

Marching Choruses? Choral Performance in Athens

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IN THE 1980s John Winkler formulated a theory of ephebic education in fifth-century Athens, claiming that “our evidence about tragic performance contains reasonably strong indications that the chorus members were young men in (or viewed in relation to) military training” and that the tragic choral dancing had “quasi-military features.”¹ Thus the chorality of the tragic performances inculcated military skill in the young men dancing in these dramatic choruses. His hypothesis was informed by the lexicographic writings on the formation of choruses such as the view of Pollux, whom I discuss below. Winkler saw the rectangular formation of the tragic choruses as a kind of miniature phalanx, and in keeping with the metrical nomenclature of the marching anapaest he concluded that given the discipline involved in marching and creating the rectangular formations through dance, the choruses of tragedy were part of the ephebic education. No ephebic education, however, is attested for the fifth century, and I will argue here that even if there was some sort of education of this kind, it could not have included dancing in a dramatic chorus.

Winkler’s thesis has had a major influence on how we perceive tragic choral performance at the dramatic festivals of

¹ J. J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song,” in J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Nothing to do with Dionysos?* (Princeton 1990) 20–62, at 58 and 57, cf. 50 “The chorus members processed in three files and four or five ranks (depending on whether there were twelve or ... fifteen persons marching)”; see also his “The Ephebes’ Song: Tragôidia and Polis,” *Representations* 11 (1985) 26–62. Throughout this article I will be citing the 1990 edition.

Athens.² As his thesis has been criticised vigorously already,³ I may seem to be preaching to the choir, but the argument offered here has not, to my knowledge, been proposed before.

1. *The sources on choral formations and entrances*

Through ancient lexicographic works we have some knowledge of what went on during the performance of Attic drama, but these sources are to a certain degree unreliable: an item could (1) stem from a comedy devoid of any context, (2) be invented to explain something in the text in question, (3) be a simple misunderstanding, (4) explain a fact true of the time of the lexicographer rather than fifth-century Athens.⁴ They can however be right: but in the following I assess one instance where I believe they were wrong. The problem is that they are so consistent in their wrong account that they have fostered a number of questionable views of the dance, performance, and context of the dramatic chorus in fifth-century Athens.

One problem must be addressed with caution: we do not possess reliable sources for the major choral events in classical Athens, unfortunately, and neither did Hellenistic commentators or scholiasts, who did what we sometimes do—explain any chorus as a dramatic chorus, conjecturing and manipulating to create a unified picture, even though the actual picture of choral performances in fifth-century Athens is extremely fragmented. In what follows I will give some examples of this practice.

² E.g. D. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens* (Cambridge 1997), and G. Ley, *The Theatricality of Greek Tragedy* (Chicago 2007), are valuable works even if one disagrees with the performative project as such. Both, however, find it hard to dismiss Winkler's thesis completely, Wiles at 93 and Ley at 191.

³ E.g. P. Wilson, *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia* (Cambridge 2000) 77–79, 83, and E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Michigan 1994) 352.

⁴ On such problems see e.g. J. P. Poe "Pollux and the Aulaia," *Hermes* 128 (2000) 247–250. The short *De choro* (Koster, *Scholia in Aristophanem* I p.19) claims among other things that the comic chorus entered through the archway, διὰ τῆς ἀριστεράς ἀψίδος, which surely must reflect Roman theatre practice, where this archway was called *itinera versurarum*, rather than a fifth-century B.C. production, cf. M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton 1961) 172.

The problem I wish to investigate ultimately stems from Pollux and his *Onomasticon*, a paragraph about the formation, number, and entrances of dramatic choruses. As with us, it was quite impossible for him to have seen a dramatic production of fifth-century Athens, but scholars tend to rely on him for information on fifth-century productions, though Eric Csapo and William Slater clearly state his deficiencies for such a purpose. Pollux 4.108–109 states:⁵

μέρη δὲ χοροῦ στοίχος καὶ ζυγόν. καὶ τραγικοῦ μὲν χοροῦ ζυγὰ πέντε ἐκ τριῶν καὶ στοίχοι τρεῖς ἐκ πέντε· πεντεκαίδεκα γὰρ ἦσαν ὁ χορός. καὶ κατὰ τρεῖς μὲν εἰσήεσαν, εἰ κατὰ ζυγὰ γίνοιτο ἢ πάροδος· εἰ δὲ κατὰ στοίχους, ἀνὰ πέντε εἰσήεσαν. ἔσθ' ὅτε δὲ καὶ καθ' ἓνα ἐποιοῦντο τὴν πάροδον. ὁ δὲ κωμικὸς χορὸς τέτταρες καὶ εἴκοσιν ἦσαν οἱ χορευταί, ζυγὰ ἕξ, ἕκαστον δὲ ζυγὸν ἐκ τετάρων, στοίχοι δὲ τέτταρες, ἕξ ἄνδρας ἕχων ἕκαστος στοίχος.

The parts of the chorus are: row and file. There are five files of three in the tragic chorus, and three rows of five, for there were fifteen in a chorus. They came in in threes, if the entrance was by files. If the entrance was by rows, then they entered by fives. Sometimes the *parodos* was one at a time. The comic chorus was of twenty-four choreuts with six files, and four to a file; there were four rows, with six in each row.

This idea, found in several lexicographical writings⁶ and probably stemming from the same Hellenistic source, claims that the dramatic choruses came into the orchestra in ranks with the

⁵ Transl. Csapo and Slater, *Context* 394; cf. 393: “The information is derived mainly from Hellenistic scholars who often draw questionable inferences from passages of ancient authors, frequently ripped out of context ... But it does contain useful and often reliable information about *Hellenistic* theater production” (my italics).

