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Dancing with a Ball

INTRODUCTION: BALL GAMES AND BALL DANCE

Written sources as well as images and objects reveal how ball games played an important role in the daily life of the Greek world.¹ Since the age of Homer, a close connection between the concepts of playing with a ball and dancing with a ball seems to be evident. The verb *paizein* (παίζειν) is related to the game, given its derivation from the word *païs*, which has parallels not only with *molpē* (μολπή), but also with playing music and dancing.² As Steven Lonsdale has argued,³ the game of Nausicaa and her companions contains musical and choreographic elements allowed for by the use of this verb. According to Claude Calame,⁴ due to the particular use of the verb *παίζω* in a dancing context, it is possible to interpret this passage in Book 6 of the *Odyssey* as a choral scene and as the first description of a ball dance ritual in Greek literature.

Nymphs are described as playing and dancing with Artemis in honour of Leto, thus linking the playful ball throw of the Phaeacian maidens to the divine dance:⁵ once the young girls have washed the laundry and hung it out to dry, they bathe and enjoy a feast

in the open air. Then, Nausicaa and her attendants throw off their veils. After eating their meal on the river bank, the girls, led by the princess, engage in a ball-throwing game (σφαίρη τὰ δ' ἄρ' ἔπαιζον) and a dance while they wait for their garments dry.⁶ One of them misses, and the stray ball awakens Odysseus. A simile compares their activity to the sport of Artemis and her Nymphs.

A similar scene is mentioned in the Homeric *Hymn to Artemis*⁷ where the goddess visits the house of Apollo in Delphi and leads the choral dance of the Muses and Graces. It is interesting to note that in both cases, the poet prefers to use the verb *paizein* to refer to not only Nausicaa's ball-throwing game with her companions on the beach, but also the dance of the Nymphs (ἄγρονόμοι παίζουσι).⁸ Moreover, in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*⁹ Hermes kidnapped Aphrodite while she was dancing (παίζομεν) with a group of Nymphs and maids.

Through the simile there is an overlap of the choral dance under the supervision of Nausicaa and the group play of the Nymphs under Artemis, whose delight in hunting is also expressed by the verb *paizō* (παίζω). The princess is compared to the goddess not

1 O'SULLIVAN (2012), 17-33.

2 Homer, *Odyssey*, 6.100; *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 206.

3 LONSDALE (1993), 206-208.

4 CALAME (2001), 87. See also CALAME (2021), 90-91.

5 BOUVIER (2021), 16-19; OLSEN (2021), 33-35.

6 CALAME (2001), 43-49.

7 *Homeric Hymn to Artemis*, 13-20.

8 HENRICHs (1996), 35.

9 *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, 119-120.

only because of her activity but also for her physical resemblance. At the conclusion of the simile, it is established that Nausicaa is preeminent among her companions. The same criteria for physical beauty and superiority is found in the description of Artemis as the leader of the choral dance on Olympus in the *Homeric Hymn* to Apollo:¹⁰ she is taller by a head, better to look at, and more enticingly graceful. Moreover, the playful ball game of the handmaids is accompanied by a chant led by Nausicaa (ἤρχετο μολπῆς), who is recognised as the leader, or *choregos*, of the dance, given that she provides her companions with the signal for the song and dance. As princess and the next to wed, Nausicaa has the right to lead off the song and dance within their play.

According to Anton Bierl,¹¹ from Nausicaa onwards, the verb *paizein* refers mostly to young girls in their rite de passage: as such they are close to or on the brink of marriage and as *numphai* in a state of in-between, belonging already partly to Aphrodite, but still maidens in the realm of Artemis, the goddess of maidenhood.

It is worth noting that the scene of the ball game played by Nausicaa and her companions recalls the ball game in the palace of the Phaeacians' king. Moreover, in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*¹² the throwing of the ball is also connected with dance, when Alcinous, the king of the Phaeacians, urges the attendees of the party in his palace to begin the banquet with a dance (ἀλλ' ἄγε, Φαιήκων βητάρμονες ὅσσοι ἄριστοι, / παίσατε):¹³ given that no one else could compete with his sons (because they are the best of the best), Alcinous orders to Halius and Laodamas to perform a solo dance (μουνᾶξ ὀρχήσασθαι).¹⁴ After catching a purple ball (σφαῖραν καλὴν... πορφυρέην), one of them leans back and throws it up (ρίπτασκε), while the other jumps and catches it (μεθέλεσκε) before his feet hit the ground. During their ball throwing performance, the other young people stand around the centre of the dance floor (ἑσταότες κατ' ἄγωνα), clapping their hands (κοῦροι δ' ἐπελήκειον) and beating the time. The Phaeacian youths are not engaged in a competition: they are displaying their excellence in dancing and ball play.¹⁵

1. DANCING WHILST THROWING A BALL

As Salvatore Costanza has argued,¹⁶ in the passages of Books 6 and 8 of the *Odyssey*, it is also possible to recognise a connection between certain dances and

games with balls of different sizes, some of which were named with the word σφαιρισμός (*sphairismos*) and are related to the symbolic value of the ball. In the *Onomasticon*,¹⁷ Pollux states that participants in ball games were called σφαιρίζοντας (*sphairizontas*), and lists the verbs used to describe the handling process of a ball (σφαῖρη παίζειν, σφαῖραν ρίπτειν, βάλλειν, ἀφιέναι, πέμπειν, προπέμπειν, ἐκπέμπειν, ἀντιπέμπειν, ἀνταφιέναι, ἀνταποφέρειν). He also mentions several ball games, providing a brief description of them. An example is offered by the ball game of *harpastōn* as well as of *pheninda*,¹⁸ involving a ball pass and a run (escape),¹⁹ and the *thermaustrizein*, a dance described as an imitation of a pincer movement.²⁰ Another reference to the relationship between ball games and ball dance can be found in a comment by Eustathius on Homer's *Odyssey* (dated to the 12th cent. CE), where the σφαίρας παιδιὰ is explained as a type of dance and the person who plays with a sphere is a type of dancer.²¹

In Pollux's lists the term *ourania* appears,²² recalling the movements of the Phaeacian dancers, given that it is referred to as a dance and a game in which a ball was thrown upwards: participants had to lean backwards and throw the ball into the air, while companions tried to catch it before it fell back down. In the *Onomasticon*, adjectives suitable to describe a ball game (εὐρρυθμον, εὐσχήμονα, εὐσκοπον, ἐπίσκοπον, εὐτονον) are also mentioned: it is noteworthy that all of them are connected to sound, harmony and rhythm, and could also apply to dance performances.²³

Other written references on dance and play are related to marriage,²⁴ as in the description of Pseudo-Hesiod's *Shield of Heracles*,²⁵ where dancing and singing, as well as the act of play during a wedding ceremony, are described (χοροὶ παίζοντες [...] παίζοντες ὑπ' ὀρχηθμῷ καὶ αἰοιδῇ).

