

# Harfen und Harfenisten im Alten Ägypten (III) Harpes et harpistes de l'Égypte Ancienne (III) Harps and harpists in Ancient Egypt (III)

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III. 19. - 20. Dynastie, Spätzeit und Ptolemäische Zeit / III. La XIX<sup>e</sup> - XX<sup>e</sup> Dynastie, Époque tardive et Époque ptolémaïque / III. The 19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, Late Period and Ptolemaic Period

In diesem dritten und letzten Beitrag beschreibt Lise Manniche, wie die Soloharfenisten zu wichtigen Personen wurden, die das Leben nach dem Tod zu beschreiben hatten; sie trugen Titel wie „Harfenist des Herrn des Jenseits“ oder „Harfenist der Wahrheit“. Auch zeigten die Harfenisten Fettrollen am Bauch als Spuren der sitzenden Lebensweise. Gespielt werden Bogenharfen, bootförmige und Winkelharfen, von letzteren sind einige erhalten, darunter die Winkelharfe im Louvre, deren Schallkörper mit grünem Leder überzogen ist.

Dans ce troisième et dernier article, Lise Manniche décrit comment les harpistes solo devinrent des personnes importantes qui avaient pour tâche de décrire la vie après la mort; ils portaient des titres de „Harpistes du Seigneur de l'au-delà“ ou „Harpistes de la vérité“. La permanente position assise des harpistes a laissé des traces car ils portent les soi-disant „cousins d'amour“ autour du ventre! On jouait de la harpe dont le corps sonore est recouvert de cuir vert.

After the religious and artistic revolution of king Akhenaten and the brief reign by the boy king Tutankhamun, Amun-Re and his fellow gods were reinstated, celebrated and once more depicted. The picture programme in the temples reverted to what it had been before, but the tomb chapels of private individuals changed. Gone were most of the so-called scenes of daily life, and the emphasis was now on life in the Hereafter. Hence there was no longer an opportunity to depict the beautiful Feast of the Valley with its happy participants and musical ensembles. The Feast remained and was mentioned in texts, but it was not part of the wall-decoration and we ignore the composition of the ensembles that performed.

19<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> dynasty  
(1307-1070 B.C.)

The solo harpist, however, came to have a prominent role to play as the person who expressed the opinion of the day about life after death. His song is often written next to him (Fig. 1), and from this we may gather that there were two main points of view concerning the quality of life after death. One extolled life on earth:

*I have heard the wise sayings of Imhotep and Hardedef which are quoted in the proverbs so much. What are their cult places? Their walls are dismantled, and their cult places exist no more as if they have never been. There is no one who can return from there to describe their nature, to describe their dissolution that he may still our desires until we reach the place where they have gone. Place myrrh upon your head, dress yourself in fine linen, anointed with real wonders of the god's own stores. Make holiday, but do not tire yourself with it. Remember it is not given to man to take his goods with him. No one goes away and then comes back.*

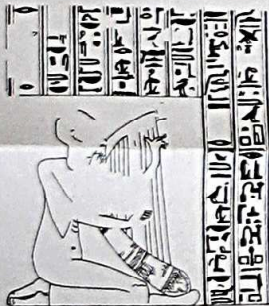


Fig. 1  
A harpist and his song. Theban tomb no. 178 of Neferhotep. 19th dynasty.  
Ein Harfenist und sein Lied. Thebanisches Grab Nr. 178 von Neferhotep. 19. Dynastie.  
Un harpiste et son chant. Tombe thébaine n° 178 de Neferhotep. XIXe Dynastie.

Other harpists, however, welcomed the inevitable and urged to consider life in the Hereafter as a place of peace:

*I have heard these songs which are in the ancient tombs, which tell of the virtues of life on earth and make little of life in the necropolis. Why then do I likewise to eternity? It is a place of justice without fear, where uproar is taboo, where no one attacks his fellow. This place has no enemies; all our relatives have lived in it from time immemorial, with millions more to come. It is not possible to linger in Egypt - no one can escape from going west. One's acts on earth are like a dream. 'Welcome safe and sound!' to whoever arrives in the West.*

Such were the songs that the Egyptians in the 13<sup>th</sup> century B.C. liked to hear and wanted to perpetuate on the walls of their tomb chapels. At the time, the texts already went back a long way. These harpists were sometimes, but not always blind, and they showed signs of sedentary life when their arched backs produced rolls of fat on their stomachs.

The harps played by these solo players of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties were arched harps of various descriptions, but almost all of them were small enough to be played by the musician in a kneeling or squatting position. They have between 8 and 20 strings, though one has 22.

The angular harp from the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty continued to be played. It is not often shown in representation, but some specimens of 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty date have survived. A similar, though undated, instrument in the Louvre is exceedingly well preserved, the soundbox being covered with green leather. Other instruments were made of wood. The strings were fixed at the lower end to a suspension rod. One such has 21 holes to receive the strings. Another has 29 holes, but the neck has only 17 pegs. The pegs could be made of ivory and ebony. The soundbox itself was provided with soundholes. Its length varies between 74.5 and 132 cm. It was thus quite a heavy instrument to hold and play.

The large boat-shaped harp was not totally abandoned and may have been more common than the evidence suggests. As mentioned earlier, banquet scenes had virtually disappeared after the Amarna interlude, but one tomb from late in the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty revived the subject. This tomb chapel at Thebes is now almost totally destroyed, but the wall decoration was copied early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It shows an animated group consisting of the tomb owner's female relatives playing a superb lyre and double oboe, followed by a man with a huge arched harp which in its size and shape is reminiscent of the earlier boat-shaped harps.

A similar large harp is seen in another chapel depicting a festival in which takes part a girl with an equally magnificent lyre and another with a large arched harp (Fig. 2). These are the only large harps of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> dynasties used on a semi-secular occasion.



