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Music in Rites. Some Thoughts about the Function of Music in Ancient Greek Cults

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Music in Rites. Some Thoughts about the Function of Music in Ancient Greek Cults

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This paper deals with the important role of music in ancient Greek cult practices. It will explore the types of music that were played and research the effect music may have had on specific cult ceremonies. As this paper will show, music served to support the religious act and enabled a secure line of communication with the divine sphere. The paper is based on the results of the author's doctoral thesis which deals with the role of music in ancient Greek processions.

Sacrifice; music; altered state of consciousness; dance; ritual act; sacred space; enthusiasm; epiphany.

Dieser Artikel behandelt die wichtige Rolle der Musik bei Kulthandlungen in der griechischen Antike. Er untersucht, welche Art von Musik dabei zum Einsatz kam und welche Auswirkungen die jeweils gespielte Musik auf die kultischen Zeremonien gehabt haben könnte. Es wird gezeigt, dass Musik den religiösen Akt unterstützte und die Kommunikation mit der göttlichen Sphäre absichern half. Der Artikel basiert auf den Ergebnissen der Dissertation der Autorin, in der die Rolle der Musik in antiken griechischen Prozessionen behandelt wird.

Opfer; Musik; erhöhter Bewusstseinszustand; Tanz; Ritualhandlung; heiliger Raum; Enthusiasmus; Epiphanie.

1 Introduction

Music played a major role in Greek life, being connected both to daily life and to cult.¹ Cult songs could serve as a medium to support the religious acts that constitute “a demonstrative change in behaviour and situation compared with a secular norm”, as Furley and Bremer point out. In this context hymns must be regarded as the predominant song type in cult performance, since they were sung in all parts of the cult ritual: during the procession, before the sacrifice and during the feast and the contest (compare table 1).² Another important function of songs in cult is to enable a secure framework of communication with the divine sphere, as I will make clear later.³

The Greek term for music is *mousiké*, the art of the Muses: a divine chorus of women with Apollo as their lyre-playing leader.⁴ They sang, danced, performed, and composed songs and poetry. *Mousiké* differs considerably from our modern sense of the word ‘music’: it means the whole range of singing, dancing, playing instruments and performing drama. The close connection between music and cult is for example reflected in Greek myth,

1 For a comprehensive introduction to ancient Greek music see Murray and Wilson 2004; Hagel 2009; Landels 1999; Anderson 1994; West 1994.

2 Furley and Bremer 2001, 1.

3 Furley and Bremer 2001, 1, 5. – The paper is based on the results of the author's doctoral thesis which deals with the role of music in ancient Greek processions: Kubatzki 2015.

4 For the etymology and history of the word see Lidell and Scott Online: *mousiké* (μουσική) (visited on December 14, 2015); Kaden 2004, 67–69 and Murray and Wilson 2004, 1–5.

where we read of gods inventing instruments and playing them.⁵ There were no doubt socio-cultural and psychological reasons why music came to be such a constant part of cult; but what effect might music have had on the ceremonies themselves? Claude Calame emphasizes that musical performances, especially circular dances, helped in rites of passage to mark transitions between childhood and adulthood.⁶ I in turn will adduce evidence that music, and by extension dancing, was used to induce an altered state of consciousness during the sacred performance of the sacrifice.

2 Music as a common feature of cults

In almost every scholarly article or book on the subject, Greek music is represented as a common feature of ancient Greek cults.⁷ This can readily be established by reading ancient texts and examining the hundreds of pottery paintings showing musicians in cult scenes.⁸ And even if we cannot take depictions and writings as evidence for the real use of music in Greek cults, they serve as hints for what was of importance.⁹ I will take a closer look at the extent to which musical activity was performed in cult, and to what purpose.

In writing my thesis on Greek processions, I selected more than fifty texts from the 8th century B.C.E. to the 4th century C.E. which illustrate cult situations involving music.¹⁰ Whilst these passages show that music was played in cults, they do not show whether actual performance was customary. However, three sources offer helpful insights into the question: the Homeric Hymns, Herodotus' History, and Xenophon's Anabasis. One of the earliest sources, the Homeric Hymn to the Delian Apollo (7th–4th century B.C.E.), does show that Apollo (Phoebus) was usually honoured with music:

Many are your temples and wooden groves, and all peaks and towering bluffs of lofty mountains and rivers flowing to the sea are dear to you, Phoebus, yet in Delos do you most delight your heart; for there the long robed Ionians gather in your honour with their children and shy wives: mindful, they delight you with boxing and dancing and song, so often as they hold their gathering.¹¹

Herodotus' (5th century B.C.E.) makes a particularly apposite remark: that the Persians did not use the *aulos* during sacrifice as was normally the case among the Greeks:

Now this is the manner of sacrifice for the gods aforesaid which is established among the Persians: they make no altars neither do they kindle fire; and when they mean to sacrifice they use no libation nor music of the pipe nor chaplets nor meal for sprinkling.¹²

5 Athena invented the *aulos* (αὐλός, a double pipe with single or double reed and a characteristic by a powerful sound), Hermes the lyre, Dionysos/ Kybele the *tympanon*, a frame drum (see Lidell and Scott Online: *aulos*, *tympanon*; visited on December 14, 2015).

