Threnodic Elegy in Sparta

Cecilia Nobili

Most studies concerning the new elegy of Simonides for the fallen at Plataea acknowledge the Spartan commission of the ode and the role played by the Spartan leader Pausanias in the extant fragments. It has been argued that the poem was composed to celebrate the Spartan soldiers who died at Plataea and was performed at a public festival which involved cultic ceremonies at the common graves.1 The Spartans, in fact, were buried on the battlefield according to the Spartan custom, and Thucydides testifies that they received offerings by the inhabitants of Plataea and were venerated as heroes.2 Later sources attest that an annual festival called Eleutheria was instituted, possibly by the Athenian Aristides, in order to honour the Plataiomachoi, but the fifth-


century origin of this festival is not certain and has often been questioned. As a matter of fact, we cannot confidently state for which occasion the poem was composed; nevertheless, the literary genre to which this poem seems to belong requires a public occasion such as a festival or a musical agon.

The discovery of the papyrus has confirmed a thesis advanced well before by Bowie, according to whom elegy could have been performed not only in the private setting of the symposium but also at public occasions. Several features of the Plataea elegy recur in odes performed before large audiences: the mythic content, the substantial length, the proem dedicated to a semi-god, and, finally, the epic language. A poem like this certainly had the function to recall to everyone’s memory the events that took place during the battle, yet a strong threnodic character cannot be denied. The poet laments the death of those who died young and declares that by assuring them eternal kleos he will provide a compensation for the grief of their families and city. The funeral origin of elegy and its mournful character has often been denied by scholars, since no attested elegy has overt threnodic function. Nevertheless, as

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Page stated, a primeval form of funeral elegy was performed in the Peloponnese in archaic times and was recalled by later authors such as Euripides in the elegiac lament of Andromache and Callimachus in the Bath of Pallas. Aloni argued that this form of elegy might represent the best antecedent for Simonides’ elegy, given also its Spartan commission. In this paper I investigate the characteristics of this obscure school of elegiac poets and try to show to what extent they might be connected with Sparta.

The first aulodes

The scanty sources concerning the origins of elegy attest that it was first performed by aulodes. Elegy developed side by side with the aulodic and auletic nomoi and was originally conceived as an aulodic nomos, i.e. as a kind of song in elegiac distichs, performed to the accompaniment of the aulos. The pseudo-plutarchean treatise On Music says ἐν ἀρχῇ γὰρ ἐλεγεῖα µεµελοποιηµένα οἱ αὐλῳδοὶ ᾗδον and lists a series of aulodic nomoi, including a nomos called Ἐλεγοι: it must have

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[Plut.] Mus. 8, Mor. 1134A. Other authors do not mention the original connection between aulody and elegy but consider either Mimnermus, Callinus, or Archilochus as the inventors of elegy (Marius Plat. Sacerd., Gramm.Lat. VI 509–510 = Mimn. test. 20 G.-P.; Didym. fr.1, p.387 Schmidt ap. Orion s.v. Ἐλεγοι). Cf. Aloni and Ianucci, L’elegia 111–114.


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been a threnodic nomos and have shared many features with the ἔλεγεια. The gloomy character of early aulody is confirmed by a passage of Plutarch: ἡ ἀρχὴ πάθος καὶ ὁ ἐπικήδειος αὐλὸς ἐν ἀρχῇ πᾶθος κινεῖ καὶ δάκρυον ἐμβάλλει.10 As we shall see, many of the sources on primeval forms of elegy and aulody allude to their threnodic features.

The first reported aulode is Olympus, who lived in Phrygia and was credited with being the pupil of Marsyas; he was believed the first to teach the musical nomoi to the Greeks.11 According to some sources there was a second aulete named Olympus who was a descendant of the former, but there is no good reason to think that they originally were two distinct figures.12 The most famous invention attributed to the latter was an auletic nomos (musical piece for solo aulos) for Apollo, called polykephalos, while the first one invented an aulodic nomos (solo or choral song accompanied by the aulos), called harmateion. Olympus was also considered the inventor of the synaulia, the unison playing of two or more auloi at funerals.

The Suda (s.v. Ὄλυμπος) says that he was a ποιητής μελῶν καὶ ἔλεγείων, but what constantly recurs in the testimonies is the funerary character of his playing: he wrote either θρηνητικοὶ νόμοι or ἐπικήδειοι.13 Moreover, the polykephalos nomos certainly had a gloomy melody, for Pindar attests that it was first invented by Athena: it imitated the threnos sung by the heads of the Gorgons over the killing of Medusa by Perseus and took its name from this episode;14 the same can be said of

13 Suda s.v. Ξυναυλίαν; Poll. 4.78. Cf. Flach, Geschichte 118–146.
the *harmateion*, which appears in a passage of Euripides’ *Orestes* and is unequivocally explained by the the glossae and scholia as the *threnos* sung as the chariot dragged Hector’s body.\(^\text{15}\)

