

CHAPTER 1

Festivals, Symposia, and the Performance of Greek Poetry

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Festivals

The performance of choral dance, music, and song featured prominently in many religious rituals, especially but not exclusively those for Apollo, Artemis, and Dionysos. Animal sacrifice, the core of many festivals, seems to have been accompanied by music on stringed and reed instruments, perhaps originally as a way to drown out inauspicious sounds of slaughter (Nordquist 1992). Although we cannot determine when such accompaniments turned into competitions, Greek tradition retrojects the introduction of poetic and musical contests (both regularly called *mousikoi agōnes*) to the mythic past. The antiquarian Pausanias (10.7.3) reports that at Delphi the oldest contest, for singing a hymn to Apollo while playing a concert lyre (*kithara*), was first won by Chrysothemis of Crete, whose father had performed ritual purification for the god after Apollo slew the Python. By the seventh century BC, the *Pythia* at Delphi had become a major event for contests in music and song (with athletics on the side). We might see the mythical retrojection as akin to the story of the Judgment of Paris with its international consequences in the Trojan War. Such stories dramatized a broader Greek concern with the exercise of serious decision making in key moments: it is not surprising that the word for “act of judgment” (*krisis*) underlies our words “crisis” as well as “criticism” (Nagy 1990: 402–403).

An original *ritual* context must be borne in mind for almost all Greek poetic productions, although it is debatable whether one can find consistent “religious” meanings in epic or drama. But the factor of *competition* made public the process of aesthetic choice, just as (in Athens at least) institutions like the assembly and law courts allowed for increasingly public contestation and articulation of political and social opinions. Unfortunately, records for competition, usually with just the bare information about winners and prizes, are scarcer than political decrees (on Athenian dramatic records, see Millis and Olson 2012). And yet, given the number of competitions and long survival of festivals (until at least the third century AD), trends emerge: the growth in professionalization after the third century BC; mobility of performers; increase in the number of festivals; and variety of events. Seventeen sites in Greece are known to have sponsored musical contests before 400 BC (Herington 1985, 160–166). By the second century AD, the region of Boeotia alone could boast that many (Manieri 2009). Most opaque is the role of the individual evaluator. Even in the most well documented cases

from Athens, we know neither the exact procedures for picking the 10 official judges each year, nor how they formed their aesthetic views. Just as jurors in a modern court of law never officially reveal the reasoning behind their verdicts, no ancient judge of a dramatic competition, a contest in singing to the accompaniment of pipes, or a recitation of Homer needed to record what prompted his favorable vote. (On judging and prizes, see further Henderson 1989, Wright 2009.)

One must distinguish the process of immediate judgment from the later activity of the professional *kritikoi* (“critics”) – scholars, especially of the Hellenistic period (third through first centuries BC) whose study of the Archaic and Classical periods (seventh through fourth centuries BC) laid the foundation for all subsequent knowledge of the poems. Yet, their approaches grew out of the practices of earlier connoisseurs, shaped by competitions (Ford 2002, 272–286). The comic poet Aristophanes chooses to stage in his *Frogs* (405 BC) a stylistic and ethical comparison of the deceased tragedians Euripides and Aeschylus as an *aggōn* (the winner getting resurrected), replicating the outer world of the Dionysiac festival, in which his own plays competed. A sense of operative fifth-century aesthetic criteria can be garnered from such tragic parodies (Hunter 2009, 10–52) as well as from Aristophanes’ attacks on his rivals (Biles 2011).

Judgments encouraged by the agonistic mode fall between the endpoints of athletic performance and physical beauty. The inventors of the horse race and pentathlon clearly recognized zero-sum criteria. Certain runners or horses crossed the line first, jumpers and throwers cast and leapt further, and results were usually clear-cut. Since athletics and poetic events often took place at the same sites (although not at the classical Olympics), criteria might well have converged. At the other end of the spectrum were beauty contests known from various communities, the most famous being the *Kallisteia* on Lesbos (Alcaeus fr. 130b). Also well known was a contest concerning beauty or manly excellence (*euandria*) held as part of the Panathenaea (Crowther 1985; cf. Wilson 2000, 38–39). The modern Miss Universe contest (to take one example) states what judges rate (from poise to appearance in evening gown), but for none of the ancient beauty contests do we have specifics. Judging artistic performances, however, came closer to the beauty contest model; from the scant and anecdotal evidence (Le Ven 2010), it appears sweetness of voice, fine sentiment in words, and the overall production of pleasure – rather than good technique – were central. Thus, competitive criteria coincided with the aesthetic ideal of extreme pleasure foremost in depictions of song within the epics and Homeric Hymns (Peponi 2012).