⁶ E.g. Phot. *Lex.* s.v. τρίτος ἀριστεροῦ, ἐν τοῖς τραγικοῖς χοροῖς τριῶν ὄντων στοίχων καὶ ζυγῶν, ὁ μὲν ἀριστερὸς στοίχος ὁ πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ ἦν· ὁ δὲ δεξιός, πρὸς τῷ προσκηνίῳ· συνέβαινε δὲ οὖν τὸν μέσον τοῦ ἀριστεροῦ στοίχου τὴν ἐντιμοτάτην καὶ τὴν οἶον τοῦ πρωτοστάτου χώραν ἐπέχειν καὶ στάσιν. See A. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1988) 241, and Csapo and Slater, *Context* 362–363, for other sources and translations. One will notice that only Photius (following Pollux?) explicitly tells us that it is a tragic chorus, but the mention of the *proskenion* suggests that he is not speaking of a fifth-century dramatic chorus.

audience on their left hand and formed a rectangular formation; thus “Tragedy was called so, because the choruses took the form of a *tetragon*.”⁷ This statement is clearly intertwined with the idea of the rectangular choruses of Attic drama and wishes to create a counterpoint to the circular “cyclic” choruses.⁸ We must, however, also entertain the possibility of my fourth caveat: that this kind of formation could be the general tendency of later dramaturgic practices, where the chorus had lost some of its dramatic potency of the fifth and, possibly, fourth century, and thus exercised this formalised type of movement that apparently took no account of the character of the chorus. What is striking is that the dramatic choruses never sing that they are standing in a rectangular formation, whereas when they sing of circular dancing, these utterances are doubted by commentators.⁹

First we should consider the ranks and files that constitute this choral “tetragon.” Winkler (50 n.90) claimed that ζυγόν and στοῖχος were technical terms for rank and file in tragic dancing. But this is only a partial truth, for they must at least refer to dramatic dancing in general since comic choruses are also said by Pollux to enter in a rectangular formation. That both tragic and comic choruses are described as entering thus does not accord with Winkler’s thesis of the “*tragōidoi* specifically designated ephebes.” But this is not the only problem: in Pollux, our main source for the ranks and files of dramatic

⁷ One of the etymologies of the *Et.Mag.* s.v. τραγῳδία.

⁸ E.g. Athen. 181B–C. Note that the distinct rectangular dance mentioned here is from Crete and the dancers are called Λακωνισταί; Athenian dance on the other hand is dithyrambic and circular. For a conjecture on the reason for this shape see A. D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb Got Its Shape,” *CQ* 47 (1997) 331–351, at 342–343. The question of the shape of the Theatre of Dionysus in the fifth century is still unsolved, but it seems unlikely that the formation of either type of chorus (e.g. the cyclic) defined the dancing space. See also M. L. Lech “The Shape of the Athenian *Theatron* in the Fifth Century: Overlooked Evidence,” *GRBS* 49 (2009) 223–226.

⁹ Winkler, “Ephebes’ Song” 50; Picard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 239. Against this scepticism, see J. F. Davidson, “The Circle and the Tragic Chorus,” *G&R* 33 (1986) 38–46; A. H. Sommerstein, *Aeschylus: Eumenides* (Cambridge 1989) 136–137.

choruses, *στοίχος* applies just as well to armies (cf. 1.126) and to rows of teeth (2.93).¹⁰ There seems in fact to be no evidence of a dramatic chorus, described in technical terms at least, as standing in *στοίχοι* or *ζυγά* in the fifth century.¹¹ Even if this is not evidence against the usage proposed by Winkler, it does suggest that the terms were not used in the fifth century. Aristophanes fr.81, ἡ που κατὰ στοίχους κεκράξονται τι βαρβαριστί, may be the only example, but in this case one wonders if we should build a performance theory about dramatic choruses relying on a question (ἡ που)¹² with no clear context.¹³ The question implies that the arriving chorus will behave in a strange manner, thus *στοίχοι* are not the typical mode of entry, just as *βαρβαριστί* is not. On the other hand, the term *στοίχος* was used of armies on occasion, but no technical term of the fifth century should necessarily be conjectured from this scanty evidence.¹⁴ I am not arguing that choruses could not move in files or ranks (or both at once), but that they only did so when this arrangement had a choreographic and visual meaning, not because they were bound by rigid educational constraints.

The argument for the rectangular formation relies as well on

¹⁰ The same is also true for *ζυγόν*, of armies at 1.127, of other things e.g. 1.87–88, 7.107, 10.108. Thucydides 5.68.3 seems to be the only instance in fifth-century literature of a military reference.

¹¹ Ar. *Ran.* 548, τοῦ χοροῦ τοὺς προσθίους, does not provide evidence for a file formation of the chorus, at least not a straight line, and a meta-theatrical reference to the actual chorus of *Mystae* seems unlikely. At any rate the passage does not presuppose more than one file of chorus-members who like teeth are *κατὰ στοίχον* but not *κατὰ ζυγόν*, see Gal. *Us.part.* 11.8 (II 132 Helmreich) and Poll. 2.93.

¹² J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* (Oxford 1959) 280 and 584.

¹³ *κατὰ στοίχον* could simply imply a contrast, cf. Thuc. 2.102.4. Cratinus fr.186 does not provide solid proof for *στοίχοι* and *ζυγά* since we lack not only the context but also the text itself. A reference to some sort of ranks or files probably was noticed in the text; but given that Aristophanic scholia rarely discuss ranks and files of the comic choruses (only schol. *Eq.* 508, *Pax* 734, and both in connection with the parabasis), it seems likely that this was a special occurrence (or from the parabasis), like, I suggest, the Aristophanic fragment discussed here.

