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**DEBATES ON MUSIC IN MUSLIM SOCIETY: HISTORICAL CONTINUITY
AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES**

Abstract. The article provides a comprehensive analysis of the historical development of theological and philosophical views on music within Islamic civilization, as well as their manifestations in contemporary Kazakhstani society. The study examines the formation of classical legal positions regarding the statuses of music: haram, makruh, and mubah. Particular attention is given to the influence of melody on the human spiritual world within the framework of Islamic aesthetics and Sufi tradition, considering the works of thinkers such as al-Ghazali, al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Turkic Sufi poetry. Music is analyzed as a means of moral education and ethical self-improvement. Furthermore, contemporary approaches of official religious institutions to evaluating music are discussed, taking into account its content and social impact. In the Kazakhstani context, the historical and cultural continuity between the national musical heritage — dombra-küy, terme — and Islamic values is emphasized, highlighting the discrepancy between radical discourses and traditional religious worldviews. The article proposes a universal principle for the Sharia-based assessment of music: melody is inherently neutral in its value, while its religious and ethical status is determined by its content, performance context, and societal influence. This approach allows for the harmonization of spiritual traditions with contemporary cultural practices, creating a foundation for a rational and ethically justified perception of music in Islamic society.

Keywords: Islam, music, fiqh, Sufism, national tradition.

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Мұсылман қоғамында музыка туралы пікірталастар: тарихи сабақтастық пен қазіргі көзқарастар

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Андатпа. Мақалада ислам өркениетінде музыканы теологиялық және философиялық тұрғыдан қарастырудың тарихи дамуы, сондай-ақ оның қазіргі Қазақстан қоғамындағы көріністері кешенді түрде талданады. Зерттеу музыкаға қатысты классикалық құқықтық ұстанымдардың — харам, макрух және мубах — қалыптасуын қамтиды. Арнайы назар мелодияның адамның рухани әлеміне әсеріне аударылады, бұл ислам эстетикасы мен суфий дәстүрі аясында, аль-Газали, әл-Фараби, Ибн Сина сияқты ойшылдардың еңбектері және түркі суфий поэзиясы арқылы қарастырылады. Музыка жеке адамның адамгершілік тәрбиесі мен этикалық кемелдену құралы ретінде талданады. Сонымен қатар, музыкаға ресми діни институттардың қазіргі заманғы көзқарастары, оның мазмұны мен әлеуметтік әсерін ескере отырып қарастырылады. Қазақстан контекстінде ұлттық музыкалық мұра — домбыра күйі, терме — мен исламдық құндылықтар арасындағы тарихи-мәдени сабақтастық айқындалады, радикалды дискурстардың дәстүрлі діни көзқараспен сәйкес келмейтіні көрсетіледі. Мақала музыкаға қатысты шарифаттық бағалаудың әмбебап принципін ұсынады: мелодия бастапқыда аксиологиялық тұрғыдан бейтарап болып саналады, ал оның діни-этикалық статусы мазмұнына, орындау контекстіне және қоғамға әсеріне байланысты анықталады. Мұндай тәсіл рухани дәстүрлерді заманауи мәдени практикалармен үйлестіруге мүмкіндік береді, ислам қоғамында музыканы ақылға сыятын және этикалық тұрғыдан негізделген қабылдаудың негізін жасайды.

Кілт сөздер: ислам, музыка, фикһ, сопылық, ұлттық дәстүр.

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Дискуссии о музыке в мусульманском обществе: историческая преемственность и современные подходы

Аннотация. В статье проводится комплексный анализ исторического развития теологических и философских взглядов на музыку в исламской цивилизации, а также их проявлений в современном казахстанском обществе. Исследование охватывает формирование классических правовых позиций относительно статусов музыки: харам, макрух и мубах. Особое внимание уделяется влиянию мелодии на духовный мир человека в рамках исламской эстетики и суфийской традиции, рассматривая труды таких мыслителей, как аль-Газали, аль-Фараби, Ибн Сина, а также тюркскую суфийскую поэзию. Музыка анализируется как средство нравственного воспитания и этического совершенствования личности. Кроме того, рассматриваются современные подходы официальных религиозных институтов к оценке музыки с учётом её содержания и социального воздействия. В казахстанском контексте подчёркивается историко-культурная преемственность между национальным музыкальным наследием — домбра-күй, терме — и исламскими ценностями, демонстрируя несоответствие радикальных дискурсов традиционному религиозному мировоззрению. Статья выдвигает универсальный принцип шариатской оценки музыки: мелодия изначально нейтральна по своей ценности, а её религиозно-этический статус определяется содержанием, контекстом исполнения и влиянием на общество. Такой подход позволяет гармонизировать духовные традиции с современными культурными практиками, создавая основу для разумного и этически обоснованного восприятия музыки в исламском обществе.

