

THE MULTIPLE ASPECTS OF DITHYRAMB

B. KOWALZIG, P. WILSON (edd.), *Dithyramb in Context*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2013, Pp. xviii + 488, ill., ISBN 978-0-19-957468-1.

STEMMING FROM A CONFERENCE held in Oxford in 2004, with the title “Song-Culture and Social Change: The Contexts of Dithyramb”, this volume includes twenty papers on the complex form of dithyramb and the way it functioned through a very long period — from the sixth century BC to the fifth century AD — as a “culturally productive phenomenon” (p. 3). The book is divided into five sections preceded by an introduction. In the latter the editors provide an overview of the elusive generic identity of dithyramb as presented in ancient and recent scholarship and, focusing on the limited textual evidence, they raise the questions of the paternity of the genre as well as of the association between dithyramb and Dionysiac cult, while also dealing with its generic transformations and the emergence of New Dithyramb. The book is rounded off by a list of Illustrations and Abbreviations, an extensive multilingual Bibliography, an Index of Passages, a Museum Index and a Subject Index.

The first section is entitled “Social and Religious Contexts”. Its starting point is Barbara Kowalzig’s contribution “Dancing Dolphins on the Wine-Dark Sea: Dithyramb and Social Change in the Archaic Mediterranean”, in which she offers rich literary and archaeological evidence to demonstrate the close association between leaping dolphins and men dancing a dithyrambic dance. She further shows that the archaic dithyramb was a cross-cultural choral song, a commodity spread in the maritime Mediterranean environment and not limited to the boundaries of a specific *polis*. In “Becoming Like Dionysos: Dithyramb and Dionysian Initiation”, Salvatore Lavecchia explores in detail the origins of dithyrambic poetry — focusing on the motifs of death

and transformation — and places particular emphasis on the association of the Argolid with Dionysos, on the one hand, and on Pindar's perception of the Theban origin of dithyramb (fr. 70b S.-M.) as a “re-appropriation of the Eleusinian mysteries” (p. 70), on the other. In “Demeter and Dionysos in the Sixth-Century Argolid: Lasos of Hermione, the Cult of Demeter Chthonia, and the Origins of Dithyramb”, Lucia Prauscello brings forward archaeological and literary evidence in order to establish the close relationship between the cult of Demeter Chthonia and the Dionysiac worship at Hermione and pins down effectively the dithyrambic connotations of Lasos' fragmentary *Hymn to Demeter*. In the first part of his chapter “Dithyramb and Greek Tragedy”, Luigi Battezzato examines the influence of tragedy on dithyramb by dealing briefly with four of Bacchylides' dithyrambs and their tragic elements — unfortunately, not analyzing them in depth — and by discussing in more detail a single case: the dithyramb of Ion of Chios (*PMG* 740) which is presented as an alternative version of / a reaction to the political dimension of Sophocles' *Antigone*. In the second part of his chapter he examines the second stasimon of Euripides' *Helen*, which contains significant dithyrambic and Spartan elements, in order to prove the strong association between tragedy and dithyramb — what is, however, an already well-established view.

The second section is entitled “Defining an Elusive Performance Form”. Giambattista D'Alessio, in “The Name of the Dithyramb: Diachronic and Diatopic Variations” offers a thorough investigation of the name and the naming of dithyramb, arguing that the label “dithyramb” is also used for other, different and overlapping, kinds of songs, such as the circular *choros* (*κύκλιος χορός*) and nome (*νόμος*). Focusing on the dithyrambic performances at Sparta he soundly concludes that the term “dithyramb” alludes to two distinct varieties of choral song. David Fearn, in “Athens and the Empire: the Contextual Flexibility of Dithyramb, and its Imperialist Ramifications”, discusses Bacchylides 17 and argues convincingly that the flexibility of the circular *choros* fits the Athenian imperialistic culture of the fifth century. In “Circular Chorus and the Dithyramb in the Classical and Hellenistic Period: a Problem of Definition”, Paola Ceccarelli offers a broad and rich examination of the inscriptional record. She observes the rare use of the term “dithyramb” (the terms *boys' and mens' choroi* and *kyklioi choroi* are found instead) and concludes that the term *kyklios choros* denotes circular choral performance, which is epigraphically attested only in association with the Dionysia, but is nevertheless not to be exclusively identified with dithyramb. She also stresses that during the Hellenistic period the performance of dithyramb and

nome merged; also dithyrambic poetry, which was still very popular, did not probably allude to choral, but to solo performance. Guy Hedreen, in “The Semantics of Processional Dithyramb: Pindar’s Second Dithyramb and Archaic Athenian Vase-Painting”, explores the depiction of circular dances in archaic Greek vases, arguing that the curved form of the vase does not allow us to see clearly if the dance is circular or processional and that the early form of dithyrambic choreography, closely associated with the birth of Dionysos, is processional. Pindar’s second dithyramb replaces an earlier processional form with a *kyklios choros*, as Hedreen argues. His conclusion, however, based mainly on Greek myths and visual representations and not basically on the textual evidence itself, is not highly convincing. In “Music and Movement in the Dithyramb”, Armand D’Angour precisely describes the evolution of dithyramb by focusing on both Archilochus’ raw presentation of dithyramb (fr. 120 W) and Pindar’s (fr. 70b S.-M.) establishment of a more formal structure of the genre, while he equally deals with the New Musicians who introduced a novel, complex and peculiar “dithyrambic melos” (p. 206).