¹⁴ Thuc. 4.47.3, Aesch. *PV* 366 (of ships), Xen. *Hipp.* 5.7 (of cavalry).

the terms used of the choreuts, such as παραστάτης.¹⁵ This term could be used for the placement of choreuts within a chorus, as Aristotle does in *Politics* (1277a11–12) and *Metaphysics* (1018b26–29), though he does not say what kind of chorus he has in mind. But the word did not necessarily have any military connotations.¹⁶

The rectangular formation is clearly bound up with the mode of entrance of dramatic choruses (the *parodos*), as if this were the only performance of any chorus. But this type of entrance does not fit many, if any, of the choruses we meet in the plays. It seems likely that the sources for this view somehow have the same primary source, e.g. Pollux or his source, which might as easily have referred to Hellenistic conventions and/or another type of choral performance. This last claim is supported, I believe, by the often-cited scholium on Aristides, *On Behalf of Four* 154, which paradoxically is used to support Pollux and the rectangular formation of the dramatic choruses. Aristides says:

Μιλτιάδην δὲ τὸν ἐν Μαραθῶνι ποῦ χοροῦ τάξομεν ἢ τάξιν τίνα;
ἢ δῆλον ὅτι τὴν πρὸ τοῦ θεάτρου καὶ οὐ πᾶσιν ἐν καλῷ τῆς θεᾶς
ἔσται; πλὴν γ' ὅσον οὐκ ἀριστεροστάτης ἀνὴρ μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ
δεξιῦ τοῖς Ἕλλησι κέρως.

In what part of the chorus or in what rank shall we place Miltiades of Marathon? Or is it clear that we shall place him before

¹⁵ Winkler, “Ephebes’ Song” 51. Also cognates like ἀριστεροστάτης (Poll. 4.106), earlier (2.161) defined as the choreuts standing to the left as distinct from the δεξιόστατης, but elsewhere (Hsch. and Phot. s.v. ἀριστεροστάτης) as the best or the leader of the chorus, inspired by military nomenclature (Phot. τρίτος ἀριστεροῦ) through schol. Aristid. 3.154, discussed below, like Thom. Mag. s.v. σκαῖός. The use of λαυροστάται in a now-lost comedy of Cratinus (fr.467, οὔτω Κρατίνος) together with Cratinus fr.229 is not evidence for the performance of a dramatic chorus, since we lack both real and dramatic context, and the claim (Hsch., quoted at fr.467) that the bad singers were put in the middle so as not to be seen can hardly refer to any chorus, dramatic or not, of Athens, see n.27 below. Thus all four of my caveats are at work here.

¹⁶ παραστάτης is not exclusively a partner in a hoplite phalanx, a usage not found in either Herodotus (though 6.117 could be a reference to a hoplite battle) or Thucydides: cf. Plato Com. fr.174.12, jocular of the testicles, and Eur. fr.295, metaphorically of a συνήγορος, Hdt 6.107 of bystanders.

the audience and in a favorable position for being seen by all? Except that the man is not quite a “a stander on the left,” but is at the right wing of the Greeks’ battle line. (transl. Behr)

The scholium relied on by modern commentators says:

ὅτε γὰρ εἰσήεσαν οἱ χοροί, πλαγίως βαδίζοντες ἐποιούντο τοὺς ὕμνους, καὶ εἶχον τοὺς θεατὰς ἐν ἀριστερᾷ αὐτῶν ... εἶτα ἐπειδὴ ἐν μὲν χοροῖς τὸ εὐώνυμον τιμώτερον, ἐν δὲ πολέμοις τὸ δεξιόν, ἐπιφέρει πλὴν γε οὐκ ἀριστεροτάτης ... τοὺς οὖν καλοὺς τῶν χορευτῶν ἔταπτον εἰσιόντες ἐν τοῖς ἑαυτῶν ἀριστεροῖς, ἵνα εὐρεθῶσι πρὸς τὸν δῆμον ὁρῶντες.

When the choruses entered they sang their hymns moving transversely and kept the audience on their left, and the foremost of the chorus kept to the left side ... since the left side in choruses is more distinguished, though in battle <lines> it is the right ... when entering they placed the good choreuts on their left side in order that they might be located facing the people.¹⁷

Some critical remarks are necessary on this piece of evidence. The scholiast claims that it “is a metaphor (ἐκ μεταφορᾶς) from the Dionysiac choruses” and from the “Theatre in Athens,” but that does not lay specific claim either to a dramatic chorus or any chorus of the fifth century, even though the events he is commenting upon were from that century and in Athens. The reference to Dionysiac choruses might merely reflect Aristides’ τὴν πρὸ τοῦ θεάτρου,¹⁸ which the scholiast knew had something to do with Dionysus, but it does not tell us anything about the thought of Aristides on whom he is commenting. But Csapo and Slater commit themselves to the dogmatic view of the passage and understand this scholium as a source on the fifth-century theatre, and thus translate τοὺς καλοὺς τῶν χορευτῶν as “the good choreuts.”¹⁹ But the passage surely describes the chorus as something to be seen, εὐρεθῶσι πρὸς τὸν

¹⁷ III 535–536 D.; transl. Csapo and Slater, *Context* 361.

¹⁸ Aristides’ τὴν πρὸ τοῦ θεάτρου the scholiast takes as ἐν τῇ κρείττονι τάξει, thus understanding it as an idiom, “at the best possible place.” The scholiast’s statement does not make it clear that the chorus in mind is dramatic, since choral performance in the theatre does not necessarily signify dramatic productions.

