ORXHSIS FOBERA
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ΟΡΧΗΣΙΣ ΦΟΒΕΡΑ

Hesychius gives us the name of a dance figure which is mentioned as such nowhere else in Greek literature, so far as I have been able to discover. The word is ποίφυγμα, and Hesychius glosses it merely as σχῆμα ὀρχηστικόν. Ensuing entries, however, are helpful: ποιφύξαι· ἐκφοβῆσαι. ποιφύξεις· ἐκφοβήσεις· καὶ τὸ φυσᾶν καὶ τὸ πνεῖν [ἐκ τοῦ] ποιφύσσειν. ποιφύσσει· φοβεῖ. Meursius (*Orchestra, s. v.* ποίφυγμα) reasonably concludes of the figure: "Videtur fuisse saltatio quaedam composita ad terrorem incutiendum, dicta ἀπὸ τοῦ ποιφύσσειν, quod est ἐκφοβεῖν." Wright [1] seems to speak of the figure as " The Squealer."

For further light upon this " terrifying " *schema* in the dance, one may turn to Pollux and Athenaeus. It has been well established [2] that, in matters concerning dancing, Pollux, Athenaeus, and Diogenianus (Hesychius) go back to a common source—a comparatively full treatment of the subject, no longer extant, which the three later writers condensed or excerpted, each in his own way. Neither Pollux nor Athenaeus mentions the ποίφυγμα; but in Pollux we find (IV, 103) : ὁ δὲ λέων ὀρχήσεως φοβερᾶς εἶδος. The lion dance, then, is *one form* of the " terrifying " dance. Athenaeus mentions the lion dance (XIV, 629 f), but says nothing of its terrifying aspect; in fact, he includes the dance among a group which he calls γελοῖαι! The problem, then, is this: What is a " terrifying " dance? Why is one form of it called ποίφυγμα? How can the lion dance be " terrifying " and " amusing " at the same time?

Let us return to Athenaeus for a moment. We find that his list of " amusing " dances includes the μορφασμός, the γλαύξ, and the λέων, merely named, in that order. A few lines later, after several other dances and figures have been mentioned, Athenaeus speaks of the σκώψ and the σκώπευμα—two other owl dances. He adds that the σκώψ is the dance figure of one shading the eyes with the hand, as if looking for something; and he quotes Aeschylus for σκώπευμα.

The corresponding passage in Pollux (IV, 103) contains men-

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[1] F. A. Wright, *The Arts in Greece* (London, 1923), p. 24.
[2] Kurt Latte, " De Saltationibus Graecorum Capita Quinque," *Religionsgesch. Versuche und Vorarbeiten*, XIII, 3 (1913), Caput I.

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tion of the μορφασμός, the σκώψ, and the λέων, in that order, but
with a sentence about each—to the effect that the μορφασμός is an
imitation of animals of all kinds; that the σκώψ is the same as the
σκωπίας, a form of dance imitating the owl as it twists its neck,
and tries to get away from its captors; and that the λέων is a
form of the " terrifying " dance.

The order is significant. Evidently the original source told
something of the μορφασμός, of several owl dances, and then of
the lion dance; and it may have added other " terrifying " dances
and figures, perhaps including the ποίφυγμα.

The word ποίφυγμα is from ποιφύσσω, a reduplicated, onomato-
poetic word denoting " puff, blow, snort." [3] Sophron wrote a
mime called " Puffing Passion "—Παιδικὰ Ποιφύξεις (Athenaeus
VII, 324 f). The verb is used of the blowing of the breath upon
a hot bowl (Lycophron, 198), and the noun of the wild snorting
of a group of excited people (Aeschylus, Septem, 281). Various
forms of the root are used to denote the whistling of the winds.
It is used of the hissing of serpents (Nicander, Theriaca, 180,
371), and of the roaring of the sea against the figurehead of a
ship (Anth. Pal., VII, 215).

Evidently, then, ποίφυγμα would seem to denote a snort, a hiss,
a roar, a loud cry of some sort. Its use in animal dances would
be obvious. Loud animal cries always startled the ancients;
witness, e. g., the devastating effect of the trumpeting of war
elephants. Even more striking in this connection is the terror
inspired in battle by the use of " fluted muzzles " upon war
steeds, to amplify their breathing and snorting (Aeschylus,
Septem, 463-4; frag. 181 Loeb), and to give it the quality of the
piping of flutes. (The word ποίφυγμα is not used of this terrifying
sound, as it happens, but πνεῦμα is.) Further, I believe that in
the dance figure called ποίφυγμα a loud cry was probably asso-
ciated with a sudden lunge at the spectators; for such lunges and
cries are a feature of all primitive animal dances today—in
Africa, in the South Sea Islands, among the American Indians.

