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Music in Persian and Thai Courts In the Early Ayutthya Period

Mr. Udom Arunrattana

## Court Music in Persia and Thailand During The Early Ayutthaya Period

Udom Arunrattana

South-East Asia, meaning the land between India and China, also known as the "Indochinese Peninsula", has been given many names; Suwanannaphum by the Indians, the Golden Peninsular by the Greeks. Its location between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Rim has caused this region to be well-known around the world. With an abundance of natural resources and agricultural produce, it has frequently drawn people passing through the area to trade, and to try their luck by settling here. This has historically made it a region comprised of a broad mix of races and languages; a truly pluralistic society. These settlers have complemented each other well. Several have split to form large or small groups within the region, making it an area of great cultural diversity. It is a situation which has had a notable impact on other independent cultures with which it has come into contact, whether they be Indian, Chinese, Muslim or Western.

The region has always been rich in many forms of cultural heritage, including lifestyle, arts and traditions. The introduction of foreign cultures and art has brought about an incremental development of the area as a whole. In other words, the influence of foreign cultures, for example Indian or Islamic, could be described as having fertilized the indigenous cultures of S. E. Asia, which we can compare to a tree with deep roots, a firm trunk and a diversity of branches. It has grown and flourished, bearing delicate and beautiful fruit.

Works of art, both as expressions of religious faith or purely as entertainment, such as dramatic art or popular music, were already flourishing in the region before being influenced by other cultures. The region was considerably transformed by the continuous influx from the Indian and Arab states, which acted as catalysts to change. They had a significant effect, for example, on the shape of musical instruments, and added to the melodious interpretation of regional songs.

Arabs had settled in areas such as Western India and the Malabar coast since decades, India may be seen as a "bridge", between Asian and Arab culture. They came to Southeast Asia by sea, much the same as Venetian merchants, bringing with them their own culture and propagating their religious doctrine. By the ninth century the Southeast Asian region had become a cultural melting-pot.

The Arabs were already familiar with the kingdom of Cham while, sailing along the coast of Peninsular Malaysia. "Cham" was the name given to the land reaching from the Mekhong Delta eastwards. Its population comprised many nationalities, most notably the Khmer and Indians who had migrated earlier. Some Malays also had crossed the sea to settle there. Most of the Cham people believed in Islam and were often called "Khaekcham". The Kingdom bordered that of Cambodia, which was a Khmer center and was influential in the region. It is said that the Arabs knew of the Cham kingdom as far back as the 9<sup>th</sup> century and called it "Sanf", or "Chanf".

By the period in which the Srivijaya Empire was thriving, the Indians had already established contacts along the Indochinese coast for trade and religious purposes. At the end of the 14th Century Malays had begun to settle in the Indochinese mainland.

Many examples of Sangkhaloke pottery have been discovered in recent years. This style of pottery was a craft of the Kingdom of Sukhothai (1248 A.D.) when it was exported to many Muslim countries, such as Indonesia, Iran (Persia) and also parts of Africa.

Two gold commemorative coins, excavated from a pagoda in Wat Ratchaburana, Ayutthaya province, which date back to the reign of King Samphraya, or Boromruchathirat II of Ayutthaya (1418-1434 A.D.) bear on one face the inscription "Sulaton-Adin" and on the other, "Chairon Abidin Mathik". They appear to have been made in Kashmir during the reign of King Zain-ul-Abidin (1422-1474 A.D). They were minted in the honor of this honorable king who seems to have been a patron of the arts. The coins are evidence of the relationship between Thailand and Arab countries during the Ayutthaya period.

We can surmise that, from the period of Sukhothai to that of Ayutthaya, contacts with Persian traders had been established. Journeying out through Persia and passing through Afghanistan, Kashmir, then on into India where they boarded ships to Tanaosri, a Thai port with a Persian Governor General. On the way to Ayutthaya they passed through Petchaburi, Pranburi and Kuiburi among other places all of which contained a significant Persian presence.

During the Ayutthaya Period, Persians probably began to establish settlements within the area. Some also became noblemen at the Royal court. We know that during the reign of King Barantrailokanat (1482 A.D.) a later generation had established official residence and positions such as "Krom Thakwah" , in charge of Indian affairs, and "Phra Chula Ratchamontri", a King's counsellor who was the chief of the Royal Wardrobe Department.

There is a record of four Persian artisans, named Nai Weraku, Nai Khrupa, Nai Pramanandri, and Nai Erakabi who were given 50 rai of land each by the king in recognition of their rank and Service.

In ancient times, it was common for royalty to absorb certain aspects of other cultures: social functions, customs and traditions, for example. We know that the style of dress for Thai royalty originated in Persia. This included the particular style of hat worn by kings, footwear, clothing, and curtains. The models and designs of swords were exactly the same as those of Persia and the Moghul Empire. Woven gold headwear made of Muslim style cloth, was excavated from a cavity in the pagoda of Wat Ratchaburana, and is ample evidence of such influence. Even the names for certain clothes were derived from Persian and Arabic. "Phusa" or "garment" in Thai, was called "Buch" in Persian, meaning "wearing clothes", the pronunciation being softened by spoken Thai.

From the early Sukhothai period until the Ayutthaya period, Persians and Arabs had contacted Thais for the purpose of trade and commerce. This was especially true during the reign of King Narai the Great (1657-1688 A.D.) when Arabs and Persians traded and held official positions. King Narai sent diplomatic missions to establish friendly relations with the Shah of Persia, Suleiman I of the Kho Fawi dynasty, between 1667-1694 A.D. Later, King Narai sent his own Persian envoy to continue these friendly relations with that country, the envoy's name being Ali Salim. King Narai's reason for sending a Persian as his envoy was to overcome the obstacles to communication such as language and Islamic customs. This clearly shows that Persians held positions of great trust within the Thai court. Persia also sent its own envoy to Thailand, Ibrahim Pi, or Ibrahim Mek, who presented many valuable and splendid gifts to the Thai monarch.

After the reign of King Narai both kingdoms still made regular contact by sea, sailing between Medchelipatan(Masulipatan) in Southern India, and Tanassaree (Tanavasri) a port of ancient Siam .

At this point it should be mentioned that Thais of the time called any nation, which has association with the Islamic religion, as "Khaek". It follows that all Arabs, Indians and Persians were referred to by this name.

Gold embroidered cloth and scented oils and perfumes were brought from Masuliputan. Utensils, called Kalamang (a type of enamel basin) derive their name from the Persian or

Arabic language. All are further proof of the long-lasting friendly relations between Thailand and Persia. The descendants of the original "Khaek" or Islamic settlers in Thailand have become an integral part of the present Thai population; they have become "Thai" in their traditions, language and culture and have been firmly established here for hundreds of years.

This long relationship was especially concerned with the flow of cultural exchange, with the musical branch of Fine Arts being a subject in which the two Royal Courts rivalled each other equally. It is believed that they exchanged songs and instruments and the way in which music was arranged, these will be discussed next.

It can be noted that many Thai songs, in fact, have "Khaek" names, or are directly involved with Persian or Arabic subjects, such as the song "Khaek Borathet". The word "Borathet", according to ancient archives, comes from the word "Khaekthet", which we understand to mean a Muslim from India, Persia, or Arabia. Indians of the time called foreigners "Paradesi" and with the modification made by Thai pronunciation became "Borathesi" which we assume further evolved into "Borathet".

In fact the song "Khaek Borathet" has a great deal of importance in Thai music. Music teachers use it as a standard for writing in the style of music called "Serried Song". These songs have varying rhythms of drumbeats with different ratios of the basic components; meaning that in the song there may be 3 rates of drumming (3 Fold) or 2 rates (2 Fold), or simply, one (1 Fold). These "Borathet" songs are teacher's "textbooks" which every Thai musician still has to study because of their intricate rhythmic "patterns". The essential characteristics of these songs are set by factors called the "Figure", the section, the phrase and the sentence.

As Thai teachers have always taught these "Khaek Borathet" songs we can assume that the art of the music from Persia must have touched something within Thai hearts. Whether it is the irrepressible beat or rhythm, we cannot be sure, but further research is obviously necessary if we wish to understand more.

In regard to Thai songs, we know that the rhythmic instrument creating the sentence of the songs was called "Thap" in the past-now, and now called "Nathap". This word has two meanings; musically it is a "fixed rhythm", and also the name of a percussion instrument. These meanings may be extrapolated further: the "Fixed Rhythm" means to measure the sentence of the song, as in Thai songs it is usually a principle that regardless of the type of

song, the length of the sentence holds great importance. For instrumental and vocal music the type of face for each drum used must be established for every song. For dancing tunes such as "Soison" the drum face is "Phatcha", for the "Sai" Flower-dance song the "Samingthong" drumface is used, for "Sae Pha" it is "Bropkai", etc. As an example, the song "Dork Soi Sawan" was composed in the ancient capital as a playful piece of music for noblemen who, in the 11th and 12th months of the year on the occasion called "Thot Khrathin", went to offer new robes to the monks. This was also an opportunity to visit the country side. These high-ranking people took along their complete retinue, with singers to lead with their words of the songs, and instruments to accompany the singers. These instruments were: drums, "Krab" (2 pieces of bamboo beaten together to create a rhythm) and small cymbals-all these were carried in the boats and headed for the country. One long boat would be filled with men while the other may solely have been for women. This may, of course, be seen as a form of socializing. The sponsor of the expedition would also think of words for them to sing, often using couplet poetry. They sailed with one group leading the singing, and the other offering a reply. This was a popular form of entertainment which can be traced back to the Ayutthaya Period.

