



THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE OUD INSTRUMENT

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Abstract

This article explores the historical evolution of the oud instrument. From the earliest stringed instruments in ancient Eastern civilizations to its development during the Islamic cultural era, its introduction into Europe via Andalusia, and its role in contemporary performance, the article analyzes the transformations the oud has undergone. Drawing on various historical, cultural, and regional sources, it reveals the changes in the instrument’s form and performance style, and highlights its significance as a piece of musical heritage. Moreover, the study reflects on the oud’s role in intercultural musical connections and traces the historical development of musical thinking.

Keywords: Oud, historical evolution, musical heritage, Eastern music, Ziryab, Andalusia, stringed instruments.

Introduction

Music is an inseparable part of human culture, reflecting each nation’s spiritual world and aesthetic values. In the musical culture of Eastern peoples, stringed instruments—especially the oud—hold a prominent place. The oud is a distinctive instrument known for its unique timbre, deep expressive potential, and rich historical legacy. It represents not only a musical tool but also a symbol of an entire cultural and intellectual worldview.

The historical roots of the oud trace back to ancient Eastern civilizations. Depictions resembling the oud are frequently found in ancient visual sources. With the rise of Islamic civilization, the oud evolved significantly, eventually achieving its refined modern form. Particularly, the reforms introduced by Ziryab in the 9th century marked a key milestone in its development. The oud reached



Europe through Andalusia and profoundly influenced Western music under the name “lute.”

Today, the oud is used not only in traditional music but also in contemporary, experimental, and academic compositions. However, the instrument’s historical development, regional characteristics, and cultural significance still require in-depth scholarly study.

This article examines the oud’s evolution from ancient times to the present, analyzing its structural changes, cultural context, and development as a tool of musical expression.

THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE OUD

The oud is an ancient stringed instrument and one of the most significant and unique representatives of Eastern music. Its formation, development, and spread across various cultures have left a deep mark on musical heritage. This article explores the oud’s historical roots, evolution, and cultural diffusion across different regions.

Ancient Roots. The earliest forms of the oud date back to pre-Christian times. Archaeological findings and wall paintings from Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Egyptian, and Assyrian civilizations show instruments resembling the oud. These early versions often had long necks and narrow bodies and were primarily used in religious rituals.

The Islamic Civilization and the Maturation of the Oud. During the flourishing period of Islamic civilization in the 8th to 10th centuries, especially in cities like Baghdad, Damascus, and Kufa, the oud played a vital role in cultural life. The musician and luthier Ziryab (9th century) is renowned for transforming the oud from a four-stringed to a five-stringed instrument. His innovations expanded the oud’s sonic capabilities and brought it closer to its modern form.

Entry into Europe via Andalusia. The oud entered Europe through Islamic Andalusia, particularly into Spain, where it became known as the laúd or lute. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the instrument held a significant



role in European music. However, with the advent of instruments like the piano and violin, the lute's prominence diminished.

Oud Traditions in Eastern and Central Asia

The oud spread widely among Eastern peoples as well.

Azamat Hasanov Oud Player, [19.05.2025 13:26]

Unique oud schools developed in countries such as Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and across the Arab world. Each region fostered distinct differences in the instrument's form, sound, and playing techniques. For instance, Turkish ouds typically have a lighter, sharper sound, while Arab ouds are known for their deep, resonant tone.

The Modern Era. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the oud has been employed not only in traditional music but also in modern genres. Renowned oud masters like Munir Bashir, Naseer Shamma, and Simon Shaheen elevated oud performance to new artistic heights. Today, the oud is appreciated by musicians and composers in both the East and the West.

Conclusion

The oud is one of the oldest and most tradition-rich stringed instruments in Eastern musical culture, with a history spanning millennia. Its development has been shaped not only by changes in musical art but also by intercultural exchange, aesthetic shifts, and technological advancement. From the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and Egypt to the golden era of Islamic civilization, from Andalusia's influence on Europe to its place in modern performance, the oud has undergone many stages of transformation.

Research shows that the oud's shape, number of strings, tuning methods, and playing techniques have changed significantly over time and across regions. The innovations introduced by Ziryab, the instrument's development in Andalusia, and the formation of various regional schools in Turkey, Iran, and the Arab world have all contributed to its historical importance.

Today, the oud is not only a symbol of traditional music but also an important tool in modern musical experimentation. Studying the oud provides deep insights into



the evolution of Eastern musical thinking, performance culture, and aesthetic ideals.

For this reason, investigating the oud's historical evolution is a relevant scholarly pursuit not only for musicology but also for fields like cultural studies, anthropology, and art history.

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