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Author(s): Veronica Doubleday

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# The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments and Power

VERONICA DOUBLEDAY / University of Brighton

## Introduction

**I**n many parts of the Middle East frame drums are strongly associated with women.<sup>1</sup> This situation is remarkable because in many other regions—Europe and sub-Saharan Africa for instance—drumming is traditionally performed by men, not women. Given the highly contested status of both music and women in Middle Eastern Muslim cultures, an instrument especially played by women offers a rich field for the investigation of gender and power.

My aim in this article is twofold: (1) to contribute to the ethnography of frame drums, and (2) based on this data, to offer theoretical conclusions on gender and musical instruments. The Middle East covers an area stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt and the Arabian peninsula, through Turkish, Arab and Persian lands to Afghanistan. Being the birthplace of ancient civilisations (e.g. Mesopotamia and Egypt), and of monotheisms (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), it is a region of great historical importance. In this setting the frame drum has a long and significant history.

This is a general survey of the frame drum, not an exhaustive study. Scholarly understanding of Middle Eastern women's music is still in its infancy, partly through androcentric cultural bias entrenched in both Middle Eastern and Western conventions. Muslim ideologies about female modesty and seclusion have contributed to the invisibility of women's traditions and have created difficulty of access for research. Among Western scholars' concern about an "unbalanced picture of world music, heavily weighted towards male musical practices" has been voiced by Nettl (1983:334, quoted in Koskoff 1989:1) and others. I draw on sources from a variety of disciplines and also present my own first-hand data from Afghanistan.<sup>2</sup>

The Middle Eastern frame drum is portable, played with the bare hands, and features in a wide variety of musical settings. As a generic type, it is

single-headed. Its frame is of variable size, usually round, and sometimes modified with percussive additions (bells, rings, chains, cymbals, metal discs). Its skin may be painted.

The most common names are *duff* (principally applied in Arabia and western regions), *daff/def* (Turkey, Iran and further east), *dâireh/dâira/doira* (Middle East and Central Asia), and *târ* (Arabia). These terms have many local variants and the terminology for frame drums is imprecise and sometimes confused, as noted in Iraq (Hassan 1980:38).<sup>3</sup> Other terms mentioned in this article are *tof* (Hebrew), *mazbâr*, *riqq* and *ghirbâl* (Arabic), and *bendir* (North African). For further details regarding linguistic, historical and geographical aspects of terminology, see Poché (1984:616).

### Frame Drums and Women

Middle East scholars have noted close associations between frame drums and women. Shiloah makes a general link between women and frame drums in the Arab world (1980:535), and refers to the *doira*, *târ*, *bendir* and *daff* as "the region's most characteristically feminine instrument" (1995:159). Touma connects the drum with Arab women's dance traditions, stressing its ancient roots, especially with Egyptian and Israelite women (1977:107). In Turkish folk music Picken associates the drum with women (1975:142), as do Morris and Rihtman (1984), who say the *def* is "almost exclusively played by women, usually in private." Women's use of frame drums extends into Muslim and Muslim-influenced regions beyond the Middle East (e.g. North Africa, the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans).

Some general features emerge regarding gender. Women lack exclusive rights over any type of musical instrument, even the frame drum itself, as noted in Iraq (Hassan 1980:94) and Afghanistan. In some areas the frame drum is one of the few indigenous instruments women play, as in Afghanistan. In Iraq, women traditionally play only idiophones and a limited range of membranophones, including the frame drum (*daff*) (ibid.:94). In Azerbaijan "the only instrument allowed into traditional women's surroundings is the *def*" (Kerimova 1996:4). No doubt there are other examples. It must, however be stressed that elite women have had access to a wider range of musical instruments. At the same time a considerable number of instruments are traditionally reserved for men. These phenomena point to a multi-faceted gender bias, which is clearly demonstrated in other aspects of Middle Eastern culture (see Ahmed 1992).

The status, rights, privileges and powers of Middle Eastern women vary greatly according to class and region. Women's role in family and social relationships is central (see Beck and Keddie 1978). Middle Eastern wom-

en often enjoy the privilege of all-women space, a setting which facilitates the power of female solidarity and provides the principal context for music-making.

Ideologies about female submissiveness and modesty have caused restrictions in many domains, including music (see below). But, as Tapper observes, inequality of status “does not preclude able women from wielding considerable power within the household” (1991:104). Koskoff also notes that—across culture—women sometimes “connive” with notions of male superiority (1989:13). Middle Eastern women may privately condemn aspects of male ascendancy, holding an inner sense of power and worth.

### **Musical Instruments and Power**

Before examining Middle Eastern frame drums, let us consider what powers are invested in musical instruments generally. Their powers may relate to healing, physical strength, farming and hunting, safeguarding villages, or help with family problems, and musical instruments may facilitate spirit possession and exorcism, or serve as vehicles for communication between the worlds of the seen and the unseen (DeVale 1989:107). Cirlot states that of all musical instruments the drum is the most pregnant with mystic ideas (1971:89). Drums are widely used in rituals and ceremonies, and may possess supernatural powers, as Jenkins describes:

In Siberia, the shaman of the Chuckchee people uses the drum not only to accompany his verses but also, by holding it in front of his mouth, to modify the sound of his voice, for greater effect. In parts of East Africa, the drum is so sacred that an escaping criminal is granted sanctuary if he reaches the drum-yard . . . In some places a drum may have a great many functions. In the Argentine, the Mataco people use the drum to frighten away spirits associated with death and disease and spirits of hurricanes, tempests and drought. They also use it to animate the good spirits so as to ensure a good harvest. The same people beat it also at burial ceremonies and at girls' puberty rituals. It is a general magical instrument (1977:41-42).

We shall examine an impressive range of powers residing in Middle Eastern frame drums.

### **Musical Instruments in Islamic Thought**

Ideas expressed by the Muslim religious establishment have had a crucial impact in the region. The legists have generally condemned music. In this, they focussed upon musical instruments, leaving unaccompanied song in a separate and less blameable category. In particular, Quranic recitation (*qirā'at*) is conceptually distinct from “music.” In Muslim cultures, a broad distinction is often made between “musical instruments” and “singing.” This

is true for Afghanistan, where words for music (Persian *sâz*; Greek *musiqi*) are synonymous with “musical instrument,” and singing (*khândan*) is closely related to reading and speech (Baily 1996:147–48; Sakata 1983:46–48).

The views of Muslim women regarding musical instruments have rarely been recorded. This relates to the androcentric bias already noted above, and to women’s exclusion from the realm of public debate and interpretation of the scriptures. The Prophet Mohammad’s wife Aisha is a significant exception, the source of many *hadiths* (Prophetic traditions) and acknowledged as a prominent authority on the Prophet’s legacy after his death (see below).

Broadly speaking, the male legists ascribed negative powers to musical instruments, saying they cause human beings to lapse into sin. This view has sometimes percolated into the popular consciousness. In Afghanistan Baily interviewed a range of people (necessarily all men) on this point, and summarised their ideas. Music possessed (1) the power to engross and attract, thus distracting people from prayer, (2) the power to deflect people from work, (3) the power to lead people astray, indulging in illicit activities, especially sex and imbibing “wine,” and (4) the power to bring people into contact with Satan (Baily 1988:146–47).

Conceptual links exist between Satan and musical instruments, especially regarding the shawm. Abu Bakr, the Prophet Mohammad’s father-in-law and successor, is reported to have called it *mizmâr al-shaitân*, “the pipe of the devil” (Farmer 1929:26). Satan may also be linked with sexuality: villagers in western Afghanistan apparently sometimes called the *sornâ* (shawm) the “devil’s penis” (Baghban 1977, quoted in Baily 1988:146–47). Generally, though, in the Muslim Middle East sexual symbolism is not commonly applied to musical instruments. When applied, however, (to my knowledge) connotations are always negative.

Positive ideas of instrumental music are also apparent in popular thought. The notion of music as “spiritual food” finds expression in Persian culture (e.g., western Afghanistan, see Baily 1988:152–55). Sufis opposed the legists, and some upheld the lawfulness and sacred potentiality of musical instruments (see below). Some brotherhoods used musical instruments in their religious rituals, even venerating them as sacred. The reed-flute (*ney*) has always been associated with Mevlevi ritual. Part of its hallowed status derives from the opening lines of the *Mathnawi* (the great poetic work of their thirteenth century founder, Jalaluddin Rumi) in which it symbolises “the soul emptied of self and filled with the Divine Spirit” (Nicholson 1978:29).

It is important to remember that Islamic legists, thinkers and writers developed a construct of history which labelled the pre-Islamic period as uncivilised; they styled it *Jâhelia* (“Days of Ignorance”). This project sup-

pressed awareness of the pre-Islamic because it was un-Islamic. Accordingly, some early magico-religious attributes of musical instruments have been obliterated from cultural memory. The reed-flute's sacred ethos dates from ancient Anatolia, where the flute-player's sacred function was to "call the deity" by accompanying the spoken epicleris (Schimmel 1994:138), but this has been forgotten. Veneration of musical instruments among the heterodox Muslim Yazidis of Iraq would also seem to predate Islam. Their beliefs display possible traces of Mithraism, Mazdaism, Manichaeism and Zoroastrianism, and they hold both the flute and frame drum as sacred (Hassan 1980:183-93).

