

Musicians and Musical Instruments in Roman and Early Byzantine Mosaics of the Land of Israel: Sources, Precursors and Significance

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“...music...reaches through all time, adorning the soul with the beauties of *harmonia* ... it is able to supply the ratios of the soul – the soul of each person separately and, as well, even the soul of the universe.”¹

ABSTRACT

Musical instruments and musicians depicted on several Roman and Byzantine mosaics of Eretz Israel (Land of Israel) figure in various scenes, some having a sacred context and others an earthly one. The meaning of each instrument is determined by the character of the scenes, and also by the location in which they appear. In this article I studied the ancient local musical culture, the precursors, as well as literary and philosophical sources in order to clarify the role and significance of the images. The archaeological findings were examined with the aim to define the accessible iconographical sources and to establish the genre and the context in which the motifs are presented.

Key words: musical instruments, Land of Israel, mosaics, literary sources, iconography, Roman, Early Byzantine, context, precursors, images.

Los músicos y los instrumentos musicales en los mosaicos romanos y bizantinos de la Tierra de Israel: fuentes, precursores y significado

RESUMEN

Los instrumentos musicales y los músicos representados en varios mosaicos romanos y bizantinos de la tierra de Israel (Eretz Israel) figuran en escenas, algunas en contexto sagrado y otras en contexto profano. El significado de cada instrumento musical es determinado por el carácter de las imágenes, pero también por el lugar en el cual aparecen. En este artículo pretendo examinar la cultura musical local de las épocas anteriores, los precursores, así como las fuentes literarias y filosóficas para poder aclarar la función y significado de las imágenes.

Los hallazgos arqueológicos son examinados con el fin de definir las posibles fuentes iconográficas y para establecer el género y contexto de los motivos presentados.

¹ Aristides Quintillianus, *On Music*, I, 1.

Palabras clave: instrumentos musicales, Tierra de Israel, mosaicos, fuentes literarias, iconografía, romano, bizantino, contexto, precursores, imágenes.

Music has always been one of the most important arts in all cultures and throughout time. Pythagoras considered that the music made by the cosmos was that of the spheres and linked inner man and the cosmos.² Therefore, cosmic music is celestial and earthly music is made by man. Macrobius clarified and asserted that “it is natural for everything that breathes to be captivated by music since the heavenly Soul that animates the universe sprang from music.”³ Music has had in all cultures a double role, earthly as well as sacred, whether polytheistic or monotheistic. However, the boundary between these two kinds of music is not always clear-cut, and earthly music may also have religious connotations. The power of music derived perhaps from the belief of ancient cultures in which magical qualities enable music to chase demons and heal mental illness.⁴ These magic qualities of music were transferred both to musicians and to their musical instruments.

This article⁵ will search for the significance of musicians and musical instruments appearing in mosaics of Roman and early Byzantine Eretz Israel (Land of Israel). The civilizations of the ancient Near East had a rich musical culture displaying many characteristics similar to those of ancient Israel. The local musical culture will be examined, as well as that of their precursors in the ancient Near East, Mesopotamia and Egypt, and these will shed light on the later depictions. Other aspects, such as Greek, Mesopotamian and Jewish philosophical and literary sources, as well as archaeological findings will also be examined.

1. Music and Musical instruments of the ancient Near East

At first glance, it might seem that Greek musical instruments should be considered as the main iconographical source for those depicted on the mosaics studied in this article. However, Greek literary sources attest that many of their own musical instruments were adopted from earlier ones in the Near East.⁶ Among them were: the lyre (*nebel*), as well as the kithara (*kinnor*),⁷ linked with Apollo; and the *auloi*,⁸ the *syrinx* and the horns, as well as the *tympana*, *krotala* and cymbals, linked with the gods Cybele and Dionysos.⁹ In addition to such Greek sources, other written sources

² JAMES 1993: 31, 37.

³ Macrobius, *Commentary*, III, 12.

⁴ SENDREY 1969: 61-62.

⁵ I am very grateful to my friends and colleagues, Prof. Asher Ovadiah and Dr. Ruth Bartal for their helpful suggestions and to my sister Dr. Ana Shidlo for her valuable advice.

⁶ SACHS 1942: 128.

⁷ Plutarch, *De Musica*, 6. 1133C; Strabo, X, 3, 17; MICHAELIDES 1978: 168-169.

⁸ Plutarch, *De Musica*, 7. 1133 D-E.

⁹ SACHS 1942: 148-149.

and archaeological findings also provide evidence for the musical culture of ancient civilizations, such as of Egypt, Sumer, Phoenicia and Canaan.¹⁰

It is thus not surprising that, despite the great time-gap, the musical instruments in Roman and early Byzantine mosaics do resemble their earlier counterparts in ancient civilizations in Israel and in its region. This suggests the need to study the significance and the concepts attached to each instrument in these earlier civilizations in order to find the sources and meaning of those depicted on our later mosaics.¹¹

2. Musicians and musical instruments on the mosaics of Eretz Israel (Land of Israel)

Interestingly, only a restricted number of musical instruments appear in the mosaics of the Eretz Israel of the Roman and early Byzantine periods: the lyre/ *kithara* (or *kinnor*), the *aulos*, the *syrinx*, horns (*shofar* and *hazozra*), cymbals, drums and tambourines. It is possible to discern that these instruments belong to different types: the stringed ones, lyre, kithara or *kinnor* are associated with Apollo, whereas the wind (*auloi*, *syrinx* and horns), as well as the percussion instruments (cymbals, drums and tambourines) belong to Dionysos and his followers. The effects of the music differ according to the type of instrument they play: thus, those of the first type produce harmonious music, whereas those of the second (wind and percussion) create a frenetic, orgiastic rhythm that leads to ecstasy, even madness and aggression, releasing man's lower urges. Plato considers that Apollo, the Muses, and the god Dionysos instilled in men not only the sense of rhythm, but also that of harmony.¹² The harmony created may be regarded as both celestial and human. The importance and power of music is emphasized by Aristides Quintillianus (fourth century CE) who considers that "... music... reaches through all time, adorning the soul with the beauties of harmonia ... it is able to supply the ratios of the soul – the soul of each person separately and, as well, even the soul of the universe."¹³

Quintillianus and Pythagoras point out that the sounds of stringed instruments elevated the human soul to the heavenly orbits, whereas those of wind instruments brought the soul down to the lower regions.¹⁴ In other words, stringed instruments bring forth celestial music, in contrast to the earthly quality of the music of the other instruments. In most mosaics they appear in different scenes, but in the few cases where they do figure in the same scene, their significance differs accordingly.