Olympus inaugurated a school of Phrygian aulody, whose most renowned member was Mimnermus; he was both a famous aulete (coming from a family of auletes) and a composer of elegies.\(^\text{16}\) Mimnermus himself composed threnodic nomoi, as is shown by Ps.-Plutarch’s mention of the nomos *kradias* (fig-branch nomos) performed during the Ionian festival of the ‘Thargelia: the mournful sound of the aulos accompanied the flagellation of the *φαρϱακϰός* with fig-branches.\(^\text{17}\)

Another important school of aulodes developed in the Peloponnese, and even though it is often connected to the Pythian musical contests, it had many contacts with Sparta.\(^\text{18}\)

The first exponent of this school was the aulode Clonas, who lived in the second half of the seventh century, i.e. a short time later than Terpander.\(^\text{19}\) Ps.-Plutarch says that both Tegea and Thebes claimed the paternity of Clonas; but the Arcadian origin is far more probable, as Arcadia played a major role in the development of music in the seventh and sixth centuries, as shown by the creation of the musical contest of the *Apodeixeis* (see below) and by the Pythian victory of the Arcadian Echem-

\(^\text{15}\) Eur. Or. 1384 and schol., which records also another version according to which it was a form of *hymenaios*, sung when the bride was led to the groom’s house on the chariot.


\(^\text{17}\) [Plut.] Mus. 8, 1134A; Hesych. s.v. *κραδίης νόμος*; Suda s.v. *φαρϱακϰός*.

\(^\text{18}\) Sparta was traditionally considered one of the most important centres for aulos performances: cf. F. Berlinzani, “Sparta e la mousiké,” in F. Berlinzani and F. Cordano (eds.), *La cultura a Sparta classica* (Milan forthcoming).


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Brotus in aulody. Clonas is said to have composed aulodic nomoi, elegies, prosodia, and epe: τὸν πρῶτον συστησάμενον τοὺς αὐλῳδικοὺς νόμους καὶ τὰ προσόδια, ἐλεγεῖαν τε καὶ ἐπών ποιήτην γεγονέναι. It is difficult to establish the exact meaning of epe in this passage since, as has been recognized by Gentili, the term does not refer exclusively to hexametric poetry, but also to elegy and, in general, to every form of dactylic poetry. Much clearer is the term prosodion, which refers to songs performed during processions: at the time of Clonas they were accompanied by the flute and composed in dactylic metra, as the much-discussed prosodion of Eumelus shows.

Clonas was credited with being the inventor of the nomoi Apotheos and Schoinion: the first must be connected with Sparta, because in Sparta there was a place called Apothetai, on the slopes of Taygetus, where the newly-born who presented any malformation or weakness were exposed and abandoned to die. This cruel practice in its ritual manifestation was accompanied by the mournful sound of the flute; it is not hard to recognize in this early musical genre a strict relation with threnodic elegy. About the Schoinion little can be said: it is probably evoked by Pindar in his second dithyramb, where it means

23 A problem arises since Ps.-Plutarch repeatedly affirms that they were aulodic nomoi, whereas Poll. 4.79 and Hesych. s.v. σχοίνων call them auletic.
“contorted like a rope.”

What seems certain is that Clonas operated in Sparta a short time after Terpander and performed aulody at Spartan festivals and rituals; we might even wonder whether he was involved in the first musical *katastasis*, which was inaugurated by Terpander and involved monodic songs. The activity of Terpander is usually connected with the institution of the kitharodic contests at the *Kärneia*, which came to have great success and attracted famous kitharodes like Arion and Timotheus. In addition to the kitharodic competitions, other musical performances are attested at the *Kärneia*: Euripides mentions *ἄλυρϱοι ἔλεγοι* performed in praise of Alcestis at the Spartan *Kärneia*.

The word *ἀλυρϱος* must be intended as a reference to aulos performances, possibly of threnodic character; this whole passage of the tragedy, in fact, is a lament by the chorus over the death of Alcestis, and Euripides elsewhere explicitly calls *ἀλυρϱος ἔλεγος* the funeral lament accompanied by the aulos. It is tempting to associate Clonas’ presence in Sparta at the

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time of the first *katastasis* with the introduction of threnodic aulodic songs at the Karneia.

Another aulode closely linked to Clonas, although much younger, was Polymnestus, who lived at the end of the seventh century: he may have been a contemporary of Alcman, who mentions him.\(^{30}\) He was born in Colophon, so that we cannot exclude that he had early contacts with the Phrygian school of aulodes inaugurated by Olympus.\(^{31}\) After youth he moved to Sparta, as the evidence on many of his works implies: he was thus one of the several foreign poets and musicians who were invited to Sparta in archaic times.\(^{32}\) Heraclides Ponticus affirms that he composed the same kind of poems as his predecessor Clonas (including aulodic nomoi and elegies), which establishes a clear relationship between the two aulodes.\(^{33}\) Polymnestus was considered the inventor of the nomos *Polymnesteion*, which was quite popular and was often mentioned by playwrights because of its lascivious and relaxed tone.\(^{34}\) He also composed the aulodic nomoi *Orthioi*, which bear the same name as the kitharodic ones.\(^{35}\)

His ties to Sparta are of various kinds: Alcman, as well as


\(^{31}\) His father was Meles; according to a Colophonian tradition ([Plut.] *Vit.* *Hom.* 1.4) Homer's father had the same name, so that we can argue that even Polymnestus belonged to a family of poets. Cf. Flach, *Geschichte* 172–178.


