

MUSIC AND IMAGE IN FIFTH-CENTURY ATHENS

Athens in the fifth century B.C. has been described as a “performance culture,” an evocative term suggesting the full extent to which the city’s activities revolved around performance: the gatherings of the assembly [*ekklesia*] and the lawcourts; the grand festivals with processions, sacrifices, and theatrical performances; athletic and musical competitions [*agones*]; cult rituals, down to the more private performances of household cult; and rituals of special occasion, from births to weddings to funerals.¹ Collective spectacle, display, and participation were in many ways the essence of the democracy.

Within this fifth-century performance culture, music played a highly significant role, just as it had for centuries. For the Greeks, music was the gift of the Muses and their divine ringleader, Apollo (compare Hesiod, *Theogony* 95–7); Classical Athenians sometimes went an extra step to proclaim that the Muses had been born in their city. Euripides said as much in his *Medea* (808–14), and in the earlier play *Rhesos* (often attributed to Euripides), the character of a Muse states point-blank: “I and my sisters make your Athens great in our art, and by our presence in the land” (941–2).² Most of the activities that colored public and private life were accompanied by music, song, dance, or all three, forming an essential part of education and marking life transitions.

What sets Athens apart from other Greek cities respected for their musical attainments is the vast amount of evidence at our disposal to comprehend the role of music in its society. Not surprisingly, literary sources have received the most attention.³ Poets, playwrights, and philosophers alike refer to the ubiquity and varying functions of music: its sounds, meanings, and sometimes its conspicuous absence. Some musical compositions survive in fragments, allowing for an understanding of notation.⁴ Plato and Aristotle, writing in the fourth century B.C., frequently refer to music in their writings, whereas lengthy treatises from the Hellenistic and Roman periods look back to the “good old days” of Greek music, which for their authors often means the music of Classical Athens.

The written sources, however, provide a tantalizingly incomplete picture of fifth-century music. Although later authors occasionally refer to fifth-century theoretical

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1. Cup by Douris with school scene, ca. 490–480 B.C. Antikensammlung, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preussischer Kulturbesitz (F 2285). Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.

texts, the originals do not survive. Only fragments of actual compositions do, most postdating the fifth century, and numerous other plays, poems, and texts that concerned music are likewise fragmentary or nonexistent. The dithyramb *Marsyas* by Melanippides of Melos is a perfect example; the complete composition is long gone, but bits of it can be recaptured from quotations in Athenaios' *Deipnosophistae* and other later sources. While texts like the *Deipnosophistae* and the pseudo-Plutarchean *De Musica* provide much information about earlier periods, they also contain hearsay and inaccuracies, having been written decades or even centuries after the fact. The literary evidence is clearly a small part of a much larger story.

We can turn to visual evidence to flesh out the picture, with two strategic advantages: the plethora of representations available and the fact they are contemporary in time. Fifth-century Athens has been dubbed a “a city of images,”⁵ and it is not surprising that many of the images that dotted the Athenian landscape – from the Parthenon frieze to the thousands of vases produced in the potters' quarter – are connected with musical performance. The potential significance of these depictions as a way to increase our understanding of Athenian music has long been recognized.⁶ However, musical scenes, on vases in particular, have often been used as mere illustrations and interpreted as photographic documents of actual practices. Such representations are typically viewed as indicative of *all* Greek music at *all* periods, rarely localized to the time and place of their production. Images such as those on a cup by Douris (Figs. 1 and 2) or on an amphora by the Berlin Painter (Figs. 3 and 4) are frequently presented as scenes of “daily life” in books on Greek

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2. Reverse of the cup in Fig. 1, with another school scene. Photo: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY.

music or culture.⁷ Many assume that, because the Berlin Painter represented a kithara *this* way, *this* is precisely how a kithara looked, or because *this* is how Douris showed a school, *this* is exactly how Greek boys were routinely educated.

Interpreting the Athenian “city of images” is hardly such a straightforward enterprise. One cannot use a vase painting purely as an illustration or as a source secondary to a written text. Indeed, like any text, an image is a document to be read, a premise emphasized in recent iconographic studies.⁸ Visual images are essentially constructions, with the combination of different symbols and signs – musical instruments or otherwise – yielding meaning. Consciously or unconsciously, the artist created an image that expressed the ideals and values permeating Athenian culture, often based in reality but sometimes with an element of fantasy. Furthermore, one must distinguish among types of images. State monuments, like the sculptures of the Parthenon, convey the agendas of the government and the elite, while painted vases, although still often linked to the consumer elite, nonetheless come closer to what we would today call “popular culture” by virtue of their large numbers and wide audience.⁹ Much as movies and television serve as alternative forms of “reality” that reflect the concerns of our own society, so too fifth-century Athenian vases can be read within the larger context of the culture that produced them.