¹⁹ For this translation one would expect ἀγαθός *vel sim.* with infinitive or else accusative, as e.g. βοὴν ἀγαθός Hom. *Il.* 2.408.

δῆμον ὀρώντες. Dramatic choruses wore masks and some uniform costume (rags, dresses, or whatever their character demanded), and therefore the audience could not see their faces. The choreuts in this passage have to look at the audience and are found (by the audience) good-looking. Paradoxically the Byzantine text *De choro* (n.4 above) explicitly states (ἄφορῶν εἰς τοὺς ὑποκριτάς) that the comic chorus looked towards the actors, not the audience, which supports my view that this whole tradition is filled with conjectures and misunderstandings.²⁰ Thus, the chorus in question in the scholium on Aristides is not a dramatic chorus. If the scholium reflects the fifth- or fourth-century performance practice of choruses (in Athens?), it would most likely refer to some other type of chorus, possibly “cyclic” for two reasons besides the choreuts’ lack of masks:

(1) We are told that they are singing τοὺς ὕμνους. A ὕμνος is not necessarily a tragic choral ode but simply a song, sometimes to one of the gods (cf. Pl. *Leg.* 700D, *Resp.* 607A), even though tragic choruses sometimes refer to their own singing as such (e.g. Eur. *Med.* 425)—but so do Pindar (e.g. *Ol.* 8.54) and Bacchylides (4.10).

(2) The ambiguity of the classical mentions of choruses offers yet another problem: they are often only referred to as χορός, “a choir,” as in this case. This was probably not a problem for the Greeks, but we, who lack the visual aspect of the choral tradition, choose the simple alternative: the tragic chorus, since we know these choruses. There were many other types of dance in the city-state, public and private, which makes the saying of Socrates so elusive: οἱ δὲ χοροὶς κάλλιστα θεοὺς τιμῶσιν, ἄριστοι / ἐν πολέμῳ (Athen. 628F).²¹ Thus when a χορός is not specified, given the extensiveness of the cyclic and

²⁰ This claim, which at least seems more reasonable than the scholium on Aristides, can of course be refuted by Ar. *Ach.* 206 which is directed at the audience, and Dicaeopolis is not on stage at all.

²¹ This passage in Athenaeus does not anywhere claim to be speaking of dramatic choruses, simply χοροίς: *pace* Winkler, “Ephebes’ Song” 51 n.94, it could very well be *pars pro toto* for “festivals,” as K. Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford 1993) 11, understands Ar. *Ran.* 1419.

dithyrambic choruses,²² we must assume that the Athenians primarily thought of these,²³ but of course not exclusively.²⁴ I propose that for the general Athenian, “a choir” without any context cannot signify a dramatic chorus *par tout*, but more reasonably a cyclic chorus or one of the great dithyrambic choruses of the Great Dionysia, because these choruses encompassed literally a thousand citizens every year, reaching a broad spectrum of the society both as active choreuts and passive audiences at the festivals.²⁵ These choruses were in the fifth century simply a greater choral event than the dramatic choruses—more expensive, more agonistic, more social, and more local owing to their phyletic division.

And if Aristides had any distinct comparison between choruses and the military in mind, which does seem doubtful, the dithyrambic and cyclic choruses seem more relevant here than dramatic choruses since these types of choruses were most connected with the military, though not in any practical manner, given the extent of the institution. Most, if not all, male citizens must have been members of a cyclic chorus, which had the same phyletic composition as the hoplite-phalanx.²⁶ If this is so, then the claim about the position of the good and the bad singers within the chorus, as discussed

²² On the problems of the distinction between these genres, see P. Wilson, “Performance in the Pythion,” in P. Wilson (ed.), *The Greek Theatre and Festivals: Documentary Studies* (Oxford 2007) 150–182, at 164–169.

²³ E.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.4.3–5, and Dem. 19.282.

²⁴ Wilson, *Khoregia* 6 with 312 n.20.

²⁵ On χορός in general, see the entry in LSJ. Cyclic contests in the fifth century are attested for the Great Dionysia, twenty choruses of men and boys; Thargelia, ten of men and boys; the quadrennial and the annual Panathenaea, unknown organisation. See J. K. Davies, “Demosthenes on Liturgies: A Note,” *JHS* 87 (1967) 33–40; J. Moore “[Xenophon] Ath. Pol. iii 4 and the Question of Choruses at the Hephaestia and Promethia,” *JHS* 91 (1971) 140–141.

²⁶ Hdt. 6.111.1; Thuc. 6.98.4, 6.101.5; Lys. 16.15. The συγχορευταί of Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.20 must also allude to dithyrambic choruses, and its impact derives from this fact: even the hated oligarchs had been a part of this institution.

above,²⁷ might equally apply, if to any at all, to the entrances of dithyrambic and cyclic choruses in the theatre, when ending their *pompe*, given that the fifty men or boys obviously did not enter in utter confusion. Perhaps they entered in this rectangular shape and upon reaching the orchestra created a circle before beginning to dance and sing. This is of course a hypothesis, but if we want to understand and use some of this “evidence” concerning the ranks, files, marching, and order, I suggest that it would be far easier to do if these terms described the entrances of dithyrambic and cyclic choruses into the orchestra—though not necessarily in the fifth century. These great choral performances were a major part of an Athenian citizen’s life, though our knowledge is deplorably limited. The sources are, however, by no means evidence for any performance of the dramatic choruses of the fifth century, either tragic or comic, and could very well be some anachronistic view of the scholiast.

