

This research is based on the analysis of audio recordings, transcribed notations, and live performance observations conducted between 2018 and 2023. The primary sources include archival recordings from the Republican Maqom Center in Tashkent, published notation collections by F. Qaromatov and O. Matyoqubov, as well as field recordings made in Bukhara, Khiva, and Ferghana. A total of eighteen instrumental sections were selected for detailed analysis, six from each regional tradition. From Bukhara: Sarakhbori Rost, Taronai Rost, Nasrulloi Segoh, Mavrigi Ushshoq, Savti Kalon, and Taronai in Navo. From Khorezm: Sarakhbori Rost, Taronau Rost, Segoh, Dugoh, Qashqarcha, and Ayyomi Navo. From Ferghana-Tashkent: Sarakhbori Chorgoh, Taronai Chorgoh, Bayot, Taronai Bayot, Ushshoq, and Navo.

The analytical framework integrates three approaches. First, structural analysis was employed to identify formal units - phrases (*jumla*), half-phrases (*nimjumla*), and cadential points (*qaror*) - and to examine how these units are organised hierarchically. Second, melodic analysis focused on intervallic structure, direction of melodic motion, patterns of repetition and variation, as well as the relationship between melodic peaks and formal junctures. Third, rhythmic analysis examined the role of *usul* (rhythmic cycles) in articulating formal sections and shaping melodic profiles. Special attention was paid to the transition points between the freely rhythmic *sarakhbor* and the metrically organised *taronai*, as these transitions reveal most clearly the interdependence of form and melody.

In addition to notation-based analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six master musicians (*ustoz*) from each of the three regions. The interviews explored how these musicians conceptualise the relationship between form and melody, which terms they use to describe formal units, and how they teach students to perceive and produce the unity of these elements.

Results

The analysis revealed four principal ways in which form and melody achieve unity in the instrumental parts of Bukhara, Khorezm, and Ferghana-Tashkent maqoms.

First, melodic phrases consistently determine formal boundaries. In all three traditions, the end of a melodic phrase is marked by a cadential formula known as *qaror* - a descending motion to the *finalis* (the main pitch of the maqom). This *qaror* is not a neutral punctuation mark but an integral part of melodic grammar. The length of each formal section is measured not in bars or seconds but in the number of melodic phrases and the complexity of their internal development. For instance, in *Taronai Rost* of Bukhara, the first formal section concludes precisely when the melody reaches a stable *qaror* on the pitch D after a characteristic descending movement from the upper octave. The same principle operates in Khorezm's *Taronau Rost* and in Ferghana-Tashkent's *Taronai Chorgoh*, although the specific melodic trajectories differ.

Second, the transition from sarakhbor to tarona exemplifies a profound interdependence of form and melody. The sarakhbor is freely rhythmical, with no fixed *usul*, and its melody unfolds in long, unbroken lines that seldom repeat. The form of the sarakhbor is essentially through-composed, yet each melodic phrase prepares the listener for the eventual arrival of a strong cadence. At the moment when this cadence occurs, the rhythmic structure transforms: the free metre collapses into a regular *usul*, usually 4/4 or 6/8, and the melody simultaneously adopts shorter, more symmetrical phrases. Analysis shows that in all three traditions, the point of transition is marked by a distinctive melodic turn - typically a rising fourth followed by a stepwise descent - that signals both formal closure of the introduction and the beginning of the metric section. Thus, the same melodic event performs two functions: it concludes one formal unit and launches another.

Third, the principle of variation (*tahrir*, *jonlama*) operates simultaneously at the level of melodic development and formal articulation. In all three traditions, an initial melodic statement is immediately followed by its varied repetition. The variation may involve rhythmic diminution or augmentation, ornamentation, transposition to a neighbouring pitch, or fragmentation. Crucially, these variations also reshape formal boundaries. For example, in *Savti Kalon* (Bukhara), the first melodic phrase occupies eight beats, its varied repetition occupies six beats, and the second variation occupies ten beats. The formal sections are not equal in length, and their unequal lengths are directly caused by melodic variation. In Khorezm's *Qashqarcha* and Ferghana-Tashkent's *Taronai Bayot*, the same phenomenon occurs: melodic variation drives formal asymmetry. This stands in marked contrast to many Western musical forms where variation occurs within a fixed formal framework.

