

## RELIEF SCULPTURE OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FROM ANCIENT GERASA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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### Abstract

*GERASA, in north Jordan, dating to the Roman period, has been found to contain impressive and well - Musicians and Musical instruments carving on architecture elements (pedestal or candelabrum base). The Gerasa carving expertly combined motifs with a long tradition, some going back to the Roman imperial age and earlier. This study is concerned with the musical instruments appear on architecture elements. The article provides a study of the musical instruments that can be classified into two main types: Aulos and Kithara. Purpose of this paper is to examine the details of those instruments and compare them with other musical instruments from the Roman period, where influences in design within and between regions can be seen. Wherever possible, comparative examples have been chosen from sites that are relatively nearby to establish an overview of musical instruments in the region, but also to distinguish the influences coming from Asia Minor and other areas.*

**Keywords:** Roman period; Jordan; Gerasa; Musicians players; Ancient musical instruments; Aulos; Kithara; Carving; Ancient Italy; Asia Minor

### Introduction

The different arts usually share the same message, the disparity in media and expression; it ends up being visualized in the screen of mental perception and sensory storage. Whether it is spatial or temporal, all are embodied after being connected through materials and various media as formations aesthetic, in the sense that the rhythms and emptiness meet as though they are held by impulses aesthetic. The arts are all meant for aesthetic pleasure as determined by Immanuel Kant, as «Art is a work aimed at pure aesthetic pleasure» [1-3], the difference between beauty in life and beauty in art is that the first is not human made, while the second is human made. There are many commonalities between the artistic work related to the visual arts, the musical work and theater work, for example, harmony and rhythm can be terms which considered essential of both painting and music, and which are often used when mentioning the characteristics of a painting or a particular arts work. Early musical instruments have appeared in the Hohle Fels cave in Germany's Swabian Jura, near Tübingen, which dates to approximately 35,000 years ago [4-6]. After that, many different musical instruments have

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appeared, whether in those civilizations or later such as Greece, Roman, Byzantine and until modern times.

### ***Purpose of the study***

The aims of this study are to document, describe, and reveals musical instruments that appeared on some architectural elements carving on limestone in the Southern Theater at Gerasa during the Roman period. Arts have appeared in Jordan of various kinds, and the focus is on musical instruments carving on architectural elements because of its cultural dimension and civilization was reflected on the religious aspect beside the cultural one. In spite of the few examples that appeared in Jordan, it is obvious that musical instruments can be classified into two main types: aulos and kithara. Musical instruments appeared throughout different eras seems to be made and shaped from multiple natural materials such as wood, plants, animal intestines, hair, bone and horns. This study includes relief sculpture of musical instruments.

### ***Musical instruments on limestone (aulos player)***

Expeditions and explorations reveals that the earliest aulos came from Keros in the Cycladic Islands (National Archaeological Museum, Athens), which dated back between 2800-2300 BC [7], where aulos players is carved on marble. Accordingly, the aulos appeared and seems to be developed during the Greek period, and many examples of drawings / bas-relief sculptures from that period can be find. Evidences of other musical instruments and musicians, but especially aulos, are craved in a stone came that from Cyprus in a statuette of limestone, there are three main locations, the first one came from “Temple of Arnathus”, dating back to the first quarter of the six century BC, the second one came from the Sanctuary of “Golgoi-Ayios Photios”, which dates back to the first half of the six century B.C. [8-9], while the third one appeared in the West of the temple at “Golgoi- Photios”, which dates back to the second quarter of the six century BC [10-12]. All examples are resemble and craved of the limestone, the aulos also appeared on marble bas-relief sculpture from Mantinea, which dates back to 335 BC, attributed to the circle of Praxiteles (Athens, National Museum, inv. no. 215) [13].

The musical instruments aulos appeared during of the roman period such as found in the architectural elements of the Southern Theatre at Gerasa, where can be find an inscription of aulos player which is carved on the front of two a Corinthian pedestals of limestone located in both sides of the Sothern Theatre at Gerasa (Fig. 1), which dates to the first century AD.

