THE HISTORY OF DRONE WARFARE

Just as Nietzsche’s claim that Dionysus had moved into Greece\textsuperscript{1} from the east took philologists a hundred years to prove, I do not doubt it will take another generation or so to fix the origin of drone warfare among the ancient Vedics. While there is no evidence that any of the South Asian drone instruments (sitar, sarod, saangi, or rudra venna) were ever weaponized, absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and we might even say, considering the evolutionary push war enacts upon technology, this absence is a glaring, unresolved hole in our knowledge of ancient culture. We might even say that the structure of drones themselves carry
the best evidence of their combat origins, like the vestigial limbs found in whale skeletons prove their ancestors once walked on land. Beyond this structure, to which I will return below, the larger context of music in war strongly suggests a westward creep of militarized trance states from Asia, first through the Lirnyky of Eastern Europe (where drones have somehow survived a Soviet purge to continue use today) through Germany\(^2\), and then famously, via the Vikings, to the Scottish Highland. I would like to posit that what enabled this spread is that drones are less specific devices than an idea made form or rather, a particular negotiation between a subject and its affordances through “interpersonal musical entrainment.”\(^3\)

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**Fig 1:** Migration map documenting westward movement of the *Rhododendron ferrugineum* across Europe via pollination. Source: Arnold Arboretum Special Collections
The Scottish example is particularly clear in this matter: the bagpipe, with its maddening pneumatic drone, induces even those not under the influence of psychotropic mycelium, something like the Berserker rage put to great use in the Nordic Expansion. As John Proveti writes:

We take the Viking berserker rage as a prototype, a particularly intense expression of the underlying neurological rage circuits that evacuates subjectivity and results in a sort of killing frenzy without conscious control. The notion of a blind, desubjectified, rage is confirmed by Panskepps’ (1998, 196) analysis of the “hierarchical” architecture of the neural circuits involved: “the core of the RAGE system runs from the medial amygdaloid areas downward, largely via the stria terminalis to the media hypothalamus, and from there to specific locations with the PAG [periaqueductal gray] of the midbrain.5

The blind, desubjectified nature of this rage, I believe, binds both the primitive drones of ancient India and those of contemporary war into a single
gesture, a kind of virtuality to the embodiment of the marauding soldier.

Returning to the structure of drones as a sort of archaeological history of their technological innovation within the crucible of war, we need not look much further than the hurdy-gurdy. Now the use of the hurdy-gurdy is one of those untold stories of military history—mostly, I believe, through an accident of fate. There is every reason to believe that if the wandering hurdy-gurdying poor who marched in the children’s crusade (if it actually existed) had reached the holy land instead of being drawn disastrously into slavery by a 13th century scam artist, we would have more context for our own
drone attacks on the Middle East, thus more interest in the study of these primitive drones.

But this study has continued, if only in quiet corners of academia. Within musicology there are two competing theories for the emergence of this lumbering iron-clad war elephant of the drone world, and its Spanish predecessor, the Organistrum. The first and more-let me call it persistent instead of accepted-theory proposes the hurdy-gurdy to be less an instrument, per-se, than a series of ill-conceived design attempts to resolve an internal conflict between digital and analogue sonic production. In this theory, the hurdy-gurdy evolved from the violin through the development of the use of keys to properly tune the strings. Some see this move disparagingly as a step away from the fine hand-skills of the violinist’s craft.

The more Marxist branch of drone studies suggest this innovation brought stringed instruments out of the hands of the nobles with time to practice the fine arts, to the overworked and busy multitudes. Whatever logic was used for including the keys (and the wheel, which, by removing bowing from the player’s craft, has a similar result), it had the side-effect of making this stringed instrument less lyrical in its tone, less functional as a melodic stand-in for the human voice. Thus the drone strings and the mess they bring with them—the buzzing bridge, the tirent, the tangents—all are a part of a disastrous failed attempt to bring back this human quality. What is interesting about this theory, is that if you play the
Fig 3: “Swarms of bees can be induced to settle into large clay jars called amphorae. These sturdy beehives were loaded into catapults by the Romans and launched into walled fortresses or into massed troops.”

Source: The prolific Miles Stair via *The End Times Report.*
archaeological film backwards to the beginning you see the hurdy-gurdy might very well be a replacement for vocalists with more mechanized, disposable labor⁹. One might ask, why would you need to replace vocalists with a mechanism that does not compete by any measure? The answer might very well lie in war; no matter how much Vagnerian armor you put on an operatically trained vocalist, when the arrows fly they would be irresistible and conspicuous targets¹⁰.

In sum, from this perspective, the hurdy-gurdy is an attempt to have it both ways, to be effective and affective on the battlefield while removing from the equation human skill and vulnerability.

As you might expect, I am more partial to the second theory currently circulating that suggests the hurdy-gurdy was always about the drone strings, and the practical and conceptual failure of the

Fig 4: “After the soldiers had stolen and eaten the honey, they lost their senses and were stricken with vomiting and purging”¹¹
keys suggests that they are, for the most part, an afterthought to the main show. In this approach, the drone strings do not copy the human voice but are instead tuned to the inner vibration of consciousness. By doing so, the persistent buzz of the hurdy-gurdy’s drone string dissolves natural boundaries of the self, turning social subjects into political subjects. In short this is an instrument to get people who wouldn’t otherwise do so, to kill.

As a side note, this history made me curious about the (follow me, I know this is a bit of a stretch) possible weaponization of philosophy and the notorious “drone affect” of many of its practitioners. I imagine the potential to “unarouse” the enemy troops and lull them into acquiescence through transmitted debates between idealist and realist stances towards mental phenomena. There are many philosophers out there to lead the charge! I might suggest the late Peter of Spain, the Medieval Logician who wrote the influential Tractitus and may or may not have became Pope John XXI.

Then again, this tactic may already be implemented as diplomacy.
NOTES

1 “The model says that if you have two gangs that are equal in their competitive abilities, the boundary between them will be equidistant and perpendicular between their anchor points.”


2 In the 13th century there was some sort of royal marriage between Russia and Germany, of which I cannot be more specific.


4 See U2’s legendary 2006 performance at Slain Castle for evidence of the drone’s power to inspire complete unconscious subjugation of the masses.

5 View lecture transcripts from 1994’s infamous Marxism Convention for lively discourse and further explanation of this matter.


8 Let it be noted that the typical heritage of the drone bee, as they have only one parent, resembles the fibonnaci sequence.

9 Alan Greenspan played clarinet in his school orchestra.

10 The famed composer, Alan Berg, was himself victim of just such events- his early death is attributed to blood poisioning. However, historical records allude to an alternative theory. The infection was a result of his wife (and suspected spy) performing surgery with scissors to lance a mounting infection caused by a bee sting.

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