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# MUSIC IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

BY

DR. CARL HEINRICH CORNILL

PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF Breslau

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## MUSIC IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

**M**USIC belongs to the inalienable rights of man. It is the effort to make one's self intelligible to his fellow men by means of the stimulation of sounds of all kinds. Music exists wherever men are found upon the earth and everywhere they show a genuine refinement in the discovery of means by which to originate sounds. There is hardly anything which can not be brought into use for its purposes.

We do not intend to lose ourselves here in speculation upon the psychological reasons for this demoniac impulse; we will be content simply to establish the fact and will not enter into it with regard to humanity in general, but only in so far as the ancient people of Israel is concerned. Even with relation to the Old Testament we will limit ourselves to what the Old Testament itself can tell us about music and musical things.

Many passages have proved very puzzling to Bible readers. For instance when we read in the heading of Psalm lxxx, "To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim-Eduth, A Psalm of Asaph"; or in the heading of Ps. lx., "To the chief Musician upon Shushan-eduth, Michtam of David, to teach"; or in the heading of Ps. lvi, "To the chief Musician upon Jonath-elem-rechokim, Michtam of David"; or when Psalms viii, lxxxix, and lxxxiv, bear the inscription, "To the chief Musician upon Gittith"; or the three, xxxix, lxii, and lxxvii "to Jeduthun"; we may cer-

tainly assume that we have an explanation for these hieroglyphics in considering that they possess some kind of a musical character.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly it will be our task to gather together and to sift out the information given by the Old Testament itself upon music and musical matters and then to see whether we can unite and combine these scattered and isolated features into one comprehensive picture or at least into a comparatively clear idea. It is only scattered and isolated features which the Old Testament offers us and not very much of them nor very abundantly. Not perhaps because music had played a subordinate and inconspicuous part in the life of ancient Israel,—on the contrary they must have been a people of an unusually musical temperament whose daily nourishment was song and sound. On this point the Old Testament itself leaves little room for doubt.

Everywhere and at all times were song and music to be found in Ancient Israel. Every festival occasion, every climax of public or private life was celebrated with music and song. Just as Homer called singing and string music “the consecration of the meal,”<sup>3</sup> so also in ancient Israel no ceremonial meal could be thought of without its accompaniment of either vocal or instrumental music. Marriage ceremonies took place amid festive choruses with music and dancing, and at the bier of the dead sounded the wail of dirge and flute. The sheep were sheared and the vintage gathered to songs of joy and dancing and tambourine playing. The same was true in public life. The

<sup>2</sup>Luther in his translation makes an attempt to translate these “hieroglyphics,” but the above quoted meaningless combinations of letters from the King James version hardly convey less significance to the reader of to-day than his sentences: “*Ein Psalm Assaphs von den Spanrosen, vorzusingen*” (lxxx); “*Ein gülden Kleinod Davids, vorzusingen, von einem gülden Rosen-span zu lehren*” (lx); etc. Professor Cornill considers the English translation “To the chief Musician” as preferable to Luther’s *vorzusingen*. The Polychrome Bible translates this word “For the Liturgy,” and interprets the succeeding clauses as “the catch-word of an older song, to the tune whereof this Psalm was to be sung.” Tr.

<sup>3</sup>ἀναθήματα δαιτός.

election of a king or his coronation or betrothal were celebrated with music; the victorious warriors and generals were met upon their return home by choruses of matrons and maidens with dance and song. So Miriam spoke from among the chorus of women who after the successful passage through the Red Sea went out "with timbrels and with dances" (Ex. xv. 20); in the same way too, David was received by matrons and maidens after his successful battle with the Philistines (1 Sam. xviii. 6); and upon this custom is founded the frightful tragedy of the story of Jephthah, whose daughter hastened in the joy of her heart to offer greeting and praise to her victorious father, only to be met by death as the fulfilment of his vow (Judges xi).

How great a place music occupied in the worship of ancient Israel is universally known. The entire Psalter is nothing else than a collection of religious songs which were sung in the temple worship where the priests with their trumpets and the choruses of music-making Levites stand before the eye of our imagination. Especially by typical expressions do we learn what a significance music had for the life of the Israelitish nation. There is in Hebrew a saying which characterizes what we would call being "common talk," "the object of gossip," "on everybody's tongue," in such a way as to indicate ditties sung in ridicule. The Hebrew expression *neginah*<sup>4</sup> means "string music," being derived from the word *nagan*,<sup>5</sup> "to beat," "to touch," with special reference to instruments, as in striking the chords. In Psalm lxix. 12, this word *neginah* is used in a passage which literally reads: "I am the lute song of drunkards." The Polychrome Bible translates the passage: "I am the subject of wine bibbers' ballads." In the same sense the word is used in Job xxx. 9, with reference to the frightful fate that had befallen him: "And now am I their song, yea

I am their byword." And in Lamentations we find (iii. 14, 63), "I was a derision to all my people; and their song all the day. . . . Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their music." Here the word translated "song" and "music" is the same in both instances. When Job's fortune changes to evil he says (xxx. 31), "My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of them that weep." The dreadful desolation of Jerusalem after its destruction is described in Lamentations with the words: "The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music" (v. 14).

Ancient Israel must have been recognized among outside nations as well, as a particularly musical people whose accomplishments in the art comprised a definite profession. For this view we have two extremely characteristic sources of evidence, one from Assyrian monuments and one from the Old Testament. In his account of the unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians in the year 701 B. C. Sanherib tells us, according to the translation of Hugo Winckler, that Hezekiah, king of Judah, besides all kinds of valuable articles sent also his daughters and the women of his palace together with men and women singers to the great king at Nineveh, while in the touching Psalm cxxxvii we learn that the Babylonian tyrant demanded songs of the Jewish exiles, to cheer them up: "Sing to us your beautiful songs of Zion."

Jewish tradition has given expression to the fact that music belongs to the earliest benefits and gifts of the culture of mankind by establishing Jubal as the inventor of music and father of musicians as early as the seventh generation after the creation (Gen. iv. 21). An important influence on the human heart was ascribed to music and it was employed to drive away the evil spirit of melancholy when David played before the sick King Saul (1 Sam. xvi. 23). It was also used as a spiritual stimulus by which to

acquire prophetic inspiration. In Samuel's time companies of prophets traversed the land to the music of psalter and harp (1 Sam. x. 5), and so the Prophet Elisha to whom the Kings Jehoshaphat and Jehoram applied for an oracle from God, sent for a lute player, saying (2 Kings iii. 15): "But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."

