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“The boys are my gods”: Anacreon’s pederastic poetry and its moral reception

Lorenzo BUCCERONI

Pindar refers this to Alcaeus and Ibycus and Anacreon and anyone else before him who may have devoted his attention to his favourite boy: for these writers were older than Pindar. They say that when Anacreon was asked why he did not write hymns to gods but to boys, he replied, “Because they are my gods” (tr. D.A. Campbell).1

Through this anecdote, the scholia to Pindar are aiming to prove Anacreon’s unconditional devotion to extolling his beloved boys: he admits that he composes hymns not to gods but to youths, since they are his deities.2 When interpreted literally, the anecdote goes against the evidence that Anacreon composed hymns to gods: one should therefore judge its meaning in relation to Anacreon’s poetics (1) and the time of the anecdote’s origin (2).

1. A mere glance to the poetic fragments enables us to grasp the symbolic value3 of Anacreon’s “boutade”.4 First, his prayers are usually functional to love for boys. The most striking example is the hymn to Dionysius, where the god of wine is requested to be a good counsellor of the young Cleoubulus, so “that he accept my love”5. Such a prayer sounds not strange in the erotic poetry, as we can easily see from Sappho (fr. 1 V); but Anacreon takes the gods of love and wine into his own symposium so concretely and intimately that their divine nature, also due to his playful and soft emotional timbre, comes to be almost deconsecrated.6 In a poem whose content is illustrated by Himerius, Anacreon

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1 Schol. Pind. Isthm. 2, 1b (III 213, 18 ff. Drachmann) ταῦτα δὲ τείνει (scil. ὁ Πίνδαρος) καὶ εἰς τοὺς περὶ Ἁλκαῖον καὶ Ἰβυκον καὶ Ἀνακρέοντα, καὶ εἰ τινὲς τῶν πρὸ αὐτοῦ δοκοῦσι περὶ τὰ παιδικὰ ἥσχολῆσθαι· οὗτοι γὰρ παλαιότεροι Πινδάρου· Ἀνακρέοντα γοῦν ἐρωτηθέντα, φασί, διατὶ οὐκ εἰς θεοὺς ἀλλ’ εἰς παῖδας γράφεις τοὺς ὑμμοὺς; εἰπεῖν, ὅτι οὕτω ἢμῶν θεοί εἰσιν.
2 Tzetzes (Chil. 8 [Hist. 228], 807 ff.) attributes the maxim to Simonides, but he probably redrafted and misrepresented our scholium.
3 Gentili 2006, p. 162.
5 Fr. 14 G. = 357 P., 9-11: Κλευβούλων ὃ γεγαθὸς γενεῦ / σύμβουλος, τὸν ἐμὸν ὃ ἐρωτ’, / ὃ Δεύνυςε, δέχεσθαι.
6 Bowra 19612, p. 273 has the feeling that Anacreon’s poems contained very little material genuinely meant to be religious.
even reproaches and threatens the “Erotes, telling them that, if they did not immediately wound the young man for him, he would no longer strike up a song in praise of them (melos euphemon)” (tr. R.J. Penella). This kind of hymn to gods appears subordinate to the praise of youths, becomes a tool for erotic conquests and annuls the distance between gods and men, ordinary members of the same symposium. At the heart of this poetic representation lies the love for pāides, regardless of what kind of relationship is displayed. This can be fluctuating: although they are preferably addressed in playful tones and a detached smile, there is no lack of more dramatic and solemn accents. Anacreon may indeed have used occasionally the celebrative language of hymns for gods in the praise of the human subjects of his erotic poems. In addressing Basilius, governor of Greece, Himerius begins one of his orations quoting the incipit of an anacreontic poem that presents itself as a divine celebration. Himerius defines it as a “hymn” and compares it to Simonides and Pindar’s compositions for Dionysus and Apollo. Judging from Himerius’s debt to a passage of Plato, we can guess that we are dealing with a hymn to Eros, but at the same time, given Himerius’s silence in this regard, it could be also the erotic praise of some youth. Another fragment employs the intonation of a cletic hymn: “Hear an old man’s prayer, you maiden of the lovely hair and golden robe” (tr. D.A. Campbell). The addressee could be