6 "Through choral performance, the rhythm of different stages in the development of the social life and the gender role of women is validated on the religious level" (Calame, Collins, and Orion 2001, 207).

7 Goulaki-Voutira 2004, 371; Rutherford 2001, 3; West 1994, 1; Landels 1999, 1; Nordquist 1994, 81, to name just a few.

8 "Probably no other people in history has made more frequent reference to music and musical activity in its literature and art" begins West his foreword about the ancient Greeks (West 1994, 1).

9 For critical view to music on depictions see for instance Bundrick 2005, 3. For cult scenes on ceramics as a symbolic language system see Laxander 2000, 146–149.

10 Kubatzki 2015.

11 Homeric Hymns, Hymn to Delian Apollo (Hesiod 1914, 146–164).

12 Histories Herodotus 1980) 1, 132. The *aulos* is usually translated 'pipe', in preference to 'flute', since the *aulos* was a reed-voiced instrument like the modern oboe.

Xenophon (5th century B.C.E.) teaches us that music was common in Greek processions honouring the gods. In his *Anabasis* he describes a feast of Greek warriors from Arcadia, a region in the middle of Peloponnes, camping in the Greek colony Kotyora in western Asia, impressing ambassadors of the hostile Paphlagonians with typical Greek war-dances and a pantomimic performance. In the following passage Xenophon describes a Mysian man, i. e. a man from the part of Greece that is now Turkey, dancing a warrior dance with clashing shields. After him, men from Mantinea, a polis in Arcadia, and some other Arcadians also danced a martial performance and ended with a processional cult song:

After this a Mysian came in carrying a light shield in each hand, and at one moment in his dance he would go through a pantomime as though two men were arrayed against him, again he would use his shields as though against one antagonist, and again he would whirl and throw somersaults while holding the shields in his hands, so that the spectacle was a fine one. Lastly, he danced the Persian dance, clashing his shields together and crouching down and then rising up again; and all this he did, keeping time to the music of the flute. After him the Mantineans and some of the other Arcadians arose, arrayed in the finest arms and accoutrements they could command, and marched in time to the accompaniment of a flute [aulos] playing the martial rhythm¹³ and sang the paean and danced, just as the Arcadians do in their festal processions in honour of the gods.¹⁴

The last few words “ὡσπερ ἐν ταῖς πρὸς θεοὺς προσόδοις” are particularly relevant here. The manner in which the Mantineans and the Arcadians danced in time to the *auloi* was like [ὡσπερ] the way they performed their *prosodia* [προσόδοις], the processional songs for their gods. *Prosodia* were mostly sung in processions, as the name suggests. Indirectly, Xenophon shows that marching to *auloi*, dancing and probably singing a *paian*¹⁵ was common in processions during cult rituals.

A late source, Lucian of Samosata (2nd century A.D.), mentions that on Delos no sacrifice was offered without music and dance:

At Delos, indeed, even the sacrifices were not without dancing, but were performed with that and with music [μετὰ μουσικῆς]. Choirs of boys came together, and while they moved and sang to the accompaniment of flute and lyre [αὐλῶ καὶ κιθάρᾳ], those who had been selected from among them as the best performed an interpretative dance. Indeed, the songs that were written for these choirs were called Hyporchemes, and lyric poetry is full of them.¹⁶

Furthermore, there are ancient texts which describe absence of music as an abnormal situation. A clear connection is drawn between absence of music and war, death and tears. As Martin West writes in his *Ancient Greek Music*, music is “constantly associated with the idea of celebration”,¹⁷ which could be taken as the opposite of grief. Contrary examples provided especially by Plutarch and Herodotus invite us to conclude that music was a common part of the ritual of sacrifice and procession. In the 1st century C.E. Plutarch wrote in his *Life of Alcibiades* about the festival in Dekelaia, a city next to Athens, noting that on one occasion the procession from Athens to Eleusis was held in silence, by force of circumstance, whereas it was usually celebrated with sacrifices and choral dances:

13 The original text, ῥυθμῶ πρὸς τὸν ἐνόπλιον ῥυθμὸν ἀυλούμενοι, may be translated ‘an *aulos* was played to the hoplites’ rhythm.’ *Hoplites* were warriors, so the ‘hoplites’ rhythm’ may in turn be taken to imply a martial rhythm.

