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IX.—"Limewood" Cinesias and the Dithyrambic Dance

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In the *Aves* of Aristophanes, in one of the many episodes in which various persons come from the earth to Cloudcuckooborough to ask for wings, the dithyrambic poet Cinesias presents himself, and is welcomed by Peisthetaerus as "limewood (*philyrinos*) Cinesias" (1378). The epithet has been the subject of much discussion, over the years. It is the purpose of this paper to shed a little further light upon it if possible, and also upon certain other ancient references to the poet; and, in the process, to clarify somewhat the nature of the dithyrambic dance as it was performed and directed by Cinesias.

The poet Cinesias is known to us chiefly from the abuse which he received at the hands of Aristophanes, of Lysias, and, to a lesser extent, of Plutarch and of Plato. The scholiasts on Aristophanes retail other low opinions held of him by his contemporaries. Taken together, the ancient indictments of the man are severe.

There is some contradictory evidence as to his native city and his ancestry; and indeed it has been said that there were two dithyrambic poets of the same name in Athens (Schol. Aristoph. *Av.* 1379). Generally discredited are the statements that the famous dithyrambist was a Theban (Schol. Aristoph. *Ran.* 153) and that his father was Evagoras (Plato Com. frag. 184 K). Scholars are inclined rather to believe that Cinesias was an Athenian, the son of Meles (Plato *Gorg.* 501E) and the grandson of Peisias (Schol. Aristoph. *Av.* 858, quoting Pherecrates, frag. 6 K), both citharoedi. Meles enjoys the dubious distinction of having been named (*ibidem*) the worst of all citharoedi. Cinesias seems to have inherited from his progenitors a preoccupation with music, song, and the dance. In his case this interest found its chief expression in the dithyramb. In the preceding century the choric dithyramb had been notable as one of the most dignified of the artistic forms of the Greeks; but in the hands of Pindar and others it had been developing, for some time, rather unconventional and less austere patterns of verse, music, and the dance (cf. Horace *Carm.* 4.2.10–12). As is often

the case with a man of limited talent, Cinesias grew impatient with time-honored forms, plunged wholeheartedly into the "new movement" in dithyrambic composition and performance, and evidently went to extremes in it. He seems to have endeavored to substitute freakishness for the genius which he lacked. Like his father before him, he is said to have "played to the galleries," and to have devoted his efforts to delighting the rabble, rather than to improving his art (Plato *Gorg.* 501E-502A).

To his contemporaries Aristophanes and Plato the philosopher, whose good taste we can trust, he was an unspeakably bad dithyrambist.[1] An unknown comic poet, reputedly Pherecrates, in his play *Cheiron* (ap. Pseudo-Plutarch *De mus.* 30.1141E; Pherecrates, frag. 145 K) presents Mousikê as complaining bitterly and at length of the "mutilations" she has received at the hands of various "new" poets and musicians, among them Cinesias. She speaks of him as "accursed," and deplores the "inharmonious twists" (ἐξαρμονίους καμπάς) of his music and poetry. In Cinesias' writing, she continues, καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς ἀσπίσιν, ἀρίστερ' αὐτοῦ φαίνεται τὰ δεξιά. The significance of this last remark is somewhat obscure. Some scholars take *aspisin* as denoting here a military formation; while others have taken it to mean shields used as mirrors, and have interpreted it as referring to a sort of "wrong way around" style of writing[2] — whatever this may mean. It may imply that Cinesias' work is a sort of horrible example of "what not to do" in the making of dithyrambs. Among later writers, Plutarch (*De glor. Athen.* 348B; cf. Ps.-Plut. *De mus.* 1141E) is outspoken in his low opinion of the dithyrambist.

Perhaps in retaliation against the writers of comedy who attacked him so mercilessly, Cinesias was instrumental in having the institution of the *choregia* taken away from comedy. As a result, he was dubbed *choroktonos.* The poet Strattis reviled him in a comedy apparently entitled *Kinesias.*[3] Later, we are told, Cinesias abandoned the dithyramb, became an informer, and amassed riches (Lysias, ap. Athenaeus 12.551E).[4]

[1] Plato *Gorg.* 501E; Ar. *Av.* 1372–1409; *Ran.* 153, 366, 1437; *Eccles.* 330; *Nub.* 332–3 and schol. *ad loc.;* frag. 149.

