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ON THE NOTATION OF AZERBAIJANI TAR PERFORMANCE TECHNIQUES

Abstract. The study of the Azerbaijani tar and its performance technique has long been a focal point for scholars. In particular, the exploration of its primary playing techniques – the plectrum (*mizrab*) and finger (*barmaq*) methods holds significant scholarly value. However, there remains a lack of extensive scientific research aimed at developing a standardized notation system to represent these techniques in written form. While some sources have proposed systems of musical notation, they are generally confined to the context of the individual work, with each author applying a different approach. This variation is a result of the absence of a unified research framework for systematizing the tar’s playing techniques within a single notation system. As such, the establishment of a standardized notation system for the tar remains a relevant and pressing issue. For the first time, this article offers detailed methodological explanations of the performance characteristics of both the plectrum (*döymə, tərs, dəmli*) and finger (*dartma, lal barmaq, barmaq döymə*) techniques of the tar. Furthermore, by referencing existing systems of international music notation, symbols have been assigned to these techniques based on their distinct sound characteristics. To support these findings, notational examples based on the tar’s performance in Azerbaijani folk dances and mugham music are presented.

Key words: Azerbaijani tar performance, playing techniques, musical notation, *mizrab* (plectrum) techniques, finger methods.

Introduction. The tar, which occupies a central place in Azerbaijani musical culture, along with its performance traditions, has been the subject of sustained research interest. In this regard, new compositions of the

tar continue to emerge in the contemporary period and are the subject of academic research. Nevertheless, one of the most pressing challenges in the notation of works within the *tar* repertoire (including both composer pieces and folk transcriptions) is the lack of explicit indication of playing methods. Frequently, only the melodic line is written down, while the execution of performance methods is left to the interpretive freedom of the performer. Each musician interprets the work according to their own approach, employing various performance techniques – particularly plectrum (*mizrab*) and finger playing. The fundamental reason for this situation is the lack of a standardized notation system specifically designed to represent these techniques. While some sources have proposed systems of musical notation [1; 2; 3; 4; 5], they are generally confined to the context of the individual work, with each author applying a different approach. This variation is a result of the absence of unified research framework for systematizing the *tar*'s playing techniques within a single notation system. As such, the establishment of a standardized notation system for the *tar* remains a relevant and pressing issue.

The interpretation of the main material. The Azerbaijani *tar* is distinguished by a wide range of playing techniques. In the present study, particular attention is devoted to the examination of specific finger methods – *dartma*, *lal barmaq*, *barmaq döymə* as well as *mizrab* (plectrum) techniques such as *döymə*, *tərs*, and *dəmlı*. These techniques are extensively employed in the practice of *tar* performers and constitute an essential component of their artistic activity.

Döymə (in Azerbaijani, “strike”) represents a specific technique of to the downward stroke. In this method, the plectrum strikes the string a hammering manner, executed exclusively from above. In *tar* performance, a conventional downward stroke is termed *üst mizrab*. When played with greater force and emphasis, this stroke corresponds to the nuance of accent. In contrast, *döymə mizrab* reveals certain technical distinctions: the angle at which the plectrum held and the manner of striking the string are altered. Unlike the ordinary stroke, *döymə* technique involves a somewhat oblique impact of the plectrum against the string, producing a sharper and more penetrating timbre. For the notation of this technique, we consider the use the symbol “**Λ**” (*marcato*) to be appropriate. The term “*marcato*” (from French *martelé*, “to hammer”) is traditionally employed Western music to indicate strongly accented passages. Similar to *sforzando*, it suggests a marked articulation,

where each note is played with a forceful attack [6, p. 25]. We consider that, in essence and in terms of its acoustic characteristics, “marcato” closely corresponds to “*döymə*” technique, and the symbol thus appropriately represents that plectrum method.