¹⁰ BRAUN 2002. From the Bronze Age (3200-1200 BCE) onwards one finds among the musical instruments the *kinnor* (a *kithara* with ten strings), the *nebel* (lyre), the *halil* (*aulos*), and the *tof* (drum) and others.

¹¹ SENDREY 1969: 15.

¹² Plato, *Laws* II, 672D.

¹³ Aristides Quintillianus, *On Music*, I, 1.

¹⁴ KARTOMI 1990: 115-116.

3. The Jerusalem Orpheus (Fig. 1)

Orpheus is known for the charms, spells and incantations -- his singing and the music of the lyre or *kithara* which he plays have magic qualities, the animals and trees listen spellbound to his music—in short, he enraptured all nature with his magical singing and playing, as Aeschylus points out.¹⁵ It should be noted that the legendary Greek Orpheus was not the first hero said to have tamed animals by music and to have been depicted as such. In fact, an earlier shepherd playing the lyre as he leads his herd appears already on a Babylonian relief of c.1600 BCE.¹⁶

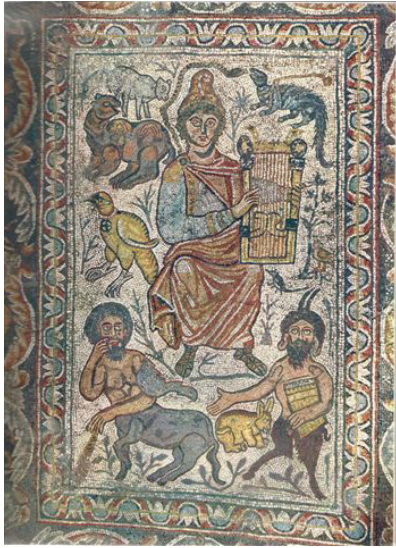


Fig. 1: Orpheus from Jerusalem (Grabar 1996: Ill. on p. 113)

Nevertheless, the depiction in the Jerusalem mosaic is unique.¹⁷ Orpheus sits here, his left hand holding the *kithara*¹⁸ (*kinnor*), which rests on his left knee, while apparently plucking the strings with the fingers of the right hand. ¹⁹ His *kithara* is, it seems, unique in shape, and also in having eleven strings instead of the usual ten.²⁰ The significance of this instrument and its player might be clarified by a study of the linguistic range of its name-- *kinnor*--in the ancient civilizations of the Near East.

The *kinnor* has an ancient, rich and interesting history, with religious connotations. First, in successive civilizations in the Near East, it denoted two or more related stringed instruments. In a slightly different form, *kinnarum*, was first found in texts

¹⁵ Aeschylus *Agam.* 1629f.

¹⁶ GALPIN 1955: 56, Pl.VIII.7.

¹⁷ The Jerusalem Orpheus mosaic, dated to the late fourth or early fifth century CE, strengthens the evidence that paganism, and more specifically Orphism, was still widespread at the time, see OVADIAH and MUCZNIK 1981: 165-166.

¹⁸ The Greeks, such as Plutarch (*De Musica*, 1133C) considered the *kithara* as an Asiatic musical instrument.

¹⁹ OVADIAH and MUCZNIK 1981: 152-166.

²⁰ FINNEY 1997: 75, 191, Ill.27a.

at Ebla (**Sumer**), ca. 2400 BCE, and later in Old Babylonian Mari, and in the Late Bronze Age in Hattusha and Ugarit. In Egypt a lyre is depicted in a wall painting of the 18th-19th Egyptian Dynasty.²¹ In the Iron Age, the *kinnor* is frequently mentioned in the Bible and also appeared in texts from Phoenicia. The lyre was divinized in Mesopotamia and as such could receive offerings.²² Secondly, in Sumerian and Hittite texts, the lyre is closely linked to the goddess Inanna. -- a Sumerian goddess linked with the Babylonian Ishtar, who merged with Astarte, and in turn corresponds to the Greek Aphrodite.²³ The deification of lyres and harps seems to have been first attested in Sumer, and may have been a hypostasis of Inanna/Ishtar.

Thirdly, *kinnor* denotes not only a musical stringed instrument but also several deities in various ancient civilizations which flourished in this geographical area.²⁴ For instance, Ugaritic texts listing deities also include one named *kinnor*.

Another link between music and divinity is that of kings who both acted as priests, sometimes with prophetic features, and played music. Thus, the Sumerian king Shulgi of Ur (ca. 2000 BCE) praises his own virtuosity in the playing of stringed instruments (lyre) and preeminence in divination.²⁵ This appears to be an early example of a king and priest who was also a skilled musician – a triple function which in a later period and in a very different cultural context, King David would apparently also assume.

Several Phoenician kings were simultaneously priests of Ishtar, and in Ugarit this seems to have been a frequent occurrence.²⁶ A striking example is Kinnyrias, the Phoenician legendary hero was a priest-king of Aphrodite who played the instrument named *kinnor*.²⁷ We might reasonably assume that the deification of the lyre and harp can be the source of the belief in the magical power of the music these instruments create, and by extension, of Orpheus' magical power?

