

# THE MUSIC IN THE LAND OF ASHUR

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The land of Ashur has a special importance in the history of music in Mesopotamia. The reasons for this are:

1. The first knowledge to come to modern man of the old Iraqi music came through the Assyrian Musical instruments that were discovered in the excavations done in the 19th century in the Land of Ashur and which were transported to museums in European countries. These became the subject of research by students and scholars; the findings were written in articles and books on old Iraqi music.
2. These writings started in 1862 when the German scholar August Wilhelm Ambros (1816-1876) published *History of Music*<sup>1</sup> followed in 1864 by *The Music of the Most Ancient Nations, (London, 1864)* by Carl Engel (1818-1882)<sup>2</sup> who concluded that the Assyrian musical instruments were not primitive and basic but must have been developed from instruments that belonged to civilisations preceding the Assyrians.
3. The oldest musical instrument left to us by the people of old Iraq was found in the northern region and belongs to the late Stone Age (6000 BC). Pottery pipes (whistles) were found at Yarim Tepe near Tel Afar<sup>3</sup> in Tepe Gawra,<sup>4</sup> near Mosul. Several bone whistles were found belonging to the late Stone Age / early Iron Age (4000-3000 BC). One of these was found in grave of a child who was holding it in his hand. This shows that the children of Land of Ashur in the old Iraq were using musical instruments before any other civilisation of antiquity.
4. The oldest cuneiform writings showing the conscription of singers for military campaigns came from the Assyrian King Samsi-Addu,<sup>5</sup> who was a contemporary of the Babylonian King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC).
5. The oldest bibliography of the music of old Iraq - documented on pottery tablets in cuneiform in the Arcadian language - has come from Ashur, the first capital of Assyria, and date back to 1100 BC.<sup>6</sup>
6. The oldest and first wall engravings to prove the use of music and songs in the heat of the battle came from Nineveh and date back to the Assyrian King Ashur Banipal.<sup>7</sup>
7. The oldest historical reference, written in cuneiform script with prominent engraving, regarding the organisation of a march in Nineveh for the victory of the Assyrian army over the Elamic enemy<sup>8</sup> upon the Assyrian Army's arrival in the heart of the Elamic land. Ashur Banipal marched with his people through the streets of Nineveh carrying the head of the Elamic King. After the end of the march he celebrated the occasion in the gardens of his palace with music and songs of victory.
8. The cuneiform scripts and other artifacts from Ashur have proved the originality, uniformity and continuity of the music and also its theoretical origin in old Iraq through the all ages of its long history.

The musical heritage of land of Ashur over the different ages was not isolated nor separated from the musical heritage of the whole of ancient Iraq but was interwoven within the unity of history and civilisation and this will be explained later.

## SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Study and research of the music in the land of Ashur relate to the results of excavations which were carried out there. These excavations were the ones that provided us with the material that enabled the researcher and experts in the field to write the history of music in the light of the findings. We can categorise the references and sources about the music in the land of Ashur as follows.

1. The excavations in the towns and settlements in the land of Ashur uncovered some of the old original instruments which were used and played by the old inhabitants of land of Ashur over the different ages. The English expedition and excavations in Niamrud produced a collection of musical instruments in the category of self-sounding instruments such as bells, cymbals, clapperboards (*musafikat*) etc.<sup>9</sup> All these original instruments belong to the later Assyrian age (9th - 8th Century BC) and may be seen in the British Museum. From the excavations by the Germans in land of Ashur, we have some musical instruments that were used by the Assyrian children as rattles and games in their daily life. We also have a bronze bell<sup>10</sup> with prominent engraving belonging to the same period.

The exploration by Iraqi teams in Hatra produced a collection of metallic bells of different sizes and shapes.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the above examples from the famous cities of Niamrud, Ashur and Hatra, explorations in Tepe Gwara, (15km North East of Mosul), a collection of bone whistles<sup>12</sup> was found that belonged to ancient man. These had several holes that enabled differing sounds to be produced from these whistles by covering holes whilst blowing. These bone whistles from Tepe Gwara belong to the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic (Mid stone Age) periods (circa 4000 BC).

The musical instrument, found in the northern region around Tel Yarum, Tepe (5 km South West of Tel Afar) discovered in the levels of the Hassuna Age (6000-5250 BC), was a pottery whistle<sup>13</sup> that is considered, to this day, to be the oldest musical instrument ever to be found in Iraq.

Many of the musical instruments used by inhabitants of land of Ashur have been lost for ever, especially the stringed and percussion instruments and cane pipes. These were made from materials that were easily broken, decayed or oxidised. In addition these instruments were deep in the ground and subjected to the pressure of soil, stones and remains for thousands of years.

### 2. **Cuneiform tablets.**

Tablets have provided us with the names of musical instruments, players, singers, musical terminology, relating to the musical scale. This is in addition to documentation of Assyrian songs mentioning the key and range and the instrumentation for the song. This, and other information, will be explained in detail at every stage and referred to in a tablet.

