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Les Chansons de Bilitis by Claude Debussy: A Discussion of the Original Stage Music and its Resulting Transcriptions

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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ABSTRACT

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In the year 1901, Claude Debussy wrote incidental music to accompany a set of staged poems written by his friend, Pierre Louÿs. The poems were taken from a volume of 143 poems and three epitaphs entitled, Les Chansons de Bilitis, which were published in 1894. Louÿs claimed that he had translated these poems from works found in the tomb of a sixth century B.C. Greek poetess named Bilitis, when in fact, he had fabricated them himself. Debussy’s incidental music is scored for two flutes, two harps, celesta, and reciter. The music was not published during his lifetime and the celesta part did not survive. Several editions have since been produced with newly composed celesta parts. Pierre Boulez created a version for a 1954 performance; this version remains unpublished. Arthur Hoérée reconstituted the celesta part and made an edition for the publisher Jobert in 1971. This is the edition from which the analysis and examples in this document were taken. Rudolf Escher made a 1972 edition for the publisher Donemus, partly in reaction to his disagreements with parts of Hoérée’s edition.

The preparation of these editions of the incidental music was greatly aided by the fact that Debussy reworked six movements of Les Chansons de Bilitis for piano four-hands in 1914 and titled them Six Épigraphes antiques. Two versions for flute and piano
have since been made from these works. Donald Peck published a version, titled *Bilitis*, for Bourne Co. based on *Les Chansons de Bilitis* in 1979, and Karl Lenski published a version for Universal Edition based on the *Épigraphe*, also titled *Bilitis*, in 1984. This document discusses all of the editions listed above, and provides background information on Pierre Louÿs, his friendship with Debussy, and the origins of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. 
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1. Introduction

In the year 1901, Claude Debussy, winner of the Prix de Rome and composer of *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune* and *Nocturnes*, wrote incidental music to accompany a set of staged poems written by his friend, Pierre Louÿs. The poems were taken from a volume of 143 poems and three epitaphs entitled, *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, which were published in 1894. Louÿs claimed that he had translated these poems from works found in the tomb of a sixth century B.C. Greek poetess named Bilitis, when in fact, these poems (written in a prose style), were completely fabricated by none other than himself. The poems are grouped into three books that are named for the places Bilitis was alleged to have lived. The first book, titled “Bucoliques en Pamphylie,” recalls her childhood. The second, “Élégies à Mytilène,” refers to incidents occurring while she lived on the island of Lesbos. The final book, “Epigrammes dans l’île de Chypre,” deals with her life as a courtesan.¹ This great literary hoax fooled many, even experts for a short time, but their disputed origin only seemed to increase the poems’ popularity. Because these poems are at times sexually explicit, they inevitably received mixed reviews from the public.

The incidental music that Debussy wrote to accompany these poems is scored for an unusual grouping of instruments: two flutes, two harps, celesta, and reciter. This theater piece is written in the style of a melodrama, with the music and text presented in alternation. Music and text are presented together in some performances/editions. The movements are, for the most part, through-composed and draw heavily on the text for inspiration. The movements are also short, ranging in length from seven measures to

twenty-eight measures. Many of Debussy's signature stylistic traits can be found in Les Chansons, which was composed in the middle of his most productive and musically significant years (1893-1913) while he was hard at work on the opera Pelléas et Méliandre. Louÿs had asked Debussy to write music to accompany the staged presentation of twelve of his poems at the Salles des Fêtes of Le Journal. This premiere took place on 7 February 1901.

The music was composed fairly quickly in late 1900 and early 1901. Debussy, in a letter to Louÿs, expressed that the time allotted him to compose the music was "horribly short." Unfortunately, Debussy did not publish this incidental music; the celesta part did not survive because Debussy, who played the celesta at the premiere, had evidently improvised it for the performance. The manuscript remained in the possession of Debussy's biographer, Léon Vallas, who commissioned a score labeled as follows:

Score on the basis of the individual parts (the minority of which in the hand of Debussy), which his first wife, Lilly Debussy gave to me. The celesta part appears to have been improvised by Debussy on the spot. Only the fragments of this remain, on pages 11 and 17. The celesta part was completed by Pierre Boulez in April 1954 for a performance in the Théâtre Marigny (10 April '54).³

For several reasons, arguments can be made that Debussy did not improvise the celesta part for the performance. Two fragments of the celesta part survived as cues in the manuscript flute parts. "Furthermore, since Debussy gave the manuscript to his friend Louÿs as a gift, it would have been very uncivil to present something incomplete. The fact that it was not among Louÿs' surviving papers is not odd either; Louÿs was

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extremely untidy and other things have also been known to be temporarily missing or lost altogether. Less explicable is that nothing was found among Debussy’s own corpus.4 It has also been stated that the additional celesta part in the Vallas score was in fact composed by Boulez.5 The manuscript, minus the celesta part, is now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale.

In 1971, Arthur Hoérée reconstituted the celesta part and made an edition for the publisher Jobert. In the foreword to this score, Hoérée noted that he had based his celesta part on the two brief cues in one of the manuscript parts, on Debussy’s typical orchestral treatment of keyboard instruments (i.e. the glockenspiel in Pelléas et Mélisande and La Mer, and the celesta in Iberia and Jeux), and finally on parts of Six Épigraphe... (discussed later).6 Hoérée’s edition is the one from which the analysis and examples in this document will be taken.

In 1972, Rudolf Escher (a Debussy scholar) made another edition for the publisher Donemus, partly in reaction to Hoérée’s edition. Escher wrote, “Apart from Hoérée’s decidedly clumsy celesta part, the reliability of this version seems doubtful to me; but it is important to note that it clearly shows the instrumental origin of the later Épigraphe...”7 Apparently Escher died before this edition was published, and it fell to Dirk Jacob Hamoen to complete it. In the foreword to the published edition Hamoen writes, “It is important to realize that Rudolf Escher did not intend to make an

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4 Ibid.
5 Hamoen, 19.
‘Utext’. He consulted Arthur Hoérée’s edition (Jobert, 1971), not the original parts. Escher’s version is based on Debussy’s later treatment of material from Les Chansons de Bilitis in the Six Épigraphe antiques.”

There are countless differences (too many to note) between the Escher and Hoérée editions. In general, Escher’s edition is sparser in texture, with fewer doublings between the parts. No changes are made in the melody or harmony. The lengths of the movements are the same, although Escher adds an introductory measure of accompaniment in the seventh and twelfth movements. He also takes the liberty of raising the octave of Flute 1 (movement twelve) and changes the endings of movements seven and twelve. The endings of these movements match those of the corresponding Six Épigraphe antiques, discussed later. The part of the celesta is the most different; Escher’s celesta part is much reduced. Unlike the Hoérée edition, Escher gives tempo indications as well as more specific directions as to the placement of the text. He specifies that the text be recited during the music in movements five, eight and nine, and during parts of the music in movements seven and ten.

The preparation of these editions of the incidental music was greatly aided by the fact that Debussy reworked six movements of Les Chansons de Bilitis for piano fourhands in 1914 and titled them Six Épigraphe antiques. He later made an edition of the Épigraphe for solo piano. Ernest Ansermet orchestrated these Épigraphe in 1954. Two versions for flute and piano have since been made from these works. Donald Peck published a version, titled Bilitis, for Bourne Co. based on Les Chansons de Bilitis in 1979, and Karl Lenski published a version for Universal Edition based on the

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Épigraphe, also titled *Bilitis*, in 1984. It is important to note that Debussy's *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*, for voice and piano, have no musical connection to any of the works mentioned above. Completed in 1897, this was Debussy's first connection to Louys' *Chansons*. With the exception of the *Épigraphe* for solo piano, this document will discuss all of these editions and provide background information on Pierre Louys and his friendship with Debussy. Further discussion of the differences between the Hoéréé and Escher editions of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* will not be pursued.

Pierre Louÿs was a close friend of Debussy for more than a decade. Debussy's junior by eight years, Pierre-Félix Louis was born in 1870 and wrote under the name Pierre Louÿs. As a child he studied piano and violin, which taught him to appreciate music. At age seventeen he wrote in his journal that he would become either a man of letters, a musician, or an artist. After his mother died when he was nine years old, Pierre was raised by his half-brother, Georges. Georges, Baron de Louis, twenty years older than Pierre, was employed in the French diplomatic service and was a man of considerable wealth. At age eighteen, Pierre inherited 300,000 francs when his father died, and he promptly devised a way to spend it. He had thus far lived a fairly reckless lifestyle and was in the process of ruining his health. He had been diagnosed with tuberculosis and warned by his doctor that unless he changed his ways, he probably would not live more than three years. With this in mind, he divided his fortune into three parts (100,000 francs a year) and proceeded to live even more wildly than before.⁹

Louÿs was a popular young man who was known for his hospitality. His circle of friends included poets, artists, journalists, musicians, and writers; including Paul Valéry, Francis Viélé-Griffin, Henri de Régnier, Ferdinand Hérold, André de Tınan, Pierre Quillard, and André Fontaine. In dispensing with his fortune, he acquired an impressive collection of books, paintings, sketches, Oriental tapestries, and coded manuscripts on paleography. Louÿs happily entertained his friends with tales of the fine objects' origins, especially elaborating on the paleography manuscripts, claiming to have discovered the keys to their translations (a fine preface to his *Chansons de Bilitis*). He was known for

his generosity in “helping many less fortunate comrades, and was particularly remembered, as Valéry said, for the way he liked to give his friends pleasure -- by leaving anonymous presents at their homes: gloves, handkerchiefs, ties, flowers, perfume, or rare bibelots and books.”¹⁰ It was at this time, the third and final year of his fortune, that he met Debussy.

Debussy and Louys became close friends in 1893, perhaps meeting at the Librairie de l’Art Indépendent, which published early works of both men, or possibly at the Auberge du Clou, where Erik Satie was pianist.¹¹ Louys had by this time already published Astarté (1891), a small volume of poems, in a private printing and was thus establishing a reputation as a writer. Debussy was instantly attracted to Louys’ carefree lifestyle, his worldliness, his financial freedom, and his ability to live life as a true artist, answering only to beauty and art. Louys had always been as interested in music as Debussy had been in literature, so they had much in common and much to talk about. Louys was an avid worshipper of Wagner whereas Debussy was trying to rebel against Wagner’s musical influence. This was a bone of contention that they debated endlessly.

Louys’ bohemian spirit and anti-Christianity intrigued Debussy as the two grew closer. Louys knew a lot about ancient cultures and enhanced the erotic mysticism of the ancient Greeks when he imparted knowledge to Debussy. Among his many travels throughout Europe and beyond, Louys made six trips to northern Africa where he insisted the climate was most conducive to writing, unlike the chilly Parisian winters. It was there in Africa that he found the inspiration for his Greek-themed works.

¹⁰ Ibid, 125.

André Gide, Louÿs' friend and fellow writer, had just returned from a winter trip to Biskra, Algeria and had brought back many tales of his adventures there. In these amorous stories, Louÿs learned of a beautiful young Arab girl named Meriem ben Atala. Meriem's culture permitted young girls to prostitute themselves to secure their dowry for marriage. Gide gives this description of Meriem:

Meriem was amber-skinned, firm-fleshed. Her figure was round but still almost childish for she was barely sixteen. I can only compare her to a bacchante—the one on the Gaeta vase, for instance—because of her tinkling bracelets too, which she was continually shaking... Her cousin En Barka was dancing there too. They danced in the antique fashion of the Oulad, their heads straight and erect, their busts motionless, their hands agile, their whole bodies shaken by the rhythmic beating of their feet. How much I liked this "Mohammedan music" with its steady, obstinate, incessant flow; it went to my head, stupefied me like an opiate, drowsily and voluptuously benumbed my thoughts.\(^{12}\)

Thus enticed, in the month of July, Louÿs decided to forgo his usual trip to Bayreuth for the Wagnerian Festival and headed instead to Algeria, accompanied by another friend, Ferdinand Hérold, and bearing gifts for Meriem from Gide. Upon arrival in Biskra, their third stop on their trip, Louÿs became very ill because of the intense heat and had to return to Constantine, their second stop, which had a milder climate. Meriem came to Constantine the next month and Louÿs became completely infatuated with her. She most likely became the muse for Les Chansons de Bilitis, which were begun in Constantine and completed in Paris. The manuscript holds a dedication to Gide "in memory of Meriem ben Atala."\(^{13}\) Louÿs later became involved with Meriem's sister, Zohra, who he brought to Paris and lived with for the year of 1896.

