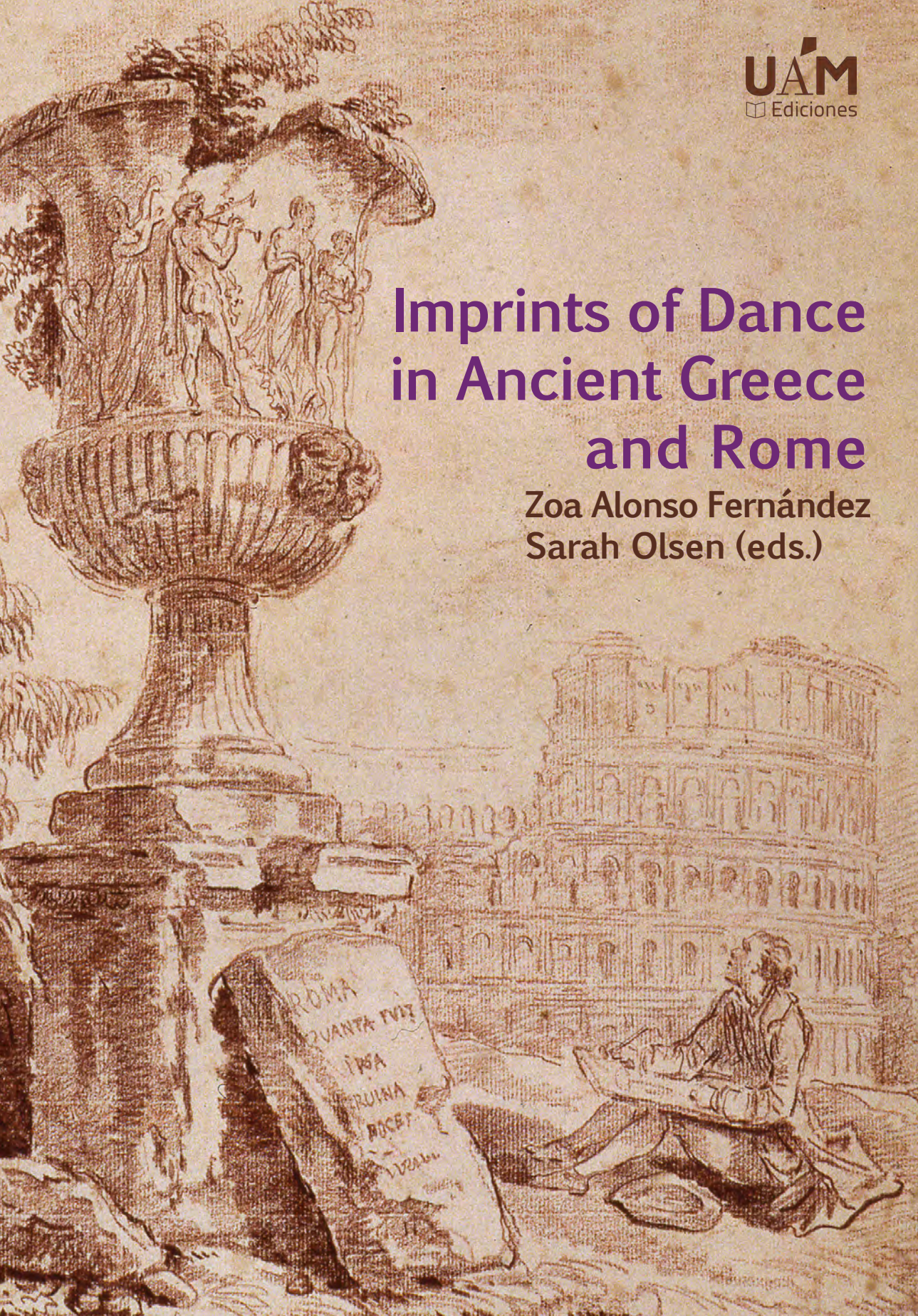


Imprints of Dance in Ancient Greece and Rome

Zoa Alonso Fernández
Sarah Olsen (eds.)



IMPRINTS OF DANCE IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

edited by
Zoa Alonso Fernández and Sarah Olsen

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Contributors

Zoa Alonso Fernández is an associate professor of Latin Philology at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). She is the Principal Investigator of the research project *Improntas de Danza Antigua (IDA): textos, cuerpos, imágenes, movimiento* (2020-2022), funded by the Fundación BBVA and the Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos. She is the author of several articles on Roman dance and on the reception of antiquity in performance and the choreographic medium.

Rosa Andújar is a senior lecturer (associate professor) at King's College London (UK), where she teaches in the Liberal Arts and Classics Departments. She has published widely on Greek tragedy in its original fifth century BCE context as well as on ancient Greek drama's rich reception across modernity. Her publications include *The Greek Trilogy of Luis Alfaro* (Methuen Drama, 2020), which won the 2020 London Hellenic Prize, and the edited volumes *Paths of Song: The Lyric Dimension of Greek Tragedy* (with Thomas Coward and Theodora Hadjimichael, De Gruyter 2018) and *Greeks and Romans on the Latin American Stage* (with Konstantinos Nikoloutsos, Bloomsbury 2020). Forthcoming books include the monograph *Playing the Chorus in Greek Tragedy*, and *The Cambridge Companion to Classics and Race*.

Lauren Curtis is an associate professor of Classical Studies at Bard College (USA). She is the author of *Imagining the Chorus in Augustan Poetry* (Cambridge University Press 2017), co-editor of *Music and Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds* (with Naomi Weiss, Cambridge University Press 2021) and *The Lives of Latin Texts: Papers Presented to Richard J. Tarrant* (with Irene Peirano Garrison, Harvard University Press 2021), as well as articles on Latin literature and Greek and Roman musical culture. She is currently working on a commentary on Ovid, *Tristia* 3 for *Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics*.

Laura Gianvittorio-Ungar is a lecturer in Classics and Marie Jahoda Research Fellow at the University of Vienna (Austria), and guest researcher at the

Austrian Archaeological Institute of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She is the editor of *Choreutika: Performing and Theorising Dance in Ancient Greece* (Fabrizio Serra 2017) and co-editor of *Choreonarratives: Dancing Stories in Greek and Roman Antiquity and Beyond* (with Karin Schlapbach, Brill 2021). Her current work focuses on the performance cultures of Greek and Roman antiquity and and finalizing a monograph entitled *Re-imagining Early Tragedy: Perspectives on Genre and Poetics*.

Carolyn M. Laferrière is the assistant curator of Ancient Mediterranean Art at the Princeton University Art Museum (USA). She is also the Associate Editor for the journal *Greek and Roman Musical Studies*. She is the author of *Divine Music in Archaic and Classical Greek Art: Seeing the Songs of the Gods* (Cambridge University Press 2024).

Sarah Olsen is an associate professor of Classics at Williams College (USA). She is the author of *Solo Dance in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature: Representing the Unruly Body* (Cambridge University Press 2021) and co-editor of *Queer Euripides: Re-readings in Greek Tragedy* (with Mario Telò, Bloomsbury 2022). She has also published articles on a range of topics in Greek literature, art, and culture. She is currently working on representations of female intimacy in Euripidean tragedy.

Karin Schlapbach is a professor of Classical Philology at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland). She is the author of *The Anatomy of Dance Discourse* (Oxford University Press 2018), co-editor of *Choreonarratives: Dancing Stories in Greek and Roman Antiquity and Beyond* (with Laura Gianvittorio-Ungar, Brill 2021), and editor of *Aspects of Roman Dance Culture: Religious Cults, Theatrical Entertainments, Metaphorical Appropriations* (Franz Steiner 2022). Her current research focuses on motion and rest in Roman literary practice.

Naomi Weiss is a professor of the Classics at Harvard University (USA). She is the author of *The Music of Tragedy: Performance and Imagination in Euripidean Theater* (University of California Press 2018) and *Seeing Theater: The Phenomenology of Classical Greek Drama* (University of California Press 2023), as well as the co-editor of *Genre in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature: Theories and Models* (with Margaret Foster and Leslie Kurke, Brill 2019) and *Music and Memory in the Ancient Greek and Roman Worlds* (with Lauren Curtis, Cambridge University Press 2021).

Preface

Plutarch, writing in Greek in the first century CE, disparagingly describes the act of stepping outside one's area of expertise as "putting your foot in someone else's chorus" (ἐν ἀλλοτρίῳ χορῷ πόδα τιθεῖς, Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 673d). This same phrase, translated into Latin (*in alieno choro pedem ponere*), is included in an Early Modern collection of proverbs by Erasmus of Rotterdam (*Adagia* 1151), although unlike many of his other ancient sayings, it has not endured in idiomatic usage in either English or Spanish. The obscurity of this particular phrase likely reflects its close relationship to its original context: Plutarch's sense that knowledge and cultural identity may be negotiated through one's relationship to a singing and dancing "chorus" is grounded in the particular performance culture of ancient Greece and Rome. While Greek and Roman dance and performance practices varied across time and context, they were persistently linked with the expression and exploration of social and cultural norms. To "put a foot in someone else's chorus" is, therefore, a powerful image for committing a social or intellectual misstep.

The editors and authors of this volume, however, would like to take Plutarch's phrase, not as a cautionary prohibition, but as a kind of manifesto. Our aim is to invite specialists in Greek and Roman antiquity, dance theory, and performance to deliberately "place their feet in one another's choruses"—that is, to make use of one another's sources, tools, and frameworks. To that end, we provide an introductory overview of key forms and historical periods of Greek and Roman dance, intended to situate readers within the world of ancient Mediterranean performance. Each chapter then takes up a concept that has proven significant to the transhistorical and transcultural study of dance: Geography, Space, Body, Audience, Movement, Objects, Politics, and Gods. Each chapter title thus represents a cluster of claims and debates already treated extensively in Dance Studies and related fields. The individual authors of this volume use these terms as starting points for exploring the relevance of those claims and debates for our understanding of ancient Greek and Roman dance, with the twin goals of both offering an introduction to some aspect of ancient performance culture for students and specialists in disciplines beyond Classics, and also challenging classicists to engage more fully with interdisciplinary concepts and conversations. The publication of this volume in both English

and Spanish is likewise intended to improve access and facilitate conversation across cultural and intellectual contexts.

We must note, however, that bilingual publication presents conceptual challenges. Certain terms and concepts are expressed very differently in English and Spanish—the vocabulary surrounding race, ethnicity, and related forms of identity is one important example. The Spanish language also demands that a grammatical gender be assigned to words like “an author” or “the dancer,” while English allows for more neutral expression (in this particular respect). We are grateful to Candela de Lorenzo for her translation of the volume, and we invite readers to consider how the complexities of translation across modern languages offers us an opportunity to reflect on the inherent challenges of translating both words and cultural concepts from Greek and Latin.

Imprints of Dance in Ancient Greece and Rome was conceived, funded, and written during the first years of the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that upended our usual modes of scholarly collaboration. All of the contributors to this volume had significant caregiving, teaching, and administrative demands, and we found, in this project, a way to sustain our individual and collective scholarly identities during a difficult and complicated time. We collectively organized a two-year series of online seminars focused on the various topics covered by this volume, and as a result, each chapter reflects not only the organizational and analytical voice of its author, but also the contributions and suggestions of the entire group. We possess diverse areas of expertise (e.g., literature, art, Greece, Rome), yet through this collaborative process, we created chapters that address a range of Greek and Roman sources and time periods—stepping beyond our individual training, yet as a group, remaining in tune with the conventions and concerns of specific subfields.

We are grateful to the Fundación BBVA and the Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos for funding the production of this volume, as well as a research meeting (in Cambridge, MA) and a conference (in Madrid) related to it. We thank Naomi Weiss and the Harvard Classics Department for their further support of our Cambridge gathering. We also thank Emilio Crespo, Jesús de la Villa, Rodrigo Verano, and Elsa Bentolila, as well as the Fundación Pastor de Estudios Clásicos, the Departamento de Filología Clásica, and the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid) for contributing to the conference in Madrid. The Oakley Center at Williams College provided support for the final stages of our editorial work, and we are especially grateful to Zoë Tavares Bennett for her careful review of the volume, and to Joshua Benjamins for compiling the indices. Mirian Galante, Saúl Martínez Bermejo, and Sara Pantoja, from UAM Ediciones, guided this volume through the publication process, and many other friends and colleagues offered valuable assistance and advice: Bernardo Berruecos, Krista Andrews, Pablo García, Helena González,

María Isabel Jiménez, José Luis Reynoso, Jorge Tomás, Lester Tomé, Esperanza Torrego, Luis Unceta, and Teresa Wu. Finally, the editors (Zoa and Sarah) would like to express our deep appreciation for the wide-ranging curiosity, intellectual generosity, and good humor of the six contributors, who made this project such a pleasure to complete, and for the patience and love of our parents, partners, and children during a time of personal and societal upheaval.

Notes on Texts, Translations, and Access

We have aimed to use familiar and consistent forms of Greek and Roman proper nouns, with a general preference for Latinized forms (e.g., Dionysus, Aeschylus). All Latin and transliterated Greek quotations and passages are set in italics, and Greek text is provided where appropriate. Abbreviations of ancient authors, works, and editions, as well as modern periodicals, follow the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition (S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth, & E. Eidinow, eds. 2012). Each chapter has its own bibliography, with a separate list of texts and translations employed. Where not otherwise noted, translations are by the author of the chapter.

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Ancient Greek and Roman Dance: An Overview

Zoa Alonso Fernández and Sarah Olsen

Some of the earliest extant Greek writing deals with dance. An eighth-century BCE oinochoe (wine jug), found in Athens in 1871, displays an inscription that may be translated as: “[for] the dancer who dances most lightly” (ὅς νῦν ὀρχηστῶν πάντων ἀταλώτατα παίζει; see Fig. 1). This text suggests that this object, commonly called the Dipylon oinochoe in reference to its findspot, might have served as a prize in a dance competition. The phrase, with its attention to “delicacy” or “lightness” as a quality of movement, also points to an early aesthetics of dance (Cullhed 2021; Steiner 2021, 493-502). The inscription’s wording further underscores the connection between dance and play that pervades both the Greek and the Roman cultural imaginations, since the verb used for “to dance” here is *paizō*, which may also be translated as “to play” or “to frolic.” In Latin, the term *ludo* has a similar range of meanings.

Our definition of “dance,” for the purposes of this volume, is intentionally capacious. In seeking out the imprints of bodily movement in ancient Greek and Roman art and literature, we will attend to both linguistic and iconographic markers, as well as the various combinations of language, imagery, and allusion that can align with dance in the visual or literary representations of a given genre, time period, or tradition.¹ We have chosen to begin with the Dipylon oinochoe because it illustrates both the flexibility of ancient Greek terminology for dance, as well as the relationship between dance and competition, community, and aesthetics. More than that, however, it indicates that ancient Greeks were

¹ Cf. Scolieri on “the conflicting and evolving perceptions” of dance in various languages and historical contexts (2013, 13). On definitions of “dance” in ancient Greek contexts, see especially Lonsdale 1993, 1-20 and Naerebout 1997, 165-66. For Rome, see Alonso Fernández 2011, 49-59. On the identification of dance in Greek vase painting, see Smith 2010a, 2021. On Roman iconography, see Castaldo 2020.



Figure 1: Attic oinochoe (Dipylon oinochoe) with inscription, 740 BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. 192 NAM © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development / photographer: Durutomo / Wikimedia Commons.

writing about dance from the moment that writing in Greek first emerged in the historical record.²

² See Powell 1988 and Binek 2017 on the oinochoe's inscription and its relationship to the earliest forms of the Greek alphabet.



Figure 2: Geometric skyphos depicting a ring of dancers, c. 735-720 BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. 874 NAM © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development / photographer: Seth Estrin.

On one level, the prominence of dance in early Greek and Roman literature and visual art attests to the significance of performance in Greek and Roman society more broadly. Many Geometric Greek vessels, dated to the same period as this oinochoe, depict various forms of dance and structured movement. In Fig. 2, for example, we see that the interior of a skyphos (drinking cup) is decorated with a ring of dancers—male and female, as indicated by their clothing. Two male figures, at the top and bottom of the image here, are depicted holding lyres and providing musical accompaniment. Based on the iconography of objects like this one, scholars have stressed the ritual significance of communal dance in eighth-century Greece, as well as the particular relationship of dance and its imagery to courtship and marriage rituals (Langdon 2008; D’Acunto 2016).³ There are corresponding traces of communal dance on the Italian peninsula in the second half of the eighth century BCE. A bronze situla (pail) found in an Etruscan tomb in Bisenzio, near Florence (Fig. 3), displays two processions of warriors, armed and ithyphallic (i.e., displaying erect phalluses), whose placement and posture indicate synchronized movement (Bloch 1958; Camporeale

³ See also Liveri 2008 on dance and ritual in the Bronze Age, as well as Soar and Aamodt 2014 on the value of archaeological evidence for studying dance practices in the ancient Mediterranean.



Figure 3: Etruscan situla (pail), with figures on lid and shoulder, c. 8th cent. BCE. Amphora in bronze plate from Bisenzio. Rome, Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia. © 2022. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali e del Turismo.

1987). The action represented on this object has been compared to representations of magic or propitiatory armed rituals beyond the ancient Mediterranean (Cherici 2017), and it also provides early evidence for the longstanding tradition of collective male dancing in the Italic and pre-Roman worlds (Spivey 1987; Lacam 2011; Gouy 2019). In the written record, some of the oldest surviving fragments of Latin hymns, the *carmen saliare* and the *carmen arvale*, similarly point to the role of dance in the creation of social and ritual bonds during the earliest periods of Roman history (Habinek 2005; Alonso Fernández 2021).⁴

The Dipylon oinochoe, along with other Geometric Greek vases, Etruscan artifacts, and Roman ritual records, further attests to an impulse to

represent and reflect upon dance. This object, and its inscription, can thus help us to take account of the gap between ancient practices and their enduring—if often fragmentary, enigmatic, or elusive—traces. In other words, we might long to know what Greek or Roman dances “really looked like” (in terms of choreography, staging, or costuming), and indeed, in addition to scholarly attempts to reconstruct ancient movement, images of ancient dance have provided imaginative fodder for a wide variety of performing artists.⁵ Yet a

⁴ The date of the *carmen saliare* is unknown. The *carmen arvale* is dated to sometime before the fourth century BCE, but preserved in an inscription from the third century CE (*CIL* 6.02104 = 32388 = *ILS* 5039 = *ILLRP* 4 = *EDCS* 19000364). See Sarullo 2014 for the former and Scheid 1990 and 1998 for the latter.

⁵ For early models of reconstructive research, see Emmanuel 1896 and Séchan 1930. An important strand of recent scholarship has focused on the potential for metrical patterns to illuminate elements of ancient dance; cf., e.g., Moore 2012, 105–34, 2022; Delavaud-Roux 2020. On later artistic and choreographic engagement with ancient Greek and Roman dance, cf. Macintosh 2010; Dorf 2019.

Geometric vase is emphatically not a video recording, nor is an inscription an uncomplicated chronicle of the past. The reconstruction of ancient dance has thus both enticed and frustrated scholars and artists for a very long time (Naerebout 1997, 60-77). It might, therefore, be more productive to think about artistic engagement with ancient dance as a creative endeavor: one that draws upon embodied knowledge and experience in order to explore, rather than erase, the distance between ancient and modern bodies. For example, “Ancient Dance in Modern Dancers,” a collaborative research project sponsored by Oxford University and the Archive of Performance of Greek and Roman Drama, offers one model for such scholarly creativity. As part of this initiative, modern dancers and choreographers developed their own creative responses to ancient sources on Roman-era dance, investigating questions of embodiment and audience reaction that span the fields of Classics, Anthropology, and Dance Studies (Slaney, Bocksberger, & Foka 2018).⁶

Even if we lack direct access to the performances of antiquity, we are rich in resources for exploring the representation, theorization, and conceptualization of dance in ancient Greece and Rome. The Dipylon oinochoe, with its intimations of dance aesthetics and competition, is but one example of this —albeit an early and thus important one. The imprints of dance may also be found in architectural elements, mosaics, friezes, wall-paintings, statues, pottery, inscriptions, hymns, dramatic poetry, proverbs, philosophical writings, and antiquarian treatises. Our aim, therefore, is to consider such representations of dance in literary and visual sources, not only as evidence for the cultural practices that they describe, but also as sites for reflecting upon the nature, impact, and purpose of dance itself. This preliminary chapter will offer an overview of the various forms and contexts for dance in ancient Greece and Rome, attending to both continuity and difference across time and culture. But in order to do this, we must first reflect further on the sources themselves and the questions that they can and cannot answer.

Objects and Methods: Dance on Delos

Putting aside choreographic reconstruction, how can we use our complex and often fragmentary sources to better understand ancient Greek and Roman dance at particular times and in specific places, as well as the relationship between dance and ancient cultural life more broadly? We would like to explore

⁶ In the same vein, see Crawley 2020 and 2021 for the work *Like Terpsichore? (Fragments)*, as described by the dancer/researcher in charge of the project. For creative choreographic engagement as part of the making of dance history, see Albright 2010.

such methodological questions by taking the Greek island of Delos as a case study, paying careful attention to the different kinds of evidence we can use to understand Delian performance practices from the late Archaic (sixth- and early fifth-century BCE) period onward, as well as the ways that these practices became exemplary for the conceptualization and appreciation of dance in later eras. We have selected Delos because we have comparatively robust evidence for the performance of dance on this island in various time periods, and because it functions repeatedly in Greek and Roman literature as a paradigmatic site of performance.

Delos is a small island located in the Aegean Sea, southeast of mainland Greece. In Greek myth, it was the god Apollo's birthplace, and thus one of the most famous cult centers of the Hellenic world. On the island, there is archaeological evidence of religious activity, in the form of temple buildings and votive offerings, from the beginning of the Archaic period, and these remains point to the ongoing worship of Apollo and his sister Artemis as patrons of the place (Bruneau & Ducat 1983). Some of our earliest Greek literary sources (Homer, the *Homeric Hymns*) associate Apollo and Artemis with dance, and they often depict choral dancing as a major form of worship.⁷ In addition, we possess a valuable set of cult songs composed for choral song-and-dance performance on Delos, mostly from the fifth century BCE (Rutherford 2001, 29; Kowalzig 2007, 56-128), and the Classical Greek historian Thucydides provides a brief account of religious festivities, including choral singing and dancing, on the island (Thuc. 3.104.3-6). Delian inscriptions from the third century BCE (e.g., IG XI² 106) commemorate choral performances in honor of Apollo, pointing to the continuation of these practices into the Hellenistic period, and likely beyond (Bruneau 1970; Bowie 2006; Perrot 2020).⁸ We can thus reasonably conclude that communal dance was performed on Delos from the Archaic period onward, accompanied by song, in connection with the ritual celebration of Apollo and Artemis.

Our sources further enable us to explore the aesthetic and social value of these performances. For example, the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (dated to the sixth century BCE) describes people gathering on the island of Delos to compete in song, dance, and athletics in honor of Apollo (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 146-50), who is later described as the leader of a divine chorus on Olympus (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 186-206). The *Hymn* includes a famous account of the "Delian maidens,"

⁷ Cf. *Hymn. Hom. Ap.*; *Homeric Hymn to Artemis* [27]; *Hom. Od.* 6.101-109; *Hom. Il.* 1.472-74; Lonsdale 1994-95; Richardson 2011; Steiner 2021, 506-507.

⁸ On the development of Delos as an economic and trading emporium of goods, crafts, and slaves, see further Rauh 1993 and Zarmakoupi 2015. The island also became a site for the expansion of Egyptian cults and customs, on which cf. Barrett 2011, with bibliography.

who sing and dance “so beautifully” that “each spectator might feel as though he himself were singing” (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 163-64). This song advances an understanding of choral song-dance on Delos as a socializing force—one that invites its viewers to feel a sense of participation in the performance and a sense of connection to one another, along with an assimilation to the realm of the divine (Peponi 2009; Kurke 2012; Olsen 2017a). Such a conceptualization of the impact of dance corresponds well with the literary and archaeological evidence for Apolline cult in the Aegean, which seems to have played an important role in forging links between communities and developing a sense of shared cultural identity (Kowalzig 2007, 69-80). The description of the Delian maidens’ dance and its power is also aligned with the broader representation of choral song-dance in early Greek art and literature, which often underscores the pleasurable sense of communal connection created by group dance (Peponi 2009; Olsen 2017a).

The special correlation between Delos and dance is also a generative literary trope for later Greek and Roman authors. Delos and its dancers provide a rich source of choral imagery for the lyric poet Pindar and the tragedian Euripides (Henrichs 1996; Rutherford 2001, 773-4; Power 2011; Weiss 2018), and Delos continues to signify “dance” in Hellenistic and Roman times (Curtis 2017, 56). Callimachus, for example, makes significant use of choral imagery in his *Hymn to Apollo* and *Hymn to Delos*, especially as a way of articulating his own poetics (Cheshire 2008; Petrovic 2011; Curtis 2017, 35-42; Steiner 2021, 389-95, 487-9). Callimachus further presents the island as the location where Theseus celebrated the “crane dance” (*geranos*) after escaping from the Cretan labyrinth (*Hymn* 4. 306-13), a performance that may have been depicted on the late sixth-century François Vase, and which seems to connect Callimachus’ present with a chain of emblematic past dances, including the chorus on Achilles’ Shield in the *Iliad* (18.590-606; Hedreen 2011; Olsen 2015; Steiner 2021, 4-6, 419-20). For the Roman-era Greek writer Plutarch, the Delian dance traditions associated with the hero Theseus provide an entry point for reflecting on the ephemerality of performance and the preservation of cultural memory through literature (Plut. *Vit. Thes.* 21-22; Olsen 2021a).

Visual, archaeological, and literary evidence combined thus give us a rich, if inevitably incomplete, understanding of Delos as a site for the performance of dance. There are questions we cannot answer: what did these dances look like? How hard were they to learn and practice? Who performed in a given chorus in a given year? What did the music sound like? Yet there is still much we can say about the organization of ritual dancing on Delos in the Archaic period and thereafter, especially in terms of its social role and cultural conceptualization. In the remainder of this Introduction, therefore, we aim to sketch out the significance of dance within a key set of ancient Greek and Roman cultural

contexts, drawing upon sources and exploring questions similar to those that we have just described. As we will see, ancient Greeks and Romans danced and represented dance in a wide variety of contexts and modes, yet there are also persistent connections between dance, ritual, and social organization in ancient culture and thought.

Communal Dance and Ritual Practice

Our examination of Delian performance has already highlighted one important form of ancient Greek and Roman dance: choral ritual. As we can see in the iconography of the Geometric vases mentioned at the outset, singing and dancing in groups played a vital role in Greek religious practice from the earliest periods onwards, and the evidence from Archaic Latin hymnody points to a similar relationship between ritual and collective bodily movement in early Roman culture. In Greece, the dances performed as part of such rituals were accompanied by music: stringed instruments like the lyre or *kithara*, the *aulos* (a double-reed wind instrument), and/or percussive instruments like *kerotala* (clappers or castanets) and *cymbala* (small cymbals). The dancers often sang in unison, and the Greek term for this performance mode is *choreia*: communal song-dance in which the synesthetic combination of sonic and kinetic expression achieves an aesthetic effect that exceeds any of its individual components (Ladianou 2005; Peponi 2009).⁹

Choruses performed at festivals for the various gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon, and particular kinds of song and dance were sometimes linked with individual deities. The *paian*, for example, is a hymn associated with the god Apollo, and performed at his major sanctuaries (Delos, Delphi) as well as in cities and towns during his festival days (Dougherty 1994; Rutherford 2001). Other choral genres are linked with specific genders and life-cycle events (Stehle 1997). Maiden songs (*partheneia*) were performed by young women on the cusp of marriage, often in veneration of goddesses, like Artemis or Hera, associated with maidenhood and/or marriage (Calame 1997; Peponi 2007). Dithyrambs were linked with the god Dionysus (and sometimes Apollo as well), and generally performed by large groups of boys or men in competitive contexts (Kowalzig & Wilson 2013). Other notable genres, many of which overlapped and morphed over time, included *hyporchēmata* (dance songs), *hymenaia* (wedding

⁹ The ancient Greek language also includes the similarly-capacious term *mousikē*, which refers not only to “music” (its English cognate), but also to dance; the significance of this has been widely discussed in scholarship on ancient Greek performance culture, cf. especially Murray & Wilson 2004; Lynch & Rocconi 2020b, with bibliography.

songs), *threnoi* (laments), and epinician (songs for the celebration of athletic victory).¹⁰ The names and stylistic features of different dance forms were compiled by later scholars and lexicographers, such as Pollux, Athenaeus, and Hesychius; while these antiquarians (writing in the second, third, and fourth centuries CE, respectively) provide only indirect evidence for earlier practices, they do attest to a long-lasting ancient interest in the definition and classification of dance.¹¹ The organization of choral dancing by gender, age, and class also points to the relationship between ritual performance and the articulation and enactment of social and civic structures. The fourth-century Greek historian and philosopher Xenophon, for example, quite explicitly connects the order of choral dancing with the similarly-corporeal cohesion of military forces (*Oec.* 8.3-7). Yet it is important to recognize that communal religious practice offers a rather flexible site for the expression of such relations and hierarchies. Choral dancers often embodied specific and carefully defined cultural and religious roles, but the lyrics of surviving choral songs could also complicate and contest prevailing social and civic hierarchies, an effect which may have been enhanced by movement or gesture (Kowalzig 2007; Kurke 2007).

Ancient Greek choral dances were sometimes staged in a single space, and the connection between dance and place is underscored by the multiple meanings of the term *choros* in Greek: it means “dance,” “group of dancers,” as well as “dancing floor.” But they could also take the form of processions through a city or sanctuary, in which case the processional route often played a powerful role in articulating relationships between specific monuments, shrines, and civic sites (Dougherty 1994; Kurke & Neer 2019).

Communal dances in ancient Greece included highly-structured choral competitions as well as rowdy and spontaneous dances (the latter often associated with the god Dionysus; Olsen 2021b, 4-5, 129-49; Weiss 2020). Maenads, female followers of Dionysus, are frequently depicted on Greek vases as engaged in exuberant and individualized forms of dancing (see Fig. 4). Representations of maenads (also called bacchantes) also provide an important entry point for studying the interaction between myth and ritual, as the varied visual and literary depictions of maenadic dancing arise alongside the historical practice of collective female *choreia* in honor of Dionysus (Hedreen 1994; Porres Caballero 2013; Valdés Guía 2013; Budelmann & Power 2015, 273-74).

It is also worth noting the continuities between dance and other forms of collective or collaborative movement. Games and athletics, for example, were

¹⁰ On all of these forms, as well as the conceptualization of song-dance genre in the Greek world more broadly, see Swift 2010; Andújar, Coward, & Hadjimichael 2018; Foster, Kurke, & Weiss 2019; Hadjimichael 2019.

¹¹ On these authors as sources see Alonso Fernández 2011, 27, 60-61.

important elements of early Greek society, and they were linked with ritual, social, and civic cohesion in ways closely akin to dance (Karanika 2012; Vickers 2016). Among these, there were also dances that combined choral performance techniques with more recognizably “athletic” forms of training, often associated with the military and educational spheres. Across the Mediterranean, choruses of boys, youths, and men competed at major festivals in armed and/or weapon dance, which was called *pyrrhichē* (Delavaud-Roux 1987, 1993; Lonsdale 1993, 137-68; Goulaki-Voutira 1996; Ceccarelli 1998, 2004).

Once more, even though our knowledge of ancient choreography and technical performance details is limited, the imprints left by dance upon ancient monuments and literature allow us to make observations about the cultural and aesthetic significance of choral performance in ancient Greece and Rome. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, which describes the god’s inauguration of *paian* processions at his sanctuary at Delphi, depicts choral ritual as an artistic form capable of incorporating local traditions while also enacting larger group cohesion: the Cretan sailors who perform the first *paian* at Delphi draw upon their own performance traditions, even as they shed their native identities in



Figure 4: Red-figure stamnos by the Dinos Painter, depicting four maenads, late 5th cent. BCE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli. Drawing reproduced from A. Furtwängler (1904-1932), *Griechische Vasenmalerei*, plate 37. Photo credit: Williams College Archives and Special Collections.

order to become permanent residents of the shrine (*Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 388-544; Olsen 2019). The Spartan *partheneia* of Alcman, though unfortunately quite fragmentary, figure the maiden dancer as poised between girlhood and marriage, stressing the superlative beauty of the young woman at this crucial moment of transition and thus articulating an important set of gender and sexual norms (Calame 1997; Peponi 2004 and 2007).

The value of choral imagery for expressing group cohesion is evident in ancient Greek art as well. A late sixth-century skyphos (drinking cup) depicts a set of armed men riding on dolphins, facing an *aulos*-player (Fig. 5). This striking combination of musical, marine, and martial imagery is not unique to this object, and it reflects sophisticated conceptual links between the orderly movement of the dancing chorus, the coordinated motion of sea animals, and the organized action of the hoplite army that emerge across Greek art and literature (Kowalzig 2013; Weiss 2020).

Indeed, dance is widely represented and conceived in ancient Greek sources as a powerful way of forming the “body politic”—of encouraging citizens of early Greek city-states to move and feel as a community. It is thus unsurprising that the fourth-century philosopher Plato, in his *Laws*, devotes a great deal of attention to the role of music and dance in structuring the social, educational, and political life of the city (Peponi 2013; Prauscello 2014). Yet as we mentioned above, the lyrics of surviving choral songs point to the possibility of contestation and competition within the chorus, and it would



Figure 5: Black-figure skyphos depicting dolphin riders, c. 520-510 BCE. Photograph © 2022. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 20.18.

be incorrect to imagine that ancient dancers always moved in lockstep. Choral performances could include designated leaders (*chorēgoi*), and the texts that we have already discussed provide useful examples of this role. In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the god Apollo himself appears as a divine *chorēgos*—instigating, choreographing, and leading his own dances among both gods and men. And Alcman’s maiden songs spotlight their outstanding female *chorēgoi*, praising the young women whose leadership of the chorus signifies their readiness for marriage and facilitates their departure from the realm of dancing girls and movement towards their future roles as wives and mothers (Calame 1997; Peponi 2007).

In the late fourth century BCE, the conquests of Alexander the Great played a crucial role in the dissemination of Greek performance modes, including choral dance. While our evidence does not allow us describe precisely how earlier forms of music and dance were reused or revised in the fourth century and beyond, it is clear that the practices established by Alexander and his lieutenants persisted through the centuries thereafter, and that there were various technical developments in musical styles and instrumentation (Le Guen 2018; Duncan & Liapis 2018; Andújar 2019, 39-43).

In Roman culture, choral dances, processions, and other forms of structured bodily movement were also a central component of civic and religious festivals (Piganiol 1923; Piccaluga 1965; Giannotta 2004; Alonso Fernández 2020; Schlapbach 2022b). In this category, we might include equestrian displays (*Lusus Troiae*), processional dances linked with athletic and theatrical games (*pompa circensis* and *pompa theatralis*; Dupont 1993; Latham 2016), and the choreography of triumphal and funerary parades (Flower 1996; Östenberg 2009; Favro & Johanson 2010). While many of these performance modes were rooted in Etruscan practices attested from the eighth century onwards (Johnston 1956; Jannot 1992; Jazwa 2020), they were institutionalized in Rome at different historical moments.

The *carmen arvale*, which we have already mentioned, was a song associated with the Arval Brothers, a company of Roman priests tasked with offering sacrifices related to agricultural fertility. Likely dating from before the fourth century BCE but revitalized in the age of Augustus, our evidence indicates that the hymn was still being performed under the rule of the emperor Elagabalus, in the third century CE (Scheid 1990, 1998, and 2012). With its archaizing style and military themes, the *carmen arvale* emphasized the status of an elite male group connected to Rome’s most distinguished and oldest traditions, namely the mythical brothers of Romulus, children of his foster mother Acca Larentia (Alonso Fernández 2021). Another company of priests, the Salii, offers a further example of Roman choral dance. Taking their name (*Salii*) from the “jumps” (*saltus*) executed in the course of their annual processions (Cirilli 1913;

Sarullo 2018; Ferri 2021), these “leaping” or “dancing” priests were drawn from among Rome’s elite families and led by a *praesul* (leader, perhaps akin to the Greek *chorēgos*), who demonstrated or “danced” (*amptuare*) so that the rest of the members could “dance in return” (*redamptuare*, *Gloss. Lat.* 334.19; Alonso Fernández 2016). The performances of these two companies—a dance usually called *tripudium* or *tripodatio* (Prescendi 2022)—were thus constructed, especially after the restoration of ancient rituals and customs at the end of the first century BCE by Augustus, as civic choreographies intended to signify and enact the social and political *auctoritas* (power, authority) of the ruling class (Habinek 2005).

Female choral performance was also a part of Roman culture. In fact, it is possible that collective female dance, and specifically maiden dance, was already a feature of Etruscan performance (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.21.2; Chericci 2017), and there is both archaeological and epigraphic evidence for female dances on the Italian peninsula in the third and second centuries BCE (Bellia 2022). According to the second-century CE grammarian Festus (*Gloss. Lat.* 439), a group of maidens called the *Saliae virgines* participated in the rites associated with the Salii, pointing to a link between virginal female and elite male collective performance (Glinister 2011; Pavón Torrejón 2016). Likewise, the Roman historian Livy, writing in the Augustan period about events set in the third century BCE, describes a group of twenty-seven girls performing in a processional chorus intended to purify the city (Livy 27.37.6-15, 31.12.9; Curtis 2021; Schlapbach 2022b, 17-19). These dances may be seen as a precursor to those associated with Horace’s *Carmen Saeculare*, a song performed by a singing and dancing chorus of young boys and girls during Augustus’ revival of the Secular Games in 17 BCE (Habinek 2005, 150-57; Lowrie 2009, 123-41; Curtis 2017, 149-58).

Communal celebrations in honor of the Great Mother (*Magna Mater*) were also an integral part of the Roman ritual landscape, beginning with the official inclusion of this Phrygian cult in 204 BCE. Roman citizens, however, were not allowed to participate in this pageant, as it contained conspicuous elements of an excessive and ecstatic—and hence “un-Roman”—nature (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.19.4; Schlapbach 2022b, 16). These choreographic spectacles from Asia Minor were then incorporated into the official Roman calendar as part of a festival called the *ludi Megalenses*, in the month of April (Beard, North, & Price 1998, 91-98; Alvar 2001, 209-16). While ancient sources and modern scholarship stress how these performances diverged from traditional and normative “Roman” practice, they also reflect the complex forms of cultural negotiation at work within the expanding empire (Mazurek 2022, 33-37; Schlapbach 2022b, 16).

Yet at times, Roman sources exhibit a rather utilitarian attitude towards dance and its place within civic and ritual structures. Cicero, for example,

says that during the Roman games, the motion of a single dancer sufficed to secure the successful functioning of the rite (Cic. *Har. resp.* 23), in a sort of synecdoche wherein one individual stands in for the collective. Similarly, Festus relates a story about an old mime-artist who saved the *ludi Apollinares* (festival of Apollo) in 212 or 211 BCE, because he kept moving alone while everyone else left to confront the Carthaginians at the gates of Rome (Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 438).¹² This would seem to suggest that the audience's active involvement in (or even presence at) the performance was not an essential prerequisite for the festival's successful execution. Like Cicero, Festus emphasizes the minimal requirements for ritual efficacy rather than the inherent pleasure or value of dance.

Choral competitions also continued through the Roman Republican and Imperial periods in the Greek-speaking regions of the Mediterranean (Bowie 2006; Kowalzig & Wilson 2013). The performance of dithyrambs in Athens, for example, provided a valuable site for the preservation of Greek cultural identity in the wake of Roman conquest (Shear 2013), and epigraphic evidence attests to the importance granted to the organization of civic festivals and processions, such as the Great Panathenaia (Sarrazanas 2022). Greek and Latin literary sources from this period describe the continued performances of male and female ritual choruses in Sparta (Ath. 15.678b-c), Delphi (Paus. 10.4.3), Elis (Paus. 5.16.2-8), and on Delos (Luc. *Salt.* 34; Plut. *Vit. Thes.* 21.1-2), as well as the appropriation of Greek choral activities by Roman generals organizing their own triumphs and parades, such as the praetor Lucius Anicius in Illyria (167 BCE; cf. Polyb. 30.22.12) or Mark Antony at Ephesus (41 BCE; cf. Plut. *Vit. Ant.* 24).

The role of the chorus as an artistic and literary image in the Roman Imperial era demonstrates its extraordinary and enduring potential as a conceptual metaphor and tool, regardless of the apparent variations in historical practice (Curtis 2017; Schlapbach 2018, 2022b). In the literary realm, Catullus, Horace, and other Roman poets deploy the image of the chorus to explore the possibilities of imagined performance within the medium of the written text (Curtis 2017). Choral imagery also permeates the aesthetics of early Christian art and literature (Marco 2000; Tronca 2022). A funerary stele from the early fifth century CE found in Rome, for example, produces an image of eternal joy and group cohesion by describing the souls' performance of *choreia* "in the fields of the pious" (*ludique choreas inter felices animas et amoena piorum*, CLE 02018 = ICUR 8.21015), while the apocryphal text known as the *Acts of John* testifies to a similar kind of choral performance as part of early

¹² This story was later turned into a famous proverb: "all is safe; an old man is dancing" (*salva res: saltat senex*), cf. Festus, *Gloss. Lat.* 438; Serv. *Ad Aen.* 3.279; Slater 2000, 117-21; Schlapbach 2021b.

Christian religious rituals (Schlapbach 2018, 154-66, 2021a). In Roman art, too, we find evocative traces and reimaginings of Greek dance motifs (Touchette 1995; Habetzeder 2012). Choral ritual was thus one of the most long-lasting, pervasive, and varied modes of ancient Greek and Roman dance, evident in some of our earliest sources and persisting into late antiquity.

Theatrical Dance

Dance was also widely performed as part of both Greek and Roman theater. Beginning with the Greek world, we might recall the philosopher Aristotle's claim that Greek tragedy and comedy developed out of choral dances and processions (Lawler 1964a; Rodríguez Adrados 1972; Csapo & Slater 1994). While the precise historical origins of Greek theater remain murky, there is a clear formal kinship between Classical Athenian drama and the various kinds of choral ritual described above. Both theatrical performances and choral song-dances were staged as part of major religious festivals, and both were fundamentally competitive—prizes were awarded to the best playwrights/producers. And the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and their lesser-known contemporaries were structured by a series of song-dances performed by a chorus and accompanied by the *aulos*. Music and movement were thus essential components of Greek theater (Zarifi 2007; Bierl 2009; Gagné & Hopman 2013; Gianvittorio 2018; Weiss 2018), and were often closely linked with its civic and ritual functions (Wilson 2000, 2003; Dué 2016).

Again, it is impossible to know exactly what Greek dramatic choreography looked like. Later Greek literary sources use the term *emmeleia* for tragic dances, and describe them as serious and solemn (Lawler 1964a, 22-63). Comedy, by contrast, was linked with a dance called the *kordax*, which was supposedly vulgar and ignoble (Lawler 1964a, 69-72). Vase paintings that seem to represent dramatic dance exist, but the interpretation of these objects is often hotly contested. For example, an Attic krater (vessel for mixing wine, Fig. 6) featuring three rows of dancing men has been interpreted as a representation of both tragic and dithyrambic performance. Yet it is probably more productive to understand this object, not as a record of any specific historical performance, but rather, as a cultural artifact that reveals the conceptual affinities between non-dramatic and dramatic choral dancing (Wellenbach 2015).

The lyrics of Greek dramatic choral songs often feature significant choreographic and kinetic imagery, which can give us a sense of the aesthetics of these performances. Sometimes described as “choral projection” or “choral self-referentiality” (Henrichs 1994-95, 1996), the chorus' depiction of itself, as articulated in relation to other mythic and historical choruses, can contribute to

the development of a play while also offering valuable insight into the Greek cultural imagination more broadly (Weiss 2018). Choral dancers are frequently compared to animals—above all, birds and dolphins—which points to an emphasis on coordinated movement and a particular interest in natural imagery (Kowalzig 2013; Weiss 2018). Stars and astronomical imagery also loom large (Csapo 2008; Steiner 2011). Animals feature prominently in the names of specific dances and poses, although these are often reported by much later authors (Lawler 1964b; Lonsdale 1993). Dramatic choruses further draw upon the language and imagery associated with non-dramatic choral genres, like the *parthenaia* and *paian* discussed above, which reminds us again of the links between these performance modes and also points to the potential continuity of dance across time and genre (Swift 2010; Andújar, Coward, & Hadjimichael 2018). Greek tragedy and comedy may have created opportunities for the performance of solo dance as well, both in the form of choral leadership and in the movements and gestures performed by individual actors in the course of their solo songs (Olsen 2021b, *passim*; Anderson 2023). In Euripides' *Ion*, for example, the titular character performs a monody (solo song) that blends



Figure 6: Red-figure column krater depicting choral dancers, c. 500-450 BCE. © Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig.

the kinetic imagery of the *paian* with the gestures of work song in a way that prefigures his transformation from temple servant to civic leader (Olsen 2021b, 73-99).

In addition to tragedy and comedy, Classical Athenian theater included a peculiar genre known as the satyr-play, which was specifically associated with a dance called the *sikinnis* (Lawler 1964a, 110; Seidensticker 2010). A satyr-play was a single play performed after a trilogy of tragedies in dramatic competition, and thus linked with tragedy yet distinct in form and style (Lämmle 2013; Griffith 2015). Only one complete satyr play (Euripides' *Cyclops*) has survived, but from what we can tell, these plays offered a humorous contrast to the tragic plays that preceded them and featured a chorus of satyrs (mythic man-goat creatures). A kalpis (water jar) depicting the movement of a satyr chorus (Fig. 7) offers us one perspective on this particular performance mode, as refracted through the medium of visual art. The theatrical quality of this image is indicated by the presence of an *aulos*-player and the lines marking the edge of the men's costumes, and the sequencing of steps from left to right produces a choreographic sequence (Hedreen 1992, 108). This kalpis thus invites its viewer



Figure 7: Attic red-figure kalpis by the Leningrad Painter, depicting dancing satyrs, c. 480-460 BCE. Photograph © 2022. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 03.788.

to imagine the satyr-chorus in action and even draw upon their own kinesthetic knowledge to identify the movement pattern at work.

The production of Greek drama was not limited to fifth-century Athens, and the kinds of plays and performances described thus far are attested across and outside the Mediterranean, and continued after the fifth century (Bosher 2012; Csapo et al. 2014; Liapis & Petrides 2018; Andújar 2019; Braund, Hall, & Wyles 2019; Jackson 2019). While it is difficult to know whether and how choreography (choral or solo) was passed on in the reperformance of Greek plays, the literary and papyrological evidence for the transmission of music may offer one set of clues (Griffith 2018).

Turning now to Rome, we find valuable descriptions of early Italian theatrical performance in the work of the historian Livy (7.2.1-7). According to his account, the *ludi scaenici* (stage games) originated in the fourth century BCE, after a group of Etruscan dancers (*ludiones*) were called to appease a pestilence by dancing to the sound of the pipes. He explains that Roman youth began to imitate these performances, adding a series of vulgar verses that later became a defining element of the art. This combination of poetry, music, and motion gradually gave way to a more established form of entertainment, called *saturnae*, until finally the Greek poet Livius Andronicus incorporated a plot and the consequent theatrical dramaturgy of what thereafter—allegedly from 240 BCE—were known as “dramas” (*fabulae*; Manuwald 2011).

During this period, many elements within the Roman plays were largely inspired by the Greek tradition. Although the *orchestra* (dancing space) was eventually removed from the Roman theaters to leave room for the seats of the authorities, dance itself did not vanish from the Roman stage (Beare [1951] 2013; Boyle 2006; Moore 2012, 2021). Fragments of tragedies in Latin attest to the presence of dramatic choruses in the third and second centuries BCE, who sang and danced during Greek-inspired plays—the so-called *fabula crepidata* or *graeca*. Key examples include Naevius’ *Lycurgus* and Ennius’ *Eumenides*, both of which are suffused with choral imagery (Gianvittorio-Ungar 2022). Yet, even as the Attic chorus was gradually disappearing from Roman drama, bodily movement continued to be a recurring feature within the plays, and not just an incidental aspect for interludes (*embolia*) and epilogues (*exodia*) (González Vázquez 2016). The tragic actor Roscius, according to Cicero, was particularly famous for his accomplishments in the art of gesture (Cic. *Arch.* 17; *De or.* 2.233).

Mime, a multimedia art comprised of speech, song, and dance, offers an important context for early Roman dancing (Fantham 1989; Webb 2008), but it is the comic genres—the *fabula palliata*, in particular—that offer some of the richest sources for dance culture in the Roman Republican period (Moore 2012, 2021, and 2022). The work of the comic playwright Plautus,

for example, exhibits various elements drawn from earlier Italian modes of performance—specifically those, termed *atellanae*, associated with southern Italian culture (Duckworth 1952; Beacham 1991; López Gregoris 2012). The festive conclusions of Plautus’ plays *Pseudolus*, *Stichus*, and *The Persian*, for example, combine music, acrobatics, and dance with elements of Greek New Comedy (Sharrock 2009; López Gregoris 2019; Moore 2012, 2021). In these metatheatrical scenes, courtesans call attention to their seductive bodies, enslaved characters compete in physical virtuosity, and the *tibicen* (piper) of the company disrupts the dramatic illusion by directly engaging with the fictional party (Marshall 2006).

In addition, there were specific characters in comedy, such as the *servus currens* (running slave), associated with distinctive forms of movement and embodiment (Taladoire 1948; Moore 2012). Male actors also typically exaggerated their choreographic abilities and gestures when playing certain types of female slaves and professional artists (Péché 2002; Richlin 2015). In fact, a number of comedies known to us only by title, such as Alexis’ *Dancing Girl* (*Orchestrais*), Titinius’ *The Female Piper* (*Tibicina*) and *The Female Late Player* (*Psaltria sive Ferentinatis*), and Naevius’ *Girl from Tarentum* (*Tarentilla*), emphasize this aspect while hinting at the possibility that female performers of music and dance were themselves featured on Greek and Roman stages.

Visual art can further enrich our understanding of the relationship between dance and Roman comedy. For example, a mosaic from the “Villa of Cicero” (Fig. 8), near Pompeii, has been linked with the Greek comic playwright Menander’s *Theoporumene* (*Girl Possessed*), an important referent for the genre of the *palliata*. It depicts a pair of male performers with *tympanum* (tambourines) and cymbals singing and dancing to music of a *tibicina* (female piper) visible at the back of a scene. A relief from Pompeii, also dated to the first century BCE, similarly features a young male *tibicen* performing in the midst of a comic scene (Fig. 9; Green 1985). These figures serve to indicate the presence of music within the silent medium of visual art, and in the case of the mosaic, complement the implied dancing of the other performers.

By the turn of the millennium, pantomime joined the traditional genres of drama as an influential and dynamic form of dance within the Roman empire (Lada-Richards 2007; Garelli-François 2007; Webb 2008; Hall & Wyles 2008). Pantomime consisted of the movements of a single (usually male) dancer, wearing a long dress with a cloak (*pallium*) and a mask with closed lips, performed with musical accompaniment from an *aulos*-player and a chorus of singers. Literary sources attribute the origins of this form to the innovations of two men, Pylades of Cilicia and Bathyllus of Alexandria (Jory 2004), and the extensive list of famous dancers coming from every corner of Roman Empire points to the role of these professionals as cultural mediators in a time of



Figure 8: Mosaic from Villa of Cicero, Pompeii, depicting a scene from comedy, c. 100 BCE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli 9985. Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali e del Turismo.

imperial geographic expansion (Schlapbach 2020). A fourth-century CE mosaic from the Roman villa of Noheda, in central Spain, offers a vivid depiction of pantomime performance and its various elements (Fig. 10; Valero Tévar 2013; Castaldo 2020). In the main image of the mosaic (above the smaller figures running along the bottom), we see a pantomime dancer in action, marked by the dark, vacant eyes of his mask. His body is turned, as if in motion, and his head tilted to the side. He is surrounded by musicians and singers, and the other elements of the mosaic help to situate pantomime within a wider culture of entertainment and competition: a scene to the dancer's left appears to depict a

distinct performance of mime, whereas the images along the bottom include boxers, a trumpet-player, and two other masked performers, probably comic actors (Valero Tévar 2013, 316). While this is but one, comparatively late, image, with its own artistic interests, it can help us to visualize pantomime performance and understand its position within Roman performance culture more broadly.

Like the forms of dance that preceded and continued alongside it, pantomime provided a rich source of images for Roman-era visual art and literature (Lada-Richards 2013, 2016; Webb 2017; Schlapbach 2018). Emphasizing mimetic physical representation over the spoken word, pantomime nonetheless drew from the same Greek mythic repertoire as the more famous tragedies of fifth-century Athens (Petrides 2013). On the one hand, the aesthetics of this innovative genre thus overlapped in several ways with ancient conceptions of Greek choral dancing (Peponi 2015; Schlapbach 2018), but the distinctive



Figure 9: Bas-relief with a comic scene, c. 1st cent. CE. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli 6687. © 2022. Photo Scala, Florence. Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali e del Turismo.



Figure 10: Mosaic from a Roman Villa at Noheda, near Cuenca, Spain, depicting scenes from pantomime, 4th cent. CE. © Viceconsejería de Cultura y Deportes – JCCM, www.cultura.castillalamancha.es.

qualities of pantomime also influenced the imagery and lyrics of new kinds of dramatic productions, such as the tragedies of Seneca (Zanobi 2014; Slaney 2016).

As an art form straddling the boundaries of high and low culture, pantomime was both greatly admired and repeatedly denigrated by ancient authors and spectators. Although pantomime dancers were not officially accepted into competitive contests until the second century CE (Webb 2012), they frequently appeared before large crowds of spectators and received recompense in the form of dedications and personal favors (Hall & Wyles 2008). Pantomime dancers also developed relationships with Roman emperors, including Augustus (Macrob. *Sat.* 2.7.1), Caligula (Suet. *Calig.* 55.1), Claudius (Tac. *Ann.* 11.36), and Nero (Suet. *Ner.* 6.3). The magnetic allure and charm of these professional artists were such that they even participated in political intrigues and social change (Jory 1984; Slater 1994), thus emerging as valuable figures for understanding the complex dynamics of Imperial culture and reality (Webb 2008; Schlapbach 2018).

Symposium, *Convivium*, and Dance in the Private Sphere

Ancient dancing did not occur exclusively at large-scale civic, ritual, and theatrical events. In Xenophon's *Symposium* (fourth century BCE), the philosopher Socrates talks about dancing alone and in private for the purpose of physical fitness (Xen. *Symp.* 2.17-19). While the historical value of Socrates' words is undoubtedly complicated by the literary and philosophical aims of Xenophon's dialogue, this comment should nonetheless remind us that rehearsals and other informal dance practices, while undoubtedly widespread, are unlikely to leave significant imprints on our surviving sources. This is also true in the case of ancient Greek children's games, many of which had dance-like elements. The "tortoise game" (*chelichelōnē*), for example, involved singing, jumping, and running, and it engaged the girls who played it in the performance of a set of social norms closely aligned with those enacted by maidenly choral song (Karanika 2012). Recalling the links between "dance" (*orchēsis*) and "play" (*paizō*) evident in our earliest sources and explored at great length by Plato (Lonsdale 1993), it is worth including such informal movement practices as part of the dance history of the ancient world.

The symposium, a drinking party involving elite Greek men and their companions, enslaved attendants, servants, and hired entertainers, also constituted an important venue for the performance of dance (Schäfer 1997). Both dancers and musicians could provide entertainment at a symposium, and a fifth-century BCE phiale (libation bowl, Fig. 11) provides one revealing



Figure 11: Red-figure phiale by the Phiale Painter, depicting female entertainers and male spectators, c. 430 BCE. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 97.371.

image of the sympotic female dancer (*orchēstris*) in her cultural and social context. The young woman on the lower right-hand side of the image dances in a short garment, as a male figure reaches towards her. The erotic overtones of this exchange point to the conflation of sympotic entertainers with sex workers—while there may well have been significant overlap between these two categories, the persistent eroticization of sympotic female dancers and musicians in our surviving literary and historical sources should not be taken as straightforward historical evidence (Goldman 2015; Olsen 2017b). Note, too, that the dancer on this phiale is depicted along with a female *aulos*-player, a woman offering a libation, and woman wrapped in a cloak approaching a man,

and it has been suggested that it depicts various stages in the life of a female sex worker (Neils 2007). If so, this image might point to the role of training (in music, dance, and perhaps other arts) in the lives of such women. And even if this interpretation is unavoidably speculative, this object does create a powerful sense of continuity between the acts of ritual and performance that could have been enacted by a woman, perhaps specifically a professional entertainer, both within and beyond the context of a symposium.

The male celebrants of the Greek symposium also danced—most of all, in the course of the *kōmos*, a revel in which the indoor celebration of the symposium spilled out into the streets of the city. On a late sixth-century BCE kylix (drinking cup, Fig. 12), we find a depiction of three men engaged in typical komastic revelry: one holds a rhyton (a vessel for wine), another plays an *aulos*, and a third lifts a foot, as if dancing. While the movement of the *kōmos* is generally described and depicted as rowdy, chaotic, and individualized, there are also formal affinities between the ritual processions that accompanied major festivals and the motion of the dancing *kōmos* through the streets of the city. The *kōmos*, as a communal performance linked with Dionysus (god of both wine and theatrical performance), is thus conceptually similar to its more organized and well-documented choral counterparts (Nagy 2007).



Figure 12: Red-figure kylix, attributed to Oltos, depicting musician and dancers, c. 520–500 BCE. London, British Museum 1848,0802.3. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The elite, citizen participants in Roman dinner parties (*convivia*) did not engage in such komastic activity. Spontaneous dancing, of course, could occur within the space of the revelry (*comissatio*), as indicated by the negative comments of Roman rhetorical invective (Naerebout 2009). Cicero repeatedly describes men as “dancers” in a pejorative sense (*Dom.* 60; *Planc.* 87; *Red. sen.* 13), implying that dancing was indecorous and inappropriate for a Roman *vir* (citizen male). Within the playful context of a banquet, however, dance performance may have been perceived otherwise (Alonso Fernández 2014; Cic. *Mur.* 13).

Entertainers at Roman events were generally of low socioeconomic status. They were often either enslaved or freedmen, and were legally regarded as *infames*, lacking in reputation and fundamental rights (Edwards 2002; Hugoniot, Hurlet, & Milanezi 2004). Nonetheless, these performers had their own networks, financial resources, and professional skills (Schlapbach 2022b, 11-12). The troupes of mimes, musicians, and dancers who performed at the theater’s interludes could be hired for private occasions as well, as demonstrated by the contracts found in Egyptian papyri from the second and third centuries CE (Perrot 2022).

One of the most famous spectacles in the context of the Roman dinner party was that of the *cinaedi*, performers—often associated with Egypt—whose erotically-charged choreographies played with the expectations surrounding male social performance in Roman culture (Sapsford 2022). Women, too, performed at Roman dinner parties. As we mentioned above, the comedies of Plautus attest to the presence of professional female musicians and dancers in private gatherings already in the Republican period (Péché 2002). The emperor Nero owned a group of Syrian musicians (Suet. *Ner.* 27.2), and women from Gades (Southwestern Spain) were said to dance at the houses of the elite during the Flavian dynasty at the end of the first century CE (Blázquez 2004; Blake



Figure 13: Mosaic from the Aventine depicting male and female entertainers, 2nd cent. CE. Rome, Musei Vaticani 902.0.0 Photo © Governatorato SCV – Direzione dei Musei.



Figure 14. Wall painting from the Villa Doria Pamphili, Rome, depicting performers and spectators, c. 50 CE. London, British Museum 1873,0208.1. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

2021; Alonso Fernández 2022). Such performances are described in literary sources as clownish and/or erotic (Mart. 5.78.26-28; Juv. 11.162-75). The sexual aspects of convivial dancing are similarly evident in a second-century mosaic found in the Aventine (Fig. 13), in which two seductive women in transparent clothes dance and play with their male counterparts (Dunbabin 2004; Morgan 2017, 87-88; Neira & Rodríguez 2021). A wall-painting from the first century CE similarly emphasizes the erotic appeal of a female dancer (Fig. 14). This painting features a central female figure, constructed as a dancer through her active posture, with one foot lifted off the ground, and the presence of a musician to the left. The woman is depicted nude and turned to reveal her backside to the viewer of the painting, as the various onlookers look directly at her exposed body.

While literary and visual sources tend to present these kinds of performance through the lens of the male gaze, other historical documents, such as papyri and epigraphic inscriptions, reveal the complexities of these artists' lives and professional habits (Webb 2002; Vesterinen 2007). Attending to these sources can help us to see that dancing was, for these performers, a communicative practice, a form of corporeal knowledge, and a complex mechanism for social interaction (Alonso Fernández 2015). Both male and female professional dancers, for example, received extensive physical training. The fifth-century CE scholar Macrobius (*Sat.* 3.14.6-7) offers an anecdote about a “dancing school” (*ludus saltatorius*) in the days of Scipio Africanus Aemilianus (second century BCE). And in later Republican times, actors and dancers were said to engage in similar bodily exercises at the *palestra* (gymnasium; Cic. *De or.* 3.83). A series of funerary steles from the Julio-Claudian period (first century CE) praise deceased dancers for their acquisition of complex technical skills (*CLE* 00055 = *CIL* 6.10096 = *CIL* 1.01214; *CLE* 01944 = 11.07476), and late imperial theatrical companies included teachers of the art of dancing (Amm. Marc. 14.6.19). Lucian and Libanius, Greek writers from the second century CE, both place great emphasis on the physical and intellectual education required of the professional pantomime dancer (Luc. *Salt.* 74; Lib. 64.104); these two authors are also valuable sources for the theorization of dance in antiquity more broadly (Schlapbach 2018, 75-131).

Imprints of Dance in Greek and Roman Antiquity

In this volume, we would like to highlight the value of dance “imprints” in both the physical and the etymological senses of the word. The term “imprints” refers to marks left by the imposition of pressure (*in-premere*)—often, the

pressure of the body.¹³ Ancient dancing bodies have, unavoidably, passed away, yet their imprints are evident across our literary, visual, and material sources. As our opening discussion of the Dipylon oinochoe indicated, Greek and Roman writing, from its earliest periods, includes reflections upon the aesthetics, politics, and social role of dance. The impressions of ancient authors and artists thus provide, for us, one possible guide to the rich and complex world of Greek and Roman dancing. At the same time, we remain alert to the more direct imprints left by dancers themselves, through, for example, funerary monuments, or fleeting glimpses of embodied experience in art and literature.

In looking for the imprints of ancient Greek and Roman dance, we have drawn upon the methodological tools and critical approaches of Dance Studies. Through their varied engagement with Anthropology, Cultural History, Philosophy, Postcolonial Studies, Performance, Literary Criticism, and Feminist and Queer Studies, Dance Scholars offer us fresh and exciting ways of engaging with our ancient sources. Their theories (from the Greek θεωρέω, to look at, to be sent as spectator) give us new ways of viewing ancient performances (Foster 2014). At the same time, we believe that Greek and Roman art and literature have something important to offer to Dance Studies in return. Ancient authors and artists were, as we have stressed, already theorists, cultural critics, and philosophers of dance. Considering ancient Greek and Roman impressions of the relationship between dance and various key concepts in Dance Studies thus enables us to frame those concepts themselves in different and, hopefully, illuminating ways.