2. *The Athenian army and the dramatic chorus*

Before commenting on the marching of dramatic choruses in the fifth century, I will address briefly the Athenian army on the march, where marching occurred, and how choral dancing could have helped in the education of young soldiers.

²⁷ Winkler, “Ephebes’ Song” 51, states that “Teachers of each discipline [sc. war and dance] are even found giving the same advice to put the best soldiers or dancers in the front and rear ranks, the less good ones in the middle,” citing Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.8, *Cyr.* 7.5.5, though neither passage speaks of choruses, only of armies. Why would a choregos want his “bad” singers in the middle to get pushed forward (ὠθώνται, Xen. *Mem.* 3.1.8)? This is not the idea of choral performance we find in textual sources, such as Demosthenes (15.16), where choral performance should be beautiful, or when Ischomachus (Xen. *Oec.* 8.20) lecturing his wife on the beauty of order (τάξις) compares the placements of utensils (χορὸς σκευῶν) to a cyclic chorus: ὡσπερ καὶ κύκλιος χορὸς οὐ μόνον αὐτὸς καλὸν θέαμά ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ μέσον αὐτοῦ καλὸν καὶ καθαρόν φαίνεται. The focus here is on the precise interval between the objects, which apparently could be compared to such a chorus. The choreuts stood singing in the orchestra in order with the same interval between them, and this order was considered beautiful (*pace* Winkler 50). But given Ischomachus’ reference to a cyclic not a dramatic chorus, it might show that it was not the aim of a dramatic chorus to create this kind of order.

The notion of marching tends to have the wrong connotation for the modern classicist, for marching as the *OED* entry defines it (“To walk in a military manner with regular and measured tread; of a body of men or troops, to walk in step ... with a regular and uniform movement”) was never in use in the Athenian army during the heyday of Athenian drama. Or to rephrase, the Athenian army did not use march as a distinct military maneuver to enhance their *war* efficiency. But when walking to battle there can be no doubt that some kind of rhythm among the soldiers enhanced the speed, and singing perhaps kept up the spirit, even though there is no evidence for this in an Athenian context. The Spartans on the other hand certainly sang while marching to battle and were even accompanied by pipes when moving their phalanx towards the enemy (see below). It is thus quite possible that the highly martial Spartans did march, as we understand it, to the rhythm of music, even when they had positioned themselves in their battle formation—at least they did so at the battle of Mantinea in 418 B.C. as Thucydides reports vividly (5.70):

καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἡ ξύνοδος ἦν, Ἀργεῖοι μὲν καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι ἐν-
τόνως καὶ ὀργῇ χωροῦντες, Λακεδαιμόνιοι δὲ βραδέως καὶ ὑπὸ
αὐλητῶν πολλῶν ὁμοῦ ἐγκαθεστῶτων, οὐ τοῦ θεοῦ χάριν, ἀλλ’
ἵνα ὁμαλῶς μετὰ ῥυθμοῦ βαίνοντες προσέλθοιεν καὶ μὴ δια-
σπασθεῖη αὐτοῖς ἡ τάξις, ὅπερ φιλεῖ τὰ μεγάλα στρατόπεδα ἐν
ταῖς προσόδοις ποιεῖν.

After this the two armies met, the Argives and their allies advancing with great violence and fury, while the Spartans came on slowly and to the music of many flute-players in their ranks. This custom of theirs has nothing to do with religion; it is designed to make them keep in step and move forward steadily without breaking their ranks, as large armies often do when they are just about to join battle. (transl. Warner)

It is obvious that the Spartan army is contrasted with the allied army from Argos (μὲν ... δὲ), which also included Athenian troops,²⁸ and that this army did not march in rhythm to music as the Spartans did. This reveals that marching in battle order against a foe was distinctly Spartan in the fifth-century Greek

²⁸ Thuc. 5.67, Diod. 12.79.1.

world, and not at all an Athenian phenomenon.²⁹ We know that the Athenians did sing the paian (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.17), as did probably most city-states, but this song can hardly account for the need to educate the young men via dramatic choruses. Given the weight of the hoplite equipment and helmets, the song(s) must have been a simple tune to heighten the war spirit, before running towards the enemy. And even the formations and tactics used by the hoplite phalanx did not create a need for any compulsory training of the soldiers.³⁰ The educational value of tragic dancing would not have helped at the critical point of the clashing of the armies, for the phalanxes ran the last metres before the clash to enhance the power of the impact. No dancing and singing in the theatre of Dionysus could prepare the young men for this.

If the Athenian army did not march as at least the Spartans did, it is implausible that choruses of Athenian drama did so. If the dramatic choruses were military training for the young *epheboi*, as Winkler argues,³¹ it is very strange that the army evidently did not take advantage of it. Even if there was some kind of slightly formalised military education in Athens, as Thucydides (4.67.2) might suggest, it is hard to see how the

²⁹ Pace Winkler, "Epebes' Song" 52. W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War I* (Berkeley 1971) 107. The Chigi Vase by the Macmillan painter (ca. 650 B.C.) shows a piper in connection with the phalanx, but again it is not evidence for an Athenian practice.

³⁰ P. Hunt, "Military Forces," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare I* (Cambridge 2008) 108–146, at 129; see also J. K. Anderson, *Military Theory and Practice in the Age of Xenophon* (Berkeley 1970) 84–110; W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War II* (Berkeley 1974) 217, "The testimonia collected here provide no evidence of compulsory military exercise, at least at Athens." Xen. *Mem.* 3.12.5 is a clear refutation of any city-organised military training and concurs with his claim at *Lac.Pol.* 13.5–6, τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους αὐτοσχεδιαστὰς εἶναι τῶν στρατιωτικῶν, Λακεδαιμονίους δὲ μόνους τῷ ὄντι τεχνίτας τῶν πολεμικῶν.

