PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON SOME ASIAN HARPS AND LUTES IN IMAGES AND LITERATURE

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In seeking to come to terms with the methodological implications of researching the musics and musicians that travelled between Africa and Asia in a period roughly 1300 to 1500 years ago, I set about searching through libraries and archives to collect materials; these were partly to think with and partly to help constitute a resource for my colleagues. Growing increasingly appalled at my ignorance of the musics of this time, I set about learning something of Iran’s (Persia’s) music and social history, as I thought I could build on a working knowledge of South Asia in this period, when influences from West Asia began to make more intensive inroads into South Asia in the wake of long centuries of interaction between the two regions.1 This period is markedly different in that it was marked by invasions and conquests, and accompanied by a relatively newly-established religious ideology.

The other impetus shaping this presentation is a decision to look to material culture, as this represents a resource produced within this period and which continues to exist and do work in present time. In a first essay in this area, I have looked at representations in iconography and literature of some string instruments from Iran and South Asia. I had every intention of mapping these occurrences in place and time, but that has yet to come about. At the same time, I am very aware of the impulses to relate this partial approach to the work that historians are undertaking, to archaeology and to many other approaches to making sense of past musical practices and sounds, but am resisting these urgings for the present. A disclaimer is in order: this paper sits in the space where scholars work on the archaeology of music.2 I confess my complete lack of archaeological credentials up front, though I have certified claims to some acquaintance with art history and literature.

In considering the images and texts that I collected and sought to relate to each other I drew up a schema for the relation between images and texts. Though I have not done so, it is possible to enter into such a schema each work under consideration, which would perhaps be useful for, minimally, keeping track of and defining the status of a work, and might suggest something of the reliability of the data. Given the many issues that arise in describing a work prior to studying and analysing it, the comments cell is likely to bulge. I think of common situations that occur, as when a manuscript might be a contemporary or later copy of an original and the artist illustrating the manuscript might introduce erroneous, fanciful or merely later notions in illustration. Where the work is a translation, contemporary or not, similar – and other – conceptual problems might well arise.

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1 I follow Merriam-Webster in defining South Asia as a ‘region of indefinite boundaries usually thought of as including all or some of the following countries: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives’ (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/South%20Asia, accessed 3 January 2017).
2 Also known by the portmanteau word ethnoarcheomusicology (Olsen 2002), or iconology of music.
Further arrangements suggested themselves as I worked; I might enumerate the kinds of texts, images, musicians, musical ensembles, instruments, musical details, contexts, etc. I began to lose my taste for theorising taxonomies and turned to description of specific works. At first I thought of the project as being to identify all possible images and related texts in East and North Africa and Asia. I have continued to collect in this way, but here limit the discussion to two groups of chordophones, harps and lutes, found in Iran and South Asia in this period.

In considering the images and texts that I collected and relate to each other I drew up a very basic schema for the relation between images and texts. These are set out in Table 1, which distinguishes five relationships between text and image where: the image and relevant text form part of one work; an image and a relevant contemporary text exist, but are not part of the same work; an image and a relevant, non-contemporary text exist; a relevant image exists, but there is no relevant text. The table also lists a speculative relationship that considers the possibility of instances where no image or contemporaneous text exists, but the existence of either or both might be inferred from images or texts.

Table 1: Relations between images and texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>contemporary</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>image and relevant text are parts of the same work</td>
<td>e.g. illustrated manuscript</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>contemporary</td>
<td>same or other</td>
<td>image and relevant text are not part of the same work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>non-contemporary</td>
<td>same or other</td>
<td>image and relevant, non-contemporaneous text exists</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>present</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td>contemporary</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>image exists but no relevant text</td>
<td>a textual source might indicate the prior existence of a relevant text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>absent</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>contemporary or not</td>
<td>same or other</td>
<td>the prior existence of an image might be inferred from a text</td>
<td>a related or adjacent plastic art work or an archaeological artefact might also indicate the prior existence of an image or an aspect of it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both kinds of instruments have a very long history prior to the period under consideration, and both classes of instrument seem to disappear in Iran and India during the 800 years the Recentring AfroAsia (RAA) project has demarcated: the period 700–1500 CE. The broad aims of the RAA project include tracing and investigating the movement and interactions of musicians and their musics between Africa and Asia in this period. Constrained by a need for brevity, this report does not extend the discussion of these instruments to elsewhere in Asia or Africa, though there is a great deal of relevant data about these regions.

