

## THE UNITY OF ALCMAN'S PARTHENEION

Alcman's great Partheneion (fr. 1 Page) is regarded, all too often, as a kind of riddle, to the understanding of which we lack the essential key. This assumption is both unnecessary and dangerous: unnecessary, because it makes the meaning of the poem impenetrable; dangerous, because it encourages unchecked speculation. Before the poem is submerged beneath the flood of erudition poured upon it by Mario Puelma (Mus. Helv. 34, 1977, 1-51), it may be well to present a brief analysis, in an attempt to elucidate the principal themes. Arguments for and against the proposals made here, with relevant bibliography, will be found in Puelma's paper.

It stands greatly to Puelma's credit to have recognized the poem for what essentially it is, a cult-song composed to accompany a specific religious rite in which the choir of maidens themselves participate. The rite in question is concerned with an act of dedication; and some aspects of the rite, but not all, are clearly revealed in the course of the poem. To put it more exactly: we learn what is being dedicated, at what hour the dedication takes place, and the reason for the dedication. It is only the identity of the dedicatee that is not fully transparent, although about that too a reasonable surmise may be made. If we look at these aspects in turn, we see that the choir speak of themselves as bearing a *φᾶρος* (61); despite the clear reading of the papyrus, it is much better to understand it as *φάρος*, 'plough', in view of the scholiast's explanation *ἄροτρον*, which is apparently derived from a tradition independent of the text. The choir later refer to this rite as 'our *θωστήρια*' (viz. *έορτή*, Σ) (81). They thus 'bear' the object dedicated, just as the votaress 'holds ... in her hand' the gold cup dedicated to Argeiphontas in the nocturnal *έορτά* which Alcman describes in fr. 56. In fr. 1 too the rite is a nocturnal one. Even this fact has been doubted, but doubts must wither away before the unequivocal expression (60-63):

*ταὶ Πεληάδες γὰρ ἔμιν  
ὄρθρῶν φᾶρος φεροίσας  
νύκτα δι' ἀμβροσίαν ἄτε σήριον  
ἄστρον ἀνηρομένα μάχονται.*

There is no need for us to cloud our understanding of the poem by seeing in these lines an allusion to a rival choir; and in fact no such allusion is contained in fr. 1.

What is the immediate motive of the dedication? It is made by way of a thank-offering (87-91):

*ἔγων δὲ τᾶ μὲν Ἄωτι μάλιστα  
Φανδάνην ἐρῶ· πόνων γὰρ  
ἄμιν ἰάτωρ ἔγεντο·  
ἐξ Ἀγησιχόρας δὲ νεάνιδες  
ἰρήνας ἐρατᾶς ἐπέβαν.*

'My desire is to propitiate Aotis above all; for she has proved the healer of our troubles; and the girls have entered upon longed-for peace through the intervention of Hagesichora'. The *πόννοι* might refer to personal pain or to distress resulting from warfare: each is possible, but neither can be proved. If *πόννοι* are political troubles, they may very well be those entailed by war with some external enemy; then we could interpret *ἰρήνας* quite literally, as the 'peace' which has succeeded the time of disturbance. But if *πόννοι* are 'physical pains' and if, moreover, these are the pains attendant on child-birth, the poem might be a song of thanksgiving for labour safely accomplished (perhaps in one of the royal houses). Were the second alternative to be confirmed, it would indicate Artemis as the dedicatee, because of her function as a goddess of child-birth in association with Eileithyia and because, more specifically, the title *Ἄωθία* she bore at Sparta was connected (by a dubious etymology) with the successful issue of labour: *Ἄωθία δέ, ὅτι ὄρθοι εἰς σωτηρίαν ἢ ὄρθοι τοὺς γεννωμένους* (Σ ad Pind. Ol. 3. 54) (*σωτηρία* being equivalent to Alcman's *ἰρήνα*). Thus we could follow either of two lines of reasoning, which lead in different directions; they have not yet received verification from any source, and they do not even exhaust the theoretical possibilities, but at present they seem more promising than any other. A direct equation of *Ἄωτις* with Artemis is, so far, incapable of proof; on the other hand, the word *Ἄωτις* does seem to contain the stem of *ἄφως*, 'dawn', and so to be congruent with the *ὄρθοίαι* already mentioned. Again, it used to be thought that behind the form *ὄρθοίαι* there lurked a dative *Ἄωθία*; and the possibility cannot be excluded altogether, although against it must be set the fact that *Ἄωθία* is not the form commonly used in Laconian inscriptions, and it does not appear even in literary texts until the time of Xenophon.

