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# KOMASTAI OR 'HEPHAISTOI'?

## VISIONS OF COMIC PARODY IN ARCHAIC GREECE

TYLER JO SMITH

Greek drama and its origins have long claimed the attention of Classical scholarship.<sup>1</sup> Some studies of the topic have touched upon the somewhat enigmatic place of dithyramb or *komos*, with particular consideration of the textual sources. Others have focused their research on the combination of textual and visual evidence, with an interest in recreating the dramatic moment or recovering lost plays. What is missing from the existing scholarly corpus is a thorough study of the archaeological material in its own right. The Institute of Classical Studies has long sponsored The Ancient Theatre Project ([www.sas.ac.uk/icls/institute](http://www.sas.ac.uk/icls/institute)) through its *Monuments Illustrating...* series and photographic archive. The existing books published therein are comprehensive accounts of Old, Middle and New Comedy, as well as Tragedy and Satyr-Play, some appearing in revised and updated editions. Presented here is a very small part of a much larger project entitled *Monuments Illustrating the Origins of Greek Drama*, sponsored by the ICS. This planned collection of dramatic monuments will differ from others in the series in several significant ways. Firstly, the subject by nature requires a comprehensive revisiting of the age-old question of dramatic origins. Secondly, because we are working from an absence of evidence, the more general problem of art and text must be confronted, if not in itself form a theoretical base for further discussion.<sup>2</sup> Simplistic attempts to match known dramas with images on painted vases in the spirit of A. D. Trendall and T. B. L. Webster can no longer be considered a sound or useful method of inquiry.<sup>3</sup> It will instead be necessary to establish clear criteria for monument identification. At the same time, like others in the series, this *Monuments Illustrating...* volume will comprise vases, terracotta figurines, votive masks, and perhaps even gems, jewellery and architecture.

Our current attention will be given entirely to the iconographic evidence provided by painted pottery, or what have long been called vases. We will first introduce the so-called

<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented as the annual T. B. L. Webster Lecture at the Institute of Classical Studies, 27 February 2008. I am very grateful to Mike Edwards, Director of the Institute, for inviting me to serve as Webster Fellow, and also to Olga Krzyszkowska and Alan Johnston for their generous hospitality and assistance. Thanks are also extended to the Department of Art History and Archaeology, Princeton University, where a version was presented during their symposium 'The politics of play: art, aesthetics and the ludic', 1 March 2008. For help in various other ways I thank S. Douglas Olson, P. Barolsky, A. Walthall, M. J. Padgett, D. Kovacs, Z. Stamatopoulou, W. J. Slater, E. W. Handley, and J. R. Green.

<sup>2</sup> Of relevance are N. K. Rutter and B. A. Sparkes, eds., *Word and image in ancient Greece* (Edinburgh 2000), and the somewhat sceptical view of J. P. Small, *The parallel worlds of classical art and text* (Cambridge 2003), esp. chap. 3 for drama.

<sup>3</sup> *Illustrations of Greek drama* (London 1971). O. Taplin revisits this approach in *Pots and plays: interactions between tragedy and Greek vase-painting of the fourth century B.C.* (Los Angeles 2007), though largely concerned with South Italian red-figure.

‘komast’ or ‘padded dancer’ vases, associated by Pickard-Cambridge, Webster and other scholars with dramatic origins; then we shall look in a certain amount of detail at those few scenes representing the Return of Hephaistos to Olympos, where komast figures have been included; and finally, we shall witness the little known and rarely discussed examples of male dancers with lame feet. It should become apparent that the images are more complex than they initially seem and that they, or perhaps their creators, are operating at the very least on two distinct levels. On the one hand, lame-footed revellers appear to mimic the god Hephaistos, and thus may provide some of the earliest and best visual evidence for comic parody. On the other hand, both the dancers and the scenes belong to a travelling repertoire of komast images, whose iconography emerges in various parts of Greece simultaneous with the spread of the black-figure technique.

### *Black-Figure Komasts*

Komast dancers first appear in Greek art during the late 7<sup>th</sup> century on the painted vases of Corinth. Komast, by way of definition, derives from the Greek κόμος, whence the English word comedy.<sup>4</sup> Etymologically, there is a sort of natural connection between the dancers and drama. But the Archaic komos was not exactly comedy. It was a small-scale, spontaneous, and disruptive private affair as opposed to a large-scale, rehearsed, public one.<sup>5</sup> Neither the dancer nor the dance may have originated in Corinth, and there is a certain amount of early evidence from the East, namely from Anatolia and Cyprus, suggesting the steatopygous dancing figure may not be indigenous to mainland Greece.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the first series of komasts on vases belongs to Corinthian black-figure painting. By the early 6<sup>th</sup> century the revelling figure joins, perhaps expectedly, the black-figure iconography of Athenian vase-painters, and it is then and there we recognize the ubiquitous ‘komast cups’, so named for the frequency with which the figure appears on the shape.<sup>7</sup> By the middle years of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, the image of the bottom-slapping, fat-bottomed, fat-bellied dancer is found in each of the major areas producing black-figure vases: Laconia, Boeotia, East Greece, and the Greek West.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it should go without saying that each of these production centres creates its own vision and version of the figure, and we are forever asking ourselves if it is simply the imagery that spreads or whether a style or type of dancing is touring round Greece as well. For the moment a

<sup>4</sup> In general see A. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, tragedy and comedy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, revised by T. B. L. Webster (Oxford 1962) 132-62; and B. Pütz, *The symposium and komos in Aristophanes* (Oxford 2007) 121-28, each with attention to the ancient sources. See also M. Silk, *Aristophanes and the definition of comedy* (Oxford 2000) 9 and 77-78, n. 116.

<sup>5</sup> G. M. Hedreen, ‘The Return of Hephaistos, Dionysiac procession ritual and the creation of a visual narrative’, *JHS* 124 (2004) 38-64, at 48-49. Other useful comments appear in S. Douglas Olson, *Broken laughter: select fragments of Greek comedy* (Oxford 2007) 2-6, 12.

<sup>6</sup> See Trendall and Webster, *Illustrations* (n. 3, above) no. I, 1, an East Greek pot fragment from Miletus; and also A. T. Reyes, *Archaic Cyprus: a study of textual and archaeological evidence* (Oxford 1994) 43-44, pl. 15, for a tomb relief with dancers.

<sup>7</sup> H. A. G. Brijder, *Komast cups and Siana cups I* (Amsterdam 1983) 25-27.

<sup>8</sup> For stylistic variations see T. J. Smith, ‘The corpus of komast vases: from identity to exegesis’, in *The origins of theater in ancient Greece and beyond: from ritual to drama*, ed. E. Csapo and M. C. Miller (Cambridge 2007) 48-76, with previous bibliography.

single important fact should be kept in mind: as the black-figure technique is adopted by these particular regions, the komast dancer is in most instances the *first human figure* depicted with regularity.<sup>9</sup> Or, put another way, the animal-style so strongly associated with vase-painting of the 7<sup>th</sup> century's Orientalizing phase of Greek art is replaced in some centres by what we shall label here for emphasis: the komast-style. When learning to paint the human figure in this very particular technique, it is the male revelling figure who is chosen on multiple occasions, at first as a nearly camouflaged member of the animal frieze and later as a solo or group performer.<sup>10</sup> Once artistic potential is realized, the iconography takes on a life of its own, and our dancing figure is inserted into a number of different situations and venues, sometimes determined by painter, other times dictated by regional or local needs. Wherever a dancing figure is required, our happy, hopping reveller fits the bill. Regardless of time, place, or setting, there is a general light-heartedness about the scenes, and in many instances unambiguous attempts at playfulness and humour. Much past scholarship has misleadingly sought a single explanation for this sizeable corpus of images.<sup>11</sup> It is impossible to equate each and every komast dancer with dramatic origins, Dionysian ritual, or drinking-parties. There are multiple-settings, if in fact inter-related circumstances, where the komast has been made to feel welcome. Indeed, each and every komos is not the same.

### *Komasts and Hephaistos*

Let us turn our attention now to the topic at hand: the lame-footed dancers and their lame-footed god, Hephaistos. At the outset, it should be made clear that the vast majority of komast dancers do not have lame feet or any type of visual deformity or disability. As well, most dance in no clearly indicated setting, and most hold no defining attributes. A large percentage of figures, however, display anatomy that appears to be exaggerated or distorted in some manner.<sup>12</sup> The short red chiton worn by Corinthian komasts, is sported at times by dancers elsewhere, but in most black-figure centres it quickly disappears in favour of full nudity. This is surely not a case for artistic convention, or the 'heroic' nudity so loved by many scholars. The komasts are incredibly un-heroic with their grotesque, sometimes erect phalloi, their somewhat tubby anatomy, and their love of public indecency – they are known to excrete, urinate, or vomit without discretion and in the company of others.<sup>13</sup> Although

<sup>9</sup> K. Kilinski, *Boeotian black figure vase painting of the archaic period* (Mainz 1990) 14-15; and A. A. Lemos, *Archaic pottery of Chios* (Oxford 1991) 142, 169-70.