14 *Anabasis* (Xenophon 1922 6.1, 9–11).

15 A *paian* is a hymn sung during processions, mostly in honour of Apollo, but also used in other cults.

16 De Saltatione (Lucian 1913 16). Again, ‘flute and lyre’ is too free a translation of *aulos* and *kitbara*.

17 West 1994, 14.

Ever since Dekeleia had been fortified, and the enemy, by their presence there, commanded approaches to Eleusis, the festival rite had been celebrated with no splendour at all, being conducted by the sea. Sacrifices, choral dances, and many of the sacred ceremonies [θυσίαι καὶ χορεΐαι καὶ πολλὰ τῶν δρωμένων] usually held on the road, when Iacchos is conducted forth from Athens to Eleusis, had of necessity been omitted.¹⁸

By contrast, ancient depictions – mostly on painted ceramics – show music less often in cult scenes.¹⁹ And even where music does appear in such a setting, the cults concerned are mainly those of ‘musically connected’ gods such as Dionysus, Apollo, Athena, Hermes and Kybele.²⁰ By examining all the musical scenes I noticed that cult music shown on ceramics was mostly symbolized by musical instruments, not by singing or dancing. This is relevant since we know that the most important musical act in cult practice was singing.²¹ Depictions of singing do not need to include conspicuous instruments: it is mostly symbolized by an open mouth, sometimes also by lines of text shown emerging from the mouth. Whilst singing is frequently depicted in ancient Greek paintings, only in a few images does it feature in cult milieux (see Fig 1).

So why, if singing was indeed the most important part of musical performances, and if it was not technically difficult to illustrate it, was it so rarely made explicit in images of cult scenes? One might argue that musical instruments and singing were so commonplace in cult that artists felt no need to indicate them. Equally, it is possible that music was important to cults but that it was not deemed important by artists when portraying them on vessels. It is striking that musical instruments are mostly illustrated in those cult scenes associated with ‘musical’ gods. But there are many more cult scenes with music and no gods depicted – musical instruments are more than just attributes of gods. They belong to certain cult performances, as depictions suggest. The main purpose of processional depictions may have been to show the effort involved in performing ceremonies for the gods, as Laxander points out.²² The depictions may show musicians in sacrificial performances less often than the texts appear to suggest.

3 Musical genres in cult

For the purposes of the present discussion we may reasonably accept that Greek cults shared the following basic performance structure: they started with a procession leading to an altar and after the sacrifice came feasting and athletic or musical contests.²³ Depending on the length of the processional route, this ritual complex could last from hours to days. Music was played at every stage, but the songs and instruments differed. Table 1 provides an overview of the main musical genres in cult,²⁴ with types of instruments and performers grouped according to their positions in the proceedings.

To explore the genres, ancient texts are needed. Depictions may help to explain the status of musicians but they do not tell us about the musical genres that were played. The

18 Alcibiades (Plutarch 1922, 34: 3).

19 Only one third of procession scenes and one fifth of sacrifice scenes show musical instruments according to figures presented in my dissertation.

20 Goulaki-Voutira 2004, 372.

21 West 1994, 39.

22 See Laxander 2000, 146.

23 True et al. 2004, 2. There were also processions to escort the sacrificial carcase to the temple after slaughtering, as we learn from Pausanias (VIII 38, 8). To learn more about the structure of processions see Goulaki-Voutira 2004, 1–20.

24 Overviews of the musical genres can be found in Lawler 1964, 98–115 (with a focus on dances); West 1994, 14–21; Neubecker 1994, 42–55.



Fig. 1 | Procession of singing men on an Attic black-figure amphora by the Affecter Painter, 550–520 B.C.E. Staatliche Antikensammlung und Glyptothek München (Inv. 1441), Photo by Renate Kühling.

table shows that the musical instruments in use at each point are almost identical, whereas the songs played and the musicians themselves change: from the principal participants to trained choruses of citizens, to professionals and slaves.

