



## ČANG

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ČANG “harp” (Pahl. *čang*, mentioned in *Xusrō ī Kawādān ud rēdag*, pars. 62-63), a musical instrument of the free-stringed family. According to Schaeffner (p. 128) the harp stems from the bowstring used by hunters and warriors in prehistoric times. The string or gut fastened onto the hollow cane of the hunter’s bow vibrates when pulled, causing the cane to resonate. The oldest known harps are arched like a bow with a sound box added to the lower end. The oldest record of an arched harp in Persia is an engraving on a seal datable to 3400 b.c. found at Čogā Miš in Kūzestān during excavations by Helen J. Cantor and Pinhas P. Delugaz in 1961-66 (Figure 55).

The resonator or sound-box of the arched harp gradually acquired a variety of shapes, and the number of strings was increased (Schaeffner, p. 193). An Egyptian harp from the Old Empire period datable to 2778 b.c. keeps the shape of a bow but is 1.5 m long and has eight strings; the player put the base of the harp, consisting of a spherical sound-box, on the ground and the other end on his left shoulder and plucked the strings, which were of silk, with fingers of both hands (Larousse, I, pp. 297-98). In later times, the tailpiece was set vertically, or at a slight angle, above the resonator (harp carving at Ṭāq-e Bostān; see illustration in [clothing, sasanian period](#)).

According to Shigeo Kishibe the making of angular harps was customary in Persia until fairly recently. The Īrān-e Bāstān Museum at Tehran possesses an earthenware figurine in high relief which portrays a woman of the Parthian period standing and playing a harp very similar to the harp in the boar hunt scene at Ṭāq-e Bostān (11.9 x 6.5 cm, made of dark baked clay, broken, with

parts missing, back plain; discovered at Šūš/Susa; high relief exhibit no. 387). In the high relief carvings at Ṭāq-e Bostān, most probably dating from the late 6th century (cf. *EIr.* II/3, p. 305a), several types of angular harp can be seen.

In the Islamic period harp playing continued to flourish. The poet Rūdakī (d. 329/940) is described as a master harp player (Zarrīnkūb, p. 214). Several writers on music tell us how harps were made and played. Fārābī briefly describes the construction of the harps called *šanj* (plur. *sonūj*) in the chapter on *ma'āzif* (methods of playing) in his *Ketāb al-mūsīqī al-kabīr* (p. 822). Amīr Qaramānī (in *Kanz al-toḥaf*) describes the harp as having a curved sound-box of apricot wood 109 cm long, a neck 81 cm long, and 24 or 25 goat-hair strings, which were attached at one end to the sound-box and at the other end to metal nails (or sometimes pegs called *malāwī*) embedded in wood. Some harps had as many as 35 strings occupying the whole length of the base of the instrument (Figure 56). To this 'Abd-al-Qāder Marāḡī (d. ca. 838/1434-35) adds: “A membrane is stretched over (the sound-box) of the harp and the strings are fastened with cords instead of pegs. Performers call these cords *parda*. Some harps may be fitted with 24 strings; the number of strings may vary depending on the choice of the performer. If the performer combines knowledge with practice, he can obtain the whole gamut of the seventeen scales” (1344, p. 131; 1366, pp. 202-03).

No other types of harp came into use in Persia. The instrument mentioned as *čang* by Rīāḡī (p. 25) is a lyre (*tanbūra*), called *čang* by the Baluch. In Afghanistan and Tajikistan *čang* designates a type of *santūr*. In Georgia harps are called *čangī* and six types are in use, four rectangular and two acute-angled (*Atlas*, figs. 463-67, 489, 734).

The mouth harp, called *čang-e dahan* or *zanbūrak* in Persian is in fact a Jews' harp in English.

In Europe instruments of the harp family were gradually improved, but in Persia harp-playing languished and disappeared from the Safavid period onward.

In Persian literature, however, particularly in poetry, the harp kept an important place. In the Pahlavi text on King Ḳosrow and his page the *čang* player is listed among the finest of musicians (ed. Unvala, p. 27; Ar. tr. in Ṭā'ālebī, *Gorar*, p. 710) and as one of the instruments played by the inmates of the harem (ibid., p. 29). In classical Persian literature the word *čang* is used not



only with the meaning of harp or musical instrument in general but also with several metaphorical meanings (Mallāḥ, 1350, pp. 89ff.). The curvature of the harp's neck prompted Ḥāfeẓ to liken the harp to the bent frame of an old man (ibid., p. 90). Since harp strings were usually made of horsehair, Manūčehrī likens a harp to a horse “with its head up and its mane down” (Mallāḥ, 1363, s.v. *čang*). The harp is frequently depicted in Persian miniatures.

For many centuries the harp provided accompaniment and support for the singers and poets at the banquets of the mighty. Well-known themes such as Nakīsā and his harp melodies, the effect of Rūdakī's playing on the Samanid amīr (*Čahārmaqāla*, ed. Qazvīnī, pp. 49-54), and the story of Pīr-e Čangī in Rūmī's *Maṭnawī* attest to the importance of the *čang* in the history of Persian music.

See also [HARP](#).

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**Figure 55.** Fragment of an unbaked clay sealing with the impression of a cylinder seal from Čogā Miš; Early Protoliterate (Protoliterate b), ca. 3400 b.c.; The Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, No. Ch.MIII-913a (Courtesy of The Oriental Institute)

**Figure 56.** Čang from *Ketāb al-adwār* by Šafī-al-Dīn ‘Abd-al-Mo‘men Ormawī (d. 693/1293-94). National Library of Cairo (drawing by H.-‘A. Mallāḥ, from Mallāḥ, 1350, p. 96)