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# UCLA ENCYCLOPEDIA *of* EGYPTOLOGY

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## MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

## الموسيقى والموسيقيون

*Sibylle Emerit*

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## MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

### الموسيقى و الموسيقيون

*Sibylle Emerit*

Musik und Musiker  
Music et musiciens

*Iconographic, textual, and archaeological sources show that music played an essential role within ancient Egyptian civilization throughout all periods. Music was of utmost importance in rituals and festivals. Different forms of music with multiple functions existed for public or private representations, profane or sacred, interpreted by male or female musicians acting as professionals or amateurs. Consequently, from religious celebrations to entertainment, the range of types of music and musicians was very large.*

تشير المصادر التصويرية ، النصية والأثرية إلى أن الموسيقى قد لعبت دورا جوهريا في الحضارة المصرية القديمة خلال جميع فترات التاريخ. حيث كانت الموسيقى ذات أهمية بالغة في الطقوس الدينية والاحتفالات. كان هناك تنوع للموسيقى بتنوع وظائفها وتعددتها في المناسبات العامة والخاصة ، كذلك فيما يتعلق بما هو ديني أو دنيوي ، مارسها الرجال أو النساء الموسيقيون فأبدعوا كمحترفين أو هاوين. ولذلك ، تعددت أنماط الموسيقى والموسيقيون بشكل كبير من الإحتفالات الدينية إلى الترفيه.

**T**he sources concerning Egyptian music represent various types of iconographic, archaeological, and textual documents from different locations. They cover the entire Egyptian history, from the Predynastic to the Roman Periods, i.e., from 3100 BCE to the fourth century CE. The principal information comes from representations on the walls of private tombs (fig. 1) and temples (fig. 2). There are also numerous depictions of musical scenes on coffins, papyri, ostraca (fig. 3), and on objects like spoons, plates, and boxes, etc. In addition, many three-dimensional representations such as statues and statuettes, terracottas, and amulets of musicians are extant.

Adding to the iconographic evidence are numerous, most often concise inscriptions in

hieroglyphs, hieratic, Demotic, and Greek, which are found not only on papyri, stelae, statues, and musical instruments, but also as legends for the representations on the walls of tombs and temples. In the New Kingdom, the textual evidence is particularly rich: we have the so-called *Harper's Song* (Osing 1992), "love songs" (Mathieu 1996), or certain "ritual texts," which were supposed to be chanted and were often accompanied by one or several instruments. These sources allow the identification of the names of musical instruments, titles of musicians, and vocabulary of musical actions, which describe repertoires as well as techniques for playing. The translation of these terms remains, however, difficult since one lexeme can have

several meanings and an object several names (Emerit 2008a: 429 - 438).

Archaeology has also provided us with traces of various musical instruments, from the simple percussion object to the more complex cordophone. For most of these objects the provenance remains unknown since they entered the museums as early as the second half of the nineteenth century after having being purchased from the art market (Anderson 1976; Sachs 1921; Ziegler 1979). In spite of the richness of the documentation, our knowledge of Pharaonic music remains limited: without theoretical treaty, or musical score, it is indeed particularly difficult to do an archaeology of music.

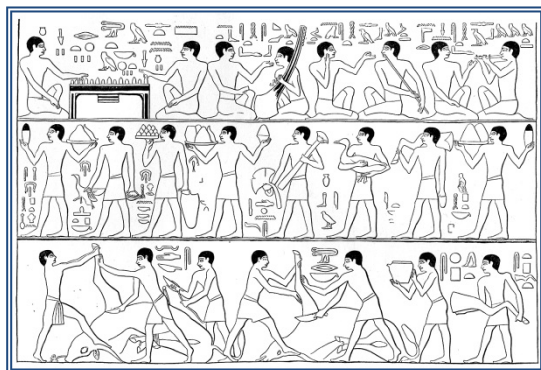


Figure 1. Tomb of Nikauhor, Saqqara S. 915. Relief in New York, MMA 08.201.2.

