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“Music in School and Temple in the Ancient Near East”

by

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Slide No. 2. Map of the Ancient Near East

Many of the best known languages of the third and second millennia are written in cuneiform script. Cuneiform writing was taught in a scribal school, often no more than the private house of a scribe, where he received his students. These scribal schools were the centres of Mesopotamian culture. The main language in school was Sumerian, which held a position comparable to that of Latin in the Middle Ages of Western Europe. Sumerian was used for examinations, scholarly works and an important part of literature. In fact, the whole educational system was based on it, for the so called lexical lists, the main introduction to the art of cuneiform writing, consist almost entirely of lists of Sumerian words. Only in later periods was a translation into Akkadian or another language provided, a situation that prevailed until cuneiform fell into oblivion.

Slide No. 3. Examination Text A line 24 and 28

Music played an important role in Mesopotamian civilisation. Musical scenes and instruments are quite often depicted on cylinder seals and terracotta plaques. But also in Sumerian and Akkadian texts music and musical instruments are well attested. Consequently musical theory belonged to the culture of the scribal school and it was integrated into the curriculum. We can learn from scholarly and paedagogical texts that the scribe had to study the most important terms for musical instruments and for musical theory.

These two lines from Examination Text A show that the student in the scribal school had to learn a whole collection of musical terms, including the names for different types of a song or for divisions of songs. The names of the parts of different musical instruments were also used to indicate particular figures in the teaching of geometry, so it is obvious, that the structure of musical instruments must have been well-known to the students.

In the Sumerian hymns dedicated to Shulgi, the king of Ur, the model of the ideal man with diverse proficiencies, his musical gifts and his learning are praised (Sheet No.2).

Slides No. 4-7. Shulgi Hymn B line 154-174

It is evident from this hymn dedicated to King Shulgi of Ur (\pm 2050 B.C.), though sometimes difficult to translate, that the musical education of a Mesopotamian king like Shulgi enabled him to discern the categories and the divisions of songs, the technical knowledge of musical instruments and their structures (as in the Examination Text). Besides that he was able to play musical instruments and he knew the scheme for tuning musical instruments higher and lower.

Slide No. 8-9. School knowledge of music: terms for songs and strophes

Apparently in Mesopotamia a very extensive musical terminology was used. Songs would be named with the accompanying instrument: "lyre-song" for a hymn of praise (Sumerian **tigi**, **zà.mí.n**); "harp-song" for a ritual lamentation (**balaĝ**) and "lamentation of the metal drum" (**ér.šəm.ma**).

Alternatively individual strophes of songs were identified by the actions of instrumentalists during the performance: "tightening of the strings" (**sa.gíd.da**); "place where the tuning of the instrument is adjusted" (**ki.ru.gú**); "place where the tuning of the instrument is modulated" (**ki.šú**); "the playing in between, intermezzo" (**šà.ba.du**₁₂); "the answer of the wood(en instruments), antiphone" (**ĝiš.gi**₄**ĝál**).

Slide No. 10-11. Musicians 1-2: nar and gala

Considering the highly technical character of ancient Mesopotamian music it is to be expected that there were professional musicians in Mesopotamia. Two professional designations can be seen to be musicians.

A general term for "musician" or "singer" is **nar**. He used the standard Sumerian literary language (**eme.gi**₇**r**) for his songs and was active at the royal court and in the sanctuaries connected with the palace. There he performed hymns and prayers dealing with the king. This hymn dedicated to Shulgi, king of Ur would no doubt have been composed by a **nar**. His instruments were the big lyre **tigi** and the smaller lyre **zà.mí**, with rhythm provided by the **adab** drum.

There was also a cult musician in Mesopotamia called **gala**, traditionally translated "lamentation singer". He used a special literary dialect of Sumerian known as **eme.sal**, traditionally translated (with questionable certainty) "women's language". A most attractive suggestion is that the **gala** was a counter tenor, sometimes but not always castrated. The "young gala's" who entered the world of the dead in the story of Inanna's descent to the netherworld must have been castrated, since no one with the ability to procreate was allowed there. The **gala** played the harp (**balaĝ**, **dubdubdi** or **budbu**) and the metal drum (**šəm**).

