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THE NIGHTINGALE'S REFRAIN: *P. OXY.* 2625 = *SLG* 460

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The sounds of birds are a common source for refrains in poetry and song. They are well suited to this role: they are easy to sing, they are meaningless (more or less), which is no disadvantage in a refrain, and they are repetitive. Refrains based on bird-song are found in Medieval troubadour lyric and in German Minnesang. English poets of the Elizabethan period also used bird-song refrains, for example in a lyric from Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, which dates from 1592.[1]

Cuckow, jugge, jugge, pu we, to witta woo.

In this paper, I will suggest that an allusion to bird-song lurks unnoticed in the refrain of a fragment of Greek lyric poetry.

POxy. 2625, fr. 1 = *SLG* 460[2] contains the end of one lyric poem and the beginning of another. The identity of the poet is a mystery: Lobel thought the style indicated Hellenistic provenance, though Rudolf Führer suggested Bacchylides as a possible author.[3] The first ended with reference to Jason and the Argo, and with something happening in a temple of Apollo; there is no sign of a prayer or formal *sphregis*, which are the most common ways in which Greek lyric poems end; perhaps the reference to the Argo was not the main theme of the poem, but a closing mythological allusion (the phrase προτέραισι φάμαις in line 3 seems to signal backwards from a later context).[4]

The second fragment, which will concern me in this paper, is from the beginning of a poem. The performance-scenario, at least the purported one, is to some extent illuminated by its title, which shows that it was in honour of Demeter and composed for a chorus from

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1 Troubadours: see G. Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (forthcoming); Minnesang: H. Freericks, *Der Kehrreim in der mittelhochdeutschen Dichtung*, 1. Teil (Paderborn, 1890), 18–19; English poetry: W. Weiss, *Der Refrain in der Elisabethanischen Lyrik. Studien zur Entwicklung eines literarischen Formelelements* (Munich, 1964), 97. The quote from Nashe comes from R. B. McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe* (London, 1910), 3. 238–9.

2 First published by E. Lobel in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 46 (London, 1967); now in 931L in *Greek Lyric V*, ed. D. A. Campbell (Cambridge, 1993), with helpful translation.

3 Lobel (above, n. 2), p. 114; R. Führer, "Zu *P.Ox*. 2625 (Choral Lyric)", *Maia* 21 (1969), pp.79ff., particularly p. 82, n. 12. Fragments of Bacchylidean *Prosodia* are attested (fr. 11–13), and Bacchylides does after all refer to himself the Ceian "nightingale" (end of Ode 3), although the nightingale in the second poem here is not from Ceos. Note also that, contra φάμαις in line 3 of the first poem, the London papyrus of Bacchylides shows φήμα/Φήμα (2.1, 5.194, 10.1).

4 Cf. the ends of Pindar, *Nem*. 8.51 (Nemean Games; cf. in particular πάλαι καὶ πρὶν); *Ol*. 10 (Ganymede).

Keos. We do not know the place of performance, or the festival.[5] The metre is aeolo-chor-iambic with the refrain in iambic; the metrical scheme was elucidated by Führer, and it seems to be something like this:[6]

(verse) o o ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ |
⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – ‖ do ph&da ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – (= doch) "ph&2da
(or " gl&da ia ")
(refrain) ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – 2ia∧∧
(or ⏑ ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ? doch)

Arranged in this scheme, the text of the poem looks like this:

Δή]μητρος Κείοις

o o ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑] {ν} κάποις ἀηδονὶς ὧδε λέλακε ̣ [
ἐκ ⏑ [– ⏑ –] ̣ ’Ορχομενοῦ δ’ ἰαχεῖ πεδί̣ον ⏑ [– –
⏑ ⏑ ⏑ μην[⏑ –] .

