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BUDDHA AS A MUSICIAN:
AN ILLUSTRATION OF A *JĀTAKA* STORY*

This paper discusses an elaborate scene on a bronze vessel recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art showing the Buddha in a previous incarnation playing the harp. To put the scene in context an account is given of music in the life of the Buddha. While music figured at decisive moments of his life, its influence was hardly laudable. As a result, early Buddhist doctrine roundly condemned the enjoyment of instrumental music for monks. As extreme as this censure was, the opposite stance was adopted in the Mahāyāna *sūtras* that became popular in the East a millennium later. The *sūtras* held instrumental music to be one of the transcendental pleasures of Paradise, and musicians were depicted in paintings (see appendix 1). But a less extreme position may have appealed to the Buddhist audience at large, judging from the popularity of the folk tale illustrated on the bronze vessel in the Metropolitan Museum. The tale is about a previous Buddha called Guttila who is a master musician. Since Guttila was not yet enlightened, his dedication to music was unproblematic.

The discussion of the Metropolitan Museum vessel follows after a brief review of music in the life of the Buddha. Appendix 2 deals with Guttila's instrument, the *vīṇā* harp.

I. Music in the Life of the Buddha

Biographies of the Buddha exist in several versions¹ written between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. but many crucial incidents are common. Some are associated with music.

During the Buddha's first three decades he was more or less permanently immersed in music. Siddhārtha, to use the name given to the historical Buddha at his birth, was born *ca.* 565 B.C. in a small state located near the present border between India and Nepal.² The state was ruled by a council and, since his father was a member, later tradition saw Siddhārtha as the son of a king. The doting father wanted to shield Siddhārtha from the miseries of life, from beggars, the sick, decrepit, aged and deformed, so the young prince was confined to three palaces, where he was surrounded by luxuries and sensuous female musicians.³ He was "happy as in Paradise"⁴ and

passed the time with the noble music of singing-women... with tambourines whose frames were bound with gold and which sounded softly beneath the strokes of women's fingers, and with dances that rivalled those of the beautiful Apsaras. There the women delighted him with their soft voices, charming blandishments, playful intoxications, sweet laughter, curvings of eyebrows

* I am grateful to Mr. Steven Kossak of The Metropolitan Museum of Art for help in procuring photographs of the bronze vessel.

¹ All go back to a lost biography thought to have been composed within a century after the Buddha's death, *ca.* 483 B.C. See Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice, Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* (Oxford, 1971), 80.

² Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism, Teachings, History and Practices* (Cambridge, 1990), 9.

³ Walter Kaufmann, *Altindien (Musikgeschichte in Bildern 2, 8)* (Leipzig, 1981), figs. 59 and 104.

⁴ Edward H. Johnston, *Aśvaghoṣa's Buddhacarita or Acts of the Buddha*, new enlarged ed. (Delhi, 1984), ii. 13.

and sidelong glances. Then, a captive to the women, who were skilled in the accessories of love and indefatigable in sexual pleasure, he did not descend from the palace to the ground.⁵

The same hedonistic life is described in the Mongolian version of the *Lalitavistara*:⁶

He enjoyed the singing, more sonorous than that of the *gandharva*-maidens, of maidens who were skillful in playing flutes, blowing pipes, and beating drums. Amidst all this the following words of *gāthās* came with the sound of violins.⁷

And in the *Nidānakathā*:

and he [the king] provided him with forty thousand dancing girls. So the Bodisat, surrounded by well-dressed dancing girls, ... and attended by musical instruments which played of themselves.⁸

Siddhārtha seems to have been content with the listener's role in music but that is probably not because he lacked aptitude. Whenever he wanted to, Siddhārtha learned quickly. For example, when taunted about his slack attitude, he practiced diligently and quickly won contests of strength, archery, and arithmetic. Since only female musicians are mentioned in the biographies, music making might not have been regarded as a fitting occupation for a prince.

The second important musical incident took place when Siddhārtha listened to a song describing the delights of Nature. He left the palace to look at the world and saw sights that made him decide to abandon court life, go out in the world alone, and seek Enlightenment. Back in the palace Siddhārtha spent the last night surrounded by female musicians but their music had lost its former appeal. Eventually, the musicians fell asleep and their sprawled bodies⁹ reminded the young prince of death and decay.

Thereupon women clad in beautiful array, skilful in the dance and song, and lovely as heavenly virgins, brought their musical instruments, and ranging themselves in order, danced, and sang, and played delightfully. But the Bodisat, his heart being estranged from sin, took no pleasure in the spectacle, and fell asleep [as did the musicians]... The Bodisat, waking up, saw them with their stage properties laid aside and sleeping – some foaming at the mouth, some grinding their teeth, some yawning, some muttering in their sleep, some gaping, and some with their dress in disorder – plainly revealed as mere horrible sources of mental distress... Seeing this woeful change in their appearance, he became more and more disgusted with lust.¹⁰

⁵ Johnston (supra n. 227), ii. 29–32.

⁶ Nicholas Poppe, *The Twelve Deeds of Buddha, a Mongolian Version* (Seattle, 1967), F 2v. The Mongolian text was translated ca. 1325 A.D. from a Tibetan version based on the Sanskrit original. The Mongolian illustrations are given by Poppe.

⁷ An inappropriate translation since violins did not appear until ca. 1520 A.D. See Emanuel Winternitz, "Early Violins in Paintings by Gaudenzio Ferrari and His School," *Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art* (New Haven and London, 1979), 99–109. The fourteenth-century manuscript has an illustration with ten musicians, two of whom play lutes and the rest (probably) percussion instruments. Since few of these instruments existed at the time of Gautama, the artist used contemporary instruments to illustrate an ancient text. This was also common practice among medieval Bible illustrators, especially when showing the "harp" of King David. – The Sanskrit version, *Lalita-Vistara or Memoirs of the Early Life of Śākya Sīmba* (*Bibliotheca Indica*, n.s. 473), trans. Rajendralala Mitra, (Calcutta, 1882), relates that "many hundreds of thousands of Apsarases appeared awaiting with conchshells, clarions, drums, banners, and bells in their hands" when Gautama's mother was preparing for his birth (*ibid.*, 119), and multitudes engaged in singing, music, or pleasant conversation (*ibid.*, 122). The garden where Gautama was born was filled with music for seven nights after the event (*ibid.*, 134 ff.).

⁸ Published as the introduction to Viggo Fausböll and T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist Birth Stories or Jātaka Tales, Translation 1*, 2–131, (London, 1880), esp. 75.

⁹ Illustrated in Kaufmann (supra n. 3), fig. 103.