In any case, the music of the lyre (or *kithara*) purifies man, raising him above material cares, and leading him to ecstasy in anticipation of the moment when the soul, finally free, ascends heavenwards.²⁸ The belief that music will, after death, restore the soul to heaven was expressed by Macrobius.²⁹ Apollo's favoured instruments, the lyre and the *kithara*, brought order and serenity to man, calming his agitation.³⁰ In the words of Aristides Quintillianus, "...Apollo and his instruments happen to be in the

²¹ BRAUN 2002: 16-17; for representations on Egyptian paintings, see Ills.III.2f, III.3 (a Canaanite lyre on a painting at Beni-Hasan dated to ca. 1900 BCE).

²² FRANKLIN 2007: 42.

²³ FRANKLIN 2007: 33-34.

²⁴ Such deities are listed in Canaanite, Phoenician, Cypriot, Akkadian and Ugaritic texts from about the middle of the third millennium.

²⁵ FRANKLIN 2006: 50-51.

²⁶ FRANKLIN 2006: 49.

²⁷ SENDREY 1969: 266. The word may have come to the Greeks from the Phoenicians. The name was known from Cyprus and the Mycenaean world. Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra, on the Syrian coast) had close trade and cultural ties with Cyprus. The name Kinnyrias seems derived from the Ugaritic *kinnarum* and Hebrew *kinnarum* see FRANKLIN 2007: 46.

²⁸ Macrobius, *Commentary*, II. iii, 11.

²⁹ Macrobius, *Commentary*, II. iii, 6.

³⁰ Plato, *The Republic*, III, 398-399d-e, and n.47.

purser and ethereal essence, and he is the leader of this essence.³¹ Thus Orpheus may be considered a musician, a poet and a philosopher, a learned man, who, by imitating the harmony of the celestial spheres on a stringed instrument and in song, earned a return to the celestial realm.³² Macrobius sheds light on the celestial origin of both the soul and the music, and the subsequent influence of music on the soul.³³

To return to the Jerusalem Orpheus mosaic, this mosaic is special in yet another way: it includes two figures that are absent on all other known Orpheus mosaics--Pan and the centaur (Fig. 2). Though frequently depicted as companions of Dionysos, their appearance here is not only unique, but also seems significantly out of context.³⁴ This is also true of the *syrinx* held by Pan, for in fact, the lyre or *kithara* is the only musical instrument traditionally shown in all the other Orpheus mosaics. This exceptional appearance may be explained by the fact that both Pan and the centaur are hybrid creatures, who unite in one body both human and animal natures. This depiction could then be interpreted as the allegory of the domestication of the bestial instincts of human beings through the power of Orpheus' music.

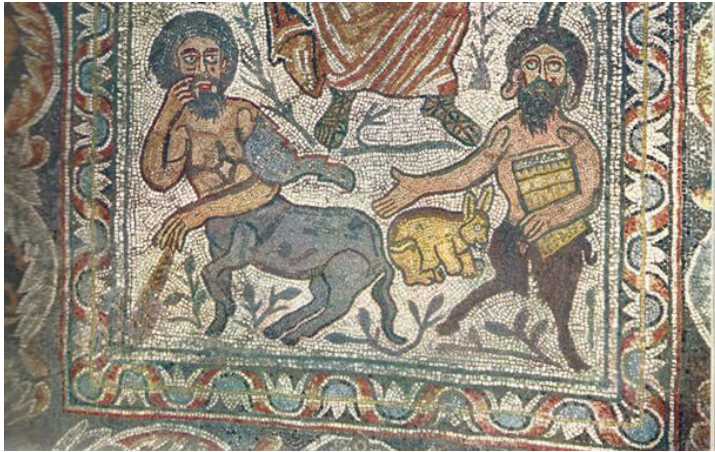


Fig. 2: Detail of Fig. 1.

Furthermore, it seems possible to suggest that the unusual inclusion of the lyre and the *syrinx* in the same scene may be an allegorical image of the harmony attained by the spiritual and the earthly nature co-existent within man himself. And finally, this depiction might also represent the parallel merging of Apollo and Dionysos. Apollo and Dionysos not only shared the same cultic site, but were two complementary sides of one and the same god, as Macrobius claimed,³⁵ citing Euripides' lyric fragment,

³¹ Aristides Quintillianus 1983: 155, Bk II.18. (second to fourth century CE).

³² OVADIAH and MUCZNIK 1980: 49 and n 41.

³³ Macrobius, *Commentary*, III. ii, 7; see also, n. 4

³⁴ FINNEY 1997: 84-85, 90. These figures also appear with Orpheus on two ivory *pyxides*, see FINNEY 1997: Ills. 11, 14.

³⁵ Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.18. 6-7.

Licymnius.³⁶ To elucidate the connection between the two gods, he adds that on the Parnassus, where the Bacchanals are celebrated, one can see several groups of Satyrs, hear their voices and frequently also the sound of cymbals.³⁷ Likewise, Plutarch declared: "...it concerns not only him [Apollo], but also Dionysos, whose share in Delphi is no less than that of Apollo."³⁸ Pausanias also refers to the women who run up "to the peaks of Parnassos raving up there for Dionysos and Apollo."³⁹ Nonnos expressed the same idea: "Bend your Olympian bow to help the Bassarids. Glorify the cliff of your Parnassos common to both, where the Bacchant woman holding revel has raised her voice in song to you and sleepless Dionysos, and kindled one common Delphic flame for both."⁴⁰ One can detect a multi-layered significance in this mosaic. The inclusion of Pan and the centaur -- two figures belonging to Dionysos' entourage, and the *syrix* held by Pan, emphasizes the symbiosis of the gods and the religious character of this mosaic.

