This paper discusses an elaborate scene on a bronze vessel recently acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art showing the Buddha in a previous incarnation playing the harp. To put the scene in context an account is given of music in the life of the Buddha. While music figured at decisive moments of his life, its influence was hardly laudable. As a result, early Buddhist doctrine roundly condemned the enjoyment of instrumental music for monks. As extreme as this censure was, the opposite stance was adopted in the Mahāyāna sūtras that became popular in the East a millennium later. The sūtras held instrumental music to be one of the transcendental pleasures of Paradise, and musicians were depicted in paintings (see appendix I). But a less extreme position may have appealed to the Buddhist audience at large, judging from the popularity of the folk tale illustrated on the bronze vessel in the Metropolitan Museum. The tale is about a previous Buddha called Guttula who is a master musician. Since Guttula was not yet enlightened, his dedication to music was unproblematic.

The discussion of the Metropolitan Museum vessel follows after a brief review of music in the life of the Buddha. Appendix 2 deals with Guttula’s instrument, the vīṇā harp.

1. Music in the Life of the Buddha

Biographies of the Buddha exist in several versions written between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. but many crucial incidents are common. Some are associated with music.

During the Buddha’s first three decades he was more or less permanently immersed in music. Siddhārtha, to use the name given to the historical Buddha at his birth, was born ca. 565 B.C. in a small state located near the present border between India and Nepal. The state was ruled by a council and, since his father was a member, later tradition saw Siddhārtha as the son of a king. The doting father wanted to shield Siddhārtha from the miseries of life, from beggars, the sick, decrepit, aged and deformed, so the young prince was confined to three palaces, where he was surrounded by luxuries and sensuous female musicians. He was “happy as in Paradise” and passed the time with the noble music of singing-women… with tambourines whose frames were bound with gold and which sounded softly beneath the strokes of women’s fingers, and with dances that rivalled those of the beautiful Apsarases. There the women delighted him with their soft voices, charming blandishments, playful intoxications, sweet laughter, curvings of eyebrows.

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* I am grateful to Mr. Steven Kossak of The Metropolitan Museum of Art for help in procuring photographs of the bronze vessel.

1 All go back to a lost biography thought to have been composed within a century after the Buddha’s death, ca. 483 B.C. See Richard F. Gombrich, *Precept and Practice*, Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon (Oxford, 1971), 80.


and sidelong glances. Then, a captive to the women, who were skilled in the accessories of love
and indefatigable in sexual pleasure, he did not descend from the palace to the ground.\footnote{Johnston (supra n. 227), ii. 29–32.}

The same hedonistic life is described in the Mongolian version of the \textit{Lalitavistara}:\footnote{Nicholas Poppe, \textit{The Twelve Deeds of Buddha, a Mongolian Version} (Seattle, 1967), F 2v. The Mongolian text was translated ca. 1325 A.D. from a Tibetan version based on the Sanskrit original. The Mongolian illustrations are given by Poppe.}

He enjoyed the singing, more sonorous than that of the \textit{gandharva}-maidens, of maidens who were
skillful in playing flutes, blowing pipes, and beating drums. Amidst all this the following words
of \textit{gāthā} came with the sound of violins.\footnote{An inappropriate translation since violins did not appear until ca. 1520 A.D. See Emanuel Winternitz, “Early Violins in Paintings by Gaudenzio Ferrari and His School,” \textit{Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art} (New Haven and London, 1979), 99–109. The fourteenth-century manuscript has an illustration with ten musicians, two of whom play lutes and the rest (probably) percussion instruments. Since few of these instruments existed at the time of Gautama, the artist used contemporary instruments to illustrate an ancient text. This was also common practice among medieval Bible illustrators, especially when showing the “harp” of King David. — The Sanskrit version, \textit{Lalita-Vistara or Memoirs of the Early Life of Śākya Śītha} (Bibliotheca Indica, n.s. 473), trans. Rajendralala Mitra, (Calcutta, 1882), relates that “many hundreds of thousands of Apsarases appeared awaiting with conch-shells, clarions, drums, banners, and bells in their hands” when Gautama’s mother was preparing for his birth (\textit{ibid.}, 119), and multitudes engaged in singing, music, or pleasant conversation (\textit{ibid.}, 122). The garden where Gautama was born was filled with music for seven nights after the event (\textit{ibid.}, 114 ff.).}

And in the \textit{Nidānakathā}:

and he [the king] provided him with forty thousand dancing girls. So the Bodhisat, surrounded by
dressed dancing girls, … and attended by musical instruments which played of themselves.\footnote{Published as the introduction to Viggo Fausbøll and T. W. Rhys Davids, \textit{Buddhist Birth Stories or Jātaka Tales, Translation 1}, 1-131, (London, 1880), esp. 75.}

Siddhārtha seems to have been content with the listener’s role in music but that is probably not
because he lacked aptitude. Whenever he wanted to, Siddhārtha learned quickly. For example, when
taunted about his slack attitude, he practiced diligently and quickly won contests of strength,
archery, and arithmetic. Since only female musicians are mentioned in the biographies, music
making might not have been regarded as a fitting occupation for a prince.

The second important musical incident took place when Siddhārtha listened to a song describing
the delights of Nature. He left the palace to look at the world and saw sights that made him decide to
abandon court life, go out in the world alone, and seek Enlightenment. Back in the palace Siddhārtha
spent the last night surrounded by female musicians but their music had lost its former appeal.
Eventually, the musicians fell asleep and their sprawled bodies\footnote{Illustrated in Kaufmann (supra n. 3), fig. 103.} reminded the young prince of death
and decay.