¹⁰ *Nidānakathā* (supra n. 8), 80 ff.

The same scene is paralleled in the *Buddhacarita*:

But even those splendid instruments, like though they were to the music of the gods, failed to delight or thrill him... Thereon the deities taking cognisance of his resolve, all at once brought sleep there over the women and distorted the gestures of their limbs. One, as she lay there, supported her cheek on an unsteady hand, and, as if angry, abandoned her flute in her lap, dear though it was to her, with its decoration of gold leaf. Another, lying with her bamboo pipe in her hands and her white robe slipping off her breast... Similarly a third was sleeping, clasping her drum, as if it were her lover... When the king's son saw the young women lying in these different ways and looking so loathsome with their uncontrolled movements... he was moved to disgust.¹¹

At the age of twenty-nine Siddhārtha renounced the world and passed the rest of his life in pursuit of wisdom and in teaching. But a third musical encounter lay in store. By recalling good deeds done in his past lives he defeated the loathsome god Māra but the latter persuaded his daughters to try to seduce the Buddha and upset his quest of Nirvāṇa. The episode is related in *Lalitavistara*.

Each of them demonstrated the thirty-two kinds of feminine tricks which provoke lust... They moved their limbs like branches of trees shaken by the wind and, beating cymbals, they sang while dancing... When they had danced and sung, in this and many other ways, the Bodhisattva, calm and firm, self-possessed, with his smiling appearance the same, unafraid and separated from ignorance, spoke in the voice which pleases the heart and is more melodious than the voice of Brahmā and the singing of the *kalavinka* bird: "Such lust is the root of suffering. It leads such fools into evil!"¹²

So far, music had had an thoroughly disreputable role in the life of the Buddha, but after his death the faithful gathered around his body and paid "homage to the remains of the Blessed One with dancing, and hymns, and music, and with garlands and perfumes." This continued for six days.¹³ Written *ca.* 300 B.C., this appreciative account of music gives a premonition of the Mahāyāna attitude.

Apparently, music was associated with states of utter depravity and sublime delight – with little in between. During the development of the Buddhist dogma of the Theravādins, music was viewed as the epitome of sin, but the subsequent popularity of Mahāyāna doctrines in the Far East brought along a more appreciative view. Music became synonymous with the highest joys of Paradise.

2. The Harper Guttilla as an Anterior Birth of the Buddha

After the Buddha's death many stories began to circulate about his anterior lives, the cycle of reincarnations that was broken when he reached Nirvāṇa. These *Jātaka* tales¹⁴ consist of narratives interspersed with chanted verses.¹⁵ *Jātaka* Number 243 tells¹⁶ how the Buddha had once lived the life of an eminent musician playing the *vīṇā* ("arched harp")¹⁷ at the court of Benares.

¹¹ Johnston (supra n. 4, v. 46–63.

¹² Poppe (supra n. 6), F 61r and v.

¹³ *Mahā-parinibbāna Suttanta* 6.26–27, *Sacred Books of the East II, Buddhist Suttas*, trans. T.W. Rhys Davids, (Delhi, 1965), 122 ff.

¹⁴ *Ca.* five hundred stories. See K.R. Norman, "Pāli Literature," *A History of Indian Literature* vii, 2, ed. Jan Gonda (Wiesbaden, 1983), 70.

¹⁵ The earliest source of the stories is from Ceylon. The verses were recited in the original Pāli while the prose stories were handed down in the Sinhalese language. The former were sung to string accompaniment. See Caroline A.F. Rhys Davids, *Stories of the Buddha, Being Selections from the Jātaka* (New York, 1929 [reprinted 1989]), xv. At the turn of this century the noted Indianologist

A climactic scene from this story is shown in detail on an extraordinary bronze vessel acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1975.¹⁸ Since nothing is known about its find circumstances, one must rely on stylistic features to date and determine its provenance, but the bronze is unique and has features that give conflicting evidence. Some elements indicate that the vessel was made in southeastern India (specifically in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa in Andhra Pradesh) during the third century A.D. but other elements (i.e. dress and hairstyles) suggest later dates and a different place.¹⁹

In order to put the scene in context, the events leading up to it will be briefly summarized. Guttila is the name of this master harper whose renown is as great as his age. One day a brash student, Mūsila, arrives and asks for lessons. Against his better judgment Guttila accepts him. Soon the student considers himself superior to his teacher and insists on replacing him as the court

T.W. Rhys Davids witnessed a *Jātaka* performance by monks during a night-long session in Ceylon. For a description of that performance see the introduction to Marie Shedlock, *Eastern Stories and Legends* (New York, 1920). Men, women and children had gathered to listen under the palm trees. Occasionally, someone would chat with a neighbor or take a walk, but most of the audience concentrated intently. The maker of the bronze vessel in the Metropolitan Museum described below, may well have learned about the Guttila story in similar circumstances.

T.W. Rhys Davids calls the *Jātaka* stories “the oldest, most complete and most important collection of folk-lore extant” (supra n. 8). The *Jātakas* were probably composed as early as the Buddha biography mentioned in n. 1. The antiquity of these stories is indicated by the presence of *Jātaka* illustrations on second century B.C. temples at Bhārhut and Sāñcī.

¹⁶ The complete texts are given in Viggo Fausböll (Pāli text) and T.W. Rhys Davids (English translation), *The Jātaka, Together with its Commentary; Being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha, text*, 6 volumes (London, 1879–96). However, only one volume of translations appeared (supra n. 8). Complete translations were subsequently published as *The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births*, E.B. Cowell (ed.), 6 vols. (1895–1906). The translator of *Jātaka* No. 243 was W.H.D. Rouse. The translation quoted below is by C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15).

¹⁷ A harp consists of a resonator-box (which has one surface – often made of leather – that easily vibrates), a rod attached to one end of the box, and many strings suspended between the rod and the vibrating leather surface. As a rule, the strings were apparently not tied directly to the leather but to a narrow wooden rib that ran the length of the leather. The strings lie in a plane perpendicular to the plane of the vibrating surface. (On lyres the two planes are parallel.) Lute strings, on the other hand, are bunched so closely that they hardly define a plane. On Indian lutes – typically the sitār and the tamburi – the strings pass over a bridge; harps lack bridges. See Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York, 1940), 231 ff.). On arched harps (fig. 4) the rod is bent and emerges in the same direction as the length axis of the box. This type of harp brings to mind a hunter's bow with a box attached at one end. The first representations of arched harps appeared in the third millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia and Egypt. See Bo Lawergren, “Reconstruction of a Shoulder Harp in the British Museum,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 66, 1980, 165–8; *idem*, “Acoustics and Evolution of Arched Harps,” *Galpin Society Journal* 34 (1981), 110–29.