17 Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 9.103-107.

18 Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 9.105. Cf. KARANIKI (2021), 221-238.

19 Cf. MENDNER (1959), 517-524.

20 Athenaeus, 14, 629e; Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 4.102; Eustathius, *Odyssey*, 1601.304.

21 Eustathius, *Odyssey*, 1601.304.

22 Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 9.106.

23 Athenaeus, 1.14f-15a; Pollux, *Onomasticon*, 9.104-105.

24 CALAME (2001), 86-87.

25 Pseudo-Hesiod, *Shield of Heracles*, 270-284: "Next, there was a city of men with goodly towers; and seven gates of gold, fitted to the lintels, guarded it. The men were making merry with festivities and dances; some were bringing home a bride to her husband on a well-wheeled car, while the bridal-song swelled high, and the glow of blazing torches held by handmaidens rolled in waves afar. And these maidens went before, delighting in the festival; and after them came frolic some choirs, the youths singing soft-mouthed to the sound of shrill pipes, while the echo was shivered around them, and the girls led on the lovely dance to the sound of lyres. Then again on the other side was a rout of young men revelling, with *auloi* playing; some frolicking with dance and song, and others were going forward in time with an *aulos* player and laughing. The whole town was filled with mirth and dance and festivity" (trans. H. G. Evelyn-White, Loeb).

10 *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 195-199.

11 BIERL (2021), 32-33.

12 Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.370-380.

13 Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.251.

14 Homer, *Odyssey*, 8.370-380.

15 GOLDEN (2021), 52-55. For the acrobatic dances in the ancient world, see TODISCO (2013), 13-29.

16 COSTANZA (2019), 219-222.

2. BALL DANCE AS RITUAL ACT

Alongside the written sources that establish the close relationship between dance and ball games, we can add a reference to the space devoted to these activities. An example is the House of Arrephoroi (*Arrephorion*). According to Plutarch, this space – located on the Acropolis, east and north of the Erechtheion and dated to ca. 500-400 BCE – was called the “ball court of *Arrephoroi*” (σφαίριστρον τῶν Ἀρρηφόρων).²⁶ Archaeological survey evidence shows that this space²⁷ could have been flat and large enough to serve as a dance floor suitable for hosting dance rituals – perhaps related to the myth of Cecropids – performed by a small female group. This marks the first time that we have heard of a special setting reserved for ball games in a ritual context.²⁸

It is not surprising that ball games were not only playful activities, but also graceful and rhythmic performances which were offered to the gods in order to please them, given that they seem to be linked to festivals and rituals as well as play: ball games related to female dance activities in particular were performed as a sort of ritual act in honour of the divinities and in anticipation and celebration of marriage. As the activities of Nausicaa and her brothers suggest, dance, music, and ball play had a salient function in bringing together groups within the community. Although a wedding was a rite of passage for the nuptial pair, marriage and its ritual events involved the entire community. Moreover, the informal play of Nausicaa and her companions provides us with information which helps us to understand certain social assumptions underlying courtship and marriage in antiquity. As Véronique Dasen has noted,²⁹ although it is not made explicit in the text, musical and choral performances rhythmically marked by the throws of the ball could have assumed a divinatory value, given that the rebounds and the deviations of the ball, as well as the sound of the ball falling to the floor (and, most likely, the sound from within the ball itself, if it was also a rattle)³⁰ were unpredictable.

Taking into account the ball not merely as a playful object, but also its cultural and religious meanings,³¹ it cannot be excluded that the movement of a ball launched into the air could be considered – especially in relationship with Eros –, as a metaphor for a very mobile loving gaze and as an oracle of the conquest of the beloved, if Eros strikes him or her. Thus, it is possible to recognise in the Nausicaa episode of

the *Odyssey* the erotic allusion evoked by dance and ball games.³² Moreover, in highlighting the harmony of gestures, eurythmy, and perfect coordination of the limbs, ball games and passages performed with mastery and a strong sense of rhythm became proof of wisdom and ethical disposition. Playing well and making a good shot with the ball denoted a sign of election: it is not just a physical record, but it responds to the requirements demanded of members of an elite society.³³

In this regard, the performances of young men in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* are focused on the building a sense of community cohesion, creating a link between the members of the performing group. As Sarah Olsen has argued,³⁴ these dancers exemplify the social force of *choreia* as conceptualised in real Archaic and Classical practice.

3. EXAMPLES OF BALL DANCE ON VASES AND TERRACOTTAS

As V. Dasen has highlighted³⁵ vases dating from 470 BCE onwards depict games with spherical objects that girls and women throw into the air, and then catch without dropping: they perform games alone or in the gynaeceum, sometimes in the presence of female or male figures. Images representing the throwing of balls and apples are related to the *parthenoi* and the *numphai* (given that the pre-nuptial state and the period of transition to the marital condition is symbolised in relation above all to Eros and Aphrodite), while in the ball games performed by *gumnai* it is possible to recognise a remembrance of the loving dexterity in the domestic activities of married women.³⁶ Whilst images representing the throwing of spherical objects exist in many iconographic versions (such as balls and apples as an alluring and loving gift, and wool balls as an expression of spinning in the *oikos*), it is possible to recognise in all of these images a symbolic value related to women of different ages and status as girls ready for marriage or as married women engaged in the care of the home and family as well as *hetaerae*.³⁷ Given that ball dance was a suitable form through which to express the grace and rhythm necessary for a performance to be appreciated by the audience, women and girls playing with the balls are represented in dance scenes on vases of different shapes and sizes.

