

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 10: THE *SĀJĀT* FROM EGYPT

Instrument:

Sājāt, ancient cymbals

Country:

Egypt



Flag:

Three equal horizontal bands of red, white, and black feature the national emblem in the white band. The emblem is a shield superimposed on a golden eagle above a scroll that bears the name of Egypt in Arabic.

Size and Population:

Egypt has an area of 386,662 square miles, with a coastline of 565 miles on the Mediterranean Sea and 805 miles on the Red Sea. The capital is Cairo and the country is slightly more than three times the size of New Mexico. The estimated population as of July 2013 is 85,294,388; ranked 15th in the world, and second largest in Africa.

Geography and Climate:

Egypt is a Middle Eastern country located in the northeastern corner of Africa. Because most of the country is desert, the majority of people live and farm along the fertile area along the Nile River, the longest river in the world, and the other important waterway, the Suez Canal. The country borders the Mediterranean Sea, Libya, Israel, the Gaza Strip, Sudan, and the Red Sea north of Sudan, and includes the Asian Sinai Peninsula. The country's four regions include the Western Desert, the Nile Valley and Delta, the Eastern Desert, and the Sinai Peninsula. Rains in central Africa flood the Nile Valley each year providing rich farmland.

Egypt has two seasons, scorching summers and mild winters. Temperatures range from a low of 45° F after sunset to 104° F in the deserts. North winds from the Mediterranean Sea cool the coast of Egypt during the summer. Hot driving windstorms called *khamsin* (com-sin) occur in the spring, along with dust storms and sandstorms. There are periodic droughts, frequent earthquakes, and flash floods, even though annual rainfall is only 8 inches on the coast and 1 inch inland.

Background and History:

Ancient Egypt, considered the birthplace of civilization, developed a great culture about 5,000 years ago. The area had the first national government, early forms of math and writing (*hieroglyphics*), and developed the 365-day calendar. The pyramids have survived for over 4,500 years and remind us of the ancient Egyptians' expert engineering skills. The ancient period



ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 10: THE *SĀJĀT* FROM EGYPT

began when King Menes united the people along the Lower and Upper Nile around 3100 B.C. The first pyramid was built about 2650 B.C., beginning the Old Kingdom known for its pyramid building. The Egyptian empire reached its height around 1490 B.C. with King Thutmose III who led conquests of Palestine and Syria. In 1070 B.C., Egypt began to decline as a strong nation. The last native dynasty fell to the Persians in 341 B.C., who in turn were replaced by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. Alexander the Great took control of Egypt in 332 B.C. and one of his generals later founded the Ptolemaic dynasty. Queen Cleopatra VII became the last Egyptian ruler in that dynasty, and when she died in 30 B.C. Egypt became a province of Rome. Invading Muslims from Arabia conquered Egypt in 632 A.D. and introduced the Arabic language, ending Roman rule. A local military caste, the Mamluks (mom-looks), took control about 1250 and continued to govern after the conquest of Egypt by the Ottoman Turks in 1517.

After the Suez Canal was completed in 1869, Egypt became important as a hub of global transportation, but soon found itself heavily in debt. To protect its investments, Britain took control of Egypt in 1882, but the country continued its allegiance to the Ottoman Empire until 1914. Egypt gained partial independence from Britain in 1922, and full sovereignty after World War II. The country became an independent republic in 1953 and has played an important role in Middle Eastern affairs. Relations with Israel were first adversarial, with four wars taking place from 1948 to 1973, but disputes ended in 1973. In 1971, Egypt developed a constitution and in the same year the Aswan High Dam was completed, creating Lake Nasser and expanding agriculture beyond the Nile River in the country. The population grew to the largest in the Arab world, stretching resources and stressing society. Modern presidents, following the removal of the last monarch (King Faruk) from power in 1953, include Abdel Nasser (1954-1970), Anwar el-Sadat (1970-1981), and Mohammed Hosni Mubarak (1981-2011). In June 2012, Muhammad Mursi, a candidate of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected President but overthrown by the military in 2013. Egypt's official name is Arab Republic of Egypt.