Modern scholars have probably underestimated religious uses of musical instruments in Middle Eastern cultures, as Hassan observes for Iraq: "The uses of musical instruments for religious purposes are incomparably more numerous and diverse than profane uses, and also far less well known" (ibid.:11). An excursion into ancient sources relating to frame drums reveals many religious and supernatural connections.

## **The Early History of Frame Drums**

The Middle Eastern frame drum dates back at least to the third millennium B.C.E. For many centuries it seems to have been the principal type of drum in the region, always closely connected with women.

### **Mesopotamia**

Artefacts from Mesopotamia (Iraq) from c.3000 B.C.E. show both men and women playing the drums (Jenkins 1977:40). Sumerian texts refer to two categories translated as "drums" and "tambourines" (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983:26, 99). In the absence of any other type of drum, these drums may distinguish differently sized frame drums, and widely varying sizes are attested. Babylonian statuettes from c.2000 B.C.E. show men and women playing "small frame drums" (Jenkins 1977:41), and the carved fragment of a bowl dated c.2100 B.C.E. shows a male drummer beating an extremely large frame drum (Postgate 1992:124 fig. 6, 11).

Blades and Anderson link frame drums with women, based on terracotta female figurines from Ur in the neo-Sumerian period (c. 2150-1850 B.C.E.). From that period dancers used the frame drum rather than clappers "in ritual performances" (1984:974). Frame drums were featured in religious ceremonies and parades (Postgate 1992:124). A Sumerian hymn to the goddess Inanna describes a parade: the drums resound dramatically after blood sacrifices (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983:99). Drums were played in laments for the dead (ibid.:53,61,69): the lamenter "circled the house

of the gods" in a circumambulation ritual that is notable in Middle Eastern religion (cf. below).

Links with Inanna are significant: in a Sumerian text she bestows drums to her people of Uruk (ibid.:26). The drum was used in the sacred marriage drama (*bieros gamos*) of Inanna and Ishtar's cult; widely attested in poetic and priestly accounts, this was performed continuously for at least two thousand years to assure prosperity and fertility to the land and its people (Ochsborn 1990:22). By means of sexual intercourse, a priestess representing the goddess bestowed kingship to the king. A nude erotic scene depicted on a clay plaque from Larsa (c.2000–1600 B.C.E.) shows a male playing a lyre and a female holding (and shaking?) a frame drum while they have sexual congress. Williams-Forte comments:

Tambourines are usually held by nude female figures and, in one instance, on a cylinder seal from Mari, by the goddess Ishtar/Inanna. Accordingly, the instrument is associated with sexual love, with seduction, and perhaps with the cult of the goddess. Thus the two figures seen here are not secular performers, but provide joyful music and erotic dancing as an accompaniment to and celebration of a cult ritual, perhaps the sacred marriage (1983:195–96).

(For this illustration, see Wolkstein and Kramer 1983:101. Also see *bieros gamos*, below).

## Egypt

Plentiful evidence attests that women played frame drums in the Egyptian New Kingdom dynasties (c.1570–947 B.C.E.). Female musical troupes (*kbener*) directed by women used the drum in temple rituals (Robins 1993:148–49). The drums (both rectangular and round) accompanied various lutes, lyres, flutes, oboes, two types of harp, and other idiophones including the sistrum (Teeter 1993:79).

Sometimes women playing circular frame drums were the sole instrumentalists. For instance, wall carvings in a fourteenth century B.C.E. tomb depict various scenes of the important *sed* festival to renew the pharaoh's kingship. The middle register of the carvings shows a procession headed by two women playing frame drums and three women clapping, followed by four female dancers and three men, possibly also dancing. (In the upper register men dance and clap; the lower is concerned with offerings and an ox sacrifice) (Robins 1993:105 fig. 38).

Female musicians and dancers also provided royal entertainments: Blades and Anderson state that rectangular frame drums "were always played by women" at New Kingdom banquets (1984:974). Teeter (1993) provides further information on the instruments (including frame drums) and gender of musicians represented on temples, tombs, stelae and other classes of objects as well as written sources.

In another link with women, the frame drum was an attribute of the fierce and grotesque dwarf-like household god, Bes. He protected women in childbirth, and was associated with music and dancing (Hall 1994:88–89). His image appeared on bedroom furniture, watching over childbirth, mothers and new-born babies (Robins 1993:85). Bes figurines often brandish a knife and beat a frame drum to ward off evil and scare away evil spirits (Teeter 1993:68). For an illustration, see Wosien (1974:plate 25).

### Hebrew Biblical Sources

The Hebrew Bible describes women playing the frame drum (*tof/top/toph*) to accompany their own singing and dancing in various ritual contexts. In the early period they used sacred space within the temple at Jerusalem. Psalm 68 is a processional hymn, sung as the ark was carried into the temple (Alexander 1973:341). Verses 24–27 describe a procession penetrating the inner sanctuary, “at its head the singers, next come minstrels, girls among them playing on tambourines [i.e. *tof*, pl. *toppim*].” After the exile of the Hebrews the sanctuary was reserved to Levites and priests, with women excluded (Mays 1968:464).

In the days of the judges (c. 1220–1050 B.C.E.) women divided the spoils of battle and spread news of victories with psalms (ibid.:464). These were performed with frame drums: the Song of Deborah, one of the oldest writings of the Hebrew Bible, is a victory psalm (Alexander 1973:221–22). Psalm 68:11–12 refers to victory psalms: “The women that publish the tidings are a great host. Kings of armies flee, they flee.” In Exodus 15:20, the prophetess Miriam plays the *tof*, and women join her to sing, drum and dance in triumph after crossing the Red Sea.

Female family members welcomed heroes home with songs, dancing and drumming. In Judges 11:12, the daughter of Jephthah came to greet her father on return from a military mission “with tambourines and dances.”<sup>4</sup> This type of performance probably extended to any auspicious homecoming. Rituals of leavetaking for Jacob in Genesis 31:27 were performed with frame drums and lyres [*kinnor*], probably the province of women. Meyers’s biblical research supports these points (1993:58–62).

### Canaanite/Phoenician-Cypriot Artefacts

Small terra cotta figures produced at widely scattered sites connect women with the frame drum. The earliest are Palestinian, from c.1000 B.C.E. Figures of women, some holding frame drums, are far more numerous than men.

Later production flourished in Phoenician Cyprus, particularly in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E. (Meyers 1993:49–58). These depict standing figures of women holding the lyre, double flute (*aulos*) and frame drum.

Male figurines play the cymbals. Depictions of three women playing a frame drum, lyre and double flute appear on high status artefacts; this women's instrumental combination is commonly called the "Phoenician (or Canaanite) orchestra." For illustrations, see Meyers (*ibid.*:60, fig. 3 and 4) or Pritchard (1975:fig. 31).

Production of terracottas continued into the Hellenistic period (second century B.C.E.), and frame drums were played in pre-classical Greece, along with the double flute, lyre and cymbals (Lawler 1965:54, 56).

### **Religious Cults in the Greek and Roman Empires**

Women used frame drums in connection with Dionysus, god of fertility and of the vine, revered all over the Greek Empire, including western Asia. Contemporary accounts describe Dionysian women (*maenads*) as "wild" and "screaming," performing "frenzied dances" (*oreibasia*) over mountains and through woods, at night, in the dead of winter. Some played frame drums (*tympana*) and double-flutes (*aulos*). People believed that "the god had actually entered into these women, taking over their minds and bodies, and controlling their actions" (*ibid.*:75-76). Rouget stresses the importance of Greek ecstatic cults in understanding later Sufi trance practices (1985:187-88).

In Dionysian scenes painted on terracotta ware, the drums have sets of thongs hanging from their rims; presumably these impacted upon the skins, giving a percussive effect. For an illustration on a vase from Samnos, c. 420 B.C.E. see Wosein (1974:116-17) or Lawler (1965:77).

From the Greeks, the Romans inherited Adoniasm, the "famous oriental dirge for Adonis, with its dinning drums, known to fifth century [B.C.E.] Athens," "screamed from the house-tops by a frenzied female" (Henderson 1957:385). Adonis was a dying vegetation god, "equivalent in spirit to the Egyptian Osiris, Phrygian Attis and Greek Dionysus" (Leeming 1990:96-97). Linked with the goddess Aphrodite, he was particularly worshipped in Syria and Cyprus (Frazer 1978:126). Frame drums were also used in the cult of Cybele, the Phrygian mother-goddess. After the second Punic war in 204 B.C.E., she became an extremely important Roman divinity. Her priests used the frame drum, double flute and cymbals, which attained great popularity in Rome (Scott 1957:405).

### **Arabian and Persian Cultures**

The frame drum (*duff*) probably has ancient roots in Arabia. As among the Israelites, it was principally played by women in a variety of genres. Farmer argues that the music of Arabian, Assyrian and Hebrew religious cults was very similar. His evidence is based on the character and etymol-

ogy of musical genres, and on close connections between musical instruments of all three cultures. For the frame drum, he matches the Arabic term *duff* with the Babylonian-Assyrian term *adapu* and the Aramaic-Hebrew *toph* (Farmer 1929:xiv).