“*Tərs*” (in Azerbaijani, “reverse”) mizrab is a specialized upward striking technique. In instrumental mugham performance, the up stroke (*alt mizrab*) is executed in a specific manner that differs from the ordinary upward stroke. Here, the grip of the plectrum and the angle of the stroke are of particular importance. The strokes are delivered from beneath the strings in a somewhat diagonal manner. This produces a “plucking” effect, in which each note sounds distinct, accented, and sharp. Therefore, to indicate *tərs* in notation, the use of the staccatissimo symbol “▼” is considered appropriate. Staccatissimo denotes a markedly short, accented, and sharp execution, more pronounced than ordinary staccato [8, p. 5-6]. We consider that, in essence, this performance technique closely corresponds to the acoustic characteristics of the *tərs mizrab* and the symbol fully represents this technique.

Dəmli mizrab is a technique widely used in folk music, associated with the concept of “sustaining a note”, traditionally performed by an accompanying musician. In solo tar performance, this function is realized through the *dəmli mizrab* technique. Specifically, while playing the melodic line, a secondary tone is continuously repeated to sustain a drone. This sustained sound may be held for an extended duration in the lower register, occasionally in the upper register, or repeated successively. This method manifests in two forms: either simultaneously with the melodic movement or alternately with it in a continuous, drone-like manner. In this way, the secondary tone functions as an organ point. The sustaining sound may occur on the same string group as the melody or on separate string groups (Example 1).



Fig. 1. *Dəmli mizrab* technique

Dartma (in Azerbaijani, “to pull”) – a technique in which the strings are plucked using the fingers of the left hand without the involvement of a plectrum. During performance, the strings are sounded by the fingers of the left hand, which functions similarly to a plectrum. As a rule, the strings are pulled downward, corresponding to a type of “downward stroke” (*üst mizrab*) used with a plectrum. Compared to plectrum strokes, this technique produces a softer and weaker sound. The utilization of the left-hand fingers in the *dartma* technique is as follows (Example 2): a) if played on an open string, all fingers may be used; b) if the 1st finger is on the fret, the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th finger is used; c) if the 2nd finger is on the fret, the 3rd or 4th finger is used; d) if the 3rd finger is on the fret, only the 4th finger is used.

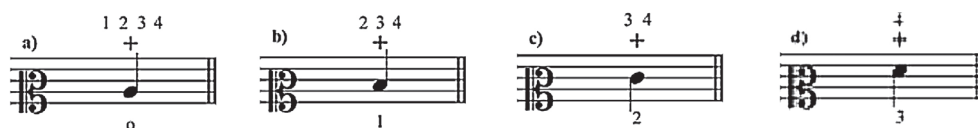


Fig. 2. *Dartma* finger technique

In the musical notation, the “+” symbol indicates that the passage is to be executed using *dartma* technique. In this case, two fingerings are indicated: the lower fingering denotes the finger placed on the fingerboard, while the upper one designates the finger that plucks the string. Moreover, this symbol is also employed in bowed string instruments to indicate left-hand pizzicato [6, p. 35; 7, p. 129]. In instrumental mugham performance, certain phrases are nevertheless executed within a defined metro-rhythmic framework. In such instances, within the musical line of the mugham (particularly in its melodic figuration), the use of bass (*bəm*) and ringing (*zəng*) strings in combination with *dartma* technique gives rise to specific rhythmic patterns (Example 3).



Fig. 3. Fragment from the Azerbaijani Mahur-Hindi mugham (*Üşşaq*)

“*Lal barmaq*” (in Azerbaijani, *lal* means “silent”, “mute”) – is a technique in which subsequent notes are produced without a plectrum stroke, relying instead on the vibration generated by the previous stroke. In this process, both principal and auxiliary tones are involved: the principal tone is articulated with the plectrum, while the subsequent pitch (auxiliary tones) is produced solely by placing the finger on the fret, utilizing the ongoing vibration. This results in a smoother, more fluid sound with a naturally decaying resonance. *Lal barmaq* technique plays a particularly important role in descending passages, repeated notes, and technical-virtuosic runs, serving as a means of creating ornamentation and embellishment (Example 4).