\(^{34}\) Ar. *Eq.* 1287; Cratin. fr.338.

\(^{35}\) [Plut.] *Mus.* 10, 1134D. On aulodic nomoi called *Orthioi* cf. Poll. 4.73; schol. Ar. *Ach.* 16; *Suda* s.v. *Ὀρθιασίατων*. Polymnestus was also considered the inventor of the hypolydian nomos (probably corresponding to the Lydian mode, cf. West, *Ancient Greek Music* 227–228) and widened the intervals called *ἐκλαύσις* (release, 3/4 tone falling) and *ἐκβολή* (discharge, 1/4 tone rising). Cf. [Plut.] *Mus.* 29, 1141B.
Pindar, mentions him, and Polymnestus himself composed a hexametric or more probably elegiac poem (ἕπη) for the Spartans dedicated to Thaletas, the well-known Cretan musician who was brought to Sparta by Lycurgus (Paus. 1.14.4). Most importantly, he participated in the second musical katastasis, which took place between the end of the seventh century and the first half of the sixth and involved the reform of some major musical festivals such as the Endymatia at Argos, the Apodeixeis in Arcadia, and the Gymnopaïdai at Sparta ([Plut.] Mus. 1134). This musical reform was promoted by important authors of paean of the time such as Thaletas of Gortyn, Xenocritus of Locri, and Xenodamus of Cythera, and by two aulodes, Polymnestus of Colophon and Sacadas of Argos.

Sacadas was a famous aulete and aulode of Argos which during the sixth century was renowned for its musicians and for the musical experiments they carried out. Herodotus says that at the time of Polycrates, the Argives were considered the first amongst the Greeks in musical practice. Sacadas won three times consecutively the newly-instituted Pythian musical contests (586, 582, and 578 B.C.) with an auletic nomos, the famous nomos Pythikos that was ever after performed at Delphi by generations of auletes. It was divided into five movements

36 [Plut.] Mus. 5, 1133B = Alcm. fr.225 Calame; Pind. fr.188. The Doric form of his name used by Pindar, Πολύμναστος, is a trace of the Spartan adoption of this poet.


and imitated the duel between Apollo and the serpent with innovative musical effects that recalled the phases of the struggle, such as the final *syriagmos* to represent the hisses uttered by the dying serpent.\textsuperscript{40} At the first festival in 586 there was also an aulodic competition; it was won by another member of the Peloponnesian aulodic school, Echembrotus of Arcadia, who performed some threnodic elegies, so sad and gloomy that the aulodic contest was suspended after that:\textsuperscript{41}

In the third year of the forty-eighth Olympiad, in which Glaucias of Crotone was victorious, the Amphictyons offered prizes for minstrelsy as hitherto, and added competitions in flute-playing both with and without the accompaniment of the voice. The victors proclaimed were Melampus, a Cephallenian, in minstrelsy; Echembrotus, an Arcadian, in singing to the flute; and Sacadas, an Argive, in flute-playing. This same Sacadas was also victorious in the next two Pythiads. On the same occasion they for the first time offered prizes for the athletes, the events being the same as at Olympia, except the four-horse chariot-race: they also added foot-race for boys in the long and the double courses. But in the second Pythiad the prizes were discontinued, and crowns were substituted. They also discontinued the singing to the flute, because they deemed the music was inauspicious. For the tunes were most doleful, and the words sung to them were dirges (ἡ γάρ αὐλῳδία μέλη τε ἣν αὐλον τὰ σκυθρωπότατα καὶ ἔλεγεία {θρῆνοι} προσιδόμενα τοῖς αὐλοῖς). This is proved by the votive-offering of Echembrotus: it is a bronze tripod dedicated to Hercules at Thebes, and bears this inscription: “Echembrotus, an Arcadian, dedicated to Hercules this pleasing gift for a victory which he gained at the games of the Amphictyons, singing tunes and dirges (μέλεα καὶ ἔλεγους)


\textsuperscript{41} Paus. 10.7.4 (transl. Frazer).
to the Greeks.” So the contest in singing to the flute was discontinued.

Echembrotus performed some threnodic elegies that were typical of the Peloponnesian school, but we do not know why the aulodic contest was suspended: as West notes, threnodic elegies were common and it seems highly suspect that the Amphictyons banned them from the festival merely because of their mournful tone.\(^\text{42}\) Even after Sacadas, the Argive school of auletes continued to dominate the Pythian auletic contest: it was won six times consecutively by the Sicyonian Pithocritus, who also introduced the practice of playing the aulos during the pentathlon at Olympia (Paus. 6.14.9).

