

The Seven-Course Oud In The Malay World: Documenting Its First Introduction To Malaysia (2005)

Oud Tujuh Tali Di Alam Melayu: Pendokumentasian Pengenalan Pertama Di Malaysia (2005)

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ABSTRACT

The history of the gambus and oud in the Malay world has often been narrated through long-distance trade, Hadhrami migration, and cultural diffusion. While these accounts highlight early transmission, far less attention has been given to modern organological innovations that reshape local practice. This article establishes 2005 as the first documented introduction of the seven-course oud (thirteen strings: six paired and one single bass) into Malaysia, following its acquisition from its original owner, Mustafa Said Antar (Beit al-Oud, Cairo). Crafted by Egyptian luthier Muhammad Ali Jaafar, the instrument was subsequently employed in teaching at the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA). The seven-course configuration extends the oud's lower register, enabling greater depth in taqsim improvisation and expanding the tonal and modal resources available to Malaysian performers. Methodologically, the study combines organological description with practice-based documentation and a compact evidentiary dossier (photographs, EXIF/checksum metadata, and witness attestations) to secure the dating and provenance of the instrument. Analytically, it reframes Malaysian gambus/oud history to include not only earlier diasporic legacies but also the continuing role of instrument design and pedagogy in shaping musical practice. Situating the 2005 introduction within broader debates on cultural transmission and Malay-world musical heritage, the article argues that organological innovation should be recognised as equally central to the narrative, alongside migration and diffusion. The earliest surviving photographic documentation dates to 2005 (personal photograph, Ampang), with additional images from 2007 (Brunei studio; TV3 rehearsal). The findings invite further research on how design changes, stringing, tuning, range extension, and curriculum, alter performance, listening, and teaching in twenty-first-century Malaysia.

Keywords: Oud, Gambus, Seven-Course Oud, Cultural Transmission, Organology

ABSTRAK

Sejarah gambus dan oud di Alam Melayu lazimnya dihuraikan melalui perdagangan jarak jauh, migrasi Hadhrami dan penyebaran budaya. Meskipun naratif ini menonjolkan proses awal penyebaran, perhatian terhadap inovasi organologi moden yang membentuk amalan setempat masih terhad. Makalah ini menetapkan tahun 2005 sebagai pengenalan berdokumentasi pertama oud tujuh tali (enam pasangan dan satu tali bass tunggal) di Malaysia, susulan pemerolehan instrumen tersebut daripada pemilik asalnya, Mustafa Said Antar (Beit al-Oud, Kaherah). Diperbuat oleh tukang gambus Mesir Muhammad Ali Jaafar, instrumen ini kemudiannya digunakan dalam pengajaran di Akademi Seni Budaya dan Warisan Kebangsaan (ASWARA). Konfigurasi tujuh tali memperluas julat nada rendah oud, sekali gus memperdalam improvisasi taqsim dan meluaskan sumber tonal serta modal untuk penggiat di Malaysia. Dari segi metodologi, kajian menggabungkan deskripsi organologi dengan dokumentasi berasaskan amalan serta satu dosier bukti ringkas (foto, metadata EXIF/sum cek, dan pengesahan saksi) bagi memantapkan tarikh serta provenans instrumen. Dari segi analisis, sejarah gambus/oud di Malaysia ditinjau semula bukan sahaja melalui warisan diaspora, tetapi juga melalui peranan berterusan reka bentuk instrumen dan pedagogi dalam membentuk amalan muzik. Dengan meletakkan pengenalan tahun 2005 dalam wacana pemindahan budaya dan warisan muzik Alam Melayu, makalah ini menegaskan

bahawa inovasi organologi wajar diiktiraf sama pentingnya dengan migrasi dan difusi. Dokumentasi foto terawal yang masih kekal bertarikh 2005 (foto peribadi, Ampang), dengan imej tambahan tahun 2007 (studio Brunei; latihan TV3). Dapatan ini membuka ruang penyelidikan lanjutan tentang bagaimana perubahan reka bentuk, penteratan, penalaan, peluasan julat dan kurikulum, mengubah persembahan, pendengaran serta pedagogi di Malaysia abad ke-21.

Kata kunci: Oud, Gambus, Oud Tujuh Tali, Pemandahan Budaya, Organologi

INTRODUCTION

The history of the *gambus* and the *oud* in the Malay world has long been narrated through discourses of trade, migration, and cultural diffusion. Conventional accounts frequently attribute the arrival of the instrument to Hadhrami merchants and religious figures who settled in the Malay Archipelago from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards. These narratives emphasise the *gambus* as part of diasporic cultural baggage carried along with the *zafin* dance tradition, devotional practices, and wider Islamic cultural networks. While this framework highlights an important channel of transmission, it has tended to conflate the Yemeni *qanbūs* with the Ottoman–Arab *oud*, thereby obscuring the distinct organological and cultural trajectories that shaped the *gambus* in Malaysia.

Recent scholarship has begun to challenge this monolithic “trade-route hypothesis.” In *Gambus Dalam Sejarah Kesultanan Melaka* (Raja Zulkarnain 2024), it was argued that the *oud* may have entered the Malay world not solely through Hadhrami migration, but also via Ottoman diplomatic channels, possibly as a royal gift to the Sultan of Melaka.

This hypothesis opens new possibilities for understanding the *gambus* not merely as a by-product of commerce, but as an instrument embedded in symbolic and political exchange. Building on this, *The Origins of the Gambus (oud) in Malaysia: A Two-Channel Hypothesis of Ottoman Cultural Exchange and Hadrami Diaspora* (Raja Zulkarnain 2025b) has articulated a dual framework: that both Ottoman and Hadhrami channels shaped the instrument’s arrival and adaptation.

In parallel, the chapter *From Middle Eastern Oud to Gambus Johor* (Raja Zulkarnain & Nizam Attan 2025) extends this discussion into the regional specificity of Johor, demonstrating how the instrument was localised within courtly, devotional, and popular traditions.

