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A Heavenly Chorus: The Dramatic Function of Revelation's Hymns

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This study considers the extent to which Revelation's hymns bear formal and functional similarities with choral lyrics of ancient tragedy. The notion that Revelation's hymns can be considered in terms of ancient tragic choral lyrics is not a novel one. In fact, the dramatic function of Revelation's hymns in this regard has been widely acknowledged, most often with a variation of the claim that the hymns function as did Classical tragic choral lyrics insofar as they "comment upon" or "interpret" the surrounding narrative. The claim has attained near axiomatic status, despite the fact that neither a comprehensive study, nor even a single article, has ever been devoted to it.

The value of such a claim is minimal, as it simply does not go very far in explaining the function of Revelation's hymns, and immediately begs questions of the precisely ways in which Revelation's hymns comment upon and/or interpret the surrounding plot. Not surprisingly, the premise for such a claim, that tragic choruses function to comment upon and/or interpret the surrounding dramatic dialogue, is problematic. Such a premise not only fails to reflect the breadth and depth of choral functions in tragedy, but in many cases actually mischaracterizes the functions of choral lyrics.

This study thus aims to advance this line of inquiry by offering a comprehensive analysis of the forms and functions of ancient tragic choruses throughout the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, with the purpose of providing a comprehensive framework within which to evaluate Revelation's hymns in dramatic terms. By revealing the varieties and complexities of the forms and functions of ancient tragic choruses, I demonstrate that Revelation's hymns are not best evaluated in terms of choral lyrics generally, but in terms of dramatic hymns specifically. That is, the hymns in Revelation do not exhibit the wide variety of functions as reflected in tragic choral lyrics; rather, they replicate the functions of ancient tragic hymns insofar as they constitute mythological-theological reflections on the surrounding narrative, and function to situate the surrounding dramatic activity in a particular mythological-theological context.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study of Revelation's Hymns

I. Introduction

At several points throughout the book of Revelation, heavenly creatures sing songs of praise to God and the Lamb. These songs, which can be identified as *hymns* on account of their formal and functional characteristics, have been evaluated extensively in terms of their similarities with hymns in antecedent literature, affinities with early Jewish and Christian liturgical forms, and their theological and Christological value in Revelation.

This study considers the extent to which Revelation's hymns bear formal and functional similarities with choral lyrics of ancient tragedy. The notion that Revelation's hymns can be considered in terms of ancient tragic choral lyrics is not a novel one. In fact, the dramatic function of Revelation's hymns in this regard has been widely acknowledged, most often with a variation of the claim that the hymns function as did Classical tragic choral lyrics insofar as they "comment upon" or "interpret" the surrounding narrative. The claim has attained near axiomatic status, despite the fact that neither a comprehensive study, nor even a single article, has ever been devoted to it.

The value of such a claim is minimal, as it simply does not go very far in explaining the function of Revelation's hymns, and immediately begs questions of the precise ways in which Revelation's hymns comment upon and/or interpret the surrounding plot. Not surprisingly, the premise for such a claim, that tragic choruses function to comment upon and/or interpret the surrounding dramatic dialogue, is problematic. Such a premise not only fails to reflect the breadth and depth of choral functions in tragedy, but in many cases actually mischaracterizes the functions of choral lyrics.

This study thus aims to advance this line of inquiry by offering a comprehensive analysis

of the forms and functions of ancient tragic choruses throughout the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods, with the purpose of providing a comprehensive framework within which to evaluate Revelation's hymns in dramatic terms. By revealing the varieties and complexities of the forms and functions of ancient tragic choruses, I demonstrate that Revelation's hymns are not best evaluated in terms of choral lyrics generally, but in terms of dramatic hymns specifically. That is, the hymns in Revelation do not exhibit the wide variety of functions as reflected in tragic choral lyrics; rather, they replicate the functions of ancient tragic hymns insofar as they constitute mythological-theological reflections on the surrounding narrative, and function to situate the surrounding dramatic activity in a particular mythological-theological context.

II. The History of Scholarship on Revelation's Hymns

The hymns have not always been thought to constitute a vital part of the rhetorical, theological, or narrative agenda of the Apocalypse. To the contrary, they have often been considered mere interruptions between the vision sequences, which are themselves thought to contain the essential narrative, theological, and Christological kernels. The subordination of the hymns to other elements of Revelation is sometimes made explicit, as when they are labeled "interludes" or "interruptions", designations which presume that the hymns represent something peripheral or tangential to the vision sequences, which constitute the essential material.¹ Just as often the hymns' subordinate role is tacitly assumed, as they are given minimal attention relative to other elements in the text, or ignored altogether.²

¹ E.g., J. Roloff, *The Revelation of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 13; David Carnegie, who considers the hymns "ancillary" to the visions. Carnegie, "Worthy is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation," in H.H. Rowdon (ed.) *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 248; Leonard L. Thompson has worked to combat this characterization. Leonard L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation: Apocalypse and Empire* (Oxford: University Press, 1990), 53-63.

² For instance, in Beasley-Murray's commentary, the hymns in chapters 4-5 receive only the scantest attention relative to treatment of other events in the throne-room scene, which he considers to be the theological and narrative "fulcrum" of Revelation. His neglect of the hymns (other than a couple of minimal comments as to their possible

That Revelation's hymns have suffered scholarly neglect is reflected in the fact that many general studies of hymnic material in the NT offer only minimal consideration of the hymns in Revelation. So, for instance, in his otherwise inclusive summary of the content and style of New Testament hymns, Gloer makes only a passing reference to the fact that there may be "fragments" of early Christian hymns in Revelation, and says nothing about them in terms of their style and content, or their similarity (or dissimilarity) to other NT hymns.³ Likewise, in his otherwise comprehensive analysis of the forms and functions of New Testament hymns, Deichgräber pays scant attention to Revelation's hymns.⁴ Even more egregious are those studies of NT hymns in which the hymns in Revelation are neglected entirely, as is the case with Karris' brief survey of NT hymns,⁵ Jack Sanders' monograph on early Christian hymns,⁶ and Edgar Krentz's study of New Testament hymns in light of hymnic antecedents in Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman world.⁷

Thus, in the history of scholarship, the hymns of Revelation have suffered from neglect relative to other portions of the Apocalypse, and in relation to analogous hymnic material in the New Testament. Still, some have recognized that the hymns constitute an essential feature of individual units of Revelation, and of the work as a whole. Scholarship on the hymns may be

sources) reveals his presumption that the hymns do not contribute substantively to the work as a whole. G.R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1974). Such neglect is not unprecedented in the history of scholarship on the Apocalypse. E.g., in his commentary, Eugene Boring fails to say a single thing about several of the hymns. E. Boring, *Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989). Cf. the sparse treatment of the hymns in J. Massyngbaerde Ford, *Revelation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975); John M. Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: SPCK, 1979).

³ W. Hulitt Gloer, "Homologies and Hymns in the New Testament: Form, Content, and Criteria for Identification," *PRS* 11 (1984), 115–132.

⁴ R. Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der fruehen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der fruehchristlichen Hymnen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 44–59.

⁵ Robert J. Karris, *A Symphony of New Testament Hymns* (Collegeville, MN.: Liturgical Press, 1996).

⁶ Jack T. Sanders, *The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Religious Background* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971).

⁷ E. Krentz, "Epideiktik and Hymnody: The New Testament and Its World," *Biblical Research* 40 (1995): 50–97. Cf. J. Schattenmann, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Prosahymnus* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1965); J. Kroll, *Die Christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandria* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); K. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972).

divided into several major categories as follows.

1. Hymnic Qualities and Antecedents

The hymns in Revelation are often considered in terms of their affinities with antecedent hymnic material, including hymnic texts in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., the Psalter,⁸ the *Tersanctus* in Isa 6:3,⁹ and Ezekiel,¹⁰ hymns in non-canonical Jewish texts, including Pseudipigraphic and Apocryphal texts, and fragments from Qumran,¹¹ as well as non-Jewish hymns in the Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman world.¹² In the following chapter, Revelation's hymns will be considered in light of these antecedent hymnic traditions.

2. Liturgical Associations

The identification of Revelation's hymns *as* hymns has led to questions of whether these hymns derived from a particular liturgical context. Scholarly attention has focused on the question of the extent to which Revelation's hymns might be traced to an antecedent liturgical context, such as the Temple or Synagogue service, early Christian liturgies, or Imperial Roman court ceremonial.

A. Temple Services

Leonard Thompson has suggested that the depictions of hymn-singing in Revelation can

⁸ Lucetta Mowry, "Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," *JBL* 71 (1952): 78ff.; D. Flusser, "Psalms, Hymns, and Prayers" in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1994), 551–577; R.P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1964), 39–52.

⁹ Mowry, "Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage," 78.

¹⁰ A. Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ézéchiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Bib* 43 (1962): 436–467; J.M. Vogelgesang, "The Interpretation of Ezechiel in the Book of Revelation," (Ph.D. diss., Harvard, 1985).

¹¹ D.C. Allison, Jr., "4Q 403 Fragm. I, Col. I, 38–46 and the Revelation to John," *RdQ* 12 [47] (1986): 409–414; Allison, Jr., "The Silence of the Angels: Reflections on the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice," *RdQ* 13 (1988): 189–197; O. Böcher, "Die Johannes-Apokalypse und die Texte von Qumran," *ANRW* II 25,5 (1988): 3894–3898; L. Hurtado, "Revelation 4–5 in the Light of Jewish Apocalyptic Analogies," *JSNT* 25 (1985): 105–124; J. Maier, "Zu Kult und Liturgie der Qumrangemeinde," *RdQ* 14 [56] (1990): 543–586; A.L. Warren, "A Trishagion Inserted in the 4 Qsam(a) Version of the Song of Hannah, 1Sam 2,1–10," *JJS* 45 (1994): 278–285.

¹² Most often studies of Revelation's hymns in terms of hymnic antecedents in the Greek and Roman world are part and parcel of larger, more general studies on the hymnic material in the New Testament.

be understood in terms of various liturgies of the Second Temple, and that the hymns themselves are patterned to some degree after songs sung in these Temple services.¹³ For example, Thompson considers the setting of the hymn in Rev 5 in terms of the order of events in the daily *Sharahith* and *Minħa* services, believing that they serve as a blueprint for the depiction of the slaughtered lamb (Rev 5:6), offering of incense (Rev 5:8), and the singing of a hymn (Rev 5:9–11).¹⁴ Moreover, Thompson argues that the “New Song” (Rev 5:9–11), whose content emphasizes the redemptive qualities of the Lamb, resembles the descriptions of God’s own redemptive activity as presented in the *Geullah* benediction of the Temple service(s).¹⁵ While Thompson’s suggestion that the Temple setting is a viable one in which to consider the depiction of the hymn-singing in Revelation has gained traction,¹⁶ his argument that elements of the hymns can be traced to particular songs of the Temple services has not garnered much support.

B. *Synagogue Worship*

Others have traced the hymns to Jewish synagogue worship. For example, Mowry has suggested that the New Song in Rev 5, which bears affinities with the *Geullah* benediction of the *Shema*, derived not from the Temple service but from the synagogue.¹⁷ She and others have recognized affinities between the hymn of the Elders in Revelation (Rev 4:8–11), in which the creative powers of the divine are the basis for the claim that God deserves “glory, honor, and

¹³ Leonard Thompson, “The Literary Function of the Hymns of the Apocalypse,” (Ph.D diss., University of Chicago, 1968), 75ff.

¹⁴ Thompson, “The Literary Function of the Hymns,” 75–6.

¹⁵ Thompson, “The Literary Function of the Hymns,” 77, esp. n. 1.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (New York: P. Lang, 1999); É. Cothenet, “Le Symbolisme du culte dans l’Apocalypse,” in *Le Symbolisme dans le culte des grandes religions: Actes du Colloque de Louvain-la-Neuve 4–5 Octobre, 1983*. (ed. Julien Ries; Louvain-la-Neuve: Centre d’Histoire des Religions, 1985), 223–238; J. Paulien, “The Role of the Hebrew Cultus, Sanctuary, and the Temple in the Plot and Structure of the Book of Revelation,” *AUSS* 33 (1995): 245–264; P. Wick, *Die Urchristlichen Gottesdienste. Entstehung und Entwicklung im Rahmen der frühjuedischen Tempel-, Synagogen-, und Hausfroemmigkeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).

¹⁷ Lucetta Mowry, “Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” 80.

power”, and liturgical elements as they are described in the *Qedushah*, which forms the center of the first blessing (*Yotzer*) of the morning synagogue service (*Sheharith*).¹⁸ Lending to the notion that the hymns themselves bear associations with Jewish liturgical traditions is the fact that the *depictions* of the hymn-singing in Revelation bear affinities with known synagogue worship traditions.¹⁹

Finally, some have suggested that Revelation’s hymns can be traced to the worship practices of early Jewish communities by virtue of the fact that the portrayal of celestial worship in Revelation bears similarities with depictions of heavenly liturgies in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ezek 1–10; 40–48; Isa 6) and in Early Jewish literature (e.g., *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*; *Apocalypse of Abraham*; *3 En.* 1:13). In other words, insofar as these depictions of heavenly worship in the Hebrew Bible are thought to reflect earthly practices of the communities who wrote and read them, such heavenly depictions of worship in Revelation may similarly reflect earthly worship practices.²⁰

C. *Early Christian Liturgies*

Clear affinities with antecedent Jewish liturgical material and traditions have led to speculation that the hymns in Revelation, and the depictions of the contexts in which the hymns

¹⁸ See Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (trans. Wendy Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 29; cf. Mowry, “Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” 79.

¹⁹ For example, insofar as the scroll described in Rev 5:1ff. may represent the Torah, or some specific part of the Torah, the description of the Lamb breaking its seals and opening the scrolls which precedes the hymns at Rev 5:9–10; 12–13, may allude to the reading of scripture in synagogue worship. Mowry, “Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” 81–3; cf. Otto A. Piper, “The Liturgical Character of the Apocalypse,” *CH* 20 (1951): 13ff. For further considerations of the Jewish liturgical context for considering elements of Revelation’s hymns, see Ph. Sigal, “Early Christian and Rabbinic Liturgical Affinities: Exploring Liturgical Acculturation,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 63–90; F. Werner, “The Doxology in Synagogue and Early Church: A Liturgico-Musical Study,” *HUCA* 19 (1945): 275–351; Mowry, “Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” 79ff.; cf. W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), 44–46; R.P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 39–52.

²⁰ See Prigent, *Commentary*, 23; J. Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36.2 (1998): 208–11. Cf. John Strugnell, “The Angelic Liturgy at Qumran—4Q Serek Sîrôt ‘Ôlat Haššabbât,” *VT* 7 (1959): 318–45; Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (3rd ed.; New York: Penguin, 1987), 221.

are sung, reflect hymns and liturgical practices of the early (“Christian”) communities amongst which Revelation circulated.²¹ Evidence marshaled in support of this supposition include the claim that John’s visions were revealed to him “on the Lord’s Day” (Rev 1:10),²² form-critical assessments which suggest that the hymns were comprised of pre-existing material,²³ and positive comparisons of the hymns’ content with known liturgical forms in the early Christian church.²⁴

Others reject the notion that the hymns reflect actual liturgical material of the early Church, suggesting rather that they were original compositions of the author, often on the grounds that the hymns’ formal elements do not meet form-critical criteria for pre-existing material, and that specific liturgical contexts cannot be identified for most of the hymnic

²¹ Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 1–8; Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 39–52; Mowry, “Revelation 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” 75–84; Piper, “The Liturgical Character of the Apocalypse,” 17ff.; John O’Rourke, “The Hymns of the Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 399–408; Pierre Prigent, *Apocalypse et Liturgie* (Neuchâtel, Suisse: Éditions Delachaux et Niestlé, 1964); Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse* (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), 77–91; H.B. Swete, *Commentary on Revelation* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1977).

²² That is, if “the Lord’s Day” refers to the Christian day of worship, then it is supposed that the visions would naturally reflect the liturgical elements of Christian worship. Shepherd, Jr., *The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse*, 78.

²³ It has been argued that if the hymns represent pre-existent material, (determined on the basis of incongruity with the surrounding text, *hapax legomena*, highly stylized elements, or by comparison with known earlier forms), they were likely to be drawn from early Christian worship. See, e.g., Leonard Thompson, “The Literary Function of the Hymns of the Apocalypse,” 8ff.; O’Roarke, “The Hymns of the Apocalypse” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 399–409.

²⁴ So, for instance, the appearance in Revelation’s hymns of expressions which surfaced in later Christian liturgies, such as “Amen” (Rev 5:14; 7:12; 19:4) and “Halleluia” (Rev 19:1–6), likewise suggest that the hymns may reflect, at least to some degree, early Christian liturgical traditions. Moreover, the appearance of the *Trisagion* (“Holy, holy, holy. . .”) in Rev 4:8, and the phrase εὐχαριστοῦμεν σοι . . . ὅτι (Rev 11:17), may reflect early Christian liturgical traditions, as each appears in early Christian texts (i.e., *1 Clem.* 34:6; *Did.* 10:4) which are thought to describe liturgical practices. S. Lächli has gone so far as to propose that Revelation’s hymns followed to a certain extent the order of the Eucharist as it was reflected in Justin’s account(s) of the Baptismal (Justin, *Apol.* 1:65ff.) and Sunday Eucharist (Justin, *Apol.* 1:67), and that each reflects the unique liturgical practices of distinct Christian communities. S. Lächli, “Eine Gottesdienstruktur in der Johannesoffenbarung,” *ThZ* 16 (1960): 359–378; D.E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 28 (1983): 7; R.H. Smith, “Worthy is the Lamb,” *CThMi* 25 (1998): 502; J. H. Strawley, *The Early History of the Liturgy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1913), 29ff.; Carnegie, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 244–5; K.-P. Jörns, *Das hymnische Evangelium. Untersuchungen zu Aufbau, Funktion und Herkunft der hymnischen Stücke in der Johannesoffenbarung* (Gütersloher: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1971), 99.

elements in Revelation.²⁵

D. Imperial Court Ceremonial

Aune has argued that the portrayal of hymns sung to God and the Lamb in Revelation are best understood in terms of the practice of hymnic praise to Roman emperors,²⁶ a practice that was common and widespread in the 1st c. C.E.²⁷ Examples of surviving *hymns* for emperors are non-existent, and so evaluating the content and form of Revelation's hymns in terms of them is not possible. However, Aune demonstrates that the *portrayal* of hymning God and the Lamb in Revelation bears some similarities with what is known of imperial court ceremonials. Aune maintains that the general setting for the hymn-singing recalls praise of Emperors. For example, the depiction of God in Revelation resembles that of a ruling emperor, insofar as God sits on a throne, meting judgments upon those who have "breached divine law" and rewarding the righteous.²⁸ More specifically, Aune contends that the identities of some of those who sing the hymns can be understood in terms of imperial court proceedings, i.e., the 24 elders (4:10; 5:8; 7:11; 11:16; 16:5), the "myriads and myriads" (Rev 7:9; 15:2; 19:1, 6), and "every creature in the universe" (Rev 5:13). That is, the 24 elders' white apparel (Rev 4:4), and the act of throwing

²⁵ Carnegie, "Worthy is the Lamb," 243–256; Ruiz, "Revelation 4:8–11; 5:9–14," 216–220; F. Manns, "Traces d'une haggadic pascale chrétienne dans l'Apocalypse de Jean?" *Anton* 56 (1981): 265–295; Smith, "Worthy is the Lamb," 500–506; Thompson, "Worship in the Book of Revelation," *ExAu* 8 (1992): 45–54; C.F.D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1961), 64; Jörns, *Evangelium*, 99ff.; Ruiz, "Revelation 4:8–11; 5:9–14," 216; G. Dellings, "Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannesapokalypse," *NovT* 3 (1959): 134ff.; Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 58ff.

²⁶ Aune, "Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial," 5–26.

²⁷ Aune claims that the Senate customarily praised the emperor with hymns, which could sometimes be taken to extremes, as Dio Cassius reported that an entire day was spent in the senate praising Gaius Caligula (Dio Cassius 59.24.5), and that hymnic acclamations were a regular part of the honors bestowed on emperors as they traveled throughout the empire, especially in the Eastern provinces. He cites the *Res Gestae*, in which it is recorded that the name of Caesar Augustus was included in the Salian hymn (*Res Gestae Divi Augustae* 10), and the existence of the 5,000 equestrian men who constantly shadowed Nero and offered praise for him (Tacitus, *Annals* 14.15). On the practice of hymning emperors, see Andreas Alföldi, "Die Ausgestaltung des monarchischen Zeremoniells am römischen Kaiserhofe," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 49 (1934): 1–118. Cf. D. Cuss, *Imperial Cult and Honorary Terms in the New Testament* (Fribourg: University Press, 1974); Erik Peterson, *Eis Theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 176–179.

²⁸ Aune, "Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial," 8–9.

down their crowns before the throne (Rev 4:10), reflect the practice of dignitaries receiving a king,²⁹ while the depiction of the “myriads of myriads”, “great multitudes”, and “every creature in the universe” paying obeisance to God and the Lamb (Rev 5:11; 7:9; 19:1, 3, 6) reflects the imperial ideal of *consensus omnium*, the principle by which an Emperor assumed and maintained power on the basis of universal consent. These proposals have been well-received, with most scholars acknowledging that the Imperial court ceremonial is indeed one context among others in which to consider the throne-room scene in which the hymns are sung, as well as the hymns themselves.³⁰

3. Theological and/or Christological Implications

Attention often focuses on the theological and Christological value of Revelation’s hymns, especially with respect to the ways in which they contribute to the theological and/or Christological orientation of Revelation as a whole.³¹ Because the theological and Christological implications of Revelation’s hymns will be taken up in great detail in the following chapter, I will only briefly mention in what follows some of the major positions.

²⁹ Aune, “Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 12–13.

³⁰ Smith, “Worthy is the Lamb, 503–4; Klaus Berger, Eugene Boring, and Carsten Colpe, *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 942; P. Borgen, “Moses, Jesus, and the Roman Emperor. Observations in Philo’s Writings and the Revelation to John,” *NT* 38 (1996): 145–159; G.M. Stevenson, “Conceptual Background to Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4,4.10; 14,14),” *JBL* 114 (1995): 257–272.

³¹ David Carnegie, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 243–256; 207–229; Smith, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 500–506; L. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 69ff.; M. Hengel, “Hymnus und Christologie,” in *Wort in der Zeit* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 1–23; K.-P. Jörns, “Proklamation und Akklamation. Die antiphonische Grundordnung des frühchristlichen Gottesdienstes nach der Johannesoffenbarung,” in *Liturgie und Dichtung. Ein interdisziplinäres Kompendium* (ed. H. Becker; Otilien: 1983), 187–207; A.R. Nusca, “Heavenly Worship, Ecclesial Worship,” (Ph.D. diss., Pontifical Gregorian University, 2008); O’Roarke, “The Hymns of the Apocalypse” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 399–409; Jean-Pierre Ruiz, “Revelation 4:8–11; 5:9–14: Hymns of the Heavenly Liturgy,” *SBLSP* 34 (1995): 216–220; J.P. Ruiz, “The Politics of Praise: a Reading of Rev 19:1–10,” *SBLSP* 36 (1997): 374–393; Gottfried Schimanowski, “Connecting Heaven and Earth” in *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities in Late Antique Religions* (ed. Ra’anan Boustan and Annette Reed; Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 67–84; G. Schimanowski, *Die Himmelsche Liturgie in der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 2002; E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 73–76.

A. *Theological and Christological Epithets*

Much of the content of the hymns consists of epithets that characterize God and the Lamb in various ways. Such titles are often evaluated in terms of their meaning(s) in antecedent literature, their relationship to theological and Christological titles elsewhere in the New Testament, and their contribution to an understanding of the theological and Christological claims being made in Revelation.³²

B. *Kingship Motifs*

Many scholars have recognized the prevalence of kingship motifs as they are applied to God and to the Lamb in the hymns, and the importance of these motifs in constructing a theology and Christology in the text. The extent to which God is portrayed as heavenly sovereign is reflected in various titles, e.g., “Lord God Almighty” (4:8; 11:16; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6), the “One seated on the throne” (5:13; 7:10), and “King of the nations” (15:3).³³ At the same time, the Lamb is also designated a king in the hymns, as for example, when he is granted the sovereign prerogatives of God (δόξα, δύναμις, τιμή, etc.) in Rev 5:12–13. The sovereignty of the Lamb is even more conspicuous in Rev 11:15, when he is designated a ruler over the “kingdom of the world”,³⁴ and in Rev 12:10, where the Messiah is said to hold “authority” in the “Kingdom of God”.

The identification of God and the Lamb as king(s) in the hymns reflects the portrayal of God and the Lamb as king(s) elsewhere in the text as, for example, in the depictions of God and the Lamb upon the throne (Rev 4:2; 5:6, *passim*), surrounded by those who appear and act in

³² See, e.g., R.H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (2nd ed.; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), cx–cxiv; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, clix–clxvii; G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 289–301.

³³ Thompson, “The Literary Function of the Hymns of the Apocalypse,” 61ff.; cf. Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 64ff; R. Bauckham, *Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 23ff.

³⁴ See Bauckham, *Theology*, 54–65; Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns.”

such ways as evoke a court of an Ancient Near Eastern or Imperial Roman monarch (e.g., the throwing down of the crowns before the throne in Rev 4:10), and through explicit statements elsewhere in the text.³⁵ As such, the sovereignty of God and the Lamb is understood to be a central theological and Christological motif in the Apocalypse.³⁶

C. *Eschatological Orientation*

Scholars often comment on the eschatological orientation of the hymns. Schüssler-Fiorenza and Leonard Thompson, for example, have each evaluated various phrases and descriptors that reveal an eschatological character, e.g., God’s “wrath” (11:18), and the “judgments” of God (15:4; 16:5–7; 19:1).³⁷ In a similar vein, Bauckham has considered the epithets of God that are essentially eschatological, e.g., the “one who was, is, and is to come” (4:8; cf. 1:8),³⁸ while Massyngbaerde Ford has catalogued the Christological titles applied to the Lamb that represent “various eschatological figures anticipated by different Jewish groups in the second-temple period,” and thereby designate the Lamb (i.e., the exalted Jesus) as the eschatological deliverer.³⁹

D. *Relationships of Theology and Christology*

Discussions of the theological and Christological titles applied to God and the Lamb, as

³⁵ E.g., the sovereignty of the Lamb is confirmed by the author’s own statement at the beginning of the Apocalypse that Jesus Christ is, in fact, the “ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev 1:5). The proclamations of God and the Lamb as eschatological rulers in the hymns raises a number of ancillary theological issues, not least of which is the question of the relationship between theological and Christological themes as they are presented in the hymns and the ways in which these themes are manifested in the surrounding narrative. Issues concerning the relationship of the thematic elements in the hymns—theological and otherwise—to the surrounding narrative will be taken up in much greater detail in the final chapter, as they relate to the essential “dramatic” functions of the hymns.

³⁶ Though see the feminist critique of the centrality of this motif in Schüssler-Fiorenza, “The Words of Prophecy: Reading the Book of Revelation Theologically,” in *Studies in the Book of Revelation* (ed. Steve Moyise; New York: T & T Clark, 2001), 1–19; Adela Yarbro-Collins, “Feminine Symbolism in the Book of Revelation,” *Biblical Interpretation* 1.1 (1993): 20–33.

³⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Justice and Judgment*, 35–67; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 63–71.

³⁸ Bauckham, *Theology*, 63–5.

³⁹ Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns,” 212ff.

well as the portrayal of God and the Lamb as eschatological rulers, often prompts discussions of the relationship between God and the Lamb in the text. The very fact that the Lamb is worshipped *together* with God (e.g., 5:13; 7:10; 12:10), and that each are hymned in similar terms, at the very least suggests a very high Christology,⁴⁰ while some go so far as to suggest that Christ is in fact portrayed *as* God in the text.⁴¹ For example, many of the divine attributes of God (glory, power, might, etc.) are also said to be prerogatives of the Lamb (Rev 5:12–13), while the doxology to the Lamb (5:9–13; cf. 1:5–6) follows the very same pattern as the doxologies to God (4:11; 7:12; 19:1, 7). So, too, are God and the Lamb said in the hymns to perform many of the same functions: they *rule* (e.g., 5:13; 11:15), they *save* (7:10), and they are *coming soon* (4:8; 12:10; 19:7), functions that correspond with the actions of each elsewhere in the Apocalypse.

At the same time, commentators consider the distinctive attributes and/or actions that characterize God and the Lamb in Revelation’s hymns, e.g., the creative power of God (4:8–11), and the power of God to judge (11:18; 15:4; 16:5–7; 19:2), alongside the enactment of the judgments of God by the Lamb (5:9–6:17), and the Lamb’s “ransoming” people for God through his blood (5:10; cf. 12:11).

E. *Anti-Imperial Theology*

A final issue raised by the identification of God and the Lamb as eschatological rulers in the hymns concerns the theological and Christological implications of such a claim in light of the political context of the author and audience of the Apocalypse. It is widely held that the depiction of hymnic praise of God and the Lamb, viewed alongside the negative portrayal of the

⁴⁰ E.g., Charles, *Revelation*, cxii; Thompson, *The Book of Revelation*, 64ff.; Bauckham, *Theology*, 58–63.

⁴¹ E.g., Carnegie, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 249; Bauckham, *Theology*, 58–65; G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1999), 172–3; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, clxii–clxiv; Caird, *Revelation*, 290.

worship of earthly entities elsewhere in the text, constitutes an attack on the practice of the Roman Imperial cult as well as the broader Roman religio-political structures that underlie it, and a corresponding claim that the worship of God and the Lamb constitutes the only proper form of worship.⁴²

Such a notion depends on the one hand on the understanding of the objects of *earthly* worship (i.e., the “Beast of the Sea” (Rev 13:1–10), the “Beast of the Land” (13:11–18) and the “image of the Beast” (Rev 13:14–15)) as representations of various elements of the Imperial apparatus,⁴³ and the recognition that such worship of the Imperial entities is not only improper, but ultimately destructive and antithetical to the worship of God and the Lamb.⁴⁴ On the other hand, certain language in the hymns might have been intended to express outright opposition to the Imperial authorities. For example, it has long been suggested that Domitian appropriated for himself the title “Lord and Our God,” so that the use of this very expression in the hymn at Rev 4:11 may signal a rejection of Domitian’s use of it, and the belief that the title was appropriately reserved only for God. That is, the term may have conjured the fact that these titles were applied

⁴² See especially D. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial,” 5–26; Ruiz, “The Politics of Praise,” 374–93; Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 101ff.; J. Nelson Kraybill, *Apocalypse and Allegiance: Worship, Politics, and Devotion in the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2010); Bauckham, *Theology*, 35–9, 88–94; Carnegie, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 254–256.

⁴³ The beasts can be taken to represent elements of the Roman apparatus by various means. For example, the “Beast from the Sea” (13:1–8) is thought to represent Roman Imperial *power*, both insofar as descriptions of the beast appear to be lightly veiled symbols of Imperial authority and insofar as the descriptions of its power appear to reflect Imperial rule, while the “Beast from the Land” is thought to represent specific elements of Imperial rule in the province of Asia Minor, e.g., the Imperial administration in the province, the Imperial cultic apparatus, or the wealthy elites who supported the official Imperial cult(s). Thus, by presenting various entities of the Roman Imperial apparatus as “beasts”, the author is signaling a negative evaluation of them.

⁴⁴ Corresponding with the representation of the Imperial entities as “Beasts”, a number of clues make clear that these entities are *not* proper objects of worship. For example, the Beast of the Sea is given its authority by the Dragon (13:4), who in the previous chapter was revealed to be none other than “Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev 12:9), and is characterized in wholly negative terms: it “utters blasphemies against God” (Rev 13:6), and “makes war on the saints” (Rev 13:7). Likewise, the second Beast of the Land “deceives the inhabitants of the earth” (Rev 13:14), and kills those who would not worship the image of the first Beast (13:15). Moreover, those who worship the Beast are first among those punished later in the text (e.g., Rev 16:2; cf. Rev 19:17–21). Thus, worship of earthly (Imperial) entities is presented in wholly negative terms.

to Roman Emperors, thus prompting an “antithetical reflection” on this fact.⁴⁵ Other terms that appear in Revelation’s hymns may have likewise connoted a reflection of, and antithetical response to, their use in the Imperial cult, e.g., ἄξιος (Rev 4:11; 5:9, 12), δύναμις (Rev 4:11; 5:12; 7:12; 11:17), σωτηρία (Rev 7:10), etc.⁴⁶

Thus, it is widely presumed that these and several other elements taken together⁴⁷ function to establish a strict opposition between the worship of God and the Lamb, and Imperial authorities. It seems there is not, at least in the symbolic world of Revelation, a middle-ground by which it is possible to worship God and the Lamb *and* Imperial authorities.⁴⁸ As such, the hymns are a vital piece of the theological and Christological claim that proper worship consists *only* of worship of God and the Lamb.

4. Structural Functions

The question of the function(s) of the hymns within the structural framework of the text as a whole has been only occasionally addressed, and can hardly be considered a major current in hymns’ scholarship by any objective measure. Nevertheless, I am foregrounding this area of inquiry, as I think the hymns often *do* perform a function vis-à-vis the surrounding narrative, but in a way that has not yet been considered, i.e., in terms of the structural function of hymns in ancient drama. Thus, the thoughts of previous commentators will provide some context for my

⁴⁵ For a summary of the issue of the titles “Lord” and “God” as they are applied to Roman emperors, see Aune, *Revelation*, 1:310–12.

⁴⁶ See R. Schütz, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes und Kaiser Domitian* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 35; E. Peterson, *Heis Theos: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Echter Verlag GmbH, 1926), 176–9.

⁴⁷ Schüssler-Fiorenza has pointed out ways in which the antithesis between worship of God and the Lamb and worship of the Emperor is established by virtue of the fact that each are presented in similar terms: E.g., (1) Both the Lamb and one of the heads of the Beast are portrayed “as though slaughtered to death”; (2) The Lamb and the Beast from the Sea receive their power from higher authorities; (3) Each are crowned; (4) Just as “all nations, tongues, and peoples” worship God and the Lamb in heaven, so do “all the inhabitants of the world” worship the Beast. See Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 83–4; Aune, *Revelation*, 2: 779–80.

⁴⁸ E.g., “Revelation’s symbolic rhetoric is absolute: one decides either for God or Satan, for the Lamb or the monster, for Christ or Antichrist. No compromise is possible.” Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 84.

discussion of the structural functions of the hymns in the next chapter.

The suggestion that the hymns functioned structurally as part of the literary texture of the Apocalypse was intimated as early as R.H. Charles' Commentary, in which he suggested that the doxology in Rev 5:13–14 constituted the “climax” of chapters 4 and 5.⁴⁹ By considering the hymns in terms of their function vis-à-vis other narrative elements in the text in this way, Charles (consciously or not) revealed an interest in their structural value, though he didn't go any further in explicating it.

In the wake of an increased interest in the literary functions of biblical texts more generally, scholars in the past few decades have been increasingly interested in the literary functions of the hymns in Revelation, and have offered various proposals as to ways in which the hymns highlight, delineate, and/or organize the narrative sections in the Apocalypse. Leonard Thompson, for example, has suggested that the appearance of liturgical activity in Revelation is not random, but related specifically to the dramatic narrative(s).⁵⁰ He cites several instances in which the hymns “introduce” major narrative sections, as for example the heavenly worship in 5:9–14, from which the opening of the seven seals is said to “flow”, and the hymn in 15:3–4, which introduces the eschatological terror of the seven bowls of wrath.⁵¹ Likewise, he acknowledges ways in which scenes of heavenly worship (i.e., hymns) conclude narrative sections, as in 7:10–12, which Thompson suggests is the “climax” to the opening of the seals, and thus a kind of bookend to the scene.⁵²

Subsequent scholars have likewise recognized the hymns to function both to introduce major narrative sections, to conclude them, or both. Clearly, the way in which a commentator

⁴⁹ Charles, *The Revelation of St. John*, 1: 125–128; 133–134; 144–152.

⁵⁰ Thompson, “The Literary Function of the Hymns of the Apocalypse,” 35. Cf. Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 53–73.

⁵¹ Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 66–8.

⁵² Thompson, *Book of Revelation*, 66–7.

conceives of the overall structure of the text determines to a large extent their understanding of the structural position(s), and thereby structural *function(s)*, of the hymns. So, for instance, Jörns has proposed five distinct vision sequences (i.e., 4:1–11; 5:1–14; 6:1–7; 8:1–11:18; 11:19–19:8), each of which concludes with a hymn, and proposes that the hymns thus function structurally to determine the boundaries of these sequences.⁵³ On the basis of this same structuration of the text, Carnegie has suggested that the hymns function to “round off” each of the five major narrative sections in Revelation, in such a way that evokes the songs of Isaiah 40–55, which perform a similar function.⁵⁴ Commentators who recognize different macro-structures likewise often recognize the extent to which the hymns function to “frame” a narrative section by beginning and/or ending it.⁵⁵

III. The Dramatic Form and Function of Revelation’s Hymns: *Status Quaestionis*

1. David Brown

In modern biblical scholarship, a connection between Revelation’s hymns and ancient dramatic choruses was first posited in 1891 by David Brown, who suggested that the hymns in Revelation functioned analogously to the choral lyrics of Greek tragedy insofar as they constituted a medium for interpreting the surrounding narrative.⁵⁶ Brown’s argument depended explicitly on a notion that was prevalent in Classical Studies at the time of Brown’s publication that the chorus functioned in Greek tragedy as a kind of *ideal spectator*. First proposed by August Schlegel in 1809, this notion was based on the idea that the lyric and musical expressions

⁵³ Jörns, *Evangelium*, 167–70.

⁵⁴ Carnegie, “Worthy is the Lamb,” 250–4.

⁵⁵ Ellul proposes five sections, three of which are book-ended by hymns. Jacques Ellul, *Apocalypse: The Book of Revelation* (trans. George W. Schreiner; New York: Seabury, 1977), 232–255; Cf. M.A. Harris, “The Literary Function of Hymns in the Apocalypse of John,” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 45, 47.

⁵⁶ David Brown, *The Apocalypse: Its Structure and Primary Predictions* (New York: Christian Literature Co., 1891), 70–1.

of the tragic chorus served primarily as a kind of “ideal” reflection upon the surrounding dramatic events, or “the sentiments of a pious and well-ordered mind in beautiful and noble forms.”⁵⁷ By offering the audience an “ideal” reflection on the surrounding dramatic events, the tragic chorus “guide[d] and control[led] the impressions” of the theater audience, in order to express the “inward signification” of the dramatic events as well as the “thoughts which lay beneath the surface. . .”⁵⁸ Thus, according to Brown, the hymns in Revelation functioned analogously to tragic choruses insofar as they constituted a sort of ideal reflection on the surrounding visions, or an “impression of what the symbolical visions are intended to teach”.⁵⁹

2. Frederic Palmer

Several years after Brown’s publication, Frederic Palmer likewise proposed that Revelation’s hymns could be understood in terms of ancient tragic lyrics, but in slightly different terms. That is, Palmer did not explicitly consider the functionality of Greek tragic choruses in terms of an *ideal spectator*, but proposed that they could be considered in terms of Greek choruses insofar as they “amplify the *motif* which is being set forth” in the surrounding visions.⁶⁰ Palmer did not provide a basis for his premise that this was the function of tragic choruses, nor did he specify *how* exactly the hymns functioned in this regard. As such, Palmer provided nothing more specific as to how Revelation’s hymns might be construed as dramatic “commentary”, save for a passing remark that Revelation’s hymns lack the “critical” attitude common in the lyrics of Greek choruses.

Palmer’s greater contribution to the study of Revelation’s hymns in dramatic terms

⁵⁷ K.O. Müller, *History of the Literature of Greece*. Translated from German by Sir George Cornwell Lewis. 2nd ed. (London: Baldwin and Cradock: Paternoster-Row, 1847), 311.

⁵⁸ On Schlegel’s influential theory, see chapter 5, pp. 307–8.

⁵⁹ Brown, *The Apocalypse*, 71.

⁶⁰ Frederic Palmer, *The Drama of the Apocalypse: In Relation to the Literary and Political Circumstances of Its Time* (New York: Kessinger Publishers, 1903), 42. Palmer is often erroneously cited as the first scholar to propose a dramatic interpretation of Revelation’s hymns.

consisted in his observations concerning the dramatic character of Revelation as a whole. That is, his (undeveloped) argument that Revelation's hymns functioned analogously to tragic choral lyrics was part and parcel of a larger argument that several elements of Revelation could be understood in terms of various features of Classical tragedy, an argument that would influence several subsequent studies on the dramatic character of Revelation's hymns.

3. Raymond Brewer

In a brief article published in 1936, Raymond Brewer advanced this line of interpretation in two important ways.⁶¹ Like Brown and Palmer before him, he acknowledged that the hymns bore a functional relationship with the surrounding dialogue such that they could be compared with the lyrics of tragic choruses, though he conceived of this relationship in still different terms than his predecessors. According to Brewer, the hymns functioned as did choral lyrics insofar as they “formed the bond between the lyric and dramatic elements in the plot. . .the chorus of elders in particular, are the bond of unity running through the swiftly moving action and the ever shifting scenes of the book.”⁶² Importantly, Brewer suggested more specific ways in which the hymns resembled the lyrics of tragic choruses: “Like the tragic choruses of Aeschylus, the choruses of Revelation, in language more stately and with thoughts more sublime, hymn the praise of the Deity, whose succor they implore, and whose acts they approve.”⁶³ Thus, while his analysis lacks depth (e.g., he does not specify *how* he imagines hymnic praise of the Deity to form a “bond between the lyric and dramatic elements” in theatrical terms), Brewer broadened the horizon for considering Revelation's hymns in dramatic terms. For one, he acknowledged the plain fact that choral lyrics often consisted of *hymns per se*, such that the hymns as they

⁶¹ Raymond R. Brewer, “The Influence of Greek Drama on the Apocalypse of John,” *ATHR* 18 (1936): 74–92.

⁶² Brewer, “Influence of Greek Drama,” 90–1.

⁶³ Brewer, “Influence of Greek Drama,” 91.

appear in Revelation can be reasonably compared with the hymns of tragic choral lyrics. Moreover, he acknowledged several specific dimensions of Revelation's hymns that are fruitfully considered in terms of tragic choruses, including the fact that the hymns can be distinguished from the surrounding text on formal and stylistic grounds, and the fact that they contribute to the structural integrity of the text as a whole.

In addition to evaluating some of the formal and functional aspects of Revelation's hymns in terms of tragic choral lyrics, Brewer also recognized similarities between those who sang the hymns and the tragic choruses themselves, as well as elements of the performance of the hymns that could be viewed in terms of the theatrical staging of the choruses. For example, he recognized that descriptions of the circular formation of the four Living Creatures and 24 Elders around the throne and altar could be considered in terms of the circular organization of the choruses around the altar in Greek tragedy, and that the descriptions of the Living Creatures may have been depicted with "masked *choreutae*" of the Greek theater in mind.⁶⁴ Thus, Brewer broadened the scope for the study of Revelation's hymns functionally in terms of tragic choral lyrics, and opened the door for considering various aspects of the depiction(s) of the hymns in terms of the staging of tragic choruses.

4. Subsequent Scholarship

In the wake of the pioneering work of Brown, Palmer, and Brewer, it is somewhat surprising that scholarship has not only failed to advance the discussion of the relationship of Revelation's hymns with ancient tragic choruses, but that discussions of the dramatic function(s) of Revelation's hymns have most certainly *regressed* since then. Indeed, scholars widely acknowledge that Revelation's hymns do bear functional similarities with ancient tragic

⁶⁴ Brewer, "Influence of Greek Drama," 83–8.

choruses, but this assertion is most often reduced to some variation of the claim that Revelation's hymns function as did choral lyrics in Classical tragedy insofar as they "comment upon" or "interpret" the action in the vision-sequences. In other words, an appreciation of the dramatic function of Revelation's hymns has been universally reduced to this lowest common denominator, with virtually no deliberation as to the *ways* in which the hymns might "comment upon" or "interpret" the surrounding narrative in dramatic terms, or consideration of the ways in which the hymns might function analogously to tragic choral lyrics in other ways. Nor is there ever any reflection on the *formal* similarities between tragic choruses and those who sing the hymns in Revelation, or on the extent to which the context(s) of the hymn-singing in Revelation might reflect dramatic conventions.

So, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler-Fiorenza claims that the hymns "function. . . in the same way as the choruses in the Greek drama preparing and commenting upon the dramatic movements of the plot,"⁶⁵ while Lambrecht acknowledges a "fair consensus regarding the commentary character of the hymns in Rev."⁶⁶ Likewise, Murphy argues that insofar as they "offer definitive comments on the meaning of what John witnesses," the hymns "function much as the chorus does in ancient Greek tragedy,"⁶⁷ while Massyngbaerde Ford likens the hymns to the Greek chorus insofar as they offer a "commentary on the events" that take place throughout the plot of the Apocalypse.⁶⁸ And so on and so forth.⁶⁹

The notion that the hymns functioned analogously to tragic choral lyrics insofar as they "comment upon" the surrounding narrative has become a virtually unchallenged maxim,

⁶⁵ E. Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Composition and Structure of the Revelation of John," *CBQ* 39 (1977): 353–4.

⁶⁶ Lambrecht cites Schüssler-Fiorenza's claim that they function "in the same way as the choruses in Greek drama." Jan Lambrecht, "A Structuration of Rev 4, 1–22, 5," in *L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (Gembloux: Leuven University Press, 1980), 99.

⁶⁷ Frederick J. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Harrisburg, Pa.; Trinity Press International, 1998), 186.

⁶⁸ Massyngbaerde Ford, "The Christological Function of the Hymns," 211.

⁶⁹ Boring, *Revelation*, 107; James L. Blevins, *Revelation as Drama* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 19.

especially among those who consider the hymns in dramatic terms. This view is so pervasive that even some who deny that Revelation's hymns ought to be considered in dramatic terms admit their similarity to tragic choral lyrics in this respect.⁷⁰ Moreover, several scholars, without explicitly acknowledging a connection to ancient dramatic choruses, nevertheless characterize the functionality of Revelation's hymns in precisely these terms.⁷¹ The claim is repeated *ad infinitum*, most often with no justification save for the citations of previous scholars who have similarly endorsed it.⁷² As a result, the argument for a dramatic interpretation of Revelation's hymns as it now regularly appears in articles, books, and commentaries exists in practically the same form as when the argument was first proposed in 1891. And thus it seems that this standard claim as to the dramatic function of Revelation's hymns needs to be re-assessed.

IV. Methodology

The premise upon which New Testament scholars have constructed the dramatic interpretation of Revelation's hymns, i.e., the notion that Classical tragic choruses functioned primarily to "comment upon" the surrounding action, is inadequate. Even a cursory survey of the lyrics of Greek tragic choruses reveals a multiplicity of choral functions both within and across various tragedies. Indeed, Classicists have long acknowledged that Classical tragic choruses performed a wide-range of functions depending on numerous factors, including the particular composer, the time-period during which the drama was produced, and above all, the exigencies required by a particular drama. Moreover, many tragic choral lyrics simply do not function to "comment upon" the surrounding dialogue at all! As a result, the presumption that

⁷⁰ E.g., Harris, "The Literary Function of the Hymns."

⁷¹ E.g., J.P.M. Sweet, *Revelation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979), 6; James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Publishing, 2009), 53; Cf. Ellul, *Apocalypse*, 234; Delling, "Zum gottesdienstlichen Stil der Johannesapokalypse," 136.

⁷² Brian Blount is one scholar who has pushed back on this idea, suggesting that the hymns do much more than to "'prepare and comment upon' plot movements." B. Blount, *Can I Get a Witness? Reading Revelation through African American Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 93.

choruses function primarily to “comment upon” the surrounding dialogue has long since been abandoned in the field of Classics. Thus, while such a definition of tragic choral lyrics is still used by New Testament scholars, it serves as an imprecise and oftentimes incorrect premise from which to consider the dramatic function of Revelation’s hymns. As such, this premise needs to be replaced with one that more accurately evaluates the breadth and depth of the forms and functions of ancient tragic choruses.

A further methodological deficiency exists in the fact that New Testament scholars have only ever considered the dramatic function of Revelation’s hymns in terms of *Classical tragic* choruses. In so doing, scholars have neglected the choruses and choral lyrics of Hellenistic and Roman tragedies which, it will be shown, exhibit marked changes in content, style, and function relative to their Classical antecedents, changes which have important implications for a consideration of Revelation’s hymns in dramatic terms. This study thus includes assessments of tragic choral forms and functions throughout antiquity.

By offering a comprehensive framework for understanding the forms and functions of tragic choruses throughout antiquity, and evaluating Revelation’s hymns in light of this framework, the extent to which Revelation’s hymns can—and can’t—be understood in terms of ancient tragic choral lyrics will be revealed. In short, it will be shown that Revelation’s hymns reflect neither the depth nor variety of the functionality of ancient tragic choral lyrics, and as such are not best understood in terms of tragic choral lyrics *generally*, from any period of antiquity. Yet, Revelation’s hymns can be considered in dramatic terms insofar as they function analogously to *hymns* in ancient drama, by providing a theological commentary on the surrounding narrative so as to frame the actions and events of the narrative in theological terms.

V. Summary of Argument

I turn first to an evaluation of the hymnic genre in antiquity, including: (a) ancient definitions of the term ὕμνος, (b) formal, stylistic, performative, and functional aspects of ancient hymns, (c) the types of literature in which hymns are found, and a consideration of the extent to which various textual units in Revelation are rightly designated *hymns*. Then I consider the context(s) in which the hymns appear in Revelation, including the setting of the hymns in the heavenly throne-room, and the identities of those who sing many of the hymns. The majority of the chapter consists of exegetical analyses of the hymns themselves, with special consideration for the structural, rhetorical, narrative, and theological relations of the hymn(s) to the surrounding narrative material. Such analyses provide the data with which comparisons can be made with tragic choruses.

The study then moves to considerations of the contexts of ancient dramatic choruses. As a preface to analyses of the forms and functions of the dramatic choruses themselves, and in order to provide a context for considering dramatic choruses, I consider two general trajectories in antiquity: (1) Choral poetry and performance in Archaic and Classical Greece, i.e., *choreia*; and (2) The particular forms of choral poetry and performance that were distinguished as *tragoedia*. Certain formal characteristics of tragic choruses (e.g., their size, composition, shape, training, etc.) as well as the choral lyrics of tragedy (e.g., metrical and dialectical tendencies, musical elements, etc.), can be understood *as* expressions of, and explained in terms of, wider choral phenomena in the ancient world, i.e., *choreia*. Such phenomena are explored in chapter three. At the same time, insofar as tragic choruses and choral lyrics appear as part of more specific choral art forms—tragedies—their formal and functional features are most fully appreciated in terms of various dynamics of tragedies themselves. Thus, various aspects of

ancient tragedy are considered in chapter four.

Having established a framework for considering ancient choruses and tragedy generally, I consider in the fifth and sixth chapters the particular forms and functions of tragic choruses and choral lyrics, concentrating on tragic choral phenomena in the Classical period in the fifth chapter, and tragic choral phenomena in the 4th c., Hellenistic, and Roman periods in the sixth chapter.⁷³ In each chapter I evaluate formal elements of tragic choruses and choral lyrics, including: (1) general features of dramatic choruses: their composition and size, the process of selecting and training a chorus, the role of the chorus-leader, and the conventional identities of the characters that were represented by the chorus; (2) formal characteristics of choral lyrics, including dialectical and metrical tendencies, and the extent to which the content of dramatic choral odes resembles non-dramatic choral poetic forms; (3) spatial aspects of dramatic choral performance, such as the position of the chorus in the theater vis-à-vis the actors, the shape of the chorus, choreographic elements; (4) musical dynamics related to dramatic choral performance, including a consideration of choral singing, and the instruments that accompanied the chorus; and (5) specific types of choral phenomena, including the *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodos*, lyric and non-lyric dialogue with actors, and non-dialogical utterances.

I then move to more detailed considerations of the functional dynamics of choral lyrics in tragedy, focusing on the relationship of the choral lyrics to the surrounding speeches, dialogue, and action of the actors. Two types of choral phenomena will be distinguished on the basis of whether the chorus: (1) *advances* the dramatic action by interacting with other characters; or, (2) *stands outside* of the dramatic action in order to cast it in a particular light. These will serve as

⁷³ A consequence of my decision to present an overarching survey of the forms and functions of *tragic* choruses is that I have chosen to exclude *comic* choruses from consideration. In this way, my approach conforms to the tendencies of the majority of Classical scholarship, in which the study of the functions of tragic and comic choruses are typically undertaken independent of one another. Indeed, the forms and functions of comic choruses are quite different from tragic choruses, and do not provide a good context in which to consider Revelation's hymns.

general categories through which more specific functionalities of the chorus will be considered, including the ways in which the chorus advances the dramatic action by providing relevant background information, introducing characters, foreshadowing dramatic events, etc., or casts the dramatic action in a particular mythical-historical, philosophical, and/or mythical-theological light. Finally, various theoretical models for considering the nature of the “voice” of the chorus, that is, its potential role as the mouthpiece of the author, or the community, etc., will be considered.

My goal in these chapters is not to present revolutionary models for evaluating tragic choruses, but rather to present an overview of the evidence of tragic choral phenomena as it is conventionally presented in Classical studies, so as to make the material accessible for those who are not familiar with the conventions of ancient drama. Thus, in the interest of presenting a general introduction to ancient choruses for non-specialists, I necessarily focus on broad trajectories of choral forms and functions.

In the final chapter, I consider Revelation’s hymns in terms of tragic choral phenomena, demonstrating ultimately that the hymns are *not* best considered in terms of tragic choral phenomena generally, inasmuch as they simply do not perform most of the most basic functions of choral lyrics in tragedy, but are best evaluated in terms of hymnic phenomena specifically, with which they share many formal and functional similarities.

Chapter 2: The Hymns in Revelation

Most scholars at the very least tacitly accept the designation of certain passages in Revelation as *hymns*. In what follows, I identify the formal, stylistic, and functional criteria by which these passages in Revelation may be properly identified as hymns, in light of formal, stylistic, and functional characteristics of hymns in antiquity. I will then consider the hymns in terms of content, position in their literary context(s), and relation(s) to the surrounding material.

I. Hymnic Material in the Ancient World

1. Definition of *Hymn*

A first task is to sort out various gradations of the meaning of the term ὕμνος in the ancient record. It sometimes appears as a general term to denote any form of *singing* or *song*, with the term being roughly synonymous to ἀείδος.⁷⁴ Elsewhere, however, the term was used to denote *praise*, either of men or of gods.⁷⁵ Gradually, it seems that the term came to denote specifically the praise of a deity, as is suggested by Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato distinguishes the praise of gods (ὕμνοι) from the praise of men (ἐγκώμια) (Plato, *Rep.* 10.607a). One piece of later Alexandrian evidence suggests that the hymn may have taken on specific formal features,⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Pindar *Ol.* 1. 8; *Pyth.* 6. 7; *Nem.* 8. 50; Homer, *Od.* 8.429; Aeschylus, *Ag.* 709; Hesiod, [*Scut.*] 205; Pausanias 5.18.4.

⁷⁵ E.g., several of Pindar's Epinician Odes, which are songs of praise in honor of a victor of an athletic contest, are cast as hymns: *Ol.* 1.8; 2.1; 7.14; *Pyth.* 10.53; *Nem.* 3. 65; *Isthm.* 7. 60. Cf. *Ol.* 3. 2; *Pyth.* 10. 53, in which the term is used to designate praise for humans. Likewise, several of the Homeric Hymns seem to be labeled hymns, e.g., *Hymn. Hom.* 9.9; *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* (5.) 293; *Hymn. Hom.* 18.11. Finally, the chorus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* suggests that the object of hymnic praise could be a city (Aesch. *Supp.* 1025). See Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 43, n. 11; 44, n. 13.

⁷⁶ A more detailed description of this evidence will be taken up in the following chapter, as part of a discussion of the generic qualities of various choral poetry (e.g., *paean*, *dithyramb*, *epinician ode*, etc.). See chapter 3, pp. 160–1.

though the vast majority of ancient commentators use hymn as defined by Plato as any song addressed to a deity.⁷⁷

2. Formal Elements of Hymns

Praise of the divine is the lowest common criterion by which modern commentators identify *hymnic* forms in ancient texts.⁷⁸ However, such a general definition, which considers the *content* of a composition—i.e., praise of the divine—to be the sole indicator that the composition is in fact a *hymn*, includes such a wide range of texts and so many formal variations that it rarely stands on its own. Often several formal elements are associated with hymnic forms. For instance, the god is typically addressed and praised in the second or third-person, either as an independent clause, or in the form of participles and/or relative clauses in the second or third-person.⁷⁹ Additionally, some have detected a basic tri-partite hymnic structure, including: (1) the invocation of the god; (2) praise of the god; and (3) a closing prayer. The invocation of the deity was most often the first element, though it could be deferred, and typically included the name of the god, divine epithets and titles, genealogies, and/or an accounting of the divine residences

⁷⁷ For instance, rhetorical handbooks echo this definition, see, e.g., the *progymnasmata* of Theon (1st c. CE), Alexander son of Numenius (2nd c. CE), Hermogenes (2nd c. CE), Aphthonius (4th c. CE), and Menander Rhetor (4th c. CE). Cf. *Etym. Gud. ὕμνος*: “a discourse in the form of adoration, with prayer conjoined with praise, addressed to a god.” Dionysios Thrax (2nd c. B.CE), includes heroes as objects of hymnic praise: “the ‘hymn’ is a poem comprising praises of the gods and heroes with thanksgiving.” 451.6 Hilgard. See Matthew E. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 116–124.

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Functions* (trans. Derek Collins and Janice Orion; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 75; William D. Furley and Jan Maarten Bremer, *Greek Hymns: Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period*. Vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 1–4; William Furley, “Types of Greek Hymns,” *Eos* 81 (1993): 24; J. M. Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” in *Faith, Hope, and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (ed. H.S. Versnel; Leiden: Brill, 1981), 193ff.; Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, 43ff.; Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 32–33.

⁷⁹ Norden was the first to recognize this, distinguishing between second-person (“Du-stil”) and third-person (“Er-stil”) forms. Eduard Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formgeschichte religiöser Rede* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1913), 143–77. Cf. William Furley and Jan Bremer, *Greek Hymns: Selected Cult Songs from the Archaic to the Hellenistic Period* (2 vols; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 56; Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998), 39; Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (trans. D. R. Ap-Thomas; 2 vols; Reprint of 1962 ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 86. Only rarely does a hymn take the form of a first-person address, as in “The Hymn of Wisdom’s Self-Praise” in Proverbs 8, and several of the Isis Aretologies.

and/or places of worship.⁸⁰ The invocation regularly included an exhortation to sing the hymn, either in first-person form (e.g., “Come now, let me sing of...”//Psalm 9: “I will praise you, O Lord, with all my heart...”), or on behalf of the participants (e.g. Psalm 33: “Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous ones...”).⁸¹

Most often following the invocation and/or exhortation, the second part of the hymn consisted primarily of praise of the deity,⁸² which was concentrated on illuminating the deity’s attributes (e.g., essential traits, powers, abilities, and privileges), and accounting for the deity’s past exploits, as for example the story of the god’s birth, past accomplishments, epiphanies, and/or primary activities.⁸³ Stylistically, this content could be presented in a number of different forms. Common were predicative participial phrases and relative clauses, *ekphrastic* descriptions of the deity’s attributes and exploits, anaphoric addresses, as well as longer, narrative depictions.⁸⁴

The precise content and stylistic tendencies naturally varied from one hymn to the next, and depended upon which deity was being praised, its length, and the attending circumstances surrounding the performance of the hymn. So, for instance, shorter hymns often contained abbreviated forms of the praise of the deity, while longer hymns included extended narratives. If the hymn was intended primarily or in part as a petition to the god (which is determined largely on the basis of whether or not it includes a specific petition or “prayer,” often as the third and

⁸⁰ Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 52–6.

⁸¹ For a summary of several scholars’ positions on this subject as it relates to the biblical Psalms, see Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 46; cf. Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 51–2.

⁸² This section of the hymn has been variously labeled. Ausfeld famously called it the *pars epica* on account of the long narrative sections detailing the exploits of the gods (especially evident in the Homeric Hymns). Others, noting that such long narratives are diminished or absent in many other hymnic genres, have labeled it more generally a *eulogia*. See, e.g., Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 56–60; Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” 195–6.

⁸³ Greek rhetoricians compiled sets of topics upon which hymnic praise may be based. See esp. Quint. 7, 7–8; *Alex. Rhetor in Rhet. Graeci* (ed. Spengel) III 5–6; Alexander Numenius in *Rhet. Graeci* (ed. Spengel) IV, 4. Leonhard von Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* (Lipsiae: Teubner, 1854). For a summary of these topics as part of a larger discussion of hymnic praise considered under the rubric of epideictic rhetoric, see Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 112–24.

⁸⁴ On the stylistic elements of Greek hymns, see E Norden, *Agnostos Theos*, 143–77; W. Race, “Aspects of Rhetoric and Form in Greek Hymns,” *GRBS* 23 (1982): 5–14; Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 56–60.

final element of the hymn, *see below*), certain elements were incorporated, including descriptions of the past honors given to the god by the hymnic petitioners, and an account of the past services rendered by the god to the petitioners.⁸⁵ Whatever the precise means by which the deity was praised in the second section of the hymn, it seems to have served ultimately as a kind of gift to the god, conferring honor so as to please the deity and, in this sense not unlike a sacrifice, to generate *χάρις* on behalf of the petitioners.⁸⁶

The final structural component of a hymn often consisted of a prayer or petition to the god, the object and purpose of which was for help in a time of distress, a wish for health, well-being or prosperity, and/or a summons for the presence of the deity to a particular location.⁸⁷ Insofar as a prayer often concludes the hymn, it has been thought by some to constitute the “climax” of the hymn, and the very “point of the hymn as a whole.”⁸⁸ Others, however, have objected that because petitions do not appear consistently in those compositions which fall under the general rubric of *hymns*, they do not constitute an essential component of the genre.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 57–9.

⁸⁶ See Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, 49ff.; W. Race, “Aspects of Rhetoric and Form,” 5–14.

⁸⁷ Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 60–3; Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 131–2.

⁸⁸ Indeed this has lent to the notion that a hymn was in its essence a type of prayer. Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 60–1.

⁸⁹ The question of the relationship of *hymns* to *prayers* is a complex methodological issue. In short, prayers and hymns share much in common, e.g., praise to the divine, invocations of the divine, and a listing of divine attributes, etc., and the relationship between them is complicated by the fact that *prayers* often conclude *hymns*. Answers to the question of the relationship between the two are varied. Some have suggested that the hymn is a *type* of prayer (Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” 193), a notion which derives primarily from the observation that many hymns include prayers as essential structural components, as well as the passing remarks of two ancient commentators on the subject: Plato, who identified hymns as a “species of song consisting in *prayers* to the gods” (Plato, *Leg.* 700ab), and Menander Rhetor, who in his rhetorical handbook suggests that certain prayers were properly considered hymns, and *vice versa* (Menander Rhetor, 1:333). It may have been that for at least these ancient commentators, hymns were considered prayers insofar as they included a prayer, or consisted primarily of a prayer. It appears, however, from Menander’s own classification system that most types of hymns are *not* considered prayers, and *vice versa*. Moreover, Plato is contradictory on the matter, as later in the same text he appears to suggest that prayers and hymns are separate entities (Plato, *Leg.* 801e). While the ancient testimony is ambiguous at best, perhaps the most damning evidence against the notion that the hymn is a type of prayer is the fact that often hymns did *not* include any kind of prayer at all. Most scholars seek to identify one or more elements which distinguish a hymn from a prayer, but it is not a simple task. Some have suggested that a hymn is distinguished from a prayer insofar as the former was *musical* in a way that the latter was not. E.g., Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, 54; cf. Bremer, “Greek Hymns,” 193. At

3. Types of Hymns

Hymns can be assigned categories on the basis of numerous stylistic, performative, and functional qualities, as well as the more specialized types of content included in them.⁹⁰ So, for instance, hymns can be distinguished on formal grounds on the basis of whether they were composed according to the principles of poetic meter, or in a form of stylized prose. Likewise, hymns may be distinguished according to their: (1) specific performance setting(s), including whether they were to be performed in a particular cultic setting (e.g., *dithyrambs* were often performed in the context of the worship of Dionysos, *psalms* in the context of worship for Yahweh, etc.), or in a non-cultic setting, such as a prelude for another poetic form (e.g., the Homeric Hymns), or in an instructional setting; and (2) attending performative context(s), including whether they were intended to be sung, chanted, or recited, accompanied by musical instruments, and presented by a single performer or a chorus of participants.⁹¹

the very same time, however, such scholars admit that musical elements were not inherent in all hymns (e.g., the so-called prose hymns), and that prayers could appear in a poetic form (i.e., metered) which suggests musical performance (e.g., certain Pindaric odes). Thus, musicality (or lack thereof) is not a viable criterion by which to distinguish consistently hymns from prayers. Pulleyn proposes a functional distinction. He argues that hymns consisted essentially of fulsome praise of the deity, constituted a gift or offering (*ἄγαλμα*) by which the god would be conferred honor (*τιμή*), and in which the god would take delight (somewhat analogously to a sacrifice), thereby generating *χάρις* on behalf of the petitioners.⁸⁹ By contrast, prayers lacked this generative function, and instead consisted essentially of a request of a god, the positive response to which was made more likely by the fact that the individual making the request was able to generate *χάρις* by means of praise, sacrifice, etc. Such a reckoning makes sense of the fact that prayers bear so many formal similarities to hymns, and the fact that prayers very often were embedded in, or concluded, a hymn.⁸⁹ In short, it must suffice to say that hymns and prayers are typically thought in antiquity to have been distinct entities, though they share certain formal similarities such that they cannot always be distinguished from one another in texts in which they are not explicitly identified as such one way or the other.

⁹⁰ A nice summary of the methodological problems associated with the classification of hymns is offered in Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 33ff. Cf., Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 1:1–40.

⁹¹ Foundational studies on the formal and functional aspects of ancient Greek hymns include most notably: Norden, *Agnostos Theos*; R. Wunsch, "Hymnos," *RE* 9: 1 (1914): 140–183; Bremer, "Greek Hymns," 193ff.; Klaus Berger, "Hymnus und Gebet," in *Formgeschichte des Neuen Testaments* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1984), 239–247; M. Latke, *Hymnische Materialien zu einer Geschichte der antiken Hymnologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991); K. Thrade, "Hymnus," *RAC* 16 (1994): 915–946. More recent taxonomic studies include: Furley, "Types of Greek Hymns," 121–41; Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 1:1–40; Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*, 43ff.; Johan C. Thom, *Cleanthes' Hymn to Zeus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 45ff.; Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 26–40; 124–33; N. G. Devlin, "The Hymn in Greek Literature: studies in form and content," (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1994); W. Burkert and F. Stolz, eds., *Hymnen der alten Welt im Kulturvergleich* (Göttingen 1994); Race, "Aspects of Rhetoric and Form in Greek Hymns," *GRBS* 23 (1982): 5–14.

Such criteria form matrices by which genres and sub-genres of ancient hymns are distinguished.⁹² For example, lyric hymns, which are characterized by elements of song and musical accompaniment, are distinguished from so-called prose hymns, which lack such features; choral hymns are distinguished from monodic hymns, on account of the difference in the number of performers; various sub-genres of hymns are distinguished on the basis of content which appears specific to them; and so on and so forth. Ultimately, the hymnic genre admits a great deal of variation of form(s), owing to the wide-range of ancient material included under the rubric of *praise to the divine*.

Thus, a general framework has been established for: (1) identifying hymns across the ancient world, both according to content (i.e., praise of a divine being), and certain formal features (second or third-person address, and a tri-partite division of content); and (2) considering these hymns in terms of a number of variable formal elements (music, accompaniment, number of performers, performance context(s), etc.). Such a framework incorporates a wide-range of hymns which spans many epochs, from (pre?)-Archaic times through the very end of the Roman period, and encompasses many genres of literature: Epic, lyric, drama, biblical texts, magical papyri, etc.⁹³

⁹² Such matrices are entirely *modern* heuristic tools for evaluating the very wide range of texts that fall under the rubric of hymns as they are so broadly defined in antiquity, as a text whose content consists primarily of praise of the divine. Several ancient commentators distinguished hymnic forms, but not consistently, nor according to a consistent set of principles. The various attempts at a classification of hymnic forms in antiquity will be taken up in the next chapter, with particular attention to the relationship of hymnic form(s) with Greek choral forms such as the *paeon*, *dithyramb*, etc.

⁹³ Encompassing and far-reaching as it is, the study of ancient hymns is beset by a number of pitfalls, which can only be touched upon briefly here. The study of hymnic phenomena across such a wide-range of texts has led to contributions from scholars across a number of different fields, leading naturally to the tendency for scholars in one field to specialize in the hymns peculiar to their field to the exclusion of others. For instance, it is not uncommon that a scholar of hymns in the Roman period fails to account for the hymns in the New Testament and Early Christianity. E.g., Gladys Martin, "The Roman Hymn," *CJ* 34:2 (Nov., 1938): 86–97. Likewise, scholars of the New Testament hymns regularly ignore many particular Roman-era hymnic forms, focusing instead exclusively on hymnic antecedents in the Hebrew Bible, non-canonical Jewish literature, and/or Christian analogues. E.g., Peter O'Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 193; Robert J. Karris, *A Symphony of New Testament Hymns* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996); Ralph P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ* (Downers

Hymnic forms are found in most genres of Greek literature, both in poetic genres such as lyric, epic, dramatic, and elegiac, as well as in some prose genres.⁹⁴ The earliest hymns are those which constitute the corpus of so-called Homeric hymns, a collection of 33 hymns of praise to each of the best known Greek gods,⁹⁵ followed by a variety of hymnic forms in the extant lyric poetry from the Archaic and Classical periods, associated with such poets as Sappho, Alkaios, Anacreon, Pindar, and Bacchylides.⁹⁶ By far the most sizeable collection of hymns from antiquity consists of those which were composed for, and performed by, the dramatic choruses of Classical tragedy and comedy, which will be considered in much more detail in chapters 4–5. From the Hellenistic period survive the hymns of Callimachus,⁹⁷ as well as Cleanthes' *Hymn to Zeus*.⁹⁸

So, too, are there a number of Jewish hymnic forms evident in texts from the Second Temple Period. Included under this rubric are many of the biblical Psalms,⁹⁹ the so-called “Hymn of Wisdom’s Self-Praise” in Proverbs 8, and in various biblical narrative sections.¹⁰⁰

Grove, Ill.: InverVarsity Press, 1997). Because the study of hymns encompasses a wide scope of academic disciplines and sub-fields, various sets of terms and categories have arisen in different fields. So, for instance, scholars of hymns who work under the rubric of Biblical Studies often employ terminologies and categories for considering biblical hymns with seemingly little consideration for hymnic categories employed in the study of hymns outside of the Bible and early Jewish and Christian communities.

⁹⁴ Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 1:41.

⁹⁵ D. J. Rayor, *The Homeric Hymns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Homeric Hymns* (2nd ed.; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); Michael Crudden, *The Homeric Hymns* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard Janko, “The Structure of the Homeric Hymns: a study in genre,” *Hermes* 109 (1981): 9–24.

⁹⁶ For a discussion of lyric poets, see chapter 3, pp. 147–52.

⁹⁷ R. Pfeiffer, *Callimachus. Vol. ii: Hymni et epigrammata* (Oxford: University Press, 1953); M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004).

⁹⁸ Thom, *Cleanthes’ Hymn to Zeus*.

⁹⁹ Much work has been done on the hymnic aspects of the biblical Psalms, beginning with the pioneering form-critical work of Hermann Gunkel, and subsequent form-critical scholarship in his wake. See Gunkel and Begrich, *Introduction to the Psalms*; Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*; C. Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980); C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981); Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988).

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Exod 15:1–18, 21; Deut 32:3–43; 33:26–29; Judg 5:3–5; 2 Sam 2:1–10. See Steven Weitzman, *Song and Story in Biblical Narrative: The History of a Literary Convention in Ancient Israel* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1997); James W. Watts, *Psalm and Story: Inset Hymns in Hebrew Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT

Jewish hymnic material can also be found outside of the Hebrew Bible in the Pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha,¹⁰¹ including many of the fragments from Qumran.¹⁰²

Extant hymns of the Roman period¹⁰³ include the Orphic hymns,¹⁰⁴ magical hymns, the hymns of Proclus,¹⁰⁵ the Isis Aretalogies,¹⁰⁶ and the prose hymns of Aelius Aristides.¹⁰⁷

Included in the Roman period are those hymns which appear in the New Testament,¹⁰⁸ which are

Press, 1992). Cf. Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 51–2.

¹⁰¹ Charlesworth includes a wide-range of texts in his survey of non-biblical, early Jewish hymns. While some of these texts bear formal similarities with hymns, many are best described in other terms (e.g., prayers, laments, etc.), as they do not fully match the criteria set forth for a hymn as outlined above. Pseudepigraphical and apocryphal texts which bear the most resemblances with other (biblical and/or Greek) hymns include: Ps 154; Dan (LXX) 3:24–90; Sir 39:12–35; Jdt 16:1–17; *Pss. Sol.* 2:30–37. See Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 73–6; James H. Charlesworth, “Jewish Hymns, Odes, and Prayers (ca. 167 B.C.E.–135 C.E.),” in *Early Judaism and Its Modern Interpreters* (ed. Robert A. Kraft and W.E. Nickelsburg; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 411–36; James H. Charlesworth, “A Prolegomenon to a New Study of the Jewish Background of the Hymns and Prayers in the New Testament,” *JJS* 33 (1982): 264–85; David Flusser, “Psalms, Hymns, and Prayers,” in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 551–77; Jan Liesen, *Full of Praise: An Exegetical Study of Sir 39, 12–35* (Boston: Brill, 2000); Patrick W. Skehan and Alexander A. Di Lella, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1987); Hans Hübner, *Die Weisheit Salomons* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 101–113.

¹⁰² Bilha Nitzan, *Qumran Prayer and Religious Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Esther-Glickler Chazon, “Hymns and Prayers in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (ed. James C. VanderKam and Peter W. Flint; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 244–270; Eileen Schuller, *Non-Canonical Psalms from Qumran: A Pseudipigraphic Collection* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Eileen M. Schuller, “Some Reflections on the Function and Use of Poetical Texts Among the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Esther G. Chazon; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 173–189; Bonnie Pedrotti Kittel, *The Hymns of Qumran: Translation and Commentary* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1980); Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985); H. Stegemann, “The Number of Psalms in *IQHodayot* and Some of Their Sections,” in *Liturgical Perspectives: Prayer and Poetry in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. E. Chazon; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 191–234; Menahem Mansoor, *The Thanksgiving Hymns* (Leiden: Brill, 1961).

¹⁰³ For a brief introduction to Roman hymnody, see Martin, “The Roman Hymn,” 86–97.

¹⁰⁴ Apostolos Athanassakis, *The Orphic Hymns: Text, Translation, and Notes* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977); Anne-France Morand, *Études sur les Hymnes orphiques* (Boston: Brill, 2001); Gordley, *Colossian Hymn*, 164–8.

¹⁰⁵ R. M. van den Berg, *Proclus' hymns: essays, translations, commentary* (Boston: Brill, 2001).

¹⁰⁶ Dieter Müller, *Ägypten und die griechischen Isis-Aretalogien* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961); Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 147–155;

¹⁰⁷ Charles Allison Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1968); Gerhard Jöhrens, *Der Athenahymnus des Ailios Aristideides* (Bonn: Habelt, 1981); D.A. Russell, “Aristides and the Prose Hymn,” in *Antonine Literature* (ed. D.A. Russell; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 199–216; Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*, 142–47.

¹⁰⁸ Introductory studies on New Testament hymns include: W. Hulitt Gloer, “Homologies and Hymns in the New Testament: Form, Content, and Criteria for Identification,” *PRS* 11 (1984): 115–32; Robert J. Karris, *A Symphony of New Testament Hymns*; G. Kennel, *Frühchristliche Hymnen?* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1995); J. Kroll, *Die Christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandria* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968); *Les Hymnes du Nouveau Testament et Leurs Fonctions. XXII^e congrès de l'Association catholique française pour l'étude de la Bible* (ed. Daniel Gerber and Pierre Keith; Strasbourg: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2009); J.T. Sanders,

taken by most scholars to include: Colossians 1:15–20,¹⁰⁹ Philippians 2:5–11,¹¹⁰ the *Magnificat* in Luke’s Infancy Narrative,¹¹¹ as well as the hymns in Revelation, to which we now turn.

II. Revelation’s Hymns

In all, sixteen units are most commonly identified as hymns in Revelation: 4:8d–e; 11; 5:9b–10, 12b, 13b; 7:10b, 12; 11:15b, 17–18; 12:10b–12; 15:3b–4; 16:5b–7b; 19:1b–2, 2, 5b, 6b–8).¹¹² However, insofar as most of these hymns constitute antiphonal pairs (e.g., the hymnic unit in 4:11 is an antiphonal response to the hymn in 4:8c; 5:12b is a response to 5:9b–10;

The New Testament Christological Hymns: Their Historical Background (Cambridge: University Press, 1971); J. Schattenmann, *Studien zum neutestamentlichen Prosahymnus*. (München: Verlag C. H. Beckns, 1965); G. Schille, *Frühchristliche Hymnen*. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1965); Leonard Thompson, “Hymns in Early Christian Worship,” *Anglican Theological Review* 55 (1973): 458–72; L.L. Thompson, “The Form and Function of Hymns in the NT: A Study in Cultic History” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1968); K. Wengst, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1972).

¹⁰⁹ Gordley, *The Colossian Hymn*; Jan Botha, “A stylistic analysis of the Christ hymn (Col 1:15–20),” in *A South African Perspective on the New Testament* (ed. Kobus J.h Petzer and Patrick J. Hartin; Leiden: Brill, 1986), 238–251; Luis Carlos-Reyes, “The Structure and Rhetoric of Colossians 1:15–20,” *FN* 12 (1999): 139–154; Ralph P. Martin, “An Early Christian Hymn (Col 1:15–20),” *EvQ* 36 (1964): 195–205; Christian Stettler, *Der Kolosserhymnus: Untersuchungen zu Form, traditions-geschichtlichem Hintergrund und Aussage von Kol 1, 15–20* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

¹¹⁰ Ralph P Martin, *A hymn of Christ*; Cf. Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 31–46; Barbara Eckman, “A Quantitative Metrical Analysis of the Philippians Hymn,” *NTS* 26 (1980): 258–266; Gordon D. Fee, “Philippians 2:5–11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?” *BBR* 2 (1992): 29–46.

¹¹¹ Stephen Farris, *The Hymns of Luke’s Infancy Narratives: Their Origin, Meaning, and Significance* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 11–13; 67–85.

¹¹² There are other units which bear affinities with hymnic forms, but which are often *not* considered as hymns, e.g., Rev 1:5a–6, 8; 13:4; 21:3b–4. The unit in Rev 1:5a–6 might be thought to contain preexisting material, and includes predicative titles, signaling the possibility that it constitutes a hymnic element. However, it is not presented with the introductory formula (i.e., λέγει/λέγοντες) which most often introduces the hymns elsewhere in Revelation. In Rev 1:8, the Lord God identifies God-self in the first-person as “the Alpha and Omega...the one who is and was and who is coming, the Pantokrator.” This title appears in hymns elsewhere in Revelation, which suggests that the title itself may be at least part of a hymnic form, while the fact that it appears as a first-person declaration of a god signals affinities with ancient hymns in the first-person (e.g., the “I Am” hymns associated with the Isis cult). However, this unit lacks the registry of the deeds of the god, and apparently for this reason alone suggests it is something other than a hymn. These first two units might be better characterized as liturgical units, or hymnic components, rather than hymns *per se*. Rev 13:4 includes the introductory formula (i.e., λέγοντες) but shares virtually no other similarities with other hymns, and ought not be considered as such. Finally, Rev 21:3b–5, though it does not praise a god *per se*, appears much like a hymn to the tabernacle (σκηνη) of God, in the deeds that will be accomplished by its presence. See Jörens, *Evangelium*, 20–2; 121ff.; O’Roarke, “The Hymns of the Apocalypse,” 400–1; S. Läuchli, “Eine Gottesdienststruktur in der Johannesoffenbarung,” *ThZ* 16 (1960): 361–7; Massyngbaerde Ford, “The Christological Function of the Hymns,” 211–2, esp. n. 26.

etc.),¹¹³ and are typically surrounded and separated by narrative elements which provide some context for the hymns, they are most often considered in terms of these larger units.

Although these units are never identified by the text itself as hymns (e.g., ὕμνοι) they can be identified as such on the basis of formal and functional affinities with hymns in the ancient world. Each of these units meets the most basic criterion of a “hymn” insofar as they consist of praise to a deity, i.e., to the Lord God (4:9–11; 7:10–13; 11:17–18; 15:3–4; 16:5–7; 19:1–5), to the Lamb, whom, we shall see, is worshipped as a deity in Revelation (5:9–13), or to God and the Lamb together (7:15–17; 11:15; 12:10–12; 19:6–8).

Having met this general criterion, these units can be further identified as hymns on the basis of the fact that they bear affinities with certain structural and/or stylistic hallmarks of hymns. That is, they typically begin with an invocation of the divine addressee in the form of second or third person address,¹¹⁴ often by including a divine epithet,¹¹⁵ and the places of worship,¹¹⁶ and often enumerate divine attributes and deeds. Moreover, various aspects of Revelation’s hymns bear affinities with specific hymnic forms. For instance, to the extent that all of the hymns are said to be sung,¹¹⁷ apparently to the accompaniment of the *kithara* (5:8; cf. 15:2), they can be considered lyric hymns. However, insofar as the hymns are presented in a kind of stylized prose, but not according to the principles of a particular metrical system, they

¹¹³ Jörns characterizes the antiphonal character of the hymns, “Eine Responion drueckt Zustimmung zu etwas Vorangegangenem und Aneignung desselben aus.” Jörns, *Evangelium*, 19. Only the hymn in Rev 15:3b–4 stands alone without an antiphonal response.

¹¹⁴ E.g., “We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty...” (11:16); “Praise our God, all you his servants...” (19:5); etc.

¹¹⁵ E.g., The Lord God “Almighty” (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6); “O Holy One” (16:5).

¹¹⁶ For the Lord God “seated on the throne” (5:13; 7:10, 15) and “within his temple” (7:15). For the Lamb, “at the center of the throne” (7:17).

¹¹⁷ Some of the hymns are clearly identified as songs, e.g., ᾄδουσιν...ὠδήν (5:9; 15:3). Elsewhere, the fact that the hymn is prefaced by an introductory formula suggests that it is *sung*, as for example, words like λέγοντες and χράζουσιν (11:15). Others are said to be sung “φωνῆ μεγάλῃ” (5:12; 7:10; 11:15), which also denotes singing. See n. 66 below.

resemble non-metrical (but nonetheless lyric!) hymns.¹¹⁸ Further, those hymns sung by a group might be evaluated under the broader rubric of *choral* hymns, while those sung by only one character evaluated in light of *monodic* hymnody. Finally, insofar as the hymns are sung as part and parcel of the worship of God and the Lamb in the heavenly throne-room, they can be understood in terms of *cultic* hymns which were performed in similar cultic contexts.

1. Exegetical Analysis of Revelation's Hymns

In what follows, I will offer exegetical assessments of the individual hymns in Revelation, including considerations of particular formal and stylistic elements, internal structural, content, theological and/or Christological value, and their relationship to the surrounding narrative. I consider as well the context in which each of the hymns is sung, and the description(s) of those singing the hymns.

A. *The Heavenly Throne-Room*

A heavenly throne-room provides the setting for much of what transpires in Revelation, including each of the three judgment scenes (the opening of the Seals in 6:1–7; 8:1–5; the trumpet blasts in 8:6–9:21; 11:15–19; and the seven bowls in 15:1–16:21), the measuring of the Temple (11:1–14), the vision of the Lamb with the 144,000 on Mount Zion (14:1–5). Important for our present purposes, the throne-room is also the location of the singing of each of the 16

¹¹⁸ For those familiar with Greek poetry and the metrical systems of Greek poetry in particular, the term lyric as it is used to include non-metrical hymns may be somewhat confusing. That is, in the world of Greek metrics, lyric poetry denotes verse which appears in *strophic* (as opposed to *stichic*) metrical system, and which was therefore thought to have been sung to the accompaniment of an instrument such as the lyre. However, in the world of ancient hymnody, lyric hymns refer to those which were sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument, regardless of whether or not they appeared in a particular metrical system. This is due largely to the fact that in many poetic forms outside of the Greek world are not presented in metrical forms, despite the fact that they are sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Thus, there appear hymns in the ancient world (e.g., in Hebrew poetry) which are non-metrical, but *lyric* to the extent that they are thought to have been sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. For a more detailed explanation of the metrical properties of lyric poetry in the ancient Greek world, see chapter 3, pp. 162–7.

hymns.¹¹⁹ Thus, while a full reflection on the imagery and symbolism of the throne-room falls outside the scope of this study, a consideration of some of its basic features will provide a picture of the context in which each of the hymns is sung in Revelation, and reveal both the identities of some of those who sing the hymns, as well as the objects of the hymnic praise.

An initial description of the throne-room, which includes an accounting of its most prominent features and brief sketch of the characters who occupy it, constitutes chapters 4–5 of Revelation. The first element described is the throne itself, and the one seated upon it (4:2). The imagery used to describe the throne leaves no doubt that the one seated upon it is God, e.g., the throne itself is described as emitting lightning and thunder (4:5a), which evokes the theophany on Mount Sinai in Ex. 19:16–20; the seven flaming torches in front of the throne (4:5b) recall the vision of the heavenly throne-chariot of the Lord in Ezek 1:13; and the rainbow that surrounds the throne (4:3) conjures the image of the glory of the Lord as it is depicted later in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 1:27). What this imagery intimates is made explicit at the end of the vision and subsequently throughout Revelation: the one seated upon the throne is “Lord and God” (4:11; cf. 19:11).

The throne is said to be surrounded by four “living creatures” (τέσσαρα ζῶα),¹²⁰ each of whom is described as having six wings, with eyes covering their front, back, and insides,

¹¹⁹ In some cases this fact is explicitly confirmed, for example, in chapters 4–5, where the depiction of the Elders and Living Creatures singing hymns is part and parcel of the description of the throne-room itself. In other instances, it is made clear that the hymn-singing is taking place in the heavenly throne-room, as when the Great Multitude is described as “standing before the throne and before the Lamb...” (7:9), or when the 24 Elders are depicted singing while sitting “on their thrones before God” (11:16), etc. (cf. 7:11; 15:2–3; 19:4). In still other instances, though the throne-room itself is not mentioned, it can be presumed that the hymns are likewise being sung in the throne-room, insofar as the singing is said to be done “in heaven” (e.g., 11:15; 12:10; 19:1). Only in Rev 16:5–7, is it unclear exactly where the “Angel of the waters” is singing, though its location in the throne-room in heaven can be inferred from the fact that the antiphonal response immediately following it comes from the altar of the throne-room itself (16:7)!

¹²⁰ The Greek here is somewhat confusing. Here the living creatures are literally said to be “in the midst of the throne and in a circle around the throne” (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου). This seems to be an amalgamation of descriptions of the Living Creatures in Ezekiel, which are described in the LXX as both “in the middle” of the fire which represented God on his heavenly chariot (Ezek 1:5), and descriptions of the *cherubim* in

respectively resembling a lion, ox, human, and eagle (4:6–8).¹²¹ These creatures, whose features especially resemble those of heavenly entities as they are described in the throne-room visions of Isa 6 and Ezek 1,¹²² as well as in heavenly visions of subsequent Jewish literature,¹²³ might be thought to function analogously to the creatures in these antecedent visions, namely, to support the divine throne.¹²⁴ But the primary function of the living creatures in Revelation, or at least the only one revealed in the text, consists in their offering endless praise and worship to God (4:8) and to the Lamb, who is introduced later in the scene. As such, these creatures perform, oftentimes with other heavenly entities, several of the hymns sung in Revelation (4:8; 5:9–13; 19:1–8),¹²⁵ the specific contexts and details of which will be taken up in a more detailed consideration of each of the individual hymns.

In a circle around the throne (κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου) are said to be 24 thrones, on which are seated 24 “elders” (πρεσβυτέρους), who are described as wearing white robes and golden crowns (4:4).¹²⁶ Unlike the living creatures, the identities of the 24 elders are a matter of considerable debate because they do not appear in depictions of heavenly activity in antecedent Jewish and Christian literature. Consequently, proposals for the identities of the elders have included: (1) Heavenly counterparts of the leaders of the twenty-four courses of priests in Second Temple period, (2) Twenty-four divisions of musicians, the descendants of

Isaiah, which are depicted “in a circle around” the throne of the Lord (Isa 6:2).

¹²¹ R.G. Hall, “Living Creatures in the Midst of the Throne,” *NTS* 36 (1990): 609–613; J. Leveque, “Les quatre vivants de l’Apocalypse,” *Chr* 26 (1979): 333–339.

¹²² E.g., four similar creatures, which are identified in the LXX as ζῴα (Hb: hayyôt), which are equated later in the text with *cherubim*, are depicted in Ezekiel beside the divine throne, each having a human form with faces of a human, lion, ox, and eagle, respectively (Ezek 1:5–14). Likewise, *cherubim* are depicted in the throne-vision in Isaiah in a circle around the throne, having six wings (Isa 6:2).

¹²³ E.g., *2 Bar.* 51:11; *Apoc. Ab.* 10:9; 4QShirShabb; *1 En.* 14; 60:1–6; 71; *2 En.* 20–1. See Aune, *Revelation*, 1:297.

¹²⁴ The notion that the *cherubim* support the divine throne is explicated most fully in Ezekiel, where their movements correspond with, and in fact determine, the movements of the wheels on the divine chariot (Ezek 1:19–21), and also evident in *2 Sam* 22:11; *Pss* 18:10; 80:1; 99:1; *Isa* 37:16. Cf. *2 Bar.* 51:11; *Apoc. Ab.* 10:9; 4QShirShabb.

¹²⁵ Other hymns, including those sung at Rev 11:15 and 12:10–12, are sung by a heavenly multitude which may include the creatures.

¹²⁶ The 24 Elders are actually introduced in the text prior to the Living Creatures.

Levi, (3) Heavenly representatives of Israel and Church (e.g., 12 tribes of Israel + 12 Apostles), (4) Martyred Christians, (5) Old Testament Saints, (6) Angels of the heavenly court, (7) Figures from Astral Mythology, (8) 24 books of the Old Testament, and/or (9) 24 hours of the day.¹²⁷

Like the living creatures, the primary function of the 24 Elders consists of their offering praise and worship to God and the Lamb.¹²⁸ It is explicitly stated that the Elders worship whenever the living creatures “give glory, honor, and thanks” (4:9–10), and scenes in which the 24 Elders are depicted in worship appear throughout the text. In these scenes, the elders are depicted with harps and censers filled with incense (5:8), prostrate before the throne of God (4:10; 5:14; 11:16; 19:4), with their crowns cast down before it, singing hymns to God and/or the Lamb (4:11; 5:9–14; 7:11–12; [11:16–18(?)]; 19:5).¹²⁹ The individual hymns of the elders are considered below.

At the center (ἐν μέσῳ) of the throne appears a Lamb (ἀρνίον) with seven horns and seven eyes, standing “as if slaughtered” (5:6).¹³⁰ Though it is not explicitly stated here, the Lamb represents the crucified and exalted Jesus. So much is intimated by the fact that it is said to

¹²⁷ See D.E. Aune, “Excursus 4A: The Twenty-Four Elders,” in *Revelation*, 1:287–292; J.F. Burke, “The Identity of the 24 Elders,” *GrJ* 3 (1961), 19–29; A. Feuillet, “Les vingt-quatre vieillards de l’Apocalypse,” *RB* 65 (1958), 5–32; A. Feuillet, “Quelques énigmes des chapitres 4 à 7 de l’Apocalypse. Suggestions pour l’interprétation du langage image de la révélation Johannique,” *EeV* 86 (1976): 455–459; 471–479; A.E. Harley, “Elders” *JThS* 25 (1974): 318–332.

¹²⁸ On two separate occasions, Rev 5:5 and 7:13–17, a comment is offered by an individual elder. These instances will be considered in more detail in the final chapter, insofar as they can be understood in terms of the function of the chorus-leader in Greek and Roman tragedy.

¹²⁹ Other hymns, including those sung at Rev 11:15 and 12:10–12, are sung by a heavenly multitude which may include the Elders.

¹³⁰ On account of the ambiguous prepositional phrase used to describe the location of the Lamb in the throne-room (ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου καὶ τῶν τεσσάρων ζῶων καὶ ἐν μέσῳ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων), the exact position of the Lamb vis-à-vis the throne, Living Creatures, and Elders is not clear. At issue is the connotation of the phrase ἐν μέσῳ, which can mean either “in the middle” or “in the midst.” The former rendering, which implies that the Lamb is seated in the center of the throne (and thus located in the conceptual *center* of the throne-room itself), seems more likely to be the correct one. Such a reading corresponds with the claim in Rev 7:17 that the Lamb occupies the middle of the throne (τὸ ἀρνίον τὸ ἀνά μέσον τοῦ θρόνου), and coincides with multiple claims in Revelation that the exalted Christ shares the throne with his Father (3:21; 22:1). Others, however, on account of the fact that the Lamb is said in chapter 5 to have “gone and taken [the scroll] from the right-hand of the one seated on the throne” (Rev 5:7), which suggests that the Lamb was not on the throne at all, have argued that the Lamb is depicted as standing in proximity to the throne, the creatures, and the elders. Cf. Aune, *Revelation*, 1:351–2.

be “slaughtered,” a veiled reference to Jesus’ death on the cross, an association which is made more clear in the hymns to the Lamb which follow its introduction. Thus, as in other passages in the NT in which Jesus’ crucifixion is understood in terms of the expiatory sacrifice of a lamb (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7; John 1:29, 36), here also in Revelation is Jesus represented as a sacrificial lamb.¹³¹

Unique in the New Testament, however, is the depiction in Revelation of the crucified Jesus as the sacrificed Lamb who also stands in heaven as a messianic ruler. The identification of Jesus *as* a lamb draws upon antecedent Jewish apocalyptic traditions in which the Lamb is presented as a leader or ruler,¹³² and in one case a Jewish messianic ruler.¹³³ That the Lamb is depicted as a messianic ruler is also suggested by the fact that he is designated “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (5:5; cf. 22:16), titles with strong messianic overtones in early Jewish and Christian literature.¹³⁴ The depiction of the crucified Jesus as a messianic ruler in heaven is most clearly demonstrated, however, by the fact that he shares the throne with God

¹³¹ The notion that the crucifixion of Jesus represents an expiatory sacrifice is not only inferred from the fact that Jesus is depicted as a slaughtered Lamb but is also suggested in Rev 5:9, where the “blood of the Lamb” is said to serve as a ransom for God, and Rev 12:11, where the “brothers” (i.e., Christians) are said to have “conquered [the accuser] by the blood of the Lamb.”

¹³² E.g., rams (and goats) represent kings of the Median and Persian empires in Dan 8:2–8, 20–1. Lambs represent various figures in the so-called Animal Apocalypse (*1 En.* 85–90), as when Samuel is depicted as a lamb sent by God to David, who is another lamb, to become a ram. i.e., an adult, male lamb which represents the king of the sheep (*1 En.* 89:42). On the lamb imagery, see C.K. Barrett, “The Lamb of God,” *NTS* 1 (1954–5): 210–8; P-A. Harlé, “L’Agneau de l’Apocalypse et le Nouveau Testament,” *ETR* 31 (1956): 26–35; N. Hillyer, “‘The Lamb’ in the Apocalypse,” *EvQ* 39 (1967): 228–36.

¹³³ In the *Testament of Joseph*, the son of a “virgin born from Judah... a spotless lamb” is depicted as withstanding the attack of a lion and other wild animals: “...but the lamb conquered them, and destroyed them, trampling them underfoot” (*T. Jos.* 19:8). See Joachim Jeremias, “Das Lamm, das aus der Jungfrau hervorging (TestJos 19.8),” *SNW* 57 (1966): 216–9. Cf. early Christian sources in which Jesus is understood as a Lamb, e.g., 1 Cor 5:7; John 1.

¹³⁴ Though used in tandem in Revelation, these titles have histories independent of one another in early Jewish and Christian literature. The title “lion of Judah,” which was bestowed upon Jacob’s son Judah (Gen 49:9), carries messianic symbolism insofar as it was Judah’s progeny which would constitute the lineage of King David. The notion that the figure of the lion represents the Messiah is conveyed in early Jewish texts such as *T. Jud.* 24:5 and *4 Ezra* 12:31–2. The “Root of David” likewise has explicit messianic symbolism insofar as it often was used to refer to the messianic king in prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12; Isa 11:1, 10) and in early Jewish messianic texts (4QFlor; 4QCommGen A 3–4; 4QpIsa 3:15–22; 4Q285 7:1–4; *T. Jud.* 24:4–6; Sir 47:22; *4 Ezra* 12. Other early Christian texts reflect the view that the Messiah would be born in the lineage of David (e.g., the title “son of David” is applied to Jesus in Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; Mark 10:47–8; 12:35; Luke 18:38–9; cf. Matt 1:6; Luke 1:32, 69; 2:4; 3:31; Acts 2:30–2; 13:22–3; Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8). See Aune, *Revelation*, 1:350–1.

(3:21; 5:6; 7:17; 22:1)¹³⁵ and is tasked with carrying out the eschatological judgment of God, which is represented in the depiction of the Lamb's taking the scroll and its seven seals (5:1–5), and opening them to unleash the eschatological destruction upon the world (6:1–17; 8:1–5).

The initial description of the heavenly throne-room in chapters 4–5 is rounded out by the depiction of the voice of “many angels...number[ing] myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands” surrounding the throne in a circle (5:11). Little more is said of these angels at this point in the text, though their identities may be understood in terms of depictions of heavenly entities which surround the heavenly throne in antecedent Jewish literature. Most important among these is a scene in Daniel, in which the “Ancient of Days” is described sitting on a throne, attended by “thousands and thousands (χιλῖαι χιλιάδες)” with “myriads and myriads (μύριαι μυριάδες)” before him (Dan 7:10). Heavenly angels surrounding God's throne are depicted in terms similar to those in Daniel 7:10 elsewhere in the Old Testament (Deut 33:2; cf. Job 25:2–3; Ps 68:17), Jewish apocalyptic literature (*1 En.* 14:22; 40:1; 60:1; 71:8; *Apoc. Zeph.* 4:1; 8:1; 2 *Bar.* 48:10), and in early Christian literature which recalls these visions in Daniel and Enoch (*1 Clement* 34:6; Jude 1:14). Thus, the angels surrounding the throne in Revelation appear to represent the innumerable angels who were fairly common stock characters in scenes depicting God upon the heavenly throne in Jewish and Christian literature. As for their function in Revelation, they are introduced as singing, along with the Living Creatures and Elders, praises to the Lamb (5:12), a role which they are said to perform (once more with the Living Creatures and Elders) again in 7:11.

Having now surveyed each of the characters, and groups of characters, as they are presented in the initial vision of the throne-room in Rev 4–5, it remains to reflect briefly on the scene in its totality. Taken together, the accoutrements, characters, and imagery which constitute

¹³⁵ See n. 57 above.

the heavenly throne-room scene suggests very strongly that the throne-room represents the sanctuary of the heavenly temple of God, which is confirmed by the fact that the throne-room is explicitly designated a “temple (ὁ ναός)” throughout Revelation (7:15; 11:19; 15:5–8; 16:1).¹³⁶

The heavenly throne represents the center of this throne-room, both geographically insofar as it marks the center-point of the various groups of heavenly entities arranged in circles around it—the Living Creatures, 24 Elders, and myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands of angels—but also conceptually insofar as it is the first element described in the vision (4:2), and the fact that throne appears at several points to be a synecdoche for the throne-room itself.¹³⁷ The centrality of the throne derives from the fact that the two primary characters in Revelation, God and the exalted Jesus are said to occupy it.

Having now considered this context for the performance of the hymns, and several of the central characters who directly or indirectly take part in singing them, it is possible to consider the hymns themselves in some detail.

B. *Rev 4:8–11*

The first antiphonal pair of hymns occurs in chapter 4 at the conclusion of the introductory vision of the throne.¹³⁸ The first hymn occurs as part and parcel of the introduction

¹³⁶ Still, some of the features, imagery, and denizens of the throne-room in Revelation are drawn from other conceptual realms, including earthly tabernacles and temples, the heavenly court-room in Daniel 7:9ff., descriptions of the throne-rooms of Ancient Near Eastern monarchs, and Roman Imperial court ceremonials. For a detailed consideration of the images and accoutrements in Rev’s throne-room in terms of descriptions of tabernacle and temples, see Robert A. Briggs, *Jewish Temple Imagery in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999); Gregory Stevenson, *Power and Place: Temple and Identity in the Book of Revelation* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2001). On similarities with Ancient Near Eastern throne-rooms, see L. Mowry, “Rev 4–5 and Early Christian Liturgical Usage,” *JBL* 71 (1952): 75–84; D.E. Aune, “Revelation 5 as an Ancient Egyptian Enthronement Scene? The Origin and Development of a Scholarly Myth,” in *Kropp og Sjæl: Festkrift til Olav Hognestad* (ed. Theodor Jørgensen, Dagfinn Rian, and Ole Gunnar Winsnes; Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag, 2000), 85–91. Finally, for similarities with Imperial Roman Court ceremonials, see D.E. Aune, “The Influence of Roman Imperial Court Ceremonial on the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 28 (1983): 5–26.

¹³⁷ E.g., Rev 16:17; 19:5; 21:3.

¹³⁸ This is also to say that there are no hymns in the prologue (1:1–8), the initial vision of the Son of Man (1:9–20), or the letters to the seven churches (2:1–3:22), which precede the vision of the throne-room in chapters 4–5. Though

of the living creatures, which are said to be “singing (λέγοντες)¹³⁹ day and night without ceasing”:

Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come (4:8c)

The first part of this hymn recalls (the first part of the) so-called Trisagion (Hb: *Qěduššah*), the song sung by the heavenly *seraphim* around the heavenly throne of God in Isa 6:3: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory,” a song which also appears in subsequent Jewish apocalyptic texts (e.g., *1 En.* 39:12–13; *2 En.* 21:1), and in *1 Clem.* 34:6—a text practically contemporaneous with Revelation—and in later Jewish and Christian liturgies,¹⁴⁰ *hekhalot* literature, and magical texts.¹⁴¹

Thus, the Trisagion in this hymn of the living creatures functions to identify explicitly the one “seated upon the throne” (4:2c) in terms familiar from antecedent Jewish traditions in which God is likewise seated upon a heavenly throne, surrounded by a host of heavenly entities, etc. At the same time, the adjectives used to characterize God in this hymn, “Lord” (κύριος) and “Almighty” (ὁ παντοκράτωρ), provide more specific information as to the particular nature of the God being described. The attributive adjective παντοκράτωρ denotes the belief that God is

see n. 39 in this chapter.

¹³⁹ This word is most often translated *singing* in English editions. Though λέγω most often denotes the act of *speaking* or *saying*, with absolutely no sense of *singing* implied, in certain contexts the word appears to take that meaning. See, for example, *Anacreont.* 23.1. That the term denotes singing in Revelation may be inferred from the fact that a hymn is once specifically referred to as a “song” (5:9; 15:3), but also from the fact that the participle λέγοντες is occasionally paired with indicative verbs which denote singing, e.g., ᾄδουσιν (5:9; 15:3), and κράζουσιν (7:10).

¹⁴⁰ While the Trisagion was most certainly prevalent in Jewish and Christian liturgies of late antiquity, it is debated whether it constituted part of earlier Jewish and Christian liturgies. On the question of the Trisagion in Jewish and Christian liturgies of late antiquity, see B.D. Spinks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer* (Cambridge: University Press, 1991); J. Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 230–3. On the issue of the Trisagion in early Jewish and Christian liturgies, see L. Mowry, “Revelation 4–5,” 75–84; D. Flusser, “Jewish Roots of the Liturgical Trisagion,” *Imm* 3 (1973–4): 37–43; Pierre Prigent, *Commentary on the Apocalypse of St. John* (trans. Wendy Pradels; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 29ff.

¹⁴¹ For a list of *hekhalot* and magical texts in which the Trisagion appears, see Aune, *Revelation*, 1:305–6.

considered the *ruler of all things*, which is implied by the etymology of the term,¹⁴² and by its use in the LXX and in Greek literature and inscriptions.¹⁴³ Thus, with this term the sovereignty of God is highlighted.

The designation of God as κύριος, a term which has a long history in non-Jewish Greek literature, the LXX, early Jewish and Christian literature, and properly denotes “authority” over a household, an army, slaves, and/or other persons,¹⁴⁴ further conveys the idea of the sovereignty of God. The term was used widely throughout antiquity, apparently first of gods and eventually of men, often in coordination with terms which similarly denote “authority” and “power,” including βασιλεύς, θεός, and στρατηγός. While the term is most often (always?) translated in modern English editions as an attributive adjective (i.e. “Lord God Almighty”), it is actually a predicate form, connoting rather more precisely the fact that God Almighty *is* Lord. At any rate, the adjective, like παντοκράτωρ, clearly denotes the essentially sovereign nature of God.

The epithet “ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος,” which appears in the hymn of the elders in place of the traditional ending of the Trisagion (“the whole earth is full of his glory”), concludes the *strophe*. While the substantive participle ὁ ὢν appears in the LXX and in Hellenistic Jewish texts and inscriptions as a designation for God,¹⁴⁵ the epithet as it appears here in the hymn of the living creatures (and, in variant forms, elsewhere in Revelation) bears stronger affinities with the tri-partite designation for God in antecedent (non-Jewish) Greek literature and in later Rabbinic

¹⁴² Lit. “ruler of all.”

¹⁴³ E.g., παντοκράτωρ is the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew *šēbā ʾōt* in the LXX when it is not simply transliterated into Greek letters. Less frequently, it is found in Greek inscriptions and literature, and used by Hellenistic Jewish authors, to denote the supremacy of God over all things. Michaelis, “παντοκράτωρ,” *TDNT* 3:914–5.

¹⁴⁴ Quell, Foerster, et al., “κύριος,” *TDNT* 3:1039–1095.

¹⁴⁵ As it is used in the LXX and Hellenistic Judaism, the term may derive from LXX Exod 3:14, where ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν stands as the Greek translation of “I am who I am” (Hb: *ʾehyeh ʾāšer ʾehyeh*). See Josephus, *Ant.* 8.350; Philo, *Mos.* 1.75; *Somn.* 1.231; *Mut.* 11; *Det.* 160; *Deus* 110; *Opif.* 172; *Legat.* 3.181; *Abr.* 121; Jer [LXX] 1:6; 4:10; 14:13; 39:17. For the term as it appears in Jewish inscriptions, magical texts and amulets, see Aune, *Revelation*, 1:30–1.

sources, in which God is characterized as one who *was, is, and will be*.¹⁴⁶ As in these Greek contexts, the epithet appears here to denote the eternity of God, with an important modification: The standard characterization of God as one who *will be* (ἔσται; ἔσσομενα; etc.), has been changed to reflect the notion that God is *coming* (ὁ ἐρχόμενος). This modification appears to put into relief the notion of the impending eschatological arrival of God, a notion which is reflected throughout Revelation, and which in fact serves as a kind of frame for the text as a whole.¹⁴⁷ In this way, the hymn re-frames the notion of the eternal existence of God to denote the fact that God's future consists primarily in God's *coming*, which, as will be shown in the subsequent vision-sequences of chaps. 6–21, entails judgment on God's enemies and salvation for God's elect.

Following this hymn of the living creatures is a brief narrative interlude in which the 24 elders are depicted as falling before the one seated on the throne, and casting their crowns before it (4:9–10), a scene which serves as the context for their performance of an antiphonal response to the hymn of the living creatures:

*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power,
For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created*

The first part of the hymn of the Elders consists of an introductory formula, common to this and the following two hymns (cf. 5:9, 11), an invocation in which the subject is deemed to

¹⁴⁶ Various forms of this tri-partite temporal scheme can be found applied to various gods throughout Greek literature, including: Homer, *Il.* 1:70; the pre-Socratics, Plato, *Tim.* 37d ff.; Pausanias, X, 12.5; Plutarch, *Is. Os.*, 9, 354c; *Corp. Herm.* 312.10; and on an Eleusinian inscription of the Augustan period (Ditt. Syll.³, 1125). Several Rabbinic texts include the tri-partite expression, including *Exod. Rab.* 3:14; *Tg. Ps.-J* 1; cf. Deut 32:39. Cf. Büchsel, *TDNT* 2:399.

¹⁴⁷ That is, a proclamation of the impending arrival of God appears in the very beginning of Revelation (“Look, he is coming with the clouds!” (1:7), and is repeated three times in the final chapter (22:7, 12, 20). Cf. also the claims that God will come upon those who do not repent in Rev 2:5, 16.

be “worthy to receive” a number of predicate adjectives (ἄξιος + λαβεῖν + dir. obj.).¹⁴⁸ In order to appreciate the meaning of this formula, it is necessary first to evaluate the precise force of these adjectives.

Honor (τιμή) is best characterized as the value ascribed to someone (or something), and/or acts or services which represent or characterize this value. In other words, to bestow honor on somebody or something is to accord it a value, and/or to perform some kind of act which represents this valuation.¹⁴⁹ While in the most basic sense, then, honor represents a *value* in the most neutral sense of the term, both in the LXX and in non-Jewish Greek and Hellenistic literature, and in the New Testament, “honor” is very often the prerogative of persons of high-standing (e.g., kings), things of high-value, or of gods. That is, persons of high-standing or gods are accorded “honor(s),” while those who are of little value have little or no “honor.”

Glory (δόξα), as it occurs in the LXX and NT, has a related connotation.¹⁵⁰ As a translation of the Hebrew word *kabod*, it connotes the attributes of a person, or a god, by which high status is revealed.¹⁵¹ In the case of persons of high-standing, their glory may be revealed in their wealth and possessions, or in the importance, reputation, and/or prestige associated with their status. As it relates to God, glory is variously revealed, often through meteorological phenomena, or by a radiant light, but in each case similarly revealing the nature of God.¹⁵² The fact that δόξα and τιμή similarly represent the high value or status accorded to, or reflected by, a

¹⁴⁸ There are clear differences between these formulae as they are found in Revelation. For example, the invocation is found in both the second-person form, as here and in 5:9, and the third-person form, as in 5:11. Likewise, there are differences in the predicate adjectives that the subject is said to be “worthy” to receive, and in the invocation. Despite these differences, some have claimed that the construction ἄξιος + λαβεῖν + dir. obj. constitutes a previously established Christian formula. See Jörens, *Evangelium*, 56–70.

¹⁴⁹ J. Schneider, “τιμή,” *TDNT* 8:169–80.

¹⁵⁰ In non-biblical Greek sources the term often denotes simply an “opinion” or “expectation.” Kittel, “δόξα,” *TDNT* 2:233–4.

¹⁵¹ Kittel, *TDNT* 2:238–42.

