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TEXTS AND IMAGES AS SOURCES FOR THE STUDY OF DANCE IN ANCIENT GREECE

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THE ancient Greek world displayed a level of saltatory enthusiasm which, although not unique, is quite remarkable. This has resulted in a considerable corpus of written evidence and of images in several media. The number of individual dances and of occasions on which dance was deemed appropriate or indispensable, mentioned or depicted in these sources is very large. Of course the (in)frequent occurrence of a phenomenon in the record does not stand in a one to one relationship to this phenomenon's (un)importance, as every statistician will explain and every archaeologist (but not every ancient historian) knows. But in this instance, I suggest a good case can be made. Dance is omnipresent in our source material, because it was omnipresent in ancient Greek society. Consequently, dance should be given its due in scholarship. This is, however, hardly the case, although the specialist bibliography on dancing in Antiquity is certainly extensive - the first monograph on the subject dating from 1618 (Meursius) - most studies, whether scholarly or popularizing, dealing with ancient Greek society, culture, religion or *mentalité* do not mention dance at all or only as an unimportant side-issue. Several different reasons can be adduced to explain why this is so; one seems to be a failing source criticism.

In the present article I will stick to texts and images, with pride of place going to the images. There are many problems involved in the interpretation of these, often well-known sources, with all the treacherous self-evidence which that familiarity entails. What is the nature of the material, what can we do with it? What can one actually find out about a phenomenon so evanescent as we know dance to be? (Sparshott 1995, 420-21). We have to face the incontrovertible fact that the ordinary type of written source can only provide a highly inadequate description of more complicated motor behaviour. Indeed everything

non-verbal is by its very nature resistant to easy verbal analysis. To be more precise one ought to use some notational scheme. The ancient world, if it felt the inadequacy of words to describe movement at all, has apparently never tried to replace words by any notation. Worse, if there ever existed in Greek any writings on the dance that could be called technical, in the sense of dealing with the actual performance of movements, these writings have disappeared without leaving a trace.

Unwritten sources, which might appear to offer a solution in dealing with movement and movement patterns, bring their own difficulties. Though iconography can of course be quite helpful in analyzing the non-verbal, we generally come up against a whole range of limitations. Even if one has decided that some activity is portrayed in a way that is true to observable reality, which decision in dealing with imagery will often be even harder to make than in judging a description, it is still doubtful whether we can perform the transition from the static picture to the dynamic dance. Indeed, if texts ask for circumspection in their use as historical evidence, the more so for imagery.

Texts and images are of course not our only sources; we also should pay attention to the accoutrements of the dancers, architectural remains, and supposed survivals in existing dance traditions. But these are all of minor importance, or incapable of proof, as is true of purported survivals. Texts and imagery will always remain central to our enquiry. The two cannot be seen in isolation. Thus we should not only ask about the particular problems involved in the interpretation of texts and images describing or portraying dance, but we also should ask how texts and images relate to each other, to observable events, and to the mental life of the community that produced them. This is a three-cornered relationship, between past reality, and written and unwritten sources, and its study should not be reduced to two separate, bilateral exercises. Speaking of source criticism, and not here attempting some synthetic account, I might, however, be allowed to tackle texts and images after one another, for the sake of clarity.

Before setting out to collect the evidence, we need to know with as little ambiguity as possible what we are looking for. Gathering any number of supposedly relevant Greek words and using the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* to compile neat catalogues is something, but not enough. First, there is the problem what dictionary to compile: what is usually worded in standard ways can also be expressed in some idiosyncratic vocabulary, or can indeed be only hinted at. To put it in linguistic terms: signifiers and signifieds are two separate things (see for instance Tambiah 1985, 3-5, on a 'lexical universe'). Thus looking up words does never absolve one from reading texts. Secondly, historians are investigating phenomena of some past society, not just names given to phenomena by some past society, even if that is where all research has to start. Of course semantic domains are everywhere bounded in distinct ways, and thus analysis of people's names for things and the grouping of these names in certain categories is done implicitly in any study of human society. But for the historian this should be only a means towards some other end, and alternative strategies should come into play. Also, tracing a vocabulary will not help in working with images or artefacts. When will historians stop looking at evidence as exclusively or primarily consisting of words? Thirdly, criteria building on Greek vocabulary are of little use when handling comparative material from non-Greek societies. The emic approach, using Greek categories to study Greek material, will not do (versus Lonsdale 1993).

We cannot, as an alternative, leave our central concepts vague; common sense offers no solution, because it does not exist and in scholarship as opposed to daily life we should not even pretend that it does. It can easily be demonstrated that we do not intuitively know what is dance and what is not (some examples taken from archaeological literature are given below). The inescapable conclusion is that we have to formulate our own definitions to guide our research. This should be an etic definition, stated in scholarly terms, and thus essentially arbitrary, though it seems wise to stay as close as possible to natural language usage (Snoek 1987; on emic-etic distinction, see Feleppa 1986). But it does not really matter how one goes about it, as long as one comes up with some explicitly stated definition that can be made operative. One should certainly not be led astray by that red herring of dance anthropology, the futile hunt for a definition that is cross-culturally valid.