4. The David-Orpheus from Gaza (Figs. 3, 4)

The David-Orpheus mosaic in the Gaza synagogue, dated early sixth century CE (508-509CE), can be seen by its nature and location, as having religious or sacred connotations.⁴¹



Fig. 3: David-Orpheus from Gaza (photo A. Ovadia)



Fig. 4: David-Orpheus from Gaza (photo A. Ovadia)

³⁶ Euripides, *Fragments* 477: (Chorus) "Laurel-loving Bacchus, healer Apollo skilled with the lyre..."

³⁷ Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.18. 5.

³⁸ Plutarch, *Moralia*, 388E.

³⁹ Pausanias, X.32.5.

⁴⁰ Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* XXVII.259. (fifth century CE)

⁴¹ OVADIAH 1968: 124-127; OVADIAH 2009: 301-307 interprets this image as a symbol of the Divine Providence, as well as of Messianic hope and the expectation of the End of Days, based on *Isaiah* 11:1, while the *shofar*, made from a ram's horn recalls the Binding of Isaac (*Genesis Rabbah* LVI 9). I am grateful to Asher Ovadia for making his article available to me.

David (somewhat like the Mesopotamian king-priests-musicians mentioned above) is depicted both as king and as musician. As Orpheus, David is a musician, whose music has supernatural power and effect. He is seated on what seems a throne, holding a lyre (*nebel* or *kinnor*) on his left side, his left hand visible behind the cords and holding a *plectrum* in his right one. This lyre resembles the one held by Orpheus of Jerusalem.⁴² David is shown wearing a *tunica* and a *chlamys* held on his shoulder, and a jewelled crown on his head, as befits a king; and he also has a nimbus.⁴³ The crown shown on the mosaic may echo 2 Samuel which asserts that the crown that was set on David's head weighed one talent of gold and had precious stones.⁴⁴ Psalm 21:4 mentions "...thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head." More important still is the passage that states that David shall be a priest for ever, a king of righteousness (Ps. 110:4).

In fact, David himself may have adopted some of the functions of the priesthood. This may be inferred by the fact that, after the ark of God had been brought into the tent we are told that "David blessed the people in the name of the Lord"⁴⁵ May one consider that this passage presents the king as assuming also the role of priest, thus providing a new understanding of the depiction of David's crown in the Gaza synagogue?

The Old Testament also helps us understand the significance or the religious role played by David the musician and his *kinnor*.⁴⁶ The *kinnor* is also mentioned as a cultic instrument, when David and all Israel bring the Ark to Jerusalem: "And David and all Israel played before God with all their might, and with singing, and with *kinnorot*, and with *nebalim*, and with timbrels, and with cymbals, and with trumpets." (1 Chron. 13:8) This musical celebration continues after the Ark arrives in Jerusalem, when David instructs the Levites "...to appoint their brethren to be the singers with instruments of music, *nebalim* and *kinnorot* and cymbals to sound loudly for joyful celebration."⁴⁷

David's role as religious leader appears in yet another way, resembling somewhat that of the Sumerian king-priest-musician Shulgi of Ur (see above). David's playing the *kinnor* can be related to that of the Levitical and temple instrument sometimes linked to prophecy.⁴⁸ "...David and the captains of the host separated to the service the sons of Assaph, and of Heiman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries and with cymbals,..." (1 Chron.25:1). Thus it seems that David was considered to be the one who ordained every thing related to Temple music, instituting also the use of the *kinnor* and the *nebel*.⁴⁹

⁴² A similar instrument appears in the mosaic in Blanzky-les-Fîsmes, see OVADIAH and MUCZNIK 1980: Fig. 6.

⁴³ The nimbus also appears in the Orpheus mosaic of Ptolemais, Cyrenaica, see OVADIAH and MUCZNIK 1980:47-48. n. 29.

⁴⁴ 2 Samuel 12:30.

⁴⁵ I Chronicles XVI: 1-2.

⁴⁶ The *kinnor* appears first, in connection with Jubal, the ancestor of all who played the *kinnor* and the *ugab*, who becomes the symbol of musicians, members of guilds, or "bards" (Gen. 4:21).

⁴⁷ See 1 Chron.15:16.

⁴⁸ BRAUN 2002: 17.

⁴⁹ BAYER 1968: 107.

Thus, the music of the lyre or harp has had many functions: the Orphic taming of animals, and of man's bestial instincts, and the accompaniment to prophesying. In addition, this music was also linked with miraculous healing, as when David played the harp to Saul and cured him of the evil spirit.⁵⁰ The *kinnor*, which was the predominant instrument in the Old Testament, has been identified as a lyre or kithara,⁵¹ a fact strengthened by archaeological finds.

5. The Sheikh Zouède mosaic

Of all the mosaics of Roman and early Byzantine Eretz Israel, the **Sheikh Zouède** mosaic presents the richest repertoire of musical instruments (Fig. 5). The scene depicts a Dionysiac *thiasos*, whose participants are musicians.⁵² It seems evident that since this procession is dedicated to the god Dionysos, the scene has religious connotations, and the depiction of music-playing and dancing has an ecstatic, frenetic character.⁵³ The female centaur harnessed to Dionysos' chariot, holds aloft an oversized lyre⁵⁴, which, by attracting the viewer's eye, creates the central focus of the scene



Fig. 5: Sheikh Zouède (photo A. Ovadiah)

⁵⁰ See 1 Sam. 16:16, 23.

⁵¹ The number of strings varies: ten according to Josephus (*Ant.vii.12.3*) seven according to the *BT, 'Arak.13.b*. For Philo of Alexandria the seven strings of the lyre symbolized the seven spheres of celestial harmony. See BRAUN 2002: 18-19. Seven was considered a mystic number in Israel, as in the ancient Near East, see SENDREY 1969: 499 and nn. 14, 15; *BT, Sukkah 45a*.

⁵² The figures and the different musical instruments depicted in the mosaic of Sheikh Zouède in Northern Sinai, were studied by OVADIAH *et al.* 1991: 181-191, espec. 185, Pls. 22-27.

