IV PERFORMANCE

Archaic hexameter poetry could be declaimed by a rhapsode; in some circumstances it could also be sung or chanted to the accompaniment of a lyre. Beyond that we know disappointingly little about performance practices or about the social context of performance. Even Homer is only a partial exception. We know that Homeric epic was performed competitively at the Great Panathenaea festival in Athens, but that was not its only possible setting and we have no reliable evidence at all about its original setting. With Hesiod we know even less. We must make do with isolated snippets of information and hints. This chapter cannot offer many answers: only present what relevant information is available and indicate which kinds of guesses are reasonable ones.

1. Musical instruments

Within the poems themselves, performers are normally portrayed singing and accompanying themselves on a lyre. A singer is an *aoidos*. The instrument is referred to interchangeably as either a *kitharis* or a *phorminx*, or, on one occasion, a *lyrē* (*Hymn. Hom. Herm*. 423). The verb for playing the instrument is usually *kitharisdō* (1× Homer, 12× non-Homeric), sometimes *phormisdō* (4× Homer, 1× non-Homeric). The mythic archetype for all these instruments is the tortoiseshell lyre invented by Hermes in the *Hymn to Hermes* (24–54). The *Hymn*, probably dating to *c.*500 BCE, describes it as having a soundbox fashioned from a tortoise shell supported by reeds and a leather backing, two outstretched arms with a crossbar, and seven sheep-gut strings; it is played with a plectrum.

By the classical era these terms consistently referred to distinct instruments. The *kithara* was the most prestigious, a large lyre used by professionals in competitive performance. The *phorminx* was a smaller bowl-lyre, associated with leisure and the revel (*kōmos*); by the classical period it was considered antiquated and was being superseded by the *barbitos*, a newer lyre with longer arms and a deeper tone. The tortoiseshell *chelys* or *lyra*, with its small, jury-rigged soundbox, would have had a soft tone and was associated with amateur aristocrats; like

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the *barbitos*, it was used by women as well as men.[1] In each case the instrument was held in the left hand and played with the right, using the left to mute strings as needed. Musicians may also have used the left hand to create higher-pitched notes, as is common on modern string instruments, with a light touch at harmonic positions along the strings.[2] The *kithara* was played in a standing position because of its size, secured against the shoulder by a strap around the left wrist; the others could be played sitting or standing. Each instrument was regularly used for a wide variety of genres.

Stylized pictorial evidence from the eighth century shows lyres with only three or four strings. That may be only an artistic convention: certainly by the seventh century lyres regularly had seven strings. At that time, according to later (and inconsistent) traditions, the semi-legendary musician Terpander supposedly increased the number of strings from four to seven.[3] Later innovations added more strings.

In the earliest period the instrument played more or less in unison with the singer, reinforcing the voice and clarifying the melodic line;[4] the voice would presumably take on the burden of ornamentation. We are told that instrumental passages without singing were first introduced by the dithyrambic poet Crexus, probably a contemporary of Philoxenus and Timotheus (that is to say, in the late fifth century BCE).[5] Our sole surviving musical score for a hexameter poem, a Hellenistic-era hymn from Epidaurus addressed to (probably) Asclepius, shows that in later times instrumental passages could be played between hexameter lines.[6]

Performances of Homeric poetry at the Great Panathenaea, by contrast, were the province of rhapsodes, who are shown with no musical instrument in sight and instead hold a staff (*rhabdos*; the word is not related to *rhapsōidia* ['song-stitching'] but associated by wordplay).[7] It

[1] For more details on these instruments see M. L. West 1992: 49–59; Landels 1999: 47–68; Bundrick 2005: 14–26.

[2] On technique see M. L. West 1992: 64–70; Landels 1999: 55–61.

[3] Terpander test. 1, test. 16, fr. 6 Campbell; Plin. *HN* 7.204. But cf. test. 14 (Terpander changed the tuning, not the number of strings); test. 17 (Terpander added only one string); ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1137b (Terpander's music had only three notes).

[4] Ps.-Arist. *Pr.* xix.918b.7–8 weighs against the idea that the lyre played at a different octave: as an example of an instrument playing at the (lower) octave he cites the φοῖνιξ, rather than one of the standard lyres.

