

Cambridge Elements

Elements in the Global Middle Ages

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EURASIAN MUSICAL JOURNEYS

Five Tales

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Abstract: This Element explores the circulation of musical instruments, practices, and thought in premodern Eurasia at the crossroads of empires and nomadic cultures. It takes into consideration mechanisms of transmission, appropriation, adaptation, and integration that helped shape musical traditions that are perceived as culturally and geographically distinct yet are historically linked. The five stories featured here range from the geographically diverse performing groups during the Sui and Tang era, to the elusive musical world of Kucha in the Tarim Basin; from the fragmentary history of a single instrument linked to the Turkic peoples across Eurasia, to the transcontinental circulation of sound-making automata, including the organ, on both east–west and north–south axes. Within the conceptual background of cultural encounter and exchange, this Element provides possible strategies for integrating such information into the historical tapestry of Eurasian transcontinental networks as explored in other Elements in the series.

Keywords: musical instruments, Silk Road, Central Asia, music, cultural commerce

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