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The Modern Greek Lyra

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AN “endangered species” list for musical instruments might include the modern Greek *lyra* (or *lira*), a folk fiddle whose use in contemporary Greek folk culture is inevitably being superseded by the more versatile western violin. The modern Greek lyra¹ is nevertheless an especially interesting instrument to study today because its basic structural characteristics appear to have remained essentially unchanged from those of its nearly 1,000-year-old Byzantine prototypes.² The lyra thereby provides musical scholars with an unusual opportunity to study what yet survives of a living medieval instrumental tradition perpetuated by Greek peasantry living in small isolated towns and quasi-medieval mountain villages.

In contemporary Greek usage, the name *lyra* is applied to two structurally distinct instruments. The first is a piriform (pear-shaped) instrument found principally on the Greek islands (particularly the

This article is an expansion of a paper presented at the fifth annual national meeting of the American Musical Instrument Society held in 1976 at the University of South Dakota in Vermillion. I wish to acknowledge the assistance given me by Dr. Sotirios (Sam) Chianis in the preparation of my master's thesis on this topic (“The Modern Greek Lyra: An Organological Study of the Lyra Collection of Sam Chianis, Binghamton, New York,” State University of New York at Binghamton, 1974) and the encouragement of Dr. Harry Elzinga of West Virginia University to continue my research in this area.

1. Hereafter, the term *lyra* will be understood to mean “the modern Greek lyra.” The latter phrase is used primarily to distinguish the instrument from the Classic Greek lyra or lyre, with which it shares only its name.

2. A Byzantine forerunner of the modern Greek lyra is depicted in a relief on a Byzantine carved ivory casket from the tenth or early eleventh century in the Museo Nazionale, Florence, Coll. Carrand, no. 26. Reproduced in Werner Bachmann, *The Origins of Bowing*, trans. Norma Deane (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), plate 9.

Dodecanese Islands and Crete) and in the northern mainland areas of Thrace and Macedonia.³ The second type, called the Pontic lyra,⁴ has a rectangular resonating box (see fig. 1). Found primarily near the mainland Greek-Turkish border, the Pontic lyra is in reality a Turkish instrument which may have been introduced into Greek culture by refugees fleeing from Turkey's Black Sea coast in the early twentieth century. Although both instruments share a generic name and similar musical functions, their structural characteristics and historical backgrounds are not related. Therefore, the focus of this article shall be on the indigenous piriform lyra.

A detailed catalogue and study was made of a collection of six piriform lyras owned by Dr. Sotirios (Sam) Chianis, associate professor of music, State University of New York at Binghamton. The instruments are listed below, along with the locality in which each was made; the maker; the year of construction; the presence or absence of an accompanying bow; the presence or absence of a back-hole; and additional remarks.⁵

Lyra 1 (fig. 2): St. Helen, Thrace; maker unknown; ca. 1850; no bow; back-hole; incomplete specimen, lacking a belly and therefore not playable.

Lyra 2 (figs. 3–5): Olympus, Carpathos (Dodecanese Islands); Michael Yioutlos; ca. 1950; bow; back-hole; instrument made from driftwood (belly) and teak (back), the teak probably obtained from a non-Greek source.

Lyra 3 (figs. 6–8): Herakleion, Crete; Manolis Vlahakis; 1968; no bow; no back-hole; a highly ornate "tourist model" made for appearance rather than performance.

Lyra 4 (figs. 9 and 10): Herakleion, Crete; George Emmanuel Frangedakis; 1968; no bow; no back-hole; instrument has a non-functional pegbox and scroll atop the traditional pegdisc.

Lyra 5 (figs. 11 and 12): Herakleion, Crete; George Emmanuel

3. Fivos Anoyanakis, *Ellinika laida mousika organa/D'instruments de musique populaires grecs* (Athens: Ministère de l'éducation nationale et des cultes, 1965), p. 38.

4. The Pontic lyra derives its name from the ancient kingdom of Pontus, in Asia Minor, which was located near the Turkish Black Sea coast.

5. The numbering of the lyras is my own, as used in chapter 4 of my thesis, a detailed catalogue of the lyra collection, pp. 77–204.

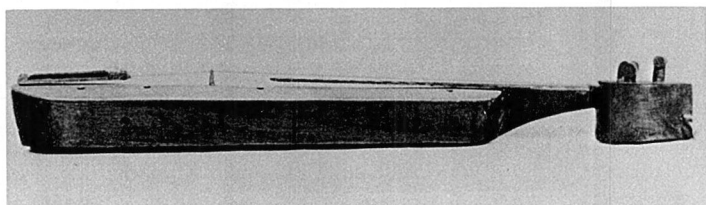
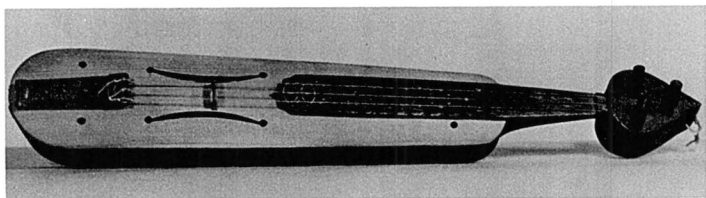


FIGURE 1. Front and side views of Pontic lyra in the Chianis collection. (Photographs by Harris Rogers.)

