


Bologna

Giovanna Alvoni


David (hereafter: D.) rests his argument mainly upon three pillars: epic poetry was originally dance music; the ‘accent’ of Greek words conflicted with the written accent marks more often than not; and the interplay between this true accent and the strong and weak positions of (dance) rhythm was the constituent feature of archaic and classical Greek poetry, the harmonía of khoreía. D. construes an image of a golden age of music, when words, melody, and dance were a true unity, which broke up in the time of Euripides into the lamentable separation that characterises later Western music. Consequently, D.’s own work comes to us as the promise of salvation: those who embrace its consequences in performance will once more appreciate the lost unity, the pristine harmonía, which so long lay concealed in the textual tradition.

To support the idea of danced hexameter poetry, D. invokes the testimony of Phemius and Demodocus in the Odyssey, who are both portrayed as accompanying dancers, and compares the heroic ballads to which the Faroese dansringur proceed (39). D. somewhat indecisively meanders between assertions that the

1 Leider ist aber der Name ‘Guidorizzi’ im ganzen Text in «Guidorizzi» korrumpiert worden.

https://doi.org/10.17104/0017-1417_2009_4_294

Generiert durch IP '54.70.40.11', am 02.01.2019, 06:50:11.
Das Erstellen und Weitergeben von Kopien dieses PDFs ist nicht zulässig.
hexameter was understood mainly as a dance rhythm until the time of Aristotle, and that the original context of the Iliad and the Odyssey no longer involved dance. In any case, D. fervently opposes the oralist stance: ‘formulas’ are not metrical building blocks, but melodic signatures, evocations (but is there really an antagonism between the two notions?). From later times, the Epinomis is quoted (991b), as well as the notorious passage from Aristotle’s Metaphysics, where the hexameter «is stepped on the right with nine syllables, and on the left with eight» (1093a).

As regards the linguistic aspect of his theory, D. makes much of Allen’s theory of Ancient Greek stress, and of his definition of Greek accent as a ‘contonation’, in which the post-accentual pitch fall has a prominent role. Whenever this downward glide occupies a long syllable, D. maintains that this syllable was actually the ‘accented’, and as such inclined to underlining strong rhythmical positions (‘ictus’). This he terms the ‘βατός’ accent, as opposed to ‘διπλός’ accents where the acute is followed by a short syllable. Some less decisive cases are variously adapted to the interpretation of verses.

For the actual epic performance, D. rightly rejects Georgiades’ old theory of a 7/8 rhythm in favour for the traditional 2/2. Even so, he draws a connection to a modern Greek syrtós dance, whose steps fit the hexameter. This dance includes a short backwards movement starting about where the hexameter has its middle caesura, forward motion being resumed with the bucolic diëresis. D. observes an incidence between ictus and ‘βατός’ accent towards the close of the half verses and the avoidance of such incidence at their start.

Much of the second half of the book is devoted to text interpretation in the context of D.’s dance theory, from individual passages (e.g. observing the fact that in the opening line of the Odyssey πολύτροπον (‘many-turned’) […] occupies no more nor less than the entire backward turn and return) [125], up to the Homeric poems as a whole, and their narrative forms («chiasmus imitates the physical retrogression and retracing of steps within the συρτός» [202]). Epic poetry is traced back to catalogues recited to the rhythm of the group dance; at first expanded by relative clauses, these catalogues were slowly transformed into narrative, finally including direct speech and lyric motives.

The final chapter turns to lyric poetry. As opposed to the stichic hexameter, where the functional equality of longs and double-shorts are tokens of verses shaped by a fixed recurring dance rhythm, D. argues that in lyric poetry it is rather the dance that is shaped by the words. To provide for a ‘recoverable’ choreography, D. proposes that every syllable corresponded to one dance step. Since recurrent accentual patterns are only occasionally detectable, he prompts us to use his theory to appreciate «the accentual determination of ictus», i.e. to interpret the rhythmic form of any lyric line with the help of his novel accents. Thus we are to experience epiphanies «yet to strike in bloom, as the music of an ancient world becomes vivid once again» (269).

The reviewer shares with D. both the conviction that the speech accent was always recognizable in hexameter performance, and the awareness that folk-dancing to hexameter performance is possible, having accompanied a chorus of boys and girls years before D. had a similar experience (10 with n. 11). Also, one can hardly doubt that modern Greek folk dance stands in an unbroken (although not unaltered) tradition that reaches back to
and before Homeric times. D. often asks important questions that the scholarly discourse tends to avoid, and sometimes proposes fascinating answers. For instance, his ‘one syllable – one step’ rule would, perhaps in a modified form, provide an answer to the tantalizing problem of how a chorus could have quickly learned to dance Pindar’s victory odes, without a sophisticated choreography and weeks of rehearsal.