An intriguing ball dance is depicted in a Beotian red-figure *pyxis* in the Moutoussi collection, a small round box decorated with female scenes:

26 Plutarch, *Moralia*, 839c. Burkert (2003), 425-427.

27 HURWIT (1999), 200; GRECO (2010), 25.

28 BURKERT (1989), 23-49.

29 DASEN (2016), 75-81.

30 BELLIA (2021a), 72-76.

31 SOURVINOU INWOOD (2008), 206-209.

32 BOUVIER (2021), 16-17.

33 COSTANZA (2019), 219-222.

34 OLSEN (2021), 28-29.

35 DASEN (2016), 76.

36 SABETAI (2020), 109-112.

37 TODISCO (2013), 95.

being special vases for the female toilette, red-figure *pyxides* in the first half of the 5th century BCE represent female activities and daily life. On this *pyxis* are depicted four groups of women, most likely engaged in a ball game in an open-air environment recalling a nuptial meaning (fig. 1 a-d).³⁸ Outside the groups are two women seated on a rock, their backs turned to one another. The one on the right holds out a round object, most likely a ball, towards three dancing maidens, who stretch both arms towards her, in an attempt to catch the ball that she is about to throw. The three lively dancers are dressed in *peploi* and are depicted moving backwards to the right. Only the lead dancer wears her hair unveiled and loose under a high *polos*, denoting that she is still an unmarried girl. This could be in line with the custom related to the period of the *pyxis*, when a particular arrangement and order of the *choregos* is requested in order to distinguish her from the other members of the dancing group not only according to physical appearance, but also dancing skills. The identification of the lead dancer on the *pyxis* as a bride allows us to grasp how this dance and its accompanying ball game was an important moment of the wedding ritual preparation.³⁹ A *trigonon* player sits on a rock, plucking her instrument with both hands. This string instrument is especially related to wedding ceremonies and female activities, contributing to the creation of a nuptial (or prenuptial)⁴⁰ context along with other symbolic objects also represented in the scene, such as the mirror, a *louterion*, and the swan, all of which are connected with rituals related to passage phases from childhood to adulthood. In this figurative context, the swan – which is paired with a maiden looking at her image in the mirror – seems assume a metaphorical meaning as an embodiment of manliness as well as a reminder to brides-to-be of the man's involvement in their transition to adulthood: the strong bonds between the female and male swans and the love for their young, well-known since antiquity, give that this bird it is not only a symbol of virility (possibly with hidden hints of sexual aggression), but also of ideal conjugal and parental behaviour.⁴¹ Moreover, the representation of the swan recalls not only to the rhythmical sounds of their beating of the wings useful to accompany their singing, but also to evoke the sonic aspects related to the wedding rituals along with the string instrument in the same scene.

Moreover, the presence of the musician leaves no doubt that the *pyxis* represents a dancing scene,



Fig. 1 a-d: Beotian red-figure *pyxis*. Athens, Moutoussi Private Collection. Late 5th century BCE. Maidens engaging in a ball-game; maiden self-mirroring and a hovering swan, maiden dipping her hands in a *louterion*; *trigonon* player plucking her instrument. © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Ephorate of Antique Shops and Private Archaeological Collections.

38 Athens, Moutoussi Private Collection (late 5th cent. BCE); AVRONIDAKI (2014), 82-95.

39 OAKLEY (2004), 313. Cf. OAKLEY, SINOS (1993), 14.

40 WEST (1992), 72-73; PAPADOPOULOU (2011), 414-418.

41 AVRONIDAKI (2014), 90. The swan with this metaphorical meaning is represented on the Lokrian *pinakes* (FIG. 6a-b).

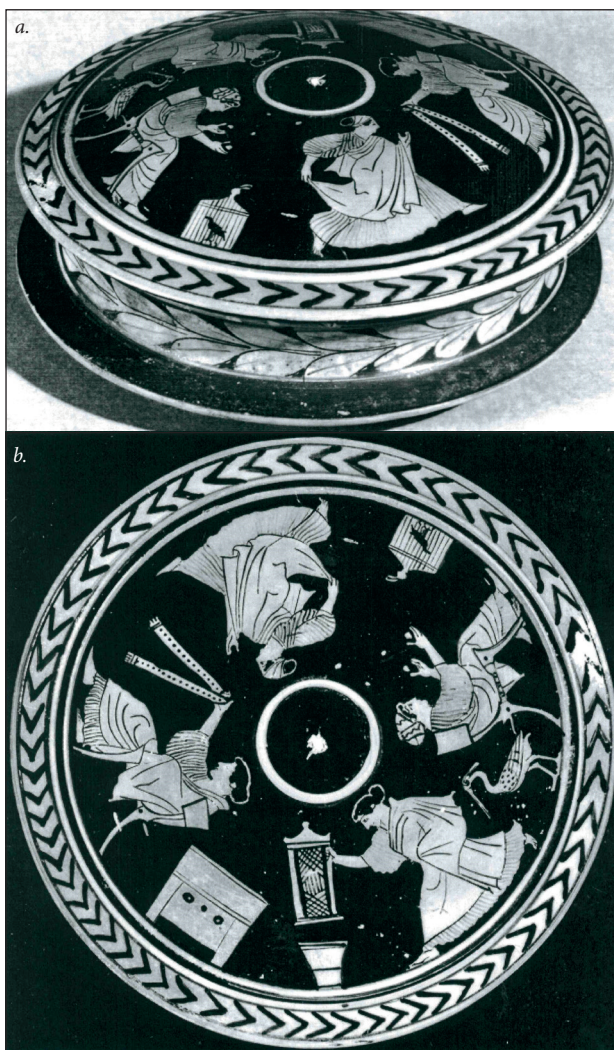


Fig. 2 a-b: Attic red-figure pyxis. London, British Museum, inv. 1907.5-19.1. 500-450 BCE. A running or a very lively female dancer holding her dress; a seated woman is playing by throwing balls.
© The Trustees of the British Museum.

given that dance – as well as ball play – requires the coordination of movements and gestures which is possible thanks only to sound, rhythm, and music. As Christina Avronidaki has argued,⁴² this scene not only seems to recall the passage describing Nausicaa's ball game accompanied by dance and song, but also highlights how “the rhythmic movement of the maidens, combined with the seated posture and different dress of the woman solemnly holding out the ball towards them, adds a ceremonial dimension to the scene.”⁴³