Sacadas was a great experimenter: he was a \(\piοιητὴς\ \muελον\ \tauε\ \ καὶ \ έλεγείων\ \muεμελοποιημένων\) ([Plut.] \(\text{Mus.}\ 8,\ 1134\alpha\)) but was better known for his inventions: he created a new type of aulos, probably named \(σακϰάδιον\).\(^\text{43}\) A statue seen by Pausanias on Mt. Helicon represented Sacadas as smaller than his flutes, but according to Pausanias the sculptor misunderstood the Pindaric passage which mentioned Sacadas’ instrument; it has been argued that the \(σακϰάδιον\) produced lower and deeper sounds.\(^\text{44}\) Pausanias adds that Pindar mentioned Sacadas in a proem, which may have been a sort of homage to a poetical genre practiced both by aulodes and kitharodes. According to Ps.-Plutarch he also invented a revolutionary kind of aulodic nomos, called \textit{trimeles}, performed by a chorus and made up of three strophes, each in a different mode, Doric, Phrygian, Lydian (the primitive modes used by auletes at that time).\(^\text{45}\)

\(^{42}\) West, \textit{Studies} 5 and \textit{Ancient Greek Music} 337.

\(^{43}\) Hesych. \textit{s.v. Σακϰάδιον}.


\(^{45}\) [Plut.] \textit{Mus.} 8, 1134\alpha–\beta. On the \textit{trimeles} cf. Flach, \textit{Geschichte} 282–285; Lasserre, \textit{Plutarque} 23; West, \textit{Ancient Greek Music} 214; Franklin, in \textit{Dithyramb}. It is improbable that the definition of the nomos \textit{trimeles} given by Ps.-
Sacadas also was among the musicians who promoted the second musical *katastasis* and, as we shall see, it can be argued that he played an important role in the introduction of elegy in the musical programme of the Gymnopaidiai.

### Elegies at the Gymnopaidiai

We must now examine the passage of Ps.-Plutarch concerning the second musical *katastasis* and the reform of the festival, which involved at least two aulodes, Polymnestus and Sacadas.46

Now music was first organized at Sparta under the direction of Terpander; for its second organization Thaletas of Gortyn, Xenodamus of Cythera, Xenocritus of Locri, Polymnestus of Colophon, and Sacadas of Argos are said to have been chiefly responsible, since it was at their suggestion that the festival of the Gymnopaidiai at Lacedaemon was instituted and so too the Apodeixeis in Arcadia and the so-called Endymatia at Argos. Thaletas, Xenodamus, and Xenocritus were composers of paean, Polymnestus of so-called Orthian pieces, and Sacadas of elegiacs (οἱ δὲ περὶ Πολύμνηστον τῶν Ὄρθιων καλομένων, οἱ δὲ περὶ Σακάδαν ἐλεγείων). Others, like Pratinas, assert that Xenodamus was a composer not of paean but of hyporchema; and of Xenodamus himself a song is preserved which is evidently a hyporchem. Pindar too employed this kind of composition. That there is a difference between the paean and the hyporchem will be seen from Pindar’s works, as he composed both *Paeans* and *Hyporchemes*.

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Polymnestus too composed nomes sung to the auloi (καὶ Πολύμνωτος δ’ αὐλῳδίκως νόμους ἐποίησεν), but whether he employed the Orthios nome in his music, as the writers on harmonic assert, we are unable to say definitely, as on this point the ancients are silent. Whether Thaletas of Crete composed paeans is also disputed. Thus Glaucus, who asserts that Thaletas is later than Archilochus, says that he imitated Archilochus’ music, but expanded it to greater length, and also used in his music the paemonic and cretic rhythms, which Archilochus had not employed, nor had Orpheus either or Terpander; for Thaletas is said to have developed them from the aulos music of Olympus (ἐκ γὰρ τῆς Ὀλύμπου αὐλῆσεως Θαλήταν φασὶν ἐξ εἰργάσθαι ταῦτα) and so gained the reputation of an excellent composer. With regard to Xenocritus, a Locrian from Italy, it is disputed whether he composed paeans, for it is said that he composed on heroic themes involving action. Hence some call his pieces dithyrambs. Glaucus says that Thaletas was older than Xenocritus.

Two of the festivals mentioned in this passage are quite obscure: no reliable evidence concerns the Argive Endymatia, but the name seems to evoke a ceremony in which the ephebes first received their arms.\(^47\) A reference to the Arcadian Apodeixeis is probably to be found in a passage of Polybius on the Arcadians’ fondness for music: young men used to appear in the theatres before all the citizens, performing dances and military songs (embateria) accompanied by auloi.\(^48\) We can thus assume that both these festivals had a military character, and at least the Apodeixeis involved aulodic performances.

\(^{47}\) At Argos there was a festival called Hybristica (Plut. Mor. 245E) where men and women exchanged clothing, but there are no grounds to think that it was the same as the Endymatia.