¹⁵² In the NT the “glory” of God is also variously depicted in the LXX sense of the *radiance* of God, with the innovation that the “glory” of God is revealed variously through Jesus, as for example in the Synoptic Gospels in the stories of Jesus’ Transfiguration and in stories of his resurrection appearances, and in the Gospel of John variously in the acts of the earthly ministry of Jesus.

person, thing, or god, is reflected in the fact that they often appear together, in the LXX, early Jewish literature, and early Christian literature, as they are here in this hymn.¹⁵³

Finally, in its most basic sense in the Greek world, δύναμις connotes the ability or capacity of a person to accomplish a task.¹⁵⁴ This is also the sense of the term as it is often employed in the LXX, as a translation of the Hebrew *hayil*.¹⁵⁵ However, the term takes on additional dimensions in the LXX, as it sometimes appears to denote an *army* or the *power of an army*—both as the translation of the Hebrew *hayil*¹⁵⁶ and *tzabab*¹⁵⁷—and, as a translation of the Hebrew *geburah*, more generally the *power* or *strength* of a person, god, or army.¹⁵⁸ As it was used as a predicate in this most general sense, it usually reflected the attributes of someone of high-status, such as a king, warrior, or God.¹⁵⁹

Thus, having established the fact that “glory, honor, and power” are the prerogatives of someone of high-status, it remains to consider precisely the status that is being demonstrated by the claim that God is “worthy to receive” these attributes. On its own, the term ἄξιος denotes the legitimacy or the reasonableness of something, as is commonly conveyed by means of a third-person impersonal construction, i.e., ἄξιόν ἐστιν.¹⁶⁰ Thus, as a predicate adjective which modifies the subject of the clause (i.e., “You, our Lord and God”), the term denotes the reasonableness or legitimacy of God’s receiving “glory, honor, and power.” Another way to

¹⁵³ E.g., Pss 8:6; 28:1; 95:7; Job 40:10; 2 Chr 32:33; 1 Macc 14:21; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 2:7, 9; 3:3; 2 Pet 1:17; Rev 21:26; *1 Clem.* 45:8; 61:1, 2; *1 En.* 5:1; 99:1; Josephus, *Ant.* 12:118.

¹⁵⁴ The root δύνα- connotes the capacity for accomplishing a task, i.e., “being able to.” Grundmann, “δύναμαι,” *TDNT* 2:284–5.

¹⁵⁵ Grundmann, *TDNT* 2:285–6.

¹⁵⁶ As, for example, in Exod 14:28 when Pharaoh’s “army” (δύναμις) is said to be drowned in the Red Sea.

¹⁵⁷ The Hebrew *tzaba*, which denotes an *army*, is translated δύναμις 120 times in the LXX.

¹⁵⁸ In this more general sense, it appears to function as a synonym for ισχύς, which is also regularly found in the LXX as a translation of the Hebrew *geburah*.

¹⁵⁹ See Marc Zvi Brettler, *God Is King: Understanding an Israelite Metaphor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 57–68.

¹⁶⁰ 1 Cor 16:4; 2 Thess 1:3.

translate this might be to say that, “You, our Lord and God, *deserve* to receive glory, honor, and power.”

Putting these observations together, the first line of the hymn of the Living Creatures in 4:11 functions as a claim that the Lord and God, the one who sits on the throne, is rightly and legitimately accorded a high-status. More precisely, I would argue that the hymn promotes the idea that God is legitimately accorded the status of divine *sovereign*. On one hand, the notion of the sovereignty of God is conveyed here insofar as the term κύριος is used as a designation for God, a term which, in the discussion of the previous hymn above, was shown to connote God’s ultimate *power* and *authority*. On the other hand, the performative context in which the hymn is sung suggests as much. That is, the hymn is said to be sung by the 24 elders while “falling before (πεσοῦνται) the one seated on the throne. . .worshipping the living one. . .and casting their crowns before the throne” (4:10), images which each denote obeisance: bowing down before a personage clearly suggests subordination on the part of the one prostrating, as does the verb used to denote worship itself (προσκυνέω),¹⁶¹ while the act of casting down crowns evokes scenes of conquered kings presenting their crowns to their subjugators,¹⁶² and/or the practice of Roman subjects presenting golden crowns to Emperors at their *adventus*.¹⁶³ Thus, the language of the hymn itself as well as the performative context in which this hymn is sung, suggests that the hymn ought to be interpreted as part and parcel of the praise of God as heavenly sovereign.

¹⁶¹ The notion that “falling down” before someone constituted an act of obeisance and worship, which has roots in Near Eastern tradition, can be found throughout the Old Testament, and in the NT, as when the Magi fall down and worship the baby Jesus in Matt 2:11, or when Satan tempts Jesus to fall before him to worship in Matt 4:9; Cf. Cornelius bowing down before Peter in Acts 10:25. The verb προσκυνέω, “to worship,” which follows the act of falling down in this case and in many of these others, likewise denotes subordination on the part of the one performing worship.

¹⁶² Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.29; cf. 2 Sam 1:10; 12:30; 1 Chr 20:2.

¹⁶³ G.M. Stevenson, “The Conceptual Background to the Golden Crown Imagery in the Apocalypse of John (4:4, 10; 14:14),” *JBL* 114 (1995): 257–72.; cf. Aune, “Excursus: Ancient Wreath and Crown Imagery,” in *Revelation*, 1:172–5; 308–9.

The language used to extol the sovereignty of God in these hymns may be understood to reflect the honorific language used in the praise of Roman emperors. The second-person invocation that God is “worthy,” itself recalls the acclamation shouted by the crowd at the ascension of Vespasian to the throne in 70 C.E.: “Benefactor, savior, and only worthy ruler of Rome...”¹⁶⁴ and similar acclamations (the rest of which post-date Revelation) which similarly use the adjective *axios* as a predicate of the Emperor.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, the designation of the one who sits on the throne as “our Lord and God (ὁ κύριος καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν)” as it appears in the hymn likely reflects titles which were bestowed upon Roman Emperors.¹⁶⁶

By evoking honorifics which denoted the sovereignty of Roman emperors and appropriating them for God, this hymn not only makes a claim for the sovereignty of God, but constitutes an implicit rejection of the claim of sovereignty for the Emperor. That is, by affirming the sovereignty of the one seated on the throne, this hymn rejects the claim of the sovereignty of the Emperor.¹⁶⁷ The hymn makes clear that it is the one who sits on the heavenly throne who is rightly called “our Lord and God,” and the one who is rightly considered sovereign as such, not the Emperor.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁴ Josephus, *J.W.* 7.71.

¹⁶⁵ Evidence of similar acclamations accorded to Emperors exists in 3rd c. C.E. and later. See Erik Peterson, *EΙΣ ΘΕΟΣ: Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), 176–80; cf. J. Comblin, *Le Christ dans l'Apocalypse* (Tournai: Desclée, 1965).

¹⁶⁶ Notably, Suetonius claims that Domitian appropriated for himself the title *dominus et deus noster* “Our Lord and God” (Suetonius, *Dom.* 13.2), a claim repeated by subsequent authors (e.g., Dio Cassius 67.5.7; 67.13.4, who claims that Domitian was called δεσπότης καὶ θεός; cf. Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 45.1). These claims have led to speculation that the title as it appears in Rev 4:11 alludes specifically to Domitian’s use of the title. However, L.L. Thompson and others have argued that the claim that Domitian appropriated such divine titles for himself was part and parcel of a smear campaign by later authors, under the benefaction of later Emperors, and not likely to be historically accurate. At any rate, inscriptions from Egypt reveal that Domitian was designated ὁ κύριος, and it is clear that each of the titles “Lord” and “God” were applied to later Emperors. See Thompson, *Revelation*, 104ff.; D. Aune, *Revelation*, 1:310–2.

¹⁶⁷ J.D. Charles, “Imperial Pretensions and the Throne-Vision of the Lamb: Observations on the Function of Revelation 5,” *Criswell Theological Review* 7 (1993): 87.

¹⁶⁸ E.g., “It was the Christian vision of the incomparable God, exalted above all earthly power, which relativized Roman power and exposed Rome’s pretensions to divinity as a dangerous delusion...in the light of God’s lordship over history, it becomes clear that Rome does not hold ultimate power...” Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 39.

An understanding of the hymn as an implicit rejection of claims of the sovereignty of the Emperor is supported by the fact that unmistakably anti-Imperial rhetoric occurs elsewhere in Revelation, most clearly for example in the visions of the Beasts in chapters 13, the Whore of Babylon in chapter 17, and the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18, which are thought by virtually all scholarly accounts to represent denunciations of various aspects of the Imperial social, economic, and political apparatus.¹⁶⁹

If the acts of the Elders while singing their hymn, taken together with the contents of the first part of the hymn, assert the sovereignty of God over and against claims of the sovereignty of the Emperor, the second part of the hymn clarifies the basis for the claim. That is, a causal clause is attached to the first part of the hymn, whose parallel construction leaves no uncertainty as to the basis for the claim of God's sovereignty: "You created all things//By your will they were and were created." The creative power of God makes sense as a basis for the claim that God is the legitimate sovereign of the world over and against claims that the Emperor is properly considered the world's sovereign. That is, any basis that one might claim for the sovereignty of the Emperor (power, wealth, etc.) is trumped by the power of God which is displayed through creation.

A few summative remarks on the first antiphonal hymn are in order. On a structural level, the hymns of the living creatures and Elders conclude the descriptions of the heavenly throne that constitute the first part of the chapter, and in this way serve as a transitional point between this scene and the description of the scroll, and the Lamb, in chapter 5. At the same time, the hymns perform a specific theological task, whose function relates to the preceding vision. In the

¹⁶⁹ E.g., "The majority of commentaries on Rev see in Rev a concrete political conflict with the Roman empire expressed in mythological language (e.g., Swete, Charles, Loisy, Beckwith, Carrington, Wikenhauser, Caird, Visser, Kiddle-Ross)." Schüssler-Fiorenza, *The Book of Revelation*, 75, n. 59. See also Bauckham, *Theology*, 35–9; David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 37–48.

vision which precedes the hymns, using imagery clearly drawn from antecedent literature, a picture is painted of a heavenly throne-room, whose center is the throne, and the one seated on it, surrounded by a heavenly retinue. The hymns constitute a theological reflection on this vision. God is identified in very specific terms as the heavenly sovereign, and a theological justification is offered for the claim: Because God has created all things, God is worthy to be considered in such terms. While the notion that the vision depicts the sovereign heavenly God might be reasonably inferred from elements of the vision itself, including the description of God on a throne, and heavenly entities falling down and praising the throne, the hymns themselves make this explicit, and go further to cast this vision of the sovereign God in such a way as to challenge the claims of the sovereignty of the Emperor. **Put another way, the hymns provide a specific theological frame for considering the scene as a whole. As we shall see, the function of the hymns to cast the surrounding vision(s) in a particular theological light by means of explicit theological reflections on the visions is characteristic of the hymns throughout Revelation.**

C. Rev 5:9–14

The second antiphonal series of hymns immediately follows the introduction and description of the Lamb in Rev 5:6–7, and concludes the chapter (5:9–14). In order to evaluate the content of the hymns, it is necessary first to consider in more detail this context in the beginning of the chapter. The vision in chapter 5 begins with a description of a “scroll...sealed with seven seals” in the right hand of the one seated on the throne (1:1), followed by the voice of an angel inquiring, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?” (1:2). There have been many suggestions as to what precisely is represented by the scroll (βιβλίον) itself, including

an “opisthograph,”¹⁷⁰ the Torah, a contract deed,¹⁷¹ the judgments and promises of the book of the prophets,¹⁷² a Roman legal will,¹⁷³ and the Book of Life.¹⁷⁴ Whatever the scroll itself is meant to represent, however, its significance is tied to the fact that the opening of its seals represents the destruction unleashed upon the world by God’s emissaries. That is, as becomes clear in chapter 6, the opening of the first seal corresponds with the unleashing of the rider on the white horse, who comes out “conquering and to conquer” (6:1–2), while the opening of the second seal corresponds to the rider of the red horse with the great sword, who permits people to slaughter one another (6:2), and so on. Thus, the scroll ultimately signifies God’s power over the world.¹⁷⁵

The notion that the scroll represents the power of God is critical for an understanding of the introduction of the Lamb in this chapter, as well as the role and function of the Lamb throughout the text, and the hymns which conclude the chapter. After a narrative sequence in which there is said to be great lament over the fact that it appears there is no one able or worthy to “open the scroll or look into it” (5:3–4), the Lamb is introduced in Messianic terms as the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah” and the “Root of David” (5:5), then described as sitting “in the midst of the throne” (5:6),¹⁷⁶ and taking the scroll from the one seated on the throne (5:7). This sequence, which has been likened to an enthronement scene,¹⁷⁷ court commissioning,¹⁷⁸ and an

¹⁷⁰ A double-sided scroll, as in Ezek 2:10. Per usual, Aune offers a comprehensive summary of each of these suggestions (and several more) in *Revelation*, 1:338–46.

¹⁷¹ As in Babylonian and ANE traditions (e.g., Jer 32:9ff.). Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 120–1.

¹⁷² Isa 8:16; 29:11; Dan 12:4.

¹⁷³ O. Roller, “Das Buch mit den sieben Siegeln,” *ZNW* 26 (1937): 98–113.

¹⁷⁴ The Book of Life, in which the names of the elect are inscribed, which is mentioned in various OT, NT, and Jewish apocalyptic texts, is described elsewhere in Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27). Boring, *Revelation*, 104.

¹⁷⁵ See, e.g., R. Stefanovič, “The Background and Meaning of the Sealed Book of Revelation 5,” (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1995), 9–10.

¹⁷⁶ On the messianic implications of these terms, and a fuller exposition of the depiction of the Lamb, see above, pp. 40–1.

¹⁷⁷ Many have argued that these elements taken together reflect divine enthronement scenes from Ancient Near Eastern traditions. So, for instance, A. Jeremias, Bousset, and Gunkel each recognized affinities between the scene

investiture,¹⁷⁹ thus ultimately represents the transfer of the power of the judgment of God to the Lamb.

This sequence provides the interpretive context for considering the hymns, as three antiphonal hymns are sung in response to it. The first hymn is sung together by the Living Creatures and the 24 Elders, who are said to sing a “new song” (ὄδῆν καινήν) at the moment that the Lamb takes the scroll (5:8):

You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because you were slaughtered and you redeemed for God with your blood [people] from every tribe, tongue, people and nation; and you made them a kingdom and priests for our God and they will rule upon the earth (Rev 5:9–10)

This hymn bears strong formal affinities with the previous hymn of the 24 Elders in 4:11. It begins with the same formula used in the hymn of the 24 Elders in the previous scene (4:11), i.e., a second-person address in which the subject is deemed to be “worthy to receive”

in chapter 5 and depictions of Marduk assuming power by gaining control of the “tablets of destiny.” Likewise, J. Jeremias, T. Holtz, and J. Roloff have each suggested that the scene reflects the pattern of the enthronement of Egyptian kings. For a survey and criticism of these positions, see W.C. van Unnik, “Worthy is the Lamb’: The Background of Apoc. 5,” in *Mélanges Bibliques en hommage au R.P. Béda Rigaux* (ed. A. Descamps et al.; Gembloux: Duculot, 1970), 445–61.

¹⁷⁸ Müller has considered chapter 5 in terms of antecedent OT and ANE traditions which depict God commissioning a member of the heavenly court to carry out a particular task. In such scenes, God asks the heavenly court *who* is able to perform a particular deed (e.g., Isa 6:8: “Whom shall I send and who will go for us?”), followed by a commission in which God ordains a particular person to fulfill the task (e.g., Isa 6:9–13). These elements of a heavenly commission are thought by Müller to be reflected in the question of the angel in Rev 5:2: “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?,” and the subsequent claims by the Elder in Rev 5:5 and in the hymns in 5:9–10, that the Lamb is “worthy” to open it. H.P. Müller, “Die himmlische Ratsversammlung: Motivgeschichtliches zu Apc 5:1–5,” *ZNW* 54 (1963): 254–67.

¹⁷⁹ Aune has likened the scene to what he calls the “investiture” of the “one like the son of Man” in Dan 7:13–4, in which the “one like the son of Man” is presented before the “Ancient of Days” who is seated on the throne, and before the divine retinue (Dan 7:9–10), and “given dominion, glory, and kingship” (Dan 7:14a). Though this investiture scene bears affinities to “enthronement” scenes elsewhere in the OT, ANE, and Jewish literature, Aune argues that the “investiture” scene is distinguished from an “enthronement” scene insofar as investiture consists of the “act of establishing someone in office or the ratification of the office that someone already holds informally,” rather than the act of taking the throne *per se*. This makes sense of the details of Rev 5, in which the Lamb is already enthroned (5:6), and the locus of the scene is the conferral of power by God to the Lamb by means of granting the Lamb the right to take and open the scroll. D. Aune, *Revelation*, 1:336–8.

something (ἄξιός + λαβεῖν + dir. obj.).¹⁸⁰ Insofar as this formula was shown in the previous hymn to function to demonstrate legitimacy, the declaration here by the Living Creatures and 24 Elders that the Lamb is “worthy to take the scroll and open its seals,” is a claim to the legitimacy of the investiture of power unto the Lamb by God which is represented by the act. In other words, the Lamb *deserves* to take the seal, and in so doing be invested with the power to enact the judgment of God. The precise nature of this power, which is elaborated in the antiphonal response to this hymn, will be described in more detail below.

As in 4:11, the *axios*-formula is followed by a causal clause which reveals the basis for the claim of the Lamb’s worthiness to receive power: because it “was slaughtered,” it both “redeemed for God with his blood people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation” (5:9c), and “made them a kingdom and priests [who] will rule upon the earth” (5:10). It must first be noted that with this clause the identity of the Lamb is here revealed as none other than the crucified Jesus himself. This is made clear not only from the designation of the Lamb as having been “slaughtered,” which is first intimated during the introduction of the Lamb in 5:6, and which alludes to Jesus’ death on the cross,¹⁸¹ but also the soteriological benefits which are said to result from his death—redemption (5:9c) and being made a “kingdom and priests” (5:10a)—benefits which are recognized elsewhere by early Christian authors to have been conferred by Jesus’ death.¹⁸²

This clause does more than to simply identify the crucified Jesus as the enthroned heavenly Lamb, however, but also explicitly reveals the mechanism by which the death of

¹⁸⁰ On the question of whether ἄξιός + λαβεῖν + dir. obj. constitutes a previously established Christian formula, see Jöns, *Evangelium*, 56–70.

¹⁸¹ So much can be inferred from the fact that Jesus’ death is reckoned a “slaughter” or “sacrifice” elsewhere in the NT. The verb σφάζω is only ever used to characterize Jesus’ death in Revelation (5:6, 9, 12; 13:8). while the notion that Jesus’ death on the cross constituted a “slaughter” or “sacrifice” is conveyed elsewhere in the NT by the verb θύειν (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7; cf. Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7). That this refers to Jesus’ death is further suggested by the fact that elsewhere in Revelation the term is used to refer to Christians who have been killed (6:9; 18:24).

¹⁸² E.g., 1 Pet 2:1–10.

Jesus is thought to have resulted in such exaltation. The claim that Jesus “redeemed (ἀγόρασας) [people] of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation” can be understood most literally as Jesus’ *purchasing* these people for God. That is, insofar as the term regularly denotes the act of buying something, most often in exchange for money, Jesus is described here as quite literally having purchased people *for* God (τῷ θεῷ) with the price being “the blood” (ἐν τῷ αἵματι)¹⁸³ that was shed through his death on the cross.

This soteriological mechanism can be evaluated alongside similar constructions elsewhere in the NT in which people are said to have been purchased for a price.¹⁸⁴ Paul, for example, claims that individuals have been “purchased for a price” (e.g., 1 Cor 6:20: ἠγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς).¹⁸⁵ Paul makes clear that Jesus’ death is understood to constitute the *price* by which people are purchased,¹⁸⁶ though it is not clear precisely to whom the price has been paid, or exactly who has been purchased.¹⁸⁷ At any rate, such a transaction constitutes *redemption* for those who have been purchased insofar as they are said to receive an improved status as a result. That is, they are given the “blessing of Abraham...and the promise of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:13), considered “adopted children” of God (Gal. 4:5), or the rightful property (“slaves”) of God (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23).¹⁸⁸

The notion that Jesus’ death constituted a transaction in which people were purchased or redeemed for God is often understood in the context of the manumission of slaves, whereby

¹⁸³ The price paid is typically represented in the genitive case. Perhaps the fact that the price appears here in the dative case is a result of the fact that it was non-monetary. That is, the dative would denote the *means* by which the payment was made, as opposed to a precise sum of money. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:18–19, in which the price paid (though with the verb λυτρόω) is denoted in the dative form.

¹⁸⁴ 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 14:3; cf. Gal 3:13; 4:5.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. 1 Cor 7:23: “τιμῆς ἠξοράσθητε”

¹⁸⁶ That is, by becoming “curse...by hang[ing] on a tree” (Gal 3:13).

¹⁸⁷ See J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 317, n. 106; Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 128, n. 18; N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1992), 143.

¹⁸⁸ On the improved status of these “slaves of God,” see Dale Martin, *Slavery as Salvation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), xvi–xvii; 63.

the freedom of a slave could be purchased by the slave himself or by some other entity.¹⁸⁹ Critical to an understanding of the concept as it is used by Paul (and as it appears in Rev 5:9) is the role of a god in such a transaction, who was sometimes said to be the one to whom the price was paid.¹⁹⁰ That is, the freedom of the slave could be said to be purchased *on behalf of a god*, whereby the slave was said to become the rightful property of the god.¹⁹¹ Such a transaction was a fiction to the extent that it was the slave-owner who actually received the payment for the slave's freedom (not the god), and that the slave was wholly set free, not technically or practically understood to be the property of the god.

Thus, the claim that people are redeemed in the hymn in Rev 5.9 (and repeated in Rev 14:5) may be considered in these terms. That is, an agent (Jesus) purchased people *for God*, for a price (his "slaughter"), with the result that they receive an improved status: they will be a "kingdom and priests" (5:10a) who will "rule upon the earth" (5:10b). While in Paul's use of the term it appears that being purchased entails freedom from the status of being "cursed under the law" (Gal 3:13; cf. 4:5), it is not absolutely clear in Revelation *from whom* or *from what* the saints are purchased. It might be inferred from the context, however, that the previous status from which the saints were purchased was related to their having been killed in the great tribulation. In other words, their current status before the heavenly throne of God constitutes "redemption" from the death that they suffered during the tribulation.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ The primary data for A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1965), 322; H.D. Betz, *Galatians: A Critical & Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 150, n. 117; Büchsel, "ἀγοράζω," *TDNT* 1:124–8; Jerome Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 191–2; Martin, *Slavery as Salvation*, 62–3; I.H. Marshall, "The Development of the Concept of Redemption in the New Testament," in *Reconciliation and Hope* (ed. R. Banks; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 154–60.

¹⁹⁰ In one instance, the god *himself* purchases the slave's freedom. *SGDI* 2, No. 2116. See Betz, *Galatians*, 150, n. 117.

¹⁹¹ E.g., "On behalf of the Pythian Apollo, NN purchased a male slave called XY, at a price of so many mina, to freedom..." Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 322.

¹⁹² In this way, the metaphor of "redemption" has been further detached from its original context. Whereas the term originally connoted the transaction by which an *actual* slave was manumitted, Paul uses the term to connote the

The notion that the saints constitute a “kingdom” and “priests” conjures God’s revelation to Moses in the desert that the children of Israel will receive the privilege of becoming a “kingdom of priests” (Exod 19:6). In the construction here, however, which mirrors the claim in Rev 1:5, the elect appear to receive two distinct privileges, designated both a “kingdom” *and* “priests to God.” Moreover, the rule will take place not in the current order of things, but in the *eschaton*, after all things have been made new.¹⁹³

The implication of their designation as a(n eschatological) “kingdom” appears to be that they will receive political benefits. So much is confirmed in the final clause of the hymn, insofar as it is said that they “will rule upon the earth,” a notion which appears elsewhere in Jewish apocalyptic texts¹⁹⁴ and in early Christian texts in various forms, apocalyptic and otherwise.¹⁹⁵ However, the claim that God’s elect will rule is reconfigured here in such a way as to suggest that their rule is associated with their status as priests, a theme that is repeated later in Revelation, when the martyrs are said to “become priests of God and of Christ, and reign a thousand years with Christ” (20:6).

Following this “new song” (an apt title for a song extolling the redemptive power of the Lamb insofar as it recalls the “New Song” sung of Moses [Exod 15:11 ff.] in praise of the redemptive power of God to deliver God’s people from Egypt) is an antiphonal response sung by the Living Creatures and 24 Elders, and the angels encircling the throne numbering “myriads and myriads, thousands of thousands”:

transaction by which freedom was attained from what might be called *spiritual* slavery. As it is used in Revelation, the term is practically divorced from a(ny) context which denotes slavery *per se*.

¹⁹³ This much is made clear later in the text, when the elect are said to become “priests. . .who will rule. . .with Christ for 1,000 years” (Rev 20:6) after the judgments of God on the current order have taken place.

¹⁹⁴ E.g., Dan 7:18, 27; *T. Dan.* 5:13; 1QM 12:15.

¹⁹⁵ Q 23:30; 1 Cor 6:2; Rom. 5:17; *Acts Thom.* 137; Athanasius, *Vita Anth.* 16.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing (Rev 5:12)

Here, in a third-person impersonal form which evokes the second-person acclamations of worthiness of God and the Lamb in the prior two hymns, the slaughtered Lamb, who has now been clearly identified as the exalted Jesus, is said to be “worthy” to receive a series of seven prerogatives. Remarkable is the fact that these prerogatives are precisely the attributes bestowed upon *God* elsewhere in Revelation. As we saw in the hymn in chapter 4, “glory,” “honor,” and “power” were the prerogatives of God on account of God’s status as heavenly sovereign. These attributes are precisely those said to be invested in the Lamb upon the Lamb’s taking of the scroll, along with “might” (ἰσχύς), “wealth” (πλοῦτος), “wisdom” (σοφία), and “blessing” (εὐλογία), which likewise appear elsewhere in Revelation *only* as designations for God (and the Lamb).¹⁹⁶ Thus, to say that the Lamb is “worthy” to receive prerogatives which characterize God elsewhere in Revelation is to say that the Lamb is the legitimate recipient of the divine attributes of God.¹⁹⁷ This claim appears to be validated on the basis of the Lamb’s investiture with power: because the Lamb is worthy to take the scroll (i.e., to be invested with the power of God), the Lamb is thereby worthy to receive those divine attributes which characterize God.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ 4:11; 5:13; 7:12; 11:17; 19:1. Only “wealth” (πλοῦτος) is associated in Revelation with an entity other than God or the Lamb, when it is used to characterize Babylon in Rev 18:17.

¹⁹⁷ Inasmuch as the notion that the exalted Jesus is the legitimate recipient of divine attributes is suggested by the contents of the hymn, it is also made clear insofar as the Lamb is praised in a manner which is so similar to the manner in which God is praised in the previous hymn. That is, the notion that the Lamb is the rightful recipient of divine praise is reflected in the very fact that the Lamb *is* praised alongside God.

¹⁹⁸ To say that the Lamb is the legitimate recipient of divine attributes is not, however, to say that the Lamb *is* God. That is, while this hymn reflects the notion that the exalted Jesus embodies the divine attributes of God, and that he ought to be venerated in a manner similar to that which is used to praise God, Jesus is clearly distinguished from God here and throughout Revelation. They share the throne as distinct entities, and carry out distinct functions throughout Revelation. What’s more, the bases for their respective attributions and functions are unique: God is venerated on account of the fact that God created the world, while the position of Jesus is due to the salvific effect(s) of his death on the cross. In short, Jesus is not venerated *as* God, in this (or any other) hymn. Cf. Bauckham, who

Insofar as these attributes denote the *sovereignty* of God, the ascription of these attributes to the Lamb denotes that the sovereignty of God has been transferred to, and is now embodied in, the Lamb. That is, as we saw above, the predicates “honor,” “glory,” and “power” are the prerogatives of someone of high-status, and, insofar as they are highlighted in a context which otherwise conveys the *sovereignty* of God, they likewise demonstrate sovereignty. To the list of predicates in the hymn to God in chapter 4 is added “wealth” (πλοῦτος), “wisdom” (σοφία), “might” (ισχύς), and “blessing” (εὐλογία) in this hymn in chapter 5. Like those in chapter 4, these attributes are also the prerogatives of someone of high-status, such as a king, or a god.¹⁹⁹ Insofar as these attributes often characterize a sovereign *per se*, and were applied in such a way in chapter 4 to denote the *sovereignty* of God (i.e., in the context of hymnic praise to one seated on a throne, in terms which conjure the praise of the Roman Emperor), they can be taken here to denote the Lamb’s sovereignty. In other words, insofar as this hymn conveys the notion that divine sovereignty has been transferred to the Lamb, it conveys the fact that the Lamb has been rightfully designated a heavenly *king*.

argues that the “parallel” worship of God and the Lamb reflects a theological viewpoint in which the Lamb is considered to be God, a viewpoint which is variously espoused in Revelation, as for example insofar as God’s self-declaration to be the “Alpha and Omega” (1:8; 21:6) mirrors Jesus’ self-declaration to be the “Alpha and Omega” (22:13), the “first and the last,” and the “beginning and the end” (1:17; 22:13). Bauckham, *Theology*, 53–65. Cf. Prigent, *Commentary*, 259.

¹⁹⁹ In many instances, “might” functions as a synonym for “power” (each appear in the LXX as translations of the Hebrew *geburah*), and likewise denotes “strength” of a person, army, or God. “Wealth,” though rarely understood to be an attribute of God, was a prerequisite of a king, and constituted an outward reflection of his “glory” and “power.” “Wisdom,” though it was not an attribute restricted to the royal class, was nevertheless particularly associated with it in many Near Eastern (including Israelite) and Greek and Hellenistic contexts. As such, God’s wisdom is often understood in the OT to be a reflection of God’s royal status. Finally, a “blessing,” at its root, represents a particular gift, favor, or power, that is transferred from one entity to another, e.g., from a father to his son; God to humankind; etc. Thus, a “blessing” refers both to the act by which a particular gift, favor, or power, is transferred, or to the gift, favor, or power itself. In this second sense, then, “blessings” are outward manifestations (wealth, possessions, children, etc.) of a particular status (e.g., as a king, or a priest) or relationship (e.g., an “heir”). This is the sense in which I believe it is to be taken in this hymn. That is, to say that the Lamb is worthy to receive “blessing” is to say that the Lamb is worthy to receive outward manifestations which reflect his status, analogously to receiving “power,” “glory,” “honor,” etc. On the royal connotations of these terms, see Brettler, *God is King*, 53–68.

This reading of the hymn is supported not only by the fact that Jesus functions as a king in Revelation (i.e., sharing the throne with God, and acquiring the power of God to judge the earth), but also insofar as Jesus' status as heavenly king is made explicit elsewhere in the text, as when the Lamb is designated "king of kings" (17:14), and in claims that Jesus Christ is the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5), and that "the Kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and His Messiah" (11:15).

The attribution of divine qualities to the Lamb as a consequence of his investiture as heavenly king can be considered in terms of the distribution of divine prerogatives to (human) kings in the OT. "Wisdom," for example, was frequently mentioned as an attribute given to the king by God, as in the example of King Solomon (1 Kgs 3:12; 5:9, 21, 26).²⁰⁰ Attributes relating to strength (i.e., "power" and "might"),²⁰¹ and "wealth,"²⁰² were likewise viewed as divine prerogatives which could be granted to the king by God. Dan 2:37 (LXX) offers an example of the attribution of a list of divine qualities to the king in a manner very similar to that found in this hymn. To King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel proclaims: "You, O king, the king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the rule, the kingdom, the power, the honor, and the glory..." (Dan [LXX] 2:37). The hymnic ascription of divine attributes to the exalted Jesus can be considered in a similar light: by his investiture, the Lamb receives those divine attributes which reflect his status as God's appointed king.

As above, moreover, the claim that the Lamb is a heavenly sovereign constitutes an implicit rejection of the claim of the sovereignty of the Roman Emperor. While specific

²⁰⁰ See Brettler, *God Is King*, 53–5; L. Kaligula, *The Wise King: Studies in Royal Wisdom as Divine Revelation in the Old Testament and Its Environment* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1980).

²⁰¹ "Strength" is an attribute much less frequently applied to human kings, and more typically reserved for God, but see e.g., the prayer of Hannah, in which the Lord is said to "give strength to his king" (1 Sam 2:10). Brettler, *God is King*, 57–68.

²⁰² King Solomon's riches were said to have been given to him by God (1 Kgs 3:13). Cf. Ps 112:3; Prov 30:8;

honorifics of the Emperor are not appropriated for the exalted Jesus in this hymn as they were for God in the previous chapter (i.e., “Our Lord and God”), the ultimate claim advanced in the hymn, that the Lamb rightly deserves the status of heavenly king, effectively challenges any claim of kingship/sovereignty of the Emperor. By affirming the Lamb’s sovereignty, the Emperor’s status as sovereign is negated.

At any rate, the attribution of qualities only to the exalted Jesus and God in Revelation which designate them as true heavenly sovereigns, and the veneration of each in similar terms and by similar means (i.e., hymnic praise of the heavenly retinue), signals that they alone are considered to be proper objects of worship. So much is made explicit in the third antiphonal response, this time sung by “every creature that is in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, and all the things in them,” (5:13a):

To the one seated upon the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and strength forever and ever (5:13b)

In this final antiphonal response, which takes the form of a doxology,²⁰³ God and the exalted Jesus are explicitly identified as mutual objects of praise. While the notion that the exalted Jesus and God are rightly praised together might be inferred from the fact that God and the Lamb share the heavenly throne, are considered in similar terms (i.e., as possessing similar divine attributes), and venerated in similar fashion (i.e., hymnic praise of the heavenly retinue), this hymn leaves no doubt: Jesus’ investiture as heavenly king results in a status in which he

²⁰³ The doxology is not a hymnic form *per se*, but rather a liturgical form which is presented here and elsewhere (cf. 4:9; 7:12; 19:1) *as a hymn*, by virtue of the fact that it is presented as an antiphonal response to the prior hymns. Jöns, *Evangelium*, 18. On the formal features of doxologies, see L.G. Campion, *Benedictions and Doxologies in the Epistles of Paul* (Oxford: Kemp Hall Press, 1934); J.K. Elliott, “The Language and Style of the Concluding Doxology to the Epistle to the Romans,” *ZNW* 72 (1981): 124–30; E. Werner, “The Doxology in the Synagogue and Church: A Liturgico-Musical Study,” *HUCA* 19 (1945–46): 275–351; Aune, *Revelation*, 1:43–6.

shares the sovereign attributes of God, and by which he is praised alongside God. The fact that every imaginable creature shares in this hymn emphasizes the universality of the truth-claim.

In this way, the final antiphonal *strophe* can be thought to provide a theological summary of all that has transpired in the description of the heavenly throne-room scene to this point. The one seated upon the throne in chapter four, and the Lamb in chapter 5, who are (independently) depicted as heavenly rulers insofar as they share the heavenly throne, and receive acclamations from the heavenly retinue as divine sovereigns, are confirmed explicitly in this hymn as co-rulers, sharing in the divine attributes that denote sovereignty and inspire hymnic praise.²⁰⁴ Likewise, as in the previous hymns in which the sovereignty of God and the Lamb is extolled, so, too, does the hymnic praise of God and the Lamb as heavenly sovereigns here signal a rejection of any claim that sovereignty lies with the Emperor. That is, by affirming that God is the true heavenly sovereign on account of the fact that God created the world and all that is in it, and that the power of God has been transferred to the exalted Jesus, thereby establishing him as a co-ruler with God on the heavenly throne, this hymn effectively challenges any claim of the sovereignty of the Emperor. The very fact that this hymn is sung by a chorus which includes creatures from every imaginable sphere (every creature in heaven, and upon the earth, and under the earth, etc.) whereas in previous instances the hymns were sung by heavenly entities encircled around the throne, intensifies the claim. That is, creation itself testifies to the claims of the sovereignty of God and the Lamb, thereby trumping the claims of any others who might argue otherwise.

The hymn to the Lamb is concluded by a single remark of the four living creatures:

Amen!

²⁰⁴ Here the adjective “strength” (κράτος) clearly serves as a synonym to “power” and “might,” which were shown to denote the sovereignty of God and of the Lamb in previous hymns.

That ἀμήν should stand alone at the end of a series of hymnic antiphonies makes sense in light of the long-standing tradition in the OT and in early Judaism and Christianity of concluding doxologies in such a way.²⁰⁵ The use of the interjection in this particular way (as opposed to its use as an adverb) appears to have been intended to signal approval or acceptance of what has immediately preceded it.²⁰⁶ In this way, it can be understood to function as a synonym for ναί.²⁰⁷

In sum, the hymns in chapter 5 can be understood to function analogously to those in chapter 4. On the one hand, the series of antiphonal hymns in chapter 5 conclude the narrative description of the Lamb and his acquisition of the scroll at the beginning of the chapter, and in this way they serve as a transitional point between this scene and the opening of the seven seals that follows in chapter 6. Likewise, as in chapter 4, the hymns in chapter 5 offer explicit theological/Christological reflections, which cast the preceding narrative elements in a particular theological/Christological frame. The Lamb, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, is clearly identified in the hymns as the crucified Jesus, and his position on the throne and taking of the scroll is revealed to be an investiture which is the legitimate consequence of his death on a cross, and the soteriological benefits that were attained as a result. As a result of his heavenly investiture, the hymns make clear that Jesus has legitimately attained divine attributes that signal his status as heavenly king, a status that results in his being considered an object of praise alongside God.

²⁰⁵ E.g., 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 8:6; cf. Pss 41:13; 72:19; 89:52; 106:48. Its use in liturgical settings in the Jewish synagogue and early Christian church is reflected in texts used in synagogue worship, and in early Christian texts (e.g., Rev 1:6; 7:12; 16:7; Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 16:27; 1 Cor 14:16; Gal. 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; 5:11; Jude 25; Justin, *1 Apol.* 65.3; *Did.* 10.6; *Acts Thom.* 29; *Acts Phil.* 146; *Acts John* 94). See Jörns, *Evangelium*, 85–8; cf. P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, vol. 3 (München: Beck, 1928), 3:456–61.

²⁰⁶ See Schlier, “ἀμήν,” *TDNT* 1:335–8.

²⁰⁷ See, e.g., Rev 1:7; 22:20; 2 Cor 1:20, where these terms function synonymously in close proximity to each other.

D. *Rev 7:9–14*

Following the throne-room scene in chapters four and five, the seven seals of the scroll are opened, each of which represent a particular aspect of the judgment of God upon the earth (6:1–17). In-between the opening of the sixth (6:12–17) and seventh seals (8:1–5), however, are recorded two visions (7:1–17). The first vision consists of four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, who are commanded by another angel to pause the destruction of the earth until “we have marked the servants of our God with a seal on their foreheads” (7:1–3), and then a record of those 144,000 who are said to have been “sealed,” who consist of “every tribe of the people of Israel” (7:4–8). Immediately following this is another vision in which is described a “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands” (7:9). In the second of these visions occurs a series of three antiphonal hymns: the first sung by this Great Multitude (7:10), the second by the angels, elders, and living creatures (7:11–12), and the third by one of the elders (7:14–17). In order to evaluate the contents of the hymns, it is necessary to consider the context in which these hymns are sung, beginning first with the question of the identity of this Great Multitude which stands before the throne.

The surest clue to the identity of the Great Multitude consists of the fact that they are explicitly identified by one of the 24 elders as those “who have come out of the great tribulation (ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης)” (7:14). At its root, the term θλίψις denotes “distress,” “affliction,” or “trouble,” and as such, the term carries a range of meanings in the LXX, and early Jewish and Christian literature, which might be considered on a spectrum that includes both personal “distress” of an internal sort, e.g., anxiety or sickness, to “distress” that is the result of any number of external forces, e.g., physical injury, imprisonment, political or military oppression,

etc.²⁰⁸ As it appears in Jewish apocalyptic and early Christian literature, however, the term often takes on a more specific meaning, denoting the severe distress associated with the end of time. So, for instance, in Daniel there is described a final “day of tribulation (ἡ ἡμέρα θλίψεως)” that will precede the final resurrection of the dead into eternal life or punishment. This sense of θλίψις as denoting eschatological distress also appears in 1QM 1:11–12; 15:1,²⁰⁹ the “mini-apocalypse” of Mark 13:19, 24/Matthew 24:21, 29, the *Shepherd of Hermas*,²¹⁰ and Paul’s letters.²¹¹ The fact that a “great tribulation” is specifically depicted in Matt 24:21,²¹² and in *Hermas*,²¹³ suggests that this particular phrase had become a fixed expression to denote the period of end-time suffering.²¹⁴ So, those depicted before the throne in heaven as having “come out of the great tribulation” (7:14), appear to denote those who have died during the time of the eschatological crisis depicted as unfolding throughout Revelation.²¹⁵

Having established that the Great Multitude consists of those who have died in the eschatological crisis, questions remain as to the specific identities of those who have died. It is certain from the text that those who have died are believed to have attained a place in the heavenly throne-room on account of the soteriological benefits of Jesus’ crucifixion, insofar as

²⁰⁸ Schlier, “θλιβω, θλίψις,” *TDNT* 3:139–148.

²⁰⁹ On the term as it represents eschatological suffering, see R. Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies in the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 226.

²¹⁰ *Herm. Vis.* 2.3.4; 4.1.1; 4.2.4; 4.2.5; 4.3.6.

²¹¹ There appears to be a wider range of meanings of the term in Paul’s letters. In most cases, however, the suffering (of Christ; of Christ’s followers, etc.) appears to be a consequence, and reflection, of the imminent end of the world.

²¹² θλίψις μεγάλη

²¹³ τὴν θλίψιν τὴν ἐρχομένην τὴν μεγάλην.

²¹⁴ Aune, *Revelation*, 2:474.

²¹⁵ There is additional evidence that the Great Multitude was imagined to have died as part of a persecution. On the one hand, so much is suggested by the fact that the Great Multitude is clothed in white. For example, those who die by sword, flame, captivity, and plunder during the “time of the end” (Dan 11:35, 40) are said to have been “tested, refined, and made shining white” (Dan 11:35; cf. 12:10). Likewise, a passage which evokes this scene in Daniel from the War Scroll describes those who have come out of the eschatological war being obligated to “clean their garments and wash themselves of the blood of the guilty corpses” (1QM 14:2–3). See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 228. On the other hand, the fact that the Great Multitude is holding palm branches (5:9) further suggests that they have died as part of a persecution, as this imagery is well attested in Christianity. See Prigent, *Commentary*, 289, esp. n. 3; Jörns, *Evangelium*, 78.

they are said to have been “washed...in the blood of the Lamb.” Insofar as this phrase is widely understood to constitute a metonymic expression denoting the atoning value of Jesus’ death,²¹⁶ it is most common to identify this group as “Christian.”²¹⁷

A second question consists of whether this group represents those who died as martyrs, i.e., those who have been executed by the Romans as part and parcel of this eschatological conflict, on account of their testimony of Jesus.²¹⁸ Some contend that it is not absolutely clear that the Great Multitude consists exclusively of martyrs, citing the fact that those who are explicitly identified as martyrs in chapter 6 are portrayed “under” the altar, while the Great Multitude in 7:9–17 is depicted “before the throne,” which suggests that martyrs are not depicted here.²¹⁹ Others, however, infer that the group consists of martyrs on the basis of the fact that the phrase “great multitude” was used by Tacitus to describe those (“Christians”) who were executed by Nero (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44), and that the author of *1 Clement* 6:1 speaks of unnamed martyrs as “a great multitude of the elect” (πολὴ πλῆθος ἐκλεκτῶν). So much might also be inferred from the fact that the Great Multitude is said to be clothed with white robes, which evoke the white robes of those seen “under the altar” in Rev 6:9–11, who are explicitly identified

²¹⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 10:16; Eph 1:7; 2:13; 1 Pet 1:19; 1:2; Heb 9:14; 1 John 1:7. See Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 147; Aune, *Revelation*, 2: 475.

²¹⁷ Most understand the group to refer to “Christians” regardless of their Jewish or Gentile orientation. Boring, *Revelation*, 129–32; Prigent, *Commentary*, 121–3; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 140–7; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:447. Some go further to identify this group more specifically as *gentile* Christians: Bousset, *Offenbarung Johannes* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Library, 1906), 287; H. Kraft, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974), 126. I see little benefit in labeling this group with designations that are not employed by the author himself (e.g., “The Church,” or “Christians”), especially those that appear as anachronistic at the time of the composition of Revelation. It is more important simply to recognize that the Great Multitude consists of those who are thought to have been granted heavenly benefits upon death on account of Jesus’ atoning death on the cross.

²¹⁸ See, e.g., J. Weiss, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1904), 66–67; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 288; R. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 210–37; Boring, *Revelation*, 131; G.B. Caird, *Revelation*, 95; W.J. Harrington, *Apocalypse of St. John* (London: G. Chapman, 1969), 131.

²¹⁹ E.g., Jörns, *Evangelium*, 78; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 145; Massyngbaerde-Ford, “Christological Function of the Hymns,” 220.

as martyrs.²²⁰ Thus, it seems more likely than not that martyrs are indeed imagined to be singing this hymn.

Having now considered the identities of those who sing the first hymn in chapter 7, it remains to consider its content:

Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb

The term “salvation” (σωτηρία) is widely attested in Greek antiquity. While the term could indicate *well-being*, i.e., the health of a person, city, citizenry, etc., or the act by which well-being is preserved or maintained, it most often constituted the act by which an entity (a person, ship, city, army, etc.) was rescued from a perilous situation, such as a battle, shipwreck, illness, guilty verdict, etc.²²¹ Such is the sense of the term and its derivatives (e.g., σῶζω) as they appear most often in the LXX, frequently as a translation of Hebrew nouns derived from derivatives of the stem *yeshah*, or synonyms thereof, and in other early Jewish literature. In Christian literature, the use of the term to denote the preservation of health or well-being is altogether abandoned, and salvation only ever denotes rescue or deliverance from a dire situation.²²²

Important for the purpose of interpreting this hymn is the fact that salvation often denotes in the LXX and early Christian literature the deliverance of a person or persons from *eschatological* conflict. That is, in the context of a perilous situation represented as the

²²⁰ That is, with the opening of the fifth seal there is depicted a vision of those “who had been slaughtered on account of the word of God and the testimony they held” (6:9), who are later given white robes and told to wait “until the number would be complete both of their fellow slaves and of their brothers who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed” (6:11). Thus, the white robes of the Great Multitude in Rev 7:9–17 may signal that they, too, are martyrs who have likewise been killed for their testimony. See, e.g., Aune, *Revelation*, 2:406; Prigent, *Commentary*, 273; etc.

²²¹ In this light, salvation can also refer to the act by which one of these disasters is *avoided*. Foerster, “σῶζω,” *TDNT* 7:966–9.

²²² Foerster, *TDNT* 7: 989–98.

eschatological end-time, “salvation” often denotes *preservation* or *rescue* from eschatological destruction. In the LXX, for example, salvation may consist of the preservation of a community, or individuals within a particular community, imagined to be taking part in an eschatological conflict, such as those who are exiled in Babylon (e.g., Isa 43:1–3; 45:17; 49:8ff.; 60:16; 63:9; Jer 23:6; 31:7; 46:27), or who have returned to Jerusalem after the exile (e.g., Zech 9:9; 12:7). Likewise, alongside uses of the term and its derivatives in the New Testament that suggest rescue from non-eschatological, physical danger (e.g., healing stories in the Gospels), salvation often denotes *eschatological* deliverance. In Paul, for instance, the salvation of an individual or a community can refer to an individual or community being spared from future, eschatological judgment (e.g., 1 Cor 3:15; 5:5; Rom 10:9, 13; 11:11, 26), which is often the sense of the term as it appears in Acts, Hebrews, 1 Peter, James, and Jude.

Not infrequently, an *agent* was responsible for bringing about salvation (e.g., a favorable wind, an effective medicine or a good doctor, wise council, a strong ship, a beneficent king, etc.) Naturally, gods were often considered to have been such agents, and this is very frequently the case in the LXX, where Yahweh is presented as the agent of salvation in a time of distress, and in early Christian literature, where salvation (of the various eschatological and non-eschatological sorts described above) is imparted upon a person or persons by God, or by Jesus.

At one level, then, this hymn can be understood to constitute a claim that the current situation of the “great multitude,” i.e., in heaven before the throne praising God and the Lamb, constitutes salvation. In other words, the hymnic acclamation that “salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb” is none other than a claim that the Great Multitude has been granted salvation *by* God and the Lamb. Such a reading is justified when the hymn is viewed in light of similar constructions in antecedent Jewish literature, as for example the Psalmist, who declared

the possibility of “deliverance” from the threat of “tens of thousands who surround” him, because “salvation belongs to the Lord” (Ps [LXX] 3:7,9), or the acclamations in the Psalms of Solomon (LXX), which demonstrate that, in spite of external threats, the “salvation of the Lord is upon [the house of] Israel” (*Pss. Sol.* 10:8; 12:6).²²³ That is, the hymnic claim in Rev 7:10 that “salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb,” which evokes similar constructions in the LXX in which “salvation of the Lord” is understood to constitute deliverance or rescue granted to an individual or community by God, can be taken to imply that the community singing it has likewise been granted salvation or deliverance by God from a similarly perilous situation. An appreciation of the precise identity of the Great Multitude puts this claim of salvation in a particular perspective: just as God had the power to rescue the Psalmist (Ps 3:7,9) and the House of Israel (*Pss. Sol.* 10:8; 12:6), so too will God have the power ultimately to rescue those who have died in the eschatological conflict.

Of course, in this hymn it is clear that salvation is not only the prerogative of God but also *of the Lamb*. The precise mechanism by which salvation has been granted to the Great Multitude is not made explicit in this hymn, though it might be inferred from the hymn in chapter 5 in which the blood of the Lamb was said to have purchased saints for God. That is, Jesus’ death constituted a payment by which saints were “purchased for God,” with the result that they were redeemed from the death(s) they suffered during the great tribulation to a place amongst the heavenly retinue. That is, whereas the claim that Jesus’ blood has purchased saints for God earlier was shown to connote an improved status on the part of those who have been purchased (in which they were to constitute a “kingdom” and “priests”), the context of the hymn in chapter 7 depicts precisely the status attained by those who have died: a very high status as part of the

²²³ The Greek construction in these examples in the LXX, τοῦ κυρίου ἢ σωτηρία, while different than the dative construction in Rev 7:10, likewise connotes that salvation *belongs* to God. For an explanation, see Jörns, *Evangelium*, 82.

Great Multitude that stands amongst the heavenly retinue before the heavenly throne of God and the Lamb.²²⁴

The short hymn of the Great Multitude is followed immediately by a depiction of the four living creatures, 24 elders, and multitude of angels before the throne, who are said to have “fallen on their faces before the throne and worshipping God,” singing:

Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!

The antiphonal response of the living creatures, elders, and angels begins with “amen,” which is used here as a formal indicator of the beginning of the response to the previous hymn.²²⁵ The *antistrophe* itself consists essentially of a doxology in which seven prerogatives are attributed to God, evoking doxologies and other hymnic forms elsewhere in the text in which such prerogatives are listed and attributed to God.²²⁶ The similarities in content between these hymnic forms betray their similar function(s): just as the ascription of such prerogatives to God and to the Lamb in the previous hymns denoted the *sovereignty* of God and of the Lamb (i.e., the ultimate sovereignty of God, and the Lamb’s acquisition of the powers of divine sovereignty on account of his death and subsequent heavenly investiture), so, too, does the doxology function here to denote the sovereignty of God.

²²⁴ Prigent has gone further to suggest that the Great Multitude is portrayed as *priests* insofar as they are clothed in white, and have unmediated access to God in God’s sanctuary. In this way, the claim in the hymn of Rev 5:9 that those who have been purchased for God will be made a “kingdom and priests” is here being fulfilled. Prigent, *Commentary*, 289.

²²⁵ The use of “Amen” in this way can be traced to Jewish liturgical practices. See Jörns, *Evangelium*, 85–8; Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 45. Schlier, *TDNT* 1:337.

²²⁶ Several of the attributes appear in this and in each of the previous hymns: “power,” “might,” “honor,” and “glory.” The attributes in this hymn appear nearly identical to those ascribed to the Lamb in the *axios*-hymn of 5:12, with “thanksgiving” (εὐχαριστία) replacing “wealth.”

Unlike the previous hymns, however, the *justification* for this claim is not made explicit. That is, while the claim of the sovereignty of God in 4:11 was justified on the basis of God's creation of the world, and the claim that the Lamb had attained sovereign powers in 5:5–9 was justified on the basis of the soteriological benefits he accrued for people on account of his death, the claim of sovereignty here is not explicitly tied to a particular action on God's part. Nevertheless, the justification for the claim can be inferred from the preceding context in which the hymn is sung: God is ultimately responsible for the *salvation* of those from "every nation, tribe, people, and language." That is, "salvation," which in this context is shown to be deliverance from the eschatological conflict to the presence of God before the throne, is the benefit conferred *by God*, as a result of the transaction by which they have been purchased by the blood of the Lamb. Thus, in this hymn God's sovereignty is affirmed on account of God's role in the salvation of the "great multitude."

This *antistrophe* concludes with a second "amen," which constitutes the formal ending of the doxology (cf. Rev 1:6; 5:8; 16:7) and re-affirms the contents of the doxology itself.²²⁷

In summary, the functions of the antiphonal hymns in chapter 7 can be considered in light of the functions of the preceding hymns in chapters 4–5. While each of the series of antiphonal hymns in chapters 4–5 appears at the end of a narrative sequence, so as to delineate one scene from another, the antiphonal hymns in chapter 7 appear in the middle of the scene, immediately after the initial description of the vision of the Great Multitude (7:9) and prior to the song of the elder which completes the chapter (7:13–17). Thus, the hymns of the Great Multitude in 7:10 and the angels, elders, and living creatures in 7:12 *differ* from preceding hymns insofar as they do not

²²⁷ In this way, the second "Amen" can be likened to the conclusions of similar doxologies in the NT and early Christian literature which signal approval and affirmation of what has preceded. See Jörens, *Evangelium*, 85–6. See above pp. 62–3.

demarcate large narrative scenes from another. However, the hymn might be considered to demarcate particular elements within the scene from one another.

The hymns in chapter 7 do resemble previous hymns, however, insofar as they provide explicit theological reflection(s) on the surrounding narrative sequence(s). The first hymn provides a theological context for interpreting the vision of the Great Multitude: the multitude has been granted salvation by God and the Lamb, which denotes the act by which God has rescued those who had died in the “great tribulation.” This act, which we were previously told occurred when they were purchased *for* God (i.e., became God’s possession) by Jesus’ death on the cross (5:9), has culminated in the Great Multitude being rewarded with a heavenly status before the throne of God and the Lamb. The antiphonal response reaffirms the sovereignty of God, which seems to be implicitly justified on the basis of God’s role in their salvation. In this way, the hymns function ultimately to cast the vision of the Great Multitude in a particular theological and Christological light.

E. *Rev 11:15–19*

The vision of the Great Multitude is immediately followed by the opening of the seventh and final seal, which results in “silence in heaven” for half an hour (8:1), and a vision in which angels are depicted worshipping in the heavenly throne-room (8:2–5). This vision inaugurates a sequence in which seven trumpets are sounded by **seven angels, corresponding to which are** various descriptions of destruction upon the earth (8:7–9:21). The blowing of the seven trumpets, and the corresponding destruction that ensues, clearly evokes the unleashing of destruction that was inaugurated by the opening of the seven seals in chaps. 6 (and presages the destruction which accompanies the seven bowls in 16:1–21), which is most often thought to represent a re-

telling or “recapitulation” of the judgments of God represented therein.²²⁸ More precisely, the destruction associated with the sounding of the seven trumpets (and later with the pouring of the seven “bowls of wrath”) is thought to represent *in different terms* the eschatological judgment(s) of God which was symbolized in the opening of each of the seven seals.²²⁹

As in the vision of the opening of the seven seals, the vision of the trumpets sounding is interrupted by two scenes in-between the sixth and the seventh trumpet: the eating of the “little scroll” (10:1–11) and the measuring of the Temple/prophecy of the Two Witnesses (11:1–14). Whereas the previous pair of antiphonal hymns occurred prior to the opening of the seventh seal, as part of the second of the two interposing scenes (i.e., during the vision of the Great Multitude), here the hymns are deferred until after the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15–18).

The first hymn is sung by “loud voices in heaven”:²³⁰

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever

Although the “kingdom of the world” (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ κόσμου) is not a phrase used elsewhere in Revelation, its meaning can be inferred from the sense of the phrase as it appears in

²²⁸ See, e.g., C.H. Giblin, “Recapitulation and the Literary Coherence of John’s Apocalypse,” *CBQ* 56 (1994): 81–95. Fewer scholars argue that the destruction associated with each of the sequences of seven (seals, trumpets, bowls) represents *progressive* stages of the judgment of God. For a summary of this theory, see Marko Jauhiainen, “Recapitulation and Chronological Progression in John’s Apocalypse: Towards a New Perspective,” *NTS* 43 (1993): 543–59; Cf. Court, *Myth and History*; A. Farrer, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964); J. Resseguie, *Revelation Unsealed: A Narrative Critical Approach to John’s Apocalypse* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

²²⁹ The destruction ushered by the sounding of the trumpets is often considered to represent more severe tribulation than that associated with the opening of the seals. See Boring, *Revelation*, 137; Jauhiainen, “Recapitulation,” 544; Giblin, “Recapitulation,” 82.

²³⁰ Though not specified, it can be reasonably supposed that the voices belong to any, all, or some combination of those who have been identified in the throne-room to this point, as each of these groups are at various points in the text said to sing “with loud voice.” So, these “loud voices” might represent the voices of one of the heavenly groups in particular. Alternatively, the loud voices might represent the voices of *all* of those occupying the throne-room. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1953), 95; Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John*, 141; Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1: 293–4.

the only other instance in the NT, in Matt 4:8. There the phrase (τὰς βασιλείας τοῦ κόσμου) refers to the lands visible from the mountain, offered to Jesus by Satan, and thus denote entities which are imagined to be under the control of Satan. By this very fact, the kingdoms of the world are presented in opposition to God. This notion is confirmed by the fact that Jesus refuses the offer, and then implies that receiving the kingdoms of the world would contradict the command to “worship the Lord your God, and serve only him” (Matt 4:10).

Thus, while the phrase as it appears in Revelation is taken by some to denote the earthly realm of humankind as opposed to the heavenly kingdom of God and the Lamb,²³¹ it appears to denote in Revelation more specifically those entities that *stand outside of, and in opposition to*, God and the Lamb, and the followers thereof. These include both earthly entities, e.g.: (1) the “inhabitants of the earth” who have slaughtered those proclaiming the word of God (6:9–10), who gloat over the death of the Two Witnesses (11:10), worship the Beast and bear its mark (13:8, 17; 16:2) and fornicate with the “Great Whore” (17:2); (2) those who worship “demons and idols” (9:20–1); (3) the “kings of the earth” who have fornicated with the “Great Whore” who is “Babylon” (17:2; 18:9), and who make war on the Lamb (17:14); and (4) the “merchants of the earth” who have become wealthy by the Great Whore/Babylon (18:3, 11–19), as well as those mythic creatures which support and represent these earthly forces, e.g.: (1) the “Beast from the Sea” who utters blasphemies against God and makes war against God’s people (13:6–7); (2) the “Beast from the Land” who deceives people the inhabitants of the earth to worship the first Beast and executes those who do not (13:11–18); and (3) the Great Whore/Babylon who is “drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to Jesus” (17:6). As in Matt 4:8, these earthly and mythic entities which constitute this kingdom of the world are depicted as

²³¹ Jörns, *Evangelium*, 93.

under the rule of Satan himself, who is represented as the “Dragon” (12:3–9) who wields the power to “lead the whole world astray” (12:9), and to bestow power to the Beast(s) (13:2,4). Thus, the hymnic claim that this kingdom of the world has become that of the Lord and of His Messiah is to say that God and the Messiah have become rulers over it. That is, the Lord, who here refers to God,²³² and His Messiah, who here refers to the exalted Jesus,²³³ who have to this point been portrayed as *heavenly* sovereigns are now said to have assumed authority over this *earthly* kingdom. Implicit in such a claim is that the former rulers of this kingdom, the antagonists of God and Jesus—both earthly and mythic—have been deposed. The process by which this occurs, though not made explicit in this hymn, is precisely what is represented in the vision sequences which occur immediately prior to the hymn. That is, the destruction unleashed upon the earth, as variously represented by the opening of the seals (6:1–17), the trumpets (8:6–9:21), and the destruction of 1/10 of the city and the deaths of 7000 in it by earthquake (11:13), constitutes acts by which God and the Lamb are assuming authority over the kingdom of the world.²³⁴

So much is revealed in the descriptions of the destruction. For example, the slaughter, famine, pestilence, earthquakes that correspond to the opening of the seals in chapter 6 are such that the “kings of the earth and the magnates and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to them: **‘Fall on us and hide us from the one seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’**” (6:15–16). Clearly, the

²³² In the vast majority of instances of the term, it refers to God (1:8; 4:8, 11; 11:4, 17; 15:3, 4; 16:7; 18:8; 19:6, 16; 21:22; 22:5, 6). Elsewhere it refers to Jesus (11:8; 17:14; 22:20, 21), and is used once to refer to one of the elders (7:14).

²³³ Throughout Revelation the exalted Jesus is referred to as the Messiah (χρίστος): 1:1, 2, 5; 22:21. In no instance is the term used to denote any other entity, such that in those instances where the identity of the Messiah is not made explicit, they can be assumed to refer to (the exalted) Jesus.

²³⁴ So, too, Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 188–9; Boring, *Revelation*, 148; Roloff, *Revelation*, 136ff.; Prigent, *Commentary*, 360ff.;

destruction unleashed upon the earth is directed at those who are presented throughout the text in opposition to God and the Lamb,²³⁵ while those who have been *sealed* by God (the 144,000 depicted in 7:1–8) and *purchased* for God (the Great Multitude in 7:9–17), are preserved. Likewise, the destruction associated with the sounding of the trumpets (8:6–9:21) appears to be directed at those enemies of God who “do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (9:4), while those who are killed in the earthquake after the death and resurrection of the Two Witnesses are part of those who are explicitly identified as the “enemies” of the Witnesses (11:12).

Thus, the hymn in 11:15 makes clear what might be inferred from the preceding (and following) visions: the destruction unleashed upon God and the Lamb constitutes a war upon those forces which oppose them, a war in which the kingdom of the enemies of God is defeated by God and the Lamb, and in which their kingdom comes under their rule of God and the Lamb as a result.

Further consideration of the symbols and imagery used in Revelation to depict this kingdom reveals something more specific about its identity: the kingdom of the world is none other than the *actual* earthly kingdom in which the author and audience of Revelation is living, the Roman Empire. The notion that those earthly and mythical entities depicted in opposition to God and the Lamb represent various aspects of the Roman Imperial apparatus constitutes one of the few, virtually unchallenged maxims in Revelation scholarship. That is, the mythical enemies are almost unanimously thought to represent various aspects of the Roman rule, while the earthly enemies are thought to represent those who participate in, or benefit from, the Roman Imperial social, economic, and political system(s). For example, the Beast from the Sea (13:1–8) is

²³⁵ Albeit these “kings, generals, etc.” and those who benefit from their position within Babylon (i.e., the “rich and powerful”) are not so clearly identified as *enemies* of God and the Lamb until later in the text.

thought to represent Roman Imperial power, both insofar as descriptions of the beast appear to be lightly veiled symbols of Imperial authority²³⁶ and insofar as the descriptions of its power appear to reflect Imperial rule,²³⁷ while the Beast from the Land is thought to represent specific elements of Imperial rule in the province of Asia Minor, e.g., the Imperial administration in the province, the Imperial cultic apparatus, or the wealthy elites who supported the official Imperial cult(s).²³⁸

This interpretive strategy likewise results in an understanding of the city of Babylon, as well as the Whore (who is identified *as* Babylon in 17:5), as a representation of Rome itself.²³⁹ Likewise, the earthly enemies of God and the Lamb are thought to represent those who take part in or benefit from the Imperial structures. **So much is made clear by** the descriptions of these “inhabitants of the earth” who worshiped the Beast and bore its mark (13:8, 17; 16:2), and fornicated with the “Great Whore” (17:2), the “kings of the earth” who not only fornicated with the “Whore” (17:2; 18:9) but who with the Beast made war on the Lamb (17:14), and the “merchants” and “sailors” who grew rich from it (18:3–19).

²³⁶ For example, the seven crowned heads are thought to represent both the seven hills upon which the city of Rome was built, as well as various Roman Emperors, a symbolic interpretation that is confirmed later by one of the seven angels (Rev 17:9–10). Moreover, the fact that the Beast is said to be “rising from the sea” is thought to denote the fact that the Emperor and his retinue would have traveled from Rome to Asia Minor “by sea,” while the description of one of the heads (i.e., Emperors) having a mortal wound that was healed is thought to reflect a legend that the Emperor Nero had not actually died but was living in the East (i.e., the “Nero *redivivus*” legend). See, e.g., Greg Carey, “The Book of Revelation as Counter-Imperial Script,” in *In the Shadow of Empire* (ed. Richard Horsely; London: Westminster Press, 2008), 157–76; Steve Friesen, “Myth and Symbolic Resistance in Revelation 13,” *JBL* 123/2 (2004): 281–313; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 384–452; A. Yarbro-Collins, “The Political Perspective of the Revelation to John,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 241–56.

²³⁷ E.g., “. . . and it [the Beast] was given authority over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all the inhabitants of the earth will worship it. . .” (13:7–8).

²³⁸ Steven Friesen, “The Beast from the Land: Rev 13:11–18 and Social Setting” in *Reading the Book of Revelation* (ed. David L. Barr; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 49–64; S.J. Scherrer, “Revelation 13 as an Historical Source for the Imperial Cult under Domitian” (Th.D. diss., Harvard, 1979); Schüssler-Fiorenza, *Vision of a Just World*, 86; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:780; F. Murphy, *Fallen is Babylon: The Revelation to John* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 309–11.

²³⁹ The identification of Babylon as Rome is based on a number of clues, chief among them the fact that Babylon was a popular cipher for Rome around the time of the composition of Revelation. See, e.g., 1 Pet 5:13; 2 Bar 11:1ff.; 67:7; *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159; cf. Tertullian, *Marc.* 3.13; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.15.2. See below pp. 124–5. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 338–83; S.M. Elliott, “Who is Addressed in Revelation 18:6–7?” *BR* 40 (1995): 98–113; K.A. Strand, “Some Modalities of Symbolic Usage in Revelation 18,” *AUSS* 24 (1986): 37–46; Adela Yarbro-Collins, “Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?” in *L’Apocalypse johannique et l’Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament* (ed. J. Lambrecht; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1980), 185–202.

The notion that the kingdom of the world represents elements of the Roman Imperial apparatus gives further dimension to the claim that this kingdom has come under the authority of the Lord and His Messiah. It is precisely the Roman Empire, and all those elements which constitute it, that is targeted by the wrath of God and the Lamb, and which is eventually subsumed by it. This vision of God's destruction of earthly adversaries and subsequent reign over the earth is thus linked with antecedent Jewish traditions in which God is likened to a king who destroys His (earthly) enemies and establishes a kingdom.²⁴⁰

While the precise nature of the new kingdom is not fully revealed until the end of the Apocalypse in the vision of the "New Heaven and New Earth" descending from heaven (Rev 19:1ff.), it is clear from elsewhere in the text that this new kingdom under the authority of God and the Lamb is unlike earthly kingdoms insofar as it, like the eternal God who rules over it (4:8), will exist forever. This is made clear in the final clause of the hymn that God (and His Messiah) "will reign forever and ever."²⁴¹ The notion that God and/or His Messiah would rule *forever* has a long history in the Hebrew Bible and also appears elsewhere in early Christian literature.²⁴²

Finally, it should be noted that the visions that follow this hymn demonstrate that the war between God and the Lamb and their enemies is not concluded at the point that this hymn is sung, and as such the assumption of God and the Lamb to power over the kingdom of the world is not complete. So much is conveyed by the aorist tense of the verb ἐγένετο, which here seems

²⁴⁰ Exod 15:11–18; 1 Sam 12:12; Pss 145:11; 146:10; Isa 24:21–23; 33:22; Mic 4:6–8; Zeph 3:15; Obad 8ff.; *Pss. Sol.* 17:2; *Sib. Or.* 3:46ff.; 3:767. Jörns, *Evangelium*, 93–4.

²⁴¹ The singular verb suggests that either the "Lord" or "His Messiah" is the subject. In the other two appearances of the verb in Revelation (11:17; 19:6), the subject of the verb is God. At any rate, it is clear from the previous depictions of God and the Lamb as co-rulers that each is thought to participate in this eternal reign.

²⁴² E.g., similar phrases occur throughout the Septuagint to denote the eternal sovereignty of God: Exod 15:18; Zach 14:9; Dan 2:44; 4:3, 34; 6:26; 7:14, 27; Ps 9:37; 145:10; 146:10; Wis 3:8; Lam 5:19; Ezek 43:7; Mic 4:7. Cf. *Jos. Azen.* 19:5, 8. The House of David was similarly imagined to rule "forever" (e.g., 2 Sam 7:13–16; 22:51; 1 Kgs 2:45; 1 Chr 22:10; 28:4; etc.) It is in this tradition that early Christian authors proclaim that Jesus the Messiah would reign "forever and ever" (Luke 1:33; Heb 1:8). See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:639–40.

to carry an ingressive sense. In other words, the hymnic claim that the kingdom of the world *has become* the kingdom of God and of God's Messiah is a claim that this has *begun* to happen. In this way, the hymn points forward to the eschatological future in which the earthly kingdom has fully come under the authority of God and the exalted Jesus, a future that is fully manifest in Rev 19:1ff., but one which to this point has just *begun* to take place.

This hymn is immediately followed by an antiphonal response of the 24 elders, who are depicted prostrate before the throne and worshipping God:²⁴³

We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and who were, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth.

The introduction εὐχαριστοῦμεν σοι indicates that the hymn constitutes a *thanksgiving* to God, a (prayer and hymnic) form well-attested in early Jewish and Christian literature.²⁴⁴ The form typically consisted of a first-person (singular or plural) formula of thanks to God, who is addressed in either the second or third-person,²⁴⁵ and followed by a ὅτι clause which details the acts of God that serve as the basis for thanksgiving.²⁴⁶ In this case, God is addressed in the second-person, with a variation of the title used in 4:8 (“who is and who was”), while the basis

²⁴³ As in chapters 4 and 7, the depiction of the 24 elders worshipping occurs here in-between the antiphonal hymns, and serves as a structural link between them. Jörns, *Evangelium*, 98.

²⁴⁴ In early Jewish literature: Jdt 8:25; 2 Macc 1:11; *T. Abr.* 15:4; 3; 1QH 2:20, 31; 3:19, 37; 4:5; 5:5; 7:6, 26, 34; 9:37; 14:8; 17:7; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.193. Several of Paul's letters include a prayer of thanksgiving: Rom 1:8–17; 1 Cor 1:4–9; Phil 1:3–11; 1 Thess 1:2; Phlm 4, as do various NT and early Christian texts: Col 1:3–8; Luke 18:11; John 11:41; *Did.* 9:3; 10:2–5; Ign. *Smyrn.* 10:1; *Apost. Const.* 7.38.4; 7.26.2.

²⁴⁵ E.e. corresponding to the *Er-Stil* or *Du-Stil* hymnic and prayer forms.

²⁴⁶ See Jörns, *Evangelium*, 98–101; Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 54; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:640–2.

for thanksgiving is the claim that God has “taken [God’s] great power and begun to reign.” Insofar as the eternal reign of God and the Lamb was equated in the previous hymn with their having assumed sovereign rule over the kingdom of the world, this antiphonal response constitutes a hymn of thanksgiving for this act.

The titles applied to God in the beginning of the hymn reflect God’s sovereignty, which is manifest in God’s reign, as well as the fact that God’s reign *has already begun*. On one hand, the epithet “Lord God Almighty” (παντοκράτωρ), as it is found here and throughout Revelation,²⁴⁷ denotes God’s status as “ruler of all”. On the other hand, the epithet “the one who is and who was” (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν), while evoking the title given to God in the hymn in 4:8 (“the one who was and is and is to come” (ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος)), is modified to reflect the fact that God is no longer one who is simply *coming*, but one whose kingdom has already *come*, as evidenced by the destruction which has subsequently taken place in 6:1–17; 8:6–9:21, and which represents the beginning of the reign of God and the Lamb on earth.²⁴⁸

The ὅτι clause that follows the introductory Thanksgiving formula clarifies the grounds for thanksgiving: “. . .you have taken your great power and begun to reign.” The construction evokes various investiture scenes in the Hebrew Bible, in which either a king is enthroned by God’s authority, or in which God is declared king. Notable are those instances in the LXX in which the aorist form of βασιλεύειν is employed to denote the enthronement of an earthly king (e.g., 2 Sam 5:10; 2 Kgs 9:6, 13), or of God (Pss 46:9; 47:8; 92:1; 95:10; 96:1; 98:1). In such instances, the aorist verb indicates that the king, or God, has assumed sovereign authority—has *become* king.²⁴⁹ Likewise, the aorist form of the verb in this clause (ἐβασίλευσας) denotes the investiture of God as king over the kingdom of the world. In this light, the corresponding aorist

²⁴⁷ It was the first epithet given to God in the hymn in 4:8, and a title applied to God in 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22.

²⁴⁸ Jörns, *Evangelium*, 99–100.

²⁴⁹ The so-called *ingressive* aorist.

participial phrase “you have taken your great power,” which does not have clear parallels in antecedent Jewish traditions, likewise apparently denotes the *assumption* of God’s reign. In other words, God has *received* great power, as in an investiture, and has consequently begun to reign.²⁵⁰

The rest of the hymn (v. 18) is best characterized as an excursus on the process by which God has “begun to reign.”²⁵¹ In other words, it constitutes a summary of the story of God’s assumption of power over the kingdom of this world, including both the circumstances which led God to intervene in the world in the first place (i.e., the “raging of the nations”), as well as the consequences of God’s intervention: (1) the coming of the wrath of God; (2) the judgment of the dead; (3) rewarding the servants, prophets, saints, and all those who fear God’s name, both great and small; and (4) destruction of those who destroy the earth.

The initial claim that the “nations have raged” can be understood as a characterization of the activities of the adversaries of God which are variously described throughout Revelation.²⁵² On one hand, the characterization here of the adversaries of God as “nations” (ἔθνη), is consistent with the characterization of God’s adversaries as “nations” elsewhere in the text.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ Such a construction sheds light on the problematic claim in the prior hymn that the kingdom of the world *has become* that of the Lord and of His Messiah. That is, while it is clear from the remaining narrative descriptions of battles between worldly enemies of God and God’s agents that the kingdom of the world has not yet fully come under the authority of God and the Lamb, this hymn clarifies that the rule of God (and the Lamb) has just begun.

²⁵¹ Jörns has suggested that v. 18 constitutes a prosaic, not hymnic, elaboration on the preceding claim.

²⁵² E.g., throwing those of the church of Smyrna into prison (2:10), the murder of the “witnesses” (2:13; 11:3–10), bearing false witness (false apostles (2:2), “those who say they are Jews but are not” (2:9; 3:9), and false prophecy (2:14–16, 20–23)), the slaughter of the faithful (6:9–11; 13:7), worship of idols (9:20), worship of the Beast (13:3–4, 8, 12), blasphemy against God (13:5–7), and assembling to wage war on God and God’s people (13:7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:19; 20:9).

²⁵³ That is, although the term sometimes denotes a group of people that would seem to include those that are considered to be “allies” of God (2:26; 5:9; 7:9; 12:5; 13:7; 14:6, 8; 15:3–4; 21:24, 26; 22:2), it often denotes a more limited group which includes only God’s adversaries (i.e., those who trample the Temple and kill the Two Witnesses (11:2, 9), those associated with Babylon (16:19; 17:15; 18:3, 23), those who are deceived by the devil (20:3, 8), and those who are struck down by the rider on the white horse (19:15)). The ambivalence of the term is apparent in its use in other biblical texts. For instance, while it sometimes refers in the LXX to “people” generally, the term ἔθνος often denotes those (Gentiles) who stand outside of the covenant with God. This is especially clear when ἔθνος is used to translate the Hebrew *goy(im)*, in juxtaposition to the Hebrew *yam*, for which the Greek *λάος* is preferred. So, too, in the NT, ἔθνη can denote: (1) people generally (e.g., all the nations, (Matt 24:9, 14; 25:32; 28:19; Mark 11:17; 13:10;

At the same time, the notion of the rage of the nations refers to the actions of God’s adversaries is further substantiated by the fact that enraged nations is a common apocalyptic motif to denote the actions of God’s adversaries that precipitate God’s eschatological response. So, for instance, Psalm 2 describes the eschatological tumult of the “nations” against God (2:1–3), which results in God’s “wrath” ultimately destroying them (Ps 2:4–11). So, too, in *4 Ezra* 13, cities, peoples, and kingdoms are said to war against each other, and to assemble against the servant of God (13:30–34), which leads to God’s servant “reproving,” “reproaching,” and ultimately “destroying” the nations (13:35–39). Likewise, in *Jub.* 23, the nations are said to instigate tribulation against the Israelites (23:23–25), which prompts God to execute judgment upon them (23:26–31).²⁵⁴ Thus, the claim that the nations are enraged in this hymn likewise denotes the actions of God’s adversaries, and situates them within an apocalyptic framework in which they can be understood as part and parcel of a conflict which precedes God’s eschatological response.

While the first clause gives the cause for God’s intervention in this world, the remaining hymn consists of a summary of God’s response, which includes: (1) the coming of the “wrath of God” and (2) the judgment of the dead. The “wrath of God” refers to the destruction that is unleashed upon God’s adversaries in response to their anger (as depicted, for example, in the opening of the seals, the sounding of the trumpets, destruction of Babylon, etc.), which can be inferred from the use of the phrase elsewhere in Revelation as a metonym for the destruction of God’s adversaries. For instance, those who are “tormented with fire and sulfur” for worshipping the Beast are said to “drink the wine of God’s wrath” (14:9–11, 19; cf. 19:15). So, too, in 15:1–16:21, the destruction caused by the pouring out of the seven bowls, which are characterized as

Luke 21:24; 24:47; Gal 3:8; Rev 15:11), of which Israel is apparently a part; (2) Israel in particular (Luke 7:5; 23:2; John 11:48–52; 18:35; Acts 10:22; 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4; 28:19; 1 Pet 2:9); or (3) a group of people in contrast with Jews (this is most often its use in the NT) or Christians. See Bertram and K. Schmidt, “ἔθνος,” *TDNT* 2:364–71.

²⁵⁴ Cf. Pss 46:6; 65:7; *1 En.* 55:5–6; 99:4; *Sib. Or.* 3.660–668

“bowls of the wrath of God” (15:7; 16:1), is said to constitute the “end of the wrath of God” (15:1). Thus, the hymnic claim that the wrath of God has come here conveys the belief that God has responded to the rage of the nations, which is variously depicted throughout the text.

This notion seems to be drawing upon traditions in the OT and early Jewish and Christian literature in which the wrath of God constitutes punishment for those who have disobeyed or angered God. While the wrath of God is not always imagined to have been a logical consequence of a specific misdeed, appearing at times in the OT rather unpredictably and inexplicably,²⁵⁵ most often it appears as a consequence for those who have in some way angered, disobeyed, and/or rebelled against God.²⁵⁶ This is also the sense of the term as it is used most often in the NT.²⁵⁷ The object of God’s wrath could consist of a group of people, as for example God’s chosen people in the wilderness,²⁵⁸ or those remaining in Jerusalem in the Last Days,²⁵⁹ or particular individuals, as in the case of Job,²⁶⁰ the Psalmist,²⁶¹ the one who disobeys the Son,²⁶² or the one who is wicked, evil, covetous, etc.²⁶³

Such a tradition, in which God’s destruction (“wrath”) is considered a fitting and expected consequence for those who have perpetrated evils against God, makes sense of the characterization in this hymn of the destruction of God’s enemies in Revelation as the coming of the wrath of God. That is, the coming wrath of God in Revelation (i.e., the opening of the seals, the sounding of the trumpets, the destruction of Babylon, etc.) is likewise considered a fitting and

²⁵⁵ The case of Job is an oft-cited example of the unpredictable and inexplicable nature of God’s wrath. Other notable instances include 2 Sam 24:1; Ps 88.

²⁵⁶ The actions which prompt the “wrath of God” are summarized in Fichtner, “ὀργή,” *TDNT* 5:401–4, 441–3.

²⁵⁷ E.g., Rom 1:18ff.; 2:5ff.; Matt 3:7; Luke 3:18; Jn. 3:36. Cf. Luke 21:23.

²⁵⁸ Num 11:1; 13:25–14:38; 17:6–15; Exod 32; Deut 1:34–36.

²⁵⁹ Luke 21:23

²⁶⁰ Job 16:9; 19:11

²⁶¹ E.g., Ps 88

²⁶² John 3:36

²⁶³ Rom 1:18ff.

expected consequence for those who are portrayed as having perpetrated evils against God, the Lamb, and the followers thereof (i.e., the raging of the nations).²⁶⁴

While the coming wrath of God refers to destruction unleashed against God's enemies *upon the earth*, the second clause in this part of the hymn confirms that the punishment of God's earthly enemies constitutes only one element of God's eschatological reign, for alongside the coming of the wrath of God is the "time for the dead to be judged" (ὁ καιρὸς τῶν νεκρῶν κριθῆναι). On one hand, as elsewhere in Revelation, consideration is given to the eschatological consequences both of those who are upon the earth, and those who have died,²⁶⁵ while on the other hand, the hymn presages the specific eschatological act of the judgment of the dead, which occurs in Rev 20:11–15.

What immediately follows is a description of what precisely this judgment entails, namely, "rewarding" the servants, prophets, saints, and all who fear [God's] name, both small and great, as well as "destroying those who destroy the earth." The exact nature of this rewarding and destroying, as well as the precise identities of those who receive each of these judgments, can be determined from descriptions elsewhere in Revelation of the judgment of the dead. In Rev 20:11–15 and 22:12, for example, it is revealed that each person will be judged ultimately "according to their works."²⁶⁶ From this, then, it can be assumed that certain works will garner an eschatological reward, while other works will merit destruction.²⁶⁷ Those works

²⁶⁴ Some scholars have argued that the author of Revelation is here evoking the particular notion of the "day of the wrath of God," which in the OT functioned as a metonym for the time of the destruction of those who have disobeyed God. For example, Ezekiel records a vision which God unleashes destruction upon the inhabitants of the four corners of the earth (7:1–27). This destruction, which is characterized as God's "wrath" and "punishment" for their abominations, consists of death "by sword," "pestilence," "famine," and "disaster upon disaster" (7:15), is said to coincide with the "day of the wrath of the Lord" (7:19). Cf. Zeph 1–2; Lam 2:2. See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:644.

²⁶⁵ E.g., chapter 7, in which those who are granted salvation on earth (the 144,000) and in heaven (the Great Multitude) are both accounted for.

²⁶⁶ Cf. 2:23.

²⁶⁷ The eschatological "rewards" are variously depicted: Eating of the tree of life (2:7; 22:14), immunity from the second death (2:11), authority over the nations (2:26–7), being granted white garments (3:5; 7:14), becoming a pillar

which are to be judged favorably are not explicitly identified anywhere in the text, but they appear to include those deeds encouraged throughout the text (especially those in the letters to the seven churches at the beginning of the apocalypse): “enduring patiently” (2:3), “repenting” (2:5, 16; 3:3, 19), “being faithful until death” (2:10), “holding fast to what you have” (2:25; 3:11), and “not worshipping or receiving the mark of the Beast” (20:4). By contrast, those deeds that will lead to ultimate destruction appear to include both those deeds that are admonished in the seven letters (e.g., abandoning earlier beliefs and practices (2:5; cf. 3:3), following the teachings of those who eat food sacrificed to idols and practice fornication (2:14, 20), living a tepid life (3:15–16)), and those specifically mentioned elsewhere in the text: e.g., those who worship the beast (14:9–11), those whose names were not written in the Book of Life (20:15), and the “cowardly, faithless, polluted, murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and liars” (21:8; cf. 22:14). Thus, the hymn further foreshadows the eventual eschatological “judgment”, which occurs at the denouement of Revelation in chapters 19–22, in which God’s people are rewarded, and God’s enemies are destroyed.

As for those whose works are to be rewarded, they include “servants the prophets, saints, and all who fear [God’s] name, both small and great.” While the “prophets” seem to refer either to particular individuals from Israel’s past,²⁶⁸ or to a specific group within the community of those who follow the Lamb whose vocational duties distinguish them from the community as a

in the temple of God and having the name of God and the New Jerusalem written upon him (3:12; 22:4), being in the presence of Christ and God on or before the heavenly throne (3:21; 7:15–17; 22:3–4), being priests of God and of Christ and reigning with Christ (20:4–6), and being a resident in the New Jerusalem (21:7, 27; 22:14). Alternatively, the eschatological penalty consists of ultimate destruction, a “second death,” which appears to consist of being thrown with the enemies of God into the “lake of fire” where they will be tormented for eternity (20:10, 14–15; 21:8).

²⁶⁸ 10:7; 22:6

whole,²⁶⁹ the remaining terms are used in Revelation to denote more generally communities of followers of the Lamb,²⁷⁰ and so can be taken to convey as much here.

By contrast, those whose works merit destruction are identified as “those who destroy the earth” (διαφθεῖραι τοὺς διαφθείροντες τὴν γῆν). The precise identities of such ones, though not explicitly stated here, as well as the specific nature of their predicted fate, can be inferred on the basis of the meaning(s) of the term διαφθείρω. The uses of the term in the non-Jewish Greek world, the LXX, other early Jewish texts and the NT, suggest both a literal and a figurative meaning, i.e., (1) “to destroy utterly” in the sense of physical annihilation, or (2) “to corrupt morally.”²⁷¹ The first meaning of the term, i.e., to annihilate physically, seems appropriate for the first use of the term in the clause, as all the evidence elsewhere in Revelation points to the belief that God’s punishment entails utter destruction, and the fact that this is always the sense of the word as it is used in the LXX when God is the subject. There is ambiguity, however, as to the meaning of the second use of the term. Presuming that the “the earth” is a metonym for the

²⁶⁹ See, for example, 10:7; 11:10; 16:6; 18:20, 24; 22:9 Prigent, *Commentary*, 79–84; Schüssler-Fiorenza, “Apokalypsis and Propheiteia. The Book of Revelation in the Context of Early Christian Prophecy,” in *L’Apocalypse johannique et l’apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament*, 120; D. Aune, “The Prophetic Circle of John of Patmos and the Exegesis of Revelation 22:16,” *JSNT* 37 (1989): 103–116.

²⁷⁰ The term ἄγιος regularly functions as a substantive adjective denoting the community (5:8; 8:3–4; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 16:6; 17:6; 18:20, 24; 19:8; 20:9; 22:21). More difficult is the designation of those who “fear your name” (τοῖς φοβουμένοις τὸ ὄνομά σου). The term is widely used in the OT to denote those who “revere” or “respect” God to the extent that they follow God’s laws, and this use is also found in the NT (e.g., the term appears in Acts denoting non-Jewish congregants who nevertheless abide by the laws and precepts of the Jewish synagogue community (Acts 13:16, 43, 50)). In *1 Clement* the term is used to denote those who follow Jesus (21.7; 23.1; 28.1; 45.6). As such, the term can be taken here and elsewhere in Revelation to denote those who follow the precepts of the (“Christian”) community. For a fuller discussion of the term, see below pp. 111–2. The phrase “both great and small” appears to denote the totality of a given group. So much is conveyed by the expression as it is frequently employed in the LXX, early Jewish literature, and the NT (e.g., Gen 19:11; Deut 1:17; 1 Kgs 22:31; 2 Kgs 23:2; 25:26; 1 Chr 12:14; 25:8; 26:13; 2 Chr 18:30; 34:30; Job 3:19; Wis 6:7; Jdt 13:4, 13; Jer 6:13; 38:34; 1 Macc 5:45; Acts 8:10; 26:22; Heb 8:11). Its function in this regard is especially apparent when the phrase qualifies groups whose *totality* is explicitly conveyed with adjectives (e.g., πάντες), or when it appears alongside similar constructions in which opposite categories are employed to express the totality of a particular group, e.g., “free and slave,” “male and female,” “old and young,” and “living and dead.” The phrase thus denotes *all* those who “fear God’s name.” Cf. Rev 13:16; 19:5, 18; 20:12, and see below p. 135–6. On these terms as designations for the “Christian” community to which John was writing, see Prigent, *Commentary*, 364. Cf. A. Satake, *Die Gemeindeordnung in der Johannesapokalypse* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1966), 39.

²⁷¹ Harder, “φθείρω, κτλ,” *TDNT* 9:93–106.

inhabitants of the earth,²⁷² διαφθείροντες could refer either to those who annihilate the inhabitants of the earth, or those who figuratively destroy the inhabitants of the earth by corrupting their behavior.

We may go further in identifying τοὺς διαφθείροντες τὴν γῆν by recognizing that the objects of God’s destruction very often in Revelation appear to be elements of, and those associated with, Roman Imperial systems.²⁷³ This, taken together with the fact that elements of the Roman Imperial apparatus (and those associated with it) are held responsible in Revelation for physically destroying the people of God and the followers of the Lamb²⁷⁴ and leading them astray by requiring participation in activities believed to be morally and religiously corruptible,²⁷⁵ allows for the conclusion that τοὺς διαφθείροντες τὴν γῆν refers precisely to those elements of the Roman apparatus and its supporters. In this way, the second use of the term is intentionally ambiguous, highlighting the fact that the Roman Empire is both literally and figuratively destructive.

In summary, the pair of antiphonal hymns in chapter 11, insofar as they occur immediately after the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet, stand in-between the narrative sequence of the trumpet blasts that concludes in chapter 11 and the scene of the battle between the “Woman with the Sun” and Satan that constitutes chapter 12. Like the hymns in chapters 4–5, therefore, the hymns in chapter 11 function to demarcate the preceding narrative sequence from what follows.

²⁷² This is the (oftentimes tacit) conclusion of virtually every commentator on the passage, as there is no concern elsewhere in Revelation for the destruction of “the earth,” or for those who would destroy “the earth.”

²⁷³ E.g., 2:13–17, 19–25; 14:8–11; 16:1–21; 17:1–18; 18:1–24; 19:19–21. On the association of the enemies of God, and the objects of God’s destruction, with elements of the Roman Imperial apparatus, see above, pp. 76–8.

²⁷⁴ E.g., 2:13; 11:7–10; 12:13–17; 13:7, 15; 17:6, 14; 19:19; 20:4; cf. 6:9–11; 7:13–14

²⁷⁵ E.g., 2:13–17, 19–25; 13:4–8; 17:2, 4; 18:3–4, 9; 19:2, 20

Moreover, the hymns serve as a theological reflection on the preceding narrative, and specifically the destruction that comes as a result of the sounding of the trumpets (and implicitly the other forms of destruction depicted in the text). That is, the first antiphonal hymn conveys the belief that the destruction unleashed upon God's adversaries (here designated the "kingdom of the earth") constitutes a battle whose outcome consists of God (and the Lamb) deposing the rulers of this earthly kingdom and becoming sovereigns over it. Insofar as the kingdom of the world is a thinly veiled representation of the actual Roman kingdom in which the author of Revelation was living, the hymn constitutes a claim that God has deposed the Roman Emperor and all of its governing apparatus, and has assumed authority upon the earth.

The antiphonal response constitutes an expansion of this theme, framing the assumption of God's power over the earth in terms familiar from antecedent Jewish and Christian eschatological scenarios, namely, as the "coming of God's wrath," and the "judgment of the dead." That is, the destruction unleashed upon God's adversaries, as represented in the sounding of the trumpets, unsealing of the seals, etc., constitutes God's retributive *wrath* for their actions against God, the Lamb, and the followers thereof. While this wrath destroys God's adversaries who are upon the earth, God's destruction also comes to those who have died, in the form of the "judgment of the dead," by which those whose works are deemed contrary to God are punished eternally, while those whose works are deemed acceptable are given eternal rewards. In this way, the hymn looks forward to subsequent events in Revelation, namely, the judgment of the dead (Rev 20:11–15), rewarding Christians in the eschatological age (Rev 20:4–6; 21:5–8, 22–27; 22:1–5), and the ultimate destruction of God's adversaries (Rev 17: 1–18:24; 19:17–21; 20:1–3, 7–10).

F. *Rev 12:10–12*

Immediately following the sounding of the seventh trumpet and the subsequent hymns is a narrative depicting the interaction(s) between the “Woman clothed in the sun” and the “Dragon,” which actually consists of two distinct but related scenes in which they are the protagonists: the first taking place in heaven (12:1–9), and the second upon earth (12:13–18). The heavenly scene opens with depictions of a celestial Woman (“clothed with the sun, with the moon at her feet”) crying out as she is about to give birth (12:1–2), and a “Red Dragon” with seven crowned heads and ten horns (12:3), who is awaiting the birth of the child, “in order that he might devour it as soon as it was born” (12:4). The Woman then gives birth to a son, who is immediately taken up away from the Dragon to the heavenly throne of God, while she flees into the wilderness where she is protected by God (12:5–6). Finally, the archangel Michael and his angels instigate a war in heaven with the Dragon, who is then explicitly identified as “the Devil and Satan,” which results in the defeat of the Dragon, and his being cast out of heaven onto the earth (12:7–9). Such ends the heavenly scene, which is followed by a brief, non-antiphonal hymn, sung by a “mighty voice in heaven” (12:10–12).

Following the hymn, the action resumes with the Dragon (i.e., Satan) now roaming the earth and “persecuting” the Woman (12:13). She is then rescued “into the wilderness” away from the Dragon, though he pursues her and attempts to drown her with a “river that spewed from his mouth” (12:14–15). The Woman is again rescued, this time by the earth that swallows up the flood waters (12:16), at which point the Dragon goes to make war on the “offspring” of the Woman, who are identified as those who “keep the commandments of God and bear witness to Jesus” (12:17).

In order to appreciate the contents of the hymn in chapter 12, further consideration of the narrative(s) in the chapter is required. The essential structure of the narrative that begins the chapter (12:1–9) appears to derive from a well-known mythic sequence, found in various iterations in Ancient Near Eastern and Greek literature, in which a goddess gives birth to a male child, who is subsequently put into grave danger by the pursuit of a mythical adversary, and who evades pursuit and soon thereafter deposes the adversary and assumes his rightful position.²⁷⁶ To this essential structure, the author of Rev 12 added and re-colored various elements, often drawing upon traditions in the OT and early Jewish literature, so as to present a unique version of the story.²⁷⁷

This particular presentation of the myth functions variously. On one hand, it incorporates the story of the *fall* of Satan from heaven within the narrative framework of the assumption of God and the Lamb to universal power over heaven and earth. As has been already demonstrated, insofar as the sovereign rule of the one seated upon the throne and the Lamb constitutes absolute authority over heaven and (now) earth, it does not admit any rival claims to authority. Thus, in terms that evoke various ancient *combat myths*, the heavenly sequence in Rev 12 depicts the expulsion of God's ultimate adversary from heaven as a consequence of this assumption of power.²⁷⁸ At the same time, this sequence functions as a mechanism for introducing the role of Satan upon the earth. Insofar as Satan functions as an adversary of the people of God on earth

²⁷⁶ In an Egyptian version of this sequence, Isis gives birth to Horus, who is pursued by the Dragon Typhon, and who eventually kills Typhon. In the Greek version of the myth, the Delphic serpent Python lies in wait for Leto to give birth to Apollo who, almost immediately after his birth, pursues and kills the Python. For a synthesis of the many variations of this myth, and the extent to which elements in Rev 12 conform to them, see Aune, *Revelation*, 2:667–74; W.K. Hedrick, "The Sources and Use of Imagery in Apocalypse 12," (Ph.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, 1970); A. Yarbro-Collins, *The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976); J. Fontenrose, *Python: A Study in Delphic Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

²⁷⁷ Conspicuous modifications include the identification of the "Dragon" as "the Devil and Satan," the preeminent adversary of God and God's people in early Jewish literature, and the fact that the Dragon is overthrown by Michael and his angels, rather than the newborn. For a summary of elements from the OT and early Jewish literature that are incorporated into this mythic structure, see Prigent, *Commentary*, 377ff.; Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 194–202.

²⁷⁸ Roloff, *Revelation*, 143.

(e.g., as the source from which the earthly “Beasts” derive their power (13:4, 11–12), and thus ultimately the source from which Babylon derives its power (17:3ff.)), the story of the expulsion of Satan from heaven onto earth thus provides a mythical explanation of the origin of Satan’s presence upon the earth.

The narratives in chapter 12 are also widely thought to function as symbolic representations of various stories of the persecution of the people of God at the hands of their adversaries. For instance, the opening narrative (Rev 12:16) evokes the story of Mary and Joseph’s flight into Egypt as told in Matthew 2:1–15. The association of “male child” with Jesus can be presumed both from his identification as the Messiah,²⁷⁹ which accords with the identification of Jesus as the Messiah elsewhere in Revelation,²⁸⁰ and also from the fact that upon birth he is pursued by one who seeks to destroy him (Matt 2:13). Insofar as King Herod is the one pursuing Jesus in the Matthew narrative (Matt 2:13), the Dragon in Rev 12 can be taken to represent him. Finally, the association of the Woman with Mary, the mother of Jesus, can be inferred from the very fact that she is presented as the mother of the Messiah, and also from the fact that she (with the child) is taken safely away from the persecutor, which in Matthew is depicted as their flight to Egypt (Matt 2:14–15).

At the same time that the heavenly sequence which begins chapter 12 conjures the story of Jesus’ miraculous escape to Egypt in Matt 2:1–15,²⁸¹ the earthly sequence that ends the chapter (Rev 12:13–18) can be taken to represent the story of the Exodus.²⁸² The actions of the Woman recall specific adventures of God’s people during the Exodus, i.e., escaping “into the wilderness” (Rev 12:14), being in danger of, and subsequently rescued from, a flow of water

²⁷⁹ I.e., by reference to Ps 2:7: “...and he shall rule all nations with a rod of iron.”

²⁸⁰ I.e., χριστός. Rev 1:1, 2, 5; 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6; 22:21.

²⁸¹ A story which itself seems to have constituted a variation of the very “combat myth” that is re-told in Rev 12!

²⁸² Prigent, *Commentary*, 372. See esp. n. 19.

(12:15–16), while elements of the narrative recall aspects of the adventures of the Exodus, including the fact that the Woman is given “eagles’ wings” to escape (cf. Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11), and is “nourished” in the “wilderness” (e.g., Exod 16). Moreover, the salvific mechanism by which the woman escapes the flood (12:16) evokes the destruction of the Egyptian army as they pursued the Israelites, i.e., the earth likewise “swallowed” them up (Exod 15:12). In this vein, the description of the actions of the Dragon can be understood to reflect the actions of the Pharaoh pursuing the Israelites into the desert (12:13), and the army of the Pharaoh driving the Israelites to the sea (12:15).²⁸³

Others recognize in the narrative broader allusions to the people of Israel and their historical adversaries. Various clues in the text lend to such an interpretation, including the fact that the depiction of the people of God as a woman is well attested in the Old Testament,²⁸⁴ as is the depiction of God’s people as a woman about to give birth.²⁸⁵ That the Woman here represents the people of God is further supported by the description of her wearing a “crown of twelve stars,” which recalls the stars (of the tribes of Israel) bowing down to Joseph in his dream.²⁸⁶

That the Dragon can be taken to represent various adversaries of God and God’s people is suggested by the terms used to identify the Dragon. For example, the “ancient serpent” recalls the serpent who tempted Eve in Gen. 3:1–7; Satan (ὁ Σατανᾶς) evokes the adversary of Job (Job 1:6ff.), Joshua (Zech 3:1–2), and Israel (1 Chr 21:1);²⁸⁷ and the Devil (ὁ Διάβολος) recalls numerous adversaries of God and God’s people in canonical and non-canonical Jewish and

²⁸³ The association of Pharaoh as a “dragon” has a precedent in Ezek 29:3; 32:2.

²⁸⁴ E.g., Ezek 16.

²⁸⁵ E.g., Isa 26:17; Jer 4:31; Mic 4:10. Cf. Isa 66:7–9; *I QH* 3:4–18.

²⁸⁶ Gen 37:9. Prigent, *Commentary*, 379; Roloff, *Revelation*, 145.

²⁸⁷ Cf. *T. Gad* 4:7; *T. Ash.* 6:4; *T. Dan* 3:6; 5:5–6; 6:1.

Christian literature.²⁸⁸ The association of the Dragon with adversarial earthly powers is further suggested by its initial description in v. 3, where it is described as having “seven heads, ten horns, and ten diadems,” features that evoke descriptions of similar creatures in antecedent Jewish literature, which likewise represent adversarial historical entities. For example, King Nebuchadnezzar is identified as a “dragon” in Jer 51:34, while in Daniel 7 a beast (θηρίον) is described as having, among other features, “ten horns” (Dan 7:7–8), which are said to represent ten “kings which will arise out of this kingdom” (Dan 7:24).²⁸⁹ That the Dragon in Rev 12 represents adversarial earthly powers is further suggested by the fact that its features recall those of the Beast from the Sea in chapter 13, which are widely thought to represent aspects of Roman Imperial rule.²⁹⁰ Finally, various actions of the Dragon correspond with the actions of the adversaries of the people of God in the OT. For example, the waters that threaten the Woman (12:15) conjure the chaotic waters which were considered to represent the enemies of Israel.²⁹¹

Thus, the characters in chapter 12 evoke (and appear to have been intended to evoke) simultaneously multiple associations.²⁹² At the same time that the Woman conjures a range of mythic images of pregnant goddesses who gave birth under duress (i.e., Leto, Isis, etc.), she evokes specific historical entities (the Israelites fleeing Egypt, Mary the mother of Jesus) who were likewise persecuted by opposition forces. At the same time, while the Dragon conjures

²⁸⁸ It is often used to translate the Hebrew *śāṭān* in the LXX. For a summary of this use and others, see Aune, *Revelation*, 2:698–700.

²⁸⁹ Cf. *Sib. Or.* 3, a Jewish interpolation based on Dan 7, in which the ten horns represent earthly kings. *Sib. Or.* 3.396–400. See J.J. Collins, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:359 (SEE SBL 7.2.21). See also Dan 8, in which the horns of the animals likewise represent historical kings.

²⁹⁰ Largely on the basis of the fact that they are explicitly identified later in the text as the “seven hills” and “kings” of Rome (17:9–12). Aune, *Revelation*, 2:731ff.; Boring, *Revelation*, 155–6; Prigent, *Commentary*, 401ff. The precise relationship of the Dragon in chapter 12 and the beast in chapters 13 (and 17) remains in question. On the one hand, the Beast appears to be distinct from the Dragon and subordinate to it (13:4), while on the other hand, the same terms used to describe the Dragon and the Beast suggest that they represent the same historical (i.e., Roman Imperial) entities.

²⁹¹ Pss 18:5–18; 46:3–4; 144:3–7; Hab 3:15. Aune, *Revelation*, 2:707.

²⁹² This approach differs from those who seek to identify a single referent for each of the characters, whereby each character is associated with a single historical entity.

images of the menacing god who threatens the pregnant goddess and its offspring (i.e., Typhon, Seth, etc.), it simultaneously evokes specific adversaries (Pharaoh, King Herod, etc.) which likewise posed grave dangers to those persecuted historical entities. As such, the narrative in chapter 12 can be taken to represent the struggles faced by various groups of people over and against historical adversaries, including the people of Israel,²⁹³ and even the early Church.²⁹⁴

By presenting a mythical story whose symbolic imagery allows for such varied associations, the author of Revelation is able to situate his story of the persecution of his people in his own time (Jesus followers in Asia Minor under Roman Imperial rule) within a larger trajectory of persecution manifest at various points in the history of his people. In other words, the author's portrayal of the present hardships of his people are framed in light of the struggles of past peoples, and can in fact be viewed *in terms of* these past struggles. The Dragon, who directly persecutes those "who maintain the testimony of Jesus" (12:17), and who indirectly supports their persecution (13:4ff.), is presented as the selfsame entity who persecuted Israelites in Egypt and threatened the family of Jesus after his birth. At the same time, insofar as the Woman and her infant son, whose story is a reflection of the very struggles the churches in Asia Minor community are now facing (as John presents them), were ultimately delivered from the peril of the Dragon's assault, so, too, can the readers of John's Apocalypse expect that they will be delivered from their current predicament. That is, the defeat of the Dragon in heaven, which allegorically represents the defeat of God's past adversaries, presages the eventual defeat of the current adversaries of God and God's people. Thus, not only are the present struggles of the community framed here in terms of those of past peoples, but the deliverance of the community

²⁹³ Yarbrow Collins, *Combat Myth*, 107.

²⁹⁴ This was an interpretation proposed by early commentators, including Hippolytus, *Antichr.* 61; Methodius, *Symp.* 8.5. The notion that the "woman" refers to the "Church" is still widely held. B.J. LeFrois, *The Woman Clothed with the Sun (Ap. 12), Individual or Collective?* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1954), 11–38.

is assured on the basis of the fact that God has delivered God's people from similar circumstances in times past.

Having now considered the narrative contents of chapter 12, the hymn itself, which occurs immediately after the expulsion of the Dragon from heaven, can be evaluated. Like the hymn in chapter 11, the identity of those singing the hymn is not revealed, and the hymn is described only as a "great sound" (12:10). From this it can be inferred, as it was in chapter 11, that the hymn is either sung by one heavenly group in particular, or some combination of heavenly entities that sing each of the previous hymns.²⁹⁵ The opening consists of an acclamation:

Now has come the salvation and power and kingdom of our God and the authority of His Messiah

The temporal adverb ἄρτι, taken together with the aorist ἐγένετο, reveals that what follows is related to the events that have just occurred.²⁹⁶ Thus, the defeat of the Dragon by Michael and his angels (12:7–9), as well as the deliverance of the Woman and her infant child that precedes this (12:5–6), are identified as constitutive elements of the coming of the "salvation, power, and kingdom of God and the authority of His Messiah."²⁹⁷

In such a reading, the coming of salvation (σωτηρία) refers precisely to the deliverance of the Woman and her infant child (12:5–6), which makes sense insofar as the term is regularly employed in the Septuagint and NT to denote "protection," "rescue," or "help" in perilous

²⁹⁵ See n. 158 above. Some have supposed that this voice could not be that of any of the angelic figures as they would not have referred to those being "accused" by Satan as "our brothers" (v. 10), and that the voice must therefore belong to the human martyrs who are in heaven, e.g., the Great Multitude in 7:9; 19:1, or those "under the altar" in 6:9. Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 1:327; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:701; Prigent, *Commentary*, 390.

²⁹⁶ See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:699.

²⁹⁷ This reading is confirmed by the ὅτι clause that follows the opening line of the hymn, in which the act of the "accuser" having been "thrown down" is identified as the cause of the "coming salvation, power, kingdom," etc.

circumstances,²⁹⁸ as well as the fact that it is used elsewhere in Revelation to denote the “rescue” of others (e.g., the Great Multitude in 7:9–17; 19:1). At the same time, the coming of the “power and the kingdom of God, and the authority of His Messiah” appear to be more directly related to Satan’s defeat and expulsion from heaven. So much is revealed by the description of the acts themselves. That is, insofar as the act of “throwing” (βάλλω) intrinsically connotes the superior power of the one performing the action over and against the recipient of the action,²⁹⁹ the description of Satan being “thrown” (ἐβλήθη) confirms the superior power of Michael and his angels over Satan. The characterization of Satan’s defeat in the war with Michael and his angels (οὐκ ἴσχυσεν) explicitly confirms such a reading.³⁰⁰ Thus, insofar as Michael and his angels represent agents acting on God’s behalf,³⁰¹ these actions thus demonstrate the sovereign *power* of God and the *authority* of the Lamb.³⁰² As is clear from other scenes in Revelation in which God

²⁹⁸ This is the most frequent sense of the term in the LXX, and becomes the exclusive sense of the word in the NT.

²⁹⁹ Insofar as the term denotes the action of an agent to move (physically) an object, it signals in the most basic Aristotelian sense the superiority of the one *throwing* over the object *being thrown*. When the agent and object are persons, the verb likewise denotes the physical superiority of the one acting (i.e., “throwing”) vis-à-vis the recipient of the action as, e.g., in Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 622; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 1.1.24; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.629; *J.W.* 4.28; Aristophanes, *Vesp.* 835. The term ἐκβάλλω carries a similar connotation, as in Demosthenes, 60.8; Thucydides 2.68.6; P. Oxy. 1.104.17. Especially relevant to the current passage are those instances in the NT in which a character’s being thrown out (ἐκβάλλω) signals an act of power and authority on the part of the one performing the action, e.g., Jesus casting out demons (Mark 1:34, 43; 3:15, 22ff.; 9:38; Matt 8:16; 12:29, 44; Luke 11:20), expelling the money-changers (John 2:15), or leading his disciples (John 10:4). Often the character is explicitly or implicitly understood to have received the power to “throw (out)” from God (e.g., Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20; John 6:37).

³⁰⁰ At its root, ἰσχύω denotes “power” or “ability,” largely synonymous with words of the stem δυνα-. In a context in which the root is used to express a relationship with another person or group, e.g., ἰσχυρότερος, it can express the relationship in hierarchal terms, demonstrating the superior power of one person over another (e.g., Matt 3:11). Cf. κατισχύω. Thus, in the context of chapter 12, the phrase οὐκ ἴσχυσεν in the context of a war signals the inferior strength of Satan vis-à-vis Michael and his angels.

³⁰¹ The angel Michael often appears in Jewish tradition as an agent of God who defends God’s people by means of military action, as in Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; sometimes as a “ruler.” E.g., *1 En.* 20:5; Dan 12:1; Dionysius Areopagita, [*De caelesti hierarchia*] 9.2. Or, as an “archangel.” E.g., *1 En.* 9:1; *T. Ab.* 1:4, 6; 10:1; 20:10; Jude 9; etc. Or, as a “lead general.” E.g., *T. Ab.* 1:4ff.; *3 Bar* 11:4–8; *Gk. Apoc. Ezra* 4:24. See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:693–5.

³⁰² The term ἐξουσία is not associated with the Lamb/Messiah/exalted Jesus elsewhere in Revelation. It may denote one aspect of God’s sovereignty that has been granted to the exalted Jesus by God upon his enthronement which is elsewhere characterized as δύναμις and ἰσχυς. On the other hand, ἐξουσία may represent the totality of those privileges that have been granted to the Lamb. In other words, the “authority of the Messiah” may refer here to the fact that God has granted kingship to the Lamb. This second reading is supported by the fact that ἐξουσία is the Greek translation for the Latin *imperium*, which denoted the authority of the Emperor granted to, and wielded by, his highest administrative agent(s). Aune, *Revelation*, 2:700.

and His Messiah are portrayed as the sole sovereigns of heaven and earth,³⁰³ the kingdom of God and the Lamb does not allow for adversarial entities to remain in power.³⁰⁴ Thus, the expulsion of Satan from heaven, which symbolizes Satan's loss of authority in the heavenly realm, is part and parcel (and a requisite element) of the coming kingdom of God.

While the salvation and power of God, and the authority of the Messiah, are itemized alongside the kingdom of God in the list of forces that are said to "have now come," they can be more precisely understood to represent *aspects* of this kingdom. In other words, the coming of God's kingdom entails precisely the coming of God's salvation, which here represents the deliverance of the woman, as well as the power of God and the authority of His Messiah, which here represents the defeat of the Dragon/Satan to establish the sovereignty of God and His Messiah (the Lamb/the exalted Jesus) in heaven and on earth. And thus, the opening of the hymn makes explicit what is depicted in the preceding narrative, that the coming of the kingdom of God has dual consequences: salvation for God's elect and punishment for God's enemies.³⁰⁵

As are hymnic acclamations elsewhere in Revelation, so, too, is the opening of the acclamation in 12:10 followed by a causal (ὅτι) clause that clarifies the grounds for the acclamation:³⁰⁶

Because the accuser of our brothers has been thrown, the one who was accusing them before our God day and night; and they conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony,³⁰⁷ for they did not love their soul to the point of death.

