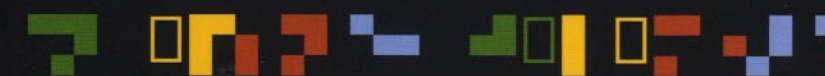




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HIGHLIGHTED WORKS OF ART

2009 SPRING **SUMMER** AUTUMN WINTER

MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS – COLLECTION OF ANTIQUITIES

THE HERITAGE OF ORPHEUS

In Archaic and Classical Greece, poets composed *Muse*-inspired songs; their craft (*techne*) was described as *mousike*. The “poem” was a unity of text, melody, rhythm and live performance, and was accompanied with a musical instrument. For the Greeks, the concept of music was both narrower and broader than its modern counterpart: the poet-composer did not simply set the poem to music. Songs were presented on a public occasion like a religious festival, or in private ritual drinking parties (*symposia*). The tradition of live singing foregrounded the external features of the performance: the musician’s mastery of his voice and instrument, his expression and splendid dress, and the musical instrument itself. In the culture of competition which grew out of the Homeric ideal of excellence, the musical contest became one of the most important forms of public *mousike*. This was reflected in myths about musicians foolhardy enough to challenge Apollo or the Muses (Linus, Thamyris, Marsyas); and also in ancient texts which mention the greatest victories of older times, such as the

competition between Homer and Hesiod, or the triumph of the first Lesbian poet, Terpander, at the Spartan Karneia festival in 676 BC.

Between the Olympic games staged every four years, three further great festivals were celebrated from the 6th century onward. These too were Panhellenic Games open to all Greeks, but — unlike the Olympics — they featured musical competitions. In the musical contests of the Nemean games organized in honour of Zeus, and at the Isthmian games held in honour of Poseidon, the victory crown brought glory to its bearer like success in an athletic event or a chariot race. Pindar’s 12th *Pythian* celebrates an aulete victorious at the festival of Apollo in Delphi, staged in the third year of the Olympiad. He won the most prominent event in the games: the *Pythios nomos* performed on a solo wind instrument, in which the musician — in accordance with the meaning of the word *nomos* (custom, law) — had to present Apollo’s fight with the Python in a strictly defined, five-movement work, relying solely on the expressive force of his instrument.

Cities also organized musical competitions as part of religious festivals. The Panathenaea festival of Athens had one day exclusively reserved for musical competitions. Athenian vase-painting constitutes our most important source concerning the 6th- and 5th-century Panathenaea. Since, unlike



in the Panhellenic “crown” games, winners were also awarded a prize of considerable monetary value, accounts were kept by the city. The value of vase paintings as evidence is corroborated by the fact that a list of prizes from around 380 BC mentions by and large the same musical competitions that we encounter on vase paintings.

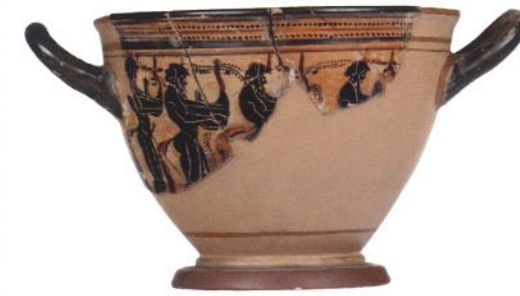
There were at least six musical contests at the Panathenaea. The greatest prize was awarded for *kitharodia*, in which the musician accompanied his own song with a string instrument

called the *kithara*. A contest of string instruments without singing was called *kitharistike*. *Aulodia* was a song sung to the accompaniment of a wind instrument called the *aulos*, which resembled the modern oboe or clarinet. The solo-aulos contest was called *auletike*. There was also an aulos-duet contest, and a contest for unaccompanied recitation of epic poetry: *rhapsodia*.

The calyx krater on display, intact save for the chipped paint, was made around 450 BC. It shows a kithara contest. A youth stands on a podium, one of the most typical features in the iconography of musical contests. The player plucks the strings from behind with the fingers of his left hand, while in his right — although here barely visible — he holds a *plektron* made of bone or metal. Similar scenes also show the singer’s head slightly bent backwards and his mouth open for singing.

An interesting feature of the Budapest krater is the double figure of winged Nike (Victory). Close inspection in raking light reveals that the right-hand Nike-figure holds a crown, and the one on the left a sash. Nike first appears in such scenes around 470 BC. Here the double Nike probably refers to a double victory. Compare a *pelike* in Plovdiv on which two Nike-figures fly towards the winner from both sides, with inscriptions above them mentioning the four games at which he was victorious: the local contests at Marathon, the Panathenaea, and the games at Nemea and the Isthmos. But the two Nike-figures might also be explained by the tradition of symmetrical composition. The great majority of musical contest scenes on vases from the middle of the 6th century BC show such an arrangement. The musician stands in the centre, framed by figures to left and right who are either listeners or judges standing or sitting on chairs. With the appearance of the Nike-figure the iconographical emphasis was laid on the victory as opposed to the performance, which also led to the blurring of the pictorial difference between *kitharodia* and *kitharistike*.

The fragment of a black-figure wine jug (*oinochoe*) exhibited next to the krater was made around 520–510, and may show the winner of a kitharodia contest. But the symmetrical composition of kitharodia scenes means that a figure (like this one) at the edge of the picture, even if the subject is indeed a competition, should rather be interpreted as a judge or a listener. Features more characteristic of the lyre



than of the kithara (the arrangement of the arms and their twisted shape, as well as its position slightly inclined towards the side) may point rather to

a *symposion*, while the instrument is a lyre, mentioned by poets in connection with such occasions, and often played or shown hanging on the wall in drinking scenes on vases. Music and singing were indispensable features of *symposia*. The instrument clearly shows the seven strings standard at the time. A connection between contest and *symposion*, as contexts of performance, is also suggested by the fact that the great majority of scenes with musical contests appear on vase types intended for the *symposion*.

Dramatic and dithyrambic contests presumably evolved from festival choruses. Dithyramb began as a choral song for Dionysus with dance and instrumental accompaniment. The black-figure drinking cup (*skyphos*) dated to around 500 BC and assembled from three larger fragments probably reflects a kind of performance prevalent before the crystallization of dramatic and dithyrambic contests, even though both existed at the time of its creation. A chorus costumed as satyrs is dancing. The satyrs play the old kind of cradle kithara, holding the *plektron* in the right hand, while under both handles of the jar are fragmentary representations of altars which refer to the religious festival context. Altogether, five black-figure scenes of satyr choruses with *kithara* are known. Based on more intact parallel scenes, the Budapest satyr chorus is presumably also singing.

The most frequent accompaniment to choral singing, and the other most important musical instrument in Greek culture, was the double *aulos*. This wind instrument had been widespread in the Mediterranean for millennia. It was one of the basic instruments of Etruscan music, as shown by *symposion* scenes in tomb paintings and sarcophagus reliefs from the 6th and 5th centuries. The Etrusco-Corinthian *alabastron* made around 570–560 is the work of the Rosoni painter. The vase, whose iconography is quite unique, shows an aulos-player. The scene is complemented by a bird and a panther — who give the impression (to a modern observer at least) that they are listening mesmerized to the music. The Etruscan musician was acquired by the Collection of Antiquities as a gift in the spring of 2009.

ANDRÁS KÁRPÁTI

