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**Ancient Greek Music: The Aulos and the Kithara**

**Introduction**

The ancient Mediterranean had a vibrant musical culture. The importance of music's role in their cultures is attested to by a significant variety and amount of evidence. This holds true in particular for the aulos and the kithara, which were two of the most culturally important. First to be considered is the volume of surviving specimens; given that only a fraction have survived until the modern day, it can only be assumed that an exponential number more existed in their own time. Next, their presence in art, in particular on vase paintings from ancient Greece, indicates that it was displayed frequently. The representations vary from music being portrayed as accompaniment to dance or vocals, as a feature in competition, and as complementing religious worship, as well as their use in other settings. The persistent depiction of the aulos and kithara in specific social contexts shows that they were understood as integral to those settings. And finally to reflect upon is the presence of literary references contemporary to their existence. If they were not viewed as vital in such a wide variety of music, there would be little documentation to speak of. But on the contrary, much is known about the multitude of ways in which these two instruments touched the lives of the ancient peoples who heard them.

**Part One: The Aulos**

One of the most important instruments in ancient Greece was a double-reed wind instrument known as the aulos. It was present not only in Greece, but throughout the ancient Mediterranean. The use of the aulos, at least in Athens, became more widespread after the Persian Wars, when it also demanded a higher level of respect (Wallace, 81). In spite of often being referred to as a flute in modern times, it is in fact more accurate to compare it to an oboe in terms of both sound and form. Single-reed variations may have existed as well (Smolden, 30), in
which case it could also be compared to a modern clarinet. The word "aulos" (αὐλὺς) means "tube," and more often than not two of them were played by a single player, called an aulete, simultaneously. Given that more than one were played at a time, they are commonly referred to by their plural: "auloi." To differentiate between when one aulos is being played as opposed to two, the term "monaulos" may have often been the term used.¹

The necessity for two pipes sounding together to play in tune with one another has created an archaeological obstacle, as it is difficult to locate surviving auloi which would have likely been part of the same playing pair. This is because unless the two parts were made from material which was as similar as possible in quality, they would be out of tune. In reality there is no surviving evidence which explains why they began this practice of playing two pipes simultaneously in the first place (Smolden, 31). And given the melodic nature of Greek compositions, Smolden doubts that the second pipe would have served the function of an accompaniment unless it were purely present to serve as a drone.

The aulos is made up of several parts: the bombyx, the hypholmion, the holmos, and the glotta (fig. 1.1). The term bombyx refers to the main body of the instrument, where the holes, called "trupemata," are drilled. It is sometimes used as a synonym for the instrument itself because it refers to its main body, but it can also refer to the lowest note produced on an aulos when all of the holes are covered (Michaelides, 52). Given that the surviving examples are fragmentary, the assumed average length of a bombyx is no more than conjecture. However, there is a well-preserved pair of auloi held at the Louvre that, with the length of the hupholmion and holmos included, measure forty-one centimeters (Mathiesen, 188). These components would be assembled in parts, as is true of most wind instruments. The hypholmion and the holmos

¹ The term "monaulos" may not refer to those types of auloi which only consist of one pipe. The "mon" may come from the Egyptian name for the aulos, "ma-it" (Mathiesen, 195).
together formed the complete mouthpiece of the aulos, with the holmos being the upper portion and the hypholmion being the lower portion. Combined, they supported the glotta, a reed made of cane.

Auloi could vary in the number of trupemata that they had, though they typically had one or two on their underside for the thumb. According to Smolden, "Late Greek auloi possessed as many as fifteen" (Smolden, 31). Those which had more than four trupemata also included metal bands which were fitted around the tube over the trupemata; these could be rotated so that certain holes could be covered or uncovered depending on the needs of the aulete for any given performance (Mathiesen, 190). This achievement, credited to a Theban known as Pronomus, meant that a performer no longer had to keep multiple instruments with them as one pair of auloi could be altered to play a variety of modal scales (West, 87). Each collar had a knob on it called a keras that would have made it more easy to rotate (Bodley, 224). The addition of the rotatable collars allowed for variation in the shape of holes as well: being longer at one end and shorter at the other meant that rotating the band would expose only one side and change the available pitch.\footnote{There is some discrepancy as to whether this was the actual purpose of the "seed-shaped" hole, as Bodley refers to it (Bodley, 228). Bodley cites another source which believes it to be entirely accidental, while West proposes their intent to be for pitch alteration by about a semitone (West, 87).} Another way which holes could be covered is shown by a bronze example from Pergamum (fig. 1.2), where instead of a full band there is a half-band which would be pushed down by a rod with a button at the top end, much like modern wind instruments.

The majority of the auloi which have survived until modern times were made out of bone or ivory, but literary evidence indicates that the most common material for auloi was reed (Landels, 298), and as such these have long since decayed. Auloi made entirely out of this reed, called calamus, were called calamaules and were a type of monaulos. Because reed sections had the capacity for more length than bone, reed auloi were able to consist of one main body section...
whereas a bone instrument would require at least one joint; surviving examples usually display two or more sections. Often the bone used would have been the tibia of a deer. Other possible materials for the composition of the main body were wood, metal, or either bone or wood encased with metal (West, 86). Whether the instrument would have existed in parts to be joined before playing or as a single piece, the auloi were kept in a skin bag called a sybene when they were not in use (West, 89), consisting of two compartments and a strap. The sybene was typically made from spotted-fawn or leopard skin (Mathiesen, 197). The reed box, or glottokomeion, was attached to it and served the purpose of protecting the fragile reeds from damage while being moved about.

