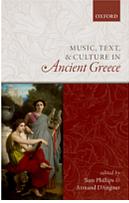


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The Musical Setting of Ancient Greek Texts

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Scholarly examination of the few surviving ancient Greek musical documents has allowed musicians to form a reasonable sense of the way the rhythms and melodies were intended to sound in practice. However, while many investigators have drawn on the work of ancient theorists to explain the musical features evident in the documents, few have attempted to consider specific ways in which the music itself—that is, both the rhythms and melodies that can be derived from the texts and markings in the documents—may be related to the words that in most cases it accompanied or adorned. In this chapter I propose to offer some suggestions about how the musical expression attached to, or reconstructed to accompany, three specific sets of texts may have been intended to contribute to their significance and effect in practice, and to ask what conclusions might emerge from them regarding the continuity or otherwise of ancient practices of rhythmicization and melodization.

The texts in question comprise the opening lines of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, with the accompanying melodic element derived from the pitch-accents of the words; part of a chorus from **Euripides' *Orestes* with ancient musical notation preserved on papyrus**; and the 'Seikilos song' inscribed on a **2nd-century AD grave stele from Asia Minor**.¹ These texts date from different periods spanning around a thousand years, but they have in common the fact that all were

¹ *Orestes* fragment, Seikilos stele: *DAGM* (no. 3) 12–17, (no. 23) 88–91.

originally conceived, like the vast majority of poetry in archaic and classical Greece, as sung music—words and music combined. They will also have been subject to specific instrumental and performance realizations of different kinds at different times, for which evidence is solely circumstantial. In practice it is bound to have varied, depending on the particular occasion of performance and the resources available to performers.

We find virtually no comments in the work of ancient authors regarding the aesthetic and phonic effects of a particular song or passage of song such as these texts represent. While ancient discussions abound regarding the ethos and effects of *μουσική* in general, and of the ethical and, to a lesser degree, aesthetic effects of different modes or instruments, one searches in vain for the description or analysis in musical terms of any substantial poem or text. The passage in which Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing in the first century BC, analyses the musical effects of some lines of Euripidean choral song is uncommon enough for it to be accorded the status of a 'document of ancient music' in its own right.² But in the writings of earlier authors, even those of musically-engaged thinkers such as Plato and Aristotle and harmonic theorists such as Aristoxenus, there is no similar commentary that might allow us to understand better the way the melody or rhythm of, say, an ode of Pindar or a Sophoclean chorus were heard in ancient times. Rare and passing mention is found in classical writers about the musical effect of the works of composers such as the tragedian Phrynichus of Athens, who 'was always sipping on the nectar of ambrosial melodies (*μέλη*) to bring forth sweet song (*φέρων γλυκεῖαν ᾠδάν*)';³ or such as Tynnichus of Chalcis 'who never composed a single poem that one would think worth mention other than the paean which everyone sings, virtually the most beautiful of all songs (*μέλη*), simply (as he says himself) an invention of the Muses'.⁴ But nowhere do we find an articulation of the reasons why particular *μέλη* should be honoured for such qualities as sweetness or beauty, let alone a description of the specific musical features that might be thought to bring about such responses.⁵

Having an understanding of how a particular song or piece of music sounded is not the same as having a sense of how it was heard by listeners in ancient times. For the latter purpose, the

² DAGM 2, pages 10–11.

³ Ar. Av. 748–51 (cf. *Vesp.* 220).

⁴ Pl. *Ion* 534d5–e1.

⁵ Cf. D'Angour (2015) 189–92.

comic parodies of the dramatists' songs in Aristophanes' *Frogs* offer valuable if partial (and, given the context, unstraightforward) evidence for the way the effects of melody or rhythm in specific instances might have been received by contemporaries.⁶ Otherwise we are largely dependent on authors of the Roman period and later for scattered and unsystematic insights into the musical impact of songs or poetic compositions. Thus Dionysius of Halicarnassus illustrates the way specific Homeric verses were felt to deploy rhythmical effects;⁷ Pollux (2nd century AD) preserves details about the structure and intended effects of the *Pythikos nomos*, a purely instrumental piece for the *aulos*;⁸ and Aelian (early 3rd century) records how the sixth-century statesman Solon of Athens, entranced by his nephew's performance of a *μέλος* of Sappho, asked to be taught it 'so that I may learn it and die'.⁹ In Aelian's story neither is the poem in question identified nor the precise basis of Solon's enthusiasm. It is therefore unclear how far the reported response should be thought to relate to the words of the *μέλος*, rather than to its rhythmic or melodic expression or to the particular vocal and instrumental virtues displayed on the occasion (though it is likely to have depended on a combination of all these factors). Aelian's account further exemplifies how the attempt to find musical commentary on a particular text is impeded by the tendency of ancient authors to conflate words and music when commenting on the effect of *μουσική*, a term which in classical times comprised both equally.¹⁰ By the time a critic such as Longinus could present a descriptive interpretation of a specific song by Sappho, the musical dimension is submerged, and his treatment of a substantial portion of the poem deals exclusively with the way style and imagery achieves sublimity.¹¹

What accounts for ancient authors' apparent lack of interest in recording and preserving the specific melodies that formed such a large part of their musico-literary heritage? The effects of melody, while generally considered secondary to that of rhythm, were not a

⁶ Ar. *Ran.* 1264–95, 1309–63.

⁷ Dion. Hal. *De comp.* 20 (see Phillips in this volume with further references). Aristides Quintilianus 69–75 (which may contain material drawn from Aristoxenus) also analyses Homeric verses for rhythmical effects.

⁸ Poll. 4.84; cf. Strab. 9.3.10.

⁹ Aelian ap. Stob. 3.29.58.

¹⁰ For an approach to the distinction of words and music in ancient discussions of *μουσική*, see D'Angour (2015).

¹¹ [Long.] *De subl.* 10.1–3.

negligible aspect of a song's power in ancient ears.¹² But while the musical realization of a song might have made a considerable difference to its actual reception, the absence of comment on the nature of a particular melodic line or passage confirms that only in rare cases was the tune considered to be a dominant or even particularly memorable feature.

In fact, ancient philosophers and musical theorists dwell far less on μέλος than on ἄρμονία, the structure of pitches from which an individual μέλος would have been derived.¹³ Classical poet-composers and singer-performers, for lack of a system of vocal notation (probably invented in the fifth century BC), will in most cases have employed variable, orally transmitted melodic motives conforming to appropriate ἄρμονίαι.¹⁴ As with oral folk music traditions universally, melody is likely to have been employed, for the most part, in a flexible and relatively free fashion.¹⁵ Consequently, non-notated melodies, including most sung texts until around the mid-fifth century, would rarely have been felt to be determinate or to carry authorial status. Rhythm, however, being a function of the syllabic quantities of words, was at the author's command; and during the earlier period of Greek musical history it was considered of greater importance than melody.¹⁶ But equally, given that the rhythms that arose from words—iambic, dactylic, paeonic, and so on—rapidly became conventional within their generic contexts, their musical effects in a particular song or passage were apt to attract comment only if, for instance, they were heard as unusual or wilfully unconventional (as in the case of the extended Euripidean melisma on εἰλίσσετε parodied by Aristophanes).¹⁷

¹² West (1992b) 129–30 cites comments on the importance of rhythm vis-à-vis melody; but numerous passages of ancient poetry suggest a play on words between μέλη, songs, and μέλει, 'it matters': D'Angour (2005) 99.