### 3. **Musical Instrument Engravings**

There is an abundance of sculptures, toys, statues, stamps, ivories, and other items containing engravings of various musical instruments and music related items. Through these engravings we gain a wealth of knowledge of the music of land of Ashur. These include the types of instruments and their forms ranging from stringed, percussion and self sounding and wind instruments. In addition, these engravings show the method of playing, whether solo, duet or orchestral,

both small and large, and the gender of the players and singers, the occasions, such as victory over enemies, feasts, carnivals, games or religious festivals, and the venues, such as battle grounds, temples, outside or indoors.

## **MUSIC OVER THE AGES**

Music is a vital witness of civilisation because it encompasses life, evolution and progress and occupies a large area of daily life. It is impossible to separate music from the nations and their history. For this reason the subject of the musical instruments of land of Ashur will be dealt with chronologically

### **Modern Stone Age**

During the second season of the excavation by the Soviet expedition in 1970 a pottery wind instrument was found in one of the ruins in the fifth layer. It was made in the shape of a cylindrical pipe - like a cigar - one end in the shape of a sheep's head. This artifact contained several regular holes that indicates its use as a pipe instrument, i.e. whistle.<sup>14</sup> The importance of this artifact comes from the fact that it is the oldest musical instrument from Iraq. It was used by ancient Iraqis in prehistoric times, in particular during the Hassuna Age (5600 BC), in the northern region. In addition this is the most ancient artifact demonstrating the links with animals to musical instruments. This relationship became evident in the late historical ages of the Sumerian and Arcadian times at the Third Dawn of Dynasties (2500-2320 BC). The importance of this artifact to the musical history was neither realised nor acknowledged by the excavator.

### **The Age of Slaves**

During the American excavation (University of Pennsylvania 1931-1938) in Tepe Gwara some bone pipes were found. Each contained two adjacent holes.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that one of these pipes was found inside the grave of a child, where it was found in the child's hand. This artifact was the first one that showed the use by the children of Iraq of musical instruments (4000-3500 BC). This shows that the ancient Iraqis pioneered the musical education of children. No record of similar educational activity exists or has been discovered in any other civilisation of the same period.

### **The Old Assyrian Age**

The University of Mosul team conducted digs in Tel (hill) Abu Daher <sup>16</sup> (86 km North West of Mosul) in 1977. In the first season they found a collection of pottery toys. One of these was in the form of a hedgehog. This turned out to be a rattle - a child's musical instrument. Prior to this, other rattles in the shape of hedgehogs were found in Tel Asmer, Tel Hirmel and Telo.<sup>17</sup> Inside these rattles were small stone chips producing the sound, when shaken, through the sound holes. The history of these toys dates back to the old Babylonian age (1950-1530 BC). Among letters found in Mari,<sup>18</sup> sent by Assyrian King Samsi-Addu the First (1814-1782 BC), is one requesting the conscription of singers, among whom is Sin-Equisham, and sending them with the army to encourage their zeal by means of music and rousing songs. This letter is the oldest known historical reference to the usage of music in armies and battles.

### **The Middle Assyrian Age.**

The German expedition found, during its excavation between 1903 and 1917 in the city of Ashur (110 km South of Mosul), an ivory comb engraved with a scene of four

people, standing beside a date palm. They all face to the left, the first playing on a stringed instrument, known in the Sumerian language as “Balag” and in English “Harp”. The yoke carrying the harp strings forms an angle with the sound box, the strings are wrapped around the yoke and drop to the sound box in a similar fashion to that used on the Babylonian instruments. This Assyrian comb dates from the 14th century BC according to Moortgard.<sup>19</sup> This artifact from Ashur confirms the uniformity and the continuity of the Babylonian instrument (2000-1600 BC) and the mid-Assyrian age (1500-911 BC). This continual development points to the uniformity of musical instruments throughout the whole of Iraq.

### **Some bibliography**

Cuneiform tablets dated to 1100 BC were discovered in Ashur, containing the bibliography for Assyrian songs. These are kept in the Near East Museum in Berlin. This tablet was published by the German scholar Ebeling<sup>20</sup> in 1919. It contains the direction and scales as follows:

23 love songs in Mode (Maqam) Eshartu Akadi  
17 love songs in Mode Kitmu  
24 love songs in Mode Ambubu  
4 love songs in Mode Bitu  
.....love songs in Mode Nid Cably  
.....love songs in Mode Cablit  
.....Total.....Arcadian love songs

The same names of the musical modes found in this tablet dated 1100 BC are also found in the same sequence in a Babylonian tablet dated at 1800 BC and found in Ur.<sup>21</sup> The time difference (700 years) between the two tablets depicts and confirms the originality of the theoretical musical origins and the continuity of these instruments throughout Iraq over a long period of time.

## **The Modern Assyrian Age**

### **Stringed Instruments**

The Assyrians, in the modern Assyrian age (911-612 BC), employed all the types of musical instruments that were used by the Babylonians in the old Babylonian and Arcadian ages. But we observe the following in the Assyrian stringed instruments:

1. The development of the Assyrian instrument
  2. The existence of primitive stringed instruments of different shapes that belonged to the nations of the countries annexed as part of the Assyrian empire.
- This will become clearer when we discuss the Assyrian stringed instruments.

