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The Origin of the *Rabāb* Reconsidered on the Basis of Early Arabic and Persian Literary and Lexicographical Sources

This essay critically examines the hypothesis that the bowed instrument rabāb originated in Arabia and that its name is of Arabic origin. It focuses primarily on the work of Henry George Farmer, who was the most passionate advocate of this narrative. To this end, a comprehensive review of a substantial corpus of early literary and lexicographical sources from the Arabic and Persian speaking worlds was undertaken, which led us to question conventional interpretations and to propose a novel reading of some key texts. This essay calls for a re-evaluation of extant research and underscores the imperative to interrogate long-standing assumptions with the aim of enriching them with more detailed source studies. In conclusion, it proposes a Persian-Khorasani origin for the rabāb, aligning with other research that suggests the emergence of bowing and bowed instruments in Transoxiana, or Central Asia.

To date, the provenance of the bowed instrument *rabāb* and the etymology of its name remain unresolved. Nevertheless, there appears to be a general consensus regarding the etymological narrative, which posits an Arabic origin for the term and also suggests that the instrument was known to the Arabs during the early Islamic period.¹ Furthermore, it is widely accepted that the “rebec”, at least in its “Hispano-Moorish” form, evolved from the *rabāb*, which was introduced to southern Europe by the Arabs.² This is not least due to the achievements of Henry George Farmer (1882–1965) in this field. Farmer is well known for being the most passionate advocate for this narrative and especially for the indebtedness of Europe to the Arabs in this regard.³ His conviction arose from the simple circumstance that the earliest literary evidence for the use of the bow comes from Arabic sources.⁴ In this paper, I will briefly review the main arguments in favour of this narrative (which are basically Farmer’s), and, based on a reconsideration of the main sources, attempt to challenge them. Before proceeding, however, I wish emphatically to express my admiration for the scholarly work of Farmer. His landmark contributions to the study of the history of oriental music, in particular to the study of oriental musical instruments, cannot be overestimated. It is difficult to find a topic he did not consider or write about. However, it is sometimes worthwhile reopening old files.

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1 See e.g. Beyer 2016; Dick et al. 2001.

2 See e.g. Bröcker 2016.

3 See e.g. Farmer 1925a, esp. p. 62 (p. 272); Farmer 1930, pp. 137, 143; Farmer 1931, esp. pp. 99–107 (pp. 111–119).

4 Farmer 2012.

H. G. Farmer on the etymology of the name *rabāb*

Rabāb, according to Farmer, is the generic name for any stringed instrument played with a bow, *qaws* in Arabic. There are three explanations for the origin of the name:

According to the first, *rabāb* is deduced from the Hebrew *lāḥab* (לָחַב), a primitive root that means ‘to ravish the heart’, ‘to encourage’, ‘to make the heart beat faster’, which is – in Farmer’s words – “scarcely feasible”.

According to the second, the word *rabāb* is of Persian origin. Some of those in favour of this explanation relate *rabāb* to the Persian *robāb*, i.e. the skin-bellied lute played with the fingers or plectrum. Albeit plausible, the “mere similarity in name must not be accepted without question”; one “argument against the alleged borrowing from Persia”, adds Farmer, is that the Persian *robāb* “was always a plucked and not a bowed instrument. Still, the Arabs may have borrowed the plucked instrument and adapted it to the bow.”⁵ Others in favour of a Persian origin would argue that the word is derived from the Persian *ravāveh* (made up of two words: *rav* and *āve* in the meaning of ‘emitting melancholy sounds’) – which is rather factitious.⁶ Early lexica, such as *Logat-e Fors* (ca 458/1066)⁷ by Asadī Ṭūsī (d. 465/1072), *Ṣaḥāho l-Fors* (728/1328) by Naḥḡavānī (d. ca 778/1376), do not list that word. Due to more direct contact between Muslim India and Iran during the time of the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 963–1014/1556–1605) and the Ṣafavid Šāh ‘Abbās I (r. 995–1038/1588–1629), critical lexicography thrived. Among the lexica created during this period are *Farhang-i Sorūrī* by Moḥammad Qāsem Sorūrī Kāšānī (d. 1036/1626), *Farhang-i Ġāhāngīrī* by Ġamāl ad-Dīn Ḥoseyn Enḡū (d. 1036/1626), *Borhān-e qāṭe* (1062/1651) by Moḥammad Ḥosayn Borhān, and *Bahār-i ‘Aḡam* (1152/1739) by Lāle Rāy Tēkḡand Bahār.⁸ Only the last three lexica list the word *ravāveh* and provide the etymology given above. Consequently, this etymology is very late, and is accordingly rejected here, for it is not attested to in any of the early sources.

According to the third and last alternative explanation for the origin of the word *rabāb*, it is derived from the polysemic Arabic root *rabba* (r-b-b), in this case meaning ‘to collect’, ‘arrange’, or ‘assemble together’. This is, incidentally, Farmer’s own interpretation, who bases his argument on the fact that the Arab music acousticians distinguish between short sounds (*munfaṣil*) produced by plucked instruments such as the short-necked *ūd* and the long-necked *tunbūr*, and long or sustained (*muttaṣil*) sounds produced by bowed instruments such as the *rabāb*. It was the application of the bow, says Farmer, which “collected, arranged, or assembled” the short notes into one sustained note, hence the term *rabāb* being applied to bowed instruments.⁹ However, Farmer omitted to include blown wind instruments, which obviously belong to the same category as the *rabāb*, as the following statement by Ibn Zayla (d. 440/1048) suggests:

Among these instruments are some that are sounded by beating. The sounds or tones produced are disjunct as the beating is cut off, like the *ūd*, the *ṣanḡ*, and what resembles them. Among them [the instruments] are also some which are not sounded in the same way; their sound is rather prolonged [*mumtadd*] and conjunct [*mutaṣil*], like the *nāy*, *surṇāy*, and the *rabāb* [...].¹⁰

5 Ibid.

6 Farmer 1931, p. 100 (p. 112). See also Engel 1883, p. 80.

7 Dates in this text are given according to both the Islamic and the Christian calendar.

8 For more details, see Perry 2021.

9 Farmer 1931, p. 100 (p. 112); Farmer 2012.

10 “wa-min ḥaḏīhi l-ālāti mā yuṣawwatu bi-qar‘in yuqra‘u bihi l-āla fa-ya’ti ṣ-ṣawtu wa-n-naḡamu minhā munqaṭi‘an ‘alā ḥasabin yaqṭa‘u l-qara‘āti miṭla l-‘ūdi wa-ṣ-ṣanḡi wa-mā ašbahahā wa-minhā mā lā yakūnu ṣ-ṣawtu minhu kaḏālika bal ya’ti ṣ-ṣawtu minhā mumtaddan muttaṣilan miṭla n-nāyi wa-s-surṇāyi wa-r-rabāb” (Ibn Zayla n.d., fol. 235v [p. 74]). Transliterations and translations by the author if not otherwise stated.

And similar to Ibn Zayla, the Iḥwān aṣ-Ṣafā' (fourth/eleventh century) divided sounds quantitatively into two categories, continuous and discontinuous, the former being like the sounds of wind instruments (*mazāmīr*, *nāyāt*), fiddles (*rabābāt*), water wheels and the like.¹¹

The *rabāb* was not, therefore, an instrument of a particular shape or construction, says Farmer, but essentially an instrument played with the bow, similar to the Persian *kamānča*, except that the latter bore this fact more clearly in its name, for *kamānča* means literally 'little bow'.¹² Farmer distinguishes between the following seven *rabāb* forms known to "Islamic peoples": 1. the Rectangular; 2. the Circular; 3. the Boat-Shaped; 4. the Pear-Shaped; 5. the Hemispherical; 6. the Pandore; and 7. the Open Chest *rabāb*.¹³

The bow question

The bow evidently came from the east, concedes Farmer. He rejects, however, the "oft-repeated" statement that the Arabs admit that they borrowed the bow (Pers. *kamān*) from the Persians, for there is not the slightest evidence for that, he says.¹⁴ This is obviously in response to Carl Engel's and Kathleen Schlesinger's opinion about the Arabs' indebtedness to Persia in this respect.¹⁵ No Arabic author, says Farmer, makes an admission of this kind, nor have the Arabs adopted the word *kamān* for the bow, their own term *qaws* having been considered sufficient. Even though al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) does not mention the bow in his chapter on the *rabāb*, he does count in his classification of instruments "those upon whose strings are drawn (*yuğarru*) other strings".¹⁶ In the same way, Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) states that there are instruments "possessed of strings and frets which are not beaten upon but are drawn (*yuğarru*) upon like the *rabāb*".¹⁷ Ibn Zayla speaks as well of "instruments with strings which are drawn (*yuğarru*) upon".¹⁸ Here, the bow is clearly implied, says Farmer, since there can be no doubt about the verb *ğarra* (lit. 'to draw'). These quotations prove, according to Farmer, the existence of the bow among the Arabs in the tenth and eleventh centuries. He is even convinced that the Arabs must have used it much earlier.¹⁹

However, if we consider the place of residence and activity of these authors, we must exclude Ibn Sīnā²⁰ and his pupil Ibn Zayla, for they spent their life in Khorasan and were probably simply referring to the instruments within their environment. In contrast, al-Fārābī, of Turkish descent, resided and worked in Baghdad.²¹ It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the bow was known in the first half of the third/tenth century in the cosmopolitan city of Baghdad.

11 "wa-l-aṣwātu tanqasimu min ġihati l-kammīyati naw'ayn, muttaṣila wa-munfaṣila [...] al-muttaṣila mina l-aṣwāti fa-hiya miṭlu aṣwāti l-mazāmīri wa-n-nāyāti wa-r-rabābāti wa-s-surnāyāti wa-d-dawālībi wa-n-nawā'iri wa-mā šākalahā" (Ikhwān 2010, pp. 38f. [ed.] and pp. 94f. [transl.]).

12 Farmer 1931, p. 100 (p. 112).

13 Farmer 2012.

14 Farmer 1931, p. 101 (p. 113).

15 See Engel 1883, p. 31; Schlesinger 1910, p. 221.

16 "yuğarru 'alā awtārihā awtārun uḡar" (Fārābī 1967, p. 497).

17 "wa-minhā dawātu awtārin wa-dasātina lā yunqaru 'alayhā bal yuğarru 'alayhā ka-r-rabāb" (Ibn Sīnā 2004, p. 232).