An art to which such a powerful influence was attributed and to whose most famous masters the greatest king of Israel belonged, must have been zealously practised, and we will now undertake to gain some idea of the cultivation of music in ancient Israel. To this end it will be most useful if we will begin our investigation with what the Old Testament says about musical instruments, of course with express exception of the book of Daniel which in its third chapter mentions a large number of instruments, using their Greek names as naturalized words;<sup>6</sup> for these prove absolutely nothing with regard to ancient Hebrew music which at present is our only consideration.

We may with equal propriety exclude singing from our investigation. Song is such an especially instinctive and spontaneous expression of the human soul that its presence is established *a priori*. In this connection the question might be raised with regard to the construction of the tone system, but this can not be answered without knowledge of the instruments employed. Only I will not neglect to mention that as early as in the time of David professional male and female singers provided music during mealtime. David wished to take with him to Jerusalem as a reward for fidelity the faithful old Barzillai who had protected him at the time of Absalom's rebellion. There he would be the daily guest of the king; but Barzillai answered (2 Sam. xix. 35), "I am this day fourscore years

<sup>6</sup> σῦριγγε, σαμβύκη, κίθαρις, ψαλτήριον, συμφωνία.

old; and can I discern between good and evil? Can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? Can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? Wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?" Solomon, the Preacher, also delighted in "men singers and women singers and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments and that of all sorts" (Eccl. ii. 8).

\* \* \*

Musical instruments are usually divided into three classes, percussive instruments, stringed instruments, and wind instruments, and we shall also follow this division. Of these three classes the percussive instruments are the most primitive. They can not be said to possess any properly articulated tones but sounds only, and their single artistic element is rhythm, which however is certainly the foundation and essential characteristic of music according to the witty utterance of Hans von Bülow, "In the beginning was the rhythm."

Among percussive instruments the one most frequently mentioned is the timbrel or tabret (in Hebrew *toph*<sup>7</sup>) which corresponds exactly to our tambourine. Often they were richly ornamented so that they were frequently referred to as decorations. In one of the most splendid passages of the prophet Jeremiah, we read: "Again I will build thee, and thou shalt be built, O virgin of Israel; thou shalt again be adorned with thy tabrets, and shalt go forth in the dances of them that make merry" (Jer. xxxi. 4). This passage is particularly characteristic of the nature of the tabret in two respects; first, it usually appears in the hands of women (in all passages where tabret players are expressly mentioned they are matrons and maidens); and secondly it almost always appears in connection with the

dance, as being swung in the dance and marking its rhythm. We can suppose it to have been undoubtedly played by men only in connection with the music of the companies of prophets in Samuel's time, for if we read that these prophets came down from the sacred high place with a psaltery, and a tabret, and a pipe, and a harp before them (1 Sam. x. 5), we would hardly think of the musicians who accompanied these wild men and played the tabrets before them, as women.

The second percussive instrument is the familiar cymbal, which comes next to our mind in thinking of the music of the Old Testament. With regard to the nature and character of this instrument we can gather all that is essential from the Bible itself. In the first place the cymbal must have been constructed of brass, for in the familiar passage, 1 Cor. xiii. 1, the Apostle Paul writes according to the Greek text, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." The Hebrew root *tsalal*<sup>8</sup> from which both words for cymbal are derived, means "clatter," to give forth a sharp penetrating sound; and the word most frequently used, *metsiltayim*<sup>9</sup> is in the dual form which is never used in the Hebrew language in its purely grammatical sense, but only in the logical sense of things which occur in nature only in pairs. Now since a penetrating and loud tone is repeatedly attributed to the cymbals we may consider them as two metal plates to be struck together (Fig. 4); that is to say, they are the instruments which we know as cymbals and which are known in German as *Becken* and in Italian as *piatti*, and which are most familiar to us in military music in combination with a bass drum.

Two other percussive instruments are mentioned of which one is still doubtful. The one which is undoubtedly

<sup>8</sup> צלל

<sup>9</sup> מצלתיים

certain, *mena'an'im*<sup>10</sup> (2 Sam. vi. 5) evidently comes from the root *nua'*,<sup>11</sup> "to shake" and corresponds exactly with the Greek *sistrum*<sup>12</sup> which consists of metal crossbars upon which hang metal rings that are made to produce their tones by shaking (Fig. 6). Accordingly in current language it is the Turkish bell-tree, the *cinelli*, with which we are familiar also through German military music.

Then too an instrument called the *shalish*<sup>13</sup> is mentioned in the hands of women together with the tabret at the triumphant reception of David upon his return from the conquest of the giant Goliath (1 Sam. xviii. 6). The word *shalish* being derived from the same root as *shalosh*, the number "three," we have been accustomed to identify it with our modern triangle, but it is a question whether we are justified in so doing. With this instrument we have exhausted the number of percussive instruments mentioned in the Old Testament.

It might perhaps be more logical for us to follow the percussive instruments at once with the wind instruments, inasmuch as they are the most primitive next to the percussive instruments because horns of animals and reeds are nature's own gifts to men, while strings made from catgut are a purely artificial product. But as far as ancient Israel was concerned the stringed instruments were by far the most important. I will remind my readers once more of the proverbial application of the word string-music above mentioned.

Accordingly I will next consider the stringed instruments, of which the Old Testament mentions two, the *kinnor*,<sup>14</sup> and *nebel*.<sup>15</sup> That both were composed of strings drawn across wood (Fig. 8) may be proved, in so far as it needs proof, by the fact that according to 1 Kings x. 12, Solomon ordered certain instruments of this class intended for the temple service to be made out of sandal wood,

<sup>10</sup> מנענעים

<sup>11</sup> נוע

<sup>12</sup> σείστρον

<sup>13</sup> שליש

<sup>14</sup> כנור

<sup>15</sup> נבל



which he had obtained during his famous visits to Ophir. Of these two instruments the kinnor is the most important, but I will begin with the nebel because we have the more definite tradition with regard to it. When Jerome tells us that the nebel, whose name became *nabla*<sup>16</sup> and *nablum* in Greek and Latin, possessed the form of a Greek Delta Δ, we thus have the triangular pointed harp indicated as plainly as possible (Fig. 1). The only objection that can be brought against this view, namely that we repeatedly meet this instrument in the hands of dancers and pilgrims, is not sound. In representations of Ancient Egypt, we also have harps so small that they could easily be carried (Fig. 2), and the best commentaries have lately shown us Assyrian representations where pointed harps with the points at the top and fastened with a band were likewise carried in the hands of dancing processions (Fig. 9). If the points of these Assyrian harps were regularly at the top, this will explain to us better St. Jerome's comparison with the Greek Delta which of course has the point at the top.

Especially noteworthy among others is an Assyrian representation (Fig. 15) in which three prisoners are being led into exile by an Assyrian king, and all three are playing four-stringed harps on the march, but the harps are so turned that the broad side is on top. It is very possible that these figures may represent captive Israelites.