Both (2009: 4) has developed a ‘general model for music archaeological research’ that has at its heart the aim of describing ‘past musical behaviours and sound’. In this paper I will consider only two modes to approach the music, musicians, and ‘musical behaviours and sound’ of the past, iconography and literature. I attempt to bring together images (of instruments, music-making, dance and ritual) with literature that sketches events or moments in music history. This approach not only yields data for the historical project, but also enables some conjecture into an aesthetics of different performances which moves between philosophy, precise technical data, cosmology and the emotional lives of the people involved in performance in whatever role.
Earlier musical practices and representations of musical instruments appear in many forms in the period 700 CE–1500 CE, and reach into the present in the form of survivals and traces of representation through graphic, textual and other media. In most instances, text and image are separated, and it is I as a researcher who juxtapose and read them together. In other instances, graphic illustrations occur alongside text; these include musical treatises where the illustrations present music-related details usually more or less in agreement with the text.

In considering instruments and their use after 700 CE, it is helpful to briefly review the known/unknown history, which I will deal with by chordophone type. At the same time, it is sometimes necessary to turn to sources earlier than 700 CE to trace a trajectory, or later than 1500 CE as some of these latter sources represent earlier practices, reference now-lost sources or serve as representations of ethnographic parallels of performance practice.

This kind of project tends towards the encyclopaedic, and what has been accomplished so far is a kind of experimentation in developing a method and exploring the possibilities of this approach to the larger endeavour. This combined approach can potentially yield data for the bigger historical project, and also enables conjecture into an aesthetics of performance which moves between philosophy, precise historical and technical data, cosmology and the emotional life of the performance.

I have relied largely on images available on the internet, and images in publications – both e-texts and printed materials. In addition I worked with some original photographs. Sizeable libraries of important primary texts known to deal mostly with music and musical instruments and/or to refer to them are not accessible to me in the few language I can read, and many relevant texts remain unpublished. The range of languages of these texts is formidable: Arabic, Chinese, Malayalam, Parthian, Farsi (Persian), Sanskrit, Swahili, Tamil and more. Further, to attempt a complete inventory of representations of musical instruments and music making is almost inconceivable. And, as Fallahzadeh notes with regard to Persian texts (2005: 17), some materials are guarded as treasures by librarians and other cultural gatekeepers. He hopes that these libraries where these treasures have been lying for decades will use new technology and be more willing to allow scholars and specialists to have access to manuscripts of these works, and that they do not let these treasures lay there year after year and century after century without being used. (2005: 224)

This plea bears repetition for the many regions and countries this project is interested in, though some institutions and many individuals are and have been exemplary in their care for and propagation of the collections, and encourage access and research.

The occurrence of images of musical instruments, music-making and dance as well as relevant texts is uneven across Africa and Asia. To generalise, it appears that the greatest number of texts dealing with music originates in Asia, and the greatest number of iconographic representations of musical instruments is in South, Central, East and Southeast Asia. Iconographic and textual repositories in Africa extend through Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia as well as parts of the Maghreb, and these – and others, too – have not been uniformly studied and need careful attention. See Simeneh (2010) for an assessment of scholarship on Ethiopian music in one East African country that appears to have a large amount of music-related material in several media.
Methodological considerations

With its reliance on materials published in print and digital media, this preliminary survey cannot be exhaustive, nor are the data of a consistently high quality. My intention is not merely to compile inventories and, later, to map, but also to begin to interpret what the meaning of the occurrence and absence of representation, and the particular forms of representation, might mean to the historical subjects who created and 'consumed' these. What kinds of meaning might one expect to find by inquiring into the nature of the iconography and related or at least contemporary texts? And what does reading the occurrence of text and iconography mean in the absence of the sounds? In some cases this is quite clear, as there are explicit statements relating to music and its effects on the listener, as well as on musicians, dancers and actors and their audiences and companions. Not all the texts are music-positive.

Chordophones in Iran and India

Iran and South Asia interacted from very early in history in many ways, not only through trade but also in cultural (including musical), intellectual and other ways. The presence of Persians in India and Indians in Iran is attested by the presence of India's Parsi community, which began migrating to India in the 8th century CE. Many texts and the plastic arts point to this mutual presence. Historians continue to debate the significance of the presence of Sasanians (or Persians) in the Ajanta murals in Western India (Spink 2005), for example Bahrām V Gōr (420–38 CE) who is said to have 'recruited 12,000 singers from India' (Lawergren 2009). Musicological and other texts refer to many instruments in both India and Iran which are not identifiable today.

The Sassanians employed large number [sic] of instruments, many of which are known only in name. In the story known as 'Khosrow and his Page' the king asks: 'Which musician is the finest and the best?' and the boy diplomatically mentions the players of all instruments he knew: chang (which he calls the foremost), vin, vinkannār, mushtaq, tunbūr, barbat, nād, dumbalak, rasn and 16 others (Unvala, 1917, pp.62–3). The identity of the chang is known, but many others are as yet unidentified, and sound-similarities in translations cannot be relied upon. (Lawergren et al. n.d.)