18 "wa-minhā dawātu awtārin yuğarru 'alayhā ka-r-rabāb" (Ibn Zayla n.d., fol. 235r [p. 73]).

19 Farmer 1931, pp. 102f. (pp. 114f.).

20 Ibn Sīnā was born near Bukhara, studied there and spent much of his early life there in the service of the Samanid rulers. He then fled to Isfahan and died in Hamadan. There is no evidence whatsoever that he came near Iraq or Syria.

21 He was born in Turkestan at Wasij in the district of the city of Farab and died most probably in Damascus. In the final years of his life, he entered into the service of Sayf ad-Dawla, the Shiite Hamdanid ruler of Aleppo.

Further etymological quest for the origin of the name *rabāb*

As mentioned above, Farmer relates the name *rabāb* to the Arabic root *r-b-b*. In my search for the etymology of this word, I consulted the following lexica and thesauri:

Kitāb al-ʿAyn by al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī (d. 175/791); *Amṭāl al-ʿarab* by al-Mufaḍḍal aḍ-Ḍabbī (d. 168?/784?); *al-Amṭāl* by Muʿarriḡ as-Sadūsī (d. ca 198/813); *Kitāb al-Ġīm* by Abū ʿAmr aš-Šaybānī (d. 206/821); *an-Nawādir* by Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830); *an-Nawādir* by Abū Miṣḥal al-Aʿrābī (d. 231/845); *at-Taḡfiya fī l-luġa* by al-Bandanīġī (d. 284/897); *Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq* by Ibn as-Sikkīt (d. 244/858); *al-Muntaḥab min ġarīb kalām al-ʿarab* by Kurāʿ an-Naml (d. 310/922); *Ġamharat al-luġa* by Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933); *Dīwān al-adab* by Abū Ibrāhīm al-Fārābī (d. 350/961); *al-Bārīʿ fī l-luġa* by al-Qālī (d. 356/967); *Tahḏīb al-luġa* by al-Azhārī (d. 370/981); *al-Muḥīṭ fī l-luġa* by Ibn ʿAbbād aš-Šāḥib (d. 385/995); *Maqāyīs al-luġa* by Ibn Fāris (d. 395/1004); *Kitāb al-Ġarībayn* by Abū ʿUbayd al-Harawī (d. 224/838); *al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ* and *al-Muḥkam* by Ibn Sida (d. 458/1066); *Maġmaʿ al-amṭāl* by Abū l-Faḍl al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124); *Asās al-balāġa* by az-Zamaḥṣarī (d. 538/1144); *al-Muʿarrab mina l-kalām al-aġāmī* by al-Ġawālīqī (d. 540/1145); *Lisān al-ʿarab* by Ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311); *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* by al-Firūzābādī (d. 817/1415); and *Tāġ al-ʿarūs* by az-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790).

Numerous derivatives of the root *r-b-b* are found in these sources. Let us consider the meanings assigned only to *rabāb*, *rabāba*, *ribāb*, *ribāba*, *rubāb*, and *rubāba*, i.e. possible designations of the bowed viol or the skin-bellied lute:

ribāb:

- as the infinitive noun of the verb *rabba* which means: ‘becoming pregnant soon after having brought forth’, or ‘to bring forth’ [said of a ewe or she-goat].
- as the plural of the noun *rabb* which means ‘a lord’, ‘a possessor’, ‘a proprietor’, ‘an owner’.
- as the plural of the noun *rubba* which means ‘inspissated juice’ or ‘thick juice’.
- as the plural of the noun *rubba* which means ‘a party’, ‘division’ or ‘distinct body, or class, of men’. Hence the plural *ribāb* signifies ‘companions’.
- a noun in the meaning of ‘covenant’, ‘obligation’, ‘treaty’ or ‘promise’.
- a noun in the meaning of ‘tenths’ or ‘tithes’.

ribāba:

- as the infinitive noun of the verb *rabba* which has several meanings: 1. ‘to rule’ or ‘govern’; 2. ‘to collect’, ‘increase’ or ‘congregate people’; 3. ‘to adjust’, ‘arrange’ or ‘put into the right, or proper, state’.
- a noun in the meaning of ‘covenant’, ‘compact’, ‘confederacy’ or ‘league’.
- a noun in the meaning of ‘a thing resembling a quiver, in which the arrows are enclosed’.
- as a substantive from the noun *rabb*, meaning 1. ‘the state, or quality, of being a lord, a possessor, or a proprietor’; 2. ‘deity’, ‘godship’, ‘godhood’.

rubāb:

- as an anomalous plural of the noun *rubba* which is applied to a ‘ewe, a she-goat, or a she-camel, that has brought forth (twenty days or two months before), has lost her young one, or is accompanied by her young one’.
- as a noun in the meaning of ‘the beginning’, ‘the commencement’ or the ‘first’ of any thing (sometimes also *rabāb* and *ribāb*).

rubāba:

- This form is not encountered in any of the sources consulted.

***rabāb*:**

- as the plural of the noun ***rabāba*** which means ‘a cloud’, or ‘a white cloud’. Hence, ***Rabāb*** as a proper name of a woman.
- the name of a place in Mecca near the wellspring Maymūn; a mountain between Mecca/Medina and Fayd; the name of a hadith²² transmitter.

Of the sources listed above, it is only in two, chronologically the most recent, that we encounter the word ***rabāb*** in the meaning of ‘a musical instrument’. The first is *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* by Mağd ad-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb aš-Šīrāzī al-Fīrūzābādī (d. 817/1415). Fīrūzābādī defines the *rabāb* as “an instrument for diversion that is beaten”.²³ Almost three-and-a-half centuries later, Muḥammad Murtaḍā az-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1790) adds in his *Tāğ al-‘arūs min ġawāhir al-Qāmūs*, the most comprehensive Arabic lexicon of all times, the words “with strings” to Fīrūzābādī’s definition: “an instrument for diversion with strings that are beaten”.²⁴ So it took until the eighth/fourteenth century for the name of the instrument to find its way into Arabic lexica. At the same time, it is very curious that both lexicographers use the verb ‘to beat’ (*ḍaraba*) in this context, and not ‘to draw’ (*ğarra*). It seems probable that what was meant here is the skin-bellied lute *rubāb*, since the only difference in orthography would be the optional vowel diacritic above the first consonant (*r*), which is not normally written, as is usual in Arabic script.

Directly after the definition of the *rabāb*, however, both sources provide an example of an exceptional musician who goes by the surname Rabābī, i.e. Mamdūd b. ‘Abdallāh al-Wāsiṭī ar-Rabābī (d. 638/1241 in Baghdad). He is introduced with a puzzling phrase, which reads: “yuḍrabu bihi l-maṭalu fī ma‘rifati l-mūsīqī bi-r-rabāb”.²⁵ Edward W. Lane translates this phrase as follows: he “became proverbial for his musical skill with the *rabāb*”, obviously interpreting *rabāb* as the name of the bowed instrument. Accordingly, Rabābī is the name given to the person who plays the *rabāb*.²⁶ In a commentary on the correct reading of the Arabic word for ‘music’, i.e. whether it should be *mūsīqī* or *mūsīqā*, Anastās al-Karmalī took a closer look at this passage from *al-Qāmūs al-muḥīṭ* and came to the conclusion that the previous phrase, “fī ma‘rifati l-mūsīqī bi-r-rabāb” (lit. ‘for [his] knowledge of music with the *rabāb*’), cannot be correct; it is a “phrase that the taste of the pure Arab rejects”.²⁷ He simply attributed this to a mistake by Fīrūzābādī and suggested a correction by omitting the definite article ‘*al-*’ as well as the preposition ‘*bi-*’ in front of the words *mūsīqī* and *ar-rabāb* respectively. The phrase should read: “fī ma‘rifati mūsīqī r-rabāb” (lit. ‘for [his] knowledge of the *rabāb*-music’). Nevertheless, just like Lane, his reading was also based on the assumption that the name Rabābī should refer to the *rabāb*-player.²⁸ Karmalī’s objection is valid, though we should consider the following. Šams ad-Dīn aḍ-Ḍahabī (673–748/1274–1348), the great historian and genealogist, provided the first bibliographic account of Mamdūd b. ‘Abdallāh al-Wāsiṭī. In his *Tārīḥ al-islām* (“The History of Islam”), aḍ-Ḍahabī gives the name as follows: Mamdūd b. ‘Abdallāh ar-Rabābī al-Qawwāl al-Bağdādī, and states: “He was a master of the art and science of music, unparalleled in his time, had a pleasant voice, and was famous, graceful, vivacious, kind, decent and wealthy. He

22 Hadith (Arab. *ḥadīṭ*) refers to the traditional corpus of sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, as well as those of others that he is said to have tacitly endorsed.

23 “ālatu lahwin yuḍrabu bihā” (Fīrūzābādī 1977, p. 71).

24 “ālatu lahwin lahā awtārun yuḍrabu bihā” (Zabīdī 2004, p. 472a).

25 Fīrūzābādī 1977, p. 71; Zabīdī 2004, p. 472a.

26 Lane 1867, p. 1005.

27 “fa-mina t-ta‘bīri llaḍī ya‘nafu minhu ḍawqu l-‘arabīyi š-šamīm” (Karmalī 1927, p. 626).

28 Ibid., pp. 624–626.

died at the age of seventy in *dū l-qa‘da* [638/June 1241] and was buried in his house”.²⁹ In a later work of aḍ-Ḍahabī entitled *al-Muṣṭabih fī r-riḡāl*, an alphabetical dictionary of proper names and appellations which appear mainly in works on hadith and might easily be confused, Mamdūd b. ‘Abdallāh is the only person listed under the name ar-Rabābī. There, we encounter for the first time the same puzzling phrase “yuḍrabu bihi l-maṭalu fī ma‘rifati l-mūsīqī bi-r-rabāb”, which from here onwards found access to subsequent lexica. This solves the riddle of this *nisba* (i.e. ‘noun of relation’): aḍ-Ḍahabī relates ar-Rabābī to ar-Rabāb, a mountain between Mecca and Fayd, not to the instrument Rabāb.³⁰ Later, Ibn Nāṣir ad-Dīn ad-Dimaṣqī (777–842/1375–1438) corrected the geographical location of ar-Rabāb, asserting that it is a mountain *en route* to Mecca, between Medina and Fayd, as well as a place near the wellspring Maymūn in Mecca.³¹ Based on the above, the meaning of the puzzling phrase “yuḍrabu bihi l-maṭalu fī ma‘rifati l-mūsīqī bi-r-Rabāb” changes completely; it becomes: Mamdūd was “proverbial for his knowledge of music in ar-Rabāb”. However, after determining the source of confusion, it is still more likely that Mamdūd was indeed a *ru(a)bāb*-player and that aḍ-Ḍahabī simply provided a wrong explanation of the *nisba*.

