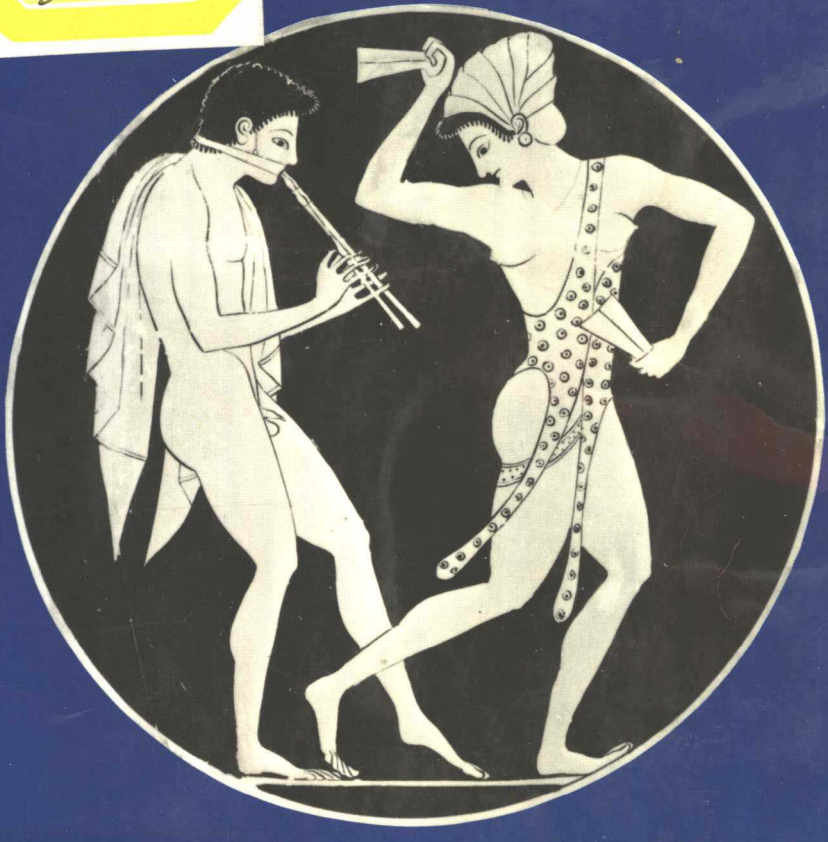
ANCIENT GREEK MUSIC



M. L. WEST

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PREFACE

My interest in the subject goes back to my second year as an undergraduate, when, browsing in J. U. Powell's corpus of fragments of Hellenistic verse, *Collectanea Alexandrina*, I was surprised to come upon several pages of music. They revealed themselves to be transcriptions of the two Delphic Paeans which are our most substantial specimens of ancient melody. I committed one of them to memory, and the next spring, when I went to Greece for the first time, on arriving at Delphi I sang it at the top of my voice in the ruins of the sanctuary where it had had its première 2,084 springs previously. My two travelling companions distanced themselves somewhat. A little later, as we examined the stone on which the text is inscribed, one of them stumbled against it, and it nearly crashed from its moorings and shattered. (I married her all the same.)

In the hope that the book may be of interest not only to classicists but also to musicologists, and indeed anyone with an interest in the history of music, I have tried to avoid allusions that might be unintelligible to one or the other group. There are bound to be mentions of ancient authors, places, and institutions that will be unfamiliar to non-classicists, but where I have left them unelucidated they should be inessential to the argument. Reference works such as *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* or Mrs M. Howatson's *Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* will assist in most cases. All quotations from ancient sources are given in translation, and any Greek words appear in transliteration. Almost no musical knowledge is presupposed.

