

Musical instruments from the period of antiquity found on the territory of Turkmenistan (artifacts of Margush, ancient Merv and old Nisa)

Abstract

The concept of musical culture includes many components, the most important of which are musical instruments. The purpose of this study is to describe artifacts found on the territory of Turkmenistan, depicting musical instruments, which represent a valuable source of information that reveals amazing facts about the culture and life of the distant ancestors of the Turkmens. Musical instruments and their images found in the excavations of Margush, Ancient Merv and Old Nisa make it possible to reveal interesting facts about the culture of the ancient peoples who inhabited Turkmenistan in ancient times, as well as to reveal their connections with other civilizations.

Keywords: culture of Turkmenistan, organology, musical instruments, archaeological finds of ancient time

Volume 9 Issue 3 - 2024

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Received: September 09, 2024 | **Published:** September 30, 2024

Introduction

A striking characteristic of any nation is its history and culture. History has not preserved ancient music in its living sound. However, archaeological finds and documentary materials allow us to look into the spiritual world of the ancient population of Turkmenistan and say that already in the early stages of humanity, music occupied an important place in people's lives, performing functions related to everyday life and cult rituals. The concept of musical culture includes many components, the most important of which are musical instruments. The connection between music and musical instruments with the creativity of the people, their way of life and forms of music-making is undeniable. The vitality of various types of musical instruments, the formation of their performing traditions, and their sustainability over many centuries is amazing. The purpose of this study is to describe artifacts with images of tools found on the territory of Turkmenistan, in the excavations of Margushi, Ancient Merv and Old Nisa, which represent a valuable source of information about the culture and life activities of the future ancestors of Turkmenistan. To achieve this goal, a number of tasks were put forward, such as: a description of historical aspects and the area on the territory of which musical instruments or their images were found; characteristics of the appearance and functionality of the found samples; cultural parallels of musical instruments of past eras and today. The works of V. Masson,¹ B. Sarybaev,² T. Vyzgo,³ G. Pugachenkova,⁴ V. Meshkeris,⁵ I. Matsievsky,⁶ S. Utegalieva⁷ and other researchers were used as a methodological basis for solving the intended problems.

The range of issues raised in these studies is diverse. This article outlines an attempt to combine research related to the musical instruments of the Turkmens and their distant ancestors. The materials obtained made it possible to reveal amazing facts about the culture of the peoples who inhabited Turkmenistan in ancient times, as well as to trace the evolution of their formation. Musical archeology, using sophisticated acoustic instruments and modern electronic technology, will try to restore the sound of music from past centuries. However, the main material for these and other historical and ethnographic studies remains artifacts depicting musical instruments depicted in stone, frescoes, sculptures and bas-reliefs. The evolution of musical

instruments in general proceeds slowly, which can explain the preservation of typical features of musical instruments in different territories in different eras. The studies of many authors are devoted to the formation and evolution of folk instruments; the history of the study of musical instruments goes back thousands of years. "Information about instruments and instrumental music can be found in the Written monuments of Ancient Egypt, Babylon, Palestine, China, India, ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Europe, the Near and Middle East, Slavic lands".⁶ A comparison of archaeological data and written sources indicates that already in ancient times musical professionalism existed in the states of Central Asia.

Singers and instrumentalists, formed from among folk musicians, were recruited to serve palaces and temples. Musical life also existed outside the fortress walls, as evidenced by terracotta figurines of horsemen-musicians and other objects typical of nomadic life. Research by archaeologists in the centers of ancient human activity allows us to recreate a picture of the life of the peoples who inhabited Turkmenistan in the past. In products made of clay and bone, in sculpture and wall paintings, testifying to the high cultural level of the ancient inhabitants, a close connection is revealed between local traditions and influences introduced from outside. Researchers attribute the formation of Turkmen music to the VI-VII centuries - the period of the formation of the original core of the Turkmen nation. The geographical location of Turkmenistan at the crossroads of numerous civilizations predetermined the development of the spiritual culture of the people. "The Turkmen people are the direct heirs of the musical culture of both the autochthonous inhabitants of ancient Turkmenistan and the ancient Turks and Turkmen-Oguz tribes, who played a fundamental role in its ethno genesis and ethnic history".⁸

The purpose of this study is to describe artifacts found on the territory of Turkmenistan, depicting musical instruments, which represent a valuable source of information that reveals amazing facts about the culture and life of the distant ancestors of the Turkmens. Musical instruments and their images found in the excavations of Margush, Ancient Merv and Old Nisa make it possible to reveal interesting facts about the culture of the ancient peoples who inhabited Turkmenistan in ancient times, as well as to reveal their connections with other civilizations.

