

Exploring the Regional Instruments of Iranian Folk Music

Explorando os Instrumentos Regionais da Música Folclórica Iraniana



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Abstract: Iranian folk music, one of the oldest and richest cultural heritages, plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural identity of this nation. This article examines the structure, technical characteristics, and historical aspects of Iranian folk musical instruments. The interdisciplinary study—combining historical research, anthropology, and musical analysis—aims to deepen the understanding of these instruments and their role in regional music. This study was collected through extensive field research, interviews with folk music masters, and reviews of written and oral sources. The findings indicate that Iranian folk instruments, beyond their structural diversity, play a significant role in religious ceremonies, social events, and daily life. Additionally, by analyzing playing techniques and cultural influences, this study explores the challenges of preserving and revitalizing these instruments while proposing strategies to sustain this valuable heritage. The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive analysis of the technical, historical, and cultural dimensions of Iran's folk instruments, as well as its efforts to safeguard and revive them.

Keywords: Folklore musical instruments. Ethnomusicology. cultural heritage. musical organology. musical instrument structure.

Resumo: A música folclórica iraniana, como um dos legados culturais mais antigos e ricos, desempenha um papel crucial na formação da identidade cultural desta terra. Este artigo examina a estrutura, as características técnicas e os aspectos históricos

dos instrumentos musicais folclóricos iranianos. Adotando uma abordagem interdisciplinar que inclui estudos históricos, antropologia e análise musical, esta pesquisa busca proporcionar uma compreensão mais profunda desses instrumentos e seu papel na música regional. Os dados para este estudo foram coletados por meio de extensa pesquisa de campo, entrevistas com mestres da música folclórica e revisão de fontes escritas e orais. Os resultados indicam que os instrumentos folclóricos iranianos, além de sua diversidade estrutural, possuem grande importância em cerimônias religiosas, eventos sociais e na vida cotidiana. Além disso, ao analisar as técnicas de execução e as influências culturais, este estudo explora os desafios de preservar e revitalizar esses instrumentos, propondo estratégias para sustentar esse valioso patrimônio. A novidade desta pesquisa está na análise abrangente das dimensões técnicas, históricas e culturais dos instrumentos folclóricos do Irã e seu esforço para salvaguardá-los e revivê-los.

Palavras-chave: Instrumentos musicais folclóricos. Etnomusicologia. Patrimônio cultural. Organologia musical. Estrutura dos instrumentos musicais.

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1. Introduction

Iran's local music, recognized as one of the oldest and most diverse musical traditions in the world, plays a fundamental role in shaping and preserving the cultural identity of the culturalhe nation. Each region of Iran has developed a unique set of instruments and melodies, influenced by a combination of historical, environmental, and social influences. These instruments are not only crucial for musical expression but also. Still, they are deeply integrated into daily life, ritual ceremonies, and the transmission of cultural values and traditions, making them an indispensable part of Iran's cultural heritage.

However, despite their cultural significance, Iran's local musical instruments remain poorly understood. Existing research predominantly offers superficial descriptions, focusing on fundamental aspects while neglecting the more intricate technical, historical, and social dimensions of these instruments. This lack of scholarly attention has led to their gradual neglect and, in some cases, a risk of extinction. The absence of a detailed exploration of these instruments' complexities has hindered a broader understanding of their authentic cultural importance.

This study aims to fill this knowledge gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of Iran's local musical instruments. Through extensive field research and the analysis of primary sources, this research will explore the structural, technical, and historical characteristics of these instruments, providing a deeper understanding of their cultural relevance. What distinguishes this study is its innovative approach, which combines historical, technical, and cultural analyses to offer a multidimensional perspective on these instruments and their role in Iranian music.

This study employs an interdisciplinary methodology integrating historical studies, anthropology, and musicology. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be utilized, including interviews with local music masters, reviews of written and oral sources, and audio analysis of regional variations.

The study aims to analyze the structural and technical features of Iran's local instruments, trace their historical development, and explore their social and cultural roles within various communities. Additionally, it will propose strategies for preserving and revitalizing these instruments, ensuring their continued relevance for future generations and safeguarding this valuable musical heritage.

This article builds on the author's previous research, "The Iranian National Musical Instruments and Their Techniques"¹, which explored Iranian national musical instruments in greater detail. In this section, the primary focus is on regional and folk instruments of Iran, including their structural features, playing techniques, and their social and cultural roles within folk communities.

2. Classification of Iranian Music Instruments

Iranian folk music, one of the world's richest and most diverse musical traditions, features a wide range of instruments, each with unique characteristics deeply rooted in various Iranian cultures. These instruments can be categorized into different groups, each playing a distinct role in the structure and performance of music. The classification is based on technical features, sound production methods, and the instrument's role in folk music. Generally, Iranian folk musical instruments are divided into four main categories: string, wind, percussion, and rhythmic instruments. Each category includes instruments with specific features and techniques that play different roles in folk music. In the following, we will examine and introduce these categories, providing a more detailed analysis of each instrument's characteristics.

2.1 Plucked String Instruments (Chordophones)

Chordophones are instruments that produce sound through the vibration of strings. These instruments are broadly categorized into plucked and bowed types. Plucked chordophones can be

¹ <https://revistas.ufg.br/musica/article/view/80795>

further divided into fretted and non-fretted instruments. Fretted instruments, such as the Tar and Setar, have a fingerboard with fixed positions for pressing the strings, while non-fretted instruments, like the Dutar and Kamancheh, allow for more flexible pitch control by adjusting the placement of the fingers along the string. Non-fretted plucked-string instruments are especially prominent in Iranian regional music, offering distinct tonal qualities and greater microtonal expression. This section will focus on the most common plucked string instruments in Iranian folk music, highlighting their unique features and cultural significance.

2.1.1 Rubab (Eighteen Strings)

The Rubab is one of Iran's most ancient musical instruments, primarily associated with the Sistan region of Balochistan, Afghanistan, and, to a lesser extent, Pakistan and Tajikistan. Historically, it was present in areas such as Saravan, Iranshahr, and Bamposh. Due to its geographic proximity to Afghanistan and Pakistan—and its tonal resemblance to traditional Balochi instruments—the Rubab has been deeply integrated into the musical traditions of Balochistan and Sistan.

Beyond its role in folk music, the Rubab holds profound significance in Sufi gatherings, where it accompanies the recitation of Persian poetry by classical poets such as Hafez and Rumi.

Picture 1- The Rubab instrument.



Source: compiled by the author.

Structural and Materials

A plucked string instrument, the Rubab is traditionally played with a plectrum. Its design consists of several key components, each contributing to its distinctive tonal quality and resonance:

Bowl (Resonator): A hollow wooden body covered with stretched animal skin, serving as the primary sound chamber. Some versions feature indentations on the upper part, creating a segmented structure.

Chest: A triangular hollow box extending from the bowl, covered with a thin wooden plate (typically just a few millimeters thick). Urban adaptations may include additional tuning pegs and sympathetic string holes.

Neck: A short, pyramid-shaped extension leading to the pegbox, often adorned with bone inlays and holding four main strings.

Pegbox: A small, backward-tilted box with six tuning pegs (three per side), allowing for precise pitch adjustments.

Bridge: A wooden or bone structure (~6 cm long) resting on the bowl's skin, guiding the strings.

Frets: Typically four, made from animal gut or nylon, wrapped around the neck. A bone piece (Shaytanak) is placed between the neck and pegbox to refine tonal precision.

String Holder: A small brass or wooden component securing the strings at the bottom of the bowl.

The Rubab is constructed using carefully selected natural materials, each chosen for its acoustic properties:

Resonator Bowl, Neck, Peg box: Mulberry wood

Chest Cover: Mulberry wood

Skin: Gazelle, sheep, or cow

Pegs and Bridge: Mulberry wood, antelope horn

Frets: Nylon string or heat-resistant thread

String Holder: Various woods, metal nails

The Rubab is played with a plectrum, traditionally made from bird feathers or soft nylon (approximately 4 cm long and 1 cm wide).

Strings and Tuning

Urban adaptations of the Rubab tend to omit sympathetic strings, while traditional models preserve them for a richer harmonic experience.

The Rubab typically features six main strings, tuned in unison pairs. Traditionally, these strings were crafted from gut or silk, but contemporary versions utilize guitar strings for increased durability.

The first two strings are nylon.

The third and fourth strings are metal.

The fifth and sixth strings are thicker metal.

Some variations incorporate a seventh sympathetic string, requiring an additional tuning peg.

The tuning system aligns with Iranian modal structures, enabling microtonal variations and adaptability across various dastgahs (Persian modal systems).

Note 1- Tuning the Main Strings.



Source: compiled by the author.

In the Rubab, in addition to the main strings, there are sympathetic strings (also called overtone strings) stretched over the neck or body. These strings vibrate sympathetically when the main strings are played, enhancing the instrument's sound and adding resonance.

Note 2- Tuning the Substrings (Overtones).

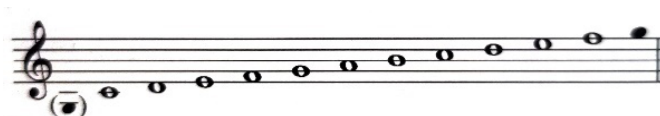


Source: compiled by the author.

Sound range

The Rubab has an approximate range of 1.5 octaves. Although it is notated in the Treble clef, it sounds one octave lower.

Note 3- Range of Rubab (Eighteen Strings).



Source: compiled by the author.

Performance Techniques

The instrument supports a range of performance techniques, offering both expressive depth and rhythmic versatility:

Right-Hand Techniques: Single strokes, Tremolo.

Left-Hand Techniques: Transverse vibrato, Longitudinal vibrato (rarely used), Glissando, Fingerpicking.

