

MAHAGITA



Music for the Burmese Harp

*transcribed by
Ingo Stoevesandt*

MAHAGITA

Music for the Burmese Harp

transcribed by
Ingo Stoevesandt

© 2022 www.musikausien.de

01. About the Burmese arched harp „Saung Gauk“

The arched harp "Saung Gauk" is a relict of more than 5000 years in musical history. Maybe coming from Mesopotamia, it traveled through India all the way down to Southeast Asia. It can only be found in Myanmar today and knows a rich tradition in the chamber music.

The Myanmar harp „Saung“ or „Saung gauk“ is an arched harp with 14 chords (traditionally, actually widened to 16 or even more chords). It consists of a hardwood body which is shaped like a boat. This body gets covered with deer skin or a dried cow bladder, in which three or four resonating holes are cut on a promising astrological occasion. The fourteen to sixteen silk thread strings get attached by special bindings (tassels) to the accacian neck, which also are used for the tuning. Modern harps show simple guitar tuning pegs at the neck, actually unfortunately only few players know how to use the old binding and tuning system.

Even if the actual shape seems to differ from the pictures in reliefs at Pagan's walls, we might assume, that the old „Saung“ is linked to a history of instrumental development which is very old:

Analogue models are shown on the walls of Angkor.

The existence of arched harps is manifested in musical history over a long time, first models date back to the year 3000 BC in Mesopotamia. From this first source it might have spread all over Africa and later Asia.

There have been several attempts to reconstruct the possible immigration to Burma from India, referring to the Indian "veena" principle (for example Judith Becker), but the true origin of this very ancient instrument is still unknown and may stay speculative in nature.