

Athenaeus of Nafkratis, a unique source
for the study of ancient stringed instruments
Ο Αθήναιος ο Ναυκρατίτης ως μοναδική πηγή
για τη μελέτη αρχαίων εγχόρδων μουσικών οργάνων

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The scope of the paper is to trace the dialogue between ancient Greek literature and ancient Greek music. In particular, I argue that Athenaeus of Nafkratis's *Deipnosophistae* is a sensitive cardinal point for one to study ancient Greek stringed instruments which would have been otherwise unknown to us. Furthermore, the approximately fifty instruments cited in *Deipnosophistae* reflect the musical interaction of the countries of the ancient Greek world. As I will try to show, the Books IV and XIV of *Deipnosophistae* are a wealthy field for the examination of seven stringed instruments: *enneachordon*, *tripous*, *skindapsos*, *klepsiambos*, *iambyke*, *lyrophoenix* and *epigoneion*. Most importantly, the two books are the sole texts which refer to two musical instruments, *enneahordon* and *tripous*.

Athenaeus's *Deipnosophistae* (ca. 2nd century A.D.) consists of fifteen books which provide information about the co-existence of Greeks and Romans, the mutual influence of their civilizations and the musical activity in the ancient world. In particular, I focus on the Books IV and XIV, extended parts of which are dedicated to music. A comparative study of the seven aforementioned musical instruments with other literary texts and archaeological findings aspires to shed new light on the musicological research. Moreover, it aims to show that Athenaeus's work is a unique guide for an exploration of the presence of the seven instruments throughout the centuries, and a description of their origin and form.

In particular, the paper explores:

- *Enneachordon* (ἐννεάχορδον)

As the etymology of his name shows, *enneachordon* is a stringed instrument with nine strings - ἐννέα and χορδή. Athenaeus does not give his reader enough information about it and only mentions that Aristoxenus classified *enneachordon* among the instruments of a foreign origin (IV, 182f). Furthermore, Athenaeus mentions that Phyllis of Delos (XIV, 636b) included *enneachordon* among other chordophones, and that Apollodorus regarded it as obsolete in the second century B.C. (XIV, 636f).

Despite the little evidence about the musical instrument, one can understand that *enneachordon* was an ancient instrument of nine strings. However, what type of instrument was it: an instrument of the family of the lyres or of the harps? One can assume that *enneachordon*'s name is a descriptive term of lyres with nine strings and, as a result, it does not designate an exceptional instrument. Only in Aratum Scholia (269, 7) and Theon of Smyrna (in *De Utilitatae Mathematicae*, 141, 10) mention it to describe the lyre with nine strings. Yet, why Phyllis of Delos ranks it among several harps and Aristoxenus among the instruments of a foreign origin, next to *pektis* and *magadis*? Seen in the light of the other literary sources, I argue that *enneachordon* is a type of a *chordophone* with nine strings, which was imported from the East and became obsolete over the centuries.

- *Klepsiambos* (κλεψιάμβος)

The word *klepsiambos* derives from the composition of the radical κλεψ- of the verb κλέπτω (steal) and the word ἴαμβος (iambus). Thus, one can presume that the term means 'the one who steals the iambus' or perhaps 'the one who hides the iambus'. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the term ἴαμβοι described mocking and satirical poems. Athenaeus indicates the foreign origin of this instrument, according to Aristoxenus (IV, 182f). Moreover, he adds that according to Phyllis of Delos κλεψιάμβοι were the instruments with which the ancient Greeks recited in distorted fashion metrical verses (XIV, 636b). According to Apollodorus, *klepsiambos*, as *enneachordon*, had become rather obsolete in use at his time (XIV, 636f).

Athenaeus testifies us an instrument otherwise unknown. However, he does not provide information about its shape nor its particularities. Information about *klepsiambos* can only be provided by Pollux (IV, 59) classifies it among the stringed instruments. Hesychius (s.v. κλεψιάμβοι), however, indicates that κλεψιάμβοι were certain songs of Alcman.

As a result, one can make only assumptions about *klepsiambos*. In his *Greek Musical Writings: I The Musician and his Art*, Andrew Barker argues that the term *klepsiambos*, as *iambyque*, probably refers to special uses of familiar instruments and not to specific instruments. What can be argued for sure is that *klepsiambos* accompanied recitative. Drawing on its name, I would also like to suggest, that *klepsiambos* was used to accompany the songs of Alcman which were also called *κλεψιάμβοι*.