\(^{12}\) Edward Lockspeiser, Debussy: His Life and Mind, Volume 1, 1862-1902 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 175.

\(^{13}\) Ibid.
The manuscript of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* was completed on September 8, 1894, but even as it was about to go into printing, Louÿs was rewriting and polishing the text. It was not until mid-November that he felt the proofs were ready to go back to the printers. Lacking the one thousand francs required to have the work published, he again had to turn to his brother Georges for funds. *Les Chansons de Bilitis* were published on December 12, 1894 (although the first edition bears the date “1895”) by the Librairie de l’art indépendant.¹⁴

In writing *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, Louÿs accomplished a great literary hoax. Nothing about the work is factual; even the full title, *Les Chansons de Bilitis, traduites du grec pour la première fois par P.L.* (Louÿs didn’t use his full name in the first edition), is untrue. He included a bibliography and a list of poems not yet translated to make it seem more authentic. The introductory “Vie de Bilitis” (Life of Bilitis) was also fabricated. “Bilitis” was a sixth century B.C. Greek poetess created completely by Louÿs. At some point in his classical education, Louÿs read Philostratus’ *Life of Appolonius* and was inspired to create a character based on “a certain Damophyle, described as being of Pamphylian origin, an intimate of Sappho, and the author of hymns in honour of Artemis.”¹⁵ In “Vie de Bilitis,” Louÿs details Bilitis’ childhood in Pamphylia, life in Lesbos, friendship with Sappho, and years as a religious prostitute working for Aphrodite at Amathus in Cyprus.¹⁶

Louÿs takes the hoax even further by creating a German scholar, Professor G. Heim, who “edited” the first edition of Bilitis’ poems and “published” them in Leipzig in

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¹⁵ Ibid., 110.

¹⁶ Ibid.
1894 after "discovering" her tomb. Louÿs pointed out to a correspondent in 1896 that anyone with a working knowledge of German should have noticed that the professor's name (G. Heim or, when pronounced in German, "Geheim"), translates as "the mysterious."\textsuperscript{17} Louÿs is also said to have sent \textit{Les Chansons de Bilitis} to a professor of Greek archaeology, M. X. (a real person), at one of the leading universities. M. X. sent back a letter of thanks, saying that Bilitis was not unknown to him, and that for a long time he had considered her a personal friend,\textsuperscript{18} meaning that he also knew of her poetic endeavors. He also suggested alternate translations of some of the original songs.

"Madame Jean Bertheroy (also a real person), 'Lauréate de l'Académie', went one better and actually published in the \textit{Revue des jeunes filles} on 5 January 1896 a new translation of six of the \textit{chansons}."\textsuperscript{19}

Not all reviewers were convinced of the \textit{Chansons}' authenticity. Paul Ginisty noted in the \textit{Gil Blas} on 5 January 1895 that it was charming if it was a literary game, but if it was a true translation, it was rather free with a lot of modern spirit. A famous German classical scholar, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, criticized Louÿs for displaying an "insufficient knowledge to the Greek language (as evidenced in periphrastic expressions and the formation of names), for introducing countless anachronisms into the poems (for instance, in the attitude toward nature), and, in general, for travestying the true spirit of the Hellenic civilization."\textsuperscript{20} He also condemned the \textit{Chansons} on moral grounds for "obscene content." Louÿs evidently found this amusing

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Wenk, 175.

\textsuperscript{19} Clive, 111.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 112.
because von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff’s review was the only one he included in the bibliography of the enlarged edition printed in 1898.\textsuperscript{21} Reviewers and readers alike often commented on the erotic character and underlying lesbianism of the work.

*Les Chansons de Bilitis* are written in “poetic prose.” Louys thought music was the perfect vehicle for artistic expression and therefore put great emphasis on incorporating musical qualities into verse and using rhythm instead of ordered rhyming schemes to organize his poetry. “The aim should be rhythmic perfection, not simply within the over-all structure of a particular stanza, but in each individual line. The ideal poem would thus consist of a series of *vers libres*—blank verse, akin to poetic prose.”\textsuperscript{22} Louys developed this theory early on, and it is partially shown in the *Chansons*.

Each song consists of four prose stanzas, suggesting the probable length of a prose version of a Sapphic or Alcaic stanza— a correspondence which unquestionably aided in winning credence for the hoax. The verse comes to a full stop at the end of each stanza. Beyond this restriction, the poems have a complete freedom, and the infinite changes of rhythm possible in such lyric prose defy analysis.\textsuperscript{23}

After reading *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, Debussy wrote a letter to Louys dated 22 January 1895 in which he noted, “everyone’s clutching Bilitis,”\textsuperscript{24} meaning that the poems were being well received. Debussy, at this time, was involved in the first revisions of his opera, *Pelléas et Mélisande*, noting in that same letter to Louys, “Pelléas and Mélisande are my only friends at the moment.”\textsuperscript{25} It was not until December of 1897 that he had the occasion to look at the poems with a thought to using them musically. M. Floury, the

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 10


\textsuperscript{25}Ibid.
owner of L’Image, a literary and artistic magazine, approached Debussy with an offer to publish a composition. Debussy then turned to Les Chansons de Bilitis and wrote his first work inspired by Louÿs’ poems; a setting of three of the poems for solo voice and piano. The first, La Flûte de Pan, reflects Debussy’s “attraction to the flute as an instrument of pure melody.” The second, La Chevelure, had not appeared in the first edition of Louÿs’ poems but was published along with several others in the Mercure de France in 1897. Debussy dedicated this song to a Mme. Peter, the wife of his friend René Peter. “One gets a precise idea of the passion this woman inspired in him, listening to the melody that is dense, voluptuous, and perfect, and which closes with heartrending tenderness. These five bars reveal Debussy’s sensitivity.” Debussy sent these two songs to Louÿs before the third was completed, and he was rewarded with encouraging and pleased words from Louÿs. The third song, Le Tombeau des Naïades, was completed the day before Christmas in 1897. Debussy dedicated the finished group of these three songs, Trois Chansons de Bilitis, to Louÿs.

Louÿs intended the first performance of these songs to be in 1898 in conjunction with a public lecture Achille Segard was giving on the poems. Debussy, though, thought otherwise:

So M. Achille Segard is going to give a talk on the Chansons de Bilitis which contain, couched in marvelous language, all that is passionate, tender, and cruel about being in love, so that the most refined voluptuaries are obliged to recognize the childishness of their activities compared to the fearsome and seductive Bilitis.

Tell me now, what would my three little songs add to the straightforward reading of your text? Nothing at all, my dear fellow; in fact I’d say the result

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26 Wenk, 176.

would be a clumsy dispersal of the audience’s feelings.

Really, what’s the point of making Bilitis sing either in the major or in the minor, considering hers is the most persuasive voice in the world? You’ll say “Then why have you set it to music?” But that, my dear Pierre, is another question... It’s for a different occasion; but believe me when I say that if Bilitis is there, let her speak without accompaniment.

I won’t bother to mention all the other material difficulties like, for example, finding a young person who, to please our pale, aesthetic selves, would devote herself utterly to studying these three songs and would be content with our expressions of deep gratitude. Then there is yours truly who has the tiresome habit of scattering wrong notes from both hands whenever he has to play in front of more than two people. I’ve been frank and hope you’ll understand. I’m not shirking but trying to act in your interests. 

*Trois Chansons de Bilitis* finally had their first public performance on 17 March 1900 at the Société Nationale, sung by Blanche Marot, an Opéra-Comique artist, and accompanied by Debussy.

In the fall of 1900, Louÿs' *Les Chansons de Bilitis* were again brought to attention. Louÿs was approached by Fernand Samuel, director of the Théâtre des Variétés in Paris, for an adaptation of the work to be mimed and recited. In a letter dated 25 October 1900, Louÿs asked Debussy to write the accompanying score even though he knew that Samuel would rather have had Gaston Serpette, a rival composer, write the music. Eight pages of violins, silences and ringing chords that give the “impression of art” is what Louÿs specifies the music should consist of. This offer came at a good time for Debussy. He was practically penniless at the moment, and his wife at this time, Lilly Debussy (née Texier) was ill. The work was to be first performed at the Salle des Fêtes of *Le Journal* and later at the Théâtre des Variétés.

Instead of Louÿs’ suggested scoring, Debussy chose to use two flutes, two harps and celesta to accompany the recitation of the group of poems. The musical material

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29 *Correspondance*, 151.
Debussy employed was completely new and unrelated to the previous *Trois Chansons de Bilitis*, as were the poems chosen for recitation by Louÿs. In this incidental music, Debussy found what he was looking for: Bilitis’ voice could speak alone (see footnote 27) while interspersed with music, mime and *tableaux vivants* (static scene with living actors). He had finished the music by 15 January 1901 and rehearsals were begun with Louÿs happily supervising. In a letter to his brother Georges dated 23 January 1901, Louÿs wrote:

> I’ve been spending every afternoon this week with naked women. It’s all very pleasing. The ladies in question are the models who are going to enact our *Chansons de Bilitis* on the *Journal* stage, some of the time wearing draped voile or robes of kos, and some of the time nothing at all besides their two hands or their stance, three-quarter view from behind.³⁰

Although Louÿs was happy with the course of the rehearsals, Debussy was worried because no instrumentalists had been hired and no music had been copied, but it all came together closer to the performance. News of the upcoming staged event leaked out and reached the ears of Senator René Bérenger, who threatened the editor of the *Journal* with prosecution if he went ahead with the event. Bérenger was a distinguished legislator and politician whose “violent and uncompromising opposition to any activity he deemed a danger to moral rectitude frequently led him to censure essentially harmless incidents and earned him the nickname ‘Père-la-Pudeur (Father of Modesty)’.”³¹

Needless to say, he did not approve of the upcoming production, but he was ignored and the performance took place in front of a very select audience of 300 people at the Salles des Fêtes of *Le Journal* on the evening of 7 February 1901. There is only one known

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³¹ Clive, 171.
review, which appeared in Le Journal the following day. The reviewer was impressed with the performance, commenting, "M. de Bussy's (sic) gracious and ingeniously archaic music... accompanied Mlle Milton's voice and combined with her in a soothing rhythm, whose charm added to the antique beauties of the poetry."

The reviewer added that "the poetry and music, which would have sufficed to keep the audience under its charm, were even more enhanced by the most artistic tableaux vivants that have ever been provided for an audience. The models brought the precious skill of their impeccable forms in a great effort toward the ideal dreamed by the poet. To contemplate these marvelous nude women, sometimes muted, sometimes powerful, always pure and draped with art, the audience could believe itself transported to the great eras of pure nudity."

Although this performance was a success, for reasons unknown, the scheduled event at the Théâtre des Variétés never took place.