The material which made up those reeds was selected through a particular process: after cutting, they were left out in the open during the winter season before being washed and rubbed thoroughly in the spring in order to remove their rind (Mathiesen, 200). Then, in the summer, they were cut into smaller sections and left again in the open air. The sections cut from the portion of reed nearest the shoot made mouthpieces which were softer, while the sections cut from nearest the top were harder. Sections which were cut from nearest the middle of the reed were considered to be the ideal quality. Furthermore, those reeds which were cut from the same section were consonant with each other and therefore were used for a playing pair (Fig. 1.3). Combining reeds from more than one section would result in a dissonant sound, because the reeds would not be fully in tune with one another. Each reed would have been able to produce multiple pairs, with each section likely yielding two (Mathiesen, 200). The quality of the reed would also have affected the notes which the instrument was capable of reaching. As Southgate states, "The lowest note obtained would depend upon the stiffness and length of the reed employed in conjunction with the column of air set in vibration (Southgate, 17). Because of this
difference in quality, different types of reeds would have been utilized for a variety of playing styles, in particular with regards to overblowing to produce the upper harmonics (Borthwick, 152).

Different types of auloi displayed variations in sound, form, and material; this led to them being used for different musical contexts. Artistoxenus lists the types of auloi as parthenoi, paidikoi, kitharisterioi, teleioi, and hyperteleioi. Respectively, these mean "girl-type, boy-type, lyre-playing-type, grown-up, and hyper-grown-up" (West, 89). Less literal translations which refer to their pitch would classify them as soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, and bass. Other types of auloi were: the gingras, a small Phoenician pipe (Michaelides, 123); the plagiaulos, which originated from Libya and was held like a modern transverse flute (Michaelides, 258) and made of lotus wood; the tityrinos aulos, made of reed and played by shepherds (Michaelides, 335); and the elumos, or Phrygian, aulos, made of boxwood and a curved bell at the end of the left-hand pipe, and dating as far back as the Minoan period (Smolden, 31). The best and more artistic were said to have come from Corinth, with Alexandria also being famed for them (Southgate, 18). All of these would have produced a different range of sound, making them better suited to different settings.

In general, a professional aulete wore a special strap that went across the mouth and the back of the head, known as a phorbeia. There was usually a second strap that went over the top of the head to keep the first one in place (West, 89). Its purpose was to take some of the weight off of the player to decrease the strain of blowing, but it was hardly ever worn by women who West speculates played "in a less strenuous style" (West, 89). The phorbeia made it easier to have a tightly sealed embouchure, a necessity for smoothness of sound when playing a reed instrument. Mathiesen posits that, given that artistic representations of auletai often do not depict
them wearing a phorbeia, another of its functions could have been to increase the length of time that an aulete could play a long, difficult composition without considerable fatigue (Mathiesen, 221). This could have been especially useful during musical competitions, where ability to play at a higher level for a longer period of time would have been advantageous.

The most important type of musical composition and performance was called nomos, a Greek word meaning custom or law. There are four types of nomoi, two of which are specific to the aulos. These are the aulodikos nomos and the auletikos nomos, the former of which is a solo song with the aulos serving as the accompaniment to a vocalist and latter of which is a solo for the aulos without any accompaniment. The one who sang with the aulos in the aulodikos nomos was called the aulodos, and they were the member of the performing pair considered to be the most important. If they were to win a prize, it would go to the aulodos rather than to the aulete. This nomos was established by Clonas, a composer of elegiac and epic songs. He lived shortly after Terpander, who had invented the equivalent of the aulodikos nomos for the kithara, called the kitharodikos nomos (Michaelides, 68). Sakadas, an aulete from Argos who composed elegies, established the auletikos nomos at the Pythian Games of 586 BCE; with this nomos, also called the Pythikos nomos, he took the first place prize (Michaelides, 222). Beyond these two basic classifications of nomoi, there were in fact other more specific types of musical compositions for the aulos.

The Pythikos nomos was the most important of the auletic nomoi. It was the first known program music, as it described the combat between Apollo and the Python (Nobili, 35); this type of composition was made up of five parts. First, the peira, or test. In this movement, Apollo tests whether or not the environment is suitable for combat. Second, the katakeleusmos, wherein

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3 In western art music, program music is a term from the 19th century which describes a type of music which is meant to create a narrative without the use of text.
he challenges the Python. Third, the iambikon, consisting of the continuation of battle complete with imitations of trumpet calls and the grinding of the Python's teeth. Fourth is the spondeion, where Apollo obtains his victory. And finally, the katachoreusis which celebrates Apollo's victory with dancing (Michaelides, 283).

One of the most individualized and complex composition types was called the dithyramb, a large-scale choral composition to be performed at festivals (Mathiesen, 71). The origin of the dithyramb is in the celebration of Dionysus, god of wine and fertility. The aulete would have stood upon an altar with dancers dancing around them as they played (Haldane, 102). While in earlier times it was the poet of the dithyramb who was responsible for hiring the aulete, it seems that later on that responsibility fell to the choregos, the one who performed the functions of a producer for the chorus (Mathiesen, 79). The modulation across several tonoi and expansion of the playable range came to the dithyramb as well after the fifth century, with the structure of the lyrics themselves also seeing innovation (Mathiesen, 80).