Together, these studies reframe the history of the *gambus* in Malaysia as a dynamic interplay of multiple transmissions rather than a linear diffusion.

Yet, while such work has illuminated the origins and early adaptation of the instrument, little attention has been paid to how more recent organological innovations have entered and transformed local practice. The scholarly focus has remained largely on “where the instrument came from” rather than “how its design has continued to evolve” within Malaysian contexts. This lacuna is significant, for instruments are not static: their forms, tunings, and organological features change across time and space, and these changes carry pedagogical, aesthetic, and cultural implications.

One such innovation is the seven-course *oud* (six paired courses and a single low bass string), a model strongly associated with *Beit al-Oud* in Cairo under the direction of Naseer Shamma. The addition of the seventh course extends the instrument’s lower register, enhancing its tonal range and expanding the expressive possibilities of *taqsīm* improvisation. Since the 1990s, this configuration has become increasingly common in Arab music conservatories and performance circuits, representing a significant development in the instrument’s modern history. Despite its prominence in the Middle East, no study has traced the entry of the seven-course *oud* into the Malay world.

This article addresses that gap by documenting the first introduction of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia in 2005. During a visit to *Beit al-Oud* in Cairo, the author acquired a seven-course *oud* crafted by Egyptian luthier Muhammad Ali Jaafar. Upon returning to Kuala Lumpur, the instrument was immediately employed in teaching at the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA), marking the first documented use of this configuration in Malaysian higher education. This event represents more than the arrival of a new instrument: it signalled the incorporation of contemporary Arab pedagogical standards into Malaysia’s music education system, expanded the technical and tonal horizons available to students, and redefined the symbolic presence of the *oud* in Malaysian cultural history.

By situating this introduction within broader debates on cultural transmission in the Malay world, the article makes two key arguments. First, that organological innovation is as important as diasporic continuity in shaping musical traditions. Just as the earlier presence of Hadhrami and Ottoman channels influenced the adoption of the *gambus*, so too did the 2005 arrival of the seven-course *oud* reshape how the instrument could be played, taught, and imagined in Malaysia. Second, that individual agency must be recognised as a driver of cultural history. While macro-level narratives emphasise trade routes and migration, micro-level events, such as the acquisition of a single instrument and its deployment in a teaching context, can have transformative and lasting impact.

The study is significant for both organology and ethnomusicology. From an organological perspective, it establishes a clear chronology for the entry of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia, grounding it in verifiable dates, makers, and institutional contexts. From an ethnomusicological perspective, it highlights how the instrument's pedagogical use at ASWARA expanded students' exposure to *maqāmāt*, improvisation, and performance techniques aligned with international practice. More broadly, the article contributes to Malay world music studies by reframing the narrative of the *gambus/oud*: not only as an artefact of historical origins, but as a living tradition continually reshaped by innovation, pedagogy, and transnational flows.

In doing so, the article extends the author's previous work on the origins of the *gambus* (Raja Zulkarnain 2024; Raja Zulkarnain & Attan 2025), shifting the focus from questions of "how the instrument arrived" to "how the instrument continues to change." The 2005 introduction of the seven-course *oud*, it argues, should be recognised as a cultural milestone, one that positioned Malaysia within global currents of *oud* development and provided a new foundation for both performance and pedagogy in the twenty-first century.

Documentation note: Primary claim year: 2005 (acquisition and first ASWARA teaching). Earliest surviving photographic evidence: 2005 (*Ampang; personal photograph, EXIF: 2005-10-20, SONY DSC-P100*), with additional images from 2007 (*Brunei studio portrait; Kuala Lumpur TV3 rehearsal, broadcast-context*). In the absence of purchase records, the dating is corroborated by EXIF metadata and contemporaneous witnesses/institutional records; see Supplementary Materials.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of the *gambus* and the *oud* in the Malay world intersects with three overlapping bodies of literature: (1) research on the origins and transmission of the instrument in Southeast Asia, (2) scholarship on organology and instrument design in global contexts, and (3) pedagogical and ethnomusicological approaches to improvisation and performance practice. Each area contributes to understanding the historical and cultural significance of the instrument, yet also reveals specific gaps that this article seeks to address.

HISTORIES OF THE GAMBUS IN THE MALAY WORLD

The *gambus* has been a subject of Malay world scholarship for over half a century, with earlier studies often repeating a diffusionist model that ties the instrument's arrival to Hadhrami migration and maritime trade routes. Scholars such as Anis (1987) and Hilarian (2003) have emphasized the Yemeni–Malay connection, framing the *gambus* as part of diasporic culture carried by merchants, religious teachers, and *zafin* performers. These accounts situate the instrument firmly within Arab–Islamic networks, underscoring its function in devotional, courtly, and social contexts.

More recent interventions have questioned the sufficiency of this one-dimensional "trade-route hypothesis." In *Gambus Dalam Sejarah Kesultanan Melaka* (Raja Zulkarnain 2024), the argument was advanced that the *oud* may have entered the Malay Peninsula through diplomatic and cultural exchanges with the Ottoman Empire, possibly as a royal gift to the Sultan of Melaka. This reframing highlights that instrument introduction was not only a matter of commerce but could also occur through political and symbolic gestures.

The author's subsequent article, *The Origins of the Gambus (oud) in Malaysia: A Two-Channel Hypothesis of Ottoman Cultural Exchange and Hadrami Diaspora* (Raja Zulkarnain 2025b), formalises this dual perspective by proposing a two-channel model in which both Ottoman and Hadhrami transmissions shaped the presence of the instrument. Complementing this framework, the book chapter *From Middle Eastern Oud to Gambus Johor* (Raja Zulkarnain & Nizam Attan 2025) traces the instrument's adaptation within Johor's court and popular traditions, showing how localised contexts absorbed and redefined it.