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3. Analysis of original stage music (Hoérée edition)

1. "Chant pastoral"

The first movement is entitled "Pastoral Song," and indeed the music's character is quiet and relaxed, traits that are typically associated with the word "pastoral." The opening line of the text reads, "One must sing a pastoral song to invoke Pan, God of the summer wind."\(^{34}\) Flute 1 "sings" this song alone for the first three measures. This melody is based on a pentatonic scale on G. The entire movement is in Dorian mode on G, which serves to underscore the setting of the text in ancient Greece. G is perceived as the tonic because it serves as the top and bottom note of the melody and also because a plagal cadence in this key can be heard in measure four.

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 3.1. "Chant pastoral," *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flute 1, mm. 1-3 (Motive 1).

These opening measures will be referred to throughout this analysis as Motive 1. This is also the start of the A section, which continues through measure nine. Although the text that goes with this section is recited after it ends, Motive 1 is indicative of its calm mood. During this section, Bilitis and her friend Sélenis are watching their flocks from the shade of an olive-tree. Motive 1 is stated louder, a fourth higher, and doubled in Flute 2 in measure seven. This can be interpreted to correspond with motion in the text; Sélenis rises from lying in the meadow to run, pick flowers, and looks for crickets.

After the initial A section, the movement continues with several other sections. The overall form is A, B, A, B, text, A, and the movement is only 21 measures long. Motive 2 and the B section (only two measures long) begin in measure ten. This is the first use of the note B♭ in the melody, which adds to the Dorian flavor. This also outlines 9\textsuperscript{th} (and occasionally the 11\textsuperscript{th}) chords in G minor, which serve as the fundamental harmonic structure of the entire piece, as explained below.

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 3.2. “Chant pastoral,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flute 1, mm. 10-11.

In the next passage in the text, Bilitis spins the wool of the sheep into yarn, and the spinning motion of the melody seems to imitate her movement. The A section resumes in measure twelve, only this time it is shortened to three measures. Measures 15-16 are the final statement of the B section. It is interesting harmonically because this is the first place Debussy uses the notes from the 9\textsuperscript{th} chord of the B section to form the harmonies. The tonality seems to alternate between B-flat major and G minor, depending on which notes are in the bass. These harmonies are clearly taken from notes in the 9\textsuperscript{th} chord.
Fig. 3.3. "Chant pastoral," *Chansons de Bilitis*, mm. 15-16.

The text is recited after measure 16 finishes. There are no specific instructions in the Hoérée edition as to exactly when the text should be recited, although the placement of the music and text on the page seem to indicate that they should be performed in alternation. The movement closes with a reprise of the A section, ending clearly in G Dorian with another plagal cadence. The text also finished with a repeat of the opening sentence, making both the music and the text very balanced.

2. "Les Comparaisons"

The first line of text in movement two, "Les Comparisons," refers to "Bergeronnette, oiseau de Kypris," which roughly translates to Sparrow, bird of Kypris. The music is extremely bird-like in texture, punctuated by trills and quick grace notes.
This opening section contains mainly upper register notes, which enhance the bird-like effect. The harps are tacet until the last chord of the movement, where low register notes finally appear. The entire movement is based on a G Dorian scale and ends with an open fifth (G and D). The main compositional device of this movement is imitation. The opening two measures of Flute 2 form the motive upon which this imitation is based. The motive is passed around through voice exchange between Flute 1 and 2. This movement is very short, only nine measures long, and there are no contrasting sections because there is simply no space for them.

The text, which is recited before the music begins, depicts Bilitis and her friends growing into puberty and commands in the first line, “Sparrow, bird of Kypris, accompany our first desires with your notes.” The young girls compare their bodies and try to best each other on their progressing development. This poem, like the “Chant
pastoral,” ends with a repeat of the opening line, but this time, unlike the first movement, there is no corresponding repeat in the music.

3. “Les Contes”

This movement, like the previous one, is only nine measures long and has text that is recited before the music begins. The text, the title of which translates as “stories,” speaks of children and how Bilitis is beloved by them. The music is very playful with a tempo marking of “rather fast and very rhythmic.” The opening notes in Flute 2 (doubled by the celesta) are the same as the first three notes of Motive 1 from the first movement (see Fig. 1), although the rhythms are new. Flute 1 (also doubled by the celesta) duplicates the same motive up a minor third.

Fig. 3.5. “Les Contes,” Chansons de Bilitis, mm. 1-2.
The grace notes are the same as the notes they precede, which adds to the playful sound of the movement, as do the triplet figures in the flute parts beginning in the third measure. The tonal center is Eb because of the alternating ostinato bass line in both harp parts. This begins in measure two and continues through the end of the movement, which also ends on an Eb major triad. A# imparts a distinct Lydian flavor until measure five, when Db becomes prevalent in Harp 1 and Celesta, changing the Eb major triad into a dominant seventh chord. This chord, however, does not function as in traditional harmonic progressions, but rather as a Mixolydian color which battles with A# until they both disappear in the final measure.

4. “Chanson”

In movement four, Bilitis is searching for her mistress, questioning the places and objects along her path as to her mistress’ whereabouts. The overall form of this ten-measure movement is A, text, A, text, A I. The opening two measures of the music are played before the text begins. The melody, doubled at the octave in the flutes, is a new motive and is questioning in character. This melody is based on a pentatonic scale consisting of whole tones [G, A, B, Db, and F]. One of the things Bilitis questions is a river, which is represented by the gurgling octave figure in the celesta.
Fig. 3.6. “Chanson,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, mm. 1-2.

The ending notes of this section form a tritone, which is new thus far in the piece. The questioning text is recited here, followed by a repetition of the opening two measures. This time, the texture is thicker, with the addition of the harps doubling the melody of the flutes. Flute 1 is in the same octave as Flute 2 in this section.

More text, in which Bilitis is again questioning places in search of her mistress, is recited after the return of section A. Bilitis questions a golden street, “Oh! Pathway of light, do her naked feet press you?” This reference to walking seems apparent in the subsequent section of music, demonstrated especially in the harp parts. Harp 1 has an undulating triple motion, while Harp 2 continues in a duple motion. This creates a mysterious-sounding sensation that is heightened by the absence of traditional harmony.
Beginning in measure seven, the whole tone scale is employed in the melody of Flutes 1 and 2, and whole step relationships continue in the part of the celesta. This whole tone scale [Eb, F, G, A, Cb, Db, and Eb] is just a filled-in version of the earlier stated pentatonic scale consisting of whole tones [G, A, B, Db, and F]. Also in this section, Harp 2, in its changing harmonies, illustrates another use of the 7th chord as the basis of harmony. The movement ends after ten measures with a cluster of three notes of the whole tone scale [Db, Eb, and F]. This can be heard as rounding off of the movement because the very opening flute melody is based on a similar arrangement of notes [F, G, and A]. Also, Db is prominent as the lowest note throughout all sections of the movement.

5. “La Partie d’osselets”

Movement five is the shortest movement of the entire piece, just seven measures long. The title translates as, “Game of dice.” In the text, Bilitis and her friend play a
game of dice to decide who will get the man they both adore. The music that follows is very playful and fast. The melody in Flute 1 uses the pentatonic scale derived from Motive 1.

Because of the prominence of G, it seems as if Debussy will use a harmonic structure similar to movement one, and base the movement on the following 7th chord: G, B♭, Db, and F. This explains the dissonance in the flutes in measure two; the resulting whole steps are a part of the 7th chord in inversion. The C♯s appearing in the harps in measures four and five hint at D minor, showing that the movement is no longer modal. However by the end, Debussy has changed to using F as the tonal center, and ends the movement with a clear F major triad via D minor.

6. “Bilitis”

The text of movement six is recited before the music starts. Bilitis is addressing her lover saying, “I must live forever nude. My lover, come and take me as I am; without
a dress or jewels or little boots, behold me: Bilitis herself and nothing more." The corresponding music has a lush and sweeping texture. The movement is ten measures long and ends in B major, not all that surprisingly since there are five sharps in the key signature. There are interesting instructions to Harp 1 in the first measure (see Fig. 3.9). Debussy directs the harpist to adjust the tuning pedals on the instrument so that only the four notes of a G# minor 7th chord will sound when a glissando is played. Harp 2 does not reflect this tuning.

![Musical notation]

Fig. 3.9. "Bilitis," *Chansons de Bilitis*, mm. 1-2.

The melody throughout the parts follows a fairly normal B major scale pattern except when the 7th chord is outlined. In regard to form, Debussy uses repetition at intervals that
get increasingly smaller. Measures 1-2 are repeated in measures 3-4; measure five (a new motive) is repeated in measure six; and in measure seven yet another motive is repeated halfway through the measure (see Fig. 3.10).

![Musical notation]

Fig. 3.10. “Bilitis,” Chansons de Bilitis, m. 7.

This motive is actually a compressed version of the idea stated in measures 1-2 (see Fig. 3.9). Fig. 3.10 also illustrates a change of tuning in Harp 1 on alternate beats. Debussy continues this method of organization in a disguised form in the last three measures of the movement. Measure eight is an augmented repetition of the third and fourth beats, measure nine is a repetition with octave displacement, and measure ten is an exact repetition in the harps and celesta.
7. "Le Tombeau sans nom"

The title of this movement translates as "the nameless tomb." The text describes a visit to the tomb of Mnasidika's mother's mistress, Mnasidika being Bilitis' lover. The music and the text of this movement are divided into three sections, with the text recited before each musical section begins. Two measures long, the first section uses a melody that is slightly reminiscent of the opening of the first movement. Some of the notes are the same [D, C, and Ab instead of A], and Debussy also uses the same dotted rhythm. In this statement, the whole tone scale is used rather than the pentatonic. Harp 1 uses a motive that runs throughout this movement: the notes D-C-D in a dotted rhythm (see Fig. 3.11). A tritone is formed with the D of the celesta and the final Ab of Flute 1.

![Sheet music image](image_url)

Fig. 3.11. "Le Tombeau sans nom," *Chansons de Bilitis*, mm. 1-2.

In the text preceding the second section of music, which is three measures long, Mnasidika and Bilitis read the epitaph on the mistress' grave: "Death did not carry me away, but the Nymphs of the river. I rest here beneath the light earth with the shorn
ringlets of my Xantho. Let her alone weep for me. I shall not say my name.” The music that follows continues to utilize the whole tone scale. The rhythm begun by Harp 1 in the opening sections [D-C-D] continues with more frequency (see Fig. 3.12).

![Musical Example]

Fig. 3.12. “Le Tombeau sans nom,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flutes 1 and 2, and Harp 1, mm. 3-5.

The final section of this movement begins with Bilitis asking the question, “How can one call an unknown soul from out of the rushing hordes of souls in Hadès?” The music that follows this question is melodically the first two sections combined to equal five measures. Harp 1 continues its earlier rhythm, but it is now an insistent figure repeating every beat. The celesta has a D on every beat, doubling Harp 1, just as it had in the previous sections. The most interesting thing, though, happens in Harp 2. As Flute 1 ascends by whole step in the last two measures, Harp 2 descends by whole step, depicting the descent into hell (Hadès).
Fig. 3.13. “Le Tombeau sans nom,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flutes 1 and 2, and Harps 1 and 2, mm. 9-10.

8. “Les Courtisanes égyptiennes”

In movement eight, Bilitis details her visit to see the “Egyptian Courtesans.” She describes their silent rooms that have no angles or corners because they have been coated with blue paint so many times. She also describes how still the courtesans sit, with their hands upon their knees. The music, which follows the recitation of the text, illustrates this motionlessness with a repetitive descending whole-tone pattern in the harps and celesta. Bilitis, in the text, tells how the courtesans grow restless when she and her friend speak in the “Lydian” language. The restlessness is expressed by the first appearance of chromaticism, the descending line of Flute 1, beginning in measure five. Flute 2 is the only part that has an ascending line, and this ascends only briefly. The descending figure in the harps and celesta in measure five is also a Lydian tetrachord, which may have been an intentional pun on Debussy’s part.
There is no traditional harmonic function in this movement. The descending whole-tone figures in the harps and celesta are centered throughout the movement on D, which is also sounded in Harps 1 and 2 on the strong beats of each measure. The fact that it begins and ends on D lends to the monotony of the ten-measure movement.