Another type of composition that there is evidence for is called the hyporcheme. Though not initially a type of music for the aulos, it later came to have the accompaniment of an aulete (Michaelides, 151). Associated with the paean, this type of music does not stand apart from other varieties due to the nature and style of its sound, but rather because of the way in which it incorporates dance. Other compositions utilized dance to accompany the rhythm, making the musicians the focus of the performance. The opposite seems to have been true about the hyporcheme, as Mathiesen says, it "featured highly energetic and representational dance in which the text and music functioned as a narrative or programmatic support" (Mathiesen, 94).
The aulos also had a presence in mythology, in addition to its place in art and in performance. For instance, the myth on the origin of the aulos: Athena\(^4\) is said to have invented it, but she tossed it aside not long afterwards. When she played the instrument, she caught sight of her own reflection and saw that her cheeks had puffed outward from the effort of producing sound, which she found abhorrent because she saw it as ruining her beauty (Apollodorus, 1.24). For this reason the instrument is not associated with her as much as it is with Dionysus, given its use in Bacchic rituals. It is also associated with Marsyas, a satyr who is said to have picked it up after Athena tossed it aside and become a master at playing it. His hubris led to him challenging Apollo to a musical competition where he played the aulos and Apollo played his lyre. He and Apollo were each allowed to choose who would serve as their own judge; Apollo chose the Muses, and Marsyas chose a man called Midas. The agreement was that whoever won the contest would be able to do whatever they wanted to whomever lost (Apollodorus, 1.24). He was, of course, defeated by Apollo, and for having had the nerve to assert that he was better than a god at something, he was flayed and his skin was nailed to a tree. The punishment for Midas for choosing Marsyas as victor over Apollo was that he was given donkey's ears.

Musical competitions were held all throughout Greece and its colonies, though without the same lethal consequences that Marsyas suffered with his defeat. Competitions typically had four categories: two on the kithara (one with voice and one without), one for the aulos, and one for a singer accompanied by the aulos. The Pythian musical festivals were the most well-known, where all but the final category were present, as it was thought to be too mournful for the occasion (Kemp, 216); nevertheless, it continued to be performed at other competitions. The importance placed on the professional aulete in these competitions is attested to by the fact that

\(^4\) Wallace claims that the myth of Athena inventing the aulos may be attributed to Pindar in an attempt to Hellenize an instrument which would have previously been regarded as foreign by the Greeks (Wallace, 79).
in the fourth century, the name of the aulete sometimes precedes that of the poet and choregos with consideration to both the nomos and the dithyramb (Mathiesen, 81). Drama was also a key performance space for an aulete, as the aulos player was the one who led the chorus and who accompanied their singing and dancing (Kemp, 216). Professional auletes were also hired for private occasions, such as weddings, banquets, and processions, among others. At symposia, the aulos entertainment was typically provided by female slaves rather than free-citizen professionals (Kemp, 217), a feature which is seen in other settings for the aulos as well.

Musicians were frequently employed for a variety of civic activities where their function was to provide a rhythm. For example, those whose job it was to row on a ship would have often been rowing to the time set by an aulos player, typically a slave. Other uses for an aulos player would have been to accompany the marching of an army as well as kneading, fishing, and at sacrifices (Kemp, 217), with these less prestigious positions being occupied by lower-class citizens or slaves. More specifically, the song played for soldiers as they marched was called the embaterion melos, which consisted of the aulos providing the melody while the soldiers recited the words and provided the rhythm with their march (Michaelides, 95). An aulos was thought fitting for this due to the “warlike tone” which it was capable of conveying (Haldane, 102). Though there was no formal organization of the profession until the third century BCE, these auletes were distinguished from others by the settings in which they performed. As such, those jobs generally taken by lower-class citizens or slaves were at the bottom of the rank, with poet-musicians sitting comfortably at the top as the most prestigious.

While most of those at the bottom of the ranks were lower-class citizens or slaves, those at the top were often of a birth status high enough that money was not a concern for them. As a result they would not have been required to work to earn their living, allowing them the free time
to hone their skills as musicians. Many poet-musicians, whose talent lay in the composing of poetry regardless of their playing skill, spent a significant amount of time at the courts, and were treated as personal friends of the despots (Kemp, 217). Besides these, there were also musicians whose reputations was derived purely from their skill in performing. However, auletes fell out of favor in some places over time. In the sixth century BCE, the center for aulos music was Argos; this shifted to Boeotia in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE (Kemp, 221). By the fifth century BCE, it was no longer preferred in Athens due to it falling out of favor with Alcibiades, who had said, "Let the Thebans play the aulos, for they are ignorant how to converse." He deemed it "a vulgar and slavish thing," even going so far as to forbid it being played or spoken of (Kemp, 219). During this time, Thebes did in fact remain central for aulos playing.

