

Introduction: What Is Reperformance?

RICHARD HUNTER AND ANNA UHLIG

In the summer of 1987, the *Olympias*, a thirty-five-meter-long wooden warship propelled by two sails and three banks of rowers wielding 170 oars, was commissioned into the Greek Navy. The vessel was, according to the scholars and engineers who oversaw its design, a reconstruction of a classical Athenian trireme, that marvel of nautical technology on which Athens' maritime empire of the fifth century BC was founded.

Conceived as an academic – indeed scientific – undertaking, the *Olympias* was not presented as an exercise in re-enactment: scores of oarsmen (and women), enlisted primarily from the rowing clubs of Oxford and Cambridge, filled the cramped benches, clad in spandex and headbands in line with an athletic fashion which was certainly not classical. Nevertheless, underlying the project was perhaps a deeper faith in the power of re-enactment than one might at first suspect, and as such it offers a particularly incisive – if surprising – point of departure for a volume concerned with the ways in which we (now) think about repetition in and of the ancient world.

With no firm ancient evidence for the process of a trireme's construction, the technical specifications for the model were largely based on modern inference. But once the ship put to sea, the trials by which the ship was tested were explicitly guided by a desire to repeat the accomplishments of ancient sailors. Accounts from Herodotus and Xenophon prescribed the complex technical maneuvers that the crew attempted, such as precise turns at high speed and long journeys under oar, and the successful accomplishment of these goals were treated not only as confirmation of the *Olympias*' integrity and 'authenticity', but also as proof of the accuracy of the ancient authors: those things did indeed happen *then*, because they have been made to happen again *now*.¹ (One can perhaps hear the echo of Schliemann exuberantly completing his third lap around the walls of Hisarlik.) Subsequent publications on the sea trials report on details such as the conditions experienced by ancient rowers and the 'paleo-bioenergetics' of the human crew,² as though the twentieth-century crew of the *Olympias* had been transported

¹ Morrison and Coates 1989, Morrison, Coates, and Rankov 2000, Rankov and Bockius 2012.

² Rossiter and Whipp 2012.

back in time through their efforts, carrying the embodied experience of the fifth-century rowers into the present day.

Since these early sea trials, the *Olympias* has largely been confined to land, displayed in dry dock at the Battleship Averof Naval Museum in Piraeus, but romantic images of the ship at sea serve to confirm the historicity of countless television documentaries.³ The image of this reconstructed trireme sailing the seas, even in a recording, stands as a link to the past, a promise that the seas of the ancient world remain open to us, so long as we use the proper vehicle to access them; the *Olympias* invites us to consider this type of repetition as an embodied performance, as something that takes shape in the doing as much as in the telling. But the idea of sailing into the past is hardly a modern invention; indeed it is a ship which is also at the heart of an ancient re-enactment which was already taking place in the fifth century BC and which the *Olympias* might be thought to recall.

In the introductory frame to the *Phaedo*, Plato makes Phaedo explain that every year the Athenians sent a ship with a theoric delegation to Delos in fulfilment of a vow to Apollo:

The Athenians say that this is the ship in which Theseus once escorted the famous ‘twice seven’ to Crete, and he saved them and himself also returned safely.⁴ The story is that at that time the Athenians vowed to Apollo that, if they returned safely, they would each year send a theoric delegation to Delos. From that time to the present (ἀεὶ καὶ νῦν ἔτι ἕξ ἑκαίονοι) they do indeed send an annual delegation to the god.

Plato, *Phaedo* 58a10-b4

Phaedo proceeds to explain that, once the *theoria* has started, the city must remain ritually pure and that no one must be publicly executed until the ship has returned from Delos. This Athenian practice explains the long delay in implementing Socrates’ death sentence, but it also carries a deeper import in this dialogue concerned with the immortality of the soul: this is the very same ship in which Theseus travelled, even after all these years. As the Athenians engage in this yearly ritual, they are keenly aware that they are repeating the actions of their predecessors: in Plato’s telling, it is the participation of the Athenians, not only as crew on the theoric expedition but as witnesses to the identity of the ship, that gives the ritual its distinctive temporal character. Like the *Olympias*, the physical structure of the ship enables both those who board it and those who view it to feel an intensely present connection with the events of the past.

³ Hobden 2013.

⁴ The Athenians were required each year to send a tribute of seven young men and seven girls to Knossos, where they were fed to the Minotaur.



