

**THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACOUSTIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE
GHIJJAK INSTRUMENT**

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Abstract (Annotation)

This study examines the historical development, structural features, and acoustic characteristics of the ghijjak, a traditional bowed string instrument of Central Asia. The research focuses on the instrument's origin, evolution, and its role in Uzbek and neighboring musical cultures, particularly highlighting its use in the Fergana Valley performance school. Historical sources and musicological treatises, including the works of Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Nasir Khusraw, and Ibn Sina, are analyzed to trace the ghijjak's development and its pedagogical, theoretical, and aesthetic significance. The study also emphasizes the ghijjak's expressive power, its close affinity to the human voice, and its enduring cultural and artistic value in both solo and ensemble performance contexts.

Keywords

Ghijjak, Bowed string instrument, Uzbek classical music, Performance school, Traditional style, Maqom (modal system), Fergana Valley, Musical heritage, Instrumental performance, Pedagogy

Music treatises The instrument is played with a bow. Its resonator, originating from Indian jaziwa traditions, is mainly made of mulberry wood, sometimes using its core. The neck is carved from a single piece of wood and measures approximately 40–42 cm in length. The iron tailpiece emerging from the resonator averages 20–23 cm. The resonator is covered with thick iron, and the handling and bowing method differ slightly from other stringed instruments: the resonator is positioned upward during performance.

Sources, including Khwafiz Darvish Ali, emphasize that the ghijjak's tone is highly pleasant and aurally appealing. This characteristic remains valued today and is widely recognized without further need for scientific justification.

Historical and literary records indicate that Borbad was the most talented and prominent musician at the court of the Sasanian ruler Khosrow Parviz between 590–628 CE. During the Sasanian era, music was categorized into religious and secular genres, with the emergence of new styles, forms, and musical instruments. The increasing number of instruments facilitated the development of ensemble performance.

Al-Farabi's Kitab al-Musiqa al-Kabir (The Great Book of Music) provides a comprehensive scientific and theoretical description of musical instruments. In his works Ihsa' al-Ulum and Kalom fi-l-Musiqo, he explains musical instruments in terms of physics and mathematics, comparing pitch, resonance, and interval laws. Al-Farabi proposed aligning instruments closer to the human voice, categorizing the ghijjak as a bowed string instrument. According to him, the ghijjak produces continuous, lyrical tones, making it highly suitable for maqom performance. Its string arrangement and tuning conform to modal and interval rules, while bow pressure and movement influence the instrument's expressive impact. He also valued the ghijjak from pedagogical and moral perspectives.

According to A. Shakarimovich Dadayev, Abu Nasr al-Farabi authored numerous works on musical science, though their exact titles and number vary across sources. For example, Bayhaqi records four volumes of “musical works,” while Ibn Abi Usaybiya lists more than ten musical texts among 112 works. The renowned English orientalist and musician G. I. Fermer considers eleven of these as purely musical treatises or closely related to music.

One of the most significant periods for the development of music theory in the Near and Middle East was the 9th–10th centuries. During this era, four major treatises were written, including Ibn Sina’s Great Book of Musical Knowledge, Al-Farabi’s Kitab al-Musiqa, Ibn Zayla’s Complete Book on Music, and Abu Abdullah Khwarazmi’s Keys of Knowledge, which played a crucial role in establishing an independent musical science in the East.

Among later musical treatises, the works of Najmiddin Kavkabiy and Darvish Ali Changiy, particularly Tuhfat us-Surur (also known as Risolayi Musiqiy), are especially significant. Comprising approximately 350 biographies of composers, singers, and instrumentalists, the treatise consists of two major parts, each divided into five chapters. The first section details twelve maqoms, twenty-four sub-modes, and six melodic forms. The second section addresses musical methods, including seventeen rhythmic modes and twenty-four techniques. Subsequent chapters discuss classical musical genres such as kor, qavl, amal, peshrav, savt, and naqshlar, and classify instruments including tanbur, chang, ney, qanun, oud, borbat, rubab, qobiz, ghijjak, shamama, neyabnun, chagona, ruhafzo, rud, and arganun.

Alisher Navoi’s Mahbub-ul Qulub (1500–1501) provides rich descriptions of performers and instrumentalists, highlighting the social, pedagogical, and spiritual significance of music. It emphasizes that ghijjak performances not only entertain but also cultivate inner peace, moral stability, and emotional refinement, enhancing the listener’s experience of social harmony. The text compares instruments to intoxicating beverages, illustrating the transformative and evocative power of musical expression.

Conclusion

The ghijjak is a unique bowed string instrument with a long-standing tradition in Central Asian music. Its development, performance practice, and theoretical foundations reflect the convergence of musical art and scholarly inquiry from the medieval period to the present. The instrument’s lyrical and continuous sound closely resembles the human voice, making it indispensable in maqom performance. Historical treatises, pedagogical traditions, and literary accounts demonstrate that the ghijjak is not only a cultural heritage artifact but also a scientifically grounded instrument with high acoustic and expressive potential. Its preservation and ongoing development remain essential for sustaining the musical identity of Uzbekistan and the broader Eastern musical world.

References

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