While each chapter in this volume can stand on its own, we see its overarching organization as shaped by a process of “zooming in” and “zooming out.” The first chapter, “Geography,” examines the social and political value attached to dance as located (historically and/or conceptually) in particular places across the ancient Mediterranean. Attending to the intersections of topography, power, and dance, this chapter interrogates the relationship between performance and identity in ancient Greek and Roman thought. In many respects, this chapter takes up questions that are also central to the later chapter on “Body,” yet it does so through the wider lens of cultural difference and geographic imagination. The second chapter, “Space,” zooms in on the varied physical locations for dance in ancient Greece and Rome and evaluates how the process of dance was both shaped by, and helped to shape, specific sites. The chapter highlights evidence for processional routes and theatrical architecture while also exposing the

¹³ A survey of linguistic, philosophical, and psychoanalytical theories of “imprints,” specifically as the concept applies to the history of art, may be found in the catalog of the exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou, *L’empreinte*, curated by Georges Didi-Huberman (1997). On traces, marks, and remnants in dance history, see also Franko & Richards 2000, 5; Albright 2010; Crawley 2021, 339-42.

often-permeable relationship between dance-space and other (civic, domestic, natural) environments. While “Geography” and “Space” might appear to cover similar conceptual ground, the diverse sources and questions explored by these twin chapters indicate how orienting ourselves around different theoretical frameworks can produce distinct, yet complementary, analyses.

The third chapter, “Body,” focuses in further on dancers themselves. Taking account of our limited evidence for historical performers in the Greek and Roman worlds as well as our more expansive sources for considering the relationship between dance and the body in conceptual terms, this chapter explores the construction and subversion of embodied identity through dance in Greek and Roman thought. The chapter on “Audience” likewise balances discussion of the evidence for historical spectatorship and audience engagement with dance in various Greek and Roman contexts with a deep theoretical examination of how Greek and Roman art and literature expose the plurality of viewing experiences activated by a given performance or representation. These chapters also form a pair, in the sense that they explore the two sides of the exchange implied by any performance. The next chapter, “Movement,” draws the preceding pair together through its investigation of mobility not as a synonym for historical choreography and its potential reconstruction, but as a way of understanding the complex temporality of dance itself. By foregrounding the challenge of seeking “movement” in visual and material sources that are, themselves, static, this chapter explores how dance, whether perceived live or via an imaginative process prompted through art and literature, mobilizes its performers and spectators alike.

“Objects,” the subject of the sixth chapter, then takes up the vital role of props, stage elements, and costumes in the performance and representation of Greek and Roman dance, exposing the distinctive forms of agency and reciprocity that emerge through the dancer’s interaction with the material world. This chapter continues the work of “Movement” in complicating the relationship between mover and moved, and inviting us to see ancient artists and authors as sophisticated theorists of concepts (materiality, choreography, reciprocity) that we often regard as thoroughly modern interventions. The next chapter, on “Politics,” traces the role of dance in the practice and conceptualization of political action in ancient Greece and Rome, including official deployments of dance in the service of specific agendas, as well as spontaneous choreographies of the social body. This chapter returns, in many respects, to questions of identity, agency, and culture raised by the first three chapters, but the concept of “politics” enables its author to engage with a distinctive discourse within Dance and Performance Studies.

The final chapter, “Gods,” considers the social, civic, and cultural implications of religion in ancient Greek and Roman dance, turning our

attention specifically to depictions of divine performance. While divine and ritual dance features throughout the earlier chapters (as well as this Introduction), this chapter draws together crucial themes from the preceding chapters (such as space, spectatorship, and identity) and explores dance not only as a human practice, but as something performed, in Greek and Roman thought, by deities themselves. This concluding chapter thus “zooms out” once more to consider the ancient conceptualization of dance on a cosmic scale.

Each chapter discusses both Greek and Roman culture, and draws upon various kinds of evidence (visual, material, literary, epigraphic). It would be impossible, however, to provide an exhaustive treatment of any of these subjects within the space allowed. Our aim throughout has been to introduce an innovative theoretical framework for each of the topics, followed by an overview of the relevant sources, and complemented by case-studies on specific themes, texts, or objects. There are other subjects, too, that arise at various points in this volume, but might also have been fruitfully addressed independently: Time, Senses, and Labor are just a few possibilities. Our contributions here are intended, above all, to spur further conversation and research along such thematic and conceptual lines, and to invite colleagues to respond to any gaps we may have left.

This volume is part of a growing body of scholarship linking the study of ancient Greek and Roman performance culture with the critical frameworks of Dance Studies.¹⁴ While this dialogue opens up many avenues for further investigation, the contributors to this volume are particularly excited about the potential of dance as a site of comparative and cross-cultural work. Classicists are increasingly attentive both to the relationship of Greece and Rome to broader cultural networks within and beyond the ancient Mediterranean, as well as to the value of comparing Greek and Roman political, philosophical, and aesthetic systems to those evident in other ancient and medieval contexts.¹⁵ We believe that dance is a rich and, as yet, largely untapped resource for understanding Greece and Rome in relation to other cultures and contexts, and that Dance and Performance Studies provide us with terms and frameworks for pursuing such comparative discussion. We ultimately see our chapters, therefore, as starting points, intended to generate questions and provide models for students and scholars both within and beyond the field of Classics itself, and we look forward to the continued development of ancient Dance Studies as a dynamic interdisciplinary field.

¹⁴ Cf. Alonso Fernández 2015, 2016; Briand 2016, 2018; Olsen 2017a, 2019; Gianvittorio-Ungar and Schlapbach 2021.

¹⁵ See, for example, Beecroft 2010; Beck & Vankeerberghen 2020; Seaford 2020; as well as the aims of the recently launched *Global Antiquities* journal.

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Geography

Rosa Andújar

A chapter on the “geography” of ancient Greek and Roman dance might seem like an odd or even superfluous choice. Since the adjectives “Greek” and “Roman” already involve certain locations in the ancient Mediterranean, what, then, might a focus on “geography” add to our understanding of dance in antiquity? Though the study of geography has historically involved physical locations and territories, the discipline has over the past few decades expanded to address the impact of humans on space, studying their imprints, behaviors and practices which might endow that space with meaning, and vice-versa.¹ In line with this attention to spatial theories and possibilities, “geography” has broadened its scope to include the construction and reflection of social, political, and economic relations.² Research on the geographies of dance has similarly expanded to address the complex intersections between a given location and the conceptualization of cultures and identities, touching on key issues such as globalization, marginalization, and transnationalism in modern dance practices.³ Some of this scholarship is focused on decoding representational aspects of dance, for example, linking the dancing body to national and global identities,⁴ or to racial dynamics and subjections.⁵ Other work is interested in

¹ On the intimate connection between place and the social, see, e.g. Agnew 1987; Agnew & Duncan 1989; Cresswell 1996; Malpas 1999. The so-called “spatial turn” has been inspired by the work of Henri Lefebvre 1974, which draws attention to spaces as dynamic and shifting constructs, imbued with various meanings.

² See, e.g., the following definition of human geography as “that part of social theory concerned to explain the spatial patterns and processes that enable and constrain the structures and actions of everyday life. It provides an account of the ways in which complex sociocultural, economic and political processes act through time and space” (Dear & Flusty 2002, 2).

³ For an overview see Pine & Kuhlke 2014, esp. viii-ix.

⁴ E.g. Wulff 2005, who considers the manner in which dance is seen to embody values linked to Irish national identity and mobility, and Thobani 2017, who examines how performances of Indian classical dance in the UK contribute to the construction of a South Asian diasporic identity.

⁵ This work reveals the complex racial and political realities faced by dancers, e.g. DeFrantz 2002; Manning 2006 and Kedhar 2020, or the racial violence that is concealed and coded in certain dance forms, e.g. Stanger 2021 and Ndiaye 2022 on “kinetic blackness.”

exploring the tension between “place” and globalized cultural production.⁶ Indeed, the geography of dance might be said to operate at the intersections of topography, identity, power, and the body.

Extending these insights into antiquity, I examine the various social and political meanings and values that were given to place-based dancing bodies and practices in the ancient Mediterranean. This geographical focus involves a stress on “place,” as opposed to “space;”⁷ that is, emphasizing particular locations and their associated meanings through the lens of dance, instead of the general areas where dance typically took place in antiquity (e.g., public venues such as theaters), which are explored in the chapter on “Space.” Previous work on the spatial dynamics of ancient literature and culture has likewise emphasized what Kate Gilhuly and Nancy Worman call “the particularity of place” (Gilhuly & Worman 2014, 5).⁸ Drawing from the observations of philosopher Jeff Malpas regarding the inextricability of place and “the social,”⁹ Gilhuly and Worman provide a list of questions which not only emphasize that key elements of place exist in the ancient imaginary, but also aim to uncover the wider meanings and conceptions attached to locations (2014, 5-6):

what are the social, political, and economic relationships that imbue a place with a distinctive character? What are the local attributes of a place that give it an identity? How can this identity be manipulated?

I take these questions, which emphasize the fundamental role of human experience and perception in assigning value to a place, as a compass for navigating the geographies of ancient Greek and Roman dance. As I propose in this chapter, the wider emphases on the theoretical possibilities of place as a constellation of social relations cohere with the definition suggested by Jane Desmond of dance as a “process” that reveals “the articulation of systems of value” (Desmond 1997, 2).¹⁰

It must be recognized, however, that this navigation involves traversing rugged and patchy terrain. Because “Greece” and “Rome” have been

⁶ This can involve the authenticity and commodification of local dance forms, as can be seen by work such as Román-Velázquez 1999; Feifan Xie 2003; Aoyama 2007; Höfling 2019, or broader transnational economic realities, e.g. Srinivasan 2011. For further discussion of body, dance, and identity in ancient Greece and Rome, see “Body.”

⁷ Cresswell 2004; Casey 2013; cf. Gilhuly & Worman 2014, 6-9.

⁸ E.g. Gilhuly & Worman 2014; Hawes 2017; Skempis & Ziogas 2014; Schlapbach 2022.

⁹ Malpas 1999.

¹⁰ Cf. Desmond 1997, 2. In Desmond’s view, dance is “both a product (particular dances as realized in production) and a process (dancing, the historical conditions of possibility for the production and reception of such texts and processes, as well as the articulation of systems of value).”

conceptualized in multiple and complex ways from antiquity to the present day, uncovering the meanings, relationships, and values attached to particular ancient places can be problematic. Extending this inquiry into “Greek” and “Roman” identities is no less complicated.¹¹ To use dance as a route into these already fraught issues might arguably be seen as futile: as discussed in the Introduction to this volume, uncovering dance practices in antiquity is a tricky business given the difficulty of extrapolating specific information from ancient sources. Even when we do have some details, they are often generic and fragmentary, as Frederick Naerebout discusses (Naerebout 2006).¹²

Despite these prominent difficulties, I contend that a focus on dance as a site of racialization provides a productive path forward towards a richer understanding of the meanings and values assigned to place-based dancing bodies in the wider Greek and Roman imaginaries. This involves, in my view, examining the intersections between identity and place—such as the ways in which non-Greek and Roman dancers are constructed as being “other” or having lesser value in antiquity—and the ways in which place might inform identity. In presenting this as a process of racialization, I am guided by Geraldine Heng’s conception of race as “a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences” (Heng 2018, 27).¹³ Heng’s broader definition of race, which does not insist on physiognomic differences, collapses the boundaries of “race” and “ethnicity,” as typically understood and employed by classicists, and instead forces us to think about power relations in the conceptualization and articulation of difference.¹⁴ As I argue, adopting her

¹¹ The bibliography on this topic is vast, but it is sufficient to note that recent work attempting to explain “Greekness” and the emergence and construction of ancient Greek identity, civilization, and culture has resorted to network theory in order to account for their complexity, e.g. Malkin 2011 and Kowalzig 2018. The topic of *Romanitas* is equally as knotty; see, e.g., Webster 2001; Dench 2005; Gruen 2013 and 2020, 72–89.

¹² This is echoed in the evaluation by Gianvittorio 2017, esp. at 26, and in the Introduction to this volume.

¹³ See also Heng’s general definition of race: “one of the primary names we have... attached to a repeating tendency, of the gravest import, to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups” (Heng 2018, 27). For the applicability of Heng’s definition to the study of the Ancient Mediterranean, see Andújar, Giusti, & Murray forthcoming.

¹⁴ For the ways in which race and ethnicity tend always to inform, and collapse into, one another rather than remaining distinct categories, see Hall 2021. See also Mac Sweeney 2021 for an overview of current conceptions of race and ethnicity, as understood by classicists. For a more flexible definition of race beyond physical attributes, which coheres with current critical understandings of race and with other work on premodern race such as Heng, see McCoskey 2021 and Andújar, Giusti, & Murray forthcoming. Some recent work argues for more sophisticated conceptualizations of race, e.g. Derbew 2022 who focuses on the way in which “blackness” has been articulated in antiquity and modernity.

definition enables us to connect dance with wider processes of assignments of otherness and superiority, with profitable benefits; namely, we can emphasize the construction of geographical and cultural identities at play in discourses about dance, which are sometimes articulated in antithetical terms such as Greek/barbarian, Roman/foreigner, Greek/Roman, west/east, and center/periphery.¹⁵ This not only enables a better sense of the nature and meaning of place-based dancing in antiquity—that is, the geographic dimensions of dance in antiquity—but also facilitates dialogue with current work in Dance Studies on race and dance.

I organize my discussion around three concepts: city, conquest, and borders. My choice of these terms enables me to situate ancient dance practices within core geographic areas of inquiry, ones which furthermore intersect in fascinating ways to reflect the multifaceted realities of Greek and Roman antiquity. I begin with a consideration of dancing in the city, with a focus on foreign dancing and dancers in Classical Athens and Rome. If dance for the ancient Greeks and Romans was a key mode of social and cultural expression and identity, then what of dancing bodies that were associated with other distant or peripheral locations coded as foreign or barbarian? Given the centrality of the city in antiquity (and specifically of Athens and Rome) as well as in modern scholarly reconstructions of ancient history and culture, it is important to examine place-based dancing bodies and practices in the city itself. I consider questions such as: how were geographic identities imprinted and managed through dance in the ancient city? What value was given to non-Greek or non-Roman dancers in the defining spaces of Athenian and Roman life, such as the symposium and the amphitheater, respectively? As my discussion reveals, part of the answer involves the presentation of these foreign dancing bodies as exotic and consumable. My second section extends these questions into the intricate relationship between dance and conquest in Greco-Roman history. Since dance was connected to military prowess in antiquity, I contend that ancient discourses on foreign conquest are a productive area for a geographic inquiry specifically related to dance. My study examines instances in both Greek and Roman history that involved dance and the movement of armies, from Greek mercenary bands in the Persian Empire at the close of the fifth century BCE to the triple triumph at Rome that celebrated the military victories of Octavian (who would later become Augustus) in the Balkans and in Egypt in the first century BCE. Finally, I consider the way in which cross-cultural dance practices illustrate the shifting and evolving borders—concerning both physical

¹⁵ The essays in McCoskey 2021, to date the most comprehensive treatment of race in antiquity, do not include any references to dancing or dance practices. On race-making in ancient Greek drama and how it might extend to the chorus, see Andújar forthcoming.

terrain and identity—of ancient Greece and Rome. Through a consideration of Theseus' importation of the crane (*geranos*) dance into Delos as well as the international and multicultural phenomenon of Roman pantomime, I emphasize the complexities of measuring the human geographical boundaries of dance in antiquity. All three sections provide a sketch of the way in which ancient dance operated along geographic terms at different periods. As this examination illustrates, place-based dancing bodies and practices enable us to map the conceptualization and construction of Greek and Roman culture, identities, and values.

City

Dance for the ancient Greeks has been widely recognized as a central aspect of civic, religious, and cultural identity.¹⁶ Dance was so fundamental to Greek culture that its cities could be conceptualized in terms of dance, as Naerebout posits: “the ancient city is not only a soundscape, it is also a performative space where the singers of those enchanting choral songs move about: a grid of processional routes and of (impromptu) dance floors” (Naerebout 2017, 39). Like other Greek cities, Athens was a city full of dancing bodies in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, as can be testified by the multiple religious festivals and public occasions which it hosted at the heart of the city in any given year, all of which featured choruses.¹⁷ Taking part in a chorus was an essential part of fifth-century Athenian civic identity; as the seminal work of Peter Wilson illustrates, the chorus operated at the nexus of multiple fundamental practices in the ancient city, not only dramatic and religious but also educational, financial, and political (Wilson 2000). To be an Athenian, and to be in Athens arguably involved dancing.¹⁸

Yet not all dancing practices in the classical city were public events or even Athens-centered. The prominent case of the “Anacreontic dancers” suggests that some dancing practices had the potential not only to travel imaginatively beyond the city but also to alter temporarily the civic identity of its dancers. A series of vases produced in Athens in the late sixth to mid fifth centuries BCE, some of which contain the word “anakreon” suggesting a link to the poet Anacreon (c. 580-485 BCE), appear to depict bearded men dressed in “female”

¹⁶ The bibliography is extensive but see most recently Gianvittorio 2017; Weiss 2020; Steiner 2021.

¹⁷ Andújar, Coward, & Hadjimichael (2018, 5-6) connect the city's wealth of choruses to the likely lyric and choral expertise of Athenian audiences.

¹⁸ On female choral culture in Athens, see Budelmann & Power 2015.

and/or “eastern” clothes and accessories.¹⁹ Many of the figures featured in them are depicted as dancing. Scholarship on the iconography of these Anacreontic vases has been divided: some, focusing on aspects of their dress including the *chiton* (tunic) and headgear such as the *sakkos* (sack) and *mitra* (head-dress or turban),²⁰ have proposed that these men were impersonating women in an elaborate performance of femininity, whereas others, focusing on the presence of parasols and the *barbitos* (lyre),²¹ connected these figures with the “east,” specifically Ionia in Asia Minor.²² In a pivotal article, Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux and François Lissarrague fuse the two through the ambiguous figure of Dionysus.²³ Their argument hinges on recognizing that the images operate at the nexus of three distinct semantic realms: male and female, Ionian music and poetry, and wine (Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990, 219). This led them to propose the now widely accepted view that these vases depict elite Athenian men engaging in sympotic activity, in fact “playing the other” before resuming their usual civic identity (Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990). In other words, these men were involved in taking up and performing an eastern guise that enabled them to cease momentarily to be Athenian precisely during one of the most recognizably Greek social institutions, the symposium.²⁴

A red-figure Athenian stamnos (a wide-mouthed jar with two handles) in Madrid, dated from between 500-450 BCE, is one such example. It shows a *kōmos* (revel) in action (Fig. 15), a frequent theme in vase painting which commonly featured dance.²⁵ Wearing long *chitōnes* and brandishing parasols, various bearded male figures with covered hair dance, as testified by their upturned feet. The cascading folds in the clothes of the two central figures in

¹⁹ Anacreon was born in the Ionian city of Teos in Asia Minor and was associated with the tyrant Polycrates from the Ionian island of Samos in the Eastern Aegean Sea. Some scholars see these vases as evidence of the poet Anacreon’s visit to Athens during the late sixth century BCE: De Vries 1972-1973, 32-33; Zanker 1995, 25; cf. Lissarrague 2021, 20. On Anacreon and the wider tradition, Rosenmeyer 1992.

²⁰ On the *chiton* as a female dress in Classical Athens, see Lee 2015, 109-110. On the *sakkos* as a type of hair accessory, see Lee 2015, 158-60; cf. Cohen 2001, 244-45.

²¹ On the parasol see Miller 1992 and Delavaud-Roux 1995. Anacreon is typically connected with the *barbitos*; see Snyder 1972. For a discussion of the persistent connection of Anacreon with *choreia*, see Ladianou 2005. The Artemon fragment by Anacreon rails against a certain Artemon who “carries an ivory parasol” (σκιαδίσκην ἐλεφαντίνην φορεῖ, *PMG* 388, 11).

²² For a summary of arguments, see De Vries 1972-1973; Kurz & Boardman 1986; Price 1990; Polos 2019.

²³ Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990. Cf. Lissarrague 2021, 18-20.

²⁴ On the central role of the symposium in Greek culture, see Murray 2016, as well as the Introduction to this volume.

²⁵ On the vast number of dancing komast figures who are depicted on decorated Archaic Greek vases, see Smith 2010.



Figure 15: Red-figure stamnos depicting bearded men dancing, c. 500-450 BCE. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11009. Photo: Antonio Trigo Arnal.

Fig. 15 likewise suggests movement. Significantly, because the dancers' feet and gazes face in different directions, they are not acting in unison nor performing a synchronized movement, in the manner of a chorus. As Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague note, this depiction of collective dance has "no fixed rules of movement, and as such it reflects one of the essential characteristics of the *kōmos*, which is a group activity with everyone on his own" (Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990, 227).²⁶

²⁶ See Nagy (2007, 212), who defines the *kōmos* as a subset of choral dancing, and Naerebout (2017, 47-48), who considers komast dancers a kind of religious chorus despite not moving in unison. For the connection between the *kōmos* and Old Comedy see Rothwell 2007, 6-35.



Figure 16: Reverse of Fig. 15, c. 500-450 BCE. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11009. Photo: Antonio Trigo Arnal.

The reverse side (Fig. 16) reinforces the sense of unchoreographed dancing. It displays two further *chiton*-cloaked bearded men with raised feet moving in different directions, one playing the *barbitos*, while the second dances, as he holds a parasol in one hand and a skyphos (cup) in the other.²⁷ The presence of the skyphos and *barbitos* bolsters the sympotic context: according to Frontisi-Ducroux and Lissarrague, the superimposition of these two specific items in the center of this vase “creates a focal point that underlines the relationship between wine and dance” (Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990, 227). Beneath the handles of the stamnos (Fig. 17) is a chair, a clear sign of an indoor space, which further accentuates the symposium as the venue

²⁷ On vases within vases in a context of *kōmos*, see Laferrière 2021.



Figure 17: Side view of Fig. 15, c. 500-450 BCE. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11009. Photo: Antonio Trigo Arnal.

for this dancing. This is a collective dance taking place indoors, and as it is not synchronized, it perhaps represents impromptu dancing at the symposium. The symposium, a central institution for shaping elite identity and social values, was a performance occasion in Greek antiquity, in which poetry was sung.²⁸ This stamnos emphasizes that it was also integrally a venue for dance.²⁹

²⁸ See e.g. Vetta 1983; Cazzato, Obbink, & Prodi 2016.

²⁹ As Xenophon's Hieron appears to confess to Simonides in the fictional dialogue, when Hieron was a private citizen (*ιδιώτης*) before becoming tyrant, one of the things symposia enabled him to do was to "absorb his soul in songs, revels and dances" (*ῥαδαῖς τε καὶ θαλίαις καὶ χοροῖς τὴν ψυχὴν συγκαταμιγνύναι*, Xen. *Hier.* 6.2). On the presence of female dancers (*orchēstrides*) in Athenian symposia, see Olsen 2021a, 152-59.

A geographic focus reveals the multiple layers at play in these images: the poses and gestures indicate collective unsynchronized (and non-choral) dance, the chair and the skyphos a sympotic context, the dress and accessories connect these dancers to Asia Minor (constructed as the east), whereas the physical vase confines the scene to Classical Athens. How, then, might such a complicated matrix be interpreted? Margaret Miller's work has revealed the way in which "oriental" accessories, such as headgear and parasols, were consumed as status symbols in Athens during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE (Miller 1991, 1992), especially *Perserie* (Persian objects, art, and textiles), in the aftermath of the Persian Wars (Miller 1997), in what she calls an "effective statement of elitism" (Miller 1991, 71).³⁰ At the same time, the clothes, as well as the implied connection of the Ionian poet Anacreon through the *barbitos* stresses the complex role of Ionia in the fifth-century Athenian imagination, in which Ionians were commonly depicted as exemplars of the east: soft, effeminate, and decadent.³¹ Other elements in these vases point to locations further east. Comparing the Anacreontic vases with early fifth-century BCE reliefs at Apadana (located in Persepolis, the capital of the Achaemenid Empire) which depict gift-bearing delegations to the Persian King, Keith De Vries identifies the specific combination of long *chiton*, *himation* ("outer garment"), and *sakchos* as belonging to the Lydians of Western Anatolia (De Vries 1972-1973, 37; Miller 2013). Though the Artemon fragment (PMG 388) by Anacreon refers to the use of a parasol as an accessory, parasols were likewise linked with the Near East, where they were depicted as being held by the attendants of the king (Lee 2015, 167). They first appear in sixth-century Attic vase painting, and sources state that parasols were used in the Panathenaic procession by attendants of *metic* descent (immigrants) who held them for elite Athenian young women *kanēphoroi* ("basket-carriers") in a manner that "broadcasts identity in the public sphere" (Lee 2015, 168).³² Given these multiple connections to locations beyond Athens, their presence and use indoors by these elite Athenian men is therefore baffling.

The geographical complexities compound if we consider the fact that the vases which depict these images generally belong to the period which scholars have identified as the major turning point in the construction and formulation of Athenian and Greek identities: 500-450 BCE. The Persian Wars have been

³⁰ This was not limited to the east, but can include notable places in the north, such as Scythia and Thrace, as Miller (1991) illustrates in her discussion of Scythian and Thracian garb.

³¹ Agathon in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* mentions a particular Ionian style, which involves wearing a *mitra* (Ar. *Thesm.* 159-63). Snyder (1974) sees Agathon as an Aristophanic caricature of Anacreon himself. On the complex role of Ionia in Athens, see Connor 1993.

³² Miller 1992, 102-4; Lee 2015, 168.

widely attributed by scholars as a formative event that shaped a strong sense of Athenian identity.³³ Since Greek expressions and articulations of ethnic identity operated in what Jonathan Hall terms “oppositional mode” (Hall 1997, 47)³⁴—that is, by contrast—these images in which elite Athenian men visibly perform the barbarian “other” from the east challenge notions of Athenian self-representation, especially in a city where (male) identity was predicated upon citizenship, which after Pericles’ law of 451 BCE hinged on unmixed ancestry and having two Athenian parents (Lape 2010). There is evidence of foreigners who were present at symposia in Classical Athens, especially as hired performers. The identities and roles of these foreigners are typically marked as such; Xenophon’s dialogue *Symposium*, for example, describes how the entertainment at this elite dinner party set in 422 BCE was provided by a man from Syracuse and his accompanying performers, presumably also from Sicily: a piper girl (*aulētris*), a dancing girl (*orchēstris*), and a male *keitharode* (singer accompanying himself on the *keithara*) and dancer (Xen. *Symp.* 2.1).³⁵ As entertainers, the role of these Syracusans was circumscribed. The adoption of this “oriental” guise in the Anacreontic vases by the Athenian elite symposiasts, however, operates in a fundamentally different manner: it not only enables these male figures to temporarily assume another identity beyond Athenian, but it also transposes the symposium and the dance to the east. Another possibility might be to see the activity of these Athenian elite men as an exercise in organizing and controlling the world, or as Beth Cohen writes, as “a means for Athenian men of *taming* the Other—of exercising control and asserting superiority in a diverse, even threatening world” (Cohen 2001, 251).³⁶ This latter possibility coheres with what Sara Ahmed calls “the politics of domestication,” in which what is strange and unfamiliar is brought home, consumed, and instrumentalized (Ahmed 2006, 116-17). In either case, these Anacreontic figures suggest that in Classical Athens dance had the potential of blurring the customarily hard boundaries of identity and geography.

³³ This distinction is neatly exemplified by Thuc. 1.3.3. See also Hall 1989; Hall 2002; Vlassopoulos 2013.

³⁴ It is important to note that in fifth-century Athens, where women occupied a marginalized position, maleness was also defined in opposition to femaleness.

³⁵ For a discussion of the wider representations of performance and dance in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, see Schlapbach 2018, 169-83 and Olsen 2021a, 159-70.

³⁶ Cohen 2001 sees these vases as visual representations of the view of the Old Oligarch, who describes the hodgepodge garb of the Athenians in Xenophon’s *Constitution of the Athenians* 2.8: “The rest of the Greeks have each a peculiar language and mode of living and dress, but the Athenians have adopted a mixture of fashions from Greeks and barbarians.”

Dance in the Roman context likewise involved complex geographic imaginaries. Ancient writers emphasize the city's cosmopolitan nature, including Ovid (*Fast.* 2.684) and Martial (*Spect.* 1); Rome's "global" dimension has long been a subject of study in scholarship (Nicolet 1991; Edwards 1996; Edwards & Woolf 2003; Hingley 2005; Loar, MacDonald, & Padilla Peralta 2018). Unlike the Greek and Athenian contexts, however, dance in Rome was not a formative element for civic identity (Schlabach 2020a). As a popular form of entertainment connected with pleasure,³⁷ it was instead conceptualized as a Greek, and therefore a non-Roman practice.³⁸ As recent scholarship has shown, these are in fact erroneous prejudices which can be traced to the Republican era (Naerebout 2009, Alonso Fernández 2020). An illustrative example can be found in the following formulation by the first-century BCE biographer Cornelius Nepos, who stresses dance as antithetical to Roman nature, in *Life of Epaminondas* (Nep. *Epam.* 1.2 trans. Rolfe, modified):

Scimus enim musicen nostris moribus abesse a principis persona, saltare vero etiam in vitiis poni: quae omnia apud Graecos et grata et laude digna ducuntur.

We know, for example, that according to our ideas music is unsuited to a personage of importance, while dancing is even numbered among the vices; but with the Greeks all such accomplishments were regarded as becoming and even praiseworthy.

Besides linking it explicitly with the Greeks, Nepos presents dance as a vice (*vitium*), thus introducing dance as a marker of the absence of Roman morality.³⁹ These assertions by ancient writers continue into the imperial period, when the geographical borders of the Roman Empire expand.⁴⁰ Critics, however, have revealed that such moralizing judgements speak to wider cultural anxieties. Catharine Edwards, for example, examines the way in which those in professions associated with public performance, including dancers, were legally labeled as dishonorable (*infames*), revealing underlying class biases (Edwards 1997). Arguing against modern conceptions of a "danceless Rome," Naerebout posits that this conception instead reflects elite anxieties about the Empire:

³⁷ Cf. Cic. *Off.* 1.150 which lists dancers (*saltatores*) as one of the many trades (*artes*) which serve the sensual pleasures (*quae ministrae sunt voluptatum*).

³⁸ Naerebout 2009; Alonso Fernández 2020; Schlabach 2022b. Curtis 2017 shows how Augustan poets invoked the chorus as a symbol of their appropriation and inheritance of the wider Greek tradition. Schlabach 2018 shows how the idea of dance as Greek affected interpretation of later practices.

³⁹ For wider context of Nepos' assertion see the discussion by Alonso Fernandez 2020, 178-79.

⁴⁰ On watching dance as a problematic activity for a Roman, see Plin. *Ep.* 7.24.3-5. See also "Politics" for discussion of dance and civic life in Roman culture.

“the members of the elite turned dancing into one of the arenas where they tried to come to terms with the cultural dynamism of the Empire, and where ‘improper’ came to mean ‘un-Roman’ and vice-versa” (Naerebout 2009, 148-49). In other words, dance emerges as a cultural marker of class, ethnicity, and race in Rome; as Naerebout writes, it was “one of the many behaviours used in a constant renegotiation of where everyone stood in Roman society” (Naerebout 2009, 157).

Poetry centered on life in Rome emphasizes the geographies of foreign dancing bodies, which are often presented as consumables for citizens in the city, calling to mind Ahmed’s “politics of domestication.”⁴¹ Statius’ *Silvae* 1.6 gives an account of a public imperial performance on the Saturnalia in Rome during the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE). The poem’s narrator is an eager spectator in this winter festival held at the amphitheater, who describes the impressive procession of goods and peoples that is paraded before his eyes.⁴² As night approaches he draws attention to the tumult that is suddenly produced by distinct groups of place-based performing bodies (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6, 67-74, trans. Shackleton Bailey, modified):

*hic intrant faciles emi puellae,
hic agnoscitur omne quod theatris
aut forma placet aut probatur arte.
hoc plaudunt grege Lydiae tumentes, 70
illic cymbala tinnulaeque Gades,
illic agmina confremunt Syrorum.
hic plebs scenica quique comminutis
permutant vitreis gregale sulphur.*

Here enter girls easily bought; here is recognized whatever pleases the theater with comeliness or wins approval with skill. In one group bombastic Lydian ladies in a herd clap, elsewhere are cymbals and jingling Gades, elsewhere again troops of Syrians make din. Here is the mob of the stage and vendors of common sulfur for broken glass.

The phrase “girls easily bought” (*faciles emi puellae* 67) illustrates the way in which dancers and sex workers were connected in the Roman imagination. Labelling these as “dances of alterity” (“danzas de alteridad”), Zoa Alonso Fernández, however, stresses the way Statius marks these female bodies as feminized, threatening, and primitive foes through animalistic (e.g. *grege*, “herd”) and military (e.g. *agmina*, “troops”) language (Alonso Fernández 2019, 109-10).

⁴¹ Thomas 1982, Alonso Fernández 2022.

⁴² Newlands (2002, 227) discusses how this spectatorship is facilitated through the collective pronoun “we” (*nos*).

The use of such language not only points to the wider processes of war and conquest which facilitated the acquisition and movement of these bodies to Rome in the first place, but also differentiates these particular bodies from those who are merely associated with sex and pleasure in line 67. The work of Paul Scolieri reveals the way dance, in a context of conquest, could have threatening connotations and be associated with death and violence (Scolieri 2013). Indeed, he recounts how conquistadors and chroniclers of the New World, such as Amerigo Vespucci, felt threatened by native dance practices that they considered “barbarous and inhuman” (Scolieri 2013, 25). His work reveals the manner in which dance became a central venue in which the “European” and the “indigenous other” were constructed. Though I consider conquest in more detail below, it is important to recognize the way dance in this context functions as a key site of not only violence but also of racialized and commodified difference.

A more focused geographic approach enhances the way in which these place-based dancing bodies are used to accentuate the wider boundaries of the Flavian empire as seen from the imperial city. The prostitutes which open the excerpt at 67 and the unnamed theatrical mob at 75 effectively frame various place-based bodies: female performers from Lydia, musicians from Southern Spain (from Cadiz, see below), and jugglers from Syria. The geographical names make clear the extent of the empire along its western and eastern borders and in particular the consumables that Romans can now enjoy in addition to their usual enjoyment of prostitutes and theater. Earlier in the poem there was a similar emphasis on the place-based origins of the delicacies at the event, as the spectator singles out Black Sea nuts (12), dates from Palestine (13), plums from Damascus (14), and figs from Asia Minor (15). As Carole Newlands points out, “these are described as *rapinis* (16), rapine, offering a view of Empire as a free plundering of its material resources in which the people symbolically share” (2002, 241).⁴³ Immediately after the excerpt featuring the foreign performing bodies Statius’ spectator notes the presence of exotic birds from the Nile in Egypt, Phasis by the Black Sea, and Numidia in North Africa, thus marking the northern and southern borders of the Roman Empire (Stat. *Silv.* 1.6, 75-78). In this wider context, these place-based bodies have a common denominator with the food and birds, likewise identified by their place of origin: consumable, foreign, sensual. That this public celebration takes place in an amphitheater is significant; the venue may in fact have been the Colosseum (Newlands 2002, 228). This elaborate demarcation of borders in the center of the imperial city takes on further significance when we consider the presence of the emperor

⁴³ On food and empire see further Gowers 1993: 37-38.

Domitian, who is described as joining everyone at the feast (Stat. *Silh.* 1.6, 43-48).

The *Gaditanae*—the dancing girls from Cadiz (Spain) who are briefly in the excerpt by Statius above (Stat. *Silh.* 1.6, 71)—are another prominent example of foreign place-based females who are frequently presented as consumables, though in the more intimate context of the Roman *convivium*.⁴⁴ In a letter to Septicius Clarus admonishing him for turning down a dinner invitation, Pliny describes at length the delicacies of his own table that the addressee chose to miss, scorning what he opted for instead (Plin. *Ep.* 1.15, trans. Radice, modified):

Hens tu! promittis ad cenam, nec venis?... Paratae erant lactucae singulae, cochleae ternae, ona bina, halica cum mulso et niue (nam banc quoque computabis, immo banc in primis quae perit in ferculo), olinae betacei cucurbitae bulbi, alia mille non minus lauta. Audisses comoedos uel lectorem uel lyristen uel (quae mea liberalitas) omnes. At tu apud nescio quem ostrea uulvas echinos Gaditanas maluisti.

Who are you, to accept my invitation to dinner and never come?... It was all laid out, one lettuce each, three snails, two eggs, wheat-cake, and wine with honey chilled with snow (you will reckon this too please, and as an expensive item, seeing that it disappears in the dish), besides olives, beetroots, gherkins, onions, and any number of similar delicacies. You would have heard a comic play, a reader or singer, or all three if I felt generous. Instead you chose to go to some nobody's house where you could have oysters, sow's innards, sea-urchins, and dancing girls from Cadiz.

The women are clearly embedded in a wider culinary context, as one of the various appetizers that could be offered when entertaining a guest for dinner. The passage emphasizes the great appeal of the dancing girls, whose dance, according to Tom Sapsford, was similar to those of the *cinaedi*, in that they “shimmy their middles in a sexually arousing manner” (Sapsford 2022, 150).⁴⁵ As Alonso Fernández emphasizes, however, this is not just about sex; rather it is “specifically their dancing—and not just their flesh!—that characterizes them as objects for human consumption” (2022, 203).

Other poets of the early imperial period likewise exhibited a fascination with female dancers from Cadiz. Martial routinely refers to Cadiz as a place with wanton forms of music and dance throughout his epigrams (3.63, 5.78,

⁴⁴ For an overview of the *Gaditanae* see Fear 1991; for their presence in the *convivium*, Alonso Fernández 2022.

⁴⁵ Sapsford 2022, 150 also compares the verbs used to describe their dances: *criso* for the women and *ceveo* for the *cinaedi*.

6.71).⁴⁶ In one poem, describing the movement they can produce, he invokes them only to exclude them (Mart. 5.78, 26-28, trans. Shackleton Bailey):

*nec de Gadibus improbis puellae
vibrabunt sine fine prurientes
lascivos docili tremore lumbos;*

nor girls from wanton Gades, endlessly prurient,
vibrate lascivious loins with practiced tremor.

Linking this passage to an excerpt of Juvenal's eleventh Satire, which similarly flags these dancing women as unacceptable for the *convivium*, Alonso Fernández emphasizes "the sensual strength" of these poetic images which reveal "the role of the dancers from Cadiz in determining their own poetic inclusion in spaces they do not belong" (Alonso Fernández 2022, 204). The fact that Cadiz was located at the end of the world according to Roman eyes (Hor. *Carm.* 2.2.11; Juv. 10.1-2) underscores their status and presence in Rome as "extreme." In these sources, the exotic origins of the *Gaditanae* go hand in hand with their perceived sexual availability.

Other place-based dancing women were similarly saddled with expectations and stereotypes of sexuality. The *Ambubaiae*, Syrian dancing girls, were conceptualized in a similar manner, given the reputation of dances originating from Syria (Hor. *Sat.* 1.2.2; Suet. *Ner.* 27.1; Naerebout 2009, 155-57). The negative values and meanings assigned to these various female foreign dancing bodies take on further significance when we consider the choreographed bodies of priestly *collegia* such as the *Salii*, which demonstrate that it was possible for dance in Rome not to signify lewd morals, public performances, or sex.⁴⁷ Named precisely after their leaping dances (from the verb *salio*),⁴⁸ these priests were not only fundamental to Roman public religion but were also themselves markers of male identity and elite status in the city (Alonso Fernández 2016 and 2017). Though these dancing girls are not the only place-based bodies marked out as exotic—another prominent example would be gladiators whose movements may be considered along choreographic and geographic terms—these various examples show the ways in which dance was embedded in the geographies of the ancient city, marking out identities and hierarchies. Given its central position, the city is often a key place from which to gauge the construction of identities, helping in particular to map out the meanings assigned to those located on the

⁴⁶ Cf. 1.41 where he compares Caecilius with a shameless teacher from Cadiz (*quod de Gadibus improbus magister*).

⁴⁷ See also my discussion of Scipio's dancing at the triumph below.

⁴⁸ On the question of the indigeneity and Roman nature of the *Salii*, see Schlapbach 2022b.

margins. From guises to be donned to exotic imports to be consumed, this account reveals how place-based dancing bodies from elsewhere were seen as commodities by those in the ancient city.

Conquest

Ancient Mediterranean history is arguably a study in conquest. Greek and Roman historiography is not only full of numerous accounts of war and subjugation but is itself generally structured around the ideologies of colonial and military expansion. This constant movement naturally involved traversing and reconfiguring geographic boundaries. Dance, which was often connected to military prowess in antiquity, can help shine a light on such processes, and in particular the ways in which they contributed to the development of a sense of Greek and Roman superiority in the face of defeated foreign foes. The connection between dance and military strength is well attested by the presence of the various dances executed by young men in armor throughout Greek and Roman antiquity (Ceccarelli 1998). In the Classical period, the Athenian Panathenaic festival, for example, featured pyrrhic contests for choruses of boys and men, given the dance's close association with the goddess Athena (Lys. 21.1-4; Ceccarelli 2004, 93-98). At Rome, various armed performances were routinely linked to the *pyrrhichē* (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.71-72; cf. Ceccarelli 1998, 147-56). Not only did dance and warfare both involve coordinated and orderly movement, but they were also connected in terms of their ability to produce disciplined and vigorous bodies, as Plato makes clear in the *Laws* (815a-b; cf. 796b). Ancient discourses about conquest involving dance, then, are a productive venue for investigating the construction of place-based values and prejudices.

The *Anabasis*, Xenophon's account of an army of 10,000 Greek mercenaries hired by the Achaemenid prince Cyrus the Younger to oust his brother Artaxerxes II at the close of the fifth century BCE, contains an illustrative episode in which dance is not only connected to military strength but is also a clear marker of geographic boundaries and identities. In *Anabasis* 6.1, the band of Greeks is at the central point of the Black Sea, near the city of Cotyora (modern day Ordu, Turkey). Noting the presence of the army which had been pillaging the nearby lands, the Paphlagonian ruler sent ambassadors to the Greeks who received them as guests at a feast. As Xenophon relates, after they all made libations and sang the *paian*, two Thracian men stood up and danced in full armor (Xen. *An.* 6.1.5-6). Their performance was then followed by a series of dances carried out by men who are identified by their local place of origin: a type of military mimetic dance called the *Carpaea* performed by

Aenianians and Magnesians (6.1.7), a solo dance by a Mysian man (6.1.9-10), and a martial dance by Mantineans and Arcadians that was accompanied by the *aulos* and a *paian* (6.1.11). The order of the dances disregards the realities of physical geography: they begin in the north with the Thracians, then travel further south to Thessaly with the Aenianians and Magnesians, after which they jump across to Northern Asia Minor with the Mysian dancer, until, heading even further west and south, they reach the central Peloponnese, represented by the Mantineans and Arcadians.⁴⁹ This careful attention to places of origins is fascinating, not only because it underlines the Greek army's visible diversity and geographical expansiveness, but also because it is one of the few places where Xenophon does so; as Andrew Dalby points out, Xenophon records the origins of only 66 individual members of the army of 10,000, eight of which were Athenian (Dalby 1992, 17). Sarah Olsen argues that the extensive descriptions in this episode, including attention to ethnic origins of the various dances, reflect Xenophon's "choreographic" narrative authority (Olsen 2021a, 189).⁵⁰

Following this impressive tour, Xenophon records the response of the Paphlagonian ambassadors, who allegedly found it strange that all the dances which they witnessed were armored ones (οἱ Παφλαγόνες δεινὰ ἐποιοῦντο πάσας τὰς ὀρχήσεις ἐν ὅπλοις εἶναι, Xen. *An.* 6.1.11). Their astonishment prompts the Mysian man to lead out a female dancer (*orchēstris*) who "danced the Pyrrhic dance with grace" (ἡ δὲ ὀρχήσατο πυρρίχην ἐλαφρῶς, 6.1.12, trans. Brownson, modified). The ambassadors responded by asking whether women also fought with the army (οἱ Παφλαγόνες ἤρουντο εἰ καὶ γυναῖκες συνεμάχοντο αὐτοῖς. 6.1.13). This exchange demonstrates the clear connection between dance and military prowess, which, in this case, transcends gender. The Paphlagonians' response accentuates these dances as "strategic displays of Greek military readiness and enthusiasm intended to intimidate the troublesome Paphlagonian raiders" (Olsen 2021a, 190). Dance, witnessed by the foreign ambassadors, not only reflects the geographic diversity of the ancient Greek world but also specifically showcases the strength of the army that the Paphlagonians face. Unsurprisingly, after this impressive display of dance the Paphlagonians make peace with the Greeks (6.1.14). The connection that Xenophon makes between dance and military strength resonates with some recent studies of dance and conquest, most notably Paul Scolieri's examination of dance practices in the New World. In at least one account, the *cacique* (indigenous chieftain) in Tecoteaga (present day Nicaragua) informs the chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés

⁴⁹ For an analysis of the choreographic qualities in these dances, see Olsen 2021a, esp. 189-91.

⁵⁰ This coheres with other accounts which likewise emphasize Xenophon's increasing role in the narrative, e.g. Bradley 2010 and Grethlein 2012.

that the dance that the Spaniard had just witnessed had no meaning other than being “a display of strength” (Scolieri 2013, 38).

The *Anabasis* is a fascinating text, not only because it deals with the realities of the Persian empire and the Achaemenid imperial administration, but also because it presents the army of 10,000 as an amalgamation of Greeks from various parts of the Greek world.⁵¹ Though their campaign was unsuccessful and despite the fact that they had been employed by a Persian, the reception of this ragtag army in antiquity was positive: many ancient writers regarded them as a demonstration of the superiority of the Greeks over the Persians. Isocrates, for example, discusses them as a collective that exposed the “softness” (*malakia*) of the Persians (Isoc. 4.145-49, cf. 5.90-93). This army was also seen as a model of “panhellenism” despite its early date (401 BCE); indeed, later writers such as Polybius saw them as a precursor of Alexander’s army (Polyb. 3.6.10-12).

In crossing multiple borders throughout his campaigns in the Near and Middle East, Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE) indisputably transformed the geography of the ancient world. Accounts of his military exploits emphasize the manner in which the celebration of his victories embedded Athenian dance practices (in particular tragic festivals and dithyramb) within the matrix of Greek cultural superiority and triumph.⁵² Dance appears to have been part of this ideology, as evidenced by a speech recounted by Plutarch and allegedly uttered by Alexander when visiting the philosopher Diogenes in Corinth (Plut. *De Alex. fort.* 1.332a-b, trans. Babbitt, modified):

εἰ μὴ τὰ βαρβαρικά τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς κεράσαι διεννοούμεν καὶ πᾶσαν ἡπειρον ἐπιὼν ἐξημερῶσαι, καὶ πέρατα γῆς ἀνερευνῶν καὶ θαλάττης ὠκεανῷ προσερεῖσαι Μακεδονίαν, καὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα σπεῖραι καὶ καταχέασθαι γένους παντὸς εὐδικίαν καὶ εἰρήνην, οὐκ ἂν ἐν ἀπράκτῳ τρυφῶν ἐξουσία καθήμην, ἀλλ’ ἐζήλουν ἂν τὴν Διογένους εὐτέλειαν. νῦν δὲ σύγγνωθι, Διόγενες, Ἡρακλέα μιμούμαι καὶ Περσέα ζηλῶ, καὶ τὰ Διονύσου μετιῶν ἴχνη, θεοῦ γενάρχου καὶ προπάτορος, βούλομαι πάλιν ἐν Ἰνδία νικῶντας Ἑλληνας ἐγχορεῦσαι καὶ τοὺς ὑπὲρ Καύκασον ὄρεους καὶ ἀγρίους τῶν βακχικῶν κόμων ἀναμνήσαι.

If it were not my purpose to combine foreign things with things Greek, to traverse and tame every continent, to search out the uttermost parts of land and sea, to push the bounds of Macedonia to the farthest Ocean, and to disseminate and shower the blessings of Greek justice and peace over every nation, I should not be content to sit quietly

⁵¹ Dalby (1992, 17) suggests that the movement of the army should be considered akin to a Greek colonizing expedition.

⁵² On how he transforms Athenian tragedy into a ready-made symbol of Hellenic culture which can easily be transported and transplanted anywhere, see Andújar 2019, 39-40.

in the luxury of idle power, but I should emulate the frugality of Diogenes. But as things are, forgive me, Diogenes, that I imitate Heracles, and emulate Perseus, and follow in the footsteps of Dionysus, the divine author and progenitor of my family, and desire that victorious Greeks should dance again in India and revive the memory of the Bacchic revels among the savage mountain tribes beyond the Caucasus.

Alexander's comments connect dance to the wider agendas of "civilizing" foreigners that he pursued in his campaigns.⁵³ Indeed, since antiquity Alexander's conquests have been presented as "Hellenizing" far-off territories. But in this passage, the use of the verb "tame" (ἐξημερῶσαι) at the outset and the adjective "savage" (ἄγριους) at the end suggest that he believed himself to be humanizing those who were in his view wild beasts. What is fascinating here is the presentation and emphasis of both Alexander as a new Dionysus through the medium of dance, and the Bacchic revels as a means of achieving this process of domestication.⁵⁴ In claiming that he follows in the footsteps of the god Dionysus, who was said to have conquered distant lands through dance—a notion already expressed in Euripides' *Bacchae*—Alexander wishes to bring about a second Greek victory in India, precisely through dance, and to remind "the savage mountain tribes beyond the Caucasus" of the *kōmos*. This notion of reminding these people or "reviving their memory" (ἀναμνησαι) of the dances which they formerly danced under Dionysus illustrates the intimate connection between dance and conquest. Here we might think of Lucian's account of Dionysus literally "dancing down" (κατωρχήσατο) his Indian and other far away enemies (Luc. *Salt.* 22). Later writers would emphasize that Dionysus was the first to set the boundaries of the human world, and that Alexander wished to transcend those boundaries. The first century CE writer Quintus Curtius Rufus, for example, cites a speech by Alexander on the eve of the battle of Issus in Southern Anatolia (333 BCE), where Alexander allegedly inspired his troops to think of themselves as "the liberators of the whole world, who had formerly passed beyond the bounds set by Hercules and Father Liber (Bacchus), to subdue not only the Persians but also all nations. Bactria and India would be provinces of the Macedonians" (*Terrarum orbis liberatores emensosque olim Herculis et Liberi patris terminos non Persis modo, sed etiam omnibus gentibus inposituros iugum. Macedonum provincias Bactra et Indos fore*, Curt. 3.10.5,

⁵³ Other sources discuss Alexander's visit to Corinth where he met the philosopher: cf. Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 14.2; Diog. Laert. 6.32. However, none include this quote.

⁵⁴ The connection with Dionysus is already present in Alexander's biographers (e.g. Arr. *An.* 4.10.6; Plut. *Vit. Alex.* 2.4) and has been widely recognized in scholarship (e.g. Mossman 1988; Stoneman 2019 and 2021).

trans. Rolfe, modified).⁵⁵ These other sources make clear that a connection existed between the conquering Alexander and Dionysus, which was solidified after the conqueror's death.⁵⁶ This example illustrates the way in which this connection extended to choral dance, one of the key modes of expression for Dionysus.

In Rome, the intersection of conquest, dance, and geography can be found in triumphs, extravagant public celebrations which commemorated the subjugation of foreigners in the capital. The triumph was, as Mary Beard writes, "a complex choreography of the victorious Roman army and their defeated enemy" (Beard 2003, 24). A definition from the first century BCE by the polymath Varro reveals the musical dimension of the triumph (Varro, *Ling.* 6.68, trans. de Melo):

Sic triumphare appellatum, quod cum imperatore milites redeuntes clamitant per Urbem in Capitolium eunti "<i>o triumphe." Id a θρίαμβῳ ac Graeco Liberi cognomento potest dictum.

So *triumphare* 'to triumph' got its name because when the soldiers are returning with their commander, they keep shouting at him throughout the City while he is going onto the Capitol: 'Hurray, *triumphe* 'triumph'!' This may have been derived from θρίαμβος 'hymn to Dionysus/Liber' and the Greek epithet of Liber.

This definition suggests that triumphs not only were accompanied by music, through the soldiers' singing of the *io triumphe* refrain, but that they also had a potential connection to Dionysus, through θρίαμβος, one of his cult titles.⁵⁷ In narrating Scipio's victory in 202 BCE over Hannibal, the Carthaginians, and King Syphax (cf. Polyb. 16.25.5; Livy 30.45), the first century CE historian Appian describes the form of the triumph: first he draws attention to the triumph's uniformity and then begins by sketching out its various elements, such as the trumpeters (σαλπικταί) who lead the way (App. *Pun.* 66). Trumpeters can likewise be seen in a relief from the temple of Apollo Sosianus depicting Octavian's triple triumph in 29 BCE (Fig. 18).⁵⁸ This spectacular triple triumph

⁵⁵ Stoneman (2021, 47-49) believes that the sources are confused, and that it was later at Nysa (Nagara) once Alexander entered India where the conqueror develops the notion that he is following in Dionysus' footsteps.

⁵⁶ This was significantly a bidirectional connection, with later sources modeling accounts of Dionysus' alleged conquest of India after those of Alexander; see Stoneman 2019, 93 and 2021, 51-54.

⁵⁷ Beard 2007, 245 points out that this connection is "only linguistically possible if we imagine an intermediate Etruscan phase." For a literary depiction of the *io triumphe* refrain see Hor. *Carm.* 4.2.50-51; see also Versnel 1970.

⁵⁸ This triumph lived in the poetic imagination, commemorated in Aeneas' shield (*Aen.* 8.714-28), in a depiction built upon *choreia*; see Curtis 2017, 224-26.



Figure 18: Relief from the temple of Apollo Sosianus depicting Octavian's triple triumph, 1st cent. CE. Rome, Capitoline Museums, Centrale Montemartini. © Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.

famously celebrated the manner in which Octavian, who would become the emperor Augustus, subjugated various peoples over a wide geographical terrain, including the Balkans and Egypt.

Descriptions of dancing and moving bodies in Roman triumphs demonstrate the key role of geographical identity. When further discussing the particular triumph of Scipio, Appian describes the musicians who accompanied his procession in more detail (App. *Pun.* 66, trans. McGing):

αὐτοῦ δ' ἡγοῦνται τοῦ στρατηγοῦ ῥαβδοῦχοι φοινικοῦς χιτῶνας ἐνδεδυκότες καὶ χορὸς κιθαριστῶν τε καὶ τιτυριστῶν, ἐς μίμημα Τυρρηνικῆς πομπῆς, περιζωσμένοι τε καὶ στεφάνην χρυσὴν ἐπικείμενοι· ἴσα τε βαίνουσιν ἐν τάξει μετὰ ᾠδῆς καὶ μετ' ὀρχήσεως. Λυδοὺς αὐτοὺς καλοῦσιν, ὅτι, οἶμαι, Τυρρηνοὶ Λυδῶν ἄποικοι. τούτων δέ τις ἐν μέσῳ, πορφύραν ποδήρη περικείμενος καὶ ψέλια καὶ στρεπτά ἀπὸ χρυσοῦ, σχηματίζεται ποικίλως ἐς γέλωτα ὡς ἐπορχούμενος τοῖς πολεμίοις.

Lictors wearing purple cloaks walk in front of the general himself, and a chorus of lyre-players and pipers wearing belts and golden crowns, modeled after an Etruscan procession, and they move in regular time, keeping step with their singing and dancing. They call them Lydians, in my opinion, because the Etruscans are colonists from Lydia. One

of them in the middle, wearing an ankle-length purple robe and armbands and torques of gold, makes all sorts of gestures to induce laughter as if dancing triumphantly over the enemy.

This passage highlights the mimetic nature of the procession, which imitates an Etruscan *pompa* (Beard 2003, 33-34). Scholars have debated the alleged Etruscan origins of the triumph which this passage posits (Dupont 1993; Beard 2007, 56; De Souza 2011, 39). Regardless of its veracity, this passage makes clear the possibilities offered by the movement of bodies in this procession. The notion of “dancing triumphantly over the enemy” (ἐπορχούμενος τοῖς πολεμίοις) in particular is suggestive: it not only recalls the example of Alexander and Dionysus, as discussed above, but also demonstrates the potential of dance in depicting the subjugation of an enemy.⁵⁹ A description of Scipio and his triumphant body likewise highlights the role of dance in identifying and signaling the victor (Sen. *dial.* 9.17.4, trans. Basore, modified):

et Scipio triumphale illud ac militare corpus movebat ad numeros, non molliter se infringens, ut nunc mos est etiam incesso ipso ultra muliebrem molliam fluentibus, sed ut antiqui illi viri solebant inter lusum ac festa tempora virilem in modum tripudiare, non facturi detrimentum, etiam si ab hostibus suis spectarentur.

and Scipio would disport his triumphal and soldierly person to the sound of music, moving not with the voluptuous contortions that are now the fashion, when men even in walking squirm with more than a woman’s voluptuousness, but in the manly style in which men in the days of old used to dance during the times of sport and festival, risking no loss of dignity even if their own enemies looked on.

Dance here is explicitly connected to a manly (*virilem*) style as well as to sport and festival. Scipio’s movements (*non molliter se infringens*) are conceptualized as the opposite of the female foreign dancing bodies which I discussed in the previous section, which were *molles*, fast, and flexible. Whereas the gaze of the spectator in Statius or the hosts in the *convivium* in the other examples defined the dancing women, reducing them to consumables in line with their status as subjugated subjects, the gaze of others is not able to affect Scipio as victor. The borders of conquest were thus mapped onto bodies, affecting how their every aspect, including movement, should be perceived.

⁵⁹ This is an aspect likewise elaborated by Scolieri 2013 in his study of dance in the New World.

Borders

The expanse and geographical extent of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds was vast, involving multiple and ever-changing borders. In the previous sections I explored how non-Athenian and non-Romans dancers were perceived in the city, as well as how conquest not only transformed geographical borders but also constructed hierarchies of power around victor and subjugated. In both cases, dance was embedded into geographical imaginaries. Here I expand that discussion to consider the larger questions of cross-cultural contact that might transform identities of dancers and characterizations of dance practices beyond localized geographical terms. I am interested in the question of mobility in the geographies of dance: who crosses borders, and how does this crossing reflect and/or complicate the construction of cultural and ethnic identities?

In Greece we have various accounts which stress the manner in which ancient dances are imported into a place by certain travelers. One of the most prominent of these aetiologies of dance involves the Athenian hero Theseus who stopped at the island of Delos upon his return from Crete, where he defeated the Minotaur (Call. *Hymn* 4.310-14, Plut. *Vit. Thes.* 21-2, Pollux 4.101, see the Introduction to this volume). According to the account by Plutarch, he danced a choral dance with his young Athenian companions which imitated the circling movement of the Cretan Labyrinth (Plut. *Vit. Thes.* 21.1-2). The dance was dubbed *geranos* by the Delians, and as Plutarch recounts, it is a dance that the Delians still perform in the biographer's time (χορείαν ἣν ἔτι νῦν ἐπιτελεῖν Δηλίους).⁶⁰ This dance, which was initially performed by Athenians, became a fundamental part of Delian cultural identity despite having clear connections to another place, Crete, in its choreography of the maze-like pattern that replicated the Labyrinth. The geographies of the dance intimately bind three locations (Athens, Crete, and Delos) as well as mythical figures (Theseus, Minos, Apollo). Theseus' movements—in all senses of the word—across the Aegean transcend time, space, and geography.

Evidence from Rome, which involved a wider geographical expanse, extends the complicated relationship between bodies, mobility, and geography in antiquity. As discussed above, despite conceptualizations of dance as non-Roman, recent work emphasizes the vastness of the "dancescape" of the Roman world given its wide chronological and geographical reach. The bending of geographical boundaries through dance can be seen in Roman religion, which featured various dancing practices that had originally travelled from abroad (Schlapbach 2022b).

⁶⁰ On the likelihood of the *geranos* being performed during Plutarch's lifetime, see Schlapbach 2022, esp. n. 30. For a detailed analysis of the way in which Plutarch's transmission of this story relates to modern performance concepts of "archive" and "repertoire," see Olsen 2021b.

The *galli*, the castrated priests of Cybele, at Rome are a fascinating example. They performed ritual dance and music (especially pipes and percussion) around Rome in honor of Cybele at the Megalesia festival.⁶¹ Various accounts stress how these rites were introduced into Rome from Phrygia in the Republican period (Livy 29.100-14; Lucretius 2.600-80; cf. Catullus 63). Despite this eastern origin, their rites were state-sanctioned and institutionalized in Rome. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, writing in the late first century BCE, delineates the tension that this generates (Dion. Hal. *Ant.* 2.19.3-5). As he describes, the priests of Cybele are Phrygians and it is they who carry out various practices related to the cult, including “striking the tambourines while their followers play tunes upon their flutes in honor of the Mother of the Gods” (καταυλούμενοι πρὸς τῶν ἐπομένων τὰ μητρῶα μέλη καὶ τύμπανα κροτοῦντες).⁶² No native Roman, however, engages in these activities; according to Dionysius, “so cautious are they are about admitting any foreign religious customs and so great is their aversion to all pompous display that is wanting in decorum” (οὕτως εὐλαβῶς ἡ πόλις ἔχει πρὸς τὰ οὐκ ἐπιχώρια ἔθη περὶ θεῶν καὶ πάντα ὀττεύεται τύπον, ὃ μὴ πρόσεστι τὸ εὐπρεπές). Despite this appropriation and adoption of this foreign cult from the east, the Romans keep their distance and refuse to be escorted by flute-players like these castrated priests. The absence of dance here defines the Roman, though they are nonetheless involved in the spectating.⁶³ In the imperial period, this tension continues: as Mary Beard writes, it wavered “between, on the one hand, Roman rejection of the cult of Magna Mater as something dangerously foreign and, on the other, the incorporation of the cult in the symbolic forms of state power” (Beard 1994, 166).

The wide appeal of pantomime in Rome potentially reveals similar tensions. The work of recent scholars has emphasized how, despite originating in the East, it took root in ancient Rome (Lada-Richards 2007; Garelli-François 2007; Webb 2008; Hall & Wyles 2008). By the second century CE Athenaeus called it the “Italian style of dancing” (Athen. 1.20e). Accounts in antiquity speak of pantomime’s unique ability to transcend linguistic or cultural boundaries (Lucian *Salt.* 64, Cassius Dio 17.21.2; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 7.24; Philostr. *VA* 5.9). In line with this view, anecdotes relating to the most prominent pantomime dancers appear to illustrate the diversity of the ancient world. Two of the most famous dancers in the Augustan period, Pylades and Bathyllus, came from Cilicia and Alexandria, respectively (Athenaeus 1.21d). They were credited with introducing pantomime to Rome through the sponsorship of Augustus; they thus helped pantomime to become Roman (Hunt 2008). Later dancers, such as Tiberios Iulios Apolaustos, performed all over the Roman world to

⁶¹ Cf. Beard, North, & Price 1998, 204. On dance and divinity, see also “Gods.”

⁶² All texts and (modified) translations are those of Cary 1937.

⁶³ On the dynamics of spectatorship and audience, see the chapter on “Audience.”

great acclaim (Slater 1995). Karin Schlapbach stresses the unique role that these dancers played as cultural mediators in a multiethnic empire in which pantomime operated as a type of universal language (Schlapbach 2020b).⁶⁴

Ancient accounts of pantomime dancers emphasize the ways in which this flexibility and ability to mime anything enables them to become anyone, as Lucian describes (*Salt.* 67):

Τὸ δὲ ὅλον ἦθη καὶ πάθη δείξειν καὶ ὑποκρινεῖσθαι ἢ ὄρχησις ἐπαγγέλλεται, νῦν μὲν ἐρῶντα, νῦν δὲ ὀργιζόμενον τινα εἰσάγουσα, καὶ ἄλλον μεμνηνόντα καὶ ἄλλον λελυπημένον, καὶ ἅπαντα ταῦτα μεμετρημένως. τὸ γοῦν παραδοξότατον, τῆς αὐτῆς ἡμέρας ἄρτι μὲν Ἀθάμας μεμηνώς, ἄρτι δὲ Ἰνὸ φοβουμένη δέικνυται, καὶ ἄλλοτε Ἀτρεὺς ὁ αὐτός, καὶ μετὰ μικρὸν Θυέστης, εἴτα Αἰγισθοῦς ἢ Ἀερόπης· καὶ πάντα ταῦτα εἰς ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν.