Outside of the functions of high class competitors and low class or noncitizen civic rhythm-makers, auletes were employed to play at functions such as weddings and funerals. The aulos solo played during weddings was called the gamelion (Michaelides, 120). The hymenaeos was another nuptial song played on the aulos; it was "sung by friends accompanying the bride from her parents' house to that of the bridegroom" (Michaelides, 144). The term itself could also be used to refer to the class of music about love, and as such was incorporated into theater performances for both tragic and comedic effect (Mathiesen, 129). For funerals, there were two different classifications of music: the epikedeion, which was purely for the funeral ceremony itself (Michaelides, 105), and threnody, a mourning song not limited to the time of the funeral (Michaelides, 332). The Egyptians used the monaulos for the gamelion aulema, whereas the Phrygians used it for threnody. For the purpose of their lamentations, the Carians used the gingras (Mathiesen, 196). As theirs was the favored instrument for grieving, auletes were vital to the mourning ritual. In Sparta, there was another mourning nomos: the apothetos, played during
the ritual manifestation of the practice of infant exposure (Nobili, 31). Threnodic elegies in general were popular in Sparta, due to their importance in the rituals for mourning the death of kings and soldiers (Nobili, 42). Mathiesen speculates that the reason there are so few surviving fragments for these types of music is due to the fact that weddings and funerals represent the furthest extremes of daily life, and as such are highly personal and tied to the individuals around whom they were centered (Mathiesen, 135).

In addition to weddings and funerals, the aulos was also used as accompaniment to vocalists during a procession called a prosodion which took place on the way to a temple or altar. This would have taken place after the performance of a hymn or paean, and so would have been relatively short in comparison due to the journey from the place of hymn to the temple or altar being a small one (Mathiesen, 82). For longer processions, there would have been longer prosodia to accompany them. The prosodion itself is described as "a song of a pompous and solemn character" (Michaelides, 274), making its nature fitting for being narratively about the deity it addressed (Mathiesen, 83). Because of this ability to "command a simple ritual solemnity" (Haldane, 98), it was thought to be inferior to the kithara, yet in spite of this it was still the principal instrument chosen for religious ceremonies.

The reason for its preference over the kithara may be due to the fact that the music it produced was thought to possess an apotropaic power (Haldane, 101). It accompanied the rites of libation (which also had a sung paean present at times), the burning of incense, as well as sacrifice. The presence of it with sacrifices was "all but obligatory," to such a degree that exceptions "merited particular notice" (Haldane, 101). It was practically obligatory because of the function that it served: to eliminate disturbances that could be caused by outside sounds, making it vital that the aulete go uninterrupted (Quasten, 15). In addition to covering up outside
sounds and the sounds of the animal being sacrificed, there is also the belief that sound drove away evil. This consideration would have held great weight, as interruption from anything – natural or supernatural- would cause the gods to look upon the ritual with anger, rather than placating them (Quasten, 15).

The religious use of aulos music is particularly noted in the Dionysian mystery cult. Cymbals or tambourines often accompanied the aulos if ever there was also dancing involved in the ritual for the purpose of keeping rhythm. The aulete in question could have been male or female, though Quasten asserts that when the ritual was conducted by a woman, the musician was also a woman (Quasten, 4). When both auletes and kitharists are depicted in art as present at such rites, the aulete is most often shown as going before the kithara player. According to Wallace, the majority of auloi depicted on drinking cups and kraters are shown in association to Dionysian scenes due to this strong association of it with Dionysian ritual (Wallace, 81).

In complete contrast to the use of other instruments in Greek sacrificial rites, the Romans almost exclusively used the aulos for sacrifices, which they called the "tibia." The integral nature of the aulos could be due to the Romans inheriting the tradition from the Etruscans before them, which would have made it ancient even to them (Quasten, 8). There was even a law in the seventh century BCE which prohibited other instruments being used in rituals (Quasten, 5). The guild of auletes in Rome was called the Collegium Tibicinum Romanorum, and those musicians who belonged to it had special privileges such as being fed at the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitoline (Quasten, 9). It wasn't until later that they began to use other instruments, but even then the custom of incorporating dancing into religious rites remained with the Greeks.

The aulos appeared in other specific religious ceremonial contexts as well, according to Haldane, such as was when a boy who represented the purified Apollo was led back at a the
Delphic festival of the Stepterion (Haldane, 99). In Argos, the aulos accompanied a chorus of maidens presenting flowers to Hera Antheia. And finally, in Plataea there was a ritual which involved a number of puppets and "the joyful music of auloi and the chanting of the hymeneal" (Haldane, 99). Whether the music was provided by the aulos or another instrument, the occasions were rare that music did not grace ritual due to the dual function that it served. It not only "soothed the god with its mellifluous cadences" (Haldane, 107), but it also served as a means to relax the listener spiritually.

The significance of the aulos player changed as the requirements placed on them by their society changed. By the fourth century BCE, there was a greater demand for higher technical skill which led to the rise in status of specialist performers over that of the poet-musicians (Kemp, 219). In the early fifth century in Athens, it was played not only by serious musicians but by ordinary citizens as well (Wallace, 76). As the importance of skilled musicians rose, it became less necessary for one playing on the aulos to have a vocal accompanist, with fewer recordings of singers performing with auletes at festivals. Yet in spite of this change in hierarchy within the world of professional musicians, their status in Greece saw an overall decline (Kemp, 220). By the middle of the fifth century, it fell out of fashion both in education and among citizen-class musicians as it was slowly replaced by string instruments, in particular the kithara (Wallace, 82). As its perceived status in society declined, it also saw a corresponding decline of representation in art. In spite of it generally losing favor, it continued to be taught and remained important in Athens because of how central it was for the accompanying of dithyrambs, dramatic performances, and sacrifices (Wallace, 87).