³¹ Winkler, "Epebes' Song" 49, 54. And one wonders why only 45 epebes every year should be trained thus. On the *ephebeia*, I agree with M. H. Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (Oxford 1991) 89. For further literature, see K. A. Raaflaub, "Equalities and Inequalities in Athenian Democracy," in J. Ober and C. Hedrick (eds.), *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton 1996) 139–174, at 157.

περίπολοι and their wanderings, probably marching, through Attica on border patrols³² cohere with tragic dancers practicing in the *choregeion* in the city, and how being a *ephebos* might coexist with the rule of military exemption for choreuts.³³ Another critical question could be raised concerning repeated performances of some choreuts. Peter Wilson (*Khoregia* 75) is surely right in claiming repeated attendance for some boys, e.g. Carcinus' sons (Ar. *Vesp.* 1501–1515) and Boeotus who as a child ἐφόιτα εἰς παίδας χορεύσων (e.g. cyclic performance, however) and again as an adult τοῖς Διονυσίοις ... ἐχόρευεν (men's contest?) (Dem. 39.23). Aristotle interestingly claims that the dramatic choruses, specifically, were often composed of the same persons,³⁴ which makes the existence of an educational program in these performances superfluous. If D. M. MacDowell is right in making Sannion both the chorus trainer and the coryphaeus of Theozotides' tragic chorus,³⁵ which seems likely, then we have to wonder for how long an Athenian man was an *ephebos*.

The choruses of the Athenian state simply did not help the citizens to be better soldiers, though one could have wished it so;³⁶ Wilson states, “[m]ilitary utility and public entertainment should *ideally* coincide” (*Khoregia* 49, italics mine). My point, however, is that they actually did not. The critique of Plato and Xenophon would be superfluous if the Athenians actually did as they recommended and made military utility and public entertainment coincide. Thus, like one of Plato's thoughts on

³² περίπολος τῆς χώρας ταύτης, Aeschin. 2.167. On the passage in Thucydides see S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides II* (Oxford 1996) 234–235.

³³ Dem. 15.15. See D. M. MacDowell, “Athenian Laws about Choruses,” *Symposion 1982* (1985) 65–77, at 70–72. Admittedly this rule did not necessarily apply to the dramatic choruses; but it seems likely that the rule simply gave exemption from a chorus at one of the city's festivals. Different laws for different types of choruses seems unnecessarily cumbersome.

³⁴ Arist. *Pol.* 1276b4–6. Even the men's cyclic choruses seem to use the same people for a long time, e.g. Aristides of the Oineis *phyle* (Dem. 15.60). See MacDowell, *Symposion 1982* (1985) 72–73. Also Pl. *Leg.* 654A.

³⁵ MacDowell, *Symposion 1982* (1985) 73 (Dem. 15.59).

³⁶ Xen. *Mem.* 3.3.12–15; Dem. 4.35–36.

education in the *Laws*, the point of choruses in Athens was rather to attach the citizens to each other through dance and song, not only for social purposes, including war of course, but for internal peace as well.³⁷ Xenophon, similarly, who was more of a soldier than Plato, sees the effect of choruses, not as practical training as such, but as making the citizens disciplined in every kind of organisation.³⁸

The Greeks created a metaphoric use because there were similarities between armies and choruses in general. In both institutions there was a leader,³⁹ a need for discipline and order, and a common wish for success.⁴⁰ But war and dance were not identical.⁴¹ In fact the chorus is a symbol of peace (cf. *Frogs* 1419), not of war. Ajax pinpoints it clearly in the *Iliad* (15.508): οὐ μὰν ἔξ γε χορὸν κέλετ' ἐλθέμεν, ἀλλὰ μάχεσθαι. The Athenians too made a sharp distinction between marching/fighting and dancing, a sentiment expressed in lyric⁴² as well as in prose.⁴³

The Spartans, on the other hand, seem to have mingled the two in their marching songs and perhaps at the naked dances, *gymnopaïdiai*, where the choruses could have been tested for endurance by ordeal.⁴⁴ But even here in the most martial Greek

³⁷ Pl. *Leg.* 654A, ὠδαῖς τε καὶ ὀρχήσεσιν ἀλλήλοις συνείρειν, and 796C. Thus P. Wilson. "The Politics of Dance: Dithyrambic Contest and Social Order in Ancient Greece," in D. J. Phillips and D. Pritchard (eds.), *Sport and Festival in the Ancient Greek World* (Swansea 2003) 163–196.

³⁸ Xen. *Mem.* 3.5.6, 3.5.18, 4.4.15–16.

³⁹ Aristides was once ἡγεμὼν τῆς φυλῆς according to Dem. 21.60.

⁴⁰ Soldiers are said by Demosthenes to be συγκεκοτημένοι (2.17), while Telephanes should συγκεκοτεῖν Demosthenes' chorus (21.17); Plut. *Pomp.* 68.5; Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.70; Plut. *Marc.* 21.3.1 and *Mor.* 193E (Ἄρεως ὀρχήστρα and πολέμου ὀρχήστρα of battlegrounds). Common goal, e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.3.14, 3.4.5.

⁴¹ E.g. Xen. *Mem.* 3.4.4, *Hell.* 2.4.20.

⁴² E.g. Aesch. *Supp.* 681; Eur. *Phoen.* 784–790; Ar. *Ach.* 263–279, *Vesp.* 1060–1061, *Pax* 975–976.

