

# A Short Dictionary of Symbols and Terms in Iranian Music

## Symbols

♭: *koron*; symbol for half-flat, approximately 1/4 tone. This symbol was introduced by Ali Naqi Vaziri (1887–1979).

♯: *sori*; symbol for half-sharp, approximately 1/4 tone (introduced by Ali Naqi Vaziri.)

^: *rāst*; playing with right hand.

∨: *chap*; playing with left hand.

×: *juft*; right and left hands simultaneously.

∪: short syllable.

–: long syllable.

آ: *Alif*; smallest possible time which can be considered between two *naqarāt*, equivalent to Ta.

ب: *Ba*; two *Alif*, corresponding also to Tan.

ج: *Jim*; three *Alif*, corresponding to Tanan.

د: *dāl*; four *Alif*, corresponding to Tananan.

ه: *ha*; five *Alif*, corresponding to Tanananan.

م: *mīm*; struck beat

## Terms

*Abjad*: special way of ordering the Arabic alphabet, which differs from its typical arrangement, such that the standard pattern (read from the right) of ا ب ت ث ج ح خ د ذ ر ز ... is transformed into ... ا ب ج د ه و ز ح ط ی ...

*Abū-atā*: one of the major subdivisions of *dastgāh Shūr*; one of the five *āvāz-ha* of Iranian classical music; its primary scale is G A♭ B♭ C D E♭ F G.

*Abyāt*: the plural form of *beyt* (see *beyt*).

*Adwār*: (pl. of *dowr*), cycles; system in ancient Arabic and Persian music theory for representing both interval patterns (mode or scales) and rhythmic patterns.

*Afā'il*: trigram of “F-Æ-L” (ف ع ل) used to represent the pattern of verbs, noun and other components in Arabic grammar. In prosody, they are used to represent the rhythmic structure of poems.

*Afshāri*: one of the major subdivisions of *dastgāh Shūr*; one of the five *āvāz-ha* of Iranian classical music; its primary scale is F G A♭ B♭ C D(♭) E♭ F.

*Ālāp*: structured improvisation on a chosen *rāg* which is the first part of any *dhrupad* (ancient vocal form in Hindustani music).

*Aghāni*: *Ketāb al-aghāni*; comprehensive book on music and musicians by Ab al-Faraj Isfahani (d. 988).

*Arāq*: *gūsheh* in *dastgāh Māhūr* (also be played in *Bayāt turk*).

*Arkān*: (pl. of *rukn*) feet; fundamentals.

*‘Arūz*: collection of certain patterns for organising the number and order of short and long syllables in each hemistich; system of metric poetry requiring the consistency of a set pattern of long (-) and short (○) syllables; system by which a poem is judged to ascertain whether its rhythm is right or not.

*Asbāb*: (pl. of *sabab*), see *sabab*.

*‘Āshūrā*: the tenth days of the holy month of Moharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, which marks the martyrdom of Imam Ḥoseyn, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad.

*Aṣl*: main; authentic.

*Assyrian*: a member of a group of Semitic-speaking peoples of the Middle East and northern Africa; an extinct language of the Assyrians regarded as a dialect of Akkadian.

*Āstān Qūds*: the organisation of the holy shrine of Imam Reza in Mashhad, Iran.

*Aṣwāt*: (pl. of *ṣawt*), voice; tune.

*Atānīn*: a system for representing the rhythm by employing the nonsense syllables *ta*, *na* (each equivalent to one time unit) and *tan*, *nan* (each equivalent to two time units).

*Āvāz*: literarily, song; subdivision of the *dastgāh* in contemporary Iranian *radif*; free-metred section of a mode.

*Avesta*: the holy book of the Zoroastrians.

*Awtād*: (pl. of *vataḍ*), see *vataḍ*.

*Azāḥif*: (pl. of *zehāf*), see *zehāf*.

*Azerbaijani*: a *gūsheh* in *dastgāh Māhūr*.

*Bahr*: sea; name referring to all the standard metric patterns in Persian and Arabic poetry.

*Bakhteyārī*: name of a region in central Iran; *gūsheh* in *dastgāh Homāyūn*.

*bālā dasteḥ*: upper part of the neck of the *tār* and *setār*; low tetrachord of every scale.

*barbat*: kind of lute.

*Baste-negār*: *gūsheh* which can be played in different *dastgāh-ha*.

*Bayāt Isfahān*: one of the major subdivisions of *dastgāh Homāyūn*; one of the five *āvāz-ha* of Iranian classical music; its primary scale is C D E<sup>b</sup> F G A<sup>♯</sup> B<sup>b</sup> C.