Fig. 2  
Arched harp and lyre. Theban tomb no. 341 of Nakhtamun. 19th dynasty. Neferronpet.  
Bogenharfe und Leier. Thebanisches Grab Nr. 341 von Nakhtamun. 19. Dynastie. Neferronpet.  
Harpe arquée et lyre. Tombe thébaine n° 341 de Nakhtamun. XIXe Dynastie. Neferronpet.

Such large harps otherwise only occur twice in the tomb of Ramses III (Fig. 3). They are among the most dramatic representations of Egyptian musicians, now much destroyed, but again happily copied early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both musicians are blind, and their expressive pose is reflected in the folds of their garments. The instruments have a decoration of a royal head, attached in a peculiar way to the soundbox, not to the neck of the harp. Their titles are „Harpist of the Lord of the Hereafter“ and „Harpist of Truth“. The words they once performed were not recorded.

After the reign of Ramses XI in 1070 B.C. followed a 3rd Intermediate Period consisting of dynasties 21 to 24. During these centuries harpists appear on small votive stelae set up to honour a deity. These wooden boards often have great artistic merit. They show a named musician facing a deity, obviously engaged in presenting a vocal offering to the god who may be different from the one referred to in the musician's title.



Fig. 3  
Harpist in the tomb of Ramses III in the Valley of the Kings at Thebes. 20th dynasty.  
Harfenist im Grab von Ramses III. im Tal der Könige in Theben. 20. Dynastie.  
Harpiste dans la tombe de Ramsès III dans la Vallée des Rois à Thèbes. XXe Dynastie.

The harp (Fig. 4) is an arched harp reminiscent of the ladle-shaped harp, decorated with a royal head and provided with 9 strings and 10 pegs.



Fig. 4  
The singer of Amun performs to the god. The Louvre. 21st-22nd dynasty.  
Der Sänger von Amun singt zum Gott Re-Harakhte. Bemalte Holzstela im Louvre. 21.-22. Dynastie.  
Le chanteur d'Amon chante au dieu Re-Harakhte. Stèle de bois peinte au Louvre. XXe-XXIe Dynastie.

The Late Period  
(712-332 B.C.)

The Late Period proper (dynasties 25-30) saw foreign rulers on the throne of Egypt. First came the Nubians who had maintained a largely Egyptian civilization in remote cities in Africa. From a musical point of view the city of Kawa near modern Dongola is interesting. Amun-Re was the chief god here, and the walls of his temple, founded by Tutankhamun some 600 years earlier, were decorated with among other subjects two rows of musicians in a procession. As in Egypt the sacred and the secular came together in these processions which would often include members of the army. At Kawa we see trumpets and large drums as in many other military events, but strangely two angular harps have been included of a size that makes them ill suited for being carried anywhere. They are adorned with the head of a ram, the sacred animal of Amun-Re. Their angles vary, and one has seven strings, the other eight. The difference in the length of the strings in the two instruments is not dramatic, and one wonders about the significance of the variation in appearance. One of the instruments appears to be played with a large plectrum unless the player is using it for tapping the sound box. This is the one and only time that a plectrum is seen in connection with a harp in Egypt (the lutenists always used them). The Kawa harps have kept their Egyptian name, *djadja*, which was also used for the large harps in the tomb of Ramses III.

The Ptolemaic Period  
(332 - 30 B.C.)

After the conquest of Alexander, Egypt came under Greek administration. In art and architecture, however, Egyptian style was maintained and this seems also to have been the case in music. The arched harp used in the temples developed into a small crescent-shaped harp (Fig. 5) which was played by women of the royal family who performed as priestesses in the temple. The instrument has a very shallow sound-box, and no pegs are shown. It is possible that these harps did not actually exist as musical instruments, but functioned as a symbol of adoration.

The angular harp had also survived Greek influence, being played by female musicians who dance and make music to Hathor, at this time also adored as daughter of the sun god Re. According to one legend she rebelled against her father and ran away from home to Nubia, falling into a mad drunken rage. Thoth, god of magic and writing was sent out to pacify her and brought her back to Egypt in triumph. This was celebrated with music and dance and depicted on the walls of her temples. The song describes the happy event:

*We dance for you, O mistress, we dance for you, O mistress, the words required by the adorners. Come! the procession takes place at the site of drunkenness, this area where one wanders in the marshes. Its routine is set, the rules firm. Nothing is left to be desired. Drunkards play tambourines for you in the cool night, and those who wake up bless you. The bedouin dance for you in their garments, and Asiatics dance with their sticks.*

The harp no longer exists on Egyptian soil, though it is found in African folk music as for example close to the sources of the Nile in Uganda (the *ennanga*) and in Mauretania (the *ardin*).



Fig. 5  
Musicians in the temple of Kawa. 25th dynasty.  
Musiker im Tempel von Kawa. 25. Dynastie.  
Musiciens dans le temple de Kawa. XXVe Dynastie.

I. Old and Middle Kingdoms (ca. 2575-1640 B.C.), see HARPA No. 31, Summer 1999  
I. Altes und Mittleres Reich (ca. 2575-1640 v.C.), siehe HARPA Nr. 31, Sommer 1999  
I. Ancien et Moyen Empires (env. 2575-1670 av. J.-C.), voir HARPA No. 31, Été 1999

II. The 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty (ca. 1550-1350 B.C.), see HARPA No. 34, Spring 2000  
II. Die 18. Dynastie (ca. 1550-1350 v.C.), siehe HARPA Nr. 34, Frühling 2000  
II. La 18<sup>ème</sup> dynastie (env. 1550-1350 av. J.-C.), voir HARPA No. 34, Printemps 2000