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Sounds from the Divine: Religious Musical Instruments in the Ancient Near East¹

Introduction

Music is an indispensable part of religious acts in most, if not all, known cultures of the ancient as well as the modern world. Musical sounds — whether created by human voice or instruments — occupy the integral function of a communication medium. As for general religious beliefs, communication through music was not restricted to human society but could also cross barriers to reach transcendental spheres. Music is a language understood by all beings, gods as well as demons and other creatures of intermediate worlds. Besides its function as a conveyer of information like regular speech, music also has a psychological value, as it is able to affect deepest moods and emotions. By using this tool in communicating with the divine, mankind increases its abilities to influence transcendental beings.

Ancient Near Eastern research on Mesopotamian musical instruments is generally directed toward their correct identification. The special interest of Assyriologists, as well as Musicologists, lies in the assignment of the many names known from written material to the images of musical instruments on stone reliefs, clay terracotta and other media.² Unfortunately, written information on shape, sound and material of musical instruments is scarce and ambiguous. Further, there are many more attested names for musical instruments in texts than there are images differentiating types and versions of musical instruments. A fundamental reason leading to diverse modern interpretations is inherent in the ancient system of music terminology itself. A single musical term could have several meanings referring to a musical instrument, a type of song or a musician. In addition, most terms appear in written sources spanning more than two millennia. There is no question that the meaning of single words is not consistent by reason of permanent cultural changes and alternating language and writing traditions.

This article deals with the question of whether it is possible to determine specific areas for the ancient music terminology referring to music in practice. Instead of revisiting the problem of the identification of single musical instru-

¹ I dedicate this article to Joan Goodnick-Westenholz, whom I only had the opportunity to know for a short but still for me very inspiring time.

² Illustrations in Rashid 1984.

ments, I will define several groups according to the content of the music they play, their position in ensembles and their function in religious contexts. All musical instruments treated here have one aspect in common: they are signified as holy or divine objects. Further their selection basically relies on the evidence taken from literary and administrative sources from the third and second millennia BCE.

The religious status of a musical instrument is apparent through its occurrences in the written evidence, consisting of literary texts, lexical lists and administrative documents. Most obvious is marking an object with the determinative *diĝir* in order to designate it as divine. Further markers are adjectives like *ku₃/kug* ‘holy; pure’ or *maḥ* ‘great’; however, such classifiers and attributes are not regularly used. Information on the religious status of a musical instrument is more easily inferred from the context in which it appears, whether it is mentioned in mythology, kept in a temple, or worshipped in ways of regular offerings and tended to through special rituals.

Divine Musical Instruments as Seen in Mythology

My investigation will start by differentiating two groups of musical instruments according to the context in which they are played: The first group is related to the religious context of praising and laudatory occasions. It consists of the instruments *Šem* (writings: *šem₃*, *šem₂*), *Ala* (writing: *a₂-la₂*) and *Tigi* (writings: *tigi₁*, *tigi₂*) and is referred to throughout this article as the »Tigi-Šem-Ala« ensemble. The second group is known as the lamentation priest’s (gala) instrumental repertoire, comprising the *Lilis* (writings: *lilis/z*, *li-li-is₃*), the *Ub* (writing: *ub₃*, *ub₂*), the *Šem*, the *Meze* (writings: *me-ze₂*, *meze*) and the *Balaĝ*. The *Šem* plays a role in both groups, since the character of its music depends on whether it is played solo or in an ensemble.

A nearly complete list of these musical instruments is presented in a passage from *Inana and Enki*. This myth tells about Inana taking over mankind’s cultural norms, the Sumerian *me*, from her father Enki in order to bring them to her own cultic centre of Uruk for the benefit of its inhabitants:³

Inana and Enki 99

You (Inana) have brought with you the holy –Tigi–, holy Lilis, Ub, Meze and Ala⁴

³ First edition by Farber-Flügge 1973; for interpretation, see Alster 1974: 23–28.

⁴ *Inana and Enki* 99. –tigi– kug li-li-is₃ kug ub₃(AB₂×ŠA₃) me-ze₂ kuš^ua₂-la₂ ba-<e-de>; in accordance with Farber-Flügge 1973: 60: 24.

The musical instruments enumerated in this verse are all part of religious music: the Tigi, the Lilis, the Ub or Šem,⁵ the Meze and the Ala. Surprisingly, only the Balaġ is missing here and is, in fact, not mentioned among the *me* in the whole composition.⁶

Instruments of Praise and Sacrifice: *Tigi-Šem-Ala*

Regarding mythology, Šem as well as Ala were originally installed by Enki in every Mesopotamian temple referred to in the composition *Enki's Journey to Nibru*:

Enki's Journey to Nibru 93–95

Enki had oxen slaughtered, and had sheep offered there lavishly. Where there was no Ala, he installed it in its place; where there was no bronze Šem, he dispatched it to its place.⁷

The combination of the Šem and Ala is mentioned in several literary compositions with a seemingly traditional position in Mesopotamian temples.⁸ The Tigi, on the other hand, is not referred to in any similar mythological context.

In *Šulgi A* the king praises himself for having presented offerings and music of this ensemble to Nanna/Suen in his temple at Ur:

⁵ Both terms ub_3 and $šem_3$ are written with the same sign $AB \times \dot{S}A_3$; see here, under *Musical Prayer and Lamentation*.

⁶ The beginning of the verse is reconstructed after Farber-Flügge 1973: 60. According to the copy in PBS 5 Pl. xv no. 25 vi 24 and the photograph in *ibid.*: Pl. 96 the reading is doubtful, since the last sign with a vertical wedge does not seem to be LUL; compare with *ibid.*: Pl. 15 and 96 v 50. Perhaps we have to read BALAĠ for $tigi_2$ ([NAR].BALAĠ) or only BALAĠ, without any sign preceding it (personal communication with U. Gabbay). See, for example, a parallel enumeration supporting this assumption in *Iddin-Dagan A* 41 $balaġ kug li-li-is_3 kug ū mu-na-da-re$; according to ETCSL 2.5.

⁷ *Enki's Journey to Nibru* (ETCSL 1.1.4) 93. $en-ki-ke_4 gud im-ma-ab-gaz-e udu im-ma-ab-šar_2-re$ 94. $kuš_2-la_2 nu-ġal_2-la ki-bi-še_3 sa_2 im-duġ_4$ 95. $ub_3 zabar nu-ġal_2-la ki-bi-še_3 im-mi-in-e_3$; see also Al-Fouadi 1969: 82.

⁸ *Gudea Cyl. B* (ETCSL 2.1.7) xv 20 joining $balaġ$; *The Lament for Nibru* (ETCSL 2.2.4) 38; in the twelfth Kirugu of *The Lament for Unug* 16–17 (ETCSL 2.2.5 Segment H) and in *The Debate between Winter and Summer* (ETCSL 5.3.3) 236 followed by Tigi and Zamzam; the third Kirugu of *The Lament for Eridug* (ETCSL 2.2.6) 62; *The Temple Hymns* (ETCSL 4.80.1) 107 following the recital of Adab-songs; in *The Debate between Hoe and Plough* (ETCSL 5.3.1) 28 and in the SB bilingual Ninurta hymn (BWL 118–120) rev. 2–3, where $AB_2 \times \dot{S}A_3$ is to be read as $šem_3$ and not ub_3 , since it is equated to $halḫallatu(m)$.