10 Fr. 91 G. = 380 P. ap. Him. 47, 3-14 (p. 189 ff. Colonna): ‘Χαῖρε, φίλον φός χαρίζει μειδιών προσώποι· μέλος γάρ τι λαβὼν ἐκ τῆς λύρας, εἰς τὴν ἑπτάθην προσάσκοι, ἡδέους μὲν ἄν πείσαι καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῖς λόγοις λύραν μοι γενέσθαι καὶ ποίησιν, ἵνα τι κατὰ σοῦ νεανισθοίμαι, ὅποιον Σιμωνίδης ἤ Πίνδαρος κατὰ Διονύσου καὶ Ἀπόλλωνος· ἐπεί δὲ ἀγέρωχοι τὸν ὄντες καὶ ὑψιστός ἀφέτοι τέι καὶ ἐξω μέτρον ἄθροισιν, ὀλίγα παρακλάσας τὴν ποίησιν δοῦναι μοι τοῖς τῆς Τήνου ταύτην γὰρ φιλο τὴν μοίς - ἐκ τῶν ἀποθέτων τῶν Ἀνακρούσαντος τούτοις σοι φέρον τὸν ὄνομα ἔρχομαι, καὶ τι καὶ αὐτὸς προσθείς τῷ ἄσματι: ’Ω φάσ δ’ Ἐλλήνων καὶ τὸν δῶς Παλλάδος ἢρον δάπεδον Μουσάων τ’ ἅλη νεμόμεθα’· Ὑμνική formula is χαῖρε. For μειδιῶν προσόπω cf. Sapph. fr. 1 V., 14 (told of Aphrodite).

11 Plat. Phaedr. 252b: “Now this condition, fair boy, about which I am speaking, is called Love by man, but when you hear what the gods call it, perhaps because of your youth you will laugh. But some of the Homeridae, I believe, repeat two verses of poems from the secret poems (ἐκ τῶν ἀποθέτων ἐπόν) of Homer, one of which is very outrageous and not perfectly metrical (ὑβριστικὸν πάνοι καὶ οὐ σφόδρα τι ἐξέμπρον). They sing them (ὑμνοῦσι δὲ) …” (tr. – with slight changes – H.N. Fowler). As for νεανισθοίμαι, cf. Phaedr. 235a.

12 Fr. 74 G. = 418 P: Κλάνθι μὲν γάρ τοις ἐπέδειξαι χρυσόπεπλε κοῦρη. Normally κλάνθι is used to address gods (cf. Hom. Il. 1, 37). The epithet χρυσόπεπλος is attested e.g. for Mnemosyne (Pind. Isthm. 6, 75).
Aphrodite or alternatively a girl hailed as a goddess.

2. The second criterion is to relate the anecdote reported in the Pindar scholia to the time when it was created, especially in relation to the reception of Anacreon’s poetry. If we relate the apothegm to the “kind of interpretative trend” which “is bound to have had its impact on the process of transmission, which has duly delivered to us a selection of fragments in which wine and love predominate”, then we would risk being satisfied with Andrew Lear’s depressive conclusion: “first, later Antiquity’s editing of Anacreon was not so complete or consistent as to present us with an exclusively erotic-Bacchic poet. Indeed, enough remains that we can see that the story from the scholia … is totally unfounded: Anacreon did write hymns to the gods.” Actually, the first aspect to consider is that the anecdote may have conveyed a specific meaning of hymnos – which finds its theoretical ground in Plato (Resp. 607a; Symp. 177a; Leg. 700a-b) – restricted to compositions in honour of gods; while, in contrast, lyric poetry currently used this term to define any celebratory song, for both divine and human subjects. In his lines that are commented on, Pindar refers to ancient erotic poetry – of course with no negative connotation – as paidéioi hymnoi (“hymns for boys”), and it is by no means impossible that Anacreon himself called some of his love poems “hymn”, given the broad use of the term in his poetry. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely that commentators of Pindar, inspired by his lines, invented the apothegm, for they were well aware of the broad meaning of hymnos; rather, they probably inherited it from some previous source, as we will see. In parallel, some kind of a devaluation of Anacreon’s hymns may have had a certain impact on the anecdote’s origin: presumably, just as they appear to us, they were not perceived as serious and appropriate celebrations of gods. This verdict could have particularly affected most of the hymns to Eros. In Plato’s