Harps

Harps are found very early in Iran and Mesopotamia. Arched harps in Iran were the first complex instruments to appear in the archaeological records… and Iran was the apparent birthplace (3300–3100 B.C.E.), although Mesopotamia was not far behind. Since the dates are close and the representations few, it is not possible to determine the region of origin. (Lawergren 2016).

In India the earliest possible textual references to the harp, referred to as a viṇa, come from the ancillary Vedic literature which records that the viṇa was played as part of Vedic ritual (Coomaraswamy 1931; Sambamoorthy 1960). In this context the term viṇa could have referred to the harp, as the term viṇa in early Indian literature is a cover-all for string instruments including harps and lutes (Rowell 1992: 14) and zithers.
Harps in Iran: Arched Harps

The earliest example of an arched harp in Iran is on an unbaked cylinder seal excavated in Çoğā Miš and dated to approximately 3400 BCE. There is very little evidence for arched harps in Iran subsequently and, according to Lawergren (2016), angular harps replaced the arched harp in Iran around 1900 BCE. Early arched harps are found in Egypt and Sumeria and elsewhere. According to Lawergren (ibid.), angular harps replaced the arched harp in Iran around 1900 BCE.

Figure 1: Fragment of an unbaked cylinder seal with image of man playing an arched harp

Harps in South Asia

Though the modern Gogla bīn-bāja of Madhya Pradesh meticulously described and documented by Roderic Knight (1985, 2007) is a marginally occurring instrument, it is the sole contemporary example of the documentation of an Indian arched harp. Mr Pandro, the musician, uses a technique of strumming and damping the strings to provide accompaniment to singing; Knight produced both a video recording and a description of the technique. This strumming-and-damping technique is one possible way of playing that harpers of the past might have used.

Before the 8th century the arched harp is widely distributed in South Asia as many art works attest. This harp is generally regarded as having disappeared from South Asia shortly after 700 CE and existing only in Myanmar, though it also disappeared from elsewhere in Southeast Asia, notably Banteay Chhmar, Cambodia, where it appears in bas-relief. But Knight’s research has forced a reconsideration that will involve meticulous investigation for further pre-colonial and subsequent occurrences.

In his article on the harp in India, Knight (1985) aggregated the information about the
occurrence of the harp in India, setting out his findings in a table and map. He omits significant iconographical depictions of the harp in South India, which I will take up here.

7th–9th century CE South Indian images of the arched harp

Coomaraswamy claims that the ‘harp-vina’ disappeared from India at the end of the Gupta period (approx. 320–550 CE) notwithstanding Cēkkilār’s description of its use in the 7th century CE in South India in his 12th century CE periya purāṇam (2008). Though five centuries intervened, the use of the yāḻ is inscribed in the name of one of the saintly musicians whose exploits he describes, viz. Tirunilakaṇṭa Yalpānar, a professional bard and harper who was beloved of Śiva and became the musical and spiritual companion of the child prodigy composer-singer-saint Tiruṉāna Campantar (Sivanandam 1999). There are several depictions of the harp and its use in South India subsequent to the 7th century, and here I look at an important occurrence of the harp and associated notation for its music.

Figure 2: Gods, celestial musicians and other heavenly beings adore the recumbent Visnu at the Tirumaiyam Satyamurti temple

Source: Poetry in Stone http://poetryinstone.in/?s=tirumeyyam, accessed June 2017

Given the numerous references to the harp (yāḻ) in caṅkam poetry – including the two Tamil epics – and later literature such as the periya purāṇam, it is surprising that there are apparently only two surviving images of harpers. One is at Malaiyadipatti, and the second at Tirumaiyam, nearby sites in Pudukottai district of Tamilnadu. The details of the Malaiyadipatti images are difficult to discern, so I focus on the latter. Both depictions are similar in concept and execution,

3 Sivananda’s telling of the Tirunilakaṇṭa Yalpānar’s life, taken from Cēkkilār: In Tiru Erukattanpuliyur, in the Chola kingdom, there lived an ardent devotee of Lord Siva by name Tiru Neelakanta Yazhpanar. He was an expert in playing the Yazh (Veena, a musical instrument). It was his habit to visit many sacred shrines and sing His glories on the Yazh. He once went to Madura. He was standing at the entrance and singing. The Lord wanted to hear him at close quarters and so asked the devotees in their dream, to bring Yazhpanar into the inner shrine the next day. When the Brahmins took him inside the shrine, Yazhpanar was surprised, but understood it was His Lila and that He wanted to hear him play on the Yazh. As he was singing, a voice was heard in the heaven: ‘If the instrument rests on the wet floor, it will be spoilt: give him a golden seat to occupy.’ At once a golden seat was offered to him. Yazhpanar prostrated to the Lord and sang of His supreme compassion, standing on the golden seat.

