

Orfeo

N°16

MAGAZINE

**The genesis
of the guitar**

**The development
of chordophones
around the
world**

N° 16 - Autumn 2020
English edition



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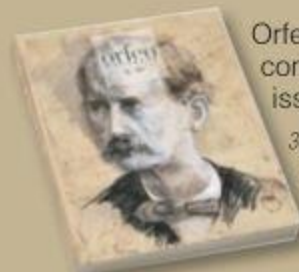
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Orfeo MAGAZINE N°16

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The hunter's bow and the reed: these two simple elements from prehistoric times led to the birth of the world's history of music. What makes both of these items special is that they produce harmonic sounds (sounds whose frequencies are double, triple, quadruple or some other multiple of the fundamental), which is rare in nature.

The first addition to the humble hunting bow was that of a hollow body, so as to amplify the sound of the string, followed by a neck. These primitive instruments would subsequently evolve in different ways in different parts of the world and, towards the sixteenth century, a new instrument of mixed heritage, European and Oriental, was conceived in Spain: our own dear guitar.

In this edition of *Orfeo*, I invite you to journey through time. First up is the history of the guitar as told by Emilio Pujol, followed by development of the plucked string instrument family around the globe. The guitar's relatives, whether close kin or distant cousins, include fascinating and often breathtakingly beautiful instruments.

Enjoy.

Alberto Martinez

A history of the guitar



1944, a young Narcís Bonet learns the guitar with Emilio Pujol, Barcelona.

The origins, birth and development of the Spanish guitar, through the eyes of Emilio Pujol. A musician's perspective on the instrument's evolution and how composers and guitarists influenced its development.

In Paris in the 1960s, the Catalan musician and composer, Narcís Bonet, who succeeded Nadia Boulanger as the head of the Conservatoire américain de Fontainebleau, taught at the Conservatoire de Paris, and was Deputy Director of the elite École normale de musique de Paris, organised a series of radio broadcasts for Radio France Internationale and invited the illustrious guitarist and composer Emilio Pujol to speak on the show about the history of the guitar. The following is an excerpt from the radio interviews.

Narcís Bonet – Today we are starting a series of programmes on the history of the guitar, with someone most highly qualified to discuss the subject: Emilio Pujol, a guitarist trained by Francisco Tárrega, a historian, composer and guitar teacher at the École normale de music de Paris, at the Conservatório Nacional de Lisboa and at the Accademia musicale Chigiana Siena. We should like to thank him for his invaluable contribution to these programmes in Spanish for Radiodiffusion-télévision française (RTF). In our first episode, we are going to be talking about the origins of the guitar.

THE ORIGINS OF THE GUITAR

Emilio Pujol – The guitar, as everyone knows, is classified as a plucked string instrument: this category of instruments, according to ancient mythology, all began with the lyre. Perhaps even the bows used by primitive humans were actually some-



Neolithic rock art.



Plate from the book *Description de l'Égypte*, Paris, 1809.

Triangular harp. Egypt, circa 1000 BCE.

thing more than a device for hunting and warfare... What iconographical and historical research shows us is that plucked string instruments, known to the most far-flung civilisations of the ancient Orient, can be categorised into two groups: those which have a neck, the length of which may vary, in order to obtain several notes per string, such as the guitar or the violin; and those without a neck, enabling the strings to vi-



Harp-player, terracotta. Eshnunna, circa 1500 BCE.



Arched harp. Egypt, circa 1300 BCE.



Masterpieces of
Greek pottery: terracotta
vases showing Apollo with
the lyre (kithara),
circa 500 BCE.

“The guitarra latina is the guitar of the troubadours.”

brate in their entirety, such as the zither, harp or harpsichord. To date, musicologists discussing the origins of the guitar have always put forward two hypotheses: according to the first hypothesis, the guitar evolved from the Chaldo-Assyrian lute, imported into Spain thanks to the arrival in succession of Egyptians, Persians and Arabs. According to the second theory, the instrument developed concurrently via different transformations: from the Assyrian lute into the Roman zither, then into the Spanish vihuela, which was, in the sixteenth century, the equivalent of our guitar today.

N.B. – When the Arabs brought their guitar to Spain, did they find that the Spanish already had one of Graeco-Roman origin?

E.P. – That is what the Cantigas de Santa Maria by Alfonso the Wise indicate; in the Cantigas there are two different and clearly defined types of guitar: one has an oval shape, with Arab motifs and incrustations; and the other with curved sides in figure of eight shape. The former, called the *guitarra moresca*, comprised three courses of strings, which is to say three pairs of strings; the second, called the *guitarra latina*, had four.

At the point in history when the *guitarra latina* was in use, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it had four courses tuned in two fourths separated by an interval of a major third, namely: C-F/A-D, like the vihuela, which is a larger version of the same instrument, to which a higher course and a lower course of strings were added, each at an interval of a fourth.

THE GUITARRA LATINA

N.B. – Maestro, could you tell us some of the other features of the *guitarra latina*?

E.P. – The neck had five frets made from strings that were tied around it at whichever location was

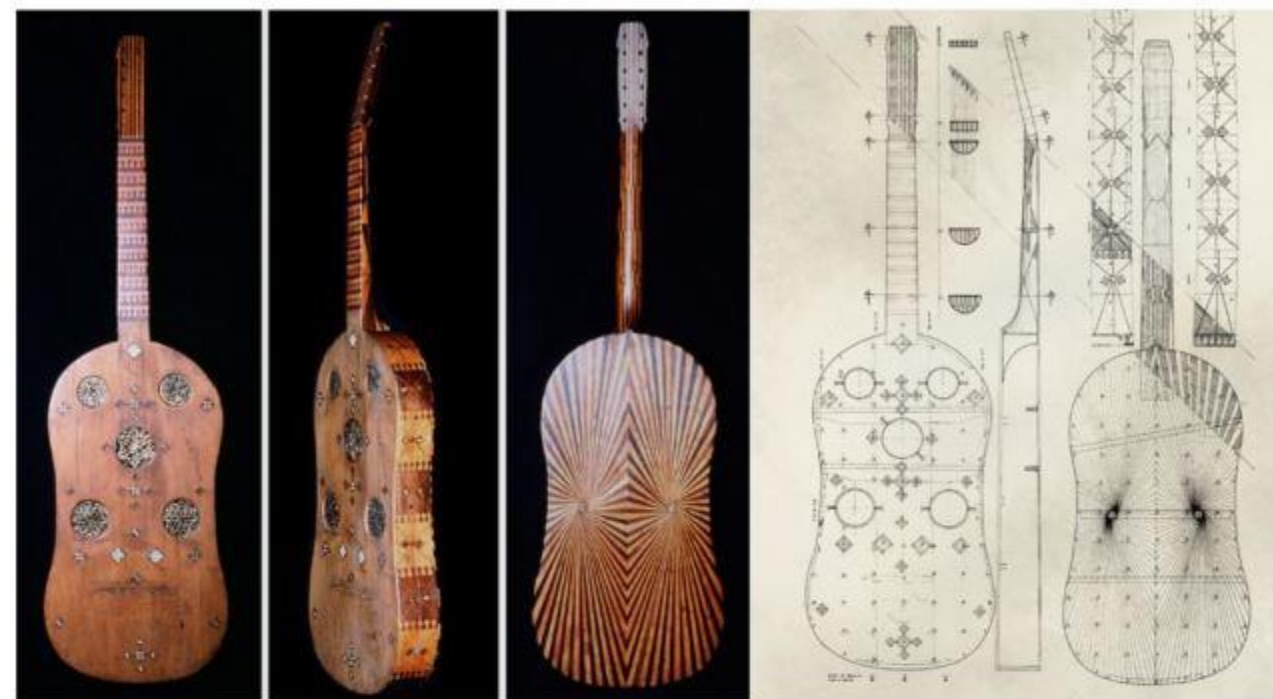


Top: Cantigas de Santa Maria, 1270.
Bottom: Orphenica lyra by Miguel de Fuenllana, 1554.

required to achieve a semitone along a given string. This was the guitar which, in the Middle Ages, was used by troubadours and minstrels for both courtly and lay entertainment, chiefly in Spain, France and Italy.

N.B. – Are there any written traces of music for the guitar from this period?

E.P. – The earliest are those of Alonso Mudarra, printed in Seville in 1546; those of Adrian Le Roy,



“Guadalupe”, vihuela at the Jacquemart-André Museum, Paris.

printed in Paris in 1551; those of Miguel de Fuenllana, printed in Seville in 1554; and those of Melchior de Barberis, published in Venice in 1549. These works, mostly fantasias and dances, are in a secular style, with the same contrapuntal rigour as polyphonic vocal works from the same era.

THE VIHUELA

N.B. – Could you tell us about the vihuela?

E.P. – There was a time when any string instrument with a neck would be called a vihuela. The word was a deformation of the Latin noun “fidicula”, itself derived from “fides”, or strings. Over and above the viola, vigola or viguela, it ended up designating two kinds of instruments: *vihuela de arco*, along with the whole violin family; and *vihuela de mano*, which is played with the fingers, in other words, the guitar, the lute and the vihuela itself.

The resurgence of the arts in Spain's golden age under the Catholic Monarchs was a factor in the improvements in musical instruments and, just as the number of strings increased on the harp and the number of keys increased on the harpsichord, two further strings (or courses) were added to the

guitar's four strings, one at the treble end and one at the bass end. Since the tessitura had been extended by two fourths, compositions had a broader range and greater contrapuntal richness. And, in order to differentiate between this newer guitar, on which it was possible to play more important pieces, and the other kind, which was smaller and thus fated to play a less important role, they decided to call the newer one the *vihuela de mano*.