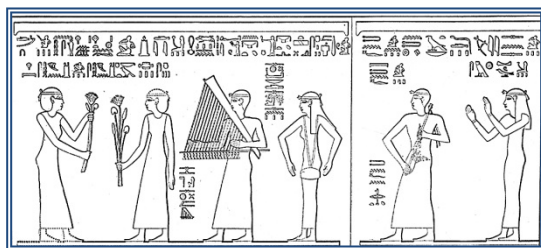


Figure 2. Temple of Medamud.

### *Historiography*

The importance of the documentation on Pharaonic music has stimulated the interest of researchers since the early nineteenth century,

and the bibliographic data on the subject is abundant. An analysis of the historiography shows, however, that a number of aspects of ancient Egyptian music remain unexplored. The field of research is subdivided into several disciplines, and the musicological approach has always been more important than the Egyptological approach. The main interest of these studies was to add an important chapter to the universal history of music and to define how the music of ancient Egypt may have contributed to the genesis of music in the West. Researchers like Victor Loret, Curt Sachs, or Hans Hickmann were seeking to rediscover the musical system of the ancient Egyptians. Lacking musical partitions and treatises on music, they hoped that organology (the study of the history of musical instruments) and comparative musicology would allow them to reach this aim. Based on aerophones (wind instruments), they tried to define the used scales, but the stage of conservation of the instruments neither allowed for reliable results nor to recover melodies (Emerit 2006b: 36). Then,



Figure 3. Ostracon Deir el-Medina.

some researchers hoped to discover the echos of the Pharaonic music in today's folk music (Borsai 1968), developing the idea of a musical heritage that has been passed on over several millennia.

The way of promoting research in musicology has progressed considerably since Jaap Kunst created a new science in 1950: ethnomusicology (Kunst 1950). According to him, it is not sufficient to be interested in a single tonal system or in the use of different types of musical instruments in a civilization for the understanding of the potential place, role, and function of this artistic expression in a given culture. Music is intrinsically subject to the social, cultural, religious, political, and economic framework of a community and can therefore be approached from different perspectives. Whenever ethnomusicologists have studied the music of modern societies, their approaches have been an inspiration for the study of music, which has disappeared, and gave birth, in the eighties, to what one might nowadays call the "archaeology of music."

### *Musical Instruments*

1. Cordophones. Three types of stringed instruments were known by the ancient Egyptians: harp, lyre, and lute.

The harp has been attested in Egypt since the 4<sup>th</sup> Dynasty in the musical scenes depicted in the private tombs (fig. 1). It was the favorite instrument of the ancient Egyptians, but this object and its representation seem to have disappeared from the Nile Valley with the advent of Christianity. From the New Kingdom on, several forms of harps coexisted (fig. 4). They led to complex typologies (for instance, the ladle-shaped, boat-shaped, and crescent-shaped harp), but in spite of the large variety, the Egyptian harp was always a vertical type, generally arched and sometimes angular (fig. 2). The fundamental difference between arched and angular harps is that the first one is built from a single wooden piece while the second one requires two (Duchesne-Guillemin 1969: 60 - 68).



Figure 4. Blind musicians. Tomb of Meryra, el-Amarna.

The lyre was imported from the Near East during the Middle Kingdom. It is represented for the first time in the tomb of Khnumhotep II in Beni Hassan, carried by a foreigner (fig. 5). This portable instrument, of asymmetric or symmetric shape, became fashionable from the New Kingdom onwards. At that time, mainly women played this instrument, holding it horizontally or vertically, except in Amarna, where men are depicted playing a huge symmetric lyre, placed on the floor or on a base (fig. 6). Two musicians play "quatremain" (playing the lyre at the same time) in a standing position. They wear special clothes: a flounced skirt, a small cape on the shoulders, and a pointed hat, which seem to indicate a Canaanite origin.



Figure 5. Tomb of Khnumhotep II, Beni Hassan.

The lute, which was introduced in Egypt at the beginning of the New Kingdom (fig. 7), was also imported from the Near East. This instrument became very popular throughout the Nile Valley and sometimes replaced the harp in depictions accompanying the famous *Harper's Song*. Played by male as well as female musicians, it was an instrument with a long neck connected to a sound-box. The lute and the lyre could be played with a plectrum, while the harp could not.