Far better known are the Spartan Gymnopaidiai, which like the Karneia and the Hyakinthia were celebrated in summer in honour of Apollo and constituted one of the most important religious and musical festivals of Sparta.49 A major role was played by young men who had to face an endurance test before the eyes of the whole citizenry, dancing naked under the open sun a slow and highly choreographic dance called gymnopaidikê;50 it is probable that the festival also included the armed dance that in Sparta was usually called Kastoreion.51 It was thus similar to what we know of the Endymatia and the Apodeixis, where enrolling the young men into the military ranks of the city constituted the main aim of the festivals.

The festival also involved performances of paeans in honour of Apollo. Sosibius, a Laconian historian of the Hellenistic period, attests that at the Gymnopaidiai choruses of young men sang songs of Alcman and Thaletas and paeans of Dionysodotus, an otherwise unknown Spartan musician: “there is a chorus composed of the most beautiful boys, another one composed of the best men: they dance naked and sing the songs (ἅσμαρα) of Thaletas and Alcman and the paeans of Dionysodotus” (FGrHist 595 F 5). A few passages from the lexica and from Bekker’s Anecdota graeca confirm that there were performance of paeans, whereas other sources refer only to


50 Plat. Leg. 633C and schol.; Luc. Salt. 10–12; Aristoxenos (fr.103 Wehrli = Athen. 630C) said that it was characterized by τὸ βαρϱὺ καὶ σεµνόν.

51 Schol. Pind. Pyth. 2.127; Luc. Salt. 10–12; Aristoxenos (fr.108 = Athen. 631B) said that the Spartans performed the armed dance and the gymnopaidikê in the agora, before proceeding into the theatre for the other shows. Cf. Robertson, Festivals 155–156; Sergent, DHA 19 (1993) 161–178; Cecicarelli, La pùrrica 99–108.
hymns to the gods or choruses to Apollo.52

Accordingly, a distorted reading of the pseudo-plutarchan passage has assigned the musical reform of the Gymnopaidiai only to Thaletas, Xenodamos, and Xenocritus who composed, in a more or less controversial way, paecans; by contrast, Polynestus was credited with operating at the Arcadian Apodeixeis and Sacadas at the Endymatia of Argos, in his home town.53 I do not think that the passage from Ps.-Plutarch supports that view: the poets are mentioned all together and no distinction is made between the three festivals. Furthermore, if Sacadas' involvement in the Endymatia is acceptable given his Argive origins, there is no reason why Polynestus, who lived in Sparta and composed poems for the Spartans, was excluded by the reform of the Gymnopaidiai and only connected with the Apodeixeis. The passage from Ps.-Plutarch, in my opinion, unequivocally says that all these poets contributed to the second musical kalastasis and to the reform of the musical performances at the three Peloponnesian festivals.54

In this case, we must consider the possibility that the musical program of the Gymnopaidiai included not only performances

52 Anecd.Bekk. I 32: γυμνοπαιδία· ἐν Λακεδαίμονι κατὰ τὴν ἄγορὰν παῖδες γυμνοὶ παιὰνας ἧδν εἰς τιμὴν τῶν περὶ Θερέας; 234: γυμνοπαιδία· ἐν Σπάρτῃ παῖδες γυμνοὶ παιὰνας ἄδωντες ἑχόρρεουν Ἀπόλλωνι τῷ Καρνείῳ κατὰ τὴν αὐτοῦ πανήγυριν. Et. Magn. s.v. γυμνοπαιδία· γυμνοπαιδία ἐφόρτη Λακεδαμιονίων, ἐν ἡ παῖδες ἧδν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι παιὰνας γυμνοὶ εἰς τοὺς περὶ Πολαίαν πεσόντας. Suda s.v. γυμνοπαιδία· χοροὶ ἐκ παιῶν ἐν Σπάρτῃ τῆς Λακωνικῆς εἰς θεοὺς ὑμνοὺς; Paus. 3.11.9: οἱ ἔφηβοι χοροῖς ἱστᾶσι τῷ Ἀπόλλωνι.

53 Hiller RhM 31 (1876) 77–79; Lasserre, Plutarque 159.

54 Cf. also A. J. Podlecki, “Poetry and Society in Archaic Sparta,” in J. Harmatta, Actes du VIIe congrès de la Fédération Internationale des Associations d’Études Classiques (Budapest 1984) 175–182, who argues that the poets were not all strictly contemporary but successively introduced some modifications to the program of the festival. According to Eusebius (ap. Jerome Chron. 1.94 Helm), the Gymnopaidiai were founded in 668 B.C.; Thaletas lived at the time of Lycurgus and was certainly much older than Polynestus, who composed an ode for him, and Sacadas, who lived in the sixth century (his Pythian victories are dated 586–574).
of paeans, but also of aulodic nomoi and elegies. If Thaletas, Xenocritus, and Xenodamos are explicitly described as ποιηταὶ παιάνων, Polymnestus and those belonging to his school composed nomoi Orthioi, whereas Sacadas and his successors composed elegies (οἱ δὲ περὶ Πολύμνητον τῶν Ὄρθιων καλουμένων, οἱ δὲ περὶ Σακάδαν ἔλεγείων). But Polymnestus and Sacadas are not the only poets connected with aulody in this passage concerning the reform of the Gymnopaidiai.

