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# The Phorminx in Classical Greece

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 OF all the principal musical instruments known to have existed in classical Greece, there is only one that has no name. The literature of the period provides names which can be associated with each of the other instruments depicted in Greek art of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.; but this one, a stringed instrument of some importance judging by the number of times it appears, has had in modern times to bear a made-up name. The soundbox of this stepchild of the lyre family, though it is not made of a tortoise shell like that of the *chelys* or *barbitos*, has a rounded base—the feature that, in earlier times, was characteristic of the only distinctively *Greek* stringed instrument, the one which we can call with reasonable assurance by the Homeric name “phorminx.”<sup>1</sup>

In *Das Musikleben der Griechen*, Max Wegner offered the view that the instrument of the sixth and fifth centuries could not be called a phorminx, in part because of differences in construction and in literary and pictorial associations, but mainly because of a difference in the number of strings.<sup>2</sup> (Wegner believes, as does

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1. The evidence for this is given by Max Wegner, *Musik und Tanz*, *Archaeologia Homerica*, III (Göttingen, 1968), 3ff.

2. (Berlin, 1949), pp. 31–32.

Ludwig Deubner, that the number of strings on instruments of the lyre family was increased from four to seven in the seventh century, and Wegner is of the opinion that this resulted in "epoch-making" changes in the rules and practice of the art of music.<sup>3</sup>) R. P. Winnington-Ingram has remarked, however, that "the rounded shape . . . might seem to derive from the phorminx," and Wegner has modified his view somewhat in subsequent writings, indicating that the later instrument is a variety of kithara with a soundbox-shape inherited from the phorminx, and stating in a still more recent work that the Homeric phorminx appears to live on in the fifth-century instrument (which he nevertheless seems still to regard as a form of the kithara).<sup>4</sup>

Evidence will be presented here to show that the later instrument should not be regarded as a different instrument, or even as an offshoot from the earlier one, but rather as the later Attic version of the phorminx, with such refinements as might be expected to develop in the course of time. The continued existence of such an instrument-form suggests, moreover, that the art of music was not subject to any fundamental reconstruction in the course of the seventh century.

Twentieth-century writers have fallen into the habit of calling the later instrument the "cradle kithara." Bernhard Aign, who believes that its development has nothing to do with the kithara and who regards it as a "late form" of the phorminx, proposes that it be called the "cradle phorminx," a term that is also not entirely satisfactory, since the later instrument is no more cradle-shaped than the earlier one.<sup>5</sup> For the purpose of this discussion, the instrument of the Homeric period, and of the seventh century as well,

3. Wegner, *Musik und Tanz*, p. 9; Deubner, "Die Viersaitige Leier," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*, LIV (1929), 198.

4. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, "Ancient Greek Music 1932-1957," *Lustrum*, III (1958), 14-15; Wegner, *Griechenland*, Musikgeschichte in Bildern, II, pt. 4 (Leipzig, n.d.), 48; Wegner, "Griechische Instrumente und Musikbräuche," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (hereafter MGG), v, col. 869; Wegner, *Musik und Tanz*, p. 10.

5. Bernhard Aign, *Die Geschichte der Musikinstrumente des Ägäischen Raumes bis um 700 vor Christus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1963), pp. 242-243.

will be called the "early phorminx," and that of the sixth and fifth centuries, the "late phorminx."

Literary and visual evidence for the earlier instrument has been brought together by both Wegner and Aign.<sup>6</sup> Almost all the representations of the instrument come from the late eighth and seventh centuries, and most of the items are vase paintings, though there are also small instrument-shaped votive objects, a small bronze statuette, and some seal stones. For information on the later instrument, the author has examined more than thirty vase paintings from the sixth and fifth centuries—paintings executed, for the most part, with the care and concern for realism and detail characteristic of painters of this period.<sup>7</sup>

These sources show that the early phorminx and the late were held and played in much the same manner. In most of the examples from the late geometric period (about 750–700 B.C.) and the seventh century, the instruments are held upright, or in a few cases tipped out slightly; in the sixth- and fifth-century paintings, the tipped-out position is the most common. In both groups a diagonal position (30° to 45° from vertical) is rare, though both provide examples of horizontally held instruments (Figure 1) a position that seems associated with some dance movement on the part of the player.

The signs that reveal the manner in which the instrument is played, though not as abundant as we might wish, are present often enough to suggest a continuity of performance practice. In *Homeric Hymn III* to Pythian Apollo (182–185; late seventh century?) the phorminx is played with a "golden plektron." The plektron (pick) for the right hand, with the cord that attaches it to the instrument, is unmistakably represented with lyres of various sorts from the very beginning of the seventh century, and a number of seventh-century paintings of the early phorminx show plektra (sometimes

6. Wegner, *Musik und Tanz*, pp. 3–18; Aign, pp. 56–107, 264–291. Minoan and Mycenaean evidence is not included in this investigation, since its relation to the civilization of the late geometric period is not clear. The dates accepted here for individual objects earlier than 600 B.C. are those given by Aign.