Picture 2- How to play the Rabab.



Source: compiled by the author.

Cultural and Historical Significance

In the musical culture of Sistan and Baluchestan and surrounding regions, the Rubab is not merely an instrument but a culturally symbolic entity embedded in the social and ritual life of local communities. It plays a central role in communal events such as weddings, regional gatherings, and narrative performances, reinforcing social cohesion and preserving historical and cultural memory. Accompanying local poetry and oral traditions, the sound of the Rubab functions as an audible marker of regional and ethnic identity.

In Sufi traditions, particularly during rituals such as *dhikr* and *sama'*, the Rubab serves as a medium for spiritual concentration and transcendence. When performed alongside the poetry of Rumi and Hafez, it creates a sonic environment where music becomes a vehicle for inner experience and contemplation. Local belief systems also attribute calming and healing qualities to the instrument, positioning it within traditional frameworks of emotional and psychological balance.

The transmission of rubab performance is primarily oral and intergenerational, following a master-apprentice model that preserves regional stylistic characteristics. In recent decades, urbanization and exposure to broader musical contexts have led to modifications in both the construction and function of the instrument. While this has generated a tension between tradition and modernity, it has simultaneously contributed to the Rubab's continued relevance in contemporary cultural settings.

2.1.2 The Talesh Tambour

The Taleshi tambour, a traditional plucked-string instrument from the Talesh region of Gilan province, Iran, is played with a plectrum or the fingers. It is closely related to the Tanbur and plays a significant role in the music of the Taleshi people, an ancient ethnic group whose musical heritage is deeply connected to the mountainous landscapes of northern Iran.

The Taleshi people, one of Iran's ancient ethnic groups, settled in the mountainous regions west of the Caspian Sea, which helped preserve their music's originality.

Although many traditional musical forms and melodies were lost due to various geographical and historical factors, only a few musicians remain to preserve the cultural legacy.

Picture 3- The Taleshi Tambour instrument



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and Materials

The Taleshi tambour is one of the smallest plucked-string instruments in Iran, characterized by a small, almost pear-shaped resonant body. The body is crafted from a combination of mulberry and oak wood, while a wooden soundboard made from walnut or mulberry wood is placed on the opening of the instrument's body. The tambour's neck is short and is seamlessly connected to the resonating body, where the player places their fingers during performance. The instrument typically features 3 or 4 strings and is carved from a single piece of wood, with the neck and body. Other key components include tuning pegs, a bridge, a saddle, and a plectrum.

Body and Neck: Mulberry and oak wood

Soundboard: Walnut and mulberry wood

Pegs: Alder, soft maple, and oak wood

String Holder: Wooden and metal pins

Bridge: Walnut and mulberry wood

Strings: White steel and silk (historically)

Fingers: Silk strings (historically) and nylon strings (modern use)

Sound range

The Talishi tambura has a relatively limited pitch range, primarily covering the low and mid registers, producing a warm, soft, and slightly raspy tone. This makes it particularly well-suited for performing the folk music of the Talesh region. It is used both in slow, emotional pieces and in certain sections of rhythmic local tunes. Its typical pitch range, depending on tuning and craftsmanship, spans about 1.5 octaves, usually from C3 to F4, creating a pleasant, expressive sonic atmosphere.

Turning

Note 4- The Tuning Required for Performing Talysh Music



Source: compiled by the author

Note 5- The Tuning Required for Performing Turkish Music



Source: compiled by the author

Performance Techniques

The Taleshi tambour is played with a plectrum and the fingers, using distinct techniques for each hand.

The right hand: performs plectrum strokes (known as Tak), executes rapid rhythmic repetition, and plays complex strumming patterns.

The left hand: employs fingerpicking, finger pressure, and transverse vibrato to create the instrument's unique sound, often producing subtle nuances that add emotional depth to the music.

Uses and Applications

The Taleshi tambour is primarily used as an accompanying instrument in traditional Taleshi music, particularly during weddings and celebratory gatherings. It enhances vocal performances and accompanies instrumental ensembles, often alongside other local instruments such as the Daireh (a type of frame drum). The tambour's versatile sound also allows it to be integrated into group performances, playing an essential role in festive and ceremonial contexts.

Cultural and Social Significance

The Taleshi tambour is not only a local musical instrument but also a key element of the Taleshi people's cultural identity. It is used in local ceremonies, weddings, and festive gatherings to accompany vocals and other regional instruments such as the Daireh. Its warm and expressive tone allows for both emotional and rhythmic performances. Moreover, the instrument plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting the musical heritage of the Taleshi community across generations, and its unique playing techniques reflect the deep connection between the instrument, collective identity, and daily life in the region.

2.1.3 Tambourak

Tambourak is an ancient and authentic instrument of Balochistan, belonging to the family of plucked string instruments. It has a significant presence across both regions, from the northernmost areas to the southernmost, including Chabahar

and Gwadar. The Tambourak is also used in the Sistani Baluch outside the realm of Sistani music.

Despite its name, meaning “small tambour,” the Tambourak is a relatively large instrument widely used throughout Balochistan. It is categorized as a plucked string instrument and is primarily played with fingers, though sometimes with a plectrum.

Picture 4- The Tambourak instrument



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and Materials

The Tambourak has a large, almost pear-shaped wooden body with a long, thick neck extending outward. A wooden plate covers the mouth of the body, serving as a soundboard. It features three strings and three tuning pegs, while fretted versions, resembling the Pakistani Dambura, typically have 5 to 6 frets.

Resonator: Woods like Poplar, Mulberry, and Anbe.

Soundboard: Poplar and other woods.

Neck: Hardwoods.

Pegs: Woods like Poplar.

Strings: Historically, gut; now, plain steel strings.

Frets: Historically, gut; now, nylon strings.

Plectrum: Made from the leaf sheath of the wild date palm.

Tuning

The Tambourak is usually tuned in a simple and relatively fixed manner, as—except for fretted models—it primarily serves as an accompanying instrument rather than a melodic one. However, depending on the musical context and desired pitch range, its tuning can be adjusted to different scales and intervals.

Note 6- The Tuning of Tambourak



Source: compiled by the author

Playing Technique

The fretless version of Tambourak is played with fingers, while the fretted version uses a plectrum made from the date palm leaf. The execution is simple, with the right-hand plectrum typically played using all fingers.

The Tambourak is primarily an accompanying instrument in most Balochi music, usually played alongside one or two other Balochi instruments.

Cultural and Social Significance

Tambourak occupies a central place in the folk music of Baloch communities, serving as a key instrument in communal celebrations, weddings, local rituals, and oral storytelling events. Its sound often accompanies vocals and other folk instruments to convey epics, love songs, social poems, and collective memory. Despite contemporary challenges such as changing tastes, migration, and economic hardship for musicians, cultural activists and musicians have engaged in revival efforts — including traditional instrumentmaking, teaching younger generations, and presenting the Tambourak in national/international festivals, thus reinforcing its role as a marker of ethnic identity and living cultural heritage.

2.1.4 Ashiqi Instrument (Saz)

The Saz, also known as the Ashiqi instrument, is a plucked string instrument, widely associated with Ashiqs (folk musicians) from Azerbaijan. This instrument resembles older ones like the Qopuz and Choghur, which Ashiqs used in the past. The Saz has deep cultural roots in both Eastern and Western Azerbaijan and is also significant in Ardabil, Zanjan, Hamadan, and Qazvin.

P5- The Ashiq Instrument



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

The Saz features a large, semi-pear-shaped resonating body (Kaseh Tonini) traditionally covered with a wooden soundboard. The instrument's ribs were originally 9, with 9 strings and 9 frets, though modern versions have 11-13 ribs and 7-8 strings. Older Saz versions had nine frets, while modern ones typically have 14 to 16, with some solo performers opting for instruments with up to 19 or 22 frets. The neck of older models was attached to the body via a small piece called "Becheh".

Body and Soundboard: Mulberry wood

Neck: Apricot, beech, or oak wood

Tuning Pegs: Walnut, boxwood, or aspen wood

Nut and String Holder: Bone (cow horn) or molded plastic

Bridge: Hard woods such as walnut, apricot, or palm

Strings: White steel wire (about 0.18 mm in diameter)

Frets: Traditionally made from animal gut, nowadays often nylon

Pick: Made from cherry tree bark or soft plastic

Performance Techniques

Right-Hand Techniques: Glissando, Crosswise Vibrato, Lengthwise Vibrato, Vibrato by Shaking the Instrument.

Left-Hand Techniques: Trills, etc.

Picture 6- playing the Saz



Source: compiled by the author

Tuning

Note 7- The tuning of the Saz



Source: compiled by the author

Sound range

This instrument typically has a vocal range of about 1.5 to 2 octaves, depending on its size and construction. The movable frets provide a flexible pitch range, making it suitable for a wide range of melodies in traditional folk music. The instrument produces a warm, clear, and resonant sound.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Saz has long been a central instrument in the art of the Azerbaijani Ashiqs — performers who combine music, poetry, narrative, singing, and performance to form the cultural and narrative core of Turkic-speaking communities. The Saz features prominently in communal celebrations, weddings, local gatherings, and folk assemblies, serving alongside vocal and narrative performance as a bridge connecting people, history, identity, and collective memory.

It is not only the sound of the Saz that matters, but also the manner of storytelling and performance that transforms it into the “voice of the people. The Saz is not merely a musical instrument but also a carrier of linguistic and cultural heritage.

In contemporary times, the role of the Saz has been redefined: it is both a solo instrument on concert stages and a symbol of cultural resilience and the persistence of Turkic identity amid globalization and shifting popular tastes. Efforts to revive Ashiq traditions, record folk repertoires, provide formal education, and involve younger generations — including women — all demonstrate the vitality and adaptability of this living cultural heritage.

