



ŠUR

ŠUR (شور), a modal system (*dastgāh*) in the traditional music in Iran.

Technical description. In the learned musical tradition established around the middle of the 19th century, the study of the *radif* started with Šur, since it was considered as the most important of the twelve modal systems (*dastgāhs* and *āvāzs*). This was due to several factors:

Five *āvāzs*, namely **Abu 'Aṭā**, **Afšāri**, **Bayāt-e Kord**, **Bayāt-e Tork** (also called Bayāt-e Zand), and **Dašti**, are considered appurtenant parts (*mota'alleqāt*) of Šur. It contains several great melody units (*guša*), such as Šahnāz, **Ḥosayni**, Salmak, Rażawi. Its modal scale is also that of the *āvāzs* or *gušas* **Delkaš**, **Šekasta** (both also included in Māhur), 'Oššāq, and 'Ozzāl, and its general scale (*parda*) is shared by the *dastgāhs* Navā and Segāh. Thus, more than 50 percent of Persian music is based on Šur scale (*parda*), the rest using three other scales, namely, those of Māhur/Rāst, **Homāyun**/Eṣfahān, and **Čahārgāh**. In Iranian folk music, the proportion is even greater. In addition, its intonations are found from Anatolia to east Khorasan (Miller, pp. 237-77) and in all of the Arabic and Berber worlds.

Šur modal scale, firmly centered on G, has two different aspects: (1) with a lowered fifth (D_p), and (2) with a perfect fifth (D). **(D Ep) F G Ap B C Dp/D** E F G (A B...). The main degrees are rendered in bold letters, the *p* equals a half flat. The first form is more typical of the essence (*māya*, *darāmads*) of Šur, while the second is more widely spread. In some tunes and *gušas*, both aspects are combined.



Table 1 shows on which pitches of Šur scale are centered the five related *āvāzs*. The pitches in small letters are not stressed in the modal structure. Segāh and Navā scales are also included in Šur scale, but these two *dastgāhs* are not members of the Šur family, as their conclusion, contrary to other *āvāzs*, does not go back to the *māya* of Šur. In the *radif*, Šur begins in the upper octave of Šur (G), yet in practice, the *āvāz* are most often transposed one fifth below (D).

The scale transcribed here in a relative pitch follows the usual tuning of *tār* and *setār* in Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh’s *radif* (F c G C). On these instruments (Ḥosayn-qoli’s *radif*), Šur also is often performed on A (tuning D a G C). As a consequence of this transposition, the intervals are slightly different: A-C becomes one comma greater than G-B. On the [Azarbaijani tār](#), Šur is played on G, but with the lower string tuned C. Other transpositions are possible on C or D. As a modal system (*dastgāh*), Šur does not display scale changes or significant modulations, but rather shift of the fundamental keynote (*not-e šāhed*), on which relies its related *gušas* and *āvāzs*.

Šur as a modal system (radif) and its relation to the āvāzs. The instrumental versions of Šur include various number of *gušas*: from twenty-three (Ḥosayn-qoli’s *radif*) up to sixty-nine (Musā Ma’rūfi’s compilation, 1962). In Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh’s *radif* (During, 2006, p. 12), they are: six *darāmads* (including Kerešma, Rohāb/Rahāvi, Mollā Nāzi), two Naḡmas, Zirkeš-e Salmak, Mollā Nāzi, Salmak, Golriz, Majlesafruz, ‘Ozzāl, Šafā, Bozorg, Kuček, Dobayti, Kārā, Qajar, Forud, and Ḥazin. Then begins a second section of Šur in the upper register (*pā’in-e dasta*): Šur of *pā’in-e dasta*, Guša-ye Rohāb, Čahār Guša, Moqaddama-ye Gereyli, Rażawi, Forud, Šahnāz, Ḥazin, Qarača, and Šahnāz Kot (‘Ašeḡkoš). Measured pieces are added to the list: Reng-e Oşul, Gereyli, Reng-e Šahrāşub featuring sixteen sections. Musā Ma’rūfi’s compilation includes a short rendition of Bayāt-e Kord.