### **Harps**

In the North-West palace in the Assyrian capital Kalkhi (Calah) were found several wall engravings that were decorating the palace walls. They contained prominent engravings depicting the various religious, military, & daily life of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup> (883-859 BC). Among these large wall engravings, found in the throne room, is one engraving 1.26m in height telling us, in silent language, of the king's military campaigns and victory celebrations. In this engraving, formed of several pieces, now in the British Museum, the Assyrian sculptor depicts the victory of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup>. The scene is composed of a handheld drum and two players on angular harps.<sup>22</sup> The sound box for these two instruments is long. Its rear section is larger than the front section. The yoke carrying the strings is perpendicular

to the sound box forming a right angle. The yokes of these two instruments are in the shape of an arm with one end the shape of a human hand. This is a modification in the making of the instrument, unknown previously by the Babylonians and others. The long hammer used by the Assyrian player on these instruments is also one of the modifications introduced by the Assyrians and was unknown before. The instrument comprises 8 strings and with the player uses the hammer whilst carrying the instrument on left of body by means of a harness and supported by then left arm.

In the throne room B in the Northwest palace of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup>, wall engravings were found with prominent sculpturing depicting a scene of the King in two stages. The first chasing lions and wild oxen and hunting the lions The second the celebration of his hunting lions and performing the religious ceremony. In this celebration the string duet play for the king suitable and appropriate tunes for the occasion and ceremony. The instruments used by the duo is an angular harp that does not differ in respect of shape, structure or method of playing from the previous engraving except in one thing. The strings are wrapped around the yoke and drop freely. The hanging of the strings from the yoke was known previously and used in the Babylonian age – ie before the Assyrian age. It was documented as a musical artifact from the city of Larsa in S Iraq and from Nefar near Afek and from Tel Asmer in the Diyala <sup>23</sup> region. It appears from these two engravings, belonging to King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup>, the presence of the angular harps showing the strings, side by side with the harp with fixed strings around the yoke that is to say without the strings hanging to the bottom. These two methods were followed in the Babylonian instruments showing the continuity and conformity of musical instruments across the whole if Iraq from North to South across the long ages.

On another wall engraving form the Northwest palace of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup> in Niamrud <sup>24</sup> we witness the king in his chariot chasing and hunting wild oxen and at the end of the hunt the king celebrates this occasion by music played by a harp duo. The two instruments in this engraving are the same as those in the previous example.

Hermez Rassam (1878) found bronze plates for the gates of the palaces he built by King Shalmaneser 3<sup>rd</sup> in Aimgur (Imgur – Enlil) currently know as Balwat (15 km from the crossroad leading to Niamrud). These plates depict victories of the Assyrian King Shalmanser for posterity with the string duo playing and singing for the king.<sup>25</sup> The two instruments in use here are the angular harp; that differ slightly from the artifact of his father King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup> as the yoke is short – one end a human hand and the strings terminating on the yoke rather than hanging freely. The method of playing and holding the instruments are the same as the previous.

Two wall engravings from Nineveh from the era of the King Sanharib (704-681 BC) (son of king Sargon II) show harps. The unknown Assyrian artist depicts the invasion of the Assyrian king on his enemy territories with the Assyrian soldiers cutting palm trees to deprive the enemy of food and water with two people each playing the angular harp. The published diagram of this engraving (in 1915) <sup>26</sup> does not show any details.

The second engraving from Nineveh (King Sanharib) represents a septet (7) of strings and percussion <sup>27</sup> and this band there are four harpists playing instruments similar to those seen in the Niamrud engravings. The number of strings on the Sanharin engraving range from 8 to 9. Two of the players are unbearded and are wearing tall hats resembling a fish-tail. This type of head gear is found in other

Assyrian engravings used by priests. Based on this, we conclude that these two players are priest-musicians. The percussion instruments are like tambourines that we will discuss in detail later in a separate section.

Four wall engravings, from the period of King Ashur Banipal (668-626 BC), show them playing on the Assyrian Harp.<sup>28</sup> A wall engraving was found in the Northern palace show a solo player on the angular harp with a singer standing on his left. The harp is similar to those described previously, with loose strings and a human hand on the yoke as shown in the engraving of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup> (883-858 BC) and those of King Sanharib (704-681 BC) showing the continuity of the making and playing of instruments over 200 year period.

The second engraving comes from King Ashur Banipal period and shows a scene of a trio of stringed and wind instruments comprising Kannara, harp and double pipe. The harp in this engraving differs from those previously mentioned with a curved rear section to the sound box. The player carries the instrument with the sound box vertical, the yoke horizontal and playing the strings with his fingers rather than a hammer. It is noted that on the edge of the sound box is a pattern of dots showing the nails used to fasten leather to the sound box. In fact the method of playing this instrument in the way that the sound box extends in front of the player from top to bottom was familiar to the old Babylonians.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> engraving from King Ashur Banipal has scene representing large orchestra of eleven players; 7 – angular harps carried vertically with only one player carrying horizontally with the yoke vertical. There are 2 double pipes and a small side drum. This orchestra is part of the main subject of the engraving that represents the victory of the Assyrian Army sent by King Ashur Banipal in 653 BC against the Elamin where he entered their capital Sousa. At this stage it is important to go through the subject of the distribution of musical instruments in large orchestras by saying that the Beethoven system of distribution currently used puts the strings at the front followed by the woodwind in the middle and behind them the brass and percussion. The engraved orchestra showing the side drum at the rear and the pipes in the middle and the pipe players, one in the middle and one second from the front. It appears that the artist did not understand the composition of the orchestra but has made a representation due to a lack of knowledge.

