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## Intoning the Qur'an as Musicological Problem

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*The study of music in the context of religious traditions is one of the highly sought-after destinations in the modern musicology. However, scope of scientific understanding varies depending on different traditions in one way or another. In particular, in Russian musical science the Muslim tradition is studied to a lesser extent than the Christian tradition.*

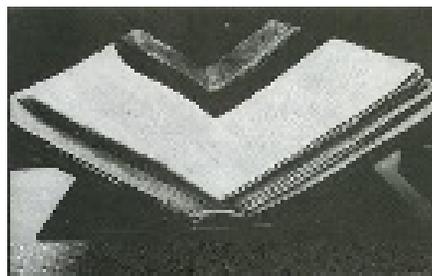
*The originality of the music intoning of the Qur'anic texts is usually defined by such terms as "melodeclamation", "song-like recitation". It seems, however, that these concepts do not fully capture the essence of music principality of the religious practices of Islam.*

*This paper presents a variety of approaches to the problem of intonation of the Qur'an from a scientific point of view, first of all – from the point of view of Oriental and Ethnomusical studies.*

*Keywords: Muslim theology, intoning the Qur'an, Tajwid, Maqam, musical and cultural tradition of Muslim Tatars.*

For a long time it had been thought that melodic recitation prevails in the Islamic cult and any detailed melodic forms are not accepted, besides that the sound of musical instruments is not permitted at all. "The music, which is in the Qur'an, is enough for the service!" – expressed Gayaz Fatkullin, Mufti of the Krasnoyarsk Territory, his attitude to the problem (personal communication in Krasnoyarsk mosque in 2008).

Indeed, the music principality is postprimary in religious service: the word, its meaning and the beauty of its sound, as if outweigh the music. However, on closer acquaintance with the sound aspect of Muslim worship we reveal a number of patterns indicating the presence of a complex, finely graded system of musical intonation in prayer texts.



Qur'an of Caliph Uthman period. The Topkapi Palace Museum, Istanbul

Musical and cultural traditions of Russian Muslims have only recently become the object of study in science. Recorded by ethnomusicologists religious music has not been published, and at first it has been treated as a purely folk phenomenon.

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Krasnoyarsk Mosque

One of the first works in this area belongs to the Tatar researcher R.A. Iskhakova-Vamba, who in 1978 raised the question of connection of Tatar culture with Arab one; she introduced religious music of the Tatars in the context of Arab culture [Iskhakova-Vamba]. In the 1990s, there were a lot of special studies in this field. These studies include: an overview of the regional musical and cultural traditions of Russian Muslims of the North Caucasus and the Volga region; a review of the process of their formation, evolution and forms of existence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (a study of Muslim music of the Volga region is notably a more complete and detailed than studies devoted to the traditions of the North Caucasus) (Imamutdinova, Sajfullina, Sofijskaja, Junusova). In the North Caucasus, in contrast to other regions of the Russian Federation, the confession is associated with the “radicalization of Islam, with the promotion of new trends, which do not accept the traditional foundations of culture and everyday way of life” (Bazieva, 2012: 61). That is, there is a certain violation of the dogmatic foundations of orthodox Islam, but there is no any obvious opposition in the collective consciousness.

Apart from these two large regional traditions of the Volga region (more precisely, the Volga-Ural

region) and the North Caucasus region, which correspond to Russia's regions with the largest spread of Islam, we can name the Siberian region and, in particular, the Krasnoyarsk Territory. The Tatars living in the Krasnoyarsk Territory are of the Volga-Ural group solely<sup>1</sup>.

In the modern musicology the discussion on “Islam and Music” takes on a wide scale; starting from the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this problem has been studied from different perspectives – from the etiquette of performing to the features of intonation of the Qur'an. The latter is of most direct relevance to the aims of this paper.

