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‘Greek’ versus ‘Barbarian’ Music: The Self-Definition of Hellenic Identity through the Culture of *Mousikē*

Summary

Ancient Greek sources are full of references to the music of peoples who are not Greek, stereotyped as ‘barbarian.’ Qualifications such as ‘effeminate’ and ‘lascivious’ are often applied to the musical paradigm of the East, especially during and after the Persian crises of the early 5th century BCE. The purpose of this paper is to explore the construction of Hellenic identity through the notion of *mousikē*, mainly by analyzing those literary and iconographic references in which ‘Greek’ and ‘foreign’ elements are presented as opposites, and by trying to interpret them as indicators of cultural and political changes in society.

Keywords: *mousikē*; musicians; instruments; *harmoniai*; ethnic identity; barbarian; hellenization

Altgriechische Quellen sind voll von Verweisen auf die Musik von Völkern, die nicht griechisch sind und deshalb stereotyp als ‚Barbaren‘ bezeichnet werden. Merkmale wie ‚weichlicht‘ und ‚wollüstig‘ werden dabei oft dem musikalischen Paradigma des Ostens zugeschrieben, vor allem während und nach den Perserkriegen des frühen 5. Jahrhunderts v. Chr. Ziel des Beitrags ist, die Konstruktion hellenischer Identität mit dem Begriff der *mousikē* zu untersuchen, wobei in der Hauptsache diejenigen literarischen und ikonographischen Quellen analysiert werden, in welchen ‚griechische‘ und ‚fremde‘ Elemente als Gegensätze dargestellt werden. Sie werden versuchsweise als Kennzeichen kultureller und politischer Veränderungen der Gesellschaft interpretiert.

Keywords: *mousikē*; Musiker; Instrumente; *Harmoniai*; ethnische Identität; Barbaren; Hellenisierung

1 Introduction

The oppositional theme of Greek versus ‘Barbarian’ has recently become a principal subject in Classical scholarship. This has been reinforced since the last century when structural anthropologists began ordering societal ontologies according to binary opposition. This is apropos since the Greeks were fond of such oppositions and, like modern anthropologists, divided the world into ‘us’ versus ‘them’, ‘Greeks’ versus ‘Others’. Hellenism, in fact, is a cultural construct contingent on the need for an oppositional ethnic group (‘Other’) in order to define its boundaries of self. Undoubtedly, Hellenic peoples discovered their common identity as ‘Greeks’ mainly through their confrontation with Persia (their principal ‘Other’), in the decades after the Persian Wars of the early 5th century BCE.

Of course the interaction of Greeks with foreign peoples, whom they termed ‘Barbarians’,¹ predates their conflict with the Persians. Let us recall that Hellas as a whole comprises the Greek communities of the Black Sea, Sicily, Italy and Asia Minor, as well as the Greek mainland and islands; and that through the politics of colonization and commerce – which began at an early date – the Hellenes had occasions to deal with other cultures constantly, even if this interchange became unquestionably more antithetic during and consequent to the Persian War period. Furthermore, Greeks did not just define themselves by contrast with ‘Barbarians’, since their sense of belonging to particular Hellenic subgroups (such as the Dorians and Ionians, to name two) was equally important to the complex construction process of their ethnic identity.² As an additional and complicating element, today there is a broad consensus among scholars that there were already significant Near Eastern influences on Greek civilization, beginning in the earliest stages of Hellenic history, for which evidence is provided in many different fields.³

It is, on the other hand, undeniable that the ‘ideology’ underlying rhetorical representations of Hellenic identity in literary and pictorial sources of the 5th and 4th centuries BCE is strictly tied to the history of political events, to which ideological images of ‘Greekness’ seem to respond in that period, as many scholars have already remarked.⁴

1 The term literally means an incomprehensible language, like (proverbially) that of the swallow, as in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 1050–1052: “Well, if her language is not strange and foreign (βάρβαρον), even as a swallow’s, I must speak within her comprehension and move her to comply” translation Smyth 1926. See also Ion fragment 33 (Snell 1971), handed down by Herodianus (one of the most celebrated grammarians of antiquity particularly interested in linguistic phenomena, hence vouching for the trustworthiness of this quotation), where ὁ χελιδῶν (i. e.

‘the swallow’) metaphorically means ‘barbarian’.

2 Hornblower 2008.

3 As in art or religion: on this see Burkert 1985; Morris 1992; West 1999.

4 From the extensive bibliography on the subject, let us at least recall Hall 1989 (whose title is intentionally echoed in the title of the present paper), who explored the Hellenic construction of the ‘barbarian’ East through the lens of Attic tragedy. For a summary of this scholarly view, offering an alterna-

Within this complicated panorama of associations, the culture of *mousikē* – one of the elements of the Greek social and cultural identity – still remains little explored, but it may yet tell us a lot.⁵

The first element of note is that ancient Greek sources on music are full of concerns regarding the ethnic characterization of its elements. In fact, since the Archaic age musical tunings, rhythms and instruments were often explicitly associated with particular geographical regions. But Greeks were not only acutely aware of the regional diversity of their music and performance influences: they considered music to be extremely important also to their self-identity as Greek, vis-à-vis their comparing it to the music of other civilizations, especially in periods of cultural and political change (like the Persian wars). Qualifications such as ‘womanish’ and ‘lascivious’ seem in fact to have been applied to the musical paradigm of the East more frequently after the Persian threat – especially by the Athenian propagandists, willing to exaggerate, when not overtly rewriting the contribution made by the polis of Athens in defeating the enemy – this in contrast to the austerity of the so-called genuinely ‘Greek’ music prototype. The purpose of this paper will thus be to explore the construction of Hellenic identity through the notion of *mousikē*, mainly by analyzing and contextualizing – socially and historically – those literary and iconographic references in which Greek and foreign (or highly ‘contaminated’) elements are presented as opposites.