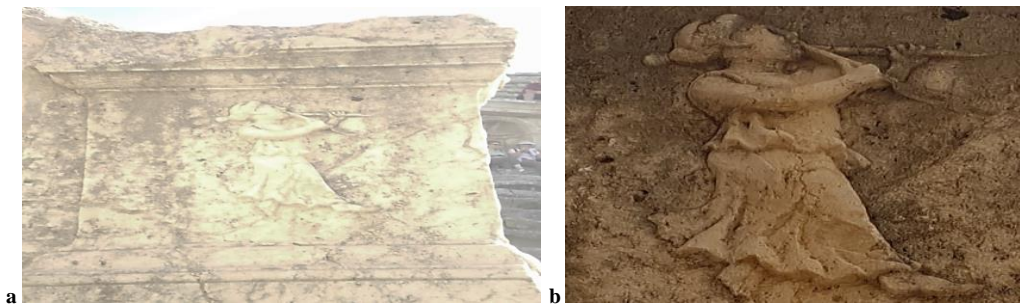


**Fig. 1.** View southern theatre, Gerasa, location of the Roman Musicians and Musical instruments

The first pedestal is located the left side of the theater, while the second is located in the right side of the theater. We find here drawings / bas-relief sculptures of musicians that inclouds a drawing of a woman and a man craved on both side of the architectural pedestals.

*A woman playing aulos, Southern Theater*

The pedestal is located in the left side of the theater, where can be finding a bas-relief sculpture of a woman playing aulos (Fig. 2a and b), she wears a chiton with short sleeves that are buttoned and thick pleats over the chest and the lower legs. In general, the aulos is a woodwind instrument and usually consists of a double pipe, one of them is horizontal, while the second angles of divergence breathing to about thirty degrees. It seems the same that design of aulos especially carved in the architectural elements is rear be found in the region, can be in parallel with other locations from the Roman period.



**Fig. 2** (a) A woman playing aulos, Southern Theater (photographs by the author);  
(b) a detail a woman playing aulos, Southern Theater, Gerasa (photographs by the author)

Moreover, the aulos continued to appear later on inscriptions and stone carvings, especially during the Roman period, where can be finding some examples similar to those found at Gerasa. An abundant sample of those examples are mostly installed in museums, where can be compared a woman playing aulos at Gerasa with other examples from roman provinces. One example came from a bas-relief sculpture of a woman playing Aulos is to be found in a sarcophagus, which dates back to the Roman period (Fig. 3) [14].



**Fig. 3.** Woman playing aulos, Vatican Museum



**Fig. 4.** Woman playing aulos  
(National Archaeological Museum – Madrid)

Another example is found from Osuna, now in National Archaeological Museum in Madrid (Fig. 4), which dates back to II<sup>nd</sup> - III<sup>rd</sup> century AD [15], the sculpture shows the woman playing aulos wearing a tunic with a double braid around her head.

*A man playing Aulos, Southern Theater*

In the pedestal located in the right side of the theater, can be finding a sculpture of a man playing the aulos (Fig. 5), which consists of a double pipe, one of them is horizontal, while the other is angled with divergence up to about thirty degrees.



**Fig. 5.** A man playing aulos (right side), Gerasa

The aulos players carving in the architectural elements are rare of the region and anywhere. However, some sites dating back to the roman period contain musical instruments similar to those found in Gerasa, for examples, can be comparing three examples from ancient Italy, the first one from the Horti Sallustiani in Rome (Fig. 6), which dates back to 40-30 BC [16-19], here, a satyr wearing what was known as “pardalis” on his left shoulder and playing the aulos similar to those found in Gerasa. The sculpture of the aulos player is carved on pentelic marble, while in the case of the Gerasa it is carved on the limestone.



