Music in Antiquity

Yuval

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Music in Antiquity

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and Edwin Seroussi

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Cover image: Female figures with drums. Bichrome ware. Cyprus.

Cypro-Archaic I period, 750-600 BCE.

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The psychagogic efficacy of music, namely its power to act on the soul in such a way as to influence characters and behaviors, and even health,¹ is based in ancient Greek thought on a likeness between soul and musical harmony.² This idea involves also a “harmonious” order distinguishing human *physis* as being a part of the world order (*kosmos*), as it is possible to notice at least since the time of the pre-Socratics. From many of the surviving fragments of their works³ we learn of the shift of the term *harmonia*⁴ (Bonaventura-Meyer 1932; Lippman 1963; Lambropoulou 1995–1996; Franklin 2002) from material aspects of human life

1 I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Joan Goodnick Westenholz and to Professors Yossi Maurey and Edwin Seroussi for the opportunity to present this paper and for their interest in my study of ancient Greek music. I would like also to thank Professors Salvatore Nicosia, Andrew D. Barker, John C. Franklin, Angelo Meriani, Eleonora Rocconi and the anonymous reviewer of this paper for their observations.

See Anderson 1966; West 1992: 31–33 (quoting many references concerning the healing and soothing properties of music); West 2000: 51–68; Barker 2005.

2 This idea was discussed extensively in ancient Greece at least since the early Pythagoreans. Among the many evidence concerning the topic of soul and musical harmony, I mention here only the well-known passage in Plato’s *Phaedo* (85 e4–86 a3) where Simmias refers to the notion of soul as a harmonious blend of the elements composing the human body (verisimilarly recalling the physiological theories and the notion of *isonomia* of the Pythagorean physician Alcmaeon of Croton, see 24B4 DK = Aët. 5.30.1 and 24A3 DK = Arist. *Metaph.* A 5.986a22; cf. also Pl. *Symp.* 186d5–e3), and the passage from *On Soul* (4.407b30–32), where Aristotle says that, according to some philosophers “soul is a kind of *harmonia*. Indeed [they say] also that *harmonia* (ἁρμονία) is a blending and combination of opposites and the body is composed of opposites (καὶ γὰρ τὴν ἁρμονίαν κράσιν καὶ σύνθεσιν ἐναντίων εἶναι, καὶ τὸ σῶμα συγκεῖσθαι ἐξ ἐναντίων)” (trans. by Huffman 1993).

3 See, for instance, Philolaus, 44B1 DK = Diog. Laert. *Vit. Phil.* 8.85 and Philolaus, 44B6 DK = Stob. Flor. 1.21.7d (1.188.14 Wachsmuth) with Huffman 1993: 123–145. Cf. also Heraclitus, 22A22 DK = Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1235a25.

4 The verb ἁρμόζω, denominative of ἄρμα and referring particularly to carpentry (Chantraine 1999: s.v. ἄρμα), originally meant *to join together* or *to fit* different pieces together into a functional and coherent whole. In Mycenaean tablets, for instance, the form *a-na-mo-to* (ἀνάρμοστοι)

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