Yazhpanar then went to Tiruvarur and, here, too, he remained outside the shrine and sang. And here, too, the Lord wanted him to sing in His immediate presence. So, He created another opening on the northern side of the temple. Yazhpanar understood the Lord’s will and entered through the gate and sang in His Presence. How he joined Sambandar and got Liberation, has been told in Sambandar’s life.
however. In the Satyamūrti temple in Tirumaiyam, Tamilnadu, the images of a harper and (apparent) lute player appear in a complex sculptural assemblage. They are part of a group of deities flanking the image of Brahma, who sits on the lotus rising from Viṣṇu's navel. The harper is a sage (Sanskrit, ṛṣi), identifiable by long dreadlocks (Sanskrit, jaṭā) crowning his head. Another sage beside him plays a long-necked lute.4

The relevance of the Kudumiyamalai inscriptions to the image in Tirumaiyam is that it apparently mirrors the same musical notation which had also been inscribed at Tirumaiyam, but was subsequently effaced in 1245 to make way for the record of an important settlement between feuding religious groups.5 It now survives only in traces sufficiently discernible to deduce the missing content. These inscriptions are published in full and discussed in Widdess (1979:115–50).

Figure 3: Detail of image in Figure 2 showing a divine sage playing the seven-stringed arched harp parivādini, alongside a lute player.

4 Yāḷ is the name for a harp in ancient and later Tamil literature. Viṇai, the Tamil form of the Sanskrit viṇa, also occurs in old Tamil literature and appears to refer to a lute (Sambamoorthy 1960: 213). There is a temptation to identify the sage as Nārada since – apart from being one of the divine beings most commonly associated with the viṇa and, as we know, the harp can be taken as a kind of viṇa (where viṇa is used generically for chordophone) – he is the son of Brahma, the central figure in this group. This identification from the iconography, however, would be inconclusive in my opinion.

5 Pradeep Chakravarthy (2001) notes: ‘The important and longest [clause...] records the settlement reached between the Vishnu and Siva worshippers in a long-standing feud. Done in the presence of an erstwhile Hoysala army chief, the clauses rival those of a modern legal contract for their comprehensiveness’.
The iconography of harp players in Tirumaiyam and other places in India shows that many harp players used plectrums; these usually look like short sticks. One possible technique is that the plectrums strummed the strings while the other hand damped the strings that should not be sounded, as in the *bin-bajā*. Sambamoorthy’s interpretation of the stick-shaped plectrum is that it was used to execute slides or ‘occasional glides’ (1960: 204); unfortunately this author provides no citation to bear out his assertion.

Figure 4: Inscriptions beside and above the image of the god Ganeśa in relief, Kudumiyamalai, India


*Angular harps*

Angular harps appear in the iconography of North Africa, West Asia, Central and East Asia but not in the South Asian record. There is, however, no continuous tradition of making and playing these harps to the present day. Ḥosayn-‘Alī Mallāḥ cites Shigeo Kishibe as saying that angular harps were made in Iran ‘until fairly recently’ (quoted in Mallāḥ n.d.).

Lawergren (2009) characterises the pre-Islamic Sasanian period as follows: Iran’s rulers were very appreciative of music and gave musicians a special, elevated status at court. Kosrow II’s reign (590–628 CE) is taken as a golden age of Iranian music; Ferdowsi in the *Shanameh* says that he brought 10 000 musicians from India. He is pictured among musicians in a boar-hunting scene in a large cliff relief at Ṭāq-e Bostān, in western Iran. There two boats carry women playing angular harps and a third carries women drummers. There is no contemporary description, though the hunt is described in the *Shanameh*.\(^6\) Lawergren (2009) describes the scene:

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\(^{6}\) I have not traced this reference, but in a disastrous episode in the *Shahnama*, (vol. 6, chap. 131), another king, Bahrām – famed for his amorous exploits – sets out hunting on camelback with a lover, a musician
The king, holding bow and arrows, stands in a boat amidst a band of harpists. Another group of harpists is seated in a second boat, while numerous musicians play on a platform at the shore. It is a remarkable scene because the boats are shown at two successive moments within the same panel, and the harps are rendered in considerable detail.

**Figure 5:** The boar hunt, Ṭaq-e Bostān. Women harpers can be seen in two boats. The high relief carvings most probably date from the late 6th century.


In Iran's Islamic period, starting in the mid-7th century CE, harp-playing continued to flourish. The poet Rūdakī (d.940 CE) is described as a master harp player (Zarrînḵūb 1984: 214, cited in Mallāh n.d.). Several writers on music tell us how harps were made and played: Fārābī (d.950 CE), the 14th-century *Resāle kanz al-tuḥaf dar mūsīqī* (see below) and ‘Abd-al-Qâder Marâqī (d.ca.1434–35 CE) who, in describing the harp, adds that the ‘performer combines knowledge with practice, he can obtain the whole gamut of the seventeen scales’ (quoted in Mallāh n.d.).

