

## Historical Background Contextualizes Exhibition on Music in Roman Egypt

The Kelsey Museum houses a unique collection of excavated musical instruments from fieldwork in Karanis and elsewhere in Egypt, as well as artifacts that relate to musical instruments and the people who played them. These holdings will be highlighted in the upcoming exhibition *Music in Roman Egypt*, opening in March 1999. The Kelsey materials in the show will be supplemented by papyrus from the University Library, which include actual musical notation as well as documents of musicians' lives in Roman Egypt. This article situates the coming exhibition in a historical perspective.

### Origins of Music

Although writers often wax poetic about the "birth" of music in prehistory, we have little direct evidence for how, where, or when music evolved. Musical instruments are known from the Mediterranean world as early as 10,000 BCE, but it is only after about 3000 BCE that substantial evidence for music becomes available. More instruments survive, as do more representations of them being played. Texts about music emerge, as well as early efforts to notate music. Cuneiform tablets from Mesopotamia contain treatises on music and musical instruments. One of the earliest pieces of musical notation to survive from the Mediterranean world is a Hurrian cult song from around 1400 BCE on a clay tablet from Ugarit. Specifics concerning instrumentation and pitch are speculative, as the widely varying attempts to reconstruct this song demonstrate. Cultures such as that



*The painted decoration of this Roman bell krater (ca. 440–430 BCE) includes a depiction of a satyr playing a double-reed flute. KM 2610.*

in Egypt, however, did not write down their music, or at least not in a form so far recognized. Thus, there are limits to what can be said with certainty about early music.

### Music in Ancient Egypt

Music doubtless existed in prehistoric Egypt, but the evidence for it becomes secure only in the historical ("dynastic" or "pharaonic") period—after about 3100 BCE. Musicians occupied a variety of positions in Egyptian society, and music found its way into many contexts: temples, palaces, workshops, farms, battlefields, and tombs. Since music was integral to religious worship, it is not surprising that several deities in the ancient Egyptian pantheon were specifically associated with music: the goddess Hathor, the god Bes, and the comparatively obscure god Ihy.

As for the actual instruments played in pharaonic Egypt, the percussion group included hand-held drums (square and round), rattles, castanets (often in the shape of human hands), bells (only in later periods and often shaped as the head of the god Bes), and the *sistrum*—a rattle used in religious worship. Hand-clapping too served as a rhythmic accompaniment. Wind instruments consisted of flutes (double and single, with reeds and without) and trumpets. Harps, lyres, and lutes—all plucked rather than bowed—made up the stringed-instrument family. Both male and female voices were also frequently used in Egyptian music.

Much ancient Egyptian music was played by professional musicians. Perhaps the highest status belonged to temple musicians, who served as accompanists to rituals and ceremonies and were often members of the elite. The high-status office of "musician" (*shemayet*) to a particular god or goddess was frequently held by women, especially during and after the New Kingdom. Musicians connected with the royal household were highly esteemed, as were certain gifted singers and harpists. Somewhat lower in the social hierarchy were musicians who played for parties and festivals, often accompanying dancers. Informal singing is suggested by representations of workers in action; captions to many of these pictures have been interpreted as words of songs. Otherwise we have little evidence for amateur musicians in pharaonic Egypt, and it is unlikely that

## Notes from the Director

This promises to be another busy and productive year in the Kelsey. We are all looking forward to the opening this March of Terry Wilfong's exhibit on ancient Egyptian music, which features instruments from our own collections (see story on pages 1–3), and the fieldwork show scheduled to go up in January, which highlights the Museum's nearly seventy-five years of exploration around the Mediterranean and the Near East (see story on page 4). Preparations are now underway for Elaine Gazda's exhibit on Pompeii's Villa of the Mysteries and the Bacchic cults associated with it. The show is scheduled for Winter Term 2000 and will feature the breathtaking watercolor reproductions of the villa's frescos painted in the 1920s by Maria Barosso under the patronage of Professor Kelsey. The show will be displayed in two venues—the watercolors in the University of Michigan Museum of Art, where these large pieces can be shown off to greatest advantage, and an array of Bacchic cult artifacts and images in the Kelsey Museum.

