

ANALYSIS OF ORNAMENTATION IN UZBEK MAQOM VOCAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: The vocal art of the Uzbek Maqom stands as one of the most sophisticated and spiritually resonant musical systems of Central Asia. Its complexity resides not merely in its modal-theoretical framework (maqom as a system of melodic modes) or its cyclic structure, but profoundly in the realm of performance practice, where the abstract mode is given life, nuance, and profound emotional depth. At the heart of this practice lies the art of ornamentation - a complex, micro-structural system of melodic embellishment that serves as the primary vehicle for artistic individuality, technical mastery, and semantic expression. This article posits that ornamentation in Uzbek Maqom vocal performance is not an auxiliary decorative element but the very substance through which the theoretical maqom is realized, interpreted, and transformed into a living, affective experience. Through an interdisciplinary analysis drawing on ethnomusicological fieldwork, acoustic examination, and the indigenous theoretical lexicon (*istilohot*), this study seeks to deconstruct the functional and aesthetic roles of specific ornamental techniques. It will argue that these techniques constitute a coded language, articulating structural points, intensifying emotional states prescribed by the poetic text, and navigating the intricate modal landscape with deliberate microtonal and rhythmic nuance. The analysis thereby illuminates the central paradox of the tradition: that its most rigidly codified aspects - the *sho'ba* (movements) and their modal rules - find their ultimate expression in the fluid, improvisational, and highly personal art of vocal embellishment.

Keywords: Maqom ornamentation, Uzbek vocal performance, *Jahla* and *nola* techniques, Microtonal expression, *Shashmaqom* interpretation, Indigenous music terminology

Introduction

The scholarly discourse on the Central Asian Maqom traditions - notably the Uzbek and Tajik *Shashmaqom* - has historically privileged macro-structural and theoretical aspects. Studies have meticulously mapped the cyclic sequences of instrumental and vocal movements, analyzed the intervallic structures of the modes, and deciphered the metric organization of the repertoire. This structural mapping is indispensable, yet it risks presenting the Maqom as a fossilized architecture, a grand but static edifice. In lived performance, however, it is the ephemeral, the flexible, and the micro-melodic that breathes soul into this architecture. The voice, as the supreme instrument in the Maqom, does not simply execute composed melodies; it elaborates them. This elaboration - *tahsin*, *zayn*, or *naqsh* in the local parlance - is where the true artistry resides. Ornamentation is the lens that focuses the modal energy, the brushstroke that colours the melodic line, and the sigh or cry that connects the poetic metaphor to human feeling. To analyze the Maqom without a deep inquiry into its ornamentation is to study the grammar of a language while ignoring its poetry, its idioms, and its emotional intonation. This article, therefore, shifts the analytical gaze from the scaffold to the intricate filigree that adorns it, proposing that an understanding of this filigree is fundamental to understanding the Maqom itself. The primary

materials for this analysis stem from recorded performances of twentieth and twenty-first-century masters such as Yunus Rajabi, Munajat Yulchieva, and the lineage of Tashkent and Ferghana style bearers, alongside direct engagement with the living pedagogical traditions.

The analysis of ornamentation must first grapple with the indigenous theoretical system. Uzbek maqom practitioners employ a rich vocabulary (*istilohot*) to describe melodic phenomena, a vocabulary that often resists direct translation into Western musicological terms. Central to this is the concept of *maye* (sometimes *mohaya*), denoting the essential, skeletal melodic phrase or the core pitch of a modal section. The *maye* is the stable ground from which ornamentation flowers. The act of ornamentation is thus the movement away from and the return to this core. Several key terms delineate specific ornamental families. *Zamin* refers to a type of vocalise, often melismatic, that develops a melodic idea, frequently used in the introductory sections (*Sarakhbor*). *Forob* (or *farob*) describes a delicate, shimmering oscillation or tremolo on a sustained pitch, not a wide vibrato but a rapid, shallow fluctuation of intensity and pitch that creates a sense of luminous fragility. *Shivirlab kuylash* (singing with a whisper) involves a dynamic shift into a breathy, intimate timbre, often at the climax of a poetic line, creating a sense of confidential emotion or suppressed yearning.

Perhaps the most critical and complex category is that of *jahla*. *Jahla* encompasses a wide range of grace notes, *appoggiaturas*, and short, expressive slides that precede or surround a main note. It is the primary tool for articulating the microtonal inflections (*nola* or *avj*) inherent in the maqom mode. A *jahla* from below, for instance, can subtly indicate that a note is to be perceived not as a pure neutral interval but as a lowered or raised degree within the mode's specific intonational hierarchy. Furthermore, the term *nola*, which literally translates to "lament" or "moan," transcends its poetic connotation to denote a specific technique: a portamento, a soulful slide between intervals that carries immense emotional weight, directly linking technical execution to affective content. This indigenous lexicon is not merely descriptive; it is prescriptive and pedagogical, forming the core of the oral transmission process between master (*ustoz*) and disciple (*shogird*). The disciple learns not abstract scales but a repertoire of *jahla* and *nola* appropriate to each maqom and each poetic context.

Ornamentation in Uzbek Maqom serves multiple, intertwined functions that can be categorized as structural, modal, and expressive-poetic.