Margush is the cradle of fire worship

The ancient historical roots of Turkmen culture, which originated, according to researchers, 5 million years ago, are clearly evidenced by excavations along the bed of the Murgab River. "In the valley of Murgab River in present-day Mary province, much larger ancient settlement called Margiana by the ancient Greeks, and Margush in Old Iranian texts, existed during the Bronze age".⁹ For many years, research of the Margiana archaeological expedition was carried out by its permanent leader, the discoverer of the new center of ancient Eastern civilization VI Sarianidi. "The channel of the Murghab," writes the researcher "is gradually shifting from east to west. Nowadays the city of Mary is located on its banks, and in the Middle Ages Merv flourished. The territory that was irrigated by the deep Murgab four to five thousand years ago has long since turned into a waterless plain".¹⁰

Ancient Merv originates from the kingdom of Margush (or, as it was called in the records of the ancient Greeks, Margianna). Being located on a populous part of the Great Silk Road, Merv received the name "Maru-Shahu-Jahan" ("city of the Shahs"). "For thousands of years, Merv played an outstanding role in history, being a link between various civilizations, from ancient to Chinese".¹¹ The first attempts to develop the ancient delta of the Murghab River date back to the Neolithic era (IV millennium BC). According to the research of researchers, the "great migration" of tribes that occurred at the end of the 3rd millennium BC. e., led to the creation of one of the large cities of Margush, the ruins of which are currently known as Gonur-Depe. Zoroastrian temples discovered by archaeologists, associated with ritual offerings to water and fire, give grounds to assert that the country of Margush was at one time the center of Zoroastrianism. As V. Sarianidi writes, "In Margiana in the second millennium BC, the Indo-Aryans lived, who became one of the many genetic ancestors of the Turkmen people. And only here and among them the first world religion was born - Zoroastrianism".¹⁰

The cult of fire worship presupposed the strict implementation of ritual actions. The Avesta, the sacred book of Zoroastrianism, contains numerous hymns and chants. Now it is no longer possible to establish the melodies to which the priests performed these hymns, but the fact that music participated in their performance is certain. Used in cult rituals, it did not yet have professional features. However, the first attempts at performance emerged, developing along with other types of human artistic activity. Over time, people began to attribute the main role in magical practice to verbal formulas, spells, and religious chants. The assignment of sacred functions to professionals led to a weakening of the artistic aspect of actions: their encrypted nature and saturation with special attributes (Figure 1).



Figure 1 Margush aerial photograph.

Information about the existence of music in the Bronze Age is clearly revealed by the drawings engraved on copper, bronze, silver seals and stone amulets found in the archaeological excavations of Margush. In the absence of writing, these drawings become the most informative source telling about the cultural state of the people. Often musical instruments appear in the depicted compositions (Figure 2).



Figure 2 Stone cylinder seal from Margush.

Thus, on a cylinder seal found during excavations in the Togolok-1 temple, there is a clear image of several musical instruments at once. The seal "engraved with a complex composition depicting people with monkey heads holding a long pole, over which a similar monkey-headed acrobat is jumping. A little to the side is another similar character, who beats a huge drum standing on his outstretched legs. Above him are drawn a wolf and some kind of deity with balls, evoking associations with the art of Mesopotamia," writes V. Sarianidi.¹² The balls mentioned by the researcher in the hands of one of the characters apparently served as percussion instruments, such as castanets. Here you can also find a longitudinal flute with three playing holes, belonging to the group of wind instruments. This plot composition draws a parallel with the culture of ancient Sumer, where the earliest mentions of monkey musicians were found. Later, this image became widespread in the art of India and East Turkestan. The monkey masks of the characters in the composition indicate a mystical cult festival. "Linguists have proven that in the Hittite archives the word "festival" means not only "holiday", but also "feast", "banquet", which often takes place with musical accompaniment".¹⁰ Such "festivals", with the participation of acrobats, whose jumps were accompanied by the loud beating of huge drums, were secret and were held with the participation of a narrow circle of initiates. Among the excavations of Margush, five pipes made of bronze, silver and faience are of great interest. According to researchers, ancient inhabitants used them as signal pipes for horses (Figure 3). The found musical instruments, as well as the colorful plot depicted on the cylinder seal of Margush with the image of a number of musical instruments, including wind, percussion and self-sounding groups, testify to the important role played by music in the ritual and cult actions of the ancient Margush people.



Figure 3 Faience tube from Margush.

