

**INSTRUMENTS OF ANCIENT MESOPOTAMIAN
AND ANATOLIAN CULTURE¹**Julide Begüm YALÇIN DITTGEN²**Article Info**

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Keywords:*Neolithic Age, Fertile Crescent,**Mesopotamia, Anatolia,**Sumerian, Akkad,**Babylon, Assyrian,**Hittite, Asia Minor,**Music, Instrument,**Cuneiform, Ritual.***ABSTRACT**

In this study, the evolution of instruments in Ancient Mesopotamian and Anatolian cultures was examined starting from the Sumerians up to the Hittite civilization. The instruments as high-ranking cultural assets are not only simple instruments in which sound, loudness, timbre, sound intensity are generated. They are the indispensable elements of rituals, conversation, communication, and more importantly art in Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The importance of instruments as high-ranking cultural assets in the Sumerian period (BC) is proven by the numerous classifications made. Cuneiform script originating from Mesopotamia has been an important type of script spreading out from Asia Minor, used in the writing of various languages from different groups and the most important source in revealing the information about the music and instrument culture of the period was undoubtedly the texts written in cuneiform, as well as the instrument finds and pictorial descriptions. Cuneiform texts give us instrument names rather than instrument types. The lexical (glossary) lists, which are available in two languages, Sumerian-Akkadian, which sometimes include descriptions of instruments, give us the Sumerian and Akkadian names of the instruments. In some cases, besides the instrument names, there are certain clues with occasional addendums regarding the material from which the instrument is made. The most important of the Mesopotamian civilizations, which started to form in the early period in the 12.000 B.C., are respectively; Sumerian, Akkad, Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittite civilizations. The cultural experiences of each of these civilizations naturally transferred influences from their cultures to the next society.

**ANTİK ÇAĞLARDA MEZOPOTAMYA VE
ANADOLU KÜLTÜRÜNÜN ÇALGILARI****Makale Bilgisi**

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Anahtar Kelimeler:*Neolitik Çağ, Bereketli Hilal,**Mezopotamya, Anadolu,**Sümer, Akkad,**Babil, Asur,**Hitit, Ön Asya,**Müzik, Çalgı,**Çivi Yazısı, Ritüel.***ÖZ**

Bu çalışmada Antik Mezopotamya ve Anadolu kültürlerinde çalgıların gelişimi Sümerlerden başlayıp Hitit uygarlığına kadar incelenmiştir. Kültürel varlıkların üst seviyesinde olan çalgılar yalnızca sesin, ses yüksekliğinin, ses tınısı ve şiddetinin elde edildiği basit çalgılar değildir. Mezopotamya ve Anadolu'da yapılan ritüellerin, sohbetin, iletişimin ve daha da önemlisi sanatın vazgeçilmez unsurlarıdır. M.Ö. Sümerler dönemi, üst seviyedeki kültür varlıkları olarak çalgıların önemini farklı sınıflandırmalar yaparak kanıtlamaktadır. Ön Asya üzerinden yayılarak, değişik guruplara ait dillerin yazımında da kullanılan bir yazı türü olan çivi yazısı Mezopotamya'da doğmuş ve dönemin müzik ve çalgı kültürüne ilişkin bilgilerin ortaya çıkarılmasında çalgı buluntuları ve resimli tasvirlerin yanı sıra en önemli kaynak kuşkusuz bu çivi yazısından oluşturulan metinler olmuştur. Çivi yazısı metinleri bizlere, çalgı türlerinden çok çalgı isimleri aktarmaktadır. Çalgılarla ilgili tasvirleri de içeren Sümerce-Akkadca olmak üzere, iki dilde var olan leksikal (sözlük) listeler bizlere çalgıların Sümerce ve Akkadca karşılıklarını da vermektedir. Metinlerde bazı durumlarda ise çalgı isimlerinin yanı sıra çalgının hangi malzemeden yapıldığı konusunda ilavelerin yer aldığı görülmektedir. Aynı zamanda Sümerlerden sonra Akkadlar, Babil, Asur ve Hitit Devletleri kendilerinden önce gelen toplulukların müzik ve çalgı bilgilerini geliştirerek Anadolu coğrafyasında kendilerinden sonra gelen halklara önemli eserler bırakmışlardır. Milattan önce 12.000'lerde erken dönemde oluşmaya başlamış Mezopotamya uygarlıklarından önemlileri sırası ile; Sümerler, Akkadlar, Babil, Asur ve Hititler'dir. Bu uygarlıkların toplumlarındaki kültürel yaşantıların her biri doğal olarak bir sonraki toplumlara kültürel yaşamlarından etkiler taşımıştır.