Frame drums were used in devotional singing and dancing (*tablil*) accompanying the circumambulation of the Ka'aba at Mecca and other cultic centres devoted principally to goddess worship. Farmer links *tablil* with the Phoenician-Cypriot terracotta artefacts discussed above (ibid.:8). Jargy defines *tablil* as a "magic incantation" and "religious dance," with accompaniment "especially by women" on frame drums (1971:14–15).<sup>5</sup> Connections with the wider Middle Eastern region are evident. The term *tablil* is close to Hebrew *tabala* (psalm or song of praise) (Fohrer 1973), and circumambulation of the "house of god" occurred in Sumer, and among the Israelites (Gibb and Kramers 1961:586). The Ka'aba is still known as the "house of God" (*beitullah*).

In the Prophet Mohammad's time, women, girls and slaves used frame drums when singing improvised blessings to honour an eminent person's arrival. The tradition resembles the songs of hospitality in the Hebrew Bible and is probably ancient. Several instances occur in the Islamic Traditions of the Prophet (Hadith). Once, some girls in the streets of Medina greeted the Prophet, singing with the *duff*: "We are girls of the tribe of Najjar; what a blessing it is to be a neighbour of the Prophet!"—and he congratulated them on their performance (Roy Choudhury 1957:66). On another occasion women greeted his arrival, singing and drumming from the rooftops (Farmer 1929:27). Also, once a slave promised to welcome him home with drumming (Poché 1984:617).

In the Prophet Mohammad's time (and probably for some time previously), Arabian women played frame drums in battles, singing to encourage warriors to victory. At the battle of Uhud (625 C.E.) the Prophet's enemy, a woman named Hind bint Utba, led the women in singing and drumming "war songs and laments for the slain" at the battle of Badr (Farmer 1929:10). Hamam suggests that sometimes Arabian women sang offers of sexual rewards to the victorious.<sup>6</sup> The lament (*marthiya*) and elegy (*nawb*) for heroes were the prerogative of women, also performed to frame drum accompaniment.<sup>7</sup>

Specialised "singing-girl" musicians, *qainât*, were "an integral part" of Arabian social life during the pre-Islamic period (ibid.:10–11). They were of slave descent, often Greek or Persian, and their place in Arabian culture dates roughly from the opening of the Christian era (ibid.:3–4). They used frame drums and other instruments.

There is little evidence of the frame drum in ancient Persian music, although its use has been suggested (e.g. During 1993:561). According to

Farmer, the earliest Persian monument depicting musical instruments is the Elamite relief of Kul-i-Firawn. It shows priests offering a sacrifice, assisted by three musicians, two playing harps. Farmer admits that identification of the other instrument as a frame drum is doubtful (n.d.:2784).

Farmer considers that the Zoroastrian magi sang without musical accompaniment. Nor is the frame drum mentioned among the numerous instruments cited in Ferdowsi's monumental eleventh century epic, *Shāh-nāmeḥ*, based on oral tradition and accepted as a crucial source (ibid.:2785-86). Sasanian rock carvings at Taq-i Bustan (western Iran) date from the seventh century C.E. A depiction of King Khusrau II's royal deer hunt shows musicians playing a variety of instruments, mainly harps. On inspection, Farmer's tentative identification of a frame drum is questionable (1938:76, see fig. 13).

### Summary

Frame drums have ancient roots in Mesopotamia, the Mediterranean, Egypt, and probably the Arabian peninsula, but not Persia. A considerable degree of continuity across traditions and through time emerges. This drum—apparently the sole drum in the region for a considerable time—was invested with considerable powers. It was used in religious rituals in all early traditions examined. Some of these (e.g. Sumerian and Egyptian) were linked with the idea of kingship. In the early period rituals featuring frame drums occupied primary roles in the cultures concerned—in Inanna's cult, in the Egyptian *sed* kingship ceremony, or the procession into the temple at Jerusalem, for instance. Later examples (e.g. women's cults of Dionysus and Adonis) appear as more "peripheral."

In many traditions frame drums were primarily played by women, often in connection with dancing. The contexts included (1) temple rituals, (2) victory and battle songs, (3) family and tribal rituals, (4) entertainments at royal banquets, and (5) ecstatic trance cults. Women often sang, drummed and danced in the open air—in temple processions, at shrines, in battle-fields, in streets, outside homes, on roof-tops, and even on mountain-tops and through woods.

Some scholars (e.g. Touma 1977:107, Blades and Anderson 1984:974) propose that frame drums were exclusive to women. Edwards asserts exclusive use by women and eunuchs in Egypt, and probably also by Israelite women (1991:19). However, men evidently played the drum in some traditions (e.g. in ancient Mesopotamia). Montagu (1984) more cautiously states that the *duff* and *tof* were "frequently, though not exclusively, played by women," and Meyers concludes that *tof* was occasionally played by Israelite men (1993:60). The evidence could never be conclusive. Exclusivity, in any case, is prescriptive and exceptions occur.

## Music and Women in Islam

The advent and rapid spread of Islam in the Middle East precipitated important social changes relating to gender. The dominant, prescriptive terms of the core Islamic discourses were founded and elaborated in Arabia at the rise of Islam, and in Iraq in the immediately ensuing period (Ahmed 1992:3). Despite its message of equality, the Holy Quran was open to misogynistic interpretation. One verse states: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made one of them to excel the other" (Sura IV, verse 34). The Quran also states that women are unclean when menstruating (Sura II "the Cow"), and thus unfit to perform ritual prayers (al-Bukhari 6.22).

The early caliphs and legists inherited a male bias from the Byzantine and Persian empires that came under Muslim control. During the Abbasid period (eighth to thirteenth centuries) Islamic law was fixed and codified, reaffirming "patriarchal family and female subordination" that were key components of the socioreligious visions of Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism already in place (Ahmed 1992:4). In a consistent trend towards "closure and diminution" of women's power and freedom—to use Ahmed's phrase—men established ascendancy. They could take up to four wives, and had preferential rights with regard to divorce and patrilineal descent. Through concepts relating to honour, male heads of families exerted control over female sexuality and all aspects of women's behaviour, including musical performance.

Women were not veiled or secluded in early Arabia, but a hundred and fifty years after the Prophet's death the "purdah" system was fully established over a wide area (Levy 1957:130). Purdah practices took different forms, generally characterised by the seclusion and segregation of women in most echelons of society. Women were gradually excluded or marginalised from communal worship, expected to pray in a special corner or balcony-like gallery of the mosque or at home (Schimmel 1994:51–53). They were discouraged from gathering communally, which inhibited the possibilities of communal religious music-making (see Ahmed 1992:115–16).

## Lawful Music

Roy Choudhury (1957) and Farmer (1929:20–38) have examined the sources regarding the lawfulness of music in Islam. Some important facts emerge: (1) there is no pronouncement against music in the Quran (Roy Choudhury 1957:65, Farmer 1929:22); (2) the Hadith attests that the Prophet listened to music and enjoyed it, women at that time being the chief music-makers (Roy Choudhury 1957:66–70); (3) many traditions regarding music derive from Aisha, wife of the Prophet; (4) the *duff* occupied a central place in the debate about lawfulness, "among the instruments most referred to in the sayings of Mohammad" (Poché 1984:617).

The frame drum was accepted as lawful and desirable in the context of weddings (Roy Choudhury 1957:70). In a well-known *badith*, the Prophet announced "Publish the marriage and beat the *ghirbâl* (round tambourine)!" (Farmer 1929:22). Aisha records that the Prophet personally sent musicians to a wedding she had arranged; he composed some verses for the occasion which would have been sung with the *duff* (Roy Choudhury 1957:68). At his daughter Fatima's marriage to Ali, a celebrated male performer Amr ibn Umayyu Dhamari played the frame drum, and became "patron saint of tambourine players" (Farmer 1929:38).<sup>8</sup>

Aisha's *badiths* provided significant support for the lawfulness of music. She recorded that the Prophet once invited an Abyssinian acrobat and musician to perform for her at home. This performance took place on sacred ground, since the Prophet's home and the mosque shared the same courtyard (Roy Choudhury 1957:69). Aisha attested that the Prophet listened to music by the professional singing-girls (*qainât*) and upheld it as lawful at festival time (Farmer 1929:26-27). However, because she led political opposition to Ali ibn Ali Talib, Shiahs revile her as an enemy and reject her scriptural authority, which allowed them to express their disapproval of music more fully (Roy Choudhury 1957:88).

### Acceptability of Music

Farmer states that after the death of the Prophet, women's "commanding position" in the realm of music declined. A radical change occurred under the caliph Uthman (644-56). Until then "music, as a profession, was in the hands of the women-folk and slave-girls for the greater part" (Farmer 1929:44). Prominent Muslims campaigned against music. This period marked the first appearance of the male professional musician (*mukhan-nath*), "an effeminate class who dyed their hands and affected the habits of women" (ibid.:45). The first of these was the famous singer, Touais, "The Little Peacock" (632-710), brought up in the house of Arwa, the caliph's mother. He accompanied himself on a square *duff* which he carried in a bag or in his robe (ibid.:52-53).<sup>9</sup>

A polemic tract against music by Ibn abi-l Dunya (823-94) uses stories about pious Muslims to support its case. An early convert to Islam, Ibn Masud (d. 652-54), patrolled gateways of enclosed residential quarters through which women needed to pass, and he and his companions publicly tore up any frame drums "girls" had. The tract quotes Suwaid ibn Ghafala, the Prophet's contemporary—"The angels do not enter a house in which is a tambourine (*duff*)"—and the famous ascetic, Hasan al-Basri (d.728): "The tambourine does not pertain at all to the practice of the Muslims" (Robson 1938:31-32).