¹³ While prepared to discuss the ethos of different ἄρμονίαι at length, Plato was suspicious and dismissive of the effects of μέλος; see Peponi in this volume.

¹⁴ For example, Aristotle (*Pol.* 1342a32–b12) relates that Philoxenus was 'forced' to use the Phrygian ἄρμονία when composing music for a dithyramb: D'Angour (2011) 207.

¹⁵ Nettl (2005) 113–15. This is an uncontroversial point for ethnomusicologists, but it bears repetition, as the standard model for modern Western music is to privilege 'the music' in its own right.

¹⁶ Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1138bc. How rhythm worked in non-vocal music is a matter of speculation, but some evidence may be extracted from theorists or derived from poetic sources (see e.g. Phillips 2013).

¹⁷ *Ar. Ran.* 1314, 1349. This kind of comment may be distinguished from observations (explicit or implicit) about unusual or contrived metrical usage, such as we

In consequence of these and other factors, it is left to modern interpreters to try to recreate from theoretical statements, documentary indications, and ethnomusicologically supported assumptions how the phonic effects that can be extracted or imaginatively reconstructed from musical texts may have contributed to the expression of a particular passage of ancient poetry and song. In this respect, it is curious to note that little scholarly effort has been expended on explicating even such well-known aspects of ancient music as its rhythms in relation to whole texts or extended passages of poetry, in the way that literary scholars and philologists standardly offer 'close readings' of such texts, or that students of classical music might provide a bar-by-bar analysis of a sonata or a song. This comparison draws attention, however, to the repetitive quality of ancient rhythms and the subtle differences between similar metrical patterns; and it highlights the difficulty of finding an adequate non-technical vocabulary to describe the effects of rhythm and melody, both in general and specifically in the ancient context. Since our task is not simply to illustrate the way music was attached to the texts but to ask what difference it made to the words, we may be required not only to pay close attention to subtle rhythmic and melodic differences but to find a new repertoire of descriptive terms.

MUSICAL EFFECTS IN HOMER

Homer's exploitation of the rhythmical features of the hexameter was recognized in antiquity and highlighted by ancient commentators.¹⁸ However, the melodic features and effects of the sung epic can be reconstructed only by conjecture. M. L. West's pioneering hypothetical elaboration of 'the singing of Homer' was based on the following premises:¹⁹ (1) the melodic contour of the vocal line followed the pitch inflections of Greek words, as recorded by Hellenistic accent-marks (including some anomalous accents that may be a

find in Hephaestion (*Ench.* 6) in relation to Sophocles fr. eleg. 1 and Critias fr. 4, and in Arist. *Poet.* 1458b5–15; D'Angour (1999) 123–5.

¹⁸ See n. 7.

¹⁹ West (1981) 115–16, 121–2.

memory of sung notes);²⁰ (2) the singer's voice was accompanied note for note by a four-stringed *phorminx* with strings tuned to corresponding pitches;²¹ and (3) the end of the verse invariably allowed for a breathing-space—and for the oral composer, a thinking-space—during which the strings of his lyre could be strummed.²² Extrapolating from what we are told about the structure of Greek modal systems, West proposed that melody of the song would have utilized a sequence of four pitches that is found at the core of nearly all the later systems, to which the strings of the bard's instrument would have been tuned.²³

The noteworthy subsequent analysis by Stefan Hagel of the incidence of pitch accents in Homer and other early epic poetry suggests that singers regularly aimed for a rising melodic shape in the early part of the hexameter verse and a falling melodic cadence at the end.²⁴ Hagel's tabulations show, in broad terms, that the melodic line standardly rises at the start, falls at a point around the central part

²⁰ The general accord of melody with word pitch is well attested in the majority of the surviving musical documents (which preserve other strands of musical tradition as well as this), and paralleled in cultures with pitch-inflected languages. The fact that the musical documents all date from post-classical times, and that the earliest papyri with music from Euripidean tragedy do not show accord with word-pitch, need not cause problems for this premise (see D'Angour 2006a: 279–80); there will have different melodic traditions from early times, for some of which (including solo instrumental and fixed-melody pieces) word pitch would have been irrelevant. See also Franklin (this volume).

²¹ In addition to the parallels adduced by West, a good example of this practice may be found in traditional Ethiopian music using the *krar* (< *kithara*), where singers accompany themselves note for note and intersperse verses with strumming.

²² West (2011) 137 compares Yugoslav oral practice, particularly one recording in which the singer 'rests his voice at the end of each verse, even when there is no syntactical pause'. This is less likely to have been the case with Homeric epic performance, where the melodization at verse-end was potentially more variable; in the former case, West (*ibid.*) notes, that 'there is almost always a fall on the final syllable, most commonly of a fifth'.

²³ West (1981) 123 gives a transcription in staff notation of the opening lines of the *Iliad* as they may have been sung by the bard, with the pitches specified (using conventional Western musical pitch appellations) as *e f a d'*; he has subsequently speculated that ('to limit the whole compass to a fifth') the pitches could have been *d e f a* (West 2011: 135). For the purposes of our discussion the exact notes are unimportant; and it is also clear that some instruments used in Homer's time would have had more than four strings.

²⁴ Hagel (1994); graves and acutes are considered equivalent for melodization, but circumflex accents, where the pitch rise was followed by a longer fall, are not. If both the latter required distinct melodic treatment from acutes, the technique of melodization will have produced effects of considerable refinement.

of the verse, then resumes a rise before a final cadential fall at the end of the verse. Far less frequently verses end on a high-pitched syllable; and in such cases, the following line tends to show a falling pitch around the third-foot caesura, allowing a parabolic arc of melodic phrasing that rises to the end of one verse to be completed halfway through the following verse. Since the occurrence of these features is statistically significant, they show that the way the text of epic was melodized is not a purely random effect of pitch accord, but one that will have involved a degree of conscious musical artistry aimed at shaping the melodic contours of the verse. Hagel's remarkable study and findings have yet to be fully appreciated and exploited by scholars;²⁵ but one immediate implication is that the singer might manipulate the pitch register at the end of a verse to emphasize, for instance, a significant word or idea, or might combine a prominent pitch at verse-end with a falling pitch contour at mid-verse to impart a melodically calibrated structure to a passage of song.

Accordingly, while one should not suppose that the precise melodic shape of every verse was the result of deliberate contrivance, Hagel's demonstration that the singer may have sought to create discernible melodic effects demands a closer look at the Homeric text to see how specific words and phrases might have been enhanced by their placement in the verse and the resulting melodic phrasing. Observation of the accentuation found at verse-end in the opening lines of the *Iliad* provides a striking impetus to such an investigation.²⁶

μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος
 οὐλομένην, ἣ μυρ' Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε' ἔθηκε,
 πολλὰς δ' ἰφθίμους ψυχὰς Ἄϊδι προΐαψεν
 ἡρώων, αὐτοὺς δὲ ἑλώρια τεῦχε κύνεσσιν
 οἰωνοῖσί τε πᾶσι, Διὸς δ' ἔτελείετο βουλή,
 ἐξ οὗ δὴ τὰ πρῶτα διαστήτην ἐρίσαντε
 Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ διὸς Ἀχιλλεύς.