Another interesting example of a ball dance is offered by an Attic red-figure *pyxis* with a lid, which represents a woman holding a “sprang” frame, used for making hairnets. On the *pyxis*, which is preserved at the British Museum, a running or a very lively female dancer is also represented holding her dress, while a seated woman is throwing some balls

in the air (fig. 2 a-b).⁴⁴ Aside from the depiction of the ball player, the presence of symbolic objects such as a sash, loom, stork, bird in a cage, basket and chest all seem to recall the nuptial sphere. The ball dance, along with iconographical elements such as the sash and chest represented on the vase, could also echo a wedding ritual in the scene depicted on the Apulian red-figure Panathenaic type amphora preserved at the Bassano del Grappa Museum. On this vase, a young female dancer throws a spherical object – most likely a ball made of leather strips – into the air in a very lively manner, while another seated female figure is playing with two balls holding the hem of her chiton with her left hand (fig. 3).⁴⁵

It is interesting to note that a female dancer holding

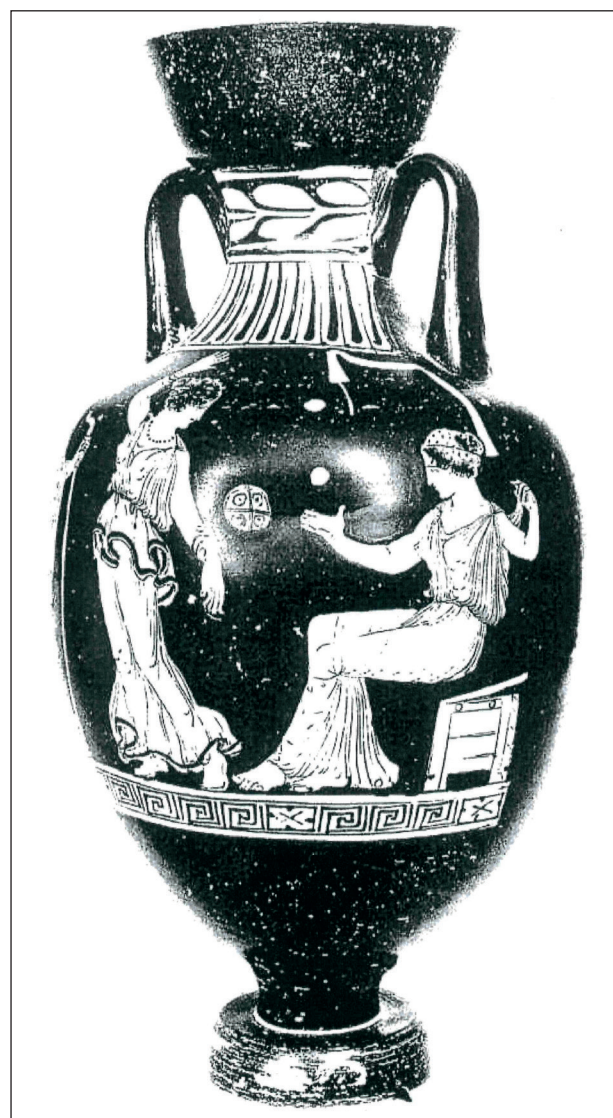


Fig. 3: Apulian red-figure amphora. Bassano del Grappa Museum, Chini Collection, inv. 67. Side A. A female dancer throws a spherical object, probably a ball; a sitting female figure is playing with two balls. 425-400 BCE. After Todisco (2013), pl. XVII, MGS5.

42 AVRONIDAKI (2014), 84-85.

43 AVRONIDAKI (2014), 90.

44 London, British Museum 1907.5-19.1 (500-450 BCE); Siron (2015), 232, fig. 10.

45 Bassano del Grappa Museum, Chini Collection 67 (425-400 BCE); TODISCO (2013), pl. XVII, MGS5.

a ball is also represented in terracotta groups of female figures dating to the 4th to 3rd century BCE (fig. 4).⁴⁶ These special *choroi*, formed by three maidens dancing and playing wind and percussion instruments while wearing jewellery and transparent clothes, have been found in many sacred and domestic contexts in Sicily and Magna Graecia.⁴⁷ As in the case of the female groups found in the sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore-Persephone in Morgantina and in Solunto (fig. 5),⁴⁸ there is an *aulos* player and a dancing *tympanon* player on the right and left sides, while in the middle a figure holding a round object, most likely a ball, is represented. These female groups depicting this dancing and musical retinue offer the opportunity to understand the different roles of the female musicians and dancers in these terracotta *choroi*. The *auletris* is lower than the other figures playing the *tympanon*; her role is secondary in the representations. The female figure without musical instruments but holding a ball is probably the *choregos*, and seems to have the most important role, given that she is placed at the centre of the *choros*. She is taller than the other figures; furthermore, she wears the *polos*, generally used by women or girls in ceremonial events like wedding rituals. It cannot be discounted that she is the bride. In this case, the ball is a symbol recalling her beauty and *charis*; she is able to arouse erotic desire by performing the dance. In these representations, the dancing figurines not only have in common the holding gesture of the hem of the chiton in the pose of a synchronised, rhythmical dance movement,⁴⁹ but also the particular nuptial gesture of *anakalupsis*;⁵⁰ with this gesture, performed during the nuptial rites, maidens showed their readiness for sexual maturity and welcomed their new status as brides.⁵¹

The contexts within which these terracotta groups representing dance and musical activities were found is a key focus of investigation for both the study of dance and its performative contexts. These terracottas present the strongest visual testimony of dance performances in sacred female spheres and also of the places where dance activities took place.⁵² Figurines representing dancers and musicians are emblematic of the close link between dance practice and the ceremonies, particularly when the figurines' iconography depicts activities identifiable as ritual acts; their production must have been