4 The function of music in cult

Formal differences between musical genres employed in cult mostly derive from the different practical uses to which they were put, as certain names suggest: *prosodion* means *on the way*, for it was a song sung during a procession. *Partheneia* were a genre of special hymns sung only by women, mostly girls, since *parthenos* describes a virgin. The worshippers would ordinarily approach the altar in a procession. The *prosodia* and hymns sung along the way praised the gods, and the sacrifice or the *xoanon*, a wooden statue of a god, was led to the temple or altar. Often the participants sang together, which created a joyful and festive atmosphere.²⁵ The central event of the processional ritual – the performance of the sacrifice by a structured mass of worshippers – was enhanced and reinforced by music. The music sung by the celebrants probably led and focused the crowd. The same can be said of the performance of the sacrifice. As the sacrifice was supposedly the most important act of the whole ritual, and the moment in which the god and the worshippers experienced a kind of interaction, one purpose of the sacrificial music could have been to draw the gods’

25 String instrument played with a plectrum, generally believed to be bigger than the lyra and made mostly of wood.

26 “The hyporchema was used principally in the worship of Zeus and Apollo, but also in the cult of Dionysus. It is said at times to have been a circle dance, executed around an altar during during a sacrifice...” (Lawler 1964, 101). See also Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 159.

27 Brass instrument like a trumpet, treated more as a signalling instrument than a musical instrument.

28 See for example Athenaios *The Deipnosophists* 201F–202A, Heliodoros *Aittopika* III 34, Apollonios Rhodios *The Argonautica* II 685–719 and Plutarch *Theseus* 23, 2–4.

Part	Genre	Instrument	Musicians	Place
1. Procession	Prosodion, paian, partheneia, hymns, dithyramb	Aulos, kithara ²⁵ , lyra, singing, choral dances	worshippers, artists' guilds, choruses of citizens	Processional way
2. Sacrifice	Hymns, hyporchema ²⁶	Aulos, lyra, solo singing, (choir), circular dance	Solo of priests or professionals, choruses	Altar
3. Feast	Drinking songs, symposium songs	Aulos, lyra, solo singing, chorus	Non-professionals, slaves, hetairai	Agora
4. Contest	1. Signalling 2. Contest genres: nomos, hymns (solo)	1. Salpinx ²⁷ 2. Aulos, kithara, salpinx, vocal, dance	Professionals	Agora, theatre

Tab. 1 | Official rituals (not including private rituals such as symposia). – Written examples for each station: Procession: Pindarus, Paian 7; Sacrifice: Alkaius, Apollon hymnus 307 LP; Feast: Homer, *Odyssey* book 8, 44–108; Contest: Pausanias *Histories* X, 7. 2–7, Xenophon *Hieron* IX 24.

attention to the sacrificial act.²⁹ The musical performance comprised praying, singing, and dancing around the altar. Moments of enthusiasm and epiphany³⁰ were prompted by sounds, dances, and of course by wine or other drugs. The music played during the subsequent feast enhanced the festive atmosphere and entertained those attending. In the contests that followed, musicians and choirs competed to deliver the best musical performance.

Of primary importance for this discussion are the procession and the sacrifice, since it was here that communication and interaction with the gods could occur. Furley and Bremer speak of two forms of communication taking place: the first, between the human participants (the poets addressing the listeners), and the second, from the worshippers to the gods.³¹ It can be observed that the music served a variety of functions and that also the cultic festivals had multiple agencies. By bringing the people in a precise arrangement the procession worked as a physical centralization of the community. The widely dispersed Greek communities were brought together through the festivals and cults. The function of each part of the sacrificial festival may be briefly summarized as follows:

- 1 The sacrifice connects the human with the divine sphere by creating a sacred space (already developed during the procession) where an altered state of consciousness could be achieved, enabling spiritual connection with the god or even a physical perception of the god through enthusiasm and epiphany.

29 See Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*: Procession and Sacrifice for Dionysus. The character Dikaiopolis sings the phallic hymn alone to please Dionysus and to beg for his attention. Some gods were also said to have accompanied the procession and so attended the rituals before the sacrifice was executed (First Delphic Hymn: Apollo walks within the worshippers).

30 'Enthusiasm' here means possession of a person by a god, whereas 'epiphany' is the human experience of the gods through natural phenomena.

31 Furley and Bremer 2001, 59.

- 2 A physical connection between god and participant, and between the participants themselves, could be established during the collective feast by eating the same flesh, in so-called commensality.³²
- 3 Contests channel anti-social energies, the aggressive tendencies of young men finding an outlet through competing with each other in feats of physical or intellectual fitness.

An altered state of consciousness is most likely to have occurred during the sacrifice, since – as the ethnological studies of Köpping and Rao seem to suggest – a sacred space had to be created to ensure a safe place for communication or interaction with the gods,³³ a place where participants' identities could be changed from citizens who behaved according to social rules into ecstatic and uncontrolled worshippers, as I will show below.