The third section is entitled “New Music”. The first chapter of this section is John Curtis Franklin’s “Songbenders of Circular Choruses: Dithyramb and the ‘Demise of Music’”, in which the author, prompted by an ancient commentator on the Aristophanic “songbenders of circular choroï” (Aristophanes, *Clouds*), questions the predominant view that dithyramb bears sole responsibility for the ‘decline’ of music, by arguing that Arion’s early choral dithyramb could be sung to the kithara and by stressing the importance of the term *καμπή* — used with regard to both strophic composition and melodic modulation — which provides an essential key for exploring the progress of dithyramb through the fifth century. After Lasos’ musical innovations, however, the Athenian dithyramb became aulodic and the great popularity of dithyrambic performances spread quickly these innovations of the New Musicians, as Franklin states. In my view, Franklin’s contribution does not appear to offer something fresh and innovative in the current research. The fusion between dithyramb and *kitharōidia* is also Timothy Power’s main theme in his valuable contribution to this volume “Kyklops *Kitharoidos*: Dithyramb and Nomos in Play”, in which the author overviews recent scholarship and pays particular attention to the rivalry between Timotheos and Philoxenos in order to demonstrate the generic blend between nome and dithyramb. Mark Griffith, in his stimulating contribution “Satyr-Play, Dithyramb, and the Geopolitics of Dionysian Style in Fifth-Century Athens” turns his attention to the generic interplay between dithyramb and

satyr drama and detects the latter's dithyrambic elements by underlining the similar mechanisms through which both genres diffuse their sociopolitical and aesthetic outlook. In "Performance and the Drinking Vessel: Looking for an Imagery of Dithyramb in the Time of the 'New Music'" Alexander Heinemann vividly presents visual discourses on *mousikê* by discussing related imagery, particularly of dithyrambic performance, on Athenian pottery of the second half of the fifth and the fourth century. He thus emphasizes the creation of a shared "language" between image and performance, while he perceives images as carriers of both past (myth) and present (practice). Unfortunately, his findings, however interesting they may be, do not introduce new and original ideas.

The fourth section entitled "Towards a Poetics of Dithyramb" begins with Andrew Ford's thoughtful study "The Poetics of Dithyramb", in which the author examines the reception of the New Dithyramb by discussing dithyrambic diction, especially the compound epithets used in Old Comedy, the epithets of Dionysos found in Euripides' *Bacchae* and in Pindar's Dithyramb for Athens (fr. 75.9-10 S.-M.), as well as the characterization of the dithyrambic poets as "wise" in many ancient sources. He concludes that the poets of New Dithyramb sought to create a new language and a modern, sophisticated style and that the criticism against this genre is a proof of its "distinctive position" within Greek poetry. In the particularly informative paper "The Dithyramb, a Dionysiac Poetic Form: Genre Rules and Cultic Contexts", Claude Calame deals with the generic identity of classical dithyramb engaging in a detailed and demanding investigation of performative/mimetic words and motifs, as well as the (narrative) content of dithyrambic poetry, in order to foreground the difference between Pindar's and Bacchylides' surviving poems labelled as "dithyrambs"; he thus underlines the genre's controversial identification. In the following contribution, "Dithyramb in Greek Thought: The Problem of Choral Mimesis", Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi wonderfully shows, through the example of the Byzantine scholar Ioannis Tzetzis, how specific misreadings of the ancient references to dithyramb by modern scholars can be attributed to false interpretations of the texts by the ancient commentators, which, in their turn, are due to the genre's perplexing but essentially mimetic/choral nature. Further, focusing on well-known, but vague, Platonic and Aristotelian passages on dithyramb she resolves a long misinterpretation regarding the term *ἀπαγγελία*. In the next chapter, "One who is Fought over by all the Tribes': the Dithyrambic Poet and the City of Athens", Giorgio Ieranò, based on both inscriptions and textual evidence, discusses the role of the dithyrambic poet or *κνκλιοδιδάσκαλος* in Athens

and concludes that with few exceptions the poets of New Dithyramb only after their deaths became classical and therefore highly appreciated.

The fifth and final section is entitled “Dithyramb in the Roman Empire” and begins with Julia Shear’s paper “Choruses and Tripods: the Politics of the Choregia in Roman Athens”. The main focal point of her examination are the Roman choregic monuments in Athens on the occasion of dithyrambic competitions at the City Dionysia. Those monuments reflect older strategies and, therefore, represent a vital link between the past and the present as regards the formulation of civic identity. Despite the wealth of information that Shear puts forward I am not sure if she succeeds in proving her main argument that “the situation in Athens under the Roman Empire was not simply a continuation of earlier practices” (p. 389). After reading her paper, I actually gathered the opposite impression.

The book concludes with Ian Rutherford’s important paper “Dithyrambos, Thriambos, Triumphus: Dionysiac Discourse at Rome”, in which he aims at defining the afterlife and identity of the dithyramb in imperial Athens by commenting on Hellenistic scholarly discourses on this genre. More specifically, he spots the association between triumph, liberation, transformation and the dithyramb, which leads him to the conclusion that in Roman poetry the dithyramb was broadly perceived as a Dionysiac *thriambos*.

On the whole, the book provides rich material derived from various scientific fields (history, literature, archaeology), informative discussions and differing approaches to the complicated, ongoing discussion of the genre of dithyramb. It is also beautifully produced with high quality illustrations and elegant style.

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