

Alcman fr.26: A Wish for Fame

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τῶν δὲ ἀλκυόνων οἱ ἄρσενες κηρύλοι καλοῦνται. ὅταν οὖν ὑπὸ τοῦ γήρωσ ἀσθενήσωσιν καὶ μηκέτι δύνωνται πέτεσθαι, φέρουσιν αὐτοὺς αἱ θήλειαι ἐπὶ τῶν πτερῶν λαβοῦσαι. καὶ ἔστι τὸ ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἄλκμᾶνος λεγόμενον τούτῳ συνφκειωμένον· φησὶν γὰρ ἀσθενῆς ὢν διὰ τὸ γήρας καὶ τοῖς χοροῖς οὐ δυνάμενος συμπεριφέρεσθαι οὐδὲ τῇ τῶν παρθένων ὀρχήσει·

οὔ μ' ἔτι, παρσενικαὶ μελιάρυες ἰαρόφωνοι,
γῆρα φέρην δύνεται· βάλε δὴ βάλε κηρύλος εἶην,
ὅς τ' ἐπὶ κύματος ἄνθος ἄμ' ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτήται
νηδεὲς ἦτορ ἔχων, ἀλιπόρφυρος ἰαρός ὄρνις.

Antig. Car. *Mirabilia* 23 = *De animalibus* fr.54B Dorandi¹

Why does the speaker in Alcman's poem wish to be a cerylus? And to what extent can we trust Antigonus of Carystus (fl. 240 B.C.), our only source for the four verses of Alcman, in our interpretation of this passage? Our answer to the first of these questions will certainly depend on that to the second, and since the edition of Page, Antigonus' trustworthiness has been much doubted, the discussion focusing on the interpretation of ἄμ' ἀλκυόνεσσι ποτήται. After assessing the various interpretations of this passage of Alcman, and of An-

¹ I quote the text according to D. L. Page, ed., *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford 1962) 41, and M. Davies, ed., *Poetarum Melicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* I (Oxford 1991) 76. Both adopt in v. 4 the conjecture of Boissonade, νηδεῆς. R. Parker, "A Note on Alcman 26,4P.," *QUCC* 26 (1977) 81–82, prefers Photius' reading ἀδεῆς, while C. Calame, ed., *Alcman* (Rome 1983) 114, prints the reading of the manuscripts νηλεῆς, as does T. Dorandi, ed., *Antigone de Caryste, Fragments* (Paris 1999) 41. According to Dorandi (xiv–xxiv, cxxi) the *Ἱστοριῶν παραδόξων συναγωγή* or *Mirabilia* attributed to Antigonus is a Byzantine miscellany, and this fragment derived from his *Περὶ ζῴων*.

tigonus' reading of it, I will suggest a new interpretation of the fragment.

The quotation from Antigonus is presumably the earliest text we possess that relates the tale about the aged ceryli being carried by the females. Among later authors this tale was also known to Plutarch (*Mor.* 983B) and Aelian (*NA* 5.48).² Until the publication of Page's *PMG* (1962) most scholars seem to have accepted Antigonus' interpretation of the fragment as a reference to this tale: thus Wellmann, Keller, Schmid, Schadewaldt, Lesky, Fränkel, Bowra.³ Page, however, rejects this interpretation for linguistic reasons (41): "falsa est Antigoni interpretatio: ἄμ' ἄλκυόνεσσι ποτᾶται, non φορεῖται, hic cerylus," and later scholars have mostly accepted Page's verdict: thus Campbell, Gerber, Giangrande, Preisshofen, Hommel, Calame, West.⁴

An exception is Guido Bonelli: "il poeta può ben essersi

² Plutarch and Aelian both share Antigonus' meaning of "cerylus" as the male of the same species as the halcyon. However, the terminology of the ancient sources varies, and Aristotle *HA* 593b8–12 mentions the cerylus as a separate species. The evidence on the halcyon and cerylus, and the myths and bird-lore connected with them, are collected in D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Birds*² (Oxford 1936) 46–51, 139–140.