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INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the climatic conditions which contributed to the emergence of Neolithic Period and the instrument culture developed in the social cultural lives of the civilizations that settled in this era. Instruments were identified from the remains of instruments from the Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittite Mesopotamian and Anatolian Civilizations and from the descriptions in the cuneiform writings. It has been concluded that these are the ancestors of the instruments we use today.

In this study, literature review was used as a data collection method.

The Neolithic Age, also known as the "First Transition to Producing Phase" started around 10,000 BC. In this era, when humans transitioned from intense hunting-gathering to producing, from nomadism to settled life, a great "revolution" was accomplished by solving food problems. Neolithic Age people cultivated some plants and domesticated many animals; Hunting was replaced by animal husbandry, gathering was replaced by agriculture or farming. In this period, human beings managed to turn their relationship with nature in their favor for the first time.

The change in the climate with the end of the last ice age allowed the proliferation of plant and animal species living in a milder environment, and a natural environment similar to today's was formed. The wild ancestors of plants such as barley and wheat, and animals such as sheep, goats and pigs, entered the flora and fauna of this temperate environment. As a result of this positive change, the NEOLITHIC REVOLUTION, which is accepted as the first great revolution in human history, was experienced. The Neolithic revolution is the fact that human societies started producing instead of hunting and gathering of which they made a living for thousands of years, that is, they learned agriculture and animal husbandry. Of course, the Neolithic revolution was not experienced by different groups of people living in various parts of the world at the same time. According to the archaeological data obtained, this revolution took place for the first time in the Middle East and over a long period between 9000-7000 BC.

Since the southern parts of Anatolia had suitable conditions and were natural habitats of the aforementioned plant and animal species it is thought that the Neolithic Age started here for the first time in this period, and this idea is constantly supported by archaeological data. Archaeologists call it the "*Fertile Crescent*".



Figure 1 – Fertile Crescent (Kısakürek & Esmen Kısakürek, 2016)

Food production took place in the Fertile Crescent, which also includes Anatolia, for the first time in the world. The Fertile Crescent is the starting point of the first cities, writing, states, and a very long chain we call civilization.

The Fertile Crescent is a name given to upper and lower Mesopotamia, that is, what is now Iraq, southeast Anatolia, the Taurus Mountains, northern and western Syria, and the lands that include Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. This name was given to the region because the mountains bordering the region are in the shape of a crescent. This definition given above, in our opinion, should also include our Central Anatolia Region. In other words, while the Taurus Mountains of Anatolia, the southeast region and a part of eastern Anatolia are already within the Fertile Crescent, Central Anatolia should also be included in this. Çatalhöyük excavations mandated this assumption (Kısakürek & Esmen Kısakürek, 2016).

The world's first cities were born in Mesopotamia, meaning "*land between rivers*", between the Tigris and Euphrates, in the land roughly equivalent to present-day Iraq. The inhabitants of these cities were farmers who lived within the city walls and went outside each morning to work in the fields. The managers, the artisans, who did not work in the fields, were the first people to lead a purely urban life. Wheeled vehicles were roaming the city streets; people were buying and selling goods in the market place. Religious ceremonies were also held at regular intervals.

From 8000 BC onwards, contributions to the common storage facility were recorded using small clay chips found throughout the Fertile Crescent. Such contributions were justified as religious offerings by the ruler-priests who oversaw the communal activities and the maintenance of the people's housing and irrigation systems. This is how the seeds of accounting, writing and bureaucracy were sown.

In 2000 BC almost the entire population of Southern Mesopotamia lived in a few dozen city-states; Ur, Uruk, Lagash, Eridu and Nippur are some of them.

The settlements of this period had a storage facility where valuables were kept, including sacred objects and surplus food. These storage facilities were definitely the common property of the village, because they were much larger than a single family would need.

Storing excess food was a precaution against a possible food shortage in the future. This was also the religious and ritual activity of wishing good harvests to the gods. As the two activities were intertwined, the storage facilities came to be seen as offerings to the gods and became temples, and after a while they were called the Ziggurat.



