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STRINGS AND THREADS

*A Celebration of the Work of
Anne Draffkorn Kilmer*



Edited by
WOLFGANG HEIMPEL and GABRIELLA FRANTZ - SZABÓ

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Sound of Silence: Music and Musical Practice in Late Bronze–Iron Age Cyprus

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And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more.
People talking without speaking,
People hearing without listening,
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared
Disturb the sound of silence.

Simon and Garfunkel, *Sound of Silence*, 1965

INTRODUCTION

Among Anne Kilmer's many contributions to the fields of Assyriology and the ancient Near East, the study of music and musical practices stands out (for example, Kilmer 1971, 1974, 1992, 1997). This is especially the case in my mind, no doubt because as her occasional research assistant at U.C. Berkeley, I found myself poring through various transliterations of obscure Hurrian and Hittite texts, searching for musical, mathematical, or dance terms and filling out detailed index cards for each occurrence. Although I have long since lost any competence in cuneiform studies per se, as a prehistoric archaeologist I have nurtured an interest in material culture and social practices. In this study, dedicated to Anne in thanks for her unwavering support of my various distractions in pursuit of a Ph.D. degree at Berkeley, I turn my attention to what might be called the materiality of musical performances on Late Bronze–early Iron Age Cyprus. This includes in particular several representations of musicians and musical instruments depicted on clay figurines, bronze stands, pottery vessels, seals, and bronze or silver bowls (Meerschaert 1991; Kolotourou 2005; V. Karageorghis 2006). In the attempt to interpret these representations, I call into question long-standing assumptions that music and musicians in Cyprus were associated primarily with ritual or religious activities, in particular with “fertility cults” (on Cyprus, for example, see Averett 2002–4; J. Karageorghis 2005: 227–28; Kolotourou 2005). Instead, I single out their performative role as musicians, dancers, celebrants – and much more – in both large spectacles (not least feasting) and more mundane contexts, all of which might usefully be termed social and “ceremonial” activities rather than specifically religious or “ritual” ones (see also Knapp 1996).



MUSIC AND MUSICIANS IN ANCIENT CYPRUS

On Cyprus, between the Late Cypriot (LC) and Cypro-Archaic periods, there are literally hundreds of images of musicians and the instruments they played, portrayed on diverse clay objects and represented on bronze stands, painted pottery, seal stones, and metal bowls. Here, I limit my discussion largely to the LC II through the Cypro-Archaic I period (about 1450–600 B.C.E.), mainly to keep the work within reasonable limits and because my own expertise draws to an end by the mid-1st millennium B.C.E.

The earliest musical instruments known from Cyprus are awl-shaped rattles made of terracotta found in several LC sites, including Enkomi and Hala Sultan Tekke, typically in mortuary contexts (Buchholz 1990). Another horse-shaped rattle was recovered from a Late Cypriot tomb (Tomb 2) at Kazaphani (V. Karageorghis 1993: 18, H2, pl. 14:5). Clay rattles in the shape of pomegranates, pigs, and bottles are also known from Cypro-Geometric through Roman times, again often from funerary contexts (Buchholz 1966). From the end of the LC IIC period (ca. 1200–1150 B.C.E.), a bronze hoard excavated in the external courtyard of a fortified residential building at Pyla *Kokkinokremos* contained a small pair of cymbals (Karageorghis and Demas 1984: 38 no. 68, 56–57 pl. 36:68). Another pair of cymbals comes from a slightly later context at Kourion *Kaloriziki*, Tomb 40 (Catling 1964: 142–46, although H. Catling defined them as shield “bosses”). Finally, a single bronze cymbal was found in a Cypro-Geometric II tomb (Tomb 64) at Palaepaphos *Skales* (V. Karageorghis 1983: 153 no. 7, 154 n. 163, fig. 120, pl. 81).

