



VARIOUS THEORIES ON THE ORIGIN OF THE UD INSTRUMENT

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Annotation:

This article analyzes various theories concerning the origin of the ud, one of the most significant instruments of the Near Eastern musical culture. Based on similarities with ancient instruments and the presence of ud-like instruments in the civilizations of Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, and the Arab world, the discussion explores which of them may be considered the direct ancestor of the ud. The ideas proposed in archaeological, historical, and iconographic sources are evaluated according to scientific criteria.

Keywords: Instrument, Ud, Sound, Theory, Eastern music, Western music, Maqam, Arab music, Andalusian music, Lute, Persian music, Music of Turkic peoples.

Introduction

The ud occupies a special place in the musical culture of Eastern peoples due to its aesthetic sound, expressive potential, and rich heritage. Although it has been known by different names in different regions throughout history, its structural and functional features have been closely related across many civilizations. However, there are several differing scholarly opinions regarding exactly where and by whom the ud was first created.

This article presents and analyzes the main theories concerning the origin of the ud, examining their scientific foundations and supporting evidence.

Main part

1. The Ancient Egyptian Theory

In Ancient Egypt, during the second millennium BCE, stringed instruments with curved necks were widespread. Archaeological findings — particularly wall paintings in Thebes dating to around 1500 BCE — depict instruments similar to the modern ud. According to this theory, the ud was first invented in Egypt and later spread throughout the Near East. Egyptian instruments featured a resonant body and a short neck, which closely resemble the later forms of the ud.

2. The Mesopotamian (Sumer–Babylonian) Theory

According to this theory, the roots of the ud go back to Mesopotamia — specifically the Sumerian and Babylonian civilizations. Archaeological excavations in the city of Ur revealed stringed instruments dating to the third millennium BCE, such as the “Babylonian lyre,” whose structure resembles the ud. Some researchers believe that early variants of the ud were used by the Sumerians in religious ceremonies. This theory emphasizes the ud as an ancient and multifunctional musical instrument.

3. The Persian (Iranian) Theory

Iranian music historians trace the ud to the Persian instrument known as barbat. The word barbat itself appears in ancient Persian written sources. Barbat was a short-necked, large-bodied, resonant instrument that became widespread during the Sasanian era. In Persian



musical history, the musician and singer Barbad is mentioned as one who perfected instruments similar to the ud. Therefore, the view that the ud originated from the Persian civilization is supported by strong evidence.

4. The Arab Theory

Arab sources describe the ud as one of the oldest musical instruments. Scholars such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ziryab studied and developed it both theoretically and practically. During the early centuries of the Islamic era, the ud became popular throughout the Arabian Peninsula and spread as far as Spain. According to this theory, the ud was invented by the Arabs and introduced to Europe through them. However, this theory relies mainly on written rather than archaeological evidence.

5. The Greek–Roman Theory

This theory suggests that the ud evolved from ancient Greek instruments such as the pandura and kithara. However, the pandura had a long neck, which makes it structurally different from the ud. Although this theory was advanced mainly by European researchers, it is not widely accepted in academic circles due to the substantial structural differences.

Discussion

The theories discussed above demonstrate that instruments similar to the ud existed in various civilizations. It can be stated that the ud was likely not created in one particular region, but rather emerged through processes of musical and cultural exchange.

Its distinct features — the rounded resonating body, short neck, and deep tone — distinguish it from other string instruments.

In many cases, the ud is regarded not as an invention of a single people, but as a synthesis of collective musical experimentation.

Interregional exchanges — especially during the Sasanian, Abbasid, and Andalusian periods — played a key role in shaping and refining the ud. Moreover, the ud's defining characteristic, its “fully rounded body,” sets it apart from other plucked string instruments.

Conclusion

There is no single, definitive opinion regarding the origin of the ud. However, based on available evidence, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- Instruments resembling the ud existed in the ancient civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia;
- The Persian civilization perfected the instrument through its ancestor, the barbat;
- Arab scholars and performers enriched the ud both theoretically and practically;
- The Islamic Golden Age played a crucial role in the ud's transmission to Europe.

Thus, the formation of the ud should be regarded as the product of intercultural interaction and shared musical experience, rather than the creation of a single civilization.

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