2.1.5 Dutar

Historically, the Dutar has sometimes been regarded as a particular variety of Tanbur (tambour/tambur). It is a traditional Iranian plucked string instrument, still played in various regions of Iran. The Dutar is especially common in the northeastern areas, such as Khorasan, the Turkmen region, Ketol in Golestan, and eastern Mazandaran. Although the Tanbur of Kermanshah belongs to the same family, it has unique characteristics that distinguish it from the Dutar.

Picture 7- The Dutar of Eastern Khorasan



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Picture 8- The Dutar of Northern Khorasan



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Picture 9- The Dutar of Eastern Mazandaran



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and Materials

The Dutar used across different regions of Iran shares certain standard features while also exhibiting regional structural variations.

Body and Soundboard: All Dutars feature a single-piece, typically pear-shaped resonator bowl, covered with a wooden soundboard. The bowl is most commonly made from mulberry wood.

Neck: The bowl is attached to a relatively long neck fitted with frets. It is usually crafted from apricot wood, though jujube and maple are also used in some regions.

Strings and Pegs: The instrument has two strings and two tuning pegs. Pegs are often made of apricot wood with a metal insert.

Nut: Traditionally made from a ram's horn or bone.

String Holder: Constructed from ram's horn, bone, or wood, depending on the region.

Bridge: Typically made of wood, though in some areas, bone or gazelle horn is used.

Strings: Most commonly made of steel wire.

The tuning

In this article, the open hand and first fret serve as the reference for tuning the Dutar and other instruments. "Do" is taken as the hypothetical note, but in practice, due to the lack of standardized tuning in Iranian instruments, the actual note may be slightly higher or lower than "Do." This article presents the most common tunings, while ornamental and secondary tunings are not covered.

Note 8- the tuning in Eastern and Northern Khorasan, Turkmen Sahra, Ketol, and Eastern Mazandaran



Source: compiled by the author

Note 9- Usual tuning in Eastern and Northern Khorasan.



Source: compiled by the author

Sound range

The pitch range (tonal range) of the Dotar varies depending on its construction region (Khorasani, Turkmen, Mazandarani, etc.) and the tuning method used.

The Dotar typically spans about two octaves, but skilled musicians can slightly extend this range using techniques such as precise fingering and specific intervals.

Khorasani Dotar: It is usually tuned in minor (Hosseini) and significant (Rast Panjgah) scales, with a tonal range varying from A or B-flat in the lower octave to C or D in the second octave.

Turkmen Dotar: It generally has a softer sound and a range similar to that of the Khorasani Dotar, but it is played with a broader range of tunings.

Fingerboard Layout of the Dutar

The fingerboard layout of the Dutar varies across regions of Iran, with differences in the number and intervals between the frets. These variations are due to regional musical content and interval distances. As in Eastern music, including Iranian music, fluid intervals are shaped by the aesthetic preferences of the region and individual performers, so a universal fingerboard

layout does not exist. Even within one area, the fingerboard layout of each master may differ slightly.

Techniques

The Dutar's performance techniques differ across Iran based on regional repertoire and aesthetics.

Some standard right-hand techniques: include alternating strokes, rapid repetition of a single note (various types of tremolos), and rhythmic sequences.

Some standard Left-hand techniques involve longitudinal and transverse vibrato, plucking, glissando, and occasional techniques such as using the thumbs for fretting in some areas.

Cultural & Social Significance

Dutar holds diverse roles across northern Iran. In Northern Khorasan, Bakhshi musicians use it as a solo instrument for sung epics at weddings and gatherings. In the Turkmen region (Golestan), it occupies a central place in Turkmen music, often paired with the Kamancheh and used in spiritual healing rituals. In the Ketol of Golestan, the Dutar mainly serves as vocal accompaniment in smaller settings. At the same time, in Eastern Mazandaran, the Dutar blends Turkmen and Khorasani styles, accompanying songs solo or alongside instruments such as the Kamancheh, Dayereh, or Tamik.

Despite contemporary challenges such as changing tastes, migration, and economic hardship for musicians, cultural activists and performers have undertaken revival efforts — including traditional instrument making, teaching younger generations, and presenting the Dutar at national and international festivals — reinforcing its role as a marker of ethnic identity and living cultural heritage.

2.1.6 Baglama and Related Instruments

The Baglama is the national instrument of the Turkish people, mainly found in Turkey's Anatolian region. It is also common among Turkish- and Kurdish-speaking populations in Turkey and northern Iraq. In the past 50 years, the Baglama and similar instruments have gained popularity among Iraqi Kurdish migrants in West Azerbaijan and Iranian Kurdistan. The Baglama is believed to have evolved from the Qopuz, an instrument traditionally played by Ashiqs (folk musicians). It has played a key role in preserving and transmitting Turkish and Kurdish culture and music to the present day.

Picture 10- The Baglama



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and materials

Body (Bowl): The Baglama features a resonant, integrated bowl shape resembling a half-pear, providing the acoustics for a deep, rich sound. Common woods used include oak, mountain cedar, and mahogany.

Neck: It has a relatively long fretted neck, allowing a wide range of notes and musical expression. Frets are typically made of nylon.

Top Plate: A wooden plate placed over the opening of the body, often made from Poplar or other light woods. The Plate is made from lighter woods, such as Poplar.

Strings: Typically equipped with 6 or 7 strings, arranged in three courses. The strings are usually made from nylon or gut.

Bridge and Nut: These parts are often made from materials such as horn, bone, or hardwood to enhance the instrument's tone and durability.

Plectrum: The plectrum, which is used to pluck the strings, can be made from wood, horn, or soft plastic.

Performance Techniques

In Turkey, Baglama performance techniques can be very complex and advanced, while in Iran, they are often simpler. The player uses a plastic plectrum to strike the strings, typically fingering the first and third strings to create melodies. In more intricate performances, various plucking techniques and strumming methods are used, varying by region and tradition.

Tuning

The Baglama and its related instruments feature various tunings depending on the style and region. Some standard tunings are associated with the Tambura (a related instrument) and the Baglama (a larger variant). Each tuning can affect the tonal quality and the kind of music the instrument is suited for.

The tuning of the Tamboura (Saz) and the tuning of the Baglama (Divan-saz) are as follows.

Note 10- Different Tunings of the Baglama



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Baglama (*Saz*) is a central instrument in the musical and social life of communities in Anatolia, Kurdish regions, Azerbaijan, and parts of Iran. Beyond music, it serves as a symbol of identity and collective memory. Traditionally accompanying *ashiks* (folk bards), it conveys stories, historical events, and moral lessons, linking generations through oral tradition. The Baglama is played in communal gatherings, festivals, weddings, and ritual ceremonies, reinforcing social cohesion and spiritual expression, especially among Alevi communities during *cem* rituals. Its melodies and variations—such as *cura*, *divan saz*, and *meydan Saz*—reflect regional identities and local musical practices. At the same time, the instrument also functions as a medium for social commentary, resistance, and cultural continuity across generations. The Baglama and its related instruments are integral in Turkish, Kurdish, and Armenian music across Turkey and northern Iraq. They are commonly used in solo performances, vocal accompaniment, and orchestral setups within regional music ensembles.

2.1.7 Azerbaijani Tar

The Azerbaijani tar is one of the most significant instruments in the performance of Azerbaijani mugham, a traditional musical form that shares similarities with the Persian Radif. According to some historical records, the Azerbaijani Tar originated from modifications made to the Persian five-string Tar. The Persian Tar was widely played at least as early as the 18th century in Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caucasus, and Tajikistan, regions historically part of Iran's political territory. During this period, a musician named Mirza Sadiq Asadoghlu (Sadiq Jan), from the city of Shusha in the Karabakh region (now part of the Republic of Azerbaijan), modified the Persian Tar to create the Azerbaijani Tar. This instrument belongs to the family of plucked string instruments and is played with a plectrum. In the classification of musical instruments, it falls into the plucked chordophones category.

Picture 11- The Azerbaijani Tar



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and Materials

The Azerbaijani tar consists of a large and a small bowl, designed to be smaller and flatter than the Persian Tar. It features 11 strings: 6 main strings, four sympathetic strings, and one bass string. The instrument is meticulously crafted from mulberry and walnut wood, cowhide, buffalo horn, and various metal alloys.

The resonating bowl of the Azerbaijani Tar, like the Persian Tar, consists of two parts: a larger bowl and a smaller bowl, known as the Nagareh. It is crafted as a single piece and is smaller than the Persian Tar. Unlike the Persian Tar, the back of the Persian Tar is relatively flat. The smaller size and flat back allow the player to rest the instrument against their chest while playing comfortably.

Resonating Bowl: Mulberry wood, walnut wood

Neck: Walnut wood

Skin: Cow's heart (the part of the skin known as "del")

Pegs: Forest walnut wood, Hartmut (pear) wood

Bridge: Cow horn (female), camel leg bone, synthetic materials

Nut (Main and Bass): Female cow horn, camel leg bone

String Holder: Horn, brass, and aluminum alloys

Note 11- Azerbaijani Tar Tuning for Shur (G) and Mahur (F).



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Techniques

The Azerbaijani tar, a key instrument in mugham, is played with a plectrum and requires advanced techniques in both hands. Right-hand strokes shape tone and rhythm, while left-hand movements, including rapid fingerings and playing multiple notes, add speed and harmonic richness. The tar is used in solo, ensemble, orchestral, and ballet performances.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Azerbaijani tar is a key string instrument in the region's folk and classical music. It is considered a symbol of Azerbaijani national music and is an essential component of *mugham* ensembles, accompanying vocalists and other instruments in both formal and informal gatherings. Socially, the tar plays a crucial role in weddings, festivals, and community celebrations, serving as a medium for storytelling, historical memory, and emotional expression. Its melodies carry regional identities and local musical modes, transmitting oral traditions across generations. Historically, the tar has also been associated with spiritual expression and education, as young musicians traditionally learned both technique and cultural knowledge through apprenticeship with masters. Beyond Azerbaijan, the tar is performed in northern Iran, southern Dagestan, and among Azerbaijani diaspora communities, reinforcing cultural continuity.

and ethnic identity. Variants of the tar reflect regional adaptations, including different string arrangements or tuning methods, yet all preserve the instrument's role as a cultural ambassador and social connector. Used in both solo performances and vocal accompaniment, the tar continues to symbolize Azerbaijani identity and conveys the region's traditions and collective emotions.