*Bayāt kurd*: one of the subdivisions of *dastgāh Shūr*.

*Bayāt turk*: one of the major subdivisions of *dastgāh Shūr*; one of the five *āvāz-ha* of Iranian classical music.

*Beyt*: complete poetic line consisting of two equal hemistichs.

*Bīdād*: *gūsheh* in *dastgāh Homāyun*.

*Buḥūr*: (pl. of *bahr*), see *bahr*.

*Būshehr*: province in southern Iran by the Persian Gulf.

*Chahār pāreh*: *gūsheh* in *Abū-atā* and *Māhūr*.

*Chahār z̄arb*: ancient rhythmic cycles consisting of twenty four *naqarāt* in the form Tananan Tananan Tananan Tananan Tananan Tananan.

*Chahārgāh*: one of seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is C D♯ E F G A♯ B C.

*Chahārmezrāb*: four strokes; an instrumental genre of compositions with fixed-metre.

*Chakām* (also in form of *chakāmak*): love-lyric or romantic story in the Sasanian period (224-651).

*Chang*: harp.

*Dānīsh Nāmeḥ Alāī*: book by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna 974-1037) in Persian which contains one chapter in music.

*Darāmad*: introduction; first *gūsheh* in every *dastgāh* or *āvāz*.

*Dasātīn*: (pl. of *dastān*), see *dastān*.

*Dashī*: one of the major subdivisions of *dastgāh Shūr*; one of the five *āvāz-ha* of Iranian classical music; its primary scale is G A♯ B♭ C D(♯) E♭ F G.

*Dast afshānī*: dancing; Sufi dance.

*Dastān*: pattern of pitches; mode; frets on a fingerboard.

*Dastgāh*: modal system; “a collection of melodic segments that share a common basic scale with its variations” (Miller 1999: 349).

*Dawāyer*: (pl. of *dāyereh*) circles.

*Dāyereh*: circle.

*Deilamān*: *gūsheh* in *dashī*.

*Dhrupad*: in Hindustani music, ancient vocal musical form in four parts preceded by extensive introductory improvisation (*ālāp*) and expanded by rhythmic and melodic elaborations.

*Dour Ma’atayn*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of two-hundred *naqarāt* reported by Abd al-Qādir in *Jāme’ al-Alḥān*.

*Dour Shāhi*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of thirty or thirty-four *naqarāt* in the form Tananan Tanan Tan Tan Tanan Tananan Tananan Tan Tan Tanan Tanan Tan.

*Faili*: a *gūsheh* in *Bayāt tūr̄k*.

*Fākh̄tī*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of four different versions: *Fākh̄tī ašqar*, which consists of five *naqarāt* (Tan Tan); *Fākh̄tī šaqīr*, which is made up of ten *naqarāt* (Tan Tananan Tananan); *Fākh̄tī moẓāʿaf*, composed of twenty *naqarāt* (Tananan Tan Tananan Tananan Tan Tananan); and *Fākh̄tī azʿāf* built upon forty *naqarāt* (by the double performance of the pattern of *Fākh̄tī moẓāʿaf*).

*Farʿ*: trivial.

*Farsakh*: 120 miles.

*Farsi*: Persian; the official language of Iran.

*Fāseleh*: duration in poetic metre equivalent of three voweled consonants and a consonant, as in “be+ra+va+m.”

*Favāsel*: (pl. of *fāseleh*) see *Fāseleh*.

*Forūd*: descent; conclusion; return to the first modal degree.

*Ghadīm*: old; ancient.

*Ghameh-zanī*: a *gūsheh* in *dashtī*.

*Ghinaʿ*: music in general (Arabic).

*Gūsheh*: a traditional repertory of melodies, melodic formula, tonal progressions, ornamentations and rhythmic patterns that serve as a model for improvisation; units which comprise each *dastgāh* or *āvāz*.

*Haft*: seven.

*Hazaj*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of two different versions: *Hazaj auwal*, which consists of ten *naqarāt* (Tan Tan Tan Tan), and *Hazaj thānī*, which consists of six *naqarāt* (Tananan Tan).

*Ḥarakat*: movement, vowel point.

*Ḥijāz*: *gūsheh* in *Abū-atā*.

*Homāyun*: one of the seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is G A<sup>♯</sup> B C D E<sup>♭</sup> F G.

*īqāʿ*: rhythm.

