CHAPTER 2

Religion and Ritual in Early Greek Lyric

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It is hard to overstate how much the modern mindset differs from the ancient in the matter of religion. Today, instead of praying to healing gods, or performing rituals in iatromantic cults if we are ill, we call on all the vast repertoire of modern medicine, confident that science and technology will have the answer to our malady. Today, when we enter an athletic competition, we rely on dietetics, training, and good equipment instead of prayers to Hermes or Iris. Today, when a state deliberates on an international crisis, it does not ask Delphi or Dodona or another oracle for advice, but rather it calls on all possible experts and, in a democracy, it debates in the relevant houses, before it, for example, imposes sanctions or declares war on another country. No need to labor the point. The old gods are dead, science and technology rule. Since most classicists—I mean teachers and students—at modern universities pursue the scientific way of thinking, it is hard for us to make the imaginative leap necessary to understand what an ancient prayer, hymn, or ritual really meant to the individual praying or the group singing.[1] They certainly would not have done it if they thought it was wasted breath. So our approach can be either that of the interested observer or we can attempt somehow to step inside the ancient mindset. It is in fact the old dichotomy of the anthropologist: emic (the perspective from within the social group) or etic (the perspective of the observer). The external observer of a rite from a different culture can interpret the rite from his point of view, while the person performing the rite may have a quite different "reason."[2] We do not need to go too far down this road. Suffice it to remind readers that in the religious lyric we will be discussing there is very much an emic and an etic standpoint.

1 Even if someone is a practicing Christian, the "pagan" gods seem merely quaint. There have been classicists who have expressed sympathy with the ancient gods: Jane Harrison, for example, Robert Graves (in a way), Walter F. Otto.

2 An example: the annual climbdown from a cliff face to harvest gannet eggs by the Faraoh Islanders may be explained by them (emic) by the desire to harvest nourishing eggs; the outsider (etic) will prefer to explain the ritual as some kind of *rite de passage*, as similar eggs may be obtained from hens. Cf. Morris 1993: 15–45.

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But what is this religion which we wish to discuss in conjunction with archaic and classical lyric poetry? The only earlier sources to survive are the epics of Homer and Hesiod, together with fragments of the so-called epic cycle. It is probable that lyric poetry coexisted with epic, but as we map existing texts, lyric comes "after" epic. And before the two epic giants there existed a society in Greece which we can only investigate through archaeology, including inscribed clay tablets which speak to us to a very limited degree. Philology on the other hand has shown how Homeric epic developed over the centuries as an oral form of poetry with its roots in Mycenaean Greece.[3] Many of the gods we encounter in literature recur in the Mycenaean linear B tablets.[4] So the first datum is the *age* of many of the gods and their cults which form the background to literary religion. In Homer we see the gods assembled and conversing;[5] we see individual gods taking individual action on earth, and humans conversely engaged in a number of actions directed toward winning divine attention and favor: praying, sacrificing, consulting oracles, singing hymns (on Achilles' Shield), burying the dead with elaborate rituals, and so on. When the lyric poets begin their work the whole *apparatus* exists. They draw on tradition, personalize it, select from it.[6] Did the poets—and their audiences—"believe" in the gods which appear in their poems, or were they already mere literary abstractions as in English classical verse? The question of belief is often brushed aside by modern scholars who maintain that Greek religion up to and including the Classical period was a question of doing, saying, but not believing. Personally I side with scholars who take the opposing view that there is no point going to great lengths to worship a god if one does not believe in his (or her) power. Is it possible to imagine that Sappho's heart-rending appeals to Aphrodite were directed at a literary abstraction? I think not.[7]

Another important point to make at the outset is the communality of Greek lyric. Choral lyric obviously involved a number of interested parties, as we shall see: the poet, chorus, listeners, and divine "audience," to whom the performance was addressed. But monodic lyric no doubt involved a group experience as well: apart from the singer (*aoidos*) there was often, we imagine, a group of male or female companions (*hetairoi* or *hetairai*) who may have joined in, too, if they knew the tune. This means that the poet was always composing *for* this performative context, and was not merely expressing feelings in private.[8] This is a very important principle for Aeolic lyric (Sappho and Alcaeus) because sometimes scholars have tried to read their works as if they were private diary entries. So Greek lyric is much more *public* than modern poetry for the reason that it had to make itself understood to its listeners, that it had to be memorable both for performer and listener, and, above all in our case, it had to deliver an unequivocal message to the gods. There was not only a "song culture" in Greece at this time, there was also a hymn and prayer culture.[9] The vast majority of lyric compositions,

3 Latacz 2004.

4 See Burkert 1987.

5 Minchin 2011: 17–35.

6 See further Hägg 1996.

7 One may consult Versnel's essay "Did the Greeks Believe in Their Gods?" (2011: 539–559). He argues against the "ritualists" that there *was* such a thing as "believe in the gods" in ancient Greece: p. 552: "On the other hand, the fact that Greek religion was basically a matter of ritual action in no way implies the consequence that Greeks did not believe in (the existence) of their gods;" same page: "Stating that Greek religion is ritualist and at the same time that 'the Athenians did not believe in their gods' is either nonsense or a kind of sophistry run wild."

8 Cf. Depew 2000: 59–79; 254–263.

9 Furley and Bremer 2001.

whether cult hymns or less overtly hieratic compositions, from this period are lost.[10] We should beware of generalizing from the scant remains, but this "congregational" aspect of the poetry should be kept in mind.[11]