In the instrumental version, the second part of this *dastgāh* (in the upper register) reproduces the modal development of the first one, as if two renditions of Šur have been put together. In the vocal *radif*, Šur is less extended (14 *gušas*; Mas’udia, 1996), and, due to the limitation of the voice diapason, it does not split into low and upper register. In [Mehdiqoli Hedāyat](#)’s transcription, Šur has only 29 *gušas* and does not extend on the section on the upper octave (*pā’in-e dasta*). Actually, in the first list of *guša* established in Iran in 1913 by Forşat-al-Dawla (Forşat, 1975, p. 37; ed. Şāleḡ, p. 26), we find only the following 15 sections: Darāmād, Kerešma, Āvāz, Naḡma (Salmak,

Golriz), Šafā, Čahār-mežrāb, **Bozorg**, Dobeyti, Kārā, Qajar, Mollā Nāzi, **Ḥazin**, and **Forud**.

Then Foršat lists seven *āvāzs* and their *gušas* and comments that “though they are not Šur, they are used in this *dastgāh*” (Foršat, ed. Šāleḥ, p. 26): Šahnāz, Qarača, Ražawi, Oqdagošā (‘Ašeqkoš); Bayāt-e Tork, Dogāh, Mehdi Žarrābi, Ruḥ-al-Arwāḥ, Dašti, Ḥājiāni, Bidgāni, Bayāt-e Širāz, Gilaki, Gavri (Gabri); Dastān-e ‘Arab, Sāranj (also called **Abu ‘Aṭā**), Sayaki, Ḥejāz, Čahārpāra, Qaṭār, Qarā’i, Gereyli (Gerāyli), Gereyli (Gerāyli) Šašti, Rahāvi (Rohāb), Masiḥi, Taḳt-e Ṭāqdis, Šāh Kātā’i; Bayāt-e Kord; Afšāri, Kuča-bāgi, Samali, Ġamangiz, Mehrbāni.

Rengs: Šahrāšub, Žarb-e Ošul (Foršat, ed. Šāleḥ, p. 26). Most of these *gušas* and *āvāzs* are also classified as *molḥaqāt-e Šur* by Mehdiqoli Hedāyat (ca. 1918).

A similar description is found in the Isfahan tradition, where each *āvāz* is much longer than Šur itself and does not always end with a return to the modal scale (*māya*) of Šur. Ḥasan Kasā’i has presented and commented on this *radif* on the National Radio in the 1960s with examples played on the *setār*. His version of Šur, called by him “the mother of the melodies” (*omm al-āvāz*), includes very few *gušas* pertaining to Šur. After a brief introduction, it goes to Bayāt-e Tork with an extensive development, then to Šekasta (two modulations found also in Azarbaijani Šur), then to Afšāri, Abu ‘Aṭā, Kord, and Dašti, followed by a brief conclusion in Šur.

Then comes Darāmad-e Rohāb, Čahārpāra or Hadāvandi (several variants sung during the Sufi *dekr*s), Kerešma, starts the mode (*āvāz*) of Bayāt-e Tork with several modulations: ‘Aširān (instrumental), ‘Aširān (as a *darāmad* of Tork), Bayāt-e Zand, Neyriz, Rāk-e ‘Abd-Allāh, back to Rāk, conclusion in Ruḥ-al-Arwāḥ, Žarbi-e Rāk, Gošāyeš (called Rāst in Ešfahān *radif*), Ḥešār-e Māhur (or Pas Māhur), Feyli (called Panjgāh in Ešfahān *radif*), Šekasta, Awj, Qarabāgi (an allusion to Afšāri), Žarbi-e Majlesafruz, Delkaš (on the upper octave of Šur), *forud*, allusion to Rāk. Then one goes back to Bayāt-e Tork with Dogāh, Mehdi Žarrābi, Qaṭār, a long Maṭnawi in Rāst (going to Šekasta, Awj, Rāk-e ‘Abd-Allāh, Ruḥ-al-Arwāḥ, and Bayāt-e Zand), and Mehrbāni. Then starts Afšāri and the other *āvāzs*, which are also much more developed than Šur itself.