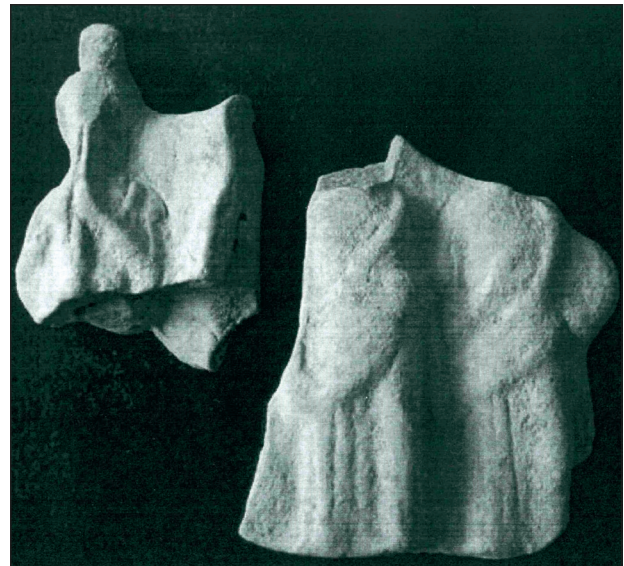


Fig. 4: Terracotta figurines representing aulos and tympanon players and a dancer holding a ball. Aidone, Regional Archaeological Museum, S.n.i. 4th-3rd century BCE. From the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore-Persephone in Morgantina. After BELLIA (2009), 103, cat. no. 228.



Fig. 5: Terracotta figurines representing aulos and tympanon players and a dancer holding a ball. Palermo, Regional Archaeological Museum "Antonino Salinas", N.I. 1193. 4th-3rd century BCE. From Solunto. After BELLIA (2009), 138, cat. no. 334.

intimately intertwined with the ritual ceremonies in sacred places. Terracottas representing female dancers holding a ball are not simply dedications and material objects, but dynamic and expressive products of performative behaviour in worship. These depictions may have been conceived as souvenirs of particular moments in a given ritual that involved singers, dancers, musicians, and the performance of dances related to peculiar ceremonies. As with the other votives found in shrines in Sicily and Magna Graecia – especially those related to Artemis and Kore-Persephone –, these figurines seem to evoke

46 Aidone, Regional Archaeological Museum (s.n.i) (4th-3rd cent. BCE); BELLIA (2009), 103, n. 228.

47 BELLIA (2016), 195-198.

48 Palermo, Regional Archaeological Museum "Antonino Salinas" N.I. 1193 (4th-3rd cent. BCE). From Solunto; BELLIA (2009), 138, cat. no. 334.

49 BELLIA (2009), 26, cat. no. 16; 85, cat. no. 165.

50 BELLIA (2009), 32-33, n. 28.

51 PAUTASSO (2008), 285-291.

52 BELLIA (2016), 191-207.

ritual acts in sacred places, where maidens took part in offerings in honour of the divinities. In this case, the representation of a sphere could recall the offering of a ball as *aparché* to the divinities, as it is referred to by the well-known epigram from the *Greek Anthology* in which Timarete offers her ball to Artemis before marriage, at the moment when she abandons puberty.⁵³

4. THE DANCE, BALL, AND CICADA ON THE LOKRIAN PINAKES

As Mario Torelli has argued,⁵⁴ the offering of the ball (sometimes a rattle toy in form of a ball, as in the case of evidence found in Pontecagnano and Spina),⁵⁵ is

⁵³ *Greek Anthology*, 6.280. CALAME (2001), 131.

⁵⁴ TORELLI (1977), 164-166.

⁵⁵ DESANTIS (1987), 29-30, cat. no. 27, fig. 19b; GASTALDI (1998), 51,

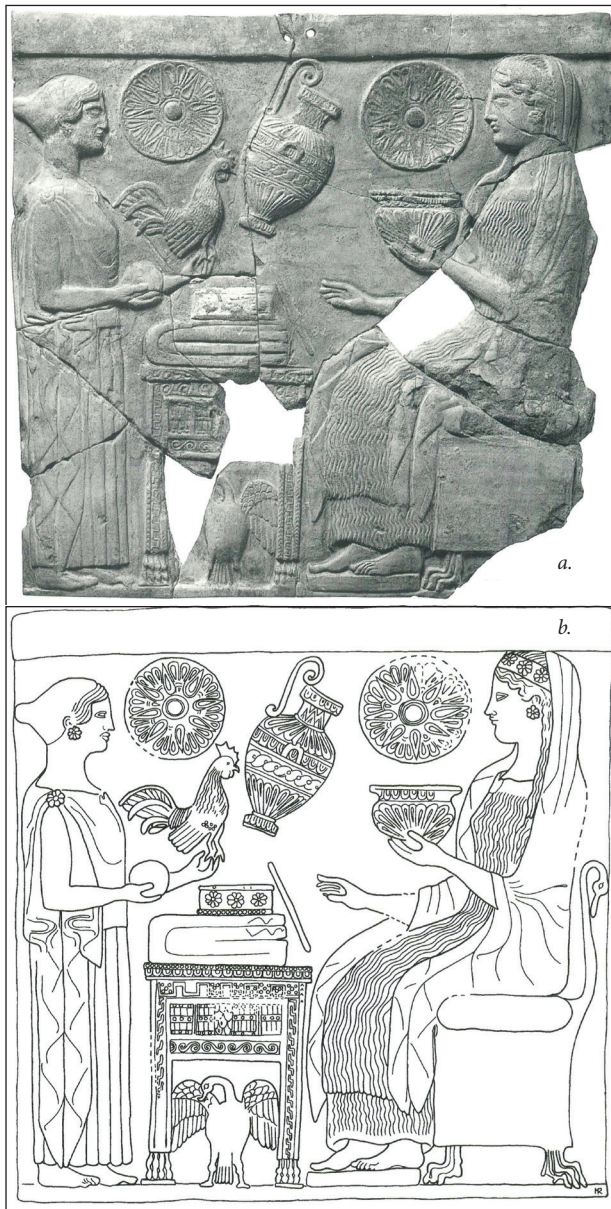


Fig. 6 a-b: Pinax with the offering of a ball. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum, 5th century BCE. From the *Persephoneion* in Lokri Epizephyrii. After I Pinakes di Locri (2000-2003), II.5, pl. LXXXIX.32, fig. 36.

