

STRUCTURE OF THE VOCAL (ASHULA) SECTION OF SHASHMAQOM AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: This study analyzes Shashmaqom - the highest example of musical heritage of Central Asia, particularly of the Uzbek and Tajik peoples - in terms of its historical development, structure, divisions, and performance traditions. The instrumental (cholgʻu) and vocal (ashula) sections of Shashmaqom, their subdivisions and branches, the internal structure of maqams, and the ghazals and rubaiyat of classical poets used as lyrics in ashula are examined. Additionally, the study highlights the teaching, preservation, and contemporary performance significance of Shashmaqom. The research also considers the development and pedagogical study of Shashmaqom through cultural centers in Uzbekistan and Central Asia - specifically the schools of Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Khorezm.

Keywords: Shashmaqom, maqam, ashula, instrumental section, vocal section, subdivision, branch, Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, Khorezm, vocal art, instrumental art, Uzbek musical heritage, pedagogical significance, contemporary performance

Shashmaqom is the highest example of musical heritage in Central Asia, particularly of the Uzbek and Tajik peoples. This art form embodies a rich vocal and instrumental system developed over centuries, creating a complex yet structured musical harmony through maqams, shoʻbas, and branches. The vocal (ashula) section of Shashmaqom is considered its central component, representing a unique vocal system that conveys human emotional experiences such as love, devotion, union, and separation. Through this section, the listener gains not only aesthetic pleasure but also spiritual and cultural enrichment.

Today, Uzbekistan is truly becoming an international center of makom art. Of course, this, in turn, serves to introduce our country and the art of Uzbek makom to the world, and to draw the attention of the world's people to Uzbekistan.¹

Although Shashmaqom was historically passed down orally from generation to generation, in the early 20th century it began to be studied systematically through specialized music schools, conservatories, and research institutes. After Shashmaqom was included in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2003, opportunities for its preservation, development, and international promotion significantly expanded. Today, the ashula section of Shashmaqom continues to develop actively, serving not only as a historical heritage but also as an integral part of contemporary performance and pedagogical activities.

Uzbekistan's cultural policy places great emphasis on preserving traditional art and transmitting it to younger generations. Institutions such as the Tashkent State Conservatory, the Yunus Rajabiy National Institute of Music of Uzbekistan, Maqom centers, and art schools teach Shashmaqom and its vocal section, providing students with the opportunity to deeply master

¹ Kurbonova, S. (2022). Makom Art is an Artistic Masterpiece of Uzbek People. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION*, 1(6), 20-22.

maqam sho‘bas. Additionally, the “Folk Arts” Department at the Fergana State University serves as an important scientific and practical platform for teaching, researching, and promoting traditional singing, ashula, and maqam performance.

In 2025, an international scientific-practical conference held at Fergana State University was dedicated to discussing the contemporary significance, preservation, and development of the ashula section of Shashmaqom. Scholars, artists, and educators highlighted the pedagogical, cultural, and creative value of the ashula section and shared experiences in adapting it for modern stages. This ensures that the ashula section is preserved as a historical heritage while being actively integrated into contemporary performance and pedagogical practices.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to scientifically examine the historical, artistic, contemporary performance, and pedagogical significance of the ashula section of Shashmaqom, as well as to analyze the processes of its teaching, promotion, and transmission to future generations.

Historical Formation and Structural Foundations of Shashmaqom

Shashmaqom (Tajik: шашимақом; Persian: ششمقام; Russian: Шашимаком) is a collection of maqams that holds a central place in the musical heritage of Central Asia, particularly among Uzbek and Tajik peoples. This classical repertoire consists of interconnected vocal and instrumental compositions, structured through elements such as pitch, melody, rhythm, form, and style. Shashmaqom evolved over centuries through extensive scholarly and creative experience in both musical folklore and professional traditions. Its development represents the culmination of national and regional classical music traditions and has become a comprehensive artistic achievement of successive generations of composers.

In medieval Near and Middle Eastern music theory, maqam primarily referred to melodic systems (parda) and compositions created according to them. Initially, maqams existed in scattered forms, but in the 13th century, Safiuddin al-Urmawi organized them into a theoretical system of twelve principal maqams. However, by the 17th century, the twelve-maqam system declined, giving rise to national and local variations among Eastern peoples.

By the mid-18th century, Shashmaqom had fully developed in Bukhara, one of Central Asia’s major cultural centers, through the creative activities of court instrumentalists, vocalists, and composers. It became known as the Bukhara Maqoms or Bukhara Shashmaqom. During this period, Uzbek maqams, including those from Khorezm, Fergana-Tashkent regions, and free-form “wild” maqams, were also influenced by Shashmaqom.

Shashmaqom comprises six primary maqams: Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugoh, Segoh, and Iroq, encompassing over 250 instrumental and vocal compositions. Each maqam is divided into two main sections: instrumental (cholg‘u or mushkilot) and vocal (ashula or nasr). The instrumental section includes parts such as Tasnif, Tarje, Gardun, Muxammas, and Saqil, named either after the maqam or the composer (e.g., Muxammasi Nasrullovi, Saqili Islimxon). The vocal section contains sho‘bas and branches such as Saraxbor, Talqin, Nasr, Savt, and Mo‘g‘ulcha, each with its distinctive performance methods and expressive characteristics, conveying various moods.

Historically, Shashmaqom was transmitted orally through a master-apprentice system. In the 1920s, specialized music schools were established in Bukhara, Samarkand, and Tashkent to study maqam and folk music systematically. Shashmaqom was transcribed into modern notation

from the performances of V.A. Uspenskiy, Ota Jalol, and Ota G'iyos. From the 1950s onward, scholarly research intensified; for instance, Ishoq Rajabov's study *"On the Issue of Maqams"* (1963) advanced Uzbek maqamology to a new level. In Tajikistan, B. Fayzullayev, Sohibov, and F. Shahobov transcribed Shashmaqom into notation, published in five volumes under V.M. Belyayev's editorship. In Uzbekistan, Yunus Rajabiy published Shashmaqom twice - in *"Uzbek Folk Music"* (1959) and *"Shashmaqom"* (1966-75).