Šulgi A 53–54

(Šulgi): “I filled with abundance the temple of Suen, a cow-pen which yields plenty of fat. I had oxen slaughtered there; I had sheep offered there lavishly. I had Šem and Ala resound there and caused Tigi play there sweetly.”⁹

In *Inana and Enki* the same ensemble plays on the arrival of the goddess in her city Uruk. For this occasion, the king was to prepare a great feast including the recitation of prayers, animal sacrifices, libation and music:

Inana and Enki 243–246

(Inana): “He shall recite great prayers. The king shall slaughter bulls, shall sacrifice sheep. He shall pour beer from a bowl. He shall have the Šem and Ala, and have the sweet-sounding Tigi play.”¹⁰

In a hymn of Iddin-Dagan again the same ensemble accompanies animal sacrifices, poetically alluded to through the image of streaming blood. Here, Tigi is mentioned first:

Iddin-Dagan A 80–81

Blood is poured on the dais standing in the *guena* hall, as Tigi, Šem and Ala are made to sound loudly.¹¹

The close connection of these three musical instruments is best documented in *The Marriage of Martu*.¹² In this composition introducing the god Martu to the Sumerian pantheon, the ruler of the precious and foremost city Inab is named *Tigi-Šem-Ala* and his wife, *Šage-gur*, literally “Desired by heart.”¹³ The names

⁹ *Šulgi A 51*. e₂ ^usuen-na tur₃ i₃ gal-gal-la ħe₂-ġal₂-la ħe₂-bi₂-du₈ 52. gud ħa-ba-ni-gaz udu ħa-ba-ni-šar₂ (Var. ħa-ba-ni-šum) 53. šem₅ a₂-la₂-e šeg₁₁ ħa-ba-gi₄ 54. tigi niġ₂ dug₃-ge si ħa-ba-ni-sa₂; according to ETCSL 2.4.2.01 and Klein 1981: 194–195; for variants in the text, see *ibid.*: 195 nos. 53–54.

¹⁰ *Inana and Enki* (ETCSL 1.3.1) 243. lugal-e gud ħe₂-em-ma-ab-gaz-e -udu- ħe₂-em-ma-ab-šar₂-re 244. kaš bur-ra ħe₂-em-de₂-[e] 245. šem₃ ^{kuš}a₂-la₂-e šeg₁₁ ħa-ba-[gi₄-gi₄] 246. tigi niġ₂ dug₃-ge si ħe₂-em-mi-[ib-sa₂-sa₂]; according to Farber-Flügge 1973: 52 and ETCSL 2.5.3.1.

¹¹ *Iddin-Dagan A 80*. barag gu₂-en-na-ka uš₂ i₃-bal-bal-e 81. tigi šem₃ ^{kuš}a₂-la₂-e gu₃ nun mu-ni-ib-be₂; Reisman 1973: 188: 78–79.

¹² Römer 1989; ETCSL 1.7.1. for discussion, see, Vanstiphout 1999: 461–474.

¹³ *The Marriage of Martu* “The ruler of Inab was Tigi-šem-ala. Now, he had a wife, whose name was Šage-gur” 11. ensi₂ i₃-na-ab^{ki}-a tigi-šem₅ ^{kuš}a₂-la₂-a 12. dam-a-ni -šag₉-ge-guru₇- -mu- -ni ħe₂-en-na-nam; Vanstiphout 1999: 461 translates the ruler’s name as “Sir Lyre-Drum-Tamburine”; Römer 1993: 323 presents a different translation “Der Stadtfürst von Inab, (der(=?) mit(?)) tigi-, üb²- (und) â-lâ-Trommeln.-”

given in this context – transferred into English as “Mr. Prawn-music” and “Mme Loveliness” – surely refer to the wellbeing of the city and its special care for religious festivities and the joy and happiness of all its inhabitants and gods.

In summary, the trio *Tigi-Šem-Ala* was a standard instrumental ensemble that belonged to every Mesopotamian temple. It was played on festive occasions and devoted to the praise of the gods. Its music primarily accompanied ritual offerings – in particular animal sacrifice. However, each of these musical instruments, when regarded separately, presents its own characteristics, which are to be presented in the following.

3.1 Tigi and Šem

The Tigi is documented in literary compositions as a solo or choral instrument.¹⁴ *Šulgi A 81* as well as *Enki's Journey to Nibru 125* both refer to groups of seven Tigi-instruments. As in the combination with the šem_3 and $\text{a}_2\text{-la}_2$ the occasions that it accompanied were of festive character associated with joy and the wellbeing of the land.¹⁵ It was kept in special rooms of the temple and affiliated with the gods.¹⁶

Representing praise and hymnic music the Tigi is opposed to lamenting and to the music made by instruments accompanying it:

Enki and the World Order 446–448

Inana, you destroy what should not be destroyed; you create what should not be created. You remove the cover from the Šem of lamentations, Maiden Inana, while shutting up the Tigi and Adab in their homes.¹⁷

14 *Gudea Cyl. B* (ETCSL 2.1.7) xviii 22–23; *Nanše A 40–41*; *The Lament for Sumer and Urim* (ETCSL 2.2.3) 437; *The Temple Hymns 6–7*; *The Lament for Nibru 83*; *The Cursing of Agade* (ETCSL 2.1.5) 36; *Enki's Journey to Nibru 125*; *Nanna N 22–27*; *Šulgi A 81*; *Išbi-Erra E 34*; Šu-Suen Inscription (RIME 3/2.1.4.9) xii 14–15; see Sallaberger 1993: 142 n. 668 for reading *tigi* for NAR.E₂.BALAĜ.

15 In literature, the Tigi is referred to as *maḥ* (*The Lament for Sumer and Urim 437*) and *niĝ₂-dug₃/ni₅-du-ge* or as *niĝ₂...ša₃ ḫul-la* (*Išbi-Erra E 34*; *Nanna N 22–27*; *Winter and Summer 237*); also next to *Zamzam*, a type of hymn and a musical instrument; Wilcke 1975: 255–257; Shehata 2009: 257–259. It is further often accompanied by *si-sa₂* ‘to arrange, to set right; to tune(?)’; *Gudea Cyl. B x 9* as *ti-gi₄*; *Šulgi A 54*; *Inanna und Enki 246*; Šu-Suen Inscription (RIME 3/2.1.4.9) xii 14–15; *The Keš Temple Hymn 119*; *Enki's Journey to Nibru 125*; see further Krispijn 1990: 3–4.

16 *Šulgi E* (ETCSL 2.4.2.05) 160. *e₂ tigi diĝir-re-e-ne-ke*, NE [...] “In the house of the Tigi of the gods.”; 255. *ĝa₂ tigi^den-lil₂^dnin-lil₂-la₂-ke₄* “In the house of the Tigi of Enki and Ninlil”; translated differently in ETCSL as “music-rooms”.

17 *Enki and the World Order* (ETCSL 1.1.3) 446. *inana niĝ₂ nu-gul-u₃ ḫe₂-mu-e-gul niĝ₂ nu-sig₁₀-ge₅ ḫe₂-mu-e-sig₁₀ 447. šem₃ a-nir-ra-da tug₂ ḫe₂-em-mi-si-ig 448. ki-sikil^dinana tigi a-da-ab e₂-ba ḫe₂-em-mi-gi₄*; see also Benito 1969: 112–113, 441–443.

The connection of the Tigi with the Adab in this passage results from their secondary meaning as two similar genres of hymns.¹⁸ From several original tablets of the song types Tigi and Adab that have survived, we learn that their content is devoted to the praise of single gods which is sometimes associated with individual kings.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the ambiguity of these words indicating either musical instruments or song types may hinder a correct interpretation for each of their attestations.²⁰ The Adab is never considered a holy or divine object, and is therefore not included in the current investigation. Contrarily, the Šem is mentioned in the above-cited passage as a characteristic solo instrument for lamenting. The goddess Inana uncovers it in order to initiate mourning ceremonies. The Šem, Akkadian *ḫalḫallatu(m)*, generally belongs to the musical instruments of the gala, the lamentation priest. With this instrument he accompanies the Eršema ‘the lament of the šem_{3/5}-drum’.²¹

A passage from the literary composition *Inana’s Descent to the Nether World* further connects this musical instrument to the performance of death rituals:

Inana’s Descent to the Nether World 34–35

(Inana): “On this day I will descend to the underworld. When I have arrived in the underworld, make a lament for me on the ruin mounds. Beat the Šem for me in the sanctuary. Make the rounds of the houses of the gods for me.”²²

Regarding their identification, neither the Tigi nor the Šem are enumerated among the list of wooden musical instruments of the Old Babylonian (OB) lexical Ur₅-ra list.²³ Only in three instances is Šem preceded by the determinative kuš

18 See, in general, Wilcke 1975: 254–260, 266–273, 290–292; Shehata 2009: 251–257.

19 For example, *Gudea Cyl. A*: a Tigi-song to Bau; *Ur-Namma B*: a Tigi-song to Enlil; *Ibbi-Suen A*: a Tigi-song to Suen; *Lipit-Eštar C*: an Adab-song to An.