Ключевые слова: ислам, музыка, фикһ, суфизм, национальная традиция.

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Müslüman Toplumunda Müzik Üzerine Tartışmalar: Tarihî Süreklilik ve Güncel Yaklaşımlar

Özet. Makale, İslam medeniyetinde müziğe ilişkin teolojik ve felsefi görüşlerin tarihsel gelişimini ve bunların günümüz Kazakistan toplumundaki yansımalarını kapsamlı bir şekilde analiz etmektedir. Araştırma, müziğin haram, mekruh ve mubah statüleri ile ilgili klasik hukuki pozisyonların oluşumunu ele almaktadır. Özellikle melodinin insanın ruh dünyası üzerindeki etkisi, İslami estetik ve tasavvuf geleneği çerçevesinde, Gazali, Farabi, İbn Sina gibi düşünürlerin eserleri ve Türk tasavvuf şiiri örnekleri üzerinden incelenmektedir. Müzik, ahlaki eğitim ve bireyin etik olgunlaşması aracı olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Ayrıca, resmi dini kurumların müziği içerik ve sosyal etkileri bağlamında değerlendirme konusundaki modern yaklaşımları da ele alınmaktadır. Kazakistan bağlamında, ulusal müzik mirası — dombra-küy, terme — ile İslami değerler arasındaki tarihî ve kültürel süreklilik vurgulanmakta, radikal söylemlerin geleneksel dini bakışla uyumsuzluğu gösterilmektedir. Makale, müziğin şariat açısından evrensel bir değerlendirme ilkesini ortaya koymaktadır: Melodi doğası gereği değer açısından nötrdür; dini ve etik statüsü ise içeriği, icra bağlamı ve toplumsal etkisine göre belirlenir. Bu yaklaşım, manevi gelenekleri modern kültürel uygulamalarla uyumlu hale getirerek İslam toplumunda müziğin bilinçli ve etik temelli algılanmasına zemin hazırlamaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: İslam, müzik, fıkıh, tasavvuf, millî gelenek.

Introduction

Music is one of the most complex and long-debated issues within the Muslim community. Among traditional Islamic scholars, there is no uniform position: some regard music as entirely prohibited, while others argue that its legal status should be evaluated according to its purpose and content. In the modern era, the debate surrounding music has acquired new dimensions, as under conditions of globalization musical culture has become widespread and its socio-cultural role has significantly increased. The issue of music is addressed both from theological and philosophical perspectives. This article analyzes the dialogue between traditional Islamic views on music and contemporary interpretations, and also examines the situation within Kazakhstani society. The relevance of debates on music is determined by the question of the place of art and tradition in the modern Muslim world. A number of conservative groups consider music to be contrary to Islam and advocate for its complete prohibition, whereas many scholars emphasize the natural affinity of music with human nature and regard an absolute ban as unjustified. In fact, throughout the history of Islamic civilization, the topic of music has been so widely debated that it may be described as “one of the most controversial issues.” Therefore, studying the relationship between traditional religious positions and contemporary demands is essential for understanding the nature of these debates.

Research Methods

This article employs comparative-historical and textual methods of analysis. By comparing classical and contemporary works of Islamic scholars, Qur’anic verses, hadiths, madhhab-based fatwas, and Sufi sources, differences in interpretation were identified. In addition, methodological shortcomings of previous studies were examined, and a broad historical-cultural context as well as an interdisciplinary approach were applied to substantiate the conclusions.

Discussion

Traditional Views on Music in Islam

According to traditional perceptions formed in the early period of Islam, music—especially the use of musical instruments—was in most cases not encouraged. Classical works of Islamic law widely reflect the view that music in general is prohibited (Maceda, 2001). In this regard, Muslim scholars relied on certain Qur’anic and hadith texts. For example, the expression *lahw al-hadith* (“idle, useless talk”) in verse 6 of *Sūrat Luqmān* was interpreted by some early exegetes as a reference to music and singing (Alyautdinov, 2010).