N.B. – So the vihuela is actually only a guitar, but with two extra strings?

E.P. – Exactly. Fuenllana mentions the “four-stringed vihuela that is called a guitar”, and Bermudo, when he wrote that “the guitar can become a vihuela by adding a chanterelle and a sixth string”, it proves that the origins of the vihuela lie with the guitar. Its main characteristics are: a body shaped like a figure of eight, like that of a guitar, albeit with less accentuated curves, a ten-fret fingerboard, frets made of string tied around the neck and six pairs of strings running between the bridge and the tuning pegs.

N.B. – Is there such a thing as an authentic vihuela today?



Emilio Pujol with two replicas of the “Guadalupe” vihuela: left, with the copy made in 1936 by Miguel Simplicio (Barcelona) and right, with the copy by José Jacopi (Buenos Aires).

E.P. – The only authentic one known today – which I had the honour and satisfaction of discovering in 1935 – is located right here, in Paris, in the Jacquemart-André Museum. It dates from the year 1500 and it bears the name Guadalupe iron-branded on the headstock, probably because it came from a monastery in Extremadura, in Spain. The oldest known piece written for the vihuela is the work intitled “El Maestro”, written in tablature, by Don Luis de Milán and published in Valencia in 1536. What is extraordinary about this author is his great skill and his flair for varying and developing phrases despite the limited modal and instrumental possibilities at the time. Truly inspired, with this work he created an absolute icon of Spanish music.

THE VIHUELISTS OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

N.B. – Our journey continues with another great figure associated with the vihuela: Luis de Narváez, author of *Los seys libros del Delphin*, a six-volume collection of music for the vihuela.

E.P. – The exact dates of birth

and death for Narváez are unknown, but we can deduce that he was born at the end of the fifteenth century, given that *Los seys libros del Delphin* was published in 1538. When the Instituto Español de Musicología was established, I was entrusted with the task of transcribing Narváez’s entire opus, which was published in Barcelona in 1945. After that, it was the work of Alonso Mudarra, followed by that of Valderrábano. One of Alonso Mudarra’s “Romanesca” pieces contains the chord sequence that gave rise to “La Folia”, the typically Andalusian cadence and universally recognisable theme. With Esteban Daza’s “El Parnaso” printed in Valladolid in 1576, the cycle of productions specifically for the vihuela *per se* drew to a close. It had in fact only lasted forty years, in the second

third of the sixteenth century, after having begun in Valencia with Luis de Milán’s “El Maestro” in 1536.

N.B. – So “El Parnaso” by Esteban Daza heralded the vihuela’s demise, then?

Bermudo: Declaración de instrumentos musicales, 1555.



“It is likely that Vicente Espinel, a musician and guitarist, was the one who added the fifth string to the Spanish guitar.”



Vicente Espinel.

E.P. – Yes and no. It was not a total eclipse; rather, a partial one. The six-course vihuela slipped into disuse, while the guitars with four and five courses remained. What happened was that the more that keyboard instruments and bowed instruments were perfected, the more musicians lost interest in the vihuela, attracted by the impressive volume and range of these other instruments. And then, the old guitarra latina with its four courses made a comeback, not in the hands of the elite musicians, but in those of ordinary folk.

FROM THE VIHUELA TO THE SPANISH GUITAR

N.B. – Was it Vicente Espinel who added a fifth string?

E.P. – It is likely that Vicente Espinel, a musician and guitarist, was the one who added the fifth string, on account of the characteristics of his voice. Prior to Espinel, the guitar was mostly played by people with no training, who were intuitively accompanying their songs and dances. There were two ways of

playing: *rasgueado* and *punteado* (strumming and picking). The first involved striking multiple strings simultaneously with the back of the fingers, which Bermudo called “struck music”, and the second entailed picking each note with a different finger.

N.B. – In the late sixteenth century, we come across another important figure: Doctor Juan Carlos Amat.

E.P. – Indeed, Doctor Juan Carlos Amat was the author of the very first written guitar method. While his treatise was born of a modest ambition, it was so ingenious that it perfectly encapsulated everything that a player would need to know in order to form the main major and minor chords on all strings, to apply them correctly, to transpose them into different keys and how to improvise with them easily.

N.B. – When did books on Spanish guitar music start to appear in Italy?

E.P. – The first is the one by Girolamo Montesardo, published in Florence in 1606, ten years after the first edi-

Guitar method written by J. C. Amat.





Thomas Durán, Seville, 1684.
The only known Spanish
guitar from the 17th century.



Matteo Sellas, German
luthier in Venice,
circa 1650.



Exceptional materials and marquetry: tortoise-shell, ebony, ivory and mother-of-pearl.



Joachim Tielke, Hamburg 1693.



Jean Voboam, Paris 1699.

tion of Amat's method in Barcelona. Montesardo claims to have invented an alphabet for designating each of the twelve major and minor chords with a letter of the alphabet, instead of using numbers, as Amat had done. And it was by building on this alphabet that the works of Ambrosio Colonna, Pietro Milioni, Benedetto Sanseverino and others appeared during the seventeenth century.

N.B. – And in France, were there signs that the Spanish guitar was developing?

E.P. – In 1626 – so, 30 years after Amat's treatise – a curious publication appeared in Paris, written by a Spanish guitarist, Luis de Briceño, who was the teacher of Louis XIII. The title was *Metodo mui facilissimo para aprender a tañer la guitarra a lo español* (Very easy method for learning to play the guitar in the Spanish style) and it contained solely the chords, to be played with the rasgueado technique, with their respective values and the lyrics written underneath, but without the melody.



Gerrit van Honthorst, "Woman Playing the Guitar", Utrecht, 1624.

CORBETTA AND HIS DISCIPLES IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

N.B. – Today, we are continuing on our journey which will take us from Italy to France, through Francesco Corbetta.

E.P. – Francesco Corbetta was born in Pavia around 1620. He was in the service of the Duke of Mantua, who recommended him to Lully who, in turn, introduced him to Louis XIV. He remained in Paris and Versailles for several years. At the behest of Charles II of England, whose wife was Portuguese, he was appointed as the queen's teacher and a musician of the court. So great was his personal success that the guitar became highly fashionable at court and he himself remained in the service of Charles II. He subsequently returned to France, where he died in 1681. Corbetta gave the guitar a sizeable repertoire and taught a plethora of disciples, particularly in France.

N.B. – Who were his most eminent disciples?

E.P. – The most important was Robert de Visée, who took over from Corbetta as guitar master to the court of Louis XIV. His book of compositions *Livre de guitare dédié au Roi* (Guitar book dedicated to the King) is, on the one hand, a complement to Corbetta's work, and, on the other, a reflection of Lully's artistic spirituality, which was deemed the starting point for France's lyricism and which would be subsequently developed by Rameau, Couperin, Fauré, Debussy and Ravel.

N.B. – It is curious to see how at that same time, even though the lute had a huge following in Eu-

“The guitar was more intimate than the lute, easier to play and more deeply rooted in the heart of the people.”

rope, the guitar managed to secure such success. What made this possible?

E.P. – Corbetta and Visée have generated as much fervour in France as Espinel and Amat had previously done in Spain and in Italy. The guitar was more intimate than the lute, easier to play and more deeply rooted in the heart of the people.

N.B. – And after Francesco Corbetta, who else distinguished themselves in Italy?

E.P. – His disciple Grana principally, who, along with Foscarini and the Count of Roncalli, enriched the guitar's repertoire considerably.

N.B. – And what about Spain, Maestro?

E.P. – Not only Spain, but Portugal as well, as the Portuguese chronicles attest, with their descriptions of the passion for the guitar at the time of King Sebastian, the merits of the vihuelist Rodrigues de Cubilhao, and the manuscripts held at the University of Coimbra of written guitar music composed by Portuguese writers in the seventeenth century. In Spain, the key figure from this historic era of the guitar is the Aragonese composer and guitarist Gaspar Sanz, born in Calanda around 1640.

Ed.: Gaspar Sanz's work was to greatly influence Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo, particularly for his Fantasia for a Gentleman, written at the request of guitarist Andrés Segovia.



Italy, circa 1800. Six single strings.



Jean Nicolas Grobert. Paris, circa 1830. Guitar that belonged to Niccolò Paganini and to Hector Berlioz.



Johann Stauffer, the great Austrian luthier. Vienna, 1830.

THE GUITAR IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

N.B. – In the eighteenth century, when the great geniuses of music appeared, Bach and Haendel, then Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, the guitar had been relegated almost exclusively to folk usage. Why this lack of interest?

E.P. – The guitar's apogee in the seventeenth century was due to Francesco Corbetta, then Robert de Visée in France and Gaspar Sanz in Spain. Later, artistic guitar playing slumped into a period of lethargy in Europe, while the common people always gave the guitar refuge and protection.

N.B. – At the end of the eighteenth century, the guitar had six courses, the same number as for the vihuela. What was behind this innovation?

E.P. – The strange thing is that we just don't know, just as we also don't know how the double strings came to disappear, in other words, the courses as used by vihuelists. It's an innovation that stayed with us right through to today, for various reasons: the difficulty in pairing two identically tuned strings, ease of play with single strings, and their greater expressive possibilities.

THE ITALIAN SCHOOL

N.B. – Who were the main architects of the Italian school?

E.P. – Fernando Carulli, born in Naples in 1770. He settled in Paris in 1797, where he focussed on composing and teaching. His abundant output reveals what a talented, prolific musician he was. His most eminent disciples were: Filippo Gragnani and the famous organist Alexandre Guilmant.