7. See the Appendix.

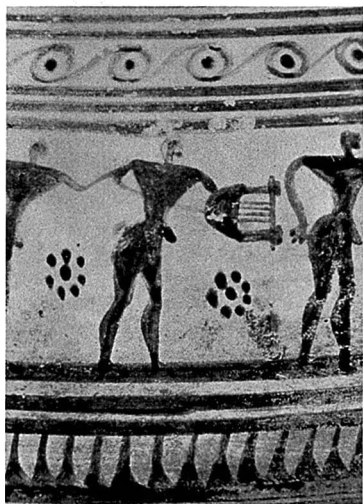


FIGURE I.  
Tübingen Univ. Coll. 2657,  
750-700 B.C. (late  
geometric period), detail.

only the cord visible), as do a half dozen of the late phorminx representations.<sup>8</sup>

The left hand appears behind the strings, fingers straight or curved, in nearly every painting of the late phorminx; but it shows in only a few cases behind the strings of the earlier instrument. (On the large amphora from Melos, Athens 911, in Figure 3, the left hand, fingers straight, *does* show behind the strings, though it is scarcely visible in photographs.<sup>9</sup>) In about half the paintings of the late phorminx (and many paintings of other lyre-type instruments of the classical period as well), a band passes around the

8. The cord is attached to the "tailpiece" at the bottom of the soundbox (called "lower string fastener" here); see Figures 3 and 4. This feature may help to distinguish instruments of this type from the chelys in early paintings, since, in the classical period at least, the plektron cord is attached to the outer arm of the chelys (as shown in Wegner, *Griechenland*, pl. 58).

9. The left hand also shows in bronze statuette Herakleion 2064 (Wegner, *Griechenland*, pl. 1) and Acropolis AP 1085 (Figure 4).

FIGURE 2. Drawing of bronze votive object from Tegea, late geometric period.

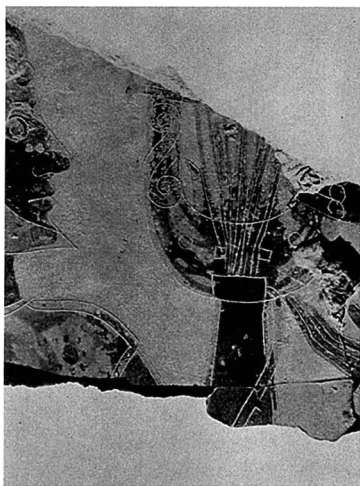


FIGURE 3.  
Athens Nat. Mus. 911,  
mid-seventh century B.C.,  
detail.

player's left wrist and around the far arm of the instrument. This wrist band is not clearly present in any examples from the earlier period.<sup>10</sup> But there is no real reason to suppose that the essentials of playing technique were different in the case of the early phorminx from those employed for all lyre-type instruments in the classical period: the right hand strikes the strings with the *plektron*; and the left hand, at least by the seventh century, is free to damp the strings,

10. Perhaps it should be assumed that there is some sort of diagonal strap across the back of the instrument: see the seal stone discussed by Aign, p. 170.

FIGURE 4.  
Acropolis AP 1085,  
625–600 B.C.



to prevent certain ones from sounding, and perhaps even to pluck them.<sup>11</sup>

Late-geometric and seventh-century representations generally do not allow any estimate of instrument size. The early artists, who, in this respect as in others, were not especially concerned with realism, seem to have made instruments such as the bronze statuette Herakleion 2064 overlarge, and others such as Acropolis AP 1085 (Figure 4) abnormally small. Apollo's instrument in Figure 3 seems to be of average size: its height is the same as the length of Apollo's arm from elbow to knuckles, its width three-quarters of that length. Using this same elbow–knuckles unit of measure, we find that the average height and width of the late phorminx are about  $1\frac{1}{3}$  and 1.<sup>12</sup> It would seem that, while the late phorminx may have become

11. Theories that the strings were stopped by one means or another are not generally accepted: see, for example, Winnington-Ingram, "The Pentatonic Tuning of the Greek Lyre: A Theory Examined," *Classical Quarterly*, vi (1956), 183–185.

12. The smallest instrument in the late-phorminx group is about 1 by  $\frac{2}{3}$  units; the largest is taller but not wider than average,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  by 1.

slightly larger, it roughly preserved the proportions of the earlier instrument.

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, in many references to the phorminx, use only one word that might have to do with the soundbox of the instrument—*γλαφυρός*, “hollow”—though classical authors such as Pindar (*Pythian* 1.1–4) and Aristophanes (*Thesmophoriazusae*, 327) describe the phorminx as “golden,” and Aristophanes calls it “inlaid with ivory” (*Birds*, 219). The outline of the soundbox, seen from front or back, varies considerably in late geometric paintings, from a thin sickle shape to a much fuller outline in which the top edge of the soundbox dips down much less, or is almost straight (as in Figure 1).<sup>13</sup> There is also considerable variation in the height of the soundbox in paintings of the late phorminx, but the average height is only slightly more than that shown in Figure 3, with the top edge curved (more when the soundbox is short, less when it is tall).<sup>14</sup> The upper corners of the soundbox are usually somewhat extended, and rounded, squared, or adapted in shape to suit the attachment of the arms. Sometimes these upper corners are quite elongated, with the result that the arms in such examples are shorter than usual, as in Figure 6. While the front and back of the soundbox of the late phorminx are sometimes marked with lines (as in Figure 6) or areas of color (as on Oxford 266 and Munich ex Schoen 80) that may indicate either construction in separate sections or an overlay material applied to certain sections, there is no evidence of this in the case of the early phorminx.