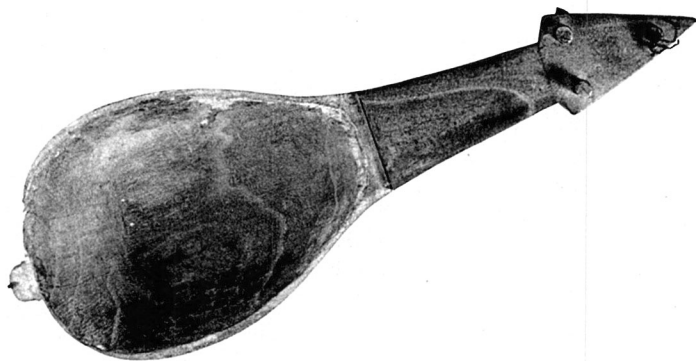


FIGURE 2. *Lyra I*: St. Helen, Thrace, ca. 1850. Lacks belly. Front view showing back-hole visible near the center of the inside of the back. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

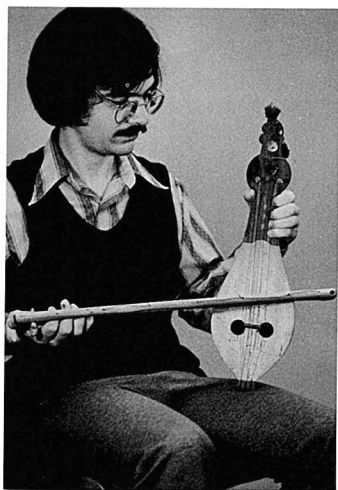


FIGURE 3. *Lyra 2*: Olympus, Carpathos; made by Michael Yioutlos, ca. 1950. Played by Michael Beebie. (Photograph by Sam Chianis.)

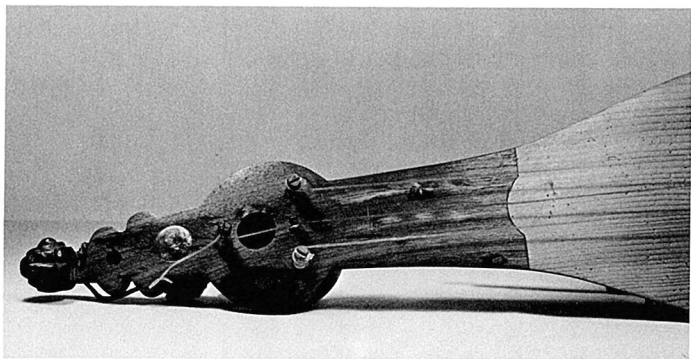


FIGURE 4. *Lyra 2*: View of neck, scroll, and middle string support. Gouges on the neck made by player's fingernails. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

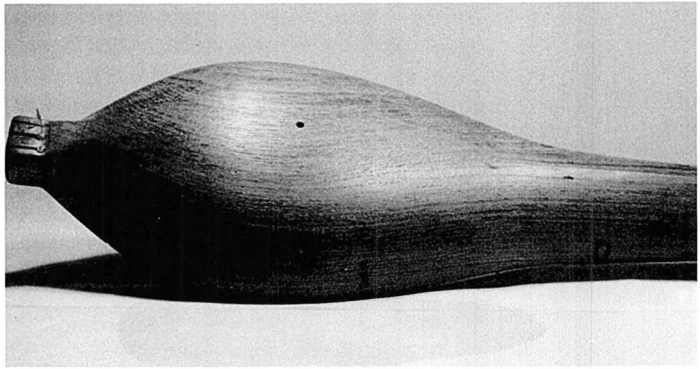


FIGURE 5. *Lyra 2*: View showing the back-hole. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

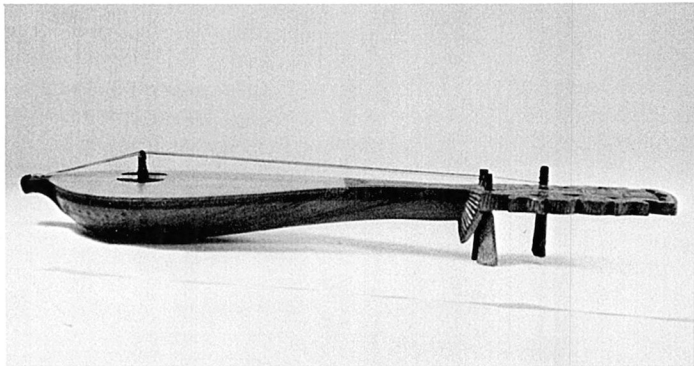


FIGURE 6. *Lyra 3*: Herakleion, Crete; made by Manolis Vlahakis, 1968. Side view showing string height. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

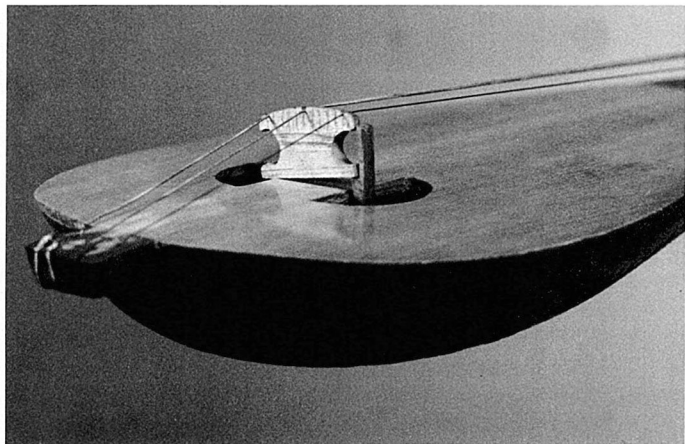


FIGURE 7. *Lyra 3*: View showing unique bridge/sound post arrangement found on the lyra. (Photograph by Sam Chianis.)

