

# The historical development of percussion instruments in central Asia

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the history, development, and cultural significance of percussion instruments in Central Asia, with a particular focus on the doyra. It highlights the long history of the doyra based on ancient depictions and archaeological findings. Additionally, the article provides information about doyra performance techniques and the various names by which it is known across different cultures. The important role of the doyra in musical traditions, especially in the maqom art, is also explored. Special performance styles developed in regions such as Khorezm, Bukhara, and Fergana are examined. The article further demonstrates how the doyra has been historically significant not only in musical performances but also in religious and ceremonial events, as evidenced by historical documents and visual art representations.

**Keywords:** Central Asia, percussion instruments, doyra, music, maqom, history, culture.

**Introduction:** The musical culture of Central Asian peoples dates back to ancient times. One of the distinctive features of the musical traditions of Central Asia and some Eastern nations is the development of both widespread folk songs and instrumental melodies alongside the oral, masterful style of classical music. Various scholars and philosophers, including the famous thinker and polymath Abu Nasr al-Farabi, have addressed issues related to the science and practice of music. His monumental work, *Kitab al-Musiqi al-Kabir* (The Great Book of Music), became a foundational text for later generations of scholars, influencing figures such as Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Abdurahman Jami, Najmuddin Kavkabi, Zayn al-Abidin Husayni, Safi al-Din al-Urmawi, and Darvish Ali Changgi.

Historical records indicate that percussion instruments have long played a significant role in the musical traditions of Central Asian peoples, particularly the Uzbek nation. Instruments such as the oud, tanbur, nay, chang, rubab, qobiz, ghijjak, setar, surnay, bolaman, nogora, and doyra have been widely used over the centuries.

The doyra, in particular, holds an irreplaceable role in maintaining rhythmic structures in music. Due to its ease of use and expressive capabilities, it has become a widely popular instrument among the people.

Archaeological excavations at Saylamtash, dating back to the second millennium BCE, have uncovered depictions of doyra-like instruments being played, indicating the ancient origins of this instrument. While modern doyra designs have undergone some modifications compared to historical depictions, their essential structure remains consistent. Ancient doyra instruments often featured metal plates embedded into their wooden frame, while modern versions include small metal rings attached to the inner frame instead. The stretched membrane has also expanded in size over time. Illustrations from the 15th and 16th centuries depict doyra instruments with decorative perforations and jingles.

One of the oldest depictions of the doyra in Central Asia can be found on the walls of the ancient Nisa fortress, showing that the instrument's early design closely resembles its modern form.

The doyra is classified as a percussion instrument and is known by various names across different cultures: it is called doyra, chirmanda, childirma, and dap in Uzbek and Tajik musical traditions; dapp in Armenian; daff in Persian and Egyptian music; def, doyre, and ghaval in Azerbaijani traditions; and dabu in other parts of the East. The variations in the instrument's size, construction, playing style, and sound projection

contribute to its diverse forms across regions.

Asia. Copenhagen: Curzon Press.

Archaeological findings suggest that, before the Islamic era, doyra was primarily played by women, who would accompany their own singing and dancing. This tradition has continued to evolve over centuries. Even today, the doyra remains an essential instrument in female musical performances in Samarkand, Fergana, Bukhara, Namangan, and other regions of Uzbekistan.

The doyra has also long been integral to vocal and instrumental ensembles. It plays a crucial role in performing maqom—one of the masterpieces of Uzbek classical music. It is almost impossible to imagine maqom performances without the accompaniment of a doyra.

Over time, regional variations in doyra performance have developed across Central Asia, giving rise to distinct local styles. For example, the Khorezm doyra school differs significantly from other Uzbek styles in terms of technique and rhythm. In Khorezm, both large and small versions of the doyra are used primarily for accompaniment.

Historical records indicate that doyra was frequently used alongside other percussion instruments such as bells and cymbals in religious and ritual ceremonies conducted by priests. The depictions on the walls of the Nisa fortress suggest that doyra was commonly played during sacred dances, either by the dancers themselves or by specialized doyra players.

In the rich tradition of Uzbek classical music, maqom is structured upon a fundamental modal system (lad), while rhythm (usul) forms the second essential element. These two aspects are inseparable, much like two sides of the same coin. As Abdurauf Fitrat stated, "Their function is the same in maqom, making it difficult to imagine one without the other." For this reason, doyra has always been an indispensable part of maqom performances, traditionally played by highly skilled musicians alongside vocalists and instrumentalists.

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