From the Late Cypriot IIA–B period (ca. 1450–1200 B.C.E.) come two female figurines executed in the Base-ring style, one playing a tambourine and the other clapping hands (V. Karageorghis 1993: 10 pls. VII/2–3, nos. A.vi.1 [Musée du Louvre AM 1] and A.vi.2 [National Archaeological Museum, Athens, no number]). V. Karageorghis (2006: 86) suggested that the “rhythmical music” played or accompanied by these nude females would have taken place in sanctuaries, and that the figurines as a class “are considered to be associated with the idea of fertility and regeneration” and “may represent priestesses or simply worshippers of the Great Goddess.” Kolotourou (2005: 188–89, 192) suggests an even more elaborate interpretation, linking tambourines (Greek *tympanon*) with the “Mother Goddess” and related deities, as well as with birth and fertility. Elsewhere, I have critiqued such interpretations at length (Knapp 2009), above all the assumption that these figurines represent a goddess of fertility, much less a precursor to or model for Greek goddesses such as Aphrodite or Demeter. There is no contextual, material, or iconographic reason to think that these figurines represent a deity or a priestess rather than, say, individual women, mothers, dancers, or celebrants at a feast or some other type of celebration, such as a birth or death or a rite of passage.

By the LC IIIB period (about 1100–1000 B.C.E.), the acknowledged hybrid iconography and contextual associations (ceremonial) of the “goddess with upraised arms” might also be considered in the present context. V. Karageorghis (1993: 1, 60–61) suggested that these so-called *psi*-figurines were used either as votive offerings to a divinity or as votive gifts for the dead. Webb (1999: 215) similarly argued that they were used in rituals for worshipping one or more female deities, whilst D’Agata (2005: 14) saw them as prestige objects related to ritual practices. To my mind, the diverse contexts in which these figurines were produced and displayed indicate multiple functions and usages and suggest instead that both female and male representations served a performative role that occasionally involved music and dance. We might also consider more carefully than scholars have in the past what kinds of gender information were being broadcast by the gestures, postures, dress, ornamentation, and color used in these images and whether they



Fig. 1. LC IIIA decorated bronze stand with seated harp player in front of stylized tree. V. Karageorghis 2006: 82–83 Figs. 68–69, no. 58 (British Museum no. 1920.12–20.1). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

might have been reserved for domestic, public, private, or ritual practices. It seems too restrictive to assume that all Cypriot figurines were involved in “religious” or “cultic” practices. Many of the LC II–IIIB figurines depict females, but males are also represented along with images that defy placement in traditional sexual categories.

On two decorated bronze stands from the LC IIIA period (about 1200–1100 B.C.E.), both of uncertain provenience and now held in the British Museum, three musicians – two harp players and a lyre player – are depicted (V. Karageorghis 2006: 82–83 figs. 68 [no. 58 BM 1920.12–20.1] and 69 [no. 59 BM 1946.10–17.1]). On the first stand (no. 58; fig. 1 here), a harp player sits on a stool in front of a stylized tree, while on the second (no. 59) a harpist, again seated on a stool, faces a standing figure who plays a lyre; behind them, another standing figure holds a kylix in his left hand and a jug in his right. Both scenes have been interpreted strictly in ritual terms as a feast or religious festival in which music as well as material goods were offered to some unspecified divinity (V. Karageorghis 2006: 82).

From the Cypro-Geometric period (about 1050–750 B.C.E.), two free-standing “horse-and-rider” figurines depict the rider holding a lyre in his left hand (V. Karageorghis 2006: 89–90 figs. 76 [no. 67, Palaepaphos *Skales* Tomb 52.2, Kouklia Museum] and 78 [no. 68, Cyprus Museum no. 1992/I-20/1; fig. 2 here]). Amongst several free-standing terracotta figurines of lyre players



Fig. 2. Cypro-Geometric “horse and rider” Figurine holding a lyre in his left hand. V. Karageorghis 2006: 90 Fig. 78, no. 68 (Cyprus Museum 1992/I-20/1).

(V. Karageorghis 1993: 82 nos. LGA[iii] 5–7), we might single out a small, painted example with the musician again holding the lyre in his left hand (V. Karageorghis 2006: 101 fig. 88 [no. 76, Cyprus Museum no. B33]), and another, unique house model within which a seated human figure holds a lyre in his left arm (V. Karageorghis 2006: 103 fig. 90 [no. 78, Cyprus Museum no. B220]).

