
The book resists any easy definition. The majority of those who went through the first few dozen of pages, where Nero’s citharodic performance is described, with all its exaggerated details, in terms of a modern pop star’s showmanship (reminding one in a way of the splendid scenes of the emperor’s narcissistic grotesquere, outstandingly performed by two movie stars, Peter Ustinov and Klaus Maria Brandauer, in two adaptations from Henryk Sienkiewicz’s historical novel Quo vadis), may take it for a book belonging to the area of reception studies, presenting an instance of detecting a ‘one of us’ in the ancient virtuoso singer wearing the iconic technicolor costume. Nothing, however, could be more mistaken. The book is the richest account yet given of the kitharôidia, wonderfully detailed and documented in a scholarly way. It brings kitharôidia, the art of singing to the kithara, out from under the rhapsôidia’s and other Greek artistic genres’ shadow and places it much more in the foreground than it has been in previous scholarship on Greek poetry. Power (hereafter P.) in the over 600 pages of his book amasses literary and visual testimonia referring to the ancient citharodic culture. The scope, scale and extraordinary multivalence of the documents presented and analysed in the book, could appear overwhelming for the reader if it were not written with the author’s sensitivity to the needs of his recipients. P. shows an aptitude for absorbing and vivid lecturing and offers a pleasurable report of kitharôidia in its artistic and social context from mythical times to its Roman evocations.

The book consists of four parts. I count the decision to begin with a chapter on Nero and his artistic activity (Princeps Citharoedus, pp. 3-181) as a success. The case of the ‘emperor-artist’ and the revival of displaying one’s virtuosity within the context of public and private performance, particularly characteristic of the Second Sophistic environment – a dazzling practice which never came to be repeated again in ancient times – serves to illuminate kitharôidia and to trace relations between the Roman citharodic enthusiasm of the Imperial era and its long, complex and continuous Greek history. Starting with Nero’s public recital debut in Naples in 64 CE and his first formal agonistic entrée at the Neronia of 65 CE, P. situates the emperor’s performance against the antecedents’ citharodic activity. He offers the readers a picture of citharodic performances and performers, interweaving figures of citharodes in a kind of filmic, retrospectively arranged, sequence in which each of the narratives emerges as distinct. Drawing entirely on ancient evidence, P. illustrates many aspects of the citharodic performance emphasising the phenomena which represent its continuing features. He shows that the substantial elements of this musico-poetic spectacle such as performative techniques, especially the method of kithara playing, the visual frame of the performance, including the artist’s glamorous skeuê as well as his emotionally impressive body language, and finally the citharode’s potent sex appeal and charisma, which seduce mass populations, remain unchanged from the time of the mythic proto-citharodic heroes, Orpheus and Amphion, to the late Empire.
Although P. in his book first of all seeks to reconcile Nero’s artistic activity with the extensive pre-Roman citharodic tradition, he also raises the question of what was Nero’s possible ‘real’ intention of presenting himself as a professional artist. He argues (p. 149) that “Neronian citharodic politics were […] genuinely communal in intent, an attempt […] to bring Rome and the Empire to order through the ancient Apollonian-Orphic-Amphionic potential of kitharôidia to effect of social harmony and good government”. This conception of ‘Neronism’ seems to overemphasise the role of public spectacles in the process of constructing the vision of civic and social values. It is true that such spectacles built a space of dialogue between the princeps and the Roman society. Nero’s total subversion of the social order by presenting himself as a professional virtuoso should be, however, understood as a play with the culturally conservative élites rather than the support of the emperor’s political ideals. Nero’s transformation from the patron of the hellenising policy to professional virtuoso, intended to show his own imperial power, appeared a turning point in his loss of the political support of the senatorial aristocracy.¹