1.1 Structural ‘Orientalisms’: the ethnic *harmoniai*

Let us start with the first puzzling element. Among the older attunements or *harmoniai* quoted by ancient Greek poets to indicate the different regional styles traditionally employed by musicians, we find not only ‘Dorian,’ ‘Ionian’ or ‘Aeolian’ *harmoniai* (corresponding to the three main Hellenic sub-groups), but also ‘Phrygian’ and ‘Lydian’ (this latter divided, at times, into three variants: Mixolydian, Tense and Relaxed Lydian). In the 7th century BCE the poet Alcman – active in Sparta, although presumably from Lydia – mentions a Phrygian tune, played on the *aulos*, called *Kerbēsion*,⁶ while in the early 5th century BCE the Boeotian poet Pindar asks his *phorminx* to “weave out music with Lydian *harmonia*”⁷ (a tuning which, according to another Pindaric fragment, had been

tive approach, see Gruen 2011, especially 1–5 and more recently Vlassopoulos 2013.

- 5 On this topic, see Uliერიu-Rostás 2013; Franklin 2015; De Simone 2016 (none of which, however, has been taken into account in the present article since they appeared after its completion).
- 6 Alcman fragment 126 (Page 1962): Φρύγιον αὐλησε μέλος τὸ Κερβήσιον (“On the pipe he played the Ceresbian, a Phrygian melody”). Stesichorus too,

a poet who lived between the 7th and 6th century BCE, refers to a “Phrygian melody” (fragment 35 (Page 1962): Φρύγιον μέλος).

- 7 Pindar, *Nemean* 4.44–45: ἔξῳφαινε, γλυκεῖα, καὶ τὸδ’ αὐτίκα, φόρμιγξ, / Λυδίᾳ σὺν ἄρμονίᾳ μέλος περιλημμένον (“Weave out, sweet *phorminx*, right now, / the beloved song with Lydian *harmonia*”). Although Pindar’s poetic activity may be set for the most part

introduced at the mythical wedding of Niobe).⁸

Now, Lydians and Phrygians are obviously non-Greek ethnic groups and have certainly been viewed as such since antiquity.⁹ Today we know for sure that many elements of Greek culture come from the Anatolian countries of Phrygia and Lydia (neighbouring the Greek colonies in the East). It is thus interesting to note that already ancient sources recorded such influences as foreign arrivals. According to the 4th-century BCE philosopher Heraclides of Pontus, the Phrygian and Lydian *harmoniai* became known to the Greeks from the Phrygians and Lydians who emigrated with Pelops to Peloponnesus.¹⁰ Nevertheless, both the Phrygian and Lydian styles were clearly perceived even then as part of that musical package which formed what modern scholars now call ‘Ancient Greek Music’. Since the Archaic Age these styles were widely known and used by travelling musicians living in a mobile and multicultural society, and they survived as traditional labels for scales and keys classified as such by musical theorists at least from the late 4th century BCE onwards (by which time Greek language and culture had spread throughout the Mediterranean world).¹¹ Evaluations of the ‘appropriateness’ of use of Phrygian and Lydian musical elements to the Greek milieu appear quite inconsistent in the sources, and my opinion is that the terms and their occurrences were manipulated to serve the needs of various political and cultural environments.

A negative evaluation of the Lydian – and, to a lesser degree, of the Ionian – *harmonia*, to take two examples, is basically absent in older literary evidence on music,¹² where the ethnic association is mainly used to indicate musical instruments of Asiatic origin (harps, in most cases, like *trigonoî* and *pēktides*),¹³ without any concern for their ‘unsuit-

after the Persian Wars, nevertheless his neutrality towards this negative view of the East (developed, as I have already pointed out, mainly by Athenian sources) may be explained both through his ‘Pan-hellenic’ activity and through his Theban origin (Thebes being one of the most philo-Persian of the Greek *poleis*).

8 Different sources, quoted in the pseudo-Plutarchean *De musica* (1136c), variously attribute its origin to other legendary musicians, such as the mythical piper Olympus.

