Objects in (Re)performances of Choral Song

Three-quarters of the way through their performance, the chorus of Spartan *parthenoi* singing and dancing Alkman's first song (fr. 1 *PMGF*) come to some of the most notorious lines in pre-classical Greek literature: ταὶ Πεληάδες γὰρ ἇμιν / Ὀρθρίαι φᾶρος φεροίσαις / νύκτα δι᾽ἀμβροσίαν ἅτε σήριον / ἄστρον ἀυηρομέναι μάχονται ("For the Pleiades, rising through the ambrosial night like the star Sirius, fight against us as we bear a *pharos* to Orthria," 1.60-63). The meaning of nearly every word in this passage has been called into question at some point since the *editio princeps* of 1863. Scholars have disagreed over whether Πεληάδες refers to stars, doves, part of the chorus, or a rival chorus; which grammatical case ὀρθρίαι is in and whether it refers to Artemis Orthia, Hera, Eileithyia, Helen, an unknown goddess, or means simply "of the dawn"; what accent should be placed on φαρος and whether it refers to a robe or, as the scholiast writes, a plow; what associations may accompany σήριον; whether ἀυηρομέναι (= ἀειρομέναι) is transitive or intransitive; and what kind of literal or metaphorical fighting we are to see in μάχονται. Amid so much uncertainty, I would point out that the only thing we can say for sure about this passage is that in it the chorus describes itself as in the process of carrying an object to a divinity. Whatever it is, the *pharos* is at the center of a ritual act of a familiar type with a particular meaning in its performative setting and, in the double-presence of self-referentiality, an object present before the audience's eyes has made its way into the language they hear as well.

Objects, such as the *pharos*, that appear to have been incorporated into choral performances are the subject of this paper. Where the use of objects or props on the tragic stage has recently attracted attention (e.g., Mueller 2010), here I survey the corpus of pre-classical songs sung by free-standing choruses to identify other instances of objects employed in

performances. Specifically, I analyze songs' references to objects with respect to their deixis, using overt linguistic markers like demonstratives as well as subtler devices, such as what have been called "contact verbs" (Martin 2004), to distinguish and discuss objects that are treated as present in its performance by a song's language. After considering other songs that refer to the conveyance of ritual objects (e.g., the πυλεών Astymeloisa bears at Alkman fr. 3.65 *PMGF* and the two references to δάφνη in Pindar's *daphnephorikon*, fr. 94b SM), I observe that *epinikia* seem not to make any such references to objects—they mention only musical instruments and crowns, which I read most often as metonymy for song and celebration.

From this I argue that a song's likelihood of drawing attention to objects used in its performance reflects implicit expectations about the circumstances of its reperformance. Ritual songs like Alkman's *partheneia*, performed according to a seasonally-recurring calendar (Calame 2001, Nagy 1990) and grounded in local community (Stehle 1996) can take for granted a great deal about future performances, from objects of ritual importance to perhaps even the level of costuming (cf. the finery listed at fr. 1.65 ff.); these details may indeed be preserved by the song. Conversely, I argue that the absence of objects from *epinikia* reflects their composers' and celebrants' hope that the songs, untethered to any one place, will find diverse reperformance scenarios throughout the Greek world, needing only a lyre, an aulos, or a crown – things found at any performance – to be successful.

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