2.2 Iranian Bowed String Instruments

Part of Iran's rich musical heritage is reflected in its diverse bowed string instruments, each with unique structures, playing techniques, and cultural significance. These instruments, found across different regions, play a crucial role in traditional music and ceremonies. Their distinct body shapes, string configurations, and bowing techniques showcase Iran's deep-rooted musical traditions and regional influences.

2.2.1 Saroz (Sarod) – Balochi Ghaychak

The Balochi Ghaychak, also known as Saroz or Sarod in Pakistan, was historically called Gharak, Ghazak, or Ghajak. It is a vital bowed instrument in Balochi music, traditionally played alongside the Tamburak for vocal accompaniment. While once widespread in Iran, it is now mainly found in Baluchistan and Sistan, with limited use in Hormozgan and Kerman. It remains common among nomadic communities and is also played in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and parts of Iran.

Picture 12- The Balochi Ghaychak



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and Materials

This instrument features a red body covered with animal skin. Its fingerboard is short and thick, while its pegbox is relatively elongated. This unique design contributes to its distinctive acoustic characteristics.

Strings and Pegs: The Baluchi suroz (also known as sarzud) typically features 3 or 4 main playing strings, tuned to pitches such as E and A (440 Hz), along with 5 to 8 sympathetic (resonant) strings that vibrate in sympathy with the main strings. The main strings are each tuned with their own pegs, while the sympathetic strings usually share a tailpiece or use an alternate tuning method rather than having individual pegs.

Body and Pegbox: The body of this instrument is traditionally made from mulberry, berberis, or Prosopis wood. These types of wood are chosen for their excellent acoustic properties, which help produce a warm, natural sound. Additionally, they enhance the instrument's resonance and durability against humidity and temperature changes.

Bridge and Tailpiece: The bridge and tailpiece are typically crafted from walnut, mulberry wood, or animal horn. These materials provide both strength and flexibility, enhancing the transmission of string vibration and improving sound quality.

Bow: The instrument is played using a bow made of willow wood, strung with horsehair. The use of horsehair allows greater control over the sound's intensity and tonal variations.

The Tuning

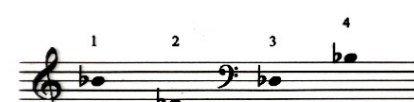
Different tuning for main strings

Note 12- The tuning for main strings



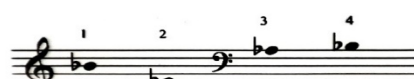
Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Note 13- The tuning for main strings



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Note 14- The tuning for main strings



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Tuning for Sympathetic Strings (Resonant Strings)

Note 15- The tuning for Resonant Strings



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Saroz (Sarod) and the Balochi Ghaychak are central instruments in Balochi music and social life, serving as essential carriers of cultural identity and collective memory. They are traditionally played at weddings, festivals, and communal gatherings, accompanying songs that narrate love, heroism, historical events, and social values. These instruments are used for vocal accompaniment in weddings, festive gatherings, and Gwat healing ceremonies, but are also played as solo instruments. Through their melodies, the Saroz and Ghaychak transmit oral traditions across generations, preserving Balochi heritage and regional musical modes. Learning and performing these instruments often involves apprenticeship within families or communities, ensuring the continuity of both musical skill and cultural knowledge. Their regional variants, differing in construction, tuning, or string arrangements, all serve as shared cultural symbols and social connectors, reinforcing communal cohesion, emotional expression, and Baloch identity.

2.2.2 Ghaychak of Sistan

The Sistan *qeychak* originates from the historic region of Sistan in northeastern Iran. This area has preserved ancient Iranian language and traditions more than many other parts of the country. This bowed string instrument, with four main strings and several sympathetic strings, closely resembles the Baluchi *qeychak* but differs slightly in size, structure, and tuning; its body is usually smaller, the neck shorter, and it produces a more transparent, brighter sound. The Sistan *qeychak* is the region's primary string instrument and plays a central role in accompanying traditional Sistani songs and performances.

Picture 13- The Sistan Ghaychak



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and materials

The Ghaychak of Sistan has a unique design optimized for rich resonance and durability, featuring a distinct body shape, carefully selected materials, and a specialized bow. Its construction elements contribute to its characteristic sound and traditional playing technique.

Resonator Shape: The Sistan Qeychak usually has a taller, slimmer resonator than the Balochi Qeychak. This feature allows the instrument to produce a distinctive sound.

Resonator Structure: The Sistan Qeychak resonator consists of two sections: a larger upper section and a smaller lower section. The upper opening is usually covered with skin, while the lower opening may be left uncovered. This design helps amplify and enhance the sound.

Neck Design: The neck of the Sistan Qeychak is usually short and thick. In some versions, wooden reinforcements are added along the neck to increase its strength and durability.

Body Material: The body of the Sistan Qeychak is typically made from sturdy woods such as walnut or mulberry. This

choice of wood contributes to the instrument's sound quality and longevity.

Lower Resonator Covering: The lower resonator of the Sistan Qeychak is usually covered with goat or sheep skin. This covering helps strengthen and enhance the sound.

Number and Type of Strings: The Sistan Qeychak usually has three main strings and one sympathetic string. These strings are typically made of metal and allow the instrument to produce a variety of tones.

Tuning Pegs: The Sistan Qeychak typically has four tuning pegs, generally made of walnut. These pegs are used to adjust string tension and tune the instrument.

Bow: The bow of the Sistan Qeychak is usually made from curved wood and strung with horsehair on both ends. This design allows the player to extract the desired sound from the instrument.

Tuning

Note 16- Usual tuning in Zaboli



Source: compiled by the author

Note 17- Usual tuning in Baluchistan



Source: compiled by the author

Note 18- Sympathetic Strings (Resonant Strings)



Source: compiled by the author

Performance Techniques

Right-Hand Techniques in Playing: Staccato, Legato, Tremolo.

Left-Hand Techniques: Limited glissando, pizzicato.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Sistani Ghaychak is a traditional bowed string instrument deeply woven into the cultural and musical life of southeastern Iran. Its haunting, resonant sound is a staple at weddings, local festivities, and community gatherings, often complementing vocal performances, storytelling, and ceremonial rituals. The instrument's expressive tones capture a wide range of emotions, preserve communal histories, and connect generations through oral musical traditions. Beyond ensemble settings, the Ghaychak shines as a solo instrument, showcasing its versatility and emotional depth. Traditionally, mastery of the instrument is passed down within families or local music circles, ensuring both technical skills and cultural knowledge endure. Various regional forms of the Ghaychak, differing in design, string configuration, and tuning, remain potent symbols of cultural identity and social unity, reinforcing communal ties and safeguarding the region's musical heritage.

2.2.3 The Kamancheh (Types of Kamancheh)

The Kamancheh, a bowed string instrument, is widely found across various regions of Iran and belongs to the family of bowed string instruments. It is commonly used in areas such as Northern Khorasan, Golestan, the Turkmen regions, Eastern Mazandaran, Damghan, Taleqan, Gilan, East and West Azerbaijan, Kermanshah, Lorestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and Fars. However, in certain regions, including Gilan, Damghan, Taleqan, and Fars, the instrument's use is gradually declining. The Kamancheh is known by different names in various areas, including "Kamancheh" (Northern Khorasan), "Gamoncheh" (Damghan and Shahr-e-Kord), "Kamanchah" (Taleqan), "Gamanja" (East Azerbaijan),

“Gaman” or “Kamancheh” (West Azerbaijan), “Qijan” (Turkmen Sahra), “Mokesh” (Kermanshah), and “Nal” (Lorestan).

Picture 14- East Azerbaijan Kamancheh



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Picture 15- Lorestan Kamancheh



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and materials

The structure and construction of traditional instruments are essential for their unique sound and performance. The selection of materials, combined with the precise assembly of each part, significantly influences shaping the instrument's resonance, tone, and playability.

The instrument's resonator is crafted from a variety of woods, including mulberry, walnut, juniper, willow, apricot, and ash, each chosen for its tonal qualities. The neck is made from woods like apricot, pear, maple, hornbeam, jujube, ebony, and boxwood, offering strength and durability while ensuring precise tuning. The fingerboard and pegs are also made from these high-quality woods to guarantee ease of use and stability.

The resonator's soundboard is typically crafted from animal skin, including cow, ostrich, duck, gazelle, fish, lamb, rabbit, or occasionally sheep or goat skin, depending on regional practices. This material selection provides the desired texture and resonance to produce a clear, rich sound.

All Kamanchehs feature a round neck that gradually tapers from the fingerboard to the resonator. A metal rod connects the neck to the resonator, serving as the primary support when the instrument is placed on the ground or held by the musician. This construction ensures the instrument's stability and facilitates ease of playing.

The instrument typically has four strings and four tuning pegs, though in certain regions, musicians may use three strings, following the traditional design of the Persian Kamancheh. In the Deylaman region of Gilan, some Kamanchehs even feature five to six strings, offering a wider range of sound.

The instrument's strings are made from white steel wire, providing durability and a sharp tone. The bow is crafted from pomegranate, plum, cherry, walnut, Poplar, elm, Arjun, ash, and boxwood, chosen for flexibility and resilience.