There must have been several varieties of nebel (e. g., Fig. 12). A harp of ten strings (dekachord) is repeatedly mentioned<sup>17</sup> in clear distinction from the usual ones which accordingly must have had fewer than ten strings, perhaps four as in that Assyrian sketch. An instrument of six strings is the interpretation of many exegetists of the word *shushan*<sup>18</sup> which Luther translates by *Rosen* in the headings to Psalms xlv, lx, lxix and lxxx. When we read

<sup>16</sup> *νάβλα*.<sup>17</sup> Ps. xxxiii. 2; xcii. 4; cvliv. 9.<sup>18</sup> שושן

in Luther's Bible in the headings to Psalms vi and xii "to be rendered on eight strings,"<sup>19</sup> this is hardly an accurate translation of a musical term with which we shall occupy ourselves later.

By far the most important stringed instrument on the other hand, is the kinnor. Its invention is ascribed to Jubal, and we meet with it on every hand in the most varied occasions. The exiles hung them on the willows by the waters of Babylon (Ps. cxxxvii. 2) and according to a passage in the book of Isaiah, which to be sure comes from a much later date, probably the Greek period, they are used by harlots for the public allurements of men (Is. xxiii. 16).

For us the kinnor has indeed a conspicuous interest and a particular significance in that it was the instrument of King David, by which the son of Jesse subdued the melancholy of King Saul, and which he played when dancing before the ark. We are particularly fortunate in possessing an authentic copy of this instrument on an Egyptian monument. On the tomb of Chnumhotep, the Prince of Middle Egypt at Beni Hassan in the time of Pharaoh Usurtesen II of the 12th dynasty, which can not be placed later than 2300 B. C., a procession of Semitic nomads is represented which Chnumhotep is leading into the presence of Pharaoh in order to obtain the royal permission for a dwelling place in Egypt. In this procession a man who comes immediately behind the women and children is carrying by a leather thong an instrument which we can not fail to recognize as the kinnor (Fig. 3, cf. also Fig. 5). It is a board with four rounded corners and with a sounding hole in the upper part over which eight strings are stretched. The man picks the strings with the fingers of his left hand while he strikes them with a so-called plec-

<sup>19</sup>The Polychrome Bible here understands "in the eighth [mode]" or key. The authorized version again resorts to a transcription of the Hebrew, "On Neginoth upon Sheminith." Dr. Cornill's view is given on pages 257 f. Tr.

trum,<sup>20</sup> a small stick held in his right hand. That the Israelites also played their stringed instruments partly with their fingers and partly by means of such a plectrum we might conclude from the two characteristically different expressions for playing on strings: *samar*,<sup>21</sup> "to pluck," and *nagan*,<sup>22</sup> "to strike." All antiquity was unacquainted with the use of bows to produce sound from stringed instruments of any kind.

Hence the kinnor may first of all be compared to our zither, except that it apparently had no hollow space underneath and no special sounding board. The stringed instruments as they are represented in countless different varieties on Jewish coins (Figs. 13 and 14) do not correspond either with the nebel or the kinnor but much more closely resemble the Greek lyre<sup>23</sup> and therefore have little value with reference to the Old Testament.

We might also consider the *gittith* a stringed instrument where the headings to Ps. viii, lxxxii, and lxxxiv, read "upon Gittith."<sup>24</sup> But it is very doubtful whether the word *gittith*<sup>25</sup> translates a musical instrument and not rather a particular kind of song or melody. In either case it will be better not to confuse the old Israelitish temple orchestra with the gittith.

We have still to consider the wind instruments. One of these whose invention is likewise ascribed to Jubal is called the '*ugab*.'<sup>26</sup> Besides in Gen. iv. 21, it is mentioned twice in the book of Job, and once in Ps. cl, in which all instruments and everything that hath breath are summoned to give praise and thanksgiving to God (Ps. cl. 4; Job xxi. 12; xxx. 31). This '*ugab*' is most probably the

<sup>20</sup> πλῆκτρον<sup>21</sup> זמר<sup>22</sup> נגן<sup>23</sup> λύρα

<sup>24</sup> The Polychrome Bible comments: "We do not know whether *Gittith* means 'belonging to the city of Gath,' which probably had been destroyed before the Babylonian Exile, or 'belonging to a wine-press' (= Song for the Vintage?), or whether it denotes a mode or key, or a musical instrument." Tr.

<sup>25</sup> גרית

<sup>26</sup> עוגב. It is translated in the authorized version by "organ," but in Ps. cl. 4, in the margin, as "pipe." Tr.

same as the bag-pipe which is of course a very primitive and widely spread instrument familiar to us as the national instrument of the Scotch, and best known in continental Europe as the *pifferari* of Italy. It has been customary to translate 'ugab\* by "shawm"; Luther calls it "pipes" (*Pfeifen*).

The most important reed instrument, the flute, we find referred to as *khalil*,<sup>27</sup> only in five passages: with the thundering music of the prophets (1 Sam. x. 5); at the proclamation of Solomon as the successor of David (1 Kings i. 40); twice in the book of Isaiah, in connection with the dinner music of the rich gluttons and winebibbers at Jerusalem (v. 12), and also "when one goeth with the pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord" (xxx. 29); and finally once in the book of Jeremiah as the instrument of mourning and lamentation, where we read (xlviii. 36), "Therefore mine heart shall sound for Moab like pipes." In this connection we are reminded to some extent of the awakening of Jairus's little daughter. When Jesus reached the house of mourning he found there before him flute players and weeping women<sup>28</sup> (Matt. ix. 23; Mark v. 38).

Of the construction of these flutes the Old Testament tells us nothing and leaves nothing to be inferred, and yet we imagine that the *khalil* was not a transverse flute but probably a sort of beaked flute, thus corresponding much more closely to our clarinet. We find the transverse flutes only in very isolated cases on Egyptian monuments, while on the other hand we find the beaked flutes regularly in an overwhelming majority with the Assyrians, and indeed

\* Since this article appeared in *The Monist*, Mr. Phillips Barry in a very readable article (*Monist* XIX, July, 1909, pp. 459-461) has pointed out that the traditional rendering of 'ugab as "bagpipe," is not well founded, but rests upon an error. Just what the 'ugab is, however, Barry himself is not able to say.

<sup>27</sup> חליל. Translated in the authorized version by "pipe." Tr.

<sup>28</sup> The English version speaks simply of "minstrels and the people making a noise," without translating the kind of instrument used. Tr.

often composed of two tubes as was the common form among the Greeks (Fig. 10). But nearer than this we can not affirm anything with regard to their use in ancient Israel.

