

In the *sphragis* of his nome the *Persians* (PMG 791), Timotheus describes his contribution to the history of lyric: $\nu\acute{\nu}\nu \delta\grave{\epsilon} \text{ Τιμόθεος μέτροις / ῥυθμοῖς τ' ἑνδεκακρουμάτοις / κίθαριν ἕξανατέλλει}$, vv. 229-231 (Timotheus brings new life to the kithara, with eleven-stringed measures and rhythms, tr. Campbell 1994). As most critics of the passage note (Janssen 1984; West 1992; Hordern 2002), ancient sources associate the name of Timotheus with the addition of strings to the traditional seven-string lyre at the end of the fifth century BC. The expression $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\iota\varsigma \rho\acute{\upsilon}\theta\mu\omicron\iota\varsigma \tau' \epsilon\acute{\nu}\delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha\kappa\rho\upsilon\mu\acute{\alpha}\tau\omicron\iota\varsigma$, however, is surprisingly technical in a passage that describes the art of the poet only in general terms or, perhaps, oddly redundant (especially with $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\iota\varsigma \rho\acute{\upsilon}\theta\mu\omicron\iota\varsigma \tau'$), and deserves more discussion than is usually offered. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the difficulties of the traditional “eleven-stringed measures and rhythms” interpretation and propose an alternative solution to understanding what is at stake in the expression.

I start by briefly reviewing the argument from M. Maas’ 1992 study of the vocabulary of string-instruments and show how literary and iconographic evidence do not offer convincing proof for a hendecachord *kithara* at the time of Timotheus. Rather than alluding to the introduction of *polychordia* in traditional string-music in the late fifth century, Timotheus’ phrase either refers to the poet’s use of an instrument from the harp- (rather than the lyre-) family or is a riddling circumlocution typical of his style.

I then turn to the expression itself and underline the rhetorical value of the number eleven in the passage, which builds a connection between the ten notes of Orpheus’ lyre (vv. 225-228) and the twelve walls of Miletus (vv. 232-236), thus creating an (artificial) sense of chronological unfolding that legitimizes Timotheus’ place in musical history. I then point to an unexamined parallel between these “eleven strikes” and another difficult expression, $\epsilon\acute{\phi}' \epsilon\acute{\nu}\delta\epsilon\kappa\alpha \kappa\acute{\omega}\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$ (with an eleven-oar cheer, tr. Henderson 1998) in the *parabasis* of Aristophanes’ *Knights*. The two passages show striking metrical, lexical, structural and thematic parallels, and I argue that the Aristophanic expression sheds light on Timotheus’ claim. Aristophanes’ metonymic and metaphoric “eleven oar-strokes” have been variously interpreted as referring to a nautical command (scholiast), the number of chorus members (Hubbard 1989) or the clapping of the “eleven fingers”, that is, of the two hands and the tongue (Sommerstein 1981). I favour this last interpretation and show how, on the model of the Aristophanic phrase, the “eleven strikes” (a proverbial phrase of obscure origin according to the *Suda*) can refer to the applause that Timotheus anticipates for his “meters and rhythms”. Understood in this way, the weight of the expression is not so much on the *musical* innovations of Timotheus as on the *poetic* success to which Timotheus looks forward, especially in relation to his innovative use of polymetric rhythms.

I conclude by showing how understanding Timotheus’ expression in the light of the Aristophanic “eleven strikes” gives us insight into three different fields: into the poet’s use of riddling language; into his rhetoric and legitimization of poetic innovations; and, finally, into the history of the reception of the poet and the interpretation of the *sphragis* of his most famous song.