Glimmers of evidence suggest the purely disinterested evaluation of aesthetic effect was not always uppermost for the ancient judge. A decree from Athens of the mid-fourth century BC (*IG II² 1153*) records a proposal by Polynikos approved by the tribe Hippothontis (one of ten such civic subdivisions) honoring Metagenes because he voted for the victory of its tribal chorus at the annual Thargelia festival of Apollo. Metagenes “judged in a fine and just manner and without taking bribes” (*kalōs kai dikaiōs kai adōrodokētōs*). If, as Peter Wilson suggests, the proposer Polynikos was himself the producer (*chorēgos*) for the chorus, and also a member of the tribe Hippothontis, the decision could have been an inside job, with a gold crown waiting for Metagenes a few months later. Note that the evaluative word here (*kalōs*) extends from the dithyramb to the manner in which it was judged (Wilson 2007, 159). In short, while discussing verdicts on poetry, we must also take into account the “aesthetics of judging” – governed by wider conceptions of social comportment.

The Greeks were not alone in sponsoring poetic competitions – Vedic hymns in ancient India and medieval Japanese *waka* poetry were subject to contests between poets. But characteristically, competition in the *mousikoi agōnes* is distinct as a civic activity, not just for an elite, and involving both professionals and amateurs (Osborne 1993). The dramatic and

other musical contests in Attica alone may have needed as many as 5000 performers annually (Fisher 2011, 186–188). How did such widespread agonistics affect poetic forms and content? Limitations in the evidence shrink our focus to drama and hexameter poetry, obscuring the undoubted importance of dithyramb (choral song for Dionysos), paean (choral song for Apollo), citharodic nomos (sung monodically to the *kitihara*), and songs for the *aulos* (a reed instrument). The *mousikoi agōnes* complicate the periodization of Greek literature. The remains of Archaic hexameter – whether Homeric epic, Cyclic and Hesiodic poems, Orphic verses, or oracles—were almost certainly mediated and transmitted by itinerant professional reciters called “rhapsodes” (“song-stitchers”). Whether or not the distant figures credited with creating Homeric and Hesiodic poetry, perhaps as early as 750 BC, themselves were competitive professionals, the texts of their poems certainly crystallized in this milieu. The *Life of Homer* traditions, dating back to the sixth century BC, depict the poet as a wandering rhapsode, working the coastal cities of Asia Minor (Nagy 2010, 29–58; cf. Graziosi 2002). It is less likely that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, in their current 24-book form, were written down in the eighth century BC, when Greek alphabetic writing was in its infancy, and then transmitted verbatim for centuries, than it is that competing reciters recreated a fluid set of compositions in each performance. Hexameter poetry probably achieved its near-final forms around the mid-sixth century BC, on the verge of the Classical period – exactly when Athenian drama was also taking shape in its own competitive context (Nagy 1996). The time-line of Greek literature is thus considerably more compressed than handbooks tell.

An indication that the epics developed within the messy world of competition is the undoubted extensive “intertextual” relations among Homeric, Hesiodic, and Orphic poems (Martin 2001; Tsagalis 2008). These are most economically explained if rhapsodes carried around in their heads “texts” – oral or written – of a number of poets at once. Plato’s *Ion* shows that they could specialize in Homer or Hesiod – but might be expected to perform either (*Ion* 531a–d). Their repertoires extended beyond epic to iambic and elegiac poets like Archilochus and Xenophanes (Athenaeus 14.620b). While the diversity of each poet’s memory-hoard no doubt enabled cross-referencing, the overall shaping of the canon must have been tailored to the circuit of competitions, each city-state exerting local preferences, while traveling poets managed a Panhellenic performance anthology.

The Homeric poems do not dwell on competitive artistic performance, even if externally shaped by it. Acknowledgment comes in one vignette about the bard Thamyris, punished by the Muses after boasting he could defeat them (*Il.* 2.594–600). Thamyris was traveling from Eurytus, a city sacked by Heracles in a feat once commemorated by a now-lost epic, the *Taking of Oikhalia*. By saying that while returning *from Oikhalia* he was “stopped from his singing,” the *Iliad* suggests that the Heracles tradition suffered a break in historical transmission from its origin (Martin 1989, 229). By contrast, the *Iliad* poet guarantees continuity with the past through the Muses, summoned in the proem to the Catalogue of Ships (*Il.* 2.484–486). Although on the surface a story about dueling mythic singers, the Thamyris incident also alludes to the potential *agōn* between Homer and rivals (or between rhapsodes backing different regional heroes).

The useful trope of “contact with the Muses” is most spectacular in the proem to the *Theogony* of Hesiod, when a shepherd of backwoods Boeotia is personally instructed by the divine mistresses of song (*Theogony* 23–34). A slightly agonistic tone gives the passage an edge: the Muses call Hesiod and his fellow shepherds “bellies only” – implying the mortals might do anything for a meal. But they proceed to assert their own right to tell lies (as beggars do) or the truth. That “Hesiod” in this scenario resembles a rhapsode bears noting. The Muses’ gift of a branch of Apollo’s sacred laurel symbolizes authority to speak, like the *skēptron* wielded by epic heroes in assemblies. In an actual performance of this Hesiodic poem, the

reference highlighted the rod (*rhabdos*) carried by rhapsodic performers (another ancient etymology of “rhapsode” being “rod-singer”).