The 14th-century Persian treatise *Resāle kanz al-tuḥaf dar mūsīqī* describes the čang and eight other instruments (Tsuge 2013). The čang is taken up in the first chapter of the second part, which deals with “‘imperfect instruments” (*sāzāt-e nāqeṣe*) and the twisting of strings’ (Tsuge 2013: 172): the author divides instruments into ‘perfect’ and ‘imperfect’ ones based on the relative limitations of instruments. The ‘perfect’ chordophones are those lutes and fiddles ‘stopped by the fingers; imperfect types include harps and psalteries [or box zithers], where the strings aren’t stopped and only a limited number of pitches can be produced’ (*ibid.*: 167). This

with her ‘lute’. Things turn sour when Āzāda criticises Bahrām’s lack of compassion towards the deer he shot, and he has his camel trample her to death. See http://persian.packhum.org/persian/main?url=p%3Fauth%3D68%26work%3D001, accessed 16 December 2016.

7 Tsuge (2013: 165), basing the date on a chronogram on the earliest known manuscript, dates it to 1355 or 1363 CE.
would seem to have to do with the limitations of the potential for modifying notes and phrases. There is not much deflection or ‘bending’ of a note possible with a harp or box zither, while an ‘ūd or robāb has greater potential for the execution of kinds of ornamentation and expressive and subtle raising and lowering of notes and slides. Though imperfect, the čang is ‘rather perfect’ (ibid.: 173). The description is marvellously detailed, with ideal measurements of the various parts (which are named), recommendations for the materials to be used (different woods, tuning collars of long goat hair, strings of three kinds: eight each of ḥād, zīr, and matlaṭ strings), and instructions on how to make various parts, how to hold the instrument, on tuning technique and theory, and on fingering techniques. This description and the illustration taken together give a very good idea of the physical construction of the instrument, and establish connections to music theory that enable a theoretical understanding of the performed music. Certainly good instrument makers have plenty to work with in developing new instruments from the description.

Apart from arched and angular harps, no other types of harp are recorded as being in use in Iran.

Figure 6: Čang from the British Library, I. O. Islamic 2067, f.19b. The labelled parts are: 1. soundchest (kāse).) 2. The rod (parde) 3. tail (daste). Copyright British Library Board.

Source: British Library. Copyright British Library Board.

Lutes

Jean During (1988) opines that the old, short-necked lute found in Iran and India ‘probably originated in central Asia’ where it is pictured in two sites in Uzbekistan: Kačayán in North Bactria (1st century BCE or CE) and in a terracotta statuette from Dal’verzin Tepe (1st century BCE). The latter ‘is at the moment the oldest evidence of the existence of the barbaṭ’.

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8 The matlaṭ strings ‘should be thicker in comparison with the other three kinds, and thinner in comparison with the bam’. The third kind, matnā, is the thinnest, while the fourth kind, zīr ‘should be thicker in comparison with the matnā, but thinner than the matlaṭ’. If a 25th string is added, it should be a bam string, i.e. the thickest kind, made of spun gut (Tsuge 2013: 167–68).

Subsequently a short-necked lute similar in form to the Uzbek examples appears in a Gandhara sculpture dated to the 2nd–4th centuries CE, which Marcel-Dubois (1937: 40) terms a luth échancre (notched lute). It was quite possibly known as a viṇa, the generic term for string instrument in early Buddhist sources. Neubauer (ibid.) describes the old barbat with reference to contemporary texts:

In the early Islamic period, the barbat was not identical with the ‘ud. It had a longer neck and a smaller body. It was compared with the Roman balance (qarasṭun, see Mofażżal b. Salama, Ketāb al-malāhī, tr., p. 6–7), and may be depicted in Qoşayr 'Amra (see Farmer, Islam: Musikgeschichte, p. 32). Only later, when the instrument had fallen into oblivion, did the name barbat come to refer to the short necked lute (e.g., Ebn Sinā, Şefā’, p. 144). The best barbat players were said to come from Marv (Jāhez, al-Tabaṣṣor p. 37).

Ovoid short-necked plucked lutes in South Asia

A lute shaped like the barbat makes its appearance in the Indian iconographic record around the 5th century CE, when it is referred to by the generic chordophone term viṇa. India has a long history of musicophilia, and the viṇa is lauded as the preeminent instrument. As early as the šatapatha brāhmaṇa the nexus between Vāc (Sarasvati) and the viṇa is established by the gods (Ludvik 2001:93; Samakanta 1911). The viṇa stands for all melody, as in the frequently cited pronouncement of ‘the most celebrated Upaniṣadic speaker and philosopher’ Yajñavalka:

\[\text{viṇāvādana tattvajñāḥ: śruti jāti viśāradah: /} \\
\text{tāḷāścā prāyasena mokṣmārgam ca gacchaḥ //} \quad \text{(Staal 2008:167)}

One skilled in Vina play, one who is an expert in the varieties of srutis (quarter-tones) and one who is proficient in tala attains salvation without effort.