Figure 0.1 *Olympias* under oar off the island of Poros in 1987. Photo Susan Muhlhauser/Getty Images.

Writing some four centuries after Plato, Plutarch fills out our picture by explaining how the Athenians cared for and preserved the ship, an activity which he treats almost as a kind of secondary ritual:

τὸ δὲ πλοῖον ἐν ᾧ μετὰ τῶν ἠιθέων ἔπλευσε καὶ πάλιν ἐσώθη, τὴν τριακόντορον, ἄχρι τῶν Δημητρίου τοῦ Φαληρέως χρόνων διεφύλαττον οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι, τὰ μὲν παλαιὰ τῶν ξύλων ὑφαιρούντες, ἄλλα δ' ἐμβάλλοντες ἰσχυρὰ καὶ συμπηγνύντες οὕτως, ὥστε καὶ τοῖς φιλοσόφοις εἰς τὸν αὐξόμενον λόγον ἀμφιδοξούμενον παράδειγμα τὸ πλοῖον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὡς τὸ αὐτό, τῶν δ' ὡς οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ διαμένει λεγόντων.

The Athenians preserved the ship, a thirty-oared vessel, in which Theseus sailed and returned safely with the young men and women, until the time of Demetrius of Phaleron. They did so by removing the aged beams and replacing them with stronger ones, constructing it in such a way that the ship became a paradigm for philosophers when they discussed the disputed notion of growth, with some saying it remained the same ship and others that it did not remain the same.

Plutarch, *Theseus* 23.1

Plutarch's account explicitly locates Theseus' ship within a theoretical debate about the complex ways in which time colours our understanding of how things remain 'the same', and it retains this status to the present day as a commonly cited example of what philosophers now call 'diachronic identity puzzles'.⁵ Viewed in light of the *Olympias* (which also underwent a full replacement of its wooden hull, though all at once, in advance of the 2004 Athens Summer Olympics), two features of Plutarch's account are particularly noteworthy. First, unlike Plato, who writes from first-hand knowledge, Plutarch's description is of a ship that had not existed for several centuries. The connection between the object and the events of the mythical past was, for Plutarch, itself a historical phenomenon, not something that he could experience himself; the disappearance of the ritual practice has precipitated the loss of the ship itself.

A second, related point emerges from the juxtaposition of Plutarch's discussion of the ship with the narrative that precedes it: a lengthy account of Theseus' return from Crete in which nearly every detail is explicitly identified as the origin of a specific later ritual practice. The herald's staff, rather than the herald, is crowned at the Oschophoria, Plutarch explains, because of Theseus' grief and haste at hearing of the death of his father (*Theseus* 22.3); the Athenians boil pulses on the seventh of Pyanepsion to mark the poor meal of Theseus' companions on their return (*Theseus* 22.4).

⁵ Gallois Winter 2015, and cf. Rutherford 2013: 180 n. 36; for a brief introduction to such puzzles and their importance, cf. Sedley 2016.

Each ritual is presented as a type of refraction of the past, but only the ship invites theorization and debate about ‘authenticity’. The distinction hinges on two features of the ship that bear scrutiny in the context of a discussion of ancient reperformance. With the loss of Theseus’ ship, the associated annual sailing was no longer practised in Plutarch’s day, unlike the garlanding of the herald’s staff or the boiling of pulses that formed part of Plutarch’s contemporary ritual landscape; with the obsolescence of the action, the temporal contours grow starker and more pronounced. Equally important, however, is the claim of continued identity – sameness – that is made for the ship, but not for the objects associated with the other events. The herald’s staff crowned each year at the Oschophoria is merely a symbol of Theseus’ grief and haste, the pulses merely modern-day equivalents of the food once consumed; it is not imagined that these objects permit a straightforwardly tangible link to the past. Through this marriage of problematic sameness and inescapable absence, Theseus’ ‘original’ ship, the ships which annually fulfilled the Athenian vow, and Plutarch’s account, which we may think of as the historian’s own ship, can all lead us back to the *Olympias* sailing off the coast of Greece (or down the Thames, as it did in the year 2000). These real and remembered ships all offer slightly different perspectives on what it can mean to repeat events of the past, to step into what Rebecca Schneider has called the temporal ‘crease or fold’ of reperformance.⁶ The diversity, ambiguities, and theoretical complexity, not to mention the gaps in our knowledge and the invitations to our imagination which they emphasize, all find clear echoes in the world of ancient lyric and dramatic performance with which this volume is concerned.