20 See, for instance, *The Lament for Sumer and Urim* 436–437, with tigi₂ appearing twice, but only once with the determinative ḡiš. In *Gudea Cyl. A* xviii, 17–18, Tigi is replaced by Adab.

21 The earliest attestation is an OB one, from the Mari Ištar ritual; Durand and Guichard 1997: 55 iii 16–18.

22 *Inana’s Descent to the Nether World* (ETCSL 1.4.1) 32. ud-da kur-še₃ ed₃-de₃-en 33. ud-da kur-še₃ ḡen-na-ḡu₁₀-ne 34. er₂ du₆-du₆-dam mar-mar-ma-ni-ib 35. šem₃ gu₂-en-na du₁₂-du₁₂-a-ma-ni-ib 36. [e₂] diḡir-re-e-ne niḡin₂-niḡin₂-na-ma-ni-ib; Sladek 1974: 107, 15–156: 32–36. The acts described here, playing the Šem and “making the rounds” are further actions undertaken by the gala in his rituals, aimed at avoiding misfortune.

23 Veldhuis 1997: 250–251: 597–619.

‘hide; leather’.²⁴ In most cases bronze or copper are referred to as its material.²⁵ Ur III and OB documents from Ur and Uruk mention Šem-instruments made of or decorated with silver and gold.²⁶ In the first-millennium commentary list Mur-gud again both Tigi and Šem are enumerated among other metal musical instruments.²⁷ They are likely to be identified as cymbals, sistrums or other sorts of metallic idiophones, though the animal’s hide (kuš) with Šem obviously refers to a membranophone.²⁸ The same commentary further equates Tigi with Akkadian *ḫalḫallatu(m)*, which is normally the translation for Šem.²⁹ Though this equation might identify both musical instruments, Šem and Tigi, as the same in shape and form, it is more likely to be a reference to an instrumental family that is distinguished by a common sound or function. In any case, a special connection between both musical instruments is objectively demonstrated. The tendency to relate the Tigi with musical instruments of the gala — i.e., *ḫalḫallatu(m)* ‘š_{em}’ — is further observed in the Seleucid version of the Balaḡ-song *Uruama’irabi*. At the end of the text the gala-priests are described sitting by the Tigi.³⁰ This connotation surely results from the decrease of knowledge about this instrument’s original character in music performance. Remarkable, this misleading connection found its way into the abovementioned early first-millennium commentary Mur-gud. Finally, the Tigi may also be related to the Balaḡ-instrument, since its logographic writing is a combination of the signs BALAḠ and NAR.³¹ The Balaḡ was the main musical instrument played by the gala-priest for accompanying Balaḡ-lamentations. Tigi, therefore, obviously refers to a musical instrument similar in form or status, which was played by the nar, “musician” in a more common sense, to accompany occasions of joyful character.

24 *The Debate between Hoe and Plough* 28; *The Lament for Nibru* 38; OB Ur₃-ra 11 (MSL 7, 222) 139. kuš-sim 140. kuš-bar'-sim; see also Gabbay 2007: 79–80 with note 161. The variant writing sim/si-im further appears in *Gudea Cyl. A* xviii, 18; *B* xv, 20, Šulgi D 366 and in SLB 1/1, 30: 32. 2 urudu₃si-im 33. ki-la₂-bi 2/3 ma-na 5 gin₂; Römer 1965: 167.

25 For lexical evidence in OB Ur₃-ra from Nippur, see here footnote 64 and, further, Gabbay 2007: 70 with note 158.

26 For references from Ur, see Gabbay 2007: 70 note 160, though in these instances the word may also refer to a vessel; see Civil 1965: 111. For Uruk: *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 21, 164: 113 (Ilum-gamil year 15) 1. 2 AB₂×ŠA₃ –AGA/nimgir– ku₃-sig₁₇ “Two golden šem₃ for the herald(?)” read šem₃ instead of ub₃.

27 Mg A II (MSL 7, 153) 194–196.

28 Kilmer (2003–2005: 368) identifies it as a “metal drum with a skin drumhead”; see, recently, Gabbay 2010 and Mirelman 2010.

29 Mg A II (MSL 7, 153) 194. urudu₃balaḡ. ti-gi₁₇nar = ti-ig-gu-ú = ḫal-ḫal-la-tum.

30 Volk 1989: 202: 91.

31 BALAḠ.NAR for tigi and NAR.BALAḠ for tigi₂.

The Ala-drum

The third musical instrument in the *Tigi-Šem-Ala* group is the most intriguing one:³² The following excerpt repeatedly attested in a group of administrative texts hints to the Ala's religious status. This group of 29 texts from Ur, dating to the time of the Larsa kings from Abīsarē to Rīm-Sîn, affords information on expenditures of amounts of oil for Ala-instruments. The expended oil was dedicated to the Ala of the temple of Ningal:³³

UET 5, 787 (AbS ii) 13–16

(list of expenditures)

For the *elūnum*-festival of Ningal.

From the Ganunmaḥ of Ningal.

1/4 litres of oil for the hide of the Ala of Ningal.

Son of Nadi (i.e., Ku-Lugalbanda) has received it.³⁴

From the time of Rīm-Sîn on, texts from the same corpus record two Alas receiving a double amount of oil. Altogether, the expenditure was registered as a monthly offering.³⁵ OB documents from Mari with similar contents further note that the oil was used for rubbing into the Ala's hide.³⁶ This hide was obviously the Ala drum-head, which was being kept from drying out.

32 A detailed discussion of the a_2-la_2 and its identification is presented in this volume by S. Mirelman.

33 In UET 3 and 5; see PSD A/1: 81; Figulla 1953: 91–121; Charpin 1986: 208. Only once in UET 5, 752: 9 (Sel 4) ghee (i_3-nun) is expended instead of oil. Although only in UET 5, 785: 16 (Sel 23²) and UET 5, 787: 14 (AbS ii) the instrument is clearly attributed to Ningal, it is the same instrument referred to in all other 27 texts. For similar expenditures in Ur III times, see ITT 2, 833 rev. 6. $1/2\ sila_3\ ub_3\ kug\ 7.\ 1/2\ sila_3\ a_2-la_2$.

34 UET 5, 787 (AbS ii) 13. $ni\hat{g}_2-dab_5\ e-lu-nu-um\ ^d\ nin-gal$ 14. $15\ gin_2\ i_3-\hat{g}i\check{s}\ ku\check{s}\ a_2-la_2\ ^d\ nin-gal$ 15. $\hat{g}a_2-nun-maḥ\ ^d\ nin-gal-ta$ 16. $dumu\ na-di\ \check{s}u-ba-an-ti$.

35 UET 5, 777 (RS 9) 16. $ni\hat{g}_2-dab_5\ iti-da$ 17. $1/2\ sila_3\ i_3-\hat{g}i\check{s}$ 18. $ku\check{s}\ a_2-la_2\ 2-bi$.

36 ARM 23, 424: 482 8. $1\ sila_3\ i_3-\hat{g}i\check{s}$ 9. *a-na pa-ša-aš* 5 *kuš a-li-i* 10. *šu-ti-a na-ra-am-ì-lì-šu* “1 liter of oil for rubbing five hides of the *alūm*, received by Naram-ilišu.”

