

Candidate 1 evidence

The influence of music in ancient Greek and modern society

Word count: 4377

Contents

Introduction 3

Music in Religion 5

Music in Theatre 11

Music in Broader Society 15

Conclusion 18

Bibliography 19

Appendix 21

Introduction

The main purpose for researching music in Ancient Greece is to get a wider and deeper understanding of early sources of music, and find out how it affects the musical world now. Another reason is to see its influence on people and the effect on ancient society in general, in comparison with the massive difference with today's world. It has been proven that music played a very significant role for the Ancient Greeks in their society. Music can be seen used in various occasions, such as symposia, religious festivals, sacrifices and in theaters during plays. This dissertation will look at each of the areas of music. In many Greek tragedies there are examples of Greeks using music for increasing a certain effect on the audience/reader about a specific part of the play. In Sophocles' play "*Antigone*", Euripides' "*Trojan Women*" and Homer's "*Iliad*" there are very clear examples proving that fact. All the information that we have about music in those times, comes from music scripts, remains of musical instruments, paintings, vases and literary references. There are even some inscriptions telling us about awards, prizes and paid fees to professional musicians. Vases and sculptures suggest how the musical instruments looked and in which way people used to play them. Despite the fact that there were many different kinds of musical instruments, there were three main ones that were used commonly amongst the people, *lyre*, *kithara* and *aulos*. The *lyre* and *kithara* were string instruments but the *aulos* was woodwind, something similar to the flute, oboe or clarinet. Just like today, music was used for entertainment, fun, dancing, relaxing, self-expression; it played the same role for Ancient Greeks as well. They even viewed music as a gift sent from the Gods. For that particular reason majority of men in Greece were taught to play musical instruments, dance and sing. One of the greatest Greek philosophers, Pythagoras, stated that there is a strong connection between mathematics and music by saying, "*there is geometry in the humming of the strings, there is music in the spacing of the spheres*".¹ He also proved that the order of the harmonies in music reflects the human soul and the universe. There are several examples of how the Greeks contributed to the

¹ <https://eu.postcrescent.com/story/life/2017/06/03/how-mathematics-relates-music/359020001/>

history of music and development of musical world nowadays. For example, it can be said there is data showing that the Greeks started studying music theory in the 6th century B.C. and it was consisted of harmonic, acoustic, scalar, and melodic studies. By having all the examples and research we will find out in what ways music affected those three aspects in classical Greece and the similarities/differences compared with the modern musical world.

Music in Religion

Apollo was of huge importance for the Greeks therefore, he was one of the most widely worshiped gods. There were numerous temples and statues dedicated to him and he also played a major part in the mythology. Besides being the god of many other aspects of life, he was most importantly the representative of music. Apollo was one of the most important figures in Greek Mythology for culture and specifically for music. He was the leader of nine Muses and was directing their choir. Hesiod refers to music a great deal and specifically to Apollo and the Muses in his *"Theogony"*. We see the great prominence of them in the lines:

"From the Muses and far-shooting Apollo are singers and guitar-players across the earth but kings are from Zeus. Blessed is he whom the Muses love. From his mouth the streams flow sweeter than honey. If anyone holds sorrow in his spirit from fresh grief and is dried out in his heart from grieving, the singer, servant of the Muses, hymns the deeds of men of the past and the blessed gods who hold Olympus and right away he forgets his troubles and does not remember a single care. Quickly do the gifts of the goddess divert him."²

Since the poem is about the birth of the gods and is of a major importance for the Greek mythology in general, Hesiod shows his affection and thoughtfulness about Apollo and the Muses that play crucial role not only in the religion but the society as well. The story of Apollo's very famous lyre is connected with his brother, Hermes, who was the one that created the lyre for Apollo. This short myth of Hermes and the Lyre is one of the most well known legends in Ancient Greek mythology. It is explained in great details in *"Homeric Hymn to Hermes"*, where Homer tells about the birth of Hermes and how he created and gave the lyre to his brother Apollo.