Theseus’ ship is a helpful example with which to explore some of the issues which surround re-enactment and reperformance, but students of dramatic reperformances in classical Greece have tended to sidestep such issues in favour of a concentration on as clear as possible an account of the historical record; what has mattered is when and where reperformances happened, not what constitutes a reperformance. An originating and authorizing text for such modern study has long since been identified, and it will not be out of place to repeat (or reperform) this here. In book six of the *Histories*, Herodotus tells of the profound effect that the Persian sack of Miletus in 494 BC had on the city of Athens, illustrating the point with an anecdote about Phrynichus’ dramatization of the city’s capture:

Ἀθηναῖοι μὲν γὰρ δῆλον ἐποίησαν ὑπεραχθεσθέντες τῇ Μιλήτου ἀλώσει τῇ τε ἄλλῃ πολλαχῆ καὶ δὴ καὶ ποιήσαντι Φρυνίχῳ δράμα Μιλήτου ἄλωσιν καὶ διδάξαντι

⁶ Schneider 2011: 89.

ἐς δάκρυά τε ἔπεσε τὸ θέητρον καὶ ἐζημίωσάν μιν ὡς ἀναμνήσαντα οἰκίηα κακὰ χιλίησι δραχμῆσι, καὶ ἐπέταξαν μηκέτι μηδένα χρᾶσθαι τούτῳ τῷ δράματι.

The Athenians made clear in many ways their sorrow at the capture of Miletus, and in particular when Phrynichus wrote a play on ‘The Capture of Miletus’ and produced it, the theater fell to weeping; they fined Phrynichus a thousand drachmas for bringing to mind a calamity that was personal to them,⁷ and ruled that in the future no one should have anything to do with this play.

Herodotus 6.21.2

This brief narrative, our earliest explicit discussion of tragic performance, has become a touchstone of modern scholarship on ancient theatre. Recently, however, scholars have shifted their focus from the reasons for Phrynichus’ punishment to the form of penalty that was levied. As Herodotus’ expression, μηκέτι μηδένα χρᾶσθαι τούτῳ τῷ δράματι, is traditionally interpreted and translated, Phrynichus’ transgression resulted not only in the levying of a fine, but also in a prohibition on future performances of his play.⁸

Our concern here is not with the evidentiary value of Herodotus’ tantalizing anecdote, but rather with the ways in which the very ambiguities of the passage provide important insight also into the challenges of studying repeat performances, dramatic and otherwise, in the ancient world. First, and most pointedly, the negative form that the notice takes should be interpreted as a warning of our profound ignorance about ancient performance, in particular what we might label ‘post-primary performance’. Herodotus, as normally understood, speaks of the possibility of reperformance in this instance only because of its unusual prohibition. Are we then to assume that the normal practice of reperformance is, as a rule, tacitly assumed in texts that do not mention its absence? The gaps in our knowledge are so great, and the record that we do possess so ‘random and fortuitous’, that our evidence cannot reasonably be treated as usable data in any meaningful sense.⁹ Yet, despite the woefully lacunose state of our evidence, it is becoming ever clearer how widespread was the practice of reperformance of lyric and dramatic works in the ancient world, no less important than the vibrant culture of epic performance and reperformance which has been at the heart of classical scholarship for the past century. With a flurry of publications on ancient reperformance, particularly dramatic reperformance,

⁷ Athens was the mother-city of Miletus.

⁸ Rosenbloom 1993: 161 n. 5, Taplin 1999: 37, and the recent discussions of Lamari 2015b: 190–1, Finglass 2015a: 209–10.

⁹ Csapo 2010: 103.

in the past few years,¹⁰ we are slowly emerging from the grip of what Eric Csapo has called ‘the romantic notion, still dear to classical scholarship, that all the expense and labor that went into the production of an ancient drama was a sacrifice designed for a single immolation – a potlatch for the god Dionysus and the glory of Athens.’¹¹

