

# The Study of Musical Performance in Antiquity



# The Study of Musical Performance in Antiquity:

*Archaeology and Written  
Sources*

Edited by

Agnès Garcia-Ventura,  
Claudia Tavolieri  
and Lorenzo Verderame

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## PREFACE

In recent years, the study of music in ancient civilizations has blossomed. In a short time, a formerly niche interest of individual scholars has turned into a widespread and organised research field within the humanities. This happened both thanks to excellent scholarly publications and as a result of explicit forms of collaboration represented by study-groups and scholarly networks operating on a worldwide basis.

I am therefore very pleased and honoured to present this beautiful book titled *The Study of Musical Performance in Antiquity: Archaeology and Written Sources*, that fits into a variegated and stimulating framework of reflections on the Mediterranean and Near Eastern musical antiquities, making a significant contribution to an ever-increasing research field.

As is usual in any cross-disciplinary field of research, the approach of individual contributions of this book is extremely varied, including not only investigations on material finds, but also inquiries on textual and visual evidence of the musical past of various cultures. The resulting overview, which runs from ancient Mesopotamia to late Christian antiquity, is nevertheless particularly consistent and coherent, in line with the most recent tendencies that gives a central role to the Mediterranean basin as a privileged meeting place between East and West.

Indeed, the emergence of innovative disciplines like music archaeology—which, using methods of both musicology and archaeology, broadened the scope of the inquiry well beyond the limits of the literary cultures—have gradually removed the barriers separating the most traditional research areas within academia, like Classical Studies, Egyptology and Ancient Near East Studies, and so on. The creation of international study-groups comprising experts of different ancient civilizations and research methods, who regularly met and discussed their ideas through close cooperation, played an essential part in this process. We only need remember the *ICTM Study Group on Music Archaeology* (established in the early 1980s within the “International Council of Traditional Music”) and the *ISGMA International Study Group on Music Archaeology* (founded by Ellen Hickmann and Ricardo Eichmann in the late 1990s, now hosted at the Orient Department of the German Archaeological Institute and the Department for Ethnomusicology at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin) that, since their establishment, have regularly organized international

symposia and published their results in important conference volumes. Several members of these study-groups are now involved in the *EMAP European Music Archaeology Project*, supported by the Culture Programme 2007-2013 of the EU, that aims to highlight the ancient European cultural common roots from a musical perspective, promoting research and experimental archaeology and disseminating its results with a touring exhibition and performance program in various countries of Europe.

Within Classical Studies, where a striking revival of interest in music-related issues had already started some decades ago, an important turning point was the establishment of *MOISA International Society for the Study of Greek and Roman Music and its Cultural Heritage* which, since 2006, has been promoting the preservation, interpretation, and valorization of music in classical antiquity, organizing annual conferences, seminars and summer schools. This experience led also to the publication of the first specialist periodical in the fields of ancient Greek and Roman music, *Greek and Roman Musical Studies*, which includes also contributions on music elsewhere in the Mediterranean region.

It is against this backdrop that this book appears as the happy outcome of the encounter of talented researchers on a common topic. My wish is that it is the first of a long series!

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Università degli Studi di Pavia

INTRODUCTION:  
THE STUDY OF MUSICAL PERFORMANCE  
IN ANTIQUITY

AGNÈS GARCIA-VENTURA<sup>1</sup>  
CLAUDIA TAVOLIERI<sup>2</sup>  
LORENZO VERDERAME<sup>3</sup>

What began as a meeting of friends – scholars of the ancient civilizations of the classical world, the Near East, and the Christian East – soon blossomed into an academic project that would set out to explore the function of the world of music and sound and constituted a particularly suggestive cultural panorama. It is no coincidence that practically all the authors who took part in this project, launched at the International Workshop “The Study of Musical Performance in Antiquity: Archeology and Written Sources” at La Sapienza, University of Rome, on 6 November 2015, and whose lectures are now presented together in this volume along with some other invited papers, are musicians in their own right or have a direct acquaintance with the world of music. So the contributors to this volume are ideally qualified to appreciate the insights contained in the set of articles we are now publishing.

This volume is not just a collection of papers on music in a generic sense; it is not another compendium on a “high impact” theme due to its enduring importance inside the history of civilizations. Rather, it is the result of a series of examinations of literary data and materials from different areas of the Classical World and the Near East in ancient times and in late Antiquity, examined both synchronically and diachronically, in some cases in dialogue with one another, and at all times in a clear

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relationship with the idea of transmission, which is manifested in the elements of continuity and discontinuity that we find here.

## **A Glimpse into Musical Performance in Antiquity**

As is well known, the cultural value of music is as a privileged reading of the ancient world. Permeating the public and private spheres, music was linked both to everyday life and to official cults and religious practices. These have come down to us in literary sources in the form of cuneiform tablets, papyri and epigraphic documentation, but above all in the rich material and figurative repertoire which has been recovered, and even, in some cases, in the form of fragments of musical instruments.

The complexity of the “phenomenon” of music is also evident in the terminology used by the sources, which often refer to it through elements of the world of sound: instrumental music, solo or choral singing, dance and metric poetry which all played an indispensable role in the education of the young. Indeed, in the Greece of the fifth and fourth centuries BC the term *mousikòs anér* referred, by definition, to the cultivated man.