In addition, a number of hadith reports transmitted from the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) condemn entertainment involving musical instruments. Thus, one hadith states that the Prophet (peace be upon him) warned: “Some groups from my ummah will consider as lawful wine, adultery, and musical instruments” (al-Bukhari, “Ashribah,” 5590). Relying on such verses and hadiths, medieval scholars approached music with caution, arguing that it often leads a person to sinful acts and idleness.

The classical position of the Sunni legal schools likewise tended to classify music as either forbidden (*haram*) or reprehensible (*makruh*). The works of the imams of the four madhhabs repeatedly emphasize a strict prohibition on playing and listening to musical instruments (Ubabuddin et al., 2025). For instance, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa regarded music—especially songs accompanied by instruments—as *makruh*, and some later Hanafi scholars interpreted this as “*makruh* close to *haram*” (“Is listening to songs *haram*?”, 2021). Imam Mālik and Imam al-Shāfi‘ī also prohibited music associated with worldly amusement, allowing only limited exceptions—such as the use of the frame drum (*daf*) in specific situations. In the Hanbali school the position was even stricter: many Hanbali scholars considered the use of any musical instruments *haram*. The traditional view permitted only the *daf* at weddings, on the two ‘Īd festivals, and on other joyful occasions (IslamWeb, 2012).

In the history of Islamic jurisprudence, one also encounters the view that the imams of the four madhhabs, along with a number of other authoritative scholars, agreed that “all forms of music are prohibited, except the *daf* on days of festivals and celebrations.” Thus, within the traditional sharia-based approach, the main concern was not music as a phenomenon per se, but the environment surrounding it—alcohol consumption, idle entertainment, frivolous behavior, and other actions leading to sin.

At the same time, some medieval scholars held more flexible views regarding the legal status of music. For example, the prominent Islamic thinker Imam al-Ghazālī opposed a total ban on music and singing, emphasizing the need to consider their spiritual impact. As a representative of the Shāfi‘ī school, in his *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* he discusses in detail the conditions and ethical boundaries of listening to music and concludes that if music does not distract a person from worship, but instead supports one’s spiritual state, then listening to it is permissible (Ubabuddin et al., 2025).

The well-known Andalusian jurist Ibn Ḥazm likewise argued that neither the Qur’an nor the hadith contains unequivocal texts that directly prohibit music as such; therefore, he considered singing and music permissible (Alyautdinov, 2010). Moreover, many Sufi shaykhs and spiritual poets (Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, Yunus Emre, Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, and others) viewed music as a means of awakening faith in the heart and used it in *dhikr* and other forms of spiritual practice. Nevertheless, it can be noted that the predominant trend in medieval thought treated music with caution, regarding it as a *mushtabih* (dubious) matter—“between the permissible and the forbidden.”

The Positions of Islamic Legal Schools on Music

To understand the controversies surrounding music, it is necessary to consider separately the positions of the Islamic legal schools (*madhhabs*). According to the Hanafi *madhhab*, music is permitted only in very limited forms. Most Hanafi scholars disapproved of playing musical

instruments and performing songs for entertainment. As noted above, Imam Abū Ḥanīfa viewed this as *makrūh*, that is, an undesirable act. Later Hanafi scholars often tightened this assessment, interpreting it as “*makrūh* close to *harām*.” Nevertheless, within the Hanafi tradition there are also opinions of individual scholars who permitted listening to *zhr* (epic songs) and religious *madh* (praise chants) performed without instrumental accompaniment (Bıyık, 2020).

Scholars of the Maliki madhhab held similar positions. Early Maliki sources sometimes show a more lenient attitude toward songs and poetic forms performed without instruments, provided their content is morally neutral. In general, however, Malikis considered entertainment music to be blameworthy and sinful. According to the Maliki approach, if music does not generate excessive emotional attachment and does not lead to heedlessness, it cannot be declared strictly prohibited; yet excessive involvement in it is regarded as sinful. For example, Malikis considered certain types of light flute or reed-pipe music *makrūh* on the condition that they were not used excessively, whereas strong attachment to music and most other instruments (stringed instruments, etc.) were treated as *harām* (Nafiz, 2025).

The classical position of the Shāfi‘ī madhhab also tended toward prohibition. It is known that Imam al-Shāfi‘ī personally disapproved of music and singing. However, some Shāfi‘ī scholars—such as Imam al-Ghazālī—reconsidered the legal status of music and, under certain conditions, allowed its use.