In addition to the orchestra that followed the usual distribution there are other orchestras and groups that do not, by themselves, whether by number or type of instrument, such as the popular, jazz and children's groups, follow this pattern. In the absence of any written evidence, it is not possible to comment upon this at this time. In addition, this Assyrian engraving has a special importance as it show us clearly, for the first time, instrumental, singing and choral music; as behind the large orchestra we find the singers marching composed of voices of different pitches – children, women and men.

This Assyrian engraving from King Ashur Banipal (669 BC) presents the early beginning of orchestral formation and the roots of the artistic and musical terms such as heterophony, polyphony, bourdon & drone.

The 4<sup>th</sup> engraving from King Ashur Banipal was found in his Northern palace and show celebration of the king at the occasion of his victory over the Elamic King. The band is lead by angular harp player, using his fingers to play.

It appears from the above examples of the harp during the modern Assyrian period (911-612 BC) that the Assyrian instruments resemble the Babylonian instruments of the old Babylonian age in shape, construction, and method of holding it while playing, both vertically and horizontally, and shows the method of using plectrum and fingers for playing and the stringing methods. The improvement and differences on the harp were the increase in the number of strings. In the horizontal the number is 15 - 22, and the vertical, 8 -12. The yoke in the Assyrian harp has been shown with a human hand, whilst in the older Babylonian harp it ended with a rounded boss resembling the head of a nail.

### **Kannara**

The stone engravings and pottery utensils surrounded by cylindrical and plane stamps which date to the modern Assyrian Age contain engraved scenes among which are different types of stringed instrument known as Kannara – an Arabic word from the Babylonian word Kannarum which was taken by Egyptian as Kanner; Hebrew, Kannor and Arameic, Kannyra.<sup>29</sup> In a wall engraving from time of King Sanharib (704-681 BC) found in Nineveh, in which the Assyrians capture document one of King Sanharib's campaigns in Palestine, conquering the kingdom of Yehuda in 701 BC. Part of the wall scene is a musical band composed of a string trio.<sup>30</sup> This instrument is a small primitive Kannara tucked obliquely under the left arm of the player from the sound box, emerge two side arms of different lengths, the distance between which increased upwards until they meet the yoke. As a result of the consequence of the difference of the lengths of the two arms tilting of the top yoke leading to difference in length of the strings which every Kannara contained in this artifact. The Assyrian artist was cleverly able to clarify and project the differences between the Assyrian instrument and the instruments from other nations that became part of the Assyrian empire, including the Jews who were included in King Sanharib's engravings.

A pendant with a golden chain was found in a grave in one of the rooms of the Northwest palace at Nimrud.<sup>31</sup> According to Mallowan, this grave belonged to an Assyrian princess from the time of King Esarhaddon (681-669 BC), and the scene on the pendant depicts two persons standing by the tree of life. I do not agree with him as I see that this duo of a Kannara and twin pipes are standing either side of an incense burner. This is because the lines on the top of the picture depict tongues of fire appearing from the holes in the lid of the burner which is in line with findings of Assyrian scenes of musicians and incense burners indicating a religious occasion.

In the same room in Nineveh, was found an sculpture of a trio of stringed and wind instruments constitute Kannara, Harp & Twin Pipes.<sup>32</sup> This Kannara is characterized by having its side arms curved towards the yoke and a small bend ending in the form of a shell. The yoke is not straight but is also curved. The player tucks this Kannara under his left arm which puts it in a tilted position and plays the instrument with hammers held in the fingers of his right hand. Five strings are seen in this Kannara which end at the base of the sound box, the curvature of the yoke gives different lengths to the strings, the first string close to the left end being the longest, the fifth string the shortest. This obviously gives difference in the sound and pitch. Stauder<sup>33</sup> compares this Kannara to another one engraved on a Phoenician artifact found in the city of Mejdoo where the player also tucked it under his left arm. Despite the Phoenician artifact showing an Egyptian influence, he does not believe that the Kannara was similarly influenced but concludes that the Kannara was developed from the Babylonian instruments.

Another engraving from the age of King Ashur Banipal in Nineveh, now in the British Museum,<sup>34</sup> shows a scene representing a string duo of Kannarra and Harp players playing in the royal gardens close to a lion. The Kannara in this artifact almost resembles, in its general appearance, the kannaras previously mentioned with one exception in the way of fixing the lower ends of the strings where it ends at the top edge of the sound box. In the artifact that is the subject of this research, the strings end at the bottom edge of the sound box.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> engraving from age of King Ashur Banipal found in Nineveh is now in the Louvre in Paris. The subject is details of the battle between the Assyrian army and the enemy.<sup>35</sup> Among the details of this battle, documented by the Assyrian sculptor in minute detail, is the use of music and songs at the heart of the battle and the in top band of this large engraving we witness the warming up of the army as they clap while marching in preparation for the attack and confrontation with the enemy. The second band shows a man between two horses that he leads beside a quartet of strings and percussion players facing each other, on the right a Kannarra and metal cymbals (cosat); on the left a large Tambourine and Kannara. The sculpture shows the movement of the players by showing their heels off the ground. The body movement of the players shows their involvement and enthusiasm of their situation by their playing and singing imparting enthusiasm to the army. In the lower half, we see the Assyrian fighters of different military ranks in the battle with the enemy fighters. We also see that the purpose of the man leading the horses is to ensure that the quartet is moved to other parts of the battle field to provide music and patriotic songs to maintain morale.