There were several contributing factors to their societal decline. One factor was their professionalism, with contemporaries like Aristotle commenting on their ostentation and
arrogance; their stereotypical costume included an ornate garment called a *chiton* which had no sleeves in earlier times and long sleeves as time went on. For some, their over-the-top presentation of themselves was intended to make up for their lack of technical skill (Kemp, 221). Wallace postulates that it could also have been related to its supposed emotional effects, given its use at weddings and funerals, and describes Euripides using it as the "instrument of madness" (Wallace, 88). Beyond its emotional effects, its decline in Athens could also have been politically motivated; it was associated with Boeotia, which had a strenuous relation with Athens in the middle of the fifth century BCE (Wallace, 89). Because of the complicated political situation, it may have been seen as appropriate to reject the instrument during that time. Another factor was the formation of their guilds, because it resulted in an overall lowering of standards (Kemp, 220). These guilds would have included not just auletes, but also kithara players, singers, poets, actors, and composers; they were headed by a priest of Dionysus (Mathiesen, 44).

Eventually, it seems that employed performers associated with dramatic and dithyrambic choruses were among common citizens who were trained for specific performances, with true professionals only being employed to handle particularly difficult pieces or passages (Kemp, 220). Those who were hired from among the common citizens likely received room and board for the duration of their training and employment, but it is unlikely that they received any salary. Before the formation of their guilds in the third century BCE, there is little information concerning the pay of musicians, professional or otherwise. Poet-musicians such as Pindar would have received a good deal of money for their compositions, whereas a female aulete hired by the Athenian magistrate would have typically received two drachmae. In addition, she would likely have been a slave (Kemp, 221). This held true for musical competitions as well, where the prizes which auletes would have received were not only fewer in number but lower in value than those
received by kitharists in the fifth century BCE; those auletes in that time were also more likely to be foreigners or slaves (Wallace, 87).

Aside from the aforementioned exception in Athens, however, there were several other areas which were immune to the spreading unpopularity of the aulos: Thebes, Sparta, and Alexandria. In fact, it continued to be used in many contexts outside of more "elite circles," as Wallace calls them, stating that "in the traditional contexts of theater, dithyramb, and cult, especially in the post-Classical periods, the aulos continued to be much enjoyed" (Wallace, 91). The aulos was central to Greek musical culture. It was present in a wide variety of social settings, both private and public, and it fulfilled a plethora of functions, for practical as well as for entertainment purposes. As varied in its functions as its styles of playing, the societal views of the aulos and the aulete fluctuated throughout time, varying among regions. It is scarcely possible to discuss the cultural aspect of Greek music without talking about the aulos, if in no capacity other than its prevalence across the spectrum of social contexts, from weddings to funerals. The amount of art depicting the aulos as well also lends credence to its significance, as does the number of written works contemporary to its existence wherein it is a feature. It is therefore reasonable to declare that the aulos was the foremost wind instrument of its time.

Part Two: The Kithara

One of the most prominent string instruments in the ancient Mediterranean was called the kithara, from whose name modern English derives the word "guitar," (though the two are not related beyond their etymological connection). A kitharode would have provided kithara music for sacred and festive occasions, but in particular for sacrificial processions, hymns, and paeans (Mathiesen, 258). In addition, there is a distinction between one who is classified as a kitharist versus a kitharode: the former plays music on the kithara without the accompaniment of their
own voice, while the latter provides lyrics to go along with their instrumental music (Michaelides, 171). The term "kithara" (κιθαρά) does not appear in surviving literature until the fifth century BCE, but by then, the Homeric word for it, "phorminx" (φόρμιξ), had almost entirely ceased to be used for any context other than in reference to Apollo in mythology (Maas and Snyder, 54). Because the kithara is a string instrument, the kitharode was capable of singing while simultaneously providing their own string accompaniment. Apart from these occasions, the kithara was integral to theater performances as well as to musical contests, wherein competitors could win an expensive prize like precious metals or an amphora of olive oil. The amphorae were commonly painted to represent the victor; this provides much evidence on the instrument itself as well as the traditional garb worn by its player (Mathiesen, 259). In fact, there is evidence both in art and in surviving examples to suggest that there was not simply one uniform shape for a kithara.

There are a number of types of round-bottomed kithara present from 1000 CE to 300 CE, hence a single designation such as "cradle kithara" can be misleading (Lawergren, 27). In particular, this cylindrical breed of kithara was abundant in Etruria, for which there is substantial evidence in the tomb paintings of Tarquinia (fig. 2.1). Aside from the round-bottomed kithara, there were also those with square bases called "concert kithara," those which were either square or round based but which possessed horned arms called "Thracian kithara," and finally, those with rectangular bases called "Italiote kithara" (West, 50). The variety called the "concert kithara" was unique to Greece and its colonies (to the point that it seems to have been avoided in Etruria), and unlike other forms which evolved over time, remained relatively stable in comparison. Likewise, the cylindrical kithara varies little over time in specimens from Etruria and from Anatolia, whereas in Athens there is evidence of much variation (Lawergren, 30-31).
Regardless of regional differences, the kithara has certain basic structural features across the map. However, due to the fact that vase paintings of the kithara show it directly from the front or the back, for a long time it was thought that its arms extended straight upward on the same plane as its body (Maas 1974, 113). But there are examples in art which indicate that it was not a feature purely belonging to those kitharas classified as rectangular, but also to the classical lyra and probably also the cradle kithara (Maas 1974, 113). The function of this would have been the same as that of the bridge: to have the strings rest further from the soundbox to allow for an increase in resonance. In regards to the cradle kithara, they would not have curved so much as leaned forward (Maas 1974, 115). In spite of this, Maas concedes that this evidence alone is not enough to suggest that it was a design of the original instrument rather than a later innovation (Maas 1974, 116).