**Fig. 6.** A man playing aulos – Villa Borghese/ Louvre Museum

The second one came from the Villa Quintiliana on the Via Appia, in the south of Rome (Fig. 7), which dates back to 100 AD [20], here satyr playing aulos and wearing a pardalis on his left shoulder.



**Fig.7.** A man playing aulos – Via Appia/ British Museum



The third example is found near the Tomb of Caecilia Metella, Via Appia at Rome (Fig. 8), dates back to 110-130 AD [21], here, can be seeing a procession with Dionysus and Ariadne (left) on a wagon pulled by two panthers ("a panther chariot"), led by pan, satyrs and maenads playing music and dancing. Also, the relief on a marble closure slab of a sarcophagus-like wall grave.



**Fig. 8.** A man playing aulos – Caecilia Metella / Altes Museum, Berlin

The scene of the man playing aulos appear on the front of the sarcophagus of the Gymnasiarch Gerostratos with dionysiac relief, made of marble in Beirut, Lebanon (Fig. 9), dating to the II<sup>nd</sup> century AD [22].



**Fig. 9.** A man playing aulos / Istanbul Archaeological Museum

The musical instruments known in Asia Minor, can be finding one example came from the Vedius Gymnasium at Ephesus (Fig. 10), which dates back to the roman period [23], here, showing Dionysus and his thiasos visiting the "athenian actor Ikarios.



**Fig. 11.** A man playing aulos / Izmir Archaeological Museum

Ancient peoples developed myths and stories about the origin and emergence of music and musical instruments, making them gifts of the Gods. They attributed with the innovation of some musical instruments to certain Gods. Thus, music had a privileged position among people since ancient times. Music and musical instruments have become part of the heritage that peoples cherish. Musical melodies were ranging between oligo-chordic, tetrachord, and pentatonic, thus, the vocal range was limited in tones, according to the nature of the small and medium-sized musical instruments used in that era, for example, number of tones produced by the harp and the kithara usually did not exceed five tones, as the number of their strings was limited to four or five, and rarely it was up to of seven strings, and its' tones are produced by the hitting the strings rather than plucking. Therefore, the music of that period was distinguished by the fact that the sounds of the musical instruments had a faint color, and this was reflected in the character of the music which was described by calmness and moderation, as well as slow rhythms, and this aligned with the description of peoples' life in that era, and it goes with the funerals' rituals and reverence.

Music was one of the necessities of life, where people dedicated some kind of occasional music, so they had invocations to Dionysus and accolades to Apollo and hymns to each one of their Gods. Their songs, where most likely labor songs done by the men and the social songs done by women, all of those were singing songs whose fortune was not as good as the songs of Semenides, but they invented a type of singing that emerged from the depth of philosophy and the complexity of the composition, which are the two motives that began to establish an advance and a new type of music. In every celebration there was a place for a choir singing, and in mostly all cities there where a group that would hold, from time to time, competitions of choir singing. In churches or temples there was no evidence of (solo singing) except for what happened in the later centuries when the accompanying voice was five tones higher than the voice or lower than it to this extent. Musical instruments were simple, and the fundamentals of musical grouping on which they were based on were the same as those on which they are built today: percussions, winds, and strings. As for percussions, the instruments were not widespread, whereas and the flute remained commonly used in Athens. It had a separate mouthpiece and pierced with holes for fingering ranging from two to seven notes in which dimples can be placed to adjust the pitch of the sound. Some musicians use the double flute. And quoting from "Boznias" where he says; music of the flute was usually a handle that was always used in burial chants and elegies [24-27], and to produce musical melodies from this musical instrument, a person must blow in both tubes and at the same time, where the required musical sound is produced through this process and by controlling the position of the fingers placing them on the holes of the musical instrument (Figs. 12 and 13).