This is evidence of zealotry against women, and against the *duff* as a women's instrument. Relatively defenceless, girls were easy targets for Muslims seeking to impose new standards of social behaviour. Asim ibn Hubaira, who lived in the Abbasid Golden Age (reputed for its fine court music), never saw a *duff* without breaking it. In old age, trampling one with his feet, he could not break it, and said: "Not one of their devils has overcome me but this" (ibid.:32). He was powerless to attack musical instruments played at court which were protected by the caliphs. The legists' condemnation of music and restriction of women's freedom apparently went—and go—hand in hand.

The Sufi movement evolved largely as a spiritual and political reaction against the corrupt Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates. There were important female Sufis in the early Islamic period, but by the late tenth century Sufism had become organised and consolidated into brotherhoods which strove to exclude women. Their influence grew in every part of the Muslim Empire (Schimmel 1975:82), and they began to use frame drums and music in their all-male spiritual rituals.

In a tract about musical audition Majd al-Din al-Ghazali (d. 1126) argues for the lawful use of music, but solely in the context of Sufi ritual. He condemns musical instruments of "diversion" (such as *jank*, *rabâb*, 'ud, *barbat* and *mizmâr*) but explicitly upholds the frame drum as lawful, based on two "sound" *hadiths* in al-Bukhari and Muslim (Robson 1938:111). Majd al-Din also expresses concern about possible sexual distractions at Sufi gatherings, requiring that "no beardless youth should be among them, nor should there be a window through which women can look at them; but if pious beardless youths are among them, they sit behind the men" (ibid.:112).

By the thirteenth century, with the close of the Abbasid rule, the legists had failed to stamp out "unlawful" types of music, but amateur women's music had disappeared from public life. Thereafter, practices relating to women and music (and the frame drum) developed differently in the various particular cultures of the Middle East.

Broadly speaking, women continued to make music within their more limited circumstances. The frame drum remained widely available. In wealthy settings women might have access to instruments like the Arabian *qânun* and 'ud, the Persian *târ* and *kamâncheh* or—for the elite—European imports such as the violin and piano.

## **The Frame Drum (*Dâireh*) in Afghanistan**

Afghan discourses on gender and musical instruments are founded in Islamic Middle Eastern thought, and the frame drum has a long history in

the region. However, Afghanistan lies on the cross-roads of Asian culture, and is not taken as “representative” of the Middle East.

### **Evidence in Persian Miniature Paintings**

Persian miniature paintings depict a fictional or mythological poetic world, but they contain naturalistic details of everyday life and provide clues about musical practices of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>10</sup> They show the frame drum played in Sufi religious gatherings, courtly settings, and nuptial celebrations.

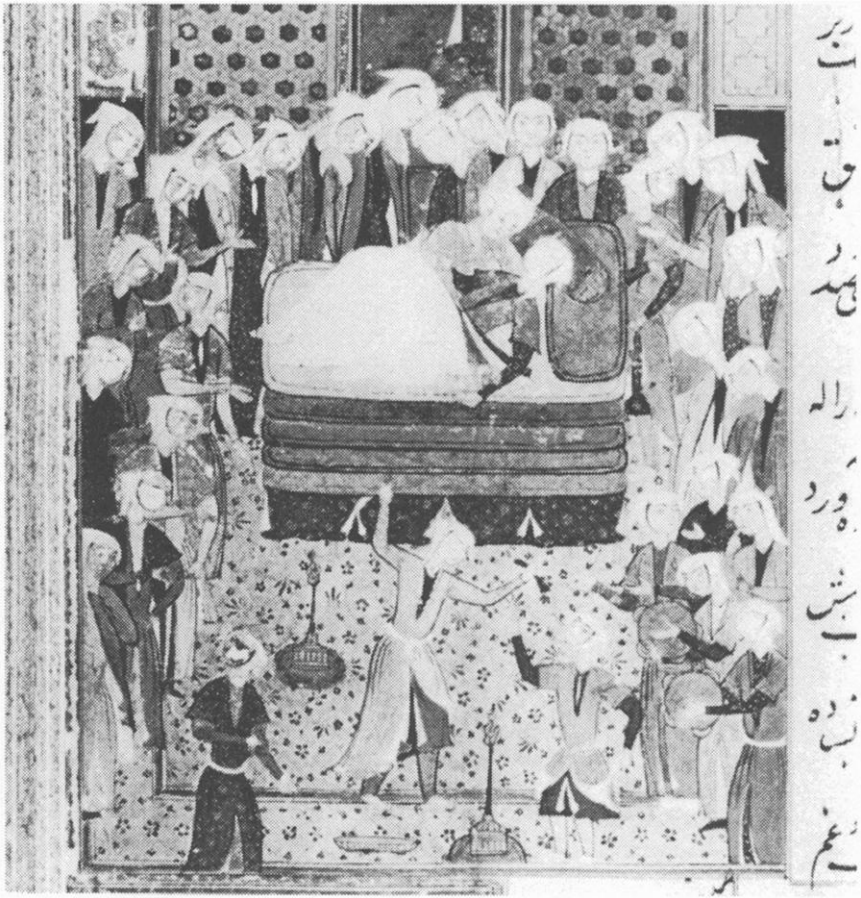
The paintings depict ecstatic Sufi religious gatherings as an exclusively male context for musical-making. Typically, several Sufis dance inside an assembled circle, with music from two frame drums and one or two flutes (*ney*), a combination frequently mentioned in Persian poetry (During 1993:561) (for illustrations, see During 1991:173, 200).

In courtly musical settings, the frame drum is played by both women and men. The memoirs of the emperor Babur, *Bâburnâme*, provide names of celebrated male musicians of the fifteenth century Timurid courts, whom Baily concludes to have been servants of the court, not people of noble birth (1988:12–13). We have no information about women musicians; they possibly had a lower status. The paintings show small ensembles—all-female, all-male or mixed—playing for a prince or king, usually in the company of a consort or guests, indoors or outdoors. Women dance, sing, play frame drums and other instruments: the harp (*chang*), various bowed and plucked lutes, and the hammered dulcimer (*santur*). The frame drum is sometimes shown held against the face, used as a resonator for the voice.<sup>11</sup>

Two miniatures from the Bodleian collection illustrate nuptial rituals in an all-female setting (apart from the presence of the bridegroom). They both depict the consummation of the marriage of King Khusrau and Shirin. One, painted in 1500–1501, shows Khusrau and Shirin in bed, with three female attendants nearby. One sits at the end of the bed while the others play a frame drum and flute (the latter possibly added later). The other miniature, painted in 1581, shows a large number of women around the nuptial bed (see Fig. 1). Three female dancers holding handkerchiefs dance in a circle to the accompaniment of two frame drums played by women.<sup>12</sup>

Several hypotheses about Persian music performance practice in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries emerge: (1) the frame drum was the only rhythmic instrument of courtly and religious music, excluding idiophones used by dancers; (2) in Sufi rituals, the frame drum was played exclusively by men (usually with the flute); (3) women used frame drums in the context of marriage; (4) at court, women musicians played a variety of instruments in prestigious settings.

**Figure 1.** Detail from a Persian miniature painted in Shiraz, 1581, showing two women playing frame drums (bottom right) and others dancing in the marriage chamber of King Khusrau and Shirin. Ms Elliott 239 folio 243<sup>R</sup>, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.



### **Recent History**

It is unclear when frame drums ceased to be used in Sufi rituals in this region.<sup>13</sup> With regard to courtly music, frame drums fell out of use with the advent of Indian court musicians to Kabul in the 1860s. They established the tabla drums as the principal rhythmic instrument of Afghan classical music (Baily 1988:25). Nearby, in Iran, the frame drum disappeared from classical music in the 19th and 20th centuries, “doubtless eclipsed by the *darb* or *tonbak*” (During 1993:561).

The mid-twentieth century saw a period of secularisation, Afghanistan becoming more open to Western influences. In the extensive instrumentarium of Afghanistan's national radio orchestra, frame drums were not used (Baily 1988:82). Thus, in the nineteenth and twentieth century the drum's use became considerably limited and it lost prestige.

Frame drums today are common all over Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> They are made by settled or semi-nomadic groups with outsider status known derogatorily as Jat/Ghorbat, who also make wooden sieves with an identical style of frame.<sup>15</sup> The drums are of varying sizes, sometimes fitted with iron rings, pellet bells, or metal jingles to enhance the sound. The skins are sometimes painted, sometimes left plain. Designs painted on the skin include the flowering tree of life common in women's embroidery. The drums are rarely sold publicly; generally the makers go from door to door in residential areas, selling them very cheaply.

Nowadays the frame drum is solely an instrument of folk and popular music, played principally by girls and women. Slobin summarizes the situation stating: "In Afghan life there is a clear distinction of musical roles by sex. In most cases women do not play or even handle musical instruments except for the tambourine and the jew's harp (the latter is also played by children). Men, on the other hand, master a great variety of lutes and fiddles, and generally shun the women's instruments" (1980:137).