My definition of dancing can be summarized as follows: dance is human movement, involving the whole body; it is a communal activity; this movement is intentional, rhythmized and patterned, always stereotyped to some degree, with some patterned sound as cue; it is in some way distinguishable from everyday movement, and the performers themselves consider it to be so; it has some potentially communicative function, carrying meaning over and beyond that carried by everyday movement (Naerebout, forthcoming).

Textual evidence

After having gathered texts on the basis of the systemic aspects of the vocabulary, which means that we should bring within the scope of the signified 'dance' a new range of signifiers not immediately associated with dancing in past research, we have to take a critical look at this huge corpus. What do the numerous texts containing lexemic units whose sense fits into my definition of dance refer to?

The information available is extensive but scattered. Relevant passages ranging from a single line to a small treatise can be found in the work of philosophers, historians, ethnographers, and lexicographers. This includes both descriptive and reflexive items. The fragmentary nature of this material has always caused scholars to hunt far and wide for evidence and combine everything from Homer to the Byzantine lexicographers in a single account as if dealing with some timeless past. The only viable theoretical basis for this unhistorical approach can be found in the Levi-Straussian structuralist tradition. Not sharing the structuralist creed, I would argue for a rigorous pigeonholing of the evidence according to time and place. Especially the use of late material in speaking of Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic times is fraught with danger. Although without Plutarch, Strabo, Lucian and the lexicographers we could in several instances not find much to tell at all, one should be aware of the fact that much of the information these authors offer reflects their own surroundings. The distortions that are likely to have resulted from the enormous popularity during the first centuries of the Christian era of a particular style of performance, viz. the (panto)mimic dance, are simply overlooked or ignored in much of the existing literature. This has given rise to several unwarranted presuppositions concerning the (panto)mimic nature of ancient Greek dancing (e.g. Wüst 1949).

Next we turn to poetry, another rich source of information on the dance. We find dance mentioned in the full range of Greek poetic output, from Homer down to Byzantine times.

Of course in Antiquity the distinction between the prose treatise and the poem was not as clear-cut as it is now, but many instances of dance in Greek poetry are not in Callimachean learned poetry, with its researched accounts of myth and ritual: they are rather to be explained by the concept of *mousikè*. Poetry, even if its recitation was not accompanied by dancing, was still regarded as part of the triad of poetry, music and dance which is *mousikè*. Of course, as soon as poetic recitation is combined with dancing, whether by the singer(s) themselves or by a third party which interprets the words and the music in movement, the texts themselves are sources for the history of ancient Greek dancing, whether their contents mention dance or not. That should cause us to ponder questions of *metre and music, but these are minefields. Up to now, nobody got through to the other side unharmed and bearing some convincing information on the dance: for one, rhythm should not be equated with metre, which leaves us stranded straightaway* (Scott 1984). The ancient vocabulary of metre shows it to have been, at least at some early stage, intimately connected with dancing, which is hardly surprising. But from our metrical analyses and musings about rhythm, only inadequately supported by the few sorry fragments of ancient Greek music surviving, there will never be, as far as I can see now, a way back to the dance.

If the singing of poems is frequently combined with dance into a single performative event, it is only to be expected that the text of at least some of these poems will contain explicit reference to the dance component. But while this usage of a meta-language by the poet-composer-choreographer is in a general sense easy to accept, there are alas many difficulties involved. First, a generalized concept of *mousikè* leaves unanswered the question which poetic texts were combined on a regular basis with dancing, and which were not. The distinction between choral and non-choral poetry is rather too simple a solution, now that doubt has been cast on the received wisdom that all so-called choral poetry was performed by choirs. In recent years much criticism has concentrated on the traditional distinction between genres (and on the related issue of self-reference in poetry: the first person which might indicate poet and/or choir; Davies 1988; Heath 1988; Lefkowitz 1988; Lefkowitz 1991; Heath & Lefkowitz 1991; D'Alessio 1994; and defending the traditional view: Burnett 1989; Carey 1989; Carey 1991). The seeds of doubt have been sown, at least some poems that have in the past been considered choral poetry, are likely to have been monodic, and unaccompanied by dance movements.

Even if some of the above questions could be satisfactorily answered, and one could conclude without serious doubts that some poetry has really been performed by a choir singing and dancing, it is still an open question whether the description they give in self-reference is a description that is true to nature. If it is, how about self-reference and intended audience at renewed performance? If choral poems are reperformed by choirs at all, how long does it take before the self-reference ceases to be realistic? How was the choreography that went with the text transmitted? (Roesler 1980). Here enter issues of orality. An ancient Greek public can be supposed to memorize the poetry they like and perform it anew. They can memorise a lot, as is typical of an oral culture. But can they also memorise the choreography? That they could preserve a particular choreography almost unchanged over a long range of years is quite unlikely (Naerebout 1994). Or was dance itself a mnemonic device, as Havelock has suggested? (Havelock 1963, 150-51; Havelock 1976-77, 370-71).