Music in terracotta sculpture of ancient Merv

Ancient Merv is a new, bright stage in the development of Turkmen culture. According to academician V.M. Masson, “there is no more grandiose monument in Central Asia than the majestic ruins of Old Merv”.¹³ The role and significance of ancient Merv in history corresponds to the impression left by the ruins of this city. Archaeological excavations on the territory of the ancient Merv oasis reveal diverse types of musical instruments. Small terracotta sculpture depicts images of horsemen, musicians, and images of animals. There are a large number of figurines of the mother goddess - the patroness of the hearth (Figure 4). Terracotta musicians are small figurines made of baked clay, 9-10 cm high, flat on the back and embossed on the front. They were pressed from pottery clay in special molds, then adjusted by hand by craftsmen and fired. Terracotta figurines date back, in most cases, to the I century BC. e. – III century AD (Figure 5).⁵ The Historical and Local Lore Museum of Mary velayat has a large collection of terracotta figurines. Oval faces, small mouths and almond-shaped eyes reproduce the ethnic type of the indigenous inhabitants of Merv. The large number of terracotta figurines depicting musicians speaks of the respectful attitude of ancient sculptors to this profession, whose veneration competed with mythological deities and epic heroes (Figure 6).

All groups of musical instruments are represented on the facades of Merv terracottas. Percussion is represented by tambourines, cymbals, castanets, self-sounding bells, bells and drums (one-sided and two-sided). In the group of stringed instruments, the main one is the lute in all its varieties. Two-string and four-string lutes are often found, with a large rounded body and a short neck.¹⁴ The way Merv lutenists performed - standing, supporting the instrument at the chest - shows that the sound was produced by plucking. The identity of the position of the hands reflects the established performing canons, as well as the desire of ancient sculptors to depict in sculpture the moment of live musical performance. The appearance of such roughly sculpted figurines dates back to archaic times, when parts of the body (nose, chin, eyes) were indicated by pinched fingers or indentations with cakes stuck on. In many terracottas, the instrument is in the hands of the rider, which, according to G. Pugachenkova, speaks of “a nomadic environment in which life was inseparable from the horse”.¹³



Figure 4 Terracotta sculpture of ancient Merv.

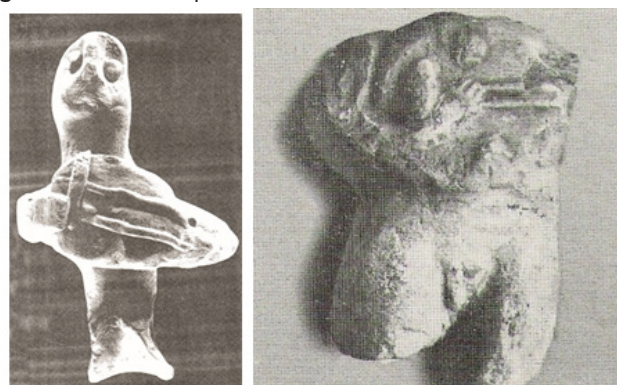


Figure 5 Musicians with lute from ancient Merv.



Figure 6 Terracotta collections in the Mary museum.

The characteristic features of the antique lute of Ancient Merv - two strings and an oval body shape - are to this day the defining features of the Turkmen dutar, the constant companion of wandering bakhshis.

Music on the friezes of the Nysian Rhyton

Another important cultural center of ancient history on the territory of Turkmenistan is the Parthian state, with its capital in Old Nisa. In 2007, the ancient city, located near Ashgabat, was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List. Interesting examples of artistic items and musical instruments were recovered from the treasury of the Parthian kings. According to history, the region of Parthiana, whose capital was Nysa (currently defined as New Nysa), in the 4th century BC. e. became part of the state of Alexander the Great. It was he, the Greek ruler Zulkarnein, who founded the city of Alexandropol (now Old Nisa) next to the Nisa fortress. “Using the example of the Turkmen, who have maintained tribal relations for centuries, one

can quite convincingly see “traces of centuries” and family ties in the names of clans and tribes. Thus, the Turkmen ethnonyms par, palvanly, pelvert dakhli, duiker, carry information about the Dakho-Parthian element...”¹⁵ The main value of the excavations at Nisa, from the point of view of the science of organology, are rhytons - horn-shaped vessels made of ivory, intended for ritual libations. (Figure 7). Covered with hundreds of bas-relief images, they provide a vivid insight into the rich culture of the Parthian era (III BC). Widespread throughout the ancient world, rhytons were used as feasting and ritual vessels. On the friezes of the rhytons are carved bas-reliefs depicting ritual scenes of lighting a fire, the marriage of gods, the worship of nature, and the offering of a sacrificial animal. All compositions contain motifs associated with ancient oriental myths (Figure 8).



