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A. M. Dale

Excerpt

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## I

## INTRODUCTION

Metric a proper subject for study even without a knowledge of music and dance, since these were ancillary, not fundamental—Greek verse rhythm based on quantity alone, with no stress accent—The commonest equation  $- = \cup \cup$ , with occasional modifications—Difference of English and French verse rhythms from the structural complexity of Greek—Structural elements of the stanza: colon, with or without metra, colon-compound, minor period, major period—Astrophic ἀπολελυμένα—Problems of a systematic study of lyric metres.

The Athenian spectator of the *Agamemnon* in 458 B.C. saw and heard the choral lyrics as a performance compounded of words, music and dance. An Athenian reading the same play in the next century would at least have the experience of many other performances similar in kind to guide his interpretation of the words on the page before him. We, who have never seen Greek dance nor heard Greek music, can never hope to recreate the living whole. Choral lyric was so elaborate and so delicate a structure that even among the Greeks comprehension waned simultaneously with the art of composition; the ‘colometry’ or line-division which the great Alexandrian philologists set in their texts is not finally authoritative, and the metrical systems of a later antiquity give an analysis of external phenomena which often ignores and obscures the more essential. The modern reader of Greek choral lyric, not content to interpret the bare meaning of the words but seeking to apprehend them as poetry, has to attempt to elucidate from the words themselves the ordered cadences of rhythm, divorced from melody and visible movement; and the metrical principles thus evolved have in the last resort no other criterion of their substantial accuracy than the text itself.

Such an attempt is justified only if it was possible for a Greek poet himself to write the words of his lyrics following principles of pure metric, upon which music and dance (even though also composed by the poet) supervened as a reinforcement of the rhythm. This

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assumption has been sometimes questioned. It can be said at once that if dance or music is to be taken as primary we may abandon all attempt at formulating a theory of metric, since too little is known of either art in the classical period to build any system upon them. Probably some ghostly reflection of the dance survives in the traditional terminology, if 'arsis' and 'thesis' echo the lift and fall of the dancers' feet.<sup>1</sup> From a comparison of the metres of the Lesbian poets, sung but not danced, with those of choral lyric, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the complex polymetry of the latter, with its resolutions, contractions and shifting rhythms, was first made possible by the interpretative power of the dance. But that such complexity could make itself heard without dance is clear; the monody of Andromeda chained to her rock is composed of metrical elements of the same kind as those of the songs sung by freely moving choruses.

That music too was ancillary and not basic has been more often denied. The systems of metric reared by scholars of the last century, notably Rossbach and Westphal, upon (as they believed) the doctrines of musical theorists such as Aristoxenus and Aristides Quintilianus were vitiated by the assumptions they borrowed from modern European music with its requirements of 'bar' and 'beat'. More recent work has been of interest for the study of Greek music as a separate branch of knowledge. But most of the evidence, and it is little enough, which can be gathered as to the relation of music to metric is of too late a period to help our understanding of the metres of Greek drama. No material evidence survives from pre-Hellenistic times; and we have only to consider the later plays of Euripides and the parodies of Aristophanes to realize how rapidly the relation of words to music was changing even before the end of the fifth century. The papyrus-fragment<sup>2</sup> which preserves a few dochmiac lines from

<sup>1</sup> These terms, obscured as they have been by the varied and contradictory usage of past generations of scholars, can only lead to confusion in a modern system of metric. For some discussion of the subject see ch. XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Published by Wessely, *Papyri Rainer*, 1892; cf. E. G. Turner, *J.H.S.* 76, 1956, 95, who suggests a date c. 200 B.C. See below, ch. XIII.