I am indebted to Dr A. C. Baines, the former Curator of the Bate Collection of Historical Wind Instruments at Oxford, for encouragement and advice on various questions that arose in connection with Chapter 4; to Dr Günter Poethke of the Ägyptisches Museum in Berlin for important information concerning the musical papyrus that resides there; to Stephanie West for examining the same and answering a series of my queries about its text; to Professor W. G. Arnott, Professor Sir John Boardman, Professor J. N. Coldstream, Dr P. A. Hansen, Dr J. G. F. Hind, and Dr B. B. Rasmussen (Curator of Classical Antiquities in the National Museum of Denmark) for

help with various questions; to Professor A. D. Trendall for permission to reproduce a plate from his book *Early South Italian Vase Painting*, published by Philipp von Zabern of Mainz, 1974; and to authorities of the following institutions for photographs and permissions: the Allard Pierson Museum, Amsterdam; the National Museum of Greece; the British School at Athens; Münzen und Medaillen AG, Basle; the Antikenmuseum and Staatliche Museen, Berlin; the Indiana University Art Museum, Bloomington; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, Brussels; the National Museum of Denmark; the Ruhrland Museum, Essen; the Museo Archeologico Etrusco, Florence; the Archaeological Museum, Heraklion; the British Museum; the Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich; the Museo Nazionale and Biblioteca Nazionale, Naples; the Metropolitan Museum, New York; the Musée du Louvre, Paris; the Museo della Villa Giulia, Rome. My thanks to them all; and, very far from least, to the production staff of the Oxford University Press for the effort they have devoted to a rather demanding book.

M.L.W.

All Souls College, Oxford
January 1992

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ABBREVIATIONS

Ancient authors, text collections, periodicals, encyclopaedias

So far as possible I have used the same abbreviations as *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2nd edn., 1970). Note in addition:

Anon. Bellerm.	Anonymus Bellermanni.
CEG	P. A. Hansen, *Carmina Epigraphica Graeca*, i–ii (Berlin and New York, 1983–9).
Cleon.	Cleonides, *Introduction to Harmonics*, cited by Jan's page.
FGE	D. L. Page, *Further Greek Epigrams* (Cambridge, 1981).
GP	A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: The Garland of Philip* (Cambridge, 1968).
HE	A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, *The Greek Anthology: Hellenistic Epigrams* (Cambridge, 1965).
Mart. Cap.	Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*.
MGG	*Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik, Kassel, 1949–79).
NG	*The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie (London, 1980).
Nicom. *Ench.*	Nicomachus, *Enchiridion*, cited by Jan's page.
Philod. *Mus.*	Philodemus, *On Music*.
PMG	*Poetae Melici Graeci*, ed. D. L. Page (Oxford, 1962).
Psell. *De trag.*	Michael Psellus, excerpt on tragedy, ed. R. Browning, in *Γέρας: Studies presented to G. Thomson* (Prague, 1963).
RE	Pauly–Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1894–1980).
Sammelbuch	F. Preisigke and others, *Sammelbuch griechischer Urkunden aus Ägypten* (Strasburg etc., 1915–).

SLG	*Supplementum Lyricis Graecis*, ed. D. L. Page (Oxford, 1974).
Supp. Hell.	*Supplementum Hellenisticum*, ed. H. Lloyd-Jones and P. J. Parsons (Berlin and New York, 1983).
TrGF	*Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, ed. B. Snell and others (Göttingen, 1971–).
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*.

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—— *Brass* = *Brass Instruments* (London, 1976).

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Barker, A., *GMW* = *Greek Musical Writings* (Cambridge, 1984–9).

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Pickard-Cambridge, A. W., *DFA*^{2} = *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 2nd edn. revised by J. Gould and D. M. Lewis (Oxford, 1968).
—— *DTC*^{2} = *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*, 2nd edn. revised by T. B. L. Webster (Oxford, 1962).
Pöhlmann, E., *Beiträge* = *Beiträge zur antiken und neueren Musikgeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1988).
—— *DAM* = *Denkmäler altgriechischer Musik* (Nuremberg, 1970).
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—— *RT* = *Rhythm and Tempo* (New York, 1953).
—— *WM* = *The Wellsprings of Music* (The Hague, 1962).
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—— *Musikleben* = *Das Musikleben der Griechen* (Berlin, 1949).
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CONTENTS

Introduction

MUSIC, Musik, musique, musica, muzsika, muzyka, musiikki, müzik, miwsig: the world owes the word to the Greeks. Melody, harmony, symphony, polyphony: these too. Orchestra, organ, chorus, chord, tone, baritone, tonic, diatonic, diapason, chromatic, rhythm, syncopation: all from Greek. Ancient Greek culture was permeated with music. Probably no other people in history has made more frequent reference to music and musical activity in its literature and art.