We find animal horns mentioned twice among wind instruments, as ram's horns, once indeed in connection with the theophany of Sinai (Exodus xix. 13) and once at the capture of Jericho (Josh. vi. 5). The term "horn," *qeren*,<sup>29</sup> for a musical instrument comes under Greek influence again in the book of Daniel. On the other hand in Old Testament times only the two forms *shofar*<sup>30</sup> and *hatsotserah*<sup>31</sup> were in common use. On the triumphal arch of Titus (Figs. 16 and 17) and on two Jewish coins (Fig. 18) we have esthetic representations of the hatsotserah which was peculiarly the instrument of worship and was blown by the priests. According to Num. x, two hatsotseroth (the word always occurs in the plural in the Hebrew with one exception) were to be fashioned out of silver by skilful handiwork and there the priests made use of them to call together the people and to announce the feasts and new moons. That these instruments in the ancient temple were indeed of silver we learn also from an incidental notice in 2 Kings xii. 13, in the reign of King Joash. According to many pictures they are rather long and slender and perfectly straight, widening gradually in front into a bell mouth, hence the very instruments which the pictures of ancient art used to place in the hands of angels, and which may best be compared with the so-called clarion of ancient music, a kind of clarinet made of metal.

The wind instrument which is second in importance, the *shofar*, still plays a part in the worship of the synagogue, but in the Old Testament, as far as religious use is concerned it is far behind the hatsotserah. According to Jerome the horn of the shofar is bent backward in con-

trast to the straight horn of the hatsotserah. It is especially the instrument for sounding signals of alarm, for which purpose it was widely used. According to law this trumpet was to be sounded on the day of atonement every forty-ninth year, the year of jubilee (Lev. xxv. 9). There is a noteworthy passage in the book of Isaiah where it says that on that day at the sounding of the great trumpet (*shofar*) all the Jews scattered and exiled throughout the whole world shall come back to worship in the holy mount at Jerusalem (Is. xxvii. 13); and this eschatological and apocalyptical passage has also become significant with regard to the New Testament, for from it the Apostle Paul takes the trump of the last judgment by whose sound the dead will arise according to 1 Cor. xv. 52, and 1 Thess. iv. 16. (Cf. also Matt. xxiv. 31.) According to the prophet Zechariah the Lord of Sabaoth himself shall blow the trumpet (*shofar*) at the last judgment (Zech. ix. 14).

Whether the ancient Israelites really played melodies or signals in the natural tones of the bugle or the signal trumpet we do not know. We have only two characteristically different expressions for the blowing on the shofar and hatsotserah, viz., "blow"<sup>32</sup> on the instruments and "howl"<sup>33</sup> on them. By the first word is meant to make a noise by short sharp blasts and by the last, by long drawn out ringing notes. This is what we learn from the Old Testament about musical instruments of ancient Israel and their use.

\* \* \*

The character of the music of ancient Israel we must consider in general as merry and gay, almost boisterous, so that it seemed advisable to refrain from music in the presence of men who were ill-tempered or moody. In the Proverbs of Solomon xxv. 20, we have the expressive simile, "as vinegar upon nitre so is he that singeth songs

<sup>32</sup> תַּקַּע *taka'*

<sup>33</sup> הִרְיַע *heri'a*

to an heavy heart." Music served most conspicuously and was of first importance in the joys of life as, for instance, dinner music, dance music, and feast music, so that the prophet Jeremiah speaks of it as the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness (Jer. vii. 34; xvi. 9; xxv. 10; xxxiii. 11). Even ritual music seems to have borne a worldly character in ancient Israel, so that through the prophet Amos, God addresses the nation in words of wrath: "Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols" (v. 23). Amos uses here exactly the same strong expression with which Ezekiel (xxiii. 42) describes the singing of abandoned women in Bacchanalian orgies, and (xxvi. 13) the sound of harps in the luxurious commercial center of Tyre.

Since in all ancient reports men and women singers are named together, it is therefore most probable that women took part in the ritual service of ancient Israel. A doubtful passage in Amos should according to all probability be translated "Then will the women singers in the temple howl" (Amos viii. 3), and this circumstance may have especially aroused the anger of the puritanical and untaught herdsman of Tekoa. But that Amos may have had a justifiable foundation for his repugnance to the singing of women became clear to me when in the spring of 1905 I attended the International Congress of Orientalists at Algiers as official delegate of the Prussian Government and had an opportunity for the first time to hear modern Arabian music. On the second evening of the Congress a lecture was offered to us on "La musique arabe" illustrated by concrete examples. At the left of the lecturer was a group of male, and on the right a group of female musicians, which at his signal performed their corresponding parts. But since no provision was made for reserved seats, then or at any other session of the congress, there ensued a battle of elbows in open competition,

and the hall was much too small for the number of the members of the Congress, which seemed to be the chronic state of things in Algiers. Hence with my particular gift always and everywhere to get the worst place, I was pressed against the farthest wall, where it was necessary in this instance to stand for two good hours wedged in a fearfully crowded corner, and so, greatly to my sorrow, many occurrences escaped me.

Still the impression of the whole was decidedly striking, presumably because of the difference between male and female singing. Never did both groups perform together in a mixed chorus (just as Orientals do not recognize a dance between men and women) but each group sang by itself. The song and music of the men was very solemn and dignified, in slow time without a distinct rhythm or melodious cadence, but in a sort of recitative (*Sprechgesang*) which is now in vogue in the latest music. The music of the women was very different. In their performance all was fire and life. They sang in a pronounced melody with sharply accentuated rhythm in a passionate *tempo*, and they treated the instruments upon which they accompanied their singing with incredible expression. Not only throat and fingers but the whole person in all its members was engaged in making music. If we may imagine the women who sang in ancient Israel entirely or approximately like their modern feminine counterparts, it is easy to understand how a man like the prophet Amos at the outbreak of such a band in the temple at Bethel might have received the impression of a "variety show" in church. And another thing occurred to me in connection with the songs of those women, that according to the language of music they are all composed in minor, and indeed only in the two scales of D Minor and A Minor, which with their characteristic intervals in the case of the so-called "church" keys have been named Doric and Aeolic,—so



then we see that just as a deep meaning often lies in the games of children, the familiar German pun that the trumpets of the Israelites before the walls of Jericho were blown in the key of D Minor (D *moll*) because they *demolished* those walls, was not made entirely out of whole cloth.

This brings us quite naturally to the question whether or not the music of ancient Israel had a tone system and a definite scale. When even on the earliest Egyptian and Assyrian monuments the pointed harps have strings of constantly diminishing length and the flutes have sound-holes where the players manipulate their fingers, it is absolutely necessary for us to investigate this question, for these pictorial illustrations testify to definite tones of varying pitch and in that case a fixed scale must have previously existed.