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the *Orestes* with musical notation disposes the words in an order somewhat different from that of our accepted text—possibly indeed to be preferred to it. Scholars who have discussed this papyrus, if they accept it as Euripides' own music, would hold it a somewhat uncharacteristic fragment from the fifth century; the *Orestes* belongs to an era of musical experiment, and Euripides notoriously departed from the classical tradition of dramatic lyric. In any case, the written lines of this fragment can be so disposed as to comply with the ordinary laws of dochmiac metre, and the most probable assumption is that they were thus composed before they were 'set to music' and suffered rhythmic modification, so that there is nothing here to discourage us from studying the principles of metric from the written word alone. The best guarantee of the reality of the metrical principles recoverable from the written page is the extreme complexity of the system, which can be built up from observation, tested by its own coherence, and disciplined by intimate relation to textual criticism. It is inconceivable that so elaborate an art of metric should have been evolved if it were regularly overlaid in performance by a further conflicting musical rhythm. Since all Greek metre is based on quantity, the ways in which music might radically affect the metrical structure would be the introduction of 'pause' and 'hold', and the power to alter the apparent quantity of syllables. Certain simple phenomena of pause and hold are readily conceivable; in dimeters and trimeters, for instance, 'syncopated' and 'catalectic' metra may have been audibly equated with full metra—syncopated by means of protraction, catalectic by a pause: thus an apparent cretic — ∪ — or bacchiac ∪ — — may occupy the time of ∪ — ∪ — or — ∪ — ∪.<sup>1</sup> But if musical determination, invisible on the written page, were fundamental to the composition of Greek lyric, the syllabic sequences would

<sup>1</sup> Choeroboscus in his commentary on Hephaestion (p. 180 Consb.), written in the sixth century A.D. or perhaps later but drawing on much older material, says the metricians and grammarians know only of the long syllable which is equal to two shorts, but that 'rhythmicians' distinguish longs equal to three or more short syllables. Such trisemes and tetrasemes are readily accounted for by syncopation and catalexis, but we do not know enough of the actual workings of protraction to write in the signs — and — in our metrical schemata.

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assuredly present an unintelligible chaos instead of their complicated but traceable pattern. A further reassurance is the measure of likeness, and also the kind of difference, between the metres of dialogue and recitative<sup>1</sup> on the one hand and those compounded with song, or song and dance, on the other. The conventional nature of many metrical principles discernible in the latter, unrelated to the sense of the words or the rhythms of prose, indicates that here is the element introduced by music, or at least characteristic of poetry written to be sung as distinct from spoken poetry. We shall never know what further modifications the actual music introduced in any given case, but we can be fairly sure that at least for the greater part of the fifth century these were merely modifications and not fundamental changes of rhythm. Any new system set on top of the metrical sequences of longs and shorts would either produce something too complicated to be intelligible to the spectator or would break up and re-simplify the elaborate original; neither hypothesis is *a priori* likely. In conclusion, then, music was, generally speaking, an underlining of the quantitative rhythm discernible in the written phrase, and even where on occasion it introduced more profound modifications there is strong probability that the words were composed in metre before they were set to music and dance. In either case we are justified in proceeding, as ‘grammarians and metricians’, to formulate as far as we can a system of Greek metric with no material other than the quantity—long or short—of the written syllables, determinable by rules of prosody.

If it be true that melodies ‘unheard are sweeter’, then such must be our consolation in the study of Greek lyric. Not only is our aesthetic understanding crippled by the loss of music and dance; there is the further difficulty of training our ear to appreciate, or even to hear, a purely quantitative rhythm. Germanic peoples, with their ear accustomed to poetic and prose rhythm in which stress is the dominant factor, have here an all but impossible task, and even in

<sup>1</sup> I use the term ‘recitative’ as the accepted translation of παρακαταλογία, ‘near-declamation’, παρά την κροῦσιν λέγειν as distinct from ἕδειν. It is not, of course, the ‘recitative’ of ‘Recitative and Aria’ in opera and oratorio.