³⁰³ E.g., the claim implicit in the listing of sovereign prerogatives to God and the Lamb in 4:11 and 5:9–10 that God and the Lamb *alone* are worthy to be designated sovereigns.

³⁰⁴ Or, if the adversarial powers do maintain some power it is because it has been granted to them by God, e.g., 20:3, 7–10.

³⁰⁵ In this way, the coming of the kingdom of God is portrayed here in similar terms to the previous chapter. That is, the coming of the kingdom of God likewise entailed both *salvation* of God's people (i.e., the "Two Witnesses" who had been persecuted and killed (11:11)), and *defeat* of God's enemies (i.e., the destruction of the "inhabitants of the earth" who were responsible for it (11:13)). At the same time, the kingdom of God is revealed in both instances to entail the sovereignty of the Messiah.

³⁰⁶ I.e., 4:11; 5:9; 11:17; 15:4; 16:5–6; 19:2, 6–7.

Here the coming of the salvation, power, and kingdom of God, and the authority of His Messiah is explicitly associated with the expulsion of Satan from heaven. While the hymn recounts Satan's expulsion in similar terms as in the preceding narrative (i.e., ἐβλήθη), it also introduces elements not depicted in the narrative, including: (1) The identification of the Dragon as "the accuser"; (2) The explicit identification of the community to whom the author was writing as the object of Satan's accusations; and (3) A description of the martyrological mechanism by which Satan is cast down to earth.

Satan is further identified as the "accuser" (ὁ κατήγορ). Though the term is a *hapax legomena* in biblical sources, it can be understood as a synonym of the more widely attested κατήγορος, which refers in the NT to one making an accusation in a law-court.³⁰⁸ In this way, the term is functionally equivalent to the Hebrew *śāṭān* and the Greek *σατανός*, for which the term appears as an epithet in Rabbinic sources.³⁰⁹ Such a designation thus further associates the Dragon with that mythical adversary of God and God's people who was variously described in early Judaism and Christianity (i.e., Satan, Devil, the Ancient Serpent, etc.) while at the same time further clarifying his function *as* an adversary, i.e., as "the accuser," a function that is repeated in the predicative clause which follows the epithet, in which he is identified as ". . . the one accusing them before our God day and night." Satan is thus understood in terms familiar from antecedent Jewish sources in which he functions as the heavenly prosecutor of God's people.³¹⁰

³⁰⁷ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας.

³⁰⁸ John 8:10; Acts 23:30, 35; 25:16, 18.

³⁰⁹ Büchsel, "κατήγορος, κτλ," *TDNT* 3:636–7.

³¹⁰ For texts which depict a heavenly court in which God sits as judge, see 1 Kgs 22:19; Pss 82:1; 89:5–7; Jer 23:18, 22. Cf. *b. Sanh.* 38b; *Exod. Rab.* 30:18; *Lev. Rab.* 24:2. For texts which depict Satan as the heavenly prosecutor, see Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; Zech 3:1–2; 1 Chr 21:1; *T. Job* 8:1–3; 16:2–4; 20:1–3; *Jub.* 1:20; 17:15–16; 48:15–18; *1 En.* 40:7.

By drawing upon such a notion, and identifying “our brothers,” which is a euphemism for the community of those (“Christians”) to whom the author is writing,³¹¹ as the object of Satan’s accusing, the author is linking the present suffering of the community to the machinations of Satan in heaven.³¹² At the same time, insofar as the expulsion of Satan from heaven is repeated in the hymn, the author is reaffirming the belief that, even if the persecution continues for a “short time” as Satan prowls the earth (12:12, 17), this suffering is about to come to an end, as the ultimate cause of the community’s suffering has been removed from his place of power.

While the cause of Satan’s expulsion from heaven in the preceding narrative is ostensibly his defeat at the hands of Michael and his angels (12:7–9), the clause in v. 11 of the hymn identifies a more specific cause: Satan was “conquered” by the “blood of the Lamb” and the “word of their testimony.”³¹³ The first of these phenomena clearly refers to the death of Jesus, insofar as the blood of the Lamb functions here, as elsewhere in Revelation, as a metonym for it.³¹⁴ In the same vein, the word of their testimony refers to the *deaths* of those in the community to whom the Apocalypse was written on account of their testimony. That the (“Christian”) community is here referred to is evident by the fact that the plural possessive pronoun αὐτῶν can reasonably refer in this hymn only to “the brothers,”³¹⁵ while the association of the word of their testimony with the *deaths* of those in the community is made clear by the following qualifying clause: “for they did not love their soul to the point of death.” This phrase, which evokes a widespread Greco-Roman trope in which noble deaths are understood to be a consequence of *not*

³¹¹ The identification of those in the community as “brothers,” which derives from well-established Jewish and Greek customs for denoting religious compatriots, is especially well attested in Acts and in Paul. See von Soden, “ἀδελφός,” *TDNT* 1:145–6.

³¹² This is something that might already have been conveyed in the character of the Woman, insofar as she could be taken to represent the community.

³¹³ The construction καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτόν suggests that the author is imagining here that Michael and his angels have physically conquered the Dragon and expelled him to heaven, while providing the underlying *causes* for the Dragon’s defeat, as given by the διὰ + accusative constructions which imply causation.

³¹⁴ Rev 1:5; 5:9; 7:14. Cf. 19:13

³¹⁵ The term functions in the hymn and elsewhere as a metonym for the community itself.

loving one's own life,³¹⁶ explicitly qualifies the word of testimony as that which leads to *death*,³¹⁷ and thus clarifies that the second mechanism by which Satan is conquered is precisely the *deaths* of those in the community that result from their testimony.³¹⁸

The claim that Satan was “conquered” by the *death* of Jesus, as well as the *deaths* of those in the community to whom the Apocalypse was written, can be understood in terms of antecedent Jewish traditions in which martyrs were said to *conquer* their persecutors, as for example in 4 Maccabees, in which martyrs are said to conquer their torturers through their own deaths.³¹⁹ This notion, which appears to reflect a Stoic worldview in which the virtues of patient suffering and endurance in the face of death represented *victory* over the passions of physical pain, anxiety, fear, etc., appears in later Christian martyrological texts, e.g., *Mart. Perpetua*, in which her martyrdom is characterized as victory over the Devil.³²⁰ Such a notion is thus incorporated in this hymn within the broader context of the story of the fall of Satan, whereby Satan's defeat and expulsion from heaven is understood to be the result of the efficacy of the deaths of Jesus and his followers.

The conclusion of the hymn includes an exultation to the heavens, and a warning call to those on the earth and in the sea:

³¹⁶ See Euripides, *Hec.* 348; *Herc. fur.* 518, 531–4; Demosthenes, *Or.* 60.28; Philo, *Leg.* 369; Josephus, *Ant.* 6.344; 12.301; 13.198. Aune, *Revelation*, 2:703.

³¹⁷ The association between “testimony” and death is found elsewhere in Revelation: 1:9; 6:9; 12:17; 20:4. Cf. 17:6.

³¹⁸ The association between “testimony” and “death” here is further suggested by the fact that testimony was often accompanied by death in the OT, and in early Jewish and Christian sources, e.g., the prophets (1 Kgs 19:10; Jer 26:20ff.), the Maccabean rebels (1–4 Maccabees), or Jesus before the high-priest (Mark 14:63/Matt 26:65, as well as the fact that *μαρτυρία* comes to connote *martyrdom* as early as the middle of the 2nd c., as is clear in the Martyrdom of Polycarp, Melito of Sardis (cf. 1 Clement). Strathmann, “*μάρτυς, κτλ.*,” *TDNT* 4:504–8.

³¹⁹ 4 Macc 6:10; 7:4; 9:6, 30; 11:20; 16:14; 17:15.

³²⁰ *Mart. Perpetua* 10.13–4.

Rejoice therefore, heavens and those who dwell in them; but woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short.

The cause for the exultation and the woe is one and the same: Satan has been expelled from heaven.³²¹ As a result, the heavens may rejoice insofar as Satan is no longer present there, while the earth and the sea must take heed now that he has been cast down amongst them. The form of the exultation recalls passages in the OT in which the heavens are told to rejoice on account of some deed for which God was responsible, e.g., the return of the exiles from Babylon (Isa 44:23; 49:13), and the creation and judgment of the earth (Ps 96:11).³²² In a sense, then, the exultation marks the formal conclusion of the activities of the Dragon in heaven. Unlike these antecedent exultations, however, in which the earth is enjoined to exult alongside the heavens,³²³ here the earth and the sea are instead warned that the Dragon has come to earth. The alert (οὐαί), which recalls prophetic warnings of imminent danger elsewhere in Revelation and in the biblical tradition,³²⁴ does not contain information as to the specific threat posed by the Dragon (who is here simply referred to as “The Devil”), other than the fact that he has come with “great wrath, because he knows his time is short.” Though it is not stated explicitly, this wrath likely consists of his actions, which immediately follow: the persecution of the woman and her offspring in 12:13–17, in which he is characterized as “angry” and as “making war,” and the destruction unleashed by the Beast from the Sea and the Beast from the Land in the following chapter(s), to which he has given his authority (13:2, 12). The characterization of such acts as Satan’s “wrath”

³²¹ The clause is clearly linked to the preceding verse by the prepositional phrase διὰ τοῦτο.

³²² In each of these cases, a passive form of the verb εὐφραίνω appears in the form of a command, with οἱ οὐρανοὶ functioning as the subject. [Is ‘subject’ the correct technical term here?] Cf. 4QTanhumin 1–2 ii 1–2; 4QPsalms 10:5.

³²³ Along with the “sea” in Ps 96.

³²⁴ See especially Rev 8:13; 18:10, 16, 19.

makes sense in light of early Jewish and Christian martyrological accounts in which the acts of the adversaries are likewise characterized as “anger” and/or “rage.”³²⁵ The final clause provides the motivation for this “wrath”, i.e., “because he knows his time is short”. The final line points forward to a point described later in the text in which God ultimate destroys Satan (Rev 20:1–3, 7–10), and thus appears to reflect a belief that the time during which Satan will persecute God’s people is both pre-determined and limited.³²⁶

In summary, insofar as the hymn in chapter 12 occurs between the two narrative sequences that constitute the chapter, it functions narratively as have the previous hymns to demarcate one scene from another. It also functions as do each of the previous hymns to frame the preceding events in a particular theological light, by characterizing the deliverance of the woman and the defeat of the Dragon as dual aspects of the coming of the kingdom of God. That is, the hymn makes clear what might be inferred from the scene itself: the deliverance of the Woman symbolizes the “salvation of God,” while the defeat of the Dragon represents the coming of the “power of God” and the “authority of His Messiah.”

By identifying the Dragon as “the accuser of our brothers,” the hymn further identifies the mythic battle as one that can also be understood to represent the battle presently occurring in the community. Moreover, the salvation of the Woman and the defeat of the Dragon, (and thus the salvation of the community and the defeat of the earthly rulers represented by them), is re-framed in the hymn to be the result of the blood of Jesus and the martyrdom of his followers. Finally, the hymn proclaims the coming persecution of the Dragon (i.e., “the devil”) upon the

³²⁵ Dan 3:13, 19; 11:30; 2 Macc 7:3, 39; 3 Macc 3:1; 4:12–13; 5:1; 4 Macc 8:2; 9:10; Acts 5:33; 7:54; *Mart. Pol.* 12:2; *Mart. Carpus* 9; *Ep. Lugd.* 1.17. See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:708.

³²⁶ E.g., the time allotted to the “nations” to trample over the holy city is 42 months (11:2–3), a duration which corresponds to the time given to the Beast from the Sea to exercise authority in 13:5.

earth, and in so doing functions unlike previous hymns to foreshadow the following scene, in which the Dragon comes to earth and persecutes those in it (12:13–17).

G. *Rev 15:3–4*

Several narrative sequences occur prior to the next hymn in chapter 15, and thus provide a context for its interpretation. As such, these sequences will be considered briefly prior to a discussion of the hymn itself. The scene involving the Dragon and the Woman is immediately followed by descriptions of two beasts—one “from the sea” (13:1–8), and one “from the land” (13:11–18)—each depicted in no uncertain terms as earthly adversaries of God and God’s people.³²⁷ Thus, the persecution of God’s people as depicted mythically in chapter 12 as the struggle between the woman and the Dragon is continued in chapter 13 by earthly proxies of the Dragon. And, as in the previous chapter, this persecution is widely understood to represent historical *realia*, insofar as the Beasts are believed to represent aspects of the Roman Imperial apparatus,³²⁸ the “inhabitants of the earth” are those who participate within its social, political, and economic structures, and the “saints” are those communities being oppressed and persecuted by it.³²⁹ As such, the chapter as a whole is at once an exposition of the author’s belief that the Roman Imperial apparatus is wholly corrupt and evil, borne by Satan himself, and stands with Satan in complete opposition to God and God’s people, and at the same time a call to those in the

³²⁷ E.g., the authority of the first beast is said to derive from the Dragon (13:4), and whose actions including blaspheming God (13:5–6), making war on the “saints” (13:7), and slaughtering those who do not worship it (13:8), while the second beast enables the authority of the first beast and exercises all of its authority (13:12–15), deceives the inhabitants of the earth (13:14), and prohibits anyone from buying or selling goods unless they bear its mark (13:16–17).

³²⁸ See above, pp. 76–8. A full treatment of the extent to which the images in chapter 13 can be understood to represent aspects of the Roman Imperial apparatus is offered by Greg Carey, “The Book of Revelation as Counter-Imperial Script,” 157–76; Steve Friesen, “Myth and Symbolic Resistance,” 281–313; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 384–452; A. Yarbro-Collins, “The Political Perspective,” 241–56.

³²⁹ That ἁγίων in 13:7, 10 refers to those in the communities to whom John was writing can be inferred from the fact that the term was widely used in early Christian literature to refer to those in the (“Christian”) community, a reading which is further suggested by its use elsewhere in Revelation, as in 14:12, when the “saints” are identified explicitly as “those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus.” See also Rev 17:6; 18:24; 19:8; 20:9.

community to recognize the Empire for what the author perceives it to be, and to reject it at all costs, even to the point of death (13:10).

Following this exposition is a vision of the 144,000 before the heavenly throne, singing with the living creatures and 24 elders a “new song” to God (14:1–5). The vision clearly evokes the vision of the 144,000 before the throne in 7:1–8,³³⁰ and appears to present a vision of the heavenly reward for those who refuse to participate in Roman Imperial systems. That is, those 144,000 who are marked with the names of the Lamb and the Father (14:1) represent an antithesis of those who received the “mark of the beast” in the previous chapter (13:16).³³¹ Read in such a way, the chapter mirrors visions elsewhere in Revelation in which those who have remained faithful to God are depicted as having received a heavenly reward (e.g., those who had been slaughtered for their testimony in 6:9–11; the Great Multitude in 7:9–17, and 19:1–10).

If the vision of the 144,000 before the heavenly throne is a vision of the coming rewards for those who refuse to participate in Imperial social, political, economic, and religious structures, the two subsequent visions reveal the dire consequences for those who *do* participate in them – i.e., destruction and punishment. The first vision consists of a series of proclamations of the coming destruction in terms of angelic announcements of: (1) the coming of the “judgment” of God, (2) the fall of Babylon, and (3) punishment for those who worship the beast and receive its mark. Although these pronouncements are couched in metaphoric and symbolic language, they leave no doubt that the recipients of God’s judgment (14:7) are none other than

³³⁰ In addition to the fact that 144,000 are depicted in heaven, they are likewise described as having been *marked* on their foreheads, and are identified by the *sound* that they make in heaven.

³³¹ It is precisely the fact that they have not received the “mark of the beast” (i.e., participated in the Roman economic system (13:17)), that has allowed them to receive the “mark” of the Lamb and the Father, which brings with it the heavenly reward as depicted in 14:1–7. Insofar as participation in the Roman economic system necessarily entailed participation in Roman social, religious, and political structures, refusal to receive the “mark of the beast” connotes not only the refusal to participate in the Roman economic systems *per se*, but refusal to participate in these broader systems associated with it. See J. Nelson Kraybill, *Imperial Cult and Commerce in John’s Apocalypse* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 113–41

Rome and its loyal supporters. Insofar as Babylon is a thinly veiled allusion to Rome itself,³³² the claim that it is “fallen” (14:8) signals none other than the destruction of the capital of the Empire. At the same time, insofar as those who “worship the beast and its image” and “receive its mark” are allusions to those who participate in various Roman Imperial systems, the claim that they will “drink the wine of the wrath of God...and experience the torments of fire and sulfur” (14:10) clearly signals their coming punishment.³³³

While the first vision announces the coming destruction and punishment upon the Roman Imperial apparatus, the second vision depicts it. That is, “one like the son of man” is portrayed “harvesting of the earth” (14:15–16), while an angel is depicted “gathering of the clusters of the vine. . .and throwing [them] onto the winepress” (14:17–20). Thus, in metaphoric terms which evoke symbolic depictions of the punishment(s) of God’s adversaries in the OT, early Jewish midrash, and the NT,³³⁴ the pronouncements of judgment are here enacted.

Having established the narrative context of the hymn in chapters 15, it remains to consider the hymn itself. The hymn is said to be sung by “those who had conquered the beast” (15:2) who, like each of the hymnists before them, are envisioned before the throne of God and

³³² That Rome should be identified in symbolic terms should be expected given the fact that it is only ever identified symbolically elsewhere in Revelation. The use of Babylon as a cipher for Rome here (and in Rev 16:19; 17:6; 18:2, 10, 21) can be inferred from the fact that it exists as a cipher in several Jewish apocalyptic texts from about the same time, including 4 Ezra 3:1–2, 28–31; 16:44, 46; 2 Bar. 10:2; 11:1; 67:7; and *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159.

³³³ While the “wrath of God” frequently denotes the punishment(s) of God in the OT and early Jewish literature, the particular metaphor of drinking from the “cup” of the “wine of the wrath of God” is found in Jer (LXX) 32:15 and Ps (LXX) 74:9. So, too, is the imagery of the torments of “fire and sulfur” employed in the OT to connote punishment in Ps (LXX) 11:6 and Ezek 38:22. Similar metaphors are used elsewhere in Revelation to connote divine punishment. For the “fury of God,” see Rev 14:19; 15:7; 16:1, 19; 19:15. For “fire and sulfur,” see 19:20; 20:10; 21:8.

³³⁴ The notion of the judgment of God as a “harvest” was widespread. See Joel (LXX) 3:13; Isa 17:5; 18:4–5; 24:13; Jer 51:33; Hos 6:11; Mic 4:12–13; 4 Ezra 4:28–32; 2 Bar. 70:20; Matt 13:24–30, 36–43; Mark 13:26–7//Matt 24:30–1. The metaphor of the sickle as an agent of God’s judgment is found in Joel (LXX) 3:13; *Midr. Ps.* 8.1.73; *T. Ab.* 4:11; 8:9–10; *Vit. Proph.* 3.6–7. The notion of the judgment of God as a grape harvest can be found in Joel (LXX) 3:13, while the metaphor of judgment as winepress can be found in Isa 63:1–6; *Tg. Isa.* 63:3–4; *Tg. Neb;* Joel 4:13–14.

the Lamb.³³⁵ Identifying this group is complicated by the fact that to this point in the text no group has been identified as *conquering* a beast; in fact, the destruction of the beast is not even intimated until 17:8ff., nor described until 19:17–21, where the beast’s demise is explicitly linked to its capture at the hands of the “rider on the white horse” and his “armies” (19:11–21). Thus, the group singing the hymn in chapter 15 might refer proleptically to this group depicted in chapter 19.³³⁶ At the same time, insofar as the language used to describe the singers in chapter 15 evokes those described as having conquered the “accuser” (i.e., the Dragon) in 12:11, the singers may here be imagined to be these martyrs.³³⁷

Before turning to the contents of the hymn itself, a final preliminary issue must be addressed: Whatever group may be envisioned to be singing the hymn, they are said to sing the “Song of Moses, servant of God, and the Song of the Lamb” (15:3). The characterization of the hymn as the Song of Moses evokes the songs sung *by* Moses in the OT (Exod 15:11; Deut 32), insofar as this hymn, like Moses’ hymn in Exodus, takes place near a “sea,” as well as by the fact that particular phrases in the hymn recall elements of each of these antecedent hymns.³³⁸ By recalling these songs of Moses, and the one from the Exodus in particular, the themes of the judgment of God’s enemies and the salvation of God’s people are foregrounded such that they frame the contents of the hymn. That is, just as the songs of Moses commemorated the intervention of God on behalf of God’s people, which entailed their salvation and the destruction of their enemies, so, too will the hymn in Rev 15 enumerate the judgments of God upon God’s enemies, as well as the ultimate salvation of God’s people.

³³⁵ So much can be assumed from the description of the scene, in which is described a “sea of glass mixed with fire,” which clearly evokes the heavenly throne-room, as for example, in Rev 4:5–6. That is, the “sea of glass” here recalls “something like a sea of glass” depicted before the throne in 4:6, while the mention of “fire” seems to recall the seven flaming torches in 4:5.

³³⁶ Although the language of *conquering*, which characterizes the group in chapter 15, is not used in chapter 19.

³³⁷ For this interpretation, see Prigent, *Commentary*, 459–60.

³³⁸ E.g., “Great and marvelous are your works” (Exod 15:11); “Just and true are your ways” (Deut 32:4).

The characterization of the hymn as the “Song of the Lamb” is less immediately recognizable. It is unlikely that the Song of the Lamb evokes a song sung *by* the Lamb, as there is no evidence for such a song in the text of Revelation or outside of it. As such, the Song of the Lamb alternatively might be thought to connote a song *about* the Lamb, as in 5:9–13.³³⁹ Such a reading is made difficult by the fact that the song does not explicitly mention, nor clearly allude to, the Lamb, but is focused rather on the actions of God (15:3) and the actions of the people vis-à-vis God (15:4). Nevertheless, the characterization of this hymn as a song *about* the Lamb makes sense if the plight of the Lamb is understood to be part and parcel of the “great and marvelous works” and “righteous and true ways” of God that are praised in the hymn, which we will see is precisely the case.³⁴⁰

The hymn proper begins with praise of God:

Great and marvelous are your works, Lord God Almighty; Righteous and true are your ways, O King of the Nations

In formal terms, the opening of the hymn resembles various Psalms and Proverbs in which virtually synonymous phrases are paired to form a kind of poetic couplet,³⁴¹ while in terms of content, the individual elements are recognizable from various OT texts, especially the Psalms.³⁴² Taken as a whole, the opening of the hymn constitutes a positive reflection on what has transpired in the text to this point. That is, “great and marvelous works” and “righteous and

³³⁹ E.g., Aune, *Revelation*, 2:872–3.

³⁴⁰ By such a reading, the characterization of this hymn as the Song of Moses can be related to its characterization as the Song of the Lamb. That is, just as the songs of Moses evoke the intervention(s) of God in history on behalf of God’s people through the character of Moses, so, too does the Song of the Lamb indicate the intervention of God in history on behalf of God’s people through the crucifixion and exaltation of Jesus (cf. 5:9ff.), which is alluded to in the description of God’s “great and marvelous works” and “righteous and true ways” in the hymn.

³⁴¹ So-called *Semitic parallelism*

³⁴² E.g., “Great and marvelous are your works” (Ps 92:5; 111:2; 139:14; Tob 12:22; cf. Exod 15:11; Job 42:3); “Righteous and true are your ways” (Deut 32:4; Ps [LXX] 144:17). Notable is the fact that each phrase recalls elements from the “songs” of Moses, Exod 15:11; Deut 32:4.

true ways” are characterizations of the acts of God as they have been so far revealed in the text.³⁴³ Such a conclusion can be reached on the basis of a consideration of the phrases as they appear in the OT, which function to characterize in positive terms *specific* deeds of God. For example, the “marvelous works” of God in the Psalms refer specifically to the creation of the human body (Ps 139:13ff.), and the protection of God’s people and destruction of their enemies (Ps 92:5–15; 111:1–10), while in Tobit the “marvelous works” denote specifically the actions of the angel Raphael to recover Tobias’ money, to bring together Tobias and Sarah, and to heal Tobit’s blindness (Tob 12:22). Likewise, the “righteous ways”³⁴⁴ of God refer in the Song of Moses to the actions of God vis-à-vis God’s people as they are described in the rest of the song: the deliverance from the Pharaoh, the sojourn in the desert, the arrival in the promised land, punishment for turning away from God, and the ultimate vindication of God’s people (Deut 32:5–43).³⁴⁵

Thus, the phrases in the opening of the hymn in chapter 15 can be reasonably thought to function as they do in the antecedent literature from which they were drawn: to characterize specific acts of God. It follows, then, that “great and marvelous works” and “righteous and true ways” more specifically characterize those acts of God³⁴⁶ as described in Revelation that include both the judgments upon the enemies of God, and the salvation for God’s chosen people. These would most naturally refer to those events which have just transpired in the text (the salvation of the 144,000 (14:1–5), as well as the judgments upon those who worship the beast (14:6–11) and

³⁴³ The notion that this hymn is integrally related to what precedes it is a minority opinion amongst scholars of Revelation, many of whom understand the hymn to consist rather of a *general* reflection on the majesty of God. E.g., Roloff, *Revelation*, 187.

³⁴⁴ Here: αἱ ὁδοὶ . . . κρίσεις, which is practically synonymous with δίκαιαι αἱ ὁδοί.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Ps (LXX) 144 in which the “righteous ways” of God (δικαίος κύριος ἐν πᾶσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ) refer more generally to the acts of God “upholding those who are falling” and “raising up those who are bowed down,” giving “food in due season,” and “satisfying the desires of every living thing” (Ps (LXX) 144: 13–21).

³⁴⁶ Of course, God does not directly carry out these deeds in the text, but is ultimately responsible for them insofar as they occur under the auspices of God as the heavenly sovereign. In other words, each of the actions in Revelation 15 is an act of God insofar as God is *ultimately* responsible for it.

others upon the earth (14:14–20)) while also alluding perhaps to prior events in which the enemies of God are judged,³⁴⁷ and God’s chosen people are saved.³⁴⁸ It might also be argued that these “works” and “ways” of God refer not only to those events that have so far occurred to this point in the narrative, but also point forward to subsequent acts of God in the text.³⁴⁹

Thus, while the “works” and “ways” refer to the specific acts of God as depicted in Revelation, their characterization as “great and marvelous” and “righteous and true,” respectively, constitutes a very positive evaluation of them. So, for example, *μεγάλα καὶ θαυμαστά τὰ ἔργα* appears in the LXX and early Jewish literature to characterize a wide range of acts of God worthy of praise—e.g., the acts of God vis-à-vis Job,³⁵⁰ the entirety of the events of Tobit, Sarah, and Tobias,³⁵¹ and the re-telling of the story of God’s actions vis-à-vis the Israelites coming out of Egypt.³⁵² Thus, the hymn frames the specific acts of God as they are depicted in Revelation in terms of biblical characterizations of God’s “great and marvelous deeds,” and by doing so casts them in a particularly positive light. The characterization of God’s “ways” as *δίκαιαι καὶ ἀληθιναί* functions similarly. While *ἀληθινός* connotes a range of meanings ranging from “sincerity,” “truthfulness,” and/or “correctness,” (and is thus for the most part synonymous with its cognate *ἀληθής*), its precise sense in this hymn can be delimited on the basis of its use elsewhere with terms denoting judgment, where it appears to denote “appropriateness.”³⁵³ Thus, insofar as “ways” here effectively refers to the *judgments* of God with respect to God’s enemies

³⁴⁷ E.g., the destruction unleashed by opening of the seals (6:1–17), the sounding of the trumpets (8:2–9:20, the destruction of the “great city” (11:11–13), and the “harvesting” of the earth (14:14–20), etc.

³⁴⁸ E.g., the “purchase” of the “saints” with the blood of the crucified Jesus (5:9), the sealing of the 144,000 (7:1–8) and their salvation (14:1–5), and the salvation of those who came out of the “great ordeal” (7:9–17; cf. 6:9–11), etc.

³⁴⁹ E.g., the pouring of bowls of wrath (16:1–21), the final judgments of the “great whore” (17:1–18), the city of Babylon (18:1–24), and the beast and its followers (19:17–21), Satan (20:1–3, 7–10), and those who warrant a “second death” (20:12–15).

³⁵⁰ Job [LXX] 42:3.

³⁵¹ Tob 12:22.

³⁵² *Ep. Arist.* 155. The terms are also used together to characterize God (Dan [Theod.] 9:4), and independently to characterize various acts of God in positive terms (Deut 7:18; 10:21; Pss [LXX] 110:2; 138:14).

³⁵³ E.g., John 8:16; cf. Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 501. Bultmann, “ἀληθινός,” *TDNT* 1:249–50.

and people, the qualifier ἀληθιναί affirms the appropriateness of these judgments. The adjective δίκαιος carries a similar connotation as it is used in this hymn. While the term regularly denotes a person who fulfills his/her obligations with respect to the Law, or to what is expected given his/her place in society, and to God as the one who most consistently accomplishes this,³⁵⁴ as it is used to qualify deeds and actions the term regularly denotes their *appropriateness* and/or *fairness*.³⁵⁵ Thus, as it appears alongside ἀληθινός to qualify the judgments of God, δίκαιαι likewise connotes a positive evaluation of their appropriateness or correctness.

A final note on the opening of the hymn concerns the vocative designations of God, and their relation to the positive characterization of God's "works" and "ways" in the hymn. Insofar as the titles κύριος and παντοκράτωρ connote sovereignty, their use as designations for God here (and elsewhere in Revelation) conveys the notion of God's sovereignty.³⁵⁶ The title βασιλεὺς τῶν ἐθνῶν, though it is not found elsewhere in Revelation or in the New Testament, likewise connotes sovereignty. So much can be surmised from the fact that βασιλεύς itself clearly connotes sovereignty,³⁵⁷ as well as the fact that the title "king of the nations" is used of God and of earthly kings in the OT and early Jewish literature in contexts in which the concept of sovereignty is foregrounded.³⁵⁸ The use of these titles which denote the sovereignty of God in a context in which the "works" and "ways" of God are being praised signal that the "works" and "ways" themselves are consequences of God's sovereignty. As in several other hymns in Revelation, the sovereignty of God is here highlighted and linked to specific acts of God which entail punishment for God's enemies and salvation for God's people.³⁵⁹ Put another way, the

³⁵⁴ This is the most common sense of the term in the LXX and NT. Schrenk, "δίκαιος," *TDNT* 2:182–91.

³⁵⁵ E.g., John 5:30; 7:24; Rom 7:12; Eph 6:1; Phil 1:7; 4:8; Col 4:1; 2 Thess 1:5, 6; 2 Pet 1:13; 1 John 3:12

³⁵⁶ Rev 4:8; 11:17; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22. See above, p. 43–4.

³⁵⁷ K. Schmidt, "βασιλεύς," *TDNT* 1:564–79.

³⁵⁸ Ps 47:8; Josephus, *Ant.* 11.5; cf. 96:10; Dan 4:1.

³⁵⁹ See Rev 7:10–12; 11:15–18; 12:10–12. For considerations of the relationship(s) between the sovereignty of God and the Lamb and the events which transpire in the text, see analyses of these hymns above.

idea that God is sovereign serves as the basis for the claim that these events *will* occur—because God is ultimate sovereign over heaven and earth, God’s enemies will be punished and God’s people will be saved.

The second part of the hymn in v. 4 is sung by the same (unknown) group as in v. 3, and thus, like the hymn in chapter 12, this hymn is non-strophic:

Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name? For you alone are just, and all nations will come and worship before you, and your righteous judgments have been revealed.

The second part of the hymn opens with a rhetorical question (i.e., one for which an answer is already presumed), a common feature of OT and early Jewish hymns.³⁶⁰ The force of the question depends on the notions of “fearing” and “glorifying” the name of the Lord. On one hand, the notion of the “fear of God” is prominent in the OT, carrying a variety of meanings ranging from the “terror” associated with mighty acts of God and the “fear” of God’s punishment, to “reverence” and “respect” of God, which takes the form of worship of God and observance of God’s laws.³⁶¹ In the NT, however, the notion of the “fear of God” has lost for the most part the sense of “terror” associated with the acts of God or God’s punishment,³⁶² and more consistently conveys the notion of piety, respect, reverence, and honor for God, which is enacted by means of adherence to God’s laws.³⁶³ Thus, “fear of the name of God”³⁶⁴ in this hymn

³⁶⁰ Exod 15:11; Pss 2:1; 6:3; 8:4; 10:13; 11:3; 13:2; 14:4; 15:1; 22:1; 35:10; 89:6, 8; 113:5; 1 Sam 26:15; Isa 40:25; 46:5; Mic 7:18; 1QS 1:25; 3:23–24; 7:28–29; 10:5–6; 1QH 15:28; 1QM 10:8–9; 4Q381

³⁶¹ In fact, “respect” and “honor” can often be seen as derivatives of “fear,” “terror,” and “anxiety.” That is, the “fear” associated with a particular event, person, or god, leads naturally to “reverence” and “respect” for that event, person, or god. Wanke, “φοβέω, κτλ,” *TDNT* 9:201–5.

³⁶² Though see Luke 23:40. The “fear” of God in this sense seems to have been transferred to the acts of Jesus—his miracles, healings, the resurrection, etc. Balz, “φοβέω, κτλ,” *TDNT* 9:208–12.

³⁶³ So, for example, the term is used in Acts to identify those (non-Jews) who nevertheless participate in Jewish customs in the synagogue.

³⁶⁴ Fear of the “name” of the Lord can be understood as synecdoche for fear of God.

likewise conveys the sense of piety and reverence towards God.³⁶⁵ On the other hand, insofar as “glorification” denotes the process of giving δόξα, or the honor, praise, or value worthy of the stature of the object—human or divine—being “glorified,”³⁶⁶ to “glorify the name of God” means none other than to give God honor, praise, or prestige worthy of God’s status.³⁶⁷ Thus, the concepts of “fearing” and “glorifying” God in this context are complimentary, if not practically synonymous.

Having clarified the meaning of these concepts generally, it remains to consider their function as part of rhetorical questions in the hymn. The form of this rhetorical question presumes an answer in the negative:³⁶⁸ nobody will *not* “fear” nor “glorify” the name of the Lord. In this way, the question functions as a *negative assertion*. Given the definitions for “fearing” and “glorifying” the “name of the Lord,” the question thus serves as a claim that in the future *everybody* will respect, revere, and honor God by obeying God’s precepts and laws.

Such a claim can be understood within the broader context of the opposition set forth in the text between God and the Lamb and Roman Imperial authorities,³⁶⁹ the present circumstances in which worship of the Imperial authorities is prevalent,³⁷⁰ and the denouement of Revelation in which the Imperial authorities, and those who worship them, are ultimately destroyed. The assertion that *all* will eventually worship God suggests that the current reality is soon ending in which Imperial authorities compete with God and the Lamb for honor, praise, and worship. Put

³⁶⁵ Contra Balz, who argues that the term as it appears throughout Revelation connotes the “fear” of God’s power and God’s eschatological judgment. Balz, *TDNT* 9:212, n. 127.

³⁶⁶ This meaning is consistent throughout the LXX and NT. See discussion of δόξα above on pp. 22–3.

³⁶⁷ Here again “glorifying” the “name” of God is synecdoche for glorifying God.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Rev 13:4.

³⁶⁹ Which is variously demonstrated in the text, e.g., by the claim that God and the Lamb are the only true objects of worship over and against Imperial claims of sovereignty (4:8–11; 5:9–13), the antagonism between God and the Lamb and the “Dragon” and “Beasts” which represent Imperial authority (e.g., chaps. 12 and 13), and the opposition between those who have received the mark of God with those who have received the mark of the beast (7:1–8; 13:16–17; 14:1–5).

³⁷⁰ As evidenced, for instance, in chapter 13.

another way, the claim that God and the Lamb alone will be worshipped and praised as sovereigns (i.e. “feared” and “glorified”), intimates that the Imperial rivals of God and the Lamb will eventually be eliminated, as will those who worshipped them. Insofar as the destruction of the Roman Imperial authorities and those who follow them constitutes an essential element of the denouement of the book of Revelation (i.e. the destruction of the Dragon, the Beast, and the Beast’s armies in Rev 19:17–21; 20:1–3, 7–10), this hymn offers a proleptic view of the destruction that is about to take place.

The end of the hymn consists of a series of three ὅτι clauses which each relate to the claim that all will fear and glorify God. The first of these consists of two consecutive predicate adjectives: μόνος ὅσιος, which serve as a justification for the claim that all will fear and glorify God. While on their own these predicates appear in the OT, and early Jewish and Christian literature, this particular combination is a *hapax legomena*. As it is used in the LXX and non-biblical Greek sources to modify a person or god, the term ὅσιος denotes the capacity to act according to what is right and proper according to moral and religious customs.³⁷¹ In this respect it is found in the LXX to describe persons who are particularly faithful to God: individuals (Pss [LXX] 11:2; 17:26; 31:6; 49:5), or the entire community of Israel (Pss [LXX] 78:1ff.; 131:9; 149:1ff.). Used of God, the term appears as a synonym of δίκαιος, denoting God’s capacity to act according to what is appropriate (Deut 32:4; Ps [LXX] 144:17).³⁷² As such, the term in English more precisely means “just,” “pious,” “upright,” or “kind,” which in fact ways the term is often translated in modern editions. Insofar as the adjective μόνος denotes uniqueness or exceptionality,³⁷³ it qualifies ὅσιος so as to convey the sense that God is uniquely “just.”

³⁷¹ Hauck, “ὅσιος,” *TDNT* 5:490–2.

³⁷² Cf. Rev 16:5, where the two terms appear together as epithets for God.

³⁷³ Μόνος appears frequently in the OT and early Christian literature to denote the uniqueness and exceptionality of God. E.g., 2 Kgs 19:15, 19; Neh 9:6; Pss [LXX] 71:18; 82:19; 85:10; Is. 2:11, 17; 26:13; 37:16, 20; 1 Esdr 8:25; 4

This claim, which constitutes yet another allusion to the “song” of Moses insofar as the assertion that God is “just” (δίκαιος) likewise follows claims about the “works” and “ways” of God (Deut 32:4), can be understood to constitute yet another characterization of God’s “works” and “ways.” That is, the claim that God is “just” (δίκαιος) is not an abstract reflection on the nature of God, but a claim that can be justified on the basis of God’s “works” and “ways” as they are manifest in the text. In other words, the destruction of God’s enemies and the salvation of God’s people is precisely what makes God “just.”

The claim that “God alone is just” must also be considered in light of the portrayal of the Imperial authorities (i.e., the “beasts”) as “unjust” or “impious.” That is, the claim that God is “uniquely just” stands in stark contrast with the Imperial authorities who are characterized as receiving their power from Satan (13:2, 4, 12), “blaspheming” (13:5–6), “making war” (13:7), and “deceiving” (13:14). The contrast between God’s “just” actions and the Imperial authorities’ “unjust” deeds, which is summarized in this hymnic claim that “God alone is just,” thus serves as rationale for the claim that all will eventually turn away from worshiping earthly authorities to “fear” and “glorify” God alone.

The second ὅτι clause consists of the claim that “all nations will come and worship before you,” a phrase which seems to be drawn directly from Ps [LXX] 85:9. The meaning of the phrase “all nations” can be inferred from its use elsewhere in Revelation to designate all those who stand outside of the community,³⁷⁴ such that those who will “come and worship” can be understood to be most generally those who are *not* at present coming and worshiping God. This group might be more specifically identified, however, as those who have participated in Roman Imperial social, religious, and economic systems from the fact that elsewhere in the text “all

Ezra 8:7; 2 Macc 1:24–25; 7:37; Mark 2:7; Rom 16:27; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:15–16; Jude 25.

³⁷⁴ E.g., Rev 12:5; 14:8; 18:3, 23.

nations” are precisely those who have “fornicated” with Babylon (14:8; 18:3, 23), which can be taken as a symbolic representation of these interactions. Likely included in this group are those “inhabitants of the earth” who in chapter 13 were depicted worshipping the Dragon (13:4) and the Beasts (13:8, 12), which likewise can be taken as symbolic representations of participation in the religious dynamics of the Imperial apparatus.³⁷⁵ Thus, the hymn is making the claim that those who at present are participating in and worshipping the Imperial apparatus will eventually come to worship God.

Thus, despite the fact that this clause stands grammatically in subordinate position to the claim that all will fear and glorify God,³⁷⁶ it functions not so much as a basis for the claim that all will fear and glorify God, as much as it stands as a reconfiguration of it. In other words, to say that all nations will come and worship God is in practical terms a re-statement of the claim that all will fear and glorify God. In this way, the clause stands not in subordinate relationship to the prior claim, but parallel to it.

The final clause in the hymn consists of the third ὅτι clause: “your righteous judgments have been revealed.” On its own, the term δικαιώματα is ambiguous insofar as it is used in the LXX and NT to denote both “righteous judgments,” i.e., legally binding decrees or rulings,³⁷⁷ or “righteous acts.”³⁷⁸ The context in which this term appears, however, as well as the fact that these δικαιώματα are said to “have been revealed” (ἐφανερώθησαν), delimits the semantic range of the term. That is, insofar as no particular “decrees” or “rulings” have been issued thus far in the text, and insofar as φανερώω is used throughout the NT to denote specific *acts* that have been made manifest, the second of the two meanings of the term can be assumed: δικαιώματα refers to

³⁷⁵ See above pp. 104–5.

³⁷⁶ Or, perhaps, subordinate to the first ὅτι clause.

³⁷⁷ Deut 4:1; 1 Kgs 3:28; Luke 1:6; Rom 1:32; 2:26; 5:16; 8:4.

³⁷⁸ Rev 19:8; Bar 2:17.

the righteous acts of God as they have been made manifest in the text, which include both the judgments upon God's enemies as well as the salvation of God's elect.³⁷⁹

Thus, the final ὅτι clause can be taken to function as did the first ὅτι clause, as justification for the preceding claim: "all nations will come and worship" God *because* God's righteous actions have been revealed. Put another way, the nations will come and worship God because of the judgments that have been revealed upon God's enemies as previously depicted, e.g., in the destruction of Babylon and those who worship the Beast (14:8–12), and the salvation of God's people, as depicted, e.g., in the sealing of the 144,000 (14:1–5). Such a reading is supported not only by the fact that there is grammatical parallelism between the clauses, i.e., a subordinate ὅτι clause following a claim, but parallelism in terms of content. In each case, the clause declares the "just" or "righteous" actions or character of God in response to a claim that all will turn to God.

In summary, insofar as the hymn in chapter 15 occurs between the scene of the 144,000 and the destruction upon the earth in chapter 14, and the series of seven bowls of wrath in chapter 16, it demarcates these two scenes. In other words, the hymn functions structurally as do several other hymns in Revelation as a tool to distinguish one vision from another. At the same time, the hymn functions theologically to frame the surrounding narrative in a particular theological light. It not only identifies the preceding events in the narrative (both those that immediately precede the hymn as well as those which occurred prior to these) as the "works" and "ways" of God, but reflect on these events, i.e., the destruction of God's enemies and the salvation of God's people, in very positive terms as "great and wonderful" and "righteous and true." The hymn concludes with two very similar theological claims, that all will eventually turn

³⁷⁹ So, too, Swete, *Apocalypse of St. John*, 196; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 394; R.G. Bratcher and H. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Revelation to John* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1993), 226.

to God. That is, they will “fear” and “glorify” God’s name, as well as “come” and “worship” before God.

H. *Rev 16:5–7*

As is the case with each of the previous hymns in Revelation, the hymn in chapter 16 is best understood in light of the surrounding narrative, which in this case consists of seven angels taking “seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God” and “pouring them out upon the earth” (16:1). Corresponding to the pouring of the seven bowls are various forms of destruction upon the earth³⁸⁰—also called “plagues” (15:1, 6, 8)—which constitute one stage of the judgment sequence that comprises chapters 15–18, i.e., the final judgments of God upon the earth (15:1). While some of the destruction seems not to be directed at any parties in particular (e.g., the death of every “living creature in the sea” (16:3), rivers turning into blood (16:4), the burning of “humankind” by the sun (16:8)), descriptions of several of the plagues reveal that the objects of wrath are, not surprisingly, none other than the entities which constitute the Roman Empire, depicted in symbolic terms: those who “bear the mark of the beast and worship its image” (16:2),³⁸¹ the “throne of the beast” (16:10),³⁸² the Euphrates River (16:12),³⁸³ and the “great city” (12:17–19).³⁸⁴ The destruction of various Imperial structures by means of the bowls of wrath in chapter 16 is followed in chapters 17 and 18 by a more detailed description of the ultimate

³⁸⁰ Cf. the two preceding series of seven judgments upon the earth (6:1–17; 8:1–9:21; 11:15–19), in which only the first six of the seven events (opening of the seals; trumpet blasts) correspond with a destructive event.

³⁸¹ From chapter 13 it is clear that the “mark of the beast” is a symbolic representation of the ability to participate in Imperial commerce. Thus, those with the mark of the beast are those who participate in Imperial economic systems.

³⁸² The fifth bowl is poured upon the “throne of the beast,” which is most often taken to be a metaphor for a locus of Imperial authority, and perhaps the Imperial cult in particular. Cf. the “throne of Satan” in Rev 2:13.

³⁸³ The sixth bowl is poured upon the Euphrates River which causes it to “dry up and prepare the way for the kings from the East,” which most likely alludes to the belief that Rome would be sacked by those from the East and who would thus necessarily cross the Euphrates. E.g., *Sib. Or.* 4.137–139. See Aune, “Excursus 16A: Rome and Parthia,” in *Revelation*, 2:891–4.

³⁸⁴ The final bowl unleashes “lightning, voices, thunderings, and a great earthquake” which causes the “great city” (which is later identified as Babylon) to be split into three parts, and the “cities of the nations” to fall, which clearly alludes to the destruction of Rome itself along with the cities of the Empire. On Babylon/Rome as the “great city,” see Rev 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18–19, 21. See Prigent, *Commentary*, 476–77; Aune, *Revelation*, 2:882–903.

destruction of Rome itself, which is here represented as a “great prostitute” (17:1) who is “stripped, eaten, and burned” (17:16).³⁸⁵

The antiphonal hymn immediately follows the pouring of the third bowl, and is sung by the “angel of the waters,” which can be taken to represent one of the countless myriad of angels before the heavenly throne³⁸⁶:

You are righteous, the one who is and who was, the just one, because you have judged these things. Because they shed the blood of the saints and the prophets, and it is blood that you have given them to drink—they deserve it.

The initial *strophe* takes the form of second-person praise of God (i.e., the *Du-Stil* hymnic form), beginning with a series of epithets which emphasize both the eternal nature of God (ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν), and the belief that God is “righteous” (δίκαιος) and “just” (ῥστος).³⁸⁷ While the first epithet (δίκαιος) appears as a predicate of God only here, insofar as it denotes the capacity for fair judgment³⁸⁸ and often functions practically as a synonym for ῥστος,³⁸⁹ it can likewise be understood here to denote God’s proper and just behavior as an aspect of God’s sovereign character. And, as the second and third epithets are used elsewhere in Revelation to highlight aspects of God’s sovereignty,³⁹⁰ they can be understood to function likewise here.

³⁸⁵ That the rape and murder of the “great prostitute” signifies the destruction of Rome is clear from the fact that the prostitute is identified as “Babylon the Great” (17:5), which is a thinly veiled allusion to Rome.

³⁸⁶ The depiction of an angel who has dominion over a particular sphere of the cosmos is common in antecedent Jewish (esp. apocalyptic) literature, e.g., *1 En.* 61:10; 69:22; 75:3; *2 En.* 4–6; 19:1–4; *Jub.* 2:2; 1QH 1:8–13. Cf. Rev 7:1–2, in which angels are depicted as having dominion over the “four winds,” and Rev 14:18, which refers to an angel having authority over fire. See Aune, *Revelation*, 2:884–5.

³⁸⁷ That God is here addressed can be inferred from the fact that each of the epithets are used elsewhere in Revelation *only* to refer to God.

³⁸⁸ Elsewhere in Revelation the term is used to characterize the *actions* (i.e., “ways”) of God (15:3; 16:7; 19:2). See Schrenk, *TDNT* 2:174–91.

³⁸⁹ The terms appear to function as synonyms in Deut 32:4; *Pss. Sol.* 10:5; *1 Clem.* 14:1.

³⁹⁰ On ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν cf. Rev 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:4, see above pp. 44–5, 80. On ῥστος, cf. 15:4, see above p. 113–4.

These acclamations confirming the sovereignty of God are justified (as are so many of the hymnic acclamations in Revelation) on the basis of a causal ὅτι clause, which in this case consists of the claim that God has “judged these things” or “judged in this way” (ὅτι ταῦτα ἔκρινας).³⁹¹ Insofar as the verb κρίνω appears frequently in Revelation to denote God acting to destroy God’s enemies,³⁹² it can be understood here in coordination with the demonstrative pronoun ταῦτα to represent the destruction caused by the pouring of the “bowls of wrath.” That is, κρίνω clearly denotes “judgment” while ταῦτα suggests that the “judgment” referred to is that which is occurring in the surrounding context. Thus, the destruction caused by the “bowls of wrath” in chapter 16 is characterized in the hymn (as is destruction elsewhere in Revelation) as God’s judgment upon God’s enemies, and lauded as evidence that God’s sovereign rule is “righteous,” “eternal,” and “just.”

The conclusion of the *strophe* consists of another causal (ὅτι) clause: “because they shed the blood of the saints and the prophets, you have given them blood to drink—they deserve it.” This final clause is related to what precedes it insofar as it constitutes both a further clue as to who exactly is the object of God’s punishment, as well as an explanation as to *why* their destruction represents the actions of a “righteous” and “just” God. The clue as to the identity of those who have been judged by God can be inferred on the basis of the fact that they are said to have “shed the blood of the saints and the prophets.” Insofar as this expression is a (slightly)

³⁹¹ Either translation is warranted by the grammatical construction, in which ταῦτα can be taken as the direct object of the verb κρίνω, or as an adverb.

³⁹² E.g., in Rev 6:10 the term is equated with the process of “avenging our blood on the inhabitants of the earth,” which amounts to the *destruction* of the inhabitants of the earth (cf. 19:2); in 18:8 and 19:2, the act of God “judging” consists of God’s destruction of Babylon (cf. 18:10); in 19:11ff., “judging” seems to consist of the “rider on the white horse” making war on “the nations” and destroying the “beast” and the “kings of the earth and their armies.” The term is also used to refer to the dual process of the destruction of God’s enemies *and* the act of protecting God’s people, as for example, in 11:18 where “judging” coincides with the coming “wrath” of God, and is further described as the process of “rewarding” those in the community and “destroying” God’s enemies; so, too, in 20:12ff., the term denotes the process of the final destruction of God’s enemies (i.e., the “second death” of those whose names were not written in the “Book of Life”), and implicitly the salvation of those whose names *were* found in it.

euphemistic way of saying that they have *killed* those in the community to whom John has addressed his Apocalypse (“saints and prophets” are terms used elsewhere in Revelation to denote members of the community,³⁹³ while “pouring out blood” is appears in the OT and early Jewish literature to refer to *murder*³⁹⁴), “they” can be identified with those who are consistently depicted throughout Revelation as persecuting and killing followers of the Lamb: various entities of the Roman Empire.³⁹⁵

The hymn then confirms that because they have killed members of the community, God will in turn kill them, which is described in similarly euphemistic terms as God giving them “blood to drink,” which denotes *death*.³⁹⁶ Such an image seems both to allude to the blood that results from the second and third bowls being poured on the sea (16:3) and into the rivers (16:4), respectively, and to serve as a response the cry of the martyrs under the altar (6:10) who question when their blood will be avenged.³⁹⁷ At any rate, it can be understood in terms of the principle of *lex talionis*, in which the punishment meted out for a crime is equal to the crime itself. Such a principle makes the most sense out of the final words in the *strophe*, in which the objects of God’s destruction are finally said to “deserve” it (ἄξιοι εἶσιν).³⁹⁸ In other words, the hymn expresses the belief that because the Roman Empire has shed the blood of those in the

³⁹³ See above pp. 85–6.

³⁹⁴ E.g., Gen 9:6; Deut 19:10; Jer 7:6; *1 En.* 9:1; *T. Levi* 16:3; *T. Zeb.* 2:2; *Pss. Sol.* 8:20; *Sib. Or.* 3.311, 320.

³⁹⁵ Such a reading makes sense in light of the reading of various entities of the Roman Empire as the objects of God’s destruction in the descriptions of the “seven bowls. See above pp. 103–5.

³⁹⁶ E.g., Isa 49:26. Admittedly, this expression is used more often in the OT, and one other time in Revelation (17:6), to represent *killing* rather than *dying*. That is, “drinking blood” refers to an image of the killer drinking the blood of the victim (Num 23:24; 2 Sam 23:17; 1 Chr 11:19; Jer 46:10; Ezek 39:17–21). Because of this, it would be possible to read the clause as an expression of the belief that the “holy ones and prophets” will be given “blood to drink” (i.e., kill), or to suppose that the expression is not to be taken figuratively but refers to God’s enemies *literally* drinking blood. Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 2:123.

³⁹⁷ Prigent, *Commentary*, 467.

³⁹⁸ ἄξιος denotes *equivalence* or *correspondence* between two entities, so that the use of ἄξιος in the predicative suggests that the subject is *worthy* of something, or *deserving* of it. See, e.g., Josephus, *J.W.* 5.408; Matt 10:10; Luke 10:7; 12:48; 23:15, 41; Acts 23:29; 25:11, 25; 26:31; Rom 1:32; 1 Tim 5:18; 6:1. Cf. Rev 3:4, in which those who have not “soiled their clothes” are said to be “worthy” to walk with the risen Christ who is clothed in white garments.

community, they *deserve* to have their own blood shed. Such an explanation for the destruction of God’s enemies thus further justifies the claim made earlier in the hymn that God punishing them in this way (i.e., “judging these things”) constitutes the actions of a “righteous” and “just” God.

An antiphonal response immediately follows the initial *strophe* and, depending on the translation, is said to be sung either by an unidentified identity “from the altar,” or by the altar itself. The issue is whether one supplies a direct object for ἤκουσα, in which case τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου is understood to be a partitive genitive (i.e., “[someone] from the altar”), or takes τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου itself to be the direct object of the verb.³⁹⁹ Commentators are fairly divided on this issue, with those who suppose that an unnamed entity is singing “from [the area of] the altar” most often suggesting that it is the voice of one of the martyrs depicted under the altar in 6:9–11.⁴⁰⁰ At any rate, the antiphonal response itself consists of an affirmative response of the preceding statements:

Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.

That the *antistrophe* consists first of all as an affirmative response to the preceding *strophe* is made clear by the interjection ναί, which functions here and elsewhere in Revelation as a formal affirmation of the preceding statement (1:7; 14:13; 22:20). As an affirmative hymnic response, it functions analogously to ἀμήν.⁴⁰¹ The epithets that follow it (κύριε ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ), like those which occur in this precise form in prior hymns (4:8; 11:17; 15:3; cf.

³⁹⁹ Cf. Rev 9:13 where a similar construction prompts the question of whether a voice is coming from the altar or from someone *near* the altar.

⁴⁰⁰ E.g., Jörns, *Evangelium*, 135ff; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 396. The notion that one of the martyrs under the altar would respond to the hymnic claim that God will “give blood to drink” to those who have killed the followers of the Lamb (i.e., the *martyrs*) makes some sense in light of the fact that the martyrs had earlier cried out asking when God would avenge their blood (6:10).

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Rev 5:14, where ἀμήν similarly concludes an antiphonal response. See above pp. 62–3. For evidence of the interchangeability of ἀμήν and ναί, see Matt 23:26//Luke 11:51; 2 Cor 1:20; *Acts Thom.* 121.

21:22), likewise convey the sovereign attributes of God, and thus also reflect the claim of God's sovereignty at the beginning of the preceding *strophe*.⁴⁰²

The claim that God's "judgments" (κρίσεις) are "true" and "just," conveys the sense that the destruction of God's enemies as depicted in the surrounding narrative in chapter 16 is wholly proper and appropriate conduct. A reading of the verse in this way depends on an understanding of the term κρίσεις, which in the LXX, New Testament, and wider Greco-Roman can carry the sense of a *verdict* or *decision*, with the implication that the possibility exists of a positive or negative outcome, but most often connotes punitive *judgment*.⁴⁰³ Punitive judgment is, in fact, the only sense of the word as it is used in Revelation, which takes the form of various forms of *destruction* of God's enemies.⁴⁰⁴ For instance, the "hour of judgment" refers in Rev 14:7 to the destruction unleashed on behalf of God by the angels in 14:8ff., while in 18:10 and 19:2 the term refers to God's destruction of Babylon as it is depicted in chapter 18. From this it can be inferred that in this hymn κρίσεις refers in particular to the destruction depicted in chapter 16 in the form of the seven bowls.

Thus, to say that these judgments are "just" and "true" is to affirm the *appropriateness* of the destruction, as this is the sense of each of these adjectives as they appear in the LXX and NT to qualify *judgments*.⁴⁰⁵ As such, the final hymnic clause is practically a restatement of the claim in the first *strophe* that God is "righteous" (δίκαιος) and "just" (ὅσιος) on account of the fact that God has judged such things (16:5).

In summary, inasmuch as the hymn in chapter 16 appears between the third and the fourth "bowls of wrath," it does not function structurally as do so many other hymns in

⁴⁰² I.e., through the use of epithets which connote sovereignty.

⁴⁰³ Büchsel, "κρίνω," *TDNT* 3:921–42.

⁴⁰⁴ Rev 14:7; 18:10; 19:2

⁴⁰⁵ See above pp. 115–6.

Revelation to distinguish one scene from another. However, just like each of the preceding hymns in Revelation, this hymn does constitute a theological reflection on the surrounding narrative. In the initial *strophe*, God is identified as the *source* of the destruction taking place by means of the “seven bowls” (i.e., God has “judged” such things), and is praised for this as the eternal sovereign (δικαιος...ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἤν...ὅσιος). By means of a causal clause, the Roman Empire is then identified as the principal target of God’s destruction, (clues for which exist in the descriptions of the “seven bowls” themselves), insofar as they are said to have “shed the blood of the saints and the prophets,” a clear allusion to the various Imperial identities which are depicted elsewhere in Revelation as responsible for the deaths of those in the (“Christian”) community. Their punishment is then described in similarly metaphorical terms as being given “blood to drink,” which is explicitly acknowledged to be a fitting punishment given the nature of their crime (“shedding blood”).

The *antistrophe* constitutes an affirmation of the theological claims made in the *strophe*. That is, the destruction of the various Roman Imperial entities is indicated to be God’s “judgments” upon them, “judgments” which are considered to be appropriate insofar as they are characterized as “true” and “just.”

I. *Rev 19:1–8*

The final series of hymns occurs at the beginning of chapter 19, and usher in the conclusion of Revelation, in which the final battles between God and God’s enemies take place, and in which the New Jerusalem and all that is in it (including the heavenly throne-room of God) comes down from heaven to inaugurate finally the reign of God and the Lamb on earth. Insofar as elements of the hymn relate both to what immediately precedes the hymn, i.e., the destruction of Babylon (17:1–18:24), and to those final events which follow the hymn, i.e., the destruction of

the Roman Empire and Satan, the judgment of the dead, and the coming of the New Jerusalem (19:9–22:7), it is necessary to consider in more detail the nature of each of these surrounding narratives.

Following the conclusion of the hymn in chapter 16, the remaining “bowls of wrath” are poured, and with them come devastating consequences upon the earth, i.e., God’s “judgment” upon God’s enemies (16:8–21). This destruction is followed by a vision in chapter 17 of a harlot seated upon a “scarlet beast,” drunk with the “blood of the saints. . . and witnesses to Jesus,” holding a cup full of the “impurities of her fornication” with the “kings of the earth,” with the name “Babylon” written on her forehead (17:1–6). Such an image of Babylon, whose drunkenness, impurity, and gaudy adornment presents a clear contrast with the “Woman clothed with the Sun” in Rev 12:1–6, constitutes yet another vilified caricature of Roman Imperial authority, as the harlot here surely represents the city of Rome itself. Such a conclusion can be reached on the basis of the fact that Babylon was a popular cipher for Rome around the time of the composition of Revelation,⁴⁰⁶ as well as several allusions in the text, none as clear as the claim that the woman sits on a seven-headed beast, whose heads are said to represent “seven mountains” and “seven kings” (17:9), which are widely believed to be veiled references to the seven hills upon which Rome was built, and the seven Emperors which ruled Rome up to the time of the composition of Revelation.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ See, e.g., 1 Pet 5:13; 2 Bar 11:1ff.; 67:7; *Sib. Or.* 5.143, 159; cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Marc.* 3.13; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.15.2.

⁴⁰⁷ See A. Yarbro-Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *BR* 26 (1981): 33–45; J.C. Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitian Date of Revelation,” *NTS* 39 (1993): 587–605; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 407–52; Prigent, *Commentary*, 492–4. Associations with Rome can also be made on the basis of the description of Babylon in chapter 18. For example, the designation of Babylon as a “great city,” full of wealth (18:7, 14, 16), and unrivaled (18:18), as well as descriptions of the merchants of the earth becoming wealthy on account of the “power of her luxury” (18:3, 9, 15, 19) seems to suggest the capital city. Yarbro-Collins, “The Political Perspective,” 241–56; Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 347ff.; Prigent, *Commentary*, 505–9.

The description of “Babylon the Whore” in chapter 17 sets the stage for chapter 18, in which the “Fall of Babylon” is described.⁴⁰⁸ This depiction, whose contents and style evoke the depiction of the fall of Tyre in Ezekiel 27–28,⁴⁰⁹ and several details of which further confirm the identification of Babylon as Rome itself,⁴¹⁰ consists of a dual proclamation of its destruction (18:1–8), followed by the lamentations of those who suffer from this destruction (the kings (18:9–10), merchants (18:11–17), and the sailors (18:18–20)), and a vision of a great millstone being thrown into the sea to symbolize the fall of the city (18:21–23).

The laments of those who mourn the destruction of Babylon in chapter 18, however, give way to hymnic adulations in chapter 19 from those who celebrate its demise (19:1–10). Consequently, much of the hymn in chapter 19 relates to the destruction of Babylon in the preceding chapters. At the same time, the hymn also points towards the final chapters in which the final defeat of the heavenly enemies of God, and the culmination of God’s rule upon the earth, is depicted (19:1–22:5). As such, these events must be considered before evaluating the contents of the hymn itself.

The final defeat of God’s heavenly adversaries begins with the advent of the “rider on the white horse,”⁴¹¹ who leads a heavenly army against the “beast” and his armies (19:11–19), captures the beast along with the “false prophet” (i.e., the “second beast” from 13:11–18 (19:20)), and destroys the armies of the beast (19:21). Insofar as these creatures were shown to

⁴⁰⁸ Though the ultimate demise of Babylon the Whore is presaged in chapter 17, as the angel who describes the harlot says, “Come, I will show you the *judgment* of the great whore who is seated on many waters...” (17:1).

⁴⁰⁹ A. Vanhoye, “L’utilisation du livre d’Ezéchiel dans l’Apocalypse,” *Bib* 43 (1962): 436–76; J.P. Ruiz, *Ezekiel in the Apocalypse: The Transformation of Prophetic Language in Revelation 16:17–19:10* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1989), 518ff.

⁴¹⁰ E.g., the descriptions of the great wealth and luxury of the city (18:11–19, 23) clearly suggest Rome. See Prigent, *Commentary*, 506–11.

⁴¹¹ Most commentators identify this “rider” as the Messiah, on account of the fact that he “judges” and “makes war” (19:11), common apocalyptic aspects of the Messiah in contemporary Judaism. See Isa 11:4; *Pss. Sol.* 17:23–44; *Tg. Isa.* 11.1–6; 4QpIsa 8–10.

represent various elements of the Roman Imperial apparatus,⁴¹² their defeat here can be taken to represent the final stage of the demise of the Empire itself, and the culmination of the process of its annihilation which includes the three series of seven judgments (6:1–17; 8:6–9:21; 16:1–21), the deaths of those who killed the Two Witnesses (11:7–13), the harvesting of the earth (14:14–20), and the destruction of Rome itself (i.e., Babylon) in 18:1–24.

The symbolic destruction of the Roman Imperial apparatus is followed in chapter 20 by the description of the destruction of the Dragon (whose identity as the mythical enemy of God, i.e., “the ancient serpent, the devil, Satan,” is reiterated (20:2; cf. 12:9)), who is described as being bound and thrown into a pit for 1,000 years, then freed for a time, and finally thrown into the “lake of fire and sulfur” (20:1–3, 7–10). The portrayal of the demise of the Dragon is commingled with the “judgment of the dead,” which includes both the “coming to life” of those martyrs who had not worshipped the Beast (20:4–6), and the “second death” of those whose names were not written in the Book of Life (20:11–15). These scenes in chapter 20, in which God’s enemies are finally and ultimately destroyed and those martyrs whom God has redeemed in heaven are given new life, sets the stage for the final vision in Revelation, the coming of the “New Jerusalem” from heaven unto earth in chapter 21–22.

This final vision in Revelation actually consists of three distinct scenes in which the New Jerusalem is described: (1) the passing away of the “first earth” to make room for the New Jerusalem, inaugurated by the “one seated upon the throne” (21:1–8); (2) a catalogue of various elements of the heavenly Jerusalem (21:9–27); and (3) a description of the new city in terms which recall the prophecy of the new temple in Ezek 47, and the creation of the world in Gen 2. Taken together, these three scenes constitute the culmination of the narrative and theological trajectories in Revelation, in which the enemies of God are completely vanquished, and in which

⁴¹² See above pp. 103–4.

the “servants” of God live peacefully and in harmony under the eternal, sovereign reign of God and the Lamb. These scenes are followed by a brief epilogue which functions as a formal conclusion of the text (22:6–21).

The final hymn, which occurs immediately after the final destruction of Babylon, and prior to the manifestation of the heavenly city of Jerusalem on earth, consists of five distinct *strophes* (19:1–8). As such, it constitutes the longest hymnic section in Revelation, a *grand finale* of sorts.⁴¹³ The first *strophe* is said to resemble “something like the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven” (19:1). While many commentators assume that the source of the hymn is the “loud voice” of the multitude of angels before the throne who sang prior hymns (e.g., 5:11–12; 7:11; 12:10),⁴¹⁴ the Great Multitude here appears to evoke instead the Great Multitude identified in chapter 7 as “those who have come out of the great ordeal” (7:14). In other words, the first *strophe* is sung by those (“Christian martyrs”) who have died at the hands of the Romans during the time of the eschatological crisis.⁴¹⁵ The contents of the hymn are as follows:

Hallelujah! Salvation, glory and power belong to our God. For his judgments are true and righteous: He has judged the great prostitute who destroyed the inhabitants of the earth with her fornication, and he has avenged the blood of his servants shed by her.

Each of the hymnic units in chapter 19, including the first one in v. 1, begins with the exclamation, “Hallelujah!” This exclamation, which is a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *halēlû-yāh* meaning “Praise God,” was associated particularly in the OT and early Jewish literature with hymns. This is evident by the fact that it appears in several Psalms,⁴¹⁶ and is found

⁴¹³ Jörns, *Evangelium*, 144, 159; Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 56.

⁴¹⁴ E.g., Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1024; Boring, *Revelation*, 192.

⁴¹⁵ See above pp. 164–7.

⁴¹⁶ Both in the MT and in transliterated form in the LXX.

in a doxology in *Apoc. Mos.* 43:4, as well as the fact that it is associated with hymnic singing in Tob 13:18 and 3 Macc 7:13. It seems to have functioned as an introductory or concluding formula, as is suggested by the fact that it appears most often either in the introduction or the conclusion in the hymns in which it occurs,⁴¹⁷ which is perhaps a result of the fact that the term originated as a liturgical formula.⁴¹⁸ So, too, does the term appear (however infrequently, and not elsewhere in the NT) in early Christian texts, most often as part of a concluding hymn or doxology.⁴¹⁹ Thus, the appearance of ἀλληλουιά at the beginning of several *strophes*, and once at the end of a *strophe*, all as part of the final hymnic sequences of the text can be understood in light of this, as it functions both to begin and end the *strophes*, and also to signal that these hymnic elements are the last in the text. In theological terms, the acclamation orients each of the hymnic units towards the praise of God, as this is what it literally connotes.⁴²⁰

Following this exclamation is a clause in which various attributes are said to be the prerogative of God: σωτηρία, δόξα, and δύναμις. While the form of the *strophe* bears affinities with previous doxologies (4:9; 5:13–14; 7:12), the combination of attributes included in the doxology are unique. That is, each of the attributes appears as part of various combinations of attributes in other hymns (not necessarily doxologies), but never together in this way. As they do in previous hymns, δόξα, and δύναμις here connote aspects of the sovereignty of God, which is repeatedly and variously proclaimed (along with the transfer of sovereign power to the Lamb)

⁴¹⁷ Though the term is excised at the conclusion of all but one Psalm in the LXX. Cf. 3 Macc 7:13 in which the priests and multitude seem to conclude a ceremony by “shouting the Hallelujah,” and *Apoc. Mos.* 43:4 where it functions as the introduction of the concluding doxology. Cf. *PGM VII.271* in which the term appears at the conclusion of a Jewish magical papyrus.

⁴¹⁸ See J. Hempel, “Hallelujah,” *IDB* 2:514–5.

⁴¹⁹ E.g., many of the *Odes of Solomon* end with “Hallelujah.” See also Tertullian, *Or.* 27; the Ethiopic version of *Apostolic Tradition* 26; a papyrus from Fayyoun (C. Birkell, *Mitteilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer II–III*, (1887), 83.7; Jerome, *In Ps.* 104; Augustine, *In Ps.* 106, etc.

⁴²⁰ This directive reflects a hymnic convention in which an exhortation to sing the hymn was included in its introduction. See above pp. 127–8.

throughout the text.⁴²¹ Insofar as “salvation” appears elsewhere in Revelation connoting “rescue” and/or “deliverance” from a dire situation (7:10; 12:10), and *only* ever connotes this in early Christian literature,⁴²² it can be assumed to mean as much here. Thus, taken together, these prerogatives simultaneously convey the sovereignty of God and the fact that God has rescued God’s people.

The identity of the singers of this *strophe* is brought to bear on a consideration of its contents and function. Insofar as the hymn is sung by those *martyrs* who came out of the “great ordeal,” acclamations of the sovereignty and salvation of God can be taken to highlight God’s power to rescue God’s people, which in the case of these *martyrs* refers to the suffering and deaths that resulted from their persecution at the hands of the Roman Imperial authorities. That is, the martyrs who are portrayed as having suffered and died at the hands of Rome are the very ones proclaiming the fact that God has delivered them from such peril.

The following clause (“true and righteous are your judgments”) is a *verbatim* repetition of a clause from the previous hymn (16:7b) and, as in the previous hymn, highlights the validity and/or appropriateness of God’s “judgments.”⁴²³ However, the different contexts in which these identical claims are made amounts to differences in their meaning. That is, while in the previous hymn “judgments” are reasonably thought to refer to the destruction unleashed upon the enemies of God by means of the pouring of the seven “bowls of wrath” in the surrounding narrative, here **the “judgments” likewise refer to the destruction taking place in the surrounding narrative, i.e., the ultimate destruction of Babylon (18:1–1–24).**

That God’s “true and righteous judgments” refers to the destruction of Babylon is made clear by the *ὅτι* clause which immediately follows, in which God’s judgment of the Great

⁴²¹ See above pp. 46–7; 57–9; 70.

⁴²² See above pp. 67–9.

⁴²³ See above pp. 121–2.

Prostitute is explicitly identified as the basis for such a claim (ὅτι ἔκρινεν τὴν πόρνην τὴν μεγάλην). Insofar as the Great Prostitute refers to the city of Babylon, which is itself a symbolic representation of the city of Rome, the martyrs are thus praising and affirming in this hymn the appropriateness of God's destruction of Rome.

The hymn goes further to identify the Great Prostitute as the one who has “destroyed” the earth with her “fornication.” Given the fact that the Great Prostitute is a symbolic representation of the city of Rome, this characterization functions to reiterate the belief that Rome both literally and figuratively destroys people,⁴²⁴ i.e., *kills* them, and leads them astray by requiring their participation in corruptible practices. Such a reading depends on an understanding of the multivalency of the word φθείρω which, like the emphatic form of the verb διαφθείρω as it appears in 11:18, means both: (1) “to destroy utterly” in the sense of physical annihilation, and (2) “to corrupt morally.”⁴²⁵ Insofar as Rome and its supporters are accused of each of these actions elsewhere in the text, the clause thus reiterates the literal and figurative destructiveness of Rome and its allies.

The hymn goes further to identify πορνεία as the means by which Rome manifests its destructiveness.⁴²⁶ The term most often denotes sexual impropriety, e.g., adultery, prostitution, or licentiousness,⁴²⁷ and is thus an apt descriptor of a “great prostitute.” At the same time, the term is sometimes found in the LXX (and especially in prophetic texts) in the context of the metaphorical description of the relationship between God and God's people as a marriage relationship, in which cases God's people are described as a “prostitute” (πόρνη) and πορνεία

⁴²⁴ As in 11:18, “the earth” appears to function here as a metonym for *people* of the earth. See above pp. 86–7.

⁴²⁵ See above p. 86.

⁴²⁶ I.e., by the use of a dative of *means*.

⁴²⁷ Hauck and Schultz, “πόρνη, κτλ,” *TDNT* 6:579–95.

connotes their infidelity vis-à-vis God.⁴²⁸ The term is used to characterize people whose practices indicate a lack of complete allegiance to God, especially those which include assimilation to foreign religious customs.⁴²⁹ The characterization of the πορνεία of Rome in this hymn can be understood in this light, as participation in Roman Imperial social, political, economic, and religious structures is consistently and thoroughly condemned throughout Revelation.⁴³⁰ In other words, to say that Rome has “destroyed” (i.e., killed and corrupted) the inhabitants of the earth *through fornication*, is to say that Rome destroys people insofar as they participate in its various structures.⁴³¹

The *strophe* concludes with the claim that God has “avenged the blood of his servants shed by her” (καὶ ἐξεδίκησεν τὸ αἷμα τῶν δούλων αὐτοῦ ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς). An interpretation of the claim in its entirety hinges on an understanding of the term ἐκδικέω. While the word can be taken generally to mean “to punish” and/or “to execute justice,” it seems in this case to mean more specifically “to punish” *in response to, and accordance with, the crime committed*—“to avenge,” or to “to execute retributive justice.” So much can be inferred from the likelihood that the conjunction καὶ equates the entire clause with the preceding claim that God has “judged the great prostitute who destroyed the earth with her fornication.” That is, the final clause seems to be an explanation of the previous claim that God has *destroyed* (i.e., “judged”) that which has destroyed God’s people: such an act constitutes God’s “avenging” their blood. Such a reading is

⁴²⁸ Hauck and Schultz, *TDNT* 6:587.

⁴²⁹ E.g., offering sacrifices to other gods (Isa 57:7–13; Jer 3:6; Ezek 16:19ff.), seeking oracles from other gods (Hos 4:12–14), observing foreign festivals (Hos 2:13), and worshiping other gods (Jer 2:23; 3:1ff.; Ezek 16:15ff.; 23:5ff.). Cf. Exod 34:16; Lev 17:7; 20:5; Num 14:33; Deut 31:16; Judg 2:17; 8:27; 2 Kgs 9:22; 1 Chr 5:25; 2 Chr 21:11, 13

⁴³⁰ Rev 2:13–17, 18–25; 9:4; 13:1–10, 11–18; 14:8–12; 17:2–18; 18:3–24; 19:17–21. The condemnation of these structures is conveyed insofar as *refusal* to participate in these structures is glorified, as represented for example by taking the “mark of the Lord” on the forehead (Rev 7:3; 14:1ff.).

⁴³¹ So much is also conveyed through the use of the same metaphor in Rev 14:8; 17:2, 5; 18:3.

further suggested by the fact that this is often the meaning of ἐκδικέω as the term and its cognates in the LXX and early Jewish literature.⁴³²

Thus, insofar as the “blood of the servants” here functions as a metonym for the *deaths* of those who follow the Lamb,⁴³³ and the prepositional phrase ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτῆς identifies the Great Prostitute, i.e., Rome, as responsible for their deaths, this clause makes clear that the destruction of Rome (i.e., God’s “judgment” of it) constitutes God’s retribution upon it in light of its misdeeds against God’s people.⁴³⁴ And, insofar as it is related grammatically to the claim that God has “judged the great prostitute” (19:2b) by the conjunction καὶ, this final hymnic clause likewise functions as a justification for the claim that God’s “judgments” are “true” and “just.” That is, the fact that God has destroyed the very entity that has destroyed God’s people is evidence for the claim that God rightly punishes those who deserve it. Moreover, the hymn serves as a fitting response to the question posed by the very same persons (i.e., the *martyrs* killed by the Romans during the eschatological conflict) in Rev 6:10 as to when God was going to “avenge” their deaths.

The first *strophe* is immediately followed by another hymn which appears to be sung by the same group as that which sung the previous *strophe*⁴³⁵:

Hallelujah! Her smoke rises forever and ever.

⁴³² Schrenk, “ἐκδικέω,” *TDNT* 2:442–6.

⁴³³ On the one hand, that “blood” refers here to *death* can be inferred from the fact that the term is used in Rev 6:10 to refer to the deaths of the martyrs under the altar. In fact, the use of “blood” as a *metonym* for death is common in the OT and early Jewish literature. See *TDOT* 3:241–3; Louw-Nida, §§ 23.107; 56:20. On the other hand, δούλοι frequently refers to followers of the Lamb in Revelation and in early Christian literature (e.g., Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 22:3, 6). See Rengstorf, “δούλος,” *TDNT* 2:273–9.

⁴³⁴ The punishment of death for the crime of murder, which falls generally under the rubric of *lex talionis*, can be understood specifically in terms of regulations in the LXX in which death is required for those who shed the blood of another (Gen 9:5–6; Num 35:33; Josh 2:19; 2 Sam 1:16; 1 Kgs 2:33, 37; Ezek 33:4; Matt 27:25), while the notion that God is ultimately responsible for carrying out this punishment (i.e., “avenging the blood”) likewise derives from the OT (Pss 9:12; 72:14; cf. Deut 32:43; 2 Kgs 9:7).

⁴³⁵ While a new subject is not identified, the third-person plural verb and the fact that the hymn is said to be sung “a second time,” each suggest this *antistrophe* is sung by the same group that sung the previous *strophe*.

The *antistrophe* begins as did the first *strophe* with the acclamation “Hallelujah!”⁴³⁶ and likewise signals that the hymn first and foremost consists of praise to God. The “smoke” surely refers to the smoke rising from the decimated city of Babylon (i.e., Rome), the burning of which was depicted in Rev 18:8, 18, and from those inhabitants of it who received the mark of the Beast, whose “torments” were said to be burning in Rev 14:11. The notion that God’s punishment consists of eternal fire is drawn from various biblical sources,⁴³⁷ while the particular image of smoke rising eternally from a city decimated by God seems to be drawing from Isaiah, who prophesied that the smoke from the ashes of the ruined city of Edom would “rise forever” (Isa 34:8–10). This notion that the punishment of God’s enemies is unending (cf. Rev 19:20; 20:10, 14–15) stands in contrast with the consistent prompts in Revelation that the suffering of the people of God and the followers of the Lamb is only temporary.⁴³⁸

This hymnic sequence is concluded by the 24 elders and the four living creatures, who proclaim:

Amen. Hallelujah!

This brief hymnic unit clearly brings the entire hymnic sequence, which began in 19:1b, to a close, as each of the terms appears in the LXX and early Jewish literature to conclude hymns,⁴³⁹ and these vocalists appear elsewhere in Revelation to conclude hymnic sequences (Rev 5:14; 7:11–12; 11:17–18). Insofar as the use of ἀμήν as an interjection signals approval or

⁴³⁶ Some commentators consider this “Hallelujah” to conclude the previous *strophe*. E.g., Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus*, 56–7. While “Hallelujah” can in fact function to conclude a hymn, this seems not to be the case in this instance, as the following *antistrophe* appears instead to conclude this hymnic sequence. Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 2:120; Jöns, *Evangelium*, 150; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1026.

⁴³⁷ E.g., Isa 66:24; Jer 4:4; 17:27; Ezek 20:48; Mark 9:43//Matt 18:8; Mark 9:48; Matt 25:41

⁴³⁸ E.g., Rev 2:2–3, 10; 3:10; 6:9–11; 7:13–14; 11:2, 9–11; 13:5; 17:8; 20:1–3. The eternal reward for the followers of the Lamb is likewise an indication that the current suffering and death is only temporary.

⁴³⁹ On ἀμήν see above pp. 62–3. On ἀλληλουσία, see above pp. 127–8. The terms appear together as concluding remarks on several occasions, including 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 5:13; *Mart. Matt.* 26:39. Cf. Ps 106:48 (MT); *PGM* VII.271; X.33.

acceptance of what has immediately preceded it, and in this way functions synonymously with *ναί*,⁴⁴⁰ it can be understood here to confirm the sovereignty of God and the worthiness of praising God in light of God's destruction of Rome (i.e., God's true and righteous "judgments"). The acclamation "Hallelujah!" likewise affirms that God is worthy to be praised (insofar as "praise God" is the literal rendering of this transliteration from the Hebrew), the basis for which can likewise be assumed to be God's righteous and appropriate punishment of Rome.

The next *strophe* is said to be sung by "voice from the throne":

Praise our God, all his servants, [and] all those who fear him, small and great.

The vague identification of a "voice from the throne," which recalls previous hymns whose vocalists are not clearly identified (11:15; 12:10; 16:7), allows for conjecture as to its source. A "voice from the throne" speaks in Rev 16:7 and 21:3, but there are no clues as to the identity of this voice in these cases. As such, the voice could be taken to represent one of the elders, creatures, or myriad of angels surrounding the throne (cf. Rev 4:8, 11; 5:9–14; 7:11–12; 11:16–18), the martyrs in heaven (cf. Rev 7:10; 15:3–4), or the throne itself (cf. Rev 16:7). It would seem that only the voice of God would be excluded from consideration on the basis of the unlikelihood that God would command God's servants to praise "our God."⁴⁴¹ Whatever the precise identity, the fact that it comes "from the throne" may be taken to indicate that there is divine authorization to sing the hymn.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Rev 1:7; 22:20; 2 Cor 1:20, where these terms appear to function synonymously in close proximity to each other. See Schlier, "ἀμήν," *TDNT* 1:335–8.

⁴⁴¹ For various solutions to the problem of the identification of this voice, see M. Philonenko, "Une voix sortit du Trône qui disait..." (Apocalypse de Jean 19:5a), *RHPR* 79 (1999): 83–9; Bousset, *Offenbarung*, 427; Charles, *Revelation of St. John*, 2:124; Kraft, *Offenbarung*, 243; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1027.

⁴⁴² Prigent, *Commentary*, 522; Aune, *Revelation*, 3:1027.

The hymn begins in the same way as does each of the hymns in chapter 19, with the acclamation to “Praise God.” However, whereas in each of the other *strophes* the transliterated Hebrew acclamation “Hallelujah!” appears, here the Greek translation of this phrase takes its place: αἰνεῖτε τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν.⁴⁴³ Also unique to this *strophe* is the naming of the addressees of this command: “all his servants (πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ), [and] all those who fear him, small and great.” While δοῦλοι appears in Revelation twice to denote particular groups, e.g., the heavenly “martyrs” (19:2), and the “prophets and saints” (11:18), it is more often used in Revelation and in the NT to refer generally to the communities of the followers of the Lamb (e.g., Rev 1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 22:3, 6), and thus can be reasonably thought to refer here to the general (“Christian”) community of believers, inclusive of particular groups within the community.

It is unclear whether “those who fear him, small and great (οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν, οἱ μικροὶ καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι)” represents an adjectival elaboration of this (“Christian”) community (i.e., an adjective in attributive position with πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι), or constitutes a group distinct from πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι. The problem is that these terms are separated in some manuscripts by a conjunctive καὶ, which would suggest that οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν represent a group distinct from πάντες οἱ δοῦλοι, while in other manuscripts there is no such καὶ, suggesting that οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν represents an appositive description of the community itself. In either case, the phrase suggests a disposition of reverence and respect for God which manifests itself in a number of ways, e.g., trembling in the presence of God, adherence to God’s laws, or dependence upon God.⁴⁴⁴ So, for example, in Acts the phrase is used consistently to connote those Gentiles who adhere to Jewish customs and beliefs. Thus, while the term may thus characterize the Christian

⁴⁴³ The Greek translation of the Hebrew phrase is most often αἰνεῖτε + accusative (e.g., Pss 150:1; 33:2; 105:1; 106:1; 107:1; 116:1; 1 Chr 16:34; Is 12:4). The dative here is thus a variation on this translation. See Jörns, *Evangelium*, 152.

⁴⁴⁴ See above pp. 111–2.

community as a whole, it may be used as it is in Acts to denote those outside the community who nonetheless adhere to its basic precepts and practices.⁴⁴⁵

The final words of the *strophe* (οἱ μικροὶ καὶ οἱ μεγάλοι) which appear to be a further characterization of “those who fear him” as they appear immediately afterward with no coordinating conjunction, constitutes an idiomatic expression denoting the *entirety* of a particular group of people. Such is the use of this expression as it is found elsewhere in Revelation, as for example to denote the *entire* (“Christian”) community (11:18), and *all* flesh that was destroyed by the rider on the white horse (19:18), and *all* of the dead (20:12). Thus, as it qualifies οἱ φοβούμενοι αὐτόν here, it can be understood either to connote *all* of those in the (“Christian”) communities, or *all* those outside of the community who nevertheless adhere to its precepts and practices.

Taken as a whole, the entire *strophe* can be understood as a more elaborate form of the invocation to sing as was communicated elsewhere simply with the interjection “Hallelujah!” and an extended call to all those who would to join the heavenly praise of God. It thus serves as a preface to the actual song of the Christian community which follows in vv. 6–8:

Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty has begun to reign. Let us give thanks and rejoice and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure.

That the song is sung by the entire community of (“Christian”) believers is suggested chiefly by the fact that the invocation to sing was addressed to the community as a whole (see

⁴⁴⁵ Commentators treat this issue in a number of ways. Aune, for example, relies on the apparent meaning of the term in Acts to suggest that the term denote *Gentile* members of the community. Aune, *Revelation*, 2:645.

above).⁴⁴⁶ As in previous *strophes* in chapter 19, the acclamation “Hallelujah!” begins the hymn. Unlike these other instances, however, this acclamation is followed by a ὅτι clause which provides the basis for it: “For the Lord our God the Almighty has begun to reign (ἐβασίλευσεν).” With epithets drawn from previous hymns which convey the sovereignty of God (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ),⁴⁴⁷ God’s lordship is proclaimed, as the verb ἐβασίλευσεν here evokes scenes from the LXX in which God assumes sovereign authority—*becomes* king.⁴⁴⁸ A very similar hymnic claim is made in Rev 11:17, in which the claim of the assumption of God’s sovereign authority coincided with the destruction of the enemies of God and God’s people (i.e., the coming of the “wrath of God”...and “destroying those who destroy the earth”), and salvation for God’s elect (i.e., “rewarding the servants, the prophets, and all those who fear [God’s] name...”). In other words, the claim in 11:17 that God has “taken his power and begun to reign (ἐβασίλευσας)” entails precisely these acts.⁴⁴⁹ The hymnic claim in chapter 19 can likewise be understood in terms of the surrounding depictions of the destruction and salvation of God. On the one hand, God’s assumption of power entails the destruction of God’s enemies, as is most clearly evident in the previous chapter by means of the destruction of Babylon (18:1–24). On the other hand, the coming of God’s sovereign rule also entails salvation for God’s people, which is manifest insofar as the enemies of God (e.g., Babylon) are destroyed, and the threat to God’s people is thus eliminated. Thus, the hymn itself constitutes a reflection on the preceding narrative events, inasmuch as these narrative events serve as the basis for the acclamation “Hallelujah!” and the claim of the coming of the kingship of God. At the same time, the proclamation that God has “begun to reign” might also be understood as a herald of the destruction of God’s enemies

⁴⁴⁶ Cf. Prigent, *Commentary*, 524; Boring, *Revelation*, 192–3. Though see Beasley-Murray, *Book of Revelation*, 273.

⁴⁴⁷ Rev 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7. Cf. Rev 21:22. For evidence that these terms convey the sovereignty of God, see above esp. pp. 43–4.

⁴⁴⁸ Pss 46:9; 47:8; 92:1; 95:10; 96:1; 98:1.

⁴⁴⁹ See above pp. 79–80.

which takes place immediately following the hymn, as depicted in the destruction of the beast and his army (19:11–21), the binding and ultimate destruction of Satan (20:1–3, 7–10), and the “second death” (29:11–15), as well as the salvation of God’s elect, portrayed as the “final resurrection” (20:4–6), and the New Jerusalem coming down to earth from heaven (21:1–22:7).

The command to “let us give thanks and rejoice and give him the glory” immediately follows, and can be understood in light of the preceding acclamation of God’s sovereignty, and in the context of the surrounding depictions of the judgment and salvation of God. That is, while this particular combination of exhortations never appears together in antecedent literature, the individual commands recall similar directives in the LXX in contexts of the judgment and salvation of God, and in contexts in which God’s kingship is underscored. So, for example, in Isa 61:10, the prophet entreats his soul to “rejoice” (ἀγαλλιάσθω) in the context of a hymnic thanksgiving for the overthrow of those who destroyed Zion (Isa 61:2, 5) and for the salvation of his people (61:1–4, 6–11). Likewise, in Tobit’s final hymn of thanksgiving to God, he declares that his soul “will rejoice” (ἀξαλλιάσεται) in the King of heaven (Tob 13:9), and implores the listeners to “to give thanks and rejoice” (χάρηθι καὶ ἀγαλλίασαι) (Tob 13:15),⁴⁵⁰ all within the context of a vision of God’s restoration of Jerusalem and God’s people within it, alongside the destruction of God’s enemies (Tob 13:1–17). Similar exhortations with these verbs appear elsewhere within the context of the punishment of God’s enemies and the salvation of God’s people (Pss [LXX] 117:24; 96:1; Joel 2:23). So, too, can the call to “give glory” to God be understood in this light. Insofar as “glory” is a manifestation of God’s essential nature, and the means by which God’s exalted status is revealed,⁴⁵¹ to give glory to God is to acknowledge and

⁴⁵⁰ In the BA manuscripts of Tobit.

⁴⁵¹ See above pp. 46-7.

affirm God's exalted status.⁴⁵² Very often, the call to give glory to God occurs on account of a particular event by which God's status is revealed (e.g., cosmic phenomena (Pss [LXX] 28:1–11), or the creation of the world (Pss [LXX] 18:1; 95:1ff.)), and importantly, the salvation and/or destruction of God are causes for such a command, e.g., the salvation of the Israelites and the destruction of the Egyptians who were pursuing them (Ps. [LXX] 113:9), the destruction of Jerusalem (Jer. 13:16), and the restoration of Jerusalem (Is. 42:12). Thus, alongside exhortations to give thanks and rejoice, the call to give glory to God here can be understood as a response to the destructive and salvific actions of God in the surrounding narrative.⁴⁵³

While the call to “give thanks, rejoice, and give glory [to God]” thus makes sense in light of the surrounding actions, they are justified, as is so often the case in Revelation's hymns, by means of a ὅτι clause, which in this case consists of the claim that the “marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.” Thus, the command to rejoice is grounded specifically in the salvific act of God bringing down to earth the New Jerusalem, as the manifestation of the New Jerusalem from heaven is presented as a kind of wedding: the exalted Jesus (i.e., the Lamb) is presented as the bridegroom (19:9), the eschatological city of Jerusalem is portrayed as his “bride” (21:2, 9; 22:17), and the “marriage feast” (τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦ γάμου τοῦ ἁρνίου), consists of the flesh of those who have been defeated (19:9, 18). That is, in terms borrowed from the OT in which the relationship between God and God's people is variously described as a kind of “marriage” between God and God's people,⁴⁵⁴ the final consummation of the relationship between God and God's people is reoriented here in terms of a(n eschatological)

⁴⁵² Kittel, “δόξα,” *TDNT* 2:244–5.

⁴⁵³ Furthermore, inasmuch as these exhortations in antecedent literature often take place within the broader context of the praise of God's sovereignty (and especially clear in Tob 13, Ps [LXX] 97, and Joel 2:32), so, too, can these appeals in chapter 19 be taken in light of the affirmation of God's sovereignty in the preceding clause. As the destruction of God's enemies and the salvation of God's people is the grounds for the acclamation of God's sovereignty in the previous clause, so, too, are the calls to “give thanks, rejoice, and give glory to God,” which function as a response to this destruction and salvation, part and parcel of the acclamation of God's sovereignty.

⁴⁵⁴ Hos 2:14–20; Isa 49:18; 54:1–6; 62:5; Jer 2:2; 3:20; Ezek 16:8–14

marriage between the exalted Jesus (i.e., the “Lamb”) and the people (i.e., the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem).

Such a depiction, which appears in various forms elsewhere in the NT and early Christian literature,⁴⁵⁵ is completed in the hymn by the idea that the “bride” has been “granted to be clothed in fine linen, bright and pure.” This imagery, which conjures the luxury items that might be worn by a bride in a wedding ceremony,⁴⁵⁶ also symbolically represents the purity which characterizes the “bride.” That is, the “bright and pure” (λαμπρὸν καθαρὸν) linens represent the purity of the inhabitants of the eschatological city of God,⁴⁵⁷ which is said in an interpolation immediately following the hymn to be a manifestation of their “righteous deeds” (19:8b). In other words, the eschatological people of God, spared from the destruction unleashed upon the beast, Satan, and their followers, are apparently saved, at least in part,⁴⁵⁸ on account of their own actions. Such a notion makes sense in light of the preoccupation throughout Revelation with the proper conduct of the people of God as a prerequisite for salvation (e.g., Rev 2:1–3:22; 13:9–10; 14:1–5, 9–12; 20:4–6, 11–15; 21:7–8; 22:14–15), and puts a fine point on the hymnic claim that the bride has “made *herself* ready” for the marriage with the Lamb.

In summary, inasmuch as it occurs after the conclusion of the vision of the destruction of Babylon (18:1–24), and immediately prior to the vision of the defeat of God’s heavenly adversaries and the manifestation of the New Jerusalem (19:11–22:7), the hymn in chapter 19

⁴⁵⁵ E.g., Mark 2:19–20/Matt 9:15/Luke 5:35; Matt 25:1–13; John 3:29; 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22–23; *Gosp. Thom.* 104; 2 *Clem* 14:2; Tertullian, *Marc.* 5.18; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.6.

⁴⁵⁶ See, for example, Rev 21:2, where the “bride” is said to be adorned (κεκοσμημένην), presumably with fine linens and jewelry. Cf. Isa 61:10, in which the “bride” of God is adorned with fine clothing and jewels. See J. Fekkes, “His Bride Has Prepared Herself: Revelation 19–21 and Isaian Nuptial Imagery,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 269–87; J. Fekkes, “Unveiling the Bride: Revelation’s Nuptial Imagery and Roman Social Discourse,” in *A Feminist Companion to the Apocalypse of John* (ed. Amy-Jill Levine; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2009), 159–79.

⁴⁵⁷ Cf. the presentation of the “pure” brides in 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:22–33, and the purity of the people of God as represented by the white robes (6:10) of the martyrs under the altar who had been slaughtered for their testimony (6:9–11) and the Great Multitude (7:9), as well as the “fine linen” of the armies of heaven (19:14). Contrast the “fine linen” worn by the “great prostitute” in Rev 18:16.

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. Rev 5:9–10 in which the blood of the Lamb is said to “ransom for God saints from every tribe. . .and people and nation. . .” See above pp. 54–6.

acts as a mechanism for dividing these narrative sequences. In other words, it functions structurally as do many of the other hymns in Revelation as a transition between these scenes. At the same time, the hymn provides theological reflections on the surrounding narrative(s). The initial *strophe* constitutes an acclamation of the sovereignty of God in terms familiar from elsewhere in Revelation, and a call to praise God on the basis of God's act of destroying Babylon in the preceding narrative sequence, characterized as God's "true and righteous judgments." So much is made explicit later in the *strophe*, where the basis for this praise is said to be God's judgment of the Great Prostitute, which clearly alludes to Babylon, and by extension, the city of Rome. The destruction of Rome, which is characterized as a city which literally and figuratively destroys its own inhabitants, is then explained as God's vengeance for the deaths of God's people at the hands of the Romans, a claim which is intensified by the fact that those making it (i.e., singing the hymn) are the ("Christian") martyrs who were killed at the hands of the Romans. Ultimately, then, the *strophe* constitutes an affirmation of the events immediately preceding the hymn, i.e., the destruction of Babylon (Rome), and a call to praise God for this action.

This initial *strophe* is followed by a very brief *antistrophe* in which the destruction of Babylon (Rome) is likened to past acts of God in which punishment consists of eternally burning fires ("Her smoke rises forever!"). The entire hymnic sequence ends with a second *antistrophe*, "Amen. Hallelujah!," a traditional hymnic ending in which the contents of the preceding *strophes* are reaffirmed, and the call to praise God on account of these contents is reiterated.

A second hymnic sequence immediately follows the first, and begins with another succinct call to all those who would praise God to do so. Immediately following this is an *antistrophe* which justifies this call: the proclamation that God has "begun to reign," language

which connotes the *acts* of God which have taken place in the surrounding narrative, i.e., the destruction of God's enemies, and the salvation for God's people. Thus, the hymn makes clear that for this, God is to be praised as heavenly sovereign (i.e., be given "glory"), and the people are to give thanks and rejoice. However, a causal clause following the summons to praise God shifts the focus from God's act of destruction in the preceding scene, to God's act of coming to earth in the following scene. That is, the call to praise God and give thanks rests on the fact that God has come to earth, which is explained as the "marriage of the Lamb," which is precisely the metaphor used to describe the advent of God and the New Jerusalem in chapters 20–22. Thus, the hymnic call to rejoice is a proleptic indication of the coming of God and the New Jerusalem in the following chapters.

Chapter 3: The Context for Dramatic Choruses: *Choreia* in ancient Greece.

I. Introduction

Abundant archaeological, literary, artistic, and epigraphic evidence testifies to the popularity and pervasiveness of choral poetry and performance in ancient Greece, and the fact that it constituted a ubiquitous element of public and private social events during the Archaic and Classical periods,⁴⁵⁹ operating across mythic, religious, social, and educational spectrums.⁴⁶⁰ An amalgamation of poetry, music, and dancing, *choreia* can be traced to the very beginnings of Greek civilization, touching all corners of the Greek-speaking world up to its greatest flourishing in the 5th c. B.C.E., and through its eventual demise in subsequent centuries.⁴⁶¹

Choruses as they appeared in ancient tragedy were particular manifestations of this wider stream of choral phenomena. As such, certain formal characteristics of tragic choruses (e.g., their size, composition, shape, training, etc.), as well as tragic choral lyrics (e.g., metrical and dialectical tendencies, musical elements, etc.), can be understood in terms of the dynamics of ancient choral phenomena. Thus, a survey of choral phenomena, including the origins, types, forms, and functions of non-dramatic choruses as they appeared in the Greek world, will provide a basis for considering the particular forms and functions of choruses as they appear in tragedy.

⁴⁵⁹ It has been said that not a single important event, public or private, occurred in Ancient Greece lacked a choral performance of some sort. Lucian, *De Saltatione*: “ἔδ’ λέγειν, ὅτι τελετὴν οὐδεμίαν ἀρχαίαν ἔστιν εὐρεῖν ἀνεθ’ ὀρχήσεως.” See Helen Bacon, “The Chorus in Greek Life and Drama,” *Arion* 3 (1995): 6–24.

⁴⁶⁰ The significance of *choreia* in Greek antiquity can sometimes be lost on a modern audience for whom the elements of singing, dancing, and music are no longer requisite communal activities, but are often associated with high-culture pursuits (i.e., the “Fine Arts”) or denigrated as tawdry forms of entertainment. Perhaps owing to this, choral poetry and its constitutive elements is rarely considered in its own right, but rather in terms of *other* major trajectories in Classical studies, e.g., music, meter, dance, lyric poetry, performance traditions, sociology, myth, and/or religious practices. “[*Choreia*] was a physical and spiritual discipline to which Greek civilization in its prime assigned a central place of honor, and we need periodically to remind ourselves how alien it has become. For us the ability to sing and dance simultaneously is a virtuoso technique reserved for professionals, and even then it has been demoted to genres that make no claim to high culture—Broadway musicals and cheerleading manoeuvres. The idea that citizens *as* citizens should engage in singing and dancing strikes us as sheer tribalism.” William Mullen, *Choreia: Pindar and Dance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 3.

⁴⁶¹ The term itself first appears in Pratinas, P.M.G. 708.16; Euripides, *Phoen.* 1265; Aristophanes, *Ra.* 247; 336; *Thesm.* 956, 968, 981, 983, but Plato is the first known commentator on the subject. Plato, *Laws*, 2.654ff.

Unfortunately, the surviving evidence allows for only partial reconstructions of each of these constitutive elements of *choreia*. Most often only small fragments or quotations survive, frequently in the commentaries of later authors, and thus only partial evidence remains for most of the choral genres known from antiquity. More devastating than this is the fact that the musical and choreographic elements of choral poetry have been lost almost entirely. No notations, or explicit choreographic instructions, remain—if they ever existed.⁴⁶² Consequently, the precise shape(s) of the dance, and the sound(s) of the music, that accompanied the poetry are beyond reconstruction.

Despite the slight and fragmentary nature of the evidence, and the problems deriving from the nature of the evidence, some aspects of choral poetry are accessible to the modern interpreter. It is possible to get a general sense of the size(s), composition, and types of choruses, to identify some of the major poets, genres, stylistic characteristics, and metrical properties of choral poetry, and to associate known choral poets with poetic genres as well as with developments and trends in choral poetry.

II. Earliest Choral Forms in Ancient Greece

The earliest attestations of a chorus (*χóρος*) in Greek literature are found in the Epic poems of Homer, Hesiod, and the Homeric Hymns, wherein a chorus refers most often to a dance, and/or a place reserved for dancing.⁴⁶³ Few details are given as to the nature of the dance, those who participated in it, and the circumstances surrounding its performance. However, the contexts in which the term appears suggest that the dance was performed in a communal context,

⁴⁶² As with other poetic forms, these elements of choral poetry are commonly thought to have been passed down through oral instruction and kinetic mimesis.

⁴⁶³ E.g., “. . .and they struck the sacred dancing floor (*χóρον*) with their feet.” *Od.* 8.264; cf. *Il.* 16.183; 18.590. Also perhaps in *Il.* 18.603: “And a great company stood around the lovely dance(-floor?) (*χóρος*), taking joy therein. . .”

and was likely accompanied by a musician,⁴⁶⁴ and/or the singing and shouting of the participants,⁴⁶⁵ though very little is known of the precise relationship between the participants, the accompaniment(s), and the music. In all instances choral activity is presented as a very leisurely affair,⁴⁶⁶ and often considered in light of, and in contrast with, the coordinated movements in battle.⁴⁶⁷

One of the most detailed descriptions of such a choral dance appears in the *ekphrastic* description of Achilles' shield in Book 18 of the *Iliad*:

Therein furthermore the famed god of the two strong arms cunningly wrought a dancing-floor (χόρος) like unto that which in wide Knossus Daedalus fashioned of old for fair-tressed Ariadne. There were youths dancing and maidens of the price of many cattle, holding their hands upon the wrists of one another. Of these the maidens were clad in fine linen, while the youths wore well-woven tunics faintly glistening with oil; and the maidens had fair chaplets, and the youths had daggers of gold hanging from silver baldrics. Now would they run around with cunning feet exceedingly lightly, as when a potter sits by his wheel that is fitted between his hands and maketh trial of it whether it will run; and now again would they run in rows toward each other. And a great company stood around the lovely dance, taking joy therein; and two tumblers whirled up and down through the midst of them as leaders in the dance. (*Il.* 18.590–606)

⁴⁶⁴ Book 18 of the *Iliad* describes a scene of the grape harvest, in which a young boy “made pleasant music with a clear-toned lyre, and thereto sang sweetly the Linos-song. . .and his fellows beating the earth in unison therewith followed on with bounding feet mid-dance and shoutings.” *Il.* 18.571ff. So, too, in Book 1 of the *Odyssey* is Phemius said to sing with a lyre amongst the suitors who had “turned to singing and dancing.” *Od.* 1.151–2.

⁴⁶⁵ As in the beginning of Hesiod's *Theogony*, where the Muses are said to “dance on soft feet. . .making lovely dances. . .with vigorous feet” while uttering “their song with lovely voice.” Hesiod, *Theog.* 1–10. So, too, in *Il.* 16.183, we hear of “singing maidens in the dancing-floor of Artemis.”

⁴⁶⁶ E.g., “There he is in his chamber. . .gleaming with beauty and fair raiment. You wouldn't think that he had come there from warring with a foe, but rather that he was going to the dance, or sat there as one who had recently come from the dance.” *Il.* 3.390–4.

⁴⁶⁷ *Il.* 3.393; “Do you not hear Hector urging all of his troops in a fury to burn the ships? Truly it is not to the dance that he bids them come, but to battle.” *Il.* 15.508; “For we are not flawless boxers or wrestlers, but in the foot race we run swiftly. . .and always to us is the banquet dear, and the lyre, and the dance, and changes of clothes, and warm baths, and the couch.” *Od.* 8.248

Epic poetry provides several such glimpses of choral poetry as it was imagined to have been performed in the Heroic Age, as well as evidence for specific choral forms, including the wedding-song (*epithalamios*),⁴⁶⁸ the Linos-song associated with the harvest,⁴⁶⁹ funeral dirge (*threnos*),⁴⁷⁰ and *paean*.⁴⁷¹ Yet, it is unclear the extent to which these depictions reflect actual practice,⁴⁷² and if they do, whether they offer a view of very ancient choral traditions, or a view into the world of choral poetry as it existed in the centuries during which Epic poetry began to take written form.⁴⁷³ At any rate, Epic poetry does not exhibit anything substantive in terms of *actual* choral poetry.

Artistic evidence from the pre-historic and Archaic periods sheds light on the earliest forms of ancient choruses, often serving as the primary means by which the size, shape, composition, and movements of choruses can be determined.⁴⁷⁴ As we will see, however, the limitations of the artistic mediums present problems for interpreting visual data. Visual evidence is helpful in establishing parameters for choral dance, but it can rarely be connected to particular choral dances.

⁴⁶⁸ *Il.* 491ff.

⁴⁶⁹ *Il.* 567ff.

⁴⁷⁰ Hector's funeral includes a funeral dirge (*Il.* 24.720ff.), which includes professional singers, a group of women, and Andromache, Hecuba, and Helen in turn. See David A. Campbell, ed., *Greek Lyric Poetry: A Selection of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac and Iambic Poetry* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2003), xvi.

⁴⁷¹ The Greek army sings a *paean* after Apollo puts an end to the pestilence (*Il.* 1. 472–4), and after Achilles kills Hector (*Il.* 22.391–2). See Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, xvi.

⁴⁷² The question of the date at which Homeric poems were committed to the written form in which they have survived is a matter of considerable debate.

⁴⁷³ That is, it is unclear at what point Epic poetry began to be committed to written form, and much less clear at what point the poems took the form as we now have them. As such, it cannot be determined with any degree of certainty which time-period is reflected in the fragments in which choral activity is depicted. For a discussion of the interplay of orality and literacy in ancient Greece, see Rosalind Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992).

⁴⁷⁴ See, e.g., T.B.L. Webster, *The Greek Chorus* (London: Methuen, 1970), 1–22.

III. Choral Poets

1. Archaic Period

At some point near the beginning of the 7th c. B.C.E., the first evidence appears for a number of choral poets,⁴⁷⁵ as do the first fragments of choral poetry. The first physical evidence for choral poetry consists of two lines that are attributed to Eumelos, a Corinthian poet who may have lived as early as the late 8th c. B.C.E., which are preserved by Pausanias.⁴⁷⁶ While most of the contents of this poem and the details of its performance remain unknown, it is probable that this was composed for a chorus, and adhered to the form of a paeon, or perhaps a “processional” hymn (*prosodion*).⁴⁷⁷

A. Alcman

From a period likely not long after this are preserved a number of fragments of Alcman, who is thought to have composed choral poetry in Sparta during the 7th c. B.C.E. Ancient commentators claim that he wrote hymns and wedding-songs (*epithalamioi/hymenaios*),⁴⁷⁸ and there may be evidence for these among his extant fragmentary poems. Most of Alcman’s fragments, however, seem to have been pieces composed for choruses of young women, so-

⁴⁷⁵ The earliest names are Thales (Thaletas), who is said to have composed paeans and *hyporchemata* in Sparta. Polymnestus was said to have composed *prosodia* in Sparta. Arion, of Corinth, was claimed to have been a pupil of Alcman, and Sacadas of Argos is mentioned by Plutarch as composing a three-part chorus. See Emmet Robbins, “Public Poetry,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 223.

⁴⁷⁶ *PMG* 696. Pausanias 4.33.2

⁴⁷⁷ G. L. Huxley, *Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis* (London: Faber, 1969), 62; Ian Rutherford, *Pindar’s Paeans: A Reading of the Fragments with a Survey of the Genre* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 459; Graham Ley, *Theatricality of Greek Tragedy: Playing Space and Chorus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 124. On the date of Eumelos, see R. Janko, *Homer, Hesiod, and the Hymns* (Cambridge: University Press, 1982), 231–3. Cf. M.L. West, *Greek Metre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 15 n. 8.

⁴⁷⁸ A note on terminology for the wedding-song: The *epithalamios* comes to refer specifically to the wedding-song sung outside of the bride’s chamber, in contrast with the *hymenaios*, which most often refers to the song sung during the wedding processional. However, *hymenaios* is also sometimes used to characterize wedding-songs outside of the processional. See Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 242–3.

called *partheneia*.⁴⁷⁹ The most substantive of these, dubbed the *Partheneion*, consists of 101 lines (out of an original total of 140?) of what appears to consist of mythic narrative, moral reflection on this narrative,⁴⁸⁰ as well as allusions to individual chorus members and figures in contemporary Sparta.⁴⁸¹

B. *Stesichorus, Ibycus, Anacreon, and Simonides*

By the 6th c. B.C.E., a number of poets are known to have composed poetry for choruses, including notably Stesichorus (630–mid-5th c. B.C.E.),⁴⁸² Ibycus (mid-6th c. B.C.E.),⁴⁸³ Anacreon (570–520 B.C.E.) and Simonides (mid-6th c.–early 5th c. B.C.E.). On the basis of ancient testimony, Stesichorus appears to have been one of antiquity’s most revered poets, choral or otherwise.⁴⁸⁴ Oddly, this testimony is belied by the meager number of extant fragments. He was said to have composed long, narrative poems reminiscent of Homer, consisting largely of mythic content,⁴⁸⁵ yet nothing approaching this magnitude survives through quotation or in the papyri. Finally, some doubt whether Stesichorus was a composer of choral poetry, proposing instead that

⁴⁷⁹ For critical editions of these fragments, see C. Calame, *Alcman. Introduction, texte critique, témoignages, traduction et commentaire* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1983); A. Garzya, *Alcmane: I frammenti* (Naples: Casa Editrice Dr. Silvio Viti, 1954). For general introductions and texts, see Emmet Robbins, “Public Poetry,” 223–31; Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 18–27.

⁴⁸⁰ Some have noted that here in the earliest substantive piece of choral poetry are found formal elements that figure prominently later in the (choral) *Epinician* odes of Pindar. That is, “there is a myth told, with attendant moralising and theological reflection, and there is much about the occasion and the performance.” Robbins, “Alcman,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 228.