Among the madhhabs, the Hanbali school is generally regarded as the strictest with respect to music. Prominent Hanbali figures such as Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn al-Qayyim wrote works in which they declared music and musical instruments to be almost entirely *harām*. They relied on certain Prophetic reports and argued that music hardens the heart and awakens base desires (Farahat, 2023). Nevertheless, alternative assessments also existed within the Hanbali school. Thus, Ibn al-Qayyim, while rejecting some reports cited by Hanafi scholars in support of permissibility, nevertheless acknowledged that singing without instrumental accompaniment, under certain conditions, could be regarded as permissible by some jurists.

Overall, if we generalize the opinions found in the *fiqh* tradition of the four Sunni madhhabs, three main approaches to evaluating music can be distinguished. First, some scholars held that music in any form—whether with instruments or without—was entirely *harām*. Second, another group permitted singing without instrumental accompaniment as lawful, while considering songs with instruments to be prohibited. Third, some scholars maintained that music, including with instruments, could be permissible if its content does not encourage immoral acts. For example, the contemporary authoritative scholar Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī notes: “From the perspective of the sharia, singing is fundamentally permissible, since there is no sound proof that directly forbids it. The hadiths cited as evidence for prohibiting music are either weak or open to more than one interpretation” (Idris bin Awang et al., 2009). Similarly, the prominent medieval scholar ‘Izz al-Dīn Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām wrote that although the dominant view of the four madhhabs classifies playing and listening to string instruments as *harām*, in essence this is not a major sin; and even some Companions and Successors permitted music, which demonstrates the diversity of sharia-based opinions. Imam al-Ghazālī likewise emphasized that, based on Qur’anic and hadith texts, listening to music with percussion instruments (the *daf*, etc.) and even beginning to dance to the rhythm of sticks is in itself *mubāḥ*; what is prohibited are only indecent songs that lead to heedlessness, as well as string and wind instruments. If, however, one claims that music is prohibited merely because it produces pleasure, then everything that brings a person pleasure would have to be prohibited.

Thus, although a strict approach to music predominated in the history of Islamic law, exceptions and limited forms of permissibility have always existed. Across all madhhabs, it was recognized that music that does not contradict sharia norms and has religious significance (for example, *mawlid* recitations or the *adhān*) may be considered permissible under certain conditions. Sound hadiths report that the Prophet (peace be upon him) allowed beating the *daf* at weddings in order to announce them (al-Bukhari, “*Nikāḥ*,” 5147), and that he did not forbid girls to sing on the

days of ʿĪd al-Aḍḥā and ʿĪd al-Fiṭr (Muslim, “Ṣalāt,” 892). Therefore, the traditional Islamic approach is not a total negation of music, but rather an assessment of its moral and ethical consequences.

Music in Philosophical and Sufi Perspectives

Limiting the discussion of music exclusively to the legal sphere fails to encompass its spiritual and philosophical dimensions. In Islamic civilization, music was examined not only in terms of permissibility or prohibition, but also as a phenomenon of art and aesthetics. Early Muslim thinkers regarded music as one of the branches of knowledge. It is well known that in the eighth and ninth centuries, scholars in Baghdad translated Greek and Persian treatises on music into Arabic and studied its mathematical foundations—namely, the arithmetic and geometry of musical intervals (Qabyłkanova, 2023). The philosopher-scientist al-Farabi, in his *Great Book of Music* (*Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr*), conducted an in-depth study of musical theory and systematized it as a domain of knowledge and art. Thus, in medieval Muslim thought, music was viewed as a phenomenon influencing human cognition and education.

Since the concept of beauty (aesthetics) occupies a special place in Islamic philosophy, music also received a certain positive evaluation. Many thinkers pointed out that even the recitation of the Qurʾān is performed in melodious maqāmāt, and that the beauty of the voice is important in the call to prayer (adhān). Although this is not music in the strict sense, it demonstrates the beneficial impact of sound and vocal art on human nature. In the Sufi tradition, music held a distinctive role as a spiritual instrument. Sufis employed it in samāʿ rituals—forms of dhikr involving chanting, melodies, and sometimes rhythmic movements (such as kumra among Turkic peoples, qawwali in the Indian subcontinent, or the whirling of the Mevlevi dervishes in Turkey). It is believed that Khoja Ahmed Yasawi allowed his hikmets to be performed with accompaniment by the kobyz or dombra, using musical motifs for dhikr and spiritual instruction (Harris, 2019). This indicates that in Sufism music was regarded as a means of spiritual therapy and purification of the heart.