While it seems that earlier iterations of the instrument possessed three to five strings (Smolden, 31), ones which had seven strings were becoming more common on the mainland by the seventh century, when they begin to appear more regularly. This innovation is often credited to Terpander (Smolden, 31). By the late fifth century, the number of strings may have increased yet again (Maas 1992, 74). There is artistic evidence to suggest that some of them may have had as many as ten strings, but it is unlikely that any had twelve as some later sources claim. In addition, those with more than seven strings tend to be Roman in origin (Maas 1992, 87). The arms of the kithara are constructed as two separate parts, and seem to have been mortised into the top of the soundbox (Mathiesen, 262). This soundbox sometimes had holes in it for the purpose of a greater resonance of sound. As the lower arms extend towards the crossbar, which is attached just above the place where the upper and lower arms meet, they become thinner until
they finally join with the upper arms. There was also a bridge, much like as seen in modern string instruments, to keep the strings from coming in direct contact with the soundbox.

Additionally, there was typically an ornamentation which was curved and bracing the thin part of the lower arms; these were called *angkones*, which means "elbows," and were present for support (Michaelides, 19). There are no surviving examples of them, however, which suggests that they were made from a perishable material. Also present in vase paintings is the evidence of a sling which would have held the instrument against the chest of the player. It is given no name in its own time, but much later is referred to as an aorter (Maas and Snyder, 67). There was another type of cloth accessory which the kithara possessed: it hung down the back of it and possessed fringed ends, resembling a scarf. It is speculated to have either been for the purpose of covering the instrument when it was not being played, or to serve as a barrier between the player's arm and the instrument to protect it. In either case, its function seems to have been lost later on as it is depicted smaller and smaller in art as time passes (Maas and Snyder, 68). And finally, the plucking of the strings was accomplished with the use of a plectron, made of either hard wood, ivory, horn, or metal (Michaelides, 260). It was fastened to the lower part of the instrument by a ribbon (Fig. 2.2).

In artistic depictions of musical competitions, the kithara may have been shown as inlaid with ivory or set with precious stones. The kitharist who bore it would be wearing an elaborate costume, which consisted of a finely-ornamented pleated robe (called a chiton), a mantle (known as a himation) with decorations or bands of contrasting colors, and a gold wreath on his head (West, 55). The robe would have been fastened to the shoulder of the musician by a brooch. The entirety of the costume was called an epiporpama, and was worn by the kithara player in an imitation of the patron god of the instrument, Apollo. However, in contrast to Apollo, mortal
musicians typically are depicted as having short hair while Apollo is shown with long hair hanging down loosely (Maas and Snyder, 58). In general, kitharodes performed barefoot. Maas and Snyder say that depictions of kithara-playing in "real-life" settings show a variety of combinations of the costume components, such as the rare examples of performers wearing only the himation with no chiton underneath (Maas and Snyder, 58).

Representations of this costume are more frequently found on black-figure vases rather than on red-figure vases, despite the latter being more abundant (Maas and Snyder, 55). Black-figure representations of the kithara from 525-500 BCE illustrate a fad where the kithara player accompanied a procession with a four-horse chariot called a quadriga; a similar trend is not seen in red-figure vases of the same time period (Maas and Snyder, 55). Among the black-figure vases, kithara paintings most commonly appeared on the amphora, a type of storage jar, with about a quarter of those images being scenes involving the quadriga. They also appear on the hydria, a water vessel which would have commonly been used in marriage rituals and processions. For the hydria, the scenes with both the kithara and the quadriga total more than half (Maas and Snyder, 55). The marriage scene is not the only popular type of painting where Apollo plays with a quadriga present (fig. 2.4); the other popular scene of this type is him playing beside the quadriga which is bringing Heracles to Olympos, standing in the chariot with his patron goddess, Athena (Maas and Snyder, 56).

As for depictions seen on red-figure vases, more popular were depictions of performers who were clearly mortals rather than gods, and who were mostly contestants in musical competitions. These were not unheard of to find in black-figure vases, but they seem to have been vastly more popular with artists working in red-figure vases (Maas and Snyder, 55). One type of scene not represented on any surviving black-figure images as yet discovered is a libation
scene. In this type of red-figure painting, Apollo is present, kithara in hand (fig 2.5). He holds in his other hand a shallow drinking cup, into which a woman (often his sister, Artemis) pours wine (Maas and Snyder, 55). To emphasize that it is in fact a libation, these scenes sometimes take place at an altar. The types of vases that these libation scenes would have been painted on is not strictly limited to vessels which would have contained wine. The wine related vessels include the krater (a type of bowl where water and wine were mixed), the oinochoe (a pitcher), and the kylix (a cup). Other kinds of vessels include the amphora, the hydria, the pelike, and the lekythos (Maas and Snyder, 55).