⁴³ E.g. Dem. 39.16, χορεύει δ' ὅταν στρατεύεσθαι δέη; Xen. *An.* 4.7.16, barbarians who ἀποτεμόντες ἄν τὰς κεφαλὰς (of their enemies) ἐπορεύοντο, καὶ ἦδον καὶ ἐχόρευον ὅποτε οἱ πολέμοι αὐτοῦς ὄψεσθαι ἔμελλον.

⁴⁴ Pl. *Leg.* 633C; R. Parker, "Spartan Religion," in A. Powell (ed.), *Classical*

polis, in practical terms there was a time for dancing and a time for war.⁴⁵

There is a clear opposition between Ares and his war and Dionysus and his festivals of musical joy. Even though there are metaphorical similarities between armies and choruses, still war and musical education were not connected in any significant way in the institution of drama in fifth-century Athens. The dramatic festivals of Athens were not the same as military drills in Sparta. We find no historical evidence of an educational role besides the general thought that a poet teaches *the audience* how to be a good citizen, not the choreuts how to fight well.

3. *Marching anapaests reconsidered*

Since the dramatic choreuts did not have anything to do with military training of future soldiers, we can question another idea that has been part of the foundation for this view. I will try to show how the notion of marching anapaests has inspired scholars like Winkler, and how the idea itself springs from ancient dogmas about performance, like that of Pollux, even though it lacks any sense of the dramaturgic possibilities of a dramatic chorus. This last claim could be seen as anachronistic, but I will try to show that we, the modern scholars, are anachronistic and dogmatic in our view of the dramatic use of anapaests.

The view of the anapaestic metre as a marching rhythm stems from a couple of short fragments of the so-called *embateria*, marching songs (*PMG* 856, Tyrtaeus?), or *laconica*, ἄγεται ὁ Σπάρτας ἔνοπλοι κούροι / ποτὶ τὰν Ἄρεως κίνασιν (*PMG* 857), and a papyrus fragment that seems to contain three anapaestic catalectic dimetres, εὐρ' ὃ σωτήρ τὰς Σπάρτας / κατὰ πάντα μόλοις μετὰ νίκας / ἰὲ Παιᾶν ἴηε Παιᾶν (*PMG* 859.17–19). Pausanias (4.15.6) tells us that Tyrtaeus himself sang his elegiacs and his anapaestic songs to the Spartans, while Athenaeus (630F) claims that they sang his poems while marching

Sparta: Techniques behind her Success (London 1989) 142–172, at 150; H. T. Wade-Gery, “A Note on the Origin of the Spartan Gymnopaediai,” *CQ* 43 (1949) 79–81.

⁴⁵ Hdt. 7.206, 9.7; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.16.

to war, but also that they contested with his songs after dinner while on campaigns, so that these songs were not in antiquity distinct marching songs. Tyrtaeus could very well have been the originator of longer and perhaps more elaborate songs for the Spartans, used for marching and other social gatherings as well; this would be consistent with Pollux 4.107, where Tyrtaeus is said to have established three choruses of Spartans on the basis of age. Why then has this idea of marching entered the study of *Athenian* theatre?

Eight tragedies have anapaestic parts before the lyrical part of the *parodos*,⁴⁶ and it has become *communis opinio* that this type of entering chorus was “typical.”⁴⁷ In fact, of the thirty-three extant plays, twelve begin their *parodoi* directly with lyrical strophes and thirteen with a lyric sequence between the chorus and the actor(s). Eight plays are not statistically significant enough to let us conjecture that this was the typical entrance for a chorus.

Next we must consider how many of these choruses can be claimed with some confidence to have *moved* along the *eisodos* or around the orchestra while reciting the anapaestic lines. Moving and marching are not identical, however. Perhaps the only real candidate for orderly movement—not marching as we understand it—would be the soldiers in *Ajax*, but there is no textual evidence for this notion. That anapaests had something to do with movement and transition from dialogue to lyrics—mental movement—is probably right, but if the anapaestic metre works so well with movement, for example during announcements of characters by the coryphaeus, why is it interchangeable with iambic, trochaic, and other metres, as in, for example, Eur. *Med.* 1116–1120, Aesch. *Pers.* 246–248, and *PV* 115–127?⁴⁸ Most announcements are in fact short iambic

⁴⁶ Aesch. *Pers.* 1–64, *Supp.* 1–39, *Ag.* 40–103; Soph. *Aj.* 134–171; Eur. *Alc.* 77–85, *Hec.* 98–153, *Bacch.* 64–72, *Rhes.* 1–22.

⁴⁷ So e.g. W. S. Scott, *Musical Design in Sophoclean Theater* (Hanover 1995) 72; cf. I. Torrance, *Aeschylus: Seven against Thebes* (London 2007) 21 (“often”).

⁴⁸ Also noted by S. G. Brown “A Contextual Analysis of the Tragic Meter: The Anapest,” in *Ancient and Modern. Essays in Honor of G. F. Else* (New York 1977) 45–77, at 48.

lines even in Aeschylus, where only three (*Pers.* 150–154, *Sept.* 861–870, *Ag.* 783–809) out of ten announcements are purely anapaestic.

Thus L. P. E. Parker was right in observing that “while recitative anapaests undoubtedly have processional uses and an association with entrances and exits, the term ‘marching anapaests’ (*Märschanapäste*), if used as equivalent to ‘recitative anapaests’, is an exaggeration.”⁴⁹ The description of the anapaestic metre by S. G. Brown within a performance-context is illuminating, but to claim that anapaests can interchange with dactyls and spondees and still declare that the anapaestic metre “lend[s] itself to marching” because these metres require the same amount of time,⁵⁰ presents a greater problem than has been realised. What makes this anapaestic dimetre a better marching rhythm than a dactylic metre? The anapaestic metre has, apparently, a moving feel (one-two, one-two)⁵¹ in which the soldier or choreut lifts his foot at “one” and put it down on “two,” which differentiates it from the dactylic metre (apparently putting down the foot on “one”). This could explain the first line of *Persians* (τᾶδ’ ἔ μὲν Πέρσων), but not of *Suppliant Women* which begins with a dactyl (Ζεῦς μὲν ἄφιτῶρ). Thus the notion that the anapaestic metre “lends itself to marching” is arbitrary, since the one-two rhythm would work just as well with a spondaic rhythm.