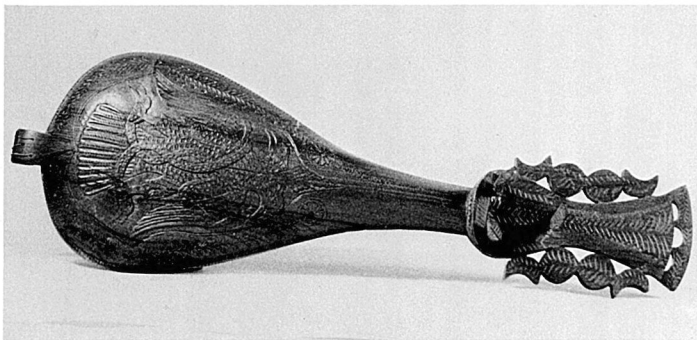


FIGURE 8. *Lyra 3*: View of ornately carved back. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

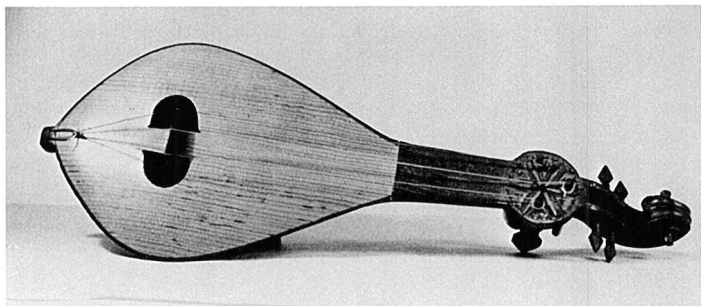


FIGURE 9. *Lyra 4*: Herakleion, Crete; made by George E. Frangedakis, 1968. A nonfunctional pegbox and scroll may be seen atop the traditional pegdisc. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

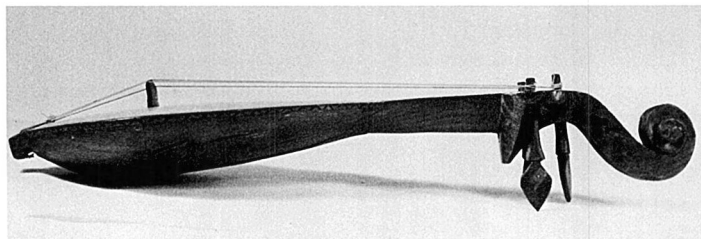


FIGURE 10. *Lyra 4*: Side view showing string height. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

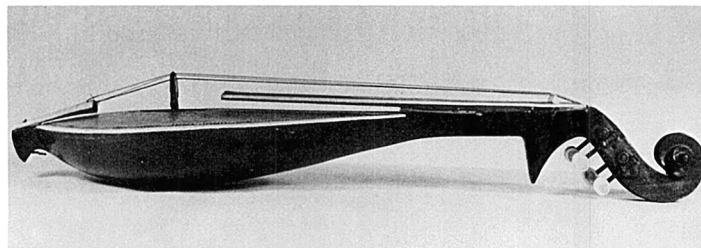


FIGURE 11. *Lyra 5*: Herakleion, Crete; made by George E. Frangedakis, 1968. Side view showing fingerboard and string height. Only three tuning pegs are functional. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

FIGURE 12. *Lyra 5*: View showing back-hole incorporated into the design of the carving. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

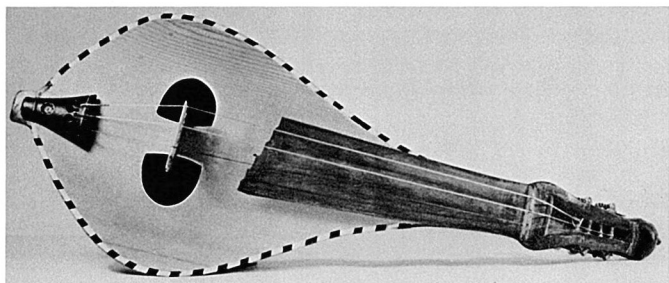
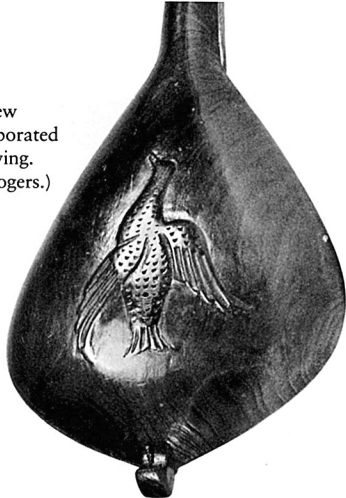


FIGURE 13. *Lyra 6*: Crete, ca. 1960. Rough-hewn figurehead in place of a scroll. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

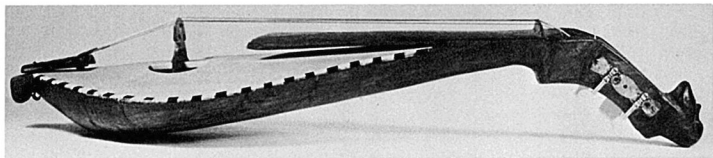


FIGURE 14. *Lyra 6*: Side view. One tuning peg is nonfunctional. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

