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# MELODY FROM THE DEPTH OF CENTURIES

*Barbat*

AZERBAIJAN, A RELATIVELY SMALL COUNTRY, IS HOME TO DOZENS OF PEOPLES AND ETHNICITIES, MOST OF WHICH ARE CONSIDERED AUTOCHTHONS OF THE REGION. AMONG SUCH ETHNICITIES THERE IS A NUMBER OF THOSE KNOWN AS THE PEOPLES OF THE SHAHDAG GROUP WHICH REPRESENT ETHNIC FRAGMENTS OF CAUCASIAN ALBANIA.



*Tar*

Musical instruments are an important attribute of civilization and serve as an indicator of the level of culture. They are presumed to have emerged as signal tools associated with human labor activity. The instruments performing the purely musical function

against different-shaped bodies and necks; holes were opened in the trunks of penny whistles and pipes, and tongues or whistles inserted into them; membranes made of animal leather were pulled over round, wooden, earthenware or metal bodies of percussion instruments of different heights, and were stricken against with drumsticks, wrists or fingers of both hands. The self-sounding instruments, which initially represented two stones, gave rise to different bells, ratchets and cymbals made of copper and materials of vegetable origin

similarity of names points to their common roots. At present, however, it is almost impossible to identify their actual origin. Therefore, the assertion that the Duduk is “the most popular Armenian musical instrument”<sup>1</sup> only because of the Latin



*Pearly tambourine*

appeared a little later<sup>1</sup>. Naturally, they were quite plain in the beginning. As human thought and the level of culture evolved, musical instruments became more sophisticated: the number of strings on stringed instruments increased, while the strings were gradually tightened

The appearance and perfection of new musical instruments is the result of development of human thought and esthetic taste. This centuries-long process has facilitated a gradual distinction of style, musical modes and genres characteristic of different peoples. Quite often musical instruments were borrowed from other ethnicities.

Due to the historical development of certain regions, including countries of Southwest and Central Asia mainly populated by Turkic peoples, musical instruments were not limited to certain boundaries states. This explains the presence of similar stringed, wind, percussion and self-sounding instruments. The



*Kamancha*

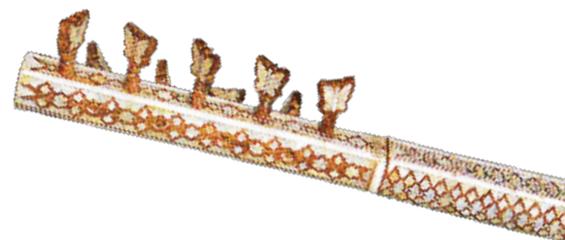
1. Musical encyclopedia, vol. 3. M., “Soviet Encyclopedia” Publishing House, 1976, p. 741



Chang

tioned in the 9<sup>th</sup> century epos "David Sasunskiy"<sup>4</sup>, while Armenian highlands are said to be the original home of the fiddlestick<sup>5</sup>. One is tempted to ask a question: if these musical instruments did originate in this territory, why do they have Persian, Arab or Turkic names, not Armenian? Why is it that there is only one type of the Ud and Kanun in Armenia, while West European musicologists know of 32 types of the Ud and 12 of the Kanun in Arab countries?

At the same time, the description of acoustical characteristics and tone rows of the instruments claimed to be of Armenian origin are mainly found in the researches of such outstanding philosophers and scholars as Abu Nasr al-Farabi (died in 950), Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980-1037), Safi al-Din al-Urmawi (1216/17-1294), Abd al-Qadir



Leather tulum



name of the apricot tree *Armeniaca* (usually used in the production of trunks for musical instruments), (according to a prominent Russian botanist, Academician P. M. Zhukovskiy, the name was given wrongly) is quite ludicrous. In fact, this popular folk instrument has many different names – Duduk, Balaban, Balaman, Mey – and is widespread on a territory stretching from Turkey to Central Asia. The name of Duduk is first mentioned in the Oghuz heroic epos, the Book of Dada Gorgud, which describes the life of the Oghuz in the 6-7<sup>th</sup> centuries and

earlier periods<sup>3</sup>.

The statements that wind instruments Sring (prototype of the Ney), a stringed Tar (the most popular instrument in Azerbaijan closely associated with the Mugham), and the Kanon (known as the Kanun in the Arab and Turkic world) originate from Eastern and Western Armenia are equally absurd. The appearance of the Dgol (known in other countries as Nagara, Doli, Gaval, Daldam, Drum, Kalmas, Dauma, etc.) is said to be associated with the cult of goddess Anahit (300-200 B.C.). It is claimed that the Zurna is first men-

2. "Food and Society" magazine, 2001, No 5, p. 8
3. The Book of Dada Gorgud. Oghuz heroic epos. Translated by V. Bartold. M.-L., Publishing House of the USSR Academy of Science, 1962
4. <http://www.hayastan.ru>
5. Digest of materials of the Second International Musicological Symposium, Samarkand, 7-12 October 1983. Moscow, "Soviet Composer" Publishing House, 1987, p. 187-192



al-Maraghi (1353-1434/35), Darvish Ali Changi (16<sup>th</sup> century), etc. Verses describing the peculiarities of their structure and sound are often encountered in the works of luminary poets Abu Abdullah Rudaki (884-940), Abulhassan Firdousi (around 940-1020 or 1030), Qatran Tabrizi

(1010-1080), Khagani Shirvani (1120/1199), Nizami Ganjavi (1141-1209), Amir Khosrof Dehlevi (1253-1325), Imadaddin Nasimi (1369-1417), Alisher Navoi (1441-1501), Muhammad Fizuli (1498-1552) and others.

