



Pindar and Some Animal Dances

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## NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

### PINDAR AND SOME ANIMAL DANCES

In the tenth Pythian ode, written in 498 B.C., the youthful Pindar gives us, quite casually and not too specifically, certain information which is of significance for the history of the ancient dance; and some of the implications of that information have, I believe, not been noted.

In lines 29–30 (Loeb) of the ode there is the famous, perhaps proverbial, reference to the Hyperboreans: “Neither by ship nor on foot could you find the marvelous road to the trysting-place of the Hyperboreans.” This serves as a transition to a reminiscence of mythological times, when Perseus visited the Hyperboreans, found them sacrificing “far-renowned hecatombs of asses” to the god (apparently Apollo), and dined with them. “In their festal gatherings and hymns of praise Apollo especially rejoices,” Pindar continues, *γελᾷ θ’ ὀρῶν ὕβριν ὀρθίαν κνωδάλων* (ll. 34–36). He goes on to emphasize the importance of song and the dance in the lives of the Hyperboreans, mentioning particularly “choruses of maidens,” the music of the lyre and the flute, wreaths, and happy revelry.

Line 36 has called forth much discussion. Some scholars, following a hint of the scholiast on the passage, see in it a reference to the sacrificial asses, rearing on their hind legs and braying as they are being brought to the altar; but surely this evidence of resistance would be an omen too unfavorable for mention in connection with the “ever-happy” Hyperboreans, and one which would hardly move Apollo to laughter. (The tone of the lines is light and merry.) Others see in the passage an obscene reference to the conduct of these same victims. Crusius<sup>1</sup> would emend to *γελᾷ ὀρῶσ’ ὕβριν Ὀρθία κνωδάλων*, and interpret the line: “Artemis Orthia laughs as she sees the lively sacrificial animals leaping.” Zielinski<sup>2</sup> saw in the line a reference

to a dance and took *ὀρθίαν* as a metrical term, denoting a foot of five “times,” used here, he believed, in connection with a joyous but somewhat grotesque hyporcheme to Apollo. The word *κνωδάλων*, “monsters,” he regarded as purely metaphorical, a hit at the clumsiness of the dancers.

A. B. Cook, in “Animal Worship in the Mycenaean Age,”<sup>3</sup> an article which has in some details been rendered obsolete by later archeological discoveries but which in many respects is still significant, recognized a reference in the line to primitive dances by performers wearing animal masks and, possibly, skins. He believed that the dancers here represented the sacrificed asses and that they executed an “ass dance” which was also a “rope dance.” He used the line to interpret certain of the “monsters” or *daimones* portrayed in Minoan-Mycenaean art. Further, he discussed a vexed passage in Athenaeus (x. 424E), in which Theophrastus is quoted as mentioning dances “around the shrines of Delian Apollo,” performed by prominent Athenian citizens, wearing *ἱμάτια τῶν Θηραϊκῶν*. Following Casaubon, Cook emended *Θηραϊκῶν* to *θηριακῶν* and interpreted these dances to the Delian Apollo as “animal mummeries.” Later, in *Zeus*,<sup>4</sup> Cook called attention to the goat dances, ram dances, horse dances, etc., performed in prehistoric Greece to promote fertility—dances which “could attach themselves to the cult of any fertility power.”

The brevity of Pindar’s wording would seem to indicate a concept quite familiar to his readers—one that would require no particular explanation or elucidation. In the lines following (37–40), the singing and dancing of choruses of maidens, the music of lyre and flute, the garlands, are all typically Greek. The Hyperboreans are, in fact, throughout much of Greek literature spoken of as a sort of idealized

<sup>1</sup> Roscher, *Lex. Myth.* I, 2816.

<sup>2</sup> Th. Zielinski, “Apollon bei den Hyperborern,” *Rh. Mus.*, XXXVIII (1883), 625–27.

<sup>3</sup> *JHS*, XIV (1894), 81–169.

<sup>4</sup> *Zeus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914–40), I, 696–705; cf. II, 460–501.

race, a nation of super-Greeks, as it were. Their doings are frequently similar to those of the Greeks themselves, on an idealized plane. The natural inference would be that Pindar's inspiration for line 36, although the line refers to the activities of the half-mythical Hyperboreans, was a type of dance which Pindar's fellow-countrymen and contemporaries had seen in rituals to Apollo, probably all their lives, and would find understandable and plausible. In this connection we must not forget that Pindar himself later became a priest of Apollo.<sup>5</sup>

I believe that Cook was correct in interpreting line 36 in the tenth Pythian ode as a reference to animal dances, performed by "monsters upright"—i.e., by men wearing masks or skins. I do not believe, however, that they are necessarily "ass dances" or that they are "rope dances" at all. The case for the latter turns upon an erroneous deduction from a Mycenaean fresco. Since the theory of a "rope dance" in this connection has been pretty well refuted,<sup>6</sup> I shall not discuss it here. As for the "ass dances," they would be possible in this setting; for one function of the primitive animal dance is the laying of the ghost of slain animals. However, the word *κνωδάλων*, used of our hypothetical dancers, usually implies "monsters," animals unnatural in some respect (e.g., the word is used in Pindar *Nem.* 1. 50, of the two malignant serpents sent by Hera to kill the infant Heracles). To be sure, any dancers disguised as animals could be spoken of as "monsters."