⁵³ To the best of my knowledge, this fact has to date been overlooked.

⁵⁴ The size of this lyre equals that of the satyr riding a mule nearby.



Fig. 6: Sheikh Zouède, detail (photo A. Ovadiah)

(Fig. 6). At her side, a male centaur holds a horn in his right hand and a straight pipe (*keras*) in his left. To the right, after the Silenos with a donkey, a dancing satyr plays a pair of slap cymbals, while before him a nude Maenad dances to the rhythm of the bells she holds in each hand (Fig. 7). The noisy and boisterous procession advances in the lower register with a dancing satyr playing slap cymbals; this same instrument, as well as a *syrinx* appears in the space nearby (Fig. 8). The procession progresses with a satyr blowing a horn – a conch trumpet (or *kochlos*)⁵⁵—and a dancing Maenad playing a drum or *tympanum* (Fig. 9).

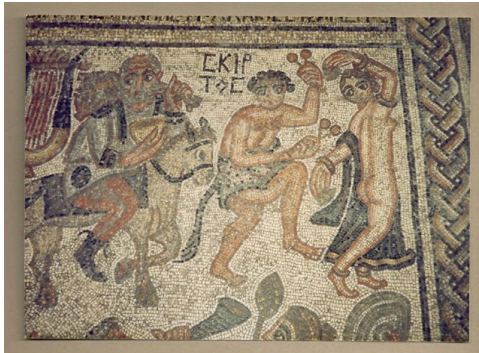


Fig. 7: Sheikh Zouède, detail (photo A. Ovadiah)



Fig. 8: Sheikh Zouède, detail (photo A. Ovadiah)

The Dionysiac *thiasos* depicted on this mosaic presents a variety of instruments, unusual in number and diversity, as compared with similar scenes on mosaics and sarcophagi. The depiction in the centre of the composition of a very large lyre held up by the female centaur is the most prominent and unique feature in the Sheikh Zouède

⁵⁵ BRAUN 2002: 256.

mosaic.⁵⁶ Examples which apparently seem similar, but have some different features, may be found on a few mosaics,⁵⁷ and sarcophagi.⁵⁸

Scholars have considered the Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus, which included “The Triumphal Return of Dionysus from India”,⁵⁹ as the iconographic source for the representations of Dionysiac *thiasoi* in art. According to the description of the procession, a chorus of three hundred men playing on kitharas gilded with gold was included.⁶⁰ The members of the Guild of the Artists of Dionysus, who were *choregoi* and flautists, also figured.⁶¹ Flute (*auloi*) players certainly had a very important role, for in this period the chorus became secondary to the flute.

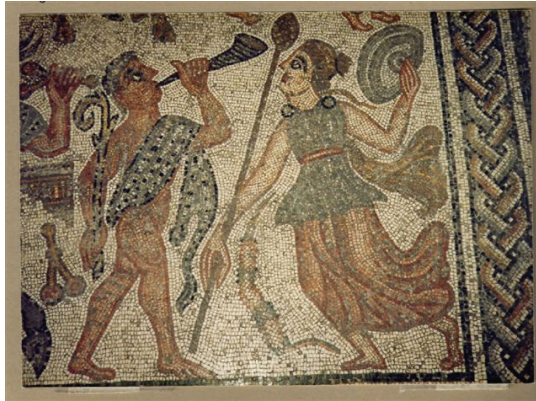


Fig. 9: Sheikh Zouéde, detail (photo A. Ovadiah)

⁵⁶ The scene on a lead sarcophagus of uncertain provenance, but possibly from Gaza, is the comparative example most similar to this representation. However, the lyre is much smaller here, and thus does not constitute the focus of the scene, as in Sheikh Zouéde. In addition, it is held by a male centaur, who shares the central part of the panel with another male centaur playing a *syrix*. See RAHMANI 1999: 97, Pl. 18, Fig. 151.

⁵⁷ A composition resembling that of the Sheikh Zouéde mosaic can be observed on a late second-early third century CE mosaic fragment from Gerasa, Jordan. Here two centaurs are shown harnessed to the chariot of Dionysos and Ariadne, and play a lyre and a double *aulos*, but the lyre is in this case, obviously secondary to the double *aulos*. This mosaic fragment is nowadays in the ancient art collection of the Yale Gallery, Ruth Elizabeth White Fund No. 2002.2, Fig. from – e Catalogue, <http://artgallery.yale.edu>. On the second century CE mosaic of Acholla the chariot of the god is yoked to a pair of male centaurs, yet none of these hold musical instruments, see DUNBABIN 1971: 52-65.

⁵⁸ See KOCH and SICHTERMANN 1982: Nos. 225-226; see also MATZ I 1968: No. 59; MATZ II 1968: Nos. 105-129, for Roman sarcophagi where the chariot of Dionysos is shown yoked to a pair of male centaurs, where the lyre also occupies a secondary place, while the *aulos* is more central and more conspicuous. On a sarcophagus from the Vatican, a male centaur holding a small lyre is shown in the foreground, as he pulls Dionysos' chariot, while in the background, another male centaur holds aloft a double *aulos*, see KOCH and SICHTERMANN 1982: No. 232. A similar scheme is depicted on a third century CE sarcophagus in the Louvre: on the part of the panel with Dionysos' chariot, a centaur holds a lyre, while on the other part, where Ariadne figures, the centaur holds a horn from which he pours wine, see BARATTE and METZGER 1985: MA 1013, 146-150, No.71.

⁵⁹ RICE 1983: 17, 21.

⁶⁰ RICE 1983: 21.

⁶¹ RICE 1983: 58.