In general, the dancer undertakes to present and enact characters and emotions, introducing now a lover and now an angry person, one man afflicted with madness, another with grief, and all this within fixed bounds. Indeed, the most surprising part of it is that within the selfsame day at one moment we are shown Athamas in a frenzy, at another Ino in terror; presently the same person is Atreus, and after a little, Thyestes; then Aegisthus, or Aerope; yet they all are but a single man.

This suggests that in performance these mimetic dancers had a protean nature, with the unique ability to become “invisible” (Webb 2012, 255),⁶⁵ which perhaps aided these dancers in adopting a role as cultural mediators. At the same time, the work of Ismene Lada-Richards draws attention to the ways in which elite authors and benefactors used these dancers to mark out their own cultural superiority (2007 and 2008). In particular she shows how the bodies of these dancers become “an important instrument for the signalling, construction and enactment of social and political meaning” (2007, 63). Describing the body that elite narratives construct, she draws attention to the emphasis of the pantomime dancer’s flexibility (Lada-Richards 2008, 289-90):

multiple and metamorphic, unbridled and incontinent, ‘sinewless’ and ‘soft’, ‘broken’ and ‘fragmented’, fluid, bending, sinuous, and luxuriously adorned, the pantomime functions as the inverse image or ‘black double’ of the body owned (or ideally owned) by a well-trained elite youth: virile and upright (no unmanly softness in the neck!), ‘bounded by lines of decorum defining, constraining, and restraining’ it at all times, resplendent without ostentation, always true to itself, and unfailing integrate.

⁶⁴ Cf. Garelli-François (2007, 190), who sees pantomime in similar terms, as “une langue de communication et moyen d’entente entre les peuples.”

⁶⁵ See further Schlapbach 2018, esp. 75-122, on mimesis.

Like the *galli*, however, the question then arises to what extent these dancers, regardless of their popularity or use by the elite, were themselves truly incorporated into society, and in particular to what extent they as individuals were coded in different locations. Did such claims to universality extend to the dancers themselves? Were these dancers of pantomime, for example, seen as performing—and/or recognized as having—multiple identities? Lucian seems to suggest that this might be the case when quoting a barbarian who remarks on a dancer's "many souls in one body" (σῶμα μὲν τοῦτο ἓν, πολλὰς δὲ τὰς ψυχὰς ἔχων, *Salt.* 66). The scantness of the evidence makes this a difficult question to answer, especially since answers depend on when and where this coding is happening. An inscription from Tivoli in the first century BCE reveals the results of a pantomime competition, in which the victor, Gaius Theorus, is praised for his representations of a god, with no other markers of identity, whereas the men he defeated are listed by name and place of origin: Pylades of Cicilia, Nomius of Syria, Hylas of Salmakis, Pierus of Tivoli (*CIL* 6.10115; cf. Csapo & Slater 1995, 381 no. 5.30). Modern accounts of dancers, often the result of a range of ethnographic studies, can account for the various ways in which dance is a privileged way in which identity can be performed, and the way in which this process might be conflicted or complicated especially in a global or transnational context. In a recent book on modern British South Asian dancers, Anusha Kedhar, for example, explores the racialization to which these dancers are subjected as ones who flexibly performed multiple identities, both South Asian and British, exotic and local. Comparing them to acrobats who "balance performing ethnic particularity and cultural assimilation," Kedhar writes that they "must also walk a tightrope between sameness and difference" (Kedhar 2020, 4). Whether this was analogous to pantomime dancers in antiquity is unclear, given the paucity of the evidence available on these dancers themselves. Nevertheless, this juxtaposition of modern and ancient is, in my view, productive. It raises various questions, such as: to what extent did dancing enable ancient dancers to step out of the performance of their everyday identities? Dance in Greek and Roman antiquity often involved crossing clearly defined cultural and political borders. Such questions encourage us to accentuate both the politics of cross-cultural contact in ancient dance practices and the performance of identity in dancers who were geographically mobile.

* * *

In this overview, I have been concerned with the ways in which dance is able to signal and even rework categories of identity in antiquity. A geographic approach is particularly generative as it encourages us to rethink the category

of place beyond physical boundaries and territories. Places, as Doreen Massey writes, “can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent” (Massey 1991, 28). This wider understanding of place enables us to think more flexibly about dancing bodies as a site of culture and especially the encoding of cultural difference. As my account has emphasized, key differences were frequently mapped onto dancing bodies in antiquity: from foreign dancing bodies in the ancient city that were coded as consumable and/or domesticated to the way in which Roman triumphs choreographed the bodies of victors and subjugated. Ancient dance must be understood in terms of the places in which it unfolded, but those places can in turn only be understood in conjunction with the bodies that occupied them, and the mechanisms by which those bodies and their meanings were constructed.

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Space

Lauren Curtis

During the COVID-19 pandemic, dance venues across the world were shuttered. As dancers struggling to find work experimented with new locations, The Dance Theater of Harlem's "Dancing Through Harlem" became a YouTube sensation. New York City—a deserted subway platform, the Hudson riverbank, and some of Manhattan's most iconic public plazas—formed a stunning venue for new ballet choreography.¹ More than a backdrop, the space itself became a participant in the dance. Sites emptied of human interaction were re-animated by pairs and groups of dancers who, no longer able to touch one other due to social distancing, spread their arms wide as if to embrace the space around and between them as a full partner in the piece. The COVID-19 pandemic forced performers and choreographers working with the most traditional of forms, classical ballet, to rethink fundamental questions about where dance can be made, and how dancers interact *within* space and *with* space itself.

The black-box concert space familiar to a dance-going audience in New York, Paris, or Sydney is, on the one hand, a legacy of the theatrical architectures designed, built, and disseminated by the Greeks and Romans. And yet, as we will see in this chapter, a great deal (perhaps, even, the majority) of dance in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds took place in a setting more similar to "Dancing Through Harlem"—outdoors in city streets, public plazas, and natural settings, using these sites' endlessly varied and multi-use spatialities to build meaning and affect into the event, and accruing new layers of significance to the site as a result. In contemporary dance, "site-specific" choreography emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a (more or less political) "alternative" to "dominant, mainstream modes of dance presentation and production."² In the Greek and Roman worlds (as in many traditional societies) it was, by contrast,

¹ "Dancing Through Harlem," 2021. Created by Company Artists Derek Brockington and Alexandra Hutchison, using choreography from Resident Choreographer Robert Garland's ballet, "New Bach, 3rd Movement."

² Barbour, Hunter, & Kloetzel 2019, 4, characterizing the rise of late twentieth-century site-dance in the United Kingdom in particular. On contemporary site-specific dance, see Kloetzel & Pavlik 2009; Hunter 2015; Barbour, Hunter, & Kloetzel 2019. The quote is from Kloetzel & Pavlik 2009,

the norm. Like Rosa Andújar's chapter "Geography," this chapter is broadly concerned with the intersection of choreography, space, and meaning-making. Grounded in dance's material parameters, it considers how dance-sites were created, delineated, and transformed by performers and audiences in classical antiquity, and how the nature of the space, in turn, affected the dance.

The Greeks' and Romans' development of theater space, and the porousness of its relationship with other dance-sites, will be an ongoing thread of this chapter. I begin by tracing the earliest examples of architectural site design, from Bronze Age dancefloors to permanent theaters, before turning to a sampling of the many locations where social dance occurred beyond such specially-designed venues, including religious dance-routes through built environments, the performance potential of natural landscapes (even those, intriguingly, where no humans were present to dance), and entertainments in domestic interiors. As we will see, dance often connected spaces, bringing them temporarily into new configurations through performance. Time also emerges as a crucial vector in designating performance space in Greek and Roman antiquity, since one of the most important ways that everyday sites became dance venues was according to the seasonal and calendar-based rhythms of ritual life. While it was often clear to a community where and when one could dance, the question of who controlled and regulated performance space was sometimes at issue: episodes such as pantomime riots in the Roman empire caused the state to intervene in draconian ways over how public space was used for dance. Such moments reveal how in antiquity, as today, dance had the potential to shape, disrupt, and transform the spaces where public and private life is conducted.³ The chapter closes with an in-depth reading of a particular performance location, the Roman forum, that will help us see the interconnected dynamics of ancient Greek and Roman site-dance in action.

From "Dancing Place" to Theater

The earliest known reference in Greek literature to a space for dance is in Homer's *Iliad*. When Hephaestus forges a divine shield for the hero Achilles, one of the many designs he hammers on it is a *choros* (dance or dancing place) said to be similar to the famous one made by the craftsman Daedalus for Ariadne on Crete (*Il.* 18.590-605). The creation of the *choros* is described using the tactile language of craftsmanship (*poikille*, "he intricately made"), language

whose subtitle emphasizes site-dance as the "lure of alternative spaces." In their preface, they describe artists who create site-specific dance as "working outside the norm" (xiv).

³ See also "Politics" for the role of dance in shaping the perception of private and public spheres.



Figure 19: Statuette figurines of Minoan circle-dancers, c. 1300 BCE. Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Crete, Greece. © Roberto Moiola / Alamy Stock Photo.

that continues when the dancers' choreography is compared to the spinning of a potter's wheel. The shape recalls figurines of circle-dancers from Bronze Age Crete (e.g. Fig. 19), as well as round, smooth platforms excavated from the Bronze Age palace at Knossos, Crete, which were probably used for group dance (Warren 1984; German 2007). Yet in the Homeric depiction it is mostly the movement and choreography of the dancers' bodies that demarcate the space rather than a description of the physical setting itself: they first move in a ring, creating a circular arrangement, and then transect the space they have created by running towards each other in rows. The audience defines the edge of the dance-space, as they "stand around" and enjoy the performance.⁴ In Greek, the same word, *choros*, can mean "dance" and "dancing place." A reader may find this ambiguous—does Hephaestus forge the dance itself or the place where dance is performed (what today we might call a "stage" or "site")? Yet the fact that the word has both meanings in Greek shows that they are deeply and conceptually related: dance does not need a special space to exist; rather, the bodies and movements of dancers and audience delineate and transform the space they are in.⁵

While dance did not require a formalized, purpose-built setting, in the late sixth/early fifth centuries BCE Greek-speaking city-states (singular *polis*, plural *poleis*) began to develop more permanent and elaborate architectural complexes to accommodate the choral song and dance (*choreia*) that were important aspects of their religious festival calendars. Most of the surviving Greek plays were originally performed at the Theater of Dionysus on the south slope of the Acropolis, where the three major genres performed during the god's festivals (tragedy, comedy, and dithyramb) blended drama with choral song and dance.⁶ Greek theaters were not buildings, but open-air venues that allowed a large audience to witness the same performance *en masse*: around 330 BCE, the Theater of Dionysus was rebuilt in stone, with banks of seating for about 16,000 people rising in a horseshoe shape around a circular stone platform called the *orchēstra* (dancing-place)—a more elaborate version of the dancing platforms of the Aegean Bronze Age. From the fourth century, theaters became larger and grander—part of a "mass-entertainment industry" across the Greek-speaking world from Sicily to the Black Sea (Csapo 2004, 54).⁷

⁴ On the role of the audience on the shield of Achilles, see Kurke 2012, 222.

⁵ *Choros* means "dancing place" also at Hom. *Od.* 8.260 (the dancing places of the Phaeacians) and 12.4 (the "dancing places of dawn"). The meaning is found in much later Greek, too (e.g. Paus. 3.11.9, referring to the Spartan *agora* as a *choros*). On the dancefloor as an object, see "Objects."

⁶ For an overview of Greek theaters and theater production, see Webster 1970, and more recently, e.g., Wiles 1997; Storey & Allan 2005. For discussion of spectatorship, see also "Audience."

⁷ On the changing architectural design of theaters in the fourth century and beyond, see Frederiksen 2000. Scholarly interest in theatrical life outside Athens and beyond the fifth century is thriving—see

Even as Greek theaters became more architecturally elaborate, they never had the trappings of modern concert space. Outdoors, they were usually built into a slope that furnished a natural auditorium and accorded a panoramic view for the audience (the third-century BCE theater at Taormina, Sicily, is an especially impressive example, with views looking out over the sea). The chorus' words—and, presumably choreography—prompted the audience to imagine dance taking place in dramatic locations of varied geography and landscape ranging from the royal Persian court (Aeschylus' *Persians*), the rocky island of Lemnos (Sophocles' *Philoctetes*), the cities of Thebes and Troy (two favorite dramatic locations of Athenian tragedy), and Crimea (Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians*). Within this setting, the chorus' movement into and out of the *orchestra* defined the formal shape of the drama. Their entrance and exit, through passages at either side of the *orchestra* known as *eisodoi* (the same routes used by the audience to access their seating), were key dramatic and choreographic moments in the play. The terms used to describe these songs recall the movement and spatial orientation that characterized them: the chorus' entrance song is called the *parodos* (the journey or movement in); by contrast, the other choral songs were known as *stasima* (songs performed *in situ*).⁸ Plays experimented to great effect with the potential for movement, surprise, and reversal of audience expectations in the *parodos*.⁹ In Aristophanes' fifth-century comedy, *Birds*, for example, the play's twenty four chorus members swooped onstage one by one as singing, dancing birds, while in Aristophanes' *Frogs* it is unclear whether the audience saw the chorus of singing, dancing frogs who performed the *parodos* of that play, or whether they were simply heard as a ghostly presence.¹⁰

Roman imperial expansion brought theatrical space to an even wider public in the Mediterranean and beyond. Rome actively resisted permanent stone theaters at first, until Pompey the Great built the first one outside the city proper, in the Campus Martius, as part of a public building program using the spoils of his

e.g. Gildenhard and Revermann 2010; Bosher 2012; Braund, Hall, & Wyles 2019; Jackson 2020; Csapo & Wilson 2020.

⁸ According to most of the ancient evidence, the chorus' exit song was, in a similar vein, called the *exodos* (journey out). According to Aristotle, however, *exodos* referred to the remaining action onstage at the play's end, after the chorus have performed their final number and left (*Poet.* 1452b). See Taplin 1977, 470-76 on the ancient terms.

⁹ Taplin 2003 (originally published 1978) is a seminal treatment of ancient Greek stagecraft; chapter four is on entrances and exits. Noy 2002 compares the entrances of the Greek theater space to those of Japanese Noh theater, arguing that the Greek theater, as a whole, was a fluid, dynamic "movement space."

¹⁰ For different views, see Allison 1983; Marshall 1996; Willi 2008; Griffith 2013, 67.

military victories in 55 BCE.¹¹ Little survives today, but it was capable of holding up to 20,000 people. Until then, entertainments by actors, mimes, acrobats and dance artists used temporary wooden stages (which could often be large and elaborate), erected in public places and in front of temples. But, based largely on Pompey's initial design, there was soon barely a city in the empire that did not boast a Roman theater building which, along with the forum and the religious architecture of temples, became a key marker of Roman urban space and culture.¹²

Unlike a Greek theater, Roman theaters were not always built into a natural landscape, but could be supported by a freestanding concrete structure and thus were more analogous to a modern building (they were not permanently or sometimes even fully enclosed, however, but could be covered by a large awning to protect against sun and rain). Especially characteristic was a tall, multi-story architectural stage backdrop called the *scaenae frons*, in whose niches were displayed artworks and portraits of the imperial family, ever-present witnesses of the entertainment below. In such spaces, people could enjoy concerts, plays, public orations, and other entertainments, even including animal and gladiator fights—but one of the main attractions would have been pantomime, a spectacular solo dance art that told tragic myths to the accompaniment of an orchestra and singing chorus, and which was beloved in Rome and across the empire.¹³

Seating was highly regulated according to social class, and audience movement was carefully choreographed by specially demarcated entrances and exits, which ensured that classes did not mix and that order was maintained (Wallace-Hadrill 2008, 144-210).

The Roman state had good reason to desire control over the theater audience, since pantomime, in particular, could be a lightning rod for social unrest. When Tiberius succeeded Augustus as emperor, riots erupted when pantomime stars demanded to be paid more; according to Cassius Dio, there were civilian casualties, and soldiers and a centurion were killed (56.47.2). In Roman historians' version of these events, the theater itself became a contested space for these artists' sway among the Roman people, which threatened the state's ability to maintain control.¹⁴ They refused to enter the theater until their

¹¹ An attempt was made to build one earlier, in the 150s BCE, on the Lupercal facing the Palatine. While it was being constructed, the consuls and the senate ordered it to be torn down because, according to Livy's summary of Book 48, it was "useless and had the potential to harm public morals" (*inutile et nociturum publicis moribus*).

¹² Beacham 1991 offers a classic overview of the Roman theater as a performance space. See Goldberg 1998 on the Roman elite's resistance to permanent stone theaters before Pompey. On theater building and design across the Roman empire, see Boatwright 1990; Sear 2006. The Roman architect and engineer Vitruvius (first century BCE) devotes a long section of *On Architecture* to theater design, especially acoustics (5.3-9).

¹³ On pantomime, see the Introduction, as well "Movement" and "Objects."

¹⁴ On the riots, see Slater 1994.

pay was increased (Cass. Dio 56.47.2). Conversely, Tacitus tells us that in an attempt to control the artists' effect on the public, the Senate decreed that their dances "could not be watched anywhere except for in the theater" (*ne alibi quam in theatro spectarentur*, *Ann.* 1.77). According to Tacitus, such attempts to restrict them to the theater were ineffectual, however, and the "depravity" (*immodestia, foeda*) of what went on in private homes eventually led pantomime artists—as well as the ringleaders of their factions among the theatergoing audience—to be expelled from Italy altogether (*Ann.* 4.14).

Dance on the Move

Beyond these specially designed dance venues, dance was omnipresent in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. And it was often on the move. As part of festive processions—such as one might see at the Rio de Janeiro Carnival, or those through Spanish cities during Holy Week—religious dance in motion sanctified both urban and rural space. In processional dance, the dance's spatial form is ever-changing as it moves. Locations can be mapped and read in new ways by the dance that connects them. Since such dances were often keyed to a community's religious calendar, time was just as important as the physical setting itself, as well as the performers' bodies, for creating the conditions for performance and celebration.

The importance of processional movement can be seen even in relation to permanent performance structures. Even when theaters had been established as venues for mass spectatorship, in Athens the movement to and from the theater was choreographed in a procession (*pompē*). Religious paraphernalia was essential—a young Athenian girl led the procession carrying a sacred basket of offerings, the god's statue was carried aloft, and the sponsors of the choruses (*chorēgoi*) followed in rich ceremonial robes. Along the way, choruses danced at various altars, including in the *agora*.¹⁵ And, long after the performance of a chorus was over, its success would be recalled during future processions to the theater: victory monuments to the choral competition winners were located along the Street of the Tripods, so called (according to Pausanias) because of the monuments along its route that led to the theater entrance (1.20.1). In this context, as in many others, the repetition of processional dance through these particular spaces was an important act of remembering past occasions, creating a link between the present performance, the rest of the festival, and the city's earlier dance history.

Beyond Athens, Pindar's lyric songs provide rich evidence for the situatedness of choreographic practice in the first half of the fifth century BCE, since his poetry was commissioned by aristocratic families across the Greek-

¹⁵ For evidence of the *pompē* (as well as the many other components of the Athenian dramatic festivals), see Pickard-Cambridge 1973, 62-63. On the route, see "Audience" (with references).

speaking world to celebrate athletic victories and religious festivals, and was performed in choruses by members of their community in specific settings. His lyric poetry—which, as with the scripts of Athenian tragedy and comedy, allows us to read the libretto of what was originally a multi-sensory musical and kinetic performance—sheds light on how processional dance events interacted with the built environment to create a dynamic religious and political experience. Leslie Kurke and Richard Neer have developed a methodology of “lyric archaeology” to understand how Pindar’s performed poetry and its material environments worked together to construct spatial reality. Choral song and dance, they argue, was, like architecture, an ancient technology that “established discursive connectivity between entities to constitute spaces.”¹⁶

Kurke and Neer’s wide-ranging study encompasses sites from Athens and Cyrene to Olympia and Syracuse. We might consider, as well, Pindar’s hometown of Thebes, where young girls performed a hymn to Apollo (Pindar fr. 94b), that was commissioned by the Theban royal family for the *daphnēphoria* (laurel-carrying) festival, a procession towards the temple of Ismenian Apollo led by a noble boy specially chosen to be the *daphnēphoros* (laurel-carrier)—in this case, the ruler Aeoladas’ grandson Agasicles.¹⁷ The girls who, dancing, follow the *daphnēphoros*, draw attention to how they honor the god with their bodies and actions: they vividly describe tying up their robe as they step out, and carrying Apollo’s sacred laurel branches with “soft hands,” their heads “blooming with garlands” (6-12). But even while they emphasize the unfolding performance event, the hymn gestures out beyond its local setting. The girls connect their site-specific procession to the wider networks of the Greek world, as they sing about the “glorious temple of Itonia” (47) where the pan-Boeotian games were held, and the site of the Olympic Games (49). Honoring the Theban royal family who brought glory to their community through their victories at these other festivals, the girls imaginatively integrate performance spaces across Greece into their locally-performed song (the fact that Pindar’s hymn was written down and circulated far beyond the boundaries of Thebes also suggests a wider audience for local hymns like this).¹⁸ Moreover, later sources tell us that in the procession, the *daphnēphoros* carried an olive wood staff with a bronze globe fixed on top representing the sun—Apollo’s realm—

¹⁶ Kurke & Neer 2019, with a precis of their framework at 277-79 (from which these quotes are taken). On Pindar and site-specific performance, see also Eckerman 2014; Weiss 2016.

¹⁷ On Pindar fr. 94b (also known as his “second partheneion”), see Stehle 1997, 93-100 and Kurke 2007, who “[reinserts] Pindar’s fragmentary poem... in its historical and ritual contexts” (67).

¹⁸ On the circulation of Pindar’s poetry as text, and how this intersects with performance, see Phillips 2016. On the poem’s relevance to Theban elites’ establishment of leadership in Boeotia, see Kurke 2012, 68-71.

and smaller spheres suspended from it that represented the moon and stars (so says the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus, as reported at Phot. *Bibl.* 239). The imaginative space of this Theban dance, then, did not encompass only the human world but (on Proclus' reading, at least) extended to the cosmic realm, connecting Apollo's local celebration to his wider orbit.

We can gain a more fine-grained understanding of poetry and choreography's creation of space in some later Greek hymns for which, extraordinarily, we have a contemporary inscribed record *in situ*. For instance, at Apollo's sacred site of Delphi have been discovered the inscribed texts of several processional hymns, some with musical annotation.¹⁹ One, a hymn to the goddess Hestia, inscribed on a marble slab discovered in the Delphic sanctuary, names its composer as Aristonoos and dates itself to 334/333 BCE. The short hymn reads as follows (trans. LeVen 2014, 297):

ἱερὰν ἱερῶν ἄνασσαν
 Ἑστίαν ὑμνήσομεν, ἃ καὶ Ὀλυμπον
 καὶ μυχὸν γαίης μεσόμφαλον αἰεὶ
 Πυθίαν τε δάφναν κατέχουσα
 ναὸν ἂν' ὑψίπυλον Φοῖβου χορεύεις 5
 τερπομένα τριπόδων θεσπίσμασι,
 καὶ χρυσέαν φόρμιγγ' Ἀπόλλων
 ὀπηνίκ' ἂν ἐπτάτονον
 κρέκων μετὰ σοῦ θαλιάζον-
 τας θεοὺς ὕμνοισιν αὔξη. 10
 χαῖρε Κρόνου θύγατερ
 καὶ Ῥέας, μούνα πυρὸς ἀμφιέπουσα
 βωμοὺς ἀθανάτων ἐριτίμους,
 Ἑστία, δίδου δ' ἀμοιβὰς
 ἐξ ὁσίων πολὺν ἡμᾶς 15
 ὄλβον ἔχοντας αἰεὶ λιπαρόθρονον
 ἀμφὶ σὴν θυμέλαν χορεύειν.

Let us sing holy Hestia, queen of the holy ones, who holds forever sway over Olympus and the *omphalos* [navel] in the recesses of the earth, and the Pythian laurel, you who dance in the lofty temple of Phoebus, enjoying the oracular voices of tripods, and Apollo's seven-string *phorminx*, whenever he plays it to exalt, with you, the feasting gods in his hymns. Hail, daughter of Cronos and Rhea, who alone brings fire to the honored altars of the immortals; Hestia, give us, in exchange for our prayers, prosperity without impiety and to sing and dance around your bright-throned altar forever.

¹⁹ The hymns, along with other inscribed hymns from e.g. Epidauros and Erythrae, are collected in Furley and Bremer 2001. LeVen (2014, 283-329) offers the first serious discussion of these hymns in their material contexts.

Hestia, keeper of the sacred hearth, was worshipped together with Apollo at Delphi. The celebrants' hymn creates a multi-sensory environment comprising movement (dance), sound (voices, the music of the *phorminx*), and sight ("bright-throned altars"). This environment is focused exclusively on the sacred architecture and landscape of Delphi, as defined by its major landmarks (the *omphalos*, the oracle, the temple of Apollo). The space encompasses several layers of time and existence: the goddess' eternal dance ("you who dance [*choreueis*]...", "who holds forever sway") is described in counterpoint to the worshippers' dance around her altar, whose actions echo her own and take place in the same location. The worshippers' dance is in the here-and-now, but the goddess' blessing is asked to make their dance similarly long-lasting ("give us... to dance [*choreuein*] forever"). Within Delphi's sacred landscape, dance is a way of mediating between these realms.²⁰ So, too, is the inscription. Its writing, carved in stone, preserves a record of the dance into the future, inscribing the event into the physical environment of the site itself, where the dance it records will be re-activated by future generations and hence—as the worshippers requested—made immortal.²¹ Such hymns are the ultimate in site-specific dance that seeks to transcend a local setting.

While readers of Greek lyric poetry have re-evaluated its spatial and material dimensions, scholars of Roman religion have recently brought new attention to the intersection of embodiment and topography in Roman cult practices. At Rome, processions (*pompa*, analogous to Greek *pompē*) were equally important, although differently coded within Rome's dense urban space.²² Not all involved dance *per se*, but the broader issues they raise about the choreography of bodies in space are deeply relevant.²³ Roman intellectuals liked to lambast dance as a foreign practice antithetical to traditional Roman values and sensibilities. Yet dance was deeply woven into the spatial fabric of Rome, from the informal dances that accompanied a victorious general's triumphal procession into the city to king Numa's founding of the Salii—one of Rome's oldest priesthoods

²⁰ On dance as a site of divine/human interaction, see also "Gods."

²¹ On reading inscriptions as a mode of reperformance, see Day 2010; Estrin 2019.

²² Much of this scholarship has focused on Roman funeral processions (Flaig 1995; Flower 1996, 91-112; Bodel 1999; Favro & Johanson 2010). See also Latham 2016 on the *pompa circensis* (the procession that began games at the Circus Maximus), and Brilliant 1999 and Östenberg 2009 on the Roman triumph. Fless & Moede 2011 stress, more generally, the importance of processional music in Roman ritual practice. On Rome more generally as a moving city, see Östenberg, Malmberg, & Børnebye 2015, and on how ritualized movement transformed unmarked space into religious space, see Ferri 2021.

²³ Alonso Fernández 2016, on the Roman festival of the *Lupercalia*, discusses the highly choreographed nature of festivals that are not always categorized under the rubric of "dance" by modern scholars.

who sanctified the boundaries of the city each year during the festival of Mars (their name comes from Latin *salio*, meaning “to leap”).²⁴ On a different spatial axis, the Arval Brothers, another Roman priestly group who danced, led a procession from Rome to their sacred grove outside the city, where their rites took place in private (Alonso Fernández 2021). As in the Greek world, Roman processional dances were fixed by the festival calendar, which made legible to the entire city the schedule on which the city’s urban thoroughfares would be transformed into sites for festivity (*ludi*), including dance.

Even theatrical entertainment was considered to have started in the streets: the Roman historian Livy tells us that theater came to Rome by way of kinetic revelry—according to his account (7.2.3-13), Rome’s mania for theater began when Etruscan dancers (*ludiones*) arrived in the city in the year 365 BCE, “dancing in time to the rhythms of a *tibia* [reed pipe] player” (*ad tibicinis modos saltantes*), and began to be imitated by young men in voice and gesture. Livy’s account is misleadingly teleological, positing a development from informal street dancing to formalized theater. In reality, different forms always co-existed. Indeed, alongside the development of monumental architecture for performance spectacles, Roman leaders also encouraged and revitalized certain kinds of processional choreographic practices when it suited them: for instance, Rome’s first emperor Augustus had his name inserted into the Salii’s ancient hymn to Mars (*Res Gestae* 10), imbuing the ritual with new meaning and making his name part of the priests’ sanctification of Rome’s urban space.²⁵

Dance, Nature, and the Pre-Human World

The site-based aspects of Greek and Roman dance we have considered so far have mostly been in the built environment—temple complexes at sites such as Delphi, and dance that wound its way through cosmopolitan centers like Rome. But we have also caught glimpses of the profound importance of the natural world in ancient Greek and Roman dance, for example in Pindar’s *daphnēphorikon*, where the foliage of Apollo’s tree, the laurel, was brought into the city streets, and where the laurel-carrier also bore aloft a representation of the wider cosmos.

²⁴ On the Salii, see the Introduction and “Objects.” On triumphal processions, see also “Geography.”

²⁵ The work of dance scholar SanSan Kwan is resonant in relation to Roman urban choreographies and their embodiment of “Romanness:” her concept of the “kinesthetic city,” used of five modern Chinese cities (Shanghai, Taipei, Hong Kong, New York’s Chinatown, and the San Gabriel Valley in Los Angeles), combines analysis of urban movement, dance, and social history to understand how a highly mobile idea of Chineseness is both contested and sustained in a postcolonial, global context.

Dance, especially as part of ancient religious experience, was often a powerful point of departure for connecting humans to other forces of the animated universe, from the magical shields of the Sali, which in legend rained down from the sky (see “Objects”) to ritual objects that depicted gods playing music and dancing (see “Gods”). Modern dancers have found inspiration in this: in the early twentieth century, classically-inspired modernists, led by Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham, looked to a vision of ancient Greece that might help a dancer “disarm the power of civilization to dominate and control the body.”²⁶ Especially potent in this legacy were the ecstatic dances associated with Dionysus and performed by maenads (or their Roman equivalent, bacchantes)—usually imagined, in Greek and Roman myth, taking place in wild spaces beyond the city, usually in the mountains.

Such sites are vividly imagined before the audience’s eyes by the chorus of tragedies involving maenadic dance. In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, for example, the chorus of female followers of Dionysus cry “to the mountains, to the mountains!” (εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, 116, 166) and the protagonist, Pentheus, is ripped limb from limb when he dares to travel there to witness their worship. The extent to which such scenes accorded with actual ritual practice is unclear.²⁷ When the Roman senate forced regulations upon the cult of Dionysus (Bacchanalia) in 186 BCE, the nocturnal aspect of the rites was deemed highly suspect, but its gatherings took place in the city, not in the mountains (Livy 39.15, “their crashing and wailing at night, which resound throughout the City,” *crepitibus etiam ululatusque nocturnis, qui personant tota urbe*).

In ancient visual depictions of Bacchic dance, the viewer is invited to imagine it in markedly non-human spaces. On a sarcophagus from the Roman imperial period (c. 190 CE), for instance, the two main registers use space differently (Fig. 20).²⁸ The upper register, showing the birth of Dionysus on the lid, uses architectural elements such as columns to space out the action. But the main register, showing Dionysus’ triumphal procession accompanied by satyrs and maenads dancing and playing the hand-drum (*tympanon*), stands in stark contrast, with natural elements, including animals and widely spreading trees, populating the space and providing a more organic and, at times, barely existent border as the figures, sculpted in deep relief, burst out of the frame.

²⁶ Francis 1994, 28. On these dancers’ relationship with classical antiquity, see Lamothe 2006; Carter & Fensham 2011, especially the essay by Fiona Macintosh that contextualizes this movement in light of contemporary philosophical debates about “nature” and “culture” in ancient Greece.

²⁷ On the relationship between mythical and historical maenads, the classic treatment is Henrichs 1978.

²⁸ See Platt 2017 for a wide-ranging discussion of how Roman sarcophagoi use visual and three-dimensional space, especially the sarcophagus’ status as a “practical and metaphorical frame” and its complex use of framing devices (354).



Figure 20: Roman sarcophagus depicting the triumph of Dionysus, c. 190 CE. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland 23.31, acquired by Henry Walters with the Massarenti Collection, 1902. Photograph © The Walters Art Museum.

The combination of these different spatial realms, in harmonious tension with each other, creates a dynamic three-dimensional environment, full of moving bodies, that houses the eternally resting body of the deceased.

Some ancient thinkers viewed dance as a deeply and distinctively human activity—a set of ritualized movement practices ascribed meaning by the humans who performed and witnessed it. In his *Laws*, for instance, Plato characterizes humans as creatures who, alone of all animals, make song and dance rather than simply noise and movement (664e-65a).²⁹ Yet many ancient sources ascribe the origins of dance to cosmic activity before and beyond human experience.

For instance, Lucian's *On Dance* describes the origins of dance as follows (*Salt.* 7, trans. Harmon):

οἱ γε τάλιθέστατα ὀρχήσεως πέρι γενεαλογοῦντες ἅμα τῇ πρώτῃ γενέσει τῶν ὅλων φαῖεν ἂν σοι καὶ ὀρχησιν ἀναφῶναι, τῷ ἀρχαίῳ ἐκείνῳ Ἑρωτι συναναφανείσαν. ἡ γοῦν χορεία τῶν ἀστέρων καὶ ἡ πρὸς τοὺς ἀπλανεῖς τῶν πλανήτων συμπλοκὴ καὶ εὐρυθμὸς αὐτῶν κοινωνία καὶ εὐτακτὸς ἀρμονία τῆς πρωτογόνου ὀρχήσεως δείγματα ἐστίν.

Those historians of dancing who are the most veracious can tell you that Dance came into being contemporaneously with the primal origin of the universe, making her appearance together with Love—the love that is age-old. In fact, the concord of the heavenly spheres, the interlacing of the errant planets with the fixed stars, their rhythmic agreement and timed harmony, are proofs that Dance was primordial.

Seen in this light, the relationship of dance with “space” in the ancient world goes beyond sites for performance—real or imagined. As Lucian's language of “interlacing” and “harmony” makes clear, dance can also be understood more fundamentally as the perfectly balanced relationship *between* different elements of space.

Such a conception makes sense of the many Greek and Roman myths that involve places themselves dancing, even before mortals inhabited the earth. Some are about the origins of urban topographies that would, eventually, be inhabited by humans—for example, the walls of Thebes were said to have sprung up when the hero Amphion played his lyre, and the stones danced into place.³⁰ Other musical and dance myths explain different kinds of landscapes—in Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos*, the geological formation of the Cycladic islands is understood as a kind of choreography. The islands are arranged in

²⁹ See Naas 2019 for a recent discussion of this “radical claim” in the context of humanism and posthumanism.

³⁰ Eur. *Antiope* fr. 223.119-24 (Kannicht); Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.740-41.

a choral ring-dance (*choros*, 300-301) with Delos in the center as their leader (*exarchos*, 18) because it is the favorite island of Apollo, god of music and dance. In Callimachus' hymn, the natural world comes alive with circling, whirling dance—most prominently the islands themselves, but also rivers (the Inopus, 263), lakes (261), and even entire regions of Greece (Thessaly, 139-40). Humans certainly have a presence, not least because the dancing landscape has an important affinity with Apollo's long-standing choral worship on Delos. But Callimachus also gives the impression that the landscape's dance is older than humans, and will outlast them in a more eternal harmony.

The Comfort of One's Own Home

The Roman senate's panic over the growth of Bacchic religion forced it out into the public: they “dragged these affairs from the shadows into the light” (*ex occultis ea tenebris in lucem extraxerunt*, Livy 39.16). So, too, all the spaces for dance that we have examined so far—both actual and mythical—have been, more or less, in the public realm. Was there any room for dance in domestic life? Did people dance indoors—for instance, in private houses—and how did the different nature of the space and the relationship with the audience change how dance was performed and consumed?

First, it is important to note that a modern (western) distinction between public and private does not map onto the spaces of ancient Greece and Rome. One's house was not a fully private space, whether one was a poor tenant sharing cooking and bathroom facilities with many other families, or a Roman aristocrat whose home was the site of business deals, networking, and patronage. One has only to think of how the private hire of dancers took place, to see the distinction between public and private become complicated. Contracts that survive on papyri (ancient paper) from Roman Egypt attest that even in small villages outside of major urban centers, households hired dancers and musicians to perform at multi-festivals.³¹ In such cases, the household functioned as a semi-public space, with one resident contracting a troupe on behalf of a group of residents, and the performance enjoyed by the neighborhood in streets and courtyards.

³¹ See, for example, the contract between a woman called Artemisia and a castanet dancer called Isidora (P. Cornell II.26) in 206 CE. Isidora was hired from a major metropolitan area, probably Arsinoe, and brought to the outlying village of Theadelphia. The women entered into the contract as private individuals, but it is clear that they were connected to wider networks. Isidora was asked to subcontract with two additional dancers. As for Artemisia, the six-day festival would have been intended for a much larger audience of family, friends, and neighbors, and was probably semi-public in nature (Westermann 1924, 137). See Vesterinen 2007; Perrot 2022.

Yet the smaller, usually more intimate spaces of domestic life created a different kind of environment. Dance in the home, especially for wealthy individuals, was a marker of luxury and taste: Romans enjoyed the *convivium* (dinner party); in Greece the social focus for men was the drinking party (symposium), for which female dancers were hired (*orchēstrides*), whose work often blurred with sex work (Olsen 2017). Fig. 21 is a red-figure phiale (libation bowl) made in Attica around 430 BCE.³² Its main register shows a series of women, including two who seem to be professional entertainers, interacting with three male figures: one woman plays the *aulos* while another plays the *krotala* (clappers) and dances, her short garment swinging to the side as she twists her body. Notable, for our purposes, are the many markers of indoor space that surround and are even involved in the interactions—upholstered chairs and stools are draped with discarded clothing, a set of *krotala* hangs on a peg, and boxes lie open near the figures' feet. But what kind of space? Are these encounters staged in women's domestic quarters, with the *orchēstris* practicing in front of a teacher?³³ Or do the musician and dancer perform in front of male clients, in an indoor setting more closely resembling the symposium? (Bundrick 2005, 90). In each case, the intimacy of the space would be interpreted differently: if the dancer is training, the discarded clothes on the chair may signify her focus on perfecting her bodily practice; if she performs, they highlight how her partially nude body attracts the audience's erotic gaze.³⁴ The phiale invites the viewer—who, in ancient Athens, may also have been the object's user, since libation bowls were for making offerings—to create their own visual and tactile relationship with the object and its horizons of spatial reference.

Private social spaces could also furnish opportunities to impress one's guests with the entertainment. In Petronius' novel, the *Satyricon*, a satire of social-climbing in first-century CE Rome whose centerpiece is a dinner party hosted by the wealthy ex-slave Trimalchio, the arrival of the main course is signaled by a crash from the orchestra and a chorus of singing waiters; four dancers leap out to reveal the revoltingly opulent fare to the guests (*Sat.* 34).³⁵ Moreover, the decorative program of especially wealthy Roman homes could offer a rich visual environment to show off one's aesthetic tastes. For instance, the Roman villa at Noheda, Spain—only just opened to the public in 2019—contains the largest mosaic yet excavated from the Roman world (Fig. 22).

³² This object is also discussed in the Introduction.

³³ Neils 2007, 71-72. Athenian homes—or at least those large enough to have separate living quarters—contained men's quarters and women's quarters.

³⁴ Neils (2007, 70-73) further argues that these encounters could be read as a narrative of the lifecycle of a professional female entertainer, on which reading we might see the female figure moving through a range of different spaces.

³⁵ On this episode, see also "Objects."



Figure 21: Red-figure phiale by the Phiale Painter, depicting female entertainers and male spectators, c. 430 BCE. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 97.371. (Same as Fig. 11)

Dated to the fourth century CE, the marble mosaic covers 290 square meters and decorates the villa's dining area. Mythological panels are interspersed with scenes of theatrical performance, including a panel depicting a performance of pantomime: musicians flank the scene, including a lyre and an organ so large it is operated by three individuals, and a masked dancer, in full costume, performs in the middle. Surely much of the mosaic's purpose was to impress visitors and diners with the owner's wealth and taste. These panels' focus on theatricality might even lead diners to view the mythological scenes *as* pantomime, drawing on their own memories and experiences of the theater, or prompting table conversation and choreographed exchanges among the group.³⁶ Enslaved servers and other staff would have had their own personal encounters with the house's visual program as the space of their labor, although those are now lost to us (Joshel 2014, 24-86). And, given the evidence for musical and dance entertainment at dinner parties, perhaps professional performers made

³⁶ On Roman dining as theater, see Kondoleon 1999.



Figure 22: Mosaic from a Roman Villa at Noheda, near Cuenca, Spain, depicting scenes from pantomime, 4th cent. CE. © Viceconsejería de Cultura y Deportes – JCCM, www.cultura.castillalamancha.es. (Same as Fig. 10)

use of these spaces, too, incorporating them into an embodied, multi-sensory experience of Roman luxury.

Dance and the Body Politic: The Roman Forum

Let us turn, in closing, to a single site, where we can examine *in situ* how some of these dynamics of ancient dance—processional movement, religious timekeeping, the reuse and transformation of urban topography, and state-organized space and its disruption—work together. The Roman Forum, nestled in the valley between the Capitoline and Palatine hills, was Rome’s civic, commercial, and religious center, which also became the heart of interconnected movements and choreographies when it regularly became a space for dancing. The forum’s vast set of symbolic associations and embodied practices, and the dances that were part of them, were mutually constitutive of meaning for performers and audiences alike.

During the Roman Republic, the Roman Forum (Fig. 23) was where the city’s governing bodies met (the *curia*, or senate-house, was situated on the western side, and the *comitia*, popular assembly, met right in front of it). Business of all sorts was transacted in shops and under porticos, law-courts met in open-air sessions, and some of Rome’s oldest and most important religious traditions

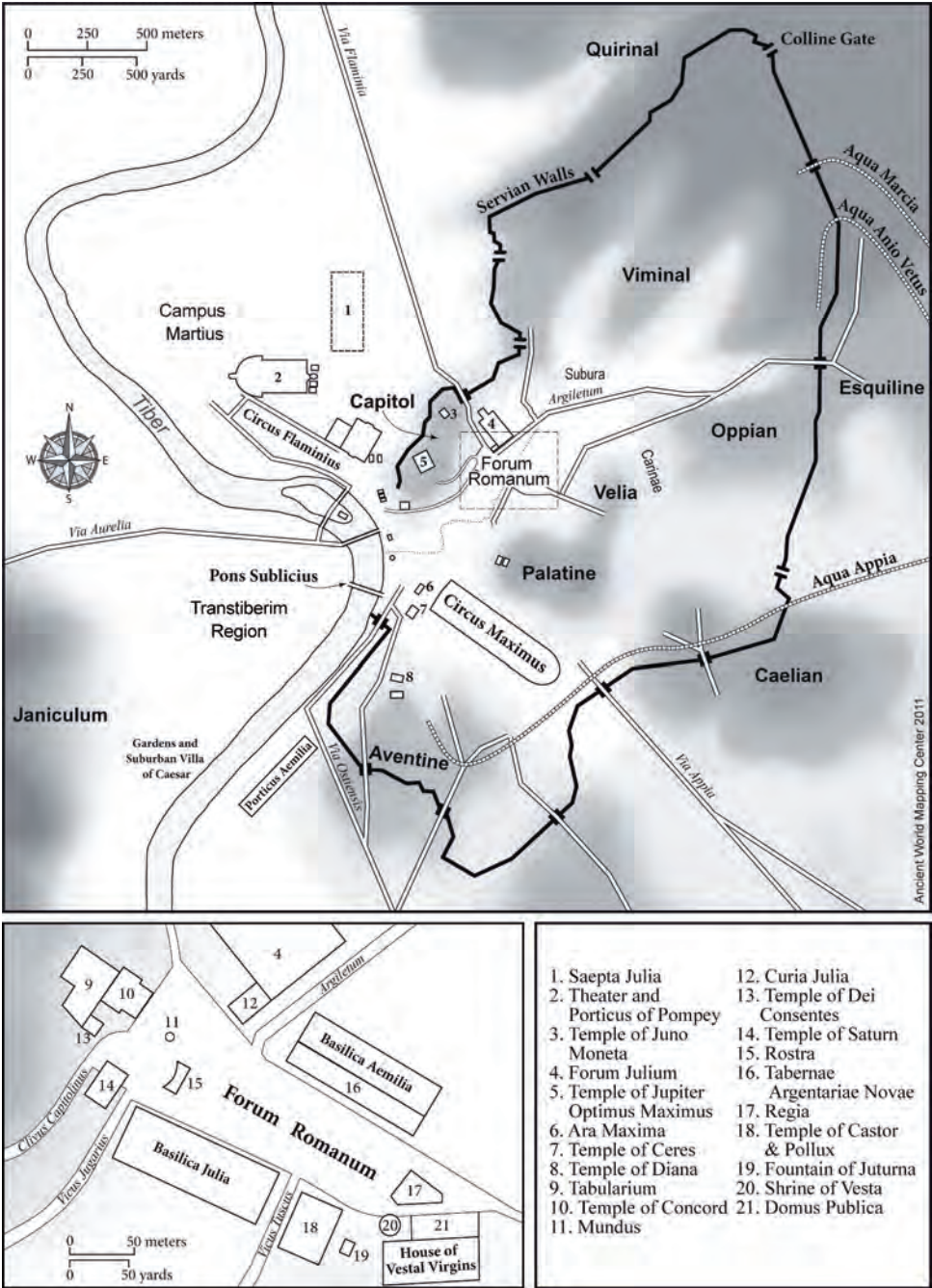


Figure 23: Map of Rome, showing the location of the Roman Forum. Ancient World Mapping Center © 2023 (awmc.unc.edu). Used by permission.

were maintained, such as the ever-burning hearth that the Vestal Virgins tended in the shrine of Vesta on the Forum's eastern side, next to a building known as the *regia*, the legendary palace of Rome's second king, Numa. Cicero would have us believe that dancing in the forum was the most preposterous thing a Roman man could do. In *De Officiis*, he uses "dancing publicly in broad daylight in the forum" (*ut... luce palam in foro saltet*) as an example of something that would put a Roman citizen's dignity at great risk (3.93). Yet on religious holidays the Roman Forum was filled with dance, and it was even performed by those who considered themselves as possessing a great deal of dignity. The Salii, Rome's "leaping priests," sanctified Rome's boundaries during Mars' festival each year, singing and dancing their three-step dance (called the *tripidium*) while clashing their sacred shields. This war-dance was considered one of Rome's oldest rituals (as mentioned earlier, it was said to have been founded by king Numa himself) and the dancing priests (all men) were drawn from Rome's most aristocratic patrician families. It must have been a loud, thrilling, and even intimidating spectacle: Dionysius of Halicarnassus, a Greek writer from the first century BCE, calls attention to the priests' splendid, brightly colored costumes, the loud noise of metal striking metal, and the interplay between solo and group movement as the priests performed their vigorously leaping dance (2.70-71). Given their role as preservers of military, civic, and political order, it is no wonder that the Salii danced in the forum: their sacred shields were kept in Numa's palace, the *regia*, and their performance must have involved some ceremony around this site.³⁷ As Dionysius of Halicarnassus tells us, "they proceed through the city with their dances to the forum and to the Capitol and many other places both public and private" (διὰ τῆς πόλεως ἄγουσι τοὺς χοροὺς εἰς τε τὴν ἀγορὰν καὶ τὸ Καπιτώλιον καὶ πολλοὺς ἄλλους ἰδίους τε καὶ δημοσίους τόπους, 2.70). His mention of "public" and "private" in the same breath suggests how this state-sanctioned religious association (*collegium*) created, through their movement, a particular version of "Romanness" that permeated and connected different kinds of space.³⁸

So potent was religious, processional dance as an embodied means of safeguarding Rome's urban space that, when Rome was faced with military and political emergencies, dance in the civic center was one of the solutions that could be officially mandated by the senate. In 207 BCE, when Rome was under serious threat of invasion by the Carthaginian general Hasdrubal and his forces amassed beyond the Alps, the senate decreed a range of religious solutions to appease the gods, including a ritual performed by a constituency rarely given a

³⁷ On how these shields could be reactivated as sacred objects over time, see "Objects."

³⁸ On constituting "Romanness" through the Salian choreography, see Alonso Fernández 2016b. See also 2016a on a different priesthood, the *Luperci*.

role in Roman public life: a chorus of twenty-seven unmarried Roman girls.³⁹ The Roman historian Livy describes their route in detail. Singing a specially-commissioned hymn to Juno and dancing together, they skirted the base of the Capitoline hill, then entered the forum from the western end: “The procession stopped in the forum and, passing a rope through their hands, the girls moved forward, accompanying the sound of their voices with the beating of their feet” (*in foro pompa constitit et per manus recte data virgines sonum vocis pulsu pedum modulantes incesserunt*, 27.37.14). In the Forum’s public, civic setting, the young girls’ status representing the desired futurity of the Roman state is made clear. Their rope-dance, a choreography otherwise little known at Rome, may be intended to enact the indissoluble bond between the performers and, by extension, with the wider community. Such religious and choreographic innovation was apparently effective: later that year, the Romans defeated the Carthaginians in the Battle of the Metaurus, and turned the tide of the Punic Wars.

Not all dance in the Roman Forum was so weighty and high-minded. Since, as we saw above, the first permanent stone theater was not built in Rome until 55 BCE, the forum also regularly served as the venue for dramas staged as part of Roman festivals (*ludi*), which included dance. Plautus’ comedies, for instance, first composed around the time of the maidens’ dance described by Livy, were musical comedies involving dance of different kinds, from gestural dance performed by the actors in certain type-scenes—such as the entrance of an enslaved character running onstage—to full-blown dance-numbers involving specialist dance artists (Moore 2012, 105-34). They were acted on temporary wooden stages in the forum area or on the forecourt of the temple whose god was being honored that day (Goldberg 1998). The boundary between performance space and non-performance space was permeable and, at times, chaotically indeterminate. Unlike the Theater of Dionysus at Athens, which served (to some extent) as a communal experience, Roman Republican drama brought to a corner of Rome’s city center a bawdy entertainment that often had to compete with what else was going on that day.⁴⁰

Halfway through Plautus’ *Curculio* (“The Weevil”), a character appears and gives the audience a tour of the Roman Forum, where they are sitting (466-82). He points out where in the Forum one can go to in order to encounter different types of people—the *comitium* for a perjurer, a certain brothel for adulterers, and so on. The metatheatrical gag, presumably accompanied by much pointing and gesturing, does not simply make fun of a broad swath of

³⁹ On this event, including the topographic dynamics of the girls’ dance, see Curtis 2021.

⁴⁰ In Terence’s comedy, *The Mother-in-Law*, the speaker of the prologue complains that previous attempts to stage the play ended in disaster because of the competing noise and disturbance of gladiatorial games, boxers, and tightrope-walkers (33-41).

Roman society. The speaker also draws attention to how the play's performance has transformed the daily business of the forum—law courts, shops, popular assemblies—into the carnivalesque alternate reality of the *ludi*, where business is put on hold and entertainment reigns. The city's space is recognizable yet transformed. A further layer of transformation is added when we remember that the play itself is set in Epidaurus, Greece, and so the deictic display of the forum surrounding the audience draws abrupt and metatheatrical attention to the dramatic processes by which, in the *rest* of the play, audience and actors work together to imaginatively transform the urban surroundings into the representation of somewhere else. It seems hardly a coincidence that the character who speaks these lines about the forum is a *choragus*, or costume manager—a figure responsible for creating dramatic illusion within the world of a drama.

Within Plautus' plays, dance helps create some of the drama's most pronounced moments of inverted Saturnalian reality (Moore 2012, 105-34). For example, three plays (*Stichus*, *Pseudolus*, and *The Persian*) end with scenes of highly sexualized dance. At the end of *The Persian*, the slaves Toxilus, Sagaristio, and Paegnium make fun of the pimp Dordalus, whom they have tricked into buying at huge expense a girl who is not a slave. As they drink, and mock him, they dance around him (824-27):

Sag.
*nequeo, leno, quin tibi saltem staticulum olim quem Hegea
 faciebat. vide vero, si tibi satis placet.*

Tox.
*me quoque volo
 reddere Diodorus quem olim faciebat in Ionia.*

Dor.
malum ego vobis dabo, ni[si] abitis.

Sagaristio
 Pimp, I can't keep myself from dancing the dance that Hegea used to do—look, see whether it's your thing.

Toxilus
 I also want to stage the one Diodorus used to do once in Ionia.

Dordalus
 I'll beat you up if you don't go away.

Although stage directions from Roman comedy do not survive, it is clear that the pair perform the dances they describe, presumably with lewd gestures. Sagaristio and Toxilus's dance moves then turn into physical violence against Dordalus, as they hit and smack him, reveling in the financial ruin they have caused him. The play's dramatic setting, like that of *Curculio*, is Greece—a setting emphasized by the “Ionian” dances that Toxilus and his friend perform. But the transgressive fun at the play's end was, in many ways, a dramatized version of the Roman *ludi* of which they were part, where life was turned upside down for the day. It is striking to recall that this play, too, was probably funded and organized under the auspices of the Roman state, and took place, broadly speaking, in the same setting as the dances of the Salii and the maidens who danced for Juno. This, too, was part of the transformation of Rome's civic, social, and religious heart through the calendar year into a versatile site for dance.

* * *

This book is about the “imprints” of ancient Greek and Roman dance—an appropriately tactile concept for the traces of a three-dimensional artform whose physical spaces we moderns now experience in a radically different way. Ancient performance spaces still give life to new art. The (sometimes restored) remains of Greek and Roman theaters across the Mediterranean world from Mérida and Cartagena in Spain to the Odeon of Herodes Atticus in Athens now host performing arts festivals, concerts, operas, and plays. Other sites leave less of a physical imprint—the temple of Cybele on Rome's Palatine hill, for example, where some of Plautus' plays were performed and where the Anatolian mother-goddess was celebrated by *tympanon*-playing castrated priests, was destroyed in 394 CE by order of Emperor Theodosius I during the persecution of the pagans.⁴¹ Yet the interdisciplinary coalition of theater, dance, and performance studies, archaeology, art history and visual culture, and philology, continues to offer new insights into the sites where dance in Greek and Roman antiquity took place, and the ways in which performance spaces created aesthetic and social meaning together with the bodies that moved through them.⁴²

⁴¹ On cults of Cybele in Rome, see also “Geography.”

⁴² My heartfelt thanks to the editors; to my fellow contributors; and especially to Zoa Alonso Fernández for her leadership of the BBVA grant and the opportunity to participate in this project.

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Body

Sarah Olsen

Dance, Ann Cooper Albright contends, “can help us trace the complex negotiations between somatic experience and cultural representation—between the body and identity” (1997, xiv). Albright’s *Choreographing Difference*, from which this quote is drawn, explores the interplay between body and identity in contemporary (meaning late twentieth-century) dance, arguing that “physical bodies are both shaped by and resistant to cultural representations of identity” (1997, xiv). The questions that Albright examines remain central to Dance Studies today, yet the work that she analyzes is now, more than twenty-five years later, only relatively “contemporary.” Her book, therefore, has both retained its theoretical import and also become a valuable historical account of North American and European dance in the nineteen-eighties and nineties. In its repeated invocation of the “contemporary,” it further exemplifies a tendency, within Dance Studies, to focus on a “present” that is always, inevitably, receding into “the past.”¹

The ephemerality of performance and the impermanence of the human body are central methodological issues for Dance Studies, but they become especially complicated when examining the dance cultures of the distant past.² What does it mean to study the movements of bodies that are not even preserved in films or photographs? Where can we find imprints of embodiment in ancient Greek and Roman sources, and what might they tell us? I have divided this chapter into two interconnected parts, which will in turn take up the two

¹ “It is one of dance studies’ major premises to define dance as that which continuously plunges into pastness—even as dance presents itself to visibility” (Lepecki 2004b, 4). See further Franko & Richards 2000. “Contemporary” has a generic force for Albright as well (cf. 1997, 50), referring to dance that draws upon multiple traditions (ballet, modern, jazz), but I am focusing here on its temporal valence (implied by Albright’s own attention to her historical moment, cf. 1997, xxiii). On similar issues of preservation, ephemerality, recollection, and experience in relation to Greek and Roman music, see Curtis & Weiss 2021, 6-11.

² On the particular challenges of studying early or ancient dance, see further Naerebout 1997; Schlappbach 2018, 1-5; Olsen 2021, 1-22. See also the chapter on “Movement” for further discussion of choreography, gesture, and bodily action.

dimensions of Albright's argument about the relationship between dance and the body.

First, I aim to examine the historical traces of ancient dancing bodies, building upon Albright's sense that dance is a valuable site for exploring how the physical body and its markers of identity operate within a specific cultural context. I stress, with Albright (cf. 1997, 94) that I am working with a conception of "the body" that understands categories such as gender, race, and class to be culturally constructed, and linked with human bodies through interconnected processes of representation, discourse, and practice. I aim in part to expose how such categories were associated with physical bodies through the practice and representation of dance in Greek and Roman antiquity, but I want to be clear that the definition, perception, and experience of embodied identity was as complex and contested in the ancient world as it is today.³ I am also taking the "human" body as my primary interest, but as we will see, the human dancer was often compared and assimilated to animals, gods, and inanimate objects in Greek and Roman thought.⁴

In the second part of this chapter, I will consider how ancient Greek and Roman literary sources engage dance as a site of play and transformation—a medium that empowers (human) bodies to not only enact, but also resist, complicate, and exceed the cultural meanings attached to them. Theatrical dance, in which the process of embodied mimesis becomes particularly complex, will be discussed primarily in this latter section. Throughout, I seek both to illuminate the culturally-specific conceptions of dance embodiment evident in specific Greek and Roman contexts, and also to explore how ancient sources can offer new perspectives on the ephemerality of dance and its bodies as a theoretical challenge.

Traces

There is scant evidence for the lives of individual dancers prior to the Roman era, but it is nonetheless clear that the social role of dance was closely

³ On Greek and Roman conceptions of the body, especially its relationship to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, and class, see Sissa 1990; King 1998 and 2013; Porter 1999; Holmes 2010; Garrison 2012 (within Garrison 2012, see particularly Holmes' chapter, "Marked Bodies: Gender, Race, Class, Disability, and Disease").

⁴ On divine dancing bodies, see the chapter on "Gods;" on the interplay between the human dancer and various physical objects (including masks), see the chapter on "Objects." I also focus here on the performer's body (or the body as a medium for dance); see the chapter on "Audience" for further discussion of ancient Greek and Roman conceptions of the body as a site for the reception and perception of dance.

linked with the embodied identities of its performers from the earliest periods of Greek history. This is particularly clear in the case of choral dance performed by young women (*partheneia*, maiden song-dance), which I will take up as my first, and, to some extent, paradigmatic example of how dance and the body intersect in ancient Greek and Roman art, literature, and culture.

As discussed in the Introduction, vase paintings from the Geometric period suggest that communal dances performed by young women were a longstanding part of ancient Greek culture (D’Acunto 2016; Langdon 2008), and Alcman’s fragmentary *partheneia* offer literary evidence for the performance of maidenly *choreia* in seventh century BCE Sparta. As the chorus of Alcman’s first *partheneion* explicitly notes, the participants in these performances were unmarried, virginal young women (“I am a maiden,” [ἐ]γὼν μὲν αὐτὰ / παρσένος, Alc. fr. 1.85-86 *PMG*). It is probable that this song, and others like it, were performed as part of coming-of-age rituals for young women (Calame 1997, 4-7, 214-63; Bowie 2011). In addition to effacing its own authority in a show of maidenly modesty (85-87; Stehle 1997, 73-93), the chorus praises its leaders, Hagesichora and Agido, calling attention to the “radiance” (τὸ φῶς, 40) of the latter and the hair, or “mane” (ἄ... χαίτα, 51) of the former, which “blossoms like undefiled gold” (ἐπανθεῖ / χρυσὸς [ὥ]ς ἀκήρατος, 53-54).⁵ The social status of these dancing bodies is significant as well, for the performers in such rituals would have been drawn from among Sparta’s elite families—and certainly not its subjugated class of Helots.⁶ The allusions to precious metals and lavish adornments scattered throughout the song (54, 55, 64-67) correspond well with its role as the soundtrack to a ritual performed by and for aristocratic bodies. Nor are these dynamics unique to Alcman and seventh-century Sparta. Pindar fr. 94b, a song composed for performance by a girls’ chorus at the Theban Daphnephoria festival in the fifth century BCE, similarly spotlights the nubile yet maidenly bodies of its performers, who “blossom with crowns upon [their] virgin heads” (στεφάνοισι θάλλοισα παρθένιον κάρα, 11-12), and negotiates elite and civic interests in part through the ability of such young women to stand in for both their noble families and the community at large (Stehle 1997, 94-100; Kurke 2007).

⁵ For further discussion of this text and its many interpretative challenges, see Page 1979; Calame 1997; Stehle 1997, 71-81; Peponi 2004; Ferrari 2008.

⁶ Plutarch, writing in the first century CE, claims that the Spartans forced the Helots, their oppressed underclass, to dance only “ignoble and ridiculous” dances (ἀγενεῖς καὶ καταγελάστους, Plut. *Vit. Lyc.* 28.4). While this is a late source, it is nonetheless instructive to contrast this description, with its implied assumptions about the bodies of such performers, with the images of elite maiden dancers in Alcman’s songs. On Helots and the structure of Spartan society more generally, see further Luraghi & Alcock 2003; Figueira & Brulé 2004; Powell 2017. Haley (2021, 122) analyzes the Spartan/Helot distinction as a racial one.

Maiden choruses were less common in the Roman world, but a pair of examples indicate that, when staged, they performed a similar set of social functions. First, Livy describes the processional performance of a maiden chorus in 207 BCE, an expiatory response to a series of ill omens coinciding with an imminent Carthaginian invasion (27.37-38).⁷ In Livy's account, the movement of the performers' bodies through Rome's established religious landscape links the performance with existing models, while their age and gender enable them to "signify new life and vitality for the community" (Curtis 2021, 86). Two hundred years later, Horace's *Carmen Saeculare* (17 BCE) was sung and danced by both young men and young women, performers whose embodied identities were particularly well-suited to the song's invocation of Apollo and Diana (1,33-36) and thoroughgoing emphasis on fertility and generation.⁸ As "chosen virgins and pure boys" (*virgines lectas puerosque castos*, 6), they represent themselves as the embodiment of Rome's bright future.

While the song-dance of the maiden chorus thus served to reinforce the social identities of youthful, virginal, female bodies, there is also ample evidence for the kinds of dance performed by other, less culturally-valued bodies. The women hired to dance and entertain at Greek *symposia* and Roman *convivia* offer illuminating counterparts to maidenly choreuts, and they are sometimes described and depicted in contrast to one another. In Xenophon's *Symposium* (fourth century BCE), for example, Socrates calls for a stately choral performance, akin to that of the Graces, Horae, or Nymphs, rather than the acrobatic solo dancing of a female entertainer (Xen. *Symp.* 7.5). In Greek vase painting, *orchēstrides* (sympotic female dancers) are often depicted in revealing poses, with little clothing, a pattern that underscores both the allure and the notional availability of their eroticized bodies (cf. Fig. 24).⁹ We can contrast such images with the depiction of young women's *choreia*, as exemplified by the decorously draped figures on a white ground phiale from the mid-fifth century (Fig. 25; cf. Steiner 2021, 427). A scene at the end of Aristophanes' comedy *Women at the Thesmophoria* (fifth century BCE) offers a particularly vivid depiction of the *orchēstris* as a silent and eroticized commodity, who is sold to a guard in order to distract him from his duties (Arist. *Thesm.* 1170-231). It is important to note that these sources can offer only limited insight into the

⁷ On the historical and literary significance of this ritual, see further Curtis 2021.