Together, these studies reposition the *gambus* in Malaysia as a product of multiple cultural vectors rather than a single trade-based narrative. However, they largely concentrate on the origins and early adoption of the instrument. What remains understudied is the continuing evolution of the instrument in the modern era, particularly the ways in which contemporary organological innovations, such as the seven-course *oud*, have entered and transformed practice in Malaysia.

ORGANOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE OUD

Globally, the *oud* has been subject to significant organological research. Wright (1992) and Farmer (1997) traced the historical evolution of the instrument from its ancient Mesopotamian and Persian antecedents, through its medieval Islamic forms, to its transmission into Europe as the lute. More recent work by Marcus (2007) and Racy (2011) has explored not only the structural aspects of the instrument but also the cultural meanings embedded in its sound and use.

A crucial thread in this literature is the recognition that the *oud* is not static: its design has shifted across regions and centuries. The number of courses, tuning systems, body shapes, and decorative practices have all varied depending on geographical context and musical requirements. In the twentieth century, makers experimented with expanding the range of the instrument by adding additional courses. This culminated in the popularisation of the seven-course *oud* in Egypt and Iraq, strongly associated with *Beit al-Oud* in Cairo under Naseer Shamma. The seventh course added a low bass string, providing greater tonal depth for *taqsim* improvisation and broader accompaniment possibilities in ensemble contexts (Arabic Oud House n.d.; Shamma 2019).

Despite these global developments, scholarship on the *oud* in Southeast Asia has not yet addressed how such organological innovations have been incorporated into local practice. Most existing studies assume a six-course standard, reflecting historical models rather than contemporary transformations. This gap underscores the significance of documenting the first arrival of the seven-course *oud* in Malaysia in 2005. By situating this event within global *oud* organology, the present study contributes to bridging Middle Eastern instrument-making traditions with Malay world adaptations.

PEDAGOGY, IMPROVISATION, AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

A third relevant body of literature concerns pedagogy and performance practice, particularly within *maqām*-based traditions. Scholars such as Nettle (1987), Shiloah (1995), and Racy (2003) have emphasised the central role of *taqsim* as both a pedagogical and performative genre. *Taqsim* allows musicians to demonstrate mastery of modal systems, ornamentation techniques, and improvisational creativity. For teachers, it provides a diagnostic and developmental tool to evaluate students' grasp of intonation, phrasing, and emotional expression.

Within Malaysia, the introduction of *oud* pedagogy into higher education from the early 2000s has been a major development (Raja Zulkarnain 2013, 2017). The incorporation of *maqāmāt* theory, alternative tunings, and *taqsim* performance into ASWARA, UiTM and UPSI curricula marked the first institutionalisation of Arab music traditions in the country. Subsequent scholarship, such as Intonaphobia (Raja Zulkarnain 2025a), has highlighted the challenges of microtonal perception among *gambus* musicians, further underscoring the need for robust pedagogical models.

The seven-course *oud*, in this context, assumes pedagogical significance. Its extended range allows teachers to demonstrate *maqāmāt* with greater clarity, including modulations that require access to lower registers. It also provides students with exposure to international standards, preparing them for participation in global *oud* networks. Yet, no study has documented how this instrument entered Malaysian classrooms, nor how its presence altered pedagogical practice. This gap forms a central focus of the present article.

IDENTIFIED GAPS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE PRESENT STUDY

From the above review, three gaps can be identified. First, while Malaysian scholarship has advanced new hypotheses on the origins of the *gambus/oud*, little attention has been given to its modern innovations. Second, while global organological studies have traced the evolution of the *oud* in Arab and Western contexts, they have not considered its recent transformations within Southeast Asia. Third, while pedagogical literature has underscored the importance of *taqsim* and *maqāmāt* instruction,

there is no documentation of how the introduction of new instrument designs, such as the seven-course *oud*, has impacted teaching in Malaysia.

The present study addresses these gaps by documenting the introduction of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia in 2005, establishing its chronology, organological features, and pedagogical implications. It situates this event within the broader framework of Malay world cultural transmission, thereby extending existing historiographical debates on the *gambus* from questions of where it came from to how it continues to evolve.

The review above highlights three intersecting strands of scholarship: (1) Malay world historiography on the origins and transmission of the *gambus*, (2) global organological studies of the *oud*, and (3) ethnomusicological research on pedagogy and performance practice. These can be summarised in Table 1, which categorises the key contributions and identifies the research gaps most relevant to the present study.

TABLE 1. Scholarship on the Gambus and oud in the Malay World and Beyond: Focus, Contributions, and Gaps.

Focus Area	Key Authors / Works	Main Contribution	Identified Gaps
Origins & Transmission (Malay World)	Anis (1987); Hilarian (2003); Raja Zulkarnain (2024, Dewan Budaya); Raja Zulkarnain (2025b); Raja Zulkarnain & Nizam Attan (2025)	- Trade-route diffusion hypothesis (Hadhrami merchants, zafin tradition). - Alternative Ottoman introduction hypothesis (royal gift to Sultan of Melaka). - Two-channel framework (Ottoman + Hadhrami). - Regional adaptation (Johor context).	- Overemphasis on “early origins.” - Little attention to modern organological changes (e.g., 7-course <i>oud</i>).
Organology (Global <i>oud</i> Studies)	Wright (1992); Farmer (1997); Marcus (2007); Racy (2011); Shamma (2019)	- Historical evolution of the <i>oud</i> from Mesopotamia to modern Arab world. - Analysis of string configurations, body design, and regional variants. - Introduction of seven-course <i>oud</i> in Cairo/Iraq contexts.	- No study tracing the seven-course <i>oud</i> 's entry into Southeast Asia/Malaysia.
Pedagogy & Performance Practice (<i>Maqāmāt</i> , <i>Taqsim</i>)	Nettl (1987); Shiloah (1995); Racy (2003); Raja Zulkarnain (2025)	- <i>Taqsim</i> as central pedagogical/performance form. - Importance of <i>maqāmāt</i> mastery in Arab music traditions. - Institutionalisation of <i>oud</i> pedagogy in Malaysia (ASWARA, UiTM, UPSI). - Challenges in microtonal perception (Intonaphobia).	- No study on how instrument design (7th course) impacts pedagogy in Malaysia.