Zithers lack the “rod and box” combination and the strings are stretched between two ends of the box. The box takes the full force of the strings and it must be strong; thus it usually lacks a surface that easily vibrates. On stick-zithers the box is a tube. To amplify the sound, one or two gourds are usually attached to the tube.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy showed long ago that the *vīṇā* was a harp: see “The Parts of a Vīṇā,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 50 (1930), 244–53. Also see *idem* “The Old Indian Vīṇā,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51 (1931), 47–51; *idem* “Uṇpavīṇā,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 51 (1931), 284–85; *idem* “The Parts of a Vīṇā,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 57 (1937), 101–3. That the instrument in this tale is a *vīṇā* can be seen from the original Pāli of the following sentence, “And Mūsila was a *vīṇā*-player, and stiffened up his *vīṇā* [strings] to the highest pitch” (“Mūsilavīṇāvādako pi *vīṇā* uttamamucchanāya mucchervā vādesi”). See Fausböll and Rhys Davids (supra n. 13), 249, line 2.

Both Rouse (supra n. 16) and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15) erroneously translate *vīṇā* as “lute.” The latter term has often been misapplied by non-musicological writers on Asian music, a particularly flagrant example being Robert van Gulik in his *The Lore of the Chinese Lute* (Tōkyō, 1940), which deals eminently with flat zithers (like the Chinese *qin*). Some confusion may have been caused by a change of the Indian definition at the end of the first millennium A.D. When the arched harp dropped out of use in India, the stick-zither, which had begun to appear at the time, was referred to as *vīṇā*. Currently, in North India the term *vīṇā* also refers to such a zither. A further change of meaning has occurred in South India where a *sitār*-like lute now is called *vīṇā*. See Sachs, *ibid.*, figs. 59 and 60, respectively.

¹⁸ Richard M. Barnhart (intro.), *The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Asia* (New York, 1987), 152, fig. 104. It is not the only illustration of *Jātaka* No. 243; e.g. see Muriel C. Williamson, “The Iconography of Arched Harps in Burma,” *Music and Tradition; Essays on Asian and Other Musics Presented to Laurence Picken*, eds. D.R. Widdess and R.F. Wolpert, 209–28 (Cambridge, 1981), 216, but the detailed correspondence here is unique.

¹⁹ Martin Lerner, “Enigmas and Masterpieces,” in *The Real, the Fake, and the Masterpiece* (New York, 1988), 39 ff.

musician. Guttīla meekly agrees and goes to the king to recommend him. The king assents but will only pay the young man half of what Guttīla was paid. Mūsīla demands equal pay to which the king agrees if the two harpers take part in a musical competition and Mūsīla proves himself the better. They agree and the competition is set to take place one week later.²⁰

As the date approaches Guttīla grows despondent, thinking of his age and feeling his powers declining. Lonely and dejected he paces back and forth in the forest, and ponders the shame that will befall him if he loses the competition against his student. But Guttīla's heavenly protector, Śāka,²¹ senses his predicament, descends to Earth, and proposes a scheme: during the course of the competition he will provide spectacular help by sending nine hundred nymphs to dance to Guttīla's music, and he adds

“Now do you, playing the harp, break one string and play on six.²² On the harp there will be your usual tones. Mūsīla may break a string, but in his harp there will not be the tone: at that moment he will incur defeat. Then seeing he is defeated, you break one after another all the other strings, then you should play on the bare body itself, and with the string-ends broken, the voice of it will go forth and persist, covering the twelve leagues of Banāres city.”²³

The crucial events during the day of the competition are illustrated on the bronze vessel in a figured relief running as a continuous strip (fig. 1). The beginning and end of the scene are easily identified by the position of the figures. A long procession moves to the right and the people at the head have reached the first part of the building where the competition is to be held. Further to the right is a wide seat occupied by two people (the king and queen) and, still further, is a seated harper (Guttīla) and a female dancer (one of the nymphs). Everyone is looking at them, including a drummer and an additional harper (Mūsīla) further to the right. At the far right a large square pillar or a side wall marks the end of the palace.

The Procession

The procession of people arriving at the gate (fig. 2) occupies seventy percent of the total relief but the text has only a brief, though informative, description:

The king sent round the drum inviting all to meet to hear teacher and pupil compete at the king's gate... Ten thousand adorned women, courtiers, brahmins and men of the country surrounded the king. All the citizens were met.

Indeed, the king's drummer and cymbal player are shown leading the train of people to the event. In order to illustrate that “all citizens” had heeded the invitation, the artist shows people from different walks of life, although the “courtiers and the brahmins” get special attention while the “adorned women” seem absent or may already be seated in the stands above the competitors and the

²⁰ The king may have had ulterior motives since the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (first century B.C. to second century A.D.) asserts that “Of all the duties of the king, this [a dramatic show] is proclaimed as possessing the best result. Of all kinds of charities, allowing people to enjoy a dramatic show without payment has been praised most.” See Manomohan Ghosh (trans.), *The Nāṭyaśāstra (A Treatise on Ancient Indian Dramaturgy and Histrionics)*, Ascribed to Bharata Muni (Calcutta, 1967), 36.80. This work implies that dramatic performances sometimes took the form of contests. See *ibid.*, 27.21–22, 71, 77–79.

²¹ Or Śākya, i.e. Gautama's clan-name deified, see C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15), 244, or *idem*, *Sakya or Buddhist Origins* (London, 1931), 1.

²² I.e. Guttīla's intact harp had seven strings. This is confirmed in the following verse: “The seven-stringed harp, the passing sweet, the lovely thing I taught to him./ He to the arena summons me: be thou my refuge, Kosiya.”

²³ C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15), 2.

royal couple. Two visible contraptions signify high status: the open litter carried in the middle of the parade and the *chattra*²⁴ hoisted above a horse rider at the front. Most likely, the two figures on the litter are the brahmans carried by servants, and a courtier is under the *chattra*.

There are five horses, three elephants, and approximately thirty people of which many are soldiers with swords and shields. The animals presumably belong to “men of the country.” It is a festive crowd with streamers flying, drums beating, horses eagerly neighing and rearing on their hind legs.

The Palace

According to the *Jātaka* text a new structure was built specially for the occasion:

At the king’s gate they had made a pavilion and prepared the king’s seat. The king came down from the terrace and sat on a divan in the midst, in the decorated pavilion... In the royal courtyard they had fixed tier above tier, seat above seat.