Fig. 4. Fragment from the Azerbaijani folk dance *Marali*

In many cases, performers also employ *mizrab* (plectrum) strokes within the *lal barmaq* technique. In faster passages, the “*lal barmaq*” notes are articulated with aid of plectrum strokes, resulting in tones that sound comparatively softer and less prominent than the principal melodic line. They thus fulfill a function of embellishment and melodic ornamentation. However, as a general rule, “*lal barmaq*” is applied exclusively with the *alt mizrab* (upstroke) (Example 5).



Fig. 5. Fragment from the Azerbaijani folk dance *Reyhani*

In the notation examples, “*lal barmaq*” notes are represented with smaller note heads. They are performed relatively shorter and with a light plectrum stroke, which brings them closer in character to the *lal barmaq* technique and distinguishes them from the main melodic line. The use of both types of

lal barmaq—without and with the plectrum—musical phrase and enriches the melodic line (Example 6).

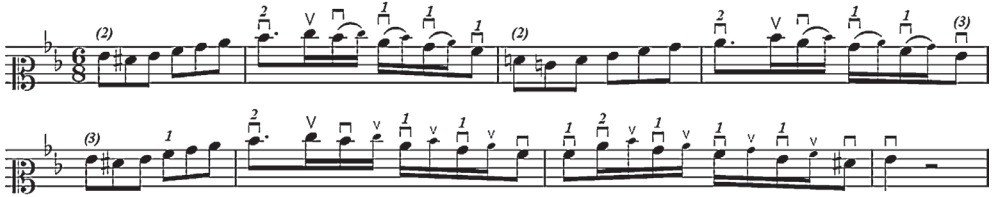


Fig. 6. Fragment from the Azerbaijani folk dance *Rəfiq*

“*Döymə*” (finger technique) – a plectrum-free performance method in which the fingers of the left hand strike the instrument’s neck, specifically the fingerboard. In this technique, the sound is produced not by plucking the strings or using the plectrum, but by forceful ginger strikes on the frets. In traditional tar playing, such plectrum-free finger passages are typically executed in combination with *sürüşdürmə* (sliding) (Example 7) and *dartma* (pulling) (Example 8) finger methods.

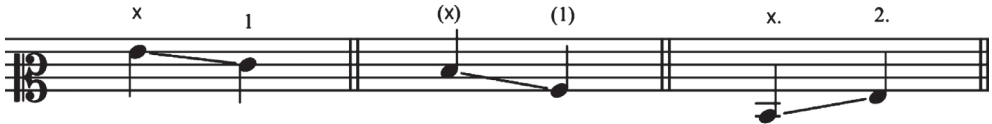


Fig. 7. *Barmaq döymə* with *sürüşdürmə* (sliding)

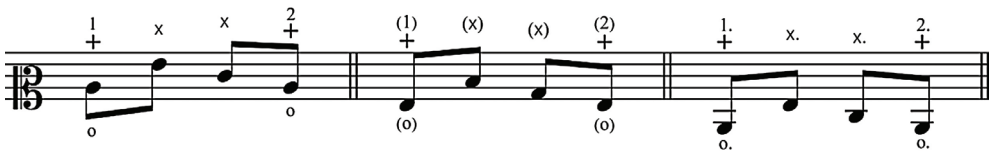


Fig. 8. *Barmaq döymə* and *dartma*

In the notation, notes indicated with the fingerings \times , (\times) və \times . corresponding to the string groups represent the *barmaq döymə* technique. In tar performance, *barmaq döymə* is primarily executed using the 2nd (middle) and 3rd (ring) fingers.

Conclusion. This article offers detailed methodological explanations of the performance characteristics of both the plectrum (*döymə, tərs, dəmli*) and finger (*dartma, lal barmaq, barmaq döymə*) techniques of the *tar*. Furthermore, by referencing existing systems of international music notation, symbols have been assigned to these techniques based on their distinct sound characteristics. The notation proposed in the article facilitates more efficient sight-reading for performers. At the same time, this article provides musicologists with precise methodological explanations regarding *tar* performance practice.