The possibility of animal dances in a ritual to Apollo should not surprise us. It is well attested<sup>7</sup> that in the ritual at Delphi there was a mimetic portrayal of the slaying of the Python by Apollo—with a dancer or dancers, apparently, taking the part of the Python. Also, an inscription found at Minoa on the island of Amorgos (*IG*, XII, 1, 246) mentions dancers of the cordax in the cult of the Pythian Apollo—

<sup>5</sup> Cf. D. M. Robinson, *Pindar—a Poet of Eternal Ideas* ("The Johns Hopkins University Studies in Archaeology," No. 21 [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1936]), p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> M. P. Nilsson, *Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), pp. 324–30.

<sup>7</sup> Paris Schol. Clem. Alex., p. 92 (Klotz); cf. Plut. *Mor.* 417F.

and the cordax very probably developed out of primitive animal dances.<sup>8</sup> In the "Hyperborean" ritual to Apollo it would be entirely natural to find dancers masked as asses, or as other animals associated with Apollo as hunter-god, or god of the flocks, or "Master of Animals"—notably wolves, goats, stags, oxen, lambs, rams, hares, or even mice, but not horses, which were taboo in the cult of Apollo. It is possible that among the animals so represented was the mythical griffin. The lion-headed griffin, rampant, is frequently seen in representations on Minoan-Mycenaean walls, rings, and sealings, and some scholars, at least, have seen in these representations portrayals of masked dancers (Nilsson does not, however). Later, the rampant griffin came to be particularly associated in legend with the Hyperborean Apollo.<sup>9</sup> Its cult significance for at least one of the areas traditionally assigned to the Hyperboreans continued down into the fourth century, as is attested by a coin of Panticapaeum.<sup>10</sup>

Perhaps our reference, then, may be to a *χορός* of "animals" of several types—like the dances to Despoina, performed by animal-headed women dancers on the famous Lycosura drapery.<sup>11</sup>

Can we form any notion of the nature of the dance to which Pindar refers? Conjecture in this matter turns, in part, upon the interpretation of the word *ὑβριον*. This word, when applied to animals, does not necessarily carry the implication of "insolence" or of "lewdness." It, and words related to it (*ὑβρισμα*, *ὑβρίζω*, *ὑβριστής*), are used of spirited, restless, high-strung, or unruly horses (Plato *Phaedrus* 253E–254E; Herodotus i. 189; Xenophon *Cyr.* vii. 5. 62); excitable braying asses (Hdt. iv. 129); chafing bulls (Euripides *Bacch.* 743); captured elephants whose spirit is being broken (Aelian *NA* x. 10); a "wild" river (Aeschylus *Prom.*

<sup>8</sup> A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1927), pp. 244–53; Lillian B. Lawler, "Ἰχθύες Χορεύσασαι," *CP*, XXXVI (1941), 142–55.

<sup>9</sup> Lewis R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1896), IV, 313–15.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, Coin Pl. A, No. 20.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Normand, *Lycosure—second livre du corpus des monuments grecs* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 26–28.

717); "showy" garments (Xen. *Cyr.* ii. 4. 5); "proud" devices on a shield (Eurip. *Phoen.* 1111-12). Interestingly enough, the words are used also of plants, to denote luxuriance, uncontrolled growth, etc. (Theophrastus *C. pl.* iii. 15. 4; *HP* ii. 7. 6). The general idea seems to be a vigorous activity, free from restraint. Accordingly, I should translate our line, "and he laughs to see the spirited prancing of monsters, walking upright."

Several writers refer to the Greek dance known as the *μορφασμός* in connection with this line. It is true that in the days of Pollux (the second century after Christ) the *μορφασμός* had come to be "the imitation of all sorts of animals" (Poll. iv. 103); but it had formerly been, as its name implies, a dance in which one dancer portrayed many concepts, one after the other—an animal, a tree, water, fire, etc.<sup>12</sup> Whether still earlier, perhaps in Pindar's day, it denoted a choral masquerade, in which each dancer was costumed as, and portrayed the actions of, one animal we do not know; but from a consideration of the etymology of the word *μορφασμός* I should think it unlikely that it did. The Greek probably called such a choral dance by the name of the animals portrayed; "lion," "fox," "owl," etc., are well attested as the names of dances. Here we may compare the numerous comedies, the titles of which are the names of animals, and particularly *Γρύπες*, a play by Plato, the writer of Old Comedy. In the case of a choral dance by many different "animals," we might note the comedy of Crates, entitled *Θηρία*, with a chorus of "beasts."

