

BACCHYLIDES' SPARTAN DITHYRAMB  
IN THE LIGHT OF CHORAL PROJECTION\*

by

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ABSTRACT: Spartan choral practice is usually taken in consideration in reference to famous Alcman's *partheneia*, but literary sources put forward an interesting image of diverse lyric performances. This paper is devoted to the possible background of Bacchylides' *Ode 20* and the function of its opening lines in creating textual illusions.

The evidence for bacchic dances in Sparta is quite abundant<sup>1</sup>, but at the same time slightly confusing. Literary sources refer mainly to maenadic female choruses<sup>2</sup>, and their description often depicts syncretism of cults so far-fetched that plausible analysis is unfortunately impossible, if we do not accept the possibility of Dionysiac choruses dancing for and in honour of Artemis<sup>3</sup>. Although in times of Bacchylides dithyramb was not necessarily sung by a chorus of strong Dionysiac character, and almost all dithyrambic choruses that we know

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<sup>1</sup> Dionysiac character of some Spartan dances was analyzed by CONSTANTINIDOU 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Ar. *Lys.* 1305–1315; Eur. *Hel.* 1302–1320, 1359–1366. But Pollux (IV 104) among other Laconian dances mentions dances of Satyrs and Silens, as for ἰθυμβοί (Hesych. s.v.) gender of dancers is not specified. Other possibly bacchic male dancers are komasts depicted on a number of Laconian vases, but despite the frequent association with wine their connection to a possible Spartan cult of Dionysos remains uncertain. For an overview of Laconian komasts see SMITH 1998; for the komasts in general, CSAPO, MILLER 2007: 41–120.

<sup>3</sup> The connection of those two supposedly contradicting cults would not be very unusual – in Patrai Artemis Triklaria and Dionysos Aisymnetes were both celebrated in the same ritual (Paus. VII 19 f.; CALAME 2001: 32, 137), in Delphi Apollo and Dionysos shared the same cultic space, ritual names and songs (with paeans sung to Dionysos: BCH XIX 1895, p. 393; FARNELL 1907: 112–114, 325 f.).