This leaves us with quite some poetry where the dance mentioned or described in the poems is not and has never been performed to accompany the reading, reciting or singing of those particular poems. Here we should try to differentiate between poetry largely reflective of contemporary practice and poetry largely reflective of the mental images of a community or an individual poet without a direct parallel in observable reality. This is very hard, but we should not be overly critical, if a dance is described in an etiological myth, the ritual dance in contemporary religious practice can be supposed to have corresponded to the aition (in fact this will have been a two-way traffic). But of course the passage of time might distort even this. In short, we have to be most careful in considering poems as referring to observable reality.

Some of the gaps left after we have put the scholarly and the poetic sources together can be filled in by turning to the epigraphic evidence other than inscribed poetry. But inscriptional sources can only make a limited contribution to the study of the dance; only rarely does one get information beyond the bare fact that dancing was going on. But that still is something worthwhile: here we have dancers of flesh and blood who put in an appearance when for instance a sanctuary is balancing the books (one example should suffice here: the scores of dancers in Delian accounts, Bruneau 1970). Above I argued against hypercriticism; it is the epigraphic evidence that put me in a position to do so. Considering this, it is a sad thing that up to now nobody working on the ancient Greek dance has felt the urge to put together the relevant epigraphical evidence. Most have ignored it altogether. I doubt, however, whether an exhaustive collection of epigraphic material would revolutionize our views on this particular subject. One of the oldest examples of alphabetic writing found in Europe is an inscription on dance (*IG I²*, 919). This is nice, but the text does not really help us along as far as the dance is concerned. But it does provide proof beyond reasonable doubt that there were dance competitions being organized in Athens in the eighth century BC.

The above implies that the ancient world has left behind enough written material on the dance to enable us to formulate (partial) answers to the questions of who, when and where, some contemporary theorizing on the nature and the societal uses of dancing, but hardly anything worthwhile to respond to questions about what and how. This is not to say that if any technical work or notation had survived we would automatically know how to interpret these sources: thus the fragments of musical notation do not assist in reconstructing the actual performance. Unless dramatic discoveries occur, we cannot even make a try.

Imagery

Now to the images, it is impossible to study whatever aspect of the life in Antiquity without paying due attention to the iconographical sources at our disposal. It is quite obvious that in the field of non-verbal communication, not least the dance, images can be highly valuable sources (Beazley 1931, 176). But we should not put our expectations too high. Many collections of dance imagery have been put together in the past, usually haphazard and starting with no specific criteria at all. Confronted with a painted vase, a relief, a terracotta statuette or whatever item of ancient imagery, we must begin by

asking a very simple question, but one which turns out to be singularly difficult to answer: 'does this portray dance?'. Now there are no escape routes such as relying on a specific Greek vocabulary. For a long time, images have been interpreted as depictions of contemporary practice, and the identification with individual dances known from written sources was not considered to be problematical (a recent example in Brommer 1989). But this identification is in fact highly problematical: there usually is no way to ascertain that, for instance, the dancers depicted wearing *kalathiskoi* are identical with the *kalathiskos*-dancers mentioned in the written sources (versus Cook 1940, 975-1015). Usually we only have the images, and we have to approach these armed with our current definition of dance. But it is obvious that we face serious problems in deciding whether the artisan in any particular instance intended to portray physical activities which are covered by our definition (we speak only of the undifferentiated concept 'dance' here, and not yet of any individual 'dances').

The saying has it that 'every picture tells a story'. The historian trying to use as evidence the imagery of a community, certainly a community that is not his own, will not seldom find it to be exasperatingly mute. Of course images might 'speak' by carrying a written comment, a language usually easier to understand. But images are labelled only in the rarest of instances, especially when we restrict ourselves to purported dance imagery. The few examples are most welcome, though not always easy to interpret. One can think of the famous Pyrrhías aryballos from Corinth, where a boy performing a high jump is enveloped by a meandering text reading *Pyrrhías prochoreuomenos* (Roebuck & Roebuck 1955; for the text see *SEG* 14.303; 17.137; 22.129; 24.269; 26.399). Other vase inscriptions offer *sprechende Namen* borne by komasts, satyrs, nymphs or maenads (Fränkel 1912; Kossatz-Deissmann 1991). We also have a few reliefs carrying an inscription, but it is not always clear whether the poses or movements portrayed belong to the dance mentioned in the text, or to some other activity (e.g. Poursat 1967).

Archaeologists regularly appear to be hard put distinguishing between dancing and running. They list images under the heading 'dance' quite arbitrarily, as can be illustrated from the work of several scholars, where scenes which are to all purposes identical are sometimes listed as dance, sometimes as running or pursuit (some examples can be seen in van Hoorn 1951, nos. 569, 918, 986; Mommsen 1975, nos. 79, 96, 97; Campus 1981, nos. 2, 3). The 'common sense' approach is inadmissible: we do need criteria, if only to be able to tell the doubtful from the reasonably secure. Obviously it is necessary to depart from a series of closely related material, and not from a single unrelated artefact. Here we can build on many previous attempts at serialization (a model study is Poursat 1968). The series selected should be studied in the context of other non-dance series, because so much of the imagery (but not all of it!) finds a place somewhere within a coherent system (Bérard 1983, 10; Hoffmann 1988, 146). It is in viewing the whole of this system that we might indicate the possible niches for a specific dance imagery. To this end one should consider the propensity of the painter or sculptor to decrease ambiguity (and I believe such a propensity was usually at work). One must try to isolate those elements which made it clear to the ancient observer that it was dance which was intended to be portrayed in a particular image. It is the *logic* of the system that ought to tell us how to isolate a specific dance iconography. This is of course slippery ground, and the danger of circuitous reasoning is always present. Indeed, the only proper checks on our recon-

struction of the original communicatory process are the textual sources, especially the epigraphic evidence, and the rare labelled image. By following this strategy we will be able to isolate a core of images, which can be considered with a reasonable degree of certainty to be dance imagery, but the farther we move away from this core the less sure we can be.