### Percussion Instruments

The most notable feature of the "Thap" drum is that it has only one face. It is a part of the "Mahori" musical ensemble, and the "Piphat" light musical instrument ensemble. In the Mahori ensemble these single-faced drums are used to control the rhythm. The Mahori musical ensemble dates back to the Ayutthaya period when it was used for light, soothing music for the nobles of the Royal Court. The Piphat ensemble was, on the other hand, used to provide accompaniment for entertainment such as "Lakhon" plays in the southern provinces-called "Lakhon Norah Chatri" – and "Nang Talung" - shadow plays. This part of Thailand was more influenced by Islam due to its closeness to countries with Islamic influence i.e. Malay Peninsula, and Java.

In reality, the single-faced drum we know as "Thap" was also possessed by the Arabs. The drum was shaped like a goblet, and in Arabic had two names, "Tom" (or "Thap") and "Bak", which were combined and became "Tomback", which is onomatopoeic in that the name reflects the sound when beaten. This type of drum was based of the design found in East Europe and parts of West Asia.

We suspect that over a long period of time this “Thap” spread to Southeast Asia. In Thailand, however, the shape of the drum was radically altered to make it more convenient to play and to bring out the skill of the Thai players.

Figure I



(a)



(b)

As we can see from the pictures both types of drum are different in the shape of the vase-like opening called the "shell". The Thai drum has a smaller shell, making it easier to play sitting on the floor with the drum laid across the musician's lap. The shell of the Arab version is more flared, and is convenient to play whilst sitting on a chair. In this position it can be played with both hands.

Traditionally, in the Thai court, musicians had to sit on the floor at a lower level than their benefactor, or master. That is a tradition that continues to date.

Changing the shape of a single-faced drum like the “Thap” must have presented some difficulty and says something of the skill of those early Thai craftsman. Besides this modification of the shell they often decorated the body of the drum with superb mother-of-pearl inlay, ivory or a coat of lustrous black lacquer covered with delicate designs in gold leaf, transforming the drum itself into a work of art.

Thai have always possessed a deep sense of respect and obligation for anything which was adopted from another country or language. The music has never truly been separated from the adopted instruments, and thus cannot help but tell us something of their origin. For example, certain songs may retain a foreign accent, such as a Mon accent distinguishable in the song accompanying the “Mon Sword Dance”. It is a song with a definite “Khaek” accent which we usually call “Khaek khao”(White Khaek) or “Khaek Borathet”. This also applies to Musical instruments, such as the “Pi- Chawa”- type of flute- and the “Klong Malayn”, or Malay drum, used in Royal Processions, which we know comes from Malaysia. Because of this, it is not difficult to believe that the “Thap” drum originally came from either Arabia or Persia and was later modified to its present shape.

The Thai kingdom has always had numerous trading contacts with foreign countries. At the same time, it developed good artistic and cultural relations with other important centers as well as developed ancient trade routes. It has played host to many nationalities and languages. Inevitably, as Thais have always had a love for music exchange, the transfusion in this arena of Fine Arts was comparatively more. Thai people were able to borrow from the music culture of other countries, and in the case of musical instruments, were able to adapt and blend these in with the instruments which they already possessed, until completely new instruments began to evolve. Primarily, instruments were borrowed from close neighbors, such as Java and Malaysia, though some come from more remote areas like Arabia and Persia. We can now see that there were many influences affecting the music of Thai ensembles which were accepted and respected by teachers of instrumental music and, in fact, by all Thai people, from merchants up to the Royal Court.

Unfortunately, there is very little documented historical evidence to prove all of this, and whatever is available is not concrete enough. We are then forced to rely on the type of historical evidence presented in murals, where the artist has captured enough detail to give us just cause in accepting the mural as a representation of reality. This is largely because we know that Thai muralist often painted scenes of what they saw of the people’s daily lives at



the time, or from the oral history related by old people for them to illustrate. Therefore, Thai murals are a narrative form of art recording the daily lives and cultural traditions of the daily lives and cultural traditions of the nation.

In relaying the events of the past artists revealed every detail of the costumes, hairstyles and jewelry of the period, and insinuated the characters depicted with a certain liveliness and temperament. The viewer can easily get engrossed in the grace and vigour of colour and the artist's interpretation.

In researching the history of Thai Music it is now accepted that mural paintings are another form of documentary evidence. Most mural work has combined a historical perspective with entertainment, but whether depicting the lives of peasants or countries, music has had its own place in the murals. Music is involved with religion for example it is played when offering food to monks, in royal ceremonies, on auspicious occasions, during cremations. Artists in every period have captured these details.

The golden era of Thai arts began in the reign of King Narai in the late Ayutthaya period when it became popular to depict Lord Buddha and choir of angels. By the end of this period murals had a purely Thai style which continued into the Rattanakosin period of King Rama I.

Muslim murals reveal that their instruments were very similar to those of Thailand, such as the "Saw Sam Sai", a 3 stringed bowed lute, the "Thap" drum and the "Ramana". A shallow drum similar to a tambourine without the cymbals were all played in the royal court. The "Saw Sam Sai" is especially well-known in Thai musical ensembles as "the King of instruments". We can assume that Muslim and Thai instruments were used side by side in the Thai Royal Courts, but who got what, from whom is difficult to say, though the following, will offer a few details. Thai murals and Muslim pictures will be used to examine the music, starting with two Thai murals, from the Phutthaisawan Hall and the hall of Wat Dusidaram. These murals are a record of events in the royal court especially involving the "Mahori" music ensemble in which all musicians were women. Kings in the Ayutthaya and Rattanakosin periods usually had many consorts and concubines living in the royal inner-court. The only men allowed to stay were priests or eunuchs. In Ayutthaya, eunuchs were usually Persians. The concubines were called "Nang Harm" in Thai, "Harom" or "Hareen" in Thai.

This is not really a part of Arabic culture but was borrowed from the culture of the Byzantine Empires of the 7<sup>th</sup> Century. Later, the califas (Culiphs) began to establish harems to indulge in their whims and as labor. Girls with musical talent were ordered to practice, in order to soothe their masters when the masters rested or slept.

The murals at Putthaisawan Hall in the National Museum comes from the early Rattanakosin period of King Rama I, and are illustrations of Buddha's life, from his birth until His enlightenment. They also depict the life in Ayutthaya, so by studying them we can learn which instruments were used at royal courts for all types of ceremonies. These instruments include the "Saw Sam Sai", "Phin" (Krachap-pi), "Khloi" or flute, "Thap"(-"Thone"), "Ramana" and "Ching". Combined, they form a musical ensemble called "Mahori". The "Saw Sam Sai" was the principle instrument, or conductor, of this style of this music. Should this instrument be removed from the ensemble, it would no longer be called 'Mahori'. This ancient method of arranging Thai ensembles is still used. "Saw Sam Sai" dominates a "Mahori" ensemble, which is the principle musical group of the Thai Court as will be described next.

#### The mural painting at Phutthaisawan Hall

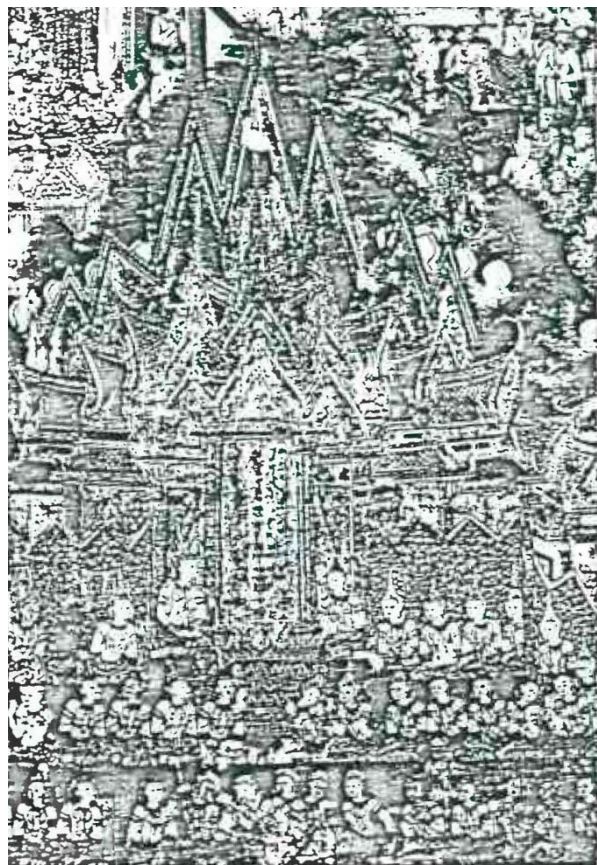


Figure 2

This mural is a pictorial description of the life of the Lord Buddha. Shown here is a part of the royal wedding ceremony of Buddha's parents; His father Phra Siri Sutthathanakuman with Nang Siri Mahamaya. In the bottom center of the picture you can see a "Mahori" ensemble of the late Ayutthaya period playing the ceremonial music. Details of the instruments are shown in figure 3.

