

**Philippe Brunet, 'Le grec, langue idéale du chant?', Pinault, Georges-Jean (ed.), *Musique et poésie dans l'Antiquité. Actes du colloque de Clermont-Ferrand, Université Blaise Pascal, 23 mai 1997.* Collection ERGA 2. Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, 2001, 11-26.**

The prosody of the Greek language has been universally admired. Many features have been described by the grammarians. Now it is possible to combine theory and practice, and to apply philological results to the restitution of Greek song and recitation, as proven by various recent experiments. Several phonetic characteristics of the Greek language are thoroughly examined. The meter of the ancient Greek poetry took advantage of the opposition between long and short syllables. Beside this rhythmical dimension, the natural accent of the ancient Greek language was tonal: the prominence of one syllable over the others of the same word was marked by raised pitch, that could be interpreted in melodic terms. There is a general agreement about the restitution of the Attic pronunciation of the Greek language in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., although there were probably some schools and religious circles keeping some more archaic features. The analysis of the syllable shows inequalities in the realization of quantitative oppositions, that could put into question the rhythmic regularity of meter. But one has to take into account the importance of convention in poetry.

The musical essence of the Greek accent had probably an influence on the composition of the tunes to which the Greek verses were sung. For epic poetry, the sources are very scanty. A composition by Mesomedes, a freedman of Hadrian, on a dactylic poem shows the general agreement between the melody and the word accent. For the lyric poems, that have been transmitted without any musical notation, it is necessary to confront the strophe and the antistrophe that did alternate in the responsorial singing. Different methods have been proposed in order to carry on this inquiry, and the results confirm the relationship between the melodic scheme and the word accent, but it remains difficult to interpret the instances of the lacking coincidence of accents between strophe and antistrophe. The triadic structure of the choral lyric poetry allows to study separately strophe and antistrophe. From the evidence of Pindar's odes, it appears that the antistrophe features a melodic variation from the strophe. This phenomenon is in accordance with the varying movements of the chorus during the performance of the poems. A further difficulty connected with the interpretation of the concordance between melody and accent resides in the fact that the long vocalic sequences can show two different intonations. There existed a large extent of playing between agreements and shifts of musical height and vocalic tone. The musical fragment from the *Orestes* by Euripides illustrates the autonomy of the melodic responsio against the accentual responsio. Although the Greek language was musical, music cannot be deduced from the prosody. [abstract, *Is Greek the ideal language for song?* p. 126]