Ritual music seems to have made a deep impression on the Mesopotamians, considering personal names like "The lady, (her) harp house is pleasant" (**nin-é.balaĝ-dùg**), "Servant of the holy drum" (**geme**₂-**šem**₆**kù**) and "Father ... at the tambourines or systra..." (**a-meze**_x**meze**_x).

Although the texts say very little about folk music, terracottas from the OB period (± 1800 BC) show the important position of music in everyday life.

Slide No. 12. Relief with horizontal harp. Adab ± 2800 BC.

This relief from Adab/Bismaya shows a horizontal harp. A particular type of harp (**balaĝ** and/or **al.ĝar** (?)), was attested from the early third millennium B.C.

Another type of horizontal harp might have been the **sa.bí.tum** "instrument from Sabum" (Western Iran). The horizontal harp is played with a plectrum, and the fingers damp (**aga.šū.si**) the string that must not sound.

Slide No. 13. Development of the sign balaĝ "harp". Uruk 3200 -> Uruk 3000 -> Fara 2600 B.C.

It is clear from the development of the cuneiform sign **BALAĜ** that it originally depicts a horizontal harp. The Fara-shapes of the sign suggests a depiction of both the horizontal and the vertical harp.

Slide No. 14. UD-GAL-NUN-text. Fara ± 2600 B.C.

UD-GAL-NUN is an alternative orthography of the presargonic period, in which different signs were substituted for normal orthography. It was used for hymns to gods and for myths and was clearly meant to obscure the meaning of these texts from all but those initiated in them. **UD-GAL-NUN** corresponds to **diĝir.en.lil₂**, "the god Enlil", in 'normal' orthography. But the sign **UD** can also be understood to signify an "heaven" as well as **diĝir** "god".

We can read the first lines of an UD-GAL-NUN-type of text describing the origin of the cosmos since other texts in normal orthography are known:

1. In those days those days (they say)
2. In those nights those nights (they say), then it was.
3. In those nights those nights (they say), then it was.

Slide No. 15. 'Standard of Ur' - 'Peace side'. Ur ± 2500 BC, and Detail of the 'Standard of Ur'. Ur ± 2500 BC

The 'peace side' of the famous standard from Ur (I) shows a drinking and offering scene with musicians, a lyre player and a singer. The hairstyle and the position of the hands freeing the chest mark the singer. Prayer statuettes adopt the same pose to indicate a prayer that was sung or spoken aloud.

Slide No. 16. Royal Tomb PG 1237, Survey of tomb 1237 and Reconstruction of tomb PG 1237 just before inhumation. Ur ± 2500 BC

During the campaign of 1926 in Ur Sir Leonard Woolley found several beautifully fashioned instruments, the so called golden lyre, the silver lyre and the gypsum lyre. Woolley found nine lyres together that were carried by women adorned with beautiful head-dresses. They are now exhibited in the museums of London, Philadelphia, and Baghdad. There are problems about identifying pictures of musical instruments with the names of instruments in the texts. Probably the general term for a stringed instrument was **balaġ**, a word also used for the harp; **budbu** (=BALAG.DI) = *timbūtu* (Akkadian) was perhaps the term for a small harp; **zà.mí.n** = *sammû* appears to be the lyre; and **tigi** (=BALAG.NAR) = *tigû* the large lyre.

It was macabre to discover that the servants, apparently poisoned, had been buried together with their lord.

Slide No. 17. Reconstruction of a harp from the tomb of queen Pu-Abi. Ur ± 2500 BC

The bow-shaped harp found in the tomb of Queen Pu-abi had strings attached to the upper part of the instrument with rings with pegs. By turning the rings the musician tuned the harp.

Slide No. 18. Reconstruction of the 'silver lyre' from the royal tomb PG 1237. Ur ± 2500 BC

Woolley reconstructed the silver lyre (now in the British Museum in London) by pouring wax into the recess left by the original wood, which had disappeared. The instrument was decorated with the head of a bull and a beard. The strings were wound around the crossbeam securing the tuning pegs. The instrument was tuned by turning the tuning pegs.

Slide No. 19. Animal orchestra: front of a lyre from tomb PG 789. Ur ± 2500 BC

The front of one of the lyres found by Woolley has a beautifully inlaid front. Several different scenes show a hero wrestling with bulls, a bear and a lion carrying offerings, a bear and a donkey playing a large lyre, a fox playing a *systrum*-like instrument and a scorpion-man with a gazelle.