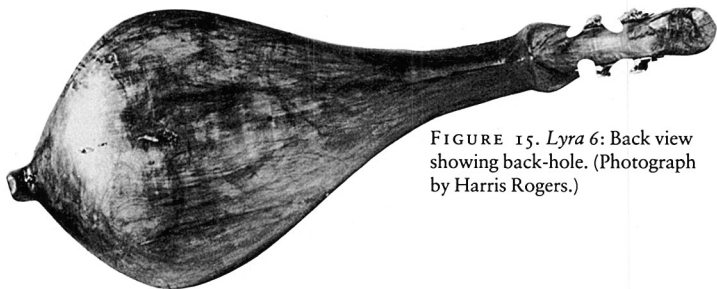


FIGURE 15. *Lyra 6*: Back view showing back-hole. (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

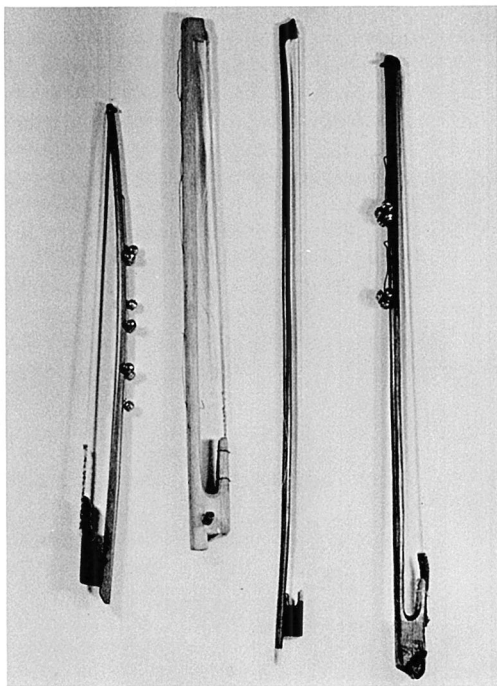


FIGURE 16. *Bows*: (L to R) Pontic lyra; lyra 2 (Dodecanese); lyra 5 (Cretan); and lyra 6 (Cretan). (Photograph by Harris Rogers.)

Frangedakis; 1968; bow; back-hole; professional model with multi-colored fingerboard and inlaid purfling.

Lyra 6 (figs. 13–15): Crete, maker unknown; ca. 1960; bow; back-hole; roughly hewn figurehead atop pegbox.

Basic Structural Characteristics

The piriform lyra displays a bipartite construction consisting of a back, integral neck, and pegdisc carved out of a single block of hardwood (of which mulberry is the most commonly used) and a belly made of a separate piece of softwood (primarily pine or spruce) which is typically flat or very slightly vaulted. According to the Greek musicologist Fivos Anoyanakis, the piriform lyras of Crete have, at various times throughout history, been produced in different sizes and styles.⁶ The first is a small lyra called the *liraki*; the second, the *vrondolira*, is the largest in size; the third, the *viololira*, is an instrument which is waisted and similar in shape to the violin; and, finally, the *lira* is the medium-sized piriform instrument represented by the instruments in Chianis's collection. They range in length from 44 to 56 cm. The widest portion of the instruments' bodies varies from 14 to 22 cm.

The piriform lyra normally has two semicircular or D-shaped sound holes; however, the shape may vary, and the Dodecanese lyra in Chianis's collection (*lyra 2*) has two circular sound holes (see fig. 3).

Customarily, the piriform lyra has a foot or thick spike at the lower end, made of a piece of wood which is carved integrally with the back of the instrument. The spike serves both as a place at which either the tailpiece or the strings themselves are fastened and as a point upon which the instrument can be supported when played. The strings on two of the lyras in Chianis's collection are attached to the spike (*lyras 2* and *3*, figs. 3 and 7), whereas the strings on one of the Cretan specimens (*lyra 4*, fig. 9) are attached to a loop of wire which is itself secured to the spike. A conventional tailpiece is utilized on two of the Cretan instruments (*lyras 5* and *6*, figs. 11 and 13).

The piriform lyra usually has three strings, although Dodecanese

6. Anoyanakis, p. 40 and plates 18, 19, and 20.

lyras sometimes have four strings.⁷ The strings are made of gut or wire and are fastened to sagittal posterior pegs in a pegdisc. Carved atop the traditional pegdisc on one Cretan lyra in Chianis's collection (lyra 4, figs. 9 and 10) is an additional, nonfunctional scroll, pegbox, and four lateral pegs which serve only an ornamental function—to make the instrument superficially appear more like a violin.

Some contemporary "westernized" lyras employ a conventional nut to equalize string lengths, but, traditionally, piriform lyras have no nut, and the middle string, which is attached to the uppermost of the three pegs, has a longer vibrating length than the two outer strings. However, some piriform lyras have a small wooden string support which serves the function of a nut for the long middle string only, thereby causing the middle string to have the same vibrating length as the two outer strings (see lyra 2, fig. 4).

The bows which accompanied three of the piriform instruments in the collection are made of straight and rather rigid pieces of wood (see fig. 16). One is very similar to the modern Tourte bow, and the other two are rudimentary in their construction. The latter are pierced with short lengths of wire to which a number of small bells may be fastened.

Use and Playing Method

The lyra and the violin are the only bowed string instruments commonly played today in Greek folk culture, and both are used primarily to accompany folk dancing, although the violin is gradually monopolizing this function. In addition, the lyra, which is customarily played by men only, often provides an accompaniment for the recitation of hero-epics and Klephtic ballads. It may be played independently, in combination with modern western instruments, or with the accompaniment of the *daouli* or *toumbi* (drums)⁸ and the *laouto* (a type of plucked lute). Small bells (*yeracocudhuna*),⁹ customarily

7. Minos E. Dounlas, "Griechenland, Volksmusik und neuere Musik: Instrumente," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 5, col. 889.

