THE MODERN CRYPTOGRAPHER, pondering long and earnestly over an intercepted message in code, has much in common with the students of the Greek dance, laboriously seeking to decipher for his contemporaries the brief and sometimes completely baffling "messages" of his ancient sources.

One such "message" from antiquity concerns a dance figure called by the Greeks xylou paralepsis. Pollux (vi, 105), with his customary assumption that his readers know what he is talking about, merely mentions the figure among others of the tragic dance. Athenaeus (xiv, 629 f) includes it in a list of dance figures one of which he documents from comedy, and another of which is known to have characterized the satyr play. Hesychius, frequently useful in matters of dance terminology, is silent on xylou paralepsis. Renaissance writers are hardly more helpful than their predecessors in the matter. Musonius does not mention the figure. Meursius (Orchestra, s.v.) lists it with tragic figures, and translates it "ligni adsumptionis." Scaliger (De Comediet Tragodia, 1523 F) names the figure in a series: "Et xylou paralepsis, cum tollere quippiam volebant." Later (1524 D) he voices his suspicion that even the ancient writers did not know what the figure was like.

Modern scholars seldom treat of the figure beyond a mere mention, or a sentence or two of description. Weege, for example, says that the "Hölzerreifen" was a dance of mimetic character, but that it is scarcely more than a name to us. Latte likewise says that we do not know what it was, but he believes that it was a figure common to the whole of the chorus participated. Grünert thought that the xylou mentioned in Delian inscriptions might have something to do with xylou paralepsis in the dance; but his conjecture has not been generally accepted, perhaps because scholars prefer to see in xylou a reference to fuel for the altars. Vulliet says the figure was performed with a club in the hand of the dancer. Wright calls it "Touch-wood." Gulick, in his translation of Athenaeus (Harvard University Press, 1930-37), vi, 399 and note k, says that this figure is "quite unknown;" but on the analogy of Aristo- tophanes, Acharnians 25 and Wasps 90, and schol., where xylon, modified by proton, denotes the front row of seats in the theater, translates the Greek words "grabbung the front seat." He gives as an alternative interpretation "hanging on the stick," and even suggests a possible eman- dation of paralepsis to prolepseis.

In view of the obscurity surrounding the figure, it might seem presumptuous to attempt to clarify it further. However, a close examination of some of the literary, linguistic, and archaeological evidence available, but not yet adduced, might possibly be helpful.

From the language of Pollux and Athenaeus, we may safely assume that our figure was a dramatic one. If that is so, indubitable traces of the figure should appear in extant dramas. We can not be sure whether it was confined to the dancing of the chorus, or whether it was found also in the gestures of an actor, for gesture, cheironomia, was regarded in Greek times as a very real phase of dancing. Accordingly, we may consider both as possibilities.

For the moment, let us turn to ling- guistic evidence. Exactly what could xylou paralepsis mean? The word xylon, of course, means "wood," in many senses, or, by extension, things made of wood. Perhaps most distinctive of all its meanings, and one common in Greek drama, is "club," "staff," "cudgel." The word paralepsis, coming from lambano, can imply either an active "taking" or a pas- sive "receiving." It often denotes "making use of." The various forms of para- lambano are used to denote "take," "seize," or "use." By an odd coincidence, the simple verb, lambano, provides us with a significance parallel to our phrase. In describing the xylkopemia, a form of execution in the Roman army, Polybius (vi, 37, 2) says of the presiding officer, "laboro xylon—taking a cudgel." I believe, then, that xylou paralepsis as a dance figure signifies a gesture of "using a club" (or staff) for mimetic enactment of beating or threatened violence.

Are there in extant Greek plays many characters or chorals types who would naturally have the opportunity to "use a club or staff? Obviously there are, in great numbers, if a real staff is involved. Included among them would be all persons who carry a club or staff as part of their conventional costume—all old men, blind men, weas, wise men, priests, heralds, messengers, suppliants, beggars, shepherds, paedagogi, doctors, generals, poets, baccchants, dignitaries of the state, and even certain deities—an impressive array, indeed. Kings with their scepters, Heracles with his club, even ordinary Greek citizens with walking sticks, might fall into this category. It would be difficult to imagine a Greek play of any of the three genres which would not have in it at least one of the types mentioned. For a character or chorutes actually bear- ing a staff or club in his hand to brand- ish it for a mimetic blow during the action of a play would be entirely normal. A mimetic blow with an imaginary staff,
of course, could occur with any type of character or chorus. But is there any extant Greek drama much opportunity for the staging of a mimetic beating? Oddly enough, Greek drama is amazingly rich in scenes of violence or threatened violence. One has but to recall the Suppliantes, the Eumenides, and the lost Bassae of Aeschylus, the Oedipus Coloneus and Ajax of Sophocles, the Heracleidae and Iphigenia at Aulis, of Euripides, and the Rhesus, to be assured of this fact. Other instances will immediately come to mind. In the account of a messenger, where the action was minded during the telling, and in a choral passage, where the real or imaginary brandishing of the club would be rhythmical, the beating would be obviously dancing. But we must not forget that it was the gestures of the dramatic actors, especially in tragedy, and not those of the chorus, which developed into the pantomimic dances of the Graeco-Roman period.