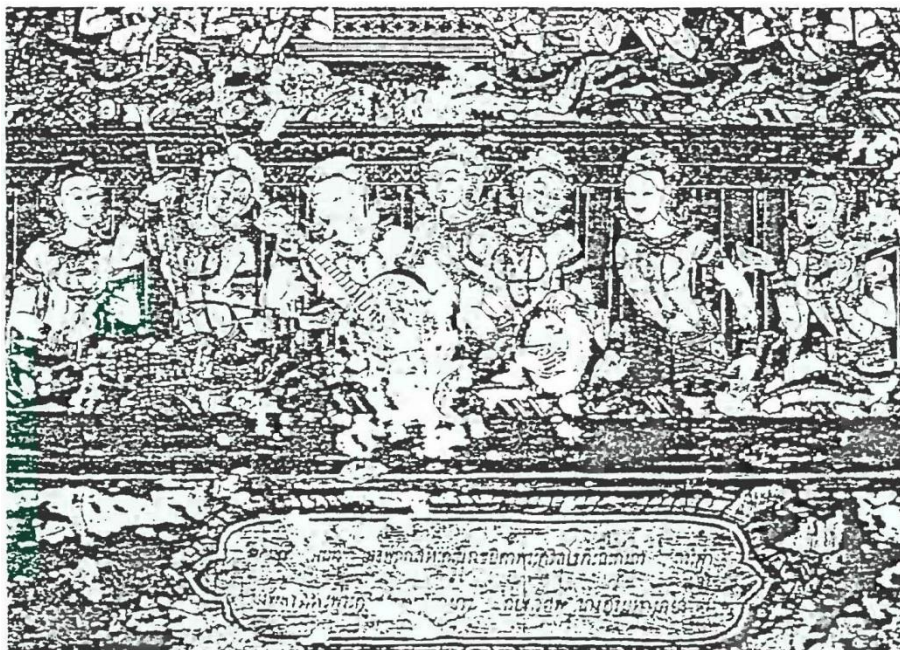


Figure 3

A 'Mahori' ensemble of the late Ayutthaya period. All the musicians are women. There are seven; starting from far left, they are:

A cymbal player

A "saw sam sai" player

A "phin" (or Krapchap-pi) player

A flutist

A ramana player

A thap thone player

The krabphuang, or singer

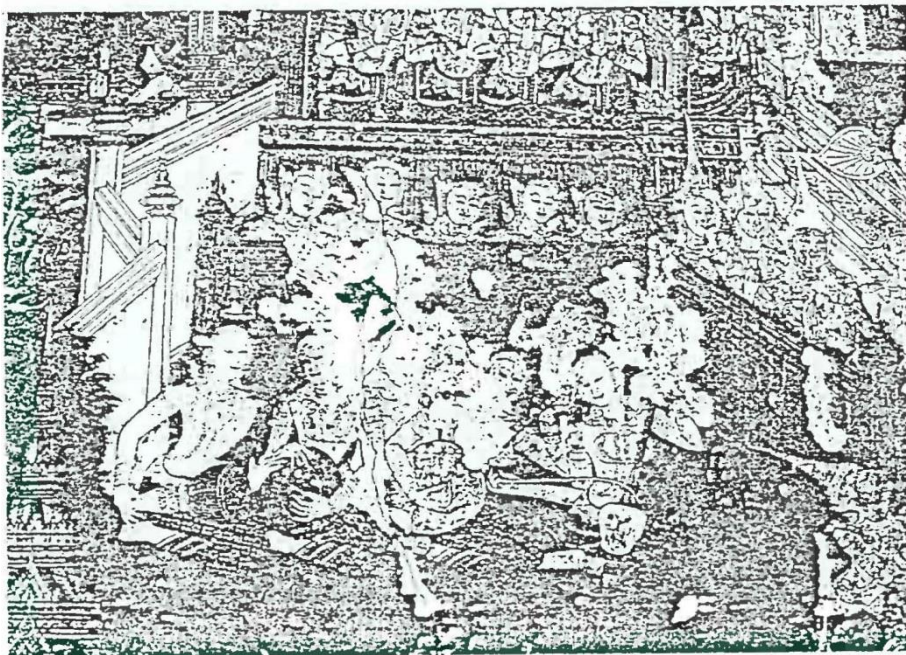


Figure 4

This part of the mural shows Thao Champhubodhi consulting with Buddha. We can see another all-female “Mahori” ensemble, soothing and entertaining with their music. The 5 musicians are, from left to right:

A “Thap Thone” player

A “Ramana” player

A flutist

A “Phin” player

A “Saw Sam Sai” player

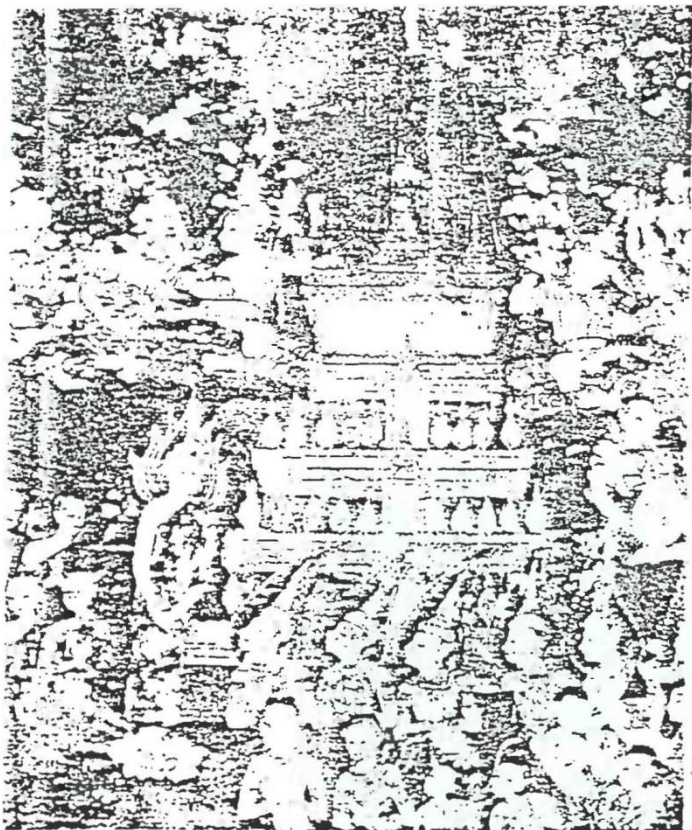


Figure 5

This section shows the lighting of the funeral pyre of Buddha's father. There is a chorus of angels to protect him. They are playing "Mahori" instruments. The group is split into males and females at different positions around the pyre. (See figure 6).

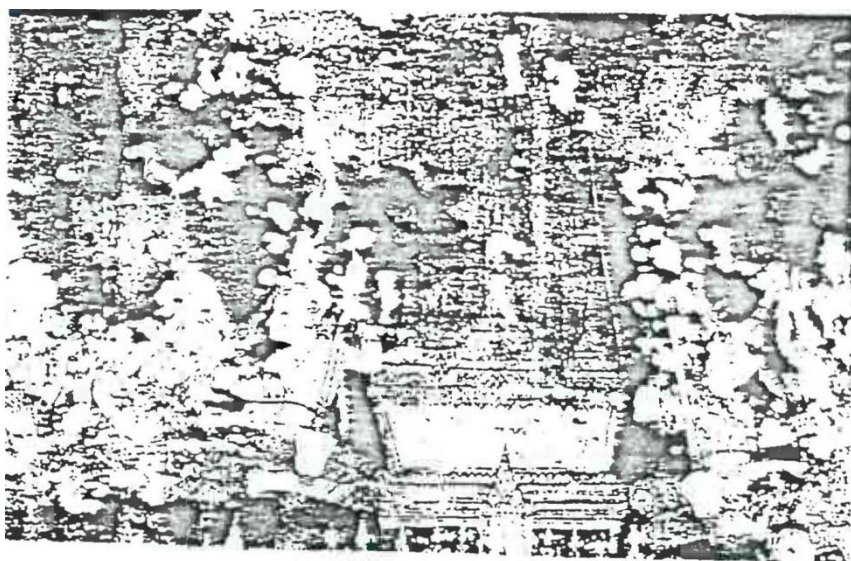


Figure 6

There are 3 “Mahori” instruments being used here, from left to right they are the “Ramana”, “Phin” and “Saw Sam Sai”.