also related to dance as a ritual act. On the Lokrian *pinakes*, the polychrome terracotta reliefs dating from the first half of the 5th century BCE and found at Lokri Epizephyrii in the sanctuary of Persephone (the most illustrious *Persephoneion* of Magna Graecia, according to ancient sources),⁵⁶ this ritual seems to be evoked in many examples (Fig. 6 a-b).⁵⁷ Amongst this outstanding group of objects are scenes of the myth and the cult of Kore-Persephone (the goddess of the underworld that, in Lokri, supervised rituals connected with the marriage of the Lokrian maidens and the entry of young people into adult life) involving ritual acts related to all passage phases from childhood to marriage. In particular, M. Torelli has given his attention to a dance and ball game, establishing a parallel between the Lokrian rituals with those – as in the *sphairisterion* (ball court) – which took place in the Acropolis of Athens, where, as we have seen, the maidens *arrhephoroi* played with the ball, performing dances before marriage away from their community.⁵⁸

The scenes on the *pinakes* representing the offerings of a ball – one of which has been found in Lokri (fig. 7)⁵⁹ – belong to the same sphere of meaning as the *pinakes* that depict childhood games recalling



Fig. 7: Clay ball from Lokri Epizephyrii. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum, Collezione Scaglione, inv. 221. 5th-4th century BCE. Graphic reworking of image from Lissi (1961), 96, cat. no. 111, pl. XLI. Archaeo Design and Drawing: Orazio Pulvirenti.

100, fig. 59, 2; BELLIA (2021a), 71-76. Cf. DURAND (1991), 92-99.

⁵⁶ MARRONI, TORELLI (2016), 9-22.

⁵⁷ Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum (5th cent. BCE); I *Pinakes di Locri* 2000-2003, s. IV, II.2, 252-253, pl. LXXXIX.32, fig. 36.

⁵⁸ BELLIA (2012), 36. On Lokrian pinakes and related archaeological material, see also D. COSTANZO in this volume.

⁵⁹ Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum, Collezione Scaglione 221 (5th-4th cent. BCE); LISSI (1961), 96, cat. no. 111, pl. XLI. Cf. HOFFMANN (1963), 20-22.

a musical context.⁶⁰ An example is the scene representing the *choros* of three young girls holding a *kalathos* and an *alabastron* in front of a seated woman holding a crown (fig. 8 a-b).⁶¹ This latter figure could be the *numpheutria*, the bride's maid of honour and important attendant who, as Victoria Sabetai highlighted,⁶² played the role of surrogate mother in the ritual of a Greek wedding. The trio of dancing girls move towards her, holding their hands.⁶³ This dancing group on the Lokrian *pinakes* seems also to recall the mythical episode of the abduction of Kore when, according to the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*,⁶⁴ Hades kidnaps the maiden while she gathers flowers and dances with her companions, carrying her off in

60 TORELLI (1977), 164; MARRONI, TORELLI (2016), 32. Cf. TODISCO (2005), 717-718.

61 Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum (5th cent. BCE); from the *Persephoneion* in Lokri Epizephyrii; *I Pinakes di Locri* 2004-2007, 615-666 and 786-808, pls. CCLb-CCVIII, fig. 65.

62 SABETAI (2020), 108.

63 Vases with the representation of dancing scenes have been found in the *Persephoneion*; BELLIA (2021b), 39-40, pl. VII, fig. 9.

64 *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 3-8. CALAME (2001), 35.

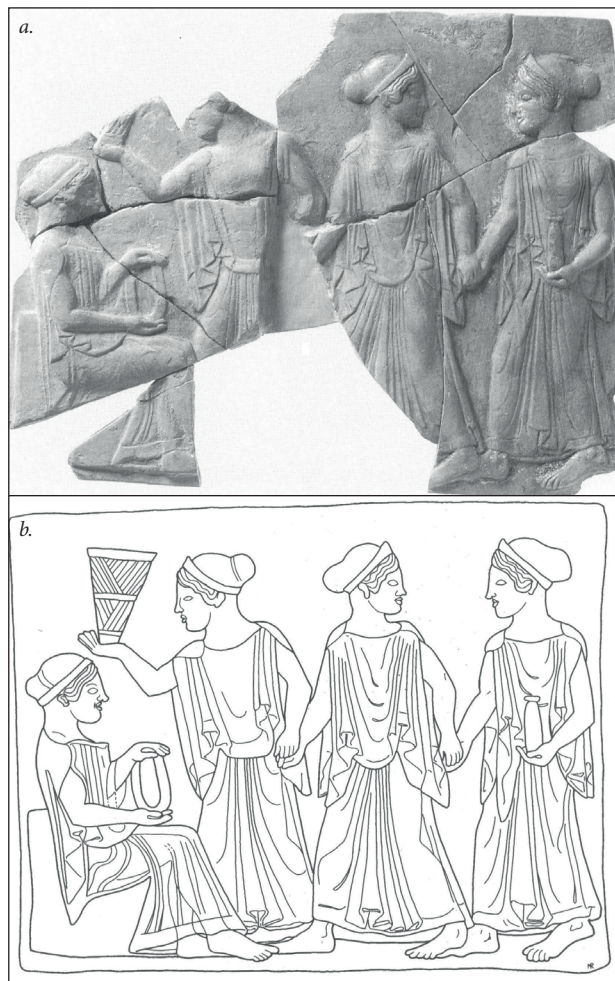


Fig. 8 a-b: Pinax with three dancers holding a *kalathos* and an *alabastron* in front of a sitting woman holding a crown. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum. 5th century BCE. From the *Persephoneion* in Lokri Epizephyrii. After *I Pinakes di Locri* (2004-2007), III.5, pl. CCLb, fig. 65.

his chariot (*παίζομεν ἢ δ' ἄνθεα δρέπομεν*).⁶⁵ It is worth noting that on the *pinakes* that depict Hades's chariot, the scared maiden holds a ball in her hand, as if at the moment of her abduction she was engaged in a ball game while dancing with the other maidens (fig. 9 a-b).⁶⁶