On the fieldwork front, a Museum-sponsored team continues to make important discoveries at Paestum (see story on page 5), and Janet Richards is planning a new season at Abydos in Middle Egypt. I am gearing up for full-scale excavations next summer at Kedesh in Israel and, as I write these notes, am preparing to take a group of Kelsey Associates to Israel and Jordan, where we will tour, among other sites, past and present Kelsey excavations (Sepphoris, Tel Anafa, and Kedesh). We will also visit Ludwig Koenen in Amman, where he is deciphering a cache of papyri found at Petra only a few years ago.

Research and conservation of the collections continues, and we continue to find new treasures in the Kelsey itself. Just last summer in Robin Meador-Woodruff's ongoing survey and appraisal of the finds from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris stored in the Kelsey, a previously unnoticed Parthian slipper coffin, complete with skeletons, was discovered in the basement. Meanwhile up in the conservation laboratory a particularly interesting papyrus is being unrolled for the first time under the supervision of Terry Wilfong and Geoff Brown.

*Sharon C. Herbert, Director*

musical achievement was considered a desirable goal for nonprofessionals.

Egyptians did not apparently notate their music before the Graeco-Roman period. Scholars have attempted to reconstruct pitches of instruments, the rhythms of Egyptian music, and even melodies based on representations of musicians and their instruments, but this work remains largely speculative. Representational evidence can give us a general idea of the sound of Egyptian music. Thus, ritual temple music seems to have consisted largely of the rattling of the sistrum, accompanied by voice, sometimes with harp and/or percussion. Party/festival scenes show ensembles of instruments (lyres, lutes, double- and single-reed flutes, clappers, drums) and the presence (or absence) of singers in a variety of situations. The musicians who accompany dancers on these occasions seem to be playing music with a strong rhythmic line, while solo harpists at parties would often play and sing melancholy songs that were probably slower and quieter in nature. Of the sound of Egyptian instruments, there is one recording made in 1939 using an original trumpet from the tomb of King

Tutankhamun, but otherwise a certain amount of guesswork is always involved in recreating the sounds of ancient Egyptian instruments.

### Music in Graeco-Roman Egypt

When Egypt came under the political domination of the Macedonian Greeks (in 332 BCE) and later the Romans (in 30 BCE), Egyptian, Greek, and Roman cultures, languages, and populations all converged, and the music of the period reflected these diverse influences. Egyptian music for feasts and festivals and traditions of religious music integrated with the Hellenistic traditions of formal public performances and music in the theater, Greek theoretical approaches to music, as well as Roman traditions of military music and the concept of music as a leisure pastime. The outward form of music in many contexts was predominantly Graeco-Roman during this period in Egypt, especially among the elite, but indigenous instruments and styles persisted in both religious and informal contexts.

Literary papyri from Egypt preserve fragments of notated music and theoretical treatises on music, attesting to music

as an object of serious study. Much of what we know of the lives of professional musicians in Roman Egypt comes from the evidence of documentary papyri—the texts of daily life that involve musicians in some way. Thus, surviving contracts engaging musicians to perform at festivals show the kinds of wages earned by performers as well as the duties expected of them. Musicians frequently performed in conjunction with dancers and were often engaged by the same contract. The papyri also show musicians functioning as private citizens—paying taxes, performing compulsory services, and making contracts unrelated to their music. Some evidence suggests that music as a profession tended to run in families. Other papyri yield fleeting glimpses of the place of music in the life of the people. Thus a declaration of death from Oxyrhynchus records a sad incident: a slave boy who was leaning out a window to watch some castanet players fell to the street and died from his injuries.

One of the most significant changes in music in Egypt in the Graeco-Roman period was the introduction of Greek-style musical notation. Separate systems of notation indicated instrumental and vocal pitches, while various markings and implicit signals showed rhythm in both systems. It is in Greek papyri from Egypt that most examples of Greek musical notation are known; these papyri preserve passages from Greek literary texts with vocal notation (such as the famous Michigan musical papyrus), as well as instrumental passages, possibly also from theatrical performances. The music thus notated follows Greek tradition; there are, as far as we know, no pieces of indigenous music notated in the new style. Papyri from Egypt in this period also provide fragments of treatises on music theory in Greek, again reflecting classical traditions.