⁴⁸¹ Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, xvii.

⁴⁸² Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 38–9; 253–60; M.L. West, “Stesichorus,” *CQ* 21 (1971): 302–14; Robbins, “Stesichorus,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 232–42; Andrew W. Miller, ed., *Greek Lyric: An Anthology in Translation* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 77–81.

⁴⁸³ There are issues in dating Ibycus’ material. The *Suda* claims that he lived during the first-half of the 6th c., while Eusebius claims that he lived during the second-half of it. See Robbins, “Ibycus,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 187–89.

⁴⁸⁴ Dionysius claimed that, along with Alcaeus (a contemporary of Stesichorus who composed non-choral lyric poetry), he was the greatest of the lyric poets. Moreover, he was mentioned by more than one ancient commentator in the same breath as Homer and Pindar. See *Greek Lyric Poets*, 253–6.

⁴⁸⁵ E.g., Longinus said that Stesichorus was Ὀμηρικώτατος. Longinus 13.3. Likewise, Quintilian said of Stesichorus that he “sustained on the lyre the weight of epic song.” Quintilian 10.1.62. Yet, he is said to have included mythic details that were both not found in Homer and Hesiod, and that contrasted with the Epic myths.

he composed poetry for individual performance (*monody*), a view which casts doubt on the value of his extant poetry for reconstructing Archaic choral poetry.⁴⁸⁶

A younger contemporary of Stesichorus, and likewise born in Magna Graecia, Ibycus is often considered in the same poetic tradition.⁴⁸⁷ That is, Ibycus composed music for choral performance⁴⁸⁸ in which “epic language, myth, and mythic cycles” were dominant,⁴⁸⁹ in a dialect characterized as “Doric,”⁴⁹⁰ and according to triadic metrical patterns. Though he composed choral work in this fashion, Ibycus was best known in antiquity for his non-choral “love poetry” for boys. Anacreon is often considered alongside Ibycus, his older contemporary and fellow poet in the court of the tyrant Polycrates.⁴⁹¹ Anacreon was said to have composed songs for choruses of young women (*partheneia*), but of these only one line exists in the form of a direct quotation. The remainder of his extant poetry appears to be non-choral love poetry.

Of the choral poets who were active in the 6th c. and from whom extant fragments remain, none appears to have been more prolific than Simonides. In addition to composing in non-choral poetic forms,⁴⁹² Simonides was well-known in antiquity for having composed choral

⁴⁸⁶ Some of Stesichorus’ poetry exhibits a triadic (*epodic*) metrical pattern, which has long served as a criterion for identifying choral poetry. However, this has been questioned recently, and on these grounds his poetry is now thought by many to consist of non-choral poetic forms (e.g., *citharodic* poetry). Additionally, Athenaeus claimed that Stesichorus wrote “love-poetry” (παίδεια / παιδικά), which suggests non-choral performance. See West, “Stesichorus,” 307–13; On the issue of triadic respension as an indicator of choral poetry, see M. Davies, “Monody, Choral lyric, and the Tyranny of the Handbook,” *CQ* 38 (1988): 52–64; M. Lefkowitz, “The First Person in Pindar Reconsidered—Again,” *BICS* 40 (1995): 139–50; Robbins, “Pindar,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 268–73.

⁴⁸⁷ L. Woodbury, “Ibycus and Polycrates,” *Phoenix* 39 (1985): 193–220; Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 63–7; 305–13; Miller, *Greek Lyric*, 95–8; Bonnie C. MacLachlan, “Ibycus,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 187–97.

⁴⁸⁸ E.g., the *Suda*: ἐρωτομανέστατος περὶ μετράκια. Cf. Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.71.

⁴⁸⁹ MacLachlan, “Ibycus,” 189.

⁴⁹⁰ This is how it is characterized in the *Suda*. Gerber, “Ibycus,” 189.

⁴⁹¹ B. Gentili, *Anacreon* (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1958); P. Rosenmeyer, *The Poetics of Imitation: Anacreon and the Anacreontic Tradition* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992); D.A. Campbell, “Anacreon,” in *Early Greek Poetry* (ed. P.E. Easterling and E.J. Kenney; Cambridge: University Press, 1989), 175–79; MacLachlan, “Anacreon,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 198–212.

⁴⁹² Simonides’ elegies, in particular, were well-known in antiquity. See Emmet Robbins, “Simonides,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 251–2.

pieces relating to events of the Persian War,⁴⁹³ victory-odes for the victors of athletic contests,⁴⁹⁴ dirges in honor of well-known persons, paeans, hymns, and dithyrambs, for which he was said to have won 56 victories.⁴⁹⁵ Many of these poetic forms are represented in Simonides' extant fragments.

2. Classical Choral Poets

The greatest flourishing of choral poetry took place in the 5th c., evidenced both by the work of two prolific and renowned poets, Pindar⁴⁹⁶ and Bacchylides,⁴⁹⁷ and the rise of *dramatic* choral forms in Athenian tragedy and comedy. Choruses as they appear in tragic and comic forms constitute the greatest number of extant choral works from this or any other century in antiquity, and bear direct and certain connections to non-dramatic choral poetry. As dramatic choruses constitute the subject of chapters 5 and 6, we shall consider here only non-dramatic choral poets.

A. Pindar

Pindar was said to have composed poems in all of the major choral genres,⁴⁹⁸ and most of these poetic forms are preserved to various degrees in fragmentary form or in quotation by later

⁴⁹³ "After Xerxes' invasion Simonides was invited to compose poems in honor of those who died at Thermopylae, Artemisium, Salamis and Plataea: epitaphs for Athenians, Spartans and Corinthians, poems on Artemisium and Salamis, a commemorative song for Leonidas and his Spartans and a dedicatory epigram for the Spartan king are all known." Campbell, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 378.

⁴⁹⁴ One tradition considered Simonides to have been the first to write victory-odes.

⁴⁹⁵ fr. 79D.

⁴⁹⁶ The standard introductions to Pindar include: C.M. Bowra, *Pindar* (Oxford: University Press, 1964); D.S. Carne-Ross, *Pindar* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); W.H. Race, *Pindar* (Boston: Twayne, 1986).

⁴⁹⁷ Standard introductions to Bacchylides include: A.P. Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985); R. Fagles, *Bacchylides: The Complete Poems* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

⁴⁹⁸ The Alexandrian library, which contained the definitive collection of Archaic and Classical lyric poetry, accorded to Pindar each of these choral types, including hymns, paeans, dithyrambs, victory-odes (*epinicians*), dirges, *prosodia*, maiden-songs (*partheneia*), and *encomia*. For a critical edition of the Pindaric odes, see Bruno Snell and H. Maehler, *Pindarus*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1987); for fragments, see H. Maehler, *Pindarus*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1989). For the Pindaric MSS tradition, see A. Turyn, *Pindari carmina cum fragmentis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1948). For the dithyrambs, see M.J.H. van der Weiden, *The Dithyrambs of Pindar: Introduction, Text*,

authors. By far the most substantive of these are the compilation of four books of victory-odes, which were composed for the victors of athletic contests held at various locations (*Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian*).⁴⁹⁹ Unfortunately, it is unclear whether these odes represent choral compositions, and thus their value for reconstructing choral poetry is ambiguous.⁵⁰⁰

Whether or not the victory-odes provide certain insight into choral poetry in the 5th c. B.C.E., the fragments which are more certainly choral provide a sense not only of Pindar's choral inclinations, but also of choral poetry more generally in the 5th c. B.C.E.

B. *Bacchylides*

A contemporary of Pindar, Bacchylides seems to have been a prolific composer of choral poetry (among other poetic forms), and likewise composed poems in each of the major choral genres. However, much less is known about his life, and until very recently our knowledge of his work depended largely on ancient commentators' largely negative opinions of it vis-à-vis the poetry of Pindar.⁵⁰¹ Prior to 1896, only 100 or so lines were known through quotation, when a trove of fourteen victory-odes (*epinician*) and six dithyrambs were discovered, and subsequently smuggled from Egypt to the British Museum.⁵⁰² While the victory-odes provide valuable data on the genre in the Classical period, the question remains whether or not these were performed as

and Commentary (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1991).

⁴⁹⁹ For studies of these odes, see E.L. Bundy, *Studia Pindarica*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962); R.W.B. Burton, *Pindar's Pythian Odes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962); F. Nisetich, *Pindar's Victory Songs* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1980); W.H. Race, *Style and Rhetoric in Pindar's Odes* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

⁵⁰⁰ That is, although most exhibit triadic responsion, which has long served as a criterion for identifying choral poetry, some have called into question whether this signals *choral* poetry.

⁵⁰¹ Campbell, "Notes on Bacchylides," in *Greek Lyric Poetry*, 413–6; Robbins, "Bacchylides," in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 278–87.

⁵⁰² For a summary of the harrowing story of the texts' discovery, see Anne Phippen Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1–2.

choral pieces. Likewise, the six partial dithyramps (if they are, in fact, dithyramps⁵⁰³) comprise the most substantive and best preserved examples of this poetic genre from antiquity.⁵⁰⁴

3. Decline of Choral Poetry in the Post-Classical Period

Already in the fourth century it appears that non-dramatic choral poetry was in a period of major decline. This is the impression given by the remains of non-dramatic poetry from the 4th c. and later, in which do not appear any choral forms, or at least not the forms evident from the 5th c. and earlier. That is to say, the characteristic elements of Archaic and Classical choral poetry -- complicated *polymetry*, *strophic* repetition, and lyric metrical systems -- are simply not evident in non-dramatic forms in the 4th c. and later. If non-dramatic choral forms did indeed exist in the 4th c. and into the Hellenistic and Roman periods, they are not clearly identifiable on the grounds used to identify earlier choral poetry.⁵⁰⁵

A decline in non-dramatic choral forms in the 4th c. is further suggested by the fact that, with the exception of the dithyramb, non-dramatic choral forms are not explicitly mentioned by commentators. For instance, in his taxonomy of literary genres, Plato makes no mention of non-dramatic choral forms (or lyric forms generally for that matter) except the dithyramb.⁵⁰⁶

Likewise, in a comment in which he reveals his favorite poets, Xenophon mentions only the

⁵⁰³ They were labeled as such in the collection of lyric poetry in Alexandria. Some modern commentators, however, have questioned whether these poems are properly considered dithyramps, in large part because they evince little or no trace of a Dionysian orientation, which is considered by some to be the *sine qua non* of dithyrambic poetry. Unfortunately, because so little is known about the formal elements of the dithyramb, these poems cannot be judged sufficiently to be dithyramps on the basis of formal analyses alone.

⁵⁰⁴ The standard critical editions are: *Bacchylidis Carmina cum Fragmentis* (ed. B. Snell and H. Maehler; Leipzig: Teubner, 1970); F.G. Kenyon, ed., *The Poems of Bacchylides* (London: British Museum, 1897); R.C. Jebb, *Bacchylides: The Poems and Fragments* (Cambridge: University Press, 1905).

⁵⁰⁵ Our inability to identify forms on the basis of the trademarks of 6th-5th c. choral poetry would hardly be surprising, given the propensity of Hellenistic poets to mix and muddle poetic genres. This notion is summed up in the comment that "the laws of the genres were respected in the archaic period but not written down; in the Hellenistic period they were written down but not respected." L.E. Rossi, "I generi e le loro leggi scritte e non scritte nelle letterature classiche," *BICS* 18 (1971): 69-94.

⁵⁰⁶ Plato, *Rep.* 3.394b-c.

choral dithyramb as a distinct poetic form, along with ‘Epic’ and ‘tragedy’.⁵⁰⁷ Thus, it appears that non-dithyrambic choral forms outside of drama had practically died out by the fourth century, perhaps on account of the disappearance of the civic and social contexts available in the fifth century which provided exigencies for their performance.⁵⁰⁸

IV. Types of Choral Poetry

1. Issues in Classifying Choral Poetry

The categories used today to classify ancient Greek choral poetry depend in large part on the classification schema handed down to us by the Alexandrians who had compiled a library of lyric poetry towards the end of the 3rd c. B.C.E. This compilation, which may have constituted a kind of “canon” of lyric poetry,⁵⁰⁹ included the works (of unknown quantity)⁵¹⁰ of nine poets:

Alcman, Alcaeus, Sappho, Stesichorus, Ibycus, Anacreon, Simonides, Bacchylides, and Pindar.⁵¹¹

It appears that the criteria used to categorize individual works in the Alexandrian library varied depending on the poet. So, for instance, the poems of Alcman, Alcaeus, Sappho, Ibycus, and Anacreon are listed according to what appears to have been a standardized numerical system, while most of those of Simonides are listed by their title. On the other hand, all of

⁵⁰⁷ Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.4.3.

⁵⁰⁸ Marco Fantuzzi and Richard L. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 19–20.

⁵⁰⁹ The notion that these works constituted a *canon* is suggested by the fact that there are no traces of evidence for another collection after this. A.E. Harvey, “The Classification of Greek Lyric Poetry,” *CQ* 5: 3/4 (1955): 158.

⁵¹⁰ It is not clear how many works were preserved of each of these authors. On a conservative estimate, the Alexandrian library may have contained at least 100 rolls of lyric poetry, with about 1000–1500 lines per roll. According to notations on extant fragments, poems could have been as short as 130 verses, or as long as about 1300 verses, which provides some sense of how much poetry may have been collected in the Alexandrian library. See Douglas E. Gerber, “General Introduction,” in *A Companion to the Greek Lyric Poets* (ed. Douglas E. Gerber; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 2, esp. n. 8.

⁵¹¹ While the number of canonical lyric poets seems to have been well-established, the criteria by which these poets were selected are not clear.

Pindar's poems, and several of Simonides and Bacchylides, are organized according to their *type* (Gk: εἶδη), that is, dithyrambs, paeans, etc.⁵¹²

The apparent lack of consistency in the classification system raises the question of whether there existed some implicit, underlying criteria for classifying the poetry.⁵¹³ In the end, the classification system in place in the 3rd c. B.C.E. says as much and perhaps more about the ways in which the Alexandrians considered the poetry than it does about formal differences in the poetic forms themselves.⁵¹⁴ Nevertheless, because no other classification system usurped the one found at Alexandria, and because so many of the poems were distinguished in the Alexandrian library by their "type" (εἶδη), this is the way they are most often distinguished today.

Few of the types of choral poetry identified by the Alexandrians can be reconstructed, owing to a lack of substantive extant examples, and the absence of information in art and literature as to their precise nature. So, for instance, *parthenaia*,⁵¹⁵ *prosodia*, *Threnody/Dirge*, and *epithalamioi/hymenaios*,⁵¹⁶ seem to have been common forms of choral compositions in the Archaic and Classical periods, but only the slightest information is available with which to reconstruct the elements of each. Fortunately, substantial evidence does exist for a number of choral forms, including the *Epinician Ode*, *Paeon*, and *Dithyramb*, allowing for a consideration of their formal and functional features.

⁵¹² Harvey, "Classification," 158.

⁵¹³ Later commentators, by further delineating poetry beyond these generic "types," may have compensated for the broad generic terms of the Alexandrians. Proklos, for example, distinguished religious poetry from non-religious poetry along the lines of Plato, and further delineated lyric forms according to the contexts in which they were performed. See Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 12–3; cf. Harvey, "Classification," 158.

⁵¹⁴ This is the principal argument in Harvey, "Classification," 164ff.

⁵¹⁵ On the *parthenia*, see Laura Swift, *The Hidden Chorus: Echoes of Genre in Tragic Lyric* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 173–88.

⁵¹⁶ See Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 241–50.

2. Choral Genres

A. *Epinician Odes*

Epinician odes were commemorative choral songs dedicated to victors of athletic contests,⁵¹⁷ such as those that took place during the major games at Olympia, Delphi, etc., or at local contests. It may have been that “victory-odes” were publically performed immediately after the athletic performance, while others were performed later at the victor’s home, or some public place near it.⁵¹⁸ Such odes seem to have constituted a distinct choral genre, with standard formal and stylistic features, as attested by the 45 extant poems of Pindar, and fifteen of Bacchylides.⁵¹⁹ Indispensable to the victory-ode is the essential information about the victor: his name, father’s name, city, the contest won, previous victories, and past athletic victories by family members. Also typically included were gnomic utterances, or aphorisms, which framed the victor’s accomplishments in terms of universal human experiences. For example, the success of the victor was often framed in terms of his possession of a number of virtues, which are claimed to have been requisite for any such achievement. Thirdly, the odes are saturated with references to the gods. These may take the form of introductory addresses and/or invocations to

⁵¹⁷ Contests included “races for four-horse chariot, mule chariot, and single (ridden) horse; foot races at various distances; contests in boxing, wrestling, and the pankration (a combination of the two); and the pentathlon, a complex event which involved racing, jumping, throwing the discus and javelin, and wrestling.” Richard Lattimore, ed., *The Odes of Pindar* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), ix–x.

⁵¹⁸ The evidence for even the most basic conditions of performance, including the location, audience, performers, etc., is scanty. Inferences from the texts themselves provide precious little information, including the likelihood that some Victory-odes were performed in the hometown of the victor. See John Herington, *Poetry Into Drama: Early Tragedy and the Greek Poetic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 27–31; cf. Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 105–6; Webster, *Greek Chorus*, 105.

⁵¹⁹ Standard editions of the victory-odes include: Snell and Maehler, *Pindarus*, vol. 1. For fragments, see Maehler, *Pindarus*, vol. 2; Snell and Maehler, *Bacchylides*; H. Maehler, *Die Lieder des Bakchylides: Erster Teil, Die Siegeslieder*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1982); David R. Slavitt, *Epinician Odes and Dithyrambs of Bacchylides* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Mary Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode: An Introduction* (Park Ridge, N.J.: Noyes Press, 1976); Swift, *The Hidden Chorus*, 104–118. On the possibility that the Victory-Odes were performed by monodists, see Malcolm Heath, “Receiving the κῶμος: The Context and Performance of Epinician,” *AJP* 109 (1988): 180–195.

various gods, prayers, or extended mythical narratives.⁵²⁰ Finally, in each poem there is typically some sort of self-reflection of the poet himself on his role as poet in composing the ode.

While these elements were more or less requisite elements of any victory-ode, the order in which they appear varies. In fact, the poems so lack a consistent organizing principle that scholars have long struggled to determine what gives the genre a unified structure.⁵²¹ By contrast, the metrical structure of the victory-odes of Pindar and Bacchylides are quite consistent, most often taking the form of a “triadic” or “epodic” structure, in which there are two successive, metrically identical stanzas—*strophe* and *antistrophe*—followed by a third stanza which is metrically dissimilar to the first two, the *epode*. Taken as a whole, the metrical pattern of each of these “triads” is constant throughout any given poem.⁵²²

B. *Paeon*

The paeon stands out as one of the best attested genres of lyric poetry in Greece during the Archaic and Classical periods.⁵²³ Not only is the paeon attested as a choral form in Epic poetry, Archaic Lyric poetry, and in the Classical historians and dramatic playwrights, but a number of entire paeans of Pindar, Bacchylides, and Simonides survive nearly intact. While the earliest form of the paeon seems to have been simply an utterance directed to a healing god in order to alleviate suffering,⁵²⁴ the surviving paeans exhibit a range of content, as well as

⁵²⁰ “No poet [Pindar] is more insistent that all achievement and all glory, in fact all elements of human life both good and bad, are the disposition of divinity.” Robbins, “Public Poetry,” 262.

⁵²¹ Some have proposed to reduce each poem to a single thematic statement which informs each of its discrepant parts. See D. Young, “Pindaric Criticism,” in *Pindaros und Bakchylides* (ed. W.M. Calder and J. Stern; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1970), 1–95. Others have looked to a single word, image, or theme which is repeated that unites a poem. See M. Lewkowitz, *The Victory Ode*.

⁵²² On meter, see below pp. 162–7.

⁵²³ See I. Rutherford, “Apollo in Ivy: The Tragic Paeon,” *Arion* 3:1 (1994–1995): 112–118.

⁵²⁴ Its nature as a simple utterance is indicated by the appearance of the refrain *η παιαν* in the earliest literature (e.g., *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 517: *ηπατηον αιειδον*) which was simply an invocation of “Paeon,” who appears as a healing god in Homer (*Il.* 5.401, 899–10) and is later used as an epithet for the “healing” gods Apollo, Artemis, and (much later) Asclepius. Given the nature of the deities invoked with this cry, it is widely thought that the *paeon* originally functioned as a petition to alleviate suffering.

structural and metrical elements which confirm that at some point it attained a more complex form.⁵²⁵ In its more developed form, the invocation to a god remained the only indispensable element of the paean,⁵²⁶ but it often included other hymnic elements such as a narrative aretalogy of the god (i.e., an accounting of the deity's attributes and past exploits), and a closing prayer.⁵²⁷

With respect to the contexts of its performance, the paean seems to have been performed most often by men,⁵²⁸ in a number of environments, including banquets/*symposia*,⁵²⁹ before a battle,⁵³⁰ after military victories,⁵³¹ marriage ceremonies,⁵³² and prior to, or during, travel.⁵³³ The ubiquitous invocation, a lack of clear and consistent formal features, and these performative contexts, have led to the notion that the single common element of the paean was a “supplicatory attitude.”⁵³⁴ That is, a paean could function to propitiate a god in certain circumstances (war,

⁵²⁵ For this reason, the surviving paeans are often thought to be advanced, “ceremonial” forms of poetry in contrast with more “spontaneous” invocations to a god, from which the ceremonial forms derived. For a typology of *paeanic* forms, see Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 18–23. Cf. Calame, *Choruses*, 78; Harvey, “Classification,” 172–3.

⁵²⁶ Rutherford, “Apollo in Ivy,” 114.

⁵²⁷ For a detailed description of *paeanic* contents and forms, see Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 68–83.

⁵²⁸ This presents a contrast with other forms of choral poetry with which women are more commonly associated; nevertheless, see choruses of girls performing paeans, as in Euripides, *Iph. aul.* 1467ff., and *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 156ff. Moreover, in several scenes where men are said to perform the *paeon*, women are described in attendance performing an accompaniment, denoted by derivatives of the term ὀλολυγή. Although it is not always clear what exactly the term connotes, it appears in texts not dealing with paeans to denote female “cries,” as when Nestor dedicates an ox to Athena at *Od.* 3.450ff., or when the Trojan women with Hecuba offer their veils to Athena in *Il.* 6.301. This is once reversed in Sophocles, *Trach.* 205ff., where young girls sing the paean (ὀμοῦ δὲ παῖᾶνα, παῖᾶ ἀνάγεται, ὦ παρθένοι) and the men make accompanying sounds (κοινὸς ἄρσένων κλαγγά). See Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 58–63.

⁵²⁹ It appears that the paean was sung by all of the guests immediately after the libations were poured at the end of a banquet, to mark not only the end of the banquet but the beginning of a *symposium*. E.g., Aeschylus, *Ag.*, 245. See also Archilochus (76D) and Alcman (71D). So, too, were paeans sung at military victory feasts, e.g., Xenophon, *Hell.* 7.2.23; *Cyr.* 4.1.7. See Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 45–7. Cf. Harvey, “Classification,” 162, 172.

⁵³⁰ For example the soldiers under Xenophon's command “sing the paean” (ἐπαιάνισαν) just before entering battle (Xenophon, *Anab.* 5.2.14), as do Cyrus' commanders (Xenophon, *Cyr.* 3.3.58). So, too, the paean could signal the start of a military campaign, e.g., Thucydides 6.32.2. See Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 42ff.

⁵³¹ The earliest literary reference to a paean appears in the *Iliad* where a victory-paean is sung over the dead body of Hektor. *Il.* 22.391–4.

⁵³² Sappho fr.44.31V

⁵³³ For instance, the Achaeans are said to “sing the beautiful paean” (καλὸν ἀείδοντες παιήονα) to appease Apollo to send a favorable wind with which to sail to Troy (*Il.* 1.472). Cf. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 517; *Il.* 1.458ff; Bacchylides 17.124ff.

⁵³⁴ E.g., L. Käppel, *Paian, Studien zur Geschichte einer Gattung* (New York: de Gruyter, 1992).

travel, etc.), as a thanks-offering, to bring about healing, as a cultic accompaniment to sacrifice, and for celebratory functions.⁵³⁵

C. *Dithyramb*

The earliest fragment of a dithyramb is attributed to the poet Archilochus (early 7th c. B.C.E.), though the tiny fragment does not reveal much about the form or function of the dithyramb at this time, save perhaps its connection to Dionysos, and the existence of a dithyrambic “leader” (*exarchon*).⁵³⁶ After Archilochus, dithyrambs are associated with a number of poets, most notably Arion,⁵³⁷ Lasos,⁵³⁸ and Simonides,⁵³⁹ though none survive until Pindar (518–442 B.C.E.), whose fragmentary dithyrambic evidence, along with the six full dithyrambs of Bacchylides,⁵⁴⁰ constitute the bulk of extant dithyrambic evidence.

From this evidence, it is possible to say something of the distinctive formal elements of the dithyramb: (1) Composed for choruses of 50 men and/or boys; (2) Structured largely around heroic themes;⁵⁴¹ (3) Accompanied by an *aulos*, and perhaps other instruments;⁵⁴² (4) Saturated

⁵³⁵ Rutherford, “Apollo in Ivy,” 113–14.

⁵³⁶ “I know how to lead the fair song of Lord Dionysus, the dithyramb, when my wits are fused with wine.” Fr. 77 D.

⁵³⁷ Arion was said to have been the “first man of those of whom we have knowledge to compose, name, and teach a dithyramb in Corinth.” Herodotus, 1.23; See also Schol. Pindar, *Ol.* xiii. 19; Schol. Aristophanes, *Av.* 1403; Proclus, *Chrest.* xii; Suda, s.v. “Arion.”

⁵³⁸ E.g., Herodotus, 7.6; Schol. Aristophanes, *Av.* 1403; Plutarch, [*Mus.*] 29. 1141 b, c.

⁵³⁹ Simonides himself claimed to have won 56 dithyrambic victories (fr. 79D), yet his work only survives in very fragmentary form. See John H. Molyneux, *Simonides: A Historical Study* (Wauconda, Ill.: Bolchazy-Carducci, 1992); *Anth. Pal.* vi. 213; Strabo, xv. 728

⁵⁴⁰ There is some debate over whether or not Bacchylides’ poems are best characterized as dithyrambs. On the one hand, they were characterized as such in the compilations of Lyric poetry in Alexandria, and by later commentators. However, the many dissimilarities between the (so-called) dithyrambs of Bacchylides and the dithyrambs of Pindar, not least of which is the fact that their content has nothing to do with Dionysus, which is thought by many to be one of the *sine qua non* of the dithyramb, call into the question the characterization of Bacchylides’ poems as dithyrambs. See Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides*; Fagles, *Bacchylides*; David Fearn, *Bacchylides: Politics, Performance, and Poetic Tradition* (Oxford: University Press, 2007); Desmond A. Schmidt, “Bacchylides 17: Paean or Dithyramb?” *Hermes* 118 (1990): 18–31.

⁵⁴¹ Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Revised by T.B.L. Webster; Oxford: University Press, 1962), 20ff.

⁵⁴² Aristotle, *Pol.* 8.1432

with speeches in the first-person; (5) Had a highly wrought vocabulary;⁵⁴³ and (6) Had considerable narrative content.⁵⁴⁴

From the beginning, dithyrambs seem to have had a connection to Dionysus,⁵⁴⁵ which is evident in the earliest known dithyrambic fragment of Archilochus, in which it is claimed that the dithyramb was the “song of Lord Dionysus.”⁵⁴⁶ The association of the dithyramb with Dionysos is further revealed in Pindar’s *Olympian* 13, in which Dionysus’ charms are said to be revealed in the “ox-driving dithyrambs” (Pindar, *Ol.* 13.18), and in a fragment of Aeschylus in which the worship of Dionysus is linked to the dithyramb just as the worship of Apollo is associated with the paean.⁵⁴⁷ Dionysian themes, including in particular the story of his birth, were consistent elements in these songs, as were praise of the deity’s attributes and exploits.⁵⁴⁸ Accordingly, performances of dithyrambs often took place under the auspices of a celebration for Dionysus, the best known of these being the Great Dionysia in Athens. As such, the Dionysian character of dithyrambs was acknowledged by poets, grammarians, scholiasts, and commentators throughout antiquity, though it is critical to note that none of these ancient commentators at any point claims that the dithyrambs were performed *exclusively* within the parameters of the Dionysian cult.⁵⁴⁹

The dithyramb is perhaps most germane to a discussion of the context of dramatic choruses insofar as tragedy has long been thought to derive from it. Both the fragment of

⁵⁴³ Plato, *Crat.* 409c; Horace, *Carm.* 4.2.10.

⁵⁴⁴ Plato, *Rep.* 394c; Horace, *Carm.* 4.2.10.

⁵⁴⁵ See e.g., P.E. Easterling, “A show for Dionysos,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (ed. P.E. Easterling; Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 36–53; Jean-Pierre Vernant, “The god of tragic fiction,” in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (ed. J.P. Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet; translated by Janet Lloyd; New York: Zone Press, 1990), 181–8; Brian Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy: Drama, Myth, Society* (London: Longmans, 1973), 33–41; Rainer Friedrich, “Drama and Ritual,” in *Drama and Religion* (ed. J. Redmond; Cambridge: University Press, 1983), 159–223; and R. Friedrich, “Everything to do with Dionysos? Ritualism, the Dionysiac, and the tragic,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic* (ed. M.S. Silk; Oxford: University Press, 1996), 257–83.

⁵⁴⁶ Fr. 120 W

⁵⁴⁷ Fr. 355 N; cf. Plutarch, *E Delph.* 389b.

⁵⁴⁸ Plato, *Laws* 3.700b

⁵⁴⁹ Euripides, *Bacch.* 523ff.; Menander, *Dysk.* 432; Pollux, 1.38; Proclus, *Chrest.* 344–5; Suda, s.v. *dithyrambos*

Archilochus noted above, as well as Bacchylides' dithyramb 18, suggest that at times there may have been some form of interaction between the chorus and a chorus-leader. This phenomenon, alongside Aristotle's claim that tragedy and comedy arose "from the leaders of the dithyramb," suggests that at some point this interaction between the chorus-leader and chorus became formalized, at which point the chorus-leader began to take on a "role" vis-à-vis the chorus. Many ancient and modern commentators consider this moment to have constituted the birth of tragedy.

D. *Hymns and Choral Poetry*

Having now surveyed some of the forms and features of choral forms, it is possible to consider the more complicated question of the relationship between these choral forms and the Greek hymn. As we saw in Chapter 2, the term ὕμνος presents definitional challenges because it was used in both a general sense, with the term and its derivatives apparently used as synonyms for ἀείδος/ἀείδω, and in a more precise sense as a form of praise for a deity.⁵⁵⁰ On the basis of this definition, paeans and dithyrambs, which have distinctive formal and functional elements but which also fall under the rubric of songs whose most elementary form consists of praise of the gods, would seem to qualify as hymns. The simple identification of paeans and dithyrambs (and other choral songs) as hymns is complicated, however, by the fact that some evidence suggests that the term was used in antiquity *not* as a category under which paeans, dithyrambs, and other choral genres might be classified, but as a distinct choral genre *amongst* them. For instance, at the library of Alexandria, a book of Pindar's "hymns" was distinguished from a book of his paeans and dithyrambs.⁵⁵¹ Likewise, Plato seems to have identified the hymn, paean, and

⁵⁵⁰ See chapter 2, pp. 26–7.

⁵⁵¹ POxy 2438; Cf. *Vita Ambrosiana*. On the classification of lyric poetry in the Alexandrian Library, see Harvey, "Classification," 158ff. Cf. H. Färber, *Die Lyrik in der Kunsttheorie der Antike* (München: Neuer Filser, 1936).

dithyramb as distinct forms of song.⁵⁵² Finally, in his taxonomy of sacred songs, Proklos distinguished the “hymn proper,” a song sung around the altar, from other hymnic forms.⁵⁵³ Responses to this evidence, which seems to be at odds with most other ancient and modern definitions of hymn, have varied. Some assume there must have existed at some point a specific choral hymnic form, i.e., a “hymn proper” as Proklos suggested, distinct from the hymn more generally defined.⁵⁵⁴ Most others have denied this, attempting instead to reconcile the evidence for a specific choral hymnic form with what is said about hymns elsewhere. For example, Didymos acknowledged that hymns were distinct from *prosodia* and paeans as a *genus* is distinct from a *species*.⁵⁵⁵ Others have suggested that the books of hymns from the library at Alexandria were not actually a distinct generic form, but rather miscellaneous hymnic forms which were not easily identified as another type (e.g., *prosodia*, dithyramb, paeon, etc.).⁵⁵⁶

V. Formal Features of Choral Poetry

While choral genres can be distinguished on the basis of various formal, functional, and performative qualities, they also share with one another certain formal features, namely, metrical

⁵⁵² “...and one form of song consisted of prayers to the gods—these were called ‘hymns’—...and paeans were another form, and another, the birth of Dionysos, I think, was called ‘dithyramb’” (Plato, *Laws* 700b1–5).

⁵⁵³ It is unclear what else may have distinguished the “hymn proper” other than the fact that it was sung around the altar. Proklos, *Bibl.* 320a 19–20. See Harvey, “Classification,” 160ff.; Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 10.

⁵⁵⁴ Harvey suggests that the “hymn proper” was a monostrophic poem sung by a stationary chorus. Harvey, “Classification,” 166.

⁵⁵⁵ That is, “The hymn is distinct from encomia, *prosodia*, and paeans not in that the latter are not hymns, but as genus is from species. For we call all forms of song for the gods hymns, and add as a qualifying expression such as prosodion-hymn, paian-hymn, etc.” Cf. Proklos (5th c. C.E.) who wrote, “They called generically all compositions to the gods hymns. That is the reason why one finds them relating the prosodion and the other genres already mentioned to the hymn as species to genus. For one can observe them writing ‘prosodion-hymn’ or ‘enkomion-hymn’ or ‘paian-hymn’ and the like.” Proklos, *Bibl.* 320a 12–17. See Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 10–11.

⁵⁵⁶ “The emergence of separate books of hymns by Pindar or Bacchylides, then, as opposed to their paians and dithyrambs etc., may be attributed to the Alexandrians’ method of classification: any composition which could be clearly identified as a dithyramb or paian or parthenion etc. by compositional elements [e.g., the *epiphthegma* ἡ παῖάν] was categorized accordingly; the remainder, which defied specific classification, was put into a book called ‘hymns’, but actually equivalent to ‘miscellaneous hymns’.” Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 11. Cf. J.A. Haldane, “The Greek Hymn, with Special Reference to the Athenian Drama of the Fifth Century,” (Ph.D. diss., King's College, 1963).

and dialectical tendencies, the composition and size of the chorus, choreography, and musical accompaniment, etc. The following consists of a survey of these formal features.

1. Meter

Choral poetic forms are distinguished in large part on the basis of particular metrical patterns inherent in the verse, i.e., the *meter* of the verse. Any poetic form, ancient or modern, is composed according to principles of meter, or the formal rhythmic structures produced from the “natural rhythmic movements of colloquial speech, so that pattern—which means repetition—emerges from the relative phonetic haphazard of ordinary utterance.”⁵⁵⁷ In Greek and Latin poetry, patterns were determined on the basis of an assigned, *quantitative* value for each syllable in the *verse*. That is, each syllable was assigned a *long* or *short* value (quantity) on the basis of the “natural” length of the vowel(s) in the syllable,⁵⁵⁸ or the position of the vowel in relation to surrounding vowels and consonants.⁵⁵⁹ In metrical notation, short values (syllables) are denoted with a *breve*: ˘. Long values (syllables) are represented with a *longum*: —. The combination(s) of short and long syllables are the building blocks of the various rhythmic patterns, or meters, of Greek poetry.⁵⁶⁰ The basic metrical unit in the Greek and Latin poetry is

⁵⁵⁷ Further, “...Because it inhabits the physical form of the very words themselves, meter is the most fundamental technique of order available to the poet. The other poetic techniques of order—rhyme, line division, stanzaic form, and overall structure—are all projections and magnifications of the kind of formalizing repetition which meter embodies. . .” Paul Fussell, Jr., *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (New York: Random House, 1965), 5.

⁵⁵⁸ The “natural” lengths of vowels are determined by the time required to produce the sound. Naturally long vowels (omega, eta, and all *diphthongs*) are those which require more time to pronounce; naturally short vowels (epsilon and omicron) require less time to produce.

⁵⁵⁹ That is, syllables which are short on the basis of “naturally” short vowels may become long *by position*, and *vice versa*, though much less frequently, under a number of circumstances depending on which vowels, consonants, or combinations of consonants, immediately follow the (natural) vowel(s) in question. Most typically, if a short vowel is followed by two consonants, including diphthongs, the syllable becomes long *by position*.

⁵⁶⁰ Syllables in English poetry are similarly assigned a long or short value. However, the value is not determined in terms of the quantitative length of the vowels in the syllable, but rather by *stress* or *accent*. That is, long syllables are those stressed, or accented, while short syllables are left unstressed/unaccented.

the *foot*, which consists of a set pattern of short and/or long values, e.g., the *Iambus*: ◡ —

Trochee: — ◡ *Anapaest*: ◡ ◡ — *Dactyl*: — ◡ ◡

In several of the most common Greek metrical systems, e.g., the *iambic*, *trochaic*, and *anapaestic*, the basic metrical unit is a *metron*, which consists of two feet:

Iambic metron: ◡ — ◡ — *Trochaic metron*: — ◡ — ◡ *Anapaestic metron*: ◡ ◡ — ◡ ◡ —

Another basic metrical unit is the *period*, which consists of a certain number of feet, or metra.⁵⁶¹ A *hexameter*, for instance, contains six feet; a *pentameter* consists of five feet (or *metra*); and so on. The period, often indicated in a text as a line of verse, is the “fundamental self-contained unit in metrical composition,” within which there is syntactic continuity, and at the end of which there is syntactic interruption.⁵⁶²

Thus, metrical systems are identified on the basis of both the type of feet (or metra), and the number of feet (or metra), in a period.⁵⁶³ That is, a *Dactylic Hexameter* consists of a period of six dactylic feet, while the *Trochaic Tetrameter* consists of four trochaic metra, and so on.⁵⁶⁴

The first line of Homer’s *Odyssey* demonstrates a straightforward example of the *Dactylic Hexameter*, where six dactyls constitute one line, or period, of verse:⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶¹ Or metra, if the smallest measured unit in the system is the metron.

⁵⁶² West, *Greek Metre*, 5.

⁵⁶³ For a brief description of the meters common in Greek poetry, see James W. Halporn, Martin Ostwald, and Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry* (2nd ed.; Norman, Okla: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 10–55; cf. Paul Maas, *Greek Metre* (transl. Hugh Lloyd-Jones; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 59–71.

⁵⁶⁴ This, and every other, Greek metrical system, allows for a degree of flexibility. E.g., the first short syllable in an *iambic metron* is not always short. In its place may be one long syllable, or two short syllables. Substitutions like these are determined on the basis of a number of consistent criteria.

⁵⁶⁵ In the last *dactyl*, the two *breve* syllables have been replaced with one *longum*, a common substitution in any

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά

— ˘˘ — ˘˘ — ˘˘ — ˘˘ — ˘˘ — — //

1 2 3 4 5 6

Poetic forms are distinguished in large part on the basis of the degree to which they operate according to these meters, or variations thereof, and according to the extent to which they exhibit specific tendencies within these systems. In other words, combinations of metrical systems and tendencies produce varieties of poetic verse. For example, the Epic poetry of Homer, Hesiod, and the *Homeric Hymns*, is so designated on the basis of the consistent use of the *Dactylic Hexameter*, while the so-called Iambic poets⁵⁶⁶ make much use of similar forms of the *Iambic* and *Trochaic Trimeter* and *Tetrameter*, and so on.⁵⁶⁷

Likewise, choral poetry is so designated on the basis of its metrical qualities, and primarily its *strophic* character. That is, two general types of poetry are typically distinguished⁵⁶⁸ on the basis of the type of repetition of periods of verse: (1) *Stichic*; and (2)

poetic system, but characteristic of the *hexameter* in particular. The resulting *foot*, consisting of two long syllables, is called a *spondee*.

⁵⁶⁶ E.g., Hipponax, Archilochus, and Ananius.

⁵⁶⁷ Broader trajectories are determined on the basis of metrical affinities amongst poets who employ these systems. For instance, all of Epic and Elegaic poetry falls under the rubric of the “Ionian” tradition insofar as each manifests similar forms of the *Dactylic Hexameter*, *Iambic Trimeter*, and *Trochaic Trimeter*, while the poetry of Sappho and Alcaeus comes under the heading of the “Aeolic” tradition on the basis of their similar use of similar *cola*. See Halporn et al., *The Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*, 12–13; West, *Greek Metre*, 29–56.

⁵⁶⁸ A third mode of delivery, *recitative*, is sometimes distinguished from *spoken* and lyric verse, and is thought to have resembled something similar to chanting. While some ancient authors seem to distinguish between *spoken* and *recited* verse, *recitative* is not clearly distinguishable from *spoken* verse, as it conforms to a *stichic* metrical pattern, and exhibits metrical systems which are nearly always spoken. Complicating matters is both that the terms used to speaking, reciting, and singing, are ambiguous. E.g., *καταλέγειν* is used to denote speaking in some contexts, and chanting in others. So, when ancient authors are referring to the performance(s) of ancient poets or actors, it is unclear whether their use of *καταλέγειν* refers to speaking or chanting. In other words, ancient authors used similar terms to describe what appear to be different modes of delivery. It may be that *recitative* referred to verse that was spoken with a musical accompaniment, to denote a contrast from verse that was spoken *without* accompaniment. At any rate, *recitation* is often most considered under the rubric of *spoken* verse. See Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan, 1995), 334–5.

Strophic.⁵⁶⁹ A *stichic* pattern consists of the continual repetition of the metrical pattern of a single period. For example, the repetition of periods of *Dactylic Hexameter* in Epic poetry represents a *stichic* pattern. In other words, single periods are simply repeated throughout the poem, with various alterations and substitutions as allowed by convention.

By contrast, *strophic* repetition consists of the repetition of the metrical pattern of a number of often metrically heterogeneous periods. A number of periods, which may be made up of *dactyls*, *anapaests*, *iambics*, etc., or combinations of these rhythms, taken together constitute a metrical *whole*—i.e., a *strophe*. A single *strophic* pattern “A” could simply be repeated, e.g., A//A//A//A//...etc.,⁵⁷⁰ or multiple *strophic* patterns could interact in the same poem, e.g., A//A//B//B//C//C//...etc. The repetition of *strophes*, and the varieties thereof, is called *responsion*. In addition to the metrical variety produced with different forms of *strophic* *responsion*, *strophic* repetition allowed for far more complicated metrical forms than did *stichic* repetition, as several metrical systems were often employed within a *strophe*. That is, varieties of *polymetry* could be exhibited in a single *strophe*.

Stichic and *strophic* repetition is further distinguished by the fact that particular metrical systems are associated with one or the other. So, for example, the most common meters for *stichic* verse were forms of the *Dactylic Hexameter* as in Epic poetry, as well as the *Iambic Trimeter* and *Tetrameter*, and the *Trochaic Tetrameter*.⁵⁷¹ Alternatively, a (larger) number of

⁵⁶⁹ These two basic patterns are not just evident to modern commentators, but ancient authors themselves made this essential distinction. E.g., Pseudo-Plutarch, writing about Archilochus’ invention of the *Iambic Trimeter*, says that “some *iambics* could be *spoken* to musical accompaniment and others *sung*. . .” Plutarch, [*Mus.*] 1140f–41a. Much more evidence concerns the modes of delivery of Classical drama. For instance, Aristotle contrasts “parts that are delivered with meter alone and against others (that) are delivered with song.” Aristotle, *Poet.* 1449b24ff. Aristotle also distinguishes between recitation and songs in *Prob.* 19.6. Pseudo-Plutarch comments that the tragic poets took over the older practice of either speaking or singing *Iambic Trimeters*. Plutarch, [*Mus.*] 1140f–41a. Finally, a 14th c. MS which contains material from Hellenistic authors contrasts “song” and “recitative.” Michael Psellos, *On Tragedy*, 61–66. See Csapo and Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 335.

⁵⁷⁰ This was the pattern of Sappho and Alcaeus.

⁵⁷¹ These meters were used in *strophic* verse, most often either comingled with other lyric meters in a *polymetric*

meters were associated with strophic repetition, including forms of the *Aeolic*, *Dochmiac*, and *Dactylo-Epitríte*.

Verse that conforms to a stichic pattern, and appears in one of the metrical systems closely associated with stichic repetition, is thought to have been spoken, with or without musical accompaniment.⁵⁷² Alternatively, verse that conforms to a strophic pattern, and which appears in a metrical system associated with strophic metrical repetition, is thought to have been sung, and accompanied by a stringed instrument such as the *lyre*, or a pipe instrument such as the *aulos*. As such, strophic verse is commonly designated *lyric* poetry.⁵⁷³

Choral poetry is thus designated on the basis of the fact that it exhibits both complicated *polymetric* strophes, as well as the fact that it exhibits a particular type of responsion, i.e., *epodic* or *triadic*, which consists of the repetition of the metrical pattern of the first strophe in an *antistrophe*, followed by a metrically dissimilar *epode*: A//A//B//A//A//B//. . .etc.⁵⁷⁴ Choral

strophe, or altered with various “lyric” modifications, such that it is most common to distinguish between lyric and non-lyric *iambics*, *Dactyls*, etc.

⁵⁷² It is unclear whether “spoken” verse was accompanied by a musical instrument. Performances of poetry in Homer are said to be sung with a *phorminx*. However, by the 7th c., Epic poetry of this sort seems to have been recited without musical instruments, as evidenced on vases which depict poets performing without instrument(s), and the (scant) testimony of ancient authors. E.g., Plato’s *Ion* portrays a conversation between Socrates and a poet in which Epic poetry is said to be spoken, with no mention of an instrument, in contrast to other poetic forms which were sung. Plato, *Ion*. See Andrew Barker, ed., *Greek Musical Writings. Vol 1: The Musician and his Art* (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), 18–61.

⁵⁷³ In its earliest usage, lyric poetry referred to verse that was accompanied by a lyre, or some other stringed instrument. Lyric poetry in this sense may have been considered a poetic *genre* as early as the Classical period, as for example when Aristotle distinguished poetry that was accompanied by a *kithara*, a type of stringed instrument related to the lyre, from Epic poetry, dramatic poetry, etc. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1447a. At some point, it seems that lyric poetry came to denote verse which adhered to a broader set of formal, stylistic, and aesthetic conventions, although the criteria by which it is distinguished are unfortunately not made explicit. Greek lyric poetry today most commonly refers to the entirety of poetic material produced in the Greek-speaking world from about the 7th c. B.C.E. to the mid-5th c. B.C.E., excluding the Epic poetry of Homer, Hesiod, *et al.* and the dramatic poetry of the Classical playwrights. Encompassing a wide range of material over nearly two centuries, lyric poetry exhibits great diversity in terms of form, functional value, geographic provenance, performance context, and exigency. Yet, adherence to particular metrical properties set it apart generically from other poetic modes.

⁵⁷⁴ Choral poetry thus designated is differentiated from other forms of lyric poetry, e.g., *monodic* poetry, which is lyric insofar as it exhibits *strophic responsion*, but reveals less complicated *polymetric strophes* and different kinds of *non-epodic strophic responsion*. Halporn et al., *The Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*, 34.

poetry has long been identified on these metrical grounds on the basis of the fact that the metrical patterns of the choruses in dramatic poetry often follow these patterns.

2. Dialect

Lyric poetry is often said to have exhibited *Doric* tendencies,⁵⁷⁵ most conspicuous of which is the long \bar{a} (i.e., the “Doric alpha”⁵⁷⁶) in place of the long \bar{e} as it appears regularly in the Attic dialect.⁵⁷⁷ Some of the earliest and best known choral lyric poets arose from Doric cities, such as Archilochus (Paros), Arion (Methymnae), Simonides (Cos), and Lasus (Hermione). Regardless of this fact, Doric forms were employed in non-dramatic lyric poetry in non-Doric regions (e.g., Ionic cities), suggesting that the dialect was widely associated with lyric poetry, and not merely a regional preference. So, for example, Bacchylides, who was from the island of Keos, employed Doric forms in spite of the fact that his native dialect was Ionic.

3. Composition of Choruses

A chorus most often consisted entirely of either male or female members. This fact is confirmed by the iconographic record, in which 94% of the roughly 116 depictions of choruses in public Greek art from the 9th–4th c. B.C.E. consist of either male *or* female members,⁵⁷⁸ and by the literary record, where the names of choruses preserved in extant choral poetry, as well as the

⁵⁷⁵ E.g., Race, *Pindar*, 14–5, esp. n. 16.

⁵⁷⁶ The designation of the long \bar{a} as a “Doric” feature is somewhat misleading insofar as it was common in most non-Attic dialects. In other words, the Attic dialect was unique in that it featured a long \bar{e} in place of the otherwise more common long \bar{a} . See Herington, *Poetry Into Drama*, 113.

⁵⁷⁷ E.g., ἀρετά instead of ἀρετή. See Race, *Pindar*, 14ff; cf. A. D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb Got Its Shape,” *CQ* 47.2 (1997): 332.

⁵⁷⁸ R. Crowhurst, “Representations of Performances of Choral Lyric on the Greek Monuments 800–350 B.C.” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1963), 208ff. For a survey of the archaeological material relating to Greek choruses from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period, see Webster, *Greek Chorus*, 1–45.

names of choruses referred to in literature which denote one sex or the other.⁵⁷⁹ This same evidence also suggests that female choruses were more prevalent than male choruses.⁵⁸⁰

Choruses also tended to consist of persons who bore some kind of relationship with one another.

So, for instance, choruses tended to be constituted entirely by members of one of three age groups: (1) Children; (2) Post-pubescent adults who were not married; or (3) Married adults.⁵⁸¹

Likewise, choruses appear to have been comprised of members who come from the same geographic location. This is apparent in descriptions of mythical and actual choruses, who are most often described as having come from the same geographic locale,⁵⁸² and often from the very same family.⁵⁸³ Finally, the use of terms φίλος and ἑταῖρος and ὁμηλική to characterize the relations of chorus members to one another denotes the close relationships of members.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁷⁹ Much less frequently, choruses seem to have consisted of members of both sexes, as in Homer, *Od.* 23.147; *Il.* 18.567, 590. “Mixed” choruses were perhaps more common when the choruses consisted of pre-pubescent or adolescent choruses, as in Hom. *Il.* 18.593; Eur. *Bacch.* 17.125ff.; Herodotus 3.48; etc. See Calame, *Choruses*, 26 n. 29. For depictions of mixed choruses, see Crowhurst, “Representations,” 219ff.; R. Tölle, *Frühgriechische Reigentänze* (Waldsassen/Bayern: Stiftland-Verlag, 1964), 54ff.

⁵⁸⁰ Calame, *Choruses*, 25.

⁵⁸¹ This can be established on several grounds. The term ἡλικίαι appears in several sources to denote the fact that choruses consisted of people of the same age. In addition, choruses are often identified in terms which reliably denote age. For example, married men and women are consistently denoted by the terms ἄνδρες and γυναῖκες, while post-pubescent but unmarried girls are variously called κόραι, παρθένοι, νεάνιδες, and νόμφοι. Both pre-pubescent boys and girls are called παῖδες. Because this term does not carry a gender connotation, it is not always clear when this term refers to a chorus of boys or girls. Finally, choruses comprised of members of similar ages is envisioned and assumed by commentators such as Plato, in his description of the processions of choruses. Plato, *Laws* 664c. See Calame, *Choruses*, 26–30.

⁵⁸² E.g., the Muses are often denoted as coming from the same region, as they are referred to as the *Pierides* (“daughters of Pieria”), the *Olympiades* (“daughters of Olympos”), or the *Helikoniades* (“daughters of Helicon). Likewise, the mythical rivals of the Muses, the Emathids, are said to have been born in Emathia. See Calame, *Choruses*, 30–31.

⁵⁸³ Very often choruses are explicitly identified as members of a particular family, e.g., θύγατρεις, κόραι, παῖδες, τέκνα. So, the *Danaïdes* were daughters of Danaos, the *Neirides* were daughters of Nereus, and several choruses were considered to have been the offspring of Zeus, including most notably the Nymphs and the Muses. The characterization of a chorus on the basis of the relation to a geographic locale and/or family is most often signified by the fact that the name of the chorus includes a derivation of -ιδ-, -αδ-, -τισ-, or -της- which denotes *belonging*, either to a geographic area or family. See Calame, *Choruses*, 30–33.

⁵⁸⁴ See Calame, *Choruses*, 33–4.

4. Size of Choruses

The fragments of choral poetry offer very little evidence as to the intended or actual size of the chorus, and as such, determinations as to the size of lyric choruses in Greek antiquity are limited to visual representations of choruses, and descriptions of choruses in literature. From the visual evidence, it appears that choruses varied a great deal in size: depictions of choruses on public and private art range in size from two to eighty.⁵⁸⁵ It must be stated first of all that the size of a chorus depicted in art is not a sure indication of how many people were actually being represented. Visual representations of choruses may be misleading as the number of *choreutai* depicted on a medium was dictated (limited) in large part to the size of the medium, as well as the space on the medium suitable for depictions. Such limitations shed light on several aspects related to the size of choruses as can be ascertained from visual evidence, not least of which is the fact that the number of *choreutai* depicted is likely to be *smaller* than the number of *choreutai* that are being represented. In other words, just as artists could indicate a building by depicting a single column, or a landscape by a single tree, so could a large chorus be depicted by just a few *choreutai*.⁵⁸⁶ With this caveat in mind, between two and fifteen *choreutai* are most often depicted in pre-Classical art, and from the mid-sixth century on, this range falls consistently between three and eight *choreutai*.⁵⁸⁷

Choruses of various sizes are also attested in a number of literary descriptions. Alcman's first *partheneion* suggests a performance of either ten or eleven girls. The dithyramb is said to have been performed by a fifty-person chorus, as attested by an *epigram* of Simonides.⁵⁸⁸ Fifty

⁵⁸⁵ See R. Crowhurst, "Representations," 205ff. For female choruses, see R. Tölle, *Reigentänze*, 55f; Calame, *Choruses*, 21–5.

⁵⁸⁶ "To the painter, sculptor or maker of figurine it was evidently sufficient to suggest the presence of a plurality of performers and their degree of conformity with the group as a whole...If he did choose or was commissioned to paint a choral performance he abridged the scene." Crowhurst, "Representations," 206–8.

⁵⁸⁷ Crowhurst, "Representations," 206.

⁵⁸⁸ Simonides, *Epigram* 76.

is also the number of daughters of Nereus, who “dance as a chorus” (ἐχόρευσαν) in Euripides’ depiction of the mythical wedding of Thetis and Peleus in *Iphigenia in Aulis*,⁵⁸⁹ as well as those who “sing as a circular chorus” (χόροι μέλπουσιν ἐγκυκλιοῖ) in *Iphigenia at Tauris*.⁵⁹⁰ While the number in a chorus could be larger,⁵⁹¹ most often it was much smaller than fifty.

5. Dancing

Dancing appears to have been a defining element of choral activity, as attested by the earliest depictions of choruses in Epic literature,⁵⁹² the direct and passing statements of ancient commentators, as well as archaeological, epigraphic, and artistic remains. A fundamental relationship between poetry and dance is revealed by the fact that the elemental measure of poetry is the *foot*.⁵⁹³ Moreover, many poems—choral or otherwise—begin with an invocation to join in, or to observe, the *dance* which accompanied the poetry.⁵⁹⁴ Dance is considered to have been such an essential part of choral performance that many scholars when referring to ancient choral activity speak of the “chorus-dance.”

While there was quite certainly a strong connection between choral poetry and dancing, frustratingly little can be determined as to the precise shapes and movements of Greek choruses. Much of the literary testimony for choral dance is extremely general in nature, or from a very late date,⁵⁹⁵ and in many cases not terribly helpful for precise reconstructions of choreography.

⁵⁸⁹ Here the daughters of Nereus are said to “dance as a chorus.” Euripides, *Iph. aul.* 1037–59.

⁵⁹⁰ Euripides, *Iph. Taur.* 425ff..

⁵⁹¹ For instance, Callimachus may describe two choruses in the *Hymn to Artemis*, one of sixty *Oceanides* and the other of twenty Nymphs. Callimachus, *Hymn Art.* 13–7. See Calame, *Choruses*, 23, n. 16.

⁵⁹² That is, the very definition of *chorus* in Epic poetry relates to the act of dancing, or the dancing-floor. See above pp. 144–5.

⁵⁹³ Herbert W. Smyth, *Greek Melic Poets* (London: MacMillan, 1906), xvii–cxxxiv.

⁵⁹⁴ E.g., Sappho, frags. 60 and 65B; Anacreon, Frag. 69B; Pindar, *Ol.* 14.1–20. Hesiod, *Theog.* 1ff.

⁵⁹⁵ For example, it is unclear how accurate are the statements of Roman authors writing in the Imperial period who classify Greek dance movements. They specify a large number of *schemata*, or “brief, distinctive patterns visible in the course of a dance,” including “hand flat down,” “sword-thrust,” “two-foot,” “elbows out,” “spin turn,” and many others. Likewise, they speak of *phora*, which denoted the movement of the hands, feet, or the whole body, and included such movements as “walking, running, leaping, twisting. . . skipping, hopping, etc.” Finally, *deixis* referred

Moreover, there exists nothing in the way of notation in the poetry itself (with the possible exception of the designations *strophe*, *antistrophe*, and *epode*) that would indicate dance steps or patterns. This may be the result of the fact either that choral dances were improvisational in nature, or were so well-known that notation would have been gratuitous.⁵⁹⁶

With literary evidence most often ambiguous and/or deficient, artistic remains often serve as primary evidence with which to reconstruct ancient choral dancing. Extant art from even the earliest periods of Greek history depict choral gestures and postures, and the data set for such art only increases into the Archaic and Classical periods. From such data it is possible to catalogue all kinds of gestures, postures, and movements,⁵⁹⁷ though it is not often that any of these can be associated with particular choral forms and/or dances.

At the same time, artistic evidence presents problems insofar as artistic conventions, as well as the limitations of the artistic medium, often prevent an accurate reconstruction of actual choral movements. On the one hand, Greek art was often “deliberately unrealistic” and concerned as much with “ideal beauty, design, balance, rhythm, linear schemes, and stylization” as with accurate depictions of things that could be seen in real life.⁵⁹⁸ On the other hand, limited

to those movements which portrayed mythical characters, a person, animal, heavenly body, wind, flame, etc. Lillian B. Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece* (London: A. & C. Black, 1964), 25–27.

⁵⁹⁶ I.e., “If the steps and gestures accompanying the choral meters were fairly standardized (allowing perhaps for variations from *polis* to *polis*, like the Morris dance steps from village to village in England), then it is easy to imagine every citizen learning them directly by practice as part of his early education. Such practice would have been an adjunct to athletics and military drills, and no more likely to profit from a notation system than practice in the broad jump or the javelin would have. And if the traditional steps and gestures were then arranged in some pleasing new sequences by way of interpreting the newly composed choral text, then that would have been something for the *chorodidaskalos* to work out with the chorus in the period before the performance, and after the performance to forget about.” Mullen, *Choreia*, 43.

⁵⁹⁷ For example, in his catalogue of evidence for choruses in Greek art, T.B.L. Webster lists a variety of postures, including “forward kick, one knee raised, the other leg bent,” “Arm bent with hand on hip,” “Walk. Legs fairly close together,” and “Arms linked, usually by hand clasping partner’s wrist.” Webster, *Greek Chorus*, 3–4. See also Lillian B. Lawler, “Phora, Schema, Deixis in the Greek Dance,” *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 85 (1954): 148–58.

⁵⁹⁸ Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 17; cf. J.R. Green, “On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens,” *GRBS* 32 (1991): 15–50.

artistic mediums often contributed to these stylized depictions,⁵⁹⁹ which make it difficult to reconstruct choral choreography. For example, if choristers are depicted all the way around a circular vase, it is unclear whether this is meant to represent dancers moving in a circle, or a straight processional line.⁶⁰⁰ Despite the paucity and problematic nature of the evidence for choral dancing, it is possible to make some general observations about choral choreography.⁶⁰¹

A. *General Formations*

Perhaps the most common choral formation was the processional. Such a notion could be inferred simply from the ubiquity of processionals in ancient Greek culture, and their corresponding social, educational, and political importance.⁶⁰² That some choral performances were first and foremost processionals is suggested by the fact that processional-songs (*prosodia*) constituted a distinct choral genre in the Alexandrian collection of lyric poetry, a suggestion which is confirmed by the fact that we have actual examples of choral processional. For example, Pindar is known to have written choral poetry specifically for the *Daphnephoria*

⁵⁹⁹ Lawler summarizes this problem succinctly: “. . . in all periods of Greek painting the figures portrayed are adapted to the space at the painter’s disposal, and poses and details are altered freely to suit the design for that space. If the space is small, a large group of dancers may be reduced arbitrarily to two or three. . . If the space to be filled is circular or approximately so, the dancers may be reduced to one typical performer. Further, in all forms of Greek art, movement, if violent, may be toned down and softened. In the archaic period, complicated poses which the artist could not depict accurately are simplified. In both relief and painting the technique is shallow and pattern-like; the figures seem flattened out and pasted side by side, so to speak, with little or no depth or background, and usually little or no overlapping figures. These conventions, also, must not be taken literally. . . The Greek never solved the problem of perspective. . . Garments are usually not depicted realistically. . . The Greek vase painter often draws figures without a ‘floor line’ . . .” Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 17–19.

⁶⁰⁰ D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb Got Its Shape,” 347.

⁶⁰¹ Others simply lament the fact that a full reconstruction is rendered impossible due to the lack of evidence, and choose not to pursue the choreographic elements of choral poetry. “Habit and amnesia, in effect, combine to keep us from reading the texts of Greek odes in the light of their nature as dance. It is easy, after all, to abandon the attempt by asserting that the details of any particular choral performance have vanished. . . Wisdom has seemed therefore to consist in dismissing the dance component in *choreia* with brief expressions of regret.” Mullen, *Choreia*, 4.

⁶⁰² Burkert: “The fundamental medium of group formation is the procession, *pompe*. . . Hardly a festival is without a *pompe*.” Burkert goes on to argue that the importance of processionals in festival contexts is revealed by the fact that the expression τὰς πομπὰς πέμπειν came to denote the celebration of a festival, and to highlight some of the better known cultic processionals, e.g., Mystery Religions of Dionysus and Demeter, the Panathenaic processional of the *peplos* of Athena, and the *Daphnephoria* festival of the Apollo cult. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 99–101.

processionals for Apollo in Thebes. Processional dithyramps are also perhaps implied by the fact that Pindar gives the epithet “ox-driving” to the dithyramb,⁶⁰³ with the implication that the dithyramb accompanied the procession of an ox to the sacrificial altar. Processional choruses might be described in the description of Achilles’ shield in the *Iliad*, in which it is said that choruses sometimes danced in a circle, and at other times in lines (ἐπι στίχας).⁶⁰⁴

The surest evidence of processional choruses, however, comes in the form of artistic remains which depict them, and in fact, most depictions of choruses appear to represent processional movement.⁶⁰⁵ Representations of processions are typically identified when *choreutai* are depicted in a single-file, and do not appear to be oriented around a tree, altar, *aulos*-player, or some other central object.⁶⁰⁶ Often the choral procession is led by an *aulos*-player, and the *choreutai* are shown with linked hands. In many cases, specific types of processions can be identified, such as wedding processions and sacrificial processions. Circular choral dancing is also widely attested. A range of terms signifying ‘circularity’ are employed in descriptions of mythical choruses, as is Theseus’ chorus of maidens in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Delos*,⁶⁰⁷ the Nymphs in Callimachus’ *Hymn to Artemis*,⁶⁰⁸ and the *Nereides* and *Deliades* as they are described by Euripides.⁶⁰⁹ A circular movement is also likely implied when choruses are said to be oriented around a center-point (typically denoted with a derivative of

⁶⁰³ Pindar, *Ol.* 13.19.

⁶⁰⁴ *Il.* 18.590ff. Insofar as the term στίχας denotes an “ordered line,” the simplest explanation of the term in this context is that it denoted a processional line. For an etymological discussion of the term, see W. Burkert, “Στοιχειόν. Eine semasiologische Studie,” *Phil* 103 (1959): 180ff. The notion that the term describes a processional chorus is supported by Xenophon’s clear use of the term to denote a processional of young persons (Xenophon, *Ephesiaca* 1.2.3). However, its use in this context is taken by some to mean a rectangular shape constituted by lines and rows of *choreutai*, or the movement of “lines which danced in a circle in opposite directions to each other.” Calame, *Choruses*, 40.

⁶⁰⁵ Crowhurst, “Representations,” 283–6; Tölle, *Reigentänze*, 58ff.

⁶⁰⁶ Such depictions are thought to represent *circular* choruses.

⁶⁰⁷ Callimachus, *Hymn Del.* 310ff.

⁶⁰⁸ Callimachus, *Hymn Art.* 170ff.; 237ff.

⁶⁰⁹ Euripides, *Iph. taur.* 427ff.; *Iph. aul.* 1055ff.; Euripides, *Herc. fur.* 687ff.

μῆσος),⁶¹⁰ or said to move around a central object, such as a tree, altar, music-player, or chorus-leader.⁶¹¹

Visual evidence from pre-historic, Archaic, and Classical periods likewise attests to the popularity of circular choruses through each of these periods. The earliest such evidence comes from the island of Crete, a place that had become very closely associated with dancing in antiquity,⁶¹² and that was thought by some to have been the birthplace of dance.⁶¹³ Similar visual evidence from later periods confirms that circular dancing on the Greek mainland. For example, a bronze statuette from Olympia dated to the 8th c. B.C.E. portrays a group of seven dancing women whose arms are interlocked in a circle. From this point on, circular choruses are portrayed on all kinds of artistic mediums well into the Classical period.⁶¹⁴

Some genres of choral poetry may have been particularly associated with circular dances, including most notably the dithyramb. The opening lines from one of Pindar's own dithyrambs suggest that in his day dithyrambs were accompanied by circular dances,⁶¹⁵ which seems to have been the standard practice for a generation or more prior to him.⁶¹⁶ In fact, the dithyramb became so closely associated with circular dancing in the 5th c. that it was often referred to

⁶¹⁰ E.g., *Il.* 18.567ff., 590ff.; *Od.* 4.17ff.; 8.256ff.; Pindar, *Nem.* 5.22ff.; *PMG* fr. Ad. 939P; Hesiod [*Scut.*] 201ff.

⁶¹¹ Callimachus, *Hymn Del.* 310ff.; Euripides, *Tro.* 551ff.; *PLF* fr. inc. 16 LP;

⁶¹² The phrase “the Cretans are dancers” was a stock phrase in literature from the *Iliad* (e.g., 16.617) to Athenaeus (e.g., 14. 630B).

⁶¹³ A fresco from the palace at Knossos appears to depict a woman participating in a circular dance, as do golden rings found in the palace portray women in a circular dance. Terracotta figures from the eastern Cretan port of Palaikastro depict women dancing around a male lyre-player. Likewise, a terracotta group from Cyprus which date to the late 13th c. B.C.E. depicts a circular dance of three individuals around a flute player, while another portrays several figures dancing back-to-back around the trunk of a tree. Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 31–39, 72, fig. 41; Lillian B. Lawler, “The Dancing Figures from Palaikastro—A New Interpretation,” *American Journal of Archaeology* 44 (1940): 106–7; John L. Myres, *Handbook of the Cesnola Collection of Antiquities from Cyprus* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1914); cf. Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 52–4.

⁶¹⁴ For a survey of artistic depictions of circular choruses, see R. Crowhurst, “Representations.”; Tölle, *Reigentänze*.

⁶¹⁵ “Formerly the singing of dithyrambs proceeded in a straight line, and the ‘s’ emerged straggling to men from human lips; but now youths are spread out wide in well-centered circles, knowing well what kind of Bromios-revel Olympian gods likewise by Zeus’ scepter hold in their halls.” Pindar, fr. 70B. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*, 23; D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb Got Its Shape,” 331–51.

⁶¹⁶ Different traditions attributed the origins of the circular dance of the dithyramb to different parties. See D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb got its Shape,” 331–51.

simply as the “circular chorus” (κύκλιος χορός).⁶¹⁷ So, too, is the dithyramb depicted as a “circular chorus” in art, beginning at the end of the 5th c. B.C.E.⁶¹⁸

While processional and circular choruses seem to have been the most common forms of choral choreography, visual evidence exists for choruses of different shapes, including the so-called “V-shaped” choruses, seen depicted on several vases as two approximately equal lines of *choreutai* facing each other,⁶¹⁹ as well as a side-by-side arrangement, in which cases figures are depicted as overlapping in such a way as to indicate an arrangement in pairs, or rows of three or greater.⁶²⁰ While visual evidence suggests such formations, there are no indicators of their existence in extant non-dramatic choral poetry, or in the commentaries of later authors with respect to non-dramatic poetry.⁶²¹

B. Choreography

It seems likely that choral choreography was related to the patterns inherent in the metrical systems, with the rhythms of the words and movements somehow aligned.⁶²² It could

⁶¹⁷ See e.g., Schol. Pindar *Ol.* 13.36. Sir Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (Oxford: University Press, 1989), 32; D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb got its Shape,” 346; B. Zimmermann, *Dithyrambos: Geschichte einer Gattung* (Göttingen: Verlag Antike, 1992), 25.

⁶¹⁸ The so-called “Phrynichos” krater (c. 425) seems to be the “earliest uncontested depiction of a formal dithyramb.” D’Angour, “How the Dithyramb got its Shape,” 347.

⁶¹⁹ It is debated whether the “V-shaped” chorus constituted a distinct choreographic movement, the depiction of the chorus in an intermediate choreographic stage somewhere between a circle and processional, or a conventional way to represent a circular chorus on a difficult medium. Crowhurst, “Representations,” 293–8; Calame, *Choruses*, 37.

⁶²⁰ It is unclear whether such depictions are meant to represent a single row, or several rows, of *choreutai*. As was noted above, artistic conventions allowed for just a few *choreutai* to represent a much larger chorus. Thus, it may be that the depiction of a single row of *choreutai* represents multiple rows. Crowhurst, “Representations,” 286–9.

⁶²¹ Still, some associate these depictions with the somewhat ambiguous term τάξις used to describe choral arrangements in a couple of literary sources. A commentary on the choral poet Aratus uses the word τάξις to define the word ὁμοστροφίχους, used by Aratus himself to describe a group of dancing girls. Anon. *I ad Arat.* 2; Alc. Fr. 33. While τάξις certainly denotes “order,” it may or may not imply “rows.” This term is at the center of the discussion of the choreographic formations of tragic and comic choruses by Pollux.

⁶²² E.g., “The premise without which no further deductions are possible, of course, is that the meter of the words and the figures of the dance flow from the same rhythm. This need not mean anything so literal as that there was one motion of the foot for every syllable of the language. . . Underlying all the refinements it must always have been the case that the dance was blocked out by the same units of composition that shaped the words, and that ultimately the same unifying rhythm was flowing from the brains of the dancers into their voices and muscles and thence out to the eyes and ears of everyone present. The notion of any poet fitting words into the extraordinarily demanding patterns

hardly have been coincidental that the “foot” came to denote the basic unit of a metrical system, most likely owing to the close relationship between the rhythms of the metrical systems *and* of the corresponding dances. To this effect, the ancient commentator Damon claimed that the dance should not “stray beyond the meter of the words” (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 628).

Widespread is the theory that particular metrical systems reflected, conveyed, and/or created particular moods, and that the dances accompanying choral poetry would have been related to the moods that were conveyed in the metrical systems. For example, it is thought that insofar as lyric dactyls engendered a “hieratic” mood,⁶²³ they would have been accompanied by similarly hieratic dances. Likewise, the *dochmiac* meter, which is thought by some to have conveyed feelings of excitement, distraction, or animation, would have been accompanied by frenzied dances. Associating particular meters with corresponding emotional states is conjectural at best, and complicated by the fact that different metrical systems seem to have conveyed very different emotional effects,⁶²⁴ or no emotional connotations at all.⁶²⁵

Choreographic movements may have correlated with patterns of *strophic* and *epodic responsion*. Such a notion is suggested first of all by the words used to denote the stanzas in lyric poetry: *strophe*, and *antistrophe*, which mean to “turn” and “counter-turn,” respectively.⁶²⁶ While testimony for this phenomenon is lacking from earlier periods, many Roman authors attest to the notion that the *strophe* and *antistrophe* indicated the turning and counter-turning of the

of the Greek choral meters and then throwing them away by arranging a choreography completely unrelated to them will not stand up to examination.” Mullen, *Choreia*, 90–1.

⁶²³ Halporn et al., *Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*, 19–20.

⁶²⁴ A.M. Dale, who analyzed the metrical systems in all of Greek tragedy, concludes that “one and the same meter can be used to convey the most diverse effects.” A.M. Dale, *The Collected Papers of A.M. Dale* (ed. T.B.L. Webster and E. Gardner Turner; Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 257.

⁶²⁵ L. Aylen, *The Greek Theater* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1985), 104ff.

⁶²⁶ F. D’Alfonso, *Stesicoro e la performance* (Rome: GEI, 1994).

chorus, and that the *epode* denoted a stationary chorus.⁶²⁷ Lacking more specific notations, however, it is unclear what specifically turning and counter-turning may have entailed.⁶²⁸

6. Musical Elements

By all accounts, music was an indispensable part of lyric poetry generally, and of choral performance in particular.⁶²⁹ After all, lyric poetry was designated as such by the very fact that it was *accompanied* by the *lyre*, *aulos*, or some other instrument. However, the importance of music in choral performance is often lost on a modern audience, for whom the musical elements are less readily accessible than, say, the content of the poems.⁶³⁰ Any attempt to recreate choral music is thwarted at the outset by the fact that no musical notations exist in the manuscript evidence—at least not from the period(s) in which choral art was composed and performed. It is not until the 4th c. B.C.E. that we have any evidence of musical notation of any kind in *any* genre of performance, choral or otherwise.⁶³¹ The absence of musical notation allows for little more

⁶²⁷ As each of these witnesses reiterates basically the same estimation, one example will suffice to demonstrate it: “The ancients sang the praises of the gods in hymns by going around their altars. The first encirclement, to which they set about from the right, they called the *strophe*, and the return made from the left, once the first circle was completed, they called the *antistrophe*. Then they would come to a halt facing the gods and follow through the remainder of the song, which they called the *epode*. . . Others maintain the tradition that in this song of the sacred rites the harmony and course of the universe was being imitated by men. . . Thus the chorus sang in imitation of the harmony and course of the universe. First they would go dancing around to the right, since the sky revolves to the right from east to west. Thence they would go back to the left, because the sun and moon and other wandering stars, which the Greeks call planets, are borne to the left from west to east. In the third part they would sing standing still, since the earth, around which the sky rotates, stands unmoving at the center of the universe.” Marius Victorinus. For these texts, see Mullen, *Choreia*, 225–30. Cf. Färber, *Die Lyrik in der Kunsttheorie der Antike*, 14–19.

⁶²⁸ The chorus may have turned clockwise during the *strophe*, and rotated counter-clockwise during the *antistrophe*. Perhaps less likely is the suggestion that the dance movements of the *strophe* were performed in reverse order during the *antistrophe*. See John G. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome* (London: Routledge, 1999), 124.

⁶²⁹ The evidence of this is incontrovertible. Singing and dancing are frequently paired in Epic poetry. E.g., *Il.* 1.472; 16.179ff.; 18. 490ff.; *Od.* 1.150ff.; 8.246ff.; Hesiod, *Theog.* 1ff.; *Shield of Heracles*, 270ff.; *Hymn to Apollo*, 149; 182ff.; 513ff.; etc. So, too, in lyric and dramatic poetry. Likewise, much artistic evidence which covers a wide span of times and places confirms that choral dancing was very often accompanied by musical instruments and/or singing.

⁶³⁰ West laments the fact that the subject of music is “practically ignored by nearly all who study” Greek culture. West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 160–276; cf. Warren D. Anderson, *Music and Musicians in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), 198–209.

⁶³¹ We are left to speculate as to how music was preserved and transmitted prior to the 4th c. Suggestions include: (1) There was musical notation that is simply no longer extant; (2) Unique melodies accompanied each choral-dance, which were passed down with their melodies through tradition; (3) Music was so general as to be applicable

than speculative guesses as to the nature of choral music in general—scales, modes, melodies, pitch, etc.,⁶³²—and much less regarding the musical character of specific choral compositions.⁶³³

A. *Rhythm, Metrics, and Music*

Something might be said of the rhythmic nature of choral music insofar as it likely depended to some extent on the rhythms of the metrical systems in the poetry. A relationship between metrical and musical rhythm is suggested by what appears naturally to be a positive relationship between the strict binary system of long and short syllables of Greek meter and the natural rhythms of music,⁶³⁴ as well as the meager evidence from Hellenistic and Roman periods which suggests that note values (lengths) corresponded with the lengths of metrical syllables.⁶³⁵ It is not uncommon to explain these rhythms in terms of Western systems of musical notation. For instance, the standard relationship between the two syllable lengths in the Greek system (two short syllables are equal to one long syllable) are thought by some to be easily transposed with quarter-notes, and half-notes, respectively. The transposition of Western musical notation mischaracterizes syllabic values in the Greek system, as it is simply not the case that two short syllables always equaled a long syllable; rather, short syllables often *replaced* long ones in metrical schemes, and *vice versa*. In fact, this often inconsistent relationship between long and short values is exhibited in some of the few extant musical scores, where long syllables could be

to a wide-range of genres and circumstances. See Anderson, *Music and Musicians*, 60.

⁶³² For general analysis of these musical elements, see Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 86–217; West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 129–276.

⁶³³ The hazard of speculating on the nature of ancient music is highlighted by Graham Ley, who remarks that, “It is fair to say here that when the experts disagree so radically, the rest of us have no way forward.” Ley, *Theatricality*, 144.

⁶³⁴ “. . . every Greek poet was his own composer, and no poet would write words in elaborate metrical schemes merely to annihilate and overlay these by a different musical rhythm.” A.M. Dale, *Collected Papers*, 161.

⁶³⁵ “In the surviving fragments of poetic texts furnished with musical notation, the note values are commonly left unspecified, and this is because they were felt to be sufficiently indicated by the metre of the words. When they are specified, they confirm the presumption that short syllables are set on short notes and long syllables on long notes.” West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 130.

given values equal to three short syllables or even four short syllables.⁶³⁶ Moreover, it appears that musical systems were not always based on metrical schemes, but rather may have actually interfered with and/or altered the metrical qualities of poems.⁶³⁷

Whatever may be the value of metrical systems for a study of musical rhythms in Greek choral poetry, it is much more difficult to associate metrical rhythms with non-rhythmic musical qualities. Some scholars take the *emotional* qualities conveyed by the meter as likely indicators of the musical qualities at any given point in the poem.⁶³⁸ So, for instance, the *dochmiac* meter may have helped to communicate an excited or frenzied atmosphere, for which there may have been accompanying frenzied music. However, such an approach is limited by the fact that the emotional states conveyed by metrical systems can only be very roughly approximated, and in the end say very little about what would have actually been heard in precise musical terms.

B. *Musical Accompaniment*

Much can be said about the musical instruments that were used in choral performances.⁶³⁹ The *aulos* and *lyre* appear to have been two instruments which most often accompanied choral performances, individually or together. Like the modern oboe, an *aulos* was a cylindrical pipe, with finger-holes on the sides, and a reed mouthpiece.⁶⁴⁰ It is thought to have produced a

⁶³⁶ See West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 132, n. 11.

⁶³⁷ Plato commented that in his ideal Republic the rhythm of the words would determine the musical rhythms, and not *vice versa*, suggesting that in his day that musical rhythms interfered with the metrics of a poem. Plato, *Rep.* 398d, 400a, d. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing in the 1st c. B.C.E., spells out this problem: “Prose diction does not violate or change round the quantities of any word, but keeps the long and short syllables just as they have been handed down naturally; but music and rhythm alter them, diminishing or increasing them, so that often they turn into their opposites, for they do not regulate their time-values by the syllables but the syllables by the time-values” (Dionysius, *Comp.* 64).

⁶³⁸ Dale, *Collected Papers*, 257ff; Wiliam C. Scott, *Musical Design in Aeschylean Theater* (Hanover, N.H.: Published for Dartmouth College by University Press of New England, 1984); cf. Ley, *Theatricality*, 138–43.

⁶³⁹ For information on the various instruments used in antiquity, see Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 24–85; Anderson, *Music and Musicians*, 171–86; West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 48–128.

⁶⁴⁰ On the *aulos*, see West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 81–109; Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 24–46.

buzzing sound in the lower register, and a piercing sound in the upper register.⁶⁴¹ Such sounds are imagined to have served better for accompaniment than solo performance, and evidence indeed suggests the *aulos* indeed played a subordinate role in choral performance.⁶⁴² The *lyre* was an instrument in which a number of strings of unequal length were stretched between two arms made of animal horns, ivory, or wood.⁶⁴³ Like the *aulos* (and unlike the related *kithara*), the *lyre* is thought to have been an instrument used primarily to accompany lyric poetry, including choral performances.

Poets were often identified with particular instruments, e.g., Terpander the seven-stringed *lyre*,⁶⁴⁴ Alcman the *kithara*,⁶⁴⁵ Simonides the *barbitos*,⁶⁴⁶ etc. Likewise, some of the gods were associated with one or the other—Apollo with the *lyre*, and Dionysus with the *aulos*. Related to this, or perhaps because of it, paeans are thought to have been most often accompanied by the *lyre*,⁶⁴⁷ while dithyrambos are thought to have been accompanied by the *aulos*. It is unclear whether other choral genres were accompanied by one instrument or the other, or both.⁶⁴⁸ While

⁶⁴¹ Although there exist several *auloi* from antiquity, the sound of the *aulos* cannot be recreated with precision due to the fact that the reeds used to force air into the pipe have not survived. The length of the reed, and its position vis-à-vis the pipe of the *aulos*, which produce the variety of sounds, are not known. Aristophanes likens the sound of the *aulos* to the buzzing of wasps (Aristophanes, *Ach.* 864–6), and “wasping” came to characterize the technique for accomplishing this effect. Hesychius, s.v. *sphēkismos*. The list of adjectives offered by Pollux include: “strong, intense, forceful; sweet-breathed, pure-toned; wailing, enticing, lamenting...” Pollux 4.72.

⁶⁴² Athenaeus, for instance, quotes the words of a certain Pratinas, who noted the displeasure of the theater-goers when the *aulos*-players “did not play music to accompany the choruses, as was traditional, but the choruses instead sang to accompany the pipes” (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 617b–e).

⁶⁴³ On the *lyre*, see West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 48–70; Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 47–68.

⁶⁴⁴ He claims to have invented “new hymns” on a “seven-toned *phorminx*,” which was a kind of stringed-instrument. Terpander frag. 6 Campbell.

⁶⁴⁵ *PMG* 38.

⁶⁴⁶ Plutarch, [*Mus.*] 29, 1141c.

⁶⁴⁷ Or a stringed instrument related to the *lyre*, such as the *kithara* or *barbitos*. Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 3

⁶⁴⁸ For instance, Victory-odes are most often said to have been accompanied by a *lyre*, although in five odes the *aulos* and *lyre* seem to have been included. Likewise, processional choruses appear to have been accompanied by the *aulos*, while *encomia* are evidently accompanied by the *barbitos*. Pindar fr. 124d; 125; Bacchylides fr. 20B.1–2; 20C.2. Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 100.

it appears that choral genres were associated with one instrument or the other, both visual and literary evidence testify that both instruments might accompany a chorus at the same time.⁶⁴⁹

The knowledge that chorus sang music that was often, if not always, accompanied by musical instruments, is tempered by the fact that we don't have a good idea of the actual sounds that were produced by either. The instruments themselves cannot be accurately reproduced: the positions of the reeds in the case of the *aulos*, and the tension of the strings in the case of the stringed instruments such as the *lyre*, cannot be recreated. We also know virtually nothing of the melodies that would have been sung, nor many of the theoretical building blocks of music in the 5th c. B.C.E. that could be marshaled to venture a guess.⁶⁵⁰ For example, we know that various *modes* (i.e., the *scales* produced by the progression of musical notes at various intervals) were associated with regional ethnic groups (e.g., Dorian, Aeolian, Ionian, etc.). However, the modes themselves cannot be re-created because the musical intervals that comprised them are not known for certain.⁶⁵¹ So, ancient commentators' remarks on the nature of Greek modes are of virtually no practical benefit in reconstructing the actual music.⁶⁵² As such, a reconstruction of

⁶⁴⁹ For a survey of the literary evidence, see Herington, *Poetry into Drama*, 182. For visual evidence, see Crowhurst, "Representations," 236–8.

⁶⁵⁰ The earliest manuscript on which is preserved musical notation comes from the first half of the 3rd c. B.C.E., which cannot be traced back to the 5th c. with any degree of certainty. The Leiden Fragment (Leiden Inv. 510) happens to contain two excerpts from Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1500–1509; 789–792). The second of the two excerpts comes from a choral *stasimon*. For text, translation, and commentary on the musical notations, see Anderson, *Music and Musicians*, 210–4.

⁶⁵¹ Aristides Quintilianus, sometime in the 2nd or 3rd c. C.E., suggested scale sequences for some of the major Greek *modes*. It simply can't be known whether the intervals as Aristides proposes correspond to the actual intervals of 5th c. B.C.E. Greek music.

⁶⁵² Several commentators associate particular *modes* with emotional states. For instance, Plato notes that the Mixolydian *mode* is mournful, the Dorian *mode* engenders manliness (especially in battle), and the Phrygian *mode* is associated with peaceful activities. Plato, *Rep.* 398e10–399a4. Aristotle agreed with Plato's characterization of the Dorian mode as being "especially manly." Moreover, he associated the Phrygian *mode* with the *aulos* and Dionysian celebration. Aristotle, *Pol.* 8.1342b. Related to this, genres of lyric poetry were associated with particular *modes*. E.g., the *dithyramb*, on account of its Dionysian associations, was associated with the Phrygian mode. *Vit. Soph.* Naturally, then, the associations of particular *modes* with the musical elements of Greek comedy and tragedy are made. Aristoxenus, a pupil of Aristotle's, records that the (mournful) Mixolydian and the (manly) Dorian were associated with tragedy. See Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 262. For discussions of Greek *modes*, see Ley, *Theatricality*, 144–50; cf. Anderson, *Music and Musicians*, 151–8; cf. Csapo and Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 344–345.

the nature of melody and modality in Greek choral performance remains frustratingly out of reach.

VI. Functions of Choruses and Choral Poetry

Scholars agree on the pervasiveness of choral poetry in these periods, but opinions as to the function(s) of the choruses vary. Choral poetry and performances functioned on different levels. On the one hand, the poetry was composed and performed at various personal, civic, and religious events, and the functions of choral performances can be considered in terms of their performative contexts. For example, the victory-ode was performed as part of the formal celebration of the victor of an athletic contest, and functioned at a fundamental level to honor his accomplishments. By contrast, the paean, both in the rudimentary form it took in Epic poetry and in the more developed forms as exhibited by Pindar and others, appears to have functioned primarily as a propitiation to a god in light of some event that had transpired, or was about to transpire (military battle, etc.). Functions of this sort have already been discussed as they relate to particular choral dances, yet still other functions of the chorus can be discerned.

1. Cultic Function(s)

The cultic/religious context(s) for many of the choral performance(s) described thus far have been alluded to, and at this point the extent to which these contexts are brought to bear on the question of the functions of choruses will be considered. Several types of choral poetry exhibit a conspicuous and explicit cultic orientation. The dithyramb, for example, was performed in the context of the celebration of a deity—most often Dionysus—and its content often dealt explicitly with some aspect of Dionysus and his cult. Likewise, the paean appears to have been, both in its earliest improvisational forms and in later, more developed forms,

essentially a formalized address to propitiate a god, most often Apollo. Likewise, various hymns, in both the general and technical sense of the term, are addressed to deities and were likely to have been performed in the cultic festivities surrounding the deity. Other choral forms, such as wedding songs (*epithalamioi*), funeral dirges (*threnoi*), and victory-songs (*epinician*), may not appear at first glance as conspicuously cultic, but do so when considered in light of their performance contexts and poetic content. That is, the content of most choral poetry, regardless of genre, includes invocations to deities, narratives of the gods' attributes and deeds, and stories of human events told in light of their relation to the super-human realm of gods and heroes. Moreover, most choral performances had a cultic dimension insofar as they took place at or near a cultic shrine. So, for example, the victory-odes performed during athletic games were cultic insofar as the games take place under the auspices of a particular god, and in or near the precinct of a god. Likewise, choral performances at weddings and funerals were cultic insofar as the weddings and funerals were themselves cultic events, imbued with cultic rites and objects, and tied up with notions of cultic space and time. Put slightly differently, it could be said that in ancient Greece there were no *secular* events, if by secular one means the absence of myths of the deities, sacred time and space, and the deities themselves. In this sense, choral performances were most often both explicitly religious in terms of their content, and religious by implication of the fact that the contexts in which they were performed were intrinsically religious.

More specifically, Steven Lonsdale has considered the cultic functions of choral performance in light of the pervasive idea in antiquity that singing and dancing constituted one of the characteristic activities of the gods themselves.⁶⁵³ Citing a bevy of Archaic and Classical sources which reflect the idea that gods and semi-divine beings were constantly engaged in the

⁶⁵³ Steven H. Lonsdale, "Homeric Hymn to Apollo: Prototype and Paradigm of Choral Performance," *Arion* 3 (Fall 1994/Winter1995): 25–40.

act of singing and dancing,⁶⁵⁴ Lonsdale suggests that human choral dances constituted ritual emulations of what was perceived to be typical divine activity.⁶⁵⁵ To the extent that choral participants emulated divine activity, they also appear to have believed that they were *participating in* divine activity.⁶⁵⁶ This is suggested by Plato, who implied that choral activity was qualitatively different than ordinary human behavior, and who claimed that choristers were in fact *participating with* Apollo and the Muses as “fellow chorus members.”⁶⁵⁷ Ritual choral singing and dancing entailed a reciprocal cultic function as well, according to Lonsdale, as the gods were dependent on the cultic acts, which included choral dancing, for their very being.

2. Mythological Function(s)

The mythic tradition constituted the shared repository of accounts of the gods, their interactions with one another and with mortals, and the patterns that could be traced across these accounts, through which sense was made of human life in the world. Through these myths were explained the origins of nations and peoples, the nature of political, social, and personal relationships, as the root causes of war, as well as the causes and effects of jealousy, sorrow, joy, etc. Myth was embedded in nearly every facet of ancient life: expressed in poetry, and literature, enacted in public processions, festivals, depicted on murals, frescoes, statues, temple

⁶⁵⁴ Two of the most descriptive examples of divine *choreia* include the *Hymn to Pythian Apollo*, and the introduction to Hesiod’s *Theogony*. See Lonsdale, “*Homeric Hymn to Apollo*,” 39, n. 5.

⁶⁵⁵ Lonsdale considers two descriptions of choral activity in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* to have been “the prototypes of all choral performance.” Aside from the far-reaching extent of this claim, elements of this hymn can certainly be viewed as a reflection of human choral performance. E.g., Artemis leads a chorus of gods, positioned in a “classic ring” formation, with participants linked with hands at the wrist singing and dancing to musical accompaniment, this spectacle all the while being viewed by a captive audience, etc. Lonsdale, “*Hymn to Apollo*,” 28–32.

⁶⁵⁶ That this activity was thought to be somehow *divine* is suggested by the fact that epithets such as “immortal” and “divine” were accorded to choral performers, and to the performance space in which they performed. E.g., “θεῖος ἀοιδός” in *Od.* 4.17; 8.87; etc.; “ἀθανάτους καὶ ἀγήρωσ . . . Ἰάονες ἀθροοὶ εἶεν” in *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 150–51.

⁶⁵⁷ Plato, *Laws* 665a.

impediments, and even the bottoms of drinking glasses. In these ways, the mythic tradition was not only shared, but “imaginatively lived in by virtually every member of society.”⁶⁵⁸

Given the extent to which mythic reflections permeated ancient life, it comes as no surprise that reflections on the mythic tradition should be so prominent in choral poetry. Some of the ways in which the mythical world was brought to the fore through choral performance has been broached in the discussion of specific choral genres. For example, paeans consistently invoked a deity whose presence, guidance, and/or benefaction was sought in relation to some event, e.g., a battle, sea-voyage, etc. Likewise, dithyrambs were oriented thematically around the attributes and deeds of Dionysus, Apollo, and/or Artemis, while an entire genre of hymnic choral poetry was classified on the basis of the fact that praise of a deity constituted the primary focus. In these ways choral poetry was firmly grounded in the mythical world, whose repertoire of stories of the gods and heroes served either as a basis for human praise, or to frame earthly events—marriages, funerals, battles, etc.

The imaginative world of myth often served to give particular meaning to specific events for which the poem was performed (athletic victory, funeral, battle, etc.), by framing them in mythic and symbolic terms. For instance, singing a paean to invoke the presence and protection of a god prior to battle puts the battle itself in a mythic perspective, signaling that the battle consists not only of armies of men on an earthly battlefield, but of the presence and participation of god(s). Likewise, linking an individual or event to a corresponding mythical personage or event (i.e., “mythical-historical analogy”) was one way to frame the individual and/or event in terms of a larger mythical narrative. A good example of this strategy appears in Pindar’s first *Pythian* ode, in which Hieron the tyrant of Syracuse is celebrated for his nearly simultaneous conquests over the Persians, Carthaginians, and Etruscans. In this ode, the conquered enemies of

⁶⁵⁸ Herington, *Poetry Into Drama*, 64.

Hieron are equated with Typhoon, who rebelled against Zeus and threatened the cosmic order of things, and was subsequently banished under Mount Aetna. Likewise, Hieron is implicitly likened to Zeus himself as the victor who promotes and protects the right order of things. Thus, the temporal events of the tyrant, and all those who participate in them, are linked through the victory-ode to the order of things as they are reflected in these mythical accounts.⁶⁵⁹ In each of these ways, choral performances had the capacity to imbue a transitory event with meaning and significance which transcended the temporality of the event itself, by explaining it in terms of the permanent and unchanging world of the divine.

3. Pedagogical Function(s)

Choral poetry also conferred pedagogical benefits upon participants and observers. Such a notion is supported first of all by commentators in antiquity. For example, in *Clouds*, Aristophanes acknowledged the benefit of *choreia* by means of a discussion between the “Just” and “Unjust” Argument about what constituted *archeia paideia*. Just as the Just Argument is recounting educational practices in the glory days of Athens, the Unjust Argument interrupts to argue that this is stuff of “hoary rituals and out-of-date dithyrambic poets” (Aristophanes, *Nub.* 983–4). It is precisely these things, responds the Just Argument, which constituted proper education, as evidenced by the fact that it was these things which reared the men who fought at Marathon (Aristophanes, *Nub.* 986), and precisely what is lacking in contemporary Athens, where “the present youth cannot even do a proper naked pyrrhic dance at the Panathanaea” (Aristophanes, *Nub.* 986–9). Aristophanes makes a similar claim in *Frogs*, where he

⁶⁵⁹ “This analogy links the Greek who participated directly or indirectly in these battles (those who died, those who survived, and the families who mourned or rejoiced) with each other and with the gods who maintain order in the universe, in one great act of harmonious affirmation. . .” Later, Bacon goes on to say that it is “in the act of celebration, shared by performers and audience, that the evanescent moment of victory achieves some kind of permanence and meaning.” Bacon, “Chorus in Greek Life and Drama,” 16, 18.

characterizes the “noble and virtuous citizens” to have been those trained in the choruses (Aristophanes, *Ran.* 728–9).

Plato also offered explicit reflections on the educational benefits of *choreia* (Plato, *Laws*, 653–673a).⁶⁶⁰ In *Laws*, he suggests that the ordered rhythms and melodies of dances provided a means by which citizens could distinguish “order” from “disorder,” a capacity which distinguishes humans from other creatures who have no such perception (Plato, *Laws*, 653e). More specifically, Plato goes on to say that in a chorus citizens model the process of distinguishing the “beautiful” from the “ugly,” the “good” from the “bad,” by imitating states of character. That is, through *mimesis*, citizens learned to take pleasure in and praise noble forms, and reject detestable forms. Through vocal *mimesis*, the soul is nourished; through choreographic *mimesis*, the body is trained.⁶⁶¹ Simply put, the sufficiently “educated” man has been trained in the choruses, while the uneducated man has not.⁶⁶²

Subsequent to Plato’s analysis, many have considered how choral activity may have conferred specific educational benefits through *mimesis*. Aristotle likewise recognized that all poetic forms (he singles out dithyrambic poetry alongside epic, tragic, and comic poetry) are essentially mimetic entities that offer “representations of life.” He argued that poets employ particular combinations of rhythms, words, and harmonies to represent different aspects or qualities of life, just as visual artists may use color and form to represent the likeness of an object. He singles out dancing as representing “by means of rhythmical gestures...character, experiences, and actions” (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1447a).

⁶⁶⁰ cf. Plato, *Rep.* 10.

⁶⁶¹ Plato, *Laws* 669–73.

⁶⁶² Plato, *Laws* 654a–b.

Others in antiquity likewise recognized the possibility for choral performance to engender virtuous behavior through *mimesis*.⁶⁶³ Specifically, a chorus may imitate technical skills such that were employed in the military, or in athletics. For instance, certain choral dances were explicitly related to military maneuvers,⁶⁶⁴ such as the *pyrrhic* dance, which was performed annually at the Panathenaea by cohorts of males of various ages, consisted of choreographic movement which simulated actions on the battlefield.⁶⁶⁵ Whether such a dance was *intended* to instruct males in the art of war, it is not hard to imagine that a symbiotic relationship existed between enacting battle-scenes in the chorus-dance and performance on the battlefield. To this effect, a saying attributed to Socrates claimed that the noblest warriors were considered those who honored the gods most beautifully in the chorus.⁶⁶⁶

4. Social Function(s)

Underlying these ancient notions that choral poetry inculcated participants (and observers) in the social, political, and religious values of the community through *mimesis* seems to be the idea that the content of choral poetry reflected and embodied these values. Insofar as the content of non-dramatic choral poetry reflected the values of a particular community, the chorus could be thought to represent the “voice” of the community, in which proper civic,

⁶⁶³ Athenaeus recognized that choral dancing both reflected and induced virtuous behavior, when recalling Damon, a contemporary of Plato, who claimed that “free, beautiful souls produce songs and dances that resemble them in that respect, and *vice versa*.” In his opinion, choral movement reflected the “nobility and manliness” associated with the words of the poem(s). Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 628 c–e.

⁶⁶⁴ “For the type of dancing in which the choruses engaged in those days was graceful and impressive, and imitated, as it were, the movements of men wearing armor.” Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 628e.

⁶⁶⁵ Plato, *Laws* 7.815a.

⁶⁶⁶ Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 628e–f. The notion that choruses conferred educational benefits on participants remained in the cultural consciousness long after the golden age of choral composition and performance had ended. Polybius celebrated the Arcadians for the fact that children from the earliest age were taught “to sing hymns and paeans,” and Arcadians of all sorts danced in a number of contexts, which led to their distinctive “character, physical formation, and complexion” (Polybius 4.20ff.). Thus, it may be said generally that choruses were thought to educate participants in multiple skills required of a citizen. Mullen, *Choreia*, 70.

political, and religious identities were modeled.⁶⁶⁷ In this vein, Calame has argued that choral dances offered a means by which societal values were transmitted to participants. That is, the myths, values, cultic rituals, community knowledge, etc., which were represented in the choral poetry, and embodied in the choral dance, were assimilated by the participants through *mimesis*.⁶⁶⁸ So, for instance, Calame understands choruses of young women in the Archaic period led by Sappho *et al.*, to be “schools of femininity destined to make the young pupils into accomplished women, through...lessons in comportment and elegance.”⁶⁶⁹ Different sorts of choruses had similarly pedagogical functions, according to Calame, including choruses in Sparta which prepared boys for military service,⁶⁷⁰ choruses of women of marriageable age which prepared them for their spousal roles,⁶⁷¹ and choruses of *ephebes* which prepared them for participation in *pederastic* relationships.⁶⁷²

Very closely related to the idea that choral participation conferred pedagogical benefits is the notion that choruses could perform critical initiatory functions for adolescents. That is, considered within the framework of a structuralist approach to initiation rituals in the tradition of Van Gennep, Levi-Strauss, Turner, Bourdieu, etc., he argues that choruses of young girls, such as those reflected in the fragments of *partheneia* by Alcman, can be identified as *rites de*

⁶⁶⁷ In this way, Stehle characterizes non-dramatic choral poetry as “community poetry,” through which the chorus speaks “for and to the audience...as both reflection of and model for the communal opinion.” Eva Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Nondramatic Poetry in Its Setting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 18ff.

⁶⁶⁸ “By reciting the poems composed by their masters the poets, the chorus-members learn and internalize a series of myths and rules of behavior represented by the material taught—all the more since Archaic choral poetry has to be understood as a performative art, as a set of poems representing cult acts in precise ritual contexts.” Calame, *Choruses*, 231.

⁶⁶⁹ “...we may agree with numerous interpreters of this poetry that most descriptions of the poet and her advice bear on the themes of feminine grace and beauty.” For analysis of these themes in Sapphic poetry, see Calame, *Choruses*, 231–33.

⁶⁷⁰ Calame, *Choruses*, 233–38.

⁶⁷¹ Calame, *Choruses*, 238–44.

⁶⁷² Calame, *Choruses*, 244–49.

passage,⁶⁷³ whereby the social, civic, and religious identity of a community was communicated, and through which participants attained full-fledged membership in the adult community.⁶⁷⁴

⁶⁷³ Such a ritual is defined by three distinct elements: (1) Separation from the “old” state of being; (2) A marginal phase “in between” old and new; and (3) Admission to new status, and reintegration into the community. “It is thus a simple sequence of leaving an old order and joining a new, with a neutral period in between.” Calame, *Choruses*, 12.

⁶⁷⁴ “This particular type of initiation (*rite de passage*) aims to confer on the individual, by a more or less lengthy series of rites, full-fledged membership in the community...It integrates...adolescents...male and female, into the systems and institutions and norms that govern the political, social, cultural, and religious life of the adult community.” Calame, *Choruses*, 11. Rutherford makes a very similar argument about paeans, in terms of their function as initiation rituals for young men. In this way, the *paeon* offers a “precise analogy to the initiatory function of the *partheneion*.” Rutherford, *Pindar’s Paeans*, 115. Rutherford’s analysis depends on his premise that paeans were performed exclusively by young men, a premise for which there is very little positive evidence, and which has been challenged. See Ley, *Theatricality*, 130–1.

Chapter 4: The Dramatic Context of Tragic Choruses: Tragedy

Having considered some of the general trajectories in the study of ancient choral poetry, a partial framework now exists for evaluating in detail the forms and functions of the choruses as they appear in ancient tragedy. As we shall see, many of the particular formal properties of tragic choruses can be gauged in terms of the trajectories of choral poetry broadly construed, including the composition and size of choruses, metrical and dialectical tendencies of choral lyrics, and choreographic and musical elements. In order to appreciate fully, however, the particular forms as well as the functional dynamics of choruses in ancient tragedy, it is necessary to consider the constitutive elements of the tragedies in which they appear. Thus, in this chapter I offer a survey of tragedy in the ancient Mediterranean world, focusing on topics which are particularly germane to the study of tragic choruses, including: (1) the origins of Greek tragedy; (2) tragedy in the 5th c., and developments in the 4th c. and Hellenistic period; (3) the origins of drama in Rome; (4) Roman tragedy; (5) performance contexts in the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods; and (6) the theater in the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods.

I. Origins of Drama

It was noted in the previous chapter that the majority of Classical scholars believe that the origins of tragedy can be traced, however vaguely, to the moment in the history of choral performance when the chorus-leader assumed a role vis-à-vis the rest of the chorus. This view of the origins of tragedy derives ultimately from chapter 12 of Aristotle's *Poetics*, in which he famously claimed that:

... it [tragedy] originated in improvisation—both tragedy itself and comedy. The one [the former] came from the leaders the dithyramb and the other from those of the phallic songs which

still survive as institutions in many cities. Tragedy then gradually evolved as men developed each element that came to light and after going through many changes, it stopped when it had found its own natural form. Thus it was Aeschylus who first raised the number of the actors from one to two. He also curtailed the chorus and gave the dialogue the leading part. (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1449a)

From this, it is widely believed that the improvised dialogic exchanges that took place between the chorus and its leader eventually developed into complex interplays between chorus and non-choral actor such that exist in drama in the fifth century.⁶⁷⁵

The notion that Classical tragedy developed organically from Greek choral poetry can be corroborated by the evidence of the tragic choruses themselves. In the earliest evidence of tragedy, the plays of Aeschylus, the chorus played a prominent role. Considered over and against the evidence of later Classical drama and Roman tragedy in which the chorus' role is increasingly diminished,⁶⁷⁶ the centrality of the chorus in the plays of Aeschylus can be seen as an early stage in the development of the tragic chorus from its entirely choral origins.

Thus, while there is widespread agreement in the choral origins of Classical tragedy, the question remains whether tragedy can be traced in particular to the *dithyramb* and the *satyr-play*. The *dithyrambic* connection is generally accepted given the formal similarities between Classical Greek tragic choruses and the extant *dithyrambic* choruses from the 5th c., as well as the

⁶⁷⁵ Various theories have been advanced which attempt to trace how *exactly* improvised dialogic exchanges amongst the chorus and its leader developed into to the kinds of exchanges between chorus and actor(s) in Classical tragedy. Kranz, for example, argued that insofar as the wholly lyric interactions between the chorus and non-choral actors represent the oldest extant form in tragedy, they must have developed from the earlier practice of lyric exchanges between chorus and chorus-leader. Others have argued that the chorus-leader would have originally responded to the chorus in spoken (i.e., *iambic*) verse, and that the wholly lyric exchanges between the chorus and actor(s) in Classical tragedy were secondary developments to this. E.g., Walther Kranz, *Stasimon: Untersuchungen zu Form und Gehalt der griechischen Tragödie* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1933), 20ff.; A.M. Dale, "The Chorus in the Action of Greek Tragedy," in *Classical Drama and Its Influence* (ed. M.J. Anderson; London: Methuen, 1965), 15; Erich Bethe, "Die griechische Tragödie und die Musik," *N. Jbb* 19 (1907): 81–95.

⁶⁷⁶ See chapter 5, pp. 315–8; cf. chapter 6, pp. 334–7.

Dionysian performance contexts for each.⁶⁷⁷ It is much more difficult, however, to reconcile Aristotle's claim that tragedy also derived from the satyr-play. To begin, satyr-plays are attested only *after* the invention of tragedy.⁶⁷⁸ Moreover, there is a conspicuous lack of formal and/or functional similarities between tragedies and satyr-plays.⁶⁷⁹ Such evidence suggests the possibility that Aristotle was simply wrong on this point.⁶⁸⁰

Others have tried to validate the particulars of Aristotle's claim by locating a common denominator between the satyr-play and the dithyramb, e.g., suggesting that the dithyramb was originally performed by satyrs, or that at some early stage the satyr-play was essentially undifferentiated from the dithyramb.⁶⁸¹ The most common approach is to suppose that when Aristotle said that tragedy originated from both the dithyramb and satyr-play, he really meant that it originated in the Dionysian cult.⁶⁸² Tradition certainly linked the dithyramb with the Dionysian cult, and the dithyrambs themselves admit associations with Dionysus. Likewise, satyr-plays were performed at the Dionysian festivals, and satyrs were long associated with Dionysus.⁶⁸³ Nothing supports the connection between tragedy, dithyramb, and satyr-play more than the fact that each is known to have been performed at Dionysian festivals in and around Athens during the Classical period.⁶⁸⁴

⁶⁷⁷ See chapter 3, pp. 159–60.

⁶⁷⁸ The first physical evidence for satyr-plays comes in the form of vase-paintings from the early 5th c. B.C.E.. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb*, 34, 66–67.

⁶⁷⁹ “All of the evidence from the sixth century on the activities of satyrs suggests revelry and buffoonery... The satyr play in the fifth century followed that bias. Tragedy, however, as represented by the plays of Aeschylus, is a highly developed, complex, and totally serious dramatic form, displaying only the slightest links with Dionysus and completely ignoring his reveling companions.” J. Michael Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), 38.

⁶⁸⁰ E.g., “...above all, it is extraordinary to suppose that the noble seriousness of tragedy can have grown so rapidly, or even at all, out of the ribald satyric drama...” Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb*, 92–93.

⁶⁸¹ See Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual* (Oxford: University Press, 1994), 267–9; Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb*, 12, 20, 96–8.

⁶⁸² E.g., “Tragedy apparently shared with satyr-play and dithyramb a common ancestry in Dionysian ritual, and this is surely what Aristotle means.” Richard Janko, *Aristotle: Poetics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 79.

⁶⁸³ For the primary evidence see Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 89–95ff.

⁶⁸⁴ See below, pp. 210–4. The suggestion that tragedy developed from aspects of the Dionysian cult has prompted a

However, there are numerous problems with the notion that the dithyramb, satyr-play, and tragedy each share a common denominator with respect to a Dionysian orientation outside of the fact that they were often performed in the Dionysian festivals. To begin, dithyrambs were not associated *exclusively* with Dionysus either in terms of content,⁶⁸⁵ or performance context.⁶⁸⁶ The same can be said about satyrs.⁶⁸⁷ Further, it is not at all clear that the tragedies themselves exhibit a Dionysian orientation.⁶⁸⁸ In fact, the tension created by the fact that tragedy was claimed to have been rooted in Dionysian tradition, and the fact that the actual plays express so little that is particularly or explicitly Dionysian, gave rise to the famous ancient expression that tragedy had “nothing to do with Dionysus.”⁶⁸⁹

Thus, on the basis of Aristotle’s claim and the evidence of the tragedies themselves, it seems reasonable that tragedy ultimately derived from Greek choral poetry, while the precise mechanisms by which this occurred remain less clear, as do the particular connections—Dionysian or otherwise—between Classical tragedy, the dithyramb, and satyr-play.

number of attempts to demonstrate various ways in which Dionysian cultic elements manifest themselves in tragedy, including storylines with particularly Dionysian themes, explicit references to Dionysus, descriptions of Dionysian cultic activity, and demonstrations that the dramatic chorus embodies Dionysian ritual.

⁶⁸⁵ Even a cursory glance at the fragments of Pindar and the dithyrambs of Bacchylides reveal that they are not limited to, nor even always oriented around, Dionysian themes. The paucity of evidence simply doesn’t allow for far-reaching statements one way or another, but Bacchylides’ dithyrambs themselves argue against an *exclusively* Dionysian orientation. S. Scullion, “‘Nothing to do with Dionysus,’” *Classical Quarterly* 52 (2002): 127.

⁶⁸⁶ Dithyrambs were performed early on at non-Dionysian festivals, including the Thargelia, Lesser Panathenaia, Prometheia, and Hephaisteia in Athens, the festival in honor of Apollo at Delphi, and a festival for Apollo, Artemis, or perhaps some other god, at Cyrene.

⁶⁸⁷ Scullion, “‘Nothing to do with Dionysus,’” 117.

⁶⁸⁸ Dionysus appears in each of the Athenian tragedies relatively *infrequently* in comparison with Zeus, Apollo, and Athena. Moreover, the billygoat was not sacrificed exclusively for Dionysus; rather, it was one of the most common sacrifices offered in the Greek world.