5 Music at the sacrifice

It seems reasonable to regard the sacrifice as the *cultic* purpose of the whole ceremony, as distinct from the procession and the communal meal which were its *social* purposes; and although it is these social purposes that received more attention from ancient writers, the music at the sacrifice was important to ensure a proper ritual. As table 1 demonstrates, hymns and lively, joyous song-dances (*hyporchemata*) were offered, in both cases usually accompanied by instrumental music and dance.³⁴ Music was played before and after the act of slaughtering. Of the slaughtering itself there are few depictions, and none of these indicate that music was being played.³⁵ Singing and dancing feature in more than just the sacrifice: they created something like a sense of community during the cultic rituals for those who knew the choir-songs and were able to sing; and dance – singing and dancing commanded the highest social status in Archaic and Classical Greece.³⁶ The musical instrument most frequently depicted in use during a sacrifice is the *aulos*, featuring in 90% of classical Greek iconography on the subject. The lyre appears only rarely, and then mainly in archaic depictions. Examples of singing can be found both in texts and, rarely, in depictions (Fig 1).

Another event in which music played an integral part was the dance around the altar, which was common in some cults, for example those of Apollo, Artemis, Dionysus, Hera, Demeter, and Aphrodite.³⁷ This circle dance can be understood as creating a holy circle, which was a frequent and highly important feature of many cults and had a long tradition behind it.³⁸ The earliest chorus mentioned in Greek mythology is that of the Muses. Their dancing too commonly revolves around an altar, an image of Apollo himself, a spring, or some other significant object. Such round dances thus had a sacred element at their centre.

It can therefore be concluded that the sacrificial rituals may usually have included singing, the *aulos*, and a circle dance, all three of which played an important part in the events. But what happened during the ritual act itself? When the worshippers arrived at the altar, sacrificial animals had already been prepared for slaughter (Fig. 2) – they were

32 The Christian sacrament may be understood as a heritage of that ancient tradition: by eating the sacrament and drinking the wine the followers could Jesus feel near. In ancient Greece the worshippers could be filled with divine power when they ate the flesh of the sacrificial animal (see also Dodds 1951, 148–149).

33 Compare Köpping and Rao 2008, 22.

34 See Lawler 1964, 99–101.

35 Van Straten 1988, 55; Goulaki-Voutira 2004; 372; Brand 2000, 118.

36 Singing and dancing in choirs was an important part of Athenian education in Classical times (compare Calame, Collins, and Orion 2001, 222–231 and Lawler 1964, 116–126).

37 See Calame, Collins, and Orion 2001, 90–140.

38 For circle dances see for instance Nilsson 1992, 113; Tölle 1964; Calame, Collins, and Orion 2001.

decorated with wreath and flowers, sometimes even with gold, and were festively led by the procession. Meanwhile, a hymn or other song was played perhaps in order to charm the god, proclaiming his greatness and his fabulous deeds, and sometimes inviting him to come down and witness the sacrifice. On some red-figure vases we can see Apollo sitting on a chair next to the altar, watching the preparations. He is identifiable by his attribute, the lyre which he holds in his hand, and by the fact that he is sitting, a posture which usually indicates a god or a king. One might suppose the figure of Apollo to be a statue, or a representation of his epiphany during the sacrifice ritual; or it could be merely symbolic – an iconographical device which the artist has used to identify this cult scene specifically with Apollo.

Elsewhere the presence of Apollo is also depicted at the moment when the flesh of the sacrifice is being grilled. This is indicated by spits or skewers (*splanchnoptai*) with pieces of meat impaled on them, as is shown on a sacrificial scene on a red-figure krater of 420 BCE (Italy, San Antonio, Museum of Art 5.120.2).³⁹ The depiction lacks any indication that music is actually being played, even though Apollo is holding his lyre in his hand. In this context it is presumably only his identifying attribute. But there are also many depictions of exactly that scene which contain a mortal *aulos* player. Gods are depicted in countless vase paintings, but in the case of sacrificial scenes I would argue that their depiction may refer to the communication with the gods that is provided by ritual. In this regard gods shown in sacrificial or processional scenes could be seen as epiphanies of gods or even as symbolic representation of the act of communicating with them.