<sup>10</sup> T. J. Smith, 'Remembering black-figure: old methods, new applications', in *Proceedings of the xvth international congress of classical archaeology, Amsterdam 1998*, ed. R. F. Dokter and E. M. Moormann (Amsterdam 1999) 387-90.

<sup>11</sup> For previous bibliography and the range of interpretations see A. Seeberg, *Corinthian komos vases*. *BICS* Suppl. 27 (London 1971) ix and 1-11; and M. Steinhart, *Die Kunst der Nachahmung: Darstellungen mimetischer Vorführungen in der griechischen Bildkunst archaischer und klassischer Zeit* (Mainz 2004) 32-64.

<sup>12</sup> See recently J. R. Green, 'The persistent phallos: regional variability in the performance style of comedy', in *Greek drama iii: essays in honour of Kevin Lee*, ed. J. Davidson, F. Muecke and P. Wilson, *BICS* Suppl. 87 (London 2006) 141-45.

this all makes them somewhat akin to satyrs, they are categorically not satyrs. The revellers are fully human and fully mortal. Not only do they choose a different style of dancing from the beastly followers of Dionysos, they also keep rather different company.

Enter Hephaistos, the Greek god of the forge and metal-working, whose primary attributes are his lame feet and the tools of his trade, such as tongs or an axe. He was worshipped throughout Greece, and in Attica was celebrated alongside Athena in her guise as *Ergane*, as patron of arts and crafts.<sup>14</sup> His disability and unsightly appearance are commonly referred to in ancient sources, and in Homer's *Iliad* he is the laughing-stock of the gods when he attempts to serve them drinks hobbling on his cumbersome lame feet. Following a rather unpleasant exchange between his parents, Zeus and Hera:

At that the white-armed goddess Hera smiles and smiling, took the cup from her child's hands. Then dipping sweet nectar from the mixing bowl he poured it round to all the immortals, left to right. And uncontrollable laughter broke from the happy gods as they watched the god of fire breathing hard and bustling through the halls (1.598-600).<sup>15</sup>

This much cited episode is humorous in several respects, and certainly would have been to the ancient ear. First and foremost, the role of cup-bearer was normally reserved for the attractive Trojan boy, Ganymede, who Zeus famously seduced into the job. The site of Hephaistos with his crippled, curved, or backward-turning feet – a variety of words are used by Homer to create this vivid picture – offers a good dose of comic relief at an otherwise tense moment of the poem.<sup>16</sup> We are further provided a divine mirror of the mortal world. As a result of his physical imperfection, Hephaistos enjoys a certain 'outsider status' among the Olympian gods. Not only is he 'consistently presented as the butt of cheap humour', to quote Robert Garland, but also his 'sexual relations are fraught with difficulty'.<sup>17</sup> Such an obvious metaphor for lameness contrasts conveniently with young Ganymede himself, whose name is thought by some to mean 'bright genitals'.<sup>18</sup> It

<sup>13</sup> H. Foley, 'The comic body in Greek art and drama', in *Not the classical ideal: Athens and the construction of the other in Greek art*, ed. B. Cohen (Leiden 2000) 275-311. Bodily functions in Greek vase-painting are the subject of B. Cohen and H. A. Shapiro, 'The use and abuse of Athenian vases', in *Essays in honor of Dietrich von Bothmer*, ed. A. J. Clark and J. Gaunt (Amsterdam 2002) 83-90.

<sup>14</sup> W. Burkert, *Greek religion* (Oxford 1985) 167-68; T. H. Carpenter, *Art and myth in ancient Greece* (London 1991) 48. For their appearance together in art see LIMC II, 'Athena', A5, and nos. 474-84.

<sup>15</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. R. Fagles, with intro. and notes by B. Knox (London 1999) 98.

<sup>16</sup> G. S. Kirk, *The Iliad: a commentary. Volume I: books 1-4* (Cambridge 1985) 114, on Homer's terminology (and cf. *Il.* 18.371, 393, 397); and R. Garland, *The eye of the beholder: deformity and disability in the Graeco-Roman world* (London 1995) 113-14.

<sup>17</sup> Garland, *Beholder* (previous n.) 63. Recall the lame divinity's unsuccessful attempt to seduce the virgin Athena, while still managing to sire the first king of Athens; Burkert, *Religion* (n. 14, above) 229; Carpenter, *Art and myth* (n. 14, above) 73-74; and recently S. Blakely, *Myth, ritual, and metallurgy in ancient Greece and recent Africa* (Cambridge 2006) 163-65.

<sup>18</sup> LIMC IV, 'Ganymedes' 154-55. Cf. *Od.* 18.67 and 87, and 22.476; and see M. W. Edwards, *The Iliad: a commentary. Volume V: books 17-20* (Cambridge 1991) 193; J. Bremmer, 'Adolescents, symposion, and pederasty', in *Symptica: a symposium on the symposion*, ed. O. Murray (Oxford 1990) 141 n. 37. J. Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek love: a radical reappraisal of homosexuality in ancient Greece* (London 2007) 171, suggests an alternative etymology.

is further a potent reminder of Hephaistos' failed lineage, having himself been conceived by Hera and Zeus without intercourse as told by Hesiod (*Theog.* 924-28), as well as his own unhappy marriage to Aphrodite recounted by Homer (*Od.* 8.266ff.). Furthermore, the occupation of divine-artisan or craftsman would be the type of skilled, if largely sedentary, profession available to lame mortals in antiquity, not to mention a sign of inferior social, cultural, and religious status. Bodily perfection was required of both sacrificial victims and priests in Archaic and Classical Greece, and it may well have been the case that individuals displaying any sort of deformity or with any known disability, would have been denied access to sanctuaries.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in this brief yet suggestive scene from the *Iliad*, Hephaistos inadvertently takes up three vital roles: firstly, he is the provider of wine; secondly, the bringer of comic relief; and, thirdly, he is drinking-party entertainment – all ideas to which we shall ourselves return. But, for the moment, it is interesting to note that when Hephaistos was serving up that godly nectar, or at least attempting to do so, it is described as though it were wine, the drink of the symposion, and is drawn directly from a krater, the sympotic vessel extraordinaire.<sup>20</sup>

The mythology of Hephaistos and his lameness, his fall and his Return, are indeed important, and also deserve brief mention. Again, we turn to Homer, again the *Iliad*, where we confront two accounts of the god's fall from Olympos – or perhaps two unfortunate, if separate falls at the hands of his abusive parents. The first occurs in Book 1, and immediately precedes the pouring episode just recounted, where Hephaistos interrupts his quarrelling parents with these memorable words to Hera:

It's hard to fight the Olympian strength for strength. You remember the last time I rushed to your defense? He seized my foot, he hurled me off the tremendous threshold and all day long I dropped, I was dead weight and then, when the sun went down, down I plunged to Lemnos, little breath left in me. But the mortals there soon nursed a fallen immortal back to life (589-94).<sup>21</sup>

From this it is concluded that it was Zeus who threw his son down to earth and it was Zeus who caused his lameness. In Book 18 are a somewhat different set of circumstances. At the point where Thetis, the mother of Achilles, visits the divine smith, asking him to craft a shield for her son, the god 'of the two lame legs' (ἀμφιγυῆς) explains:

Verily then a dread and honoured goddess is within my halls, even she that saved me when pain was come upon me after I had fallen afar through the will of my shameless mother, that was fain to hide me away by reason of my lameness (ἣ μ' ἐθέλησε κρύψαι χωλὸν ἔοντα).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Garland, *Beholder* (n. 16, above) 64; Burkert, *Religion* (n. 14, above) 56, and 95-98; and R. Parker, *Miasma: pollution and purity in early Greek religion* (Oxford 1983) 175 and 205, on priests.

<sup>20</sup> Kirk, *Iliad* (n. 16, above) 113. On the role and importance of the krater see F. Lissarrague, 'Around the krater: an aspect of banquet imagery', in Murray, *Symptica* (n. 18, above) 196-209; and A. M. Bowie, 'Thinking with drinking: wine and the symposium in Aristophanes', *JHS* 117 (1997) 1-21.

<sup>21</sup> Trans. Fagles, *Iliad* (n. 15, above) 97.

<sup>22</sup> Hom. *Il.* 18.393-97; trans. A. T. Murray. Loeb Classical Library (New York 1925, repr. 1967) 317.