Prominent Islamic philosophers sought to understand more deeply the secret of music’s effect on the heart. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), analyzing the categories of beauty and love, observed that just as the human eye delights in a beautiful form, the ear seeks harmonious sound. He wrote that “the inclination toward beauty is a natural human quality, and the highest beauty is revealed in love for God,” and that delight in melody may lead to the perception of divine beauty (Spahic, 2024). The philosopher-scientist Ibn al-Haytham also emphasized that the perception of beauty is a process of the soul: when a particular form or sound evokes a pleasant feeling, the soul recognizes it as beautiful. This idea was further developed by al-Ghazali and other thinkers, who explained the relationship between what pleases the external senses and what brings joy to the heart as the locus of spiritual beauty (Spahic, 2024).

The relationship between music and spirituality was described particularly eloquently by Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. In his *Kīmīyā-yi Saʿādat* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*), he devotes a separate chapter to music and dance, explaining their effect on the heart. According to al-Ghazali, “the human heart is like flint, within which lies a fire created by God. Music and harmonious sounds kindle this inner fire. Melodious sounds are reflections of the beauty of the spiritual world (ʿālam al-arwāh). They remind a person of his spiritual origin and of the realm from which his soul comes. Therefore, music stirs the heart deeply and brings it to a state of ecstasy—an unfamiliar joy.” According to al-Ghazali, the effect of music and dance is connected to human nature itself: people with tender and sensitive hearts may experience elevated states filled with joy and love, whereas those with “hardened” hearts do not perceive this. “Music intensifies the love already present in the heart—if there is love for God within it, music inflames the fire of divine love; but if the heart is filled with passions, music merely strengthens base desires.”

On this basis, al-Ghazali viewed music as a mirror of a person’s inner state and as an instrument that amplifies the feelings already present in the heart. If faith resides in the heart, music

strengthens it; if the heart is governed by passions, music awakens those passions. He summarizes his view with a vivid analogy: “If a person possesses love for God, then engaging in what increases that love is praiseworthy. But if the heart is consumed by worldly greed, music will only intensify it, and for such a person music becomes haram. Yet if one listens to music without evil thoughts, merely for pleasant relaxation, it is neutral and not sinful. Just as there is no sin in enjoying the singing of birds or rejoicing in the beauty of nature, so a pleasant melodic sound in itself carries no sin” (Ghazālī, 2010).

As can be seen, in Islamic philosophy and the Sufi tradition music is evaluated not from the standpoint of outright prohibition, but in terms of its impact on the human spiritual world—whether positive or negative. When used in an appropriate context and with wholesome content, music may serve as a means of drawing closer to God. Sufi poetry and religious hymns (*ilāhī*) have for centuries played an important role in the spiritual formation of Muslims. For instance, the musical heritage of Turkic Sufism—Yasawi’s *Dīwān-i Hikmet*, as well as the Kazakh zhyrau tradition and their *terme* chants—conveyed religious and ethical ideas through melody and word. Steppe thinkers such as Bukhar Zhyrau and Aktamberdi Zhyrau transmitted moral and spiritual values through the *dombra*—an instrument that became a symbol of national ethics and aesthetics. All these phenomena demonstrate that in certain regions Islam harmoniously intertwined with local musical culture, fostering a positive attitude toward music. It is no coincidence that many authoritative shaykhs emphasized: “Islam has never been an enemy of beauty and art.”

Contemporary Debates and Fatwas

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Islamic discussions on music have continued at a new level. On the one hand, conservative movements—such as certain circles in Saudi Arabia or the Taliban in Afghanistan—continue to uphold a strict prohibition of music. On the other hand, official theologians and intellectuals in many Muslim countries adopt a more moderate position. With the development of modern technology and mass culture, music has become an integral part of the lives of Muslim youth. Under such circumstances, a number of scholars emphasize that “declaring music entirely haram is unnatural; excessive prohibition only increases young people’s interest,” and advocate for fatwas that take real social conditions into account.