We can see above that the instrument used, though for human use, are also used by heavenly creatures such as angels. Besides having been played during auspicious royal ceremonies we can see that they were played on inauspicious occasions as well. Nowadays, the “Saw Sam Sai” is played only during happy occasions.



Figure 7

#### The Mural Painting at Wat Dusitdaram

This mural is inside the chapel of Wat Dusitdaram. It is the handiwork of an artist from the reign of King Rama I and comparable in beauty to the one at Phutthaisawan Hall. The picture of the ‘Mahori’ ensemble here reveals great attention has been paid to the intricacy of the linework. The colours have a delicate, pastel-like beauty and are soothing to the viewer’s

eyes. It is painted in a style which was very popular during the Ayutthaya period, and shows the marriage of Prince Sitthartha –the Buddha, before his enlightenment- and Princess Pimpah. The female musicians of the “Mahori” ensemble are sitting with legs tucked under and leaning on one side of their bodies, at the far right of the picture.

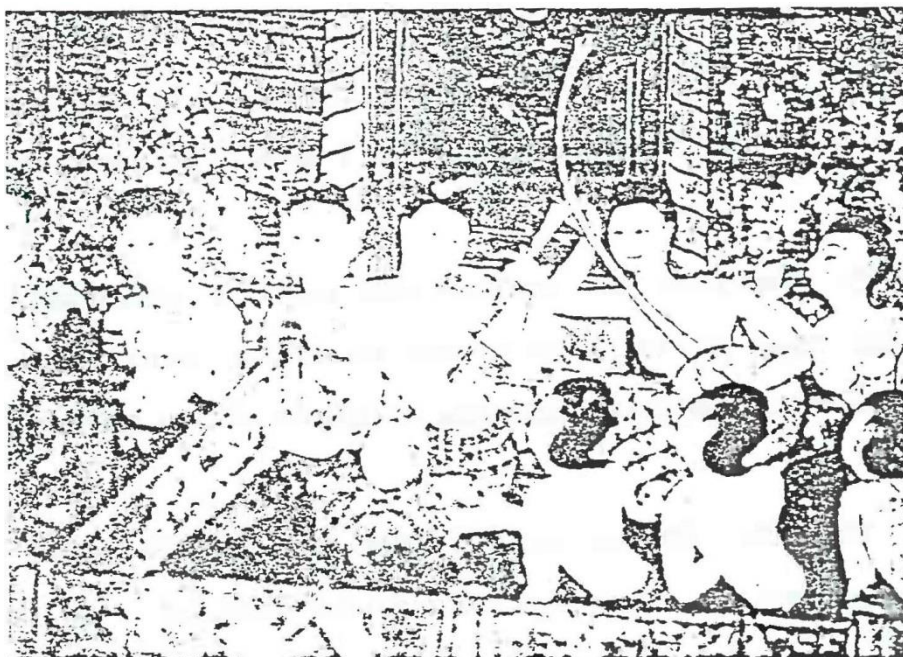


Figure 8

This shows a performance by a “Khab Mai” trio featuring the “Phin” and “Saw Sam Sai”. Six women who are seated on the same pavilion appear to be singing along with the ensemble.

These murals clearly illustrate the stringed and rhythmic instruments which were in actual use in the early Ayutthaya period, and even further back, in the Sukhothai period. These were two important instruments; the "Saw Sam Sai" and "Phin", which are nowadays called "Krachapi". Historically, they were the instruments of the "Mahori" ensemble. A group in which the “Phin” was dominant was called "Khab Mai". Its rhythm section used either the 'Thap', Krab and Ramana or woodwind instruments like "Khlui", and the "Ching", or cymbals, which are a metal percussion instrument. The latter was added to the Khab Mai Trio, as was the 'Phin', in the late Ayutthaya period. They were then passed down to the Rattanakosin period. These days the 'Phin' has been replaced by a newer instrument, the Chakay.



To summarize, we now know that there are 3 instruments (‘Thap’; ‘Phin’ and ‘Saw Sam Sai’) which are in fact the oldest court instruments in Thailand, they have been used for centuries and go as far as the beginning of Thai history.

The ‘Saw Sam Sai’ in particular resembles the human voice to stunning perfection. Its tone has a color which can, both, be soothing or stir-up passionate emotions. It creates an unconscious empathy in the listener, draining the anger and soothing the feelings. It has a sweet voice and an exquisite shape created by skillful craftsmen. These instrument makers have shown tremendous artistry in developing the shape of the ‘Saw Sam Sai’, combining vision and experience, to make it the foremost musical instrument of Thailand. As a part of Thai cultural heritage it has become well-known everywhere, called by foreigners the “Siamese Spiked Fiddle”. It is rather similar to an instrument used in Persian royal courts.

Below are a series of pictures taken from the book “Islam and Muslim Art”

Fig 9. A painting of the Royal Wedding Ceremony of Prince Mihr and Princess Nawid. (1532 A.D.)

Fig 11. This picture depicts the events surrounding the visit by Moghul Emperor, Homayun, to a temple. (1540 A.D.)

Fig. 13. Bahram Gur and a Turkish princess in a green pavilion. (1553 A.D.)

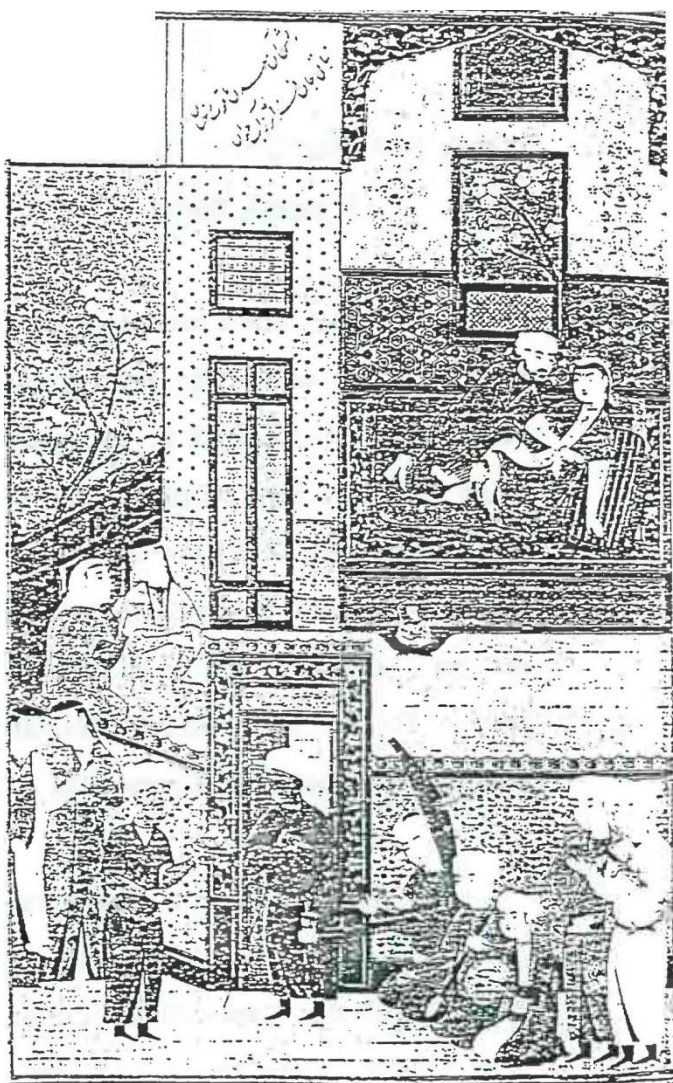
Figure 9 A Painting of the Royal Wedding Ceremony of Prince Mihr and Princess Nawid

These are 5 musicians in the bottom right of the picture. The first person on the far left is kneeling and plucking a "Phin" with his right hand, holding it by the body and resting it on his left arm while using his left hand to play. The second is kneeling and bearing a “Saw”, which looks very much like the Thai “Saw Sam Sai”. It is called “Rabab” in Arabic. A check of available evidence reveals that the “Rabab” had many designs, some with one or two strings only. The bow was used outside the body. It is an Indonesian instrument, though a direct descendant of an Arabic instrument, and appears in Europe also.

When this writer demonstrated Thai Music at the 12<sup>th</sup> Festival of Asian Art in Hong Kong there was a Turkish ensemble which showed a type of “Saw” called the “Kemence” or “Turkish Fiddle”, a Muslim instrument adopted from Persia. This fits in with the Theory of

Diffusion in explaining the similarity between instruments, and it is likely that the “Saw Sam Sai” proves this theory.