The silhouette style of the late geometric paintings does not permit any indication of the circular ornaments on the soundbox that we see in seventh-century examples (Figures 3 and 4), but the small bronze votive object in the shape of a phorminx from the geometric-period sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea (Figure 2) has four small circles on the body in the same locations as those of the instrument on the seventh-century Athens 911 (Figure 3). Acropolis AP 1085 (Figure 4), a late seventh-century *pinax* fragment, shows only two

13. An example of the sickle shape: Aign, fig. 59, p. 92.

14. Munich 2362 has a “short” soundbox; Lecce 572 a “tall” one.





FIGURE 5.  
Rhodes Mus. Civ. 12.200,  
second half of sixth century, detail.

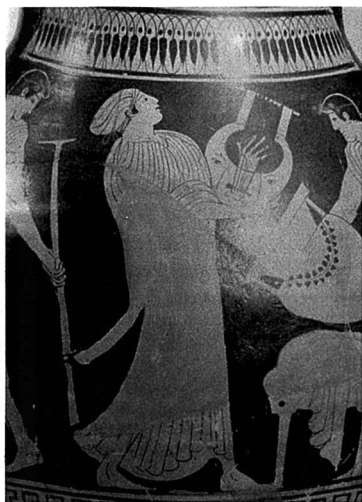


FIGURE 6.  
Fogg Art Mus. 1959.188,  
first half of fifth century, detail.



FIGURE 7.  
Kranert Art Mus. 70-8-5,  
first half of fifth century,  
detail.

small circles on the front of the soundbox; and two is the usual number in paintings of the late phorminx.<sup>15</sup>

In a fair number of fifth-century examples, the circles are painted to resemble eyes, sometimes complete with eyebrows, as on Kranert 70-8-5, on which they appear on the back of the instrument (Figure 7).<sup>16</sup> Such eyes are found on no instruments other than those of the phorminx type. The significance of eyes painted on objects from ancient Greece (cups, warships, shields, amulets, and other objects) is not in doubt: they are apotropaic symbols, meant to ward off evil influences. It is interesting to see that the same

15. Bologna Pell. 151, from the second half of the sixth century, provides an illustration of a late phorminx with four circles, however, and on the back of the soundbox rather than the front. The circles apparently do not represent soundholes, for on Boston 98.887 they are replaced with rather large round gold bosses.

16. The author is indebted to Mrs. Harold R. Snyder of Champaign-Urbana for calling attention to this vase. Corinthian alabastron Paris 5 1104 (625-600 B.C.) has small eyelike trapezoidal shapes on the soundbox: see A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London, 1971), fig. 1-3.

progression, from plain circle to actual eye, can also be traced in the development of prow ornaments for Greek warships during the same centuries.<sup>17</sup>

Information about arm shape, width, decoration, and attachment to the soundbox is also an important part of the evidence for continuity. The sixth- and fifth-century vases present quite a clear picture for the late phorminx: its arms are straight and rather wide, and with few exceptions they seem to be either made separately and attached to the soundbox or elaborately designed so as to appear to be separate constructions. The evidence for the early phorminx is not so uniform, but provides satisfactory examples on these points.

The arms of the early phorminx are straight in all but a half-dozen cases.<sup>18</sup> Tübingen 2657 (Figure 1) and the bronze votive objects from Tegea (Figure 2) offer some testimony as to the width of the arms of eighth-century instruments, and Acropolis AP 1085 (Figure 4) and Corinthian alabastron Paris s 1104 (see note 16) provide similar evidence for the seventh century. There is even a small amount of evidence that the arms may sometimes have been separate or made to appear so: in Figure 1 the outline of the outside of the soundbox is somewhat indented where the arms begin, an indication shown more clearly on a stone relief from Cilicia (Aign fig. 101). The arms of the instrument in Figure 3 were once covered with white paint, now mostly gone, to make them appear "ivory inlaid" and to differentiate them from the soundbox. In both the early and late instrument, the arms normally ran parallel to one another, though there are examples in both groups (Figures

17. Lionel Casson, *The Ancient Mariners* (New York, 1959), plates 4-7. About half the front views of the late phorminx show a lower string fastener and bridge like those of other classical-period lyre-family instruments. Neither can be seen in early paintings in silhouette technique, but the string fastener is found in the form of a large loop on Herakleion 2064 and on a stone relief from Cilicia, both dated 700 B.C. or earlier (Aign, figs. 23, 101); and the rectangular string fastener appears in seventh-century paintings. Acropolis AP 1085 (Figure 4) is the only clear evidence for the bridge before the sixth century. The bridge of the late phorminx is a long rectangle not far above the string fastener, wide in some cases, narrow in others, sometimes flaring a bit at the ends, possibly to indicate feet.