Slide No. 20. Silver flute from tomb PG 333. Ur ± 2500 BC

Beside the stringed instruments flutes were excavated from the royal tombs. The instrument might have had a reed mouthpiece. It certainly covers a diatonic scale, possibly from C-D-E-F-G-A.

Slide No. 21. Stele. Ebla ± 2400 BC

This stele from Tell Mardikh/Ebla shows an offering scene combined with a large drum. The drum, as an important instrument in the cult, is often depicted in ritual scenes. During the cult the drum marks important moments in the ritual.

Slide No. 22. Singer Ur-Nanshe. Mari ± 2400 BC

The hair style and position of the hands suggest that this is a statue of a **nar**, “singer-musician”. The name Ur-nanše, a Sumerian name from the Lagaš territory in Southern Mesopotamia, is unexpected in the Mari region. Apparently he had come from Lagaš to be a court musician in Mari. He was shown playing the harp, but that has been broken away.

Slide No. 23. Fragments of a stela of Gudea, ruler of Lagaš ± 2150 BC

Stelae of Gudea, ruler of the city-state Lagaš (± 2150 BC), depict musical scenes. In the broken fragments that remain are a large lyre, women clapping and a cultic drum being beaten.

Cylinder B XV describes such cultic activities:

19. That the courtyard of the Eninnu may be filled with joy,
20. that together with the kettledrums, ala-instruments
and harps may sound in perfect concert
21. and that (Ninĝirsu's) beloved harp,
the Dragon-of-the-Land,
22. may walk in front of the procession.

Slide No. 24-25. Details of votive plaques with musical instruments. Early dynastic ± 2600 B.C. Also, Votive plaque from the temple of Ninhursag in Susa. ± 2000 BC

From the early dynastic (± 2800-2400 B.C.) and later periods in Mesopotamia come several votive plaques depicting drinking scenes which may be ritualistic. Often harps and lyres are played in front of the main participants. The Susa plaque shows a drinking scene and a bow-shaped harp with a rectangular soundbox

Slide No. 26-27. Terracotta reliefs with a vertical horizontal harp Eshnunna. ± 1800 BC.

In the Old Babylonian period ensembles used both the vertical and the horizontal harp. A hymn to King Iddin-Dagān of Isin describes orchestra parading before the statue of the goddess Inanna:

Iddin-Dagan-hymn A

35. They play the silver algar-instrument (horizontal harp?) before her

38. The holy drum, the holy timpani, they beat before her.
 41. The holy (vertical) harp, the holy timpani, they play before her.
 79. The tigi-instrument (large lyre ?), the kettle drum, the ala-instrument (drum?) make a loud noise

Slide No. 28. balaĝ “harp-song”. Old Babylonian

Cultic songs named **balaĝ** are attested from the Old Babylonian period. A **balaĝ** is a collective lament, or a lamentation of the congregation.

One of the best known **balaĝs** of the Old Babylonian period, also attested in the first millennium **balaĝ** collections, is **uru₂ àm.i.ra.bi** “That city that has been pillaged!” (Sippar. OB period, ± 1600 B.C.). Shown here is a photograph of the tablet and a handcopy of the text.

A translation of the OB version of **uru₂ àm.i.ra.bi**

1. That city that has been pillaged! Oh its children!
2. Mother hierodule, that city that has been pillaged! Oh its children!
3. Kulaba, that city that has been pillaged! Oh its children!
4. Hierodule of heaven, Inanna!
5. Destroyer of the mountain, Lady of the Eanna (temple)!
6. She who causes the heavens to rumble, lady of the ĝipar-house!
7. Lilla’enna, lady of the cattle pen and sheepfold!
8. Mother of Uruk, Ninsun!
9. Its children! Its adults!

Slide No. 28. balaĝ “harp-song”. Late Babylonian

A handcopy of one of the texts of the late Babylonian-Hellenistic version of this **balaĝ**. (3rd century B.C.) is reproduced here. Most of these late **balaĝs** have the Sumerian text interlined with a translation in Akkadian.

- C+419 **(aba mu.un.da.ab.sá.a e.ma.da**
 man-nu i-šá-an-na-an-ni ja-ti)
 Who can rival me?
- C+420 Who can compare to me?
- C+421 I am the hierodule. I am the hierodule.
- C+422 I have been installed as the hierodule.
 I have been installed.
- C+423 When I stand (in the sky) at dawn
- C+424 Indeed I am the lofty light of heaven.
- C+425 When I come out shining during the day,

- C+426 When I come out shining from sunrise to sunset,
 C+427 When I proceed at the mouth of battle,
 C+428 Indeed I am the leader of all the lands.

