PINDAR, PAE. 6, 121-122.
MEASURING SONG AND SACRIFICE
IN GREEK LYRIC AND THE RIGVEDA*

Almut Fries

Abstract · This paper offers a fresh perspective on the invocation at Pind. Paes. 6, 121-122. ἰὴ ἵ ν ῶ ν , μέτρα παινίδω/[ν] ἵ ν ῶ ν , νέοι. While the phrase μέτρα παινίδω/[ν] ἵ ν ῶ ν ("measures of paeans") almost certainly refers to the traditional παινίδωcry, which can be said to 'measure' a paean-song by concluding all or parts of it (often recurring as a refrain), the metaphor itself has never been explained. It is not safely attested elsewhere in Greek, but several parallels for the idea of 'measuring' a poetic composition by one or more of its formal components are found in the Rigveda. The relevant words, which are also applied to the correct execution of sacrifices, are māh- ("to measure out") and mātrā- ("measure"), possibly root-related to Greek μέτρον and μετρέω. It is argued, therefore, that Pindar's "measures of paeans" may be an expression of Indo-European (or at least Graeco-Aryan) origin, one of the growing number that are identified in early Greek lyric poetry, especially Pindar and Bacchylides. But the comparison is also instructive in itself, since it highlights the latent importance of formality in Greek religious song.

Keywords: Pindar, Paeans, Rigveda, Indo-European Comparative Poetics.

The purpose of this paper is to throw new light on a puzzling expression in Pindar by comparing it with an etymologically related and semantically similar idiom found several times in the Rigveda. This approach follows the growing tendency to extend the study of comparative Indo-European poetics in Greek from Homer and other archaic epic to lyric poetry, which in its own way is just as traditional in phraseology and compositional technique. Pindar and Bacchylides have so far provided the greatest interest

almut.fries@classics.ox.ac.uk, The Queen’s College, Oxford.

* This is the extended version of a paper delivered at the Oxford Classical Languages and Literature Sub-Faculty Seminar, 5 March 2018, and at the 5th Open Conference of the Network for the Study of Archaic and Classical Greek Song, Lyric and the Sacred (Spetses, 27 June - 1 July 2018). For instructive comments and conversations I am much indebted to Mary Bachvarova, Angus Bowie, Michael Lipka, Timothy Power, Enrico Emanuele Prodi, Ian Rutherford, Elizabeth Tucker and the anonymous referee for Quad. Urb. Carmine Catenacci has my thanks for accepting the piece into this journal.

https://doi.org/10.19272/201906401002 · QUCC, 1, 2019