The author of the treatise, in fact, prompts many doubts about the performance of paeans, which he attributes to the other three poets. He says that Pratinas considered Xenodamus as a composer of hyporchesmes, whereas according to Glaucus of Rhegium, Thaletas, whose activity as composer of paeans is confirmed by other sources, composed poems like those of Archilochus, i.e. iamboi or elegies, which were accompanied by the aulos (μεμιμηθαί μὲν αὐτῶν φησι τὰ Ἀρχιλόχου μέλη); he was also credited with being a pupil of the famous aulode Olympus (ἐκ γὰρ τῆς Ὀλύμπου αὐλήσεως Θαλήταν φασίν ἐξειργάσθαι ταῦτα). Such a view is confirmed by Sosibius (F 5) who, concerning the performances at the Gymnopaidiai,


56 The author of the treatise is puzzled by the statement concerning Polymnestus, because he knows that this musician was famous as aulode (Πολύμνητος δ᾽ αὐλοδικοὺς νόμους ἐποίησεν), whereas the nomos Orthios was a famous kitharodic nomos, invented by Terpander. The only possible explanation is that the famous kitharodic nomos derived from an older aulodic nomos called Orthios. Cf. Lasserre, Plutarque 24–25; Barker, Greek Musical Writings I 252.

57 Strab. 10.4.16: ὁς δ᾽ αὐτῶς καὶ τοῖς ῥυθμοῖς Κρήτηκοις χρήσθαι κατὰ τὰς φόδας συντονωτάτους οὐσίν ὦς Θάλητα ἀνευρέως, οί καὶ τοῖς παιάνας καὶ τὰς άλλας τὰς ἐπιγραφῶς φόδας ἀνατίθεας; Porphyr. V.Pyth. 32: ἀρ-μοσύνεν μὲν πρὸς λύραν τὴν εὐωτοῦ φωνῆν καὶ ἄδων παιάνας ἀρχαίοις τινάς τῶν Θάλητος.

58 Podlecki, in Actes 175–182, argues that Thaletas introduced in Sparta songs for military training accompanied by auloi.
ascribes the paians to Dionysodotus alone and ἄναµατα to Thaletas and Alcman. Even Xenocritus, who is mentioned by Pindar and Callimachus as a composer of paeans, may have written dithyrambs, i.e. a kind of ode generally accompanied by the flute. If Ps.-Plutarch prompts so many doubts about the activity of famous paean authors, it means that he knew for certain that other genres, such as aulody, were included in the programme of the Gymnopaidiai and the other Peloponnesian festivals.

The commemoration of the fallen in the battle of Thyrea

We can now try to establish for what reason and in what context Sacadas, Polymnestus, and perhaps even Thaletas introduced in the Gymnopaidiai elegiac and aulodic performances. As we have seen, at that time elegies and aulodic nomoi mainly had a threnodic character and accompanied certain gloomy rituals such as the exposure of children at the Apothetai. They maintained the same features even when they were performed in agonistic contexts, as the example of Echembrotus at the first Pythiad shows. In Sparta threnodic elegies may have been very popular because, as is often reported by the sources, the laments over the dead kings or soldiers were part of the musical usages of the city. Tyrtaeus (fr.12 W.) mentions the mourning of the whole citizenry over the dead soldiers, and it has often been noted that this may have influenced later threnodic production, such as epitaphs and funerary orations. However, I think that the passage of

Ps.-Plutarch suggests a closer relation between threnodic elegies and the Gymnopaidiai.

In fact, many sources attest that during the Gymnopaidiai there was a commemoration of the fallen at Thyrea: this battle was fought in 546 B.C. between Spartans and Argives for control of the Thyreatis, the border region between Argolid and Laconia. The war between the two cities over this land was long, lasting for several centuries, interrupted by only short periods of peace; it must be contextualized into the long-lasting enmity between Argos and Sparta from the eighth to the fifth century which became, in Vannicelli’s words, “the main theme of Peloponnesian history in the archaic age.”62 The first episode of this long war was the battle of Hysiae in 669, won by the Argives;63 a view of Wade-Gery, much disputed, would set the foundation of the Gymnopaidiai in 668 in relation to the defeat, as an attempt to restore confidence in the ranks of the army.64 The battle of Thyrea, won by the Spartans, put an end to the conflicts for quite a long time—the “battle of the Champions,” recounted in detail by Herodotus, who seems to rely on local sources.65 The Spartans occupied the Thyreatis until the

62 P. Vannicelli, Erodoto e la storia dell’alto arcaismo (Sparta-Tessaglia-Cirene) (Rome 1993) 67–85, esp. 78.


65 Hdt. 1.82. As Brelich (Guerre 22–34, Paides 189–190) has pointed out, the conflict over the Thyreatis was not limited to single conflicts, but continued over the centuries, taking on a ritual character. Herodotus’ account in fact presents some ritual aspects, such as the number of fighters (three hundred), the suicide of the survivor, and the haircut, that recur in other crucial battles (e.g. Thermopylae, Hdt. 7.208, 232). Cf. D. Asheri, in A

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fourth century, when it was finally recovered by the Argives after the battle of Leuctra.

