

XXXIII ESEM - GEORGIA
Ethnomusicology in the 21st Century

Polyphonic Instruments in the Greco-Roman World

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Panel (2) Echoes from Greco-Roman Past: Polyphony in the Classical World

ABSTRACT:

Some years ago, researching about Greco-Roman musical instruments, we were struck by the surprising absence of specialized monographs devoted to some polyphonic musical instruments that were present in the Classical World before the 2nd century BC: bagpipes, launeddas, and polyphonic type asymmetrical double aulos. Two other polyphonic instruments, *pandouras* (lutes) and organs have been well studied, starting more than 50 years ago. For our study we gathered ethnomusicological comparative data from several European archaic populations, and scrutinized available documentary sources, both literary and iconographic. We published reviews of sources for each of these instruments until the end of the Classical World, including: 30 literary and 22 iconographic sources for bagpipes; 14 iconographic sources for launeddas (there are no literary sources for this instrument); 50 iconographic and about 10 literary sources for double aulos with asymmetrical tubes; also, 30 literary and 33 iconographic sources for *pandouras*, and for organs – 42 pagan and 29 Christian literary sources, and about 55 iconographical sources. The detailed analyses of the above-mentioned material (in a recent doctoral thesis and in a series of related specialized publications) allows us to assert that the presence of chords and multiphonic practices in the Greco-Roman ancient world is beyond any doubts. The paper will present a brief selection of the most critical iconographic and literary sources, in order to acknowledge the presence of polyphonic practices in the Greco-Roman world, an aesthetic capacity which had been long neglected in musicological studies from the times of Camerata Bardi, in an obvious disagreement with the available sources about Greco-Roman artistic, technical, and scientific achievements.

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