"... Phoebus Apollo took it, and readily put his shining whip in Hermes' hand, and ordained him keeper of herds. The son of Maia received it joyfully, while the glorious son of Leto, the lord far-working Apollo, took the lyre upon his left arm and tried each string

² Hesiod, *Theogony*, page 3

with the key [see appendix 1]. Awesomely it sounded at the touch of the god, while he sang sweetly to its note.”³

Apollo then mastered the lyre and it became one of his symbols. On paintings and vases he is usually portrayed with the lyre, in order to represent the importance of the instrument to him, and his deep connection with music. Even the fact that this legend exists and contains so many deep details in it, accentuates how significantly the Greeks viewed music and its influence on the religion and their lifestyle.

There were so many gods and goddesses in Greek mythology, but the Muses can be considered to have the strongest influential role in music. The Muses were representations of science, literature and the arts. It was believed that they lived on Mount Olympus and entertained the Olympian gods with their talents. However, later the tradition put them on Mount Parnassus.⁴ There were nine of them: Calliope – the muse of epic poetry, Clio – the Muse of history, Erato – the Muse of lyric poetry, Euterpe – the Muse of music, Melpomene – the muse of tragedy, Polyhymnia – the muse of sacred poetry, Terpsichore – the Muse of dance and chorus, Thalia – the Muse of comedy and idyllic poetry, Urania – the Muse of astronomy. Each of the Muses had their own role and purpose in people’s lives, but all of them were needed to inspire poets, dramatists, composers and other artists. This shows that their general position in the Ancient Greek religion was quite crucial, especially for people connected with arts. As proof there were a lot of cults, festivals and sacrifices dedicated to the Muses. According to the tradition the Muses were placed on the Mount Parnassus, where the Castalian spring was situated. Therefore the majority of the cults dedicated to the Muses were associated either with springs or fountains, just like for Euterpe (the muse of music), poets and artists would go to the spring to pray and get inspiration for their pieces of work. Their main role was to help the poets, performers and writers to reach the highest levels of their artistic skills. One of the greatest poets, Hesiod mentions

³ Homer, *Hymn to Hermes*, [500]

⁴ <https://owlcation.com/humanities/The-Muses-The-Nine-Muses-Goddesses-of-Greek-Mythology>

about the importance of the Muses in one of his poems, *"Theogony"*. The poem opens with Hymn to the Muses, which already implies the fact that the Muses were utterly important Ancient Greeks. In *"Theogony"*, the author tells how he met the Muses on the mount Parnassus. They breathed a divine voice into him and consequently he became inspired, and transformed from an ordinary shepherd to a great poet. The Muses were also involved at the beginnings of different epic performances to inspire authors. Great examples are [Homer's *"The Odyssey"* - *"Tell me, Muse, the story of that resourceful man..."*;⁵ *"The Iliad"* - *"Anger - sing, goddess, the anger of Achilles...."*⁶ and *"The Homeric Hymns"* - *"Muse, tell me the deeds of golden Aphrodite..."*;⁷ *"I Prithee, clear-voiced Muse, daughter of mighty Zeus, sing of the mother of all gods and men"*;⁸ *"I sing of golden-throned Hera..."*;⁹ *"I begin to sing about Poseidon, the great god..."*.¹⁰ Since all these literary texts were so important for the Greeks and as we know they were inspired by the Muses it shows that without the Muses the texts would not even exist and highlights their big role in the literature and the religion.

Other mythological creatures connected with music are the Sirens. They were the daughters of Achelous and one of the Muses. Sirens were half-maidens, half-birds that were able to enchant and kill sailors with their beautiful singing. However, if someone survived their singing and did not die, they were doomed to die instead. In Homer's *"The Odyssey"* book 12, when Odysseus is returning back to Ithaca, Circe warns him about all the upcoming dangers he is about to face. She says:

"But listen to my words – and some god will recall them to your mind. Your next encounter will be with the Sirens, who bewitch everybody who approaches them. There is

⁵ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 1, Page 3

⁶ Homer, *The Iliad*, Book 1, Page 4

⁷ Homer, *Hymn to Aphrodite*, [5]

⁸ Homer, *Hymn to the Mother of The Gods*, [1]

⁹ Homer, *Hymn to Hera*, [1]

¹⁰ Homer, *Hymn to Poseidon*, [1]

no homecoming for the man who draws near them unawares and hears the Siren's voices...¹¹