If this metre is considered in the performance context, we have to ask how the phenomenon of catalexis fits into the general feeling of movement (one-two, one-two). M. L. West (*Studies* 8) states that a catalectic metre marks a halt in marching, but one wonders how this would have worked both visually and dramatically, and then how the chorus began marching anew on a dactyl after such a halt, as in *Persians* verse 16. Of the catalectic endings or “halts” found in the *parodos* of *Persians*

⁴⁹ *The Songs of Aristophanes* (Oxford 1997) 57.

⁵⁰ Brown, in *Ancient and Modern* 47–48.

⁵¹ Or “double paces” as M. L. West, *Studies in Aeschylus* (Stuttgart 1990) 8, defines it. A. M. Dale, *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama*² (Cambridge 1968) 47: “the tramp of soldiers feet then give us the normal anapaestic tempo—left, right.”

(at 7, 15, 20, 28, 32, 40), the chorus continues their “march” two times on a spondee (29, 33) and four times on a dactyl (8, 16, 21, 41), never with an anapaest. Note that none of the fragmentary Spartan *embateria* shows any signs of this, but all begin after each catalexis with an anapaest (*PGM* 856 is more spondaic) as far as we can see, which is not evidence for its qualities as a marching rhythm but at least shows a more steady rhythm.

In the dramatic metre the cluster of anapaest and dactyl (υυ– –υυ) destroys any rhythmic feeling, e.g. in *Persians* lines 1–2, 6–7, 10, 12, to mention but a few, or vice versa (the rare –υυ υυ–) in line 51.⁵² The chorus of *Ajax* enters in a more steady rhythm than do the Persians, but still we find clusters of unrhythmical anapaest-dactyl in lines 139, 149, 157, 160, 162, 166–167, also in Eur. *Hec.* 126, 132, 135, 137, –υυ υυ– in 145,⁵³ in *Alc.* 83, in *Bacch.* 65, 67, 70, 71, and in *Rhes.* 4, 7. And why is there so great a difference in the length of these passages? Did the Persians walk slower or more times around the orchestra, than the men of *Alcestis*? Thus the choreuts could very well be moving while reciting anapaests, but not as orderly as the marching-idea implies to the modern mind, simply because the dramatic rhythm is ill-suited to continuous, orderly movement.

This idea has influenced the way we look at the plays themselves, because we supposedly know that the Persian elders while reciting their anapaestic lines *had* to march around the orchestra.⁵⁴ But nothing in the texts gives a hint of this: if anything they are just dancing in front of their chairs, as the coryphaeus urges them to sit down after the strophic ode (140–141). We might reasonably suggest that the sailors of Ajax in *Ajax* and of Neoptolemus in *Philoctetes* came into the orchestra in some kind of orderly fashion displaying a sort of warlike attitude, but this is not because of the anapaests (the chorus of *Philoctetes* is standing still while reciting), but because of the

⁵² W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytus* (Oxford 1964) 404.

⁵³ J. Diggle, *Studies on the Text of Euripides* (Oxford 1981) 45.

⁵⁴ E.g. West, *Studies* 8–9; H. D. Broadhead, *The Persae of Aeschylus* (Cambridge 1960) 37; E. Fraenkel, *Aeschylus: Agamemnon II*² (Oxford 1962) 27.

dramatic character of the chorus. The poets choose and use the metres to enhance their plays, not the other way round.⁵⁵ Thus, no poet for the Athenian theatre made his chorus look like soldiers with regard to gestures, position, and walk unless their dramatic character needed it, e.g. when the choreuts had to act out “soldiers.” And as the Athenians did not use marching in their army in any manner comparable to the movement in dramatic performances, we must abandon this concept of marching-anapaest. It is a modern dogma that anapaests equal marching choruses, and equally modern to connect this “marching” with marching armies.

In sum, we should not explain the institution of the dramatic choruses by making the metaphoric militarism of the Greeks concrete. The dances of the choruses at either the Great Dionysia or the Lenaea were a holiday from Ares and his violence, and nothing supports the idea that it was at the same time military training for the future soldiers of Athens. That some choruses did have militaristic symbolism is without question true, but these festivals of Dionysus were, as Pericles said (Thuc. 2.38), τῶν πόνων ἀναπαύλας τῇ γνώμῃ ... ὧν καθ’ ἡμέραν ἢ τέρψις τὸ λυπηρὸν ἐκπλήσσει, “relaxations from toil for the spirit ... whose daily delight drives away sorrow,” and not a venue to display physical endurance as in Sparta (Pl. *Leg.* 633C, δειναὶ καρτερήσεις).⁵⁶

January, 2009

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⁵⁵ They have all their idiosyncratic preferences: e.g. it appears that Aeschylus preferred greater anapaestic parts of anapaestic dimetres than Sophocles and Euripides. See Brown, in *Ancient and Modern* 47, for statistics.

⁵⁶ I would like to thank the anonymous referee of *GRBS*, D. Bloch, D. Jacobson, J. Mejer and T. H. Nielsen for valuable suggestions and criticism.