As Table 1 indicates, while significant work has been done on the origins of the *gambus* and on the global evolution of the *oud*, no study has documented the entry of modern organological innovations, such as the seven-course *oud*, into Malaysia. The following section addresses this gap by reconstructing the cultural transmission pathway of the instrument in 2005. Having identified these gaps, the next section reconstructs the specific cultural transmission pathway through which the seven-course *oud* first entered Malaysia in 2005.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION PATHWAY: THE ARRIVAL OF THE SEVEN-COURSE OUD IN MALAYSIA (2005)

The year 2005 marks a turning point in the history of the *oud* in Malaysia. For the first time, a seven-course *oud*, an instrument with six paired

strings and one additional low bass string, was introduced into the country, expanding the tonal and pedagogical horizons of the instrument in ways previously unavailable to local performers and students. This section reconstructs the pathway of that transmission, beginning with the instrument's organological features and global context, before tracing its acquisition in Cairo and subsequent deployment in Kuala Lumpur at the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA).

ORGANOLOGICAL INNOVATION: THE SEVEN-COURSE OUD

The seven-course *oud* represents one of the most important modern innovations in Arab instrument-making. While the *oud* historically featured four to six courses, experiments with additional strings began in the late twentieth century, driven by both

luthiers and performers seeking to expand the instrument's expressive range. The extra course typically extends the instrument's lower register, often tuned to *C* or *B*, thereby providing a deeper foundation for *taqsīm* improvisation and harmonic exploration.

Within Middle Eastern contexts, the seven-course *oud* became particularly prominent in Egypt and Iraq, linked to the pedagogy of *Beit al-Oud* in Cairo under the leadership of Naseer Shamma. The expanded range not only enabled more elaborate *maqām* explorations but also aligned with contemporary compositional practices that sought to modernise Arab classical music. By the early 2000s, the seven-course *oud* was becoming a new

standard among advanced students and professional performers in the Arab world (Arabic *Oud* House, n.d.; Shamma 2019; Racy 2011).

For Malaysia, however, the *gambus* and *oud* traditions had until this point been limited to six-course instruments, reflecting historical continuity with earlier Arab models. The absence of the seven-course design meant that local players were restricted to a narrower register and had limited exposure to the innovations shaping contemporary *oud* practice globally. The arrival of the seven-course *oud* in 2005 thus represented not only the physical entry of a new instrument but also the symbolic incorporation of Malaysia into international currents of *oud* organology.



FIGURE 1. Seven-course *oud*—introduced in 2005; photographed in 2005 (Ampang, Selangor). Crafted by Muhammad Ali Jaafar (Cairo). The seven-course layout (thirteen strings: six paired and one single bass) extends the instrument's lower register and performance range. Photo credit: Author's archive.

ACQUISITION IN CAIRO: BEIT AL-LOUD AND MUHAMMAD ALI JAAFAR

The transmission of this instrument into Malaysia began with a visit to *Beit al-Oud* in Cairo in 2005. Founded in 1999 by Naseer Shamma, *Beit al-Oud* has served as one of the most influential institutions for *oud* pedagogy and innovation in the Arab world. The school not only trains students in *maqāmāt* theory, *taqsīm* improvisation, and composition, but also encourages the adoption of modern instrument designs, particularly the seven-course *oud*, as a means of expanding artistic possibilities.

During this visit, the author purchased a seven-course *oud* from its original owner and teacher at *Beit al-Oud*, Mustafa Said Antar, a respected Egyptian blind *oud* master; the instrument itself was crafted by Egyptian luthier Muhammad Ali Jaafar, whose work is closely associated with *Beit al-Oud*'s pedagogy. Jaafar's *ouds* are known for their balance between traditional craftsmanship and contemporary innovation, and his seven-course models had become widely used by students and teachers at the school. The acquisition of such an instrument, therefore, symbolised both a tangible connection to Egypt's leading *oud* institution and a commitment to introducing its pedagogical philosophy into Malaysia.

This moment of acquisition is significant not simply as a personal purchase but as an act of cultural transmission. Instruments often serve as carriers of both material and symbolic value: they embody the design preferences of their makers, the pedagogical ideals of their institutions, and the musical aspirations of their performers. In this case, the Jaafar-crafted seven-course *oud*, purchased from Mustafa Said Antar in 2005, was not just another instrument; it represented the transplantation of a new organological paradigm from Cairo to Kuala Lumpur.

DEPLOYMENT IN ASWARA TEACHING

Upon returning to Malaysia, the seven-course *oud* was immediately employed in the author's teaching at ASWARA. This marked the first documented use of such an instrument in the country's higher education system. Its introduction into the classroom carried several pedagogical implications.

First, the expanded range allowed for more comprehensive demonstrations of *maqāmāt*. Teachers could now illustrate modal progressions that required access to lower notes, enabling students to hear and practice modulations that were previously more abstract or theoretical. For example, *maqāmāt* such as *'Ajam* or *Nahāwand* could be explored with greater bass resonance, while improvisational pathways into *maqāmāt* like *Hijāz* or *Rast* could be deepened through the additional register.

Second, the instrument aligned Malaysian students with international standards of *oud* pedagogy. At a time when Arab conservatories were increasingly adopting the seven-course model, its presence at ASWARA ensured that Malaysian students were not learning on outdated configurations. This alignment was crucial for enabling cross-cultural dialogue, allowing students trained in Malaysia to interact musically with peers and teachers in the

Middle East without being limited by instrument design.

Third, the *oud* provided a new repertoire of technical exercises and compositions. *Beit al-Oud's* pedagogical system, for example, often incorporates the use of the seventh course in its studies and compositions. By introducing this instrument into Malaysia, the author was able to adapt these exercises for local students, enriching the curriculum with materials that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE 2005 INTRODUCTION

The arrival of the seven-course *oud* in Malaysia in 2005 thus represents a cultural milestone with multiple layers of significance. At the organological level, it marked the first documented expansion of the *oud's* design in the country, breaking with the six-course standard that had previously dominated.