9 See the remarks of DeVries 2010.

10 Heraclides Ponticus fragment 114 (Schütrumpf 2008), *apud* Athenaeus, *The Banquet of the Learned* 14.625e–f.

11 Hagel 2009, 4.

12 Pindar, *Nemean* 4.44–45 (quoted in note 6 above); Pindar, *Nemean* 8.15: φέρων / Λυδῖαν μίτραν καναχιθὰ πεποικιλμέναν, “bringing / a Lydian crown embroidered with song” – although the ethnic label here refers to the headband called *mitra*, this

latter is said to be “embroidered with song”; Pindar, *Olympian* 14.17–18: Λυδῶ γὰρ Ἀσώπιχον ἐν τρώφῳ / ἐν μελέταις τ’ αἰείδων ἔμολλον, “for I have come to sing of Asopichus / in Lydian melodies and chosen phrases”.

13 Pindar, *Olympian* 5.19: ἔρχομαι Λυδίοις ἀπύων ἐν αὐλοῖς, “I come as your suppliant, singing to the sound of Lydian pipes”; Pindar fragment 125 (Maehler 1971; Snell and Maehler 1975): ἐν δείπνοισι Λυδῶν / ψαλμὸν ἀντίφθογγον ὑψηλᾶς ἀκούων πακτίδος, “when hearing at Lydian banquets / the octave-answering strum of the lofty harp”; Sophocles fragment 412 (Radt 1977): πολλὸς δὲ Φρύξ τρίγωνος ἀντίσπαστά τε / Λυδῆς ἐφουμνεῖ πηκτίδος συγχορδία, “the Phrygian *trigónos* sounds aloud, and the concord of the Lydian *pēktis* sings to it in answer”; Ion fragment 22 (Snell 1971): ἀλλ’ εἶα, Λυδαὶ ψάλτρια, παλαιθέτων / ὕμνων ἀοιδοί, τὸν ξένον κοσμήσατε, “now you, Lydian harpists, singers of ancient songs, adorn the guest”.

ability’ in an Hellenic context. The reputation of Lydian musical style for ‘softness’ (perceived as potentially dangerous, considering the great ‘psychagogic’ power which was attributed to music in antiquity)¹⁴ seems to coincide with the diffusion of an unfriendly attitude towards the Ionian-Lydian customs conspicuously introduced into Athens after the creation of the Delian League.¹⁵ This reputation ascribed to Lydian music is, for instance, indicated in a fragment of the Athenian comic poet Cratinus (whose poetic activity ceased by 421/420 BCE), where a *didaskalos* of tragic choruses – a certain Gnesippus, son of Cleomachus – is mocked because “he has a chorus of women who pluck out their hair playing indecent Lydian melodies.”¹⁶ Let us further consider the polarization of Lydian and Dorian music style (“the Lydian tune, rival of the Dorian muse”) in some fragmentary verses of the dithyrambographer Telestes of Selinus – active between the 5th and 4th centuries BCE – though here the context is clearly favourable to the *aulos* and its eastern, Lydian and Phrygian, connections.¹⁷ In musical imagery of the late 5th to 4th century BCE (especially identifiable, one must emphasize, in more censorious literary sources such as comic poetry or philosophical writings), Lydia became connected most of all with the acoustics of the orientalizing symposium, hence subject to negative stereotypes. In the *Republic* (around 380 BCE), Plato labels the Lydian – together with the Ionian – *harmoniai* as “soft (*malakai*) and suitable for drinking parties (*sympotikai*)”, as well as “relaxed” (*chalarai*).¹⁸

The Ionian *harmonia*, though linked with one of the two main ethnic sub-divisions according to which ancient Greeks categorized themselves, was itself gradually involved in this process of ideological ‘contamination’ by oriental influences (attributed, in particular, to some Ionian colonies of the Western coasts of Anatolia, such as Miletus). In a manifestly prejudiced passage on musical *harmoniai* quoted by Athenaeus, Heraclides of Pontus contends that there are only three genuine scales, the Dorian, the Ionian and the Aeolian, corresponding to the three Greek ethnic groups, whereas all others are alien

14 Psychagogic literally means ‘leading’ or ‘persuading souls’: in fact, according to a belief widespread among Greeks, music could influence the character (*ēthos*) of those who heard it.

15 The Delian League was founded in 477 BCE as a military alliance of Greek city-states, under the leadership of Athens, with the purpose of fighting the Persian empire, but it soon became an Athenian political instrument used to exert that city’s supremacy over the other members.

16 Cratinus fragment 276 (Kassel and Austin 1983): ὁ Κλεομάχου διδάσκαλος, / παρατιλτρῶν ἔχων χορὸν / λυδιστί τιλλουσῶν μέλη / πονηρά. For a different interpretation of the passage, which locates

Gnesippus’ chorus within the symposium, see Jennings and Katsaros 2007, 196.

17 Telestes fragment 806 (Page 1962): “Of the Phrygian king of the sacred beautiful-breathing *auloi*, who was the first one to fit together the Lydian tune, rival of the Dorian muse, weaving together the well-winged wind of the breath to the reeds of changing form”, translation Leven 2010, 38.