The musical instruments figuring in the Sheikh Zouéde *thiasos* are usually associated with the cult of Dionysos: the *aulos*, *syrinx*, cymbals, clappers, *tympanum*, and tambourines. As mentioned, wind instruments, such as the *aulos* and the *syrinx* symbolized the urges and passions of man, while providing the ecstatic ambience for the Dionysiac cult.⁶² These instruments, as well as the horns, cymbals, *krotala*, timbrels and tympana were closely associated with Dionysos' wild and orgiastic religion,⁶³ releasing man's lower, animal impulses.

There is, however, one instrument that seems out of context here – the large lyre held in the centre by the female centaur harnessed to Dionysos' chariot. This evokes Apollo and his music. It seems reasonable to propose that this mosaic, as the Jerusalem Orpheus mosaic, suggests the merging of Apollo and Dionysos, an idea that underlies the mosaic at Sheikh Zouéde.

6. The Roman Villa at Sepphoris/Zippori

Another mosaic dedicated to Dionysos and the myths connected with him, appears in the *triclinium* of the Roman villa at **Sepphoris/Zippori** (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Zippori/Sepphoris, Roman villa (Meyers, Netzer and Meyers 1992: Fig. on p. 43)

Several of the scenes include musical instruments, but here these are limited to double *auloi* and a few *tympana*. Significantly, the lyre does not figure in any of these panels. The scene of the *Symposion* or the Drinking Contest shows Dionysos lying, as he raises his empty cup, while Herakles stands before him and lifts his cup. A satyr playing a double *aulos* stands between the two, and two maenads look on, while one holds aloft a *tympanum* (Fig. 11). In another panel the god, lying in his chariot accompanied by a satyr shown playing a similar double *aulos*, appears in the scene of the *thiasos* (or triumphal procession of Dionysos) (Fig. 12). In a procession of gift-bearers depicted in another panel, a centaur plays the same instrument, while a maenad beats a *tympanum* (Fig. 13). On yet another panel a maenad is shown sitting and holding a basket, and another one is shown playing a double *aulos* nearby. The word

⁶² WINTERNITZ 1967:37.

⁶³ These instruments were also linked with Cybele, see SACHS 1942: 148-149.

Komos appears above the scene (Fig. 14). This word refers to the revelry or merry-making of Dionysiac festivities, but it can also be suggested that the figure may be the personification of *Komos*⁶⁴ since it is included among personifications of some abstract ideas, that accompany Dionysos.⁶⁵ Philostratus mentions that: “This spirit *Comus* (Revelry) to whom men owe their revelry....”⁶⁶ In another scene, which represents a procession of offerings, a maenad is depicted playing a double *aulos*.⁶⁷



Fig. 11: Zippori/Sepphoris, Roman villa, Drinking Contest (Bowersock 2006: Ill. 25)



Fig. 12: Zippori/Sepphoris, Roman villa, Dionysos' Triumph (Meyers, Netzer and Meyers 1992: Fig. on p.48)



Fig. 13: Zippori/Sepphoris, Roman villa, Gift bearers (Meyers, Netzer and Meyers 1992: Fig. on p. 49)

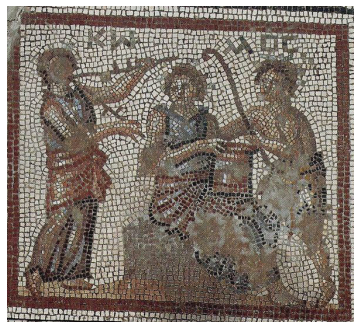


Fig. 14: Zippori/Sepphoris, Roman villa, Komos (Meyers, Netzer and Meyers 1992: Fig. on p. 46)

The musical instruments in the cases of Sheikh Zouède and of the Sepphoris/Zippori mosaics are both associated with Dionysos, however, the atmosphere conspicuously diverges in each: while the first displays lively movement and merriness, the second, in contrast, suggests a calm and subdued character. However, a very obvious and important difference can be discerned -- only in the Sheikh Zouède mosaic does

⁶⁴ HINKS 1968: 112; LEVI DORO I, 1971:52; OVADIAH 2002: 177.

⁶⁵ HASTINGS 1951: 794.

⁶⁶ Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, I, 25.

⁶⁷ BRAUN 2002: 262-266.

the lyre appear. This may be a reminder of Apollo's music, hinting at the connection between the two gods (see above).

7. The Synagogue at Sepphoris/Zippori

A very different and interesting mosaic pavement was found in the synagogue at **Sepphoris/Zippori** (Fig. 15).



Fig. 15: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, whole composition (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p. 14)

Several musical instruments are included in the various panels, of which the religious connotations are not hard to find: A *shofar*, decorated with three rings, appears on the right side of each *menorah* shown in the two lateral sections of the panel, and the Sacred Ark in the central section, in a scene frequent in synagogue mosaics in Eretz Israel (Fig. 16).⁶⁸ The scene in the following panel, may however, despite its damaged state, be identified as representing the consecration of Aaron, with one of the golden bells which must have hung from the hem of his garment, still visible (Fig. 17).⁶⁹ The daily offerings in the Temple of cattle, oil and flour with two trumpets *hazozroth*, labeled by the inscription -- *hazozrot* are depicted in one of the lateral sections of the next panel. The pair of *hazozrot* symbolize those that were sounded at the daily offerings in the Temple (Fig. 18).⁷⁰ A basket of fruits filled with fruits is shown in another section of this same band, probably referring to the first fruits brought to the Temple. A pair of cymbals connected by a chain appears below it (Fig. 19).⁷¹ According to 'Arakin, there was a bronze cymbal from Moses' time in the Temple.⁷²

⁶⁸ For the synagogues, see OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: No. 29, Pl. XXIX (Beth Shean); No. 87, Pl. LXV (Hammat Tiberias); No. 103, Pl. LXXXIV.2 (Hosefa); No. 104, Pl. LXXXIX (Hulda); No. 108, Pl. XCII (Jericho); No. 145 (Kefar Qarnaim); No. 170, Pl. CVI (Khirbet Susiyah); No. 178 (Ma'oz Haim). For the symbolism of the *shofar*, see OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: 160-161, and n. 93. Also at Beth Alpha and Ma'on Nirim, see BRAUN 2002: Ills. V.65, V.66.