13 As argued by Gentili 1973, p. 135.
14 For the dating of the anecdote, the tradition of the scholia vetera on Pindar is not so helpful. As a matter of fact, they have been delivered to us in an epitomised redaction of the second half of the 2nd cent. AD, but they contain exegetical material dating back to the 3rd cent. BC. Behind our scholia should lie Dydimus’s massive late-alexandrian commentary especially: see, in this regard, the still useful reconstruction of Deas 1931, p. 1 ff. Furthermore, Dydimus is reported to have pursued the curious task of quantifying the frequency of erotic theme in Anacreon’s poetry (Sen. Ep. 88, 37).
17 Pind. Isthm. 2, 1-5: The men of long ago, O Thrasyboulos, who used to mount / the chariot of the golden-wreathed Muses, taking with them the glorious lyre, / freely shot their honey-sounding hymns of love / at any boy who was beautiful and had the sweetest bloom / of late summer that woos fair-throned Aphrodite” (tr. W.H. Race). Cf. Bacchyl. Pae. 1, 80. Pindar (Ol. 2, 1 ff.) states explicitly that hymns can be dedicated to gods, heroes and men.
18 Hymns to Dionysus are almost certainly the kalòi hymnoi mentioned in fr. 33 G. = 356 P., 10-1 (cf. v. 6). The Homeric scholia (on Il. 13, 227) attest that Anacreon (fr. 168 G. = 485 P.) also used “hymn” meaning threnos (lyrical lament).
19 Until Dydimus’s eidographic classification, reproduced by Proclus, hymnos preserved both its specific and broad meaning: see Harvey 1955, p. 164 ff.
20 It is by referring to Anacreon’s many hymns to Eros that Athenaeus (13, 600d) introduces Critias’s hexametric portrait of the Ionian poet, but this poem makes no mention of the god. However, Athenaeus
Symposium, Phaedrus complains that no poets had composed an encomium in honour of such a powerful god.\(^{21}\) Plutarch takes up the idea specifying that “now generally poets who write or sing of the god seem to be making fun of him or carousing in a drunken revel; but they have some serious productions to their credit” (tr. E.L. Minar a. o.).\(^{22}\) Another harsh verdict, although concerning the particular theme of royal education, is pronounced by Dio of Prusa:\(^{23}\) the young Alexander, who recognises Homer as his favorite poet, quotes the above-mentioned hymn to Dionysus as an example of prayer unsuitable for kings to sing and listen to, after rejecting as indecorous the entire poetic production of Anacreon and Sappho.\(^{24}\) Dio borrows the Platonic distinction between praises of gods and praises of men. Perhaps the song for Cleobulus was perceived as the result of an unacceptable contamination of poetic genres. But such contamination was, after all, willingly pursued by most of hymnodic poetry to love deities: we may call them “erotic hymns”, adopting an expression attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite.