The satyr play probably made use of the beating motif frequently and with gusto. Hints of this may be gathered from the Cyclopes, the Iphigenae, and fragments of the Sylenus, the Hecale, the Fight on the Ships, etc.; and the hints seem to be borne out by the fact that innumerable vase paintings showing Bactrian routes include the figures of satyrs and Maenads swinging thyrsi lustily against fellow revelers.

In Old Comedy, beating and threatening are very common motifs. In fact, beating with a staff is listed in Clouds 541-542 among the stock plots of comedy. One recalls the famous basoan of Frogs 605-673, and other basoan in Acharnians, Thesephoriae, and Knights. In the Lysistrata (350-387) there are fights between men and women, in the course of which the weapon is called xylon (357). In the Wasps there is spirited fighting: cf. especially line 458 "Strike them with your stick (xylon) ." In a choral passage (1325-1328) of the Birds, the chorae suggest that Peisistratus sit up his servant, "beating him like this;" quite evidently, while singing they enact a beating, using their wings instead of weapons! Elsewhere the play abounds in beatings.

The beating motif, then, seems to be present in Greek tragedy, satyr play, and comedy. That it persisted into the pantomime of late Greek times—indeed to the days of Justinian—is attested by the Homeric epics. Theophrastus' text: "When beaten or struck over the head" (in the pantomime) "she used to improve a jest and start laughing." Beating and fighting dances were by no means uncommon in the classical period. We have, for instance, a specific record of a dance called konostikhe, which Pollux (iv, 100) says made use of fighting (mocher) and blows (plegas). In Xenophon (Anabasis vi, 8) there is an account of the karpzia, a mimetic dance in which a man sowing his field is accosted by a robber; he fights, and the veteran (sometimes the sower, sometimes the robber) binds his adversary. The kosmos, or revel dance, occasionally made use of blows (Scaliger, De Com. et Trag. 1533 D). In an ancient dance at Delos the performers were women (Callimachus Del. 321; Hychius, s. v. Deliakos kosmos) or struck the altar with whips (Schol. Callimach. Del. 321). The various armed dances (kolabriamos, enoplion, polemike, prylis, tellaises, etc., and, of course, the Pyrrhic), while having some elements in common with the dances just mentioned, really form a group apart.

In like manner, dances accompanied by the beating of two sticks, or by the beating of a stick against another immovable object, to mark the rhythm, form a separate genre. In all of these dances, however, a gesture identical with our xylou paralepis certainly appeared at one time or another.

Peoples in all parts of the world, ancient and modern, have made use of ceremonial beating, to induce fertility, to stimulate the magic powers of life, and to ward off evil; and the Greeks were no exception to the rule. Passanemas (vii, 15, 2-3) tells us of a ritual to Demeter Kidaria at Pheneus in Arcadia, in which the priest, wearing a wooden mask, beat the ground with rods, presumably to arouse it to fertility. The statue of Pan was beaten with sticks by the shepherds of Arcadia (Theocr. vi, 104), perhaps to stimulate the powers of the deity. (We are reminded, of course, of the Lupercalia beatings in Rome.) Cuts and blows in the air with clubs were used to dispose of evil spirits. The pharmakos was beaten ceremonially with sticks, to flute-music, in order that the sin, evil, or famine magically put upon him by the worshippers might be expelled from the community. It is possible, then, that the beating and threatening motif in Greek tragedy and in the accompanying dance may be the ultimate descendant of ceremonial rhythmic floggings of great antiquity, designed to stimulate the powers of life and fertility, and to ward off evil. Whether the tragedy originated in the ceremonies at tombs, as a few scholars maintain, or in rituals to Dionysus as fertility divinity, the more commonly accepted theory, such rhythmic floggings would be eminently appropriate to it in its early phases (cf. British Museum B 80, an archaic patera upon which the figures of two men with clubs appear in what seems definitely a connotation of early tragedy) ; and refinement of the flogging to a gesture or dance scheme would represent a normal development in Athenian tragedy.

