

The Classical Review

<http://journals.cambridge.org/CAR>

Additional services for *The Classical Review*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



Notes on a Fragment of the Music of Orestes

C. F. Abdy Williams

The Classical Review / Volume 8 / Issue 07 / July 1894, pp 313 - 317

DOI: 10.1017/S0009840X00196532, Published online: 27 October 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0009840X00196532

How to cite this article:

C. F. Abdy Williams (1894). Notes on a Fragment of the Music of *Orestes*. The Classical Review, 8, pp 313-317 doi:10.1017/S0009840X00196532

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

tion of manuscript Scriptures whether Greek or Hebrew.

2. All admit that Hebrew was not the vernacular, but Robertson Smith's readers will know whether Bleek should call it a dead language, while, for reasons indicated, the unintelligibility of Hebrew in the Synagogues seems to me overstated. What Professor Roberts must prove and has not proved is that the unlearned had a *book* of Scripture in their hands. I regard it as established that they knew Holy Writ by oral translation and exposition in Aramaic.

3. Whether Mr. Marshall can establish an Aramaic *Urevangelium* or not, he lends probability to an Aramaic substratum for

many elements of our Gospels. I am more troubled than Professor Roberts by the differences of our Greek Gospels, but I seem to have strained somewhat his words: 'still possess His teachings in the form in which they were originally uttered' (p. 99). I must add that some of us do not regard the Fourth Gospel and the Book of Acts as accurate historical sources. Granting, finally, that in the absence of an Aramaic Old Testament only a Greek version could be in general circulation, the necessity of Professor Roberts' final inference does not penetrate to this side of the Atlantic.

F. A. CHRISTIE.

Meadville, Pa., U.S.A.

NOTES ON A FRAGMENT OF THE MUSIC OF *ORESTES*.

THE *Mittheilungen aus der Sammlung der Papyrus Erzherzog Rainer*, vol. 5, part 3, published in August 1892, contains a facsimile of the musical notation of a small portion of the first chorus of *Orestes*. The MS. is attributed by Dr. Wessely to the age of Augustus, at which time Dionysius of Halicarnassus is known to have possessed a 'score' of this play.

The fragment contains the following words and musical signs:—

Ex. 1.

1	ΠΡ	ϸ	Ρ	Φ	Π									
2	ΥΡ	Ο	ΜΑΙ	Ζ	ΜΑΤΕΡ	Ο	ϸ							
3	Ζ		Ι	Ζ	Ε									
4	Α	Κ	Χ	Ε	Υ	Ε	Ι	Ζ	Ο	Μ	Ε	Γ	Α	ϸ
5	Π		Ρ	ϸ		Ι	Ζ							
6	ϸ	Ε	Μ	Β	Ο	Τ	Ο	Ι	ϸ	Ζ	Α	Ν	Α	
7	ϸ	Ρ	Π		ϸ	Ρ	Ζ	Φ		ϸ				
8	ϸ	Α	Κ	Α	Τ	Ο	Υ	Θ	Ο	Α	ϸ	Ι	Ν	Α
9	(.)	Π	Ρ		Π									
10	Κ	Α	Τ	Ε	Κ	Λ	Υ	ϸ	Ε	Ν	ϸ	ϸ		
11				Ζ	Ι	Ζ								
12	Ν	ϸ	ϸ	ϸ	Ω	Ω	ϸ	Π	Ο	Ν	Τ			
												?		
13	Ρ					ϸ	Ρ	Γ						
14	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	Ο	ϸ	Ω	Ν			

There is not sufficient material here to attempt any reconstruction of the melody; but we obtain a certain amount of insight

NO. LXXI, VOL. VIII.

into the Greek method of notation, and something may also perhaps be learnt with regard to rhythm. The words and music are written continuously like prose, as is the case with modern vocal music, the single phrases of which are never written in separate lines.

Alypius tells us, p. 2, that 'the upper notes of the Lydian trope are those for the voice, the lower those for the accompaniment (τῆς κρούσεως).' The latter notes are here mingled with the text: the reason for this will appear later.

The enharmonic and diatonic genera are used indiscriminately.

The ictus dot is placed either above the musical sign, or alongside of it, apparently according to the exigencies of space.

In lines 5, 7, and 9 is seen the simultaneous use of the three signs showing pitch, value, and accent.

When two or more successive syllables are to be sung to the same note, the note is only written over the first, as in lines 3 and 4. When a single syllable is to be sung to two notes, the vowel sound is written twice, as ω, ως in line 12. The Paean discovered at Delphi also shows both of these features. The translation of the few notes of melody, which are in the Lydian notation, offers no difficulty, while the reconstruction of the rhythm can only be conjectural, owing to the dilapidated condition of the papyrus. I venture however to suggest the following reconstruction, with an explanation of the principles on which I have made it.

the note on which it occurs corresponds with the first note of a bar in modern notation.¹ The confusion which has arisen through the negligence of scribes with regard to the ictus dot is referred to by Vincent in his *Notices* p. 232.