*Isfahān*: large city in central Iran; one of the major subdivisions of *dastgāh Humāyūn*; one of the five *āvāz-ha* of Iranian classical music; its primary scale is C D E(♭) F G A<sup>♯</sup> B C.

*Ismāʿīliyah*: branch of Sufism.

*Jadīd*: new.

*Jāhiliyah*: pre-Islamic period in *Ḥijāz* (currently Saudi Arabia).

*Kamāncheh*: unfretted spike fiddle (bowed) with four strings which is about the size of a viola. It is played resting upright on player's lap.

*Kanz al-Tuḥaf*: book on music theory and musical instruments in Persian written between 1341 and 1364, author unknown.

*Karbalā*: city in Iraq where the holy shrine of Imam Ḥoseyn is located.

*Karbzan*: stone beating; ceremony of mourning.

*Ketābkhāneh*: library.

*khafīf ramal*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of ten *naqarāt* in the form Tan Tanan Tan Tanan.

*Khorāsān*: large province in north-east Iran.

*Khosro and Shirin*: a *gūsheh* in *Abū-atā*.

*Kitāb al-adwār*: book of cycles; substantial book on Arabo-Persian music by Ṣafī al-Dīn Abd al-Mu'min Urmawī (1216-94).

*Koron*: ♯ ; flattened by a quarter tone.

*Māhūr*: one of the seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is similar to the major scale in Western music.

*Majlis*: gathering.

*Maqāsid al-Alhān*: old music theory in Persian language by Abd al-Qādir Marāqī (ca. 1367-1435).

*Marāwis*: (pl. of *Murwas*), see *Murwas*.

*Maṣnavī*: poetic form; *gūsheh* in the poetic metre of *Maṣnavī* played in different *dastgāh-ha* and *āvāz-ha*, particularly *Afshārī*.

*Mezrāb*: plectrum on long-necked stringed instruments such as *tār* and *setār*; hammers on the hammered dulcimer (*santūr*).

*Misra'*: hemistich.

*Mokhammas*: poetic form; ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of three different versions: *Mokhammas kabīr* (the grand), *Mokhammas ousat* (the medium) and *Mokhammas ṣaqīr* (the small).

*Motoghayyer*: changeable.

*Munfarid*: simple.

*Murakkab*: compound.

*Murwas*: small double-headed cylinder drums.

*Mūsiqī*: music.

*Mūsiqī-i aṣīl*: indigenous or noble music.

*Mūsiqī-i dastgāhi*: *dastgāhi* music.

*Mūsiqī-i radīfi*: *radīfi* music.

*Mūsīqī-i sonnatī*: traditional music.

*Naḡham*: pitch; melody.

*Naḡhmeh-i aval*: *gūsheh* in *dastgāh Shūr*.

*Naqarāt*: (pl. of *naqareh*), see *naqareh*.

*Naqareh*: measurement of note values; smallest unit in a rhythmic cycle.

*Naṣirkhānī*: *gūsheh* in *Māhūr*.

*Navā*: one of the seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is C D<sup>♯</sup> E<sup>♯</sup> F  
G A<sup>♯</sup> B<sup>♯</sup> C.

*Ney*: kind of vertical flute.

*Nimā'ī*: new style of Persian poetry.

*Norūz*: Iranian New Year; series of three *gūsheh-ha* in *Rāstpanjgāh* and *Humāyūn*.

*Oj*: ascendance; the climax of a *dastgāh* or *āvāz*.

*Pā'in dasteh*: high pitches.

*Pardeh*: fret; mode.

*Pāyeh*: fundamental; tonic; referring motif in *chahārmezrāb*.

*Pīshdarāmad*: instrumental genre; rather long prelude in slow tempo played by Iranian orchestra as the opening piece; apparently first introduced by Gholām Hoseyn Darvish, known as Darvishkhān (1872–1926).

*Radīf*: entire collection of *gūsheh-ha* in all the 12 modes (seven *dastgāh-ha* and five *āvāz-ha*) as transmitted by an authorised master.

*Rāh-i Samā'*: tune of *Samā'* (dervishes dancing); old rhythmic cycle from Khorāsān

*Rajaz*: poetic metrical pattern; ancient rhythmic cycle (see table of 'Arūz in chapter one).

*Rāk*: *gūsheh* in *Māhūr* and *Rāstpanjgāh*

*Ramal*: poetic metrical pattern (see table of 'Arūz in chapter one); ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of twelve *naqarāt* in two different versions. The first version equals Tan Tan Tan Tan Tananan and the second version equals Tan Tan Tananan Tananan.