And if music was an essential element of *paideia*, it is equally true that, because of its ability to stir the emotions, it was often subjected to rigid control by educators in order to ensure that it was not put to inappropriate uses.

The social fresco that emerges from all these contributions invites us to reflect on the importance of the world of music and sound as a privileged but at the same time spontaneous activity, present in both royal and household contexts, imbued with religious feeling and practice and characterized by an unflinching atavistic relationship with the supernatural.

All the civilizations that have populated the earth have borne witness to the legendary thread that links music to its distant and mysterious origins and manifests itself in its function of creating joy and exaltation, offering consolation, and, in general, making life worth living.

The studies collected in this volume explore ancient Mesopotamian civilizations, Greek and Roman cultures, Hebrew and Syriac communities, and the cultural history of ancient local populations such as Etruria and Iberia. Within this varied picture, some of the specific themes explored through the comparison of material data and literary sources emerge with particular relevance in ancient Near Eastern civilizations, characterized by a multitude of priests and astrologers who tirelessly explored the mysteries of the universe in settings where music, an essential component of ceremonial court life, was cultivated with great diligence and skill: sound,

regarded as the life-breath of every phenomenon, had the power to evoke the superhuman forces of nature.

Musicians sang and played during temple services, accompanied by a surprising variety of musical instruments: wind, percussion and string. Though we do not have a very large number of testimonies, we have enough evidence to demonstrate the presence and vitality of a properly developed and organized music system which, in the view of some scholars, may even suggest the use of some form of harmony.

The musical techniques and performances in ancient Mesopotamia must have influenced the practices of the civilizations that came into contact with them. As with all ancient peoples, even the Egyptians, music belonged to the dawn of life and constituted the voice and the sound of things; it strengthened the deep bond between the human and the divine. In this regard, the ability to modulate sound was strictly confined to a set of privileged people initiated in this art, mostly members of the court or the priesthood.

In the Jewish world, a sufficiently clear picture of musical experience in Israel can be obtained from the many biblical quotations that help us to reconstruct a society in which there was extensive musical production, albeit lacking any written notation. In fact, Israel entrusted its songs and music to the exclusively oral tradition.

To the Greeks, the “art of the Muses”, *mousiké*, which included dance, singing and teaching, had an enormous social importance as an indispensable discipline for the moral and intellectual education of its citizens. It represented an important part of school teaching and its proper learning was considered the expression of a noble and virtuous soul, particularly sensitive to the Platonic aesthetics of “beauty”.

In addition, the Greeks were the first to confer scientific dignity on music by studying sound from the point of view of physics, formulating a suitable terminology for new contents, *music*, *tone*, *rhythm*, *melody*, *harmony*, establishing the notation, and elaborating a theory enriched by philosophical principles.

The Romans acquired the taste for music, and consequently the technique, only after their expansion into the Mediterranean and their contact with the various peoples of the conquered territories. Initially conducted in convivial settings, musical art subsequently became part of theatrical or secular performances during which the artists performed with the accompaniment of flute and lire, and which soon became an essential component of social life.

For their part, the Christians, spread out over large tracts of the ancient world, used psalmodic hymns and hymns in which a variety of traditions

came together to create the ideal of a universal song, adapted to a universal belief, which represented the “voice” of all humanity. *Salmodie*, hymns and *ubilationes*, in addition to a great artistic movement which in the following centuries would give birth to the Gregorian chant and other creations, were also valid instruments for disseminating and consolidating the various doctrinal positions taken up by the church.

### On this Volume

The present volume includes 11 papers which, as we said above, cover a wide range of chronologies (considering sources scattered over 3000 years) and geographies, from Syria to Iberia, passing by Greece and Rome. Needless to say, this diversity does not cover all the possible sources and aspects of musical performance in Antiquity, but aims to provide the reader with some valuable insights into its richness. To help the reader to navigate the vast range of sources and frameworks in this volume, the contributions are presented in chronological order according to the sources discussed. In addition, when possible, they are also ordered geographically; that is, according to the origins of the sources, moving from ‘East’ to ‘West’, using these labels in the traditional (though problematic, and widely questioned today) sense used in secondary literature. The first five studies deal with Ebla, ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, and ancient Israel respectively. The next five papers deal with Greece, Etruria, Rome and Iberia. Finally, to close the volume we travel back to Syria, to the ‘East’, with a study of the sources from Late Antiquity that highlights the influences and interconnections between Eastern and Western patterns and traditions.

In ‘The First Ancient Near Eastern Written Sources on Musicians’ Activity and Performance: the Ebla Archives. A Look at the Evidence from 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BCE Syria’, Maria Vittoria Tonietti concentrates on the textual evidence from Ebla (Tell Mardikh), in North-western Syria, and offers some insights into the musical life of the area in the mid 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. In doing so, and discussing certain terms and texts, the author shows how musical practice in Ebla reflected the cultural complexity and richness also found in other contexts.

In ‘«The Poor Musician» in Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Images’, Regine Pruzsinszky identifies musicians of different social rank in both texts and images from ancient Mesopotamia. Pruzsinszky takes as her starting point the Sumerian poem, *The Slave and the Scoundrel* (early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC), which was taught in schools and was intended to warn

the students of the risks of a carefree lifestyle that paid excessive attention to useless art. She also considers other Ancient Near Eastern archaeological and textual remains and sheds light on the lives of both high-status and lower ranking musicians, their functional properties in everyday life, and their organization and relation to other professional groups.