³ M. Wellmann, "Eisvogel," *RE* 5 (1905) 2153; O. Keller, *Die antike Tierwelt* II (Leipzig 1913) 54–56; W. Schmid, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* I (Munich 1929) 458; W. Schadewaldt, "Lebenszeit und Greisenalter im frühen Griechentum," *Hellas und Hesperien* I (Zurich/Stuttgart 1970) 120, first published in *Die Antike* 9 (1933) 282–302, cf. his *Sappho. Welt und Dichtung, Dasein in der Liebe* (Potsdam 1950) 159; A. Lesky, *Thalatta* (Vienna 1947) 200; H. Fränkel, *Dichtung und Philosophie des frühen Griechentums* (New York 1951) 221; C. M. Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*² (Oxford 1961) 24.

⁴ D. A. CAMPBELL, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (London 1967) 217; D. E. GERBER, *Euterpe. An Anthology of Early Greek Lyric, Elegiac, and Iambic Poetry* (Amsterdam 1970) 98; G. GIAGRANDE, "Interpretationen griechischer Meliker," *RhM* 114 (1971) 99, and "On a Passage of Alcman," *QUCC* 31 (1979) 161; F. PREISSHOFEN, *Untersuchungen zur Darstellung des Greisenalters in der frühgriechischen Dichtung* (*Hermes Einzelschr.* 34 [1977]) 49; H. HOMMEL, "Alkmans Eisvogelverse (fr.94D.). Plaidoyer für ein Stück Poesie," *Gymnasium* 85 (1978) 398 [cited hereafter by authors' names]. Calame (*supra* n.1: 279) translates "qui en compagnie des alcyons vole sur la crête fleurie de la vague"; still, in his commentary (474–475) he refers to "l'équation qui est établie entre le κηρύλος enraîné par les alcyons et le poète qui aimerait être porté par les jeunes choreutes." M. L. West, *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford 1993) 34, translates "flying sea-blue, fearless, amid you halcyons down to rest on the foaming brine!"

rappresentato il librarsi del cerilo portato dalle alcioni sotto forma di un volo,” and “ποτήται dunque può esser la parola adatta per il cerilo che viene trasportato, ma non come soma grave, bensí come amabile compagno.”⁵ Although this meaning of ποτήται is not attested elsewhere, it should not be rejected outright. In a case like this the *argumentum ex silentio* cannot carry much weight, as the meaning “to be voluntarily carried through the air” is an extraordinary one in a Greek context. In our own airborne culture this meaning is regularly expressed in a similar way; we say that we “fly with” a specific airline, not that we are “flown” or “carried” by it. Likewise, Alcman may well have used ποτήται in the meaning of φορεῖται. In any case, this meaning was accepted by Antigonos, a native Greek speaker, although of a later age than Alcman. Furthermore, Antigonos presumably knew the whole poem, and so was in a better position to judge than any modern scholar.

In this choice between two possible interpretations, the one that the cerylus flies *with* the halcyons, the other that he is carried *by* them, we have to ask which of the two provides the more meaningful interpretation of the whole fragment. I will venture to show that Antigonos’ interpretation is the preferable one.

By dismissing Antigonos’ explanation of the passage, Page severs the close connection between the image of the cerylus and halcyons and its occasion, the old age of Alcman. The more specific content of Alcman’s wish as interpreted by Antigonos is replaced by a general one, as Alcman appears simply to be saying “o that I were a bird,” or at the very most “o that I were a male bird flying over the ocean with the female birds.” If Page is right, the naming of this particular bird will have been without significance, unless it refers to some other feature of the halcyons, real or imagined.

⁵ G. Bonelli, “Lettura estetica dei lirici greci,” *RSC* 25 (1977) 79.

One such feature is prominent in the ancient authors, namely the notion that the halcyons nested in the weeks around the winter solstice, and that in this period the sea stayed calm.⁶ Preisshofen (48–49) interprets the fragment in the light of this piece of bird-lore, rather than that related by Antigonus. He holds first that the wish “in sich ganz geschlossen ist,” and that therefore Antigonus, although he knew the whole poem, was not more privileged in his interpretation than we are. This view is untenable, as a part of a poem can never be independent of and undetermined by its context. Furthermore, Preisshofen claims that it cannot have been stated *expressis verbis* in the lost text that the cerylus was carried, “wenn man nicht annehmen will, daß Antigonos genau das beim Zitieren weggelassen hat, was er erklären wollte.” But it is not Antigonus’ business to explain a passage from Alcman: rather he chooses this passage as an example of how the tale has been employed in poetry, and for that purpose his quotation is sufficient.