The identification of the Ala, Akkadian *alû*, as a giant drum, already supposed by Galpin,³⁷ is further supported by several OB letters from Mari.³⁸ Literary texts further describe its sound as rumbling and loud as a storm.³⁹

The construction and dedication of the Ala is documented in two OB year names belonging to local North Babylonian rulers of Kish and Sippar:

Kiš: Yawium (g)

Year: Yawium has fashioned a leather Ala for the temple of Zababa.⁴⁰

Sippar: Mananâ (e) and (f)

Year: Mananâ has fashioned a (leather) Ala for the temple of Nanna.⁴¹

The mention of the Ala in year names demonstrates the high religious status of this musical instrument, being dedicated to a god and set up in his temple.⁴² There are only two other musical instruments that appear in year names: the Lilis and the Balaĝ, which belonged to the musical instruments of the gala-priest. Notably, only once in Late Babylonian versions of the Balaĝ-song *Uruama'irabi* is the Ala attributed to this same priest, who plays it as a solo instrument.⁴³ This connection is probably a later tradition that developed because of the similarity in form between the Ala and the Balaĝ and Lilis. In third- and second-millennium texts only nar musicians appear singing or proclaiming to the sound of the Ala.⁴⁴

37 Galpin (1955: 6–7) identifies it with the giant drums represented on the Ur-Namma stele (Rashid 1984: 70–73). This identification is followed by S. Mirelman in this volume.

38 Durand 1988: 119–121; Villard 1989.

39 *Gudea Cyl. B xviii*, 22. ušum-gal-kalam-ma ti-gi₄-a mu-gub xix 1. a₂-la₂ ud-dam šeg₁₂ mu-na-ab-gi₄ “Ušumgal-kalama was accompanied by Tigi, and the Ala roared for him (Ninĝirsu) like a storm”; BWL 204 (Column B): 9...]-li tirik a-le-e ra-mi-mi PSD A/2: 82b “the beating of the *alû*-instrument (is my dog’s) sound”; CAD R: 126b translates differently: “...the beat of the rumbling drum” see also (ibid.) the equation ^dra-mi-mu = MIN (= ^dAdad) in the gods list CT 25, 16.

40 mu^{kuš}a₂-la₂ Ia-wi-u₂-um e₂ ^dza-ba₄-ba₄-ra mu-na-an-dim₂; Simmons 1960: 83 (ii).

41 mu^{kuš}a₂-la₂ e₂ ^dnanna Mananâ mu-na-an-dim₂; Charpin 1978: 28. The following year (f) mu u₂-sa has the variant ^{šis}a₂-la₂ differently Gabbay in this volume.

42 See also MVN 10, 200: obv. 4. mu^{kuš}a₂-la₂-še₃.

43 Volk 1989: 83: 48–50.

44 *The Keš Temple Hymn* 118; *Gudea Statue I* (RIME 3/1.1.7) obv. iv’ 6–7.

Music of Prayer and Lamentation

A single passage from *The Cursing of Agade* assembles all known musical instruments from Babylonia in the gala's repertoire:

The Cursing of Agade 193–208

At that time, Enlil rebuilt his great sanctuaries into small reed (?) sanctuaries and from east to west he reduced their storehouses. The old women who survived those days, the old men who survived those days and the chief lamentation singer (gala-maḥ) who survived those years, for seven days and seven nights, he set up seven Balaḡs, as if they stood at the horizon, and together with Ub, Meze, and Lilis (Var. Ub, Šem, and Lilis // Ub and bronze Šem) made them resound for him (Enlil) like Iškur. The old women did not restrain the cry “Alas my city!” The old men did not restrain the cry “Alas its people!” The gala-priests did not restrain the cry “Alas the Ekur!” Its young women did not restrain from tearing their hair. Its young men did not restrain from sharpening their knives.⁴⁵ Their laments were (like) the lament Enlil's ancestors were performing in the awe-inspiring Holy Mound by the holy knees of Enlil.⁴⁶

Line 201 score transliteration for the variants of the text's duplicates:⁴⁷

- | | | |
|-----|--|--|
| (1) | ub ₃ me-ze ₂ li-li-is ₃ | ʔiškur-gin ₇ šag ₄ -ba mu-na-an-du ₁₂ |
| (2) | ub ₃ šem ₃ li-li-is ₃ | ” ” |
| (3) | ub ₃ šem ₃ zabar | ” ” |

The musical instruments enumerated in this passage are seven Balaḡs opposed to each of one Ub, Šem, Meze and Lilis. Except for the Balaḡ, the combination of all other musical instruments appears in three different variants, as may be seen in the score transliteration for line 201.


The text describes the performance of an extensive ritual lamentation as a reaction to the cursing and destruction that befell the city of Agade, because of Enlil's decision. The duty of the gala-maḥ playing his instruments is to sooth the god's heart. His orchestra is accompanied by choral singing of old men and








⁴⁵ The tearing out of the hair is a typical gesture of mourning women; Fritz 2003: 344; see also *The Lament for Urim* (ETCSL 2.2.2) 299–300. The young men with their knives were also part of the lamenting and mourning ritual.

⁴⁶ According to *The Cursing of Agade* and Cooper 1983: 59, 61.

⁴⁷ Variant (1) in E₁/Q₂/Y₂/G₃; variant (2) in O/S/W and variant (3) in D₄; see Cooper 1983: 201. Note that none of the OB manuscripts (D₄ from Ur and W of unknown provenance) writes me-ze₂,

women as well as gala-priests.⁴⁸ Except for this single literary passage, the gala's instruments were always played solo.

The Balaġ occupies a special position in the repertoire of the gala, apart from the other musical instruments. The Lilis, Ub, Šem and the Meze are grouped together not only according to their contextual setting but also based on the shape of the cuneiform signs denoting them. In logographic terms, each of these terms are composites of the sign AB_2 , 'cow', with varying inscribed signs:

Lilis	š _{em} ₃	ub ₃	š _{em} ₅	ub ₅	š _{em} ₆	ub ₆	meze	š _{em} ₄
$AB_2 \times BALA\hat{G}$	$AB_2 \times \check{S}A_3$	$AB_2 \times KAR_2$	$AB_2 - KID_2$	$AB_2 \times ME - EN$				
								

Only the logogram for Lilis is distinct. The graphemes for the musical instruments Šem, Ub and Meze are written in several ways, which makes them difficult to differentiate. They might have all referred to one generic family of musical instruments distinguished in shape, sound or position in a music ensemble.⁴⁹ According to the OB Balaġ-lamentation *ša₃-zu ta-am₃-ir*, which integrates a mythical narration about the creation of the gala, the Ub and the Lilis were given to the gala by his god Enki.⁵⁰

Ub, Šem and Meze

Whether $AB_2 \times \check{S}A_3$ is to be read as ub_3 or $\check{š}em_3$ is determined mostly by consulting the context. When appearing next to Ala the reading $\check{š}em_3$ is preferred, but next to Lilis, the same sign, $AB_2 \times \check{S}A_3$, is read as ub_3 ,⁵¹ and when appearing alone, the differentiation between these musical instruments remains ambivalent and has to be determined separately for each passage.⁵²

⁴⁸ For further discussion on this passage, see Cooper 2006.

⁴⁹ According to Kilmer 1977: 133, AB_2 may have been a phonetic sign referring to drums; according to Heimpel 1998: 15 ab_2 "cow" refers to the animal whose hide was used for the drumhead; see, further, Gabbay 2007: 71 with all the evidence for names of musical instruments that are written with ab_2 . Alternatively, ab_2 'cow', as opposed to gu_4 'bull' appearing with *balaġ* or ub_5 , may reflect a concept for differentiating instrumental groups based on sex – distinguishing between feminine and masculine musical instruments.