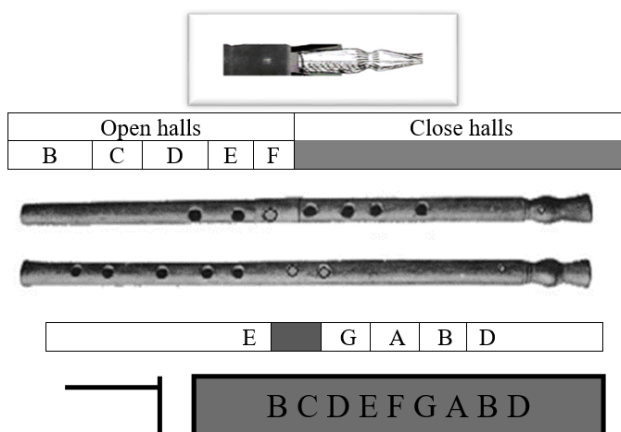


Fig. 12. Hypotonic mode

One of the ways of musical notation for this musical instrument is as follows.



Fig. 13. Notes and scales in aulos

As for the string instruments, playing them was limited to plucking the strings with fingers or the pick, and the player used to be standing in upright possession while playing. There are different types of string instruments, and in sizes of small and large, but they were in essence generally one thing consisting of four or five strings made of animals' intestines and stretched on a bridge over a resonating body of metal or a tortoise shell [28]. The impact of the musical doctrine on all that civilization left us in terms of literary works and artistic masterpieces that won our admiration, especially in the statues of: Homer, Sophocles, sculptures of Phidiasin, Praxiteles, and others. But the interest of the Greeks in architecture and sculpture, and the union of words with music remained until the sixteenth century when the instrumental music appeared that was performed purely independent without accompanying words, which were nevertheless playing old lyrical melodies where musical instruments started to perform relatively as of a human voice. The most prominent of these models is the "Hymn of Apollo", which was developed around the year 300 BC, and its separate parts were discovered in the Temple of Delphi, and then reconnected according to the logical context during the year 1893 AD [29].

#### *Musical instruments (kithara)*

The kithara is one of the musical string instruments used throughout the ages and was associated with celebrations in general. It seems that the oldest (kithara) in this civilization came from Ur in Mesopotamian through the excavations in the royal tombs, which dates to 2500 BC [30, 31]. The kithara player also appeared in Egyptian civilization, for example, there are complete sets of drawings on tomb walls that include drawings of musicians and musical instruments, as those found on the walls of the tomb of Djoserkarsenb and Tomb of Nakht in Teba, the two tombs are dated to the XVII<sup>th</sup> Dynasty of the modern Kingdom [32, 33], there, it was found evidences of girls playing on both oud and kithara. In ancient Greece, the decoration of Greek ceramics, for example, used images of musical instruments, Amphora by the Berlin painter with kitharode, a singer is given his instrument, the kithara, which dates to 490 BC [34]. There are two distinct basic forms of the kithara; the first form is a flat-based type, while the second is the earlier which had a round base such as the one that is sculptured on a stone in the Southern Theater at Gerasa (Fig. 14). It is in the lower buttresses of the Cavea (seating area) left side of Ocstra, here, it seems that the woman is playing four strings kithara, wearing a chiton with short sleeves that are buttoned and thick pleats over the chest and the lower legs.

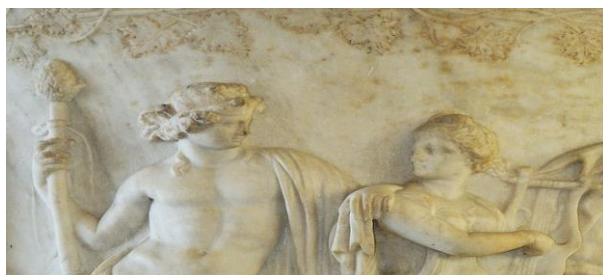
The design of the form of the kithara back to XIV<sup>th</sup> century BC came from Crate and was found in a painting on the Hagia Triada Sarcophagus [35]. It continued to appear during the

Greco-Roman era. It seems the kithara player carved in the architectural elements is rare in the reign and other areas especially a kithara with round base.