Religion itself as a thing in its own right did not exist either in the archaic or the classical period. The Greeks had no one word for it, as scholars never tire of pointing out.[12] No need to rehearse that argument. The converse of this truism, however, is that religion was everywhere and intertwined with everything, as we shall see. The Greeks did not separate religion from other activities, but included it in the sense that the gods and their *entourage* made themselves felt, and demanded recognition, in all walks of life. It might be true to say that the gods then were as omnipresent and omnipotent as the Internet today. As this spreads its tentacles into almost all our activities nowadays, and watches over our shoulder, so then the Greeks believed they lived and prospered by the grace of the gods and suffered, and died, by the will of the gods. Nevertheless it is important to remember that at this time "religion" was organized only in the sense that the early *polis* began to choose its priests, that is, the functionaries who would supervise sacrifice on the various civic altars, and the times that was appropriate. Otherwise there were many freelancers: prophets, seers, purveyors of the Mysteries, healers, and so on.[13] They were a motley crew, as Aristophanes liked to point out later.[14] Their reputation was, no doubt, predicated on their apparent success. The Greek army attacking Troy had its Chalcas; the Spartans at Plataea their Teisamenos; the Ten Thousand in Xenophon's *Anabasis* their Silanos (1.7.18), or generally "prophets" (4.3.17 μάντεις).[15] Likewise, holy scripture had never been organized into a unity like the books of the Bible; there were sacred texts such as those composed by hexameter poets such as Orpheus, Musaios, Olen, but these did not form a coherent unity, and nobody tried to force them into such. Thus "religion" did not exist as a recognized body of sacred scripture. All these people and entities vied with each other for the truth,[16] as, indeed, did the gods. There was competition and rivalry among the gods, as there was among holy men on earth. True, as Herodotus says, Homer and Hesiod did their best to give the Greeks a theogony, and organize their worship into something like a coherent system (2.52), but their works were still *poetry* and nothing like holy law, or catechism.

So when the gods and ritual are invoked in lyric poetry we should bear this in mind. The poets were calling on a vast conglomerate of traditional *hiera* (lit. "sacred things"), by no means to be scorned in its *numen* (lit. "holy power"), but not part of what might be called a system politic. The famous case of Sappho fr. 1 Campbell takes the form of a genuine private prayer to Aphrodite with many features of the ancient prayer-hymn;[17] we would, I think,

10 As Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1921 said: "Die gottesdienstliche Poesie der alten Zeit ist verloren."

11 As (young) people today share on social media lyric poets then shared in their group of flesh-and-blood friends.

12 For more cf. Garland 1994.

13 Dignas and Trampedach 2008.

14 For example in the *Birds* 959–992 (chresmologue); *Peace* 1046–1126 (Hierokles); *Knights* 961–1111 (Kleon and Sausage-Seller vie with pseudo-oracles).

15 See Flower 2008.

16 An interesting testimony to this at the turn of the fifth century is the Derveni Papyrus, which is all about the "correct" interpretation of an Orphic poem.

17 Furley and Bremer 2001: no. 4.1.

certainly admit this piece to the category "private religion," but it is equally certainly not a cult hymn in the sense of a song repeatedly sung by a congregation engaged in cult worship. Or we might take several of Alcaeus' fragments in which recognized gods are called upon, again, with many features of the traditional hymn, but with a recognizable purpose of calling the gods' support for Alcaeus' faction (his *stasis*) on Lesbos.[18] Again, definitely religion, but hardly "official" worship. Later on, some genuine cult hymns do indeed come to light. One of the most interesting is the Cretan Hymn for the Great Kouros.[19] Its precise dating is a matter of debate but it *may* be very old. The inscription which transmits it to us is, admittedly, much later. But this indeed is genuine cult lyric, with a recognizable lyric meter (ionics) and a refrain (*ephymnion*) which no doubt rang out when the congregation sang it. Some other "authentic" cult hymns are equally late: the inscriptions on the Athenian Treasure-House at Delphi recording hymnic compositions by Limenaios and Athenaios are hymns to Apollo in ionic meter for the ritual known as Pythais (a procession from Athens to Delphi).[20] Again, clear cases of cult hymns, but originating in the second century BC. In this essay the texts we collected in Furley and Bremer 2001 will be largely taken as read; it will perhaps be of greater interest to the reader if we concentrate here on new developments: new texts and new approaches. Let us begin with the latter.

Some Recent Research

A new line with regard to the choral lyric of Pindar and Bacchylides has been taken by Barbara Kowalzig, whose central hypothesis is that the fragments of Pindar and Bacchylides, sung by choruses representing their state of origin, contain myths which reflect local, or regional, history.[21] That is, the myths which they relate are *aetiological* in the sense that they give an *aition* or grounding, to the social history of the performers and recipients of one such example of *choreia*. An example: Pindar's sixth *Paian* tells—among other things—of Neoptolemus' death and burial at Delphi. Kowalzig argues that this myth somehow reflects the ambivalent position of the Amphictyons at Delphi: they exert control over Delphi but are not actually the local owners of the cult. Neoptolemus's position can be seen as somehow analogous: an opponent of Apollo, yet buried, and given hero worship within the cult precinct. Similarly Kowalzig examines missions to the Delia festival during the period of Attic hegemony: cities positioned themselves with respect to the Delian League by contributing—or staying away—from the festival. One might say that they voted by their dances.[22] With great attention to detail and vast scope of the socio-political history of each cult locality she attends to, Kowalzig has illuminated above all the socio-historical dimension of the myths sung by Pindar and Bacchylides, with particular focus on their cult poetry. Myth is never innocent in these compositions, but rather encoded history, or even politics.

The dissertation by Yuriy Lozynsky (2014) takes up the gauntlet thrown down by Kowalzic, and Furley and Bremer, in the sense that he argues against a monocausal interpretation of cult

18 Cf. Furley and Bremer 2001: nos. 4.3, 4.3.
19 Furley and Bremer 2001: 1.1.
20 Furley and Bremer 2001: 2.6.1 and 2.6.2.
21 Kowalzig 2007.
22 Cf. Simon 1997: 247–259.

lyric in favor of a plurality and hierarchy of factors in their composition. Yes, they employ hieratic rhetoric (Furley and Bremer), and reflect local socio-political realities (Kowalzig), but there are other factors as well, and Lozynsky makes it his job to show the various components, or layers of significance, in these texts. The key ingredient in his work is that of "stakeholders," that is, the various parties who are involved and interested in the presentation of a cult hymn.[23] Of course there are the gods, the actual addressees of a hymn, but the human side is not simply the audience. Lozynsky identifies "hosts," for example, the Delphians, or Delians, where the hymns are performed, the presenters, who are usually a trained chorus, perhaps from a different city, such as Athens or Thebes, the poet who composes the hymn, and perhaps other performers such as musicians. His thesis quite rightly points to the performance context of cult hymns, and how the various stakeholders influence the shape and content of the hymnic text. This work could perhaps be linked to the essay by Carey, which seeks to identify the identity and singing voice of monodic compositions and choral works.[24] The important point here is the way singers "construct" their identity and "negotiate" a relationship with the deity or entity hymned.