Further traces of competition emerge from the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* (also called the *Certamen*). This melange of prose and poetry dates, in its current form, to Hadrian’s time (second century AD), but stemmed from the sixth century BC (Richardson 1981). It provides fascinating views of competition and judging. (Hesiod wins because his poetry praises peace, even though the audience likes Homer.) The rivals engage in virtuoso manipulations – capping each other’s verses, using curve-ball enjambment to change the meaning of dueling quotations, opposing one another’s themes – that can be paralleled in Archaic and Classical poetry (Collins 2004). Aristophanes’ *Frogs* echoes the older form of the *Certamen* (Rosen 2004), while verse exchanges characteristic of the symposium manifest the same techniques (see below).

Whatever form a sixth-century *Certamen* might have had, two scraps of old evidence depict Homer and/or Hesiod competing. In the *Works and Days* (650–659), Hesiod recalls his only sea voyage, from Aulis on the mainland to Chalcis in Euboea to compete (and win) at funeral games for Amphidamas. He dedicated his bronze tripod to the Muses at Mt. Helicon, near where they taught him to sing. The alleged prize was still displayed in the time of Pausanias (second century AD), its story doubtless reworked in Hellenistic times in the context of a long-running local festival, the Mouseia at Thespieae. The poet of the *Works and Days* does not name his rivals in Euboea, but a fragment attributed to Hesiod (fr. 357 MW) implies that he did compete with Homer at a different event, on Delos: “Then for the first time Homer and I, singers, sang about Phoebus Apollo with the golden dagger, having stitched together a song in new hymns” (*en nearois humnois rhapsantes aoidēn*). The phrasing clearly marks their “rhapsody” as a *collaboration*. This accords with the dynamic interactions in the *Certamen* whereby each singer tags new lines onto the other’s. It is hard to imagine an entire epic created in this way; the fragment probably alludes to the so-called “Homeric” hymns.

From that genre, in fact, we do have further testimony to competition. The conclusion of a short hymnic prayer to Aphrodite (*Hom. Hymn* 6) begs the goddess to “grant that I win victory in this contest” (*en agōni ... tōide*). Longer hymns elaborate richly on the structure of shorter types that functioned as introductions to epic performances, and these genres exerted mutual cross-influence. The long *Hymn to Apollo* was developed by rhapsodes, in the leisurely narrative style of epic. It falls into two distinct but related portions about Apollo at Delos and Delphi, which can represent a poetic collaboration between composers using the styles of Homer and Hesiod (Martin 2000). The Delian portion contains an interesting snapshot. At lines 166–175 the narrator makes a light-hearted contract, promising to spread the fame of some virtuosic girl singer-dancers, in return for their future testimony about his own talent. When someone asks, “who, for you, is the sweetest singer hereabouts, in whom do you most delight?” they are to answer, “A blind man, he lives in rocky Chios; it is his songs that are best, all of them.” This scenario captures some key features of Archaic poetics. The resident maidens of Delos can recall the immediate past as well as the distant horizons of myth, thus binding the broader Panhellenic world to their “epichoric” or local traditions about Apollo. Their miraculous mimetic performance, we are told, resonates powerfully with the emotional experience of every spectator (Peponi 2009). Furthermore, they are living witnesses to the superiority of a certain singer’s compositions, judged in the immediate aesthetic terms of *sweetness and delight* (note – *not* accuracy in preserving tradition). Finally, in depicting this interaction the *Hymn to Apollo* (a piece of hexameter rhapsodic poetry) refers to another genre, women’s choral song, associating itself with it through the narrative figure of “Homer” (the “man of Chios”).

It is worth pointing out that the *Hymn* elides any mention that either the maiden’s choral *hymnos* recalling “men and women of the past,” or the Chian narrator’s (epic?) songs, occur within competitions. Yet other evidence about Delian performances regularly portrays an

agonistic environment (Kowalzig 2007, 54–128). Thucydides, the historian, quotes this very part of the *Hymn to Apollo* (at 3.104) to support an argument that musical contests existed well before his own late fifth-century era (Nagy 2010, 13–20). This is a general problem in recapturing how festivals shaped Greek poetry: the texts themselves suppress or scramble evidence for their actual composition and performance conditions, in what has been called “diachronic skewing” (Nagy 1990, 21–24).

From these sporadic mentions of early contests outside Athens, we can turn to the most important *mousikoi agōnes* that shaped extant Greek poetry, the Athenian Panathenaea and Dionysia. The vastness of the field allows concentration on only three topics relevant to the festivals’ aesthetic products: selectivity, interactivity, and ethos.