Yet the subject is practically ignored by nearly all who study that culture or teach about it. Sometimes its very existence seems to be barely acknowledged. In a justly celebrated book on the Lesbian poets we read that it is a natural assumption that all or almost all Sappho's poems 'were recited by herself informally to her companions'.[1] The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece, where burning Sappho loved and *recited*? In that generally admirable volume *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (1986) we look in vain for a section on Greek music. The subject is indeed touched on in connection with lyric poetry, but in the briefest terms. Many similar cases could be cited.

The most pervasive sign of the average classicist's unconcern with the realities of music is the ubiquitous rendering of *aulos*, a reed-blown instrument, by 'flute'. There was a time when it was legitimate, because the classification of instruments had not been thought out scientifically and it was quite customary to speak of a 'flute family' that included the reed-blown instruments.[2] But that tolerant era is long past, and now the only excuse for calling an aulos a flute is that given by Dr Johnson when asked why he defined 'pastern' as the knee of a horse: 'Ignorance, madam, pure ignorance.' Yet countless literary scholars and even archaeologists persist in this deplorable habit, deaf to all protests from the enlightened. One might as well call the *sȳrinx* a mouth organ. Those who rely on the standard

[1] D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford, 1955), 119. His emphasis is on 'informally', as opposed to a formal or ceremonial setting.

[2] See Becker, 36–8.

Greek–English lexicon are not well served in this matter: 'flute' appears erroneously in at least seventy articles.

But the malady extends to other instruments too. Even so eminent a musicologist as Dr Egon Wellesz, in his *History of Byzantine Music and Hymnography*, besides calling *auloi* flutes, renders *kitharai* as 'zithers'. In the New English Bible, supposedly an effort of the most authoritative and up-to-date scholarship, not only are *auloi* constantly 'flutes' but in the Book of Revelation *kitharai* are 'harps' and *kitharōidoi* 'harpers'. The Jerusalem Bible commits the same errors, only more consistently.[3] Meanwhile *pēktis*, which in the classical period does mean a harp, is variously rendered by different scholars as a 'lyre' or a 'lute'.[4]

It must be allowed that those wishing to inform themselves about Greek music have not found things made particularly easy for them. Accounts of the subject in English have been few and far between. They have tended to be of the highest scholarly accomplishment, but daunting to the uninitiated inquirer, who has soon found himself floundering among disjunct enharmonic tetrachords and Mixolydian/Hypoaeolian/Hyperphrygian transposition-keys, and has halted before a long table of notes with prodigious names like *paranētē diezeugmenōn* and *tritē hyperbolaiōn*. Little wonder if he has cried out, like Thomas Morley's Philomathes, 'heere is a Table in deede contayning more than ever I meane to beate my brayns about'.[5]

Well, he will eventually come upon such horrors in this book too; they are unfortunately necessary. But I scheme to lead him to them so gently and persuasively that by the time they rear up before him they will not seem so formidable after all. I am particularly well qualified to attempt this, being wholly without musical training. I have to take these things slowly to make them clear to myself.

I try to explain everything from the ground up, desiring the book to be accessible to anyone who knows roughly what an octave is. To the reader whose musical theory is at or near this minimum level I say with Epicurus, 'I congratulate you on coming to philosophy untainted by any education.' As for those who have left this state of innocence behind, I trust they will bear patiently with explanations

[3] Likewise H. W. Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians* (London, 1977), 35.

[4] Webster, 93, and others; J. E. Powell, *Lexicon to Herodotus* (Cambridge, 1938), 305.

[5] T. Morley, *A plaine and easie introduction to practicall musicke* (London, 1597), 34.

of things that to them are elementary. They may occasionally find that their learning is a treacherous light. Some, for instance, who are familiar with the terms chromatic and enharmonic as they are used in connection with Western music will be unprepared for the fact that they mean something different in Greek. And some who are sure they know what the Dorian or the Lydian mode is may be disconcerted to discover that in Antiquity it was nothing of the kind.