Thereupon women clad in beautiful array, skilful in the dance and song, and lovely as heavenly
virgins, brought their musical instruments, and ranging themselves in order, danced, and sang,
and played delightfully. But the Bodhisat, his heart being estranged from sin, took no pleasure in
the spectacle, and fell asleep [as did the musicians]… The Bodhisat, waking up, saw them with
their stage properties laid aside and sleeping — some foaming at the mouth, some grinding their
teeth, some yawning, some muttering in their sleep, some gaping, and some with their dress in
disorder — plainly revealed as mere horrible sources of mental distress… Seeing this woeful change
in their appearance, he became more and more disgusted with lust.\footnote{\textit{Nidānakathā} (supra n. 8), 80 ff.}
The same scene is paralleled in the *Buddhacarita*:

But even those splendid instruments, like though they were to the music of the gods, failed to delight or thrill him... Thereon the deities taking cognisance of his resolve, all at once brought sleep there over the women and distorted the gestures of their limbs. One, as she lay there, supported her cheek on an unsteady hand, and, as if angry, abandoned her flute in her lap, dear though it was to her, with its decoration of gold leaf. Another, lying with her bamboo pipe in her hands and her white robe slipping off her breast... Similarly a third was sleeping, clapping her drum, as if it were her lover... When the king's son saw the young women lying in these different ways and looking so loathsome with their uncontrolled movements... he was moved to disgust.

At the age of twenty-nine Siddhārtha renounced the world and passed the rest of his life in pursuit of wisdom and in teaching. But a third musical encounter lay in store. By recalling good deeds done in his past lives he defeated the loathsome god Māra but the latter persuaded his daughters to try to seduce the Buddha and upset his quest of Nirvāṇa. The episode is related in *Lalitavistara*.

Each of them demonstrated the thirty-two kinds of feminine tricks which provoke lust... They moved their limbs like branches of trees shaken by the wind and, beating cymbals, they sang while dancing... When they had danced and sung, in this and many other ways, the Bodhisattva, calm and firm, self-possessed, with his smiling appearance the same, unafraid and separated from ignorance, spoke in the voice which pleases the heart and is more melodious than the voice of Brahmā and the singing of the *kalavinka* bird: "Such lust is the root of suffering. It leads such fools into evil!"

So far, music had had an thoroughly disreputable role in the life of the Buddha, but after his death the faithful gathered around his body and paid "homage to the remains of the Blessed One with dancing, and hymns, and music, and with garlands and perfumes." This continued for six days. Written *ca.* 300 B.C., this appreciative account of music gives a premonition of the Mahāyāna attitude.

Apparently, music was associated with states of utter depravity and sublime delight – with little in between. During the development of the Buddhist dogma of the Theravādins, music was viewed as the epitome of sin, but the subsequent popularity of Mahāyāna doctrines in the Far East brought along a more appreciative view. Music became synonymous with the highest joys of Paradise.

2. The Harper Guttila as an Anterior Birth of the Buddha

After the Buddha's death many stories began to circulate about his anterior lives, the cycle of reincarnations that was broken when he reached Nirvāṇa. These *Jātaka* tales consist of narratives interspersed with chanted verses. *Jātaka* Number 243 tells how the Buddha had once lived the life of an eminent musician playing the *vīnā* ("arched harp") at the court of Benares.
A climactic scene from this story is shown in detail on an extraordinary bronze vessel acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1973. Since nothing is known about its find circumstances, one must rely on stylistic features to date and determine its provenance, but the bronze is unique and has features that give conflicting evidence. Some elements indicate that the vessel was made in southeastern India (specifically in Nāgārjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh) during the third century A.D. but other elements (i.e. dress and hairstyles) suggest later dates and a different place.

In order to put the scene in context, the events leading up to it will be briefly summarized. Guttila is the name of this master harper whose renown is as great as his age. One day a brash student, Mūsila, arrives and asks for lessons. Against his better judgment Guttila accepts him. Soon the student considers himself superior to his teacher and insists on replacing him as the court performance see the introduction to Marie Shedlock, Eastern Stories and Legends (New York, 1920). Men, women and children had gathered to listen under the palm trees. Occasionally, someone would chat with a neighbor or take a walk, but most of the audience concentrated intently. The maker of the bronze vessel in the Metropolitan Museum described below, may well have learned about the Guttila story in similar circumstances.

The Jātaka stories “the oldest, most complete and most important collection of folk-lore extant” (supra n. 8). The Jātaka were probably composed as early as the Buddha biography mentioned in n. 1. The antiquity of these stories is indicated by the presence of Jātaka illustrations on second century B.C. temples at Bhārhat and Sānci.

The complete texts are given in Viggo Fausbøll (Pāli text) and T.W. Rhys Davids (English translation), The Jātaka, Together with its Commentary; Being Tales of the Anterior Births of Gotama Buddha, text, 6 volumes (London, 1879–96). However, only one volume of translations appeared (supra n. 8). Complete translations were subsequently published as The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births, E.B. Cowell (ed.), 6 vols. (1895–1906). The translator of Jātaka No. 243 was W.H.D. Rouse. The translation quoted below is by C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15).

A harp consists of a resonator-box (which has one surface — often made of leather — that easily vibrates), a rod attached to one end of the box, and many strings suspended between the rod and the vibrating leather surface. As a rule, the strings were not tied directly to the leather but to a narrow wooden rib that ran the length of the leather. The strings lie in a plane perpendicular to the plane of the vibrating surface. (On lyres the two planes are parallel.) Lute strings, on the other hand, are bundled so closely that they hardly define a plane. On Indian lutes — typically the sitār and the tamburi — the strings pass over a bridge; harps lack bridges. See Curt Sachs, The History of Musical Instruments (New York, 1940), 231 ff.). On arched harps (fig. 4) the rod is bent and emerges in the same direction as the length axis of the box. This type of harp brings to mind a hunter’s bow with a box attached at one end. The first representations of arched harps appeared in the third millennium B.C. in Mesopotamia and Egypt. See Bo Lawgren, "Reconstruction of a Shoulder Harp in the British Museum,” Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 66, 1980, 165–8; idem, "Acoustics and Evolution of Arched Harps," Galpin Society Journal 34 (1981), 116–29.