Figure 6. Musician with a giant symmetric lyre. Tomb of Huya, el-Amarna.

2. Aerophones. In Egypt, one can distinguish the long flute, the double clarinet, and the simple or double oboe, but it is, however, very difficult to differentiate with certainty these four instruments, which are individualized—from an organological point of view—by the presence or the absence of a simple or double reed. When the instruments survived, these tiny reeds have generally disappeared, and they are never visible in the iconography.

The oldest representation of a wind instrument is depicted on a mudstone palette of the Predynastic time: it is the long flute (Quibell and Green 1902: pl. XXVIII). Cut in a reed with a large diameter, it possessed only a small number of holes in its lower part. In the Old Kingdom, this flute occupied a dominating place in music scenes in the private funerary chapels (fig. 1). Only men used it during this period. In the Middle Kingdom, the fashion of this instrument started to fade.

The double clarinet has been attested since the 5<sup>th</sup> Dynasty. During the Old Kingdom, it was the most frequently represented aerophone (fig. 1). It is a simple reed instrument with two parallel pipes tied together by string (fig. 8). The musician plays the same tune on both pipes, but since the holes' spacing is not strictly parallel, the obtained note is slightly dissonant.



Figure 7. “Singers” (*hsw*) playing lute. Temple of Luxor, Opet-procession.



Figure 8. Two clarinets. Cairo Museum, CG 69837 and 69838.

The oboe appeared during the New Kingdom (fig. 3). It consisted of one or two long, thin pipes, which separate starting from the mouth of the musician to form an acute angle. The melody is only played on one of the pipes, the other one giving a held note. This instrument, mainly played by women during that period, supplanted the long flute and the double clarinet. According to the pictorial record, the latter two instruments did not disappear from the musical landscape and were played until the Roman time. With the arrival of the Ptolemies, a new type of oboe was attested in Egypt: the Greek *aulos*.

The trumpet was used in Egypt since the New Kingdom, mainly in a military context. This instrument did not look like the piston trumpet invented in the nineteenth century, which is capable of giving all the notes of the scale. The Egyptian trumpet, straight and short, produced only the harmonic series of a note. It served especially for passing on orders

as is indicated moreover by the name of the instrumentalist *dd-m-šnb*: “The one who speaks on the trumpet.” In the tomb of Tutankhamen, two trumpets were discovered, one made of silver and the other one of copper (Manniche 1976).

In the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods, new instruments were introduced to enrich the instrumentarium with, on the one hand, the introduction of the panpipes by the Greeks and, on the other hand, the invention of the hydraulic organ in Alexandria during the third century BCE. Terracotta figurines show musicians playing these instruments.

3. Membranophones. The two main membranophones used by ancient Egyptians were the single membrane drum mounted on a frame and the barrel-shaped drum with two membranes.

The single membrane drum is attested in the Old Kingdom in a scene carved in the solar temple of Niuserra in Abu Ghurab (Bissing and Kees 1928: pl. 3, no. 118). It is a very large-sized round drum, which was used during the Sed Festival. In the New Kingdom, a small-sized model, the round tambourine, was depicted to be exclusively played by women in a context of ovations. A so-called “rectangular” tambourine (but of quadrangular shape, fig. 9) was also used by the musicians, but only during the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (Manniche 1975: 5 - 6).

The barrel-shaped drum has been attested from the Middle Kingdom onwards. The instrument, suspended round the neck of the musician, was struck with the hands. The use of drumsticks seems to have been unknown in Egypt. In the New Kingdom, this instrument was only played by men and more particularly by Nubians during military or religious processions (fig. 10). In the Late Period, depictions are found of a small-sized barrel-shaped drum in the hands of some women (fig. 2). The existence of a vase-shaped drum is still debated (Ziegler 1979: 71).



Figure 9. Women making ovations and beating round and “rectangular” tambourines. Tomb of Meryra, el-Amarna.



Figure 10. Nubians playing drum. Temple of Ermant.