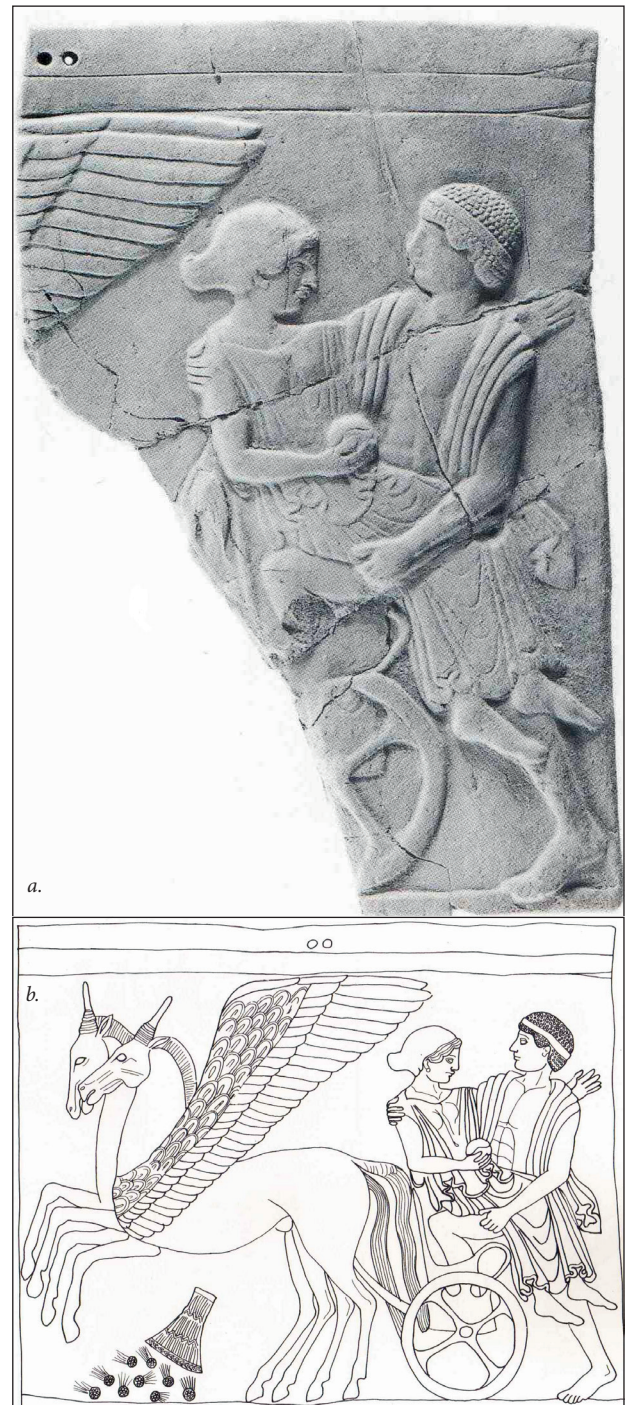


Fig. 9 a-b: Pinax with abduction of a maiden holding a ball. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum. 5th century BCE. From the *Persephoneion* in Lokri Epizephyrii. After *I Pinakes di Locri* (1996-1999), I.4, pl. CCXXXV.a, fig. 31.

65 *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 417-428. Cf. BELLIA (2012), 30-34; MARRONI, TORELLI (2016), 32-33.

66 Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum (5th cent. BCE); *I Pinakes di Locri* 1996-1999, 228, pl. CCXXXV.a, fig. 31.

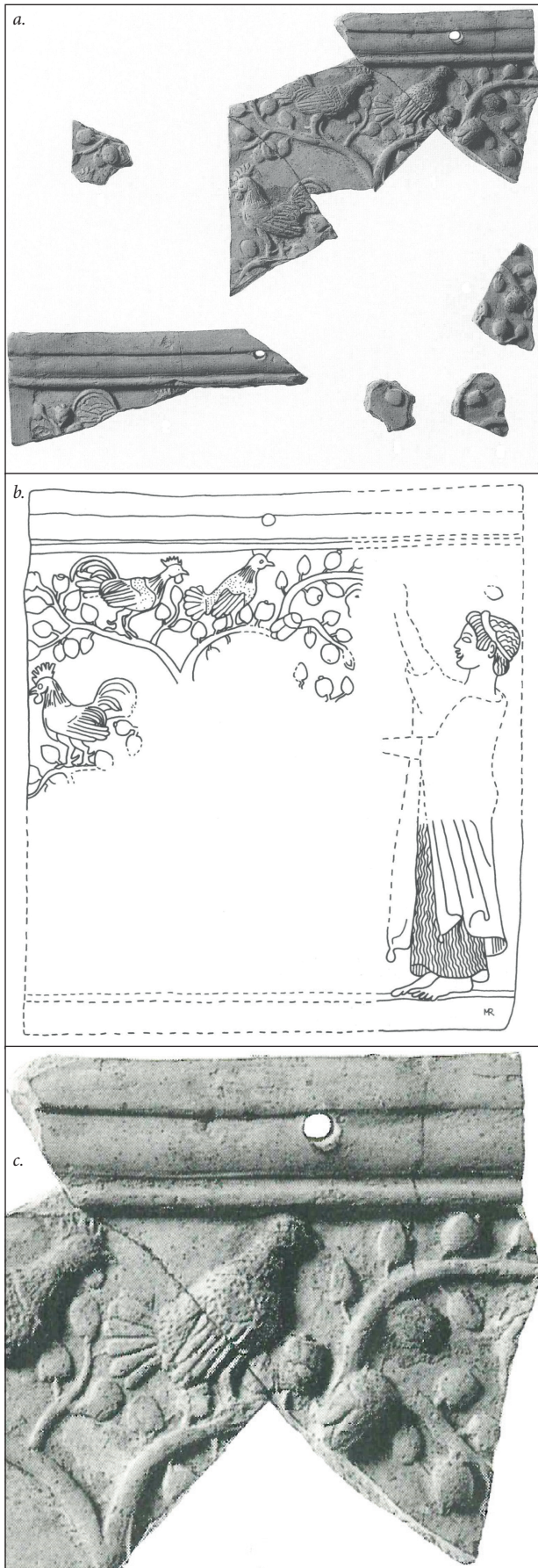


Fig. 10 a-c: Representation of a little female figure while trying to reach a cicada. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum. 5th century BCE. From the Persephoneion in Lokri Epizephyrii. After *I Pinakes di Locri* (2000-2003), II.5, pls. XXXVIIa-b, fig. 16.