The musical component itself in the Muslim cult is studied by Russian scientists mainly on the basis of religious practice of Muslim Tatars of the Volga region (Imamutdinova, Sajfullina, Sofijskaja, Junusova). Works, which analyze general principles of religious singing during service in Islam, are relatively few. Perhaps, G.R. Sajfullina was the first who began to study religious singing in the Volga region on the material of local tradition (Sajfullina). However, in the center of her attention there are questions of religious, philosophical and cultural planes, while the issues of a more private nature, which relate to the actual religious singing during service, are though concerned, but need to be further developed.

Qur'anic singing is considered in the context of the musical culture of the Tatars in the works of such researchers as V.N. Junusova, Z.A. Imamutdinova (Junusova, Imamutdinova).

Turning to the issue of verbal intonation of the Qur'anic texts, researchers usually come from commonly recognized existence of two kinds of such intoning the Qur'an: Qira'at – the method of recitation for ritual purposes, studied only in professional religious institutions (Islamic universities); Tajwid, studied in religious, as well as in secular educational institutions. Tajwid has the basic meaning for Islamic culture, it is “a

fundamental resource for the musical language” (Junusova, 1997: 26).

Each of the researchers highlights their own keypoints in the study of the problems of intonation. Thus, V.N. Junusova emphasizes the aspect of the genre, focusing on the cycle of canonical prayers – rakats, including the five mandatory. Unfortunately, the scientist does not reveal particular intoning of each.

The structure of the Islamic MCT (musical-cultural tradition, the abbreviation was introduced by V.N. Junusova) in its version of the Volga region is shown in the work of V.N. Junusova in the form of concentric circles, the united center of which forms the ceremonial (folk in its origin) layer of Islamic music and cultural traditions. The researcher also distinguishes the cultural layer – core Islamic musical and cultural tradition, which is linked, above all, to services in mosques, and the formation of a new musical culture, containing spiritual songs and other genres, performed usually at concerts. These three layers are typical for the culture of the whole Muslim world; they are filled with concrete content in each region. Their uniqueness is characterized by the features of ethnic history, language, culture and music. Their study in the musicological perspective is based on the idea of the close relationship of the three discovered layers. It is emphasized in this relation that in the Russian Federation “recitation of the Qur'an ...has never been confined to ritual and it has always been in intimate relationship with a “sound” (musical) practice. This is an argument in favor of that this tradition can be seen in musical and aesthetics terms”. (Junusova, 1997: 102).

In the characterization of the process of MCT historical evolution special attention is paid to the problem of genres, their existence and their functions, while the analysis of musical and expressive means is scarce and relies only on the individual samples of Tatar folklore and “book

singing” (in this respect, the study of V.N. Junusova is close to that work of Z.A. Imamutdinova, who examines the Bashkir music culture). However, some analytical musicological observations of V.N. Junusova have, from our point of view, certain methodological significance. Let us enlist them.

1. Genres of secular and religious layers are in communication, which is witnessed by the mere practice of inclusion of secular tunes as models in religious singing, and also by data, which we find in theoretical treatises (Junusova, 1997: 19).

2. MCT of Islamic world is not isolated from the world musical and historical process. It is, like any other tradition, included in this process, which can be reflected in the following chain: the musical culture of the ethnic group – the musical culture of the region – the musical culture of the whole world (Junusova, 1997: 64).

The object of special study in a number of scientific papers has been the aspect of religious holidays, such as holiday Mawlid in the practice of Russian Muslims (Junusova), and Eid al-Fitr, Eid al-Adha, Mawlid (Sofijskaja). The musical material of the last three holidays is analyzed in the study by A.G. Sofijskaja, who gives a description of the structure of services, characterizes their dramatic composition and highlights such common features, as the prevalence of recitative intonation, the influence of Tajwid, ensemble performance, etc. (Sofijskaja, 2004: 21). The research material includes music samples recorded in mosques in Kazan, the Madrasah “Muhammadiyah” and villages in Atninsky and Vysokogorsky Districts of Tatarstan (during the period of 2001-2003), and records stored in the collections of Radio Company “Tatarstan” (it should be noted that in the study of A.G. Sofijskaja melodies are notated in the same scale, their original “tonality” is marked only by the final tone stability, that is set at the beginning of each chant).

After the analysis of the collected material we come to the following conclusions.