In short, the joke in the anecdote acquires sense only in the light of the restricted meaning of hymnos, denoting exclusively the celebration of gods: neither Anacreon nor Pindar would have perceived the name of hymn for a song celebrating boys as anomalous. The scholiast could have selected our anecdote because of its thematic continuity with Pindar’s text – which is undeniable – but its inventor was inclined to appreciate the dichotomy between hymns and celebratory poems for boys. On the other hand, the anecdote apparently remarks the lack of hymns to gods in Anacreon’s poetry: if his Classical and Hellenistic canonisation as an could have had in mind here Anacreon’s poem for the Lesbian girl (13 G. = 358 P.), cited above (13, 599c). However, there are two Hellenistic epigrams that focus, more or less explicitly, on Anacreon’s hymnodic composition (Anth. Pal. 7, 25, 1-4; App. Plan. 16, 308, 6-8). For the songs in praise of Erotes remembered by Himerius, see above, n. 7.

\(^{21}\) Plat. Symposium 170a ff.: Φαῖδρος γὰρ ἑκάστοτε πρὸς με ἁγανακτῶν λέγει Οὐ δεινόν, ϕῆσίν, ϕῆν τὸν Ἐρυξίμαχον, ἄλλοις μὲν τὶς θεὸν ὅμιλος καὶ παικτὸς εἶναι ὑπὸ τῶν ποιητῶν πεποιημένους, τῷ δὲ Ἁριῶτῃ, ἀλλικούτῳ ὄντι καὶ τοσοῦτοι θεῷ, μηδὲ ἕνα πῶποτε τοσοῦτοι γεγονότων ποιητῶν πεποιηκέναι μηδὲν ἐγκώμιον;

\(^{22}\) Plut. Amat. 765d s.: τὰ μὲν οὖν ποιηταὶ προσπαίζοντες ἔδικαι τῷ θεῷ γράφειν περὶ αὐτοῦ (scil. Ἁριῶτῃ) καὶ ἄδικα ἐπικομίζοντες, ὀλίγα δὲ εἴρηται μετὰ σπουδῆς αὐτοῦ …

\(^{23}\) Dio Chrys. Or. 2, 62: τούτοις γε μὴν ξυνέπεται μηδὲ εὐχὰς εὔχεσθαι τὸν βασιλέα τοῖς ἄλλοις ὁμοίας μηδὲ αὐ τοῖς θεοῖς καλέν ὄστες εὑχόμενον ὡσπερ ὁ Ἰόνων ποιητής Ἀνακρέων … fr. 14 G. = 357 P. “It follows that the king should not offer such prayers as other men do nor, on the other hand, call upon the gods with such a petition as Anacreon, the Ionian poet, makes …” (tr. J.W. Cohoon). In the Christian era, Synesius (Hymn. 1 Lacombrade = 9 Dell’Era) says to reject the Anacreontic and Sapphic pattern in favor of the more solemn Doric song.

\(^{24}\) Dio Chrys. Or. 2, 28: οὐδὲ γὰρ μουσικὴν, ἐδη (scil. ὁ Ἀλέξανδρος), πᾶσαι μαθάνειν ἑθέλουσιν ἂν, ἀλλὰ καθὰ λόγον ἢ λόγῳ χρῆσθαι πρὸς θεῶν ὅμιλος καὶ θεραπείας. ἐπὶ δὲ σῆμα τῶν ἄγαθῶν ἀνδρῶν τοὺς ἐπαύσαν, οὐδὲ γε ἦδεν τὰ Σαπφοῦς ἢ Ἀνακρέοντος ἀρωτικὰ μέλη πρέπον ἂν εἴη τοῖς βασιλέσσιν … ‘‘And so, too, with music,’ continued Alexander; ‘for I should not be willing to learn all there is in music, but only enough for playing the cithara or the lyre when I sing hymns in honour of the gods and worship them, and also, I suppose, in chanting the praises of brave men. It would surely not be becoming for kings to sing the odes of Sappho or Anacreon …’’” (tr. J.W. Cohoon).
erotic poet really played a role, also unaccompanied by a bottleneck in the transmission of Anacreon's poetry, it is all the more important that his hymns could be disregarded as not being serious prayers. As a matter of fact, the comparison with several of his fragments, where we can actually find, as we have seen, a conflation of hymnodic and erotic motifs, can lead us towards a symbolic interpretation of the joke and of the sort of poetic atheism attributed to Anacreon.