This military band used three types of instrument:

- 1 stringed instrument – Two forms of Kannara
- 2 leather percussion – Tambourine
- 3 Self sounding – Cymbals

The presence of stringed instruments in military bands points to the use of songs and music on the battle field as stringed instruments are tuned and are not loud or frightening and does not induce fear in the enemy. In fact, all these instruments mentioned earlier and depicted in the engravings, were used in ancient Iraq by nations who lived there before the Assyrians such as Babylonians, Arcadians & Sumerians. However, the remains left by these peoples do not show musical instruments being used militarily purposes but for other purposes and occasions. Therefore this Assyrian engraving in the Louvre acquires a special importance in the history of music because it is the first and oldest historical witness that pictorially confirms the originality of music and its roots and its usages at the heart of battle by the Assyrians, ahead of any other civilization.

In addition there are other musical artifacts like the Kannara that cannot be dated to a particular king other than that that it belongs to the modern Assyrian Age (911-612 BC) One is a pottery fragment that was found in Ashur.<sup>36</sup> It contains a religious scene of several people among whom a Kannara player tucking under his right armpit in a tilted fashion. Also from Ashur we have pottery fragments from the same era which is part of a scene, the only thing left of it is part of a disc with a star being looked at by two men playing Kannara. The man in front holds the Kannara vertically so that strings are vertical. The sound box of this one is oblong, small sized and unpatterned. From its top and in a parallel fashion two side arms emerge that are linked to the yoke that is parallel to the sound box. The yoke projects beyond the

side arms. The few strings on this instrument come down to end on the upper edge of sound box. On the second Kannara the bottom ends of the strings are tied at the lower edge of the sound box.

It appears from this that there are different designs for this instrument so they are developed Kannara and other primitive and basic. This phenomenon is due to the presence of several different races that have been brought under Assyrian influence and rule. However we could not find, in the modern Assyrian era, any foreign musical instruments that belonged to the conquered races that had been annexed by the Assyrians that were not similar to instruments of old Iraq. These instruments were basic and primitive and had not influenced the Assyrian instruments in any way.

## **UD**

This instrument was found on a wall engraving belonging to the era of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup> (883-859 BC) and was found in Niamrud.<sup>37</sup> It contains a large scene showing Prisoners of War being handed to the victorious Assyrian King as he stands in front of his pavilion with an Ud player and two people disguised in animal costume, dancing. The sound box of the Ud is small and circular with a long neck with strings hanging from the upper end. The player holds the Ud so that the neck is tilted upwards – the same position that started in Iraq in the Keshi era (16<sup>th</sup> -12<sup>th</sup> Century BC).

## **LEATHER PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS**

### **The Drum**

The shape and size of the Assyrian drum differed from the Sumerian indicating that the Assyrians invented new shapes that did not exist in the nations that preceded them in old Iraq or in other countries. The shape of many of the modern drums such as the side drums, the tom-toms and the congas. The artifacts of the Assyrian drums were found in Nineveh and are now in the British Museum. They show the side drum in wall engraving from the era of King Ashur Banipal 668 – 626 BC. The engraved drum is small, cylindrical shape carried in front of the player who uses his hands to play.<sup>38</sup> Stauder<sup>39</sup> believes that this drum, made of leather on both sides and engraved circle of the top part of the drum, points to the use of nails to fixed the leather to the frame, however, Frederik Behn<sup>40</sup> believes that his drum contains only one skin.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Assyrian artifact of the drum was the wall engraving found in the Northern palace at Nineveh<sup>41</sup> from the era of King Ashur Banipal. This was among the musical band that played and sang to the King and his wife songs of victory. This drum has a special shape not known prior to the era of King Ashur Banipal by any other nation or people. This drum is characterized by its body tapering with a much smaller opening at the base than that covered by the skin. The Assyrian player is using both hands in a similar way to many drums used in Latin America – known at the Tam-Tam

### **Tambourine**

The circular tambourine was used by the Sumerians & Babylonians and continued afterwards by the Assyrians. Among the Assyrian Museum Artifacts the oldest engraving showing the circular tambourine was found in Niamrud<sup>42</sup> and is from the era of King Ashur Nasserbaal 2<sup>nd</sup>. The scene engraved here depicts the celebration of the victory over the enemy as we see a trio with string & percussion playing in front

of the Assyrian army who are dancing. The trio has one tambourine player and two on angular harps.

From Niamrud also came an ivory piece with the engraved scene of a castle with a large gate with women seen on the roof and towers playing metal cymbals with one of them playing the tambourine. In front of the castle, the King stands fully armed and equipped. Mallowan<sup>43</sup> states that this king is either in the state of departing to war or returning victorious, and the women are playing for either occasion. This artifact dates from the era of King Shalmaneser 3<sup>rd</sup> (859-824 BC).