When we now try to put all this into practice, that is, to isolate depictions of 'dance' from the whole of Greek imagery, we must start by distinguishing between different types of movement. Simple locomotor movement such as walking, running or leaping, was not too hard to depict, and with a proper knowledge of artistic conventions it is fairly easy to recognize. Postural and gestural movement will usually have been much harder to portray, and is consequently much less easy to interpret. Naturally, it is the detail that suffered most in the transference from observed movement to image; in asking what movement a particular piece of imagery depicts, we can usually answer in the most general terms only: jumping, turning, crouching, standing, and so on. Next we should ask which of these movements can belong to the particular category of human behaviour covered by the particular definition of the dance which it has been decided to work with. This might be because the movement cannot be interpreted as anything else, or because of some contextual clues that disambiguate an image.

A rapid overview on the basis of my above definition: in depictions in which both feet stay on the ground, there is as far as I can see never anything that might be specific for the dance in the position of the legs. So we need some other criterium. First the number of people and their relative position ought to be considered; if they are depicted as a group arrayed in a single file (or a circle, but in two-dimensional images this is difficult to judge), we might be justified in thinking of a chorus. As so much of the dancing was choral, we can reasonably expect that several images attempt to visualize choruses. Extra support for supposing a file of persons to be a chorus, can possibly be found in the way they are holding one another. Two specific holds depicted seem to differ rather strongly from everyday movement: the wrist hold (the so-called *epi karpoi* grasp), and the w-position of the arms, with forearms lifted upwards, elbows pointing downwards and the protagonists holding hands. Turns, full or partial, are sometimes indicated by the whirl of a dress; without this element everything is open to doubt. If a turn is indeed depicted, one might think of dance imagery without much hesitation. In depictions of movements in which one leg is lifted off the floor, the position of the legs is portrayed according to well-known conventions. Movements which confirm to known running schemata cannot usually be fitted into whatever dance context: they belong in the sphere of athletics, or in depictions of flight and/or pursuit. If doubt is lingering, one should study the relative position of the protagonists. Non-dance scenes also confirm to certain patterns, and it is the departures from this pattern that should alert us. The darting out of a leg is usually rendered fairly recognizably, though of course it is not always possible to say where a simple raising of the leg ends and a high kick begins. Such more vigorous movements seem to indicate dance rather unambiguously. In depictions of movements in which both feet leave the floor, the presence or absence of jumping weights (*halteres*) clinches the argument. Jumpers suspended in mid-air without *halteres* are most likely to be dancing. The arms in general are not very indicative. A few gestures, such as shading one's eyes with one hand (*apokopein*) or crouching while clasping both hands above the head

(*oklasma*), have been claimed as belonging in a dance context, but being wholly dependant upon textual evidence, they cannot in themselves serve to disambiguate an image. In the position of the torso and of the head there is hardly anything that can be claimed as specific for dance scenes, only some of the stronger contortions in depictions of ecstatic behaviour, which might under certain circumstances be called dance, are hardly found elsewhere. A single element seems strongly associated with the dance, and this is prominence of the buttocks. The highlighting of this specific part of the anatomy can be traced in prehistoric scenes, some of which could very well be dance scenes, and it is of course a stock element in what have been called komos-dancers, or *Dickbauchtänzer*, a set of images that easily fit into the definition. But is also found in other images eligible as dance scenes. With all the above the presence of musicians is supportive evidence, as is the absence or presence of accoutrements which help to disambiguate a particular image (detail in Naerebout, forthcoming).

Imagery and artistic conventions

After isolating a core of dance imagery according to the above procedures, we have to address the issue of the validity of these images as historical evidence: what can the imagery contribute to our understanding of the dancing of the ancient Greek world? Obviously, it might tell us something about what the dancing looked like. But then we have to take into account all possible distortions, especially formulas or conventions, and restrictions imposed by the medium. Conventions are many and they change over time. Greek visual representation shows a tendency towards increasingly naturalistic or illusionistic portrayal; illusionism was deliberately sought after and was admired, as illustrated in stories about successful *trompe l'oeil* (I use 'illusionism' to indicate a representative tradition tending towards the naturalistic, narrative, pictorial, veracious, literal, as opposed to the schematic, iconic, generalized, and paradigmatic (see Gombrich 1972). But the restricted number of formulas implies that even their most illusionistic efforts move within narrow limits and usually fall far short of what in Western art we have come to regard as successful illusionism. This is most obvious in painting (though we have to allow for the fact that Greek monumental painting is almost completely lost to us). Notwithstanding the increasingly accurate representation of the human optical experience of nature, it should be kept in mind that the long and complex history of depiction in the ancient world oscillates between verisimilitude and convention (Pollitt 1985, 99-100).