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Here the first four verses end with on falling melodic contour, so that when an oxytone first occurs, at the end of the verse in line 5, it does

²⁵ For a concise account of the practical application to Homeric singing, see Danek and Hagel (1995) with their sung realizations at <https://www.oeaw.ac.at/kal/sh/>.

²⁶ The importance of verse-end melody may find corroboration in the number of anomalous Homeric accentuations that place a prominent accent (acute or circumflex) on the final syllable; of the nine examples given by West (2011) 13, all but two have anomalous *final* accents.

so to salient effect: the phrase Διὸς δ' ἔτελείετο βουλή ('and the will of Zeus was fulfilled') is of clear programmatic significance for the epic. The three identical falling cadences at the ends of lines 2–4 could be sung, say, to the descending notes *a f e* (as might the final two syllables of Ἀχιλλῆος in line 1); the fifth verse would have emerged with particular emphasis if the singer's voice and accompanying lyre notes ended it, in clear distinction to the previous lines, with a conspicuous rising phrase (e.g. *d a*) or a series of rising pitches (e.g. *e f a* on the last three syllables).

Line 5, however, is not the end of the *Iliad's* opening programmatic 'statement'—a term that carries, of course, musical no less than literary significance. The final closural verse comes at line 7, where the two protagonists of the epic are formally introduced, side by side as it were, with honorific epithets—and again with a climbing final melodic phrase:

Ἀτρεΐδης τε ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν καὶ δῖος Ἀχιλλεύς.

The high-pitched ending of line 5 thus appears to have laid the ground for a similar melodic sequence of rising notes at the conclusion of the opening statement at line 7. This may indicate that the pitch at the end of line 5, shortly to be picked up by that at line 7, effected a kind of anticipatory closure.²⁷ It might have been sung to the same notes as final closural phrase in line 7, or may have been distinguished from the latter by using a different sequence of rising pitches. Either way, the pitch in these two verses will have risen prominently above the general level of the song, in contrast to the falling cadences at the end of the foregoing verses, suggesting that the singer could have been aiming to create a pattern of thematic markers through small melodic variations.

The melodic character of the *Odyssey's* opening verses presents a striking contrast to the *Iliadic* opening. While the *Odyssey* as a whole exhibits closely similar frequencies of rising and falling verse-ends,²⁸ its opening lines are markedly different in this respect:

ἄνδρά²⁹ μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλὰ
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν

²⁷ The notion is familiar to students of modern Western music who use terms such as 'half cadence', 'final cadence', 'imperfect authentic cadence', etc.; Caplin (1998) 45.

²⁸ Hagel (1994) 27.

²⁹ For this accentuation see West (2011) 138.

πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄσπεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
 πολλά δ' ὅ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὄν κατὰ θυμόν,
 ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων. 5
 ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὡς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ·
 αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο,
 νήπιοι, οἳ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἥελίοιο
 ἦσθιον· αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἡμᾶρ.
 τῶν ἀμόθεν γε, θεά, θύγατερ Διός, εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν. 10

The end of the first verse, with its oxytelic (high-pitched final) syllable on *πολλά*, does not effect any kind of closure. Rather, the raised final syllable is noticeable, and picks up the repeated high notes of the emphatic opening word *ἄνδρά*. Both the meaning and melodic salience of *πολλά* reinforce the thematic importance of ‘multiplicity’, hammered home by the polyptoton of *πολλῶν* and *πολλά* (3–4).

The climbing melody at the end of the *Odyssey*'s first verse serves both musically and syntactically to invite a direct continuation into the second line. Here the pitch drops at the caesura with *Τροίης*, to foreshadow melodically, as it were with a ‘half cadence’, the completion of the song's opening melodic arc that comes to rest with a ‘final’ cadence in line 2, *πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν*. The oxytelic first verse finds no echo until the end of line 4, where the final oxytone (*θυμόν*) recalls the melodization of the opening verse only to serve as a precursor to the closural cadence at line 5. Unlike in line 2, however, the musical phrase does not rest on a half-cadence at the midpoint of line 5, but remains at a high pitch (*ψυχὴν*), coming to rest only at the end of that verse with *νόστον ἐταίρων*, a falling final cadence reminiscent of—but given the paroxytone *ἐταίρων*, perhaps blunter than—line 2. The following five lines continue with standard falling cadences of varied shapes, only for the melodic phrasing to be reversed at the very end of the cited passage with a prominent perispomenon, marking the closural, melodically emphasized, request to the Muse at line 10 to ‘narrate [the story] also to us’ (*εἰπέ καὶ ἡμῖν*).

It has long been recognized that the *Odyssey* begins with a noticeably different and more vigorously dactylic rhythm than the *Iliad*. The difference is signalled by the trochaic caesura in the first line and the unavoidable enjambment of the first two lines. But in addition to these distinct rhythmical features, we may now observe that the composer has arranged his phrases at verse-end to create a melodic shape that is unmistakably and, one might suppose, intentionally distinct from that of the opening statement of the *Iliad*.

An interpretation of verse-endings that proposes that a pitch rise at the end of a verse may be used in some instances as an indication of marked closure and in others as a means of creating continuity into the following verse risks being over-explanatory. However, the frequency with which an enjambed oxytelic line is followed by one with a barytone at the caesura partly mitigates this concern. The possibility arises that, in melodizing enjambed lines, singers will have carried on for two or even three lines without an intervening breath or instrumental flourish, or at least used a pause of lesser duration between enjambed lines than at the end of syntactically complete verses and closural phrases (oxytelic or otherwise) where a longer flourish might have been demanded. One might further speculate that rising enjambed lines (such as *Od.* 1–2) were melodized in a different manner from those with prominent closural accents such as the acute in line 4 and the perispomenon in line 10.

The general principle of 'significant melodization' that emerges from these examples clearly merits further examination. For this purpose we may here proceed with thirteen further verses from the *Iliad's* beginning:

τίς τ' ἄρ σφωε θεῶν ἔριδι ξυνέηκε μάχεσθαι;
 Αἰητοῦς καὶ Διὸς υἱός· ὃ γὰρ βασιλῆϊ χολωθεῖς
 νοῦσον ἀνὰ στρατὸν ὄρσε κακὴν, ὀλέκοντο δὲ λαοί, 10
 οὔνεκα τὸν Χρῦσσην ἠτίμασεν ἀρηγήρα
 Ἀτρεΐδης· ὃ γὰρ ἦλθε θοὰς ἐπὶ νῆας Ἀχαιῶν
 λυσόμενός τε θύγατρα φέρων τ' ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα,
 στέμματ' ἔχων ἐν χερσὶν ἐκηβόλου Ἀπόλλωνος
 χρυσέῳ ἀνὰ σκήπτρῳ, καὶ λίσσετο πάντας Ἀχαιοῦς, 15
 Ἀτρεΐδα δὲ μάλιστα δύω, κοσμήτορε λαῶν·
 Ἀτρεΐδαι τε καὶ ἄλλοι εὐκνήμιδες Ἀχαιοί,
 ὑμῖν μὲν θεοὶ δοῖεν Ὀλύμπια δώματ' ἔχοντες
 ἐκπέρσαι Πριάμοιο πόλιν, εἰ δ' οἴκαδ' ἰκέσθαι·
 παῖδα δ' ἔμοι λύσαιτε φίλην, τὰ δ' ἄποινα δέχεσθαι, 20
 ἀζόμενοι Διὸς υἱὸν ἐκηβόλου Ἀπόλλωνα.