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languages like French where stress is weak and fluctuating the effect of lyrics set to music with equidistant beat is to create a similar demand for 'ictus' as an element in ordered rhythm. There is no vestige of evidence that dynamic stress had any structural significance in Greek verse rhythm before the imperial period. The spoken language doubtless had its slight and fluctuating variations of stress, whether accompanying the pitch-accent or the longer quantities; it is conceivable also that dance, especially the energetic dancing of a fairly simple and regular metre (as often in comedy), reinforced the quantitative rhythm with some kind of dynamic beat. But the basis of all poetic rhythm was quantity alone. In spoken poetry the pitch-accent must of course have been audible above the quantitative rhythm, to which it stood in no kind of regular relation; in sung poetry also rhythm was independent of word-accent, and it is quite uncertain how far the melodic pitch took any account of the spoken.<sup>1</sup> An ear trained to stress-rhythm has often great difficulty in apprehending a purely quantitative form as rhythmical at all, and in reading we almost inevitably falsify the time-relations in our craving for some kind of equidistant beat. On practical grounds this is not serious so long as we are aware of using stress as a mere device for the satisfaction of our ear alone, to give audible shape, as it were, to the phrases which form the metrical units of Greek lyric; moreover it is possible with practice to emancipate ourselves in some degree from its demands. The danger is that we may be influenced, consciously or unconsciously, by such presuppositions in our interpretation of Greek metres.<sup>2</sup> It is the more easy to fall into this error since quantitative rhythm and stress-rhythm in some ways work

<sup>1</sup> If, as is mostly assumed, strophe and antistrophe were sung to the same melody, then clearly antistrophic music at least paid no regard to word-accent. But no absolute principles can be deduced from the musical fragments in inscriptions or papyri. See the well-balanced summary in R. P. Winnington-Ingram's survey, *Lustrum*, 3, §3 'Melody and Word-Accent', see below ch. XIII.

<sup>2</sup> As, for instance, in such aberrations as the invention of the 'cyclic dactyl', wherein  $- \cup \cup$  was supposed to occupy the time of  $- \cup$ , and the derivation of the dochmiac  $\cup - - \cup -$  from an 'iambic tripod'  $\cup - (\cup) - \cup -$ .

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alike: thus there is a certain resemblance between the metra of iambic and trochaic verse, with their syncopated and catalectic variations, and the bars of 'common time'; the sense that iambic movement is kept when  $--\cup--$  replaces  $\cup--\cup--$  but broken by  $\cup---$  is acceptable to our ear on principles of stress-rhythm; the general rule that a phrase in falling rhythm may not be followed by a phrase in rising rhythm without the intervention of a pause<sup>1</sup> corresponds with our own feeling. Probably the reason for this degree of correspondence is the presence of a quantitative *element* in stress-rhythm.

Syllabic quantity was determined by laws of prosody, which remained almost constant throughout the history of Greek lyric, certain modifications being regularly associated with certain types of verse. Prosody distinguished only two categories of quantity, long and short. The exact nature of the time-relation of  $--$  to  $\cup$  is a difficult problem. Ancient metricians speak only of  $-- = \cup\cup$ , and the common practice of resolution indicates that this was the ordinary convention. The musician Aristoxenus, however, a pupil of Aristotle, in a fragment<sup>2</sup> of his treatise on rhythm says that while the conventional signs demarcate exactly equal 'feet' the art of  $\acute{\rho}\upsilon\theta\mu\sigma\pi\omicron\iota\alpha$  recognizes much more varied distinctions of tempo: αἱ δ' ὑπὸ τῆς ῥυθμοποιίας γινόμενα διαίρεσεις πολλὴν λαμβάνουσι ποικιλίαν. Dion. Hal.<sup>3</sup> also speaks of syllables longer than the normal long and shorter than the normal short, and adds<sup>4</sup> that according to the 'rhythmicians' the long of an epic dactyl was less by an indeterminate amount than the sum of two shorts. Much has been built on this distinction between the science of 'metric' and the science of 'rhythmic', but caution is always necessary in arguing from Greek theory to Greek practice. It is a reasonable assumption that quantity, since it is the basis of Greek poetic rhythm, was more clearly defined and perceptible an element in speech-rhythm also than is the case in most modern

<sup>1</sup> Thus a trochaic colon ending in  $--\cup--\cup$  may not be followed by iambic  $\cup--\cup--$ . Such special exceptions, however, as the dactylic tetrameters of Sophocles so often followed by iambic clausula  $--\cup\cup--\cup\cup$  |  $\times--\cup--$  keep us warned of the fallibility of our ear.