An interesting development was also marked by Laura Swift's monograph on sacred songs mirrored in Attic drama.[25] The idea here—one anticipated in more rudimentary terms by Furley and Bremer in *Greek Hymns*—was that the choruses of Greek drama frequently sing songs which are "like" cult hymns or traditional songs but embedded, of course, in the dramatic context. Her book is less focused on the formal attributes of choral lyric and how they recur in tragic choruses; she concentrates more on the imagery and context suited to the lyric forms and how these are mirrored in tragedy. An example is the paianic song in Sophokles' *OT* in which the chorus sing a long paian which forms the parodos of the play. The audience is perhaps led to believe in salvation when it hears this type of song, but, if so, it is deceived, as the play gradually leads to disaster. Similarly in Euripides' *Ion*, paianic song in honor of Apollo by the chorus, stands in *contrast* to Apollo's negative role in the play. There is, in the opinion of Swift, a tension between paianic mood and the development of the play.[26] She also considers epinician, a genre which traditionally and socially celebrates great deeds, but the epinician sung by the chorus in Euripides' *Herakles* leads to an ironic effect when juxtaposed with Herakles' butchering of his family. One might in fact align the thrust of this work with the older subject of tragic irony, but played out in a new arena. Here the tragic motif examined is the choral song imitating genres of choral lyric placed contrapuntally to the development of the tragedy. Another aspect of her work is the alignment of gender in choral song and the heroine of the play. Thus, partheneia and hymenals for female leads and epinikia and paians for men. The choral lyrics here are not always, it seems, placed contrapuntally to the plot; if I understand her correctly, the third stasimon of Euripides' *Helen*, a notoriously difficult piece, can be seen as a kind of *partheneion* in that Demeter must become reconciled to her daughter's gender (i.e., sexuality), which is achieved by her taking on the character of Oreia Mater and "receiving" Aphrodite's gift. It is not *surprising* that many choruses in tragedy are cast in the mold of existing models of choral lyric; Swift's book takes up this motif and, not contenting herself with

23 The work is marred by an excess of typing errors.

24 Carey 2017: 34–60.

25 Swift 2010.

26 "Thus the paian is used to indicate a form of religious morality which the play encourages us to question" (p. 88).

identifying types of choral song, she asks how these contribute to audience reception by bringing with them generic expectations.

Thus new research has turned the microscope on the social and historical background of choral lyric (Kowalzig), the tiered structure of performance (Lozynski), and the reception of lyric genres in Attic tragedy (Swift). Turning now to some new or less well-known *texts* we may begin with the magnificent new series of Sapphic fragments which have come to light, even if partly under questionable circumstances.[27] The poems which have been rediscovered are not purely religious but they contain religion, and this, after all, is typical of much of cult lyric: the poems often contain a religious element, vital to the composition of the whole, and yet not dominating it.

New Discoveries of Sappho

The so-called "Old Age Poem" shows the poet lamenting her old age, although there is no overt indication that the subject is a female, like Sappho herself.[28] One could read it as a general indictment of old age. The poem opens on a religious, if conventional, note: the children (probably a fictional girl chorus) are to "employ the fine gifts of the violet-bosomed Muses and the fine-voiced tortoise-shell which loves song."[29] Note that the "song-loving tortoise-shell" evokes a well-known myth here: how Hermes found the "original" tortoise, eviscerated it, and turned its shell into an instrument which "loved song."[30] The opening has evoked both the Muses with a particularly feminine epithet (ἰοκόλπων), and Hermes who turned the tortoise to music. Then the poem progresses, listing the unwelcome attributes of advancing age: wrinkled skin, stiff joints, gray hair, depression. All these things, the text says, "I lament much. But what can I do?" (τὰ ‹μὲν› στεναχίσδω θαμέως· ἀλλὰ τί κεν ποείην;). A *gnōmē* follows, then the poem suddenly plunges into myth: "they say Dawn of the rosy arms, <overcome> by Love, carried Tithonus off to the ends of the earth, since he was beautiful and young, but nevertheless grey old age overcame him in time, he who was married to an immortal wife." Is myth religion? Intuitively we will probably say yes.[31] The second but last word indicates that a religious *dimension* is implied: Tithonos aged like a mortal; but his wife and captor, Eos, was immortal. Hence the whole poem suddenly acquires a religious dimension. Everything Sappho has said about advancing old age should be set in relation to immortality. It is not just that mortals age: we are *mortals*, unlike Eos, who was taken in by Tithonos' beautiful youth.[32] Thus the poem begins with the Muses and ends with Eos; between these immortal brackets humans enjoy—or endure—their life span, their youthful beauty close to divinity at first, but withering unpleasantly and inevitably with the passing of

27 The remark applies to the papyri in the Green Collection. See Obbink 2015b. The first poem I discuss, the "Old Age Poem," is transmitted separately (see below).

28 P.Köln inv. 21351 + 21376. See West 2005; duBois 2011: 5–6.

29 Following West's restorations of the lacunose text: ὔμμες πεδὰ Μοίσαν ἰ]οκ[ό]λπων κάλα δῶρα, παῖδες, / σπουδάσδετε καὶ τὰ]ν φιλάοιδον λιγύραν χελύνναν.

30 *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, with Vergados' commentary (2012).

31 Cf. Bremmer 1987; Veyne 1988; Gantz 1996.

32 Tithonos occupies a kind of unfortunate limbo between mortality and immortality, as he ages and ages without dying. Structuralists might say that he "mediates" between the conditions of mortal and immortal.

time (χρόνωι). Thus the Greek belief in gods and men frames this poem. Perhaps not a difficult or complicated structure, but nevertheless vital to the full message, to use an unfashionable word.