⁶⁹ WEISS and NETZER 1996: 20, who quote Exodus 28: 31-35.

⁷⁰ WEISS and NETZER 1996: 20-22.

⁷¹ WEISS and NETZER 1996: 24.

⁷² 'Arakin 10b.

This unusual juxtaposition of two so very distinct motifs has gone unnoticed and disregarded. Up to date no other case has been found on mosaics of Roman and early Byzantine Eretz Israel where a basket of fruits appears accompanied by a musical instrument.⁷³

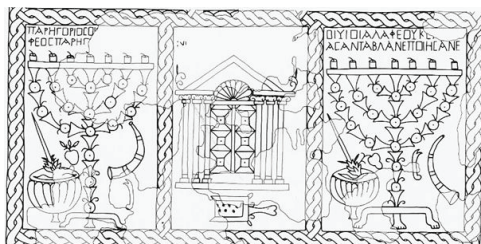


Fig. 16: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, panel 2 (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p. 18)



Fig. 17: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, panel 3 (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p.20)

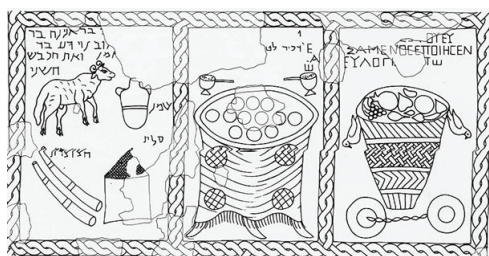


Fig. 18: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, panel 4 (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p. 24)



Fig. 19: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, detail of Fig. 18 (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p. 25)

An explanation might be found in the next panel of the mosaic in this synagogue at Sepphoris/Zippori. Another unusual element appears here: the next panel of the mosaic in the synagogue at Sepphoris/Zippori presents a Zodiac, with large parts of the signs destroyed; however, it is still possible to identify most of them, as well as the inscriptions inserted (Figs. 20, 21). Two youths appear in the sign of the Gemini, with only their heads and legs still visible, with a club near the right and a lyre near the left leg (Fig. 22). The inclusion of a lyre in a Zodiac wheel seems to be unique -- it has not been found up to date, neither in the mosaics of Eretz Israel, nor in those of other regions of the Roman or early Byzantine world.

⁷³ For other baskets with fruits, see OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: Monastery of Lady Mary, Beth Shean, No. 26, Pl. XXI; El-Hammam, Beth Shean, baskets with various fruits, 30-31, No. 27a,b, Pls. XXV-XXVI. All of these may symbolize fertility and abundance.



Fig. 20: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, Zodiac (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p. 26)



Fig. 21: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, Zodiac (Weiss and Netzer 1996: Fig. on p. 27)

This Zodiacal sign of Gemini (*Teomim*) corresponds to the Jewish month of *Sivan*⁷⁴-- the month when the festival of *Shavuoth* (the Feast of Weeks and Tabernacles) takes place. This feast is characterized by music-playing, singing and dancing; it is also one of the three feasts of pilgrimage to Jerusalem both in the time of the Temple and today. The representation of a lyre in the sign of Gemini, as well as the inclusion of the basket with the first fruits (*Bikurim*), which is also a component of this feast, together with the cymbals shown below it in the same panel, in addition to the two *hazozrot* in the panel near the last, all this seems to suggest that they may represent an allegory of the Feast of Shavuoth. The *shofar* and the *hazozra*, as well as cymbals, were instruments played by the priests, according to Chronicles.⁷⁵ The *shofar* (lamb's horn) recalls the Sacrifice of Isaac, symbolizing Divine Providence, redemption and Messianic hope.⁷⁶

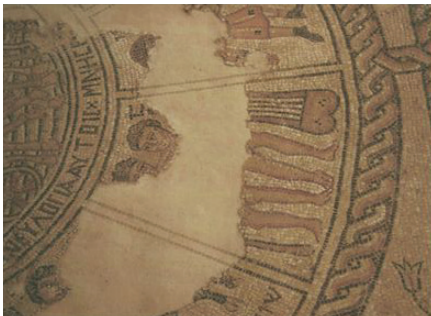


Fig. 22: Zippori/Sepphoris, Synagogue, Gemini (photo M. Hassner)

⁷⁴ WEISS and NETZER 1996: 28.

⁷⁵ I Chronicles XV, 24, where the priests blow the *hazozrot*; I Chronicles XVI, 42, where they played *hazozrot* and cymbals. Both refer to the bringing of the Ark to Gibeon.

⁷⁶ OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: 161, and n. 93; OVADIAH 1996: 56, and n. 15, quoting Genesis Rabbah LVI 9.

It can be proposed that these scenes be interpreted as the procession of the Feast of Weeks or Tabernacles, with singing, music-playing and dancing, such as still takes place nowadays in many kibbutzim (in memory of the pilgrimage processions to the Temple, with the bringing of the First Fruits and Offerings).