In conclusion, it is evident that the term *rabāb*, as a designation for a musical instrument, is not present in Arabic lexicographical sources prior to the eighth/fourteenth century. Furthermore, when the term was first mentioned in Firūzābādī’s *Qāmūs*, no etymological explanation was offered, and no connection was made between the name of the instrument and the meaning of *rabba* as ‘to collect’, ‘arrange’ or ‘assemble together’, as was suggested by Farmer.

Arabic lexicographical collections as sources for information on musical instruments: The special cases of Ibn Sīda and Ibn Salama

The utilisation of sources pertaining to the Arabic language for the purpose of gathering information on issues related to music and musical life is a highly rewarding endeavour, offering insights that would otherwise be unavailable. At this point, it is pertinent to enquire as to whether the names of instruments (*malāhī*) apart from *rabāb*, or any terminology related to them, were included in these sources at all. A cursory examination of all the lexicographical sources listed in the previous section reveals the following, music-related items:

Category	Terms (in the singular)
Plucked string instruments	‘ūd; kirān; barbaṭ; mizhar; ṭunbūr/ṭinbār; dirriḡ/durrayḡ; wann/wanaḡ; mi‘zafa; kinnāra; muwattar; ṣanḡ; ‘arṭaba/‘urṭuba; qinnīn
Wind instruments	zamḡhar/zamḡhara; mizmār/zammāra; rammāṭa; nāy; dūnāy; surnāy; qāṣib/qaṣaba/quṣṣāba; ‘irān; yarā‘; zanbaq; hanbaqa/hunbūqa; hayra‘a; mustaq/muṣṭaq; būq
Percussion instruments	duff/daff; ḍafāṭa; ṭabl; kabar; kūba; dardāb
Singers, instrumentalists	qayna; karīna; muḡannī; muḡanniya; qawwāl; muṭrib; ṣādī; ṭunbūrī; zāmīr; zāmira; qaṣṣāb; aṣḡāb al-‘īdān (pl.); ama; ṭabbāl; daffāf/mudaffif
Singing and playing techniques, composition, genres, voice qualities, and dance	lahw; ṣadw; ḡinā‘; ta‘līf; naṣīd; sawt; aḡaṣṣ; waṣī; muḡassad; tahakkum; mumarraḡ; ṭarḡ; ḍarb; bazz; ṣīyā‘; kahkaha; karkara; qahqaha; ḍafḍafa; qals/taqlīs; dadā/dadan/daydabūn; zafan

29 “kāna ustāḍan fī ṭ-ṭarabi wa-‘ilmi l-mūsīqī. lam yakun fī waqtiḡi miṡluḡū wa-kāna ṭayyiba ṣ-ṣawti ba‘īda ṣ-ṣīti zarīfan ḡafīfan laṭīfan laḡū ḡiṣmatun wa-dunyā. tuwuffiya fī ḡī l-qa‘da wa-lahū sab‘ūna sanatan wa-dufina bi-dār-iḡ” (Ḍahabī 1998, p. 386 [No. 564]).

30 Ḍahabī 1962, p. 299.

31 Dimaṣqī 1993, pp. 100f.

Melody and rhythm	<i>laḥn; nağma; nağam; iqāʿ; ṭabaqa; ṭaqīl awwal; ṭaqīl ṭānī; ramal; hazağ</i>
Strings	<i>miḥbaḍ; širʿa; watar; maṭnā; maṭlaṭ; zīr; bamm</i>
Frets and instrument parts	<i>malwā; dastān; ʿatab (pl.); ṣadr; ʿunuq; ibriq</i>

All of the music-related terms given above are already attested to in Arabic lexicographical sources prior to the sixth/twelfth century. It is vital to recall that over the course of most of the second/eighth century and the first half of the third/ninth century, lexicographers competed in recording data from the Bedouins (*a ʿrāb*), for their speech was identified as the ‘purest’ and most eloquent form of Arabic. This process of data collection was known as *ğam ʿ al-luğa*. The vast number of lexical items that the process of data collection yielded was thereafter arranged either thematically (e.g. plants, animals, the human body, rain, wind, clouds, swords, but also as homonyms, synonyms, Arabicised words, solecisms and so forth) or formally (*lafẓī*) according to a certain principle that helps the user locate the desired lexical item or root. Accordingly, the “lexicographers preserved much of the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Arabs that might have otherwise been lost.”³²

These different semantic approaches gave rise to two types of lexica that continued throughout the lexical tradition, with each serving a purpose different from the other. The first is the ‘onomasiological type’ (*mubawwab*), where meaning leads to sign, as in the thematically arranged monographs and thesauri. The second is the ‘semasiological type’ (*muğannas*), where sign leads to meaning.³³ For example, Ibn Sida al-Mursī (d. 458/1066), the Andalusian lexicographer and philologist, authored a multi-volume lexicon of each type: *al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ* and *al-Muḥkam wa-l-muḥīṭ al-a ʿzam*. Having authored his *muğannas* lexicon, *al-Muḥkam*, which was arranged according to the phonetic-permutative principle and, hence, intended to guide the user to the exact place in which a word occurs, he wanted to match it with *al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ*, a multi-themed *mubawwab* thesaurus that was arranged semantically and would allow orators and poets to choose the most appropriate word from among a number of listed adjectives and synonyms.³⁴ Among the authorities that Ibn Sida refers to in both of his works are al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791), Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Malik al-Aṣmaʿī (d. 213 or 216/828 or 831), Abū Zayd al-Anṣārī (d. 215/830), Abū ʿUbayd al-Harawī (d. 224/838), Ibn as-Sikkīt (d. 244/858), al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama (d. c. 290/902), Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933), and az-Zağğāğī (d. 337/949), all of whom were leading Arab philologists and authors of seminal lexicographical works. In *al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ*, Ibn Sida devotes an entire chapter to the topic of musical instruments and singing (*bāb al-malāhī wa-l-ğināʿ*; lit. “Entry to the diversions and singing”), followed by a chapter on “Dance” (*bāb ar-rağs*).³⁵ There we encounter almost all of the music-related terms listed above. However, the only instrument that is missing is the *rabāb*.

Ibn Sida wrote his two major lexicographical works under the patronage of Muğāhid al-Muwaffaq, the ruler of Dénia (r. ca 403–436/1012–1045), who was eager to present himself as a promoter of science and the arts. The fact that Ibn Sida, who lived and worked in al-Andalus, does not mention the instrument *rabāb* or any bowed fiddle-type instrument in his otherwise comprehensive chapter on musical instruments, raises a legitimate question about the popularity of the *rabāb* on the Iberian Peninsula before the year 1000.

32 For more details see Baalbaki 2021.

33 Ibid.

34 For more details on Ibn Sida and his works, see Weninger 2021.

35 Ibn Sida 1902, pp. 9–16.

As just mentioned, one of the sources for *al-Muḥaṣṣaṣ* was al-Mufaḍḍal b. Salama (d. after 290/903). Ibn Salama was a transmitter of historical materials (*aḥbārī*) with wide interests and a philological-lexicographical background. He studied under significant linguists and grammarians of the Kūfan school and was highly regarded as a calligrapher by the bibliophile and patron of poets and literati al-Faṭḥ b. Ḥāqān (d. 247/861 or 862). A voluminous writer (the *Fihrist* attributes nineteen books to him), Ibn Salama's works deal mainly with philological and lexicographical topics.³⁶ One of his works, entitled *Kitāb al-Malāḥī*, deals with two subjects: primarily with the musical instruments known to the Arabs, explaining, here and there, a few technical terms, and ending with a reference to different types of singing, and, secondly, with the sanctions given for the use of musical instruments – in other words: which musical instruments were considered unlawful and which were permitted or tolerated.³⁷ This is very often considered a “work on music”.³⁸ However, it was compiled by a philologist and lexicographer in response to assertions that “the Arabs were ignorant of the lute, and that they make no mention of any of its strings and its appurtenances.”³⁹ The author “resolved to clarify matters regarding the lute [*ūd*] and other musical instruments [*malāḥī*], [and to state] who was the first to make any of them and what the Arabs said about their names and the designations of their appurtenances, for the perusal of those who are interested in any of these matters.”⁴⁰ From this, it becomes obvious that *Kitāb al-Malāḥī* was nothing but one of those thematically arranged thesauri that strive to include all vocabulary related to a special topic, in this case names of musical instruments of the Arabs or known by them, as well as other music-related items. There is no *rabāb* or any other bowed instrument among those listed here.

Farmer's arguments for early familiarity with the *rabāb* among the Arabs, as documented in Arabic literary sources

In addition to lexicographical sources, are there any other early literary sources that might provide evidence of Arab familiarity with the *rabāb*? In a number of his writings, Farmer cites a variety of literary sources to support this notion. We shall subject these to critical questioning in what follows here.

According to Farmer, “there are good reasons for believing that the Arabs looked upon the *rabāb* as an indigenous production.”⁴¹ First, he claims that the *rabāb* is mentioned as early as the Arabic polygraph Abū ‘Uṭmān ‘Amr b. Baḥr al-Ġāḥiẓ (d. 255/868 or 869) in his *Mağmū‘at ar-rasā’il*, but that one cannot be sure whether this was the bowed *rabāb* or the plucked *rubāb*. Farmer adds that al-Ġāḥiẓ wrote that the instrument had a legendary history.⁴² This is an inconclusive piece of evidence, for at no point does al-Ġāḥiẓ mention the *rabāb* in his *Rasā’il*, most certainly not in *Kitāb al-Qiyān*, *Ṭabaqāt al-muğannīn*, or *Kitāb Mufaḥḥarat al-ğawārī wa-l-ğilmān*.⁴³

Farmer then refers to *Kašf al-humūm* [*wa-l-kurab fī šarḥ ālat aṭ-ṭarab*] (fourteenth rather than fifteenth/sixteenth century) in which, according to legend, the invention of the *rabāb* was

36 For further information on Ibn Salama, see Sellheim 2012; Sawa 2021b.

37 Ibn Salama 1984. Ibn Salama's text was included as a first appendix to ‘Azzāwī 1951, pp. 73–89. For an annotated English translation, see Robson/Farmer 1938.

