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Francis W. Galpin

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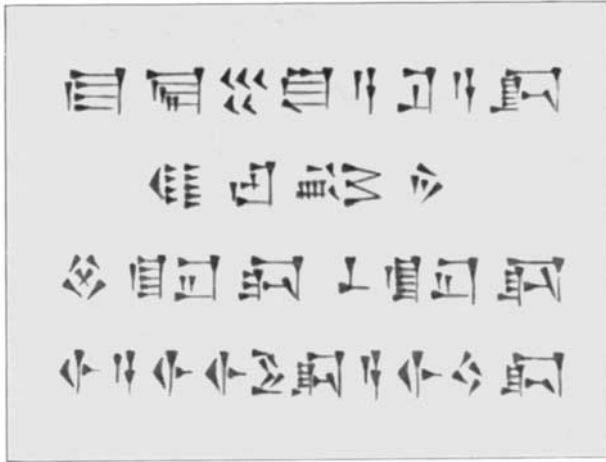
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PLATE I



“Musick’s Ministerie”

A Sumerian appreciation in cuneiform script; *c.* 2400 B.C. (see p. vii)



A Sumerian Banquet with music and song
 From the Royal Standard, Ur; *c.* 2700 B.C. British Museum

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THE
MUSIC OF THE SUMERIANS
AND THEIR IMMEDIATE SUCCESSORS
THE BABYLONIANS & ASSYRIANS

Described and illustrated from original sources

by

FRANCIS W. GALPIN, LITT.D., F.L.S.

*Canon Emeritus of Chelmsford Cathedral and Hon. Freeman of
the Worshipful Company of Musicians*



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PREFACE

THE world is growing older, older at both ends, for the past ten or fifteen years have seen a wonderful unfolding of its early history through the researches which have been so skilfully and successfully undertaken in Western Asia. Egypt no longer looms alone as the cradle of art and learning. Mesopotamia, with a culture in many respects surpassing it in fertility of imagination and ingenuity of invention, has staked a rival claim, and, as evidence, permitted us to view the greatness and splendour of her hitherto unknown past, the influence of which will probably be found to reach much farther westward than is at present recognized.

It is unnecessary for me to recall the diverse aspects of this Asiatic culture. The originality of its conceptions, the brilliancy of its embellishments, the delicacy of its handiwork and the astonishing modernity of its productions have been lavishly set before us in the published reports of excavators and experts and in the exhibitions which have been held of their discoveries.

Thus, through many avenues of past history, the paths of knowledge have been extended. A wider outlook stands revealed before the eyes of the potter, the metal worker, the architect, the builder, the artist and, I will add, the musician, for it is with this branch of art I desire to deal in the following pages. Something, it is true, has already been attempted to unfold the musical history of Babylonian and Assyrian days, and pioneers, such as Engel, Virolleaud and Sachs, deserve our thanks for breaking into unknown ground. For the wonderful age, however, which preceded these recognized periods and on which their foundations were laid, we have hitherto had but the literary researches made among archaic "cuneiform" tablets of clay by eminent scholars in works which are not usually familiar to musical students. Now, at last, hidden treasures of ancient cities and temples have revealed not only illustrations of the musical tastes of an older "Sumerian" people on seals and pottery, but actual specimens of the instruments they used and enjoyed, cleverly preserved to us by the most modern methods of salvage. In this connection mention must be made particularly of Sir Leonard Woolley's unrivalled explorations at Ur of the Chaldees and the richly illustrated and scientifically treated volumes of his Reports.

With these great advantages thus open to us, I have here endeavoured to give as detailed an account of the Music of the Sumerians and their immediate successors, Babylonians and Assyrians, as is at present possible. Dubious points still exist and I have not failed to note them; for another generation and other men's labours will, I hope, resolve them.