The 3rd person to the left of the man with a "Saw", is kneeling and beating a single-faced drum called "Klong Ranmana". This beating controls the rhythm of the Mahori Ensemble. In farsi, the Persian language, this drum is called "Dayerh" and "Duff" in Arabic. The reason why it is called "Ramana" in Thai is rather interesting; the Suffee people pray to God to the rhythm of this drum's beat, believing that it would bring them closer to Him. At the same time they chanted the word "Robbana" meaning "God, who takes care of us", thus Thais who heard this called the drum, what they thought sounded like, “Ramana”.



The 4th person in the picture is standing. His duty is unclear.

The 5<sup>th</sup> person is standing with an instrument tucked under his arm. Both arms are partially raised in the manner of Islamic prayer. It is obviously a part of the royal wedding ceremony.

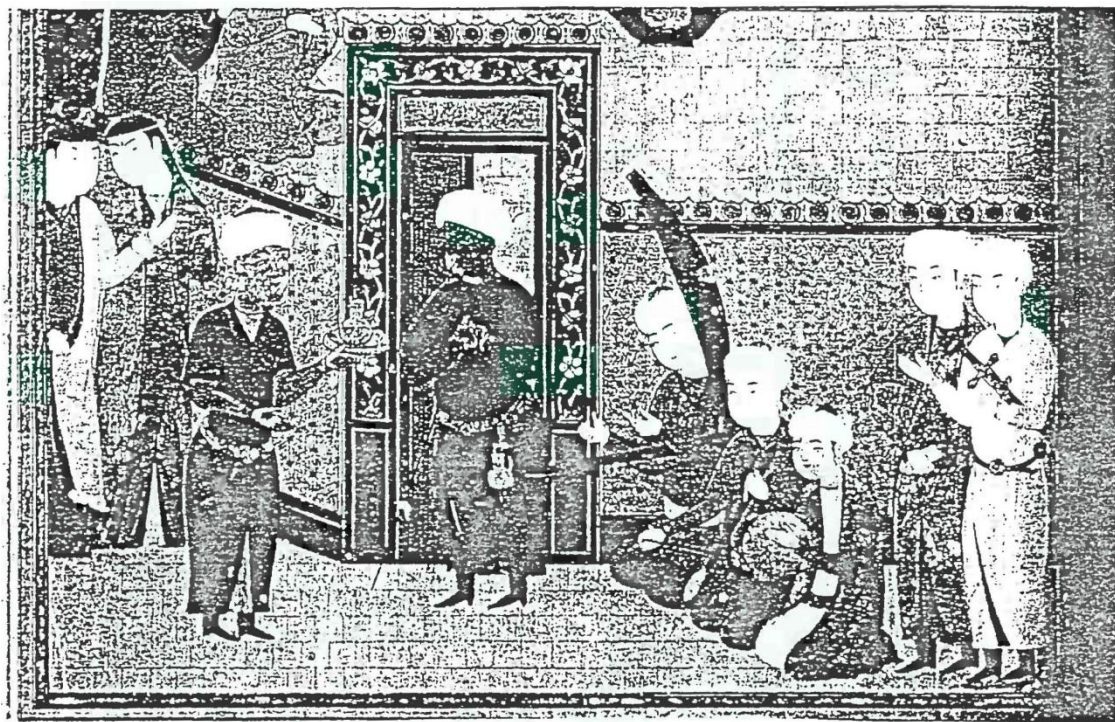


Figure 10 A detail of a painting revealing more about music. We can see by the style of the costume that there are 3 male musicians kneeling and playing the “Phin”, “Rabab” and “Duff”, or “Dayerh”.



Figure 11 This records an event during the reign of the Moghul Emperor Humayun, the founder of the Moghul dynasty in India. There are 4 musicians at the bottom left of the picture. The first person is sitting cross-legged on the far left playing an instrument similar to the Thai Krachap-pi. This instrument is called “Ud” in Arabic. It was very popular in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. We understand that it is a pre-Islamic instrument of Persia. This type of musical instrument had 4 strings. The outer pair of strings played the rhythm and had a Persian name. The inner pair produced the melody and had an Arabic name. Its tone is distinctive because of

the type of wood used for its construction. It is the same wood used for the “Phin”, from the Sukothai period. It was plucked with the right hand and the left hand fretted the 4 strings. Again, the outer strings produced the rhythm, and the inner pair the turn “voices” to go with the rhythm. It was very similar to the “Ud”, an instrument still important for the Safi-al-Din groups who use it as a controlling or governing sound, to fix the tone of their music.

This instrument is quite important and is comparable to the Thai “Phin”. The Arab and Thai variants have no important principle like fixing the tone. The philosophy of its use was also significant. The Thai “Phin” is a standard melodic instrument, and the sound of ancient Thai music. It is also a heavenly instrument belonging to the angel Phra Bunchai-Likom.

We can say that the “Ud” and Phin are singular types of ancient, wooden instrument with a post-Islamic influence from Persia.

The shape of the instruments was a mixture of Persian and original Indian influence. Rhamir Khusrao (1253-1325), whose father was a Turk and mother an Indian, absorbed the Islamic influence which came from Turkey, Persia and Central Asia and invented an instrument, we call the “Sitar”. To be played while sitting it is rather similar to the Thai “Phin”.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> person standing behind the others seems to be giving the rhythm and is probably singing. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> persons are playing a “Saw” and beating a drum, respectively. Full details of these instruments can be found in the accompanying figure 1.



Figure 12 A Musical depiction clearly showing that the musicians are male.

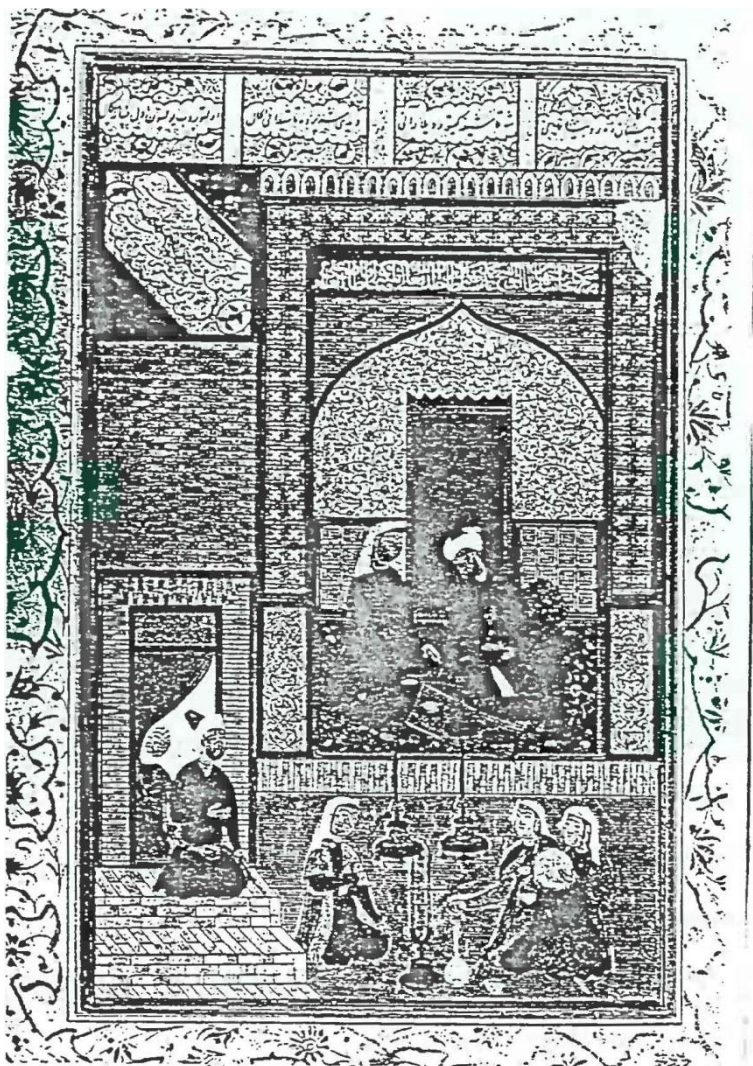


Figure 13 A picture of Bahram Gur and a Turkish princess happily passing the time in a green pavilion, outside, 3 female musicians play for the couple. This is a “Rabab” player, a “Ramana” player and a singer. Many of the lyrics of Muslim songs describe deep love, female beauty, the myriad of colors and flowers and the dazzling beauty of nature. They appear to be celebrating life.