18. Aign, figs. 42, 49, 65, 66, 114, 121, all of them among the most unsatisfactory representations for other reasons.

3 and 5) in which they lean toward one another slightly.<sup>19</sup> Only among examples of the late phorminx are the arms set somewhat closer to each other so that their edges extend inward further than the upper ends of the soundbox, as in Figure 8, a feature that must be assumed to be a sixth-century development.

In some paintings of the late geometric period, the arms of the phorminx are decorated at the top, above the crossbar, with little crosspieces; but this decoration does not appear on the geometric-period bronze votive objects (on which the arms themselves are wider) or in any seventh-century paintings.<sup>20</sup> The phorminx-shaped bronze objects do have a decoration at the base of the arms just above the soundbox, however: two holes separated by a diagonal ridge (Figure 2). The custom of ornamentation at this point was one that continued. Acropolis AP 1085 (Figure 4) has an S-shaped scrollwork, and among representations of the late phorminx the majority show half or full circles at this point which may indicate openings, though on Boston 98.887 there are circular gold bosses at this point. There is some reason to think that the half circles shown with inset arms (Figure 8) may curve, not directly toward one another, but somewhat forward as well.<sup>21</sup> In any case, as this plate shows, the inside end of the half circle is sometimes extended down past the ends of the soundbox to terminate in a small decorative ring or ball.

The yoke or crossbar of the phorminx—in the case of Achilles' instrument (*Iliad* 9.187) a silver (decorated?) crossbar, *αργύρεον ζυγόν*—is depicted in most instances, early and late, fixed a short distance from the top of the arms, and extending slightly beyond the arms on both sides.<sup>22</sup> This is the location of the crossbar in all

19. The instrument sketchily drawn on Athens 1241 seems to be a painter's effort to show that the arms also lean slightly *forward*, instead of continuing upward in the same plane as the front of the soundbox. See Martha Maas, "On the Shape of the Ancient Greek Lyre," *Galpin Society Journal*, xxvii (1974), 113–118.

20. Crosspieces: Aign, figs. 55, 56, and 59.

21. Aign believes that in Paris CA 482 he sees *two* instruments, one lying in the lap of the player (p. 244). If he is correct, this is a side view of the instrument, and there may be some confirmation here that the half-circle decoration stands away from the front of the instrument. Cf. Wegner, *Griechenland*, pl. 24.

22. Whether the crossbar was customarily fixed in front of the arms or behind them is not clear.



FIGURE 8.  
Fogg Art Mus. 1925.30.42,  
second half of fifth  
century, detail.

the sixth-century paintings now at hand, but there are examples both from the earlier geometric period and from the fifth century in which the crossbar is fixed at the very top of the arms.<sup>23</sup> The bronze statuette Herakleion 2064 (900–700 B.C.) has a crossbar at the top that does not extend beyond the arms; but Athens 291, a late geometric sherd, shows a crossbar at the top that *does* extend beyond the arms (its appearance in this respect is similar to Figure 6 from the early fifth century). Again after about 450 B.C. a crossbar at the very top normally does not extend beyond the arms.<sup>24</sup>

23. The tallest examples of the late phorminx do not have the crossbar at the very top.

24. Athens 291: Wegner, *Musik und Tanz*, fig. 1-p. *Kollopes* around the crossbar are common to all classical-period lyres. They are mentioned in the *Odyssey* (21.407, a reference to stretching a string around a new *kollops*) and are visible in several early representations. *Kollopes* seem to have been short leather rolls, possibly with a pin through them around which the string could be made fast. They

Knobs or discs at the ends of the crossbar appear in a number of early paintings in connection with various kinds of lyres, but mainly instruments of the "kithara" or "chelys" class.<sup>25</sup> Two late geometric vase paintings, Athens 234 and Dresden 1699 (Aign figs. 49, 65), depict round-based instruments (peculiar in several respects) that have ornaments of some sort at the ends of the crossbar; and there are at least three seventh-century paintings that show knobs, Athens 911 and Acropolis AP 1085 (Figures 3 and 4), and Corinthian alabastron Paris S 1104. But among the sixth- and fifth-century instruments there is only one with knobs, Naples 3232. The kithara seems to have exerted an influence on both phorminx and chelys in this respect, but only a temporary one, since neither instrument retained this decorative feature for long.<sup>26</sup>

Although the late phorminx does share with the kithara the width and straightness of its arms, there is little further evidence of any kithara influence. The phorminx does not share the soundbox shape or the intricate lower-arm ornamentation of the kithara; its arms do not extend far above the crossbar as do those of the kithara; and the elegant cloth which usually hangs from behind the kithara is seen only in Munich 1416 and Athens 14909.<sup>27</sup>

The question of the number of strings requires some consideration, since it has been alleged that the "Homeric" phorminx was an instrument of four strings, that possession of four strings is basic to the definition of "phorminx," and that therefore instruments

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are visible on the late phorminx in about half the paintings, but separate *kollopes* are clearly shown in only a few instances.

25. "Kithara" class: Aign, figs. 28, 68, 122, 123, 124; "chelys" class: Aign, fig. 63.

26. Aign, pp. 212-213, has made a good case for the thesis that such knobs (or discs, or crosspieces) served no useful purpose, either for tuning or for drawing the arms together.