Culture:

Today, Egypt is 99 percent Eastern Hamitic people, that is, Egyptians, Bedouins, and Berbers. The remaining 1 percent is Greek, Nubian, Armenian, and European (mainly French and Italian). Arabic is the official language, but English and French are widely understood. The country is 94 percent Muslim and 6 percent Coptic Christian and other religions. The present-day Coptic Church is one religion where cymbals are used to emphasize the hymn in a worship service as they were in ancient times. This practice dates back to the beginning of Christianity.

Much of the population lives in crowded cities and the rest are peasants or farmers, known as *fellahin* (feh-lah-heen), living along the Nile or Suez Canal. Some rural people are Bedouin, nomads who wander the deserts with their herds. Farmers live in villages and celebrate festivals, marriages, and births all centered in Mosques, or Islamic religious houses. While many people wear Western style clothing, many still follow the Muslim code in which women wear robes and cover their hair, ears and arms with a veil. A typical evening meal consists of bread dipped into a large bowl of hot vegetable stew. The favorite sport is soccer and people enjoy socializing by going to the outdoor market to visit with friends. The Muslim religion affects many aspects of an Egyptian's life but Islam is officially controlled by the government. Egyptians age 10 and older can read and write. Despite problems in their system of education, graduates from the 33 Egyptian universities are among the best trained in the Arab world.

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 10: THE *SĀJĀT* FROM EGYPT

Egypt has a long artistic tradition of painting, sculpture, stories, and music dating back to ancient times. People enjoy traditional and classical music from the past as well as modern Egyptian and Western music.

Music: Instruments & Rhythms

Instruments: Generally, Egyptian musical instruments include a wide variety of flutes, reed instruments, trumpets, harps, small drums, and several types of rattles and cymbals. The drums that are used to play the rhythms for this cymbal lesson are (1) the goblet shaped *tabla* (tah-blah), also called the *darabouka* (daar-ah-boo-kah) with fish skin drumheads, (2) *mazhar* (mas-harr) and *duf* (duff), large frame drums with donkey skin drumheads, and the *riqq* (rick), a small frame drum with fish skin drumheads and small tuned cymbals. Of all the percussion instruments from ancient times, cymbals are more likely to survive for thousands of years because they are metal (drums made with wood and skin will deteriorate more quickly over time). Also, images of instruments, especially in stone and paintings, have survived to tell some of the story and as it turns out, ancient Egyptian cymbals closely represent those of today. The British Museum has two pairs of cymbals around 5 inches in diameter that were found on the coffin of the mummy Ankhape (on-cop-eh), a sacred musician, from around 100 B.C.

The word cymbal is derived from the Latin *cymbalum* (sim-bol-um), which comes from the Greek word *kymbalom* (kim-bol-um) meaning small bowl. In India, *tāl* (tol) is an ancient word for cymbal and comes from the Sanskrit word *tāla*, meaning palm of the hand or clap or meter (rhythm). Thus, cymbals have had a long association with keeping time in a rhythm. The focus of this lesson is the set of small Egyptian cymbals attached to the fingers or “finger cymbals” called *sājāt* (sah-got) in Arabic and called *zils* in Turkish. The *sājāt* (considered the plural form) are important in the history of percussion because it is likely that cymbals were first made small, and over the centuries were made larger to satisfy larger audiences. Whether small finger cymbals or larger hand-held cymbals, they are considered concussion idiophones (see Introduction for definition). There are two types: *crotales* (kro-tol-es) that have a definite pitch and ring like a bell, usually made by casting the metal; and cymbals without a definite pitch that have a clashing sound, typically cast and then beaten with hammers to form the final shape and define tonal qualities. The *sājāt* are of the type that rings like a bell. The word *sājāt* means metal trays and in reference to cymbals means two small cymbals held on the fingers in each hand.

Most of today’s cymbals originated in Turkey, China, or India, and while Egyptian ironwork dates back to at least 2000 B.C. they all likely share a common bronze cymbal technology learned from the Greeks after 500 B.C. The formula for making bronze cymbals today is an alloy of 80 percent copper, 20 percent tin, and traces of silver. It is important to note that Turkish cymbals gained enormous refinement in 1623 when Avedis Zildjian discovered a new process for treating traditional cymbal by making alloys in the casting process. Egyptian cymbals of today are of three types: large flat types, medium sized cymbals with a deep central cavity, and small cymbals sometimes attached to long forked handles. This lesson will focus on small cymbals—four per person on fingers, and medium size cymbals—two per person held in front.