It is worth indicating that Abu

Nasr al-Farabi described the Kho-rasan and Baghdad types of the Tam-bur, while Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi referred to the Shirvan and Turkish ones. Also known are the Mogol, Af-ghan, Iranian and Indian Tamburs.

The Rubabs of different design are encountered these days in Ta-jikistan, Uzbekistan, north-western China (Sintsiang province), Iran (Sis-tan province), Pakistan, India (states of Jammu and Kashmir) and Afghani-stan. Depending on the location, they are described as the Afghan, Kashgar, Dulan, Pamir and Shugnan Rubabs. For instance, the Kashgar Rubab was spread in medieval Azerbaijan<sup>6</sup>.

Due to the spread of the Ashik art in the Turkic world (especially in Azerbaijan), the Saz is one of a hand-ful of instruments known under a single name on a large territory. Un-der the influence of the Ashiks, this art form also developed in Armenia, Georgia, Dagestan and Adzharia (in Adzharia the Ashiks are referred to as the Ashir). In middle ages, the word Saz meant a set of all instruments (this tradition is followed in modern Turkey). Subsequently, the term was applied to one instrument only. The word Saz translates as something in good condition and, when applied to a musical instrument, it means tuned. There are 12 Ashik com-munities established by Azerbaji-jani Ashiks<sup>7</sup>. Nine of these still exist, while the Erevan, Geycha and partly the Childir groups have ceased to exist in the aftermath of Armenian



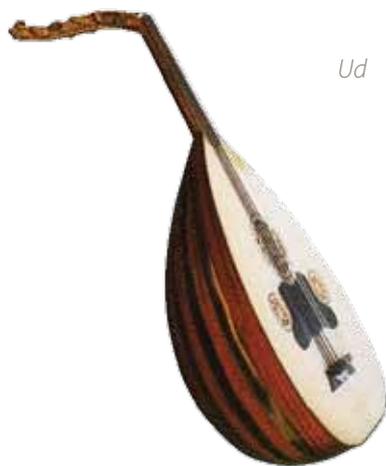
Double Nagara



6. S. Abdullayeva. Azerbaijan's folk musical instruments. Baku, "Elm" Publishing House, 2000

7. M. Gasimli, Ozan-Ashik art. Baku, "Ugur" Publishing House, 2007

ethnic reprisals against Azerbaijanis in 1905-1918, 1948-1950 and 1987-1988. At present, Turkic Sazes do not differ a lot from each other. The only difference is the manner of performance. In the provinces of Iran bordering on Turkmenistan, it is played with fingers like the Dutar, while the plectrum, the Tazana, is used in other regions. A two-stringed Dutar with a pear-shaped body looking like the Saz is very popular with the Turkmens and is an invariable instrument for the Bakhshi, folk narrators. The Dutar is also widespread in



*Ud*

Uzbekistan and Tajikistan<sup>8</sup>. This is an important argument in the drawing of parallels between musical cultures of regional peoples.

The names of those who invented and refined musical instruments are recorded in written sources and embedded in human memory: Plato, Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Safi al-Din al-Urmawi, Abd al-Qadir al-Maraghi, Antonio Stradivari, Sébastien Érard, Theobald Boehm, Adolph Sax, Mirza Sadig Asad, etc. From

this standpoint, the development of the Tar has an interesting history. Although it is associated with Abu Nasr al-Farabi (born in Turkestan), this instrument was mainly used in Iran and Azerbaijan starting from the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Although a sixth string was added to the five-stringed instrument by well-known Iranian musician Dervish Khan, the instrument became popular only after being redesigned by prominent Azerbaijani performer Mirza Sadig Asad oglu (1846-1902). He increased the number of strings to 12, established 22 frets on the neck and, most importantly, changed the shape of the body, making it lighter. This made it possible to hold the instrument against the chest, not on the lap as before. The refined instrument, known as the Azerbaijani Tar<sup>9</sup>, quickly became popular in Iran, eastern Anatolia (Turkey), Georgia, Armenia, Dagestan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.

We believe it would be more appropriate to channel the effort not into finding out the origin of musical instruments but into studying their evolution, spread and migration routes.

The mission of a new generation of musicologists is to preserve and revitalize the forgotten instruments created by our ancestors, to objectively research different aspects of instruments. Of course, the desire of instrument-makers and musicians to create new instruments must be encouraged so that the quality of sounds and tones could improve, enabling listeners to perceive all nuances of different folk music genres. ✦



*Choghur*



*Tanbur*



*Ruhab*



*Rud*

8. K. Vertkov, G. Blagodatov, E. Yazovitskaya. Atlas of people's musical instruments of the USSR. M., "Music" Publishing House, 1975

9. V. Abdulgassimov, Azerbaijani Tar. Baku, "Ishyg" Publishing House", 1990