φ[⏑ – πό]τ̣νι’ {α Δάματερ} ’Ελευσινία ῥοδόπ̣αχυ μελ̣[– –
εὖ[⏑ –]ἐ̣[.]ο στέφανον τ̣[⏑ ⏑ –] ⏑ ι ταῖσδ’ ἐν ὥραις·
ἴτω ἴτω χ]ορός

Διὸς] αὐτοκασι[γνή]τ̣α †δαυ† θυγά[τ]ηρ βασιλῆ̣ος
ὄλβιαι [⏑] ̣ ἀμφότερ[αι μακ]άρεσσι φίλα[ι] θεοῖσιν·
ἴτω ἴτω χ]ορός· [

ο]π’ ἀπημον[⏑ – – ⏑ – ⏑]ε καλὸν ἴκ̣[ε]σθε
πλούσιό]ν τε κα[ὶ ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ ⏑ –] ἐρατᾶς ἀν̣[ύ]σ⟨σ⟩αι·
ἴτω ἴτω χ]ορός

] . νδ[ ]π̣ο̣[
]π̣ ̣ [

[5] Anything is possible; in view of the reference to Orchomenos, it seems worth suggesting that the *locale* might have been the cult of Demeter at Koroneia near Orchomenos: see A. Schachter, *Cults of Boeotia* (*BICS* Suppl., London, 1981), 1.155.

[6] Führer (above, n. 3) had to make several minor emendations to make this scheme work (see apparatus). All of these seem reasonable, but there is still a problem with line 7, where the impossible δαυ seems to require emendation (Lobel’s suggestion is cited in the apparatus), which would probably upset the colometry of the first half of the strophe. In view of this, Führer’s colometry is uncertain, and in fact it was not followed by Page or Campbell in their editions.

Title: Lobel; εἰς θυσίας Δή]μητρος e. g. Rutherford ‖ 1 {ν} Führer, for the sake of metre ‖ 2 ἐκ π̣[ετάλων Lobel, comparing Homer, *Od.* 19, 518 ׀ κ̣λ̣ [Führer ‖ 3 perhaps μῆ[να]ς, but not μη[νό]ς Lobel ‖ 4 φ[ίλα πό]τ̣νι' or φ[ιλτάτα Lobel ׀ {α Δάμ̣ατερ}Führer, for metrical reasons ‖ 5 δ]έ̣[ξ]ο Führer ‖ 7 Διὸς] Lobel ׀ αὐτοκασι[γνή]τα ⟨μετὰ⟩ δ' αὖ θυγά[τ]ηρ suggested by Lobel ‖ 8 ὄλβιαι end of line in ∏ ‖ 9 refrain written at the end of the previous line in ∏ ‖ 10]ε καλὸν or ἔκαλον Lobel ‖ 11 πλου- end of previous line in ∏ ׀ πλοῦ[τον or πλού[σιον Lobel ׀ ἀφθονίας, εὐπορίας] e.g. Rutherford ׀ ἀν̣[ύ]σ⟨σ⟩αι Führer (for the sake of metre) ׀ fragments of an asterisk in the right margin, according to Lobel ‖ 12 refrain written at the end of the previous line in ∏.

(TITLE: [For a festival ?] of Demeter for the Keians; TEXT: . . . in the garden the nightingale sings like this . . . the plain of Orchomenus resounds . . . Eleusinian lady, with rosy arms . . . accept the crown . . . at this time. *Go chorus, go*. Sister of Zeus, the king, and daughter, happy . . . both dear to the blessed gods. *Go chorus, go*. You come to . . . fair and rich and . . . to accomplish delightful . . . *Go chorus, go*.)

In the first line a nightingale speaks (the word λέλακε is perhaps imitated from Hesiod, *Op*. 207, but it is in any case a common verb for bird-song).[7] Lines 4–5 contained a short invocation to Demeter; lines 7–8 described Demeter's and Persephone's return to the sanctuary. Lines 10–11 suggest that they are greeted by prosperity and wealth, which they themselves have presumably helped to bring about (line 11?). The presence of the nightingale suggests that the time (ταῖσδ' ἐν ὥραις in line 5) is the spring, when the nightingale was thought to return from its winter absence.[8] According to Alcaeus' hymn to Apollo, cited in Himerius, *Or*. 48.11, nightingales and other birds welcomed Apollo's return to Delos.[9]

The refrain is ἴτω, ἴτω χορός, restored in part from other fragments of the papyrus (fr. 2 = *SLG* 461; fr. 3, *SLG* 462; fr. 6 = *SLG* 465).[10] It is strangely not present in line 3; the explanation for that absence might be that the first verse is an introduction, dissimilar in form to the rest of the song. Perhaps the main part of the song, with the refrain, is represented as being uttered by the nightingale mentioned in line 1. (There is a general appropriateness here, in so far as the nightingale is a famous symbol of human song.)[11] The first verse would then be a speech-frame with the sense: "the nightingale sang, and the plain of Orchomenus resounded".