At the pedagogical level, it transformed the way *maqāmāt* could be taught and practiced, providing students with a broader technical and expressive palette. At the symbolic level, it positioned Malaysia within the global currents of *oud* innovation, demonstrating that the country was not only inheriting historical traditions but also actively participating in contemporary developments.

This event also underscores the importance of individual agency in cultural transmission. While macro-level narratives of *gambus* history emphasise trade routes and diasporic flows, the case of the seven-course *oud* shows how a single individual's acquisition and deployment of an instrument can reshape an entire field of practice. By bringing the *oud* from Cairo to Kuala Lumpur and employing it in teaching, the author catalysed a transformation that would influence not only students but also the broader perception of the *oud* in Malaysia.

TABLE 2. Timeline of the *oud* in Malaysia, Showing the Transition from Six-course Traditions (pre-2005) to the Landmark Introduction of the Seven-course *oud* in 2005 and its Subsequent Integration into Pedagogy and Performance.

Period	Development	Notes
Pre-2005	Six-course <i>oud/gambus</i> dominant in Malaysia. Mostly linked to Hadhrami traditions and regional Malay adaptations.	<i>Gambus</i> widely used in <i>zapin</i> , ghazal, and social performance contexts; <i>oud</i> pedagogy in ASWARA, UiTM, UPSI based on six-course instruments.
2005 (Landmark)	First introduction of the seven-course <i>oud</i> into Malaysia. Acquired from <i>Beit al-Oud</i> , Cairo, made by Muhammad Ali Jaafar.	Brought by the author during visit to Cairo; employed in ASWARA teaching; first documented use of expanded-range <i>oud</i> in Malaysian higher education.
Post-2005	Pedagogical and performance integration. Expanded <i>maqāmāt</i> teaching, alignment with Middle Eastern standards, new improvisational depth in <i>taqsim</i> .	Students exposed to international practices; Malaysia positioned within global <i>oud</i> innovation currents.

The trajectory of the *oud* in Malaysia can be visualised as a three-stage development: the pre-2005 reliance on six-course instruments, the landmark moment of the seven-course *oud*'s arrival, and the subsequent transformations in pedagogy and performance. Table 2 summarises this timeline, highlighting 2005 as the decisive point when Malaysia entered into global currents of *oud* innovation.

Finally, the 2005 introduction complicates and extends the historiography of the *gambus* in the Malay world. As argued in earlier work (Raja Zulkarnain 2024; Raja Zulkarnain & Nizam Attan 2025), the instrument's origins can be understood through both Ottoman and Hadhrami channels. Yet the seven-course *oud* demonstrates that the story does not end with origins: new designs, transmitted through contemporary networks, continue to reshape how the instrument is understood and played. The history of the *gambus* and *oud* in Malaysia, therefore, must be seen not only as a legacy of past transmissions but also as an ongoing process of innovation, adaptation, and renewal.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE MALAY WORLD

The introduction of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia in 2005 cannot be understood in isolation from the broader history of cultural transmission in the Malay world. Rather, it represents the continuation of a long pattern of exchange, adaptation, and renewal, in which instruments are not only inherited from earlier channels of contact but also re-shaped by subsequent innovations. This section situates the 2005 event within three overlapping cultural transmission pathways: (1) the Ottoman channel, (2) the Hadhrami channel and (3) the modern innovation channel. Together, these demonstrate that the history of the *gambus/oud* in the Malay world is not confined to its "origins" but is continually renewed by new inflections of organological and pedagogical practice.

THE OTTOMAN CHANNEL

In earlier work, the author has argued that the *gambus* may have first entered the Malay Peninsula through Ottoman cultural exchange, possibly as a royal gift presented to the Sultan of Melaka (Raja Zulkarnain 2024). This hypothesis challenges the conventional "trade-route" diffusion model by emphasising the symbolic and diplomatic functions of instruments in

cross-cultural contact. In this view, the *oud* was not merely an object carried by merchants but a cultural artefact tied to statecraft, prestige, and cosmopolitan identity.

The Ottoman channel situates the *gambus* within a narrative of political symbolism, where musical instruments served as embodiments of cultural authority. While direct archival evidence remains limited, this hypothesis reframes the Malay world as actively engaged in reciprocal exchanges with major Islamic centres, rather than as a passive recipient of diasporic flows.

THE HADHRAMI CHANNEL

Alongside the Ottoman pathway, the Hadhrami diaspora provided a second major vector of transmission. From the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries onwards, Hadhrami Arabs settled in the Malay Archipelago, bringing with them religious practices, *zafin* dance traditions, and the Yemeni *qanbūs*. This channel is the one most frequently emphasised in existing scholarship (Anis 1987; Hilarian 2003), and it remains central to understanding the social embeddedness of the *gambus* in Malay devotional and communal contexts.

The Hadhrami channel underscores the role of migration and religious networks in shaping musical practice. In particular, it explains how the *gambus* became naturalised in local genres such as *zapin* and *samrah*, where the instrument was integrated into Malay musical aesthetics while retaining its Arab associations. The Hadhrami channel, however, has often been conflated with the broader history of the *oud*, leading to misconceptions that the Yemeni *qanbūs* and the Ottoman/Arab *oud* were the same instrument. As argued in *The Origins of the Gambus (oud) in Malaysia: A Two-Channel Hypothesis* (Raja Zulkarnain 2025b), it is essential to differentiate between these lineages while recognising their combined impact.