The ceremonial beatings of boys in the ritual of Artemis Orthia at Sparta have been much discussed. Orthia was certainly a divinity of fertility, and the formal scourging of boys at her altar may have been purely a fertility charm, similar to the beating of the earth at Pheneus. The numerous terracotta masks found in the shrine of Orthia at Sparta are especially interesting, in view of the ritual at Pheneus. Some scholars think they represent wooden originals. Interests among the finds in the sanctuary are lead figurines of both male and female types, carrying clubs. However, there is another, and perhaps far more ancient, ritual of beating in the Orthia cult at Sparta—the ceremonial punishment of thefts of food or drink from sacred spots (Xenophon, Rep.)
The performances are illustrated on a famous performance is seen by scholars on a seventh-century Corinthian aryballos in the British Museum (A 1437). Another representation of the deikelistai were burlesques of an extant Greek comedy (e.g., in Knights 54-57, 97-101, 417-426, 822; Frogs 549-578, 860, 79 where the taking away of food from Heracles is listed among stock themes of comedy: Peace 739-751: Epicharmus, fr. 239, Kaibel; etc.). It appears also in the satyr play—cf. Cyclops 228-229, and the fragments of the Syleus of Euripides (Nauck). Theft in general is very common in Greek comedy, and it has some ritualistic importance as well. It may be significant to note that the statue of Artemis Orthia was reputed to have been the one stolen by Creates and Iphigenia from the land of the Taurians.

I believe, then, that beating motifs played an important part in the dramas of tragedy, of the satyr play, and of comedy. I believe that the dramatic beating dance stems from two primitive ancestors—one a dance of the fertility-apotropaic type, the other a dance connected with ritual theft.

(Note: I am indebted to Professor B. L. Ullman, of the University of Chicago, who checked material on Callimachus scholia for me, and made some helpful suggestions in that connection.)

BOOK NOTES

Note—Books reviewed here are not sold by the American Classical League. Persons interested in them should communicate directly with the publishers. Only books already published, and only books which have been sent in specifically for review are mentioned in this department.


This document is one of a series of reports prepared by college and university representatives of various subject matter fields and published by the U. S. Office of Education, which office, however, "does not assume responsibility for statements contained therein." The members of the committee which prepared this report are: George D. Hadziyas, University of Pennsylvania; Walter R. Agard, University of Wisconsin; Mason Hammond, Harvard University; Casper J. Kraemer, New York University; and Louis E. Lord, Oberlin College.

The report consists of a Foreword, Part I ("Linguistic Study") and Part II ("Study of Classical Civilizations." and a "Conclusion"). The authors of the report, while freely admitting the value of most of the other subjects commonly found in college curricula, insist that Greek and Latin should not be placed "on an outer periphery, highly respected cultural studies . . . but . . . thought of as essential, now, in a collegiate education that is being definitely subjected to war needs." (Part I, p. 3).

A majority of the committee affirms its belief that "one year of beginner's Latin should be established without delay as a required subject" for all students who enter college with no or little acquaintance with the language (Part I, p. 3). The reasons given for this recommendation are: (1) the disciplinary value of Latin and (2) its transfer value for the study of other languages, including English.

The committee also recommends the establishment, upon a required basis, of two year courses which would deal with various phases of Greek and Roman civilization. The committee insists that such courses are needed in these days of war even more than in days of peace because (1) "a permanent understanding of and successful relations with Italy and Greece are unthinkable without a genuine knowledge on our part . . . of their civilization" (Part II, p. 1) and (2) "our own Western civilization has been so largely molded by the traditions of Greece and Rome that a knowledge of that inheritance becomes an absolutely essential part in the education of all college students for a proper understanding of our own past, present, and indeed future" (Part II, p. 2).

In defense of the seeming illiberality of requiring these two types of course, the committee says (Part II, p. 3): "War imposes sternest necessities upon us than peace, . . . and the only way to bring them (these courses) as a dominating force into the lives of all our college students is to make them obligatory instead of leaving their selection to whims and fancies: . . . the neglect of these two highly historical factors in human civilization will leave our student body an essentially uneducated population."

In the text and footnotes of this brief manifesto the committee has passed a lot of good ammunition to beleagured teachers of the classics all over the country.

L. C. W.


Random House has given us in this volume simply a lovely picture-book, with just enough text to quicken literary memories. There are fifty well reproduced photographs, each occupying a whole page; facing each is a brief quota-

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