Figure 2 – Ziggurat (<https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziggurat>)

During the excavations in Anatolia, among Neolithic Age relics, duduks made of various animal bones called Raspa, and pottery darbukas were found.



Figure 3 – Flute found in Aslantepe, Malatya. (Sonmez, 2008, p. 25)



Figure 4 – Terracotta drum found in Korucutepe, Elazığ. (Sonmez, 2008, p. 25)

Instruments in Sumerian Civilization

Recorded history began in the Sumerian Civilization. This is the region where writing first began to appear in Southern Mesopotamia around 3400 BC. They brought a number of technological and cultural innovations to the world, such as the first wheeled carts, the potter's wheel, the cuneiform script, and the first law (legal) texts. They also laid the foundations of mathematics and geometry by finding the four operations and calculating the area of the circle (Standage, 2016).

Music was extremely important to the Sumerians. In the temples (Ziggurat) music was played constantly to please and calm the gods. The songs were usually written by the poet-priests of the temple and composed by their musicians. In the songs, the passages to be sung by the choir and the instruments to accompany them are specified (Çiğ, 2014).

In the archaeological excavations of the royal tombs in ancient Asia Minor, especially in Sumerian Ur, it is very important that the king be buried with all his entourage and the musicians with their instruments. Among the objects found in the tombs of the king and his entourage in these temples, the Bull-headed Lyre draws attention.

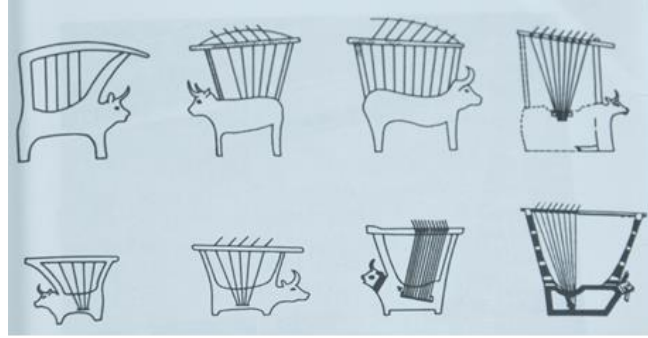


Figure 5 – Sumerian Lyres, (Dinçol, 2003, p. 21)



Figure 6 – Bull-headed Lyre (<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/29445001>)

Information about the musical instruments of ancient Asia Minor is based on written sources and descriptions on archaeological documents. As a result of examining these by comparing them with each other, many instrument types have been identified.

However, documents written in Ancient Asia Minor do not provide (complete) information that would facilitate identification. They are also not very illuminating on the musical characteristics of the instruments. Determinative words give important clues in determining these. For example, GIŠ “tree, wood” determinative refers specifically to the stringed instruments group. ZABAR “bronze” and URUDU “copper” are determinatives for percussion instruments. Some of them carry the KUŠ “leather” determinative. While the suitability of this method is open to interpretation, we use it to identify the instruments used during that era. This naturally leads to some mistakes. For example, a wind instrument that was often played in pairs, like its predecessors in the Ancient East, which passed from Anatolia to Ancient Greece (Greeks consider *aulos* of Phrygian origin), although many people call it a *double flute*, the Greek *aulos* (plural *auloi*) is an instrument musically similar to the contemporary oboe. Furthermore, very little remains of the *lyre* and *harp* types used in ancient times. On the other hand, no member of the popular string instrument group of modern times was used in that period (Dinçol, 2003).

The moist top soil of Mesopotamia first allowed the growth of trees and bamboos used in the making of musical instruments, and then the instruments of this land disappeared over time without leaving a trace, just like the animal skins used in drum making and stringed instruments made from guts. Only instruments such as *duduks* and *flutes* made of earth, which make a sound through the vibration of the air blown into it, and *cymbals*, *finger cymbals*, and *wind instruments* made of metal and instruments made of other durable materials remained (Rashid, 2004).

Inclusion of an instrument name in a particular instrument type group has been possible in some cases until now. The word *balag* (Akkadian *balaggu*), which is frequently used at least in late periods, was used to describe

the harp instrument in ancient Sumerian times. In this context, some lexical (glossary) texts listing different types of instruments and their parts are meaningful.