Slide No. 30. ér.šēm.ma “Lamentation of the drum”. Old Babylonian, Neo-Assyrian, and Late Babylonian)

The **ér.šēm.ma** “Lamentation of the drum” is a cultic hymn addressed to the main gods. The **ér.šēm.ma** entitled **dilmun niĝin.ù** “Important one go about” is for the god Enlil and is given here in its Old Babylonian (Sippar 1600 B.C.), Neo-Assyrian (Ninive ± 650 B.C.) and Late Babylonian (Babylon ± 250 B.C.) forms.

1. dilmun niĝin₂.ù uru₂.zu u₆ bí.dug₄

Important one, go about! You have watched over your city.

dilmun niĝin.na uru₂.zu u₆ ĝá.e.dè

kab-tum: ^dEn.líl na-as-hi-ram-ma ana uru (ali)-ka tu-ur: uru (al)-ka hi-iṭ-ṭi-i

Important one, Enlil, go about! Return to your city! (You may) watch over your city.

- 2 Honoured one, important one, go about! You have watched over your city.
 3 Lord of the lands, important one, go about! You have watched over your city.
 4 Lord whose pronouncements are true, go about! You have watched over your city.
 5 Enlil, father of the nation, go about! You have watched over your city.
 6 Shepherd of the black-headed, go about! You have watched over your city.

Slide No. 31. ér.šà.huĝ.ĝá “Lamentation to calm down the heart (of a god)”

The **ér.šà.huĝ.ĝá**, in contrast to the **ér.šēm.ma**, is an individual lamentation. One of the earliest, from Sippar (± 1600 B.C.), is given here, and it can be seen that some lines show the particular character of this type of song.

40 šà.zu šà.ama.tu.da.gin₇ ki.bi ha.ma.gi₄.gi₄

Like the heart of a mother, may your heart return to its place for me!

41 ama.tu.da a.a.tu.da gin₇ ki.bi ha.ma.gi₄.gi₄

Like a natural mother and a natural father, may you return to its place for me!

Slide No. 32. Terracotta relief with horizontal harp. Eshnunna ± 1800 BC

The horizontal harp (**ĝišal.ĝar**) is played with a plectrum. (**ĝišal.ĝar.sur₉**). The strings, that must not sound are damped with the fingers.

Slide No. 33. Vase from Inandik Anatolië ±1650 BC

The Vase from Inandik is a very famous archaeological object from Anatolia and several musical instruments are depicted on it. In contrast to Mesopotamia the lute and the tambourine are included in an ensemble in Anatolia.

Slide No. 34. Ivory plaque with lyre player. Megiddo, 1000 BC

The ivory plaque from Megiddo (\pm 1100 BC) shows a woman, perhaps a princess, playing a small lyre, standing before the king who is sitting on a throne. Cherubs as well as the queen stand in front of him.

Several terms for lyre are known from second millennium texts. Sometimes they are identified by the place of origin, such as **mi.rí.tum** “from the city of Mari” and **Urzabababikum** “from the court of Urzababa (king of Kiš)”. The lyre called **zanaru** seems to have had an Anatolian origin.

Slide No. 35-37. Relief with orchestra. Sam'al, \pm 900 BC; Relief with shofar and drum. Carchemish, \pm 800 BC; Relief with orchestra. Kararatepe, 700 BC.

Reliefs from the late Hittite-Aramaic kingdoms of Northern Syria show temple orchestras. One from Zindjirli/Sam'al (8th century BC) shows two hand drums, two small differently shaped lyres.

The ram's horn or shofar as an instrument of the cult in a relief from Carchemish (\pm 800 B.C.) is noteworthy. In Israel it was given a most important cultic status and in Mesopotamia it was used to alert soldiers and gangs of workmen.

A relief from Karatepe (end of the 8th century BC) shows an offering scene above, and below it shows an orchestra, with hand drums, two lyres and a double oboe. It is very plausible that the two tubes of the double oboe (**gi.di.d** = *embūbu* "sounding reed") differed by one-fifth, since in musical theory the *embūbu*, "sounding reed" interval of one fifth is attested.