5.1 Enthusiasm

In ancient Greek texts, the dance performed during the sacrificial ritual was intended to be both a source of pleasure to the gods and a religious spectacle for onlookers: in their dances the worshippers portrayed various animals and military scenes, or acted out mythical narratives.⁴⁰ The re-enactment of sacred events was of central importance to many ancient Greek cults. Plato writes that all dances are imitations of habits – divine, human or animal – and that the act of imitation is able to change the character of the actors.⁴¹ This, he argues, is why dancers should only imitate positive things, like a god's good behaviour or moments of divine joy and happiness. The imitation of the 'Good' is at the core of Plato's educational philosophy, as laid out in the *Laws* and in his *Republic*. Imitation was the artist's vocation, whether dancing, singing, playing instruments or performing a role in the theatre. It is because of their aptness to imitation that music and dance are so important in Plato's ideal state. The notion that habitual imitation leads to a change in the person who is imitating is adopted in turn by Aristotle. He writes that all artistic creations are in the end imitations (*mimesis*).⁴² But this is not a conception that is necessarily unique to Greece: today both the Brazilian *candomblé*, the dervish dance of the Sufi and the African *voodoo* cult exhibit similar elements, such as experiences of trance or ecstasy that may overcome dancers after performing dances that are emotionally

39 Deschodt 2011, Fig. 10.

40 In the cult of Zeus the mythic followers of Zeus (*kouretes*) were imitated by young armed men. There are many different imitation-dances in the Greek cults, as Lawler shows (Lawler 1964, 98–115). For mimesis in dances see also Calame, Collins, and Orion 2001, 33–35, 104, 202, 224.

41 "Or haven't you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought?" Plato *Republic* (Plato 1968) 395a–e. The anthropologists Köpping and Rao argue that the divine force in several cultures could only be awoken by imitation of divine habits (Köpping and Rao 2008, 21).

42 Aristotle *Poetics* 1, 14–17. To compare both approaches to mimesis see Halliwell 2002, 15 and chapters 1 and 2. He argues that there is 'no single English equivalent that appropriately translates mimesis in all contexts' (Halliwell 2002, 16, FN 38).



Fig. 2 | Attic red-figure Amphora by the Painter of Berlin. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (F 1686), Photo by Johannes Laurentius.

and physically intense and may be of very long duration.⁴³ There is evidence that in at least some Greek cults the aim of the dance was to achieve an altered state of consciousness, as for example in the cults of Dionysus, Artemis and Kybele.⁴⁴ Through dance the worshippers could become divine entities: satyrs, nymphs and muses. In the words of philologist Hermann Koller, „Weil göttliche Kraft gefühlt und im Tanz personell erlebt wird, prägt sie sich in menschengestaltigen göttlichen Wesen, den Nymphen, Silenen, Musen, Korybanten, Bakchen aus.“⁴⁵ The songs imitated the god’s behaviour, natural phenomena and animals mainly by means of sound and dancing: the imitation of divine movements and habits led the dancers to feel as if they were those gods, demi-gods, animals or phenomena. Koller concludes that while in their ecstatic state the *bacchae* and other divinely possessed actors (*entheoi*) felt as if they themselves were divine. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer writes that all mythical creatures had an earthbound core.⁴⁶ The interrelation between ‘normally behaving’ Theban women and divinely possessed, ecstatic maenads is well illustrated in the fifth century in Euripides’ *Bacchae*:

43 For the trance in *candomblé* see Kaden 2004, 52–66.

44 Koller 1963, 159; Kaden 2004, 70.

45 “Since divine force could be felt and be experienced personally in dance, it takes the shape of anthropomorphic divine creatures: nymphs, silenes, muses, korybants, bacchae” (Koller 1963: 20–21, English translation by the present author). See also Koller 1963, 158–159.

46 Koller refers to Ernst Cassirer 1925, 51 (Koller 1963, 20).

They [the women of Thebes, J. K.] set up full wine bowls in the middle of their assemblies and sneak off, one here, one there, to tryst in private with men. The pretext for all this is that they are maenads performing their rites....⁴⁷

Within the protective and permissive framework of cult a Greek could thus slip into another identity: women could become wild and sexually aggressive maenads, men infantile, uncontrolled and sexually possessed satyrs. Plato called this *mania*, which could be erotic, poetic, prophetic, or (in the case of the maenads) ritually mad, as one of the early scholars of Greek irrationalism E. R. Dodds noted.⁴⁸ These roles were in obvious and exact opposition to what was demanded of the citizen in daily life.⁴⁹ Dodds' characterisation of the early Dionysius cult remained as a nucleus in later Dionysiac rituals:

If I understand early Dionysiac rituals aright, its social function was essentially cathartic, in the psychological sense: it purged the individual of those infectious irrational impulses which, when dammed up, had given rise, as they have done in other cultures, to outbreaks of dancing mania and similar manifestations of collective hysteria; it relieved them by providing them with a ritual outlet.⁵⁰

Dodds concept of catharsis is orientated in Aristotle's delineation of the theatre. Aristoteles claims that the theatre that derives from the cult activity of the *dithyrambos* and the phallic processions, worked like an outlet for emotions to the onlookers.⁵¹ The word *tragedia* itself (τραγῳδία: *tragos* = he-goat, *ode* = song) shows that theatre may have originated within the Dionysian cult.⁵² There is a close connection between mimetic acting, the cult and the theatre: the divine itself is something unutterable, and only through mimetic action can the invisible and inconceivable be experienced.