Today, finger-held cymbals are mostly associated with belly dancing, and this type of dance called “Oriental dancing” by the Arabs is one of the oldest forms of dancing. The dance eventually became a dance of seduction and a performance dance by men and women. Larger

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 10: THE *SĀJĀT* FROM EGYPT

cymbals held by the hands appeared intermittently in Europe from the 13th century on, although they are believed to have been imported earlier. Turkish military music used cymbals in bands during expansion of the Ottoman Empire, and this led to the introduction of the cymbals into the orchestra. They gained a permanent position in the orchestra during the late part of the 18th century.

Rhythms: Egyptian rhythms for the *sājāt* are played along with the goblet drum and frame drum rhythms. For this reason, it is important to begin with an understanding of these drum sounds and rhythms. The two basic drum sounds are “dum”(doom) for one low, un-damped tone and “tak” (tack) for one accented high damped tone. The rhythms described here are presented in eight counts for the non-musician, but they are usually thought of as being in four counts each with a two-count subdivision, or as two counts each with a four-count subdivision, as follows:

Eight counts	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Four counts	1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + (+ = “an”)
Two counts	1 e + a 2 e + a (e = “ee” and a = “ah”)

Typically, there are three versions of Egyptian drum rhythms: 1) the “basic” form, a skeleton of the beat; 2) “filled” with in between hits; and 3) “accented,” which includes the previous two with several accents. For purposes of the *sājāt*, the examples below will use the “basic” form.

One of the most common Egyptian rhythms is called *wahed wa nusf* (wah-head wah noosf) as shown in the Resources section (Example 1). Some say the *maqsoum* (mock-sume) rhythm is the basis of Egyptian rhythms with its characteristic two dums at the beginning (Example 2). When this rhythm is slowed down it becomes the *masmoudi #1* (mos-moody). American dancers call this rhythm *baladi* (bah-lah-dee), which means “from the country” or “old fashioned.”

Zaffah (zah-fah) is a march rhythm used in wedding processions as well as in belly dances that recall such events (Example 4). The rhythm called *saiidi* (sah-ee-dee) is popular in Upper Egypt (south) and played fast as an accompaniment to *tahtib* (tah-teeb), a traditional men’s martial arts stick dance to prove manhood; the female cane dance is a parody of the male dance (Example 5). This rhythm is also used among the Egyptian *Ghawazee* (gah-wah-zee). The *fellahi* (feh-lah-hee) rhythm is a common *Ghawazee* dance with songs of celebration in Upper Egypt (Example 6). *Curcuna* (joor-joon-nuh) is an example of rhythms that are combinations of 2+3 patterns (Example 7). In this case, the pattern for the 10 counts is 3+2+2+3 with a “dum” on counts one and five. This rhythm originated in Armenia and might be pronounced “gurgina” in Egypt.

The *Kas* (kahs) cymbal rhythms are all to be played at the same time (Example 8). They show how cymbals can be used to play polyrhythms like two against three—as shown in the darkened section of this notation on the Resources page. These rhythms are common in North Africa and found in Egypt.

Listen & Play Along: *Use *Roots of Rhythm* CD Notes to support this section.

Note to teachers: if instruments are not readily available, consider using substitute instruments described below, or encourage students to improvise - using everyday items. Rhythms can also be created with body percussion including hand clapping, foot tapping, finger snapping, etc.

ROOTS OF RHYTHM - CHAPTER 10: THE *SĀJĀT* FROM EGYPT

Listen to Tracks 86-88 of the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD to hear the sound of the sājāt. Now it's time to play along. Snap your fingers or clap your hands along to the rhythms on Tracks 86-88 of the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD. Practice the drum rhythms first. If you don't have a goblet drum or frame drum, find any drum to play along with the drum rhythms. Be sure to listen for the low tones and high tones and make the same sounds on your drum.

Now, use some finger cymbals and small cymbals (7-10" diameter) from the music classroom, or make some substitutes. For finger cymbals substitutes, place two different sized spoons right side up next to each other on a thick towel and strike the cups with two other spoons. Find two metal cooking lids that can be struck together for cymbal substitutes. Tie a 20" string from one lid handle to the other, then grab the string very tightly next to the cymbals and hit them together.