The king’s drummer and cymbal player have moved past a palm tree and reached a building which is surmounted by a dome resting on a wide horizontal slab (fig. 3). The dome has a brick-like pattern and the slab has vertical lines delimiting fields of crossed lines. Could this be the gate mentioned in the text? Unfortunately, there is little preserved secular architecture from the time of the story but domes and *stūpa*-like structures were common on temples.²⁵

Figure 3 shows the padded royal seat raised on a wide pedestal and a tier above it. Spectators crowd above a wall on the left, presumably the pavilion. It is a sturdy design, supporting an elephant, a horse, and three important spectators under an umbrella.

Although the structure had been built in a week, “decorations” had not been neglected. Beside the massive square pillar at the end of the pavilion, there is a slender pillar with an elaborately contoured top. Bunting seems to hang above the royal seat and the upper part of the pavilion is elegantly curved and finished with a cornice.

Above Guttila, next to the king, is a semi-circular recess in the pavilion wall. It is probably a supernatural structure occupied by Sāka holding an umbrella to signify the exalted status of Guttila. The text says: “Sāka came with unseen body and stood in the air.” In fact, no face is turned in his direction, not even Guttila’s.

The King

The king and his consort sit in relaxed attitudes on a broad seat with two servants holding fly-whisks above.²⁶ The king’s left leg hangs down and his right leg is drawn up vertically with the foot resting on the seat. This casual posture (*āsana*) is called *mahārājatilāsana* (“royal ease”).²⁷

²⁴ The *chattra*, or umbrella, was an ancient emblem of royalty, known in Mesopotamia from the third millennium and in Urartia during the seventh century B.C. See Ursula Seidel, “Die Siegelbilder,” in Wolfram Kleiss, *Bastam I (Teberaner Forschungen 4–5)*, (Berlin, 1979), 138, 142, refs. 21–24. Although mainly used in the East, the use of the umbrella as an emblem of royalty spread to Greece. See M.C. Miller, “The Parasol: an Oriental Status-Symbol in Late Archaic and Classical Athens,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 62 (1992) 91–105. Another royal insignia was the *cāmara*, or fly-whisk. See Gösta Liebert, *Iconographic Dictionary of the Indian Religions (Studies in South Asian Culture 5)* (Leiden, 1976).

²⁵ J.C. Harle, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent* (Harmondsworth, 1986), 44.

²⁶ Liebert, *supra* n. 24.

²⁷ Or *rājatilāsana*, Liebert (*supra* n. 24), Harle (*supra* n. 25), 216. Had the drawn-up leg been horizontal, the posture would have been *lalitāsana*. The posture was particularly favoured by the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Chinese: Guanyin), who often strikes the pose

The Musical Competition at the Palace

In spite of the description in the *Jātaka* text,

the Bodhisat, bathed and anointed, having eaten food of divers choice flavors, and taken his harp,
sat down on his prepared seat, and Mūsila on his,

the two harp players depicted on the Metropolitan Museum bronze vessel seem to be sitting on the floor (fig. 4). The harp nearest to the king is larger than the one to the right, and it accords with the story to assume these belong to Guttila and Mūsila, respectively. The identification is supported by the fact that the larger harpist has long ear lobes, a traditional attribute of the Buddha. A dancer, representing the celestial nymphs, and the larger harpist maintain eye-contact (fig. 4). As the story has it, she dances to Guttila's music. The drummer to the right also participates, intently watching the dancer.

Since the texts informs us that the harp strings were to be broken, it is tempting to examine the harps closely. Strings are, in fact, missing but their absence may be a result of the difficulties in representing such delicate details.

The two harpists have very different hand positions. Guttila is obviously playing since he holds his left hand near the vertical arch of the harp and his right hand near the mid-point of the (imagined) strings, and this is the typical playing position now used on the Burmese harp.²⁸ One of Mūsila's hands is also supporting the harp near the arch, but his other hand is high above the strings, i.e. he is probably not playing. Instead, Mūsila seems to be looking down on his instrument with raised eyebrows as if bewildered (fig. 4, extreme right).

3. Buddha as a Music Critic

Another episode in the life of the Buddha is reported in the *Sakkapañha Sutta*:

At that time Sakka [Sāka],²⁹ lord of the gods, felt a strong desire to see the Lord. And Sakka thought: "Where is the Blessed Lord, the fully-enlightened Buddha, now staying?" Then, perceiving where the Lord was, Sakka said . . . : "Gentlemen, the Blessed Lord is staying in Magadha . . . in the Indasāla Cave. How would it be if we were to go and visit the Lord?" . . . Then Sakka said to Pañcaśikha of the gandharvas: "I propose to go to visit him." "Very good, Lord," said Pañcaśikha and, taking his yellow *beluva*-wood vīṇā, he followed in attendance on Sakka . . . Then Sakka said: "Pañcaśikha, it is hard for the likes of us to get near the Buddha when he is enjoying the bliss of meditation, and therefore withdrawn. But if you, Pañcaśikha, were first to attract the ear of the Blessed Lord, then we might afterwards be able to approach and see the Blessed Lord, the fully-enlightened Buddha." "Very good, Lord," said Pañcaśikha and, taking his yellow *beluva*-wood vīṇā, he approached the Indasāla Cave. Thinking: "As far as this is neither too far nor too

on near-lifesize wooden sculptures. See e.g. Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, vol. 4 (London, 1925), pls. 586–91; in The Victoria and Albert Museum, London: John Larson and Rose Kerr, *Guanyin, a Masterpiece Revealed* (London, 1985); The Metropolitan Museum of Art: inv. nos. 42.25.5 [ca. 1000 A.D.] and 1976.326 [ca. 1600 B.C.]; and on a porcelain sculpture (Helmut Brinker and Eberhard Fischer, *Treasures from the Rietberg Museum* (New York, 1980), 145 [ca. 1300]). The Chinese deity Guanyin was based on the Indian Avalokiteśvara, the chief minister of Amitābha ruler of the Western Paradise. See John Blofeld, *In Search of the Goddess of Compassion, the Mystical Cult of Kuan Yin* (London, 1977), fig. 13.

²⁸ Williamson (supra n. 13), pl. 1, 211 ff.

²⁹ Cf. n. 21.

near to the Lord, and he will hear my voice,” he stood to one side. Then, to the strains of his *viṇā*, he sang these verses extolling the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Arahants, and love.³⁰ When he heard this, the Lord said: “Pañcaśikha, the sound of your strings blends so well with your song, and your song with the strings, that neither prevails excessively over the other.”³¹

It was a sage comment from someone whose musical taste had been honed over several lifetimes and who, like many later critics, did not play himself.