A pronounced ideology of gender separation is defined and imposed by male authority (see Doubleday forthcoming). This affects musical life in several ways: (1) virtually all musical activity is segregated according to gender, (2) men dominate religious, classical and radio music, leaving only folk music to be shared with women, and (3) men have inhibited women from playing almost all musical instruments.

The frame drum's status is somewhat particular: (1) it is by far the most common instrument, played by the largest body of performers, including women, men and children; (2) it is the only self-sufficient non-melodic instrument; (3) it is the only traditional instrument to be played by women (apart from the jew's harp);<sup>16</sup> (4) through its connection with the Arabian *duff*, it has significance in the religious debate about the lawfulness of music; (5) because of its acceptability to some jurists, its status as a musical instrument is questionable; (6) used within women's quarters, it is the principal instrument for effecting the marriage process; (7) it has connections with illicit sexuality.<sup>17</sup>

### Contexts for Performance

Women use the frame drum for informal musical entertainment (*sâ'attiri*) in the privacy of their all-women domestic space. Inhibited by

male authority, they say it is “bad” (*bad*) to play when men are at home and would be disturbed.

Weddings provide the most significant lawful context for women to play frame drums.<sup>18</sup> It is incumbent on the bridegroom’s women to drum, sing and dance, unless they hire female professional musicians to fulfil that role for them. Inhibitions and ideas of modesty are temporarily forgotten. Women may even play the drum in public space, albeit fully veiled, in wedding processions (see Doubleday 1990: photo 21).

The drum facilitates the marriage process in many ways: (1) it accompanies songs of blessing whose verses give emotional support to the bride and her close relatives; (2) women’s music and dancing promote bonding between the bride and groom’s families; (3) the drum announces arrivals, accompanies bridal processions, and advertises the marriage to the neighbourhood; (4) music and dancing provide a “boiling hot” (*por jush*) atmosphere suitable for the eventual consummation of marriage.

Apart from wedding processions, women’s legitimate use of public space for drumming is highly restricted. Until recently, New Year festivities at the spring equinox offered a notable opportunity for outdoor music. These celebrations connected with greenery and renewal are of ancient origin, widely celebrated in Persian-influenced regions (Doubleday 1990:62–67).<sup>19</sup> In 1972 at the mass women’s spring gathering in the Gohar Shad Park at Herat, Sakata observed women’s open-air music-making, an activity permissible only at that time of year: “Small groups of women sing and dance to the accompaniment of tambourines called *daira* which they bring with them or which they purchase in the park from gypsy-like women who traditionally make and sell them” (1983:19). By the mid-1970s, in Herat women no longer played outdoor music at the mass spring picnics, inhibited by male guards, although they confirmed that music-making had been their custom.

## Evaluations of the Drum

In her fieldwork among Jat/Ghorbat groups who make sieves and frame drums, Rao collected a myth about the origin of the drum. It describes their ancestors making the first frame drum for the Prophet’s daughter, Bibi Fatimeh, in Medina, for use at a wedding (Rao 1982:67). The myth gives the drum positive value, invoking the sanctity and prestige of the Prophet and his daughter, and its use in the lawful context of marriage.

Those who make or use the drum professionally give it value. Zainab Herawi, a female professional musician of Jat origins, was one such person. The drum was the tool of her trade: in the past female entertainers were known as *dâireh-dast* (“drum-in-hand”). As my teacher, Zainab suggested I make a religious vow to “make my fingers flow” on the drum.<sup>20</sup> This vow

linked her instrument with a venerable Sufi shrine frequented by the greatest master musicians of Kabul, and she said it would bring me religious merit (*sawâb*) (Doubleday 1990:181).

Afghan women generally cherish the drum as “a good thing,” necessary for celebratory festivities and valuable for entertainment. They say festivities have religious merit, but I never heard them claim merit for the drum itself. They attribute certain apotropaic properties to the drum. Following a birth, they play it in festivities that ward off malevolent spirits (*jinn*) (ibid.:144–45). People believe that music (especially drums) can facilitate the exorcism of spirits (ibid.:200).<sup>21</sup>

Afghan men hold a more negative view of the drum and some deride it as a women’s instrument. The drum has no part in prestigious genres like classical or radio music, and male professional musicians scathingly say women do not “know anything” about music theory. Another negative aspect of the drum is its connection with Jat/Ghorbat groups, who have outsider status. Some Jat/Ghorbat groups practised the prostitution of women and boys, with dancing as an erotic lure (Rao 1982:28–29, Baily 1988:34, 141–42). Further, professional women musicians collect customary tips and gifts from the bridegroom’s family in the drum, behaviour which is also seen as shameful (Doubleday 1990:189, 201–2).

Baily (1996) discovered that some men resisted classifying the *dâireh* as a musical instrument. In a range of tests of sound perception, he questioned various Herati male informants about a recording of a man singing to his own *dâireh* accompaniment. Two theological students did not consider this to be “music” (*musiqî*). Their judgment was based on a pre-understanding of the drum as lawful and upheld in the Hadith. Their logic would seem to run as follows: “The drum is not sinful, therefore its sound is not sinful. Music is sinful, therefore this sound is not music and the drum is not a musical instrument.”

Another informant, Gada Mohammad, a professional musician, also initially claimed the *dâireh* was not a musical instrument, but for different reasons. Perhaps because it is normally played by unskilled women, he did not see the drum as a “proper” instrument. But when he remembered that a prestigious male singer had played the *dâireh* on Radio Afghanistan, he changed his mind (ibid.:69–70). All three informants sought to categorise the drum according to preconceived ideas about music as defined by male authority.

To summarise, in Afghanistan uses of the frame drum have changed over the centuries. In the past it was intrinsic to Sufi rituals and the principal rhythm instrument of prestigious courtly music. Today it is primarily the instrument of women. Its most important use is in wedding rituals. Certain other uses are connected with shameful illicit sexuality.

## Sexuality and Power

The Middle Eastern frame drum has important links with dance and sexuality. From a global perspective, Hanna emphasises multiple associations between sex and dance. She identifies “aphrodisiac dancing” as a broad category, outlining several types of which the first two relate to our line of enquiry:

1. Dance in settings with courtship opportunities and at wedding parties (where courtship often occurs)—whether women and men dance together or apart, for the opposite sex or for their own sex—encourages culturally licit procreation. A group’s own members may dance, or it may hire professional dancers of high or low status.
2. Dancing may be for the purpose of alluring a pre- or extra-marital affair, including prostitution (1988:46–47).

This analysis is useful for the modern era, but concepts of “licit” and “illicit” sexual union in or outside marriage did not always apply in Middle Eastern culture.

The region has an ancient history of non-monogamous female sexuality in temple service. Historically remote, it was transmuted and largely erased from cultural memory. It appears to have originated in Sumer (Iraq) in the third millennium B.C.E., with the worship of the goddess Inanna. An important characteristic of Inanna/Ishtar-Astarte’s cult was the sacred marriage ritual (*hieros gamos*) in which frame drums were featured (see above). Embodying the goddess, the priestess (hierodule) actively “summoned” the king to her embrace (Long 1992:133). Buonaventura suggests that the Middle Eastern “Dance of the Seven Veils” was an aphrodisiac “welcome” dance within this ritual (1983:17–23).<sup>22</sup>

For many centuries the *hieros gamos* fertility drama was an occasion for “love feasts for the whole community” through sacred sexual intercourse (Long 1992:132), probably with drumming and dancing. Judaism opposed goddess worship, and biblical writers and commentators reviled temple service and its associated ceremonies, denigrating priestesses of Ishtar-Astarte as “temple harlots” or “prostitutes.”<sup>23</sup>

Under Judaism, Christianity and Islam, religious laws controlled female sexuality within marriage. Women’s “aphrodisiac” dancing and drumming was sanctioned as an integral feature of Middle Eastern wedding celebrations. For women, weddings are highly significant rites, usually held over several days at great financial expense. Frame drums often play an important role.

Shiloah mentions “large female ensembles” (*adida*) who “beat out complex rhythms on *târs* (frame drums) at weddings in the Persian Gulf” (1995:159). Hassan (1980) provides information on Iraq; for Turkey, see Ziegler (1990); and for Afghanistan, Doubleday (1990). At weddings, girls

and women typically perform solo dance improvisations focussing upon female corporeal beauty. Arab dancing, with its emphasis on pelvic movements, is implicitly erotic, and—within its lawful context—has a positive and wholesome ethos.

Erotic dancing to the rhythm of frame drums has a long history as an entertainment in palaces, harems, cabarets, brothels and other places. Outside the context of marriage, legists define it as illicit. Buonaventura's (1983) historical study contains six illustrations of women or transvestite boys dancing with frame drums in Egypt and Turkey.<sup>24</sup> The drum also appears as a sexualised "stage prop" in Orientalist erotic constructions of Middle Eastern and North African women, especially photographs (see Graham-Brown 1988, Alloula 1986, and Fig. 2).