38 See Sawa 2021b.

39 Robson/Farmer 1938, p. 234.

40 Ibid.

41 Farmer 1930, p. 265n.

42 Farmer 2012.

43 See Hārūn 1979.

attributed to a woman of the tribe of Ṭayy, an influential Arab tribe in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times.⁴⁴ This woman, whose name was Su‘dā bint ‘Āmir al-‘Absī, had a son (or a stepson or nephew) who was very dear to her. The boy died and she grieved violently for him. He was called Rabīb or Rabāb Su‘dā (literally “foster-son of Su‘dā”). The woman lamented him day and night, disturbing her tribe, who then agreed to cut out her tongue so she would not be able to worry them again with her wailing. When she could not wail anymore, she had a *rabāb* made for her that she named after the boy and started to play. In the wailing of it there was the sound of the human voice weeping, and every time the *rabāb* wailed, it renewed her grief. After that, all the Arabs started singing to the *rabāb* their melancholy poetry and elegies and lamented.⁴⁵

The relatively late *Kašf al-humūm*, however, is no scientific treatise on musical instruments, nor does it deal with the theory of music in any scholarly fashion, for it was undoubtedly written for popular consumption, i.e. for a people who liked to hear stories and legends of far-off times. It cannot be compared, for instance, with other, more formal, valuable writings on music.⁴⁶

Farmer also refers to Evliyā Čelebi (1020–1095/1611–1684), who in his travel account *Seyāhat-nāme* says that the *rabāb* was perfected by ‘Abdallāh Fāryābī, and was played before King Solomon and considered a lawful instrument before the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. This would mean that it was known to the Arabs in pre-Islamic times. This is borne out by another authority, says Farmer, who cites al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791) as saying that “the ancient Arabs sang their poems to its [the *rabāb*’s] voice”.⁴⁷

While the *Seyāhat-nāme* offers a wealth of information on language, cultural history, folklore and geography of the eleventh/seventeenth century, thereby satisfying the need for entertainment and instruction of the Turkish-speaking intellectuals of its time, Evliyā Čelebi himself is looked upon today as an imaginative writer with a marked proclivity for the wonderful and the adventurous – someone who preferred legend to bare historical fact.⁴⁸

Regarding the quotation of al-Ḥalīl, Farmer gives the following bibliographic reference: “Huth MS. The author’s”.⁴⁹ This manuscript was acquired by Farmer in 1923 among other books and papers which came from the library of Frederick Henry Huth of Bath (1844–1918). It is kept at the Farmer Collection in the Library of the University of Glasgow. This two-leaf manuscript is written in English on seventeenth or eighteenth-century paper. According to Farmer, its construction has clearly marked features of being a literal translation from some unidentified Arabic work, possibly one of the popular treatises mentioned in the *Fihrist* of Ibn an-Nadīm. The transliteration is quite unusual and is certainly not modern, says Farmer. The passage regarding the *rabāb* reads: “And the *rebab* is an instrument of the people of Khorasan and Khaleel [i.e. al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad] says that the ancient Arabs sang their poem[s] to its voice.”⁵⁰ Farmer comments on this passage by simply saying: “That the ‘rebab’ was used by ancient Arabs to accompany their poems is mentioned elsewhere.”⁵¹ The source of this transliteration cannot be determined, and Farmer seems to ignore completely the part which clearly states that the *rabāb* was “an instrument of the people of Khorasan.”

44 Farmer 2012. On the Arab tribe Ṭayy see Shahīd 2012.

45 Anonymous 1, pp. 263–293. For a discussion and an English translation of the section pertaining to the *rabāb* in *Kašf al-humūm*, see Hardie 1946, pp. 221–244.

46 See *ibid.*, p. 13.

47 Farmer 2012; Farmer 1931, pp. 99f. (pp. 111f.).

48 Mordtmann/Duda 2012.

49 Farmer 1931, p. 100 (p. 112).

50 Farmer 1944, p. 202 (p. 54).

51 *Ibid.*, p. 205.

Farmer furthermore refers to an anonymous work “on the merits of music”⁵² dated 1750, which he mistakenly attributes to a famous man of letters named Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Kanḡi (d. 1153/1740). Farmer writes that the way in which the instrument is mentioned in the tract would seem to show that the *rabāb* was looked upon as an Arabian instrument.⁵³ Actually, the text does not suggest this at all. It reads: “I am not aware of any people that do not use musical instruments in war and apply them just like weapons, for instance the drum by the Turks, the *rabāb* by the Arabs, the *kamanḡā* by the Kurds and the Trumpets by the Franks.”⁵⁴ This passage can be traced back to the fourteenth century and was copied among other things from *Kitāb al-Mizān fī ‘ilm al-adwār wa-l-awzān*.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, this is still a very late date. It is hardly credible that the Arabs could have grown to appreciate the *rabāb* as a musical instrument in a war context by the fourteenth century. However, this text nowhere says that the Arabs looked upon the *rabāb* as an Arabian instrument.

The tradition in the Maghreb, says Farmer, is that the (boat-shaped) *rabāb* was invented in al-Andalus by an Arab during his captivity among the Christians. This is based on a legend, originally transmitted orally, that Delphin and Guin tell in their account of poetry and music in Algeria, published in 1886.⁵⁶ To make his stay in jail comfortable, it says, the prisoner hollowed out a big log. He made strings from the innards of the animals slaughtered to feed the prisoners; a piece of reed served as a bridge. At first he only plucked the strings, then after much trial and error, he made a bow. Amazed at his skill, the jailers brought the news to the king, who summoned the prisoner to court. The king was so pleased by his skill that he eventually set him free. The legend continues, saying that a skilled craftsman named ‘Abd as-Salām later made a similar instrument out of jujube wood and undertook some improvements to the sound box.⁵⁷ But as beautiful as this story is, it remains a legend.

Finally, Farmer states that “the *rabāb* was ‘mentioned’ by writers in Spain before the time of Al-Shaqundī (d. 1231), and that it had ‘artistic merit’ is evident from the poets Abū Bakr Yaḥyā ibn Hudḡail (d. 995 [recte: 999]), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) and others.”⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥazm az-Zāhirī (d. 456/1064), the great polymath, historian, jurist, philosopher, theologian and poet from Córdoba, was known for his permissive attitude towards music and listening to music; he even composed a work in which he doubts and rejects the authenticity of the hadiths that forbid making and listening to music.⁵⁹ When he was discussing the lawfulness of musical instruments in general, he did not mention the *rabāb*, for there is not a single tradition of the Prophet naming that instrument. Farmer, however, refers his readers to an *urḡūza*, i.e. a didactic poem in the meter *raḡaz*, in Šihāb ad-Dīn al-Ḥiḡāzī’s (1795–1857) song-text collection *Safīnat al-mulk wa-naḡīsat al-fulk*, where Šihāb ad-Dīn enumerates the musical instruments (*ālāt at-ṭarab wa-l-lahw*) and defends the “lawfulness of listening to them following the doctrine of Ibn Ḥazm.”⁶⁰ This poem does not directly quote Ibn Ḥazm.

52 “Risāla fī faḡl ‘ilm al-mūsīqī” (Farmer 1931, p. 100 [p. 112]).

53 Ibid.

54 “fa-innā lā nadrī tā’ifatan illā wa-lahā ‘inda ḡarbiḡā šay’un min ālāti l-aḡāmi yuḡrū[na]ḡā maḡrā s-silāḡi fī l-ḡarbi ka-t-ṭubūli li-t-turki wa-r-rabābi li-l-‘arabi wa-l-kamanḡā li-l-kurdi wa-l-būqāti li-l-ifranḡ” (Anonymous 2, fol. 47v).

55 For more details see Maraqa 2015, pp. 63 and 76.

56 Farmer 1931, p. 100 (p. 112).

57 See Delphin/Guin 1886, pp. 56–60.

58 Farmer 1931, p. 106 (p. 118). See also Farmer 2012.

59 See Ibn Ḥazm 1987.

60 “al-qawli bi-ḡilli samā’ihā ‘alā maḡḡab Ibn Ḥazm” (Ḥiḡāzī 1856, pp. 472–474).

Farmer's source for Ibn Huḍayl at-Tamīmī (d. 389/999), one of the greatest poets of his generation in al-Andalus,⁶¹ is Madrid MS., No. 603, fol. 15,⁶² i.e. ms. No. DCIII (today RES/246) held at the National Library of Spain.⁶³ This Madrid manuscript is a copy, dated 701/1301, of Ibn ad-Darrāğ as-Sabtī's (d. 693/1293 or 1294) *Kitāb al-Imtā' wa-l-intifā' fī mas'alat samā' as-samā'*.⁶⁴

Kitāb al-Imtā' deals with the propriety of listening to music. It is divided into many sections. Of particular importance is a section on musical instruments which enumerates and comments on 31 instruments including the *rabāb*. Ibn ad-Darrāğ describes the *rabāb* as a well-known (*ma'rūf*) instrument that was mentioned by the šāfi'ī scholars, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111) in his *Ihyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*⁶⁵ and Ibn aṣ-Ṣabbāğ al-Bağdādī aṣ-Šāfi'ī (d. 477/1084) in his *aṣ-Šāmil fī l-fiqhi š-šāfi'ī*. Additionally, he cites verses by Ibn Huḍayl, which include a description of the instrument (metre: *al-munsariḥ*; vocalised throughout in the manuscript):

It [the *rabāb*] differs from the lute in its behaviour, but it has its shape, albeit smaller
Yet it encompasses the sounds from the wisdom of the bow when swinging back and forth
It looks, in the hands of its performer, as if it would saw my heart with it [the bow], without noticing⁶⁶

Ibn Huḍayl's authorship of this poem can be taken for granted since it appears in his *Diwan* though it is one verse longer there.⁶⁷ Important information emerges from the poem, and while some of it is of less interest to us here, it is relevant for organologists who are interested in the development of the shape of the *rabāb*. The poem clearly states that the *rabāb* had the same shape as the *'ūd*, though it was smaller. In this case, one may speak of a 'bowed lute', which makes the use of the bow the main distinguishing feature between the two instruments. Nevertheless, the fact that the fourth/tenth-century Andalusian poet from Córdoba, Ibn Huḍayl, describes a bowed *rabāb* in a poem provides compelling evidence for the existence of a bowed instrument in tenth-century al-Andalus. By the time of Ibn ad-Darrāğ, that is to say, the thirteenth century, the *rabāb* was evidently well known (*ma'rūf*) in al-Andalus.