8. Sam Chianis, review of Fivos Anoyanakis, *Ellinika laida mousika organa* (see fn. 3) in *Ethnomusicology* 13 (1969): 570-71.

9. Alexander Buchner, *Folk Musical Instruments of the World*, trans. Alžběta Nováková (New York: Crown Publishers, 1972), p. 236.

attached to the lyra bow, provide a continuous jingling accompaniment.

In performance the lyra is held in a vertical or slightly oblique position. The player may stand and support the instrument at his waist either by placing the lyra's thick spike in an appropriate waist-sash or belt, or by holding the lyra out in front of him, supporting it with only the left hand.¹⁰ Players may also choose to sit or squat; in this posture the lyra rests upright upon the left knee (see fig. 3). In both cases the lyra is bowed horizontally, palm upwards. It is customary to pivot the piriform lyra on its spike when the player changes strings in order to avoid hitting the sides of the instrument with the bow.

The left-hand finger technique used to play the piriform lyra is quite unlike the method used to depress the strings on a violin or similar stringed instruments. In playing the piriform lyra, one stops the strings by pushing them laterally with the fingernails; thus, the strings are never depressed directly onto the neck, as is required in most stringed instrument technique. There is no real need for a fingerboard, then, although some contemporary lyras do have one in order to resemble the violin more closely. The strings themselves are raised from 0.5 to 2 cm. above the upper end of the neck (or fingerboard, if one is present) and are spaced from ca. 1 to 1.7 cm. apart at that point.

A variety of tunings are applied to the piriform lyra, dependent largely upon the player's voice range or preference for a particular tuning. However, several conventional tuning systems are preferred. The Cretan lyra is usually tuned *g d' a'*,¹¹ but the tuning *d' g' b'* has also been observed;¹² the Dodecanese lyra with three strings may be

10. A photograph of a Macedonian lyra player holding the instrument in this manner may be found in Curt Sachs, *The History of Musical Instruments* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1940), plate 13, facing p. 224.

11. This tuning is cited in the following sources: Samuel Baud-Bovy, "L'accord de la lyra antique et la musique populaire de la Grèce moderne," *Revue de Musicologie* 53 (1967): 5; Buchner, p. 236; Dounlas, p. 890; and Sibyl Marcuse, *Musical Instruments: A Comprehensive Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 310.

12. This variant tuning is cited in the following sources: Bachmann, p. 97, fn. 179; Francis W. Galpin, *A Textbook of European Musical Instruments: Their Origin, History, and Character* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1937), p. 137; and Curt Sachs,

tuned $g' d' a'^{13}$ or $c' g d'$,¹⁴ and with four strings the tuning is $G d a d'$.¹⁵

When playing the piriform lyra, the right,¹⁶ or lowest pitched string (as on the Cretan lyra), and sometimes the middle string (as on the Dodecanese lyra) is used as a drone, while the melodic material is played primarily on the left, or highest pitched string, and the middle string (Cretan lyra).

Bridge and Sound Post

A unique feature of the piriform lyra is the use of a sound post or *stilos*,¹⁷ placed through the sound hole directly beneath the left side of the bridge, which supports and actually lifts the left side of the bridge slightly off and above the belly (see fig. 7), an arrangement quite different from that found in the violin, in which the sound post is located just behind the left foot of the bridge between the upper and lower tables of the instrument.

The lyra and the Bulgarian *gadulka*, an instrument very similar to the Greek lyra but often supplied with a set of sympathetic strings,¹⁸ appear to be the only bowed stringed instruments that use this specific bridge/sound post arrangement. Some similar but slightly different arrangements can be found in the Welsh *crwth*, the Polish *mazanki*,¹⁹ and in a few other isolated examples, such as a Chilean folk fiddle located in the Stearns Collection of Musical Instruments, The Uni-

Real-Lexikon der Musikinstrumente, 2d ed. rev. (New York: Dover Publications, 1964), p. 247.

13. Baud-Bovy, p. 5.

14. This tuning is cited in the following sources: Buchner, p. 236; Dounlas, p. 890; and Marcuse, p. 310. When this tuning is applied, the lowest-pitched, center string is used as a drone.

15. The four-stringed "Turkish tuning" for the Dodecanese lyra is cited in Buchner, p. 236, and Dounlas, p. 890. Marcuse's tuning (p. 310), $G d a e''$, is questionable.

16. The directions right and left are to be understood from the player's point of view.

17. Anoyanakis, p. 38.

18. Anoyanakis (p. 38) writes that the modern Greek lyra "once had" sympathetic strings, but that this is no longer the case. A picture of the *gadulka* in performance may be found in Buchner, plate 256.

19. Czeslaw R. Halski, "Folk Music: Polish," *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., vol. 3, p. 337. The instrument which I studied is in the private collection of Frederick Selch of New York City.

versity of Michigan, Ann Arbor (Stearns no. 1275). The sound post of the Welsh *crwth* is integral with the right side of the bridge; the extra-long right foot of the bridge bypasses the belly and is directed through a circular sound hole to rest on the inside back of the instrument. In the *mazanki*, the right side of the bridge is again integral with the sound post; the extended foot of the bridge does not pass through a conventional sound hole, but through another hole in the belly, located just below the main sound holes. The Chilean fiddle has an integral bridge/sound post unit made of metal which travels through a hole positioned on the right side of the instrument below the conventional sound holes. The extended foot of the bridge is braced against the inside back of the fiddle. However, the left side of the bridge does not actually touch the belly of the instrument until the strings are put into vibration, according to the principle of the *tromba marina* bridge.