At no point in this passage do we find a fully closural melodic leap such as we did earlier at line 7; rather, the whole passage is notable for enjambment, and the syntactical period does not come to rest finally until line 21. Melodic prominences on the final syllable of the last word of the verse, as indicated by an acute, grave, or (less frequently) circumflex, occur in six lines (as underlined above), all of which are followed by verses in which the syllable at the third-foot caesura is non-accented (also underlined).

Once again, the high pitches of different verse-ends may be seen to serve more than one function. Thus, the oxytelic line 9 both suggests an expressive ‘rising’ accentuation of *χολωθείς* (‘roused to anger’) and invites continuity through to the melodic fall on *ῥρσε* in line 10. The oxytone at verse-end of line 10 on *λαοί*, which comes at a point of non-closural pause, keeps the melodic tension of verse-endings at a high pitch. At the end of 12 comes the first, and melodically prominent, mention of ‘Achaean’, whose oxytelic form (*Ἀχαιῶν*) is picked up by the oxytelic polyptoton (*Ἀχαιοῦς*, 15, *Ἀχαιοί*, 17) a few lines further on. The words form part of three successive oxytelic lines (15–17), where the melodic prominence of the terms that spell out, in different ways, ‘the army of the Achaeans’ (*λαὸς Ἀχαιῶν*) makes this referent more of a thematic focus in the passage than would the verse-end anaphora alone.

What provisional conclusions might we draw from this preliminary investigation of the possible effects of the melodization of Homeric song? Folk musical melodies universally tend to have an outwardly repetitive character and limited melodic range, and these tendencies are likely to have been exaggerated in works of unusual length such as Homeric (and other) epic.³⁰ The fact that Greek epic song is rhythmically characterized by the repetition of near-identical hexameter lines in succession does not, however, prevent the oral poet from having created a vast range of subtle effects by varying both intentionally and adventitiously the rhythmical resources available to him. Pending further statistical and practical examination, one might venture to claim that the epic singer deployed melodic phrasing with no less variability than he did rhythm, so as to make a discernible difference to his performance in at least three areas: to signal moments of special significance in his narrative, to reinforce or differentiate the syntactic connection between successive verses, and to impart a thematic substructure of melodic echoes to individual passages and to the overall pattern of his song.

³⁰ Monotonous, repetitive melodies and limited range are evident in Parry and Lord’s recordings of Yugoslav epic song (excerpts are on the CD accompanying Lord (2000)); but how these songs sound to modern Western ears should not be confused with the way they are heard by those familiar with the living tradition.

THE CHORUS OF EURIPIDES

The centuries that followed Homer saw the introduction to Greece of new musical techniques and traditions. While folk music using conventional rhythms and employing melodic formulas that conformed to spoken Greek pitch contours must have continued throughout the period, more exotic, refined, and professional styles of music entered the repertoire. As lyric song, both choral and monodic, grew in range and popularity, the singing of Homer yielded to rhapsodic performances of the epic. Professional citharodes performed passages of Homer to their own lyre accompaniment, but the absence of the instrument in accounts and images of rhapsodes indicates that the original melodic realization of epic was being set aside in favour of declamation. It may be that, among the plethora of innovative melodic and rhythmic styles, the subtler effects of Homeric melodization were no longer heard or appreciated by listeners for what they were, and audiences' engagement with the dramatic narrative eclipsed the appeal of what may increasingly have seemed a monotonous and repetitive form of melodic expression.³¹

The most revolutionary change in musical style, the so-called New Music, was felt to have taken place between the middle and the end of the fifth century.³² One key aspect of this revolution was the perceived violation of traditional styles of instrumental and vocal expression, an eventuality that has been linked with the need for progressive melodists such as Euripides to find a way, for the first time in Greek musical history, to notate exactly how a song should be sung.³³ It is hard not to see the influence of these developments on the earliest surviving substantial fragment of ancient Greek musical notation, Vienna papyrus G2315, which preserves a few words from a chorus of Euripides' *Orestes* of 408 BC accompanied by both melodic and rhythmical markings. The melodic line, which is preserved with both vocal and some interspersed instrumental notation, is notably

³¹ The kitharodes who were associated with the singing of Homeric passages were evidently tarred with the same brush: Power (2010) 197, 237. See now also Franklin (2016) on Stesander.

³² In D'Angour (2006a) I argue that the 'revolution' may not have been as sudden or as radical as is suggested by some of the sources.

³³ D'Angour (2006a) 282.

adventurous, and is generally thought to have been composed by Euripides himself.³⁴

In the antistrophe of the first stasimon of *Orestes*, the chorus conveys its distress to Orestes by singing in the agitated rhythm of dochmiacs. I present the relevant passage below in its standard colometry (which differs somewhat from that of the musical papyrus), using square brackets to mark the lacunae and showing the melodic prolongation over two syllables of ἐν (345) and ὦς written out as on the papyrus (ἐ-εν, ὦ-ως). My translation aims, with some inevitable awkwardness, to match the position of significant phrases. I use bold print in both English and Greek to indicate moments where a high-pitched melody is notated, and a double underline where the notation indicates a falling melodic cadence. Here, then, the Chorus voices alarm over the avenging spirits of the murdered Clytemnestra, one of whom, it sings, is staining the royal house with:

your mother's blood—which makes you leap in **frenzy!**
 Great good fortune is not lasting for mortals;
 I lament, I lament.
 Up like the sail 342
 of a swift ship, some god shaking
 overwhelms it in fearful troubles, as **of the ocean's**
 rough and deadly waves, **in its billows**.
 ματέρος [αἷμα σᾶς, ὃ σ' ἀναβ]**ακχεύει;**
 ὁ μέγα[ς ὄλβος οὐ μόνιμο]ς ἐν βροτοῖς:
 [κατολοφύρομαι κατολο]φύρομαι.
 ἀνὰ [δὲ λαΐφος ὦς 342
 τι]ς ἀκάτου θοᾶς τινά[ξας δαίμων
 κατέκλυσεν δ[εινῶν πόνω]ν ὦ-ως πόντ[ου
 λάβροισι δλεθρ]ίοισιν ἐ-εν κύμα[σιν.

It is visually evident from the above how significant melodic moments of high pitch or falling cadence are distributed in the antistrophe. On closer inspection one finds that the final three syllables of line 339 (above in bold) are all set to a single repeated high-pitched note (*e*); the italicized final segments in lines 341 and 342 are set to a lower-pitched falling cadence (*b* – *a*♯ – *a*); the first three syllables of ὦ-ως πόντου are set to a high-pitched turn (*e d e*); while

³⁴ This is cautiously assumed by Pöhlmann and West (*DAGM* 3, p. 16); some scholars, including Rocconi (2003) 71, are less confident about the Euripidean provenance of the melody.

the first three syllables of ἐ-εν κύμασιν in line 342 describe a swooping arc from low to high and down again (*a# – e – bb*).³⁵

What is the rationale for this melodization? The same melodic notation evidently accompanied both strophe and antistrophe, and the melody shows no consistent conformity to Greek word accents.³⁶ This is not simply a function of strophic composition, which can accommodate a melodic line subject to the same harmonic structure (similar to the structure of notes used for Homeric singing) to produce a repeated melody with minor variations across verses and stanzas.³⁷ Here, however, the melodic line was clearly through-composed, and on a fundamentally different principle.