Zithers lack the "rod and box" combination and the strings are stretched between two ends of the box. The box takes the full force of the strings and it must be strong; thus it usually lacks a surface that easily vibrates. On stick-zithers the box is a tube. To amplify the sound, one or two gourds are usually attached to the tube.

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy showed long ago that the vīṇā was a harp: see “The Parts of a Vīṇā,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 50 (1930), 244–53. Also see idem “The Old Indian Vīṇā,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 51 (1931), 47–51; idem “Upaviṇā,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 51 (1931), 284–85; idem “The Parts of a Vīṇā,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 57 (1937), 101–3. That the instrument in this tale is a vīṇā can be seen from the original Pāli of the following sentence, “And Mūsila was a vīṇā-player, and stiffened up his vīṇā [strings] to the highest pitch” ("Mūsila vīṇāvādakā pi vīṇā uttamamucchanāya mucchaevāvādesa"). See Fausbøll (supra n. 13), 249, line 2.

Both Rouse (supra n. 16) and C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15 erroneously translate vīṇā as “lute.” The latter term has often been missapplied by non-musiotological writers on Asian music, a particularly flagrant example being Robert van Gulik in his The Lore of the Chinese Lute (Tokyo, 1940), which deals eminently with flat zithers (like the Chinese qin). Some confusion may have been caused by a change of the Indian definition at the end of the first millennium A.D. When the arched harp dropped out of use in India, the stick-zither, which had begun to appear at the time, was referred to as vīṇā. Currently, in North India the term vīṇā also refers to such a zither. A further change of meaning has occurred in South India where a sitār-like lute now is called vīṇā. See Sachs, ibid., figs. 59 and 60, respectively.

Richard M. Barnhart (intro.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art: Asia (New York, 1987), 152, fig. 104. It is not the only illustration of Jātaka No. 243; e.g. see Muriel C. Williamson, “The Iconography of Arched Harps in Burma,” Music and Tradition; Essays on Asian and Other Musics Presented to Lawrence Picken, eds. D.R. Widler and R.F. Wolpert, 209–28 (Cambridge, 1981), 216, but the detailed correspondence here is unique.

musician. Guttila meekly agrees and goes to the king to recommend him. The king assents but will only pay the young man half of what Guttila was paid. Mûsila demands equal pay to which the king agrees if the two harpers take part in a musical competition and Mûsila proves himself the better. They agree and the competition is set to take place one week later.20

As the date approaches Guttila grows despondent, thinking of his age and feeling his powers declining. Lonely and dejected he paces back and forth in the forest, and ponders the shame that will befall him if he looses the competition against his student. But Guttila’s heavenly protector, Sâka,21 senses his predicament, descends to Earth, and proposes a scheme: during the course of the competition he will provide spectacular help by sending nine hundred nymphs to dance to Guttila’s music, and he adds

“Now do you, playing the harp, break one string and play on six.22 On the harp there will be your usual tones. Mûsila may break a string, but in his harp there will not be the tone: at that moment he will incur defeat. Then seeing he is defeated, you break one after another all the other strings, then you should play on the bare body itself, and with the string-ends broken, the voice of it will go forth and persist, covering the twelve leagues of Banares city.”23

The crucial events during the day of the competition are illustrated on the bronze vessel in a figured relief running as a continuous strip (fig. 1). The beginning and end of the scene are easily identified by the position of the figures. A long procession moves to the right and the people at the head have reached the first part of the building where the competition is to be held. Further to the right is a wide seat occupied by two people (the king and queen) and, still further, is a seated harper (Guttila) and a female dancer (one of the nymphs). Everyone is looking at them, including a drummer and an additional harper (Mûsila) further to the right. At the far right a large square pillar or a side wall marks the end of the palace.

The Procession

The procession of people arriving at the gate (fig. 2) occupies seventy percent of the total relief but the text has only a brief, though informative, description:

The king sent round the drum inviting all to meet to hear teacher and pupil compete at the king’s gate... Ten thousand adorned women, courtiers, brahmans and men of the country surrounded the king. All the citizens were met.

Indeed, the king’s drummer and cymbal player are shown leading the train of people to the event. In order to illustrate that “all citizens” had heeded the invitation, the artist shows people from different walks of life, although the “courtiers and the brahmans” get special attention while the “adorned women” seem absent or may already be seated in the stands above the competitors and the

20 The king may have had ulterior motives since the Nâtya Śâstra (first century B.C. to second century A.D.) asserts that “Of all the duties of the king, this [a dramatic show] is proclaimed as possessing the best result. Of all kinds of charities, allowing people to enjoy a dramatic show without payment has been praised most.” See Manomohan Ghosh (trans.), The Nâtya Shastra (A Treatise on Ancient Indian Dramatology and Histrionics), Ascribed to Bharata Muni (Calcutta, 1967), 36.80. This work implies that dramatic performances sometimes took the form of contests. See ibid., 27.21–22, 71, 77–79.

21 Or Sâkya, i.e. Gautama’s clan-name deified, see C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15), 244, or idem, Sakyâ or Buddhîst Origin (London, 1931), 1.

22 i.e. Guttila’s intact harp had seven strings. This is confirmed in the following verse: “The seven-stringed harp, the passing sweet, the lovely thing I taught to him./ He to the arena summons me: be thou my refuge, Kosiya.”