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Appendix I: Subsequent Buddhist Views on Music

An Early Precept Warning Against Music

In the stories about the Buddha, music is a corrupting force and a mere aid to seduction. Naturally, the Buddha – and early Buddhists – regarded music with misgivings, and issued an outright ban on it in the *Brahmajāla Sūtra*,³² one of the oldest works in the Buddhist canon.³³ It stipulated a set of *śīla*, or precepts, to be observed by monks, but only some precepts were required of the laity. These *śīla*³⁴ range from general rules of civilized conduct (not to kill or steal) to specialized constraints (not to sleep on high beds). One precept demands

He avoids watching dancing, singing, music, and shows.³⁵

The stern command is further amplified:

... whereas some ascetics and Brahmins ... remain addicted to attending such shows as dancing, singing, music, displays, recitations, hand-music, cymbals and drums, fairy-shows, acrobatics and conjuring tricks, combats of elephants, buffaloes, bulls, goats, rams, cocks and quail, fighting with staves, boxing, wrestling, sham-fights, parades, manoeuvres and military reviews, the ascetic Gotama [Gautama] refrains from attending such displays.³⁶

³⁰ The scene is illustrated in Kaufmann (supra n. 3), fig. 98. Only the last topic is exemplified in the *Sutta* with a typical stanza: “Come, embrace me, maiden fair of thighs, / Seize and hold me with your lovely eyes, / Take me in your arms, it’s all I ask! / My desire was slight at first, O maid / Of waving tresses, but it grew apace...,” i.e. sentiments familiar to the young Siddhārtha.

³¹ Maurice Walshe, *Thus I Have Heard; the Long Discourse of the Buddha, Dīgha Nikāya* (London, 1987), 21.

³² Consisting of the first part of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, which exists in two complete English translations: (1) T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha (Sacred Books of the Buddhists 2, F. Max Müller, ed.)* (Oxford 1899); and (2) Walshe (supra n. 31).

³³ These sayings of the Buddha were collected after his death and put in final form within fifty years, Rhys Davids (supra 32), xix. Also Sir Charles Eliot, *Japanese Buddhism* (New York, 1969) (first published 1935), esp. 10–11.

³⁴ In Pali; *śīla* in Sanskrit; *shira* in Japanese. Beside the *Brahmajāla*, the precepts are given in the *Tervigga sūtra* of the *Dīgha nikāya*. See Rhys Davids, and Walshe (supra n. 233), and T.W. Rhys Davids *Buddhist sūttas (The Sacred Books of the East 11)*, (Oxford 1881), 167–203, and referred to more obliquely in other *sūtras*. The music precepts are presented in two consecutive sections headed *Kūla sīlam* and *Maggbhima sīlam*. See Rhys Davids, *ibid*, 190–92.

³⁵ From “The Short Paragraphs on Conduct,” Walshe (supra n. 31), 69.

³⁶ From “The Longer Paragraphs on Conduct,” Walshe (supra n. 31), 70. The Rhys Davids translation (supra n. 32) has pertinent annotations on the musical terms.

Later Practice in the Far East

Some five hundred years later this view of music was reversed in the canon of the Mahāyāna Buddhism that spread to the Far East. Its most popular *sūtras* describe a Western Paradise filled with many gaudy objects, of which musical instruments were among the most conspicuous.³⁷ Their sheer splendor evince the delights awaiting the faithful, and their sounds bring Buddhist doctrines into contemplative focus. It is difficult to reconcile this view of music with the earlier precept,³⁸ but similar reversals have been noted in other areas.³⁹

Quite possibly, the new opinion was stimulated by the highly developed state that music had reached in China at that time. At least since the Shang dynasty,⁴⁰ music had played an important role in early rituals and was encouraged in Confucian traditions. For millennia, music had been considered a necessary attribute of religious ceremonies at Chinese courts, something that seems to have been on the mind of Prince Wenxian of Qinghe, who established a Buddhist temple where on great feast days they always provided girl musicians. The singing voices would play among the beams, while the dancers' sleeves slowly turned this way and that, and strings and pipes sounded clear, in harmonies so perfect that they partook of the divine.⁴¹

In Japan, Genshin (942–1017 A.D.) described the glory of heavenly orchestras in his *Ōjōyōshū*,⁴² a work based⁴³ on the Indian *Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra*.⁴⁴ Both works mention orchestras composed of “innumerable musical instruments,” and marvelous instruments that play by themselves. The music, it is said,⁴⁵ propounds the virtues of “suffering, non-existence, impermanence, and non-self.” Streams of water, and trees with golden branches and coral leaves emit equally marvelous sounds:

And what shall we say of the wonderful sounds that are heard! Five kinds of sounds are making a wonderful timbre⁴⁶ just as if a hundred thousand kinds of musical instruments were being played in unison. Whosoever hears this music naturally is led to meditate on Buddha, the Law and the Priesthood.⁴⁷

Following those leads, Far Eastern painters at the end of the first millennium A.D. often placed a (large) Buddha among (small) musicians. Many oasis cities along the northern and southern course of

³⁷ Some examples in (1) F. Max Müller (trans.) “The Larger Sukhāvati-vyūha,” in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts (The Sacred Books of the East 49)* (Oxford, 1894 [reprinted Delhi, 1966]), 91–95, and (2) Leon Hurvitz (trans.), *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sūtra)* (New York, 1976), 11.

³⁸ In Japan the precepts no longer make references to musical performance, but merely to “places of amusement,” Beatrice Lane Suzuki, “Ceremonies for Lay Disciples at Kōya-san,” *Mikkyō, Kōbō Daishi Kūkai and Shingon Buddhism (Bulletin of the Research Institute of Esoteric Buddhist Culture)* (October, 1990), 117–30, esp. 123.

³⁹ “It is noticeable that these delights [of Paradise], though they do not include eating, drinking, and things sexual, are mainly agreeable sights and sounds which Gotama would have pronounced vain and impermanent” (Eliot, supra n. 33, 106). Cf. Ivan Morris, *The World of the Shining Prince; Court Life in Ancient Japan* (London, 1964 [second edition, 1985]), 118.

⁴⁰ Keith Pratt, “The Evidence for Music in the Shang Dynasty: a Reappraisal,” *Bulletin of the British Association for Chinese Studies* (1986), 22–50.

⁴¹ Alexander Coburn Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (Ascona, 1959), esp. 109.

⁴² A. K. Reischauer, “Genshin’s *Ōjō Yōshū: Collected Essays of Birth into Paradise*,” *The Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan*, II ser., 7 (1930), 16–97.

⁴³ Eliot (supra n. 33), 261.

⁴⁴ Müller (supra n. 37), 161–203.