1. Musical principality is the most important component of each of the rituals. In each separate case, there is a group of tunes, we are in direct connection with a particular religious holiday

2. Ritual festive tunes are in line with the traditional Tatar music. Nevertheless, their uniqueness is determined to the greatest extent by their metric and rhythmic structure, which appeared due to the influence on the structure of the texts of such systems, as Saj', Tajwid, Arud. More typical of traditional Tatar poetry Barmak system has been affected by the impact of the latter (Sofijskaja).

3. The specific features of the mode and scale organization of chants of religious holidays, compared with the traditional musical and poetic culture of the Volga Tatars, include: mode genus anhemitonic structures of small interval-like composition, pentatonic pitch forms, complex pentatonic structures, which are turning into the very anhemitonic pitch structures.

The tradition of reading the Qur'an in the context of the general laws of the Islamic culture and the culture of the Volga Tatars itself as one of the cultural phenomena of the Muslim world is the object of study by G.R. Sajfullina.

In her monograph she examines the history of the tradition of reading the Qur'an, ways of development of traditional Tatar Muslim culture as a whole (its formation and peculiarities, the place and role of Islam in shaping its religious and secular components, and, in particular, Islamic influence on the Bulgar-Tatar culture). The study is based on scientific and theoretical understanding of a wide range of Russian and foreign sources.

Special attention should be paid to the indicated by the scientist intonation proximity between the Tatar tradition recitation of the

Qur'an and the Tatar folk-song tradition – both at the level of mode organization (anhemitonic pentatonics), and at the level of the intonation system. The most stable melodic elements are, according to the observations of G.R. Sajfullina, song-like expressive melodic intonations of three chords in the intervals of fifths and fourths and characteristic features of cadencing (the latter are not specified). In addition, there is a general feature of the ornamentation of melody. Observations of this kind have been made on the basis of a comparative analysis of several verses of the Qur'an's notated surahs (recorded by various artists) with the melodies of several folk songs (notations being borrowed by the author from scientific literature). The work resulted in the conclusion about a universal aesthetic principle, linking the folk and religious cultures together, in a single unit, on the basis of which “the formation of a new professional tradition becomes possible. Inherent in art of the Qur'an recitation itself harmonious ratio of the sacred and the music is realized by the artist as the unity of a narrator and a musician (in the broadest sense of this word), and a pledge of this is the very creative nature of the tradition, which is manifested in original “reckoning” on the uniqueness of each individual experience” (Sajfullina, 1999: 180).

Describing the processes taking place in the musical culture of the Bulgar-Tatar after the 16<sup>th</sup> century (meaning landmark 1552 year in the history of this ethnic group, it was the year of the Kazan fall), the author of this study notes changes in the form of existence of “many forms of creativity. Thus, all the wealth of the former Muslim (primarily secular) traditions as if shrinks to a single mainstream of the religious tradition itself and actually exists in two dimensions: performance by ordinary Muslims of “permitted” genres of baits<sup>2</sup>, munadzhat<sup>3</sup>, chanted reciting of religious and didactic books (the tradition of the

book singsong); music and poetic legacy of the dervishes (having been almost disappeared by now)” [Ibid.].

The researcher also stresses the “unconscious desire of the folk artists to smooth phonetic ‘edges’ of the Arabic language and drawing it closer to the phonetics of their native language ... <whereupon happens> a formation of recitation in accordance with the usual ‘sound ideal’, based on the folk song tradition” [Ibid.] Furthermore “the Qur’anic recitation of the Muslim Tatars shows the greatest intimacy in relation to the examples of the book singsong – traditions that are genetically connected with the ritual of reading the Qur’an, and with the content, structural features and characteristics of existence similar to the Qur’an” [Ibid.].