The purpose of the unusual arrangement of the piriform *lyra*'s bridge and sound post has not been adequately explained. The following remarks attempt to present the important functions of a sound post and to apply these principles to the unique piriform *lyra* arrangement.

One basic function of a sound post is "to transmit vibrations from the belly of soft wood to the back of harder wood and so slightly increase the sound."²⁰ Although there is a slightly discernible difference in the quantity of sound when the *lyra* is first played with the sound post and then without the sound post in its unique position, the difference is not dramatic. This leads one to speculate that the special bridge/sound post arrangement was not created specifically to affect sound quantity.

A second function of a sound post is "to support the bridge and prevent the downward pressure of the strings from forcing the feet of the bridge through the wood of the belly and, particularly important in flat-bellied instruments such as the *lira* and *crwth*, to prevent the belly from cracking under the strain."²¹ Whereas this may be true to some extent with the *lyra*, nevertheless the piriform *lyra*'s sound post

20. Jeremy Montagu, personal communication (London: April 23, 1974).

21. *Ibid.*

is customarily inserted only when the instrument is about to be played. After a player finishes using his lyra, the sound post is removed. Thus, the idea that the sound post might serve the function of "preventing the belly from cracking under the strain of the downward pressure of the strings" seems in this case not to be a primary concern of lyra players.

Emile Leipp, in his historical and acoustical study of the violin, writes that the piriform lyra's bridge/sound post arrangement "can be justified from the acoustic standpoint: a system is sought which offers a twofold degree of freedom, the low strings stirring a relatively supple front and the high strings reacting upon the much more rigid back."²² Whereas Leipp describes what happens physically to the distribution of the vibrations and says that "this construction permits a wide musical range,"²³ he does not attempt to explain exactly what kind of a sound this produces. Instrument maker Derwood Crocker also observes that the hardwood on the back of the lyra responds primarily to the vibrations of the upper range of the instrument, whereas the belly, made of soft, coniferous wood, responds to the vibrations of the bass or lower range strings. He suggests that the unusual bridge/sound post arrangement, in which a portion of the bridge directly underneath the highest pitched string is lifted off the belly, would amount to a bypassing of a significant portion of the vibrations from the belly, and thus of the bass or lower-pitched sounds of the instrument. In contrast to this possible lessening of both the quality and quantity of bass sound, the upper range of the instrument might thereby be heightened through its direct link with the hardwood back by means of that portion of the bridge lifted by the sound post.²⁴ Such an arrangement may account for the particular timbre of the instrument which imitates a desirable sound quality in Greek folksinging, one which is "strained, frequently nasal, and mostly in a higher register."²⁵

It should be noted that the sound posts of the *crwth*, the Polish

22. Emile Leipp, *The Violin: History, Aesthetics, Manufacture and Acoustics*, trans. Hildegarde W. Parry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), pp. 18-19.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

24. Derwood Crocker, personal communication (Windsor, N.Y.: May 28, 1974).

25. Dounlas, p. 888.

mazanki, and the fiddle from Chile do not travel through the left sound hole as in the lyra, but rather through the right sound hole, directly underneath the bass strings. It would be interesting to study the effect of this arrangement on the timbre of those particular instruments.

In addition to the fact that sound posts reinforce the shorter vibrations of the higher tones, Francis Galpin observes that bass-bars under the left side of a bridge give support to the lower tones.²⁶ Whereas three of the piriform lyras in the collection studied do have bass-bars, two do not. It is, therefore, difficult to draw any significant conclusions concerning the frequency of use of bass-bars in lyras, or the possible countereffect they might have to the unique bridge/sound post arrangement.

Perhaps the simplest, but philosophically the most appropriate explanation for the unusual bridge/sound post arrangement on both the lyra and gadulka is one suggested by Ivan Kachulev in his study of the Bulgarian gadulka. He writes that "to the players, this sound post is the most important thing; they know that the sonority of the gadulka depends upon it."²⁷

Back-hole

A second unusual feature of many, but not all, piriform lyras is the presence of a hole located near the center of the back, the function of which is not entirely clear (see figs. 2, 5, 12, and 15). Although several ethnomusicologists involved in field research in Greece have attempted to find a reason for the strange aperture, they have not been entirely successful.²⁸

There may be several ways to explain the existence of the back-hole. At first glance, one might assume that it is used to hang the instrument on the wall when it is not in use. This seems unlikely, however, since the back-holes on the instruments which have been examined range in diameter from 2 to 4 mm., hardly large enough to allow for the use of a hook or a nail of sufficient size to support the

26. Galpin, *Textbook*, p. 149.

27. Ivan Kachulev, "Gadulkas in Bulgaria," *Galpin Society Journal* 16 (1963): 101.

28. Sam Chianis, personal communication (Binghamton, N.Y.: 1973), and Michael G. Kaloyanides, personal communication (Watertown, Mass.: November 25, 1975).

instrument's weight. Furthermore, the location of the hole varies slightly among the four instruments in Chianis's collection which bear such a hole, and although it always appears to be symmetrically placed with regard to each individual instrument, it is not always in a position which would balance the lyra, if it were hung on a wall.