8. Image of a flute-player

Images of flute-players are shown on several mosaics of the Eretz Israel – either as a figure within a large scene or as a sort of vignette within a medallion -- part of a larger complex. In the first case, a Siren is depicted playing an *aulos* in a scene depicting Odysseus and the Sirens, on the mosaic pavement of the House of Kyrios Leontis at Beth Shean (Fig. 23).⁷⁷ According to Plato, a Siren stood on each of the celestial spheres, uttering one note and together their music created celestial harmony.⁷⁸ Moreover, the Sirens had divine wisdom, for they “knew all that happens on the rich earth” (*Od.* 12.189-191); in fact, Homer became identified with his Sirens.⁷⁹

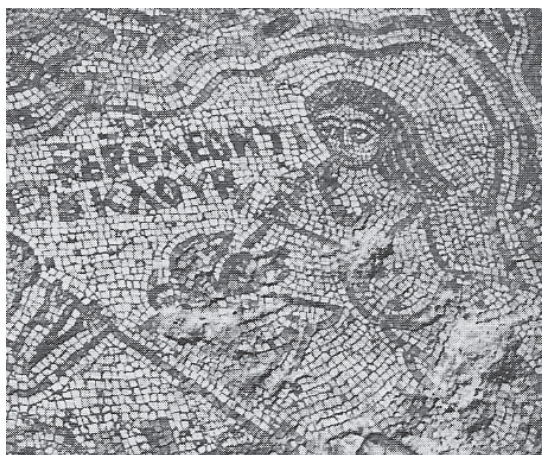


Fig. 23: Beth Shean, House of Kyrios Leontis (Ovadiah and Ovadiah 1987: Pl. XXXI.1)

The second type – a vignette-like image appears in several mosaic pavements. Several flute-players present images of a very different character, divested of any religious connotations, reflecting aspects of contemporary beliefs and practices of daily life. A man seated on a basket playing a pipe is depicted within a medallion formed by a vine-trellis in a mosaic pavement of a sixth-century CE tomb chamber in El-Hammam at Beth Shean.⁸⁰ In a medallion of the sixth-century CE mosaic pavement in the Monastery of Lady Mary, at Beth Shean, a man is shown seated on a round stool, playing a flute, with near him, a dog or a bear sitting, with his front paws lifted

⁷⁷ This mosaic has been thoroughly examined by OVADIAH and TURNHEIM 2003: 111-118.

⁷⁸ OVADIAH and TURNHEIM 2003: 114, n.23, quoting Plato, *Rep.* X.xiv. 617B.

⁷⁹ LAMBERTON 1986: 7.

⁸⁰ This medallion is placed in the second medallion of the sixth row, see OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: 30.

(Fig. 24).⁸¹ Can this be an animal, such as those trained for acrobatic acts? A seated man playing a flute appears within a medallion of acanthus leaves in a fifth-sixth-century church at Naharya.⁸² The medallions covering the pavement in the Church of Khirbet Shema or Horvat Be'er-shema are formed by vine trellis and contain various animals, birds and human figures. In one of these a man seated on a basket is shown playing a flute, with a sort of flask hung behind him (Fig. 25).⁸³ A seated flute-player is depicted on a vault in Caesarea, with a fragment of what seems to be a vine-scroll, suggesting perhaps that this had been a medallion.⁸⁴ The instrument these figures are playing, commonly known as a flute, has been identified as a *zurna*.⁸⁵ These medallions are part of a larger carpet of medallions containing various other scenes, some connected with grape-harvesting or wine-making, others having animals and birds, which display everyday life, hunting, or genre motifs. Many of these scenes or motifs are undoubtedly of everyday life, which may have been copied from pattern books. It also seems possible to interpret the image of the flute-player as an itinerant musician, who was hired for playing at harvest time -- to provide rhythm to the workers as they tread the grapes (it seems that certain songs, played on the *aulos* existed for this aim), as well as to create a joyful atmosphere at the end of their daily toil.⁸⁶ It is also possible to interpret this image as showing a shepherd playing the flute, while herding his flock.



Fig. 24: Beth Shean, Monastery of Lady Mary (Ovadia and Ovadia 1987: Pl. XXIV, detail)



Fig. 25: Horvat Be'er-shema, Church of St. Stephen, detail (Gazit and Lender 1993: Pl. XX.A)

⁸¹ OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: 29.

⁸² OVADIAH and OVADIAH 1987: 114.

⁸³ GAZIT and LENDER 1993: 275, Pl. XX; BRAUN 2002: III. V.27a.

⁸⁴ BRAUN 2002: III.V.27d. No further information is now available.

⁸⁵ BRAUN 2002: 229.

⁸⁶ BÉLIS 1999: 70-71 and 261, n. 30, based on Philodemus and Sextus Empiricus..

The evidence presented in this study indicates that the iconographic and conceptual precursors of the musical instruments were found in the ancient Near East and Egypt, and should not be limited to the Greek and Roman ones.

Greek philosophers attributed certain qualities to musical instruments and the music they produced, connecting them to gods, especially to Apollo and Dionysos. They considered that the music of stringed instruments (lyre) raises the soul to the celestial spheres, while that of wind instruments bears it down to the lower ones. As shown on the mosaics studied, both types of instruments appear simultaneously in two cases, in the villas at Sheikh Zouède and Sepphoris/Zippori, thus suggesting that the music created appeals both to the celestial and the earthly natures in man. This may derive from the merging of Apollo with Dionysos, thus bestowing a sacred character to the representation. This harmony may be discerned in the Jerusalem Orpheus, where the celestial music of Orpheus' lyre or *kithara* merges with the earthly music of Pan's *syrinx*. The sacred quality of the David-Orpheus of Gaza is derived from the celestial music emitted by his lyre/*kithara*, as well as from the ideas associated with the figures of both King David and Orpheus. Evidently, the representation in the Synagogue of Sepphoris/ Zippori has a sacred character as a result not only of the nature of its location, but also through the interpretation proposed in this article, i.e. that it alludes to the Feast of Shavuoth.

The music-players depicted in Sheikh Zouède and Sepphoris/Zippori are anonymous, and defined by the role they play – satyrs and maenads – participants in Dionysos' cult and *thiasos*. The earthly character of the music produced by their instruments has the power to lead men into frenetic, ecstatic or orgiastic states that may even drive them to madness.

The prevailing stance that considers that Apollo's music is celestial, while Dionysos' is earthly, should be reconsidered in light of the evidence presented in this article. It can be proposed that the merging of the two gods, their music and its polarity bestow the equilibrium essential to the human spirit.

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