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## Ancient Musical Discoveries in Slovakia

The article is devoted to the musical artefacts discovered on the territory of Slovakia. During the remotest ancient periods of time music served chiefly as a means for ceremonies, cults and magic rituals, and accompanied the process of work. Present-day perceptions about music in prehistorical times are formed from various types of evidence: archeological artifacts, pictures, carved figures and musical instruments. The most ancient of the latter are various rattles and pipes. An inherent part of musical activities was formed by dances and singing. Although there is an absence of direct evidence of the sound of the instruments, it may be presumed that during the first stages of the development of music one of its most important aspects was rhythm. Melodies were simple and consisted of few pitches with small intervals in between them, which comprised a basic motive, subsequently repeated numerous times.

### Keywords:

the music of Slovakia, ancient musical instruments, music of the prehistoric period.

## Древние музыкальные находки в Словакии

В статье речь идёт о музыкальных артефактах, обнаруженных на территории Словакии. В древнейшие эпохи музыка служила главным образом для церемоний, культов, магических ритуалов, сопровождала процесс работы. Суждения о музыке в доисторические времена складываются из различных свидетельств: археологических артефактов, картин, резных фигурок и музыкальных инструментов. Самые древние из последних – это различные погремушки и трубы. Неотъемлемой частью музыкальной деятельности были танцы и пение. Хотя отсутствуют прямые доказательства звучания инструментов, мы предполагаем, что на первых этапах развития музыки важным аспектом являлся ритм. Мелодия была простой, складывалась из нескольких тонов с небольшими интервалами, образующими основной повторяющийся мотив.

### Ключевые слова:

музыка Словакии, древние музыкальные инструменты, музыка доисторической эпохи.

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Slovakia is a small country in the middle of Europe. During the era of ancient history (from the end of the Prehistory to the fall of the Western Roman Empire), the territory was populated by various tribes, such as Romans, Celts, Germans and Huns or Avars. During the Period of Migration (4th–6th Century AD) the Slavs arrived in this region, but the authentic Slovak music culture had not appeared until the 9th century, when the Slovak nation started its formative period. Therefore, the oldest music testimonies which were discovered cannot be related directly to Slovak culture. They merely prove that music had existed in the territory where Slovakia is situated now.

The oldest musical activities were documented by various artifacts – musical instruments and iconographic depictions, such as cave paintings, rock carvings, drawings on vases, etc. Even though we cannot reconstruct the sounding music, we can make deductions, based on this evidence, about the way instruments were played, the settings for various music activities and the musicians themselves.

We assume, that music had been a part of ceremonies, cults and magic rituals. Music, mainly vocal music accompanied by instruments, was supposed to ward off evil spirits, call to the gods and natural forces for help, celebrate the feats of the tribal chiefs, etc. The integral part of musical activities was made up of dancing and singing.

The oldest evidence comes from the Prehistoric era. The first instruments had been made of bones, rocks, wood, skin, plants, and antlers. Unfortunately, they were often made from materials which are not durable, and therefore, they could not be preserved until the present day. A number of them has been restored by use of experimental archaeological methods. Nonetheless, the actual sound of prehistorical music has not been evidenced, because these artifacts are too valuable to actually play on them (since they could get damaged). For our experiments we make use of reconstructions of prehistorical instruments. Besides musical instruments, artifacts of regular application

were used to produce music/sound, among them scrapers or *crepitaculum*.



Picture 1: Scraper from a swan bone<sup>1</sup>

From this time period various clay rattles have been found, for example, various turtle-shaped rattles or bottle-shaped rattles containing baked marbles inside them.



Picture 2: Bottle-shaped rattle<sup>2</sup>



Picture 3: Bottle-shaped rattle<sup>3</sup>

These discovered instruments indicate to us that rhythm had been a very important aspect of music from the start. One example of valuable archaeological evidence in the territory of present-day Slovakia is a clay egg-shaped rattle from Dvory nad Zitavou

(Picture 4). The scientists dated it back to the time of the Great Migration of the Nations.



Picture 4: Egg-shaped rattle<sup>4</sup>

It is documented, that at the dawn of pre-Christian era, the music involved various pipes, horns, flutes, syrinxes, bagpipes, double-pipes and so on. Historians created the panpipe based on iconographic depiction out of hollow bones of birds and stripes of skin (Picture 5).



Picture 5: Pan pipes<sup>5</sup>

The picture of the pan pipes was found on a silver cup (skyph), and the syrinx was

pictured on the skyph ornate handle in Amor's hands (Picture 6). This cup was made in Italy and was found in the grave of an earl in Krakovany – Straze.



Picture 6: Ornamented handle<sup>6</sup>



Picture 7: Silver skyph<sup>7</sup>

At the earliest stage of its development, music was monophonic. Melodies progressed in small intervals in the ambitus of a small number of tones. Since the main functions of music were to accompany magic or sacred rites and menial labor, we assume that the short motives in the melodies were repeated numerous times with no change at all, or with the simplest variations.

 NOTES 

<sup>1</sup> See [3, p. 40].

<sup>2</sup> See [2, p. 95].

<sup>3</sup> See [7, 20E].

<sup>4</sup> See [4, picture 169].

<sup>5</sup> See [5].

<sup>6</sup> See [4, picture 103].

<sup>7</sup> See [4, picture 101].



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