Matteo Carcassi, born in Florence in 1792, also settled in Paris at a very young age and enjoyed great esteem in this city. His guitar method, published by Schott Music in Mainz, comprises 25 Etudes, some of which are still popular today. Mauro Giuliani, born in Bologna in 1780, is without a doubt the most important of the three. In late 1807, he settled in Vienna, where he dedicated all his efforts to teaching. He created a new kind of instrument, the "Terz guitar", smaller than the current standard size, tuned a major third higher, for which he wrote several compositions with accompaniment by a quartet or orchestra. At the same



Remarkable ribbon-shaped pegbox. France, circa 1800.

“After Sor, the guitar slumped yet again into lassitude, almost as if the art of this instrument had already said everything.”

time, other big names emerged in the guitar world, the likes of Gragnani, Diabelli, Legnani and even Paganini.

THE SPANISH SCHOOL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

N.B. – In the nineteenth century, the guitar was relaunched and began to flood the gatherings and theatres of Spanish society.

E.P. – All French, Spanish or Italian guitarists from this period, or nearly all, had one thing in common: they all composed and published their own method for the guitar. Perhaps because it is easier to teach what one knows than to learn what others know...

Out of all of these methods, the didactic work that best summarises and frames the nineteenth-century guitar technique – and some of it still prevails today – is that of Dionisio Aguado.

Aguado, born in Madrid in 1784, published his guitar tutorial, *Escuela de Guitarra* (Guitar School), in 1825. It is a guitar method that addresses all the technical problems of his day. Many guitarists who came after him learned from his teaching, and even today, despite guitar techniques having come a long way, his content remains extremely useful for studying the instrument.

N.B. – But the truly great name from this historical period is surely Fernando Sor.

E.P. – Naturally. Fernando Sor was born in Barcelona on 13 February, 1778. At the age of seven, he entered the celebrated Escolania de Montserrat choir school, where he studied the organ, Grego-

rian chant, violin, cello and composition for nine years. It was only later that he started the guitar. In 1813, we find Sor in Paris, where he had become famous and struck up friendships with Cherubini,

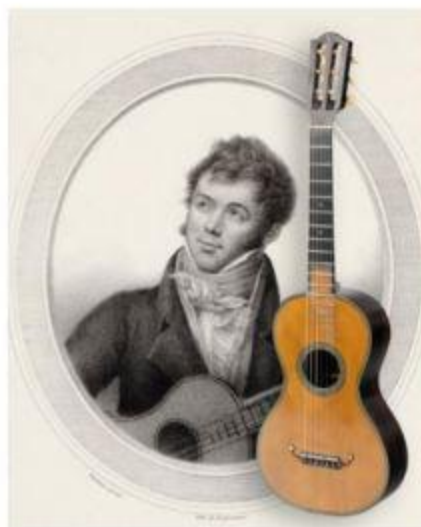
Mehul and Pleyel. And it was in fact this very environment that nudged him toward opera, ballet and pantomime, where he notched up his most outstanding successes. He wrote sonatas, themes with variations, studies, fantasias and divertissements for the solo guitar and guitar duets. The fact that he himself was a musician and performer afforded him the freedom to create personal pieces that elevated the instrument to its zenith.

After Sor, the guitar slumped yet again into lassitude, almost as if the art of this instrument had already said everything that it

had to say. Reminiscences remained. In France: Napoléon Coste, a disciple of Sor's and an excellent harmonist; in Italy, Regondi; in Belgium, Molino; in Austria, Mertz; in England, Pelzer; and in Spain, the renowned Julián Arcas, who, with his flair as a virtuoso and as a composer of popular Spanish themes, kept alive the embers that would one day rekindle the guitar's new flame.

N.B. – You were a disciple Francisco Tárrega's and, driven by your admiration and gratitude for your teacher, you published a biography of this illustrious nineteenth-century guitarist.

E.P. – Tárrega appeared after the lethargy that followed Fernando Sor's death. But the circumstances into which Tárrega was born and raised



Guitar by René Lacote, 1835. Label signed by Sor; once belonging to Julian Bream.



Napoléon Coste's seven-string guitar, made by René Lacote. Paris, 1850.

were hardly propitious for his ascent to the lofty place he would come to occupy in the history of the guitar.

Tárrega was born in Villarreal de los Infantes on 21 November 1852 into a modest family. His father taught him the guitar when he was very young and in 1860, he started studying music theory and piano. He later went on to study the piano, harmony, counterpoint and composition in the Madrid conservatory. His teachers advised him to focus on the guitar and Tárrega, satisfied with his increasingly refined playing, let the guitar take over his work, eventually squeezing out any study of the piano whatsoever. From then on, and given that he was living in the best musical environment in Spain, the piano became merely a supporting instrument, to assist him in successfully achieving his classical and Romantic adaptations for the guitar.

Hence the new technique, the new aesthetics and the discoveries of sounds that determined the foundations of his school. Tárrega's technique

stood for a realism that was every bit as objective and authentic as that of Velázquez on canvas. Every note had to display the volume, intensity and intention that its interpretation demanded. There needed to be a perfect fit between the idea and the fingertip, between each gesture and every nuance, commanded by strength of will. Not even the slightest flaw would go unnoticed. This is why he kept on working, not only for the pleasure of playing, but also out of his love for the absolute truthfulness that his art required. The difficulty with the guitar, he would say, only starts once you want to play it very well. Tárrega's school is not about a system or a form, but rather of substance. His first commandment is: play well; initially play a little, but well; later, play a lot and still play well.

N.B. – I think that one of Tárrega's technical concerns was the delicate issue of the fingernail, as had already been the case for Fuenllana in the sixteenth century and later for Sor.

E.P. – That is true. In his experience playing bowed



Seated:
Enrique
García,
Miguel Llobet
and Emilio
Pujol.

instruments, Tárrega had realised the extent to which the noble, generous and humanly expressive sound of the string when bowed eclipsed the harsh, short and at times injurious sound of a string being plucked with a plectrum or fingernail. "The guitar's voice ought to be somewhere between the human and the divine", he would say. Sor also had an avowed intolerance to the sound of a guitar being played with fingernails. Dissatisfied with the harsh sound of the attack on the string, he searched for a pure sound, filing down the part of the nail with which he struck the string, and ultimately eliminating it altogether. And he didn't stop until he had worked the flesh of his fingertips up into firm pads, which afforded the string a strong, warm sound without any harshness, with maximum intensity and richness. This forced him to find a new playing position for the right hand, characteristic of Tárrega's school.

N.B. – But we cannot end our conversation without mentioning another great guitarist...

E.P. – Naturally, Miguel Llobet, born in Barcelona in 1878. As gifted with painting as he was with music, he only turned to the guitar after having heard Tárrega play. With the grand master as his guide, he successfully launched his career with concerts in Valencia, Malaga and Seville, culminating with further concerts still in



Madrid's prestigious Teatro de la Comedia and at the Royal Palace, which cemented his renown as a great artist.

N.B. – What is crucial to understand about Miguel Llobet is that, having settled in Paris and being in close contact with Ricardo Viñes, Debussy, Ravel and Manuel de Falla, his gifts as an excellent musician surpassed his aesthetic ones and, in the harmonisations that he wrote of Catalan songs for the guitar, he greatly expanded the panorama, ushering in a modern conceptualisation of the instrument.

E.P. – Yes, "El Mestre", "La Pastoreta", "Canço del lladre" and others are absolute gems in today's guitar repertoire.

N.B. – This brings us to the end of our voyage through the history of the guitar, for which Emilio Pujol has been our guide. Before we sign off, I should like to ask you, Maestro, how you see the future of this marvellous instrument.

E.P. – We should perhaps not try to predict the future. The instrument is merely the voice that conveys whatever the musician's soul puts into it. The way in which artists develop will be what determines the guitar's future aesthetics. With its tremendous generosity, the guitar can adapt easily to any genre, form or style of music. The guitar really only asks one thing of us in return: warmth and magnanimity.



Portrait of Tárrega by
Catherine Keun.
Left, his Antonio de Torres
guitar from 1864.

Plucked chordophones of the world and their development, region by region

ASIA
"Tamburi" long-
necked lute. India,
seventeenth
century.



AFRICA
"Kora" harp-lute.
Africa, nineteenth
century.



AMERICAS
Gibson double-
neck EDS-1275.
Kalamazoo, 1960.



MIDDLE EAST
"Guembri" lute.
North Africa,
twentieth century.



EUROPE
Lute. France,
twentieth
century.



"If you want to measure the spiritual
depth of society, make sure to mark its
music" Plato

Africa, the word and the string

We seldom think of Africa as the continent of string instruments and tend to oversimplify its musical heritage by focussing on its emblematic ensembles of drummers. Yet Africa, the cradle of humanity, is home to a wealth of string instruments that accompany the words sung by poets, the hymns of religious leaders, the incantations of healers or the tales of traditional story-tellers.



Lute-player,
Egyptian fresco,
circa 1400 BCE.

Be they musical bows, harps, viols, lyres or zithers, every imaginable sub-category of instruments finds representation in Africa, with some even proving inadequate, since some of the continent's unique hybrids defy classification, such as the pluriarc, the harp-lute or the harp-zither, to name but a few.

We are introducing a small selection of plucked string instruments, consciously leaving out a whole swathe of Africa's musical heritage: the chordophones whose strings are struck or bowed.

The question of origin

The earliest iconographic sources attesting to the existence of string instruments in Africa are the Ennedi Plateau rock paintings in north-eastern Chad, which date from the fourth millennium BCE, and wall paintings from the Egyptian New Empire, which clearly show a procession of female musicians playing the harp, lute and lyre.

Let us now take a quick tour of the African continent, looking at the most emblematic chordophones so as to sketch, through a mere handful of examples, the rich diversity and representativeness of this organological group on the continent.