THE MODERN INNOVATION CHANNEL

The introduction of the seven-course *oud* in 2005 represents a third channel of cultural transmission, one not based on ancient diplomacy or historical migration, but on contemporary organological innovation and educational practice. Acquired from *Beit al-Oud* in Cairo, the instrument crafted by Muhammad Ali Jaafar embodied a new design

standard emerging in Arab music education in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This channel differs from the Ottoman and Hadhrami ones in three key respects. First, it is pedagogically intentional: the instrument was brought into Malaysia specifically for teaching at ASWARA, embedding it directly into the country's higher education framework. Second, it is organologically modern: the seven-course *oud* expanded tonal and modal capacity beyond what had been possible on six-course instruments, reshaping how *maqāmāt* could be taught and improvised. Third, it is globally integrative: by aligning Malaysian students with Middle Eastern conservatory standards, it positioned the country within international networks of *oud* pedagogy and performance.

This “modern innovation channel” demonstrates that cultural transmission is not a closed historical

process but an ongoing dialogue. Just as the Ottoman and Hadhrami channels reshaped musical practice centuries earlier, the 2005 introduction of the seven-course *oud* renewed the instrument's place in Malaysian culture for the twenty-first century.

INTEGRATING THE THREE CHANNELS

The three channels can be visualised as overlapping yet distinct pathways (see Table 3). The Ottoman channel represents symbolic and political exchange; the Hadhrami channel represents migration and religious networks; the modern innovation channel represents pedagogical and organological renewal. Each channel reflects a different mechanism of transmission, and together they provide a more holistic understanding of how the *gambus/oud* has entered and re-entered the Malay world at different historical moments.

TABLE 3. Three cultural transmission channels of the oud/gambus in the Malay world: (1) Ottoman cultural exchange to Melaka, (2) Hadhrami diaspora through the Malay Archipelago, and (3) modern innovation from Cairo to Kuala Lumpur in 2005.

Channel	Geographical Pathway	Historical/Organological Context	Key Period
Ottoman Channel	Istanbul → Melaka	Diplomatic and cultural exchanges; possibility of royal gifts of the <i>oud</i> to the Sultan of Melaka (Raja Zulkarnain, 2024).	15th–16th centuries
Hadhrami Channel	Hadhramaut (Yemen) → Malay Archipelago (via Indonesia) → Malaysia	Migration of Hadhrami Arabs; spread of religious practice, <i>zafin</i> dance, and the Yemeni <i>qanbūs/gambus</i> (Raja Zulkarnain 2025b).	18th–19th centuries
Modern Innovation Channel	Cairo (<i>Beit al-Oud</i> , Muhammad Ali Jaafar) → Kuala Lumpur (ASWARA)	Introduction of the seven-course <i>oud</i> ; first documented use in Malaysian higher education, expanding tonal and pedagogical scope (Raja Zulkarnain, 2005 event).	21st century (2005)

Building on previous scholarship that identified Ottoman and Hadhrami channels as formative to the *gambus* in Malaysia (Raja Zulkarnain 2024; Raja Zulkarnain & Nizam Attan 2025), the present study proposes a third channel: modern organological innovation. As shown in Table 3, this framework positions the 2005 introduction of the seven-course *oud* as a cultural transmission event on par with earlier historical pathways, thereby integrating Malaysia into global trajectories of *oud* development.

By framing the 2005 event as part of this tripartite model, the study situates it not as an isolated anecdote but as the latest phase in a long trajectory of cultural flows. The seven-course *oud* thus joins earlier transmissions as a formative milestone, reshaping the instrument's identity in Malaysia and reaffirming the country's engagement with global currents of musical practice.

REFRAMING MALAY WORLD MUSICAL HERITAGE

Recognising the modern innovation channel has broader implications for Malay world heritage studies. Too often, heritage discourse privileges ancient origins over contemporary transformations, treating tradition as something fixed in the past. The case of the seven-course *oud* challenges this paradigm by showing that innovation itself can become heritage. The instrument's introduction in 2005 not only altered pedagogical practice but also redefined the symbolic significance of the *gambus/oud*: no longer only a marker of diasporic pasts, it became a vehicle for modern cosmopolitan identity.

This reframing calls for a more dynamic approach to Malay world musical heritage, one that acknowledges both continuity and change. The Ottoman and Hadhrami channels illustrate

continuity with broader Islamic and Arab traditions, while the modern innovation channel demonstrates change through the adoption of new organological standards. Together, they show that the *gambus/oud* in Malaysia is not a relic but a living tradition, constantly negotiating its place between local identity and global currents.

INDIVIDUAL AGENCY AND CULTURAL AUTHORITY

Finally, the modern innovation channel underscores the role of individual agency in shaping cultural history. While the Ottoman and Hadhrami channels operated through collective political or migratory movements, the 2005 introduction hinged on the actions of a single individual: acquiring the instrument in Cairo, bringing it to Kuala Lumpur, and embedding it into ASWARA's teaching. This highlights how personal initiative can serve as a catalyst for wider cultural transformation.

In this sense, documenting the first use of the seven-course *oud* in Malaysia is not merely a matter of asserting priority but of recognising how cultural authority is enacted through practice. By employing the instrument in pedagogy, the author did not simply possess a new object but redefined the conditions of musical education in Malaysia. This act of agency parallels earlier historical moments (whether the symbolic gifting of an *oud* to a Melakan ruler or the diasporic introduction of the *qanbūs* into Malay communities), demonstrating that individual choices and institutional contexts are integral to the unfolding of cultural heritage.

TOWARDS A DYNAMIC HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE GAMBUS/LOUD

The significance of the 2005 event, therefore, lies in its capacity to reframe the historiography of the *gambus/oud* in the Malay world. By adding the modern innovation channel to the Ottoman and Hadhrami ones, the study moves beyond static accounts of "origins" towards a dynamic narrative of ongoing transmission. It shows that the *gambus/oud* is not only a heritage object tied to past legacies but a continually evolving instrument that adapts to new contexts, pedagogies and global exchanges.

DISCUSSION

The introduction of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia in 2005 represents more than the arrival

of a new instrument; it embodies a cultural and pedagogical turning point. By synthesising organological developments in the Arab world with Malaysia's own traditions of *gambus* and *oud* performance, the event illuminates how innovation, pedagogy, and cultural transmission interact to reshape musical practice.