4. Idiophones. Clappers, sistra, menit-necklaces, cymbals, bells and rattles were used as idiophones.

The first percussion instrument known in the Nile Valley was the clapper. It has been attested since prehistoric times, in the iconography as well as in archaeological remains. Made of two wooden or ivory sticks, either straight or curved, they are struck against one another by the musician with one or both hands; the presence of a hole made it possible to tie them together (fig. 11). Various ornamental motives decorate these instruments, varying according to the period they were in use: Hathor, either human or animal headed (fig. 12), a hand, a humble papyrus, or a lotus flower.



Figure 11. Clappers. Cairo Museum, CG 69217.

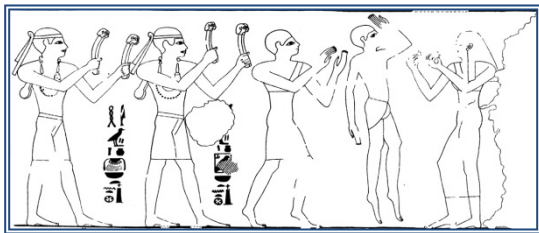


Figure 12. "Percussionists" (*ḥwy*) playing clappers. Tomb of Amenemhat, Thebes.

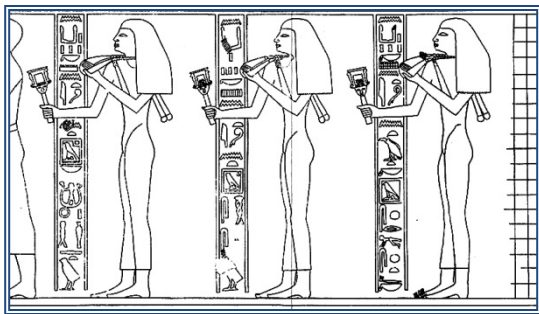


Figure 13. Women shaking sistrum and menit-necklace. Tomb of Ukhhotep, Meir n° B2.

Sistra and the menit-necklace were also used as percussion instruments. This use has been attested from the Old Kingdom to the Roman Period. Two types of sistrum coexisted, the sistrum in the form of a "naos" and the arched sistrum. In both cases, it is a kind of rattle formed with a handle and a frame crossed by mobile rods, sometimes embellished with metal discs. The swishing sound made by the menit-necklace was caused by rows of beads, shaken by the musician, which would be the counterweight part of the collar (fig. 13).

Cymbals, bells, and crotals (small metal rattles) were introduced more recently in Egypt, probably during the Ptolemaic Period.

In the study of the idiophones, it is also necessary to consider the cadence led by the hands or the feet, which always played a dominant part in the music and the dance of ancient Egypt as is apparent from the iconography (fig. 4).

### *Musical Notation*

In the 1960s, Hans Hickmann claimed to have discovered a system of musical notation based on chironomy or gesticulations (Hickmann 1958: 96 - 127, 1963: 103 - 107). Indeed, he saw in the variations of the positions of the hands and the arms of the singers depicted in music scenes in Old and Middle Kingdom private tombs a way to indicate to the musicians the musical intervals of fourth, of fifth, or octave. This idea met with a deep interest, but it is widely questioned today because this body language is not really codified (Dominicus 1994: 165 - 167).

More recently, von Lieven (2002: 497 - 510, 2006a: 9 - 38, pl. 1-4A) suggested a system of musical notation indicated with dots and red crosses placed above a Demotic text dating from the first or the second century BCE, which was discovered in Tebtunis (Papyrus Carlsberg 589). These signs of an extreme simplicity could transcribe, according to her, a rhythmic punctuation intended to be played by a percussion instrument. She based this interpretation on the fact that this papyrus contains an Osirian liturgy and that drums could be used in this ritual context. However, this interpretation may be going too far, because research on text metrics shows that the literary and religious texts, intended to be recited, were composed in a rhythmic structure. Red dots aided the pupils in learning how to recite and to remember the scansion (Servajean 2003: 75 - 76). According to the Deir el-Medina ostrakon 2392, this recitation could be moreover accompanied by a musical instrument (Mathieu 1996: 22, 139 - 140, pls. 22 - 25). The notation in P. Carlsberg 589 differs from the usual signs because apart



from the dots also several crosses were inscribed over the text. Hoffmann (2008: 75 - 76) interpreted these signs as an aid for the priest in charge of the declamation as to how to accentuate a group of words.