The most completely preserved verse in our fragment is the fifth. The first note is wanting, but, by analogy with vv. 2, 3, 4, and 6, we may take it for granted that it was provided with the ictus dot.

Seidler in *De versibus dochmaicis* gives thirty-two varieties of the dochmius, of which the second is $\cup \cup \cup \cup \cup$ or, in musical notation, $\text{♪} | \text{♪} \text{♪} | \text{♪} \text{♪} | \text{♪}$. The first portion of verse 5 therefore gives the rhythm of Seidler's second form of dochmius, except that our fragment places the accent on the

first note while Seidler places it on the second. It will also be observed that this half verse is divided by a single instrumental note from the second half. Westphal considered that the end of the dochmius was completed by a rest, or by the extension of the last syllable. Dr. Karl Wessely suggests in the *Mittheilungen* that where two ictus-notes follow one another as in lines 1 and 2, 3 and 4 etc. Ex 1, we may take it for granted that the time is to be completed by the addition of a rest or a three time long. I have given the preference to the rest as the sound of a single note on the lyre must have been of a very transient character. The first half of the fifth verse then, with the rests suggested by Westphal and Wessely, will give us the following perfectly intelligible rhythmical phrase, which might occur in any modern song :

¹ Westphal, *Aristoxenus* p. 32.

Voice. Inst.

1 2 3 4

dochmius

SCHUMANN. *Frauenliebe.*

Voice. Inst.

1 2 3 4

O hätt' - er - doch un - ter Al - len

In Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* 3rd ed. 1890, vol. ii. p. 561b, we find the following remark concerning the dochmius ; 'It is doubtful whether the chief ictus is on the first or second long syllable.' In the fragment before us, the ictus occurs on the first syllable of each dochmius, whether

short or long, on the fourth 'time,' and on the final instrumental note of the colon. To represent this exactly in modern notation we should be obliged to use a combination of simple and compound bars of the three time species :

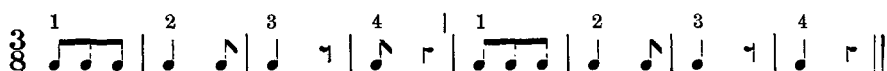
It is worth while to compare the scherzo of Beethoven's first symphony, in which the two time notes of the first, second and fourth bars of each colon produce a subtle accentuation somewhat akin to that of the above

scheme: for the third bar, consisting of three equal notes, is relatively less accented than those which contain the contrasting long and short notes.

BEETHOVEN, Symphony No. 1.

This subtle accentuation is not shown by Beethoven, but it can scarcely fail to be felt when attention is called to it. In the Greek passage the accentuation is distinctly shown by the ictus.

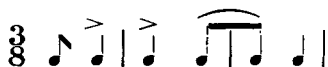
The first colon of v. 5, as well as the second colon of vv. 1, 2 and 3, finish with the accented instrumental note ; and I have therefore ventured to complete this rhythm on the following scheme :



which would correspond with an ordinary modern period, composed of two tetrapodic cola.

In the second colon of vv. 2, 5, and 6, in which two long syllables occur in succession,

I have made use of syncopation. *τινάξας δαίμων*, v. 5, by this means corresponds exactly with Seidler's ninth form of dochmius; $\cup \text{—} \cup \text{—}$, or in musical notation :



Without syncopation, it is impossible to translate the ninth dochmius into an intelligible modern musical rhythm, unless we take each long as of three-time value :

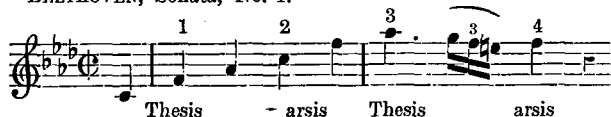


Syncopation (in the musical sense) is no modern invention. It is found in the oldest folksongs, and is a striking feature in the *pressus* of the Gregorian neumes.

In modern music, not only does each foot contain its thesis and arsis, but of each pair of feet one is slightly more accented than the other. In the majority of instrumental movements, the tetrapodic cola occupy the space of two bars; hence each bar contains two feet, one of which forms the thesis, and the other the arsis, of the bar.

Example of ordinary tetrapodic colon :

BEETHOVEN, Sonata, No. 1.

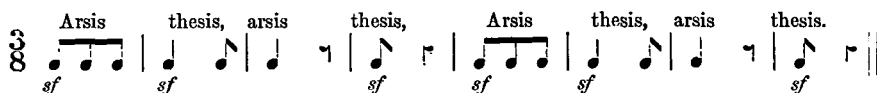


Where the accentuation of the pairs of feet is not thus shown by the notation, as in those pieces in which each bar contains only a single foot, the performer generally instinctively feels it : if he does not, or if he gives the wrong order of accentuation, his performance is insipid and unsatisfactory.

But modern composers, especially Beethoven, Schumann, and Chopin, are very fond of disturbing the regularity of this succession by means of *sforzandos*, etc. which make

accents occur in unexpected places, in order to produce special effects on the hearer.

