Space in archaic Greek lyric: city, countryside and sea
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Citation for published version (APA):

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5. CONCLUSION

The study of city, countryside and sea has shown that, generally speaking, space can perform two roles in archaic Greek lyric. These roles are not mutually exclusive: the distinction is one of gradation according to the dominant role. The first role is that of setting, i.e. the scenic backdrop against which the action takes place, and frame, i.e. a place close to the action (secondary frame) or distant from it (distant frame). This is the case in narratives related to the Trojan saga for cities like those of Troy and Mysia and their coastal plains with rivers as well as for the sea in narratives about the journeys of Theseus and the Argonauts. In this respect, archaic Greek lyric aligns with epic poetry, where the primary role of space is to set the scene of the narrative and space is mentioned only when relevant to the action.

The second role is that of symbol. Space can also be symbolic in epic poetry: for example, spatial marks on the Trojan battlefield such as the oak tree near the Scaean gate are associated with security for the Trojans in the Iliad, while the rugged mountains and caves on the island of the Cyclopes is associated with primitiveness in the Odyssey (9.106-115).

An important outcome of my study is that there is a marked difference between epic and lyric poetry: in the former the role of setting or frame tends to prevail, but in the latter that of symbol. The symbolic role of space in archaic Greek lyric is twofold. Firstly, contemporary cities (ἄστυ and πόλις) take the form of metaphor, when the capture of a city stands for an erotic ‘conquest’ or the downfall of a political system, and personification, when the city is presented as a human being suffering from chaos and injustice. While the personification serves to dramatise and persuade, the metaphors establish ‘cognitive elucidation’ or indirectly express sexual experiences. Secondly, the countryside is predominantly an erotic symbol: fields are metaphors for the female body or have erotic associations which mirror female desire; gardens are metaphorical for female genitals or are associated with incipient sexuality; meadows have associations with seduction of girls by
men (‘meadow of love’ motif), homoerotic associations or associations with Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Finally, the sea is a symbol of danger, which has a ‘psychologising function’, as it is connected to emotions of fear.

This study has demonstrated that specific roles of space and uses of diction correspond. If space performs the role of setting or frame, much of the diction is shared with epic poetry (especially epithets). The main differences between the diction in epic and lyric poetry are lexical, i.e. the combinations of nouns and epithets and the formation of an epithet differs, and semantic, i.e. epithets have other meanings. Where space has a symbolic role, the rare instances of diction shared with epic poetry have referential differences, particularly in instances of (city) personification. In each case, the use of diction shared with epic poetry has important, contextual effects: it either reinforces symbolic associations (of the sea with danger) or adds grim overtones to settings and frames (of the city and the countryside), in the latter often in combination with the anachronical order of a ‘lyric narrative’. In light of the fact that these effects are created by the use of epithets, this thesis has demonstrated their important contextual relevance, which had already been pointed out for some individual lyric poets (Alcaeus, Sappho and Bacchylides).