Since there was only one option for passing the Sirens undamaged, which was by not hearing their singing, following Circe's advice Odysseus told all the members of his crew to cover their ears with beeswax. Although, he decides to take larger risk and asks his sailors to tie him very tight so he would not be able to break free. Odysseus was the one who succeeded and survived passing them unharmed; hence, the Sirens threw themselves in the sea and washed away without bothering any other sailors anymore. This example tells us that it was almost impossible to pass the Sirens without being charmed by their mind blowing singing, which also shows that Greeks viewed music as a very powerful sensation. The best way to describe this phenomenon is to use the verb '*thelgein*' which means to enchant, and is frequently used to describe charming with the help of music. The variety of figures that Ancient Greeks had in the mythology devoted to the arts and music definitely demonstrates that music had significantly greater function for Greeks than for just mere entertainment purposes.

Another part of life tenaciously connected to music were cults. There was a strict structure that was followed in all Greek cults. Firstly, there was the procession at the altar then afterwards came feasts and musical contests. The length of the procession varied, it could last couple of hours or even days. However, music was presented at every stage with a slight difference of musical instruments. The music during sacrifices was essential to make sure that the ritual was religiously correct; music was used in order to distract the god's attention if there were any unwanted sounds around, otherwise the god would not accept the sacrifice and they would need to do it again. The most commonly used musical instrument was the flute (*aulos*). Besides instrumental music, there was also singing and dancing, which created very strong feeling of community during the rituals. People who had singing and dancing skills were considered to

¹¹ Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 12, Page 158 [40]

have the highest social status.¹² In specific cults dedicated to Hera, Apollo, Artemis, Demeter and Dionysus, music, and specifically dance, was a major part of the event. The dancers formed a circle, which can be understood as creating a holy circle, and this was a very frequent a crucial aspect of several Greek cults. The very first chorus that is mentioned in the mythology is the one of nine Muses. They had a sacred object in the middle of the formed circle, for example, an image of Apollo, an altar, a fountain etc. As all the evidence suggests, it can be stated that music, specifically, singing and dancing formed an integral part in Ancient Greek sacrificial rituals.

Similarly to the classical world, the importance of music is greatly noticeable in religion in modern times as well. Music is still being used in churches during religious events. John Piper, an American author and Baptist priest, once mentioned the role that music plays in religion, as he said:

"The realities of God and Christ, creation and salvation, heaven and hell are so great that when they are known truly and felt duly, they demand more than discussion and analysis and description; they demand poetry and song and music. Singing is the Christian's way of saying: God is so great that thinking will not suffice, there must be deep feeling; and talking will not suffice, there must be singing"¹³

From his words it can be analysed that music also stands as something much more powerful and gives endless chances for communication with anybody, even the God. However, the music style very much varies from what it used to be in Ancient Greece. Now, instead of the flute, the main instrument used is the organ, and major part is given to choir. There are three main types of music in churches now, hymns, contemporary songs and modern songs. All the new and various changes in politics, economics and especially in the church in the whole Europe led to massive changes connected with composing and disseminating music, next to new musical genres, and

¹² https://www.ancient.eu/Greek_Music/

¹³ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/singing-and-making-melody-to-the-lord>

the development of musical instruments. When the Catholic Reformation happened, many musicians criticized the church music and tried to make it a more worship-friendly form of music. The new studies were introduced in different ways in the 17th and 18th century as people became acquainted to the new styles of church music. During the Elizabethan period there were famous composers for church anthems, such as Thomas Tallis and William Byrd, Tye. These pieces of music were written only for choir, often without any accompaniment. Another type of anthems consisted of one or more solo voices, contrasting with sections for full choir, which are also accompanied either by organ or other instruments. This tells us that music was an essential part of religious and social life during the Renaissance period.

Very similarly to the classical times music plays a tremendous role in religion of modern era as well. The sacrifices could not take place without music, nor any religious festivals in classical Greece, and it proves that religion simply could not exist without music. In churches nowadays music also plays the most important part, specifically for any event or ritual.