The new "Brothers Poem" is framed with a similar, but overt, contrast between mortal and immortal.[33] We are not quite sure what the context is, as the first stanza is mostly missing. The speaking voice is not identified, and the addressee is also left open. I am tempted to think Sappho left these parameters deliberately undetermined: the poem is, to an extent, open-ended. The speaker admonishes an addressee that she is "always going on about Charaxos returning with a full ship." Immediately she brings in the gods: "Only Zeus and all the other gods know such things," she says. "You should not think about such things, but rather you should send me off to entreat Hera that Charaxos may return home with his ship and find us safe and sound." I think this is two girls talking to each other; the first editor of the poem, Dirk Obbink, thinks the addressee may be the *mother* of the speaker.[34] Anyway the picture is clear: the speaker should pray to Hera for both the safety of Charaxos (Sappho's brother) and for the safety of both (?)girls. "Let's leave the rest to the gods," she says, followed by a *gnōmē*: "Blue skies come suddenly after great storms." There follows an extension of the *gnōmē* which returns to the theme of almighty Zeus: "Whomsoever's fate Zeus wishes to turn from troubles to the better,[35] they are blessed and very fortunate." The final stanza then puzzles us: "If ever Larichos (another brother of Sappho) proves himself a man, then we, too, (κἄμμες) might be freed forthwith from great heavy-heartedness."

The religious dimension of the text is easy to spot. The speaker should pray to Hera for the safety of Charaxos at sea. The world is built upon the superior knowledge and power of the gods: only they can save man from danger. Humans cannot know such things. Their *daimon*, fate, is in the hands of Zeus and the other immortals. Gregory Hutchinson noted that Horace, for one, echoed the theme of the gods' superior power in his "Soracte Ode."[36] The piece has been entitled "The Brothers Poem" because it mentions two names known to be brothers of Sappho from Herodotus and Athenaios: Charaxos and Larichos.[37] Is it then Sappho speaking? Is the poem autobiographical in quite a simple way? Is the addressee, as Obbink posited, Sappho's mother, worried about Charaxos at sea? I doubt it; so many of Sappho's pieces are open-ended. The situation is as it is with popular modern songs; when Bob Dylan sings "You're the reason I'm travelling on. But don't think twice, it's all right," we do not need to identify the two people involved; in fact we might read aspects of our own lives into the words of the song. True, we can read biographies of Dylan and learn who the woman in the song *might* have been, but that does not necessarily increase our enjoyment of the song. Similarly even when Leonard Cohen sings about Marianne: "Now so long Marianne. It's time that we began…" one does not need to know who this Marianne is; the lyric situation is what counts. In the same way, when Sappho, or perhaps someone else, sings this

33 See Obbink 2014: 32–49.

34 Suggested by West's supplement of the last line of the (defective) first stanza] σε μᾶ[τερ].

35 Reading, with West ἐπ' ἄρηον and not ἐπάρωγον Π. Even the parallel in Theocritus 17.132 (cited by Henrichs) does not convince me of the latter. The actual reading of the papyrus is επαρωηγον.

36 *permitte divis cetera, qui simul / stravēre ventos aequore fervido / deproeliantes, nec cupressi / nec veteres agitantur orni,* "leave the rest to the gods who, the moment when they lay to rest winds raging on the heaving seas, nor cypresses nor ancient ashes toss."

37 Herodotus 2.135.3–4; Larichos is only known from Athenaios X = 425a Sappho test. 203a V. A third brother called Erigyion was, apparently, named by the Peripatetic philosopher Chamaileon in his treatise on Sappho (see P.Oxy. 2506 fr. 48, col. iii lines 36–48).

song, we do not need to know the precise biographical details for the words to work. It is the song's internal world as constructed by the interplay between the recital and the listener which matters.[38] I personally prefer to think it is one girl addressing another: the addressee yearns for Charaxos who is engaged in trade with his ship overseas: the girl hopes against hope that he will return home, with a full ship.[39] The speaker admonishes her that it is in the lap of the gods whether a man is saved from danger. She phrases her belief in a whole, carefully constructed stanza: only Zeus can steer a man's *daimon* from troubled to better, as stormy seas can become calm.[40]

The poem is a clear example of the way religion is woven into lyric. The human drama would be unthinkable without the gods, who are omnipresent here. The main divinities involved are Hera (βασίληαν Ἥραν, 10) and Zeus (βασίλευς Ὀλύμπω, 17), the great parental pair of the Olympian family, although the remaining gods also play a part (lines 7, 14). Humans should not fret overmuch about their fate, as they cannot decide that, only gods. It is interesting that the same word δαίμων used in the plural in line 14 means gods, while in the singular in line 18 it refers to the *daimon*, or fate of the individual. Likewise, whom Zeus favors, acquires the attributes of the gods: such people become μάκαρες and πολύολβοι (15–16), blessed and much-fortunate, words normally reserved for the blessed gods on Olympus. There is another interesting parallel between the storms which "suddenly cease" (αἶψα πέλονται, 12) and the misery of the speaker which might "suddenly cease" (αἶψα λύθειμεν, 20) if Larichos behaved properly: as the elements, so the emotions. A certain naïvety has been remarked upon in the poem: it is certainly not Kierkegaard. But the monody is lively and moves with the stanzas in interesting directions. I find it might capture the somewhat naïve exchanges between girls, as for example in *Sense and Sensibility*, well.[41]

The new discovery of the "Brothers Poem" shows the same personal religion as we encounter in other poems of Sappho.[42] Here Hera is to be invoked to save a brother of Sappho's; Zeus is said to be responsible for the individual *daimon* of people. In the third fragment which has emerged from the new discoveries,[43] Aphrodite is entreated in a way not dissimilar from the great opening poem of the Alexandrian collection of Sappho's poems, which we only know through indirect quotation by Dionysios of Halicarnassus (fr. 1 Campbell).[44] Here the lyric "I" prays to the goddess for help in a love affair.[45]

"Immortal Aphrodite of the embellished throne, daughter of Zeus, weaver of intrigues, I entreat you, do not destroy my soul with pains and torments, but come here…" (lines 1–5)

38 For the former Hutchinson uses "narrator" to emphasize that it is not necessarily Sappho.

39 That detail is also important: the girl hopes for affluence.

40 This is not the place to consider possible interpretations of the Larichos stanza at the end.

41 If Sappho had wanted to write a biographical memo about her brothers she would have chosen prose, like Hekataios, perhaps. The lyric medium involves interplay between biography and timeless situations constructed by the words and music. Detailed biographical interpretations of the poem are, in my opinion, misguided.