The kora harp-lute of Senegambia

The kora is undoubtedly the best-known African string instrument in Europe. Historically played by musicians and griots of the Mandinka Empire's great governors, as an accompaniment for historical accounts of the nobility, family genealogies or even tributes to heroic ancestors, the kora combines the characteristics of the harp – strings set perpendicular to a sound box – and the lute, with the use of a bridge. This instrument is made from a calabash covered in hide, which serves as a resonator. Its 21 strings are attached to the wooden neck with the aid of hide rings or pegs with which the instrument is tuned.



"Kora" harp-lute. Africa, nineteenth century.
"Mvet" harp-zither. Gabon, twentieth century.

The ganbare lute from Mali

Among the Soninke people, the ganbare is traditionally played by griots at funerals or whenever celebrations are to be had. It is a lute with three or four strings, generally made by the very musician who plays it. The body is carved from a single piece of wood into a bowl-like shape, over which hide is stretched taut to function as a soundboard. The neck, also made of wood, extends deep into the body, but stops under the opening in the soundboard where it is attached to the bridge. This unique feature has earned it the name of "innerspike lute".

The mvet harp-zither from Gabon

The mvet's strings are perpendicular to the calabash resonators, while it is the bridge that gives them their height. In older models, the strings are cords of raffia-palm or bamboo fibre. Moveable fibre rings secure the strings and enable tuning of the instrument.

The story-teller's tale is interspersed with improvised segments dealing with contemporary societal problems such as adultery, political corruption or recurring breakdowns of new technological tools.

The lokombe pluriarc from the Congo Basin

A pluriarc is an instrument comprising several

"Konting" lute
(similar to the
"ganbare"
from Mali).
Senegal,
nineteenth
century.





Kora-player.
Mali, 1973.





arches, affixed to a sound box, to which the strings are attached using clamping rings. Musician-narrators play the instrument for entertainment, for enthronement of a chief, for war chants or during healing rituals.

The *begena* lyre of Ethiopia

The lyre in East Africa, like the harp-lute of West Africa, is the most typical instrument of singer-poets. It can be found all the way from northern Ethiopia to the south of Kenya. Ethiopia's *begena* lyre is unquestionably the most sacred instrument of the Amhara cultures and the repertoires with which it is associated comprise religious pieces played in intimate settings, or which are used meditatively to connect with the invisible realm.

The harps of Central Africa

From the start of the twentieth century, the harps of Central Africa have piqued Europeans' curiosity and aroused much interest, be it from a scientific, artistic or commercial point of view. One of the features of African harps that undeniably cemented their popularity in Europe is their aesthetic value, whether due to their finely sculpted necks, their figurative sound boxes or, quite simply, their acoustic qualities.

The *ngombi* harps of Gabon's Fang people

In Gabon, the *ngombi* is an eight-string arched harp, tuned using a hexatonic system. The neck is fastened to the body with plant fibre bindings or wire. The sound box sports an extension that is often sculpted. Today the instrument is used in rituals, during men's initiation rites or women's



"Begena" lyre.
Ethiopia, twentieth century.



Left, "nsambi" pluriarc. Central Africa, twentieth century. Here, "ngombi" harp. Gabon, twentieth century.



Luthier Jean-Luther Misoko Nzalayala, alias "Socklo", has been building and repairing guitars in Kinshasa since 1978.



healing ceremonies, but also in lay contexts, as an accompaniment for contemporary musical expression.

The Ngbaka *ngombi* harps of the D.R. of Congo

These *ngombi* harps differ from their Gabonese homonyms in that their sound boxes are anthropomorphic and that they have a different number of strings, tuned in accordance with a pentatonic scale.

The Azande *kundi* harps of the D.R. of Congo

The *kundi* harp was an iconic instrument of courtly music of the Azande people of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The faces sculpted at the top of the neck are features that date from that era. The instrument subsequently gained broader popularity in the early twentieth century. The *kundi* harp has five strings, tuned to a pentatonic

scale. Harps may be played in a duet by singer-poets, accompanying narrations that are at times historical, lyrical or satirical, or as an accompaniment to *manza* xylophones.

The Socklo guitar from Kinshasa

From the early twentieth century onwards, the guitar has been the most recurrent chordophone used in Africa's expressions of popular music and especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo, home of the rumba.

Let us conclude our brief overview of plucked string instruments in Africa with the guitars of luthier Jean-Luther Misoko Nzalayala, known as Socklo. They are crafted in his Kinshasa workshop, using numerous upcycled materials, such as sheets of plywood for the bodies, pieces of metal for the frets and brake cables or electrical coils from cars for the strings.

Rémy Jadinon

African instruments are not only for musical expression: they may also have ritualistic or religious significance. "Kundi" harp. Central Africa, nineteenth century.



Anthropomorphic arched harp. Central Africa, nineteenth century.



"Kundi" harp, detail.



The Americas, from Baroque guitar to electric guitar

The history of plucked string chordophones in the Americas begins with the arrival of the Spanish colonisers. Although music is an inherent manifestation found in all human cultures, we find few traces of chordophones from pre-Colombian civilisations. String instruments developed thanks to various European and African influences.

Latin America

Apart from the harp, what we mostly find is a huge range of instruments derived from the guitar, imported during the sixteenth century during the Spanish and Portuguese conquests. Here is a selection of the continent's most typical instruments.



Street performers.
Mexico, circa 1900-1910.

Charango

The *charango* is a small lute probably inspired by Baroque guitars. It is said to have originated in the Bolivian city of Potosí or the Peruvian city of Ayacucho in the eighteenth century. Today it can be found in Bolivia, in southern Peru and in northern Argentina, and is played by men during festivities or agrarian rites. The *charango* is a plucked string instrument with five double strings (pentatonic tuning). The body is traditionally made using the armour of an armadillo, but can also be of wood such as cedar or walnut.



Cavaquinho

The Brazilian *cavaquinho* has the same roots as the Hawaiian ukulele. Both instruments

"Cavaquinho". Brazil,
twentieth century.

Tres

The *tres* is a small rudimentary guitar, made in Cuba as of the seventeenth century. It is strung with three courses of strings (*tres* is the Spanish word for three). It later spread, with Latin American music, to Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. These days the *tres* is strung with metal strings and are practically ubiquitous in bands playing typical Caribbean music.

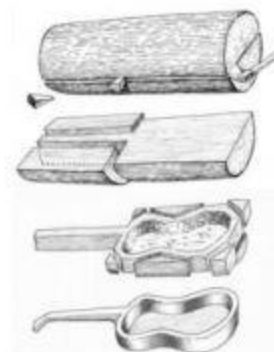
Cuatro

The *cuatro* is used throughout Latin America, but its role is especially important in musical ensembles from the northern

are adaptations of the Portuguese *braguinha*, introduced by immigrants from the island of Madeira. The *cavaquinho* has four metal strings. Very popular in Brazil and Cape Verde, it serves as an accompaniment for numerous traditional musical genres (samba, choro, morna, etc.). The Hawaiian ukulele is crafted entirely from koa wood and, unlike the *cavaquinho*, it employs four nylon strings.



"Requinto". Colombia,
twentieth century.



Some instruments,
such as the *cuatro*,
are carved from
a single piece of
wood.

countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, where it is part of the folklore, serving as an accompaniment for folk dancing and singing. The *cuatro* (which is the Spanish word for four) is a small guitar with four double strings, fashioned out of a single block of wood. Today *cuatros* may feature four or five courses.

Requinto guitar

The *requinto* guitar belongs to a vast family of plucked string instruments that is very widespread in South America. Resembling a Renaissance guitar and a Spanish vihuela, it comes in various shapes and sizes depending on its geographical and cultural context. *Requinto* guitars have six nylon strings in Mexico and Argentina, whereas they feature six metal double-coursed strings in Peru, and triple-coursed strings in Venezuela and Colombia.

Harp

Stemming from the Spanish Baroque harp, this instrument was originally introduced to South America to be played in church, but subsequently spilled out into the wider community. The harp developed in different ways in different regions, resulting in variations in the number of strings, manufacturing techniques and varieties of woods used. The harp is quite prominent in the music of Paraguay, Venezuela, Colombia and Mexico.

North America

In the United States, the techniques for building



Above:
"Charango"
lute with
a back of
armadillo.



Below:
Diatonic "arpa
llanera" harp.
Venezuela,
twentieth
century.

chordophones hail from two sources: firstly from Spanish colonists, and secondly from luthiers emigrating from other European countries. Only the banjo is of African origin. Since the guitar's low sound volume barred it from inclusion in musical ensembles, it was eclipsed by mandolins and banjos until the 1930s. Motivated by the advent of radio and musical recordings, guitar-makers turned their attention to boosting its volume so that it could rival that of the other instruments. Guitars changed shape, grew in size and came to be rigged with microphones.

Mandolin

The mandolin is a small lute originating in Italy that was brought to North America by Italian immigrants at the turn of the nineteenth century. The mandolin swiftly found favour with certain types of bands and was taught in schools and universities, especially in the southern United States, like the guitar and the banjo. Orchestras comprising twelve or more mandolins became extremely popular. In 1905, Gibson revolutionised the instrument, with his "A" and "F" models that were a radical departure from the traditional Italian mandolin.

Banjo

The banjo is a chordophone of African origin, popularised in the United States by slaves in the nineteenth century. It initially comprised a circular frame over which a membrane was stretched taut. Four metal strings passed over a moveable bridge and were attached to the tailpiece. Open tuning is commonly used for the banjo, with the open strings tuned to the notes of a perfect G major chord.

Over time, the banjo became endowed with frets, a fifth (shorter) string, tuners and sometimes a resonator. Banjos featured in Dixieland and jazz bands until the 1920s and were gradually supplanted by archtop guitars.



