



## DOTĀR

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**DOTĀR**, long-necked lute of the *tanbūr* family, usually with two strings (*do tār*). Several different types are current in the area between Turkey and Central Asia, sometimes with other names (generally derived from the word *tanbūr*). The principal feature is the pear-shaped sound box attached to a neck that is longer than the box and faced with a wooden soundboard. *Dotārs* can be classified in several different types.

The Central Asian *dotār* is the largest (total length ca. 125 cm) and is equipped with two silken strings; the box is made of wooden strips glued together ([Plate XLV](#)). It is tuned in fifths, in fourths, and sometimes in unison. Its sonority is grave and noble, and it is as suitable for accompanying popular songs as for solos and interpretation of the classical repertoire (e.g., *Šaš maqām*, *Oniki muqam*).

The *dotār* of Khorasan (in the broad sense) is narrower and shorter (total length ca. 100-110 cm); it was formerly strung with silk or gut, materials that in the 20th century have been supplanted by steel. It is tuned in fifths or fourths. The box is carved from a single mulberry log, and the neck is often fitted with metallic frets, sometimes of silver. This *dotār* is played by the Turkman, Karakalpaks, Turks, Kurds, and Persians, as well as the Afghans, of Khorasan ([Plate XLVI](#)). It is the favored instrument of the troubadours (*baḳšī*) and is also played as a solo instrument. It has a very light, brilliant timbre, and the technique of playing it is based on ornamentation, basically a very rapid tremolo. Several subcategories can be distinguished, corresponding to the various ethnic traditions in the region (Baily and During). A close variation is



the Kurdish and Lorī *tanbūr*, the sharp cord of which has recently been doubled (Plate XXXVI, above).

The sound box and neck of the *dotār* (or *dombra*) used in the popular music of Tajikistan are carved from a single piece of apricot wood. There are no frets, and the gut (or nylon) strings are no more than 60 cm long, the total length of the instrument being 75 cm (Sakata, p. 72). In contrast to the other types, its sounding board is of poplar wood, rather than mulberry.

The *dotār* of Herat has undergone certain recent modifications. The gut strings have often been replaced by metal ones, and a third string has been added. In the 1960s, under the influence of Indian instruments, strings for resonance and a drone bass were added, which led to a change in the technique of playing (with a metal pick) and to a change in proportions (Baily, pp. 31-33).

The musical function of the *dotār* determines its status. In the province of Herat it has been relegated to the array of rustic instruments, but in Persian Khorasan it retains its former nobility, especially in Torbat-e Jām, one of the great musical centers of the region. It is often richly decorated with inlays, marquetry of bone and horn, and silver niello.

Despite differences in proportions, sonority, and manufacture, all the *dotārs* (except the modern Afghan instrument) and many other *tanbūrs* and *dombbras* share one common feature: When played the two strings are plucked simultaneously in a single movement of the entire hand, including the index finger and one or several other fingers, without a plectrum or metal sheath, in such a way that the accented notes are sounded from high to low. This basic technique has been refined to varying degrees, incorporating different kinetic-rhythmic patterns and fingerings and reaching a consummation in the Tajik-Uzbek tradition.

The term *dotār* does not appear in early texts, but it is probable that this same instrument was described under the term *tanbūr*. In the 14th century Marāgī (1367 Š./1988, pp. 200-01) described a two-string *tanbūr* that was tuned in fourths and equipped with ten frets (*dasātīn*), producing the Pythagorean scale based on limma and comma; he doubtless drew his description from Šafī-al-Dīn Ormavī. Marāgī also described two other two-string *tanbūrs* (the *torkī* and the *šervānī*).

It may be supposed that the original *tanbūr*, which, with the *ūd*, occupied the



central position in early musicological writings (especially those of [Farābī](#)), gave rise to variations with three or more strings, called *tanbūr*, *setār*, *čahārtār*, and so on and that the two-string type was then distinguished by the more popular term *dotār* (or *dombra*).

This type of instrument is rarely represented in pre-Islamic art, though there are innumerable representations of the *barbač* (Karomatov, Meskeris, and Vyzgo, pp. 92-93) and later of the *ūd*. To judge from medieval miniature paintings, the *dotār* or two-stringed *tanbūr* lost its place among the classical instruments of Persia for a considerable period, doubtless supplanted by the *setār*, which is represented frequently.

For a music sample, see [Harāy-āhang-e bolbol](#).

For a music sample, see [Ilāri](#).

For a music sample, see [Korasan – Dekr Hāji Majnun Šāh](#).

For a music sample, see [Kōroğlu](#).

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

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[Plate numbers in this entry have been corrected; the numbers given in the print edition's version of the entry are in error.]