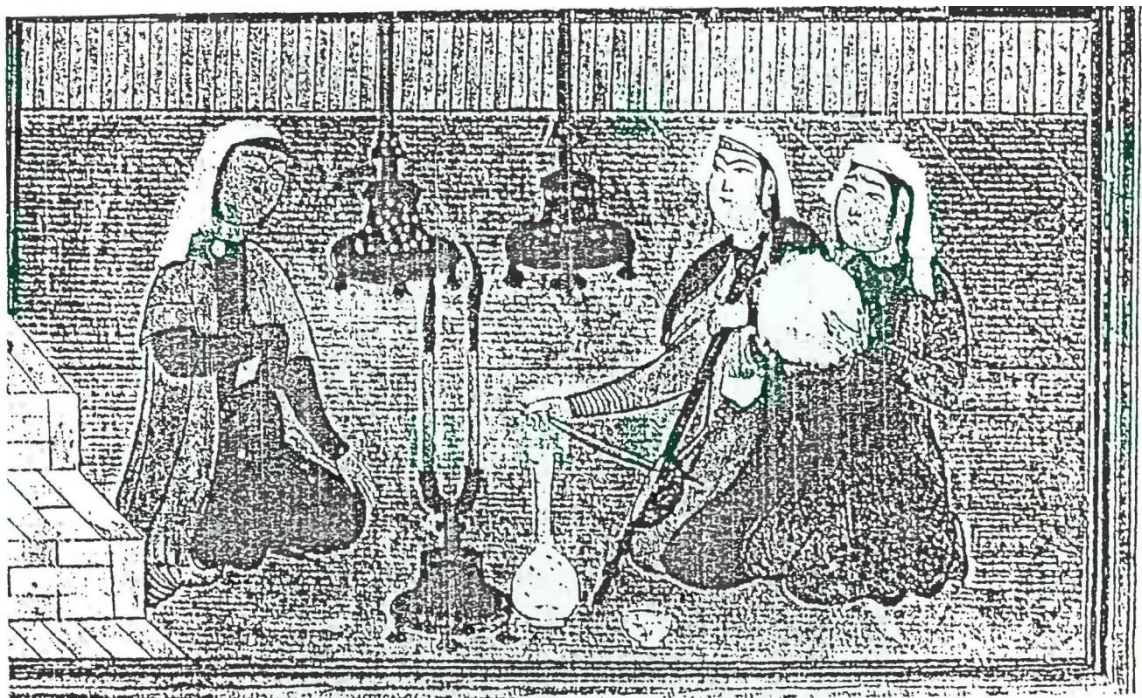


figure 14 This detail shows more clearly the shape of the Rabab and the manner of sitting and playing. The type of head-dress worn is different from that worn by women.

It is interesting that the musicians at the green pavilion are women, contrary to previous paintings.

The high point of Arab Cultural achievement in music - its classical period - is generally recognized as having occurred during the reign of Ummaya Khalifa (661-750). Notable development included lyrics written specifically for the lute. Combined with skillful and experienced musicians these songs proved to be a pinnacle of artistic development.

The 17th Century saw the rise of Persian influence. The shape of the lute was modified to add to its beauty and sweet sound, which was different from the original.

It is worth mentioning here that centuries ago "lute" didn't necessarily mean only a plucked instrument, but covered many types of musical instruments such as the Fiddle, Viols, Vielle, Rabab and Three string bowed lute (Saw Sam Sai) .

All stringed instruments featured in Islamic art have been described above. These instruments play the melody in gentle songs to soothe and entertain in the royal court or harem. The 'Rabab' is shaped like a Thai 'Saloh', but the manner of sitting to play it resembles the 'Saw

Sam Sai'. As Persian influence grew the Rabab was developed to be more beautiful than in the past, and spread to Southeast Asia by sea. It appeared in Java, Indonesia, and Siam(Thailand). Persia and Thailand shared good relations since the Sukhothai period and during the Ayutthaya period. Persian influence increased cultural exchange in regard to language and clothing. Many things were introduced, tested and modified. Most appeared in the court first and later spread throughout the Kingdom slowly. As Thailand was an agricultural nation, farmers had little time to think about anything except farm work. Village art and music were essentially concerned with agriculture more than anything else.

Thus, the Thai Royal Court took a leading role in molding the traditions, customs, art etc. With servants to do the work, it was natural that countries had more time to think and create. This was especially true of developing instruments, writing songs until a sense of fulfillment and completeness was arrived at.

Some foreign things or ideas were immediately accepted without change, others were modified or adapted. Some other things were impossible to adapt and became known as "foreign". Languages, as an example, had to go through the court before the peasants would know about them, though they were so concerned with farming that most other things never interested them.

The 'Saw Sam Sai' is from Persia or Arabia, as previously stated and was modified in the Ayutthaya Period when it came to Thailand. Indonesians did the same thing. The body construction of the Rabab and 'Saw Sam Sai' are similar, as we have seen. The details, however, are not, for example increasing from 2 strings to 3, and from wire strings to silk. It was shortened and a head weight was attached for balance. The sound box was enlarged and 3 bulges were added to form a resonance chamber reproducing a sound similar to the human voice. It was (and is) very sweet when accompanied by singing.

The Saw Sam Sai is more beautiful because it was designed using all of the intelligence of the Thai craftsmen to create their best handiwork. Materials such as ivory and coconut shells were carefully chosen, as was the goatskin which covered the face of the "Saw". The "Yai Kaew" wood for the neck can be ordered especially from the south of Thailand. Only the best royal craftsmen achieved the ornate details fitting for us in a royal court. The Saw Sam Sai has been

used in a design similar to the larger Rabab of Indonesia. A comparison can be made by looking at figure 15.

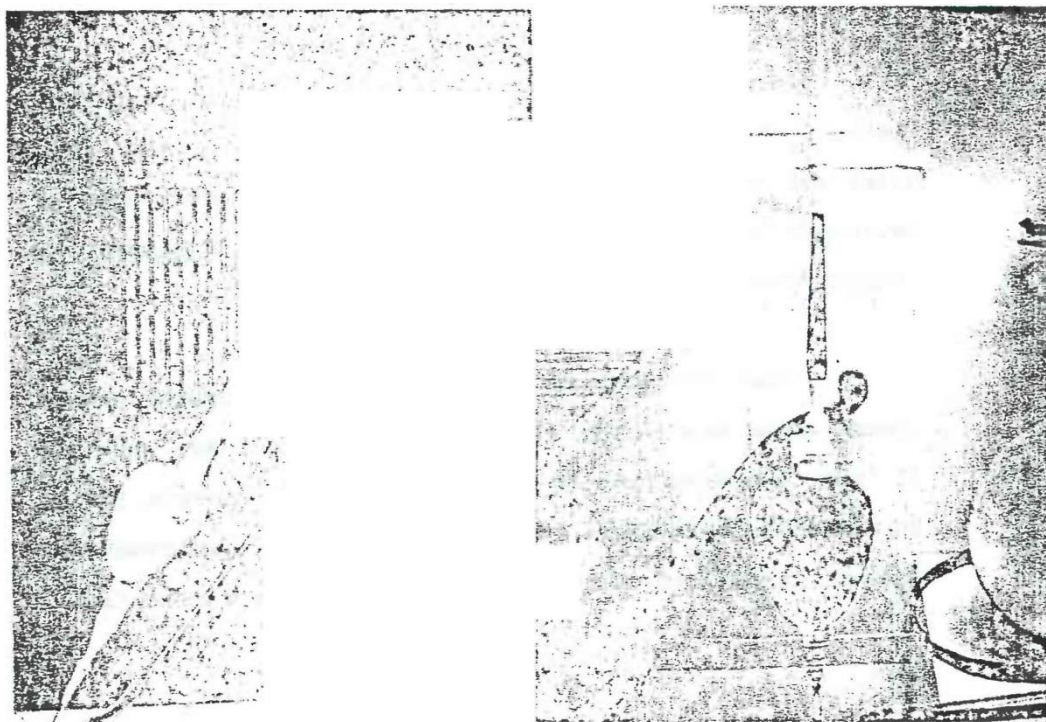


Figure 15 a- Thai Saw Sam Sai

b- Indonesian Rabab

We can see that both are similar, and are made with ivory, but the area between the headweight and soundbox are different. The Thai instrument employed precious metals such as silver or gold to create beautiful designs and the Rabab uses a hardwood without sculptured designs. The Saw Sam Sai has a headweight which often was made from gold or emerald and mounted with a diamond while the Rabab has no headweight, but is no longer a bridge.

Both were played resting on the floor but Saw Sam Sai lay at about 45 degree from the player and the end was sharp for convenience in this action. The Rabab was held vertically, parallel with the player's body, and rested on the sole of his upturned foot.



Figure 16 shows a player sitting and playing a Saw Sam Thai

Sitting and playing the Saw Sam Sai(Three-String Bowed Lute) is Phya Phumeesewin (Jitr Jitrsewe) a maestro of the instrument.