Apart from petty snares like these, there is a general danger of coming to ancient Greek music with preconceptions formed by Western musical culture. Some nineteenth-century investigators fell prey to such preconceptions to a degree that looks grotesque from this distance. Can we do better? Yes, we can; in particular, because of the great advances made by ethnomusicology in the present century, and the general widening of musical horizons. The concert-going or radio-listening public nowadays wanders in a landscape that extends not from Bach to Brahms but from Gregorian chant to gamelan and gagaku. Ancient Greek music is not part of our local, West European, post-Renaissance tradition, but it *is* part of world music, and it needs to be seen in ethnological perspective. Musical instruments and melodic styles have histories that extend over millennia and across geographical zones far larger than the territories of a single nation. At various points it will be appropriate to refer to comparative material from the ancient Near East or from more recent musical cultures in the Balkans, Africa, or elsewhere. There may even be mention of 'primitive' music, which I hope will be taken in the right spirit. It is not a question of setting the Greeks on the level of what used to be called 'savages'. The fact is that their music is better understood by putting it in the broad category of ethnic music, extending down to the most primitive and limited manifestations of the melodic instinct, than by looking in it for the workings of supposedly natural and universal principles which are actually abstracted from German music of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as was once the approach.[6]

[6] From the writings of Rudolph Westphal: (1) 'The rhythm of ancient music is so essentially one with the rhythm of modern composers that without detailed knowledge of the rhythmic forms used by these, and in particular without detailed appreciation of the rhythms of the great J. S. Bach, the necessary parallels were lacking which alone enabled the material transmitted by the Greek rhythmicians to be correctly understood' (*Die Musik des griechischen Alterthumes nach den alten Quellen neu bearbeitet* (Leipzig, 1883), 5). (2) 'The Greeks' non-diatonic music that admits intervals smaller than a semitone, which are wholly foreign to the modern art, will probably, alas, remain for ever an enigma to scholarship' (*Griechische Harmonik und Melopoeie*, 3rd edn. (Leipzig, 1886), ix).

Source material

How do we know anything about ancient music? The evidence can be summarized under five heads.

First, there is the evidence of archaeology and art. We have some remains of actual instruments, mainly pipes, but only, of course, their less perishable parts. There are also models of instruments, made for votive or other purposes, and figurines, statues, and reliefs representing men, women, or deities playing instruments. Above all, there are large numbers of vase-paintings, particularly from Athens in the sixth and fifth centuries BC and from Greek South Italy in the fourth. They have much to tell us not only about forms of instruments but also about performing techniques and contexts. They can even tell us something about singing. Other forms of pictorial art, such as engraved gems, frescos, and mosaics, contribute additional information for later periods.

Secondly there are the innumerable references to music and music-making scattered through Greek literature from the eighth century BC onwards. The lyric and comic poets are especially rich in them. We are fortunate in the fact that many musical references by lost authors of these categories and by out-of-the-way historians and antiquarians were collected and quoted by Athenaeus of Naucratis (AD c. 200) in his *Deipnosophistai*, a lengthy work in dialogue form in which all aspects of the Classical supper-party and symposium are eruditely discussed and illustrated. Athenaeus' dull-witted contemporary and fellow citizen Pollux is also of importance as a compiler of Classical terminology, catalogued in the manner of Roget's *Thesaurus* with no discussion and only sporadic citation of sources. Latin authors provide further useful material, in so far as they reflect Greek sources or allude to current Greek or common Graeco-Roman musical practice.

As a third category we may distinguish specialist writing on music. This supplies us with much information of a technical nature on which other authors are largely silent. Of especial importance is Aristoxenus of Tarentum, a pupil of Aristotle. A number of his many works were to do with music in one aspect or another. Nearly all of them are lost, regrettably, though valuable fragments are preserved by Athenaeus and others. What has survived in a more continuous state consists of a few pages from his *Elements of Rhythm* and three books of *Harmonics*, the first of which represents a different treatise from the rest;

the third book breaks off in mid-argument.[7] Aristoxenus' harmonic theory was highly influential, and it is regurgitated in several works written probably between the second and fifth centuries AD, where lost portions of Aristoxenus' exposition are also reflected. These works are the *Introductions to Harmonics* of Cleonides and Gaudentius, the *Introductions to Music* of Bacchius and Alypius, and the much longer and more wide-ranging work *On Music* by Aristides Quintilianus. Cleonides' lucid handbook, formerly misattributed to Euclid, is the most purely Aristoxenian.

