

How Many Hetaerae?

Pindaric Arithmetic in the *Skolion* to Xenophon of Corinth

One of the longest, and strangest, of the surviving fragments of Pindar is 122 Snell-Maehler, the sixteen surviving lines of a poem in praise of Xenophon of Corinth, also the recipient of Olympian 13.¹ I will have nothing to say here on whether the poem is properly classified as a *skolion* or an encomium,² and only a bit in the last footnote on whether Xenophon is praised for contributing new *hetaerae* to the Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth (Boeckh and many others) or for entertaining the existing staff on a single occasion (Van Groningen).³ This note deals only with the problem of the total number of *hetaerae*.

The poem ends with a brief prayer to Aphrodite (14-16):

ὦ Κύπρου δέσποινα, τεὸν δεῦτ' ἐς ἄλσος
φορβάδων κορῶν ἀγέλαν ἑκατόγγυιον Ξενοφῶν τελέαις
ἐπάγαγ' εὐχολαῖς ἰανθείς.

The traditional problem with this passage (nearly as tasteless as the poem itself) concerns the interpretation of the adjective ἑκατόγγυιον (15): precisely how many *hetaerae* has Xenophon brought to the temple? The answer depends on how we understand the second half of the adjective, which is *hapax legomenon*, so no precise parallels are available. If the γυῖα of which there are 100 are 'limbs' in the English sense, there are obviously 25 *hetaerae*, with 50 arms and 50 legs among them. If only their legs (or conceivably their arms, but not both) are numbered, then there are 50. If the γυῖα represent their whole bodies, then Xenophon has contributed no fewer than 100.

¹ My text is quoted from H. Maehler 'post B. Snell', *Pindarus, Pars II, Fragmenta, Indices*, Leipzig, 1989, with longer lines printed as units and purely metrical punctuation omitted: there are no pertinent variants. The fragment is numbered 107 by Bowra (Oxford Classical Text, 1947²), and is quoted by Athenaeus (xiii 573e-574b) from Chamaeleon of Herakleia's *Περὶ Πινδάρου*. Although it is conventionally included among the fragments, nearly all of it survives: 16 lines of a probable 20, though it is possible that an additional stanza or two is also missing. There is a full commentary in chapter 1, "Les hiérodules d'Aphrodite", of B. A. van Groningen, *Pindare au Banquet*, Leiden, 1960, 19-51.

² The poem is sometimes classified among the Encomia, as by Snell-Maehler, though both Athenaeus, (or perhaps his source Chamaeleon – 573f) and Pindar himself (line 11) refer to it as a *skolion*.

³ The two questions are related, in that a higher number makes an outright gift that much less likely to be affordable, even for a very rich man. Consequently, in so far as I argue for a lower number, I make Boeckh somewhat more likely to be right, though I would not press the point

As this is not a doctoral dissertation, I have not attempted a full review of scholarly opinion on this point, which would be as tedious as it is unnecessary. Those who prefer one hundred include Farnell, who translates “a hundred head of herded girls”, and *LSJ*⁹, which defines ἐκατόγγυιον “with a hundred limbs or bodies”, which is not so much ambiguous as out-and-out waffling, but then adds “κορᾶν ἀγέλαν ἐκατόγγυιον a band of 100 maidens, Pi. Fr. 122.15.”⁴ Slater’s *Lexicon to Pindar* and the latest Loeb editors of Pindar and Athenaeus all say “hundred-bodie”. This much can be said for the larger number: one hundred is the only number specified, and the implication of the second half of the compound is quite vague.⁵ A contemporary listener or later reader might well have come away with a vague impression of hundredness. We will return to this point below. This reading might also be defended as making the girls the individual limbs of their collective centipede, as it were. Depending on how we picture their entrance – dancing? single-file? both? – this might be a very appropriate comparison.

Others read the number of *hetaerae* as fifty, as if the adjective were ἐκατόμποδα, ‘hundred-footed’, used of the fifty Nereids by Sophocles (*O.C.* 718). Van Groningen puts this interpretation first, and gives it the most room, and D. S. Robertson semi-endorses it in his review.⁶ Gulick, in the apparatus of the old Loeb Athenaeus, records an emendation that puts fifty into the text of Athenaeus 573e: Schweighäuser inserted ν’ (=50) after ἐπάξειν, where it would have easily dropped out by haplography. Puech in the Budé prints the conjecture and translates as fifty.

Twenty-five would be the most literal, and logical, answer to our question. Indeed, in his review of Van Groningen’s commentary, D. S. Robertson writes “Common sense rejects Kleantes’ comically logical ‘twenty-five girls’ (each with two arms and two legs)”.⁷ It also inevitably summons up an unfortunate image of the women trooping up the steps of the temple on all fours. As comical, and repulsive, as that looks to the inner

⁴ Unless they are just entering the profession of sacred prostitution, ‘maidens’ seems not quite the proper word, though I suppose Farnell merely wishes to imply that they are young and unmarried.

⁵ In arguing about this passage in the old Loeb Athenaeus, Gulick notes (VI, 99 n 3) that “γυῖον seems to mean ‘body’ in Pind. *Nem.* vii. 73.”

⁶ *CR* n.s. 11 (1961), 111-15.

⁷ *Op. cit.* 113. I am still wondering who this Kleantes is. The Stoic?

eye of the imaginative modern reader,⁸ the image is entirely consistent with the bovine or ovine connotations of Pindar's vocabulary in the rest of the poem: it fits particularly well with ἄλσος and φορβάδων just before (14-15).⁹ In addition, since Pindar apologizes for the tastelessness of his poem in the previous stanza, we are hardly entitled to argue away it away.

So much for the problem. My solution can be presented much more briefly. Although certainty is unattainable, a plausible answer is easy enough. In a paper entitled "1 + 1 = 3: Studies in Pindar's Arithmetic",¹⁰ Thomas Cole argued that Pindar uses ambiguous language in several of the *Epinikia* to imply, without actually stating, that the athletic victories of the *laudandus* are more numerous than a strictly prosaic accounting would tell. I believe that his paper provides the key to our passage as well. If Pindar indulges in similar sleight-of-hand here, with multiplicative rather than additive ambiguities, then Xenophon surely contributed or entertained twenty-five *hetaerae*, but the poet contrives to imply that the number might just as easily have been fifty or even a hundred. No doubt he has later readers more in mind, since the audience at the first performance would have been perfectly capable of counting heads — and limbs.¹¹

⁸ The fact that slavery is now (at least nominally) illegal and prostitution either illegal or tightly controlled almost everywhere in the world surely makes it much more offensive to us than it would have been to Pindar's contemporaries, particularly the successful men for whom he wrote.

⁹ Farnell's note on this is interesting: "The last stanza, in which he speaks of Xenophon's girls as a herd of sacred cattle presented to the Goddess, is remarkable for the choice irony of its diction; and his pretended fear that 'the Lords of Isthmos' might be shocked at him is agreeable, for he knew that they, the Corinthians, were not puritanical in morals. Even in such company he is markedly the aristocrat, with a certain arch delicacy of expression." (Farnell 1932: 344).

¹⁰ *AJPh* 108, 1987, 553-68.

¹¹ Cole talks about this point in discussing the victory-odes, but here the case is even stronger: unlike an athlete's previous victories, these girls are presumably right in front of the original audience. The ambiguity as to just what Xenophon did for the temple – contribute new sacred prostitutes or just feed the current staff – may also be intentional. Perhaps he did the latter, but Pindar implied that he might have done the former?