Sosibius, the Hellenistic collector of Spartan traditions, attests that the fallen at Thyrea were commemorated every year at the Gymnopaidiai by choruses of young men, called *Thyreatikoi*, who wore crowns made of palm leaves \( (F \, 5) \):\(^{66}\)

_Thyreatikoi_: the name which the Lacedaemonians give to certain crowns, as Sosibios says in his _On Sacrifices_. He states that they are now called crowns of feathers, although in fact they are made of palm-leaves. They are worn, according to him, in commemoration of the victory at Thyrea, by the leaders of the choruses which are staged during the festival which also involves the Gymnopaidiai. The choruses are as follows: in front, the chorus of _paides_, and on the left the chorus of _andres_. They dance naked and sing songs \( (\alphaματα) \) of Thaletas and Alcman, as well as paians of the Lakonian Dionysodotos. [transl. Ducat]

The passages from the lexica and _Anecd.Bekk._ (n.55 above) confirm that at the Gymnopaidiai naked boys sang either paeans or hymns for those who died at Thyrea. These passages have been much disputed because, from Bölte onwards, it has usually been assumed that the commemoration of the fallen at Thyrea was added to the program of the Gymnopaidiai only after the battle of Leuctra (371 B.C.), when the Thyreatis was re-conquered by the Argives, and until then the commemoration was held in the same place where the battle was fought, at Parparos, in a festival that included athletic and musical contests.\(^ {67}\) Unfortunately, the information concerning this festival and its connection with the battle of Thyrea is meagre: the Parparonia certainly existed in the fifth century and hosted

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\(^{66}\) Commentary on Herodotus Books I–IV (Oxford 2007) 139.

\(^{67}\) The crowns, originally made of feathers, were not exclusive to the Gymnopaidiai but were probably used in other Spartan festivals: cf. Wade-Gery, _CQ_ 43 (1949) 79–81.


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athletic competitions, as the Damon inscription attests (IG V.1 213). They may have also involved poetic contests if the Hesychius entry refers to this epoch, but the only claim of a connection between Parparos and the battle of Thyrsea is in the late grammarian Chocrates. It is very strange that neither Herodotus nor Pausanias who visited the battlefield record such a name. Pliny, moreover, attests that Parparus was the name of a mountain in Argolid, and it is not easy to imagine how the battle could have taken place on a mountain; Pausanias rather describes it as a plain, dominated by the Mt. Parnon.

I am more inclined to the view of those who treat more cautiously the scanty information about the Parparonia and consider the reconstruction advanced by Jacoby and Bötle as a fascinating but uncertain hypothesis. Robertson, for example, in his ample study dedicated to the Parparonia, argues that it was an Argive festival dedicated to Zeus, like many other Peloponnesian mountain festivals, above all that of Zeus Ithomatas. We cannot even exclude the possibility that both the Parparonia and the Gymnopaidiai commemorated the

68 Hesych. s.v. Πάρπαρος· ἐν οὐκ ἄγων ἔγετο καὶ χοροὶ ἔσταντο.
69 Gramm. Gr. IV.1 297: Πάρπαρος· τόπος ἐν οὐ περὶ Θυρεῶν ἐμαχέσαντο Ἀργεῖοι καὶ Λακεδαιμόνιοι.
70 Hdt. 1.82; Paus. 2.38.5–6. It is not even mentioned in the fictive epigrams of the Palatine Anthology which commemorate the fallen in the battle (7. 244, 229, 430–432, 720, 721).
71 Paus. 2.38.5: ἵναι δὲ ἐνον πρὸς τὴν ἡμείρον ἄντις αὐτῆς χορίον ἔστιν, ἐνθα δὴ ἐμαχέσαντο ύπὲρ τῆς γῆς ταύτης λογάδες Ἀργείων τριακόσιοι πρὸς ἄνδρας Λακεδαιμονίων ἁριθμόν τε Ἰσοὺ καὶ ἐπιλέκτους ὁμοίως. Attempts have been made to identify Mt. Parparos with the Mt. Zavitsa or with a hill below mount Parnon, where an inscription containing the word ΠΑΡΠΑΟ has been found: W. Pritchett, Studies in Ancient Greek Topography III (Berkeley/Los Angeles 1980) 110–115; J. Christien and Th. Spyropoulos, “Eua et la Thyréatide. Topographie et histoire,” BCH 109 (1985) 455–466. But see the objections of Robertson, Festivals 179–207.
72 Robertson, Festivals 179–207; cf. also the doubts about the Parparonia expressed by Brelich, Guerre 22–34.
battle of Thyrea;\textsuperscript{73} but certainly “for the Gymnopaidiai the tradition of ‘Thyreatic’ crowns and commemorative paeans is sound and uniform.”\textsuperscript{74}