18 Plato, *Republic* 398e: Τίνας οὖν μαλακαί τε καὶ συμποτικάι τῶν ἁρμονιῶν; Ἰαστί, ἢ δ’ ὅς, καὶ λυδιστί αὐτίνας χαλαραὶ καλοῦνται (“What, then, are the soft and convivial modes? There are certain Ionian and also Lydian modes that are called lax”, translation Shorey 1969, 247).

to the true Hellenic tradition.¹⁹ Trying to provide each of these musical structures with an historical and social background, Heraclides picks out a kind of ‘degeneration’ of the Ionian mode, due to the fact that “the great majority of the Ionians have been contaminated (*ēlloiōtai*) through adaptation to the various barbarians who ruled them”. He continues: “the Ionian kind of mode is neither exuberant nor merry, but is harsh and hard, having a weight that is not without nobility. Hence this mode is also agreeable to tragedy. But the characters of present-day Ionians are much more dainty, and the character of the mode is different.”²⁰ Between the 5th and the 4th century BCE, we indeed find growing evidence for the proverbial association of Ionic musical style with ‘softness’: the famous mid-5th-century citharode, Phrynis, is called *īōnokampṭēs* by his rivals (literally, “one who sings with soft Ionic modulation”),²¹ while in 390 BCE the comic poet Aristophanes describes saucy songs sung by prostitutes as Ionic (“Oh, Muses, alight upon my lips, inspire me with some soft Ionian love-song!”²²).

Moreover, in the course of the 5th century BCE, especially in the period of maximum tension between the leading Dorian state, Sparta,²³ and the leading Ionian state, Athens (tension that will lead, in the second part of the century, to the Peloponnesian War),²⁴ Ionians and Dorians started to be sharply polarized. Dorian people – and, accordingly, their music – were depicted, especially in Dorically oriented sources, as vigor-

19 Heraclides Ponticus fragment 114 (Schütrumpf 2008), *apud* Athenaeus, *The Banquet of the Learned* 14.624c–625f: ἀρμονίας γὰρ εἶναι τρεῖς· τρία γὰρ καὶ γενέσθαι Ἑλλήνων γένη, Δωριεῖς, Αἰολεῖς, Ἴωνας. [...] τρεῖς οὖν αὐταί, καθάπερ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἶπομεν εἶναι ἀρμονίας, ὅσα καὶ τὰ ἔθνη. τὴν δὲ Φρυγιστὶ καὶ τὴν Λυδιστὶ παρὰ τῶν βαρβάρων οὕσας γνωσθῆναι τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν ἀπὸ τῶν σὺν Πέλοπι κατελθόντων εἰς τὴν Πελοπόννησον Φρυγῶν καὶ Λυδῶν (“For there are three modes, since there are also three races of Hellenes: the Dorians, the Aeolians, the Ionians [...]. So the modes are three in number, just as in the beginning we said that they are, the same number as even the races. The Phrygian and Lydian modes, which originated with the barbarians, became known to the Greeks from the Phrygians and Lydians who had returned to the Peloponnesus with Pelops”, translation Stork/van Ophuijsen/Prince, in: Schütrumpf 2008, 106). For a comment on this fragment, see Barker 2009.

20 Heraclides Ponticus fragment 114 (Schütrumpf

2008), *apud* Athenaeus, *The Banquet of the Learned* 14.624d–625c (translation Stork/van Ophuijsen/Prince, in: Schütrumpf 2008, 106): Ἴωνων δὲ τὸ πολὺ πλῆθος ἠλλοιώται διὰ τὸ συμπεριφέρεσθαι τοῖς αἰεὶ δυναστεύουσιν αὐτοῖς τῶν βαρβάρων. [...] διόπερ οὐδὲ τὸ τῆς Ἰαστὶ γένος ἀρμονίας οὐτ’ ἀνθηρὸν οὔτε ἰλαρὸν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ αὐστηρὸν καὶ σκληρὸν, ὄγκον δ’ ἔχον οὐκ ἀγεννή· διὸ καὶ τῆ τραγῳδίᾳ προσφιλέης ἡ ἀρμονία. τὰ δὲ τῶν νῦν Ἴωνων ἦθη τραφερώτερα καὶ πολὺ παραλλάττον τὸ τῆς ἀρμονίας ἦθος.

21 Plutarch, *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively* 539c.

22 Aristophanes, *The Assembly Women* 882–883 (translation O’Neill 1938): Μοῦσαι, δεῦρ’ ἔτ’ ἐπὶ τοῦμὸν στόμα, / μελύδριον εὐρούσαι τι τῶν Ἴωνικῶν.

23 Together with Sparta’s allies Corinth and Megara, whose conflict with Athens had more tangible causes, mostly economic.

24 The Peloponnesian War (431 to 404 BCE) was a war fought by Athens and its allies against the Peloponnesian League led by Sparta.

ous, strong and manly (see Plato, *Republic* 399a–b²⁵ or Aristotle, *Politics* 1342b²⁶), most often in opposition to Ionians who are described as weak, effeminate and associated with luxury and with Asia Minor.²⁷ In the *Laches*, Plato (who felt a particular attraction to Dorian customs and politics) portrays the Dorian as “the only true Greek *harmonia*”²⁸ while, according to the already mentioned Heraclides, “the Dorian mode exhibits manliness (*to andrōdes*) and magnificence (*to megaloprepes*), and this is not relaxed or merry, but sullen and intense, and neither varied nor complex”²⁹ (in Greek perception, all of these being distinctive features of oriental music).