The most important statement by Ibn ad-Darrāğ in connection with the *rabāb* – hitherto completely ignored – is that the word (or the instrument) itself is a *muwallad*.⁶⁸ In Arabic language and literature, the term *muwallad* refers to any word that is not found in the classical Arabic of pre-Islamic or early Islamic times, nor in its literature, hence: 'post-classical'. It denotes a word that is "not of pure Arab (Bedouin) stock", i.e. usually "a word newly derived from a known root".⁶⁹ This idea probably comes from the fact that the word *rabāb* as the name of a musical instrument does not appear in any Arabic lexicon prior to Ibn ad-Darrāğ's time, i.e. the seventh/thirteenth century.⁷⁰

61 For biographical details on Ibn Huḍayl see Vidal-Castro 2021.

62 Farmer 1931, p. 106 (p. 118).

63 See Robles 1889, pp. 249f.

64 See Ibn Ṣaqrūn 1982; partial English trans., see Robson 1953; studies of content see Robson 1958; Farmer 1939; Odeimi 1991. Farmer (1939, p. 21 [p. 151]) and Robson (1953, p. 1; 1958, pp. 171f.) mistakenly attribute *Kitāb al-Imtā'* to the copyist Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm aṣ-Šalāḥī.

65 Ġazālī (1982, p. 272) categorises the *rabāb* (or *rubāb*) as one of the unlawful instruments.

66 "Yuḥallifu l-'ūda fī taṣarrufihī / wa-h'wa 'alā ḥalqihī wa-in ṣağurā // Wa-innamā yaḥtawī 'alā nağamin / min ḥikami l-qawsi kullamā ḥaṭarā // Ka-annahū fī yaday muḥarrikihi / yanşuru qalbī bihi wa-mā ša'arā" (Ibn ad-Darrāğ n.d., fol. 15r).

67 Tamīmī 1996, p. 86. See also Ibn al-Kattānī 1966, p. 108.

68 Ibn ad-Darrāğ n.d., fol. 15r.

69 Cf. Editors et al. 2012.

70 Ibn ad-Darrāğ (n.d., fols. 15r, 17r) employs the term *muwallad* to refer to at least two additional instruments, the *šāhin* and *kīṭār*. The *ṭunbūr* and the *barbaṭ* are on the other hand Persian/foreign (*ağāmī*) words (ibid., fol. 17r).

Did the Arabs know the *rabāb* in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times? – *Argumentum ex silentio*

There is an absence of any information on bowed instruments prior to the fourth/tenth century, not only in all lexicographical and grammatical sources but also in all music treatises such as the works of Tābit b. Qurra (d. 288/901), al-Kindī (d. ca 252/866) or Ibn al-Munağğim (d. 300/911). They are also not to be found in any literary sources – neither poetry, nor in historical works or in works on cultural or social life. Why is there no mention of the *rabāb* in Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al-Andalusī’s (d. 328/940) *Kitāb al-‘Iqd*? Nor in Iṣbahānī’s (d. 356/967) *Kitāb al-Aḡānī*?⁷¹ Why is there no mention of the *rabāb* in early theological discourses or legal sources dealing with the lawfulness of music and other means of diversion, such as the works of Ibn Abī d-Dunyā (d. 281/894), al-Āğurrī (d. 360/970) and others? If we accept the attribution of what is probably the earliest work on dream divination (also known as oneiromancy), i.e. *Muntaḥab al-kalām fī tafsīr al-aḥlām*, compiled by Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusayn ad-Dārī at the beginning of the ninth/fifteenth century, to Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728), the traditionist and first renowned Muslim interpreter of dreams, then it would be legitimate to ask: why could an Arab in early times dream of musical instruments (*ālāt aṭ-ṭarab*) like the *barbaṭ*, *būq*, *duff*, *ḡulḡul*, *ṣanḡ*, *ṭabl*, *ṭunbūr*, *‘ūd*, and *mizmār*, as well as of dancing (*raqṣ*) and singing (*ḡinā*), all of which are discussed by Ibn Sīrīn, but not of the *rabāb*?⁷² The most likely answer is simply that it was unknown.⁷³

The absence of the *rabāb* in all these sources is a powerful argument that the Arabs did not know of this instrument in pre-Islamic or early Islamic times. If it indeed existed back then, it can only have played a marginal role or was perceived as ‘vulgar’.

Signs of the limited prevalence of the *rabāb* in major Arab urban centres after 300/900

When al-Fārābī (fourth/tenth century) informs us that he will generally be dealing with the instruments that are common or famous (*mašhūra*) in his lands (*bilādīnā*), this does not imply that all the instruments are equally popular or equally familiar to different people in different regions. In Baghdad, al-Fārābī’s town (*balda*), for example, one could find both the *ṭunbūr al-baḡdādī* and *al-ḥurasānī*, but the former was far more famous, hence it was discussed first. The wind instruments are various and too numerous for them all to be dealt with, says al-Fārābī, so he confines himself to the discussion of those common in his town, i.e., the *nāy*, *sunrāy* and *dūnāy* (the last of these being less common than the first two). When he discusses the *rabāb*, he does not state whether or not it was famous or common in his town of Baghdad.⁷⁴ In any case, how popular was the *rabāb* in Baghdad in the first half of the fourth/tenth century?

Abū ‘Alī al-Muḥassin at-Tanūḥī’s (d. 384/994) *Niṣwār al-muḥāḍara wa-aḥbār al-muḍākara* recounts a story that may offer some clues. At-Tanūḥī, the son of a learned *qāḍī* in Basra, received his early education there from aṣ-Ṣūlī (d. 336/947) and Abū l-Faraḡ al-Iṣbahānī (d. 356/967) and others. He chose a judicial career and rose to be *qāḍī*, first in Baghdad and then in Ahwaz. In the *Niṣwār*, it was at-Tanūḥī’s purpose to record interesting facts which had come to his

71 Sawa says “the term *rabāb* is not found in *K[itāb al-]A[ḡānī]*”. See Sawa 2021a, p. 143n; Sawa 2015.

72 See Ibn Sīrīn 2002.

73 When the *rabāb* became the subject of dream interpretation is difficult to determine. The earliest evidence I am aware of comes from the second half of the ninth/fifteenth century. See Zāhirī 1993, pp. 465–469, esp. p. 468.

74 Fārābī 1967, pp. 629f., 771, 780–800.

knowledge by personal experience or by hearsay; in general he avoided matters which had already appeared in books. There we read the following story under the title “a debate over the *rabāb* between the judge and some virtuous man”:

I heard the judge Abū l-Qāsim Ġaʿfar b. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Hāsimī say: “I was in the presence of the judge Abū ʿUmar in privacy and congeniality, sometime after he had accepted my attestation, and we went over the topic of musical instruments.” So I said: “So-and-so beats the *rabāb*.” Hereupon the judge Abū ʿUmar yelled and said: “Huh, are you making fun of us, are you mocking us? What are you saying?” So, I said: “What is it, may God protect our judge? God knows that nothing I have said has to do with what our judge said!” He [Abū ʿUmar] said: “you are saying *beat*, as if you would not know that, in order to sound, the *rabāb* is bowed, not *beaten*”. There I firmly swore that I did not know that and that I have never seen the *rabāb* before. There he said: “this is even worse, for the path of the pious is to know the courses of depravity in order to intentionally avoid them, not unconsciously”. Thereafter, I went back to my place and said to a stableman who accompanied me: “Woe betide you, go and look for a *rabāb*-player”. So he did and came back with one! This [man] then bowed it in front of me and I saw that what Abū ʿUmar said was true.⁷⁵

There is a great deal of contradictory information in the historical records about the man telling the story, i.e. al-Qāḍī Abū l-Qāsim Ġaʿfar, whose dates of birth and death remain uncertain. We do, however, know more about Abū ʿUmar al-Qāḍī, a judge and later a chief judge (*qāḍī l-quḍāt*) in the city of al-Manṣūr (today a district of Baghdad). His name was Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Azdī. He was born in Basra in 243/857 and died in Baghdad in 320/932. So here we have our *terminus ante quem* for the story, i.e. the year 320/932, the year of the death of the chief judge. Abū l-Qāsim, the other, younger judge and the narrator of the story, informs us that his meeting with Abū ʿUmar al-Qāḍī took place shortly after the latter accepted his attestation as a judge, something that he could only have done as a chief judge with authority over all the *qāḍīs* and authorisation to appoint and dismiss them. So if we could determine the date when Abū ʿUmar al-Azdī took over the position of the chief judge, we would have our *terminus post quem* for the story. The biographers provide us with this date. It is the year 317/929. So the story must have taken place between 317/929 and 320/932. We learn two things from this story: first, that the *rabāb* existed in Baghdad by 318/930 and, secondly, that it was definitely played with the bow. This information corresponds with what we already know from al-Fārābī. However, it could not have been widespread, nor could it have been a courtly instrument.

75 “baḥṭun fi r-rabāb bayna l-qāḍī wa-aḥadi l-ʿudul. samiʿtu l-qāḍī Abā l-Qāsim Ġaʿfar ibn ʿAbd al-Wāḥid al-Hāsimī, yaqūl: kuntu bi-ḥaḍrati l-qāḍī Abī ʿUmar, baʿda qabūlihi šahādati bi-mudda, ʿalā ḥalwatin wa-uns, fa-ḡarā ḥadiṭu l-malāhi. fa-qultu: fulānun yaḍribu bi-r-rabāb. qāla: fa-šāḥa ʿalayya l-qāḍī Abū ʿUmar, wa-qāl: hāh, huwaḍā tahzaʿu binā, huwaḍā tunammisu ʿalaynā? mā ḥadā l-kalām? fa-qultu: mā huwa ayyada llāhu l-qāḍī? fa-wa-llāhi, mā adri annī qultu šayʿan yataʿallaqu bi-mā qālahu l-qāḍī. fa-qāla: qawluka yaḍribu, ka-annaka lā taʿlamu anna r-rabāba yuḡarru ḥattā yusmaʿa šawtuhū, wa-lā yuḍrabu bihi. fa-ḥalaftu lahū bi-aymānin muḡallaḏatin annī mā ʿalimtu ḥadā, wa-lā raʿaytu r-rabāba qatṭu. fa-qāla: inna ḥadā aqbah, sabīlu š-šālihi an yaʿlama ṭuruqa l-fasādi li-yaḡtanibahā ʿalā bašīratin, lā ʿalā ḡahl. fa-ʿudtu ilā dāri, fa-qultu li-sāʿisin kāna maʿī: waylaka ṭlub li rabābiyan. fa-ṭalabahū, wa-ḡāʿa bihi, fa-ḡarrahū bayna yadayhi, fa-raʿaytuhū, fa-kāna mā qālahū Abū ʿUmar šahīḥan” (Tanūḥī 1995, p. 170).