This section discusses the broader implications of the 2005 introduction, focusing on three interconnected themes: (1) organological renewal and its significance for the Malay world, (2) pedagogical transformation and the alignment of Malaysia with global standards, and (3) the historiographical reframing of *gambus/oud* studies as an ongoing rather than closed process.

ORGANOLOGICAL RENEWAL IN CONTEXT

Instruments are never static; they embody both continuity and change. The seven-course *oud* represents a clear case of organological renewal, expanding the tonal and modal range available to performers. Its addition of a low bass string was not simply a technical adjustment but a design innovation that responded to evolving musical demands in the Arab world, particularly the desire for greater depth in *taqsim* improvisation and modern ensemble performance (Arabic *Oud* House, n.d.; Shamma 2019; Racy 2011).

In Malaysia, this innovation marked the first incorporation of global *oud* developments into local pedagogy. Earlier six-course models had long defined regional practice, effectively anchoring it in a pre-modern phase. The arrival of the seven-course design synchronized Malaysia with international standards, demonstrating that local musicians could evolve in parallel with global trends. More importantly, heritage in the Malay world should be understood not only as the preservation of older forms but also as the embrace of new organological ideas that shape future traditions.

Thus, the 2005 event stands as a moment of renewal that linked Malaysian practice with a living global continuum of *oud* design and performance.

PEDAGOGICAL TRANSFORMATION

The pedagogical implications of the seven-course *oud*'s introduction are equally significant. As documented in Section 3.3, the instrument expanded the scope of *maqāmāt* teaching at ASWARA by allowing teachers and students to explore deeper registers and more complex modal transitions. This

is particularly important for improvisational training, where access to lower notes can open pathways into new modal spaces and enrich the expressive palette of *taqsim*.

This alignment not only improved technical competency but also fostered cross-cultural dialogue, enabling Malaysian performers to engage more fully in regional and global *oud* networks. Exercises once adapted for six-course instruments could now be taught authentically, enriching curriculum and solidifying ASWARA's role as a pioneering institution for contemporary *oud* pedagogy in Southeast Asia.

Collectively, these changes established a pedagogical bridge between Cairo and Kuala Lumpur that continues to shape Malaysia's *oud* education today.

CULTURAL TRANSMISSION AND INDIVIDUAL AGENCY

Unlike the Ottoman and Hadhrami channels that emerged from collective movements, this modern transmission stemmed from the deliberate action of a single educator who brought the instrument from Cairo and embedded it in ASWARA's teaching. This act exemplifies how individual agency can catalyse cultural change, transforming a personal acquisition into institutional practice.

The significance of such individual agency lies in its capacity to reshape collective practice. Once introduced into the classroom, the seven-course *oud* became part of a wider institutional framework, influencing generations of students and expanding the horizons of Malaysian *oud* pedagogy. In this way, a single act of acquisition became a catalyst for systemic change.

Through this agency, Malaysia's *oud* pedagogy entered a new phase, where innovation and heritage converge through teaching.

REFRAMING MALAY WORLD HISTORIOGRAPHY

The 2005 event also has implications for how the history of the *gambus/oud* in the Malay world is written. As argued in earlier works (Raja Zulkarnain 2024; Raja Zulkarnain & Nizam Attan 2025), the instrument's origins can be understood through Ottoman and Hadhrami channels. Yet these accounts often treat history as something that ended once the instrument was introduced. The introduction of the seven-course *oud* complicates this by showing that new transmissions continue to occur, and that these can be as significant as earlier ones.

This study's three-channel model, Ottoman, Hadhrami and Modern Innovation, recasts Malay-world historiography as an evolving narrative rather than a closed past. It shows that the region is not merely a recipient of earlier transmissions but an active contributor to ongoing global exchanges. In this sense, innovation complements tradition as a vital aspect of cultural continuity.

This reframing aligns with broader debates in ethnomusicology that emphasise the fluidity of tradition and the importance of recognising innovation as part of cultural heritage (Nettl 1987; Marcus 2007). In this light, the 2005 introduction of the seven-course *oud* should be seen not as a rupture but as a continuation of the processes that have always defined Malay world music: adaptation, negotiation, and renewal. The 2005 event thus becomes a lens through which to read the Malay world's capacity for continual reinvention.

MALAYSIA IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

By adopting the seven-course model, Malaysia joined a transnational community of *oud* practitioners engaged in redefining the instrument's modern possibilities. This participation demonstrates that the Malay world is not peripheral but central to global musical dialogues. It also lays the groundwork for future collaborations and research that integrate Malaysia within international networks of *oud* innovation.

In doing so, Malaysia affirms its place as a contemporary contributor to the *oud*'s evolving global narrative.

SUMMARY

In sum, the 2005 introduction of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia represents a cultural milestone with wide-ranging implications. Organologically, it renewed local practice by expanding tonal and modal possibilities. Pedagogically, it transformed the teaching of *maqāmāt* and aligned Malaysia with international standards. Culturally, it demonstrated the role of individual agency in shaping collective heritage and reframed historiography as an ongoing process of transmission and innovation. Globally, it positioned Malaysia within contemporary currents of *oud* practice, ensuring that the country participates in the evolving story of the instrument rather than remaining anchored in its past.

CONCLUSION

This article has documented the first introduction of the seven-course *oud* into Malaysia in 2005, situating the event within the broader history of *gambus/oud* transmission in the Malay world. Acquired in 2005 from its original owner, Mustafa Said Antar, at *Beit al-Oud* (Cairo) and crafted by Muhammad Ali Jaafar, the instrument was employed in teaching at the National Academy of Arts, Culture and Heritage (ASWARA), marking its entry into Malaysia's higher education system. More than a personal acquisition, this moment represented a cultural milestone: the incorporation of contemporary Arab organological innovation into Malaysian pedagogy and performance.