More must be said later about the question of identity; meanwhile, let us consider the second element in the Partheneion, the description of the laudandae.

Many writers on the poem have thought that one of its major themes is that of a beauty-contest. One or two phrases do seem, at first sight, to favour this interpretation: *αἰδῶ Ἀγιδῶς τὸ φῶς* (39–40), *δοκεῖ γὰρ ἡμεν αὐτὰ ἐκπροεπιῆς* (45–46), *ἃ δὲ δευτέρᾳ πεδ' Ἀγιδῶ τὸ Φεῖδος* (58). It is true that in some parts of the poem, and especially in the phrase last quoted, Alcman institutes a comparison; but that does not amount to a contest. Many comparisons are found in the short poem: *ὄτ' ἄλιον* (41), *ὥπερ αἴτις ... στάσειεν* (46–47), *χρυσὸς ὡς ἀκήρατος* (54), *ἵππος Ἴβηνηῶ Κολαξαῖος δραμήται* (59), *ἄτε σήριον ἄστρον* (62–63), *λέλακα γλαυξ* (86–87), *ὄτ' ἐπὶ Ξάνθῳ ῥοαῖσι κύνος* (100–101). Each of these expressions is either a simile or a metaphor; the phrase *ἃ δὲ δευτέρᾳ πεδ' Ἀγιδῶ τὸ Φεῖδος* merely presents a comparison in a different form; the implication is that 'although she (an unnamed person, who cannot possibly be Hagesichora) is of outstanding appearance, yet she is second to Agido'. About the first phrase, *Ἀγιδῶς τὸ φῶς*, Puelma has said all that one need say, namely that *φῶς* refers not to the physical appearance of Agido but to her function as 'saviour, deliverer', a use found in the *Iliad*, when Achilles says of himself (Σ 102–103):

*οὐδέ τι Πατρόκλῳ γενόμεν φάος οὐδ' ἐτάροισι  
τοῖς ἄλλοις...*

Once the notion of a contest is abandoned, we may turn to the status and function of the two laudandae, Agido and Hagesichora. In precisely what relation they stand to each other and to the choir we cannot tell, for the description of Hagesichora as the 'cousin' of the choir is too vague to help us – it should not be taken to mean that all the members of the choir literally belong to the same family. In any event, there is no foundation in the text for the belief that Agido and Hagesichora are leaders of the choir. The two references to choir-leaders come in the following passages.

In the first (43–45), the choir check their effusive praise of Agido and say:

*ἐμὲ δ' οὐτ' ἐπαινήν  
οὔτε μωμήσθαι νιν ἃ κλενὰ χοραγός  
οὐδ' ἄμῶς ἐῖ.*

These lines provide little enough warrant for equating ἡ κλενὴ χοροαγός with Agido; and even less for equating her with Hagesichora, who is not even mentioned until 51. The meaning of lines 43–45 seems to be: ‘but the brilliant choir-leader by no means allows me to praise or blame her (sc. Agido)’. The device is a rhetorical one, preparing us for the change to the new topic: the (ironical) praise of the choir-leader herself. No one, in fact, has thought of *blaming* anybody; but the idea of praise, once expressed, immediately sums up its opposite. Three similar instances may stand for many others in Greek poetry. In the *Odyssey*, Eumaeus says of Telemachus (ξ 178–179): τὸν δέ τις ἀθανάτων βλάψε φρένας ... ἢέ τις ἀνθρώπων. It is out of the question that any *man* destroyed his wits, but the mention of immortals has provoked the mention of their opposite, and that opposite too is forthwith expressed to complete the phrase. Then we might cite Pindar’s gnome, τὸ πρόσω δ’ ἔστι σοφοῖς ἄβατον κἀσόφοις, *Ol.* 3. 44–45: ‘what lies beyond is unapproachable by the skilled and the unskilled’. From a logical point of view, the ‘unskilled’ are completely redundant; they have been called in as complement. Again, in Euripides, Helen speaks of a Phrygian *or a Greek* having cut the timbers for Paris’ ship (*Hel.* 229–232): of course no Greek was involved. So with Alcman; he is concerned solely with praising Agido and not with blaming her. The reasons for the veto on praising her, if seriously meant, are undiscoverable; the modern reader would infer, rightly or not, that simple jealousy on the choir-leader’s part is responsible.

The second allusion to a choir-leader, which this time takes the form of an actual address to her, comes after a gnome and before a deprecating comparison in which the choir liken their song to the screech of an owl (83–87):

σιῶν γὰρ ἄνα  
καὶ τέλος· χοροστάτις,  
Φείπομι κ’, ἐγὼν μὲν αὐτὰ  
παρσένος μάταν ἀπὸ θρόνου λέλακα  
γλαύξ.

Again the leader is brought in for no very significant purpose, but simply in order to provide a referent for the verb *Φείπομι*: ‘choir-leader, I would say, I am only a maiden and screech away, an owl from the roof-beam’.

The facts so far adduced about the choir-leader permit only two conclusions to be drawn from them, and both are purely

negative: 1. whoever the choir leader is, she is neither Agido nor Hagesichora; 2. the ode is couched in such a way as to imply that the leader herself does not take part in the singing – of course it is impossible to tell whether a real situation is thereby reflected. But we can add at this point a third fact (also, unfortunately, a negative one): namely that the choir-leader is not herself one of the *laudandae*, since (according to the choir) her superiority exists only in her own fancy (45–49):

δοκεῖ γὰρ ἡμεν αὐτὰ  
ἐκπρεπῆς τῶς ὥπερ αἴτις  
ἐν βοτοῖς στάσειεν ἵππον  
παγὸν ἀεθλοφόρον καναχάποδα  
τῶν ὑποπετριδίων ὄνειρων.

‘For she believes herself to stand out pre-eminent, as if there were set among the grazing herds a powerful stallion, a prize-winner with ringing hoofs, (a creature) of winged dreams’. The mention of ‘dreams’ constitutes an artful touch: it is only in dream-land that you could see such a horse, and only in dream-land that our leader could be equated with him. Mention of this fantastic horse has provoked the allusions to an Enetic (51) and to an Iberian and Colaxaeon (59): these are real breeds of horses, and to them the *laudandae* (and even ‘she who is second to Agido in beauty’, 58) may fittingly be compared.

If Agido and Hagesichora are not choir-leaders, who are they? We would not be far from the truth if we called them priestesses; or, at least, women exercising some sacral function. It does not seem possible to interpret in any other way the complex of ideas conveyed by passages already discussed: first the reference to Ἀγιδῶς τὸ φῶς (40), where, as we have seen, φῶς means not simply ‘radiance’ but more specifically ‘light of deliverance’; second the phrase ἐξ Ἀγησιχόρας δὲ νεάνιδες ἱρήνας ἐρατᾶς ἐπέβαν (90–91), which reveals Hagesichora as the instrument or vehicle by which the divine benefits have been bestowed. The two women are brought together in the mutilated passage 78–81:

οὐ γὰρ ἄ καλλίσφυρος  
Ἀγησιχόρα πάρ’ ἀντεῖ,  
Ἀγιδοῖ.....αἰμένει  
θωστήριά τ’ ἄμ’ ἐπαινεῖ.