⁸ On the *Carmen Saeculare* and Roman performance culture, see further Habinek 2005, 150-57; Lowrie 2009, 123-41; Curtis 2017, 149-58.

⁹ On erotic dancing, sex work, and status in Classical Athens and beyond, see further Olsen 2017; Gianvittorio 2018; Olsen 2021, 150-77. On this object, see also "Audience."



Figure 24: Red-figure kylix depicting *aulos*-player and dancer. c. 510 BCE. London, British Museum 1843,1103.9. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

lives of historical women who performed such dance professionally.¹⁰ We can see the traces of cultural hierarchy far more clearly than the traces of lived experience.

The pseudo-Virgilian *Copa*, an anonymous poem generally dated to the first century CE, can help to highlight some of the links between dance, identity,

¹⁰ Cf. Goldman (2015), on similar issues in relation to the lives and labor of female musicians. On women's labor in Classical Athens (and specifically, the work of immigrant/*metic* women), see further Kennedy (2014, 123-61), who stresses how the literary and visual representations long used to study these women "almost universally treat them as sexually available and socially deviant. Inscriptional evidence, however, gives us a broader picture and allows us to see, despite the prejudices and the legal vulnerability, how important they were to the life of the city" (quote at p. 153).



Figure 25: White ground phiale depicting women dancing; c. 450 BCE. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 65.908

and the body in the Roman world.¹¹ The poem begins by describing “a Syrian girl, a tavern-keeper” (*Copa Surisca*, *Copa* 1) who “knows how to move her quivering hips to the beat of the castanet” (*crispum sub crotalo docta mouere latus*, 2). The identification of the performer is accomplished through the use of a diminutive (*Surisca*, 2), which I have translated “girl” in an attempt to capture the casual and patronizing tone. This description is followed by close attention to the features and movements of the woman’s body: after mentioning her “quivering hips” or “flanks,” the speaker goes on to describe how she “dances a drunken, wanton dance in the smoky tavern, / shaking her elbow to the tune of the reed pipes” (*ebria fumosa saltat lascina taberna / ad cubitum raucos excutiens calamos*, 3-4).¹² The eroticization of the performer recalls the depiction of female entertainers in earlier Greek sources.

Yet this *Copa Surisca* is also *docta*, “learned” (2), a term used to very different effect in funerary inscriptions for professional female performers of song

¹¹ On this poem, see also “Audience.”

¹² These lines present several interpretive challenges; my translation here follows the suggestions of Morgan 2017, 86-87.

and dance in the Roman empire.¹³ While Roman literary sources, such as the *Copa*, often depict female dancers and entertainers as eroticized commodities, epigraphical evidence offers us a different perspective on women's dance in the Roman world. In these commemorative texts, presumably commissioned by surviving family members or patrons of the women described, their performance skills are cast as a valuable form of cultural knowledge, and they are largely identified as either maidens or wives (Alonso Fernández 2015, 322-29). In part, the variations among our sources reflect the diversity of dance modes practiced in the time of the Roman empire: women and girls performed dance as entertainment at private parties, as well as in mimes and other theatrical productions.¹⁴ But they also highlight the challenges of investigating the lives and experiences of ancient dancers, especially those whose identities (as women, as non-Romans, as poor or working class) render them less valued and less visible in the surviving sources.

The role of literary sources in constructing, rather than simply documenting, the relationship between performance and embodied identity is particularly clear in the *Copa's* attention to the performer's Syrian identity (*Surisca*, 1). Located on the eastern margins of the Roman empire, the province of Syria encompassed a large portion of the modern Middle East, and Harry Morgan demonstrates that imperial Roman art and literature repeatedly link Syrian women, sex work, and the performance of music and dance, in a way that reflects "deep-seated feelings of anxiety and resentment about Syrian culture and its assimilation into Roman society" (Morgan 2017, 95).¹⁵ It is also quite possible that many female performers and tavern-workers in the Roman empire did come from Syria and other eastern provinces (as well as any number of other places).¹⁶ In the anonymous poet's description of this particular *Copa Surisca*, therefore, we can see how the poetic text participates in processes of racialization, as described and theorized further in the chapter on "Geography."¹⁷

¹³ See also Henderson 2002, 264-75, who underscores the (often underappreciated) allusivity and literary sophistication of the *Copa* itself.

¹⁴ On professional female dance in the Roman empire, see further Webb 2008, 44-57; Alonso Fernández 2015; Morgan 2017; Curtis 2023.

¹⁵ See further Morgan 2017, 94-97 (with examples from Suetonius, Juvenal, Horace, and Martial). On Roman Syria, see de Jong 2017.

¹⁶ On the origins, identities, and class positions of performers and entertainers in the Roman world, see Duncan 2006, 124-218; Webb 2008, 44-57. See also the Introduction.

¹⁷ See also Andújar, Giusti, & Murray forthcoming, as well as Heng 2018. Anglophone Classicists have long preferred "ethnicity" as a term for describing the complex nexus of somatic, genealogical, and cultural attributes that scholars in other disciplines might more readily describe as "race," a tendency that has recently been interrogated and debated (cf. Gruen 2020, 1-10; McCoskey 2021b, 18-19; Mac Sweeney 2021). Yet more than fifteen years ago, in the closely related field of religious studies, Buell (2005, 1-33) identified the value and limitations of both "ethnicity" and "race" as

It is striking, after all, that the adjective *Surisca* in this poem focuses the reader's attention on geographic origin (Syria), which may imply, but does not insist upon, any number of somatic, genealogical, or cultural attributes. The diminutive "*Surisca*" is, in fact, the only direct reference to this aspect of the woman's identity; she also wears a "Greek headband" (*Graeca... mitella*, 1) and performs movement and music potentially linked to various locations and traditions in the ancient Mediterranean.¹⁸ The overall impression, then, is one of general alterity or "exoticness," rather than a specific set of cultural practices or an "identity" grounded in either physical appearance (e.g., skin color, hair) or familial lineage.¹⁹ Does this woman dance (and labor) in this way because she is Syrian, or does she become "*Surisca*" through her performance and its context? As a literary artifact, the *Copa* both exposes and participates in the construction of identity through dance. The poet casts this woman as a "Syrian girl" (*Surisca*) in part to articulate a cultural hierarchy of embodied performance, identity, and pleasure: the delights offered by his "motel muse" are "exotic," predicated in part on her identity as a "defamiliarized and mystified 'Other'" (Henderson 2002, 277), and also a bit seedy, "tawdry" (Goodyear 1977, 120).²⁰ The contrast between this dancer and the "chosen virgins" (*virgines lectas*) of the *Carmen Saeculare* could scarcely be clearer—or more revealing of Roman cultural attitudes about the social role and value of different performing bodies.

I began by discussing women and dance because, in both Greek and Roman culture, concerns about the meaning and construction of "the body" tend to be more immediately visible in the representation of the feminine "other" to the masculine "norm." There is also a recurring, though by no means universal, association between dance and femininity in ancient Greek and Roman thought, to the extent that dance can be said to have "been associated with decadent pleasure-seeking, unmanliness, and the arousal of sexual desire from its very first appearance in western cultural history" (Hall 2010, 168). The potential links between dance and non-normative performances of gender are perhaps most visible in the figure of the *kinaidos*. While the term *kinaidos* (κίναϊδος/*cinaedus*) is used pejoratively in Greek and Roman literature to describe an effeminate and/

frameworks for understanding ancient Mediterranean identity formation; her concept of "ethnic reasoning," like the concept of "racialization," emphasizes the discursive processes through which human difference is articulated and manipulated.

¹⁸ See Morgan 2017, 85-90.

¹⁹ The depiction of this woman also resonates with Haley's account (2021) of racialized gender in the Roman empire.

²⁰ Note that Morgan also explores how the literary qualities of the *Copa* confound any straightforward connection between its alluring dancer and the historical performers upon whom she is, at least partially, modeled. This poem, with its multifaceted and elusive performer, could thus also fit comfortably within the kinds of analysis offered in the second half of this chapter.

or sexually-passive man, papyrological sources from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt refer to *kinaidoi* primarily as performers of music and dance (Sapsford 2015). Here again, we can see a distinction in how literary and documentary sources ascribe social and cultural meaning to the bodies of specific kinds of performers. If *kinaidoi* were dancers, as they are described in Roman literature and Egyptian documentary papyri (cf. Plaut. *Stich.* 769-75; Macrobian *Sat.* 3.14; Sapsford 2015), it may be that they were particularly masterful performers of the gestural and embodied expression of gender.²¹

Yet, as the lyrics of the *Carmen Saeculare* indicate, normative masculinity could also be constructed and enacted via dance: the performing bodies of the “pure” or “unpolluted” boys (*pueros castos*, 6) symbolize a virility and futurity comparable to the chastely fertile bodies of their female, “chosen virgin” (*virgines lectas*, 6) counterparts. The performance of choral *pyrrhichē* (weapon dances), attested across the ancient Greek and Roman world (Ceccarelli 1998), is a particularly good example of how dancing helped to articulate the social role of the male body. A statue base in the Acropolis Museum in Athens (Fig. 26) commemorates a late fourth-century victory in pyrrhic dance competition, and depicts two sets of four men, neatly spaced and coordinated in pose, holding their shields beside their nude bodies. The absence of full armor reminds us that this is dance, not war, yet the nature of the dance itself forges links between the two and reflects the fact that competitive dancing and military exploits, along with athletic competition, offered important venues for Greek youths and men to put their bodies in service of state and social interests. The coordination and overlap among the bodies depicted on the base underscores the collective nature of these endeavors.²² The links between dance, warfare, athletics, and other communal male activities can also prompt us to expand our understanding of dance itself. The Roman celebration of *Lupercalia*, in which young men ran naked through city and struck onlookers with goat-skin straps, lacks some of the usual markers of “dance” (music, special gestures), yet it nonetheless choreographs the movement of the virile male body through civic space in order to reinforce specific social, political, and religious values (Alonso Fernández 2016). Ovid’s account of this rite even links the young men’s “running” (*currant*, *Fast.* 2.283) with Pan, who “takes delight in running swiftly” (*velox discurrere gaudet*, 2.285): such human imitation of divine patterns

²¹ On the *kinaidos* as a category of performer, see further Sapsford 2022.

²² On the *pyrrhichē* and its social role, see further Lonsdale 1993, 137-68; Ceccarelli 1998; Ceccarelli 2004. On male *choreia* more broadly, see Stehle 1997, 119-69; Olsen 2021, 75-85.



Figure 26: Inscribed base of a dedication (Atarbos base), with relief images on two sides, 323-322 BCE. Athens, Acropolis Museum 1338. © Acropolis Museum, Photo by Socratis Mavrommatis, 2010.

of movement is one of the key ways in which ancient choral dancing uses the body as a potent site of religious experience.²³

Many of our sources stress the superlative beauty, physical virtuosity, and athleticism of the dancing body, which might reasonably lead us to wonder about the conceptualization of the disabled body in relation to ancient performance culture. Debby Sneed has shown that, contrary to longstanding assumptions, archaeological evidence points to the care and accommodation of disabled children and adults in the ancient Greek world (2020, 2021), and both Sappho and Plato reflect upon the poignant pleasure of watching dance for those who, due to the impairments of age, can no longer perform it (Sappho fr. 58b and Pl. *Leg.* 657d). In the *Iliad*, the disabled god Hephaestus appears as a masterful crafter of (the representation of) dance, a depiction that grants him a rich and generative role in relation to performance (*Il.* 18.590-605). At the same time, there is substantial evidence for the employment (and sometimes enslavement) of disabled people, particularly those with dwarfism, in industries of entertainment and spectacle—a context rife with opportunities for mockery, othering, and exploitation (Dasen 1993; Stoner 2015).

As the texts and images that I have surveyed here indicate, the ability of the body to signify gender, class, age, ability, race, and/or ethnicity was essential to the performance and cultural value of dance in ancient Greece and Rome. An elderly body did not dance *partheneia*; a female one did not race through Rome in the performance of the *Lupercalia*. In this way, dance also played a role in the construction of such categories themselves: to participate in particular modes of dance would have been to make visible, through the movement of the body, certain aspects of one's social identity. And yet, an

²³ On *choreia* as a privileged site for the conceptualization of human/divine relations, see Lonsdale 1993, 44-136; Kurke 2012; Laferrière 2024.

obvious complication emerges from one of the most well-known forms of ancient dancing: the dramatic chorus. While Archaic *partheneia*, for example, provided an important stylistic model for many songs within Classical Athenian tragedies and comedies (Bierl 2009; Swift 2010, 173-240), the performers of the odes that draw upon those traditions were not virginal young women, but adult men.²⁴ Dance is a mimetic art, through which performers can embody their own identities and also represent others. Attending now to this second dimension, I would like to consider how ancient Greek and Roman sources conceptualize the ability of dance to complicate, expand, and transform the meanings attached to its performers' bodies.

Transformations

From the Archaic Greek period onward, Greek and Roman aesthetic discourse explores the transformative power of dance (Peponi 2015; Schlapbach 2018). As we have seen, it was crucial to the social and ritual role of Alcman's *partheneia* that the dancers be young, elite, virginal women; in other words, their performing bodies were necessarily inscribed with specific cultural meanings. Yet the lyrics of Alcman's songs also urge the viewer to envision these dancers as an extraordinarily wide range of other entities, from horses to radiant light, in order "to imaginatively transform the actually visible agents and their actions into a virtual and imaginary spectacle" (Peponi 2004, 301). Ancient dance forms structured by age, gender, and other embodied markers of identity, like *partheneia*, thus simultaneously construct dance as a means through which bodies escape their own bounds and become, at least for a moment, something else entirely. A brief fragment of a Pindaric *hyporchēma* (dance song) has become an important locus for the scholarly discussion of this phenomenon (fr. 107a.1-3 M):

Πελασγὸν ἵππον ἢ κύνα
 Ἀμυκλᾶν ἀγωνίῳ
 ἐλελιζόμενος ποδὶ μιμέο καμπύλον μέλος διώκων,

Represent the Pelasgian horse or the dog
 of Amyclae, whirling your foot
 in the contest in pursuit of the curved song.

²⁴ For further details (and varying perspectives) on the composition of the dramatic chorus, see Pickard-Cambridge 1953, 239-51; Winkler 1990; Wilson 2000. On tragedy and comedy as genres in which men perform the roles of women, see Zeitlin 1990; McClure 1999, 19-29; Foley 2001; Murnaghan 2005; Cawthorn 2008; Mueller 2016.

In these lines, the chorus deploys a strategy that Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi has termed the “multi-mimetic” mode of dance perception, a way of envisioning the dancer through the use of multiple external referents that “challenges any kind of singularity” (2015, 214-15).²⁵

To what extent do such ancient conceptions of mimetic multiplicity align with modern notions about the relationship between dance and the body? Discussing the solo choreography of Marie Chouinard, Albright observes that “because dance is at once both social and personal, internal and external, a dancer can both embody and explode gendered images of the body—simultaneously registering, creating, and subverting cultural conventions” (1997, 94). Albright encountered Chouinard’s dancing directly and could speak with the choreographer and dancer about her own embodied experience, modes of inquiry unavailable to those studying the distant (and even not-so-distant) past. We simply cannot know how a seventh-century Spartan girl felt about her own choral dancing, and how it shaped her embodied experience of gender and identity. And yet ancient sources return repeatedly to images of dance as a force of transformation and transcendence, a mode of performance that seems to simultaneously instantiate and exceed, even, to use Albright’s term, “explode,” the cultural significance attached to a given human body. Without making any claims as to the historical experiences of specific ancient Greek and Roman dancers or audiences, I would like to consider how these cultures’ conceptions of dance and embodiment anticipate and address the modern concerns exemplified by Albright.²⁶

Greek and Roman sources invite audiences to envision human dancers as other humans, as divinities, as animals, and even as inanimate objects like stars or architectural elements.²⁷ Yet one persistent and intriguing image is that of the dancer as a tree. In the remainder of this chapter, I would like to focus on a few examples of this surprising image—surprising, in the sense that a tree (static, grounded, plant rather than animal) might seem to be an unlikely figure for a dancing human body. I would like to suggest, however, that arboreal imagery functions in both Greek and Latin poetry as a way of exploring the experience of dance from the perspective of the performing maiden. It thus exposes

²⁵ On the aesthetic significance of these lines, see also Andújar 2018, 268; Weiss 2018, 26-27; Steiner 2021, 192-93, 241.

²⁶ I am using Albright’s work here as a representative example of a rich vein of twentieth- and twenty-first century work on dance and the body, cf. also Foster 1995; Lepecki 2004a; Giersdorf & Wong 2019, 5-6, 11-12.

²⁷ Steiner 2021 explores all of these examples, cf. also Lonsdale 1993; Peponi 2015; Weiss 2018.

the ability of dance to both enforce and expand the modes of embodiment available to young women in the Greek and Roman cultural imagination.²⁸

Let us begin with the *Odyssey*, since early Greek hexameter poetry offers compelling paradigms for the conceptualization of dance in both Archaic and later Greek culture (Lonsdale 1993; Richardson 2011). When Odysseus encounters the Phaeacian princess Nausicaa, he compares her to Artemis (*Od.* 6.151-52), envisions her as a choral dancer (6.157), and likens her beauty to that of a palm tree that he once saw on the island of Delos (6.162-63). His address to Nausicaa underscores a curious connection between the image of the dancer and that of the tree, as he remarks that her family must take delight in seeing her, a “young shoot” or “branch” (θάλος, 6.157), “entering the chorus” (χορὸν εἰσοιχνεῦσαν, 6.157). While the relatively stationary image of the tree may seem a strange point of comparison for a dancer, Odysseus’ words underscore the links between young female dancers and the natural world. Artemis, as a goddess of both female transition and wild space, is thus an appropriate figure for Nausicaa at this moment in her life: poised on the cusp of marriage, happily cavorting with other young women on the margins of the settled world (Steiner 2021, 384). Odysseus’ claim that Nausicaa is specifically akin to a Delian palm further emphasizes the connection to Artemis, who was worshiped on Delos.²⁹

The tree, with its simultaneous monumentality and animacy, is also an apt image for the young female choral dancer more broadly. Like a tree, Nausicaa is rooted in place, grounded in her Phaeacian home and familial context. Her growth outward and upward is constrained by her social role, as indicated by her preparations for marriage (6.56-70) and her subsequent anxiety that she not be seen in public with Odysseus (6.255-88). Yet she nonetheless grows, even flourishes (θάλλω, the verbal form of θάλος/θάλλος). “Entering” (εἰσοιχνεῦσαν) the dance, she is poised at the moment of movement towards (*eis*) her marital future, not yet arrived. Her likeness to a “young sprout” suits her temporary embodiment of wildness, of an Artemis-like freedom. The Delian palm, in Odysseus’ imagination, “shoots upward,” the present participle indicating continuous movement (ἀνερχόμενον, 6.163)—like Nausicaa, it is both rooted and yet in motion.

André Lepecki suggests that (2004b, 6):

²⁸ My discussion of dance and arboreal imagery in the *Odyssey* and *Iphigenia among the Taurians* picks up and expands upon observations made by Steiner 2021, 382-85. Cf. also Steiner 2021, 382-183, 385, 393-95 on trees and choruses in Pindar and Callimachus, as well as Payne 2019 on conceptual links between arboreality and chorality.

²⁹ See further Olsen 2021, 40-43.

Dance as critical theory and critical praxis proposes a body that is less an empty signifier (executing preordained steps as it obeys blindly to structures of command) than a material, socially-inscribed agent, a non-univocal body, an open potentiality, a force-field constantly negotiating its position in the powerful struggle for its appropriation and control.

I have already discussed how an Archaic Greek female choreut, performing in a maiden chorus, embodied her social role through her choreography (even if the “steps” as such are lost to us). For Odysseus, the image of Nausicaa as a “young shoot entering the chorus” marks his recognition of her as an elite maiden eligible for marriage, presenting herself (and delighting her family) through the performance of dance. Yet the image of the tree also captures the dancing body’s “open potentiality,” its inscription (rooting) in its established social roles and its simultaneous yearning (shooting, sprouting) toward new and divergent ones. For the duration of a dance, at least, the young woman can be like Artemis: flourishing in the wild, moving toward maturity without ever quite arriving.

This collocation of trees, youthful femininity, and dance also appears in Euripides’ tragedy *Iphigenia among the Taurians* (c. 412 BCE). The chorus of this play is made up of Greek maidens in service to Iphigenia, whom Artemis has transported to the land of the Taurians (near the Black Sea) to serve as a priestess after saving her from sacrifice at Aulis.³⁰ These young women, however, would have been represented by Greek citizen men, performing for an Athenian audience in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens.³¹ This play is thus a particularly striking example of the complex workings of tragic theatrical mimesis, involving the performance of both women and non-Greek characters.³² It is illuminating, therefore, to consider how the chorus’ description of itself and its movements, presumably coordinated in some way with its actual dancing, serves to construct its identity.

In its third ode, the chorus compares itself to a “wingless bird” (ἄπτερος ὄρνις, 1095) longing for the “gatherings of the Hellenes” (Ελλάνων ἀγόρους, 1096) that it no longer enjoys. While this song draws upon a rich nexus of ancient Greek dance imagery (birds, female transition, fleets), its first and final stanzas make striking use of arboreal imagery.³³ In the first strophe, for example, the chorus recalls the ritual landscape of the sanctuary of Artemis Lochia on Delos, describing a “palm with luxuriant foliage” (φοίνικα... ἄβροκόμαν, 1099), a

³⁰ For an overview of this play, see Kyriakou 2006, 3–46.

³¹ On the Theater of Dionysus, see “Space.”

³² On the representation of women and non-Greek characters in tragedy, see further Hall 1989 and 1997; Murnaghan 2005; Mueller 2018; Rankine 2021.

³³ On the imagery of this ode, especially in relation to *partheneia* and the choral imaginary, see Swift 2010, 207–13; Weiss 2018, 29–30; Steiner 2021, 122–23, 201, 385.

“flourishing laurel tree” (δάφναν... εὐερνέα, 1100), and a “sacred shoot of gray-green olive” (γλαυκᾶς θαλλὸν ἱερὸν ἐλαί-/ας, 1101-102).³⁴

For this particular chorus, the trees of Delos offer a poignant image. Displaced and isolated in a foreign land, the chorus longs to be rooted once more in the sacred spaces of its Hellenic home.³⁵ Linking its own growth and flourishing with Artemis and Delos, it figures its present song-dance as an impoverished echo of its former, abundant chorality—a lament (θρήνους, 1095) instead of a maiden chorus (ἡλίκων θιάσους, 1146). Yet through its insistence upon its memories of Greece and its attachment to specific elements of the ritual and natural landscape, the chorus simultaneously reinforces its own Hellenic identity, linking specific modes of embodied ritual performance with “Greekness,” and implicitly contrasting them with the violent sacrificial practices of the Taurians.³⁶ Through their words, they encourage the audience to see their dancing as an expression of their own identities, articulated through the trees of Delos.

The arboreal imagery at the song’s outset finds an echo in the final antistrophe, as the chorus describes its own past performance of hymeneal song (1143-50).³⁷ Note, for example, that the Delian palm tree (φοίνικα, 1099) is described as ἀβροκόμαν (1099), defined by its “luxurious” or “delicate” (ἀβρο-) “foliage” or “locks” (-κόμαν). The word *komē* can mean “hair” as well as “foliage.” In the chorus’ concluding self-description, it is the dancing maidens who possess “richly luxuriant” (ἀβροπλούτοιο, 1148) “locks” (χαίτας, 1148; *chaite* can similarly mean both “hair” and “foliage”). The final antistrophe further describes the “locks” or “braids” of the maidens’ hair that, “thrown round, shadow their cheeks” (καὶ πλοκάμους περιβαλλομένα / γένυσιν ἐσκίαζον, 1151-52); their hair thus shades them like the leaves of a tree. In light of these links, the choreuts’ description of the motion of their hair, “cast about” (περιβαλλομένα, 1151) in the dance, could further evoke the movement of leaves and branches in the wind.

At the end of their song, the choreuts thus imaginatively transform themselves into trees. Aligning their memories of their own dancing bodies

³⁴ See Kyriakou 2006, 354-56 on how these references allude to specific topographic features of Delos and echo descriptions of the island in earlier literary sources.

³⁵ The precise origins of the choreuts are not made clear; in their first ode, they similarly sing of leaving Greece (*Hellas*, line 132) rather than any specific city-state. On the identity of the chorus in this play, see Kyriakou 2006, 36-37.

³⁶ On the alterity of the Taurians in this play, especially in relation to broader Athenian conceptions of cultural, ethnic, and/or racial identity, see Hall 1989, 110-12; Wright 2005, 177-202; Kennedy 2009, 79-87; Gibert 2011; McCoskey 2012, 151-52.

³⁷ Cf. Swift 2010, 212 on the categorization of this imagined chorality as hymeneal (rather than parthenaic), as well as the affinities between the two forms of maidenly song-dance.

(1144-52) with their memories of the Delian palm (1099), they highlight their present estrangement from both the normative paths of womanhood (they long to dance “away from their dear mothers,” παρὰ... φίλας / ματέρος, 1145-46, towards “marriage,” γάμων, 1144) and their Hellenic home. The dramatic construction of their performing bodies as both female and Greek is accomplished in part through their emphatic longings for the rituals, performances, and places (maiden chorality, Delos) that they have left behind. On the “force-field” (Lepecki 2004b, 6) of the dancing floor, these performers long not for subversion or explosion, but for a restoration of the cultural roles they once embodied, and the fulfillment of their disrupted journey “toward marriage” (γάμων, 1144).

As I mentioned above, the construction of the body in and through drama is a particularly complex process. In the case of *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, arboreal imagery helps to ground the audience’s perception within the multiplicity of images, movements, and possibilities made available by the dancing body, as well as the experiences and imaginations of the audience members themselves. Broadly speaking, this play dramatizes a disorienting journey through a land of violent, foreign peoples and practices, culminating in the restoration of Hellenic identity for Iphigenia and her chorus and, along with it, the valorization of Athenian ritual and cultural practices.³⁸ This ode, with its longing for a return to Greece and its ritual spaces, thus offers a microcosm for some of the play’s larger thematic concerns. The chorus, imaginatively rooting itself in the soil of Delos, foreshadows Athena’s *dea-ex-machina* conclusion, which neatly settles the various characters into their future and seemingly-permanent roles.

I previously suggested, however, that the image of the dancer as a flourishing tree-branch might, for Nausicaa, represent a kind of appealing liminality, an opportunity to embody Artemis’ divine freedom from the narratives and constraints of mortal womanhood. I would like to propose that arboreal imagery similarly complicates the stability of the dramatic chorus’ identity, even as it seeks to reinforce it. On the one hand, the trees of Delos clearly represent, for the chorus of *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, a longing for rootedness, completion, and fulfillment. Yet those trees are also celebrated specifically for their growth and vitality (“luxuriant foliage,” ἀβροκόμαν; “flourishing,” εὐερνέα; a “shoot,” θαλλόν). When the chorus recalls its past dancing in arboreal terms, it employs present participles (εἰλίσσουσα, 1145; περιβαλλομένα, 1151) and an imperfect tense verb (ἑσκίαζον, 1152), emphasizing ongoing rather than simple or completed action.

³⁸ See further Hall 1989, 110-12, 122, 124, 211; Kyriakou 2006, 449-68; Kennedy 2009, 79-87.

Like trees, the choreuts of *Iphigenia among the Taurians* might seem to be deeply rooted in their Greek, female identities. Yet of course, these “identities” are created (originally, at least) by male Athenians through the process of song, dance, and speech in the course of each performance. Each time this chorus begins its parodos, it begins anew the process of performing (and making perceptible to the audience) its assigned role.³⁹ The gap between the body of the performer and the body he seeks to represent ultimately underscores the mimetic instability of the performance itself: the dancer is at once an Athenian man, a Greek maiden, and a tree—and at the same time, not fully any one of those things. When the choreuts liken themselves to trees—an obvious act of imaginative representation—they remind us that seeing them as “Greek girls” is also an act of imagination. The growing tree, or the branch moving in the wind, is thus a powerful image for the way that the description and practice of dance can orient the performer’s body within the overlapping cultural categories of “young, Greek, woman,” while also allowing space for movement, oscillation, and becoming.

If we consider these Homeric and Euripidean passages together, we can further see how the singularity of the tree-image exists in productive tension with the collective quality of female *choreia*. Odysseus’ description of Nausicaa as a single “shoot” (θάλος, 6.157) entering the chorus reflects his focus on her distinctive position among the crowd of maidens, the way she (like Artemis) stands out (cf. 6.151-52). Yet a “branch” or “shoot” also implies a connection to a larger plant, indicating how Nausicaa remains linked to her family and fellow performers. Euripides’ chorus, for its part, invokes a set of three distinct trees, located within the same sacred precinct (1099-102). When it later returns to the “richly luxuriant locks/foilage” (ἄβροπλούτοιο χαίτας, 1148) of its own tree-like performers, it thus allows for variation within the chorus, the possibility that the dancers, like the trees, maintain distinct identities as they move together in choral space.⁴⁰ I have already suggested that the tree’s ability to represent both mobility (growth, movement in the wind) and monumentality (rootedness, a connection to place) corresponds well with the conceptualization of the maiden’s performing body as both mobile (in dance and in transition) and yet grounded in a specific place and social context. I would now add that the tree is similarly able to represent both the singularity of the individual dancer and her sense of connection to others.

³⁹ See further Weiss 2020 on how the prologues of ancient Greek plays engage their audiences in the process of imaginative perception—of seeing “this” (the actor, the stage-space) as “that” (Oedipus, Thebes), as well as Weiss 2023 on ancient Greek theatrical perception more broadly.

⁴⁰ On the accommodation of individual and local identities within Greek ritual choruses, see Kowalzig 2007; Kurke 2007; Olsen 2015.

Turning to Roman literature, we might observe that Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 CE), narrates the mythic transformation of several young women into trees—descriptions that bear, in Ismene Lada-Richards’ (2016) account, the “imprints” of contemporary pantomime dance. Acknowledging that we cannot establish a secure historical link between this particular text and the practice of pantomime, she nonetheless offers a compelling case for reading the *Metamorphoses* as “vibrantly alert” (2016, 157) to the kinds of bodily transformation associated with pantomime, especially the transformation of the dancer’s body into a tree.⁴¹ For the purposes of my analysis, I would like to revisit one of Lada-Richards’ examples and consider how it also resonates with earlier Greek images of arboreal dance, especially in its capacity to articulate both the liberating and the constraining force of dance as performed and experienced by maidens.

In his first and probably most famous account of arboreal transformation, Ovid describes Apollo’s pursuit of the river-nymph Daphne, who has pledged herself to “lifelong maidenhood” (*perpetua... uirginitate*, 1.486-87) in honor of the goddess Diana (Roman Artemis). Fleeing from Apollo, Daphne prays to her father (the river-god Peneus, 1.546), with the result that she becomes a laurel-tree (*laurea*, 1.565). Prior to pursuit and transformation, however, Daphne emulates Diana, delighting in woodland groves and shunning the company of men (1.474-80). While she is not specifically described as dancing, her activities recall the maidenly veneration of (and likeness to) Artemis that, as we have seen, very often corresponds with the practice of choral dancing. When Ovid describes her “hair” as “arranged without order” (*positos sine lege capillos*, 1.477), it is tempting to recall Euripides’ image of the maidens’ hair flowing in the dance (*IT* 1151). Daphne’s hair remains a touchstone throughout the narrative. Apollo later observes her “hair, hanging without ornament on her neck” (*inornatos collo pendere capillos*, 1.497) and wonders how it might look “if adorned” (*si comantur*, 1.498). When Ovid stresses how Daphne’s “beauty is increased by her flight” (*aucta fuga forma est*, 1.530), he highlights how “a light breeze drives back her hair” (*levis impulsos retro dabat aura capillos*, 1.529), and when Apollo is on the verge of capturing the maiden, he “breathes upon the locks scattered on her neck” (*crinem sparsum ceruicibus adflat*, 1.542). Daphne’s

⁴¹ Lada-Richards (2016) focuses on the potential links between Ovid’s “arborization narratives” and related themes and aesthetic elements in pantomime dance. Ovid himself claims that his poems were performed as pantomime (*Tr.* 2.519) and it seems entirely possible (if difficult to conclusively “prove”) that the relationship between the two arts (poetry and pantomime) went both ways. See further Ingleheart 2008; Lada-Richards 2013 and 2018 on Ovid and pantomime, as well as Garelli 2006, 2007, and 2013; Hall & Wyles 2008; Zanobi 2014; Schlapbach 2018; Gianvittorio-Ungar & Schlapbach 2021, 8-9 on the interactions between pantomime and literature more broadly.

metamorphosis eventually includes the transformation of her “hair into leaves” (*in frondem crines*, 1.550). Tracing this single body-element (hair) through the narrative shows how Daphne’s beauty is linked with her movement and Apollo’s pursuit, and ultimately preserved in her tree-form.

Lada-Richards detects two striking choreographic elements in this narrative. First, the emphasis on rapid flight followed by sudden stillness (“a heavy torpor seizes her limbs,” *torpor gravis occupat artus*, 1.548) corresponds well with the fourth-century CE orator Libanius’ interest in the particular delight of watching the dancer shift from fluid motion to total fixity (Lada-Richards 2016, 161; cf. *Lib. Or.* 64.118).⁴² Second, the progressive process of bodily constraint evident in Ovid’s accounts of transformation, especially arborification, calls to mind the rich potential of restricted movement for the virtuosic dancer—the ability to convey emotion, narrative, or identity even through a limited set of gestures (Lada-Richards 2016, 162–64).⁴³ Both of these elements recall the features that I previously linked with arboreal dance imagery in Greek poetry: the tree and dancer are simultaneously rooted and mobile, constrained in their movement yet nonetheless capable of dynamic gesture and growth. Transformed into the laurel, Daphne’s “once-swift feet become fixed to roots” that, while “sluggish,” “slow,” are nonetheless still living and growing plant-matter (*pes modo tam uelox pigris radicibus haeret*, 1.551). When Apollo touches the tree, he feels how “beneath the new bark, her heart trembles” (*trepidare nouo sub cortice pectus*, 1.554).⁴⁴ The dancing tree (or the dancer-as-tree) captures the dynamism present even in moments of stillness and pause.

For Daphne, transformation is a bitter escape. Her human form eludes Apollo’s lustful grasp, but as he triumphantly declares, her leaves (/hair) will furnish wreaths to adorn Apollo himself and his worshippers (1.556–64). In this respect, the vulnerability of the tree and its value as a natural resource offers yet another powerful image for the maiden herself, whose dance often serves primarily to position her within the marketplace of marriage, to further her progress along a nuptial and reproductive path that makes her into a productive resource for her family and community. Like a maiden, a tree can grow and change, but only in certain directions and within specific bounds. Like a maiden dancer, its movement remains rooted in a particular place and time.

The idea that a dancer can be like a tree—that a human body might represent not just another human or animal form but a sprouting (*ἀνερχόμενον*, Hom. *Od.*

⁴² On dance and stillness, see also “Movement.”

⁴³ Lada-Richards offers Martha Graham’s *Lamentations*, with its powerful use of fabric entanglements, as an illuminating point of comparison.

⁴⁴ This moment exemplifies the powerful sense of sexual violence and violation coursing through this passage; on sexual violence in Ovid, see further Richlin 1992 and James 2016.

6.163), grayish-green (γλαυκᾶς, Eur. *IT* 1101), or sluggish-rooted (*pigris radicibus*, Ov. *Met.* 1.551) plant—remains just one example of the transformative power accorded to dance in Greek and Roman thought. Indeed, the three descriptions that I have considered here do not always rely on simile or analogy: Nausicaa “is” (not “is like”) a “young shoot entering the chorus” (6.157); Euripides’ chorus makes repeated use of words that collapse the distinction between hair and foliage; Ovid’s poem is obviously interested in metamorphosis, not comparison. These descriptions certainly remind us that transformation is not synonymous with liberation: for the maidens in these poems, arborification offers at best a temporary reprieve from the norms that otherwise govern their youthful, female bodies—and at worst, a permanent transformation into an impotent, if “honored” (*honores*, Ov. *Met.* 1.565) resource.

Yet if, as Albright argues, dance is capable of “*simultaneously* registering, creating, and subverting cultural conventions” (1997, 94, emphasis mine), it may be that, sometimes, dance only partially “explodes” (cf. Albright 1997, 94) the social norms that define and constrain the body. We might return, here, to Lepecki’s understanding of dance as an act of “negotiation,” whereby bodies can sense and even affirm their roles without necessarily engaging in “blind obedience” to them (2004b, 6). The tree, rooted in place yet moving in the wind, animate and growing even if its expansion is generally imperceptible to the human eye, is hardly the most dynamic image for a dancer. But perhaps this is what makes it such a productive image for the *maiden* dancer, whose body is particularly enmeshed with her identity and assigned position in Greek and Roman society.

* * *

In an analysis that has been influential across the humanities, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari contrast the tree with the rhizome (root system): while the former (the “arborescent”) represents genealogical and hierarchical organization, the latter (the “rhizomatic”) is an assemblage capable of connecting at any point, rerouting and redrawing its lines without aiming at culmination (1987, 3-25).⁴⁵ The rhizome, with its heterogeneity, multiplicity, and ongoing metamorphosis, offers one powerful way of thinking about how a community of dancers constitutes itself, connects within and beyond its own bounds, and

⁴⁵ Originally published in 1980, Deleuze & Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus (Mille Plateaux)* is enjoying something of a renaissance in Classics (cf. the 2020 double issue of *Ramus*, edited by Khellaf). On the influence of Deleuze and Guattari more broadly, see the various articles in *Deleuze and Guattari Studies* (an interdisciplinary journal published by Edinburgh University Press); on dance specifically, see Colebrook 2004 and Damkjær 2005.

repeatedly dissolves only to re-form anew. In an analysis of Sappho's Tithonus poem, Leslie Kurke explores the value of the rhizomatic assemblage in relation to the "non-linear, non-teleological temporality of *choreia*" (2021, 27).

The dancing tree, however, scrambles the distinction between the rigidity of the arborescent and the flexibility of the rhizome. I would thus like to conclude by suggesting that the tree-maidens of Greek and Roman poetry enable us to productively expand upon Deleuze and Guattari, and also to use their work as a springboard for conceptualizing the study of ancient dancing bodies. On the one hand, there is an arborescent dimension to ancient Greek and Roman depictions of young women as dancing trees: the maiden entering the chorus is participating in a highly organized and hierarchical process of transition from virgin girl to married woman. Rooted in her natal family, she grows up and branches towards marriage, the progression of the tree-form aligning with an orderly temporal progression through normative female life.

But as Deleuze and Guattari themselves stress, their articulation of the arborescent and rhizomatic is not meant to create "a new or different dualism;" there are, they observe, "anarchic deformations in the transcendent system of trees" (1987, 20). In some ways, Deleuze and Guattari's model is most compelling in its application to the "tree" as a term for an explanatory chart (linguistic trees, family trees, stemmata). As a living, growing botanical form, the tree undermines its own arborescence through grafting, breaking, and symbiotic relationships with vines and animals. These two theorists are also famously interested in moments of "becoming" (cf. 1987, 232-309), arguing that representational arts, including dance, do not imitate, but instead facilitate a process in which the performer and the object of representation enter into a simultaneous experience of "becoming" one another (1987, 305).⁴⁶ This phenomenon is illustrated by the poetic examples that I have discussed here, for we find not only the maiden-becoming-tree (Daphne's transformation; Nausicaa-as-young-shoot), but also the tree-becoming-maiden (Euripides' Delian trees recast, several stanzas later, as young women with foliage-like hair; the Delian tree that Odysseus reimagines as a figure for Nausicaa). These dancing trees underscore how dance itself is a process of "becoming," a feature further highlighted by the persistent use of present and imperfect tenses (*εἰσοιχνεύσαν*, *Od.* 6.157; *ἀνερχόμενον*, *Od.* 6.163; *περιβαλλόμενα*, *IT* 1150; *ἔσκιαζον*, *IT* 1151; *remanet*, *Met.* 1.551; *trepidare*, *Met.* 1.553). It is precisely in such moments of "becoming" that young women are represented as both enacting and exceeding the cultural meanings attached to their moving bodies. If even trees can dance, perhaps dancing maidens can find—in trees, stars,

⁴⁶ See further Cawthorn 2008, 11-12 and Worman 2020 on this notion of "becoming" in relation to ancient Greek theatrical mimesis.

or animals—modes of being and feeling beyond and beside the cultural conventions that surround them.

I began this chapter by suggesting that when we set out to investigate the relationship between dance and the bodies that perform(ed) it, the ephemerality of dance poses a particular challenge. Greek and Roman sources can give us important information about the performers of ancient dance—or at least, important information about the cultural assumptions and meanings attached to them. Attending to sources beyond the literary canon (inscriptions, documentary papyri) is thus particularly important in developing a broader view of ancient dancers and their work. Yet Greek and Roman literature also offers its own reflections on embodiment, animated by a keen awareness of dance as an art of “becoming.” Images of transformation, exemplified here by the maiden-as-tree, encourage us to think about dance in the present tense, even as we inevitably study it in the past tense. The process of looking backward itself inclines us toward arborescence, and there is certainly value in locating the dancing bodies of the past within teleological and genealogical narratives of various kinds (e.g., maiden to wife; images of Greek dance as key resource in the development of modern dance). But those narratives, those “trees,” should also be given room to dance.⁴⁷

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Audience

Naomi Weiss

In Dance Studies, the question of “audience” is focused not so much on who audiences of dance are but on how they respond to a performance and how their responses are choreographed. One especially influential way of broadly characterizing at least one form of audience response is through the concept of kinesthetic empathy or contagion—that is, a spectator’s somatic identification with a dancer’s movements.¹ Indeed, kinesthetic empathy as a framework has been used very productively in several recent discussions of dance and its audiences in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, which have shown how attuned ancient writers and theorists were to this type of response (Alonso Fernández 2015, 2016a; Jackson 2016; Olsen 2017a). However, kinesthetic empathy as a model or frame can run the risk of universalizing spectators’ experiences.² As Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds remind us, an audience’s experience of dance is neither monolithic nor fixed: “spectators’ responses to movement are not produced in a singular manner by the movement alone—a particular quality of movement always producing a particular kind of response—but also by the interpretative strategies with which individual spectators engage with that movement” (2010, 68). The “interpretative strategies” or processes that motivate different levels of engagement, identification, and pleasure among an audience develop from each individual’s own status, gender, cultural knowledge, and numerous other aspects of their identity and lived experience.³ Thinking of audience responses in the plural keeps us alert to how they can be “linked with broader aspects of emotion, admiration, escapism, and sensuality” (50). At the same time, any account of how an audience reacts to dance is always constructed: any survey is formed according to certain agendas and

¹ On “kinesthetic empathy,” see esp. Sklar 2001; Foster 2008 and 2011.

² See esp. Reason & Reynolds 2010, 52-55 and Foster 2011, 155-62 on universalizing conceptions of kinesthesia, particularly in the work of the twentieth-century dance critic John Martin (e.g., Martin 1939).

³ Cf. Sklar 2008 on the “embodied cultural knowledge” that shapes an audience’s reception of dance.

points of interest; even a direct conversation with audience members is shaped by who they are talking to, when, and in what context (51).

It is near impossible to avoid some degree of universalizing when approaching the topic of “audience” (singular) for the vast stretch of time and geography that constitutes the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. While we have numerous depictions of dance in ancient texts and art, the manifold experiences of its individual spectators survive in traces that are always mediated, often in service of broader ideologies regarding particular forms of performance and the ethics of watching them. In large part, then, the audience itself is absent and inaccessible. We can talk only in broad sweeps about who would have watched dance and in what contexts, from an elite man enjoying female acrobatic dancers at a symposium in Athens in the fifth century BCE, to a woman seeing the dancing Salian priests process past in Rome a few hundred years later, to a military veteran at a performance of pantomime in the newly built theater at Timgad in Numidia in the second century CE.⁴ In some contexts, such as choral performances in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, the spectators may seem to have been homogeneous enough for us to draw some general conclusions about how they might have reacted, but, even so, their responses would always have been plural and multiform—and we can only go so far in reconstructing them from the evidence that survives.

In this chapter, I will first provide an overview of what an audience of dance was or could be in ancient Greece and Rome—its various forms, contexts, and degrees of participation in a performance. Inevitably this cannot be entirely comprehensive, but it does demonstrate a huge range of dance spectatorship, which serves as a useful backdrop for the next section, in which I discuss types of audience response. There, taking from Reason and Reynolds the model of a “series of possibilities” (50), I outline how ancient literary sources emphasize particular forms of response: wonder, identification, desire, and the pleasure of escapism. None of these can be taken at face value, nor do they come anywhere near to covering the vast range of possible responses across the many different audiences mentioned in the previous section. Even so, they demonstrate a deep interest in the relationship between dance and its spectators dating back at least to the eighth century BCE and extending into the early Christian church of the fourth and fifth centuries CE. In the final section, I turn more directly to some of the ways in which an audience and its reaction to a performance of dance can be traced and constructed by examining two very different ancient artifacts: the pseudo-Virgilian *Copa*, a Latin poem from the first or early second century CE, and a Paestan red-figure calyx-krater from around 350 BCE. The latter takes

⁴ On the design of ancient theaters and dancing-spaces, see “Space.”

us away from the rest of the chapter's textual focus, providing an example of how material culture—in this case vase painting—can be used to address the question of audience response. Neither the *Copa* nor the calyx-krater presents any sort of straightforward depiction of an audience, nor do they depict any “real” or unfiltered performance. Both look out toward their own reader or viewer as an audience, whose “interpretative strategies” they manipulate. Partly because of their very constructedness, however, they offer productive ways of approaching the question of how an (ancient) audience could experience dance.

Greek and Roman Audiences

As there were many types of and contexts for dance, so there were many kinds of audience. Some were physically demarcated in a theater setting, as many audiences are today. With the spread of tragedy and comedy from Athens across the Greek world in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE came the building of theaters, from Syracuse in Sicily to Ai-Khanoum in modern-day Afghanistan (see “Space”). In Greek theaters, spectators would sit on wooden or stone benches radiating upward and outward from the *orchestra* (dancing space), where the chorus of a play would sing and dance. These were sites of other sorts of dance performance too, such as the *pyrrhichē* (armed dance) and dithyrambs, which were choral song-dances involving fifty men or boys. Audiences might see these not just within the same space but even within the same festival as dramatic choral performances; dithyrambs were a regular feature of the City Dionysia in Athens, for example, at which most of the surviving Classical Greek tragedies and many comedies were first produced. Theaters were also a major site for the performance of the various genres that developed in the Hellenistic and Roman periods—pantomime, mime, and new forms of tragedy and comedy—although there was no permanent theater in the city of Rome until the completion of the Theater of Pompey in 55 BCE. The physical structure of Roman theaters, and the size of audience they could hold, varied widely, from a small roofed *odeon* to huge amphitheaters.⁵

From Athens in the fifth century BCE to Antioch in the fourth century CE, theater-going was a frequent and familiar experience. The sheer physical size of the theaters that remain attests to the popularity of performances within them: for example, the theater at Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, originally built in the fourth century BCE and then expanded some two hundred years later, still

⁵ Hall (2008, 14) demonstrates this point nicely by emphasizing the variety of theater venues in Pompeii.

regularly holds audiences of some 13,000 today; the Theater of Pompey had a capacity of up to 20,000. The actual composition of these audiences varied and can be hard to reconstruct. While those in later periods and in other parts of the Greco-Roman world often comprised a more diverse population, it was long assumed that those at the Theater of Dionysus in Classical Athens would have been almost exclusively citizen men. Scholars now generally agree that some women and slaves may also have been present, at least on the hillside above, where presumably they would experience a performance very differently from those sitting close to the *orchestra*. There would also have been *metics* (resident foreigners) and non-Athenians who traveled to the city specifically for the festival.⁶ But even if much of the audience was relatively homogeneous in terms of being predominantly male and free, it was not restricted within this group to the wealthy in the way that ballet, for example, often is today. On the contrary, spectatorship of theater performances came to be subsidized by distributions of public funds called *theōrika*, which enabled poorer citizens to attend, though the front seats would be reserved for particular officials, public benefactors, celebrities, and foreign dignitaries.⁷ When the Theoric Fund, along with other democratic institutions, was dismantled under Macedonian rule in the late fourth century BCE, theater audiences in Athens became less socioeconomically diverse.⁸ Admission was usually free in Roman public theaters, but the arrangement of audiences tended to be “representative of the hierarchy of the state... itself,” with particular seating areas assigned to certain classes, as well as to magistrates, priests, and professional groups (Csapo & Slater 1994, 306); under legislation introduced by Augustus, women were moved to the back of the theater to sit with slaves and the poor (T. Jones 2008, 27).⁹

Dance spectatorship was by no means, however, an experience restricted to the formal space of a theater. Epinicians (victory songs for athletes), dithyrambs (large group songs for Dionysus), *paian*s (celebratory hymns linked to Apollo), *partheneia* (maiden songs), and various other types of danced choral songs occurred in other public spaces in ancient Greece, such as a city’s agora or by a temple, where spectators were more likely to be on the same plane as the performers, rather than looking down upon them as in a theater. Some surviving choral songs situate their audience both in a particular space and in close relation to the performers’ dance. A surviving fragment of a *partheneion* by the seventh-century BCE Spartan poet Alcman focuses on the choreography

⁶ On the attendance of women and foreigners at theatrical productions in Classical Athens, see esp. Roselli 2011, 118-94.

⁷ On the beginnings of the Theoric Fund in Athens, see esp. Roselli 2009. For a useful overview of the theater’s seating arrangements, see Csapo & Slater 1994, 289-90.

⁸ On the fate of *theōrika* in the late fourth century BCE, see esp. Roselli 2011, 108-109.

⁹ On the social ordering of Roman theaters, see Wallace Hadrill 2008, 144-210. See also “Space.”

of someone with the generic name Astymeloisa (“Care of the City”) within the space of the assembly (ἄγων, fr. 3.8 *PMG*) in Sparta. Tracking Astymeloisa’s movement away from its own maiden group, the chorus repeatedly refers to the larger community of watching male citizens—the *asty* (city, referenced by her name), *damos*, and *stratos*—whom she approaches or even dances through, marking her entrance into adulthood through marriage (Peponi 2007). Her other audience here is the chorus itself, which expresses longing for her to “take [their] tender hand” (ἀπαλᾶς χερὸς λάβοι, 80) and return to their dance.

Many dances by their very nature did not have any one specific, stationary group as their audience but rather were seen by people in different spots throughout an urban space. Our earliest account of such an experience on the part of the onlooker appears in the *Iliad* amid one of the city scenes depicted on the shield Hephaestus makes for Achilles: there brides are being led “through the city” (ἄνὰ ἄστυ, 18.493) with loud wedding songs, instrumental music, and young men who “whirl” as they dance (ἐδίνεον, 494), while “the women/marveled, each standing in her doorway” (αἱ δὲ γυναῖκες / ἱστάμεναι θαύμαζον ἐπὶ προθύροισιν ἑκάστη, 495-96). The ecphrasis then shifts immediately to the men witnessing a lawsuit in the assembly space (497-508). This passage suggests that female spectators hover between private and public spheres, watching and admiring as the hymeneal celebrations go past, on the point of either following them or going back inside, while the men move more freely as they witness these various aspects of civic life.¹⁰ It also gives the impression more of an incidental audience than of one gathered for the specific purpose of watching a performance. A much later, nonfiction source also reminds us of such incidental spectators, and of how they may often have been from subaltern populations. A papyrus from Roman Egypt (*P Oxy.* 475), dated to 182 CE, records how a slave boy called Epaphroditos died from leaning too far out of a window to see the castanet dancers performing in front of his master’s house. These dancers were hired for a village festival—a public event that many could attend, but some may only have been able to sneak glimpses from more private spaces (see the Introduction to this volume).

There are numerous examples of processions or *pompae* involving dance in both Greece and Rome. One of the biggest in the ancient Greek world was the great *pompē* that opened the City Dionysia in Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. We can imagine spectators lined along the route of roughly 2.5 km from or near the agora to the Sanctuary of Dionysus; probably many gathered on the Agora Hill to watch the parade go around the altars and shrines below.¹¹

¹⁰ Cf. Kurke 2021, 105-106 on these women “hovering on the threshold of public performance” (106).

¹¹ For a reconstruction of this route, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 107-109; Csapo 2015, 93-105. Csapo points out that it was unlikely to have started within the agora itself (96-97). On dance and processional routes, see also “Space.”

However, the numbers involved—a recent estimate is that, at the height of the Athenian empire, over 8,000 people would have participated in this procession, many of them in choruses—suggest that this was an event in which a significant portion of the civic body participated, moving with the parade rather than watching passively (Csapo 2013). In Rome, huge crowds gathered several times a year for the *pompa circensis*, a parade from the Capitol through the Forum to the Circus Maximus, which included multiple choruses of armed dancers followed by choruses of men playing satyrs, who apparently “mocked and mimicked [the former’s] serious movements, turning them into laughter-provoking performances” (κατέσκωπτον τε καὶ κατεμιμοῦντο τὰς σπουδαίας κινήσεις ἐπὶ τὰ γελοιότερα μεταφέροντες, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.10).¹² Religious processions involving song and dance were also a common experience in the streets of Rome, “a space constantly traveled by bodies in ritual motion” (Curtis 2021, 84). These included the Salian priests who carried the shields of Numa around the city while singing the *carmen saliare* and performing a sacred dance called *tripudium*.¹³ Some processions could physically involve their spectators—perhaps none more so than the *Lupercalia*, when a group of young naked Roman men ran through the city in an improvised but nevertheless choreographed form, striking passersby with goat-skin thongs called *februa* (Plut. *Vit. Rom.* 21.5). As Zoa Alonso Fernández has demonstrated, such “arbitrary interaction with passers-by demonstrates the agency of the *Luperci*, who incorporate other bodies as ‘co-actors’ in the ceremony and transform traditional modes of spectatority... into choreographic participation” (2016b, 324).¹⁴

Audiences could also be much smaller and more exclusive than those at such large-scale civic events. Dance was a regular feature of Greek *symposia* and Roman *convivia*, where it was one part of a variety of entertainments and sensory stimuli—“eating, drinking, viewing, smelling, hearing, laying, touching, and seducing” (Alonso Fernández 2022, 181). At a symposium, the intended audience was typically free, wealthy men, but others would have been among the spectators as well, including household slaves and female sex workers, who might themselves be dancers and musicians but could also recline with the men on the couches, as they are shown doing in many Greek vase paintings. By late Republican Rome, it was common for elite women also to dine in *convivia*, though practices varied widely (Dunbabin 2003, 23). In these contexts, the distinction between spectator and professional dancer was marked in terms of social status, so that the position

¹² On the dancers or *ludii* (or *ludiones*) in the *pompa circensis*, see Dupont 1993; Latham 2016, esp. 31–35. See also Dessì 2020, 438–39 on the role of music and dance in Roman *pompae*.

¹³ On *Salii* and their dance, see esp. Alonso Fernandez 2016a; Prescendi 2022, as well as the Introduction.

¹⁴ See also Alonso Fernández 2017, 55 on such “kinetic involvement,” especially on the part of female spectators.

of the banqueters in relation to the performers reinforced the hierarchy between them. At the same time, in such an intimate environment, where dancers were often sex workers, the potential for contact between spectator and dancer was explicit. Archaic and Classical Greek vase paintings often play with this potential through their own medium. For example, within a thin red circle at the bottom (tondo) of an Attic red-figure kylix (drinking cup, Fig. 27) are a naked male *aulos*-player and a female dancer, almost naked save for a skimpy leopard-skin costume, who moves and claps *kerotala* (castanets) to her partner's instrumental accompaniment. As observed in the chapter on "Body," this sort of depiction of an *orchēstris* "underscores the allure and the notional availability of their eroticized bodies." This cup was designed for the symposium itself; as a symposiast drank his wine, the image of these eroticized bodies (the *aulos*-player as well as the dancer) would come tantalizingly into view, available for his consumption like the bodies entertaining him with actual music and dance.¹⁵

These various types of audience should not be understood as discrete categories. On the contrary, a symposiast in Classical Athens, for example, would also most likely have been a regular theatergoer, while many in a play's audience would also regularly attend symposia. The two contexts come together in the mute body of the *orchēstris* (female dancer) brought onstage in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*, as well as that of Euripides' castanet-playing Muse in *Frogs*; presumably also in the title character of *The Orchestris*, a lost fourth-century BCE drama by the comic playwright Alexis.¹⁶ When other characters comment on the sexual nature of these women's performances, they draw on the experience of audience members who have themselves enjoyed such sympotic bodies. In Rome, pantomime dancers would regularly perform at dinner parties, while various sources attest to how those who were audiences of pantomime in theaters and amphitheaters attempt to become dancers themselves in private.¹⁷ Velleius Paterculus, for instance, describes how the senator Plancus danced the role of the sea-god Glaucus at a *convivium*, naked save for blue body paint and a fish's tail (2.83.2, see "Objects"). Seneca plaintively claims that "the private stage resounds through the whole city" (*privatum urbe tota sonat pulpitum*, *QNat.* 7.72.3) as husbands and wives compete over who can best imitate pantomimic dances.¹⁸ Thus not only would audiences in these different spaces cross over,

¹⁵ Cf. Olsen 2017b, 23. On dancing bodies as objects for consumption, assimilated to food and wine, see esp. Alonso Fernández 2022, on the Roman *convivium*.

¹⁶ Olsen 2017b, 26.

¹⁷ The performance itself could be the same in both spaces: see Macrobius *Sat.* 2.7.16-17 on how the dancer Pylades performed the part of mad Hercules for Augustus in his dining hall (*in triclinio*), just as he had for the Roman people in the theater.

¹⁸ Private theatrical performances could be on quite a large scale: see Csapo 2010, 168-204. On "dinner theater," see also C. Jones 1993.



Figure 27: Red-figure kylix depicting *aulos*-player and dancer, c. 510 BCE. London, British Museum 1843,1103.9 Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum. (Same as Fig. 24)

but, like at the *Lupercalia*, the boundary between audience and performer was not always so clear-cut, as I shall discuss in more detail below.

Possibilities of Audience Response

The sorts of literary sources on which I have been focusing here do not allow us to detail precisely how the many different audiences across this vast expanse of space and time actually reacted to performances of dance. We are, however, able to identify some—though by no means all—of the forms of audience response on which ancient writers dwell, whether because they are describing ideal or paradigmatic ways of experiencing dance or because they are

propounding the dangers of watching it in the first place. But it is worth noting at the outset that an audience does not always have a direct response to dance, or at least that, despite what the sources discussed below may suggest, the dance itself is not necessarily its primary focus. Ovid reminds us of a spectator's other possible preoccupations in his *Ars Amatoria*, when he advises a man hoping to seduce a girl to concentrate on her at the theater, follow *her* movement ("when she rises, you will rise; so long as she sits, you will sit," *cum surgit, surges; donec sedet illa, sedebis*, 503), and hint at his own intentions by applauding the dancers whenever they portray lovers (502). Aristotle demonstrates how "when we take only slight pleasure [in something], we do other activities" (ποιουῦμεν ἄλλοις ἡρέμα ἀρεσκόμενοι, *Eth. Nic.* 1175b) by giving the example of the nuts and dried fruit that were distributed at the theater in Athens: people eat these most of all, he claims, "when the performers are rubbish" (ὅταν φαῦλοι οἱ ἀγωνιζόμενοι ᾧσι). Some of a theater audience's activities beyond watching the performance itself are also outlined in the opening scene of Aristophanes' *Acharnians*. The protagonist, Dicaeopolis, ostensibly describes his behavior while waiting for a meeting at the assembly to begin, but in doing so provides multiple potential models for the audience's own response to a theatrical performance, all of which suggest a lack of focus on the play itself (Weiss 2023, 58-59): "I sigh, I yawn, I stretch, I fart, / I'm bored, I write, I pluck my hair, I count" (στένω, κέχηνα, σκορδινῶμαι, πέρδομαι, / ἀπορῶ, γράφω, παρατίλλομαι, λογίζομαι, 30-31). When he goes on to say that he is looking out toward the countryside, longing for peace, he mimics how a spectator, especially one in an open-air theater rather than a black-box auditorium, could be looking away (ἀποβλέπων, 32) from the performance area entirely. Aristophanes essentially acknowledges that his audience may be more preoccupied with worries about Peloponnesian War than with the play right in front of them.

Such a lack of focus on the performance itself is very far from depictions of archetypal dance, especially choral dance, in ancient Greek poetry, which tend to highlight reactions of concentrated wonder. In the *Odyssey*, when a group of boys dances for Odysseus in Phaeacia, he "watches the glimmerings of their feet and wonders in his heart" (μαρμαρυγὰς θηεῖτο ποδῶν, θαύμαζε δὲ θυμῷ, 8.265). As Leslie Kurke has pointed out, such a response of wonder is often tied to a chorus' metallic radiance—a particular sort of visual appeal connected to the frequent assimilation of choruses in Archaic Greek poetry "to precious or top-rank objects, the products of divine or uncanny crafting" (2012, 224). In the account of the Nereids dancing in the home of their sea-god father in Bacchylides' Ode 17, for example, Theseus is "awe-struck" (ἔδεισε(ν), 102) by their "gleaming limbs" (ἀγλα- / ᾧν... γυίων, 103-104), their golden ribbons that "twirl" (δίνηντο, 107), and "liquid feet" (ὕδροῖσι ποσσίν, 108). The audience of Bacchylides' song may thus be urged to similarly admire the movements of the bodies performing

it (Weiss 2018, 31-32). Like *Odyssey* 8, this scene, with its focus on the dancers' brightness, also points to the synesthetic experience of dance as a blend of light and movement. The adjective ὑγροῖσι ("liquid") even suggests a tactile quality, as if Theseus can feel the rippling form of these underwater bodies.¹⁹

Wonder can also be tied to a spectator's sense of participation in a dance, suggesting a twofold reaction of distance and identification (Kurke 2012, 2013). In the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, the Delian maidens, described as a "great wonder" (μέγα θαῦμα, 156), are said to represent people's voices and movements so well that "each one might think / that he himself is giving voice" (φαίη δέ κεν αὐτὸς ἕκαστος / φθέγγεσθ', 163-64). According to this ideal model, such song-dance brings about a merging of audience and chorus, as "the line separating the act of performing from the act of attending tends to disappear" (Peponi 2009, 67).²⁰ As Sarah Olsen has shown, such a fusion is bodily as well as acoustic, with the verb φθέγγομαι suggesting not just vocality but "somatic and kinesthetic experience" (2017a, 160). Olsen connects this passage with other accounts in Greek literature of forms of kinesthetic empathy and suggests that, while not itself a choral song, the poem "models an ideal and correct experience of spectatorship for its listener" (2017a, 162). In such accounts, as in the Homeric hymn, an audience's response is typically uniform; individual acts or affects on the part of either performers or spectators are elided to augment the social order and cohesion that a chorus so often symbolizes.²¹ But, across different texts, we can still find variation in terms of what such kinesthetic empathy could encompass. For example, in Plato's *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger describes how older men enjoy looking at dance and remembering their own youth "now that our former nimbleness is leaving us" (ἐπειδὴ τὸ παρ' ἡμῖν ἡμᾶς ἐλαφρόν ἐκλείπει νῦν, 657d). We can see points of contact between this observation and Reason and Reynolds' account of some of the former dancers in their study, whose experience of "inner mimicry" while watching dance included conscious reflection on the fact that they could no longer do it themselves (2010, 60).²²

It is not a great jump from this conceptualization of choral spectatorship to the idea that an audience might adopt the same behavior or character as that represented by a dancer, musician, or actor. Indeed, the extensive discussion of *choreia* in *Laws* centers on the relationship between the type of

¹⁹ Cf. "Movement" on the "choreographic potential" of the adjective *liquidus* in Latin.