Three key contributions emerge from this study. First, at the organological level, the seven-course *oud* renewed local practice by expanding tonal range and improvisational possibilities beyond the six-course standard. Second, at the pedagogical level, the instrument transformed the teaching of *maqāmāt* in Malaysia, aligning students with international conservatory standards and providing access to repertoire and techniques previously unavailable. Third, at the cultural-historical level, the event extends the historiography of the *gambus/oud* in the Malay world by introducing a third channel of transmission, modern innovation, alongside the established Ottoman and Hadhrami channels.

Recognising 2005 as a landmark year reframes Malay world musical heritage as dynamic rather than static. The history of the *gambus/oud* is not limited to its origins but continues to evolve through ongoing transmissions and innovations. In this light, the seven-course *oud* stands as both an educational tool and a heritage object, symbolising Malaysia's active engagement with global currents of *oud* development. It demonstrates that innovation itself can become heritage, reshaping tradition not by replacing it but by expanding its horizons.

This study also underscores the importance of individual agency in cultural transmission. Whereas earlier channels were shaped by collective processes of diplomacy and migration, the 2005 introduction hinged on the deliberate action of a single individual who bridged Cairo and Kuala Lumpur. Once embedded in pedagogy, however, this act became institutionalised, influencing students, curricula, and broader perceptions of the *oud* in Malaysia. Such cases remind us that cultural history is often driven not only by large-scale flows but also by micro-level decisions that carry lasting significance.

Looking forward, further research could explore the impact of the seven-course *oud* on subsequent generations of Malaysian *oud* and *gambus* players, including how it has shaped performance practice, repertoire, and local instrument-making. Comparative studies with other regions of Southeast Asia would also help situate Malaysia within broader transregional flows of *oud* innovation. By setting the record of 2005, this article establishes the seven-course *oud* as a turning point in the cultural history of the Malay world. It demonstrates that the *gambus/oud* tradition in Malaysia is not merely inherited from the past but is continually renewed through innovation, pedagogy, and global exchange.

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Data and Materials Availability: High-resolution photographs (2005 Ampang personal; 2007 Brunei studio; 2007 TV3 rehearsal), checksum/EXIF reports, and caption sidecars are provided in the Supplementary Materials (to be deposited at OSF/Zenodo, DOI to follow).

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

EVIDENTIARY DOSSIER: SEVEN-COURSE OUD INTRODUCTION (2005)

Prepared for academic submission • Generated on 2025-09-27

To substantiate the 2005 introduction of a seven-course *oud* into Malaysian higher education, this dossier compiles contemporaneous photographs, basic EXIF/creation-date checks, and cryptographic checksums (MD5/SHA-256). Where commercial receipts are unavailable due to mutual transfer, dating is corroborated through photographic evidence and independent institutional/media references. Original image files are preserved; this report is non-destructive.

Use of images featuring identifiable participants is authorised; permissions were obtained for academic publication.



S1. Personal photograph — seven-course oud (Ampang, 2005)

Title: Seven-course *oud* (close-up of bridge, strings, and soundholes)

Provenance: Purchased in 2005 from Mustafa Said Antar, the instrument's original owner and the author's teacher at *Beit al-Oud* (Cairo); maker: Muhammad Ali Jaafar.

Description: Close-up image showing the seven-course layout (thirteen strings: six paired and one single low-bass), bridge, pick guard, and three oval soundholes of the Muhammad Ali Jaafar–crafted instrument. Documents organological features consistent with the 2005 introduction and early pedagogical use.

Location / Date (author dating): Ampang, Selangor — 2005 (*personal photograph*)

Photographer / Credit: Author's archive (Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof)

Rights: © Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof. Used with permission for academic publication.

Technical (EXIF, if retained): SONY DSC-P100; timestamp 2005-10-20 16:51:31 (*camera clock—may not reflect actual capture year*)

Integrity (hashes):=

MD5: 091f1c168b2ba3d4ef07d97d0e108a83

SHA-256: f6cacd6d082d9af0aaedbacaed77d3c647e7d898f68fbc4cf857f557f3ad8a3f

Original filename: Ali Jaafar.JPG



S2. DSC_0037.JPG

Title: Seven-course *oud* — studio portrait (Brunei, 2007)

Description: Color studio portrait showing the author holding a seven-course *oud* (13 strings) with a single low-bass course; three oval soundholes; extended pegbox accommodating the bass course. Serves as contemporaneous visual documentation of the instrument's introduction period.

Location/Date (text): Brunei / 2007

EXIF Date Time Original: 2007:04:29 20:58:31

Camera: NIKON CORPORATION NIKON D70

MD5: 01198cde77c48b383824d991aff8af08

SHA-256:86c37b833afa42ae4be9ac99570661fd653fce7773077023d328de1be43d820e

Credit/Rights: Author's personal archive | © Raja Zulkarnain Raja Mohd Yusof. Used with permission for academic publication.



S3. rehearsal bnw.jpg

Title: TV3 morning-show rehearsal (Kuala Lumpur, 2007) — seven-course *oud* in ensemble use

Description: Black-and-white rehearsal image prior to a TV3 morning-show appearance, Kuala Lumpur (2007). Features the seven-course *oud* used in teaching/performance with students, providing third-party context.

Location/Date (text): Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia / 2007

EXIF Date Time Original: 2007:11:21 07:52:28

Camera: SONY DSC-T100

MD5: 4eec8167eda4d234c785576fb99bd3f8

SHA-256:9c9c5a408530ebb77ff0e2e88481ba73e5875c2e7ebc1dfaf306e304645b0931

Credit/Rights: Author's personal archive / TV3 |
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NOTES AND LIMITATIONS

These materials are provided to support historical verification in a practice-based organological study. Original files and sidecar metadata (CSV/XMP) accompany this report with MD5 and SHA-256 hashes for integrity checks. Third-party corroboration (station confirmation, course documents, witness attestations) should be appended as received.