The rationale emerges from the way the earlier verses in the strophe (322–8) are melodized.³⁸ Composed prior to the antistrophe, it will obviously have generated the original melodization for both passages:

<p> ταναὸν αἰθέρ' ἀμπάλλεσθ', αἵματος τινύμεναι δίκαν, τινύμεναι <u>φόνον</u>, καθικετεύομαι καθικετεύομαι, τὸν Ἀγαμέμνωνος 325 γόνον ἔασατ' ἐκλαθέσθαι λύσσας μανιάδος φοιταλέου. φεῦ μόχθων, οἴων, ᾧ τάλας, ὄρε-εχθεῖς ἔρρεις you who tread the spacious air, her life-blood's penalty repaying, repaying <u>murder</u>, I beseech, <u>I beseech</u>: 325 </p>
--

³⁵ The notation is best interpreted as in the enharmonic, not the chromatic, genus (see DAGM 3, p. 16), even though Ps.-Psellus *On Tragedy* 5.39 states that Euripides diverged from previous tragedians in his use of chromatic (see D'Angour (2017), 436).

³⁶ DAGM 3, p. 16. The papyrus shows line 341 transposed to just before line 339, which affects how the melody might be interpreted; I take the transposition to be a scribal error (due to confusion arising from the melodic notes Π P Σ repeated at the end of two lines) and have interpreted accordingly. Either way the overall relationship with pitch accents remains the same.

³⁷ Thus it is not the case that 'the fragment enables us to answer the much-debated question whether strophic lyric was subject to melodic as well as metrical responson' (DAGM 3, p. 16). This fragment can only answer for itself, and may even be evidence for notated 'through-composition' being a Euripidean innovation; D'Angour (2006a) 280–1. For further discussion of Euripides' melodic practices see Thomas (this volume).

³⁸ I depart from the transcription in DAGM (p. 13) in supposing that the scribal error (see n. 36 above) requires us to return line 341 to its received position, transferring the melodic notation along with the misplaced text.

let Agamemnon's
 son be allowed to forget the frenzies
 of mad affliction. **Oh for the toils**
 which you, poor man, **stretching out** for are lost.

The melodization here nicely supports the testimonies that point to the way Euripidean musical practice sought to enhance the dramatic impact of words by being imitative or expressive of words and emotions. Such imitation seems evident in the falling cadence (*b - a# - a*) to which the last three syllables of the word for 'I lament' (*κατολοφύρομαι*, 341) are set; and this corresponds to the identically shaped and affectively similar 'I beseech' (*καθικετεύομαι*, 324) in the strophe. These words both follow phrase-endings which use the same falling melodic cadence to accompany the phrases 'for mortals' (*ἐν βροτοῖς*, 340) and its strophic counterpart '[repay]ing murder' (*[τινύμε]ναι φόνον*, 323). While the expressive function of the melody is not so evident in these phrases, the successive repetitions of the same cadential phrase, creating an aural reminiscence of the melody attached to 'I beseech' and 'I lament', serve to emphasize the dejected, lamentatory impression of the chorus's sentiments.³⁹

The fact that a modern ear shares a sense of the dejection indicated by a falling cadence is striking evidence for considering Greek music a true ancestor of the Western musical tradition. It cannot be taken for granted that the shape-symbolism perceived by the modern ear was the same for the ancients; but while one must be cautious of importing modern reactions, there are grounds in this instance for acknowledging a historical continuity in the symbolism of melodic shape.⁴⁰

Equally noteworthy is the possibility that the composer intended the thematically important word '(her) life-blood' (*αἵματος*, 322) to receive special emphasis from its melodic expression. The word's three syllables respond to the latter three of the antistrophe's *ἀναβακχεύει*, '(leap) in frenzy', which are set as a group to the highest note in the fragment, e;⁴¹ but the latter has three long syllables, while

³⁹ In my discussion below of the Seikilos song I return to the question of the continuity of Western melodic shape from ancient music through to Gregorian chant and beyond.

⁴⁰ Langer (1976) 226–32 suggests features of the symbolism of musical shape (without noting that it may be culturally specific to Western musical experience).

⁴¹ If the alternative transcription is assumed as in *DAGM* (see nn 36 and 38 above), the main corollary is that the high *e* falls at the end of *τινύμεναι φόνον* rather than *ἀμπάλλεσθ', αἵματος*. While *φόνον* might be construed no less dramatically than

αἴματος is long-short-long (this more compact word will more easily have attracted the single pitch than the responding longer one, which might have been more likely to invite some pitch variation). Moreover, to express the sense of 'leap', this high note appears to represent a melodic upward leap of a large interval, perhaps of a fifth.⁴²

A figure involving a similar upward rise from *a#* to *e*, followed by an immediate fall by a fourth to *bb*, is imitatively used to melodize the effect of Orestes' 'stretching out' (*ὄρε-εχθείς*, 328) in the strophe. The text of the antistrophe to which this melodic expression attaches (*ἐ-εν κύμασιν* 'in the waves', 345) offers no imitative rationale, supporting the presumption that this distended, 'stretched-out', melodic figure was originally designed for the strophe. Two other features of the melodization of *ὄρεχθείς* are notable. First, the fact that the final accented syllable is pitched higher than the first syllable allows for a degree of pitch conformity, by-passing the 'stretch' effect of the intermediate syllable, to be felt. Secondly, the melodic rise on the second syllable creates an aural expectation that the singers are about to address Orestes by name, since in terms of sense *Ὀρέστα*, which rises tonally on the second syllable, might easily have taken the place of *ὄρεχθείς*. While the melody makes less expressive sense as an accompaniment for the subsequent 'in the waves', it serves again to create an aural reminiscence (as in the case of the repeated falling cadence on *ἐν βροτοῖς* etc. discussed above) of the melodic figure associated with 'stretching out' (*ὄρε-εχθείς*) in the strophe.

Another aspect of the compositional process might provide an explanation for why no imitative melodic emphasis appears to be placed, as we might have expected, on the words for 'up' (*ἀνά*, 342) and 'shaking' (*τινάξας*, 343) in the antistrophe. In each case, these syllables correspond to words in the strophe that are affectively neutral and would not obviously invite emphatic melodic expression—the first two short (unaccented) syllables of *Ἀγαμέμνονος* (325) and the third (accented) syllable of the word 'forget' (*ἐκλαθέσθαι*, 326). However, in addition to melody there were choric and

αἴματος, its position at the end of the repeated phrase with *τινύμεναι*, and the implication of upward movement connoted by the preceding *ἀμπάλλεσθ'*, are both factors that incline me to hear *αἴματος* as having been accompanied by the high *e*.

⁴² The lacuna at this point does not allow certainty: while the pitch level of the surviving text before the lacuna dwells at around a fifth below this note, other reconstructions (such as that by von Jan, for instance) might propose less dramatic intervals.

rhythmical resources available to Euripides' chorus to add impact to words, and in the case of both *ἀνά* and *τινάξας* a syllabic emphasis might have indicated by the latter means. Support for this notion is suggested by the precious markings preserved on the papyrus representing ictus, the beat that gave form to the chorus's singing and dancing: a diacritical point (*στιγμῆ*) is used to mark the upbeat (*ἄρσις*), indicating that the the downbeat (*θέσις*) fell on syllables where *ἄρσις* is not marked.⁴³ What these markings show confounds any expectation that the beat of the dochmiac metre coincided with the long elements of the basic metrical pattern.