The sense of these lines seems to be that Hagesichora is present on the spot along with Agido ‘and approves our festival’. This

cast of phrase summons up the picture of a religious functionary who keeps watch on the due observance of the rite; and it is thereby implied that, high as Agido's status is, the status of Hagesichora is higher still. This implication is quite consistent with the order in which the choir introduce the laudandae; for naturally the lesser light is mentioned first (40), the greater afterwards (51).

If I have interpreted correctly the drift of the later part of the song (39-end), we see a maiden-choir describing their participation in a dedicatory rite. They mention by name the goddess to whom the dedication is made; in the mortal sphere, the objects of their praise are two women who serve the cult of the goddess. This situation is not unlike that envisaged in the two surviving Partheneia of Pindar (94a, 94b Snell-Maehler). In both of these Partheneia, the maiden-choir speak of themselves as actually taking part in the rite; in both, praise of a mortal is involved as well; and in the second (also, we may be sure, in the first) a god is named as ultimate honorand. The differences between Pindar's art and that of Alcman in the composition of Partheneia are as interesting as the similarities between them. In one important respect, the Partheneion of Alcman has a more closely knit structure than the extant examples by Pindar. In Alcman's poem, as we have seen over and over again, Hagesichora and Agido are bound to the choir by close ties, which involve the laudandae in being present at, and even presiding over, the rite performed by the choir. In another way also the laudandae are brought into intimate association with the choir. Unlike Pindar in his Partheneia, Alcman has made a 'myth' an integral part of the ode. It is this myth, with its associated religious teaching, which refers both to the laudandae and to the act of dedication and which gives the poem its underlying unity.

There are, in fact, two myths; but a similar moral is drawn from each. In the first (1-14), the sons of Hippocoön are named. Little can be said about this list, except that upon the manner, or the cause, of their death Alcman bases the general precept: 'let not the winged daring of man fly to heaven or attempt to violate lady Aphrodite' (15-18). The second myth (20-35) is transmitted in an even more fragmentary state than the first; it seems to allude to the defeat of the giants by the gods. At least the memorable conclusion is extant in its entirety (34-35):

ἄλαστα δὲ  
*Ἔργα πάσον κακὰ μῆσαμένοι.*

'They compassed wicked deeds and suffered unforgettably'. The moral of this conflict too is stated in a striking form (36): *ἔστι τις σιῶν τίσις*, 'divine vengeance does exist'. Despite our ignorance of much of the content of the myths, the sequence of legends and gnōmai is coherent and is in perfect accord with a trend of Greek thought often made explicit in archaic and classical poetry: heroes may attain great glory, but they must beware of encroaching upon the preserves of the gods.

Between the dark deeds recounted in the myths and the second part of the ode, vivid with light and colour, there stand some lines of transition (37-39):

*ὁ δ' ὄλβιος, ὅστις εὐφροῶν  
ἀμέραν διαπλέκει  
ἄκλαντος·*

If these lines are truly transitional, as I have called them, they will both refer backwards to the myths and point forwards to the praise of Agido. The meaning of *εὐφροῶν* thus becomes all-important in this context. To translate it 'merrily' or 'with glad heart' debases the whole utterance to the level of banality and tautology. What has Alcman told us, if all he has said is: 'Blessed is he who merrily weaves the day's pattern to its end, without a tear' (Page)? The moral would then be virtually meaningless and would have no obvious connexion with either the earlier or the later part of the poem. But if we equate Alcman's *εὐφροῶν* with the Homeric expression *εὖ φρονέων* (six times in the *Odyssey*), we see that it describes not a person's outward appearance but his character: 'well-disposed (towards)', 'of good intent (towards)'. In Homer, the context always makes it clear to whom the good intent is felt; and in Alcman too it is clear: only if a man remains well-disposed (towards the gods) will he pass the day without cause for weeping. Now the sons of Hippocoön and the giants notoriously were not *εὐφροῶνες* in their attitude. They did not observe the boundaries set between gods and other beings. So much for the backward reference. What of the forward? The choir continue (39-40): *ἐγὼν δ' ἀείδω Ἀγιδῶς τὸ φῶς*. It is obvious, and indeed it was pointed out long ago, that the *δέ* in this expression is not adversative but continuative: '(we must act *εὐφρόνως* towards the divine), and so I sing of the delivering light of Agido'. Why do the choir sing *at this moment*? Because the goddess, whose cult Agido tends together with Hagesichora, has released the choir (or the city?) from the *πόνοι*