[5] Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1141b.

[6] M. L. West 1992: 279, 287–8.

[7] Ps.-Pl. *Hipparch.* 228b–c; Lycurg. *Leoc.* 102; Dionysius of Argos *FGrH* 308 F 2; Dieuchidas of Megara *FGrH* 485 F 6. See Burgess 2004 on possible rhapsodic performance of the Epic Cycle.

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follows that we cannot be confident that any particular poem was originally sung. In Homer, performances are always musical, but in Hesiod the narrator holds a staff, unmistakeably a rhapsode (*Theog.* 30–1): yet both use the same verb for what the performer does, *aeidein* ('sing'). Pindar lumps rhapsodes and singers together, calling the Homeridae *rhaptōn epeōn…aoidoi* ('singers of stitched hexameters'; *Nem.* 2.2). Later sources tend to confine sung hexameter to hymnic poetry, especially that of Terpander. Heracleides of Pontus mentions that Terpander set Homeric poetry to music for competitions, implying that he thought it was not sung previously; Plato calls Homer's character Phemius a rhapsode, even though Phemius uses a lyre.[8] Xenophanes composed not only hexameter but also elegiac and iambic poetry, yet we are told that he performed his own work rhapsodically.[9] There is a significant possibility that the musician-performers whom we see in Homer are just a poetic convention, representing an imaginary past that never really existed.

2. Rhythm

We know the basic rhythm of hexameter performance thanks to the evidence of the hexameter itself (see p. 63): it is a march-like rhythm with six beats and a regular *dum-diddy-dum-diddy* riff. Ancient theorists called the alternate hemipedes *thesis–arsis* ('placement–lifting') or *katō–anō* ('downward–upward'). These terms refer quite literally to downward and upward movement, a performer beating time with his feet, to judge from descriptions of musicians doing exactly that in Quintilian and other ancient sources.[10] For rhapsodes, the obvious way of establishing a regular beat would be the traditional staff. In modern terms, *thesis* and *arsis* translate to downbeat and upbeat.

In some performance contexts – we do not know which – there may have been a rhythmic irregularity that ancient theorists referred to as 'irrational' (*alogon*). This term did not indicate a truly mathematically irrational ratio of note lengths, but just that a rhythm did not fit

[8] Heracleid. fr. 157 Wehrli (ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1132b–c); Pl. *Ion* 553c.
[9] Xenoph. fr. A 1 §18 (ἐρραψῴδει τὰ ἑαυτοῦ).
[10] Quint. *Inst.* 1.12.3 ('even the foot is busy with keeping a regular time'), 9.4.55 ('the beat of fingers and feet'). See M. L. West 1992: 133–7, esp. 133 nn. 13, 14. Terentianus Maurus 1345 is more metaphorical ('[a metrical foot] lifts the sound in one part, puts it down in the other').

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comfortably into the most commonly recognized types.[11] Dionysius of Halicarnassus, citing unnamed rhythmicians on the subject, tells us that in dactylic rhythm two short syllables occupy a slightly longer time than one long, and that the ratio between them is 'irrational'.[12] But other ancient testimony is against him. The fourth-century-BCE theorist Aristoxenus categorizes dactylic rhythm as *en isōi logōi* ('in equal ratio'), as do other sources;[13] and Dionysius contradicts himself elsewhere, speaking of 'irrational' dactyls as a rushing of tempo, not a slowing.[14] Moreover, Dionysius' initial observation is confined to just two rhythmic units, the dactyl (— ⏑⏑) and an obscure foot called the 'cyclic anapaest'. It follows that 'irrational' time in dactylic rhythm was hardly universal. So Dionysius' comment about the 'irrational' dactyl probably refers to an unevenness caused by semi-musical chanting as opposed to natural language or formal song: in English, too, quasi-spoken musical forms such as Anglican chant or hip-hop have strongly characteristic rhythms, different both from spoken language and from one another.

We can be confident that there were breaks in rhythm between lines, as in modern improvised verse forms.[15] Some pieces of evidence for this are the indifferent length of the last note in each line; the fact that there are no hypermetric metrical features (that is to say, sound combinations at line-end); and the (late) testimony of the Epidaurian hymn to Asclepius, mentioned above, which has an instrumental phrase between each line.

