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Euripides' Phrygian Slave and Timotheus of Miletus' Phrygian Soldier: Musical References and Relative Chronology

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According to Janssen (1984:21), both Euripides' tragedy *Orestes* and Timotheus' citharodic nome *Persae* were performed in Athens for the first time in 408/407 BCE. There are striking similarities between Euripides' Phrygian slave's monody (*Orestes* 1369–1502) and Timotheus' Phrygian soldier's speech (*Persae* 140–161):

- (1) in the *dramatis personae* and in the situation (i.e. an armed Greek humiliates an unarmed Phrygian suppliant);
- (2) in the use of the operatic solo to narrate dramatically actual events (i.e. Helen's murder attempt in *Orestes* and episodes occurred during the battle of Salamis in *Persae*);
- (3) in the verse (cf. the astrophic arrangement, the medley of rhythms, and a perfect correspondence in language and metrical form, i.e. Ἀσιάδι φωνᾶ | βασιλέων in *Orestes* 1397 and Ἀσιάδι φωνᾶ | διάτορον in *Persae* 147).

In light of these similarities, the relative chronology of *Orestes* and *Persae* is controversial. Bassett (1931:159–160) argued for the priority of *Persae* over *Orestes*, underlining the debt of Euripides to Timotheus in terms of musical innovations. But, as Porter (1994:201) observed correctly, the ties between Euripides' monody and 'New Music' (Hagel 2010:444–452) would have been obvious even if *Persae* were yet to be performed since the tragic himself was an active protagonist of the Athenian musical revolution. In my opinion, some disregarded musical references found in both passages may provide good clues to confirm that Timotheus' *Persae* chronologically followed Euripides' *Orestes*.

The Phrygian slave in *Orestes* 1384 mentions the μέλος or νόμος ἄρμάτειον (Plut., *de mus.*, 1133b; Grandolini 2002), a specific melody in the Phrygian *harmonia* (= *mode*, a distinctive series of intervals in the scale; West 1992:177) characterized by a high register to which his monody has to be sung. The relationship between high register and threnodic songs emphasized by Plut., *de mus.*, 1136c, explains the threnodic use of μέλος ἄρμάτειον in *Orestes* 1384. On the other hand, in *Persae* 150–161, the Phrygian soldier is portrayed speaking broken Greek, a linguistic attempt explicitly described as a hunt for Ἴαονα γλῶσσαν in 149, thus suggesting an association with the ἀνειμένη Ionic *harmonia* characterized by a low register described by Pratinas (fr. 712 Page). Hagel (2010:73) confirms that lower registers of the voice were used to perform special effects despite the high-pitched tuning of the cithara.

I argue that, after the performance of Euripides' *Orestes*, a high-pitched exotic monody in the Phrygian or Lydian mode was the expected musical rendition of an Oriental Barbarian character. Timotheus counterattacked with his Phrygian soldier's speech by hinting at the Phrygian slave's portrayal and, at the same time, reversing it. Exempted from the conservative limits imposed by tragedy (Hagel 2010:389), the lyric poet had the chance to pursue *mimesis* both:

- (1) linguistically, through *Secondary Foreigner Talk* (Hinnenkamp 1982:40–41), i.e. by imitating a broken Ionian Greek dialect spoken by a non-native speaker (Anfosso 2021);
- (2) musically, through the choice of a low-pitched, Ionian *harmonia* aligned with the linguistic effort of the Phrygian soldier despite his ethnic origins, thus deliberately defying the audience's expectations.

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