Indications for the non-Arabian origin of the *rabāb*

The earliest authority to mention the *rabāb* in connection with Persia and Central Asia was Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Ḥwārazmī (fl. 366–387/976–997), who, according to Farmer, informs us that “the *rabāb* is well known to the people of Persia and Khurāsān”.⁷⁶ This quote is from al-Ḥwārazmī’s *Mafātiḥ al-‘ulūm* (‘Keys of the sciences’), dedicated to Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Ubaydallāh b. Aḥmad al-‘Utbi, vizier to the Sāmānid Nūḥ II Ibn Maṣṣūr (366–387/976–997), at whose court in Bukhara al-Ḥwārazmī appears to have served. *Mafātiḥ al-‘ulūm* is a dictionary of basic technical terms drawn from many disciplines, in particular those terms which were left out of current lexica. It is divided into two roughly equal discourses dealing respectively with the religious sciences (‘*ulūm aṣ-ṣarī‘a*) and the Arabic sciences associated with them, and the ‘foreign’ sciences (‘*ulūm al-aḡam*). The second discourse contains a section (*bāb*) on music which is divided into three chapters: the first is on “the names of the instruments of this art”, the second on “the generalities of music which are mentioned in the books of the learned”, and the third on “current rhythms”.⁷⁷

Farmer provided a translation of the section on music. Relevant for us at this point is the part about musical instruments (words in parentheses and square brackets below are Farmer’s; omissions are by the present writer):

As for ‘music’ (*mūsīqay*), its meaning is the composition of melodies (*alḥān*). The word is Greek, and it is called ‘the delighting’ (*al-muṭrib*). The composer of melodies is the *mūsīqūr* and *mūsīqār*. The *urghānūn* (organ) is an instrument of the Greeks (*ὄργανον*) and Byzantines, and it is made of three large buffalo skins: and there is mounted upon the head of the middle bag a large skin. Then there are mounted upon the skin brass pipes having holes upon well known ratios from which are omitted beautiful sounds, pleasing and melancholy, according to what the player desires. The *salbāq* [σαμβύκη] is a stringed instrument of the Greeks and Byzantines resembling the *jank* [or harp of the Arabs]. The *lūr* [or lyre] is [the name of] the *ṣanj* [of the Arabs] in Greek [λύρα]. The *qīṭāra* (guitar) is [also] an instrument of theirs [i.e. the Byzantines], and it resembles the *tunbūr* [or pandore of the Arabs]. The *tunbūr al-mizānī* (measured pandore) is [also] known as the [*tunbūr al-*] *baghdādī*, the long-necked pandore. The *rabāb* [viol: or *rubāb*, a kind of double-chested lute], is well known to the people of Persia and Khorasan. The *mi‘zafa* was an instrument of [many] strings used by the people of Iraq. The *mustaq* (mouth organ) is an instrument of China made of pipes fitted together [in an air chamber]. Its name in Persian is *bīsha mushta*. The *nāy* is the [Arabic] *mizmar* [reed-pipe]. The *surnāy* is the [Arabic] *ṣaffāra*, and similarly the *yarā‘* [flute]. [...] The *ṣanj* is [the Arabic name for] the Persian *chang*, and it is an instrument possessed of strings. Al-Khalīl says that the *ṣanj* with the Arabs is that [jingling plate] which is heard in the tambourines (*dufūf*). [...] As for the *ṣanj* which is a stringed instrument, it is an Arabicized word, and it is but the *wanj*. The *shahrūd* [or grand *rūd*] is a modern instrument invented by Ḥakam ibn Aḥwaṣ al-Sughdī in Baghdad in the year 300/912. The *barbaṭ* is the [Arabic] ‘ūd (lute), and the word is Persian [...].⁷⁸

Based on Farmer’s interpretation of the text, it is obvious that al-Ḥwārazmī endeavoured to attribute each of the instruments known to him to a people or a specific inventor.

In some cases, however, Farmer contributes to the text by assigning in square brackets some of the instruments to the Arabs or Persians, such as the *ḡank*, which he identified as the “harp

⁷⁶ Farmer 1931, p. 101 (p. 113); cf. Farmer 1958, p. 3 (p. 455).

⁷⁷ Farmer 1958, pp. 1–9 (pp. 453–461).

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 2f. (pp. 454f.).

of the Arabs”; the *ṭunbūr* which is the “pandore of the Arabs”; and the *‘ūd*, *mizmār*, *saffāra* (also *yarā*) are Arabian and correspond to the Persian *barbat*, *nāy* and *surṇāy* respectively.

In a few cases, it is not clear whether the instrument belongs to a people or is just known to them or played by them, such as the *rabāb* and the *mi‘zafa*. The first, according to Farmer’s interpretation, was “well known to the people of Persia and Khorasan”, while the second was “used by the people of Iraq”. In neither case can one tell if the instrument indeed belongs to the people it is associated with. Actually, Farmer is convinced that the former phrase can be simply explained by the fact that al-Ḥ^wārazmī was writing in the land of the Sāmānids. In other words, these people could have become masters in *rabāb*-playing, though this need not cast doubt on whether the *rabāb* was also known and played in Syria and Mesopotamia.⁷⁹

Al-Ḥ^wārazmī’s original text on which Farmer based his interpretation was published by Gerlof van Vloten in 1895.⁸⁰ In his edition, van Vloten collated approximately five manuscript copies, thereby establishing the text as a reliable source. A closer look at the edited text, however, casts doubt on Farmer’s interpretation of some passages.⁸¹

When assigning instruments to people, al-Ḥ^wārazmī’s use of the Arabic possessive preposition “*li-*” (lit. “of”; “belongs to”) is obvious. However, Farmer is not always consistent with his interpretation of these cases, as the following examples show:

al-Ḥ ^w ārazmī (ed. by van Vloten)	Farmer’s interpretation
“ <i>li-l-yūnāniyīn wa-r-rūm</i> ”	“of the Greek and Byzantines”
“ <i>la-hum</i> ”	“of theirs” [i.e. Greek and Byzantines]
“ <i>ma‘rūfun li-ahli Fāris wa-Ḥurāsān</i> ”	“well known to the people of Persia and Khorasan”
“ <i>li-ahli l-‘Irāq</i> ”	“used by the people of Iraq”
“ <i>li-ṣ-Ṣīn</i> ”	“of China”

Why does his interpretation differ in two places? Why does “*li-ahli l-‘Irāq*” become “used by the people of Iraq”? The context is clear; the passage in Arabic reads: “*al-mi‘zafa ālatun dātu awtārin l-ahli l-‘Irāq*”. The interpretation should be, whether plausible or not: “the *mi‘zafa* is a stringed instrument of the people of Iraq”. This corresponds to the other cases where al-Ḥ^wārazmī uses the possessive preposition “*li-*”.

The other question pertains to Farmer’s interpretation concerning the *rabāb*. He translates “*ma‘rūfun li-*” as “known to”. The word “*ma‘rūf*” is the passive participle of the verb ‘*araḥa*. Used as an attribution in the sense of ‘well known’, ‘famous’, ‘popular’ etc., it is a technical term among lexicographers, who use it with words that require no definition or any further explanation. The possible examples are too many to list, but here are a few with regard to musical terminology from the earliest Arabic lexicon *Kitāb al-‘Ayn* by al-Ḥalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/791):⁸²

79 Farmer 1931, p. 99 (p. 111).
80 Ḥ^wārazmī 1895. The section on music runs from p. 235 to p. 246.
81 Although this is not the place to evaluate or correct Farmer’s interpretation or to question his attributions of other instruments, since what really concerns us here is the question of the origin of the *rabāb*, there are nevertheless a few things that are worth commenting on. For example, Farmer’s statement that “music” (*mūsīqay* [sic]) is called “the delighting” (*al-muṭrib*), while the composer of melodies is the *mūsīqūr* or *mūsīqār*. The original passage reads, however: “*al-mūsīqī ma‘nāhu ta‘līfu l-alḥāni wa-l-lafẓatu yūnāniya wa-summiya l-muṭribu wa-mu‘allifu l-alḥāni al-mūsīqūr wa-l-mūsīqār*” (Ḥ^wārazmī 1895, p. 236). It is much more likely that “*muṭrib*” here means the “singer” or anyone who causes others to be affected with *ṭarab*, i.e. a lively emotion or delightful excitement. Thus the terms *mūsīqūr* or *mūsīqār* refer not only to *mu‘allif al-alḥān* (composer of melodies), but also the *muṭrib* (performer, singer, etc.).
82 See Farāhīdī 2003, Vol. 2, p. 417; Vol. 3, pp. 37 and 345.

