

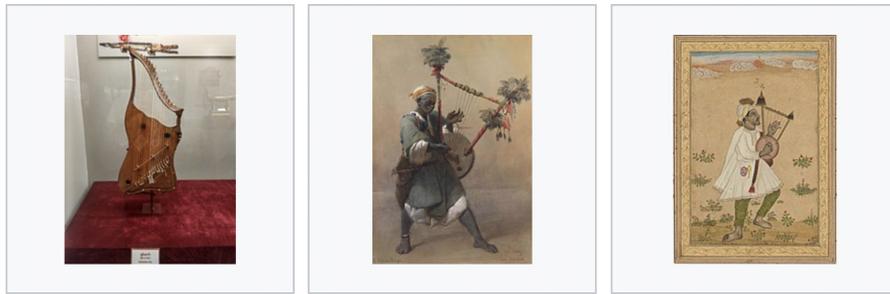
# MUSC 115 Response #1

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**Q:** Pick one or several of the early instruments from Mesopotamia, Ancient Greece or Rome and discuss their features, associations and sound. Give examples of traditional equivalent instruments from other cultures.

*Response.* **Lyre.** In a nutshell, lyre is characterized by its strings, a yoke, two arms, and a crossbar, more or less resembling the appearance of a harp. There are numerous variants, three of which are shown below. It is believed that various forms of lyres were developed from 2700 B.C. to 700 B.C., and scholars typically divide them into the **eastern lyres** and the **western lyres**.



Left: Burmese lyre; mid: Tanbūra (Cairo, 1858); right: African Lyre (1600s) [source].

(1) Eastern lyres originated from Mesopotamia; they are the oldest documented lyres that date back to 2700 B.C. They are characterized by flat base sound boxes, unlike their eastern lyre counterpart. There are four types of eastern lyres. **Bull lyres** is the oldest kind, and they have a bull's head on one side. **Thick lyres** originated from Egypt at around 2000 B.C. and Anatolia from around 1600 B.C. They have a bigger sound box and consequently more strings. Variants have also been unearthed in Mesopotamia, dating back to 1900-1500 B.C. **Thin lyres** have a smaller soundbox but have their resonator open, thereby creating "sound holes." They date back to 2500 B.C. in Syria, with variants found in Egypt, Samaria, and so on. Here is one example (more specifically, a kinnor). Finally, **giant lyres** requires two players. They from Iraq dates back to 2500 B.C. and was popularized in ancient Egypt at around 1300 B.C.

(2) Western lyres have round-based sound boxes and originated from syria and Anatolia in around 3000 B.C., but they were far less popular than the flat-based lyres. They died out by 1750 B.C. but reappeared in western ancient Greece from 1400 B.C. to 700 B.C. These lyres were also called ancient Greek **kithara**, and the arms were hollow extensions of the body.