Instrumentation of music in Graeco-Roman Egypt also showed the influences of Greek and (to a lesser extent) Roman traditions. Thus, Egyptian-style harps, lyres, and lutes continued to be used, but many professional musicians in Egypt played the Greek-style *kithara* either alone or to accompany theatrical performances. Egyptian reed flutes fell under the influence of the Greek *aulos*, which was another favorite of professional musicians in Graeco-Roman Egypt, while the pan-pipes (or *syrinx*) became popular for less formal music. Roman-style military trumpets and

horns became common in Egypt with the arrival of the Roman army.

Percussion instruments showed changes in the Graeco-Roman period as well. Egyptian-style clappers in the shape of hands and arms gave way to the L-shaped castanets seen in Greek vase paintings, then to the pinecone-shaped castanets typical of later periods. Examples of both were found at Karanis and will be featured in the Kelsey exhibition; these were the instruments favored by dancers hired for parties and festivals. Clappers consisting of rectangular pieces of wood tied to a handle were common in Graeco-Roman Egypt as well, with many examples found at Karanis; these may be connected with domestic worship. Cymbals played with the hands were well known in Egypt already, but pairs of cymbals mounted on wooden forks became more common in the Roman period and are especially characteristic of later periods. Drums, tambourines, and bells continued to be used in Egypt but often in shapes closer to Greek and Roman styles. On the other

hand, the sistrum continued in its ancient form as a truly Egyptian instrument, though one that found its way into the rest of the Mediterranean world through the diffusion of Egyptian cults. Most of these instruments are known both from the archaeological record and from representational evidence. *Music in Roman Egypt* will feature surviving examples of instruments from Karanis, Soknopaiou Nesos, and Terenouthis, as well as comparanda from elsewhere and contemporary representations of these instruments being played.

#### Music in Late Antique Egypt and Later

The gradual domination of Christianity in Egypt in the fourth and fifth centuries CE marked a dramatic change in the musical life of Egypt. For, to the Christians, the varieties of music popular in later Roman Egypt were incompatible with Christian life. This is not to say that the early Christians in Egypt were opposed to music; singing was an important part of religious worship to Christians and, indeed, the earliest

known notation of Christian music is on a papyrus from Oxyrhynchus. But the instrumental music of the non-Christians in Egypt, and the festivities that often accompanied it, were considered inappropriate, even dangerous. Egyptian Christian authors write of the licentiousness occasioned by the use of kithara and castanets, the incitement to lasciviousness caused by secular music, and what they considered to be the loose morals of secular musicians.

The very vehemence of some writers on the subject suggests that the call to abandon secular music and musical instruments was not initially very successful. Certainly, Hellenized Christian elites in Egypt continued to listen to (and even perform?) music in the earlier traditions. Thus Dioscorus of Aphrodito (sometimes characterized as the "worst" poet of the ancient world) as late as

the sixth century wrote a poem invoking classical precedents ("Always, I want to dance / Always, I want to play the lyre . . .") even though he was a Christian. Gradually, however, these earlier traditions declined, and formal music in late antique Egypt was largely limited to liturgical chanting in the church, mostly unaccompanied except by bells and cymbals. Indeed, the bell was one musical instrument to retain a special connection with the Christian church in Egypt since it was used in worship as well as in calls to services. Sung liturgical music in Egypt, mostly in the latest form of the Egyptian language known as Coptic, was comparable to such music throughout the eastern Mediterranean world; certain distinctive features, however, have led some scholars to suggest that Coptic church music retained elements of earlier Egyptian music. These vocal traditions in Egyptian Christian music have persisted to the present. Yet it was not until after the Muslim conquest in 641 CE that Egypt was exposed to substantial new traditions of instrumental music. During the successive centuries of Muslim rule, Egyptian music drew upon idioms and styles from elsewhere in the Islamic world to develop specifically Egyptian traditions in instrumental, as well as vocal, music.

Terry Wilfong, Exhibition Curator



Mold-made terracotta figurine of the Egyptian god Bes playing a lute (1st–2nd century CE). KM 4960.



Roman-period (1st–4th centuries CE) musical instruments from University of Michigan excavations in Egypt. From Karanis, top left: wooden clapper (KM 7535) bronze cymbal (KM 21434), bronze bell (KM 10735); top right: bone whistle (KM 8504), wooden reed-flute (KM 26997), wooden reed-flute (3568); bottom left: pinecone-shaped wooden castanet half (KM 26358); From Dimai, bottom right: pair of L-shaped wooden castanets (KM 26360–1).