42 Other hymns/prayers: fr. 5 Nereids; fr. 327 Eros; fr. 325 Athena.

43 The so-called Kypris poem, see Obbink (2014), lines 45–49: πῶς κε δή τις οὐ θαμέως ἄσαιτο, / Κύπρι δέσπ̣οιν', ὄτ̣τ̣ι̣να [δ]ὴ φιλ[είη / και] θέλοι μά[λιστα] π̣ά̣λ̣ι̣ν κάλ̣[εσσαι; "how could anyone not suffer greatly, Lady Kypris, when he/she loved someone and greatly wished to call them back?."

44 *De Comp.* 23 (vi 114ss. Us.-Rad.) (+P. Oxy. 2288).

45 For an exploration of the lyric "I" in Sappho see Calame 2012.

…and influence the course of my love affair, the poem goes on. Aphrodite is addressed in a one-to-one manner; although almighty, she is imagined as *caring* about the speaker's torment; as in the past she will fly in her winged chariot from Olympus down to earth *specially* to relieve the speaker's (singer's) torment (9–12). "Come to me now," the speaker prays, "as you have previously" (5–7 paraphrase). The depiction of Aphrodite and her engagement with the singer could not be more personal. This in itself is no major departure in Greek religion. In epic, too, individuals have their patron gods or goddesses; Odysseus his Athena; Paris his Aphrodite; Sarpedon no less than Zeus. Nor is the form of the prayer new: "Da ut dedisti."[46] What *is* new is Sappho's dramatization of her personal relations with Aphrodite in the form of a traditional prayer. She depicts her life as repeated engagement with the goddess; in a previous affair Aphrodite managed to swing things the singer's way; now she needs her good offices again.[47]

Alcaeus has not been served so well by recent discoveries. Boychenko makes the point that Sappho's hymns, or prayers, tend to be cletic, that is, they appeal to the god(s) to *come*, while Alkaios shows a preference for narrative hymns to gods.[48] This leads her to a reconsideration of fr. 304 V (=Sappho fr. 44a Campbell), a fragment from a hymn to Artemis, it seems, which had previously been attributed variously to Sappho or Alcaeus. The narrative quality of the fragment points, she says, to authorship of Alcaeus. Although the article makes a case for a categorization of Aeolic hymns as tendentially Celtic or narrative, the distinction does not map cleanly onto the two chief authors of Aeolic hymns known to us.[49]

Simonides' Elegy for Plataia

Poets were generally obliged to make a bow to the gods at the beginning of their compositions.[50] Thus we have near-complete hymns and prayers at the beginning of a number of melic works. Pindar *Ol.* 4 is a good example, which gets under way with a magnificent prayer to Zeus. Elegy, too, was often launched by a show of piety, as the *Theognidea*[51] shows us; here a miniature hymn to Apollo and Artemis stands at the beginning of the work.[52] Of particular interest, then, is the newly (partly) reassembled beginning of a long elegaic poem by Simonides on the Battle of Plataea, one of the two major Greek victories of the Persian Wars.[53] The poem itself celebrates the heroism of the Spartans marching out from the Peloponnese, over the Isthmus, in pursuit of the Persians to save Greece from the "day of slavery" (25). The poet says they drew strength and courage from their epic forebears, in

46 For the formula "give as you have given" and variants see Bremer 1981.

47 And in the new "Kypris Poem," the narrator asks Kypris in a spirit of desperate resignation "What do you have in mind to torture me thus idly with such uncertainty?" (v. difficult text) [ποῖ]ον ἔχησθα / [νῶν] ϙάλοισι μ' ἀλεμάτῳς δαίϙδ[ην].

48 Boychenko 2017. The remark is based on Menander Rhetor's comment "most [sc. hymns] by Sappho or Anacreon or other melic poets tend to be cletic, as they contain an appeal to many gods to come."

49 See esp. the chapter "Gebet und Götterhymnus" in Tsomis 2001: 38–96.

50 The expression ἀφοσιοῦσθαι θεῶι implies "satisfy one's conscience towards the gods."

51 On the transmission of the *Theognidea*, see Bowie (Chapter 21) in this volume.

52 1–10 W in honor of Apollo, 11–14 W to Artemis, 15–18 W the Muses.

53 Simonides fr. 11 W (P.Oxy. 2327 fr. 5 + 6 + 27 col. i + 3965 fr. 1 + 2). Cf. Boedeker 1995.

particular Menelaus (36), and from the twin Spartan "horsemaster sons" of Zeus, the Dioskoroi. At the Isthmus they sacrificed the *diabateria*, transition sacrifices, as we can extrapolate from the Greek [θεῶν τεράε]ϙσι πεποιθότες, "trusting the divine signs" (39). But what interests us here particularly is the beginning of the poem, a hymnic encomium of Achilles, it seems, called the "son of the glorious goddess (Thetis), daughter of Nereus" (19–20). The text is unfortunately not complete. When it begins, Achilles is struck and he falls like a pine felled by foresters in the highlands (1–3). Grief overcomes his people; he himself is much honored and buried in the same urn as his friend Patroklos (4–6).[54] Despite his death the goddesses Athena and Hera see to it that Troy falls, as they are angry at Paris' wickedness (9–10). A *gnōmē* seals the fate of Paris' city: "the chariot of divine justice catches the sinner in time." There follows a brief praise of Homer who "made the heroes' short-lived race a theme familiar to younger men" (15–18), then the poet takes his leave of Achilles in a conventional transitional formula in hymnic address (19–20):

[ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲ]ν νῦν χαῖρε, θεᾶς ἐρικύ[δεος υἱὲ]
[κούρης εἰν]αλίου Νηρέος· αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κτλ.