However, more importantly, our scholia inserted the apothegm to show the absolute predominance of Anacreon's interest in pederastic poetry. Since he is said to have directed his hymns to youths instead of gods, he appears as the most representative of the poets who “have devoted their attention to their favorite boy” (see above). Now, it is perhaps significant that this image is accompanied by a reference to a triad of poets – the ‘three crowns’ of pederastic poetry: Anacreon together with Alcaeus and Ibycus. This is probably not a random occurrence, for they are also mentioned by Cicero, again on the subject of pederastic poetry: “What disclosures lastly do men of the highest culture and poets of supreme merit make about their own life in their poems and songs? What things Alcaeus, a man of bravery and of note in his country, writes about the love of youths? Of Anacreon I say nothing, for his work is all love-poetry. Above all, however, Ibycus of Rhegium was, it is clear from his writings, a passionate lover. In fact we see that love in all the examples given is lustful” (tr. J.E. King).

Like the scholia to Pindar, Cicero makes an absolute statement about Anacreon’s poetry being tota amatoria: what is different about Cicero’s passage is his tone of moral condemnation, transferred from the poetry onto its authors. Introduced by an ironic hyperbole (hominès doctissimi et summī poëtae), the three poets represent different examples of love excess. Starting from the didactic perspective that literature should be morally edifying, Cicero censures these poets for having published songs in which they narrate their lustful life. In doing so, he undoubtedly repeats the moralistic verdict of his source, that was most likely, as we will see, Peripatetic. A possible candidate is Dicaearchus of Soli, mentioned not long after our three poets with respect to his attack to Plato for defending love. But it is noteworthy that such condemnation concerning the lecherous contents of love poetry was probably delivered by

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25 Fragments of indirect tradition are too various to support this argument. A. Müller, *Anacreon und die Carmina Anacreontea. Ein literarisches Generationenverhältnis*, München 2010, p. 47, arguing with some Patricia Rosenmeyer’s statements, points out that “Allerdings wurde, wie sich zeigen wird, Anakreons nicht sympotisch-erotische Dichtung in der poetischen Rezeption nahezu nicht wahrgenommen, sondern fand ausschließlich Beachtung bei Autoren mit beispielsweise historischem oder sprachwissenschaftlichem Interesse.”


28 Dicaearch. fr. 43 Wehrli (perhaps from Bioi). Dicaearchus’s researches concerned Alcaeus and sympotic customs.
an eminent fellow-disciple of Dicaearchus, Aristoxenus of Tarentum. According to Ps.-Acro’s commentary on Horace, Aristoxenus said that Anacreon and Alcaeus “used their books as friends”.29 This sentence is certainly likely to be interpreted in moral terms, in a very similar way to Cicero’s view. What Anacreon and Alcaeus shared confidently with their friendly books may be the content of their songs: lustful and immoral loves which should have been kept secret instead.

In any case, our triad of poets does not appear immediately, at least explicitly, to be linked to pederastic poetry, but rather to musical themes. Its first occurrence is in Aristophanes’s *Women at the Thesmophoria*.30 In a famous scene of the play, the effeminate poet Agathon is subtly trying to justify his feminine dress by linking his effeminacy with the Oriental refinement represented by Ibycus, Anacreon and Alcaeus: they would have been able to embellish their music (*harmonian ekhymisan*) thanks to their Ionic way of life and luxury symbolised by the use of mitre. Traces of this tradition can be found in Philodemus of Gadara’s polemic against the Stoic Diogenes of Babilonia, who in his work *On Music* embraced and revised (from a Stoic point of view) the ancient Pythagoric theory, already variously treated by Damon, Plato and the Peripatetics, dealing with the psychagogic effects of music as well as its ethical and educational value. As an Epicurean, Philodemus rejected these principles and accused Diogenes of conferring on melody what can be proved only about poetic words and texts. Therefore, says Philodemus, Diogenes “did not [manage to] show that Ibycus and Anacreon and the like corrupted the young men by their music: rather this happened through their ideas” (tr. Yatromanolakis).31 These youths are obviously the poets’ pupils, corrupted in both the erotic and paideutic senses.32 Diogenes supported his argument through examples (*parédeixen*) taken from poems or informations about poets,33 and in particular liked to dwell