The same view is held by Z.A. Imamutdinova (Imamutdinova). As a result of comparison of several samples of the Qur’anic recitation in the Ural-Volga region and Central Asian regions of Russia, she comes to the following conclusion: “If the stylistics of the Qur’anic recitation in the Central Asia was influenced by the tradition of maqam (understood as a mode structure here), the Bashkirs (as well as the Tatars) adopted the expressive means of *uzun-küy* (plangent song), improvisational genre and stylistic sphere of folklore: rhythmic features and motive and variation development, modal elements of – pentatonics (Imamutdinova, 1997: 73). We emphasize that the genre of *uzun-küy*, in turn, was formed under the influence of the Muslim religious art.

On the one hand, this can be seen as a manifestation of local characteristics of the perception of maqamat system. On the other hand, this can be seen as the impact of differences that exist between the oral and written traditions of the art of maqam. The first of these traditions is largely dependent on the experience and professionalism of the performers, and although

they use the maqam system in their practice, their choice is quite arbitrary in each particular case<sup>4</sup>. This is all the more important, since the book tradition does not offer any clear criteria for selecting a particular maqam.

Looking ahead, we stipulate that in the analyzed material the focus on maqamat – the main foundation of a modal organization in the professional music of oral traditions of the Middle East – has a natural character. At the same time, however, there is a certain selective tendency, and sometimes – arbitrariness in the use of various forms of maqam. However, this selectivity in its own way has some patterns and its impact on the intonation of sacred texts is noticeable.

Peculiarities of the local (in this case – the Bashkir) intoning tradition of the sacred texts, considered also in comparison with the samples of national songs, identified in the thesis research of Z.A. Imamutdinova (Imamutdinova, 1997: 73), where the tradition of reading the Qur’an and Bashkir folklore are seen as correlated. The main result of the work was the conclusion about a “complicated relationship between the Bashkir folk music of archaic and changed under the spiritual influence Islam, and of later acquired legacy as a result of Europeanization” (Imamutdinova, 2010: 5).

In another study, this researcher focuses on the problem of articulation in reading the Qur’an, presented as vocal and melodized forms<sup>5</sup>. Using computer means for fixing the smallest changes of voice and comparing the curves of dynamic-articulating activity, shown by various reciters (of Ufa, Medina, Cairo), performing the same initial ayats of a few surahs, Z.A. Imamutdinova comes to the conclusion that the differences in the level of articulation activity are caused by various factors, such as age, fluency of language skills, individual musical abilities, orientation on a particular stylistic model, and finally – the emotional state (See further: Imamutdinova).

We should note that this conclusion is not consistent with the findings of the philologist G.R. Aganina (Aganina), who believes that recitation of the Qur'an "still sounds almost the same over a vast area, covering not only the territory of the huge Arab-speaking region, but the whole area of distribution of the Qur'an" (Aganina, 2006: 3).

Main prerequisite for such stability G.R. Aganina finds in orthoepic laws of the Qur'an recitation, elaborated by medieval scholars in the science of the Qur'an recitation. In accordance with these laws a number of sounds and syllables are distinguished. These sounds and syllables are prone to the musical intonation – they set the overall musical structure of the Arabic language, and this predetermines the chanted way of reciting the Qur'an. The art of Tajwid is governed by the same laws and each letter is given the proper and rightful place and manner of articulation, nasalization, short length, longitude, and the like of the rules of reciting the Qur'an (See about this [2]).

I.M. Gaziev focuses on issues related to performance (Gaziev, 2009). He considers the performance traditions in the vocal culture of the Volga-Ural Muslims as the basis for the formation of professionalism. The professionals are folk singer-storytellers, *ozyn* keys – performers of plangent songs, performers of Muslim religious music of various genres, "scenic" performers.

On the basis of concept of I.R. Eoljan (Eoljan, 1977), I.M. Gaziev characterizes the main genres in the light of specific traditions of Muslim religious musicperformance and, namely, on: *adhan* (azan), the Qur'an recitation, *dhikr*, "book singing" (intoning the Arab-Persian and Turkic medieval books). Orientated on performance in front of an audience, these traditions are, in the opinion of the researcher, the basis of "faith-based" excellence, the main feature of which is the texts' written existence (See further: (Gaziev, 2009: 3)).