The bowstring is made from horsehair, providing the tension and smoothness needed for precise playing.

Different types of Kamancheh

Despite minor regional variations, Kamanchehs across Iran share a relatively common structural design. The main differences lie in the shape and construction of the resonator bowl, which can be categorized into two types:

Open-back resonators: Found in regions like Lorestan, Kermanshah, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Konol in Golestan, and Damghan, these Kamanchehs produce a sharper and more penetrating sound.

Closed-back resonators: Common in Northern Khorasan, the Turkmen regions of Golestan, Eastern Mazandaran, Taleqan, Gilan, East and West Azerbaijan, and Fars, these instruments have a softer, more muffled tone. The resonators can be dome-shaped, spherical, or flat.

Turning

Tuning some Kamancheh in different regions

Note 19- Tuning the Kamancheh of the Damghan and Taleghan area



Source: compiled by the author

Note 20- Common Kamancheh tuning in the north and east of the Mazandaran area



Source: compiled by the author

Note 22- Tuning the Kamancheh for the Golestan (Turkmen Sahara) area.



Source: compiled by the author

Note 23- One of the tunings of the Kamancheh for the Lorestan area.



Source: compiled by the author

Playing Techniques

Playing techniques on the Kamancheh, while slightly varying by region, share many similarities across Iran.

Right hand: Techniques include legato, staccato (used sparingly), tremolo (limited), and various bowing lengths using either the tip or the middle of the bow.

Left hand: Techniques involve fingering the strings, pizzicato, glissando, and trills.

Picture 16- Playing kamancheh



Source: compiled by the author

Cultural & Social Significance

The Kamancheh plays a crucial role in social and cultural life. It is commonly performed at weddings, festivals, community gatherings, and ritual ceremonies, often accompanied by vocalists, storytelling, and epic recitations. Its expressive, resonant tones convey emotions, social narratives, and collective memory,

serving as a bridge between generations through oral musical traditions. The instrument is also performed solo, highlighting its versatility and the musician's skill. Learning and mastering the Kamancheh typically involves apprenticeship within families or local music circles, ensuring the transmission of both technical proficiency and cultural knowledge. Across its regional types, the Kamancheh continues to act as a cultural symbol and social connector, reinforcing communal identity, artistic heritage, and the continuity of regional musical traditions.

2.3 Wind Instruments (Aerophones) in Iranian Music

Wind instruments, or aerophones, are unique in their structure and global use, playing a vital role in sound production by directly interacting with air. Unlike string or percussion instruments, which create sound through the vibration of air within the instrument, they create sound through the vibration of the instrument itself. Three key factors—force, mass, and acceleration—work together to generate sound waves. Wind instruments can produce a range of sounds, from monophonic to complex tones, depending on the technique and design. In Iran, these instruments come in various forms, each contributing to the country's rich musical traditions.

2.3.1 Edge-blown wind instruments

Edge-blown wind instruments in Iran are instruments in which sound is produced by air passing over a specific edge or lip, causing vibrations within a tube to generate sound. These instruments typically have a tubular shape, and the edge at the mouthpiece plays a key role in sound production. The musician blows air into the instrument, and the air interacts with the edge or specific holes, creating vibrations that result in sound.

In Iran, instruments like the Ney and Ney Labak fall into this category. These instruments are often made of wood or similar materials, and their unique edge structures enable them to

produce loud, distinctive sounds. They are commonly used in traditional and folk music, and their powerful sound makes them suitable for open spaces and festive, high-energy events.

Ney

The Ney is one of the oldest musical instruments, and it has been prevalent in numerous cultures throughout history. With its simple structure and profound, penetrating sound, the Ney is the precursor to many wind instruments across different cultures. It is used widely in Iran, particularly as a shepherd's and caravanserai instrument, with many of its players being shepherds and caravan drivers. The Ney goes by various names in different regions of Iran.

Picture 17- the Ney



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and materials

The Ney is a tubular wind instrument crafted in various lengths and diameters, typically made from reed. The suitable section of the reed, which usually has seven joints and six knots, is selected for making the instrument. The diameter of the Ney typically tapers from top to bottom. On its front, four holes are generally made, with one hole on the back. In some regions, such as Mazandaran and Bakhtiari, the Ney may have five front holes, whereas in Kurdistan it can have five to six. The Ney used in

Iranian classical music typically features five front holes and one back hole. The upper opening, where the player blows into the instrument, is slightly shaved to sharpen the edge and facilitate sound production.

While the primary material for the Ney is reed, regions where suitable reeds are scarce may produce the instrument from metal, synthetic materials, or wood. Metal Neys are often made from brass, aluminum, water pipes, or steel pipes. The brass Ney from Kurdistan, known as Shamsal, holds significant cultural value within Kurdish communities. However, no material is considered superior to reed, as it produces the best tonal quality.

Techniques

The playing technique of the Ney varies regionally within Iran. Typically, the Ney is played at an angle to the lips, and the player uses a “reverse breath” technique to maintain a continuous sound. The reverse-breath technique allows the musician to sustain sound uninterrupted. However, in regions where the Ney is played with the teeth, reverse breathing is impossible because the mouth is open.

Picture 18 -Playing the Ney



Source: compiled by the author

Sound Regions

The Ney can produce four distinct registers: Bam, Owj, Gheyth, and Pas Gheyth, each with unique tonal qualities. Owj is approximately one octave above Bam, while Gheyth typically lies

higher, though its exact interval may vary depending on the Ney and playing technique. Pas Gheyth reaches approximately two octaves above Bam. Musicians face challenges such as controlled octave transitions, adjustments in lip positioning, and variations in breath pressure when shifting between these registers.

Note 24-The Bam range



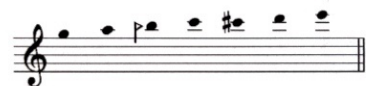
Source: compiled by the author

Note 25 - The Owj range



Source: compiled by the author

Note 26- The Gheyth range



Source: compiled by the author

Note 27 - The Pas Gheyth range



Source: compiled by the author

Cultural & Social Significance

The Ney is a traditional instrument central to the musical and cultural life of Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and various regions of the Middle East. It is widely used in classical, folk, and spiritual music, particularly in Sufi ceremonies, where its breathy

and expressive tones are considered a medium for spiritual reflection and connection. Beyond its role in religious and ritual contexts, the Ney is performed in weddings, festivals, and social gatherings, often accompanying poetry, vocal performances, and storytelling. Its melodies convey emotional depth, social narratives, and cultural memory, linking generations through oral musical traditions. Learning the Ney traditionally occurs through apprenticeship with master musicians, ensuring the transmission of both technical skill and cultural knowledge. Across regions, the instrument varies in length, tuning, and ornamentation style. Yet, it consistently functions as a symbol of cultural identity and social cohesion, reflecting the musical heritage and communal values of the societies in which it is practiced.

2.3.2 Double-Reed Wind Instruments with a Closed Reed

Double-reed wind instruments are standard in various regions of Iran, including Khorasan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, parts of Lorestan and Ilam, as well as Hormozgan and Bushehr. These instruments are essentially double versions of the single-pipe reed instruments mentioned in the previous sections. Different names are used for these instruments in other regions: Dozleh in Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Lorestan, and Ilam; Ney-jofti (paired reed) in Hormozgan and Bushehr; Qamsha in North Khorasan; and Do Sazeh in South Khorasan.

Dozleh

The Dozleh is a prominent traditional instrument in the Zagros region, particularly in Kurdistan. It consists of two reed pipes positioned side by side and connected. The reed pipes are typically made from the bones of birds of prey, such as hawks and eagles, which have a unique geometric shape (one end narrower, the other almost square). In some cases, the reed pipes are made from cane or metal.

Picture 19 - Dozleh instrument



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and Materials

Body: Dozleh consists of two parallel pipes of equal length, typically made from bird bones, cane, or narrow metal tubes. Pipe lengths generally range from 22 cm to larger sizes, depending on regional variations and player preference.

Reeds: The cane reeds are positioned at the upper ends of the pipes and are often shaped similarly to corn-shaped reeds. These reeds are bound together so that both pipes can be played simultaneously, creating the instrument's characteristic, rich, penetrating sound.

Finger Holes: Each pipe usually has five to seven finger holes on the front, with no holes at the back. This configuration allows the musician to produce melodic scales while the second pipe often functions as a drone.

Mouthpiece: The instrument has an open mouthpiece through which the musician blows air into the pipes. The sound is generated as the air vibrates through the bound reeds.

Pipes: Bird bones (often from birds of prey), cane, or narrow metal tubes.

Reeds: Cane, carefully shaped and bound for simultaneous vibration.

Performance Technique

The Dozleh is played using the technique of reverse breathing. The performer places the reeds in their mouth and uses their fingers to control the holes on both pipes. This technique

produces a continuous, sustained sound, with the instrument's range extending approximately two octaves from the C note.

Finger Placement and Tune Production

Note 28 - Sound Production for Each Finger Placement for a type of Dozleh



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Dozleh is commonly played at celebrations, festivals, and communal gatherings, often alongside instruments such as the Tombak or Daf. It is especially prominent in wedding ceremonies and other joyful events, where it is ideally suited for performing lively dance tunes and songs, accompanied by singing and oral storytelling. Its distinctive, penetrating sound reflects local identity, collective emotions, and the social narratives of each region, forming a musical bridge between generations. Learning the Dozleh traditionally takes place within families or local community circles, allowing both technical skill and cultural knowledge to be passed down. Although variations in construction, tuning, and pipe arrangement can be found in different areas, the Dozleh consistently stands as a cultural symbol and social link, strengthening communal bonds, preserving folk heritage, and expressing the unique musical identity of the communities that play it.