27. Athens 14909: André Dessenne, "Pyxis à figures noires du Musée National d'Athènes," *Revue Archéologique*, ser. 6, xxxv (1950), 40-75 and fig. 8. The "sash" (or extra strings?) customarily attached to the outside of the arm furthest from the player is a common feature of all types of lyres. There is one vase from about 500 B.C., London E 38, on which an instrument of the late-phorminx type has an arm ornamentation and curving upper-soundbox edge that resemble that of the kithara. The scene is Herakles killing Busiris, and the instrument has fallen from the hands of an Egyptian: photograph in Arthur Lane, *Greek Pottery* (London, [1947]), pl. 71b.

with seven strings cannot rightfully be called by that name.<sup>28</sup> This theory rests, first, on remarks by certain writers of the early Christian era (Strabo, Pliny, Nikomachos, Kleonides, and the tenth-century Suidas) that the seventh-century (?) musician Terpander "invented" a seven-stringed instrument; and second, on the fact that geometric-period representations often show instruments of four strings, while no object from that period has been found that shows one with seven.<sup>29</sup>

The difficulty with the literary evidence is, of course, that it is from a much later period than the representations, though the writers are no doubt reporting a traditional idea. We know relatively little about the stringed instruments of seven hundred years ago in our own era, or about their inventors; and since seven centuries are supposed to separate Terpander from his chroniclers, we would perhaps do best to view their reports, as we do a similar story about Amphion, as retellings of a traditional legend.<sup>30</sup>

From the period before 700 B.C. there are available at the present time a little over two dozen "phorminx" representations, most of them from about 750-700 B.C., in which strings are indicated. Nine or ten of these show four strings, and the rest have two, three, or five (if we include seal stones, the number with three strings is equal to that with four, as Aign points out<sup>31</sup>). Only in the seventh century do we begin to find examples of seven-stringed lyres: at least seven of them are known at the present time.<sup>32</sup> But we must not be too hasty to judge the meaning of this. Late geometric style and painting techniques must be taken into consideration, as well

28. See, for example, Wegner, *Griechenland*, pp. 42 and 46, and *Musik und Tanz*, p. 12.

29. This question, which cannot be discussed at length here, has been addressed by Deubner in "Die viersaitige Leier" (above, note 3), by Wegner in *Musik und Tanz*, pp. 3-16, and by Aign, pp. 218-223.

30. Cf. Isobel Henderson, "Ancient Greek Music," *New Oxford History of Music*, 1 (London, 1957), 381. Two lines of poetry quoted by Strabo and ascribed to Terpander speak of a *seven-stringed* instrument as a phorminx. Strabo does not say the lines are by Terpander, only that they are attributed to him; and it is not in the poetry, but in Strabo's interpretation, that it is said that Terpander was the first to use the seven-stringed lyre in place of the four-stringed (*Geography* 13.2.4).

31. Pp. 219-222.

32. Figures 3 and 4; Aign, figs. 42, 68, 113, and 122; Trendall-Webster, fig. 1-3.

as the size of the image, the medium (in the case of statuette and seal stones), and, above all, the painters' interests and intentions.

Emanuel Winternitz has pointed out that the style of the period and the limitations of the medium are factors which may cause an image to deviate from reality, and John Coldstream and Martin Robertson have both commented on the late geometric painter's preference for design over realism.<sup>33</sup> Even on vases of the sixth and fifth centuries, when interest in realism was at its height, about five per cent of the lyre-type instruments have only three or four strings—but these are generally on the smaller, less carefully painted vases.<sup>34</sup>

Whether showing three or four strings was anything more than a convenient way for artists to indicate that an instrument *had* strings, we cannot say. Instruments of the lyre family with rounded bases and with at least seven strings were known in mainland Greece as well as in Crete in the Mycenaean period (before 1100 B.C.), and as yet there has been no really convincing evidence to show that the knowledge and use of such instruments was completely lost in the Greek world during the geometric period.<sup>35</sup>

The possibility of a four-stringed antecedent to the seven-stringed instrument does not necessarily also suggest a basic change in musical system or even style of performance.<sup>36</sup> We know exceedingly little about the Greek pitch system and its practical application even as it existed in the fourth century B.C., and nothing whatever about how it affected the tuning of lyres.<sup>37</sup> It is just possible, for example, that instruments of the lyre family, however

33. Winternitz, *Musical Instruments and Their Symbolism in Western Art* (New York, [1967]), p. 39; Coldstream, *Greek Geometric Pottery* (London, 1968), p. 28; and Robertson, *Greek Painting* (Geneva, 1959), p. 37.

34. The author has examined some four hundred vases from the fifth and sixth centuries which show lyre-family instruments with visible strings. The lists assembled by Otto Gombosi in *Tonarten und Stimmungen der Antiken Musik* (Copenhagen, 1939), pp. 48–78, contain too few examples and cover too wide a time span to be of use.

35. Minoan and Mycenaean objects: Aign, figs. 14, 15, 47.

36. The author cannot agree with Aign, p. 364, that a greater number of strings indicates a "high art" and a lesser number, a deterioration to the status of accompaniment instrument.