Parts II-IV are Greek-centered. Part II (Anabolê, Prooimion, Nomos: Form and Content of Citharodic Songs, pp. 185-314) is arranged according to the sequence of the standard elements of citharodic performance. P. looks at the three-stage performance of the citharode (a short instrumental prelude, prooimion, the song proper) using mainly functional criteria as a means of distinguishing between them. This line of presenting the issues is transparent and instructive. We are prevented from being certain which subjects were of prime importance by the paucity of citharodic texts. Thanks to P.’s subtle, thorough and nuanced analysis of a considerable amount of external evidence referring to the kitharôidia we are now able to form a good idea of the citharodic content in general as well as many details. The exegesis of sources leads P. to the view that identical narrative subjects might have had their citharodic as well as rhapsodic manifestation in the Archaic and Classical periods. The performative differentiation of heroic themes has been persuasively argued to be symptomatic of the Panhellenic and local artistic activity at an early stage of Greek culture. Of particular value are the pages on the relationship between the citharodes and rhapsodes. P.’s treatment of a professional rivalry between them, emphasises – due to the thematic affinities of both – the performative differences of rhapsodic and citharodic spectacles as decisive in competing for the cultural prestige of these generic forms. P. also provides an interesting perspective on the general issue of the role of the mousikoi agônes in the process of the conceptualisation of literary genres in Classical Greek culture.

It is worth mentioning that similar assertions have also been recently made by other scholars of the interaction between poetic competitions at musical contests and traditional types of poetry. I mean the serious study of the Panathenaia, the Amphiaraia, and the Artemisia carried on by Andrea Rotstein.² The results of her and P.’s investigations into this matter, presented independently of one another,³ coincide in many respects, although

¹ For the adequate discussion of this issue see the clear brief treatment presented by Juliana Bartos Marques, Nero as an Artist and Political Changes in the Principate, ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΙΑ ΔΙΕΘΝΟΣ ΣΥΝΕΛΕΥΣΗ ΚΑΛΕΣΜΙΚΩΝ ΣΠΟΥΔΩΝ, v. 1, Athens 2001, pp. 101-107.
² A. Rotstein, Mousikoi Agones and the Conceptualization of Genre in Ancient Greece, Classical Antiquity 31 (2012), 92-127.
³ See eadem, p. 117. n. 113.
the conceptual frameworks for dealing with the relation between musical contests and the poetic genres, applied by both, are different.

In attempting to reconstruct the scope of the citharodic repertoire and to show the kitharôidia’s cultural centrality P. builds up his argument cumulatively casting the net wide in search of possible citharodic traces in Greek culture. There is a clear common ‘citharodic thread’ running through all analysed ancient sources and the majority of conclusions is convincing.

Sometimes P. becomes, however, over-enthusiastic in finding citharodic reminiscences in extant lyric passages, as it seems to happen in the case of Sappho, fr. 44. 32-34 (pp. 260-265). P. treats three words, orthion (which he takes to be the adjective with an unstated object noun such as melos or nomos, not as an adjective used adverbially, meaning ‘at high pitch’), bekabolon and eulyran (Apollo’s epithets), emphatically placed at the end of the description of the Trojans’ choral performance, as an allusion to the citharodic Terpander Orthios nomos and the reference to Apollo as a model citharode. The idea of a Sapphic manifestation of a living Lesbian citharodic tradition is conceivable but completely uncertain here: the orthios may be used in the general sense qualifying the voice of the singers (‘high, shrill’) without the connotation of the technical-generic meaning of nomos. The Trojans’ invocation of Apollo with two epithets commonly attached to the god, does not sufficiently support P.’s hypothesis, although in Terpander’s fr. 697 PMG (= fr. 2 Gostoli) Apollo is invoked with the variant form bekatebolos.