In the 4th century BCE, the ideologically ‘pure Greekness’ of Dorian music even led to the emergence of the mutual exclusiveness of Dorian and Phrygian modes, the latter perceived as the ‘Asiatic’ mode par excellence.³⁰ According to Aristotle, no one could possibly compose a dithyramb in the Dorian scale: in the *Politics* he reports that, although Philoxenus attempted to do this with Mysians, he “was unable to do so, but merely by the force of nature fell back again into the suitable harmony, the Phrygian.”³¹ Actually, historic evidence tells us another story: an epigram recording a dithyrambic victory at the Athenian Dionysia, probably from the first half of the 5th century, refers to the piper as having nursed the song “in Dorian *auloi*” (that is, instruments on which Dorian scales could be played).³² Hence Aristotle’s concerns could perhaps have been influenced by non-historical reasons, as seems to be later confirmed by his pupil Aristoxenus. According to the latter, the Platonic rejection of Ionian and Lydian *harmoniai*, and preference for the Dorian, had nothing to do with their actual usage in antiquity. Plato

25 “I don’t know the musical modes, I said, but leave us that mode [i. e. the Dorian] that would fittingly imitate the utterances and the accents of a brave man who is engaged in warfare or in any enforced business, and who, when he has failed, either meeting wounds or death or having fallen into some other mishap, in all these conditions confronts fortune with steadfast endurance and repels her strokes [...]”, translation Shorey 1969, 248.

26 “And all agree that the Dorian mode is more sedate and of a specially manly (*ἀνδρεῖον*) character”, translation Rackham 1944.

27 The Ionians, on the contrary, despised the Dorians as invaders and newcomers: see the myth of the so-called ‘Return of Herakleidaí’, an event known to modern scholars as the Dorian Invasion (cf. Zacharia 2008, esp. 27–29).

28 Plato, *Laches* 188d: δωριστί [...] ἤπερ μόνη Ἑλληνικὴ ἐστὶν ἀρμονία.

29 Heraclides Ponticus fragment 114 (Schütrumpf 2008), *apud* Athenaeus *The Banquet of the Learned* 14.624e. At the beginning of the 5th century Pindar too, in a fragmentary Paean, acclaimed the Dorian

as “the most dignified kind of melody” (fragment 67: Maehler 1971; Snell and Maehler 1975: Δωριον μέλος σεμνότερόν ἐστιν), though without any ethnic implication or contra-position with other music styles. In addition see also Pratinas’ opposition of New Music to ‘Dorian dance-song’ (*τὰν ἐμὴν Δωριον χορείαν*) in fragment 708 (Page 1962).

30 On this, see the useful remarks by Csapo 2004, esp. 233–234 (on which I am relying here). As a further piece of evidence on the opposition between the characters of the Dorian and Phrygian scales, we should consider the famous episode of the Tauronian man (variously attributed to Pythagoras or Damon) who, excited by a Phrygian song, was calmed simply by changing the *aulos* melody from Phrygian to Dorian (lit. “through the spondaic song of a piper”; cf. Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life* 112).

31 Aristotle, *Politics* 1342b (translation Rackham 1944): Φιλόξενος [...] οὐχ οἷός τ’ ἦν, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ τῆς φύσεως αὐτῆς ἐξέπεσεν εἰς τὴν φρυγιστὶ τὴν προσήκουσαν ἀρμονίαν πάλιν.

32 *Anthologia Graeca* 13.28.5–8.

– he says – was well aware that early tragedy had employed Lydian and Ionian *harmoniai*,³³ and that the Dorian mode had been used also for girls' choruses, tragic laments and love songs,³⁴ but “the reason he preferred Dorian was rather because of its high degree of dignified nobility.”³⁵

Growing evidence for an ethnic (and, consequently, ethnic) characterization of the *harmoniai*³⁶ and their manipulation in order to express increasing Greek xenophobia and chauvinism seem, then, to go hand in hand with the history of events occurring during the Classical period: an intricate chain of actions – from the first Panhellenic alliance against Persia to the later internal strife among Greek city-states – which were undoubtedly crucial to the construction of Hellenic identity and which are clearly reflected in contemporary music culture.

1.2 Mythical ‘Orientalisms’: Marsyas and Thamyris

A further indication of this ideological process may be seen also at a mythical level. As a matter of fact, Greek poets engaged in a constant process of retelling and revising their musical past, to suit the requirements of each age and context. A clear example is identifiable in two correlated myths which enjoyed great popularity in the Classical period, above all in Athens: the invention (and rejection) of the *aulos* by the goddess Athena and the instrument's consequent adoption by the satyr Marsyas, who then challenged the god Apollo to a music contest.

According to the myth narrated by Pindar around 490 BCE, Athena discovered the *aulos* and the art of *aulos*-playing (the *aulētikē*) while imitating the Gorgons' lament for the death of Medusa.³⁷ But then – according to Melanippides, a dithyrambic composer whose poetic activity is placed between about 440 and 415 – the goddess, seeing in the reflection in the water that her face was deformed, threw the instrument away.³⁸ So

33 Cf. also Heraclides Ponticus fragment 114 (Schütrumpf 2008), quoted above: “Hence this mode [i. e. the Ionian] is also agreeable to tragedy.”