[2] Cf. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford 1927), 54, 60.

[3] Ath. 12.551D; schol. *Ran.* 404; Pollux 4.169; Harpocration, s.v. *"Kinêsias."*

[4] But see Maas, "Kinesias," *RE* Vol. 11, who discounts these statements. The Maas article assembles all the extant references to Cinesias.

The character of Cinesias, as well as his poetic style, aroused the animosity of his fellow Athenians. They were outraged by his bad morals and indecency, by his godlessness and impiety, by his lawlessness.[5] Lysias flayed Cinesias in two speeches (Harpocration, s.v. "*Kinesias*"), only fragments of which survive, in the twelfth book of Athenaeus. An anecdote which Plutarch tells twice (*Mor.* 22A and 170AB) reveals some crudity and bad taste on Cinesias' part. Anaxilas, a poet of Middle Comedy, apparently (the text is corrupt) spoke of him as having "the snout of a pig" (*Circe*, frag. 13 K, ap. Ath. 3.95B). Whether this was a commentary on his character, or on his appearance, or on his unclean and indecent habits, we can only conjecture.

Physically, Cinesias was, at least in the latter part of his life, both pathetic and repulsive. He is described as tall, sickly, sallow, thin to the point of emaciation, and mummy-like — so much so as to be a suitable envoy from the dithyrambic poets on earth to those among the shadowy dead![6] Athenaeus (12.551E), quoting Lysias, says he was *νοσώδης καὶ δεινὸς τἄλλα*. He was ulcerated, and apparently suffering from tuberculosis (Plato Com. frag. 184 K), to such an extent that he "died daily," in a manner that only his worst enemies could wish for him (Lysias frag. 53 Thalheim, ap. Ath. 12.552AB). Galen took a clinical interest in Cinesias, and quoted in detail the gruesome description of him given by the comic poet Plato (frag. 184 K; Galen, *Ad Hippocr. Aph.* 7.322):

> Μετὰ ταῦτα δὲ
> Εὐαγόρου παῖς ἐκ πλευρίτιδος Κινησίας
> σκελετός, ἄπυγος, καλάμινα σκέλη φορῶν,
> φθόης προφήτης, ἐσχάρας κεκαυμένος
> πλείστας ὑπ' Εὐρυφῶντος ἐν τῷ σώματι.

In the passage in the *Aves* of Aristophanes which we have been considering, and, in fact, in the line (1379) immediately following the one in which Cinesias is called *philyrinos*, occurs a reference which has aroused much speculation and some misunderstanding.

[5] Suidas, s.v. "*Kinêsias*"; Harpocration, s.v. "*Kinêsias*"; Ar. *Eccles.* 330 and schol. *ad loc.*; *Ran.* 366 and schol. *ad loc.*; Ath. 12.551–552B = Lysias frag. 53 Thalheim; *Paroem. gr. App.* 4.81.

[6] Ath. 12.551A, C–E; Ar. *Ran.* 1437 and schol. *ad loc.*; schol. *Av.* 1406; schol. *Eccles.* 330; schol. *Ran.* 153; frag. 149; Suidas, s.v. "*Pyrrhichais*"; Aelian, *VH* 10.6; Plato Com. frag. 184 K.

The line reads:

τί δεῦρο πόδα σὺ κυλλὸν ἀνὰ κύκλον κυκλεῖς ;

The scholiast and the Alexandrian grammarians (cf. Schol. *Av.* 1379; Pollux 4.188) deduced from this single line that Cinesias was lame in one foot. However, many modern scholars agree with Merry[7] that "there is probably some joke we do not understand in the question," and that there is in it "perhaps an allusion to *kyklikoi choroi*." The expression πόδα κυκλεῖν seems (narily to denote "walk 'round and 'round" (Eur. *Or.* 632).