American blues players.
Lafayette, Louisiana.

"Dobro" resonator

This is a resonator guitar designed in the 1920s with a view to amplifying the instrument without electricity. The idea is based on the same principle as a loudspeaker: an aluminium cone functions as a resonator inside the guitar's body, with the latter corresponding to the box surrounding the speaker.

The unique sound of the resonator guitar is still associated with bluegrass bands, bluesmen and Hawaiian musicians. Along with his brother, the inventor, John Dopyera, established the Dobro brand (a portmanteau of Dopyera Brothers), which became a generic term for resonator guitars.

Acoustic guitar (flat-top)

The acoustic guitar is one of the most popular instruments in the United States. While Antonio de Torres was endowing the instrument with the features of the modern classical guitar, thousands of Germans were emigrating to the United States, and among them was luthier Christian Frederick Martin. It was he who would perfect the "flat-top" guitar in the early twentieth century. Using the European Romantic guitar as a starting point, he replaced gut strings with steel, and strengthened the bracing. The soundboard remained flat but the dimensions varied (parlour, orchestra, dreadnought, jumbo), almost always leaving enough room for a neck with fourteen off-the-body frets.

Jazz guitar (archtop)

Created by Orville Gibson, the defining features of these guitars are the domed soundboard, the F-holes and the moveable bridge, as on violins. They have been adopted by jazz musicians and electrified since the 1930s.

Electric guitar

Various attempts to electrify the guitar, the first



Gibson F5 mandolin.
Kalamazoo, 1929.



C.F. Martin, 1860.



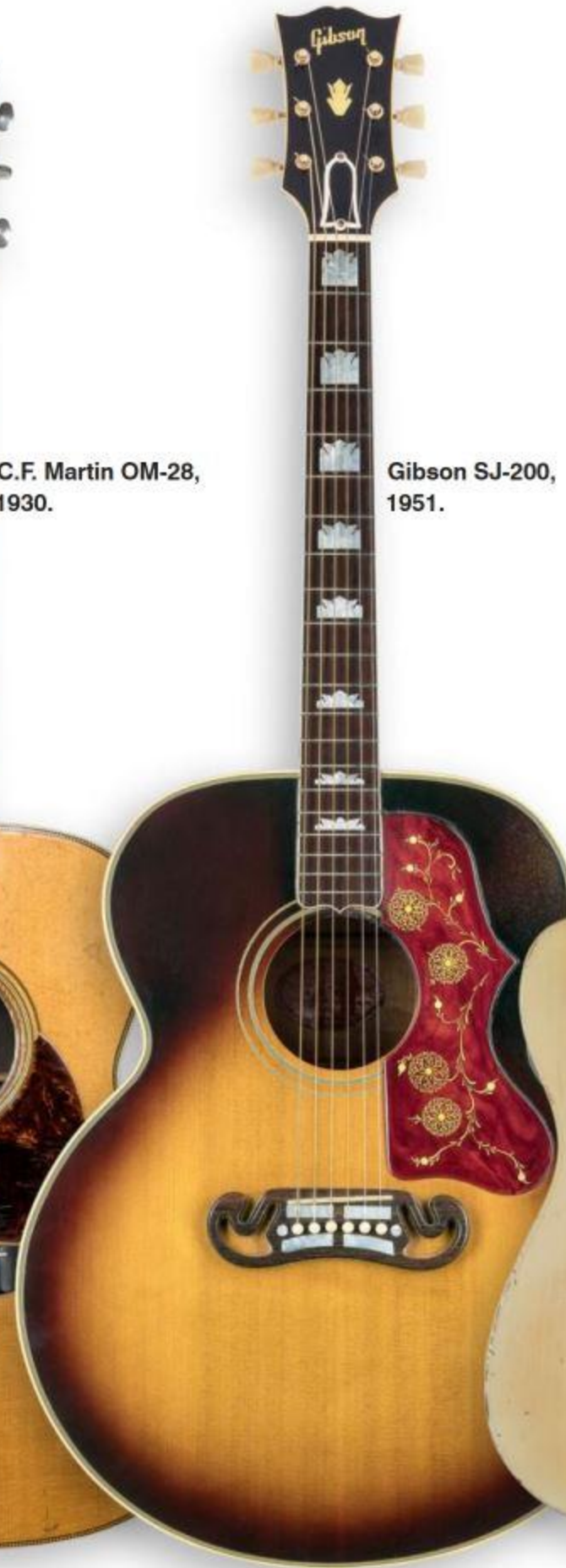
National Duolian,
1932.



Gretsch White
Falcon, 1958.



C.F. Martin OM-28,
1930.



Gibson SJ-200,
1951.



Fender
Telecaster, 1952.



“Banjo” by Hercules McCord.
USA, circa 1884.

of which was Adolph Rickenbacker’s project in 1932, culminated in the '50s and '60s with the creation of the Telecaster and Stratocaster models by Leo Fender (“solid body” guitars, devoid of any sound box) and Gibson’s Les Paul model. Even today, these three are still highly-respected models among electric guitars.

The greater volume achieved through amplifiers, and the variety of effects on offer with “pedals” led to the birth of myriad new groups, new musical styles (rock, pop, funk, reggae, and metal, to name but a few) and gave the guitar unprecedented popularity.

Gibson Les Paul Custom
« Black Beauty ».
Kalamazoo, 1959.



Asia, continent of diversity

Asia, home to half of the world's population, has witnessed the rise of several great civilisations in its immense territory. Despite the huge distances, vast deserts and practically impassable mountain chains, reciprocal influences have criss-crossed it for millennia.



"Qin" long zither.
China, nineteenth century.

"Koto" long zither,
detail. Japan,
sixteenth century.

Musical instruments have travelled and been tailored to aesthetic demands and to lifestyles as varied as those of nomads, farming folk or imperial courts. Trade, migration, the spread of religions, wars and political systems have all played a part in such phenomena.

We often think of the Near East as being the cradle of string instruments, given the wealth of ancient accounts of lutes, harps and lyres. Yet another venerable family of string instruments was developing nonetheless in the opposite reaches of Asia: long zithers represented by Japan's *koto*, or China's *guzheng* and *guqin*.

Zithers

The zithers have no neck and their strings run the entire length of the instrument's body. The *koto* and the *guzheng* sport as many movable bridges as there are strings, each producing a single note. The *guqin*, on the other hand, the iconic instrument of Chinese scholars, has neither bridges nor frets: thirteen mother-of-pearl inlays corresponding to harmonic nodes serve as markers for the player. The strings, traditionally of silk and nowadays often synthetic, can be played either as open strings or by pressing down on the soundboard with a finger or by a very light touch, producing various harmonics. Innumerable ornaments and nuances in timbre are essential in *guqin* music and these are carefully noted in extremely detailed tablatures. The zithers of the Far East, present in countries where the Chinese civilisation has had an influence, have not been adopted beyond the deserts of Central Asia.

Harps

The harp, on the other hand, which is also built on the principle of one note per string, travelled not only from west to east, but also, skirting the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau, from north to south. This is evident not only in the scant ar-



"Saung-gauk"
arched harp. Burma,
twentieth century.



"Waji" harp.
Nuristan,
twentieth
century.



chaeological finds to date, but also, and above all, in the pictorial representations in Buddhist caves along the Silk Roads, not to mention the carefully preserved harps in Nara, which was Japan's capital in the eighth century.

The harp's southward migration is magnificently represented by the *saung-gauk*, the often highly ornamented, very unique, emblematic instrument of Burmese music. The *saung-gauk* is an arched harp which is tuned using a system of bindings as in harps from ancient times, instead of tuning posts.

The earliest representations of harps in Burma date from the seventh century, in a Buddhist context. Other harp models can be found throughout South Asia, such as the *bin baja* of central India or the Karen harp of Burma and Thailand. These attest to the harp's spread far and wide in ancient times across enormous distances. The *waji*, for example, an instrument unique to the mountainous province of Nuristan, in eastern Afghanistan, is used as an accompaniment for singing and story-telling. It has a wooden body, over which skin is stretched with bindings. A curved piece of wood to which the strings are attached is affixed to the body, with part of the curved string-holder passing through the hide soundboard.

Because of their foreign origins, the harp, lute, and later the viol, were never part of the ensembles used for State rituals in China, although they

were used in all manner of lay orchestras in the service of the Court.

Lutes

Lutes were used throughout the Ancient World. They reached the Far East via the routes of Central Asia and made their way to China around the start of the first millennium. While the Buddhist caves of Central Asia attest to a huge diversity of lute models, it was the pear-shaped *pipa* that rose to prominence, and even today it is still one of the main instruments used in Chinese music. It underwent modifications last century that turned



Left: "Pipa"
lute. China,
seventeenth
century.

"Shamisen"
lute. Japan,
nineteenth
century.



it into a virtuoso instrument, while nonetheless remaining an important instrument for traditional repertoires.

From China, the instrument continued on to Korea and to Japan. The soundboard of the Japanese *biwa* is protected by a piece of skin against damage from the plectrum. Its shape is similar to that of the early *pipas* and it retained the same crescent-moon soundholes that can be seen in paintings from more than a thousand years ago. There are several *biwa* models, corresponding to different types of music and offering the tones that are typical of the different styles.

"Krajappi"
long-necked
lute. Thailand,
before 1913.





"Tar" lute. Iran, 1950.

"Kacapi" lute. Indonesia,
twentieth century.

Long-necked
"sarasvati vina" lute.
India, twentieth century.



"Tambura" long-necked
lute. India, seventeenth
century.

"Biwa" lute. Japan,
nineteenth century.

