CHAPTER NINE

ION OF CHIOS AND THE POLITICS OF POLYCHORDIA

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Introduction

In the intensely politicized musical culture of Classical Athens, where few aspects of the production or consumption of mousike were ideologically neutral or purely aesthetic, the musical instrument, the organon, always occupies a most critical position; it is the material object, visually symbolic, around which the changing socio-political dramas of musical experience can be scripted. As musicologist Kevin Dawe has put it, musical instruments are “part of active and potent symbol systems. They exist in webs of culture, entangled in a range of discourses and political intrigues, and they occupy engendered and status defining positions”.¹ This assertion is meant as a wake-up call to collectors and curators—who typically fetishize instruments as purely aesthetic objets d’art or antique mechanical curiosities—and to contemporary musicology, until fairly recently an insistently ‘apolitical’ discipline, based in great measure on Romantic notions of music as a socially autonomous art, that has long neglected (or resisted) serious consideration of the sociology of instruments.² But no-one familiar with the representation of musical instruments in fifth and fourth century Athenian art and literature will be surprised by Dawe’s contentions; certainly, no-one who has read Peter Wilson’s rich studies of the manifold webs of culture in which the aulos and the lyra are entangled in Athens, of the wide-ranging ideological projects and social strategies in which these ‘simple’ reed and stringed instruments are put to deliberate use by Athenian poets, musicians, politicians and intellectuals.³ Wilson has shown definitively

¹ Dawe (2001) 221.
² This has been changing with some rapidity, however. See especially McClary (1991), Leppert (1993) and Waksman (1999), an important study of the electric guitar in twentieth century American popular culture.
the extent to which *organa*, always exceeding their materiality, constitute dynamic, contested complexes of ‘extra-musical’ ideas about cultural power, social formation, political order and identity.

In this chapter I would like to consider a short poetic text that raises a number of intriguing questions about the changing social significance of the lyre in the later fifth century. We owe its preservation to the second century AD music theorist Cleonides. In his *Introduction to Harmonics*, Cleonides undertakes a survey of the semantics of the word *tonos*. Arguing that *tonos* can be used in the sense of *phthongos* “musical note” (like that produced by a plucked string), he cites these elegiac couplets attributed to an “Ion” (93 Leurini = 32 West = Cleonid. *Isag. harm*. 12, p. 202 Jan = Euclid. 8, 216 Menge; Manuel Bryennius *Harmonica* p. 116 Jonker):

> ένδεκάχορδοι λύραι, δεκαβάμονα τάξιν ἔχουσα\(^4\)
> καὶ οὐσίας ἀρμονίας τριώδους\(^4\)
> πρὶν μὲν στ’ ἐπτάτονον ψάλλων διὰ τέσσαρα πάντες
> Ἐλλήνες, σπάνιον μούσαν ἀειράμενοι.

Eleven-stringed lyre, having a ten-step arrangement and concordant road-junctures of attunement: previously all Greeks plucked you at seven notes, through (two) tetrachords, raising a poor music/Muse.\(^6\)

Probably the beginning of a poem that would have continued for at least one more couplet,\(^7\) these lines have received a fair amount of scholarly attention over the past century, much of it focused on two problems. First, the question of authenticity and authorship—is Cleonides’ “Ion” Ion of Chios? Wilamowitz-Moellendorff thought that the eleven-stringed lyre celebrated in the poem was only invented (by the Milesian citharode Timotheus) long after the Chian’s death c. 422 BC. Accordingly, Wilamowitz-Moellendorff denied Ion’s authorship, putting forward another candidate instead, the fourth century Ion of Samos, an obscure composer of epigrams. However, these arguments have been satisfactorily refuted, and it is now generally agreed that “Ion” is the famed Ion of Chios.\(^8\)

\(^4\) ἔχουσα áei fere codd.: ἔχουσα Meibom, ἔχουσα Diels.
\(^5\) τάξις συμφ. codd.: καὶ West.
\(^6\) The translation is much indebted to the commentary of West (1992c) 23–8. On the Atticism, see West (1974) 174.
\(^7\) Α (non) de clause must have answered the *prin men* in line 3.