Such an approach invites new questions. Not only can we ask *what* can be learned about musical practice, but also *why* painters chose to depict musicians, *why* certain types of scenes were favored, and, perhaps most important, *why* these

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3. Amphora by the Berlin Painter with kitharode; ca. 490 B.C. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1956 (56.171.38). Photo: All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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4. Reverse of the amphora in Fig. 3 with the kitharode's trainer or judge. Photo: All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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images were popular at a particular point in time. In the case of Douris' school scene, for example: How does it relate to other scenes of this type? To other scenes by Douris himself? To other scenes on the same vase? Where does it fit in the larger chronological spectrum? Where is the line drawn between an image of actual practice and a symbolic image? Douris did not sit in a schoolroom and attempt to photographically document its ambience. He worked with cultural constructs, but what was he trying to say and what can we learn from it? Similar questions can be asked of all fifth-century musical images. Plato or Aristotle each serve as only one voice speaking decades later, but the vases give us a glimpse into a wider, contemporary consciousness.

As part of a larger interest in so-called genre imagery among scholars of iconography, certain scenes that include musicians have already garnered exploration.¹⁰ Representations relating to the Panathenaic musical contests, for example, have been the subject of recent studies, as have wedding scenes.¹¹ Scenes of the symposium and komos have also been examined, although not necessarily from a musical standpoint.¹² Images of women have been a popular subject for scholarly inquiry, with female musicians occasionally coming into play.¹³ Mythological musicians such as Marsyas, Orpheus, and Apollo have had a longer history of academic scrutiny, corresponding to the longtime interest in mythological iconography.¹⁴

But we can go a step further, considering musical scenes not just individually, but broadly: Are certain scenes more popular than others at specific times? Is there a point at which musical imagery as a general category flourishes in the repertoire of Athenian artists? The answer is yes, and this realization inspires the present volume. If one examines the full scope of musical representations from the Early Archaic through the Late Classical period, it becomes apparent that their heyday lies in the fifth century. Whereas in the Archaic period music and musicians are found in a relatively limited range of scenes, a situation duplicated in the fourth century, we find a veritable explosion of new musical subjects and a dramatic transformation of old ones in the period from about 510 to 400 B.C. Thus Douris' cup is but one example of the new school scenes that appear at the turn of the fifth century, while the Berlin Painter's kitharode represents a newly expressive variation on an old musical theme.

Just as images of musicians were reaching a point of greater variety, creativity, and iconographic richness than had previously been seen in Athenian art, musical theorists and performers were expanding the boundaries of the discipline, transforming Athens into a preeminent center for musical innovation. The fifth century witnessed important and sometimes radical developments in organology and composition, as well as in musical theory and philosophy. Music had always been considered essential, but in the fifth century this attitude escalated into a heightened awareness of the power of music and its ability to influence the well-being of the city and its

inhabitants. Texts, mainly later in date, allude to the musical “revolution” of fifth-century Athens, but visual imagery truly shows the extent to which new musical tastes and ideas permeated contemporary society. Music was “on the agenda” in a way it had not been before and would not be again after the century ended.¹⁵

SIXTH-CENTURY MUSIC AND MUSICAL IMAGERY

Athens was a relative latecomer to the musical scene, initially overshadowed by regions better known for innovation, including Ionia, the islands, and certain cities of the Peloponnese, such as Sparta, Argos, and Corinth.¹⁶ During the seventh century, Sparta achieved prominence with the establishment of the festival of the Karneia and its musical contests, as well as the presence of musicians such as the poet Alkman and Terpander of Lesbos.¹⁷ Terpander is recorded as being the first winner of the Karneia *agon* and is further credited in the literary tradition (no doubt with some exaggeration) with inventing the barbitos, increasing the number of strings on chelys lyres from four to seven, and composing the first kitharodic *nomos*.¹⁸

In the sixth century, the cities of the northeastern Peloponnese reached their own level of musical notoriety, so much so that Herodotos (1.131.3) claims that “the Argives were spoken of as occupying the first place for music among the Greeks.”¹⁹ Sources preserve the names of such virtuosi as Sakadas of Argos, three times victorious in the Pythian auletic contest at Delphi (see subsequent discussion). At Corinth, tradition accords the invention of the dithyramb to a Lesbian kitharode, Arion, brought to the court of the tyrant Periander (Herodotos 1.23).²⁰ The origin of both Arion and the earlier Terpander at Lesbos testifies to the importance of the islands in the development of Greek music; one need think only of lyric poets such as Alkaios and Sappho.²¹ In Ionia, the tyrant Polykrates of Samos contributed to the positive state of musical affairs, bringing to his court such worthies as Ibycus of Rhegion and Anakreon of Teos.