One might suggest that the lyra's back-hole could be utilized to support the instrument while it is being played. According to Kachulev's study, Bulgarian gadulka players sometimes "fasten [the gadulka] to their belts with a small nail, a 'hook' inserted into the back of the body of the instrument."²⁹ Although the lyra may have been supported in this manner at one time, field researchers have not observed this to be a recent custom with Greek lyra players.³⁰

One final suggestion is that the back-hole serves as a secondary sound hole. The Dalmatian *lirica*, another lyra type described in the catalogue of the Austrian Museum for Folk Art in Vienna, also has a round hole in its back which, the cataloguer claims, serves as a sound hole.³¹ As in the case of the lyra, the back-hole is much too small in comparison with the two main sound holes to produce any significant change in tone resonance or intensity in relation to them. Indeed, if it functions as a sound hole, why do not all piriform lyras have one? Ethnomusicologist Michael Kaloyanides posed this question to a "number of Greek musicians and instrument makers." According to Kaloyanides, only the lyra maker George Frangedakis even attempted to answer the question. Kaloyanides reports that "in the past lyra makers and players felt that the back-hole would improve the sound. Frangedakis did not know whether this was supposed to improve the tone quality or the volume, but he noted that people had realized in recent years that the hole really did nothing and instrument makers stopped adding it."³² Frangedakis himself has made both types (lyras 4 and 5). Some Greek lyra makers and players have even gone so far as to plug already existing back-holes, a fact which is documented by a contemporary Cretan lyra in the private collection of Jeremy Mon-

29. Kachulev, p. 106.

30. Chianis and Kaloyanides, 1973 and 1975.

31. Adolph Mais, *Volksmusikinstrumente der Balkanländer: Katalog* (Vienna: Österreichisches Museum für Volkskunde, 1969), p. 23.

32. Kaloyanides, 1975.

tagu of London, England.³³ In the absence of a definitive answer, Frangedakis's explanation at least accounts for the fact that some lyras do have a back-hole, whereas others do not.³⁴

History of the Lyra

The centuries of foreign domination in Greece following the Classic period of Greek antiquity make it difficult to define an "indigenous" Greek folk music. Similarly, the scarcity of extant instruments or other objective evidence hinders an authoritative determination of the history and development of the modern Greek lyra.

Within only the past 150 years can one begin to establish the lyra's history in Greece with any degree of certainty. We know, for instance, that the Thracian lyra in Chianis's collection dates from about 1850, or three decades after Greece declared its independence from the Ottoman Turks in 1821. The other five piriform lyras in this collection date from the twentieth century, thereby establishing what is undoubtedly an unbroken continuity in the use and basic structural elements of the Greek folk fiddle up to the most recent times. We know also that there has been a marked decline in the popularity of the lyra in the last few decades. The instrument has gradually acquired some of the physical characteristics of the more versatile Western violin, such as ornamental scrolls, pegboxes, lateral tuning pegs, a longer and more distinct neck, and a fingerboard. Indeed, since World War II it has gradually been replaced by the violin.

To establish a definitive account of the Greek lyra's history before the nineteenth century is quite a bit more difficult. There is, however, one point about which little doubt exists. Werner Bachmann maintains that there is "irrefutable pictorial evidence" that bowed stringed instruments, similar in appearance to the modern Greek lyra, were in existence in the Byzantine empire at least as early as the tenth century A.D.³⁵ One important iconographical source for this conclusion is the representation of a bowed piriform instrument on the richly carved

33. Jeremy Montagu, personal communication (London: November 13, 1975).

34. Perhaps this topic will be dealt with further by Phoibos (Fivos) Anoyanakis in the forthcoming English translation of his recent study of Greek folk musical instruments published in Greece in 1978.

35. Bachmann, pp. 35-37.

Byzantine ivory casket mentioned above (see fn. 2), dating from the tenth or early eleventh century. The similarities with the modern Greek lyra both in shape and playing position are obvious.

In addition to his iconographic sources, Bachmann cites literary evidence indicating that in Byzantium the name *lyra* had ceased to denote the ancient Greek lyre by the ninth century A.D.³⁶ Rather, from that point on, it refers to fiddle-type instruments similar in appearance to both the modern piriform Greek lyra and the Arabic *rabab*.³⁷ It is noteworthy that all of Bachmann's references come from the time period which he has cited for the earliest evidences of the use of the bow.

Lyra-like instruments are known to have been in use in Western Europe by at least the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and pictorial representations of these piriform lyra-types abound in medieval sources.³⁸

The actual use of the word *lyra* to identify such piriform instruments can be seen in two Western European manuscripts of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The first of these is found in the *Hortus Deliciarum*, an Alsatian manuscript drawn for convent use by the Abbess Herrad von Landsberg between 1175 and 1185.³⁹ In the representation of "music" from a page containing the "seven free arts," an instrument very similar in appearance to the piriform lyra, but depicted without a bow, is actually labelled "LIRA."

The second representation was drawn in a miniature within a thirteenth-century manuscript once located in the library of an Abbey at St. Blasien in the Black Forest. Unfortunately, the manuscript itself was destroyed by fire. A copy of the miniature, however, is preserved in Martin Gerbert's publication of 1774, *De Cantu et Musica Sacra*. The name *lyra* is written beside Gerbert's reproduction.⁴⁰

36. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

37. For a critique of past research on the derivation of the *lira* name, see Hugo Steger, "Sprachzeichen, Bild und Sache im literarisch-musikalischen Leben des Mittelalters: Lire, Harfe, Rotte und Fidel," *Philologia musica*, in *Münstersche Mittelalterschriften*, vol. 2 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), pp. 46-71.

38. Bachmann, pp. 63-64. See, for example, his plates 25-50.

39. Reproduced in Heinrich Besseler, *Die Musik des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, *Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft*, vol. 2 (New York: Musurgia publishers, 1931), ex. 50, p. 92; and Leipp, p. 14.