**Fig. 14.** Woman playing kithara/ Southern Theater – Gerasa.

In general, it can compare the kithara player of the Southern Theater with other locations that are carved in limestone and marble from the Roman period. There are some locations that included a scene of kithara players like those found in Gerasa, and we also find that some of examples came as funeral scenes carved in sarcophagus, while in case at Gerasa they are an architectural element (candelabrum base). There are some locations in Italy that showed a kithara player, for example, from the Borghese Vase, Pentelic marble, and Attic work from the Horti Sallustiani at Rome (Fig. 15), which date back to 40-30 B.C. [36-40], here, it can observe Dionysus wearing a Mitra and holding a thyrsus while Ariadne is playing the kithara.



**Fig. 15.** Man playing the kithara/ Horti Sallustiani – Rome (Daru Gallery, Louvre Museum)

Another example, is in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 16), which dates back to the third quarter of 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD [41-43] muses and the sirens.



**Fig. 16.** Woman playing the kithara (Metropolitan Museum of Art)



Finally, such as funeral scenes with kithara player is are to be found at the British Museum, the kithara player is craved on Lenos sarcophagus (Fig. 17), which date back to 250-280 AD [44].



**Fig. 17.** Woman playing the kithara (British Museum)

These statues are considered a source of inspiration for some kinds of arts such as poetry, storytelling, music, and theater. They are the daughters of the great goddess Zeus which are represented in nine statues. It was found in the pool of the eastern baths in Gerasa, and the names of these statues are: Calliope, Urania, Euteribi, Cleo, Erato (music), Polyhymenia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, and the Statue of Thalia, as found in the Great Temple of Zeus around 450 AD, which was considered the largest at that time in honor of the god Zeus Olympius, and was built over the original sanctuary of Zeus and overlooks the public square, and recently, six of them in the Museum of Bell Antiquities and two in the Gerasa Visitor Center (Figs. 18 and 19).



**Fig. 18.** Statues, Gerasa Museum



**Fig. 19.** Erato statue (music) - Gerasa Museum

Erato was one of the nine *mousai* (muses), the goddesses of music, singing, and dancing, and was named muse of erotic poetry and mime, and represented with a lyre. Her name means "lovely" or "beloved" from the Greek word *eratos* [45]. According to the legend, Erato and her sisters came into being when Zeus, the king of the gods, and Mnemosyne, the Titan goddess of memory, laid together in nine consecutive nights. As a result, one of the nine muses was conceived on each of these nights. In some representations, Erato is shown holding a golden arrow which is a symbol of *eros* (love or desire), the feeling that she inspired in mortals. At times, it was depicted holding a torch alongside the Greek god of love, Eros. It was also often shown holding a lyre or a kithara. Erato is depicted most of the time with its eight sisters and they were said to have been very close with each other. They spent most of their time together, singing, dancing and making merry [46].

## Conclusions

This study shows that Jordan is an important point of reference for the study of ancient arts of all kinds, especially during the roman and byzantine studies. This study used visual arts in highlighting the musical arts by portraying the musicians with their distinctive instruments. This level of skill of carving musicians and musical instruments may be inferred from the refinement of the final products, which are evidently of a high level of technique as measured by repetition, similarity, and uniformity. Comparative study of the musicians and musical instruments has increased our understanding of the relationship between Gerasa and other roman sites and thus a comparison of the artistic level of the artists in Gerasa with those at other sites. Similar elements have been found in other sites in the Levant, and of particular interest are the similarities between decorative elements found at Gerasa and several sites in Italy and modern Turkey, as well as in the broader territory of roman domination. The importance of the musical instruments that emerged through the carving on the architectural elements in the southern theater at Gerasa appears to be the only carried out on these architectural elements and this is evident through the comparative study. It was found all the scenes of musicians and musical instruments carved on the sarcophagus represent funerary scenes, while in case of Gerasa it seems the scenes of musician's players it has relations with theater and religious performances. The authors hope that these findings will contribute to the sphere of this significant phenomenon.

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