"Rebab" lute.
Afghanistan, nineteenth
century.





Ravi Shankar with his “sitar” lute.



“Bin-sitar” zither. India, seventeenth century.

Viewed from the front, the *pipa* is reminiscent of the oud and the European lute, but its structure is very different: this is a very shallow-bodied instrument carved from a single piece of wood, with a thick-walled, heavy sound box whose inside face is only minimally worked. Yet the *pipa* can be richly decorated, with the pegbox filial adorned with a bat (which brings good luck in China), frets made of bone and a beautifully sculpted bridge. Asia also boasts a huge variety of long-necked lutes, ranging from China’s three-stringed *sanxian* with its rectangular body, to Thailand’s very large, elegant four-stringed *krajappi*, or the lutes played by certain tribes in China and South-East Asia.

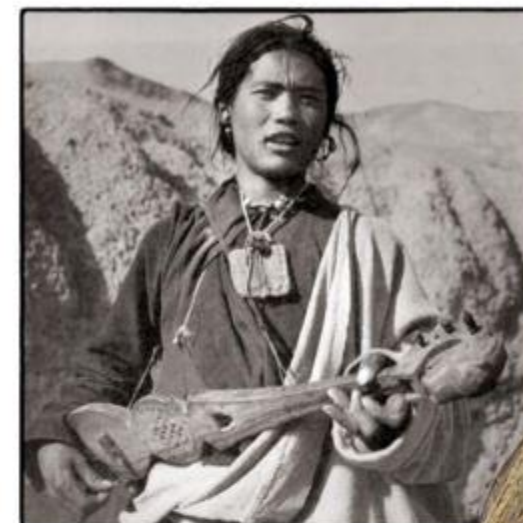
The body of the Chinese *sanxian* (which translates literally as “three strings”) comprises a thick wooden frame covered in snakeskin on both sides. This popular instrument is notably used as the accompaniment for tales told in song. It most likely reached Japan via Okinawa and is the ancestor of the *shamisen*, built in the same manner,

with a four-sided frame glued together. The absence of large serpents in Japan meant that the snakeskin was substituted by hides from cats or dogs, or sometimes thick paper.

The Himalayan regions are home chiefly to Indo-Tibetan Buddhist culture. Alongside the instruments used for ritual music, there are also flutes and a lute: the *sgra-snyan*. It is made from a single piece of hollowed-out wood, with a soundboard of hide and sometimes an additional covering of wood. The pegbox is sculpted to resemble the head of a horse or sea monster and the body also features carved ornamentation. This five- or six-stringed lute, without frets, is played with a plectrum; it is used as an accompaniment for singing and dancing.

instruments from the islands

Indonesia and the Philippines have developed an *instrumentarium* with many similarities. One that springs to mind is the resemblance between *gamelan* ensembles and metallophone ensem-



“Sgra-snyan” lute.
Tibet, twentieth century.



Tubular “sasando” zither. Indonesia, twentieth century.

bles in these two countries, where we also find very original instruments, such as the *sasando* from the island of Timor, a tube zither historically likened to the Madagascan *valiha*. The *sasando*, made from a section of bamboo upon which strings are set, is partially encased by an amplifying decoration made of a cupped fan of palm leaves. Both countries also developed fretted lutes known as “boat-lutes” because of their shape. One kind of boat lute is the two-stringed *kacapi*, which has a slender shape, and another is the *sapeh*, which has more bulk and sports three metal strings.

India’s lutes and zithers

Our whirlwind tour of selected plucked string instruments in Asia ends in India, with a lute and a zither. The *sitar*, the flagship instrument of North Indian classical music, is a long-necked lute with playing strings running above the curved frets and sympathetic strings placed underneath, between the neck and the frets. Many of these often

richly decorated instruments feature a gourd attached to the underside of the upper neck, as seen in the portraits of Ravi Shankar.

The *bin-sitar*, on the other hand, is a zither on a hollow rod set across two resonator gourds. The spine of this instrument resembles the neck of a *sitar* and it is sometimes strung, but not always, with sympathetic strings. Once used in Hindustani classical music, it has now become something of a rarity.

From among the instruments that have come to Asia from afar and been adopted, the case of the violin’s integration into Carnatic music of southern India may easily spring to mind. The case of the guitar is less well-known. Yet the guitar was adopted in Vietnam and transformed, resulting in raised frets that could enable bending ornamentation. It has thus been incorporated into ensembles and can be seen playing alongside lutes of Asian origin.

Europe, home of polyphonic instruments

From the Graeco-Roman world to our time, from the cittern to the balalaika, from Portugal to Turkey, a trip through the realms of plucked string instruments.

Antiquity

In the Graeco-Roman world, the most commonly represented plucked string instruments are the lyre, kithara and harp. Typically, the string lengths on the lyre and the kithara are almost identical and they feature a yoke comprising two arms and a cross-bar. The strings were stretched between the cross-bar and the soundboard, passing over a bridge that transmitted the vibrations to the soundboard. In this regard, the lyre and kithara differed from the harp, which had strings of decreasing lengths.

There are representations of stringed instruments with necks, but they are rarer and there is uncertainty as to their nomenclature.

The Middle Ages

In Western Europe, after the fall of the Roman Empire, the lyre faded into obscurity. The harp, however, as well as necked instruments, re-

mained in use and further developed. This latter category of instruments came in diverse forms. One of their common features was that their tuning posts were all forward-facing on the pegbox. The names used in the Middle Ages for these plucked string instruments have long been the subject of musicological debate. There are two terms that are particularly problematic: the "gittern" and the "citole". It is now generally accepted that at the end of the Middle Ages, the gittern was an instrument with a rounded shape. The citole, on the other hand, is an instrument with a more box-like body, with discernible angles that were more or less sharply defined.

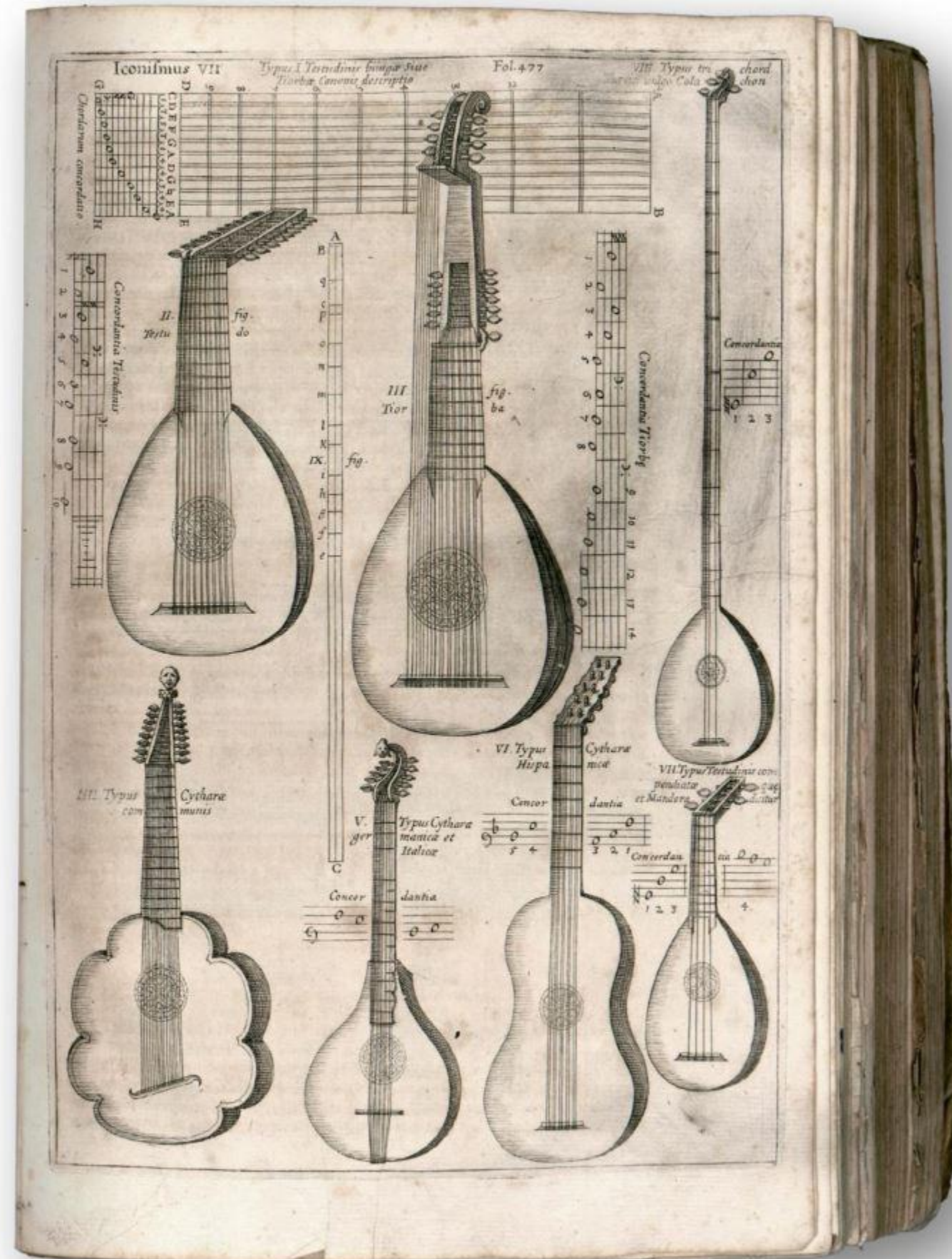
In the fourteenth century, some iconographic sources show early examples of frets. Lateral pegs, of Arab influence, also become quite commonplace.