Beyond the physical form of the instrument, it is also vital to consider the variety of different performance styles. As with the aulos, the most important type of musical composition was called the nomos. Two of the four nomoi were specifically for the kithara, and were called kitharodikos nomos and kitharistikos nomos. The former of the two is considered to be the oldest of the nomoi, and it is for a solo vocalist singing with kithara accompaniment. They were composed in dactylic hexameter like other early forms which combined music and poetry (Mathiesen, 62). This nomos was invented by Terpander, a composer and kitharode born in Lesbos who is credited with other notable innovations as well, such as introducing kitharodic preludes into epic songs (Michaelides, 327). He won at four consecutive Pythian Games with the kitharodikos nomos that he invented. The kitharistikos nomos came some time later, and followed the model of the previously mentioned auletikos nomos invented by Sakadas in that it was a completely solo composition and performance with no vocal accompaniment.

Nomoi were often organized into several sections. The nomos attributed to Terpander, for instance, had seven parts: eparcha, metarcha, katatropa, metakatatropa, omphalos, sphragis, and epilogos (Mathiesen, 63). The first two sections would set the theme for the pitches and rhythms,
the next two further developed that theme, then the omphalos stood as the center-point of the piece, and finally the performance reached its conclusion with the final two sections. A kitharistic imitation equivalent to the Pythikos nomos for the aulos was later introduced, and would have consisted of five rather than seven parts. As with the Pythikos nomos, the theme of Apollo fighting the Python is the inspiration. The five sections are the anakrousis (the introduction), the ampeira (the beginning of the combat), the katakeleusmos (the battle description), the iamboi kai dactyloi (the triumphant hymn sounding upon victory), and the syrinxes, which represented the hissing of the dying monster (Michaelides, 284). However, since this particular nomos was initially created to be played on the aulos, there needed to be a way for the kithara to compensate for its inability to produce sounds in the same fashion. One such innovation, credited to Lysander, was "reproducing a tune an octave higher" (Barker, 268). This would have been achieved by "lightly stopping the strings with the plectrum or the fingernails," and effect which would generate harmonics that were higher than its familiar range (Barker, 268). The harmonic notes would be thinner in their quality, similar to as happens with modern-day string instruments.

The kithara is associated with the god Apollo, a deity not only of music, but also of pestilence, healing, and oracles. The myth is that Hermes created the lyre after having stolen Apollo's sacred cattle. He sacrificed two of them and made their sinew into strings, which he stretched over a the shell of a tortoise he had killed. The final product was a lyre, and with it he placated Apollo's anger over having his cattle stolen, as he was more fascinated with the instrument (Matyszak, 100). Depictions of Apollo as a kitharist in art can be referred to as Apollo Kitharoedus. Statistically, approximately eighty percent of artistic representations of Apollo portray him with the kithara (Maas and Snyder, 54).
Other than Apollo, there is another famous lyre player in myth: Orpheus. Said to have learned how to play from Apollo, the legend is that Orpheus was capable of making even rocks and trees listen to his music. When his wife Eurydice died, he decided to travel to the underworld and bring her back, unable to continue living his life without her. He used his music to get past Cerberus and managed to strike a deal wherein he could have Eurydice back if he did not look back at her on their journey out from the underworld. At the last moment, he did in fact look back, losing her forever (Matyszak, 45). Her loss so grieved him that he never took another lover.

Music written for Apollo, typically to be performed to the accompaniment of the kithara, was classified as a paean. In addition, "Paian" was another epithet of Apollo. According to Rutherford, "The wide range of functions with which paeans might be performed, ranging from apotropaic prayer to the celebration of victory, simply reflects the wide range of Apollo's interests and capacities" (Rutherford, 354). The paean is also used for military hymns and in honor of important events, such as for the ratification of treaties (Mathiesen, 37). As time went on, however, it became less strictly associated with Apollo as paeans began to be written in dedication to other deities and eventually even to honor highly distinguished men (Rutherford, 355). On the contrary, Mathiesen asserts that it was originally a special hymn for Apollo, Artemis, Zeus, Dionysus, Asclepius, or Hygieia (Mathiesen, 36). Regardless of its intent, there are several paeans among the surviving musical fragments (Fig. 2.3).

The role of kithara players in society was an essential one, as music was a vital part component of a young boy's education, without which he would be considered to be uneducated. In Homer's time, the verb kitharizein was used to mean "to play the phorminx," but eventually it comes to mean a more general "to have knowledge of music;" given that the kithara was more or
less reserved for professionals, it was also used to refer to the tortoise-shell lyre that a school-boy would have been learning on (Maas and Snyder, 55). In some places music education was even compulsory, such as in Arcadia and Crete (Kemp, 213). While learning to play a stringed instrument would have been part of his education, as taught by a kithara player, the kithara itself was primarily the lyre of choice for professional musicians (Maas and Snyder, 53). A kithara player who served as a music teacher was called a kitharistes, a term which earlier in history had designated a musician who was dedicated in their service to both Apollo and the Muses (Maas and Snyder, 55). The third century BCE saw the beginnings of guilds for these and other professionals, with little attempts before this point to organize them.