Some researchers emphasize the form of choral singing, which exists in Muslim religious music. For example, as reported by L.A. Mamedova, "collective singing in Azerbaijan continued to exist in the Sufi branch of Islam, based on the ethnic music, on the one hand, and on the other hand – on the way of reciting the Qur'an as if chanted, singsong ... In the culture of Islam collective musical thinking, collective singing and melodeclamation had its definite place" (Mamedova, 2006).

A.B. Dzhumaev traced the evolution in relations of Islamic religious doctrine to the phenomenon of music (Dzhumaev, 1992). Without taking into account the properties of the Qur'an intonation, this author identifies two main forms of the Qur'an recitation, generally describing each of them. One of them is the official one, which is based on standard requirements and cultivated by readers (*qurrā*), having obtained special education in mosques. This form differs in significant melodiousness, high uniformity and stability, and relative complexity of melody. Another, "popular" form has been practiced in the vast territory of the Muslim world. Its bearer can be any Muslim. This form has inherent for this or another region features of the Qur'an recitation due to the influence of folk-song culture. Cultivated at home, this form of intoning the Qur'an is free with respect to the canon, and the individual manner of intonation is evident. Such a form is called folk. Another form of existence – the official – was formed within the walls of mosques. Here the orientation on the standards, "dictated" by canons, dominates.

A broad panorama of music art, covering folk, professional secular, religious, and household (urban) layers, is presented in the monograph of I.R. Eoljan (Eoljan, 1977). Like other researchers, this author pays particular attention to the complexities of interaction of art with Islam.

Religious music is observed in a separate chapter, where “three types of music are defined (Eoljan, 1977: 128): “Adhan”, or azan (we shall indicate that in reality adhan is the start of chanting in the Muslim service), the Qur'an recitation (method of intonation) and “Dhikr” – glorification of God's name (originally it was a genre, developed in the context of Sufism).

Despite the lack of musical examples in notes, the author makes a generalization about such properties of music of the Arab East as “the modal colorful structure, high skill of improvisation, emotional tension” (Eoljan, 1977: 136).

Today we can name many foreign publications, specifically focused on the Qur'an recitation in the context of the particular Arab ethno-regional Muslim culture background; among the authors we can enlist H. Farmer, H. Tuma, L. Faruki, K. Nelson.

Exploration of tradition in the light of the general laws of the Muslim culture and in connection with other phenomena of musical practice allowed L. Faruki (al-Faruki, 1986) to create his own theory that the recitation of the Qur'an is the foundation and core of the whole Islamic sound art (*handasah al sawt*), or “the art of sound”. L. Faruki reveals the essence and importance of the tradition of the Qur'an recitation in Islamic culture.

In her studies ethnomusicologist K. Nelson consider purely musical issues (Nelson, K., 1985). The starting point for her monograph is the thesis

that the Qur'an recitation is the production of divine and human fortitude. In the focus of this scientific view there is the theory of declamation, where we find the relationship between affective forces of sound in everyday life and in religious practice (this issue is discussed on the Cairo material).

Referring to the ideas drawn from classical Muslim theology, projected on her own scientific experiments, K. Nelson captures the artistic and expressive nuances of declamation, as well as the dynamics of psychic and emotional interaction between the reciters (*qurrā*) and their audience, in order to detect certain criteria distinguishing the actual music and recitation. At the same time the following aspects are brought forward: 1) the perception of a reciter as an artist, 2) the reaction of the audience, 3) the interaction between the reciter and the audience, 4) therapeutic possibilities of professional reciters, who are some sort of conductors of divine energy contained in the words of the Qur'an and detectable by reciters, who use various means of melody (Nelson, 1985).

So, the overall picture of the music research in Muslim culture is multifaceted. It covers religious, philosophical, historical, musical, orthoepic, and regional aspects of the study. It shows that by now in various fields of the humanities there have been developed sufficient prerequisites for raising the question about the uniqueness of the musical canon in the Muslim cult.