29 Aristox. fr. 71a Wehrli ap. Ps.-Acro, in Hor. Serm. 2, 1, 30: ‘Illie, velut fidis arcana sodalibus olim credebat libris’; hoc Lucilius ex Anacreonte Graeco traxit et Alcaeo lyricis, quos ait Aristoxenos libris propriis vice amicorum usos esse. Porphirion (*in ibid.* = Aristox. fr. 71b Wehrli), attesting the name of Sappho rather than that of Anacreon, could imply that Aristoxenus was also referring to her (cf. Comm. Cruq. p. 408). The information concerning Lucilius’s debt to Greek poets is probably autoschediastic, but we should ask ourselves whether Horace knew Aristoxenus’s sentence. However, there’s a difference between his sentence and what Horace says on Lucilius, which displays some features of satyrical poetry such as autobiographic themes and boldness. On Horace’s passage see Harrison 1987, p. 38 ff.

30 Aristoph. *Thesm.* 149-63: ΑΓ ἄλλως τ’ ἁμοσιόν ἐστι ποιητὴν ἰδεῖν / ἀγρεῖον ὄντα καὶ δασύν, σκέψαμαι δ’ ὦτι / Ἠβυκος ἔκεινον κάνακρεών ο Τήιος / κάλκαως, οἵτε ἀρμονίαν ἐχύμισαν, /ἐμιτροφόρον τε καὶ διεκλῶν’ Ἰονικῶς. “AGATHON: Besides, ‘tis discordant to see a poet looking loutish and shaggy. Observe that the renowned Ibycus, and Anacreon of Teos, and Alcaeus – poets who put some spice into music – used to wear bonnets and cavort Ionian style” (tr. J. Henderson).


on Aristophanes’s jokes against the contemporary poets Agathon and Democritus: for this reason, there is no doubt that he also appealed to the aforementioned lines of Aristophanes’s *Women at the Thesmophoria*, and this allows us to infer that Philodemus numbered Alcaeus too, together with Ibycus and Anacreon, among the corrupting poets. Furthermore, we are told by Sextus Empiricus that, contrary to grammarians’ notion of the value of poetry, some Epicureans (probably those identified with Philodemus and his circle) argued that “the love-madden and the wine-bibbers are further inflamed by reading the poems of Alcaeus and Anacreon.” (tr. R.G. Bury).

The passages from Aristophanes and Philodemus, mentioned above, support the attribution of Aristoxenus’s fragment regarding Anacreon and Alcaeus to his work *On Music.* Aristoxenus was doubtless an authority for Diogenes’s musical treatise and his work was probably directly consulted by Philodemus, a contemporary of Cicero, too. If Aristoxenus in this work expressed his view about the immorality of Anacreon and Alcaeus’s poems, it is likely that his reference did not dismiss the matter of musical ethos. What distinguished him from the traditional theories of the psychagogic effects of music, was the idea that music’s dimension is aesthetic before being ethical (neither exclusively ethical as for Plato and Diogenes, nor exclusively aesthetic as for Philodemus). Hence, one could question how Aristoxenus considered Anacreon and Alcaeus’s music, especially in relation to educational issues. He seems to have been entrenched in the traditional models of music education. Starting from his aesthetic and ethical conception, he condemned ‘modern’ music as effeminate (θηλυνομένη), opposed to the more masculine (ἀνδρικώτερα) ancient music (Aristox. fr. 70 Wehrli). In