But it is debated whether there were any breaks between cola within a line. On the one hand, pauses between cola would (1) violate the regularity of the dactylic beat (on which see above); (2) create hypermetric instability because of the shifting placement of pauses in successive lines; (3) obstruct all metrical features based on sound combinations between adjacent words, namely elisions, correptions, and closed syllables; and (4) be physically unnecessary, since trained singers are accustomed to much longer phrases on a single breath than untrained

[11] Aristox. *Rhythm.* 22.27–8 Pighi (2.20 Barker): irrational time is between 1 : 1 and 2 : 1 time; Aristid. Quint. 1.(§14).34: irrational rhythms 'do not fit comfortably into any of the ratios specified above'.

[12] Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 17 (71.4–72.2 Usener–Rademacher).

[13] Aristox. *Rhythm.* 24.16 Pighi (2.30 Barker); Maurus 1409 (the dactyl 'balances the time in the *arsis* with the *thesis*'; similarly 1350 of the spondee); Aristid. Quint. 1.(§15).35 (rhythms called dactylic because of their ἰσότης ['equality']).

[14] Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 20 (93.6–16 Usener–Rademacher).

[15] Daitz 1991: 151–3; Danek and Hagel 1995: 6–8.

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singers. On the other hand, Andrews has shown that 'overlength' (an excess of phonemes) is more common in syllables at colon-end than elsewhere, implying a slightly more protracted phonation.[16] Ancient testimony is mixed. Quintilian tells us that rests occur 'within metre', *inania…in metris*; but he also speaks of a continuous flow of *arsis* and *thesis* (Latin *sublatio* and *positio*) until the end of each line.[17] The earliest surviving account of caesuras in hexameter – that of the Roman-era theorist Aristides Quintilianus – gives no hint about their impact on performance practice.[18] Then there is the bizarre system of punctuation devised for Homer by the second-century-CE grammarian Nicanor (nicknamed *stigmatias*, 'the punctuator'): Nicanor mandates pauses of varying lengths after nearly every phrase, including quadruple-length pauses after every sentence end, vocative, or interjection.[19] Protracted silences of that kind are unrealistic, especially in view of the 'equal' time that Aristoxenus and other theorists associate with dactylic rhythm. However, it is perfectly reasonable to imagine a moderate rubato in accordance with Andrews' findings.

3. Pitch and melody

If hexameter poetry was performed musically – and that is a big 'if' – then the sound of its music becomes a legitimate object of inquiry. Our evidence on the tuning of ancient Greek music is very fragmentary prior to Aristoxenus in the late fourth century BCE.[20] In extant Greek musical theory the basic unit of tuning was not the octave (as in modern Western music) but the tetrachord, a group of four notes with an interval between the outer notes that we would call a perfect fourth (a frequency ratio of 4 : 3). There were various different systems for tuning the inner notes of each tetrachord, depending on both mode (Lydian, Dorian, Phrygian, and so on) and temperament, or tuning. Aristoxenus distinguished three temperaments: 'diatonic', 'enharmonic', and 'chromatic'. These systems were not confined to the pitches used in modern Western music but made heavy use of what we would call microtones,

[16] Andrews 2005: 9–24.
[17] Quint. *Inst.* 9.4.51, 9.4.55. Quintilian's *inania* probably refer to strict caesuras in non-hexameter metres, such as in the middle of the pentameter: thus Landels 1999: 115.
[18] Aristid. Quint. 1.(§24).47.
[19] Sch. on Dion. Thrax, 26–8 Hilgard; see also Daitz 1991: 150.
[20] See Barker 2007: 19–104 on what may be inferred about Aristoxenus' predecessors.