This is the only refrain surviving from ancient lyric poetry in which a chorus is asked to go. The idea of movement and continuation seems very appropriate to a refrain, which has a formal link with continuity, since it is repeated through the song; so in Pindar, *Paian* II, the chorus pray that Paian "never fail".[12] The surface meaning of the refrain is that the chorus

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[7] The perfect of λάσκω of birds also at Alcman, *PMG* 1.86 (γλαύξ), Aratus, *Phaenomena* 972 (ἐρώδιος), Homer, *Il*. 22.141 (πέλειας), Aristotle, *HA* 618b31.

[8] A. Steier, *RE* s. *Luscinia*, col. 1856.

[9] If μην[ ] in line 3 indicates that the events are happening at night, we can perhaps connect this with the tendency for the nightigale to be represented as a nocturnal performer (Steier [above, n. 8], col. 1859).

[10] It also occurs above the column (i.e. above the surviving section of the first song), perhaps in misplaced scholion; Campbell makes this part of the text of the first song, but it seems very unlikely that the first song had the same refrain.

[11] Steier (above, n. 8); A. Pischinger, *Der Vogelzug bei den griechischen Dichtern des klassischen Altertums* (Eichstätt, 1901).

[12] Cf. e.g. the refrain in Catullus 64: *currite ducentes subtegmina, currite, fusi*.

should perform the song as they walk, or at least that they are imagined as walking (if the poem is Hellenistic, the performance-scenario may be fictional). If the performance is processional (or represented as such), the song is probably meant to be interpreted as a prosodion.[13] However, there is also a secondary meaning, and that is that the song itself should "go", i.e. that it should continue.

I want to suggest that the precise form of this refrain is due to the fact that the words ἴτω, ἴτω sound like the song of the nightingale. We know that to educated Greeks, the nightingale's song was interpreted as ""Ιτυν, ″Ιτυν", Procne's lament for the son whom she had murdered to revenge herself on her husband Tereus for the rape of her sister Philomela.[14] I would argue that the sequences ″Ιτυν, ″Ιτυν and ἴτω, ἴτω are close enough in sound that the second could have represented the nightingale's song also. This would be the only refrain based on bird-song in Greek poetry, as far as I know, though Aristophanes' sportive use of the croaking of frogs (*Batrakhoi* 209–210; 220 etc.) shows that Greek poets were capable of using animal-refrains.

The equivalence of the verbal form ἴτω and a bird-cry is illustrated and confirmed, as Gregory Nagy pointed out to me, by the song of the hoopoe in Aristophanes' *Birds* (227ff.):

ἐποποποῖ ποποῖ, ποποποποῖ ποποῖ
ἰὼ ἰὼ ἰτώ ἰτώ
ἴτω τις ὧδε τῶν ἐμων ὁμοπτέρων·

(*epopoi popoi popopopoi popoi, io io ito ito*. Let one of my wing-men come)

A hoopoe is not a nightingale, but this hoopoe is supposed to be Tereus, Procne's husband, reconciled to her in their bird-incarnations. Shortly before, Tereus had woken up his wife, and asked her to sing of Itus. Perhaps the loving husband welcomes his wife with a fond imitation of her song. Or perhaps it is Procne who sings ἴτω, ἴτω off-stage, and Tereus joins in. At any rate, it is clear that part of the point of this passage is to set up the verbal joke which resides in the equivalence of the nightingale's cry and the verbal form ἴτω.[15]

The only other case of the repeated ἴτω attested in Greek poetry comes later on in the *Birds*. This is the short ode of jubilation usually attributed to the *khoros* (851ff.):[16]

ὁμορροθῶ, συνθέλω
συμπαραινέσας ἔχω

[13] So Lobel (above, n. 2), 116, who also raises the possibility that it might be from the special form of poetry associated with Demeter called the ἴουλος (on which see H. Färber, *Die Lyrik in der Kunsttheorie der Antike* (Munich, 1936), 1.43; 2.62

[14] Attested in Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 1144; Sophocles, *Electra* 148; cf. also Euripides fr. 775 (*Phaethon*) = line 70 in J. Diggle, *Euripides. Phaethon* (Cambridge, 1970), discussed pp. 100ff.