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AZƏRBAYCAN TAR İFAÇILIQ ÜSULLARININ NOTASIYASINA DAİR

Azərbaycan tarı və onun ifa texnikalarının öyrənilməsi tədqiqatçılar üçün daim diqqət mərkəzində olmuşdur. Xüsusən də tarın əsas çalğı texnikalarının – mizrab və barmaq üsullarının araşdırılması mühüm əhəmiyyət kəsb edir. Lakin həmin ifa üsullarının notasiyada göstərilməsi və not-ışarə sisteminin təyin edilməsi istiqamətində kifayət qədər elmi iş aparılmamışdır. Bir sıra mənbələrdə müəyyən not-ışarə sistemi təklif edilsə də, onlar yalnız həmin mənbənin çərçivəsində qalmış və hər bir müəllif fərqli yanaşmalar tətbiq etmişdir. Bu fərqlilik tarın ifa texnikalarının vahid not-ışarə sisteminə cəlb olunması istiqamətində tədqiqatın olmaması ilə əlaqələndir. Bu səbəblə də tar üçün standartlaşdırılmış notasiya sisteminin yaradılması hələ də aktuallığını qoruyan mühüm bir məsələdir. Bu məqalədə ilk dəfə olaraq, tarın həm mizrab (*döymə, tərs, dəmli*), həm də barmaqla (*dartma, lal barmaq, barmaq döymə*) çalğı texnikalarının ifa xüsusiyyətlərinə dair detallı metodoloji izahlar təqdim

edilir. Bundan əlavə beynəlxalq notasiyada mövcud olan işarələr sistemində müraciət edərək bu texnikalara onların səslənmə xüsusiyyətlərinə uyğun simvollar təyin edilmişdir. Bu nəticələrin dəstəklənməsi üçün tar ifaçılıq təcrübəsinə əsaslanan Azərbaycan xalq rəqsləri və muğam musiqisinin not nümunələri təqdim edilmişdir.

Açar sözlər: Azərbaycan tar ifaçılığı, çalğı texnikaları, notasiya, mizrab üsulları, barmaq metodları.

Канан Садыгов (Азербайджан)

О НОТАЦИИ ИСПОЛНИТЕЛЬСКИХ ПРИЁМОВ АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСКОГО ТАРА

Изучение азербайджанского тара и его исполнительских приёмов на протяжении долгого времени остаётся в центре внимания исследователей. Особое значение имеет исследование основных способов игры на таре – приёмов игры плектром (мизрабом) и пальцевой техники. Однако в направлении фиксации этих исполнительских приёмов в нотной записи и разработки соответствующей системы обозначений до настоящего времени не проведено достаточного количества научных работ. В ряде источников предлагались определённые системы нотации, однако они оставались в пределах данных публикаций, и каждый автор применял собственный подход. Такая разнородность обусловлена отсутствием комплексного исследования, направленного на формирование единой системы нотации исполнительских приёмов тара. По этой причине создание стандартизированной нотационной системы для тара остаётся актуальной научной задачей. В настоящей статье впервые представлены детальные методологические пояснения, касающиеся особенностей исполнения как мизрабной (*döymə, tərs, dəmli, barmaq döymə*), так и пальцевой (*dartma, lal barmaq*) техники игры на таре. Кроме того, с опорой на существующую систему международной нотации данным приёмам были сопоставлены символы, соответствующие их звуковым характеристикам. Для подтверждения полученных результатов приводятся нотные примеры азербайджанских народных танцев и мугамной музыки, основанные на исполнительской практике игры на таре.

Ключевые слова: исполнение на азербайджанском таре, исполнительские приёмы, нотация, техники мизраба (плектра), методы игры пальцами.