Other works of about Aristoxenus' time or soon after it are the *Sectio Canonis* or *Division of the kanōn*, which may be a genuine work of Euclid's, and the (pseudo-)Aristotelian *Problems*. The *Problems* are a collection of about 900 scientific questions in the form 'Why is it that ...' with reasoned suggestions for answers, arranged under thirty-eight headings and put together in the Peripatetic school. Two of the sections, the eleventh and nineteenth, are concerned with matters of acoustics and harmony respectively. The *Sectio Canonis* is a short treatment of harmony from the mathematical angle, the *kanōn* being the graduated rule of a monochord which gives out different notes according to the length of the resonating section of the string. This approach is also represented in several works of the first half of the second century AD: Theon of Smyrna's *Explanation of Mathematical Matters for Readers of Plato*, Nicomachus of Gerasa's *Harmonic Handbook*, and, much more important, the *Harmonics* of Ptolemy. In the third century the Neoplatonist Porphyry wrote a commentary on Ptolemy's work. This too contains some useful matter.

The Epicurean philosopher Philodemus (first century BC) wrote a work on music which is partially preserved; it is a polemic against the view that music has ethical effects on the listener. Sextus Empiricus (AD *c.* 200) argues similarly in his essay *Against the Musicians*, which forms the sixth book of his *Against the Scientists*. The dialogue *On Music* which comes down to us as a work of Plutarch's, but is certainly not by him, is a source of unique value for the early history of Greek music, or at least for what was believed about it in the Classical period. Though itself late—perhaps of about Athenaeus' time—it cites excellent Classical authorities such as Glaucus of Rhegium

[7] 'Harmonics', in ancient terminology, is the science dealing with the ordered arrangement of notes in scales and the relationships between scales. It was not concerned like modern harmonic theory with chords and chord-successions.

(*c.* 400 BC, author of a book *On the Ancient Poets and Musicians*), Heraclides Ponticus (mid-fourth century BC), and Aristoxenus (lost writings), and it paraphrases substantial excerpts from them in undigested form.

There are other, still later sources that preserve valuable nuggets of information derived from Classical historians of music. There is the *Chrestomathy* of the fifth-century Neoplatonist Proclus, a history of poetry of which half survives in an epitome by Photius; and a brief discussion of tragedy by Michael Psellus (eleventh century), not published until 1963.[8] Many elements of Greek theory were taken over by the Arab writers on music, the most important of whom is Abū n-Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Tarḫān ibn 'Uzlag̀ al-Fārābī, popularly known as Al-Fārābī (*c.* 870–950).[9]

Two Latin authors occasionally cited are Martianus Capella (early fifth century) and Boethius (early sixth century). Martianus' *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* is a survey of the liberal arts. The treatment of music, which occupies the ninth book, is based primarily on Aristides Quintilianus. Boethius too is writing a compendium of the subject as one branch of the higher learning among others. His main authorities are Nicomachus, Cleonides, and Ptolemy. Though he has little of independent value for our inquiry, he is of great historical significance as the point of departure for medieval theorists.

Finally a mention must be made of the so-called Anonymus Bellermanni, the notional author (or, according to the latest editor, three authors) of a scrappy collection of material on music, transmitted in a number of Byzantine manuscripts and first published by F. Bellermann in 1841. It is drawn to a marked extent from Aristoxenus and Aristides Quintilianus, but contains some valuable matter not found elsewhere, including half a dozen little instrumental tunes and exercises.[10]

[8] By R. Browning in *Γέρας: Studies presented to G. Thomson* (Prague, 1963), 67 ff.

[9] His *Grand Book of Music* (*Kitâbu l-Mūsiqī al-Kabīr*) is translated by R. D'Erlanger in *La Musique arabe*, i (Paris, 1930).

[10] D. Najock, *Anonyma de musica scripta Bellermanniana* (Leipzig, 1975). —The above brief survey is not intended to be a comprehensive catalogue of all who wrote on music, but merely to introduce the names of the main ones whom the reader will find referred to in the book. For a fuller review see Neubecker, 16–38. Of the authors and works I have mentioned, the following are translated, with excellent introductions and notes, in Barker, *GMW*: the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* (selection), Aristoxenus, Euclid, Nicomachus, Ptolemy, pseudo-Plutarch, Athenaeus (selection), Aristides Quintilianus.