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especially in the enharmonic and chromatic tunings favoured by fifth-century musicians. Fifth-century music made many other innovations too, but we cannot delve into that complex subject here.[21]

Aristoxenus believed that the enharmonic was the most recent temperament, invented by the semi-mythical melic poet Olympus, and that earlier music was diatonic or chromatic.[22] Modern musicologists tend to believe that the diatonic was originally the norm.[23] But ancient diatonic tuning was not the same as in modern tonal music. If we trust the detailed report in Claudius Ptolemy's *Harmonics*, we can plot the exact intervals in the diatonic tetrachord as tuned by several ancient theorists.[24] The earliest of Ptolemy's theorists is Archytas, a Pythagorean and a contemporary of Plato. Table 1 converts these intervals to the corresponding number of semitones in the modern equal temperament system. If Aristoxenus is right, and Olympus' music was indeed based on the notes *mesē*, *parhypatē*, and *hypatē* tuned diatonically, still the interval between the lower two notes may have been anywhere between half a semitone and well over a semitone.

As mentioned above, our only musical score for hexameter poetry comes from a Hellenistic-era hymn, after the musical revolution of the fifth century. For what it is worth, in that score the same melody is repeated in each line, and there is an instrumental phrase between each line. We cannot know how far back these practices go. There may possibly be clues in the nature of the language itself. All words in Archaic Greek, except clitics, had a pitch accent: that is, one vowel pronounced at a higher pitch than the rest of the word. In written Greek from the Hellenistic period onwards, base pitch is shown either unaccented or with a *bareia* ('grave') diacritic; high pitch, with an *oxeia* ('acute'); and, on some long vowels, a high pitch descending towards base pitch, marked with a *perispōmenē* ('circumflex').

A study by Danek and Hagel (1995) uses the pitch accent of the spoken language to attempt to reconstruct melodic contours in poetry. Their first starting observation is that, in normal voice production in languages with a pitch accent, pitch does not change instantaneously but climbs and descends over the course of a word, phrase, and sentence. The pitch of successive high-pitched syllables tends to descend

[21] For recent treatments see Landels 1999: 86–109; Barker 2007; Hagel 2009.
[22] Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1134f–1135b.
[23] Hagel 2009: 10, with n. 35.
[24] For commentary on Ptol. *Harm.* 2 see especially Mathiesen 1999: 451–77.

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Table 1. Intervals in the ancient diatonic tetrachord

	Archytas	Aristoxenus, 'soft'	Aristoxenus, 'tense'	Eratosthenes	Didymus	Ptolemy, 'soft'	Ptolemy, 'tense'	Ptolemy, 'even'
mesē to *lichanos*	2.039	2.490	1.992	2.039	2.039	2.312	1.824	1.824
lichanos to *parhypatē*	2.312	1.494	1.992	2.039	1.824	1.824	2.039	1.650
parhypatē to *hypatē*	0.630	0.996	0.996	0.902	1.117	0.845	1.117	1.506

Intervals are expressed in equal-temperament semitones to three decimal places. Derived from Ptol. *Harm*. 2.(§14).73–4. Two of Ptolemy's own temperaments ('tonic' and 'ditonic') are omitted because they duplicate others shown here. *Mesē*, *lichanos*, *parhypatē*, and *hypatē* are the names of four notes in a tetrachord, going from high frequency to low frequency. Each tetrachord adds up to 4.980 semitones, not 5, because a true perfect fourth corresponds to 4.980 equal-temperament semitones.

over the course of a phrase. This means that melodic contours can be conjectured for musical phrases longer than a single word. Their second observation is that some extant Greek musical scores – but not all – show a good correspondence between pitch accent and musical pitch. They adopt the following additional assumptions: (1) the lyre had four strings; (2) the *perispōmenē* is a melisma sung on two notes, the second lower than the first; and (3) a word's natural pitch-contour persists even when it has the *bareia* accent, with the result that the *bareia* is not a total cancellation of high pitch but rather a reduction, intermediate between base pitch and high pitch. Based on these, their reconstruction of a basic outline of a four-note melody follows naturally and systematically.[25]

Danek and Hagel do however point out that this type of reconstruction is heavily stylized: it is a skeletal structural analysis, not an *obbligato* melody. They are also agnostic about the tuning of the strings. There are a few additional caveats to bear in mind. First is the four-stringed lyre: by the seventh century, seven strings were standard. Another is that Dionysius of Halicarnassus famously reports at one point that the *oxeia* accent is typically about a fifth higher than base pitch,[26] but that interval does not fit into a single tetrachord. Lastly, while some extant musical scores observe pitch accent carefully, that is hardly universal. Dionysius states that 'words are subordinate to melodies, not melodies to words', and cites an example in Euripides (*Orestes* 140–2) where the melody runs counter to the natural pitch accents; many extant musical scores do the same.[27] In the Epidaurian hymn to Asclepius, pitch accent was simply ignored: every hexameter has the same melody. The study of the relationship between pitch accent and colon boundaries is of great interest and is likely to yield further results, but even a systematic reconstruction like that of Danek and Hagel has to be treated as mostly speculative.