In 1976, after the death of the head of the ensemble, academician Yunus Rajabi, it was led by People's Artist of Uzbekistan Arif Alimaksumov, Artist of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirzaev. At the moment, the leader of the ensemble is Abduhoshim Ismailov, People's Artist of Uzbekistan.²

The formation of Shashmaqom relied on the twelve-maqam system as a primary source. Over time, the twelve maqams were reduced and consolidated into six (Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugoh, Segoh, Iroq), making complex pitch and modal structures more compact and easier to perform. Thus, Shashmaqom stands out not only for its rich history but also for its musical complexity, philosophical depth, and performance traditions, making it a rare cultural monument in Eastern musical heritage.

In Shashmaqom performance, instruments such as the tanbur, doira, Afghan rubab, sato, and qobyz are used. The tanbur leads in tuning the maqam modes and producing a resonant sound, while the doira provides rhythmic and melodic structure. Instrumental and vocal sections are enriched with various rhythmic and melodic techniques, offering the listener profound musical and spiritual depth.

The vocal section of Shashmaqom draws on classical Uzbek and Persian poets' ghazals, philosophical and religious poetry, as well as traditional quatrains. This art form significantly influences both national musical heritage and contemporary music development. Composers such as Yunus Rajabiy, M.Ashrafiy, M.Burhonov, K.Jabborov, and T.Jalilov extensively used Shashmaqom's potential in their works, enriching songs, romances, choral pieces, symphonies, and operas with maqams.

Today, professional ensembles, Maqom ensembles, and amateur groups throughout Uzbekistan actively engage in creatively performing and promoting Shashmaqom.

Structure and Main Components of Shashmaqom

Shashmaqom is a system of maqams central to the musical heritage of Central Asia, particularly the Uzbek and Tajik peoples. It consists of instrumental (cholg'u) and vocal (ashula) sections, each with specific structural and musical features. Despite its complexity, Shashmaqom is characterized by melodic harmony, rhythmic coherence, and internal order within the maqams.

Primary Maqams of Shashmaqom:

1. Buzruk
2. Rost
3. Navo
4. Dugoh
5. Segoh
6. Iroq

² Kurbonova, S. (2022). Makom Art is an Artistic Masterpiece of Uzbek People. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION*, 1(6), 20-22.

Each maqam contains various sho'bas and branches, divided into instrumental and vocal sections. These maqams were initially structured based on Safiuddin al-Urmawi's twelve-maqam theory and later developed into national and local forms. The 18th-century Bukhara court performance solidified these local forms.

Instrumental Section (Cholg'u):

The instrumental section establishes the maqam's tonal and rhythmic foundation, featuring:

- Tanbur - primary instrument for tuning maqam modes and resonant sound.
- Dutor, Gijjak, Nay, Sato, Qobuz - add tonal variety.
- Doira - provides rhythm and cyclic performance patterns.

Main Parts of Instrumental Section:

1. Tasnif - introductory section of the maqam
2. Tarje - developed instrumental path, typically short and interconnected
3. Gardun - performed in doira style, provides rhythmic foundation
4. Muxammas - complex, long, and technically demanding section
5. Saqil - concluding part, completes the instrumental section
6. Peshrav - shows the maqam's internal tonal development

Some instrumental parts have specific names, e.g., Peshravi Dugoh, Xafifi Segoh, Nag'mai Orazi Navo.

Vocal Section (Ashula):

The most significant part of Shashmaqom, expressing human emotions such as love, devotion, union, and separation through various sho'bas and branches.

Groups of Sho'bas:

First group: Connected sho'bas

- Saraxbor - opening sho'ba, defines maqam melody
- Talqin - sung in doira style, enriched with melodic variations
- Nasr - complex sho'ba, may contain 2-3 melodies within one maqam
- Ufar - closing sho'ba, completes the group

Second group: Independent sho'bas

- Savt and Mo'g'ulcha - main vocal paths, performed in distinct doira style
- Talqincha, Qashqarcha, Soqiynoma, Ufar - branches enrich the main vocal lines and introduce new rhythmic and melodic patterns

Poets' ghazals and rubaiyat are widely used in ashula, e.g., works by Navoiy, Jomiy, Hafiz Shirazi, Bedil, and other classical poets. Through control of voice, breath, pronunciation, and emotion, the ashula section delivers profound artistic impact.

Internal Structure of Sho'bas:

1. Bosh xat - introductory part with instrumental prelude
2. Miyonxat - phrases expressed in middle modes
3. Avj and Namudlar - enhance dramatic and lyrical expression
4. Furovard (Tushirim) - final structure, concluding tone after the climax

During sho'ba performance, 12 maqam modes and their corresponding branches are employed, creating a complex yet rich, melodious, and deeply artistic piece.

Conclusion: Shashmaqom is the highest and most intricate example of Uzbek and Tajik folk music. Its harmony between instrumental and vocal sections, order within maqams, and

sho‘ba and branch system create a rich musical and spiritual-aesthetic experience. Developed historically in Bukhara, Samarkand, Tashkent, and Khorezm, the Shashmaqom tradition has been transmitted through both oral and written forms. The vocal section allows listeners to gain aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural enrichment. In the modern era, the preservation, teaching, and creative interpretation of Shashmaqom are supported by Uzbekistan’s cultural policy, introducing young generations to national musical heritage and promoting it internationally.

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