⁵⁰ Kramer 1981.

⁵¹ Hartmann 1960: 103–107; Römer 1965: 167; and, now, Gabbay 2007: 68 regarding the connection and equation of Ub and Lilis.

⁵² A differentiation regarding the determinatives (*kuš* 'hide' for ub_3 and *zabar* 'bronze' for $\check{š}em_3$) is equally difficult, since ub_3 is also attested with urudu 'copper'; see Civil 1965: 108–113, in detail.

The variant ub_5 as an older writing of ub_3 is only attested in the third millennium.⁵³ Early Dynastic (ED) administrative documents from Lagaš provide evidence for a divine or holy ub_5 receiving offerings.⁵⁴ According to texts from Ĝirsu, this holy instrument was played or tended by maids and a special functionary probably acting as their foreman.⁵⁵ For the Ur III period there is a single text from Ĝirsu that mentions seven holy Ubs associated with six different gods and goddesses, each receiving a bull's hide.⁵⁶

Similar to Šem, OB literature presents the Ubas an instrument of lamentation mostly played on its own:

The Lament for Urim 299–302

The woman (Ningal) tears at her hair as if it were rushes. She beats the holy Ub at her chest, she cries “Alas, my city.” Her eyes well with tears, she weeps bitterly: “Woe is me, my city which no longer exists — I am not its queen.”⁵⁷

Reading the sign $AB_2 \times \check{S}A_3$ as ub_3 in this passage is supported by a bilingual liturgical text where the instrument's name is rendered *uppu* in Akkadian.⁵⁸ The beating of the chest is a typical gesture of lamenting and mourning. Kilmer 1977: 134–135, 138 Figs. 9–10, in my opinion, rightly identifies this musical instrument with the small frame drum played by women and several men, held in front of their chest, in many OB terracotta reliefs.⁵⁹ Interestingly, first-millennium rituals refer to the lamentation priest (gala) as beating his chest while uttering “Woe” sounds and

53 Selz 1997: 195 n. 154.

54 In Lagaš the ub_3 kug was associated with Nanše; Selz 1995: 200: 61, 359; Selz 1997: 172–173.

55 For example DP 134 obv. ii, 6. $geme_2-ub_5-ku_3-ga$, rev. i, 2. $lu_2 ub_3 ku_3-ga-me$ and RTC 61 obv. ii, 8. $geme_2-ub_5-ku_3-ga$, obv. vii, 15. $lu_2 geme_2-ub_3 ku_3-ga-me$ as “person in charge of the (maids of the) holy ub_5 ”; with Selz 1997: 176, 198 n. 187; contra Selz 1989: 236 “Männer (und) Mägde der heiligen Trommel sind sie”.

56 HSS 4, 52 obv. 5. 2 $kuš gu_4 ub_5-kug$ ^dba-ba₆ min-a-bi 6. 1 $kuš gu_4 ub_5-kug$ ^dnanše 7. 1 $kuš gu_4 ub_5-kug$ ^dnin-dar-a 8. 1 $kuš gu_4 ub_5-kug$ ^ddumu-zi 9. 1 $kuš gu_4 ub_5-kug$ ^dnin-mar^{ki} 10. 1 $kuš gu_4 ub_5-kug$ ^dinana.

57 *The Lament for Urim* 299. $lu_2 siki-ni numun_2-bur-gin_7$, $šu mu-ni-in-dub_2-dub_2$ 300. $gaba-ni ub_3 kug-ga-am_3 i_3-sag_3-ge$ a $uru_2-ĝu_{10}$ im-me 301. $igi-ni er_2-ra mi-ni-ib-zi-zi-i-zi er_2 gig i_3-še_8-še_8$ 302. $me-li-e-a uru_2-ĝu_{10}$ nu-me-a me-e $ga-ša-an-bi nu-ĝen$; following Römer 1965: 157; see also Römer 2004: 66 reading $šem_3$ instead.

58 CT 42 Pl. 30b rev. 7. $gaba-a-ni kuš-ub_3$ [...]; 8. *i-rat-su ki-ma up-[pi...]* “[He beats] his breast like an *uppu*”; Kilmer 1977: 133.

59 Kilmer 1977: 133; CAD S: 150–151 for *sapādu*; bilingual parallels to this passage are in Balaḡ-songs: *E Turġin Niginam* (OB version) in Cohen 1988: 77, 85: a + 42 and *Enzu Samarmar* in Cohen 1988: 408, 412: g + 114.

singing an Eršema.⁶⁰ The Eršema though is known to be accompanied by the šem₃ ḫalḫallatu(m). From this intermingled usage we may assume that Šem and Ub are names of two similar instruments used in similar contexts.

Finally, the Akkadian myth of *Atramḫasis* refers to the Akkadian *uppu* and to its sound as standing for the introduction of death among mankind:

Atramḫasis 214

And we may hear the *uppu* till the end of times.

*aḫ-ri-a-ti-iš u₄-mi up-pa i ni-iš-me*⁶¹

As suggested by Moran, to the ancient listener, the sound of the *uppu* was closely associated with mourning rituals.⁶² Kilmer, on the other hand, interprets this occurrence of the *uppu* — also regarding the aforementioned passages — as the sound of the heartbeat.⁶³ Both connotations were probably intended here, since mourning and beating the drum are also linked to the beating of the chest.

As opposed to third-millennium evidence for the ub₅, there is no second- and first-millennia attestation of a special cult of the ub₃ as a divine object. It therefore might have been replaced by other similar musical instruments.

Mentions of the Meze are very scarce, the earliest coming from OB lexical and literary sources.⁶⁴ Similar to the Šem, the Meze is also defined as a metal object made of *zabar* ‘bronze’.⁶⁵ In first-millennium literary transcriptions of older texts it replaces Šem.⁶⁶ In most texts it is written syllabically, *me-ze₂*; the logograph MEZE is only known from first-millennium texts, where it is rendered Akkadian *manzû*.⁶⁷ According to its documentation, the Meze appears to be of a late musical

⁶⁰ Farber 2003: 209–212: 8–9 [*ira*]ssu *isappid u ū'a iqabbi uru₃.a.še.er.ra iz[ammur]* ‘He beats his [bre]ast and says ‘Woe!’ He si[ngs] *Uru'ašerra* (an Eršema to Enlil)’; see also Walker and Dick 2001: 231.

⁶¹ See Lambert and Millard 1969: 58.

⁶² Moran 1970: 45–46.

⁶³ Kilmer 1977: 133.

⁶⁴ Lexical: OB *Ur₅-ra* from Nippur 12 (MSL 7, 234: 32ff.) 565. šem₅ ^{zabar} 566. me-ze₂ ^{zabar} 567. li-li-is₃ ^{zabar}; see also BM 85983 rev. ii 31 and Isin IB 1612b rev. 1 7. meze ^{zabar} again next to šem_{3/5} and li-li-is₃ (N. Veldhuis in CDLI P247861); *Inana and Enki* 99; Cohen 1981: 104: 20 (Eršema to Gula).

⁶⁵ For its identification, see Volk 1989: 101: 17 “Klangstab(?)” and Selz 1997: 192 Anm. 90 “a sound of sistrum(?)”; for a different view, see Kilmer 2003–2005: 369 interpreting it as a membranophone.

⁶⁶ *The Cursing of Agade* 201; Balaḡ-song *Uruamma'irabi* Volk 1989: 29: 16/17.

⁶⁷ CAD M/1: 239; see recently Gabbay 2010: 25–26 for the word’s etymology and its identification as sistrum.

tradition which was integrated to the original Sumerian music no earlier than the second millennium onward. At the same time, it shares similarities with the Šem either in shape or sound.⁶⁸

The Kettledrum Lilis

The Lilis is the only instrument from Mesopotamia identified through an image representation. It is depicted on a Seleucid ritual tablet describing the cultic acts that accompany the covering of its bronze sound box.⁶⁹ Just as presented for the Ala from OB Mari evidence, the Lilis was also covered with red-dyed bull skin. The logographic writing AB₂×BALAĜ for its name further demonstrates its special religious position.