A significant sixth-century development was the reorganization of the Pythian Games at Delphi to include musical contests [*mousikoi agones*], generally believed to have taken place in 586 B.C. (compare Pausanias 10.7.2–5), although an *agon* for kitharodes may have preceded this reorganization.²² Pausanias makes clear that aulos contests were a new addition to the festival, including one for aulodes (with a singer accompanying the aulos player) and one for auletes, solo performers of the instrument.²³ Sakades of Argos first won the latter with his daring *Pythikos nomos* commemorating Apollo’s victory over the dragon, a piece that would become standard fare in competition. Pausanias adds that the aulodic contest was disbanded only four years later because the performances were thought too “elegiac.” The auletic competition and the other *mousikoi agones*, however, remained a high point

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of the Pythian festival, reflecting Apollo's own status as the musical god *par excellence*. An *agon* for kitharists – performers on the kithara without sung accompaniment – was added to the Pythian program in 558 B.C.

Athens, although not a total cultural backwater, certainly had much to live up to. The sixth century witnessed the efforts of Athens to achieve greater notoriety among Greek cities on a number of levels, the sphere of music being one of them.²⁴ The reorganization – most scholars agree on a “reorganization” rather than the “foundation” – of the Greater Panathenaia in 566 B.C. represents one of these concerted efforts, a desire on the part of Athens to possess its own great festival to rival those of the Panhellenic centers and other cities. Although literary sources do not say, many believe the Panathenaic program included *mousikoi agones* right from the start, based on the evidence of sixth-century vase painting.²⁵ The success of these contests, however, reached nowhere the point of the Pythian *agones* in this period; they remained essentially local in character until the fifth century, when professional competitors increasingly made the Panathenaia a “must” on their tours of Greek festivals.

The tyrant Peisistratos, together with his sons Hipparchos and Hippias, is usually and rightly credited with many important cultural innovations. Tradition explicitly links him with the Greater Panathenaia, although the extent of his actual involvement remains unknown.²⁶ The profusion of Athenian vases referring to the *mousikoi agones* suggests that Peisistratos and his sons shared a keen interest in the musical contests.²⁷ Hipparchos is associated with the promotion of the rhapsodic contests, in which participants recited Homeric passages; although these may or may not have included musical accompaniment, by their poetic nature they can be considered together with the *mousikoi agones*.²⁸ Literary sources show that Hipparchos, in the style of tyrants elsewhere, brought contemporary musical celebrities to Athens, including the poet Simonides, the musician–theorist Lasos of Hermione, and the poet Anakreon of Teos. Peisistratid involvement in the reorganization of the festival of the Delia on Delos and perhaps in the foundation of the City Dionysia in Athens demonstrates an additional yearning to place Athens on the musical map. During the fifth century, the City Dionysia in particular would become a central locus for musical innovation.

There is no question that important foundations were laid during the sixth century for the future development of *mousike* in Athens. Accordingly, we begin to see in Archaic Athenian art a steadily rising visibility of musical imagery, although its settings and contexts remain fairly limited. Not surprisingly, scenes relating to the Panathenaic musical contests make their first appearance around mid-century and grow in number as time progresses. Images of Apollo as Kitharoidos likewise play a significant role. Occasionally, mythical musicians such as Paris, Theseus, and Orpheus are shown with instruments, but these are relatively rare. Exceptions to

this general rule are scenes dating from circa 530 B.C. until the end of the sixth century that depict the hero Herakles as a kithara player (see Chap. 5). By far the most numerous musical scenes are associated with the symposion or komos, either actually showing mortal participants in these elite social occasions or indirectly referring to them through images of Dionysos and his entourage [*thiasos*]. Sympotic scenes themselves reflect elements of sixth-century musical innovation, most notably in the rather sudden appearance of the barbitos, around the time that Anakreon of Teos came to join the Peisistratid court.