- *Iambyque* (ἰαμβύκη)

Iambyke derives from ἰαμβος, a noun which signifies a metrical foot, a verse or a literary genre. Moreover, Athenaeus (XIV, 622b) uses the word to describe the songs sung by buffoons and mummers called *ἀντοκάβαλοι*.

Athenaeus mentions that *iambyque*, according to Phillis of Delos, was the instrument with which the ancient Greeks sang the ἰαμβοί (XIV, 636b). In addition, he says that, according to Eupolis, the author of *The Helots*, Gnessipus invented serenades for adulterers held *iambyque* and *trigonon* to sing and lure their wives (XIV, 638e).

Athenaeus does not describe the instrument in detail. Thus, drawing on other literary texts one can only make assumptions about its form and use. Pollux (IV, 59) classifies it among the stringed instruments, while Hesychius (s.v. ἰαμβῦκαι) describes it as a triangle instrument with which they sung *iambes*. Suda (s.v. ἰαμβῦκαι) and other lexicographers also provide the same information.

That said, I argue that it is possible to assume a resemblance of *iambyque* with *sambyque* (triangular harp), although to what Photius claims (s.v. ἰαμβῦκαι). One could further argue that *iambyque* resembles to *trigonon*. Still, as I have already suggested, for Athenaeus the two instruments are not the same. In his *Greek Musical Writings: I The Musician and his Art*, Andrew Barker suggested that these two terms refer to particular features of familiar instruments and not to distinct instruments. The paper suggests that *iambyque* is a triangular instrument used to accompany *iambes*.

- *Skindapsos* or *Kindapsos* (σκινδαψός or κινδαψός)

The term *skindapsos* is probably of oriental origin and defines not only the musical instrument but also an ivy like plant.

Athenaeus classifies *skindapsos* among the instruments of a foreign origin, citing Aristoxenus (IV, 182f). For Athenaeus, *skindapsos* had four strings, as parodist Matro (IV, 183a) claimed, and was of large size, as big as the lyre. Moreover, Athenaeus cites Theopompus of Colophon who testified that the instrument was made of withes of a willow. Athenaeus also mentions that it was played by a man (IV, 183b), although Matro claimed that it was previously played by a woman. Yet, Athenaeus testifies the existence of the *skindapsos* among the stringed instruments in a workshop of a lyra-maker in the 4th century B.C. according to Anaxilas (IV, 183b). In this light, one should therefore not ignore the fact that two specialists in music, Phyllis of Delos and Aristoxenus, classify *skindapsos* among other stringed instruments (IV, 182f, XIV, 636b).

We have already argued that Athenaeus is a significant and unique source for the study of this instrument. Indeed, Pollux (IV, 59) briefly mentions the term *skindapsos* ranking it among the stringed instruments. Aristotle (*Politica*, VIII, 6, 7) and Strabo (X, 471) indicate its foreign origin.

However which was its shape? Athenaeus describes it as ‘close to the lyre’ and Hesychius ‘close to the zither’. In *L’instrument de musique dans la céramique de la Grèce antique: études d’organologie*, Daniel Paquette classifies it in the family of the lutes. Annie Bélis examines the instrument held by the Thracian musician Thamyras in Greek and Roman ceramics to argue that the instrument illustrated is *skindapsos*. Thus, she suggests that the instrument was imported from the East, and describes it as mi-lyre and mi-guitar. A look at ceramics will attempt to highlight the particular qualities of the instrument.

An examination of Athenaeus’s *Deipnosophistae* in the light of other literary texts shows that the most likely definition of *skindapsos* is that of a ‘mixed’ instrument.

• *Epigoneion* (ἐπιγόνειον)

Epigoneion is a compound word which derives from the adverb ἐπί-on and γόνυ-knee. The etymology of the word defines the way of playing and holding this instrument. Athenaeus mentions *epigoneion* only once. Citing Juba, Athenaeus reveals that in Juba’s days (1st century B.C.), *epigoneion* was an upright harp - ψαλτήριον ὄρθιον – which preserved the name of its inventor Epigonos (XIV, 183d), a musician of the 6th century B.C. from Ambracia of Epirus.