The Panathenaea, in particular, illustrates these. Selectivity, for instance, characterizes everything about the annual July festival (made especially grand every four years), from the choosing of who will parade in the great procession, carrying various objects (as depicted on the famous Parthenon frieze), to the handling of the musical/poetic competitions. A key selection was the choice, apparently in the sixth century, of just five musical *tekhnai* as being eligible for prize competition: the “rhapsodic” performance of poetry without music, alongside four arts related to instruments (singing to the *kithara*; singing to the aulos; playing the *kithara*; playing the aulos). Selectivity applies, too, to the scale of prizes, according to which the highest regard, at least in the early fourth century BC, was for citharody, for which first prize was a crown of gold worth 1000 drachmas plus an additional 500 silver drachmas (Kotsidu 1991). And most importantly, selectivity elevated Homeric poetry. Just as competitions on Delos had been reconstituted by Peisistratus in the sixth century BC, so his family had a hand in the primacy of Homer at Athens. The oldest son of Peisistratus is said to have introduced the public performance of Homeric poetry at the Panathenaea (ps.-Plato, *Hipparchus* 228b). Such tyrannical choosiness for public performance of certain poets can be paralleled about 50 years earlier in the sixth century, when Cleisthenes of Sikyon banned the rhapsodic contests in his polis because they used the Homeric poems, in which Argives (his enemies) were (he thought) always being glorified (Herodotus 5.67.1). Whether Hipparchus singled out Homer on reverse political grounds, in order to foster an Ionian connection with Athens, the main point is that selectivity *in a festival context* canonized particular texts.

Engendering much recent discussion is the custom (supposedly established by Hipparchus) by which rhapsodes would perform Homer in relays, each taking up where the other left off. Such procedures give another sense to the notion of “stitching” songs seen in the fragment of Hesiod mentioned above: once more, collaborative competition is in play. But this specific protocol illustrates two additional themes, interactivity and ethos. If a consensus text of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had already been written down, against which individual rhapsodes could be checked, then competition at the Panathenaea would have devolved into a contest to see who best remembered lines from Homer. If, at the other extreme, there was as yet only a general notion of what episodes went where, in an otherwise unadorned and fluid “oral” text of the poems, then each rhapsode would be judged for composition-in-performance – a much tougher, but more rewarding, activity, for both artist and audience. The scenario in Plato’s *Ion* resembles more the former, as the rhapsode Ion is expected to produce on-demand episodes similar to those in our current texts – the slaughter of the suitors, for instance (*Ion* 535b). This still leaves leeway, however, if not for wholesale creation, at least for histrionic “interpretation” (as we can speak of “dramatic interpretation” of fixed scripts). Rhapsody thus approaches the art of the competitive dramatic actor (*hupokritēs*). As Ion tells Socrates, his vivid feeling for the episode he is interpreting produces a similar aesthetic effect on the audience: “for from the platform I look down at them at various points crying and staring at me with awe and being amazed as the narrative is told” (*Ion* 535e). At the same time, Ion contends, he is totally attuned to his audience: “For if I make them cry, I’ll be the one to laugh, getting the money,

but if they laugh, I'll be the one crying, having lost the money." Not only does this sort of interactivity provide a reason for certain episodes to ascend in popular demand, while others (perhaps The Catalogue of Ships) must have sunk. It also assimilates epic recitation to at least one of the other *tekhmai* in the same suite of contests at the Panathenaea, the citharodic. Aristotle in the *Poetics* (1462a4–8), in mentioning how rhapsodic performance can be overdone by such performers as Sosistratus, specifically makes the analogy to over-stylized singing (presumably citharodic) by Mnasiheus of Opuntium. The possibilities for extreme elaboration of citharody are recounted in numerous examples from the ancient world, up to and including the would-be artist Nero (Power 2010, 3–181). In the later fifth and the fourth centuries BC, rhapsodic art, citharody, and the art of acting (*hupokritikē*) practiced in tragedy and comedy seem to have been converging, due precisely to the festival context of the Panathenaea. On a wider scale, the coexistence in Athens of the Panathenaea with the heavily choral and dramatic festival of the Dionysia meant that the white-hot *mousikē* culture of the city-state could meld together the modes of recitation, song, acting, and dance. Even if these had to be kept separate for purposes of competition – and thus eventually became canonized as the genres we know (Rotstein 2012) – in practice, the coexistence of many genres with the same viewing audiences would have led to a fruitful broadening of the aesthetic and critical horizon for all involved. That individual actors, as well as the dramatic productions as a whole, were rated, starting in the mid-fifth century, only turned up the heat. To a conservative critic like Plato, on the other hand, the genre-bending thereby encouraged seemed decadent, a sign of increasing *theatrokratia* – “rule by the viewers” (*Laws* 700–701).