### **Outsider Status and Gypsies/Rom**

Professional female dancers often belonged to Gypsy communities whose traditions set them apart. As outsiders, their subversive power, self-

**Figure 2. Use of the Frame drum as an erotic "stage prop" in a studio postcard titled "Chanteuses arabes." Egyptian postcard, ca. 1920, author's collection.**



assertion, and independence threatened the status quo and led them to be stigmatised. In eighteenth and nineteenth century Egypt, *ghawazee* dancers were Gypsy women who performed in the open air, social outcasts "seldom admitted to respectable harems and frowned upon by the religious and upper classes" (Buonaventura 1983:41). During Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 four hundred *ghawazee* women were captured and decapitated for causing trouble among the soldiers, a barbaric incident which reveals their vulnerable status as outsiders (ibid.:7).

Many related Gypsy/Rom performance traditions survive today. Connections with sieves, frame drums, dancing, prostitution and female impersonation by boys are common. The Afghan Jat/Ghorbat groups have strong occupational links with Gypsies (see Sakata 1983:79-83). Similar musician groups in north-west India, Pakistan, and Iran have outsider status and are related to the "European Gypsies" (Qureshi 1980:105).

In south-western Turkey, Gypsy women professionals (*delbekci kalinlar*) play frame drums (*delbek*) at wedding festivities. These Gypsies live outside towns, "never regarded as full members of society." Ziegler comments: "Their role as musicians is closely connected with the flavour of indecency and they are spoken of by Turkish men as the village prostitutes. Whether this is simply an accusation which underlines the ambiguous status of these women, or presents some degree of truth remains to be established" (1990:89).<sup>25</sup> Similarly, Picken notes that "some stigma" is attached to the frame drum: "Not only is it a women's instrument, it is also an instrument of women of ill-repute [i.e. Gypsies]." Further west, in the Balkans, Gypsy musician groups also use frame drums (1975:144).<sup>26</sup>

### Male Control of Sexuality

Accusations of "harlotry" and "prostitution" reflect male discomfort with active female sexuality. As in all male-dominated cultures, in the Middle East unbridled female sexuality was seen as potentially dangerous (see Beck and Keddie 1978; Ahmed 1992).

Anxieties increase when there is conflict or political instability. In recent Afghan history this was reflected in tight restrictions relating to women and music. During the *jehâd* ("holy war"), Afghan Resistance leaders controlling the refugee camps of the north-west Frontier Province of Pakistan completely prohibited music. They invoked the customary moratorium on all music-making following death, declaring the Afghan community to be in a state of permanent mourning. With the men away fighting, the camps mainly contained women and children, so the authorities were effectively banning women's use of the frame drum. An underlying concern was the control of women's sexuality.

By contrast, the Afghan communist regime promoted music and recruited schoolgirls in Kabul to dance on television, a move which shocked conservative members of the public as an act of flagrant debauchery. Fatima Gailani states: "[Refugee women] were restricted to their own homes, often no more than tents. Men were of the opinion that the more women were placed in seclusion, the more obvious it would be that this reflected on their own piety. Meanwhile, in another form of exploitation, in Communist-controlled Kabul, attractive young women and girls were picked out of schools and colleges and forced to perform patriotic songs and dances on television" (1996:60).<sup>27</sup> In 1992, when Islamist leaders took control, music was banned from the radio and television, and women news-readers and announcers were summarily dismissed.

These examples demonstrate how male authorities seek to contain female sexuality, and how the frame drum's close links with sexuality may imbue it with subversive power, especially in the hands of "prostitutes" and outsiders.

**Figure 3. Women from an Afghan Jat/Ghorbat professional musician family entertain the author at their home. Gohar, on Indian harmonium (an instrument adopted by woman's bands in the late 1930s) has worked as a musician almost all of her life. Her daughter, Kauki, plays the frame drum. Since 1993 local authorities have prohibited women from practising music as a profession. Photo by Veronica Doubleday, Herat, 1994.**



## Men, Music and Power

### The Power of the Sacred

Sexuality is not the only domain in which Middle Eastern men wield power. Male dominance in the religious, political, and economic spheres has significantly affected musical life.

In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, male legists reserved the right to interpret sacred texts and codify religious law. Similarly, musical knowledge was guarded within male preserves. The Sufi brotherhoods were systematised as chains of power, with knowledge transmitted from master to pupil. Within them frame drums acquired esoteric significance. Commenting on the *zikr* ritual of the Kurdish Qadiri dervishes of Sanandaj (Iran), During states:

The masters affirm that there is a secret to the art of *daf*-playing, which summons energies similar to those exploited in martial arts . . . only a dervish is able to play the *daf*: in the hands of a profane, even a virtuoso, it doesn't have the same effect. An effect, probably obtained through the spiritual disciplines (moderate but assiduous), the zeal (*bimmat*) and the faith of the dervishes, through their taxing moral demands, and also thanks to an unbroken line of initiation passed on from the great charismatic men of the past, mystics, miracle-workers, gnostics and saints (1994:22).

Among Sufis and heterodox sects, frame drums have been hallowed and rendered exclusive in a number of significant ways: (1) protected and set apart, (2) endowed with sacred symbolism, and (3) physically modified.

Sufi frame drums are usually kept within sacred space. In Iraq, the *daff* is hung from the walls of the *takia* (religious gathering place) when out of use (Hassan 1980:173). In Arab culture the *mazhâr* "stays in the mosque and cannot be used outside religious ceremonies: in fact each *mazhâr* is dedicated (*consacré*) to a saint . . . It is reserved for religious music: the *zikr* of Rifai and Qadiri Sufi brotherhoods, and other festivals such as the Prophet's birthday, burials and healing ceremonies" (Touma 1977:108). Likewise, in Turkey, the *mazhâr* is "reserved for the Mevlevi and other religious orders" and "never used in secular music" (K. Reinhard 1969, quoted in Poché 1984).

The Iraqi heterodox Yazidi sect hold the *daff* as very sacred. It is used to bestow blessings, and is highly protected. Members of the sect may not touch it except to kiss it in respect, and it is carried by a "religious musician," wrapped in cloth. When he passes everyone seated in the cafés is supposed to rise. Granted a brief examination, Hassan inadvertently touched an instrument, and was told it would have to be purified with water (Hassan 1980:183-84).<sup>28</sup>

Attributions of sacred symbolism may express androcentric ideas. In Persian culture the frame drum's round shape symbolised "the image of both the heavens and the assembled circle of [male] mystics" (During 1993:561). Majd al-Din's tract on Sufi audition contains an important passage of this kind:

the tambourine is a reference to the cycle of existing things (*dâ'ira al-akwân*); the skin which is fitted on to it is a reference to general existence (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*), the striking which takes place on the tambourine is a reference to the descent of divine visitations (*wâridât*) from the innermost arcana (*bâtin al-butun*) upon general existence to bring forth the things pertaining to the essence of the interior to the exterior, the five small bells (*jalâjil*) are a reference to the prophetic ranks, the saintly ranks, the apostolic ranks, the khalifate ranks, and the imamate ranks, and their combined sound is a reference to the appearance of the divine revelations and unrestricted knowledge by means of these realities in the hearts of the saints and the people of perfection (Robson 1938:98-99).

These ideas, couched in terms of a hierarchy of male prophets and saints, relate to a male communal spirituality.

Physical modifications to instruments may bestow an exclusive sacred identity. In Iraq, chains attached to the Sufi *daff* produce percussive effects which facilitate ecstatic union with God. The four links in each percussive chain symbolise the four poles (*qutb*) of the Sufi orders, or 101 links recall 101 names of God. Sacred names and inscriptions such as "*Yâ Allâh*" (Oh Allah) may be painted on the drum skin (Hassan 1980:173).<sup>29</sup> Gender bias may not be consciously applied, but it is there: Allah's names are in the male gender, and the *qutb* (pole) is the male leader of the Sufi hierarchy.

### Secular Power and Knowledge

Divisions of labour deeming certain work as "unsuitable" for women protect male economic interests. In Middle Eastern cultures professional women musicians were stigmatised, while "respectable" women were excluded from spaces where music was transmitted, such as music conservatories or cafés. In Baghdad, in the first half of the twentieth century, each café had music in the evenings and early mornings before work: cafés became like "schools" where ideas about *maqâm* (the classical modal system) and musical technique were discussed and appreciated (ibid.:110). Women were unwelcome.

Male hereditary professional hierarchies guarded technical and theoretical knowledge. They held exclusive control of many instruments. In the nineteenth century, a small frame drum called the *riqq* became part of the Arabic classical *takbt* ensemble, its name distinguishing it from the larger *târ*. The *riqq* was taught in conservatoires, in a virtuoso playing style (Poché

1984). Its name, context of performance and specially transmitted techniques reserved it for male use, and mother-of-pearl inlay decoration also denoted a special, high status.

Male professional musicians sometimes assert priority of rights when instruments are shared with women. At weddings in Turkey, Ursula Reinhard noted that “professional and semi-professional” women musicians had to concede their instruments to men when required: “The women mostly accompany their songs with the goblet drum *delbek*, or the tambourine, *def*. When the instruments are needed at the moment by the men, they play just as happily on a pot or a serving-tray” (1990:101).<sup>30</sup> The term “semi-professional” may imply lack of payment or low payment compared with men.

Male professionals sometimes assert their ascendancy by downgrading “women’s instruments.” In Afghanistan the *dâireh* is partially reduced to a “non-instrument,” and the jew’s harp is derided as a toy (Sakata 1980b:144, also see Note 16). Feminist art historians note similar patterns in European culture: male artists denied women access to their profession, and then degraded the products of female creativity.<sup>31</sup>

These examples demonstrate how men have asserted superior rights and status over women with relation to musical instruments, using various techniques of enforcement.