Example	Translation
“aṣ-ṣanġu l-‘abdu wa-ṣ-ṣanġu ma‘rūf ”	the <i>ṣanġ</i> is the slave, and the [other] <i>ṣanġ</i> [i.e. the harp] is well known
“al-wataru ma‘rūf , wa-ġam‘uhū awtār”	the <i>watar</i> [i.e. the string, cord, nerve, gut, etc.] is well known , its plural is <i>awtār</i>
“ṭabl: aṭ-ṭablu ma‘rūf . wa-fi‘luhu t-ṭaṭbil. wa-ḥirfatuhu ṭ-ṭibāla, wa-yaġūzu: ṭabala yaṭbulu, wa-huwa du l-waġhi l-wāḥidi wa-l-waġhayn [...]”	<i>ṭabl</i> : the <i>ṭabl</i> [i.e. the drum] is well known ; <i>ṭaṭbil</i> is the infinitive noun; <i>ṭibāla</i> is the art, or occupation, of beating; also: <i>ṭabala</i> [past tense]; <i>yaṭbulu</i> [present tense]; it is the single-faced or double-faced [drum]

In his *al-Muḥīṭ fi l-luġa*, aṣ-Ṣāḥib Ibn ‘Abbād (d. 385/995) defines the *ṭunbūr* as “*ma‘rūf*”, i.e. “well known” or “needs no further definition”.⁸³ It is in this sense that al-Ḥwārazmī used the term “*ma‘rūf*”.⁸⁴

Based on this, the phrase “ar-rabāb ma‘rūf li-ahli Fāris wa-Ḥurāsān” should be interpreted as follows: “The *rabāb* is well known; it is [an instrument] of the people of Persia and Khorasan”, rather than just “well known to the people of Persia and Khurasan”.⁸⁵ Whatever instrument is meant here, whether *rabāb*, the viol, or *rubāb*, the double-chested lute, it belongs, according to al-Ḥwārazmī, to the Persians and Khorasanis. From the perspective of an author active in Bukhara (in Khorasan), this interpretation arguably makes more sense, for there is no need to provide a definition of an instrument that belongs to the indigenous people of that region, just like there is no need to define for the Khorasanis what *čang* or the *ṭunbūr al-ḥurāsānī* are. On the contrary, these known instruments are used e.g. to describe the Greek and Byzantine instruments they resemble, like the *šilyāq* [Farmer reads *salbāq*] that resembles the *čang*; the lyre that resembles the *ṣanġ* (Arabicised from *čang*); or the *qītāra* that resembles the *ṭunbūr*. On the other hand, unknown instruments of other peoples are described in as much detail as possible, as in the *urġānūn* (organ) of the Greeks and Byzantines; the *mustaq* (mouth organ) of the Chinese; or the *ṣanġ* (jingling plate) of the Arabs.

Finally, if one considers the order in which the instruments are mentioned in *Maḥāṭiḥ al-‘ulūm*, one notes a sort of ordering of the material by “nation” or “region”. Al-Ḥwārazmī starts with the instruments of the Greeks and Byzantines. These are the *urġānūn*; *šilyāq*; *lūr*; and *qītārā*. These are then followed by the instruments of the Persians and Khorasanis and partly explained by them, which are: *čang*; *aṭ-ṭunbūr* [*al-ḥurāsānī*] as opposed to *aṭ-ṭunbūr al-baġdādī*,⁸⁶ and *ar-ra(u)bāb*. One example is provided for a Chinese instrument, i.e. the *mustaq*. There then follow instruments common to Persians, Khorasanis and Arabs: *nāy* (Arab. *mizmār*); *sur-nāy* (Arab. *ṣaffāra* or *yarā’*). Then come the instruments of the Arabs: the jingling plate *ṣanġ*, not to be confused with the stringed *ṣanġ* (Arabicised from Pers. *čang* and also known as *wanaġ*); and the ‘ūd (Pers. *barbaṭ*).

83 See Ibn ‘Abbād 1994, p. 245.

84 For example, one may consult his definition of the terms *taṣġī’* (rhyme-prosing), *fālġ* (hemiparalysis), *zaḥīr* (tenesmus), *iklīl al-malik* (king’s crown), *qātilu l-kilāb* (dogbane), *kusūf* (eclipse), and *lawlab* (screw) (Ḥwārazmī 1895, pp. 72, 159, 163, 173, 174, 222 and 248).

85 In Farmer 1929 (p. 210) it is stated that “*rabāb* or *rebec*, appears to have to been specially favored in Khurāsān, although it must have had considerable support in Arabs lands since it passed for a national instrument”.

86 It is unclear why Farmer attributes the first of the two types of the *ṭunbūr* mentioned by al-Ḥwārazmī to the Arabs, for if the second is the one known as *al-mizānī* and *al-baġdādī*, the first must be the one referred to by others as *al-ḥurāsānī*. While *al-baġdādī*, according to al-Fārābī, is far more famous in Baghdad, as well as in the surrounding countries and those to the south and west (hence discussed first in his *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī l-kabīr*), *al-ḥurāsānī* is more common in the lands of Khorasan, the surrounding countries and those to the north and east. See Fārābī 1967, pp. 629f.

Bearing the above in mind, it is more than likely that the *rabāb* was considered by al-Ḥwārazmī to have been of Persian or Khorasani (i.e. Central Asian) origin.⁸⁷ Farmer seems to have misunderstood this. His interpretation was rather misleading, especially when we consider that nobody can easily question his authority in oriental languages.

Al-Ḥwārazmī's account of Greek and Byzantine instruments lacks any reference to bowed instruments. However, the third/ninth-century authority and high-ranking Persian functionary, littérateur, and courtier in the 'Abbāsīd administration, Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih (d. ca 300/913), informs us in his *Kitāb al-Lahw wa-l-malāhī* ('Book on diversion and instruments of diversion') of the existence of a Byzantine (*rūm*) instrument called *lūrā* [= *λύρα*]. "The *lūrā*", he says, "is the *rabāb*" (*wa-lahum al-lūrā wa-hiya r-rabāb*); it is made of wood (*ḥaṣab*) and has five strings (*awtār*).⁸⁸ Farmer identifies the *lūrā* as the pear-shaped wooden viol "identical with the *rabāb* of the Arabs".⁸⁹ He indicates that the *lūrā* may be observed on a Byzantine ivory casket (dating from the tenth or early eleventh century⁹⁰) held at the Bargello National Museum in Florence, whereas "what the Arabian instrument was like" is revealed by the frescos adorning the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel at Palermo (dating from the twelfth century).⁹¹ Farmer proposed that the favoured type of *rabāb* at the time of Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih was the pear-shaped instrument.⁹² In his opinion, it was most likely this specific form of the *rabāb* that al-Fārābī discussed, and of which he provided comprehensive information regarding both its *accordatura* and scales.⁹³ Due to an erroneous dating of the iconographic evidence, Farmer concludes that the Byzantines possessed a bowed instrument in the eighth or ninth century. Consequently, he posits that the Arabs must have had it as well, and perhaps even earlier.⁹⁴ He even went so far as to assert that the Byzantines had borrowed the *rabāb* from the Arabs.⁹⁵ In fact, there is no causal connection in Farmer's conclusions. Despite the erroneous dating of the iconographic evidence, the fact that the Byzantines had bowed instruments as early as the ninth century (or even, although very unlikely, the eighth) does not necessarily imply that this was also the case with the Arabs. Furthermore, Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih does not associate the *rabāb* with the Arabs in any way. This association was first proposed by Farmer. It is likely that Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih's intention was not to suggest that the *rabāb* was identical to the *lūrā*, but rather that it was comparable in terms of execution and playing method. Additionally, there is also no evidence to suggest that

87 This correlates with the findings of Werner Bachmann (1964), which indicate that bowing and bowed instruments originated in Central Asia.

88 Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih 1961, p. 17. Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih's text was briefly cited by Mas'ūdī 2005, pp. 175–181, here p. 176. Mas'ūdī's text was included as a second appendix to 'Azzāwī 1951, pp. 92–101, here p. 95. It was also included as an appendix to Ibn Salama 1984, pp. 31–54, esp. pp. 39f. For a discussion of the section under consideration, see Farmer 1925b. Besides the *lūra*, Ibn Ḥurraḍāḍbih mentions the *arḡan* (*ὀργانون*), which has sixteen strings, a wide compass, and is of ancient Greek origin; the *šilyāq*, which has twenty-four strings and is interpreted as meaning "a thousand voices" (lit. *χίλιοι ἦχοι*); the *qīthāra* (*κιθάρα*), which has twelve strings; and the *šalīḡ* (?), which is made of calf skins (probably a bagpipe?).

89 Farmer 2012.

90 The dating provided here is based on Goldschmidt/Weitzmann 1930, p. [5], cf. also pp. 37f.; Bachmann 1964, p. 47. Farmer (1930, p. 20; 2012) asserts that the casket is of eighth- or ninth-century origin. This erroneous dating seems to be based on Schlesinger 1910, pp. 408 and 493.

91 Farmer 2012. The relief on the Italo-Byzantine ivory casket in Florence (Coll. Carrand, No. 26) shows a boy seated on an acanthus leaf while playing a bowed instrument. See Goldschmidt/Weitzmann 1930, plates XX, XXI; Bachmann 1964, plate 9. For images and commentary on the frescoes on the ceiling of the Palatine Chapel in Palermo depicting a *rabāb*, see Monneret 1950, p. 38 and plates 209, 240; Bachmann 1964, p. 41 and plate 21; Farmer 1966, pp. 58f.; Gramit 1985, pp. 18–20 and plates 2, 11, 12.

92 Farmer 1931, p. 106 (p. 118).

93 Farmer 2012; Farmer 1957, esp. p. 445 (p. 175).

94 Farmer 1931, p. 101 (p. 113).

95 Farmer 1930, p. 20.

al-Fārābī's *rabāb* was the pear-shaped *rabāb*, comparable to the Byzantine *lūrā*; if this was the case, he would have informed us. It should be noted that Ibn Ḥurraḍābih spent his career in the capitals Baghdad and Sāmarrā' as well as in Western Iran.⁹⁶ For this reason, the *rabāb* he is referring to was most likely the *rabāb* of the Persians and Khorasanis.

In his discussion of musical instruments in *Ḥāwī l-funūn wa-salwat al-maḥzūn* ('Collector of the Arts and Consolidation of the Vexed'), written during the time of the Fāṭimīd caliph az-Zāhir (r. 411–427/1021–1036), the Egyptian Ibn at-Ṭaḥḥān (d. after 449/1057) was very dependent on Ibn Ḥurraḍābih.⁹⁷ For this reason, he states that the *rabāb* is also a Byzantine instrument (*mina l-ālāti r-rūmiya ayḍan*) that is called *lūrā*. It has three, four, five, or six strings. However, he adds that "it is also said, that it was rather invented by the people of Sind" (*wa-yuqālu bal huwa min 'amali s-sind*).⁹⁸

The Persian historian Aḥmad b. Yahyā al-Balāḍurī (d. 279/892) relates in his history of the Muslim conquests, *Futūḥ al-buldān*, a story of a bath (*ḥammām*) in Basra, which was demolished and became a "*rabāb* workshop" during his lifetime.⁹⁹ In those days, Basra was inhabited by the Zuṭṭ (Middle Indo-Aryan: Ḡaṭṭa), which is the name of a northwestern Indian people found particularly in the Punjab, Sind, Rajasthan and western Uttar Pradesh, members of whom were brought into the Persian Gulf region in the first Islamic centuries and possibly earlier. There may have been further migrations of Zuṭṭ from India to the southern provinces of Persia and Lower Iraq during early 'Abbāsīd times (third/ninth century).¹⁰⁰ That the Indians (*al-hind*) were well known for their "wonderful singing" (*ḡinā' mu'ḡib*), "various dances" (*ḍurūb ar-raḡs*), "beautiful voice" (*ḡawdat aṣ-ṣawt*) and for their female singers especially if they were of the Sind (*al-qiyān iḍā kunna min banāti s-sind*), was attested to by the great Arab man of letters from Basra, al-Ḡāḥiẓ (d. 255/868–9).¹⁰¹ Did the Indians introduce the *rabāb* into the lands of the Arabs?