Here it is Hera's embarrassment at his lameness, be it congenital or accidental, that resulted in a second fall from divine company. Similarly, Hera squawks emphatically at one point in the *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo*: 'my son Hephaistos, whom I bore, was a weakling among all the gods and had withered feet (ῥικνὸς πόδας), and so I picked him up and hurled him into the great sea' (2.316-18). Alas, a rather elaborate variation on the real exposure of unfit children thought to have occurred to some extent in antiquity.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the cause of his lameness, or the circumstances of his tumble down to earth, it is his unintentional descent to the mortal world that necessitates his much grander return to the divine one. But why the urgency to end the nine year holiday on Lemnos? Pausanias, in his description of a painting in a sanctuary of Dionysos in Athens, explains that Hephaistos, seeking a most clever sort of revenge on his brute of a mother, who 'threw Hephaistos out when he was born', fashioned her a golden throne as a gift.<sup>24</sup> Once positioned in this beautiful chair, she was unable to get up – she was literally bound to her seat. The gods attempted without success to encourage Hephaistos back to Olympos in hopes he might free his shrewish mother. It was finally Dionysos who enticed Hephaistos back home, but only after one too many cups of wine. It is the exact same sort of persuasion to which Odysseus treats the Cyclops – another marginal and physically impaired figure – in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*.<sup>25</sup>

The Return of Hephaistos to Olympos is not terribly well-documented in ancient literature, and our fullest accounts of it are found on Athenian black- and red-figure vases.<sup>26</sup> It is thought, however, to be the subject of a lyric poem by Alkaios in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC; and at about that time (c. 570) we encounter the famous François Vase on which one of the earliest Athenian depictions of the story is identified.<sup>27</sup> Although the scene is not fully preserved, inscriptions name the figures. Hephaistos is mounted side-saddle on the back of a donkey, while Dionysos directs him on foot back to Olympos. Included in the frieze are the gods awaiting the Return, including Hera, no doubt still bound to her throne by invisible cords.<sup>28</sup> Hephaistos' lameness is emphasized by his inability to make the long journey on foot, and also by his feet which the artist has cleverly turned in opposite directions. Also joining the entourage are satyrs (here labelled 'silens'), playing pipes and hauling wine.<sup>29</sup> Among the more visually virile aspects of the scene are the large erect phalloi displayed not only on the satyrs, but also on the mount of the god. Many of these same details will be repeated by other vase-painters, among them

<sup>23</sup> Garland, *Beholder* (n. 16, above) 13-18, and for the translation 63.

<sup>24</sup> Paus. 1.20.3; Carpenter, *Art and myth* (n. 14, above) 13-14. Additional textual references are collected by T. H. Carpenter, *Dionysian imagery in archaic Greek art* (Oxford 1986) 13-15; and discussed by Hedreen, 'Hephaistos' (n. 5, above) 39.

<sup>25</sup> Garland, *Beholder* (n. 16, above) 63.

<sup>26</sup> F. Brommer, *Hephaistos: der Schmeidegott in der antiken Kunst* (Mainz 1978) 10-17 for vases, and 35-36 for other arts.

<sup>27</sup> Florence 4209; Brommer (previous n.) 10-11, and 7-8, for Alkaios.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Paus. 1.20.3; and see n. 24 above on literary references.

<sup>29</sup> G. M. Hedreen, *Silens in Attic black-figure vase-painting: myth and performance* (Ann Arbor 1992) 1-12, on both the terminology and the vase. See also J. D. Beazley, *The development of Attic black-figure*, 2nd edn, revised by D. von Bothmer and M. B. Moore (Berkeley 1986) 28-29 ('satyrs').

the ithyphallic donkey, Dionysos as leader, music and drink, and of course the funny feet of Hephaistos. As we shall soon learn, it is not always satyrs who join the proceedings of what otherwise resembles, according to Hedreen, an ancient Greek religious procession.<sup>30</sup>

It is again with the story of the Return of Hephaistos to Olympos that we are first able to associate komast dancers with the lame god. The iconography of the Return, both with and without mortal revellers, has been well-studied by Brommer, Seeberg, Carpenter, and most recently Hedreen, and there is little need to review it in full here.<sup>31</sup> What must be mentioned at this point, as it provides our only concrete textual clue, is a lost play of Epicharmos, the late 6<sup>th</sup>/early 5<sup>th</sup> century Sicilian comic playwright, conveniently entitled *Komastai* or *Hephaistos*. The exact subject of this play does not survive, but it is assumed by many to be based on the Return myth. Not terribly much is known about Epicharmos' plays, but it seems he was particularly fond of mythological burlesques and that some of his writings, like later Attic comedy, had plural or double titles; such titles, one part singular, the other plural, are thought to have indicated an individual character, Hephaistos, and the chorus of komasts respectively.<sup>32</sup> Although we cannot be certain if the komast figures portrayed on vases played the role of the chorus in this or other dramas, the title is at least suggestive of this possibility. Webster even adds in *Greek theatre pro-duction* that Epicharmos may have used the padded dancers 'in his other comedies ... for his chorus and actors'.<sup>33</sup>

Turning now to some less well-known aspects of the imagery, we learn that a few of the many komast dancers of Archaic Greek art might be performing a role that associates them with Greek dramatic origins. A Corinthian amphoriskos in Athens of c. 600-580 is considered by many the earliest known representation where fully mortal komasts attend the affair.<sup>34</sup> Hephaistos is mounted on mule-back, and this artist has both feet turned backwards. Perhaps it is a beardless Dionysos draped in a fancy patterned garment who moves things along from behind, though the identity of this standing figure has been much debated (some believe it is actually a woman).<sup>35</sup> Yet another character offers even more drink to the already inebriated rider. The other figures in the scene are very similar to the dancing revellers who decorate literally hundreds of Corinthian vases.<sup>36</sup> They gesture excitedly, sport short chitons, and rather unusually for Corinthian komasts have large

<sup>30</sup> See above (n. 5) 38-64.

<sup>31</sup> Though see T. J. Smith, 'Komast vases in archaic Greece: the question of the lame-footed dancers', *AJA* 99 (1995) 314; and Steinhart (n. 11, above) 41-43.

<sup>32</sup> Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb* (n. 4, above), 230-90, esp. 264-65, on this play; and more recently R. Kerkhof, *Dorische Posse, Epicharm und attische Komödie* (Munich/Leipzig 2001) 116-29, esp. 121. Olson, *Broken Laughter* (n. 5, above) 8, believes the titles may also indicate rewriting or re-performance.

<sup>33</sup> 2nd edn (London 1956) 100. Cf. Bowie, 'Thinking with drinking' (n. 20, above) 2 n. 19; and M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman theater* (Princeton 1961) 38-39.

<sup>34</sup> Athens NM 664; D. A. Amyx, *Corinthian vase-painting of the archaic period* (Berkeley 1988) 621-22, esp. n. 12; and Carpenter, *Dionysian* (n. 24, above) 15-16.

<sup>35</sup> Carpenter, *Dionysian* (n. 24, above) 16, is sceptical, and see n. 16 on the gender debate. In favour of Dionysos are Trendall and Webster, *Illustrations* (n. 3, above) I, 4, who further suggest masks on the bearded figures; and E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The context of ancient drama* (Ann Arbor 1995) 95-96, who claim: 'It follows that the grandly dressed figure whom they follow must be Dionysos, though he is not usually so portrayed'.

<sup>36</sup> Collected by Seeberg, *Komos* (n. 11, above); and see Amyx, *Corinthian* (n. 34, above), 651-52.



grotesque phalloi. A variety of explanations have been offered regarding these and other komast figures. Some have associated the figures with cult proceedings, such as a festival to honour Dionysos, Artemis, or some other god at Corinth. Though Axel Seeberg (who follows Webster in this belief) in his 1965 article entitled 'Hephaistos rides again', himself concedes that at this point 'there was little serious religious purpose left in the proceedings'.<sup>37</sup> Such figures have been labelled demons or proto-satyrs. Still others have argued that the revellers are draped in special costumes, acting out the plot of a lost poem or play.<sup>38</sup> While it is possible that the komasts wore padding to enlarge their anatomy and enhance their comic appearance (and thus the term 'padded dancers' so often used to describe them), such ideas remain unproved. The phalloi and padding worn on stage by the actors of Old Comedy of a later period are well attested in Greek vase-painting and other arts, but it bears reminding that the images under discussion were produced at a pre-dramatic stage. Naturally, the wearing of phalloi conjures the image put forth by Aristotle in the *Poetics*, where he suggests that comedy emerged from 'phallic songs'.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of any socio-cultural or religious implications, most would agree at this point that, if anything, we are witnessing 'ordinary people dressed up', as aptly put by Csapo and Slater.<sup>40</sup>

A Corinthian krater (Fig. 1) in the British Museum, dated c. 575-550 and attributed to the Orphelandros Painter, displays figures who are more obviously komasts accompanying the gods on the Return. In this example both the animal and the modest revellers have lost their phalloi altogether.<sup>41</sup> One male figure stands behind Dionysos and totes a wineskin and a pouring jug, reminiscent of the satyrs on the François Vase. The other mortal males, a confronting pair, are typical komastic characters. They wear short red chitons, which I would argue are not padded, gesture manneristically, and one holds a drinking-horn: the very same vessel chosen for both Dionysos and Hephaistos in this instance as in others. It should be mentioned that in these early versions, where mortal revellers belong to the procession, their anatomy is more or less normal, and there is no indication of lameness, be it real or simulated. At the same time, such scenes enjoy a mythological quality, and it becomes impossible to disentangle fact from fiction, or life from myth. The ambiguity so often indicative of Dionysian imagery may very well be intended here.