(Sambamoorthy’s translation 1960: 202)\(^9\)

The viṇa came to be associated very early with the goddess Sarasvati also known as Vāc (Sanskrit, speech), the embodiment of the Vedas and thus of all knowledge, who is frequently shown playing a viṇa with two hands while holding a book representing the Vedas, a rosary and/or other objects (Wayman 1977: 256). If we follow Sambamoorthy (1960: 213) in identifying the viṇa as a lute, then the occurrence of a fretted lute dates at least to Vedic times: ‘In the Vedic lute for example, two guts were tied around the dandi [i.e. the neck] to indicate the svarita and udatta svaras, the anudatta svara being given by the open string’.\(^{10}\) In the same place he also notes that ‘[t]he bowl of the Vedic viṇa was covered with leather’.

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\(^9\) I prefer to translate śruti as microtone; tāla refers to rhythm.

\(^{10}\) Svarita, uddata and anudatta svaras are the three tones used in Vedic singing, lower, higher and middle tones respectively.
While the major Tamil classics Tolkāppiyam, Cillapatikāram and Manimēkalai all refer to the harp (yāḻ), as do some shorter poems of the caṅkam period, none of these refer to a lute (Tamil, viṇai, Sanskrit viṇa) (Zveibil 1973). But by the 7th century, Tirunāvukkaracar (a.k.a. Appar) sings of the viṇai in a life-threatening crisis: a Jain king, outraged by his apostasy in embracing the worship of Śiva, ordered him to be drowned far out at sea, with a rock to weigh him down. At his moment of greatest danger, Appar sang of the shelter of Śiva’s feet, starting with the phrase ‘mācila viṇaiyum māla matiyamum’ (like the viṇa’s pleasing tone). Then he went on to compare this refuge to the early evening moon and other delightful, comforting experiences: a pleasant breeze, springtime and a pond where bees hum. Miraculously the stone became a boat and Appar came ashore safely at a village near Tiruppatiripuliyūr, modern-day Kadaloor (cf. Shaivam.org n.d.).

In the 9th century CE, the Tamil saint Māṇikkavācakar refers to the viṇai and the yāḻ played in the same devotional performance context. This provides a late date for the existence of the harp in South Indian music practice, providing the poet isn’t being anachronistic. It also establishes the presence of the lute played at the same time in the same context. Sambamoorthy cites the relevant lines and translates them, noting that ‘[t]he lute and the harp continued side by side and Manickavachagar in his Tirupalliyezhuchchi (verse 4) significantly refers to the fact that there were players on the Veena and the Yazh:—viṇaiyar oru pāl yāḻinar oru pāḷ’ (1960: 213). I translate this Tamil verse literally as: a viṇai player (masc.) one side, a yāḻ player (masc.) one side.

Sambamoorthy’s citation, however, differs from others. Pope has ‘innicai viṇaiyariyāḻinar orupāḷ’ in his translation of the full tirupalliyeḻucci (Māṇikkavācakar & Pope 1900: 209). Here is the
relevant stanza in which the citation occurs, with Pope's translation; to gain a better understanding of the performance situation, it is important to quote the stanza in full:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{innicai vīṇaiyāḷinār orupāl} & \quad \text{There stand the players on the sweet-voiced lute (vīṇai) and lyre \textit{sic}; harp;}, \\
\text{[irukkoṭṭottiramiyampinar orupāl} & \quad \text{there those that utter praises with the Vedic chaunt;} \\
\text{tunnīya piṇai malarkkaiyinar orupāl} & \quad \text{There those whose hands bear wreaths of flowers entwined;} \\
\text{toḻukaiyar aḻukaiyartuṉkaiyar orupāl} & \quad \text{there those that bend, that weep, in ecstasy that faint;} \\
\text{cenniyil aṅcali kūppinar orupāl} & \quad \text{there those that clasp above their heads adoring hands;} \\
\text{tiruperuṇṭurai uṟaicivaperumāne} & \quad \text{Civa-Lord, in Perun-turrai's hallowed shrine Who dwellst!} \\
\text{ennaiyum āṇṭukonṭinnarulpuriyum} & \quad \text{Me too make Thou Thine own, on me sweet grace bestow} \\
\text{emperumān paḷḷi eḷuṭarulāyē]} & \quad \text{Our mighty Lord FROM OFF THY COUCH IN GRACE ARISE!}
\end{align*}
\]

This stanza is one of a series intended to be sung at dawn to waken Śiva, asleep in his temple in Peruntūrai. It presents a scene of ecstatic worshippers at dawn, one of them the poet who longs for the god's mystic grace.