In 'Singing and Singers in 2nd Millennium Babylonia', Dahlia Shehata considers texts and images mainly from 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium Babylonia and Syria in her study of the world of musicians and singers at that time. More specifically, Shehata concentrates on letters from Mari and on terracotta plaque reliefs found at various sites in Babylonia and Syria which inform us of the everyday matters of musicians and singers and of other themes ranging from mythology to everyday work.

In, 'Textual, Iconographical, and Archaeological Evidence for the Performance of Ancient Egyptian Music', Heidi Köpp-Junk offers an overview of what we know about music in ancient Egypt, which instruments were used, who the musicians were and how and where the performances took place, and finally some technical aspects. Köpp-Junk also reflects on the possibilities and limits of elucidating ancient Egyptian music on the basis of the lyrics of the songs (especially love songs) and the instruments that are preserved, as well as modern practical experiments with replicas of ancient Egyptian instruments like the ones the author has been carrying out since 2005.

In, 'Potential Musical Instructions in Ancient Israel', Theodore W. Burgh considers data from the Hebrew Bible along with examples from the archaeological record to provide some insights into possible musical practices for musicians. In his paper, Burgh concentrates specifically on two of these practices that may have developed in the musical performance of the Israelites in the Iron Age (1200-586 BCE) – circular breathing, and improvisation – in an attempt to understand how certain musical instruments were connected with the interpretation of musical systems and how rhythm and tempos were conceived.

In the paper, 'Dancing Myths: Musical Performances with Mythological Subjects from Greece to Etruria', Daniele F. Maras concentrates on the analysis of some visual monuments from Etruria dating from the early seventh century BC, and sheds light on the patterns of transmission and reception of Greek myths in Etruscan culture (as well as in other parts of the Mediterranean), adding dance and music to the oral, written and visual sources that are usually considered by scholarly studies. In doing so, Maras shows how dances with narrative contents, often characterized by a mythological subject, were customary in the Greek world, and might well have been exported to other cultures during the period of Hellenization.

In, ‘Performative Aspects of Music in Sacred Contexts of the Western Greeks’, Angela Bellia takes as her starting point the elements which suggest the occurrence of musical and choral performances in the context of the cultic theatre, a frequent feature in the sanctuaries of the Western Greek *poleis*. Despite their importance to the field of ancient Greek music, says Bellia, the musical and choral performances staged in these structures have not been studied in depth. Her paper aims to fill this gap, paying special attention to the relationship between musical and choral activities in theatrical buildings and their link with rituals performed in the sanctuaries and agoras of Western Greece.

‘The Aulos and the Trumpet: Music, Gender and Elites in Iberian Culture (4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE)’, co-authored by Raquel Jiménez Pasalodos and Peter/Pippa Holmes, explores the abundant Iberian iconography in order to analyse the cultural function of music in Iberian societies, as well as some symbolic concepts and cultural behaviours. In doing so, the authors assert that despite the lack of organological remains a study of the music iconography can allow us a privileged view of some aspects of the world of sound of the Iberians.

In, ‘Clues of Roman Soundscapes around the Vesuvius: Some Case Studies’, Mirco Mungari shows how the area of Vesuvius and primarily the two buried cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum provide a precious laboratory for the study of musical archaeology. In this paper, Mungari claims that a careful study of the various kinds of source available at these sites and preserved in the Archaeological Museum of Naples (paintings, urban contexts, buildings) give archaeologists the opportunity to compare and contrast a vast amount of diverse data and thus build up an invaluable overview of the material culture related to music in a living Roman context, as well of the spaces where music was performed and its social function.

In the paper, ‘*Tibia multifora, multiforatis, multiforabilis*... Depictions of a «Many-Holed» Tibia in Written Sources’, Kamila Wysłucha proposes the interpretation of four passages from Latin literary works that mention a “many-holed tibia”. Attempting to decode this phrase, after a careful philological analysis Wysłucha poses the following questions with reference to each passage: What role does the many-holed tibia play in the passage? What sort of instrument might the phrase represent? Is the tibia purely metaphorical or can it be identified with any instruments played in the times contemporary to the text? The author aims to explore the interpretational potential of musical imagery in Latin texts, rather than to use these texts as a basis for reconstructing musical realia.

In the last paper in the volume, ‘Body and Soul: the Dangers of Music and Song in Syriac Christianity’, Claudia Tavolieri concentrates on singing, and more specifically on choral singing inside and outside monastic circles, as portrayed in written texts and iconographic sources from Syriac Christianity (4<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> century CE). With her analysis, Tavolieri shows the inherent contradictions found in the sources. On the one hand it was claimed that through the sweetness of a “heavenly song” men and women could approach God, indirectly affirming the authority of the doctrinal principles that inspired their singing; but on the other, although the practice was indispensable for these Christian communities, it was often perceived as an element of instability because it involved, and at the same time confused, body and soul. Her paper investigates this complex phenomenon in depth.