It is likely that most of these instruments were carved from a single block of wood. The only

Gittern attributed to Hans Ott. Nuremberg, 1450.



Opposite: Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis*, 1650.





Cittern. England, eighteenth century.

Lute. France, twentieth century.

piece to be subsequently added was the sound-board. This type of construction can be seen in the gittern attributed to Hans Ott. If authentic, this instrument is one of the rare Mediaeval chordophones to have survived to our time.

The lute and its developments

The lute, which made its debut in Europe in the fourteenth century, heralded a new way of crafting musical instruments: the assembly of numerous wooden pieces on a mould. This technique, like the instrument itself, came from the Arab world.

On the lute, the body resembles a shell, constructed in juxtaposition to the

ribs, which were shaped with a bending iron. This assembly technique meant that instruments could be built more lightly, despite their sometimes-impressive size. As of the sixteenth century, it gradually spread to stringed instruments with necks.

The lute itself came to evolve decade by decade. In the fifteenth century, it usually had gut strings, arranged in a limited number of courses.

These very slowly multiplied thanks, in particular, to progress in catgut manufacturing. With the advent of wound strings in the



The origins of Greece's bouzouki (left), like those of Turkey's saz, lie outside Europe.

mid-seventeenth century, the tessitura extended downwards to include more bass. By the end of the Baroque period, lutes in Germany could sport as many as thirteen courses. From that time onward, the instrument sank into oblivion. Frets on lutes were still merely gut strings tied around the neck. It is quite possible, however, that in the late Middle Ages, some lutes were still unfretted altogether, like Arab lutes.

Around 1600, several lute-like instruments were invented, in particular with the aim of realising the newly-theorised basso continuo. These instruments featured double pegboxes and bass strings that could not be stopped on the fingerboard, and which were therefore only ever played as open strings. The strings were sometimes metal. Depending on their origin, they would go by such names as the theorbo, *chitarrone* or archlute. This group of instruments was nonetheless quite diverse, displaying varied arrangements of strings and pegboxes.

The cittern

The sheer number of strings on a lute made it a difficult instrument to tune. In 1713, Johann Mattheson wrote that if a lute-player had lived eighty years, he would surely have spent sixty of those years tuning (*Das neu-eröffnete Orchestre*, Hamburg, 1713). While Mattheson's animosity to the lute doubtless explained this quip, there was no denying the real need for simpler instruments. The solution came partly, in the seventeenth century, in the form of the cittern. Thanks to its metal strings, it stayed in tune longer. Its frets, also made of metal, were set into the neck itself and some instruments sported half-frets, making it to possible to play diatonically in the bass range and chromatically in the trebles.

A later variant on the cittern was the English guitar, a very widespread instrument in England from 1750 to around 1810, which was also in use in France in the late eighteenth century.

Top: Portuguese guitar. Porto, nineteenth century. Right: Archlute attributed to Magno Tieffenbrucker's workshop. Venice, 1640.





A gigantic theorbo. "Lady Mary Campbell" by James Macardell, mezzotint on paper (1762).

"The Lute Player", painting by Caravaggio. Italy, 1596.



Often pear-shaped, the English guitar was coveted above all by a select public, frequently female, seeking to play a simple repertoire. To make it easier to use and play, the instrument was equipped with a threaded watchkey tuning system (sometimes called "Preston tuners") and a keyboard mechanism in the 1770s. The Portuguese guitar is a descendent of the English guittar and the cittern; it also inherited the Preston tuners, albeit with a different shape. This is the quintessential Fado instrument.



Harp-Lute by Edward Light, London circa 1810.

The mandolin

Still in the eighteenth century, there was another metal-stringed instrument whose popularity soared: the mandolin, and more particularly, the Neapolitan mandolin. The body of this instrument was reminiscent of that of the lute, albeit smaller and deeper. The soundboard was not flat; rather it was canted at the bridge. The pegbox was flat and its tuning pegs were, in the eighteenth century, rear-facing. In the nineteenth century, tuners became more widespread. A round soundhole opened up on the instrument's top. It was still played with a plectrum, hence the presence of the protective plate

on the top. Tuning a mandolin was the same as tuning a violin, which made it relatively easy to move from one instrument to the other. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, mandolins came with different kinds of strings. Over the course of the nineteenth century, steel came to dominate.

Hybrid guitars

Around the middle of the eighteenth century, a new kind of guitar was developed: the lyre-guitar. This instrument had a neck with six strings like a classical guitar, but its shape was inspired by the lyre of old. Interest in this instrument stemmed more

from its visual qualities than its musical ones: it enabled women from privileged backgrounds to strike "Greek" poses, and indeed there are examples of such players who chose to have their portraits styled in precisely this way.

The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of several other types of guitars, and their concomitant variations, with additional strings that were played free of the instrument's neck. In England, Edward Light patented an instrument called the British Harp-Lute in 1816. The base of

Lyre-guitare. France, nineteenth century.



The lyre-guitar was inspired by the Greek lyre. France, nineteenth century.



Mandolin by Antonius Vinaccia. Naples, 1781.

the invention was rounded like a lute. The melody strings can be stopped with the aid of frets. The remaining, longer strings were attached to a neck resembling that of a harp. In Austria, in the nineteenth century, a dual-neck guitar appeared, known as a *Kontragitarre*. Strings on the fretted neck could be stopped as on a conventional guitar, while those on the unfretted neck could only be played as open strings. This model is closely associated with a local repertoire: *Schrammelmusik*.

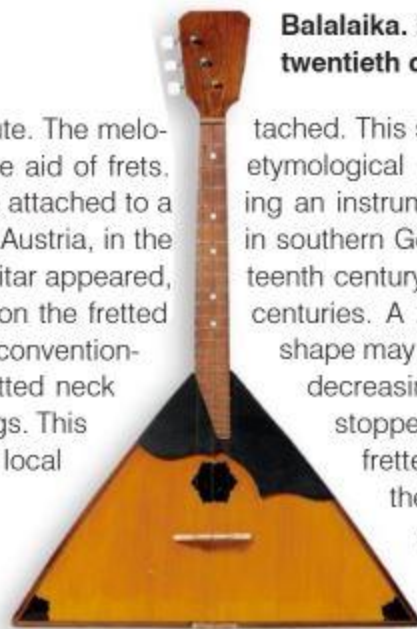
The balalaika

The balalaika is a plucked string instrument with a triangular body. It has a distinctive long neck and three strings, which may be either gut or steel. The balalaika is native to Russia and was originally associated with the rural classes. In the nineteenth century, it gained favour with the nobility. A whole family of instruments evolved, in a range of sizes, and they came to be used in concerts.

The zither

In Classical antiquity, the Greek word "kithara" referred to a lyre-like instrument, with two arms and a cross-bar to which the strings were at-

Balalaika. Russia, twentieth century.



tached. This same original word also lies at the etymological root of the term "zither", denoting an instrument without a neck, very popular in southern Germany and in Austria in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth centuries. A zither consists of a body, whose shape may vary, covered with metal strings of decreasing lengths. The first strings can be stopped with the left hand thanks to the fretted fingerboard. On these strings the melody can be played with a plectrum attached to the thumb of the right hand. The other strings are for the accompaniment.

The Selmer-Maccaferri guitar

In France, in 1932, the manufacturer Selmer and luthier Mario Maccaferri invented a unique acoustic guitar that was to become the preferred instrument of Django Reinhardt and the signature instrument of "gypsy jazz". This guitar features steel strings, a cutaway in the upper right bout so as to facilitate playing the highest notes and a D-shaped soundhole ("grande bouche"), or an oval soundhole ("petite bouche"). Some models were fitted with a resonator.

Anne-Emmanuelle Ceulemans

Selmer-Maccaferri "Gypsy jazz" guitar. Paris, 1951.



Two specimens of zither. Germany, nineteenth century.

Middle East, kingdom of the oud

The fertile crescent is home to numerous musical instruments, notably plucked string instruments. This latter category still constitutes the majority to this day in the Middle East. The most representative of them all is surely the “king of instruments”: the oud.

Before examining a selection of instruments that are typical of the Middle East, let us look for a moment at their origins.

Antiquity

After Prehistoric hunters' bows, the most ancient instruments known to humanity are harps and lyres (end of the third millennium BCE). A thousand years later, in Mesopotamia, the addition of a neck gave birth to the lute.

The harp first made its appearance in Sumer. At first an arched harp, its shape was angular or curved like a hunting bow. The strings were pulled taut on a diagonal between the two sides.

Five hundred years later, these harps spread to Egypt, and later to Greece and India. Use of the arched harp has survived in some places to the present day. Sumerian craftsmanship progressed, giving rise to other styles of harps, which in turn evolved and spread geographically, coming closer to resembling the modern shapes of the instrument as they are known today. In the Cycladic civilisation in the third millennium BCE, for example, we find the oldest traces of harps that are “closed” by a third side, heralding present-day construction. One of the most ancient repre-



The oud, king of all lutes

The oud is a short-necked lute. Its kingdom extends to every corner of the Middle East, and even beyond.

In the beginning of the third century, it made its debut in the Persian Empire as a local variant of the lute. It was technically

Harp-player.
Cyclades, 2800 BCE.

sentations of plucked string instruments is that of a lyre from Megiddo (in present-day Israel). This lyre has a trapezoid shape, narrower at the base, and a soundboard with a bridge. The lyre has no neck and its strings run parallel to the soundboard. It is generally a small instrument, and yet the Sumerians had large wooden lyres that were richly ornamented and covered with precious materials. Standing upright on the floor, they were sometimes played by two musicians simultaneously, whereas most lyres are held in the player's arms. This magnificent creation has come to us from instruments dating back to 2,600 BCE, found in the royal cemetery of Ur.