## Winter Show to Highlight Kelsey-Sponsored Fieldwork

The new show *Expedition! Kelsey-Sponsored Fieldwork, 1924–1998*, opening January 8, will offer a retrospective of the Museum's seventy-five years of fieldwork. Cocurated by Sharon Herbert and Lauren Talalay, it will feature archival expedition photographs and early excavation equipment, as well as illustrating the development of mapping.

Since 1924, the Kelsey has helped sponsor more than twenty projects, including both excavation and surface reconnaissance (survey), in ten different countries. In the 1920s and 1930s archaeological finds tended to be divided between the host country and the institution sponsoring the project. At that time thousands of objects and works of art were brought to the University of Michigan from various Mediterranean expeditions.

The first Kelsey-supported projects focused on two distinctly different sites: Karanis, a Graeco-Roman town in lower Egypt, and Antioch of Pisidia, one of the most important Roman colonies in Asia Minor. The rural village of Karanis would prove to be the Museum's signature site and would ultimately

yield massive numbers of finds, 45,000 of which were shipped to Ann Arbor between 1924 and 1935. Labeled the "Pompeii of Egypt," Karanis opened a new window onto daily life in Graeco-Roman Egypt. Today the Kelsey's collection represents the finest assemblage of daily-life objects from that period outside of the Cairo Museum.

Kelsey-sponsored fieldwork between the wars also focused on other important sites: Carthage, the North African city-state founded by the Phoenicians in the ninth century BCE; Soknopaiou Nesos, a Graeco-Roman site in northern Egypt; Terenouthis, a long-lived Egyptian necropolis with tombs ranging from the Middle Kingdom to the Roman period; Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, the eastern capital of the Seleucid Empire located at a well-traveled crossroads in present-day Iraq; and Sepphoris, a site in ancient Palestine that later yielded some of the finest mosaics of the Roman world.

Halted during World War II, fieldwork did not resume until the mid 1950s, when the Museum sponsored projects in Libya and Syria at the Monastery of St. Catherine's, an isolated stronghold

on Mount Sinai that maintained a small working monastic order; Qasr al-Hayr, a medieval Islamic town located at the foot of one of the few mountain passes in the central Syrian desert; Cyrene, an affluent settlement occupied for more than 1,000 years during Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman times; and Libyan Apollonia, the seaport of ancient Cyrene.

The emphasis of fieldwork shifted again in the 1980s and 1990s. Reflecting changes that have swept other disciplines since the 1960s, archaeology is evolving into a more self-reflexive enterprise. While chronology and description are still vital concerns, archaeologists now focus on well-defined research objectives, more quantitative procedures, and a greater concern with regional archaeology. Computers have also found a place in archaeological research. Thus the Kelsey's new projects have begun to include large-scale survey and computer-aided technology. This new age of scholarship is exemplified by projects such as those at Tel Anafa and Kedesh in Israel; Lepti in Tunisia; Abydos and Coptos in Egypt; Paestum in Italy; and regional surveys near Pylos and Karystos in Greece.

Lauren Talalay



Photo: Kelsey Museum Archives, 7.1123

On May 29, 1924, during the first Kelsey-sponsored expedition, workers at Antioch struggle to tilt up a stone with an inscription indicating who paved the square.

## Paestum Season Focuses on Archaic Greek Building



General view (from west) of the archaic stoa under excavation at Paestum.

This past summer a team composed of undergraduates from Bowdoin College and Villanova University, supervised by graduate students from the University of Michigan, carried out excavations outside the ancient city wall of Poseidonia-Paestum in the località Santa Venera, Italy. Under the direction of Professor Jim Higginbotham of Bowdoin College, and assisted by Paul Legutko, Jeremy Hartnett, and Joe Rife of the University of Michigan, the excavation sought to document aspects of the early religious life in this ancient Greek colony.

The focus of this season's excavation was the remains of an archaic Greek building (first explored in 1997) connected to cult practice in this extramural zone. The architecture, uncovered during two seasons' work, reveals a building rectangular in plan with three interior rooms, arranged side by side, fronted by a colonnade nearly 14 meters long. The use of large cut ashlar blocks laid upon sand foundations is consistent with a date of the late sixth century BCE. This chronology was supported by portions of the building's epistyle (lintel and frieze backer blocks) that compare favorably with examples from the Temple of Athena at Poseidonia. The interior was remodeled during the fourth century BCE and in the Roman period, when a small corner section of the exterior wall was rebuilt.