A similar complementary set of pressures can be detected within the Dionysia itself. A good deal has been written about Euripidean comedy and the paratragedy of Aristophanes – dramatic phenomena that must owe their development to the cheek-by-jowl presentation of both genres (along with satyr plays) at one and the same annual festival (Revermann 2006). This interactive fusion process must have been further accelerated if the choruses of tragedy and comedy consisted, in some occasions, of the same performers, a possibility that Aristotle in the *Politics* (3.1276b) takes for granted. Selectivity was manifest at the Dionysia in other ways. For example, the members of the mandatory 10 dithyrambic choruses of men and the 10 of boys all had to be citizens by birth and members of the tribe for which they sang and danced. The chorus *trainer* on the other hand, often was *non-Athenian*. By contrast, in the dramatic contests at the same festival, the *khorodidaskalos* had to be a citizen, while the chorus members could be from various tribes. About the strict qualification of entrants into the competition we know little: the whole process of the “preview” (*proagon*) for drama, and the tribal selection of producers for dithyramb, are fairly opaque (Csapo and Slater 1995, 109–110). There may even have been a sort of off-Broadway exile to the Lenaia festival for certain playwrights who did not make high enough grades to keep competing at the Dionysia, if evidence from an Oxyrynchus papyrus (P.Oxy 2737) is interpreted aright (Rosen 1989). Again, our ideas about aesthetic choices and values would be far better informed had we access to more precise factual information. What we might glean from the foregoing is a sense that the polis in the Classical period sought a balance between epichoric religious correctness – hence the restrictions on participation in the dithyramb for the god Dionysos – and Panhellenic entertainment. The latter led to a growing recognition of professionalization among actors, and a desire to offer only top-grade productions.

The ethos of the *mousikoi agōnes* at Athens was, in a word, fairness. We can interpret the custom of rhapsodic sequencing as specifically designed to prevent one performer from grabbing the juiciest parts – such scenes as the death of Patroklos – in order to wow the audience for a win. Instead, some rhapsodes presumably had to get stuck with the equivalent of less inspiring bits of the *Iliad* (Book 7? The Catalogue of Ships?). The ruling idea is basically Olympian: a level playing field for all. This might even have extended to running time, when

it came to Dionysia dramas, if we trust an offhand remark in Aristotle's *Poetics* concerning plays formerly being regulated by the *klepsydra* or water-clock (1451a8).

The fairness doctrine appears in another stage in the reports about judging of drama at the Dionysia. While we may still wonder over individual decisions – for instance why Sophocles did not win with *Oedipus the King* – the process itself, if followed regularly, short-circuited attempts at bribery (Wilson 2000, 98–102). Lists of names were submitted tribe by tribe and placed in 10 urns, with which it was a capital offense to tamper; eventually, 10 judges, one per tribe, were selected by random draw, sworn to impartiality, and asked to submit their ranked lists of the plays (each of three dramatists having staged three tragedies and a satyr play). Out of these 10 lists only five were then drawn, again at random, and somehow (perhaps simple addition) first, second, and third places were awarded. The dominant ideology must have been that the demos at large was a reliable judge, since, as Pickard-Cambridge observed of the tribal judges, “That there was any demand for critical capacity seems unlikely” (Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 97).

Plato, naturally, was jaded about the capacity of theater judges to resist persuasion, or the hooting, whistling, and wooden-bench-banging-by-the-heels of the mob (called *pternokopein*). He has the Athenian remark in the *Laws* (2.659a) that “the true judge should not take his cue in judging from the audience, affected by the roar of the crowd or his own lack of education. Nor on the other hand, when he knows, should he, out of the same mouth that invoked the gods when he undertook to be a judge, lyingly and carelessly proclaim a decision through unmanliness and cowardice.” The Athenian scorns, as especially corrupting, an alleged law of Sicily that entrusted decisions to a show of hands by the spectators (659b). Contrast this with the optimistic Aristotle who in the *Politics* (3.1281b7) entertains, at least in theory, the notion that “the many are better judges of works of music and of the poets, because different men judge different parts [of the performance], and all of them all of it.”

How was the *content* of literary works affected by festival judgments? Minimally, it would seem. Most tragic and comic works have on the surface *nothing* to do with Dionysos, and while the aesthetics of “pleasurable beauty” (*kharris*) within the Homeric poems coincides with values cultivated at the Panathenaea (Nagy 2010, 266–277), there is much else about epic that this overlap leaves out. Instead, we might consider a connection that escapes initial notice precisely because it is right before our eyes: the overriding thematics of fairness and justice in all the works deriving from the two key Athenian festivals, whether epic or dramatic. It is perhaps not accidental that the machinery of fair competition so important to the actual running of the *mousikoi agōnes* resembles the workings of divine Justice (*Dikē*) in rhapsodic, tragic, and even comic productions. The overarching principle that structures the *Oresteia* and *Antigone* lies beneath the ideas of just distribution inherent in the democracy. Of course, one could say that it looms large already in the *Iliad*.