⁶⁸⁹ “When Phrynichus and Aeschylus developed tragedy to include mythological plots and disasters, it was said, ‘What has this to do with Dionysus?’” Plutarch, *Quaest. Symp.*; Cf. Suda, s.v. “Nothing To Do with Dionysus”: “When Epigenes the Sikyonian made a tragedy in honor of Dionysos, they made this comment; hence the proverb. A better explanation: Originally when writing in honor of Dionysos they competed with pieces which were called satiric. Later they changed to the writing of tragedy and gradually turned to plots and stories in which they had no thought for Dionysos. Hence this comment. Chamaeleon writes similarly in his book on Thespiis.” Cf. Zenobius, V.40: “When, the choruses being accustomed from the beginning to sing the dithyramb to Dionysos, later poets abandoned this custom and began to write ‘Ajaxes’ and ‘Centauris’. Therefore the spectators said in joke, ‘Nothing to do with Dionysos.’ For this reason they decided later to introduce satyr-plays as a prelude, in order that they might not seem to be forgetting the god.”

Finally, it seems unlikely that all of the elements of Classical tragedy as they appear in the fifth-century can be explained exclusively in terms of a derivation from non-dramatic choral performance. Several of the essential features of tragedy (e.g., Messenger speeches, *rhesis* speeches of the protagonists, etc.) likely derived from, and/or were influenced by, different contexts, including Epic poetry,⁶⁹⁰ the Hero-cult,⁶⁹¹ rituals tied to the changing of the seasons,⁶⁹² and/or a particularly Greek fascination for wrestling with the paradoxes of the human condition.⁶⁹³

II. Athenian Tragedy in the 5th c. B.C.E.

1. The Poets

The origins of tragedy in Athens were linked with the figure Thespis, who was constantly cited in antiquity as the founder of tragedy in Athens.⁶⁹⁴ Though most of the details of his life and poetry remain obscure, he was said to have won the first dramatic competition at the Great Dionysia in 534 B.C.E.⁶⁹⁵ Undoubtedly, the high point of Classical Greek tragic poetry comes not long after his inaugural victory, during the last three-quarters of the 5th c. B.C.E. and most closely associated with three poets, Aeschylus (525–456), Sophocles (496–406), and Euripides

⁶⁹⁰ Gerald Else, *The Origin and Early Form of Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965); John Herington, *Poetry into Drama*; Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1992), 8–11; C.A. Trypanis, *The Homeric Epics* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), 59–64, 82–92; S.E. Bassett, *The Poetry of Homer* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), 57–80.

⁶⁹¹ William Ridgeway, *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races* (Cambridge: University Press, 1915).

⁶⁹² Gilbert Murray, *Aeschylus: The Creator of Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

⁶⁹³ F. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (trans. Douglas Smith; Oxford: University Press, 2008).

⁶⁹⁴ E.g., Themistius, *Orat.* 26.316 d: “Did solemn Tragedy with all its trappings and chorus and actors come before the audience at a single moment? Do we not believe Aristotle that first the chorus came in and sang to the gods, then Thespis invented prologue and speech...?” Diogenes Laertius, 3.56: “As of old in tragedy formerly the chorus by itself performed the whole drama and later Thespis invented a single actor to give the chorus a rest...” Contrast the conflicting testimony of John the Deacon, said to have been taken from Solon’s (no longer extant) treatise *Elegies*: “The first performance of tragedy was introduced by Arion of Methymna...Charon of Lampsakos says that drama was first produced at Athens by Thespis.” John the Deacon, *Comm. in Hermogenem* (Rabe, *Rhein. Mus.* lxxiii (1908), 150). For a compilation of the primary sources, see Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 89–102.

⁶⁹⁵ Dating of the source, the *Parian Marble*, is uncertain: “From when Thespis the poet first acted who produced a play in the city...” The *Parian Marble*.

(480–406). The fact that their works are the only tragedies from this period to survive signals their pre-eminence, which seems to have had less to do with the quantity of work they produced, though it was substantial, than with the quality of their poetry as judged by later poets.⁶⁹⁶

Aeschylus' first play, *Persians*, was first performed in Athens in 472 B.C.E., and the five remaining extant plays of Aeschylus, out of 80 or 90 that are thought to have been written by him, were probably composed sometime before 458 B.C.E. Sophocles was at least as prolific as his older contemporary. Approximately 125 plays are ascribed to him, of which seven are extant. In terms of the number of victories at the Great Dionysia, Sophocles was much more successful than his predecessor.⁶⁹⁷ The youngest of the three Classical tragedians, Euripides wrote over 90 plays, but won the prize at the Dionysia only a handful of times. His apparent unpopularity in his own time is tempered by the fact that his popularity seems to have increased with later generations.⁶⁹⁸

2. The Quasi-Historical, Quasi-Mythical Setting of Tragedy

While only a small fraction of material produced during the 5th c. has survived, the extant texts allow for something to be said of the tragic form. Surviving Classical tragedies are most often situated in a quasi-historical, quasi-legendary setting, such as the period of the Trojan War, or the remote past of Argos, Thebes, and Athens.⁶⁹⁹ Tragic plots drew from a fairly limited collection of stories of gods and heroes, well-known stories that had been told and re-told for

⁶⁹⁶ Their superiority is made explicit by a number of ancient commentators, and evidenced by the fact that their statues were erected outside the Lycurgean theater in Athens.

⁶⁹⁷ Conflicting evidence suggests that Sophocles won between 18 and 24 prizes, while Aeschylus won 13 times.

⁶⁹⁸ This is attested by the fact that: (1) many more of his plays survive (nineteen) than those of his contemporaries; (2) he is the most frequently quoted, and parodied, tragic poet in history; (3) scenes from Euripidean drama are more often depicted in 4th c. art than scenes of Aeschylus or Sophocles; (4) his plays were more often reproduced in the 4th c. and beyond; and (5) the explicit praise of later commentators. See G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth-century Tragedy* (ΑΘΗΝΑΙ: ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ: 1980), 32–33; A.D. Trendall and T.B.L. Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama* (London: Phaidon, 1971), 1ff.

⁶⁹⁹ An exception is Aeschylus' "historical" tragedy *Persians*, which takes place less than a decade before it was performed and details with the events surrounding the defeat of Athens by the Persians.

centuries in the form of Epic cycles that have come down under the names of Homer and Hesiod, lyric poetry of the sort that was discussed in the previous chapter, and in other poetic forms.

Because of this, tragic poets were limited to a certain extent by the mythic traditions available to them (e.g., Oedipus always kills his father, Medea is always married to Jason, etc.) as well as the themes which are conveyed in these traditions, e.g., retribution for past crimes, outmaneuvering an opponent, the return home of the lost, and the coming of age, etc. As a result, tragic audiences would have already known, to a certain extent at least, the casts of characters and plot trajectories for a given tragedy.⁷⁰⁰ Yet, it was hardly the case that plots were simply regurgitated. On the contrary, significant details of the plot, and the plot-structure itself, varied from tragic poet to poet. In this way, tragic poets were “continuously recasting tales already known to the audience” in such a way that the audiences’ experiences of the plots were constantly being reshaped.⁷⁰¹

By re-casting stories of their common past, Athenian tragic poets were able to say something specific about the social and political circumstances of 5th c. Athens.⁷⁰² By couching contemporary social and political concerns (e.g., the aftermath of the destruction of Athens by the Persians in 480, subsequent Athenian victory at the Battle of Salamis, plagues, the rise of the Delian league, the Peloponnesian War, and notable political figures such as Pericles) in the mythic re-tellings of the narratives of an heroic past, the social and political commentaries of the Classical tragedies could be expressed just beneath the surface of the narrative.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰⁰ The fourth-century comic poet Antiphanes claims: “...tragedy is a blessed art in every way, since its plots are well known to the audience before anyone begins to speak. A poet need only remind. I have just to say, ‘Oedipus,’ and they know all the rest: father, Laius; mother, Jocasta; their sons and daughters; what he will suffer; what he has done. Antiphanes, Fr. 191K.

⁷⁰¹ See Peter Burian, “Myth into *Mythos*: The Shaping of Tragic Plot,” in *Greek Drama* (ed. Harold Bloom; Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2004), 321–54.

⁷⁰² “Although the heroic figures seem prehistoric, the treatment, through them, of contemporary issues is of immediate concern.” Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 6.

⁷⁰³ See D.M. Carter, *Politics of Greek Tragedy* (Bristol: Phoenix Press, 2004); Michael X. Zelenak, *Gender and*

3. Structural Features

Classical tragedy exhibited fairly consistent structural features. A tragedy typically began with an introductory speech, or *prologue*, of one or more of the protagonists. This was followed by the *parodos*, or entry of the chorus through the side passageway into the *orchestra*. The *prologue* and the *parodos* each served as an introduction of the main characters to the audience, and as a means of conveying background information for the plot. The introduction of the chorus and characters was followed by a number of *episodes* or *acts* (Gk: *episodia*), which consisted of a number of longer sections of monologue and/or dialogue between a character and the chorus, or between (non-choral) characters. Episodes were consistently separated by *stasima*, which were lyric odes sung by the chorus, or *lyric dialogues* between the chorus and one or more characters. The *exodos*, which consisted of the exit of the chorus from the stage, most often marked the end of the play.

Additional elements common to many, but not all, Classical tragedies included: (1) *Messenger speeches* in which an unimportant character conveys information about dramatic off-stage events, such as a murder, battle, or rape;⁷⁰⁴ and (2) emotionally charged lyric exchanges

Politics in Greek Tragedy (New York: Peter Lang, 1998); Christian Meier, *Die politische Kunst der griechischen Tragödie* (München: Beck, 1988); J.K. Davies, *Democracy and Classical Greece* (London: Fontana, 1978).

⁷⁰⁴ It was a convention in Greek tragedy that particularly violent events (battles, murders, etc.) did not transpire before the eyes of the audience, but rather took place off-stage and out of view, a convention which likely arose out of both practical considerations, e.g., the difficulty in depicting large-scale battles, and a sense of decorum that such scenes ought not to be represented. At any rate, the details of such events were typically conveyed to the audience by means of a stock “messenger” character. The Messenger’s speech was not only a common element in Greek tragedy in the Classical period, but adhered to various formal and stylistic conventions. For example, the messenger was consistently portrayed as an outsider, not otherwise connected to the protagonists, and defined in vague terms according to his or her vocation (messenger, servant, shepherd, etc.), while the speech itself was typically preceded by a dialogue, and conveyed exclusively with past-tense verbs. James Barrett, *Staged Narrative: Poetics and the Messenger in Greek Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Irene J.F. deJong, *Narrative in Drama: The Art of the Euripidean Messenger Speech* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); C.W. Marshall, “How to Write a Messenger Speech,” in *Greek Drama III: Essays in Honour of Kevin Lee* (ed. J. Davidson, F. Muecke, P. Wilson; London: University of London, 2006), 203–21; J.M. Bremer, “Why Messenger-Speeches?” in *Miscellanea Tragica in Honorem J.C. Kamerbeek* (ed. S.L. Radt, J.M. Bremer, and C.J. Ruijgh; Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1976), 29–48.

between characters and the chorus (*kommoi*) on the subject of some extraordinary dramatic event.

The structural dynamics in Classical tragedy were not only driven by the juxtaposition of these different formal features, but by the interaction of the distinctive features within each, including: (1) parts performed by actors and those performed by the chorus; (2) metrical variations between different parts, e.g., lyric and non-lyric (spoken) lines; and (3) monologues and dialogues, etc. The use and functions of these formal elements were not static in the Classical period, and in fact a great deal of change can be observed from Aeschylus to Euripides.

Aristotle claimed that prior to Aeschylus tragedy consisted of just two characters: one actor and a chorus. He goes on to say that Aeschylus increased the number of actors from one to two, and that Sophocles further increased the number of actors from two to three.⁷⁰⁵ Regardless of the accuracy of Aristotle's claim that Aeschylus and Sophocles were solely responsible for these additions, the extant plays do reflect a change in the number and function(s) of actors through the Classical period.

Aeschylus' plays include exchanges between two non-choral characters, confirming that at least at the time of Aeschylus, two actors were required to produce a tragedy. Moreover, in Aeschylus' earlier plays, no more than two actors seem to have been required. By contrast, the later plays of Aeschylus, and the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, exhibit three non-choral characters, lending to the notion that a third actor had been added, whether or not it was Aeschylus or Sophocles who first did so.⁷⁰⁶ Sophocles and Euripides appear to have increased the frequency with which three characters—and thus, three actors—appear simultaneously in a scene. The increase in the appearance of multiple actors in any given scene coincides with a

⁷⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.* 1449a.

⁷⁰⁶ An alternative tradition suggests that it was Aeschylus, not Sophocles, who added the third actor. Themistius, 26, 316D.

decrease in the appearances of, and importance of, the chorus as a dramatic character, a phenomenon which will be discussed in much more detail in the following chapter.

III. Greek Tragedy in the 4th c., and into the Hellenistic Period

1. Evidence of the Tragic Form in the 4th c., and Hellenistic Period

Evidence of the tragic form in the 4th c. B.C.E. and the early Hellenistic period is extremely scanty and scattered. With the possible exception of the *Rhesus*, a tragedy of unsure provenance, authorship, and date, which has come down under the authorship of Euripides, not a single tragedy survives intact that can be confidently dated in the 4th–1st c. B.C.E. Rather, the literary evidence of Hellenistic tragedy consists of fragments which are preserved in papyri⁷⁰⁷ and by later authors.⁷⁰⁸ The fragmentary literary evidence is complemented by the depiction of dramatic scenes on papyrus fragments, artwork on pottery from Southern Italy,⁷⁰⁹ mosaics, sculptures, and terra-cottas that represent dramatic characters and scenes, and the opinions of contemporary and later commentators.

The dearth of evidence for tragedy in the 4th c. and in the Hellenistic period, coupled with the belief that Athens was weakened politically and financially in the wake of the Peloponnesian War, has prompted many scholars to suppose that tragedy suffered a severe decline in popularity and influence after the death of Euripides.⁷¹⁰ Such a view is supported by the testimony of

⁷⁰⁷ The fragments of Hellenistic drama are compiled in *TrGF* vols. 1 and 2 (= B. Snell, R. Kannicht, and S. Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1971).

⁷⁰⁸ The majority of information is provided in Aristotle, *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*; Stobaeus, *Anthologium*; and Athenaeus. For the quotations and information provided by other commentators, see Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies*, 26.

⁷⁰⁹ Scenes from various Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedies are depicted on several vases. See T.B.L. Webster, "South Italian Vases and Attic Drama," *CQ* 42 (1948): 15–27; cf. Webster, "Fourth-Century Tragedy and the Poetics," *Hermes* 82 (1954): 294–308; Trendall and Webster, *Illustrations of Greek Drama*, 1ff.

⁷¹⁰ E.g., under the heading "Decline of Tragedy and Old Comedy," Reinhold suggests that "in the catastrophic environment of the Fourth Century B.C., tragedy ceased to be a significant, dominant literary form." Meyer Reinhold, *Classical Drama: Greek and Roman* (Great Neck, N.Y.: 1959), 176; Cf. H.D.F. Kitto, "Le Déclin de la Tragédie à Athènes et en Angleterre," in *Le Théâtre tragique: Études de G. Antoine et al. réunies et présentées par J. Jacquot*. (Paris: 1962), 65–73. Others speak of the decline of *serious* drama in the 4th c. E.g., Xanthakis-

Aristophanes and Aristotle, who lambast the inferiority of contemporary tragic poets in comparison with their 5th c. forebears,⁷¹¹ the fact that reproductions of 5th c. plays began to be performed alongside new ones, and a Roman literary tradition in which Hellenistic tragedians were excluded from the pantheon of great Classical poets.⁷¹²

Despite the lack of extant tragedies, we know of several prolific Hellenistic tragic poets in Athens, such as Carcinus, who is said to have written 160 plays, and won eleven victories at the Dionysia,⁷¹³ Astydamos, who composed 240 plays and is said to have won fifteen times,⁷¹⁴ along with several others.⁷¹⁵ Whatever might be said about the quality of these tragedies vis-à-vis those of the 5th c., the prolific output of Athenian tragic playwrights in the 4th c. suggests that the popularity of tragedy in Athens in this period did not decline, but rather grew.⁷¹⁶ The increasing popularity of tragedy is also suggested by the fact that many of the tragic titles known from this period deal with topics that were unknown in the 5th c., as well as the fact that permanent stone theaters were constructed across the Mediterranean throughout the Greek world during the Hellenistic period.

The curious case of the *Rhesus* warrants special consideration. An intact tragedy, it was included in various ancient manuscript traditions with the plays of Euripides, although there is considerable doubt that Euripides in fact composed the play, on the basis of both internal and

Keramanos, *Studies*, 6–14.

⁷¹¹ “The tragedies of our most recent playwrights are characterless... The older poets made their characters talk like statesmen... those of today make them talk like rhetoricians.” Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450a–b. Cf. Aristophanes, *Ran.* 89; cf. *Ran.* 86ff.; *Ach.* 140; *Thesm.* 168–70; *Pax* 802–17.

⁷¹² For example, Dionysius Halicarnassus, Cicero, and Quintilian each present lists in which only these three tragedians are listed.

⁷¹³ *TrGF* 70 T 1, 2.

⁷¹⁴ *TrGF* 60 T 1, 3–7.

⁷¹⁵ E.g., Theodectes, who wrote 50 plays, and won eight victories, and Aphareus, who wrote 35 plays, and won twice at the City Dionysia and twice at the Lenaia. See Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies*, 20.

⁷¹⁶ “Despite the paucity of evidence, there is good reason to believe that tragedy flourished in the Hellenistic period and remained much more important than our evidence and the powerful influence of Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, which seems to announce the ‘death of tragedy’, might have suggested.” Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation*, 432. Cf. P.E. Easterling, “The end of an era? Tragedy in the early fourth century,” in *Tragedy, Comedy, and the Polis* (ed. Alan H. Sommerstein et al.; Bari, Italy: Levante Editori, 1993), 559–69.

external evidence.⁷¹⁷ Scholarship seems evenly divided between attributing the text to a very early, or very late, period of Euripides' career, and attributing it to a 4th c. imitator of Euripides.⁷¹⁸ The lack of a consensus as to the authorship and date prevents us from using the *Rhesus* as a sure source of Hellenistic tragedy. Yet, because it very well may represent an example of 4th c. tragedy, it is most often included in discussions of tragedy in this period.

The next largest extant tragic text which can be dated with a reasonable degree of certainty to the Hellenistic period consists of 267 fragmentary lines of a tragedy called *The Exagoge*, by a poet named Ezekiel,⁷¹⁹ preserved in the works of three Church Fathers.⁷²⁰ Centering around the story of Moses, this text was most likely written by a Jewish citizen of Alexandria,⁷²¹ and composed sometime between the end of the 3rd c. and the middle of the 2nd c. B.C.E.⁷²²

⁷¹⁷ On external grounds, scholars note the doubts expressed by ancient authors that the text was in fact written by Euripides. In terms of internal evidence, scholars note the deviation from dramatic norms as evidenced in Euripides' other extant plays, something which is admitted even by those who adhere to the notion that Euripides composed it. For a presentation of all of the external evidence relating to the author, provenance, and date of the *Rhesus*, see William Ritchie, *The Authenticity of the Rhesus of Euripides* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 1–59. Cf. Gilbert Murray, *The Rhesus of Euripides* (London: George Allen & Co., 1913), v–xii.

⁷¹⁸ See Murray, *Rhesus*, v–xii; Ritchie, *Authenticity of the Rhesus*, 1–59; D. Ebener, *Rhesos: Tragödie eines unbekanntes Dichters* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1966).

⁷¹⁹ The most comprehensive study of this text is H. Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1983). Cf. Carl Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors. Vol. 2: Poets* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989).

⁷²⁰ The *Exagoge* is preserved in three ancient sources: (1) Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 9, containing all of the extant fragments, which were likely taken from Alexander Polyhistor; (2) A part of the prologue is found in Clement *Strom.* 1.23.155; and (3) A description of the Phoenix is found in Eustathius, *Comment. in Hexaemeron* (PG 18.729). Jacobson, *The Exagoge*, 36–7.

⁷²¹ Scholars are almost unanimous in their belief that the text was composed in Alexandria, in spite of the lack of external evidence to corroborate this suggestion.

⁷²² It was clearly written after the composition of the LXX, from which Ezekiel quotes extensively, and before Polyhistor (fl. 80–30 B.C.E.), who appears to have had knowledge of it. See Jacobson, *The Exagoge*, 40–47. Cf. M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1973), 200, 303, n. 383; A. Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1963), 797; E. Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 80–1. However, numerous dates have been proposed, some of which are centuries later than the 1st c. B.C.E. *terminus ante quem* proposed here. For a comprehensive summary of the various dating proposals, see Jacobson, *The Exagoge*, 6.

2. Formal Elements of Tragedy in the Hellenistic Period

By considering these texts alongside the fragmentary and artistic evidence, and assessing all of this evidence against the testimony of later authors who comment on the state of tragedy in this period, it is possible to trace at least a general outline of the structures and characteristics of Hellenistic tragedy.⁷²³ The mythic plots of Classical tragedy remained important, though an interest in past and recent historical events seems to have framed storylines to a much greater extent than in Classical tragedy.⁷²⁴ Moreover, the plots of tragedy in this period appear to have eschewed political topics, which is widely understood to be a result of the diminished political importance of Athens,⁷²⁵ and the elimination of the *polis* as the central political entity in Greece.

Largely on the basis of Horace's claim that Hellenistic drama consisted of a five-act structure, and the fact that each of the tragedies of Seneca seem to reflect a five-act structure, many scholars have attempted to identify the remnants of five-acts in the Hellenistic tragic fragments. While the structural formation of Hellenistic tragedy may remain a mystery, several formal elements seem to have continued in Hellenistic tragedy, including the Prologue, Messenger speeches, and discernible *episodes*. At the same time, several changes are evident. For instance, Horace laments the fact that catastrophic events, which had never in Classical drama been represented on-stage, were more commonly depicted in Hellenistic tragedy.⁷²⁶ Many more changes can be discerned with respect to metrical and dialectical tendencies, choreography, and the form of the chorus, etc., the details of which as they relate to the chorus will be taken up in the next chapter.

⁷²³ See Heinrich Kuch, "Continuity and Change in Greek Tragedy Under Postclassical Conditions," in *Tragedy, Comedy, and the Polis*, 545–557; Easterling, "The End of an Era?" 559–69; Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies*, 3–20.

⁷²⁴ Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies*, 15–18.

⁷²⁵ By eschewing political issues, 4th c. and Hellenistic tragedy corresponds with the apolitical nature of Middle and New Comedy. Kuch, "Continuity and Change," 551.

⁷²⁶ Horace, *Ars* 185–8.

IV. Drama in Rome

1. Origins of Roman Drama

A discussion of the origins of drama in Rome must deal with both the history of: (1) Greek drama in Italy prior to the 3rd c. B.C.E., which was part and parcel of a much larger and longer process by which Greek culture was adopted, appropriated, and adapted in the mainland of Italy;⁷²⁷ and (2) native traditions, most of whose origins, features, and connections to Roman drama remain obscure.

The origins of drama in Rome can be explained in large part in terms of a continuation of Greek drama in Roman territory. Greek theatre was prevalent in the coasts and islands of southern Italy (*Magna Graecia*) at least as early as the 6th c. B.C.E., as the cultural influence of the Greeks in this area at the time would suggest, and as the evidence of Greek theatres in the area confirms.⁷²⁸ Among other Athenian playwrights known to have traveled far and wide to showcase Athenian drama, Aeschylus is said to have staged dramatic performances in Sicily in the early 5th c. B.C.E.⁷²⁹ Vases uncovered in southern Italy dating from the early to the middle of the 4th c. B.C.E., which most likely depict scenes from Old and/or Middle Comedy, testify to the continuing presence of the Greek dramatic tradition there.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁷ The nature of Greek influence and adaptation in Rome is the subject of countless studies. For an introduction, see Gordon Williams, *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

⁷²⁸ For a survey of the Greek theatres in southern Italy see F. Sear, *Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 48–9. On the performance of Greek drama in southern Italy see B. Gentili, *Theatrical Performances in the Ancient World: Hellenistic and Early Roman Theatre* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1979) rev. and corr. Version of the Italian edition: *Lo spettacolo nel mondo classico: Teatro ellenistico e teatro romano arcaico* (Rome and Bari, 1979), 16–32.

⁷²⁹ See Alan H. Sommerstein, *Greek Drama and Dramatists* (London: Routledge, 2002), 33.

⁷³⁰ Although they were originally thought to depict some kind of farcical light drama (e.g., *phylakes*) of indigenous peoples, these vases are widely thought to depict performances of Attic Old and/or Middle Comedy. See J.R. Green, “Notes on phylax vases,” *NAC* 20 (1991): 49–56; O. Taplin, *Comic Angels and Other Approaches to Greek Drama through Vase-Paintings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

In addition to a long history of the Greek dramatic tradition in Southern Italy, indigenous dramatic traditions of the Etruscans,⁷³¹ Oscans,⁷³² and early Romans⁷³³ are attested, which ought to have influenced early Republican Roman drama, even if the links between them are hard to trace with much precision.⁷³⁴

The traditions associated with the emergence of drama in Rome are ambiguous. On the one hand are reports of the Etruscan and Oscan heritage of Roman drama, including the Oscan heritage of Ennius, an early Roman poet and tragedian,⁷³⁵ Oscan vocabulary in the tragic poet Pacuvius,⁷³⁶ and the essentially Etruscan pre-history of Roman drama presented by Livy.⁷³⁷ Alongside these are explicit links between early Roman drama and the Greeks, such as Suetonius' claim that the first Roman playwrights were "half-Greeks,"⁷³⁸ and the Greek origin of names in early Roman drama.⁷³⁹ Nothing, however, indicates the supreme influence of Greek drama in Rome more than the fact that, beginning with Livius Andronicus, the undisputed originator of drama in Rome, the earliest Roman tragedians (and comedians) were producing

⁷³¹ Etruscan paintings from the 6th c. B.C.E. onward reveal a festival culture, which included "processions, sport contests, gladiatorial combats, games in the circus, the play of *phersu*, cult dances accompanied by a player on a wind instrument...mime-like performances, and mimetic dances by masked players." Gesine Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre* (Cambridge: University Press, 2011), 24.

⁷³² Later Roman authors speak of a popular farcical drama, *fabula Atellana*, wherein stock characters are presented in a kind of burlesque comedy. For the primary evidence relating to *fabula Atellana*, see Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 18–9, 29, 169–77; cf. Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience* (London: Routledge, 1991), 5–6.

⁷³³ E.g., the "Fescennine verses" were "improvised and responsive, and they contained jesting and abuse; they were regarded as rustic and were performed regularly at weddings and harvest festivals..." Horace, *Ep.* 2.1.139ff.; cf. Cicero, *Resp.* 4.10.12

⁷³⁴ On the Etruscan influence on Roman drama, see H.D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 12ff. Cf. J.G. Szilágyi, "Impletæ modis saturate," *Prospettiva* 24 (1981): 2–23; J.-P. Thuillier, "Sur les origines étrusques du théâtre romain," in *Spectacula II: Le theater antique et ses spectacles. Actes du colloque tenu au Musée Archéologique Henri Prades de Lattes les 27, 28, 29 et 30 avril 1989* (ed. C. Landes and V. Kramérovskis; Paris: Lattes, 1992), 201–8.

⁷³⁵ He was said by Gellius to have "three hearts," meaning he knew Greek, Latin, and Oscan. Gellius, *NA* 17.17.1.

⁷³⁶ Pacuvius, *Trag.* 64; 215 R³ = 59; 224 W.

⁷³⁷ Livy traces the history of Roman drama back to scenic performances performed in Rome by Etruscan performers in the mid-4th c. B.C.E., which were emulated by Roman youths and to which was added comic banter, and which was later refined by professional actors (*histriones*). Livy 7.2; cf. Valerius Maximus, 2.4.4. A summary of Livy's history is offered by Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 30–4.

⁷³⁸ Suetonius, *Gramm.* I.2.

⁷³⁹ E.g., Varro, *Ling.* 7.82; Ennius, *Trag.* 208–10 R.³ = 256–8 W.

adaptations of Greek dramas almost exclusively, a phenomenon which appears to have continued throughout the Roman period. Why this was the case is well beyond the scope of my inquiry; however, the ways in which Roman authors adapted Greek originals are extremely important, especially with respect to the use (or lack of use) of choruses in their reproductions.

2. Roman Playwrights

Livius Andronicus, one of the “half-Greek” playwrights mentioned by Suetonius, was universally regarded as the founder of Roman drama, though little of him or his plays are known for certain. Nearly all modern sources agree that he first produced a play (or plays) in Rome in 240 B.C.E. at the *ludi Romani*,⁷⁴⁰ although nothing is known about the drama except the fact that it was a Greek play presented in the Latin language. He is said to have produced several such adaptations of Greek plays, and several titles which survive, e.g., *Achilles*, *Ajax*, *Trojan Horse*, *Aegisthus*, etc., also suggest this. As only a few lines are preserved, very little can be said about how exactly Livius adapted these plays. Cicero claimed that Roman playwrights translated into Latin “word for word,” and this is assumed by many modern commentators simply to have been the case.⁷⁴¹ Yet, in the same paragraph Cicero implies the possibility that to the originals could be added “our own opinions and style of composition...”⁷⁴² Inferences about Livius’ transformation of Greek drama into Roman dress are often made on the basis of later Roman playwrights, who similarly adapted plays from Greek predecessors, though certainly not “word for word.” Though it is now generally agreed that they must have combined together “new” and “old” elements, the exact nature of this process, i.e., whether Livius and subsequent Roman

⁷⁴⁰ Cic. *Brut.* 72; *Tusc.* 1.3; *Sen.* 50. Alternative dates are offered by Livy, who claims that he flourished in the middle of the 4th c. B.C.E., and Accius, who reports that Livius first produced drama in Rome in 197 B.C.E.

⁷⁴¹ E.g., Pighi prefers to speak of Roman drama as “Greek literature in Latin.” Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 35, n. 78.

⁷⁴² Cicero, *Fin.* 1.2.4. For a discussion, see Mario Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 1–51; Cf. Niall W. Slater, *Plautus in Performance: The Theatre of the Mind* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1985).

authors “copied,” “transcribed,” “transposed,” “adapted,” and/or “modified,” Greek predecessors, is the matter of a longstanding debate.⁷⁴³

A number of Roman playwrights are mentioned after Livius, including notably Gnaeus Naevius⁷⁴⁴ (270–201 B.C.E.), who is considered the first native Roman dramatist. In addition to composing a number of epics dealing with major events in the history of Rome, composed a number of tragedies and comedies. Only six titles, and about sixty verses of tragedy, and more than thirty titles, and 130 lines of comedy, are known.⁷⁴⁵ While Livius and Naevius composed both tragic and comic works, those who followed them specialized in one or the other. From the mid-3rd c. B.C.E., it is possible to trace the distinct contours of Roman tragedy and comedy.

3. Roman Tragedy

A. Types

Two types of Roman tragedy are typically distinguished: (1) *Tragoedia*, also known as *Fabula Crepidata*;⁷⁴⁶ and (2) *Praetextata*. The former consists of Roman tragedy that follows very closely the conventions of Greek tragedy with respect to structure, style, and content. Many tragedies of this type consist of adaptations of known Greek tragedies.⁷⁴⁷ The latter type, while similar to Greek tragedies in terms of structure and style, differed primarily in terms of content.

⁷⁴³ “Scholars’ answers range from the view that Greek-based Roman plays are basically literal translations of Greek models to the opinion that Roman poets used Greek dramas as starting points, but transformed them into plays suitable for Roman audiences rather freely and might sometimes not even have used a specific Greek dramatic model.” Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 282–92.

⁷⁴⁴ See Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 194–204.

⁷⁴⁵ From what little remains, it is possible to draw connections between both his predecessor Livius, and his dramatic successors, most notably Plautus and Terence. George E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy: A Study in Popular Entertainment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), 40–2.

⁷⁴⁶ W. Beare, *The Roman Stage: A Short History of Latin Drama in the Time of the Republic* (3rd ed.; London: Methuen & Co., 1964), 70–84, 119–27; F. Dupont, *L’Acteur-Roi ou le Théâtre dans la Rome Antique* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1985), 163–211; E. Fantham, “Roman Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Latin Literature* (ed. S. Harrison; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 116–29; A.J. Boyle, *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 2006); A. Schiesaro, “Republican Tragedy,” in *A Companion to Tragedy* (ed. R. Bushnell; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 269–86.

⁷⁴⁷ Roman *tragoedia* were recognized as Greek-style Roman drama even in antiquity. See Cic. *Fin.* 1.4–7; *Acad.* 1.10; *Opt. Gen.* 18; *Tusc.* 2.48–50; Gellius, *N.A.*, 11.4

That is, while Roman *tragoedia* created or adapted the storylines of Greek drama, the storylines of Roman *praetextata* revolved around the early history of Rome, and/or Roman public figures and affairs.⁷⁴⁸

Both *tragoedia* and *praetextata* are associated with each of the major names in Republican Roman drama (Livius Andronicus, Naevius, etc.). However, no tragedies from the Republican period survive intact, and the evidence consists entirely of fragments, the testimony of commentators, and the known titles. As such, frustratingly little can be said with certainty about tragedy in the Republican period. Of the 100 or so known Roman *tragoedia*, most have Greek titles or Latin translations of Greek titles. Mythical characters from the Greek tradition (gods, heroes, kings, etc.) seem to have been central to most plots in *tragoedia*, and the formal structural elements of Greek tragedy (prologue, monologue, dialogue, episodes, choral *stasima*, messenger speeches, etc.) most likely constituted the major structural elements.⁷⁴⁹

B. *Seneca's Tragedies*

Clearer data exists for tragedy in the Imperial period in the form of eight complete tragedies of Seneca, and two plays attributed to Seneca but widely thought to have been written by another playwright after his death.⁷⁵⁰ No firm evidence exists with which to date any of his tragedies, though most scholars presume they were composed either during his exile (41–49 C.E.), or sometime thereafter, perhaps during the time that the young Nero was under his tutelage, or after he had become chief advisor to Emperor Nero (54 C.E.).⁷⁵¹ Despite questions

⁷⁴⁸ See the descriptions of the content of Roman *praetextata* in Diom. *Ars* 3, *Gramm. Lat.* 1, pp. 489.14–490.7, 490.10–14; Euanth. *Fab.* 4.1–3; Donat. *Com.* 6.1–2. Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 140–4.

⁷⁴⁹ Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 138 (esp. n. 33), 320–325.

⁷⁵⁰ That is, ten titles attributed to Seneca have been passed down, but two, *Hercules on Oeta* and *Octavia*, are not likely to have been written by him. See R.J. Tarrant, *Seneca's Thyestes* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 8–9.

⁷⁵¹ E. Fantham, *Seneca's Troades* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 9–14; R.J. Tarrant, *Seneca's Thyestes*, 10–3; J.G. Fitch, “Sense-Pauses and Relative Dating in Seneca, Sophocles and Shakespeare,” *AJPhil* 102 (1981): 289–307.

about precise dates of any of the plays, they are typically grouped together on the basis of similarities in metrical features,⁷⁵² topical allusions,⁷⁵³ and/or stylistic tendencies.⁷⁵⁴

Each of Seneca's plays is clearly an adaptation of a Greek tragedy (*Fabula Crepidata*), and the titles betray the Greek originals (*Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*, *Trojan Women*, *Phoenician Women*, *Phaedra* (= *Hippolytus*), *Medea*, *Thyestes*, and *Hercules*). And yet, even a cursory look at Seneca's plays reveals significant departures from the eponymous antecedents. For example, in structural terms, Seneca's tragedies follow a strict five-act rule, and the traditional beginning and endings of the play in Classical tragedy, the choral *parodos* and *exodos*, are excised.⁷⁵⁵ Moreover, there appear to be discrete scenes within the five acts, often separated by brief choral interludes, which give a distinctive structural form to Seneca's tragedy.

In addition to these structural dynamics, Seneca's tragedies exhibit a keen interest in relating the thoughts, motivations, and struggles of individual characters.⁷⁵⁶ Moreover, there is a conspicuous absence of the traditional gods and goddesses. In fact, only in the prologue to *Hercules Furens*, itself of questionable Senecan authorship, does a divine being (Juno) appear. Although characters summon the gods on occasion, there is not nearly the same kind of preoccupation with their roles in human affairs in Seneca as in Classical tragedy.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵² O. Herzog, "Datierung der Tragödien des Seneca," *Rh. Mus.* (1928): 51–104.

⁷⁵³ P. Grimal, *Sénèque, ou la conscience de l'Empire* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1977), 424–28. Cf. Herzog, "Datierung," 83.

⁷⁵⁴ E.g., the frequency of enjambment, or the use of sense-pauses. See Fitch, "Sense-Pauses," 289–307.

⁷⁵⁵ See chapter 6, pp. 336–7.

⁷⁵⁶ This is reflected in the fact that in comparison to Classical tragedies, individual monologues, soliloquies, and asides take up a much larger percentage of the overall number of lines in Seneca's plays, dialogues are much less frequent, and the role of the chorus is reduced. This focus on the inwardness of the characters, which comes at the expense of the reduction of interest in interactions between characters, has been explained as a result of: (1) a fascination across authors of the Imperial Age in the exploits of particularly influential individuals, e.g., the Epic heroes of Homer, Alexander the Great, and the Roman Emperors; and (2) Seneca's interest in promoting his Stoic philosophical views which centered on the individual: controlling passions, conforming emotional and behavioral patterns with nature, and considering the *psyche* as the locus of philosophical and ethical reflection. Emily Wilson, *Seneca: Six Tragedies* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), xxi.

⁷⁵⁷ Clarence W. Mendell, *Our Seneca* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 139–151.

Such differences prompt questions as to how Seneca arrived at his adaptations. For example, how much in Seneca's tragedies represents original work, and to what extent did he replicate previous versions? If Seneca relied on previous versions, what did they look like? Did he have access to manuscripts, or did he rely on his memory of past performances?⁷⁵⁸ The problems associated with identifying the traditions to which Seneca had access prior to the composition of his own plays is brought to bear on the matter of those elements in Seneca's plays that are unique vis-à-vis the Greek originals. That is, several trends can be identified in Seneca's plays, though it is unclear whether these elements are attributable to the ingenuity of Seneca, or to the tradition of Roman drama which Seneca shared.

V. Tragic Performance Contexts

1. Festivals in the Fifth Century

In and around Athens during the Classical period, dramatic performances took place exclusively under the auspices of festivals given in honor of Dionysus, most notable among them the Great Dionysia, the Rural Dionysia, and the Lenaia.⁷⁵⁹ From sometime in the 6th c. B.C.E.,⁷⁶⁰ until the late Imperial period, Athens hosted a five or six day festival during month of *Elaphebolion* (mid-March through early-April), in honor of Dionysus: the "Great Dionysia,"⁷⁶¹ or, the "City Dionysia."⁷⁶² Not least among the many social, political, and religious events that

⁷⁵⁸ See R.J. Tarrant, "Senecan Drama and Its Antecedents," *HSCP* 82 (1978): 213–63.

⁷⁵⁹ The Anthesteria, another large Dionysian festival, likely did not include dramatic performances until the 4th c. B.C.E..

⁷⁶⁰ Although Dionysian events surely predated the 6th century, the Great Dionysia seems to have originated with the institution of tragic performances in 501 B.C.E., and comedic performances in 486 B.C.E. The establishment of performances at the Great Dionysia was associated in antiquity with the ruler Peisistratus and Thespis in 534 B.C.E.. However, the "Fasti" inscription suggests that dramatic performances at the Great Dionysia were not initiated until 501 B.C.E. *I.G.* ii² 2318.

⁷⁶¹ Aristotle *Ath. Pol.* lvi; *I.G.* ii² 654, 682.

⁷⁶² Thucydides, 5. 20; *Dionusia ta en astei*, Demosthenes, *Mid.* 10.

surrounded the festival, and took place during the festival itself, were the performances of the dithyramb, satyr-play, tragedy, and comedy.

Several events took place in the theatre on the day immediately prior to the official commencement of the festival.⁷⁶³ The first official day of the festival was given to the procession (*pompe*) of the statue of the god, and to the sacrifices, the *sine qua non* of any Greek, Hellenistic, or Roman festival. Dramatic performances took up most of the remainder of the festival. The regular order of the dramatic events is uncertain, and during times of war there is even less certainty.⁷⁶⁴ Likely the dithyrambic competitions of five men's and five boys' choruses took place during the second day, and during each of the next three days, tragedies and satyr-plays were performed, with each day given to one playwright who was responsible for producing three tragedies and one satyr-play.⁷⁶⁵ On the final day of the festival, five comedies, produced by five different playwrights, were performed.

It seems that in the Classical period, *new* plays were typically performed at each of the festivals. However, on rare occasion plays were reproduced and performed again in the following years, either at the City Dionysia, Lenaia, one of the Rural Festivals, or elsewhere in

⁷⁶³ These include a public announcement of the manumission of slaves, a parade of armored war-orphans who had reached age of service, libations in honor of the beginning of the military season poured by the generals for each of the ten *phylai*, the announcement of a variety of public honors, and a procession of the statue of Dionysus which recreated the mythical advent of Dionysus into the City. For this procession (not to be confused with the procession which took place on the first day of the festival), *epheboi* carried the statue of Dionysus from the Dionysian temple to a temple near the Academy, on the road leading to Eleutheria, the mythical home of Dionysus. In the evening, after sacrifices were offered and hymns were sung, the *epheboi* brought the statue into the theatre by torchlight. In addition to these social, political, and religious events, the poets who were presenting plays in the Dionysia, and the actors who were performing in them, would offer a kind of preview of the upcoming performances.

⁷⁶⁴ E.g., compare the sequence of events envisioned by Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 107; Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 31; Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 62.

⁷⁶⁵ The *archon* of the festival was in charge of choosing the playwrights, and chose each playwright one year prior to the performance. See Rush Rehm, "Festivals and Audiences in Athens and Rome," in *Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre* (ed. Marianne McDonald and J. Michael Walton; Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 187.

the Greek speaking world,⁷⁶⁶ either because they were not well-received the first time,⁷⁶⁷ or because of popular demand.⁷⁶⁸

Much less is known about the *Lenaia*, an older festival held in (or around) Athens⁷⁶⁹ in honor of Dionysus during the winter month of *Gamelion* (roughly January). Inscriptional and literary evidence confirms that the *Lenaia* included a procession, sacrifices, as well as dramatic performances.⁷⁷⁰ The earliest known performance of a comedy occurred in 442 B.C.E., and the earliest tragedy a decade later.⁷⁷¹ In addition to the fact that comedies may have predated tragedies at the *Lenaia*, additional evidence suggests that comedy was more integrally related to the *Lenaia* than was tragedy. For example, more comedies were performed than tragedies, and the well-known Classical tragic poets, with the exception of Sophocles, seem never to have produced tragedies at the *Lenaia*.⁷⁷²

Individual Greek demes are known to have held smaller festivals in honor of Dionysos, the Rural Dionysia, which usually took place during the month of Poseidon (December), and which likewise included a procession,⁷⁷³ sacrifices, and dramatic performances. Little is known about the dramatic performances themselves at the Rural Dionysia, including exactly where they

⁷⁶⁶ See Sebastiana Nervegna, “Staging Scenes or Plays? Theatrical Revivals of ‘Old’ Greek Drama in Antiquity,” *ZPE* 162 (2007): 14–42.

⁷⁶⁷ For example, Euripides produced two versions of *Hippolytus*, and perhaps *Autolycus* and *Phrixus*. See Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 100–103. See also Nauck, *Fragm. Trag.*² pp. 215, 441, 627.

⁷⁶⁸ E.g., popular demand was said to be the reason that Aristophanes produced *Frogs* twice.

⁷⁶⁹ The question of the location for the festival is a matter of some debate. Most sources, some of which are of an extremely late date, locate the festival in the “Lenaion”, which was said to be in the *agora*, though there is no archaeological evidence to support this. See Demosthenes, *Cor.* 129. Cf. Hesychius (5th c. C.E.), Photius (9th c. C.E.).

⁷⁷⁰ For a comprehensive summary of the primary evidence relating to the *Lenaia*, see Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 22–26.

⁷⁷¹ This dating is based on the inscriptional victory-lists of comedic and tragic actors. *I.G.* ii² 2325

⁷⁷² Two tragic poets presented two tragedies apiece, but produced neither a dithyramb nor a satyr play, while five different comic poets each presented one comedy. D. Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 212–222. Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 38–39.

⁷⁷³ The procession centered around a group of revelers carrying a phallus on a pole. What little we know of this procession comes from Aristophanes’ parody of it in *Acharnians*, and what may be images of this procession on 4th c. South Italian vase-paintings. Aristophanes, *Ach.* 241–79. See T.J. Smith, “The Corpus of Komast Vases: From Identity to Exegesis,” in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama* (ed. Eric Csapo and Margaret Miller; Cambridge: University Press, 2007), 48–76.

took place, at what point tragedies were first performed at such festivals, the schedule of events, etc.⁷⁷⁴ Nearly all of the remaining literary, inscriptional, and archaeological evidence comes from the 4th c. B.C.E. or later, confirming that tragic and/or comic performances took place at Rural Dionysia in several demes in the 4th c. B.C.E., and suggesting their popularity in the rural demes during this period.⁷⁷⁵ Festivals in the rural demes continued into at least the 1st c. C.E.⁷⁷⁶

Close as the connections were between the Dionysian festivals and dramatic performances in Athens and its environs, such performance contexts outside of Attica are less clear. Dramatic performances were included in festivals for other deities, such as a late 5th c. festival for the Olympic gods in Dion,⁷⁷⁷ and the festival for Athena at Coronea.⁷⁷⁸ In the 4th c., tragic choruses performed in Cyrene in honor of Artemis, Apollo, or perhaps Apollo Iatros,⁷⁷⁹ and in the 3rd c., dramatic performances were a part of festival of the Soteria in Delphi, the

⁷⁷⁴ Possible sites may have included Ikarion, on the basis of a reference to *choregoi* on an inscription, which suggests that dramatic performances occurred there already in the 5th c. B.C.E., and Thorikos, at which there are remains of a theater which imply the performance of drama as early as the 6th c. B.C.E.

⁷⁷⁵ Eleusis, Icarion, Aixone, Acharnai, Aigilia, Collytus, Glyphada, Paionia, Peiraeus, Phyla, Rhamnous, and Salamis. There is archaeological evidence for 4th c. theatres (perhaps earlier) at Rhamnus, Ikarion, Euonymon, and Argos. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens: Performance Space and Theatrical Meaning* (Cambridge: University Press, 1999), 25–35; Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 63; cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 42–49.

⁷⁷⁶ An anecdote offered by Plutarch suggests that this was the case (Plutarch, *Epicurum* 1098 b), as does perhaps a frieze on the church of *Hagios Eleutherios* in Athens from sometime in the 1st c. B.C.E.–1st c. C.E. which may depict a scene from a Rural Dionysia. Ludwig Deubner, *Attische Feste* (Berlin: Heinrich Keller, 1932), 248ff. For detailed analyses of some of the Rural Dionysia in the Hellenistic and Roman Republican periods, see Ian Rutherford, “*Theoria* and Theatre at Samothrace: The *Dardanos* by Dymas of Iasos,” in *Greek Theatre and Festivals* (ed. Peter Wilson; Oxford: University Press, 2007), 279–293; Charles Crowther, “The Dionysus at Iasos: Its Artists, Patrons, and Audience,” in *Greek Theatre and Festivals*, 295–334. For a detailed analysis of the Dionysia in Delos see G.M. G.M. Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Hellenistic Drama* (London: Athlone, 1967).

⁷⁷⁷ D.S. (Diodorus Sic.?!?!?) 17.16.3

⁷⁷⁸ *TrGF* I DID B 12.

⁷⁷⁹ *SEG* 9, 13; *SEG* 48, 2052. These inscriptions, each of which are dated to 335 B.C.E. and describe the yearly expenditures of the civic officials charged with the maintenance of sacred spaces, mention expenses related to the maintenance of dithyrambic and tragic choruses. The association of dithyrambic and tragic choruses with Dionysian festivals elsewhere lead many to conclude that this inscription implies that a cult of Dionysus was flourishing in Cyrene in the late 4th c. B.C.E.. However, there are no archaeological, epigraphic, or literary remains of a precinct of Dionysus in Cyrene prior to the first-century B.C.E.. It is likely, therefore, that the choruses mentioned in these inscriptions performed in honor of another god, such as Artemis, Athena, or Iatros (Apollo), each of whom are mentioned explicitly, and for whom there are temple remains in Cyrene dated to the 4th c. B.C.E.. See Paola Ceccarelli and Silvia Milanezi, “Dithyramb, Tragedy—and Cyrene,” in *The Greek Theatre and Festivals*, 185–214. Cf. F. Chamoux, *Cyrène sous la monarchie des Battiades* (Paris: de Boccard, 1953), 271; A. Laronde, *Cyrène et la Libye hellénistique. Libykai Historiai* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1987), 335.

festival of Heraia in Argos, the festival of Naia in Dodona,⁷⁸⁰ and the Dionysia in honor of Serapis in Alexandria.⁷⁸¹ That the theatrical spaces themselves were not in all places and times the sacred space of Dionysos is confirmed by the fact that the theatres of Cyrene and Delos were constructed in sanctuaries of Apollo, as was perhaps the theatre at Syracuse.⁷⁸² Likewise, the theatre in Isthmia was dedicated to Poseidon, in Oropos to the hero Amphiaraus, in Pergamum to the Attalid rulers, and in Samos to Hera.⁷⁸³

A. *Who Attended Festivals?*

On the basis of the vulgarity of the dramas, and the fact that comedic poets most frequently address the audience as “the men of Athens”, it was once fashionable to argue that women and children were excluded from attending dramatic performances.⁷⁸⁴ Yet, a number of clues in the dramas themselves, and the testimony of later authors, suggests that Athenian youth⁷⁸⁵ and women were likely to be audience members for dramatic performances.⁷⁸⁶

⁷⁸⁰ This evidence comes from a 3rd c. B.C.E. victory list of a tragic actor from Tegea. W. Dittenberger, ed., *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* (3rd ed., 4 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 1080.

⁷⁸¹ Lightfoot, “Nothing to do with the *technitai* of Dionysus?” in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (ed. Pat Easterling and Edith Hall; Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 221.

⁷⁸² Ceccarelli and Milanezi, “Dithyramb,” 198. Cf. Scullion, “Nothing to do with Dionysus,” 114.

⁷⁸³ Scullion, “Nothing to do with Dionysus,” 102–37.

⁷⁸⁴ For a comprehensive summary of the primary sources for the composition of the theatre audience, see Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 286–305. Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 268–270.

⁷⁸⁵ For example, in the *parabasis* of *Peace*, Aristophanes addresses both men and youths (Aristophanes, *Pax* 765–6), while in *Frogs*, Aeschylus claims that Euripides is ruining the youth, among others, by making them sit through his plays (Aristophanes, *Ran.* 1050–1). In Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates includes children among those who were negatively affected by dramatic rhetoric (Plato, *Gorg.* 502b–d). Likewise, Aristotle, by arguing that youths ought not be allowed to attend comedies until they had reached an age when they would be immune from their detrimental effects, suggests that youths were, in fact, allowed to do so at the time of his writing (Aristotle, *Pol.* 7.1336b).

⁷⁸⁶ Dionysian festivals were notable for being generally inclusive of women, and there are specific examples which suggest that women attended the theater. Aristophanes’ description of a scene in which the women in the audience had escaped having the sacrificial barley-meal thrown on them by the servant implies that women were members of the actual audience (Aristophanes, *Pax* 962–7). A late 5th–early 4th c. scholiast on Aristophanes relates the decree of a certain Phylomachus, who had ordered that women be separated from men in the theatre (On *Ekkles.* 22). For a recent and comprehensive treatment of women in the ancient theatre, see David Kawalko Roselli, *Theater of the People: Spectators and Society in Ancient Athens* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2011), 158–194. See also Simon Goldhill, “Representing democracy: women at the Great Dionysia” in *Ritual, Finance, Politics* (ed. R. Osborne and S. Hornblower; Oxford: University Press, 1994), 347–69; Cf. Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 78–82; A.J. Podlecki, “Could Women Attend the Theatre in Ancient Athens?” *Ancient World* 21 (1990): 27–43.

Moreover, foreigners, slaves, and the poor also seem to have been ordinary members of theatrical audiences in the Classical period.⁷⁸⁷

B. *Festival and Dramatic Personnel*

In Classical Athens, the responsibility for managing festivals, including the Great Dionysia, fell to the *archon eponymous*.⁷⁸⁸ Alongside his festival duties relating to the processions, sacrifices, opening and closing ceremonies, etc., the *archon* was charged with selecting the poets to write the plays, as well as the *choregoi*, who were largely responsible for funding and producing the dramatic productions.

It is unclear how the *archon* decided which playwrights would be chosen to present in the Dionysia, though the poets perhaps read extracts of their dramas to the *archon* for consideration.⁷⁸⁹ Whatever the process, the objective of the poet was to be “granted a chorus,”⁷⁹⁰ which meant that the *archon* would fund the performance of his play by allotting to him a fully-funded chorus of citizens to perform in them. If the poet was not granted a chorus, he could not present his play(s) at the City Dionysia.

Funding the dramatic performances was the responsibility of the *choregos*, a wealthy citizen who was chosen each year by the *archon*. This selection process was part and parcel of the system of *leitourgia* in antiquity, whereby wealthy citizens were called upon to fund various

⁷⁸⁷ The regularity which with foreigners attended the theatre in Athens is clear from surviving evidence in the plays themselves. It is tacitly suggested by Aristophanes in *Acharnians*, when he highlights the fact that there are no foreigners in the theatre during the Lenaia (Aristophanes, *Ach.* 501–508). Likewise, in Plato’s *Gorgias*, Socrates laments the “unflattering” effect of dramatic rhetoric upon “... women, and men, both slave and free...” (Plato, *Gorg.* 502b–d; cf. Plato, *Laws* 700c–701a). Finally, Theophrastus speaks of the “Shameless Man” who would buy tickets for foreign guests, and then bring his children and their pedagogue instead (Theophrastus, *Char.* 9.5). On foreigners in the theatre, see Roselli, *Theater of the People*, 118–157.

⁷⁸⁸ So named because the year in which he served as the *archon* was named after him. A similar position existed at the *Lenaia*, the *archon basileus*.

⁷⁸⁹ Plato, *Laws* 7. 817d.

⁷⁹⁰ Aristototle, *Poet.* 5.

activities of the state, including the construction of warships (*trierarchos*), funding of various festivals (*gymnasiarchos*), etc.⁷⁹¹

As many as eight *choregoi* were required for every festival as each of the 3 tragic poets, and 5 comic poets, was assigned a *choregos* and chorus. Of the many financial obligations required of the *choregos* in any given year, which included expenses related to stage attendants, security personnel, scenery, stage props, and perhaps the costumes, masks, and actors' props,⁷⁹² funding the chorus was the most expensive. The chorus required a professional trainer (*chorodidaskalos*), a task which could be performed by the poet himself,⁷⁹³ perhaps an assistant (*upodidaskalos*), as well as funding for the outfitting and training of twelve, fifteen, or twenty-four chorus members,⁷⁹⁴ and the musician(s).

Early on, poets seem to have played the lead roles, and perhaps several of the minor roles, in their own productions,⁷⁹⁵ while hiring a professional actor (or actors) to play the other roles.⁷⁹⁶ At some point in the middle of the 5th c., protagonists began to be chosen by the state (perhaps by the *archon*) and assigned to perform for the plays of one tragedian, or one comedian.⁷⁹⁷ At this point the responsibility for paying the actors also shifted from the playwrights to the state.

Despite the paucity of evidence in the Classical period, a competitive environment for the dramatic elements of the festival(s) can be assumed on the basis of the competitive nature of the

⁷⁹¹ For a discussion of *leitourgia* as it related to festival productions, see Peter Wilson, *The Institution of the Khoregia: The Chorus, the City, and the Stage* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 21–49.

⁷⁹² It isn't clear which items were paid for by the *choregos* and which items were the responsibility of the playwrights, or actors. See Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 67.

⁷⁹³ Aeschylus is purported to have trained his own choruses. Athenaeus, i. 22 a. Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, 25.

⁷⁹⁴ Comic courses included 24 performers. The number of tragic chorus members in the 5th century is a matter of some debate. See chapter 5, pp. 244–5.

⁷⁹⁵ Aristototele, *Rhet.* 3 1; Plutarch, *Sol.* 29. See Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 74; Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 94.

⁷⁹⁶ Schol. Aristophanes, *Nub.* 1267; Schol. Aristophanes, *Eq.* 537.

⁷⁹⁷ Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 74–75; Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, 27–28.

other elements of Hellenic festivals (e.g., athletic, choral, and musical⁷⁹⁸), as well as inscriptional evidence and the testimony of commentators which confirms that post-Classical dramatic performances were competitive.⁷⁹⁹ It is thought that the highest honors were awarded to the *choregoi* of tragic performances, and that they received prizes commensurate with those given to the *choregoi* of dithyrambic choruses, or to the winners of athletic competitions,⁸⁰⁰ while the dramatic poets, as well as the actors and the choruses themselves, also received awards.⁸⁰¹

2. Performance contexts in the 4th c. and into the Hellenistic Period

A. Proliferation of performances

Abundant architectural, epigraphic, and literary evidence indicates that tragedy continued as a popular art-form not only in Athens, but also in the lands introduced to Greek art-forms as a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great and his successors. The number of theatres in the Hellenistic period increased dramatically in the lands conquered by Alexander the Great and his successors, attesting to the popularity and influence of the Greek theatre in these places.

Although it is not possible to determine with absolute certainty what precisely was performed at most of these theatres, epigraphic evidence of tragic contests, poets, and actors in Athens, Delos, Delphi, and in several other cities,⁸⁰² suggests that performances of tragedies were taking place in some or all of these theatres during the Hellenistic period, likely alongside other Greek

⁷⁹⁸ The dithyrambic contests, for example, were competitive events about which much more is known. See, e.g., Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 77–9; Robin Osborne, “Competitive festivals and the polis: a context for dramatic festivals at Athens,” in *Tragedy, Comedy and the Polis*, 21–37; cf. David H.J. Larmour, *Stage and Stadium* (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1999), 1–55.

⁷⁹⁹ See, e.g., Larmour, *Stage and Stadium*, 1ff.

⁸⁰⁰ Rush Rehm, “Festivals and audiences,” 189.

⁸⁰¹ So much can be gathered from the evidence of victory-lists on monuments erected after the festivals, which included not only the *choregos* but also actors and choruses. Much more information is preserved regarding the process of judging dramatic contests (e.g., the random selection of the judges from the ten Athenian tribes, and the role of the audience in influencing the judges’ decisions, etc.) than the awards themselves. See Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 70–125; Helen Foley, “Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy,” *CP* 98:1 (2003): 1–7; Larmour, *Stage and Stadium*, 1ff.

⁸⁰² See Sifakis, *Studies*, 24–30.

dramatic art-forms, e.g., comedies, dithyrambs, satyr-plays, etc.⁸⁰³ Despite the proliferation of dramatic performance outside of Athens in the 4th c., there is no reason to suppose that Athens was no longer the center for the production of Greek drama, but remained so until the rise of Greek-style drama in Italy in the beginning of the 3rd c., when the center of gravity begins to shift to Rome.

B. *Re-Orientation of the Festivals*

Drama in the Classical period was strongly associated with, though not confined in all areas, to Dionysian festivals, and the association of drama with Dionysus remained strong into the Hellenistic period. Philip of Macedon and Alexander the Great each instituted Dionysian festivals in recently conquered cities (e.g., Olynthus in 348 B.C.E. and Dion in 335 B.C.E.), which likely included dramatic performances, in order to celebrate their military conquests.⁸⁰⁴ Theocritus speaks of the “sacred games of Dionysus,” and professional troupes of actors worked under the patronage of Dionysus throughout the Hellenistic period.⁸⁰⁵ And of course, Dionysus continued to be the patron deity of the Great Dionysia in Athens, and throughout many of the demes in Attica well into the Imperial Roman period. Dionysus may not have held the exclusive rights to drama, but in many ways Dionysus extended his influence with the expansion of Greek culture in the Hellenistic period.⁸⁰⁶

In the early Hellenistic period, festivals (Dionysian or otherwise) appear to have become less exclusive in terms of the events that took place therein. In contrast to the exclusively dramatic festivals of the 5th c. in Athens and its environs, or the festivals in which *athletic*

⁸⁰³ The testimony of Roman Republican authors concerning Livius Andronicus and the origins of drama in Rome provides more certain evidence that Greek-style tragedies were performed in Rome at the beginning of the 3rd c. B.C.E. and through the Republican period. See above, pp. 204–5.

⁸⁰⁴ Rehm, “Festivals and Audiences,” 190.

⁸⁰⁵ *Technitai Dionysou*

⁸⁰⁶ See Lightfoot, “Nothing to do with the *technitai* of Dionysus?” 209–224.

contests pre-dominated the festivities,⁸⁰⁷ there is evidence that dramatic, athletic, and otherwise musical competitions occurred concurrently during (at least some) festivals in the Hellenistic period.⁸⁰⁸

At about the same time, the festivals themselves also became more closely aligned with ruling political powers, and in particular the rulers' cults. As such, tragic performances at such festivals became associated with rulers and their cults. Performances began to be performed under the auspices of festivals organized in honor of rulers,⁸⁰⁹ and actors' guilds were sometimes explicitly associated with rulers and their cults.⁸¹⁰ The integration of dramatic performances with rulers' cults only increases through the Hellenistic period, and becomes especially prominent in Rome.⁸¹¹

C. Acting Guilds

Coinciding with the increase in festivals that included dramatic performances, and the proliferation of theatre construction during the early Hellenistic period, was a rise in professional associations of poets, actors, musicians, choruses, chorus-directors, and all those included in the apparatus of dramatic performance.⁸¹² Such guilds are first attested in Athens at the beginning of the 3rd c. B.C.E.,⁸¹³ and evidenced in several locales later in the 3rd c.,⁸¹⁴ though their existence

⁸⁰⁷ E.g., the Greater and Lesser Panthenaia in Athens, as well as other regional and Panhellenic games throughout the Greek world. For a list of such athletic events, see Larmour, *Stage and Stadium*, 187–92.

⁸⁰⁸ See Larmour, *Stage and Stadium*, 1–25; 171–7.

⁸⁰⁹ E.g., Antiocheia and Laodicea instituted by Ptolemy Philadelphus II in Alexandria in the 270's B.C.E.. *SEG* 41 (1991) 1003 2.1.8.

⁸¹⁰ Lightfoot, "Nothing to do with the *technitai* of Dionysus?" 220–221.

⁸¹¹ On the relation of festivals and rulers' cults, see A. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte* (München, Beck, 1970), 149–50.

⁸¹² Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 286–315; B. Le Guen, "L'activité dramatique dans les îles grecques à l'époque hellénistique," *REA* 103.1/2 (2001): 261–98; B. Le Guen, "Théâtre et cités à l'époque hellénistique: 'Mort de la cite—mort du théâtre?'" *REG* 108 (1995): 59–90; Le Guen, *Les associations de Technites dionysiaques à l'époque hellénistique* (2 vols.; Paris: ADRA, 2001).

⁸¹³ An inscription at Delphi dated to 277 B.C.E. alludes to such a guild. *I.G.* ii² 1132.

⁸¹⁴ Isthmia and Nemea in the middle of the 3rd c. B.C.E. *SIG*³ 457, 460. Ptolemais in Egypt in the middle of the 3rd c., B.C.E. *OGIS* 50, 51. Teos in the last quarter of the 3rd c., B.C.E. *SIG*³ 507, 563–5.

may be inferred at an earlier date from the testimony of Demosthenes, Aristotle, and Aeschines,⁸¹⁵ and from the likelihood that a rise in professional acting in the 4th and 5th c. would have necessitated some kind of organization.⁸¹⁶ The rise of acting guilds in the Hellenistic period is often cited as evidence that the actor had gained pre-eminence in the world of drama over and above the playwright and the chorus, a phenomenon lamented by Aristotle.⁸¹⁷ Importantly, the rise of the actor and actors' guilds corresponds with a *decline* in the prominence of tragic choruses in this period, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

D. *New Productions Alongside Revival Performances*

Around the beginning of the 4th c. B.C.E., poets seem to have begun reproducing the tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides, and the like, for performance at the Dionysia alongside the regular daily program of three new tragedies and one new satyr-play.⁸¹⁸ Reproductions of 5th c. tragedies were officially integrated into the dramatic program in 341–339 B.C.E.⁸¹⁹ No record exists for a similar practice occurring at the Lenaia,⁸²⁰ but the reproduction of plays is well-attested outside of Athens.⁸²¹

At some point, it seems that reproducing tragedies from the fifth-century became as common (and perhaps more so) than the production of new plays, both at the Dionysian festivals

⁸¹⁵ Both Demosthenes and Aristotle refer to groups of actors available for hire (*technitai*) which becomes the common designation for members of dramatic guilds in the Hellenistic period. Moreover, such persons are ascribed dramatic and political functions known to have been functions of the (later) guilds. Demosthenes, *Fals. leg.* 12, 18, 94, 192, 315; *Cor.* 21; Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2; *Prob.* 20. 10; Aeschines, *Fals. leg.* 15–19.

⁸¹⁶ These guilds shared features with other clubs and associations of the Hellenistic period, including the organizational structure, civic benefits, and diplomatic influence. See Jane L. Lightfoot, “Nothing to do with the *technitai* of Dionysos?” 209–24; E.J. Jory, “Associations of Actors in Rome,” *Hermes* 98 (1970): 224–5; Sifakis, *Studies*, 99ff. For the primary evidence, see Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 239–55.

⁸¹⁷ E.g., Aristotle laments the fact that actors had become more important than the poets. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1403b 31–5.

⁸¹⁸ *I.G.* ii². 2318. For a summary of the reproductions of old tragedies, see Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies*, 20–24.

⁸¹⁹ *I.G.* ii². 2320. An analogous trend existed for the (re)-performance of comedies

⁸²⁰ In 288 B.C.E. all of the comedies were all still new. See Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 126.

⁸²¹ For a comprehensive presentation of the evidence for reproductions in the Hellenistic period, see Nervegna, “Staging Scenes or Plays?” 19–21.

and at other dramatic venues.⁸²² This phenomenon testifies to the increasing canonization of the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and to the fact that their work was taken to be the standard by which subsequent drama was evaluated.⁸²³ As such, there may have been more prestige associated with performing “old” tragedies and comedies. This much is also suggested by an inscription from Tanagra (83 B.C.E.) which indicates that performers were paid more for reproducing old tragedies than they were paid for performing new ones.⁸²⁴

E. *Other Performance Contexts: Reading Drama*

While public performance was the primary form in which dramas were conveyed throughout antiquity, a new trend in dramatic reception appears to emerge in the 4th c. B.C.E.: drama that was read aloud, but not performed. The primary evidence for this trend depends on Aristotle’s discussion of a particular type of playwright, the ἀναγνώστικοί.⁸²⁵ In a larger discussion of the essential characteristics of, and differences between, written composition and oral delivery, Aristotle contrasts the ἀναγνώστικοί, which seems to denote poets whose works were meant for reading, with those whose works were meant to be performed.⁸²⁶ He singles out the tragic poet Chaeremon as just such an ἀναγνώστικός, who is said to compose as precisely as a professional speech-writer.⁸²⁷ By contrasting Chaeremon’s precise, compositional style with other forms that are more suitable for oral delivery, Aristotle seems to suggest that Chaeremon’s

⁸²² Inscriptional evidence attests for such reproductions at festivals in Argos, Dodona, Delphi, Oropos, Tanagra, Thespiiai, in Samos, and elsewhere. See Sifakis, *Studies*, 1–2.

⁸²³ The canonization of the fifth-century tragedians was also signaled in other ways. For instance, “Ten years after Astydamos’ manifesto Lykourgos rebuilt the theatre of Dionysos in stone, erected in it the statues of the three great tragedians of the fifth century and established their texts...All the influence of Lykourgos, therefore, goes to establishing the fifth century tragedians as classics and producing them in a way worthy of classics, and sounds the knell of new tragedy.” T.B.L. Webster, “Fourth Century Tragedy and the Poetics,” 307.

⁸²⁴ *I.G.* vii. 540. Lightfoot, “Nothing to do with the *technitai*,” 214.

⁸²⁵ Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1413b12.

⁸²⁶ Cf. Demetrius’ (3rd c. B.C.E.?) discussion of two types of dramatic presentation: the *reading* style, characteristic of the dramatist Philemon, and the *acting* style of Menander. Demetrius, *Eloc.* 193.

⁸²⁷ See also Kuch, “Continuity and Change,” 556–7.

plays were well-suited for reading. While many scholars tend to take Aristotle's distinction at face-value, it is hotly debated whether these dramas were considered by Aristotle to be better suited for reading than for performance, or to be intended solely for a reading audience.⁸²⁸

Additional evidence suggests that there was, in fact, a reading audience for drama. For example, in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus reads Euripides' *Andromeda* to himself. Moreover, there is a tradition which relates a story that Plato kept a collection of mime-plays from the poet Sophron under his pillow,⁸²⁹ suggesting that Plato read the mime-plays.

3. Dramatic Performance in the Roman Period

A. Increasing Number of Performance Contexts

In the Republican period, drama was performed in a wide array of performance contexts. Drama continued to be performed in the context of public festivals (*ludi*),⁸³⁰ and festivals in this period continued in large part along the lines of Greek festivals. For example, each the five *ludi* known to have taken place in the middle of the 3rd c. B.C.E. were established in honor of a God,⁸³¹ took place over the course of at least a few days, and included dramatic performances.⁸³²

The opportunities for dramatic performance increased in the Roman period as the number of

⁸²⁸ See R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship, from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968); G.F. Else, *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1967).

⁸²⁹ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, 3.18. Athenaeus attributes this same story to Duris (340–270 B.C.E.). Athenaeus, 11.3.504b. For a summary of all of the evidence, see Jill Gordon, *Turning Toward Philosophy: Literary Device and Dramatic structure in Plato's Dialogues* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State Press, 1999), 71.

⁸³⁰ In Rome, *ludi* referred both to the dramatic performances at festivals (e.g., *ludi scaenes*), and to the festivals themselves (e.g., *ludi Romani*).

⁸³¹ E.g., the *ludi Megalenses* were held in honor of Cybele; the *ludi Romani* in honor of Liber, the Roman counterpart of Dionysus; the *ludi Apollinares* in honor of Apollo; the *ludi plebeii* in honor of Jupiter; the *ludi Florales* in honor of the Goddess Flora. It is unclear the nature of drama at the *ludi Florales*.

⁸³² It is likely that at least some of these festivals were taking place much earlier than 240 B.C.E. when dramatic performances are said to have been introduced to them. On Republican Roman festivals, see Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 41–49; Harriet I. Flower, "Fabulae Praetextae in Context: When Were Plays on Contemporary Subjects Performed in Republican Rome?" *CQ* 45 (1995): 170–190. Cf. Lily Ross Taylor, "The Opportunities for Dramatic Performances in the Time of Plautus and Terence," *TAPA* 68 (1937): 284–304.

official festivals increased. By the Imperial period, there were around fourteen days officially allotted for dramatic performance.⁸³³

In addition to annual festivals held in honor of a god, dramatic performances may have been included at one-time performances (*munera*) in honor of special occasions, such as funerals,⁸³⁴ temple dedications, and military victories.⁸³⁵ Such contexts are rightly considered *religious* to the extent that they were public, and included processions, sacrifices, and dramatic performances, etc.⁸³⁶ But these contexts served to link the performance of drama with particular individuals, and with the Emperors in particular during the Imperial period. This association is made clear architecturally as theaters were often connected with political figures, and the temples associated with them. Such was the case with the first permanent theater in Rome, dedicated by Pompey after his conquests in Asia. Not only did Pompey bequeath the theater to the city, but the steps of it were said to have led up to his Temple of Victory.⁸³⁷

Although little is known about the details of the performance of dramas at Roman festivals, performances included chariot races, mimes, beast-fights, wrestling, boxing, rope-dancing, etc., in addition to tragedy and comedy.⁸³⁸ In the absence of permanent theatre buildings, which were not constructed in Rome until 55 B.C.E., plays may have been staged in front of the temple of the god to whom the festival was dedicated, on structures that were erected solely for the purpose of dramatic performance. The steps of the temples may have served as *ad*

⁸³³ P.J. Davis, *Seneca: Thyestes* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 16.

⁸³⁴ Dupont, *L'Acteur-Roi*, 218ff. Cf. Flower, "Fabulae Praetextae," 177–179.

⁸³⁵ Public festivals in honor of Sulla (*ludi Victoria Sullanae*) and Caesar (*ludi Victoriae Caesaris*) in 81 and 46 B.C.E. Earlier festivals in honor of military victories are attested by Livy 36.36.1–2; 39.5.7–10. See Richard Beacham, *Spectacle Entertainments of Early Imperial Rome* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2–44.

⁸³⁶ The prologue of Terence's *Mother-in-Law* hints at the competition between boxers, tightrope walkers, and gladiators to attract an audience's attention at the *ludi*. See Rehm, "Festivals and Audiences," 193–4. Cf. J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York: Bodley Head, 1967), 244–52; C.W. Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy* (Cambridge: University Press, 2006), 16–20; M. Leigh, *Comedy and the Rise of Rome* (Oxford: University Press, 2004), 3.

⁸³⁷ Aulus Gellius, 10.1.5.

⁸³⁸ Cicero, *Leg.* 2.38; Liv. 33.25.1; 40.52.3; 42.10.5.

hoc auditorium seats.⁸³⁹ Opportunities for dramatic performance further increased into the Imperial period, and by the time of Augustus it is commonly thought that 43 days of the year were given to dramatic performances. Attendance at dramatic performances seems to have been open to the entire populace, women, wet-nurses, children, slaves, attendants, and prostitutes,⁸⁴⁰ and admission was free of charge.

Festivals in the Republican Roman period likely included performances of new tragedies (and comedies), though there is much evidence that revival performances of older drama were increasingly common.⁸⁴¹ As was the case of Greek drama in the Classical period, Roman tragedies might be repeatedly performed according to their level of popularity.⁸⁴² By the Imperial period, there is evidence that Roman authors had all but ceased to write new plays for performance, and that dramatic performances in the Imperial theater consisted almost exclusively of revival performances of older dramas.⁸⁴³

B. *Roman Acting Guilds*

The first Roman guild, which is associated with the first Roman dramatist, Livius Andronicus, is attested in 207 B.C.E.⁸⁴⁴ The guild, whose members are called *scribae* and *histrionae*, seems to have been modeled on the Greek system in terms of organization, political influence, and benefits for guild members, with the exception that their patron god was not Dionysus, but rather Minerva.⁸⁴⁵ Local Greek Dionysiac guilds, which were organized in the East through the Roman period, seem to have operated alongside local Roman dramatic guilds in

⁸³⁹ John Arthur Hanson, *Roman Theater Temples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 29–39.

⁸⁴⁰ The prologue of Plautus' *Poenulus* addresses each of these groups, while Terence speaks of women in attendance (*Hec.* 35), and Vitruvius alludes to the presence of "citizens with their wives and children." Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture* 5.3.1.

⁸⁴¹ Richard C. Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and Its Audience*, 154.

⁸⁴² Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 108–119.

⁸⁴³ Rehm, "Festivals and audiences," 194.

⁸⁴⁴ Jory, "Associations," 225–7.

⁸⁴⁵ Jory, "Associations," 225–33.

the West. These guilds remain active well into the Imperial period, at which time local guilds seem to have given way to a singular, “worldwide” organization of dramatic artists. However, at the end of the 3rd c. C.E., not long after the guilds seem to have reached a pinnacle of popularity and influence, they disappear entirely from the historical record.⁸⁴⁶

C. *Recitatio*

Commentators have long doubted that Roman tragedies were always performed as full-scale productions in the theater. The evidence of dramas that were read aloud in the Hellenistic period casts such doubt, though further evidence exists in the form of several dramatic elements in Seneca’s tragedies which appear unlikely to have been performed on-stage. A case in point is Act 2 of Seneca’s *Oedipus*, in which cattle are sacrificed and later rise to attack the priests, but many other examples arouse similar suspicion.⁸⁴⁷ In many other ways Seneca’s tragedies seem to have been composed without consideration for the realities of theatrical production: “The setting can fluctuate without warning...absent characters appear at a moment’s notice...and figures on stage just as abruptly vanish...action that would be visible to a theater audience is elaborately narrated...while significant entrances and exits are reduced to dumb-shows by a shorthand style of description.”⁸⁴⁸ A passing remark by Ovid casts further doubt that Roman tragedies were performed in the theater. While he is known to have written at least one tragedy *Medea*, he claimed never to have written for the theater, which suggests that his tragedy was not performed in one.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁶ The last recorded evidence for a dramatic guild dates to 274/5 C.E., during the reign of Aurelian. Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 242.

⁸⁴⁷ For a summary of those elements of Seneca’s plays which seem to pose particular problems for performance, see Otto Zweirlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1966); cf. Fantham, *Seneca’s Troades*, 34–49.

⁸⁴⁸ Tarrant, *Seneca’s Thyestes*, 14.

⁸⁴⁹ Ovid *Tr.* 5.7.27.

The question remains what kind of performance context could have intended for Roman tragedies, if not the theater. Quintilian may offer a clue in his description of an argument between Seneca and Pomponius. An argument between the two men had become public to the point that it was said to have made its way into the prefaces (*praefationes*) of each of their tragedies.⁸⁵⁰ Quintilian's choice of words may be illustrative. If Quintilian had meant to denote the prologue of a play that was performed in a theater, he would have likely chosen *prologus*. However, insofar as the Latin word *praefatio* denotes the beginning of a text that was meant to be recited, such as a legal or religious document, Quintilian's passing remark may be a clue that these tragedies were intended for public *recitation*.

Indeed, the testimony of Roman authors appears to confirm that some tragedies were presented in the form of a public recitation.⁸⁵¹ Tacitus recounts the story of the poet Curiatius Maternus, who is said to have publically recited his tragedy *Cato*.⁸⁵² Likewise, Pliny relates the story of Pomponius Secundus, a contemporary of Seneca, who first recited his tragedy amongst friends before bringing it to the theater for full performance,⁸⁵³ suggesting that the recitation of a tragedy did not necessarily preclude stage performance.

Thus, the question of the performance context cannot be posed in strictly dualistic terms, i.e., *either* recitation *or* theatrical performance.⁸⁵⁴ Still, there are many who argue vigorously that Seneca's plays were composed with the intent of being performed exclusively in the

⁸⁵⁰ "Nam memini iuvenis admodum inter Pomponium ac Senecam etiam praefationibus esse tractatum, an gradus eliminat in tragoedia dici oportuisset." Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.3.31.

⁸⁵¹ For a summary of the ancient evidence, see Zweirlein, *Die Rezitationsdramen Senecas*, 127–66; Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship to the End of the Hellenistic Age*, 28ff.; Howard Jacobson, "Two Studies on Ezekiel the Tragedian," *GRBS* 22 (1981): 168.

⁸⁵² Tacitus, *Dial.* 2:1–3:3. E.g., "Nam postero die quam Curiatius Maternus Catonem recitaverat, cum offensus potentium animos diceretur, tamquam in eo tragoediae argumento sui oblitus tantum Catonem cogitasset..."

⁸⁵³ Pliny, *Ep.* 7.17.

⁸⁵⁴ Tarrant, *Seneca's Thyestes*, 13, 15.

theater.⁸⁵⁵ At any rate, it is difficult to determine what exactly a recitative performance of tragedy would have entailed. Roman authors describe the practice of recitation of other poetic forms as a solo performance, often by the poet himself.⁸⁵⁶ It appears this may have been the case with Roman tragedy, as is suggested by Tacitus' story of Curiatius Maternus, although it is not clear how exactly one performer would have successfully recited scenes that featured dialogue,⁸⁵⁷ or would have performed the role of the chorus. It may have been that more than one performer could have been employed in the recitation, or that perhaps only *parts* of Seneca's were performed—so-called *excerpt performances*⁸⁵⁸—which may have eliminated the need for more than one performer.

VI. Theater Buildings

1. Theaters in the Classical Period

Imagining the design and precise contours of the 5th c. theater such as would have been contemporaneous with the Classical tragedians and comedians is limited by three factors: (1) So very few of the remains of theaters can be reasonably dated to the 5th c.;⁸⁵⁹ (2) Many of the

⁸⁵⁵ W.M. Calder, "Originality in Seneca's *Troades*," *CP* 65 (1970): 75–82; Leon Herrmann, *Le Théâtre de Sénèque* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1924).

⁸⁵⁶ Two passages in Pliny (*Ep.* 7.17; 9.34) suggest that this was the norm, and there is no explicit testimony to the contrary. See Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 47.

⁸⁵⁷ C.J. Herington, "Senecan Tragedy," *Arion* 5 (1966): 422–71.

⁸⁵⁸ Herrmann, *Le Théâtre de Sénèque*. Cf. Pierre Grimal, "Sénèque: le theater latin entre la scène et le livre," *Vita Latina* 89 (1983): 2–13; D.F. Sutton, *Seneca on Stage* (Leiden: Brill, 1986); George W.M. Harrison, "Semper ego auditor tantum? Performance and Physical Setting of Seneca's plays," in *Seneca in Performance* (ed. George W.M. Harrison; London: Duckworth, 2000), 137–150; C.W. Marshall, "LOCATION! LOCATION! LOCATION! Choral Absence and Dramatic Space in Seneca's *Troades*," in *Seneca in Performance*, 27–52; Peter Davis, *Shifting Song: The Chorus in Seneca's Tragedies* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidmann, 1993); H.A. Kelly, "Tragedy and the performance of tragedy in late Roman antiquity," *Traditio* 35 (1979): 21–44. See also A. Dihle, "Seneca und die Aufführungspraxis der römischen Tragödie," *Antike und Abendland* 29 (1983): 162–171; Gyllian Raby, "Seneca's *Trojan Women*: Identity and Survival in the Aftermath of War," in *Seneca in Performance*, 173–195; Katharina Volk, "Putting Andromacha on Stage: A Performer's Perspective," in *Seneca in Performance*, 197–208.

⁸⁵⁹ In the beginning of the 20th c., the only extant theater from the 5th c. was the Theatre of Dionysus on the slope of the Acropolis in Athens. Even now the number of theaters that can be dated to the Classical period remains less than 10. Moreover, none of those dated to the 5th c. have been found intact in the dimensions in which they were originally constructed, due to the fact that Hellenistic and Roman theaters were built directly on the site(s) of the Classical theaters.

architectural features of the theaters of the Classical period were most likely constructed of wood, which have not survived as have the stone and marble structures of the 4th c. and later; (3) A complete lack of (original) stage instructions, and a dearth of unambiguous clues in the plays themselves, which might have given an indication of the theaters and their features. The dearth of primary evidence permits only tentative and tenuous reconstructions of nearly every aspect of Classical theaters on the basis of secondary evidence. Such evidence includes the archaeological remains of the Classical period found underneath the stone and marble ruins of Hellenistic and Roman ruins, the testimony of later authors who comment on the Classical theaters, and the clues in the Classical plays themselves. Given the secondary nature of the evidence, the fact that different scholars interpret this evidence differently, and the conflicting nature of much of the evidence, there is rarely a consensus about the details of these reconstructions; rather, nearly every aspect of the reconstruction(s) is a matter of considerable debate.

A. *Theatron*

Derived from the infinitive *theasthai* (“to see”), *theatron* referred to an area where spectators could observe events, including those in non-dramatic contexts.⁸⁶⁰ Prior to the construction of permanent theaters, it may have been that the *theatron* consisted of the 360 degree space around the *orchestra*, where spectators simply stood at the *orchestra* level, or where they sat on naturally occurring embankments.⁸⁶¹

It is likely that spectators in the Classical period, whether in a circle around the *orchestra*, or on naturally occurring embankments, sat in bleachers made of wood. Aristophanes pokes fun

⁸⁶⁰ See, e.g., Xenophanes, *Hell.* 7.4.31. Dittenb. *Syll.* 970.

⁸⁶¹ See, for example, the auditorium embankments at Rhamnous, Ikarion, Euonymon, Thorikos, Priene, Megalopolis, Oropos, Delos, Eretria, and the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. See plans in Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 23–38; Cf. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 198–210.

of the fact that the spectators' seats were made out of wood,⁸⁶² while the (much later) compilations of Photius, Suidas, and Hesychius, similarly define these wooden structures for theater-goers. Suidas describes the collapse of just such a wooden *theatron* in Athens in 499 B.C.E., which prompted the Athenians to build a more permanent (stone?) structure.⁸⁶³

Theatrons constructed out of stone are not evidenced at Athens or anywhere else until sometime in the 4th c.⁸⁶⁴

B. *Orchestra*

The *orchestra* refers to the flat surface situated between the *theatron* and *skene*. There is an almost complete lack of physical evidence of orchestras from the 5th c., most likely owing to the fact that they were made of earth/clay.⁸⁶⁵ The dearth of physical evidence for 5th c. orchestras leaves much room for conjecture and disagreement as to their precise dimensions. A rectilinear orchestra is suggested by the rectilinear orientation at several theater sites.⁸⁶⁶ Two clues, however, point to the likelihood that most theatrical orchestras in the Classical period were circular: (1) All of the excavated theaters from the 4th c. and into the Hellenistic period exhibit

⁸⁶² Aristophanes, *Thesm.* 395.

⁸⁶³ Hesychius described the wooden structures (*ta ikria*) on which spectators sat prior to the construction of a permanent theater, "... wooden benches stood, upon which the spectators stood, fell, and after this a *theatron* was built by the Athens." Hesychius, v. *par' aigeirou Thea*. Cf. Suidas, v. *ikria*.

⁸⁶⁴ The lack of physical evidence precludes the possibility of knowing with certainty the shape(s) of the auditoriums in each of the theatres of the Classical period. The consistency of the slightly more than semi-circular shape of the auditoriums in extant theatres of the 4th c., and into the Roman period, suggests that a semi-circular shape was most common in the Classical period. And yet, several of the extant auditoriums which can be reasonably dated to the 5th c. or earlier are rectilinear in shape, leading others to the conclusion that rectilinear auditoriums were standard in the Classical period, even in theatres which later featured semi-circular auditoriums in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

⁸⁶⁵ The positive archaeological evidence from the 5th c. is limited to a half-dozen stones unearthed in the Dionysian Theater in the 1880's by Dörpfeld, which were thought to have delineated the *orchestra*. The arrangement of the stones suggested to Dörpfeld a circular shape, though archaeologists in his wake have disagreed as to the dimensions of the circle, or whether the stones confirm a circular shape at all. See W. Dörpfeld and E. Reisch, *Das griechische Theater* (Athens: 1896). Subsequent archaeologists have been split as to whether or not in the Classical period the orchestra in the Dionysian theater was circular. For a brief synopsis of the various reconstructions of the 5th c. orchestra, see Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 44–46.

⁸⁶⁶ For instance, the theaters in Thorikos, Ikarion, Euonymon, and one of the two theaters at Morgantina. See Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 23–62.

circular orchestras;⁸⁶⁷ and (2) A circular orchestra in the theater was likely a continuation of the spatial medium of the circular *dithyrambic* chorus.

C. Altar (*Thymele*)

In each Classical and Hellenistic theater was included an altar for the god to whom the theatre was dedicated, most often called a *thymele*.⁸⁶⁸ Such an altar would not have been out of place in a theater precinct considered a sacred space of the god, nor unexpected in a festival context, and it likely served as the place where the offerings of the festival-goers were sacrificed.⁸⁶⁹ The *thymele* was often located precisely in the center of the orchestra,⁸⁷⁰ though if not in the center, in the proximity of the orchestra and in plain view of the spectators.⁸⁷¹ In fact, the *thymele* was so closely associated with the orchestra that it came to be used as a synecdoche⁸⁷² for the orchestra itself.⁸⁷³

To the extent that it became a part of the space inhabited by the dramatic chorus and actors, the altar often became a part of the drama itself. On the one hand, as the geographic center of the orchestra, it served as the focal point for the choral dances. In the center of the orchestra, the altar had the potential to become an especially integral part of the dramatic action,

⁸⁶⁷ It is especially interesting, perhaps, that theaters in this period were so consistently designed around a circular orchestra, when architecture in general remained so consistently rectilinear.

⁸⁶⁸ E.g., Pollux, iv. 123; Hesychius, *Etym. Gud.*, Pratinas fr. 1.2; Suidas v. *skene*; Alciphron ii. 3;

⁸⁶⁹ Suidas describes a “bema (of Dionysus)” and called it a *thymele*, “on account of the sacrifices that took place on it.” Suidas, v. *skene*.

⁸⁷⁰ At Epidauros, Aigai, and Dodona, for example, there have been found stone slabs in the Center of the orchestra into which is drilled a circular hole widely thought to have received the altar. Some argue that the slab would have received not an altar *per se*, but a sacrificial table, or some sort of other receptacle for offerings. See also similar slabs at Corinth and Athens. See Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 71–72.

⁸⁷¹ E.g., Rhamnous, Ikarion, Thorikos, Cefalu on the island of Kos, and Pergamon. See Clifford Ashby, “Where Was the Altar?” in *Classical Greek Theatre: New Views of an Old Subject* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1999), 42–61.

⁸⁷² At some later point, when the *skene* came to replace the orchestra as the locus of dramatic movement, it too was called *thymele*, which retained one of its original meanings as the place where an actor would stand for an address.

⁸⁷³ The theater in Priene has produced the best unambiguous remains of one of these altars intact and in the place it was originally intended. It was found situated immediately in front of the *prohedria*, in line with the center of the orchestra.

inasmuch as the orchestra was a locus of most, if not all, of the choral action, and perhaps the actions of the actors. On the other hand, it may have been used as a prop when the exigencies of a particular play required an altar.⁸⁷⁴ In some instances, the altar may have represented something *other* than an altar. For instance, it may have been that the orchestral *thymele* was used to represent the tomb of Darius in the opening of Aeschylus' *Persians*, or the cenotaph in Euripides' *Helen*.⁸⁷⁵ Finally, the altar was perhaps used by the Chorus director (*coryphaeus*) or one of the actors for the purpose of addressing the chorus,⁸⁷⁶ or as a standing-place for the musician.⁸⁷⁷

D. *Skene*

It is likely that in the Classical period some kind of (wooden) building stood behind the orchestra opposite the auditorium, to provide a place for actors to change costumes in-between scenes, and/or to assist in projecting acoustics to the audience.

⁸⁷⁴ Often the altar was a conspicuous part of the dramatic scenery and action as, for instance, in Aeschylus' *Supplikes*, where the altar serves as the center around which all of the action of the suppliant maidens takes place; or, when Andromache hovers at the altar of Thetis in search of refuge in the opening lines of Euripides' *Andromache*. In many other instances the altar figures into the action in a less direct manner, as when the chorus comments on the fact that Clytemnestra seems to be preparing for sacrifice (83–103), and then sings an ode of the smoke rising from the altar; or when Dionysus' command to Euripides to "throw on a pinch of incense" in Aristophanes' *Ran.* 888, which suggests that an altar lies before them. The altar of Dionysos may have served to represent such altars in these scenes. However, some believe that the sanctity of an altar of Dionysus would have prevented its use in a dramatic performance, and that a *stage altar* would have been used as a prop in a scene. That is, in addition to the sacred altar located in the proximity of the *orchestra*, an "imitation" altar—a *stage altar*—could have been constructed elsewhere for scenes which required an altar. On the view that the *thymele* was not to be used in the drama, see Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus*, 131; cf. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions*, 45. For a list of all of the direct and indirect references to altars and altar-scenes in Classical Tragedy and Comedy, see Peter Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions in the Fifth-Century B.C.* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 46–51.

⁸⁷⁵ On the central altar as a stage prop, see Aeschylus, *Persians* (transl. Janet Lembke and C.J. Herington; Oxford: University Press, 1981), 18–9; cf. Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (London: Clarendon Press, 1977), 117.

⁸⁷⁶ A fragment of Aeschylus in a *scholia* on *Il.* 14.200 suggests that the *thymele* was used for this purpose in Classical times, while a *scholia* on Aristophanes *Eq.* 149 speaks of an actor "getting up as if on a *thymele*." See Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*, 132.

⁸⁷⁷ Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions*, 44.

E. *Stage*

The data for a raised stage in the Classical period is as scant as is all of the data for the theatre buildings in this period. On the one hand is the evidence of the ancient commentators who, though not contemporaneous with the Classical plays, were consistent in their testimony that some sort of stage was part and parcel of the Classical theatre.⁸⁷⁸ On the other hand is the fact that there is not one piece of unequivocal archaeological,⁸⁷⁹ artistic,⁸⁸⁰ or epigraphic evidence from the 5th c. to corroborate the claims of the ancient commentators. Thus, the question of whether or not there was some sort of stage in the 5th c. theatre is as hotly debated as any in the field of ancient drama.⁸⁸¹

The implications of the existence of a stage in the Classical period are not simply archaeological in nature. The lack of a stage would suggest that the actors and chorus performed together in the orchestra. If, however, a stage was a standard element of the Classical theatre, and the actors performed on it, the Chorus and actors would have been performing in different spaces.

⁸⁷⁸ A number of scholia on Aristophanes' comedies, many of which were written hundreds of years after the composition of

the plays themselves, assume a stage. These scholia fairly consistently claim that the location of the stage was the *logeion*, the platform on top of the *proskenia*. See Sifakis, *Studies*, 129.

⁸⁷⁹ For a presentation of some physical evidence for structures that may have been used to support a raised stage, see Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions*, 12–15.

⁸⁸⁰ There are a number of vase paintings from Southern Italy which depict performances of comedies on a raised stage supported by wooden posts. Some argue that these *phylakes* vases may depict on a small-scale the kinds of stages that would have been employed for the larger-scale performances, such as those that were performed in the Theatre of Dionysus. See M. Bieber, *History of the Greek and Roman Theater* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939). There also exists an Attic oenochoe from the late 5th c. which depicts some kind of theatrical scene on a "Phylakes" stage, prompting some to Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions*, 16–17.

⁸⁸¹ Some take the ancient commentators at their word, and presume the existence of a stage in this period. Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*, 71; Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions*, 6–41. Others speculate that the Hellenistic and Roman commentators, for whom a stage had become a standard and ubiquitous element of the theatre, had erroneously projected the existence of a stage back into the 5th c., and that no such stage existed. Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, 34–6; Oliver Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 441–2; Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 63ff.; Ley, *Theatricality*, 1ff.

2. Theaters in the 4th c. and Hellenistic Period

Evidence for theaters becomes increases dramatically in light of the fact that during the 4th c. theaters began to be constructed out of stone.⁸⁸²

A. *Theatron*

While there is evidence for rectilinear and semi-circular auditoriums in the Classical period, stone auditoriums were consistently slightly larger than semi-circular by the 4th c. The vast majority of 4th c. auditorium seats were simple and functional, constructed of wood benches, or large slabs of stone, and rising up many rows around the orchestra. The size of the auditoriums varied across time and place. The largest extant stone auditoriums of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, such as those in Athens, Ephesus, Epidauros, and Megalopolis, likely seated close to 17,000 people. Auditoriums in the smaller Attic demes, Asia Minor, and Magna Graeca, were 1/8 to 1/4 this size.⁸⁸³

B. *Prohedria*

Most Hellenistic auditoriums contained seats in the front row that were considerably more ornate, wider, and higher than the rest of the auditorium seats. From the many inscriptions found on the *prohedria* themselves, and elsewhere in the theaters, something may be said about the persons for whom such seats were typically reserved. For example, in Athens the very first rows were likely reserved for priests and priestesses,⁸⁸⁴ dignitaries,⁸⁸⁵ public benefactors, children of fallen soldiers, and judges of the dramatic contests.⁸⁸⁶ The practice of reserving the

⁸⁸² The theater of Dionysus in Athens, for instance, was re-constructed with stone under the authority of Lycurgus in 333 B.C.E.

⁸⁸³ The auditorium at Euonymon, for example, which was one of the biggest demes in Attica, contained 21 rows, and seated perhaps 2,000 spectators.

⁸⁸⁴ Hesychius, v. *vemhseis theas*. Cf. Corp. Ins. Att. ii. 589.

⁸⁸⁵ See Aeschines, *Fals. leg.* 111; *Ctes.* 76.

⁸⁸⁶ See Vitruvius, *Praef.* 5.

prohedria for citizens (or foreigners) of high repute is attested elsewhere,⁸⁸⁷ and this process carried social, political, and dramatic significance.⁸⁸⁸ Architectural variations of *prohedria* existed throughout Greek auditoriums,⁸⁸⁹ and into the Roman period.

The most prominent seat in the theatre seems to have been reserved for the Chief Priest of the God to whom the theatre was devoted. Owing to the fact that so many of the dramatic contests were held in honor of Dionysus, and that the theatre itself was often considered part of the sacred precinct of Dionysus, this seat was often reserved for the Chief Priest of Dionysian cult. Most often situated in the very center, and in one of the first few rows, this seat was larger and placed higher than the rest of the *prohedria*. For example, in the Dionysian theatre at Athens, this seat and backrest were not only made of marble, but were very elaborately decorated, and were covered by an awning.⁸⁹⁰ These central seats are very common features in Hellenistic theaters.

C. *Orchestra*

Orchestras in the Classical period may have taken different shapes, but from the 4th c. onwards they are consistently circular.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁷ E.g., the Peiraeus. Corp. Ins. Att. ii. 589. See also Whitehead, *The Demes of Attica*, 123–4. Cf. M. Maas, *Die Proedrie des Dionysostheaters in Athen* (München: 1972).

⁸⁸⁸ Members of the audience who sat in the *prohedria* were seated in a ceremonial fashion. For example, an inscription on one of the *prohedria* in Magnesia, dating to the 2nd c. B.C.E., relates that a Certain Apolophanes was “to be invited by the herald” to take his seat amongst the other benefactors in the theatre, “so that everyone knows that the people thankfully acknowledge the good and virtuous men and show the gratitude that benefactors deserve” (*I. Magnesia* 92a). Implied in this inscription, and in similar ones, is that the herald’s public announcement set these invited guests apart from the rest of the spectators, and that the ritual surrounding their seating in the *prohedria* was indeed part of the dramatic show. See Peter Wilson, *The Athenian Institution of the ‘Khoregia’*, 95–102; 136–43; cf. A. Chaniotis, “Theatre Rituals,” in *The Greek Theatre and Festivals* (ed. Peter Wilson; Oxford: University Press, 2007), 60–62.

⁸⁸⁹ E.g., at Megalopolis the front row had a backrest, but was not divided into individual seats, while at Epidauros there were three such rows: one in the front, and two half-way up the auditorium. In Oropus, five *prohedria* lie inside the orchestra, each seat a few yards away from another. In addition to these, see also Rhamnous, Ikarion, Euonymon, etc. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 25–35; Cf. Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 298–301.

⁸⁹⁰ Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*, 143.

⁸⁹¹ The first of these is often thought to be at Epidauros.

D. *Skene*

In the Hellenistic period, the *skene* became a common feature as evidenced by the stone remains of *skenai* throughout the Greek world, and remained a common feature of Roman theatres. In addition to the building itself, whose one or two-story structure⁸⁹² would have served as a backdrop for the dramatic action and a place for actors to change costumes, the most prominent feature would have been the *proskenion*, a raised platform extending out from the *skene* towards the *orchestra*. One of the functions of the *proskenion* was likely to provide a backdrop for the performance taking place in the *orchestra*, and in it could be inserted interchangeable panels depicting various scenes that would serve as background(s) to the play. Additionally, the top of the *proskenion*, the *logeion*, may have served as a kind of stage for various parts of the drama.

E. *Stage*

While the question remains whether or not a stage was part of the Classical theater, archaeological, artistic, and literary evidence confirms that in the Hellenistic periods, a raised stage was a standard element of the Greek theater, rising somewhere between 5–12 ft. above the *orchestra*, and lying tangent to, or partially intersecting, the *orchestra* opposite the Center of the *theatron*. At least in some theatres, the top of the *proskenion* (the *logeion*) was likely used as the stage,⁸⁹³ while in other theatres the stage was likely a separate entity.⁸⁹⁴ The existence of a stage

⁸⁹² 4th c. architecture confirms that *skene* were often two-storied, while a two-story *skene* already in the 5th c. is a reasonable likelihood on the basis of: (1) the testimony of later writers, who refer to something approximately equivalent to a two-story *skene*, e.g., an *episkenion*; (2) the comic poet Plato describes the upper-story of a *skene* (Frag. 112K.); and (3) the likelihood that dramatic elements in several plays would have required a second story, e.g., Aristophanes, *Peace*, Sophocles, *Philoctetes* and *Ajax*. See James Turney Allen, *The Greek Theater of the Fifth Century Before Christ* (New York: Haskell House, 1966), 59–62, esp. n. 127.

⁸⁹³ Several Roman sources speak of the *proskenion* itself as the stage. E.g., Polybius, 30.22 and fr. 212, (Büttner-Wobst); Plautus, *Amph.* 92; *Poen.* 17, 57; *Truc.* 10; Plutarch, *Mor.* 1096 b; cf. *Demetr.* 34; Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 512, 536 a; cf. 14.631ff. There are 4 competing theories as to the function of the *proskenion*. See Sifakis, *Studies*, 126.

⁸⁹⁴ E.g., Flickinger *Greek Theater*, 69 ff.

in the Hellenistic period raises the question of whether the actors would have performed entirely on it, or whether they would have ever performed with the chorus in the *orchestra*.

3. Theaters in the Roman Period

A. *Temporary Theaters in Republican Rome*

The earliest Greek-style dramatic performances in Rome, which likely began sometime in the beginning of the 3rd c. B.C.E., took place not in permanent stone theaters of the Hellenistic type as in Greece, Asia Minor, and *Magna Graeca*, but rather in temporary wooden structures. Because nothing of these impermanent structures remains, we can only surmise what they may have looked like on the basis of clues offered in the Roman dramas themselves, possible artistic depictions of them, and the observations of commentators.⁸⁹⁵

The stage-building (Gk. *skene*—Lat. *scaena*; *frons scaenae*) likely consisted of a one or two-story structure⁸⁹⁶ which served as a simple background for the dramatic action, and included perhaps some of the adornments of a Hellenistic skene, such as the trap-door, and a crane used to depict humans and gods in flight (e.g., the “flying machine” used for the *deus ex machina*).⁸⁹⁷ The stage altar likely remained a standard theatrical feature, as it continued to be featured prominently in the dramas themselves.⁸⁹⁸

A wooden platform extended out from the *scaena* (Gk. *proskene*—Lat. *proscenium*), and served either as a support for the stage (Gk. *logeion*—Lat. *pulpitum*), or as a backdrop for the action that took place on the ground-level.⁸⁹⁹

⁸⁹⁵ Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience*, 56–85; Frank Sear, *Roman Theatres: An Architectural Study* (Oxford: University Press, 2006), 54–7.

⁸⁹⁶ For evidence that the *scaena* had two levels, see Peter Arnott, *The Ancient Greek and Roman Theatre* (New York: Random House, 1971), 104–105.

⁸⁹⁷ Arnott, *Ancient Greek and Roman Theatre*, 105–106.

⁸⁹⁸ Arnott, *Ancient Greek and Roman Theatre*, 103.

⁸⁹⁹ A stage is assumed by Livy and Tacitus. Livy 40.51; 41.27. Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.20.

It is unclear whether some or all of the action took place on the stage (*pulpitum*), or on the ground in front of it between the *pulpitum* and the audience. It may have been the case that the chorus of early Roman tragedy (if there *was* a chorus) performed on the ground in front of the *proscenium*, apart from the actors who performed upon it, or that the chorus and actors performed together on the *pulpitum*.

Spectators likely viewed the action either sitting on wooden bleachers,⁹⁰⁰ or standing on the ground.⁹⁰¹ The temporary nature of the structure made it highly unlikely that anywhere near the number of people who attended the stone theaters in Greece or Asia Minor.

While temporary theaters may have lacked the *gravitas* and drawing power of a permanent stone structure, they didn't necessarily lack the splendor of one. Pliny the Elder, for instance, emphasized the extravagant decoration of the temporary theater erected by M. Aemilius Scaurus in 58 B.C.E., which included a three-story *scaena*, the first story of which was made of fine marble, the second story of glass mosaic, and third story of gilded plates, replete with bronze statues and marble columns.⁹⁰² Tacitus concluded that the high cost of erecting and dismantling such ornate temporary structures every year made a permanent theater a more economical option.⁹⁰³

It is unclear exactly what prevented the Romans from constructing permanent theaters, though Tacitus' remarks provide some hints. Tacitus decries the theater for its propensity to induce lax, degenerate, and effeminate behavior in the populace, even amongst the noblest Romans,⁹⁰⁴ and Livy hints that the theater's association with the Greeks made the theater a

⁹⁰⁰ Livy 40.51.

⁹⁰¹ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.20.

⁹⁰² Pliny, *Nat.* 35–36.

⁹⁰³ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.21.

⁹⁰⁴ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14.20. Compare Tacitus' objections to those of the Quakers and Methodists to the building of the Theatre Royal in Bristol in 1764, for fear that it would "diffuse an habit of idleness, indolence and debauchery throughout this once industrious city." Beare, *The Roman Stage*, 164.

potentially seditious place.⁹⁰⁵ At any rate, temporary theaters were normative in and around Rome, even after permanent theaters had begun to be erected at the beginning of the 1st c. B.C.E.

B. *Permanent Theaters*

Two types of permanent Roman theaters may be distinguished: those that were newly built by the Romans, and Hellenistic buildings that were refurbished by the Romans. Of the former type, the first permanent theater in Rome was completed in 55 B.C.E. by Pompey,⁹⁰⁶ and newly built theaters such as this one spread throughout the Mediterranean as Rome's influence expanded. There are examples of the latter type all across the Mediterranean, in those newly conquered territories where Hellenistic-style theaters had already been built, e.g., Greece, Asia Minor, and Alexandria. Although Roman theaters of both types exhibit many of the same features as Hellenistic theaters, it possible to identify architectural features that are uniquely Roman.

Newly constructed Roman theaters were self-supporting structures, in contrast with those of the Hellenistic period, which were built along naturally occurring slopes. The largest elements, the auditorium (Gk. *auditorium*—Lat. *cavea*) and *scaena frons*, were supported by vault and arch construction typical in Roman public architecture.

i. Theatron (*Cavea*), Orchestra, and Prohedria

As for the refurbished Hellenistic theaters, the Romans did not regularly alter the entire structure—its location, orientation, size, etc. They did, however, make substantive changes to constitutive elements of the theater, including the orchestra, auditorium, and stage. The general

⁹⁰⁵ Livy 41.27.

⁹⁰⁶ Outside of Rome, and away from the vigilance of those who held such negative opinions of the theater, some permanent structures were built prior to this, e.g., Gabii, Pietrabbondante, Tivoli, and Praeneste. See A.J. Brothers, "Buildings for Entertainment," in *Roman Public Architecture* (ed. Ian M. Barton; Exeter: University of Exeter, 1989), 101–2.

shape of the Roman auditorium conformed in large part with the standards of the Hellenistic theaters. However, the circumference of the auditorium was often reduced to a semi-circle.⁹⁰⁷

As such, the shape of the orchestra in the Roman theatre was likewise very often constructed (or modified from an existing Hellenistic structure) to an exact semi-circle.⁹⁰⁸ In Hellenistic theatres that were modified in the Roman period, it seems that at least part of the (original) orchestra was used regularly for seating.⁹⁰⁹ Such changes reflect the likelihood that spectators were no longer oriented towards the orchestra, and the chorus (and perhaps actors) that performed therein, as they were in the Classical and Hellenistic periods, but rather towards the *stage*, on account of the fact that the majority of dramatic activity in Roman drama occurred on the stage.

As in the Hellenistic period, special seating (*prohedria*) was reserved for politicians, priests, and dignitaries. Such seating was often quite ornate, including stone or marble back-rests and foot-rests, and set apart from other seats.⁹¹⁰

ii. Scenae frons and Stage (Pulpitum)

Roman stages were both wider, and longer, than the stages in Hellenistic theaters. Whereas the stage in the Classical and Hellenistic periods was not wider than the orchestra, the stage in the Roman period was often twice as long, and much deeper.⁹¹¹ The increased size of the stage in the Roman period, taken together with the decrease in the size of the orchestra, is a further indication of the fact that dramatic activity had become centered on the *stage*. In fact, the

⁹⁰⁷ Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 7, 9, 68–80.

⁹⁰⁸ Although there are many examples of modified Hellenistic theatres in the Roman period that maintained a more-than-semi-circular shape, as in the Hellenistic period. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 24.

⁹⁰⁹ Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 5–6.

⁹¹⁰ Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 5.

⁹¹¹ For Roman stages, see Beacham, *The Roman Theatre and its Audience*, 154–198; cf. Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 7, 33–4.

Roman theatrical stage may have in fact accommodated *all* of the dramatic action, including the performances both of the actors and the chorus, if there were a chorus.

The *scenae frons*, or the wall that served as the back-drop for the stage, was very often a very considerable structure that rose higher than the top of the auditorium, and was decorated with several stories of columns.⁹¹² This structure might represent any number of buildings in a drama, e.g., a palace, etc., and contained doorways through which actors could enter and exit the stage.

iii. Altar

The altar(s) used for festival sacrifices remained a standard feature in both types of Roman theaters,⁹¹³ and were most often located in the *orchestra*. There is also more certain evidence that, in addition to the sacrificial altar, a *stage altar* was used for dramatic purposes. Pollux likely refers to just such an altar in his description of an “altar standing on stage in front of the doors...,”⁹¹⁴ which likely referred to an altar that was stationed in front of one of the three doors leading into the skene.⁹¹⁵ The question remains whether this altar—or any stage altar—was a permanent fixture in the theater, or a portable scenic prop which was positioned as needed.

⁹¹² Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 8, 83–9.

⁹¹³ Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 7.

⁹¹⁴ Pollux 4.123. See Arnott, *Scenic Conventions*, 45.

⁹¹⁵ This theatrical convention may have represented the altar of Apollo, commonly found in city streets in front of house-doors, as in fact altars in dramas are commonly referred as the “altar of Apollo.”

Chapter 5: Forms and Functions of Tragic Choruses in the Classical Period

I. Introduction

The sheer quantity and diversity of choral activity in Greek tragedy complicates the task of compiling a catalogue of Classical tragic choral forms and functions, let alone considering developments in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Perhaps it is for this reason that there are few studies which attempt a comprehensive examination of choral phenomena in antiquity. Rather, investigations into dramatic choral phenomena most often: (1) single out a specific formal element, such as the *parodos*, *exodos*, *stasima*, or the lyric exchange(s) between the chorus and actor(s), and consider its range of formal and functional characteristics; or (2) concentrate on the formal and functional dynamics of a chorus evident in a particular playwright, or within a particular drama. By contrast, my own taxonomy of tragic choral forms and functions attempts to account for all types of choral phenomena in ancient tragedy, and has the goal of illuminating general trajectories across playwrights and plays, and indeed across ancient epochs as I consider not only the functions of choruses as they appear in Classical tragedy, but also as they took shape in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

My goal in the following two chapters is to establish a comprehensive framework with which the formal and functional characteristics of tragic choruses can be evaluated across playwrights, plays, and time-periods. Highlighting many important developments that take place in the form(s) and function(s) of tragic chorus through antiquity, I demonstrate that common denominators exist between choruses in each of these time-periods, such that choruses of the 5th c. B.C.E. can be compared with choruses in the 1st c. C.E. in similar terms, and evaluated in terms of larger trajectories that appear to span the many centuries that separate them.