9. “L’Eau pure du bassin”

Movement nine is entitled, “Clear water of the Basin.” In it, Bilitis asks the water, “silent mirror, tell me of my beauty.” The water answers, “Bilitis, or whoever you may be, Tethys or mayhap lovely Aphritrite, you are beautiful, oh, know it well!” The water then goes on to describe in explicit detail the love marks resulting from Bilitis’ sexual exploits. The music, which follows the recitation of the text, uses the motive of the river from movement four (see Fig. 3.6) to represent the “clear water of the basin” in this movement. Here however, the motive is on E instead of the previous Db. Harp 2 carries this figure throughout the entire eight measures of the movement. The flutes are
tacet throughout. The melody in Harp 1 has a similar shape to that of the opening idea of movement one.

Fig. 3.15. “L’Eau pure du bassin,” Chansons de Bilitis, Harps 1 and 2, and celesta, mm.1-3.

The shape of the movement is based on the water motive. It flows gently along, with a dynamic peak of forte in measure six before receding back to pianissimo on an E major harmony that ends the movement. Earlier support for the designation of E major harmony can be found in Harp 2, which has E’s throughout, and in the celesta, which consistently uses E and G#. In this case, E major is colored by Lydian and whole-tone elements, namely A# and D#.  

10. “La Danseuse aux crotales”

“Dancer with castanets” begins with music rather than text. The text that follows the music depicts a dancer, Myrrhinidion, who begins the dance by taking off her dress. Bilitis describes her movements and notes, “Suddenly you clap your castanets! Arch yourself on tip-toe, shake your flanks, fling your legs, and may your crashing hands call
all the lusts in hordes about your fiercely twisting body.” In the music, there is a six-measure introduction, where Harp 1 and Flute 1 arpeggiate D minor and A minor seventh chords. In this introduction, Flute 1 hesitantly begins the triplet figure that structures the rhythmic pattern of the movement. Both of these introductory voices sound fragmented, but are made clearer at the true beginning of the movement starting in measure seven (see Fig. 3.16).

The harmony in measure seven alternates between C major and D minor in Harp 1 to match the triplet pulse begun in Flute 2 and followed in imitation by Flute 1 two measures later. The clap of the castanets is illustrated in both Flutes 1 and 2 at various times by the ascending (sometimes ascending and descending) scalar runs that appear suddenly, beginning in Flute 2 in measure eight.

![Musical notation](image1.png)

Fig. 3.16. “La Danseuse aux crotales,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flutes 1 and 2, and Harps 1 and 2, mm. 5-9.

There is a glissando figure in the celesta leading into measure eleven which, like the run in Flute 1, marks a transition into G Mixolydian. The “castanet” runs in Flute 1 are accompanied by E minor chords, but everywhere else the tonality is G Mixolydian, including the end of this section, of which the last chord is an open fifth.
Fig. 3.17. "La Danseuse aux crotale," *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flutes 1 and 2, and Harps 1 and 2, mm. 10-13.

The closing material of this section, measures 15-18 (not illustrated), can be seen as a rounding off of the opening because the melody in Flute 2 is a return of measures 5-6, and the Harp ends alone, just as it began.

After the text is recited, the music resumes in measure 19. The "castanet" idea is stated softly, over and over, in Flute 1, while the triplet figure resumes in Flute 2 (see Fig. 3.18). The harmony in this section is the same as in measure seven (see Fig. 3.16).

Fig. 3.18. "La Danseuse aux crotale," *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flutes 1 and 2, and Harps 1 and 2, mm. 19-20.
In measure 21, the celesta states the triplet figure from Flute 2 in diminished note values for two measures. The glissando figure in the celesta (see Fig. 3.17), along with the run in Flute 1, returns on the last beat of measure 22 (not illustrated). The dance slows in measure 26 and closes on a G7 chord with a missing third.

11. “Le Souvenir de Mnasidika”

The title of this movement translates as “Memory of Mnasidika.” The text, recited before the music, depicts the sensual dance of two women. “They danced before each other in swift and fleeting movement: they always seemed to wish to touch each other, but never touched, unless it be their lips.” The dance can easily be heard in the music. The harps set the mood with a soft, tapping chordal accompaniment, hinting at B♭ Mixolydian, that continues throughout the movement. The parallel motion of these chords is very characteristic of Debussy’s style. When the flutes enter in measure three, the harmony changes to G Phrygian. The flutes are in unison throughout the entire movement, which signifies the movement of the two dancers. The whole-tone flute melody that begins in measure five (see Fig. 3.19) is taken from Flute 1 in the seventh movement, “Le Tombeau sans nom” (see Fig. 3.11). The rhythm is different in some places, but otherwise the melodies are identical.
The accompanying harmony changes to B♭ Mixolydian in measure 5 and then back to G minor in measure seven.

The text ends with, “and suddenly they fell, to consummate their tender dance upon the earth… Memory of Mnasidika, it was then that you appeared to me, and everything except your dear sweet image was annoying.” The flutes begin to fall to the earth in measure ten, descending mainly by whole steps. They begin the descent on the same note, D, as did Harp 2 in the seventh movement (see Fig. 3.13). Perhaps Debussy intended them to descend into hell, as was the reference in the seventh movement. This could be a moral comment about the poetry on his part. The movement ends, after fifteen measures, on a tonal center of D in the celesta, which was also the tonal center of the seventh movement (see Fig. 3.20).
Fig. 3.20. “Le Souvenir de Mnasidika,” Chansons de Bilitis, mm. 10-15.

Debussy has gradually moved away from the strict modality of movements one and two to the point of tonal ambiguity in this movement. It hints at B♭ Mixolydian, G Phrygian, true D minor (because of the F♯ in measure seven), then planning the two half-diminished seventh chords (measures 10-15) to arrive at a very ambiguous ending: surely G is the tonic but the Ab hints at Phrygian and the E♯ hints at Dorian. In essence, Debussy has created his own artificial mode [G, Ab, B♭, C, D, E♯, F, and G], which the flutes play going downward from D to D.

12. “La Pluie au matin”

The final movement’s title translates as “Morning rain.” The text is usually recited during the first section of the music, although there are no instructions for this practice in the score. It is sad in character: “The night is fading. The stars are far away. Now the very latest courtesans have all gone homewards with their paramours. And I, in the morning rain, write these verses in the sand.” Bilitis is old, lonely, and despairing in
this poem because she is ignored and forgotten. She takes some pleasure in that, "those who will love when I am gone, will sing my songs together, in the dark."

The rain is portrayed in the part of the celesta, by means of a steady alternation of sixteenth notes on B and G in the right hand. The left hand of the celesta uses a grace note motive that is reminiscent of the pattern in Harp 2 beginning in measure seven of movement ten, "La Danseuse aux crotales" (see Fig. 3.16).

![Musical notation](image)

Fig. 3.21. "La Pluie au matin," Chansons de Bilitis, mm. 1-4.

The melody that begins in unison in the second measure in the flutes, F♯-D♯-F♯-D♯, is derived from Motive 1, C-D-C-D (see Fig. 3.1). The low register used in the flutes might symbolize the loneliness felt by Bilitis. This use of the low register and soft dynamics throughout the score allows the text to be recited while the music is going on if the performers desire to do so. The text might begin with the last beat of measure five.

The timbres of the harmony change in measure six when an augmented 7th chord between Harp 1 and the flutes [G, B, D♯, and F♯] becomes prevalent. The "rain" motive in the celesta now becomes an alternating chromatic figure in measures 6-9.
Fig. 3.22. "La Pluie au matin," *Chansons de Bilitis*, mm. 6-8.

This section ends with the notes G, B and C#, which form a tritone and lend a rather unfinished tonal quality. In performances where the text is recited during the music, the text finishes after the music has stopped.

The final section, starting in measure thirteen, begins with the last statement of Motive 1 in the harps (see Fig. 3.23). Perhaps this is a reflection of the part of the text when Bilitis states, "They will learn my verses, and the children of their children..." The "children" could be learning something old: Motive 1. This also promotes an image of continuity by linking the beginning and ending of the piece and indicates that old melodies are "passed on."
Fig. 3.23. “La Pluie au matin,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, Harps 1 and 2, mm. 13-15.

In measure sixteen, Flute 1 repeats the melody it played in measure two of this movement (see Fig. 3.21), this time in a slightly different rhythm. Debussy might have used this lonely motive to counter the effect of the hopeful sound of the previously-stated Motive 1. The statement of this melody ends with the Eb in measure eighteen. Harp 2 in this same measure uses the notes from Motive 1 in quarter notes. The following measure, Harp 1 uses those same notes in triplets.

Fig. 3.24. “La Pluie au matin,” *Chansons de Bilitis*, mm.17-21 (end).
The solitary low Ds in the last three measures of the flute parts are interesting because all of the movements with sad text have used D as a prominent note (see Figs. 3.11, 3.14 and 3.20). The piece ends very calmly and softly in G Mixolydian.

In using Motive 1 as a device to connect the first and final movements, Debussy harmonizes the pentatonic theme in different ways. The statement of Motive 1 in the first movement is in Dorian, while the statement in this final movement is in Mixolydian. This use of different modes illustrates the juxtaposition of pessimism and optimism in the text and in the music. Bilitis has had a rather sad life but is happy because she will be remembered for her poetry; her art will live on. Mixolydian has a rather unfinished character, so it is very well suited for the ending of this piece.
4. *Six Épigraphes antiques*

In the summer of 1914, more than a decade after completing the stage music, Debussy reworked part of the incidental music for piano four-hands and titled it *Six Épigraphes antiques* in an effort to provide his publisher with new material. He told his publisher, Durand, that he had at one point intended to turn them into an orchestral suite. Debussy never wrote that suite, although Ernest Ansermet did orchestrate the *Épigraphes* some years later. Only half of the original 1901 score is used in the newer work, *Chansons* numbers 1, “Chant pastoral”; 7, “Le Tombeau sans nom”; 4, “Chanson”; 10, “La Danseuse aux crotales”; 8, “Les Courtisanes égyptiennes”; and 12, “La Pluie au matin.” The titles of the *Épigraphes* do not always match the titles of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. Debussy expanded the existing material with newly composed music, expanding the 100 measures taken from *Les Chansons de Bilitis* to create a work 273 measures long. The new material blends easily into the older material and forms a pleasing work.

In the first of the *Épigraphes*, “Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d’été,” the opening Piano Primo part is exactly the same as that of Flute 1 in *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. Both statements of the melody are unaccompanied.

\[\text{Modéré}\]

![Musical notation](image)

*Fig. 4.1. “Chant pastoral,” *Les Chansons de Bilitis*, opening measures of Flute 1.*
Fig. 4.2. “Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d’été,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, opening measures of Piano Primo.

There is a clean break at the end of measure 16 in both works. Text is spoken in *Les Chansons de Bilitis* while fourteen measures of new material occur in the *Épigraphe*. The new material, beginning in measure 17, has a melody (measures 17-20) that outlines an F major scale, rather than the pentatonic scale of the opening measures. This music is developmental in nature, especially with the syncopated chordal rhythm beginning in measure 20 in Piano Secondo.

Fig. 4.3. “Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d’été,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Secondo, mm. 17-20.