This list shows that the *radif* of the Isfahan school is sometimes very different from that of Tehran, which goes back to *tār* master ‘Ali-Akbar Farahāni (d. ca.



1860). The bulk of the *guša* is almost the same, but their names change sometimes and their arrangement can be significantly different.

In the *radif* collection of Isfahan, Šur is reduced to a few original *gušas* and appears as a general and somehow theoretical structure for putting together a great number of *āvāzs* and *gušas*. In practice, the five *āvāzs* are independent, as their succession hardly constitutes a chain, a *radif*. In a performance of *dastgāh-e Šur*, quotations of these *āvāzs* are always possible, but only Dašti and Kord can be developed. In contrast with Ḥasan Kasā'i's *radif*, which is mainly vocal, in the instrumental *radif* of the 'Ali-Akbar Farāhāni school, Šur displays more specific *gušas* that do not pertain to the five related *āvāzs*, while all the *āvāzs* are separate units, except for Kord, which is included in Ma'rufi's version of Šur.

A valuable *radif* recorded and taught by the Isfahani vocalist 'Abbās Kāžemi displays even more divergences with the *radifs* of Tehran: Rohāb, Zirkeš, Ṭarz, Sayak, Qarača, Rohāb-e Masiḥ, Kerešma, Dāgestāni, Taḳt-e Ḳosrow, Awrangī, Amiri, Mollā Nāzi, Šur, Samā'-e Sufiān, Nağma-ye Qomri, Šabdizi (*bā guša-ye Amiri*), Ḳosrow wa Širin, Māwarā'-al-Nahri, Rāvandi, Borāzjāni, Naḳjiri, Zirafkand, Rażawi (Ḳosravāni) Āšurvand, Šahrāšub, Tusi (or Nišāburi), Ḥāji-Ḥasani, Šafā, Suz-o Godāz, Malek-Ḥosayni, Rāz-o Niāz, Sarvestāni, Jahromi, Dašttestāni, Lorestāni, Salmak, Gereyli (2 forms), Ḥosayn-e Aḍerbāyjāni, Maṭnawi (Matinfar).

The author notes that in Isfahan, the *radif* starts with Rohāb and Guša-ye Šur. The latter corresponds to the Tehran Salmak, Salmak corresponds to the Tehran Rażawi, and Šahnāz to the Tehran Qarača.

In view of the diversity of content and sequentialization of the different *radifs*, one may assume that Šur is quite a recent *dastgāh*, still unstable and not as strictly defined as the others (e.g., Čahārgāh, Māhur, Segāh, Homāyun).

Šur in the Azarbaijani school. In Azarbaijani *moqām/maqām*, Šur is a great modal system (*dastgāh*) that is often performed. Its modal scale is similar, with a variable degree D-Dp. In the modern interpretation the second pitch (Ap, higher than in Iran) varies with the melodic attraction, lowered to A□ on the way back to G.

The content of the *dastgāh* and the chain of the parts (*šo'ba*) and *gušas* vary from one school to the other. Sanubar Baghirova (I, p. 34) reports six lists of

gušas (between 15 and 30) coming from different transmitters. The development of Šur diverges from the Persian one by the stress of the B□ (Bayāt-e Tork) and the modulation in Šekasta-ye Fārs on F. A current version is that of the master Ahmad Bakikhanov (d. 1973), which was taught for several decades by Kamil Ahmadov (d. 1996) and includes: Bardāšt (starting from the upper octave), Māya, Šur-Šahnāz (with *Dp*), Bayāt-e Tork (Bayāt-e Qājār and Dogāh), Šekasta-ye Fārs, ‘Aširān, Samā‘-e Šams, Hejāz, Sāranj, Našib-o Farāz, Ayaq. Zaminkāra is also often included in Šur, as well as Bayāt-e Kord on D. Šur-Šahnāz can be performed as an individual *maqām*. In the Persian *radif* of Mirzā ‘Abd-Allāh, transcribed (ca. 1918) by Mehdiqoli Hedāyat (Eslāmi and Katherine St. John, 2013), as well as in Ḥosaynqoli’s *radif*, Šahnāz is located at the end.