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My subject I have taken down to the closing centuries of the pre-Christian era, when Sumerian was practically a dead language and the nation, as such, had ceased to exist for fourteen or fifteen hundred years. Well-ascertained dates are not wanting for the later periods, but for the earlier centuries considerable uncertainty still obtains. For these I have not hesitated to follow Dr Frankfort's chronology, as outlined in his treatise on *Archaeology and the Sumerian Problem* (1932), because it appears to be based on reasonable calculations. The date of the royal tombs and their treasures at Ur is therefore placed during the first half of the third millennium B.C. (c. 2700 B.C.), and this Early Dynastic Period, which may have begun with a 1st Dynasty of Ur (c. 3000 or 2900 B.C.), lasted till c. 2500 B.C., when it was succeeded by the Agade Period initiated by Sargon I. In the closing centuries of this same millennium we have the Gudea Period of Lagash (c. 2400 B.C.) with its interesting revelation of temple building and ritual, overlapping the commencement of the IVth and Vth Dynasties of Erech (c. 2380–2275 B.C.), which gave way to the IIIrd Dynasty of Ur (c. 2275–2170 B.C.) and the rule of Isin and Larsa (2170–1950 B.C.). The first Babylonian Empire occupies the earliest quarter of the second millennium (2040–1750 B.C.), until it was overshadowed but not eclipsed by the Kassite invasion (1740–1160). The balance of power then passed northward and the famous Assyrian kingdom held the field till 625 B.C. Nineveh fell in the year 612, and the second Babylonian Empire lasted but a century (625–538 B.C.): then Median and Persian kings ruled the land, until in 331 B.C. they were dispossessed by the Greeks under Alexander the Great, with whom our story ends. We have, however, still to account for the centuries of civilization which elapsed before the Early Dynastic Period of the third millennium. There was the "Jemdet Nasr" Period, which immediately preceded it and from which we have our first indication of that peculiarly Sumerian instrument, the bow-shaped harp. Yet further in the distance are the "Uruk" (Erech) Period with its marked individuality in culture and progress, and the "Al'Ubaid" Period, stretching back into the simple life of the first settlers for an untold number of years. No dates with any probability can yet be given for these remote ages.

In the arrangement of the material provided I have followed the popular classification of my subject into (a) Instruments of percussion, placing the *autophones* and *membranophones* together under this heading, (b) Wind instruments or *aerophones*, and (c) Stringed instruments or *chordophones*. To avoid, moreover, constant footnotes and references to authorities in the text, I have grouped such notes under chapters and subjects at the end of the book: here too will be found measurements of specimens and other technical details.

The difficulty of allocating their proper names to the instruments discovered has been much increased by the fact that the original texts are written in cunei-

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form script: to consult them for due identification has therefore required a rudimentary knowledge, at any rate, of the Sumerian language. When we recall that to an unmusically-minded writer "harp" and "lyre" or "flute" and "pipe" are synonymous terms, it was quite unsafe to rely on translations: in every possible case I have consulted the Sumerian text itself. For the Assyrian language I have generally used the word Akkadian, both being of Semitic origin; they were practically alike, save in certain grammatical constructions: but in dealing with the days of the great Assyrian kingdom I have adopted the more usual word. It is with regret that I have been compelled to omit all quotations in cuneiform script, with its pictorial charm and old-world primness. Specimens, however, will be observed in the illustrations and on Plate I, our frontispiece, there are a few lines, inscribed between four thousand and five thousand years ago, in praise of Music and Song: they are taken from one of the clay cylinders of Gudea, the peace-loving king-priest of the third millennium B.C. at Lagash. In these words, which I have entitled "Music's Ministry" and given in translation below, they breathe the eternal spirit of the Divine Art:

MUSICK'S MINISTERIE

Kisal Eninnu ħula siada

Gig uru ibgar

Šag ħungada bar ħungada

Igi ir pada ir sigda

To fill with joye the Temple court
And chase the Citie's gloome awaie,
The harte to still, the passions calme,
Of weeping eyes the teares to staie.

Owing to the rapidity with which the Near East is unfolding the wider knowledge of its past history, an exhaustive bibliography of published works on the subject would not only be out of place but largely out of date. For English readers, however, who wish to know more of the general history of these interesting peoples, with whom we are here dealing, the late Dr Leonard King's *Sumer and Akkad* (1910) and his *History of Babylon* (1915) will be found useful, while Mr Sidney Smith's *Early History of Assyria* (1928) will, at the same time, supply many valuable details more recently available. Mr C. J. Gadd's *History and Monuments of Ur* (1929) too is an attractive and able survey of the subject. A handy compendium is Sir Leonard Woolley's *The Sumerians* (1928); though also dealing in the main with the city of Ur, it outlines very briefly the general chronicles of the nation. In *Archaeology and the Sumerian Problem* Dr Henri Frankfort (Chicago University Press, 1932) faces the difficult question of racial origin and development, while Dr Gordon Childe's *New Light on the Most Ancient East* (1934)

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summarizes most of our present information. Such works as these, if read in connection with the notices which appear from time to time in the daily press and in the well-illustrated articles written by experts for the *Illustrated London News*, will help the ordinary student to keep abreast with the latest discoveries.