23 C.A.F. Rhys Davids (supra n. 15), 2.
royal couple. Two visible contraptions signify high status: the open litter carried in the middle of the parade and the *chattra* hoisted above a horse rider at the front. Most likely, the two figures on the litter are the brahmans carried by servants, and a courtier is under the *chattra*.

There are five horses, three elephants, and approximately thirty people of which many are soldiers with swords and shields. The animals presumably belong to “men of the country.” It is a festive crowd with streamers flying, drums beating, horses eagerly neighing and rearing on their hind legs.

The Palace

According to the *Jātaka* text a new structure was built specially for the occasion:

At the king’s gate they had made a pavilion and prepared the king’s seat. The king came down from the terrace and sat on a divan in the midst, in the decorated pavilion... In the royal courtyard they had fixed tier above tier, seat above seat.

The king’s drummer and cymbal player have moved past a palm tree and reached a building which is surmounted by a dome resting on a wide horizontal slab (fig. 3). The dome has a brick-like pattern and the slab has vertical lines delimiting fields of crossed lines. Could this be the gate mentioned in the text? Unfortunately, there is little preserved secular architecture from the time of the story but domes and stūpa-like structures were common on temples.25

Figure 3 shows the padded royal seat raised on a wide pedestal and a tier above it. Spectators crowd above a wall on the left, presumably the pavilion. It is a sturdy design, supporting an elephant, a horse, and three important spectators under an umbrella.

Although the structure had been built in a week, “decorations” had not been neglected. Beside the massive square pillar at the end of the pavilion, there is a slender pillar with an elaborately contoured top. Bunting seems to hang above the royal seat and the upper part of the pavilion is elegantly curved and finished with a cornice.

Above Guttila, next to the king, is a semi-circular recess in the pavilion wall. It is probably a supernatural structure occupied by Śaka holding an umbrella to signify the exalted status of Guttila. The text says: “Śaka came with unseen body and stood in the air.” In fact, no face is turned in his direction, not even Guttila’s.

The King

The king and his consort sit in relaxed attitudes on a broad seat with two servants holding fly-whisks above.26 The king’s left leg hangs down and his right leg is drawn up vertically with the foot resting on the seat. This casual posture (*āsana*) is called *mahārājālāsana* (“royal ease”).27

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26 Liebert, supra n. 24.

27 Or *rājālāsana*, Liebert (supra n. 24), Harle (supra n. 25), 216. Had the drawn-up leg been horizontal, the posture would have been *laliāsana*. The posture was particularly favoured by the bodhisattra Avalokiteśvara (Chinese: Guanyin), who often strikes the pose...
The Musical Competition at the Palace

In spite of the description in the *Jātaka* text,

the Bodhisat, bathed and anointed, having eaten food of divers choice flavors, and taken his harp,
sat down on his prepared seat, and Mūsila on his,

the two harp players depicted on the Metropolitan Museum bronze vessel seem to be sitting on the
floor (fig. 4). The harp nearest to the king is larger than the one to the right, and it accords with the
story to assume these belong to Guttala and Mūsila, respectively. The identification is supported by
the fact that the larger harpist has long ear lobes, a traditional attribute of the Buddha. A dancer,
representing the celestial nymphs, and the larger harpist maintain eye-contact (fig. 4). As the story
has it, she dances to Guttala’s music. The drummer to the right also participates, intently watching
the dancer.

Since the texts informs us that the harp strings were to be broken, it is tempting to examine the
harp closely. Strings are, in fact, missing but their absence may be a result of the difficulties in
representing such delicate details.

The two harpists have very different hand positions. Guttala is obviously playing since he holds
his left hand near the vertical arch of the harp and his right hand near the mid-point of the
(imagined) strings, and this is the typical playing position now used on the Burmese harp. One of
Mūsila’s hands is also supporting the harp near the arch, but his other hand is high above the strings,
i.e. he is probably not playing. Instead, Mūsila seems to be looking down on his instrument with
raised eyebrows as if bewildered (fig. 4, extreme right).

3. Buddha as a Music Critic

Another episode in the life of the Buddha is reported in the *Sakkapāñha Sutta*:

At that time Sakka [Sāka], lord of the gods, felt a strong desire to see the Lord. And Sakka
thought: "Where is the Blessed Lord, the fully-enlightened Buddha, now staying?" Then,
perceiving where the Lord was, Sakka said .... "Gentlemen, the Blessed Lord is staying in
Magadha... in the Indasālā Cave. How would it be if we were to go and visit the Lord?"... Then
Sakka said to Pañcaśīhka of the gandharvas: "I propose to go to visit him." "Very good, Lord," said
Pañcaśīhka and, taking his yellow belata-wood viṇā, he followed in attendance on Sakka... Then
Sakka said: "Pañcaśīhka, it is hard for the likes of us to get near the Buddha when he is enjoying
the bliss of meditation, and therefore withdrawn. But if you, Pañcaśīhka, were first to attract the
ear of the Blessed Lord, then we might afterwards be able to approach and see the Blessed Lord,
the fully-enlightened Buddha.” "Very good, Lord,” said Pañcaśīhka and, taking his yellow belata-
wood viṇā, he approached the Indasālā Cave. Thinking: “As far as this is neither too far nor too


Williamson (supra n. 13), pl. 1, 211 ff.

Cf. n. 21.
nearly to the Lord, and he will hear my voice," he stood to one side. Then, to the strains of his vina, he sang these verses extolling the Buddha, the Dhamma, the Arahants, and love. When he heard this, the Lord said: "Pañcaśīkha, the sound of your strings blends so well with your song, and your song with the strings, that neither prevails excessively over the other."10

It was a sage comment from someone whose musical taste had been honed over several lifetimes and who, like many later critics, did not play himself.