37. See Henderson's remarks, pp. 343–348.



many strings they had, were tuned according to one of several plans based on certain of the "fixed notes" described by Aristoxenos, perhaps with the addition of one "movable note" in each tetrachord.<sup>38</sup> But whatever the tunings, an instrument that has seven strings rather than four cannot on that account be considered a new instrument, or even an offshoot.

While the literary and visual material concerning the early phorminx does not tell us a great deal about its construction, it provides us with an abundance of information concerning the players and situations with which it was associated. In the *Iliad*, Apollo plays the phorminx to accompany the Muses' singing at a feast of the gods (1.601-604) and is said to have played at the marriage feast of Peleus and Thetis (24.62-63). In *Homeric Hymn III* to Pythian Apollo, his use of the phorminx is mentioned twice (182-185, 514-516), the second passage relating how he accompanied a procession of men singing the Paean in the Cretan manner.

The *Iliad* twice refers to the phorminx as an accompaniment for dancing (18.494-496, 567-571): young men dancing circle-dances at wedding festivities, young men and women grape-harvesters in a dancing procession behind a youth who plays the phorminx and sings the Linos-Song. Passages in the *Odyssey* mention the "holy singer" (*θεῖος ἀοιδός*) to the phorminx who leads the dance at the marriage-feast of Menelaus (4.15-18) and later at an imitation wedding-feast (23.133-136, 143-145), or accompanies the dancing exhibition that concludes a day of games (8.254-264); and *Homeric Hymn V* to Aphrodite says (18-20) that the phorminx and dancing are dear to Artemis. Late geometric vase paintings also show the player of the early phorminx in a row of dancers, male or female or both together.<sup>39</sup>

Nearly all the references to the phorminx in the *Odyssey* place it in the hands of the "holy singer" (bard) who regales the company at a feast with sung tales of gods and heroes. No other players of the phorminx, men or gods, beyond those already mentioned, are

38. For an argument against the pentatonic theory, see Winnington-Ingram, "The Pentatonic Tuning of the Greek Lyre."

39. See, for example, Wegner, *Griechenland*, pl. 3; *Musikleben*, pl. 1b; MGG, v, cols. 879-880, fig. 17.

found in Homeric literature except in *Iliad* 9.186–194, in which the hero Achilles whiles away time privately by singing songs of famous men to the phorminx. Since Achilles is the son of the goddess Thetis, even this use of the instrument of Apollo is possibly not without religious significance.

In *Das Musikleben der Griechen* Wegner indicated that the round-based instrument of the sixth and fifth centuries cannot be associated with the instrument used by such performers in such situations, and must be regarded as a different instrument, one used by women in their own apartments.<sup>40</sup> The vases that have been listed here (see the Appendix), however, permit quite a different view of the matter. Such differences in uses and associations as we find seem to be the result of the passage of time and the gradual change in social customs, rather than the introduction of a different instrument.

In Homeric literature, Apollo plays the phorminx while the Muses sing, a scene remembered in the fifth century by Pindar (*Nemean* 5.22–25), who in another work speaks of the phorminx as owned by both Apollo and the “violet-haired” Muses (*Pythian* 1.1–4). Long before, of course, in the seventh century, the more imposing kithara had in fact replaced the phorminx as Apollo’s instrument, so that only its connection with the Muses remained. In time this association was extended to other groups of female divinities, Charites (Pindar, *Olympian* 7.11–12) and Sirens (Euripides, *Helen*, 167–173)—though not to the Furies, whose madness-inducing hymn is called “unphorminxed” (Aeschylus, *Eumenides* 328–333)! Among the vases on our list there are seven from the fifth century on which the women shown are unmistakably Muses, either because of the presence of inscriptions with their names, of Apollo (who does not hold the phorminx), of rocks indicating Mt. Helicon, or of all the other Muses, carrying such instruments as *lyra*, *aulos*, *syrix*, and harp.<sup>41</sup>

Fifth-century writers continue to think of the phorminx as an instrument related to dance (Bacchylides, *Epinician* 14.8–18; Pin-

40. Pp. 31–32.

41. Muses: Boston 98.887, Munich 2362, Athens 1241, London E 271, Munich ex Schoen 80, Tarquinia 684, and Munich 3268.

dar, *Pythian* 1.1-4), and the late phorminx is depicted in dance scenes on eight of the vases on our list.<sup>42</sup> There is reason to think that the dance has some religious significance in a number of cases: on Munich 1416 (late sixth century) the player and his four companions (all male, as on Rhodes 12.200, Figure 5) are all wreathed, and three of them wear the winged boots associated with Hermes. The scene on the lid of Athens 14909, which seems related to the scene with phorminx on the side, has to do with the women's festival honoring Demeter and Persephone, the *Thesmophoria*, according to André Dessenne (there is, at any rate, an altar, and in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, 327-330, the "golden phorminx" is mentioned in the invocation at the women's assembly).<sup>43</sup> In two dance scenes there is an Eros: on Munich 2363, the Eros is the dancer (on the reverse of this vase a woman holds a torch—also mentioned in the *Thesmophoriazusae* scene). An Eros who himself holds a phorminx takes part in the dance scene on Florence 4014.<sup>44</sup>

Dancing at feasts, so often mentioned in Homeric references to the phorminx, is less clearly represented in the later vase paintings. But customs had changed, and dancing at banquets had become the province of entertainers. The female dancers whom we see on Naples 3232, Florence 4014, and London E 185 dancing the "pyrrhic" (the "war" dance with shield, spear, and helmet) and other dances are probably such entertainers—the presence of acrobats (Naples 3232) and of male onlookers (all three vases) supports this point of view.<sup>45</sup>

42. Dance scenes: Rome 259, Munich 1416, Lecce 572, Athens 14909, Florence 4014, Munich 2363, London E 185, Naples 3232. The woman on the Krannert vase, Figure 7, may be dancing—the nude youth on the reverse of this vase is dancing, and the figures on the two sides seem intended as parts of the same scene.