Despite, however, the confidence with which Herodotus’ anecdote about Phrynichus is normally interpreted, the phrasing of the reported injunction against Phrynichus’ play not only encapsulates our uncertainty about the meaning of the Athenian prohibition, but also suggests the multiple forms that post-primary performance could take in antiquity. Herodotus employs the verb *χράομαι* to denote the future activities that the Athenian edict proscribed, and although this is usually translated as ‘perform’ or ‘stage’, *χράομαι* more properly means ‘make use of’ or ‘have something to do with’;¹² the term is resolutely indeterminate, particularly in contrast to the more technical terms that Herodotus has just used in connection with the formal premiere in the theatre at Athens (*ποιήσαντι, διδάξαντι*).¹³ The choice of terminology may be Herodotus’ own or it may stem from the original decree, but, either way, the imprecision is a signal to us that the formal vocabulary of production and staging may break down in the context of subsequent performance; our very slim historical record presents only one facet of the complex picture. The post-debut *uses* of ancient texts constitute a broad range of practices from formal restaging in the context of a civic festival (as with the introduction of ‘revivals’ (*παλαιὸν δράμα*) at the Great Dionysia in 386 BC) to the informal recitation of excerpts in sympotic gatherings (cf. the exchange between Strepsiades and Pheidippides at the end of Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (vv. 1353–90)) or indeed to the private reading of dramatic texts (as, most famously, when Dionysus recalls reading a play of Euripides at Aristophanes, *Frogs* 52–4).¹⁴ Just as we are always learning more about the opportunities for performance throughout the ancient world and the sites where such performances were held,¹⁵ so recent

¹⁰ On drama, see Taplin 1993, 1999, Easterling 1994, 2002, Revermann 2006, Csapo 2010, Boshier 2012, Vahtikari 2014, Lamari 2015a; on lyric, see Currie 2004, Hubbard 2004, 2011, Morrison 2007b, Athanassaki 2012.

¹¹ Csapo 2010: 83–4.

¹² Lamari 2015b: 191, Rosen 2015: 241 n. 7.

¹³ It is also worth remarking that it is very difficult to parallel the use of *χρᾶσθαι* with *δράμα* or *τραγωδία* in anything like an appropriate sense. At *VS* 2.590, Philostratus says of Hadrian of Tyre that he overdid his ‘use of tragedy’ in his style (*ἀταμιεύτως τῇ τραγωδίᾳ χρῆσάμενος*); cf. also Lucian, *Nigrinus* 12. For a bibliographically rich survey of modern interpretations of Herodotus’ use of *χρᾶσθαι* in connection with Phrynichus’ play, cf. Mülke 2000.

¹⁴ Cf. the contributions of Hanink, Budelmann and Currie to this volume.

¹⁵ Important new historical findings are presented in Csapo and Wilson 2015.

studies, and some of the contributions to this volume, rightly emphasize how much there is to learn about the fluid boundaries between types of ‘performance’ and ‘reperformance’.

The contributions gathered here are all situated within that indeterminate space which Herodotus’ report of the Athenian injunction adumbrates: the uncharted, and too often unacknowledged, ways in which our ancient texts found form, or *uses*, beyond a debut performance. The origins of this volume lie in the 2014 Laurence Seminar, hosted by the Faculty of Classics at the University of Cambridge, where the central concern was to explore what it might mean to conceive of Greek performance culture in terms of repetition and recurrence, that is, as fundamentally iterative, rather than occasional, in nature. In the course of this seminar, questions of terminology would not go away. Was ‘reperformance’ indeed the best term to describe the various practices under consideration? Could other words, such as ‘revival’ or ‘re-enactment’, offer greater specificity or a more helpful way to frame the subject under discussion? Was the term ‘reperformance’ more closely aligned to ancient terms, such as ἀναδιδάσκειν, or to modern ones? These terminological quandaries merely reflect, of course, the very range of texts and practices, some apparently incompatible, which are standardly assembled under the heading of ‘reperformance’, and the fact that the modern use of this term has been shaped by theorists and practitioners of *contemporary* performance.

Against such a background of inclusive multiplicity, this volume seeks to embrace the open boundaries of ‘reperformance’; the very ability of this term to encompass such a broad range of practices – to invite us to draw connections that might not otherwise arise, to suggest new ways of imagining ancient performance culture – that constitutes the most convincing reason to continue to use it. Thus the most basic question of this volume, ‘What is reperformance?’, from which we draw the title of this Introduction, is not one that we seek to answer, so much as to ask repeatedly, to reperform, as it were, through different lenses and in different registers. Here we offer a preliminary framework for this central question, a set of compass-points which are certainly neither systematic nor exhaustive, but which we hope will help to situate the more specific interventions that follow within the overall context of current scholarship in Classics and elsewhere.