Like the Ala, the Lilis too was constructed and dedicated to a god or goddess, as documented in OB year names of local dynasties in Babylonia:

Isin: Itēr-piša A

Year: Itēr-piša the king made a copper Lilis for Šamaš.⁷⁰

Year: Itēr-piša the king made a bronze Lilis for Inana of Zabalam.⁷¹

Kiš: Mananâ

Year: Mananâ has fashioned a bronze Lilis for the temple of Nanna.⁷²

Kisurra: Itūr-Šamaš

Year: Itūr-Šamaš has fashioned the bronze Lilis for Annunitum.⁷³

⁶⁸ See Hartmann 1960: 101; Gabbay 2007: 72, for an Akkadian origin.

⁶⁹ Text *TU* 47, see Rashid 1984: 140 text illustration; Linszen 2004: 92–100.

⁷⁰ mu *I-te-er-pi₄-ša* lugal-e -li-li-is₃ zabar ^dutu-ra mu-na-dim₂; Sigrist 1988: 36.

⁷¹ mu ^d*I-te-er-pi₄-ša* -lugal-[e] [li]- -li-is₃ zabar -^dinana-^{ti} zabalam^{ti}-ra mu-na-dim₂; Sigrist 1988: 36.

⁷² mu li-li-is₃ zabar e₂ ^dnanna Mananâ mu-na-an-dim₂; Charpin 1978: 28 (e).

⁷³ lilis_x -zabar- (li-li-is₃/li-li-sa-am a-na an-nu-ni-tum) *I-tur*₂ -^dšamaš mu-na-du₃; for variants, see Kienast 1978 vol.1: 22 and copy Taf. 15, 32: 14; (e) mu *li-li-sa-am-* and Itūr-Šamaš e: mu us₂-sa-a-bi li-li-is₃ zabar (BM 28454).

Kisurra: Unknown ruler:

Year: The copper Lilis for Nininsina.⁷⁴

Sippar: Buntahtun-ila

Year in which he installed the Lilis in the temple of Ninkarrak.⁷⁵

Holy Lilis-drums were dedicated to many different gods and were brought into their temples by the ruling kings. Notably, this is only attested from middle and north Babylonian dynasties and never from Sumerian rulers. This fact might be a hint to the regional origin of the Lilis, be it as a word or as the musical instrument itself.⁷⁶ Beside the Seleucid ritual mentioned above, information on its material and weight is given in Ur III and OB texts.⁷⁷ In Mari this instrument was used in a ritual next to the Balaġ of Ištar named Ninigizibara.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the passage is badly destroyed and no further contextual information is available.

Most evidence for the Lilis comes from the first millennium. Much information is gained about its cultic usage from Neo-Assyrian scholarly letters addressed to the king, as well as from Seleucid rituals. It was installed in front of deities, stars and planets; took part in circumambulation rites around temples; and accompanied lamentation prayers.⁷⁹ Personified as the god ^dlilis its sound was used to prevent misfortune and negative prediction.

Balaġ

It is not the aim of this article to present this musical instrument and the difficulties that its identification poses in its whole complexity; Uri Gabbay's article

⁷⁴ ^{urudu}li-li-is₃ ^dnin-in-si-in--na--ra; Kienast 1978: vol. 1: 25; Ac).

⁷⁵ CT 48, 42: l.e. mu li-li-sa-am a-na e₂ ^dnin-kar-ra-ak -u₃ -še^l-ri-bu; see Harris 1970: 316; Charpin 1978: 28 note 55; Westenholz 2010: 385.

⁷⁶ See further Sumula'el (CT 4, 50a) mu balaġ li-li-is₃ 2-a-bi <^d>utu-ra mu-na-an-dim₂ (Horsnell 1999: vol. 2: 63; contra Charpin 1978: 28 n. 55 Immërum). Here balaġ seems to act as a classifier or determinative for /lilis/, as it does in the *Warad-Sîn Inscription* (RIME 4.2.13.1002) 260 iii 8'; more on this in Gabbay's article in this volume.

⁷⁷ TCL 5, 6055 (AS 3) ii 9. 1 ^{urudu}li-li-is₃ 10. ki-la₂-bi 20 ma-na "One copper Lilis; its weight 20 minas (≈10 kg)"; ARM 24, 105: 1. 2 ^{gun}₂ ^{urudu} 2. a-na li-li-si-[ilm] "Two talents (≈60 kg) copper; for the Lilis"; note the differences in the amounts expended.

⁷⁸ Durand and Guichard 1997: 59: 21'-22'.

⁷⁹ Linszen 2004: 92-94.

in this volume is dedicated to these matters. Nevertheless, since the Balaġ — in regard to its religious status — enjoys the highest position among other musical instruments presented here, a short summary of its characteristics is necessary.

The Balaġ belongs to the instrumental repertoire of the lamentation priest, and was put under the special care and protection of the gala-maḥ, the chief lamentation priest.⁸⁰ It was connected to the well-known genre of lamentation songs of the same name — Balaġ. These liturgical songs were performed in Emesal Sumerian, as all other music of the gala-priest, to soothe the gods' raging hearts and to forestall danger for mankind.

Evidence for ritual offerings presented to the Balaġ comes from administrative documents dating to the ED times until the OB period.⁸¹ The most comprehensive material dates to the Ur III period. Holy and divine Balaġ-objects received all sorts of offerings, animal sacrifice, as well as herbal products and libations, and participated in circumambulation rites.⁸²

Other texts mention offerings to groups of seven divine Balaġ-instruments.⁸³ This seemingly consistent group may be connected to the seven Balaġs mentioned in the passage from *The Cursing of Agade*, cited above.

The word “Balaġ” was determined either through ġiš ‘wood’ or kuš ‘hide; leather’.⁸⁴ An OB reference from Ur mentions a bronze Balaġ.⁸⁵ Another OB administrative text from the leather archive of Isin lists different expenditures for the restoration of a Balaġ of Inana, probably dedicated by the deified king Išbi-Erra:⁸⁶

BIN 9, 445 (IŠEr 25) 1–7

(For) [x] old Balaġ of ^dInana, ^dIšbi-Erra

Its red bull's hide 1/3 tanned?

80 ED: Volk 1988; Ur III: Sallaberger 1993: 298; OB: BIN 9, 445 (IŠEr 25).

81 PSD B: 75–76; see, for example, ED: Nik 1, 148 ii 3 (Selz 1989: 369) and DP 167 iii–iv for the dedication of a balaġ by Šaša, wife of Uru-KA-gina (Krecher 1988: 260); for Lagaš, see Selz 1995: 103–104; OB: UET 3, 282: 18–21 (RS?).

82 Sallaberger 1993: 297–298; Heimpel 1998.

83 ED: Selz 1995: 103; Ur III: N(S)ATN 824 (2N-T592); see PSD B: 75a.

84 OB Ur₃-ra from Nippur 2 597–599 (Veldhuis 1997: 250–251) and first millennium Ur₃-ra 11 (MSL 7, 136: 265, 221: 135).

85 UET 3, 282: 17–21 (broken date [RS?]), where it received several natural (raw) products as offering and is mentioned directly after the monthly oil expenditure for the Ala of Ningal.

86 This Balaġ is not known to me from any other source. It is surely a different one than the Balaġ dedicated to Enlil in RIME 4.1.1 with the name “Išbi-Erra trusts in the god Enlil” (^dIš-bi-er₃-ra ^den-lil₂-da -nir-ġal₂).