This brief outline of each of the articles reflects our firm belief that exploring themes as suggestive and important as the ones selected for this multi-faceted volume can guide us towards a fuller understanding of ancient societies. We also feel that this volume will heighten the awareness of the importance of music as a transversal phenomenon. Hopefully, the specific nature of some of its contents will encourage the formulation of working hypotheses that might help to develop some of the arguments that emerge in further scientific areas. What is more, this collection has stimulated debate not only on the history of music, but also on the extraordinary capacity of this art to act as an effective indicator of the social dynamics and gender tensions that underpinned the daily lives of ancient civilizations.



CHAPTER ONE

THE FIRST ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WRITTEN  
SOURCES ON MUSICIANS' ACTIVITY  
AND PERFORMANCE:  
THE EBLA ARCHIVES—  
A GLANCE AT THE 3<sup>RD</sup> MILLENNIUM BCE  
SYRIAN EVIDENCE

MARIA VITTORIA TONIETTI<sup>1</sup>

It is well known that the Ancient Near Eastern documentation is in general extremely fragmentary, not continuously distributed in the different periods and in the many sites of the area. This preliminary assumption must be especially borne in mind in approaching the study of the different aspects related to music in this area, and in particular of its performance. In this field, in fact, both textual and archaeological sources are often very scanty and especially diachronically and diatopically vary consistently in quantity and quality.<sup>2</sup> In particular, if we focus on the early periods of Ancient Near Eastern history, from its beginning until the very last centuries of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE (i.e. until the beginning of the Ur III period), we almost only find some interesting but scattered archaeological and iconographical evidence, and very little textual data on this subject, all only located in the Syro-Mesopotamian area.

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<sup>1</sup> Università degli Studi di Firenze. The following abbreviations are used below: ARET = Archivi Reali di Ebla, Testi; MEE = Materiali Epigrafici di Ebla; VE = the so-called "Vocabulary of Ebla"; FAOS 7 = Gelb / Kienast 1990.

<sup>2</sup> Not to speak of the almost totally lacking evidence of musical notation, in particular in the most ancient periods.

In this poor context, the first significant textual evidence comes from Ebla (Tell Mardikh), in North-western Syria.<sup>3</sup> For the first time in Ancient Near Eastern history, in fact, the 24<sup>th</sup> century BCE Archives of Ebla<sup>4</sup> provide important data concerning the musical life of this and other contemporary Syrian centres, also enabling a comparison with the still very limited other 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE Syrian sources, from Nabada and Mari,<sup>5</sup> and with the later Old Babylonian Mari documents, where, in addition to innovations, interesting elements of cultural continuity with the previous periods are attested.

The Ebla Archives, not only historically represent the very first written documents coming from the Syro-Palestinian region, but with their approximate 17,000 inventory numbers, representing a wide spectrum of text typologies,<sup>6</sup> they also are the first rich group of texts written in a Semitic language in the Syro-Mesopotamian area before the Akkadian Empire period (i.e. before the 23<sup>rd</sup> century BCE). Moreover, what has a direct bearing on the matter at hand is the fact that the Ebla Archives, although covering a rather short span of time (a total of about 40 years, toward the end of the century), are the most ancient documents in the Ancient Near East giving us a certain amount of important and varied data on different aspects concerning musical practice and the categories of persons directly related to it.

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, in fact, despite the number of musicians mentioned in the administrative documentation of Fara, the latter does not provide relevant data on the matter in hand, because of its extreme conciseness.

<sup>4</sup> Early Bronze Age IVA = Mardikh IIB1.

<sup>5</sup> The only other texts from Syria which can be dated to more or less the same period, much more limited in quantity and textual typologies, but nevertheless very important especially for linguistic comparison: forty inscriptions (Gelb and Kienast 1990: 3-25), about fifty administrative texts (Charpin 1987 and 1990) and an incantation (Bonechi and Durand 1992) from Mari/Tell Ḥarīri (see also Charpin 2008: 121-123); more than 200 administrative texts, five school texts, one legal text, a fragment of a Sumerian literary text, and numerous inscribed *bullae*, from Nabada/Tell Beydar (Ismail et al. 1996; Milano et al. 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Administrative, chancery (letters, agreements and treatises, documents of purchase or transfer of lands and other legal texts, reports), ritual, and 'medical' texts; Sumerian and Semitic incantations and literary texts; numerous lexical texts, some originating from Mesopotamia, others locally composed, first of all the bilingual "Vocabulary of Ebla" (= VE or LL), in four principal sources (A, B, C, D) and some extracts, consisting of approximately 1500 Sumerian words, mostly with Eblaite glosses. For more details, see Archi 1986 and 2006. The Ebla texts are published in the official series of the Ebla Mission: ARET; and (without direct collations) in the series MEE.