I believe that we must consider in connection with this line the epithet *oknêros*, applied to Cinesias by the scholiast on *Ran.* 153 and by Suidas (s.v. "*Pyrrhichais*"), in comments which are obviously derived from the same source. In either case the word denotes a physical characteristic — cf. *to sôma* of the scholiast and *peri to sôma* of Suidas. Both writers also include in the same sentence mention of Cinesias' wasted, skeleton-like appearance. The word *oknêros* here probably means "hesitant"; but whether Cinesias' "hesitancy" is to be taken as due to timidity, or general weakness, or lameness, or indeed to some personal affectation, we are not informed. *A priori*, we should not expect it to be due to timidity, for all our ancient testimony stresses Cinesias' boldness, exhibitionism, and defiance of convention.

The comic poet Plato, I believe, clarifies our problem. In his highly unflattering description of Cinesias (frag. 184 K), as we recall, Plato represents him as καλάμινα σκέλη φορῶν. Cinesias' legs, then, when he is in motion, look as if they were "made of reeds" — in other words, are thin, weak, and "wobbly." Accordingly the dithyrambist, when moving about, would aptly be described as *oknêros*, "hesitant," or perhaps "shaky."

This brings us back to *philyrinos*. Various interpretations of the word have been offered, from antiquity to modern times. The most interesting of these is probably that of Athenaeus (12.551D) — that Cinesias was so tall and so thin that he habitually strapped a piece of limewood to his body for support![8] Others are to the

[7] W. W. Merry, *Aristophanes, The Birds* (Oxford 1904), Part II, 69; cf. Theodor Kock, *Ausgewaehlte Komoedien des Aristophanes* (Berlin 1876), Viertes Bändchen, *Die Vögel*, 210.

[8] Cf. similar ancient stories of unusual devices adopted by persons light in weight, as assembled by J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Aves* (Lugduni-Batavorum 1902) 211–2.

effect that the word emphasizes the sallowness or pallor of Cinesias; or his "lightness," in all senses;[9] or his deviation, both physical and spiritual, from that which is straight and upright; or that it denotes merely "as thin as a lath." The wood of the lime or linden tree is notably light and pliant. Accordingly, as applied to a human being, "limewood" must be essentially a synonym for "made of reeds." It seems to me that, in the light of the fragment of Plato Comicus, *philyrinos* in this connection must mean thin, weak, "wobbly," "shaky."[10]

Furthermore, the presence in Cinesias of a physical condition such as Plato describes, together with a characteristic desire on Aristophanes' part to exaggerate, and to pun on *kyklon* and *kykleis*, could account amply for the *poda kyllon* of line 1379 of the *Aves*. In the absence of any specific evidence, we need not, I believe, assume that these words denote actual deformity or lameness. Nor need the singular, *poda*, necessarily limit the reference to one foot. Although the argument from silence is always a dangerous one, it seems significant that, unless Aristophanes, in this very line, be taken as an exception, no ancient author, not even Athenaeus or Galen, who are particularly concerned with the poet's infirmities, actually says that Cinesias was lame.

We have noted the supposition of Merry and others that Aristophanes is punning and is referring to the cyclic chorus in the passage in question. We are informed[11] that Cinesias devised and taught the dances with which the members of the chorus accompanied his verses. Such "dances," of course, would include steps, gestures, and choreography. Aristophanes is, as we know, a master of the double meaning and of innuendo. Accordingly, we must not rule out the possibility that the scene in the *Aves*, while referring directly to the movements of Cinesias as he sings dithyrambic lines on this particular occasion, may, as performed, actually have afforded a recognizable burlesque of the movements of the cyclic

[9] Cf. Kock, *op. cit.* (above, note 7) 210.

[10] Cf. van Leeuwen (above, note 8) 211 and note 4, who connects the epithet with Cinesias' "corporis tenuitas," and cites the Dutch expression "een papieren mannetje." The referee to whom the present article was submitted very kindly directs my attention to Herodotus 4.67, where *philyra* is used for the bark as well as the tree. He refers also to a gloss of Hesychius: φιλύρινον · ἀσθενές. It is interesting that Schmidt adds to this gloss the word ἔλαφρον of the following line, which is there obviously by mistake.

[11] Ar. *Ran.* 153 and schol. *ad loc.*; *Av.* 1403–4 and schol. *ad loc.*; Suidas, s.v. "*Pyrrhichais.*"

choruses which sang and danced his dithyrambs under his direction. Let us see, then, what is known or can be inferred about the nature of the dithyrambic dances of Cinesias.