[15] A. Haury, "Le chant du rossignol ou buffon mystifié par Aristophane", *BAGB* 13 (1960), 323–326.

[16] The lines are needlessly assigned to a priest by F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart, *Aristophanis. Comoediae* (Oxford, 1900), who attribute the emendation to Wieseler.

προσόδια μεγάλα σεμνὰ προσιέναι θεοῖς
καὶ προβάτιόν τι θύειν.
ἰτώ ἰτώ. ἴτω δὲ Πυθιὰς βοά,
συναυλείτω δὲ Χαῖρις ᾠδᾷ

(I applaud, I am willing, I agree and have great and holy procession songs to approach the gods and to sacrifice a little sheep walking in front. Ito, ito, let the Pythian shout go! Let Chaeris play an accompaniment on the *aulos*.)

Everything here is about moving forward: great and holy prosodia, the action of approaching the gods, even a sheep that according to its etymology "walks in front". The "Pythian shout" is presumably the paean-cry, often a sign of celebration; saying "let the paean-cry go!" amounts to an instruction both that people should utter paean-cries, and that people singing the paean-cry should advance in processions.[17] It is possible that all three instances of ἴτω could be interpreted as the imperative; alternatively, only the third need be an imperative, and the first two could be the bird-cry, as earlier in the Hoopoe's song.[18] In any case, the reference to the prosodion in this passage seems to corroborate the link between that genre and the ἴτω-refrain suggested earlier.

Whereas in Aristophanes the nightingale's song ἴτω, ἴτω . . . is uttered only by birds, in *SLG* 460 the borderline between bird-song and human song is less distinct, and the nightingale provides not only a frame for the poem, but also a model and a cue for the singers. It is because one meaning of song of the nightingale is "let it go" that the chorus who perform the song "goes" (literally), and that the song "goes" (metaphorically). Thus, the poet seems to be offering an ornithological aetiology for processional song, and for song in general.

If *SLG* 460 is Hellenistic, I suppose its ἴτω-refrain could be modelled on the passages of Aristophanes *Birds* that I have mentioned. Alternatively, if it is by Bacchylides, it would be possible that Aristophanes has imitated it.[19] But, whatever the relative dating, it is equally possible that both passages draw on some lost folk-song with a similar refrain, perhaps also involving nightingales, and perhaps also performed processionally. The Rhodian swallow song (*PMG* 848), and its ritual-scenario of χελιδονισμός (sketched by the local historian Theognis whose views are summarised by Athenaeus),[20] provide a suggestive parallel for the possible significance that might have been attributed to birds and birds-song in cultic or quasi-cultic contexts.

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[17] The same construction occurs at the end of an ode in Euripides, *Phaethon* (ἴτω τελεία γάμων ἀοιδά), the ode which earlier on mentioned the nightingale's song for Itus (above, n. 14); at Sophocles, *Trachiniai* 208: ἴτω κλαγγὰ τὸν εὐφραρέτραν ᾽Απόλλω προστάταν . . ., and at *Ion*, fr. 27: ἴτω διὰ νυκτὸς ἀοιδή . . .; cf. also Aeschylus (?), *Septem* 964: ἴτω γόος, ἴτω δάκρυ.

[18] Most MSS have three instances of ἴτω, but one (the Vaticanus) has only two.

[19] It seems unlikely that this was one of the motifs he borrowed from the *Tereus* of Sophocles.

[20] A. Tresp, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Kultschriftsteller* (Gießen, 1914), n. 106 = FgrHist 526F1; Athenaeus 8, 360b.