For example, the Malaysian scholar Spahic Omer writes: “A total prohibition of music contradicts human nature and ultimately leads to negative consequences. The most appropriate approach is to recognize moderate, morally sound music as part of our lives and to create lawful opportunities for meeting the aesthetic needs of youth.” Indeed, since contemporary society cannot exist without music, Islamic scholars increasingly apply the principle of “removing greater harm by means of lesser harm” (*al-ashadd yuzāl bi al-ḍarar al-akhaḥf*), preferring limitation and regulation rather than outright prohibition. A mass ban on music among youth in modern conditions is not only extremely difficult to implement but often ineffective. Hence, the emphasis is increasingly placed on reasonable and practical solutions rather than categorical prohibitions.

In a number of Muslim countries, official fatwa bodies have adopted balanced positions on music. For instance, in 2017 the Higher Council for Religious Affairs of Turkey (Diyanet) issued a special fatwa stating: “There is no evidence in the Qur’an or the Sunnah that listening to or engaging in music is in itself sinful. On the contrary, certain statements of the Prophet indicate the fundamental permissibility of music. Therefore, musical forms that contradict the principles of faith, worship, and morality, or that lead to sinful acts, are haram. Music that does not contradict Islamic norms and does not lead to prohibited actions is not condemned from the perspective of the sharia” (Din İşleri Yüksek Kurulu, 2017). The fatwa also cites hadiths indicating that the Prophet (peace be upon him) permitted the beating of the *daf* at weddings and did not forbid girls from singing on festival days. Based on this, it concludes that music in general is not absolutely prohibited (*mutlaq haram*), but by its nature falls into the category of *mubah* (permissible).

Similar positions have been expressed by scholars of al-Azhar University (Egypt), the Qatari scholar Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and the muftiates of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian

countries. In recent decades, they have emphasized that “music as such is not prohibited; its evaluation depends on content, context, and impact” (Al-Azhar Grand Mufti’s Office, n.d.).

In contemporary Muslim society, developments in the musical sphere can be broadly divided into two directions. The first is traditional Islamic melodies and nasheeds (religious chants). In this genre, musical instruments are used sparingly (primarily the daf, drums, or purely vocal a cappella performances), and the lyrics focus on praise of God, the Prophet, or moral and spiritual themes. Examples include Arabic nasheeds and Turkic ilāhīs. Many scholars view this genre as a permissible and even beneficial alternative to entertainment music.

The second direction involves infusing contemporary popular music styles with Muslim content. Over the past decade, performers such as Maher Zain and Sami Yusuf have gained wide popularity, performing songs with Islamic themes in pop, rock, or rap styles. Some artists use full instrumental arrangements, while others prefer a cappella vocal ensembles. Such genres are often seen as a means of bringing Islamic values closer to youth.

At the same time, conservative groups express opposition to these trends. For example, some Salafi and Taliban religious leaders in Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan declare all music haram and impose bans on its use in public spaces. It is known that under Taliban rule in Afghanistan in the 1990s, music was completely banned, and there were cases of punishment for listening to it (Saber, 2023). After returning to power in 2021, the Taliban again introduced restrictions on music in public spaces. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, a specific policy is in place: Western pop and rock genres are restricted and censored as “incompatible with the spirit of Islam,” while traditional Persian and religious music is supported by the state. Thus, in certain countries, attempts to suppress “modern Western music” are interpreted as a return to cultural roots and resistance to Western expansion.

Overall, in the contemporary Muslim world considerable attention is paid to the moral character of music. Islamic scholars emphasize the thesis that “the harm of music lies in its haram content,” and call not for total prohibition but for directing musical culture into constructive channels, especially in youth education. Music therapy, recognized by modern medicine, demonstrates that soft classical and natural melodies reduce stress and improve emotional well-being. On this basis, theologians note that Islam approves of art and knowledge that positively influence the human psyche.

For example, in several developed countries hospital patients undergo treatment accompanied by classical music, which has a positive effect on hormonal balance (Zholdybayuly, 2014). Moreover, historical sources indicate that during the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him), Muslims used percussion instruments to raise the morale of the army. In some past Islamic states, there were even specialized centers of music therapy—for instance, Ottoman hospitals employed musical melodies in the treatment of nervous disorders. All this demonstrates that music has not only an entertainment dimension but also therapeutic and spiritual potential.

In conclusion, contemporary fatwa practice tends to classify music into three categories:

Music with immoral content, calling for debauchery, unethical behavior, or containing statements that contradict the principles of faith, is unequivocally considered haram. This category includes erotic and vulgar songs, music encouraging alcohol consumption or adultery, and compositions that mock religion or contain elements of disbelief.