Historical and comparative approach. Šafi-al-Din Ormavi (III, p. 391), describes a fundamental genre (*jens*) identical to the first form of Šur (with *Dp*), the *šo‘ba* Nowruz, on which is built Ḥosayni, one of the twelve *maqāms* of the scholastic school. In the Irakian *maqām* school, Ḥosayni is similar to the Persian Šur, which includes Ḥosayni among its *gušas*. Persian Ḥosayni could be regarded as the origin of Šur, since it shares structural characteristics with this *dastgāh*, and, in contrast with the *āvāzs*, it starts and ends on the same degree and does not point to another modal context than itself. Ḥosayni goes along with Rohāb, Rahāvi, and ‘Ozzāl, which share the same structure. In Azarbaijan, Rohāb is an ancient *dastgāh* rarely performed because it is said to be very close to Šur. According to an early Qajar source, Rohāb was one of the 12 *dastgāhs* (Mas‘udia, 1996, p. 239).

In spite of its importance and the “universality” of its modal structure (e.g., Ḥosayni, ‘Oššāq, and Bayāti in the Near East), Šur, as a *maqām*, appears only in the Persian and Azarbaijani inventories of the 19th century. Arutin Tanburi (d. ca. 1750), an Armenian musician from Istanbul who followed Nāder Shah Afšār, had established a list of 109 oriental *āvāz* and melodies, in which a Šori (Šuri?) is referred to among the *gušas* of Ḥosayni (Jung, pp. 117, 120).

In Ottoman and Arab traditions Šuri is a development of *maqām* Bayāti. Its beginning on the first register is close to Šur, but its second pentachord (*jens*) is in Hejāz. The Turkish master Necder Yašar played Šuri with an introduction similar to the Darāmad-e Kārā (personal communication), sung in Iran as an overture of this *dastgāh*. Šur does not appear in treatises from the Safavid period or before, but is documented in early Qajar period (Mas‘udia, 1996, p. 239) among the 12 *dastgāhs* under the name Šur-o Šahnāz.



In his *Wożuḥ al-arqām* (written in 1884), Mir Möhsun Nawwāb does not mention Šur among the six *dastgāhs*, and considers it as an *āvāz*. These data suggest that Šur was promoted to provide a theoretical umbrella to a great number of independent *šāh-gušas* (Rohāb, Šahnāz, Ḥosayni, Rażawi, Bozorg, etc.) and the five *āvāzs*: Abu ‘Aṭā, Bayāt-e Tork, Afšāri, Dašti, and Kord). Although these *āvāzs* are related (*molḥaqāt*) to Šur, they are not derived from it, as it is often said in English and French sources (e.g., Mas‘udia, 1978, p. 35).

In practice, it was difficult to handle all these *āvāzs* and their development in one single *dastgāh*, so they have remained independent. They are typically Iranian, although they bear names that, like Šur, are mentioned only in sources from the Safavid and later periods. They became much popular and up to a point overshadowed Šur itself. In the 20th century, Šur and Segāh were most often played in light urban music (*moṭrebi*), but in modern times, Šur is relatively more often performed by instrumentists than by singers, although it has provided an inspiration for the production of a good deal of vocal compositions (*taşnif*).

For music samples, see: [Borumand – Daramads of šur](#)
[Bozorg](#)
[Hosaynqoli – Hajjani](#)
[Hosaynqoli – Shur](#)

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