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Appendix I: Subsequent Buddhist Views on Music

An Early Precept Warning Against Music

In the stories about the Buddha, music is a corrupting force and a mere aid to seduction. Naturally, the Buddha—and early Buddhists—regarded music with misgivings, and issued an outright ban on it in the Brhadajala Sūtra,23 one of the oldest works in the Buddhist canon.33 It stipulated a set of sila, or precepts, to be observed by monks, but only some precepts were required of the laity. These sila34 range from general rules of civilized conduct (not to kill or steal) to specialized constraints (not to sleep on high beds). One precept demands

He avoids watching dancing, singing, music, and shows.35

The stern command is further amplified:

... whereas some ascetics and Brahmins ... remain addicted to attending such shows as dancing, singing, music, displays, recitations, hand-music, cymbals and drums, fairy-shows, acrobatics and conjuring tricks, combats of elephants, buffaloes, bulls, goats, cocks and quail, fighting with staves, boxing, wrestling, sham-fights, parades, manoeuvres and military reviews, the ascetic Gotama [Gautama] refrains from attending such displays.36

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30 The scene is illustrated in Kaufmann (supra n. 3), fig. 98. Only the last topic is exemplified in the Sutta with a typical stanza: "Come, embrace me, maiden fair of thighs, / Seize and hold me with your lovely eyes, / Take me in your arms, it's all I ask! / My desire was slight at first, O maid / Of waving tresses, but it grew apace...," i.e. sentiments familiar to the young Siddhārtha.


32 Consisting of the first part of the Dīgha Nikāya, which exists in two complete English translations: (1) T.W. Rhys Davids, Dialogues of the Buddha (Sacred Books of the Buddhists 2, F. Max Müller, ed.) (Oxford 1899); and (2) Walshe (supra n. 31).

33 These sayings of the Buddha were collected after his death and put in final form within fifty years, Rhys Davids (supra n. 32), xix. Also Sir Charles Elton, Japanese Buddhism (New York, 1969) (first published 1931), esp. 10–11.

34 In Pali; sila in Sanskrit; shira in Japanese. Beside the Brhadajala, the precepts are given in the Tavagga sūtra of the Dīgha nikāya. See Rhys Davids, and Walshe (supra n. 23), and T.W. Rhys Davids Buddhist sūtras (The Sacred Books of the East 11), (Oxford 1883), 167–203, and referred to more obliquely in other sūtras. The music precepts are presented in two consecutive sections headed Kala silam and Magghima silam. See Rhys Davids, ibid, 190–92.

35 From "The Short Paragraphs on Conduct," Walshe (supra n. 31), 69.

36 From "The Longer Paragraphs on Conduct," Walshe (supra n. 31), 70. The Rhys Davids translation (supra n. 32) has pertinent annotations on the musical terms.
Later Practice in the Far East

Some five hundred years later this view of music was reversed in the canon of the Mahāyāna Buddhism that spread to the Far East. Its most popular sūtras describe a Western Paradise filled with many gaudy objects, of which musical instruments were among the most conspicuous. Their sheer splendor evince the delights awaiting the faithful, and their sounds bring Buddhist doctrines into contemplative focus. It is difficult to reconcile this view of music with the earlier precept, but similar reversals have been noted in other areas.

Quite possibly, the new opinion was stimulated by the highly developed state that music had reached in China at that time. At least since the Shang dynasty, music had played an important role in early rituals and was encouraged in Confucian traditions. For millennia, music had been considered a necessary attribute of religious ceremonies at Chinese courts, something that seems to have been on the mind of Prince Wenxian of Qinghe, who established a Buddhist temple where on great feast days they always provided girl musicians. The singing voices would play among the beams, while the dancers' sleeves slowly turned this way and that, and strings and pipes sounded clear, in harmonies so perfect that they partook of the divine.

In Japan, Genshin (942–1017 A.D.) described the glory of heavenly orchestras in his Ōjūyōshū, a work based on the Indian Amitāyurdhyāna sūtra. Both works mention orchestras composed of "innumerable musical instruments," and marvelous instruments that play by themselves. The music, it is said, propounds the virtues of "suffering, non-existence, impermanence, and non-self." Streams of water, and trees with golden branches and coral leaves emit equally marvelous sounds:

And what shall we say of the wonderful sounds that are heard! Five kinds of sounds are making a wonderful timbre just as if a hundred thousand kinds of musical instruments were being played in unison. Whosoever hears this music naturally is led to meditate on Buddha, the Law and the Priesthood.

Following those leads, Far Eastern painters at the end of the first millennium A.D. often placed a (large) Buddha among (small) musicians. Many oasis cities along the northern and southern course of

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38 In Japan the precepts no longer make references to musical performance, but merely to "places of amusement," Beatrice Lane Suzuki, "Ceremonies for Lay Disciples at Kōya-san," Mikel., Kōbō Daishi Kōhaku and Shingon Buddhism (Bulletin of the Research Institute of Esoteric Buddhist Cultures) (October, 1990), 117–30, esp. 123.
39 "It is noticeable that these delights [of Paradise], though they do not include eating, drinking, and things sexual, are mainly agreeable sights and sounds which Gorama would have pronounced vain and impermanent" (Eliot, supra n. 33, 106). Cf. Ivan Morris, The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan (London, 1964 [second edition, 1985]), 118.
41 Alexander Coburn Soper, Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China (Ascona, 1939), esp. 109.
43 Eliot (supra n. 31), 261.
44 Müller (supra n. 37), 161–203.
45 Müller (supra n. 37), 171; cf. Reischauer (supra n. 42), 74.
46 While the translation reads "harmony," unison playing — of course — does not result in harmony.
47 Reischauer (supra n. 42), 75.
Fig. 1  Figural scene in a continuous register surrounding the bronze vessel in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. no. 1975.419, Rogers Fund 1975). Photograph by Mr. Justin Kerr.