Figure 7 Ruins of old Nisa.



Figure 8 Parthian rhyton from old Nisa.

Music on the Nysian rhytons is the main participant in cult activities. Participants in sacrificial processions and musical processions on the friezes of the rhytons are the gods of Olympus, as well as men and women, youths and elders, dancers and priests. Much space is devoted to the depiction of musical instruments representing various groups. The most common are strings (corner harp, lute and cithara), winds (aulos and Pan Flute) and percussion (tambourine, cymbals, and double-sided drum). The main performer of the cithara is Apollo, the ancient Greek god of the sun, patron of art. The citharas of the Nysian rhyton have an elongated shape with five or seven strings. Silver coins found in the territory of Nysa, with an image on the back of the cithara, demonstrate the special attitude of the Parthians to this instrument. Also, an important instrument of Nysian rhytons is the lute. The type of two-stringed musical instrument, similar to the Parthian lute, with a long neck and small body, indicates close cultural ties between the countries of Central and Western Asia (Figure 9).¹⁶

The aulos and Pan’s flute, which also came from the East, were widely used in Greek art. The Greeks themselves considered these instruments to be of Asian origin, although they were not widespread in Asia; their images are found mainly on the Nysian rhytons. “In Greece, the aulos, along with the cithara, served as the basis for the emergence of instrumental genres of music (auletics and kifaristics). The functions of these instruments were strictly demarcated: the kithara (lyre) is associated with the cult of Apollo, the aulos - with the cult of Dionysus” (Figure 10). In Parthia, the tambourine was used in ritual dances, and women depicted in the dance on Parthian cups accompanied themselves. The fact that the tambourine performers are women gives researchers reason to believe that the instrument was associated with the ancient cult of the moon and the rituals performed by its priestesses.



Figure 9 Musical instruments on friezes of rhyton.



Figure 10 Turkmen female performers on the dep.

Genre parallels of ancient and modern Turkmenistan

The doyra and dep, widespread in Turkmenistan, are descendants of the Nysian rhytons, with their even more distant predecessor in the form of the Sumerian tambourine. Song and dance genres of Lebab velayat (eastern Turkmenistan) are performed by women to the accompaniment of dep. The positioning of the hands of modern Turkmen performers, supporting the tambourine with both hands, is characteristic of dancers on rhyton friezes. In the monograph “Musical Instruments of Central Asia,” T. Vyzgo reveals connections between the types of musical instruments in this region. According to the researcher, the harp and cithara of ancient Khorezm are the results of close relationships with the countries of Western Asia; instruments of Nysian rhytons—with Hellenistic culture.

Bactrian instrumentation connects the art of Asia with India and Iran, and in Sogd and Margiana they represent the traditions of local instrumentalism. “Mastering the achievements of the ancient civilizations of the East,” writes T. Vyzgo, “Central Asia was not always the receiving side; in relation to some musical instruments, it acted as a giving country. This is the lute in its typical form, that is, a lute with a large rounded (or pear-shaped) body, turning into a short neck ending with a head bent back. According to all data, Central Asia played an important role in the origin, development and spread of the instrument, in the formation of the culture of lute performance. It was this type of stringed-plucked instrument, recorded by the Merv terracottas that served as the prototype of the medieval Arab oud, and then the European lute”.³

As we see, not all the instruments depicted on the friezes of the Parthian rhyton were alien. In the life of the steppe tribes that inhabited the spaces between the Caspian Sea and the Amu Darya, there were their own, ancient and original traditions of musical instrumentalism. It is necessary to note the homogeneity of musical instruments among a number of Central Asian nationalities, the predominance of solo samples and the close connection between the vocal and instrumental principles. In terms of methods of performance and functioning, the closest to each other are Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, partly Azerbaijani, Uzbek and Karakalpak musical instruments, the commonality of which was once noted by researcher A. V. Zataevich.¹⁷ The most diverse group of musical instruments in this group is represented by the group of chordophones (plucked, bowed). Having the same three-part structure (*bas-orta- ayak*; top-middle-foot), they most clearly reproduce at the same time a two-pronged, cosmogonic model of the universe and man.¹⁸ Varieties of Turkic instruments are also distinguished by their timbre originality. On different instruments, regardless of their structure and capabilities, a universal timbre-phonetic sound model is constantly reproduced. The variety of sounds of wind, string and self-sounding musical instruments is formed due to the timbre-register division of the musical space. Also, Turkic instruments represent the unity of vocal and instrumental principles, which is expressed in the instrumentalization of the voice in song creativity, as well as the vocal interpretation of the instrumental heritage. The above premises are generated by a certain type of musical thinking and serve as the basis for the taxonomy of musical instruments.