These two examples of Tamil poetry representing the instruments occur in devotional religious poetry. This is in contrast to the earlier Tamil caṅkam literature, which presents the instruments in settings where professional women musicians perform for and sometimes with their customers and/or lovers, who at times are themselves skilled (usually) amateur musicians and composers. The other context is where a professional bard sings the praises of, or rebukes a ruler (who might be a local chieftain or even a king). Heroes who are not rulers also come in for praise (cf. Zvelebil 1973).

But by the 7th century CE – starting with Āntāl, the Vaishnava woman poet-saint transformed into a goddess – a major religious movement had arisen in South India. This devotional approach to religion – in which music and devotional song are key – moved through the entire religious world, sweeping away or transforming many other approaches to religion and speeding the exit of Jainism and Buddhism from large areas of India, initially in South India. One can argue that this devotional approach remains the dominant mode of religious activity within Hinduism. It is this devotional mysticism that appears in Tirunāvukkaracar and Māṇikkyavācakar (Yocum 1973).
Figure 8 shows an image from the 5th century that depicts both a lute and an arched harp being played together. Though it is from a Hindu temple, it does not depict performers in the presence of a deity; the scenes are not likely to be much different from that of secular performances; the musicians appear to be regular humans, as there are no mythological musician-figures like divine sages, *gandharvas* and *kinnaras*.

Figure 8 is dated to the Gupta period c.400–499 CE. It is a panel of an architrave from the Padmāvatī temple in Pawāyā, Madhya Pradesh, India (cf. Saxena n.d.). It clearly shows the lute and arched harp as part of the ensemble accompanying a dancer. All the performers are women, and the artist has placed them in three horizontal bands with differences in size to create a sense of distance / depth, with the lower figures slightly larger than those in the top band. The dancer, the only standing figure, is by far the largest, and is placed prominently just off-centre and standing on the lower framing ledge of the bas-relief. The top left of the bas-relief is missing. The woman holding hand cymbals in the top band conducts the dance and – judging by later accounts – the entire performance. The cymbal player is flanked by a woman apparently fanning her and another woman, probably a singer. A drummer is seated to the left of the top band. The middle band of musicians comprises a transverse flute player and another drummer, seated on a raised seat in order to clasp a drum between her thighs. At her feet is a lamp. In the lowest band one woman plays a seven-stringed lute, and another plays a six- or seven-stringed arched harp. It is clear that the harper holds a stick-like plectrum in her left hand, while the lute player’s right hand is in the same position as a modern *sarod* player, who uses a coconut-shell plectrum.

On the question of the plectrum, the most popular Sanskrit thesaurus, the *amarakośa*, states that the *vīna* and other instruments are played with a *kōṇa: kōṇo viṇādi vādānam* (Amarasimha 2016:19). Sambamoorthy identifies the *kōṇa* as a plectrum, and notes that ’*Danta kōṇa* [Sanskrit, literally a ‘tooth’ *kōṇad*] was an ivory plectrum’ (1960: 214). He is supported by Srinivasa Reddy (2010) commenting on an image in v. 47 of the epic Telugu poem *amukatamalyada* written by the Vijayanagar emperor Krishnadevaraya; [*Paraśurāma*’s] fame became a lute, plucked with a hatchet. Drawn from the fire of a raging sun’. Reddy translates the Sanskrit word *vallaki* as ‘lute’, and comments on two other interpretations that ‘identify it as a bowed instrument when they take *kōṇamu* as a *kaddini* (stick) and *kamanu* (bow) respectively. I read *kōṇamu* as a tip or edge, and interpret Paraśurāma’s axe (*kuthāram*) as a type of plectrum’ (Reddy 2010: loc. 2735–45).11

From the earliest appearance in India of the *barbat*-like ovoid shaped lute to the development of many long-necked lutes is a long trajectory in which – going by the number of images – the lutes appear at times to have been eclipsed by stick zithers of various kinds. The latter can be related to stick zithers in Africa and southeast Asia, as Blench (2012) has done in looking at the chest-resonated stick zither.

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11 Paraśurāma was a brāhmaṇa incarnation of Viṣṇu who set out to destroy the warriors’ (ksatriyas’) power, using his axe to annihilate his enemies. He is said, finally, to have hurled his axe into the sea, thus creating Kerala in south-western India.
Figure 8: Bas-relief of dancer with musicians, including an ovoid short-necked plucked lute (lower left) and arched harp. From an architrave, Padmavati temple, Pawaya.


Ovoid short-necked plucked lutes in Iran

Not long after the Gandharan example (Figure 7), the barbat appears in the Iranian iconographic record. During (1988) relies on a reference in Ferdowsi’s Šāh-nāma (c.1010 CE), written some six centuries after the event, to suggest that the short-necked lute was introduced to Iran from India:

[t]his form of barbat was probably adopted in Persia a few decades later [than its appearance in Gandhara, estimated at 2nd–4th centuries CE]; it is said to have appeared during the reign of Bahrām Gór, when, according to the Šāh-nāma (ed. Borūḵīm, VII-VIII, p. 2259), 10,000 Lōris arrived from India, ‘all excelling in the art of the barbat’. This suggests that the instrument was imported to Iran via north India.