Ney Jofty (Hormozgan)

The Ney Jofty, also known as the Dozleh of Hormozgan, is another traditional and regional instrument of Iran, particularly in Hormozgan and southeastern areas of the country. This wind instrument consists of two narrow reed pipes placed side by side and connected. Each pipe has seven holes at the front and lacks a

back hole. The reeds are designed similarly to the Dozleh and are placed at the upper mouthpiece of the pipes.

Picture 20 - The Ney Jofty



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and Materials

The Ney Jofty consists of a double pipe, with both sections featuring finger holes for playing. It is usually made of reed or wood and features two reeds that vibrate simultaneously, giving the instrument a rich, resonant tone. In its structure, both pipes are typically of equal size and tuned to the same pitch. However, in some cases, one pipe primarily plays the melody while the other provides harmonic reinforcement or a continuous supporting tone.

Body of the Reed Pipes: Cane.

Performance Techniques

The performance technique for the Ney Jofty is similar to that of the Dozleh. The performer plays both reed pipes simultaneously. The reverse breathing technique is employed to produce a continuous, uninterrupted sound. A semitone with increased air pressure can extend the pitch range of the Ney Jofty.

Finger Placement and Tune Production

Note 29 - Sound Production for Each Finger Placement



Source: compiled by the author

Sound range

The sound range of this instrument generally exceeds one octave and, with the addition of a few chromatic intervals, can extend to nearly two octaves.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Ney Jofti of Hormozgan is more than a simple wind instrument; it is deeply rooted in the coastal life of southern Iran and serves a function beyond mere music. In the ports and villages along the Persian Gulf, the Ney Jofti forms part of the everyday soundscape, intertwined with the wind, the sea, daily work, and local rituals.

The instrument is frequently played at wedding ceremonies, music festivals, and local celebrations, often accompanied by drums such as the Dohol, Tombak, and Ghir, in regions including Bandar Abbas and the islands of Qeshm and Hormoz. Its repertoire encompasses dance tunes, songs, and occasionally mourning music. The dual sound of the Ney Jofti—one voice carrying the melody and the other providing accompaniment—symbolizes social dialogue and communal harmony.

From an ethnographic perspective, the Ney Jofti serves as a tool for constructing and preserving local identity and for transmitting intergenerational knowledge. Local masters are not only performers but also custodians of the region's cultural memory, while youth learning the instrument become part of the historical and social continuity of their community. The instrument also accompanies moments of leisure and daily labor, conveying collective emotions and the narrative depth of local culture.

Overall, the Ney Jofti of Hormozgan can be considered a “bridge instrument,” connecting humans and nature, the individual and the community, the past and the present—a sound that embodies and reflects the geography, history, and identity of its people.

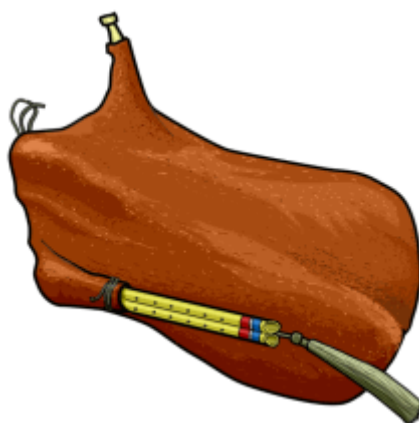
2.3.3 Single reed, double bore, and air reservation instruments

Instruments with a single reed, double bore, and air reservoir are typically classified as wind instruments, with the Bagpipe being a prominent example. This instrument has a single reed in its mouthpiece, two sound pipes for accompaniment, and an air reservoir that allows continuous playing without interruption. The air is blown into a bag, which then steadily supplies it to the pipes. Bagpipes are popular in various cultures, including Scotland, Iran, and Spain, and their distinctive, continuous sound plays a significant role in traditional music.

Ney Anban

The Ney Anban is a double-reed wind instrument used primarily in southern Iran, particularly in areas such as Bushehr, Khuzestan, Hormozgan, and southern Kerman. It plays an essential role in ceremonies, especially at weddings and local festivities. Similar versions of the Ney Anban exist worldwide, with each region having unique variations that affect the instrument's structure and sound.

Picture 21- Ney Anban



Source: compiled by the author

Structural and Materials

Body: The body of the Ney Anban is typically made of wood and is shaped like a trough. Inside the body, there are two reeds, each with six finger holes. The reeds are fixed inside the body using beeswax.

Airbag: The airbag, serving as the air reservoir, is made from tanned goat or sheep skin. The skin is typically seamless, with its neck closed inside. It has two central holes: one for blowing air into the instrument and the other for connecting the Ney Anban body to the bag.

Mouthpiece: The mouthpiece is a tube through which the player blows air into the airbag, setting the reeds in motion. The mouthpiece can be made from either plastic or wood.

Body: Wood.

Reeds: Cane.

Reed Holder: Cane.

Airbag: Goat or sheepskin.

Mouthpiece: Plastic or wood.

Finger Placement and Tune Production

Note 30 - Sound Production for Each Finger Placement



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Sound range

The sound range of the Ney Anban is about 1 to 1.5 octaves, and with advanced techniques, it can approach 2 octaves.

Techniques

Preparation: The musician fills the instrument with air by blowing into the mouthpiece. Once this is done, the instrument's body is held, and the music begins.

Sound Control: The sound produced is adjusted by controlling the air pressure inside the airbag, and by opening or closing the finger holes, the pitch changes significantly.

Air Usage: The air stored in the bag allows the player to keep playing without having to repeatedly blow, helping sustain notes.

History

Geographic Distribution and Usage: In Iran, the Ney Anban is commonly used in the southern provinces such as Bushehr, Khuzestan, and Hormozgan. It plays a prominent role in weddings and local celebrations and is also used in rituals like Moludi and mourning music.

Globally, similar instruments are found in countries like India, China, Turkey, and Scotland. In Scotland, the instrument is known as the Bagpipe, which has spread to various parts of the world.

Techniques

The Ney Anban, a traditional bagpipe of southern Iran, requires breath control, finger techniques, and rhythmic articulation to produce its distinctive sound. One key technique is continuous airflow, in which the player maintains a steady stream of air by using the bag as a reservoir, allowing uninterrupted sound. Finger ornamentation, such as rapid trills and grace notes, adds expressiveness and complexity to melodies. Another essential technique is vibrato, achieved through subtle variations in finger pressure or airflow, which creates a dynamic and emotive tone. Additionally, players use drone control, adjusting the balance between the melody and the drone pipe to shape the harmonic texture. These techniques, mastered through practice, give the Ney Anban its rich, rhythmic, and lively character, making it a vital part of the folk music of Iran's southern coastal regions.

Picture 22 - playing Ney Anban



Source: compiled by the author

Cultural & Social Significance

The Ney Anban is a traditional wind instrument of southern Iran, widely used in the region's cultural and religious ceremonies. Beyond its musical function, it serves as a medium for artistic expression, social cohesion, and intergenerational knowledge transmission.

This instrument is commonly performed at celebrations, weddings, religious events such as Mouludi singing and Zār rituals, and mourning gatherings. It is frequently accompanied by percussion instruments such as the Dohol, Tombak, and Ghir in regions including Bushehr, Hormozgan, and the islands of Qeshm and Hormoz. Its repertoire encompasses dance melodies, vocal accompaniments, ritual music, and occasional mourning pieces, reflecting the diverse social, emotional, and religious contexts in which it is used. Its distinctive and rhythmic sound has become a symbol of the cultural identity of southern Iran's coastal populations.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, the Ney Anban functions as both a cultural artifact and a pedagogical tool. Local masters act as custodians of musical and cultural knowledge, transmitting skills and traditions to younger generations, thereby

reinforcing communal identity and continuity. The instrument is also employed in everyday contexts, accompanying labor, leisure, and maritime activities, further embedding it in the lived experience of coastal societies.

In sum, the Ney Anban can be conceptualized as a “community instrument,” mediating relationships among individuals and the collective, between humans and the environment, and between the past and the present. Its sonic presence embodies the historical, geographical, and cultural identities of southern Iran’s coastal peoples.

2.3.4 Double reed - Single resonator pipe

A group of wind instruments that produce sound through two wooden reeds that are pressed together to create vibrations, which generate sound. In these instruments, the reeds are attached to a resonator pipe, and the player blows air into the pipe, causing the reeds to vibrate. These vibrations produce sound. In this category, both reeds are typically positioned parallel to each other on either side of the pipe, resulting in a loud, powerful sound. Notable examples of instruments in this category include Sorna. Due to their distinctive, strong sound, double-reed instruments are commonly used in celebrations, traditional ceremonies, and regional folk music. They are often played in settings where loud and prominent sound is required.

Sorna- Kermanshah

The Sorna of Kermanshah is a traditional wind instrument from Iran, predominantly used in western Iran, including Kermanshah, Kurdistan, Lorestan, and Ilam.

Picture 23- Sorna instrument



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structural and Materials

Kermanshah Surma is a traditional wind instrument that, in terms of appearance and playing technique, shares similarities with other Surma types found in western regions of Iran. This instrument is renowned for its unique structural features and its rich, resonant sound.

The sound tube of the Kermanshah Surma has seven finger holes on the front and one hole at the back, allowing for the execution of musical notes and the modulation of pitch. Unlike Surmas from eastern regions of Iran, the Kermanshah version features a bifurcated or hook-like structure at the top of the sound tube, on which the reed is mounted. This design enhances the instrument's tonal richness and clarity.

The reed of the Kermanshah Surma is made of thin brass and is usually connected to a small tube to produce a more transparent, more vibrant sound. The bell of the instrument can be made from various materials, such as wood, metal, shell, plastic, or bone, which not only affects the timbre but also ensures the player's comfort while performing.