Music in Theatre

The theatre played a significant role in the Greek society and it was a part of a festival devoted to Dionysus. Playwriting was a very popular and widespread occupation, and people organized competitions for the authors and their plays during the festival called Dionysia. Music played a major part in the theatre as well. It was played during the plays, but also the chorus (a group of people), would sing and foreshadow the upcoming events in the play. One of the first evidences of the construction of an Ancient Greek theatre tells us about the presence of choral songs and dances. Earlier sources provide that there were some performances which took place in the agora, and there still was an area known as the orchestra. Afterwards the shape of the theatre started developing, to include *theatron*, round orchestra and the *skene*, which also had a door. Just like music, theatre was influential in the lives of the Ancient Greeks. Originally, it came from the cult dedicated to the god Dionysus. During the rites, people who participated would sing and dance and fall into a deep euphoric state. As it developed, different words were added to those songs and dances, and that is how the theatre started developing.

Today, music in the theatre varies vastly from Greek theatre. By saying 'music' to the Greeks, they understood dancing and words as well. It was believed that they were all interconnected with each other and could not merely exist on their own. Music, dancing and poetry were considered to be parts of a whole, and they acted as an essential part of the Greek philosophy. For example, when Aristophanes used monodies into his plays there were some parts in the manuscript that needed to be sung. Others included monodies in their plays as well, for example Euripides and Sophocles. There is even some evidence that Euripides wrote music, however the melody is not very clear. It is because Greeks wrote their music in letters not notes as we do today, hence, it is impossible to read his music properly. Nevertheless, there were some combinations of letters that had certain melodic and rhythmic qualities. A great example of it

is "*The Frogs*"¹⁴ by Aristophanes, where he copied the rhythmic way of writing from Euripides and mentioned it as "*occasional musical stuttering*".

A major part in the theatre, especially in plays, was the Chorus. The Chorus consisted of twelve to twenty-four male singers and dancers who were chosen to take a part in a play for their religious education as Greek citizens. They took part in both tragic and comic plays.

Unfortunately, there are no specific evidences what the music sounded like back then, we cannot be sure about the choreography either, however, there are plates and vases saved that show us a clear dance moves performed by a chorus. The reason the chorus played a significant role in the Ancient Greek plays was that the playwright would use them in order to tell a story or foreshadow upcoming events. Usually the chorus would give the audience specific information that the characters would not be aware of, which will eventually create a dramatic irony. By singing and dancing, they delivered messages and created the right feeling for different scenes, and made the audience get the right idea the playwright wanted them to know.

Nowadays, music in films serves many different jobs to impact the way the audience accepts the movie itself. It firstly affects the viewer's emotions, creates a specific atmosphere, connects different scenes, creates contradictions, and psychologically unites the audience. It also helps to develop the story line and define different characters. Music is even important for the director as the script or the story of the film. For example, there might be some scenes that would not fit in together at all without music, but by choosing the right music it can create a splendid effect on the quality of the scene. Another quite important function is portraying emotions as music can get into the emotions of the characters. The actor's face without any expressions can be made into "feeling" just by adding a specific kind of music to the background. In the same way it works to raise certain emotions with the audience. One of the most famous composers for the movie soundtracks is Hans Zimmer, who composed music for around 150 movies. The most famous ones are *Gladiator*, *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Lion King*. It is also important for the

¹⁴ Aristophanes, *The Frogs*

composer to get the right music for the specific genre of film, this is where his talent is shown. His works are very much appreciated, he received four Grammys two Golden Globes and many other highly respected awards. Zimmer was also listed in the top 100 living geniuses by The Daily Telegraph.¹⁵

Just the way music helps to create emotions for the characters and the audience in films, we see a similarity in the Ancient Greek plays as well. For example, in *"Trojan Women"* by Euripides. There is a scene where Cassandra, princess of Troy, is performing her marriage song,

*"Lord, god of the wedding bed, Hymenaeus, I bring you light with the fire of the torch!...Blessed is the bridegroom, my god and blessed am I, for you have given me a king's bed, in Greece. Blessed am I, the bride!... But mother, why cry? Why lament the loss of my dead father and our destroyed city? See? I have lit the torches to give light and dignity to my marriage!".*¹⁶

From these lines we get the feeling of happiness and excitement that Cassandra is having about her marriage to Agamemnon, which is quite surprising for the audience and her mother, Hecabe, since she thinks that her daughter has gone mad. However, later in the play, Cassandra explains her strange behaviour in her song,

*"Mother, the victory is mine! Deck my head with garlands and rejoice in my royal marriage!...I will kill him; I will sack his home as he has mine, taking revenge for my brothers and father"*¹⁷