## Conclusions

Today frame drums have a wide range of uses, with or without other instruments, played in private or public performance contexts which are variously viewed as lawful, sinful or meritorious. The drums are featured in folk, popular, classical and religious traditions. Players are of differing age and status, both male and female, amateur and professional.

Evidence points to a broad historical shift in relation to gender. The early sources show women playing frame drums in many contexts, and men appear to have played them rarely. Some women’s traditions have been lost. Middle Eastern women no longer publicly play frame drums in battle songs and victory songs, or their modern equivalents such as military parades. To my knowledge, they do not play frame drums in elegies for the dead, or in public religious ceremonies. Drumming as a ritual of hospitality has also declined or disappeared. On the other hand, in more recent times frame drums feature in exclusively male or male-dominated traditions (e.g. Sufi rituals and classical ensembles).

However, several factors have helped maintain women’s right to play frame drums in traditional settings. The drums were protected as lawful by the Prophetic traditions. Playing techniques could be transmitted informally.

The drums were cheap and easy to produce. Stigmatised professional women musicians (including Gypsies) made and sold them, keeping traditions alive and evading control by male authorities.

Finally—and most significantly—frame drums are linked with rites of passage. Weddings remain as the primary context in which the drum is lawful and desirable. There the drum facilitates transfer of a young woman from the control of her father to her husband. Given the separation of men and women prescribed by Islamic custom—the dominant ethos of the region—men needed women's music to enliven festivities which ensured continuance of the patrilineal social order. Men had a vested interest in the transformative powers of frame drums—in the hands of women.

### **The Powers of Frame Drums**

A considerable range of powers have been—and are—attributed to frame drums in Middle Eastern culture. Some are acknowledged, others implicit. My understanding of this is informed by personal experience as a performer, including ritual contexts in Afghanistan (see Doubleday 1990:187–89, 197–201).

Certain powers are inherent in the drum's physical essence, its particular sound, and playing techniques. Bodily relationships are notable: close connections with the throat (with singing, or when used as a resonator) and hands and fingers (through playing). The drums are held close to the heart and navel, important spiritual centres. When played in movement (dancing or processions), their rhythms unite people in a communal consciousness.

In common with other musical instruments, frame drums promote emotional bonding. Frequently used in connection with singing, including meritorious ritual blessings, their power to enhance or modify the voice is significant. They possess transformative powers in life-crisis rituals. In connection with dancing, they facilitate physical arousal and trance states.

Supernatural powers are frequently attributed to frame drums. The use of drums—and other loud explosive sounds—at weddings and other life crisis ceremonies may be apotropaic, protecting humans in liminal states (e.g. brides, new-born babies, or women during the forty day post-partum period), when they are particularly vulnerable to attack by the evil eye or by *jinn*s.

Some performers believe frame drums have the power to ward off or exorcise *jinn*s (Doubleday 1990:200). Belief in these beings predates Islam, and they have ancient connections with trance and divination. Arab poets were considered to be possessed by them (*majnun*) as a source of inspiration (Rouget 1985:280; Shiloah 1995:4), and Shiloah states that the *jinn*

“re-emerged” as “an inspirational source among some poets and musicians in Islamic times” (ibid.).

Frame drums are believed to connect other spiritual beings. The Qaderi Sufis of Kurdistan state that, in their rituals, drumming invokes the presence of angels, prophets and saints (During 1994:21–22). Among the Yazidi of Iraq, the *daff* is used to honour angels (Hassan 1980:193).

Basilov, a leading ethnographer of Central Asian shamanism, considers that historically Sufism incorporated Central Asian shamanistic rites into the *zikr* ritual (quoted in Levin 1996:307). During makes a similar point with relation to the Refai and Qaderi Sufi brotherhoods (1993:561), and Rouget notes that certain trance techniques (the “rasping saw” *zikr* breathing) of the Yasawiyya Sufi order came from Turkestan in the twelfth century (1985:272). In Tajikistan, male and female *baxshi* healers use the drum to call spirits and perform divinations. The tradition reflects a syncretism of Central Asian shamanism and Islam (see Levin 1996:242–58, 306–7).

Supernatural uses of drums and sieves appear over a wide area extending beyond the Middle East, sometimes linked with Gypsies and divination (for Egypt and Spain, see Hassan 1980:38). In Macedonia many ritual events are “initiated by a respected woman leading the dance line with a decorated object such as a sieve” (Silverman 1996:68). In Morocco, frame drums and sieves are powerful instruments of sorcery (Philip Schuyler, personal communication). Another (apparently rare) supernatural use of the drum, in Iraq, is in prayer for rain (Hassan 1980:138).<sup>32</sup>

### Techniques of Exclusivity

The data demonstrate various processes whereby frame drums—and other musical instruments—are assigned according to gender. These “techniques of exclusivity” have not previously been analysed in detail, and there is scope for further work in this field.

In the Middle East, male musicians have monopolised musical instruments in various ways. These include (1) keeping instruments within all-male performance space, (2) transmission of technical knowledge through an all-male hierarchy, and (3) physical modification of instruments, creating an exclusive identity. In the Middle East certain powers appropriated by men have been crucial in these processes: the interpretation of sacred texts, enforcement of laws, and the seclusion of many classes of women in domestic space.

These exclusivity techniques are evident outside the Middle East—examples abound in Europe, Africa and the Indian subcontinent, for instance. Other techniques exist that are not evident in the Middle East. For example, in Melanesia, South America and sub-Saharan Africa, powerful

taboos on musical instruments pose threats of punishment or death (e.g. the “sacred flutes” of Papua New Guinea, see Chenoweth 1980). Another widespread exclusivity technique entails sexual identification with musical instruments (in various ways too complex to be easily summarised).

Exclusivity depends upon enforcement, sometimes with threats of physical violence. It is rare to find these techniques employed by women: they usually lack the power of enforcement. Our planet is male-dominated. Equality between the sexes is not the norm, and female political, economic, sexual or religious ascendancy is rare. This may explain why—across cultures—women have few musical instruments exclusively of their own.

### **The Importance of Sexuality**

As we have seen, male control of female sexuality underlies gender power struggles and impinges upon musical life. Koskoff outlines three important points about sexuality and musical performance: “Sexuality both self- and other-defined, affects music performance in three important ways: (1) performance environments may provide a context for sexually explicit behavior, such that music becomes a metaphor for sexual relations; (2) the actual or perceived loss of sexuality may change women’s roles and/or statuses; and (3) cultural beliefs in women’s inherent sexuality may motivate the separation of or restriction upon women’s activities” (1989:6). These points apply equally to musical instruments, as the Middle Eastern material demonstrates.

(1) Music as a metaphor for sex. This point recalls the close associations of the frame drum with women, dancing and sexuality. The desire to control female sexuality is intimately linked with restrictions on women’s use of musical instruments in the Middle East (and the stigmatisation of those who defy those restrictions). Historical religious opposition by the monotheistic religions towards polytheistic goddess worship and associated sexual rituals is also notable.

(2) Loss of sexuality and change of musical role. This point may be expanded to include the whole female life-cycle, through puberty, fertility and menopause. In the Middle East the attainment of sexuality and loss of virginity (at marriage) are highlighted. Nubile or newly married girls may experience severe restrictions relating to veiling, education, and musical performance (Doubleday and Baily 1995). Women’s access to musical instruments may decline as they age, inhibited by conventions of dignity.

(3) Separation and restriction of women’s activities. This has been a recurrent theme of this article, evidenced by the segregation of music-making according to the purdah system, and assignment of musical instruments according to gender.

## Notes

1. This article is an expanded version of a paper presented at the 2nd Meeting for the ICTM Study Group on Music of the Arab World, Oxford 1996. Thanks to the following people, who have given valuable advice, encouragement and support for my research: John Bailly, Margaret Birley, Abdul-Hamid Hamam, Schéhérazade Hassan, Nancy Lindisfarne, Asphodel Long, Martin Stokes, Lou Taylor, Bruce Wannell, Owen Wright, and Wim van Zanten. Translations from French material are mine.

2. I undertook fieldwork in Herat city in 1973–1977, in partnership with my husband John Bailly. I have subsequently worked on Afghan music in London, New York, Pakistan, and Herat (1994).

3. Farmer notes the following terms used in the Abbasid period: *duff*, *ghirbāl*, *bandair*, *tār*, *mazhar*, *tiryāl* and *shaqf* (1929:211).

4. Jephthah's unfortunate daughter was rewarded for her welcoming song with death. Her father had vowed that if he succeeded in battle he would sacrifice the first living creature he saw on arrival home (Judges 11:30–40).

5. Pre-Islamic *tablil* is "the song performed as pilgrims danced around the Ka'aba" (Hamam 1996:7–8). The Islamic ritual of seven circumambulations (*tawāf*) has its roots in sacred dance (Schimmel 1994:104; Farmer 1929:8). However, *tablil* is complicated because it was apparently performed both around the deities and around sacrificing stones (*nusb*). Hamam's textual research indicates that nubile girls performed *tablil* in the latter context.