The modern reader tends to stress the long elements in metrical patterns, thus reading the basic five-position pattern $\sim - - \sim -$ as 'di **dum dum** di **dum**' with three stresses (in bold print) as in the mnemonic 'the **wise kangaroos**'; but there are in fact *two* places only in which an upbeat is specified by the *ἄρσις* mark, one on position 1 and the other on position 3, leaving the downbeat to fall (and arguably to create greater emphasis) on positions 2 and 4–5. This articulation makes the rhythm subject to two downbeats of unequal durations, 'di **dum** dum **di-dum**' (as heard in the mnemonic 'that **ol**' man **river**').⁴⁴ It is uncertain how far the use of an *ἄρσις* sign at this period represents a purely rhythmical convention indicating 'upbeat' (as it does in our next example, the Seikilos song), or whether it preserves a genuine record of the movement of singers' bodies or limbs as, for instance, they raised up and brought down their arms or feet in the dance. Either way, it is noteworthy that in the case of both *ἀνά* and *τινάξας*, the first downbeat (*θέσις*) of the dochmiac pattern in the verse coincides with the pitch-accented syllables of those words.⁴⁵ This suggests that, as a substitute for marking the pitch inflection with a melodic rise, the *θέσις* could have imparted to those syllables an emphasis, perhaps both aural and visual, marked by a stamp of feet. This would add an obvious expressive weight to *τινάξας* and *ἀνά*. The fact that the sense of *ἀνά* as 'up' is marked by a 'down' beat is not an objection to this supposition; a dynamically accented beat may be

⁴³ Anon. Bell. 1.85.

⁴⁴ Cf. D'Angour (2006b) 491–2.

⁴⁵ We do not know the melodic accompaniment to *λύσσας* (326) or *δαίμων* (343), but it may be noted that in both cases the *θέσις* would have fallen on these disyllabic words, effectively coinciding with the paroxytone.

used to give a sense of the 'raised' syllable (as appears to be the case in the Seikilos song discussed below).⁴⁶

There is no need to suppose that the enunciation of the vocal line was always tied to the insistently regular rhythm indicated by the *ἄρσις* and *θέσις*. One of the keys to the exciting impact of the New Music may have been the vigorous interaction between the complex patterns of rhythms arising from the disposition of the sung words and a dance-beat dictated by simpler alternations of up and down beats. Such complexity would have been no less attractive to the sophisticated composers and chorus-trainers than the redirection of traditional expectations of word-pitch accordance into different form of expression by means of vocal or bodily ictus as well as expressive melodization. The varied and complex interaction of beat, melodic line, and pitch-accent offered a wealth of possibilities for creative poet-musicians to enhance their words through musical settings.

THE SONG OF SEIKILOS

Over half a millennium after Euripides composed the exciting, innovative music for his *Orestes* chorus, the same symbols of vocal notation were used to record the short song recorded on the 'Seikilos stele'. Dated to around 150–200 AD, the song preserves precious testimony to the way ancient musical notation, both melodic and rhythmical, was applied, and to a style of melodization that would have been familiar to musicians at this early period of overlap between pagan and early Christian practices. The song represents not only one of the most complete of ancient musical compositions, it is also the most accessible to the modern ear. The reasons for this are worth noting. First, in marked contrast to Euripides' agitated and complex dochmiacs, the form of the song (technically a series of iambic dimeters with syncopation and resolution) falls neatly and explicitly (given the ictus-marks included above the melodic

⁴⁶ In addition to the examples in the above footnote, the *θέσις* coincides with a number of other pitch-prominences on other important words where the melodic setting conflicts (or may have conflicted) with word-pitch, e.g. *δικαν*, *φόνον* (323), *μόχθων* (327), *τάλας*, *ἔρρεις* (328), *ἀναβακχεύει* (339), etc. It may be significant that fewer such coincidences occur in the antistrophe: the composer would not have attempted to replicate in detail the expressive effects used in the strophe.

notation) into two regular four-bar phrases, a pattern that has dominated Western musical phrasing for hundreds of years.⁴⁷ Secondly, the melody, which is diatonic throughout and centres on a repeated *a*, is both lightly repetitive and artfully varied.

Transcribable into modern notation in the key of D major as shown below (but with the dominant *a* acting as a kind of ‘tonic’ note), the Song of Seikilos sits at least as easily with modern Western harmonic and rhythmical notions as with ancient modal and metrical theory.⁴⁸ With the possible exception of the last two falling notes of the song (a coda whose function I consider below), the general melodic form is familiar, and in practice somewhat reminiscent of the melodic effect of Gregorian plainsong:⁴⁹



The words to which the music is set have been regularly dismissed by scholars as slight and banal, and the song itself is often described somewhat pejoratively (e.g. as a ‘ditty’).⁵⁰ Yet the sentiment it expresses, though hardly original, represents a timeless maxim, dignified by no less a philosophical system than Epicureanism, which

⁴⁷ See in general Rosen (1998) 258–78: ‘On the whole, it is clear that by the 1820s the four-bar period has extended its domain over musical composition’ (261).

⁴⁸ Solomon’s (1986) painstaking analysis would be even harder for the song’s original composer to understand than it is for a modern reader. The transcription here uses the standard key-signature of D major (initially without the barlines that are standardly used to mark off the phrases). However, the tune is recognizably centred on *a*; all that prevents the designation of A major with *a* as the tonic is the G natural (though this clearly *functions* as a subtonic).

⁴⁹ Were it not for the provenance of the stele and its conformity to obscure epigraphic and notational conventions (some of which were not widely recognized until the twentieth century), on the basis of the musical style alone it might be suspected of being an accomplished nineteenth-century forgery. According to the Alypian tables the notation is nominally Ionian (or Iastian), whereas the melody itself is clearly in the Phrygian species, i.e. it can be played entirely on the white notes of the piano octave that span *d-d'*, taking *g* as the tonic in place of *a*. Moreover, according to classical theory, the scale created out of the disjunct tetrachords *E-a* and *b-e* would correspond to a mode whose tonal centre should be expected to be *b*; were this in fact the case the opening ‘fifth’ would not be a perfect fifth (as it is clearly intended to be, based on the tonic *a*) but an irrational interval slightly greater than a fifth.

⁵⁰ West (1992b) 301.

bears and attracts repetition in every generation.⁵¹ Equally it is clear, as I will show in detail below, that the melody itself has been composed and presented with close care and attention. The elegiac couplet that serves as an epigraph to the song sets out Seikilos' proud claim to have set up the stone as 'long-lasting sign of eternal memory' (*μνήμης ἀθανάτου σῆμα πολυχρόνιον*).⁵² It says much for the composer's musical skill that he makes his melody conform almost entirely to word pitches without ever allowing these to restrict in any discernible way the overall shape and gently alternating patterns of his melodic phrasing. But there are expressive melodic elements in this apparently slight composition which have been overlooked by scholars in their zeal either to patronize it or to subject it to excessive technical analysis.⁵³

A piece with so consistent an accord with word pitch inevitably draws attention to the one or two occasions on which it diverges from that accord, and the most obvious example is the rising fifth with which the song begins. This has been explained as a 'conventional *incipit*', but the sole ancient parallel adduced for such a practice is the opening rising fifth of Mesomedes' short 'Hymn to the Muse' (*ἄειδε Μοῦσα*) composed in the earlier part of the second century AD.⁵⁴ One cannot comfortably posit a convention on so slim a base of evidence. Another explanation is available if we recall the use made by Euripides of ictus to represent what would otherwise be heard as a rise in pitch on an accented syllable. It makes perfect aural sense here for the first syllables of *ῶσον* and *ἄειδε* to bear a dynamic stress in place of a melodic heightening.⁵⁵ The same use of dynamic rather than melodic representation might be observed in the case of the other

⁵¹ Cf. Horace's *carpe diem* (C. 1.11.8). As I write, the pop group 'Take That' perform their song *Shine* to international audiences, while the refrain in Sean Lennon's *Sunshine Lyrics* is another pertinent example.