The song here also foreshadows the upcoming events and reminds the audience about the prophecy skills of Cassandra. We witness another example in the play *"Antigone"* by Sophocles, ends with Antigone's funeral song, which gives a very powerful feeling of sympathy to the

¹⁵ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1567544/Top-100-living-geniuses.html>

¹⁶ Euripides, *Trojan Women*, [310]

¹⁷ Euripides, *op.cit.*, [350]

audience and emphasizes the ability of music to deliver strong emotions from one person to another. In her funeral song Antigone talks about marriage:

“Look upon me, friends, and pity me. Turning back at the night’s edge to say Good-by to the sun that shines for me no longer; Now sleepy Death Summons me down to Acheron, that cold shore: There is no bridesong there, nor any music.”¹⁸

This part of her song shows that for being an “unusual” Greek woman, she still wanted to play the same role as every other woman in the Ancient Greek Society. Both examples listed previously tell us how important it was to have songs or music in the plays and the theatre, because music was the main communicator between the audience and the actors. It made easier to understand the plot and the emotions the playwright tried to convey by the characters.

¹⁸ Sophocles, *Antigone*, [655]

Music in Broader Society

In Ancient Greece only very wealthy people would allow their children to be trained in different musical talents. It was known that in Ancient Greece boys from affluent families were taught to play musical instruments (usually a *lyre*) and sing in schools, and it was a great privilege for someone to have those skills. We can see the examples of it on different vases and paintings (*see appendix 4*). However, there were some females as well who learned to play musical instruments, but the difference was, that they did it at home, since they were not allowed to go to school. There are women portrayed on vases who played instruments, but they are mostly slaves who were entertaining guests during symposiums.

Starting from the 7th century B.C. symposium became a crucial part of ancient Greek culture. It was an event for males to gather together, eat, drink and sing which was held in a private house. During symposiums it was common to discuss poetry, philosophy and politics. There are a lot of references to symposium in paintings and specifically pottery (*see appendix 2,3*). The symposium was only for Greek males, but there were some women who were allowed to take part in it as well. Those women were called *hetairai*. They were considered to be high-class prostitutes. Their specialty was to perform music, since they were taught to play different musical instruments, usually the *aulos* or the flute and they were also skilled in dancing and gymnastics. According to the tradition, after eating and drinking, the guests would play games, tell stories or perform/listen to music. There were also many poetry recitals given during the symposiums; works by Theognis and Alkaios were popular amongst the guests. Another very popular activity was singing. There were two types of songs, one was *silloi*, which was a comic song, and the other one was *skolia*, which was being sung by the symposiasts, while going around the room in anti-clockwise direction. Occasionally, the singers would continue performing outside on the streets, without worrying about annoying their neighbors.

Music during parties nowadays differs greatly from what it used to be. There is only one similarity in that people invite professional musicians to perform live for their special occasions, for example, birthday parties, weddings and anniversaries. The music also varies connected with the specific event. During the marriage ceremonies in church there is usually a classical combination; a quartet or a trio of string players. The most widespread classical music pieces to play at weddings are Pachelbel's Canon, Bach's Air in G string, Mendelssohn's Wedding March and Bach's first cello suite. However, afterwards, there is either a jazz/pop band performing at a later party, or there is a DJ. At birthday parties or anniversaries, the music is more upbeat and can usually include jazz, pop or rock musicians. At clubs during different events the main source of music comes from the DJ. However, in smaller and less formal occasions in houses, the music is mostly played by the people hosting it themselves and does not require a lot of effort. The music is perceived differently during all the important events and parties nowadays because of the development of the technologies. There is no necessity now to hire professional musicians for a drinking parties or parties in general, since everyone can have an access to music very easily. However, since symposiums were such a big part of Greek culture and society, it was impossible to imagine them without any musical involvement.