It seems surprising that the Egyptian civilization, which developed an elaborate system of writing very early on, did not find a means to record music—but many cultures have lacked such a system. Musical notation is not indispensable for the transmission of musical knowledge. Its use matches a specific cultural need, such as, for example, the sharing of the musical pieces. In addition, the ancient Greek musical notation was invented at the end of the sixth century or at the beginning of the fifth century BCE, and several Greek musical papyri of Hellenistic and Roman time were discovered in Egypt. Apparently, the Egyptians did not adopt this technique for their own music.

### *Musicians*

In Pharaonic society, both men and women could choose to devote themselves entirely to music. Among them were musicians of foreign origin, children, and dwarfs. From the beginning of the ancient Egyptian civilization, the musical art was also the privilege of some divinities. However, the iconography of musician gods developed especially in Greco-Roman temples. In this context, Hathor, Mistress of music, was depicted playing tambourine, sistrum, and menit-necklace, often in the form of the seven Hathors (goddesses of fate who are present at childbirth). Hathor's son Ihy shakes the sistrum and menit for her. Meret (fig. 14), Mistress of the throat, was represented as a harp player (Guglielmi 1991: 78 - 90). Bes and Beset were depicted dancing while playing trigon harp, lute, or tambourine. Priests and priestesses played the role of the gods in rituals. For example, in the Osirian liturgy, two young women were chosen to personify Isis and Nephthys and play tambourine for the god (Faulkner 1933: 1, l. 1, 2 - 4). Lastly, animals playing musical instruments are an iconographic theme known continuously

from the Old Kingdom to the Roman Period (figs. 3 and 15). For instance, a monkey with a double oboe, a crocodile with a lute, a lion with a lyre, and an ass with a harp are depicted in the Turin Erotic Papyrus (no. 55001; Omlin 1973: pls. II, XI, XII).



Figure 14. Meret playing harp. Temple of Kom Ombo.



Figure 15. Monkey playing lute. Temple of Philae.

### *Musical Specialties*

One of the paradoxes of the ancient Egyptian documentation is that there is a discrepancy between the number of musical specialties expressed in the iconography and in the vocabulary. The iconographic sources allow the identification of at least 12 categories of

artists: singers, harpists, players of lute, lyre, long flute, double clarinet, oboe, double oboe, trumpet, and tambourine, as well as percussionists and rhythmists.

The number of musicians' titles is, on the other hand, more difficult to establish, because for some of them the translation is hypothetical (to the extent that it is even uncertain whether they are musicians), whereas the names of other professions remain unknown (Emerit 2006a). Furthermore, if titles such as *jhwy*, "percussionist" (fig. 12), or *dd-m-šnb*, "trumpet," describe a single musical specialty, others such as *hsw*, *šmꜥw*, and *hnw/d-hnw* indicate musicians who can play several instruments and, sometimes, who can also dance. Thus, the *hsw* is above all a singer who can accompany himself by clapping in his hands or by playing a stringed instrument: harp, lute (fig. 7), or lyre. The lute can also be played by the dancer *tnf* (fig. 2). The main function of a *hnw/d-hnw* is marking the cadence by clapping hands or with a percussion instrument; this rhythmist is also able to use his voice to punctuate its interventions, probably by the scansion. Finally, the *šmꜥw* strikes the cadence with his hands (fig. 16), sometimes by carrying out a dance step or by singing, using in exceptional cases a harp. The dividing line between music and dance is not always clear. An analysis of the terms related to the semantic field of music also reveals the importance of rhythm in the concept of this art in ancient Egypt (Emerit 2008a, 2011).

The titles *hsw*, *šmꜥw*, *hnw/d-hnw*, or *jhwy* are used for men and women, but they do not cover exactly the same artistic activities and vary by gender. Other titles like *dd-m-šnb* and *sbꜣ*, "flutist," are attested only for male musicians, whereas *šhmyt*, *jwtnty*, and *nbtj* are known only for female musicians.