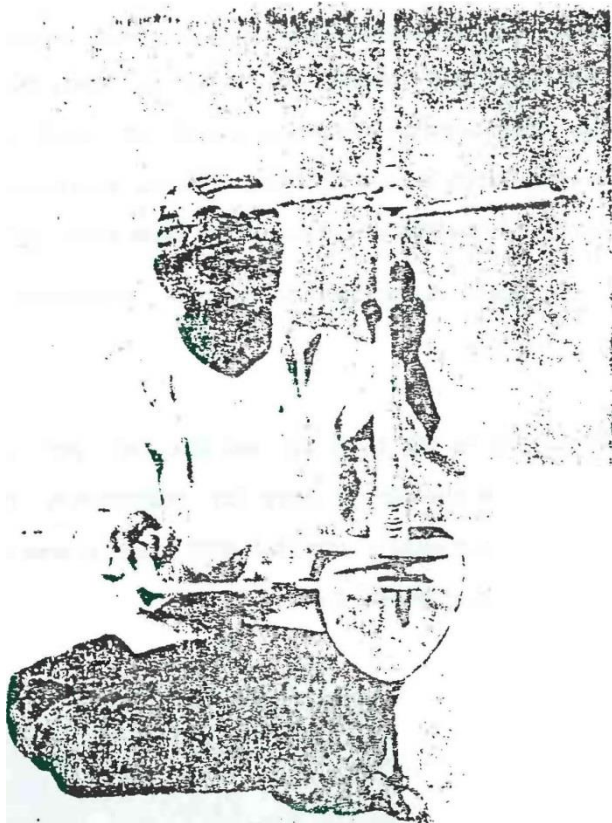


Figure 17 shows a player sitting and playing a

Rabab

Figure 17: An Indonesian man playing the Rabab (Two-string Bowed Lute)

In the past the soundbox was made of coconut shell and the face was covered with goatskin. Nowadays wood is used, and buffalo gut covers the mouth of the soundbox. Behind it, beautiful knitted cloths are used. Usually the bow is made from orange wood but the old ones were made from ivory and were quite expensive.

One more noticeable thing about the Phin(Luto) is that the sound comes from the bowing action. These types of instruments are still very popular in Cambodia today. They are called “Thrua Kumer” with three strings. The shape of the saw is a local handicraft but it has not been modified at all to make it as beautiful as the Thai Saw.

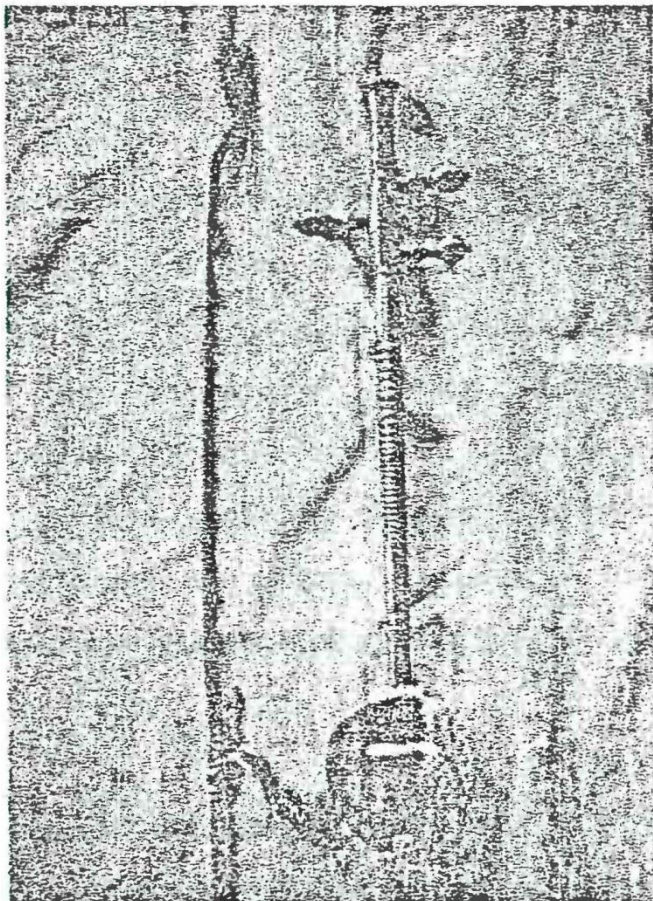


Figure 18: Thrua Khmer

This Thrua Khmer has a coconut shell soundbox. It is covered with snake skin. The strings are made of wire. There is no headweight attached because a bridge is used of the same length as the Rabab. The picture shows that it is similar to the Persian Rabab. If we look at figure 10, 12 and 14 we can see that this instrument used to be very popular. The Thai version developed in form and music to become visually appealing and more melodious. For this reason it has been used by the royal court for centuries.

### Thad Songs

These are used in Royal Ceremonies such as solemnizing the white umbrella of state, to celebrate the birth of a royal son, commissioning of new elephants into the King's possession, and solemnizing the Emerald Buddha. It is believed that Thad Song were played by the Khab Mai ensemble, and played with the Phin and Saw Sam Sai. The Phin played the rhythm. The

Thap and Ramana marked the arrival or departure of noblemen. When playing soft lullabies we call them “Khab Mai” songs.

When the “Phleng Khap Mai” chanting was sung with the Saw Sam Sai then one pair of Ban Daw were able to keep the rhythm without the Thap, Phin and Ramana. The reason for this is that some ceremonies are from the Brahministic traditions, which means that in their ideology Ban Dew is Siva’s instrument and its rhythm is said to be the “rhythm of creation”. It is a double-faced drum, like two soup bowls placed bottom to bottom. This drum has been discovered in China, Tibet and India. The face is of goat skin, the same as the Saw Sam Sai.

Three musicians form this trio: the Saw Sam Sai player, a singer, and another person to swing the Ban Daw. This group is called a Khab Mai ensemble.

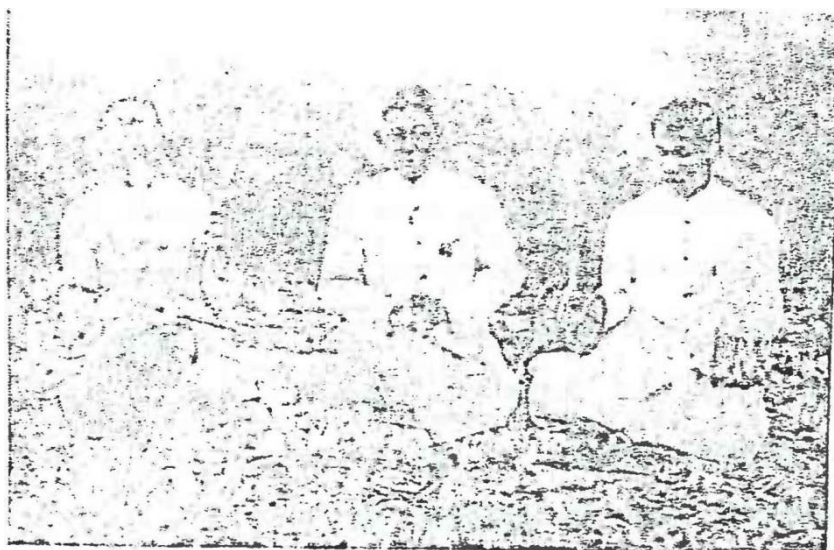


Figure 19: Khab Kai Ensemble

This ensemble was used in Royal Ceremonies to make light, soothing music; the details of each ceremony will be discussed in the next part. First, the history of Thad and Khab Mai songs will be discussed.

The “Khitalak” form of the Khab Mai songs is believed to have been derived from Arabic or Persia because of the way the refrain is repeated, which we believe to be of Persian style. In Arabic the “Sroi”, or refrain, is called “Makom”, meaning to alternate. Therefore, the song

has “Makom” continually alternating with the main melody. This verse form in Thai music is called “Sroi Khong Phleng”. However, in many songs each verse is sung twice and then the “Sroi” is alternated between them. At the end of the song it is possible to start over again. This style is suitable for Royal Ceremonies, which often take a long time. “Khab Mai” tunes may be repeated indefinitely, due to the alternating “Sroi”, or at least until the very end of the ceremony. The song may be stopped at any point without disturbing the listener.

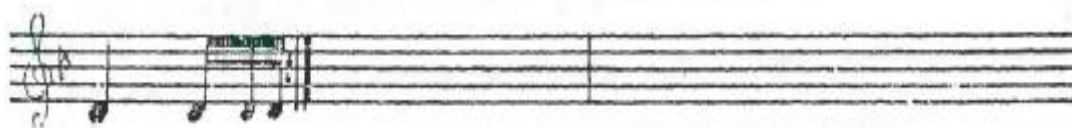
A basic feature of these songs is that they originated in the Northern Lanna Thai provinces after which they were named "Prasart wai". They were played on occasional ceremonies such as the marriage of a nobleman and to help "send" the newlyweds into their Marriage Home, which the Lanna Thai called a "castle", or "Prasart". These songs have a background similar to others mentioned earlier, in that the Lanna Kingdom received some cross-acculturation from the Sukhothai Kingdom. However, the court at Ayutthaya which also received and adopted Sukhothai arts and culture, had only one part of the songs. The rhythm of Prasart Wai was also split into two parts, as by modifying the beginning the original part remained unchanged but gave the impression of being more elaborate.

In its instrumental version it was given the name “Thad”, and with vocals added for Royal Ceremonies, was called “Khab Mai”.