Its black billy-goat hide one half; its lime 1/3 litre;

Deliverer: Lu-igi.KU, the gala-mah⁸⁷

Among all other musical instruments referred to in the several documents of this same archive, only the Balaĝ received a red-dyed bull skin, doubtless to be used as its drumhead.⁸⁸ The chief lamentation priest Lu-igi.KU who received the materials was responsible for this musical instrument.

The Balaĝ, like the Ala and the Lilis, also was dedicated to a god or goddess, as documented in year names as early as Gudea's times. Apart from being affiliated with a god and the household of his temple, the Balaĝ was given a proper name. It was personified and worshipped as an individual deity. Two such deities will be presented here briefly:

Ur: Ibbi-Suen, year 21

Year: Ibbi-Suen, the king of Ur, built the Balaĝ Ninigizibara for Inana.⁸⁹

The Balaĝ-goddess Ninigizibara of Inana is mentioned for the first time in the reign of King Šulgi.⁹⁰ Ur III period offerings for this goddess are documented in administrative texts from Umma and Uruk.⁹¹ During the OB period there is evidence of a regular cult for Ninigizibara in Larsa, Isin, Sippar, Mari and Tuttul.⁹² Hitherto unique is this Balaĝ's mention in two OB Mari rituals, where it functioned as a cultic and divine object in the course of ritual performance.⁹³ It was set up in front of the image of Ištar, with gala-priests and an orchestra to its left and right. In the second ritual it was positioned close to the king.⁹⁴ In another

87 1. [x] ^{šis}balaĝ sumun 2. ⁱⁿina-na ^{er}er₃-ra 3. ^{ku}kuš ^{gu}gu₄ u₂-^{hab}hab₂-bi 1/3 4. ba-a-si 5. kuš maš₂-gal gi₆-bi 6. še-gin₂-bi 5 gin₂ 7. gir₃ lu₂-igi-KU ^{gala}gala-mah⁸⁷; for u₂-^{hab}hab₂ (Akk. *hūratu*) used for dying or tanning leather red, see Van de Mieroop 1987: 153–154; Stol 1980–1983: 532–535; for si as “tanning,” see Stol 1980–1983: 529.

88 All other musical instruments mostly received black billy goat hides; see BIN 9, 444 (Šull 3) and BIN 10, 104 (IšEr 13) for ^{šis}ša₃-tar and ^{šis}za₃-mi.

89 mu ^II-bi₂-^{den}den.zu lugal ur₂^{ki}-ma-ke₄ ⁿⁱⁿnin-igi-zi-bar-ra balaĝ ⁱⁿina-na-ra mu-na-dim₂; Sigrist and Gomi 1991: 329.

90 See all evidence in Heimpel 1998–2001a: 382–383.

91 Sallaberger 1993: 220 and Table 72.

92 Walker and Wilcke 1981: 96: D 11; Heimpel 1998–2001a: 384; Richter 2004: 212–213, 373–374; MHET I/1 63: 8 (Ad 2); ARM 25, 566; for god lists, see Wilcke 1987: 94: A II + 11 (Isin); Lambert 1985: 183: 94 (Mari).

93 Durand and Guichard 1997: 46–63 nos. 2–3.

94 Durand and Guichard 1997: 52–54 i 8'–12' and *ibid.*: 59 i 19'–22'.

document from Mari Ninigizibara is said to have been decorated with silver and gold.⁹⁵ This goddess is finally referred to in first-millennium god lists as a *gu₄-balaĝ* “bull-balaĝ” of Inana.⁹⁶

The second famous Balaĝ-god to be presented here is known only from the third millennium. Its construction and dedication is documented for Gudea’s third regnal year:

Lagash: Gudea, year 3

Year: The Balaĝ Ušumgalkalama was fashioned.⁹⁷

Ušumgalkalama, literally the “Great Dragon of the Land,” was associated with the god Ninĝirsu and is referred to in Gudea’s expanded temple-building hymns.⁹⁸ Offerings for this same Balaĝ are registered in an Ur III document from the time of Šulgi, where it received beer, bread and oil rations.⁹⁹ Seemingly, the cult for this divine object outlived the reign of Gudea and continued into Ur III times. Nevertheless, we lose track of this instrument from OB times onward. Note that AN = ^d*Anum* refers to this god as an-gub-ba “tutelary deity” of the Eninnu.¹⁰⁰

Many more Balaĝ-gods are known by name from inscriptions, administrative texts or god lists.¹⁰¹ Most of them are enumerated in the first-millennium god list AN = ^d*Anum*, where they are subordinated to superior gods and referred to as “bull(*gu₄*)-Balaĝ of the god/goddess NN.” Each major god of the pantheon could have several *gu₄-balaĝs* attributed to him, when the highest number is observed for the god Nanna with eight *gu₄-balaĝs*.¹⁰² Here are a few examples:

Ninĝirsu (Litke 1998: 177)

104. ^ddu₁₁-ga-lugal-a-ni-ša₃-ḥun-ĝa₂ “The king's word is heart-soothing”

105. ^dnita^{ni-ta}-zi “Righteous man”¹⁰³

95 ARM 25, 566.

96 AN = ^d*Anum* IV 74 (Litke 1998: 153); Emesal god list MSL 4, 9: 87.

97 mu balaĝ ušum-gal-kalam-ma ba-dim₂-ma; Sigrist and Gomi 1991: 317.

98 *Gudea Cyl. A* vi, 24–25; vii, 24–25; *Gudea Cyl. B* xv, 21.

99 Amherst 17 (Š 25) ii, 18.

100 Litke 1998: 177: 97.

101 Some examples: Balaĝ Ninĝinuna of Gula or Nini(n)sina; see Cavigneaux and Krebernik 1998–2001: 378; two Balaĝs for Enlil, otherwise mentioned in SAT I 198: 6–9; Balaĝ Ninildagaldi of Baba mentioned in *Gudea Statue D* (RIME 3/1.1.7) 44 iv 12–14; see Heimpel 1998–2001b: 461.

102 AN = ^d*Anum* III 49–57; Litke 1998: 123.

103 Cavigneaux and Krebernik 1998–2001: 590.

106. ^d dug ₄ -a-ni-si	“His word is fulfilling”
107. [7 gu ₄]-balaĝ Nin-ĝir ₂ -su- ^r ke ₄	“(In sum:) Seven bull-Balaĝs of Ningĝirsu”
Diĝirmaḥ (Litke 1998: 77)	
94. ^d ad-gi ₄ -gi ₄	“Counsellor”
95. ^d ad-gi ₄ -gi ₄ gu ₄ -balaĝ	“Counsellor, bull-Balaĝ”
...	
98. 6 gu ₄ -balaĝ ^d Diĝir-maḥ-ke ₄	“(In sum:) Six bull-Balaĝs of Diĝirmaḥ”
Ningal (Litke 1998: 123)	
59. ^d nin-da-gal-zu	“Killing with the Lady” ¹⁰⁴
60. ^d nin-da-maḥ—di—(-e)	“Sounding greatly with the Lady” ¹⁰⁵
61. 2 gu ₄ -balaĝ ^d Nin-gal-ke ₄	“(In sum:) Two bull-Balaĝs of Ningal”

The names of these Balaĝ-gods are constructed in several different ways referring to different attributes. In Akkadian they are referred to as *muntalku* or *mumdalku*, which is to be translated as counsellor or advisor.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, literary passages describe the divine Balaĝ-instruments Ninigizibara and Ušumgalkalama in Sumerian as ad-gi₄-gi₄ ‘counsellor’ and ‘advisor’.¹⁰⁷

Last, there is yet a third appearance or concept of a divine Balaĝ, which must be mentioned here: the individual deity ^dBalaĝ. Ur III documents mention it among deities of the divine circle of Ninlil in Nippur, receiving animal sacri-

104 Cavigneaux and Krebernik 1998–2001: 337; “die mit der Herrin tötet.”

105 Cavigneaux and Krebernik 1998–2001: 338; “die mit der Herrin laut tönt.”

106 KAV 64 ii 16f.; iii 21f.: gu₄-balaĝ // *mu-un-tal-ku* as Gt participle of *malāku* with a reciprocal meaning; CAD M/2: 207 sub. lex. 2; see also Gabbay in this volume.