Body: Cylindrical, widening at the end into a bell shape.

Reed mount (bifurcated or hook-like): The location where the reed is installed, playing the leading role in sound production.

Bell: Circular, allowing the reed to pass through, and the part that is placed in the player's mouth.

Sound range

Note 31 - The usual Sound range of Sorna



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Playing Techniques of the Kermanshah Sorna

The playing techniques are similar to those of other regional Sornas, but the Kermanshah Sorna produces a deeper, more subdued range compared to the Sorna of Eastern Khorasan. It is often played in the mid-range and uses the technique of “turning back” (reversing the direction of the air).

Playing the Sorna requires mastery of various techniques, the most important of which include precise control of air pressure to produce different sounds and regulate volume, correct finger placement to alter notes, and breath control techniques to change the sound quality. Additionally, the player must be able to use tongueing techniques for varying the speed and intensity of the sound, as well as adjust the amount and method of blowing to achieve different tonal ranges. Finally, the use and mastery of the wooden reed are vital for producing a clear and distinct sound from the Sorna.

Picture 24 - playing Sorna



Source: compiled by the author

Cultural & Social Significance

The Sorna of Kermanshah is a traditional Iranian double-reed wind instrument that plays a central role in the cultural and social life of local communities. Its powerful, penetrating sound is commonly used in celebrations, festivals, weddings, and religious and mourning ceremonies, enhancing festive atmospheres and expressing collective emotions. Its wooden body, typically crafted from hardwoods such as mulberry or walnut, is optimized for outdoor performance.

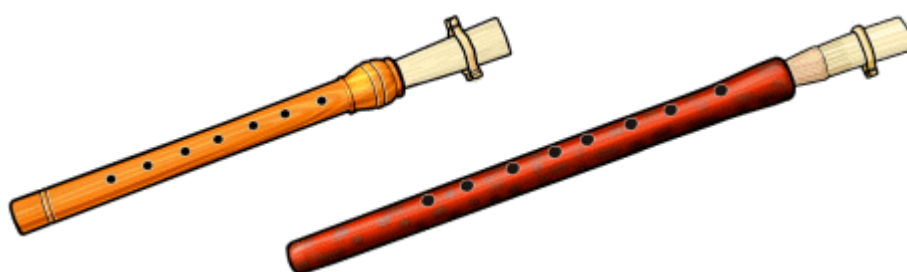
The Sorna is often accompanied by percussion instruments such as the Dohol or Tombak. Its repertoire ranges from lively dance melodies to ceremonial and mourning tunes, reflecting the region's diverse social, emotional, and ritual contexts.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, the Sorna functions not only as a musical instrument but also as a medium for preserving and transmitting cultural identity and intergenerational knowledge. Local masters serve as custodians of musical and cultural heritage, and teaching the instrument to younger generations reinforces communal identity and cultural continuity. Its powerful and far-reaching sound establishes the Sorna as a "community instrument," mediating relationships among individuals and the collective, humans and the environment, and past and present, while embodying the cultural identity of the people of Kermanshah.

Balaban / Narmeni / Duduk

The Balaban, also known as Narmeni in regions of Iran such as East and West Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Hamedan, Zanjan, Qazvin, and Semnan, is called Narmeni in Kurdistan. In Armenia, it is known as Duduk, and it is also played in Tajikistan, Dagestan, Kyrgyzstan, Greece, and parts of Eastern Europe. The name Balaban is derived from a hawk species with brown wings and a white belly.

Picture 25- The Balaban instrument



Source: compiled by the author

Structural and Materials

Stem (Body): The stem is typically made from hardwoods such as apricot, mulberry, walnut, hazelnut, pear, or boxwood. The body usually measures 280 to 320 millimeters in length, with an internal diameter of approximately 10 millimeters. These woods, in addition to their strength, also significantly impact sound quality, helping produce a smooth, resonant tone.

Reed: The reed of the Balaban is made from a reed tube approximately 6 centimeters long, with its end cut flat. This double-reed structure produces a warm, soft, and mellow sound, a distinct feature of this instrument. The precise crafting of the reed and the quality of the materials used significantly affect the clarity and timbre of the sound.

Mouthpiece: The mouthpiece of the Balaban, where the player blows into, is usually made from wood, metal, shell, plastic, or bone. Each of these materials affects the sound quality

differently. For example, wooden mouthpieces produce a more natural and warm sound, while metal mouthpieces can create a sharper, more transparent tone.

Finger Holes: The Balaban has 8 or 7 finger holes on the front of the body and 1 hole on the back between the first and second holes. These allow the player to adjust the pitch and tone. These holes are essential in tuning the notes and altering the tonal variations.

Sound ranges

Note 32 - Sound Production for Each Finger Placement



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Sound range

The Balaban typically has a range of about one and a half octaves, roughly from its fundamental note up to the twelfth or thirteenth semitone above it.

Playing Techniques

The Balaban employs specialized techniques to produce a rich and varied sound. Key methods include breath reversal for continuous tones, controlling dynamics from soft (pp) to loud (ff), and sustaining long notes through air pressure and constant breathing. Finger pressure and tongue techniques add tonal variety, allowing skilled players to create a broad and expressive range of sounds.

Picture 26 - Playing Balaban



Source: compiled by the author

Cultural & Social Significance

The Balaban (also known as Narmeni) is commonly performed at weddings, festivals, communal gatherings, and religious and mourning ceremonies. Its repertoire spans lively dance melodies, lyrical songs, and solemn ritual tunes. It may be played solo or in combination with percussion instruments, creating intricate melodic and rhythmic frameworks. The distinctive tonal qualities of the Balaban have elevated it as an enduring symbol of cultural identity and regional heritage.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, the Balaban operates not merely as a musical instrument but as a cultural artifact. Local masters function as custodians of musical knowledge, transmitting skills, repertoire, and expressive techniques to younger generations through oral apprenticeship. This instrument mediates social and emotional experiences, articulating collective feelings of joy, sorrow, nostalgia, and celebration.

In essence, the Balaban is a “community instrument,” connecting individuals to their communities, music to daily life, and the present to the past. Its sound embodies the historical, geographical, and cultural identities of the peoples of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and northwestern Iran, preserving a living heritage that continues to resonate across generations.

2.4 Percussion and Struck Drums with Skin

In this category, sound is produced by striking a skin (which is stretched over a circular ring, bowl, or sometimes a frame) using a soft or rigid object, such as a mallet or a drumstick. The skin, usually made of animal hide or synthetic materials, acts as the membrane that vibrates when struck, creating sound waves that produce a variety of tones and timbres. The skin can be stretched over a ring, a cylinder, or sometimes, over both sides of the drum, affecting the resonance and sound characteristics. Percussion instruments can be classified by how they produce sound: some produce indefinite pitches (meaning the sound does not have a distinct note). In contrast, others are tuned to specific pitches, allowing for greater musical versatility. For example, in most Iranian drums, the skin is struck with both hands, allowing greater control over intensity, rhythm, and tonal quality.

Varieties of Percussion Instruments with Skin

Drums that make sound through direct striking: These drums are the most common type and produce sound when the skin is struck directly with hands or sticks. The force and speed of the strike, along with the location on the drum's surface, influence the sound produced. Examples of these drums include the Tombak, Daf, and djembe.

Drums that produce sound through indirect striking: In these types of drums, the skin is struck so that the vibration is influenced by the materials or the resonating body, rather than a direct strike. An example is the tabla, where the skin's response is also affected by the air column inside the drum and by factors such as the drum's placement in the performance environment.

Double-sided drums: These drums feature a skin stretched across both ends. The skin on both sides vibrates when struck, and the sound is typically fuller and more resonant. Double-sided drums are standard in many cultures and are often used in ensemble settings. The Dammam is a typical double-sided drum used in Iranian music.

Single-sided drums: As the name suggests, these drums have only one skin stretched over a frame. The sound produced by a single-sided drum is often sharper and more focused than that of a double-sided drum. The single skin allows a more pronounced tonal quality, ideal for specific rhythmic patterns and dynamic variations in performance.

2.4.1 Dohol Sistan (Double-sided drum)

The Dohol Sistan is a large cylindrical drum with two sides, traditionally used in various ceremonies. Its unique features and playing techniques make it significant in Sistan's cultural traditions.

Picture 27- The Dohol of Sistan



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Picture 28 - Drumsticks for the left and right hands, shown in order.



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and materials

The drum has a cylindrical body made of wood or sometimes metal.

Both drumheads are stretched with goat skin and secured to the body with ropes.

It is suspended from the left shoulder by a long strap, and the player positions it in front of the chest, with the drumheads on either side.

Although the instrument's diameter and height vary significantly across regions, the drum's diameter is approximately 55 cm, with a height of **45 to 55** cm.

Body: Hardwood or metal.

Drumheads: Goat skin.

Drumsticks: Hardwood or tamarisk wood.

Playing Techniques

The player holds the main stick in the right hand, and the Nelok sticks in the left hand (tied to the third and fourth fingers).

The right hand produces deep, resonant beats, while the Nelok sticks from the left hand add rhythmic embellishments, creating a dialogue between the hands.

Picture 29 - Playing Dohol Sistan



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Dohol of Sistan is a traditional double-sided drum from southeastern Iran, with a wooden body and two animal-skin drumheads producing deep, resonant sounds. Historically, it was also used for public announcements. Today, it is played at weddings, festivals, communal gatherings, and rituals, often alongside melodic instruments like the Sorna.

Its rhythms range from lively dance beats to solemn ceremonial patterns, reflecting social and emotional life. As both a musical instrument and cultural artifact, the Dohol connects individuals to their community, preserves traditions, and embodies the historical and cultural identity of southeastern Iran.