⁴⁵ Müller (supra n. 37), 171; cf. Reischauer (supra n. 42), 74.

⁴⁶ While the translation reads “harmony,” unison playing – of course – does not result in harmony.

⁴⁷ Reischauer (supra n. 42), 75.



Fig. 1 Figural scene in a continuous register surrounding the bronze vessel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. no. 1975.419, Rogers Fund 1975). Photograph by Mr. Justin Kerr.

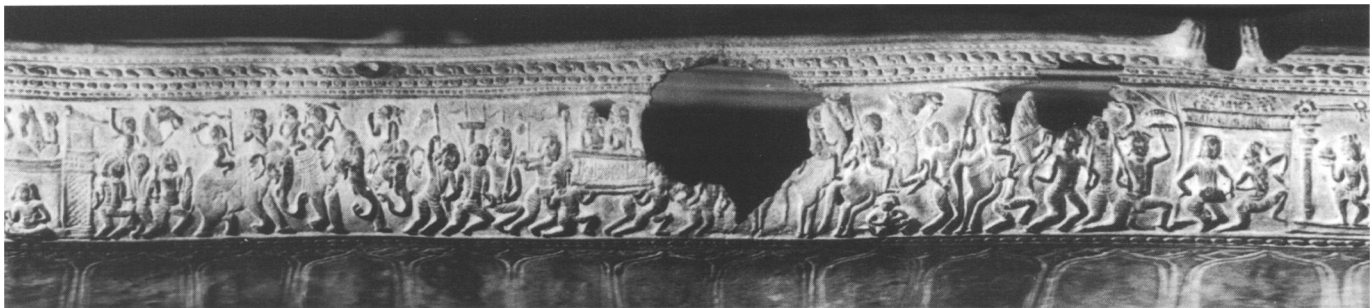


Fig. 2 Detail of Fig. 1 showing the arrival of the audience.



Fig. 3 Detail of Fig. 1 showing the palace, including (from left to right) the domed gate, a narrow round pillar, the seated king and queen, Gurttila with Śāka hovering above, a dancing nymph, a drummer, Mūsila, and a wide square pillar.



Fig. 4 Detail of the musicians and the dancer. A composite of photographs taken from two angles, showing sharp details with some perspective distortions.

the Silk Route in the Taklamakan Desert had paintings of orchestras.⁴⁸ At Dunhuang – the entrance of the Silk Route into China – orchestras were painted on cave walls⁴⁹ and on silks.⁵⁰ Typical scenes show three large central figures (the Buddha and Bodhisattvas such as Śākyamuni, Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī) surrounded by crowds of worshippers. Among the worshippers are musicians divided into two groups playing diverse combinations of instruments.⁵¹ Equally lavish orchestras were shown on Japanese paintings *ca.* 1000 A.D. In particular, *raigō* scenes show Amida Buddha descending from Paradise to welcome a devotee, and his entourage may include an orchestra of assorted string, wind and percussion instruments,⁵² but other Buddhist musicians are known.⁵³

Ecclesiastical orchestra music seems largely confined to Paradise,⁵⁴ where its principal inhabitant – the Buddha – now again listens to music daily. Although some earthly scenes depict musical performances, they seem to be symbolic or teeter on the threshold of Paradise. The Japanese illustration of a *sūtra*⁵⁵ shows a spiritual teacher on a platform surrounded by approximately ten musicians but the place is probably in a virtual Paradise. In 980, we are told, a Japanese court noble was so devout that three days before his death

A fragrant odor filled his house, and beautiful music announced the arrival of Amida's heavenly retinue, welcoming him to Paradise. Several days after his death he was still as if alive, his body showing no signs of decay.⁵⁶

⁴⁸ In the neighborhood of Kucha (Kucha, Kizil, Kumtura and Subashi), Khotan (Khotan and Dandan-uiliq), Turfan (Turfan, Khocho and Chikkan Kul). For a map, see Herbert Härtel, *Along the Ancient Silk Routes, Central Asian Art from the West Berlin State Museums* (New York, 1982), 16 ff.

⁴⁹ Chang Shuhong and Li Chengxian, *Dunhuang feitian* (Beijing, 1980), translated by Li Rongxi, *The Flying Devis of Dunhuang* (New York, 1983), nos. 10, 15, 16, 44, 148, 158, 161, 172, 285, 327, and 428.

⁵⁰ Roderick Whitfield, *The Art of Central Asia; the Stein Collection in the British Museum I; Paintings from Dunhuang I* (Tōkyō and London, 1982), pls. 8 and 9, esp. 9-3 (8th-9th century A.D.); Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas* (New York, 1990), pl. 2; also Katharine Schlesinger, "Notes on Musical Instruments Represented in the Stein Collection," in Aurel Stein, *Serindia, Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China* (Oxford, 1921), 1467-69.

⁵¹ Many of the instruments (zithers, end-blown and side-blown flutes, mouth-organs, pan-pipes, wooden clappers, and drums) had long been known in China. See, for example, the relief from Yi'nan, Shandong province, carved during Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.), reproduced in Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Painting I:III*, (New York, 1956), pls. 3-4. For an analysis of the instruments, see Werner Bachmann "Ensemblemusik im 5. Jahrhundert vor unserer Zeitrechnung. Ein Vergleich der Bildquellen und der Instrumentfunde," *Imago Musicae* 4 (1987), 209-28. – The new element of Buddhist orchestras is the stress on thin-plate string instruments (harps and lutes) at the expense of stone chimes and large bronze bells. The new instruments entered China by way of the Silk Route. The Yi'nan relief depicts acrobats, floats containing drums and banners, horses carrying equilibristic riders, but this carnival spirit is absent in the Buddhist setting. – A closer analysis of the new instruments falls outside the scope of this article, but significant correlations between harps and Buddhist affiliation can easily be demonstrated. Sites under the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism (the Turfan and Khotan regions in the Tarim basin – see n. 48 – and most of the Far East) preferred angular harps, while those of the Theravāda school (Kizil in the Kucha region, India and southeast Asia) favored arched harps. In Dunhuang, however, both types of harp coexisted (supra ns. 49 and 50).

⁵² One *raigō* scene, particularly well executed and preserved, containing about a dozen instruments, is now in the Reihōkan Museum at Kōyasan. See Robert Treat Paine and Alexander Soper, *The Art and Architecture of Japan* (Baltimore, 1960), fig. 38; for larger reproductions in full color, see Osamu Takada and Yanagisawa Taka, *Butsuga* 7, Series: *Genshoku Nihon no bijutsu* (Tōkyō, 1969), fig. 118. M.W. De Visser discusses the figures in the painting in *Ancient Buddhism in Japan* (Leiden, 1935), 334-35, but his assignment of Genshin as the painter is no longer accepted by specialists. Other *raigō* scenes with an orchestra appear in Yashiro Yukio, *Art Treasures of Japan* (Tōkyō, 1960), pls. 182-84, and Akiyama Terukazu, *Japanese Painting* (New York, 1990), 43.

