

# The history of the oud essays examples

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The oud is an object of fascination and wonder for the audience and one of desire and passion for the musician and artist. The instrument is ancient, always undergoing transition and has the potential to transcend political and spatial boundaries in the modern world. It is representative of the rich and diverse cultures that have shaped its modern forms and variations. The instrument is now being understood more in western countries and its influence on western music and musical instruments is undeniable. This paper will discuss the history of the instrument within the evolution of string instruments. It will argue that the oud is a model for Eastern and Western relations in the modern age as a result of its cultural importance.

There were stringed instruments before the emergence of the oud and this informs the reader of how the evolution of the instrument came about from a spatial perspective. The Turkish had a similar instrument called a 'kopuz' it was thought to have magical or healing properties and was used by Turkish military bands and by ordinary citizens. There is a belief that the oud may have some relationship to the 'kopuz' however this is unknown. The 'kopuz' had three strings made of gut and is believed to have dated back to 6000BC after archaeological digs found the instrument printed on clay plates. The instrument spread in variation to other countries including the Ukraine, Poland and Hungary at about the same time that the Huns moved into the region in the 4th Century. Others believe that the oud came into existence because of the lyres of Ur from ancient Mesopotamia that date back to 2500 BC. The instrument had several strings each of which played one single note. There is evidence to suggest that it was used all over Europe and was discovered as far as Scotland where a 2300 year instrument was discovered.

This demonstrates that although that it is possible to interpret history there is always speculation about the origins of ancient musical instruments like the oud.

There is also uncertainty about the etymology of the word 'oud' however it is likely that the word derived from the Arabic word (al-ud) meaning a thin piece of wood or what would now be referred to as a plectrum. It is also possible that the oud may have derived from the Persian word 'rod' or 'rud' to differentiate between stringed instrument from the other Persian variation know as a 'barbat' . Just like the 'kopuz' and 'lyre', there are numerous scholars, writers and researchers that have given religious, mystical and healing stories as circumstantial evidence for the origins of the instrument. Muslim scholar known to many as Alfarabi born in 872, believed that the oud was invented by Noah's grandfather and represented the shape of the hanging body of his dead son. This belief in the instrument's qualities extends further into the healing of the soul with another 19th century writer commenting that " It places the temperament in equilibrium, it calms and revives hearts." Furthermore there are reasons to suggest that the instrument was used from the 9th to the 19th century as a means of treating illness and healing. For example Miwardi, the jurist of Baghdad used it for these purposes and this was supported further by the 11th-century theologian Ibn Hazm.

The earliest known sightings of the Oud are over 5000 years old. Sightings are from Syria and Mesopotamia and the in the Kassite period from 1600 to 1150 BC. It was played by the Assyro – Babylonians and Sumerians and had a small oval body at that period of its history. A larger variation was found

that was almost the same size as the modern oud in Anatolia. The instrument was probably played in the period of the Hittite Kingdom from 1460- 1190 BC. A history of how the modern oud came about is a complex and contested matter but there are references to it in some 14th century writings. Some believe it was used in the reign of Sassanid King Shapur I (241-72). Others believe it emerged as an accompaniment to religious offerings by the Manes and the spread of Manicheism.

Arguments about the history of the instrument are made even more difficult when one looks at two matters of importance. One is the divergence of the lute and the oud; the other is the spatial context with which the instrument began to emerge. A similar instrument called the 'biwa' emerged in Japan. A Russian instrument called the 'balalaika' came to prominence in that country and an Indonesian instrument called the 'gambus' also emerged. The Chinese played an instrument called the 'pipa' that emerged with the Chinese Han Dynasty in 206 B. C. It was seen as a short necked lute similar to the oud where we begin to see the oud and lute diverge from east to west slowly. The oud itself was mainly used in southern Iraq where it then spread to the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th to 10th century.

The oud began its slow evolution to the west by way of Andalusia and it is believed that what is now known as southern Spain became an important part of the divergence of the instrument from eastern to western traditions. It is believed that a student of a grand master that founded the school of the oud in Baghdad transported the instrument to Moorish Spain. From there it may of spread with variation to Seville and Granada. The student known as Ziryab probably introduced new music from Greece, Persia and Arab empires

that would eventually influence classical music and the development of the lute in the Elizabethan period. The lute helped develop the romantic courts and the renaissance in Europe. The similarities of the instrument can be heard in the pronunciation of the word ' lute' and ' oud' as they sound very similar when the first letter is taken away. The lute was also hugely influential in the development of the mandolin that came about in the 17th and 18th centuries in Italy and the guitar that emerged in Spain during the 13th century.

The construction of the oud has undergone many changes in size, materials and tuning throughout its history. A description is given below;

The modern oud is now played throughout the world but is still most popular in the Middle East, Africa and Eastern Europe. The modern day instrument is either a Turkish or Arabic form however this encompasses many different variations found in other countries. Arabic ouds are usually larger and deeper. The Turkish version is tuned one whole step higher than the Arabic version and is smaller in length than its counterpart.

The evolution of the oud has seen many challenges and variations throughout its history and is still undergoing transition. The modern day oud is under threat in countries like Iraq where Islamic militants consider music secular and have threatened people for playing the oud. Many players have gone into hiding or have fled to other countries. The instrument is considered the soul of Iraq and is now in the guise of political and religious divisions. “ I am going to make a coup d'état and make everyone in all neighbourhoods play the oud” is the comic statement made by one persecuted oud player. How will war affect the evolution of oud music in Iraq? Already the players

have been persecuted and now even music itself is the war torn country. Famous Iraqi love songs have changed so that the words no longer speak of love but only of religious doctrine. . History shows that music may often be targeted and destroyed and the music from the oud will be no different in Iraq's history. The music exists now in so many parts of the world, therefore the history and usage of the instrument will emerge in some other form in the future.

The oud represents a truly global and evolutionary instrument that has been held in some form by people experiencing good and bad throughout history. The construction, tuning, songs and materials have evolved along with the desire of the players in each country or empire it passed through. This is no different to the modern form of the instrument and song that are now being persecuted in some countries and openly embraced in others where it has not been a traditional instrument. The instrument will continue to embrace new forms and transcend spatial boundaries.

## **Bibliography**

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