²⁰ Cf. Kurke 2012, 224-26 and 2013, 147-49.

²¹ On this conceptualization of *choreia*, see, e.g., Wilson 2003; Weiss 2020, 164-65; Olsen 2021, 15-18.

²² On this passage in relation to kinesthetic empathy see Olsen 2017a, 165-67. She also draws on Sappho's Tithonus poem (fr. 58 West), in which the speaker "experiences a kind of corporeal identification with the performers, a sensation made bittersweet by her simultaneous awareness of age and debilitation" (p. 164).

choral performance and the character of its performers, who are also, in a city essentially constructed through chorality, its spectators.²³ This is closely tied to ideas about music too: in the eighth book of *Politics*, Aristotle, harking back to Plato's discussions in both the *Republic* and *Laws*, dwells at length on how everyone listening to a piece of music becomes συμπαθεῖς (*sympatheis*, 1340a13)—that is, they adopt affects corresponding with those of the music's rhythms, tunings, and melodies. Plato and Aristotle herald a long line of ancient thinkers concerned with this particular potential of dance, especially pantomime. Usually they are concerned with dance as a source of contagion outwards as opposed to a more bidirectional sense of identification between performer and spectator. The second-century CE writer Lucian, in his dialogue on pantomime, humorously plays with this idea, along with broader Platonic doctrines about mimesis and the attainment of philosophical knowledge: the main character Lycinus claims that the best dancer seems to reflect the state of individual audience members, such that each one “recognizes his own traits, or rather sees himself in the dancer as if in a mirror” (γνωρίζη τὰ αὐτοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ ὥσπερ ἐν κατόπτρῳ τῷ ὀρχηστῇ ἑαυτὸν βλέπη, *Salt.* 81).²⁴ But Lucian/Lycinus also assumes a more traditional stance shortly afterwards in the same dialogue, when he recounts how a dancer playing Ajax represented the hero's madness through “an excess of imitation” (ὑπερβολὴν μιμήσεως, 83), with the result that the audience “went entirely mad with Ajax” (ἅπαν συνεμεμήνει), copying his movements as they “leapt and shouted and tore their clothes” (ἐπήδων καὶ ἐβόων καὶ τὰς ἐσθῆτας ἀνερρίπτουν). Christian writers often declaim the dangers of such kinetic contagion, emphasizing the immodest behavior that pantomime can urge upon its audiences. We find an early example of such polemic in the work of Tatian, a Syrian convert to Christianity writing in the late second century CE, who declares “I do not wish to share the disposition of [a dancer] nodding his head and moving contrary to nature” (τῷ νεύοντι καὶ κινουμένῳ παρὰ φύσιν οὐ βούλομαι συνδιατίθεσθαι, *Ad Gr.* 22 = *PG* 6.837). As Ruth Webb points out, the verb συνδιατίθεσθαι suggests that Tatian “is thinking primarily of the danger that the spectator will be moved to imitate the dancer's gestures, with the further implication that movement and emotion are, in fact, indissociable in the dance” (2008, 87).

The possibility of audiences coming to “share the disposition” of a dancer—or, to use Aristotle's term, being *sympatheis*—can underlie the idea of erotic

²³ See Peponi 2013b on the blurring of performer and audience, and the absorption of the latter into the former, in *Laws*.

²⁴ On Lucian's subversion of Platonic tradition here, see Schlapbach 2018, 132–41, focusing on the motif of cosmic spectatorship. On the particular form of kinesthetic empathy suggested here, see Olsen 2017a, 167–69.

desire as a primary response.²⁵ In the Archaic Greek cultural imaginary, desire is frequently mentioned as part of a chorus' pleasurable impact. For example, on Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, in addition to the hymeneal procession that I mentioned above, is a scene of young men and women dancing; their chorus is described as "desirable" (ἱμερόεντα, 18.603) for the large crowd that stands around, delighting (τερπόμενοι, 18.605) in the performance. As Kurke points out, it is the chorus' quality of erotic desire "that produces pleasure in the human spectators... and draws them like a magnet to form a larger circle around the circle of dancers" (2012, 226). But later Greek and Roman texts tend to dwell instead on the potential for nonchoral dancers to physically affect their audiences because of their explicitly erotic styles of movement and, if the dance is representational, their erotic content.²⁶ We have already seen how desire and sexual contact were bound up with a spectator's response to a dancer in the context of a symposium or *convivium*. At the end of Xenophon's *Symposium*, written around 380 BCE, a Syracusan troupe's proto-pantomimic performance in this context of a dance about Dionysus and Ariadne is so convincing and absorbing that "those who were unmarried swore they would marry" (οἱ μὲν ἄγαμοι γαμεῖν ἐπώμνυσαν), while the married men rush home to have sex with their wives (9.7).²⁷ Roman writers frequently refer to erections as a response to especially expert female dancers: in the *Priapea*, for example, the dancer Quintia, "delight of the people, very famous in the great circus" (*deliciae populi, magno notissima circo*, 27.1) and "skilled in moving her vibrating buttocks" (*vibratas docta movere nates*, 2), asks Priapus to ensure that "her crowd always be erect, following the god's example" (*tentaque ad exemplum sit sua turba dei*, 6); in *Amores* 2.4 Ovid employs the same motif, claiming that the skilled performance of a group of dancing girls could turn even Hippolytus, famous for his chastity, into an erect Priapus (32).²⁸

Such constructions cannot, of course, be used to map out the actual lived experience of dance among Greek or Roman audiences. We must be aware of the ideological patterns at work—and all the more so when texts produced by and mostly for men focus on female audiences, who, so critics of pantomime claim, are especially susceptible to dance's erotic impact. The Roman poet Juvenal, for instance, provides a satirical account of how, when the dancer Bathyllus does

²⁵ On desire (*eros*) in Greek discourses on aesthetics, especially regarding auditory pleasure, see Peponi 2013c, 95-153.

²⁶ On this particular concern, see esp. Lada-Richards 2007, 71-74; Webb 2008, 168-87.

²⁷ On this scene in the context of contemporary ideas about representation, see Schlachbach 2018, 169-200. On its place within Xenophon's dialogue as a whole, see Schlachbach 2018, 178-83; also Olsen 2021, 168-70.

²⁸ On such accounts of *doctae puellae*, see Alonso Fernández 2015.

a performance of Leda, some women's orgasmic responses mean that they are unable to control their bodies at all: "Tuccia has no command over her bladder, Apula moans / [as if in sex, suddenly, and miserably long]" (*Tuccia vesicae non imperat, Apula gannet / [sicut in amplexus, subito et miserabile longum]*, 6.64-65).²⁹ As Alonso Fernández demonstrates, here "the physicality of the dancer transcends the realm of the stage, leading the women in the audience to experience bodily reactions that reflect the connections already commonly made between dance and sex" (2015, 317). A third woman, Thymeles, whose name means "stage" in Greek, instead "pays attention" (*attendit*, 66) and "learns" (*discit*); the verb *attendere* also means "becomes erect," suggesting that she is learning from Bathyllus not just a way of dancing herself but a new, masculine form of sexual agency.³⁰ If we wish to locate any "actual" or at least potential spectator in this vignette it is not Tuccia, Apula, or Thymeles but the poem's (male) audience or reader, for whom these women produce a vividly titillating performance, equivalent to the one Bathyllus performs for them within the narrative itself.

Erotic desire was by no means the only type of pleasurable response to dance detailed in imperial and early Christian literature. Some of Reason and Reynolds' subjects' "interpretative strategies" are the "hopes, rewards, and pleasures they want to find within a work" (2010, 66); they talk of the escapism of watching dance and the increased calmness and joy that come from being focused on others' bodies. Similarly, the fourth-century CE writer Libanius talks of how, thanks to the "pleasure" (*τέρψις*) involved in "examining the placing of feet, the gesture of hands, the harmony of movements" (*ἐξετάζοντες θέσιν ποδῶν, φορὰν χειρῶν, νευμάτων... εὐαρμοσίαν*, *Or.* 64.57) at the theater, we are able to get relief from our daily troubles and more easily face them.³¹ This may appear to be a somewhat authentic account of his own experience, though it has a clear rhetorical agenda, delivered within a speech that, like Lucian's *On Dance*, is defending dancers against some of the attacks commonly made against them. Lucian's Lycinus also talks of the curative effects of dance, but more in terms of being swept up in the mythical story being represented than as a result of focusing on the performer's somatic skill: "dance is so enchanting that if a lover enters the theater, he becomes right-minded by seeing all the evil

²⁹ Even if interpolated, line 65 elaborates on the already clear implication that this is an orgasm. The names Tuccia and Apula, far from referencing real women, are both "ironically suggestive of chastity" (Watson & Watson 2014, 97).

³⁰ See also Alonso Fernández 2015, 317 on how the verb *attendere* in *Juv.* 6.66 points to "the embodied knowledge of the [female] dancer as a dangerous form of social interaction." Cf. Lada-Richards 2007, 74 on female spectators of pantomime "slipping out of their role of passive and desired objects into the impermissible domain of male active and desiring objects."

³¹ On this and similar comments on dance among Christian writers, see Webb 2008, 169-70.

results of love” (οὕτω δὲ θέλγει ὄρχησις ὥστε ἂν ἐρῶν τις εἰς τὸ θέατρον παρέλθοι, ἐσωφρονίσθη ἰδὼν ὅσα ἔρωτος κακὰ τέλη, *Salt.* 79).

We can see, then, both continuities and differences in ancient Greek and Roman ideas about how an audience might respond to dance. This brief survey does not give us access to any sort of unfiltered, firsthand accounts—though these, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, are also always constructed in some way. Ancient authors tend to foreground particular forms of response for particular forms of dance, but the range here alone reminds us of how, just as there is no one uniform audience, so the experience of dance is always manifold. Its plurality results from the many different “interpretative strategies” that can be in play for any one spectator. The sources discussed above suggest—though by no means straightforwardly—some of these strategies: the sorts of cultural knowledge and discourses, as well as, perhaps, individual desires and expectations, that could shape an audience’s response to dance.

Constructing an Audience

So far, in mining ancient sources for different types of audience and audience response, I have mostly prioritized these over depictions of dance itself. We can also, however, approach an ancient audience—or its absence—by working outward from representations of dance, not just searching within them for traces of spectatorship but analyzing how they construct external audiences of their own. In this final section, I analyze two artifacts from this perspective. Despite differences in medium, period, and provenance, they both play with the relationship between the dancing they depict and the reader or viewer’s own spectatorial position.

(i) The Pseudo-Virgilian *Copa*

In the *Copa*, the 38-line Latin elegiac poem already discussed in the chapter on “Body,” the reader is led into the multisensory environment of a tavern through the dancing body of a Syrian hostess (*Copa Surisca*, 1). The poem begins with a synesthetic tableau of her performance *App. Verg. Copa* 1-4):

*Copa Surisca, caput Graeca redimita mitella,
crispum sub crotalo docta mouere latus,
ebria fumosa saltat lasciuia taberna
ad cubitum rancos excutiens calamos.*

A tavern-keeper, Syrian girl, her head bound with a Greek headdress,

skilled at moving her vibrating hips to the castanet's beat,
 drunkenly, sexily, in a smoky tavern dances,
 shaking her elbow to the sound of noisy pipes.

The opening four lines center on this figure's movement, but also set it amid various other sensory stimuli: the Greek costume; the castanets and "noisy" (*raucos*) pipes; the wine-induced drunkenness; the smokiness of the tavern itself; and the possibility of sexual contact with this "sexy" (*lasciva*) dancing girl.³² Amid all these the dancer offers several movements and musical possibilities: she can "move her vibrating hips" (*crispum... mouere latus*, 2) to one instrumental accompaniment and shake her arms to another. As Alonso Fernández points out, the phrase *sub crotalo* in line 2 could also be understood in a physical sense as "under the castanet"—that is, the dancer could be hitting the instrument against her hips (2015, 310 n. 35). Line 4 could instead be rendered "shaking noisy pipes against her elbow," thereby avoiding the dislocation of the preposition *ad* from its object. Some scholars reject this due to the "obvious choreographic difficulties" involved in dancing, playing castanets, and piping all at the same time (Morgan 2017, 86).³³ I think it possible, however, to retain here this most immediate sense and understand the scene not as a single snapshot but as a moving image, capturing multiple visual, kinetic, acoustic, tactile, even olfactory elements of her performance.

Following this arresting tableau, the rest of the poem is in the form of a direct address to the reader, positioning him as a weary traveler passing by, to be tempted by the many pleasures available within this roadside tavern. Like the dancer herself, presented at the outset without any narratorial filter, these are all immediately available for enjoyment and consumption: almost every other line in lines 5-24 begins with *sunt* or *est* ("there are/is"), once with the added vividness of the interjection *en* (9), as if the wine, food, music, flowers, and intimate spaces are right there for the reader to see; the repetition of *hic* ("here," 20, 31) and *nunc* ("now," 27, 28) underscores the impression of their material presence. From line 25 there is a switch from the third person to a string of imperatives, choreographing the addressee's activities as he lies down and drinks (29-30), entwines his head with roses (32), and finally gets to "tug at a tender girl's lovely lips" (*formosa et tenerae decerpens ora puellae*, 33). Then, abruptly, the addressee shifts, from the reader starting to follow the example of the erect Priapus (mentioned at 23-24) to one who has an "old-fashioned supercilious frown" (*prisca supercilia*, 34), or indeed anyone "who is concerned

³² On the poem's sensory abundance, see Henderson 2002, esp. 259-61.

³³ Cf. Tarrant 1992, 336-38.

about tomorrow” (*qui crastina curat*, 37) rather than the here and now—the *hic* and *nunc*. The narrator tells both such people to get lost (*pereat*, 34, 37).

The entire poem is essentially the *copa*, both heralded by and contained within her body as described in the first four lines. It is, to use John Henderson’s phrase, “body-talk” (2002, 260), where “the dancer’s dance will figure the writing ahead” (258). The *copa*’s performance not only encapsulates all the sensory pleasures that the *taberna* offers (Henderson 2002, 258-61; Morgan 2017, 88-90) but even appears to produce the address that follows: there is no verb of vocalization introducing the direct speech; instead the only verbs from which it could lead are ones of movement (*saltat*, *excitans*). The *copa*’s dancing, shaking, vibrating body in effect is the invitation itself. And without narratorial mediation or an internal interlocutor, the exchange constructed by this inviting body is one between it and the reader. Given the scene’s connections to pantomime (Morgan 2017, 98-100), we might even see it as a sort of parodic literalization of the common idea that pantomimic dancers can “speak” with their bodies—and that their audiences can “hear” what they see.³⁴

Thus the audience of the *copa*’s performance exists outside the poem itself: it is the reader who, caught by her body, is to see the vivid delights she offers, one after the other, and then to retrace them all as he is brought to the climax of kissing a (the?) girl’s lips. While the poem constructs in detail the reader’s experience of the *copa*’s body and the pleasures of her *taberna*, however, it also allows for some range of responses. On the one hand, the shift at the end to someone with a disapproving attitude at least theoretically opens the scene up to and preempts different types of readers/audiences. On the other hand, a reader’s own degree of—to use Deidre Sklar’s phrase—“embodied cultural knowledge” could affect his particular reactions or lack thereof (2008). For one who has frequented such a *taberna*—to the extent that we may take this depiction as reflective of a Roman reality—the multiple options of music, space, drink, and food allow for multiple points of contact with his own lived experience—including, perhaps, his enjoyment of a dancing girl in this sort of intimate environment.³⁵ But the *copa*, her *taberna*, and the sorts of erotic pleasure she can provide there are also constructed from multiple performance genres, including mime, pantomime, and other sorts of entertainments offered in more private

³⁴ On this idea, expressed across many sources regarding the clarity of dance, see esp. Lada-Richards 2007, 44-48; Schlapbach 2018, 92-103; Gianvittorio-Ungar & Schlapbach 2021, 8-9. It repeatedly comes up in Lucian’s *On Dance*, such as in the anecdote about the Cynic philosopher Demetrius: upon seeing a pantomimic dancer perform the story of Ares and Aphrodite, he apparently exclaimed “I hear what you’re performing, man! I don’t just see it, but you seem to me to be talking with your very hands!” (ἀκούω, ἄνθρωπε, ἃ ποιεῖς· οὐχ ὁρῶν μόνον, ἀλλὰ μοι δοκεῖς ταῖς χερσὶν αὐταῖς λαλεῖν, 63).

³⁵ For such a positivist reading of the poem, see, e.g., McCracken 1932; Grant 2001. Such approaches and their shortcomings are usefully summarized in Morgan 2017, 90-93.

convivial settings, as well as their literary and artistic representations (Morgan 2017).³⁶ In this respect she is a hybrid body, to be especially enjoyed by anyone familiar with her orchestric and intertextual allusions, even while her “body-talk” is clear to all.

(ii) The Lipari Acrobat Krater

My second case study, a west Greek comic vase painting from the fourth century BCE,³⁷ offers within the one image multiple types of audience and audience response, even while it ultimately positions the viewer as the audience of the entire theatrical performance. This elaborate scene decorates one side of a Paestan red-figure calyx-krater (mixing bowl) from Lipari (an island off the north coast of Sicily), dated to 360-350 BCE and attributed to the Painter of Louvre K 240 (Fig. 28).³⁸ Right in the scene’s center is a female acrobatic dancer, performing a handstand on a stool. Her femininity is marked not only by white paint, which contrasts starkly with the background’s black glaze, but by her nakedness; she wears just some golden anklets and a band around one thigh.³⁹ Her particular position, with legs bent over her head, resembles that of other artistic representations of acrobats both in pottery and in the form of terracotta and even bronze figurines (van den Hoek & Herrmann 2013, 183-87; Compton-Engle 2015, 35). She and three other figures are on an elaborately curtained stage platform. To one side is Dionysus, seated on a chair and directly

³⁶ See, e.g., the marked similarities between the *copa*’s movement and that of Quintia, “skilled in moving her vibrating buttocks” (*vibratas docta movere nates*, 27.2) in the anonymous *Priapea* poem discussed above. On similarities between these poems, see Alonso Fernández 2015, 310-12; Morgan 2017, 96-97. Alonso Fernández focuses on both Quintia and the *copa* as *doctae saltatrices* (cf. *docta* in *Copa* 2), professional female dancers whose “erotic labor” exerts agency in performance and over the texts in which they appear. See Henderson 2002, 264-75 on the poem’s Virgilian, elegiac, and other intertexts.

³⁷ South Italian and Sicilian comic vases from the late fifth through late fourth centuries BCE used to be called “phylax” vases on the assumption that they showed the sorts of buffoonish performances referenced in both Pollux (4.149) and Athenaeus (14.621f). For a helpful summary of this now outdated view and arguments against it, see Dearden 2012, 273-74.

³⁸ Lipari, Museo Archeologico Luigi Bernabò Brea 927. On such acrobats as dancers, see Olsen 2021, 164, with reference to Xen. *Symp.* 7.2.

³⁹ On the thin lines painted on her legs as representing jewelry rather than diaphanous leggings or shorts, see Conventi, D’Ignoti, & Lazzarin 2020, 126-27. The only other surviving vase showing an acrobat with a comic actor is a Paestan red-figure skyphos in Oxford, dated to 350-325 BCE (Fig. 36, “Objects”). There the acrobat is in a similar pose atop a potter’s wheel; a male comic character holds the cord that turns it (*PbL*² 94, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum AN1945.43). The acrobat has a bare torso but wears shorts and leggings, though with her pubic area still visible. On this image see esp. Marshall 2000.



Figure 28: Paestan red-figure krater depicting scene of *phlyakes* with acrobat, 360-350 BCE. Lipari, Museo Eoliano. © 2022. Photo Scala, Florence – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Att. Culturali e del Turismo.

facing the dancer, as if her primary spectator.⁴⁰ He lifts his right hand to his head, a gesture that suggests a powerful response to her performance: wonder at

⁴⁰ While Dionysus often appears with a comic actor on Paestan vases from the fourth century BCE (Hughes 2003, 285-86), this depiction is unusual for showing him on a stage: see Taplin 1993, 33-34.

her skill, but perhaps also desire.⁴¹ At the same time, we might see his bent arm in line with her feet as a form of kinesthetic empathy—a sort of spontaneous mirroring of her carefully poised limbs. In his left hand he holds both his thyrsus and, unusually, an *aulos*. The pipes, painted white like the girl, rest against his lap; in a sexually suggestive gesture, they point directly from there toward her mouth. Perhaps the *aulos* is the god's own, but the connection between it and the girl implies that she may also provide musical and sexual entertainment, assuming the role of *aulētris*—female *aulos*-player and also, often, sex worker—as well as an acrobatic dancer (perhaps, in an extraordinary choreographic feat, all at once).⁴² To her other side are two comic characters, both wearing masks and padded costumes. The older one crouches down to get a better look at the dancer's midriff,⁴³ while the other casually leans against a post (marking the edge of the stage), looking upward, perhaps toward her knees but without the avid interest of his partner. The heads of two other figures, shown in profile wearing white female masks, appear near the krater's rim, looking toward each other through the stage building's windows on either side of the acrobat's bent legs. Such "window-women" appear in other comic theater scenes on fourth-century Sicilian and Paestan vases (Hughes 2003, 284–85). Along with the stage, masks, and costumes, they mark the scene as a theatrical one.

We should not view this image as a snapshot of an actual theater production. Produced by an artist who emigrated from Sicily to Paestum in Southern Italy, it may allude to various performance traditions at once, both local and connected to the Greek mainland: comedy, mime, and other forms of popular entertainment, all categories that may have been quite fluid (Dearden 1995, 84–

⁴¹ Green 2012, 321 sees this posture as a mark of admiration. In sympotic scenes men often raise arms in this way in response to an *aulētris*.

⁴² Paestan pottery is unusual in the extent to which it links Dionysus himself with the *aulos*: Castaldo & Rocconi 2012, 351. He is also shown holding the instrument on an oenochoe: Paestum, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 104378. Hughes goes so far as to imagine that the god was actually playing the *aulos*: "the viewer is to suppose that he played an accompaniment until the girl sprang into her handstand, whereupon he dropped his *aulos* to his lap, and clapped his right hand to his head in a conventional gesture of dismay" (2008, 13). Acrobatic dancers are often shown playing with other objects in Attic and South Italian art (e.g., wine cups, swords, a kottabos stand) while doing a handstand: see, e.g., Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 81398 (*BAPD* 213444); Berlin, Staatliche Museen F3489; Genoa, Museo Civico di Archeologia Ligure 1142 (*BAPD* 9004269). On these see esp. van den Hoek & Hermann 2013, 180–87; also Hughes 2008, 8–10. In Xenophon's *Symposium*, a dancer performs somersaults over swords (2.11) and Socrates contemplates the "wonder" (θαῦμα) of a dancer "performing marvels" (θαυματουργήσιν) by writing and reading aloud atop a potter's wheel (7.2). See "Objects" for further discussion of dancers, props, and acrobatics.

⁴³ Cf. Trendall & Webster 1971, 128: he seems to be "gazing with gloating eyes at the naked body of the tumbler." Dearden (1995, 83) suggests that he is standing on the base of a potter's wheel and is merely "seeking to learn the skills for a future performance of his own."

86 and 2012, 282).⁴⁴ The various iconographic markers of theater, as well as the appearance of Dionysus not as a character but as the god himself, remind us that the painting represents a theatrical performance without claiming to show exactly what an audience might see onstage.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the spectatorial dynamics depicted in this scene can offer some traces of a viewing experience. The inclusion of Dionysus gestures to how a sense of his presence—indeed his spectatorship as the god of theater—could often be an important element of theater-going in the Greek world, especially when plays were performed as part of festivals in his honor; it simultaneously gestures toward the experience of Dionysus, as god of wine, in the context of the symposium, for which the krater was notionally designed.⁴⁶ On the other side of the krater are a maenad and satyr, who reinforce the object's Dionysian themes. At the same time, the exchange between the god and the dancer also provides a possible model of audience response, whether in the theater or in the symposium, where she might also perform—potentially even in the same space as the krater itself.⁴⁷

While Dionysus shows wonder tinged with desire, the older comic figure exhibits a more explicitly pornographic reaction. In this respect he is reminiscent of the guard in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria*, who praises each part of the dancing girl's naked body ("Wow, what firm tits... what a fine ass!" οἴμ' ὥς στέριπο τὸ τιττί'... καλὸ γέ τὸ πυγή, 1185-87) and exhibits his erect phallus in response (1187-88). The vase painting may thus allude to a particular sort of comic scene, but it simultaneously provides another possibility for how a male audience might enjoy this female body, especially in the more intimate environment of a symposium. As in the Aristophanic scene, this comic figure's reaction "[reinforces] the sexual nature of her dance and [emphasizes] her status as an available commodity: an eroticized body he can both watch and touch" (Olsen 2017b, 26). Such dynamics are emphasized by the sharp contrast between the availability of her white, naked flesh and his body's coverings—his padded clothes and leery male mask.

⁴⁴ Pushing against recent arguments for primarily Attic origins for west Greek comedy, Boshier (2021, 107-59) shows how Sicilian and, by extension, Paestan theater-related vase painting suggests strong native dramatic traditions within Sicily, in addition to sophisticated interaction with those of mainland Greece. Cf. Dearden 2012. On the mix of genres shown on the Lipari krater, see also Castaldo & Rocconi 2012, 347.

⁴⁵ Hughes (2003) argues that Paestan comic vases were painted from the artists' memories of theater in Sicily and not related to any actual performances in Paestum itself. For a critique of this argument see Boshier 2021, 146-47. See also Green 2012, 322 on the vase's "ambiguity between the actuality of a performance in a theater and the further reality involving the god's presence."

⁴⁶ Ultimately the vase, which was found in Lipari tomb 367, had a funerary function.

⁴⁷ On the vase painting's connection to the symposium, see Boshier 2021, 141.

The remaining figures in this scene offer further possibilities of audience response. The younger comic man is apparently not so interested in the dancer's performance at all. The "window women" may primarily be understood as iconographic markers of theater, although there have been attempts to identify them as actual characters within a drama.⁴⁸ Even so, they too are spectators here, providing a contrast with the male characters who are able to enjoy the dancer up close. The women inside look on more voyeuristically, their removal from the action mirroring how such a performance is primarily for an audience of men, even if other, more subaltern members of society look on—we may in this regard remember the poor slave boy in Egypt peering from the window to see the castanet dancers outside.

The spectator of the entire scene, however, is the krater's viewer, whom it positions as if they are a member of a live audience, looking at the stage and the figures upon it. As for a performance of dance, we cannot reconstruct this object's ancient viewers in any definite way. The site of the krater's production (Paestum) and its provenance (Lipari) remind us that they were not in any neat sense "Greek," since both regions were under the control of native Sicilian and Italic (Lucanian) populations. We may conjecture that the krater was used in symposia prior to being deposited in a grave, in which case some of its viewers/users would be men enjoying the Dionysian pleasures of wine, music, and possibly even dance; the krater reflects all these pleasures while also evoking Dionysus' other sphere of theater. At the same time, we may wonder about its other audiences—women in the position of the dancer herself as sexualized commodities; slaves helping to mix the wine; family members of the man who took the krater to his grave. Whatever the context in which a viewer would encounter this object, the scene draws on their familiarity with multiple forms of performance, from the intimate dancing of a female sex worker in a sympotic setting to a large-scale mime and comedy.

Finally, we, too, are this krater's audience, even if most of us see it as a flattened image on a page rather than a large, physical object in the round. Despite the immense gap between us and its ancient viewers, let alone the audiences of the sorts of performances it represents and evokes, it is in this confrontation, as in the confrontation between us and the *Copa*, that we may trace something of the experience of ancient Greek and Roman dance. As we have seen, both the poem and the Lipari krater are productive for thinking about ancient audiences and audience response precisely because they do not represent any one audience in a straightforward way. By so explicitly directing its reader's journey through the dancing body of its own text, the *Copa* reminds

⁴⁸ Trendall & Webster (1971, 128) identify them as "the hetaira... and the kore." On the mask types and difficulties of such identifications, see Bernabò Brea & Cavalier 1997, 42.

us of how constructed and filtered any account of audience response may be. The Lipari krater offers a great plurality of potential experiences of dance, even while the (human) audience itself, both within the image and beyond it, remains absent. Thus in one sense it provides, in visual, material form, something equivalent to what I set out to do in the preceding section of this chapter, which in turn followed Reason and Reynolds' approach by outlining a "series of possibilities." The many possible audiences of dance in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds will always remain as elusive and intangible as the bodies of the performers, but they leave imprints for us to uncover.

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Movement

Zoa Alonso Fernández

How to differentiate dance from movement? What are the defining principles we use to demarcate the actions of a moving body? How do we determine whether these belong to the realm of dance? In the first years of the twenty-first century, dance and performance scholar André Lepecki (2006) began to question the “ontological” relationship between dance and movement—a relationship that had sustained for centuries the indisputable notion of what was and was not dance. In a monograph that has, since then, redirected the course of scholarship on contemporary dance, Lepecki argued that the choreographic strategies employed by artists working in the nineteen-seventies, -eighties, and -nineties challenged “dance’s identity as a *being-in-flow*,” to the point that the certainties about dance’s relationship to movement were “being exhausted” (2006, 1). In order to reevaluate the definition of dance, Lepecki analyzed a set of contemporary works and tactics that purposely criticized the “constitutive elements of Western theatrical dance” (4). These contemporary strategies included, among others, spasmodic tics that threatened the viewers’ capacity to “enjoy dance,” the use of stillness and slowness, the toppling of the vertical plane of representation, and a deliberate use of the ground—crawling, stumbling—as opposed to the uninterrupted lightness that had characterized “dance” since the rise of Romantic ballet (4). Outside the proper limits of “dance,” these practices were explicitly grounded in the choreographic: they reconfigured dance’s relationship to its “coming into presence” (5) and, at the same time, offered us a way of rethinking the agential and political potential of dance in terms of the body.¹

For Lepecki, these methodological questions were also linked with the distinctive temporality of dance and its relation to movement. In examining the modern project of recording movement, Lepecki pointed to one of the “first” Western attempts to merge dance and writing in the *Orchesographie* (Thoinot

¹ On the methodological notion of “choreography” and the values (social, political, historiographical, etc.) ascribed to it in the past three decades of dance scholarship, see Foster 1995, 1996, 2009, and 2010. See also Franko 1995; Martin 1998.

Arbeau's dance manual, 1589 CE) and explored the “melancholic” attitude that lay behind the author's acknowledgement of dance's ephemerality—that is, the alleged need for his written treatise. Lepecki argued that, through Arbeau's “fusion of the two actions” (the Greek *orchēsis*, “dance”, and *graphein*, “to write”) into one word, he created “a new mode of understanding the coming into presence of the dancing subject [...] the mournful perception of the temporality of the present as an ongoing, ceaseless passing away of the ‘now,’” something that informed Western reflections on dance and performance at least until the end of the twentieth century (123).² To eradicate this melancholic dimension of dance theory, namely the idea that dance's present disappears as soon as it is performed, Lepecki proposed “to track the coexistence of multiple temporalities within the temporality of dance, to identify multiple presents in the dancing performance, and to expand the notion of the present [...] from its entrapment in the microscopy of the now”, thus insisting on the value of stillness as a means to access another sense of duration (131).³

In this chapter, I too propose to discuss questions of movement and time alongside the idea of stillness and the ways it allows us to think about ancient Greek and Roman dance. For the most part, the study of dance in Greek and Roman antiquity has tended to align with the modern attempt to “recuperate” and reconstruct the patterns of hypothetical choreographies for the sake of creating a “faithful” impression of the past,⁴ or even to trace dance lineages that aim at demonstrating the existence of unbroken genealogical traditions of, primarily, folk practices and performances.⁵ Understandable though they are, these exercises of positivistic description and emulation disregard important aspects of the social and cultural role of dance at any given historical time, while indirectly perpetuating the “mournful” academic perspective that Lepecki denounces in his criticism.⁶

² Lepecki collects theoretical definitions from the last decades of the twentieth century, such as those by Siegel 1972 and Phelan 1993, arguing that they also share an “overarching *melancholic affect* in relationship to the dance event” (2006, 128).

³ For the idea of a multiplicity of presents extending towards past and future and the coexistence of temporalities defining this sense of duration, Lepecki elaborates on the theories of Bergson 2004 and Deleuze 1994. Franko & Richards (2000), for their part, elaborate on the movement between present and past in historical performances and speak about the palpability and elusiveness of the past.

⁴ For the case of ancient Greek and Roman dance, Naerebout (1997) offers a thorough overview of these modern attempts and the methodological issues they raise.

⁵ On this cf. also Naerebout 2010, 43–44.

⁶ Franko (2015, 11–12) provides what is perhaps the most interesting reflection on these issues, focused, indeed, on the reconstruction of dances between the 16th and 18th centuries, for which there are numerous treatises, with written indications and dance notations. For the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, Naerebout (2020, 118) insists: “we can say quite a lot about the position of

For this reason, I will turn to Lepecki's observations on stillness and movement in order to explore, instead, the potential of the ancient sources—most of them static artifacts “in essence”—to activate the kinetics of dance in the Greek and Roman worlds. Attending to how ancient textual and visual sources present dance as something that generates sensations, affects, and memories, rather than focusing on the melancholic search for and reconstruction of lost choreography, I intend to approach ancient dance movement from a set of unconventional strategies that foreground the value of its multiple temporalities, with all the implications that this entails at the cultural level.⁷ In this vein, the first part of my chapter will provide a general overview on the mobility that lurks behind Greek and Roman writings from various genres and time periods, even when they cannot tell us anything about the actual dance steps and movements that they reference.

In the second section, I will then proceed to an analysis of one of these texts, a Latin epigram from Martial's *Liber spectaculorum* (c. 80 CE) in which a group of swimmers carry out a very particular form of aquatic spectacle. By focusing on this poetic description—one that recounts a non-danced collective performance, which turns out to be, nevertheless, highly choreographed—I will demonstrate how the implicit kineticism of these verses provides valuable information on the cultural dimension of dance in antiquity and on the ways in which the ancient Greeks and Romans conceptualized the making of movement into dance.

In the final part of my chapter, I return to stillness and immobility—the quintessential anti-definition of “dance”—in order to reflect on the representation of movement as an interesting artistic problem. In this section I will turn to a cluster of monuments and objects—a group of columns, a knucklebone-shaped terracotta, and a marble krater—to perceive how even when they are not actually dancing (that is, moving in a literal sense), the characters represented in these artifacts are still able to move, be moved, and mobilize.

Greek and Roman theorization of dance brings out an array of interesting issues that directly intersect with our contemporary concerns. Ancient discussions of the tensions between dance's ephemerality and materiality, absence and presence, transience and concreteness (Schlapbach 2018, 3; Peponi 2020), can be set alongside the questions that scholars like Lepecki have stressed

dance (singular) in society, and its functions within a ritual context, but we will not be able to speak about dances (plural), let alone the actual realizations of such dances in performance.”

⁷ Peponi (2020) provides an important reflection for the understanding of dance's temporality in ancient Greek and Roman sources, specifically as it relates to lived aesthetic experiences and the inner and durational narratives these imply.

in the past few decades. Yet the richness and variety of the ancient sources are such that it may be better to let them speak for themselves.

Exceptional Motility

I begin my exploration of latent textual mobility by approaching a series of ancient Greek and Roman writings that demonstrate the performative capacity of words when mediated through the materiality of actions, thereby revealing the potential of our apparently static sources in evoking and stirring an array of movements. In particular, I want to open this section with a collection of ancient Greek compositions that are explicitly connected to the realm of play. These consist of a series of folk songs that are usually included in compilations of ancient Greek lyric poetry and which comprise a number of scattered verses, uttered in the form of rhythmic dialogues, with the characteristically inventive and colorful quality of children's games (Page 1962, 464; Rodríguez Adrados 1980, 97-98). Perhaps the most famous piece of these poems is the so-called song of the *chelichelonē* (tortoise game), mentioned in the Introduction to this volume as an illustration of choral and choreographed dance-like play “wherein young girls sit, run, chant, and jump in prescribed ways” (Olsen 2021a, 4).⁸ Other examples of these melic lines are the lyrics of the *chytrinda* (game of the cooking pot), the *chalkē muia* (bronze fly game), and the more straightforward exhortation to the sun whenever a cloud passed over (PMG 875 and 876a-b; Poll. *Onom.* 9.113 and 122-23)⁹:

(i) τίς τὴν χύτραν;
ἀναζεῖ·
τίς περὶ χύτραν;
ἐγὼ Μίδας·

Who [has] the pot?
It boils.
Who [goes] around the pot?
I, Midas.

(ii) χαλκῆν μυῖαν θηράσω·
θηράσεις, ἀλλ’ οὐ λήψει·

⁸ On this see Griffith & Griffith 1991; Karanika 2012.

⁹ A good lexicon to ancient games can be found in the online archive elaborated by the ERC Research Project “*Locus Ludi*. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity,” directed by V. Dasen.

I'll hunt the bronze fly.
You'll hunt it, but you won't catch it.

(iii) ἐξεχ' ὦ φίλ' ἥλιε.
Come out, dear Sun!

Thanks to the thorough explanations provided by the second-century CE scholar Julius Pollux, the reader of these songs is, to a certain extent, informed about the kinds of movements they entailed as instances of embodied expression (Smyth 1900, 503-504; Rodríguez Adrados 1986, 101). Surely, a silent and mental approach to the bare lines of the games—especially in translation!—would puzzle anyone who tried to interpret what they meant without knowing, for instance, that the game of the “cooking pot” was arranged in a circle, that the “bronze fly” was an ancient version of the modern “blindman’s buff,” and that the children used to clap when asking the sun to shine out.¹⁰ Yet even in the absence of Pollux’s instructions, the words of these songs, their musicality, their rhythmic patterns, their dialogic structure, their parallels to utterances in either near or remote cultures,¹¹ or all these features together may disclose the imprints of their inherent motility.

While I am not attempting to reconstruct the individual movements (plural) of ancient bodily practices like these, the need to perceive and take into account the kinetics (uncountable) of either informal, spontaneous, or choreographed motion in Greek and Roman writings motivates the overview that I propose in this section, an effort which foregrounds, in turn, a still-pending task within the fields of ancient Greek and Latin philology and literary studies.¹²

The need to acknowledge movement has been increasingly more recognized by scholars dealing with ancient material culture and visual arts.¹³ The more immediate component of vision as a bodily act has triggered, already, kinesthetic contemplations of the moving figures in ancient pots and reliefs that facilitate phenomenological understandings of Greek and Roman dance practices,¹⁴ including, of course, the more creative artistic engagements with

¹⁰ Similar to the “Marco-Polo” game, the “blindman’s buff” or “blindman’s bluff” is a game in which a blindfolded player tries to catch and identify the rest of the players, who are not blindfolded.

¹¹ A very interesting approach that illuminates this view from the historical and anthropological perspective can be found in Karanika 2014, on female work songs.

¹² The “performative turn” of classical scholarship in the latter half of the twentieth century has since then allowed for a neater focus on aspects of performance in ancient Greek and Roman literary cultures, but there is still much to be acknowledged about the potentiality of the moving body as a creator of meanings. On this question, see Curtis 2017, 27, with bibliography and notes.

¹³ On these approaches, see the recent works by Angliker & Bellia 2021 and Laferrière forthcoming, with bibliography and references.

¹⁴ See, for instance, Smith 2016 and 2021; Warford 2019; Laferrière 2021; Weiss 2023.

these sources by dancers and choreographers from different time-periods.¹⁵ In the case of texts, movement is, of course, thematically present, but the highly aseptic and intellectual process that dominates our acts of reading has usually prevented us from approaching the evidence in more somatic ways.¹⁶ For example, descriptions of dance practices in literature provide us with important clues about certain positions and patterns for movement. Plato's reflections on the exercises comprising the pyrrhic (armed or weapon) dance reveals, among other things, that the dancers imitate the ways in which blows and darts are to be avoided and also the modes in which an enemy is to be attacked (*Leg.* 815a). These quick movements and defensive positions, represented as well in the visual arts (Delavaud-Roux 1993), can be compared with other descriptive accounts, such as those by the Classical Athenian historian Xenophon (*An.* 6.1.5) and the Roman-era antiquarian Athenaeus (1.15e), thus allowing us to visualize a more or less accurate version of the performance of armed dances in ancient Greece (Ceccarelli 1998). In addition, however, the information provided by these narratives can also give us a sense of how these texts might be perceived by ancient readers with a degree of corporeal memory and knowledge of the pyrrhic dance, whether as practitioners or spectators (Ceccarelli 2004). And this is exactly why the sources' implied mobility is a necessary feature to identify and process when exploring ancient dance.

Similarly, the literary ecphraseis of other well-known communal dances, like the *geranos* on Delos and the *Lusus Troiae* in Rome, have already opened the door to alternative readings of the most famous accounts on these labyrinthic dances, namely Callimachus (*Hymn* 4.306-13) and Plutarch (*Vit. Thes.* 21-22) for the former, and Virgil (*Aen.* 5.548-603) for the latter (Curtis 2017, 175-83; Olsen 2021b).¹⁷ The awareness that there is an explicit connection between how the authors perceived a dance's whirling movements and how they deployed them for the sake of their writing (anaphora, ring composition, strophic schemes, alliterations, etc.) highlights the interconnectedness of dance and literature in the Greek and Roman worlds (Schlapbach 2018; Olsen 2021a).

In the past few years, in fact, we have seen new treatments of the written sources that have facilitated deeper understandings of the kinetic aspects of texts. The growing interest in the study of ancient song and dance has invited us, for

¹⁵ The most famous examples of this artistic endeavor would be, without a doubt, the modernist approaches to ancient Greek dance by dancers like Loïe Fuller, Isadora Duncan, and Vaslav Nijinsky, all inspired by ancient images and monuments. Cf. Smith 2010; Albright 2010; Manning 2015; Dorf 2019. For the present day, see also Crawley 2020 and 2021.

¹⁶ On this reflection, cf. Butler & Purves 2013; Olsen 2021b; Grethlein, Huitink, & Tagliabue 2020. Slaney 2017 offers examples of practical approaches to reading dance in ancient texts.

¹⁷ On these dances, see also the Introduction, "Geography," and "Politics."

instance, to examine the performative traces of ritual compositions that have come to us in the form of epigraphic inscriptions and that we know were expected to be re-enacted in performance (Day 2010). These include, among many others, the Cretan hymn to Zeus (*IC* III.2.2; *CA* 160-2), known as the Palaikastro Hymn, an anonymous *paian* (hymn, often to Apollo) to Asclepius from Erythrea (*CA* 136-8), and the archaizing Roman *carmen arvale* (*CIL* 6.02104).¹⁸

In these inscribed poems, the performers usually call out for an epiphanic appearance of a deity, who is summoned to merge with the group. In the Palaikastro hymn, the boys call upon young Zeus with the utterance Ἵω μέγιστε Κούρε χαῖρε μοι, Κρόνιε, [...] Δίκταν ἐς ἐνιαυτὸν ἔρπε καὶ γέγαθι μολπᾷ<ι> (“Oh, supreme *kouros*, hail, son of Kronos [...] Come to Dicte at the turn of the year and take pleasure in our song!” *IC* III.2.2.1-6). The call to Asclepius is, in turn, accompanied by the usual *paianic* cry to his father Apollo (ἦ Παιάν, Ἀσκληπιὸν, | δαίμονα κλεινότατον, “iē Paian, Asclepius, most most famous divinity,” *CA* 136.7-8) and, in the case of the Latin *carmen*, the Arvals open their hymn with an invocation to the dancing Lares (*enos Lases invate!* “Help us, oh Lares!” *CIL* 6.02104.1). In all these occasions, the dancers also describe the kind of movements they expect the god to perform in their company ([θόρε κές] πόληας ἀμῶν θόρε κές ποντο<π>όρος νᾶας | θόρε κές ν[έος πο]λείτας, “and leap to our cities and leap to our seafaring ships, and leap to our new citizens,” *IC* III.2.2.29-30; δ’ ἐπίνισσο | τὰν ἐμὰν πόλιν εὐρύχορον, “come to my city with broad-dancing places,” *CA* 136.19-20; *limen sali, sta berber!* “leap to the border, take your position!” *CIL* 6.02104.4-5) and shout a number of self-exhortations that enhance the hymn’s unifying dynamics of content and form. In addition, these self-referential exhortations are presented as refrains and ritornelli that organize the song’s rhythmic schemes in call and response, thus pointing to various forms of choreographic structure, either between the chorus leader and the group or between semi-choruses.¹⁹

From the modern perspective, we could somehow infer the kinds of impressions that the ancient readers had when confronting these inscriptions, as the texts interacted with the surrounding space of specific cult sites where previous rituals had taken place. Through the actual experience of reading, the liveliness of language’s kineticism reverberated in the viewers’ bodies and had an impact —visual, mnemonic, imaginary—on various levels of the

¹⁸ See Alonge 2005 for the Cretan Hymn; LeVen 2014, 283-94 for the *paian*; Scheid 1998, 295-96 for the *carmen arvale*. See also the Introduction to this volume.

¹⁹ On antiphonal choreographic interaction between single actors and choruses (conventionally known as *amoibaia* in choral songs), see Peponi 2007. For the *carmen arvale*, see also Alonso Fernández 2021.

performance, whether with active practitioners or with visitors and passersby (Day 2010; Estrin 2019).

In a similar vein, evidence of spontaneous folk songs and ritual processional chants offer us comparable instances of performativity, yet this time through the filter of literature (Karanika 2014; Curtis 2021). The Roman poet Catullus' poem 61, for example, provides important clues to how a real wedding song might have been perceived and transformed into a well-composed, that is, literary, *epithalamium*. Here, Catullus adapts the modes of Greek and Roman nuptial traditions and fills his pages with performed movements and rhythmic ceremonial cries (Catull. 61.1-15):

*Collis o Heliconii
cultor, Vraniae genus,
qui rapis teneram ad uirum
uirginem, o Hymenaeae Hymen,
o Hymen Hymenaeae;* 5

*cinge tempora floribus
suaue olentis amaraci,
flammeum cape laetus, huc
huc ueni, nuneo gerens
luteum pede soccum;* 10

*excitusque hilari die,
nuptialia concinens
uoce carmina tinnula,
pelle humum pedibus, manu
pineam quate taedam.* 15

Oh dweller of Helicon Mount, stock of Urania, you who seize a tender virgin and carry her off to a man, o Hymenaeus, Hymen! o Hymen Hymenaeus! Crown your temples with flowers fragrant with sweet marjoram, take your flame-colored veil and come happy over here, wearing a reddish yellow slipper on a snow-white foot! And having been roused on this cheerful day, singing wedding songs with a tinkling voice, strike the ground with your feet, and shake the pinewood marriage-torch with your hand!

In this case, the strophic refrain typical of the Greek wedding song (*hymenaios*) appears to be embedded within the poet's description of a bridal ceremony with the usual group of Roman friends celebrating together (*concinens*) and chanting (*o Hymenaeae Hymen | o Hymen Hymenaeae*). Yet as part of that very description, Catullus exhorts the Greek god of marriage (Hymenaeus) to come and assimilate with those who are singing to the point that we read, in the

end, a series of written instructions for the performance that sets in motion the echoes of past lived songs (*pelle humum pedibus, manu | pineam quate taedam*, “strike the ground with your feet, and shake the pinewood marriage-torch with your hand!” 14-15). In Catullus’ literary project, the Roman wedding tradition offers, among other things, a narrative framing for exploring his own themes with regard to myth, poetry, and even imperial expansion (Dufallo 2021, 183-86), but the popular songs of Hymenaeus set the pace of the poem’s rhythmic structure, ensuring a subliminal engagement with the readers’ cultural heritage.

Lyric genres like *hymenaios*, and especially the poetry of Archaic and Classical Greece, constitute, in fact, a crucial reference when tracking the imprints of dance and movement in literary sources. As exemplary vestiges of the actual practice of *choreia* (communal song-dance), compositions like the *paian*, the *partheneion* (maiden song), the epinician (victory song), and other Greek choral songs reveal the aesthetic power of choreography in symbiotic relation to words (Peponi 2009; Kurke 2012; Olsen 2017; Bocksberger 2017; Weiss 2020). To exemplify this relationship, Plutarch, writing in Greek in the first century CE, evokes a famous *hyporchēma*—a composition where the chorus represented the words in dance—that was attributed either to Pindar or to Simonides (*Quaest. conv.* 747b-c; Schlapbach 2018, 36; Peponi 2015, 214). In speaking about dance and the other arts, Ammonius, teacher of Plutarch and one of the characters in his *Table Talk*, claims that this composition was so transparent as an example of the unity of dance and poetry that even when recited without any intended accompaniment of dance, the audience’s bodies would be moved like puppets, as by strings.²⁰ While this is obviously a late and biased interpretation of the most choreographic example of the ancient Greek lyric forms, Ammonius’ portrayal of the *hyporchēma* points again towards the interconnectedness of Archaic dance and poetry and towards the perception that bodily movement was an integral aspect of ancient Greek literary culture (Schlapbach 2018, 38).

Another relic of the conceptual fusion between orchestric motion and poetic language is the terminology of Greek and Roman metrics (David 2006, 22). The basic rhythmic unit that formed part of a verse was called “foot” (ποῦς in Greek, *pes* in Latin), precisely because of the actual implication of this body part in beating the time. Each foot varied in the number of syllables and the length of its vowels, and the ancient grammarians used to explain the etymology of its various combinations through the image of several dance steps. For example, the Roman Terentianus Maurus stated, at the end of the second century, that the pyrrhic pattern (two short syllables) had to do with

²⁰ For this image’s earlier Greek antecedents, see Kurke 2013 on Plato’s *Laws*. See also “Objects.”

the pyrrhic dance (1366-67, Cignolo 2002, 98-99), whereas the fourth century Diomedes (3.479) related the Cretic foot (long, short, long) to the dance of the Curetes in Crete. In drama too, the Binding Song of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (371) or the parody of Euripides' choral lyric in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (1329-33) provide substantial evidence on how "feet" were both metrical and bodily features of rhythm (Prins, 1991, 188; Weiss 2022).²¹

Ancient Greek lyric and dramatic poets were genuinely concerned with the formal composition of their choruses. As Sophie Bocksberger emphasizes when describing the poets as choreographers, they would "create all three components of μουσική" (that is, poetry, music, and dance) as they believed that each of these contributed "in equal measure to shaping and conveying the meaning of a piece to the audience" (2017, 165). According to Athenaeus (1.21e-f), Aeschylus was the first tragic poet to organize his choruses without the help of a dance teacher (ὀρχηστοδιδάσκαλος) and to compose the dance steps and corporeal attitudes for these choruses (cf. also Ar. fr. 696 *PCG*).²² As part of this practice, the poets might have relied on the study and acquisition of *cheironomia*, as the art of gesture, and other techniques to enhance corporeal postures and movements.²³ However, given that the members of the choruses were regular citizens without professional skills, most processes of training and rehearsal must have been more specifically oriented towards the comprehension of those rhythms, spatial arrangements, and steps that constituted the building blocks of a choreography.²⁴

With all this in mind, the study of drama turns out to be, perhaps, the most useful mechanism to think about the value of dance's mobility in ancient performance culture, even if we cannot access the patterns and form of dramatic dance precisely. On the one hand, as I have anticipated, meter offers interesting clues to the relationship between the internal structure of choral odes—division of strophe/antistrophe/epode—and the motion of the chorus through space (Wiles 1997, 87-132; Dale 1968; see "Space"). On the other hand, it also reveals something of the nature of dance's movement—whether

²¹ See also Sapsford 2022, 201-206 on Sotadean meter and kinaidic movement.

²² The other known dramatic poets of the sixth and fifth centuries BCE—Thespis, Phrynichus, Pratinas, and Cratinus—were also reported to have themselves integrated their plays with dancing and even to have acted as teachers of anyone who wanted to learn dance (Athen. 1.22a).

²³ On occasional and professional dance training, see the Introduction to this volume. In later times, it is usually believed that part of the practice of *cheironomia* was akin to the oratorical training, as the use of gesture was integral to the speech's delivery (ὁπόκρισις or *pronuntiatio*). See Cic. *De or.* 3.83; *Brut.* 225; Quint. *Inst.* 1.11.18-19 and 11.3.88-89; Gell. 1.5.3. On this see Rocconi 2022, with bibliography.

²⁴ Sophocles, in fact, who was said to have written a treatise *On the Chorus* (*Suda*, Σ 815), may have well reflected on all these aspects when conceiving his choral odes.

it was fast or slow, clipped or smooth, energetic or calm (Olsen 2021a, 52-72; Gianvittorio-Ungar 2021; Moore 2021 and 2022; Weiss 2022).

In addition, the texts that survive tend to contain vivid and self-referential descriptions of movement, especially when the chorus dances. An emblematic example of choral kinetics in tragedy is the Binding Song of the Erinyes in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (307-96), a moment in which the chorus of these dark figures sings and dances on stage to assure that Orestes will not escape from them (Prins 1991; Weiss 2018, 42-43; see also "Politics"). In this performance, the Erinyes' song draws attention to the nature of their own performance, as the violent movements they describe are simultaneously enacted in dance. The language and rhythm of the ode "dramatize the physical movements of the chorus," and so the audience sees a curse that is "both enacted and embedded" in words (Prins, 1991, 188).

Other examples of perceived choral mobility can be found in Sophocles' *Antigone* (1146-52), the hymeneal song of Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* (1036-57), and perhaps every choral scene of the *Bacchae* (Henrichs 1994-95 and 1996; Bierl 2013; Andújar 2018), not to mention the choral repertoire of Aristophanes' comedies (Zimmerman 2021). In all these cases, the chorus explicitly refers to its own musical performance and strengthens the links between its choreographed movement and the meaning of its words. At the same time, these self-referential expressions are best understood as part of a complex process of "choral projection," which enables us to understand dramatic movement and choreography in wider and more abstract ways (Henrichs 1994-95). These include instances in which members of the chorus "locate their own dancing in the past or the future, in contrast to the here and now of their immediate performance" (Henrichs 1996, 49), or when they "project their collective identity onto groups of dancers distant from the concrete space of the orchestra and dancing in the allusive realm of the dramatic imagination" (Weiss 2018, 15). Thus, just as the visual representations in vases and pots allude to suggestive choral constructs (Weiss 2020), the words in these odes generate sophisticated images of movement in the spectators' imagination that enhance, expand, and complicate the real movement on stage (Weiss 2018 and 2020).

So, while dance is the form of non-verbal language *par excellence*, it also offers a creative resource for dramatists to experiment with their own writing (Olsen 2021a, 3). Outside the realm of the chorus, tragic and comic compositions reveal traces of solo dance as well, especially in scenes "in which an actor's monody coincides with significant choreographic language and kinetic references" (Olsen 2021a, 53). The literary representation of these particular dances provides us with a strong sense of choreographic movement that develops, complements, and disrupts the well-established choral imaginaries

from Archaic and Classical Greece (Olsen 2021a, 15-18). Yet, for the most part, it is also nearly impossible to confirm and reimagine the form that such dances took. Assuming that an actor might include specific gestures and movements in his monodies and other moments of solo acting, we may infer that there was a certain choreographic control on the part of the poet and/or the performer, similar to the processes for designing the choral building blocks. However, it might be more probable that these instances of individual dance manifested themselves in the here and now of the spectacle as examples of self-produced (spontaneous) choreographies.

We do not know how much room for improvisation there was in ancient Greek and Roman theater, but it is possible that the irreverent and parodic elements of comedy created further occasions for the un-rehearsed creation of movement. The case of the Roman playwright Plautus is notable in this regard, especially when he draws upon earlier forms of Italian drama.²⁵ The feasts enacted or described in his comedies, as well as the movements that distinguish behavioral traits of his stock characters are, indeed, excellent indicators of the range of mimetic gestures and actions an actor could have at his disposal, all characterized by a strong sense of exaggeration and openness (Taladoire 1948; Moore 2012 and 2022). Paradoxically, however, this sort of choreographic spontaneity could have grown more articulated and frequent with the actors' gradual process of professionalization and the likely acquisition of improvisational techniques.

In speaking of spontaneity, the more informal practice of dancing, either at dinner parties or in athletic training, could also avoid the burden of pre-arranged patterns. And, in the context of religion, the expected rigor of ritual choreographic schemes still allowed for some freedom of movement and expression. The fourth-century Roman grammarian Servius, commenting on a verse of Virgil's *Georgics* (1.347-50), reveals an awareness of the distinction between the "rambling movements" of improvised dances at a cultic celebration (Virgil says *motus incompósitos*, "non-arranged movements"), and those other choreographies that came "from a skill" (*ex arte*). According to Karin Schlapbach, Servius's distinction contains, in fact, an aesthetic judgement—these are not only "not-choreographed" movements but rather "inelegant" or "rough"—so the apparent dichotomy of his statement would be pointing to the "sliding scale of skillfulness" that characterized ancient dances "according to different occasions, functions, and practitioners" (2021, 509-10). Yet, at the most basic level, the comment reveals the significance of non-choreographed

²⁵ On the forms of early Roman theater, see the Introduction. See also "Space."

dances in ancient Greek and Roman cultures and their distinctive role in the cultural imaginary of dance.

In escaping the fixity of rules, the imprints of improvised movements in our sources turn out to be as elusive as the kinetics of the nursery rhymes and folk songs I collected at the beginning of this section. While it is true that not every dance in Greek and Roman antiquity needed choreography, the fact that these dances depended on individual choices and contextual factors makes us wonder once again to what extent it is valid to look for the lost movements of ancient dance practice and how we can track, instead, Lepecki's multiple temporalities of dance on the basis of the evidence's incipient motility. To accomplish this task, perhaps the best approach is to ponder, in each case, the evocative, referential, and imaginary aspects that transformed a movement into a dance. Yet, in the context of ancient Greek and Roman dances, this will always be more easily identified in examples of coordinated movement.

Coordinated Movement

My inquiry into the perception of dance movement in Greek and Roman antiquity thus continues with an image of highly synchronized motion. The passage I am about to discuss exemplifies the intricacies that we have encountered in exploring the exceptional motility of texts and prompts a constructive reflection on the value of stillness in its relation to dance. Attending closely to the blending of Greek tradition and Roman innovation, fluidity and rigor, stability and change, I will, in this section, turn to a poetic description of a choreographic spectacle, which is not yet fully portrayed as a dance, at least to a modern reader (Mart. *Spect.* 30 [26], trans. Coleman):

*Lusit Nereïdum docilis chorus aequore toto
et uario faciles ordine pinxit aquas.
fuscina dente minax recto fuit, ancora curuo:
credidimus remum credidimusque ratem,
et gratum nautis sidus fulgere Laconas
lataque perspicuo uela tumere sinu.
quis tantas liquidis artes inuenit in undis?
aut docuit lusos hos Thetis aut didicit.*

5

A well-trained troupe of Nereids was frolicking all over the surface and decorating the compliant water with various formations. The menacing trident had a straight prong, and the anchor a curved one: we believed in the oar and we believed in the ship, and the star—the Dioscuri—shining its welcome to sailors, and the broad sails billowing in distinc-

tive folds. Who designed such amazing tricks in the limpid waves? Either Thetis taught these feats, or else she learnt them.

Written to celebrate one of the marvels at the Flavian Colosseum in Rome, this short epigram forms part of Martial's *Liber spectaculorum*, a collection of thirty-six poems interweaving the images of the amphitheater as a newly inaugurated building (80/81 CE) and the various displays it could hold at a time when the Roman culture of spectacle was at its peak.²⁶

The verses above describe an aquatic display, an outstanding “number” (*lusus*, 8) that a troupe of women (*chorus*, 1) perform as if they were the mythical Nereids or even simply characterized as such (Coleman 2006, 212; Berland-Bajard 2006, 103-28). The swimmers follow a strict choreographic scheme, which is both appealing and pleasant for those who attend the performance. The variety of patterns and the actors’ skillfulness are conspicuously presented as the result of a refined technique, an original artform (*artes*, 7) that is still hard to define.

From a cross-cultural perspective, a composition like this becomes an excellent entry point for interpreting how the ancient Greeks and Romans conceptualized dance practice and how the aspect of movement—whether on earth, in the air, in stillness or in the water—can be of use when considering the complexity and capacity of Greek and Roman understandings of dance. These are, I suggest, significantly broader than the restrictive ideas of dance that we, from a modern perspective, may possess—that is to say, the notion of rhythmical movements by a person or group to the sounds of music, within a given space, and typically following a set sequence of steps.²⁷

As we have observed, the poem does not explicitly depict the Nereids’ bodily show as a dance. The generic *lusit* (“was frolicking,” 1) and *lusus* (“pleasantry,” 8) are rather common Latin verbs for dancing (Alonso Fernández 2011, 134-40), but they are here used to describe more the atmosphere of the context (the *ludi*) and the participants’ joyful spirit than the orchestric nature of the routine. The aquatic medium for the performance (a pool) diverges from the common structure of a dance floor, and there is no mention whatsoever of music as an integral or subsidiary element within the spectacle. Yet the sum of choral and choreographic elements in the epigram opens the door to a highly

²⁶ On the problematic chronology of the *Liber*’s historical date, the identity of the emperor eulogized in the epigrams, and the question of whether these were real or fictional spectacles created by the poet’s imagination, cf. Coleman 2006, xix-lxxxiv. See also Coleman 1993.

²⁷ See Naerebout 1997, 165-66, whose anthropological definition of dance is a valid one for the context of ancient dance. Cf. also Naerebout 2006. On further definitions of dance and their usefulness for the ancient Greek and Roman context, see the Introduction to this volume.

refined recollection of ancient dance's aesthetics, revealing the centrality of these forms of coordinated movement—and the value of their transformative-mimetic properties—in the ancient Greek and Roman imaginaries.

First, the absence of music as well as the elusive polysemy of the terms *lusit* and *lusus* are counteracted by the strength of the Greek loanword *chorus*. The swimmers, in fact, are here completely assimilated to the Nereids, a band of marine nymphs whose orderly formations became archetypal signifiers of choral aesthetics in ancient Greek culture, from the Archaic period onward (Csapo 2003; Weiss 2018, 31-58; Steiner 2021, 258-339). Together with other examples of exceptional—non-human—bodily movement in the animal and natural worlds, such as the flight of birds, the racing of horses, and the leaping of dolphins, the chorus of Nereids stands in Greek and Roman art and literature as a familiar motif, linked to the creation of ancient dance's imaginaries in highly sophisticated ways (Curtis 2017, 47-52; Weiss 2018, 9; see also “Body”). The opening phrase *Nereïdum chorus* allows, thus, for an immediate evocation of Greek song and dance. The reader perceives the moves of the amphitheater's swimmers as inserted within a longstanding tradition of coordinated dances and communal song, and the artistic transmission of movement travels across space, media, and time.