There were exciting and unexpected finds associated with an earlier sixth-century phase. The excavations team

unearthed two votive doric capitals (one still preserved with the original paint) carefully placed within the sand foundations of the ashlar building. The profiles of these capitals match examples dated to the second and

third quarters of the sixth century BCE.

Artifacts recovered within the structure support the multiple phases dated to this active archaic period. Ceramic remains include many imported fabrics and shapes that attest to frequent banqueting. Some of these vessels bear inscribed dedications, and one Ionian cup sports one of the earliest Greek dedications yet found at Poseidonia-Paestum. Unfortunately, because of their fragmentary condition, these inscriptions defy any precise attribution or connection to a particular cult. Some deposits of the artifacts were found together with substantial faunal remains that highlight the convivial activity associated with cult practice.

The building's design and apparent function fits that of a *stoa*, or portico, that formed part of a larger religious sanctuary. The small numbers of figurines found during our excavations support an identification not as a temple but rather as a building where worshippers retired to celebrate the fruits of the religious rites and enjoy their portions of the sacrifices.

The presence of elaborate meals and the remains of pig could argue for a link to Demeter, whose shrines are customarily placed outside the walls. A connection to the cult of Aphrodite is also possible. Our *stoa* lies at right angles to the sanctuary of Aphrodite excavated by the University of Michigan in the 1980s, though at a considerable distance. Exact identification of the deity honored by this *stoa* will require further excavation and study.

*James Higginbotham, Bowdoin College*

## The Kelsey Museum of Archaeology

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### Associate Director

Lauren Talalay

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 Elaine Gazda, *Hellenistic and Roman*  
 Robin Meador-Woodruff,  
*Slides and Photographs*  
 Janet Richards, *Dynastic Egypt*  
 Margaret Cool Root (on leave),  
*Greece and Near East*  
 Lauren Talalay, *Educational Outreach*  
 Thelma Thomas, *Post-classical*  
 Terry Wilfong, *Graeco-Roman Egypt*

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### Museum Hours

Tuesday–Friday 9:00–4:00  
 Saturday–Sunday 1:00–4:00  
 Admission is free  
 and open to the public.

### World Wide Web Address

<http://www.umich.edu/~kelseydb/>

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## New Docent Class

Since August 31, a new docent training class has been meeting every Monday afternoon from 12 to 2 p.m. at the Kelsey and will continue until the beginning of March. The fifteen-member class includes individuals with diverse backgrounds in such areas as physics, aerospace engineering, political science, nursing, social work, English, and classics. The training class is taught by Curator of Educational Outreach Lauren Talalay.

Geared toward the Museum's collections, the course syllabus ranges over the civilizations of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, and the Near East. Lectures, delivered by Lauren Talalay as well as a number of guest speakers, alternate with behind-the-scenes tours of the Museum's collections. The lecture portion of the course will conclude in the middle of January, with February classes devoted to learning tour techniques and offering practice tours.

Beginning in March, our newly graduated docents will offer tours to the public. A few class members have already volunteered to help prepare for

the Kelsey Family Days planned for this spring. Soon they will be "viserating" the famous Kelsey Barbie dolls in preparation for our Mummy Days.

If you are interested in becoming a docent or volunteering at the Museum, please contact Lauren Talalay (747-0441 or talalay@umich.edu).

## New Associates Officers

At their annual meeting on May 1 the Kelsey Museum Associates elected a new slate of officers for 1998-99:

Christine Crockett, *President*  
Joseph Pearson, *Vice President*  
Pearson Macek, *Secretary*

## Kelsey Cabaret

Join us for an evening benefit featuring champagne, hors d'oeuvres, and New York jazz pianist/composer Frank Ponzio. Mark your calendars for Saturday, March 27, Kerrytown Concert House!

Photo: M. Lourie

Members of the new docent class explore some of the treasures housed in the Kelsey's climate-controlled storage facility. Here instructor Lauren Talalay displays a sham canopic jar (KM 88193), attributed to the Late Period in Egypt.

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