Starting from balag instruments and other types of harps, first large bull-shaped lyres, then medium and small portable lyres, in addition to these, small three-string cordophones and wooden percussion instruments, and finally long-necked instruments are listed (Duymuş Florioti, 2014).



Figure 7 – Lute in Late Sumer and Babylonians, (Say, 2022, p. 35)

Mesopotamian cuneiform texts have conveyed to us many musical terms such as pitch, plectrum, tuning of strings, tuning board (rod), pulling, stretching, loosening, ear, sound box (instrument body), nuance in the vocalization of music (Rashid, 2004).

Instruments in Akkadian Civilization

The Akkadians, who got stronger with the weakening of the Sumerians, settled in the lands of Sumer and applied the same practices (of Sumerians) in music to themselves. The foremost fact to mention here is that they left Lute or Bağlama as a legacy to Anatolia. Again, the harp maintains its importance in religious rituals. (Önal, 1972) Numerous songs and hymns have been documented in Sumerian and Akkadian literature. The songs were divided into two groups, the joyful praise songs (IR) or laments (RA).

1. IR -These songs were usually joyful and flattering. Songs dedicated to gods, kings or powerful people are also included in this category.

2. RA- These songs were more serious and sad. They deal with topics such as death, separation, or life's difficulties. These songs are also called laments and mourning hymns.

Instruments in Babylonian Civilization

The city of Babylon was founded in 1900 BC, where the Tigris and Euphrates come closest to each other. Due to its location, it was at the intersection of trade routes. The first Babylonian kingdom 1894-1595 BC is the most glorious page in the history of Mesopotamia. During this period, Babylon experienced glorious days both economically and politically. It also assimilated all the Mesopotamian culture before it and established an important civilization that would guide the following ones.

Babylonian musicians began writing about music in the 1800s BC "*Information about instrument tuning, playing techniques, note intervals and musical genres*" were the main topics.

Babylonian musicians writing about music theories; it allows us to have a little idea about the music of that time. According to what can be deduced from these writings, the Babylonians and probably the earlier Sumerians used the 7-note diatonic scale. Theoretically, they established 7 different diatonic scales.

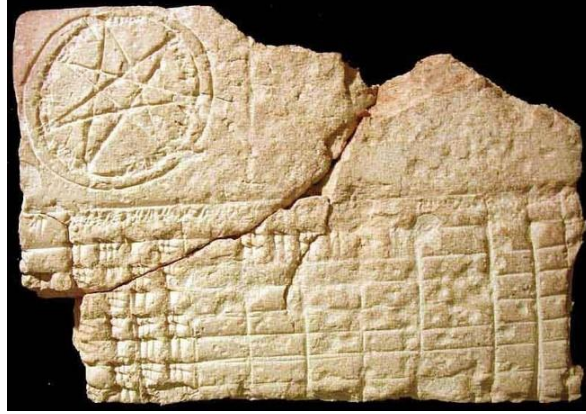


Figure 8 -Tablet CBS 1766 - 7-note diatonic scale notation (<https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=54528>)

Instruments in Assyrian Civilization

While the Assyrians were originally a Semitic community living in and around the Assyrian (*Aššur*) Şarkat Castle city in Northern Iraq, on the banks of the Tigris, they were the Ancient Age people who developed after 2000 BC by benefiting from the global trade between the East and the West and expanded their lands and transformed their country into an empire. Their largest trade colony in Anatolia was located in Kültepe (Kayseri). Its capital was Nineveh.

The lyre was first documented during the period of the Assyrian Trade Colonies in Anatolia. Different form features are seen in the samples belonging to the Assyrian Trade Colonies Age. At this age, *cymbals* had a handle and their disc surfaces were flat. While their sizes were different, diversity was observed in metal types and ornaments. The musicians of the period, who produced different instruments using small cymbals in these ages, shaped the metal like a master sculptor, interpreted animal figures such as birds, deer, goats and lions in their own way and ornamented the circumference of the instrument, creating a work of art with its appearance beyond being an object that only made an impact with its sound (Duymuş Florioti, 2014).

Another instrument seen for the first time among the Assyrians is the *Guïro*. The *Guïro* is a rhythm instrument made by arranging wooden or metal rods parallel to a four-cornered frame. As seen in the figure given below, it was played by holding the top with the left hand and stroking it with the right hand. It is understood from the various *Lyre* depictions on the reliefs that the *Lyre* was frequently used in addition to the harp in the Neo-Assyrian period. In addition to the *Lyre*, another instrument first seen among the Assyrians was the Santur, which can be described as the Horizontal Harp and it was similar to the instrument of the *Kanun* today (Tunçer, 2005).



