



DAF(F) AND DAYERA

DAF(F) AND DĀYERA (*daf* < Ar. *daff*, *duff* “tambourine”; E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* III, London, 1867, p. 888; cf. Hebrew *ṭōph* “timbrel” [Genesis 31:27, Judges 11:34, Psalms 68:25, 150:4]; *dāyera*, colloquial NPers. *dārīa*, colloquial Afghan *doyra* < Ar. *dā’era*, “circle”), the frame drum or tambourine.

i. In Persia.

ii. In Afghanistan.

i. In Persia

The terms *daf* and *dāyera* are applied to types of frame drum common in both the art music and popular traditions of Persia. Such drums have long been known throughout Asia in various forms and under different names (*duff*, *def*, *mazhar*, *bendīr*); at present, however, *daf* is the most common. The term *dāyera* originally referred to the flat, circular drums of pre-Islamic Arabia (Sadie, p. 145), in contrast to the square or hexagonal *daf*, which had two faces covered with skin. The two instruments were probably originally associated with different functions, for in the popular tradition the *dāyera* is still most closely linked with women’s circles.

Nevertheless, in the Persian-speaking world the original distinction between the *daf* and the *dāyera* has largely been lost (perhaps because at present all tambourines are round), and, as the definition of the two terms varies in



different traditions, it is impossible to make general statements. For example, one particular type of tambourine is called *dāyera* in Tajik-Uzbek classical music but *daf* in the Pamirs and Azarbaijan. It seems, however, that in Persia itself the distinction between the two terms still reflects a division between the classical and popular traditions. *Daf* connotes art music, generally referring to a tambourine with rings only on the interior surface of the frame, whereas *dāyera* is connected with a more vernacular sphere and applied to frame drums provided with small metal disks (*zang*) around the rim (*dāyera[-ye] zangī*).

Dafs and *dāyeras* can be classified according to their dimensions, their proportions (e.g., the thickness or depth of the frame), their sonority, and the rings, disks, or other jingling elements on the interior face. The drumheads (*pūst*) are generally of goatskin, though sometimes the skin of sheep or other species is used. They must be played with both hands, in order to combine at least two sounds of different timbres. The instrument normally rests on the left hand, though in Transoxania it is sometimes played in the same fashion as the type of drum known as *darb* (q.v.) or *tonbak*, resting on the thigh and supported by the left forearm or gripped between the thighs. The following are among the most common types of *daf* or *dāyera*. The Azeri and Armenian *daf*, called *gaval* among the poet-minstrels known as *‘āšeqs* (see [drums](#)), is 36-39 cm in diameter. It is light and often richly ornamented with inlay work; catfish skin is used for the drumhead. The Tajik-Uzbek *dāyera* (called *daf* by the Tajiks of Sinkiang [Xin-jiang]) is ca. 42 cm in diameter, with a very heavy nutwood frame reinforced by metal bands. In Tajikistan there are several complex compositions specifically for the *dāyera* but of popular (*kalqī*) origin; whether traditional or modern, they are intended either as accompaniment to dances or as virtuoso solos, sometimes played by a single musician on two or three *dāyeras*. A smaller variant (*dap*) of the instrument, with a diameter of only about 26 cm, is played in Turkestan. In Badaḡṣān in the Pamirs the *dāyera* averages about 45 cm in diameter; it is played by women, who specialize in a polyrhythmic repertoire in which each group of instruments follows a different formula (see ii, below). A very different type is the *daf* of the Qāderī dervishes (see [DARVIŠ](#)) of Kurdistan. It is a heavy drum made from the wood of nut, plane, or chestnut trees; the diameter is ca. 70 cm, and it is about 10 cm deep. The decoration consists of several rows of rings that strike the skin when the drum is tilted. It produces a very loud sound (During, pp. 254, 280, 328-29).

The existence of the *daf* in Persia has been attested since ancient times. A



square form was in use among the Elamites in the 7th-8th centuries b.c.e. and is still common in Arab countries (Koch, p. 549; de Waele, pp. 29-30, 35, 36 and fig. 1; cf. Farmer, s.v. *duff*), but the round *daf* is shown in representations from Egypt dated as early as 1300 b.c.e. (Hickmann, pp. 57, 107). Mas'ūdī (ed. Pellat, V, p. 127) mentioned that the *daf* had been invented by Yūbal b. Lamak, the biblical Jubal b. Lamech, called “the father of all who play the lyre and pipe” (Genesis 4:18-21). Various types of *daf* or *dāyera* of different sizes are represented in Persian miniature paintings from the Timurid and Safavid periods, the most common being the *dāyera zangī* with five small metal disks (During et al., pp. 27, 64, 76, 80, 103, 107, 168). The instruments are shown both in rural settings and in combination with classical instruments in courtly scenes. They are almost always represented beside the *ney* in paintings of Sufi musical sessions (*samā'*) and are frequently mentioned together in poetry as well.