Fig. 2  Detail of Fig. 1 showing the arrival of the audience.

Fig. 3  Detail of Fig. 1 showing the palace, including (from left to right) the domed gate, a narrow round pillar, the seated king and queen, Gurûlī with Śaka hovering above, a dancing nymph, a drummer, Mûšilâ, and a wide square pillar.
Fig. 4 Detail of the musicians and the dancer. A composite of photographs taken from two angles, showing sharp details with some perspective distortions.
the Silk Route in the Taklamakan Desert had paintings of orchestras. At Dunhuang – the entrance of the Silk Route into China – orchestras were painted on cave walls and on silks. Typical scenes show three large central figures (the Buddha and Bodhisattvas such as Śākyamuni, Avalokiteśvara and Māñjuśrī) surrounded by crowds of worshippers. Among the worshippers are musicians divided into two groups playing diverse combinations of instruments. Equally lavish orchestras were shown on Japanese paintings ca. 1000 A.D. In particular, ratīgō scenes show Amida Buddha descending from Paradise to welcome a devotee, and his entourage may include an orchestra of assorted string, wind and percussion instruments, but other Buddhist musicians are known.

Ecclesiastical orchestra music seems largely confined to Paradise, where its principal inhabitant – the Buddha – now again listens to music daily. Although some earthly scenes depict musical performances, they seem to be symbolic or teeter on the threshold of Paradise. The Japanese illustration of a sūtra shows a spiritual teacher on a platform surrounded by approximately ten musicians but the place is probably in a virtual Paradise. In 980, we are told, a Japanese court noble was so devout that three days before his death

A fragrant odor filled his house, and beautiful music announced the arrival of Amida’s heavenly retinue, welcoming him to Paradise. Several days after his death he was still as if alive, his body showing no signs of decay.

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48 In the neighborhood of Kucha (Kucha, Kizil, Kumtura and Subashi), Khotan (Khotan and Dandan-uliq), Turfan (Turfan, Khoch and Chikkan Kül). For a map, see Herbert Härkel, Along the Ancient Silk Routes, Central Asian Art from the West Berlin State Museums (New York, 1982), 16 ff.


50 Roderick Whitfield, The Art of Central Asia; the Stein Collection in the British Museum I; Paintings from Dunhuang I (Tōkyō and London, 1982), pls. 8 and 9, esp. 9-3 (8th–9th century A.D.); Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, Caves of the Thousand Buddhas (New York, 1990), pl. 2; also Katharine Schlesinger, "Notes on Musical Instruments Represented in the Stein Collection," in Aurel Stein, Serindra, Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost Cina (Oxford, 1912), 1467-69.

51 Many of the instruments (zithers, end-blown and side-blown flutes, mouth-organs, pan-pipes, wooden clappers, and drums) had long been known in China. See, for example, the relief from Yi'nan, Shandong province, carved during Eastern Han (25-220 A.D.), reproduced in Oswald Sirin, Chinese Painting III, (New York, 1966), pls. 3–4. For an analysis of the instruments, see Werner Bachmann "Ensemblemusizieren im 5. Jahrhundert vor unserer Zeitrechnung. Ein Vergleich der Bildquellen und der Instrumentalfunde," Imagio Musicæ 4 (1987), 209–28. – The new element of Buddhist orchestras is the stress on thin-plate string instruments (harp and lutes) at the expense of stone chimes and large bronze bells. The new instruments entered China by way of the Silk Route. The Yi'nan relief depicts acrobats, floats containing drums and banners, horses carrying equilibristic riders, but this carnival spirit is absent in the Buddhist setting. – A closer analysis of the new instruments falls outside the scope of this article, but significant correlations between harps and Buddhist affiliation can easily be demonstrated. Sites under the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism (the Turfan and Khotan regions in the Tarim basin – see n. 48 – and most of the Far East) preferred angular harps, while those of the Theravāda school (Kizil in the Kucha region, India and southeast Asia) favored arched harps. In Dunhuang, however, both types of harp coexisted (supra nn. 49 and 50).

52 One ratīgō scene, particularly well executed and preserved, containing about a dozen instruments, is now in the Reihokan Museum at Kōyasan. See Robert Treat Paine and Alexander Soper, The Art and Architecture of Japan (Baltimore, 1960), fig. 38; for larger reproductions in full color, see Osamu Takada and Yanagisawa Taka, Bunyaga 7, Series: Genshoku Nihon no bijutsu (Tōkyō, 1969), fig. 118. M.W. De Visser discusses the figures in the painting in Ancient Buddhism in Japan (Leiden, 1971), 334–35, but his assignment of Genshin as the painter is no longer accepted by specialists. Other ratīgō scenes with an orchestra appear in Yasuhito Yukio, Art Treasures of Japan (Tōkyō, 1960), pls. 182–84, and Akiyama Terukazu, Japanese Painting (New York, 1995), 43.


55 Supra n. 53

56 De Visser (supra n. 52, 666 ff.)
An equally mythical scene was reported by Ennin, a Japanese Buddhist who visited China ca. 840. He came to a sealed grotto, and was shown a list of its content which included a silver harp ... made of 84,000 notes, and each of the 84,000 notes cured one of the worldly passions.\(^7\)

The instrument was said to have been deposited before the birth of Gautama, but that is impossible, since China did not have harps before the second century A.D.\(^8\)

Ennin reported one occasion with music in an earthly setting. A maigre feast was given in honor of a Buddhist bishop and "there were all sorts [of food] in profusion, and they also held a concert,"\(^9\) but – of course – it may have been a purely vocal performance, in which instruments were not necessarily involved. Earlier Buddhists may have employed instrumental music on ritual occasions,\(^6\) but by the end of the millennium Eastern Buddhists seem to have imagined instrumental music rather than to have practiced it.