The name of the characteristic dithyrambic dance was *tyrbasia* (Hesychius, s.v.; Pollux 4.105). This word is related to *tyrbê*, "disorder, confusion, tumult, revel." Undoubtedly the name became attached to the dithyrambic dance in early times, when the worship of Dionysus was more or less of a rout,[12] and continued to be used as a technical name, even after the nature of the dithyrambic performances had changed markedly. We have fragments of several actual dithyrambs of the classical period;[13] their rhythms suggest active and varied, yet dignified, dance movements. We have no sure specimens of Cinesias' verses; for it has been pointed out frequently that the high-flown lines which Aristophanes puts in his mouth in *Aves* 1372–1409 are a burlesque of Anacreon. However, we are told repeatedly (cf. Schol. Aristoph. *Ran.* 153; Suidas, s.v. "*Pyrrhichais*") that the dances accompanying Cinesias' dithyramb were vivacious, and were characterized by much movement.

The dances were performed to the flute, the traditional instrument for the cyclic choruses; but sometimes the cithara, and even tympana and other instruments,[14] were added by unconventional dithyrambists. The flutist customarily entered the orchestra with or behind the dancers, and stood among them (Schol. Aeschines, *In Timarch.* 10). The music was usually in the Phrygian mode,[15] and displayed the modulations and trills so characteristic of the flowery "new" dithyramb, with its varied meters.[16]

Also, the dances of the "new" dithyramb were highly mimetic, making use of gestures freely to interpret the poet's thought. There is some reason to believe that in the developed literary form of the dithyramb, just before the period of Pindar's alterations, the dancers in the cyclic chorus often danced with hands joined or enmeshed, as in the old "rope-carrying" dances. Elsewhere[17] I

[12] Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 2) 18–19, 49–50.

[13] *Ibid.*, 33–47.

[14] Cf. Pindar, *Thrasys Herakles*, fragment 61 in *Pindari Carmina cum Fragmentis*, edited by C. M. Bowra (Oxford 1935); Sir John Sandys, *The Odes of Pindar* (London and New York 1930) 558–560; Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 2) 36 and 61.

[15] Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 2) 17.

[16] Pseudo-Plut. *De mus.* 30.1141E; Ar. *Av.* 1374–1409; *Nub.* 331–9, 967–972.

[17] Lillian B. Lawler, "The Geranos Dance," *TAPA* 77 (1946) 112–130 and especially 129.

have pointed out that the famous *geranos* dance was probably originally a "snake-carrying" dance, and later a "rope-carrying" dance; that it became a dance performed by a line of dancers with hands joined or crossed; and that it had a profound influence on many other dances. Pindar's vexed *σχοινοτένεια ἀοιδὰ διθυράμβων*[18] is, in my opinion, very significant here. It should, I think, be given a somewhat more literal interpretation than is usually accorded to it. In olden days, the poet says, the "singing of the dithyramb crawled, drawing a rope," but in his day "new gates have been opened for the sacred cyclic choruses." This, it seems to me, could very well be a reference not so much to a long-drawn-out song, as many editors have interpreted it, but rather to the manner of performance of the song. Thus Pindar may be telling us that before his reforms in the dithyramb the dancers often used the old-fashioned formation with hands joined or enmeshed; but that in his day newer, freer dance forms were coming into the cyclic performances. In other words, it is entirely possible that Pindar and his associates in the "new" dithyramb may, among other things, have emancipated the cyclic dances from the closed or half-closed circle formation. This would, of course, have afforded the dancers much greater scope for freer, more independent movement and for mimetic gesture.

Have we any evidence as to what Cinesias' dithyrambic movements and gestures were like? The scene in the *Aves* of Aristophanes (1372–1409) in which he is ridiculed abounds in opportunities for extravagant "flying" gestures — a fact which may point to excessive arm-flapping in his cyclic dances. Also, I believe that a passage in the *Ranae* (146–153) is pertinent in this connection. There Heracles, preparing Dionysus for the horrors of the lower regions, tells him of a great slough, in which languish all sorts of criminals. Among them, says Heracles, would be such a man as would "copy out a speech from Morsimus," one of the lesser lights among the writers of tragedy; and Dionysus, improving upon his jest, adds also "whoever has learned the Pyrrhic dance of Cinesias" (153). All sorts of interpretations of this "Pyrrhic dance of Cinesias" have been offered — e.g., that Cinesias actually composed a Pyrrhic dance;[19] that he inserted a Pyrrhic dance into one of his

[18] *Thrasys Herakles* (above, note 14).