Music with neutral or morally positive content, not contradicting sharia norms in form or performance, is considered halal or mubah. This includes patriotic songs about one’s homeland, parents, goodness, and unity, as well as religious nasheeds and ilāhīs of various Sufi orders. Ethical requirements regarding performance are also taken into account: if the attire, behavior of performers, or the atmosphere of an event contradict Islamic ethics (for example, uncontrolled gender mixing), even morally positive lyrics may acquire a blameworthy aspect.

Music without harmful content intended for moderate entertainment is generally regarded as mubah (neutral), although excessive attachment to it is discouraged. This category includes many examples of classical music, folk songs and instrumental compositions (küy), as well as

melodies performed on national instruments. Islamic scholars emphasize that if such music leads a person to good thoughts and positive feelings, it does not cause harm.

Islam and Music in Kazakhstan

As part of the Muslim world, Kazakhstan experiences debates about music within its own cultural context. In the centuries-long tradition of the Kazakh people, music occupies a special place. Songs, *küy* (instrumental pieces), *zhyr*, and *dastan* have long been-and remain-the backbone of spiritual life. National instruments such as the *dombra* and the *kobyz* served as means of transmitting spiritual heritage from generation to generation, and the Kazakh people have never separated this heritage from their religious worldview. Abai's famous lines, beginning with "When a person comes into the world, he enters it with a song," symbolically suggest that life itself was perceived as moving to the rhythm of music-reflecting an understanding of song and *zhyr* as an integral part of existence.

Indeed, the musical heritage-from *besik zhyr* (lullabies) to *terme* accompanied by *küy*-is closely intertwined with the moral and spiritual upbringing of Kazakhs. Despite the intensification of secularization during the Soviet period, religiosity began to grow again after independence. Along with this resurgence, new debates about music also emerged. Some young people influenced by foreign radical preachers began spreading categorical statements such as "the *dombra* is haram" or "singing is a sin," which sparked wide public resonance. Social media posts about "the prohibition of music" generated confusion among the population, as reported by the mass media. For a society in which the *dombra* and *küy* are part of historical identity, claims about the "sinfulness of national music" became a genuine cultural shock. Some experts explained this phenomenon by a lack of religious literacy and an uncritical reception of external ideological influences.

In response, Kazakhstani scholars of religion and theologians intensified educational outreach, emphasizing that Islam does not abolish art and culture. The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK) and its Council of Scholars published a number of fatwas and explanatory materials on music. For example, in the article by the theologian Kairat Zholdybayuly, "Muzyka tñndau haram ba?" ("Is listening to music haram?"), it is noted that the Sunnah contains both hadiths that censure music and hadiths that allow it under certain circumstances. Examining their context, the author concludes that "the diversity of hadiths shows that prohibition or permissibility is not directly tied to musical instruments, but depends on the purpose of use and the state of the listener's heart." In other words, in this Kazakhstani scholar's view, the key criterion is not the instrument itself, but the situation and intention.

The same article stresses that if a song or a *küy* awakens good feelings in a person and strengthens love for one's homeland, parents, and moral values, it cannot be considered prohibited. Indeed, many Kazakh folk songs and *küy* contain profound philosophical reflections and calls to virtue. Musical works-from Korkyt's *küy* to Ablai Khan's "Aq Tolqyn"-convey ideals of courage, unity, and national dignity. Therefore, domestic theologians regard traditional Kazakh musical art as not contradicting Islamic norms, but in many respects resonant with them.

In fact, the traditional religious understanding characteristic of Kazakh spiritual culture never treated the *dombra* and *küy* as sinful phenomena. The culture of using musical instruments inherited from *bakhsy* and *zhyrau* organically intertwined with Islam. For instance, in his *tolğau*, Bukhar Zhyrau disseminated religious knowledge and combined sharia norms with moral instruction; his legacy is still perceived today as a school of spirituality. In this context, categorical judgments that have appeared in recent years-such as a total ban on music-are assessed by Kazakhstani theologians as "the influence of destructive movements," and society is urged to approach such claims critically. Indeed, the ideology of a small group that considers song and *küy* to be haram contradicts the people's traditional worldview. Scholars affiliated with SAMK likewise affirm in their explanations that sharia does not declare music absolutely prohibited, and

that national musical heritage performed on traditional instruments does not contradict Islamic norms.