2.4.2 Dohol Khorasan (Double-sided drum)

The Dohol Khorasan is a traditional Iranian percussion instrument played in various regions of Khorasan in different styles. This large, double-sided drum is made with the skin of a cow or buffalo. It is often played alongside other instruments, such as the serna (a type of wind instrument), during local ceremonies and celebrations. In northern Khorasan, particularly in areas like Jajarm and Quchan, the dhol is played by musicians known as "Ashiqs," who perform at festive events such as games and celebrations. Additionally, in the eastern and southern parts of Khorasan, drummers use specific techniques to play the dhol during local ceremonies, enhancing the cultural and musical richness of these regions.

Picture 30 - Dohol of South Khorasan (Gonabad) and its drumstick



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Picture 31- Dohol of East Khorasan (Torbat-e-Jam) and its drumsticks



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Picture 32 - Dohol of North Khorasan (Shirvan) and its drumsticks



Source: *The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments* by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and materials

Dohol in Khorasan shares similar characteristics. It consists of a relatively short wooden cylinder with drumheads stretched over both ends. The body is made by bending a wooden strip into a circular shape, with the drumheads secured by a wooden or metal hoop and tightened with ropes. It is worn over the left shoulder with a strap. The right drumhead is played with a slightly curved stick, while the left is struck with a thin twig.

The Dohol of Khorasan, especially the standard type in North, East, and South Khorasan, does not have a fixed size and varies slightly by region and playing style.

The Dohol of Khorasan has a diameter of 50–100 cm and a height of **20–60** cm.

Body: Hardwood (Mulberry, Plane tree, Poplar)

Drumheads: Goat, sheep, deer, or kid skin

Drumsticks: black cherry, walnut, apricot wood

Twig: Willow wood

Hoops: Flexible wood

Ropes: Goat hair, synthetic fibers

Playing Techniques

The main stick (the bigger one) is held in the right hand, while the twig is gripped between the fingers of the left hand. The right and left hands complement each other in producing rhythmic symmetry. The right-hand strikes produce deep and resonant tones, while the left-hand strikes create sharp and high-pitched sounds.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Dohol of Khorasan is a traditional double-sided drum widely used in northeastern Iran. It consists of a cylindrical wooden body with two animal-skin drumheads that produce deep, resonant, and powerful sounds that carry across open spaces.

This instrument is central to local musical and social life, commonly performed at weddings, festivals, communal gatherings, and ritual ceremonies. It is often accompanied by melodic instruments such as the Sorna, and its rhythmic patterns vary from lively dance beats to solemn ceremonial rhythms, reflecting diverse emotional and social contexts.

From an ethnomusicological perspective, the Dohol of Khorasan is not merely a musical instrument but also a cultural artifact. Local drummers act as custodians of rhythm and tradition, transmitting their knowledge orally to younger generations. The drum mediates social cohesion and emotional expression, marking celebrations, rituals, and communal identity.

In essence, the Dohol of Khorasan is a “community instrument,” connecting individuals to collective experience, linking music to daily and ceremonial life, and embodying the historical, geographical, and cultural identity of the people of northeastern Iran. Its sound preserves a living symbol of Khorasan’s musical heritage.

2.4.3 Dammam (Bushehr)

Bushehr, located in southwestern Iran along the Persian Gulf, has been an important cultural and historical hub since the Elamite era. Its rich cultural history is influenced by various ethnic groups, including African migrants who have contributed to its musical traditions. Bushehr’s music is categorized into religious and non-religious genres.

This instrument is widely recognized in Bushehr and Khuzestan for its cultural significance.

Picture 33- The Dammam instrument and its drumsticks



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Materials Used

Body: Solid wood with metal reinforcements

Drumheads: Goat skin

Drumsticks: Palm tree stems

Ropes: Natural fibers (cotton threads)

Playing Techniques

The right hand holds a curved stick, while the left hand plays directly on the drumhead, and a rhythmic conversation between the two sides varies.

Cultural & Social Significance

The Dammam is a traditional double-sided percussion instrument from southern Iran, especially prominent in Bushehr and Khuzestan. It is most commonly performed during religious ceremonies, particularly in the month of Muharram, including Ta'zieh performances and mourning processions. Played in groups, the Dammam produces deep, synchronized rhythms that intensify the atmosphere of devotion and collective sorrow.

Beyond its ritual function, the Dammam acts as a powerful sonic symbol of communal unity and spiritual expression. Its rhythms structure sacred time, evoke shared memory, and embody the coastal and devotional identity of the region's musical culture.

2.4.4 Daf (Kurdistan and Other Regions of Iran)

The Daf is a traditional Iranian frame drum, especially essential in Kurdish Sufi dhikr and Sama rituals, particularly in the Qadiri order. Its simple design, combined with advanced playing techniques, has made it popular in classical Iranian music, percussion ensembles, and even pop music.

Picture 36 - Daf instrument



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Structure and Materials

Frame: Made from grapevine, willow, or other woods.

Drumhead: Traditionally, lamb, goat, or synthetic materials.

Metal Rings: Made of brass, copper, or iron.

Playing Techniques

The Daf, one of the most essential percussion instruments in Kurdish music, is played using various techniques that enhance its expressive richness. The player holds the Daf with the left hand and strikes the skin with the fingers of both hands, with the right hand playing the primary role. The surface of the Daf is divided into three zones: the center, middle, and rim, each producing a different sound. The “Tom” stroke is played in the center, creating a deep bass sound, while the “Bak” strokes are executed in the middle and rim areas, producing higher-pitched tones. Various techniques, such as “riz” (fast and continuous strokes), “dast-bast” (muting the skin for a dampened sound), and “eshareh” (short, quick strokes), are commonly used in Kurdish Daf playing. Additionally, moving the Daf in different directions and playing it horizontally creates further tonal variations.

Picture 37 - Playing Daf



Source: compiled by the author

Cultural & Social Significance

The Daf is an ancient frame drum widely used in Kurdistan and other regions of Iran, recognized for its deep, resonant, and layered sound. Constructed with a wooden frame and a stretched

membrane—often fitted with internal metal rings—it produces a rich range of timbres, from subtle vibrations to powerful, driving rhythms.

Within Kurdish communities, the Daf holds a central place in both spiritual and social life. It accompanies the Mawlud celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birth. It is closely associated with dhikr and sama rituals in Sufi traditions, particularly within the Qadiriya order, where its repetitive, intensifying rhythms guide participants toward spiritual focus and trance. A notable manifestation of its cultural significance is the annual Hazar Daf ceremony in Palangan during Eid al-Fitr, in which large groups of performers gather to play the Daf, symbolizing artistic solidarity, communal identity, and cultural unity in Kurdistan.

Beyond its ritual role, the Daf is also performed at weddings, seasonal festivals, and communal celebrations. From an ethnographic perspective, it is more than a musical instrument; it is a vessel of memory, belonging, and continuity. Through oral transmission and communal learning, the Daf connects generations and mediates emotional, spiritual, and social experience, embodying the living heritage of Iran's diverse cultural landscape.

2.5 Percussion Instruments: Striking and Rubbing Without Drumheads

In the rich and diverse world of music, a group of instruments that produce sound from their own material is called idiophones. Later, musicologists Kurt Sachs and Hornbostel expanded on this concept, categorizing them as "self-sounding" instruments. Idiophones can be found in traditional music cultures worldwide, including Iran.

Idiophones are divided into various categories based on the method of sound production: struck, scraped, rubbed, and blown idiophones. These instruments have evolved from everyday objects, such as pots, pans, bowls, and spoons, that

were gradually adapted into musical tools. Their design reflects the close relationship between music and everyday life in many cultures.

This exploration will focus on struck idiophones commonly found in Iran, examining their history, materials, structure, and role in Iranian traditional music.

2.5.1 Sanj (Bushehr and Other Region)

Various names are used in different regions of Iran for these double-disc metallic idiophones. In Bushehr, they are called Sanj; in Sistan, Qashghak; and in Hormozgan, Shiring or Jing.

Picture 38 – The Sanj



Source: The Encyclopedia of Iranian Musical Instruments by Arfa Atarayi and Mohammad Reza Darvishi.

Characteristics

Materials: Typically made of iron, aluminum, brass, bronze, or zinc.

Shape: These instruments are usually disc-shaped, with slight regional variations in their construction.

These instruments are played by striking them together. The player can also produce different sounds by varying the intensity and angle of the strikes.

Usage and Application

The Sanj is a traditional hand-held cymbal used in Bushehr and other regions of Iran. Smaller versions are tied to dancers' fingers during wedding celebrations, adding to the rhythmic

flow. In comparison, larger versions are played during Ashura mourning ceremonies, accompanied by other instruments to mark the solemn commemoration. Its bright, sharp sound enhances rhythm, collective participation, and cultural identity across both festive and ritual contexts.

3. Final Note

Due to global modernization, the use of traditional musical instruments in Iran has sharply declined, especially among the younger generation and urban communities. This highlights the urgent need for protective and promotional measures. Preserving and modernizing these instruments, documenting their structural features and playing techniques, and creating audio-visual archives are crucial for passing this cultural heritage to future generations. Organizing educational workshops, supporting local musicians and instrument makers, creating sustainable markets, and using modern technologies to improve sound quality can help revive and promote this art both nationally and internationally.

4. Conclusion

This study examined Iran's regional folk musical instruments, highlighting their structural diversity, historical evolution, and cultural significance. Instruments such as the Rubab, Saz, Dutar, and various types of Ghaychak and Kamancheh reflect Iran's ethnic identities and play key roles in ceremonies, rituals, and social life. Despite challenges from modernization, urbanization, and environmental changes, these instruments remain vital carriers of intangible cultural heritage. Ensuring their preservation through education, regional workshops, digital archiving, and community festivals is essential to pass this legacy to future generations and enrich both Iran's musical heritage and global cultural diversity.

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