[19] Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 2) 61, note 1.

dithyrambs;[20] that he gestured violently, as if fighting an enemy, whenever he recited his own lines; that he used for his cyclic choruses music written for the Pyrrhic dance. The Pyrrhic was, at this time, an idealized "war" dance. Plato (*Leg.* 7.815A) gives a good description of it; it makes use, he says, of movements used by soldiers in avoiding missiles of all sorts, in throwing weapons, in shooting arrows, in striking blows with and without arms. Surely the poet's point in calling Cinesias' cyclic dance a "Pyrrhic" is that his dance is frequently too brisk, too active, too full of sharp, even contorted, gestures and postures, to be appropriate for the dignified dithyramb. There is an implication that the dance was exaggerated and forced, even to the point of absurdity. We may compare, perhaps, the artificial and inappropriate "pump-handle" gestures of amateur orators of the nineteenth century in our own country; or the efforts of some of the lesser exponents of the "modern dance" today, with their overly angular and contorted movements, which are often derided and burlesqued.

Scholars have speculated occasionally as to whether Cinesias did or did not take part in public performances of his dithyrambs. There is no direct testimony on either side of the question. However, dithyrambic poets from earliest times did often appear as leaders of their own choruses; and even when, in the days of Aristophanes, it was no longer taken for granted that they would do so, the poet frequently entered with the chorus and spoke a prologue, often long-winded and rambling, explanatory of the story to be told in the dithyramb.[21] He then withdrew, and the chorus sang and danced the dithyramb proper. If Cinesias was really as weak and unsteady on his legs as our sources indicate, he probably did not actually dance with his chorus. However, he undoubtedly did appear in prologues to his dithyrambs. In accompaniment to these prologues, as to most verse that was recited or sung, it was customary for the "singer" to make use of mimetic movements of the hands and arms, or symbolic gestures and postures (Plato, *Leg.* 7.816A; cf. Ath. 14.628E). This was regarded as "dancing," in the larger sense of the word. In all probability, many of the characteristics of the choral dances which Cinesias taught to the members of his chorus would appear also in his own rendition of his prologues.

[20] Crusius, "Dithyrambos," *RE* 5.1217.

[21] Plato, *Rep.* 3.394C; Arist. *Rhet.* 3.1409A.25–B.24; cf. schol. on Ar. *Nub.* 596.

We have noted the possibility of double meanings in Aristophanes' comments on Cinesias. As it happens, there were in the Greek dance various movements and figures to which the adjective *philyrinos* might well be applied. There is, e.g., the figure called variously *lygisma*, *lygismos*, *lygizein*, or *lygistikon*. All of these words are derived from *lygos*, which denotes a pliant twig of any sort, and especially a willow twig. The figure is associated by the lexicographers with *igdê* or *igdisma* (*Et. Mag.* 464, 49–52; Suidas, s.v. "*igdisma*"), a lewd, writhing dance.[22] Evidently its various names mean "writhing, twisting, as a willow wand." It would fit in with the "Pyrrhic dance" metaphor of Aristophanes in its suggestion of swerving, twisting, dodging, to escape a blow; as actually used in reference to the dance, its implication is always of obscenity. In the *Vespae* of Aristophanes (1487), Philocleon makes use of this dance figure — until his vertebrae crack! The figure was used also in wrestling (Schol. *Vesp.* 1487). The descriptive adjective applied by the Greeks to dancers of these and similar figures, and also to the dancing itself, is *hygros*, "fluid," remniscent of our "slippery as an eel." Certainly Aristophanes' audience, hearing his epithet *philyrinos* applied to a teacher of dancing, would associate this whole group of dancing terms with it. The implication would be that the wobbly-legged Cinesias, indecent in his personal life and audacious in his handling of the sacred dithyramb, had cheapened the cyclic chorus with his new-fangled figures and gestures, which were not dignified, restrained, and appropriate, as in the older form of the dithyrambic dance, but often loose, free, and even wanton.[23]