Figure 9 – Guïro (Tunçer, 2005, p. 63)

Instruments in the Hittite Civilization

The Hittites, who appeared on the pages of Anatolian history of in the last period of the Colonial Age, according to the written texts, Pithana's son Anetta took the first step in the unification of the Hittites living as city principalities in Anatolia and established the first Anatolian state governed centrally. The Hittites, who came to a very advanced level in art, created the first relief vase art in their own era. İnandık vase, on which embossed motifs are placed as friezes, is one of the best examples of this type.



Figure 10 – İnandıktepe vase (Sipahi, 2014)

On the İnandıktepe Vase, cult scenes are depicted in four rows of friezes.

Instrument depictions including lyre, lute and cymbals appear on the first and fourth frieze rows of the İnandıktepe vase. (Sönmez, 2008)



Figure 11 – First frieze from the top of İnandıktepe vase (Sönmez, 2008, p. 39)



Figure 12 – Fourth frieze from the top of İnandıktepe vase (Sönmez, 2008, p. 41)

On the second and third frieze of the İnandık Vase, a bull is sacrificed, accompanied by a lyre-playing musician in this sacrifice and adoration scene.



Figure 13 – Second frieze from the top of İnandıktepe vase (Sönmez, 2008, p. 39)



Figure 14 – Third frieze from the top of İnandıktepe vase (Sönmez, 2008, p. 40)

Hittites, who were influential in Anatolia both politically and culturally, furthermore left very important works in the field of music. In particular, the use of metal by processing dates back to the Neolithic Age. The oldest *cymbals* in the world started to be produced in Anatolia about 4200 years ago. In addition to this instrument, *Darbuka*, *Big Lyre*, *Small Lyre*, *Hittite Bağlama*, *Hittite Tar* are also important instruments left by the Hittites to the Anatolian music world (Sayın, 2017).

Classification of Ancient Mesopotamian and Anatolian Instruments

Musical instruments of the Ancient East can be examined in four main groups with regard to contemporary classification:

1-Cordophone (string instruments) [Harp, Lyre, Lute]

It is a general definition used for instruments in which sound is obtained through vibrating strings.

2- Membranophone (instruments with leather / membrane) [Drum, Tambourine, Darbuka]

A group of instruments in which sound is produced by vibrating a membrane (animal skin, in modern times also an artificial material) stretched over a sound box in the form of a vessel, pipe, or frame.

3- Aerophone (wind instruments) [Aulos, Duduk, Kaval]

A group of instruments in which sound is produced by the vibration of the air inside the instrument.

4- Idiophone (self-sounding) [Sistrum, Rattle, Finger cymbals, Cymbal, Sun Disk, Idiophone]

Instruments in which sound is produced by the vibration of the instrument itself. They are made of hard materials such as wood, terracotta, stone, metal or glass that seem to be able to provide sound, as they do not have any strings, leather, or air columns (Dinçol, 2003).

CONCLUSION

The peoples living on the ancient lands of Mesopotamia and Anatolia made important contributions to music and music culture. Especially in the development of instrument science (organology) and harmony, cuneiform writings and tablets have survived to the present day and have enabled music to reach universal values. It is expressed by all national and foreign archaeologists in their archaeological studies that many objects found in Anatolia 4000 years ago are closely related to music, and that the instruments and musical works found in the excavations in Anatolia reached Europe much later.

Based on the evidence of written texts and surviving relics reported in the studies on Sumerian, Akkad, Babylonian, Assyrian and Hittite civilizations, it is possible to say that each civilization carried cultural transfers to the next.

In the light of the information obtained from the resources, the instruments of the ancient Mesopotamian and Anatolian civilizations can be classified in four groups as Kordophone (string instruments), Membranophone (leather/membrane instruments), Aerophone (wind instruments) and Idiophone (self-sounding).

The instruments in this classification are the predecessors of today's instruments. In this study, organological origins of Mesopotamian and Anatolian culture from Sumerians to Hittites were researched and it was concluded that Mesopotamian and Anatolian civilizations of this era encompass the foundations of instruments of our age.

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