The mention of Thetis in the final verse of the epigram further emphasizes such perception, for she is another archetypal figure in the representation of choral leadership, herself usually setting the Nereids' mythical movements (Csapo 2003). In ancient sources, gods and divine characters are often said to have invented specific dances that they then explained to their followers for the sake of rehearsal and reperformance (Lonsdale 1993, 47-57; see also “Gods”). The most famous instance is perhaps the case of Apollo, who is first portrayed as the leader of divine *choreia* in the Archaic Greek *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (180-206) and then as an instructor, leading Cretan sailors in coordinated movement towards his shrine at Delphi (514-19). Athena, too, was linked to the invention of the armed dance (Ceccarelli 2004, 94), and Dionysus is said, by Plato, to have spread frenzied dances among his revelers after having experienced this movement himself (*Leg.* 672b).²⁸

In his epigram, Martial seems to be so fascinated by the marvels of the Nereids' compositions that, in the first place, he seeks to find out a divine origin for their choral discipline (*tantas... artes*, “such amazing tricks,” 7). The easy answer to his question (“who designed such amazing tricks?”) would be, of course, to presuppose a well-trained group of swimmers following the patterns of an inventive *chorēgos* (choral leader) such as the nymph Thetis. Yet the poet

²⁸ On Plato and the broader idea that choral education was first administered by the gods (*Leg.* 653d-54b, 798e, 816c-d), cf. Calame 2013; Kurke 2013; Kowalzig 2013; Schlapbach forthcoming.

complicates the equation by acknowledging the agency and skillfulness of the ensemble to the extent that, in the end, the mythic teacher literally becomes student (*didicit*, “she learnt,” 8) of their highly elaborate art.²⁹

The creation of this aquatic dance is not therefore presented as a passive process of instruction—there is not direct mention of a choreographer—but rather as a calculated collaborative practice of turning movement into something else. The chorus is deliberately depicted as an individual entity, with the verbs used in the singular form—*lusit* (“was frolicking,” 1) and *pinxit* (literally “painted,” 2). The Nereids, all together, proceed *en bloc* in their bodily use of the pond (*aequore toto*, 1), and only through the systematic order of their choral movements do they depict, as a group, the various forms of a trident, an anchor, an oar, a ship, etc. The potential success of these mimetic formations, that is, the possibility that they can be read and assumed as such by the audience (*credidimus*, “we believed,” 4), depends entirely on the cooperative involvement and self-discipline of every single actor in performance, a sum of individual dancers who are not only “teachable” (*docilis*, 1), but also fundamentally “apt” (*docilis*).³⁰

As we mentioned in the Introduction to this volume, ancient Greek choral performers could complicate and contest prevailing hierarchies within the ensemble in terms of status and role. The lyrics of surviving choral songs from the Archaic and Classical periods may imply choreographic possibilities of enacting competition between members of the group, usually in the figure of a dancer who momentarily takes a leading position (Peponi 2007). Lyric and dramatic choruses, too, include antiphonal and other exchanges between actors and choruses or between the semichoruses, either mirroring each other’s actions or performing individually to then merge again into a single group (Calame 1997; Andújar forthcoming). In Martial’s depiction of synchronized swimming, the actions of this coordinated chorus point more specifically to an articulation of the collective, wherein each dancer nonetheless has her own place and function within the whole of the choreographic design. Their “aptness to learn” (*docilitas*) relies, this way, on a high level of proficiency and expertise.

Written in the last quarter of the first century CE—and within the *Liber spectaculorum*!—the epigram of the Nereids is imbued with the extraordinary richness and variety of Roman Imperial performance culture, where multiple

²⁹ On this punchline and its relationship to other ambiguous instances of extremely skillful performers presented as divine figures, cf. Schlapbach 2018, 191–92. See also the chapter on “Gods.” For other interpretations of the punchline, cf. Coleman 2006, 217, who relates it to the power of the emperor as the ultimate mastermind of the show.

³⁰ *Oxford Latin Dictionary* s.v. *docilis*.

entertainments were based on special corporeal movement, such as tight-rope walkers (*funambuli*), acrobatic mimes, jugglers of weapons (*uentilatores*), and exotic female dancers from every corner of the Empire. Pantomime, the solo mimetic dance of mythological subjects, stood apart for its notoriety and esteem, but more especially for the representational scope of its choreography, the technical refinement of its dancers, and the general perception that it was capable of influencing many other artistic languages (Garelli-François 2007; Hall & Wyles 2008; Webb 2008a).

Within this context of professionalism and competition, it would not be unreasonable to suppose, first, that if this were a real spectacle, the swimmers at the amphitheater were among the most qualified performers³¹ at the time and, second, that the effects they pursued in their numbers—namely the spectators’ wonder at their synchronized kinetics—were in consonance with the aesthetic codes of pantomime dancing, except for the fact that this was usually performed by a soloist and the Nereids danced in group.³²

Either because this was the choreographic trend at the end of the first century CE or because the poet incidentally presents this aquatic choral performance through the lens of mimetic dancing, it is thus important to recall that pantomime was, fundamentally, a form of communicative motion, and that most of its representational principles can be found in the epigram of the swimming chorus.

In Greek, pantomime dancers were called “actors of tragic rhythmic movement” (τραγικῆς ἐνρhythμοῦ κινήσεως ὑποκριτής, *FD* III.1: 551) and offered presentations of the various characters involved in a myth through the “silent” actions of a single body (Montiglio 1999; Lada-Richards 2011). Their pieces compressed the most significant scenes of a—usually tragic—story that the audience was expected to understand.³³ As part of the dance’s narrative, the artist relied on a balanced combination of symbolic acting and pure movement, punctuated by iconic pauses that condensed the representational strength of the play, the so-called *schemata* (Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 747e; Webb 2008a, 70-

³¹ To this, we may add, as Coleman (1993, 64) suggests, that they were surely to be also very attractive and sexually desirable, an important aspect of Imperial female public performances of this sort, with all the implications this factor may entail with regard to the audience.

³² As demonstrated by Zanobi 2014 and Lada-Richards 2016, among others, the aesthetics of pantomime are visible in literary and dramatic texts, such as Ovid’s poems and Seneca’s tragedies. On the cultural interactions between pantomime and oratory, cf. e.g. Schlapbach 2008 and Rocconi 2022. On the interaction between the genre and visual arts, see Webb 2017; Schlapbach 2018, with bibliography.

³³ Webb 2017 speaks of different degrees of the audience’s perception and comprehension, from the connoisseur’s critical observance to the most spontaneous appreciation. Cf. also Peponi 2015; Alonso Fernández & Gianvittorio-Ungar forthcoming.

73).³⁴ All these elements were an integral part of the dramatic performance, which implies that the language of movement needed to be as expressive as the poses that paused the flow of action (Webb 2008b, 51). Yet, beyond the expressiveness of mimesis, pantomime fascinated the ancients for the inner tensions it entailed between dynamism and immobility (Lib. 64.117; Schlapbach 2018, 3; see also “Objects”). As reflected in a late anonymous epigram from the *Latin Anthology*, a dancer “fights, plays, loves, revels, turns round, stands still” (*pugnat, ludit, amat, bacchatur, uertitur, adstat*, 100.7).

Essentially, the pantomime’s sculptural poses distilled all the actions’ complexity as the growing dramatic intensity came to its climax. At the same time, these static moments may well have been a way of indicating the character that the dancer was about to embody or, as Ruth Webb suggests, a mechanism to express “the emergence of the image (*eikon*)” out of a flux of rapid movement (2008a, 82). Stillness, thus, was inextricable from the pantomime’s non-stop mobility: it was conceived as a highly perceptive upbeat, a transitional means to set the pace of the dance, and a moment to reflect on the movement itself.³⁵

In the *Liber spectaculorum*, the Nereids’ choral arrangements are far from being conceived as examples of dramatic stasis. The outlines that the swimmers draw in the water are, apparently, a series of plain unanimated figures choreographed for the sake of spectacle. Yet the scrupulous, coordinated order through which the chorus proceeds can be seen as an equivalent to the pantomime’s search for clarity (*saphēneia*) and precision (*akribēia*), two aspects that reveal the dancer’s requirement of total physical control and that are specifically prescribed in the ancient treatises of Lucian and Libanius as part of the artist’s imitative and creative project (Luc. *Salt.* 36; Lib. 64.116-18).

From the visual perspective, the forms of the Nereids convincingly illuminate the spectators’ perception as the chorus stands within the proper limits of mimesis. While this is not an example of dramatic dancing *per se*, the audience believes (*credidimus*, 4) the objects of representation resulting from the choreography not just because they may have a presupposed body of knowledge about the show and its repertoire, but because the artists’ skillful performance allows them to do so. In this way, it is worth noting that the Nereids’ virtuosity is portrayed with a vocabulary (*pinxit, artes*) that recalls the most famous theoretical comparisons of pantomime with the visual and figurative arts (Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 748a-b; Luc. *Salt.* 35; Lib. 64.118) and that

³⁴ For a broader interpretation of *schēmata* as kinetic styles of movement and corporeal attitudes, cf. Bocksberger 2021.

³⁵ For specific examples of stillness in pantomime, cf. Lada-Richards 2016, 161 on Daphne’s transformation into a tree in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a passage further discussed in the chapter on “Body.”

places the aquatic performance within its broader aesthetic dimension (Lada-Richards 2004; Schlapbach 2018, 25-73; Webb 2017), only now insisting on the dancers' status as something that differs from their intrinsic art.³⁶

Ultimately, the Nereid's well-ordered formations are also described, almost oxymoronically, as "varying" (*uário*, 2), an adjective that points to what is perhaps the most important feature of pantomime, namely the aspect of change (Hall 2008; Webb 2008a). At the pool, the dancers create a series of different forms that reveal the versatility and swiftness of the group, as they proceed from straight shapes (*recto*, 3) to curved contours (*curuo*, 3) in "a constant flux of transformations" (Peponi 2015, 210) culminating with the shining star of the Dioscuri and the billowing broad sails (5-6). The Nereids' mimetic stops thus render a collective version of the pantomime's *schēmata*, but also of the uninterrupted growing sequence of actions and movements that the epigram in the *Latin Anthology* exemplified.

In the ancient sources, the pantomimes' mobility is often compared to the transformations of the mythical Proteus, a metamorphic sea-god whose constant fluidity became an archetype of choreographic virtuosity (Luc. *Salt.* 19; Lib. 64.117; Lawler 1943; Schlapbach 2008, 320-27; Olsen 2021a, 200-202). Like those of Proteus, the aquatic movements of Thetis and other marine deities were commonly associated with flexible, effortless actions that were highly adaptable to every context and medium. The Nereids' varied formations are then Protean in essence, as the spectacular challenge they pose in creating their figures relies on the transformative strength of their fluent choreography. On the one hand, the smooth conversion of one object into another implies a necessary alternation between direct, transitional movements and coordinated pauses, a combination that, as in pantomime, must be stylized to the greatest extent. By doing so, the chorus of Nereids fills the pool with their incessant mobility and with the series of figures that the audience needs to track down. On the other hand, the medium of water is itself not static, and so the overall flux of movement can be perceived even within the quietness of the still forms. The poem of Martial, therefore, underscores a potent kinetic understanding of the Nereids' performance in its relation to space. The syntagms *faciles aquas* ("compliant waters," 2) and *liquidis undis* ("limpid waves," 7) evoke a continuum of dynamism that not only contrasts with the effect of the stationary formations but further emphasize their choreographic potential as functionally imbued in movement.³⁷

³⁶ I thank Karin Schlapbach for this idea, where the dancer is, oddly enough, separated from the dance.

³⁷ On the usage of similar aquatic vocabulary, see "Audience."

In the stillness of their non-danced choreography, we can see how Martial's Nereids offer an excellent case for exploring and identifying the imprints of movement in ancient performance culture, as well as the ways in which these speak about the Greek and Roman inexhaustible notions of dance. In a blend of tradition and innovation, the Nereids' choreographic spectacle unites the most striking elements of ancient Greek choral imagery with the aesthetics of pantomime dancing in order to reveal the many ways in which a movement (or even a pause) becomes a dance.

Stillness and Materiality

In the previous section, I discussed the significance of the pantomime's *schēmata* as static forms that, within the context of movement, rely precisely on the absence of movement. Stillness in pantomime allows us to contemplate those “furtive,” interstitial moments between immobility and movement that distill the tremendous kinetic potential of dance in any of its forms.³⁸ In this final section, I want to return to this idea to briefly consider the representation of ancient movement and dance as a necessary artistic problem, particularly with regard to the issue of “capturing” the moving body in its relation to time.

Like their literary counterparts, ancient Greek and Roman monuments and archaeological artifacts facilitate the transmission of dance movements across time and media and I argue that they do so by relying on those interstitial moments of kinetic stillness that any dance allows us to identify. Epitaphs of professional dancers and pantomimes stop the passerby and invite her to evoke, with their semiotic combination of vision and words, the mobility of the deceased in the very immobile context of the stele.³⁹ Archaeological remains, such as floors, stages, and other dancing spaces, can further provide us with a phenomenological understanding of the physical location of dance practice—one which engages our proprioceptive, haptic, and kinesthetic sensations when moving around these spots (Rojas 2019, 71-80). But the most interesting items to consider in a section like this are those objects and materials whose challenging fixity invites us to ponder their ancient functions and their relationship to dance through the filter of the visual and figurative arts.⁴⁰

³⁸ I thank Antonio Pradel for his remarks on this aspect and his bibliographic recommendations. The expression “furtive interstice” is by Louppe 2004, 246.

³⁹ Leppin 1992; Webb 2012, 231-32; Alonso Fernández 2015, 322-30. On how an inscription can choreograph the viewer's body, cf. Estrin 2019.

⁴⁰ I thank the members of the IDA Project for the ideas collected in this section of the chapter, in particular Naomi Weiss and Carolyn Laferrière.

I begin with a glimpse at the six columns of maidens that flank the south porch of the Erechtheion on Athens' Acropolis (fifth century BCE), a group of sculptures that serves as architectural support for part of the temple's construction (Fig. 29). The statues' hair, faces, and draping are carved differently one from the other, emphasizing the maidens' individuality within the ensemble, but they all frozenly face the same direction as they rest in a relaxed pose: the three on the left lean on their right foot, while the other three put their weight on their left. Some of the women have lost their arms, partially or entirely, which, for the modern viewer, increases the sense of motionlessness that their columnar nature requires, especially as they are solidly made from Pentelic marble. The Maidens of the Erechtheion, thus, are static in essence—yet they have been associated with dance movement for many different reasons (Steiner 2021, 9 and 358-73).



Figure 29: Athens, Erechtheion: the Karyatid Porch after the restoration of the monument, © YSMA 2002, Photo by Socratis Mavrommatis.

In the Roman period, the architect Vitruvius created an inventive story about the origin of women-like columns like these, claiming that the first of these images represented the matrons from Caryae, a Peloponnesian town allied with the Persian enemy against the Greeks. According to Vitruvius, after the war, the so-called Caryatids were forced by the Greeks to become servants

for the rest of their lives and doomed to uphold a heavy load in their heads (Vitr. *De arch.* 1.1.5). While this is a colorful approach to the story, it is also a problematic interpretation of these erect and richly dressed female statues in terms of servitude and submission.⁴¹ For my purposes here, I will only stress how Vitruvius' account emphasizes the challenging aspect of the maidens' inherent mobility by specifically stating that, instead of being shown in a triumph (*non uti una triumpho ducerentur*, 1.1.5.10), that is to say, led through the city in procession as the Romans would do, the captives exhibit a permanent picture of slavery (*aeterna, servitutis exemplo*, 1.1.5.10) in the form of architectural tokens.

This aspect of restrained movement becomes more evident when we consider the actual role of women from Caryae and the choruses they formed in honor to Artemis Caryatis in Laconia (Calame 1997, 149-56), as well as the choral rites that were held at the Athenian temple to commemorate the sacrifice of the daughters of Erechtheus after they were turned into celestial deities.⁴² In addition, we might fruitfully recall the links between columnar monuments and chorality in other sanctuaries, such as the Siphnian Treasury in Delphi.⁴³

With this in mind, my interest in the static group of the Erechtheion comes from what Timothy Power would describe as their "incipient chorality" (2011, 75), the choreographic dynamism they transmit as a coordinated ensemble—or, even, as two semichoruses of three dancers each!—and that I see as akin to the extraordinary motility that I explored in the first part of this chapter. In this regard, we should recall that, in Archaic Greek sources, choral dancers are often compared to the most famous *agalmata* or *daidala*, that is, precious moving statues of uncanny or divine crafting whose synchronized movements were the source of the audience's fascination (Kurke 2012; see also "Objects"). In the case of the maidens from the Erechtheion, however, the analogy runs the other way around, for this time the statues are comparable to the members of a dancing chorus (Steiner 2021, 358-79). On the one hand, the fact that they are all placed before the temple transforms them into an archetypal model of choral worship, a ritual act that that was equivalent in meaning and function to other sacrificial offerings.⁴⁴ In addition to their original purpose as gift-bearers,⁴⁵ the maidens are materialized in their communal structure as a colonnade—a

⁴¹ On this, cf. Shear 1999; Ridgway 1999, 145-50; Neer 2001; Steiner 2021, 358.

⁴² Steiner (2021, 9 and 364) explains these rites from a fragment of Euripides' *Erechtheus* (fr. 370.77-80 K). On the ritual activity at the Erechtheion cf. Gaifman 2018, 1-16.

⁴³ On the Siphnian Treasury and its choral activity, cf. Neer 2001; Power 2011, 75; Steiner 2021, 358-59.

⁴⁴ On this equivalence, cf. Kowalzig 2004, 49-55 and 2007, 70-72; Kurke 2012, 221.

⁴⁵ On the women's character and structural service, cf. Steiner 2021, 366-67. See also Neer 2001, 316 and Gaifman 2018, 1-2.

pattern that in ancient Greek would receive the name of *rhythmos*—, creating an organizational structure that merges with the cultic atmosphere of the environment to performatively invite other choruses to sing and dance in their place. On the other hand, scholars have stressed that the inner dynamism of the statues—or, in other words, the static stylization of the women’s involvement in the rite—may be complemented by a number of songs and written sources, mostly Archaic choral compositions that, in referring to a certain imaginary, fuse the real vision of their immobile presence with the suggestive visualization of their movement created by a given poem (Weiss 2016). The columns, then, are not immobile remains of an architectural building, but relics that reveal the intricacies of ancient choral aesthetics.

Another object (Figs. 30 and 31) that nicely highlights the eloquent kinetics of ancient Greek material culture radically differs from the Erechtheion columns in style and scale. And yet, the group it presents has been identified as a celestial chorus of women, just like the daughters of Erechtheus when transformed into Hyades.⁴⁶ This piece, however, is made of a totally different material and artistic technique, as it is a small knucklebone-like terracotta in red-figure style (12x16cm). Attributed to the Sotades painter (470-50 BCE) and currently housed at the British Museum, the vessel is decorated with a series of female figures that walk, dance, and fly on each of the sides, following the indications of a bearded man who moves his arms up and down in directing the women’s choreography. The object’s striking shape seems to commemorate the ancient game of the *astragalos* (akin to jacks), in which the knucklebones are tossed up and bounced in a prescribed series of throws. The aerial imagery of the paintings thus aligns with the piece’s intended function, at least at the imaginary level.

In the Sotades’ vessel, the various scenes represented in each of the object’s sides are never seen at the same time, as their fixed snapshots must inevitably vary with the “flights” of the *astragalos*. As a piece made of clay, the object could never be used to play in a real way but, despite its breakable materiality, the knucklebone grants multiple possibilities for viewing and apprehending the images, either by turning the object in the users’ hands or by flitting from one side to the other. As Naomi Weiss has recently proposed, the person interacting with this vessel overcomes a sort of “perceptual instability” in the experience of handling and looking at the images contained in it, a powerful phenomenological effect which entails, at the same time, the transformative dynamics of ancient choral imaginaries (Weiss 2023, 15-29). On the one hand,

⁴⁶ See Ferrari 2008, 2-5; Steiner 2021, 9 and 156. See also Weiss 2023, 25-27.



Figure 30: Vessel in the shape of an astragalus by Sotades, depicting a chorus, 470-450 BCE. London, British Museum 1860,1201.2. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

the female group walking on the ground invites us to think of a ritual or civic choral performance, or even a training procedure with the man acting as *chorodidaskalos* (a trainer or leader of the chorus). On the other hand, as we saw, the winged floating figures on the top can be seen as representations of the archetypal referents the dancers are compared to, such as clouds, stars, doves, and other sky deities (Ferrari 2008). The knucklebone, in this way, becomes a rich counterpart to the texts surveyed in the first part of this chapter, enabling us to contemplate the conflation of real, remembered, and imaginary movements implied in viewing and visualizing a choral dance (Weiss 2020).

When reflecting on the modern interaction with the *astragalos* and the combination of movements that, intentionally or not, one elicits by means of an almost choreographic handling (or seeing) of the object, the knucklebone becomes an important item for considering, as well, the temporality of dance. By stirring new affects and sensations with each of the turns that it inspires, the piece reflects Lepecki's "multiple presents" of dance and how the vigor of this conception can be fueled with the valuable contribution of ancient materials and sources. All in all, the vessel's capacity to blend real and imaginary dance worlds, its referential connection to the literary aspects of ancient dance culture, its connection to the realm of play, and its overlapping of special movements—walk, fly, dance—provide a unique combination of viewpoints about what turns a movement into a dance, similar to the epigrammatic approach to the



Figure 31: Top view of Fig. 30. London, British Museum 1860,1201.2. Photo © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Nereids in the *Liber spectaculorum*. Furthermore, just as we saw with the choral aquatic *schēmata*, the perceptions of dance on the *astragalos* always depend on those interstitial moments of stillness that are, nonetheless, never static in essence.

In the same vein, the final object I want to examine (Figs. 32 and 33) relies as well on the user's ability to amalgamate lived and presupposed experiences of movement and dance apprehension, but it translates this time the artistic styles of vase painting into the voluminous shapes of a marble relief. This is the monumental mixing bowl from the first century BCE known as the Borghese Vase, a bell-shaped vessel that would have likely decorated the gardens of an elite Roman villa and is now housed at the Musée du Louvre.⁴⁷ The Vase renders in stone a calyx krater, "a shape commonly associated with the Athenian symposium," but its "imposing physical presence" and "three-dimensional mass" re-inscribe the objects' functional purposes within the "timelessness" of Neo-Attic reliefs (Laferrière forthcoming). The krater contains a whole scene of a Dionysiac revel, in which a group of satyrs and maenads sing, move, and play their musical instruments with the god Dionysus in a seemingly-spontaneous way. Yet, unlike the columns of the Erechtheion, the characters in this marble are portrayed as moving within the dance, so the artist has necessarily chosen a moment to be sculpted that requires the representation of mobility.

Here again, the original (at least implied) use of the vessel, namely the mixing of water and wine to be consumed at a drinking party, interacts with the represented images, as to deliberately unite shape and function in the viewers' encounter with the object. A krater would be a key component of Dionysiac revelry, just as the satyrs and maenads are evocative characters for such an event. Only this time, however, the Vase's size and materiality add an extra layer to the reading of the otherwise flat figures in their special—and spatial—relationship to time.

As Carolyn Laferrière has shown, the ritual, sympotic context of the mixing bowl has been exchanged for a domestic one, where it serves a decorative purpose within the gardens of a cultivated Roman owner interested in the Greek past. In addition to the new setting, the vessel's usage of archaizing styles and forms changes and readapts the significance of the carved figures as evoking other temporalities and even re-presenting them for different ends (Laferrière forthcoming). Such a creative combination of stylistic techniques and figurative types is indeed characteristic of Neo-Attic reliefs, where the

⁴⁷ On the Vase see Cohon 1993, and Laferrière forthcoming, with bibliography. It was discovered at the Gardens of Sallust, in Rome.



Figure 32: Borghese Krater, detail of maenad, 1st cent. BCE. Paris, Louvre 86. © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN – Grand Palais / Daniel Lebée / Carine Déambrosis.

mythological themes further emphasize the temporal ambiguities and ahistorical spaces that they encapsulate. The marbles, this way, “move between various temporal moments” and, in doing so, create spaceless modes of representation that blur the boundaries of visual and perceptual apprehension (Laferrière forthcoming).

In the Borghese krater, the realm of the stone’s mythical dancers merges, at the imaginary level, with archetypal images of Athenian and Dionysiac sympotic revelry, but also physically, with the Roman spectators who surround the vessel in their own flow. The shallowness of the carved reliefs enhances the illusion of movement and, to a certain extent, suggest the implicit exit of the characters from the visual ground as if they could actually move to the tunes of



Figure 33: Borghese Krater, detail of satyr, 1st cent. BCE. Paris, Louvre 86. Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

the outside world. Other “visual slips”—a Maenad’s foot that crosses the bands of decorative patterns, a Satyr who seems to look out of the image—push the “limits of the frontal plane” and emerge out in the viewers’ space as inviting them to go around the sculpted bodies and dance with them in a moment of “visual and kinesthetic unity” (Laferrière forthcoming). The Vase, in the end,

captures an instant of Dionysiac dancing that allows for a continuation of movement beyond the choreographic schemes of an unattainable past.

* * *

Objects, and the tensions that they expose between inert matter and the human body, will be thoroughly discussed in the following chapter, particularly as they play a crucial role in organizing, participating, and complicating the movement of the dance. Here, I have concentrated on just a few of them, as they reveal processes of dance spectatorship beyond the realm of vision. From the columnar stasis of the Maidens at the Erechtheion to the shallow contours of Maenadic drapery on the Borghese krater and the overlapping dancing flights of the *astragalos*, the group of monuments and items analyzed above has demonstrated, once again, the necessity of considering materiality, setting, and function when studying visual artifacts in relation to time and mobility. Through all these objects, the furtive perception of dance and choreographic movement reveals itself as a generator of meanings that, in relying precisely on immobility, captures the complex status of dance in Greek and Roman antiquity. I argue that this is only possible because dance was not an “autonomous” discipline in the ancient world—that its multifaceted connection to words, music, play, religion, and culture made ancient static pieces able to move, be moved, and mobilize.⁴⁸

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⁴⁸ I thank all the IDA members for their enthusiastic engagement with the project and the collaborative thinking and creativity. All my gratitude to Sarah Olsen for her constant support, efficiency, and motivation.

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Objects

Karin Schlapbach

Es bewegt sich alles, Stillstand gibt es nicht.

Jean Tinguely, Für Statik (1959)

Objects are at the opposite end of the spectrum from the dancing body in terms of their ability to move of their own accord. While the dancing body is by definition moving and mobile, material objects are inert. They do not move on their own, they need to be manipulated or acted upon in order to be set in motion. Perhaps it is partly due to this inherent tension between the dancing body and inert matter that objects—among them costume, mask, props, musical instruments—play in fact a vital role in dance, in Greek and Roman antiquity no less than today.¹ Their presence as inert matter swept up and encompassed by the dance throws the miracle of movement into relief.

And yet the stark contrast just outlined does not hold up to scrutiny. Leaving aside the fact that some objects are almost part and parcel of the body of the dancer, especially costume and mask, the movement of the body as a whole is never uniform. Rather, as the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus observes with remarkable attention to details, in dance one body part is acted upon by another, one muscle by another in a constant, fully internalized turnaround of giving and receiving energy as well as sensation (*Enn.* 4.4.33, 13-26).² In this

¹ Well-known examples from recent decades include the use of chairs—usually places to sit and be comparatively still—in Merce Cunningham’s *Antic Meet* (1958), Pina Bausch’s *Café Müller* (1978), or Ohad Naharin’s *Echad Mi Yodea* (1990), a rocking chair as a moving companion in Israel Galván’s *Arena* (2004), and wheelchairs mobilizing dancers in the work of AXIS Dance Company. Dances involving material objects are often situated at the threshold between dance, circus, and theater. For a recent overview of objects in contemporary dance, see Birringer & Fenger 2019. For an example of a chair on an ancient Greek dance floor, see Fig. 11/Fig. 21 (a phiale in Boston representing a female dancer having discarded her clothes on a nearby chair), which is further discussed in the Introduction and the chapter on “Space.”

² Webb (2008a, 91) supposes that this careful description reflects common assumptions about dance in the imperial period. The permeable frontier between body parts as objects and as animate and sentient entities has been theorized by Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, as Bielfeldt (2018, 421-24) discusses.

light, the frontier that seemingly separates active and inert bodies appears to be less impermeable than one might think, and their dialogue more interesting. Gravity acts upon all bodies alike, and the human body's ability to respond to it and counteract it is variable and dependent on many contingencies, including its size, position, strength, and location. Even the term "attraction," which was introduced at the end of the seventeenth century to describe the phenomenon of gravity, reminds us that the forces that bodies exert on each other are fundamentally reciprocal.³ This chapter aims to show that one basic function of objects in Greek and Roman dance was to explore the conditions of physical movement and to demonstrate its modalities. Objects may serve to mirror, extend, or complement the movement of the human body, or they may offer a static point of reference that structures the dance and its space. As objects participating in and organising the movement of the dance, they are kinesthetic, which means that they actively contribute to the kinetic orientation of the body in the space and its interaction with the environment.⁴ In this process, objects can acquire complex meanings which are informed by the dance as a whole and which in turn enrich the dance.

In addition, although objects may not move on their own, they possess their own agency by being desirable or otherwise commanding our attention; indeed, they may invite movement or even, perhaps, dance. In Greek and Roman antiquity in particular, material objects—including but not limited to artifacts—can be seen as inhabited by divine forces, and they may demand certain types of behaviour, for instance acts of veneration. The epistemological status of objects has exercised modern philosophers especially in the first half of the twentieth century, with phenomenology and existentialism seeking to overcome a rigid dualism of mind and matter. This interest in material objects beyond their mere function or meaning in relation to human agents has persisted in the second half of the twentieth century; more recently, it has been complemented by the need to radically rethink ecology.⁵ Robotics and

³ The term and its connotations underwent an ingenious critique by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, on which see Blumenberg 2019, 171.

⁴ The term "kinesthesia" was introduced by the physician and neurologist Henry Charlton Bastian, who identified a "Sense of Movement" or a "Kinaesthetic Centre" in the brain, "whereby we are made acquainted with the position and movements of our limbs, whereby we judge of 'weight' and 'resistance,' and by means of which the Brain also derives much unconscious guidance in the performance of Movements" (Bastian 1880, 543). Space and objects coming close or touching the body inevitably interact with kinesthesia. Today the term is used alternately with proprioception (for which see, e.g., Bellan 2017; Barlow 2018). See also "Body," "Movement," and "Audience."

⁵ Baudrillard 2005 (first published in 1968 as *Le système des objets*); Latour 2004; Bennett 2010; on the "withdrawal" of objects from human beings, see Harman 2014; on the agency of artefacts, see Gell 1998; Osborne & Tanner 2007; Bielfeldt 2014b, 15–23. The material turn, under which many of these studies are subsumed, is closely related to posthumanism.

prosthetics have also refined our understanding of the permeable border that separates objects and the human body.⁶ Thanks to these advances, the study of objects in Greek and Roman antiquity has entered a new phase.⁷ A particular focus has been on objects on the dramatic stage, where the question of how things are made present to us is further complicated by their integration into a performative context.⁸ This chapter takes a slightly different approach, asking specifically what things do when they are in motion, or how things behave when they are moved and move along with dancers.⁹ A set of case studies will show that they serve in various ways to mark dance as a cultural practice characterized by imitation, competition, and reciprocity.

The first two parts of this chapter sets out to discuss flying objects and falling bodies, respectively. In an attempt to subvert the received dichotomy between human subjects and material objects, the discussion includes objects that move in unpredictable ways and bodies that dance unintentionally thanks to the action of gravity, before elaborating briefly on the intersection between animated and inanimate bodies by examining the metaphorical nexus between dancers, statues, and puppets and showing that dance ties into the powerful idea of self-moving objects (*automata*). The third part turns to costume and props, among them swords, and to sonorous objects. It gives special attention to garlands, the default way, as it were, of preparing the body for dancing.

Flying Objects

Among the first dancers in ancient Greek literature, the ones of the Homeric poems, are the two sons of king Alcinous, Halius and Laodamas, in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*. During the banquet which Alcinous hosts in honor of his guest, Odysseus, the choicest Phaeacian youths perform dances, but at the end the pair of Halius and Laodamas perform alone, “since no one could

⁶ See Leroi-Gourhan 1993; Lipomi et al. 2020.

⁷ See Bassi 2005; Grethlein 2008; Bielfeldt 2014a; Purves 2015; Gaifman, Platt, & Squire 2018; Harich-Schwarzbauer & Scheidegger Lämmle 2022.

⁸ See Taplin 1978, 77-101; Chaston 2010; Revermann 2013; Coppola, Barone, & Salvadori 2016; Mueller 2016; Mueller & Telò 2018; Merabet, Noel & Sermon 2019; Weiss 2023.

⁹ This chapter does not address an aspect of ancient culture that further complicates the relationship between dancers and material objects, namely the fact that many ancient Greek and Roman dancers were slaves and, as “reified humans,” had the legal status of objects (*chrēmata, res*). See Bielfeldt 2018, 424-25, with further literature. Andújar, in the chapter on “Geography,” notes that “foreign dancing bodies... are often presented as consumables for citizens in the city” (p. 57); see also Alonso Fernández 2022. Nor does this chapter address the objectifying role of the (male) gaze, introduced into film studies by the seminal study of Mulvey 1975, on which see Manning 1997.

vie with them” (8.371). The unusually detailed description of their physical movement puts some emphasis on how they first get hold of a purple ball, which had been specially made for them (8.372-80, trans. Murray):

οἱ δ' ἐπεὶ οὖν σφαῖραν καλὴν μετὰ χερσὶν ἔλοντο
 πορφυρέην, τὴν σφιν Πόλυβος ποίησε δαΐφρων,
 τὴν ἕτερος ρίπτασκε ποτὶ νέφεα σκιόεντα
 ἰδνωθεὶς ὀπίσω, ὃ δ' ἀπὸ χθονὸς ὑψόσ' ἀερθεὶς
 ρῆιδίως μεθέλεσκε πάρος ποσὶν οὐδ' αὖς ἰκέσθαι.
 αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ σφαῖρην ἀν' ἰθὺν πειρήσαντο,
 ὥρχεισθην δῆπαιτα ποτὶ χθονὶ πουλυβοτείρῃ
 ταρφέ' ἀμειβομένω· κοῦροι δ' ἐπελήκεον ἄλλοι
 ἑσταότες κατ' ἀγῶνα, πολὺς δ' ὑπὸ κόμπος ὀρώρει.

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And when they had taken in their hands the beautiful ball of purple, which wise Polybus had made for them, the one would lean backward and toss it toward the shadowy clouds, and the other would leap up from the earth and skillfully catch it before his feet touched the ground again. But when they had tried their skill in tossing the ball straight up, the two fell to dancing on the bounteous earth, constantly tossing the ball to and fro, and the other youths stood in the place of contests and beat time, and loud was the applause that arose.

Their virtuosic dance comprises throwing the ball straight up “towards the shadowy clouds” and catching it “skillfully” or “easily” (ῥηιδίως) while jumping up in the air, towards it. The ball mirrors and amplifies the vertical motion of the dancers themselves, who strive to achieve the very lightness of the material object.¹⁰ In the second part of this passage, their performance seems more grounded, as they dance “on the all-nourishing earth” and the ball moves back and forth between them.

The use of the ball allows them not only to demonstrate their control of the object as well as to keep in touch with each other via the ball, but also to project themselves into the space in all directions. Strikingly, just as their dance is non-representational, the description makes no use of imagery.¹¹ It offers no suggestion as to how to “read” this dance which is, as it were, the “degré zéro” of dance, i.e., displaying nothing but itself. As we will see, a basic function of such a dance may be to put oneself on display, and to interact with and measure oneself against others.

¹⁰ Olsen (2021, 31) associates this lightness with choral dance; see also Steiner 2021, 163, and the Introduction to this volume.

¹¹ See Peponi 2015, 213; Olsen 2017, 12; 2021, 34.

For what looks like a playful exhibition of their skill harks back to two earlier moments of the Phaeacian books (*Od.* 6-8). On the one hand, it evokes Odysseus' arrival among the Phaeacians, which coincides with the moment the king's daughter, Nausicaa, loses her ball: while dancing and playing ball with her companions Nausicaa, prompted by Athena who "had other thoughts in mind" (ἄλλ' ἐνόησε θεά, 6.112), throws her ball out to the sea, upon which the girls' cries wake up Odysseus who rests nearby (6.99-117).¹² On the other hand, Halios and Laodamas' dance can also be read as a response to the athletic competition which preceded the banquet and in which Odysseus bested his hosts by throwing the discus farther than any of them (*Od.* 8.189-93).¹³ By echoing this scene, the purple ball gains in significance: just like Odysseus' mighty throw of the discus, the two dancers' agility in handling the ball commands attention and respect. While the discus might easily be imagined as a weapon that kills, the purple ball is its convivial stand-in, an innocuous reminder that physical dexterity and coordination are indispensable qualities in war, and that objects, especially ones that can be thrown, critically extend the reach of the human body and its relation to the surrounding space and to others.

The connection between acrobatic dances involving objects and military strength is a topic of conversation in Xenophon's *Symposium*, remarkably in relation to a female dancer, who is part of a troupe of hired entertainers led by a Syracusan man.¹⁴ Among her feats is dancing while throwing hoops up in the air and catching them in a rhythm, twelve in all. Upon seeing her accomplish this easily, Socrates remarks that this shows clearly that the nature of women is not inferior to that of men (2.8-9). Later, the same dancer performs somersaults in and out of a wheel that is tightly fitted on its inner side with swords, darting towards the blades but avoiding their deadly touch. Socrates now expands on his earlier remark by interpreting this woman's feat as evidence for the fact that manly courage (ἀνδρεία) can be taught, even to a woman. Antisthenes replies, not without irony, that if this was so, it would be best if the Syracusan had the woman perform in the city, promising to give the Athenians the courage to leap towards the spear points (2.11-13). This scene spells out much more clearly what is only hinted at in the Phaeacians' dance. The woman's performance is a living expression of physical skill and moral excellence, and the progression from the hoops to the more dangerous stunt involving swords leaves no doubt

¹² In addition to the characteristic polysemy of *paizō* (lines 100, 106), "to play" or "to dance," *molpē* (106) also designates the combination of song and dance.

¹³ Olsen 2021, 23-51 and 2017. Interestingly, throwing as a possibly gender-specific physical behaviour has received a lot of attention since Young's seminal article (Young 1980).

¹⁴ On female dancers performing at the *symposion*, see Olsen 2021, 152-59; on female dancers associated with military strength, see the chapter on "Geography."

as to the possible warlike undertones of such exhibitions, which are also depicted in vase paintings (Fig. 34).¹⁵



Figure 34: Apulian red-figure bell-krater, depicting contortionist with swords, attributed to the Chevron Group, c. 4th cent. BCE. Private collection. Photo Hellas et Roma. Thanks to Veronique Dasen.

The display of control over material objects, especially weapons, signals power and strength. This is probably one of the motivations for armed dances, in addition to the practical aspects of training the body and fostering cohesion and coordination in a group. The best-known dance in armor is the *pyrrhichē*, which was closely associated with Sparta but was practiced widely across Greek cities.¹⁶ The Romans had their own version of a dance in armor, called *tripudium*, presumably a rhythmical pattern of three steps, and executed by an ancient

¹⁵ Dasen 2019, 138, whom I thank for sending me the photo. See the chapter on “Audience” for further discussion of visual depictions of dances involving a variety of objects.

¹⁶ Athenaeus 14,631a; Lucian, *Salt.* 10. See Ceccarelli 1998 and 2004.

college of twelve priests, the Salii. In mid-March and possibly other moments of the year, these priests carried their arms and processed through the city, “singing songs accompanied by *tripudia* and a stately dance” (*canentes carmina cum tripudiis sollemnique saltatu*, Livy 1.20.4).¹⁷ Among their elaborate costumes and arms, the shields, which were called *ancilia*, stand out and deserve our attention in the context of this chapter. A close look at these objects is illuminating and will suggest further insights about the use of objects in dance. The story that was told about the Salian shields at the beginning of the Imperial period is of particular interest.¹⁸ According to Ovid and Plutarch, the first one of the twelve shields, which Livy calls “heavenly arms” (*caelestia arma*, 1.20.4), fell from the sky in the distant past, during a pestilence. The flying object was recognized as a divine gift destined to save the city, upon which king Numa had eleven identical shields made (Ov. *Fast.* 3.367-392; Plut. *Vit. Num.* 13.2-3). The first shield’s mythical origin as a self-propelled object certainly elevates the performance of the Salians, who now handle and possess control over this object and its copies.¹⁹

What is more, its original flight is characterized by Ovid as “light,” the two words denoting this quality being highlighted by alliteration: “Behold, a shield, floating gently on a light breeze (*levi scutum versatum leniter aura*), fell down; from the people shouts travelled up to the stars” (*Fast.* 3.373-74). The vertical movement of the people’s voices mirrors and responds to the downward movement of the shield, whose materiality is not specified but whose motion suggests a slight object, quite in contradiction with a shield’s actual purpose and with what we know about the Salian shields from other sources. Its shape, which is characterized by the absence of angles (3.377-378), suggests a shield made of oxhide, but according to Plutarch it was bronze (*Vit. Num.* 13.2), as were the actual shields carried by the Salians in their procession. It is therefore natural to assume that the mythical craftsman who multiplies their number is a blacksmith, even though Ovid uses a nondescript expression for his craft (*fabrae... artis*, 3.383). But if the shield that fell from the sky was made of metal, there is a strong tension between its actual nature and function on the one hand and the way Ovid describes its airborne arrival on earth on the other. The memory of its easy flight encapsulated in this story enriches the perception of this heavy object within the Salians’ dance, during which it rests on the Salians’ left sides

¹⁷ Habinek 2005, 8-33; Estienne 2006; Alonso Fernández 2016, 2021, 101-106; Prescendi 2022; see also the chapter on “Space.”

¹⁸ The myth and its date (early 20s BCE) are discussed by Bremmer 1993, 160-65. On the *ancilia*, see Borgna 1993; Ferri 2016. For an Athenian depiction of dancers carrying shields, see the chapter on “Body” (including Fig. 26).

¹⁹ A parallel is found in the Palladium, a cult statue descended from heaven: according to one source, a copy was made in order to protect the original from thieves (see Bremmer 1993, 161).

and moves along with their bodies and arm movements. It is interesting to note, though, that several visual representations privilege another moment of the ritual, depicting the shields as hanging from a rod carried on the shoulders of two assistants, a detail confirmed by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman antiquities* 2.71.1 (Fig. 35).²⁰ The two modes of public display of the shields evoke the object's original flight in different ways, showing it at one point in mostly vertical positions but moving along horizontally as part of the Salians' dance, and at another allowing it some autonomy from the dancer's bodies and a degree of uncontrolled movement as they hang from the rack. They oscillate between their role as kinesthetic objects directing and amplifying the movement of the dancers and as a visual echo of the shield's self-moving origin.

In the iconography, then, we find the shields as a shorthand of the Salian ritual.²¹ Before and after the Salian dance and procession through the city, the shields are kept in the *regia* (the legendary residence of king Numa on the forum), as durable material symbols of divine protection.²² But at particular moments in time their power to avert evil is activated by agitating them and interrupting their inert "slumber," namely when before a military expedition the army leaders "move" them (*commovere*) while pronouncing the words "Wake, Mars!"²³ This detail shows beautifully that the function of this material object is inseparable from its kinetic dimension; in order to fulfil its specific purpose, it has to move (or be moved). The material object and what it signifies converge in its motion; there is no way to tell the two apart. Inasmuch as the Salian shield no longer moves by itself, human agents are tied into its meaning; conversely, the latter's move towards war is dependent on the shields' concurring movement, both during the annual festival and before an expedition, a movement which recalls the first arrival on earth of this token of divine protection. The shield cannot be reduced to its material properties, nor is its meaning fully defined by human agents. Rather, it is the performative centre, as it were, of a web of kinetic forces and affective engagements.²⁴ In the Salian ritual, it is a vital aspect of the dance's ability to enact

²⁰ See Schäfer 1980; Torelli 1997.

²¹ Habinek 2005, 21 notes that each component of the ritual, including the shields, evokes the ritual as a whole. Similarly, the *pompa circensis* which included various groups of dancers was represented on coins and reliefs by showing a single dancer (*ludio*) in a static pose, recognisable by his attributes (see Latham 2016, 32-35, 157; Fless & Moede 2007, 256).

²² The "off-stage lives" of masks are explored by Duncan 2018, 82-91. Temporarily unused objects are often depicted in the iconographic record; for an example see Fig. 24, discussed in the chapter on "Space," a phiale in Boston representing a female dancer holding clappers in her hands and, on the opposite side, a pair of suspended clappers.

²³ Serv. *Aen.* 7.603: *in Martis sacratio ancilia commovere*; 8.3: *ancilia commovebat... dicens 'Mars vigila.'*

²⁴ See Latour 2004, 210-11; Gell 1998, 231; for a case study (Ajax' sword) along these lines, see Mueller 2016, 19-38.

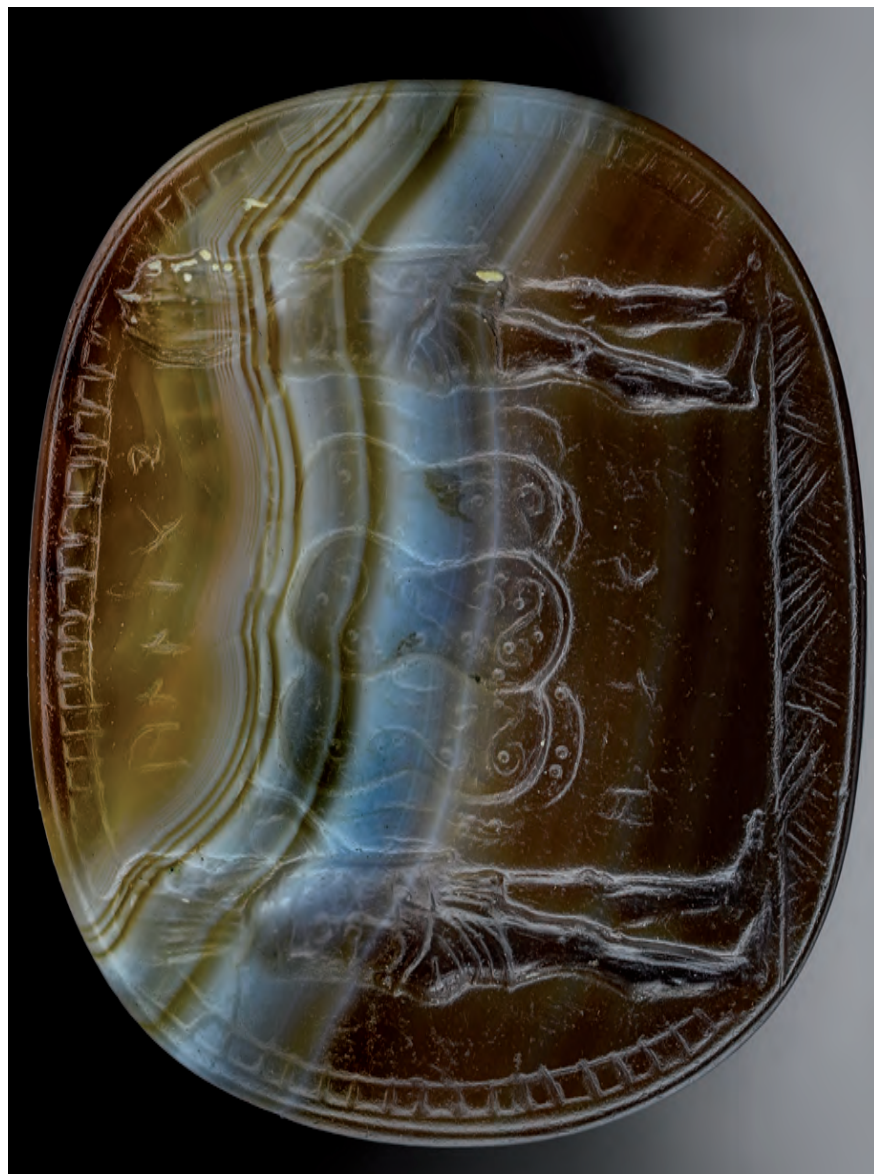


Figure 35: Sardonyx depicting two figures carrying the *ancilla*, 3rd-1st cent. BCE. National Archaeological Museum of Florence 14400. Image credit: with kind permission of the National Archaeological Museum of Florence (Direzione regionale Musei della Toscana). Reproduction of this image is forbidden.

and embody the divine consent encapsulated in the tale of the shields' origin and thus to elicit strong and positive emotions (see Prescendi 2022).

The reason for replicating the first shield is based on motifs that are often associated with dance or enacted through dance, namely imitation and deception. Numa, having picked up the shield from the ground (*tollit humo munus*, Ov. *Fast.* 3.375), contrives “a very clever plan” (*consilium multae calliditatis*, 3.380): in order to safeguard this precious object, “he has several more made, engraved according to the same pattern, so that a confusion may arise in front of a thief’s eyes” (*plura iubet fieri simili caelata figura, / error ut ante oculos insidiantis eat*, 3.381-82; similarly, Plut. *Vit. Num.* 13.2). Even the ball tossed by Halius and Laodamas is an object made by a clever, “skillful” (δᾶφρων) craftsman (*Od.* 8.373), a detail perhaps implicitly inviting a comparison between the craft that went into the object and the skill of the dancers.²⁵ But in the case of the shields, the accomplished craftsmanship of the blacksmith who replicates the archetype serves the additional purpose of masking the original and deceiving the viewer, including Numa himself. This aspect “materializes,” as it were, one of the age-old functions of dance as it transpires from the myth of the Curetes, who covered the cries of the baby Zeus by dancing around him while loudly clashing their arms in order to keep his father from harming him; according to one source, Lucian of Samosata, this ruse is one of the foundational moments of dance (*Salt.* 8; on the sonorous dimension of arms and shields used in dance, see below).

Interestingly, in the account given by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the *Salii* are interpreted as the Roman equivalent of the Greek Curetes (*Ant. Rom.* 2.70.4), whose myth was regularly evoked down to the imperial period by dancers impersonating the Curetes in the cult of Magna Mater, at Ephesus, or at Palaikastro on Crete (Lucr. 2.629-39; Knibbe 1981, nos. B1-B54; SEG 28, 751).²⁶ Given that both the *Salii* and the Curetes are armed dancers, the assimilation of these distinct groups of dancers is not surprising, but the motif of deception adds another element that their myths share. At the same time, the multiplication of the shields transposes to the material object the motif of imitation which is enacted for instance in the series of choruses that characterize the *pompa circensis*, where armed dancers, the *ludiones*, are followed by satyrs imitating and exaggerating their movements (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72).²⁷ These dancers from the entourage of Dionysus draw attention to the contrived

²⁵ This amounts to a comparison between *poiēsis* and *praxis*, but dance is adduced as an example of the latter only in the imperial period (Quint. *Inst.* 2.18.1-5). See also below, notes 37 and 42.

²⁶ See Graf 2022; Prescendi 2022.

²⁷ Latham (2016, 33) notes that the *ludiones* are professional players using “dummy-weapons.” See also Jannot 1992; Dupont 1993; Tagliafico 1994.

and artificial nature of the performance, spelling it out, as it were, in case it had not been noticed.²⁸ Likewise, if on one level, the multiplication of the Salian shields serves to protect these “certain guarantees of power” (Varro quoted by Serv. *Aen.* 7.188) which are inextricably linked to the well-being of Rome, on another level, the series of identical shields only makes the irretrievability of the original, heavenly shield evident, just as the regulated dance movements of the priests demonstrate and enact the distance from an original, natural way of moving, prior to human intention and convention.²⁹ The twelve shields of the Salians, just like the ball made by Polybus, enhance the perception of dance as a craft, a technique. More specifically, the objects—Polybus’ ball no less than the Salians’ warlike shields—serve to drive home the point that dance is a cultural practice which participates in measuring oneself against others. In so doing, dance contributes to defining social order, both by demonstrating unity and harmony within a duo or a chorus and by establishing hierarchies in relation to others.³⁰ In the case of solo dancers, the stress inevitably falls on the latter aspect. Indeed, it is Xenophon’s female dancer leaping towards the swords who prompts comments on the suitability of her courage and skill for war.³¹

There is a strong connection, then, between imitation, reduplication, and competition, and objects serve to bring these issues to light. Furthermore, the objects considered so far—balls, shields, and swords—show that there is a sliding scale between toys and weapons; the former may well be stand-ins for the latter, as the example of Alcinous’ sons suggest. It is thus evident that the objects included in a dance possess a mimetic or expressive dimension, even when they are not part of a representational dance or embedded in an overarching dramatic setting. This is true also for Xenophon’s sympotic dancer leaping towards the sword, not just in that her dance might in fact evoke a battle scene, but in that it turns her into a model of courage for Athenian men.

²⁸ Similarly, in Xenophon’s *Symposium* the professional dancers are imitated by Philipp the buffoon, who acts out their movements by grotesquely exaggerating them (2.22).

²⁹ Similarly, Ovid expands on how the Curetes and Corybants, whom he both associates with Magna Mater, use their arms as noisy instruments in imitation of an original action, now lost: “the matter was concealed, and of the original feat there remain simulations (*res latuit, priscique manent imitamina facti*): the companions of the goddess move the bronze and the noise-making skins, they beat cymbals instead of helmets, drums instead of shields, the pipe plays Phrygian melodies, as it did in the past” (*Fast.* 4.211-214).

³⁰ *Od.* 8.371 (quoted above) brings this out. Incidentally, Bremmer (1993, 163) argues that the story of the multiplication of the shields was devised so that no particular member of the Salian priesthood would “feel himself raised above his fellow Romans.”

³¹ As Olsen (2021, 2) puts it, solo dance “tends to signify vulnerability or violation within the social and political order.”

Falling Bodies

At the opposite extreme from orchestric control over material objects is the falling body of the dead soldier.³² The lifeless, inert body experiencing the effect of gravity becomes itself an object exposed to and manipulated by external forces. Surprisingly, even such a fall can be seen as a form of dance. In Book 16 of the *Iliad* Kebriones, who is fatally wounded, falls “like an acrobat” (ἄρνευτήρι ἐοικώς, 742), and Patroclus mockingly describes him as tumbling down (κυβιστῶ) like a somersaulting diver plunging into the water (745-50). Beyond the obvious sarcasm of the comparison in the situation at hand, the simile acknowledges that the human body given over to gravity and letting up all control can yield a movement that resembles an acrobatic dance.³³ The grey area between dancing and dying, between moving and being moved, between artful and natural physical movement will be exploited to great effect in the late antique epic *Dionysiaka* by Nonnus (for instance 11.217-21). It could be compared to what choreographer Elizabeth Streb has called a “real move,” exemplified by the body falling from a considerable height: “Velocity matters—someone moving who could choose, instead, to be still is probably not performing a real move. A real move, such as a fall, is one that a person would get hurt trying to stop” (Wilkinson 2015). The interest of this type of experiment for a reflection on dance as an art form and on art in general was not lost on ancient authors.

In antiquity, too, the body of a dancer in free fall can be part of a spectacle, as in an episode of Trimalchio’s dinner party in Petronius’ novel *Satyricon*. Among the many entertainments orchestrated by the host is a boy dancing atop a ladder held by another acrobat. He jumps through some burning hoops and balances an amphora on his teeth, when all of a sudden, the ladder breaks and he tumbles down onto the host, apparently injuring the latter’s arm (53.11-54.1). The whole sequence, though, seems to be staged, with the boy duly appealing to the dinner guests “to be let off” (*missionem rogabat*), as if impersonating a gladiator begging for mercy (54.3). The narrator suspects that this is yet another “coup de théâtre” (*catastrophæ*) arranged by Trimalchio for his clueless guests, and he looks around to check for “some contrivance” (*automatum aliquod*) to come out of the wall

³² The “gesture of falling” in Homer has been examined by Purves 2006 and 2019, 37-65.

³³ The soldier exposed to the force of war turns into a mere thing even while alive, as Simone Weil notes in her famous essay on the *Iliad* (Weil 1965). Patroclus’ simile does not necessarily minimize this force by aestheticizing it; rather, it signals that a dancer lets up control within the limits governed by moderation, a quality the Iliadic warriors lack—except perhaps, according to Weil (1965, 22), for Patroclus. Hutchinson (2020, 68-70), who discusses ἄρνευτήρ in n. 52 expands on the contrast between this motion and the resulting “grandiose stillness.”

(54.3-4).³⁴ Instead, Trimalchio frees the boy, “so that no one could say that such a great man had been hurt by a slave boy” (54.5). The boy’s fall is instrumental to this dénouement, in which the expected appearance of some mechanical contraption explaining the stunt is replaced by Trimalchio’s speech act, and the ostensible mishap of the broken ladder becomes the agent of the boy’s new social status. Another memorable fall of a dancer is recorded in a late antique epigram on a pantomime impersonating Capaneus, the mythical warrior who was struck by Zeus’ thunderbolt while trying to scale the walls of Thebes. It cleverly plays with the ambiguity of the word *casus*, which means both “chance” and “fall” (Auson. Epigram 95 Green): “A felicitous coincidence (*felix casus*) blended into duped art (*deceptae... arti*): a pantomime dancing Capaneus fell to the ground.” In this Latin variation on the traditional pair of *tuchē* (“chance”) and *technē* (“skill”), chance complements technique in the form of the dancer’s uncontrolled fall, which is reclaimed as an integral part of the danced story.

It would be simplistic, then, to think that inert objects as part of choreographies first of all serve to showcase human agency and control. On the contrary, the examples of the falling human body which contributes to a dance suggest that all kinds of objects, including the dancing body itself, may actually introduce or signal an element of fortuitousness and showcase the limits of human control, or rather point to an interdependence and exchangeability of human dancers and material objects which together make up a dance.

Another scene from Xenophon’s *Symposium* explores precisely this interplay between a dancing body and a material object. At one point, “a potter’s wheel was brought in for the dancer, upon which she was going to perform marvels” (εἰσεφέρετο τῇ ὀρχηστρίδι τροχὸς τῶν κεραμεικῶν, ἐφ’ οὗ ἔμελλε θαυματουργήσιν, 7.2).³⁵ We do not learn whether the wheel was set into motion before (or while) the dancer went up to perform her feats on it, but we may presume that it was, for otherwise any other platform would do. An image on a Paestan skyphos at the Ashmolean Museum shows a dancer on a potter’s wheel and another performer setting it into motion (Fig. 36).

On a spinning wheel, the dancer’s body has to contend with the centrifugal forces pulling it off the wheel; the dancer must adjust his or her own position and movement constantly in relation to the moving support. One could say that the wheel partly conditions the body’s movement; in reality, it only brings to consciousness the simple fact that the moving body, thanks to proprioception, *always* adjusts constantly to the environment and to its own kinetic impulses,

³⁴ On *automata*, see also below.

³⁵ See also Pl. *Enthyd.* 294d-e, and Vickers 2016, 218-30; Attia & Delahaye 2021, 53-54. Olsen (2021, 166) notes that the potter’s wheel objectifies and commodifies the dancer, who occupies the place of a pot.



Figure 36: Paestan red-figure kotyle depicting a female acrobat with an assistant wearing a comic mask, c. 4th cent. BCE. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford 1945.43. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

but mostly without any of it registering. Contemporary choreographers have experimented with moving surfaces to explore the body's ability to cope with unusual and changing forces acting upon it. Yoann Bourgeois, for example, gave a group of dancers the task of staying on their feet ("tenir debout") while on a platform that was alternately swaying or spinning, a visualization of sorts of the ancient idea that the space itself dances (see Fig. 37 for a photograph of this production).³⁶

Xenophon's potter's wheel harks back to one of the dance scenes of the shield description in *Iliad* 18, where this object is an image for the swift movement of the dancers' feet (*Il.* 18.600).³⁷ In fact, the proximity of the human body and material objects is borne out in the ubiquitous and abundant use of comparisons and images to describe dance. While different from actual objects and props appearing in dances, these linguistic procedures can nevertheless

³⁶ See the chapter on "Space," and the characteristic ambiguity of the Greek word *choros*, which means both "dance-floor" and "dance." Further contemporary examples include Israel Galván, *La Fiesta* (2017), and Cie Moost, *Palette(s)* (2017).

³⁷ Steiner 2021, 60 notes that this comparison resolves the contrast between moving and making; see also above, on the skill of a craftsman and the skill of dancers. Xenophon's dancer literalizes the metaphor of the *Iliad* 18.600 by adding the actual object (see Olsen 2021, 166).



Figure 37: Yoann Bourgeois, *Celui qui tombe* (2014). Image credit: Géraldine Aresteanu.

add further nuances to our understanding of the role of objects in dance. Many images are drawn from the natural environment, including animals, trees, and the heavenly sphere.³⁸ But artifacts crop up, too. In one dance scene of Xenophon's *Symposium*, for instance, the female dancer bends backwards to "imitate hoops" (τροχούς ἐμμεῖτο, 2.22), likening herself to the props she used earlier. And in an epigram in Martial's *Liber spectaculorum*, a chorus of Nereids arranges itself alternately into the shapes of a trident, an anchor, an oar, and a ship.³⁹ These examples are typical in that they do not simply illustrate the use of images as a descriptive strategy; rather, the dancers themselves are, as it were, kinetic metaphors of the things they figure. Indeed, as Olsen notes discussing the transformative dimension of dance, they "become" the things they represent or look like.⁴⁰ Dance thus explodes the notion of metaphor: if dancers "become" animals, trees, and artifacts, the association operated by metaphor is no longer located in the language but in the body of the dancer.⁴¹ If the Sword-Dance, to give a simple example, is called thus because according to the lexicon by Hesychius (s.v. *xiphosmos*) the dancer stretches his arms straight up, in the eyes of the onlooker the dancer himself likens his body to a sword.⁴²

³⁸ See the chapter on "Body." More generally on the imagery pertaining to (choral) dance, see Kurke 2013, 154-59; Peponi 2015, 2013-14. See also the Introduction to this volume.

³⁹ Mart. *Spect.* 30 (26). Cf. the chapter on "Movement" for further discussion of this poem.

⁴⁰ See the concluding section of the chapter on "Body."

⁴¹ Physical *mimesis* seems to underlie a number of rhetorical notions (see Schlapbach 2008; Bocksberger 2017).

⁴² The affinity of metaphor as a literary device and metamorphosis as a plot element, for instance in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, has been explored by Sharrock 1996; LeVen 2021. It is certainly of the

One comparison or conflation is especially persistent through the centuries, that of nimble dancers and glowing statues, and it goes both ways. Statues are seen as frozen dancers, and dancers stiffen into the shapes known from statues (e.g., Callistratus, *Descriptions of Statues* 11.4, and Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 747c, respectively).⁴³ The space in between these two extremes is populated by self-moving statues, like those invented by Daedalus or Hephaestus, and rigid dancers seemingly made of wood or stone.⁴⁴ The latter represent a paradox explored by a number of epigrams on pantomimes portraying the metamorphosis of a mythical character—Daphne, Niobe—into inert matter (see also “Body”). An example by Lucillius ingeniously plays with the connotations of the word *automatos*, which often denotes self-moving objects but is here applied tongue-in-cheek to a dancer named Aristo, “the living original of Niobe,” who appears to be “naturally made of stone” (αὐτομάτως λίθινος, *Anth. Pal.* 11.253, lines 4-6).⁴⁵ Among the recurring images that Plato uses in his normative discourse on *choreia* is the marionette, which is situated in an ambiguous grey area between miraculous animation and constraint, as it is moved by external forces.⁴⁶ Even audience members turn into marionettes according to Plutarch’s *Table Talk*, where Ammonius quotes a dance-song by Pindar or Simonides (fr. *107a Maehler or F 255 Poltera, respectively) and comments that the poet “practically used to impose representation in dancing and to sway both hands and feet, or rather to pull and brace the whole body with the melodies as if with strings, since it cannot keep still when these words are spoken or sung” (748b-c).⁴⁷ If true, audience members are involved too in the characteristic blurring of active and passive, of agency and objectification that dance enacts and makes visible.⁴⁸

Beyond metaphor and comparison, actual images seem to appear on the stage in a fragment from Aeschylus’ satyr play *Isthmianstai* or *Theōroi*, which features a chorus of satyrs who behold (and comment on) their own likenesses—masks, portrait heads or statues—which they affixed to the temple of

greatest interest in pantomime, which combines dance and text and which gave the representation of metamorphosis ample space (see Ingleheart 2008; Lada-Richards 2013).

⁴³ For the Archaic and Classical epochs, see Kurke 2012 and 2013; Steiner 2021; see also the chapters on “Audience” and “Movement.” In their stillness before dancing, Halius and Laodamas resemble statues (see Power 2011, 69, 98; Olsen 2021, 29). See also Bielfeldt 2018.