Thus Greek artisans have used a number of formulas to impart a sense of movement: running schemata, and so on, as mentioned above. Secondly, there are the problems of spatial representation, encountered in all modes of rendition, except freestanding sculpture in the round and statuettes, but these are but minor sources for dance iconography. How to suggest space beyond the plane of the picture, how to present a notion of depth? Here enter questions of perspective and related phenomena (White 1956; White 1957; Richter 1970). Overlap (receding without diminution) is found early, but 'true' representations of objects in the distance, that is, objects diminishing in size, are rarely found earlier than in Hellenistic and Roman days. Converging central point perspective may have been introduced in stage painting in the fifth century, but it certainly was not used by vase

painters. In imagery without perspective many difficulties have to remain unsolved, amongst them the portrayal of human beings or objects arranged in a circle. A related problem is the position of the floor line: this can be positioned rather arbitrarily, or no floor line is indicated at all. Restrictions imposed by the medium are most obvious: most of our imagery consists of vase paintings, which of course lack the three-dimensional quality of sculpture. The image is transferred to the two-dimensional plane; but this carrier is in vase painting not an ordinary picture plane, but a freestanding *object*, with a convex or concave surface. The shape of a vase or of the decorated field of a vase often strongly influences or even determines the composition (a clear example is the tondo inside cups). Summarily one can say that it is always difficult to decide on the relative position of whatever people and objects are depicted in Archaic and Classical Greek paintings and reliefs.

Next, some general pronouncements on the nature of Greek visual representation are in order. Most of the imagery has been created by craftsmen or artisans, not by what we would call 'artists'. But whether we speak of artisans or artists, the imagery these men produced is usually restricted in its scope: there was a fairly limited, set repertory to choose from, and developments were generally slow and usually consisted of *rearrangements of already existing elements*. Obviously, the stance taken towards questions of originality and borrowing is radically different from our preconceptions about 'art', which of course does not preclude individual idiosyncrasies in the choice of subject matter or in execution. Indeed much of the imagery consists of objects made in series, sometimes even true mass-products. This is obvious when we are dealing with mould-made objects like terracottas, but holds good for other items as well. But with unique, or fairly unique objects, such as the larger sculpture in the round and the better quality reliefs, the innovative drive was equally restrained. Even the unicity of so-called 'unique works of art' is open to doubt: it is likely that most objects were copied. We can conclude that individual expression did not play a dominant part: the imagery as a whole should not be seen as the sum total of highly individualized products of innovative, 'artistic' minds, but as the unified result of a collective effort. The collectivity intended here is the workforce consisting of all producers of imagery working in close proximity in a single environment, usually their *polis*, a group that can reasonably be expected to have a shared background and outlook.

Now from producers to consumers: the imagery was widely distributed, either in private ownership, or intended for public display. Now all viewers interpret imagery against the background of their own 'mental universe' (Baxandall 1972, 45; Bérard 1983, 10-11). This can lead to widely diverging interpretations, but the respective mental universes of the members of a given society will be fairly homogeneous, if this society is not too big, as was for instance the face-to-face society of the Classical Greek city-state. Thus it is also on the receptive side that we should first think in terms of collectivity instead of individuality (again without denying the existence of idiosyncrasies).

With most of the imagery we will find that the craftsman seeks to decrease ambiguity and to increase intelligibility. We could also say: the craftsman wants to communicate (sometimes with others than his own community, if working for an export market). In a magisterial article, Paul Veyne has argued for the importance of the communicatory process in analyzing ancient imagery (Veyne 1985). In situations wherein the mental

universes of craftsman and customer overlap to a large extent, we can expect that the act of communicating frequently turned out successful. Images that appear to be equivocal from our distanced viewpoint, images in which things are not made sufficiently explicit, may well have been left in this relatively implicit state because the artisan knew (of course he did), that the viewer would add what is lacking in the image from his own mind. In the visual representations of the ancient world ambiguity, as opposed to multivalence, must usually have been unintended and in the eye of the beholder: ambiguity is an issue of reception. If communication fails, ambiguity might result; and of course it is always possible that something not intended by the sender is communicated, additionally or alternatively: the message received is unambiguous, but the receiver is mistaken. However, the unintended communication can be as interesting as the intended one, and we should certainly pay much, though never exclusive, attention to the receptive side, to what has been called 'to rediscover the beholder's share' (Lowenthal 1986, 190; 'beholder's share' is taken from Gombrich 1972). Of course apparent ambiguity might result from our inability to translate into narrative the various non-verbal stimulations arising from imagery: not only is a foreign imagery difficult to penetrate, but also imagery in general can be quite resistant to proper verbal explanation. Indeed, if such a translation would be easy or could be complete, there would be no need for texts and images dealing with the same slice of human experience to exist side by side. Summing up, the imagery, a largely stereotyped product, was known to a large number of people, was indeed intended for as large a public as possible, and was interpreted by this public in a fairly consistent and homogeneous manner.