Follow the rhythms shown in the Resources section and play along with them on Tracks 89-97 of the *Roots of Rhythm Companion CD*. Use your classroom instruments or your homemade or substitute versions. For the hand-held cymbals, play just the two against three polyrhythm shown in bold "X's" on the *Kas* notation.

Sājāt:

Finger Held Cymbals (*Sājāt*).



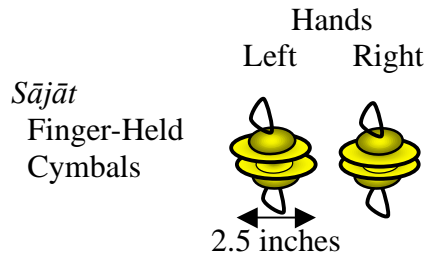
Hand Held Cymbals (*Kas*).



Photographs by Craig Woodson.

Resources: Egyptian Cymbal Rhythms

Egyptian Rhythms for *Sājāt*



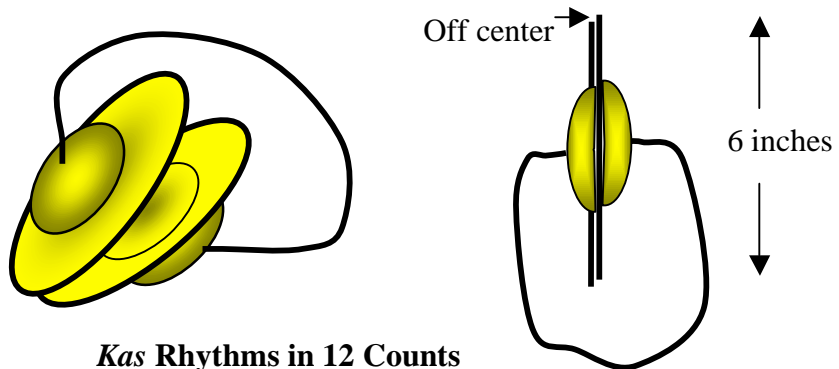
Notes:

1. “Dum” = low drum tone and “tak” = high drum tone.
2. **R** or **L** = hands hitting the *sājāt* together.
3. The *sājāt* can also just play **R L R L R L R L**.
4. This is shown for a right-handed person.

Examples:

	Count	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8			
	Say	dum	tak	.....	tak	dum	.....	tak	.....		
1. <i>Wahed wa nusf</i>		R	L		L	R		L		The main Egyptian rhythm		
	Say	dum	dum	.....	tak	dum	.....	tak	.....		
2. <i>Maqsoum</i>		R	R		L	R		L		Slowed it is <i>Masmoudi #1</i>		
	Say	dum	dum	.....	tak	dum	.....	tak	tak	
3. <i>Masmoudi #1</i>		R	R		L	R		L	L	Play half as fast as <i>maqsoum</i>		
	Say	dum	tak	tak	tak	dum	tak	dum	.....		
4. <i>Zaffah</i>		R	L	L	L	R	L	R		Wedding march, a rest on 8		
	Say	dum	tak	.....	dum	dum	.....	tak	.....		
5. <i>Saaidi</i>		R	L		R	R		L		Martial art stick dance rhythm		
	Say	dum	.....	tak	.....	dum	tak	tak	tak	
6. <i>Fallahi</i>		R		L		R	L	L	L	Farmers’ song rhythm		
	Count	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	Say	dum	tak	tak	dum	tak	tak	tak	
7. <i>Curcuna</i>		R		L	L		R	L	L		L	For cabaret dancing

Hand-Held Cymbals
8. *Kas Rhythms*



Kas Rhythms in 12 Counts

Count	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	<u>Polyrhythm: 2:3</u>
Player #1	X		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	Two hits on 1 & 4 in the same time as three hits on 1, 3 & 5 all fitting in 6 counts.
Player #2	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X		
Player #3	X		X		X		X		X		X		
Player #4		X		X			X		X			X	

Note: X = Hit cymbals together keeping them damped and off-center when they strike.