To better understand the cultural context in which the Ebla musical tradition developed – and which certainly also affected the musical practice itself – some important preliminary points must be established. Almost totally discovered in 1975, the Ebla Archives provided elements to reconstruct a quite different linguistic picture from the one some scholars expected for mid 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE Northern Syria: firstly, the existence of a Semitic language, and clearly a locally spoken language,<sup>7</sup> in a region where other and no better identified languages had instead been supposed to exist in this period;<sup>8</sup> then, the fact that this language, albeit located in the same region where we know only Western Semitic languages were spoken since the beginning of 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE, definitely belongs to East Semitic, just like Akkadian.<sup>9</sup> Apart from its linguistic affiliation, however, and despite the fact that Ebla imported from Southern Mesopotamia many aspects of the Sumero-Akkadian scribal culture along with cuneiform writing, we must point out that the Ebla region, probably like most of Northern Syria, already presents at the epoch of the Archives cultural peculiarities which clearly characterize it as distinct from the mentioned Lower Mesopotamian culture. As Mazzoni (1991: 165) brilliantly synthesized, the Eblaite phenomenon constitutes a rather peculiar example of a complex cultural growth, integrating the strong presence of some cultural superstructures of Mesopotamian origins (writing – combined with elements of the administrative and political language – and symbolic iconographies), with the strong local character of the material infrastructures (ceramics, architecture) and, especially, of other important cultural superstructures

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<sup>7</sup> Unlike what seems to occur for other Syrian centres in the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE – where Western Peripheral Akkadian dialects are generally believed to be attested (but for the possible presence of alloglottographic phenomena in the area, see von Dassow 2004, and Rubio 2006) –, the language to which the Ebla Archives bear witness is not a literate language imported from Central or Lower Mesopotamia along with the scribal practise and tradition, but it certainly reflects a local language. A comparison between the various typologies of documents has indeed shown that the language of the Chancery, Ritual and locally composed Literary Texts, and, with expected and justifiable exceptions, that of the Lexical Lists, substantially belong to the same diasystem as that of the anthroponyms prosopographically identifiable as Eblaite (Fronzaroli 1982: 141; Krebernik 1996: 249; for other elements in the texts supporting the local character of the language, see Tonietti 2017 and in print). Of course, the known peculiar and mostly conservative aspects characterizing the onomasticon make it, even beyond diatopic distinctions, a *corpus* to be analysed with specific criteria.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Gelb 1961. A Semitic presence throughout the area had instead already been hypothesized in Fronzaroli 1960: 123-144.

<sup>9</sup> For an overview on this subject, see Tonietti 2017.

like language, religion and figurative style. These peculiarities – which reflect a local Syrian culture and religion and present a strong continuity in the Syro-Palestinian area through the following centuries<sup>10</sup> – constitute an important element to understand the cultural context of musical practice. As we shall see below, in fact, musical practice in Ebla in some way also reflects this cultural complexity and richness.

## Our Sources

The major bulk of texts come from the Palace G main Archive, L. 2759. This is the only Archive whose texts entirely cover the documented period, although by far the largest amount of them dates back to the epoch of the last king of Ebla, Yitgar-Damu (Yiš'ar-Damu); only a small group of texts goes back, in fact, to the last but one king Yirkab-Damu, and very few, but very important, to the second but last king Yigriš-Halab and his predecessor. The other, much smaller, Ebla Archives all date back to the period of the last king. Whereas in the main Palatial Archive texts belonging to many different genres were kept,<sup>11</sup> the smaller Archives generally only contain administrative – mostly specialized – texts, and, in one case, letters and rare royal decrees. The most important of them, the L. 2712 Archive, deals to a large extent with food deliveries to the Palace personnel for the last three years before the destruction of Ebla.

In trying to reconstruct some aspects of musical life and practice in Ebla, it must be pointed out that, as occurs with many other later centres, the Ebla sources are highly sectorial. No temple or private archives have in fact been found, which is relevant, of course, for our research. The texts we have all come from the Palace and so they only, though not exhaustively, attest the activities in which the Palace was involved. The main consequence of this is that the local cult is only documented for what concerns the different practices performed or administratively managed by the Palace. Apart from a few administrative texts concerning the Ebla 'prime minister' and his family's activities, we lack any kind of archives belonging or related to private individuals, and, in particular, to individuals directly connected to the musical practice – as, e.g., the important late Old Babylonian Archive of the gala-maḥ, 'chief cult singer', Ur-Utu, from Sippar-Amnānum.<sup>12</sup> To this we must add that, in

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<sup>10</sup> Emerging in 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BCE Syrian centres like Mari, Emar and Ugarit, and, in some cases, later in the Bible. See Tonietti 2010b for an overview of some different aspects of this continuity, with previous bibliography.

<sup>11</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>12</sup> See Van Lerberghe and Voet 1991, and Tanret 2002.

contrast to what we have from Old Babylonian Mari, no legal documents or letters sent or received by musicians or concerning musical activities have been found among the so-called chancery texts. No musicians are even mentioned in the few ritual texts, apart from the balag-di ('lamentation singer?'). Moreover, no inscriptions on stelae or statues have been found in Early Dynastic Ebla, therefore nothing where music or musicians could be mentioned, as for instance on the almost contemporary Ur-Nanše statuettes from Mari (FAOS 7, MP 14 and 15) or the Puzurinšušinak stele (FAOS 7, Elam 3:34-37). Furthermore, we do not even possess any iconographic evidence from Ebla related to music.

Almost all the information we have on music from Early Dynastic Ebla, then, comes from the administrative texts.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, contrary to the very concise administrative documents coming from the other Syro-Mesopotamian contemporary or slightly later sites, the Ebla administrative texts represent a rich source of important and differentiated data, thanks to their internal structure. In most of them, in fact, beside the object, the subject and/or the recipient of each delivery, its occasion and other precious details are generally recorded. Thanks to these data, many different aspects of the Ebla, and in some cases of the contemporary Syrian life and history, may be reconstructed – from chronology<sup>14</sup> to cult and religion, from wars and commerce to interdynastic marriages – in addition to the data we also generally acquire from more concise administrative texts.