### *Lame-footed Revellers*

Although Corinthian vase-painters seem only to have portrayed the Return scene a few times, on multiple occasions they include a lame-footed dancer, with twisted or deformed feet, among more sure-footed friends. Interestingly, such dancers take a variety of forms,

<sup>37</sup> *JHS* 85 (1965) 102-09, at 108.

<sup>38</sup> The range of interpretations is available in Csapo and Miller, *Origins* (n. 8, above) Part 1; and see n. 11 above.

<sup>39</sup> Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb* (n. 4, above) 132-34; Csapo and Slater, *Drama* (n. 35, above) 99-100; and D. Wiles, 'Aristotle's *Poetics* and ancient dramatic theory', in *The Cambridge companion to Greek and Roman theatre*, ed. M. McDonald and J. M. Walton (Cambridge 2007) 102.

<sup>40</sup> *Drama* (n. 35, above) 91; and also Amyx, *Corinthian* (n. 34, above) 651. Though see J. R. Green, 'Let's hear it for the fat man', in Csapo and Miller (n. 8, above) 98-99, who disagrees.

<sup>41</sup> London 1867.5-8.860; Amyx, *Corinthian* (n. 34, above) 234, no. 1.



Fig. 1. Corinthian column-krater. London, British Museum 1867.5-8.860. Return of Hephaistos. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum.

and arguably no two are the same.<sup>42</sup> Two dancers decorating a small aryballos in London are among the least attractive, but surely most informative of the known examples.<sup>43</sup> The figure on the left beds both knees with feet and legs held together, and thrusts his chest forward, while stretching both arms a totally unbelievable 180 degrees behind him. His friend on the right, however, reaches forward with both arms, balances on one foot, while kicking slightly back with his other mal-formed one. Both figures have large, exaggerated buttocks, and it is difficult to judge if this is the result of costuming, artistic imagination, or incompetence. Another, slightly more elucidating version appears on a Corinthian oinochoe in New York (c. 600) published recently by Ian McPhee, where one of the pair of confronting dancers raises a lame foot, and both performers demonstrate credible poses and gestures.<sup>44</sup> A more well-known and often cited scene is found on the lower frieze of

<sup>42</sup> Seeberg, *Komos* (n. 11, above) 104, lists 39 vases as showing komasts with 'twisted' or 'mishappen' feet.

<sup>43</sup> British Museum 65.7-20.14; Seeberg, *Komos* (n. 11, above) no. 174, pl. 5c.

<sup>44</sup> 'Classical pottery from Corinth: the A. D. Trendall memorial lecture 2003', *BICS* 47 (2004) 1-21, at 17, fig. 13 (Metropolitan Museum 1976.223).



Fig. 2. Corinthian alabastron. Paris, Louvre S 1104. Detail of komast with 'bandaged' foot. Photograph: Reunion des musées nationaux.

an alabastron in Paris of similar date (Fig. 2), where two komasts are engaged in either a dance or a struggle, or some combination of both.<sup>45</sup> One grabs the leg of the other, perhaps to assist in balancing the noticeably lame foot, but it bears reminding that leg-grabbing and fighting are not uncommon activities for such revellers.<sup>46</sup> The back-turned foot on this figure has been assumed to be attached artificially, described by Trendall and Webster as 'bandaged'.<sup>47</sup> However, the fussy incision at the ankle is used on other figures, such as the animals, on this same vase. It is further remarkable that the lame foot itself terminates from a unusually thin and puny leg, especially considering the normally athletic build of the male komast in early black-figure vase-painting. That being said, according to Seeberg, figures such as these are 'scarcely true to life' and 'either the painters imagined the

<sup>45</sup> Louvre S 1104; Amyx, *Corinthian* (n. 34, above) 110, no. 2; P. Ghiron-Bistagne, *Recherches sur les acteurs dans la Grèce antique* (Paris 1976) 248-49, figs. 97-100.

<sup>46</sup> See Seeberg, *Komos* (n. 11, above) 105, for 'kicking' and other forms of aggressive behaviour.

<sup>47</sup> Trendall and Webster, *Illustrations* (n. 3, above) I, 3.





Fig. 3. Corinthian cup. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1968.1835. Multi-figure komast scene with lame dancer.

cripples or else lameness was simulated as part of the dance. In choosing between the two, it should be noted that there is evidence which can be taken to mean that the crippled feet are artificial'.<sup>48</sup> The lame-footed dancers of Corinthian vase-painting may also be squeezed more discreetly into large group compositions, as evident on the exterior of a cup in the Ashmolean Museum (Fig. 3).<sup>49</sup> In this scene the single lame-footed dancer is joined by several other male revellers, some who drink, others who engage in explicit homosexual activities. By contrast, the odd Corinthian lame-footer is a solo-performer, as seen on the interior of a plate assigned to the Painter of the Copenhagen Sphinxes (Fig. 4).<sup>50</sup> The painter of a mastos inserts a few more details, enabling us to get a better idea of performance setting.<sup>51</sup> A komast with a back-turned foot is given pride of place at the centre of the composition as he reaches with his oinochoe towards an elegant krater, no doubt already full of wine. His mate on the other side likewise holds a drinking-horn, the vessel familiar from the more mythical examples already mentioned, and he situates himself on a curiously up-turned foot. Meanwhile, a dancing pair to the right executes familiar and regular steps and gestures. In fact several of the figures are slapping their bottoms with one hand, an action commonly associated with komast dancers from every part of Archaic Greece.<sup>52</sup> The presence of the krater in this scene places our dancers, both lame-footed and not, squarely into the location of the symposium, and recalls Hephaistos in his briefly lived Homeric role as wine-server. Might the pair of lame-footed dancers be impersonators of the divine Hephaistos, humbly serving wine to less-lame friends? Might

<sup>48</sup> 'Hephaistos' (n. 37, above) 75.

<sup>49</sup> Oxford 1968.1835; Seeberg, *Komos* (n. 11, above) 212<sup>bis</sup>; and Amyx, *Corinthian* (n. 34, above) 199, no. 2 (related to the Taranto Painter; Middle Corinthian).

<sup>50</sup> Copenhagen, National Museum 1631; Amyx, *Corinthian* (n. 34, above) 170, no. 2, and pl. 2b.

<sup>51</sup> Paris, Louvre E 740; T. J. Smith, 'Dancing spaces and dining places: archaic komasts at the symposion', in *Periplous: papers on classical art and archaeology presented to Sir John Boardman*, ed. G. R. Tsetskhladze, A. J. N. W. Prag and A. M. Snodgrass (London 2000) 311, fig. 1; and see Seeberg, *Komos* (n. 11, above) 38, no. 205, who describes 'two (each with a deformed foot) flanking a krater on a stand'.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, 'Dancing spaces' (previous n.) 309.



Fig. 4. Corinthian plate. Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark 1631, Department of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities. Lame komast as solo-performer.

scenes such as these be early visions of comic parody via Greek art? Are the lame-footed dancers actually ‘*hephaistoi*’ (literally Hephaistos’s), who in iconography, if not in private performance, mimic the deformity of the easily identifiable, effortlessly imitated lame-footed god? Such a suggestion stands in complete contrast to the words of Tom Carpenter, who has stated emphatically: ‘the significance of these figures is not clear, but surely they are not “hephaistoi!”’.<sup>53</sup> Regardless of any possible play-acting, there is one feature common to each and every scene where a lame-footed dancer is present. Neither the lame-footed god Hephaistos, nor the god of wine and drama, Dionysos, is anywhere to be found. If we were once in the imagined mythological setting of a journey from Lemnos to Olympos, we are now most certainly present among mortal revellers at a late night drinking party.

<sup>53</sup> Carpenter, *Dionysian* (n. 24, above) 16.





Fig. 5. Athenian skyphos. Athens, National Museum 22609. Pair of komast dancers, one lame. Attributed to the manner of the KX Painter. Photograph: Maria Pipili, with permission of the National Museum of Athens.