The melody from measures 17-20 returns in measure 27 but changes to 6/8 and ascends rather than descends in measure 29. In both the *Chanson* and the *Épigraphe*, the movement ends quietly with a recap of the opening melodic statement, although the penultimate measure in this *Épigraphe* is a 4/4 measure and corresponding *Chanson* has instead two measures of 2/4. Only the time signatures are different; the musical material is the same.
The second Épigraphe, “Pour un tombeau sans nom,” again opens like its corresponding Chanson, No. 7 “Le Tombeau sans nom.” This Épigraphe intersperses portions of the Chanson movement throughout: measures 1-2, 5-6 and 8-12 (the entire ten measures of the Chanson movement). Upon hearing the melody, we realize that the new F major theme from the previous movement is actually derived from it (compare Fig. 4.3 with Fig. 4.5 and Fig. 4.6). The measures between those sections are filled with transitional music in Piano Seconde, which corresponds with the pauses in the Chanson movement where the text was recited. The following examples illustrate the added transitional material and how it is drawn from the descending figure in the harps and celesta of the Chanson movement.

Fig. 4.4. “Pour un tombeau sans nom,” Six Épigraphe antiques, Piano Seconde, mm. 3-4.

Fig. 4.5. “Le Tombeau sans nom,” Les Chansons de Bilitis, m. 6.
New material fills the rest of Épigraphes No.2, with the exception of two places. Measures 25-27 of Piano Primo is another statement of the main whole-tone melody of this movement.

Fig. 4.6. “Pour un tombeau sans nom,” Six Épigraphes antiques, Piano Primo, mm. 25-27.

The new material in measures 16-17 contains inverted 7th chords that move chromatically in eighth notes (see Fig. 4.7). This eighth note rhythm could be a reflection of the constant moving eighth note pattern from the Chanson, “Les Courtisanes Égyptiennes” (see Fig. 3.14).

Fig. 4.7. “Pour un tombeau sans nom,” Six Épigraphes antiques, Piano Primo, mm. 16-17.

Debussy could have intended this to prepare for the highly chromatic material found in mm. 28-32, taken exactly from Flute 1 of the Chanson, “Les Courtisanes égyptiennes,” measures 5-9 (see Fig. 3.14).
The new material in measures 18-24 is a transition back to the repetition of the melody (measures 25-28). It is repetitive within itself because measures 20-21 of Piano Primo are echoed in a lower octave in Piano Secondo in measures 22-23 (not illustrated). The final three measures of the movement are also new and interesting because they impose a 7th chord on Eb [Eb, G, Bb, and Db] in Piano Primo upon an Eb-Db (whole-step relationship again) juxtaposed against an A♭ in Piano Secondo (see Fig. 4.9). This is the most dissonant sound encountered thus far.

Épigraphe No.3, “Pour que la nuit soit propice,” uses the entire fourth Chanson (only ten measures long), titled “Chanson,” at the beginning of the movement. This
music in both works is marked “Lent et expressif.” The new material starting in measure 13 develops the grace note motive from the first part of the movement (Piano Primo).

Fig. 4.10. “Pour que la nuit soit propice,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Primo, mm. 13-16.

The accompanying figure in Piano Secondo (not illustrated) is a repeated B♮ in 12/8 meter: eighth note followed by four sixteenth notes. Neither the rhythm nor the notes are the same, but repetitive rhythms are an important feature of the accompaniment of the first section and Debussy uses this rhythm as a linking device. This repetitive technique continues as Debussy uses measure 17 in measure 25, and measure 15 reappears in measures 21-23 and 26. The movement finishes with a florid cadenza-like figure in Piano Primo that is not derived from anything previously stated in the movement.

Fig. 4.11. “Pour que la nuit soit propice,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Primo, mm. 28-29.

The fourth *Épigraphes*, “Pour la danseuse aux crotales,” derives its music from the similarly titled *Chanson*, “La Danseuse aux crotales.” The first fourteen measures of the *Chanson* are used in the beginning of the *Épigraphes* but differ slightly in measures 11-14. During those measures, there is a trill in Flute 1 of the *Chanson* that is not imitated in
either the Piano Primo or Secondo of the Épigraphe. Only the short chords played in the harps and later the celeste appear in the piano version.

Fig. 4.12. “La Danseuse aux crotales,” Les Chansons de Bilitis, Flutes 1 and 2, and Harp 1, mm. 11-13.

New material intervenes in the Épigraphe from measure 15 until measure 52, when the Chanson material resumes. Text is recited in the Chanson while the new material is stated in the Épigraphe. The new music in the Épigraphe begins in measure 15 with a development of the “castenet” idea in Piano Primo. The triplet motive from measure three is again stated beginning in measure 22 and developed in measures 29-32. A new triplet idea begins measure 33 in Piano Primo, this time as an accompanying figure.

Fig. 4.13. “Pour la danseuse aux crotales,” Six Épigraphe antiques, Piano Primo, mm. 33-34.
The melody in Piano Secondo in measures 35-41 is new and very different in style and content from the rest of the movement.

Fig. 4.14. “Pour la danseuse aux crotale,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Secondo, mm. 35-37.

After this new melody, the beginning triplet motive is re-stated and followed by a two-measure reminiscence of Piano Secondo’s melody from measure 35, a half step higher than before. The final ten measures are exactly the same as in the *Chanson*.

*Épigraphe* No.5, “Pour l’Égyptienne,” is connected to the corresponding *Chanson*, “Les Courtisanes égyptiennes,” only by title. They are unrelated by way of time and key signatures and differ also in rhythmic and melodic content. The opening section of the *Épigraphe* sounds improvisatory, as does the previously cited chromatic section in the second *Épigraphe* (see Fig. 4.8), which can be traced back to the *Chanson*, “Les Courtisanes égyptiennes”. Other than that, there appears to be no real connection between *Épigraphe* No. 5 and the *Chanson* of the same name, and one can assume that Debussy was inspired elsewhere.

The opening melodic figure, stated in Piano Primo, has a shape similar (at least in the first few notes) to that of the opening melody of the first movement (see Figs. 4.1 and 4.2), although the intervals are not the same.
Fig. 4.15. “Pour l’Égyptienne,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Primo, mm. 5-8.

This melody sounds “Egyptian” because of the interesting combination of intervals that Debussy uses: a half-step, major third, and a whole step in this opening motive (see measure six of Fig. 4.15). The melody becomes more rhythmically active in measure ten (see Fig. 4.16), which makes it sound improvisatory.

Fig. 4.16. “Pour l’Égyptienne,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Primo, mm. 10-12.

The form of this movement can be seen as ABA\(^1\) while the tonality is basically E-flat minor (usually melodic minor). The A section encompasses measures 1-18 and is clearly in E-flat minor because of Piano Secondo’s unchanging harmony, which carries through this entire section.

Fig. 4.17. “Pour l’Égyptienne,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Secondo, mm.1-3.
There is a chromatic figure in Piano Primo leading to the end of the A section, the final chord of which is a cluster of five notes of the E-flat melodic minor scale, the same notes as in measure three (see Fig. 4.17). The B section includes measures 19-42 and does not contain the improvisatory-sounding rhythms of the first section (see Fig 4.16). The underlying rhythm of Piano Secondo (see Fig. 4.18) has a soft, dance-like character against the more pulsating dotted-eighth, sixteenth-note rhythm of Piano Primo (not illustrated).

![Figure 4.18. "Pour l'Égyptienne," Six Épigraphes antiques, Piano Secondo, mm. 31-33.](image)

The A' section, measures 43-50 (end), is considerably shorter than the A section and finishes with a six-tone E-flat melodic minor cluster, adding Ab to the previous chord.

The final Épigraphé, “Pour remercier la pluie au matin,” derives its inspiration from the final Chanson, “La Pluie au matin.” Measures 2-3 of Flutes 1 and 2 (see Fig. 3.21) have the same melody as measures 5-6 of Piano Secondo.

![Figure 4.19. "Pour remercier la pluie au matin," Six Épigraphes antiques, Piano Secondo, mm. 5-6.](image)
The undulating sixteenth notes in the celesta of the *Chanson* movement’s opening measures are major thirds which change to chromatic intervals in measure six, while the sixteenth notes of Piano Primo are chromatic from the beginning. It is interesting to note that in the *Chanson* movement the chromatic intervals are written as Cb, Bb, A, and Bb, while those of Piano Primo are written as B, Bb, A, and Bb.

![Modérément animé \( \text{\textit{d.60}} \)](image)

Fig. 4.20. “Pour remercier la pluie au matin,” *Six Épigraphes antiques*, Piano Primo, m. 1.

This chromatic sixteenth-note figure persists throughout the movement until measure 55, trading off between Piano Primo and Secondo so that it is always present.

The melody in this work does not follow the melody of the corresponding *Chanson* movement except for the opening measures and the final eight measures. There is almost an absence of melody in the *Épigraphes* because the chromatic texture is so prevailing, thus the movement is through-composed. The movement concludes, beginning in measure 55 (see Fig. 4.21), with a reworking of measures 13-21 of the *Chanson* (see Figs. 3.23-4). In the *Épigraphes* there are eight measures instead of the *Chanson*’s nine, no reference to the F#-G# theme, and a rhythmic variation of the chromatic figure.
Fig. 4.21. “Pour remercier la pluie au matin,” *Six Épigraphe**es antiques*, Piano Primo, mm. 55-58.

The final three measures of both works close with the chromatic motive and end quietly in G Mixolydian.

In using *parts* of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* to create *Six Épigraphe**es antiques*, Debussy was able to produce a work that could stand on its own merit. Because it was published in Debussy’s own lifetime (unlike *Les Chansons de Bilitis*), it is the better known of the two works, and probably performed more often than *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. The fact that it requires only one piano and two performers rather than five instruments and six performers certainly makes it a more programmable work. The absence of the text is not a liability in this piece because of Debussy’s skillful arrangement.
5. *Bilitis*, arranged by Donald Peck

Donald Peck, former Principal Flute with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, was inspired by a performance of the *Épigraphes antiques*, which Ernest Ansermet orchestrated and performed with the Chicago Symphony, to create a version of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* for flute, narrator, and piano. Although he was inspired by the performance of the *Épigraphes*, he based his version solely on the original stage music. He writes in the Preface of his version of *Bilitis*:

> It was exceedingly beautiful [the *Épigraphes*]. So, I was excited when I read that some of this music was included in the unpublished “Bilitis.” I was determined to unearth this composition.

> I spent three years trying to find a copy through publishers, other musicians, and libraries. I finally found a photostat of someone’s hand written copy in Belgium. The owners graciously loaned it to me.

> In the manuscript, it was not exactly clear when the narrator spoke and when the music was to be played, so I fashioned a version of my own with the original instrumentation. This I performed in Chicago’s Orchestra Hall, with Lola Rand as the narrator and members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. This beautiful work had an extra-ordinary success.

> Later I had the idea to make an arrangement of “Bilitis” for flute, piano, and narrator so that the work could be more easily performed and made available to a wider audience.

> Attempts to do this by others I found unfaithful to the unique texture of the Debussy original. In some cases even the wrong melody had been assigned to the piano. I therefore returned to the original instrumental version and made my own arrangement in the summer of 1977. This final edition did not come about quickly. Rather, it is the result of several performances in 1977 and 1978. Each time we played it I made improvements and refinements, always seeking the proper Debussy sound and atmosphere.

> I am pleased that this arrangement is now being published. It makes available to the world another work by a master, Claude Debussy. And, it adds a major composition to the repertoire of the flutist.\(^\text{35}\)

This arrangement, as Peck says, is definitely more accessible for performance. The instrumentation involves fewer people than the original stage music, especially since it

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does not require two harps. Peck also wrote a very detailed, easily followed
"Performance Procedure," which takes the performer through the entire piece. There is
no such "Performance Procedure" or instructions on how to fit the music with the text in
Hoérée's edition of *Les Chansons de Bilitis*. Peck's edition closely follows Flute 1, and
at times, Flute 2, of the original stage music. The flute part contains the verses of the
narrator so that it is easy for the flutist to follow the course of the music. Unlike the
Épigraphe, Peck's twelve movements retain the titles of the movements from the
original stage music.