In the 19th and 20th centuries the *daf* or *dāyera* disappeared from Persian classical music, doubtless eclipsed by the *darb* or *tonbak*, which flourished in the same period. In the 1980s it reappeared in the form of the Kurdish *qāderī* among instrumental groups, but played with a technique inappropriate to a solo instrument and to the personal classical style; the refined and complex style of playing still current in Azarbaijan and Central Asia is no longer known elsewhere in Persia.

According to several Hadiths (Muslim traditions), the *daf* was one of the rare instruments that were considered licit by the strictest religious figures (see, e.g., Robson, pp. 3, 31-32, 53-54, 78-84, 96, 98, 132-39, 154, 156-57). It had been prevalent in the shamanistic rites of Central Asia and subsequently became the favored instrument of many Sufi brotherhoods, most notably the Refā'ī and the Qāderī. It was often considered a sacred instrument, particularly among Yazīdīs (*šayṭān-parast*) in northern Iraq and Kurdistan, and its manufacture therefore also sometimes took on a sacred character, even in secular contexts (as in Central Asia). It was thus charged with a rich symbolism, serving as a kind of microcosm, in which the round form was seen as the image of both the heavens and the assembled circle of mystics, uniting in itself mineral (metal rings), vegetal (wood frame), and animal (skin) elements (During, p. 280). For Aḥmad Ṭūsī (13th century; 1360 Š./1981, p. 11; cf. idem, 1938 Š./1981, p. 98) the circular *daf* represented the entire universe, and its skin covering was the symbol of absolute existence; its sonority represented the divine visitations (*wāredāt*) emanating from the world of mystery. The five



disks attached to the rim represented the five degrees: royalty, sainthood (*welāya*), prophesy, humanity, and spirituality. Among the Kurdish Qāderī dervishes “each chain must be composed of four circular links representing the great poles . . . the total number of links corresponds to the 101 attributes of God” (Qasim-Hassan, p. 173). The technique of playing the *daf* is also conceived as calling upon subtle forces to transmit psychic energy (During, p. 320).

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(Jean During)

ii. In Afghanistan

In Afghanistan the frame drum is known as *dāyera*. It consists of a ring of wood covered on one side with cured animal skin (usually goat or deer) glued or nailed to the frame. The frame is normally about 6 cm wide and 35-45 cm or less in diameter. In Afghanistan most *dāyeras* are made by members of the gypsy-like groups known derogatorily as Jats (for a detailed description of the social and economic organization of one Jat group specializing in this craft, the Ġorbat, see Rao). *Dāyeras* are often fitted with metal pellet bells (*zang*), metal rings (*ḥalqa*), or both, fixed at regular intervals along the inside of the frame, so that they vibrate and jingle when the drum is struck ([Plate LIV](#)). Alternatively, pairs of metal disks cut from cans are inserted in slits equally spaced around the frame, as in the Arabic *reqq* or the European tambourine. The skin



of the *dāyera* is sometimes painted with symmetrical abstract or flower patterns. Occasionally factory-made *dāyeras* are imported from Persia or the former Soviet Union.

In Afghanistan the frame drum is no longer used for classical art music; for example, it is not included among the instruments in the orchestra on Radio Afghanistan. It is, however, played in a variety of styles and contexts, amateur and professional, by adults of both sexes, as well as children. It is particularly associated, however, with women, who play it as accompaniment to singing and dancing. Male singers in the Wākān region sometimes wave it in front of their mouths to add a slight vibrato. In all Afghan village and nomad communities, drumming on the *dāyera* accompanies wedding processions.

The most common style of playing the *dāyera* is to hold it in the left hand while beating the taut skin with various strokes of the fingers, thumb, palm, and heel of the right hand. At the same time the fingers of the left hand produce additional flicking sounds on the rim of the drum, usually on the offbeat. Sometimes the drum is thrown upward or sideways in a regular beat, which causes the bells and rings to jingle. The player may also strike the rim of the drum on his or her knee.

Another method is to lay the drum across the shins and beat the skin with both hands (Plate LV). In Badakšān the performer may rest his or her instrument on the floor, holding it at the top with the right hand (Slobin, p. 266).

For a music sample, see [Fadāye Rokṣār – Dekr Qāderieh](#).

For a music sample, see [Falak-e Matam](#).

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