"But now I take my leave of you, son of a famous goddess, daughter of the sea-god Nereus. But I [call now on the Muse…]"

The proemium, then, to Simonides elegy on the Battle of Plataia began with an encomium of Achilles. He is called "son of a goddess" and it is said explicitly that no mortal killed him but rather the hand of Apollo (8). The divine elevation of the epic battle is maintained by saying that Athena and Hera took Troy because of divine anger at the children of Priam (10). Achilles has the status of a half-god, but he was worshipped after his death as divine. He was not actually a Spartan, but nevertheless Simonides has chosen him to head his elegy. We see that the praise of Achilles took narrative form, as in lines 1–6 there is an account of his death. Apollo, presumably, struck him; he fell like a great tree in the wilderness; in their grief his people buried him together with his friend. The "point" of the encomium was no doubt to set the tone of the Spartans' heroism at Plataia. The greatest warrior of the Greeks at Troy was a suitable figurehead for the great valor of the Greeks fighting a much larger force of Persians at Plataia.[55] And, by then, the barbarian hordes of the Persians were assimilated to the Trojans (living in what is now Persia), an ethnicity not emphasized by Homer.[56] We see, then, in this fragmentary poem that the religiosity has two levels. There is the level of epic saga in which half-gods fought alongside deities, and there is the day-to-day level represented by the favorable omens at the Isthmos, and also by the Dioskoroi, as these were Spartan gods who regularly received cult there.[57] Strengthened both by thoughts of their epic forebears and by their tutelary deities, the Spartans marched forth. Simonides realized that the victory was unthinkable without these fortifying religious elements.

54 According to West's plausible supplements.
55 As Pausanias (3.4.7–8) says explicitly when he is discussing Leonidas' glory in the Persian Wars: "It is only in a few (cases) where the virtue of one man alone has magnified that of many, as Achilles did in the Trojan War."
56 Hall 1989.
57 Walker 2015, esp. ch. 5.

Archilochus' Telephos Elegy

It was a great surprise when a fragment of Archilochus was revealed on a bedraggled Oxyrhynchus papyrus which was neither iambic nor (overtly) parodistic but was, in fact, a fragment from a poem very much in the manner of the last we have been discussing by Simonides: a long narrative poem in elegiac meter.[58] The fragment has come to be known as the "Telephos Poem," as its main feature is a battle between Telephos, son of Herakles, and the Greek force against Troy, which has landed in Mysia by mistake: Telephos routs the unfortunate Danaoi more or less single-handed, it seems. But this basic narrative has, again, very clear religious import. In the first place there is the same quasi-sacred status of heroic epic:[59] here the routing of the half-gods who fought before Troy is used as a paradigm to comfort some person(s) who have obviously fled in battle. There is no shame when greater men than you fled before one man! is the basic paraenetic message. This is reinforced by saying that one cannot withstand "divine necessity"; the text is incomplete but it seems to be saying "When [the opponent] is driven by the strong compulsion of a god, one should not speak of weakness and cowardice."[60] The poet repeats this point in line 7: "to such an extent the fate of the gods cast fear [sc. on them], although they were brave spearmen."[61] We note other touches which emphasize the elevated sacred nature of the epic paradigm: the fleeing Greeks are themselves "sons and brothers of gods" (14); their proper destiny, Troy, is a "holy city" (15); and the ground they have mistakenly trodden, Mysia, by bad navigation, is the "lovely city of Teuthras" (17).[62] We see that such a paraenetic appeal to epic includes the divine apparatus familiar from Homer: the gods decide the humans' destiny, they fight in person, in this case the son of Herakles, Telephos. What they fight for has a sacred quality: the citadel of Troy, or, here, Mysia. Probably the context is a battle in which Archilochus and his comrades fled ignominiously. "Don't worry," says the poet, "braver men than you have fled before just one opponent, Telephos."[63] But the human message which today we would communicate by psychology—for example, "it was the shock element which demoralized you"—is here explained in the abstract by gnomic wisdom "one can't fight against the compelling fate of god" and by the half-god status of Herakles' son, Telephos, and his father Herakles, who eggs him on.[64]

58 P.Oxy. 4708. Obbink 2006; and see West 2006. At least one more heroic work of this nature seems to have been Archilochus' "Hymn to Herakles," which was allegedly sung at Olympia for victors; cf. Eratosthenes (*FGrH* 241 F 44) who quotes an opening "Greetings lord Heracles, glorious in victory." Pòrtulas 2012 suggests that the myth may have been about Herakles' fight with Poseidon, Apollo, and Hades, as mentioned by Pindar *Ol.* 9.30–35. Note also his discussion of a new cult song introduced by Archilochus in Paros, as documented in the Mnesiepes Inscription. He taught the song (διδάξαντα) and organized its performance by "companions" (ἑταῖροι).

59 Cf. West 2006: 15.

60 2–3 [εἰ δὲ].[….].[].ι θεοῦ κρατερῆς ὑπ᾽ ἀνάγκης, / [οὐ δεῖ ἀν]αλ̣[κείη]γ̣ κ̣αὶ κακότητα λέγει[ν].

61 7–8 [ἐ]ς τόσα̣ δὴ μοῖρα θεῶν ἐφόβει -- / αἰχμητ̣αί περ ἐόντε[ς].

62 The epithet ἐρατήν, lovely, is perhaps not religious *per se*, but the attribute "of Teuthras" firmly locates it in the heroic sphere.

63 Cf. West loc. cit., who cites as parallel *Adesp. iamb.* 38.5–11, another case of sensible flight. We hear of another poem by Archilochus on the heroic myth of Herakles, this time in connection with the fateful crossing of the River Acheloos: frr. 286–288 W.

64 I don't quite understand Swift's point (2014) that there is a conflicting message in the paradigm: both the fleeing Greeks *and* Telephos are said to be brave: the point is, *even* the brave Greeks fled before a rampant Telephos.

