

Gregory JONES

Non-Elite Origins of the Attic Skolia and the Birth of Democracy

The politico-historical significance of the Attic skolia has long been recognized by scholars who focus their attention on the four stanzas celebrating the Tyrannicides; the so-called Harmodios song. Two of these songs contain the earliest recorded appearance of the term *isonomia*, thus forming a fundamental basis for studies dealing with the origins of Athenian democracy. Unfortunately, analyses of the skolia have traditionally been based on the a priori assumption that these songs originated within the symposia of aristocratic circles, despite their nearly universal association with the common citizens of the demos within our sources. Nicely summarizing the standard approach, Raaflaub has recently stated that "such songs point to an aristocratic environment, but allusions in several Aristophanic comedies suggest that by the late fifth century they were familiar and popular far beyond the elite" ("Stick and Glue: The Function of Tyranny in Fifth-Century Athenian Democracy." In *Popular Tyranny*, ed. K. Morgan 2003, 65). As a result, the discussion has been limited to questions of intra-elite power politics and propaganda, centered on individuals and elite circles (Bowra 1961, 373-97; Fornara 1970; Ostwald 1969, etc.). I challenge this previously unquestioned assumption, asserting that the Attic skolia (and thus the concept of *isonomia*) were in fact a product of the communal feasts of Attic farmers of the hoplite class.

Investigation into the nature of the preserved skolia allows us to articulate a more specific definition of the genre than has been previously acknowledged, revealing an Attic folk tradition alongside a separate practice of elite composition. All skolia are bound by the same occasion, namely the public communal feast. Elite poets seem to have written skolia for specific occasions, such as Pindar's song for the communal sacrifice at Corinth administered by Xenophon (fr. 122), or Aristotle's skolion sung in the common dining room (*en tois sussitiois*) (Athen. 15. 696a-697b), while traditional Attic skolia were anonymous verses continually repeated at various community feasts, such as the Harmodios song sung by the Acharnians (Ar. *Ach.* 980), or the skolia sung by the Athenian farmers, their wives, and the Spartan envoys in the *Lys.* (1236-8). The genre is also defined by the element of antiphonal performance, such as the back and forth capping method of singing skolia demonstrated in the *Wasps* and elsewhere. The elite lyric poets seem to have adapted this element to the melody, as we learn from the skolion to Hieron (fr. 125), in which Pindar says that Terpander invented the barbitos when he heard the "voice answering (*antiphthogon*) plucking" of the pektis at Lydian banquets.

As M. Alexiou (1974, 104-5, n. 13) points out, the genre originated at archaic communal meals, but as I argue such gatherings were not restricted to aristocratic circles: the communal gathering (*sunousia koine*) was a vibrant cornerstone of deme society (Whitehead 1986, 230) in which the hoplite farmer was predominate. These old men of the Marathonian generation own the Harmodios song as their anthem (Ar. *Lys.* 616-35). In the *Wasps* (1223), Philocleon counters his blundering of sympotic manners by demonstrating his command of the rustic genre as he sings the skolia "better than any Diacrian." There is good reason to attribute the Attic skolia to non-elite sources and this concept accords well with the notion that the popular tradition of the Tyrannicides

embodied in the skolia was at odds with elite attitudes (J. Henderson in Morgan op. cit.). It also harmonizes with J. Ober's declaration that "in Athens' revolutionary drama, the key role was played by the demos" (1996, 35).