Slide No. 38. Relief from the palace of Sennacherib showing an orchestra. Nineveh, \pm 700 BC

Imitations of the Syrian-type lyres are found on the reliefs of the palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh, which are being played by courtiers. Double oboe players were also part of the court ensemble.

Slide No. 39-40. Relief from the palace of Sennacherib showing horizontal harps. Nineveh, \pm 700 BC. Also, Relief from the palace of Sennacherib showing a singer before horizontal harps. Nineveh, \pm 700 BC

The evolution of the vertical and the horizontal harp can be observed on the reliefs of the palace of king Sennacherib in Nineveh. Cult musicians are playing beautifully fashioned horizontal harps. The fingering technique of damping the strings is clearly visible.

Slide No. 41. Relief from the palace of Assurbanipal, after the battle at the river Ulay, showing orchestra. Nineveh, ± 650 BC

An Elamite orchestra of harp, oboe and tambourine players is marching along the river Ulay, after Ashurbanipal's defeat of Teumman king of Elam. The harps have more than thirty strings.

Slide No. 42. Nabnitu Tablet 32. ± 600 BC

A text concerning musical theory.

To decipher the so-called "Hymn of Ugarit" one needs a knowledge of the musical theory on which the music is based. The puzzle of reconstructing Mesopotamian musical theory was particularly difficult because several pieces were missing. Only recently have we been able to produce a more or less comprehensible picture.

The first piece of the puzzle concerns the names of the strings of the lyre. Tablet 32 of the Akkadian-Sumerian dictionary **SIG7.ALAM (uktin) = Nabnītu** contains the names of the nine strings of a musical instrument, showing that Mesopotamian musical theory was based on a nine stringed instrument with the strings numbered from high to low (as in Ancient Greece). The third string, which is named in Akkadian name "thin string", was most probably one of the highest.

Slide No. 43-44 List and table of intervals: CBS 10996. ± 500 BC.

One of the drawers of the University Museum in Philadelphia contains a text already known for a long time but whose importance became only clear at the end of the sixties. It was unfortunately miscatalogued as a mathematical text and put aside by Assyriologists, most of whom were not specifically interested in mathematics. But in fact this text is the second piece of our puzzle, and has been very important for the reconstruction of ancient Mesopotamian musical theory.

The text deals not only with the names of the strings of a musical instrument but also with the names of a combination of two strings. Such a combination of strings is termed in Akkadian *pitnu*, a word also used for chests or parts of furniture. In a musical context it means something like "stringing", the structure formed by the strings. These stringings or intervals have some strange names like "fifth, the double oboe" (see Slide 37). Some intervals are defined with the higher string first (sixths and fifths) and others with the lower string first (fourths and thirds), as is clear from the table on the next slide. This

variation may be related to the procedure for tuning the lyre, by playing a series of rising and descending intervals. The intervals in this text are tabulated on Slide 44.

Slide No. 45. List of *irtu* “breast”-songs: KAR 158 column VIII 45-51. Asshur, ± 850 BC

This catalogue of *irtu* “breast”-songs, i.e. love songs, from the city of Aššur also contains several names of intervals. such as those listed in CBS 10996 (Slide 43-44). It seems that the names of the intervals were also used for categories of songs, but the exact meaning of these terms was unclear until the tuning text from Ur was found (Slide 46).

Slide No. 46 Tuning instructions for the lyre. Ur, ± 1800 BC

Fragments of Old-Babylonian tablets from Ur demonstrate that the interval names were also used as designations for tuning modes of the lyre and are the most important pieces in our puzzle. The fragment shown here was published by O. Gurney in *Ur Excavation Texts* VII, No. 74 (London - Philadelphia 1974). A comparable fragment was published in hand copy by A. Shaffer in *Ur Excavation Texts* VI/3, No. 899 (London 2006), an edition of which is being prepared by S. Mirelman and T.J.H. Krispijn for a forthcoming issue of *Iraq*. The text reads as follows:

4	<i>šum-ma ḡišzà.mí em-bu-bu-um-ma</i>	"When the lyre is <i>embūbum</i> (3-7)
5	<i>ki-it-mu-um [la za-ku-ú]</i>	and <i>kitmum</i> is not “clear”,(6-3)
6	<i>re-bé úḫ-ri-im [tu-na-sà-aḫ-ma]</i>	you shall tighten the fourth string from behind
7	<i>ki-it-mu-um iz-za-[ku-ú]</i>	and <i>kitmum</i> has become “clear”.(6-3)
8	<i>šum-ma ḡišzà.mí k[i-it-mu-um-ma]</i>	When the lyre is <i>kitmum</i> (6-3)
9	<i>i-šar-tum la za-[ka-at]</i>	and <i>išartum</i> is not “clear”, (2-6)
10	<i>ša-mu-ša-am ù úḫ-ri-a-a[m tu-na-sà-aḫ-ma]</i>	you shall tighten the second string and the back string
11	<i>i-šar-tum iz-za-[ku-ú]</i>	and <i>išartum</i> has become “clear”. (2-6)
12	<i>nu-sú-ḫ[u-um]</i>	(It is the chapter) Tightening.
13	<i>šum-ma ḡišzà.mí i-šar-t[um-ma]</i>	When the lyre is <i>išartum</i> (2-6)
14	<i>qá-ab-li-ta-am ta-al-pu-[ut]</i>	and you have played an ('unclear') <i>qablītum</i> , (5-2)

15	[š]a-mu-ša-am ù úh-ri-a-am te-[né-e-ma]	you shall loosen the second string and the back string.
16	ḡišzâ.mí ki-it-mu-[um]	and the lyre is <i>kitmum</i> . (6-3)
17	[šum]-ma ḡišzâ.mí ki-it-m[u-um-ma]	When the lyre is <i>kitmum</i> (6-3)
18	[i-ša]r-ta-am la za-ku-ta-am t[a-al-pu-ut]	and you have played an "unclear" <i>išartum</i> , (2-6)
19	[re-bé] úh-ri-im te-né-[e-ma]?	you shall loosen the fourth string from behind
20	[ḡišzâ.mí em-bu-bu-um]	and the lyre is <i>embūbum</i> . (3-7)

The following conclusions can be drawn from the quoted texts:

1. The interval between two successive strings of the lyre is the second. Therefore the octave contains seven strings or tones. This is proved by line 10: "You shall tighten the third string **and** the back (ninth) string". It is obvious that the only reason for tightening the two strings simultaneously must be that the interval between those two strings, the third and the ninth string, is an octave.
2. The augmented fourth and the diminished fifth are named "unclear" in the text, which is surprisingly similar to the general musical feeling and taste today in the West.
3. The different tuning modes were named after the interval with which one started the tuning procedure consisting of a sequence of fourths and fifths to tune the lyre correctly. This procedure is largely comparable with the practice of the present-day piano tuner.
4. The tuning mode which the Mesopotamians called the "correct stringing" is the DO-RE-MI-FA-SOL-etc. scale (Lydian mode), and the *nid qablim* mode most attested in the musical texts of Ugarit is the MI-FA-SOL-LA-etc. scale (Dorian mode).
5. The tuning procedure is only applicable on a lyre, whose first string is the highest, otherwise the tightening and loosening will not work.

Slide No. 47-48. Prayer of an infertile woman. Ugarit, ± 1200 BC

On the basis of our reconstruction of ancient Mesopotamian musical theory we are now more or less able to interpret the text RS 15.30+15.49+17.387, published by E. Laroche in *Ugaritica* 5, 487. The upper part of this unusual shaped tablet contains a hymn to the moon goddess Ningal in the Hurrian language. The lower part contains a musical instruction, most likely for the accompanying instrumentalist.

Unfortunately Hurrian is one of the less known languages in the Ancient Near East, although the situation has recently improved after the discovery of a Hurro-Hittite bilingual text a few years ago. The German Hittitologist Jochen Thiel has made various valuable suggestions for the understanding of the text, and so we are able to understand parts of the hymn. A tentative translation of the text is:

A	For the ones that are offering to you (?)
B	prepare two offering loaves in their bowls, when I am making a sacrifice in front of it.
	They have lifted sacrifices up to heaven for (their) welfare and fortune (?).
C	At the silver sword symbol at the right side (of your throne) I have offered them.
	I will nullify them (the sins). Without covering or denying them (the sins), I will bring them (to you), in order to be agreeable (to you).
D	You love those who come in order to be covered (reconciled).
	I have come to put them in front of you and to take them away through a reconciliation ritual. I will honour you and at (your) footstool not....
E	It is Nikkal, who will strengthen them. She let the married couples have children. She let them be borne to their fathers.
	But the begetter will cry out: "She has not born any child!" Why have not I as a (true) wife born children for you?"