During this same period, we find some musicians painted on pottery vessels. One example is a large amphora in White Painted style with a lyre player seated on a large chair (V. Karageorghis 2006: 102 fig. 89, no. 77 [Archbishopric of Cyprus collection]); another is an amphora in Bichrome II–III style with a standing male figure holding a lyre (V. Karageorghis 2006: 104 fig. 92b, no. 79 [Kourion *Kaloriziki*, Tomb 11 no. 5, Kourion Museum; fig. 3 here]). Dancers, both male and female, are represented on a terracotta figurine and a circular disc, on a Bichrome Ware amphora, and on a shallow, decorated bronze bowl from Idalion, the last also with musicians playing a harp, pipes, and tambourine (terracottas: V. Karageorghis 2006: 106–13; bronze bowl: Markoe 1985: 171–72, 246–47, Cy3 [Metropolitan Museum of Art no. 74.51.5600]). J. Karageorghis (2005: 58–59, fig. 46) sees the scene on the bronze bowl (Cy3) as a representation of musical and dance ceremonies that honored Aphrodite. Dunn-Vaturi (2003: 109–10 with figures) illustrates further representations of Cypriot “ring dancers” standing on round, flat ceramic discs, with their arms linked or in upraised position. Predictably, these dancers have been interpreted as participants in feasts or other ceremonies being held in a “sanctuary,” in honor of some (typically female) deity. None of these authors, however, offers any reason why we should see these depictions of human figures holding hands or with upraised arms, accompanied by a suite of musicians, as anything other than people dancing and clapping in a musical performance or at a (secular) banquet.



Fig. 3. Cypro-Geometric Bichrome II-III amphora with standing male figure holding a lyre. V. Karageorghis 2006: 104–5, fig. 92b, no. 79 (Kourion *Kaloriziki*, Tomb 11 no. 5). Kourion Museum.

From the Cypro-Archaic I period (about 750–600 B.C.E.), several free-standing figurines depict tambourine, cymbal, lyre, and flute players (V. Karageorghis 2006: 144–48 nos. 118–26). Both females and males are represented. Kolotourou (2005: 197) suggests that two of the figurines, identified as tambourine players (V. Karageorghis 2006: 146 nos. 121–22), should instead be regarded as cymbal players. Two scaraboid seals of Cypro-Archaic date and disputed origin (perhaps local Cypriot copies of Levantine originals) depict a lyre player (Reyes 2001: 68–69 figs. 97 [no. 74] and 98 [no. 75]); one of them (no. 74) also portrays a woman with a tambourine. Singers and dancers are depicted in terracotta figurines and on terracotta plaques (V. Karageorghis 2006: 149–52 nos. 127–31). One frequently cited terracotta group of ring-dancers has a tambourine player in the center of the group (Flourentzos 1991: 42 pl. III.3; V. Karageorghis 1993: 65, G-D3, pl. XXVIII:11; 2006: 150–51, no. 129, fig. 144 [Cyprus Museum C350]; Averett 2002–4: 16–17 fig. 3; Kolotourou 2005: 191 [Cyprus Museum no. C350; fig. 4 here]). A recently published female tambourine (*tympanon*) player dated to the Cypro-Archaic II period (about 600–480 B.C.E.) is said to have been produced at a workshop “specifically as a votive offering for the Cypriot Goddess”; the tambourines themselves are argued to have been played primarily by women in “rituals associated with women, fertility, birth, and rebirth” (Averett 2002–4: 14 figs. 1, 15, 21). Commenting on a group of tambourine and lyre playing figurines from Lapithos, J. Karageorghis (2005: 204–5, figs. 271–72, 276–79) states that “they give us a very clear image of the cult of the Cypriot goddess.” Below I argue that all such statements are not just conjectural but unsupported by the archaeological evidence itself, both in terms of style and context.