This chapter considers choruses of the 5th c. Classical tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, while the following chapter covers tragic choruses in the 4th c. and into the Hellenistic and Roman periods. In each chapter I evaluate formal elements of tragic choruses and choral lyrics, including: (1) general features of dramatic choruses: their composition and size, the process of selecting and training a chorus, the role of the chorus-leader, and the conventional identities of the characters which were represented by the chorus; (2) spatial aspects of dramatic choral performance, such as the position of the chorus in the theater vis-à-vis the actors, the shape of the chorus, and choreographic elements; (3) formal characteristics of choral lyrics, including dialectical and metrical tendencies, and the extent to which the content of dramatic choral odes resembles non-dramatic choral poetic forms; (4) musical dynamics related to dramatic choral performance, including a consideration of choral singing, and the instruments which accompanied the chorus; and (5) specific types of choral phenomena, including the *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodos*, lyric and non-lyric dialogue with actors, and non-dialogical utterances.

I then move to more detailed considerations of the functional dynamics of choral lyrics in tragedy, focusing on the relationship of the choral lyrics to the surrounding speeches, dialogue, and action of the actors. Two types of choral phenomena will be distinguished on the basis of whether the chorus: (1) *advances* the dramatic action through interaction with other characters; or, (2) *stands outside* of the dramatic action in order to cast it in a particular light. These will serve as general categories through which more specific functions of the chorus will be considered, including the ways in which the chorus advances the dramatic plot by providing relevant background information, introducing characters, foreshadowing dramatic events, etc., or casts the surrounding dramatic action in a particular mythical-historical, philosophical, and/or

mythical-theological light. Finally, various theoretical models for considering the nature of the “voice” of the chorus—its possible function as the mouthpiece of the author, or the community, etc.—will be considered, as will significant developments in the forms and functions of the tragic chorus in the Classical period.

The presentation of material in each chapter reflects the imbalance of the surviving material. That is, while quite a lot can be said about the forms and functions of tragic choruses both in the Classical period and in the plays of Seneca in the Roman period, much less can be said about tragic choruses in the Hellenistic period, and in the Roman period prior to Seneca.

II. The Forms of Tragic Choruses in the Classical Period

1. The Constitution of the Chorus and Choral Personnel

A. *Composition*

Surprisingly little is known for certain about those who participated in Classical tragic choruses. Unlike non-dramatic choruses, which were known to have been comprised of persons of a particular age, gender, geographic and familial association, and social class, there are very few clues which point to the composition of the choruses of tragedy. The consensus position is that tragic choruses were comprised entirely of adult males, both on account of the so-called *Pronomos* Vase, whose depiction of the cast of characters from a satyr-play and/or tragedy includes only males, and the fact that those who served as *choreutai* were exempted from military duties during the time of their choral appointment, suggesting that the chorus was comprised of men of the requisite age for military service.⁹¹⁶

⁹¹⁶ E.g., Peter Wilson, *The Institution of the Khoregia*, 77; Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 77. In the absence of more specific criteria for identifying the constituents of tragic choruses, Winkler has suggested that the choruses were comprised of male youth who were in military training, and who through the performance in the chorus in drama would have been inculcated in the requisite military skills. See J.J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song,” in *Nothing To Do with Dionysos?: Athenian Drama in Its Social Context* (ed. J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin; Princeton: Princeton

It is unclear how the dramatic choruses were selected, though inferences can be made from what is known of the selection of *choreutai* for non-dramatic performances. Men were likely chosen from various *demes* around Attica by the *choregos*, who was appointed to assemble and fund the dramatic choruses.⁹¹⁷ While *choreutai* were most probably selected according to their proficiencies in singing and dancing (prizes were given out, after all, on the basis of the best dramatic performance(s)), choruses appear to have been comprised of amateur citizens who represented a cross-section of the Athenian citizenry.⁹¹⁸

B. *Size*

Evidence of any sort as to the number of actual *choreutai* who performed in tragedy in the Classical period is extremely scanty, as the poets did not provide stage directions of any sort, and the size of the actual chorus is never explicitly revealed throughout the course of any of the plays. As such, judgments as to the size of tragic choruses must be inferred from clues in the texts, and from the testimony of later commentators. The number of characters who were represented by the *choreutai* may give an indication of how many *choreutai* actually performed. For instance, the fifty daughters of Danaus who are represented by the chorus in Aeschylus' *Suppliants* may indicate that the size of the actual dramatic chorus was fifty.⁹¹⁹ However, this is the only tragedy in which the number of the characters being represented by the chorus is revealed, and as such the question of the number of *choreutai* in other plays must be approached by other methods.

University Press, 1990), 20–62.

⁹¹⁷ See Chapter 4, pp. 215–6.

⁹¹⁸ Wilson, *The Institution of the Khoregia*, 78.

⁹¹⁹ Pollux says as much in his recounting of the fear that was induced in an Athenian audience upon seeing a fifty-member chorus during a production of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (Pollux, 4.110). A fifty-member chorus is not out of the question given the connection between early tragedy and the fifty-person *dithyramb*. Moreover, the size of the *orchestra* would not have prohibited a chorus of such a size, and there is no explicit evidence contrary to this. For the summary of the argument in favor of a fifty-person chorus, see A.D. Fitton Brown, "The Size of the Tragic Chorus," *The Classical Review* 7.1 (Mar., 1957): 1–4.

The number of *choreutai* in Aeschylus' plays is most commonly taken to be twelve, chiefly on the basis of a scene in *Agamemnon* in which twelve successive *iambic* couplets are given to the chorus, and which are likely to have been spoken consecutively by twelve different chorus members.⁹²⁰ The testimony of later commentators further suggests that the standard number of *choreutai* in Aeschylean drama was twelve.⁹²¹ It is sometimes thought that Sophocles increased the number of *choreutai* to fifteen, but this opinion is supported entirely on the evidence of a single passage in the *Life of Sophocles*.⁹²² Thus, while the size of Classical choruses cannot be known for certain, it is generally assumed that the choruses of Classical tragedy included between 12–15 members.⁹²³

C. Training

Once the chorus had been selected, it was likely trained by the playwright himself, who would have had been involved in developing and directing the choral choreography, stage directions, music, etc.⁹²⁴ In addition to the playwright, a professional chorus-trainer (*chorodidaskalos*), or assistant chorus-trainer, was employed by the *choregos* to help to prepare the chorus for performance. The chorus-trainer was not only responsible for training the *choreutai* with respect to the specific choreographic, musical, and dramatic elements of a particular dramatic production, but also for the broader physical requirements of choral participation, including provisioning the *choreutai* with appropriate diets and physical exercise, and perhaps requiring ascetic practices, which were thought to improve their physical and vocal

⁹²⁰ Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1343–1371.

⁹²¹ *Vit. Soph.* 4; Two *scholia* refer to twelve chorus members in *Persians* and *Seven Against Thebes* (On Aristophanes, *Eq.* 586; On Aeschylus, *Eum.* 585.) Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals*, 241.

⁹²² *Vit. Soph.* 4; cf, *Suda* s.v. Sophocles. At any rate, even those who are suspicious that Sophocles was himself solely responsible for the increase in the number of tragic *choreutai* support the notion that at some point the tragic chorus may have increased in size. E.g., Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 134.

⁹²³ In this reckoning, a 12–15 member chorus could have represented a larger number of characters, e.g., the 50 daughters of Danaus.

⁹²⁴ Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 34, 66.

strength.⁹²⁵ In the absence of more specific information as to the nature of choral training, characterizations of chorus-training must suffice from which general conclusions may be drawn. For instance, chorus-training is likened in ancient sources to military training,⁹²⁶ and as such may have consisted of “forging good order, discipline, and the much sought-after ‘grace’ of choral *eukosmia*.”⁹²⁷ Likewise, insofar as *choreia* constituted an integral part of a comprehensive education according to Plato,⁹²⁸ it might thus be considered under the auspices of education more broadly in ancient Athens.

D. Chorus-leader

While the chorus was assembled and funded by the *choregos*, formally trained by the *chorodidaskalos* and/or the playwright himself, the chorus was led in performance by the chorus-leader, or *coryphaeus*.⁹²⁹ The chorus-leader was likely the most proficient singer among choral performers, and likely assumed a prominent position in the choral formation. He not only gave the signal to start a choral ode, and provided the pitch and rhythm for the chorus to follow,⁹³⁰ but also likely took part in dramatic dialogue with the actors from time to time in place of the chorus

⁹²⁵ E.g., The Athenian in Plato’s *Laws* speaks of “...those [chorus members] competing for victory whose members are forced to sing without food and go lean when training their voices.” Plato, *Laws* 665e. Cf. Aristotle, [*Prob.*] 11.22, 901b. On the other hand, other ancient sources describe the lavish lifestyle of *choreutai* who were in-training. E.g., Plutarch, *Glor. Ath.* 348d–349b. See Wilson, *Institution of the Khoregia*, 82–84.

⁹²⁶ *Choreutai* in training are likened to sailors under the leadership of a commander: “The behavior of sailors is a case in point. So long as they have nothing to fear, they are, I believe, an unruly lot, but when they expect a storm or an attack, they not only carry out all orders, but watch in silence for the word of command like choristers.” Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 3.5.6. Cf. Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 14.628 e–f.

⁹²⁷ Wilson, *Institution of the Khoregia*, 82.

⁹²⁸ See chapter 3, p. 187.

⁹²⁹ The chorus-leader was designated with different terms, including: χορυφαῖος, ἡγεμών, χορολέκτης, χοροδέκτης, χοροστάτης, and χορηγός. It is possible that the *coryphaeus* may have also taken on the role of *choregos* and/or *chorodidaskalos*. See Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 135; Cf. Rosa Andújar, “The Chorus in Dialogue: Reading Lyric Exchanges in Greek Tragedy” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2011), 26ff.

⁹³⁰ Aristotle, [*Prob.*] 19:22, 45. M. Kaimio, *The Chorus of Greek Drama within the Light of the Person and Number Used* (Helsinki: Helsingfors, 1970), 158.

as a whole. As such, the success of the chorus seems to have depended at least to some extent on the proficiency of the chorus-leader.⁹³¹

E. *The Chorus as Characters*

Whatever was the composition and size of the actual members who made up the tragic choruses, in the extant plays they are always *portrayed* as a homogeneous group of individuals in terms of gender, age, vocation, locale, social standing, and/or familial status (e.g., Theban elders, Argive sailors, Captive slave women, etc.)⁹³² The characters represented by the chorus, in those instances when the chorus itself did not play the role of the main character (i.e. the protagonist)⁹³³ were nearly always connected to the main character.⁹³⁴ That is, the characters often shared some kind of close bond with the protagonist, and likewise shared somehow in his/her plight.⁹³⁵ The relationship between the chorus and protagonist was more or less direct, with the chorus and protagonist often sharing the same age, gender, and/or vocation.⁹³⁶

Importantly, the chorus nearly always occupied a subordinate status vis-à-vis the protagonist(s).⁹³⁷ For example, the chorus may be comprised of *elders* when the protagonist is

⁹³¹ Demosthenes attests to the importance of the chorus-leader for the success of the chorus as a whole: “You know, of course, that if the leader is withdrawn, the rest of the chorus is done for...” Demosthenes, *Mid.* 60.

⁹³² In this way, the composition of the fictive characters of the dramatic chorus resemble the composition of non-dramatic choruses, which were most often comprised of members of the same sex, age-group, social status, etc. For lists and analyses of choral representations according to gender, age, social status, etc., see Helen Foley, “Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy,” 1–30.

⁹³³ Throughout this chapter, I use the word *protagonist* not in the technical sense of the term as it was used in the Classical period to denote the first actor on-stage, and the one who competed in the acting competition. Rather, I adopt the sense of the term as it is now used to connote the most prominent character in a given play.

⁹³⁴ The only extant play in which the chorus is typically considered the protagonist is Aeschylus’ *Supplikes*. See below, pp. 279–81.

⁹³⁵ For example, the chorus in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* represents young women who, like the protagonist Antigone are waiting fearfully inside the walls of Thebes as the army of Polynices is approaching; likewise, the chorus in Euripides’ *Helen* portrays the fellow captive women of Helen in Egypt.

⁹³⁶ The exceptions to this in the extant plays are Aeschylus, *Ag.*; Sophocles, *Ant.*; Euripides, *Bacch.*

⁹³⁷ Donald J. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 89, 98–106.

the leader of the city,⁹³⁸ *maidens* of the Queen and/or female royal heiress,⁹³⁹ or *sailors* under the command of a military protagonist.⁹⁴⁰ The subordinate position of the chorus is not only reflected in terms of their social and/or vocational status vis-à-vis the protagonist(s), but also in terms of its inability to *act* in exactly the same way as the protagonists, e.g., to make a speech, to come into physical conflict with characters,⁹⁴¹ or to suffer the fate(s) of the protagonist(s), etc. In these ways, the chorus is largely considered to occupy a marginal status relative to the protagonist(s) in Greek tragedy.⁹⁴²

As a final note on the composition of the choral characters in Greek tragedy, the chorus consistently functioned in Greek tragedy as a collective body over and against the individual characters in the play. That is, the chorus was always comprised of a group of characters, and the chorus represented the only groups of characters in a given tragedy. To put it yet another way, any group of tragic characters was, by definition, a chorus. As we will see below, this collective “voice” of the chorus was essential in helping to create a picture of the protagonists, to shape the dramatic plots, and to convey the larger themes of a particular play.

F. *Multiple (Secondary) Choruses*

There are several instances in Classical tragedy in which a second (and in one case, perhaps, a third) chorus, i.e., a secondary chorus, appears in addition to the standard chorus.⁹⁴³

⁹³⁸ E.g., Aeschylus, *Pers.*; Sophocles, *Ant.*, *Oed. tyr.*; Euripides, *Heracl.*

⁹³⁹ Sophocles, *El.*; Euripides, *Ion*, *Med.*, *Iph. aul.*, *Iph. taur.*, *Orest.*

⁹⁴⁰ E.g., Sophocles, *Aj.*, *Phil.* The exceptions to this may be those instances in which the chorus consists of divine beings, e.g., the Furies in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, and the Oceanids in Aeschylus' [*Prometheus Bound*]. While the chorus may not occupy a clearly subordinate position to the protagonist in these cases, they *are* clearly subordinate to the other gods who figure in the drama.

⁹⁴¹ See A.M. Dale, *The Collected Papers*, 211ff.

⁹⁴² While this is an apt characterization of many of the choruses in extant Classical tragedy, it certainly does not apply in the same way across tragedy, or at all in some cases. Generally speaking, the chorus is much more integral to the action of the earlier tragedies of Aeschylus than in the later plays of Sophocles and Euripides. See below, pp. 74–83.

⁹⁴³ E.g., Aeschylus, *Eum.* 868–887; *Suppl.* 1034–1073; Euripides, *Suppl.* 1113–1164; *Hipp.* 58ff.; *Phaeth.* 227ff. There is reason to suppose that a third chorus appeared in Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 825–871. In addition to these examples

For the most part, the formal characteristics of a secondary chorus can be understood in terms of tragic choruses generally, i.e., homogeneity in terms of gender, age, vocation, locale, social standing, and/or familial status, size, close relation to one of the main characters, and subordinate status.⁹⁴⁴ While the formal characteristics of the secondary chorus approximate those of the primary chorus, the functions of the secondary chorus are much more limited, and will be considered below.

2. Spatial Elements: The Chorus in the Greek Theater

A. *Position of the Chorus in the Theater vis-à-vis the Actors*

There is considerable debate over the configuration(s) of the chorus and actors in fifth-century drama, and in particular the relative position(s) of the chorus vis-à-vis the non-choral actors. While it is virtually certain that the chorus would have performed at all times in the *orchestra*, and remained there while it was not participating in the dramatic action, it is unclear whether the actors would have performed with the chorus in the orchestra, or apart from the chorus on some sort of raised stage.⁹⁴⁵

The question of whether there existed in the fifth-century a separate stage for the actors is brought to bear not only on questions of the spatial proximity between the chorus and actors in the theater, and the extent to which this proximity would have affected communication between them, but also on the question of the conceptual relationship of the chorus and actors in Greek tragedy. That is, if the actors performed together with the chorus in the orchestra, there can be

from the extant plays, a scholiast on *Hipp.* 58 confirms the existence of secondary choruses in two, no longer extant Euripidean tragedies, *Alexandros*, and *Antiope*. The identification of secondary (or tertiary) choruses is not always a simple task. In those instances when a secondary chorus is not explicitly introduced, it is unclear whether in fact a secondary chorus appears, or whether the primary chorus has been split into two groups. See A.F. Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplikes: Play and Trilogy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1969), 193, n. 1; cf. Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 216–8, 230–8.

⁹⁴⁴ The most detailed study of the phenomenon of the secondary chorus in ancient tragedy (of which I am aware) consists of a small section in Taplin, *Stagecraft in Aeschylus*, 230–8.

⁹⁴⁵ On the question of the existence of a stage in the fifth-century theater, see chapter 4, p. 232.

little doubt that the audience's attention would have been wholly and consistently focused in the orchestra, and that to this extent the conceptual center of tragedy was located there. If, however, the actors were removed from the orchestra, the question becomes whether the conceptual center of Greek tragedy would have been located in the orchestra with the chorus, or on the stage with the actors. In the absence of concrete archaeological data, the evidence of the extant tragedies themselves alone offer evidence as to the relative importance of the chorus vis-à-vis the actors, as well as the question of the location of the conceptual center of Greek tragedy in the Classical period, which will be considered later in this chapter.

B. *Shape of the Chorus*

It is an oft-repeated maxim in studies on Classical drama that tragic choruses (along with satiric and comic choruses for that matter) consistently formed a rectangular shape while in the orchestra, and that in this way they differed from the circular *dithyrambic* choruses from which they are thought to have derived.⁹⁴⁶ The notion of a rectangular tragic chorus depends on several factors: (1) A fragment attributed to the 5th c. comic poet Cratinus, which speaks of a “left-stander” in the chorus, thereby suggesting a rectangular formation;⁹⁴⁷ (2) Evidence of comic authors who claimed that tragic chorus was positioned in “ranks” and “files”;⁹⁴⁸ and (3) A perceived etymological connection between the Greek words for “tragedy” (*trag/oidia*) and “rectangular” (*te/trag/onon*).⁹⁴⁹ Others have suspected a rectangular choral formation on the

⁹⁴⁶ E.g., Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 82; Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 245. For the ancient sources, see Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 360ff.

⁹⁴⁷ Hesychius, s.v. *aristerostates*; Photius, *Lex.*, s.v. *aristerostates*. See Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama*, 363; Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 95.

⁹⁴⁸ The first seems to have been Pollux, who claimed that the chorus entered the *orchestra* during the *parodos* in a rank-and-file formation: “...κατὰ ζυγά...κατὰ στοίχους...” Pollux 4.108–9.

⁹⁴⁹ See, e.g., *Etymologicum Magnum* 764: *Tragoedia*. As Ley points out, “The correlation is totally spurious, since the word for ‘rectangular’ is a compound of *tetra* (four) and *gonion* (angled), and so the apparent *trag* element is a purely fortuitous result of the compound.” Ley, *Theatricality*, 126, n. 28.

basis of the fact that choral choreography was likened in antiquity to military formations, which are by and large thought to have been rectangular formations.⁹⁵⁰

While this represents the consensus position, the supreme deficiency of the etymological connection which links the tragic chorus with a rectangular formation, the fact that most of the testimony for the rectangular formation of the chorus comes from a very late date, and the realization that not *every* military maneuver (and corresponding movement of the chorus) had to be rectangular,⁹⁵¹ has led some scholars to re-assess the notion that dramatic choruses consistently maintained a rectangular shape. Further, there is positive evidence for supposing that the chorus at least at times maintained a *circular* arrangement, including most simply the fact that several orchestras in the 5th c. appear to have been circular.⁹⁵² The chorus may signal its circular orientation by words in the choral odes which suggest circularity,⁹⁵³ a notion which derives from the idea that the choreography of non-dramatic and dramatic choruses mimetically represented the content of the poetry. In other words, if the chorus in fact *mimetically* represented the content of its lyrics, and those lyrics imply circularity, then the chorus may have taken a circular formation.⁹⁵⁴ The positive evidence for a circular chorus is such that several

⁹⁵⁰ E.g., Aelius Aristides, who considers the similarities between the “leftstander” in the dramatic chorus to the “right wing” of battle formations. Aelius Aristides, *On Behalf of the Four* 154. Cf. *Scholion* to Aristides, *On Behalf of the Four* 154. Winkler understands the tragic chorus to have operated as a kind of miniature military phalanx. See J. J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song,” 57–58, cf. 50; See also J.J. Winkler, “The Ephebes’ Song: Tragôidia and Polis,” *Representations* 11 (1985): 26–62.

⁹⁵¹ “Various dance formations could be good for military training or for times of peace, or manly in terms of their disciplined style (Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 628e–f, Plato, *Leg.* 7.814e–16d) without being consistently rectangular.” Foley, “Choral Identity,” 9.

⁹⁵² For the evidence of rectilinear orchestras in the 5th c., see chapter 4, p. 40. At any rate, the evidence for circular orchestras suggests that choruses may at least at times have formed a circular arrangement. E.g.: “...given the circular shape of the orchestra, it is difficult to accept that, if the evidence has any validity at all, the tragic chorus was straitjacketed into rectangular formation throughout every song in every tragedy for the entire duration of the fifth century.” J.F. Davidson, “The Circle and the Tragic Chorus,” *GR* 33:1 (Apr 1986): 41. Of course, the theaters at Ikarion, Isthmia, Syracuse, etc.,

⁹⁵³ E.g., Aeschylus, *Ag.* 997; Sophocles, *Trach.* 129–131; *Ant.* 117–119; Euripides’ *Iph. taur.* 1143ff., and *Herc. fur.* 687ff. For a brief discussion of these passages, see Davidson, “The Circle and the Tragic Chorus,” 41–2; Cf. T. J. Sienkewicz, “Circles, Confusion, and the Chorus of Agamemnon,” *Eranos* 78 (1980): 133–42.

⁹⁵⁴ Likewise, if the chorus’ choreography mimetically represents the action taking place by the actors, then circular choral formations may be suggested even in those scenes which do not directly mention or necessarily involve the

scholars who argue for a predominantly rectangular chorus readily admit the possibility that the chorus may have taken a circular shape as demanded by these dramatic circumstances.⁹⁵⁵ It is thought that the center of the orchestra would have served as the center-point of any such circular choral formation.⁹⁵⁶ Thus, in those theatres in which an altar was located in the center of the *orchestra*, the altar would have formed the geographic center-point of the choral formation, and the focal point of the dramatic choral action.

C. Choreography

The texts of extant dramas offer the clearest evidence that dancing was an integral part of choral performance in Classical tragedy and comedy. References are sometimes explicitly made by the chorus to their own dancing, often relating to a major turn in the action, such as the death of a character,⁹⁵⁷ or the delivery of good news.⁹⁵⁸ References to processional dances, dancing women, wedding dances (*epithalamia*), ecstatic *Dionysiac* dances,⁹⁵⁹ etc., occur throughout Classical tragedy (and comedy for that matter), likely signaled some sort of accompanying choreography.⁹⁶⁰ Kernodle rightly asks what could have been the purpose of such a large orchestra if not for action and movement on the part of the chorus.⁹⁶¹

chorus, such as the (circular) military maneuvers in Aeschylus' *Persians*, the crowds encircling Teucer in Sophocles, *Aj.* 723–4, Heracles in Sophocles, *Trach.* 194–5, and Philoctetes in Sophocles, *Phil.* 356–7. By contrast, the chorus never alludes to their rectangular formation. Marcel Lech, "Marching Choruses? Choral Performance in Athens," *GRBS* 49.3 (2009): 346.

⁹⁵⁵ Ley, *Theatricality*, 126ff.; Davidson, "The Circle and the Tragic Chorus," 41–45; Lech, "Marching Choruses?" 343–361; Foley, "Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy," 9; Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 176ff.; Webster, *The Greek Chorus*, 112.

⁹⁵⁶ E.g., Pickard-Cambridge, *Theatre of Dionysus*, 131–2; Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions*, 44.

⁹⁵⁷ E.g., the death of Lycus in Euripides, *Herc. fur.* 761; Pentheus' death in Euripides, *Bacch.* 1153. For a compilation of this evidence, see Davidson, "The Circle and the Tragic Chorus," 39.

⁹⁵⁸ E.g., the imminent arrival of Heracles (Sophocles, *Trach.* 216–20), or Ajax' decision to lay down his sword (Sophocles, *Aj.* 646ff.). In other cases self-references to choral dancing are more oblique, as when the Theban elders declare that despite their old age they will dance to celebrate Heracles' victories (Euripides, *Herc. fur.* 673–686), and in the famous question asked by the chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which points to the essential role of dancing to the dramatic chorus: "If impious act are honored, why should I dance?" Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 896.

⁹⁵⁹ E.g., Euripides' *Bacchae*.

⁹⁶⁰ Davidson suggests a likely example at the beginning of Euripides' *Bacchae*. In the prologue, a disguised

Aside from the evidence provided by the extant dramas, and the nature of the dramatic space allotted for the chorus, ancient commentators consistently testified to the importance of dancing in drama.⁹⁶² And so it is thought by most modern commentators that dance accompanied most, if not all, choral activity in Classical drama, from the chorus' entrance into the orchestra to begin the play (*parodos*), through the choral odes and interactions with the actors,⁹⁶³ to the chorus' exit which concluded the play (*exodos*).⁹⁶⁴ As we shall see, it may have been that the chorus danced even when it was not singing lines or participating in the dramatic action, as a choreographic accompaniment to the actors.

Attempts to re-create the choral choreography of Classical drama are stifled by the same kinds of problems intrinsic to the study of choreography of non-dramatic choruses: choreographic notation simply does not exist in any of the extant manuscripts, commentators provide little in the way of specific information as to the nature of dramatic choral dance, and depictions of choral dance in artistic remains have a limited value in reconstructing choreographic movements.⁹⁶⁵

Dionysus announces his departure to Mount Cithaeron to join in the dances of his ecstatic followers, which is immediately followed by the choral *parodos*, which consists of these very followers of Dionysus on Mount Cithaeron. "...it is reasonable to assume that [the chorus'] own dancing in a sense brings before the audience the rhythms and movements which are to be imagined as simultaneously taking place on Mount Cithaeron." Davidson, "The Circle and the Tragic Chorus," 40–1.

⁹⁶¹ George R. Kernodle, "Symbolic Action in the Greek Choral Odes?" *CJ*53:1 (Oct., 1957): 1.

⁹⁶² The early tragic playwright Phrynichos testifies: "Dance furnishes me with as many figures as ruinous night makes waves on the sea in a tempest." Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 8.732ff. Likewise, writing long after the decline of Classical drama, Athenaeus attests to choral dancing in Classical drama by assigning to the early dramatic poets the role of choral choreographer. He claimed that Aeschylus "devised many dance figures himself and assigned them to the dancers in his choruses..." Moreover, "The early poets, Thespis, Pratinas, Kratinos, Phrynichos, were called dancers because they not only realized their dramas through the dancing of the chorus but also, apart from their own poems, trained people who wished to learn to dance." Athenaeus, *Deipn.* 1.21e–22a. Cf. Mullen, *Choreia*, 20.

⁹⁶³ It was long ago argued on etymological grounds that the choral ode, or *stasimon*, consisted of a stationary chorus. For rejection of the theory that *stasimon* meant "song without dance" see Dale, *Collected Papers*, 34–40.

⁹⁶⁴ I am not aware of a single scholar who has argued against the proposition that the chorus danced in some form or fashion in Classical drama.

⁹⁶⁵ Depictions of choral dance in artistic remains may provide clues as to specific dance postures, but these postures offer glimpses of a snap-shot in time, not the totality of actual choreographic movements. In other words, artistic remains allow for taxonomies of various dance postures (foot movements, hand movements, etc.), but these cannot be assimilated in such a way as to reconstruct *movement*. What's more, it is extremely difficult to associate such

The nature of dramatic choral choreography might be extrapolated from what is known of non-dramatic choral dances which gave rise to tragedy. So, for instance, insofar as Classical tragedy is thought to have derived from the *dithyramb*, which was widely associated with the god Dionysus, tragic choreography may have exhibited elements of the “disorder, tumult, and revel” which characterized early Dionysiac worship.⁹⁶⁶

More likely, the choreography accompanying dramatic choral poetry was related to the patterns inherent in the metrical systems,⁹⁶⁷ and to the moods which may have been conveyed and/or created by particular meters.⁹⁶⁸ It seems natural that the rhythms inherent in the words of the chorus should align with the cadence of the chorus’ movement(s).⁹⁶⁹ As noted earlier, the fact that the *foot* came to denote the basic unit of a metrical system most likely owes to the

depictions with specific dramatic productions, much less with particular scenes within a drama. Those who work most closely with the visual evidence are the first to acknowledge their limitations in reconstructing actual choreography. E.g., Webster, *The Greek Chorus*, xi; Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greek Theatre*, 85; cf. Ley, *Theatricality*, 150ff.

⁹⁶⁶ Likewise, the choreography of comic choruses may have included elements common to phallic/fertility processions, drinking-processions (*komoi*), animal dances, and masked revilers dancing from house to house, which are thought to have been the forerunners to Classical comedy. Lawler, *The Dance in Ancient Greece*, 74–86.

⁹⁶⁷ In this vein, the fact that many of the choral odes in tragedy exhibit *strophic responsion* may be a clue to the choral movements in these sections. Insofar as the words used to denote the stanzas in lyric poetry, *strophe*, and *antistrophe*, denote *turning* and *counter-turning*, respectively, it is reasonable to conclude that the *strophe-antistrophe* in dramatic poetry signaled some kind of turn and counter-turn. Yet, it is more difficult to determine what this would have meant in specific terms, especially in those cases when the chorus was not arranged in a circular formation. Several have suggested that the movements of the chorus during the *strophe* would have been somehow repeated *in reverse* during the *antistrophe*.

⁹⁶⁸ For example, *lyric dactyls*, which may have engendered a *hieratic* mood, may have conjured similarly *hieratic* dance postures, while the Ionic meter with its *Oriental* connotations may have included appropriately *Oriental* movements. An oft-cited example of this line of thinking with respect to dramatic choral poetry concerns *anapaests*. *Anapaests*, which consisted of two short syllables followed by one long syllable (˘ ˘ –), were thought to convey the sense of marching, they are thought to have been accompanied by marching choruses. Insofar as *anapaests* occur regularly in the *parodos*, when the chorus first entered the orchestra, and during the *exodos* when the chorus exited the orchestra, it is thought that the chorus would have been marching at these points in the performance. A.M. Dale offered her analysis of the moods conveyed by various meters in a comprehensive study of the meters of Greek tragedy, which have subsequently been taken as programmatic. A.M. Dale, *The Lyric Metres of Greek Drama* (Cambridge: University Press, 1948).

⁹⁶⁹ “It was the words which lent the dances of tragedy their rhythm. There was no percussion, only the stamp of feet on the earth. The piper was not supposed to change the rhythm embedded in the words, but only to enhance the words through his melody. The job of the dramatist, at least in the earlier part of the period, was to compose the dances at the same time as the words. The metres in which they choruses were written presupposed specific dance steps. Greek metre was based upon the precise length of time taken to utter syllable...and this feature of the language allowed the two rhythms of word and movement to be precisely aligned.” Wiles, *Greek Theatre Performance*, 138–9.

intrinsic relationship between the rhythms of the metrical systems and of the corresponding dances.

It may also have been that choreography was determined by, and inherently related to, the content of the choral odes sung by the chorus. The notion that the words of the choral odes provide clues as to the chorus' movements is suggested by Athenaeus' remark that "poets from the very beginning...used the movements only to illustrate the words that were sung" (Athenaeus 628d),⁹⁷⁰ and by the impression that choral movements were generally mimetic in nature. For instance, the physical entrance of the chorus was likely determined by the dramatic exigencies of the play. Elsewhere in the drama, the chorus may have performed "symbolic equivalents" of deeds which theatrical convention did not allow to be performed outright, e.g., deaths, murders, battles, etc.⁹⁷¹ In the absence of much in the way of choreographic clues implicit in the words of the choral odes, we are left to speculate as to how the chorus might have moved accordingly.⁹⁷²

To this point I have considered the movements of the chorus while the chorus was performing. One of the more vexing questions, however, concerns the activity of the chorus while the actors were speaking. That the chorus appears to have remained in the *orchestra* throughout the play, including during the *episodia*, appears likely on account of the fact that the chorus would be called upon to interact with the protagonist(s) within dramatic episodes, as in

⁹⁷⁰ Landels echoes a fairly common sentiment on this issue: "...given the Greek view that the dramatist's medium was a blend of music, words, and *rhythmos* (i.e., bodily movement), it is surely safe to assume that the dancing of the *choros* was representational (or mimetic, to use Aristotle's special term), miming the events of the story, and expressing the emotions of the singers in what is now called body-language." Landels, *Music in Ancient Greece and Rome*, 14.

⁹⁷¹ For instance, in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, when Phaedra rushes inside to hang herself (and out of the sight of the audience, who were unaccustomed to see such horrific acts acted-out in the theater) the chorus sings of the details of the rope being tied around her neck, and her body swinging from the rafters. Euripides, *Hipp.* 765–775. Kernodle, "Symbolic Action," 2.

⁹⁷² E.g., Wiles looks to those images that appear in both the *strophe* and *antistrophe* to determine what was likely to have been represented mimetically. Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 97ff.

lyric dialogue between the actors and chorus. But the question remains what the chorus did—or did not do—while it was not participating in the dramatic action.

On the one hand are those who believe that the chorus did not provide any kind of choreographic accompaniment while they were not singing any lines, but sat or stood quietly and out of the sight of the audience.⁹⁷³ Still others imagine the chorus to have performed a choreographic accompaniment while the actors were performing.⁹⁷⁴ The popular notion that non-dramatic choruses functioned essentially as *mimetic* entities lends credence to the notion that dramatic choruses might have mimed the words and actions of the actors, or danced in such a way as to represent them symbolically.⁹⁷⁵ Again, in the absence of explicit or implicit information as to the chorus' activity during *episodia*, we are left only to speculate as to their movements, or lack thereof.

3. Types of Choral Lyrics

A. Method

It remains to consider some of the specific and regularly occurring types of choral lyrics in Greek tragedy. Two categories of tragic choral lyrics are typically distinguished, those which occur outside of/in-between scenes, and those which occur during scenes. In order to appreciate

⁹⁷³ E.g., “Between their songs the chorus will have stood (or knelt or sat) as still and inconspicuous as possible: their role was to dance and sing, not to be a naturalistic stage crowd.” Taplin, *Greek Tragedy in Action* (London: Methuen, 1978), 12–13.

⁹⁷⁴ Lawler, *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre*, 28; Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 54–56; H.C. Baldry, *The Greek Tragic Theatre* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), 64–7; Kernodle, “Symbolic Action,” 1–7.

⁹⁷⁵ Two very late *scholia* on Aristophanes suggest that the chorus did just this. In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the chorus inquires as to the origin of the dispute between the Just and Unjust causes. The chorus sings: “But from where the dispute first arose, *you must speak to (the) chorus*.” Aristophanes, *Nub.* 1351–2. The lack of a definite article in the second clause is explained by the scholiast to refer to a formulaic expression (i.e., “to speak to chorus”). A *scholiast* on this passage remarks, “They used the term ‘to speak a chorus’ when, while the actor was reciting, the chorus was dancing the speech.” Likewise, in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, alongside a passage in which Aeschylus and Euripides are before Dionysus in Hades, the chorus sings, “We are anxious to hear from you two wise men what harmony (*emmeleia*) of words you embark upon...” Aristophanes, *Ran.* 895–7. Here a *scholiast* notes that the meaning of *emmeleia*, which most commonly meant the dancing in tragedy which accompanied the choral ode, is taken by some to mean “the accompanying dance to the speeches.” See Walton, *Greek Theatre Practice*, 54–55.

this distinction, it is necessary first to consider briefly what constituted a *scene* (*episodion*), and how scenes were distinguished from one another in Greek tragedy.⁹⁷⁶ The beginning of a scene is typically identified by the entrance of an actor (or actors) onto a stage (or orchestra) previously unoccupied by any other actors, while the end of a scene is marked by the exit of the actor(s) from the stage.⁹⁷⁷ The beginnings and ends of scenes are further marked, most often, by choral odes (*stasima*), which occur in-between them. That is, the end of a scene (i.e., the exit of the actor(s) from the stage) coincides with the beginning of a choral ode (*stasima*), while the beginning of the next scene (i.e., the entrance of the actor(s) back onto the stage) coincides with the end of the choral ode. Thus, the “formal structure of Greek tragedy is founded on a basic pattern: enter actor(s)—actors’ dialogue—exunt actor(s)—choral strophic song/enter new actor(s)—actors’ dialogue...and so on.”⁹⁷⁸ To this basic pattern is added: (1) the *prologos*, or introductory speeches and/or dialogue of the actors; (2) the *parodos*, or the entrance of the chorus into the theater;⁹⁷⁹ and (3) the *exodos*, or exit of the chorus from the theater which formally ended the play, to arrive at the essential structural elements of Greek tragedy. Thus, it is possible to distinguish those elements which are primarily the domain of the actors, that is, the *prologos* and the *episodia*, from those which are primarily the domain of the chorus, the *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodos*.

⁹⁷⁶ The first theoretical discussion of the structural elements of tragedy was offered by Aristotle, and subsequent ancient and modern discussions of the topic have consistently relied on the basic structural categories he employed. Even the most stringent modern critiques of Aristotle’s analyses consist primarily of refinements or modifications of his basic categories. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1452b17–27.

⁹⁷⁷ These parameters were first offered by Oliver Taplin, whose conclusions have, as far as I can tell, received unanimous acceptance. For a summary of his analysis of the structure of Greek tragedy, see Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 51ff.

⁹⁷⁸ Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 55. Variations to this basic pattern occur throughout Classical tragedy, the most common of which is the tendency for one actor (and less often, more than one actor) to remain on the stage and to interact with the chorus in-between scenes.

⁹⁷⁹ In a couple of extant Aeschylean tragedies, the *prologos* does not appear, and is replaced by the choral *parodos* which constituted the very first dramatic element.

Such a distinction is only tentative, for, as we will see, actors regularly participate in the choral elements, and *vice versa*. For instance, one or more actors regularly participated in-between scenes by means of a lyric dialogue with the chorus. Likewise, the chorus regularly interacted with actors in-between scenes, by means of various forms of lyric and non-lyric dialogue, and non-dialogic utterances. At any rate, the chorus participates both: (1) outside of/in-between scenes, in the *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodos*, and in lyric dialogue between the chorus and one or more actors which occurs in-between scenes; and (2) during scenes, including: (a) lyric and non-lyric dialogue which occurs between chorus and one or more actors within a scene; and (b) non-dialogic utterances.⁹⁸⁰

My goals in this section are to elucidate the most important formal characteristics of each of these types of choral phenomena, to consider some of the functions of the chorus as they relate specifically to their structural position within the drama, and to evaluate developments throughout the Classical period. A more detailed discussion of the content of choral utterances, considerations of the functions of choral utterances as they relate to the surrounding speeches, dialogue, and action of the actors, will be taken up later in the chapter.

⁹⁸⁰ My presentation of the chorus' contribution in structural terms follows past studies which most commonly recognize the distinction between choral activity in-between scenes and choral phenomena during scenes. Given the sheer quantity and variety of choral activity in Greek drama, such a distinction has a definite heuristic value, but brings with it methodological flaws which need to be accounted for. The root methodological flaw to this approach is that the chorus' roles within the episodes are often considered in different terms than its role in-between episodes, such that similarities and/or overlap between choral functions in these different structural positions are neglected. For instance, such a distinction often minimizes the dramatic value of choral action in-between scenes, with the premise that the *action* of Greek drama took place amongst actors during the scenes, while the choral odes and the chorus do not contribute to the dramatic action *per se*, but only relates to it, reflects upon it, comments upon it, etc. On the contrary, there are not a few ways in which the chorus' activities in-between scenes contribute to the immediate dramatic action (e.g., providing background information, introducing characters, foreshadowing future events, etc.), and an evaluation of these functions are essential to an understanding of the chorus' role in-between scenes. Just as often, the roles of the chorus within scenes are often considered in ways that effectively neglect the ways in which the chorus reflects upon, and provides a context for understanding the dramatic action, and in so doing to shape larger philosophical and theological themes in the play, as the chorus does more conspicuously in-between scenes. Thus, while I recognize the conventional distinction typically made between the chorus' activity in-between scenes, and the chorus' participation within scenes, it is necessary to foreground the methodological obstacles which arise from considering this distinction in absolute terms.

B. *The Chorus In-Between Scenes*

Choral activity which occurs outside of or in-between scenes most often took the form of an exclusively choral ode, and less often, the form of a dialogue with one or more actors. Choral lyrics in-between scenes consisted either of the *parodos*, the initial entrance of the chorus into the orchestra, a *stasimon*, the choral song sung in-between scenes, or the *exodos*, the exit of the chorus from the orchestra. While each of these types of choral lyric in-between scenes exhibits many formal similarities, because of the distinctive functional characteristics of each, *stasima*, *parodoi*, *exodoi*, as well as choral odes *within* scenes, are often considered independently of one another.

i. *Parodos*

The *parodos* refers to the initial procession of the chorus into the orchestra, the choral ode which was sung during this procession, and to the passageway(s) by which the chorus made its entrance into the theater.⁹⁸¹ In some of Aeschylus' extant plays the choral *parodos* constituted the very first dramatic element in the play, although the entrance of the chorus elsewhere in Aeschylus and in the rest of Classical tragedy (and comedy) normally followed the prologue, or introductory speech of the protagonist, and/or dialogue between characters.⁹⁸² Even though the *parodos* rarely represented the very first element of Greek drama, and sometimes came only after several hundred lines had already been spoken by the actors, it is thought to have constituted the formal beginning of the play.⁹⁸³ This is suggested by the fact that everything that

⁹⁸¹ Each Greek theater included two *parodoi* on either side of the *skene*, which led to the orchestra from off-stage. These passageways were also referred to as *eisodoi*.

⁹⁸² That the chorus begins the play in this way in Aeschylus may reflect an early stage in the development of the chorus in Greek drama, wherein the chorus played a more prominent role than is evident elsewhere in subsequent Greek tragedy and comedy.

⁹⁸³ Peter Arnott, *Public and Performance in the Greek Theatre* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 25.

preceded the arrival of the chorus into the orchestra was considered *prologos*,⁹⁸⁴ a view which perhaps owes to the origins of drama in choral performance and the subsequent notion that drama was in its essence a choral art form.

The entrance of the chorus in Greek tragedy was typically cast in terms of a response to a dramatic event in the play. The chorus often entered in response to the summons of the protagonist or the protagonist's pleas for help,⁹⁸⁵ in pursuit of a transgressor,⁹⁸⁶ or in a spontaneous act of sympathy for the protagonist.⁹⁸⁷ This dramatic exigency provided an opportunity for the chorus to identify itself, the protagonists, its relationship to the protagonists, and its intentions.⁹⁸⁸

Later in the chapter, I will demonstrate how the chorus could act in the *parodos* on the one hand as a dramatic instrument to provide pieces of information which are critical for the development of the plot, e.g., by providing back-stories on the protagonist(s), a synopsis of the past events that have led to the current circumstances, and a summary of the present circumstances including introductions to the protagonist(s) and their plot-lines, and on the other hand as a medium for reflecting upon the surrounding speeches and dialogue of the protagonists, and for casting the speeches and dialogue in a particular historical-mythical, philosophical, or mythical-theological light.

⁹⁸⁴ *Prologos* was the term given by Aristotle for all that which precedes the entrance of the chorus. Aristotle, *Poet.* 12.

⁹⁸⁵ E.g., Sophocles, *Oed. tyr., Ant.*; Euripides, *Heracl., Tro., Iph. taur., Hel., Bacch.*; Aristophanes, *Nub., Pax., Av., Plut.*

⁹⁸⁶ E.g., Aeschylus, *Eum.* 244ff.; Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 117ff.; Aristophanes, *Ach.* 280ff.

⁹⁸⁷ Euripides, *Andr., Hec., El., Heracl., Orest.*

⁹⁸⁸ See Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 127–9.

ii. *Stasimon*

A *stasimon* is typically identified as the choral song, performed alone by the chorus in the absence of actor(s), in-between *episodia* in Greek tragedy and comedy.⁹⁸⁹ While choral *stasima* consistently exhibited *lyric* dimensions (lyric metrical systems, *strophic respension*, etc.) the specific forms of the *stasima* varied even within a single play, and much more so across playwrights throughout the Classical period. That is, the lengths of the *stasima*, the number of *strophic* pairs, etc., varied substantially from Aeschylus to Euripides.

One of the primary functions of choral *stasima* appears to have been to demarcate episodes.⁹⁹⁰ Aristotle suggested as much in his definition of *episodia*, which he identified as that which occurred in-between choral odes. Choral songs in-between scenes are often thought to have provided an opportunity for the actors to catch their breath, change costumes, etc. While choral *stasima* consistently serve as act-dividers, episodes can also be demarcated (especially in later drama) by lyric dialogue which may or may not have included the chorus at all. In other

⁹⁸⁹ Aristotle defined *stasimon* as a “song of the chorus without anapaests or trochees,” two metrical systems, the first of which is closely associated with recitative performance. His definition thus appears to distinguish the choral *stasimon* from the *parodos* and *exodos*, each of which frequently exhibited *anapaests* and *trochees*. However, the lack of specificity in Aristotle’s definition has presented a number of problems. For instance, insofar as choral songs without anapaests or trochees appear during scenes, it appears at first glance as if *stasima* would include all instances of choral song, whether it occurred in-between or during scenes. However, scholars typically assume that Aristotle must have intended to exclude choral songs within *episodia* in his definition of *stasimon*, on account of the fact that he speaks elsewhere of “choral songs” as those odes which demarcated *episodia*. A related issue concerns whether or not choral songs with another actor (i.e., “lyric dialogue”) which occur in-between scenes are properly considered *stasima*. Most scholars speak of lyric dialogues in-between scenes as taking the place of a choral *stasimon*, rather than including them under the general rubric of *stasima*. For a fuller discussion, see Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 470–6.

⁹⁹⁰ Claiming that choral *stasima* functioned primarily to divide episodes clearly subordinates them to the dramatic action within the episodes, and often implicitly or explicitly renders them unimportant dramatically. While it is inaccurate to say that choral activity in-between scenes is always critical to the dramatic action—on the contrary, many choral odes in-between scenes, especially those of Euripides and into the Hellenistic period(s), appear to become much less dramatically relevant—at once discounting the dramatic importance of all choral odes by considering them primarily in terms of their role as act-dividers neglects the many cases, and the many ways, in which they are critical to an understanding and appreciation of the play. Such a view is teleological insofar as it takes the opinions of later commentators (e.g. Horace) and the evidence of later tragedy which suggests that the chorus functioned primarily in such a way.

words, all choral *stasima* in-between scenes divide episodes, but not all episodes are divided by choral *stasima*.

Choral activity in-between episodes contributed much more dynamically to Greek tragedy, however, than to demarcate episodes, or to provide filler material while the actors changed costumes.⁹⁹¹ On the one hand, the lyric rhythms, song, and dance of the chorus in-between scenes constituted a unique aesthetic element in drama,⁹⁹² and a poetic form distinctive from the poetry of the actors within scenes in terms of dialect, metrical tendencies, musical accompaniment, and its collective presentation. That is, the choral odes in the *stasima* served as a structural contrast to the spoken word of the actor(s) during scenes,⁹⁹³ whose contrasting and complementary elements together created the “essential rhythm” of dramatic performance.⁹⁹⁴

iii. *Exodos*

⁹⁹¹ The choral songs in-between scenes are often considered to have been the most essential, and most impressive, contribution of the chorus to Greek drama. Their importance may be gauged in quantitative terms, insofar the lines given to the chorus in-between scenes make up the largest percentage of the total number of lines given to the chorus in any given Classical tragedy, and in qualitative terms, insofar as they are often critical to the progression of the plots, and in conveying larger thematic interests in the play. As such, they tend to receive the majority of critical attention from commentators, often to the neglect of other choral contributions in drama. Such tendencies are lamented by those who recognize the value of the choruses within the scenes. See, for example, Andújar, “The Chorus in Dialogue.”

⁹⁹² The aesthetic qualities and entertainment value of choral lyric was recognized by ancient commentators and scholiasts, who measured the intrinsic values of lyric in such terms. For instance, Aristotle noted that tragic lyrics created *hedusma*. Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450b16, 62a16; cf. *Pol.* 1339b20, 40b16. Cf. a *scholion* on Sophocles, *Aj.* 693.

⁹⁹³ “[The Chorus] performs this basic task primarily by contrast. The metrical texture (and also its musical and choreographical accompaniment) contrasts with the predominant texture of the verbal text within the acts: and along with this change of texture there is a corresponding change of dialect colouring and poetical vocabulary; in both respects, therefore, act-dividing lyric advertises itself as an obviously different kind of poetry... Act-dividing lyric is therefore set apart from what is contained within the acts, and because of this contrast it is capable of marking the structural break clearly.” Heath, *Poetics*, 138. However, the contrast between chorus and actors is not always so rigid. In fact, actors can take on lyric roles, most often when participating in lyric dialogue with the Chorus, but also independent of the Chorus, especially in later tragedy. At the same time, the Chorus may take on non-lyric roles, while participating in *iambic* dialogue with another character or characters.

⁹⁹⁴ Rush Rehm, “Performing the Chorus: Choral Action, Interaction, and Absence in Euripides,” *Arion* 4.1 (Spr., 1996): 45. Cf. Hugh Parry: “...as it establishes its inner rhythms the ode works in counterpoint to the dialogue, pitting dance against slow march, poetry against argument, words and images of passion against words and images of exposition...” Hugh Parry, *The Lyric Poems of Greek Tragedy* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1978), 75.

The *exodos* consisted of the final exit of the chorus from the orchestra (by way of the *parodoi* through which the chorus entered the theater), as well as the choral song which accompanied it. Most often in Classical tragedy, the lyrics of the choral *exodos* constituted the very last lines of the play, which signals their most obvious function as a formal conclusion to the drama.⁹⁹⁵ The *exodos* not only served most often as the structural culmination of the drama,⁹⁹⁶ but often consisted of a thematic conclusion to the play. For instance, the *exodos* in Aeschylus' *Persians* (which does not take the form of an exclusively choral ode, but rather a lyric dialogue between the chorus of Persian elders and Xerxes) consists of a final lament over the fact that the Persian army was destroyed by the Greeks,⁹⁹⁷ the exposition of which constituted the focus of the tragedy. The *exodos* in Sophocles' *Antigone* concludes (likewise in the form of a lyric dialogue between the chorus and King Creon) with the admonitions of the chorus that it is unwise to be impious towards the gods, and that the "great words of boasters" are always punished (1348–52), sentiments which serve as a fitting conclusion to a tragedy in which the protagonists, Antigone and Creon, each met ruinous ends on account of (it could be argued) impiety and boasting.

As these examples demonstrate, the chorus' final words in the *exodos* could be immediately related to the specific themes of the play. However, the final choral odes were sometimes thematically so vague as to be applicable to virtually any play. For example, several of Sophocles' tragedies end with very brief choral utterances which are only very tenuously related to the surrounding dramatic circumstances, as in *Philoctetes* when the Greek sailors remark, "Let us depart all together, with a prayer to the sea nymphs that they may come to bring

⁹⁹⁵ The fact that a choral ode should have regularly concluded a Greek tragedy further testifies to the fact that tragedy was considered to have been essentially a *choral* performance.

⁹⁹⁶ Not every Classical tragedy concluded with a choral song, but the *exodos* was most often one of the final, if not very final, dramatic elements.

⁹⁹⁷ Aeschylus, *Pers.* 931–1079.

us safely home” (Sophocles, *Phil.* 1469–71), or in *Oedipus at Colonus*, when the chorus of elders beckon Antigone and Theseus, “Come, cease your lament and do not arouse it more! For in all ways these things stand fast” (Sophocles, *Oed. col.* 1777–9). In this vein, several of Euripides’ plays end with a more or less identical formulation: “The dispositions of the gods take many forms; the gods bring many things to fulfillment unexpectedly. What was expected has not been fulfilled, but god found a way for the unexpected. Such is the outcome of this affair.”⁹⁹⁸

The choral odes of the *exodos* exhibited a range of forms throughout the Classical period. On the one hand the choral *exodos* could be quite long, as in several of Aeschylus’ extant tragedies which, like the choral odes elsewhere in his tragedies, were often several dozen lines in length, and which exhibit multi-*strophic responsion*. At the other end of the spectrum are extremely short *exodoi*, as in Euripidean tragedy, which were most often *astrophic* and only a few lines long.

C. *The Chorus Within Scenes*

Insofar as the choral odes which appear in-between the scenes of Greek tragedy comprised the majority of all choral lyrics they are often considered to have constituted the most significant contribution of the chorus to the drama, and/or the element of drama in which the chorus most fully expressed its choral identity. A negative consequence of such focused attention on the choral odes is that choral phenomena within scenes are often minimized or neglected altogether.⁹⁹⁹ However, such phenomena are neither infrequent nor inconsequential in Classical Greek tragedy. Two categories of choral phenomena within scenes are typically

⁹⁹⁸ Euripides, *Alc.* 1159–63; *Andr.* 1284–8; *Hel.* 168–92; *Bacch.* 1388–92. See Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 105–6. Cf. D. Roberts, “Parting Words. Final lines in Sophocles and Euripides,” *CQ* 37 (1987): 51–64.

⁹⁹⁹ While choral participation within scenes is often simply neglected in scholarly treatments, Garvie openly declares its insignificance: “The least important of its [the Chorus’] functions is to be a character in the drama.” Garvie, *Aeschylus’ Supplikes*, 109. The relative neglect of the chorus within scenes is lamented by Rosa Andújar, who has recently completed a dissertation on this very topic, “The Chorus in Dialogue.”

identified in Greek tragedy: (1) Lyric or non-lyric dialogue with protagonist(s); and (2) Non-dialogic choral utterances.

i. Lyric Dialogue

Lyric dialogue between the Chorus and actor(s) constitutes the most frequent choral contribution within scenes.¹⁰⁰⁰ Two types of lyric dialogue may be distinguished on formal grounds, the first consisting of wholly lyric dialogue in which the lines of both the actor(s) and Chorus were sung, and the second consisting of choral lyric stanzas interspersed with, or followed by, the spoken dialogue of an actor. In either case, the combined lines of the chorus and actors most often constitute *strophic* metrical patterns, which further contribute to the lyric nature of the dialogue.¹⁰⁰¹

Lyric dialogues as they appear in extant Classical tragedies vary so considerably that very little can be said of consistent formal features and structure.¹⁰⁰² At the same time, lyric dialogues so consistently occur at similar dramatic points throughout tragedy—at emotionally charged moments of dramatic turbulence—that something can be said of their functional characteristics.¹⁰⁰³ For example, lyric dialogue often occurs during such a charged event, such as the murder of Clytaemestra (Sophocles, *El.* 1398ff.), or Electra (Euripides, *Orest.* 1246), or even

¹⁰⁰⁰ Both types are identified on metrical grounds, according to whether the lines of both the chorus and actor(s) appear in *lyric* meters (including *anapaests*) or in mixed meters (i.e., a *lyric* meter in the case of the chorus, and an *iambic* meter in the case of the actor(s)). The latter form, which occurs more frequently than the former, is typically referred to as *epirrhematic* dialogue on account of the fact that the spoken words of the actor were thought to have been “additions” to the essentially lyric structure. Lyric dialogue also occurs between choruses, and between two or more actors, though with much less frequency than lyric dialogue between the chorus and actor(s). For a classification of these types of lyric dialogue, see Rosa Andújar, “The Chorus in Dialogue,” 18ff.

¹⁰⁰¹ Given the apparent origins of Classical tragedy and comedy in the interaction(s) between chorus-leader and chorus in Archaic and pre-Classical choral poetry, it seems reasonable that tragic lyric dialogue of this sort—whether wholly or partially (mixed) lyric—constitutes a remnant of the earliest tragic forms.

¹⁰⁰² “Though they comprise the most regular point of contact between actor and chorus, these lyric dialogues—which henceforth I refer to as ‘conversational’—contain no standard format.” Andújar, “The Chorus in Dialogue,” 34–5.

¹⁰⁰³ “...lyric exchanges, which blend choral and solo voices in song at critical junctures in the plot, tend either to dramatize reactions to horrific revelations or to reenact ritual laments for the dead...” Rosa Andújar, “The Chorus in Dialogue,” 7.

more often, immediately after a dramatic event, such as the murder of Agamemnon (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1448ff.), Oedipus' self-blinding (Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 1313), and the death of Pentheus (Euripides, *Bacch.* 1031).¹⁰⁰⁴ As such, lyric dialogue often consists of a (more or less) formal lament in the wake of a tragic event.¹⁰⁰⁵ Much less frequently, the lyric dialogue takes place during, or immediately after, moments of joy and gaiety.¹⁰⁰⁶

The regular appearance of lyric dialogues at such emotionally charged moments in the play betray their most immediate function, to convey in lyric form the most dramatically intense scenes. A lyric exchange might be expected at such points on the basis of the fact that the metrical and strophic dynamics of lyric forms provide opportunities for the expressions of a wider variety of emotions than is available in ordinary *iambic* speech. Lyric dialogue provides an opportunity for the protagonist(s) to express in the most emotionally charged lyric form their experience of, or their reactions to, pivotal events in the play.

Although lyric dialogue often takes place within scenes, these dialogues can (especially in the later plays) take the place of the *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodos*, and in so doing, take on the

¹⁰⁰⁴ Cornford's table attests to the fact that lyric dialogues most often appear at such points. F.M. Cornford, "The So-Called Kommos in Greek Tragedy," *The Classical Review* Vol. 27, No. 2 (Mar., 1913): 43.

¹⁰⁰⁵ The *kommos*, not to be confused with the *kômos*, the drunken revelry and dance associated with the origins of Greek Comedy, appears to have been a conventional form of lament in the form of lyric dialogue (see Aristotle, *Poet.* 1452bff.). While Aristotle clearly imagines tragic *kommoi* in terms of non-dramatic choral *dirges*, the lack of surviving evidence of non-dramatic choral *dirges* makes it impossible to consider tragic *kommoi* in terms of them, although there is no evidence to suggest that they were not related. This, along with no further definition of the term, prevents us from knowing exactly what constituted a *kommos* in Aristotle's mind. Moreover, Aristotle's discussion of tragic *kommoi* may or may not have had a close relationship to the term, or the dramatic device the term represented, as it was employed by the 5th c. tragedians. Nevertheless, examples abound of such *threnetic* lyric exchanges between chorus and actor(s), and less frequently, exclusively between actors, in Classical tragedy. Problematically, the term *kommos* has been taken by many scholars to denote *any* lyric dialogue between chorus and actors, whether or not such dialogue conforms in any sense to a *threnos*. Because the use of *kommos* in this broader sense creates confusion insofar as it conflicts with Aristotle's technical definition of the term, and because the greater number of lyric exchanges between Chorus and actor(s) are *not* *dirges* in any sense, many scholars distinguish between general lyric exchanges between the chorus and actors as *amoebaeon* ("mixed") dialogue, and reserve the use of *kommos* for those instances in which the lyric dialogue takes the particular form of a *dirge*. D.J. Conacher, "Interaction between Chorus and Characters in the Oresteia," *The American Journal of Philology* 95.4 (1974): 323; cf. Cynthia P. Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus: A Study of Character and Function* (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1987). See Cornford, "The So-Called Kommos," 41–45; H. Popp, "Das Amoibaion" in *Die Bauformen der griechischen Tragödie* (ed. W. Jens; Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971), 221–75.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 916ff.; Euripides, *Bacch.* 576.

structural functions of these otherwise wholly choral elements in-between scenes. That is, in those instances that lyric dialogues serve as the choral *parodos*¹⁰⁰⁷ they mark the formal beginning of the drama, and insofar as lyric dialogues can take the place of choral *stasima*, they function structurally to distinguish *episodia*. Likewise, a lyric dialogue may constitute the formal ending to a drama in the place of the otherwise wholly choral *exodos*.¹⁰⁰⁸

ii. Non-lyric Dialogue

Much less frequently, dialogue takes place between an actor and the chorus in which the lines given to both appear in an *iambic* meter, and thus are most likely to have been spoken between the actor(s) and the Chorus. In contrast to the lyric exchanges between chorus and actor(s), which occur consistently in Greek tragedy at points of dramatic and emotional intensity, and whose content most often reflects this intensity, *iambic* dialogue between chorus and protagonist(s) is mundane by comparison. That is, the chorus in these instances functions to provide some piece of information relevant to the immediate circumstances of the play, e.g., the introduction of a new character, or as a conversation partner for one of the protagonist(s). On account of the relatively meager number of such occurrences, and the seemingly mundane use of the chorus in these instances, few acknowledge much dramatic value in the *iambic* dialogue of the Chorus.¹⁰⁰⁹

iii. Non-lyric, Non-Dialogical Choral Elements

¹⁰⁰⁷ As they do in Sophocles, *El.* 121–250; *Phil.* 135–218; *Oed. col.* 117–253; Euripides, *Med.* 131–212; *Heracl.* 73–117; *Ion* 219–36; *Tro.* 153–96; *El.* 167–212; *Iph. taur.* 123–235; *Hel.* 164–251; *Orest.* 140–207.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Cf. the lyric exchange between semi-choruses in Aeschylus *Sept.* 1054–1075; Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 1018–1073.

¹⁰⁰⁹ “In general, the dramatic value of the *iambic* lines of the chorus in the episodes is slight: they call attention to newly arrived persons and offer rather conventional and unexciting comments on most of the long speeches. Perhaps...these comments are often no more than opportunities for the audience to applaud the speeches without missing any important remarks. Occasionally, however, there is an appreciable dramatic value in their small comments...” G.M. Kirkwood, “The Dramatic Role of the Chorus in Sophocles,” *Phoenix* 8.1 (Spring 1954): 3–4; Cf. Gilbert Norwood, *Greek Tragedy* (London: Methuen, 1948), 79–80; Cf. Andújar, “The Chorus in Dialogue,” 33, n. 77.

Often in Greek tragedy the chorus offers cursory comments in-between the speeches and dialogue of the protagonists within the episodes. Such choral remarks often consist of a response to the surrounding dramatic events by means of very brief expressions of joy, lament, triumph, or resignation, affirmation or reproach, appropriate to the attending circumstance. So, for example, in Euripides' *Helen*, after Helen's current sorrowful circumstances alone in a foreign land have been revealed,¹⁰¹⁰ the chorus remarks "Your lot is painful, I admit. But it is best, you know, to bear life's harsh necessities as lightly as you can" (Euripides, *Hel.* 252–3).¹⁰¹¹ Likewise, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, after it has been revealed that Antigone has unlawfully buried the body of her brother Polynices, and a short speech by Antigone defending her actions, the chorus proclaims "It is clear! The nature of the girl is savage, like her father's, and she does not know how to bend before her troubles" (Sophocles, *Ant.* 471–2).¹⁰¹²

As evidenced by these examples, non-dialogical choral responses within scenes take the form of brief gnomic utterances, which are (more or less) related to the surrounding dramatic circumstances. For instance, in Euripides' *Helen*, after Helen has revealed herself as the "true" Helen, and recounted to Menelaus the circumstances which led to her current predicament, the chorus remarks "If you get good fortune in the future, it will be sufficient solace for all that is past" (Euripides, *Hel.* 698–9). Likewise, in Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, after Jocasta has

¹⁰¹⁰ In Euripides' version, we learn that the "real" Helen was not taken to Troy by Paris, but conveyed to Egypt by Hermes, while a *doppelgänger* was substituted for her and taken by Paris to Troy in her stead. Thus, at the beginning of the play, Helen laments the fact that she finds herself alone in Egypt, and the fact that her name is besmirched on account of the events which have transpired between Paris and her *doppelgänger*.

¹⁰¹¹ It should be noted that choral utterances of this kind are less likely to occur when the chorus plays an otherwise significant role in the play. For instance, generally speaking, in the plays of Aeschylus, where the chorus functions more often and more prominently than in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, the chorus offers fewer of these brief comments within scenes. Correspondingly, when in later drama the dramatic action takes place more often between non-choral characters, the chorus is relegated more often to a role in-between the speeches and dialogue of the characters. See below, pp. 316–24.

¹⁰¹² Sometimes these responses are characterized as brief *paeans*, hymns, dirges, etc., apparently more so because they appear to *recall* these forms than on the basis of formal similarities between these utterances and non-dramatic choral hymns, *paeans*, etc., or even *paeans*, hymns, dirges, etc., offered by the chorus elsewhere in drama. E.g., M.A. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides* (London: Methuen, 1973), 105.

been reunited with her son Polynices, and sings an ode expressing joy at their reunion, the chorus observes that “childbirth and its labor pangs have a surprising effect on women, and all womankind are somehow drawn to their children” (Euripides, *Phoen.* 355–6).

While such choral contributions come in response to surrounding dramatic events, and are most often related in some way to them, the chorus’ remarks tend not to elicit responses from the protagonist(s), and seem not to affect the course of action in an appreciable way. In other words, the chorus’ participation in this regard, although occurring within the scene, could be characterized most often as taking place outside of the action.¹⁰¹³ While the chorus may not be as integrally related to the surrounding action in this sense, the sympathetic responses and gnomic utterances which constitute these brief remarks reflect the chorus’ capacity to reflect on the surrounding action, and/or to cast the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light, about which more will be said later in this chapter.

Such choral remarks may function structurally within the scene. That is, insofar as they appear in-between the speeches and/or dialogue of the protagonists, these brief choral responses appear to serve as a transition point within a scene, much in the way that choral odes in-between scenes function to demarcate entire episodes. In such instances, the lyrics of the chorus also function as they do elsewhere in drama, as an aesthetic contrast to, and a transition in-between, the spoken word(s) of the actors.¹⁰¹⁴

To conclude the forgoing discussion of the basic structural contributions of the chorus in Classical Greek tragedy, a couple of additional remarks are required. First, while each of these choral components is found regularly in the extant tragedies of the Classical period, they can function within a particular tragedy in quite different ways, depending on the tendencies of the

¹⁰¹³ There are cases when the protagonist(s) will acknowledge the chorus’ brief remarks, but these are few and far between, and in any event could never be considered *essential* to the plot.

¹⁰¹⁴ Rehm, “Performing the Chorus,” 45.

playwright, particular dramatic exigencies, and so on. The purpose of the preceding discussion was to introduce the reader to the most basic choral contributions in Greek tragedy, while more specific functions of the chorus as they relate to the surrounding dramatic action will be taken up in the next section.

A second concluding remark concerns the role of the *coryphaeus*, or chorus-leader. It is widely supposed that only the chorus-leader, and not the chorus as a whole, participated in lyric and non-lyric dialogues with the actor(s), and in the non-dialogical utterances within scenes. While there is no evidence in the manuscript tradition to support this hypothesis, nor any corroborating testimony from antiquity, the notion is supported largely on the basis of anecdotal observations such as the fact that it is easier to understand one person than a number of people,¹⁰¹⁵ that “groups of persons do not normally converse as a whole with individuals,”¹⁰¹⁶ and that it would have been easier to train one person than the entire chorus for the role of conversation partner.¹⁰¹⁷ Some scholars/editors are so certain of the role of the *coryphaeus* in this regard that they go so far as to assign such lines in Greek tragedy exclusively to the chorus-leader. In the end, however, it is unclear whether it was the chorus-leader or chorus as a whole who dialogued with the actor(s).

Finally, the types of remarks of the secondary chorus must be considered. In each tragedy in which a secondary chorus does play a role, the chorus only appears *once*. However, the precise types of choral lyrics sung by the secondary chorus differ somewhat across tragedians. In the tragedies of Aeschylus, the secondary chorus appears exclusively outside of,

¹⁰¹⁵ E.g., “We understand hearing a single voice better than many voices speaking the same things at the same time, just as with the strings of a musical instrument.” Aristotle, [*Aud.*] 801b15–17.

¹⁰¹⁶ Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus*, 8. While arguing that the responsibility for *iambic* dialogue was most likely given to the chorus-leader, Gardiner leaves open the question of whether wholly lyric dialogues would have been sung by the chorus-leader or the chorus as a whole.

¹⁰¹⁷ Kaimio, *The Chorus of Greek Drama*, 158.

or in-between scenes, to sing the lyrics of a *stasimon*,¹⁰¹⁸ or the *exodos*.¹⁰¹⁹ In two cases in Aeschylus the secondary chorus participates in lyric dialogue with one of the protagonists, and in each instance during emotionally charged moments, according to the convention of lyric dialogue.¹⁰²⁰ By contrast, in Euripides the secondary chorus appears only during scenes, and in three entirely different capacities. In two instances, the chorus participates in lyric dialogue with one of the protagonists,¹⁰²¹ (only one of which conveys the details of an emotionally intense scene),¹⁰²² and in another instance alone to sing a very brief *hymenaios* in response to the marriage of Clymene and Myrops.¹⁰²³

4. Formal Properties of Choral Lyrics

A. *Meter*

The essential dynamics of choral metrics (and non-choral dramatic metrics for that matter) throughout the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman periods can be understood in terms of the metrical principles of non-dramatic poetry as they are described in Chapter 3.¹⁰²⁴ However, dramatic choruses in each of these periods exhibited distinctive metrical properties. Perhaps the most distinctive metrical property of Greek dramas in the Classical period is the fact that they employed so many different metrical systems within any single play.¹⁰²⁵ That is, in contrast to non-dramatic poetry, whose metrical forms were uniform throughout, consisting of either spoken

¹⁰¹⁸ Aeschylus, *Supp.* 825–871; 1034–1073.

¹⁰¹⁹ Aeschylus, *Eum.* 868–887.

¹⁰²⁰ Aeschylus, *Supp.* 825–871; 1034–1073. In the case of the *Suppliants*, the primary chorus of Danaid women plays the role of the main character, and thus, the lyric dialogue occurs between the secondary and primary choruses.

¹⁰²¹ Euripides, *Supp.* 1113–1164; Euripides, *Hipp.* 58–113.

¹⁰²² Euripides, *Supp.* 1113–1164.

¹⁰²³ Euripides, *Phaethon* 229–243.

¹⁰²⁴ See chapter 3, pp. 19–24. The change from metrical systems which were based on the quantitative value assigned to each syllable, to inflective systems based on stress-accent did not occur until the 4th c. C.E. Maas, *Greek Metre*, 11–12.

¹⁰²⁵ West, *Greek Metre*, 77; Maas, *Greek Metre*, 10.

or lyric metrical forms, dramatic poetry combined spoken and lyric forms.¹⁰²⁶ Moreover, dramatic poets often combined varieties of spoken systems together (e.g., *trimeters* alongside *tetrameters*; *iambics* alongside *trochaics*, etc.), as well as different lyric systems within a single *strophe*, to produce very complex *stichic* and *strophic* metrical patterns.¹⁰²⁷ Choral lyrics most often exhibited (sometimes very) complex *strophic responsion* in the form of non-repeating *strophic* pairs (AA//BB//CC), although more complex *strophic* patterns than this were possible, as were *astrophic* odes.¹⁰²⁸

B. *Dialect*

The choral lyrics of tragedy regularly exhibit tendencies of a Doric dialect, the most conspicuous of which is the long \bar{a} (the “Doric alpha”) in place of the long \bar{e} as it appears regularly in the Attic dialect. Such tendencies are not unexpected given the longstanding Doric associations of non-dramatic choruses, and lyric poetry more generally. Given these associations, which were explicitly acknowledged by Aristotle,¹⁰²⁹ and which can be traced back to non-dramatic choral poetry in the Archaic period, at least some in the Athenian audience in the 5th century would have likely been familiar with such choral dialectic tendencies.¹⁰³⁰ Nevertheless, the non-Attic dialect of the chorus would have sounded distinctive in contrast to

¹⁰²⁶ On this point, Rehm quotes Herington’s well-known evaluation of the innovation of tragic lyrics: “The innovation of tragic lyric did not lie in discovering new meters, but in ‘its fusion of the known metrical genres within the compass of a single work.’” Rehm, “Performing the Chorus,” 47.

¹⁰²⁷ “The lyric of tragedy... usually combines the units of various meters in such a manner that they lose their original identity and make for a larger organic whole, a whole which can no longer easily be associated with this or that particular meter.” Halporn et al. *The Meters of Greek and Latin Poetry*, 46.

¹⁰²⁸ West, *Greek Metre*, 78–9.

¹⁰²⁹ Aristotle, *Poet.* 1448a.

¹⁰³⁰ Moreover, the Attic dialect of the actor(s) alongside the (occasional) Doric tendencies of the chorus may reflect an historical reality in which non-dramatic choruses predominant in Doric lands were transformed in Attica with the addition of actors. That is, the Attic dialect of the actors may reflect the fact that the actors themselves were particularly Attic contributions to tragedy.

John Gould, *Myth, Ritual, Memory, and Exchange* (Oxford: University Press, 2001), 382, n. 13.

the consistently Attic dialect of the actors.¹⁰³¹ The distinctive voice of the chorus would not only have provided an aesthetic contrast to the voice of the actors, but may have cast the chorus in a distinctively foreign light. That is, the distinctive dialect may have given the audience the sense that the chorus somehow represented the other.¹⁰³²

C. *Non-Tragic Lyric Elements*

Given the extent to which dramatic choruses resembled pre- and non-dramatic Greek choruses in terms of composition, size, dialect, meter, etc., it should come as no surprise that many choral songs in drama bear formal similarities to non-dramatic lyric genres, e.g., paeans, dithyrambs, Epinician odes, laments, etc. Particular lyric genres can sometimes be identified in dramatic choral lyrics on the basis of the appearance of formal elements that are unique to a particular genre. So, for instance, dramatic choral odes may include the invocation of a particular deity (e.g., “Io, Io, Paean!” or “Hymen, Hymen!”), which signals a formal similarity with a particular genre. Moreover, odes could be framed in such a way as to signal the fact that it represented a particular lyric genre, as for example in *Seven Against Thebes* when Eteocles asks the chorus of Theban maidens to “utter a paean...,” suggesting that the following song of the chorus is rightly considered a paean (Aeschylus, Sept. 268ff.). Finally, through allusive descriptions of its own activities the chorus may signal that they were singing a particular choral genre.

Choral odes do not always exhibit generic characteristics so clearly as to be able to identify them precisely in terms of one of the non-dramatic lyric genres. On one hand,

¹⁰³¹ One of the distinguishing characteristics of Greek drama is the fact that it *combines* dialects within a single work. See Herington, *Poetry Into Drama*, 114.

¹⁰³² “...the song of the chorus is expressed in a language yet further removed, in its non-Attic dialectical colouring...from the ‘speech of the city’ given to the actors who play the heroic protagonists: it is, for its Athenian audience, an alien and strangely ‘distant’ tongue, which could indeed be called the speech of the ‘other’.” Gould, *Myth, Ritual, Memory, and Exchange*, 382.

insufficient data for several of the non-dramatic choral genres often precludes the comparison of the formal features of a choral ode in terms of non-dramatic precedents. On the other hand, choral odes oftentimes appear to combine various elements of different choral genres, preventing the simple identification of a choral ode in terms of one choral genre or another.

Particularly hymnic forms are included in these non-dramatic lyric forms found in the choral lyrics of ancient tragedy. Especially common in tragic choral lyrics are elements of the paean, though even when choral lyrics did not reflect specific hymnic forms, they often manifest elements of hymns in the broader sense of the term, i.e., as the sung praise of a deity, which may include an invocation of a god or goddess, a listing of their divine attributes and exploits, past assistance, and sometimes a prayer or petition. Both specific forms of hymns and hymns broadly construed, are so common and pronounced in dramatic choral lyrics that one modern commentator has characterized dramatic choral lyrics as “essentially hymnal...[or] modifications of hymnal form[s].”

In terms of the structural dynamics of ancient tragedy, hymnic lyrics can appear at virtually any point in a play, i.e., in-between scenes during the *parodos*, *stasimon*, and/or *exodos*, and at various points during scenes. It should be noted that while hymnic lyrics do occur during scenes, they are never presented in the forms that most commonly appear during scenes, i.e., dialogue (lyric or non-lyric), or non-dialogical, non-lyric utterances.¹⁰³³ In other words, hymns do not take some other form when they appear in tragedy, but are recognizable in terms of the

¹⁰³³ In other words, hymns are always lyric to the extent that they are presented according to lyric metrical systems. See chapter 3, pp. 164–7. Thus, according to what is believed to be true of the performance of lyric metrical systems, hymns were likely to have been sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument. Aside from their lyrical properties, hymns were never presented as a dialogue between characters. In fact, in only two instances in Classical tragedy are hymns sung by more than one character, in Aeschylus, *Supp.* 1018–1073, and Euripides, *Or.* 174–186. While lines of the hymn are sung in an alternating fashion by more than one character, it is not dialogical in nature.

formal characteristics of the hymnic genre outside of tragedy.¹⁰³⁴ At any rate, choral hymns most often occur in-between scenes, most often as one part of a larger *stasimon*. However, frequently a *stasimon* was comprised entirely by a hymn.¹⁰³⁵ While hymns might be sung by non-choral characters, hymns were sung much more often than not by a chorus, a phenomenon which perhaps owes to the origins of various hymnic forms in (non-tragic) choral forms, and the continued association of these hymnic forms with choruses. While hymns of both the specific and general sort can be found throughout Classical Greek tragedy, there is a conspicuous increase in the number of hymns performed by the choruses of Euripidean tragedies.

5. Musical Dynamics

In Chapter 3 it was noted that although music is universally acknowledged to have constituted an essential part of choral poetry, it is extremely difficult to reconstruct choral music on account of the lack of evidence of musical notation contemporaneous with the choral poets, and a general lack of understanding of the theoretical building-blocks of music in ancient Greece. Thus, the same difficulties that arise during a reconstruction of choral music in general attend any discussion of the musical elements of the chorus in Greek drama.¹⁰³⁶

A. *Singing*

It is generally accepted that tragic choruses sang most of the lines given to them, on account of the fact that most of the lines given to the chorus exhibit lyric metrical systems.¹⁰³⁷

By contrast, lines given to the chorus in non-lyric metrical systems (often *iambic* or *trochaic*

¹⁰³⁴ Very rarely, a hymn might constitute one part of a lyric dialogue. E.g., Euripides, *Iph. taur.* 126–142.

¹⁰³⁵ E.g., Aeschylus, *Supp.* 524–599; 625–709; 1018–1073; *Eum.* 1032–1047 (*exodos*); Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 151–215; *Ant.* 1115–1152; *Oed. col.* 1556–1578; Euripides, *Alc.* 568–606; *Hipp.* 525–563; 1268–1281; *Bacch.* 519–573; *Herc. fur.* 348–435; *Heracl.* 748–783; *Iph. taur.* 1234–1282; *Hel.* 1301–1368.

¹⁰³⁶ “...there is no subject on which it is more difficult—if not virtually impossible—to reach a clear understanding, not to speak of appreciation, than that of the music to which the words [of drama] were set and the character of the instrumental accompaniment.” Pickard-Cambridge, *Festivals*, 262.

¹⁰³⁷ See Chapter 3, pp. 164–7.

trimeters or *tetrameters*) were likely spoken by the chorus or the *coryphaeus*. Insofar the majority of the lyric lines in Classical drama were given to the chorus, and not to the individual actors, choral singing (and the instrumental performance which likely accompanied it) provided most of the musicality in ancient Greek theater.

While it is nearly certain that the chorus (and at times individual actors) did in fact sing certain parts, it is unclear how these would have sounded, e.g., whether the chorus sang in unison or in harmony,¹⁰³⁸ whether the singing was simple or complicated, etc.¹⁰³⁹ Owing to the fact that tragic *choreutai* were amateurs, and the fact that singing was most often, if not always, accompanied by dancing, it is hard to imagine that the level of vocal difficulty would have been very high.

B. *Instruments*

The importance of musical instruments in comedy and tragedy is confirmed by visual evidence, the remarks of later commentators, as well as the witnesses of the texts themselves. So, for example, the so-called *Pronomos vase*,¹⁰⁴⁰ on which are depicted the full assembly of characters of a Greek satyr-play, sits the *aulos*-player, “Pronomos,” who is flanked by the chorus-trainer holding a *lyre*. That the *aulos* and/or *lyre* may have been used in *tragedy* is suggested by the fact that the very same actors who would have performed in a satyr-play would have also performed in tragedy. Thus, the instruments depicted on the vase may also have been those used in tragedy.

That a tragic chorus would have been accompanied by an *aulos* can be inferred on the basis of the fact that it is known to have accompanied non-dramatic choruses, and were

¹⁰³⁸ There is simply no evidence for polyphonic or harmonic singing or music in the Classical period.

¹⁰³⁹ The parody of Euripides in Aristophanes’ *Frogs* suggests perhaps that only in the time of Euripides did dramatists begin to compose lyrics in which a single syllable extended over multiple notes.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Oliver Taplin and Rosie Wyles, eds., *The Pronomos Vase and Its Context* (Oxford: University Press, 2010).

particularly associated with the forerunner of the tragic chorus, the *dithyrambic* chorus.¹⁰⁴¹ At any rate, artistic remains suggest that the *aulos* was an essential element in the accompaniment of the chorus in both Greek tragedy and comedy,¹⁰⁴² as do clues from the plays themselves.¹⁰⁴³ While the *aulos* was certainly the most frequent accompaniment to the singing in Greek drama,¹⁰⁴⁴ artistic and literary evidence suggests that other instruments, including the *lyre*, as well as percussion instruments, also may have been used from time to time.¹⁰⁴⁵ The knowledge that the chorus sang most, if not all, of its lines in any given tragedy or comedy, and that this singing was often, if not always, accompanied by musical instruments, is tempered by the fact that we don't have a good idea of the actual sounds that were produced by either.

¹⁰⁴¹ There exist numerous artistic remains which depict groups of men dressed as animals, i.e., animal choruses. In these depictions there is always an *aulos*-player. Insofar as such animal choruses are thought by many to have preceded the animal choruses in Classical Comedy (e.g., Aristophanes' *Frogs* and *Birds*), the presence of an *aulos*-player in the non-dramatic animal choruses suggests a presence in Classical comedy.

¹⁰⁴² *Auloi* are depicted on many of the nearly 100 vases depicting scenes from comedy and between 300–450 vases depicting tragic scenes which have survived. See Oliver Taplin, *Pots & Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth-Century B.C.* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007); Wiles, *Tragedy in Athens*, 91.

¹⁰⁴³ Both Sophocles and Euripides include choral scenes in which there are references made to the *aulos*, and other instruments. For instance, the chorus of women in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* sing that they "will not reject the cry of the *aulos*" and then address the *aulos* directly: "Behold me!" (Sophocles, *Trach.* 205ff.). Likewise, when the chorus of Dionysian worshippers in Euripides' *Bacchae* describes the revelry that attends the worship of Dionysus, they speak of the pipe (λωτός), which refers to the material used to create the *aulos* and served as a *metonym* for the *aulos* itself, as "sounding a sacred, playful tune" (64ff.). It is reasonable that in these cases, and others in tragedy which instruments are mentioned, that the chorus is performing to the accompaniment of the instruments described in the scene. Comic poets were more explicit about the use of the *aulos* in comic performance. At one point in Aristophanes' *Birds* the chorus asks an *aulos*-player to "lead us into the *anapaests*". Aristophanes, *Av.* 682–4. Likewise, the marginal note of a *scholiast* in line 223 of the same play confirms an *aulos* accompaniment, by noting that at this point in the play "someone plays the *aulos* from behind the scene." Finally, a *scholiast* on Aristophanes' *Wasps* 582 remarks that the *aulos*-player led the chorus into the *orchestra* to begin the play (*parodos*).

¹⁰⁴⁴ Some believe the *aulos* was the *only* instrument that ever accompanied the singing. For example: "With rare exceptions, if any, performances of tragedy, comedy and satyr-play had no accompaniment except what one *aulete* provided." Anderson, *Music and Musicians*, 113.

¹⁰⁴⁵ The scant evidence seems to suggest that these were used most often as props, and not as regular accompaniments. For example, lyres are occasionally mentioned in Aristophanes' comedies, as are drums (*tympana*) in Euripides' *Bacchae*. In such instances, it seems likely that such instruments could have been played during these scenes, but in this manner would have functioned as a prop, and not as a true accompaniment. It is not thought that a lyre could carry a sound in theaters as big as those in Athens and the surrounding areas. Likewise, the harp and lyre are mentioned in two fragments of Sophocles' *Thamyris*. Again, the use of an actual lyre or harp is not out of the question, but they would have likely been used only as props during these brief scenes. See Anderson, *Music and Musicians*, 114–5.

II. The Functions of Tragic Choruses in the Classical Period with Respect to the Surrounding Speech and Dialogue of the Characters

1. Method

In the previous sections, I have considered various aspects of tragic choruses, formal characteristics of choral lyrics, as well as some of the functional qualities of choral phenomena as they relate specifically to the structural framework of Greek tragedy. In the following, I consider relationships between choral activity and the surrounding speeches and dialogue of the actors. On the one hand, the chorus is considered in terms of the extent to which it serves as an instrument to advance the dramatic action, by: (1) signaling the arrival of characters; (2) offering a synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances of the protagonist(s) and/or the plotlines, including perhaps background information relevant to these circumstances; (3) foreshadowing future dramatic events; and (4) interacting with the protagonist(s) in such a way as to advance the plot. On the other hand, the role of the chorus is considered in terms of the ways in which it responds to and reflects upon the surrounding dramatic action, and casts the surrounding action in a particular light, by: (1) offering an emotional response to a dramatic event; and (2) setting the event(s) into a larger historical-mythical, philosophical, and/or mythical-theological contexts.

Related to my analyses of the chorus' relationship to the surrounding dramatic action of the actors, and to the larger themes addressed in the plays as a whole, I evaluate well-known and oft-cited theoretical models for considering the chorus' capacity to cast the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light, including notions of the chorus as: (1) "Ideal Spectator"; (2) voice of the poet; (3) voice of the community; and (4) "Implied Spectator."

2. Chorus as “Protagonist”¹⁰⁴⁶

Insofar as most dramas in the Western tradition, including the vast majority of extant dramas from the Classical period, feature a chorus in a clearly subsidiary role to the actors, it may come as a surprise that the chorus should play the role of protagonist in one of the earliest extant Greek plays. But this is precisely the role of the chorus of fifty virgin daughters of Danaus in Aeschylus’ *Supplices*, which, viewed from just about any angle, constitutes the chief vehicle for the dramatic action. The centrality of the chorus can be established in quantitative terms, insofar as the number of lines spoken by the chorus constitutes over 60% of the total number of lines in the play.¹⁰⁴⁷ The chorus’ function as the protagonist can also be established by other measures. The flight of the chorus of *Danaid* virgins from their homeland provides the initial dramatic setting for the play, and their tragic plight seeking asylum in new land is the fulcrum of the drama for its duration. The chorus constantly speaks and acts on its own behalf, and the words and actions of the chorus provide the exigency for all dialogue throughout the play. The centrality of the chorus is put into relief when considered in the context of the actions of the other characters. Critically, dialogue rarely occurs in the play that does not include the chorus, the very fact of which highlights the auxiliary status of the actors vis-à-vis the chorus, and the unequivocal importance of the chorus at each stage of the plot-sequence.¹⁰⁴⁸

In other words, the chorus of *Danaids* in *Supplices* plays the role of protagonist, which in every other Greek play is a part played by a non-choral character,¹⁰⁴⁹ and in this way it is unique

¹⁰⁴⁶ Again, I am using the term here *not* in the Classical technical sense as the first actor who carried the primary parts, and competed in the acting contests, but in the modern sense of the character whose role in the play is the most prominent.

¹⁰⁴⁷ For a statistical breakdown of the number of lines spoken by choruses in Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, see A.E. Phoutrides, “The Chorus of Euripides,” *HSCP* 27 (1916): 77–107.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the actors, whose words, thoughts, and emotions are bound to the plight of the chorus, are accorded a subsidiary status in relation to the chorus, whose fortunes are, first and foremost the subject of the play. Dale, “The Chorus in the Action of Greek Tragedy,” 17; cf. Garvie, *Aeschylus’ Supplices*, 106.

¹⁰⁴⁹ While the chorus plays the role of protagonist in this play, it is not the case that it functioned as did non-choral

among extant Greek plays. This is not to diminish the importance of the chorus to the plots of many other plays, in which the chorus functions as one of the lead characters, as in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, and Euripides' *Supplikes*, or as an otherwise indispensable element of the dramatic production as it is in many of the tragedies in the Classical period. Nevertheless, the dramatic movement of *Supplikes* is entirely oriented around the chorus of maidens, and in this way stands alone in the history of (extant) Greek drama.¹⁰⁵⁰

While Aeschylus' *Supplikes* demonstrates a unique way in which the chorus could function as a protagonist, elsewhere in Greek tragedy the role of protagonist was performed by non-choral characters. Insofar as the chorus most often functioned in a complementary, and increasingly subsidiary,¹⁰⁵¹ role vis-à-vis the non-choral characters, it is most often evaluated

protagonists elsewhere in tragedy. For one, the chorus does not give speeches in a manner typical of individual characters. The chorus may contend, threaten, and/or attempt to persuade other characters, but not in the form of an extended speech. "For it is an unbroken law, all through the history of Greek tragedy, that though a Chorus may join in the dialogue to a limited extent it must never make a set speech, a 'rhesis,' never marshal arguments, try to prove or refute a contention, or speak a descriptive set piece. The whole province of what Aristotle calls 'dianoia,' the art of developing at length all that can appropriately be said on a given subject, is closed to the chorus." Dale, "The Chorus in the Action of Greek Tragedy," 211–3. Moreover, the chorus functions somewhat more passively here than do protagonists elsewhere in tragedy. That is, the chorus is unable in many ways to influence events in the play, and the fate of the chorus lies ultimately in the hands of the non-choral characters. These observations can be applied to the chorus in its role as a character elsewhere in tragedy. That is, the chorus whether it is the protagonist, one of the leading characters, or a subsidiary character, functions differently than non-choral characters insofar as it cannot make speeches, and cannot influence the course of events as can non-choral characters. Such a view, however, ought not to be overstated. The chorus indeed acts in other tragedies, albeit in different ways than do the non-choral characters.

¹⁰⁵⁰ That the chorus should have functioned at some point in the history of Greek drama as a protagonist makes sense in light of the history of drama so far as it can be reconstructed, as an organic development out of choral poetry, at the particular point when the chorus-leader began to take on a rôle vis-à-vis the choral performers, which eventually developed into complex interplays between chorus and actor(s) such that exist in drama in the fifth century. In short, insofar as Classical drama was in its beginnings an essentially and primarily a choral phenomenon, it makes sense that the chorus should play the central rôle in one of the plays of Aeschylus, the playwright whose extant plays offer the earliest evidence of dramatic poetry. In fact, in light of this trajectory, the preeminence of the chorus in Aeschylus' *Supplikes* was at one point the primary basis for considering it the earliest of Aeschylus' plays, and as such the earliest extant Greek drama. A papyrus fragment discovered at Oxyrhynchus in 1952 seems to indicate that *Supplikes* was not, in fact, the first play. Nevertheless, it stands near to the beginning of the development of drama from a primarily *choral* performance to one that became dominated by individual actors. At any rate, it appears to represent what was likely an early form of drama. It is impossible to know for sure whether there existed other plays in which the chorus functioned as the protagonist, and scholars are divided in their opinions as to the likelihood that there were other such plays. See Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplikes*, 1–28, 88ff., 108ff.

¹⁰⁵¹ Throughout the fifth century, non-choral characters became more prominent, to the detriment of the chorus, whose role was subsequently reduced in quantitative and qualitative terms. See below, pp. 316–24.

functionally in terms of its relationship to the surrounding speech, dialogue, and dramatic action of the actors, according to whether it: (1) moves the dramatic action forward; or (2) stands outside of the dramatic action in order to cast it in a particular light.

3. Moving Forward the Dramatic Action

The chorus is often considered in terms of its function to announce the arrival of a character, to provide information about the characters and the plot-lines, including back-stories of the characters and foreshadowing of future dramatic events, as well as to provide a dialogue partner and/or audience for a character, and in so doing to advance, or help to advance, the plot in a very practical sense. The chorus' functions in these ways, which has been likened to a "narrator,"¹⁰⁵² is taken up in what immediately follows.

A. *Character Entrance Announcements*

One of the most frequent functions of the chorus, and most consistent throughout Classical tragedy, was to announce the arrival of a character onto the stage (or into the orchestra). This may take the form of a simple announcement (e.g., "Stop, stand still! Two men are coming, one a sailor from your ship, the other a foreigner; hear what they can tell us...") (Sophocles, *Phil.* 539–541), or, "Be silent now, for I see a man wearing a garland coming to bring us news!" (Sophocles, *Trach.* 178–9)). Elsewhere, the announcements are more substantial, not only revealing something of the character's identity, but offering a reasonable motive for the appearance, and establishing the relationship(s) of the character within the

¹⁰⁵² Such a label may be applied with a few caveats. The term does not denote, as the modern senses of the term imply, that the chorus functions in this regard exclusively outside the dramatic action as a kind of omniscient observer. That is, the chorus' narrative functions are operative while the chorus is interacting with other characters. Moreover, the chorus' narrative comments often reflect the perspective of the age, sex, social status, etc., of the characters that the chorus is portraying, and in this way do not always represent an omniscient perspective. Finally, the precise narrative functions of the chorus vary according to structural position, and change from one drama to the next, and across playwrights. Arnott, *Public and Performance*, 30; cf. Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus*, 164ff.

plot.¹⁰⁵³ Entrances may be announced at any point in the drama (i.e., at the end of a choral ode in-between scenes, during a lyric exchange with one of the characters, or at any point during a scene),¹⁰⁵⁴ though it is just as likely that the entrance of a character will *not* be preceded by an announcement.¹⁰⁵⁵

B. *Synopsis of Present Circumstances*

The chorus is often responsible for providing more substantive introductions for characters and/or plotlines in the drama. This often takes place in the *parodos*, in which the chorus offers a synopsis of the present dramatic circumstances, which in some cases includes a summary of past events that have led to the current circumstances of the protagonist. So, for example, amidst its lengthy account of the expedition to Troy in the *parodos* of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the chorus introduces Clytaemestra and announces that she has ordered that sacrifices be offered around Argos. This introduction sets the stage for Clytaemestra's announcement that Agamemnon is indeed returning to Argos, and sets into motion the plot which ends in Agamemnon's demise at the hands of Clytaemestra (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 83-103). Likewise, in the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the chorus recounts the perilous situation in Thebes, which will compel Oedipus to rid the city of the source of pollution (himself!) which is the cause of this peril (Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 167-189). Similarly, the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, which takes the form of a lyric dialogue with Neoptolemus, serves as an introduction

¹⁰⁵³ Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus*, 30. As for the formal features of such announcements, "...most announcements contain at least two of the following standard elements: announcing particles (*καὶ μὴν; ἀλλὰ γάρ*), deictic pronoun, name, reference to the entering character's movement, reference to the announcer's perception of the arrival." R. Hamilton, "Announced Entrances in Greek Tragedy," *HSCP* 82 (1978): 63.

¹⁰⁵⁴ However, they appear least frequently at the end of a choral ode or lyric exchange which constitutes a *stasimon*, most likely on account of the fact that an audience would have naturally expected an entrance at the end of a *stasimon*. In other words, there would have been a greater need for an entrance announcement when the audience was not expecting an entrance, i.e., during a scene. Oliver Taplin, "Aeschylean Silences and Silences in Aeschylus," *HSCP* 76 (1972): 84.

¹⁰⁵⁵ In the extant Greek tragedies, precisely 50% of entrances are announced. Hamilton, "Announced Entrances in Greek Tragedy," 64.

to the plight of Philoctetes, who has been stranded alone on an island awaiting his savior(s) who will sail him home (Sophocles, *Phil.* 135–218).

C. *Foreshadowing*

Often the chorus creates a general sense of foreboding, and/or foreshadows specific dramatic events, either in the form of a choral ode in the *parodos* or *stasima*, or a brief comment within a scene. For example, up to the point of the second choral *stasimon* in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the surrounding speeches and dialogues of the protagonists are entirely positive, and divulge nothing of the tragedy which is about to beset Agamemnon. The tone of the speeches and dialogues are imbued with the emotions associated with the return of a loved one from a long, arduous war, i.e., recounting the sadness on the part of those who were left at home to await the return of their loved ones, dead or alive, and happiness at the news of the Achaeans' conquest of Troy and imminent return. In the second *stasimon*, however, the chorus introduces a sense of foreboding which points towards Agamemnon's tragic denouement. After lamenting the wedding of Paris and Helen which begot the sufferings for Achaeans and Trojans alike at the beginning of the second *stasimon* (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 681–749), the chorus remarks that impious deeds breed further impiety (750–772), and that Justice looks unkindly on the power of counterfeit wealth acquired with unrighteous hands (773–781). On one level, the "impious deeds" and "unrighteous hands" can be understood to be those of Paris, whose kidnapping of Helen prompted the Trojan War, while "Justice" relates to his eventual demise. At the same time, the "impious deeds" and "unrighteous hands" can also be understood to refer to those of Agamemnon himself, who sacrificed his own daughter Iphigenia in order to allow the Achaeans to sail to Troy in pursuit of Paris. "Justice," it soon turns out, appears to refer to Agamemnon's demise, which will be accomplished by Clytaemestra in retribution for their daughter's

sacrifice.¹⁰⁵⁶ Thus, the choral *stasimon* offers the first glimpse of Agamemnon's impending doom.

In the following *stasimon*, which immediately follows Agamemnon's introductory speech and Clytaemestra's response, the chorus more directly instills a sense of impending disaster: "Why, why does this fear persistently hover about, standing guard in front of my prophetic heart? Whence comes this presaging song, unbidden, unhired? Why can I not spurn it...?" (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 975–979). That the chorus' song presages the death of Agamemnon is made clearer in the lines immediately following this, in which the chorus claims that the fortunes of a rich man can strike unforeseen ends, and that an "end" is coming very soon (1001–1007).

The chorus may also very explicitly foreshadow specific dramatic events. So, for example, in Sophocles' *Ajax*, during a lyric exchange between the chorus and Ajax' wife Tecmessa, in which Tecmessa reveals how Ajax stole and illegally sacrificed the Danaans' livestock, the chorus replies "Alas, I fear the future! Exposed to the site of all, the man will perish..." (Sophocles, *Aj.* 239–240), portending Ajax' eventual death later in the drama. Throughout Classical tragedy, the chorus often presages future dramatic events in such ways.

D. *An All-Purpose Tool: Dramatic Audience, and Instrument for Eliciting the Thoughts of the Character, and/or Providing Relevant Dramatic Information to the Characters*

¹⁰⁵⁶ That these words are meant to apply to Agamemnon is further suggested by the fact that they immediately precede the chorus' introduction of Agamemnon and his first speech.

By virtue of the chorus' constant presence in the orchestra during scenes,¹⁰⁵⁷ it was always at the playwright's disposal as a tool for staging various dramatic elements. So, for instance, the chorus often served as the dramatic audience for the speeches and/or dialogue of the characters, as for example the *agon*, the debate between antagonists,¹⁰⁵⁸ or the Messenger's speech. Additionally, the chorus could take part in dialogue with a protagonist in order to elicit information relevant to the dramatic plot. So, for example, it has already been shown how the chorus functioned as a dialogue partner for a character in a number of different circumstances in Greek tragedy (e.g., lyric dialogue with a character to convey the details of a particularly intense dramatic situation, and non-lyric dialogue with characters relating to some mundane element in the plot, such as the introduction of a new character). In many cases of both of these types of dialogue, however, the dialogue between chorus and protagonist functions entirely as a dramatic pretext for which to allow the main character(s) to offer some piece of information.¹⁰⁵⁹ Alternatively, the chorus could serve as a tool by which to provide information to a character. The chorus may inform a character of an event that has taken place unbeknownst to him or her, as when Medea's attendants reveal to Jason that Medea has killed their children,¹⁰⁶⁰ or when the chorus of Creusa's attendants betray Xuthus' plot to convince Ion that Xuthus is his father.¹⁰⁶¹

4. Casting the Surrounding Dramatic Action in a Particular Light

¹⁰⁵⁷ See above, p. 256.

¹⁰⁵⁸ See Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, 105; Cf. Dale, "The Chorus in the Action of Greek Tragedy," 215ff.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Cf. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies*, 17.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Euripides, *Med.* 1292–1316.

¹⁰⁶¹ Euripides, *Ion* 725–924.

The functions of the chorus to advance the dramatic action in these ways constitute only one aspect of Classical tragic choral functionality.¹⁰⁶² Alternatively, the chorus is often employed in such a way as to reflect upon, illuminate certain aspects of, or provide a particular frame through which to view the dramatic characters and events in the episodes. The chorus in this capacity does not function so much to provide information or interact with characters in ways which advance the plot, as it casts the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light. Put in slightly different terms, the chorus often operates *outside* the dramatic action in order to say something about it. The chorus' function in this regard might be considered as a kind of commentator on the surrounding action.

There exists no standard methodology, terminology, or conceptual framework, for evaluating the chorus' function(s) in this regard, likely on account of the sheer volume of instances in which the chorus could be said to function in this way, and the varieties of ways that the chorus accomplishes this task. Rather, the chorus' role in this regard is variously construed by different scholars. The chorus is thought to have: (1) provided "frames" through which to consider the protagonists and their plot-lines;¹⁰⁶³ (2) "played a significant role...in the deepening of the mythic and moral background of the events on stage...";¹⁰⁶⁴ (3) "sharpen[ed] perceptions

¹⁰⁶² In fact, the characterization simply does not apply in many cases. Generally speaking, the characterization is more applicable to Aeschylean choruses than to the choruses in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides, as in the later playwrights, the presentation of background information necessary to the protagonists and plot-lines, as well as the present circumstances of the protagonist(s) and the plot trajectories themselves, is often offered by means of speeches and/or dialogue of the protagonist(s).¹⁰⁶² This is not to say that the choral odes become dramatically unimportant later in the fifth century, or that the chorus never offers narrative comments in Sophocles and Euripides. Rather, the role of the chorus as a narrator is reduced, and much of the narrative function is transferred to the protagonist(s). See below, pp. 316–24.

¹⁰⁶³ "It [the chorus] can introduce a perspective that reaches beyond the immediate context of the ode and even beyond what the chorus, as a human participant and character, can know. At such times the ode creates a larger frame for the particular purposes of the protagonists or the struggles between the main actors, a frame that looks beyond the limits of the specific time and place." Charles Segal, "The Chorus and the Gods in *Oedipus Tyrannus*," *Arion* 4.1 (Spr., 1996): 20–21.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1986), 268.

of the immediate situation”;¹⁰⁶⁵ (4) “link[ed] the immediate action to a larger body of stories, or placing the present in a wider context, to demonstrate that what the audience is watching is no mere isolated event, but illustrative of a general principle...serving, therefore, as an intermediary in universalizing the story”;¹⁰⁶⁶ (5) “broaden[ed] our horizon, to get us away from the narrow purview of the dramatic agent by folding larger discourses into the tragic design...opening up the wider implications of occurrences or of acts about to be undertaken”;¹⁰⁶⁷ (6) “...illuminat[ed] by poetical expression certain features in the thought, emotion, and language of the actors’ speeches...”;¹⁰⁶⁸ (7) “...situate[d] the action [of the actors] in its political, social, or theological context”;¹⁰⁶⁹ and (8) “produce[d] the overtones and tensions which help to determine our sense of what we are dealing with a tragedy...It is a preparer, a shaper of expectations, and a mood setter, permitting us to read the terms of the dialogue against a magnifying screen.”¹⁰⁷⁰

While these examples demonstrate that differences exist with respect to the terminology used to describe the ways in which the chorus relates to the surrounding dramatic action, they also underscore the similarities underlying each of these conceptions of the function of the chorus to cast the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light.

A. *Emotional Reactions*

One way in which the chorus might cast the dramatic action in a particular light is by signaling joy, sorrow, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, etc., with a preceding speech, dialogue, or dramatic event. For instance, the chorus may express an overtly sympathetic position vis-à-vis the protagonist by lamenting his or her present circumstances, or rejoicing at a recent turn of

¹⁰⁶⁵ Arnott, *Public and Performance*, 34.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Arnott, *Public and Performance*, 33–34.

¹⁰⁶⁷ T.G. Rosenmeyer, “Elusory Voices: Thoughts about the Sophoclean Chorus,” in *Nomodeiktēs: Essays in Honor of Martin Ostwald* (ed. R.M. Rosen and J. Farrell; Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 559.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles’ Tragedies*, 2.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Stephen Esposito, “The Changing Roles of the Sophoclean Chorus,” *Arion* 4.1 (Spr., 1996): 85.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus*, 149.

events, etc.¹⁰⁷¹ This may appear in the form of a brief emotional outburst during a scene, a lyric exchange with a character during or in-between a scene, or in the form of an extended choral ode in-between scenes.

Importantly, such responses of the chorus were often presented as variations of traditional lyric forms.¹⁰⁷² For example, we have already seen how lyric exchanges between the chorus and a non-choral character after a tragic event could take the form of a traditional *kommos*, or lyric lament.¹⁰⁷³ Elsewhere, but with less formal consistency, the chorus' response(s) to tragic events resembled non-dramatic hymnic forms. For instance, the chorus may offer a variation of the traditional *paeon* in order to summon the presence of a deity, as in the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* when the chorus of Theban elders invokes the presence of Zeus, Athena, and Apollo to save Thebes from its current devastation,¹⁰⁷⁴ and in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, when the chorus of Theban maidens beckons the Olympian deities to protect the city and people of Thebes as Polynices' army is approaching.¹⁰⁷⁵ Hymns to the gods sung by the chorus were particularly common in Greek tragedy, and their function will be taken up in more detail later in the chapter.

At the very least, choral responses to dramatic events draw attention to a particular aspect of the event by concentrating the audience's attention on it.¹⁰⁷⁶ In so doing, the chorus may also

¹⁰⁷¹ The generally positive disposition of the chorus towards the protagonist has led to the notion that the chorus functioned primarily in tragedy as a kind of "sympathetic character" for the protagonist. This is the precisely the definition of the chorus offered by Horace. Horace, *Ars* 85. The characterization of the chorus as a "sympathetic character" does not apply universally to the chorus, as it often takes an ambivalent, or even antagonistic, stance towards the protagonist. So, too, can the chorus' position vis-à-vis the protagonist can change throughout the course of the play. Cf. Conacher, *Aeschylus*, 169; cf. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, 100ff.

¹⁰⁷² Although the generic similarities between dramatic and non-dramatic hymnic forms are "usually fairly loose". Rutherford, "Apollo in Ivy," 112, 118.

¹⁰⁷³ See above, pg. 26, n. 84.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Sophocles, *Oed. tyr.* 151ff.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Aeschylus, *Sept.* 287ff.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*,

function to modulate the emotional response to the preceding events for the audience.¹⁰⁷⁷ That is, the chorus may heighten the emotional tension created in the surrounding dramatic action: joy at a perceived good turn of events, sadness when things have turned out poorly, or anxiety when a course of action is yet undetermined. By contrast, the chorus may also offer a digression which provides relief from an emotionally charged scene.¹⁰⁷⁸

The chorus' reactions to dramatic events provide opportunities for the audience members to reflect upon the dramatic events.¹⁰⁷⁹ More than this, however, the chorus thus signals to the audience how *it* might react emotionally to these events. In other words, the chorus serves as a tool at the playwright's disposal to guide the audience's response(s) to the events.¹⁰⁸⁰ Much more will be said later in the chapter about the specific means by which the chorus directs the sympathies of the audience in this way.¹⁰⁸¹ For now, the preceding discussion of the chorus' typically sympathetic response to the protagonist, and its conventional reactions to various dramatic events, suffices to demonstrate that one of the primary functions of the chorus is to offer a *reaction* to the surrounding dramatic events.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus*, 148ff.; Kirkwood, "The Dramatic Role of the Chorus in Sophocles," 6–22. E.R. Dodds, *Bacchae* (Oxford: University Press, 1960), 117, 142, 182–3; 219; Esposito, "The Changing Roles of the Sophoclean Chorus," 85–114; Phoutrides, "The Chorus of Euripides," 77–170.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Mastronarde has argued that choral odes which are not immediately connected to the preceding (or following) dialogue often do just this, by diverting attention away from the specific circumstances of an emotionally intense scene. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 133–45. Good examples are the choral odes in Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the primary suspense is created in a series of five exchanges between actors, and in which the chorus functions in-between these exchanges to quell the emotions created by them. Esposito, "The Changing Roles of the Sophoclean Chorus," 89ff.

¹⁰⁷⁹ For example, Easterling comments that the tragic chorus acts in this sense "as a group of 'built-in' witnesses" whose job is "to help the audience become involved in the process of responding..." P.A. Easterling, "Form and Performance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge: University Press, 1997), 151–177.

¹⁰⁸⁰ For example, Grube has argued that by offering their own response to the tragic events, the chorus helped to "fix" the emotional response of the audience to the surrounding events. Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, 99–126. Likewise, in his consideration of Aeschylean choruses, Gruber argues that the tragic chorus' chief function is to focalize and guide the viewing audience's response. M. A. Gruber, *Der Chor in den Tragödien des Aischylos: Affekt und Reaktion* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 2009).

¹⁰⁸¹ See below, pp. 305–16.

B. *Framing the Dramatic Action in a Mythological-Historical Context*

The chorus sometimes offered a survey of past mythological-historical events which are somehow relevant to the current dramatic action and/or the protagonist(s), thereby casting the dramatic plot in a particular mythological-historical light. In Classical tragedy, this often occurred during the synopsis of the present dramatic circumstances in the *parodos*. For example, in the *parodos* of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the chorus of Argive elders announces that it is the tenth year of the expedition against Troy, and recounts the pivotal events that have led to this point: the launch of the Greek ships to Troy by Menelaus and Agamemnon, on account of Paris' abduction of Helen (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 40–67), the auspicious omen that was interpreted by the diviner Calchas to portend a successful expedition (104–159), and the unfavorable winds that compelled Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia (185–247). The narration of these events is certainly not exhaustive, but rather oriented around those events which are critical for situating the events which will transpire in the rest of Aeschylus' play. That is, the chorus' summary of the expedition to Troy provides the context for the play's setting, i.e., Agamemnon's victorious return from Troy, while their account of Iphigenia's sacrifice directs attention to the event in Agamemnon's past that will lead ultimately to his demise, that is, his murder at the hands of his wife Clytaemestra as retribution for this deed.

The chorus also regularly offered such mythological-historical context during the *stasima*. So, for instance, in the third *stasimon* of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, immediately after it has been made clear that Eteocles intends to defend the city of Thebes rather than cede partial control to his brother Polyneices, the chorus offers a long *strophic* ode lamenting the familial curse which has brought about the current strife (Aeschylus, *Sept.* 720–791). The chorus explains that the current hostility between Eteocles and Polyneices is one

consequence of the curse which was leveled upon their grandfather Laius for disregarding the oracle of Apollo (742–749), whose consequences included each of the events which has led to the present scenario: Oedipus' birth, unknowing murder of his father, and marriage to his mother (750–757), his self-blinding (778–784), and subsequent curse that his sons would battle for his inheritance (785–791). By recounting this history, the chorus thus situates the battle about to take place for control of Thebes as part and parcel of this larger mythic cycle.

A common means by which the chorus would set the current dramatic circumstances into a mythological-historical perspective was to consider them in terms of mythological precedents. So, for instance, in the second choral *stasimon* in Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, after the evil deeds of Clytaemestra and the retributive plan hatched by her children Orestes and Electra to kill her have been recounted, the chorus identifies the ultimate source of such heinous crimes as the unchecked female passions (Aeschylus, *Cho.* 585–652). The chorus goes on to explain that this claim can be validated not solely on the basis of the events which have transpired in the house of Agamemnon, but by considering similarly heinous, familial crimes in the mythical history, e.g., Meleager's mother who, having been informed that her son would die once the log burning in her hearth was finally consumed, eventually let the log burn up (602–612); Scylla, who betrayed her father by cutting off the lock of hair with which his city was kept safe, allowing King Minos of Crete to besiege it (613–622); and the women of Lemnos, who murdered their own husbands and took the Argonauts as lovers (631–638). Among these monstrous acts, the chorus goes on to claim, is the wedding of Clytaemestra to Aegisthis, and their subsequent murder of Agamemnon (623–630). In this way, the actions of Clytaemestra are shown to be part of a long history of transgressions whose source is the misguided passions of a woman.

