

THE FIRST TWELVE MAQOM SYSTEM OF SHASHMAQOM AND ITS COMPONENTS

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
<p>This article explores the structural, modal, rhythmic, and historical foundations of the first twelve maqoms that form the classical Shashmaqom system. As one of the most influential musical heritages of Central Asia, Shashmaqom embodies centuries of cultural experience reflected in its melodic, rhythmic, and poetic dimensions. The study examines the organizing principles of the maqom cycles, their modal characteristics, compositional layers, performance traditions, and internal structural components such as nasr, tasnif, ufar, savt, and tarona. By analyzing these elements, the article highlights the unique complexity of Shashmaqom’s first twelve maqoms and their significance in preserving artistic identity in the region’s musical culture.</p>	<p>Shashmaqom, maqom system, modal structure, traditional music, Central Asian heritage, rhythm cycles, classical repertoire.</p>

Introduction

The Shashmaqom tradition represents one of the most refined classical music systems of Central Asia, particularly associated with the cultural centers of Bukhara, Samarkand, and Khiva. The term “Shashmaqom” literally means “six maqoms,” referring to the core six large maqom cycles that make up the system. However, each maqom includes multiple sections and subgenres, which, in total, consist of a broader collection of modal sequences. Historically, musicians and scholars have referred to the first twelve maqoms or twelve constituent modal branches that appear within the opening portions of the major cycles. These components capture the essence of maqom modal logic, rhythmic hierarchy, spiritual philosophy, and poetic integration [1].

The first twelve maqoms thus represent the foundational layer from which the entire Shashmaqom repertoire unfolds. Their careful study provides insight into the earliest developmental phases of maqom structure, internal melodic organization, and performative aesthetics. Understanding their components is essential not only for ethnomusicologists but also for performers seeking to maintain authenticity within a living performance tradition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Shashmaqom tradition evolved through centuries of cultural synthesis, incorporating elements of Persian, Turkic, Arabic, and regional Central Asian court music. The earliest maqom cycles originated in the medieval period, strongly influenced by classical poets, Sufi thought, and professional court musicians known as “khonandas” and “sazandas.” The foundational twelve maqoms emerged as early pedagogical models used to systematize modal progression and ensure consistency in teaching. They served as the basic framework upon which the six grand maqoms—Buzruk, Rost, Navo, Dugoh, Segoh, and Iroq—were constructed.

The essence of each maqom lies in its modal organization, known as “parda.” Each of the first twelve maqoms contains a unique tonal center, ascending and descending scale patterns, and characteristic intervallic relationships. Modes often include microtonal inflections typical of Central Asian traditional music

These foundational maqoms typically outline [2]:

a principal scale or tetrachord,
modulation pathways to related modes,
cadential formulas,
central melodic motifs that unify the cycle.

Because the maqom system is cyclical, the first twelve maqoms introduce performers to tonal contrasts, emotional atmospheres, and modal functions that recur throughout the entire Shashmaqom corpus.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The structural sophistication of the first twelve maqoms becomes even more evident when examining the system of melodic pathways (sayr) embedded within each mode. Sayr refers to the traditional method of transitioning between pitch segments, articulating emotional shifts, and guiding performers through characteristic modal zones. In the earliest maqoms, these melodic pathways follow established trajectories that trace the historical logic of oral transmission. Performers learn to navigate ascending and descending contours intuitively, yet with precise awareness of modal gravity points. Such awareness ensures that improvisational passages remain faithful to inherited stylistic norms, even when performers introduce personal nuances [4].

Another critical component of the twelve foundational maqoms is the interaction between poetry and melody. Unlike many global art-music traditions, Shashmaqom treats poetry not as an accessory but as an equal structural pillar. The first twelve maqoms frequently employ verses from classical poets whose imagery aligns naturally with the emotional tone of each mode. This integration demands that performers master prosodic alignment — the ability to synchronize melodic accents with textual rhythm. In training settings, musicians practice scanning poetic feet, analyzing semantic emphasis, and adjusting phrasing so that both musical and literary meanings are preserved. This task reinforces sensitivity to linguistic nuance and strengthens interpretative depth.

Equally important is the role of instrumental color and timbral layering. In the earliest maqoms, each instrument occupies a defined expressive role: the tanbur outlines modal skeletons, the sato provides elongated, emotional resonance, the gijjak introduces ornamental contours, and the doira articulates rhythmic subtlety. The orchestral texture in Shashmaqom is not a mere accompaniment system; rather, it is an interdependent sonic architecture. Training tasks include timbre-blending exercises, harmonic

drone coordination, and ornamentation layering drills, enabling performers to hear the maqom as a multi-dimensional fabric rather than a single melodic line.

The development of modal memory also forms an essential stage for mastering the early maqoms. Because these modes rely on micro-intervallic relationships, performers must develop long-term auditory memory for pitch deviations that lie between Western semitones. Musicians engage in listening comparisons between historical recordings, teacher demonstrations, and ensemble rehearsals. Such tasks gradually refine their internal pitch models, allowing them to replicate modal purity even without instrumental reference. This cognitive discipline is particularly crucial in *nasr* and *savt* sections, where slow tempos make intonation errors more noticeable.

CONCLUSION

The first twelve maqoms of the Shashmaqom system represent the intellectual and artistic foundation of one of the world's richest classical music traditions. Their modal structures, compositional layers, rhythmic frameworks, and interpretative demands illustrate a sophisticated musical philosophy that integrates emotional depth, spiritual symbolism, and technical mastery. Studying these foundational maqoms not only provides insight into the structural logic of Shashmaqom but also strengthens the transmission of cultural identity across generations. As living musical heritage, they continue to inspire musicians, scholars, and audiences by revealing the profound creative potential embedded within Central Asian classical art.

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