⁵³ For an example in a late twelfth-century handscroll, see Yutaka Mino, *The Great Eastern Temple, Treasures of Japanese Buddhist Art from Tōdai-ji* (Chicago, 1986), 124. Later still, odd lutes appear on Tibetan *mandalas*, perhaps in the hands of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the lute-playing Guardian of the East and leader of the *gandharvas*. See Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boston, 1989), 101, pl. 8.

⁵⁴ Instrumental music flourished at the Japanese courts, however, as exemplified by the eloquent scenes of Japanese music making *ca.* 1010 described in Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker (New York, 1989), 254-56, 419-20.

⁵⁵ Supra n. 53

⁵⁶ De Visser (supra n. 52), 666 ff.

An equally mythical scene was reported by Ennin, a Japanese Buddhist who visited China ca. 840. He came to a sealed grotto, and was shown a list of its content which included

a silver harp ... made of 84,000 notes, and each of the 84,000 notes cured one of the worldly passions.⁵⁷

The instrument was said to have been deposited before the birth of Gautama, but that is impossible, since China did not have harps before the second century A.D.⁵⁸

Ennin reported one occasion with music in an earthly setting. A maigre feast was given in honor of a Buddhist bishop and “there were all sorts [of food] in profusion, and they also held a concert,”⁵⁹ but – of course – it may have been a purely vocal performance, in which instruments were not necessarily involved. Earlier Buddhists may have employed instrumental music on ritual occasions,⁶⁰ but by the end of the millennium Eastern Buddhists seem to have imagined instrumental music rather than to have practiced it.

A few centuries later celestial music scenes disappeared from Buddhist art in the Far East. Today Buddhist music no longer brings to mind a rich array of string and wind instruments. Instead, there is the chanting of *sūtras* interspersed by ringing sounds from bells and cymbals, a tradition that goes back – at least – to the eighth century⁶¹ in Japan, and earlier in China and India.⁶² The emphasis on the voice – at the expense of instruments – is in accord with the metaphysical interpretations of syllabic sounds common in esoteric Buddhism,⁶³ where the mere repetitions of certain word combinations (*mantras*) promise salvation and rebirth in the Western Paradise.⁶⁴

* * *

⁵⁷ Edwin O. Reischauer, *Ennin's Diary; the Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law* (New York, 1955), 248.

⁵⁸ Angular harps did, however, exist in this part of the world ca. 400 B.C., e.g. at the Central Asian site of Pazyryk. See Bo Lawergren, “The Ancient Harp from Pazyryk,” *Beiträge zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Archäologie* 9–10 (1990), III–18.

⁵⁹ Reischauer (supra n. 57), 76.

⁶⁰ When Faxian [Fa-hsien] visited Khotan ca. 400 A.D. he found that “The country is prosperous and happy; its people are well-to-do; they have all received the Faith, and find their amusement in religious music. The priests number several tens of thousands, most of them belonging to the Greater Vehicle.” See *The Travels of Fa-hsien (399–414 A.D.)*, or, *Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms*, trans. H.A. Giles (Westport, Conn., 1981), esp. 4. At Maghada, by the river Ganges, they “make a four wheeled car of five stories by lashing together bamboos... The car is over twenty feet in height, and in form like a pagoda... They make images of devas, ornamented with gold, silver, and stass, and with silk banners and canopies overhead. At the four sides they make niches, each with a Buddha sitting inside and a Bodhisattva in attendance... All the ecclesiastics and laymen in the district assemble; they have singing and high-class music, and make offerings of flowers and incense... all night long lamps are burning, high-class music is being played, and offering are being given. Such is the custom in all these regions”, *idem*, 47.

⁶¹ Eta Harich-Schneider, *A History of Japanese Music* (London, 1973), 45.

⁶² Tibetan ritual orchestras contain a multitude of percussion instruments, pairs of metal trumpets and reed instruments of very limited ranges. A nineteenth-century painting depicts thirty-five instruments. See Arnold Perris, “Padmasambhava's Paradise; Iconographical and Organological Remarks on a Tibetan Ritual Painting,” *Imago Musicae* 1 (1984), 175–87.

⁶³ Specifically: Yoshito S. Hakeda (trans.), *Kūkai, Major Works* (New York, 1972), 234–62. Generally: Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, a Historical Survey* (Princeton, 1964), 325–37.

⁶⁴ Often the name of the Buddha was uttered incessantly, as in the case of a seventh-century monk who repeated it a million times in seven days. See Ch'en (supra n. 63), 346.

Appendix 2: The *Vīṇā*

Arched harps can be found in many parts of the world⁶⁵ and in India they were often shown on Buddhist sculpture dating between the second century B.C. and the eighth century A.D. But it was not a Buddhist instrument *per se*, since the *vīṇā* is mentioned already in Vedic texts with the familiar attributes of the arched harps. According to the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (before 600 B.C.) the instrument was invented by the gods.⁶⁶

But the arched harp probably existed in the region much earlier. The Indus civilization⁶⁷ had a script based on pictographic signs, one of which appears to represent the side-view of an arched harp.⁶⁸ It depicts a gently arched rod with three or four strings suspended across its arch. Although there is no trace of a sound-box, the identification seems reasonable.

According to the *Nāṭya Śāstra* the seven-stringed harp, like Guttilla's, bore the name *citrā vīṇā* and the nine-stringed version was the *vīṇā vīṇā*.⁶⁹ The former was plucked with fingers, and the latter with a plectrum. This treatise codifies a rich repertoire of playing techniques. Plucking could be done in four ways: *udātta* (the accentuated style), *lalita* (the elegant style), *ribhita* (the rattling style), *ghana* (the full style). There were three ways to accompany a singer, and six ways to execute the music. The strings could be plucked in ten different manners: with the little finger and the thumb, with two thumbs, with the index finger, etc. One way, *tala*, is described as "a stroke with the right hand after pressing with the left hand." It is probably the same technique long known to have been used by ancient lyre players (in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece) and still practiced in Africa.⁷⁰ The right hand strikes the plectrum across all the strings; the fingers of the left hand touch the upper half of some strings from behind. Only the untouched strings sound fully while the damped strings contribute percussive sounds.