After their forming, the musicians’ guilds served as the locations for music education, as well as education in drama (Mathiesen, 44). Classes that would be taught were the psalmos (playing with fingers on a stringed instrument), kitharismos (playing the kithara with a plectrum), kitharodia (singing with the kithara), rhythmographia (rhythm writing), and melographia (melos writing) (Mathiesen, 44). There are, however, records of singular musicians, namely those who made notable innovations and those who were reputed for the victories they earned at musical competitions. While not much is known about the pay for professional musicians, there are inscriptions which show that the amount of money the kithara player could win may be as much as fifteen-hundred drachmae (Kemp, 221).

There were multiple roles in society which a kithara player would have fit in. One of those was as an accompanist in the music that was played to dramatic performances. Though the aulos was the most important instrument for the purposes of theater, there is enough visual evidence through surviving vase paintings to indicate that the kithara would have also been present for certain plays. Maas and Snyder also suggest that it could have accompanied the
choral odes in tragedy, based on a satirical passage from Aristophane’s comedy, *Frogs* (Maas and Snyder, 59). Besides their role in the theater, kithara players could also have been part of the accompaniment of victory odes after athletic contests. It is not certain as to whether or not it was specifically the kithara or simply another instrument of the lyre family, but Maas and Snyder are comfortable asserting that the kithara was highly likely (Maas and Snyder, 60).

Another key role for the kitharist was that of a performer in the musical contests which were held at religious festivals. There is much visual evidence through surviving vase paintings in support of kithara players having been at the Panathanaia, a local Athenian festival (Maas and Snyder, 61). For religious ceremonies not strictly related to festivals, the kithara featured in the cult of Apollo (Haldane, 98). It did not often appear by itself, however, more commonly being paired with other instruments and with vocalists; in the case of worshipping Apollo, instrumental music was frequently combined with lyrical song and dance. For those kithara players who performed their own vocal accompaniment, it was recommended by some for the musician to "gargle the throat" with conger-eels, which was thought to make the voice more supple. Garlic and other green vegetables, such as leeks, were also considered beneficial to the voice (Borthwick, 150). In contrast, the artichoke was bad for the voice of the tragic actor.

Given its inability to produce a tone as penetrating as that of the aulos, the kithara was not suited for accompanying many processions simply because it would not have been practical. This very quality was also what made it fitting to support "the graceful advance of a group of dancers" (Haldane, 100). It did at times lead the chorus through its dancing during rituals for Apollo, while at other times it would have simply participated. Other than Apollo, the kithara was played with the aulos in the mystery cults of Demeter and Persephone, where they accompanied the dance which told the story of Persephone (Haldane, 107). However, the kithara
was absent from Roman custom until it became legitimized in their eyes through the practice of the lectisternium; this practice took place at the major feasts of the gods and involved placing cushions in a circle with images of the gods reclining and eating (Quasten, 5). From then on, it slowly came to be used in other Roman religious rites as well.

Given the importance of this instrument in its own place and time, it is easy to see how the kithara stayed alive for long enough to transform into the predecessors of modern instruments rather than disappear entirely. Its function and appearance were diverse, as were the variety of ways in which a performer could produce music. Kithara players were valuable to a number of diverse social settings, many of which had their own characteristic types of music. The weight it held in society explains its emphasis in education, as well as the sheer amount of visual evidence surviving through samples and art, and the wealth of its literature, both contemporary with it and with the present. Though its centrality to musical culture was highly dependent upon era and region, its designation as the most important stringed instrument in ancient Greece is well-deserved.

**Conclusion**

Though the opinions towards and uses of both the aulos and the kithara changed throughout time and place, alternately gaining and losing favor, these peoples clearly valued their presence. Just as happens today, styles for performance and composition changed as trends were born and then died. The passing of these trends is itself a testament to the prevalence of musical culture, as the more popular the aulos and the kithara became, the greater the variations they underwent due to the innovations of the musicians. All the same, neither the aulos nor the kithara as the ancient Greeks would have known them exist any longer. Yet rather than having been tossed aside in favor of other instruments, they were more replaced bit by bit over time by
more modern innovations. They change in form and use over time, so much so that they contain hardly any similarities with their predecessors, but overall, music will always have a place in society so long as there are those willing to perform it.

Appendix

**Fig. 1.1.**
Anatomy of an aulos. 
*Mathiesen, fig 20, pg 186.*

**Fig. 1.2.**
Model of a bronze aulos from Pergamum. 
*West, fig 4.1, pg 88.*
Fig. 1.3
Anatomy of an aulos reed.
[Mathiesen, fig 23, pg 201.]

Fig. 2.1
Revelers and Musicians, detail from Tomb of the Leopards at Tarquinia.
[Image from Artstor Database.]
**Fig. 2.2.**

Kithara player, by the Berlin Painter.

*Mathiesen, fig. 44, pg 261.*

**Fig. 2.3**

Fragment of a paean in modern notation.

*Mathiesen, pg. 41.*
Fig. 2.4

Apollo walking beside wedding *quadriga*.

*Maas & Snyder, fig. 2, pg. 71.*

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Fig. 2.5

Apollo and Artemis at an altar.

*Maas & Snyder, fig. 1, pg 71.*
Bibliography