A few centuries later celestial music scenes disappeared from Buddhist art in the Far East. Today Buddhist music no longer brings to mind a rich array of string and wind instruments. Instead, there is the chanting of sūtras interspersed by ringing sounds from bells and cymbals, a tradition that goes back – at least – to the eighth century\(^6\) in Japan, and earlier in China and India.\(^6\) The emphasis on the voice – at the expense of instruments – is in accord with the metaphysical interpretations of syllabic sounds common in esoteric Buddhism,\(^6\) where the mere repetitions of certain word combinations (mantras) promise salvation and rebirth in the Western Paradise.\(^6\)

\(^7\) Edwin O. Reischauer, Ennin’s Diary; the Record of a Pilgrimage to China in Search of the Law (New York, 1955), 248.
\(^8\) Angular harps did, however, exist in this part of the world ca. 400 B.C., e.g. at the Central Asian site of Pazyryk. See Bo Lawergren, "The Ancient Harp from Pazyryk," Beiträge zur allgemeinen und vergleichenden Archäologie 9-10 (1990), 111-18.
\(^9\) Reischauer (supra n. 57), 76.

When Faxian [Fa-hsien] visited Khotan ca. 400 A.D. he found that "The country is prosperous and happy; its people are well-to-do; they have all received the Faith, and find their amusement in religious music. The priests number several tens of thousands, most of them belonging to the Greater Vehicle." See The Travels of Fa-hsien (399–414 A.D.), or, Records of the Buddhist Kingdoms, trans. H.A. Giles (Westport, Conn., 1981), esp. 4. At Maghada, by the river Ganges, they "make a four wheeled car of five stories by lashing together bamboos ... The car is over twenty feet in height, and in form like a pagoda ... They make images of divas, ornamented with gold, silver, and stass, and with silk banners and canopies overhead. At the four sides they make niches, each with a Buddha sitting inside and a Bodhisattva in attendance ... All the ecclesiastics and laymen in the district assemble; they have singing and high-class music, and make offerings of flowers and incense ... all night long lamps are burning, high-class music is being played, and offering are being given. Such is the custom in all these regions", idem, 47.


\(^6\) Often the name of the Buddha was uttered incessantly, as in the case of a seventh-century monk who repeated it a million times in seven days. See Ch’en (supra n. 63), 346.
Appendix 2: The Vina

Arched harps can be found in many parts of the world\textsuperscript{65} and in India they were often shown on Buddhist sculpture dating between the second century B.C. and the eight century A.D. But it was not a Buddhist instrument \textit{per se}, since the \textit{vina} is mentioned already in Vedic texts with the familiar attributes of the arched harps. According to the \textit{Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa} (before 600 B.C.) the instrument was invented by the gods.\textsuperscript{66}

But the arched harp probably existed in the region much earlier. The Indus civilization\textsuperscript{67} had a script based on pictographic signs, one of which appears to represent the side-view of an arched harp.\textsuperscript{68} It depicts a gently arched rod with three or four strings suspended across its arch. Although there is no trace of a sound-box, the identification seems reasonable.

According to the \textit{Natyā Śāstra} the seven-stringed harp, like Guttīla’s, bore the name \textit{ciśrā vina} and the nine-stringed version was the \textit{vīnāṭi vina}.\textsuperscript{69} The former was plucked with fingers, and the latter with a plectrum. This treatise codifies a rich repertoire of playing techniques. Plucking could be done in four ways: \textit{udātta} (the accentuated style), \textit{lalita} (the elegant style), \textit{ribhitā} (the rattling style), \textit{ghana} (the full style). There were three ways to accompany a singer, and six ways to execute the music. The strings could be plucked in ten different manners: with the little finger and the thumb, with two thumbs, with the index finger, etc. One way, \textit{tala}, is described as “a stroke with the right hand after pressing with the left hand.” It is probably the same technique long known to have been used by ancient lyre players (in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece) and still practiced in Africa:\textsuperscript{70} the right hand strikes the plectrum across all the strings; the fingers of the left hand touch the upper half of some strings from behind. Only the untouched strings sound fully while the damped strings contribute percussive sounds.

The \textit{vina} ceased to be represented in Indian art in the seventh century A.D., and it has been assumed that the instrument disappeared about that time. However, an arched harp, reminiscent of the \textit{vina} has recently been discovered in an Indian village, where it was held in very low esteem.\textsuperscript{71} So, the \textit{vina}, once having been fit for Buddha himself, has now declined to become the instrument of the downcast.