Preisshofen concludes that the fragment must be referring to the concept of halcyon days: in the winter of his old age⁷ Alcman wishes for the calm days of the halcyon, when he can fly without fear of the winter storms. Although this wish cannot be fulfilled, the song of the choir offers an image of its fulfilment: “Aber etwas wie ein Abbild der Halkyones stellt der Chor doch dar ... die Möglichkeit einer ‘Ruhepause’” (53). This is indeed possible, but it is definitely not being stated *expressis verbis* by Alcman, and there is no mention of the seasons of the year in this fragment. Moreover, the halcyon days were the time of

⁶ Thompson (*supra* n.2) 48–51.

⁷ Bowra (*supra* n.3) 24, without reaching the same conclusion, has also made this point: “In other words, Alcman uses a half-mythical piece of bird-lore to express how he wishes that he could still join in the dance, from which old age bars him, and would like to be carried off by the maidens. The point of the myth is perhaps strengthened by the belief that the halcyons appeared in winter, and Alcman seems to compare his old age with this.”

nesting, an aspect which does not fit their supposed function as a metaphor for tranquil old age.

Although he disagrees with him, Preisshofen accepts for a fact that Antigonos does interpret the fragment in terms of the tale about the aged cerylus.⁸ Hommel, by contrast, denies that this is Antigonos' intention (394): συνφκειωμένον "besagt ja nur, daß die alkmanischen Verszeilen mit der Sage in Beziehung gebracht worden sind ... oder vielleicht nur, daß sie damit verwandt sind oder 'daran erinnern', wie wir sagen würden." This is also the view of Giangrande: "Antigonos says that Alcman's passage is 'related to', 'a reference to' (τούτω συνφκειωμένον: not 'an instance of') the rule whereby old κηρύλοι can no longer fly and are reduced to being carried by the flying females."⁹ Thus both Hommel and Giangrande claim that although Antigonos understood the passage correctly, his tale is irrelevant to its interpretation. I find their reading of συνφκειωμένον hard to accept: Giangrande translates it as "related to," or "a reference to," but is effectively saying that this passage of Alcman is *not* related to, *not* a reference to Antigonos' tale. If so, this quotation seems particularly ill-suited for Antigonos' purposes.¹⁰ Antigonos, then, must have interpreted Alcman as referring to the tale, or else he would not have quoted this passage. However, if Antigonos was wrong in this, the interpretations of Alcman set forth by Hommel and Giangrande may still apply. These interpretations therefore require some discussion.

Hommel (397–399) dismisses as gross the application of Antigonos' tale to Alcman's words, as they imply the image of the old poet "von seinen mit den Eisvögeln verglichenen Chor

⁸ Preisshofen 48: "Diese Mythenversion bringt Antigonos mit den Versen des Alkman in Verbindung, d.h. er interpretiert."

⁹ Giangrande 1979, 161, also 1971, 101.

¹⁰ There remains the possibility that Antigonos deliberately misinterpreted the passage to make it appear a reference to his tale, but this does not seem very likely: he could hardly have got away with a reading of the words in question that differed widely from their received meaning.

mädchen huckepack auf den Rücken genommen.“ He then points to the tradition that the halcyon was monogamous,¹¹ and polemically asks: “Welches von den Mädchen soll denn ... die Rolle des Vogelweibchens übernehmen: die Chorführerin oder sie alle zusammen, sei es abwechselnd oder gar auf einmal?” These questions arise from a too detailed reading of a metaphor. A metaphor indicates the identity of two things which to our senses appear as different, and is obviously not true in the literal sense. The metaphor transfers meaning, but beyond a certain point the search for detailed correspondence leads *ad absurdum*: in the case of “you are a rose” not only the beauty of the flower, but also its thorns, may be relevant, but to go on with a botanical description of the flower and claim the relevance of root, leaves, and stem would change the statement into parody. In Alcman’s case, the tale of the halcyons carrying the cerylus may be relevant to the metaphor, without implying the indignities of what Hommel calls the “Huckepackszene.”