5.2 Divine epiphany

Besides enthusiasm, divine epiphanies also took place during the sacrifice, as ancient texts and depictions show (compare fig. 2). The texts indicate that it was common in some cults for the god to dance among his worshippers (as Apollo did) or for him to be recognized through other phenomena (in the case of Dionysus). How should this be understood? Does it mean that one of the dancers, a worshipper in a trance, was believed to be possessed by Apollo, or should we suppose that Apollo himself was imagined to have descended from Mount Olympus and to be revealing himself directly to the people? The myths seem to support the latter: many gods simply appear, they do not need to possess a human body in order to do so.⁵³ There are for instance some few texts from the 7th to the 3rd century B.C.E. that show epiphanies of Apollo. My first examples are from the Homeric hymns of the 7th century B.C.E.:

Then, like a star at noonday, the lord, far-working Apollo, leaped from the ship: flashes of fire flew from him thick and fast and their brightness reached to heaven. He entered into his shrine between priceless tripods, and there made a flame to

47 Euripides *Bacchae* (Euripides 2002, 221–225).

48 Dodds 1951, 64–65.

49 Katharina Waldner called the change of social roles within cultic rituals ‚Gegenwelt‘ (for which see Waldner 1995, 41–57). She claims that the transgression of social boundaries by disproportionate behaviour served to fix those rules.

50 Dodds 1951, 76.

51 *Poetics* (Aristoteles 1995) 1449a–1449b.

52 Latacz 2003, 53–65; Lidell and Scott Online: τραγῳδία (visited on December 14, 2015).

53 Consider, for example, the countless myths concerning epiphanies of Zeus enabling him to make love to mortal women, or the Aphrodite myth in which she appears to young mortal Anchises, with whom she has fallen in love. Almost every major Olympian god is reported to have appeared to a human.

flare up bright, showing forth the splendour of his shafts, so that their radiance filled all Crisa, and the wives and well-girded daughters of the Crisaeans raised a cry at that outburst of Phoebus; for he cast great fear upon them all. From his shrine he sprang forth again, swift as a thought, to speed again to the ship, bearing the form of a man, brisk and sturdy, in the prime of his youth, while his broad shoulders were covered with his hair: and he spoke to the Cretans, uttering winged words.⁵⁴

And later:

And when they had to put away craving for drink and food, they started out with the lord Apollo, the son of Zeus, leading them, holding a lyre in his hands, and playing sweetly as he stepped high and featly [sic!]. So the Cretans followed him to Pytho, marching in time as they chanted the Ie Paean after the manner of the Cretan paean-singers and of those in whose hearts the heavenly Muse has put sweet-voiced song.⁵⁵

Callimachus, writing in the 3rd century B.C.E., also provides illustrations of epiphanies of Apollo and Theseus.

How the laurel branch of Apollo trembles! How trembles all the shrine! Away, away, he that is sinful! Now surely Phoebus knocketh at the door with his beautiful foot. See'st thou not? The Delian palm nods pleasantly of a sudden and the swan in the air sings sweetly [κύκνος ἐν ἡέρι καλόν ἀείδει] Of yourselves now ye bolts be pushed back, pushed back of yourselves, ye bars! The god is no longer far away. And ye, young men, prepare ye for song and for the dance [μολπήν τε καὶ χορόν ἐντύνεσθε].⁵⁶

In this context the swan – one of the attributes of Apollo – anticipates the epiphany while the worshippers prepare for song and dance. It is remarkable that two different words are used for singing: *aeidein* and *molpein*. The difference is that *aeidein* means the act of singing itself while *molpein* means the combination of song and dance.⁵⁷ In the following example we see Theseus leading the choir of the worshippers:

Having escaped the cruel bellowing and the wild son of Pasiphaë and the coiled habitation of the crooked labyrinth, about thine altar, O lady, they raised the music of the lute [κιθαρισμοῦ] and danced the round dance, and Theseus led the choir.⁵⁸

It is hardly a coincidence that music is mentioned in all the texts in connection with epiphanies. Although we are dealing with literary genres that are highly poetic the texts nevertheless illustrate how an epiphany can be recognized through sound and movement in nature.

54 Hymn to the Pythian Apollo (Hesiod 1914, 440–447).

55 Hymn to the Pythian Apollo (Hesiod 1914, 508–513).

56 Hymn 2 (Callimachus 1921, 1–5).

57 Lidell and Scott Online: *melpe*, *melos* (visited on December 14, 2015). See Kaden 2009, 17; Kaden 2004, 68 and Ley 2007, 118.