Jacoby and Bölte interpreted the first lines of the fragment of Sosibius as a reference to the Parparonia, which took place at the same time (ὅτε καὶ) as the Gymnopaidiai.\textsuperscript{75} But such an interpretation is contradicted by the last lines of the fragment, where a reference to the famous trichoria is usually recognized. As Ducat has now demonstrated, the whole fragment concerns the Gymnopaidiai (the expression ἑορϱτῇ ταύτῃ must apply to what follows, not what precedes) and there is no allusion to an earlier phase when the Parparonia and the Gymnopaidiai constituted two different festivals: the ambiguous sentence starting with ὅτε καὶ must be read simply: “in the festival where the Gymnopaidiai are also celebrated.”\textsuperscript{76}

However, the whole passage clearly is corrupt, for the expression of the last lines is elliptical: a chorus of paides and a left-side chorus of andres are mentioned, but the phrase presupposes mention of a right-side chorus, which may have been formed of old men.\textsuperscript{77} The trichoria was a well-known Spartan custom, which attracted the attention of many ancient authors because it represented the harmonic coexistence of all the age classes in the city;\textsuperscript{78} in fact, the division of the citizenry into age groups recalls the military character that we have envisaged at the Gymnopaidiai. It is well explained by a statement in Plutarch’s Lycurgus: during their festivals three choruses, of paides, andres,

\textsuperscript{73} Wade-Gery, \textit{CQ} 43 (1949) 79–81; Nafissi, \textit{La nascita} 303–306.
\textsuperscript{74} Robertson, \textit{Festivals} 163.
\textsuperscript{75} Bölte, \textit{RhM} 78 (1929) 124–143; Jacoby ad \textit{FGrHist} 595 F 5.
\textsuperscript{76} Ducat, \textit{Spartan Education} 269.
\textsuperscript{77} Wyttgenbach and Kaibel emended the passage to <γ>, ὁ μὲν πρόσω παιδῶν, ὁ δ’ ἐκ δεξιοῦ γερώνων, ὁ δ’ ἐξ ἀριστερῶν ἀνδρῶν. The presence of old men in the festival is confirmed by another fragment of Sosibius (F 8).
\textsuperscript{78} Poll. 4.107 considers Tyrtaeus the inventor of the trichoria.
and *gerontes*, sang a traditional song in alternating voices.\(^{79}\) The context is not explicitly stated, but scholars agree that the festival that included the performance of the *trichoria* was the Gymnopaidiai, on the basis of Sosibius.\(^{80}\) It is interesting that in the lines before the section on the *trichoria*, Plutarch discusses the funeral laments, saying that the Spartans attributed great importance to musical education, particularly to the songs that praised those who bravely died for Sparta (*Lyc.* 21.1). The digression about the *trichoria* is thus integrated into a passage that concerns laments over the dead: we can possibly conclude that this is due to the fact that the Gymnopaidiai commemorated the fallen at the battle of Thyrea.

As the passage of the pseudo-plutarchan treatise *On Music* attests, Polymnestus first and Sacadas later are connected with elegiac performances at the Gymnopaidiai. Since elegiac poetry performed by the early poets of the Peloponnesian school mainly had threnodic features, we can plausibly argue that it was related to the commemoration of the fallen in the war over the Thyreans. Polymnestus may have been the first who introduced aulody or elegy in the programme of the festival and Sacadas renewed the same practice in the first half of the sixth century. We cannot exclude that this Argive poet was invited to Sparta to reform the musical programme of the Gymnopaidiai after the victory of the battle of Thyrea in 546. If this is the case, we must conclude that Sacadas competed at the Pythian contests in 586–578 as a young man, and some forty years later, as an old and acclaimed poet, he was invited to Sparta to renew the commemoration of the fallen at Thyrea with his innovative music.\(^ {81}\)

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\(^{81}\) Cf. Podlecki, in *Actes* 181. Shaw, *Discrepancies* 177, rather believes that Sacadas’ victory in the second Pythiad, when Cleithenes of Sicyon also
Conclusions

The performance of threnodic elegy to commemorate the fallen at Thyrrea constitutes the best antecedent for the performance of Simonides’ elegy for the fallen at Plataea. A solid tradition of threnodic elegy was rooted in Sparta since early times and Simonides certainly drew on it when he composed his elegy: the echo of Tyrtaeus’ fr.9 is just one of the many possible connections with this rich (and mostly unknown) musical tradition. Even though no sure inference can be drawn about the performance of Simonides’ elegy and the cults in honour of the fallen at Plataea, the example of the Gymnopaidiai (and possibly of the more obscure Parparonia) confirms that public ceremonies either on the battlefield or at home are securely attested in Spartan society. No wonder that those who died at Plataea fighting against the Persians received the same honours of those fallen in the perpetual war with Sparta’s most hated enemies.

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won the chariot race, must be set around 546: if this was the case, the coincidence with the battle of the Champions was even closer.

82 The parallelism between the celebrations of Thyrrea and Plataea have been detected by Nafissi, La nascita 301–305; D. Boedeker, “Paths to Heroization at Plataea,” in The New Simonides 148–163, at 151.