6. Hamam provides the following translation from Ibn al-Kalbi (d.819):

"On the day of at-Tahaloq [a war between two tribes], al-Fand az-Zamani, an old man more than a hundred years old, arrived with his two daughters. The first one took off her clothes and started singing to the tribes of Shaiban and Bakr [to encourage them to victory]:

War, war, war, war! The fire of war is glowing  
How lovely, how lovely, to be with the victorious at dawn!  
The second one also took off her clothes and sang:  
We are the daughters of Tariq  
We walk on carpets  
If you fight we'll embrace you  
And prepare beds for you [?]  
But if you desert we'll abandon you"

This latter verse is well known and commonly quoted (e.g. Glubb 1971:207).

7. In the Prophet's presence some "little girls" played frame drums and lamented heroes who died at Badr (Robson 1938:75). In the seventh century, weekly concerts by female ritual mourners (*nāibāt*) were of a high musical standard (Farmer 1929:53). In fifteenth century Cairo, female professional mourners used frame drums to accompany their laments, although this activity was prohibited by orthodox Islam and periodically banned by the authorities (Ahmed 1992:119).

8. I have been unable to trace details about Amr ibn Umayyū Dhamari (also Baba Amr or Amr Iyar), the "patron saint" of the drum. According to Farmer, he was a male companion of the Prophet (1929:38). It is possible that he was a eunuch (see Note 9).

9. Touma describes Touais as the first man having access to the frame drum, a "privilege undoubtedly accorded on account of his being a eunuch" (1977:107). The term "privilege" implies a special or possibly sacred status which reserved the drum for women, but Touma's evidence for this is unclear.

10. In 1978 I undertook a complete survey and analysis of musical instruments depicted in miniature paintings housed in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (as yet unpublished). I thank the staff who facilitated this work.

11. For the drum as resonator for the voice, see Ms. Ell. 239:904, painted by Mohammad

Hossein Herawi at Shiraz (1581). This use of the drum was noted by Sakata in the Wakhan region of northern Afghanistan (1980a:32).

12. The miniatures are (respectively) Ms Ell. 194:676, in Turkmen style with Indian re-touching (1500-1); Ms Ell. 239:913, painted by Mohammad Hossein Herawi at Shiraz (1581).

13. Baily found that in western Afghanistan the Sufis performed *zikr* (also called *jabr*) with several singers and no musical instruments. At the Chishti shrine of Kharabat in Kabul (now destroyed by war) musicians played all instruments of Afghan classical music, with rhythm from tabla drums and large percussion stones identified by Slobin as *qatrâq* (1976:277).

14. The frame drum is termed *dâtreh* in all areas of Afghanistan except Badakhshan, a culturally distinct region overlapping Afghanistan and Tajikistan. There it is termed *daff* (Sakata:1980a:31; van den Berg, personal communication). During his fieldwork (1967-68) Slobin estimated that most urban households in northern Afghanistan possessed a *dâtreh* "to be taken down for festivities" (1976:265). In Herat women always had access to a drum—either their own, or that of a neighbouring household. Frame drums were usually communal property, not individually owned. No reliable information about the distribution of musical instruments in Afghanistan is currently available, but they are certainly less common.

15. *Jat* is a general derogatory term applied to a variety of different groups. Other terms are Gharibzadeh, Chelu, and Ghorbat (see Rao 1982; Baily 1988). Similar groups producing frame drums and sieves exist in a widespread area (e.g. the nomadic Kouli tribe of Iran, "kinsfolk of the gypsies" who specialize as sieve-makers, blacksmiths and tinkers (Wulff 1966:234-36)).

16. The jew's harp (*chang/chang-qobuz*) is notable as a solo instrument of women in Central Asia (see Levin 1996:155-56). In Afghanistan its use is confined to the north (Slobin 1976:273-76). Sakata states: "Generally, the Afghans do not seriously consider the *chang* as a musical instrument. Instead, they feel that the jaw's harp is a toy or an instrument of amusement for girls and women. Indeed, most of the performers are female" (1980b:144). In the 1960s, when Lubtchansky recorded a solo on jew's harp, the male Uzbek performer was very embarrassed, saying only women and children play the instrument.

17. Another group who used the drum before the civil war were fully grown semi-transvestite eunuchs (*isâk*), outsiders by virtue of their indeterminate sexual organs. They behaved in ways that were considered deeply shameful and "unmanly," wearing long hair, make-up and women's shawls, drumming and singing comic verses in the street as they collected tips from passers-by. They frequented an area of Kabul old city near Darwaze Lahori, by the bus and lorry depot. Some worked as tea-house waiters, and they possibly also offered services of a sexual nature. Thanks to Nabi Misdaq for this information.

18. Marriage in Afghanistan is not necessarily patrilineal, but Quranic laws of divorce and inheritance prescribe patrilineality. For further details on marriage, see Doubleday (1990); Tapper (1991).

19. New Year festivities are a widespread and ancient feature of the Persianised world. The city of Persepolis in southern Iran was built as a site for New Year rituals. In Afghanistan Ali's shrine at Mazar-i Sharif, near Balkh, is the national focus of New Year festivities. His cult is syncretised with that of Anahita, goddess of the Oxus river, a major deity extolled in the Avesta. She had a celebrated shrine at Balkh where "licentious rites" were performed in her honour (Rahimi 1977:24; Lee 1996). In the late 1960s, at New Year, Slobin noticed heaps of frame drums being sold around the central square of Ali's shrine (1976:265). The drum skins were painted in red and green with a symmetrical flowering tree of life symbol common in women's embroidery (see Paiva and Dupaigne 1993).

20. In *Three Women of Herat* I gave Zainab Herawi the pseudonym Shirin, but in 1994 her children urged me to reveal her true identity, since she is now unfortunately dead.

21. In Afghanistan possession by *jinn*s, known as *maraz* ("the illness"), is a state of mental and nervous distress especially found among women. See Doubleday (1990:101-114;128-38).

22. The dance mirrors the goddess Ishtar's descent to the Underworld (see Wolkstein and Kramer 1983; Pritchard 1975). At each of the seven gates of the Underworld, she sheds an item of personal adornment. The biblical story of Salomé's aphrodisiac dance for King Herod

may be a derogatory remodelling of this myth and its ritual, casting Salomé as a wicked temptress. The dancer's name, Salomé, may refer to Ishtar's "dance of welcome" (*shalom*: Hebrew for "peace," used as a welcome greeting) (Buonaventura 1983:18).

23. In contrast with modern connotations of "prostitution," Ishtar's female temple servants had high status. Hammurabi's code of laws gave them privileges (Long 1992:11-33).

24. These are: two Gypsy *ghawazee* in Cairo, with a male *daff* player (nineteenth century drawing, p.7); a troupe of Egyptian female dancers accompanied by eight women musicians, one playing a frame drum (nineteenth century French lithograph, p.36); some Cairean bare-breasted *ghawazee*, accompanied by a veiled female *daff* player and male lutenist (1762, p.40); transvestite buffoon boy dancers accompanied by male musicians including three frame drum players (Turkish miniature, p.50); Turkish *chengi* (female dancer) accompanied by a female frame drum player (p.57); Samia Gamal, renowned Arab dancer of the 1950s, accompanied by three male frame drummers (still from cinema film, p.99).

25. The female professional musicians of Herat with whom I worked were not prostitutes, but they were labelled as such.

26. The "frame drum couple" is one of the three principal Balkan Gypsy ensemble types (Pettan 1996:38). In Greece, Yiftoi Gypsy musicians use frame drums; deep-seated prejudice was directed particularly against their women's "libidinous" dance (Brandl 1996:26-27). A large Rom community in Skopje, Macedonia, make and play frame drums, and perform a "sexually provocative dance" called *chochek* (Silverman 1996:66, 69).

27. Fatima Gailani is the daughter of Pir Gailani, leader of a "moderate" Resistance group. Her information is reliable, backed up by my own observations and recorded interviews in Pakistan. Thanks to Anthony Hyman for drawing my attention to her article.

28. Levin reports a similar case in northern Tajikistan. When he touched a male *baxshi* healer's frame drum, the owner angrily told him he had sinned by touching the drum without washing himself or saying a special prayer: the drum would have to be reconsecrated (Levin 1996:243).

29. For an illustration of calligraphy on a Kurdish Sufi drum, see During (1994:back cover). These Kurdish Sufis apply the same numerological symbolism to percussive chains added to their drum. Another example of physical modification to frame drums occurs in Morocco, where Sufis remove snares from the *bendir*, seeking to avoid their "sensual effect" (Langlois 1997:caption to Plate 21).

30. It is unclear whether by "just as happily" Reinhard means that the women do not mind men making prior claims on the instruments, or whether they play just as proficiently on trays. Any musician prefers to play a good instrument.

31. See for instance, this quotation from a French article in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1860: "Male genius has nothing to fear from female taste. Let men of genius conceive of great architectural projects, monumental sculpture, and elevated forms of painting. In a word, let men busy themselves with all that has to do with great art. Let women occupy themselves with those types of art they have always preferred, such as pastels, portraits or miniatures" (quoted in Parker and Pollock 1981:1).

32. Hassan quotes Salim al-Tikrit (1973:156-57): "At Tikrit, when there is a lack of rain, the mullahs, adherents of the brotherhoods and the population meet after the Friday [communal] prayer. They make a popular procession out of the village, beating the *daff* and singing poems, begging God to grant his grace in the form of rain."

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