Another model of lyre – lighter and played with a plectrum – became more widespread in the region because it was easier to transport.

Some 2000 years BCE, another instrument appeared in Mesopotamia: the lute. (In organology, the family of lutes encompasses a broad range of instruments, not only the European lute from the Baroque period). Endowed with a neck, it was now possible to alter the strings' vibration length and thus play several different notes on the same string. The Mesopotamian lute spread throughout the entire Middle East over the next 500 years, and led to the advent of myriad instruments: the most famous is the oud.



Replica of the harp
found in the royal
cemetery of Ur, in
Mesopotamia.
Circa 2500 BCE.



INSTRUMENTS ORIENTAUX A CORDE CONNUS EN ÉGYPTÉ.

**"Oud" lute. Syria, 1931.**

Opposite: plate from *Description de l'Égypte*, Paris, 1809.

different to other short-necked lutes of the time, such as the barbat, also Persian, with its top of stretched hide, whereas the oud's soundboard is of wood. The spread of this instrument was perhaps facilitated by that of the Manichaean religion, which appeared at this time in Persia. Indeed, Manichaean proselytes are depicted with short-necked lutes which were probably, although not certainly, ouds. It was after the Moorish invasion of Andalusia in 711 that the oud gained a foothold in Europe; it became more widespread and developed into the instrument which today goes by the name of lute.

The strings of this instrument are set in four to six "courses", pairs of strings that play the same note, be it an octave apart or in unison. The fingerboard is smooth, devoid of frets.

The oud is played with a plectrum, very often made, even to this day, from eagle feathers. The way that the oud is crafted is not standardised or fixed. Since it proliferated so widely, there are numberless regional variations. The



**"Guembri" lute.
North Africa,
twentieth
century.**

number of pieces used in its construction, the instrument's dimensions, the number of strings and even the manner in which the instrument is tuned can vary greatly. The oud is not alone, however, out of the vast array of types of lutes present in the Middle East.

The tanburs, a very large family

Tanburs are long-necked lutes with frets. Like the oud, the *tanbur* evolved from the Mesopotamian lute. The earliest reference to this instrument is to be found in the writings of the philosopher Al-Farabi, at the end of the first millennium. In the book *Description de l'Égypte* (Description of Egypt), published in Paris, 1809, G.A. Villoteau identified five distinct types of tanbur in Cairo alone.

Saz, baglama, buzuq, setar... a wealth of names can be found, sometimes designating true variations of the instrument, and sometimes merely local variations of the name.

The body, traditionally made of wood – sometimes of metal these days –, is usually pear-shaped. As is the case with the oud, the *tanbur's* strings are arranged in courses.

Tanburs have ten to twenty-four frets. One could be forgiven for thinking that a fretted instrument would preclude the playing of microtonal music, but some tanburs have mobile frets, which can be



**"Tanbur" lute.
Middle East, 1930.**

adjusted before playing so as to accommodate the required scale.

The guembri, a mystical instrument

Another notable lute is the guembri (or sintir). It has one to three strings. It has no headstock, as the tuning posts are located on the neck, and the neck itself reaches into the instrument's body. While the guembri is relatively commonplace in Egypt, it is especially emblematic of the mystical Gnawa musicians, present chiefly in Morocco.

The kissar, descendent of ancient lyres

The kissar is an ancient Nubian lyre, still in use today in Egypt and Ethiopia. Whereas the resonator was traditionally made of tortoise-shell, today's models are made of wood. Hide is stretched over the resonator into which two or three small apertures are cut, and the strings are wound around the cross-piece at the top.

The qanun, cousin of the psaltery

The qanun is a horizontal zither that can be found across a rather large area, encompassing the Middle East, Central Asia and Greece. The spelling differs depending on the region: fairly well-known variants include *kanun*, or *kanoon*. As its name indicates, this instrument is a relative of the *canons*, European psalteries of the Middle Ages. The trapezoid resonator is made of wood. The soundboard features three or four sound holes and may be inlaid with mosaics. The qanun is strung with courses of two strings (for the basses)



"Rebab" lute. Algeria, nineteenth century.



"Kissar" lyre. Ethiopia, nineteenth century. Opposite: plate from *Description de l'Égypte*, Paris, 1809.

or three strings, tuned in unison. The total number of strings varies between sixty-three and eighty-four, and they are plucked with small plectra fitted to the index finger of each hand.

The rebab, an adaptable instrument

The name rebab and its many variations (*rubab*, *rabab*, etc.) designates several different types of chordophones across

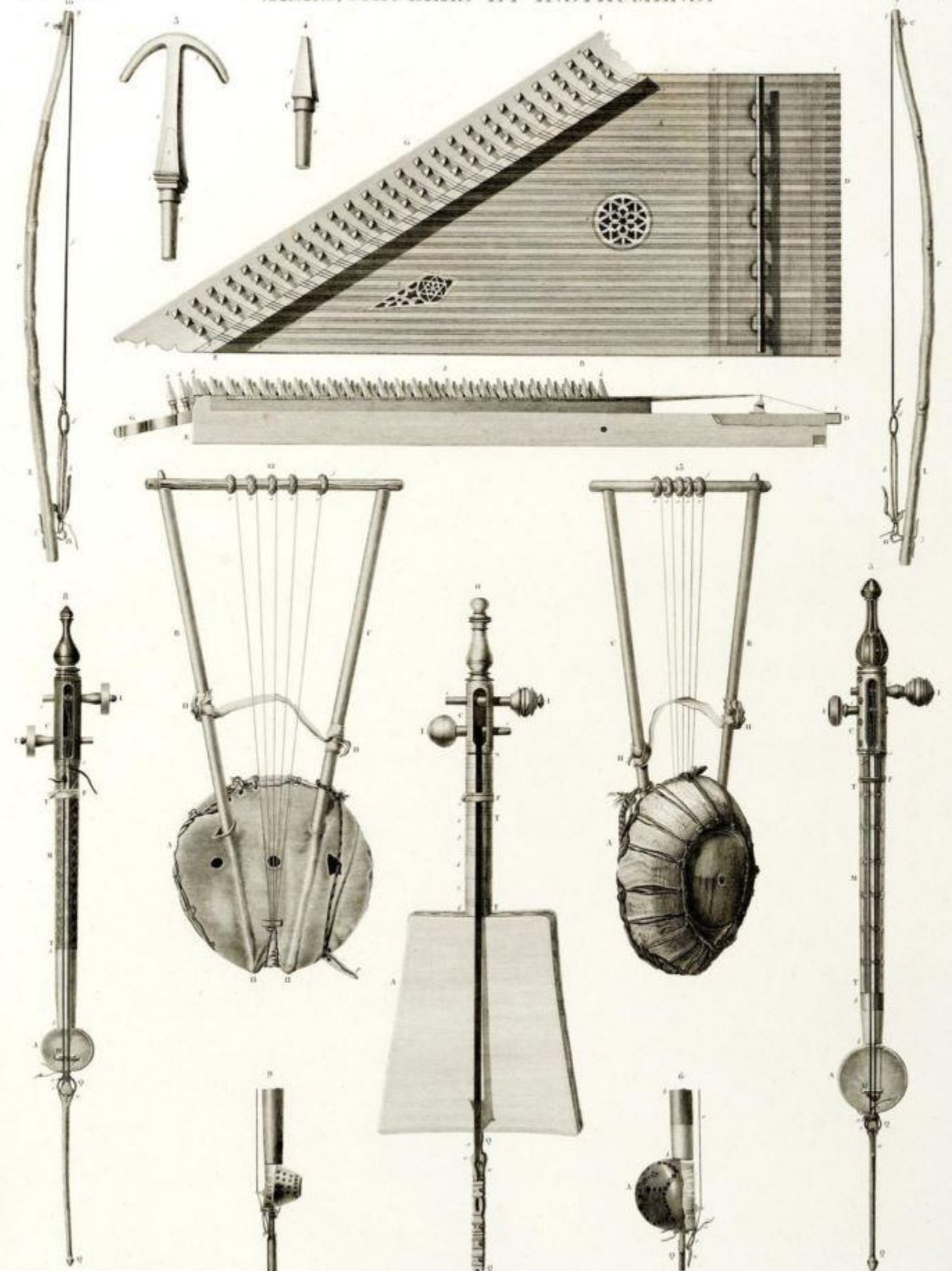
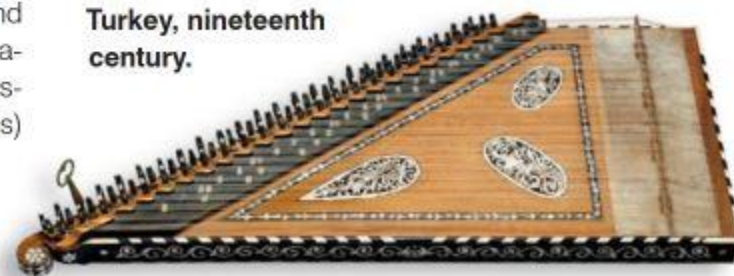
the Middle East. As in the case of tanburs, Al-Farabi attests to their existence and some of their characteristics at the end of the first millennium. Some of these instruments are lutes, and as such are played by plucking the strings, while others are viols, which are bowed. This latter type made its way to Spain with the Moors and, as of around 1300, lent its name to the *rebec*, the first European violin.

Rich diversity

Any attempt to trace a linear evolution of plucked string instruments in the Middle East would be as futile as it is tempting. One defining characteristic of these instruments is the fact that they come in countless local variations and then each variation seems to go by countless local names. All one can do is admire their surprising protean richness in wonder!

Lucas Chaumard

"Qanun" zither. Turkey, nineteenth century.



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Alberto Martínez

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