*Ramal thaqīl*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of twenty-four *naqarāt* in the form Tananan Tananan Tan Tan Tan Tan Tan Tananan.

*Rāst-panjgāh*: one of the seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is similar to the major scale in Western music.

*Reng*: instrumental genre in fixed-metre originally played to accompany dances.

*Risāleh Mūsīqī*: music treatise in Persian written by 'Abd al Raḡmān Jāmī in 1489.

*Sabab*: duration in poetic metre equivalent of one vowel-consonant and one additional consonant, as in “*de+l*.”

*Sang-zamī*: stone beating; ceremony of mourning.

*Sasanian*: ancient Iranian dynasty between 224–651 evolved by Ardashir I in years of conquest, AD 208–224, and destroyed by the Arabs during the years 637–51.

*ṣawt*: sound; tune.

*Sayakhī*: *gūsheh* in *Abū-atā*

*Segāh*: one of the seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is A ♯ B♭ C D ♯ E♭ F G A ♯.

*Sepīd*: new style of Persian poetry.

*Setār*: long-necked, four-stringed lute with pear-shaped wooden body; fretted like the *tār* but played with the nail of the index finger.

*Shahābi*: a *gūsheh* in *Bayāt tūrīk*.

*Shāhid*: witness; sweetheart; note which is the centre of attention in melodic phrases. It is comparable to the dominant in Western art music, but is not necessarily the fifth.

*Shahnāz*: a *gūsheh* in *Shūr*.

*Sharḥ-i Adwār*: clarifications of the cycles; old music treatise on cycles of modes and rhythm in Persian by Abd al-Qādir Marāqī (ca. 1367–1435) based on Ṣafī al-Dīn’s *Kitāb al-Adwār*.

*Sharveh*: vocal form song in different regions of Iran, particularly the south.

*Shi’r*: poem.

*Shekasteh*: a *gūsheh* in *Māhūr* and *Bayāt tūrīk*.

*Shi’it*: the second largest branch of Islam.

*Shūr*: largest *dastgāh* in the set of the seven *dastgāh-ha* in contemporary Iranian music; its primary scale is G A ♯ B♭ C D E♭ F G

*sīneh-zamī*: breast beating; ceremony of mourning.

*Sūz-o-godāz*: a *gūsheh* in *dashī*.

*Tabriz*: large city in north-west Iran.

*Taḥrīr*: falsetto break; cracking of the voice. In vocal music *taḥrīr* takes the form of melisma and is characteristic of musical performance from Tibet to West Asia.

*Taqīm*: free-form melodic improvisation in Islamic music, performed by solo voice or instrument, often a lute, or by the principal instruments of an orchestra playing in succession. The *taqīm* often forms the first movement of a suite (*nawbah*), a popular form in Arabic music.

*Tār*: long-necked lute with double belly, covered with sheepskin membrane. It has six strings, tuned in pairs, and twenty-six movable gut frets.

*Ṭarab-angīz*: a *gūsheh* in *dastgāh Māhūr*.

*Ṭaṣnīf*: most popular vocal form in Iranian classical music with a fixed-metre rhythm.

*Tāsū'ā*: ninth day of Moharram, the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar.

*Tekiyeh*: a grace note which is normally one step higher than the main note—sometimes more than one step higher, as governed by special rules of interpretation.

*Thaqīl auwal*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of sixteen *naqarāt* in the form Tanan Tanan Tananan Tan Tananan.

*Thaqīl thānī*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of sixteen *naqarāt* in the form Tanan Tanan Tan Tanan Tanan Tan.

*Tūsī*: *gūsheh* in *Māhūr*.

*Ūd*: lute.

Umayyad: Arab dynasty which ruled the Empire of the Caliphate (661-750).

*Vatad*: duration in poetic metre equivalent of a pair of two voweled consonants and a one consonant, as in “*de+la+m*.”

*Wazn*: weight; rhythm.

*Zābol*: *gūsheh* in *Segāh* and *Chahārgāh*.

*Zang-i Shotor*: *gūsheh* in *Segāh* and *Homāyun*.

*Zanjīr-zanī*: chain beating; ceremony of mourning.

*Zarb fath*: ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of fifty *naqarāt* in the form Tanan Tanan Tananan Tananan Tanan Tanan Tananan Tanan Tanan Tananan Tananan Tananan Tananan Tananan.

*Zarb Jadīd*: an ancient rhythmic cycle consisting of fourteen *naqarāt* in the form Tananan Tananan Tanan Tanan.

*Zehāf*: name referring to each of the varied forms of *bohūr* in Persian and Arabic poetry.