34 Such a piece of evidence seems to confirm that the statement reported by Pseudo-Plutarch in another passage of his dialogue, according to which “in the time of Polymnestus and Sacadas there were three *tonoi* (i. e. *harmoniai*), Dorian, Phrygian and Lydian” (Plutarch, *On music* 1134a–b), could well belong to the same Aristoxenian tradition (Barker 1984, 213, no. 62).

35 Aristoxenus fragment 82 (Wehrli 1967), *apud* Pseudo-Plutarch, *On music* 1137a (translation Barker 1984): Πλάτων [...] πολὺ τὸ σεμνὸν ἐστὶν ἐν τῇ Δωριστί, ταύτην προὔτιμησεν.

36 It is worth noting that the literary evidence for eth-

nic adjectives related to *harmoniai* were, surprisingly, less frequent in the 7th and 6th centuries BCE than later on.

37 Pindar, *Pythian* 12.

38 Melanippides fragment 758 (Page 1962). That this story comes from outside Greece seems to be implied in a fragmentary poem by Telestes (titled *Argo*), which Athenaeus quotes in *The Banquet of the Learned* (14.616f–617a) as a response to Melanippides' fragment: “That the clever one took the clever instrument in the mountain thickets, I cannot fancy in my mind – that divine Athena, fearing the shameful sight unpleasant to see, immediately threw it away from her hands to be the *kleos* (i. e. ‘fame’) of the hand-clapping nymph-born beast Marsyas! No,

Marsyas, a satyr from Phrygia, a land associated with Dionysus, picked up the *aulos* and played it. The earliest references to the myth in the visual arts are Myron's statue, mentioned later by Pausanias as having been placed on the Acropolis (maybe as a dedication made after the victory of Melanippides' dithyramb at the Panathenaia),³⁹ and a series of Attic vases from the second half of the 5th century, which reproduce essentially the same scene.⁴⁰

This story has been seen by modern scholars as an attempt to reconcile two contradictory versions of the wind instrument's invention: a Theban one, which placed it in Thebes and by Athena, the other seeing it as a non-Greek creation, coming from Phrygia. Both these 'ethnicizations' of the instrument may have partially contributed to (or, on the contrary, been influenced by) ambivalent, if not actually negative, evaluations of the *aulos* in late 5th-century Athens. In particular, the Theban connotation of the *aulos* was probably perceived as negative because of the difficult relationship between Athens and Thebes during the first years of the Peloponnesian Wars.⁴¹ A scene from Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, staged in 425 BCE, where in the market-place the character Dikaiopolis meets a Boeotian surrounded by a swarm of ethnically-stereotyping *aulētai*, is emblematic: most of the players active in Athens at that time came from the great 'Theban school.'⁴² The association with Phrygia, instead, could have cast a shadow on the *aulos* because of the already mentioned Asiatic stereotype, which involved music too. Therefore, as other scholars have rightly noticed, even if through this myth the wind instrument had been incorporated into the world of the Athenian mythic-religious collective imagination, that incorporation is nevertheless presented as "an act of transgression."⁴³

The debate over the value of *aulos*-playing and of Phrygian music used for education is well represented by another musical myth related to Marsyas, his contest with the god Apollo. The earliest reference to the story is in Herodotus, who explicitly ascribes it to

why would a keen love for lovely beauty distress her, to whom childless and husbandless virginity was the lot decided by Clotho? But this is a tale unsuitable for the chorus that has idly flown to Greece"; translation Leven 2010, 37.

- 39 Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 1.24.1. On the hypothesis that the sculpture could have been a commemorative monument placed on the Acropolis for the victory of Melanippides' dithyramb, see Wilson 1999, 63, with relative bibliography.
- 40 Translation Henderson 1998, 166–167 s.v. 'Marsyas.'
- 41 Let us remember that Boeotia defeated Athens at the battle of Delium in 424 BCE. Furthermore, in Athenian sources this connotation could have been

negatively influenced also by Thebes' sympathy for the Medes during the Persian Wars.

- 42 Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 860–863: "Ἴττω Ἡρακλῆς ἔκαμιόν γα τὰν τύλαν κακῶς / Κατάθου τὸ τὰν γλάχων' ἀτρέμας, Ἴσμενία· / ἕμῃς δ', ὅσοι Θείβαν ἀλείται πάρα, / τοῖς ὀστίνοις φυσεῖτε τὸν πρωκτὸν κυνός ("Heracles bear witness, my shoulder's damned weary. Put the pennyroyal down easy, Ismenias. And all you pipers who are here with me from Thebes, puff on those bones to the tune of 'The Dog's Arsehole!"; translation Henderson 1998, 166–167). On this scene, see now Moore 2017.
- 43 Wilson 1999, 59.

the Phrygians.⁴⁴ Marsyas was so pleased with his *aulos*-playing that he challenged the god to a musical competition, pitching his instrumental performance on the *aulos* against Apollo's singing to the *kithara*. The Muses judged the contest and declared Apollo the winner: as a result, the satyr was flayed and his skin hung up in a temple in Celaenae, a Phrygian town in south-western Asia Minor.