We should also note that the structure of the “Mahon” spread as far as Europe, through Turkey. The words as sung in the Royal Ottoman Court contained an alternating refrain in the same manner as “Khab Mai”. As further illustration, please refer to the following pieces of musical notation.



Prasart Wai Song



Khah Mai Song

๗๗๑ ๐



๗๗๒



๗๗๓ ๐



๗๗๔

### A Cradle to Bring Back the Spirits Ceremony

This Royal Ceremony was a celebration for the one month birthdate of the king's son or daughter and was very important at that time. The Khab Mai trio was the only musical group allowed to perform in this ceremony. The Saw Sam Sai would play the melody and the Ban Daw would beat out a slow, regal, rhythm. This rhythm and the accompanying words are quite unlike those for other members of royalty, all of whom were considered below the status of a king's son.

This was a very elaborate and difficult song, so it was not easy to find a singer who could do full justice. Here are some of the words:

Suamchaepbangkhombaht	Phrayaowaratthibeosoon
Phutchapongwongprayoon	Issararatuangdecha
Phrayodyaoyuphin	Norphuminamaeoamara
Cheunsadetkheunsaiyah	Norphuminmaeoamara
Cheunsadetkheunsaiyah	Banthomsuksamranrom

The poet wrote the words with a suitable rhythm for singing, He gave it a rhythm; a graceful tone of voice which could accompany the gentle rocking of the cradle. Putting the royal baby to sleep through singing was seen as a form of bonding between the nursemaid or servant and her young master. This brought more respect and honour than the ordinary family system. This was obviously seen differently in village and royal society. Due to traditions and customs, the royal father was usually very busy and had little time to spare for his children as did commoners. In court society the nursemaid held an important place due to her task of taking care of her small, royal, master. For this reason nursemaids were honored with the title, "Phra Philliang" or "Phra Nom".

Singing lullabies for the prince at night was one way for people to show their highest respect for him. The lullabies go along with the belief that the child was an angel newly arrived from heaven. A performance by a Mahori ensemble at bedtime traditionally demonstrates the love and respect nurses feel for their young charges.

### The Top-Know Cutting Ceremony

Royal Ceremonies during the Ayutthaya period included a ceremony to formally cut the top-knot of children aged around 9-11 years. In the reign of Rama I the ceremony was arranged at the Dusit Mahaprasart Hall and included a “Khab Mai Bandoh” ensemble. It is believed that this ensemble is the same as the Mahori ensemble in the mural at Phutthaisawan Hall. It comprised of a Saw Sam Sai, Phin, Khloi, Thap(Thone), Ramana and Ching. It may have the Phin ensemble, which was usually used only in Welcoming Ceremonies and not for lullabies. This ceremony is no longer performed.

### Ceremony to Welcome Elephants into the Royal Household

The elephant has always been the most useful animal to Man in this region. They could be used for work in peace and during wartime. In war, especially, the elephant was useful, comparable to a Modern tank. Their importance has been known since the Sukhothai Period. A King with many elephants was seen as having a lot of power. Short wars were sometimes fought in order to capture the enemy’s elephants. Some rulers lost their lands in the battle. Some rulers traded the elephants to raise their country’s income.

Elephants were a warrior’s vehicle up to the Rattanakosin era, it was believed that elephants were heaven’s gift to a virtuous king. The faithful Brahmin - who dealt with many royal ceremonies-, divided the 10 members of the family of elephants into 4 types. We know only four types, Brahmin, Vishnu, Issavora and Aukhani . These are mentioned in a song for elephants, roughly translated as:

“I pay my highest regards to the four angels who protect my royal king. With lotus leaves they created ten groups of elephants in four types. Any kind of great virtue has the right to capture these elephants.”

However, white elephants are not necessarily white all over. They may be white from the eyebrows to the trunk and have white freckles around its ear. These are characteristics of elephants in the four types mentioned above. See figure 19.

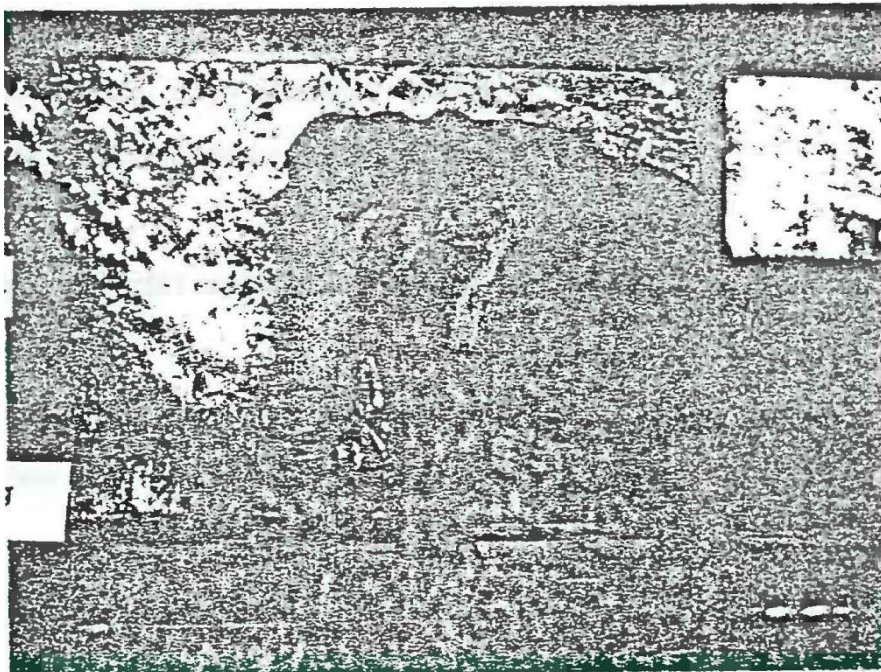


Figure 20: White Elephant

Captured elephants were commissioned into the royal household at a special ceremony. The present monarch, His Majesty King Rama IX still holds this ceremony occasionally. There is 'Khab Mai' music and singing for the elephants.

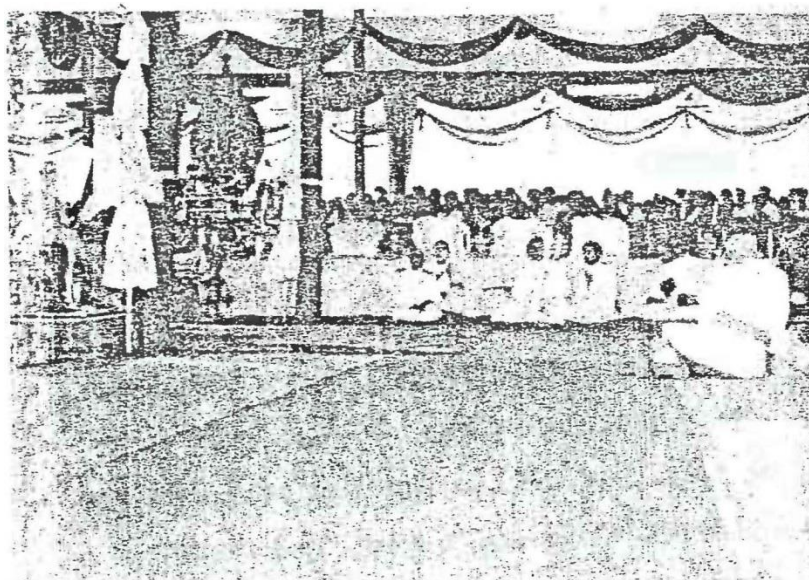


Figure 21: Khab Mai

Ensemble

Figure 21 shows 'Khab Mai' music being played for an elephant in front of the Royal Ground, Muang District, Petchaburi Province. The date is May 29, 1988. At the right of the picture are the present King and Queen welcoming the elephant. In the middle of the picture is the Khab Mai Group and at far right, part of the elephant can be seen.



Figure 22:Khab Mai Ensemble

Figure 22 is a picture of a Khab Mai ensemble at the chapel of Temple of the Emerald Buddha. It was taken during the Bicentennial Anniversary of Rattanakosin Period, April 6, 1982. Part of the ceremony captured in the picture, involved giving food to monks and walking around the chapel 3 times with lighted candles. On the far right is the prince, who presided over the ceremony. In the center is the Khab Mai ensemble.

### Summary

There have been contacts between the Persian and Thai Royal courts for a long time. These relations may have reduced when Europe imposed its will on the Far east. Now, there is more frequent contact as in the past, though Persia has changed its name to Iran. Thai people are, however, regaining their interest in the art and culture of the Middle East. If this paper could set a bridge between Thai and Iranian musicians may develop further, which would be very good. The basic principles of Buddhism and Islam are the same: All people are brothers and sisters. All join in society, and must strive to do good and not sinister things. Hatred, disassociation give rise to stubbornness. The world wants a little more of these good things.

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Grateful to

Assistant Professional Hanas Kinttharai

History Department,

Faculty of Arts,

Silpakorn University,

Nakhon Pathom