⁵² *σῆμα πολυχρόνιον* sets up a slight tension with *μνήμης ἀθανάτου* ('immortal memory'); the stone will eventually decay, but the memory will last forever. The musical author may also be playing on the technical meaning of *χρόνος*, a rhythmical beat, suggesting that the song to come contains many such *χρόνοι*, until 'χρόνος itself brings it to a close' (a metapoetic gloss on the final phrase).

⁵³ After twenty-four pages of technical analysis, Solomon (1986) describes it as 'an "attractive melody" not without melodic inspiration' (479).

⁵⁴ DAGM 24.

⁵⁵ If 'the change from a primary pitch accent to a primary stress accent was . . . widespread by the middle of the second century BC' (Horrocks (2010) 111), it will have been well established by the time of Hadrian (whose freedman Mesomedes was).

apparent violation of pitch accent, in respect of ἐστὶ in the third line. The graceful melodic figure on the first long syllable incorporates a slight rise in pitch, but the ictus on the second syllable makes a more definite impact on the word's accentuation—which at this period, moreover, would have been heard in spoken Greek as a dynamic stress (a point to which I will return).⁵⁶

Using the opening *a* as a melodic centre, Seikilos establishes with a rising fifth to *e* the harmonic framework of the melody to follow; out of its thirty-seven notes, only four fall below the 'tonic' *a* and none rise above the *e*. The rising interval of a fifth not only embraces the song's central melodic span, it imitatively 'spans' the word ὅσον—'so long as'—in a manner reminiscent of the imitative use of the interval by Euripides in the melodically distended setting of 'stretching out' (ὄρε-εχθεῖς).⁵⁷ Further expressive uses of melodic shape are evident throughout the song. At the end of the second phrase, λυποῦ ends with a falling melodic figure that symbolically imitates the sense of despondency inherent in the word's meaning. The final note of that phrase, the 'subtonic' note *g*, is melodically a half-cadence; so the listener grasps that the statement is not yet over—indeed, that we are only half-way through it. The third phrase illustrates the notion of life being for a 'little' span by beginning with a series of 'little' (i.e. resolved short) syllables (πρὸς δλίγον); while the last word of that phrase, ζῆν, precisely echoes the melody of the final syllable of the previous line and similarly ends on the subtonic *g*, reinforcing the sense that 'the end' is yet to come.

The final verse, which begins with the words τὸ τέλος, 'the end', is set to a series of notes that strike the ear as a simple rearrangement of those in the penultimate verse; yet they are subtly different, with the addition of a further infixed note (*b*). This allows for a stepwise upward progression of a pattern which maps the melodic shape of τὸ τέλος onto that of ὁ χρόνος at a higher pitch, melodically asserting that 'time' is the arbiter as well as the grammatical subject of the sentence. The final word ἀπαιτεῖ is melodized to strike a note of finality, even of doom. In contrast to the high, optimistic sentiments

⁵⁶ This suggestion obviates the need to posit a paroxytone accent for ἐστὶ (i.e. ἔστῃ), as assumed in West (1992b) 3–1 and suggested in *DAGM* p. 90.

⁵⁷ The sound and shape of the rising *hoson* has drawn comparison to the early chant *Hosanna Filio David*: Reese (1941) 115. Curiously, the surviving musical documents preserve other occasions on which a *hosanna* may be heard in some form, including the Euripidean ὁ σ' ἀναβακχεύει.

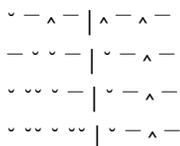
indicated by the high pitch and rising melody of *φαίνου* in the first verse, the 'demand' of time with its falling final pitches (to the lowest note of the whole piece, *E*) brings the hearer to a sober realization of the inevitability of ending.

The subtly imitative qualities of the melody are masterly, and never intrude on the musical integrity of the song. The artful compactness of the song's form also merits consideration, and our recognition of the changed pronunciation of Greek in the Roman era alerts us to a formal feature that has not been generally remarked on: the last syllable of each couplet of the four-line song is composed to give the effect of a rhyme. Pronounced correctly for their time, the words *ζῆν* ([zi:n]) and *ἀπαιτεῖ* ([ape:ti:]) at the end of the penultimate and final verses would have been heard, no less than *φαίνου* and *λυποῦ* in the opening verses, to create an unmistakable assonance. This feature significantly highlights the remoteness of this composition, with its rhyme scheme AABB, from classical poetic practice, where rhyme is never used in this way. Despite detectable elements of expressive continuity with earlier music such as we have mentioned, this alien intrusion on classical norms warns us that the use of the musical notation alone should not mislead us into supposing that the song was heard to operate according to traditional rhythmic canons any more than it conforms to classical harmonic theory.

Under these circumstances, it seems as anachronistic to analyse the song in terms of ancient musical theory and metrics as it would be to explain an artist's choice of colours of an ancient mosaic in terms of spectrographic frequencies. If the rhythm were, in fact, to be straightforwardly analysed as 'iambic dimeters', the standard scansion of the text might appear as follows:

<i>Ὅσον ζῆς, φαίνου,</i>	˘ — — — —	2 ia
<i>μηδὲν ὄλωσ σὺ λυποῦ·</i>	— ˘ ˘ — ˘ — —	2 ia
<i>πρὸς ὀλίγον ἔστι τὸ ζῆν,</i>	˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ — ˘ — —	2 ia
<i>τὸ τέλος ὁ χρόνος ἀπαιτεῖ.</i>	˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ ˘ — —	2 ia

Setting aside the indications of beat and syllable duration on the stele, these verses are recognizably iambic in form. The lyric iambic metron is subject to transformations such as those created by syncopation (a missing beat, standardly indicated by \wedge) and resolution (two short beats for one long). Complete with syncopations and 'bunched' resolutions, the rhythmical equivalence of each line invites more appropriate visual representation as follows:



Such an analysis, however, alerts us to practical complications. Without the *στιγμαί* to indicate a regularly spaced beat, the second line could represent (in ‘scansion mode’) the rhythm **dum** di di **dum** di **dum** [di] **dum**; that is, it might most easily be read *μηδέν ὄλωσ* σὺ *λυποῦ* with stress accents on the long syllables (as underlined) and a compensatory shortening of the value of the double-short element (*♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩.*).⁵⁸ In place of this offbeat rhythm, the duration-signs and *στιγμαί* show that the intended rhythm was one of evenly pulsed intervals, *μηδέν ὄλωσ σὺ λυποῦ* (*♩. ♩. ♩. ♩. ♩.*). Similarly, in the absence of *στιγμαί* the third and fourth lines might more readily be stressed on the second and fourth elements (with or without resolution) of each iambic metron, i.e. *πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐστὶ τὸ ζῆν, / τὸ τέλος ὁ χρόνος ἀπαιτεῖ*. The apparently correct evenly stressed rhythm (*πρὸς ὀλίγον ἐστὶ τὸ ζῆν, / τὸ τέλος ὁ χρόνος ἀπαιτεῖ*) may be restored by showing the staff transcription with barlines (which imply ictus at the beginning of a bar) in place of the *στιγμαί* used on the stone:



The result of reinforcing the ictus on the first syllable of each verse, however, is that the song is easily heard (particularly the last two phrases, as its nineteenth-century editor Carl von Jan perceptively noted) as falling into a trochaic rhythm i.e. $- \sim - \sim$, a ‘falling’ rather than a ‘rising’ rhythm.⁵⁹ Moreover, the substitution of a choriamb ($- \sim \sim -$) for an iambic metron in the second line represents a rare metrical variant in classical verse (technically an ‘anaclastic’ iamb, in which the position of the first two elements $\sim -$ are reversed to $- \sim$).⁶⁰ Its presence here raises further questions about how securely the song can be analysed in classical metrical terms. The regular ictus and prolonged notes (it is better to speak of prolongation than the

⁵⁸ Cf. West (1982) 23–4.

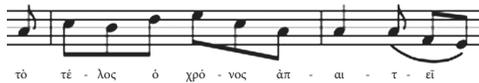
⁵⁹ Jan (1962 [1895]) Supplement p. 36.

⁶⁰ A possible (but not universally accepted) example of such anacalasis may be found in the first line of the ‘Nestor’s Cup’ inscription (CEG 454).

traditional 'syncopation', which strictly speaking connotes a 'gap' in the rhythmic flow) suggest a different approach to rhythmicization from that of classical verse, albeit one which has elements of continuity. Rather than subject the song to heavy-handed metrical analysis, therefore, we might be better advised to trust the aural impression that the song produces, which is one of syllabic and phrasal balance reinforced by assonance, comparable to a familiar nursery rhyme:

*Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
 Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
 All the king's horses and all the king's men
 Couldn't put Humpty together again.*⁶¹

Finally, however, one might wonder how the increasing dynamic stresses of the word accents in regular spoken Greek of the time (touched on above in the discussion of the melodization of ἐστὶ in the third phrase) might have interacted with the metre and phrasing. This becomes particularly acute in the fourth phrase of the song, where the dynamic accents of second-century speech would have fallen on syllables that do not coincide with the ictus implied by the στιγμαί. Taking dynamic stress solely into account, it would be more accurate to transcribe the latter part of the song with barlines placed immediately prior to the words τέλος, with the definite article τό acting as a kind of upbeat before the barline, i.e.:

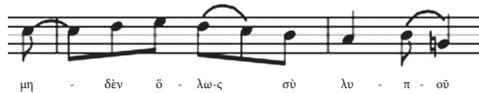


Given the natural placing of stresses on the words in spoken Greek at the time of the song's composition, this may well be how the enunciation was perceived by the composer, and inscriptional indications may support this view: the placing on the stele of the στιγμαί over the second syllable of λυποῦ in the second phrase has been 'corrected' by recent editors so that it falls in the centre of the diseme sign.⁶² This

⁶¹ Such a comparison may in the past have led to the song's being dismissed as a musical trifle. It is instructive to sing the Seikilos melody to the words of 'Humpty Dumpty', noting how the word 'fall' coincides with a melodic fall, the melody speeds up with 'all the king's horses', and the coda of the final bar strikes a note of dejection appropriate to the conclusion. While these melodic coincidences may be the result of felicitous chance, the effects are noticeable.

⁶² DAGM p. 88, line 7; similar assumptions may have guided the editors' placing of the στιγμαί over ζῆν and ἀπαιτεῖ.

leads to an even and regular rhythmical interpretation of the verse, as shown in the staff transcription above. On the stele, however, the *στυγμή* is placed above the *υ̇* of *λυποῦ*. This may suggest that the author considered the ictus as falling on the second note to which that diphthong is set, as it would be if one sings the words in ‘scansion mode’ as earlier suggested (i.e. stressed on the long beats as *μηδὲν ὄλωσ σὺ λυποῦ*):



In practice, it is open to listeners to switch their perception of ictus to either manner of execution.⁶³ But when one attempts to sing the piece according to such dynamic accentuation while simultaneously preserving the notated *ἄρσις*, the resulting cross-rhythms give the performer a different (and arguably more interesting) sense of melodic movement from that achieved by stressing the words solely according to the regular alternation of ictus.

A corollary of this observation is that the composer will have been less prone than we are to hear the verses as rhythmicized in the regular sing-song way that may have contributed to modern scholars’ dismissive characterizations of the piece. The rhythmical interaction between dynamic accent and ictus would not be the only anomalous feature of the song to modern ears. When the stele was first transcribed, the melodic drop by the interval of a fourth at the end of the song came as an unwelcome surprise to some modern musical commentators, who would have preferred a more familiar cadential close with reversion to the initial *a*. In terms of modern harmonic expectations, it is not unusual for a melody to end on the functionally dominant note of the scale (*e*), in this case that of the octave below the tonic. But here the explanation may be found in terms of the composer’s attempt to create formal balance: as the opening interval is a rising fifth *a-e*, the closing interval matches it by being the falling interval *a-E*. As well as having an expressive purpose, then, the falling notes of the last word form an apt counterpart to the rising

⁶³ This is a phenomenon well known to listeners of classical music; one may for instance ‘choose’ when listening to a performance of Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* (1st Movt) to hear the triplets as stressed on any one of the three triplet quavers, even if the intended ictus is on the first.

notes of the opening word of the song. With the final phrase creating a fitting melodic response to the opening rising fifth, the song's octave range is brought to completion only with the song's final note. The ear easily accommodates the sense of closure afforded by the last note being the lower extremity of the octave *E-e*, for which the centrally placed *a* has provided the tonic centre throughout.

CONCLUSIONS

The particular qualities of Greek music, as demonstrated in examples that span nearly one thousand years, may be shown to have consistently affected the way texts were understood, performed, and received. From Homer through to Seikilos, a remarkable continuity is demonstrated in the relationship of words to sung texts that depends not solely on conventional rhythmical patterns and pitch accents but on the use of melody for expressive purposes. While the precise mechanisms for the use of melody, rhythm, and musical form for the purpose of textual enrichment varied widely across the centuries, many of the same characteristics and principles are evident in the singing of Homer, the choral expression of Euripides, and the song of Seikilos. They all involve the use of music for the heightening of the emotional and semantic qualities of the text, the patterning of thematically important elements, and the structuration of their songs.

All these elements are picked up in what is standardly taken to be the foundational expressions of modern Western music, the Gregorian chants that are first found in notated form in the ninth century AD. This brings us back to the question of whether we may validly attribute to the ancients an understanding and employment of melodic shape in expressive and thematic terms that are so immediately graspable by a modern Western ear. The answer seems to be that the earliest music of Greece exhibits elements of symbolic and affective, no less than geographical and cultural, continuity with the well-springs of the Western musical tradition. This demonstrable fact allows us to return to the songs of ancient composers with renewed illumination and admiration for the way they used rhythm and melody to make a difference to their texts.