It will be noted that if this interpretation of ποίφυγμα is cor-
rect, the figure would be appropriate to the three dances bracketed
together in Athenaeus and Pollux—the μορφασμός, the animal

[3] Émile Boisacq, Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque
(Heidelberg and Paris, 1923), s. v.

dance in general; the owl dance; and the lion dance, which is specifically called " terrifying."

The owl dances are particularly interesting.[4] We recall that the owl is associated with things dark and mysterious and terrifying, and that the cry of some species is particularly blood-curdling. Also, the word γλαύξ is regarded by some linguists as a hypocoristic form of γλαυκῶπις, and is associated by them with γλαυκός. Hesychius glosses γλαυκή as φοβερά, γλαυκιόων as φοβερὸν βλέπων, and γλαυκῶπις as φοβερὰ ἐν τῷ ὁρᾶσθαι. Whether the etymological connection here is or is not correct, the owl, as seen at night, with its big eyes, can be very frightening; and a " terrifying " figure in an owl dance, in which the dancer uttered an unearthly cry and " flew " at the spectators, would be quite appropriate.

Lion dances are fairly uniform, the world over; and in all of them, roars and lunges at the spectators are practically inevitable (cf. the Lion's reassuring words to his public in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, Sc. 1). We recall that one of the satyr plays of Aeschylus was called *The Lion*; it may have dealt with Heracles and the lion of Nemea. Other satyr plays which made use of the Heracles story may have touched upon the Nemean episode. In all satyr plays there was dancing; and in Aeschylus' play, at least, there must have been some form of lion dance, probably in burlesque.

Animal dancers, as seen in primitive societies today, almost invariably perform with masks. Disguised in this way, the dancer strives to enter into the nature of the sacred animal which he is portraying. Incidentally, the mask lends anonymity to the dancer, and increases the terror inspired in the audience by his ferocious dance. When the African animal dancer, a strange and fearsome creature in his great mask, rushes at the spectators, roaring, they invariably retreat, with startled cries.

The Greek animal dances were probably done with masks, also; in the drama they were certainly so performed. In early times, animal dances were solemn rituals, and the terror they inspired must have been real. As time goes on, however, and a race becomes sophisticated, such dances always become sources of

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[4] Lillian B. Lawler, " The Dance of the Owl," *T. A. P. A.*, LXX (1939), pp. 482-502. Cf. *C. V. A.*, Robinson Coll., I, p. 57, Pl. xlviii.

amusement rather than of dread. One notes this fact particularly among the American Indians. They still watch with close attention the various animal dances of their tribe, and they still instinctively draw back as the dancer lunges and roars at them; but their cries are ejaculations of amusement as much as of alarm; and even the squeals of the children contain delight and excitement as well as fear.

In our own motion picture theaters a similar effect is sometimes produced by experimental " three-dimensional movies," in which balls that are apparently thrown straight at the spectator's eye, pieces of machinery that seem to poke at his nose, and animals that roar and leap out into the auditorium at him evoke screams of mingled anguish and amusement.

A dance figure involving lunging and a loud animal cry, then, can be γελοῖον and φοβερόν at the same time. I believe that we can with reasonable certainty restore such a figure in the animal dances of the Greeks, and identify it with what Hesychius calls ποίφυγμα.

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ARIDUM ARGENTUM IN PLAUTUS, *RUDENS* 726.

In the *Rudens*, when Daemones forbids the slave dealer, Labrax, to lay hands on the girls who have taken refuge at an altar, Labrax says: *tu, senex, si istas amas, huc arido argentost opus.* Obviously the phrase *aridum argentum* here means " sound money," but commentators from Nonius Marcellus [1] to Friedrich

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[1] Nonius Marcellus, p. 245 M.: *aridum: purum, lucidum. Plautus in Rudente* (726) : *argento arido.* Oscar Scofield Powers (*Studies in the Commercial Vocabulary of Early Latin* [Univ. of Chicago dissertation, 1940], pp. 56-57) cites also Pollux (VII, 98), who glosses ἄργυρος καθαρός with διαφανής, Ἀρυανδικός [cf. Herodotus, IV, 166], and Hesychius: διαφανές· λαμπρόν, διάπυρον. Powers also describes the tests by fire which make the application of διαφανής appropriate, it seems, to both silver and gold, since these metals are not subject to oxidation in the molten state. Perhaps *lucidus* as used by Nonius—a usage which has puzzled commentators—also refers primarily to the appearance of