Mythical analogies just as often take the form of a very brief allusion without a philosophical or aetiological explanation. For instance, in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, the Danaid chorus likens their escape to Argos from their Egyptian suitors to Procne, who was pursued by her husband (Aeschylus, *Suppl.* 57–67). Likewise, in Euripides' *Heracles*, the chorus likens Heracles' maddened murder of his children both to the Danaids' murder of their husbands, and to Procne killing Itys (Euripides, *Heracl.* 1016–1024). Finally, mythical analogies may not be explicitly related to the current dramatic circumstances, but may rather take the form of a brief thematic, topographical, or mythical allusion, from which a connection might be inferred.¹⁰⁸² Whatever form they take, mythic analogies allow the chorus to offer a kind of vantage point from which the present dramatic events can be considered, whereby the achievements (or failures) of past heroes become the lens through which present achievements, and/or failures, can be judged.¹⁰⁸³

C. *Framing the Dramatic Action in a Philosophical Context*

Often, the chorus offered philosophical reflections in light of a dramatic event or situation. Such reflections took numerous forms, ranging from extended deliberations to very brief musings, though in any form they most often occurred during one of the choral odes. The chorus touched on a wide-range of topics according to the dramatic exigency.¹⁰⁸⁴ For instance,

¹⁰⁸² Mastronarde observes that such allusions may not have been perceived unanimously, but perhaps apparent only to those who were learned enough to draw inferences from the choral allusions to such connections. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 122.

¹⁰⁸³ "The burden of the past, the intervention of the gods, and what one might call the fatal beauty of famous events are kept before the audience's mind as it reacts to and combines the different perspectives offered to it." Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 123. For more on mythic analogies see Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 122ff.; Rosenmeyer, *The Art of Aeschylus*, 153; H. Parry, *Lyric Poems of Greek Tragedy*.

¹⁰⁸⁴ The chorus' philosophical deliberations reflect a wide variety of opinions on a number of subjects, and as such, the question of the source of the chorus' philosophical reflections has long been considered. That is, which philosophies, or whose philosophies, are represented by the chorus in Classical tragedy? The poet's own philosophy? The conventional wisdom of the community? The question of whose, or which, *voices* are reflected in the tragic chorus will be taken up detail later in the chapter. See below pp. 305–16.

in the *parodos* of Aeschylus' *Libation-Bearers*, the chorus of elderly female attendants of Clytaemestra reflects on the fact that Clytaemestra has sent them to the tomb of Agamemnon, who was killed by Clytaemestra. After recounting their task at the tomb, and the ominous dream Clytaemestra received which prompted her sending the chorus to Agamemnon's tomb in the first place (Aeschylus, *Cho.* 23–41), the chorus laments the destruction that has come to the house of Agamemnon (44–58). At this point, the chorus reflects on the tendency for Justice to outmaneuver Fortune in mortals' lives (58–65). The implication appears to be that while mortals tend to assume that good fortune will prevail for them, even in those instances such as the current predicament in which Clytaemestra has landed herself, Justice always demands retribution. In other words, the chorus casts Clytaemestra's current circumstances in philosophical terms by suggesting that the universe is ordered in such a way by Justice that Clytaemestra will be forced to pay the consequences for the murder of her husband (66–74).

Likewise, in the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Electra*,¹⁰⁸⁵ the chorus of Argive maidens, who are there ostensibly to comfort Electra as she mourns the death of her father Agamemnon, constantly frame Electra's laments in terms of their philosophical and ethical consequences. They caution Electra that immoderate weeping and prayers not only will never bring Agamemnon back, but will eventually lead to her ruin (137–144), and remind her that she is not the only mortal to have suffered such sorrows (153–4). Finally, the chorus notes that it is impossible to struggle against those in power, and that consequently Electra ought to abandon her vengeful plots, lest they plunge her into ruin by creating misery out of misery (213–220; 233–235). The chorus' calls to moderation serve as a consistent counter-point to Electra's

¹⁰⁸⁵ Here the *parodos* is presented not as an exclusively choral ode, but in the form of a lyric dialogue between the chorus and Electra.

vengeful plotting, and constitute a contrasting perspective on Electra's present circumstances and intentions.¹⁰⁸⁶

Philosophical reflections are often not as comprehensive elsewhere as in these examples, but may instead consist of brief musings which could occur either during the course of a choral ode in-between scenes, in dialogue with another character, or as a non-dialogical comment during a scene. To cite just a few examples from a very wide range of material, the chorus of elders in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* reflects the notion that an excess of pride, impiety, or wealth tends to bring about unintended disaster (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 367–402), in addition to the idea that impious deeds beget further impiety and just deeds breed further justice (750–762), while Sophocles' chorus of women in *Electra* warns against excess passions (Sophocles, *El.* 137–144; 177; 369), touts the benefits of foresight and wise-thinking (990; 1015), claims that it is impossible to struggle against those in power (219–20), and highlights the fact suffering and pain are a hallmark of human existence (1171–3).

D. *Framing the Dramatic Action within a Mythological-Theological Perspective*

Philosophical deliberations of the chorus often included considerations of the gods. No firm boundaries existed in antiquity separating the domains of mortals, heroes, and gods; rather, they were intimately connected—the gods were thought to interfere regularly in human affairs, human actions had divine consequences, and the initiatives of the gods impinged upon mortals' lives. Consequently, firm boundaries often did not exist between the world of *philosophy* and *theology*. The chorus was often a vehicle for reflecting on the nature of the gods and their

¹⁰⁸⁶ “It is generally agreed that they [the chorus] represent ordinary women with the usual human instinct for caution and reasonableness, in contrast to Electra's heroic stature and capacity for suffering, and that they rebuke her emotional excesses, attempt to persuade all parties to yield to moderation, and in general serve as an effective foil to Electra's character.” Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus*, 141. Cf. Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies*, 192.

interactions in the world, the consequences of divine favor and disfavor on human affairs, and the divine underpinnings of the goings-on in the human world.

So, for example, in the *parodos* of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the chorus offers theological reflections on the fate of the Trojans at the hands of Agamemnon and the Danaan contingent. At the very beginning of the ode, the chorus connects the ten years of war in Troy with divine acts (perhaps the doings of Apollo, Pan, or Zeus), which are said to be ultimately responsible for the war and the destruction of Troy (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 40ff.). The gods are said to have exacted "revenge" upon the citizens of Troy as retribution for Paris' abduction of Helen (55–59). The chorus then specifically identifies Zeus, the "god of hospitality" (ξένιος Ζεὺς), as the one who compelled the sons of Atreus against Paris (apparently, as the epithet suggests, on the basis of the fact that Paris' abduction of Helen constituted a breach of Menelaus' hospitality), and in so doing "imposed" the struggles amongst Greeks and Trojans alike (60–67). Before turning to other matters, the chorus concludes by remarking that Zeus had established this destiny for the Greeks and Trojans such that the course could not be altered by any means (67–71). In this way, the past sufferings of the Greeks and Trojans, the present circumstances of Agamemnon and his fleet, and no less the future calamity which is about to beset Agamemnon, are situated theologically in a context of the retributive power of Zeus.

In the same play, the *kommos* which occurs between Queen Clytaemestra and the chorus shortly after Clytaemestra has murdered King Agamemnon, serves as a good example of the tendency of the chorus to frame *episodic* events in theological terms (Aeschylus, *Ag.* 1407–1577). The *kommos* comes immediately on the heels of Clytaemestra's speech in which she insistently claims *sole* responsibility for the murder of the King.¹⁰⁸⁷ Given Clytaemestra's

¹⁰⁸⁷ Per the conventions of Greek drama, the murder took place off-stage, and as such the audience was left to hear about its details after the fact, either from a Messenger (i.e., a Messenger's speech) or a witness to the event.

hostile position vis-à-vis Agamemnon throughout the play, and the conspicuous foreshadowing of her eventual murderous deed, there is no reason to doubt Clytaemestra's admission or to suspect an accomplice at this point. In the *kommos*, however, it is revealed that Clytaemestra was not alone responsible for the murder; on the contrary, many are responsible. To begin, Clytaemestra introduces the role of "Avenging Justice"¹⁰⁸⁸ in the plot (which operates on behalf of her daughter, Iphigenia, who was sacrificed by Agamemnon in order to procure favorable winds with which to sail to Troy), and in doing so implicates Justice as "coadjutor" in the murder of Agamemnon.¹⁰⁸⁹ At the same time, Clytaemestra implicates her illicit lover, Aegisthus, in the plot (1436). In their response, the chorus likens Clytaemestra's adulterous murder to Helen who, like Clytaemestra, caused Agamemnon's demise (1451–61). By means of a mythical-historical analogy in which Clytaemestra's madness is compared with Helen's strife,¹⁰⁹⁰ the chorus implies that "unconquerable strife" was also partly to blame for Agamemnon's demise. The chorus concludes their argument in this vein by implicating the *daimon* which compels women such as Helen and Clytaemestra to such deeds (1470), and ultimately Zeus, who is said to be the ultimate cause of all events (1485–86). In this way, the choral *kommos* establishes that Agamemnon's demise at the hands of Clytaemestra was not an isolated act of a madwoman, as Clytaemestra herself had claimed, but was intimately tied up in the workings of various mythical-theological forces, e.g., "strife," "daimons," and Zeus himself, outside of human control, and thus fundamentally reframes the issue of Clytaemestra's culpability in mythical-theological terms.

Several of the choral odes in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* provide clear mythical-theological reflections on *episodic* events as they unfold throughout the play. The primary storyline of the play consists of the unfolding revelation that the unidentified murderer of King Laius is, in fact,

¹⁰⁸⁸ τὴν τέλειον...Δίκην

¹⁰⁸⁹ Conacher, "Interaction between Chorus and Characters in the Oresteia," 326.

¹⁰⁹⁰ ἔρις. The connection between Helen and "strife" was also made by the Chorus at line 698.

(current) King Oedipus himself who, it turns out not only unknowingly killed his father, but has also been unknowingly married to his own mother, Jocasta. Central to Oedipus' recognition of his true identity are two separate oracles through which his crimes were foretold:

(1) *An oracle once came to Laius...saying that it would be his fate to die at the hands of the son who should be the child of him and me [Jocasta] (Sophocles, Oed. tyr. 711–13).*

(2) *I [Oedipus] went to Pytho, and Phoebus [Apollo] sent me away cheated of what I had come for, but came out with other things terrible and sad for my unhappy self, saying that I was destined to lie with my mother...and I should be the murderer of the father who had begotten me (787–93).*

Of course, it turns out that these oracles have accurately predicted both Laius' murder by his own son, and the incestuous relationship between Oedipus and his mother. The choral odes throughout the play provide a mythical-theological perspective on the story of Oedipus in two related ways. On the one hand, the chorus consistently takes the position that oracles are, in fact, accurate predictors of future events and as such can be relied upon by mortals. And in fact, the chorus' positive view of the efficacy of oracles, which is challenged throughout the play by Jocasta's conviction that the course of mortals' lives is determined by random chance, and Oedipus' belief that human machinations determine human affairs, turns out to be the correct position.¹⁰⁹¹ In other words, the chorus' mythical-theological perspective with respect to the efficacy of the divine oracle turns out to be the correct perspective in which to view the unfolding of the events in the play.¹⁰⁹²

¹⁰⁹¹ For a discussion of the conflict between the chorus and the characters in this respect, see Esposito, "The Changing Roles of the Sophoclean Chorus," 93–5.

¹⁰⁹² Although such a position is not infallible in and of itself, as attested by the third *stasimon*, in which the chorus casts doubt on the reliability of the oracles, a doubt which is ultimately overturned. See Segal, "The Chorus and the Gods in *Oedipus Tyrannus*," 26–8.

Closely related to the chorus' confidence in the efficacy of the Delphic oracle is the notion that the Olympian divinities are ultimately responsible for creating the kind of ordered universe which is revealed through the oracles, an idea which is promoted throughout the choral odes in the play, and summed up in the *antistrophe* of the first *stasimon*:

“Both Zeus and Apollo have understanding and know the ways of mortals” (498–9).

This view is repeated by the chorus in the second *stasimon*, and presented in such a way as to connect Zeus with an eternal order of things:

“May such a destiny abide with me that I win praise for a reverent purity in all words and deeds sanctioned by laws that stand high, generated in lofty heaven, the laws whose father is Olympus. The mortal nature of men did not beget them, neither shall they be lulled to sleep by forgetfulness. Great in these laws is the god, nor does he ever grow old” (863–72).¹⁰⁹³

Thus, in these particular odes and elsewhere in the play, the chorus provides a mythical-theological perspective with which to explain the efficacy of the oracles.¹⁰⁹⁴

The chorus' mythical-theological reflections in the choral odes are often not as comprehensive elsewhere in Greek drama as they are in the previous examples. Elsewhere the chorus' reflections often consist of less elaborate reflections which nevertheless set the current circumstances in a mythical-theological perspective. For instance, the dramatic context for the beginning of Sophocles' *Ajax* is the (truthful) accusation that Ajax has slaughtered the Argive cattle as retribution for not receiving Achilles' shield (Sophocles, *Aj.* 1–90). The choral ode in the *parodos* briefly recounts the charges made against Ajax, and then suggests that only a god

¹⁰⁹³ This explicit connection between Zeus and an eternal divine order is reflected elsewhere in Sophocles, most notably in the second *stasimon* of *Antigone* (604–10).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Segal, “The Chorus and the Gods in *Oedipus Tyrannus*,” 25.

could have prompted Ajax to commit such a deed (172–185). The very next line is a plea to Zeus and Apollo to avert the rumor from among the Argives, so as to ward off their vengeance upon him (185–6). Here the chorus’ reaction to Ajax’ situation is not an exposition on the theological nature of retribution, or an extended reflection on how it was that the gods could have compelled Ajax to commit such a crime. Rather, the chorus’ brief comments simply connect Ajax’ deeds with the workings of the gods, and suggest that only the gods could avert further calamity.

E. *Mythological-Theological Reflections and Choral Hymns*

One of the most common ways in which a tragic chorus framed the surrounding dramatic action in theological terms was by singing a hymn in response to a dramatic event. I have already touched upon the fact that such hymns often bore similarities to non-dramatic hymnic forms, *paean*s, *dithyrambs*, etc., while they very often consisted of blended elements of otherwise distinct hymnic genres.¹⁰⁹⁵ The functions of hymns in tragedy are manifold. At the structural level, the hymns most often constitute responses to specific dramatic events that have just taken place on-stage, or have been described by one of the characters: a hymn of joy in response to positive news, a wedding-hymn in honor of a marriage, a *paean* to summon Apollo in the face of imminent disaster, etc. In this way, the function(s) of choral hymns in tragedy evokes the function(s) of choral hymns in the “real-life” of Classical Athens. Insofar as choral hymns were prevalent in the actual lives of Athenians in the Classical period as responses to

¹⁰⁹⁵ Commentators are typically very comfortable speaking of a tragic hymn incorporating elements of various hymnic genres in a single hymn. Segal suggests that dramatists were free to deviate from traditional hymnic forms on account of the fact that they were not tied to the actual cultic contexts in which the hymn(s) were actually performed. Furley and Bremer likewise acknowledge that dramatists adapted traditional hymnic forms in order to suit a particular dramatic purpose, the particular exigencies of which often required that traditional forms be modified. Segal, “The Chorus and the Gods in *Oedipus Tyrannus*,” 20–32; Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 1:275–7.

various life-events, and inasmuch as tragedies were imitations of life,¹⁰⁹⁶ choral hymns in tragedy would have appeared as natural and expected as part and parcel of various dramatic sequences of events.¹⁰⁹⁷ In other words, “dramatic hymns may be considered part of the dramatic illusion created in order to present before a receptive audience the impression of events happening in mythical time.”¹⁰⁹⁸

While tragic hymns can thus be understood as dramatic events within the dramatic movement of the play as a whole, they also function to cast the surrounding dramatic action in a particular mythical-theological light. At one level, the hymns offer a mythological-theological perspective in the drama simply by associating and connecting dramatic events with mythological-theological characters, for in doing so the chorus demonstrates the belief in the inherent relationship between the gods and mortals, and the comingling of the divine and mortal realms. That is, the chorus confirms through hymns that mortal events include divine workings and have divine implications. At the same time, the chorus often offers by means of hymns explicit reflections on the mythological-theological underpinnings and implications of the dramatic events themselves.

The hymn to Zeus in the middle of the *parodos* of Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* serves as a good example of this phenomenon. As was shown above, the *parodos* begins with a theological reflection on the fact that Zeus has caused both the Trojans and Greeks to suffer long and hard on account of Paris’ abduction of Helen. Most of the rest of the *parodos* consists of the chorus’ description of the events which led to the sacrifice of Iphigenia, and the account of the sacrifice

¹⁰⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Poet.* 1450a17

¹⁰⁹⁷ While certain formal and functional elements of tragic hymns can be considered in terms of pre- or non-dramatic hymns, their formal characteristics and functional contributions cannot be considered in isolation from the particular dramatic context(s) in which they appear. Their functional value in drama is determined primarily with respect to their relationship(s) to the surrounding dramatic action, and must be considered first and foremost *in terms of* these relationships. Conacher, *Aeschylus*, 165–7.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 1:273.

itself (140–159; 184–247), which constitutes both an illustration of the kind of suffering that the war entailed, and a foregrounding of the principal event which leads to the tragic denouement in this particular play (i.e., Clytaemnestra’s murder of Agamemnon on account of his sacrifice of Iphigenia). In the midst of this account is a hymn to Zeus,¹⁰⁹⁹ whose central themes are the supreme divinity of Zeus (160–175), and the notion that Zeus confers wisdom upon mortals through suffering (176–183). Thus, the hymn confirms the sentiment expressed at the beginning of the *parodos* of the sovereignty of Zeus, implicit in which is the reaffirmation that the course of the war, including all the suffering that was occasioned by it, was ordained by Zeus. So much might also be understood by the claim that Zeus “set mortals on the road to understanding” (176–7). At the same time, the hymn goes further to claim that the suffering decreed by Zeus serves a pedagogical function. That is, suffering begets learning (πάθει μάθος), even against one’s will (176–181). Though the precise means by which learning occurs is not further explained, the hymn makes clear that the suffering entailed in the war, i.e., the very suffering described in the *parodos*, as well as the suffering that is about to take place in the course of the tragedy, is part and parcel of an ultimately benevolent mechanism (χάρις) by which Zeus confers wisdom upon mortals.

The *parodos* of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, which consists of a hymn to Apollo, also clearly demonstrates the extent to which a hymn casts the surrounding dramatic action in a particular mythical-theological light. The dramatic context for the hymn, revealed in the introductory prologue and dialogue, consists of the description of great suffering in Thebes on account of the fact that the murderer of former King Laius (i.e., Oedipus) is living unpunished in the city. The chorus begins the *parodos* by calling upon Apollo to accomplish some salvific deed in response to the current misfortune which has beset the city, and to convey the nature of this deed through

¹⁰⁹⁹ The so-called “Hymn to Zeus, whoever he might be (Ζεὺς ὅστις ποτ’ ἐστίν)”

the oracle at Delphi (151–157). The chorus then invokes both Athena and Artemis to appear alongside Apollo, with the stated hope that the three gods will be able to ward off the doom which looms over Thebes (158–166). After a brief recounting of the dire straits in which the city has found itself (167–189), the chorus then calls upon Ares to hasten away from Thebes, and next upon Zeus to destroy Ares with a thunderbolt (190–203). The hymn concludes with a reiteration of the chorus’ invocation of Apollo and Artemis, and a final invocation of Bacchus to help to rid the city of Ares. This hymnic *parodos* thus frames the preceding dramatic material in a particular mythical-theological perspective, i.e., the chorus proposes a divine source of the suffering of Thebes (i.e., Ares), and associates the salvation of the city with the beneficence of other Olympian deities.

These examples highlight the predominant function of tragic hymns to provide mythical-theological contexts for considering the surrounding dramatic circumstances. The lowest common functional denominator of tragic hymns is to associate dramatic events with divine activity, though this can be variously accomplished. That is, a hymnic response to a dramatic event may constitute an analysis or “diagnosis” of the mythical-theological forces which led to the event,¹¹⁰⁰ including perhaps a recounting of a god’s past deeds which are brought to bear on the current dramatic circumstances, an explanation or elaboration of the mythical-theological implications of a dramatic event, or an attempt to highlight the divine means by which a resolution to a dramatic problem might be reached.

F. *Caveats*

Having established this framework for considering the “reflective” functions of the chorus, a couple of additional observations may be offered:

¹¹⁰⁰ See William D. Furley, “Hymns in Euripidean Tragedy,” in *Euripides and Tragic Theater in the Late Fifth Century* (ed. M. Cropp, K. Lee, and D. Sansone; Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 183–97.

(1) While some functions of the chorus with respect to the surrounding dialogue are more likely to appear either during or in-between scenes, or to be associated with a particular type of choral lyric (i.e., *parodos*, *stasimon*, lyric dialogue, etc.), the functions of the chorus tended not to be strictly associated with one type of choral lyric or another. For example, while the chorus most often offered a synopsis of current dramatic circumstances, and the historical circumstances which have led to them, during the *parodos*, this could also occur at later points in a tragedy. In this vein, the chorus could introduce a character, foreshadow future events, or create various dramatic exigencies by means of a lyric song in-between scenes (i.e., *parodos*, *stasimon*, *exodos*, or lyric dialogue with another character), or by some means during a scene (e.g., lyric or non-lyric dialogue with another character, or in a non-lyric, non-dialogical utterance). Likewise, the chorus offered emotional responses to a dramatic event, and framed the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light (e.g., in a mythological-historical, philosophical, and/or mythological-theological context) by means of choral lyrics that occurred both during and in-between scenes.

(2) The chorus is not solely responsible for offering emotional reactions to, or mythical-historical, philosophical, or theological perspectives on, the dramatic action. The main characters very often offer emotional reactions of the same sort as the chorus does, and reflect on the historical, mythical/theological, philosophical, and ethical underpinnings and consequences of their own thoughts and actions. As such, the chorus' reflections on the present circumstances are not always unique. For instance, the choral *parodos* sometimes reflects the sentiments expressed in the *prologos* of the actor.¹¹⁰¹ Throughout a given tragedy, the confluence(s) and/or differences in the ways in which the main characters and the chorus react to, and/or contextualize, the dramatic events often constitute critical dramatic dynamics.

¹¹⁰¹ See Grube, *The Drama of Euripides*, 107–110; Garvie, *Aeschylus' Supplikes*, 120ff.; Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies*, 140ff.

(3) The content of the chorus' utterances are not always intimately related to the surrounding dialogue and (non-choral) dramatic action. On the contrary, the connection of the choral odes to the surrounding dramatic action appears at times conspicuously unrelated. On account of this, the content of the choral odes can be evaluated in terms of the extent to which it relates—or does not relate—to the surrounding dialogue and dramatic action within scenes, a topic which will be taken up below.

(4) Often, the philosophical, mythical-historical, and/or mythical-theological perspective offered by the chorus provides a framework for considering larger themes in the play. That is, the perspective offered by the chorus in the beginning of the play often re-appears in subsequent choral odes and/or dialogue(s) with the protagonist(s), though this is not to say that the perspective of the chorus remains the same throughout a play. For example, the framework offered in the *parodos* often frames the entire tragedy play (e.g., Aeschylus, *Ag.*; Sophocles, *Trach.* 496ff.; Euripides, *El.* 432–86). The relationships of the chorus to larger themes of the play are often more conspicuous when the chorus immediate relationship to the surrounding dramatic action is less conspicuous.

(5) While dramatic choruses exhibit fairly consistent functionality in terms of these broad trajectories, their functions within a given tragedy are fluid, and determined largely by the particular needs of a playwright in a given play, and the specific plot demands at a particular point in the drama. The flexibility of the dramatic chorus in this regard is conspicuous from even a cursory read of Greek tragedy, and in this way, the chorus has rightly been called an “all-purpose character.”¹¹⁰²

¹¹⁰² E.g., Vickers, *Towards Greek Tragedy: Drama, Myth, Society*, 10ff. Cf. Rush Rehm, “Performing the Chorus,” 46.

(6) The functions of the secondary choruses with respect to the surrounding dramatic action can be considered in the very same terms as those of the primary choruses. On the one hand, as I noted above, on several occasions the secondary chorus serves as a lyric dialogue partner with a protagonist, in order to convey the details of an emotionally charged scene, and in this capacity the chorus clearly functions to advance the dramatic action. In addition to this, a dialogue between the secondary chorus and Hippolytus in Euripides' *Hippolytus* functions to provide background information relevant to the plot.¹¹⁰³ This dialogue allows Hippolytus' defining traits to be revealed, i.e., his chaste lifestyle, and disrespect for Aphrodite. Insofar as Hippolytus' disrespect for Aphrodite sets in motion subsequent dramatic events, i.e., Aphrodite's curse upon Phaedra to fall in love with Hippolytus, and Hippolytus' eventual demise at his father's hands, the dialogue provides critical background information relevant for understanding subsequent dramatic events. These are the only ways in which the secondary chorus could be said to advance the dramatic action. In other words, in the extant texts, the secondary chorus never: (1) signals the arrival of characters; (2) offers a synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances; or (4) foreshadows future dramatic events.

On the other hand, the secondary chorus appears at least once to cast the surrounding dramatic activity in a particular light. The clearest example of this occurs when a (secondary) chorus of maiden girls sings a *hymenaios* in Euripides' *Phaethon*, in response to the wedding of Clymene and Merops.¹¹⁰⁴ Insofar as it represents an emotional outburst in response to a dramatic event, it functions according to one of the conventions of choral lyrics generally. Moreover, the hymn represents a positive response to the marriage, and frames it in (almost excessively) positive terms. This response functions ironically in the text, as the reality of the situation is

¹¹⁰³ Euripides, *Hipp.* 58–113.

¹¹⁰⁴ Euripides, *Phaethon* 229–243.

much worse than any of the characters realize (i.e., Merops' "son", Phaethon, has died). Thus, the choral reflection on the marriage functions as an ironically positive reflection upon circumstances which are in reality quite disastrous.

5. The "Voice" of the Chorus

The various ways in which the chorus operated in Greek tragedy, by responding in a particular way to tragic events, or by casting the surrounding speeches, dialogue, and dramatic action of the other characters in a particular mythical-historical, philosophical, or theological light, prompts questions about the *voice* that is represented in such instances by the chorus—*whose* opinions are reflected in the suggestion that the sufferings of the house of Agamemnon are a consequence of his unholy sacrifices, or that the progeny of Laius continue to suffer on account of the fact that he disobeyed the command of the oracle at Delphi? Or, *which* philosophical systems are evident in the aphoristic statements offered by the chorus in various Classical tragedies?

A. *The Voice of the Choral Characters*

On the one hand, the chorus often reflects the dramatized "voice" of the characters they represent in the tragedy, e.g., Theban elders, Argive women, Egyptian slaves, etc. In other words, the chorus often speaks in accordance with what might be expected of, say, *elders*, or *maidens*, in a particular dramatic situation. For instance, the histrionics of the chorus in the first *stasimon* of Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* can be understood as the expected, stereotyped expression of young girls whose city is under siege. In other words, the voice of the chorus at that particular time appears to have been determined by the collective age, sex, and social status of the characters they represent, their relationship to the protagonist(s), as well as the dramatic

exigencies of which the chorus is a part.¹¹⁰⁵ This may be referred to as the “intra-dramatic voice” of the chorus.¹¹⁰⁶

By contrast, the chorus often offers reflections on the meaning of a particular event in ways which are far less attributable—if attributable at all—to the characters they represent, or to particular dramatic exigencies. In other words, the chorus often takes on a voice which goes beyond the limitations imposed by the fact that the chorus is representing a particular group of persons within the confines of a particular play. The chorus of young maidens in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* again offers an example of such a voice during a dialogue with Eteocles. Even as the opposing army remains outside the city poised to attack, the girls offer tempered, calculated reflections on the many detrimental consequences of war, which serve as counterpoints to Eteocles’ unrestrained desire for battle (Aeschylus, *Sept.* 680ff.). Commentators have acknowledged that the chorus’ remarks represent philosophical reflections that go far beyond what might be expected from besieged maidens.¹¹⁰⁷ In other words, at this point the chorus demonstrates “...a degree of prescience or insight that exceeds what can be reasonably assigned to the chorus if the latter is felt to be strictly in character within the temporal continuum of the action.”¹¹⁰⁸ Choral reflections of this sort are frequent in Classical tragedy, and may be considered the “extra-dramatic voice” of the chorus.¹¹⁰⁹

¹¹⁰⁵ This is not to say that the chorus’ voice in this respect remains constant from one play to the next. Rather, the chorus’ voice changes from play to play in according to who is being represented in the play. That is, Greek soldiers returning from Troy would offer different kinds of reactions, advice, and dialogue than would female attendants in the royal household.

¹¹⁰⁶ Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 89.

¹¹⁰⁷ E.g., “Compared with their earlier exchanges (180–286), the reversal in the positions of Eteocles and the chorus is so complete that this chorus of young maidens even speak to him as if his superiors in age and wisdom.” Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes* (ed. Alan Sommerstein; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 222, n. 98.

¹¹⁰⁸ Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 112.

¹¹⁰⁹ Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 89.

Thus, the voice of the chorus was not consistent in any given tragedy, as the chorus expresses both intra-dramatic and extra-dramatic voices within any given play.¹¹¹⁰ However, distinguishing between these voices is not always so easy. While the extra-dramatic voice of the chorus is often thought to be heard when the chorus is thought to offer a comment, reflection, etc. inconsistent with its persona as a character in the drama, there exists no standard methodology by which to determine consistency in this regard.¹¹¹¹ In addition, any consideration of the chorus' expressions of an extra-dramatic voice is complicated by the question of whose extra-dramatic voice is actually being represented by the chorus. Because the extra-dramatic voice of the chorus is so prominent throughout Classical tragedy, and it is not immediately clear whose *actual* voice is represented by it, these questions have continued to yield various answers.

B. *The Chorus as "Ideal Spectator"*

The Romanticist scholar and poet August Schlegel first suggested in 1809 that the chorus functioned as a kind of surrogate for an audience member, insofar as its reactions to the dramatic action would have been a reflection of audience members' own reactions. In other words, the chorus' reflections on the dramatic events, sympathies with the main characters, and evaluations of the events in terms of mythical-historical, philosophical, and theological contexts, constituted "lyrical and musical expressions of [the audience members'] own emotions."¹¹¹² According to

¹¹¹⁰ "An unjaundiced survey of the evidence could not overlook the precipitous turnabouts in the choral role—from sympathetic concurrence to moral aloofness, from the didactic narration of myth to the somber enunciation of prayer, from the formal but lowly service of heralding entrances to the equally formal authority of pronouncing γνῶμαι—not to mention the clear cases of moral or political inconstancy marking some of the Euripidean choruses." Rosenmeyer, "Elusory Voices," 559.

¹¹¹¹ Fletcher summarizes the consequences of this: "...in most cases where one scholar detects inconsistency, another is able to defend the unity of choral character." Judith Fletcher, "Choral Voice and Narrative in the First Stasimon of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*," *Phoenix* 53.1/2 (Spring–Summer 1999): 29, n. 3. Some have attempted to identify the extra-dramatic voice of the chorus in those instances where the chorus uses a first-person singular pronoun in place of the plural, though this approach has not won widespread support. See, for example, T. Rosenmeyer, "Irony and Tragic Choruses," in *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Else* (ed. J. H. D'Arms and J. W. Eadie; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977), 39–40; Fletcher, "Choral Voice," 29–49.

¹¹¹² A.W. Schlegel, cited in M. Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 179.

Schlegel, the chorus' reactions were not merely reflections of the audiences' own sympathies, but symbiotic so far as the chorus' reflections, contextualization of the surrounding action, etc., "elevate[d the audience member] to the region of contemplation" of the dramatic events.¹¹¹³ In other words, in Schlegel's view the chorus led the audience to adopt the reaction to, and an understanding of, the plight of the protagonist and the surrounding dramatic action as the chorus did. In this way, Schlegel understood the chorus to function as a kind of "ideal spectator."

Perhaps the biggest obstacle in accepting Schlegel's interpretation is the notion that audience members would have had a monolithic reaction to the dramatic events, and would have consistently adopted the viewpoint of the chorus in terms of their reactions, reflections, etc., to the dramatic events. Such is the gulf that exists between a Romanticist interpretation of the reception of drama and the methodologies which guide theories of dramatic reception today. Nevertheless, it would be hard to overstate the influence of Schlegel's formulation in subsequent discussions of the function(s) of the dramatic chorus.¹¹¹⁴ Schlegel provided a framework for considering the chorus' role vis-à-vis the non-choral dramatic action, and the chorus' role as a mediator between the drama and the audience, which has proven very influential even as the notion of the chorus as an "ideal spectator" has been modified, or abandoned altogether. That is, the question of the chorus' relation(s) to the non-choral action and to the audience continues to be a central consideration of most studies of dramatic choruses.

Having moved away from the abstract idea that the voice of the chorus in tragedy somehow represents, and at the same time shapes, an *ideal* audience member, modern scholars have considered other possible sources of the voices of the chorus, including notions that the

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹¹¹⁴ The idea that the chorus functioned as an "ideal spectator" had an extremely long shelf-life, which dominated scholarship for nearly 150 years after Schlegel first proposed it. It was not until Müller's publication of "Chor und Handlung bei den griechischen Tragikern," in 1967 that the position was really challenged. See Gardiner, *The Sophoclean Chorus*, 2, n. 2.

voice is: (1) the author's himself; (2) the voice of the community; and/or (3) an "Implicit Spectator."

C. *The Chorus as the Voice of the Poet*

Many have considered the extra-dramatic voice of the chorus, at least at times, to be none other than the poet's own voice.¹¹¹⁵ Of course, at some level the voice of the chorus is always the playwright's insofar as the words, actions, music, etc., were wholly determined by him. At issue, however, are those instances in which the chorus appears to speak (or, more often, sing) in a manner that appears out of character. It is thought by many that in such instances the poet's own opinions are reflected in the chorus' words.

The notion that the chorus represented the voice of the poet is supported in the ancient record by a *scholion* on Euripides, *Med.* 823, which claims that the chorus took on the "persona" or "presence" of the poet,¹¹¹⁶ and the fact that the voice of the poet was conspicuous in the chorus of Classical comedy.¹¹¹⁷ Thus, while the notion that the poet utilized the chorus to express his own opinions is supported by external evidence, the criteria used by various scholars to identify the voice of the poet in Classical tragedy are extremely vague. For example, statements which seem to reflect a particular political, social, or theological view might be traced to the poet. However, it is virtually impossible to determine that this view represented the

¹¹¹⁵ "The choral odes of Sophocles express, like all parts of the plays but often in special degree, his own interpretation of the action... He uses the chorus... as his own mouthpiece." R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena," *JHS* 88 (1949): 132; Cf. G.M. Kirkwood, *A Study of Sophoclean Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958): 186; Rosenmeyer, "Elusory Voices," 561-4. Rosenmeyer, "Irony and Tragic Choruses," 31-44; Fletcher, "Choral Voice," 29-49.

¹¹¹⁶ Καὶ αἰεὶ ὁ χορὸς ἐν προσώπῳ τοῦ ποιητοῦ... See Roos Meijerink, "Aristophanes of Byzantium and Scholia on the Composition of the Dramatic Choruses," in *Σχόλια. Studia ad criticam interpretationemque textuum Graecorum et ad historiam iuris Graeco-Romani pertinentia D. Holwerda oblata* (ed. W.J. Aerts et al.; Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1985), 97.

¹¹¹⁷ Nowhere was the voice of the poet clearer than in the comic *parabasis*, a formal element of Classical Comedy in which the chorus would address the audience not as a character but as a medium through which the poet would communicate directly to the audience.

author's personal opinion(s).¹¹¹⁸ Complicating matters is the likelihood that if the poet had wished to express his own voice, i.e., personal opinion, reflection, commentary, etc., he could have just as easily done so through the medium of the chorus *qua* character.¹¹¹⁹ Put another way, there is no reason to think that the voices of the chorus in their roles *as* dramatic characters did not represent the poet's own views from time to time. This is all to say that, to the extent that the playwright controls each of the voices in a given tragedy, it is very difficult to distinguish a voice of the poet which exists somehow apart from the intra-dramatic voices themselves.¹¹²⁰

A related problem concerning the idea that the chorus represents the voice of the poet is the fact that the content of choral remarks which seem to stand beyond what the chorus *qua* characters ought to know is often more than what could be characterized as a personal opinion that could be traced to a particular individual such as the poet. That is, the chorus may offer a summary of the Trojan war, the family line of Agamemnon, or details of the shield of Achilles, which might not represent the opinions of a group of dramatic characters, but which could neither be said to represent the voice of a single individual. Rather, such information appears to have been culled from the collective historical, mythical, ethical, civic, and religious consciousness of an Athenian citizen in the 5th c.

D. *The Chorus as the Voice of the Community*

To the extent that one can speak of it at all, one cannot evaluate the voice of the poet as if it were an autonomous voice disconnected from the wider social, civic, and religious institutions

¹¹¹⁸ Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 267.

¹¹¹⁹ In this way, the chorus could be said to express a "double-voice," both as a character, and on behalf of the poet. Fletcher, "Choral Voice," 30.

¹¹²⁰ Frequently cited examples of instances in which the poet's own voice is thought to have emerged in Greek tragedy are the first *stasimon* of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the first *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and the second *stasimon* of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*. See Kranz, *Stasimon*, 120–1, 170–1; Burton, *The Chorus in Sophocles' Tragedies*, 85; Max Pohlenz, *Die griechische Tragödie. Erläuterungen* (2nd ed.; Göttingen: B.G. Teubner, 1954), 92–3; Rosenmeyer, "Elusory Voices," 562–3.

in 5th century Athens, as it was to a large extent these institutions which “predetermine[d] the possible ‘creative’ area of the individual poet,” and thus influenced his voice as it was expressed in drama, through the chorus or elsewhere.¹¹²¹ Thus, inasmuch as the chorus reflected the voice of the poet, it is also necessarily reflected the voice of the community that shaped the poet.

The voice of the community may be more directly evident, however, in much of the choral content in Greek tragedy. We have seen, for instance, how often in the choral odes there appear (variations on) traditional choral songs. Just as often, through these songs and by other means, the myths of the gods, and the mythical-historical exploits of the heroes of the Greek imagination are re-told. Insofar as the chorus “preserve[s], transmit[s], and explore[s] the values of society” as they are expressed in these choral forms, and in the re-tellings of traditional myths, scholars have considered the chorus to have functioned as a kind of voice of the community.¹¹²²

The community’s voice might be recognized in the chorus in more subtle ways. Some have argued that insofar as the theater itself was a space for expressing, depicting, and questioning various social realities (relationships, behaviors, customs, beliefs, etc.), the chorus’ collective presence represented the voice of the community over and against the distinctive voices of the individual actors. The chorus, whose voice represented “the feelings of the spectators who make up the civic community,” may have functioned within drama to provide an

¹¹²¹ In addition to the fact that the poet was influenced implicitly by the social, civic, and religious institutions of which he was a part, the notion that the poet exercised autonomy over his dramatic output is undermined by the fact that his drama was always the product of a number of explicit communal mechanisms. That is, “...the author is but one of the mechanisms of dramatic production, located between two acts of selection: the preliminary selection (we would perhaps hesitate to call it preventive censorship) administered to his text-outline, on which depends the possibility that his text, when perfected in a script, will see the light (will be perfected on stage), and the subsequent selection made by the public (or more precisely the jury, chosen from the public according to procedures strictly analogous to those used for political proceedings)... In other words: the concepts of artistic autonomy, of creative spontaneity, of the author’s personality, so dear to bourgeois esthetics, must be radically reframed, when speaking of Greek theater, by considerations of the complex institutional and social conditions within which the processes of literary production in fact took place.” Oddone Longo, “The Theater of the *Polis*,” in *Nothing to Do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context* (ed. J.J. Winkler and F.I. Zeitlin; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), 14–15.

¹¹²² Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, 271.

ideological contrast with the individual actors whose voices represent past heroes who are more or less “estranged from the ordinary condition of the citizen.”¹¹²³ In this vein, Vernant and Vidal-Naquet have argued that the chorus embodied “the collective truth, the truth of the mean, the truth of the city” which is set over and against the “excess” of the protagonists in tragedy.¹¹²⁴

The notion that the chorus represented the voice of the community depends largely on the premise that the chorus as somehow representing the audience, and that the audience would have easily and consistently identified the view of the chorus as its own. The notion that the audience would have identified with the chorus might be supported on the grounds that the dramatic chorus actually did represent a cross-section of (male Athenian) citizens. Moreover, the audience and chorus shared a similar spatial vantage point vis-à-vis the dramatic action of the protagonists, apart from the actors in the *theatron* and *orchestra*, respectively,¹¹²⁵ as well as a collective identity over and against the individual actors who represented the protagonists. In these ways, the chorus could be considered an “internal analogue,” or a “staged metaphor,”¹¹²⁶

¹¹²³ E.g., “[the chorus’] role is to express through its fears, hopes, questions and judgements, the feelings of the spectators who make up the civic community.” By contrast, the actor, who represents “a hero from an age gone by...[is] always more or less estranged from the ordinary condition of the citizen.” Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, 10.

¹¹²⁴ According to Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, the character of Eteocles in Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* well represents this phenomenon. Prior to the news of Polynices’ siege of Thebes, Eteocles embodied “all the virtues of moderation, reflection and self-control that go to make up the statesman.” Not coincidentally, at this point in the drama the chorus of Theban girls is presented in contrast to Eteocles as gripped with the fear that might be expected of them as they are being surrounded by an opposing army. Once Eteocles hears of the impending invasion, however, his “moderate” character is transformed into a “murderous madness” which disassociated him from the ideals of the democratic city and linked him to “another world rejected by that of the *polis*: he becomes once again the Labdacid of legend, the man of the noble *gene*, the great royal families of the past that are weighed down by ancestral defilement and curses.” Though Vernant and Vidal-Naquet are not explicit about this, it is precisely at this point that the chorus transforms itself into a voice of moderation, of impassioned pleas which counter the possessed, hubristic, mania of Eteocles. In this way, the chorus has come to represent the voice of democratic moderation over and against the excesses which are demonstrated in the character of Eteocles. See Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, *Tragedy and Myth in Ancient Greece*, 10ff.

¹¹²⁵ “...during long stretches of its presence, the chorus must have stood (or knelt or crouched) to face the actors, doing little more than observing and listening in the same way that the audience did.” Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 94. However, when the chorus and actors interacted, it is unclear how often the actors and chorus performed together in the orchestra, or the proximity of the chorus to the actors in the 5th c. theater.

¹¹²⁶ Longo, “The Theater of *Polis*,” 17.

for the spectators in the theater,¹¹²⁷ which lends credence to the notion of the chorus as the voice of the community, and the understanding that the audience would have identified with it as such.¹¹²⁸

E. *The Chorus as “Other”*

In response to the notion that the chorus represented a voice which would have been easily associated with the community at large, many scholars have recognized that dramatic choruses most often represented those who are best characterized as marginalized members of society: women, foreigners, etc.¹¹²⁹ At the very least, tragic choruses never nominally represented a broad cross-section of the Athenian citizenry, let alone a cross-section of the theater-going audience, which likely included women and children.¹¹³⁰ On the contrary, by convention the choruses represented a small cross-section of the populace, and very rarely those who represented the majority of folks who likely attended the theater: Athenian adult males in their prime. The chorus not only depicted marginalized characters, but also sung and spoke in a non-Attic dialect that would have further distanced the audience from it.¹¹³¹

As such, an audience of fifth-century tragedy may not have as easily or quickly identified with the voice of the characters that are represented by the chorus in Greek tragedy, but rather would have identified the voice of the chorus instead as representing the “excluded, the

¹¹²⁷ “Communicatively, the chorus and its leader are authorized to interact with and react to the actors within the formal conventions of song or change and (much more restrictedly) of iambic dialogue, while the theatrical audience observes the same events with a range of participation that may have varied from polite contemplation and silent emotion to involuntary gasps, spontaneous hisses, and even, occasionally, the catcalls and heckling of the most boisterous or boorish members.” Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 94.

¹¹²⁸ Clearly, the chorus was not always a spectator—primarily or at all—in this sense, and such a view underestimates, or altogether neglects, the extent to which the chorus participated in and helped to advance the dramatic action.

¹¹²⁹ See above, pp. 247–8.

¹¹³⁰ See chapter 4, pp. 214–5.

¹¹³¹ See above, pg. 32.

oppressed, and the vulnerable.”¹¹³² Such a view is critically undermined, however, by the fact that choral utterances which are reasonably identified as extra-dramatic, i.e., those which are understood to represent the voices other than those of the (sometimes marginal) dramatic characters who convey them, do, in fact, most often reflect views which are best characterized as the collective wisdom, history, and traditions of the Athenian citizenry. In other words, reflections which might be thought to represent a marginal group can be understood in terms of the chorus’ role as a marginal character, not as the extra-dramatic voice of the other.

F. *The Chorus as Implied Audience*

Underlying each of these theories is the notion that choral utterances actually represented, and can be reasonably traced to, a particular extra-dramatic viewpoint, be it the community, the playwright, an “Ideal Spectator,” or a marginal societal group. The voice of the chorus can be gainfully considered, however, apart from the question of whether it ultimately derived from and represented the views of a particular extra-dramatic personage or collective body. One way to do this is to consider the chorus in terms of its function as an “implied spectator” in the drama. In such a view, which derives from the theory of the “implied reader/audience” in modern literary and theater criticism,¹¹³³ one of the primary functions of the chorus is understood to lie in its capacity to lead the audience to a particular understanding of the dramatic action. That is, the

¹¹³² “...the ‘otherness’ of the chorus...resides indeed in its giving collective expression to an experience alternative, even opposed, to that of the ‘heroic’ figures who most often dominate the world of the play; however, they express, not the values of the *polis*, but far more often the experience of the excluded, the oppressed, and the vulnerable. That ‘otherness’ of experience is indeed tied to its being the experience of a ‘community,’ but that community is not that of the sovereign (adult, male) citizen-body.” Gould, “Tragedy and Collective Experience,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic* (ed. M.S. Silk; Oxford: University Press, 1996), 388–9.

¹¹³³ Literary theory distinguished the “implied audience”, or the audience envisaged in the text, from the “model” audience which is conceived by the author to deal interpretively with the text in the same way as the author deals generatively with them, and from the “empirical” audience which actually engages a given text. See Bettezzato, “Lyric,” 154. Cf. P.J. Rabinowitz, “Other reader-oriented theories,” in *From Formalism to Poststructuralism* (ed. Raman Selden; vol. 8 of *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson; Cambridge: University Press, 1995), 375–403; M. Carlson, *Theories of the Theater* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

chorus' responses to, and reflections upon, the surrounding dramatic events, are understood to be chosen by the author primarily in order to lead the audience towards a particular understanding of the dramatic events themselves.¹¹³⁴ The audience may be led, say, to sympathize with the plight of the protagonist in light of the chorus' sympathetic position towards him/her, or to adopt the philosophical understanding of a particular situation as it is advocated by the chorus.

The notion of the chorus as an implied spectator thus shares similarities with the notion of the chorus as an "ideal" spectator. However, in contrast with the notion of the chorus as an ideal spectator, the notion of the chorus as an implied spectator assumes that the chorus offered reflections on the surrounding dramatic action in such a way that would have elicited *various* reactions from the actual audience. The audience may not always (or ever) adopt the chorus' position as its own. The audience may reject the position of the chorus if, for example, the audience believes the chorus to have been misguided about the course of events, or to have given a conspicuously *wrong* impression of the current dramatic circumstances.¹¹³⁵ In this way, the chorus' utterances may not have always determined the audience's response, but provoked the audience to "to engage in constant renegotiation of where the authoritative voice does lie."¹¹³⁶ In such a view, the theater audience is not presumed to have responded monolithically to the dramatic events, nor necessarily according to the intentions of the playwright. Rather, it assumes that the audience would have reacted variously, and to a certain extent independently from the author's original intentions, with the chorus as a kind of conversation partner with whom to consider the dramatic events.

¹¹³⁴ Such a view thus accounts for the fact the chorus often does not maintain a consistent voice throughout a given play.

¹¹³⁵ Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 106–14. Cf. Luigi Battezzato, "Lyric", 154ff.

¹¹³⁶ S. Goldhill, *The Oresteia* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), 20, taken from Fletcher, "Choral Voice," 30.

III. Trends in the Function(s) of the Chorus in the Classical Period

To this point, I have considered some of the categories by which the functions of dramatic choruses are typically evaluated across fifth-century tragedy, demonstrating that many of the functions of dramatic choruses are considered in similar terms throughout the Classical period, i.e., the same categories which are used to evaluate choruses in Aeschylus' tragedies at the beginning of the fifth-century are used to evaluate Euripides' choruses at the end of the century, and as we shall see, dramatic choruses of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. And yet, choral functionality was not static throughout the Classical period. (It was not, as we have seen, static even within the course of a single tragedy!) Thus, I will consider some of the most significant developments choral functionality throughout the fifth-century, with an eye towards the forthcoming discussion of choral functionality in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.¹¹³⁷ In the simplest terms, the role of the chorus appears to have diminished throughout the fifth century, a phenomenon which can be demonstrated in both quantitative and qualitative terms.

1. Quantitative Decline

The number of lines given to the chorus as a percentage of the overall lines in tragedy decreases, with the consequences that choral participation during scenes diminishes as does the length of the choral songs in-between scenes. On the other hand, the quantitative decline in the number of lines given to the chorus in later tragedy coincides with a qualitative decline in the importance of the chorus to the tragic plot.

¹¹³⁷ It must be acknowledged here again that my conclusions as to trends in choral forms and functions in Classical tragedy are tempered by the fact that the surviving data may not represent choral forms and functions in tragedy as a whole. That is, the surviving work of the three tragedians constitutes only a small portion of tragedy that was actually produced and performed in the Classical period. Because this data is not available, it is not possible to say with certainty that the trends evident in the works of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, represent trends across Classical tragedy.

The decline in the role of the chorus throughout the fifth-century can be demonstrated in quantitative terms of the number of lines given to the chorus by each of the three tragedians. In Aeschylus' extant plays the chorus typically performs around 40% of the total lines,¹¹³⁸ while in contrast, the chorus is given on average roughly 20% of the total lines in the plays of Sophocles and Euripides,¹¹³⁹ a quantitative reduction which clearly coincides with the introduction of the third actor in Sophocles.¹¹⁴⁰ At any rate, the decline in the total number of lines given to the choruses in the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides is brought to bear especially on the choral odes, which tend to be much smaller than those of Aeschylus. For instance, the *parodoi* in Aeschylus' tragedies, which can run upwards of 200 lines, appear colossal in comparison to most of those of Euripides, the shortest of which runs approximately 12 lines, e.g., the ode in the first *stasimon* in *Helen*.¹¹⁴¹ Certainly the function(s) of the Chorus cannot be measured entirely on the basis of how many lines they sing, but this does demonstrate a trend towards the diminished role of the chorus in the latter part of the fifth century.

2. Qualitative Decline

A qualitative decline in the importance of the tragic chorus can be seen in the tendency for roles that were once reserved for the chorus to be transferred to the actors. For example, the background information, summary of the present circumstances, and foreshadowing of plot developments that was typically conveyed through the chorus in the *parodos* in Aeschylus, was increasingly offered by the actors prior to the entrance of the chorus in the tragedies of Sophocles

¹¹³⁸ The largest percentage of lines given to the chorus in Aeschylean drama is 60% in *Supplices*.

¹¹³⁹ A decline in the number of lines given to the chorus as a percentage of the total lines of the play is also evident in the last two choruses of Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus*, in which the chorus is given fewer lines relative to the protagonists. In contrast to Aristophanes' *Acharnians* and *Birds*, for example, in which the chorus constitutes 25% and 23% of each play, respectively, the choruses in *Ecclesiazusae* and *Plutus* account for 8% and 4%, respectively, of the total lines of each play.

¹¹⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Poet.* 1449a. See chapter 4, pp. 9–10.

¹¹⁴¹ While short odes are fairly common in Euripides, they occasionally approach the length of some of the shorter odes of Aeschylus.

and Euripides.¹¹⁴² A consequence of this development is that the choral *parodos* becomes less essential to the forward movement of the dramatic action. A good example of this is the *parodos* of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which is more or less a re-telling of the prologue/dialogue of Oedipus and the Priest. New details are not offered by the chorus, and they are not responsible for foreshadowing the dramatic plot, as it is offered in the prologue by Oedipus himself.

So, too, were lyric elements (i.e., singing in lyric metrical systems, according to patterns of *strophic responsion*, and likely to the accompaniment of an instrument such as the *aulos*) increasingly transferred from the chorus to the actors. In the tragedies of Aeschylus, lyric elements were offered almost exclusively by the chorus in the form of the *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodus*, with the exception being an occasional lyric dialogue between actors and the chorus.¹¹⁴³ In the tragedies of Sophocles and Euripides, however, lyric dialogues between actors and the chorus and actors increased dramatically, often taking the place of an exclusively choral *stasima*, with the result that wholly choral lyrics (increasingly) constituted a lower percentage of the total lyrics in tragedy. A further development occurred when lyric dialogue began to take place exclusively *between* actors, thereby eliminating altogether the chorus in these lyric exchanges.¹¹⁴⁴ The chorus became even further distanced from the performance of lyrics in Euripidean tragedy as actors began to sing solo lyric *monodies*.¹¹⁴⁵ That is, while in Aeschylus

¹¹⁴² It should also be noted that even in Aeschylus the chorus was not solely responsible for providing these narrative elements, as non-choral characters often provided background information and/or a synopsis of the present circumstances. The point is that this function is increasingly transferred from the chorus to the actors over the course of the fifth century.

¹¹⁴³ The one example of non-choral lyric in material attributed to Aeschylus is the protagonist alternating spoken and sung lines in the *parodos* of *Prometheus Bound*. Aeschylus, [*Prometheus Bound*] 88–127.

¹¹⁴⁴ See Andújar, "The Chorus in Dialogue," 18ff.

¹¹⁴⁵ Edith Hall, "Actor's Song in Tragedy," in *Performance, Culture, and Athenian Democracy* (ed. S. Goldhill and R. Osborne; Cambridge: University Press, 1999), 96–124; Edith Hall, "The Singing Actors of Antiquity," in *Greek and Roman Actors: Aspects of an Ancient Profession* (ed. P. Easterling and E. Hall; Cambridge: University Press, 2002): 3–38; E. J. Beverley, "The Dramatic Function of Actor's Monody in Later Euripides," (D.Phil. diss., Oxford University, 1997).

and Sophocles there are no examples of a single actor singing alone, several solo lyric *monodies* are evident in Euripides.¹¹⁴⁶

As the activities of the actors increase in Sophoclean tragedy, and further increase in Euripidean tragedy, the participation of the chorus decreases, and as this occurred, the center of gravity in Greek tragedy shifted from the chorus and its interactions with the actors to the interactions between actors. This can also be observed insofar as characters in Aeschylean tragedy conventionally addressed the chorus upon entering the scene, signaling the fact that dramatic action was centered on the chorus and its interactions with the other characters.¹¹⁴⁷ By contrast, in Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedy, actors increasingly addressed other actors, signaling the fact that the focus of dramatic action had shifted to them.

A. *Detachment of the Chorus from the Surrounding Dramatic Action*

One of the most conspicuous ways in which the role of the chorus diminished in tragedy can be observed in the increasing detachment of the content of the choral *stasima* from the surrounding dramatic action. This detachment, which can be detected in a few of Sophocles' choral odes, and which becomes much more prevalent in the odes of Euripides' tragedies, is exhibited in two related ways. First, as we have already seen in the case of choral *parodoi* in Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedy, the chorus less frequently offers information in the odes critical to advance the dramatic action, such as providing background information relevant to the plot(s) and/or character(s), synopses of the current dramatic circumstances, and foreshadowing turns in the plot, all functions which are increasingly transferred to the actors.¹¹⁴⁸ Rather, the

¹¹⁴⁶ E.g., Hippolytus' *astrophic monody* in Euripides, *Hipp.* 1347–88; Cassandra's in Euripides, *Tro.* 308–341; Creusa's in Euripides, *Ion* 859–922; Andromache's in Euripides, *Andr.* 103–116. On monodies in Euripides, see Battezzato, "Lyric," 153.

¹¹⁴⁷ For a brief discussion, see Taplin, *Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 86–87.

¹¹⁴⁸ It should be noted that the chorus' role to advance the dramatic action by introducing characters remains

choral odes increasingly function to reflect upon the surrounding material, frame it, and/or cast it in a particular mythical, philosophical or theological light. However, the chorus' reflections upon, and framing of, the surrounding material, also become increasingly less related to the immediate dramatic context. That is, while the reflections and framing mechanisms of the chorus in Aeschylus' undisputed tragedies tended to exhibit an integral relation to the immediate dramatic action, either by reflecting directly upon the immediate circumstances of the protagonist, the events which led to the current circumstances, or the consequences of possible actions given the present circumstances, the content of the choral odes of Sophocles' and Euripides' tragedies are often only tangentially related to the immediately surrounding dramatic action.¹¹⁴⁹

The third *stasimon* of Euripides' *Helen* offers an example of an ode that is only tenuously connected to the surrounding dramatic context (1301–1368). The ode consists of a hymn to the “Mother of the Gods,” who is clearly identified in the hymn as Demeter. The hymn presents a cursory sketch of the story of Demeter and Persephone, recounting Hades' snatching of Persephone (1301–1313), Demeter's futile pursuit for her daughter and the famine which resulted from it (1319–1337), and the act of Zeus which reunited Persephone with her mother (1338–1352). The end of the ode connects the hymn with the plight of Helen, by suggesting that Helen's plight as a suppliant in Egypt can be attributed to her failure to honor Demeter with sacrifices (1355–7), but only in this way is the hymn connected to the plot.

Similarly, the second *stasimon* of Euripides' *Electra*, which consists of the re-telling of the myth of Thyestes, Atreus and the golden-fleece, is only minimally connected to the plot. The

constant throughout the Classical period.

¹¹⁴⁹ A similar detachment of the chorus is evident in the last two plays of Aristophanes. In fact, the detached chorus in these plays is precisely one of the reasons they are considered to have represented a shift in generic form of comedy at the end of the fifth century, i.e., from Old Comedy to Middle Comedy.

ode recounts the discovery in Mycenae of the lamb with the golden-fleece (699–712), the illicit affair between Thyestes and Atreus’ wife by which Thyestes steals the golden-fleece (718–726), and the story of Zeus’ subsequent changing the course of the sun which registered Zeus’ displeasure with Thyestes’ theft and restored the fleece to Atreus (727–736). The chorus then reflects on the myth, claiming that it represents the kind of stories that mortals tell, stories whose subject-matter of the punishment of the gods cause them to worship the gods. The final words of the ode connect the myth to the present circumstances of Electra:

“But fearful tales benefit mortals,
making them worship the gods,
the gods you forgot, kinswoman of glorious brothers,
when you murdered your husband” (743–6).

With this turn, Euripides has established a connection between the ode and the plot, though it is clearly a superficial one, as the content of the ode is completely unrelated to the course of events in the drama, and the re-telling of virtually *any* tragic myth would have sufficed to provide an exigency for the chorus’ claim in the final lines that the gods have been forgotten.

The third *stasimon* in Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Tauris* provides an example of an ode whose connection to the surrounding action is even further removed, and is not related even superficially to a character or to the plot (1234–83). The ode consists entirely of a hymn to Apollo, which recounts his having been brought by his mother Leto to Delphi (1234–1244), his conquering of the dragon which guarded the oracular shrine (1245–1258), his jealousy over the fact that his oracular duties were shared by Themis (1259–1269), and his successful supplication to Zeus for full oracular authority (1270–1283). This hymn to Apollo is related to the larger context of the play only insofar as Apollo has figured elsewhere in the background of the

play;¹¹⁵⁰ yet, the hymn could hardly be said to relate in any way to the immediate dramatic circumstances of the characters or the plot, insofar as the story of Apollo and Themis has no bearing on the plot-sequence, none of the other characters in the drama are mentioned or alluded to, no character is introduced, nor is offered any kind of history of the events which led to the current circumstances, a synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances, or a foreshadowing of future events. Rather, the ode is almost entirely severed from the surrounding context.

The detachment of choral odes from their dramatic context is especially apparent in the *exodoi* of Euripidean tragedy. Generally speaking, the role of the chorus in the final scene(s) of his play(s) is reduced, and the choral contributions at the end of the play most often consist of pithy kernels of conventional wisdom which have little relevance to the particulars of the tragedy. For instance, the *exodos* in *Electra*: “Farewell! Whoever of mortals is able to fare well and does not suffer from some misfortune enjoys a blessed fate” (Euripides, *El.* 1357–9). Compare the generalized content of the *exodos* of *Ion*: “If anyone’s house is tormented by misfortunes, they should revere the gods and have no fear: for in the end, the noble receive the good fate they deserve, while the base, as suits their nature, would never fare well” (Euripides, *Ion* 1519–22). The contents are not reflective of the particular dramatic events which conclude the play, and could just as easily conclude any tragedy. The view that the *exodos* had become in Euripidean tragedy a formulaic conclusion with little relevance to the plot is best demonstrated by the fact that Euripides concludes several plays with nearly *verbatim* repetition of the very same phrase: “The dispositions of the gods take many forms; the gods bring many things to fulfillment unexpectedly. What was expected has not been fulfilled, but god found a way for the

¹¹⁵⁰ “This [ode to Apollo] does have a rather tenuous contextual motivation in the play; but the emphasis must be on ‘tenuous’, and it is hard to discern any functional complexity in this ode.” Heath, *Poetics*, 140.

unexpected. Such is the outcome of this affair” (*Alc.* 1159–63; *Andr.* 1284–8; *Hel.* 1688–92; *Bacch.* 1388–92; *Med.* 1415–19).

These examples demonstrate some of the ways in which, and the extent to which, choral odes could be detached from the surrounding dramatic contexts in Sophoclean and (especially) Euripidean tragedy, a phenomenon which has clear analogues in the latest comedies of Aristophanes at the very end of the fifth-century,¹¹⁵¹ and which, as we will see, continued in tragedy (and comedy) into the Hellenistic and Roman periods in the form of *embolima*. Certainly not all odes were so disconnected from the surrounding plot.¹¹⁵² However, the increasing detachment of the choral odes to the surrounding dramatic action in each of these ways is clear, and has long been recognized. Aristotle, for instance, lamented the fact that choral odes had become so detached from the plot, and offered a corrective: “The chorus too must be regarded as one of the actors. It must be part of the whole and share in the action, not as in Euripides but as in Sophocles. In the others the choral odes have no more to do with the plot than with any other tragedy. And so they sing interludes, a practice begun by Agathon. And yet to sing interludes is quite as bad as transferring a whole speech or scene from one play to another.”¹¹⁵³

The decreasing connection(s) of choral odes to the plot was clearly understood by Aristotle to have been a negative phenomenon, and his sentiments have been echoed by many

¹¹⁵¹ The last surviving plays of Aristophanes are thought to represent the beginnings of Middle Comedy, a period which is identified largely on the basis of the change in the function of the chorus. That is, in Aristophanes’ *Plutus* (398 B.C.E.) and *Ecclesiazusae* (392 B.C.E.), the relation of the content of the choral odes to the surrounding dramatic action is very minimal. Viewed in terms of a spectrum on which on the one hand is a fully integrated comedic Chorus in early Aristophanes (i.e., “Old Comedy”), and on the other hand a chorus in New Comedy whose odes are completely disassociated from the plot, the increasingly detached choral role in Middle Comedy appears as a middle point.

¹¹⁵² Mastronarde has concluded that the ratio of choral *stasima* in Euripides which bear very little or no relation to the surrounding dramatic action to those which bear an immediate connection is 60/40. Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 130.

¹¹⁵³ Aristotle, *Poet.* 1456a. Cf. scholiasts who defend Sophocles against similar charges of irrelevance, and criticize Euripides’ treatment of the choral lyrics in this respect: Sch. Sophocles, *Aj.* 596a, 1205; *Oed. tyr.* 463; Sch. Aristophanes, *Acharn.* 443; Sch. Euripides, *Phoen.* 1019; 1053.

modern commentators, who have similarly understood the increasing detachment of the chorus from the plot to constitute, along with the quantitative decrease in the number of lines given to the chorus, a further demonstration of the decline of the chorus in later Classical tragedy. Some have gone so far as to consider the choral odes of later tragedy to have become irrelevant to the play.¹¹⁵⁴

However, as we have already seen, the function of choral odes goes beyond their capacity to reflect upon, and contextualize, the surrounding dramatic action. Without being integrally related to the surrounding action, choral odes can function to: (1) decrease dramatic tension, which is especially likely to have been achieved especially when the content of the ode was unrelated to surrounding action which is particularly intense; (2) express larger themes of the play; and (3) divide scenes.¹¹⁵⁵ As the relevance of the choral odes to the surrounding dramatic action decreases, their functions in these capacities are likely to have appeared more prominent.

¹¹⁵⁴ E.g., "...we may say that the basic function of act-dividing lyric [i.e., choral *stasima*], if it does not strictly demand 'irrelevance', certainly tolerates, and perhaps encourages, it..." Heath, *Poetics*, 139.

¹¹⁵⁵ "...irrelevance is no hindrance to act-dividing lyric's achieving its fundamental purpose" which, clearly for Heath, is *to divide acts*. Heath, *Poetics*, 139. For a detailed discussion of the functionality of Euripidean choral lyrics as they relate to the surrounding dramatic action, see Mastronarde, *The Art of Euripides*, 126–152.

Chapter 6: Forms and Functions of the tragic chorus in the 4th c., and into the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

Before considering in detail some of the formal characteristics of post-classical dramatic choruses, it is worth re-stating at this point that the surviving evidence of tragedies from these periods is extremely slight. With the exception of the *Rhesus*, which can be reasonably, but not certainly, dated to the 4th c., no tragedies survive intact (or even *close* to intact) until those of Seneca in the middle of the 1st c. C.E. The fragmentary nature of the evidence in this period thus confounds any investigation into the nature of tragic choruses, and often precludes anything but very tentative answers for some of the most basic questions of the nature of tragic choruses in these periods.

It should be noted first of all choruses appear to have continued as requisite elements in Hellenistic and Roman tragedies.¹¹⁵⁶ The likelihood that choruses continued to constitute a formal and functional presence in Hellenistic and Roman tragedies is suggested first of all by the fact that 5th c. tragedies were regularly re-performed in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.¹¹⁵⁷ Given the extent to which choruses were integrated in the dramatic action throughout 5th c. tragedy, it seems improbable that the chorus could have been excised in these re-performances.¹¹⁵⁸ The continued presence of the chorus in post-Classical tragedies is further suggested by the fact that the titles of tragedies in these periods continued to be named for the characters represented by the chorus.¹¹⁵⁹ It seems unlikely that tragedies would have continued

¹¹⁵⁶ That choruses should not have appeared regularly in post-Classical tragedy is only suggested by the evidence of Hellenistic and Roman comedy, in which the chorus appears to have disappeared entirely as a functional element.

¹¹⁵⁷ See Chapter 4, p. 220–1, 224.

¹¹⁵⁸ Although choral *stasima* may in some instances have been excised from re-performances of 5th c. tragedies in the Hellenistic period. See Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 435.

¹¹⁵⁹ For titles in the fourth-century and Hellenistic periods, see Sifakis, *Studies*, 114ff. On tragic titles in the Republican Roman period, see Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 138.

to be named for the choruses if choruses were not, in fact, a part of the tragedy.¹¹⁶⁰ Finally, the fragmentary evidence confirms the existence of the tragic chorus in both the Hellenistic and Republican Roman periods,¹¹⁶¹ while the comments of several Roman authors suggest the continued role of the chorus in Roman tragedy.¹¹⁶²

I. The Forms of the Chorus in Post-Classical Tragedy

1. The Constitution of the Chorus and Choral Personnel

As for the actual chorus members, in the Hellenistic period it appears that *choreutai*, along with the rest of the personnel required for a dramatic performance, were selected from the ranks of one of the professional guilds of dramatic performers—i.e., the *technitai* of Dionysus.¹¹⁶³ In Athens, the selection of the *choreutai* was managed by the *agonothetes*, who was singularly charged with managing all aspects of the dramatic performances,¹¹⁶⁴ including the disbursement of public funds to pay for them, selecting the chorus-trainer, etc. In the Roman period, it appears as if *choreutai* were likewise selected from the increasing ranks of professional acting guilds.¹¹⁶⁵

¹¹⁶⁰ “Plural titles like Agathon’s *Mysians*... can hardly be explained if they are not to be taken as implying choruses of Mysians...” Sifakis, *Studies*, 114.

¹¹⁶¹ Otto Ribbeck’s compendium of tragic fragments from the Republican period includes a few dozen verses of choral lyrics. Otto Ribbeck, ed., *Scaenicae Romanorum Poesis Fragmenta*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1871); cf. M. Hose, “Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores in der römischen Tragödie der Republik,” in *Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama* (ed. Peter Riemer and Bernhard Zimmermann; Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1998), 113–37; Sifakis, *Studies in the History of Drama*, 116–24. In the Republican Roman period, choruses appear so frequently in the fragments that it has been said that Roman tragedy “never lacked a chorus.” See Edward Capps, “The Chorus in Later Greek Drama,” *The American Journal of Archaeology and of the History of the Fine Arts* 10 (Jul.–Sept., 1895), 297, esp. n. 19; cf. Sifakis, *Studies*, 120–4.

¹¹⁶² For example, Plutarch reports the re-performance of Euripides’ *Bacchae* in 53 B.C.E., which included a chorus, and speaks of the tragic chorus as if it were a living practice. Plutarch *Cras.* 33.3; *Mor.* 63. Likewise, Epictetus speaks of the chorus in such a way as to suggest their continued presence in tragedy. Epictetus, *Diss.* 3.14.1. Finally, Vitruvius commented on the fact that choruses performed regularly together with the actors on the stage. Vitruvius 5.6.2.

¹¹⁶³ Jory, “Associations of Actors in Rome,” 224; Lightfoot, “Nothing to do with the *technitai* of Dionysus?” 215; P. Ghiron-Bistagne, *Recherches sur les Acteurs dans la Grèce Antique* (Paris: Société d’Édition ‘Les Belles Lettres’, 1976), 169. See Chapter 4, pp. 219–20.

¹¹⁶⁴ In this way, the *agonothetes* assumed the responsibilities of the Classical *choregos*.

¹¹⁶⁵ Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 80–90. See Chapter 4, pp. 224–5.

The number of *choreutai* in the Hellenistic and Roman periods cannot be determined with certainty, though there are reasons to believe that the number of the chorus may have decreased. The professionalization of the theater personnel may have had a bearing on the number of *choreutai* that performed in Hellenistic tragedies (as well as *dithyrambs*, comedies, etc.), insofar as the costs associated with maintaining a professional chorus may have reduced their numbers.¹¹⁶⁶ A fragment attributed to Diogenes of Babylon suggests that the size of the (tragic?) chorus had decreased *circa* 200 B.C.E., though the exact number of *choreutai* is not specified.¹¹⁶⁷ A (now lost) wall-painting from Cyrene of an unknown date, which likely depicted a scene from a Hellenistic (or Roman?) tragedy, appears to depict a chorus of seven.¹¹⁶⁸ Even less conclusive is the evidence which exists with which to identify the specific number of choral *choreutai* in the Roman period.¹¹⁶⁹ Thus, scholars are undecided as to the size of chorus in these periods.¹¹⁷⁰

Despite the absence of much data for the actual choral performers, something can be said of the characters represented by the chorus in post-Classical tragedy. The titles themselves often

¹¹⁶⁶ “Mais ce qu’il faut souligner, c’est qu’avec les chorèges, les choreutes disparaissent, ou du moins l’exercice de cette fonction en tant que service civique.” Ghiron-Bistagne, *Recherches sur les Acteurs*, 169.

¹¹⁶⁷ *Diogenes of Babylon* collected by von Arnim in *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Book III, 210 ff.

¹¹⁶⁸ For a reproduction of the wall-painting, see Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theater*, 238, Fig. 787. This evidence has to be considered cautiously, as artistic depictions are notoriously unreliable sources for determining the actual number meant to be represented. See Chapter 3, p. 169.

¹¹⁶⁹ E.g., Calder assumes a chorus of “between three and seven members” in the tragedies of Seneca. W.M. Calder, “The Size of the Chorus in Seneca’s *Agamemnon*,” *CP* 70.1 (Jan., 1975), 33.

¹¹⁷⁰ Questions of the composition and size of tragic choruses in the Hellenistic and Roman periods are complicated by the fact that alternative forms of tragic performances—i.e., “excerpt” performances, private performances, public *recitatio*, and private reading—are known to have taken place alongside full-scale theatrical productions in these periods. With the exception of private tragic performances, which may have included some kind of chorus, the chorus would not have performed in these other contexts except in the imaginations of those who were hearing or reading descriptions of choral performance in the tragedies. Thus, while questions of the composition and size of an actual chorus are irrelevant in these cases, questions as to the composition and size of the chorus supposed by the tragedies remain. It seems reasonable that the composition of the chorus would have been conjured in the imaginations of a non-theatrical audience on the basis of the fact that they were identifiable in the tragedies themselves. However, there are not, as far as I can tell, clues in the surviving Hellenistic and Roman tragedies themselves which suggest the implied size of the chorus. As such, non-theatrical audiences may have envisioned choruses of the sort that would have been seen in the theatre, which may have been 12 or 15 as in the Classical period, or smaller if actual choruses did, in fact, decrease in size in the Hellenistic period.

reveal the identities of the characters represented by the chorus, e.g., *Bacchae*, *Danaïds*, *Trojan Women*, *Phoenician Women*, etc. Further information as to the characters represented by the chorus in post-Classical tragedies can be inferred from the knowledge that they were based largely on Classical models. That is, like their Classical models, the chorus in post-Classical tragedies most likely took on a subordinate role vis-à-vis the protagonist, often assumed a sympathetic stance with respect to the protagonist, shared to some extent in his/her predicament, etc. Such is the case, for instance, in the *Rhesus*, whose chorus is comprised of Trojan soldiers under the command of the protagonist, Hector, and who stand to gain (or lose!) from Hector's decisions regarding the Greek army.

The identities of those represented by the chorus are more problematic in Senecan tragedy. Unlike in Classical antecedents, in which the identity of the chorus was most often stated explicitly very early in the drama (e.g., the *parodos*), the identity, age, or even sex of the chorus is rarely acknowledged in Senecan tragedy.¹¹⁷¹ While the identities of the chorus can nevertheless be ascertained by other means in some instances,¹¹⁷² the lack of explicit identification of the chorus, explanations as to its relationship to the protagonist(s), and its purpose in the drama, may reflect the detachment of the chorus from the dramatic plot, a phenomenon which will be addressed later in the chapter.

Finally, as in Classical tragedy, there are instances in Senecan tragedy in which a second chorus, i.e., a *secondary* chorus, appears in addition to the standard chorus.¹¹⁷³ These are always entirely distinct choral characters, whose formal characteristics can nevertheless be understood in terms of tragic choruses generally, i.e., homogeneity in terms of gender, age, vocation, locale,

¹¹⁷¹ R.J. Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1976), 180ff.; Sutton, *Seneca on the Stage*, 35.

¹¹⁷² Sutton, *Seneca on the Stage*, 36–7; Peter J. Davis, *Shifting Song: The Chorus in Seneca's Tragedies* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1993), 39–63.

¹¹⁷³ Seneca, *Ag.* 589–658, 664–781; Seneca, [*Herc. Oet.*] 583–699, 700–715; [*Oct.*] 762–819.

¹¹⁷³ Seneca, *Ag.* 589–658, 664–781; Seneca, [*Herc. Oet.*] 583–699, 700–715; [*Oct.*] 762–819.

social standing, and/or familial status, size, close relation to one of the main characters, and subordinate status. As in Classical tragedy, the functions of the secondary chorus deviate from those of the primary chorus, which will be taken up below.

2. Spatial Elements: The Chorus in the Hellenistic and Roman Theater

A. *Position of the Chorus vis-à-vis the Actors*

While there is considerable disagreement over whether or not a stage was a part of the fifth-century theater, archaeological and artistic evidence, as well as the testimony of contemporaneous commentators, clearly supports the fact that a stage was a regular part of the Greek theater in the Hellenistic period.¹¹⁷⁴ The existence of a stage is brought to bear on the question of the chorus' proximity to the actors in the theater, as the chorus is now most certainly separated from the actors. That is, it is believed that actors occupied the stage, while the chorus remained in the *orchestra*.¹¹⁷⁵ Moreover, if this constituted a change from the practice in the Classical period of the actors and chorus performing together in the *orchestra*, it highlights spatially the fact that the locus of dramatic action was shifting away from the *orchestra* to the stage, a phenomenon reflected in the plays at the end of the Classical period and into the Hellenistic period, in which the locus of dramatic action was shifting away from the chorus to individual actors.¹¹⁷⁶ Despite being separated from the actors, the chorus would have had to be in such proximity to the actors so as to carry on dialogue, which was a common element in tragedy of the Hellenistic period.

¹¹⁷⁴ See chapter 4, pp. 235–6.

¹¹⁷⁵ See, e.g., Sifakis, *Studies* 113ff.

¹¹⁷⁶ See chapter 5, pp. 316–24.

The size and depth of the stage only increased in the Roman period, meaning that the stage increasingly encroached into the space of the *orchestra*.¹¹⁷⁷ At the same time, in his commentary on architecture of the Roman world, Vitruvius claims that the *orchestra* itself began to be used for seating.¹¹⁷⁸ These two facts suggest that the chorus may have performed together with the actors on the stage in the Roman theater,¹¹⁷⁹ allowing for dialogue between chorus and actors.

B. *Choreography*

The evidence for choral choreography in post-Classical tragedy is as scanty as is the evidence for choreography in fifth-century drama. On the one hand, very little is known of the terms which characterized tragic choral dance. For instance, several Roman authors labeled the tragic dance *emmeleia*, though the term is not clearly defined by any of those who employed it, and so we have no real sense of what it means.¹¹⁸⁰ Several terms are known from the Roman period which denote various dance gestures (*schemata*) such as “the double,” “flat-hand,” “the sword-thrust,” etc., the meanings of which can be reasonably inferred from the terms themselves.¹¹⁸¹ Likewise, certain gestures which are known to have been characteristic in ancient life, e.g., beating the breast, and tearing the hair and garments to express grief, could reasonably be thought to have been employed in tragedy as required by dramatic circumstances.¹¹⁸²

¹¹⁷⁷ See chapter 4, pp. 239–40.

¹¹⁷⁸ Vitruvius 5.6.2; Livy 34.44.5. See Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius*, 18.

¹¹⁷⁹ Vitruvius confirms that the chorus shared the stage with the actors. Vitruvius 5.6.2. Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama*, 78; Cf. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius*, 31.

¹¹⁸⁰ For instance, Plato contrasts the peaceful dance of the *emmeleia* with the warlike *pyrrhic* dance, but provides no more detail than this as to the specific nature of the *emmeleia*. Plato, *Laws* 816b–c. See Lillian B. Lawler, *The Dance of the Ancient Greek Theatre* (London: A. & C. Black, 1964), 59ff; cf. Ley, *Theatricality*, 158ff.

¹¹⁸¹ E.g., the “flat-hand” may have been used for “slapping hands.” Lawler, *The Dance of Ancient Greece*, 83.

¹¹⁸² Lawler, *The Dance of Ancient Greece*, 83.

Inferences on the nature of choral choreography in the Hellenistic and Roman periods may be made on the basis of the evidence in the texts themselves. On one hand, if choreographic patterns of the chorus were based to some extent on the metrical patterns of the lyric verse, it stands to reason that the less complicated metrics of the chorus in the Hellenistic and Roman periods would have resulted in less complicated choral choreography. The lack of *strophic responsion*, in particular, may have decreased the complexity of choral choreography, inasmuch as the chorus would have no longer “turned” and “counter-turned” according to the *strophe* and *antistrophe*, respectively.¹¹⁸³ On the other hand, the chorus may have had less room with which to move, on account of the encroachment of the stage upon the *orchestra* proper in the Hellenistic period, and the fact that the chorus most likely performed with the actors on a stage in the Roman period. These facts lead most scholars to believe that the nature of choral choreography in the Hellenistic and Roman periods was either much less sophisticated than in the Classical period, or altogether non-existent.¹¹⁸⁴

3. Types of Choral Lyrics in Hellenistic and Roman Tragedy

A. *The Rhesus*

The Rhesus testifies to a high-degree of continuity of choral forms early in the post-Classical period. At the structural level, the chorus is employed as it was in Classical tragedy: (1) *in-between* scenes in the *parodos*, *stasima*, *exodos*, and in lyric dialogue; and (2) *during* scenes, by making brief non-dialogical comments and by participating in lyric and non-lyric

¹¹⁸³ The lack of *strophic responsion* may have meant that “the chorus no longer engaged in the complicated, carefully balanced evolutions which had once carried the choreutae over the broad expanse of the Greek orchestra, but sang and danced without moving about so much or occupying so much space.” Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama*, 149.

¹¹⁸⁴ For example, a fragment attributed to Plato suggests a stagnant chorus: “If someone danced in the orchestra well, that was a spectacle. But now they do nothing; they stand still as if they were paralyzed and scream” (Plato, Fr. 130). Likewise: “...the elaborate singing and dancing characteristic of fifth-century tragedy would have been impossible.” Davis, *Seneca: Thyestes*, 17.

dialogue with other characters. Apart from the evidence of the *Rhesus*, however, the paucity of surviving data in the Hellenistic and Roman periods prior to Seneca, and the fragmentary nature of the evidence that does survive, precludes much from being said as to the precise *forms* of the tragic chorus in these periods. Without information as to the surrounding dramatic context for a choral fragment, it is virtually impossible to determine *where* in the tragedy a choral fragment belonged, either with respect to its place in the macro-structure of the drama (e.g., *parodos*, *stasima*, or within a scene), or with respect to particular elements within the drama.

B. Choral Participation within Scenes

What little evidence is available suggests degrees of continuity and divergence with Classical predecessors. For example, the chorus appears to have continued to participate in dialogue with other actors during scenes. Choral dialogue is intimated in a fragment of a fourth-century *Medea*, in which the chorus is addressed by one of the protagonists: “My dear women, who inhabit the Corinthian plain of this country...”¹¹⁸⁵ In the absence of a preserved response of the chorus, however, it is unclear whether the chorus actually participated in dialogue with *Medea* at this point in the play, and much less what the content or the form of the choral dialogue might have been. At any rate, actual choral dialogue is attested in a tragic fragment from the Hellenistic period,¹¹⁸⁶ in which the chorus is explicitly named and participates in a short non-lyric dialogue with two other characters:

Cassandra: He has thrown the terrible shaft.

Priam: Who my child? Tell me.

Chorus: The Peliores?

Cassandra: But he has missed!

¹¹⁸⁵ Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth Century Tragedy*, 173–7; H.J.M. Milne, *Catalogue of Literary Papyri in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1927), no. 77. Sifakis, *Studies*, 114.

¹¹⁸⁶ R.A. Coles, “A New Fragment of Post-Classical Tragedy from Oxyrhynchus,” *BICS* 15 (1968): 110–8; Cf. Bruno Gentili, *Theatrical Performances in the Ancient World* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1979), 63ff.

Chorus: You have said how it is.

Cassandra: Hector is [making his throw?]

Chorus: This is an unlucky contest.

Cassandra: Equally he (Hector) was unlucky.

That this dialogue took place during a scene is suggested both by the fact that it does not exhibit lyric metrical systems, and the conversational content of the dialogue. Apart from this, little can be determined of the chorus' role in the play other than the fact that it *does* at this point participate in a non-lyric dialogue with two actors. Such is the evidence for chorus during scenes in Greek tragedies of the Hellenistic period.

Choral participation within scenes seemingly continued in Republican Roman tragedy, as attested by several fragments and the testimony of ancient commentators. For example, the chorus appears to participate in dialogue with other actors in a fragment of Ennius' *Medea*, where the chorus appears to be responding to the revelation of Medea's plans,¹¹⁸⁷ and in a fragment from Ennius' *Thyestes*, in which the chorus appears to have participated in dialogue with one of the protagonists.¹¹⁸⁸ Likewise, in a fragment from Pacuvius' *Niptra* is preserved elements of a dialogue between the chorus and Ulixes.¹¹⁸⁹ Horace appears to confirm that the chorus continued to participate within scenes in his commentary on the proper function(s) of the chorus: *Actoris partis chorus officiumque virile defendat* (Horace, *Ars* 193–4). The notion that the chorus was to assume the role of an actor is often taken to mean that the chorus was to participate in the dramatic action, along with the (other) actors during the scenes.¹¹⁹⁰

¹¹⁸⁷ E.H. Warmington, ed., *Remains of Old Latin: Vol. 1 Ennius and Caecilius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936), 323. Fragment 288.

¹¹⁸⁸ Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin: Vol. 1 Ennius and Caecilius*, 351, 353. Fragments 355 and 361.

¹¹⁸⁹ Joannes D'Anna, ed., *M. Pacuvii Fragmenta* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo Roma, 1967), 133–4. Fragment XI.

¹¹⁹⁰ E.g., Horace, *The Art of Poetry: To the Pisos* (edited by C. Smart and Theodore Alois Buckley; Harvard: University Press, 1867), n. 3. LOEB

Cf. the oft-cited comment of Aristotle, who advocated that the chorus be “regarded as one of the actors (καὶ τὸν

While evidence such as this confirms the presence of the chorus during scenes in Roman Republican tragedy, it is left to conjecture how frequently the chorus participated during scenes, and the precise nature of this activity.¹¹⁹¹ The little positive evidence which does exist suggests that the chorus may have continued to appear during episodes in the Hellenistic and Roman periods as they did in the Classical period. Moreover, the absence of ancient commentary specifying changes in choral activity within scenes may suggest continuity with Classical predecessors.¹¹⁹² At any rate, if substantive changes did take place with respect to the function of the chorus within scenes in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, they are not preserved in the fragmentary remains or alluded to in ancient commentaries.

However, the lack of clear data in these periods for several choral elements which were common during scenes in fifth-century tragedy, e.g., lyric dialogues, *kommoi*, non-dialogical choral utterances, etc., does cast doubt on whether these choral elements appeared in tragedies of the post-Classical periods as they did in the fifth-century. Uncertainty as to the nature of choral elements during scenes in post-Classical tragedy is also fostered by the fact that choruses in Senecan tragedy played a greatly diminished role during scenes, which will be taken up below.¹¹⁹³

χορὸν δὲ ἓνα δεῖ ὑπολαμβάνειν τῶν ὑποκριτῶν”, and “be part of the whole, and participate in the action” (Aristotle, *Poet.* 1456a25). Such a statement, which concerns first of all the role of the chorus singing odes in-between scenes, might also be taken to refer to their functionality within scenes.

¹¹⁹¹E.g., Flickinger, *The Greek Theatre and its Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1918), 149. Cf. Capps, “The Chorus in the Later Greek Drama with Reference to the Stage Question,” 297, n. 19.

¹¹⁹²For example, in his discussion of tragic choruses in *Ars Poetica* 193ff. which constitutes the most thorough treatment of the subject after Aristotle, Horace does not mention that choruses had ceased to function during scenes.

¹¹⁹³Likewise, the choral forms evident in the (Hellenistic) *New Comedies* of Menander, for which there remains substantial evidence, suggest a diminished choral presence. In short, the choruses of Menander’s comedy only rarely appeared during scenes, and did so as a “band of revelers” who did not contribute meaningfully to the dramatic action. G.M. Sifakis, “High Stage and Chorus in the Hellenistic Theatre,” *BICS* 10 (1963): 32; Sifakis, *Studies*, 114ff., esp. n. 4; K.J. Maidment, “The Later Comic Chorus,” *CQ* 29 (1935): 16ff.; T.B.L. Webster, *Studies in Later Greek Comedy* (2nd ed.; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), 59.

C. Choral Participation In-Between Scenes

As we have already seen, the *Rhesus* testifies to the presence of a choral *parodos*, *stasima*, and *exodos*, as well as lyric dialogue in-between scenes, such that the chorus could be reasonably assumed to have continued to appear in-between scenes in post-Classical tragedies as it had in the Classical period. However, there is evidence in several tragic manuscripts from the Hellenistic period of a radical development in choral *stasima*, insofar as they were not actually written into the dramatic script, but indicated simply by the notation “XOROU” or “MELOS XOROU” in-between scenes.¹¹⁹⁴ This phenomenon is associated with Agathon, whom Aristotle claimed was responsible for introducing choral odes which were entirely disconnected from the plot-sequence in the play, i.e., *embolima*.¹¹⁹⁵ Thus, it is common to refer to the unwritten choral odes in-between scenes such as demonstrated in Hellenistic fragments as *embolima*.¹¹⁹⁶ Insofar as these *stasima* were not included in the manuscript, it is impossible to determine the precise nature of these lyrics, though it is imagined that they consisted of a conventional repertoire of songs, whose content perhaps related to some tragic theme, such as fate, fortune, hubris, etc., and which could be easily transposed from one play to the next.¹¹⁹⁷

¹¹⁹⁴ On the manuscript evidence for post-Euripidean tragedies in which exhibit these notations are evident, see G. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth Century Tragedy*, 10ff; cf. Webster, “Fourth Century Tragedy and the Poetics,” 294ff.; Handley, “XOROU in the *Plutus*,” *Classical Quarterly* N.S. 3 (1953): 58, n. 3.

¹¹⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Poet.* 18.1456a29–30. There are doubts as to whether or not Agathon himself was ultimately responsible for the introduction of *embolima* in Greek tragedy, though it is assumed that by Aristotle’s time they had become so common that he was able to speculate as to the origins of the practice. See, e.g., Flickinger, *The Greek Theater and its Drama*, 145ff.; cf. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 556; P. Lévêque, *Agathon* (Paris: “*Les Belles Lettres*”, 1955), 140ff.

¹¹⁹⁶ A similar phenomenon occurs, and for which there is much more evidence, in the New Comedy of Menander, in which the chorus was only ever indicated in-between scenes by the notation “XOROU” or “XOROU MELOS”. Likewise, there is no indication of the content of these choral songs, and they are most often thought to be generic melodies, and unrelated to the specifics of the surrounding dialogue, but comprised rather of stock hymns, stories of the gods, mythic narratives, etc. A.W. Gomme and F.H. Sandbach, *Menander: A Commentary* (Oxford: University Press, 1973), 172; Eric W. Handley, *The Dyskolos of Menander* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), 171–2.

¹¹⁹⁷ Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth Century Tragedy*, 10.

Of course, the *Rhesus* itself demonstrates that the practice of inserting choral *embolima* in-between scenes was not consistently applied in post-Classical tragedy, and it appears that *embolima* did *not* ultimately become predominant, as confirmed by the evidence of written choral odes in the Roman Republican fragments of Ennius' *Iphigenia* and *Medea*, as well as in Senecan tragedy. Moreover, commentators on the tragic chorus appear to confirm the role of the chorus in-between scenes in the post-Classical period. Aristotle, for example, demonstrated his preference for the use of choral odes in-between scenes that exhibited Sophoclean tendencies over and against Euripidean practices,¹¹⁹⁸ suggesting that in his day such tragic choruses *did* exist. Similarly, the comment of the Republican Roman playwright Accius that Euripides employed choruses “rather thoughtlessly”¹¹⁹⁹ is understood to confirm the existence of choral odes in-between scenes in his day.¹²⁰⁰ Finally, the absence of any commentary suggesting that choral odes in-between scenes had been discontinued likewise constitutes an argument *ex silencio* of their continued presence in Republican tragedy.¹²⁰¹

Ultimately, the development of choral *embolima*, taken together with the dearth of evidence of the chorus *within* scenes, as well as the evidence of a decrease in choral participation in Senecan tragedy, is often taken to represent the continuation of a decline in the role of the chorus in the post-Classical period.¹²⁰² Explanations typically offered for this transformation of the role(s) of the Chorus include: (1) A decline in the 4th c. B.C.E. of the *choregia*, the institution

¹¹⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Poet.* 1456a25.

¹¹⁹⁹ Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin: Vol. 1 Ennius and Caecilius*, 323. Fragments 11–12.

¹²⁰⁰ Manuwald, *Republican Roman Theatre*, 139; M. Hose, “Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores in der römischen Tragödie der Republik,” 135.

¹²⁰¹ E.g., Jocelyn: “. . .it is hard to believe that the despised republican playwrights abandoned the chorus and that Horace passed over in silence such a divagation from the Attic practice he so much admired.” Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius*, 19.

¹²⁰² E.g., Sifakis characterizes the evolution of the tragic chorus in the Hellenistic period as a “decline”. Sifakis, *Studies*, 113. Xanthakis-Karamanos considers the reduction of the choral role in post-Classical tragedy to be part and parcel of the “disintegration” of Classical tragic forms. Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies*, 6–11.

responsible for funding a chorus;¹²⁰³ (2) The rise of individualism, and thus the individual actor, in “post-democracy” Athens;¹²⁰⁴ and/or (3) The professionalization of actors which rendered amateur choruses obsolete.¹²⁰⁵

D. *Developments in the Form of the Chorus in Senecan Tragedies*

The structural contributions of the chorus in Senecan tragedy are in large part explicable in terms similar to those used to characterize choral roles in Classical (and post-Classical) Greek tragedy. Choral phenomena occurs both during and in-between scenes, in many of the same forms in which they occurred in the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, e.g., lyric and non-lyric dialogue, as well as non-dialogical choral utterances during scenes, and act-dividing *stasima* in-between scenes.

There are, however, conspicuous innovations in the use of the chorus in Senecan tragedy, perhaps most notable of which is the dramatically decreased role of the chorus, evident both in terms of choral participation within scenes and in-between scenes. On the one hand, choral participation within scenes diminished drastically from the standards of Classical tragedy. In only one of Seneca’s plays does the chorus appear during a scene more than twice,¹²⁰⁶ and most

¹²⁰³ It is thought that the political turmoil in Athens at the beginning of the 4th c. B.C.E. made it less likely that private citizens would be able, or willing, to fund choruses. Peter J. Wilson, "Leading the Tragic Khoros: Tragic Prestige in the Democratic City," in *Greek Tragedy and the Historian* (ed. C. Pelling; Oxford: University Press, 1997): 81–108; Wilson, *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia*; Kenneth Rothwell, Jr., "The Continuity of the Chorus in Fourth-Century Attic Comedy," *GRBS* 33 (1992): 209-225.

¹²⁰⁴ E.g., "In the history of Athens choral drama and participatory democracy are coexistent: when one declines, so does the other...In its dramatic structure, it also marks the virtual death-knell of the chorus. Although there is still a chorus in this play [*Ecclesiazusae*], its appearances are spasmodic and perfunctory. The action, as in politics, is left to the principals..." Arnott, *Public and Performance*, 24.

¹²⁰⁵ "A primary cause of the decline is the growth of professionalization in the theater and the development of new standards in acting, music, and dances, rather than changes in the constitution of the chorus itself. The chorus continued to be drafted from citizen amateurs until the abolition of the *khoregia* in the late 4th c. b.c. (sic), while music tended to ever-greater rhythmic and melodic complexity, better suited to a single voice. In contrast with highly trained actors, the amateurishness of the chorus became an embarrassment. In addition, the growing taste for realism and more complex plots tended to favor actors over the chorus." Csapo and Slater, *Context*, 351.

¹²⁰⁶ The chorus appears twice in *Phaedra* (404–5; 1244–6) and thrice in *Oedipus* (980–991; 1004–1009; 1040–1).

often it appears only once during a scene throughout the course of the play.¹²⁰⁷ Most of the chorus' participation within scenes consists of non-lyric dialogue with one actor. Of these instances, the chorus functioned in a very mundane fashion (as did non-lyric dialogue in Classical tragedy), most often speaking no more than one line, in order to introduce a new character to the stage, or as a dialogue partner when no other actor is present on-stage with whom to engage the protagonist. As in Classical tragedy, the chorus' function in this regard is consistently, clearly and wholly subordinate to the actors, insofar as the choral remarks serve entirely to expedite the dialogue of the protagonist.

So, too, are the instances of lyric dialogue during scenes, which represented the most common contribution of the chorus during scenes in Classical tragedy, severely diminished in Senecan tragedy, as lyric dialogue occurs only twice in all of the extant Senecan tragedies.¹²⁰⁸ They are similar to their Classical forerunners in terms of both formal elements and the dramatic circumstances in which they occur. The lyric dialogues each occur at moments of emotional turbulence, e.g., in the first Act of the *Trojan Women*, as the chorus of Trojan maidens participates with Hecuba in a ritual lament over the sack of Troy (82–163); in the fourth Act of *Agamemnon*, when the chorus of Trojan women lament with Cassandra, upon the return of the Agamemnon and his fleet to Argos, the lives that have been lost in the Trojan War, the harrowing journey home from Troy, as well as the ruined families and cities that suffer in its wake (659–781). So, too, do lyric dialogues in Senecan tragedy share certain formal elements with Classical antecedents. For example, each represents a response to the news of traumatic circumstances, a kind of ritual lament which was the hallmark of the lyric *kommos* of Classical

¹²⁰⁷ *Hercules*. 1032–4; *Trojan Women* 166–7; *Medea* 879–892; *Ag.* 664–778; *Thyestes* 623–788.

¹²⁰⁸ E.g., Seneca *Ag.* 664–778; *Troades* 82–163.

tragedy.¹²⁰⁹ Likewise, both the wholly lyric form of the dialogue, in which both the chorus and protagonist alternate in lyric verses, is represented in *Trojan Women*, as is the *epirrhematic* form, in which the chorus' lyric verses alternate with the spoken meters of the protagonist, in *Agamemnon*. Like other lyric passages in Senecan tragedy, lyric dialogues did not replicate Classical forms insofar as they did not exhibit *strophic responsion*.

Thus, while it might be said that the structural roles given to the chorus within scenes are not at all dissimilar to those given to choruses in Classical tragedy, the chorus in Senecan tragedy performed these roles much less frequently. The diminished role is evident in quantitative terms, as the chorus is given only four lines, sixteen lines, and twenty-four lines, during the acts in Seneca's *Medea*, *Oedipus*, and *Phaedra*, respectively.¹²¹⁰ Even in those tragedies of Seneca in which the chorus participates in an extended lyric dialogue (*Trojan Women* and *Agamemnon*), and in which the total number of lines given to the chorus during acts is increased proportionately as a result, the greatly reduced role of the chorus during scenes is conspicuous vis-à-vis Classical predecessors.

At the same time, the nature of choral activity in-between scenes changed substantively. In short, the choral *parodos* and *exodos* were excised in all Senecan tragedies, leaving the choral *stasima* as the only forms of choral participation in-between scenes. The elimination of the *parodos* and *exodos* coincided with the fact that Senecan tragedies were bookended by five distinct acts.¹²¹¹ That is, the beginning of the play typically consisted of a speech given by one of the protagonists, and introductory dialogue amongst characters, which constituted a definitive

¹²⁰⁹ See chapter 5, pp. 265–7.

¹²¹⁰ Mendell, *Our Seneca*, 132–3.

¹²¹¹ A clarification of terms is in order at this point. In reference to Greek dramaturgy, the term *scene* is used to denote the dramatic element which consists of the interaction of characters and chorus which occurs after the *parodos*, and in-between *stasima*. However, in reference to Latin drama, this dramatic element is referred to as an *act*, while *scene* is used to refer to smaller dramatic units *within* an(y) given act.

Act.¹²¹² The chorus still performed regularly after this introductory Act, but the characteristic elements of the *parodos* from Greek tragedy are rarely evident, e.g., the response to some dramatic exigency such as the pleas of the protagonist, or the introduction of the chorus and their relationship to the protagonist(s).¹²¹³ Likewise, it is unclear whether the chorus actually entered the stage at this point, or whether they were already present on-stage during the first act.¹²¹⁴ Thus, with no formal or functional features that distinguish it from other *stasima*, the first song of the chorus in Senecan tragedy is most widely considered simply a *stasimon*.

Likewise, Senecan tragedies regularly concluded with the fifth and final act, consisting of a speech of one of the protagonists, a dialogue between actors, or a brief concluding remark of one of the protagonists. This final act thus replaced the choral *exodos*, which in Classical tragedy regularly consisted of the final remarks of the chorus as they exited the stage and served as the formal conclusion to the play.¹²¹⁵ Thus, with the choral *parodos* and *exodos* altogether eliminated in Senecan tragedy, at least in the forms in which they regularly appeared in the Classical period, the role of the chorus in-between acts was limited almost entirely in-between acts to the four *stasima* which occurred in-between the five Acts.¹²¹⁶

¹²¹² There is some confusion in the terms used by scholars to describe introductory phenomena in ancient tragedy. The first speeches and/or dialogue of the protagonists in Classical tragedy were often so short as to be identified as a *prologue*, and not an Act. However, the first speech of the protagonist in Senecan tragedy is sometimes called the *prologue*, and also the beginning of the first Act.

¹²¹³ “The genuine plays of Seneca also fail to distinguish the first from later choral odes by the means usual in Greek tragedy: self-identification of the chorus, references to the chorus’ motive for coming to the scene of the play and so on.” Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon*, 180ff.

¹²¹⁴ For a summary of the question of the presence or absence of the chorus during scenes, see Davis, *Shifting Song*, 38. Of course, any discussion of the chorus in Senecan tragedy is tempered by the possibility that tragic performance did not include an actual chorus, or stage for that matter, as many have argued that Seneca’s tragedies were not meant for full-scale theatrical performance, but rather for public or private recitation. See chapter 4, pp. 225–7.

¹²¹⁵ Scholars have debated whether the dramatic structure manifested in Senecan tragedy was an innovation of Seneca, or owes to developments in Hellenistic and Roman Republican drama. Evidence suggests that a five-act structure may have been common in post-Aristotelian tragedy, as is most strongly suggested by the five-act/four *embolima* structure of Menander’s *Dyscolos*, and a remark of Horace, who assumes a five-act structure. Horace, *Ars*, 189ff. For a concise summary of the five-act structure in Senecan tragedy, see Tarrant, “Senecan Drama and its Antecedents,” 218–221.

¹²¹⁶ The case of *Phoenician Women* presents an interesting case in light of the clearly reduced role of the chorus in

These changes in the structural contributions of the chorus affected choral functionality in Senecan tragedy in a number of ways, about which much more will be said in the following chapter.

i. Multiple (Secondary) Choruses in Senecan Tragedy

The forms of the *secondary* chorus in Senecan tragedy can be considered in the same terms as those used to evaluate primary choruses. Secondary choruses appear both during scenes, to participate in dialogue with the main characters,¹²¹⁷ and in-between scenes, to sing choral *stasima*.¹²¹⁸ Unlike the secondary choruses in the Classical period, however, which appeared only once in any given tragedy, in each of those Senecan tragedies in which a secondary chorus does appear, it appears more than once, and sings different types of choral lyrics. For instance, in Seneca's *Agamemnon*, the secondary chorus sings both a choral *stasimon* (589–658), and participates in a lyric dialogue with a character during a scene (664–781). This evidence, though meager, might suggest that the role of the secondary chorus has become more prominent in Senecan tragedy. The precise functions of the secondary chorus with respect to the surrounding dramatic action will be evaluated below.

ii. Hymnic Elements in Senecan Tragedy

As in Classical drama, the lyrics of the chorus in Senecan tragedy sometimes take the form of a hymn. In some cases, hymns can be identified on the basis of similarities with

Senecan drama, insofar as no choral lyrics are included in it. While some have suggested that no chorus was ever *intended* for the play, others assume that the play as we now have it merely survives as an incomplete version, and that the choral lyrics would have been completed eventually once the narrative and dialogue sections had been completed. In either event, the evidence of the *Phoenician Women* suggests that the chorus had become a less integral dramatic component in Seneca's tragedies, a phenomenon which is confirmed in the rest of his surviving tragedies. See, e.g., Marica Frank, *Seneca's Phoenissae* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 8–10; Tarrant, "Senecan Drama and Its Antecedents," 221–8.

¹²¹⁷ Seneca, [*Octavia*] 762–819.

¹²¹⁸ Seneca, *Ag.* 589–658; [*Hercules on Oeta*] 583–699.

particular hymnic forms in the Greek and Roman world. For example, the first ode in *Medea* is a wedding hymn (*epithalamia*); the second ode in *Oedipus* evokes elements of the *dithyramb* (402ff.); etc.¹²¹⁹ Others are identified by the inclusion of various generic elements, i.e., invocation and praise of a deity, a listing of their divine attributes, exploits, and/or past assistance, and perhaps a specific prayer or petition. Hymns of various sorts appear throughout Senecan tragedy, although like most choral elements in Senecan tragedy, they do not appear as often as in Classical tragedy.

4. Formal Elements of Tragic Choral Lyrics in Post-Classical Tragedy

A. *Meter/Dialect*

Insofar as metrical systems in the post-Classical periods were based on the principles of Classical Greek meter, the metrical dynamics of Hellenistic and Roman tragedy can be considered in essentially the same terms. As such, the fundamental similarities between the metrics of Classical, Hellenistic and Roman tragedies are often recognized.¹²²⁰ At the same time, however, some striking developments in choral metrical and dialectical dynamics are evident. For instance, the so-called ‘Doric’ dialectical coloring is no longer apparent in the choral lyrics of Hellenistic tragedy. Moreover, choral (and non-choral) lyrics in post-classical tragedy exhibit less complicated metrical systems than their fifth-century forebears. Combinations of metrical systems (*polymetry*) in choral lyrics are neither as frequent nor as complex,¹²²¹ while choral odes

¹²¹⁹ See Davis, *Shifting Song*, 50ff.

¹²²⁰ E.g., the metrics of the *Rhesus* are entirely compatible with those of Euripides, and for this reason among others, is often considered to have been the work of Euripides himself. Likewise, the metrical dynamics in Ezekiel’s *Exagoge* are frequently noted for their similarities with Classical metrics, and those of Euripides in particular. See Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 167; J. Strugnell, “Notes on the Text and Metre of Ezekiel the Tragedian’s *Exagoge*,” *HTR* 60 (1967): 453.

¹²²¹ “Metrically...[lyric in the Hellenistic period] seems from our evidence to have been more straightforward than much of Pindar or of tragic lyric. It was (sometimes, at least) astrophic and polymetric. But the metres are easy to analyse. We shall find that this comparative simplicity is a permanent feature of post-classical lyric. We shall not face again such problems as Pindaric and tragic song posed.” West, *Greek Metre*, 138.

throughout Hellenistic drama are consistently *astrophic*, that is, non-repeating, self-contained metrical units.¹²²² Finally, it may have been that choral lines were less frequently given in lyric metrical systems at all. For example, in the *Exagoge* of Ezekiel, none of the chorus' lines are given in a lyric meter.¹²²³

Metrical and dialectic trends evident in the choral fragments of Hellenistic tragedies continue in the Latin plays of the Roman period. For example, choral lyrics written in Latin did not exhibit particular dialectic tendencies which distinguished them from the spoken or sung meters of the actors.¹²²⁴ So, too, *astrophic* composition was the norm in the choral lyrics of the Roman period.¹²²⁵ Accordingly, choral odes were presented in the form of non-repeating *strophes* or, more often, in *stichic* patterns (i.e., the repetition of lines which are presented in one particular metrical system), even when lyric metrical systems were employed.¹²²⁶

B. *Musical Elements*

Several pieces of evidence contribute to the notion that the chorus continued to contribute musical elements in Hellenistic tragedy. On one hand, as in Classical tragedy, the appearance of lyric metrics in the choral fragments of Hellenistic tragedy most likely denoted sections that were sung to a musical accompaniment. On the other hand, tragic *auletes* were regularly included in the records of tragic performances in the Hellenistic period, whose appearance suggests the role

¹²²² *Astrophic* odes (choral or otherwise) were atypical but evident in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, and became increasingly common in the later plays of Euripides. Thus, the *astrophic* lyrics evident in Euripides may represent a development in the evolution of choral metrics which found completion sometime in the Hellenistic period with consistently *astrophic* metrical composition, which is evident not only in dramatic poetry but non-dramatic poetry as well. Kranz, *Stasimon*, 229; Ritchie, *Authenticity of the Rhesus*, 336–7.

¹²²³ This very fact is used to argue that the maidens in the text do *not* actually constitute a proper chorus. See Jacobson, *Exagoge*, 31.

¹²²⁴ Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 327.

¹²²⁵ West, *Greek Metre*, 176; Tarrant, *Seneca's Thyestes*, 31–3.

¹²²⁶ H.D. Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius: The Fragments Edited with an Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: University Press, 1967), 33.

of the *aulos* to accompany the lyrics of the chorus and actors.¹²²⁷ Beyond this, very little can be said for certain when it comes to the nature of the musical elements in Hellenistic tragedy, on account of the lack of internal and external evidence. Perhaps it could be inferred from the lack of commentary by Hellenistic authors that musical elements continued in much the same form as they took in the Classical period, as significant divergences may have elicited remarks to that effect. That musical elements in tragedy of the Hellenistic period did not radically differ from Classical tragedy might also be inferred from the evidence of the fourth-century *Rhesus*, whose metrical tendencies, from which musical elements can be inferred, very closely follow those of the extant Classical tragedies.

However, it is widely believed that the musical elements which accompanied choral lyrics were slightly less prominent in Hellenistic tragedy. This notion is based on two considerations: (1) A belief that the decrease in the number of choral lyrics as a percentage of overall lines in tragedy of the Classical period would have continued into the Hellenistic periods; and (2) The belief that actors increasingly performed lyric *monodies*, the musical dynamics of which would have impinged upon the musical contribution of the chorus.

Though perhaps reduced slightly in magnitude and scope, the musical elements of the chorus likely continued to be prominent in tragedy of the Hellenistic period. This conclusion can be reached on the basis of the fact that music continued to be an integral element of Roman tragedy.¹²²⁸ Cicero frequently commented on the nature and importance of music in the Roman theater, which no doubt included the musical contributions of the chorus.¹²²⁹ The manuscript evidence in Republican Roman tragedy and in the tragedies of Seneca confirms the presence of

¹²²⁷ Sifakis, *Studies*, 156–65.

¹²²⁸ On music in the Roman theater, see Beare, *The Roman Stage*, 168–9; DuPont, *L'acteur-roi*, 88–91; Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theatre*, 89–90; 326–330; C.W. Marshall, *The Stagecraft and Performance of Roman Comedy*, 203–44.

¹²²⁹ Cic. *Tusc.* 1.106–7; Cic. *De or.* 3.196; *Parad.* 26; *Orat.* 173; *Acad.* 2.20; 2.86.

lyric systems in the lines given to the chorus, which likely denoted lines that were sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument.¹²³⁰ Musical sections in Roman tragedy may also have been signaled in tragic manuscripts by the use of the *siglum* “C” (= *canticum*), as opposed to the *siglum* “DV” (= *deverbium*), which denoted spoken, non-accompanied verse.¹²³¹

The *tibia*, which appears to have been the Roman equivalent of the Greek *aulos*,¹²³² normally accompanied sung lyrics. However, based on the testimony of Horace, it was the *lyre*, and not the *aulos* as in Classical tragedy, which typically accompanied the choral lyrics. Horace claims that the *tibia* was used during scenes, which at this point contained very few choral lyrics as a percentage of the overall number of verses, while the *lyre* accompanied the exclusively choral lyrics in-between scenes.¹²³³

II. Functions of Tragic Choruses in the Post-Classical Periods Prior to Seneca

With the exception of the *Rhesus*, which is tenuously dated to the fourth century, there is a conspicuous lack of data for tragedy in the post-Classical periods prior to the tragedies of Seneca.¹²³⁴ What data does exist is fragmentary in nature, and inconclusive with respect to so many of the basic issues in the study of Classical and Senecan tragedy. As such, very few scholars dare even to venture into this territory.¹²³⁵ The scant and fragmentary evidence for post-

¹²³⁰ Spoken speech was denoted by the *iambic senarius*, the Latin meter which closely resembled the Greek *iambic trimeter*, and the rhythmic patterns of ordinary speech. Hor. *Ars.* 79; Cic. *Orat.* 184; Quint. *Inst.* 2.10.13; Hor. *Sat.* 1.14.45–62.