Imagery and connotation

After the images have been selected, and their particular nature has been taken into account, what is the contribution that dance imagery can make? To use the images as mere illustration only, simply adding a handful of images to some written account of past actions is either mistaken, or going only half the way; imagery, whether in conjunction with textual material or in isolation, should be used as a source in its own right (Wohlfeil 1986; Haskell 1993). We ought to consider what Abby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, and others have called iconology (and what nowadays is sometimes subsumed under the giant umbrella of semiotics): the uncovering of a certain symbolism, to enable us to use visual representations as an entry into the *histoire des mentalités*. First we have to admit that our understanding of this field is very provisional: how people see and how they interpret what they see is an indescribably complex process, still in large parts unknown, physiologically, psychologically and otherwise. The main progress made since Panofsky seems to me that we tend to move from symbolism to connotation, and that the imagery is no longer seen as a reflection of a mental universe, as merely mirroring developments outside the world of pictorial rendition, but as a functioning part of a society's mental make-up, what I would call its 'system' (for system and practice, see Naerebout 1987, following Ortner). There has arisen a contextual approach that obviously goes beyond iconography, but also takes us a step beyond iconology (bibliographic guidance is provided in Frontisi-Ducroux & Lissarrague 1990).

Ascertaining the connotation of imagery means finding out what general idea(s) the images are related to. To this end we have to ask ourselves what at a particular moment of time is the most likely association that a majority of spectators will have had when confronted with a particular image. Whatever the answer we come up with, it should best be put in rather broad terms, not highly specific ones: people's connotations, in the sense used here, will often be of the vaguest kind. It is symbolism, which is a learned system of references, that is specific. The one does not exclude the other: a piece of say, Dionysiac imagery can have with the general public the connotation 'religious, sacred, elevated', but can at the same time be interpreted according to a worked-out symbolism by some individual schooled in Neo-Platonic philosophy. Studying symbolism is a perfectly legitimate enterprise. But unless one is after the more or less idiosyncratic games played by an intellectual elite, the concept of a much wider, much vaguer, connotation appears to be the more fruitful one in historical research (Veyne 1985).

Imagery is not a passive mirror, produced by a craftsman/artist who is a mere conduit for extra-artistic information encoded in a visual form. In real life imagery is creative and contributes actively to the way in which people see and structure the world around them. Images, as messages in a communicatory process, are an integral part of the mental universe of every man and help structure human experience. Where this meant first analyzing the cultural background in order to 'read' the imagery, we also can turn things round and make use of the imagery to give us insight into a culture's world-view or system: 'penetrating the assumptions of an age', as it was put in a collection of historical studies using imagery of one or another kind (see the introduction by Th. K. Rabb and J. Brown to Rabb, ed. 1986). I must stress that this does not imply that we can use the evidence of the imagery as giving easy access to previously inaccessible terrain; our general knowledge of a culture and a period, derived from written sources, must give direction to our efforts. If written sources are completely lacking, imagery will remain hard or even impossible to interpret; without interpretation, however, there is no way back from the imagery to past reality. This is not to say that texts are primary, they are not, certainly not in many particular instances, but we ought to have a general knowledge of the past, which can sometimes come from oral sources, but usually is derived from texts. The images are there, in certain combinations, with a certain systematization, and any serious attempt at interpretation that sees these images as an active force in shaping man's understanding of himself and his world, is worthwhile.

All imagery aimed at a fairly wide audience can, and should, be seen as a living, shaping part of the mental universe of the ancient individual. But can we at the same time use at least some images to tell us about observable reality, or practice? Here in my opinion much is possible, in a particular image practice could be the main ingredient. But problems are manifold, we have to be constantly aware of conventions, as I have already [been] outlined above, to keep these from interfering at this stage of our interpretative effort. Of course the greater the illusionism the more this enables us to see in an image (and increases the likelihood of an image being) a rendering of practice. But the artisan's licence is of course another factor to reckon with and a problem less easily overcome; the dance depicted can be partly or completely imagined and not remembered. It is disconcerting to see the painter or sculptor using stock figures in whatever context he prefers, by slight manipulation he can turn non-dancers into dancers. A convincing example

can be seen in two vases in Malibu (Getty Museum L.78.AE.10) and in Copenhagen (Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek H 153). The satyrs portrayed on both vases are in identical or but slightly varied poses, on the one vase they rest their feet on rocks (in what seems likely to be the original composition), on the other the rocks have been left out and the poses of the satyrs, with legs lifted in the air, could easily be interpreted as a dance (see Del Chiaro 1985, 161-62). An equally persuasive example are two vases by the Pig Painter in Cleveland (A.W. Ellenberger Sr Endowment Fund CMA 26.549) and in Brussels (Musées Royaux R 305). The one shows what look like dancers, the other athletes training. One of the athletes is almost identical with one of the supposed dancers (see Driscoll 1993). Thus, one can see the same schemata used for athletes and dancers (if that is what they are); only the context (*halteres* and the forked wand of the trainer) disambiguates. The artisan appears to be free to play around with whatever is in his fund of imagery. The image also can be built up from several disjointed remembrances or examples: moments observed in a number of different dances, or seen in other depictions of dances, past, present, local or foreign, can be combined within a single image. If that is the case, the image is a rendering of practice, but every element should be judged separately, the combined elements present a whole that never was. Indeed, often 'real' versus 'unreal' is not a workable dichotomy, rather we are dealing with a spectrum ranging from a very strong to a very weak linkage to practice.