The Lille Stesichorus

The religion of heroic epic emerges in another relatively recent find. Stesichorus had been hardly more than a name known for composing lyric narratives[65] when, in Lille in the seventies of last century, Egyptian mummy cartonnage was unwrapped to reveal nearly a hundred lines of continuous verse in dactylo-epitrite meter on the subject of Theban myth (fr. 97 F).[66] Scholars are nearly agreed, by now, that the author must be Stesichorus. The poem is hundreds of lines long, and written in lyric triads in marked Doric dialect. Of interest to us here is the interplay of religion and cult with the narrative. This concerns the Labdacid family, and in the recovered section, the strife prophesied for Oedipus' children, Eteokles and Polyneikes. The intact section contains a dramatic dialogue between Jocasta (probably) and Teiresias, the famous Theban seer.[67] First Jocasta speaks, mulling over the prospect of strife between her children: gods do not always give continuous strife to mortals on the "holy earth," she says, but they alternate this daily with friendship (204–208 paraphrases). "Let us hope Lord Apollo the far-shooter does not bring all your prophesies to fulfillment" (209–210). She continues with another Homeric concept: the fate which men cannot escape. If, she says, it is my fate to witness my children killing each other[68] let the end of death take me immediately before I see such misery in the home, or the city sacked (210–217 paraphrases). She concludes with a prayer that Zeus (228) may protect Thebes and put off the evil day predicted by Teiresias' prophecy for as long as possible (230). All the Homeric concepts are there: Zeus himself, chief among many; fate in her various guises; Teiresias uttering prophecies as Chalkas did about Troy; Apollo as the mantic god deciding issues on earth by his arrows. In this poem the human level is represented by the heroic age; Iokaste's fate is not paradigmatic of a contemporary situation, as it is in Archilochus' Telephos poem, or Simonides' ode on Plataia. In this sense, Stesichorus is "pure" Homer in a different metrical garb.[69] Such heroic lyric narratives were, we are told, sung by choruses. We should imagine them performed, like Pindar's choral lyric, at great occasions such as religious festivals, the marriage, or funeral, perhaps, of a Syracusan grandee. Culturally, they convey and propagate Homeric ideology, showing an heroic age in close contact with gods and goddesses, among other things through their prophets. Even Iokaste's opinion that gods send mixed blessings and troubles to men has an Homeric model in Zeus' jars of good and evil, which he variously doles out to mankind.

Pindar's Second Paian

We have raced through the genres—Aeolic monody, elegy, lyric dactyls—and yet, as Herodotus remarked, it is Homer and Hesiod who prevail when it comes to religion. The same gods receive worship, in the same forms, even if poets show preferences: Sappho for

65 Cf. Pseudo-Plutarch, *On Music* 1131b10-c1 ἀλλὰ καθάπερ <τὴν> Στησιχόρου τε καὶ τῶν ἀρχαίων μελοποιῶν, οἳ ποιοῦντες ἔπη τούτοις μέλη περιετίθεσαν· "but like the <diction> of Stesichorus and the archaic melic poets, who composed epic verses in melic [metres]." Later the author of this work says that Stesichorus imitated none other than Olympos, a legendary pupil of Marsyas, employing τῶι Ἁρματείωι νόμωι καὶ τῶι κατὰ δάκτυλον εἴδει (1133f3–6), "the Harmateion nome and dactylic meter."

66 Parsons 1978.

67 On the identity of Oedipus' wife and other questions of interpretation, see Hutchinson 2001: 120–139; Davies and Finglass 2014, *ad loc.*

68 The well-known mythical theme as dramatized by Aeschylus, for example, in *Seven against Thebes.*

69 Pseudo-Longinus *De sublimitate* 13.3.1, calls him (and Archilochus) Ὁμηρικώτατος, "most Homeric."

Aphrodite, Archilochus for Heracles, Stesichorus for Apollo, and the list could be extended. The most significant finds in the last century of cult poetry are the remnants of Pindar's paians,[70] dithyrambs,[71] prosodia,[72] daphnephorika, nomoi, and others.[73] And here, if anywhere, we have a poet who took his art beyond the Homeric model, although there is much of Homer in Pindar, too.[74] Again from Oxyrhynchus a tattered papyrus roll was recovered by Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt in their Victorian-age exploration of Egypt.[75] We imagine Pindar's paians to have been sung and performed by choruses of young men and women, at cult centers such as Delphi and Delos primarily in honor of Apollo and his sister Artemis. Although one might think paians were composed for a *particular* crisis of the state, as in *Iliad* 1.472–474, where the Achaeans seek to propitiate Apollo's wrath at the mistreatment of his priest, that seems not to be true for the majority of the paians written by Pindar, which were composed for calendrical cult. The exception is the ninth, composed on the occasion of a solar eclipse at Thebes, and suitably urgent in tone: here there is lament, and appeal to Apollo who has occluded the sun, giver of light and life. We included a selection of these works in *Greek Hymns* (including the 9th) but nevertheless these compositions should be revisited here. Let us consider the second, to Abdera.[76]

The second paian, to Abdera, is a fascinating, if fragmentary, piece which closely binds the genre of paian with military bravery. Without considering the whole piece, which is over one hundred verses, let us grapple with the opening verses. The address is clearly to Abderus (Ἄβδηρε, 1), and it is phrased in the manner of hymnic address, that is, Abderus is given his divine genealogy—son of the Naiad Thronia and Poseidon.[77] His military credentials are immediately invoked by the epithet χαλκοθώραξ, "of the bronze breastplate" (1). Thus the paian does not address the city of Abdera directly, but rather the eponymous hero, who is a half-god, being the son of Poseidon. Then comes a first-person statement, possibly by the poet Pindar himself, or possibly by a representative member of the singing chorus. "This paian in your honour I am pursuing with this Ionian company beside Derenian Apollo and Aphrodite."[78] The latter phrase tells us that the paian will be performed at a local sanctuary in Abdera, one combining the worship of a local identity of Apollo, and Aphrodite. The beginning of the sentence is full of difficulties. I take [σέ]θεν with [παι]ᾶνα as a genitive of possession: "your paian" or "a paian to you," while William Race prefers "beginning with you." Then comes Ἰάονι λαῶι, a dative which the Loeb editor takes as "for the Ionian people" but I prefer an instrumental sense "with this Ionian company."[79] In other words the poet announces that he will sing Abderus, the eponymous hero of Abdera, through or by means of a company of Ionian paian singers. Either way, we have here a cult song for Apollo Derenos

70 The main edition and commentary is by Rutherford 2001.

71 van der Weiden 1991; Zimmermann 1992.

72 New edition by Prodi 2014.

73 The main edition of Pindar's cult poetry is the Teubner by Snell and Maehler (see S-M in list of abbreviations). Cf. Pavlou 2011.

74 Nagy 1990a.

75 Tony Harrison's play *Trackers of Oxyrhynchus* contains a portrait of the pair, as they unearth and decipher papyri.

76 Cf. Rutherford *loc. cit.*; Dougherty 1994; also considered by Carey 2017.

77 The cult details tie in with local socio-demographic structures in a way inviting analysis according to Kowalzig's method.