In the first movement, "Chant pastoral," the flute part is faithfully that of Flute 1
of the stage music, while the text is also recited in the same place, between mm. 16 and
17. The piano accompaniment is chordal and simple, like that of the stage music; it does
include the sections of Flute 2 of the Chanson that are not doubled. Peck gives the
following instructions for the movement: "Play No. 1 up to the verse. After the verse is
read, continue playing till the end." In the text is also placed the same way in *Les
Chansons de Bilitis*.

The second movement, "Les Comparaisons," is different from the first movement
in that the parts of Flute 1 and 2 of the stage music are combined for a flowing texture in
the single flute version.

![Musical notation graphic]

Fig. 5.1. "Les Comparaisons," *Chansons de Bilitis*, Flutes 1 and 2, mm. 1-4.

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36 Ibid.
Fig. 5.2. “Les Comparaisons,” Bilitis (Peck), flute and piano, mm. 1-4.

These combined flute parts follow the length of the movement, all eight measures of it. The piano accompaniment is decidedly different from the accompaniment of Les Chansons de Bilitis. Trills in the piano, which are left over from the combined flute parts, replace the undulating octave figure in the celeste of the Chanson (see Fig. 3.4). Peck gives the following instructions: “There is no [musical] Introduction. The verse is read, and then the music is played.

In “Les Contes,” the third movement, Peck specifies that the first four and a half measures should be played as an introduction to the text, whereas in the stage music, there is no such introduction or notation.

Fig. 5.3. “Les Contes,” Bilitis (Peck), flute part, mm. 1-5.
In a note at the bottom of the page, Peck specifies that the grace notes be played quickly and on the beat, as is the common practice with most grace notes of this style. After this introduction, the entire movement of the stage music is performed, duplicating Flute 1 except for measures 5 and 6, where the flute also plays the triplet figures from Harp 1. The piano accompaniment follows Flute 2 from the Chanson and continues with triplet rhythms in the bass voice through most of the movement while the ostinato bass line is played without interruption in the harps.

Fig. 5.4. “Les Contes,” Bilitis (Peck), flute and piano, mm. 5-7.

Fig. 5.5. “Les Contes,” Chansons de Bilitis, Flutes 1 and 2, Harp 1, mm. 5-6.

The fourth movement, “Chanson,” is identical in the flute part to that of Flute 1 of the Chansons’ “Chanson” except for the third and fourth measures where Bilitis takes the
flute part up an octave, perhaps to make it match the statement of measures 1-2. In this movement, the piano accompaniment is a good reduction of the remaining parts of the Chanson, though it leaves out the duple rhythm stated in Harp 2 (see Fig. 3.7) because there is simply no way to fit it in. The text is divided and inserted in the same way at the breaks in the music in both versions, between measures 2 and 3, and measures 4 and 5. Peck specifies in his version, “to play the small note slowly and on the beat, about the value of a sixteenth note.” This reference is necessary because grace notes in this style of music are not usually performed in this manner; they are usually performed quickly and before the beat.

![Music notation]

Fig. 5.6. “Chanson,” Bilitis (Peck), flute part, mm. 1-2.

“La Partie d’osselets,” the fifth movement, is the same length as in the Chansons’, with no extra introductory music. Peck does specify that the text should be recited after the fermata in the second measure, whereas the Chansons’ text is stated at the beginning, before the music begins. This is the only structural difference, although the Chansons’ version has a “piano” dynamic marking in the beginning, and one can see in Fig. 5.7 that the marking in the flute part is “forte.” The notes of the third and fourth beats of measures four and five also differ between the versions: compare Flute 2 of the Chanson and the top voice of the piano (see Figs. 5.7 and 5.8) which is taken from Harp 2.

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37 Ibid, 3.
Peck structures “Bilitis,” the sixth movement, like the previous movement, with the opening two measures played as an introduction. “The verse is then read and the piano re-enters on the word ‘rondes.’ The flute enters on the word ‘commes.’ The word ‘plumes’ should fall on the first beat of the second measure.”

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38 Ibid., 1.
The *Chansons*’ movement is again noted only with the text appearing in the beginning of the movement, before the music begins. The piano reduction of this movement of *Bilitis* uses different accompanying figures than does its corresponding *Chanson*: measure two and four of the piano reduction replace the glissando in Harp 1 (see Fig. 3.9) with a sixteenth-note triplet figure (see Fig. 5.9), and in measure seven, the glissando in Harp 1 and the arpeggiated figure in the celesta (see Fig. 3.10) are replaced with triplets in the piano (not illustrated).

In this version, movement seven, “Le Tombeau sans nom,” has an extra statement of the opening two measures as an introduction before the text is recited. The *Chansons*’ movement does not contain this. After this, Peck notes,

the verse is read as far as the words “ma mère.” Continue the music and the narrator re-enters on the second measure with the word “Alors.” The music stops after the two measures while the narration continues. The music re-enters on the words “Je ne dis pas mon nom” for three measures. After these the narrator re-enters on the word “Longtemps.” The music begins again on the last word of the verse, “l’Hadès” and continues to the end.\(^{39}\)

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
The *Chansons* version places the text in the same spots, but does not indicate whether or not the text is to be recited while the music is being played. Throughout this movement, the most obvious difference between *Les Chansons de Bilitis* and the piano reduction is that the continuous statement of the note D from Harp 2 and the celesta is missing in the piano reduction (not illustrated).

"Les Courtisanes égyptiennes," the eighth movement, is not very different from the *Chansons*. They both are ten measures long and have the text recited at the beginning before the music starts, but in *Bilitis*, the last sentence is spoken with the beginning of the first measure. In *Bilitis*, the second measure of the flute part is taken from the octave D's of Harps 1 and 2, while the third and fourth measures follow melody of Flute 2.
The part of Flute 1 is followed beginning in the fifth measure, but there is a different note in that measure. The last note of the triplet figure in that measure is noted as a “C” in Bilitis, while it is noted as a “B” in Les Chansons de Bilitis. I think the “B” in the Chanson makes more sense because it is a descending chromatic figure, and the grace notes are the only notes that break the pattern. The piano accompaniment of this movement faithfully follows the repetitive eighth-note figure of the Chanson (see Fig. 3.14).
The ninth movement, "Eau pure du bassin," again follows the pattern established in earlier movements, where the first measures are stated as an introduction and then repeated after the text is recited. In this movement in Les Chansons de Bilitis, there are no flute parts. Peck uses Harp 1 as the basis of the flute part and states it in its entirety; the piano accompaniment plays practically all of the remaining voices. After the introductory three measures, Peck indicates that the music should resume as the narrator says the words, "...ta fraîcheur..." and should continue while the narrator finishes.

![Music notation](image)

Fig. 5.13. "Eau pure du bassin," Bilitis (Peck), flute and piano, mm. 4-5.

In "La Danseuse aux crotales," movement ten, both versions are separated into two parts, with the narration being the divider. Peck advises, "Part 1 is the Introduction. Then the verse is read. Begin to play Part 2 on or about the words 'Cambre-toi.' Adjust the tempo of the words and the playing so that the words 'les désirs' come at the fifth bar of Part 2. Note that the tempo of Part 2 is slower than that of Part 1."\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\) Ibid.
Fig. 5.14. “Les Comparaisons,” Part Two, Bilitis (Peck), flute and narrator parts, complete.

Peck also notes that the grace notes in the penultimate measure should be played on the beat and not too quickly. The movement follows Flute 1 part from the Chanson precisely while the piano accompaniment closely follows the remaining voices in Part 1, but leaves out the voicing of the celesta in Part 2 (not illustrated).

The eleventh movement, “Le Souvenir de Mnasidika,” has no changes from that of Les Chansons de Bilitis. They both are just fifteen measures long. The flute part in Peck’s version is the same as in the original music where Flutes 1 and 2 are doubled in unison; the piano accompaniment, like Part 2 of the previous movement, is only missing the voicing of the celesta. Peck does note that there is no introduction and that the music should begin as the last two words of the narration finish.

41 Ibid., 7.
For the twelfth movement, "La Pluie au matin," Peck makes several specifications. "The Introduction is the first measure played once. Then the verse begins, but the music continues to repeat the first measure as background until the words 'ma chanson;' then the playing ceases. The narration continues and the music re-enters on the 2nd measure at the word 'ici.' The music continues to the end."

![Sheet music image]

Fig. 5.15. "La Pluie au matin," Bilitis (Peck), flute and narrator parts, mm. 1-8.

The twelfth movement of Les Chansons de Bilitis indicates only that the text should be recited after the double bar that ends measure twelve. There is no indication in this version that the first measure should be repeated as a preface to the text. Flute 1 from Les Chansons de Bilitis and the flute part from Bilitis are exactly the same, with the exception of dynamic markings. The most significant change in the piano accompaniment is the missing syncopated figure in the celesta of the Chanson (see Fig. 3.21).

In Peck's version of Bilitis, an "Epilogue" is included for which there is no text, only music. There is no such final section in the original stage music. This "Epilogue" is an exact restatement of the opening movement except for the cut that takes out measures 12-16, so that the movement can end without the section that set up the text.

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42 Ibid., 1.
Fig. 5.16. “Chant pastoral,” *Bilitis* (Peck), flute and narrator parts, mm. 12-21.

Included in Peck’s “Performance Procedure” are the following instructions for the pianist as well as notes about adjustable dynamics:

When performing this arrangement, the pianist should keep in mind that at times the piano must sound like a harp; at other times like a celesta. It is almost never expected to sound like a piano. The texture should be transparent, ebullient, mellow, and seductive; never hard, aggressive, or academic. Between each movement, enough time should elapse to separate the movements clearly. But, within each movement, the narration and the music should always overlap slightly, unless otherwise suggested above, in order to tie each movement together as a unit.

The dynamics may be altered to suit the performance conditions, such as the quality and volume of the speaker’s voice, the size of the room, the use or absence of amplification. The printed dynamics are applicable to a recital hall, intimate and small in size, with no microphone for the narrator.43

In arranging *Les Chansons de Bilitis* into the edition *Bilitis* for flute, piano, and narrator, Peck has created a version much easier to perform. It is often hard to put together an ensemble of the original instrumentation, and this version allows more flutists to perform the work than would otherwise be able to do so. The liberties taken by Peck in repeating the opening measures of some of the movements and in creating an Epilogue only serve to enhance the piece, especially without the presence of the original instrumentation.

43 Ibid.
6. *Bilitis*, arranged by Karl Lenski

The most current version inspired by the *Chansons de Bilitis* is, like the Peck version, titled *Bilitis*. This one, though, is based more directly on the *Six Épigraphes antiques*. Karl Lenski formulated and edited this version, which is for flute and piano (no narrator), in 1983. Lenski writes, "It was an enticing idea to take the final version of the *Six Épigraphes Antiques* as a basis and to restore the flute's original melodic function—this time in a arrangement with piano."\(^{44}\) He also writes, "The flautist is required to play with an extremely subtle, poetic and colourful range of tone, while the pianist needs the consistency, fluent graciousness and imagination implicit in the poetic material."\(^{45}\) This version is extremely faithful to the *Épigraphes*, and in comparing both works, I found that very few things were changed. The exception to this is the final movement, which is based on the final *Chanson*. This comparison will be based on the *Épigraphes* piano four-hands version discussed earlier.