Many musical instruments are of ancient Turkic origin. Their names, including national versions, are extremely stable. Information about *tuyduk* is contained in the dictionary of Mahmud Kashgari and in a number of Arabic and Persian-language sources of the V-VIII centuries. The existence of Turkic terms with names of Mongolian, Iranian and Arabic origin demonstrates the conventions of linguistic boundaries and indicate historically established musical communities-nomadic and sedentary and, accordingly, two branches of musical instruments. The disappearance of old and the appearance of new musical instruments is a natural process. At the same time, previous names are often transferred to other, borrowed musical instruments.¹⁹ The basis of such “equality” is similarity in sound, as well as in operating conditions. Over the course of centuries of history, new state formations arose in Central Asia. This trend, characteristic of antiquity and later centuries, culminated in the creation of numerous states with their cultural centers in *Margiana*, *Marakanda*, *Nisa*, *Bactria*, and *Khorezm*. The efforts of archaeologists are reviving the amazing treasures of ancient masters. Numerous household items, ceramics, sculpture, and images of musical instruments presented in archaeological finds reveal the high achievements of the culture of distant ancestors. The formation of a new layer-professional music

of an unwritten tradition-demonstrates the transition of musical creativity to a qualitatively new level of general cultural development. A professional approach to musical performance opened up new prospects for the development of musical activity as an independent art form. Genres and forms of musical performance common to different nations appear. However, as researcher T. Vyzgo writes, “it would be in vain to try to establish the priority of any one people in the creation and development of certain types of musical instruments. The most advanced of them are the result of centuries of development. The culture of folk instrumentalism already in the era of Central Asian antiquity was a complex and versatile phenomenon created by the efforts of many peoples” (Figure 11).



Figure 11 Turkmen bagshy.

Conclusion

Thus, historical processes influenced the uniqueness of the Turkmen musical culture and the formation of its instruments. Traditions of nomadic culture occupy a special place in the process of “polishing” Turkmen musical instruments. The history of nomadism reveals the harmonious relationship between man and nature, which gave rise to a unique culture in which every object, from homes to utensils and musical instruments, was functional. The era of early nomads (*saks*, *huns*, *masagets*) smoothly flows into the medieval ancient Turkic tribes. This continuity is the result of the unity of nomadic societies, their way of thinking, the proximity of material culture, ideology, and religious ideas. The laws of nature were comprehended through mythology; the worldview of the ancient ancestors was associated with such beliefs as *totemism*, *Tengriasm*, and *shamanism*. With the help of musical instruments, widely used in the magical practice of shamans, the sounds of nature, the voices of birds, animals, and human speech were transmitted. The types of musical instruments described in the article contain information on the ethnogenesis and history of Turkmen culture. The descriptions showed that among the instruments there are samples brought from outside (musical instruments of Margush and Parthia), as well as those that arose in the Turkic environment (chordophones of Ancient Merv). A number of musical instruments, such as the cithara, lute, and tambourine, having arisen in the process of assimilation with other species, subsequently became the property of other cultures.

Turning to artifacts allows us to more deeply raise the problems of interethnic cultural connections and migrations both within the Turkic ethnic community and in interaction with other peoples. The comparative historical research method used in the article made it possible to identify the direction of migration of musical instruments that do not coincide with linguistic and ethnic boundaries. A comparative

study of the musical instruments of the nomadic Turks reveals the presence of typologically related cultures, which include the Turkmen and nearby peoples (Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis). Images of musical instruments identified by archaeologists help to present the range of cultural ties between the countries of the Central Asian region of the ancient period and draw genre parallels to the present day. The variety of musical instruments of ancient times testifies to the breadth of musical practice, the richness of the performing repertoire and the genre diversity of the works performed. Among the musical instruments found on the territory of Turkmenistan, the most numerous are stringed instruments. The variety of their types, shapes and designs, as well as methods of sound production, is striking: the sound is reproduced with a bow, plucking a string, rattling and a plectrum. Lutes, flutes, harps and many other musical instruments are direct carriers of the living performing tradition that has reached us. Today they appear not as archaic types, but as perfect and professional examples that have gone through a long evolution. The stability of instrumental traditions, laid down in ancient centuries, contributed to the creation of favorable soil for creative contacts and wide interpenetration of musical cultures of different peoples. This influenced the growth of the performing traditions of the Turkmen, the improvement of their instrumental culture, and therefore the development of dutar music in Turkmenistan is distinguished by the preservation of its originality, a combination of ancient features and a level of high professionalism.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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