Although the epithets in the address to the girls specifically point to their singing, Hommel (389) claims that the comparison between the choir and the halcyons solely concerns their youthful movements—the cerylus that Alcman longs to be is young, and flies with the certainty and fearlessness that he himself no longer enjoys.¹² The parallel between aged poet/young girls and weak cerylus/strong females thus has to be abandoned, as a general idea is substituted for a more specific one. Hommel imagines Alcman standing on the beach, watching the birds, “Da ruft er im Geist seine Elevelinnen an, mit denen er einst selber im vergleichbarer Weise dahinschwebte, und äußert den sehnsüchtigen Wunsch.” This interpretation of Alcman’s

¹¹ This is not made explicit by Antigonus, who speaks of the females carrying the males, not of each of them carrying her spouse. It is attested in Eur. *IT* 1089, but there the context is not a scientific or paradoxographical discourse, but a mythical explanation of the halcyon’s plaintive song, the halcyon crying for her dead spouse. In Antigonus’ tale the spouse is not dead.

¹² Hommel (392) therefore supports the conjecture $\nu\eta\delta\epsilon\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$ in v. 4.

wish seems to me unsatisfactory. Archaic poetry is written for performance, Alcman has to address a present audience, and when he speaks of himself he has to create a persona that is relevant to the audience and the occasion. In Hommel's interpretation he appears as the opposite, as a modern poet using an apostrophe to speak of his personal experience to an unknown, absent audience.

Giangrande (1979, 163–164), unlike Hommel, accepts that the cerylus in question is old, and supports the manuscript reading *νηλεές* in v. 4, translating it “steadfast,” “stubborn,” because the bird is “unflinchingly determined” to make do without the help of the halcyons. This, as follows from the “*τε* of permanent characteristic” in v. 3, is a general feature:

Every κηρύλος, when old and as such no longer inclined (ὁ μὴ θέλων!) to fly, nevertheless stubbornly (νηλεές) continues to fly “bis zum letzten” (my art.cit. p. 101 n. 7), in spite of the “incapacità fisica” caused by his old age (Degani-Burzacchini, op.cit. p. 282), in order to demonstrate his sexual “Potenz” to the ἀλκυόνες (my art. cit. p. 101).¹³

This tale of the dogged persistence of the aged ceryli is not attested elsewhere, and it is contrary to Antigonus' tale. Besides, Alcman's wish is not occasioned by lack of will, but by lack of strength. Giangrande's repeated ὁ μὴ θέλων is a quotation from another scholar; the text itself does not say this, but that his limbs *cannot* carry him: οὐ ... δύναται. The idea that this stubbornness should be a show of sexual potency is unsupported, and in Alcman's context highly improbable: if Giangrande is right in this, then the strengthless Alcman's wish to be such a bird effectively becomes an admission of impotence, hardly a suitable subject of his address to the

¹³ The references are to Giangrande 1971 and E. Degani and G. Burzacchini, *Lirici greci* (Firenze 1977). The parenthesis “(ὁ μὴ θέλων!)” refers to Degani and Burzacchini, who are twice quoted as saying “vecchio e debole com'è, non vorrebbe più volare (ὁ μὴ θέλων).”

maidens.¹⁴ Like Hommel and Preisshofen, Giangrande substitutes a less specific reading for a more specific one; he reduces the image to an illustration of a wish to be steadfast and stubborn, as Hommel reduced it to a wish for youth and agility, and as Preisshofen reduced it to a wish for tranquil old age.

One further interpretation must be mentioned: George Huxley connects the fragment with the report of the *Suda* that a book of Alcman's poems was known as *κολυμβῶσαι*. This name, he suggests, refers to the choir:¹⁵ "The maidens have been diving and swimming like halcyons in the sea. They then suggest to Alcman that he too should plunge in." Alcman's complaint is supposed to be a response to this suggestion, and Huxley imagines the scene quite literally: "We infer, then, that the maidens are *κολυμβῶσαι*, on a visit to Gytheion perhaps." This seems to me, as to Gerber (99), "most improbable." Still, Huxley's interpretation has the advantage of better accounting for why Alcman wishes to be this particular bird: the kingfisher is not any chance bird, but like the girls it is a diver. However, if the girls were known by this name, there is no need to presuppose a bathing trip. The wish would nevertheless seem to imply something like "o that I could dive with you," metaphorically saying "o that I could (sing and) dance with you." Attractive as this interpretation may be, it has weaknesses. Alcman's *cerylus* is not depicted as diving, but as flying; furthermore it remains speculation that the choir was called *κολυμβῶσαι*, and if in fact it was, this (and its implications) seems to have been lost upon Antigonus. The lost context of these four verses, then, can hardly have contained any overt reference to the girls as divers.