\textsuperscript{65} Cf. supra n. 17.
\textsuperscript{66} “The [distracting] gods then created the ‘lute’ (vina?) and sat playing and singing, saying, ‘Thus we sing to thee, thus we amuse thee!’ She [the goddess Vāk] turned to the gods; but, in truth, she turned to them vainly, since she turned away from those engaged in praising and praying, to dance and song. Wherefore even to this day women are given to vain things: for it was on this wise that Vāk turned thereto, and other women do as she did. And hence it is to him who dances and sings that they most readily take fancy.” See Julius Eggeling (trans.), \textit{The Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, (The Sacred Books of the East 26)} (Delhi, 1966; first edition 1885), iii 2.4.6. This Vedic text reflects the same censorial attitude towards women, music, and dance as the cited accounts of the Buddha. Indeed, it was a world dominated by males — brahmins and Buddhist monks — and the status of women was at a low point. Cf. Margaret Stutley, \textit{Hinduisrn, the Eternal Law} (Wellingborough, 1985), 23.
\textsuperscript{68} Sign no. 311, shown in sequences of three signs on two seals from Harappa and one seal from Mohenjo-daro. See Iravatham Mahadevan, \textit{The Indus Script: Texts, Concordance and Table} (New Delhi, 1977), nos. 4680, 4692 and 1046.
\textsuperscript{69} Emmie te Nijenhuis, “Die Musik in alrindischen Theater nach dem Nāṭakaśṭra”, in Kaufmann (supra n. 3, 188–96, esp 191.
\textsuperscript{70} Sachs (supra n. 17), 112.
\textsuperscript{71} This \textit{bin-buja} was found in the Mandla District of Madhya Pradesh (Central India) where it was played by a member of the Gogia Pardhans tribe which in ancient days are said to have supplied priests and musicians to the Gond court. It is a five-stringed harp played with a back-and-forth stroke of the right-hand plectrum across all strings. Simultaneously, the left hand periodically touches and releases the strings from behind, so as to muffle their sound. See Roderick Knight, “The Harp in India Today,” \textit{Ethnomusicology} 29 (1985), 9–28. See also, idem “The Bana of Bachargaon and Beyond,” \textit{Oberlin Alumni Magazine} 79, no. 3 (1983), 30–39. Cf. the \textit{tala} technique discussed above.
When the \textit{vīnā} declined in India it began to appear in Burmese art\textsuperscript{72} and its context was exclusively Buddhist. Apparently, Indian monks brought the instrument to Burma long after the decline of Buddhism in its homeland in the seventh to eighth centuries. The \textit{vīnā} also spread into Central Asia along the Silk Route and in China but disappeared there in the thirteenth century A.D.\textsuperscript{73}

The Burmese harp (the \textit{saìng-gauk}) still survives and its design\textsuperscript{74} suggests how the \textit{vīnā} might have looked in ancient times. The Burmese version has a number of intricate details that are too fine to carve on stone sculpture.\textsuperscript{75} However, ancient sculptures show general outlines, and these underwent only minor changes in India, Burma, Central Asia, and China. Sometimes the arch curls up over the body, sometimes it extends far forward; the body may be short or long. It is probably unwise to build grand migration theories on the basis of this evidence. For one thing, representations consist mostly of fairly eroded public temple sculpture or wall paintings on rough cave walls. For another, the known representations give a woefully incomplete picture of ancient arched harps. As an example, consider phoenix-headed arched harps which are mentioned in Burmese texts from 802 A.D.\textsuperscript{76} No such harps are represented in this region, but they are known at Dunhuang,\textsuperscript{77} during the Song dynasty (960–1279 A.D.).

Recently an unusually well-preserved Indian representation of a \textit{vīnā} from the fifth century A.D. has been published.\textsuperscript{78} One easily discerns the three-dimensional shape of the body, the junction of the arch and the body, the tuning collars on the arched rod,\textsuperscript{79} and the nine strings tied to the rib,\textsuperscript{80} which rests on the skin covering the top of the body. Both the body and the rib are strongly curved. This is emphasized by the body spilling over the pictorial frame.

Most interesting on that \textit{vīnā} is the end of the stick, which does not run the full length of the body but stops short of the rear end after bending steeply upward to create a bulge on the top of the box. The same design is present on the modern Burmese arched harp, on which it is called the “monkey head.”\textsuperscript{81} That characteristic feature of the Burmese harp seems to be present in this Indian design of the fifth century A.D., a time not far removed from the casting of our bronze vessel discussed here.

Judging by the deep lobes of the harpist’s ears, Buddha himself is the musician on the tile and, maybe, his name is Guttila.

Most Indian monuments are non-committal about the “monkey head,” either because the harp is drawn too schematically or it is obscured by the player’s hand. One exception is a second to third century A.D. scene\textsuperscript{82} which, in a crude way, confirms the “monkey head.”

\textsuperscript{72} The first representation, from Pyu in Lower Burma, is dated to 650 A.D. by Williamson (supra n. 13), 212, while Judith Becker, in “Migration of the Arched Harp from India to Burma,” \textit{Galpin Society Journal} 20 (1967), 17–23, esp. 21, assigns it to the fifth century.

\textsuperscript{73} Caroline Blunden and Mark Elvin, \textit{Cultural Atlas of China} (New York, 1983), 111.

\textsuperscript{74} Muriel C. Williamson, “The Construction and Decoration of One Burmese Harp,” \textit{Selected Reports (Institute of Ethnomusicology UCLA)} 1, no. 2 (1968), 46–72.

\textsuperscript{75} On the other hand, a recently found Javanese set of bronze statuettes from the early tenth century A.D. has a \textit{vīnā} with details even richer than on the current \textit{saìng-gauk}. See Jan Fontein, \textit{The Sculpture of Indonesia} (Washington and New York, 1990), 127.

\textsuperscript{76} Laurence Picken, “Instruments in an Orchestra from Pyu (Upper Burma) in 802,” \textit{Musica Asiatica} 4 (1984), 245–70, esp. 245.

\textsuperscript{77} Supra n. 49.

\textsuperscript{78} Amy G. Poster, \textit{From Indian Earth; 4,000 Years of Terracotta Art} (New York, 1986), 166.

\textsuperscript{79} The function of collars has been described earlier. See Bo Lawergren, “The Cylinder Kithara in Etruria, Greece, and Anatolia,” \textit{Imago Musicae} 1 (1984), 147–74, figs. 20–22.

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. n. 69.

\textsuperscript{81} Williamson (supra n. 74), 49.

\textsuperscript{82} Kaufmann (supra n. 3), fig. 62.