43. Dessenne, "Pyxis à figures noires."

44. There is also an Eros on Würzburg 521, and there is a tiny Eros on Leningrad 732 (not examined).

45. A woman dancing the pyrrhic is mentioned in Xenophon, *Anabasis* 6.1.12. The Lecce 572 scene (seated woman playing aulos for girl dancer, late phorminx and krotala [clappers] hanging on wall) may be intended to show entertainers, or preparation for a religious festival, or private recreation; the first seems the most likely. The instrument hanging "in the field" (the composition of the painting does not seem to require it) appears to have some symbolic value here, in London E 185, and in other paintings discussed below.

At first glance it seems remarkable that there should be, among scenes showing the late phorminx, four vases (three from the late sixth century) on which are found the god Dionysos, known chiefly as god of wine, and his customary attendants, satyrs and maenads (women), with a maenad playing the instrument.<sup>46</sup> But paintings such as these testify to yet another kind of religious association, and when we remember that in the *Iliad* (18.567–571) the phorminx appears in the scene of dance and song at the grape harvest, these paintings and those showing the player of the late phorminx among wine-drinking revellers do not seem so surprising.<sup>47</sup>

In the society of the classical period there were no longer any professional “holy singers” who performed at banquets. But the memory of them was preserved in tales of such mythological poet-singers as Orpheus and Mousaios, personifications of the bards of earlier times “taught by the Muses” (*Odyssey* 8.480, 488). Pindar calls Orpheus “Apollo’s son, singer to the phorminx” (*Pythian* 4.176–177), and Mousaios, whose name reveals his connection with the Muses, is named on two vases in scenes where the late phorminx is shown; on Munich 1416 he himself is the player, and on London E 271 he is in the company of two of the Muses.<sup>48</sup>

The phorminx may have been an instrument to which were sung the praises of great heroes; but it was not an instrument played by heroes, except in the single *Iliad* reference to Achilles. The nearest instance that can be cited for the later period is the Schwerin *skyphos* on which Linos (associated with the Linos-Song, *Iliad* 18.567–571) and Iphikles, the brother of Herakles, appear as music-teacher and pupil, each of them holding a chelys. (Herakles himself, who is depicted on the reverse of this vase, killed his teach-

46. Bologna Pell. 151, Philadelphia 2462, Ashmolean 212, and Fogg 1925.30.42 (Figure 8). The women in Rome 259 and Munich 2446, both late sixth century, might have been intended as maenads; but they might also be Muses, or even ordinary women, though this seems unlikely.

47. Revellers: Munich 1416, Rhodes 12.200 (Figure 5). On Vienna 770 and Fogg 1959.188 (Figure 6), the player is a woman but the others in the scene are men. Concerning the “Anacreontic” garb of the men on the Vienna vase, see Jane M. Snyder, “Aristophanes’ Agathon as Anacreon,” *Hermes*, CII (1974), 244–246.

48. Munich 1416 (ΜΟΣΑΟΝ); London E 271 (ΜΟΣΑΙΟ[Σ]). On the latter vase, the late phorminx is once again suspended in the field, over the heads of the Muses, perhaps as a symbolic reminder of its association with them.

er Linos by striking him with the lyre, according to one story.) The late phorminx hangs on the wall over their heads as other lyres do in other school scenes, but perhaps here as a symbol with special meaning.

The souls in Elysium "delight themselves with horses and wrestling, others with games of draughts, and with the phorminx," says a fragment of Pindar (Bowra 114b, 4-5). Instruments of the lyre family are often played by the deceased on grave reliefs and paintings on vase-offerings, and the same is true of the late phorminx. Three *lekythoi*, oil vases of the sort commonly used as grave offerings, show seated women holding the instrument or receiving it from another woman.<sup>49</sup> There is no indication that the women are Muses, though another *lekythos* by the same painter as two of these, Munich ex Schoen 80, shows the female player as a Muse sitting on a rock marked "Helicon."

Aside from these three *lekythoi*, there are only two vases in the list with scenes that may be regarded as representing women making music privately in their chambers. The seated woman on Paris CA 482 has often been called a Muse, though she has no attributes (other than the instrument); on the wall behind her there is on one side a wreath (?), on the other side a mirror. On Würzburg 521 one woman holds a barbitos, another the auloi and the late phorminx. Between them on the floor is a chest (from which the auloi have been taken?), and hanging on the wall are a towelike cloth and a cross-shaped object of uncertain use.<sup>50</sup> Other examples of this sort may exist, of course, but there are clearly not enough of them to justify regarding the late phorminx as an instrument primarily for private use in the women's apartments.