We also see the circular tambourine on a wall engraving from the time of King San (704-681 BC) found in Nineveh now in British Museum. The engraved scene represents a septet of strings and percussion with two players on Circular Tambourines.

From the era of King Ashur Banipal an engraving was found in Nineveh with a scene of military musical band playing and singing in the heart of the battle to boost the morale of the Assyrian fighters. Among this band is a player using the Circular Tambourine playing in the same fashion as today. This artifact and others is the proof of the use of the Tambourine in war and peace.

### **Square Tambourine**

The engraving showing Square Tambourine is only found in Assyrian artifacts, the oldest & first wall engraving containing the Square Tambourine is one found in Nineveh and dates from the time of King San (704-681 BC) now in the Near East Museum in East Berlin.<sup>44</sup> This scene represents a band marching behind the Assyrian Fighters with three players on Square Tambourine with a fourth playing metal cymbals. The Square Tambourine is still used in Mosul, but rarely. We have seen the Mosuli Band playing the Square Tambourine in *Mulla Othman Al Mawsili Band* in 1973 and during the singing of songs from Mosul on TV. Farmer<sup>45</sup> refers to the use of Square Tambourine as being no longer used in Arabia, Syria, Egypt and Persia. However it may exist and be used in Morocco. The German scholar Hickmann<sup>46</sup> states that Egypt is indebted to Iraq in its use of the Square Tambourine.

## **SELF SOUNDING INSTRUMENTS**

Self sounding instruments are where the sound is created from within by the impact or through vibration or percussion. This type of instrument include: metal cymbals (cosat & jinjanat), bells, rattles and resonant blocks, **salasil** (clay mixed with sand), triangle, xylophone and others.

### **Metal Cymbals**

The first appearance and use of Metal Cymbals in antiquity goes back to era of Sumerian King Ur-Nammu (2113-2095BC). The use of this instrument continued in to the old Babylonian age and then we find it with the Assyrians in the modern Assyrian age. The instruments indicate that the Assyrian use two forms of this instrument. The first is the ancient Sumerian shape characterised by a loop handle fixed on the upper face of each cymbal. This shape of Metal Cymbals is found in ivory engraving from Niamrud dated by Mallowan<sup>47</sup> to the era of King Shalmaneser 3<sup>rd</sup> (859-824BC). The shape is also seen in a wall engraving found in Nineveh dated to the King Ashur Banipal era(668-626 BC) showing an engraving of an Assyrian musical band playing in the heart of the battle.<sup>48</sup>

The second shape of Metal Cymbals is characterized by the presence of long thin handle fixed at the centre of the cymbal for the player to hold and this shape is found for the first time within Assyrian culture in a wall engraving from the time of Kin San (704-681 BC) in Nineveh.<sup>49</sup> In addition to the engraving showing the Assyrian Metal Cymbals, the excavation in Niamrud Rimmer<sup>50</sup> found a collection of original Metal Cymbals used by the Assyrian in the 9<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC. These were made of bronze and have small handles i.e. the type known previously by Sumerians & Babylonians, and these are in British Museum.

### **Bells**

Excavations in Niamrud found a collection of bells from Modern Assyrian Era and in addition to these original bells a bronze bell was found in Ashur<sup>51</sup> that belonged to the priests and was used to expel the evil spirits. This is depicted in the religious scenes engraved on the bell showing people wearing fish and lion masks. This differs from Niamrud bells that are free of engraved patterns. The use of bells for religious purposes are also found in engravings from the age of King Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) showing a man in a costume and mask of a lion and a collection of bells hanging in a frame in two rows and interlinked. It is known that the Jewish High Priests used to wear robes adorned with bells during their religious festivals and ceremonies. The same was used by Christian priests in the Middle ages and this clearly demonstrates the influence of the Assyrian on the religious ceremonies of Jewish & Christian religions. This is a topic that has never been addressed by foreign or Arabic publications and studies in either music or cultural. The use of bells was not only restricted to religious ceremonies or festivals but we find it is some Assyrian engraving from the time of Tiglath-Pileser III and King Ashur Banipal hanging from Horse's necks. This custom of hanging bells around animals' necks continues today in both East and West,

## **WIND INSTRUMENTS**

### **Pipes and Double pipes**

Pipes and double pipes are among wind instruments found on engravings on Assyrian artifacts. In an engraving found in Nineveh<sup>52</sup> dating to era of King Ashur Banipal we find a trio of strings and wind. This Assyrian trio is a Kannara, Harp and Double pipes. Also from Nineveh<sup>53</sup> other engravings of double pipes played either solo or with other musical instruments. In Ashur<sup>54</sup> pottery fragment was found with engraving of religious scene with a double pipe player and drummer. It is noted in the Assyrian scenes that this double piped instrument is made of 2 pipes meeting in the player's mouth and diverting for playing and frequently shown with the 2 pipes are of different length but sometime of equal length. This Wind Instrumentis found engraved on a pendant with a gold chain found in a grave in one of the rooms of the Northwest Palace in Niamrud<sup>55</sup> and it belonged to an Assyrian princess and dated by Mallowan<sup>56</sup> to the era King Esarhaddon (681-669 BC).<sup>57</sup>

The pipe was found engraved on a flat stamp in Niamrud and dates to 641 BC. This stamp contained animals sitting face to face – each playing a pipe.