Looking for evidence beyond Corinth, we must ask what becomes of the lame-footed dancer and his companions in the other regions of Greece. The evidence on vases outside Corinthian painting is far less, and as suggested earlier, may be more indicative of the spread of the black-figure technique than of the occurrence of any accompanying dance, cult, or myth. Athenian vase-painters produce hundreds of scenes of revelling, and, as noted previously, the komast dancers most often function in no discernable context. An early Athenian painter of the subject, known as the KX Painter (or an artist working in his manner), situates a pair of male dancers, both bearded and beardless, on either side of a skyphos, a stemless drinking cup.<sup>54</sup> The pair on one side makes no bodily contact, and one seems to be in the midst of a bottom slapping routine. His friend opposite, however, grabs hold of his own leg with one hand, an action highly unusual, if not unique to this scene. On the other side of the same vase (Fig. 5), the reveller on the right quite clearly slaps his bottom with one hand while reaching towards his partner with the other. His fellow dancer leans back and supports his weight on what is obviously meant to represent a debilitating lame foot, while his other foot is oddly elongated.

The lame-footed dancer is found in several varieties on the black-figure vases of Boeotia. Yet again, the regional artist manipulates the komast figures to fulfil local needs, and the '*hephaistoi*' prove no exception. As in Corinth, the lame dancer may form part of a larger group, kicking his funny foot high in the air; and on at least one known Boeotian vase a solo nude dancer proudly revels with not one, but two lame feet (Fig. 6).<sup>55</sup> A

<sup>54</sup> Athens, National Museum 22609; *CVA Athens* 4 (4) pl. 4.3-4.

<sup>55</sup> St. Petersburg, Hermitage Museum 3134; V. Suslov ed., *The State Hermitage Museum: masterpieces from the museum's collection* (London 1994) 222-23, figs. 190a-b, a lekanis by the Protome Painter.

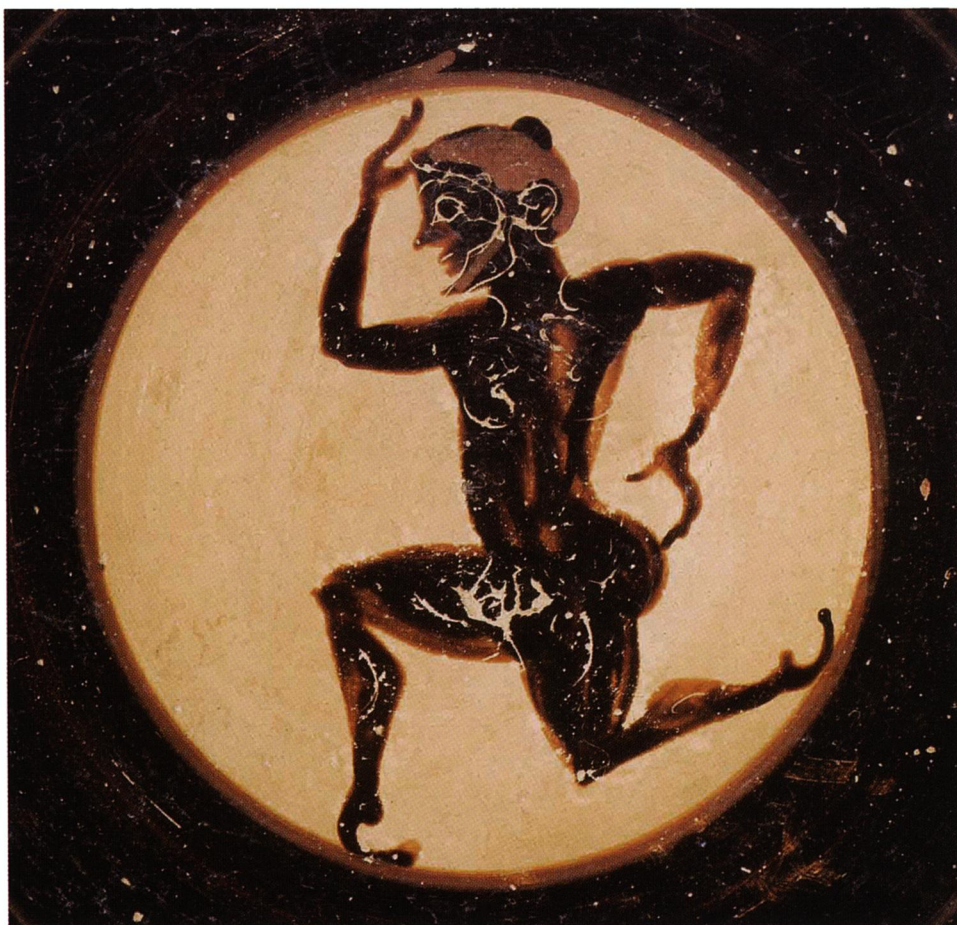


Fig. 6. Boeotian lekanis, from Olbia. St Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum 3134. Dancer with two lame feet. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum.

kantharos from Rhitsona dated c. 580-570 BC also displays a lively lame reveller, who kicks his extremely deformed foot towards his friend, who pauses from the fun to vomit.<sup>56</sup> The lame dancer, along with several others in the scene, wears a type of buttock attachment, suggesting he might be in costume; also unusual in this regard, is the grotesquely phallic (though not padded) komast who dances behind the lame one. Undoubtedly, the most interesting of the extant Boeotian vases is a slightly later skyphos in Thebes Museum, with a miniature komast scene on one side and the Return of Hephaistos on the other.<sup>57</sup> Beginning with the Return, we immediately recognize

<sup>56</sup> Thebes Museum 86.274; V. Sabetai, *CVA* 6 (1) pl. 2.1-4, and 16: 'his toe twisted or deformed as if crippled'.

<sup>57</sup> Thebes Museum 31.187, from Rhitsona; *CVA* 6 (1) pl. 10.1-4, 11.1-3 (details). Sabetai, *CVA* 6 (1) 23, expresses some doubt about the lameness of the figure, the identification of Hephaistos (as opposed to Dionysos), and the certainty of a Return scene.



Fig. 7. Laconian cup interior. Taranto, Archaeological Museum 20909. Detail of dancer with back-turned feet and *kentron*? Attributed to the Rider Painter. Drawing: D. Weiss, after P. Pelagatti, *ASAtene* 33-34 (1955-56), 36-39, fig. 37.

Hephaistos, who nearly slips off his mount as he reaches for a drink from the wine-laden reveller behind him. Another mortal participant to the front, also burdened by a wineskin tied to his back, forces even the animal to imbibe. Both the males and the mule have the by now familiar erect phalloi, and this painter even invites women. The other side of the skyphos is difficult to discern, but equally as interesting. An orgy of komastic activity is well underway, as we witness both heterosexual and homosexual love-making. Garments hang on the wall behind several figures, another indicator of the sympotic setting, and at least one reveller plays pipes to accompany the party. Inconspicuously, one of the male komasts near the centre of the frieze penetrates a female from behind, and quite clearly supports himself on a recognizably lame foot. This combination of elements – the Return, the komasts, the symposion, and the erotic – is by no means unique to this little vessel; they in fact prove crucial to our growing visual analysis.

In Laconian art the evidence for lame-footed dancers is less obvious and less certain. Laconian vase-painters prefer the stemmed cup, decorated on the interior, rather than the exterior, and there are perhaps as many as 50 known examples of komos iconography decorating the shape.<sup>58</sup> The Laconia painters, however, confront the challenge of filling the round space with a pleasing composition, and with somewhat mixed results. On a Laconian

<sup>58</sup> Komos and symposion scenes are collected in M. Pipili, *Laconian iconography of the sixth century BC* (Oxford 1987) 118-19; and see C. M. Stibbe, *Lakonische Vasenmaler des sechsten Jahrhunderts v.Chr. Supplement* (Mainz 2004) for additions.