To be sure I must at the outset abandon one means of determining this scale, and that is accent. Besides the vowel signs our Hebrew texts have also so-called accents which perform a threefold function; first as accent in its proper signification to indicate the stress of voice, then as punctuation marks, and finally as musical notation. This accent also denotes a definite *melisma*, or a definite cadence according to which the emphasized word in the intoned discourse of the synagogue (the so-called *niggun*<sup>34</sup>) was to be recited. The learned bishop of the Moravian Brethren and counsellor of the Brandenburg consistory, Daniel Ernst Jablonski, in the preface to the Berlin edition of 1699 of the Old Testament made under his patronage, undertook to rewrite these accents according to the custom of the *Sefardim*, (that is, of the Spanish-Portuguese Jews) in modern notes and has thus rewritten in notes one longer coherent passage in Genesis (xlviii. 15, 16), which I sometimes have occasion to sing to my students at col-

lege. But this *niggun*, as evidence has lately been found to prove, is of Christian origin, an imitation of the so-called *neumes*,<sup>35</sup> used in the Greco-Syrian communities of the Orient in reciting the Gospels, and accordingly has been handed down from the church to the synagogue, and so for ancient Israel and its music has no meaning;—at least directly, for the Church was essentially under Greek influence, and Greek music must not be identified with that of ancient Israel, nor must the latter be constructed according to the former. The only trace, although an uncertain one, in the Old Testament itself appears in the expression which I have however already mentioned, and which Luther translates “on eight strings” (*auf acht Saiten*). But in Hebrew the word is *sheminith*,<sup>36</sup> meaning “ordinal number” so that we must not translate “on eight” but “on (or after) the *eighth*.” Accordingly a musician can hardly do otherwise than insert this “eighth” in the familiar *octave*, the foundation of our tone system, and assume that the ancient Israelites also had a scale of seven intervals so that the eighth becomes the same scale but placed an octave higher. And this interpretation has also a support in the Old Testament. Our principal source for the music of ancient Israel is the Biblical book of Chronicles which has evidently been written by a specialist, a Levitical musician of the temple, who offers us a complete series of technical statements with regard to ancient musical culture. So we read in one of the most important passages (1 Chron. xv. 20, 21) that a circle of temple musicians played upon the *nebel*, the harp, *al alamoith*,<sup>37</sup> literally translated “after the manner of maidens,” and another on the *kinnor*, the lute, *al hashsheminith*,<sup>38</sup> literally, “after the eighth.” By the designation “after the manner of maidens” can only be meant the high clear voices of women, that is to say soprano, and then it is of course natural to see in the “eighth”

<sup>35</sup> νεύματα.<sup>36</sup> שמינית<sup>37</sup> על עלמות<sup>38</sup> על השמינית

the deeper voices of the men an octave lower. If this combination is correct, and it is at least very promising, we see clearly proven in it the existence of a scale of seven intervals, even if we know nothing about the particular intervals and their relation to each other.

Another characteristic of the music of ancient Israel is that it does not take into account pure instrumental music, the so-called absolute music, but on the contrary regards instruments simply as accompaniment for singing. The usage of the language is significant with regard to this point. The Hebrew calls instruments *kele hashshir*,<sup>39</sup> "instruments of song" and calls musicians simply "singers"; for it has long been observed that in the passages which treat of singers in the proper sense a particular form of the participle is always found, the so-called *Kal*,<sup>40</sup> while another participial form of the same root, the so-called *Polel*,<sup>41</sup> designates musicians in general. Accordingly Israel considers the essential nature and the foundation of all music to be in song, in *Melos*. And what an ingenious instinct, what an artistic delicacy of feeling is given utterance in this designation! The end pursued by modern music is to compress the living human voice into a dead instrument, while the great musicians of all times have considered it their task rather to let the instruments sing, to put a living human soul into the dead wood, metal, or sheeput. Such was the case with the people of Israel.

Likewise the music of ancient Israel knew nothing of polyphony which is an abomination to Orientals in general. And to be sure must not polyphony be designated as a two-edged sword? For counterpoint is commonly understood to come in exactly at the point when the musician lacks melody and conception. And what is even the most artistic polyphony of a Richard Strauss or a Max Reger compared to the heavenly melody of the larghetto in Mo-

zart's clarinet quintet! What the chronicler considers an ideal performance is stated in a characteristic passage: "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord" (2 Chron. v. 13). Hence a single powerful *unisono* is the ideal of the music of ancient Israel.

The passage of Chronicles above quoted, leads us to the dedication of Solomon's temple. And since Israel is the nation of religion, and as we are moreover best informed by the chronicler just about temple music, we shall in conclusion make an attempt to sketch a picture of the temple music of ancient Israel.

With regard to the orchestra of the temple, the lack of wooden wind-instruments is noteworthy. Even the flute is mentioned only once in connection with a procession of pilgrims (Is. xxx. 29),<sup>42</sup> but never in connection with the worship proper.

Since the trumpets were reserved for the use of the priests in giving signals at certain definite places in the ritual, the temple orchestra consisted only of stringed instruments, harps and lutes, so that the music of the temple is repeatedly called simply "stringed music," *neginah*.<sup>43</sup>

And to these stringed instruments cymbals also may be added. These three instruments, cymbals, harps and lutes are always mentioned in this order as played by the Levites.

The Levites were again divided into three groups after David's three singing masters, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun (sometimes Ethan). Since these three names always occur in the same order we are led to combine the corresponding systems and to give to Asaph the cymbals, to

<sup>42</sup>The Polychrome Bible reads "Joy of heart like his who sets forth to the flute to go to the mountain of Yahveh," but in the authorized version the instrument is called "pipe" and not "flute." Tr.

<sup>43</sup>נְגִינָה. In the headings of Psalms iv, vi, liv, lv, lxi, lxxvii, and lxxvi. Cf. also Is. xxxviii. 20; and Hab. iii. 19.

Heman the harp, and to Jeduthun the lute; and for the first and third of these combinations we have corroborative quotations: Once in 1 Chron. xvi. 5, it is expressly mentioned as a function of Asaph, that he "made a sound with cymbals"; and again in 1 Chron. xxv. 3, Jeduthun is mentioned as he "who prophesied with a lute."<sup>44</sup> This shows us how to understand the heading of the three Psalms xxxix, lxii, and lxxvii, "To Jeduthun."<sup>45</sup> These evidently are to be accompanied only by Jeduthun with the lute, and this agrees with the grave and somber character of those three psalms.