### **Trumpets**

Excavations showed the presence trumpets in Iraq and their use by Sumerians in the era of the Dawn of Second Dynasties<sup>58</sup> (2600-2500 BC). Their use continued and they are found with the Assyrian in an engraving found in Nineveh<sup>59</sup> depicting a

scene of transportation of a winged ox. Standing on a stone block that represents the winged ox are four people one of them blowing a trumpet to give orders and instructions to the individuals pulling the stone plinth. This engraving is from the King Sanhareeb period.

The trumpeter was described in the Nile valley as the person who speaks, via the trumpet, conveying the orders of the Pharaoh or leader through the trumpet.<sup>60</sup> The use of the trumpet continued through the Arabic Islamic ages and was adopted by Europeans and used for military music during the Crusades.

## **LAND OF ASHUR DURING PARTHIAN DOMINATION**

**The Parthians** – the Indo-European races residing in the Iranian plateau known as the Parthian province of Parthia – controlled Hetra and other cities in the Land of Ashur. However, Hetra – known as the city of Sun – challenged the foreign authority as we see that one of her kings carries the title of Sanatuk – “King of the Arabs”. Hetra was excavated by Iraqi teams for several seasons from 1951. These excavations uncovered various musical instruments :  
Stringed, skin percussion, self sounding and wind instruments

### **STRINGED INSTRUMENTS**

#### **Kannara**

In the 5<sup>th</sup> temple of Hetra a statue made of brown marble 1.88m tall was found representing Kimi daughter of Abd Samia that was sculptured in 238 BC.<sup>61</sup> She is standing with her right hand raised in salute while in her left hand she carries a Kannara. The instrument in this statue is small and her fingers are resting on the yoke that is parallel to the oblong shaped sound box. This instrument has 5 strings that are fixed in the middle of the sound box. Fuoad Safar believes that Kimi was a performer and player during religious praise in the temple.<sup>62</sup>

### **SKIN PERCUSSION**

#### **Circular Tambourine**

In the 1<sup>st</sup> temple of Hetra, a 62cm high statue of Semmi, daughter of Ajiba, was found that had been erected by her husband Ajiba, son of Aba, the priest of the Goddess Eterata in the temple. It is possible that Semmi was also a performer and she carries a red circular tambourine in her left hand while her right hand is open palmed in front of her chest in preparation to strike the circular tambourine. It is noted that the sculptor of this statue put the player's neck tilted slightly to the right as an expression of body movement during playing of music. This statue, carved in light grey marble, is on display in the Cultural Museum in Mosul.

In addition to this round statue there are prominent sculptures on some stone pieces of frieze found in the temple built by Sanatruk in the northwest corner of the yard of the large temple in Hetra. The main scene of the carnival of the goddess Elat Nemesis <sup>63</sup> shows several players participating, playing different percussion instruments (with no strings instruments). The scene itself shows a woman standing between the camel and the balance, holding a circular tambourine with the right hand beating the tambourine with the fist.

The use of the circular tambourine is repeated in this great festivity in other sculptures from the temple of Elay erected by King of Arab Sanatruk bin Nassro and his son, the heir to the throne, Abd Semia.

## **SELF SOUNDING INSTRUMENTS**

### **Metal Cymbals.**

Among the musical instruments used in the above festival is a metal cymbal known as cosat and jinjanat.<sup>64</sup> This instrument that only accompanies the circular tambourine thus forming a dual percussion,

### **Bells**

Most of the bells uncovered during the excavation in Hetra came from temples such as the great temple and the temple of Semia. These bells were of different shapes and sizes. On some, there were engravings of Aramaic such as the banner belonging to Acuba, Najul the dog, and the banner of the goddess Bermarin.<sup>65</sup> These Aramaic inscriptions indicate the use of bells in Hetra's banners

## **WIND INSTRUMENTS**

The wind instrument shown on the stone friezes from Hetra characterized by shapes and numbers. In addition some of these wind instruments appear for the first time not only in the land of Ashur but also in the whole of Mesopotamia. And despite the fact that some of these are Greek in origin, the instruments of Hetra have some marginal differences.

### **Double Pipe**

This instrument – also known as Ronay – and by the Greeks as Aeolus was used by Assyrians & Babylonians. However the new thing that made this different from all others is the presence of keys that are placed over the holes that is prominent piece. Without these keys the pipe player needs several pipes because on a single pipe, without them, it is not possible to play different notes. The appearance of these keys in a later Iraq artifact, and its absence in the Assyrian & Babylonian artifact, points to the fact that it is alien to Iraq and was a Greek invention.