In the first movement, "Pour invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d'été" (all titles are the same as those of the *Épigraphes*), the flute part is taken from the *Épigraphe* in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flute part:</th>
<th>Taken from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 1-16</td>
<td>Piano Primo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 17-20</td>
<td>Piano Secondo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 24-30</td>
<td>Piano Secondo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 32-end</td>
<td>Piano Primo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deriving the flute part from both Piano Primo and Secondo is very effective. There are two spots in this movement where the piano transcription differs from the original. In


\(^{45}\) Ibid.
measure 24, the Piano Secondo has a D and C in the left hand on the second eighth note, whereas in Bilitis, the piano has an A and a C. This slight change does not noticeably change the harmony because the D can still be heard in Bilitis in the right hand of the piano on beat one. The other difference is in measure 26, beat one, where the piano in Bilitis is missing the low C from the Piano Secondo. The flute part takes the liberty of playing measures 34-35 up an octave, whereas this does not happen in the Épigraphes.

In the second movement, “Pour un tombeau sans nom,” the flute part is taken only from the Piano Primo of the Épigraphes. The first difference occurs beginning in measure 15, where the top octave doubling that occurs in the Piano Primo is missing in Bilitis. The next difference occurs in measures 25-27, where the flute states the melody an octave higher than in the Piano Primo. The final octave difference happens at the end, mm. 33-34, where the flute is an octave lower than the Piano Primo.

In the third movement, “Pour que la nuit soit propice,” the flute part is again taken from the Piano Primo. However, there are several octave discrepancies. Throughout the transcribed piano part there are octave doublings missing, but never missing notes. The flute plays an octave higher than the Piano Primo in measure 25, but then an octave lower from measure 27 to the end. The latter change was made because it is easier for the flutist to play fast, technical passages in this octave.

The fourth movement, “Pour la danseuse aux crotales,” has the flute part devised in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flute part:</th>
<th>Taken from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mm. 2-32</td>
<td>Piano Primo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 35-41</td>
<td>Piano Secondo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mm. 43-end</td>
<td>Piano Primo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The flute part introduces a few changes in this movement. The first change is that the glissando in measure ten begins on an A, whereas in the Piano Primo it begins on an F and goes up an octave higher than the flute. The flute also adds a B trill that is new material not found in either of the Épigraphe parts. The runs in measures 13 and 14-16 continue to be stated an octave lower in the flute compared to the Piano Primo. In measures 17-18, though, the flute is marked *ad lib.*, an octave higher. The final difference is in measure 55, where the Piano Primo glissando, again, goes an octave higher than the flute.

In the fifth movement, “Pour l’Égyptienne,” the flute part is taken exactly from the top voice of the Piano Primo with no deviations. The piano part of Bilitis contains the full remainder of both piano parts from the Épigraphe. The final movement, “Pour remercier la pluie au matin,” unlike the other movements, is based on the corresponding movement from Les Chansons de Bilitis, “La Pluie au matin.” In the beginning of this movement, Lenski draws the “rain motive” from the more complex Épigraphe figure, but then takes the flute melody and the other harmonic motions from the Chanson (see Fig. 3.21).
The grace note figures that occur in the celesta in the Chanson are not found in this version; Lenski seems to want to keep this section very simple and calm. The last section, beginning in measure 13, does not deviate except in the penultimate measure, where the notes of the celesta part are omitted.

This version of Bilitis by Karl Lenski is a welcome addition to the flute repertoire. It allows the flutist to experience a good-sized piece of Les Chansons de Bilitis without dealing with the logistics of putting together the larger group of instruments that the piece originally required. The fact that Bilitis is based mainly on the more complex Épigraphes makes it more substantial, because if Les Chansons de Bilitis were to be performed with only flute and a piano reduction of the original instrumentation, the narration of the text would be sorely missed. This way, the new material that Debussy added to the Épigraphes fills the void left by the missing text.
7. Conclusion

Although it was quickly written and forgotten for a number of years, Les Chansons de Bilitis by Claude Debussy is an important work that should not be trivialized because of its unusual origins. The premiere of the piece on 7 February 1901 at the Salles des Fêtes of Le Journal in Paris generated a bit of a scandal because the incidental music and recitation of the text were accompanied by tableau vivants, some of them nude. Despite the fact that Debussy never published Les Chansons de Bilitis in its original form, several works were inspired by the piece, including a work by the composer himself. Six Épigraphe antiques for piano four-hands (and later piano two-hands) is Debussy’s resulting inspiration. Although it freely departs from Les Chansons de Bilitis at times, it is still a wonderful adaptation of the piece in a presentation without Pierre Louys’ text.

After Pierre Boulez unearthed Les Chansons de Bilitis (in manuscript form and missing the part of the celesta) for a 1954 performance, interest in the piece was renewed and arrangements were made based on the surviving parts. Boulez’s arrangement has never been published. Arthur Hoérée’s 1971 edition published by Jobert, though criticized by some, is a good version, with speculation occurring only in the newly composed part of the celesta, if what Hoérée writes in his foreword is true. Rudolf Escher’s 1972 version of Les Chansons de Bilitis, published by Donemus, is more detailed in its performance markings, perhaps making it an easier version to perform. The changes Escher made from the Hoérée edition give the piece a new texture that is less dense in sound. Donald Peck’s Bilitis, published by Bourne in 1979, closely follows the intent of Les Chansons de Bilitis while requiring only one flute, piano, and narrator.
Karl Lenski’s *Bilitis*, published by Universal Edition in 1984 for flute and piano, is a faithful arrangement of Debussy’s *Six Épigraphes antiques*, differing only in the last movement where it follows the final movement of *Les Chansons de Bilitis* more closely.

The fact that all of these works were inspired by Debussy’s *Les Chansons de Bilitis* shows that the piece is important in its own right. *Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune*, written in 1894, was Debussy’s first effort to use the flute as a solo instrument, and as his second effort, *Les Chansons de Bilitis* is very much like it in character and difficulty. *Syrinx*, written in 1913, Debussy’s only piece for flute alone, was written very much in the same style. The fact that these three works draw their themes from Greek antiquity shows that Debussy thought highly of the flute in terms of its expressive capabilities and mood-invoking tonal qualities. Debussy’s final work piece using the flute as a featured instrument, *Sonate en trio* (1915) for flute, viola, and harp, is his only flute piece that is not inspired by literature or Greek antiquity and is his most technically challenging piece for the instrument. *Les Chansons de Bilitis*’ place in the flute repertoire is firmly entrenched now that it is published with several different performance options. Nonetheless, the original version for two flutes, two harps, celesta, and narrator will most likely always remain the favorite of performers and audiences alike because of its wonderful timbral array.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books and Articles


Editions of Music


APPENDIX

French and English translation\(^1\) of poetic text

1. Chant Pastoral

Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d’été. 
Je garde mon troupeau et Sélénis le sien, à l’ombre ronde d’un olivier qui tremble.

Sélénis est couchée sur le pré. 
Elle se lève et court, ou cherche des cigales, ou cueille des fleurs avec des herbes, ou lave son visage dans l’eau frâiche du ruisseau.

Moi, j’arrache la laine au dos blond des moutons pour en garnir ma quenouille, et je file. 
Les heures sont lentes. 
Un aigle passe dans le ciel.

L’ombre tourne, changeons de place la corbeille de fleurs et la jarre de lait. 
Il faut chanter un chant pastoral, invoquer Pan, dieu du vent d’été

*Let us sing a pastoral song invoking Pan, god of the summer wind.* 
*I watch my flock, and Selenis watches hers, in the round shade of a trembling olive-tree.*

*Selenis is lying on the meadow.*
*She rises and runs, or looks for crickets, picks flowers and grasses, or bathes her face in the brooklet’s cooling stream.*

*I pluck the wool from the bright backs of my sheep to supply my distaff, and I spin.*
*The hours are slow.*
*An eagle sails the sky.*

*The shadow moves; let us move the basket of flowers and the crock of milk.*
*Let us sing a pastoral song invoking Pan, god of the summer wind.*

2. Les Comparaisons

Bergeronnette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos premiers désirs! 
Le corps nouveau des jeunes filles se couvre de fleurs comme la terre. 
La nuit de tous nos rêves approche et nous en parlons entre nous.

Parfois, nous comparons ensemble nos beautés si différentes

\(^1\) Taken from translations by Alvah C. Bessie, Mitchell S. Buck, and Lola Rand.
nos chevelures déjà longues, nos jeunes seins encore petits,
nos pubertés rondes comme des cailles et blotties sous la plume naissante.

Hier, je luttai de la sorte contre Melanthô, mon aînée.
Elle était fière de sa poitrine qui venait de croître en un mois,
et, montrant ma tunique droite, elle m’avait appelée Petite enfant.

Pas un homme me pouvait nous voir, nous nous mêmes nues devant les filles,
et, si elle vainquit sur un point, je l’emportai de loin sur les autres.
Bergeronnette, oiseau de Kypris, chante avec nos premiers désirs!

Sparrow, bird of Kypris, accompany our first desires with your notes
The fresh bodies of young girls bloom with flowers like the earth.
The night of all our dreams arrives and we whisper it together.

At times we match our different beauties,
our long hair, our budding breasts,
our quail-plump deltas, couched beneath the springing down.

But yesterday I strove this way against Melantho, my elder.
She was proud of her bosom, which sprouted within the month,
and, mocking at my flattened tunic, called me Little Child.

No man could possibly have seen us, we showed ourselves nude before the other girls,
and, if she won upon one point, I vanquished her by far upon the others.
Sparrow, bird of Kypris, accompany our first desires with your notes.

3. Les Contes

Je suis aimée des petits enfants;
dès qu’ils me voient, ils courent à moi
et s’accrochent à ma tunique et prennent mes jambes dans leurs petits bras.

S’ils ont cueilli des fleurs, ils me les donnent toutes;
s’ils ont pris un scarabée, ils le mettent dans ma main;
s’ils n’ont rien, ils me caressent et me font asseoir devant eux.

Alors ils m’embrassent sur la joue, ils posent leurs têtes sur mes seins;
ils me supplient avec les yeux.
Je sais bien ce que cela veut dire.

Cela veut dire:
“Bilitis chérie, redis-nous, car nous sommes gentils,
l’histoire du héro Perseus ou la mort de la petite Hellé.”
I am loved by little children;  
    when they see me, they run to me  
    and cling to my tunic or clasp my legs in their little arms.

If they have gathered flowers, all are mine;  
    if they have caught a beetle, they place it in my hand;  
    if they have nothing, they fondle me and make me sit before them.

Then they kiss me on the cheek, they rest their little heads upon my breasts;  
    they supplicate me with their shining eyes.  
How well I know just what they wish to say.

They wish to say:  
    "Bilitis sweet, tell us again, for we are good,  
    the tale of the hero Perseus, or of the death of little Hellé."

4. **Chanson**

"Ombre du bois où elle devait venir, dis-moi, où est allée ma maîtresse?  
- Elle est descendue dans la plaine.

- Plaine, où est allée ma maîtresse?  
- Elle a suivi les bords du fleuve.

- Beau fleuve qui l’as vue passer, dis-moi, est-elle près d’ici?  
- Elle m’a quitté pour la chemin.

- Chemin la vois-tu encore?  
- Elle m’a laissé pour la route.

- O route blanche, route de la ville, dis-moi, où l’as-tu conduite?  
- A la rue d’or qui entre à Sardes.  
- O rue de lumière, touches-tu ses pieds nus?  
- Elle est entrée au palais du roi.

- O palais, splendeur de la terre, rends-la-moi!  
- Regarde, elle a des colliers sur les seins et des houppes dans les cheveux,  
    cent perles le long des jambes, deux bras autour de la taille."

"Shadows of the wood where she now ought to be, tell me, whence has my fair mistress strayed?  
- She has gone down to the meadow.  

- Meadow, where is my mistress?  
- She has followed the banks of the river."
- Beautiful river who hast seen her pass, tell me, is she nearby?
- She has left me to stray on the road.

- Oh, road, do you still see her?
- She has left me for the street.

- Oh, white street, path of the city, tell me, where have you led her?
- To the golden street, which enters Sardis.
- Oh, pathway of light, do her naked feet press you?
- She has entered the home of the King.