This indicates that even in the most primitive beginnings there was an art of instrumentation which took into consideration the timbre of the instruments, and as a modern analogy we might point out certain priestly passages in the Magic Flute. The wonderful effect of these passages rests on the fact that Mozart neglected the common usage (which would have combined two violins with a tenor and bass viol in the string quartette) and left out the violins, assigning the quartette exclusively to the viols. But just here in this division of instruments is a point expressly handed down by tradition, which must appear strange to us: to Asaph who is always mentioned in the first place and apparently acts as the first orchestra leader, is assigned only the ringing brass of the cymbals. But these cymbals apparently served the purpose of a baton in the hand of a modern orchestra leader marking the rhythm with their sharp penetrating tone and so holding together the whole. The trumpets of the priests were to serve the people as "a memorial before God" (Num. x. 9-10). Hence they are

<sup>44</sup> The English version translates this also as "harp." Tr.

<sup>45</sup> Wellhausen in his Notes to the Polychrome Edition of *The Book of Psalms* thus explains the word which he translates as "for (or from) Jeduthun." "*Jeduthun*, like *Korah* and *Asaph*, was the name of a post-Exilic guild of temple-musicians. . . . Hence the Psalms may have been attributed to them originally in just the same way that many German hymns are attributed to the Moravian Brethren: they belonged originally to a private collection, and subsequently found their way into the common hymn-book." Tr.

in some measure a knocking at the door of God, and apparently have the same function as the bell at a Catholic mass in giving the people the signal to fall upon their knees (2 Chron. xxix. 27-28). The supposition has been expressed that the puzzling *selah* in the Psalms, which undoubtedly had a musical liturgical sense and indicated an interruption of the singing by instruments, marked the places where the priests blew their trumpets—an assumption which can be neither proved nor disproved.

What now is the case with regard to the temple song which of course was the singing of psalms? We learn from Chronicles that the later usage removed women's voices from the service and recognized only Levitical singers. In a remarkable passage (Psalms lxviii. 25) which describes a procession of the second temple the women still come into prominence as "damsels playing with timbrels" but ordinarily only male singers and lute players are mentioned. But if Psalm xlvi, for instance, were sung according to its inscription "after the manner of maidens,"<sup>46</sup> we must assume that the men sang in a falsetto, just as not so very long ago when women's voices were in the same manner excluded from the service of the Evangelical Church, falsetto was regularly practised and belonged to the art of Church music.

With regard to the melodies to which the Psalms were sung, here again, as it seems, we have the same process as in the German Church songs. When we find ascribed to the Psalms as melodies the words "To the Tune of the Winepress,"<sup>47</sup> Psalms viii, lxxxi, lxxxiv; "To the Tune of Lilies,"<sup>48</sup> Psalms xlv, lx, lxix, lxxx; "To the Tune of The Hind of the Dawn,"<sup>49</sup> Psalm xxii; "To the Tune of

<sup>46</sup>This part of the heading to Psalm xlvi, Luther translates, "*Von der Jugend, vorzusingen*"; the authorized English version gives "a song upon Alamoth"; and the Polychrome Bible says "with Elamite instruments." Tr.

<sup>47</sup> על הגתית if derived from גת winepress.

<sup>48</sup> על שושנים

<sup>49</sup> על אילת השחר

The Dove of Far-off Islands,"<sup>50</sup> Psalm lvi; or according to the somewhat doubtful interpretation, Ps. v, "To the Tune of A Swarm of Bees,"<sup>51</sup> we can not doubt that they originally were secular melodies, folk-songs which found admittance into the worship of the people.

With regard to the arrangement of the temple orchestra the chronicler is again able to give us information: the singing Levites stood at the east end of the bronze altar of burnt sacrifice (2 Chron. v. 12) opposite the priests who sounded the trumpets (2 Chron. vii. 6); that is to say to the west of them. This statement to be sure involves difficulties since the whole temple was orientated from west to east so that if the Levites stood before the altar they must have obstructed the entrance to its steps and the priests were entirely concealed behind it. But we must not on this account doubt the definite statement of so competent an authority as the chronicler.

Of a musical liturgical service in the ancient temple we have two vivid descriptions: one from the chronicler and one from Jesus Sirach. The chronicler gives us the following description of a Passover in the first year of the reign of King Hezekiah (2 Chron. xxix. 26-30):

"And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.

And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel.

"And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

"And when they had made an end of offering, the king

<sup>50</sup> עַל יוֹנָה אֱלֹהִים רַחֲמִים, the אֱלֹהִים being regarded as an error in writing אֵלִים.

<sup>51</sup> אֵל הַנְּהִילוֹת.

and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped.

“Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praise unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.”

And Jesus Sirach says in describing the installation of Simon, a contemporary, as high priest, (Ecclesiasticus 1. 15-21):

“He stretched out his hand to the cup, and poured of the blood of the grape, he poured out at the foot of the altar a sweetsmelling savour unto the most high King of all.

“Then shouted the sons of Aaron, and sounded the silver trumpets, and made a great noise to be heard, for a remembrance before the most High.

“Then all the people together hastened, and fell down to the earth upon their faces to worship their Lord God Almighty, the most High.

“The singers also sang praises with their voices, with great variety of sounds was there made sweet melody.

“And the people besought the Lord, the most High, by prayer before him that is merciful, till the solemnity of the Lord was ended, and they had finished the service.

“Then he went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips, and to rejoice in his name.

“And they bowed themselves down to worship the second time, that they might receive a blessing from the most High.”

Here we see art inserted organically in the whole of the service; music too, like the swallow, had found a nest on the altar of the Lord of Hosts (Psalm lxxxiv, 3).

From such descriptions we comprehend the enthusiastic



love and devotion of the Israelite for his temple where everything that was beautiful in his eyes was consecrated and illumined by religion, where he "might behold the beautiful worship of the Lord," as Luther translates Ps. xxvii. 4, incorrectly to be sure, but most comfortingly;<sup>52</sup> and music has contributed the richest share in making this "beautiful worship of the Lord."

Both the secular and temple music of ancient Israel have long since died out in silence. Not one tone has remained alive, not one note of her melodies do we hear, but not in vain did it resound in days of old. Without temple music there would be no temple song; without temple song, no psalms. The psalms belong to the most precious treasures among the spiritual possessions of mankind; these we owe to the music of ancient Israel, and in them the temple music of ancient Israel continues to live to-day and will endure for all time.

<sup>52</sup>The authorized version has simply "the beauty of the Lord." Tr.



PLATE I.

