

Was the *paian* ever considered a competitive festival genre? If we follow Bremer (“Der dithyrambische Agon,” 2000), the answer to this question is a resounding no: he asserts that, given its quintessentially ‘cultic’ character, performing a *paian* for a prize would have infringed the Greeks’ sense of religious propriety (cf. Furley and Bremer, *Greek Hymns*, 2001). Bremer’s forceful appraisal, built on a rather more guarded (but still misleading) statement by Käppel (*Paian*, 1992:56), has convinced many, and one may safely consider it now the consensus opinion (cf., e.g., Kowalzig, *Singing for the Gods*, 2007:71n35 and Rutherford, *Pindar’s Paeans*, 2001:27n17). In this paper, I disprove Bremer’s view, which, I believe, derives not from the ancient Greeks but from a modern, mostly protestant, religious sensibility; and I expose its dominance as detrimental: (i) because it hinders an accurate grasp of the ways in which generic distinctions functioned in archaic Greece; (ii) because it clouds the history of the Pythian festival and obscures the character of its *mousikoi agônes*; and (iii) because it stymies insight into the relationship the *paian* bears to the citharoedic *nomos*.

My point of departure is Proklos’ statement that “the *nomos* seems to derive from the *paian*” (*Chrest.* ap. Phot. *Bibl.* 320b23f.). This should not be dismissed as an artifact of late and excessively neat generic classifications; rather, it preserves a precious fact of early Greek music history and practice. To establish this account I survey the extant evidence on the musical events of the Pythian festival and the relevant material from the cognate *Pythais* and the Delphic *Soteria*. (The sources include the inscriptional record, the Pindaric scholia, Pausanias, Strabo, Ps.-Plutarch, and others.) I show that the data point to the competitive performance at the *Pythia* of a “hymn” that is best understood as an instance of the *paian*. I also demonstrate how the conventional pragmatic dichotomy of ‘cultic’ versus ‘competitive,’ and the performative opposition ‘monodic’ versus ‘choral,’ when rigidly applied, lead the scholar astray and distort the true shape of the song culture of ancient Greece. I substantiate that, ordinarily, the agonistic pursuit of victory and honor was considered neither morally problematic nor antithetical to Greek religious piety. The doxological texture of *Pythais* inscriptions helps to make this point. Finally, I claim that the *paian* is best viewed as a generic prototype, within the framework of cognitive poetics (Stockwell, *Cognitive Poetics*, 2002); and that, furnished with the flexibility of this approach, one can explain the otherwise problematic, close relationship in which ancient sources set the citharoedic *nomos* and the *paian*.

This paper contributes to our knowledge of the organizational and operational history of a preeminent Panhellenic festival; to our grasp of the impact that setting and occasion could have on the development of, and the relationship between, genres; to a more realistic notion of the *paian*; and to our awareness of the pitfalls that beset a habitual resort in the study of Greek culture to the dichotomies noted above.