<sup>1</sup> In Siberia, the Tatar population growth was mainly due to the relocation of the Volga-Ural Tatars. Thanks to the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway and the conduct of the Stolypin agrarian reform the flow of migrants to Siberia from different provinces of Russia sharply increased, including migrants from the Kazan and Ufa regions. It was during this period there appeared many Tatar villages in the Yenisei Governorate. For example, from 1907 to 1910, there were formed 5 mono-ethnic Tatar settlements, and in 1911-1912 their number was 47.

The revolutionary events of 1917 and the Civil War were critical events in the life of the Tatar population of Siberia. Immediately after the expulsion of Kolchak's forces in the Yenisei Governorate there were set up special Tatar sections in the structure of the Party and Soviet bodies, as well as in the system of public education.

After the terrible famine of the early 1920s that hit the Volga region, Siberia enjoyed the influx of refugees and in-migrants, including the Tatars. Krasnoyarsk's citizens gave shelter to tens of thousands of “*golodbezhtsy*” (refugees from starvation), many of whom remained there permanently.

In the following times, there has been steady growth of the Tatar population. The maximum number of Tatar population was in the end of 1980s – 54 thousand people.

- <sup>2</sup> Bait is an epic and lyrical genre of the Tatar and Bashkir folklore. Baits are composed typically of quatrains with rhymes of types aaba, abcb. Baits have mainly historical and legendary, song and fairytale content.
- <sup>3</sup> Munadzhat is one of the oldest genres of music and poetry of the Tatars. The word "munadzhat" is of Arab origin. The dictionary explains its meaning as follows: 1. Night prayer, secret prayer; 2. Religious hymn; 3. Secret conversation. In the Tatar folklore "munadzhat" is understood as a particular genre of music and poetry, which has the character of a monologue-reflection or a monologue-complaint.
- <sup>4</sup> Here is one of explanations of this arbitrariness. It should be known that His Holiness Moses (Musa), peace be upon him! - [ranked as] the prophet, peace be upon him over us, made the night prayer in parda (mode) Ushshak (Uššaq). Prophet David (Dawood, or Daud) sang Psalm in parda Husseini. Prophet Muhammad, the Messenger of God – peace be upon him! – recited the Qur'an as a singsong in parda Rahab. The head of the faithful, the first Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib – peace be upon him! – recited the Qur'an as a singsong in parda Ajam (Ājām). Prophet Noah (Nuh) – peace be upon him! – sang funeral songs in Segah. Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim) – peace be upon him! – not dead in the fire, made the night prayers in Nava. Prophet Ishmael (Ismail) – peace be upon him! – made the night prayer in time of peace in the maqam Bogorg. Prophet Joseph (Yusuf) – peace be upon him! – made the night prayer at the bottom of a well in parda Arak. Prophet Solomon (Sulaiman) – peace be upon him! – in the perfect melody of Husseini performed nonmetrical vocalization. Prophet Job – peace be upon him! – recited the Qur'an mostly in Nouruz Haara (Amir-khan kawkabi Risalah-I musigi. Azerbaijan Milli Akademiyasinin Alyazma Institutu. B-5006).
- <sup>5</sup> In a similar perspective, the articulating issues are also seen through the prism of Tajwid in the works of Faruki (L. Faruki) and K. Nelson (K. Nelson), devoted to the Arab tradition, and in the work of G.R. Sajfullina, who focused on the material of the Tatar religious music.

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## **Интонирование Корана как музыковедческая проблема**

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*Изучение музыки в контексте религиозных традиций является одним из весьма востребованных направлений в современном музыкознании. Однако разные традиции получают научное осмысление в той или иной мере. В частности, в отечественной музыкальной науке мусульманская традиция разработана в меньшей степени, нежели традиция христианская. Своеобразие музыкального интонирования коранических текстов обычно определяют такими понятиями, как «мелодекламация», «напевное чтение». Представляется, однако, что эти понятия не в полной мере отражают суть музыкального начала в религиозной практике ислама. В данной статье представлена картина взглядов на проблему интонирования Корана с научной точки зрения, прежде всего – с точки зрения этномузыкознания и востоковедения.*

*Ключевые слова: мусульманская теология, интонирование Корана, таджвид, макам, музыкально-культурная традиция татар-мусульман.*

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