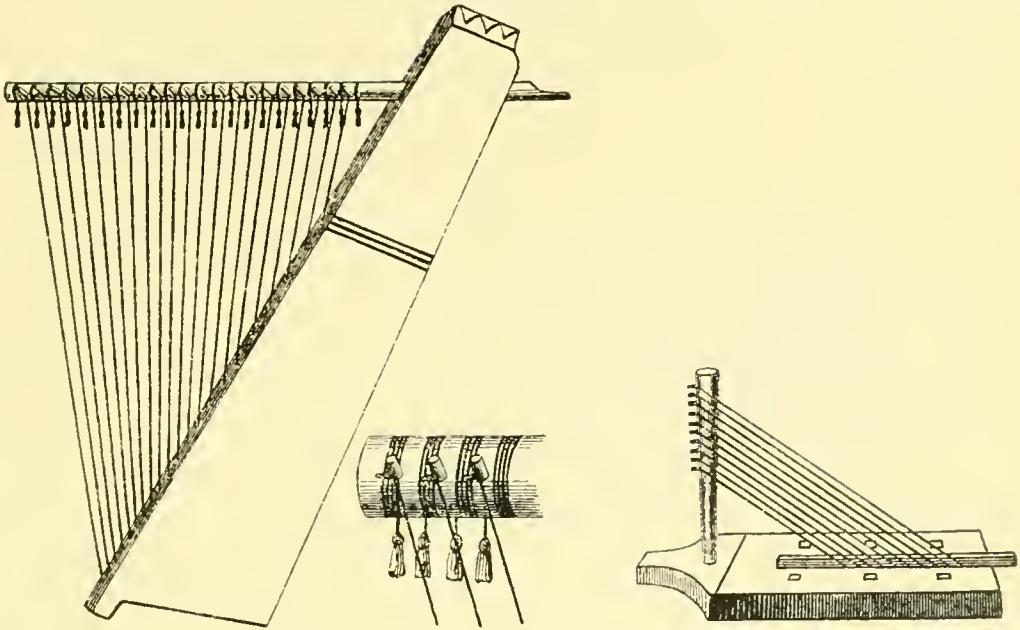


FIG. 1. EGYPTIAN HARPS.



FIG. 2. EGYPTIAN HARP CARRIED IN PROCESSION.



FIG. 3. EGYPTIAN PICTURE OF A BEDOUIN WITH KINNOR.



FIG. 4. AN ASSYRIAN CYMBALIST.



FIG. 5. ASSYRIAN LUTE PLAYERS.



PLATE II.



FIG. 6. SISTRUM AND OTHER ANCIENT INSTRUMENTS.  
(British Museum.)



FIG. 7. RELIEF FROM SENDSCHIRLI IN NORTHERN SYRIA.





FIG. 8. ASSYRIAN HARPISTS.  
(British Museum.)



FIG. 9. ASSYRIAN PROCESSION OF MUSICIANS.





PLATE IV.



FIG. 10. ASSYRIAN HARP AND FLUTE PLAYERS.



FIG. 11. ASSYRIAN QUARTETTE.



FIG. 12. AN ANCIENT ELEVEN-STRINGED HARP OF BABYLON.



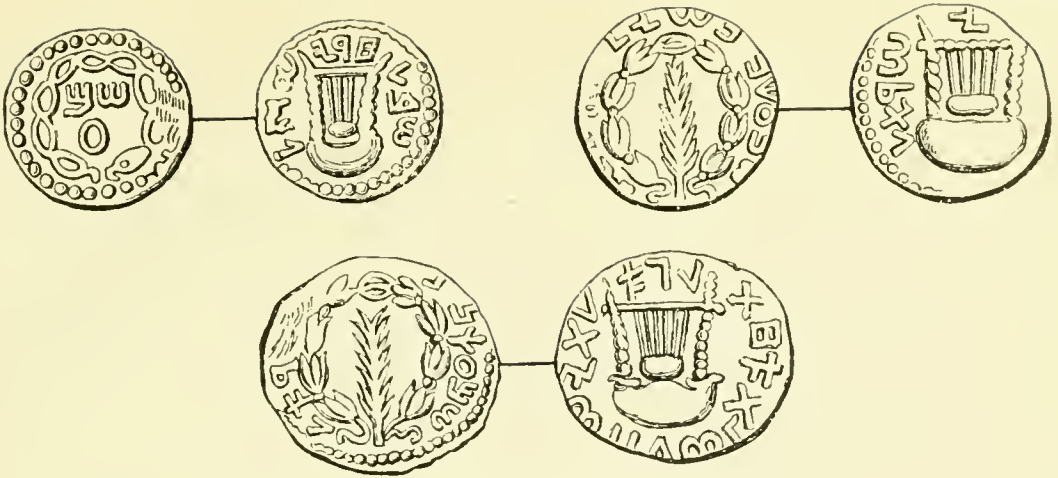


FIG. 13. LYRES ON ANCIENT COINS.  
(After Madden.)



FIG. 14. LUTES ON ANCIENT COINS.  
(After Madden.)



FIG. 15. SEMITIC CAPTIVES PLAYING ON FOUR-STRINGED HARPS.



PLATE VI.