58 Callimachus Hymn 4 (Callimachus 1921, 310–313). ‘Music of the lute’ does not adequately translate *κιθαρισμοῦ*. Today we would instead express it as ‘music of the *kithara*’.

6 Epiphany and enthusiasm as the main function of the sacrificial music?

Ancient Greek texts paint a picture of human-divine communication that is interactive: Greeks experienced their gods as epiphanies through phenomena of the natural world, as visible persons, or as demons that possessed the bodies of dancers who had fallen into trance.⁵⁹ However, this interaction needed to take place within a safe frame, which is to say within a designated sacred space – the myths show that spontaneous and individual contacts with the divine sphere were dangerous and could end in death.⁶⁰ To provide such a sacred space cultic rituals were needed to define the boundaries of the ‘other world.’⁶¹ Ritual elements such as music, aromatic substances, cultic meals, specific garments and behaviour helped to delineate the sacred space. Halliwell remarks: “From an observer’s point of view, religious behaviour represents a complex of utterances and actions... intricately linked with, but markedly distinct from, other areas of social life.”⁶² Next to socio-political and ritual functions, such as rites of passage, one could argue that one of the main tasks of music in cult was to enable the participant to enter a controlled trance or ecstasy in which enthusiasm and epiphany could take place. Such transformations of personality were achieved in the Dionysus cult through ecstatic music made with *auloi*, drums and cymbals, as is well illustrated in Euripides’ *Bacchae*:

Ὡ ἴτε βάκχαι,
ὦ ἴτε βάκχαι,
Τμώλου χρυσορόου χλιδᾶ
μέλπετε τὸν Διόνυσον
βαρυβρόμων ὑπὸ τυμπάνων,
εὔια τὸν εὔιον ἀγαλλόμεναι θεὸν
ἐν Φρυγίαισι βοαῖς ἐνοπαῖσί τε,
λωτὸς ὅταν εὐκέλαδος
ἱερὸς ἱερὰ παίγματα βρέμη, σύνοχα
φοιτάσιν εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος: ἡδομέ-
να δ’ ἄρα, πῶλος ὅπως ἅμα ματέρι
φορβάδι, κῶλον ἄγει ταχύπουν σκιρτήμασι βάκχα.

‘On bacchant, on you bacchant, pride of the River Tmolus that runs with gold: sing Dionysus’ praises to the deed-roaring drums [ὑπὸ τυμπάνων]⁶³, making ecstatic cries to the god of ecstasy with Phrygian shouts and exclamations, when the lovely pipe [λωτὸς ὅταν εὐκέλαδος] *shrills, all holy, its holy* [sic!] sings in concert with those who go to the mountain, to the mountain!’ Hence in joy, like a colt with its grazing mother, the bacchant leaps and gambols on nimble legs.⁶⁴

59 For some considerations about trance and ecstasy in ancient Greek cults see Kaden 2004, 70, 74–77

60 The mortal Semele, mother of Dionysus, died when, momentarily, she saw Zeus in his real shape. A relative of hers, Aktaion, is reported to have been transformed into a deer when he accidentally saw naked Artemis bathing.

61 For rituals as sacred spaces that provide a safe framework within which the worshippers could interact with the gods or experience them, see: Köpping and Rao 2008, 22–23.

62 Halliwell 2002, 1.

63 *Tympana* are generally thought to signify frame drums.

64 Euripides *Bacchae* (Euripides 2002, 152–166). Even though Kovacs’ translation is one of the most recent and accurate in the literature, his musical terms are insufficiently technical: ‘drums’ should be translated by ‘frame drums’ or even better with ‘tympana’; ‘pipe’ should be replaced by *aulos*. *Lotos* is an expression used for *aulos*, since it has sometimes been made also out of the lotus plant (see Barker 1989, 67, footnote 34). The word ‘holy’ in ‘its holy sings in concert’ might be better expressed as ‘holiness’.

Even in non-ecstatic cults such as the Apollonian or the Panatheneia, music and other ritual elements still created the frame for a non-ordinary, ritualised behaviour that allowed the worshippers to mitigate the pressures of their daily lives through experience or through witnessing enthusiasm and epiphanies.⁶⁵

65 Egyptologist Jan Assmann regards festivals as places of 'the other.' They provide a platform on which the 'spill-over of cultural information' could be calm down without harming the community (Assmann 1991, 15). This means that there is much more input of each individual from the experiences in a community as he could express in daily live. Therefore festivals are suitable places for the community to express emotions and values.

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