Interesting onomastic and prosopographical data are also provided by the fact that, in particular in the texts of the Yiṭgar-Damu period, apart from people belonging to the lower ranking personnel, the name of the person receiving or making the delivery is generally recorded, often specified by his patronimic or his master's name and the centre he comes from, when other than Ebla; male musicians are, then, almost always mentioned by name in these texts, with only some exceptions.

For all these reasons, even only on the basis of administrative texts, we can gather a relevant amount of information which helps in shedding some light upon different and important aspects of musical life in this 24<sup>th</sup> century BCE Syrian kingdom (the different figures related to music, their linguistic affiliation and provenience, their activity and social level, the instruments, the importance of music in cult and ceremonies, etc.), and

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<sup>13</sup> With rare exceptions, like the few lexical entries concerning music in the Ebla Bilingual List (see below), and the mention of balag-di performers in the important *Ritual for the Royal Wedding and Kingship confirmation* (see below).

<sup>14</sup> In the Ebla texts, in fact, year dates are only exceptionally recorded.

even upon the probable existence of different musical praxes in Ebla and in other Early Dynastic Syrian centres.

## What Data Can We Derive from the Texts?

### *The Performers*

Very few categories of music performers are mentioned in the Ebla texts. The only musician widely mentioned in the Ebla Archives is the nar, ‘musician, singer’.

### *The Male nar*

No mention of nar is made in the few ritual texts we have, and musicians or similar figures are to date also missing in the chancery texts. Nevertheless, the presence of nar in the administrative texts, particularly in the texts concerning textiles’ allocations,<sup>15</sup> is numerically substantial, and provides important data.

The term nar, only attested in logographic writing, since the Yitgar-Damu period is frequently qualified as nar-maḥ (literally “‘great’ musician”) or nar-tur (literally “‘young, small’ musician”), rarely nar-gibil (literally “‘new’ musician”),<sup>16</sup> in the oldest texts.<sup>17</sup> This particular terminology is mostly unattested elsewhere in the Syrian and, more generally, Mesopotamian texts. The term nar-maḥ is also found in Early Dynastic Mari, qualifying Ur-Nanše in his inscriptions; in later Mari, however, the term nar-gal is used, as in Lower Mesopotamia. The term nar-tur, on the contrary, is also regularly attested in Old Babylonian Mari, but instead very rarely mentioned outside Mari and Ebla, and only in a few literary texts.<sup>18</sup>

The Ebla Archives testify to the existence of an already large and diachronically increasing number of nar musicians at the service of the Palace. In the texts of the period of king Yirkab-Damu, 5 to 20 nar (rarely lú-nar) already frequently receive deliveries of textiles.<sup>19</sup> Only an otherwise unknown nar Baba, is mentioned by name in these older texts, in

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<sup>15</sup> Much rarer in the Annual Metals Accounts.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. the *nârâtum eššêtum* in the Mari texts, Ziegler 1999: 116.

<sup>17</sup> An ugula nar = *ir-’à* is also attested in the Lexical List, VE 957, who, however, never appears in other texts.

<sup>18</sup> Not in the Enmerkara passages, however, where it must be differently read (see recently Mittermayer 2009: 118).

<sup>19</sup> See ARET XV index *s.v.*

an individual allocation (ARET XV 32 [21]). During the reign of Yitgar-Damu, instead, the names of the group of musicians regularly carrying out their duties at the Eblaic court are almost always recorded.<sup>20</sup> People listed by name, whose profession is clearly specified by the rubric “nar of Ebla” or “nar of SA.ZA<sub>x</sub>”,<sup>21</sup> receive annual or biannual textiles allocations, regularly on the 9<sup>th</sup> month, *za-lul*, and sometimes on the 3<sup>rd</sup> month, *za-’a-tum*.<sup>22</sup> To these regular deliveries, others can rarely be added related to particular occasions.

The Ebla texts more or less regularly record deliveries for people listed by name belonging to important, mostly but not exclusively professional, categories, such as the judges, the NEdi dancers, but even the king’s women (*dam en*), besides the *nar*. For the lists of some of these categories it has been possible to detect a precise hierarchical, diachronically changing order, particularly clear and strict, for instance, in the case of the *dam en*:<sup>23</sup> the lists of Yitgar-Damu period open with the king’s mother, immediately followed by the queen (after the royal marriage), and the most important secondary wives of the current or former king mentioned in a strict hierarchy; at the end of the list some of the strict female relatives of the most important women of the court, and the royal family wet nurses may be added.

Also for the *nar*, the regular structure of the lists has made it possible to organize them in a diachronic sequence, and to follow, then, the growth and the career of single musicians, occasionally confirmed by other data.<sup>24</sup>

In the *nar* lists, in fact, two separate groups are generally given: the *nar-mah*, ‘senior musicians’, and the *nar-tur* (or *nar-gibil*), ‘junior/new musicians’. The number of *nar-mah*((*nar*))<sup>25</sup> increases throughout the period from 13 to 22. The progressive periodic inclusion of a group of *nar-tur* (whose number varies from 7 to 11 persons), or of part of it, at the bottom of the *nar-mah* group is slightly counterbalanced, in fact, by the gradual but rare disappearance of particular individuals; a disappearance

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<sup>20</sup> See Archi 1988 and Tonietti 1988.