[25] Andrews 2005: 2–9 makes many similar observations, but does not attempt to pin pitch contours down to a musical melody.

[26] Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 11 (40.17–41.1 Usener–Rademacher).

[27] Dion. Hal. *Comp.* 11 (41.18–42.14 Usener–Rademacher); for extant scores, see M. L. West 1992: 283–326. Some egregious early examples: no. 3 West (Eur. *Or.* 338–44), a low note on the second syllable of ματέρος; no. 4 (Eur. *IA* 784–92), a descent of nearly an octave onto the second syllable of πατρίας; and possibly no. 7 (p.Cair.Zen. 59533), descending lines on ἑτάρων and γονάτων. The main exemplars where melody and pitch accent do go hand in hand are late: nos. 12–13 West, second century (these also include melismata on syllables with *perispōmenē*).

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4. Performance context

For some readers, the romantic icon of the early hexameter poet is Achilles singing of the 'glories of men' in front of his tent (*Iliad* 9.185–91). According to this view, the earliest performances were private, an aristocrat singing to himself or to an intimate companion. But that is just one possibility: we can hardly take it as typical.

Starting in the sixth century BCE, competitive performance of Homeric epic was instituted as a regular part of the Great Panathenaea festival at Athens.[28] Gregory Nagy has laid particular emphasis on a cultic and festival context for Homeric performance, as part of his argument that cult and the apparatus of cult are integral to the progressive pan-Hellenization of the two major epics.[29] Not many poems fit that mould, of course.

A few do, however. Musical contests were a fixture of many Greek religious festivals; the question is which other hexameter poems were fixtures. One Attic vase shows a rhapsode performing the line 'Even so once in Tiryns. . .'.[30] This line, attested nowhere else, could be the opening of an epic about Bellerophon, who went to Tiryns; it might perhaps be a line from the Homeric *Thebaid*, since the expedition against Thebes set out from nearby Argos. Whatever it is, a non-Homeric hexameter in the mouth of a rhapsode performing in Athens implies that the poetry performed at the Panathenaea was originally 'Homeric' poetry understood broadly, not just the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The *Hymn to Demeter* almost certainly had some role in the Eleusinian cult of Demeter and Kore: the hospitality scene where Demeter is welcomed into the house of Keleos (98–230) is an enactment of the religious rite of *Theoxenia*, where a divinity is welcomed into a house and has a place set for a feast; and some elements of the *Hymn* provide 'just so' stories for elements of Eleusinian cult, notably the *kykeōn* or initiatory potion (206–11), the mock battle or *ballētys* (263–7), and Demeter's teachings about the afterlife that awaits initiates (473–84). The *Hymn to Apollo* represents itself as being performed at the Delia festival (151–76), and a plausible case has been made that

[28] See n. 7 above.
[29] Nagy 1996: 39–43, 2009: 9–28.
[30] BM E 270, Attic, Cleophrades Painter, *c.*490–480 (='Homer' unplaced fr. 1 West). It is conceivable that the 'rhapsode' might be singing, accompanied by an *aulistēs* on the other side of the vase; but, taken together, his staff and the hexameter imply rhapsodic performance.

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the combined Pythia–Delia of 523 BCE, celebrated on Delos by Polycrates, was the occasion when Cynaethus first performed a combined Delian–Pythian hymn to Apollo.[31] Thucydides shows that musical contests at Delos had ceased by his time (3.104.5).

