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A "Mortar" Dance

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—Note

## A "MORTAR" DANCE

Lillian B. Lawler, Hunter College

AMONG THE LESS noble forms of the Greek dance is one called variously *igde*, *igdis*, or *igdisma*. Pollux says in one passage (x, 103) that it is a *schema*, or figure; in another (iv, 101), that it is a "lascivious form of dance." Athenaeus (xiv, 629F) lists it among "funny" dances—*geloiai orcheseis*. Pollux (iv, 101) adds to his statement the fact that it involves rotation of the hips. Both Athenaeus and Pollux couple it with such lewd dances as the *maktrismos* and the *apokinós*. Antiphanes (see Pollux x, 103) implies that it was performed to the music of the flute. The author of the *Etymologicum Magnum* (pp. 464, 49-52) explains *igde* as "a mortar, in which we mix seasonings," and adds, ". . . and there is also a form of dance, *igdismata*, in which they used to rotate the hips in the manner of a pestle." Suidas defines *igde* as "a mortar," and *igdisma* as *lygisma*, that is, "writhing, twisting." Hesychius explains *igdis* as "mortar." In addition, he has an obscure gloss, *igden:arsen*, which has been emended to *igden:orchesim*—"a dance."

It is interesting that etymologically the names applied to this dance do not denote a pestle, as we might expect, but rather a mortar. The noun *igdisma* goes back to a hypothetical \**igdiso*, "grind, pound," which Boisacq (s.v. *igdis*) and Walde-Hoffmann (s.v.

*ico*) connect with Latin *ico*, "beat, strike." A mortar, of course, is a vessel in which something is ground, or beaten, or both.

From the names given to the dance, I believe that it must have included both a rotation of the hips, the movement which reminded the Greeks of the stirring of a pestle, and also an occasional sharp jerk, suggestive of pounding. This would differentiate it from other dances and *schemata* which involved similar hip movements—for instance, the *maktrismos*, *apokinós*, *aposeisis*, *rhiḱnousthai*, etc. It was certainly a lewd performance, and was not, as some modern students of the dance have stated naively, a "folk dance" based on the "work rhythms" of pounding food in a mortar.

Oddly enough, we have an exact parallel both to the dance and to its name, in the modern theater. On the burlesque stage, rotations of the hips, I am told, are called "grinds," and sudden jerks of the body are known technically as "bumps"! Rhythmical "grinds" and "bumps," I am informed reliably, make up the typical dance of that estimable branch of our American theater. The ancient "mortar dance," be it said, was probably of about the same social standing as its modern counterpart!

—Current Events

## OKLAHOMA LATINIST HONORED

A PROMINENT Oklahoma writer, Mrs. Zoe A. Tilghman, received the Olympian Council medal, an award for excellence in Latin, which was presented to her by the Latin club of Central State College. This medal distinguishes her as the outstanding Latin major who graduated from Central in July 1947.

To be eligible for this honor, a student must have taken at least 34 hours of Latin with no grade lower than "B." Mrs. Tilghman has studied five years of Latin, two of Greek and one of French.

She is listed in the *Handbook of Oklahoma*

*Writers* by Marable and Boylan, and she is recognized by her list of published books which include: *The Dugout*, prose tales, an historic background in 1926; *Prairie Wind*, poetry; *Outlaw Days*, a short book history for Oklahoma; *Quanah, the Eagle of the Comanches*, the life of Quanah Parker, the chief of the Comanches.

The medal was presented in general assembly of the college by Dr. Jessie D. Newby (Mrs. Louis B. Ray), chairman of the Latin department and sponsor of the Olympian Council.