The musical instruction reads as follows:

5	<i>kab-li-te 3 ir-bu-te 1 kab-li-te 3 ša-aḥ-re 1 i-šar-te 10 uš-ta-ma-a-re</i>
	qablītu 3 - erbūtu 1 - qablītu 3 - šēru 1 - išartu 10 nicht singen. (± 18 notes)
6	<i>ti-ti-mi-šar-te 2 zi-ir-te 1 ša-[a]ḥ-re 2 ša-aš-ša-te 2 ir-bu-te 2</i>
	titūr-išarti 2 - serdû 1 - šēru 2 - šalšatu 2 - erbūtu 2 (± 9 notes)
7	<i>um-bu-be 1 ša-aš-ša-te 2 ir-bu-te 1+[x] na-ad-kab-le 1 ti-tar-kab-le 1</i>
	embūbu 1 - šalšatu 2 - erbūtu 1+? - nīd-qabli 1 - titūr-qabliti 1
	<i>ti-ti-mi-šar-te 4</i>
	titūr-išarti 4 (± 10 notes)
8	<i>zi-ir-te 1 ša-aḥ-re 2 ša-aš-ša-te 4 ir-bu-te 1 na-ad-kab-le 1 ša-aḥ-re 1</i>
	serdû 1 - šēru 2 - šalšatu 4 - erbūtu 1 - nīd-qabli 1 - šēru 1 (± 10 notes)
9	<i>ša-aš-ša-te 4 ša-aḥ-re 1 ša-aš-ša-te 2 ša-aḥ-re 1 ša-aš-ša-te 2 ir-bu-te 2</i>
	šalšatu 4 - šēru 1 - šalšatu 2 - šēru 1 - šalšatu 2 - erbūtu 2 (± 12 notes)
10	<i>ki-it-me 2 kab-li-te 3 ki-it-m[e] 1 kab-li-te 4 ki-it-me 1 kab-li-te 2</i>
	kitmu 2 - qablītu 3 - kitmu 1 - qablītu 4 - kitmu 1 - qablītu 2 (± 13 notes)
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11	<i>an-nu]-ú za-am-ma-rum ša ni-id-kib-li za-l[u]-z[i] šu Iam-mu-ra-bi</i>
	"This is a song in the Nidqabli (mode), a prayer (?) of [] (written) by the hand of Ammurapi"

The tuning mode of the accompanying instrument is *Nīd Qabli* (The Mi-scale) according to the colophon. Above the colophon a series of intervals is listed, which we can be recognized from comparable Mesopotamian texts concerning intervals, such as CBS 10996 (Slide 43). Even so the interval names are somewhat corrupted in the Hurrian language. The interpretation of this part of the instruction and the meaning of the numbers behind the names of the intervals is obscure. The term *uš-ta-ma-a-re* in the first line of the instruction might be understood as the corruption of the Akkadian expression *ul zamaru* "not singing", an expression also attested in texts from Ancient Anatolia/Turkey. If that is correct, it means that in the first line only instrumental music is noted down. I have interpreted (following the American Assyriologist Anne Kilmer concerning the relation of the notes and the text) *kab-li-te 3* as the interval *qablitu* which should be played three times. Doing so one gets a sequence of played intervals or notes that more or less correspond to the syllables of the Hurrian text.

Ann Kilmer's reconstruction of the melody differs from mine because it is based on the assumption that the first string is the lowest. This is less certain now that we have a new interpretation of the tuning instruction text from Ur. Her reconstruction gives an ascending melody instead of the descending in of my reconstruction.

The final step in solving in our puzzle is unfortunately an uncertain one. How the singer actually performed the song remains unclear. Perhaps the voice moved freely following the accompaniment of the lyre, as Marcelle Duchesne-Guillemin feels. Or perhaps the voice followed one of the tones of the intervals. We simply do not, and perhaps never shall, know.

My interpretation of the song will be performed on a reconstructed lyre. It presumes (with many question marks) that the singer is an infertile woman and uses the higher tones of the intervals to persuade Nikkal to hear her prayers.