⁴⁴ For the *daidaleia* or *daidala*, see Eur. fr. 372 Kannicht; for Hephaestus, see *Il.* 18.375-76 and 416-21 (where the objects make up for the god’s physical handicap). See Pugliara 2003.

⁴⁵ On *automata* in the Hellenistic period, see Trnka-Amrhein 2021.

⁴⁶ *Divine* forces according to Plato, *Leg.* 644d 7-8 and 803c 4-5 (see Kurke 2013).

⁴⁷ Pickard-Cambridge 1988, 249; Schlapbach 2018, 36-37.

⁴⁸ Quite in line with Lepecki’s remarks on the body as “a material, socially-inscribed agent, a non-univocal body, an open potentiality, a force-field constantly negotiating its position in the powerful struggle for its *appropriation and control*” (2004, 6, my emphasis; see also the chapter on “Body”).

Poseidon as votive offerings (fr. 78a col. I, 5-17 Radt).⁴⁹ In this *mise-en-abîme* of the dramatic situation—another variation of the motif of imitation and multiplication—static (and “voiceless,” line 20) objects mirror the usually vigorous and energetic satyrs. The scene not only spells out visually the *topos* of the dancer as an animated image and the image as a frozen dancer, but also draws attention to the fabricated, artful nature of both, an aspect which in the passage at hand is further complicated by the fact that the satyrs, as often in satyr plays, do not behave as is expected of them but “learn new ways” (line 34). Ironically the images, which the satyrs recognize as faithful (lines 13-17), serve to authenticate the satyrs in a play that pushes the limits of their identity.⁵⁰

Overall, then, material objects—more precisely, artifacts—play a crucial role in connoting dance as a cultural practice and in distinguishing it as such by making its contrived, man-made nature evident. Far from establishing a contrast between physical movement and inert matter, the use of objects in dance tends to confound the two.

Costume, Sonorous Objects, Garlands

Some props simply support and underline the structure of the physical movement. This seems to be the case of the rope that links the maidens’ hands in the procession described by Livy for the year 207 BCE: “a cortege was formed on the forum, and the maidens, holding a rope that ran through their hands, proceeded while modulating the sound of their voice with the beat of their feet” (*in foro pompa constitit et per manus recte data virgines sonum vocis pulsu pedum modulantes incesserunt*, 27.37.14).⁵¹ Others have a more pronounced representational function. Many ancient Greek and Roman dancers wore masks. This is true for dramatic choruses and for pantomimes alike. While the mask focuses the attention of the spectator and lends emphasis to the slightest head movement which may in turn suggest expressive glances, it possesses no kinetic autonomy in relation to the dancer’s face, with which it basically

⁴⁹ See Wessels & Krumeich 1999; Weiss 2023.

⁵⁰ Lämmle 2019, 35; Weiss 2023.

⁵¹ A rope is mentioned also in Terence (*Ad.* 752), apparently not in relation to a chorus: “You will dance among the two, drawing a rope?” (*tu inter eas restim ductans saltabis?*), but the late antique commentary on this line by Donatus does mention a chorus. Lawler (1946, 128-29) assumes a remote connection with snakes. Holding each others’ hands is a very common characteristic of choruses; see already *Il.* 18.594: “they danced while holding each others’ hands by the wrist” (ὄρχευντ’, ἀλλήλων ἐπὶ καρπῷ χεῖρας ἔχοντες).

merges.⁵² By contrast, a dancer's cloak can be agitated and set into motion to great effect, as Loïe Fuller's famous Serpentine dance demonstrated at the turn of the twentieth century. While Fuller's costume in this dance had first of all a kinesthetic function, expanding and aggrandizing her bodily movements, the popular perception that she imitated the ancient Greek Tanagra figurines (for an example, see Fig. 38), documented in an important production of Art Nouveau statuettes with titles such as "Loïe Fuller dite 'Tanagra danseuse'" (by Joseph and Pierre Mougin), filled her costume with a meaning, namely Greekness (Figs. 39 and 40).⁵³

In Imperial pantomime, the cloak was perceived as a polysemous signifier, which could change its meaning according to what the dancer needed for his story. A passage from the second century rhetorician Fronto, which adduces a dancer's costume by way of comparison, is telling (*De orationibus* 5 p. 150, 14-20 van den Hout):

Primum illud in isto genere dicendi vitium turpissimum, quod eandem sententiam milliis alio atque alio amictu indutam referunt. ut bistriones, quom palliolatim saltant, caudam cycni, capillum Veneris, Furiae flagellum eodem pallio demonstrant, ita isti unam eandemque sententiam multimodis faciunt: ventilant, commutant, convertunt, eadem lacinia saltitant, refricant eandem unam sententiam saepius quam puellae olfactaria sucina.

First of all, the most terrible flaw in this type of speech is that they repeat the same statement a thousand times wrapping it in a different cloak each time. Just as the dancers, when they perform with a mantle, represent the tail of the swan, Venus' hair, or the whip of the Fury with the same garment, thus these orators fashion one and the same sentence in many different ways: they flourish, turn around, flip over and show in the dance one and the same thing with the same fringe, and they rub it more thoroughly than girls rub fragrant amber.

Strikingly, while in the case of the orators the "different cloak" is a metaphor for new words saying the same thing over and over again, for the dancer the mantle is always the same but signifies different things at different moments of the dance. The comparison turns the familiar image of words as envelopes on

⁵² The dramatic and pantomimic masks have been studied extensively; see Wiles 2007; Webb 2008b; Meineck 2011; Petrides 2013; Duncan 2018.

⁵³ The critic Roger Marx wrote that thanks to Loïe Fuller, "l'orchestrique des anciens Hellènes nous est rendue;" to illustrate his point he includes the image of a Tanagra figurine characteristically draped in various layers of cloth (Marx 1904, 7). Interestingly, the question of whether Fuller's costume signified anything in particular was at the centre of a lawsuit which Fuller intended against an imitator and lost: the judge ruled that since her dance was not representational, it was not eligible for copyright (see Doran 2015). In 1927, Martha Graham created a dance entitled "Tanagra," in which the costume also played a central role.

its head: whereas in relation to language the image suggests that things can be isolated by peeling away the words, in dance the thing that is represented is just as variable as the versatile cloak, the two change together and cannot be told apart. Representation does not work the same way in dance and in language; the medium of dance suggests a material coincidence that language cannot achieve.⁵⁴ The versatility of the piece of garment is granted in large part by the dancer's movement, which makes up for the relative paucity of other expressive tools the dancer works with, i.e. his or her own body and attire.⁵⁵ Perhaps because these tools were limited in number, the costumes, props, and masks used by dancers were of paramount importance to them, as can be gleaned from inscriptions found on the doorways of rooms at the back of the theater in Aphrodisias, which mention the "invincible equipment" of performers.⁵⁶ In the more private and informal context of the *convivium*, it was probably also the cloak that could be repurposed to represent attributes such as the infamous tail of Glaucus, a mythical sea-god



Figure 38: Terracotta statuette of a standing woman, so-called Tanagra figurine, late 4th or early 3rd cent. BCE. Image credit: bpk | The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

⁵⁴ On the age-old metaphor of words as envelopes, see Blumenberg 2019; on the comparison between dance and language, see Schlapbach 2018, 66, 98.

⁵⁵ Jory (1996, 11) notes that the cloak is an "all-purpose prop." On costumes and their meanings, see Wyles 2008, 2011, 2020; Gouy 2023.

⁵⁶ Roueché 1993, 15-21.



Figure 39: Loïe Fuller, photograph by Benjamin J. Falk. Library of Congress.

with animal traits who was impersonated by a follower of Antonius, Munatius Plancus: “when painted in blue and without his clothes, his head adorned with reeds and trailing a tail, he was propped up on his knees and danced Glaucus at a banquet” (*cum caeruleatus et nudus caputque redimitus arundine et caudam trabens, genibus innixus Glaucum saltasset in convivio*, Vell. Pat. 2.83.2).

The uncertain boundaries between object and body, as well as between a kinesthetic prop and a signifier, can be illustrated by a somewhat hazardous variant of an aerial dance found at the beginning of Apuleius’ novel *Metamorphoses* or *The Golden Ass*. In this episode, a material object virtually becomes a body



Figure 40: Loïe Fuller, photograph by Samuel Joshua Beckett. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Image credit: bpk | The Metropolitan Museum of Art
| Samuel Joshua Beckett.

part of a performer who all but ingests it, offering another performer an opportunity for a pole dance of sorts (1.4.4, trans. Hanson):

Et ecce pone lanceae ferrum, qua bacillum inversi teli ad occipitium per ingluviem subit, puer in molliem decorus insurgit inque flexibus tortuosis enervam et exossam saltationem explicat, cum omnium qui aderamus admiratione.

Then suddenly, above the metal part of the spear where the staff of the inverted weapon rose from his throat toward his crown, an effeminately beautiful boy shinnied up and unfolded a dance without muscle or spine, all twists and turns, to the amazement of all of us there.⁵⁷

The stunning feat defies credulity, and is meant to, in the context of Apuleius' novel. But the account does not end here; instead, the narrator proceeds to offer an interpretation of what he saw, drawing on his iconographical knowledge (1.4.5, trans. Hanson):

Diceret dei medici baculo, quod ramulis semiampulatis nodosum gerit, serpentem generosum lubricis amplexibus inhaerere.

You would have said it was that noble serpent clinging in its slippery embrace to the Physician-God's staff, the one he carries all knotty with half-amputated branches.

In this highly selective interpretation, which once more juxtaposes dance and sculpture, the spear is miraculously transformed into a knotty staff and the boy into Asclepius' snake, while the most arresting and potentially dangerous detail, namely the fact that the weapon protrudes from another performer's throat, is simply left out of the picture. This short sequence of a dance followed by an interpretation will be complemented by a much more elaborate scene combining dance and interpretation situated at the very climax of the narrative (10.29-34). Both scenes illustrate in different ways how props, even though they are initially recognized and described as such, somehow disappear from the spectator's field of vision, leaving in place only the representational content. Arguably the props themselves are agents of this transformational process, despite their seemingly unequivocal materiality. But props may of course also resist or transcend their assigned role in the dramatic illusion or in any staged display. Weapons are a case in point, doubly interesting because of their capacity to harm. Macrobius transmits an anecdote according to which Pylades impersonating *Hercules furens* once shot arrows into the audience who apparently did not appreciate his performance; in another anecdote, a dancer

⁵⁷ See Vickers 2016, 100 n. 287.

representing Ajax was carried away by his own play, grabbed an *aulos* (double-reed pipe) from a musician and struck another performer on his head, almost killing him (Macrob. *Sat.* 2.7.16-17; Luc. *Salt.* 83).⁵⁸

Musical instruments participated in dance spectacles not only by providing music but also as physical objects interacting with the dancers and the audience, as we saw in the discussion of a Paestan red-figure calyx-krater from Lipari in the chapter on “Audience.” The shape of the musical instrument is crucial in an anecdote about a *cinaedus* performing in a theater in Suetonius’ *Life of Augustus* 68: when this solo dancer played a circular hand-drum, the crowd mockingly referred his performance to Octavian’s endeavour to control the globe. Percussion instruments in particular allow the dancer to coordinate physical movement and sound production very closely, and castanets (*crotala*) are not musical instruments but veritable “dancing instruments.”⁵⁹ In addition, a whole range of objects could both be part of the dancer’s attire and serve to create sounds and rhythms. This is the case of the aforementioned shields and swords of the Curetes, which were instrumental in saving the baby Zeus: “acting as nurses to Zeus, they strove to amuse him by the clashing of arms and the rhythmic movements of their limbs, as the legend has it” (ὅτε τὸν Δία τιθηνοῦμενοι θέλγειν ἐβούλοντο κτύπῳ τε ὅπλων καὶ κινήσει μελῶν ἐνρhythμῳ καθάπερ ὁ μῦθος ἔχει, Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.7, trans. Cary). Paulus Diaconus, drawing on a lost work on the meaning of words by Festus (second century CE), uses an expression which puts the emphasis on the sound produced by armed dancers (p. 31 Lindsay): “they called it the war-sounding dance, when they danced with arms, what was introduced by Romulus” (*bellicrepam saltationem dicebant, quando cum armis saltabant, quod a Romulo institutum est*). Plutarch notes that the Salian priests strike their shields with daggers while they move through the city performing their dance, the *tripudium* (*Vit. Num.* 13.4-5).

As far back as in Homer, the young dancers depicted on Achilles’ shield are distinguished by attributes according to their gender (*Il.* 18.597-98):

καὶ ῥ’ αἱ μὲν καλὰς στεφάνας ἔχον, οἱ δὲ μαχαίρας
εἶχον χρυσείας ἐξ ἀργυρέων τελαμώνων.

The maidens wore beautiful garlands, the boys daggers
of gold, which hung from their silver belts.

⁵⁸ See Schlapbach 2018, 193-94. Such deviations from the implicit script could in principle also happen in acrobatic performances.

⁵⁹ I owe this phrase to Zoa Alonso Fernández. The observation is borne out beautifully in the pseudo-Virgilian *Copa* (lines 2 and 4), discussed in the chapters on “Body” and “Audience.” The anecdote on the *cinaedus* is discussed by Curtis 2022.

The lines were later quoted by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 7.72.5), but some ancient readers considered them a later addition, because they thought that male armed dancers needed swords, not daggers (see Coray 2016, 261). Be that as it may, many passages show that garlands are a minimal requirement to adorn the body, male and female, and make it special for the dance.⁶⁰ Lucretius' account of how dance was first invented illustrates this beautifully (5.1399- 404):

*tum caput atque umeros plexis redimire coronis
floribus et foliis lascivia laeta movebat,* 400
*atque extra numerum procedere membra moventes
duriter et duro terram pede pellere matrem;
unde oriebantur risus dulcesque cachinni,
omnia quod nova tum magis haec et mira vigeant.*

Then, a joyful exuberance moved them to adorn their heads and shoulders
with garlands of plaited flowers and leaves,
and to pace unrhythmically while moving their limbs
in a rough manner and to beat mother earth with a rough foot,
which provoked sweet laughter and chuckling,
because all these new and marvelous things were stronger then.

Strikingly, dance is the first cultural innovation which in Lucretius' account of the early stages of human society does not find a model in nature, whereas music, for instance, arises by imitating the birds and the wind that blows through reeds (1379-89). This crucial moment of arbitrary invention is characterized by the preliminary act of transforming the body, as though the new practice itself, the dance, needed this additional mark to be recognizable as such.⁶¹ It seems, then, that dance involves more than simply a moving body, and at this initial stage the material object of the garland compensates for the fact that technical mastery is as yet absent.

To conclude, if the first part of this chapter showed that imitation, this core concern brought to light by dance and further enhanced by material objects, contains by its very nature a comparative and competitive dimension, this observation can now be extended also to the relationship between dancer and material objects, which is fundamentally reciprocal. The moving body, complemented by material objects moving in relation to it or providing a stable

⁶⁰ Again, see *Copa* (line 32): *et gravidum roseo necte caput strophio* ("and adorn your heavy head with a garland of roses").

⁶¹ For a somewhat similar account of the invention of dance, see Tib. 1.7.35-52, where garlands are complemented by special clothes, ointments, scents, and cult objects. See Schlapbach 2021.

point of reference, is a living image of the give and take of static and kinetic energy which characterizes not only competitive physical interactions among human beings but also, and more fundamentally, a way of being in the world and interacting with the physical environment. In this light, it is interesting to return once more to Alcinous' sons and ask why the dance scene in *Odyssey* 8 culminates in this rare depiction of a pair of dancers playing ball. As we saw, their dance, which oscillates between a solo performance and choral dance, is an answer to Odysseus' solitary and threatening throw of the discus. It is in a way a singularly complete dance, which by its very structure—two dancers handling a material object travelling back and forth between them—spells out and showcases dance as a primordial cultural practice that endeavours to give shape to one's being with each other and being in the world.⁶²

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Politics

Laura Gianvittorio-Ungar

Introduction: Expanding the Politics of Ancient Dance

A traditional approach to the political dimensions of dance is to discuss how heads of state and high-ranking politicians resort to dance to advance their power games and diplomatic agendas. This might include, for example, the use of lavish dance events to shape marriage politics and international relationships, or the ways in which leaders enhance their public image with the allure of their own dancing bodies and costumes.¹ While the love affairs of, for example, Louis the Fourteenth and Elisabeth the First with dance have been particularly well-studied, this phenomenon is still observable today.² As far as the ancient world is concerned, rulers involved themselves with dance and dance-related arts, such as theater and *mousikē*, with different political effects that also depended on the attitudes of Greek and Roman societies towards these arts.³ For example, in Classical Athens, where theater and *mousikē* were highly valued, the man who would eventually lead the city through its Golden Age, Pericles, made his political *entrée* by sponsoring the singing and dancing training of choruses for a theater play (Aeschylus' *Persians*: see Wilson 2000, 174-75), and one of the so-called Thirty Tyrants, Critias, engaged in political debate also through his own theatrical works and the conservative positions on music that they promoted (Wilson 2003b). On the other hand, due to the prevalent attitudes to theatrical and musical performers in early Imperial Rome, Nero's reputation for being an Actor-Emperor and a lyre-player served as a strong argument for undermining his moral and political credentials.⁴

¹ See, e.g., Braun & Gugerli 1993.

² E.g., in 2018 the waltz and final curtsy of Austria's Foreign Minister Karin Kneissl to Vladimir Putin at her wedding reception epitomized the values and geopolitical orientation of the far-right government which she represented.

³ At least until the end of the Classical Greek period, terms such as *mousikē*, *molpē*, and *choreia* referred to varying combinations of song, dance, and instrumental music; see the Introduction to this volume.

⁴ For example, Nero was said to wear on stage masks in the likeness of the women who were murdered on his command (Cass. Dio 63.9.4-5), and to contribute with his performances to

The biographical narratives surrounding Theodora, a sixth-century Byzantine empress fabled to have used her skills as a dancer-actress in her ascent from brothel to throne, are emblematic of the difficulties and possibilities presented to historians of ancient dance. On the one hand, information about Theodora's artistic career depends on a venomous pamphlet against her husband the Emperor Justinian—Procopius' *Secret History* (sixth century CE)—which debases the Empress with lurid descriptions of obscene performances.⁵ On the other hand we, as modern readers, may be tempted to extract from the *Secret History* the narrative of a self-empowered woman who enhanced her status and political standing through the deployment of her different skills, including her skills as a performer. In this vein, it is remarkable how modern representations of Theodora highlight her commanding physicality, assertive body language and rich attire, portraying her as a woman in control of her presence and power. In Fig. 41, for example, we see Sarah Bernhardt as Theodora in the homonymous melodrama by Victorien Sardou (1884), a production for which the actress drew inspiration from the mosaics in Ravenna depicting the empress.⁶ And in *Empress Theodora* by Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant (1887; Fig. 42), the body language of the young empress posing on the throne indicates how she fits her role—with an alert head, a straightforward gaze, her arms resting on majestically high armrests, and her feet apart at shoulder width.

These examples show that there is evidence available for a study of rulers' engagement with dance in the ancient Greek and Roman world. Yet, probably, de-centering men and women of power from our investigation makes sense for reasons pertaining to the very nature of both politics and dance. To begin with the latter, dancers can be politically influential even when they do not hold public office, and in fact, even when they are largely unaware of the political implications or manipulations of their agency. The visual vocabularies of dance lend themselves to commentary on social change, instability, and visions; furthermore, the often-elusive quality of dance communication offers room for readings of this kind.⁷ In short, dance is suitable for socio-political messages as well as interpretations. As for politics, what motivates a more comprehensive approach is the fact that the horizon of "the political" encompasses far more than the agency of individual politicians.

delegitimizing Rome in the eyes of enemies such as the rebel Vindex, who allegedly said of the Roman Emperor: "I have often heard him sing, play the herald, and act in tragedies" (63.22.5-6). On Nero's theatricality see, e.g., Champlin 2003, 83; Dessì 2020, 441-42; Curtis 2022, 308.

⁵ On Theodora see, e.g., Foss 2002; Potter 2015; Becker 2017.

⁶ Shapira 2021.

⁷ Franko (1995, xi) observes that dance works stay "glued to expectations, delusions, and agendas projected by the spectators," though of course the same applies to other (wordless) arts.



Figure 41: Sarah Bernhardt as Theodora. Photograph by William Downey, 1900. Source: Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 42: *Empress Theodora*, by Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant. Oil on canvas, 1887. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Buenos Aires. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The present chapter is indebted to studies that over the past decades have expanded the notion of “politics” and “the political” to include important social and cultural dimensions. A prime example is Mark Franko’s pioneering reappraisal of French dance in the baroque period (Franko 2015, first edition 1993). Departing from the tradition of focusing on dancing monarchs, Franko argued for seeing the political “not solely as the history of diplomacy and statecraft but as *rapport de forces*”—a structuralist framework which quickly gained traction in dance scholarship.⁸ His emphatic refusal to reiterate “royalist fairy tales” about French dance and society of that period highlighted how writing about dance can be a political act in itself (an issue to which I will return in my concluding remarks). Along similar lines, today’s dance scholars are further expanding the field in

which dance and politics can be observed to interact with each other. They are re-thinking the construction of political meaning as a participatory process that

⁸ The quotation is from Franko’s Preface to the revised edition of 2015, xv-xvi. For an example in subsequent dance scholarship see Martin 1998, 3: “Politics concerns the forces that devise the social world.” In some regards, Connerton 1989 anticipated dance scholarship by investigating how bodily practices shape cultural and political identities through the collective body of society.

nuances the dividing line between dancers and spectators, exploring dance's capacity to attract endorsement and consensus, and reconceptualizing the dialectics between bodily practices and the regulations imposed upon them—to mention issues that are particularly relevant to this chapter.⁹

These frameworks encourage us to broaden the range of questions that can be asked about the interfaces of dance and politics in antiquity, but they also need to be fine-tuned to the specifics of ancient bodily and political cultures and to the very nature of our documentation. Created primarily by and for members of the elite (political, social, economic, geographic, and cultural), much of the surviving literature and art of Greek and Roman antiquity reflects specific distributions of power, wealth, and privilege. Within Classics, approaches have been developed that help to explore the political implications of dance-related arts, even though dance itself has not been a major focus of attention. These approaches have illuminated how theater and music became involved with institutions, legislation, ideologies, propaganda, satire, censorship, economies, and societies, how they strengthened or re-negotiated political and cultural identities in times of peace and conflict, and the role they played in defining categories such as ethnicity, regionality, and otherness.¹⁰

Drawing on the multi-disciplinary background outlined above, this chapter tackles the mutual influences between dance and politics according to the (sometimes overlapping) categories of political agency, soft power, and political discourse, which will be discussed in separate sections. The first section, “Dance and Political Agency,” will deal with very concrete ways of doing politics through dance, discussing how individual dancers appear to produce tangible effects on their political environment. The subsequent section, “Dance and Soft Power” will consider subtler and more mediated influences, inquiring into how dance practices contributed towards spreading ideologies, selling agendas, and representing institutions. These two sections reflect that which I perceive to be a meaningful, though porous, distinction between a more individual, proactive, improvised, and potentially subversive type of political influence *vs.* a more social, regulated, and rehearsed one that aligns with established hierarchies of

⁹ E.g., Foster 2003, Lepecki 2013, Croft 2015. For further references see the chapter sections that follow.

¹⁰ E.g., Winkler & Zeitlin 1990; Griffith 1995; Musti 2000; Wilson 2000, 2003a and 2003b; Restani 2004; Kowalzig & Wilson 2013; Peponi 2013; Eichmann, Howell, & Lawson 2019; Rocconi 2019; Csapo & Wilson 2020a and 2020b; Griffith 2020; Dessi 2020; Klavan 2021, 71–84; Yu 2021; Curtis 2022; Olsen 2023. Some of these works will recur through what follows. On the role of dance in articulating collective identities, see also “Geography” and “Body.”

power. Finally, combining approaches to dance politics that focus on rulers with those oriented toward broader cultural perspectives, the section “Dance and Political Discourse” will analyse the role which dance-relevant legislation played in philosophical and historical discourses about utopian and dystopian states.

Dance and Political Agency

One ancient account portrayed the invention of dance as an act of civil resistance: according to this aetiology, dance was created when tyrants prohibited the use of language and the people employed physical expressions such as gestures, glances, and tears to communicate with each other.¹¹ This is one of a number of narratives, anecdotes, and traditions that highlight political dimensions of dance according to the popular imagery of past times.

My investigation of dance and political agency begins with two anecdotes about how individual dancers intervened in politics in direct and proactive ways. The first anecdote is recounted in the first decades of the third century CE by a Roman senator of Greek origins, the historian Cassius Dio.¹² It narrates how in 282 BCE Meton, a citizen of Taras in Apulia (Southern Italy), resorted to an improvised dance to make his political advice more compelling after having failed to persuade his fellow-citizens by means of oratory (Cass. Dio, 9.39.10, trans. Csapo & Wilson):

ὅτι Μέτων ὥς οὐκ ἔπεισε Ταραντίνους τὸ μὴ Ῥωμαίοις ἐκπολεμωθῆναι, ἐκ τε τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὑπεξῆλθε καὶ στεφάνους ἀνεδήσατο, συγκωμαστάς τε τινὰς καὶ αὐλητρίδα λαβὼν ὑπέστρεψεν. ἄδοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ καὶ κορδακίζοντος ἐξέστησαν τῶν προκειμένων καὶ ἐπεβόων καὶ ἐπεκρότουν, οἷα ἐν τῷ τοιούτῳ φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι. Καὶ ὃς σιγᾶσας αὐτοὺς Νῦν μὲν καὶ μεθύειν, ἔφη, καὶ κωμάζειν ἔξεστιν ἡμῖν· ἂν δ' ὅσα βουλευέσθε ἐπιτελέσητε, δουλεύσομεν.

Meton, failing to persuade the Tarantines not to engage in war with the Romans, withdrew unobserved from the assembly, tied garlands on his head, and returned along with some fellow revellers and a piper girl. At the sight of him singing and dancing the cordax, they gave up the business at hand to accompany his movements with shouts and hand clapping, as people are apt to do under such circumstances. But he, after reducing them

¹¹ *Prolegomenon Sylloge* 4 (ed. Rabe 1995: 24-25 = Walz 1968: 11-12) mentions the tyrant Hiero of Syracuse; Aelian, *Variae historiae* 14.22 mentions Tryzus; see Schlapbach 2018, 94-95. For further aetiologies of dance see Schlapbach 2021, 512-17.

¹² Cf. also Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 19.8.1-3.

to silence, said: “Now we may both be drunk and revel, but if you accomplish what you plan to do, we shall be slaves.”

According to this narrative, Meton would appear to dance with the purposes of politically engaging his audience, mobilizing their support, and gaining political leverage to avoid a war between Taras and Rome. By dancing, he first steps into the spotlight: relying on his knowledge about the dance tastes of his own fellow citizens, he captures their attention. He expects that the spectators will engage in the merry dance called the *kordax* (often associated with Greek comedy) “as people are apt to do under these circumstances,” and indeed, they soon join him with shouting and rhythmic clapping of the hands.¹³ In this way, Meton calls into existence an improvised chorus with himself as a leader. Group performance activates the spectators. It creates a sympathetic bond between them and their leader while making people enjoy themselves—an important point to which I will return in the final section. Physical, rhythmic, and communal agency, as well as the pleasure it engenders, turns casual bystanders into the community which Meton needs to deliver his political message. Crucially, dancing the *kordax* makes the Tarantines experience first-hand the fun and freedom of peace, which Meton cleverly contrasts with the consequences of war: “now we may both be drunk and revel, but if you accomplish what you plan to do, we shall be slaves.” Through dance, Meton constructs for the Tarantines the physical experience of peace and war—the very pleasures which they are enjoying *vs.* the potential deprivation thereof. He uses not only words but also the citizens’ bodies to help them grasp political scenarios. In Dio’s account, Meton’s pacifist message is compelling because of its embodied nature.

While Meton pursues his political goals by dancing, others are said to have done so by refusing to dance. An anecdote recalled by Sextus Empiricus (second century CE) recounts how when the king Antiochus took the city of Priene (in Asia Minor), a local dancer named Sostratus refused to perform the so-called “Liberty Dance” while his homeland was in servitude, with astonishing consequences (Sext. Emp. 293):¹⁴

Σώστρατος ὁ Ἀντιόχου ὀρχηστής, λαβόντος ὑποχείριον τὴν Πριήνην τοῦ βασιλέως πατρίδα οὖσαν αὐτοῦ καὶ παρὰ τὸ συμπόσιον τὴν ἐλευθερίαν ἀναγκάζομενος ὀρχεῖσθαι, οὐ καλὸν ἔφη τῆς πατρίδος αὐτοῦ δουλευούσης αὐτὸν ἐλευθερίαν ὀρχεῖσθαι· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐλευθερώθη τὴν πόλιν.

¹³ On the various genres of theatrical dance, see the Introduction to this volume.

¹⁴ On this anecdote see Schlappbach 2018, 177–78.

Sostratus, the dancer of Antiochus, when the king had conquered Priene—which was his homeland—and he was forced to dance the Liberty Dance at the banquet, said that it was not right for him to dance the Liberty while his homeland was enslaved; and because of this the city was set free.

Unlike Meton, Sostratus is a professional dancer and expected to perform on demand for a set audience. Under these circumstances, the boycott of the Liberty Dance and the uncompromising statement that accompanies it strike the internal spectators and readers as deliberate acts of resistance and defiance against the conquerors of Priene. These acts supposedly translated into the city's being "liberated"—a lofty word for the relative autonomy with which the Seleucids used to reward conquered territories that did not cause them troubles.

While the anecdotes about Meton and Sostratus show individuals using dance to proactively pursue political goals of their own, dancers were also instrumentalized for political purposes set by others. A testimony by the Syrian-born Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (fourth century CE) exemplifies the complex ways in which dancers acted politically and were at the same time acted upon. In complaining about the degeneracy of Rome in his day, Ammianus regrets that Romans are irremediably under the spell of dance and recalls recent events involving three thousand female dancers (*saltatrices*) (Amm. Marc. 14.6.19-20, trans. Rolfe 1935, slightly modified):

Postremo ad id indignitatis est ventum, ut cum peregrini ob formidatam haud ita dudum alimentorum inopiam pellerentur ab urbe praecipites, sectatoribus disciplinarum liberalium, impendio paucis, sine respiratione ulla extrusis, tenerentur mimarum asseculae veri, quique id simularunt ad tempus, et tria milia saltatricum, ne interpellata quidem, cum choris totidemque remanerent magistris. Et licet, quocumque oculos flexeris, feminas affatim multas spectare cirratas, quibus (si nupsissent) per aetatem ter iam nixus poterat suppetere liberorum, ad usque taedium pedibus pavimenta tergentis, iactari volucriter gyris, dum exprimunt innumera simulacra, quae finxere fabulae theatrales.

At last we have reached such a state of baseness, that whereas not so very long ago, when there was fear of a scarcity of food, foreigners were driven hastily from the city, and those who practised the liberal arts (very few in number) were thrust out without a breathing space, yet the genuine attendants upon actresses of the mimes, and those who for the time pretended to be such, were kept with us, while three thousand dancing girls, without even being questioned, remained here with their choruses, and an equal number of dancing masters. And, wherever you turn your eyes, you may see a throng of women with curled hair, who might, if they had married, by this time, so far as age goes, have already produced three children, sweeping the pavements with their feet to the point of weariness and whirling in rapid gyrations, while they represent the innumerable figures that the stage-plays have devised.

According to this report, when the prospect of a famine materialized in 383 CE, the Roman authorities were quick to expel foreigners, including a comparatively small group of intellectuals (“very few in number” and possibly including Ammianus himself),¹⁵ but made generous exceptions for artists who worked with dance in various capacities. As a result, three thousand female dancers were permitted to stay in Rome along with the choruses that accompanied them and their “dancing masters.”¹⁶ The figure is not self-explanatory: we are not informed about the size of choruses, and in spite of the mention of an “equal number” (*totidem*) of dancing masters it seems likely that each one of them could supervise several dancers. Even so, the total of foreigners who were supposed to share limited supplies with the citizens in exchange for dancing shows would easily amount to a five-digit number.

A dance craziness of a sort, Ammianus continues, drove women from the domestic spaces in which they belonged out into the public (“wherever you turn your eyes...”). Their movements blur the line between private and public female spheres, thereby transforming Rome’s costumes and landscape—in short, the city itself.¹⁷ In dance, as in private matters, this “throng of women” (*feminas... multas*) is scarcely controllable and detrimental to Roman morals and identity; they dance according to their own whims instead of getting married and “producing three children.” Yet, it appears that the real or perceived spell of dance on the Roman population, which Ammianus sternly condemns, had not escaped the authorities either. In a likely hour of need, they temporarily granted citizen-like privileges to foreign female dancers and their troupes—a community which under normal circumstances would find itself at the bottom of Rome’s social ladder—in an attempt to use dancers for socio-political control and to distract the masses from possible riots or civil disturbances. This was by no means unheard of; dancers were often a commodity in situations that were likely to escalate—as, for example, when pantomime dancers were showcased to help maintain public order during circus games (see, e.g., Cassiod. *Var.* 1.20).

There were, of course, many possible positions in between the seemingly-opposite poles of Meton’s activism and the commodification of the three thousand dancing girls. For example, dancers could gain political power through corporations which were more effective at lobbying and networking than stand-alone actionists like Meton could ever be. The best-documented case is that of “The Guild of Dionysus’ Artists” (οἱ περὶ τὸν Διόνυσον τεχνῖται), which, in the Hellenistic period, enrolled a variety of professional performers

¹⁵ See Rolfe 1935, xiii.

¹⁶ *Magister* could also refer to the producers, organizers, and stage directors of the spectacles.

¹⁷ See Alonso Fernández 2015 on multiple agencies of female dancers in Roman culture.

including dance artists of different specialties.¹⁸ The guild pursued the interests of its members by enhancing their socio-economic status and even facilitated their access to political careers. The results were notable: members of the guild enjoyed privileges such as immunity from prosecution for crimes, exemption from taxes and military service, and it was not uncommon for them to serve as state officials.¹⁹ Other forms of mediated and conditional engagement with politics regard performers who, unlike Meton, enacted political agendas determined by others, as a variety of cases can illustrate. One concerns priests who officiated on behalf of the state with immediate political effects: for example, the Greek orator Lysias recalled in 399 BCE how priestesses and priests performed the curse of the orator and politician Andocides in a dedicated ceremony at which they donned special robes and carried out ritual movements ([Lys.] 6.51). Another case is that of the mimes who in the Republican period, under the likely direction of the political faction of the *populares*, lampooned politicians at public games (López Barja de Quiroga 2018). In many cases, it was dancing choruses that contributed to the government's political agenda. One might think of the choruses of epinicians that celebrated the athletic victories of tyrants, the dancing parades of the Roman Salii as celebrations of the state's sovereignty, or, to mention one less apparent and more specific case out of countless others, the chorus that sung and danced in Aeschylus' tragedy *Women of Aetna* to celebrate the foundation of the homonymous city.²⁰ Established powers, such as leaders and civic institutions, thus carefully constructed the political influence of choruses and institutionalized them, which brings us to the issues of the next section.

Dance and Soft Power

Historically, dance has often functioned politically in the form of “soft power”—that is, by attracting rather than coercing consensus, cooperation, and endorsement.²¹ With regard to modern times, this phenomenon has

¹⁸ Le Guen 2001; Aneziri 2003. The dance artists represented by the guild included instructors of choruses (χοροδιδάσκαλοι or διδάσκαλοι χοροῦ), choreuts for theater plays (χορευταί), tragic and comic actors, and in one reported case, a dancer (ὄρχηστής).

¹⁹ While privileges were originally limited to the duration of the festivals at which the artists performed, they became permanent in the Hellenistic period. On the political career of guild's members see Aneziri 2003, 243-57.

²⁰ Cf. Csapo & Wilson 2020b, 429: “Although just a few fragments of the play survive, it is clear that it provided ideological cover for [Hieron's] imperial undertaking that involved huge violence, demographic disruption, and ethnic cleansing.”

²¹ Political scientist Joseph Nye began to conceptualize soft power in the 1980s; see, e.g., Nye 2004.

been illuminated by Clare Croft in a compelling study of the diplomatic and ideological significance of international dance tours during the Cold War. For Greek and Roman antiquity, it would be arbitrary to select a specific period, since dance and especially choral dancing was key to cementing and spectacularizing civic/cultural identities in a wide range of eras and contexts, with governments and rulers regularly financing, promoting, institutionalizing, and thus to some extent controlling choral practices and contests.²² The ideological importance of choral dances such as dithyrambs in Athens, Salian *tripudia* in Rome, and weapon dances that can be subsumed under the label of *pyrrhichē* have been the objects of particularly detailed investigations.²³ Pyrrhic dances, for instance, mostly performed by choruses, trained Greek and Roman citizen-warriors in physical and psychological traits, such as dexterity, speed, and group cohesion, from which the state expected to benefit, while at the same time offering public displays of military strength and safe outlets for competition.²⁴ What follows focuses on two cases from two (differently illiberal) forms of government, namely Athenian democracy and the Roman empire, to exemplify how choral dancing could catalyze political support.

In Classical Athens, choruses were prominent in all theatrical genres (dithyramb, tragedy, satyr play, and comedy). The ties between Athenian democracy, theater, and chorality are illustrated on the one hand by the quintessentially democratic institution of the *chorēgia*, which allowed a large number of citizens to perform in choruses by charging the wealthy ones with the expenses for rehearsals (Wilson 2000), and on the other hand by the funds provided to support theater attendance (*theōrikon*), defined by fourth-century-BCE politician Damedes as the “the glue of democracy,” (κόλλαν ὀνομάζων τὰ θεωρικά τῆς δημοκρατίας, Plut. *Quaest. Plat.* 1011b).²⁵ which ensured that vast audiences attended theater/choral spectacles.

Narrowing the focus to a particular chorus will help us to grasp the powerful ways in which choral dancing could visualize political messages. In 458 BCE, Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* directly addressed the political insecurities with which Athens was confronted. The play includes three mentions of an eternal alliance with the city of Argos (*Eum.* 289-91, 669-73, 762-74), which serve to project a recent political alliance between Athens and Argos back into the heroic age, as well as several references to Athenian wars (including Athena’s

²² See, e.g., the seminal study of Wilson 2000 on the Athenian institution of *chorēgia*.

²³ For dithyrambic choruses see, e.g., Wilson 2003a; for Salian dances see most recently Alonso Fernández 2016a, 2021, and 2022; for pyrrhic dances Poursat 1968; Lonsdale 1993, 142-48; Ceccarelli 1998.

²⁴ Wilson (2003a, 164) speaks of “displaced violence.”

²⁵ For the *theōrikon* see Csapo & Wilson 2020b, 423, as well as “Audience.”

curious blessing that her own people may have plenty of them; see 864), which present these conflicts as “a divine boon enabling Athenians to win glory” (Sommerstein 2010, 285). At the same time, the play places special emphasis on domestic issues. It condemns civil strife and highlights the unity and good order of Athens in the eyes of the Panhellenic audience that attended the festival of the City Dionysia (cf., e.g., 976-87). Even more conspicuously, it celebrates on stage the importance and venerability of the Areopagus council shortly after the democrat Ephialtes had limited its powers—and had been murdered for reasons which most Athenians present in the Theater of Dionysus felt to be political.²⁶

Crucially, Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* resorted not only to words but also to choral dance to represent the strength of Athens as rooted in her institutions and democratic structures. The changing nature of the chorus, which underwent a metamorphosis from demons threatening the survival of the *polis* (cf., e.g., 778-92) into its very protectors, enabled them to embody a transition from dangerous and chaotic individual forces to a safety guaranteed by social cohesion and the establishment of institutions. The text indicates that at the beginning of the play and up to some point before their transformation, the dances of the Erinyes, who were dressed in black, stood out for their spectacularly disorganized design and the physical violence that they expressed. The initial dance of the Erinyes in which they awakened from a torpor,²⁷ exhibited such dispersed choreographic qualities that Apollo (an internal spectator) declares that the chorus should withdraw without the sympathy of any gods like “a herd tended by no herdsman” (ἄνευ βοτῆρος αἰπολούμεναι, 196-97). The comparison of the chorus to a herd without guidance suggests some deficiency in choral organization and leadership. A much later testimony recalls how this very chorus entered the stage “in a scattered fashion” (σποράδην) and scared the spectators “so much that little children lost consciousness and unborn ones were miscarried.”²⁸ Despite the exaggeration, this testimony indicates that the Erinyes’ reputation for disorganized, frightening dancing endured long after 458 BCE. Later on in the play, the dancers themselves vividly describe their performance as the display of a “horrifying muse” (μοῦσαν στυγεράν, 308), and

²⁶ See Sommerstein 2010, 281-89 for the political import of Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*. Csapo & Wilson (2020b) offer a more general account of the ties between tragedy and Athenian democracy.

²⁷ Even if we accept the view that the Erinyes did not enter the stage at this point but were already on stage and asleep at the start of the play (Taplin 1977, 369-74), it is only starting from line 140 that their agency became evident.

²⁸ *Vit. Aesch.* 9. Although it is difficult to translate σποράδην accurately (see, e.g., Csapo & Slater 1994, 14 “in separate groups spaced at intervals,” Burges Watson 2014 as “one by one”), the word clearly indicates the disunity of the chorus.

characterize it with words that would inspire ancient and modern interpretations of dancing Erinyes or Furies (*Eum.* 368-76, trans. Sommerstein):²⁹

Δόξαι δ' ἀνδρῶν καὶ μάλ' ὑπ' αἰθέρι σεμναὶ
 τακόμεναι κατὰ γᾶς μινύθουσιν ἄτιμοι
 ἀμετέραις ἐφόδοις μελανεῖμοσιν 370
 ὀρχησμοῖς τ' ἐπιφθόνοις ποδός·
 μάλα γὰρ οὖν ἄλομένα
 ἀνέκαθεν βαρυπετῇ
 καταφέρω ποδὸς ἄκμάν,
 σφαλερὰ καὶ τανυδρόμοις 375
 κῶλα, δύσφορον ἅταν.

Men's conceit of themselves, however proud while under the bright sky,
 dwindles and melts away into worthlessness when beneath the earth,
 thanks to our black-garbed assaults
 and the angry dancing of our feet;
 for I give a great leap
 and then bring down my foot
 from above with a heavy crash,
 a leg to trip even a runner
 at full stretch and cause unendurable ruin.

However, once the Erinyes were integrated into Athens' political and institutional system, their violent movements and chaotic choreographic logics turned into the very opposite. At the end of the play, the *exodos* (exit song) made this transformation splendidly visible: guided by processional escorts (προπομποί) of Athena's temple and now draped in purple robes, the Erinyes, aptly renamed the Eumenides ("Kindly ones"), exited the stage in a solemn procession resembling a real-life one,³⁰ apparently in linear formation.³¹ At this point, Athena herself acts as the chorus leader (*Eum.* 1003-35, trans. Sommerstein):

Ἀθηνᾶ
 χαίρετε χῦμεῖς· προτέραν δ' ἐμὲ χρῆ
 στείχειν θαλάμους ἀποδείξουσιν

²⁹ Prins 1991 and Weiss 2018, 43 offer interpretations of the so-called Binding Song that highlight its musical and dance aspects. For other ancient choruses of Erinyes inspired by Aeschylus see, e.g., Gianvittorio-Ungar 2022. See also "Movement."

³⁰ See, e.g., Sommerstein 2009 *ad loc.*

³¹ Cf. *Eum.* 1004: στείχειν, "to walk in line." This verb often refers to neat formations such as those of soldiers marching in rows.

πρὸς φῶς ἱερὸν τῶνδε προπομπῶν 1005

αἰνῶ τε μύθους τῶνδε τῶν κατευγμάτων [...]

πέμψω τε φέγγει λαμπάδων σελασφόρων

εἰς τοὺς ἔνερθε καὶ κάτω χθονὸς τόπους

ξὺν προσπόλοισιν, αἶτε φρουροῦσιν βρέτας

τοῦμόν, δικαίως· ὄμμα γὰρ πάσης χθονὸς 1025

Θησῆδος ἐξίκοισθ' ἄν, εὐκλεῆς λόχος

<

>

φοινικοβάπτοις ἐνδυτοῖς ἐσθήμασιν

τιμᾶτε· κᾶτα φέγγος ὀρμάσθω πυρός,

ὅπως ἂν εὐφρων ἦδ' ὀμιλία χθονὸς 1030

τὸ λοιπὸν εὐάνδροισι συμφοραῖς πρέπη.

Προπομποί (στρ. α)

βᾶθ' ὁδόν, ὧ μεγάλοι φιλότιμοι

Νυκτὸς παῖδες ἄπαιδες, ὑπ' εὐφροني πομπῇ.

εὐφραμεῖτε δέ, χωρίται ... 1035

ATHENA

You too rejoice! But I must go (στείχειν) before you

to show you your chambers,

by the sacred light of these escorts (προπομποί)

I thank you for these words of blessing, [...]

and I will escort you, by the light of blazing torches,

to your place below and beneath the earth,

together with my servants who guard my image

—and rightly so; for I invite you to come

right to the jewel of the whole land

of Theseus, an honoured band

<

>

honour <them> with special robes dyed with purple,

and then let the flame of fire set forward,

so that for the future these companions of ours in this land

may be friendly towards it and give it the glorious blessing of manly excellence.

THE PROCESSIONAL ESCORT (Προπομποί)

Come on your way, you great, honour-loving,

Childless children of Night, with our friendly escort.

Speak fair [*s.c.* Keep silence], people of the land!...

Aeschylus gave material shape to the message that socio-political cohesion and functioning institutions should prevail over domestic strife. He did so by resolving dances marked by violence and disunity into a well-ordered procession conforming with Athenian customs. To emphasize how the choral dances of

Eumenides are suitable for political interpretation, we can look at them through the lens of what André Lepecki (2013) has conceptualized as “choreopolitics” and “choreopolice”—the first notion indicates the kinetic nature of collective events with politically subversive potential (e.g., protests and demonstrations), the other indicates the ways in which police forces regulate, constrain or disperse choreopolitical events. As long as the Erinyes antagonize the political system and institutions of the city, their dancing displays violent instincts as well as splintering, centrifugal, and, in a way, anarchical forces. By contrast, at the end of the play, Athena (martial goddess and supreme commander of the city) takes on the leadership of the chorus, unifying the performers and regulating their movements. Athena completes the reorganization of a riotous lot into her own obedient fellowship by ordering them to follow her in processional formation and by putting them under the supervision of her “servants” (1024). Ultimately, she removes the chorus from the public space altogether to confine them in “chambers” that are “below and beneath the earth.”³²

The second case study of this section is the so-called *Lusus Troiae*, an equestrian game of unknown, but possibly very ancient origins,³³ that several Latin sources and most noticeably Virgil describe in terms of dance and chorality.³⁴ In Virgil’s account, three leaders, offspring of noble families on magnificent horses, guide three groups of young knights during the funeral games to Anchises. The performers are proudly aware of being a spectacle for the audience to behold and bask in its admiration (*Aen.* 5.577-78). Then, acoustic signals synchronize the point of attack of the performance (5.578-79), which according to Virgil unfolds as follows (*Aen.* 5.580-95, trans. Fairclough 1999):

*Olli discurrere pares atque agmina terni
diductis solvere choris rursusque vocati
convertere vias infestaque tela tulere.
inde alios ineunt cursus aliosque recursus
adversi spatii, alternosque orbibus orbes*

³² For another politically relevant tragic chorus see, e.g., Kowalzig 2013, according to which Athens’ religious imagery and economic interests in the Black Sea region find expression in the chorus of Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris*.

³³ The history of the *Lusus Troiae* confronts us with many unsolved problems, including the origins of its name: the word *Troiae* can be related to *trua* (from the Salian *amptuare*) and to *truia*, as found in the puzzling Tragilietella oinochoe of the seventh century BCE. On historical aspects of this game see, e.g., Scheid & Svenbro 1996, 40-49; Ceccarelli 1998; 148-50; Sarullo 2018.

³⁴ Serv. *Aen.* 5.602 reports that Suetonius associates the *Lusus Troiae* with pyrrhic dance. For Salian and pyrrhic undertones in Virgil’s description of the *Lusus* see, e.g., Curtis 2017, 179-84; Sarullo 2018.

impediunt, pugnaeque cient simulacra sub armis; 585
et nunc terga fuga nudant, nunc spicula vertunt
infensi, facta pariter nunc pace feruntur.
ut quondam Creta fertur Labyrinthus in alta
parietibus textum caecis iter ancipitemque
mille viis habuisse dolum, qua signa sequendi 590
frangeret indeprensus et inremeabilis error:
haud alio Teucrum nati vestigia cursu
impediunt texuntque fugas et proelia ludo,
delphinum similes, qui per maria umida nando
Carpathium Libycumque secant luduntque per undas. 595

Thereupon they galloped apart in matching order, the three troops breaking their column and dividing into their separate squads; then at the word of command they wheeled about and charged each other with levelled lances. Next they perform other movements and countermovements, confronting one another in the lists; they weave circle with alternate circle, and with real arms awake the mimicry of war. Now they turn their backs in flight, now point their spears aggressively, and now ride side by side in peace. As once in high Crete, it is said, the Labyrinth held a path woven with blind walls, and a bewildering work of craft with a thousand ways, where the tokens of the trail were broken by the indiscoverable and irtraceable maze: even in such a course do the sons of Troy entangle their steps, weaving in sport their flight and conflict, like dolphins that, swimming through the wet main, cleave the Carpathian or Libyan seas and play amid the waves.

Virgil's aim is not to describe historical dance practices, but he does represent the game as a minutely choreographed equestrian ballet, the political relevance of which can be reconstructed with the help of external evidence. Virgil indicates the choreographic nature of the game in a number of ways, for example by calling the squadrons not only troops (*turmae*), as it is usual, but also choruses (*chori*), and by underscoring the elegant geometry of their movements with figures of speech that produce almost plastic effects (*cursus... recursus, orbibus orbes*). The complexity of the performers' evolutions materialize in the intricate patterns that the horses impress on the floor (*vestigia... impediunt*). Allusions to well-known imagery of Greek choruses further emphasize the affinity of the game to choral dancing (Curtis 2017, 175-84): the windings of the Cretan labyrinth evoke the dance floor created by Daedalus, which Homer recalls in describing the dancing youths and girls engraved on the legendary shield of Achilles (Hom. *Il.* 18.590), and the comparison of the young Trojans with dolphins alludes to the dolphin imagery of dithyramb and tragedy (cf. Csapo 2003).

While Virgil's poetry clearly constructs the *Lusus Troiae* in terms of dance, we need some historical context to understand the political relevance of this game in the first decades of the first century CE. Dance spectacles in military garb were common in the Roman Empire, not only in pyrrhic contexts but also in processions (*pompae*) that included dancers displaying war manoeuvres (Dessi 2020, 439). Also, we know from ancient military treatises such as those written in Greek by Arrianus (second century CE) and Asclepiodotus (possibly later) that cavalry units were trained to perform sophisticated movement sequences, even though these do not compare with the exceptional choreographic qualities described in the *Aeneid*. As for the *Lusus Troiae* itself, the historian Suetonius reports that the game was revived under the Republic by Sulla and Julius Caesar as a showcase for the offspring of preeminent families (*Iul.* 39). It was Augustus, however, who further promoted the event in order to support the empowerment of the equestrian class (*ordo equestris*) hereby appropriating Republican values as he did in other performance contexts.³⁵ In Virgil's time, the *Lusus Troiae* was one of several kinaesthetically appealing practices of high visual impact, paramilitary character, and Republican origin that all enhanced the prestige of the knights.³⁶ One may think, to mention just one example, of the Republican parade called *transvectio equitum*, which Augustus transformed into a yearly triumph-like ceremony in which knights in military attire rode on white horses through Rome's centres of power, and which he also combined with a new, explicitly moralizing version of yet another equestrian ceremony (*recognitio equitum*),³⁷ in which the knights had to publicly account for their lives at the presence of the Emperor.³⁸ In the context of such strategically-revitalized equestrian ceremonies, it appears that the *Lusus Troiae*, as well as the representation of it offered by Virgil (who was possibly from an equestrian family himself), aestheticized the political ascent of the knights under the not purely metaphorical choreography of Augustus.

³⁵ E.g., the revitalization of the *Lupercalia* (see Alonso Fernández 2016b) and of Arval and Salian ceremonies (Alonso Fernández 2021 and 2022). Cf. Curtis 2022 on the appropriation of performing arts by Roman emperors.

³⁶ For the empowerment of the knights under Augustus see, e.g., Mattingly 1910, 48-67; Davenport 2019.

³⁷ On the *recognitio equitum* see Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 22.4-6; Suet. *Aug.* 38.3 and 39.1.

³⁸ The main sources about the *transvectio equitum* are Dion. Hal. 6.13.4 and funerary reliefs (see pictures in Davenport 2019, 388-95); see also Suet. *Aug.* 39.1; Ov. *Tr.* 2.89-90. Thus reformed, the ceremony made a show not only of the knights, but also of their personal subjection to Augustus as the arbiter of moral fitness (Davenport 2019, 384-85).

Dance and Political Discourse

I would now like to consider how dance was involved in theories and debates regarding politics. Ancient legislation that was supposed to regulate matters of dance offers an excellent field of observation. My focus will be on the Athenian philosopher Plato's *Laws* and the Roman historian Livy's account of the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus*. Although these case studies differ in key respects—especially in their cultural settings and theorizing *vs.* historicizing character—they both shed light on how ancient rulers and lawmakers (dreamed-of or historical) feared that uncontrolled bodily and movement practices might undermine the state and resolved to police them.³⁹

In his *Republic* and *Laws*, Plato reflects on how dance-based arts such as *choreia*, *mousikē* and theater contribute to the formation of ideal citizens, and hence utopian states (*politeiai*). In a nutshell, the main speaking characters of these dialogues—Socrates in the *Republic* and the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws*—advocate for conservatism and censorship with regard to both the content and form of performances. They hold that rulers should design specific laws to be enforced by specially trained judges in order to ensure that musico-poetic, dance, and gymnastic shows only represent or re-enact (*mimountai*) content that is edifying and socio-politically suitable. Legislation on these matters should also prevent uncontrolled innovation in repertoires and cross-contamination in performance styles from tarnishing the citizens' tastes and morals. Above all, poets, musicians, and dancers should strictly obey the laws and institutions that regulate their arts.

While analogies between a unified chorus and a well-ordered community appear across Greek literature,⁴⁰ the *Laws* theorizes the political role of choral dancing in the most explicit and sophisticated manner. To determine how Magnesia, a new Cretan colony, should realize an ideal *politeia*, this ambitious dialogue ends up discussing the ways in which “a city and its socio-political character should be effectively danced into existence” (Wilson 2003b, 181). The second and seventh book particularly focus on bodily practices and *choreia* as a means for educating citizens throughout their lives, from the prenatal stage until senior years and with special concern for childhood and youth. The Athenian Stranger starts from a set of premises, namely, that humans have the unique ability to recognize and, no less importantly, enjoy rhythm (ῥυθμός) and order (τάξις) in song and dance, and that choruses are quintessentially mimetic inasmuch as they represent or reenact, again in song and dance, ways of life,

³⁹ Again, these sources can be seen as representing ancient dialectics between choreopolitics and choreopolice.

⁴⁰ See Wilson 2003a, 165, with examples.

characters, and stories (*Leg.* 655d).⁴¹ Following his argument, rhythmic singing and well-ordered dancing are key to the “right education” (ὀρθή παιδεία) of individuals because they combine ethical models with physical experiences that are enjoyable (e.g., beautiful acoustic, kinetic, and visual experiences). In other words, mimetic choruses make morals pleasurable—on the condition that the objects of their *mimēsis* correspond to the lawgivers’ views.⁴²

Rhythmic singing, well-ordered dancing, and the festivals in which they are embedded (ἐορταί) shape not only individuals, but also society. They forge sympathetic bonds between citizens that cement the civic body as such, and hence the city’s identity and unity. The pleasures of *choreia* are described as communal, participative, well-organized, rhythmical, and deeply rooted in the human body. These features make chorality an instrument of mass persuasion that is all the more effective because it is largely subliminal and apt to permeate society.⁴³ The much-debated notion put forward by the Athenian Stranger that young, adult, and senior citizens should perform in three distinct choruses (664c-d)⁴⁴ is embedded in a broader reflection about the political necessity of persuading the citizens of that which is in the interest of the city (664a); to this end, “the entire city should never cease to sing the entire city into incantation” (ἐπαδουσάν, 665c), with the rhythm of bodily movement, the harmony of song, and *choreia* as their combination (665a). The *kordax* discussed in “Dance and Political Agency” illustrates Platonic notions inasmuch as Meton resorted to *choreia* and its physical pleasures to persuade the Tarantines to act in the interest of their city.

It is difficult to determine to what extent historical practices and discourses inspired Platonic views on the significance of dance to politics—and, on the other hand, on the political necessity of regulating dance. In the *Republic*, when arguing that rulers should be watchful against innovations “in music and gymnastics” (424b), Socrates leans on the authority of Athens’ most prominent theorist of music, Damon, for the claim that “styles of *mousikē* are never changed without change in the greatest political rules” (424c, cf. *Leg.* 669b-e). Although some of the theories ascribed to Damon may well be Plato’s (Lynch 2013; Hagel 2019), Socrates clearly counts on this gnomic-like piece of wisdom carrying Damon’s trademark, and while we do not know whether the

⁴¹ Cf. also Arist. *Poet.* 1447a 25-28: καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι διὰ τῶν σχηματιζομένων ῥυθμῶν μιμοῦνται καὶ ἦθη καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις, “since they [*sc.* the dancers] through rhythms translated into movements, create mimesis of characters, emotions and actions.” On these passages see, e.g., Peponi 2017; Gianvittorio-Ungar 2020, 236-38; on the narrativity of ancient dance see Gianvittorio-Ungar & Schlapbach 2021.

⁴² E.g., *Leg.* 672e-73b. See Griffith 2013; Prauscello 2013.

⁴³ Prauscello 2013; Jackson 2016.

⁴⁴ For recent discussions see, e.g., Calame 2013; Prauscello 2013; Jackson 2016; Pfefferkorn 2021.

latter put the political potential of *mousikē* into practice, he became sufficiently involved in pro-Periclean politics to be ostracized (Wallace 2015, 51-75). Again, in the *Laws* the Athenian Stranger commends Egyptian repertoires of dance and music (*schēmata, melē*) on the grounds that they have been institutionalized and resisted change for ten thousand years by being archived in temples and re-performed faithfully at religious ceremonies (*Leg.* 656d-57b, 798e-99a). This view is clearly idealizing, even though Plato might be inspired by (Greek knowledge regarding) Egyptian habits of recording rituals by depicting performances, of preserving such records, and of using temples as places for the preservation of a performance canon (Rutherford 2013). What is certain is that, by Plato's time, the relationship between dance and politics had long been the subject of theater works addressing mass audiences. Plays such as Aeschylus' *Lycurgeia* and Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, staged the mechanisms through which rituals involving unregulated dancing became a social force that defied established powers, and how repressive measures against them could fatally backfire upon rulers themselves.⁴⁵

While the historical background of Plato's theories on dance politics eludes us, we know for certain that the ancients legislated on dance-relevant matters such as rites and theater. In the case of rituals and related bodily practices, such laws usually banned foreign cults or, alternatively, institutionalized their practice. Bans were attempts to defang uncontrolled changes in public morals and society, changes for which rituals coming from elsewhere were held responsible.⁴⁶ In the Roman world, a senatorial decree from 186 BCE banning Bacchic rituals (*Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*) is a valuable case in point, and a well-documented one thanks to archaeological, epigraphic, and literary evidence—that is, traces of the destruction of temples dedicated to Bacchus, a remarkable inscription in Archaic Latin (*CIL* 1².0581), and a rich account by the Augustan historian Livy.⁴⁷ My focus here will be upon this last source, a historiographical narrative brushed with poetic color.

Livy's literary account can be summarized as follows: first, he relates the decree (39.14.6-8) and details its immediate execution in and outside Rome (39.14.9-10), then he quotes a longer public speech by the consul Postumius on the Bacchanalian affair (39.15.1-39.16.13), and finally, he recounts how, as a result of these events, Bacchic initiates were imprisoned or more often

⁴⁵ See below on maenadism and for the gap between mythical and historical versions of it.

⁴⁶ For examples, see Takács 2000.

⁴⁷ Paillet (1988) offers an extensive study of the *Senatus consultum de Bacchanalibus*. The inscription is 1².0581 (= 10,00104 = *ILS* 00018 = *ILLRP* 0511), found in 1640 in Calabria, and is now preserved at the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* of Vienna. For a recent comparison of the inscription and Livy, Book 39, cf. Steinhauer 2020.

sentenced to death by the thousands (39.17.1-39.18.8). In several passages, Livy also describes the rituals and practices subsumed under the label of Bacchanalia. These descriptions probably reflect the significant gap between historical and mythical maenadism which scholars of religion generally posit.⁴⁸ Ancient literature and arts ascribed to the Bacchantes a variety of practices hardly mentioned in inscriptions and other historical documents, including the distinctive sort of dance (and music) illustrated by a multitude of artworks displaying dancing maenads and by poetic expressions such as “to uplift in a Bacchic fashion,” “with Bacchic posturing,” and so on.⁴⁹ In many respects, Livy’s testimony resonates with the maenadism of this artistic and literary tradition; in particular, his vocabulary is suggestive of Bacchic music produced with cymbals and *tympana* and of Bacchic dancing, as when he describes men who toss their bodies and utter prophecies as though being insane (39.13.11). At any rate, for the present purposes my point is not to ascertain whether Romans actually danced to worship Bacchus in 186 BCE, but to consider how the (dancing) Bacchanalia of artistic and literary tradition are invested with political relevance in Livy’s account.

According to Livy, the senators regarded Bacchic practices as a serious threat to their own personal safety and to the political *status quo* (39.14.4); their reaction to the cult appears to enhance the role of the Senate as guardian of the state (Takács 2000, 302). The speech of the consul Postumius illustrates the politicization of the Bacchanalian affair most clearly.⁵⁰ Postumius conjures up a picture of a society split into the moral and political categories of “us” *vs.* “them:” the ones who are true citizens follow inherited habits that define Roman identity, while the others are false Romans who betray such habits for foreign ones.⁵¹ The second group is depicted as a criminal mass organization whose ultimate goal is to replace the state (39.16.3):

⁴⁸ Cf., e.g., Henrichs 1978 and Alonso Fernández 2013, with bibliography.

⁴⁹ Ennius, fr. 122-24 Jocelyn, *Bacchico insultans modo*; Naevius, *fr. com.* 35 Ribbeck (from a tragedy of Bacchic subject, *Licurgus*), *Bacchico cum schemate*. For a recent discussion of these fragments see Gianvittorio-Ungar 2022, 142-43. On the other hand, sources that can be presumed to aim towards greater historical accuracy than, say, theatrical plays give us reason to think that Dionysiac mysteries featured dance in the Roman age: see Nilsson 1975, 58-60.

⁵⁰ On the possible sources of Livy for Postumius’ speech, see Riedl 2012, 117 n. 12.

⁵¹ Burkert (1990, 54) speaks of a different people disguised among the Roman population. According to Livy 39.9.1, the Bacchanalia would come from Etruria (cf. Takács 2000, 304-305 for possible Etruscan connotations) and at 39.16.8-9 Postumius elaborates on the dangers of imported cults and ceremonies (*patrio ritu* *vs.* *externo ritu*).

Adhuc priuatis noxiis, quia nondum ad rem publicam obprimendam satis uirium est, coniuratio sese impia tenet. Crescit et serpit quotidie malum. Iam maius est, quam ut capere id priuate fortuna possit, ad summam rem publicam spectat.

Their impious compact still limits itself to private crimes, since as yet it does not have strength enough to crush the state. Daily the evil grows and creeps abroad. It is already too great to be purely a private matter: its objective is the control of the state.