THE NEW DEMOCRACY, “NEW MUSIC,” AND NEW MUSICAL IMAGERY

The assassination of Hipparchos in 514 B.C. and the increasingly oppressive regime of Hippias, brought to an abrupt end in 510 B.C., understandably slowed the progress of musical development in Athens. However, with the advent of *demokratia* in 508/7 B.C. and Athens’ subsequent rise to prominence as a result of the Persian Wars, the city quickly became *the* center of Greek musical innovation. The cultural seeds sown by the Peisistratids and others during the sixth century bore abundant fruit in the fifth, as musicians and musical thinkers from throughout the Greek world came to Athens to promote their ideas. Early twentieth-century German musicologists coined the phrase *Neue Musik* – “New Music” – to describe the altered state of the discipline, and more recent scholars still agree that the musical mood in Athens at the time verged on the highly radical.²⁹ Virtuosi performing in the theater or *mousikoi agones* tested the limits of musical technique, modifying musical genres and instruments to push the envelope and wow the crowds. Most performers were not Athenian, but from such places as Thebes and East Greece, further attesting to the central role Athens now played. Their ideas won popular support on many fronts but also sparked controversy, alienating more conservative thinkers like Aristophanes and later Plato and Aristotle. In the treatise *De Musica*, the speaker Lysias, himself a musical conservative, refers to specific virtuosi of the day and describes their impact (1135c–d): “Crexus, Timotheos, and Philoxenos, however, and other poets of the same period, displayed more vulgarity and a passion for novelty, and pursued the style nowadays called ‘popular’ or ‘profiteering.’ The result was that music limited to a few strings, and simple and dignified in character, went quite out of fashion.”³⁰

It is surely no coincidence that, beginning with the last decade of the sixth century, Athenian musical iconography dramatically transformed and continued to change over the course of the next hundred years. I argue that the appearance of new types of musical scenes, together with significant alterations of old subjects, reflects not only important developments in the field of Greek music, but the

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specific relevance and location of those developments in the city of Athens. Three concepts that received particular attention, and around which I have organized this volume, are the discipline of *mousike* itself, the exploration of musical *ethos*, and the overarching ideal of *harmonia*.

Lasos of Hermione, who was brought to Athens under the Peisistratids but remained after the founding of the democracy, is credited in literary sources with the first musicological treatise.³¹ Although no fragments of the text survive, he was clearly both a theorist and a practitioner; the pseudo-Plutarchean *De Musica* (1141c) says that Lasos “transformed the music that existed before him.”³² Lasos’ work is indicative of the questioning and exploration *mousike* – literally “the art of the Muses” – would receive in fifth-century Athens. One area that received particular attention was the role of *mousike* in education. Recent scholarship has emphasized the fifth century as a turning point in Athenian education, from a system rooted in *mousike* and *gymnastike* [athletic training] to a curriculum more grounded in literacy [*grammatike*] and rhetoric. Education in *mousike* was originally a given for the elite male upper class, with the memorization and recitation of sung poetry, together with elementary training on a musical instrument, being standard fare. Whereas prior to the founding of the democracy instruction in *mousike* apparently took place at home or in small informal gatherings, schools seem to have appeared in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, perhaps a response to *demokratia*. The literary evidence for such a development is admittedly scant, but it is striking that scenes of boys and youths in an apparent schoolroom setting emerge in Athenian iconography around this time. So too other types of images stress the educational value of *mousike*, including scenes of the symposion and komos, which continue in the early decades of the fifth century to stress the performance of elite participants, as well as representations of Muses, who for the first time are characteristically shown with musical instruments. Subsequent tensions over *mousike* and education, however, appear to be played out in contemporary iconography, with school scenes and similar subjects virtually disappearing around mid-century. In representations of symposia from the second half of the century, citizen symposiasts play music less often themselves, while female professional entertainers (the often inaccurately dubbed “flute girls”) are frequently the only musicians in a scene. A general downplaying of “amateur” performance over the course of the fifth century forms an intriguing counterpoint to the increased visibility of musical “professionals.”

The term *ethos*, a word with a range of nuanced meanings, refers to the character of a musical instrument or composition, based on such elements as rhythm, mode, tempo, or pitch. Although the Greeks had long been aware of the potential effects of music on one’s actions – witness the deadly song of the Sirens in the *Odyssey* – extensive theoretical exploration of musical *ethos* apparently did not arise until the late sixth and early fifth centuries, escalating into the fourth. Concepts of musical