What then do we know about this context, what can be

¹⁴ Although Giangrande (1971, 100) apparently thinks so: "Alcman hat dagegen, wie seine pointierte Implikation gesteht, sogar den Willen zur Potenz verloren."

¹⁵ G. Huxley, "Studies in Early Greek Poets," *GRBS* 5 (1964) 27–28.

inferred about it, and what parallels are offered by the extant works of other archaic poets?

Fr.26 is the longest of a small number of fragments of Alcman in hexameters, and it has been interpreted as part of a citharodic prooimion, for example by Campbell: "(Plutarch) *Mus.* 4 says of Terpander that he wrote προοίμια κιθαρῳδικὰ ἐν ἔπεσιν, hexameter preludes for κιθάρα accompaniment: Alcman's lines may have been part of a prelude sung or recited by him before the performance of a partheneion."¹⁶ The length of this fragment seems to me to support his view: it is difficult to imagine a sequence of four hexameters in a lyric poem, and so presumably the whole poem will have been in hexameters. To judge from their contents, the other hexameter fragments may all have been part of this or other prooimia: fr.28 is an invocation of the Muse, fr.77 a catalogue of epithets, fr.80 is a piece of narrative, fr.43 seems to be part of a *recusatio*, and the Διὸς θύγατερ addressed may well be the Muse, as in fr.27 and 28;¹⁷ fr.104 contains a gnome, suitable for a prooimion, while fr.107 is easier to imagine as spoken by the poet's persona, as the idea that the women should leave the talking to the men would sound strangely sarcastic in the mouth of a well-articulated maidens' choir.

There seems to be no reason to doubt that the voice of fr.26 is that of Alcman's persona, and that the maidens he addresses are those of a choir. Though the choir in Alcman's poems frequently addresses itself, our fragment is the only instance where it is addressed by the poet's persona, and this strengthens Campbell's hypothesis that the verses were part of a prelude performed by Alcman himself. Such an address to a defined group (as opposed to general exhortations, whether in the first

¹⁶ Campbell 217; also Bowra (*supra* n.3) 23.

¹⁷ In fr.27 the Muse Kalliope is θύγατερ Διός, while in fr.28 the Muse is Διὸς θύγατερ. In fr.169 (of uncertain attribution) there is an unnamed Διὸς θύγατερ. In fr.57 Ἔρσα, the dew, is Διὸς θυγάτηρ ... καὶ Σελάνας.

or second person, or addresses to an unspecified audience) is a rare feature in archaic poetry, but there are a few instances. In *Ol.* 6.87ff¹⁸ Pindar addresses one Aeneas, presumably the chorus trainer, and instructs him as to what the *ἐταῖροι*, presumably the chorus, should celebrate or sing of (*κελαδῆσαι*). As this is a text written for performance by the self-same *ἐταῖροι*, the instructions are carried out as they are spoken. In fr.122¹⁹ Pindar addresses and describes the prostitutes, who were presumably present at the celebration. Sappho fr.81b²⁰ addresses a girl by name and tells her to put garlands in her hair; according to Athenaeus (674E) the occasion is a sacrifice, and so apparently the girl is *pars pro toto* for a group. Only in the first of these three instances is a choir involved, and there it is only addressed through its leader, while in none of them is there anything similar to Alcman's wish.

The only comparable passage in archaic poetry is not to be found in the lyric poets, but in another hexameter poem: the Homeric Hymn to Apollo.²¹ The poet addresses the maidens' choir on Delos, asking it to remember him and extol him in the future. When they are asked who is their favourite poet, they

¹⁸ *Ol.* 6.87ff: ὄτρυνον νῦν ἐταίρους, / Αἰνέα, πρῶτον μὲν Ἴηραν / Παρθενίαν κελαδῆσαι κτλ. (text: William H. Race [Loeb, 1997]).

¹⁹ Fr.122.1–4: πολύξεναι νεάνιδες, ἀμφίπολοι / Πειθοῦς ἐν ἀφνειῷ Κορίνθῳ, / αἶ τε τὰς χλωρᾶς λιβάνου ξανθὰ δάκρη / θυμιᾶτε κτλ.