Bahrām V Gór reigned from 420 to 438 CE, so this is presumably the period During has in mind.

In Persian and Arab textual sources the barbat occurs frequently in accounts of musicians’ presence and exploits. At times there is a mere mention, as when we read that Sultan Maḥmud Ġaznavi’s (r.388–421/998–1030) ‘son and successor, Sultan Masʿud (r.421–32/1031–40), was entertained by the lute player Moḥammad Barbaṭi and the songstress Setti Zarrin-kamar, also
called Setti Zarrin Moṭreba’ (Mašḥun, I, 163, quoted in Neubauer 2009). The ‘Barbaṭi’ in Moḥammad Barbaṭi’s name indicates his proficiency on the instrument. More details are recorded in some cases, such as that of the renowned poet and musician, Bārbad, at the court of the Sasanian ruler Ṭosrow II Parvēz (r.591–628), whose poetry and music is remembered in a wealth of anecdotes, and led to him becoming an emblem of a golden age of music and poetry in later periods. The extent of his influence on music is indicated by the following references that Tafażżoli (1988) collected.

Bārbad is related to have composed, at the request of the workmen, a melody called Bāg-e nakjirān ‘garden of the game’ on the occasion of the completion of the great gardens at Qaṣr-e Šīrīn (Ebn al-Faqīh, pp. 158ff.; Yāqūt, IV, pp. 112-13). Neẓāmī (Kosrow o Šīrīn, pp. 190-94) mentions the name of the thirty airs composed by Bārbad for each day of the month. These names, with some variations, are also recorded in some Persian dictionaries such as Borhān-e qāṭe’ (see Christensen, 1918, pp. 368-77, and Iran. Sass., pp. 485f.). He is also said to have composed 360 melodies for the king’s banquet, one of which he used to sing each day (Ṭārīḵ-e gozīda, p. 123). Taʿālebī (p. 698) attributes to him the authorship of the royal modes (koĀ’sravānī), apparently the same as the seven royal modes (torq al-molūkīya) mentioned by Masʿūdī (Morūj, ed. Pellat, V, pp. 127-28; cf. also Ebn Ḳordāḏbeh, Lahw, p. 15).

An anecdote from the Agānī (V:58) deals with Bārbad’s musicality and his mastery of the barbaṭ even in a vexatious situation:

a musician who together with Bārbad was present at a royal banquet, instigated by jealousy, took advantage of the latter’s temporary absence from the banquet and disordered the strings of his lute. On his return to the banquet, Bārbad, unaware that his instrument was out of tune, started to play. As kings did not approve of musicians’ tuning their instruments in their presence, he continued his performance so dexterously that nobody noticed the defect of his instrument. It was only after the banquet that the king was informed of it. (Tafażżoli n.d.).

The lute on a Sasanian-period metal plate in the British Museum is taken to be a barbaṭ. In appearance it is similar in form to the elongated ovoid short-necked plucked lutes found in Gandharan (Figure 9) and Indian images (Figure 8). The way that the lute player holds the instrument is similar to that seen in the Gandharan and other Iranian images.

In later developments in Iran, the evolution of the ovoid short-necked plucked lutes in Iran into the ūd, for example, assumes many different forms that I am not discussing here in the interest of brevity.

The diffusion and development of the ovoid short-necked plucked lutes beyond Iran and India is an important field of study, and one I do not take up here.
Figure 9: A metal plate depicting a banqueting scene with musicians including a man playing an ovoid short-necked plucked lute and other musicians, 3rd–7th century CE, Sasanian period, Iran


Conclusion

Bringing together a few images and snippets of texts I have given some account of the kinds of activities I have been engaged in. To survey even this limited range of instruments demands a range of skills and access to sources and resources that collaborative work might be able to harness better than my solo attempts.

Sourcing, matching and reading together texts and images has the potential to produce technical understanding of the instruments and tuning and playing techniques (especially in the music treatises), though the more literary texts, dictionaries and religious texts also yield some understanding of the musicians, music and music-making, and the contexts in which performances occurred. As I said above, the song texts in the original already provide a good deal of the sonic fabric with which the musicians worked. The contents of song texts also yield a great deal of information about places, ideology, the human (sometimes historical) and the non-human characters referenced, and some aspects of musical sound. And, perhaps, they have the potential to open ways to understanding affect in the life of music-making in different instances. Finally, I think that developing a database of texts and images and indicating – among other fields – the relationships between these two elements will be a very useful resource that will complement very well the mapping of such sources in time and space. This work can be extended to various other regions and, with the accumulation of good data, the more complex material should begin to produce new historical information and approaches.
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