Fourth, the melodic contour of an entire instrumental section follows a consistent arch shape across all three traditions. The melody begins near the *finalis*, gradually ascends to a peak in the middle of the piece, then descends back to the *finalis* at the end. This arch shape not only creates a satisfying emotional trajectory but also defines the large-scale formal divisions. The ascending section corresponds to a looser, more exploratory formal organisation; the peak section is typically where the most elaborate variations and ornamentations occur; and the descending section features shorter phrases, more frequent *qaror* endings, and a gradual simplification of melodic gestures. Interviews with master musicians confirmed that they consciously shape the melody according to this arch, and they use the arch's turning point as a primary formal marker.

Discussion

The results demonstrate that the unity of form and melody in the instrumental parts of Bukhara, Khorezm, and Ferghana-Tashkent maqoms is not a vague aesthetic ideal but a concrete, describable musical principle. Form emerges from melodic processes rather than being imposed upon them. This finding challenges the conventional musicological assumption that form is a pre-existing architectural plan within which melody is placed. In the maqom tradition, the relationship is reversed: melody generates form.

Why has this particular relationship between form and melody persisted across three geographically distinct and stylistically divergent traditions? Several explanations are possible. Historically, the instrumental sections of maqoms were transmitted orally, without notation. In an oral tradition, formal boundaries cannot be indicated by visual markers such as double bars

or repeat signs. Instead, they must be encoded in the melody itself. The qaror cadence serves as an audible signal of a formal boundary. The variation principle allows the performer to adjust phrase lengths while maintaining coherence. The melodic arch provides a large-scale formal map that can be felt even without prior knowledge of the piece. These melodic-formal devices are inherently memorable and transmissible, which explains their persistence across centuries and across regions.

The three traditions, however, are not identical in how they realise this unity. In Bukhara instrumental sections, the melodic arch tends to be wider, the ascent slower, and the peak section more elaborated with numerous tahrir ornaments. In Khorezm, the same arch is steeper and the variations more rhythmically driving, reflecting the region's preference for dramatic expression. In Ferghana-Tashkent, the arch is gentler, the melodic phrases more symmetric, and the qaror endings more frequent, giving the music a more lyrical, intimate character. These differences do not undermine the underlying principle of unity; rather, they demonstrate the flexibility of that principle across regional aesthetics.

One unexpected finding is the absence of a strict proportional relationship between melodic and formal units. In many musical traditions, formal sections are balanced in length (e.g., eight-bar phrases). In maqom instrumental parts, as shown above, phrase lengths vary considerably, sometimes by a factor of two or more. The unity of form and melody here is not one of strict proportion but of organic process: the melody unfolds, and the form follows wherever the melody leads, yet the result is always coherent because the melodic grammar contains its own rules for beginning, continuing, and ending.

This study has implications for both theory and pedagogy. In maqom theory, it suggests that form should be redefined not as a static scheme but as a dynamic emergent property of melodic processes. In pedagogy, it recommends that students be taught to perceive formal boundaries through melodic cues rather than through counting bars. Master musicians already teach in this way, but written textbooks have often imposed Western formal categories onto maqom music, obscuring its unique logic. Re-centering instruction on the unity of form and melody could lead to more authentic learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The unity of form and melody in the instrumental parts of Bukhara, Khorezm, and Ferghana-Tashkent maqoms is a defining characteristic of this musical tradition. Form is not a container but an emergent property of melodic processes: cadential formulas (qaror) mark formal boundaries, the transition from sarakhbor to tarona is signalled by specific melodic turns, variation simultaneously develops melody and reshapes formal sections, and the overarching melodic arch defines large-scale formal divisions. While regional differences in melodic contour, ornamentation, and pacing exist, the fundamental principle of unity remains constant across all three traditions. Recognising this unity not only deepens scholarly understanding of maqom music but also enriches pedagogical practice and contemporary composition inspired by maqom principles.

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