Music competitions were very popular amongst wealthy young males. Their main purpose for competing was the prize they were getting. Every single town had their own musical competition, but the most important one was in honour of Zeus or Apollo, where young men gathered from different parts of Greece to compete with each other. Public competitions included adult men as well. They usually took part during religious festivals, and later, these kinds of competitions developed including the theatre. There were mainly two kinds of such musical competitions; *stephanites* and *chrematites* which had prizes like valuable objects or money. In the modern world, every single person is able to get a music education. Neither gender nor financial situation matters. However, while music is more accessible now, the importance of a profession of a musician is not hugely popular. Parents in modern world tend to want their children to focus

more on other subjects than music, considering it to be not the most important source of information they need for their future. However it was different in classical world, since musicians were well paid and had a very high social status. But however, the director of music division of Boston Conservatory, Karl Paulnack thinks that music is as important for the society as other subjects like medicine or law. He expressed this thought in his message to all the music majors,

"If we were a medical school, and you were here as a med student practicing appendectomies, you'd take your work very seriously because you would imagine that some night at 2 am someone is going to waltz into your emergency room and you're going to have to save their life. Well, my friends, someday at 8 pm someone is going to walk into your concert hall and bring you a mind that is confused, a heart that is overwhelmed, a soul that is wary. Whether they go out whole again will depend partly on how well you do your craft..."¹⁹

This quote shows that mostly musicians or people connected with music consider musicians to have a significant role in the society; otherwise there are not many other people that have the same opinion about it nowadays. The difference is quite noticeable between the perception of musicians on classical Greece and in modern times. There is not much of a difference, but now it is more widespread to play a musical instrument, since it is available for everybody. It also plays the same role – entertainment, self development, education and self expression.

¹⁹

https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/hoisi/pdf/s091/Welcome_address_to_freshman_at_Boston_Conservatory.pdf

Conclusion

It can be concluded that music had a crucial role in every aspect of Ancient Greek society. It has its own importance in religion, theatre and society in general. In religion music was mostly presented by the god of music, Apollo, the Nine Muses, sirens and other mythological creatures. This emphasizes that Ancient Greeks considered music an important factor that is why there are so many stories, myths and legends connected with it. It can be proved by the fact the Muses were such powerful goddesses and had an influence on poets and other gods. They were also the main inspiration source for all the creative pieces that were made in classical times. Meanwhile the Sirens also had a massive impact shown in different stories, since no one could resist their enchanting singing abilities. The same kind of importance can be seen in the theatre, where music was mainly used in order to either make the audience feel the emotions of the characters or foreshadow an upcoming event. The role of the Chorus in the theater was held by music, and they would also create a dramatic irony between the audience and the play. The purpose of music has not changed much in the modern world. It has a similar role in films and the theatre nowadays. Without music it is very difficult to get the right emotions from watching a film or a play, sometimes it is even impossible to understand what is going on. In the broader musicians had a big role in classical society, while they do not now. In the modern world the importance of musicians is not valued very highly. Specifically, instrumental music played a religious and entertaining role in ancient Greece; frequently it would also serve as an accompany for religious festivals, rites, sacrifices, and rituals. Music was also used for entertainment at symposiums and it took a major part in it. Nevertheless, the effect on the modern world is also very crucial, because everything started in Ancient Greece. The bases of music theory and harmony, even the word "music" itself came from the Greek Muses. According to all the evidence collected, it can be concluded that music had an enormous impact on classical society and it gradually impacted modern society as well.

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Appendix

Appendix 1



<http://hannahfielding.net/lyre-ancient-greece/>

Appendix 2



“A scene from an Attic red-figure drinking cup showing two males at a symposium. First half of the 5th century BCE. (Mykonos Archaeological Muscum)” <https://www.ancient.eu/image/9787/greek-symposium-scene/>

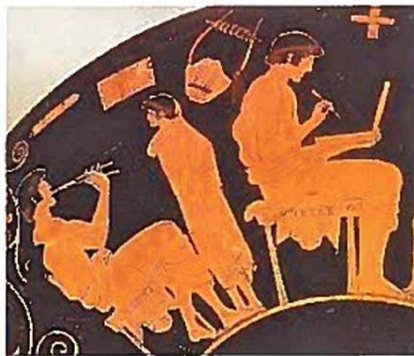
Appendix 3



“A scene from the interior bowl of a red-figure kylix or stemmed drinking cup (490-480 BCE) depicting a symposiast and hetairai - high-class prostitute. (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)”

<https://www.ancient.eu/image/1035/symposiast--hetairai/>

Appendix 4



“A teacher shows a boy how to play pipes; a lyre hangs on the wall.”

<https://quatr.us/greeks/musicians-ancient-greece.htm>