40. Martin Gerbert, *De Cantu et Musica Sacra* (St. Blasien: Typis San Blasianis,

The name *lyra* was often very casually used as a generic term for all types of stringed instruments in the Middle Ages.⁴¹ It also survives in European literary sources into the Renaissance, in connection with such bowed stringed instruments as the *lira da braccio* and the *lira da gamba*. During the Renaissance the designation *lyra* for piriform fiddles was gradually replaced by various forms of the term *rebec*, which became more commonly associated with instruments of this type.⁴²

Only a few medieval bowed stringed instruments are actually known to exist and can be studied in order to document the history of bowed strings in general and the history of the *lyra* type in particular. Four of the oldest known extant specimens, slightly smaller but otherwise very similar in appearance to the *lyra*, were unearthed in archaeological excavations carried out in Novgorod, Russia, between 1951 and 1962.⁴³ Two of the four specimens are only fragments of the original instruments. According to Frederick Crane's catalogue of extant medieval musical instruments,⁴⁴ the oldest fragment (Novgorod inventory no. 23-29-775) dates from between 1055 and 1076 A.D. and consists of the upper end of a fiddle's resonating body. The other fragment (Novgorod inventory no. 8-12-874) is a pegdisc which dates from between 1369 and 1382. The two more complete specimens clearly exhibit some of the typical characteristics of the

1774), vol. 2, plate 32, fig. 18. See Bachmann, fn. 69, p. 35. Reproduced in Francis Galpin, *Old English Instruments of Music*, 4th ed. rev. (London: Methuen, 1965), fig. 13, p. 60; and Sachs, *Real-Lexikon*, p. 247b. There remains some question as to whether or not the appellation *lyra* was Gerbert's own contribution to his copy of the thirteenth-century miniature.

41. Leipp, p. 14.

42. Well over one hundred variations of the term *rebec* have been discovered in the course of my research on the history of the *rebec* (Ph.D. dissertation in progress, West Virginia University).

43. Boris Aleksandrovich Kolchin, *Novgorodskie drevnosti. Derevyannyye izdeliya*, Akademiya Nauk SSSR. Institut Arkheologii. Arkheologiya SSSR. Svod arkheologicheskikh istochnikov, E1-55 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Nauka," 1968), pp. 86-87, 94, and 178-81.

44. Frederick Crane, *Extant Medieval Musical Instruments: A Provisional Catalogue by Types* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1972), pp. 15-16. I wish to acknowledge Dr. Crane's assistance in providing access to his translations of pertinent sections of Kolchin's study.

piriform lyra. One (Novgorod inventory no. 17-19-859) is made of spruce, lacks a belly, and dates from between 1177 and 1197; it is 41 cm. long by 11.5 cm. wide. The other (Novgorod inventory no. 9-9-1876), dating from before 1368, is made of fir and is almost completely preserved; it is 30 cm. long and 10.5 cm. wide. Unfortunately, no bows were found in the excavation.

In reviewing the evidence available, one can readily recognize how difficult it is to come to any indisputable conclusions concerning the early history and development of the lyra form in Greece. It is safe to say that there did exist in Byzantium a piriform fiddle which was the prototype of the contemporary Greek folk instrument and which was referred to as a "lyra." It is plausible that the cultural contact between Byzantium, Russia, Bulgaria, and other areas of the medieval Eastern world might have resulted in the exchange of a lyra prototype among those areas. It may be further hypothesized that the Byzantine lyra exhibited a major influence upon the early development of the medieval Western European fiddle, and ultimately upon the rebec.

Bearing in mind these possible historical influences, one can see that further study of the modern Greek lyra, an instrument which has remained basically unchanged in structure for more than a thousand years, would be useful in comparative studies with the medieval fiddle and the rebec. Various aspects of construction, such as the application of the lyra's unusual bridge/sound post arrangement to the contemporary reconstruction of rebecs, might well be—and indeed are being—applied by some instrument builders today.⁴⁵ Christopher Page's observation that many medieval fiddles similar in appearance to the modern Greek lyra are depicted without a nut⁴⁶ leads me to the proposition that such nut-less instruments may have been played with a lateral finger technique as is found on the lyra and other related contemporary folk fiddles.⁴⁷ It is apparent that without a nut

45. Christopher Page, personal communication (Heslington, England: November 4, 1975).

46. Christopher Page, "An Aspect of Medieval Fiddle Construction," *Early Music* 2 (July 1974): 166-67.

47. The Renaissance musician Martin Agricola documents the use, during his lifetime, of a left-hand lateral finger technique for the "Polish fiddle" in his treatise *Musica instrumentalis deudsch* (Wittenberg, 1529). See Halski, p. 336; and Adolf Koczirz,

the strings on a fiddle must out of necessity be strung a considerable distance above the neck merely to avoid hitting the neck; strung as such it would be almost impossible to depress the strings, violin-fashion, directly onto the neck. Perhaps these ideas, as well as the technique of "polyphonic drone fiddling"⁴⁸ on the lyra, could be used to advantage when trying to recreate "historically accurate" medieval and Renaissance instruments and performances.

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"Über die Fingernageltechnik bei Saiteninstrumenten," *Studien zur Musikgeschichte: Festschrift für Guido Adler* (Vienna: Universal Edition, 1930), pp. 164-67.

48. Laurence Picken, "Instrumental Polyphonic Folk-Music in Asia-Minor," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 80 (1953-54): 73-86.