On the Lokrian clay tablets, another reference to a childhood game can be recalled from the scene depicting the catching of cicada.⁶⁷ In this representation, a little female figure seems to sing, given that her lips are open, whilst trying to reach a cicada⁶⁸ on the tree, possibly an apple tree (fig. 10 a-c).⁶⁹ The playful features of the cicada and the related game of its catch performed during childhood⁷⁰ is also evidenced by the discovery that clay and ivory cicadas were laid in sanctuaries where rites of passage from puberty to adulthood were performed, as well as by the cicadas found in the burial sites of girls who died prematurely:⁷¹ this includes an example in Locri, where an ivory cicada was placed in a tomb belonging to a newborn or infant girl (fig. 11),⁷² according to the custom also mentioned in an epigram attributed to Teodorida which appears in the *Greek Anthology*.⁷³ The insect depicted in the Lokrian *pinakes* could allude to the choir of cicadas as a metaphor for female choral songs⁷⁴ related to the erotic sphere and the power to seduce.⁷⁵ Therefore, whether considered on the level of ideological meaning or not, the scenes of offering

67 BELLIA (2010-2011), 129-138; BELLIA (2012), 35-37; MARRONI, TORELLI (2016), 32.

68 *I Pinakes di Locri* 2000-2003, series IV, II.1, 207-215, cat. nos. 1-10, fig. 16, pls. XXXVII.

69 Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum (5th cen. BCE); from the *Persephoneion* in Lokri Epizephyrii; *I Pinakes di Locri* 2000-2003, series IV, II.1, 207-215, fig. 16, pls. XXXVIIa-b.

70 Cf. SALZA PRINA RICOTTI (1995), 39-50; FITTÀ (1997), 24.

71 ORSI (1913), 7, fig. 6. Cf. GIUMAN (2008), 223-226.

72 Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum (6th-5th cent. BCE); BELLIA (2012), 38, fig. 8. On its use as jewellery for the girl to be married, alluding to the transformation of the *numphê*, see also DASEN (2015), 303-304, figs. 10.10 and 10.12.

73 *Greek Anthology*, 6.156. See BRILLANTE (1987), 59-62.

74 TORELLI (1977), 163; ARIAS (1984), 100-102; BELLIA (2012), 39.

75 CALAME (2001), 35.

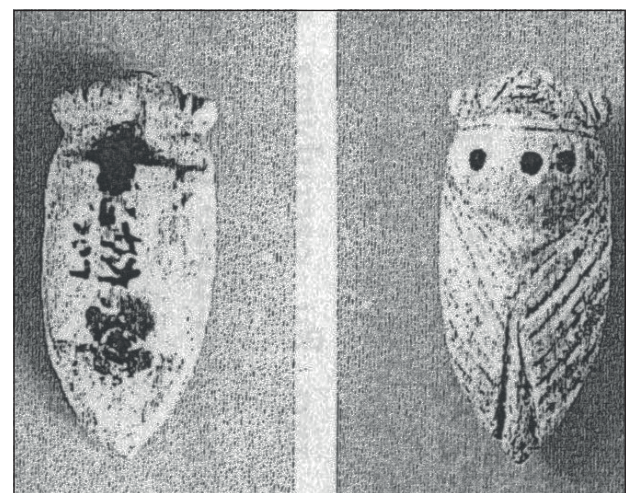


Fig. 11: Ivory cicada. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum. 6th-5th century BCE. From the tomb 594/8 of the necropolis of "Contrada Lucifero" in Lokri Epizephyrii. After BELLIA (2012), 38, fig. 8.



Fig. 12: Bronze statuette of a girl hording a ball. Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum, inv. 6736. 460-450 BCE. From the *Persophoneion* in Lokri Epizefirii. After GRILLO (2005), 194, cat. no. 39.

the ball, as well as the action of wearing the hair down as represented in the bronze statuette from the *Persophoneion* in Lokri (fig. 12),⁷⁶ could be related to the same symbolic meaning of dance and games of cicada capture performed before leaving childhood. Since they refer to the pre-nuptial condition, which was bound to change with marriage, it should be remembered that dance and ball games contributed to the acquisition of grace and beauty as well as endurance in difficult conditions, qualities required in adult women.

⁷⁶ Reggio Calabria, National Archaeological Museum 6736 (460-450 BCE); GRILLO (2005), 194, cat. no. 39.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

From what has emerged on this survey of ball games and ball dances, it is clear these special activities required that certain skills be performed, and that audiences were expecting the dancers and performers to possess these skills. This reasoning could explain why written sources mention the skills and performances of ball players and ball dancers, both those from the mythical realm as well as from real life. These skills were an advantage for girls, allowing them to expose their prowess to the admiration of potential suitors. Indeed, ball playing or ball dancing are represented within scenes that likely display a number of activities that maidens ready for marriage would have to carry out. These activities, which related to beauty, youth, and femininity, as well as musicality and grace in movement, were requested and expected of girls in order to be desirable and suitable for marriage.

Regarding the depictions of ball dances, whilst we have not distinguished between human and non-human dancers, it is possible to consider them as reflective of human dance in honour of divinities and their retinue, as well as of special ceremonies. Therefore, the images present us with at least an idea of which dance was appropriate for which ritual context. Despite ritual events being a favourite subject for sculptors and painters and the fact that we possess countless images of sacred events, there are only a few that explicitly show a worshipper in the act of dancing. This is not surprising given both the difficulties of depicting movements and, by contrast, the appeal of more visually interesting ceremonial scenes.

As Frederick Naerebout has highlighted,⁷⁷ images were intended to portray “dance” but not any particular event. For this reason, neither the depictions nor the written sources allow us to reconstruct the actual performances, since we lack the music and their song texts. Moreover, not only must we be aware that these performances cannot be seen or heard, we must also consider that a dance and a particular movement are never fixed but are constantly evolving, and even if a dance can be localised and pinned down in time, every performance is unique and can never be repeated in exactly the same way. For this reason, images can be questioned on the basis of the function and social role of dance as marker of an occasion other than ordinary, mobilising an audience, and communicating messages about the community and about social relations.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ NAEREBOUT (2019), 35-49.

⁷⁸ NAEREBOUT (2017), 39-66.

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