²⁰ Fr.81 L.-P.: σὺ δὲ στεφάνοις, ὦ Δίκα, πέρθεσθ' ἐράτοις φόβαισιν / ὄρπακας ἀνήτω συναέρραισ' ἀπάλαισι χέρσιν· / εὐάνθεα ἴγάρῃ πέλεται καὶ Χάριτες μάκαιραι / μᾶλλον ἴπροτερηνῃ, ἀστεφανώτοισι δ' ἀπυστρέφονται.

²¹ *Hymn.Hom.* 3.166–176 (text: T. W. Allen, W. R. Halliday, E. E. Sikes, edd., *The Homeric Hymns* [Oxford 1936]):

χαίρετε δ' ὑμεῖς πᾶσαι· ἐμεῖο δὲ καὶ μετόπισθε
μνήσασθ', ὅπποτε κέν τις ἐπιχθονίων ἀνθρώπων
ἐνθάδ' ἀνείρηται ξείνος ταλαπεῖριος ἐλθῶν·
ὦ κοῦραι, τίς δ' ὑμῖν ἀνήρ ἠδιστος ἀοιδῶν
ἐνθάδε πωλεῖται, καὶ τέφ' ἔρπεσθε μάλιστα;
ὑμεῖς δ' εὖ μάλα πᾶσαι ὑποκρίνασθ' ἀμφ' ἡμέων·
τυφλὸς ἀνήρ, οἰκεῖ δὲ Χίῳ ἐνὶ παιπαλοέσση,
τοῦ πᾶσαι μετόπισθεν ἀριστεύουσιν ἀοιδαί.
ἡμεῖς δ' ὑμέτερον κλέος οἴσομεν ὅσσον ἐπ' αἴαν
ἀνθρώπων στρεφόμεσθα πόλεις εὖ ναιεταώσας·
οἱ δ' ἐπὶ δὴ πείσσονται, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἐτήτυμόν ἐστιν.

are to answer that he is a blind man from Chios, while he for his part will carry their fame wherever he goes. In making the choir a subject for his poem, he has added to the maidens' fame as performers of poetry, and in return he asks them to add to his fame. In this mutual exchange of gifts both parties will receive *fame through song*, but the gifts are not identical. While he has made the girls a subject for his song, they are apparently supposed to praise him, not as a choir singing a poem in his honour, but in their speech as individuals. Allen and Sikes comment that "the lines seem to be practically a request by the poet to be awarded the prize."²² If so, by using the choir as a proxy the poet has elegantly avoided the embarrassment of addressing this request to the jury. Instead he suggests an idea of reciprocity, of both parties voluntarily exchanging gifts and so establishing a relationship of χάρις. He has given the choir praise that he could hardly have given the jury: now he asks the girls for recognition that the jurors have it in their power to give him.

This parallel from a prooimion further strengthens the hypothesis that Alcman fr.26 is from a poem in the same genre, as it provides another example of the voice of a hexameter poem addressing a choir. Furthermore, the content of this address also suggests a possible interpretation of fr.26, an interpretation that does not dismiss Antigonus' tale as irrelevant, and which accounts for Alcman's choice of this particular bird for his metaphor. I argue that, although there are no verbal similarities, Alcman's fragment expresses the same idea as this passage from the Homeric Hymn, namely the idea of fame through song.

Surely the relationship between cerylus and halcyons must in some way be a metaphor for that between Alcman and the choir, between the aged poet and the young girls. According to

²² T. W. Allen and E. E. Sikes, edd., *The Homeric Hymns* (London 1904) 89.

Bonelli, Alcman is complaining that, unlike the cerylus, he has no one to carry him.²³ But the analogy between girls and halcyons, an analogy which Bonelli himself acknowledges, must mean that in some way the girls can carry him. As Bonelli also states, the wish is an “*implicita richiesta di sostegno alle fanciulle,*” but in what respect can it be that Alcman wants to be carried by the girls?

The wish is occasioned by the feebleness of his limbs, and Bonelli may well be correct in reading here a complaint that the poet is no longer able to dance, but this alone cannot explain the image of the halcyons carrying the cerylus. To one who cannot dance, being carried by the dancers is not a solution, rather a humiliation. Neither can the wish be solely to be agile, as then the proper image would not have been of a bird being carried, but of one flying with other birds, and, as I have argued, any other bird (or none in particular) would have been better suited for this purpose than the cerylus.