It would ill-become me to take to myself the credit of the research which the present work has entailed over several years. I am deeply indebted for the generous assistance I have received on all sides: especially for the interest, help and information which Mr Sidney Smith, Keeper of the Assyrian and Egyptian Antiquities in the British Museum, has shown and so readily given me, as well as for the encouragement which Mr C. J. Gadd, the Deputy Keeper, has afforded me, not only by his expert criticism, but through his excellent *Sumerian Grammar and Reading Book*, which has rendered my task possible. Although I would by no means wish to debit such authorities with all the conclusions here given, yet their approval has often heartened me, whilst their opinions, when adverse, have received, I trust, the consideration they deserve, and have been weighed against the musical, historical and ethnographical facts in my own possession.

For the interpretation of the notation set to the Sumerian Hymn I am solely responsible: spurred by the word "impossible", I have tried to express this ancient music in modern form on reasonable and acknowledged lines. Unfortunately we shall never meet with anyone who was present at its first performance and could vouch for its certitude: I must therefore leave it to my friends and critics to say whether they do not feel that these old strains, of nearly 4000 years ago and the oldest music we have, are indeed well-wedded to the yet more ancient words.

To Dr Langdon, Professor of Assyriology in Oxford University, to Dr Legrain, Keeper of the Babylonian Antiquities at the University Museum, Philadelphia, to Dr Moule, Cambridge Professor of Chinese, to Sir Leonard Woolley, to Dr Curt Sachs, to Dr Andrae of the Staatliches Museum, Berlin, to Dr Contenau of the Musée du Louvre, Paris, and to the Keeper of the Cairo Museum of Antiquities my sincere thanks are due for particulars I could not otherwise have obtained and for illustrations they have so generously allowed me to use. For many other details and illustrations here given I am grateful to the Trustees of the British Museum and of the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Conservateur of the Louvre, the authorities of the Babylonian and Musical-Instruments Museums, Berlin, to the Superintendent of the Museo Archeologico, Florence, to the Conservateur of the Museum of Antiquities, Istanbul, to Messrs Putnam, to Baron von Oppenheim, Professor Herzfeld, Dr Frankfort and the Oriental Institute of Chicago University, and to Dr Ernest Mackay.

Nor must I forget the willing assistance which has been given me in my research-work by Mr F. G. Rendall, F.S.A. of the British Museum, the Rev.

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A. Parrot of Paris, Mrs Volkmann of Berlin, and Miss Dorothy Cross of the University Museum, Philadelphia, with other friends, as well as the expert and artistic production of the results by the Cambridge University Press.

To my wife, who has carefully read both manuscript and proofs, I dedicate this little book in memory of a long and happy comradeship. Twenty-five years ago in *Old English Instruments of Music* I endeavoured to trace existing forms to early sources: I trust that my present effort may throw yet further light on the history of origins, for it is clear that the evidence provided by the forms of Musical Instruments plays an important part in this quest. It is not probable that a peculiar form of instrument was invented in widely differing or separated localities; it must presume a migration of a special material culture, and so a diffusion of another achievement in the long tale of human progress.

FRANCIS W. GALPIN

Richmond, Surrey
1937

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TYPOGRAPHICAL NOTES

The Sumerian names of musical instruments are given in Roman capitals and, following the usual practice, the component signs of words and phrases are separated by hyphens for derivative and grammatical aid. In the quotation, however, transliterated in the foreword, the words are treated on ordinary linguistic lines. In the Creation Hymn the names of Gods and Goddesses are initialed for clarity with a capital letter and, as a key to vocal rendering, recognized contractions and elisions are frequently employed.

Akkadian and Assyrian names of instruments are placed in *Italic* type, as are also names of foreign extraction.

The small figures in the letterpress refer to the notes on the respective chapters at the end of the book.

The pronunciation of some of the less familiar transcription-signs is as follows:

ç = tsh	č = tsch	ḫ = kh	ḵ = q
š = ts (z)	š̄ = sh	ṭ = hard t	g is hard

The vowels sound as in Italian. A circumflex over a vowel denotes two similar vowels contracted.

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