Almost inevitably, it is questions, rather than answers, which immediately bubble to the surface. Is ‘reperformance’ simply a duplication, or is the very act of repetition itself transformative? What does it mean for the ‘same’ work to be mounted in different places, such as Athens and Sicily, as is said to have occurred with Aeschylus’ *Persians*? What difference would it have

made to hear a work composed for a specific event, such as a Pindaric *paian*, outside of the festival context for which it was intended? In what ways, in fact, other than performance context, did post-primary presentations of dramatic and lyric works differ from their premiere, if indeed they did? Did choruses remain the same in size and configuration? Were elements such as music and dance altered and, if so, how? Did economic factors impact post-primary performances? Recent scholarship has taught us much about the lavish spending and extensive preparations often associated with debut performances, but we would like to know much more about the conditions of subsequent performances. Changes, major and minor, could transform a work in numerous ways. Different music, changes in choreography, or slight alterations to language (including so-called ‘actors’ interpolations’) would set subsequent reperformances apart from a work’s premiere. Radical change was also of course possible: works that were originally performed by a chorus could be reperformed by a solo performer, or works could be abridged or excerpted, as today operatic arias are lifted out of context and performed as ‘stand-alone’ entertainments.

Above and beyond this very proper concern to understand the possible differences between ‘performance’ and ‘reperformance’, however, looms an overarching issue at the very heart of this subject: if the post-primary performance of lyric and dramatic texts, both formally in civic and religious festivals and informally in symposia and other private gatherings, was a standard occurrence in the ancient world, if, in other words, the very practice of ancient performance was inherently iterative, how and why do we need to distinguish reperformance from performance? This fundamental question, posed in various ways by a number of our contributors, reflects a legacy of productive interchange between the fields of Classics and performance studies, a cross-fertilization which this volume seeks to reaffirm.¹⁶

To understand the relevance of reperformance studies today, it is useful briefly to recall how the notion of performance *tout court* ascended to its current interpretive primacy. The ‘performative turn’ of classical scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century occurred within the context of a wider shift in which both the methods and results of social anthropology and the notion of drama as ritual, or at least ritualized, became increasingly prominent.¹⁷ The rich performance culture of the ancient world served in

¹⁶ This relationship is also recently championed by Hall and Harrop 2010, though the focus there is on post-Renaissance performance reception.

¹⁷ Amongst classical scholars, this tendency is most evident in the structuralist analysis pioneered by French scholars such as Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Jean-Pierre Vernant, and Marcel Detienne, and epitomized in the Anglophone world by Winkler and Zeitlin 1990.

fact as an important model for this broader theoretical recalibration, as was very clear, for example, in Richard Schechner's ground-breaking work of 'environmental theatre', *Dionysus in 69*, a racy adaptation of Euripides' *Bacchae* in the New York of free love and Richard Nixon.¹⁸ The potential for repetition and reinvention, here seen as central features of ritual practice, was put at the centre of this early incarnation of performance studies and has always maintained a significant place in classical studies; Gregory Nagy, for example, defines much archaic poetry as a process of ritual re-enactment.¹⁹ Yet, by contrasting the 'authenticity' of live experience with the 'artifice' of repetition and imitation, Schechner and his peers were less interested in iterations than they were in a vividly singular present.²⁰ As the heady initial experiments grew into established scholarly practice, performance came to be ever more firmly conceived as a single, unrepeatable occasion. In performance studies, this took the form of rejecting repetition and, above all, documentation. The extreme position is encapsulated in Peggy Phelan's oft-cited declaration:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being ... becomes itself through disappearance.²¹

Phelan's dictum is rarely quoted by classicists, who are necessarily bound to exploring the past and rely on documentation and 'the economy of reproduction' to furnish our objects of study. Yet a kindred spirit, born of a similarly idealized view of performance undefiled by commodified reproduction, can be detected in the way that classicists have traditionally tended to focus on the first performance of a work to the exclusion of all others.²²

In recent years, scholars of performance have also begun to revisit the hallmark of impermanence, but in markedly different terms than those deployed by classicists. This work, exemplified by Rebecca Schneider's influential explorations of American Civil War re-enactment and other forms of

¹⁸ For discussion of Schechner's influence and the importance of Greek tragedy in the late twentieth century, see Hall, Macintosh, and Wrigley 2004.

¹⁹ This claim runs throughout Nagy's work, but its most comprehensive expression is found in Nagy 1996.

²⁰ The delicate balance that allowed early proponents of performance studies to maintain this singular focus on the present is gracefully explored by Schneider 2001: 124–8.

²¹ Phelan 1993: 146.

²² Csapo 2010: 83–4.