Whether Justice dominated also in the dithyrambic texts emerging from the Athenian Dionysia and Thargelia is impossible to say, given the pitiful fragments that represent nearly 800 years of annual performances at multiple locations, down to AD 200 in Athens. If Bacchylides' Ode 18 was actually composed for a boys' dithyrambic chorus at the Thargelia (as some have suggested), it is interesting that even this occasion-bound festival text focuses on *Dikē*: “A god rouses him, so that he can bring justice down on the unjust,” says its chorus, speaking to the old king Aegeus of the imminent arrival of the Athenian hero Theseus (18.41–42). Accidental preservations such as this make one rue the loss of many other non-dramatic choral performances. Even the Anthesteria, better known for mass drinking, is said to have had performances, which featured in the first-century AD the recitation of Orphic poems.

A dearth of texts means we know little about Spartan festival poetry, although this was part of the Archaic complex of Gymnopaïdia, Karneia, and cult songs for Artemis (Pettersson 1992). Nor can we catch the voices from festivals like the Argive Aspis or Hecatombaia, or

the Karneia at Cyrene, familiar to the poet-scholar Callimachus. Every polis worth its name held contests, and most of the texts from these have vanished. One would love to know what the poetess Aristomache of Erythrae sang to win a contest at Isthmia in the second century BC, or how the hymns for the emperor Hadrian sounded at Ephesos centuries later. What we *can* say is that the gradual integration of Athens into the wider Hellenistic scene, while it saw a shift in the funding and production of original choral work at Athens, also saw an explosion of poetic activity, often reusing classic Athenian genres and texts, around the Mediterranean. Aristotle's pupil Alexander the Great in 332 and 331 took actors and musicians with him, giving shows all the while from Memphis in Egypt to Tyre in Phoenicia (Arrian 2.5.8; 3.1.4; 3.6.1). Later at Ecbatana, it is said that 3000 professional entertainers showed up for *mousikoi agōnes* staged by Alexander (Arrian 7.14.1). The hugely influential role of the professional guildsmen called *Dionysou Tekhnitai* (Artists of Dionysos) facilitated the introduction of Greek culture to far-flung foreign lands, the preservation of older Greek texts, and even the creation of new ones, such as a dithyramb titled *The Horse* by an artist called (appropriately) Kallippos, who was commemorated, on an inscription discovered not long ago by John Ma in a Turkish schoolyard, for winning a competition at Teos near Smyrna, sometime in the third century BC (Ma 2007).

Symposia

Festivals provided intermittent opportunities to see performances on a large scale. While an intrepid ancient traveler might have visited one a week, in sailing season, the ordinary Athenian or Spartan would have to wait a full year for the most important dramatic or musical competitions. (The Athenian was perhaps better served, since “deme” theaters existed at many sites throughout Attica, the region surrounding Athens, although it is unclear what sorts of competitions or productions might occur in Ikarion, Eleusis, Peiraeus, or Myrrhinous.) From the Archaic period onward, the symposium – an all-male, elite drinking party, featuring various entertainments – functioned to socialize young men and equalize all participants (Rossi 1983; Murray 1990b). In this regard, the symposium was equivalent to the festival environment, writ small. It had its own political dynamics, centered internally on *isonomia* (equal distribution), while presenting a less democratic face to the outside world. In symposia, poetry and song, jokes, riddles, fables, comparisons, and other “small” genres were the common currency of self-presentation.

Since Richard Reitzenstein's groundbreaking study (1893) the origins of a number of important literary genres have been traced to the symposium. Poetry sung to the lyre by one voice, like that of Alcaeus and Anacreon; elegiac poetry (accompanied by the pipes) ascribed to such figures as Theognis, Callinus, Tyrtaeus, and Mimnermus; and iambic poetry by Archilochus, Hipponax, and others (most likely recited without music) are now understood as having been addressed, notionally at least, to an intimate audience of like-minded symposiasts, some of whom may have been rivals for political or erotic rewards. Love and war, public events and private desires, all found expression in sympotic poetic practices.

While it is useful to contrast the smaller space of the symposium with the larger festival contexts in which choral lyric and drama flourished, the relationship of the two venues is also marked by overlaps and similarities. Elegy, for example (composed of couplets alternating hexameter and pentameter dactylic lines), clearly interacted in terms of diction and theme with epic traditions, such as those in larger public recitations. (The fifth-century BC poet Pigras went so far as to compose an alternative *Iliad* by inserting a pentameter after each verse of the Homeric epic.) Elegy was clearly performed at symposia but also at festivals (Bowie 1986). The former would be appropriate locations for shorter compositions, like those found

in the body of poems attributed to Theognis (Figueira and Nagy 1985). As Bowie has shown, the scene-setting characteristic of these and other short elegies – Archilochus speaking as if on military watch (fr. 4), Tyrtaeus as if rousing troops (fr. 10, 11) – can best be interpreted as fictional projections, within verses actually recited at drinking parties. The festival environment, on the other hand, would accommodate poems like Simonides' recently discovered elegy on the Greek victory at Plataea in 479 BC (Boedeker and Sider 2001). Evidence for competition in singing elegies at the Delphic Pythia and at the Athenian Panathenaea exists (Bowie 1986, 27).