- Oh, palace, splendor of the earth, give her back to me!
- See! She has necklaces, hung to her breasts, chaplets of blossoms entwined in her hair,
  long strings of pearls looped on her legs, and two arms encircle her waist.

5. La Partie d’Osselets

Comme nous l’aimions toutes les deux, nous l’avons joué aux osselets.
Et ce fut une partie célèbre.
Beaucoup de jeunes filles y assistaient.

Elle amena d’abord le coup des Kyklôpes, et moi, le coup de Sôlon.
Mais elle, le Kallibolos, et moi, me sentant perdue, je priais la déesse!

Je jouai, j’eus l’Epiphenôn, elle le terrible coup de Khios,
  moi l’Antiteukhos, elle le Trikhias,
  et moi le coup d’Aphrodite qui gagna l’amant disputé.

Mais la voyant pâlir, je la pris par le cou
  et je lui dis tout près de l’oreille (pour qu’elle seule m’entendit):
    “Ne pleure pas, petite amie, nous le laisserons choisir entre nous.”

As we both loved him, we played for him a game of dice..
It was a great match.
Many maidens watched most anxiously.

She led off with the Cyclops throw, and I cast the Solon.
Then she threw Kallibolos, and I, sensing my defeat, besought the Goddess.

I played, I threw Epiphenon, she the high cast of Kios,
  I the Antiteukos and she the Trikias,
  and then I threw the cast of Aphrodite which wins the cherished lover.
But, seeing her pale, I clasped my arms about her neck
and I whispered in her ear (that no one else might know):
"Do not weep, little friend, we'll let him choose between us."

6. **Bilitis**

Une femme s’enveloppe de laine blanche. Une autre se vêt de soie et d’or.
Une autre se couvre de fleurs, de feuilles vertes et de raisins.

Moi je ne saurais vivre que nue.
Mon amant, prends-moi comme je suis:
sans robe ni bijoux ni sandales, voici Bilitis toute seule.

Mes cheveux sont noirs de leur noir et mes lèvres rouges de leur rouge.
Mes boucles flottent autour de moi libres et rondes comme des plumes.

Prends-moi telle que ma mère m’a faite dans une nuit d’amour lointaine,
et si je te plais ainsi, n’oublie pas de me le dire.

*One woman drapes herself in snowy wool. Another clothes herself in silk and gold.
And still another hangs herself with flowers, green leaves and purple grapes.*

*As for myself, I must live forever nude.*

*My lover, come and take me as I am:*

*without a dress or jewels or little boots, behold me! Bilitis herself and nothing more.*

*My hair is black with its own blackness, and my lips are red of their own color.*

*My tresses swirl about me free and loose and round as feathers.*

*Take me as my mother made me in a distant night of love,*

*and if I please you in that fashion, please do not forget to tell me so.*

7. **Le Tombeau sans nom**

Mnasidika m’ayant prise par la main me mena hors des portes de la ville, jusqu’a un petit champ inculte où il y avait une stèle de marbre.
Et elle dit: "Celle-ci fut l’amie de ma mère."

Alors je sentis un grand frisson, et sans cesser de lui tenir la main je me penchais sur son épaule, afin de lire les quatre vers entre la coupe creuse et le serpent:

"Ce n’est pas la mort qui m’a enlevée, mais les Nymphes des fontaines.
Je repose ici sous une terre légère avec la chevelure coupée de Xanthô.
Qu’elle seule me pleure. Je ne dis pas mon nom.”
Longtemps nous sommes restées debout, et nous n’avons pas versé la libation.
Car comment appeler une âme inconnue d’entre les foules de l’Hadès?

_Mnasidika took me by the hand, and led me outside the gates of the city to a little barren field where a marble tomb stood._
She said to me: “This was my mother’s mistress.”

_I felt a sudden tremor, and, clinging to her hand, leaned on her shoulder, to read the four verses between the serpent and the broken bowl:_

“Death did not carry me away, but the Nymphs of the river.
I rest here beneath the light earth with the shorn tresses of my Xantho.
Let her alone weep for me. I shall not say my name.”

_For a long time we remained standing, and did not pour libation.
For how could we call an unknown soul from out the rushing hordes of souls in Hades?_ **8. Les Courtisanes égyptiennes**

_Je suis allée avec Plango chez les courtisanes égyptiennes, tout en haut de la vieille ville._
_Elles ont des amphores de terre, des plateaux de cuivre et des nattes jaunes où elles s’accroupissent sans effort._

_Leurs chambres sont silencieuses, sans angles et sans encoignures, tant les couches successives de chaux bleue ont émoussé les chapiteaux et arrondi le pied des murs._

_Elles se tiennent immobiles, les mains posées sur les genoux._
Quand elles offrent la bouillie, elles murmurent: “Bonheur.”
Et quand on les remercie, elles disent: “Grâce à toi.”

_Elles comprennent le hellène et feignent de le parler mal pour se rire de nous dans leur langue; mais nous, dent pour dent, nous parlons lydien et elles s’inquiètent tout à coup._

_I have been with Plango among the Egyptian courtesans, far above the old city.
They have amphoras of earth and copper salvers, and yellow mats on which they may squat without an effort._

_Their rooms are silent, without angles or corners, so greatly have their successive coatings of blue lime blunted the pillars rounded the base of their walls._
They sit motionless, their hands resting on their knees.
When they offer porridge they murmur: “Happiness.”
And when one thanks them they say: “Thanks to you.”

They understand Hellenic, but feign to speak it poorly so that they may laugh at us in their own tongue; but we, tooth for tooth, speak Lydian and they suddenly grow restless.

9. L'Eau pure du bassin

“Eau pure du bassin, miroir immobile, dis-moi ma beauté.
- Bilitis, ou qui que tu sois, Téthys peut-être ou Amphitrite,
  tu es belle, sache-le.

“Ton visage se penche sous ta chevelure épaisse,
gonflée de fleurs et de parfums.
“Tes paupières molles s'ouvrent à peine et tes flancs sont las des mouvements de l'amour.

“Ton corps fatigué du poids de tes seins
  porte les marques fines de l'ongle et les taches bleues du baiser.
“Tes bras sont rougis par l'étreinte.
“Chaque ligne de ta peau fut aimée.

- Eau claire du bassin, ta fraîcheur repose.
Reçois-moi, qui suis lasse en effet.
Emporte le fard de mes joues, et la sueur de mon ventre
  et le souvenir de la nuit.”

“Pure water of the basin, silent mirror, tell me of my beauty.
- Bilitis, or whoever thou art, Tethys perhaps, or Amphitrite,
  know that thou art beautiful.

“Thy face inclines beneath thy luxuriant hair,
  heavy with flowers and fragrance.
“Your tender lids can scarcely open, and your thighs are wearied by the thrusts of love.

Your body, weighted by your heavy breasts,
  displays fine nail-marks and the deep blue scars made by ardent kisses.
“Your arms are reddened by the fast embrace.
“Each wrinkle in your skin has been beloved.”

- “Clear water of the basin, thy freshness brings repose.
Receive me, who am truly wearied.
Erase the false rouge of my cheeks, the perspiration of my belly
and the memory of the night."

10. La Danseuse aux crotales

Tu attaches à tes mains légères tes crotales retentissants, Myrrhinidion ma chérie,
et à peine nue hors de la robe, tu étires tes membres nerveux.
Que tu es jolie, les bras en l’air, les reins arqués et les seins rouges!

Tu commences: tes pieds l’un devant l’autre se posent, hésitent, et glissent mollement
Ton corps se plie comme une écharpe, tu caresses ta peau qui frissonne,
et la volupté inonde tes longs yeux évanouis.

Tout à coup, tu claques des crotales!
Cambre-toi sur tes pieds dressés, secoue les reins, lance les jambes
et que tes mains pleines de fracas appellent tous les désirs en bande
autour de ton corps tournoyant.

Nous, applaudissons à grands cris, soit que, souriant sur l’épaule,
tu agites d’un frémissement ta croupe convulsive et musclée,
soit que tu ondules presque étendue, au rythme de tes souvenirs.

You attach your castanets to your light hands, Myrrhinidion my dear,
and, stepping naked from your robe, you extendest your nervous limbs.
How pretty you are with arms flung in the air, arched flanks and rouge-red breasts!

You begin: your feet step one before the other, daintily hesitate, and softly slide.
With body waving like a scarf, you caress your trembling skin
and desire bathes your long and fainting eyes.

Suddenly you clap your castanets!
Arch yourself on tip-toe, shake your flanks, fling your legs,
and may your crashing hands call all the lusts in hordes
about your fiercely twisting body.

Let us applaud wildly, whether, smiling over your shoulder,
you twitch your convulsed and strongly-muscled croup,
or undulate, almost stretched abroad, to the rhythm of your ardent memories.

11. Le Souvenir de Mnasidica

Elles dansaient l’une devant l’autre, d’un mouvement rapide et fuyant:
elles semblaient toujours vouloir s’enlacer,
et pourtant ne se touchaient point, si ce n’est du bout des lèvres.
Quand elles tournaient le dos en dansant, elles se regardaient, la tête sur l’épaule,
et la sueur brillait sous leurs bras levés,
et leurs chevelures fines passaient devant leurs seins.

La langueur de leurs yeux, le feu de leurs joues, la gravité de leurs visages,
etait trois chansons ardentes.
Elles se frôlaient furtivement, elles pliaient leurs corps sur les hanches.

Et tout à coup, elles sont tombées, pour achever à terre la danse molle...
Souvenir de Mnasidika, c’est alors que tu m’apparus,
et tout, hors ta chère image, me fut importun.

*They danced before each other in swift and fleeting movement;*

*they always seemed to wish to touch each other,*
*but never touched, unless it be their lips.*

*When they turned their backs in the mazes of the dance, and looked at one another, head*
*on shoulder, the perspiration glistened ‘neath their high-uplifted arms,*
*and their fine-spun tresses swished before their breasts.*

*The languor of their eyes, the fire in their cheeks and the serious expression of their*
*faces, seemed three ardent songs all sung at once.*
*They brushed against each other furtively, they bent their swaying bodies at the hip.*

*And suddenly they fell, to consummate their tender dance upon the earth...*
*Memory of Mnasidika, it was then that you appeared to me,*
*and everything except your dear sweet image seemed wearisome.*

12. La Pluie au matin

La nuit s’efface. Les étoiles s’éloignent.
Voici que les dernières courtisanes sont rentrées avec les amants.
Et moi, dans la pluie du matin, j’écris ces vers sur le sable.

Les feuilles sont chargées d’eau brillante.
Des ruisseaux à travers les sentiers entraînent la terre et les feuilles mortes.
La pluie, goutte à goutte, fait des trous dans ma chanson.

Oh! Que je suis triste et seule ici!
Les plus jeunes ne me regardent pas; les plus âgés m’ont oubliée.
C’est bien. Ils apprendront mes vers, et les enfants de leurs enfants.

Voilà ce que ni Myrtalê, ni Thaïs, ni Glikéra ne se diront,
le jour où leurs belles joues seront creuses.
Ceux qui aimeront après moi chanteront mes strophes ensemble.
The night is fading. The stars are far away.
Now the very latest courtesans have all gone homewards with their paramours.
And I, in the morning rain, write these verses in the sand.
The leaves are laden with shimmering beads.
Rivulets across the path trail earth and dead leaves.
The rain, drop by drop, makes little holes in my song.

Ah! How sad and lonely I am here!
The youngest do not look at me at all; the oldest all have quite forgotten me.
'Tis well. They will learn my verses, and the children of their children.

Here is something neither Myrtale, nor Thaïs, nor Glykera will say,
the day their lovely cheeks grow sagged with age.
Those who will love when I am gone, will sing my songs together, in the dark.