Of course there are limits to the artisan's licence: there are customers to think of, he wants to communicate, or to put it in commercial terms, he wants to sell. Images are, amongst other things, 'fossils of economic life' (Baxandall 1972, 1). How far licence can go is an intriguing problem, but not easy to solve. In studying both form and contents of imagery one of the central issues should be the image as a tradable object: we should ask about customers or patrons. I have repeatedly argued above that the artisans keep their audience, their public in mind, but do they often produce to order and if so, are their patrons leaving them free in the execution of the required subject matter, or do they specify things in detail? We would of course be interested to know whether a patron asked a vase painter or relief sculptor to produce a recognizable rendering of a particular event. As far as ancient Greece is concerned, we are in no position to answer this sort of questions. Some things might be gained, however, by comparison with literary patronage, and with patrons and artisan/artist in other, better documented periods.

Everything points in the direction of a situation wherein bespoke were relatively few, and ready-mades predominated: apart from metalwork in precious metals and large scale sculpture (statues and reliefs) most 'works of art' will have been more or less mass-produced items, often 'copy-book stuff', not ordered, but selected from existing stock. Some items may however have been produced with a particular public in mind, if not indeed as bespoke copies: here we can think of differentiated gifts for sanctuaries, vases or statuettes intended as dedications or offerings. The particular iconography of Brauron comes to mind, or of Artemis Orthia. If dance scenes are found in a temple context, these might portray the dance danced at the sanctuary. After the dancers have departed the dedicated vase or statuette perpetuates the dance for the god(s), and for other visitors. Of course it is also conceivable that a random dance, or even just 'dance', is depicted, not the dance connected with the sanctuary in question, if any, but the hypothesis of a link between practice and the imagery of a gift might be considered reasonable (for the

whole subject see Brommer 1984, 178-80). Also remarkable departures from the normative could be interpreted as having been caused by a client's wishes. We also can ask whether a vase or other item might be bought and taken home because its imagery shows some religious ritual in which the buyer of the object has partaken (or of course the god in whose honour the ritual was performed, or any associated symbols). The imagery then functions as a souvenir.

Without supportive evidence hardly any image can be used to reconstruct practice (but every image that is part of a series can be used to reconstruct system). But despite the many obstacles in our way, we will be left with at least some images that can, with all possible care, be considered representations of practice. This is not to the exclusion of the approaches outlined above, but complementary. An item of say Dionysiac imagery can in addition to its general connotation or symbolism be a depiction of, or at least be strongly dependant upon, ritual as practised (Geyer 1977). We have to be acutely aware of the fact that a rendering of contemporary practice and a connotative or symbolic dimension can perfectly go together: we encounter factual symbols, and symbolic facts. A successful combination of the depiction of practice and the reference to system might very well make out much of the attractiveness of a picture. A fruitful comparison here is the ongoing discussion on the symbolic nature of seventeenth-century Dutch imagery, where the illusionistic rendering of observable reality was combined with a strong interest in electrifying this illusionism with a wide range of messages (Hecht 1986; Hecht 1992; de Jongh 1992a; de Jongh 1992b). In seventeenth-century Dutch art we find a strong urge to make images after observable reality, but not in the sense of creating mirror images, but in the sense of creating the plausible, that which might exist. The approach of de Jongh and all who work in his manner is fruitful, the results obtained consistently supported by the evidence, while the factuality of the images is not, and need not be, denied (versus Alpers 1989). Of course the dangers are obvious: seeing symbols in everything, hunting for parallels in even the most obscure emblemata-books, what Schama has aptly called 'iconographic overkill' (Schama 1987, 162).

Of course many images will defy all attempts to find in them a depiction of practice. But we should avoid the dangers of hypercriticism: if the dance in the image cannot be shown to be practice, we need not conclude there was no dance at all (see the concept of the *okkasionel* in Hoelscher 1973, 11). When Marcadé, in speaking of the dancers on the famous acanthus pillar in Delphi, concludes that the dance motif was merely decorative (Marcadé 1974, 245), this is as much jumping to conclusions as would have been the suggestion that these statues render Delphian practice. Even if we admit that the marble girls might dance a dance that never was, there can very well have been *some* dance, or even a dance by dancers who were very much like the ones surrounding the acanthus pillar. Considering the written evidence we have for the central position and for the frequency of dancing in religious cult, I would posit as a general rule: if dance is portrayed in what can be interpreted as a ritual context, dance there was, whether the portrayal is true to practice or not. Of course there are likely to be some exceptions to such a general rule.