The paean was another genre that enjoyed a double life. Sung in public gatherings by choruses of men or boys, in procession or in dance, this poetic hymn to Apollo was part of many cult celebrations. At major international festivals like those for Apollo on Delos, choruses from many city-states performed, and star poets, like Pindar, wrote for some (Rutherford 2001, 58–68). At Delphi, competitive paean-singing may once have existed. More privately, at the symposium, the paean held a canonical place in the regular routine, marking the start of the drinking party by the choral singing of the participants. In Sparta, according to the historian Philochorus, (Athenaeus 14.630f), the custom during military campaigns was to sing together a paean after dinner, then to individually sing verses from the elegies of the favored poet Tyrtaeus, the best performer being awarded a prize cut of meat by the commander. Another famous Spartan poet, Alcman, speaks of “striking up the paean” for the diners at communal meals (fr. 98 *PMG* = 129 Calame). Xenophon describes a symposium of Greek soldiers and Paphlagonians, at which the paean-singing preceded displays of armed dancing by various contingents and more paean-singing by men from Arcadia (*Ana.* 6.1-5-12). Typically for sympotic poetry, it is difficult to disentangle any one genre from a web of related performance practices, or to pinpoint the meaning of a single poetic act: the paean, which in its minimal form could be a thanksgiving prayer or an apotropaic plea, could usefully establish a range of sympotic moods.

Another form of essentially sympotic poetry illustrates the same sort of flexibility, while presenting a miniature version of some agonistic behaviors we have already noted in festival contexts. *Skolia* – literally “crooked” or “zig-zag” – compositions are songs generally of two to six lines. A corpus of 25 anonymous songs is preserved in Athenaeus from the late second century AD, but the poems themselves most likely date to the sixth and fifth centuries BC (Fabbro 1995). Some praise the Athenian heroes Harmodius and Aristogeiton (*PMG* 893–896); others warn darkly of false friendship, “scorpions under the rock,” and the need to be “straight” – as the crab said to the snake (*PMG* 889, 903, 892). Dicaearchus, the pupil of Aristotle, who wrote a treatise *On Musical Contests*, associated the word “crooked” with the practical details of performing this type of song at parties, citing the random, non-linear order of those who sang, passing around a myrtle twig as they did so (Suda, s.v. *skolion*). Alongside the set of anonymous short verses, a number of other poems, of which we have scant knowledge through quotations or references, are also named *skolia* by various ancient sources. They are attributed to at least a dozen different poets, including Pindar, Corinna, Terpander, Sappho, Alcaeus, and even Aristotle (Fabbro 1995, xi–xii; cf. Jones 2007, 313–352). What apparently unites the two subcategories is a strong tendency to provide commentary on the sympotic scene through *indirection* – more plausible semantics for the meaning of the term *skolion*. This can be observed in the earliest representation in Greek literature of an exchange of *skolia*, in Aristophanes' *Wasps* (422 BC). As part of a plan to reform his hyper-democratic father, Bdcluceon rehearses the old man for an elegant symposium at which various elite figures will be present (Vetta 1983b). When the symposiasts begin talking, the father is supposed to “take up the *skolia* in a fine way (*Wasps* 1222: *ta skoli' hopōs dexei kalōs*). There follows an imagined sequence of hilariously mismanaged song-exchanges, with Philocleon the father first insulting other guests, like Cleon himself, through improperly aggressive

directness in his verses. The old man gradually shows he is learning the art of being *skolios* (indirect). If Cleon chooses to threaten him, says Philocleon, he'll respond in song, "With your madness for absolute power, you will end up toppling the city." A scholiast on the passage notes that Philocleon has slightly altered some old verses of Alcaeus, the monodic poet of Lesbos, to fit the situation. In this turn and his next two, he thus deflects opprobrium by using a dead poet's opinions. The *Wasps* passage shows, as well, how segments identified as the work of well-known poets like Alcaeus could end up being labeled "skolia" in later literary histories. In the free-floating atmosphere of the symposium, *any* composition – even snatches of choral poetry intended for large public audiences – could be re-purposed and sung within a net of allusive, socially positioned reference.