### **Shu'aibiya (Pan Pipes)**

The player blows across the top of the pipes the bottom being closed. Others appear to be the same length but are "tuned". The materials used are cane, ivory, wood or metal and its numbers range from seven to nine pipes

The Greek legends attribute the invention of this instrument to the god Hermes then to his son Pan from where the name "Pan-Pipes" originates. While the Arabic name Shu'aibiya comes from the prophet Shuaib. Imam Kamal Eldin bin Thaalab bin Jaaffer bin Ali Eladfawi Alshafie'(d 748 hijri) in his book Alimtaa' Bi Imtaa' Al Simaa' (The enjoyment by the Rules of Sound) "...the shepherd strikes the pipe called 'Al Minjaira' and two pipes stuck together called 'Al Maqroona' while pipes bound together are called 'Al Shu'aibiya'." <sup>66</sup>

Therefore we see that the usage of Fuoad Saffer and Mohammed Ali Musitafa the name "mizmar" in page 139 of their book aldadher maninet Alshams (Hetra a city of Sun) is an inappropriate useage of the term as there is an old Arabic word used to

refer to this instrument, in addition to the term “mizmar” refers to another instrument that differs considerably from the Shu’aibiya instrument.

Before the finding of these musical instrument artifacts in Hetra, we have several artifacts of musical instruments from Soulochia, Babylon, Uruk, Larsa, and other cities and sites that are older in history than the Hetra artifacts. This instrument was found in Hetra engraved on one of the stone pieces that lie in the centre of the archway in Iwan (Portico) no.7 of the great temple that belongs to the stage of development of Hetra that ended in about the first Century.<sup>67</sup> Pan Pipes in the arch had 10 pipes, four are equal length and are longer than the other six. The upper part of the pipes are surrounded by a patterned frame. Some of the engravings of this instrument were found on pieces of stone that belonged to the musical scene specific to the carnival held in the temple of the goddess Elat Nemesis erected by Sanatruk bin Nessro and his heir Abd Sammia (167-193). We observe the differences in the panpipes in the frieze of this temple and the panpipes engraved in the arch no 7 of the great temple. The Pan Pipes on the archway has 10 pipes while one from the temple of Elat Nemesis has 15 pipes and the other has not less than 12. We see the differences clearly in the disparity in the lengths of the pipes and the frame that surrounds the tops of the pipes. In fact, the appearance of Pan Pipes in Iraq, Syria & Egypt was after the entry of Greeks to these countries in the Hellenic era. In Greece, artifacts of this type date to the 7<sup>th</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC as the origin and home of this instrument is still unknown especially as it was mentioned in the Iliad as a foreign instrument.<sup>68</sup>

### **Zorna**

This is a Turkish word for a wooden pipe with a bell end. The artifact was discovered in the temple of Elat in Hetra belonging to 2<sup>nd</sup> Century confirms existence of this type of instrument in Iraq before the time of Islam. The use of the Zorna continued through the Arabic Islamic and was adopted by Europeans in the Middle Ages and developed into the oboe.<sup>69</sup>

### **Trumpet**

This belongs to the group of instruments that are made from tubes that expand into a conical or bell end. This originated from the horn instrument that first appeared in Iraq at the Dawn of 2<sup>nd</sup> Dynasties (2600-2500 BC). It was found in the temple of Elat in Hetra<sup>70</sup> found in the musical frieze a piece was found of a prominent engraving showing a player of the instrument with several coils in the upper parts close to the mouth.

### **Horn**

In the left corner of the great archway of temple of Elat in Hetra an engraving representing the God Triton, son of the gods of seas Poseidon and Amphitrite was found. Triton lived with his parents in the golden palace in the depths of the oceans and has been depicted in legends and artifacts as a creature with a human upper torso and the tail of a dolphin. The front legs are those of a horse. The symbol of Triton is a shell horn and oar. Depending on the type of blowing he does on this instrument the state of the seas is governed. When he is angry and blows hard, the sea is excited with big waves but when he blows gently, the sea calms down. Greek mythology is well depicted pictorially in artifacts in Roman engravings from the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.<sup>71</sup> We see prominent engravings of the creature with upper half in human form and the lower the twisted tail of a dolphin blowing, in his right hand the horn and in his left the oar, the waves of the sea are seen on the right and left sides of the creature’s body which represents the Greek god Triton, son of

Poseidon, god of the sea, and Amphitrite, goddess of the sea. The musical artifact in Hetra represents the god Triton as seen in the roman engravings with the upper part in human form and the lower the twisted tail of the dolphin. In both of these artifacts we see the same instrument held in the right hand and the oar in the left. The arms, as horses' limbs are the same as depicted in Greek engravings and legends.

## SUMMARY

The musical artifacts in the form of original instruments and cuneiform writings and engravings of the different instruments have proven the existence of musical instruments in the land of Ashur in its originality, uniformity and continuity and its influence on other countries. In addition the land of Ashur has used all types of musical instruments, Stringed, Wind, Skin Percussion and Self-Sounding instruments and contributed in the development of some of the old Iraqi instruments and invented new designs for percussion instruments that show much resemblance to modern day instruments of East and West. All these aspects have given the land of Ashur a special significance in the history of music in Mesopotamia that was mentioned at the beginning, and throughout this paper.

\* From the chapter on Music in Ashur by Dr Subhi Anwar Rasheed, Mosul's Cultural Encyclopaedia, volume 1, Pages 468-489. Published by University of Mosul Printing and Publishing House, 1991 BC, 1412 H

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