Burgh (2004) and Kolotourou (2005) have highlighted and discussed several representations of sexually ambiguous dancers and musicians on ceramic and ivory objects, in relief sculpture, and on seals from the Bronze and Iron Age Levant, western Asia, and Cyprus. Singers and dancers along with musicians (flute, lyre, and tambourine players) are represented on two metal bowls from Cyprus (Cypro-Geometric III), one fragmentary and made of silver, the other complete and made of bronze (V. Karageorghis 2006: 140–43 nos. 115 [Metropolitan Museum of Art no. 74.51.4557] and 116 [British Museum no. 1892,0519.1; fig. 5 here]). Whereas the terracotta singers and dancers and the bronze bowl are interpreted mainly in terms of their ritual role and association with some deity (V. Karageorghis 2006: 143, 149, 152), the silver bowl, at least, is regarded by some as a



Fig. 4. Cypro-Archaic I terracotta group of ring-dancers with tambourine player in center. V. Karageorghis 2006: 150–51, no. 129, fig. 144, (Cyprus Museum no. C350).

representation of feasting among the urban and royal elites of this period (V. Karageorghis et al. 1999; cf. Hermary 2000).

In attempting to interpret the role of musicians and musical instruments in ancient Cypriot society, scholars have linked them to ritual, fertility, religion, gods, and goddesses – in particular the “Great Goddess” – whatever that may mean. For example, in the case of another decorated bronze bowl (MMA no. 74.51.5700), we find that: “The seated figure may be a goddess, probably Astarte herself, or her priestess. It is important that all figures of participants in the ritual feast are female, servants of the Great Goddess, who is entertained with music, dancing, and is offered food and drink” (V. Karageorghis 2006: 113 no. 84). Or, to take another example, regarding the female figurine in Base-ring style noted above (Musée du Louvre AM 1): “It is reasonable to suggest that the female Base-ring ware tambourine player represents a ritual action ensuring fertility” (Kolotourou 2005: 192). These examples could be multiplied many times over in virtually every publication that deals specifically with music and musical practices on Cyprus and in numerous others dealing with female figurines or representations of women.

Bolger (2003: 99–100) has argued firmly, and correctly in my opinion, that we should not adopt modern religious concepts to discuss prehistoric society on Cyprus, nor should we see goddesses in every female figurine or other representation. If we cannot determine the function of these figurines and related images by their (often elusive) contexts or (typically diverse) styles, then we at least need to acknowledge that what present-day scholars often regard as distinctive



Fig. 5. Cypro-Geometric III bronze bowl depicting three musicians and a female dancer. V. Karageorghis 2006: 142–43, no. 116 (British Museum no. 1892, 0519.1). Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

aspects of ancient cultures — social, political, economic, religious — may have been intimately connected in prehistoric and protohistoric societies. How can we get round this kind of interpretive deadlock, not at all uncommon in prehistoric archaeology?

MUSIC, MUSICIANS, AND DANCING IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

One way to reassess all these interpretations of Cypriot musicians and musical practice is to compare them with the ways in which the same phenomena are viewed in other, contemporary, often literate societies of the neighboring ancient Near East. Cuneiform documentary evidence related to music and musical practices within contemporary societies in Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and the Levant is most instructive here. I am not suggesting that Late Bronze and early Iron Age Cypriot society (and the music performed there) can be compared directly to Babylonian, Hittite, or Hittite society and musical practices. I would argue, however, that what we do know about these contemporaneous cultures calls into question most assertions that have been made about the ritual or religious nature of Cypriot music, musicians, and musical practices.

As Anne Kilmer (1995–97: 463) wrote in her masterful summary in *RIA*, music was one of the “powers” (ME) of Mesopotamian arts and culture. Although the god Ea/Enki served as its patron deity (and also personified the fourth musical string or note), information about music, musicians,