Deipnosophistae show that *epigoneion* was classified in the family of harps. Moreover, one can assume that it had a different form in the ages of Juba. Thus, drawing on the etymology of *epigoneion*, several commentators presume that it was probably held horizontally, placed on the knees of the player. Shortly, in his *Musik des Alterums*, Curt Sachs argues that the instrument was a wooden and horizontal zither in the shape of a table. In addition, Pollux (IV, 59) mentions that it had forty strings. Consequently, according to him, it was one of the biggest instruments of antiquity although he was not clear about the characteristics of the instrument were.

Therefore, one can argue that the term *epigoneion* defined a grand instrument *polychorde*, that it was played without a plectrum (*ψαλτήριον*).

- *Lyrophoenix* (*λυροφοῖνιξ*)

Λυροφοῖνιξ is a compound word deriving from the nouns *λύρα* and *φοῖνιξ*. It describes a stringed instrument of a foreign origin, which is directly related to the instrument *phoenix*, a foreign instrument and more specifically Phoenician, according to Athenaeus (IV, 182f and XIV, 636b). In *Deipnosophistes* Athenaeus cites that according to Juba *lyrophoenix* is a Syrian invention and is the same instrument with *sambyque* (IV, 175 d-e; IV, 183d).

Although certain commentators, including Paquette, associate *lyrophoenix* to *sambyque*, like Athenaeus, others associate it to *phorminx* and *phoenicion*. However, Pollux (IV, 59) mentions the diminutive *λυροφοινίκιον* to classify it among the stringed instruments and differentiate it from *phoenix*. As for Hesychius (s.v. *λυροφοῖνιξ*), *λυροφοινίκιον* is a kind of guitar.

To resume, we could designate it as an instrument combining the usual shape of the *lyre* and the *phoenix*, according to the etymology of its name. Otherwise, why does Pollux differentiate it from *phoenix*? In this way, the name *lyrophoenix* describes in details, the family of the instrument. However, we could also suppose that this term could refer to a Phoenician lyre, with particular characteristics, and for this reason a different name is attributed to it.

- *Trirous* (*τρίπους*)

Trirous means ‘with three feet’ (*τριῶς – πούς*), and defines apart from vessels, tables and cauldrons, a musical instrument according to Athenaeus.

In Book XIV, 637, b-c Athenaeus mentions that for Artemon, *tripous* was a rare musical instrument, invented by Pythagoras of Zakynthos, a musician of the 5th century B.C. *Tripous* quickly became obsolete and was totally forgotten because people find it difficult to handle it and for various other unknown reasons. In addition, Artemon gives an interesting designation of it. For him, *tripous* resembled the Delphic tripod, from which derives its name and it could be used as a triple guitar. The three legs rested on a base which turned easily, like the bases constructed for revolving stools; the three spaces between, from leg to leg, were tightly girded by the strings; at the top of its space a cross-arm was fixed with string-tighteners, while the upper adornment joined together the cauldron with the resonators. As a result, *tripous* had a more elegant appearance and produced a loud sound (XIV, 637, c-d). Artemon continues to affirm that Pythagoras tuned each guitar in three modes, the Dorian, the Phrygian and the Lydian. In this way, the player had the opportunity, by turning with his foot the base of the instrument, to play with the plectrum at any harmony he wanted. This gave the impression to the listener that *tripous* was not one instrument but three guitars, all tuned differently. However, although this instrument was greatly admired, it was fallen into disuse after Pythagoras's death (XIV, 637, d-f).

To sum up, Athenaeus touches upon the question of rare instruments, which have disappeared quickly, like *enneachordon* and *klepsiambos*. In fact, he provides no other information about *tripous*. Did our ancestors regard *tripous* as a distinct musical instrument? Based on *Deipnosophistae*, I argue that it is probable that our ancestors used this term to designate a system of three guitars each tuned in the Dorian, Phrygian and Lydian mode, which can also explain the lack of evidence.

In my paper, I attempted to present the stringed instruments testified only by Athenaeus as well as those for which he is the most significant source. Furthermore, this study sheds new light on the musical interaction of the countries in the ancient Greek world, given that the majority of the instruments illustrated are oriental. The contribution of Athenaeus is not only limited to stringed instruments but is greater since it expands to all instruments and covers every aspect of ancient Greek music. I would like to close my paper with the suggestion that a profound study of *Deipnosophistae* and the registration of all information concerning music would be a considerable tool for the study of ancient Greek music.

Handouts will be distributed.