Through the contact with other antique cultures, new instruments were adopted in Egypt, giving birth to new musical specialties. For example, the introduction of the double oboe during the New Kingdom was followed

by the creation of the title *wꜥny*, "double oboe player." Some titles were increasingly fashionable, as *hsyt* and *šmꜥyt*, which developed especially from the New Kingdom onwards to become particularly popular in the Third Intermediate Period (Onstine 2003: 25). Despite the evolution of musical tastes, it is necessary to underline the perpetuity of the harpist figure from the Old Kingdom to the Roman Period, whether in the iconography or through the title of *hsw*, which remains the most common in the documentation.

### Organization

The musicians' titles reveal that their professions were more or less structured and organized into a hierarchy according to their musical specialty, the most complex body being the *hsw*. Also, they indicate very often the name of the deity to which the musician plays and/or the place where he practices: usually in the palace or a temple.

During their career, certain artists could attain high ranks, such as *shꜥ* ("inspector"), *hrp* ("director"), *jmj-rꜣ* ("overseer"; fig. 17), *jmj* ("director"), and *hrj* ("superior"). However, it is difficult to understand how these levels worked together and to which types of skills they referred. On the other hand, it is certain that these ranks were not purely honorary because their holders generally led a group of persons or oversaw the music in a precise area (palace, temple) or a whole region. Female musicians rarely reached this high level (for *hryt šmꜥyt*, see Onstine 2003: 68), but their hierarchical organization did not apparently follow the same pattern as that of the men, especially from the New Kingdom onwards when their number continually increased. Connected to the service of a temple, they were distributed within *phyles* as common priestesses. It is likely that they were subordinated to the *wrt hnr* (the great one of the institution-*keheneret*) or to the Divine Adoratrices, but this link is not sufficiently explicit in the records (Onstine 2003: 68). If most of the *hsyt*, *šmꜥyt*, and *jhwt* really were exercising their art, it seems certain that these titles also had a honorary character.

Finally, from the New Kingdom onwards, there was a choir (*šspt d-hnw*) that brought together men as well as women (fig. 16).

It is not unusual that a male musician or a female musician used several titles in connection with the music. For example, in the Old Kingdom, Temi was at the same time *sbz* and *hsw* (Labrousse and Lauer 2000: I, 22, II, pl. 26 a-d.), whereas in the Third Intermediate Period, Henouttaoui was *šmꜥyt* and *wꜥny*t (Kees 1964: 53 - 54).

Musicians' titles also indicate that they often occupied other functions in Egyptian society. It was usually a position in the priestly hierarchy, but they could also attain offices in the royal administration. For example, in the Old Kingdom, Ptahaperef was "Inspector of the craftsmen of the palace" (Hassan 1936: 212, 214, figs. 232, 235) and Raur was "Overseer of linen" (Hassan 1932: 66 - 68, pl. XLIV 1).

#### *Place of Performance and Orchestras'* *Composition*

Music was performed in several types of spaces, public and private: inside the temple (fig. 2), the palace, during religious processions (fig. 16), military parades (fig. 10), during burials to maintain the funerary cult, or also during private festivities (fig. 1). Access to these spaces reveals the status of the artists and the music. Musicians, such as singers, exercised their profession in practically all social spheres, whereas the musical practice of other artists was limited to a particular context or event, such as the military and royal context in which the trumpet was used.

Depending on the period, the orchestras' composition evolved. In the Old Kingdom banquet scenes, the bands include singers, rhythmists, harpists, and long flute and double clarinet players. In the New Kingdom, new instruments appeared: tambourines, lutes, lyres, and double oboe enter henceforth the musical groups. Some artists played solo, such as harpists and lute players, whether it was to interpret the *Harper's Song* or to play in front of a divinity. The trumpeter was the only

musician to follow the sovereign to war, while in the royal escorts, drummer and rhythmists were also present. According to the context, music had different functions. For instance, in the temple ritual it was used to gladden the god and to pacify him, whereas in a funerary context it could help the rebirth of the dead. A few rural scenes also show singers and flutists entertaining the workers in the agricultural fields (Cleveland 30.736; Berman 1999: no. 77, 46, 137 - 138).



Figure 16. Choir (*šspt d-hnw*) of female and male musicians (*šmꜥw*). Akhmenu, Temple of Karnak.