If we consider the contemporary situation in Kazakhstan, music is present in all spheres of life: from the performance of the national anthem in schools to concerts held on public holidays. In mosques, one hears the melodious *adhān*, *qasidas*, and religious chants during Islamic festivals. Although there is no single official document devoted specifically to music, SAMK's informational resources (muftyat.kz, islam.kz, ummet.kz) publish responses to questions about music. These explanations convey the idea that music in itself does not contradict sharia as long as it does not lead to immorality. Such educational work is already yielding results: among Kazakhstani youth, genres of religious music are developing, groups performing *nasheeds* are being formed, and mosque-based circles teaching traditional religious chants are being established.

Of course, in a secular state a complete prohibition of music is impossible. However, within religious circles criticism is often directed at certain currents of Western mass culture—indecent music videos, explicit scenes, and aggressive musical styles. Such concerns are consistent with Islamic moral norms. In contemporary conditions, certain features of the domestic pop scene—excessive imitation of Western models, provocative stage images, and content lacking meaning—also draw criticism among believers. Religious leaders draw attention to these phenomena as well, calling on artists to take national and moral values into account in their creative work.

Thus, within Kazakhstan's public space, a balanced understanding of attitudes toward music is gradually taking shape: approval of musical works that align with national traditions and serve educational and cultural goals, and restraint toward musical content that contradicts moral norms or promotes violence or debauchery.

Conclusion

Islamic debates on music represent a complex process resembling a dialogue between tradition and modernity. As the present analysis has shown, throughout history many Islamic scholars approached music with caution, pointing to its potential harmful aspects. The traditional viewpoint associated the danger of music primarily with its ability to distract a person from the remembrance of Allah, to intensify passions, and to lead to the waste of time. Therefore, most prohibitive rulings were directed specifically at such negative consequences.

Nevertheless, it is well known that an essential characteristic of Islam is its pursuit of moderation and the “middle path.” There is not a single Qur'anic verse that explicitly declares music to be haram. Even within the hadith literature, there are reports permitting it under certain conditions. Contemporary scholars, analyzing sharia-based arguments, conclude that Islam does not prohibit musical art in its entirety, but rather condemns only its distorted and immoral forms. In its essence, music is a neutral phenomenon; it acquires a good or bad meaning through human intention and the purpose of its use.

Within the dialogue between tradition and modernity, the key task of Muslim scholars today is to preserve the wisdom of the classical heritage while offering it a balanced contemporary interpretation. In the case of music, this means avoiding both excessive rigidity and unjustified permissiveness, and adhering to an objective and academically grounded position. As research and modern fatwas emphasize, music in sharia is viewed as an “instrument” whose legal status is determined by context and consequences. It is like a knife: when used for good, it is beneficial; when used for harm, it becomes destructive.

Therefore, the most just approach to evaluating music is to determine its status on the basis of its content and impact. By adhering to this principle, Muslim society can, on the one hand, preserve and protect religious values, and on the other, maintain its connection with the broader human cultural heritage of which music is a part.

In the context of Kazakhstan, debates about music are gradually finding a balanced resolution. As religious literacy increases within society, it becomes increasingly evident that there is no fundamental contradiction between national tradition and Islam. The *dombra* and *kobyz*,

revered by thinkers such as Abai and Shakarim, did not distance them from faith; on the contrary, they served as means of spiritual awakening. Contemporary theologians continue this line of thought, clarifying for the public the distinction between beneficial and harmful music. Similar processes can be observed across the wider Muslim world: in Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, and other countries, musical art develops in harmony with Islam, becoming part of the modern cultural landscape.

Debates on music in the Islamic context should be viewed as an important phenomenon reflecting the evolution of Muslim intellectual tradition. Through these discussions, Islamic society reconsiders the boundaries of art and culture and refines their religious and ethical criteria. Positions formed through thoughtful dialogue and scholarly analysis provide the most objective foundation for social consensus. The widely held view today states that music does not contradict Islam if its content guides a person toward goodness and morality. This position, on the one hand, aligns with the classical heritage (without exceeding the principles established by traditional scholars), and on the other, takes into account contemporary scientific and social realities.

Islam does not reject art; rather, it requires that art preserve spiritual purity and educational and ethical value. Therefore, attitudes toward music in Muslim society should likewise be strengthened within these principles. As continuity between tradition and modernity deepens, scholarly and religious understandings of music will continue to develop and mature.

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