In conclusion, the early sources discussed above indicate that the *rabāb*, regardless of its form, was a bowed instrument of the Persians and Khorasanis. It exhibited some resemblance to the Byzantine *lūrā*, most likely in regard to the application of the bow, rather than in shape. It has also been suggested that it was invented by the people of the Sind,¹⁰² while there is nowhere any clear reference to an Arabian origin.

Evidence for the *rabāb* in early Persian Lexicography

Is the word *rabāb* mentioned in early Persian lexicographical sources? Persian dictionaries do not predate the fifth/eleventh century. The first and second extant monolingual dictionaries, i.e. *Loḡat-e Fors* (ca 458/1066) by Asadī Tūsī (d. 465/1072) and *Ṣaḥāḥo l-Fors* (728/1328) by Naḥḡavānī (d. ca 778/1376), as well as the first dictionary compiled in India, i.e. *Farhang-e Qawwās* by Faḥr ad-Dīn Mobārakšāh Qawwās, a poet at the court of 'Alā' ad-Dīn Ḥalḡī (695–715/1295–1316), do not make any reference to the bowed instrument *rabāb*. However, all three

96 Zadeh 2021.

97 See Sawa 2021a, p. 276.

98 "wa-yuqālu bal huwa min 'amali s-sind" (Ṭaḥḥān n.d., fol. 107v [p. 212]). For more information on and details especially about at-Tifāšī's adaptation of Ibn at-Ṭaḥḥān's text in his *Mut'at al-asmā' fī 'ilm as-samā'*, see Sawa 2021a, pp. 269–278.

99 "wa-mawḍi'uhu l-yawma yu'malu fihi r-rabāb" (Balāḍurī 1901, p. 379).

100 Bosworth 2012.

101 See Hārūn 1979, Vol. 1, pp. 223f.

102 The role of the Indians would have been limited to the introduction of the bow or the first bowed instrument in the Arab territories, for the theories about the Indian origin of bowed instruments are untenable and have been disproved. See Bachmann 1964, pp. 15–17, 163.

mention an instrument by the name *šōšak*, *šōršak*, or *šāšak*, which they define as a four-stringed *robāb*, or *čahārtār*.

Ketāb al-Bolğa al-motarğem fi l-loğa, compiled in 438/1046 by Ya‘qūb Kordī Nišāpūrī (fifth/eleventh century), is perhaps the earliest Arabic-Persian topical dictionary. It comprises forty chapters (*bāb*) listing Arabic words and phrases with Persian glosses. In the ninth chapter dealing with the names of instruments and tools used in different professions (*fi adavāte š-šonnā‘ va-l-mohtarefīn*), there is a sub-chapter on the names of musical instruments (*faṣl fi adavāte l-‘avvād*; literally, instruments of the ‘ūd-player). One of these instruments is *ar-rabāb*. While Nišāpūrī provides a Persian equivalent for all words of Arabic origin, such as *barbaṭ* for *al-‘ūd*; *rūd* (string) for *šir‘a* and *watar*; *zohme* (plectrum) for *miḍrāb*; *bīše* for *yarā‘* etc., he defines the words that are already of Persian origin, that have no other special term in Persian, or that were Arabised, simply as *ma‘rūf*, i.e. ‘well known’. These words are: *zīr*, *bamm*, *daff*, *šanğ*, *ṭunbūr* and *rabāb*.¹⁰³

In 497/1104, Abū l-Faḍl al-Maydānī (d. 518/1124) compiled another Arabic-Persian topical dictionary of common terms and words, similar to *Ketāb al-Bolğa*, entitled *as-Sāmī fi l-asāmī*. Section 2, chapter 8 is on the names of instruments and tools used in different professions. It includes a sub-chapter on the names of musical instruments.¹⁰⁴ Abū l-Faḍl’s system is similar to that of Ya‘qūb Kordī Nišāpūrī; Arabic words are translated into Persian, Persian words or those that are identical in Persian are either repeated like *ṭunbūr*, *nāy* and *daff*, or defined by means of the letter “m” for “ma‘rūf”, such as *rabāb*, *zīr* and *bamm*.

The Arabic-Persian dictionary entitled *al-Merqāt* and attributed to Adīb Naṭanzī (fifth/eleventh century) covers the traditional range of topics in twelve chapters, each with sub-chapters, without any alphabetical ordering. Chapter 2 (classes of people and professions) contains a sub-chapter on instrumentalists, musical vocabulary and instruments. Naṭanzī translates thirty musical terms from Arabic into Persian, among which ten are musical instruments. One instrument is missing, and that is the *rabāb*. It was obviously not considered an Arabic word.¹⁰⁵ It is, however, included in Zamaḥṣarī’s (d. 538/1143) famous bilingual dictionary *Moqaddema to l-adab* (*Pīshrav-i adab*; lit. “Prolegomenon to literacy”). The Mu‘tazilī polymath of Ḥ‘ārazm and author of the important Arabic dictionary *Asās al-balāğā* divides his work into five sections (*qesm*), of which the first two are lengthy lexical lists, one for nouns, the other for verbs, supplied with Persian (or other) glosses. In his list of musical terms he unambiguously states by means of the letter “f” (for “fārsī”, i.e. Persian) that *rabāb*, *ṭunbūr* and *daff* are either Persian words or used identically in both languages. The former possibility is more likely, if we consider all other similar cases in Zamaḥṣarī’s work.¹⁰⁶

It is important to note that in all these sources the word was given fully vocalised as *rabāb*, not *robāb*. So it can only be the bowed *rabāb*, and not the lute. Based on the above, it becomes obvious that the name *rabāb* found its way into the Persian lexicographical sources before the Arabic ones.

103 Nišāpūrī 1977, pp. 120f.

104 Maydānī 1966, pp. 204–206.

105 Naṭanzī 1967, pp. 55f.

106 Zamaḥṣarī 1843, pp. 54f.

Conclusion

The arguments and evidence presented above demonstrate that the Arabs in the early Islamic period were rather unaware of the *rabāb*. It can be argued that, prior to the fourth/tenth century, it was not regarded as a courtly musical instrument and that its role was marginalised or perceived as ‘vulgar’. It is notable that no term denoting a bowed musical instrument is found in any of the earliest lexicographical sources. This is particularly striking, given that these early sources were compiled during a period of flourishing Arabic lexicography when scholars were engaged in a competitive endeavour to collect lexicographical data and produce a vast array of thesauri. The etymological explanation provided by Farmer for the *rabāb* is not corroborated by any source. In addition, the earliest musical writings and literary works do not mention any bowed string instruments, let alone the *rabāb*. Furthermore, the limited reliable references to the *rabāb* in the literature from shortly before 300/900 onwards indicate that the instrument’s origins are likely to be Persian-Khorasani, rather than purely Arabian. This is consistent with previous research indicating that bowing and bowed instruments originated in Transoxiana, or Central Asia.¹⁰⁷

It is reasonable to posit that this development occurred during the third/ninth century. The precise date of arrival of the *rabāb* or the bow in the central (e.g. Iraq and Syria) and western regions (Egypt, North Africa, and al-Andalus) of the Arabic-Islamic Empire is uncertain, as are the different possible routes it may have taken. However, it is clear that this cannot have occurred prior to the fourth/tenth century. Consequently, the assertion that the “Oriental Rebab came to Spain with the Moors in the eighth century”¹⁰⁸ is untenable.

The literary testimonies of Ibn Ḥurradādhbih, al-Ḥ^wārazmī, al-Fārābī and Ibn Huḍayl demonstrate that by the end of the fourth/tenth century, the bow in particular, or bowed instruments in general, regardless of their type, were known in Byzantium, Bukhara, western Persia, Baghdad, Syria and al-Andalus. This implies that the area of their distribution roughly corresponds to the extent of the Arab-Islamic and Byzantine empires.

Finally, should we accept that the bowed *rabāb* originated in Central Asia, it would be reasonable to assume that the word itself is rooted in one of the Middle Iranian languages. It is evident that a considerable number of musical instruments documented in Arabic sources had Persian names that were either retained or Arabicised. These include the horizontal angular harp *vin* (Arabicised as *wann/wanağ*), the light vertical angular harp *čang* (Arabicised as *ğank/šanğ*), the short-necked lute *barba(u)t*, the long-necked lute *tan(m)būr* (Arabicised as *ṭunbūr*), the reed pipe *sornāy* (Arabicised as *surnāy*), the forked cymbals *čagāna* (Arabicised as *šağāna*), the hourglass drum *kūba*, and so forth. This prompts the question as to whether the word *rabāb* might also be Persian or have been Arabicised from a Persian word. The earliest bilingual Arabic-Persian dictionaries convey the impression that the word is more likely to be Persian. In the event that the word *rabāb*, as a name of a musical instrument, was indeed of Arabic origin and subsequently entered other languages, including Persian, then it could have only been a *muwallad*, i.e. a neologism derived from a known root, as was proposed by Ibn ad-Darrāğ, for it is not found in the classical Arabic of pre-Islamic or early Islamic times.

107 Although not entirely convincing in all respects, see e.g. Bachmann 1964, pp. 53–70, 163; more recently, see Bachmann et al. 2021.

108 Panum 1971, p. 343.

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Rabab, Rubeba, Rubāb

Fellbespannte Streichinstrumente
im historischen und kulturellen Kontext

herausgegeben von

Thilo Hirsch, Marina Haiduk
und Thomas Gartmann

unter redaktioneller Mitarbeit von
Daniel Allenbach

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MUSIKFORSCHUNG DER HOCHSCHULE DER KÜNSTE BERN

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