#### *Training*

The existence of a hierarchical organization of the musician's profession raises the question of the training in their discipline. Although very rare, some documents allow us to assert that music schools existed (BM 10246 recto 3, l. 7 - 8; Mathieu 1996: 137, 139) and that some sort of institutional teaching was given within the court or the temples. In the Old Kingdom, several instructors are known with the title *sbz*, who taught music and dance. In the Middle Kingdom, Khesu the Elder is depicted in his tomb giving lessons to female musicians in sistrum playing and hand-clapping (Silverman 1988: figs. 31 and 35d). Roth (1995: 42) showed that part of the palace musicians belonged to the *hntj-š* group, which brought together royal attendants. Musicians were apparently recruited from among these people. The learning of music certainly began within the family. Indeed, by comparing titles, it is clear that it was not uncommon for numerous members of a lineage to all be musicians (Emerit 2005: 11).



### *Socio-Economic Status*

Several elements within the documentation allow us to understand the social and economic status of an individual and to recognize his uniqueness compared to other members of society. The status markers for musicians are of two kinds: archaeological remains and titulary. The nature of archaeological remains is related to the quantity of monuments and objects, which belonged to the musicians, or where the musicians are mentioned or represented. Indeed, a musician known by his inscribed tomb does not have the same economic and social status as the musician who could only erect a stela or statue in a sacred place. Nevertheless, most musicians did not possess a funeral chapel, but simply a monument or commemorative object with their name, such as a false-door, stela, rock inscription, statue, shabti, box with shabtis, libation basin, offering table (fig. 17), textile, or seal. Others are known only from the evidence in the tomb or on the stelae of a personality of high rank, their names being sometimes only enumerated in lists of temple employees, in letters, or official documents. The titulary of a musician reveals his social and economic status. It is composed of several elements including titles, epithets, and sentences of laudatory character, the names of the person, and affiliations. It therefore allows us to place the individual in an enlarged familial and social frame. It is not uncommon to see a musician involved in other functions in society that may have been a source of supplementary income or prestige.

Sources show that the economic and social status of the musicians varied a lot according to individual and gender. From a quantitative point of view, the female musicians occupy a more important place in the iconographic and textual records. Some of them even belonged to the royal family. Since the Old Kingdom, the role of sacred musician, shaking sistra and menit-necklaces for the Hathor cult or other divinities, was devolved to queens and girls of royal blood (Troy 1986: 83 - 88). However,

their status and function cannot be compared to those of a musician who played music to earn his subsistence. Nevertheless, the male musicians' social recognition seems superior to that of the female musicians because some male musicians possess their own tomb, which is a sign of royal favor. Thus, this privilege was not restricted to persons in charge of religious, administrative, political, or military tasks. The economic and social status of female musicians (*hsyt*, *šmꜣyt*, and *jhyt*) seems to rather be determined by that of their spouse, especially from the New Kingdom onwards (Fantechi and Zingarelli 2002: 32). Often married to a high dignitary, they are represented or named with him on their monuments (be this tombs, stelae, or statues). Some objects, however, were dedicated by these women and used as memorial in places of pilgrimage, as Abydos. However, a prosopographical documentation is specific to the female musicians who lived during the 21<sup>st</sup> Dynasty: the sarcophagi from the Deir el-Bahari Cachette and the funerary papyri.



Figure 17. Offering table of Sneferunefer, Overseer of singers of the Great House. Cairo Museum, CG 1328.

Since the musician did not produce his subsistence, he was dependent on an employer, who was in charge of his living costs. Those who were attached to the palace or a temple were privileged and comparable to other “functionaries.” If a few musicians are known to us by a title or a name, we should be aware that a large part of the artists involved in the musical life in ancient Egypt definitely



is not known to us. Most of them remained anonymous, because they could not afford to leave an epitaph, or their monuments did not survive the ages. That is what the “East Cemetery” of Deir el-Medina dating to the 18<sup>th</sup> Dynasty seems to testify. The study of the non-epigraphic material from these tombs, in which numerous musical instruments were discovered, reveals that the persons buried in this place belonged to a modest social class attached to the service of local noblemen. Among them were apparently musicians of both genders (Pierrat-Bonnefois 2003: 49 - 65). It is probable that their function was not limited to music and that they also participated in domestic tasks.

