



GUILLEMIN, MARCELLE

GUILLEMIN, MARCELLE, a well known scholar of ancient Near Eastern organology and ancient music theory (b. Liège, Belgium, 5 July 1907; d. Liège, 3 December 1997; [Figure 1](#)). She studied musicology under the supervision of Charles Van den Borren and ancient Mesopotamian civilization with Georges Dossin at the University of Liège. Her doctoral dissertation, completed in 1931, bore the title “Les instruments de musique en Asie Occidentale ancienne.” After her marriage to the Iranologist Jacques Duchesne in 1935, Guillemin published under the name Marcelle Duchesne-Guillemin.

Duchesne-Guillemin’s thirty-nine scholarly contributions which followed the writing of her doctoral dissertation include work on comparative organology, original observations on string instruments of western Asia and their influence on the origin of some classical Greek instruments, discussion of the oliphant in antiquity, and a discovery of the earliest example of the pneumatic organ on a mosaic from Mariamin, Syria. In 1959, she worked with the *Encyclopédie de la Pléiade*, where she was responsible for the articles dealing with ancient Mesopotamian music.

Duchesne-Guillemin was one of the early investigators of the reconstruction of ancient Babylonian musical scales and music theory. She was the first scholar to explore and explain the musicological significance of the sequence of number-pairs of musical strings in a cuneiform text of the first millennium B.C.E. excavated at the archaeological site of Nippur in southern Iraq. She was able to demonstrate that the tablet presented two series of intervals on a musical scale; that musical intervals of fifths, fourths, thirds, and sixths were



known at that time; and that the evidence for an ancient Mesopotamian heptatonic-diatonic scale was strong. She was also one of the few scholars who attempted to interpret the musical instructions found on a cuneiform tablet (mid-2nd millennium B.C.E.) from ancient Ugarit (modern Ra's Šamra) in Syria which contained a nearly complete hymn written in the Hurrian language but whose musical instructions were in Semitic Akkadian.

Duchesne-Guillemin's 1969 article, "La harpe à plectre iranienne, son origine et sa diffusion," is an excellent example of the penetrating studies she made in order to identify ancient instruments. While she was not trained as a cuneiformist, Dr. Duchesne-Guillemin undertook close scrutiny of the iconographic representations of the instrumentarium and utilized the Mesopotamian textual sources available to her; she was able to argue for the identification of the *algar* instrument as the horizontal harp that was played with a plectrum (**algarsurrû?*). Her conclusion was that the plectrum-played harp originated in Iran since the earliest horizontal harp depicted is on a cylinder seal found in southeastern Iran and dated to ca. 2300 B.C.E. That harp style would thus have spread both east and west from Iran. Her major publication on Persian musicology was *Les instruments de musique dans l'art sassanide*, which appeared in 1993.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A complete list of Guillemin's publications may be found in the obituary notice in *Stud. Ir.* 28, 1999, pp. 147-49.

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