The *vīṇā* ceased to be represented in Indian art in the seventh century A.D., and it has been assumed that the instrument disappeared about that time. However, an arched harp, reminiscent of the *vīṇā* has recently been discovered in an Indian village, where it was held in very low esteem.⁷¹ So, the *vīṇā*, once having been fit for Buddha himself, has now declined to become the instrument of the downcast.

⁶⁵ Cf. supra n. 17.

⁶⁶ "The [distracting] gods then created the 'lute' (*vīṇā*?) and sat playing and singing, saying, 'Thus we sing to thee, thus we amuse thee!' She [the goddess Vāk] turned to the gods; but, in truth, she turned to them vainly, since she turned away from those engaged in praising and praying, to dance and song. Wherefore even to this day women are given to vain things: for it was on this wise that Vāk turned thereto, and other women do as she did. And hence it is to him who dances and sings that they most readily take fancy." See Julius Eggeling (trans.), *The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, (*The Sacred Books of the East* 26) (Delhi, 1966; first edition 1885), III 2.4.6. This Vedic text reflects the same censorial attitude towards women, music, and dance as the cited accounts of the Buddha. Indeed, it was a world dominated by males – brahmins and Buddhist monks – and the status of women was at a low point. Cf. Margaret Stutley, *Hinduism, the Eternal Law* (Wellingborough, 1985), 23.

⁶⁷ Ca. 3000–1800 B.C. See Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language, the Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (New York, 1987), 183.

⁶⁸ Sign no. 311, shown in sequences of three signs on two seals from Harappa and one seal from Mohenjo-daro. See Iravatham Mahadevan, *The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Tables* (New Delhi, 1977), nos. 4680, 4692 and 1046.

⁶⁹ Emmie te Nijenhuis, "Die Musik in altindischen Theater nach dem Nāṭyaśāstra", in Kaufmann (supra n. 3), 188–96, esp 191.

⁷⁰ Sachs (supra n. 17), 132.

⁷¹ This *bin-baja* was found in the Mandla District of Madhya Pradesh (Central India) where it was played by a member of the Gogia Pardhans tribe which in ancient days are said to have supplied priests and musicians to the Gond court. It is a five-stringed harp played with a back-and-forth stroke of the right-hand plectrum across all strings. Simultaneously, the left hand periodically touches and releases the strings from behind, so as to muffle their sound. See Roderick Knight, "The Harp in India Today," *Ethnomusicology* 29 (1985), 9–28. See also, *idem* "The Bana of Bachargaon and Beyond," *Oberlin Alumni Magazine* 79, no. 3 (1983), 30–39. Cf. the *tala* technique discussed above.

When the *vīṇā* declined in India it began to appear in Burmese art,⁷² and its context was exclusively Buddhist. Apparently, Indian monks brought the instrument to Burma long after the decline of Buddhism in its homeland in the seventh to eighth centuries. The *vīṇā* also spread into Central Asia along the Silk Route and in China but disappeared there in the thirteenth century A.D.⁷³

The Burmese harp (the *saṅg-gauk*) still survives and its design⁷⁴ suggests how the *vīṇā* might have looked in ancient times. The Burmese version has a number of intricate details that are too fine to carve on stone sculpture.⁷⁵ However, ancient sculptures show general outlines, and these underwent only minor changes in India, Burma, Central Asia, and China. Sometimes the arch curls up over the body, sometimes it extends far forward; the body may be short or long. It is probably unwise to build grand migration theories on the basis of this evidence. For one thing, representations consist mostly of fairly eroded public temple sculpture or wall paintings on rough cave walls. For another, the known representations give a woefully incomplete picture of ancient arched harps. As an example, consider phoenix-headed arched harps which are mentioned in Burmese texts from 802 A.D.⁷⁶ No such harps are represented in this region, but they are known at Dunhuang,⁷⁷ during the Song dynasty (960–1279 A.D.).

Recently an unusually well-preserved Indian representation of a *vīṇā* from the fifth century A.D. has been published.⁷⁸ One easily discerns the three-dimensional shape of the body, the junction of the arch and the body, the tuning collars on the arched rod,⁷⁹ and the nine strings tied to the rib,⁸⁰ which rests on the skin covering the top of the body. Both the body and the rib are strongly curved. This is emphasized by the body spilling over the pictorial frame.

Most interesting on that *vīṇā* is the end of the stick, which does not run the full length of the body but stops short of the rear end after bending steeply upward to create a bulge on the top of the box. The same design is present on the modern Burmese arched harp, on which it is called the “monkey head.”⁸¹ That characteristic feature of the Burmese harp seems to be present in this Indian design of the fifth century A.D., a time not far removed from the casting of our bronze vessel discussed here.. Judging by the deep lobes of the harpist’s ears, Buddha himself is the musician on the tile and, maybe, his name is Guttila.

Most Indian monuments are non-committal about the “monkey head,” either because the harp is drawn too schematically or it is obscured by the player’s hand. One exception is a second to third century A.D. scene⁸² which, in a crude way, confirms the “monkey head.”

⁷² The first representation, from Pyū in Lower Burma, is dated to 650 A.D. by Williamson (supra n. 13), 212, while Judith Becker, in “Migration of the Arched Harp from India to Burma,” *Galpin Society Journal* 20 (1967), 17–23, esp. 21, assigns it to the fifth century.

⁷³ Caroline Blunden and Mark Elvin, *Cultural Atlas of China* (New York, 1983), III.

⁷⁴ Muriel C. Williamson, “The Construction and Decoration of One Burmese Harp,” *Selected Reports (Institute of Ethnomusicology UCLA)* 1, no. 2 (1968), 46–72.

⁷⁵ On the other hand, a recently found Javanese set of bronze statuettes from the early tenth century A.D. has a *vīṇā* with details even richer than on the current *saṅg-gauk*. See Jan Fontein, *The Sculpture of Indonesia* (Washington and New York, 1990), 227.

⁷⁶ Laurence Picken, “Instruments in an Orchestra from Pyū (Upper Burma) in 802,” *Musica Asiatica* 4 (1984), 245–70, esp. 245.

⁷⁷ Supra n. 49.

⁷⁸ Amy G. Poster, *From Indian Earth; 4,000 Years of Terracotta Art* (New York, 1986), 166.

⁷⁹ The function of collars has been described earlier. See Bo Lawergren, “The Cylinder Kithara in Etruria, Greece, and Anatolia,” *Imago Musicae* 1 (1984), 147–74, figs. 20–22.

⁸⁰ Cf. n. 69.

⁸¹ Williamson (supra n. 74), 49.

⁸² Kaufmann (supra n. 3), fig. 62.