The popularity of this subject in Classical art and literature may be explained in various ways, but it certainly reflects also an ideological antithesis: it pitches Apollo (described as the quintessential 'Greek' god) against Marsyas (a *daimōn*, half human and half beast, coming from a 'foreign' land like Phrygia), suggesting in turn the superiority of singing to the accompaniment of the quintessentially Greek lyre over instrumental performances on the Asiatic *aulos*. The strategic and intentional opposition of 'Greek' and 'Asiatic' music elements, already pointed out in connexion with the *harmoniai*, finds then a clear echo in Athenian mythical tales related to music.

Other myths, on the contrary, show how the 'foreign' music stereotype could also (at least apparently) exert a particular fascination for the Hellenes. Thrace, the region north of Thessaly, was particularly associated with music. According to Strabo, music had its origin there and Thracians (that is to say 'barbarians', as Thracian people are described by both Herodotus and Thucydides⁴⁵) included two of the most famous mythical musicians, Orpheus and Thamyris. Both of these were especially popular in Athens during the 5th and 4th centuries BCE.

Nevertheless, if we analyze the development of these myths by Greek poets and artists of such periods, we realize that the evidence actually shows an attempt at 'mitigation', or even 'Hellenization' of the most peculiarly exotic attributes associated with these characters.

Let us start with Orpheus.⁴⁶ In visual imagery of the mid-5th century BCE, the most frequently depicted episodes related to this legendary singer are two: one in which he charms the Thracian men with his music, and the other in which he meets his violent death at the hands of the Thracian women. In both cases Orpheus is quite often

44 Herodotus, *Histories* 7.26.3: "When they had crossed the river Halys and entered Phrygia, they marched through that country to Celaenae, where rises the source of the river Maeander and of another river no smaller, which is called Cataractes; it rises right in the market-place of Celaenae and issues into the Maeander. The skin of Marsyas the Silenus also hangs there; *the Phrygian story tells that it was flayed off him and hung up by Apollo*," translation Godley 1922, 341; the Italics are mine. See also Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.2.8: "There is likewise a palace of the Great King in Celaenae, strongly fortified and situated at the foot of the Acropolis over the sources of

the Marsyas river; the Marsyas also flows through the city, and empties into the Maeander, and its width is twenty-five feet. It was here, according to the story, that Apollo flayed Marsyas, after having defeated him in a contest of musical skill; he hung up his skin in the cave from which the sources issue, and it is for this reason that the river is called Marsyas", translation Brownson 1922.

45 Herodotus, *Histories* 2.167; Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.97 and 4.109.

46 Tsifakis 2000; Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, s. v. 'Orpheus'.

represented as looking 'Greek' (as also Pausanias points out, talking about the famous wall-paintings by Polygnotos in the Hall of the Cnidians at Delphi⁴⁷), with a kind of Apollinean attitude, in opposition to the Dionysiac 'wildness,' or even violence, of Thracian men or women. In the same vein, Aeschylus' lost play *Bassarides* seems to have contrasted the calming music of Orpheus, disciple of Apollo, with the frenzy of the songs of Dionysus' Thracian Bacchants.⁴⁸ Hence, the ambiguity of such a character and of his attributes (i. e. his 'magic' power to charm all living things with his music) was clearly mitigated by setting him in opposition to proverbial 'barbarian' savageness and to the cruelty of typical Thracian characters, though a complete conversion of the singer into a 'Greek' hero was never completed.⁴⁹

Most indicative of all is the case of Thamyris. Born in the region of the Thracian Odrysians, this kitharode was punished (that is, blinded and/or deprived of his musical skills) by the Muses for believing that he could defeat them in a musical contest. The first piece of evidence of his 'Hellenization'⁵⁰ may be found in the pseudo-Euripidean *Rhesus* (4th century BCE), a drama where, for the first time, the musician is said to be a son of the poet Philammon, who was in turn son of the god Apollo. But most probably the same fatherhood had already been assigned to him by Sophocles in the homonym tragedy, staged around 460 BCE.⁵¹ This parental specification seems to have been the first step in a gradual transformation that his character underwent in literary and iconographic sources of the 5th century BCE: from his representation as a barbarian⁵² rightly punished for his insolence towards divinities, to his representation as a skilled singer and player

47 Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 10.30.6 (describing Polygnotus' wall paintings in Delphi, see no. 52): "Turning our gaze again to the lower part of the picture we see, next after Patroclus, Orpheus sitting on what seems to be a sort of hill; he grasps with his left hand a *kithara*, and with his right he touches a willow. It is the branches that he touches, and he is leaning against the tree. The grove seems to be that of Persephone, where grow, as Homer thought, black poplars and willows. The appearance of Orpheus is Greek, and neither his garb nor his headgear is Thracian", translation Jones and Ormerod 1935, 545.

48 The topic of Orpheus' violent death is first attested in Aeschylus' *Bassarides*, fragment 23–25 (Radt 1985): see West 1983; Hall 1989, 130.