Agonistic performance is a closely related form. This refers to a more direct, personal style of competition. We could compare it to medieval 'flyting', but a better way of capturing its immediacy is to think of modern American freestyle rap battles, like those depicted in the hit film *8 Mile* (2002). Agonistic poetry was not only a matter of being judged best in a line-up of performances, like those at the Great Panathenaea and the ones alluded to in some poems;[32] it could also be an aggressive face-to-face contest. In the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, the two poets compete to display their virtuosity in answering each other's riddles, giving moral aphorisms, and completing seemingly incompletable lines, as in these exchanges (*Contest* 9):

ὣς οἳ μὲν δαίνυντο πανήμεροι, οὐδὲν ἔχοντες
— οἴκοθεν, ἀλλὰ παρεῖχεν ἄναξ ἀνδρῶν Ἀγαμέμνων.

δεῖπνον δειπνήσαντες ἐνὶ σποδῶι αἰθαλοέσσηι
— σύλλεγον ὀστέα λευκὰ Διὸς κατατεθνειῶτος
— παιδὸς ὑπερθύμου Σαρπηδόνος ἀντιθέοιο.

(Hesiod:) *So they feasted throughout the day with no food—*
(Homer:) *Of their own; it was provided by Agamemnon, lord of men.*

(Hesiod:) *After making their feast among the sooty ashes—*
(Homer:) *They collected the white bones of the dead one, Zeus'—*
(Hesiod:) *Proud son, the godlike Sarpedon.*

This material is attested relatively late, but it seems to be representative. One source has Lesches, the poet of the *Little Iliad*, as the judge of the contest; one mentions another poetic duel, between Lesches and Arctinus; a third mentions duels, or at least poetic attacks, made by Syagrus upon Homer, and Cercops upon Hesiod.[33] Two early sources give vivid depictions of an agonistic poet choking on stage (an immediate loss in modern battle raps). In one exchange between two legendary seers in the Hesiodic *Melampodia*, Mopsus answers a riddle so well that

[31] Burkert 1979; M. L. West 1999: 376–82.
[32] *WD* 654–7; *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 165–73; *Hymn* 6.19–20.
[33] Plut. *Conv. sept. sap.* 154a (Hes. test. 38); Phaenias *FGrH* 1012 F 10; Diog. Laert. 2.46.

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'the sleep of death shrouded Calchas' (fr. 214). And a poetic duel between Thamyris and the Muses ends when the Muses 'in anger made him maimed, and took away his wonderful voice and made him forget his *kithara*-craft' (*Il.* 2.599–600). This last, with the reference to anger, sounds very like a battle where the participants 'diss' one another, competing in wit and semi-improvised insults: the 'maiming' is not divine vengeance for Thamyris' audacity but Thamyris choking because he has been successfully dissed.[34]

More peaceful is the idea of the court poet. Phemius and Demodocus in the *Odyssey*, and Apollo and the Muses in the *Iliad*, perform in the halls of great lords: the houses of Odysseus, Alcinous, and Zeus, respectively.[35] There they entertain the leisured nobles and their guests while they feast and dance. These poets are revered public figures and an integral part of aristocratic society: Phemius keeps company with the herald Medon, and Odysseus spares him in the slaughter of the suitors;[36] Demodocus is greatly honoured in Alcinous' hall. We should be sceptical of these images, and of the responses they get from their audiences, since they are authorial self-insertions: they are not-so-subtle hints at how real poets ought to be treated. The self-insertion is clearest in the case of Demodocus, who, like the Homer portrayed in the mythical biographies, is blind.[37] And the hints had some success: certainly tyrants such as Polycrates, Hipparchus, and Hieron gave great favour to Anacreon, Simonides, Pindar, and others. But there is no evidence of any historical hexameter poet enjoying a comparable status.[38]

It is best to interpret these Homeric scenes as self-aggrandising versions of sympotic performance. The symposium was an integral part of early and classical Greek aristocratic life. It combined communal eating, drinking, games, poetry, and sex. It bound together male social groups culturally and politically, and provided a forum for personal

[34] Also comparable in hexameter are the face-offs in Theoc. *Id.* 5, 6, ps.-Theoc. *Id.* 8, 9, and the pairs of songs in Theoc. *Id.* 7, 10. Pretagostini 2006: 57–61, following Serrao, believes we can be confident in a historical reality behind Theocritus' singing contests (though that would not imply any link to earlier agonistic contexts); Gutzwiller 2006: 17–18 sees instead a literary model, Euripides' lost *Antiope*.