and musical practice can be found in virtually every category of cuneiform text: lexical texts, scholarly tablets on music theory, poetic texts and hymns, food rations for musicians, and descriptions of religious as well as political ceremonies. Such texts demonstrate that musicians in the ancient Near East played a wide variety of stringed, wind, and percussion instruments accompanied by cymbals, rattles, clappers, and bells (Kilmer 1997: 463–67). Performers included anyone who played an instrument (pipe, stringed, drum), and there are several terms for professional “musicians” (*NAR/nâru*; *nârûtu* ‘female musician’), including lamentation singers, solo singers, group singers, professional mourners, and specialists in non-liturgical songs. In Proto-LÚ lists (Sumerian LÚ means ‘people, man’) of the early 2nd millennium B.C.E., entertainers, musicians, and musical instruments were recorded alongside more technical music vocabulary. The corresponding later lists contain more than 90 terms for musicians amongst various other types of entertainers. Some composers or performing musicians are known by name, the best known being Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon, king of Akkad in the mid-3rd millennium B.C.E., and Ur-Nanshe of Mari, from the early 2nd millennium B.C.E. (Kilmer 1997: 469, 472).

When we envisage the vast array of types of music, musicians, and musical performances listed or discussed in cuneiform texts, we arrive at the very heart of my concerns over the presumed function of music on prehistoric and protohistoric Cyprus. In the ancient Near East, simple songs and music were performed in a wide variety of locations: in the home, in workshops, and in agricultural fields one could hear lullabies, work songs, and herders’ lays accompanied by pipes (Kilmer 1997: 467). More complicated musical performances were, indeed, held in and around the temples, but the palaces also served as a venue for feasting and musical entertainment involving pipes, a harp or lyre, percussion, and dancers. Literary catalogues and song repertoires list work songs, battle songs, funerary songs, and love songs; there were hymns of praise, magical incantations, laments, prayers, and devotional compositions performed by orchestras; the Nanshe Hymn even lists precisely where individual instruments should be positioned in the orchestra (Heimpel 1981: 84). There are also depictions of portable platforms where performances were carried out and of folding seats reserved for harpists and lyrists. The Middle Assyrian Song catalogue (KAR 158) lists some 360 song titles in Sumerian and Akkadian and sorts them into 31 different types of songs.

Song, music, and dance also accompanied the performance of magical rites, royal ceremonies, wedding parties, and “circus”-like acts by people and animals. They were heard and seen in taverns and on “sexually explicit” scenes involving the lute, drums, and dance. Students practiced at school the musical compositions they learned to read and play. Blind children were trained in the musical arts and in special singing styles. More elaborate, professional musical performances seem to have been conducted in special halls, whether religious, political, or cultural in nature. For example, lyric poetry epics and myths were sung by various different singers and accompanied by instrumentalists. Music was used when oaths were taken and on potentially ominous occasions such as eclipses, the disappearance of the moon, at childbirth or on the deathbed, and during mortuary ceremonies. Musicians are found among palace personnel who received rations, and some royal courts may have promoted musicians through music schools (Rashid 1984: 16). Royal correspondence from the site of Mari on the Euphrates indicates that popular singers and instrumentalists accompanied the army on its field operations and that some foreign captives – women, in particular – were trained to become vocalists. On the lighter side, we learn in one Sumerian letter that a performing monkey complained about being locked up and underfed in the chief musician’s house (Powell 1978).



ANCIENT MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AND PRACTICE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Why do most scholars who have studied musical representations and musical practices on prehistoric or protohistoric Cyprus maintain that there is a virtually exclusive connection between musical performance and religious ceremonies, fertility rituals, and cult? What leads otherwise careful scholars who have studied their materials thoroughly to proclaim, for example, that “hand drums were played primarily by women in Eastern Mediterranean rituals associated with women, fertility, birth, and rebirth” (Averett 2002–4: 15)? Perhaps so, but if we turn to consider ethnographic and archaeological evidence from other parts of the world, it is evident that drumming can also be associated with rites of transition, funerary processions, incantations to ward off diseases or pestilence, or simply singing and dancing (Needham 1967; Moore 2006; Houston 2006).