which afflicted them. The myth showed the power of the gods to do harm to their enemies; now we shall hear of their corresponding power to heal their friends, those who are *εὐφρονας* towards them. The power of harming and that of healing are possessed by every one of the gods; but, if there are two deities above all who exercise both powers, they are Artemis and her brother Apollo. Hence we have a slight additional reason for supposing that the presiding goddess at the present rite is Artemis.

Such are the leading themes of Alcman's Partheneion. Annexed to these are two others: the art of song and homosexual love. Both themes, but especially the second, recur in the other extant Partheneion by Alcman, fr. 3 Page. In the latter fragment, the choir apparently invoke the muses at the beginning, mention the song they are about to sing, and say that '(somebody or something) leads me to go to the *ἀγών*' (8). The best-preserved section describes in eloquent and unmistakable language the proud beauty whose favours are solicited by the other girls; but she 'makes no answer to me' (64)... 'I would soon have been her suppliant' (81). Fr. 3 introduces these topics in a very straightforward manner; but in fr. 1 they are handled much more obliquely. About the topic of singing, the choir in fr. 1 have this to say (if the text is correctly restored) (96-101):

*ἃ δὲ τᾶν Σηρηνίδων  
 ἀοιδότερα μὲν οὐχί,  
 σιαὶ γάρ, ἀντὶ δ' ἔνδεκα  
 παίδων δεκάς ἄδ' αἰεῖδει·  
 φθέγγεται δ' ἄρ' ὥτ' ἐπὶ Ξάνθῳ ῥοαῖσι  
 κύκνος·*

'She [Hagesichora] is not more melodious than the Sirens, for they are goddesses, while we are a choir of ten who sing, instead of eleven girls, and the music we make is like that of the swan on the streams of the Xanthos'. The expression is complex but is comprehensible, except for one allusion. The comments of the scholiast make it clear that sometimes the choir consisted of ten members, sometimes of eleven. Obviously the variation in number was not a haphazard one, since it would have been impossible to compose choral lyrics, with their closely-connected elements of words music and dance, unless the size of the choir were known beforehand. Why the number varied we cannot tell; but at least we can corroborate the conclusion, already



reached, that the choir-leader (on *this* occasion) did not participate in the song.

The homosexual language of fr. 1 is more restrained than in fr. 3, but it is no less explicit. We come to the relevant passage of fr. 1 by a circuitous route. Let us take up the text at the point where the choir have just described the rite in which they are engaged. That this is a real rite and that it takes place at the time of the rising of the Pleiads (namely, the constellation of stars known to the Greeks and ourselves by that name) I see no reason to doubt. The choir continue (64–69):

οὔτε γὰρ τι πορφύρας  
τόσσοσ κόρος ὅστι' ἀμύναι,  
οὔτε ποικίλος δράκων  
παγχρόσιος, οὐδὲ μίτρα  
Λυδία, νεανίδων  
ἰανογλεφάρων ἄγαλμα.