But I do not think that any of D.’s major claims can hold. When the bards within the Homeric poems accompany dancers, nothing in the context suggests a hexametric, i.e. epic, performance. On the other hand, whenever the reference is clearly to epic song, there is no dance. The relevant conceptions in the Epinomis stand in a tradition about pitch structures, not dance rhythms; and Aristotle almost certainly references not a dance but a simple rhythmic analysis in terms of syllables ‘stepped out’. Finally, D.’s particular ‘hexameter syrtós’, it transpires, is an adaptation of a scarcely attested variant of the modern dance.

As regards the accent, D. gives a good account of how modern speakers of a language with stress accent perceive a reasonable reconstruction of the ancient Greek pitch accent. That this was however not how the Greeks themselves perceived it is evinced not only by the way they chose to mark it – D. suspects that Aristophanes of Byzantium was not a native Greek (75) and ignores evidence from the scholia and papyri – but also by the fact that the Modern Greek stress accent has maintained the position of the ancient accent, instead of continuing D.’s alleged stress on different syllables.

D.’s view also requires a translation of ὀξύς and ἕξυς not as ‘high’ and ‘low’, but ‘sharply rising’ and ‘heavily falling’ up until Aristotle (17ff: D. treats these terms as if they were not everyday language but technical vocabulary, open to redefinition by theorists). For such a deep-reaching claim one would certainly expect an investigation of the early pitch-related uses of the words; if undertaken, it would have shown that D.’s re-definition is impossible (note the many composites). All in all, D. is here entirely at odds with an-

tern dance.

Development of around 400 BC (33; his indifference to ancient Greek music as such is also shown by his mistaking the kithára for a harp [98]). Consequently D. overlooks the fact,
potentially detrimental to his theory, that very close correspondence between song and speech melody is not only claimed for the Delphic hymns, but has painstakingly been proven so by Devine and Stephens (1994). On the other hand, D. appears to perceive archaic and classical song as slavishly following the contours of speech melody – which implies different melodies for strophe and antistrophe. Thus D. denies composition reflecting speech prosody where there is decisive evidence for it, while at the same time claiming such a correspondence for earlier strophic styles where most scholars deem it unlikely. But can the notion, so central to D.’s view, that in archaic and classical poetry words were music, be reconciled with the idea of a tunesmith at all (32f; 225f)? The intervention of a composer between a text and its performance as a song is of course indispensable (at least where more than two or three pitches are involved, as there undoubtedly were in the styles in question). So how would the work of the archaic tunesmith, if he or she followed D.’s guidelines at all, differ from that of the Hellenistic composer, whom we can observe, and on whom D. heaps scorn, as setting words to music? In effect, D.’s idealistic dichotomy between a golden age of choral unity and the downfall of the New Music inevitably breaks down once music is truly considered as music, i.e. as including a melodic component beside dance and rhythm.

Similar is the case of D.’s approach to ársis and thésis. At surface value, these basic terms of ancient rhythmical analysis denote the raising and the setting of the foot within one step, marking the weak and the strong positions respectively. On the one hand, this terminology is crucial to D.’s conviction that early Greek poetry can only be understood as dance. On the other, his theory flies in the face of the terms, because it posits an entire step for each metrical position, so that in D.’s performance the rhythmical ársis and thésis have nothing at all to do with the movement of the feet. In his hexameter dance, for instance, each rhythmical ársis corresponds not to one raising of the foot, but to two steps, with two raisings and two settings. This major contradiction is glossed over lightly by assigning (as I rather think) to ársis the notion of light passing steps (37). Another consequence is the assignment of three (or more) steps to many types of metrical ‘feet’.

With all his concern for dance, one is also surprised when D. proves entirely indifferent to the idea that similar dance steps should be assigned to corresponding rhythmical structures: he does not hesitate to assign different numbers of steps (and syllables!) to the strophes of Pindar, Olympos 1, (213) or to the lines of PMG Adesp. 38 (219). In the discussion of strophic lyric, the musical reality of rests occupying rhythmical time is never taken into consideration (32: ‘The rhythmic pattern is of course fully given in the syllabic quantities’). Finally, one misses a discussion of tempo: any syròs, for instance, would impose a slow tempo upon the hexameter; the growth of epic out of such a performance would apparently require a substantial acceleration.

On the whole D. does not cite literature other than English; the absence of Italian and German references in a technical book on the hexameter is somewhat baffling, similarly the neglect of the insights in A. M. Devine / L. D. Stephens, The Prosody of Greek Speech (New York/Oxford 1994), from which D.’s metrical discussions would have benefited just as much as his naïve view on the ‘grave accent’. 

Wien

Stefan Hagel


Wer sich bis jetzt weder mit antiker Wissenschaftsgeschichte noch mit den Publikationen von Leonid Zhmud beschäftigt hat, wird kaum erwarren, was ich hier dankbar anzeige: ein sehr wichtiges, temperamentvoll geschriebenes Buch, das sowohl begeisterte Zustimmung wie auch heftige Proteste auslösen wird –