Music enables us to experience our bodies, heighten our emotions and the sense of the moment, renew our energies, and incite us to action; it can make our feelings richer than simply using words to express them (Younger 1998: 51–52). Contemporary research in biomusicology suggests that rhythmic patterns – along with repetition and synchronism – facilitate human bonding and interaction and lead to cognitive and emotional responses that condition group behavior (Kolotourou 2005: 184, citing Wallin, Merker, and Brown 2000). Rhythm, in fact, is one of the most primordial expressions of human life, felt from the very beginning in the beating of the mother’s heart (Dissanayake 2000) and later in life through bodily experience (McClary 1991). In both the humanities and social sciences, the study of “performance” – which embraces several different levels of music, dance, and “spectacle” more generally – forms an important theme, while archaeologists increasingly realize the potential of this approach (for example, Morris 1995; Pearson and Shanks 2001; German 2005; Inomata and Cohen 2006). Musicians and musical performances form an integral part of many different types of social, cultural, political, and ritual or religious events (or “spectacles”). In Mayan society, for example, musicians and musical practices, as well as dancing and other public performances, are depicted not only on stelae and other stone monuments in the ritualized contexts of ceremonial plazas and pyramids, but also in elite residences, which contained musical instruments such as drums, clay flutes, whistles, and conch horns (Inomata 2006: 197–209).

In classical Greece, music had not only “ethnic” but also ethical value; both Plato and Aristotle discussed its impact on contemporary society (West 1992: 356–72). In his detailed survey of Bronze Age Aegean music and musical instruments, in part contemporary with the situation on Cyprus, Younger (1998: 46–47) noted that representations of musicians, instruments, and dance in several different media and in diverse contexts indicate not just religious ceremonies but also funerary, economic, and administrative practices. Musical instruments represented or, in some cases, actually preserved in the Bronze Age Aegean include harps, lyres, *kitharas*, *auloi* (a reed instrument, not unlike a clarinet or oboe), pipes and triton shell trumpets, rattles (*sistra*), and cymbals. Some professional musicians are named by title in a Linear B tablet from Thebes, and Minoans seals likely depicted musical instruments to signal the occupation of the seal bearer. Among the 72 Bronze Age Aegean musical instruments or depictions of music and musicians catalogued by Younger (1998: 61–80), two of the best-known objects come from Crete. They are (1) the Harvester Vase, which shows three men singing and a *sistrum*-shaker in front of them (Warren 1969: 88), and (2) the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, which shows a man playing a *phorminx* (a type of lyre) in what is presumably a funerary scene with two women carrying large vases (“buckets”) and three men carrying representations of calves and of a boat (Long 1974; Younger 1998: 66–68, pls. 10–11).



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To summarize: the settings for music and musicians in the Bronze Age Aegean, as well as in Homer, include not only “religious” and funerary events but also military processions, feasting activities, harvesting, weddings, epic performances, athletic contests, and all sorts of private occasions (Younger 1998: 46–48).

In a strictly material setting such as that of prehistoric or protohistoric Cyprus, without documentary evidence to guide us, it can be very difficult to disentangle just what kind of people or events were involved in ancient musical performances. Context is all important, but a large percentage of the Cypriot objects discussed in this study lack specific provenience, and those that have a provenience often stem from mortuary settings, rarely from buildings that have been identified – seldom with sound reason – as “sanctuaries” (see Knapp 2008: 206–11 for further discussion). With respect to style, the fact that musicians and musical instruments are portrayed on so many different media (pottery, bronzes, seals, terracottas) makes it very difficult to assert some level of coherence that might reflect specific function(s). In any case, from other artistic representations and literary sources, as well as personal experience, there is little doubt that the rhythms of music provide atmosphere for everything from making love to making war, worshiping gods to weaving carpets, hunting animals to harvesting grains, reciting poetry to pledging allegiance, celebrating births and deaths, and much more.

Thanks in no small part to the painstaking efforts of Anne Kilmer, who has portrayed so well the contemporaneous practices of music and musicians in the ancient Near East, there seems to be little basis for interpreting musical practices on Bronze–Iron Age Cyprus strictly in ritual or religious terms. This brief review of hundreds of cuneiform records, and of music and musicians in other cultural contexts, makes it apparent that we should not be identifying all female figurines as representations of Astarte, Ishtar, Hathor/Isis, Aphrodite, or Artemis, and that we should not be associating every singer, dancer and musician with worshipers or priests and priestesses of such divinities.

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