Aristophanes provides other glimpses of this sympotic recycling process. In the *Clouds*, Strepsiades complains that his wayward son refused at the symposium to sing lyrics of the sixth-century master Stesichorus, or to recite something from Aeschylus, preferring to declaim a speech about incest from the radical tragedian Euripides (*Clouds* 1353–1372). Alcman, Simonides, and even the relatively more recent Pindar (first half of fifth century BC) are elsewhere dismissed as too old-fashioned for late fifth-century symposiastic use (Reitzenstein 1893, 31–38). Clearly a generational shift subverted the familiar canon.

The relationship of sympotic poetry – especially elegiac – to the institution of the drinking party varies from vivid description of an individual's desire for music, friendship, wine, and sex (the lattermost especially in Theognis 1231–1389) to more didactic analysis of the proper behavior in the midst of such pleasures (Hobden 2013, 22–65). While Anacreon can call in verse for a bowl "to drink without a pause for breath" (*PMG* 356), or professes mad love for Cleoboulus (*PMG* 359), Xenophanes of Colophon (sixth century BC) recommends order and cleanliness, reverent speech, avoidance of violence (or even narratives of violent Giants), and drinking just the quantity that one can toddle home without an attendant (1 W). Moderate drinking was also poetically applauded, as a healthy Spartan habit (like avoiding toasts) in the later fifth century by the conservative politician Critias (6 W). It is hardly surprising that sympotic poetry, sung within intense male groups, was obsessed with politics and ethics, but also musical practices, eugenics, and antiquarian lore. What is distinctive about the surviving verses is how these concerns are knit together and allegorized, the symposium constituting a microcosm of the city-state (Levine 1985). Solon, the early sixth-century Athenian lawmaker, explicitly connects the hubristic behavior of the city's leaders with their inability to "hold down excess or handle with good order [*kosmein*] the festivities of the banquet" (4.5–10 W). The private is political, just as symposia echo festivals. The richly diverse corpus of elegiac verses attributed to Theognis (sixth century BC) is the best introduction to this mindset, in which lessons from the symposium (to discriminate friend from foe, true from false, base from elite) hold the only hope for his troubled city Megara. Next to its ethical precepts, this sympotic corpus also provides us with the most powerful expression of an essential aesthetic attitude relevant to ancient Greek society. Verses from Theognis (15–17) explicitly mythologize and articulate the "aesthetic" as a coefficient of the social:

Muses and Graces [*Kharites*], daughters of Zeus,
 You who came to the wedding of Cadmus, sang this verse:
 "Whatever is beautiful [*kalon*] is near and dear [*philon*];
 what is not *kalon* is not *philon*."

We can find no neater expression of the absolute necessity, in Greek thought, for making the qualities inherent in worthwhile human interaction into the ultimate criteria for beauty.

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FURTHER READING

Essential are source books by Pickard-Cambridge (1968) and Csapo and Slater (1995). Herington (1985) pioneered study of ancient Greek "song culture"; his useful appendices are keyed to poetic genres. Wilson (2000) examines the details of Athenian production. Wilson (2007) features studies of festivals outside Athens. Kowalzig (2007) demonstrates the bonds between choral poetry and local cult celebrations. Manieri (2009) is an epigraphic survey of Boeotian contests.

Inscriptional evidence for the Athenian dramatic victors is re-examined by Millis and Olson (2012), while Kotsidu (1991) gathers (but does not translate) the relevant sources for the Panathenaea. Two fine collections by Neils (1992, 1996) uncover the larger meanings of that landmark festival. The politics and sociology of Athenian festivals are analyzed in Osborne (1993), Goldhill and Osborne (1999), and Fisher (2011). Connor (1987) is a pathbreaking analysis using anthropological approaches. The long-term implications of the Panathenaic contests for Homeric epic have been brilliantly developed over two decades by Nagy (1990, 2002, 2009, 2010). Larmour (1999) looks at parallels between athletic events and dramatic contests, with a focus on tragedy. Paean and citharody are given magisterial treatment by Rutherford (2001) and Power (2010), respectively. Biles (2011) explores the impact of contest environments on comic poetics. Griffith (1990) sketches a full range of agonistic effects in a number of genres. Representations of contests, including vase paintings, are examined in Shapiro (1992) and Martin (2003, 2010).

Studies of the symposium and its poetry have exploded since the 1980s. Essential is Murray (1990b); Rösler (1980), Rossi (1983), and Gentili (1988) are still fundamental. Hobden's recent work (2013) offers a greatly expanded overview and bibliography. Filtering of poetic corpora through symposia is examined in Budelmann (2012), Carey (2011), Figueira and Nagy (1985), Nagy (2004), and Irwin (2005). A vast literature took the symposium as its fictional setting: J. Martin (1931) is still a good introduction to the whole range, while Bowie (1993) concentrates on the early period.

Finally, two overarching studies connect rhapsodic, choral, and sympotic performances to much larger cultural concerns: Stehle (1997) to gender and Peponi (2012) to philosophical aesthetics.