<sup>21</sup> None of these rubrics appear in the much drier Yirkab-Damu period texts. According to Archi 2009, the name SA.ZA<sub>x</sub><sup>ki</sup> generally used as a synonym for Ebla, indicates the palatine quarter of Ebla, but it is still difficult to precisely define it.

<sup>22</sup> See Tonietti 1989b: 118-119.

<sup>23</sup> See Tonietti 1989a.

<sup>24</sup> See Tonietti 1988 and Tonietti 1989b; a sample of the reconstructed diachronic ordering of the lists is given below. The diachronic ordering of the lists has also been one of the tools to reconstruct the relative chronology of the Ebla texts (see above, footnote 14).

<sup>25</sup> See below.

probably mostly due to death, old age or retirement, as confirmed, in some cases, by other texts. As in the case of Haddamilku, one of the oldest and most important, if not the most important, nar of Ebla: he regularly opens the oldest lists until he definitely disappears from them. In a text which can be dated some years after this disappearance, his funeral ceremony is recorded:

TM.75.G.2417 obv. XI 4-5: *ʾA-da-mi-gú* nar ÉxPAP<sup>26</sup>

He seems, then, to have died quite old, i.e. some years after he retired from the profession. In the meanwhile, two of his sons also became musicians of Ebla, as we shall see below.

The case of *(I)-ku-ʾa-bù/u*<sub>16</sub> seems different. His name disappeared from the lists of the musicians receiving textiles or other goods at about the same moment his death was recorded in another, almost contemporary, text.

ARET IV 9 (17): (1 t.) / *Ku-ʾa-bu*<sub>16</sub> / nar / *si-in* / ÉxPAP / šu mu-tak<sub>4</sub>

He must have died quite young, then, to continue his profession until the end.

The shift of the nar-tur to the nar-maḥ group is probably due to the young singers' voice change during puberty. During the whole period, three new groups of nar-tur are documented, for a total of some 25 new people. The progressive movements in the lists are clearly visible in Table 1-1 (see below).

It seems, then, that in Ebla, during the Yitgar-Damu period, a distinction among nar, nar-maḥ and nar-tur is attested comparable to the one among nar, nar-gal and nar-tur we find in the Old Babylonian Mari, and, at least in part, in the *šakkanakku* Mari, where only the terms nar-gal and nar are attested. The analysis of the contexts shows however that the value of these terms is different in the two centres. The Ebla nar-maḥ and Mari nar-gal, in fact, are not slightly different synonyms denoting the same reality, but they appear to reflect different situations. The two terms nar-maḥ and nar-tur only seem to describe at Ebla the opposition between the nar-maḥ and the nar-tur groups in the lists. Out of this opposition, the simple term nar is currently used to indicate the same persons and groups otherwise defined as nar-maḥ, both in the lists, and in individual allocations; this is clearly proven by the comparison between parallel passages, such as ARET VIII 527 (23), where the listed musicians are

<sup>26</sup> Cit. in Archi 1988: 273.

simply labelled as nar SA.ZA<sub>x</sub><sup>ki</sup>, and the contemporary lists ARET I 5 (50) and ARET VIII 531 (46-47), where exactly the same PNs are instead labelled as nar-maḥ, as their group is immediately followed by a group of nar-tur (absent, instead, in ARET VIII 527).<sup>27</sup>

As clearly emerges from its occurrences, then, the term nar-maḥ does only indicate in Ebla the adult musicians (otherwise simply defined nar). It is thus clear that the nar-maḥ is not here a chief-musician, as the nar-gal of the Old Babylonian, and probably of the *šakkanakku* period Mari. No chief musician figures seem attested in Ebla with comparable functions and power of those in later Mari.<sup>28</sup> It is probable however that a similar role was held instead by the nar-maḥ in Early Dynastic Mari, where this figure presumably had at least a higher status than the Ebla nar-maḥ, as the nar-maḥ Ur-Nanše could dedicate his statuettes to INANNA.ZA.ZA.

Other evidence of a different role of the nar-maḥ in Ebla and in Early Dynastic Mari comes from the Ebla Archives. Beside the nar of Ebla/SA.ZA<sub>x</sub>, in fact, a group of nar from Mari (also mostly listed by name) are also in service at the Palace for a certain period, whose total number is almost the same as their contemporary Ebla colleagues (maximum 29 Ebla and 27 Mari nar). Just as the Ebla nar, they were divided in two groups, a nar-maḥ and a nar-tur group, but the numerical composition of the Ebla and Mari groups is totally different: the Ebla nar are 13 to 22 nar-maḥ and 7 to 11 nar-tur, the Mari ones, 2 to 3 nar-maḥ and 21 to 24 nar-tur. This remarkably different internal proportion, strongly suggests that in ED Mari the nar-maḥ were already limited in number and had a stronger leading role. As we shall see below, these differences also suggest a different performance and/or musical praxis between the Ebla and Mari groups.