78 3–5 σέθ]εν Ἰάονι τόνδε λαῶι / παι]ᾶνα [δι]ώξω / Δηρηνὸν Ἀπόλλωνα πάρ τ' Ἀφρο[δίταν].

79 The poem is in Doric dialect!

and Aphrodite which foregrounds Abdera, the place. Lozynsky could identify at least four separate "stakeholders": the gods, the poet, the singers, and the audience.[80]

After a lacuna of fourteen lines we take up the thread when a voice announces that "I inhabit this fertile Thracian plain" (paraphrase) "… I am a young city; but still, I gave birth to the mother of my mother who had been struck by fire."[81] Pindar riddles deliberately. This is mantic language, deliberate obfuscation. Race prefers to take νεόπολις as "I am *of* a young city," but others differ, with them me.[82] I think Abdera herself must be speaking and saying "I am a young city." The riddle with the bearing of the mother's mother is normally explained with reference to Teos, the mother city of Abdera, which was ransacked by the Persians but then reestablished by the colonists from Abdera. The locals might understand the enigma; difficult for anyone not in the know. There follows a *gnōmē* about courage producing peace, then the paianic ephymnion ἰὴ ἰὲ Παιάν, ἰὴ ἰέ· Παιὰν / δὲ μήποτε λείποι ("may Paian never wane"). This paian was composed by Pindar for a ritual celebration (as we have said) but it maintains the genre's links with war. As an army advanced in formation singing the *paian*,[83] no doubt designed to put courage in the hearts of the *phalanx* and fear in the enemy, so here we have the supreme literary development of what may have started as a mere chant. Pindar has pushed the genre to the limits in a way which brought him fame and much money.[84] Of time (following the successful foundation of Abdera) Pindar says literally: "may steadfast time treading mightily not tire for me hereafter" which perhaps means "may things remain good in future." My point is the hieratic style which Pindar uses to achieve the *semnotēs*, elevated dignity, suited to paianic prayer.[85] The final prayer (104–108) is that Abderus (masculine again) should be victorious in battle.[86] Wilamowitz opined that Pindar did not in any sense write "normal" Greek.[87] Perhaps the mantic style was supposed to speak directly from, and to, Apollo.

Conclusion

Can we pull the strings of what has been said together? The first thing is that religion encompassing the gods' and humans' place in the world,[88] prayers to these gods, stories about them and their children, their worship in traditional places and ways, is ubiquitous in archaic Greek

80 Carey 2017 considers the question of the identity of singer and audience more carefully.

81 28–30 νεόπολίς εἰμι· ματρὸς / δὲ ματέρ' ἐμᾶς ἔτεκον ἔμπαν / πολεμίωι πυρὶ πλαγεῖσαν.

82 I find the metaphor "I have given birth," ἔτεκον, odd if applied to the young men of the chorus, more natural if applied to personified Abdera. Unfortunately there is no specific indication of gender in the whole run from 24 to 36.

83 Known as παιανίζειν.

84 Note lines 102–103 ἐμο[ὶ δ' ἐπ]ξέ[ω]ν ἐσ[.] / …ε]ὐκλέα [……]ν χά[ρ]ιν, in which Pindar seems to be talking of the "fame of words" which is due him.

85 As Käppel 1992 says.

86 Ἄβδ]ηρε, καὶ στ[ρατὸν] ἱππ̣οχάρμαν / σᾶ̣ι] βίᾳ πολέ[μ]ωι τελευ- / ταί]ωι προβι[β]άζοις, "Abderus, may you advance your cavalry, too, with your force in a final war."

87 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1907 (=1995): 55.

88 Cf. Liapis 2017.

lyric. We must assume that belief corresponded to action: no prayer or sacrifice without belief in that deity, that is, in the deity's power to harm or help. Gods must sanction poetry like anything else. Hence the desire to "begin with the gods" (ἄρχεσθαι θεοῦ) in any composition, either in the form of a prayer or a miniature hymn (Simonides *Plataia*).[89] Here verse imitates ritual: the poem is offered, like a physical *agalma*, with a prayer at its head.[90] The themes of heroic epic still play a large part, as we have seen, in lyric, either as a source of comparison (Telephos) or as a poetic material in its own right (Stesichorus). The gods have become more personal (Sappho) or politically engaged in *stasis* (Alkaios). Dionysos (Anakreon) and Aphrodite (Sappho again), whom we have not examined, dominate the world of the symposium, both of men and women. Pindar is exceptional both in the length of his compositions and his sophistication; Bacchylides equals his length but his compositions in the traditional fields of paian and dithyramb do not match Pindar's *semnotēs*, elevation.[91] These last two are the only true representatives of cult lyric, as their trained choruses performed at the great cult centers of Greece. As such they represented their city-states (Kowalzig) and performed with an agenda suiting both home city and place of performance (Lozynksi). It is vital to remember that all compositions we have been considering were meant for oral performance (Depew) before an audience whose constitution we can sometimes only guess at. Sappho's works were "hits" still sung in later centuries.[92] We must never forget, either, the agonistic quality of many Greek poems. Whether explicitly or not, the poet usually wanted to win, or win praise.

FURTHER READING

Many Greek hymns are collected in Furley and Bremer 2001, along with a discussion of their conventions and the wider hymn-culture in which they originate. Much work has also been done on the *paian*: see in particular Ford 2006, and on Pindar's *paianes* in particular Rutherford 2001. Pindar's cult poetry more broadly is collected in Snell and Maehler 1975 vol. ii. On the dithyramb, see Kowalzig and Wilson 2013a. On the intersection between myth, history, and cult, see Kowalzig 2007, and for the relationship between lyric and Homeric perspectives, see Nagy 1990a.

89 One ancient reference to this common saying in Aristophanes *Clouds* 566
Σ: ἔθος τοῖς ποιηταῖς τὴν ἀρχὴν τῶν ποιμάτων ἀπὸ τοῦ Διὸς ποιεῖν: "It was the custom of poets to make their beginning from Zeus."
90 Cf. Depew 2000. *Agalma* derives from ἀγάλλω, "pay honour to a god"; we may thus gloss the word as "that which pays honour to a god."
91 At their best they contain fine lyric narrative (*Theseus*, 17) in simpler language.
92 Aristophanes fr. 235 *PCG*; Plutarch *Sympotic Questions* 711d.