<sup>2</sup> § 292 Marq.

<sup>3</sup> *De Comp. Verb.* 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

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European languages; but consonantal groups, degrees of emphasis and the inflections of the voice must nevertheless have kept it irregular. Some writers of artistic prose strove to harness this spoken rhythm, with its indefinitely fluctuating quantities, in syllabic sequences measured like those of poetry, especially in the close of their periods. In declaiming such prose, the speaker doubtless steadied its quantities to an audible regularity greater than that of everyday speech; it would be interesting to know how the degree of regularity compared with that of the iambic dialogue of tragedy. It is clear from Dionysius' statement that in recitative, such as the rhapsode used in declaiming the Homeric hexameter, the relative value of longs and shorts was kept remarkably constant. But though Greek theory (witness Dionysius) passes easily from the approximations of prose to the regulated rhythm of poetry, and metricians quite reasonably use the same symbols to 'measure' the quantities of spoken verse and of song, the empirical irregularities of elocution find of course no echo in sung metres. The music defined the quantities, and without this definiteness it would not be possible to apprehend the rhythmical complexity of lyric metres. Our traditional music, rich in harmony, constructive symmetry and melodic grace, is relatively limited in rhythm; the poverty of Greek music in purely musical forms allowed a corresponding wealth of rhythmical expression. The existence of trisemes, tetrasemes and pentasemes, of which the musicians tell us, indicates a definite numerical relation between  $-$  and  $\cup$  as the normal, and the variations of this ratio would account for the ποικιλία claimed by Aristoxenus. It is probable that in many places where he considers the metricians' measurement of 'equal feet' inadequate our more scientific system would also reject their analysis; their separation of disyllabic 'feet', for instance, has been recognized as a largely unreal division.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless,  $- = \cup \cup$  is to be assumed as the commonest equation

<sup>1</sup> When Aristoxenus speaks (§§293–4) of feet in which the relation of  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omega$  to  $\acute{\kappa}\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega$  is neither 1:1 nor 1:2 but something which he does not determine with numerical exactitude between the two, it seems probable that this  $\acute{\alpha}\lambda\omicron\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha$  is such as occurs in e.g. the long *anceps* of an iambic metron  $\bar{\alpha} - \cup -$  in relation to the following true long.

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in musical μετρητική. The *slight* adjustment of relative values required for audible ‘long *anceps*’ is a different phenomenon. Though unfortunately such a ‘modified long’ is not susceptible of proof, yet since bar-free music could quite well follow such niceties of quantity its existence could make sense of our efforts to distinguish different metrical movements in apparently identical phrases; thus, for example, the ambiguous – – ∪ ∪ – – could be differentiated by musical elocution into ionic, pherecratean or dactylic. The strongest evidence for such determination is of course context, but that is by no means always enough and it is a reasonable conjecture that such *standardized* variations from the normal quantity of ‘long’ did express the recognized conventional tempo of certain metres, and that they were slight, addressed only to the sensitive perception engendered by quantitative rhythm.

To this accurate hearing of time-values our ear is unaccustomed. Syllabic quantity is indeterminate in the metrical systems of modern European poetry. Taking the classic metres of French and English poetry as representative of two different types, the rhythmical principle of the first is a fixed number of syllables, of the second a fixed number of equidistant stresses, in phrases running in a series and demarcated by pause. Assonance or ‘rhyme’ often reinforces the rhythmical separation of one phrase from another and groups them in larger units. Differences of quantity are in both, so long as they remain spoken verse, an empirically modifying factor only. Set to music, the syllables assume definite quantity, but this is determined by the musical tempo, not by the inherent quantities of the words. The rhythm of French verse acquires a new structural factor in the stresses given by the musical beat; in English, musical stress is substituted for the spoken, with which it often, but not necessarily, coincides. In both, the delicate art of the spoken rhythm is largely overridden by the music, since the structural principles of verse-rhythm are in each case simple, and rhythmical finesse comes into play only with empirical modifications. This is especially the case with English, where the regulative principle itself, equidistant stress or ‘ictus’, is subject to modification by its degree of conflict or coincidence with the natural spoken stress of the word or group of



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words, and is obscured to a greater or less extent by the differences of tempo arising from the varying length of words, the obstruction of consonants, rhetorical pauses and the like. These empirical factors often enter into harmonious co-operation with the sense, as in

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense . . .

The variety and suppleness of the rhythm lie precisely in the susceptibility of the regulative principle itself to these irregular influences; the actual operation of this principle is a question of *degree*, and it is the simplicity of the principle that makes possible so great a range and delicacy of variation. ‘Vers libre’ emancipates itself from structural principle and proceeds arbitrarily, with none but empirical elements; the subtlety of its rhythms is not a formal complexity but arises from the fusion of a number of indeterminates, the effect of which again is weakened or annulled by the addition of music. In all this there is nothing of the formal elaboration which makes Greek metric a difficult and involved but systematic study. English verse has an extremely simple metrical structure with infinite degrees of modification reducible to no laws, whereas Greek verse starts from conventionally fixed units, syllables of certain lengths, and achieves its variety by combining these in extremely elaborate patterns, reducible to laws of great complexity. The rhythm of spoken Greek verse was indeed subject to a limited degree of indeterminate modification (in the fluctuations of pitch-accent, the proportion of vowels to consonants and the like), but even the incidence of word-end was largely controlled by law, and in sung poetry the part played by indeterminates was still further diminished. English poetic rhythm achieves its most versatile expression in spoken verse, and therefore its variety lies in the sphere of τὸ ἄπειρον, whereas Greek lyric, composed to be sung and not read, has a variety enormously exceeding that of any known body of verse in any language, but this is a formal and structural variety, based on τὸ πέρας.

The rhythms of stressed verse are often used as illustrations for certain phenomena in Greek metric, and such parallels are useful

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pedagogically for the beginner confronted with a bewildering variety of phenomena and terminology. Generations of young scholars have been grateful for the poem of ‘the wise kangaroos’ as a mnemonic for dochmiacs; in

singest of summer with full-throated ease

the opening rhythm has an effect like that of ‘choriambic anaclassis’  
 – ∪ ∪ – ∪ – – in the clausula of an iambic period; a simple parallel for syncopated iambs is given by such a verse as

Yet, stranger, here from year to year    – – ∪ – | ∪ – ∪ –  
 she keeps her shadowy kine.  
 O, Keith of Ravelston,            – – | ∪ – ∪ –  
 the sorrows of thy line!

But these are rough analogies only, and at a later stage the differences appear more instructive than the resemblances. The dochmiac is not, like ‘the wise kangaroos’, ∪ ∩ ^ ∩ ∪ ∩, but ∪ – – ∪ –. In ‘singest of summer’ the inversion of the first stress is intimately linked with the melodious assonance of the words ‘singest’ and ‘summer’; the protraction of ‘O, Keith’ is a device used deliberately for its plangent effect. Many such modifications, indeed, have no reference beyond the rhythm itself, but it is, nevertheless, characteristic of English poetry that rhythmic variation is often, as in these examples, intimately related to the sound and sense of the words. In Greek lyric such a relation is altogether exceptional. Certain metres are often associated with certain moods, and the prevailing tempo, slow or broken, of a song may have a general appropriateness to the sentiment, but it is seldom possible to carry such interpretation into the detail of rhythmic expression. The movement of the ode to Sleep, in *Philoctetes* 827 ff., is smooth and dreamy with the repeated *rallentando* of its long syllables, but in the line *καρὸς τοι πάντων γνῶμαν ἰσχύων* the drawn-out rhythm has no such relation to the sense of the words as can be heard in

With how sad steps, O Moon, thou climbst the skies.

Sidney’s rhythmic variation is onomatopoeic, and arbitrary; Sophocles’ is a piece of musical-metrical technique, an unusual but