The Greek papyrological documentation of the Hellenistic and Roman Periods contains some examples of contracts for hiring musicians (Perpillou-Thomas 1995: 226 - 227). It was possible to rent these artists to animate religious or private festivities. That is also shown in a Demotic papyrus of the first or second century CE in which the adversities of a poor talented harpist are related, who goes from place to place, begging for his meal in exchange of his art (Collombert 2003: 29 - 40; Thissen 1992). This type of punctual hiring, which was certainly common previous to the Ptolemaic Period, reveals the precarious status of the itinerant musician compared to the one who was attached to the court or to the temple. We find an echo of this practice in the Papyrus Westcar where three goddesses, dressed as musicians/dancers-*hnywt*, offer their service to Redjedet to help her give birth (P. Westcar 9.27-11.4).

### *Clothing*

Generally, musicians never wear ceremonial dress or distinguishing features connected to their profession, even when they perform their art. The only identifying feature is the particular instrument they hold. In P. Westcar, the husband of Redjedet identifies the goddesses as musicians/dancers-*hnywt* because they show him their sistrum and merit-necklaces. An unusual feature should be noted in Amarna: in the iconography,

musicians are dressed with a hat of conical shape, a flounced skirt, and a short cape, but these clothes are probably linked to their foreign origin and are not stage clothes (fig. 6).

Certain musical specialties seem to be reserved for a particular ethnic group, as, for example, the barrel-shaped drum, which is usually struck by Nubians (fig. 10). This is not, however, a generality, because this instrument is also played by Egyptians. The Nubians are perfectly recognizable in the iconography whether it is by their facial features or the loincloths they wear.

Physical characteristics differentiate the Egyptian musician from the others in the iconography. In the Middle and New Kingdom, the harpists are often represented obese and old, whereas their eyes are generally closed (fig. 4). It has long been considered that these artists were blind; however, this characteristic is certainly more symbolic than real (Manniche 1978: 13 - 21). In the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty funerary chapel of Reia, this is clearly an iconographic topos: when this overseer of the *hsw*-singers is depicted playing the harp, he is blind, while in the other scenes of his tomb he is not and is depicted as an ordinary noble (Martin 1985: pls. 22, 24).

### *Conclusion*

The nature of the archaeological remains, their quantity and quality, inform us about the importance of musical art in ancient Egyptian society, either through iconographic study, textual evidence, or the discovered extant instruments. The study of these sources contributes to the knowledge of the function of this music. An analysis of the context in which the music is exercised—religious celebration, funerals, war, work, dance, games, or entertainment—reveal different musical languages.

As a powerful vector of the cultural identity of a population, music also reflects the functioning of human society, in particular its composition with respect to sex, age, and social hierarchy with numerous implications as

to the religious, political, economic, and social fields. The type of instruments used during the musical entertainment allows us to recognize technical capacities of the musician and to determine whether he had the benefit of education in music. A natural result of

such an organized education is the emergence of a corporation, with its own hierarchy, as can be attested in ancient Egypt.

## *Bibliographic Notes*

For a bibliography on the subject, see the numerous encyclopedic articles in the *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* written by E. Hickmann, and more recently Lawergren (2001). The book by Manniche (1991) is the only synthesis written on music and musicians, but unfortunately without references to the sources in footnotes. Specific studies on musical instruments have been published by Manniche (1975), Krah (1991), and Sourdivé (1994), with a focus on the use of instruments in particular contexts by Emerit (2002, 2008b). The challenges posed by the interpretation of musical sources is treated by von Lieven (2004). The social standing of musicians in Egyptian society has been discussed by Sourouzian (1999) and von Lieven (2006b). Recently Koch has made a new analysis of the *šmꜣyt*, *ḥsyt*, and *jḥyt* and their link with the institution of the Divine Adoratrice. She also focuses on their hierarchical organization and their social status (Koch 2012: pp. 185 - 199). The recent doctorate thesis of Kinney (2008) deals with dance and dancers and their connections with music.

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