¹²³¹ Although there is no evidence for these markings in the surviving tragic fragments of the Republican Roman period, or in the tragedies of Seneca, their existence elsewhere is often inferred from their existence in the (much more complete) manuscripts of the Republican comedians Terence and Plautus. See T.J. Moore, “When did the *tibicen* play? Meter and musical accompaniment in Roman comedy,” *TAPhA* 138 (2008): 20–38.

¹²³² West, *Ancient Greek Music*, 81–5.

¹²³³ Horace, *Ars*, cf. Cicero, *de Leg.* ii. 9 + 15.) See Horace *The Art of Poetry An Epistle to the Pisos* p. 75. Notes by George Colman.

¹²³⁴ The lack of surviving evidence may appear to suggest the declining popularity of tragedy in the Hellenistic period. However, many scholars believe that tragedy flourished in the 4th c. and beyond. See chapter 4, pp. 200–1.

¹²³⁵ For example, Xanthakis-Karamanos begins his study of fourth-century tragedies by admitting that there is “little to encourage us to take an interest in fourth-century tragedy.” Xanthakis-Karamanos, *Studies in Fourth-Century Tragedy*, 1.

Classical tragedies has particularly negative repercussions for the study of the developments in the functions of tragic choruses. That is, while the fragmentary evidence allows for something to be said of some of the formal characteristics of tragic choruses in the post-Classical periods, the absence of a dramatic context in which to situate the choral fragments makes it is much more difficult to say something of the functional characteristics of choruses. For example, without information as to the surrounding dramatic context for a choral fragment, it is most often very difficult to determine in what ways, if at all, the chorus was functioning to advance or to contextualize the surrounding dramatic action.

1. The *Rhesus*

Analyses of choral functions in the post-Classical period must begin with the best-preserved text from the period, the *Rhesus*. If it is in fact correctly dated to the fourth century, the *Rhesus* testifies to a high degree of continuity of choral function early in the post-Classical period. On the one hand, the chorus functions conventionally to advance the dramatic action. In the *parodos*, for example, the chorus functions conventionally in three specific ways, by: (1) Offering a synopsis of the present dramatic circumstances (i.e., Hector and the Trojan army, who are encamped near Greek ships, are awakened by the chorus who reports that there is tumult in the Greek camp (1–51)); (2) Serving as a dialogue partner for Hector to share his belief that the tumult signals that the Greeks are about to sail from Troy, and to command the army (of which the chorus of Trojan soldiers is a part) to take up arms to prevent the Greeks from departing, and to destroy them once and for all (52–84); and (3) Foreshadowing that something is amiss by questioning Hector’s assessment of the Greeks’ actions (76–79).

Elsewhere, too, the chorus functions to advance the dramatic action in ways that very closely resemble choruses in fifth-century tragedy. So, for instance, the chorus functions as: (1)

an audience for messenger's speech (727–803); (2) a non-lyric dialogue partner; (3) a lyric dialogue partner at emotionally dramatic moments (882ff.); (4) a medium to: (a) foreshadow future dramatic events (330–2; 555–562); (b) provide background information, as for Rhesus (342ff.), and for Odysseus (715–721); and (c) introduce new characters (e.g., Hector (10), Aeneas (85–6), Rhesus (380–87), Odysseus (675–82), and again Hector (804–7)).

On the other hand, the chorus also functions in the *Rhesus* to cast the surrounding action in a particular light. For instance, the first *stasima* consists of a choral *paean* to Apollo, sung in order to ensure the safety of Dolon in his mission to spy on the Greek camp. The *paean* invokes Apollo as the protector of Troy (224–232), asks that he guide Dolon on a successful mission into the Greek camp (233–241), focuses on the bravery required of Dolon in order to complete such a task (242–252), and asks ultimately that Dolon may kill Menelaus and Agamemnon in retribution for the Greek expedition to Troy (253–263). Thus, in a manner which echoes the conventions of Classical drama, the chorus frames the present dramatic circumstances in terms of their larger mythological context: Dolon's success, and ultimately the fate of the Trojan army, is dependent upon the (continued) protection of Apollo.

In the second *stasima*, the chorus reflects on the character of Rhesus in anticipation of the arrival of him and his (allied) army in Troy (though does not constitute the proper introduction of Rhesus, which occurs at 380–387). In the first *strophic* pair, the chorus invokes Adrasteia, daughter of Zeus, considers Rhesus' mythical lineage as the son of the River God Strymon and the Muse (342–354), and deems the arrival of Rhesus' in Troy as the coming of Zeus the Liberator (342–359), while in the second the chorus reflects on the possibility that Rhesus' arrival might allow Troy to return to its halcyon days before the arrival of the Greeks (360–369), and invokes Rhesus' presence in order to accomplish this very deed (370–379). Thus, in this

stasima, the chorus functions conventionally to provide relevant background information on one of the main characters, and to frame his arrival in terms of the expectation that he will be able to liberate Troy.

Insofar as each of the two *stasima* reflections situates the surrounding dramatic action in a particular context, they can be considered in terms of the choral functionality evident throughout Classical tragedy. Choral reflections in the *Rhesus* are not, however, limited to the *stasima*, but occur within scenes at various points throughout the play. For instance, as Aeneas attempts to persuade Hector to send a spy into the Greek camp in lieu of a full-fledged night attack (105–130), the chorus (of Theban soldiers) signals satisfaction with Aeneas' plan, commenting that they “do not like when generals order unsafe things” (132). Likewise, after the conversation between Hector and Dolon in which it is revealed that Dolon is seeking nothing but Achilles' famed horses in exchange for performing his risky mission into the Greek camp (154–194), the chorus implies that a greater gift might have been to marry into the royal house (197–8), and iterates that his fate is ultimately in the hands of the gods and Justice (199–201). As a final example, in a non-lyric dialogue with Hector, in which Hector has decided not to accept Rhesus as a military ally but rather as a house-guest, the chorus reminds him of the dangers of rejecting an ally (317–334). In each of these cases, then, the chorus offers brief reflections which touch on popular philosophical and social tropes: the reckless behavior of military commanders, the windfall of a royal inheritance, the idea that a happy fate depends on divine favor, and the dynamics of hospitality to guests.

Thus, the *Rhesus* demonstrates that there were general continuities in choral functionality of the Classical period in the post-Classical period. At the same time, the *Rhesus* exhibits choral tendencies which seem to be a continuation of the diminished role of the chorus towards the end

of the fifth century:¹²³⁶ (1) Exclusively choral activity is diminished. That is, there are only two choral odes (224–263; 342–380), and a lyric dialogue between members of the chorus (527–564), while the rest of the choral activity in the play takes place with other actors both within and in-between scenes; (2) Actors continued to encroach upon roles which had once been reserved for the chorus. For example, a lyric *kommos* takes place between the chorus and the Muse in which it is revealed that Rhesus has been killed (882ff.). Insofar as the *kommos* conveys dramatically important and emotionally powerful information, it functions analogously to lyric *kommoi* in the fifth century. However, the participation of the chorus in the dialogue is absolutely minimal. As a consequence of this, the chorus does not actually lament the death of Rhesus—this is performed entirely by the Muse;¹²³⁷ (3) Finally, the length of the two choral odes in the *Rhesus* (38 and 40 lines, respectively) corresponds with the shorter odes in Sophocles and the average length in Euripides, as does the fact that *strophic responsion* is limited to two pairs.

2. The Chorus in Roman Republican Tragedy

In the absence of additional substantive data for choral phenomena prior to Seneca, however, scholarly analyses of choral functions in these periods are minimal. The incomplete evidence and the absence of surrounding dialogue in which to contextualize the lyrics allows for only very tentative conclusions to be drawn as to choral functions.

It appears from several fragments of Republican Roman tragedy that the tragic chorus participated in dialogue(s) with the protagonist(s) during scenes.¹²³⁸ In this way, the chorus seems to have continued to function, at least at times, as an integral element in expediting the

¹²³⁶ The role of the chorus is, among other similarities between the *Rhesus* and plays of Euripides, one of the reasons that the play has been attributed to Euripides, and not an unnamed playwright in the 4th c. or later.

¹²³⁷ Rather, the chorus pays homage to lament at 940–5.

¹²³⁸ See above, pp. 333–4.

dramatic plot within scenes.¹²³⁹ Without clearer data, it is difficult to establish with any certainty the chorus' precise function(s) in this regard, though we might suppose that through dialogue the chorus functioned in this capacity as it did in Classical tragedy, as a tool for conveying relevant dramatic information, eliciting information from the protagonist(s), or as a dramatic audience for the speeches and/or dialogue(s) of the characters. For example, in fragments of Pacuvius' *Niptra*,¹²⁴⁰ it appears that the chorus participates in lyric dialogue with Odysseus after his grave injury. As this passage evokes scenes from Classical tragedy (i.e., Hippolytos' injury in Euripides, *Hipp.* 1342–1388, and Heracles' injury in Sophocles, *Trach.* 971–1045), it appears the chorus functions here as it often did in Classical tragedy as a lament, in this case on account of Odysseus' injury.¹²⁴¹

Insofar as the chorus' presence and participation during scenes can be established with some certainty on account of this evidence of dialogue, it might be supposed that choruses also participated during scenes as they did in Classical tragedies to: (1) introduce characters; (2) offer a synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances; and/or (3) foreshadow future dramatic events. The suggestion that tragic choruses of the Republican Roman period functioned in these ways is pure conjecture, as there is no physical evidence which confirms it.

It is likewise unclear whether tragic choruses in the Republican period functioned at all in-between scenes. In light of the fact that there exists no unmistakable evidence of choral lyrics in-between scenes (i.e., *stasima*), information as to choral functionality in-between scenes depends largely on circumstantial evidence and the testimony of ancient commentators. Several scholars have questioned the existence of choral odes in-between scenes in Republican Roman

¹²³⁹ The functions of the chorus in this regard seems to be presumed by scholars of Hellenistic drama, including M. Hose, "Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores," 117–38; Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius*, 18–9; 30–1; Manuwald, *Republican Roman Theatre*, 320–4;

¹²⁴⁰ Frgs. 256–267 R.

¹²⁴¹ Hose, "Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores," 127–9.

tragedy on the basis of the clear evidence from Roman *comedy* that choral odes in-between scenes had been altogether eliminated.¹²⁴² That is, on the basis of perceived formal similarities between Roman comedy and tragedy, such scholars presume that choral odes in-between scenes would have been absent in both dramatic forms in the Republican period.¹²⁴³

Others suggest that the chorus wasn't altogether eliminated in-between scenes in Republican tragedy, but that its function was greatly reduced. Some presume the existence of choral odes in-between scenes in Republican tragedy on the grounds that their absence would have constituted such a radical change in choral function that it would have prompted commentary from ancient critics, which does not exist, and on the basis of Seneca's tragedies in which choral lyrics most frequently appear.

Several extant fragments suggest the possibility of choral *stasima*. For example, a fragment from Ennius' *Medea*¹²⁴⁴ may represent choral lyrics from a *stasimon* insofar as it appears to be an adaptation of the choral *stasimon* of Euripides' version of the play.¹²⁴⁵ Likewise, a fragment from Ennius' *Iphigenia*,¹²⁴⁶ which records the anxious musings of Agamemnon's soldiers as they await to depart for Troy, evokes the reflective characteristics of a choral *stasimon*.¹²⁴⁷ The best evidence, however, for choral participation in-between scenes exists in the form of the testimony of Horace, who implicitly confirms the existence of choral

¹²⁴² That is, Plautus, Terence, and many other Roman comic playwrights eliminated the chorus altogether. It was no longer a part of the dramatic action within episodes, and no longer performed in-between scenes. Roles given to the chorus in Greek comedy (*parodos*, *parabasis*, *stasima*, etc.) were transferred to the actors. For example, acts were divided by the entrances and exits of the protagonists, and many of the lyrical elements provided by the chorus in Greek comedy were transferred to the protagonists. See Eduard Fraenkel, *Plautine Elements in Plautus* (trans. Tomas Drevikovsky and Frances Muecke; Oxford: University Press, 2007); Manuwald, *Republican Roman Theatre*, 144–69. For further discussions of the Roman “adaptations” of Greek “originals” in Plautus and Terence, see Slater, *Plautus in Performance*; Beacham, *Roman Theatre*, 29–55; F.H. Sandbach, *The Comic Theatre of Greece and Rome* (New York: Norton, 1977), 106ff.; Duckworth, *Nature of Roman Comedy*, 46ff.

¹²⁴³ E.g., Manuwald, *Republican Roman Theatre*, 139.

¹²⁴⁴ Fr. 110 J = 284–286 V.

¹²⁴⁵ Jocelyn, *Tragedies of Ennius*, 369–75; Hose, “Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores,” 125–7.

¹²⁴⁶ Fr. 99 J = 234–40 V.

¹²⁴⁷ Hose, “Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores,” 133–5.

stasima in Republican tragedy of his day: “do not let the chorus sing anything between the acts which is not conducive to, and fitly coherent with, the main design” (Horace, *Ars* 193–201).

The presumption that the role of the chorus in-between scenes would have been greatly reduced in Republican tragedy vis-à-vis the choruses of Classical tragedy is based in part on the belief that Republican tragic choruses would have been part and parcel of a general trajectory of decline in the relevance and importance of the tragic chorus throughout antiquity, beginning in the Classical and Hellenistic periods,¹²⁴⁸ and evident in the plays of Seneca.¹²⁴⁹ Others presume that the chorus would not have been able to engage in the same kinds of elaborate songs and dances in-between scenes as in the Classical period insofar as they were performing on a stage that was much smaller than the Classical *orchestra*, and which was perhaps shared by the actors.¹²⁵⁰ In this vein, others have suggested that the proximity of the chorus to the actors on the stage would have diminished their role as a mediator between the actors and the audience, and would have thus obviated their role as a commentator on the surrounding dialogue as in Classical tragic *stasima*.¹²⁵¹

III. Functions of Tragic Choruses in Senecan Tragedy

With respect to their relationship(s) with the surrounding dramatic action, the choruses in Senecan tragedy can be evaluated in similar terms as the choruses of Classical tragedy. That is, the chorus functions on the one hand to advance the dramatic action by: (1) introducing characters; (2) offering a synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances, which often includes a summary of the events which have led to them; (3) foreshadowing future dramatic events; and

¹²⁴⁸ As evidenced by the decreased relevance of the chorus in Euripidean tragedy, the evidence of choral *embolima* entirely unrelated to the specifics of the dramatic plot, and the knowledge that in certain re-performances of Classical tragedies in the Hellenistic period the choral lyrics were simply excised. See Fantuzzi and Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation*, 435.

¹²⁴⁹ See below, pp. 356, 368–70.

¹²⁵⁰ Jocelyn, *The Tragedies of Ennius*, 31.

¹²⁵¹ M. Hose, “Anmerkungen zur Verwendung des Chores,” 120, 125, 134.

(4) serving as an instrument through which to elicit information from the protagonists relevant to the plot. The chorus also functions to reflect upon, illuminate certain aspects of, or provide a particular frame through which to view the dramatic characters and events in the episodes, by (1) reacting to the preceding dramatic material in such a way as to elicit an emotional response from the audience; and/or (2) framing the surrounding dramatic action in a mythological-historical, philosophical, or mythological-theological context.

1. Moving Forward the Dramatic Action

A. *Character Entrance Announcements*

As in Classical tragedy, one of the most frequent functions of the chorus in Senecan drama is to announce the arrival of a character. Such announcements could occur at any point in the drama, and most often took the form of a simple announcement to reveal the character's identity, and to identify the circumstances of the entrance. Though such announcements occur fairly regularly, they are less common in Senecan tragedy than in Classical tragedy.

B. *Synopsis of Present Circumstances*

In a very few instances, the chorus in Senecan tragedy offers a synopsis of the present dramatic circumstances of the protagonist(s). However, insofar as the chorus most often offered such a synopsis in Classical tragedy during the *parodos*, a choral element absent in Senecan tragedy, it is no surprise that this function of the chorus is thus conspicuously diminished. Examples of the chorus' function in this regard occur in the first choral odes of *Oedipus* and *Trojan Women*, wherein the choral lyrics constitute a summary of the events described in the prologue and first act.¹²⁵² In these cases, the present circumstances are not introduced by the chorus as in Classical tragedy, but rather expounded upon and detailed by the chorus. Elsewhere

¹²⁵² Seneca, *Oed. tyr.* 110–201; *Tro.* 67–163.

in Senecan tragedy, the chorus' contributions in this regard are brief,¹²⁵³ while the majority of summative information is provided instead by the (other) actors by means of speeches and dialogue.

C. *Foreshadowing*

Examples of the role of the chorus to foreshadow dramatic events were offered above in my discussion of the introductory odes of *Trojan Women* and *Thyestes*, wherein subsequent dramatic events were vaguely presaged by means of the background stories provided by the chorus. However, a similar kind of foreshadowing occurs in instances in which background information is not provided. For instance, in the first ode of *Agamemnon*, the chorus offers reflections on the volatile and ultimately transitory nature of sovereign power, likening it to the tempests of the sea, the sacking of citadels, forsaken marriages, and natural disasters (57–107). In so doing, the chorus dimly portends the events of Agamemnon the King as they are about to unfold in the drama, i.e., his betrayal and murder at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra. So, too, later in the play does the chorus appear to presage the impending fate of Agamemnon with their story of the fall of Troy (589–658). However, while the chorus appears to foreshadow dramatic events in this kind of elusive way, it does not make more conspicuous allusions to unfolding dramatic events, and this function of the chorus which is so prominent in Classical tragedy is in Senecan drama for the most part given to other characters.

D. *Instrument for Exposition of Characters' Thoughts and a Dramatic Audience for Speeches*

As in Classical tragedy, the chorus in Senecan tragedy could be deployed as a dramatic tool in order to (1) stage a dialogue with a protagonist, with the dialogue functioning solely as a

¹²⁵³ E.g., the chorus' description of Medea's maddened disposition in the fourth *stasimon*. Seneca, *Med.* 849–878.

pretext for eliciting some piece of information from the protagonist; and (2) provide an audience for a protagonist's speech. The chorus' function in this regard appears to have been a natural result of the fact that, unlike the actors, it was present on-stage most, if not all, of the time during scenes and could therefore be deployed in such a way in the absence of other characters on-stage. For instance, Act 2 of *Trojan Women* opens with the herald of the Greek army, Talthybius, alone on stage announcing that the Danaan ships were delayed in their return home from Troy (164–5). The chorus then prompts Talthybius to explain the cause of this delay (166–7), a prompt which serves no other purpose in this instance than to provide a dramatic exigency for Talthybius to reveal in his following speech precisely the cause of the delay of the Greek ships (168–202). So, too, at the beginning of Act 2 in *Phaedra* does the chorus function in such a way. Phaedra has already revealed to her nurse the passion she feels for her step-son Hippolytos, along with her plans to commit suicide, while the nurse expresses anxiety over the severity of Phaedra's present state. At this point, the chorus instructs the nurse to appease the "virgin goddess", with the hope of rectifying the situation (404–5), which the nurse immediately proceeds to do (406–430). The chorus is alone on-stage in the position to offer such instruction (Hippolytos does not know of Phaedra's plans, while Phaedra herself is in no position to do so), and its instruction functions solely as a pretext for the nurse to offer her prayer.¹²⁵⁴

E. *Summary*

While the choruses in Senecan tragedy function analogously to the choruses in Classical tragedy by moving forward the dramatic action in these ways, choral functionality in Senecan tragedy differs from Classical tragedy most considerably insofar as the chorus participated in the

¹²⁵⁴ The chorus functions in such a way elsewhere in Senecan tragedy, as for example in Act 5 in *Medea*, where the chorus' questioning of the Messenger allows him to reveal the disaster that has befallen Creusa (879–892), and in Act 4 of *Thyestes*, where the chorus responds intermittently throughout the Messenger's speech to probe the Messenger for details of what has happened to Thyestes' sons (623–788).

action in these ways with much less frequency. This decrease in choral activity corresponds to a decrease in lines given to the chorus in Senecan tragedy as a whole,¹²⁵⁵ and can be explained in large part by the fact that such roles that had been given to the chorus in the Classical period were increasingly in Senecan tragedy given to actors.

2. Casting the Dramatic Action in a Particular Context

A. *Emotional Reactions*

As in Classical tragedy, the Senecan chorus often cast the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light is by signaling joy, sorrow, satisfaction, dissatisfaction, etc., with a preceding speech, dialogue, or dramatic event. So, for instance, a chorus of Jason's sympathizers in *Medea* sings a joyful wedding-song after hearing of Jason's impending marriage to Creusa (57–115), the chorus of exiled Trojan Women in *Trojan Women* sings a lament for the fallen city of Troy (67–163), and the chorus in *Hercules* mourns the deaths of Hercules' children by the hands of their father (1053–1137). While such reactions occasionally appear in the form of a brief emotional outburst during a scene, much more often in Senecan tragedy the chorus reacts to dramatic events by means of a lyric exchange with a character in-between a scene, or in the form of a choral ode in-between scenes.

Interestingly, these often appear as variations of traditional hymnic forms.¹²⁵⁶ For example, mourning could take the shape of a lyric exchange between the chorus and protagonist which resembled the *kommos*, or lyric lament, as in *Trojan Women* between the chorus and Hecuba over the fallen city of Troy (67–163).¹²⁵⁷ Elsewhere, other hymnic forms are evoked, as

¹²⁵⁵ See above, pp. 337–41.

¹²⁵⁶ The generic relationships between dramatic and non-dramatic choral forms are “rarely exact” and are in fact “usually fairly loose”. Rutherford, “Apollo in Ivy,” 112, 118.

¹²⁵⁷ See also Seneca, *Med.* 879–892; *Ag.* 659–781; [*Herc. Ot.*], 104–232. On the *kommos*, see chapter 5, p. 266, n. 932.

in the wedding-song (*epithalamia*) of the chorus in *Medea* in response to Jason's and Creusa's nuptials (57–115),¹²⁵⁸ and the thanksgiving hymn of the chorus of Argive women in *Agamemnon* to the Olympian gods in appreciation for Agamemnon's victory (310–387).

Choral responses to dramatic events functioned at one level simply to draw attention to a particular aspect of the event by concentrating the audience's attention on it. In so doing, they may function at another level to modulate the emotional response to the preceding events for the audience, heightening the dramatic tension created in the surrounding action, or providing relief from the tension conjured by an emotionally charged scene. Such a response may provide an opportunity for the audience itself to reflect upon the events, and to consider how *it* might react to the events.

B. *Framing the Dramatic Action in a Mythological-Historical Context*

The chorus in Senecan tragedy sometimes offered a survey of the mythological-historical events which have led to the current predicaments of the protagonist(s), thereby casting the dramatic plot in a particular mythological-historical light. For example, during the first ode in *Trojan Women*, the chorus of now exiled women retells various events of the Trojan War and the events that led to it (e.g., the abduction of Helen (69–70)), Greeks sailing to Troy (71–2), ten years of war in Troy (73–8), the death of Hector (98–116), the death of Priam and his soldiers (138–141), and their fate in the Underworld (156–163). Likewise, in the first ode of *Thyestes*, the chorus (of unknown identity) recounts the story of Tantalus, including the murder of his son Pelops and presentation of him as food for the gods (136–148) and his subsequent punishment in the Underworld (149–175).¹²⁵⁹

¹²⁵⁸ Davis, *Shifting Song*, 50–1.

¹²⁵⁹ Cf. the chorus' recounting of Hercules' toils in the second ode in Seneca, *Herc. fur.* 524–591.

In both cases, this mythological-historical background information provided by the chorus constitutes a fitting introduction to the tragic plot-lines and, alongside the speeches and/or dialogue in the prologue and first act, serves to frame the dramatic events about to unfold. In the case of *Trojan Women*, the chorus' laments over the various suffering and death at the hands of the Greeks in the Trojan War provides a context for explaining the current predicament of the protagonists—Hecuba, Andromache, and their children—as exiles from Troy looking for refuge, while also foreshadowing the suffering they will continue to face as a result of this defeat. So, too, the background story of Tantalus serves as a fitting introduction to the story of Atreus and Thyestes, as both are descendants of the house of Pelops, and a kind of frame for considering the events which subsequently unfold in the tragedy, i.e., Atreus killing Thyestes' sons and serving them to Thyestes for dinner.¹²⁶⁰

The chorus also regularly performed a similar function elsewhere in Senecan tragedy, either by offering additional mythological-historical background information, or by providing a particular mythological-historical analogy for the dramatic action. For instance, in the second *stasimon* of *Medea*, the chorus' summary of the perilous voyage of the *Argo* and the particular obstacles faced by Jason and his crew, provide a context for considering the current struggle of Jason against his current treacherous threat, Medea (301–379).¹²⁶¹ Likewise, the (secondary) chorus of *Trojan Women* in the third *stasimon* of *Agamemnon* sings of the night that Troy unexpectedly fell at the hands of the Greeks and their deceptive Wooden Horse (589–658), as a

¹²⁶⁰ As was the case with the chorus' role to provide a synopsis of the present dramatic circumstances, such background information is not *introduced* by the chorus. Rather, it constitutes a continuation of, and/or elaboration upon, information that was previously introduced by one of the characters. In this way, the information provided by the chorus appears less essential dramatically than it was in Classical tragedies.

¹²⁶¹ The connection between Jason's past and current threats (i.e., the sea and Medea) is made explicit in the ode (361–363). See Davis, *Shifting Song*, 78–84.

means of contextualizing the similarly unexpected and deceptive fall of Agamemnon at the hands of his wife which occurs in the following acts.¹²⁶²

While the chorus contextualizes the surrounding dramatic events and characters by recalling various mythological-historical events and personages, it also considers certain dramatic circumstances and protagonists more explicitly in terms of particular mythological-historical precedents. For example, in the third *stasimon* of *Medea*, Medea's destructive deeds are likened to similarly reckless mythological-historical events, such as Phaethon driving the chariot too close to the Sun, Jason sailing for the Golden Fleece, Orpheus traveling to the Underworld, etc. (579–669). Thus, whether by setting the dramatic circumstances within a larger mythological-historical cycle, or by considering the current events to be emblematic of past ones, the chorus regularly contextualizes the present dramatic circumstances within a particular mythological-historical context.

C. *Setting the Dramatic Action in a Philosophical Context*

As in Classical tragedy, the chorus in Senecan tragedy regularly offered philosophical reflections on a particular dramatic situation. While choral reflections of this sort in Classical tragedy took numerous forms ranging from extended deliberations in the *stasima* to very brief musings during scenes, philosophical deliberations of the Senecan chorus consisted only of

¹²⁶² See Davis, *Shifting Song*, 106–18. Cf. the fourth choral ode in *Agamemnon*, in which the chorus sings of the exploits of Hercules (808–866). By singing an ode of a mythic hero who was killed by his own wife (though Hercules' death by Deianira is not recounted in this ode), the chorus sets the stage for Agamemnon's own death at the hands of his wife. See B. Seidensticker, *Die Gesprächsverdichtung in den Tragödien Senecas* (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1969), 132, n. 163.

lengthy reflections which occurred during the choral odes. Philosophical deliberations of the chorus touched on a wide range of topics as determined by the surrounding plot.

For instance, the chorus in the second ode of *Thyestes* offer reflections on the proper attributes of a good king, suggesting that a true king is not one who possesses outward accoutrements (wealth, robes, cavalry, weapons, etc.), but rather one who boasts certain inward traits (a lack of fear or willful ambition, wisdom, and a stable disposition, etc.). Such a view constitutes an explicit response to the depiction of Atreus the King in Acts 1 and 2 of the play, as overwhelmed with passions, e.g., insatiable desire for more power, for revenge, etc. The choral ode thus casts light on Atreus' sovereign attributes and reveals them as ultimately destructive, a perspective which proves tragically correct in light of the subsequent events in the play, as Atreus kills his brother's children and serves them to him for dinner.

A different sort of philosophical topic is raised in the third choral ode of *Phaedra*. Immediately after Phaedra has falsely accused Hippolytus of rape, the chorus considers the apparent absence of order and stability in the lives of all mortals, and the tendency for shame, treachery, and adultery to be rewarded, and for virtue, chastity, honor, and modesty to be punished (959–988). This unpredictable state of mortal affairs, which is contrasted with the seeming stability and order in the heavens and in Nature, is said to be governed by Fortune, who appears to “scatter gifts blindly, promoting all that is worst” (978–980). This theme is repeated in the following ode, which is sung in response to the report that Hippolytus has been killed. After suggesting that mortals' fates are apportioned relative to their place in life, i.e., the lofty experience the greatest upheavals, while the meek experience lesser blows (1123–1140), the chorus remarks that Fortune “pledges her faith to none” (1142–3). Such a view is not only implicitly justified on the basis of Hippolytus' unmerited death at the hands of his father

Theseus, but also explicitly on the basis of the fact that Theseus himself now will experience only sorrow and tears as a result of this action (1144–1148).¹²⁶³

The above example highlights two especially prominent philosophical themes that are repeated elsewhere in Senecan tragedy. The first is the notion that Fate determines the course(s) of mortals' lives, and that the course determined by Fate cannot be altered by any means. The chorus takes up this topic in the fifth ode of *Oedipus*. Following the revelation that Oedipus was his father's killer and his mother's husband, and the description of Oedipus' self-blinding, the chorus offers a short ode which consists of a series of brief sayings each centering on the notion that mortals' lives are determined by inexorable Fate, e.g., no anxious fretting can alter it (981–2); all that occurs comes from on high (983–4); everything travels on a path already made for it (987–8); no gods or prayers can alter it (989–992). The ode can be read as a philosophical summation of the dramatic events which have transpired: Despite every effort to escape it, Oedipus has succumbed to the Fate that was predicted for him.

Another prominent theme running through many of the choral lyrics in Senecan tragedy is the notion that Fortune's destiny is most severe for those who hold high positions in life. The first ode in *Agamemnon*, which constitutes a reflection on the tendency for those who are exalted to be humbled, and as such foreshadows Agamemnon's impending doom, is a good example of this (57–107). So, too, in the fourth ode of *Oedipus* does the chorus highlight the tendency for those in high places (i.e., Oedipus) to be rewarded with misfortunes proportionate to their position. The idea that exalted persons lead inherently precarious lives corresponds with a

¹²⁶³ The chorus' view of Fate in these odes is only one amongst others advocated in this play; for example, in the fourth act, it appears as if Hippolytus' fate is not governed by random chance, but rather a result of Phaedra's passions. See Davis, *Shifting Song*, 153.

position often advocated by the chorus that a middle-course in all aspects of life is to be preferred over a life of excess.¹²⁶⁴

Such ideas evident in several of Seneca's choral odes (and elsewhere in non-choral elements of Senecan tragedy) highlight the extent to which Stoic philosophy permeated Senecan drama. Given the extent to which Seneca advocated Stoic principles elsewhere in his letters and treatises, it is not surprising that conventional Stoic principles appear in his tragedies, and are regularly advocated by the chorus. Additional Stoic themes in Seneca's tragedies include: (1) the well-ordered cosmos which governs Nature;¹²⁶⁵ (2) the human ideal of conforming to nature;¹²⁶⁶ and (3) the finality and banality of death.¹²⁶⁷ Despite the prominence of such Stoic positions, by no means does the chorus advocate Stoic philosophical positions exclusively.

D. *Setting the Dramatic Action in a Mythological-Theological Context*

As in Classical tragedy, philosophical topics broached by the chorus in Senecan tragedy often involve considerations of the gods. While the roles of the traditional gods are not as prominent in Senecan tragedy as they are in drama of the Classical period, they are nevertheless brought to bear on various topics. The examples above reflect various mythological-theological positions, e.g., the futility of the gods to alter Fate, and the propensity for Fate to punish people in proportion to their position in life. So, too, elsewhere are various attributes and exploits of the gods are considered in choral lyrics in terms of their relation to the dramatic events taking place. For example, in the third *stasimon* in *Phaedra*, the topic of which is the apparent discrepancy between the well-ordered nature of the celestial and natural worlds and the chaotic sphere of

¹²⁶⁴ E.g., *Med.* 579–669; *Phaedra* 736–823; 1123–1148; *Oedipus* 882–914; *Thyestes* 336–403; 546–623.

¹²⁶⁵ *Phaedra* 274–357; 959–988; 1123–1148; *Oed.* 980–996; *Ag.* 57–107; *Trojan Women* 1009–1055.

¹²⁶⁶ *Herc. Fur.* 125–204

¹²⁶⁷ *Trojan Women* 371–408; *Ag.* 589–610. Cf. the final choral ode in *Thyestes*, in which is envisioned the end of the world as postulated by Stoic physics (830–74).

human affairs (959–988), the chorus attributes the regularity in the heavens and nature to the care of Nature and Zeus (959–971), the seeming lack of order and the prevalence of injustice in human affairs to the indifference of Nature and Zeus (972–977), and the sovereignty of Fortune (978–9). Insofar as this reflection on the divine cause of instability and injustice in the lives of mortals immediately follows a dramatic sequence in which Theseus has just decided to punish Hippolytus on the basis of Phaedra’s false claims that he raped her, the ode can be understood as a mythological-theological reflection on the preceding dramatic events. That is, the choral ode frames the success of Phaedra’s lies, and the unmerited punishment of Hippolytus, in terms of widespread injustice evident in human affairs, and casts blame for this injustice on the seeming indifference of the gods to such outcomes.

The third ode in *Oedipus* likewise casts the surrounding dramatic action in a mythological-theological framework by offering a mythological-theological explanation for the surrounding dramatic events. In the previous Act, Creon has revealed to Oedipus that Oedipus is in fact Laius’ murderer, and the husband of his own mother, and has thus exposed Oedipus as the cause for the suffering in Thebes. In the ode that follows, the chorus explains that the ultimate cause of Thebes’ suffering is not Oedipus’ unknowing acts, but rather a sequence of mythological-theological events which preceded him. That is, the chorus traces the cause of the current suffering in Thebes all the way back to Jupiter’s kidnapping of Europa. In various instantiations of this myth, Cadmus wanders through various lands in search of Europa, founding various cities and territories (of which Thebes was one) but eventually grows weary and ultimately fails in his task. Cadmus’ failure to bring back Europa is thus identified by the chorus as the cause of the suffering of Cadmus’ descendants in Thebes, including Oedipus (712–763).

Thus, the ode situates the circumstances of Oedipus within a clear mythological-theological framework.

i. Mythological-Theological Reflections and Choral Hymns

On several occasions, the chorus frames the surrounding dramatic action in mythological-theological terms by means of a hymn. As was shown above, hymns in Senecan tragedy appear as they do in Classical tragedy as responses to dramatic events, e.g., a lament in response to the news that Hercules has unknowingly killed his wife and children (*Herc. fur.* 1053–1137), a supplicatory hymn in light of the imminent threat to Thyestes and his children (*Thy.* 122–175), etc. Thus, at one level, the hymns in Senecan tragedy likewise offer a mythological-theological perspective simply by associating and connecting dramatic events with mythological-theological characters, for in doing so the chorus demonstrates the belief in the inherent relationship between the gods and mortals, and the comingling of the divine and mortal realms. That is, the chorus confirms through hymns that mortal events include divine workings and have divine implications.

At the same time, as in Classical drama, these hymnic odes often consist of mythological-theological reflections which cast the surrounding dramatic action in a particular mythological-theological perspective. For example, in the first *stasimon* in *Phaedra*, the chorus sings a long hymn to Cupid, highlighting his powers in the human, divine, and natural realms, by listing the numerous entities who have come under his power, including men and women, young and old, of virtually all earthly realms (281–295), Apollo (296–298), Zeus (299–316), Heracles (317–329), and the animals in the earth, water, and sky (330–352). This hymnic demonstration of Cupid’s powers is framed by the claim that the effects of Cupid’s arrows are deep (281–2), and that nothing is immune from them (353), not even, as the very last line suggests, the “cruelty of

stepmothers” (357). Thus, the very last line makes clear what might be inferred from the context in which the hymn is found: the hymnic demonstration of the extent of Cupid’s unconquerable powers frames the story of Phaedra’s “unnatural love” for her step-son Hippolytus. On the one hand, insofar as the hymn immediately follows the first Act in which Phaedra reveals her “flames of passion” for Hippolytus, it frames her passions in terms of the divine “fire” that overpowers all beings.¹²⁶⁸ On the other hand, the kind of “love” that Phaedra reveals for Hippolytus throughout the can be contrasted with those forms listed in the hymn insofar as hers appear “unheard of,” “unnatural,” and proof of her “madness,”¹²⁶⁹ in contrast with those in the hymn which appear so “natural” as to be (con)fused with “Nature” itself (353).¹²⁷⁰

More often than not, the contents of a hymn relate thematically to a particular dramatic character or event, without being connected explicitly with it as in the above example. In several cases, hymns in Senecan tragedy frame the surrounding dramatic events in mythological-theological terms through analogy.¹²⁷¹ That is, in choral hymnic lyrics the exploits of mythological-theological characters sometimes provide implicit analogies for the dramatic activities of the protagonists, in such a way as to demonstrate their mythological-theological implications. The second ode in *Oedipus*, which consists of a hymnic recounting of various attributes and adventures of Bacchus and his followers, provides such an example, as several of these attributes and exploits are suggestive of the character of Oedipus in the play: The concealed identity of Bacchus (403–428) evokes the fact that Oedipus’ true identity is likewise concealed; the recounting of the myths of Lycurgus, Agave and Pentheus, and Ino (429–503),

¹²⁶⁸ E.g., *flammas* (120; 131); *Sacer est ignis (credite laesis) nimiumque potens* (330–1)

¹²⁶⁹ E.g., *malum et ardet intus* (101–2); *nefanda* (130; 160); *amoris impii flammis* (165); *concupitus novos* (170); *furor* (178; 184; 268); *mentis effrenae impetus* (255); *furibundum impetum* (263).

¹²⁷⁰ See Davis, *Shifting Song*, 93–9; A.J. Boyle, *Seneca Tragicus: Ramus Essays on Senecan Drama* (Melbourne: Aureal, 1983), 114–27; C.P. Segal, *Language and Desire in Seneca’s Phaedra* (Princeton: University Press, 1986).

¹²⁷¹ This constitutes one of the biggest differences between Senecan hymns and Classical tragic hymns, which most often cast the surrounding drama into a mythological-theological light by means of *explicit* reflections on the mythological-theological underpinnings and implications of the dramatic events.

evoke past instances of the murder of blood-relatives which engenders suffering. In these ways, an ode which does not relate explicitly to the particulars of the plot of *Oedipus* nevertheless situates the story of Oedipus within a history of the house of Cadmus, by framing his similar circumstances in light of them.

E. *The Functions of the Secondary Chorus*

The functions of the secondary choruses with respect to the surrounding dramatic action can be considered in the very same terms as those used to evaluate the functions of primary choruses. In several instances, the secondary chorus functions to advance the dramatic action, as for example when it introduces characters.¹²⁷² So, too, the secondary chorus can offer a synopsis of the present circumstances, as in the fourth act of *Agamemnon*, when the secondary chorus of captive Trojan women relates the madness of their princess Cassandra as she becomes possessed by visions of the impending fate of Agamemnon (659–778). The chorus' synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances sometimes includes a summary of the dramatic events which have led up to them, as for instance, in the third *stasimon* of *Agamemnon*, when the chorus of Trojan women sings of their current plight as captives of a fallen city (589–610), and the sack of their city which led to their current plight (611–648).

Finally, the secondary chorus may also serve as an instrument through which to elicit information from the protagonists relevant to the plot. For example, in the beginning of Act 3 of Seneca's [*Hercules on Oeta*], the chorus of Deianira's attendants asks Deianira to explain what misfortunes are troubling her (715), which prompts her to relate the events surrounding her unknowing poisoning of Hercules. So, too, in Seneca's [*Octavia*], the chorus of Poppaea's attendants participates in dialogue with a Messenger, with the sole purpose of providing a

¹²⁷² Seneca, *Ag.* 778–781; Seneca, [*Hercules on Oeta*] 700–705; Seneca, [*Octavia*] 778–789.

dramatic exigency in which the Messenger can explain the current events in the palace (780–805). In summary, then, with respect to moving forward the dramatic action, the secondary chorus in Senecan tragedy performed each of the functions of the primary chorus, except foreshadowing specific dramatic events.

The secondary chorus can also frame the surrounding dramatic action in a particular light, according to the conventions of choruses generally. That is, the secondary chorus might cast the surrounding dramatic action in philosophical terms, as in the third *stasimon* of *Agamemnon*, in which the chorus of captive Trojan women consider what they believe to be the irrational fear of death, and propose that mortals would be better suited if they abandoned this fear (589–610). Insofar as this reflection immediately follows the herald's retelling of various harrowing events of the Trojan War, including a number of incidents that occurred as a result of the fear of the soldiers, the reflection of the chorus can be understood to cast these events in terms of the (Stoic) philosophical perspective that the fear of death causes excessive and unwarranted hardships. So, too, in the second *stasimon* of Seneca's [*Hercules on Oeta*], the chorus of Deianira's attendants expound upon the common (Stoic) philosophical trope that the middle course in all things is to be preferred over excess, and that those who do not choose the middle course are bound to experience hardships (583–699). Insofar as this ode comes immediately after a scene in which Deianira has unknowingly poisoned the cloak that will eventually kill her husband, Hercules, it thus serves to frame Deianira's excessive response to Hercules' disloyalty to her (which itself represents excessive behavior), in terms of this Stoic principle.

In one instance, a secondary chorus provides a mythological-theological reflection on the surrounding dramatic events. In a very brief ode near the end of Seneca's [*Octavia*], a chorus of supporters of Poppaea respond to the actions of a populace that is very unhappy with her

(destroying statues of her, threatening to kill her, etc.), by claiming that Cupid will eventually overwhelm them and repay them in kind for such misdeeds (806–819). The ode thus frames these unruly actions of the populace as futile in light of the ultimately superior power of the gods to bring about their desired outcomes.

As these examples demonstrate, the functions of the secondary chorus accord with the conventions of choral function generally in Senecan tragedy. Moreover, the range of functions of the secondary chorus in Senecan tragedy appears to increase in comparison with the relatively limited role of the secondary chorus in Classical tragedy. This, alongside the fact that the secondary chorus appears relatively more often in Senecan tragedy than in the extant Classical tragedies, perhaps suggests that the secondary chorus had become a more prominent dramatic element in Imperial tragedy.

F. *Detachment of the Chorus from the Surrounding Dramatic Action*

Many of the choral odes of Seneca's tragedies appear not to relate directly to the surrounding dramatic material, and sometimes not at all. Perhaps nowhere is the chorus' detachment from the plot more conspicuous than in the introductory *stasima*. In contrast to the introductory choral odes of Greek tragedy (i.e., *parodoi*), through which are often revealed the major characters, background information relevant to the plot(s), and the beginnings of the plot-lines themselves, the chorus in Senecan tragedy sometimes reveals no knowledge of the dramatic circumstances, characters, or plot-lines,¹²⁷³ and oftentimes offers a general reflection on a theme which has little relevance to the *particular* dramatic circumstances evident at the beginning of the play.

¹²⁷³ E.g., Tarrant acknowledges that this is characteristic of Seneca's use of the chorus. Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon*, 181; cf. Peter Davis, *Shifting Song*, 165.

A good example consists of the first ode in *Agamemnon*, which was shown above to consist of a reflection on the fleeting nature of power, and the tendency for those who are exalted to be humbled (57–107). While the central theme of the ode, i.e., the volatility and transiency of sovereign power, is relevant to the play as a whole insofar as the primary plot-line consists of the unfolding calamities of Agamemnon the King, the chorus demonstrates no knowledge of the plight of Agamemnon as it is revealed by the ghost of Thyestes in the prologue of his sacking of Troy, arrival in Mycenae, and impending doom at the hands of his wife Clytemnestra (1–56), and provides no further information with respect to background information relevant to the plot, details of the plot itself, or information concerning the protagonist(s). Thus, while the ode thus functions to foreshadow these events to a certain extent, its contents do not relate explicitly with the particularities of the plot at this point in the drama.¹²⁷⁴ Similarly detached introductory odes occur in *Hercules Furens* (125–204), and *Phaedra* (274–357).

The chorus' seeming detachment from the plot is also often evident in choral *stasima* elsewhere in the plays. For example, the second ode in *Oedipus*, which consists of a hymn to Bacchus (403–508), may appear at first glance to be entirely unrelated to the particulars of the plot, as the contents of the hymn, which consist entirely of the recounting of various exploits of Bacchus and his followers, do not include anything that would conjure the characters or events in this particular play, and they are not explicitly related to the surrounding dramatic action. Instead, the connections of the hymn to the surrounding plot are vague, implicit, and/or tangential. That is, a hymn to Bacchus relates tangentially to the plot insofar as the action is taking place in Thebes, a city which in this and several other myths maintains a special relationship with the god. In addition, several of the exploits of Bacchus recounted in the hymn

¹²⁷⁴ E.g., Tarrant: "In *Agamemnon* the dramatic isolation of the chorus is complete: no line of the ode reveals either a definite persona or a specific allusion to the situation revealed by Thyestes' ghost." Tarrant, *Seneca: Agamemnon*, 181; cf. Davis, *Shifting Song*, 165ff.

might be understood to reflect aspects of Oedipus' own character in the play. Similarly detached odes can be identified elsewhere in Senecan tragedy, where the exigency for an ode might depend somehow on the dramatic circumstances of the plot (e.g., a wedding-song after Jason's wedding), but the contents of which do not relate explicitly to the plot itself.

The apparent disconnection of many of the choral odes from the surrounding plot might thus be understood as a continuation of a choral trajectory evident in the increasingly detached odes of Euripides.¹²⁷⁵ F. Leo goes so far as to claim that in this sense the choruses in Seneca's tragedies are analogous to choral *embolima* in the Classical period,¹²⁷⁶ while others, without going so far, nevertheless maintain that this detachment from the plot constitutes evidence of the decline of the relevance and importance of the chorus in post-Classical tragedy.¹²⁷⁷ Others, however, acknowledge the extent to which choral odes that do not appear immediately relevant to the particular plot details of the tragedy nevertheless relate to thematic elements developed elsewhere in the play. Several of the choral odes considered above, for example, are not explicitly related to the surrounding dramatic material, but nonetheless contextualize it in various ways.¹²⁷⁸

G. *The Voice of the Senecan Chorus*

¹²⁷⁵ See chapter 5, pp. 318–24.

¹²⁷⁶ Friedrich Leo, "Die Composition der Chorlieder Senecas," *RhM* 52 (1897): 511ff.

¹²⁷⁷ Mendell, *Our Seneca*, 135; Wilhelm Marx, *Funktion und Form der Chorlieder in den Seneca-Tragödien* (Köln: Peter Kappes, 1932).

¹²⁷⁸ David J. Bishop, "The Choral Odes of Seneca: Theme and Development" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1964); Davis, *Shifting Song*; Christoph Kugelmeier, "Chorische Reflexion und dramatische Handlung bei Seneca—einige Beobachtungen zur *Phaedra*," in *Der Chor im antiken und modernen Drama*, 139–69; Ann Reynolds Lawler Dewey, "The chorus in Senecan tragedy exclusive of Hercules Oetaeus and Octavia" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1968).

The issue of the voice of the chorus is complicated by the fact that so often the dramatic identities of the chorus are unknown, and by the frequent detachment of the choral lyrics from the dramatic plot. It is difficult, on the one hand, to identify the contents of choral songs as typical of young women or fearless soldiers, etc., when the identities of the characters are unknown.¹²⁷⁹ On the other hand, the choral lyrics are rarely so consistent and conventional as to be able to associate them positively with a particular group, and in many cases the choral lyrics could be assigned just as easily to one group as to another.¹²⁸⁰

i. *The Voice of the Chorus as a Character*

Despite these difficulties, it is possible to say something about the voice of the chorus in Senecan tragedy. Oftentimes, the voice of the chorus can be understood to represent simply the voice of a(n unknown) dramatic character. That is, the lyrics of the chorus often consist of reactions to dramatic events, seem to be determined primarily by the exigencies of the tragedy, and make the most sense in light of them, e.g., lament over a horrific death, anxiety over impending events, etc. In other words, the voice of the chorus in such instances does not reflect a perspective outside of the drama, e.g., of the author, of the community, of a particular philosophical viewpoint, etc., but rather a perspective that might be expected from a(ny) character in the play.

At the same time, commentators acknowledge Stoic leanings in Seneca's tragedies generally, and in the voice of the chorus in particular.¹²⁸¹ As noted above, Stoic principles are indeed regularly advocated by the chorus. At the same time, Stoic philosophical elements are

¹²⁷⁹ Often the contents of the choral songs are mined for clues as to the identity of the chorus.

¹²⁸⁰ Mendell, *Our Seneca*, 133–4.

¹²⁸¹ B. Marti, "Seneca's Tragedies: A New Interpretation," *TAPA* 76 (1945): 216–45; T.F. Curley, *The Nature of Senecan Drama* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1986), 19; Norman T. Pratt, "The Stoic Basis of Senecan Drama," *TAPA* 79 (1948): 1–11; Fantham, *Seneca's Troades*, 15–9; Tarrant, *Seneca's Thyestes*, 22–5.

not consistently advocated throughout Senecan tragedies, and appear much less prevalent there than in his other letters and treatises.¹²⁸² This can also be said of the Senecan chorus, which often advocates non-Stoic philosophical principles,¹²⁸³ and in fact sometimes opposes Stoic ideals.¹²⁸⁴ So, while the chorus could advocate Stoic ideals and principles, it was not used consistently in this way, and thus cannot be thought to represent a consistent Stoic “voice” throughout his plays. Ultimately, as in Greek tragedy—and perhaps even more so—the chorus in Seneca’s plays could represent the voices of different characters, positions, and/or philosophical views, as required by the demands and exigencies of the plot. So, in those instances in which the chorus took on what appeared to be the “voice” of an extra-dramatic character (Stoic or otherwise), it is reasonable to suspect that this voice may have represented the voice of the poet, or the community itself. However, as in Classical tragedy, it is very difficult to determine the source of this choral “voice” with any certainty.

ii. *The Chorus as “Implied Audience”*

To the extent that the choruses in Senecan tragedy offered reflections upon the surrounding dramatic action, and by doing so contextualized the dramatic events in various ways, it can be considered in terms of the theory of the “implied spectator”. That is, the choral lyrics can be understood to have functioned to lead the audience to a particular response to,

¹²⁸² A.J. Boyle, “Senecan Tragedy: Twelve Propositions,” in *The Imperial Muse: Ramus Essays on Roman Literature of the Empire* (ed. A.J. Boyle; Melbourne: Aureal, 1988), 78-101; J. Dingel, *Seneca und die Dichtung* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1974); D. Henry and B. Walker, “Tacitus and Seneca,” *GR* 10 (1963): 98–110; Davis, *Shifting Song*, 125–83.

¹²⁸³ So, for example, the chorus promotes Epicurean ideals of the universality of misfortune (*Trojan Women* 1009–1055), a pastoral life over and against city living (Seneca, *Herc. fur.* 125–204), and the benefits of leisure (*Thyestes* 336–403). Davis, *Shifting Song*, 125–83. For examples of principles which are often taken to represent Stoic ideals but in fact represent philosophical and/or literary commonplaces, see Howard Vernon Canter, *Rhetorical Elements in the Tragedies of Seneca* (Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1925), 40–55.

¹²⁸⁴ For instance, in *Trojan Women*, the chorus emphasizes the role of Chaos in life (*Trojan Women* 400), while in *Hercules Furens* and *Trojan Women* the chorus describes the journey of the dead into the Underworld (*Hercules Furens* 830–892; *Trojan Women* 156–163). See A.J. Boyle, “Hic Epulis Locus: The Tragic Worlds of Seneca’s Agamemnon and Thyestes,” in *Seneca Tragicus: Ramus essays on Senecan drama* (ed. A.J. Boyle; Berwick, Australia: Aureal, 1983), 218–20.

and/or understanding of, the dramatic circumstances.¹²⁸⁵ For example, the audience might be led sympathize with Jason in light of the chorus' sympathetic position towards him in *Medea*, or to adopt the chorus' explanation of the universe as ordered by the gods in such a way that human actions have particular consequences.

At the same time, the audience may have responded to dramatic events differently than the chorus, and may have rejected the philosophical or mythological-theological perspective with which the chorus framed dramatic events. In any event, the notion of the chorus as an "implied spectator" assumes that chorus, as a kind of "audience" within the drama, offered reflections on the surrounding dramatic action in such a way as to provoke the actual audience to consider their *own* positions with respect to the dramatic action.

¹²⁸⁵ See chapter 5, pp. 314–6.

Chapter 7: Revelation's Hymns as Choral Lyrics

Having established a taxonomy of tragic choral forms and functions throughout antiquity, it remains to evaluate Revelation's hymns, and those who sing the hymns, in terms of this taxonomy. In what follows, I consider the groups of characters who sing the hymns in Revelation in terms of tragic choruses, as well as the forms and functions of the hymns themselves in terms of tragic choral lyrics.

I. A Chorus in Revelation?

1. Method

Before I consider the groups of characters who sing the hymns in terms of ancient tragic choruses, and the hymns themselves in terms of tragic choral lyrics, I consider a theoretical basis for taking up such a project in the first place. Those who have gone the furthest in considering the hymns, and their singers, in terms of ancient tragic choruses and choral lyrics have most often done so as part of a larger project of considering Revelation as a whole *as* a kind of ancient (Christian) tragedy. The problem with grounding a(ny) consideration of the choral function of Revelation's hymns in the notion that Revelation as a whole constitutes a kind of tragedy is quite simply that Revelation cannot be characterized as a tragedy on the basis of any reasonable evaluation of the structural, formal, and functional dynamics of the ancient tragic genre. Revelation fails to conform to so many of the most basic conventions of the genre. To cite just a few examples: (1) The content of Revelation is presented as a narration of a vision of the author, and not as a progression of speech and dialogue between characters; (2) The structure of the text does not follow the conventional tragic format (i.e., scene-chorus-scene-chorus), and includes several structural elements that simply never appear in any form in tragedy, e.g., the letters in

Rev 2–3; and (3) Scenes are neither clearly nor regularly divided by the entrances and exits of the characters. By contrast, Revelation very clearly adheres to many of the generic conventions of ancient apocalypses, prophecy, and letters.¹²⁸⁶

And yet, I argue that the forms and functions of Revelation's hymns do, in fact, evoke the choruses and choral lyrics of ancient tragedy. But I will construct this argument with a different theoretical basis, and consider Revelation's hymns in terms of tragic choral lyrics apart from the question of the extent to which Revelation conforms to the conventions of ancient tragedy as a whole. The basis for such a move is grounded in the premise that the individual elements of a(ny) text would have been influenced not only by the conventions associated with the primary genre(s) of the text as a whole, but also by any number of conventions outside of the primary genre(s).¹²⁸⁷ That is, the forms of individual elements in the text (e.g., the hymns) were not generated in a vacuum that was constricted by the conventions of a particular genre, but were most likely influenced by forms from other genres, which might be called networks of reference, and as such, any element in a text might bear formal and generic similarities with similar elements in other genres. As a result, the appearance of an(y) element in a text would have conjured various networks of references and relationships in the minds of the audience of the text.

¹²⁸⁶ For considerations of the genre of Revelation, see, e.g., John J. Collins, "Pseudonymity, Historical Reviews, and the Genre of the Revelation of John," *CBQ* 39.3 (1977): 329–343; Schüssler-Fiorenza, "Apokalypsis and Prophetia," 133–58; M.E. Boring, "The Apocalypse as Christian Prophecy: A Discussion of the Issues Raised by the Book of Revelation for the Study of Early Christian Prophecy," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1974 Seminar Papers* (ed. G. MacRae; Cambridge, Mass.: SBL, 1974), 2:43–62; D. Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 13–64; M. Karrer, *Die Johannesoffenbarung als Brief: Studien zu ihrem literarischen, historischen und theologischen Ort* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986); F.D. Mazzaferri, *The Genre of the Book of Revelation from a Source Critical Perspective* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1989); Aune, *Revelation*, 1:1xx–xc; Bauckham, *Theology*, 1–17.

¹²⁸⁷ This premise applies both to those elements that appear to be requisite features of a text according to its primary genre(s), and to those elements that do not appear to conform to the conventions of the primary genre(s) of the text.

Thus, the interpretive possibilities for the constitutive elements of a(ny) text ought not be restricted to a consideration of these elements solely in terms of the conventions of the primary genre(s) to which the text conforms, but rather explored in light of any possible networks of relationships that the elements share with similar forms in other genres. In practice, scholars make this interpretive move all the time. For example, the songs sung in response to the destruction of Babylon in Rev 18:1–24 have been considered in terms of the formal and structural conventions of *lament*, apart from the question of whether or not Revelation as a whole might be considered a kind of *lament*, and apart from the question of whether or not the *lament* constitutes a constitutive element of the genre *apocalypse*, or *prophecy*, etc.¹²⁸⁸ The very fact that the hymns in Revelation are considered in terms of their formal and functional similarities with all sorts of hymns in the wider Greek and Roman world, and entirely apart from any question of the extent to which hymns constituted an integral generic element of apocalypses, or prophecy, etc., testifies to the value of considering individual elements of a text in light of various networks of reference outside of the particular genre in which the element is found.

Given the popularity of drama in the 1st c. C.E.,¹²⁸⁹ it is reasonable to consider these dramatic forms as possible networks of reference for various elements in the book of Revelation, without going so far as to claim that Revelation constitutes a kind of drama, and in fact quite apart from the question of whether or not other elements in Revelation can be considered in terms of ancient drama. The methodology that I am proposing here accords with that of several recent biblical scholars who have considered elements of other biblical texts, especially the book

¹²⁸⁸ See, e.g., Adela Yarbro Collins, “Revelation 18: Taunt-Song or Dirge?” 185–202.

¹²⁸⁹ See chapter 4, pp. 204–7; 222–4.

of Job and the Gospel accounts, in terms of the conventions of ancient drama, apart from the question of the extent to which the texts in their entirety can be understood as drama.¹²⁹⁰

Thus, in what follows, I consider the forms and functions of Revelation's hymns, and those who sing the hymns, in terms of tragic choral lyrics, and tragic choruses, respectively. I first demonstrate that the 24 Elders most closely resemble a tragic chorus, insofar as several dimensions of their portrayal in Revelation conform to conventions of the chorus as it appeared in ancient tragedy, including: (1) their identities as Elders, their number, and relation to the main characters; (2) choreographic formations; and (3) the presence of a chorus-leader. Following this, I demonstrate that while several aspects of the portrayal of the other groups of characters who sing hymns might be considered in terms of a tragic chorus, especially the Four Living Creatures, the extent to which they resemble tragic choruses is less conspicuous. Finally, I consider Revelation's hymns in terms of choral lyrics of tragedy, evaluating the hymns in light of the various types of choral lyrics that occur in tragedy, the formal characteristics of tragic choral lyrics (i.e., meter, dialect, singing, instrumentation), and the varieties of the functions of choral lyrics, including the role of the chorus to advance the dramatic action and the role of the chorus to frame the dramatic action in a particular (mythological-historical, philosophical, or mythological-theological) context.

¹²⁹⁰ See, e.g., George L. Parsenios, *Rhetoric and Drama in the Johannine Lawsuit Motif* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); George Mlakuzhyil, S.J., *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1987); J.R.C. Cousland, "The Choral Crowds in the Tragedy According to St. Matthew," in *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative* (ed. Jo-Ann Brandt, Charles W. Hedrick, and Chris Shea; Atlanta: SBL, 2005), 255–74. More often than not, however, scholars argue that such elements warrant the designation of these texts as drama. See, e.g., Horace M. Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1959); William Whidbee, "The Comedy of Job," in *On Humor and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Yehud T. Radday and Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1990), 217–50; David Wolfers, "Job: A Universal Drama," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 21.2 (Apr., 1993): 80–89; F.R. Montgomery Hitchcock, "Is the Fourth Gospel Drama?" in *Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (ed. Mark W.G. Stibbe; Trans. David E. Orton; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 15–24; Clayton R. Bowen, "The Fourth Gospel as Dramatic Material," *JBL* 49 (1930): 292–305; C.M. Connick, "The Dramatic Character of the Fourth Gospel," *JBL* 67 (1948): 159–69; Jo-Ann A. Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004); Stephen H. Smith, "A Divine Tragedy: Mark," *NovT* 37 (1995): 209–31.

2. The 24 Elders

A. *The Identity of the 24 Elders, Number, and Relation to Main Characters*

Of those aspects relating to the depiction of the Elders in Revelation that can be considered in terms of the depiction of choruses as characters in ancient tragedy, perhaps the most conspicuous is the fact that they are identified *as* Elders. On one hand, they represent a homogeneous group of characters in terms of gender and age, and are identified in the text *only* by reference to these characteristics.¹²⁹¹ On the other hand, choruses are very often identified in ancient tragedy as “elders,”¹²⁹² such that the appearance of such a group in Revelation warrants a comparison. Moreover, the fact that these Elders, unlike every one of the other characters in the throne-room, do not clearly represent any particular personages from early Jewish and/or Christian tradition,¹²⁹³ prompts reasonable speculation that their identities in the text may be wrapped up entirely in their (generic) status *as* elders, and further suggests that they might be evaluated as characters primarily in terms of their association with analogous characters from ancient tragedy.

The number of elders—twenty-four—falls within the range of the number of tragic chorus members as they are known from antiquity, the high end of which may have been 50 in Aeschylus’ *Suppliants*, a mid-range at perhaps 12–15 in the time of Sophocles and Euripides,¹²⁹⁴

¹²⁹¹ In ancient tragedy, choral characters are sometimes also identified by their *occupation* (e.g., *sailors*), their current predicament (e.g., *captives*), and/or their geographic provenance (e.g., *Trojan captives*; *Theban elders*; etc.). However, when the tragic chorus is comprised of *elders*, they are identified *only* in terms of their gender, age, and geographic provenance, and not in terms of an occupation. The description of the Elders in Revelation thus conforms to the convention of tragedy in this respect. The Elders in Revelation differ from tragic elders only insofar as they are not associated with a particular geographic location, though it could be argued that their provenance in the text is *heaven*. See chapter 5, pp. 247–8.

¹²⁹² Cf. “elders” in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*; *Persians*; Sophocles’ *Antigone*; *Oedipus at Colonus*; Euripides’ *Alcestis*; *Hercules Furens*; *Heracleidae*.

¹²⁹³ Despite the attempts to associate the elders with one or more historical entities, including the twenty-four courses of priests, the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles, etc. See chapter 2, pp. 38–9.

¹²⁹⁴ See chapter 5, pp. 244–5.

and the low end perhaps in the single digits by the Hellenistic and/or Roman period.¹²⁹⁵ Thus, while the number of tragic *choreutai* is never explicitly acknowledged to be twenty-four in ancient tragedy,¹²⁹⁶ twenty-four would have been a reasonable number of characters if they were indeed meant to be portrayed as a kind of chorus.

Finally, the relationship of the Elders to the main characters in Revelation can be considered in terms of the typically close relationships of the chorus and the main characters in ancient tragedy. On the one hand, the Elders are depicted as having a close bond with the main characters, i.e., the One Seated upon the Throne, and the Lamb, both insofar as they occupy space with them in the heavenly throne-room, share a kind of exalted status, maintain a close proximity to the throne, and insofar as the positive outcomes for the main characters result in positive responses of the Elders. In other words, the Elders seem to share, at least to a certain extent, in the plight of the One Seated upon the Throne and the Lamb.

On the other hand, the Elders occupy a subordinate position vis-à-vis the main characters. That is, just as tragic choruses were subordinate to the main characters both in terms of social status (e.g., *maidens* of the Queen and/or female royal heiress, or *sailors* under the command of a military leaders), and dramatic functionality (the chorus does not have the authority to act in the same way as the protagonists, to make speeches, to come into contact with the characters, or to suffer the same fate(s) of the main characters),¹²⁹⁷ the Elders are portrayed in a subordinate position to the main characters in each of these ways. The subordinate relationship of the Elders to the One Seated upon the Throne and the Lamb is most clearly established throughout the text by the very fact that the primary action of the Elders consists of giving obeisance to them and

¹²⁹⁵ See chapter 6, p. 327.

¹²⁹⁶ Interestingly, twenty-four is precisely the number of *choreutai* in Old Comedy.

¹²⁹⁷ See chapter 5, p. 248.

worshipping them,¹²⁹⁸ though their subordination as characters is also demonstrated by the fact that their agency is much more limited in the text. That is, while the Lamb opens seals and unleashes destruction upon God’s enemies, and God presides over their ultimate judgment, the actions of the Elders consist solely of praising God and the Lamb—they do nothing else.¹²⁹⁹

B. *Formations and Movements*

The Elders are depicted throughout Revelation in a circular formation. This much is made clear in the initial description of the Elders, where they are depicted seating on twenty-four thrones “in a circle around the [main] throne” (κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου) (Rev 4:4), a position they appear to maintain throughout Revelation. This circular orientation itself, which appears to be mirrored by several other characters/entities in the throne-room,¹³⁰⁰ might be understood in light of the circular formation of the chorus in tragedy.¹³⁰¹ Moreover, the depiction of the Elders in a circular orientation *around a central object*, i.e., the throne, also makes sense in light of the conventions of ancient tragedy. In theatres throughout the ancient Mediterranean, and across time-periods, an altar (*thymele*) was a requisite part of the theatre complex.¹³⁰² In those theatres in which the orchestra was circular, or nearly circular,¹³⁰³ the altar often stood in the very center of the orchestra, and it is widely thought that the tragic chorus would have, at various points throughout a tragedy, maintained a circular orientation around it, with the altar serving as the geographic center-point of the choral formation, and the focal point of the dramatic action.¹³⁰⁴

Thus, the depiction of the Elders in a circular formation around the throne might be considered in

¹²⁹⁸ Cf. Rev 4:9-10; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4. See chapter 2, p. 39.

¹²⁹⁹ At least not as a *group*. As we shall see below, an individual elder engages in a conversation with the Seer at Rev 7:13–14.

¹³⁰⁰ E.g., the rainbow (4:3), the four Living Creatures (4:6), and the myriad of angels (5:11; 7:11).

¹³⁰¹ See chapter 5, pp. 251–2.

¹³⁰² See chapter 4, pp. 231–2; 240.

¹³⁰³ Including modified Hellenistic theatres in the Roman period, which were especially common in Asia Minor. See Sear, *Roman Theatres*, 24–5.

¹³⁰⁴ See chapter 4, p. 252.

terms of the circular formation of the chorus around the altar in tragedy, whereby the central religious object in his throne-room scene, i.e., the throne of God and the Lamb, took the place of the central religious structure in the Greek theatre, the altar of Dionysos, and likewise served as the geographic center and focal point for the dramatic action.

C. *A Chorus-Leader?*

A final point concerning the evaluation of the Elders in Revelation in terms of choruses of ancient tragedy relates to the dialogue that takes place between “one of the elders” (εἷς ἐκ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων) and the Seer in Rev 7:13–14. In the first verse, the elder asks the Seer about the identity and provenance of the Great Multitude, to which the Seer responds in the next verse that the Elder himself is the “one who knows.” The Elder then completes the verse by revealing the identities of the Great Multitude as those who have “come out of the great ordeal, and who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”¹³⁰⁵ This interaction, in which one of the Elders is explicitly singled out to participate in dialogue with another character, might be considered in terms of the convention of choral dialogue in ancient tragedy, in which only *one* chorus-member, e.g., the chorus-leader, spoke in dialogue with other actor(s).¹³⁰⁶

3. Other Groups of Heavenly Characters as Choruses?

While the 24 Elders sing the greatest number of hymnic stanzas in Revelation, *most* of the hymnic stanzas are sung by other groups of characters, including the Living Creatures (4:8; 5:8–10, 14; 7:11–12; 19:4), the Great Multitude of martyred Christians (7:9–10; 19:1–3, 6–8), “loud voices” (11:15; 12:10–12), the “myriad of myriad of angels” (5:11–12), “all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea” (5:13), and “those who conquered the

¹³⁰⁵ See chapter 2, pp. 64–6.

¹³⁰⁶ See chapter 5, p. 270.

beast” (15:2–4). The portrayal of such groups of characters singing hymns thus raises the question of whether or not they too could be considered in terms of tragic choruses.

The very fact that such characters are presented as groups of characters prompts a consideration of them in terms of dramatic choruses, as any group of characters who were given speaking lines in ancient tragedy by definition constituted a chorus.¹³⁰⁷ Moreover, the fact that these groups of characters sing hymns suggests their choral character. While non-choral characters could sing hymns in ancient tragedy, a hymn was much more likely to have been sung by a chorus.¹³⁰⁸ Thus, the collective identity of these groups of characters, considered alongside the fact that they sing hymns, suggests that they might be considered in terms of their choral dimensions.

The formal characteristics of these groups in Revelation do not, however, quite as closely match those of tragic choruses. To begin, the groups only tenuously resemble tragic choruses in terms of composition. Some of the groups might be said to be homogeneous insofar as they are each comprised of the same kinds of entities (e.g., the Living Creatures, the Myriad of Angels, and the Great Multitude), while the others seem to include disparate entities (e.g., all creatures in heaven and on earth). The functions of the members of each group are homogeneous, and they each group clearly occupies a subordinate status to the main characters. However, none of these groups are identified with the kinds of generic terms that are so consistently used to characterize the identities and statuses of tragic choruses (“elders,” “maidens,” “soldiers,” etc.), and which thereby demonstrate homogeneity in terms of gender, age, occupation, etc. As for the size of each of these groups of characters, only the number of Living Creatures (four) is ever revealed, a number which falls within the range (though on the low-side) of the number of chorus-members

¹³⁰⁷ See chapter 5, p. 248.

¹³⁰⁸ See chapter 5, p. 275.

that might have participated in the performance of an actual tragedy in the Hellenistic or Roman period.¹³⁰⁹ In every other case, however, there is no clear indication of the precise number of the group, though they each appear to represent numbers of characters that far exceed the numbers of characters ever represented by tragic choruses.¹³¹⁰

In addition to considerations of the formal aspects of the portrayal of these groups, the spatial orientation of the characters can be evaluated. Like the 24 Elders, both the Living Creatures and Myriads of Angels are said to comprise a circle around the throne (4:6; 5:11). Thus, the Creatures and Angels might likewise evoke the circular formations of choruses around the central altar in ancient tragedy. The association of the Living Creatures and Angels with tragic choruses in terms of their circular orientation may be weakened by the fact that such characters appear in circular formations in antecedent Jewish literature.¹³¹¹ In other words, the circular formation of the Living Creatures and Angels may be explained entirely in terms of the fact that they were imagined in antecedent literature to have maintained a circular orientation, and not necessarily because they are conceptualized on the model of tragic choruses. At any rate, none of the other groups are imagined to have taken this circular form.

Thus, while none of these groups who sing hymns in Revelation as clearly resemble tragic choruses as do the 24 Elders, they do bear some formal similarities. The appearance of multiple groups in Revelation that bear resemblances to tragic choruses may be considered in

¹³⁰⁹ See chapter 6, p. 327. The number of Living Creatures was probably determined on the basis of the fact that four was the number of Creatures depicted in Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1. At any rate, the number of Living Creatures could be considered in terms of the number of tragic *choreutai*.

¹³¹⁰ This is clear of the “myriads and myriads and thousands and thousands of angels” (5:11–12), “every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them” (5:13), and the “great multitude that no one could count” (7:9). So, too, the number of “those who conquered the Beast” (15:2), a group which appears to refer proleptically to those “armies of heaven” who in 19:14–21 actually conquer the Beast, is quite high. While a small number of *choreutai* might represent a greater number of characters than actually appear in the theater (i.e., a chorus of a half-dozen women might be intended to represent a larger number of maidens), never in Classical, Hellenistic, or Roman tragedy does a chorus represent a group of characters nearly as large as these.

¹³¹¹ In the LXX, the *cherubim*, who appear to be one of the conceptual models for the Living Creatures in Revelation, are stationed “in a circle” around the throne (Isa 6:2). Likewise, the angels are arranged in a circular formation in *1 En.* 71:8.

light of the convention of multiple (secondary) choruses in ancient tragedy. While the appearance of several “choruses” in Revelation would have represented a deviation from the normal practice of including only one secondary chorus in ancient tragedy (and in the case of Aeschylus’ *Suppliants* perhaps two secondary choruses), the appearance of multiple groups of characters in Revelation might be considered in light of the appearance of multiple choruses in tragedy.

At any rate, the preceding discussions have not accounted for all those characters who actually sing hymns in Revelation, as there are at least two hymns sung by characters that bear absolutely no similarities with tragic choruses, i.e., the angel of water in Rev 16:5–6, and the altar in Rev 16:7. Thus, whether or not one or another group in Revelation can be considered in terms of a tragic chorus, it is critical to note that there exist at least these two hymns that are not portrayed as being sung by groups that resemble tragic choruses.

II. Choral Lyrics in Revelation?

1. Classifying Revelation’s Hymns in Terms of the Various Types of Choral Lyrics

Classifying Revelation’s hymns in terms of the various types of choral lyrics in ancient tragedy is complicated by the fact that Revelation is not presented according to the structure of ancient tragedy. In ancient tragedy, the content of a play was presented as a succession of scenes that were delineated by the entrances and exits of the actors—the beginning of a scene defined by the entrance of an actor (or actors) onto a stage previously unoccupied by any other actors, and the end of a scene marked by the exit of the actor(s) from the stage—and demarcated by choral odes that occurred in-between the scenes.¹³¹² As such, the various types of choral lyrics in tragedy are typically classified on the basis of their position within the structural framework of

¹³¹² See chapter 5, pp. 256–7.

the drama, i.e., choral lyrics that occur in-between scenes, and choral lyrics that occur during scenes. In short, Revelation lacks this basic structural pattern: enter actor(s)—actors' dialogue—exeunt actor(s)—choral strophic song/enter new actor(s)—actors' dialogue...and so on. Rather, Revelation is presented as a series of visions of the author, which are demarcated by similar introductory phrases, e.g., “And then I saw...”, “After this I looked...”, or “After this I heard...”¹³¹³ Thus, insofar as Revelation lacks, strictly speaking, this clear structure of ancient tragedy, Revelation's hymns are not as easily classified in the structural terms used to classify choral lyrics.

Despite this, it is nevertheless possible to evaluate Revelation's hymns in terms of the basic structure of choral lyrics in tragedy, i.e., their position vis-à-vis the surrounding content as presented in the visions, in order to see whether there are any similarities between Revelation's hymns and tragic choral lyrics in this respect. That is, the content of Revelation's visions can be considered in terms of the sequences of events that are presented therein, sequences which can be roughly delineated according to the occurrence of particular actions involving the same characters in the same time and place. For example, the sealing of the 144,000 constitutes a distinct sequence of events insofar as it conveys the actions of a particular group of characters in a defined time and place, which is clearly distinguished from the actions described in the surrounding narrative (i.e., the opening of the first six seals by the Lamb, the actions of the Living Creatures, etc., in 6:1–17, and the identification and praise of the Great Multitude in 7:9–17).¹³¹⁴ So, despite the fact that the structure of Revelation does not, strictly speaking, follow the

¹³¹³ The precise structure of Revelation is a matter of considerable debate amongst scholars.

¹³¹⁴ In some cases, a single dramatic sequence comprises an entire vision. For example, the opening of the six seals, the sealing of the 144,000, and the Great Multitude, each constitute an entire vision, as determined by the fact that each begins with an introductory formula, e.g., “After this I saw...”. In other instances, a single vision contains within it several dramatic sequences. For example, Rev 10:1–12:18 constitutes a single vision, yet the vision includes several distinct sequences of events, including the Angel with the little scroll (Rev 10:1–11), the Two Witnesses (Rev 11:1–14), the blowing of the seventh trumpet (11:15–19), and the Woman and the Dragon (Rev

structural principles of ancient tragedy, sequences of action in Revelation can be considered in roughly similar terms as those that are used to define *scenes* in ancient tragedy.¹³¹⁵ As such, they might be considered *dramatic* sequences of events. Considering the contents of Revelation's visions in this way constitutes a basis for evaluating Revelation's hymns structurally in terms of tragic choral lyrics, i.e., in terms of their position with respect to these sequences of dramatic events—that is, during dramatic sequences or in-between them.

Considered in this light, most of Revelation's hymns occur during a dramatic sequence of action, and in fact appear to constitute part of the action itself. For example, hymns are often sung by characters immediately after they have been introduced, as in Rev 4:8; 5:11–13; 7:9–10; 15:2–4, and/or presented as taking place during a particular dramatic action, as in Rev 4:11; 5:9–10; 7:11; 11:15–18; 15:2–4; 16:5–7. In only two instances do hymns occur at points that might be considered in-between dramatic sequences: Rev 12:10–12; 19:1–8. With this general structural observation in mind, it is possible to consider in more detail the hymns in light of various types of tragic choral lyrics.

On one hand, none of Revelation's hymns (neither those that appear during dramatic sequences, nor those that occur in-between dramatic sequences) bear any structural similarities with tragic choral lyrics that occur during scenes, including lyric dialogue, non-lyric dialogue, and other non-lyric choral utterances. That is, the hymns are in no way dialogical, and thus cannot be compared with either lyric or non-lyric dialogic utterances of the chorus. Moreover, insofar as they are lyric to the extent that they are sung and appear to be accompanied by instruments, and represent substantive theological reflections on the surrounding dramatic

12:1–18).

¹³¹⁵ Many scholars, especially those who have considered the dramatic character of other biblical texts, often simply characterize these sequences *as* scenes.

material, they do not resemble non-lyric, non-dialogical choral utterances.¹³¹⁶ This is not to say that no such elements ever appear in Revelation—in fact they do—but to point out that none of Revelation’s *hymns* functions in any of these ways. On the other hand, none of Revelation’s hymns resemble choral *parodos* or *exodos*. That is, the first hymn in Revelation does not function like a tragic *parodos* as a general introduction to the narrative, setting the stage (so to speak) for the characters and plot-lines, nor does the last hymn serve as a formal conclusion to the text.

This leaves one major type of choral lyric to be considered, the *stasimon*. Indeed, two hymns clearly resemble choral *stasima* insofar as they appear in-between dramatic sequences and demarcate one dramatic sequence from another (12:10–12; 19:1–8). That is, like choral *stasima*, which in Classical tragedy demarcated entire scenes,¹³¹⁷ and which in Roman tragedy demarcated entire acts and sometimes smaller dramatic units within acts,¹³¹⁸ these hymns appear to act as intermediary elements between dramatic sequences.¹³¹⁹

This evidence suggests that most of Revelation’s hymns are evaluated most profitably not in terms of tragic choral lyrics generally, but in terms of tragic choral *hymns* in particular. First, insofar as Revelation’s hymns conform to the formal standards of ancient hymns, as they consist of the sung praise of a god, and include an invocation of the god, a listing of divine epithets, attributes, and exploits, and (sometimes) a particular request, they much more clearly and closely resemble *hymns* that appear in tragedies, than they do choral lyrics in general.

¹³¹⁶ See chapter 5, pp. 264–9.

¹³¹⁷ See chapter 5, p.p. 261–2; cf. chapter 6, pp. 335–7.

¹³¹⁸ See chapter 6, pp. 340–1.

¹³¹⁹ Interestingly, many of those hymns that appear during dramatic scenes (i.e., Rev 4:8–11; 5:9–14; 11:15–18), also appear to function in structural terms like choral *stasima*, insofar as they occur at or very near the end of a dramatic sequence, and appear to constitute an intermediate element prior to the beginning of a new dramatic sequence. Such hymns cannot be characterized as *stasima*, however, simply on the basis of the fact that they each clearly occur during a dramatic sequence.

Second, the fact that hymns which occur during dramatic sequences in Revelation but bear no affinities with the most common types of choral lyrics during scenes, makes sense in light of the evidence of hymns in tragedy, as choral hymns in ancient tragedy never appeared in such forms.¹³²⁰ At the same time, the very fact that hymns do occur during dramatic sequences in Revelation is easily understood in terms of the conventions of tragic hymns, which regularly occurred during dramatic scenes. Even the two hymns that bear formal similarities with choral *stasima* can be reasonably considered *qua* tragic hymns, insofar as choral *stasima* were frequently comprised entirely of a hymn.¹³²¹ In other words, it makes just as much sense to consider these two hymns structurally in terms of tragic choral hymns that took the place of a choral *stasimon*, as it does to consider them in terms of choral *stasima* generally.

Finally, considering Revelation's hymns not in terms of choral lyrics generally, but in terms of hymns that appear in tragedy, makes sense of the fact that some of Revelation's hymns are sung by characters that do not in any way resemble a chorus. That is, insofar as tragic choral lyrics are by definition lyrics sung by a chorus, those hymns sung by individual characters in Revelation are not easily viewed in light of choral lyrics *ipso facto*. When considered in terms of tragic hymns, however, the fact that Revelation's hymns are sung by individuals makes better sense, as hymns were sometimes sung by individual characters in tragedy.

2. Revelation's Hymns in Terms of the Formal Characteristics of Tragic Choral Lyrics

Revelation's hymns bear neither the metrical nor dialectical hallmarks of tragic choral lyrics. Revelation's hymns do not exhibit any of the metrical properties distinctive to tragic choral lyrics in the Classical period, i.e., combinations of distinct metrical patterns to produce

¹³²⁰ See chapter 5, p. 274.

¹³²¹ See chapter 5, p. 274–5.

metrical *strophes*, and repetition of metrical *strophes* (*strophic responsion*).¹³²² This fact in and of itself does not necessarily preclude a consideration of the hymns in terms of choral lyrics, as the choral lyrics of Hellenistic and Roman tragedy likewise appear not to evince these distinctive metrical characteristics.¹³²³ However, Revelation's hymns do not exhibit any metrical properties whatsoever,¹³²⁴ and thus, Revelation's hymns cannot be evaluated at all in terms of the metrical characteristics of tragic choral lyrics from any period.

Nor do Revelation's hymns reveal traces of the Doric dialect that sometimes characterized the choral lyrics of Classical tragedy.¹³²⁵ Such evidence does not reveal much about Revelation's hymns in terms of tragic choral lyrics insofar as neither do tragic choral lyrics in the Hellenistic and Roman periods reveal any traces of the Doric dialect.¹³²⁶ Thus, if the hymns do in fact reflect formal elements of tragic choral lyrics, the lack of Doric coloring in Revelation's hymns may be explained in terms of the fact that Doric coloring in choral lyrics had altogether ceased by the Roman period.

While Revelation's hymns do not bear the metrical or dialectical marks of the choral lyrics of ancient tragedy, or tragic hymns for that matter, the musical dynamics may be likened to those that were associated with tragic choral lyrics. On one hand, insofar as each of Revelation's hymns are said to be sung, they might be considered in terms of tragic choral lyrics, the great majority of which were sung.¹³²⁷ Thus, as in ancient tragedy, in which the sung lyrics of the chorus constituted the majority of the musical elements in ancient tragic theater,¹³²⁸ so, too, do

¹³²² See chapter 5, pp. 271–2.

¹³²³ See chapter 6, pp. 342–3.

¹³²⁴ Nor for that matter do the surrounding narrative and dialogue in the text.

¹³²⁵ See chapter 5, pp. 272–3.

¹³²⁶ See chapter 6, pp. 342–3.

¹³²⁷ See chapter 5, pp. 275–6; cf. chapter 6, pp. 343–4.

¹³²⁸ This was the case especially in Classical tragedy, as the chorus provided nearly all of the musical elements. Despite the fact that in Hellenistic and Roman tragedy, lyric monodies were increasingly given to individual actors, the chorus appears to have continued to provide the majority of musicality by way of sung choral lyrics. See chapter

the hymns provide the majority of the musical elements in Revelation.¹³²⁹ On the other hand, the hymns are said to be accompanied by “harps”, i.e., κithάρα.¹³³⁰ The very fact that the hymns would have been accompanied by musical instruments accords with what is known about the performance of choral lyrics in tragedy, insofar as tragic choral lyrics were typically accompanied by an instrument, while the fact that the hymns are said to be accompanied by a *kithara*, in particular, might reflect knowledge of the performance of tragic choral lyrics in Roman tragedy. That is, while the *aulos* appears to have been most common in Classical tragedy, the *lyre* is said by Horace to have accompanied tragic choral lyrics in the Roman period.¹³³¹ Thus, the singing of the hymns in Revelation to the accompaniment of a *kithara*, which was in the family of stringed instruments that included the lyre, might be likened to the singing of choral lyrics in Roman tragedy.

While the musical dynamics of the hymns in Revelation bear affinities to the musical dynamics of choral lyrics in tragedy, they can just as easily be understood in terms of the musical dynamics of hymns in particular. There were not, as far as it is known, distinctive musical elements associated with hymns; rather, the same kinds of musical dynamics that would have accompanied choral lyrics in general would have accompanied hymns in particular. Thus, the musical dynamics that accompany the hymns in Revelation can be reasonably evaluated in terms of the musical dynamics of tragic hymns.

6, pp. 344–5.

¹³²⁹ The only other musical elements appear in chapter 18, in which various groups of characters sing laments over the destruction of “Babylon”. The clue that these laments were imagined to have been sung lies in the words that were used to characterize the laments. In one instance, a lament is introduced in the very same terms as the hymns, i.e., Rev 18:4: καὶ ἤκουσα ἄλλην φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ λέγουσαν. In every other instance, the words used to introduce the laments suggest that the laments were imagined to have been sung: ἔκραξεν (18:2); κλαίουσιν καὶ κόπονται (18:9); κλαίουσιν καὶ πενθοῦσιν (18:11); κλαίοντες καὶ πενθοῦντες (18:15, 18).

¹³³⁰ Rev. 5:8; 15:2.

¹³³¹ See chapter 6, p. 345.

3. Revelation's Hymns in terms of the Functions of Tragic Choral Lyrics vis-à-vis the Surrounding Dramatic Action

It remains to consider Revelation's hymns with respect to their function(s) vis-à-vis the surrounding content, in terms of the categories used to describe the functions of choral lyrics vis-à-vis the surrounding dramatic action. It will be recalled that all tragic choral lyrics can be divided roughly into two functional categories: (1) Lyrics that move forward the dramatic action; and (2) Lyrics that pause the dramatic action in order to frame it in a particular light. In what follows, Revelation's hymns will be considered in terms of the extent to which they function, or do not function, in each of these ways.

A. Revelation's Hymns Moving Forward the Dramatic Action

i. Introducing Characters

Introducing characters was one of the most frequent and consistent contributions of the chorus in ancient tragedy.¹³³² Simply put, none of Revelation's hymns function to introduce characters in the text, in any way.

ii. Synopsis of Present Circumstances

None of Revelation's hymns can be said to offer synopses of the present circumstances of the characters and/or plot in a manner similar to choral lyrics in tragedy. There are indeed (many) instances in which the hymns include comments that relate to the plot, but always in such a way as to contextualize information that has already been presented in the narrative. In other words, the hymns could be said to relate to the present circumstances primarily insofar as they comment upon the surrounding narrative, which constitutes an entirely separate category of choral function, and which will be taken up below.

¹³³² See chapter 5, pp. 281–2.

However, it will be recalled that oftentimes during the course of offering a synopsis of the current dramatic circumstances, the Classical tragic chorus would also offer a survey of past events that had led to the present circumstances of the characters.¹³³³ Inasmuch as there are several instances in which past events of the characters are revealed in the hymns of Revelation, they might be considered in terms of tragic choral lyrics in this respect. For example, the past creative acts of God are highlighted in 4:11, God is said to have given blood to drink to those who have shed the blood of the saints and the prophets in 16:6, and God is said to have judged the Great Prostitute, and avenged on her the blood of his servants in 19:2. Likewise, the salvific act of the Lamb, i.e., Christ, on the cross is announced in Rev 5:9–10. It is critical note that these descriptions of the past activities of these characters function differently depending on the context in which they occur. In most cases, hymnic descriptions of past events refer to actions that have just occurred in the text. So, for instance, the claim that God has judged the Great Prostitute and avenged the blood of his servants in 19:2 refers specifically to the events narrated immediately preceding the hymn in 18:1–24. Likewise, the claim that God has given blood to drink to those who have shed the blood of the saints and prophets in 16:6 refers to the destruction unleashed by the pouring of the bowls of wrath in the surrounding narrative (16:1–21). Insofar as such hymnic accounts of past actions of the characters refer to events that have just been described in the narrative, they cannot be considered in terms of choral lyrics that *introduce* background information relevant to the plot, but rather in terms of choral lyrics that frame the surrounding action in a particular way.

There are, however, two examples in which hymns introduce background information of the sort that is not merely a description of events that have just taken place in the narrative. For example, in Rev 4:11, the Elders claim that God is worthy to receive “glory, honor, and power”

¹³³³ See chapter 5, pp. 282–3.

on account of the fact that God “created all things.” Likewise, in Rev 5:9–10, the Elders and Creatures proclaim that the Lamb, i.e., the exalted Christ, is worthy to open the seals on the scroll on account of the salvific work that was accomplished on the cross. While these hymns do clearly provide what could be characterized as background information about these divine characters, it is critical to note that the manner in which this background information is presented conforms specifically to the convention of *hymnic* choral lyrics, and not choral lyrics generally. That is, background information presented in non-hymnic choral lyrics tended to be expansive, touching on a wide-range of topics that related to the characters and their plot-lines, and most often covering quite a long period of time. This information provided a kind of general setting for the entire plot, and in this way could be said to advance the dramatic plot. By contrast, content that could be characterized as background information in hymnic choral lyrics tended to highlight very specific attributes of a deity, or particular exploits of a god(dess) that occurred at one particular time,¹³³⁴ and tended to relate very specifically to a particular dramatic event. In other words, background information relating to the past exploits of a god(dess) in a choral hymn functioned more specifically to frame the immediate surrounding dramatic action in a mythological-theological light.

Thus, insofar as the hymns in Rev 4:11 and 5:9–10 convey specific exploits of the deities (i.e., God’s creation of the world, and Christ’s salvific activity on the cross), as they relate to very particular events in the action (i.e., as justification for God’s cosmic sovereignty, and the Lamb’s heavenly investiture, respectively), and not general information relating to the broader plot of Revelation itself, they much more closely resemble hymnic choral lyrics in tragedy than choral lyrics in general.

¹³³⁴ This tragic phenomenon appears to have been a natural outgrowth of the fact that this kind of information (i.e., a listing of divine attributes, past exploits of the deity, etc.) was intrinsic to the hymnic genre itself.

iii. Foreshadowing

In a few instances, Revelation's hymns could be said to foreshadow future events that take place in the text. The clearest example occurs in chapter 12, during the hymn that occurs after Michael and his angels have expelled the Dragon from heaven and cast him onto the earth (Rev 12:10–12). While the beginning of the hymn frames the expulsion of the Dragon from heaven in theological terms (i.e., to be the result of the coming of God's kingdom), the end of the hymn casts the Dragon's time on earth in a foreboding light:

But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short! (Rev 12:12)

The last line of the hymn thus appears to foreshadow both the Dragon's impending persecution of the Christians, which is alluded to as a "war" in 12:17, as well as the ultimate demise of the Dragon, which is described in Rev 20:1–3, 7–10. Insofar as the hymn creates a sense of foreboding over an event that takes place later in the narrative, it can be evaluated in light of choral lyrics that regularly perform a similar function in ancient tragedy.¹³³⁵

Foreshadowing likewise occurs in two other hymns in Revelation. At the end of the hymn in Rev 11:17–18, the coming of God's "wrath" is proclaimed, and described in terms of a coming of the time for God's "judgment of the dead," which includes both "rewarding [God's] servants..." and "destroying those who destroy the earth." This hymnic announcement clearly presages God's eschatological judgment, which constitutes the culmination of Revelation, including specifically the rewards for God's people (e.g., Rev 20:4–6; 21:5–8, 22–27; 22:1–5),

¹³³⁵ See chapter 5, pp. 283–4; cf. chapter 6, pp. 354–5.

and the ultimate destruction of God’s adversaries (Rev 17: 1–18:24; 19:17–21; 20:1–3, 7–10).¹³³⁶ Likewise, at the end of the hymn in Rev 15:3–4 includes a rhetorical question, “Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?”, and eventually followed by a pronouncement that “all nations will come and worship before [God]”, elements which appear to allude to the reality described in the New Jerusalem at the end of Revelation, in which the city is filled with the glory of God and the Lamb, and occupied by all those who worship them (Rev 22:1–5).

Insofar as each of these hymns clearly foreshadows events that take place later in the text, they can be likened to tragic choral lyrics that perform a similar function, though these examples differ from most tragic choral lyrics in this regard in two particular ways. First, the fact that the hymns foreshadow events that are not altogether ominous constitutes a departure from the conventions of choral lyrics in tragedy, wherein the tragic chorus consistently foreshadowed ominous (“tragic”) events. Second, these hymns differ from choral lyrics insofar as they each presage very specific events that take place later in the text, in the precise terms that are eventually used to characterize the future events themselves. In ancient tragedy, much more often than not, foreshadowing is created through vague allusions, which create a general sense of foreboding or impending disaster.

While future dramatic events might be foreshadowed by means of a number of types of choral lyrics (e.g., *parodos*, *stasimon*, lyric-dialogue, non-lyric choral utterances during scenes, etc.), it was sometimes the case that information was foreshadowed by means of choral hymns. For example, the impending battle for the city of Thebes is portended by the chorus by means of a hymn in Aeschylus’ *Sept.* 109–181. Likewise, the destruction about to be unleashed by Phaedra’s unholy love for Hippolytos is foreshadowed in a choral hymn in Euripides, *Hipp.* 525–563. As these examples demonstrate, choral hymns sometimes included contents that

¹³³⁶ See chapter 2, pp. 82–7.

foreshadowed events that would take place later in the play. Thus, the function of several of Revelation's hymns to foreshadow future dramatic events need not be understood in terms of the functions of choral lyrics generally, but can be reasonably understood in terms of this function of tragic hymns in particular.

iv. An All-Purpose Dramatic Tool: Dramatic Audience, and Instrument for Eliciting
the Thoughts of the Characters, and/or Providing Relevant Dramatic
Information to the Characters

It will be recalled that oftentimes the tragic chorus, on account of its constant presence in the *orchestra*, functioned to accommodate dramatic action without itself playing an appreciable role in the action. The chorus in such instances could be said to appear essentially as a pretense for accomplishing some other dramatic end, i.e., to provide an audience for a character's speech, to elicit speech or dialogue of the characters, and/or to convey some piece of dramatic information to a character.¹³³⁷ Insofar as each of Revelation's hymns are sung in response to various events that take place in the text, the groups of characters who sing them might be envisioned as a kind of dramatic audience to these events. In this way, the characters themselves might be compared with choruses, which likewise functioned as a dramatic audience for the speeches, dialogue, and action in tragedy. So, too, in one instance does a member of one of these groups of characters provide dramatic information to another character, i.e., one of the Elders divulges the identity of the Great Multitude in Rev 7:13–17, and by so doing evokes the tragic chorus (or chorus-leader¹³³⁸), which regularly provided relevant dramatic information to

¹³³⁷ See chapter 5, p. 285.

¹³³⁸ It is widely assumed that only the chorus-leader, and not the chorus as a whole, participated in dialogue with the actor(s). See chapter 5, p. 270.

characters.¹³³⁹ While these elements may reveal something about the role of the characters in Revelation in terms of a tragic chorus, they say nothing about the extent to which the hymns themselves might be considered in terms of tragic choral lyrics, as they do not involve the hymns.

The hymns themselves do not function as a means for achieving these kinds of dramatic effects that were achieved by means of choral lyrics in ancient tragedy. For example, the hymns never appear in Revelation solely as a pretext for eliciting speech or dialogue of other characters. Nor is information ever revealed to one of the other characters by means of a hymn. Thus, Revelation's hymns do not resemble tragic choral lyrics to advance the plot in these ways.

v. Summary of the Functions of Revelation's Hymns to Advance the Plot

A consideration of Revelation's hymns, in light of the functions of the tragic choral lyrics to advance the dramatic plot (i.e., to function as a kind of "narrator") yields mixed results. To the extent that several of the hymns do function to foreshadow events that take place later in the text, they bear similarities to tragic choral lyrics that perform a similar function. Moreover, the hymns convey background information about the divine characters in ways that resemble tragic choral hymns in particular. However, with respect to "narrative" functions, the similarities between Revelation's hymns and tragic choral lyrics end there. While there are instances in which various characters in Revelation perform roles that resemble those "narrative" functions of the tragic chorus (i.e., by offering hymnic responses to dramatic events in ways that suggest that those who sing them constitute a kind of audience to the events, and in one instance by providing relevant dramatic information to another character), the hymns themselves demonstrate no such resemblances to tragic choral lyrics in these ways. The hymns simply do not function in most of

¹³³⁹ See chapter 5, p. 285.

the ways that choral lyrics did in this regard, i.e., in the role of a *narrator*, to advance the dramatic plot.

The absence of such narrative functions in Revelation can be understood at least in part as a result of the fact that the function(s) of the chorus as a kind of narrator in ancient tragedy were rendered unnecessary in Revelation by the fact that Revelation was not a drama *per se*. In the Greek theatre, the chorus was often given “narrative” functions on account of the fact that it was the most convenient character, and in some cases the *only* character, to perform such functions. For example, given an empty stage prior to the beginning of a scene, the chorus was the only character who could introduce a(nother) character onto the stage. By virtue of the fact that Revelation was not limited by the conventions of the theatre—i.e., performed in a theatre, nor limited in the number of characters that could be present in a scene—many of those narrative functions that were required of the chorus in tragedy were simply unnecessary, or could be accomplished by other means. For example, characters did not need to be introduced onto an empty stage for the benefit of a live audience; rather, they could be introduced by the Seer himself as part of his description of the vision-sequence. Nor was a chorus required to provide a dramatic exigency for character speeches or dialogue, on account of the fact that it was the only available character to do so. Finally, updates on the current “dramatic” circumstances could be provided by many other means (often by way of a first-person account of the Seer himself).

While Revelation’s hymns do not bear similarities with many of the narrative functions of tragic choral lyrics to advance the dramatic plot generally, the ways in which the hymns function to move forward the plot do resemble the functions of tragic choral hymns in particular. That is, while tragic choral hymns did not function to introduce characters, provide synopses of current dramatic circumstances, offer a survey of relevant background information relevant to

the current dramatic circumstances, or provide exigencies for various dramatic events (e.g., eliciting speech and/or dialogue of the other characters, or providing information to the characters), they did sometimes include contents that functioned to foreshadow events that took place later in the play, and to provide relevant background information (e.g., divine attributes, past exploits of the god(dess)) of the deities to whom the hymn was addressed.

B. Revelation's Hymns Casting the Surrounding Action in a Particular Light

It will be recalled that tragic choral lyrics often operated to a certain extent outside of the dramatic action in order to say something about it, i.e., to offer an emotional response to a dramatic event, and/or to frame the surrounding action in a mythological-historical, philosophical, or mythological-theological light, and that such choral lyrics functioned as a kind of commentary on the surrounding action.¹³⁴⁰ Revelation's hymns can be profitably viewed in these terms.

On one hand, as exegetical analysis has revealed, each hymn constitutes a positive response to events that are narrated as part of preceding dramatic sequence. For example, hymns are sung in response to the cosmic enthronement of God and the investiture of the Lamb in chapters 4 and 5, respectively,¹³⁴¹ the depiction of the salvation of the Christian martyrs in heaven in chapter 7,¹³⁴² the destruction of the enemies of God and the Lamb in chapter 11,¹³⁴³ and so on. Insofar as Revelation's hymns constitute joyous responses to these dramatic sequences, they can be viewed in terms of tragic choral lyrics that function similarly.¹³⁴⁴ On the other hand, exegesis of the hymns demonstrates that Revelation's hymns clearly and consistently

¹³⁴⁰ See chapter 5, pp. 285–305.

¹³⁴¹ See chapter 2, pp. 42–63.

¹³⁴² See chapter 2, pp. 63–72.

¹³⁴³ See chapter 2, pp. 72–88.

¹³⁴⁴ See chapter 5, pp. 287–9.

function to cast these dramatic sequences in Christian mythological-theological terms. For example, the enthronement of God as cosmic sovereign is said to be the result of God's creation of the world (Rev 4:9–10),¹³⁴⁵ while the Lamb's (i.e., Christ's) heavenly investiture is said to be the result of his salvific death on the cross (Rev 5:9–10).¹³⁴⁶ Likewise, the depiction of the expulsion of the Dragon (i.e., Satan) from heaven in Rev 12:1–9 is characterized in the subsequent hymn as a result of the cosmic sovereignty of God and the Lamb (Rev 12:10), the salvific death of Christ, and the testimony of martyred Christians (Rev 12:11–12),¹³⁴⁷ while the pouring of the seven bowls (plagues) upon the earth in chapter 15 is cast as the just and proper retributive “judgment(s)” of God (Rev 16:5).¹³⁴⁸ And so on. Thus, insofar as Revelation's hymns frame the surrounding dramatic sequences in mythological-theological terms, they bear striking similarities with tragic choral lyrics.

However, Revelation's hymns *only* ever frame the surrounding dramatic sequences in these terms. The hymns simply do not touch on topics that could be characterized as philosophical, and never include surveys of past mythological-historical events, and as such could not be said to frame the surrounding dramatic sequences in philosophical or mythological-historical terms. Thus, to the extent that Revelation's hymns only ever frame the surrounding dramatic sequences in mythological-terms, they are considered best not in terms of tragic choral lyrics in general but rather in terms of tragic choral hymns in particular, which likewise frame the surrounding dramatic action regularly in mythological-theological terms.¹³⁴⁹

¹³⁴⁵ See chapter 2, pp. 45–51.

¹³⁴⁶ See chapter 2, pp. 53–62.

¹³⁴⁷ See chapter 2, pp. 95–100.

¹³⁴⁸ See chapter 2, pp. 117–122.

¹³⁴⁹ See chapter 5, pp. 299–302.

III. The “Voice” in Revelation’s Hymns

Revelation’s hymns can be considered in terms of the categories used to evaluate the various “voices” reflected in tragic choral lyrics, i.e., the “voice of the poet,” the “voice of the community,” etc.¹³⁵⁰ At one level, the content of Revelation’s hymns likewise very often accord with what might be expected of the characters who sing them, given the dramatic situations in which they take place. For example, the occurrence of hymns sung by heavenly angels in Revelation makes sense in light of the fact that angels were regularly depicted in antecedent traditions singing hymns of praise to God as part of heavenly worship. Likewise, it makes sense that the 24 Elders and Living Creatures, who are portrayed as entities within the heavenly temple of God, and continually worshipping before their heavenly throne, would utter hymns of praise in response to various acts of God and the Lamb. Insofar as the contents of the hymns make sense simply as the lyrics of *characters* within the text, they might be considered in terms of the “intra-dramatic” voice of the characters in ancient tragedy, i.e., lyrics that accord with what might be expected of dramatic characters in a given situation.¹³⁵¹

At another level, the contents of Revelation’s hymns may also reflect the “voices” of various persons and/or communities amongst which Revelation circulated. If, on one hand, Revelation’s hymns represent actual hymns that were sung by early Christian communities, including those communities amongst which Revelation circulated,¹³⁵² they would directly reflect the mythological-theological sentiments of these communities. In this way, Revelation’s hymns could be considered in terms of tragic choral lyrics that likewise represented the sentiments, values, and beliefs of the community of spectators that watched tragedy. In other words, like tragic choral lyrics, Revelation’s hymns might be said to represent the “voice of the

¹³⁵⁰ See chapter 5, pp. 306–15; cf. chapter 6, pp. 371–4.

¹³⁵¹ See chapter 5, pp. 306–7.

¹³⁵² See chapter 1, pp. 6–7.

community.”¹³⁵³ If, on the other hand, Revelation’s hymns represent not songs of the community but rather original compositions of the author himself, the contents of the hymns might be considered in light of choral lyrics in which the “voice of the poet” is reflected. That is, just as choral lyrics are thought to have sometimes served as a mouthpiece for the tragic poet himself,¹³⁵⁴ the hymns in Revelation might likewise represent the mythological-theological ideas of the author.

Whether or not the contents of the hymns can be traced to any particular extra-dramatic “voice” (the community, the author, etc.) the hymns can be compared with tragic choral lyrics in terms of their function to lead the audience towards a particular understanding of the surrounding dramatic action. It will be recalled that, insofar as the tragic chorus often offered direct responses to, and reflections upon, the surrounding dramatic action, it constituted a kind of intra-dramatic spectator to these events, i.e. an “implied audience.”¹³⁵⁵ As such, the responses of this intra-dramatic audience to the dramatic events are thought to have functioned to elicit similar responses from the actual audience, i.e., to sympathize with the protagonist, to adopt a particular mythological-theological interpretation of the events, etc. Thus, the hymns in Revelation, as direct responses to, and reflections upon, the surrounding dramatic action, may have functioned likewise to lead the audience of Revelation to adopt the mythological-theological perspective(s) it offers on the dramatic action in the text.

The audience may not have always (or ever) adopted the mythological-theological perspectives reflected in the hymns. For example, one who did not believe that the Roman Empire was wholly corrupt, and under the control of Satan, would not have likely responded sympathetically to hymns that celebrate Rome’s ultimate destruction. Likewise, one who did not

¹³⁵³ See chapter 5, pp. 311–4.

¹³⁵⁴ See chapter 5, pp. 310–1; cf. chapter 6, p. 373.

¹³⁵⁵ See chapter 5, pp. 315–6.

believe that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth had been exalted to share in God's cosmic sovereignty heavenly would not likely have ascribed to such views promulgated in the hymns. At any rate, the Christian mythological-theological perspectives reflected in the hymns constituted a kind of "voice" against which the audience could negotiate its own views as they relate to the contents of the dramatic visions.

IV. Conclusions

The preceding analysis of Revelation's hymns in light of tragic choral lyrics, and consideration of those who sing the hymns in terms of tragic choruses, has yielded mixed results. On the one hand, only some of those who sing the hymns can be reasonably viewed in terms of tragic choruses. The 24 Elders bear the most striking similarities to tragic choruses, as they not only represent a homogeneous group in terms of age and gender, but in fact are identified specifically in terms which very often characterize the chorus in tragedy, i.e., as *elders*, and are clearly depicted in a subordinate relationship with the main characters in the text. Moreover, the number of elders can be considered in light of the number of characters that might have been represented by a tragic chorus (especially one that existed only in narrative form and did not actually appear on a stage), while their circular formation and orientation around a central object certainly evokes common formations of the choruses in tragedy.

Other groups of characters who sing hymns in Revelation likewise bear some similarities with tragic choruses, though not as consistently nor as clearly as the 24 Elders. The very fact that *groups* of characters are depicted hymns itself evokes choruses in tragedy. However, the formal characteristics of these groups do not as clearly match tragic choruses. For example, the number of Living Creatures—four—evokes the size of tragic choruses in the Roman period, although the numbers of the other groups are never revealed. Moreover, while the homogeneity

of some of the groups in terms of identity, gender, age, status, and function might be inferred from their descriptions in the text, they are not identified with the generic terms that are consistently used to characterize tragic choruses. In terms of spatial orientation, the circular formations of the Living Creatures and Myriads of Angels around a central object resembles the (sometimes) circular orientation of tragic choruses, though none of the other groups who sing hymns are presented in such terms. Thus, while none of these groups resembles tragic choruses as clearly as do the 24 Elders, they do bear some similarities, and as such might tentatively be considered in terms of secondary choruses in tragedy.

However, not every hymn in Revelation is sung by a group that could be identified as a kind of chorus. Each of the hymns in Rev 16 is sung by individuals that could in no way be identified as a chorus. Thus, whether or not some groups of characters or others bear resemblances with tragic choruses, such considerations do not account for the fact that these two hymns are sung by characters that absolutely do *not* resemble a tragic chorus.

An evaluation of the hymns themselves in terms of the forms and functions of tragic choral lyrics yields more conclusive results. In sum, if the forms and functions of Revelation's hymns are viewed in terms of tragic lyrics at all, they are most profitably considered not in terms of choral lyrics, but in terms of tragic hymns.

First, Revelation's hymns do not reflect the varieties of forms of tragic choral lyrics. For example, Revelation's hymns bear no similarities with the major categories of tragic choral lyrics that regularly occur during scenes. Moreover, none of the hymns resemble the choral lyrics of the choral *parodos* or *exodos*, and only two hymns can reasonably be considered in terms of choral *stasima*, Rev 12:10–12 and 19:1–9, insofar as they occur in-between dramatic sequences.

While only two of Revelation's hymns are profitably evaluated in terms of the most common types of choral lyrics, all of Revelation's hymns are very easily evaluated in terms of the formal properties of tragic *hymns* in particular. Revelation's hymns conform to the formal standards of ancient hymns, as they appeared in tragedy and elsewhere, insofar as they consist of the sung praise of a god, and include an invocation of the god, a listing of divine epithets, attributes, and exploits, and (sometimes) a particular request. Moreover, the hymns are sung by a variety of characters (i.e., not just those that could be viewed as a kind of chorus), and appear intermittently both during and in-between dramatic sequences. Finally, insofar as Revelation's hymns are depicted as being sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments, they can be viewed in light of tragic hymns that are likewise sung to instrumental accompaniment.

Second, Revelation's hymns reflect neither the breadth nor depth of the functions of tragic choral lyrics, either in terms of the function of choral lyrics to advance the dramatic plot, or to frame the dramatic sequences in a particular context. On one hand, the hymns never function to introduce characters, provide a synopsis of the present dramatic circumstances, or as a means for accomplishing various dramatic effects, e.g., as a pretext for eliciting speech or dialogue of other characters, or for revealing information to one of the other characters. On the other hand, Revelation's hymns never function to frame the surrounding dramatic sequences in a mythological-historical or philosophical context.

Still, some of Revelation's hymns function in ways that can be considered in light of the functions of tragic choral lyrics. For example, several hymns could be said to advance the dramatic plot insofar as they foreshadow future dramatic events. Moreover, each of Revelation's hymns cast the surrounding dramatic action in a mythological-theological light, by contextualizing aspects of the surrounding dramatic action in particularly Christian

mythological-theological terms. Thus, insofar as Revelation's hymns bear these particular affinities with choral lyrics in tragedy, they are best explained not in terms of the functions of choral lyrics in general, but in terms of the functions of tragic hymns, as tragic hymns likewise function in these very ways.

Finally, insofar as Revelation's hymns can be viewed in light of hymns in ancient tragedy, they might also be considered in terms of the intra- and extra-dramatic voices they represent. At one level, inasmuch as Revelation's hymns constitute responses to events in the text, they make sense simply as the lyrics of *characters* within the text, and as such can be considered in terms of the "intra-dramatic" voice of the characters in ancient tragedy. At the same time, the hymns most likely reflect the mythological-theological sentiments of the author, and/or Christian communities to whom Revelation was addressed, and in these ways can be viewed in light of tragic choral hymns that likewise represent the mythological-theological sentiments of the author and/or the community. Finally, Revelation's hymns can be viewed in terms of their function to lead the audience of Revelation to adopt the mythological-theological perspective offered in response to the events depicted in the text, and can in this way be evaluated in terms of the function of an "implied audience" in tragedy.

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