It is possible that the choreography of Cinesias' dances, as well as their figures and gestures, was startlingly unusual and varied. Writers speak of his ἐξαρμονίους καμπάς, "inharmonious twists and turns," and in general use the verb *kamptô*, in referring to his verse, music, and dances[24] — as they sometimes do, indeed, of his emaciated body (Ath. 12.551D). In general, the movement in the cyclic dance must have been, as the name implies, in a circle.[25] Many

[22] Lillian B. Lawler, "A Mortar Dance," *CJ* 43 (1947) 34.

[23] The reader to whom this paper was referred points out other hints of obscenity in connection with *philyrinos:* the fact that in Herodotus 4.67 there is a presumption that the lime tree was sacred to Aphrodite; also, that Philyre was the name of an Athenian hetaera, as well as the title of a comedy by Ephippus (Ath. 7.286E; 13.586E).

[24] Pseudo-Plut. *De mus.* 30.1141E; cf. Ar. *Nub.* 333 and schol. *ad loc.;* 970–1.

[25] See Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 2) 48–9 and note 3, page 48.

scholars think that the circling may have been first from left to right on the strophe, then from right to left on the antistrophe, with interludes or epodes on which the dancers stood still. The much disputed scholion on Euripides' *Hecuba* 647 (p. 211 Dindorf) speaks of this type of movement as characteristic of the dance of tragedy; and the *Etymologicum Magnum* (690, 47) associates it with the lyric hyporcheme. Most scholars agree today that the scholiast is incorrect in ascribing such a dance pattern to tragedy; but many of them, among them Haigh,[26] have believed that it was the pattern of the circular dance of the dithyramb. (In a forthcoming study I expect to discuss the dance of the dithyramb in more detail.) Whether Cinesias' verse was or was not antistrophic, we do not know. Aristotle (*Probl.* 19.15.910B.18) says definitely that the new type of dithyramb was not antistrophic; but fragments of "new" dithyrambs by Pindar and others which have survived are written in strophes and antistrophes.[27] Aristotle, to be sure, may be referring to interpolated lyric solos, which were a feature of some of the "new" dithyrambs; or he may be speaking of a still later phase of the dithyramb. However that may be, Cinesias, in introducing his "inharmonious twists and turns," probably varied the dance line freely, and permitted the individual dancers to move with some independence, instead of as one harmonious whole. It is possible also that the movement of the dancers, instead of being a straightforward walk, may have shown variations — reversals of direction, perhaps, or some "hesitation" which reminded Aristophanes of Cinesias himself, and prompted the gibe in *Aves* 1378: *τί δεῦρο πόδα σὺ κυλλὸν ἀνὰ κύκλον κυκλεῖς;* This line, I believe, refers to both Cinesias and his dithyrambic dance, and means something like: "Why do you come here, shaking your shaky foot around and around in your twisted, crooked cyclic dance?" The pun is perhaps strengthened by the fact that *kampê*, applied often to the verse, music, and dance of Cinesias, can denote also a bend, crook, curve of a limb.[28] It is interesting also to note that sometimes *kyllos*, "crooked," has the same double meaning as its English equivalent. In Aristophanes, *Hip.* 1083, for instance, *κυλλὴ χείρ* is used in connection with a bribe.

[26] A. E. Haigh, *The Attic Theatre* (Oxford 1907) 315–6.
[27] Cf. Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 2) 37.
[28] Arist. *Hist. An.* 498A.25; 490A.31; Plato, *Tim.* 74A, B, E.

In some such way as this, then, by putting together odd bits of related information, we may acquire a general idea of Cinesias as a performer, choreographer, and teacher of the dance. His cyclic choruses, as displayed before the Athenian populace, must have furnished a sharp contrast not only with the traditional choric dithyramb, but also with the newer dithyrambs of Pindar and others — which were undoubtedly in far better taste. It was perhaps fortunate for Greek poetry and the Greek dance that Cinesias turned his attention from the dithyramb to other fields of endeavor.