cup attributed to the Rider Painter, the figures are separated into three distinct decorated zones.<sup>59</sup> The top features a symposion, dominated by a large lyre-player; at the centre is a decorative animal frieze; and below we confront a row of rowdy revellers. The figures are easily identifiable by their dress and attributes, including the short red chitons which expose their buttocks, the pipes played by one, and a large mixing krater at the centre. The komast (Fig. 7) who discreetly catches our attention is awkwardly squeezed in at the far left of the komast scene. He leans back and, in a most uncomfortable manner, would seem to have both feet turned backwards. In addition, his attribute recalls the goad (*kentron*) carried by Hephaistos or sometimes by another figure in scenes of the Return, including the Corinthian krater in the British Museum (Fig. 1) discussed previously. The story of the Return was certainly known to Laconian vase-painters, and may be identified on the interior of a well-known cup in Rhodes of c. 560, attributed to the manner of the Boreads Painter.<sup>60</sup> We should further note Herakles and the lion, again in a highly localized version, decorating the other half of the same cup tondo. In the Return scene, however, Hephaistos is perched side-saddle on an ithyphallic donkey, with his feet turned up and facing opposite direction. He thrusts his drinking-horn in the direction of a nude and bearded man, who holds up a heavy wine-skin perhaps in need of a top up. The male with the wine-skin is thought by Pipili to be Dionysos, perhaps because the god is essential to the story.<sup>61</sup> However, it is very uncertain whether Dionysos is portrayed here, and Brommer in fact long ago declared the figure a follower of the god, such as a satyr, rather than the god himself.<sup>62</sup> Although commonly shown in Archaic Greek art as a mature, i.e. bearded, adult, the god of wine is not normally nude. In a few early Athenian black-figure scenes Dionysos is the ‘bringer-of-wine’, but as we have noted among Return scenes, it is actually komasts or satyrs who do the heavy lifting.<sup>63</sup> The bearded, nude male seen here may be nobody other than a regular reveller of the type sometimes included in the vase-painter’s version of the story. Be they full or partial nudes in Laconian vase-painting, komasts are always capable of taking a drink or serving one whenever needed.<sup>64</sup>

Finally, outside the Greek mainland, there is a single possible representation of a lame-footed komast dancer. The komast in question decorates a fragmentary chalice, potted and painted on the East Greek island of Chios, and would have featured on the cup’s exterior (Fig. 8).<sup>65</sup> As in other Chian black-figure scenes, the dancers are wearing turbans on their heads, wreaths or garlands across their chests, and seem to have a padded attachment on their buttocks. It should be added that, based on the extant evidence, East Greek komasts

<sup>59</sup> Taranto 20909; Pipili, *Laconian* (previous n.) 118, no. 198.

<sup>60</sup> Rhodes, Archaeological Museum 10711; Pipili, *Laconian* (n. 58, above) 116, no. 149, and fig. 77.

<sup>61</sup> Pipili, *Laconian* (n. 58, above) 53.

<sup>62</sup> F. Brommer, ‘Die Rückführung des Hephaistos’, *JDAI* 52 (1937) 198–217, at 199. See also Carpenter, *Dionysian* (n. 24, above) 18–19, who argues on purely iconographic grounds against Dionysos.

<sup>63</sup> Carpenter, *Art and myth* (n. 14, above) 1–12, for the deity’s role as such in scenes of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis.

<sup>64</sup> Pipili, *Laconian* (n. 58, above) 74–75, on their general appearance in Laconian art.

<sup>65</sup> Chios, Archaeological Museum, from Kato Phana; Lemos, *Chios* (n. 9, above) 325, no. 1485, pl. 194.9.

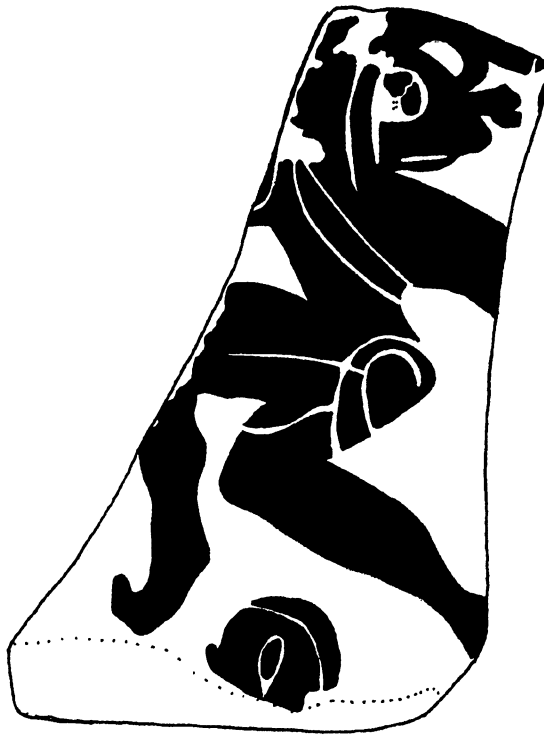


Fig. 8. Fragment of Chian chalice, from Kato Phana. Chios, Archaeological Museum. Dancer with upturned foot. Drawing: D. Weiss, after photograph provided by A. Lemos.

are far more modest than their mainland counterparts. Their genitals are never shown, none is ithyphallic, and they are not the least bit interested in overt sexual display. In fact, the komast dancers of Chios are a fairly monotonous bunch, who hold no attributes of song or drink, and gather in no particular setting.<sup>66</sup> That being said, there are several unusual aspects to this particular dancer. He throws his head back and his arms apart. It is not obvious that he slaps his bottom, though many Chian komasts do. Furthermore, the toes on one of his feet are turned upwards, and we are immediately reminded of a similar figure on the Corinthian mastos mentioned above. Although some figures in East Greek art do wear boots with pointed toes, it is not obvious this figure wears anything on his feet.<sup>67</sup>

What, if anything, does this brief regional survey suggest about the komasts, their dance, and their relationship with the god Hephaistos? Although the illustrations of revellers with funny feet are few, they are informative. The earlier and fuller narrative scenes of the Return, such as one decorating the Corinthian krater in the British Museum (Fig. 1), include komast-type figures as members of the processional journey to Olympos. These rather ambiguous scenes combine the mythological and mortal realms in a manner

<sup>66</sup> Lemos, *Chios* (n. 9, above) 169-73.

<sup>67</sup> Lemos, *Chios* (n. 9, above) 96-98.

fairly unusual for komast imagery. In fact such juxtaposition of myth and reality occurs in only one other series of komast vases, and those are attributed to a single Athenian artist: the Amasis Painter.<sup>68</sup> Such scenes, dated to the middle years of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, are thought to belong to a time of increased interest in Dionysian imagery, perhaps a direct result of the reorganization of the City Dionysia.<sup>69</sup> Regarding the Corinthian vases, however, we have recognized that it is far more regular to invoke the Return story by omitting the gods altogether and, instead, incorporating the standard male dancing figure of black-figure painting and the attribute of lameness otherwise uniquely associated with a single Olympian divinity. The Return story is reduced to its one or two most vital visual elements. More important than the ithyphallic mule, the processional composition, or even the main characters Dionysos and Hephaistos, is the lameness – repeatedly shown by painters as a curled back foot, or two feet facing opposite directions – and the consumption of wine – manifest in the form of drinking vessels or a mixing-bowl added to the scene, or by virtue of the sympotic shapes chosen for decoration (cups, kraters, oinochoai). Without the lameness, the cause of the whole mess in the first place, and the wine, the ultimate solution to the problem, there would be no story at all. As the black-figure technique and its requisite imagery spreads to other areas of Greece, those few lame-footed revellers, our ‘*hephaistoi*’, seem to have travelled along with it. That vital combination of lameness and wine continues to be chosen, and is explicit in the examples from Boeotia and Laconia. Quantity is also an issue here. Komast vases, such as those attributed to the KY Painter, were made in great numbers.<sup>70</sup> The highly conventionalized black-figure technique, with its flat, two-dimensional profile figures, allows very little space for artistic imagination, and certainly creates a challenge for the painter attempting to bring life or emotion to his subject. Dance and motion must have been especially difficult to portray. As a result dance poses become somewhat codified – bottom-slapping, front kicks, back kicks, head tapping etc., as do compositions – dancers form pairs, solos, or even chorus lines. The lame dancer is one of a variety of komast figures, particularly in Corinth, who prefers play-acting (leap frog, leg-pulling, stealing wine) to that boring and predictable just plain dancing. At the same time, a simple dancing scene is quicker and easier to paint than a profound narrative with multiple figures, and it soon becomes preferable for most painters. At Corinth, it is reasonable to assume a mythic, cultic, or poetic connection, or perhaps even a political one where lame-footed revellers took the stage.<sup>71</sup> It is not necessarily the case that outside Corinth, at Athens or Chios, the same associations were prevalent. The lame-footed dancer may simply have been one dancer of many, his relevant myth one tale of many.

At the same time, in order fully to understand the meaning of our lame-footed dancers, regardless of region, we must ultimately consider what appears to be the context of their

<sup>68</sup> C. Isler-Kerényi, *Dionysos nella Grecia arcaica: il contributo della immagini* (Pisa/Rome 2001) 135-38; Carpenter, *Dionysian* (n. 24, above) 44-46.

<sup>69</sup> H. A. Shapiro, *Art and cult under the tyrants in Athens* (Mainz 1989) 85-87.

<sup>70</sup> See Brijder, *Komast cups I* (n. 7, above) 73-76.