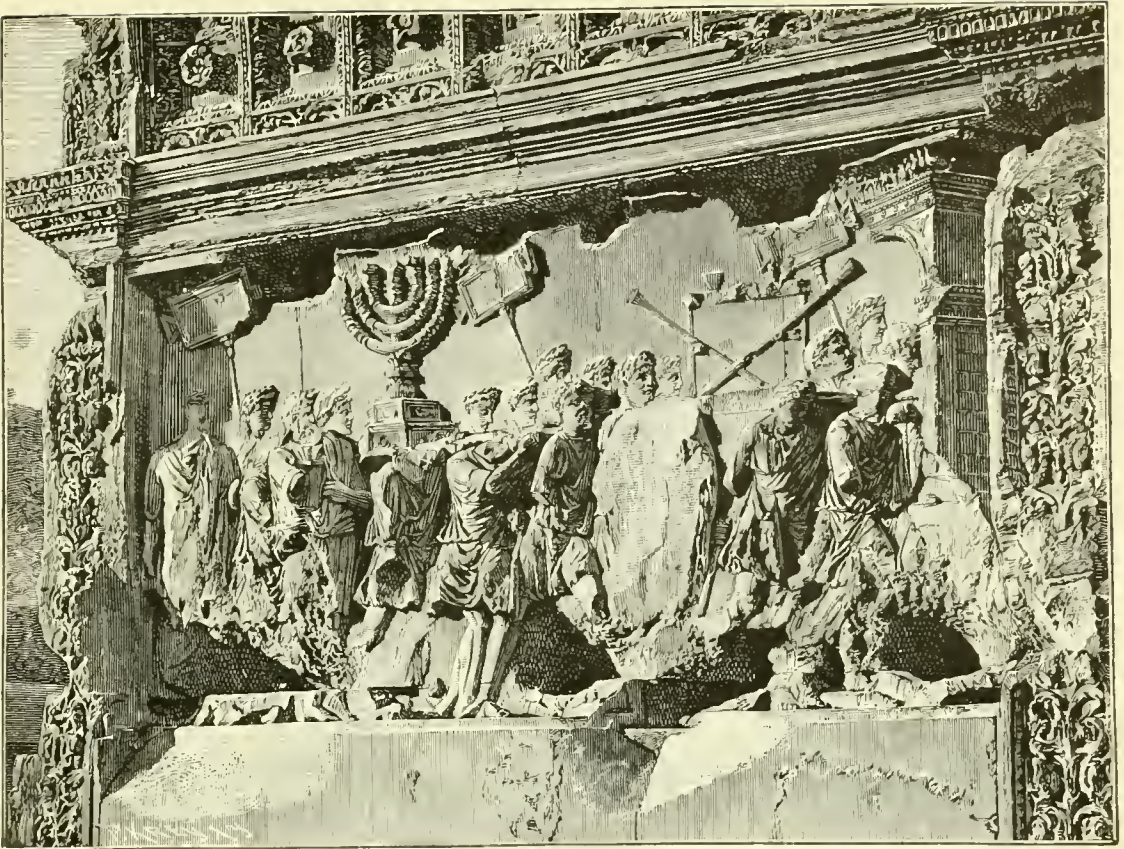


FIG. 16. RELIEF ON THE ARCH OF TITUS.  
Showing the Trumpets (*hatsotseroth*) taken from Herod's Temple.

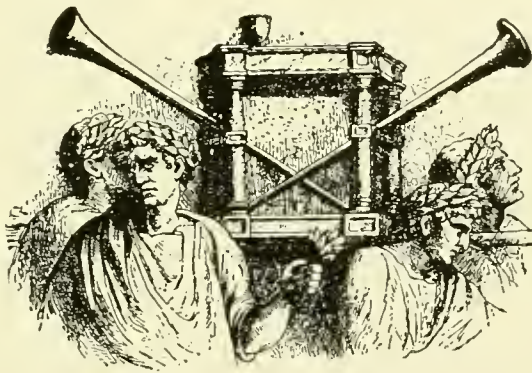


FIG. 17. DETAIL FROM FIG. 16.

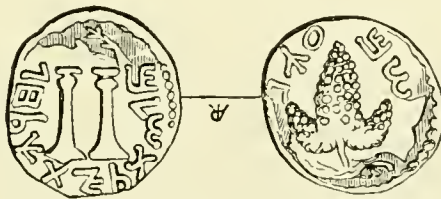


FIG 18. TRUMPETS ON ANCIENT JEWISH COIN.  
(After Madden.)



PLATE VII.

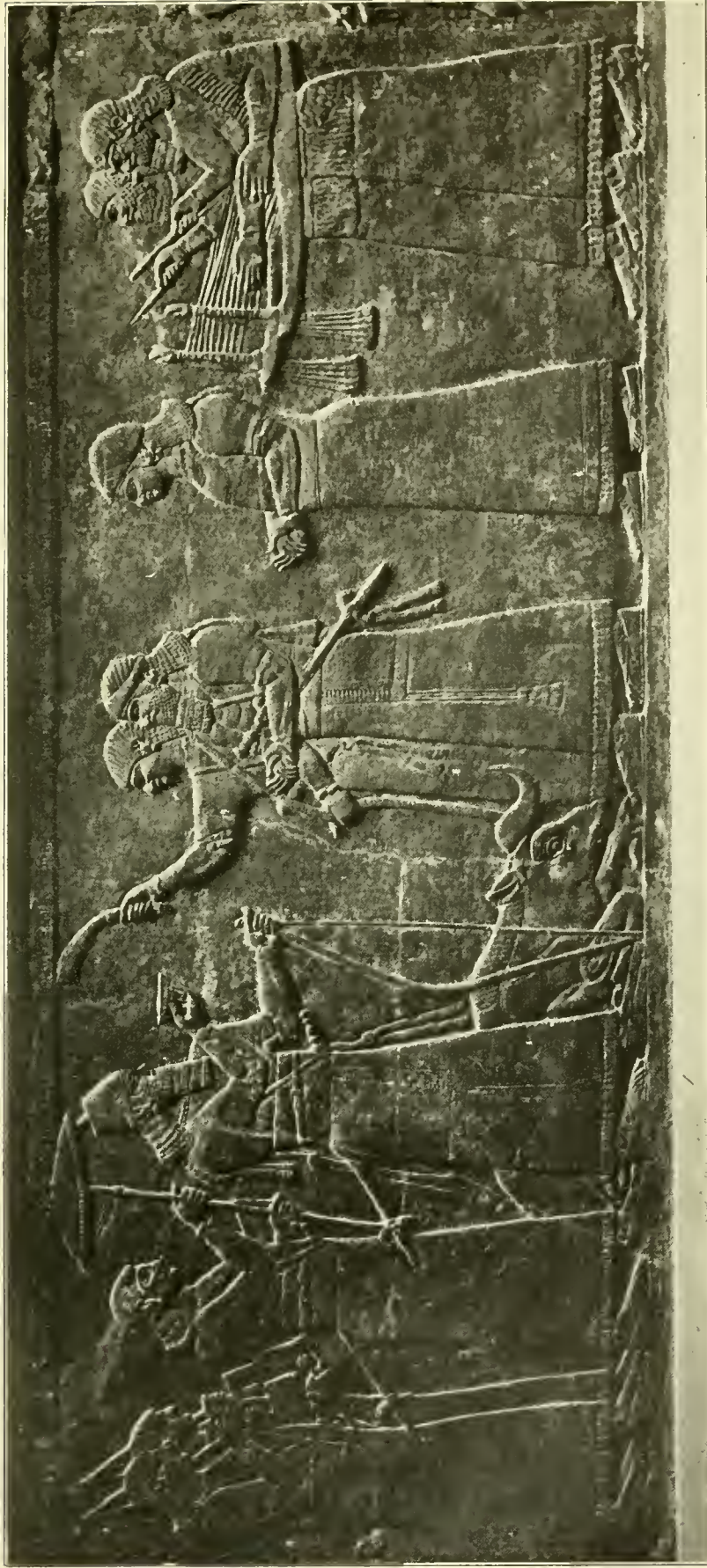


FIG. 19. ASSUR-NASIR-PAL GREETED BY MUSICIANS ON HIS RETURN FROM A BULL HUNT.  
(In the British Museum.)











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