The address to the maidens points in another direction. They are addressed not as dancers but as singers, with the epithets *μελιγάρυες ἰαρόφωνοι*, their voices are sweet and holy. I suggest that Alcman addresses them thus because it is through these sweet and holy voices that he can hope for his wish to be fulfilled: with their voices the maidens can carry the name and fame of Alcman, like that of the blind Chian in the Homeric Hymn. If, as has been argued, this is a fragment of a prooimion, performed by Alcman himself before the choir performs one of his songs, such a wish makes perfect sense. It is the same wish that any composer or dramatist will have on a first night: he has finished his work, and now its success or failure is up to the performers. The complaint about old age, then, is changed into a wish for artistic success, for the performance to be successfully

²³ Bonelli (*supra* n.5) 77–79.

launched, and ultimately for fame, the one thing that can survive impending death.

This reading gains support from Theognis 237–254, for there too fame is expressed by the image of flying, and in particular by that of flying over the sea. While Alcman imagines the choir as halcyons carrying the cerylus over the waves, to Theognis the poems are wings that will carry Cyrnus (and Theognis himself, though he does not mention that) throughout Greece, wherever they are sung. Alcman does not appear to share this Panhellenic ambition, but Theognis' words about travelling widely (247 καθ' Ἑλλάδα γῆν στρωφόμενος ἢ δ' ἀνὰ νήσους) do recall those of the Homeric Hymn (174–175 ὄσσον ἐπ' αἶαν / ἀνθρώπων στρεφόμεσθα πόλεις εὖ ναιεταώσας), although the poet of the Hymn speaks of himself travelling, not his poems, and does not employ the image of flying.

Similar imagery occurs in Pindar, though his subject is the fame of the victor, not that of the poet. The successful man takes flight on the wings of manly deeds,²⁴ the name of the Aiakidai flies widely over land and sea,²⁵ and the poet wishes for Herodotus to be elevated on the wings of the Muses, from Pytho and Olympia as well as from Isthmia.²⁶ This mention of geographical names, just like the *distributio* “land and sea” in *Nem.* 6.48, and “mainland and islands” in Theognis 247, emphasises that his fame is to be far-reaching. Horace²⁷ exploits this imagery in his own way, stating that he will change into a bird, and that in fact he is already growing feathers. This

²⁴ *Pyth.* 8.88–92: ὁ δὲ καλόν τι νέον λαχών / ἀβρότατος ἔπι μεγάλας / ἐξ ἐλπίδος πέταται / ὑποπτέροις ἀνορέαις, ἔχων / κρέσσονα πλούτου μέριμναν.

²⁵ *Nem.* 6.48: πέταται δ' ἐπὶ τε χθόνα καὶ διὰ θαλάσσης τηλόθεν / ὄνυμ' αὐτῶν.

²⁶ *Isthm.* 1.64–67: εἴη νιν εὐφώνων πτερύγεσσιν ἀερθέντ' ἀγλααῖς / Πιερίδων, ἔτι καὶ Πυθῶθεν Ὀλυμπιάδων τ' ἐξαιρέτοις / Ἀλφειῶ ἔρνεσι φράξαι χεῖρα τιμὰν ἑπταπύλοισ / Θήβαισι τεύχοντ'.

²⁷ *Carm.* 2.20: iam iam residunt cruribus asperae / pelles, et album mutor in alitem / superne, nascunturque leves / per digitos umerosque plumae.

parody strengthens the case that we are dealing with a firmly established topos.

Fr.26, then, is part of a prooimion. The speaker is Alcman's persona, describing himself as feeble, while the addressee is a maidens' choir about to perform one of his songs. Alcman's wish is a wish for himself to be carried by the maidens as the old cerylus is carried by the halcyons, and metaphorically for his fame to be carried by their song. This reading is supported by the fact that the only other example of a prooimion addressing a choir contains a similar wish, and by the use of the fame/flight topos by other poets. It is also in accord with our source Antigonus, with his reading of the problematic ἄμ' ἀλκύνεσσι ποτήται and his interpretation of the wish as a reference to the tale about the halcyons carrying the cerylus.

Concerning the different readings of v. 4, this leaves both νηδεές and ἀδεές as better alternatives than the manuscript reading νηλεές, which Calame and Dorandi print. Perhaps Photius' ἀδεές, "confident," is to be preferred: as the cerylus can trust in the halcyons, so he hopes not to be disappointed in his confidence in the choir.

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