<sup>71</sup> T. B. L. Webster, ‘Some thoughts on the pre-history of Greek drama’, *BICS* 5 (1958) 43-48; Seeberg, ‘Hephaistos’ (n. 37, above) 105-07; and Hedreen, ‘Hephaistos’ (n. 5, above) 38-45, who argues against literary origins.

revels. The symposion is a performance venue associated with komasts in literature, as in art.<sup>72</sup> In the *Symposion* of Plato (228b [and 212c7]) the band of unruly komasts literally crashes the party.<sup>73</sup> Jan Bremmer has emphasized the connection: 'it was typical of Greek civilization that the occasions for laughter and mockery were not those of everyday life but those of conviviality and festivity'.<sup>74</sup> Vase iconography indicates the symposion room, the *andron*, in a number of komast scenes, by the presence of a krater for mixing wine, drinking cups held in the hands of participants or hanging on the wall, *klinai* for reclining, and of course other varieties of entertainment, such as music or prostitutes. In 6<sup>th</sup> century Athens, the *andron* would have been the chosen space for private performers, both male and female, before a small audience of aristocratic males. When komasts join a symposion, be it as invited guests or totally unwelcome ones, whether their dancers are impromptu or well-planned, they are arguably setting the stage for acts to come. The performance culture of Archaic Greece inhabits both public and private spheres – those of the festival and of the symposion; and to some extent, komast dancers may be recognized in both (though here we are mainly concerned with the latter). These two dancing stages will merge – *i.e.* private performance will give way to public – when Classical drama becomes formalized, with Dionysos at the helm in his dual guise as god of wine and god of theatre. Public performance will persevere and there will long be room for a comic drama which pokes fun at those same aristocratic-sympotic types. Meanwhile, our komasts, be they padded, nude or otherwise clothed, accompanied by pipes or lyre, be they bottom-slapping or clapping, joined by women, dogs, or others belong securely to the proto-dramatic world – and one ideally suited to their unique variety of fat-bellied revelry. Other occasional manifestations of their demeanour that foreshadow formal drama, and thus evoke a Dionysian connection, would include the possible wearing or carrying of a mask, play-acting or pantomime, cross-dressing or other forms of disguise, and choreographed dance movement. In the vast majority of cases, however, we should imagine first and foremost a simple reveller, who likes his wine, at times even pours it for others, and supplies spontaneous comic relief or uncouth entertainment, reminiscent in every way of the buffoonery of Hephaistos in *Iliad* Book 1. In this light, the dancers of this time and these places should be distanced from those rather more serious suggestions of cult proceedings, or rehearsed dramatic presentations, where they may have taken part. If anything, as we have seen, they prefer to parody the gods and their myths, not to honour them.

### *Dance, Drama, and Disability*

Whilst we have been able to make the connection between the lame Hephaistos and the komast dancers, via the Return myth, the vases, and the symposion, still we must ask an obvious question: why lame-footed dancers? Is their lameness nothing more than a simple part of the act, and thus a form of costume or disguise? Certainly, we have witnessed how

<sup>72</sup> Smith, 'Dancing spaces' (n. 51, above) for iconography; and Pütz, *Symposion and Komos* (n. 4, above) for text.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Xen., *Symp.* 1.11; and see B. Fehr, 'Entertainers at the *symposion*: the *akletoi* in the archaic period', in Murray, *Sympotica* (n. 18, above) 187-91, who elaborates on this.

<sup>74</sup> 'Jokes, jokers and jokebooks in ancient Greek culture', in *A cultural history of humour*, ed. J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (Oxford 1997) 11-28, at 13, and also 12; and Bowie, 'Thinking with drinking' (n. 20, above) 4-11.

easily the Hephaistos story fits a familiar characterization of komastic behaviour as well as their preferred sympotic circumstances. The *Komastai* or *Hephaistos* of Epicharmos' title – let us imagine an actor and his chorus enacting the Return myth – are envisioned by earlier vase-painters as *komastai* or '*hephaistoi*', revellers in their elevated, though hardly revered divine role. But might their lameness say something more to the ancient viewer of dance as well as the ancient consumer of vases?

The disabled entertainer was more than a simple vase-painter's fiction. There is ample evidence from both Greek and Roman sources that individuals suffering from various physical deformities or disabilities, among them clubfoot, dwarfism, and hunchback, were hired to entertain at private gatherings.<sup>75</sup> The ancient attitude to such individuals is one of playfulness, ridicule, and laughter, rather than one of sympathy or pity. Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, claims: 'the ridiculous is a species of the ugly' (5, 1449b); while Cicero spouts: 'in deformity and disfigurement there is good material for making jokes' (*De oratore* 2.239).<sup>76</sup> Indeed, 'deriding the disabled' was an acceptable practice, and one that far post-dates Graeco-Roman antiquity. It was the stuff of humour, the fodder of good jokes.<sup>77</sup> We have commented previously on the types of skilled professions available to the disabled, to which must be added the entertainment realm, welcoming them as singers, dancers, clowns, and acrobats. If the gods laugh openly at the affliction of one of their own, then surely humans are allowed the same such privilege. Even the ordinary komast figure, whose physical features and/or raucous antics are far distant from the Classical ideal, fits the bill. Komast dancers are not dwarfs, but painters do sometimes give them distorted characteristics and unkind anatomy.<sup>78</sup> In this regard, they sustain a notable visual affinity with pygmies, satyrs, and monkeys in contemporary Greek art. Collectively, they are a well-documented category of 'other', and by no means the only one.<sup>79</sup>

### *From Komastai to Kabeiroi*

The story of komast dancers and the lame deity Hephaistos does not end with the few vases presented here. A number of iconographic successors are visible on a variety of Athenian black- and red-figure vases, as well as some non-Athenian ones. For example, an alleged Etrusco-Corinthian olpe dated to the early 6<sup>th</sup> century (Fig. 9) portrays a pair of lightly armed males each mounted side-saddle and proudly displaying a pair of lame feet; the painter has either missed the point altogether, combines artistic licence with a little down-home flavour, or represents a pair of komast-riders.<sup>80</sup> Likewise, the running, or

<sup>75</sup> Garland, *Beholder* (n. 16, above) 33-34, 114; V. Dasen, *Dwarfs in ancient Egypt and Greece* (Oxford 1993) 230-33.

<sup>76</sup> Both after Garland, *Beholder* (n. 16, above) 74-78.

<sup>77</sup> See Garland, *Beholder* (n. 16, above) 83-86; and Bremmer, 'Jokes' (n. 74, above) 12-16, on buffoons.

<sup>78</sup> Dasen, *Dwarfs* (n. 75, above) 234-42; and V. Dasen, 'Squatting komasts and scarab-beetles', in Tsatskheladze, *Periplous* (n. 51, above) 89-97.

<sup>79</sup> See the very useful discussion of B. A. Sparkes, 'Small world: pygmies and co.', in Rutter and Sparkes, *Word and image* (n. 2) 79-98; and also N. Vlahogiannis, "'Curing" disability', in *Health in antiquity*, ed. H. King (London 2005) 180-91, at 181-84, 190.

<sup>80</sup> Princeton University Art Museum y1987-29; *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 47, no. 1 (1988) 46. Museum records indicate the pair might be the Dioskouroi, but this is not obvious. For the side-saddle

more likely dancing, ithyphallic satyr on an Etruscan black-figure neck-amphora displays what may only be described as a pair of lame hooves!<sup>81</sup> Some Athenian vases tend to combine several known visual elements or a melange of details familiar from both the Return myth and from other komast scenes. Such is the case on the interior of a black-figure cup belonging to the middle of the century or later, where we find an abbreviated image of the Return, complete with satyrs and maenads dancing before an enthroned Dionysos, and at least one satyr straddling an ithyphallic mule.<sup>82</sup> In the central tondo, however, are two mortal revellers who gesticulate on either side of a courting homosexual couple. Though no couches or kraters are present, it is actually the dog who suggests the setting is a symposion.<sup>83</sup> Typically, the painter has totally separated the mortal and mythological worlds, the norm for komast imagery throughout much of the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>84</sup> A related image decorates the exterior of a slightly earlier dinos of c. 560 now in Paris, where the Return of Hephaistos is more obvious by the presence of the regular suspects.<sup>85</sup> As becomes standard, satyrs accompany the divine entourage, and might even be said to lead it. Bringing up the rear is a group of fully human dancers, whose *komarchos* has a funny mask-like face. It is surely relevant that the painter has again separated the mythological followers of Dionysos, the satyrs, from the revellers. Also of note is the symposion, including recliners on couches, food, female musicians, and dogs, and the fact that each of these figures has been partitioned from the satyrs as well. With these two Athenian vases we have strayed far from those original Return scenes back in Corinth, as well as from the individual lame-footed revellers produced throughout Greece. These scenes lack in some sense the simplicity of others, and instead hit us squarely over the head with komastic associations. By contrast, on some later Athenian black figure vases (c. 540-530 onward) and on a number of red-figure ones, Hephaistos undergoes both a change of attributes and a change of company. The setting is pure mythology, the iconography less ambiguous. The lame-god's wine-cups will be replaced by the tools of his trade, on some vase he will even wear a lowly worker's hat, and satyrs will come back

posture of Hephaistos, and his mount, see M. J. Padgett, 'The stable hands of Dionysos: satyrs and donkeys as symbols of social marginalization in Attic vase painting', in Cohen, *Classical ideal* (n. 13, above) 49-59, esp. 56 n. 46. For komast-riders see C. Bron et al., 'Hephaistos bacchant ou le cavalier comaste: simulation de raisonnement qualitatif par la langue informatique LISP', *Annali archeologia e storia antica* 11 (1989) 155-72; and Lemos, *Chios* (n. 9, above) 313, no. 1324, pl. 171.