107 PSD A/3: 18; Volk 1989: Tafel Ia and II (BM 38593) i 15–16 and rev. iii 14 (PSD A/3: 18b); *Gudea Cyl. A vi*, 24–25 // vii, 24. balaĝ ki aĝ₂-ni ušumgal kalam-ma 25. ĝiš-gu₃-di mu tuku niĝ₂ ad gi₄-gi₄-ni; see above also the gu₄-balaĝ of Diĝirmaḥ named Ad-gi₄-gi₄. According to *Inana and Enki* Seg. I 91–92, the concept of ad-gi₄-gi₄ belongs to the me, followed by ša₃ kuš₂-u₃ with a similar meaning “to counsel; to comfort.” For the Akkadian equivalent, *māliku*, see CAD M/1: 162; Cohen 1988: 54–55: 86. balaĝ-e ad-gi₄-gi₄-zu la-ba-gub en₃-zu: *ba-lag-gu ma-li-ki-ka ul iz[zaz...]*.

fiċe.¹⁰⁸ In first-millennium god lists this deity appears in Akkadian as *Lumĥa* and is referred to as “Enki of the gala-priests.”¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

It must be pointed out initially that all musical instruments discussed here and qualified as cultic, “holy” or even divine were percussion instruments, either membranophones or idiophones. This is an important observation on the character of religious music, especially regarding the late third and second millennium BCE. To be sure, there were other musical instruments, drums, strings and pipes that played a role in cultic festivities. Nevertheless, to my knowledge they never gained a comparable religious status, receiving offerings in a temple, being dedicated to the gods and even worshipped as individual deities.¹¹⁰

From the above overview I further deduce several groups of religious musical instruments regarding (a) their context and function and (b) their religious status:

(a) First, concerning context and function, there is a clear differentiation between praise music and music accompanying lamenting and praying. Regarding the former, the trio ensemble *Tigi-Šem-Ala* was obviously the main music accompaniment for cultic festivities in the third and second millennia BCE. It especially served to initiate ritual offerings like animal sacrifices and libations to the gods. Its music had a joyful character, the ensemble played loudly in open-air spaces, probably mainly by *nar*-musicians.

The music of lamentation and liturgical prayer on the other hand, was a solo instrumental performance in most instances. Here, a single lamentation priest — probably supported by several vocal choruses — accompanied his prayer playing on a single percussion instrument. Although based on speculation, I assume his cultic laments were either accompanied by rather large membranophones like the *Balaĝ* or the *Lilis* while other prayers, for instance, the *Eršema*, were performed to the sound of smaller percussion instruments, be them frame drums, sistrums, rattles or the like (*Šem*, *Ub*, *Meze*).¹¹¹ The purpose of this music was to influence the gods’ moods and to ward off evil from mankind. Altogether, there is

108 Sallaberger 1993: 100–101.

109 AN = ^d*Anum* II (Litke 1998: 104) 307. ^{d(lum-ĥa)}BALAĜ // diĝir gala-ke₆; AN = *Anu ša amēli* (Litke 1998: 239) 131. ^dlum-ĥa // ^de₂-a // ša₂ ^{lu2}ka-le-e 132. ^dBALAĜ // ^de₂-a // ša₂ ^{lu2}gala.

110 The ^{gis}alĝar is the only musical instrument comparable to the group discussed above, since it was connected to gods and goddesses, designated as “holy” (see *Enki’s Journey to Nibru* 66–67) and held in temples (UET 5, 550 [AbS 6]). Nevertheless, it never received cultic attention.

111 See recent discussion in Gabbay 2010.

the music for offerings and sacrifices with an extrovert character opposed to the introvert performance of the gala's liturgy.

This being said, the role definitions for each musical instrument still appear to be inconsistent. The foremost example is the Šem, which demonstrates a positive festive character only when it joins the Ala and Tigi, but is an instrument for lamenting when played solo and as part of the gala's instrumental repertoire. From this it may be concluded that the character and the function of a musical instrument strongly depended on the ensemble to which it belonged.

As part of the gala's instrumental repertoire, the Šem, again, is occasionally replaced by Ub and Meze. It may be assumed that all these terms referred to similar musical instruments, on the basis of the writing of their names. Other similarities may be connected to the sound they made, for example a common metallic clattering, their shape or their role within a musical context.

Last, there are the Tigi and the Ala, originally musical instruments of praise, which in first-millennium texts are associated with the gala. In my opinion, these ostensible discrepancies are attributed to cross-cultural influences and to the overlapping of different music traditions with terminology that constantly changed over a time span of more than two millennia. They are manifested in different phonetic, as well as logographic values, used to describe similar musical objects in different religious contexts. The scribes of later texts obviously reused old terms like Tigi and Ala, disregarding their original meanings and musical context.

(b) Regarding the issue of religious status of the musical instruments discussed here, a third group may be distinguished, comprising the Ala, the Lilis and the Balaġ that have several characteristics in common. First of all, they were built of similar material: The Ala and the Lilis, both big membranophones, had a sound box generally made of bronze or copper; they were covered with red-dyed bull skins, same as the Balaġ. The color red, as well as the bull hide, probably symbolizes an extraordinary divine status for these instruments.¹¹² Second, all three musical instruments were specially built and dedicated to a single god or goddess. This act is referred to in several year names or inscriptions. Last, they were all ritually tended to through regular offerings and sacrifice.

The third-millennium ub₅ may be included in this group of high-ranking religious instruments. It was similarly deified and kept in a temple associated with a god or goddess; its drumhead was also made of bull hide and it received offerings. Again, the different position of the ub₅ in comparison to the later ub₃ is an example of how music terminology and names for musical instruments undergo changes through cultural influences in the course of time. The ub₅ was most obvi-

112 The bull and especially its horns are general symbols for deities also in iconography. The color red is connected to the divine, e.g., in physiognomic omnia; Böck 2000: 78–79: 75, 80–81: 95.

ously replaced in its special religious status by Lilis and Balaĝ from the second millennium on.¹¹³ Further attention must again be drawn to the Tigi, which, like the Balaĝ, appears in a group of seven. Furthermore, its writing NAR.BALAĜ or BALAĜ.NAR associates it with the former, though linked to the nar and not to the gala. Since the meaning of Balaĝ is ambiguous, either referring to an actual musical instrument or to a religious concept, I forbear from relating this observation to any specific meaning, which, relying on the currently available evidence, would be highly speculative.

The Balaĝ, again, may be excluded from the aforementioned group, as I believe it does not only represent a specific musical instrument, but also a religious concept of its own. Balaĝ-instruments were personified, given their own name and cult. They served as a cultic image and were worshipped as an individual deity. Such deities were listed among gods and goddesses in first-millennium god lists. The attribute “bull” in *gu*₄-balaĝ seemingly refers to the divine status of the object and not only to its shape or material. The function of such a Balaĝ-god lies in mediating, advising and counseling either to superior deities or humans. The word “balaĝ” therefore did not refer to a special instrument with a specific shape and sound, but rather to a concept describing transcendental communication by means of musical instruments. This concept of communication was personified and worshipped as the god ^dBalaĝ, a specific manifestation of the god Enki, which is connected to the skills of lamentation priests. Enki is the first initiator of musical communication. He is the former holder of the holy *me*, including all musical instruments discussed in this paper. He installed Ala and Šem in every Mesopotamian temple. He also put Ub and Lilis into the gala’s hands in order to enable him to affect the gods’ moods and thereby influence the future existence of humanity.

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113 See also Gabbay 2007: 71–72.

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Cypro-Archaic I period, 750–600 BCE.

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