The changes that took place in the seventh century, and the degree of musical continuity that can be observed during that century, must be the subject of another study. It can be said, however, that there is evidence for the persistence of this one musical instrument from late geometric times until nearly the end of the classical

49. Bowdoin 15.46, Bologna PU 362, and Ashmolean 266.

50. A small Eros flies above their heads. Since there are several instruments in the scene, it is possible that the women, if not Muses, are mortals preparing for some festivity.

period, providing at least one testimonial that Greek musical life was not completely transformed during the seventh century.

The changes that have been observed in the uses and associations of the phorminx during the classical period are of the sort that might be expected, given the fact that social customs changed, that other instrument forms were introduced, and that virtually all the sixth- and fifth-century vase paintings are by Athenian artists, while the earlier evidence is drawn from all parts of the Greek world. The instrument which enjoyed such prestige in the Homeric period did not completely lose its place in later centuries. Its connection with various aspects of religious life is clear; and while its players, after the sixth century, are almost all women, this may be simply a consequence of its close association with the Muses.

The instrument of Apollo, best seen as he himself plays it on the amphora from Melos (Figure 3), did not disappear after the seventh century or leave behind only a weak offshoot in the women's quarters. It became the phorminx of the Muses, and its sacred aura and honorable position were not forgotten.

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## APPENDIX

### Vase Paintings Showing the Late Phorminx

Dates for vases later than 600 B.C. are those indicated by John D. Beazley in *The Development of Attic Black-Figure* (Berkeley, 1951) and other works mentioned below; and by Gisela M. A. Richter in *Attic Red-Figured Vases: A Survey* (New Haven, 1958). In the list below the illustrations mentioned are those in music publications, or failing that, in the volumes of the *Corpus vasorum antiquorum* (CVA), published under the supervision of the Union Académique Internationale; the references are to the volumes of the country, city, and museum in question. Other illustrations may be located by consulting Beazley's *Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters* (Oxford, 1956) and *Attic Red-Figure Vase-Painters*, 3 vols., 2d ed. (Oxford, 1963), abbreviated ABV and ARV<sup>2</sup>; or his *Paralipomena* (Oxford, 1971), a supplement, abbreviated *Para*.

Second half, sixth century: Rhodes Mus. Civ. 12.200 (Figure 5; ABV 115); Bologna Mus. Civ. Pell. 151 (CVA pls. 1469-1470; ARV<sup>2</sup> 4, 1617;

*Para* 320); Philadelphia Univ. Penn. Mus. MS 2462 (*Para* 147); Oxford Ashmolean Mus. 212 (CVA pls. 7-9; *ABV* 331, 670; *Para* 146); Rome Mus. Cap. 259 (CVA pl. 27; *Para* 182); Munich Mus. Ant. Kleinkunst 2446 (CVA pl. 280; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 10) and 1416 (Wegner, *Musikleben*, pl. 9; *ABV* 367); London Brit. Mus. E 38 (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 72, 1623).

First half, fifth century: Vienna Kunsthistorisches Mus. 770 (CVA II, pl. 92; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 576); Cambridge, Mass. Fogg Mus. 1959.188 (Figure 6; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 566); Urbana, Ill. Krannert Mus. 70-8-5 (Figure 7); a Schwerin Landesmuseum *skyphos* (Wegner, *Griechenland*, pl. 56; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 862, 1672); Lecce Mus. Prov. 572 (CVA pl. 3; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 564; *Para* 389); Bowdoin Coll. Mus. 15.46 (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 858); Boston Mus. Fine Arts 98.887 (*Griechenland*, pl. 23; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 774; *Para* 416); Paris Louvre CA 482 (*Griechenland*, pl. 24; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 774, 1669).

Second half, fifth century: Athens Nat. Mus. 14909; Florence Regio Mus. Arch. 4014 (CVA II, pl. 59; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1060, 1588, 1680); Munich M.A.K. 2363 (CVA pls. 272, 274; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 853) and 2362 (CVA pl. 272; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1162); Athens 1241 (CVA pl. 77); Cambridge, Mass. Fogg Mus. 1925.30.42 (Figure 8; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1048); London Brit. Mus. E 185 (CVA VII, pl. 80; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1019) and E 271 (*Griechenland*, pl. 22; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1039; *Para* 398, 443); Naples Mus. Naz. 3232 (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1032; *Para* 442); Munich M.A.K. ex Schoen 80 (Aign, fig. 125; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 997; *Para* 438 no. 155); Oxford Ashmolean 266 (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1000); Bologna Mus. Civ. PU 362 (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1000); Tarquinia Mus. Naz. 684 (CVA pl. 1, 9; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1122); Würzburg Univ. Mus. 521 (Wegner, *Musikleben* pl. 20; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1046); Munich M.A.K. 3268 (*Musikleben*, pl. 22).

The author has not been able to see several other vases which may show a late phorminx: Leningrad Hermitage 732 (*ARV*<sup>2</sup> 857; *Para* 516); Copenhagen Nat. Mus. 7776 (CVA IV, pl. 166; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1199); possibly other vases by the Achilles Painter; and there are no doubt still more.