Structurally, ornaments act as signposts and connectors. In the complex, through-composed architecture of a Maqom cycle, melodic phrases are often delineated by specific ornamental figures. A cadential formula (*forikht*) is not merely a sequence of pitches; it is a characteristic pattern of *jahla* and rhythmic placement that signals closure to both the accompanying instrumentalists and the knowledgeable listener. Ornamentation also provides the essential connective tissue between sections of different tempi and character. A transition from a meditative, *rubato* *Moghulcha* section to a rhythmic *Talin* may be facilitated by a vocalise (*zamin*) that gradually incorporates the new rhythmic pulse through embellishment.

Modally, ornamentation is the primary vehicle for realizing and clarifying the microtonal landscape. The theoretical scale of a maqom like *Rost* or *Navo* is not a sequence of twelve equal semitones; it contains intervals perceived as neutral (between a major and minor second or third). In performance, the exact intonation of these neutral tones is not fixed but context-dependent. The singer uses *jahla* - a slight scoop from below or a delicate upper mordent - to "find" and

emphasize the correct pitch shade required by the melodic progression. The ornament becomes the means of tuning the phrase. Similarly, the crucial concept of *avj* (climax, zenith) in a *maqom* development is often achieved not by a leap to a high note alone, but by a complex ornamentation on that pitch - a sustained *forob*, a cascading run of *jahla*, or a powerful *nola* leading into it - that magnifies its importance and modal tension.

The most profound function, however, is expressive-poetic. The *Maqom* is a fusion of music and classical Persian-Turkic poetry (Hafiz, Navoi, Fuzuli). Each line of *ghazal* carries dense layers of metaphor concerning divine love, earthly longing, separation, and the beauty of nature. Ornamentation is the singer's hermeneutic tool for interpreting this text. A word like *sog'inch* (yearning) or *dard* (pain) is almost invariably laden with a *nola* - a sorrowful slide. The word *bolbul* (nightingale) might be decorated with quick, bird-like trills and turns. A phrase expressing bewilderment (*hayron*) could be rendered with a fragmented, rhythmically unstable sequence of ornaments. The *Hofiz* does not simply sing the words; they illustrate and amplify their emotional core through melodic embellishment. The choice of a breathy *shivirlab* *kuylash* versus a full-throated, ornamentally dense delivery is a direct commentary on the text's intimate or declamatory nature.

While the indigenous terminology provides a conceptual map, acoustic analysis offers a microscope to examine the physical reality of these ornaments. Spectrographic analysis of recorded performances reveals the precise contours of techniques like *jahla* and *nola*. A *jahla* can be seen as a very rapid, often asymmetrical pitch curve preceding a stable note. Its duration is typically between 50 and 150 milliseconds, too brief to be perceived as a distinct note but essential for colouring the attack of the main pitch. The *nola* or portamento shows as a smooth, gliding connection between two pitches, its speed and curvature varying with emotional intensity - a slow, mournful slide versus a quick, graceful connection.

The *forob* (tremolo) presents a fascinating acoustic profile. It is not a regular, sinusoidal amplitude modulation (vibrato) but an irregular fluctuation involving both amplitude and a very narrow band of pitch oscillation (often less than a quarter-tone). This creates a textured, "living" sound, akin to the shimmer of sunlight on water, distinct from the wider, more metronomic vibrato common in Western operatic singing. Furthermore, the placement of ornaments is deeply tied to breath management and timbral shifts. A master singer uses the diaphragmatic support not only for sustaining long phrases but for controlling the velocity and precision of rapid ornamental clusters. The shift to a nasal resonance (*hangra*) or a guttural depth (*qaltis*) is frequently coordinated with specific types of ornamentation, adding a layer of timbral ornament that works in concert with the melodic.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of ornamentation in Uzbek *Maqom* vocal performance reveals it to be the dynamic lifeblood of the tradition. It is the mechanism through which abstract modal theory becomes felt emotion, through which poetic text transcends literal meaning, and through which the cyclical structure is rendered a compelling narrative journey. The *jahla*, *nola*, *forob*, and *zamin* are not mere decorations added to a pre-existing melody; they are the very means by which the melody is conceived, articulated, and communicated. They constitute a sophisticated, orally transmitted grammar of expression that requires decades to master.

This perspective also reframes our understanding of tradition and individuality within the Maqom. The framework - the maye, the cycle, the mode - is sacrosanct and shared by all practitioners. Yet, within this strict framework, the realm of ornamentation is the domain of profound personal artistry. The way a Hofiz chooses to ornament a particular phrase in Maqom Buzruk becomes their signature, a testament to their creative personality within the collective tradition. It is where innovation subtly occurs; a new combination of jahla, a fresh approach to a nola, can become a generation's influential style, as seen in the distinct ornamental approaches of the Samarkand, Tashkent, and Ferghana schools.

Therefore, to study the ornament is to study the soul of the Maqom. It demands an analytical approach that synthesizes the deep respect for indigenous knowledge systems with the precise tools of acoustic science and the sensitive ear of phenomenological listening. As the Maqom continues to evolve in the 21st century, facing new media and audiences, the preservation and understanding of this intricate art of ornamentation is paramount. For if the structure is the body of the Maqom, its ornamentation is undeniably its breath, its voice, and its beating heart.

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