[35] Phemius: *Od.* 1.150–5, 1.325–52, 17.358–9, 23.130–6, 23.143–7. Demodocus: *Od.* 8.62–92, 8.254–389, 8.470–522. Apollo: *Il.* 1.601–4, 24.62–3; *Shield* 201–3.

[36] *Od.* 16.252, 22.330–80.

[37] *Od.* 8.62–4; see also Introduction, pp. vii–viii.

[38] Xenophanes may possibly have been a guest of one of the Sicilian tyrants: Diogenes Laertius states that he visited Sicily (Xenoph. fr. A 1§18), and his lifetime overlapped with Gelon's reign.

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and social education as well as entertainment. Poetry was an important feature. Clay is sufficiently struck by certain passages in the *Hymns* to suggest that hymns, theogony, and heroic narrative may originally have been performed in a sympotic context.[39] Irwin points out that the 'tribe(s) of women' named as the subject of the *Catalogue* (fr. 1.1) are a theme of sympotic poetry, and interprets the poem as posing a question about who the 'best' women in the present would be. More fundamentally, she argues that the *Catalogue*'s ethos of sexual activity and its conception of social stratification – some women and men are the 'best' – mesh well with a sympotic ethos: 'As early as line 4, the poet undresses his female subjects' (*mitras allysanto*, 'they loosened their girdles'), and in line 6 he proceeds to talk about feasts and who gets to sit with whom.[40] And Murray sees the *Odyssey* (but not the *Iliad*) as pervasively flavoured by a sympotic setting.[41]

The *Hymn to Hermes* only reinforces the impression of the symposium as a central theme.[42] Here is the first-ever performance of hexameter poetry (*Hymn. Hom. Herm.* 54–61):

> θεὸς δ' ὑπὸ καλὸν ἄειδεν
> ἐξ αὐτοσχεδίης πειρώμενος, ἠύτε κοῦροι
> ἡβηταὶ θαλίῃσι παραιβόλα κερτομέουσιν,
> ἀμφὶ Δία Κρονίδην καὶ Μαιάδα καλλιπέδιλον,
> ὡς πάρος ὠρίζεσκον ἑταιρείῃ φιλότητι,
> ἧν τ' αὐτοῦ γενεὴν ὀνομακλυτὸν ἐξονομάζων·
> ἀμφιπόλους τε γέραιρε καὶ ἀγλαὰ δώματα νύμφης
> καὶ τρίποδας κατὰ οἶκον ἐπηετανούς τε λέβητας.

[Hermes] sang beautifully to [the lyre], impromptu, experimentally, as young men at dinners (*thaliai*) make ribald interjections: (he sang) about Zeus son of Kronos and fair-shod Maia, how they used to talk love in companionable intimacy, and declaring his own renowned lineage. He also celebrated the servants of [Maia], and her splendid home, the tripods disposed about it and the unending cauldrons.

Hermes' first song evokes men at a symposium, and also imitates standard hexameter forms, complete with a hymnic prelude to Zeus, a praise poem, and a genealogy. His second song (418–33) is even clearer:

[39] Clay 1989: 7.
[40] Irwin 2005a: 40–9, citing Semonides fr. 2 and Phocylides fr. 2 on 'tribes of women'.
[41] Murray 2008 (note the helpful survey of views on Homeric performance at 161–4).
[42] However, see Johnston 2003 on possible links between the *Hymn* and the Hermaia festival, and between Hermes' cattle raid and initiation songs: 'Public recitation of myth, then, almost functions as a ritual itself, as listeners negotiate the tensions that the myth expresses' (170).

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there, a hymnic prelude to Memory is followed by a theogony that organizes the gods into social strata, honouring them 'according to seniority and affiliation', exactly the kind of stratification that we associate with the aristocratic symposium. Apollo, impressed, compares the invention of the lyre to the idea of passing things to the right at feasts (454). In turn Hermes gives him the lyre as a present and portrays it as a *hetaira* at a symposium: he instructs Apollo to '[t]ake her confidently to the banquet (*dais thaleia*) and the lovely dance and the bumptious revel (*kōmos*)', and advises that 'If one questions her with skill and expertise, she speaks all kinds of lessons to charm the fancy' (482–8).

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