

Comparative Study of Musical Gestures and Corporeality: The Case of Long-Necked Lutes in Iran and Central Asia

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The geopolitical divisions today distinguish different countries in Central Asia, but it should be noted that between the geo-cultural areas (anthropological, linguistic and musical) the boundaries remain vague. It should be mentioned that many of the studies on the musical traditions carried on the vast area of Iran and Central Asia focus on one region, a particular tradition or a specific geo-cultural area, without undertaking a comparative study of all musical traditions present in this vast zone. However, a comparative approach allows better understanding of singularity in one hand and the common points in another.

This communication approaches the question of musical gesture in a particular angle of the comparative study of the instrumental gestures and the playing techniques, combined with the question of the body. We start with a study of playing techniques of the long-necked lutes (*tār*, *dotār*, *setār*, *rubāb*, *shurangiz* and *tanbur*) from Iran and Central Asia, by trying to define the complete inventory of gestures and techniques used to play these instruments. Our approach focus on the study of instrumental gesture in various contexts of production, ranging from laboratory conditions to field research in Iran and Central Asia. Our data collection includes interviews with performers, video recordings, 2D and 3D gesture and motion capture and analysis. Our approach uses an adaptation of the methods mainly used in linguistics, especially the paradigmatic analysis, applied to the domain of musical gestures study.

According to our analysis on musical gestures in the playing of the Iranian and the Central Asian lutes, we find a series of common playing techniques but also techniques that are associated with a specific tradition and which can not be found in the other neighbouring cultures. However, each musician develops his own technique to create his own “signature”.

The analysis of the musical gestures can reveal not only the facts concerning interaction between man and the musical instrument but also, at the anthropological level, on how those musical traditions in contact, differentiate one from another by adopting a particular gesture in playing techniques or even a whole separate body posture. So in a broad continuum which includes various musical traditions, or even wider, different cultural areas in contact in the region, some techniques are the “distinctive features” which allows to distinguish between different traditions. These features manifest not only by the particularities in the musical gestures but also by a whole different definition of corporeality and cultural image of the body of the musicians.