49 After this parenthesis of the 5th century BCE, Orpheus will always be depicted with oriental clothes and attributes (Thracian or even Phrygian).

50 As other scholars have already pointed out (Bélis 2001, 34; Meriani 2007, 46). However we should note how, in the 5th century BCE, 'Greek' heroic

and divine ancestors were identified also within the Persian environment; see Herodotus, *Histories* 7.61.3: "When Perseus son of Danae and Zeus had come to Cepheus son of Belus and married his daughter Andromeda, a son was born to him whom he called Perses, and he left him there; for Cepheus had no male offspring; it was from this Perses that the Persians took their name", translation Godley 1922, 377.

51 See the *scholion* to *Rhesus* 916: τὸν Θάμ<υριν> λέγει [i. e. Euripides] Φιλάμμονος γεγενῆσθαι παῖδα, <καθὰ>περ καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ("Euripides, as well as Sophocles, says that Thamyris was son of Philammon").

52 In Polygnotus' wall paintings for a building called 'Lesche' (a kind of recreation hall dedicated to the Cnidians in Delphi, of which we are informed by Pausanias), Thamyris "has lost the sight of his eyes; his attitude is one of utter dejection; his hair and beard are long; at his feet lies thrown a lyre with its horns and strings broken" (Pausanias, *Guide to Greece* 10.30.8, translation Jones and Ormerod 1935, 545).

who no longer wears Thracian clothes but is instead dressed as a professional musician ready to step up to the podium and play a definitively Greek instrument (i. e. no longer the stringed instrument of unusual shape most commonly depicted on earlier Attic vase-paintings, called “Thracian *kithara*” by modern scholars). He does so in front of the same Muses responsible for his original punishment. This is the scene we may observe on the Polion *krater* from Spina, dated around 420–410 BCE.⁵³ If in the anti-Thracian atmosphere of mid-5th-century Athens (caused by the unfortunate Thracian expedition of the Athenian statesman and general Cimon, which culminated in defeat at Drabescos) Thamyris had been represented – by Sophocles and Polygnotus – as a ‘barbarian’ rightly castigated for his *hybris*, i. e. ‘hubris,’ ‘insolence’ (a depiction that Athenian theatrical audiences of that period would certainly have appreciated), in later decades the mythical musician could have been more easily assimilated into the Athenian cultural system, softening his most oppositional features of ‘Otherness’.

2 Conclusions

As we have seen from these scattered examples, the oppositional theme of ‘Greek’ versus ‘Barbarian’ music – fictionally created only after the Persian Wars – could have been developed in many different ways by writers and artists of the time, being directly affected by contemporary events and by related ideologies.⁵⁴

The Greek attitude towards the music of Others was in origin essentially neutral: since the Archaic age, ancient musicians had travelled all over the Mediterranean and, meeting other music cultures, had easily assimilated their musical idioms, attributing to them ethnic labels without any implied prejudice.

In the early fifth century BCE, however, violent encounters with the Persians influenced the cultural construction of the Hellenic musical idiom, ideologically shaped in opposition to a stereotyped representation of the foreign element. The Athenian ban against Oriental music and poetry, which were perceived as dangers to the social, religious and political order, reveals a desire to control the musical habits of the *polis*, habits which were deeply rooted in the social and religious system of the time. Plato,

53 For these remarks, see especially Menichetti 2007. *Contra Sarti* 2012, 223.

54 During the 5th century BCE, the word ‘Barbarian’ is most often explicitly applied to music in exotic tragic contexts, as in Euripides, *Iphigenia in Tauris* 179–185 (where the Chorus says that he will sing for Iphigenia responsive songs and “a barbarian cry of Asian hymns”) and Euripides, *Orestes* 1381 *pas-*

sim (that is, the famous solo song of the Phrygian slave, full of references to “Asiatic” and “barbarian” voices). In the second half of the 4th century BCE, Aristoxenus (fragment 124, Wehrli 1967) will talk about the “barbarization” of contemporary theatrical music (τὰ θεάτρα ἐκβεβαρβάρωται), confirming the negative meaning assumed by the term at this time, though without any explicit ethnic reference.

in the *Republic*, points out how the musical styles of any Greek city were strictly interrelated with its political and social system, even depending upon them: "For the musical styles are never disturbed without unsettling the most fundamental political and social conventions, as Damon affirms and as I am convinced"⁵⁵

The suggestion that, in times of changing social and political condition, public musical tastes might be subject to discernible change, which was the starting point for this conference, seems not only self-evident in ancient Greek culture but also achieves political expression in the work of ancient Greek writers. We may question the scientific basis on which musical knowledge came to be applied to political matters, as Stefan Hagel argues persuasively elsewhere in this volume; but it cannot be doubted that musical experience and political developments did indeed combine to shape public attitudes to political identity and to Otherness; and at the very least the sources confirm the increasing importance that attached to *mousikē* in Greek political thought.

55 Plato, *Republic* 424c. Translation Shorey 1969, slightly modified. Damon is supposed to have been

a 5th-century musicologist, credited as teacher and advisor of the Athenian statesman Pericles.

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