Part III (Inventions of Terpander, pp. 317-422) provides a well-constituted treatment of Terpander, the protos heuretes of the kitharôidia according to the ancient sources. P.’s approach to the Terpandean biographical tradition is diametrically opposed to that proposed by Antonietta Gostoli in her monograph on this poet. 2 He supplies an alternative vision of interpreting the Terpandean testimonia, making his main concern the cultural horizons revealed in them. Inspired by Gregory Nagy’s view, 3 who regards Terpander as a proto- or archetypal lyric composer, P. treats the stories concerning Terpander’s life and activity as representations of «cultural truths», not as information pertaining to one individual figure who actually lived and worked in the early seventh century BCE. Independently of which of two constructs emerging from analyses of testimonia one is sympathetic to, that built by Gostoli or that presented by P., one must agree that P. did an excellent job in reconstructing the production and consumption of the citharodic culture in the Archaic and Classical periods. The range of knowledge about Terpander’s activity and its artistic affinities, accumulated in this part of the book, is essential in our imagining of what the kitharôidia was actually like and recognising its vast cultural setting.

P.’s looking at ancient evidence for Terpander and for the citharodic culture in general, must of course rely on the testimonia that come to us via late sources, as it is in the case on the Ps.-Plutarch’s On Music, which provides us with a stock of quotations from earlier authors concerning the history of Greek music and poetry. Each time P. tries to judge to

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1. He seems to be not unaware of the fact that it may cause others’ objections. See his remarks on p. 310 of his book.
what extent a passage cited by a later source may reflect earlier views or may modify the «long-lost» Archaic and Classical tradition according to certain patterns of later reception. This is precisely the sort of source criticism to which each responsible classicist gladly subscribes (for P.’s manifesto concerning Quellenforschung see p. 323 of his book).

In Part IV (Panathenaic Kitharôidia, pp. 425-554), devoted to the process of establishing the kitharôidia’s dominance in the musical culture of Athens, P. attempts to identify and characterise particular stages of its cultivation in this city – from the time before its official installation at the Panathenaia, through the citharodic akme under the Peisistratids, till the Athenian ‘New Music’ era, the typical product of which were Timotheus’ new nomoi. The history of kitharôidia in Athens is discussed from the point of view of its dependence on political and social changes. P. persuasively proves that the kitharôidia had a meaningful part to play in the Athenian imperial agenda in its both, aristocratic as well as demotic, aspects. The exploration of sources, especially of those visual, pertaining to the kitharôidia in its «all the Athenians» form is sound and valuable, as it is in previous parts of the book too. It was left to the end of this part to treat in details the proprieties of the citharodic ‘deformations’ and to show how the once-controversial paranomia of Timotheus had slowly become classical in its own right.

As to the problem of the comic critique of the New Music, P. exploits several texts concerning the practitioners of the new style. Dealing with Phrynis, heavily derided in Old Comedy, he repeatedly points to the scholia to Aristophanes’ Clouds 971a, but does not mention the lines from Pherecrates’ Cheiron (fr. 135, 14-16 K.-A.) where the personalised Music attacks Phrynis as one of her lovers who treat her abusively. It is a pity that P. does not explore further the whole of fr. 135 and restricts himself (p. 507) only to noting the image of Timotheus’ ‘perverse ant tracks’ (without, however, saying a word about the Ps.-Plutarch’ attribution of the last three lines of the quoted passage to Aristophanes and understanding it, probably misleadingly, as referring to Philoxenus). The fragment, preserved in Ps.-Plutarch’s On Music (1141d-1142a), is a mine of valuable information on the development and decline of music, also in its citharodic form.

P. does not end his book with a summary of the sections and parts. It appears that the author, like a skilled citharode, broke off in the middle of a sentence keeping the public in pleasurable suspense. One would feel like saying: what a citharodic mastery! But to conclude seriously, ‘The Culture of Kitharôidia’ is an excellent book, which brillianty discusses the nature of the kitharôidia in its cultural setting. The learned comments on numerous ancient testimonia, devoid, however, of boring pedantry, help the readers to appreciate the role of the art of singing to the kithara in the ancient Greek and Roman societies. Thanks to P. kitharôidia has been placed firmly in the varied landscape of lyric poetry. Some of his views must, of course, remain hypothetical, since speculation is unavoidable in the case of having to rely upon fragmentary and ambiguous sources. This is – paradoxically – another advantage of the book since it still leaves scope for further work on this subject.

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