Imagery and reconstructionism

I have now argued that only some of the dance imagery can be used to illuminate practice (though all of it gives access to system). I have also argued that those images which depict practice, often do so in a way which is very generalized, without any reliable detail. One conclusion that can be drawn, is that existing imagery is quite unlikely to allow the reconstruction of actual dance movements, for that purpose there is not enough and what there is, is not usually specific enough. But in the past images have in fact been used to do exactly that. They have been supposed to be in large part reliable renderings of observable reality, and the reconstruction of individual movements, or even of complete dances, seemed the obvious thing to attempt on the basis of this evidence. Several scholars have been trying to reconstruct the dances of Antiquity, relying primarily on the iconographic sources (Emmanuel 1896; Prudhommeau 1956; Delavaud-Roux 1991). Let me act as devil's advocate, and accept this unlikely presupposition that most images are depictions of past practice and true to nature at that. Even accepting this, I would maintain that no static image can assist in recreating even a single movement, let alone a sequence of movements, if that movement or sequence of movements is not known beforehand (and even knowledge of a particular movement *idiom* is no guarantee). A moment depicted, of course all the time assuming this was done in a reasonably accurate manner in the first place, can be (and will be) interpreted as belonging to several different movements. A simple test with a couple of photographs will prove as much. Obviously, Greek dance movements should be considered unknown, as the reconstructionists will all agree, otherwise there would not be any need to reconstruct such movements: a simple reviving or even conserving would be enough. It is telling that the essentially French school of reconstructionism, from Emmanuel to Delavaud-Roux, presupposes a resemblance between (Italo-French) classical ballet and ancient Greek dance. But on what grounds they should do so, has always eluded me.

Of course the possession of a series of images showing several different moments taken from one and the same movement would make something of a difference. Both Emmanuel and Prudhommeau suggest that some Greek vase paintings are composed of what we might call frames of a film. Put the images behind one another on a film strip, run the film, and we have got the original movement (Emmanuel 1896; Prudhommeau 1965). In most instances this seems highly unlikely and the evidence has to undergo Procrustean treatment. No one can deny that there is found *within a single image* simultaneity of what is in fact a *sequence* of events: in Greek imagery there is not necessarily unity of time or place (Himmelman-Wildschutz 1967, with the review by Hemelrijk 1970). Instances of 'chronological conlapsus' (unified composition, but no unified time) occur with some frequency in Archaic vase painting, for example on a sixth-century Laconian cup in Paris (Cabinet des Médailles 190), where we see Odysseus and his companions offering wine to and blinding the Cyclops in a single move. Apparently absent in Greek representations, however, is the serialized depiction within a single picture of the same human being at different moments of time (well known from other artistic traditions: Western mediaeval imagery for instance offers many examples); a possible isolated example is an early fifth-century cup in Paris (Louvre G 152), where on a single vase we find Astyanax portrayed twice, once alive and once dead, but this is on different sides of the vase.

Thus it does not seem likely that a row of dancers could be seen as a depiction of a *single person* at different stages of a particular dance. I cannot prove that Greek dance imagery does not contain examples of 'synoptic narrative' (Pipili 1987, 33), but these will have to go unrecognised. All we can say is that in some cases it is possible that the painter took different moments from the same movement, but that this cannot be ascertained if one does not know the dance. But we do not, so how to tell what role was played by the artisan's urge to individualize a group of dancers by introducing small shifts in poses not related to the observable dance? And if we would have different moments taken from a single dance movement, how to pronounce on any details, how to judge tempi or expressiveness? And, still increasing the confusion, why not include in a single image poses, movements or configurations taken from *more than one dance*, as has indeed been suggested by Jucker? (Jucker 1956, 23). So the evidence does not allow us to reconstruct the actual movements. Even if we could, how about floorpatterns, how about tempi, how about expressiveness? All unanswerable questions, that neither images, nor texts have much to tell about. The loss of the music is crucial as well, the same steps performed to different music might very well be different dance. Much energy has been and is being spent in chasing a chimera: ancient Greek movement is lost and we have to accept it is.

In lieu of a conclusion

The full story of the dance of the ancient Greek world will never be told; on the one hand we have too much source material. Whatever way we formulate our selective criteria, we have on our hands many hundreds of texts and images of direct import. It seems all rather too much to cope with (happily 'it is not necessary to know everything, in order to understand something', as Clifford Geertz put it). On the other hand we have too little material. The dances of Antiquity are lost and will remain lost. Where written sources and iconography fall short, we have to accept that some types of research into nonverbal and nonvocal communication will be hampered because we lack knowledge of the body movements themselves. Not only reconstruction is impossible (if it is deemed possible at all), but any *modern morphological approach to form-function relationships* must remain largely unworkable for the historian of the dances of the ancient world (and, I hasten to stress, of several other periods). Not a few people seem to find it indescribably difficult to accept that some things simply cannot be done on the basis of a particular set of evidence. But our sources cover a wide range of topics other than form: the many occasions at which particular dances were performed, the different functions fulfilled by the dance (in a most general sense), the appreciation of dance by Greek society, the way individual dances were named and depicted, and much more, are all documented. Amongst the material we even have a few examples of the ancients reflecting on their own dance tradition. This is sufficient to give us a generalised knowledge of the dance in the ancient world, a knowledge which enables us to study not so much the history of the dance, as the dance in history, that is, not its forms, but its role as the movement aspect of a wide range of events. A proper appreciation of the dance will definitely not revolutionise our view of ancient society. But dance should be brought within the field of vision of scholars. Its frequent absence from modern accounts of the ancient world would certainly have

surprised the ancient subjects of all this diligent research who were going out to perform or watch yet another dance.

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