It has occurred to me that the dochmius may possibly have formed one of the Greek methods of disturbing the regularity of accentuation, thus producing restless effects, such as are to be found in many of the works of the great modern masters : *i.e.* that (if my reconstruction of the rhythm of the fragment of *Orestes* is anywhere near the mark) the accentuation would be something of the following nature :



which, in its rhythmical disturbance, might produce something of the same emotional effect on the Greek mind that the overpowering syncopated *sforzando* chords succeeding one another in Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony produce on us.

V. 6 is broken by instrumental notes. As neither the ictus nor time value of these are given, I have merely written them in conjecturally. They are doubtless ritornels, the exact nature of which it is impossible in our present state of knowledge to discover. An

important passage occurs in the treatise by *Anonymus* (Bellermann, § 68, p. 78) in which it is explained that two kinds of notation are employed, one for the song, the other for the instrument (*ἐπὶ λέξεως γὰρ καὶ κρούσεως*).

‘It is necessary that there should be this difference of notation, since *κῶλα* are interposed in songs. The melody will properly begin, and be made known, and recognized, through its employment on the instrument (*ἐν κρούσει*). And the notation (*στίξις*) is not

restricted to what is sung in words (ῥητῶ): but prolongation of the melody is produced on the (single) syllables, and variety is brought about through the intercepting or succeeding colon.

Vincent (*Notices* p. 35) considers that the κῶλα here are passages for the instrument alone, as opposed to κρούματα which are the instrumental accompaniment to the voice.

From the above quotation it would seem :

1. That there could be an introductory ritornel on the instrument, before commencing the song, just as in an ordinary modern song.

2. That syllables were extended, in order to produce vocal melody without words, as in the neumae of the ancient church music, and in the florid passages of Italian opera : (but no examples occur in the fragments of music known to us of more than three notes to a syllable).

3. That monotony, which would be produced by an unbroken flow of vocal music, was avoided by the introduction of ritornels during the course of the song, as is the case in modern music.

Since these ritornels occurred between the vocal passages, it seems natural that they should be written on the same line as the words, as is done in our fragment. It is quite possible that the interposed ritornels were left to be extemporized, and merely a single note, or a few notes, were given as a cue to show where they were to occur. It will be observed that the single notes at the end of vv. 1, 2, 3, and in the middle of v. 5 of our fragment do not harmonize with the vocal note which immediately precedes them : but they do, except in one instance, with the note which follows them. Is it possible that they were the *concluding* notes of the ritornels, and were written for the same purpose as the concluding shake of a modern cadenza is written, i.e. to show the conductor when to bring in his orchestra ?

While no information has come down to us with regard to the treatment of the instrumental accompaniment, a passage in Plutarch's 'Περὶ Μουσικῆς' seems to prove that the lyre was not always played in unison with the voice: for he tells us that the 'ancients' used the *trite* as the accompaniment to the *parhypate* (producing the interval of a fifth), 'Ὅτι δὲ οἱ παλαιοὶ οὐ δι' ἄγνοιαν ἀπέιχοντο τῆς τρίτης ἐν τῷ σπονδαία-

ζοντι τρόπῳ, φανερόν ποιεῖ ἢ ἐν τῇ κρούσει γινομένη χρήσις· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ποτε αὐτὴ πρὸς τὴν παρυπάτην κεχρησθῇ συμφώνως μὴ γνωρίζοντας τὴν χρῆσιν.' Westphal's edition, ch. 14, p. 13. From the same chapter it appears that they also used the intervals of the second, fourth, and sixth in the same way. The accompaniment seems to have always been above the voice, not below as with us : and it is probable that it was extemporized and never written down, while only a few notes of the ritornels were given in writing, as we have already seen.

The question has been asked of late why the musical compositions of the Greeks have so entirely disappeared, while so many of their dramas and poems have been preserved. After the fall of Greek independence, through the Macedonian and Roman conquests, the dramas and poems of the 'classical' school were no longer sung on the stage, which was given over to a degenerate form of music and dancing, intended merely to amuse the ignorant mob. The musical notation was of such a complicated nature, that even the most learned men would not be able to read and enjoy a 'score' without hearing it ; while, on the other hand, the noble thoughts expressed in the words of the dramas were easily conveyed by writing, and could be appreciated without their being publicly performed.

Hence, the scribes, who were responsible for multiplying and handing down to posterity copies of the Greek classics, would, while taking every care with the text, omit to copy a number of musical signs, which neither they nor their employers any longer understood and appreciated. Thus, the texts of the dramas were preserved in the libraries of the learned, while the music was entirely lost. Whether, if we were fortunate enough to discover sufficient of this ancient music to be enabled to perform some of it, as it was performed in its own day, it would appeal to modern ears, is very doubtful. No art varies in its methods of expression so much as music. European music seems as barbarous to Orientals, as theirs does to us : and even the music which delighted our forefathers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seems antiquated and expressionless to the general public of to-day. How much more then would that of 400 years before Christ appear strange and weird to us !

C. F. ABDY WILLIAMS.