37 *Περὶ μουσικῆς*: frs. 71-89 Wehrli. Actually, Wehrli 1945, p. 70 already ascribed the fragment to the introduction of this work, although through a different interpretation of it: “wenn jene (scil. Sappho, Alkaios und Anakreon) als Zeugen für den allgemeinen Wort der μουσική aufgerufen sind, dann hat das Wort protreptischen Charakter und findet seinen Platz in der Einleitung zu *Περὶ μουσικῆς*.”
38 Philodemus (*De Mus.* 4, col. 109, 28 ff.) seems to criticise Aristoxenus (fr. 73 Wehrli: *περὶ μουσικῆς?*); see Rispoli 1991, p. 74 ff. (cf. Lomiento 2011, p. 140, n. 2). But he occasionally could have also appealed to his authority against Diogenes: see Brancacci 2008, p. 125 ff.; see also Ferrario 2011, p. 73 ff.
39 In this work (fr. 81 Wehrli), Aristoxenus ascribed the invention of the Mixolydian mode to Sappho. On the Aristoxenic ethical theory of music, see Rocconi 2011, p. 71 ff. and Lomiento 2011, p. 140 ff., whose different views depend respectively on recognising and denying the value of Ps.-Plut. *De Mus.* 1133c-1144d as testimony for Aristoxenus’s thought.
40 The ethos of music is not expressed by the kind of harmony (mode) or rhythm, but instead by the musical composition as a whole. We do not know to what extent Aristoxenus agreed with Aristoteles (*Pol.* 1399a ff.) regarding the idea that melodies can influence the human soul because they imitate its character, but undoubtedly he agreed with his master that music performed the functions of amusement (*paidiá*) and entertainment (*diagoghé*): cf. Wehrli 1945, p. 69.
41 Aristox. fr. 76 Wehrli: e.g. Pindar, Lasus, Pratinas “and those other lyric poets who had shown themselves excellent composers for the cithara (καὶ τῶν λυρικῶν ἀνδρῶν ἐγένοντο ποιηταὶ κρομμάτων ἀγάθοι)”: tr. B. Einarson – Ph.H. De Lacy.
this conservative view, Aristoxenus would be expected to express unfavorable opinions on
the music of Oriental poets such as Anacreon, held in honour by poets such as Agathon and
perhaps Cinesias (Aristoph. Av. 1372/3), since he considered the new music fashion that these
poets represented to be degenerate. Nevertheless, Aristoxenus’s ethical view on music appears
too well connected with his technical reflections, to consider his judgment of some poets of the
past harsh given how they came to be perceived later.

Conclusions

I intended to show how the tradition concerning Anacreon, along with Ibycus and Alcaeus
(in relation to pederastic poetry, within and beyond the subject of music), can be related to
Aristoxenus. In any case, he may have been the first to introduce the example of Anacreon as an
erotic poet into the music theory literature. Of course, it may seem too pretentious to establish
a stemma of sources on the basis of only the triadic “cluster”42 and thematic similarities, since
the tradition could be more complex than it seems. But limited data and their probabilistic
outcomes should not discourage us from seeking links among the sources. On such premises,
I would suggest that, had Aristoxenus mentioned Ibycus too, he may have played a central role
in the moral background that seems to have inspired the mention of the three poets in later
tradition.

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42 According to the definition of Yatromanolakis 2007, nn. 251 ff., who also explores the occurrences
of couple Anacreon – Sappho.
Vox O. 1990, *Studi anacreontei*, Bari
Abstract

“The boys are my gods”, what Anacreon says in an anecdote transmitted by the scholia to Pindar (Isthm. 2, 1b), symbolises a characteristic of his erotic poetry, at the heart of which are his pupils. The datum that Anacreon would have composed no hymns to gods can be explained in the light of both a narrow concept of “hymn” (celebration of gods) on the one hand, and a devaluation of Anacreon’s hymns on the other. Anacreon’s appearances here and throughout the tradition, together with Ibycus and Alcaeus – especially as a representative pederastic poet and/or in connection with musical subjects – lead back to the moral background of IV cent. BC within which the Peripatetic Aristoxenus of Tarentum appears to have played an important role.