The consul portrays this anti-state as an efficiently organized structure that operates through proselytizing and dark powers. With the orchestration of criminal minds (39.17.6), it already counts “many thousands” in its ranks, who infiltrate all domains of Roman life (39.15.8-10). There is an almost choreographic touch in the description of how this multitude acts with one purpose and in the sinuous paths along which this “disease spreads and snakes” (*crescit et serpit... malum*, 39.16.3) through Roman society, below its surface and above its laws, against its interests and towards a goal of their own. The rhetoric of these arguments interlocks cultural identity, moral standards, and bodily practices.⁵² Postumius creates a sharp divide between those for and against the Roman state, and hence gives political legitimation to a brutal repression of the state’s enemies.⁵³ In a way, the dystopian picture of Rome drawn by Postumius inverts the Athenian Stranger’s utopia of Magnesia: while the latter envisioned institutionalized choruses as publicly promoting the unity of the *polis*, Postumius’ Rome is divided by the undercover commotions orchestrated by enemies of the state.

Conclusion

I have thus far discussed the diverse ways in which ancient authors represent or construct the political dimensions of dance. With these case studies in mind, it is worth going back to the observation of Mark Franko that *writing* about dance can be a political act in itself (see the introduction to this chapter). This implies that ancient authors who wrote about dance might have political motivations and effects that scholars of ancient dance should try to dissect.

On the other hand, according to the same logic, scholars themselves end up exercising political agency of a sort in the process of (re)writing histories

⁵² The bodily practices include ritual and sexual ones: see, e.g., 39.15.9 (*simillimi feminis mares*); 39.10.7 (*stuprum*).

⁵³ According to Burkert (1990, 54), “es gibt sonst kaum was Vergleichbares vor den Christenvorfolgungen” as far as the dimensions and brutality of religious repression is concerned.

of ancient dance, because the sources that they select and the interpretative paradigms that they apply are not innocent of politics. It follows that dance scholarship also needs to address its own political facets and implications.⁵⁴ To start with an example at hand, the present chapter has opted for using the proactive, self-determined politicization of dance by individuals such as Meton and Sostratus as term of reference for other forms of agency, valued popular rather than official sources of information about dance (e.g., anecdotes rather than records of winning choruses), focused on secular rather than religious aspects, and contrasted “free” dancing practices with the regulations imposed upon them. These choices, along with the very measure of including in this volume a chapter on dance’s politics, can all be interpreted as political micro-acts.⁵⁵

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⁵⁴ To mention just one example, the historical paradigm according to which ancient Greek and Roman dance is a driving force in modern western dance (e.g., with the legacy of pantomime in ballet of the eighteenth century) has sometimes conformed with Eurocentric views of western moderns as direct cultural heirs of the ancients.

⁵⁵ I am most grateful to the authors of this volume for their incredibly perceptive feedback on previous versions of this chapter, and to Zoa Alonso Fernández and Sarah Olsen also for realizing the best possible conditions for intellectual exchange throughout the working process. Many thanks to Geoffrey Greatrex and Stefan Hagel for sharing with me materials and thoughts.

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Gods

Carolyn M. Laferrière

On a fragment of a Roman Neo-Attic marble relief, five figures process along a shallow ledge, their legs moving together in tandem (Fig. 43; Vermeule 1981, 195, no. 61; Sauser 1987, 6; Zagdoun 1989, 87-88, 90-94, 97, 100). The identities of these figures are clear: leading the group is Zeus, so identified by the thunderbolt he holds in one hand and the staff he holds in his other. Following him is Hera, her veiling gesture a common feature of her representation, while Athena follows, wearing her aegis and holding a helmet and spear. A female figure moves behind the warrior goddess and is likely Aphrodite. Concluding the procession is Apollo, shown here as a youthful, nude musician who plays his lyre, as we can see by the active use of his right hand, which strums the instrument with the *plektron*, while his left plucks at individual strings.

Within the corpus of Greek and Roman representations of the gods, this relief presents a cohesive scene of group movement. Each god's body is carefully spaced out across the image as they move in unison, taking the same



Figure 43: Archaistic relief showing five divinities, marble, c. 25 BCE-14 CE. New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery, Leonard C. Hanna Jr., Class of 1913 Fund, 1965.132.

steps and maintaining the same distance between themselves. Their drapery also moves in similar ways as it falls around their ankles and feet, and swings out in front and behind them as they step together. But it is especially the shared forward motion that each divine body undertakes that not only suggests their unity as a group as they collectively respond to the sounds of the music Apollo plays.¹ Instead, they move, or rather they dance, as a chorus, responding with their bodies to the music that they hear.

As we have seen throughout this volume, dance was pervasive in antiquity: not only did it play a part in political, social, and religious life, but it made use of various objects, spaces, and the bodies of the performers to communicate distinct affects and narratives. What has become clear throughout this volume is how interrelated these aspects of ancient dance truly were and how, when examined individually, these various elements tell only a small subsection of the larger significance and history of dance in antiquity. The relief with which we began offers us a similar vision of dance, one where the gods have come together to play music and move their bodies to the musical rhythm. Within ancient Mediterranean myth and ritual, the gods delighted in dance—and in music more generally—and shared in the human use of dance for marking points of transition, delineating spaces, and negotiating interpersonal politics. For students of Greek and Roman ritual, the notion of the gods dancing and enjoying music is perhaps unsurprising:² within the surviving literary accounts of myth, the gods regularly participate in these activities, whether it is to dance together as a chorus on Mount Olympus in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* or around bodies of water on Parnassus in Hesiod's *Theogony*. However, it is not obvious that the gods should necessarily dance, much less in ways that are similar or comprehensible to their human counterparts. How, then, do gods or other mythological figures dance and, by extension, why do they dance? This is a particularly fraught and overlooked set of questions, since the majority of our evidence from antiquity focuses, quite understandably, on the practice of human dance and its social, aesthetic, and political consequences. Similarly, in the rich discussions that precede this chapter, which range from addressing objects to movement to bodies to space, the nature of the performers themselves has

¹ On various approaches to seeing musical performances, see Bundrick 2005; Porter 2010, 436–44; Yatromanolakis 2016b, 1–42; Laferrière 2020, 63–90; Laferrière 2024.

² Indeed, many of the earliest scholarly accounts of Greek and Roman dance focused on the relationship among dance, religious ritual, and the gods, whereas more recent work has prioritized its function within human social practice. Nevertheless, acknowledging the perceived sacred origins of dance inevitably inflects the modern understanding of its role in ancient societies. For more on the historiography of Dance Studies with respect to the Greek and Roman worlds, see especially Macintosh 2010.

remained a relatively constant point of commonality. Not whether they are men or women, Greek or Roman, or broadly situated from within the ancient Mediterranean but, rather, that they are all human, all mortal performers with the constraints and limitations that are bound up with that particular ontological state. How does our discussion of dance in antiquity change, however, if the performers are not human and are thus capable of moving their bodies in ways that seem otherwise impossible? To address the remarkable phenomenon of divine dancers, we must in turn develop a working understanding of how they dance, since these performers are capable of achieving remarkable feats with their own dancing bodies that, in turn, affect their audiences in similarly remarkable ways.

In laying open the possibility of the gods engaging in dance, we thus similarly open up the range of questions that we may ask of the surviving literary and visual evidence for divine performance. Where did they dance? How did they dance? With whom did they dance? And, perhaps most importantly, why did they dance? The relief with which we began presents particular challenges in our attempts to answer these questions: not only does it depict an arrested moment in time, where the dancers are caught in an unending temporal moment of transitioning between movements, but the dance itself, performed by ephemeral supernatural forces, can never be fully re-performed by the watching human audience, who are incapable of moving their bodies in the same ways that the gods do. The possibility of re-enactment—a topic much discussed with respect to recording and archiving contemporary dance (e.g. Lepecki 2010, 29-31)—is simply not feasible here. By extension, understanding how these scenes of divine dance may have once affected their human viewing audience, that is, how “the viewer’s response [to the dance] takes place powerfully at the level of muscular sensation and memory...” (Bryson 2008, 137), becomes increasingly fraught when the dancers are divine, for they move in ways that are beyond our human capabilities. In what follows, then, I explore not only the visual and literary evidence for the divine performance of dance, but I will also discuss the effect that such scenes or descriptions of the gods’ dancing bodies could have had on their human audience, interrogating how the gods’ own distinct “performative mode,” to echo André Lepecki (2010, 28-48), may once have invited its viewers not only to witness the divine performance, but also to feel the gods dance in their own bodies, to generate, in other words, a somatic re-enactment of divine performance. In addressing these questions, I move through a series of case studies taken from a range of Greek and Roman contexts, and end by returning to the important question of the mimetic function of dance. Drawing in particular on work by Anastasia-Erasmia Peponi (2004 and 2015) and on discussions of kinesthetic empathy by Deidre Sklar

(2001 and 2008) and Susan Foster (2011), I focus on how, within the context of divine dance and the manner in which men and women engaged with it, the transformative and mimetic experience of the gods' dance offered the human audience the opportunity not only to join in the gods' chorus, but to become the gods themselves through the shared performance of dance.

The Divine Origins of Dance

As with music, there was broad agreement in antiquity as to the origins of dance: it was created by the gods themselves, and belonged to their particular realm of experience before having been passed on for the enjoyment of men and women. For instance, Athena is said to have invented the *pyrrhichē* after defeating the Titans, when she “began to dance (ὀρχεῖσθαι) and perform choral song (χορεύειν) with arms as a victory dance” (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.7).³ Yet other accounts attribute the dance's origins to the Curetes as they soothed Zeus with the noise of their armour and the rhythmic movement of their limbs (Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 7.72.7; Luc. *Salt.* 8), or even to Neoptolemus upon his martial victory (Archil. fr. 304 West). Moving from the specifics to the general, Lucian (second century CE) positions dance as a general practice as having been created at the same time as the world itself (*Salt.* 7, trans. Harmon):

ἀλλ' οἳ γε τάληθέστατα ὀρχήσεως πέρι γενεαλογοῦντες ἅμα τῇ πρώτῃ γενέσει τῶν ὅλων φαῖεν ἂν σοι καὶ ὀρχησιν ἀναφῶναι, τῷ ἀρχαίῳ ἐκείνῳ Ἑρωτι... κατ' ὀλίγον δὲ αὐξανομένη καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον αἰεὶ προσθήκης τυγχάνουσα, νῦν ἔοικεν ἐς τὸ ἀκρότατον ἀποτετελέσθαι καὶ γεγενῆσθαι ποικίλον τι καὶ παναρμόνιον καὶ πολύμουσον ἀγαθόν.

Dance came into being contemporaneously with the primal origin of the universe, making her appearance together with Love... Little by little she has grown in stature and has obtained from time to time added embellishments, until now she would seem to have reached the very height of perfection and to have become a highly diversified, wholly harmonious, richly musical boon to mankind.

Positioning dance as having originated together with the universe itself, Lucian establishes it as a pervasive and fundamental feature of life, both with respect to the gods and to the men and women who learned the increasingly embellished dances from the gods.⁴ We see a similar effort to position dance among the earliest

³ On the *pyrrhichē*, see especially Ceccarelli 1998 and 2004.

⁴ Cf. also Pl. *Ti.* 40b-d.

moments of the universe and the gods' existence in Hesiod's *Theogony*, which begins from the Muses on Mount Helicon (1-10, trans. Steiner 2021),

Μουσάων Ἑλικωνιάδων ἀρχώμεθ' αἰεῖδεν,
 αἴθ' Ἑλικῶνος ἔχουσιν ὄρος μέγα τε ζᾷθεόν τε,
 καί τε περὶ κρήνην ἰοειδέα πόσσ' ἀπαλοῖσιν
 ὀρχεῦνται καὶ βωμὸν ἐρυσθενέος Κρονίωνος·
 καί τε λοεσσάμεναι τέρενα χροά Περμησσοῖο 5
 ἢ Ἴππου κρήνης ἢ Ὀλμειοῦ ζαθέοιο
 ἀκροτάτῳ Ἑλικῶνι χοροὺς ἐνεποιήσαντο,
 καλοὺς ἡμερόεντας, ἐπερρώσαντο δὲ ποσσίν.
 ἔνθεν ἀπορνύμεναι κεκαλυμμέναι ἡέρι πολλῶ
 ἐννύχαι στείχον περικαλλέα ὄσσαν ἰεῖσαι, 10

Let us begin to sing from the Heliconian Muses,
 who possess the great and holy mountain of Helicon
 and dance with supple feet around the violet-dark spring
 and the altar of Cronus' broad-strengthened son.
 And having washed their tender skin in Permessus
 or the spring of Hippocrene or holy Olmeius,
 they perform fair, desire-instigating choral dances
 on highest Helicon and ply their feet.
 Setting out from there, enshrouded in much mist,
 they process by night, emitting their very beautiful voice . . .

As Steiner has recently argued (2021, 582), in this opening proem the Muses are presented as an archetypal chorus, so that this particular narrative episode, and indeed the entire poem, emerges as the song and dance that the Muses perform.⁵ Moreover, not only do they sing their own theogony (11-21) that recounts the struggle among the gods for control, but they also pair their movements and the spaces in which they dance to the poetic narrative that they sing (Steiner 2021, 582). For instance, they move from the heights of the mountains to lower valleys as they recount the dispute for power, ultimately, as Steiner notes, “invert[ing] the regular sequence that determines the movements of a chorus: first the linear procession to the sacred site, then the ring dance, typically performed around an altar...” (2021, 582). Instead, the Muses begin by leaving the altar of Zeus to descend to the mortal realm, mimicking or, at the very least, evoking the passage of power and time of which they sing. In this instance, their choral dance functions to convey the narrative of the gods' creation through both the poetic medium itself and through their danced movements, ultimately

⁵ For more on the muses as dancers or musicians, see Bundrick 2005, 49-102; Laferrière 2024.



Figure 44: Attic black-figure lekythos by the Sappho Painter, depicting Apollo and female musicians, c. 500 BCE. Paris, Louvre MNB 910. © RMN – Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

reaching men and women as the final endpoint of their chorality. Here, then, divine dance becomes a medium for conveying narrative not just between the gods, but also to their human audience.

We see a very different type of chorus performed by the Muses on a black-figure lekythos (funerary oil jar) by the Sappho Painter, where female dancers dance energetically as they play the *chebys* (tortoiseshell) lyre, *krotala* (clappers), and *aulos* (pipes) (Fig. 44 and Fig. 45).⁶ Performing their music in front of Apollo, the chorus of four female figures seems to be the Muses, especially given their association in literature with singing, which was their essential mode of communicating with mortal poets. Much like we saw in the *Theogony*, they also sing and dance together, though here they perform in some unidentifiable space, the location kept deliberately ambiguous, as if to suggest that this divine chorus can perform anywhere. While their movements are coordinated, in that each takes a dramatic step forward, they undertake separate actions: one plays the *krotala*, another plays the lyre, yet another plays an *aulos*, while the fourth

chorus member exclusively dances. Adding to this spectacle are the female figures' voices, indicated by the small black markings that emerge from each of

⁶ BAPD 7974; LIMC s.v. Apollon no. 701a; Haspels 1936, 226.7, pl.32.2 A-B; Wegner 1949, 213; Zanker 1965, 57, no. 260; Queyrel 1985, 159.



Figure 45: Reverse of Fig. 44. Paris, Louvre MNB 910. © RMN – Grand Palais (Musée du Louvre) / Hervé Lewandowski.

their mouths, and slowly fall to the ground.⁷ What we see here, then, is not just a danced performance, but an intensely musical one, where the three instruments, plus Apollo's own *kithara*, sound together in a harmonious cacophony only made possible, it seems, by the performers' divine status.

Unusually, at least within the corpus of images that depict divine or mythological female dancers, here the chorus consists of four members, rather than the more typical three. The presence of the deer is also unusual: although a deer may appear with Apollo as he plays his music, they are not typical companions of the Muses.⁸ They do, however, also appear within Dionysian contexts, where a larger chorus of maenad dancers is also more typical.⁹ The inclusion of the figures' *krotala* here further complicates their identity, however, since *krotala* are similarly associated with ecstatic maenads in a Dionysian revel, who play their instruments and dance under the influence of the god of wine. Yet Dionysus is not included in this scene, nor are there other overt references to a Dionysian context within the image itself. Moreover, even though the female figures play their *krotala* and wear ivy wreaths around their heads in the manner of maenads, they are here shown performing together, moving in similar patterns, almost as a chorus that supports Apollo's music. Their actions are harmonized between them, each figure lifting her arm and clacking the instrument together in unison before Apollo, who adds his own music to their performance. As the audience for this chorus, we are thus presented with a complicated scene of divine performance, one where multiple instruments are performed together in illogical combinations, where the dancers move their bodies with abandon, where the dancers' very identities are unclear, where animals watch the performance unfold, and where the spectacle is so expansive that Apollo's instrument pushes through the image's frame.¹⁰ In other words, this image suggests that together with the sounds of divine music, the spectacle of divine dance is so expansive that it cannot be contained in a mere image. The poetic text of the *Theogony* suggests a similar compelling nature of divine dance, where the "fair, desire-instigating choral dance" (χορός καλὸς ἱερόεις, Hes. *Theog.* 7), is deliberately meant to reach out to the audience, to entice them to be enveloped in the spectacle, to immerse themselves in it. So, within a Greek understanding of dance and its relationship with its audience, much as we already saw in the chapter on "Audience," divine dance is no different, and is shown in early poetic and visual accounts to be

⁷ For more on representations of singing and on the presence of musical notes and sounds on vases, see Lissarrague 1990, 123-39; Heesen 2016, 91-118; Yatromanolakis 2016b, 1-42; Laferrière 2020, 63-90.

⁸ For further discussion of deer and divine music and dance, see Laferrière 2024.

⁹ For more on the deer and Dionysian dance, see below.

¹⁰ On the importance of frames in Greek art, see Hurwit 1977, 1-30; Platt & Squire 2017, 1-99.

intensely participatory. In each instance, the audience is asked not just to watch, but also to lose themselves in the performance as the music surrounds them and the dance unfolds before them.

Developing a Vocabulary for Divine Dance

As the previous examples suggest, the gods are not only capable of moving their bodies in dance, but the practice of dance itself can be associated with the beginnings of the world, so much so that the *Theogony* begins with a divine dance, while Lucian posits that Dance and Love came into being together with the creation of the universe, so that one does not pre-exist the other. The question remains, then, as to how gods dance, whether they dance alone or together in a chorus, what types of bodily autonomy they might enjoy, and for what reasons they might dance. If we return to the relief with which we began (Fig. 43), it becomes apparent that the gods depicted do not, despite our first impression, all move their bodies in the same way; rather, Aphrodite, located between Athena and Apollo, deviates in her movements from the unified processional dance. Unlike her companions, she reaches down to lift her robes as she steps, out of sync with her fellow gods who move together. Instead, seemingly caught up in her own response to Apollo's music, she performs a dance of her own making.¹¹ Arranging her body in distinct patterns of movement, she lifts up a flower with her left hand, raising it in front of her while her three remaining fingers extend outwards, almost touching the arm of Athena, who walks in front of her. Aphrodite's drapery even mimics the movement of her hand, and indeed mimics the movement of Apollo's own drapery behind her, as it swings forward in front of her body to nearly touch the crest of Athena's helmet, connecting the source of music with the chorus of dancers.

In order to describe the form and appearance of the gods' choral dance, as well as Aphrodite's departure from it, we need to develop a vocabulary that helps us to isolate specific moments within their chorality. Throughout this chapter, I make use of a term typically used for the choreography and execution of human dance, namely *schēma*, since both human and divine dancers share in the creation of bodily movements, even if the nature of the dance and its effect on the audience might differ.¹² By adopting this term, we may demarcate important points of both similarity and difference between the dances of gods and the dances of men and women, as well as the resulting effect that such dances could have had on their respective audiences. In the Classical period,

¹¹ On solo dancers, see especially Olsen 2021.

¹² For more on *schēma* and its use in dance terminology, see Robinson 2021; Bocksberger 2021.

schēma is often used to describe the particular pose of a statue, as we see in Demosthenes' speech *De Falsa Legatione* (251), or to describe the movements of a body that are captured by an image, such as putting something down or picking something up, as we hear in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (3.10.7).¹³ It is also a term that is particularly used within descriptions of dance, where it denotes the endpoint of danced movement. So, within this understanding of *schēma*, especially as it is discussed by Aristides Quintilianus (late third–fourth century CE), a dancer continuously moves between *schēmata*, with the movements that lead up to and determine the form of the poses, described as *peras* or *semeia*. One dances, therefore, by linking a sequence of gestures, of *schēmata*.¹⁴ Moreover, following J.J. Pollitt's discussion of *schēma*, we can even think of it as the more colloquial or informal counterpart to *rhythmos*. And *rhythmos*, which is a complex technical term, has both a musical and visual sense.¹⁵ Not only can it be defined as the form or shape of a figure, object, or composition, but in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, the term also took on a sense of repetition, so that it could also refer to the configuration or proportion of the component parts of a melody or of a pattern painted onto a vase or sculpted into stone.¹⁶

If we take *rhythmos* and *schēma* together as a way of describing the depiction of divine bodies, then we may also discuss the visual pattern and aesthetic effect that dance produces as forms arrange themselves in space, as figures reach out to each other, as they move alongside each other.¹⁷ Moreover, if, as Frederick Naerebout observes, “dance is an *effective* medium of communication, because it is an *affective* [one]” (2006, 64, italics in the original), examining how divine dancing bodies interact with each other and with the space in which they perform offers us the opportunity to explore how divine *schēmata* could visually communicate important features of the gods' dance as well as a collective virtual and timeless experience of dance in which the viewers might

¹³ Pollitt 1974, 258.

¹⁴ Discussed more fully in Robinson 2021.

¹⁵ Laferrière 2020, 63–90.

¹⁶ The term first appears among the lyric and elegiac poets of the seventh and sixth centuries. The earliest attested usage is in a fragment of Archilochus (128 West), in which he implores his heart to recognize the changeable nature of life (οἶος ῥυσμός ἀνθρώπους ἔχει). It acquired a sense of patterning already by the beginning of the fifth century, when Aeschylus (*Cho.* 793–99) describes the regular beat of a horse's strides as *rhythmos*.

¹⁷ I do not mean to imply that it is possible, or even desirable, to attempt to reconstruct the type of music to which they move, or the sequence of steps that any of the gods perform. Rather, I draw on Smith (2010a, 8, 12–13), who argues that representations of dance communicate “the idea of dance, not an actual one.” For further discussion, see Naerebout 1997, 60–77, 112–13; Naerebout 2017, 60; Smith 2010b, 77–98; Smith 2014, 231.

imaginatively participate.¹⁸ It is within this theoretical framework that the figure of Aphrodite is particularly significant for our discussion of divine dance, for she belongs—and yet also does not—to the divine procession, acting as a member of the chorus even as she deviates from its rhythmic movements through her own dance. Such aberrations from the group’s movements visually suggest a real moment in time, where the goddess experiences a particular reaction to the music, and responds to it in her own way, moving through space in a manner distinct from her companions, exploring her bodily response to the music in her own time.

We might take a similar approach to another scene, this one dating to the late Archaic period. On one side of a black-figure amphora, we see the god

Apollo playing his large performance *kitara* (Fig. 46).¹⁹ Unusually, however, he also dances to its music, prancing forward on tip-toes in a manner reminiscent of the description in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* where Apollo “plays his *kitara* and dances beautifully and steps high” (ἐγκιθαρίζει / καλὰ καὶ ὕψι βιβάζ) during his performance, “with radiance shining from him” (αἴγλη δέ μιν ἀμφιφαιέωει; 202).²⁰ He is joined here by a female figure, likely Artemis, who stands to his right, and Hermes, who stands on the left. In front of Artemis grows a vine that reaches above and below the *kitara*, effectively framing the instrument within



Figure 46: Attic black-figure neck amphora by the Edinburgh Painter, depicting Apollo with Hermes and Female Figure (possibly Artemis), 520-500 BCE. Schwerin, Staatliches Museum 726.

¹⁸ For more on dance’s ability to communicate, see Naerebout 1997, 165-66, 234; 2015, 108; Smith 2010a, 8; 2016, 147; 2021, 49-84. On the importance of considering the spectator’s response for any discussion of dance, see Peponi 2015, 207.

¹⁹ BAPD 3273; Haspels 1936, 219.68; von Lücken 1972, 13-14, pls. 12.1-2, 13.1-4.

²⁰ This is an unusual depiction of the god who, in black-figure vases, is more commonly shown standing still while playing the *kitara*. For further discussion, see Laferrière 2024.

the composition. Hermes similarly draws attention to the music in the scene: with his left hand, he holds out his *kērykeion*, his messenger staff, which reaches upwards, visually echoing the straight lines of the *kithara*'s strings, while his right hand points down to Apollo's dancing feet, as if acknowledging Apollo's physical reaction to the sounds of his own music. The vegetation is repeated on the other side of the vase (Fig. 47), where Hermes appears again, though here he is accompanied by Dionysus, who holds the vine that curls down in front of the god and twists to grow back behind him.²¹ Both gods actively stride forward as Hermes positions the *kērykeion* almost horizontally, as if directing Dionysus' movement within the image.

The two sides of the vase are thus visually connected by the vine, which repeats from side to side, suggesting that each scene is a continuous series of events. Not only does Apollo's music draw Artemis and Hermes towards him, but it also reaches out to Dionysus on the other side, as suggested by the vine that spreads out across both sides. Apollo's music and his dance act as instigating forces that draw those who encounter them towards the god. Similarly, in the Archaic Greek *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, Apollo's music and dance inspires the other gods to perform. A number of female collectives, such as the Graces and the Horai (the Seasons), as well as Harmonia, Hebe, Aphrodite, and Artemis all dance together (ὄρχεσθαι, 195), while Ares and Hermes join, creating a spectacle of divine bodies that move together in a communal dance that delights even Zeus (205-206). Just as with a corresponding human practice, divine music and divine dance are intensely connected, where the allure of Apollo's music and accompanying dance is so strong that it draws in the other gods, indeed in much the same manner as the Muses' desire-instigating dance in the *Theogony*, and inspires them to respond similarly, to move their own bodies together in a divine chorus.

We might imagine, then, for both the vase-painting and the poetic lines, that the *schemata* exhibited by Apollo's moving body are determined in part by the sounds of his music, and that together, they create a harmonious, enticing spectacle that is capable of drawing in all those who encounter it, whether they are gods or even mortal viewers. The vase itself, with the vine that passes from one side to the other, encourages a kind of embodied viewing and response to itself as a three-dimensional object, where its physical manipulation becomes a kind of dance as it is turned one way and then the other, animating the god's performance and creating the opportunity for the audience to respond (Gaifman & Platt 2018, 402-19; Gaifman 2018, 444-65). Importantly, this interaction offered by the image of Apollo's dance occurs against a blank

²¹ For more on the relationship between Dionysus and the vine, see Dietrich 2010, 69-79.

background, freeing it from any spatial constraint and allowing it to unfold wherever the vase is set up. We, the viewers, might imagine that it takes place on Mount Olympus, as we hear in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, or it might take place in the remote countryside, where unsuspecting audience members might come upon it unawares. But, what this vase suggests is that divine dance can occur anywhere, at any time, so long as there is an audience who is ready to experience it.

We may see a similar effort to encourage embodied viewing with respect to divine dance with depictions of the Lares from late Republican and early Imperial Rome.²² These gods are best understood as guardian figures and, as Harriet Flower has shown, “no place in Rome was without its guardian gods” (Flower 2017, 1, 76).²³ As protective deities, they were ubiquitous in the ancient world, and could be found in their own public temples, in the domestic sphere where they were found especially in corners at entranceways or in the kitchens, at street corners, or in small individual shrines at historical points in the city or at crossroads.²⁴ Underscoring their close relationship to dance, the Lares themselves are often shown as dancers, caught mid-dance, moving their bodies on either side of the *genius*, a male protective spirit, and near one or two snakes. Typically, when they are represented in this way in the visual material, their representation involves the two figures raising one arm in the air, holding a rhyton (a drinking vessel) with the other hand on or near their hip (Fig. 48). At the same time, they stand on their tiptoes, as if just about to begin smoothly turning to face each other. This position has resulted in the designation of these gods as the “dancing”



Figure 47: Reverse of Fig. 46 depicting Hermes and Dionysus. Schwerin, Staatliches Museum 726.

²² My thanks go to Zoa Alonso Fernández for her remarks throughout this discussion.

²³ See Van Andringa 2009 for further discussion of the Lares cult within a wider religious context.

²⁴ Flower 2017, 76.



Figure 48: Shrine to the Lares from the House of the Vettii, Pompeii, 1st cent. CE. © Foto Scala, Firenze – su concessione Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali e del Turismo.

(or “playful”) Lares (*Lares ludentes*), a phrase taken in part from a fragment by Naevius.²⁵ These dancing or playful Lares have been uncovered throughout Rome, and survive in great numbers from Pompeii, where they are depicted adorning the walls of small domestic shrines or standing as portable bronze figurines throughout the city.²⁶

We see a powerful instance of their protective role coming together with dance in the opening lines of the archaic *carmen arvale*, likely re-introduced together with the Arval Brethren by Augustus in the years following the battle of Actium (Alonso Fernández 2021, 107-108). Although the Lares themselves

²⁵ *Theodotum / cum Apella comparas qui Compitalibus / sedens in cella circumtectus tegetibus / Lares ludentes peni pinxit bubulo?*, “Do you compare Theodotus with Apelles / Theodotus who, at the Compitalia / sitting in a corner and fenced off with mats / painted the playful Lares with an ox-tail?” Naevius *fr. com.* 99-102. Ed. Warmington, trans. Padilla Peralta 2020, 159.

²⁶ Giacobello (2008), for instance, catalogues 114 Lares shrines that are all in or near a kitchen.

were not the focus of ritual and hymnic activity, the hymn, preserved on a third century CE inscription, nevertheless begins with an invocation to the Lares:²⁷

E nos | Lares invate, | [e] nos Lares invate, e nos Lares invate!

Hey you, Lares, help us! Hey you, Lares, help us! Hey you, Lares, help us!

Within the context of the hymn and the danced performance that accompanied it, we might imagine, following Alonso Fernández (2021, 115), that the Lares' protective nature is brought together with the self-referential invocation *e nos*; importantly, the nature of their help is not specified, and rather they could aid at once in establishing a protected space in which to dance, a cohesive chorus, or even each individual dancer's own physical readiness.

The Lares' accessibility was a major feature of their personae as divinities: not only were they set up and venerated in wealthy houses, such as the House of the Vettii where this particular fresco and shrine were discovered,²⁸ but they were also venerated in kitchens, where the elite owners would not have worked, suggesting that these gods had a broad appeal to Romans of all social strata (Flower 2017, 4-5). Indeed, often the main focus of the cult was in the kitchen, underscoring just how important this cult and these gods were for the religious life of the enslaved and freed people working for wealthy elite Romans (Flower 2017, 4).

While there is much that could be written about the Lares within the Roman lived experience of religion,²⁹ important for our purposes is the gods' proclivity to dance, and to dance in spaces that are markedly different from what we might expect for a divine performer, who typically, as we saw with Apollo, dances in a sacred space to divinely produced music for a divine audience. The Lares, however, as guardian deities, occupy a very different role within ancient ritual and, consequently, dance in very different places. In isolating their movements, that is, the *schēmata* they adopt, the Lares' dance takes on an important function: not only do they dance, surrounding and protecting the genius of the family through the specific divine *schēmata* they adopt, but these same movements and gestures also serve to create a sacred landscape, a space which these gods sanctify through their danced movements (Flower 2017, 58). This is especially

²⁷ CIL 6.02104. Translation from Alonso Fernández 2021, 111. As Alonso Fernández notes, García Calvo (1957, 413-14) suggests that the hymn may have opened and concluded with a ritual cry (*el*), intended to call attention to this invocation to the Lares. For detailed discussion of the hymn and the surviving inscription, see Alonso Fernández's full 2021 account, with previous bibliography. This text is also discussed in the Introduction and the chapter on "Movement."

²⁸ For the Lares frescoes in Pompeii, see Boyce 1937; Orr 1978, 1988; Fröhlich 1991, especially 110-28; Giacobello 2008.

²⁹ See especially Flower 2017 as well as Rüpke 2011 and 2016; Raja & Rüpke 2015.

the case when the Lares are shown to be much bigger than the Genius, as they are typically depicted. In these scenes, their dance not only surrounds the family but, visually, almost seems to completely enclose it.

If we move beyond the image itself, the contexts in which the Lares were seen dancing also, by extension, fall under their purview, so that the kitchen, the crossroad, the entrance way, all of these spaces became protected by these gods, who danced their protection around them. Similarly, the vast array of people who would have encountered images of dancing Lares were also protected through their visual encounter with the divine dance. We might even think of their invocation at the beginning of the *carmen arvale* as undertaking a similar function, where the oral shout protects all who hears it, even as the subsequent danced performance protects those who dance and those who watch. Even more, if we consider Sklar's discussion of kinesthetic empathy, where "the process of translating from visual to kinesthetic modes" allows the viewer to gain the capacity "to participate with another's movement or another's sensory experience of movement" (2001, 198f. n. 3), the images of dancing protective deities could also have invited their viewers to feel their bodies move in similar ways, to adopt similar poses as they encountered similar divine *schēmata* reproduced throughout the home and city. In this way, through the shared performance of dance between divine and human dancing bodies, the city remains fully protected under the watchful eye of these guardian gods. A city that dances with their gods, these images suggest, will remain safe.

Becoming Gods through Dance

Lucian—a Greek writer from the second century CE to whom we have returned many times already in this volume—makes clear in *On Dance* that, for him, dance is a universal practice in the ancient world, where it is performed not just for the enjoyment of men and women, but also with the intended purpose of pleasing and engaging with the gods. Though this is a somewhat different inflection of the questions I raised at the beginning of this chapter, it is worth noting that according to this text, a range of ancient peoples danced together with the express purpose of pleasing the gods, either within a distinctly ritual context or outside of it. For instance, the Spartans, he notes, perform the Caryatic dance with the help of the Muses, even as they also use music and coordinated rhythmic movements to choreograph their entry into battle (10). At Delos, choruses of boys sang to the musical sounds of the *aulos* and lyre while some among them danced to accompany ritual sacrifice (16). Choral dance too takes a place of importance in cultic rituals for Dionysus and Aphrodite (11), as it does too in mystery cults for Orpheus and Mousaios (15). Lucian

even ascribes a mythological origin for the dancer Proteus, who is conceived not simply as a shape-shifter, but rather as a dancer who is capable of evoking the forms and qualities of the world around him through intensely mimetic performances (19).³⁰ We see too in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, for instance, a similar impulse, as the Ionians “... entertain you [Apollo] with boxing, dancing (ὄρχηστές), and singing” (149).

In developing further the significance of divine dance for their human audience, as well as the potential for human involvement in the gods’ dance, I turn to a passage in Lucian’s text that addresses the practice of ritual dance in India (*Salt.* 18, trans. Harmon):

... ὅπου καὶ Ἴνδοι ἐπειδὰν ἔωθεν ἀναστάντες προσεύχονται τὸν Ἥλιον, οὐχ ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς τὴν χεῖρα κύσαντες ἡγούμεθα ἐντελῇ ἡμῶν εἶναι τὴν εὐχὴν, ἀλλ’ ἐκεῖνοι πρὸς τὴν ἀνατολὴν στάντες ὀρχήσῃ τὸν Ἥλιον ἀσπάζονται, σχηματίζοντες ἑαυτοὺς σιωπῇ καὶ μιμούμενοι τὴν χορείαν τοῦ θεοῦ· καὶ τοῦτ’ ἐστὶν Ἰνδῶν καὶ εὐχὴ καὶ χοροὶ καὶ θυσία. διὸ καὶ τούτοις ἱλεοῦνται τὸν θεὸν δῖς, καὶ ἀρχομένης καὶ δυομένης τῆς ἡμέρας.

Even the Indians, when they get up in the morning and pray to the sun, instead of doing as we do, who think that when we have kissed our hand the prayer is complete, face the sunrise and welcome the god of day with dancing, posturing in silence and imitating the dance of the god; and that, to the Indians, is prayer and dance and sacrifice all in one. So they propitiate their god with those rites twice each day, when it begins and when it declines.

This passage is distinct among the examples presented in Lucian’s text in discussing not simply a dance performed in the hopes of pleasing the god for whom it was performed.³¹ Rather, it seems to address the contemporaneous Indian practice of yoga, here conceived as a dance performed within the context of ritual practice. Not only do the worshippers pray to the god of the sun, but they welcome the deity through danced bodily movement, ὀρχέομαι, adopting certain forms, σχηματίζω, that allow the dancers both to worship the god and to imitate his very movements, μιμέομαι τὴν χορείαν τοῦ θεοῦ (17). The use of the term *schēmata* here is significant, for do not only the worshippers venerate the god through dance, but the passage suggests that they dance the *same* dance as the god, using the same steps in their attempt to re-create the same *schēmata*. We also see a similar emphasis on the mimetic capabilities of dance in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where “a man might think they were the unageing immortals if he came along then... [taking] in the beauty of the whole scene and [delighting] at the spectacle...” (151-53). In each case, the human

³⁰ For further discussion of dance within Roman cult practices, see Curtis 2017; Schlapbach 2022.

³¹ I thank Karin Schlapbach for this reference.

dancers do not simply mimic the god's movement, but rather they perform the same choreography as a divine being, so that the performance of dance becomes a point of shared contact between the dancer and the divine audience. These passages from Lucian and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* thus open up questions into how the human audience for the divine dancers, that is, those men and women who would have once seen images of the gods' dances or heard the poems sung aloud, could have possibly responded to or engaged with these instances of sacred performance. When considered within the context of kinesthetic empathy, these passages also introduce the further dimension of a shared danced practice between human and divine, where both are engaged in performing the same dance. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss other instances where the gods' dance facilitates contact with their mortal audience, even as it also creates opportunities for the audience members to join in the dance and become part of the divine chorus.

The audience's response to the performance of dance can be a powerful experience, as discussed in the chapter on "Audience." Such interaction between the performer and the audience becomes especially powerful when the personae that are adopted in the performance are divine, not simply because of their supernatural nature, but also because of the extreme emotional and physical states that divine beings were believed capable of instilling.³² Drawing on accounts of epiphanic encounters within the Greek and Roman worlds, experiencing the presence of the divine could overwhelm the senses; beyond the realm of religious sacrificial ritual that occurred within specifically designated spaces, the dramatic stage of the theater offered similar opportunities for encountering the gods and creatures from myth. In Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, for instance, the chorus sings, "Come, let us now join in the dance / since we have resolved to display / our horrifying artistry" (Aesch. *Eum.* 307-10, trans. Sommerstein). The chorus members, dancing together before the audience, become the Furies themselves, performing their "horrifying artistry" before the audience, making the Furies present to the audience through bodily movement and song (Prins 1991; see "Movement," "Politics"). Such mimetic engagement with mythical creatures could be so powerful and effective that we hear in the *Vita Aeschyli*, for instance, that "some say that in the staging of *Eumenides* the chorus, which entered the stage in a scattered fashion, impressed the people so much that little children lost consciousness and unborn ones were miscarried" (9; Calder 1988, 554-55). Dance not only offered the chorus the opportunity to take on the personae of the Furies, but it was such an effective medium

³² On epiphany more broadly in antiquity, see Platt 2011; Petridou 2015.



Figure 49: Detail of the monument of Lysicrates, depicting a pirate who is being partially transformed into a dolphin, 335-334 BCE. Photo by David B. Lewis.

of transformation from human to mythological that it caused physical, bodily harm to the audience.

Within the theater, it is above all with the figure of Dionysus and the dithyramb that we see the fullest transformational possibilities. The earliest surviving fragment of a dithyramb was composed by the poet Archilochus, whose two trochaic tetrameters read, “Thus I know how to lead off the fine song of the Lord Dionysos, the dithyramb, wits thunder-struck with wine” (Fr. 120 W; Kowalzig & Wilson 2013, 4). Though tantalizingly vague, the fragment may suggest the presence of a chorus leader, the function of the dithyramb as worship for Dionysus, and the ecstatic state both the dithyrambic performance and the experience of Dionysus’ presence could provoke for its audience.³³ Such transformative power was frequently associated with Dionysus, as we see on a frieze that decorates the choragic monument erected by Lysicrates after his victory in the theater (Fig. 49). Although the exact myth depicted is disputed, Dionysus observes satyrs fighting against human pirates, some of whom the god has already begun to transform into dolphins.

³³ Other notable poets who composed dithyrambs in the fifth century are Pindar, Bacchylides, and Simonides. Less survives from the later Classical period, often just the names of the poets. For more, see Kowalzig & Wilson 2013.

Indeed, the dithyramb itself, as a mode of performance, is closely linked with the idea of transformation (Lavecchia 2013, 59). Eric Csapo, Barbara Kowalzig, Peter Wilson, and Salvatore Lavecchia have each shown that the dithyramb, which originated as a ritual hymn for Dionysus, could be further conceived as a musical manifestation of Dionysus' divine presence (Csapo 2003, 69-78, 90-95; Kowalzig 2007, 226, 229-31; Kowalzig & Wilson 2013, 9-11; Lavecchia 2013, 59-60). The myths conveyed through many of these songs often narrated the story of Dionysus' birth while other fragments use evocative language to play with the word dithyramb, in order to establish Dithyrambos as another name for Dionysus (Kowalzig & Wilson 2013, 9-11). Within the City Dionysia, the dithyrambic choruses repeatedly invoked Dionysus through his name Dithyrambos. Each chorus, therefore, sang and danced Dionysus into a musical and embodied epiphany, so that he was made manifest both through the collective singing and dancing by the choruses, and through the shared audience experience of hearing and feeling his presence (Kowalzig 2007, 229-30; Kowalzig & Wilson 2013, 9-11; Lavecchia 2013, 59-60, 69).³⁴ Even more, Csapo has argued that Archaic and Classical dolphin imagery, including instances where the dolphins are shown with human legs or where men are shown riding dolphins, should be associated with Dionysus and the dithyramb because, as he notes, within the Greek visual context, "dolphins are dancers" (2003, 81). These scenes, therefore, not only visualize the transformational powers associated broadly with Dionysus in myth, but they position that moment of close proximity to the god as one where dance is performed, so that dance itself could become the medium through which divine presence is experienced and felt within one's own body.³⁵

Beyond the dithyramb, red-figure vases, many from the second half of the fifth century BCE, also depict Dionysus dancing in the company of his followers, that is, the maenads and satyrs who regularly accompany him in both myth and art. For instance, Dionysus dances exuberantly on the exterior of a cup by the Briseis Painter (Fig. 50) while revelers fill the scene with sweeping lines that amplify the range of movement exhibited by each figure.³⁶ Prominently filling the central visual field is Dionysus, who balances precariously on one foot as he tips forward, holding out a curling snake that extends behind him and an ivy branch that reaches in front. He moves rapidly, his drapery flowing out behind him as he dances to the *aulos*-music played by the satyr who

³⁴ For the relationship among Dionysos, *choroi*, and circular dances, see D'Angour 1997, 331-51; Kowalzig & Wilson 2013, 9-11.

³⁵ On Dionysus, see also Bernabé, Jiménez San Cristóbal, & Santamaría 2013.

³⁶ BAPD 204401; *ARV*² 406.2; *Paralipomena* 371; *Beazley Addenda* 115; *Beazley Addenda*² 232; Williams 1993, 66-68, fig.12D, pls. 74.A-B, 75.A-B, with previous bibliography; Carpenter 1997, pl. 10A.



Figure 50: Attic red-figure cup by the Briseis Painter, depicting a Dionysian revel, c. 485-480 BCE. London, British Museum 1843,1103.54 (E75).
© Trustees of the British Museum.

follows him.³⁷ In this scene, Dionysus stands out, not just for the acrobatic dance he performs, but also for the visual space given to his body, which has been carefully surrounded by a black background. The space afforded him in the scene is distinct as the other revelers overlap with each other, and are surrounded by plants, *thyrsos* (a staff topped by an ornament in the shape of a pinecone), and large rocks. As a result of this compositional choice, Dionysus acts as the swirling focal point from which the revel unfolds: he is at once the source of inspiration for the music the satyrs play, one of whom overlaps with the god's outstretched dancing feet, while he is also the embodiment of the ecstatic response his presence demands. In other words, the music played by the satyrs is so powerful and inherently affective that it even draws in the god himself, who, paradoxically, is then consumed by the very music that he inspires and that draws together his followers.

We see another example of Dionysus' dance on a stamnos (a vessel used to mix water and wine), where the god dances alone on one side of the vessel, moving his body to the music that he hears being played from the other side of the vase, where a satyr stands still as he plays the *aulos* (Fig. 51; satyr musician on reverse is not pictured).³⁸ Unencumbered by a frame that might limit his movements, the god seems to move rapidly to one side, his voluminous clothing sweeping out behind him as he looks down at the ground in front of him. The panther skin he wears around his neck adds to the spectacle, its dotted pattern creating a striking visual rhythm over the god's moving body while the limbs and tail of the animal move expressively in front of and behind the dancer. This is not simply a scene of divine dance, however, but much like the Briseis Painter's cup discussed above, this is also a scene of Dionysian ecstasy, for as the god dances, caught up in a revel of his own making, he has torn a small deer apart. As with the animal skin that is draped over the god's shoulders, the disembodied animal's limbs extend outwards, framing the divine dancing body even as it points to the violence and danger that are associated with close proximity to Dionysus and the rituals performed for him.

We should position both the cup and the stamnos within the imaginative and transformative space of the Athenian symposium, the elite ritual gathering of men in which wine was consumed, songs were sung, riddles and jokes were told, and dances were performed (see the Introduction to this volume). It was also a place in which one's own individual identity could be suspended for the duration of the evening's festivities, so that it created the conditions necessary for the symposiasts' transformation into the mythical followers of

³⁷ The maenads who accompany him wear the unusual "wing sleeve," which is occasionally included when they are shown dancing, as discussed by Schöne 1987, 152-56.

³⁸ Walters 1927, III Ic Pl. 19, 3.



Figure 51: Attic red-figure stamnos depicting Dionysos brandishing a slain fawn, c. 480–460 BCE. London, British Museum 1836,0224.35 (E439). © Trustees of the British Museum.

Dionysus through the singing of poems or the dancing of stories.³⁹ Adding to this complex juggle of identities is the wine that the symposiasts consumed, in each instance physically taking in the god of wine through the liquid that was mixed in the central vessel, ladled into jugs, and poured into cups. As the evening progressed, not only were the participants surrounded by music, song, and dance, but they could also feel the alcohol—and by extension the god—move within them, rousing them to act in ways they might not have otherwise (Osborne 2014, 34–60). Within this state of transformation, of in-

³⁹ Much has been written on the symposium, but for the importance of vases and their imagery for the symposiasts, see especially Neer 2002.

betweenness, the symposiasts could become the figures of myth, or even the gods themselves, as they sang and danced together to the music that they hear.

In other words, the images of this particular divine dancer offered ancient viewers the opportunity to participate in the god's dance and to feel his presence move through their bodies. We see a similar conception of the god in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where the god's presence inspired those around him to dance (105-19, trans. Kovacs):

ὦ Σεμέλας τροφοὶ Θῆ-	105
βαι, στεφανοῦσθε κισσῶ·	
βρύετε βρύετε χλοήρει	
μίλακι καλλικάρπῳ	
καὶ καταβακchioῦσθε δρυὸς	
ἢ ἐλάτας κλάδοισι,	110
στικτῶν τ' ἐνδυτὰ νεβρίδων	
στέφετε λευκοτρίχων πλοκάμων	
μαλλοῖς· ἀμφὶ δὲ νάρθηκας ὕβριστὰς	
όσιοῦσθ'· αὐτίκα γὰρ πᾶσα χορεύσει,	
Βρόμιος εὐτ' ἂν ἄγῃ θιάσους	115
εἰς ὄρος εἰς ὄρος, ἔνθα μένει	
θηλυγενῆς ὄχλος	
ἄφ' ἱστῶν παρὰ κερκίδων τ'	
οἰστρηθεὶς Διονύσῳ.	

O Thebes that nurtured Semele,
 be crowned with ivy!
 Abound, abound in the green
 bryony with its lovely berries,
 be consecrate as bacchant
 with boughs of oak or fir,
 and deck your dappled fawnskin garments
 with white strands of wool!
 Wrap the violent bacchic wand
 in holiness! Forthwith the whole land shall dance,
 when Bromios leads the worshipful bands
 to the mountain, to the mountain, where there rests
 the throng of women,
 driven by Dionysos in madness
 from their looms and shuttles.

Dionysus is here presented as enjoying and participating in dance, as we saw with the two vessels, but, even more, as the instigating force that could inspire

others to dance.⁴⁰ Indeed, his influence could be so expansive that “forthwith the whole land shall dance, when Bromios leads the worshipful bands to the mountain...” (114-16), suggesting both an immediacy to his dancing and the effect he has on those around him, as well as a delight in causing others to lose themselves in the dance with abandon. This reaching out to the audience, to those witnessing the dance, is also evoked in the visual record, as we see on a red-figure pelike (a storage vessel for liquids) where Dionysus is again shown dancing, having just torn apart a goat (Fig. 52).⁴¹ He is joined here by his followers, the maenads and satyrs, all of whom dance and play music around an altar, creating a scene of Dionysian revel and worship all in one. While there is much that could be written about this particular scene of ecstatic dance and expansive movement, I draw our attention to one satyr in particular, located underneath the handle behind the god (Fig. 53). Here, if we follow the sightline directed by the torso and legs of the torn goat, it leads us to the kneeling satyr, whose arms are raised as he dances. In the midst of his dance, however, he twists, turning to face the frontal plane of the image, looking directly out of the scene. His mouth is open and shaped into an ‘o’ shape, as if he has been caught by surprise mid-dance, surprised by us, the external viewers, who now look back at him.⁴² Piercing the frontal plane of the image, the vase not only includes us as the audience for this scene of Dionysian dance and ritual, but it includes us as participants in that experience, where we do not simply look at what is unfolding before us, but we are invited to feel the music move through us, to respond with our bodies to the music and to Dionysus’ presence, so that “the whole land [does] dance,” after all.

For the external viewer who could have encountered all three vessels—the cup, stamnos, and pelike—in a symposium, the full extent of the transgressive and ecstatic states associated with Dionysus could similarly manifest through one’s exposure to music, song, and dance. In drinking wine from this cup, the symposiasts physically consumed the god’s presence and thus opened themselves up to the destabilizing and wild energy Dionysus and his followers exhibit in the image. Similarly, by listening to music played on the *aulos*, especially when in a blurred, intoxicated state, the symposiasts might have imagined that they listen to the same music that they see. The image offers its viewers the opportunity to share the same sensory experience as Dionysus, where both

⁴⁰ Weiss 2018, 241-46.

⁴¹ Walters, Forsdyke, & Smith 1893, E362.

⁴² In general, important work on frontal figures in ancient art has been carried out by Korshak 1987; Frontisi-Ducroux 1995; Mackay 2001, 5-34; Mack 2002, 571-604; Hedreen 2007, 217-46; 2017, 154-87. I also follow Meyer Schapiro’s argument (1973, 38f.) that these frontal faces actively look at their viewers.



Figure 52: Attic red-figure pelike by the Earlier Mannerist Painter, depicting Dionysos Chimserophonos and *thiasos*, c. 480-460 BCE. London, British Museum 1867,0508.1126 (E362). © Trustees of the British Museum.

man and god hear the same sounds, respond the same way, and dance the same steps. The image thus suggests that Dionysus draws his followers in by offering a fully embodied experience of divine presence.

We see a similar conflation and blurring together of divine and human dancers with the Nymphs, particularly as they are shown dancing as a chorus



Figure 53: Detail of Fig. 52, London, British Museum 1867,0508.1126 (E362). © Trustees of the British Museum.

with Pan on a series of fourth-century BCE votive reliefs.⁴³ For instance, on a votive relief discovered near the sanctuary of Eleusis, three female figures move together through the available visual space (Fig. 54).⁴⁴ Here, the figures grasp tightly onto their companions' robes and move together across the visual field,

⁴³ For more on the Nymphs in Greek religion more generally, see especially Larson 2001. For a thorough discussion of the Nymphs on Archaic vases, see Díez Platas 1998, 303-44.

⁴⁴ Feubel 1935, xix, no. IIIa.A2, 54-56, with earlier bibliography; Travlos 1960, 55, pl. 41.β; Fuchs 1962, 21, no. A2, 36, note 75; Isler 1970, 30-31, 42, 112, 117, no. 12; Edwards 1985, 565-69, no. 38; Güntner 1994, 121, A23, pl. 5.1; Kaltsas 2002, no. 455. The relief's precise find spot is unclear,



Figure 54: Votive relief depicting Pan and the Nymphs, from a cave of Pan in Eleusis, 325-300 BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens. NM 1445 © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development / photographer: Carolyn M. Laferrière.

their drapery gently floating out behind them. The god Pan strides forward in front of the Nymphs, separated from his companions by the large, rectilinear stone altar. He holds in his hands a large *syrinx*, roughly the size of the god's torso. The size and nature of his instrument hints at the type of music that the god plays, so that the visual prominence the instrument holds within the image suggests a corresponding acoustic dominance. As viewers, then, we are invited to imagine a loud musical sound emerging from Pan's pipes, which then swirls around the space and envelops the three Nymphs. The four figures, bound together in their collective experience of music and corresponding bodily

although Travlos states that it was likely found on this hill. The hole may be explained by the relief's later reuse as a waterspout.

response, move as a chorus throughout the cave in which they reside. They have an attentive audience: nestled throughout the cave walls are Pan's goats and sheep, and along the left side sits the protome, or mask, of Acheloös the river god. Though the animals and the god do not participate in the Nymphs' dance and remain within the rocky landscape, their rhythmic, circular placement around the central performance retains a sense of movement and chorality.⁴⁵

On this relief, the Nymphs are shown holding their companions' mantles and moving forwards together as a unified group, their drapery swirling around their feet and flowing out behind them. This particular mode of representation, where the three dancers hold each other's garments or hands, is typical within the Greek visual tradition for indicating that the figures are engaged in *choreia* (Rocconi 2015, 81-93; Weiss 2020, 161-72; Steiner 2021). The gesture of holding hands during a choral dance is not restricted to the visual material, and it also appears, as we have already seen, in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, where the female divinities dance together, holding each other's wrists (194-96). As discussed above, the Nymphs, together with other divine female collectives, are often characterized as chorus dancers. The *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* introduces dancing Nymphs when Aphrodite narrates her abduction by Hermes, stressing that just beforehand, she was in the forest where "nymphs and marriageable maidens" (νύμφαι καὶ παρθένοι ἀλφεσίβοιαι, 117-41) danced together in the wild forest with Artemis. Aphrodite returns to the Nymphs at the end of the hymn, where she uses dance as a feature that is distinctive to these particular divinities, saying that they "tread the lovely dance (καλὸν χορόν) among the immortals" (254-76). Dancing Nymphs similarly appear in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, where they move alongside Dionysus (10-11). Perhaps the clearest discussion of dancing Nymphs in relation to Pan occurs in the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*, where the "clear-voiced mountain Nymphs" (Νύμφαι ὄρεστιάδες λιγύμολποι, 19), are "moving nimbly" (φοιτῶσαι πύκα, 20) beside Pan as they sing and dance (μέλπονται, 21). Later fifth-century comedy similarly develops the idea of choral Nymphs, who dance in caves with the chorus in Aristophanes' *Birds* (1099), or who dance in a chorus with Socrates in *Clouds* (271). The inclusion of dancing Nymphs on fourth-century votive reliefs, therefore, would have immediately evoked for the viewer the *choreia* with which these divinities were associated (Lonsdale 1994-95, 25-40; Peponi 2009, 56-57, 60-68 and 2013, 15-16). The relief from Eleusis offers us a clear example of how the Nymphs exhibit features of Athenian *choreia*: the figures move forward together in unison, holding each other's mantles, their steps carefully coordinated.

⁴⁵ Animals are often imagined as dancing to music played by Apollo and Pan. For further discussion, see Weiss 2018, 27-31, 236-41.

Further nuancing their dance is the close syntactical relationship between divine Nymphs and mortal young women. Their name, *nymphai*, hints at their ambiguous status, where the term refers both to the nature spirits who occupy mountains, trees, and bodies of water, and to young brides preparing for their marriages (Larson 2001, 3-4). In a passage from Euripides' *Ion*, the mortal Aglaurids, who are young, unmarried women, or *nymphai*, are similarly conflated with the dancing Nymphs (492-502, trans. Kovacs, modified):⁴⁶

ὦ Πανὸς θακήματα καὶ	
παραυλίζουσα πέτρα	
μυχώδεσι Μακραῖς,	
ἵνα χοροὺς στεῖβουσι ποδοῖν	495
Ἀγλαύρου κόραι τρίγονοι	
στάδια χλοερὰ πρὸ Παλλάδος	
ναῶν συρίγγων <θ'>	
ὕπ' αἰόλας ἰαχᾶς	
ὕμνοῦς ὅτ' ἀναλίοις	500
συρίζεις, ὦ Πάν,	
τοῖσι σοῖς ἐν ἄντροις.	

Oh resting place of Pan
and cliff that lies near
the Long Rocks full of caverns!
There they tread the dance,
Aglauros' daughters three,
over the verdant grass before the temple
of Pallas and sing
to the shimmering sound of piping
when in your cave
shaded from the sun, O Pan,
you play your pipes.

Euripides' elision of the two groups of women⁴⁷ establishes a link between young women and the physical landscape of Athens. The young girls in Euripides' tragedy are thus at once representative of an ever-present potential for future regeneration, but as the daughters of King Erechtheus, who was born from the earth itself, they also maintain a link with the Athenian landscape through their genealogical heritage. In front of Athena's temple,

⁴⁶ At the time this tragedy was performed, between 414 and 412 BCE, the association between Pan and the Nymphs in Attica was well known, and they shared cave sanctuaries throughout Attica.

⁴⁷ On the meaning of *nymphē*, see Calame 2001, 26; Larson 2001, 3. Tragic choruses do, however, frequently assimilate themselves to dancing Nymphs, as discussed by Weiss 2018, 69-70.

where the patron goddess of the city acts as their audience, the three young women dance. We might likewise consider the female visitors who travelled to the cave sanctuaries of Pan and the Nymphs as similarly engaged with the Nymphs, so that they could offer worship to the Nymphs even as they were themselves *nymphai*. The potential for elevation to the divine was thus built into cult worship for the Nymphs: the goddesses dance, responding to the music that Pan plays, and so every young woman may also dance, joining in the divine chorus and transforming into a divine dancer through its very performance.

Conclusion

Though we began with one question—what does it mean for a god to dance—I want to end our discussion by posing another: what does it mean to see a god dance? Or, perhaps more accurately, what does it mean to *experience* a god's dance? Throughout this chapter, we have seen how gods dance on their own, such as when Aphrodite alters her movements from the rest of the divine chorus to dance in a way that suits her persona, or when Apollo moves to the music he creates and inspires his fellow gods to join him in his performance. In isolating a vocabulary by which we can discuss divine dance, we have also discussed how the Lares could ask their audience, taken from every socio-economic level in Rome, to adopt similar poses, to dance with the gods and celebrate their protected sacred landscape. Finally, in our consideration of the role of mimesis in the human spectatorship of divine dance, we have looked at three case studies: the dithyrambic performances in the Athenian theater, the immersive experience of the symposium, and relief scenes of nymphs dancing. In each instance, however, we have returned to our question of how the human audience could have experienced these images of divine dance and how the performances offered by the gods could offer their audiences opportunities to join the performance. While the gods do dance on their own, away from their human viewers, they also repeatedly make themselves accessible to them, inviting them to join in the dance, so that the performance of dance becomes a point of contact between the two, a shared activity that both participate in, experience, and perform.

And, perhaps, dance can become something more than a shared activity, either when a god performs it or when a mortal performer dances with such skill that he or she seems to be more than human. The transformative powers of dance become apparent in the moment of performance, where the dancer moves his body in certain ways, holds certain objects, performs

in certain spaces, instills certain reactions in the audience. In the *Greek Anthology* (poetic epigrams collected together in the tenth century CE), we see one such moment of transformation within the context of pantomime (248, trans. Paton, modified):

Εἰ τοῖος Διόνυσος ἐς ἱερὸν ἦλθεν Ὀλύμπου,
 κωμάζων Λήναις σὺν ποτε καὶ Σατύροις,
 οἷον ὁ τεχνήεις Πυλάδης ὠρχήσατο κεῖνον,
 ὀρθὰ κατὰ τραγικῶν τέθμια μουσοπόλων,
 παυσασμένη ζήλου Διὸς ἂν φάτο σύγγαμος Ἥρη·
 “Ἐψεύσω, Σεμέλη, Βάκχον· ἐγὼ δ’ ἔτεκον.” 5

If Dionysos had come revelling with the Maenads and Satyrs to holy Olympus, looking just as Pylades the great artist played him in the dance according to the true canons of the servants of the tragic Muse, Hera, the consort of Zeus, would have ceased to be jealous and exclaimed: ‘Semele, you pretended that Bacchus was your son; but it was I who bore him.’

Not only can a god invite his or her human audience to join in their divine dance, but through the performance of dance itself, if that dancer is particularly skillful, he can even become the god, so that through a dynamic mimetic performance, he moves in ways that only a divine dancer might and looks “just as” a god.⁴⁸ At the most extreme end of skill and performance, dance becomes much more than a shared activity among men, women, and the gods; rather, it becomes innately transformative, moving its audience to feel and experience in certain ways and, even, to become something else, something divine, even if just for the duration of the dance.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ For more on pantomime and the dynamic bodily transformation of the dancer, see Webb 2022. More generally, on pantomime: Lada-Richards 2007, 2011; Garelli 2007; Hall & Wyles 2008; Webb 2008; Tedeschi 2019.

⁴⁹ I am profoundly grateful to Zoa Alonso Fernández and Sarah Olsen for their careful guidance through our journey into the intricate steps and movements of ancient dance. Through ongoing conversations with them and with Rosa Andújar, Lauren Curtis, Laura Gianvittorio-Ungar, Karin Schlapbach, and Naomi Weiss, my thinking on Greek and Roman dance has become both more nuanced and more expansive, and I am thankful to have had the opportunity to work alongside each of them. I would also like to thank the Programa Logos (Fundación BBVA/Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos) for their generous support for our project. Finally, I gratefully thank both Zoa Alonso Fernández and Sarah Olsen for their help in securing image permissions and for their efforts to ensure that this volume is made available both in English and Spanish.

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This book explores the many traces of ancient Greek and Roman dance—the impressions, reimaginings, and imprints of bodily movement and choreography evident in the literary, visual, and material sources of Greek and Roman antiquity. By placing ancient representations and realities in dialogue with the fields of Dance and Performance Studies, the analyses contained herein offer a range of new approaches and fresh perspectives.

After providing a general introduction, this volume surveys Greek and Roman ideas about dance through a set of concepts that have proven to be central to the recent and ongoing development of dance theory and practice. Taking up “Geography,” “Space,” “Body,” “Audience,” “Movement,” “Objects,” “Politics,” and “Gods” in turn, the book provides tools and models for understanding ancient dance from a variety of angles. Each chapter considers both Greek and Roman sources, and draws from both literary and material evidence, thereby illustrating the wealth of possibilities for the continued study of related questions across the various subfields of Classics. The volume orients scholars of contemporary performance within the world of ancient Greek and Roman dance, while also deepening classicists’ engagement with interdisciplinary frameworks and methods for the study of dance and performance.

Imprints of Dance in Ancient Greece and Rome demonstrates the centrality of dance to ancient culture and society, and underscores its value as an avenue of scholarly investigation. Its eight authors invite further conversation and debate on the themes of this volume and look forward to new developments in the fields of ancient dance and performance studies.