The deliveries for individual Ebla nar are rare. In a few cases, also in the Yitgar-Damu period deliveries of textiles for small groups of nar, where no personal or geographical names are specified, are attested.

The nar in service at the Palace generally receive two or three different fabrics of average value – slightly higher for the nar-maḥ – which are normally assigned to palace personnel not of the executive level.<sup>29</sup> Only very rarely do nar receive an aktum-túg, a more important textile.<sup>30</sup> They may also, rarely, receive other objects, like daggers, but not objects of

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Tonietti 1988: 112.

<sup>28</sup> See Ziegler 2007: 7-12 and passim.

<sup>29</sup> See Tonietti 1988: 115-117.

<sup>30</sup> As the already mentioned nar Baba, and, later, only one of the 17 nar-maḥ listed in ARET I 6 (27''), and the three Mari nar-maḥ in ARET I 5 (79) and TM.75.G.10185 obv. VII 9'-16'.

great value.<sup>31</sup> None of them seems, then, to have a high status.<sup>32</sup> The existence of regular differences in the deliveries among the two groups, and in a few cases among the members of each group,<sup>33</sup> testifies, anyway, to clear hierarchical differences.

**Table 1-1: The reconstructed diachronic sequence of some of the musicians' names lists occurring in the administrative texts.**

<i>ARET III 468</i>	TM.75.G.10079	<i>ARET I 6</i>	TM.75.G.2335
<i>Á-da-mi-gú</i>			
<i>I-ti<sup>-d</sup>En-ki</i>	<i>I-ti<sup>-d</sup>En-ki</i>	<i>I-ti<sup>-d</sup>En-ki</i>	
<i>Ti-ga-LUM</i>	<i>I-ku-à-bù</i>		
<i>Ír-az-NI</i>	<i>Ti-ga-LUM</i>		
<i>EN-da-za</i>			
<i>I-ku-à-bù</i>	<i>Ír-az-NI</i>	<i>Ír-az-NI</i>	<i>Da-šè</i>
<i>Da-šè</i>	<i>Da-šè</i>	<i>Da-šè</i>	<i>Ír-az-NI</i>
<i>Gú-lu-ga</i>	<i>Gú-a-ga</i>	<i>Gú-l[i-lu]</i>	<i>Kum-a-gú</i>
<i>Zi-ri-ik</i>	<i>En-na-NI</i>	[ <i>Du-AN</i> ]	<i>Du-AN</i>
<i>Ša-za-iš</i>	<i>Ša-za-iš</i>	[ <i>En-na-NI</i> ]	<i>En-na-NI</i>
<i>Wa-da-ra-im</i>	<i>Du-AN</i>	<i>Š[a-za-iš]</i>	<i>Sa-za-iš-lu</i>
<i>Tu-AN</i>	<i>Wa-da-ra-im</i>		
<i>En-na-NI</i>			
<i>nar-nar-maḥ</i>			
BE-É	BE-É	B[E]-É	BE-É
<i>I-šar-ma-lik</i>	<i>I-šar-ma-lik</i>	<i>I-šar-ma-lik</i>	
BE-ḪI	BE-MUŠ-ḪI	BE-(SUD)-ḪI	BE-SUD-ḪI
<i>Ib-dur-i-šar</i>	<i>Ib-dur-i-šar</i>	<i>Ib-dur-i-šar</i>	<i>Ib-dur-i-šar</i>
[...]	<i>Zi-ri-ik</i>		
[...]	<i>nar maḥ</i>		
[...]	<i>En-na-ni-il</i>	<i>En-na-ni-il</i>	
<i>Íl-a-ma-lik</i>	<i>En-na-da-gan</i>	<i>En-na<sup>-d</sup>da-gan</i>	
<i>Ba-du-rúm</i>	<i>Gú-na-lu</i>		
<i>nar-nar-gibil</i>	<i>Bù-da-NI</i>	<i>Bù-da-NI</i>	
	<i>Ba-du-lum</i>	<i>A-bù-ma-lik</i>	<i>A-bù-ma-lik</i>
	<i>A-bù-ma-lik</i>	<i>Ba-du-rúm</i>	<i>Ba-du-lum</i>
	<i>nar-tur</i>	<i>Ša-ma-ḥu</i>	
	<i>nar-maḥ</i>		
	<i>Ib-dur<sup>-d</sup></i>	<i>Da-gan</i>	<i>Ib-dur<sup>-d</sup>Da-gan</i>
	<i>Ib-dur-NI</i>		
	<i>ʾÁ-bí</i>	<i>ʾÁ-bí</i>	
	<i>Ni-zi-ma-NI</i>	<i>Ni-zi-ma-NI</i>	

<sup>31</sup> See, e.g., MEE 12 37 (43a), where tin and copper are given for (the bronze of) 20 daggers destined to nar-nar, and silver for their hilts; in (43b) the same metals are given for 4 an-zam<sub>x</sub> cups for the nar from Mari. In MEE 7 48 rev. I 9-II 6, 7 copper and silver bracelets are assigned to 7 nar-tur.

<sup>32</sup> Only an unnamed nar from NI<sub>rar</sub>, regularly receives the three fabrics set normally assigned to the executive level people, see, e. g., ARET VIII 527 (35).

<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., ARET I 6 (27<sup>o</sup>) and (28<sup>o</sup>).