'For an abundance of purple does not suffice to give protection, nor dappled snake of solid gold, nor Lydian head-band, the delight of dark-eyed girls'. Give protection from what? I do not know; but, in view of the description of the rite which immediately precedes, I judge the most likely answer to be that the only efficacious means of acquiring defence against enemies or rivals is by worship of the gods; the splendour of rich ornaments, even if worn as amulets, will not avail. The choir now strike off in a different direction (70–77):

οὐδὲ ται Ναννῶσ κόμαι,  
ἀλλ' οὐδ' Ἀρέτα σιειδήσ,  
οὐδὲ Συλακίσ τε καὶ Κλησισηήρα,  
οὐδ' ἐσ Αἰνησιμβρότας ἐνδοῖσα φασεῖσ·  
Ἀσταφίσ τέ μοι γένοιτο  
καὶ ποτιγλέποι Φίλυλλα  
Δαμαρέτα τ' ἔρατά τε Φιανθεμίσ·  
ἀλλ' Ἀγησιχόρα με τείρει.

'Not even the tresses of Nanno, nor yet god-like Areta, nor Sylakis nor Kleësera; nor will you go to the house of Ainesimbrotas and say "may Astaphis be mine and may Philylla look (upon me with favour) or Damareta or lovely Wianthemis". No, Hagesichora *με τείρει*'. Deferring for a moment discussion of the last word, we recognize that, by a surprising but not unparalleled twist, the choir have veered away from beautiful

objects to beautiful girls. In such a context, the mention of Ainesimbrotā's house can have only one plausible reference: Ainesimbrotā is either a procuress or a purveyor of love-charms which may help the choir to attain their heart's desire. By this unexpected route we come back to Hagesichora. Since the words 'Αγησιχώρα με τείρει mean 'Hagesichora wears me down', and since this meaning is clearly intolerable, other meanings have been invented: 'it is Hagesichora for whom we pine'; 'Hagesichora is my torment'; and so forth. As I have not yet seen a demonstration that τείρει could mean such things, I conclude that τείρει is wrong and that the old suggestion τηρεῖ must be restored to favour: it is noteworthy that elsewhere Page does not hesitate to read -η- instead of the -ει- given by the papyrus, e. g. δαμῆται (59), Πεληάδες (60), ἀνηρομέναι (63). Excellent sense would be given by the phrase ἀλλ' Ἀγησιχώρα με τηρεῖ: 'but it is Hagesichora who watches over me'. In love-affairs, as in other aspects of life, Hagesichora provides the healing touch.

A word, in conclusion, about a formal feature of Alcman's poem. The first personal pronoun is used both in the singular and in the plural: ἐγὼν δέ (39), ἐγὼν μὲν (85), ἐγὼν δέ (87), ἐμέ (43), ἐμᾶς (52), μοι (74), με (77), but ἄμυν (41, 60, 89) and ἄμα (81). From these facts, and particularly from the collocation ἐγὼν μὲν... ἐγὼν δέ... (85, 87), two quite different inferences have been made. According to the first, the distribution of pronouns reflects the individual sentiments of different members of the choir, so that the contrast between ἐγὼν μὲν and ἐγὼν δέ indicates a real difference of opinion; over and against these personal views there stands the common voice of the choir, and that is rendered by the plural pronouns. According to the second explanation, the choir is fragmented not into all of its component members but into two semi-choirs, which put forward opposing points of view. Both inferences I believe to be mistaken. The choir possesses a corporate personality and, like the choir in Pindar's epinicia, it may express itself in the singular or in the plural, quite indifferently. As for the clauses beginning with ἐγὼν μὲν and ἐγὼν δέ respectively, these are not the utterances of different members of the choir, or of different sections of it, giving different view-points; for why should one maiden, or one semi-choir, say 'I am a maiden and screech, an owl from the roof-beam' (85-87) while the other says 'but my desire is to propitiate Aotis above all' (87-88)? It would be grotesque to put the contrast in such a form that one girl calls herself a screech-owl and

another responds: 'but for *my* part I desire to propitiate Aotis'. The latter constitutes one of the crucial statements of the entire poem, and it could not be balanced against the deprecating utterance about the *γλαύξ*. It is the absolute necessity of making the whole choir join in the statement about Aotis, as much as anything else, which persuades me that the ode is sung by the whole choir from beginning to end. The unity in construction is matched by a unified performance.

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