



The Earliest Instrument: Ritual Power and Fertility Magic of the Flute in Upper Paleolithic Culture

Lana Neal

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This book investigates the earliest known musical instruments within the larger cultural context. Upper Paleolithic flutes are the oldest musical instruments that have survived in the archeological record. The significance of this study lies in the synthesis of various methodologies and sources of evidence to gain an understanding of the place of the instruments in Upper Paleolithic culture. It is a comprehensive investigation of the artifacts and their ritual and social functions. Upper Paleolithic flutes have been discovered at archeological sites dating from approximately 43,000 to 12,000 years ago. Although humans were most likely creating music prior to this time, the people who entered Europe approximately 43,000 years ago began to create musical instruments that have survived to the present day. Analysis of the artifacts is followed by examination of the archeological contexts, parietal and mobiliary art as it relates to sonic expression, ethnographic examples, and the instrument as it appears in various mythological systems around the world. These instruments were powerful symbols essential to the expression of the most fundamental aspects of life and death. They were symbols of life and thus intrinsically linked to human fertility as well as the fecundity of plants and animals. The flutes were associated with the cycle of life and death and marked important points in this cycle. This investigation provides a new level of insight into the function of music in human culture.

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