<sup>81</sup> Winchester College, attributed by Beazley to the Orvieto Group; *CVA Great Britain* 19, pl. 14.66.

<sup>82</sup> Private collection (formerly Spencer-Churchill); K. Schauenburg, 'Zu attisch-schwarzfigurigen Schalen mit Innenfriesen', in *Studien zur griechischen Vasenmalerei*. Beiheft zur Halbjahresschrift Antike Kunst 7 (Bern 1970) 45, no. 21, pl. 15.3. Cf. C. Bérard et al., *La cité des images* (Lausanne/Paris 1984) 134-35, fig. 188 (Würzburg HA 166a).

<sup>83</sup> P. Schmitt-Pantel, *La cité au banquet: histoire des repas publics dans les cités grecques* (Rome 1992) 18, and see, e.g., fig. 21 (Tarquinia RC 6823). The presence of dogs may also evoke the hunt; A. Schnapp, 'Eros en chasse', in Bérard, *Cité des images* (previous n.) 67-83.

<sup>84</sup> Such is the case on Nikosthenic amphorae; see e.g. V. Tosto, *The Black-figure pottery signed 'nikosthenese-poiesen'* (Amsterdam 1999) 66-67, and pl. 100, no. 28 (Cleveland, Museum of Art 74.10).

<sup>85</sup> Louvre E 876; Schmitt-Pantel, *Cité au banquet* (n. 83, above) 569, no. 18; and C. Bérard, *Cité des images* (n. 82, above) 132, fig. 187a-c.



Fig. 9. Etrusco-Corinthian oinochoe. Princeton University Art Museum y1987-29. Lame-footed riders. Photograph: Princeton University Art Museum, Museum purchase, Classical Purchase Fund.



into favour full-stop, replacing the human revellers.<sup>86</sup> The very latest depictions on vases, where Dionysos and Hephaistos are each walking and thus no participant is riding, have interestingly been associated with staged drama, such as satyr-play.<sup>87</sup>

The komast dancers' most obvious successors in vase-painting are another set of grotesque, pot-bellied figures known as 'Kabeiroi', dating primarily from the later 5<sup>th</sup> century. These minor Greek divinities are most often associated with the Boeotian skyphoi from Thebes, the site where a good number have been discovered.<sup>88</sup> Their iconography quite obviously caricatures myth and parodies well-known stories. The combination of myth and humour often prevalent in the scenes recalls the earliest black-figure images of the Return, as well as a number of red-figure depictions of supposed satyr-plays. Their iconography and their special mystery cult are suggestive of strong Dionysian associations, and many of the Kabeiroi with their fat bellies and large genitals bear an uncanny resemblance to the komast figures of the previous century. In addition, they may themselves be dancers, as indicated by the postures, gestures, and exaggerated anatomy of some.<sup>89</sup> Interestingly, the Kabeiroi were worshipped elsewhere in Greece, not least of all on the island of Lemnos, the site of the famous fall of Hephaistos. Various sources 'allude to their short stature' or dwarfism, their skill at the forge, and their close association with Hephaistos.<sup>90</sup> It has even been suggested that the name – Kabeiroi – derives from the Indian god *Kubera* (Sanskrit for 'ill-shaped one'), a male figure at times portrayed as a pot-bellied dwarf.<sup>91</sup>

It is hoped that the current survey of lame-footed *komastai*, though brief, has added a new dimension to the ongoing discussion of 'padded dancers' and their significance. Their imagery lives on in only one known modern example, a bookmark-cum-advert for Oxbow books (Fig. 10), inspired by Corinthian vase-painting – a curiosity more at home in reception studies than of direct relevance here. Where the ancient komast figures are concerned, may it be said that the search for dramatic origins has beckoned us too far ahead and too far afield. The direct evidence relating their iconography to early Greek theatre is not vast, but it is worth documenting in its own right. We might also conclude that it is not simply costume that best relates komasts to comedy, as Webster suggested, but rather their behaviour and the

<sup>86</sup> Brommer, *Hephaistos* (n. 26, above) 12-16; *LIMC* IV, 'Hephaistos', nos. 153-66. See also Padgett, 'Stable hands' (n. 80, above) 53-54.

<sup>87</sup> Brommer, *Hephaistos* (n. 26, above) 14 n. 14. Cf. D. Ogden, *The crooked kings of ancient Greece* (London 1997) 36-37, and n. 30 (*phlyakes*).

<sup>88</sup> *CVA* Thebes 1 (6) 25-26; and on the setting see S. Schachter, 'Evolutions of a mystery cult: the Theban Kabeiroi', in *Greek mysteries: the archaeology and ritual of ancient Greek secret cults*, ed. M. B. Cosmopoulos (London 2003) 112-42, at 128-32.

<sup>89</sup> Blakely, *Myth* (n. 17, above) 46-47 nn. 80-84, for a list of 'padded Kabeiroi' and dancing ones.

<sup>90</sup> Dasen, *Dwarfs* (n. 75, above) 194-96, and 198-99 for their connection to the Return. See also Burkert, *Religion* (n. 14, above) 281-85; and Blakely, *Myth* (n. 17, above) 38-54, esp. 44-46 for their relationship to Hephaistos, Dionysos and performances.

<sup>91</sup> Dasen, *Dwarfs* (n. 75, above) 195. For the type see P. Chandra, *The sculpture of India 3000 BC-1300 AD* (Washington DC 1985) 58-59, no. 12 (early 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD).



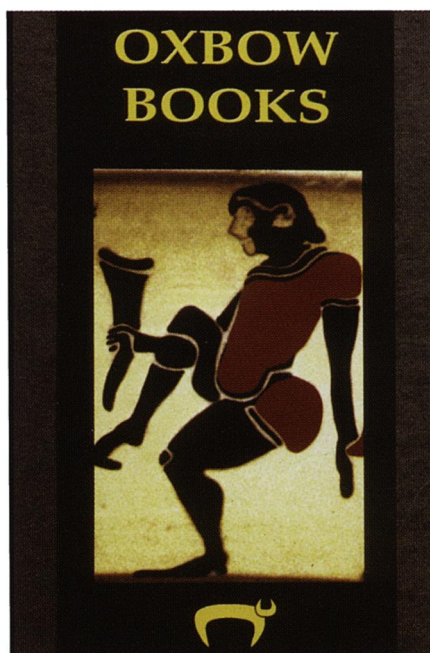


Fig. 10. Bookmark, Oxbow Books. c. 2000 AD. Photograph: the author, reproduced courtesy of David Brown Book Co.

circumstances of their revels. As for the lame-footed dancers and their lame god Hephaistos, it seems safe to suggest that, when considered together, they maintain more in common with the Homeric than the Classical, with the epic than the dramatic. Komast figures, be they padded or nude, disappear from vase-painting altogether by the later years of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, only to be replaced in Athenian art by satyrs and early comic choruses, as posited more than once by J. R. Green.<sup>92</sup> Though tragedy rather than comedy so often capitalizes on mythological themes, David Wiles has recently remarked that ‘through its mockery and parody, comedy educated the mass Athenian audience, helping to produce even more sophisticated viewers of tragedy’.<sup>93</sup> At the end of the day, however, it is neither the comic nor the tragic that may make a laughing stock of us all. From ballet to modern dance, gymnastics to *Cirque de Soleil*, the feet of some professionals, with proper training and practice, actually can be contorted into a ‘*hephaistoi*’ position. Dare we recognize the lame-footed revellers of antiquity for such talent and skill, which they may well have demonstrated in reality completely unaided by attachments or costumes?

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#### ABBREVIATION

*LIMC: Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*

<sup>92</sup> E.g. ‘Art and theatre in the ancient world’, in McDonald and Walton, *Greek and Roman theatre* (n. 39, above) 163-83, at 165.

<sup>93</sup> Wiles, ‘Aristotle’s *Poetics*’ (n. 39, above) 95.