That brings us to another point—the significance of the word *γελαῖ* in Pindar's line: Apollo *laughs* at the choral dance.

Among primitive peoples, animal dances are very important rituals. They are undertaken for a variety of purposes, all of them more or less vital to the community. Some of these purposes are: to worship a sacred animal; to appease a theriomorphic deity; to honor a totem, or animal ancestor of a clan; to secure communion with animal-gods; to invoke or win the support of a deity to whom the animal

in question is sacred; to lay the ghost of a slain animal; to ward off the evil eye; to influence the weather, which certain animals are believed to control; to secure to the dancer some characteristic of the animal imitated; to insure success in the hunt, by sympathetic magic; to induce fertility in the animal imitated, whether it be a domestic animal or an animal hunted as food; to induce fertility in man, by the imitation of a fertile animal; to avert possible injury or death which might be caused by the animal; to disguise rough revelry.

For the achievement of many of these purposes it is obvious that the dance must be performed in a solemn, ritualistic manner. For others, there is less need of solemnity; and the very nature of the dance produces riotous buffoonery (cf. our own word "horseplay"). Such uproarious dances serve incidentally as entertainment for the community, and supposedly for the gods also. There are, then, two forms of animal dance in primitive societies—the serious and the comic. Where both exist in the same community, they are usually distinguished with care, and sometimes the expression of mirth at the solemn dances is severely punished.

There is evidence that the primitive Greeks had a large number of animal dances of the serious type. Some survivals of these dances are found in the classical and even the post-classical periods. We know, for instance, that Athenian girls between the ages of five and ten performed a ceremonial bear dance to Artemis Brauronia, wearing saffron-colored robes which presumably symbolized a bearskin (Aristoph. *Lys.* 645 and schol.; Eurip. *Frag.* 767 [Nauck]; Suidas *s.v.* *ἄρκτος*; Harp., *s.v.* *ἀρκτεῦσαι*; Hesychius *s.v.* *Βραυρωνίαις*). Priests of Artemis Ephesia, in whose ritual there were dances, were called "king bees" (Suid. *s.v.* *ἑσσην*). Priestesses of Demeter and Persephone and women who had been initiated into the mysteries of Demeter were called "bees" (Schol. Pind. *Pyth.* 4. 106; Porph. *De antro nymph.* 18; Theocr. 15. 94 and schol.; Hesych. *s.v.* *μέλισσαι*). Apparently, priests in the Dionysiac mysteries were sometimes called "herders of the oxen" (*βουκόλοι*); and votaries in other cults were called "colts" (Hesych. *s.v.* *πωλία, πῶλος*). Per-

<sup>12</sup> Lillian B. Lawler, "Proteus Is a Dancer," *Class. Weekly*, XXXVI (1943), 116-17.

sons initiated into the mysteries of Mithras, in later ages, were called "lions," "lionesses," "crows," "griffins," "eagles," "hawks," etc., and wore masks representing the heads of animals (Porph. *De abstin.* iv. 16; Pseudo-Augustinus *Quaest. Vet. et Novi Test.* 114). Dances formed an integral part of all these rites. Porphyrius tells us (*De abstin.* iv. 16) that "the man undergoing the initiation" into these mysteries "puts on all sorts of forms of animals"—*περιτιθεται παντοδαπὰς ζώων μορφάς*. His words call to mind the dance to which we have already referred, the *μορφασμός*.

In the frenzied dances to Dionysus, also, some of the women dancers wore the *νεβρίς*, or fawn skin, originally a form of animal disguise. Strikingly enough, another passage in Pindar seems to confirm the presence of animal dances in the worship of Dionysus and, at the same time, furnishes an interesting parallel to the lines we are considering. In a fragment preserved in damaged form on papyrus,<sup>13</sup> Pindar mentions Artemis as "yoking" lions in Bacchic rites, and of some divinity, presumably Bromius (who has been spoken of earlier in the fragment), as being "beguiled also by dancing herds of wild animals"—*ὁ δὲ κηλεῖται χορευούσαισι καὶ θηρῶν ἀγέλαις*.

Over a period of centuries, as a race passes from savagery into civilization, the importance of the solemn animal dances lessens, their original significance is forgotten, and the dances tend to be burlesqued and to degenerate into pure entertainment. By the Greco-Roman period the *μορφασμός*, which was always, in part, at least, an animal dance, had become a "funny" dance; Athenaeus, coming a little later than Pollux, so lists it (xiv. 629F). It is not mentioned as sacred to any deity. Hence many of the other animal dances seem to have become amusing tours de force (cf. the pantomimic fish dance in Velleius Paterculus ii. 83) or to have disappeared altogether.

We have noted several survivals of the serious animal dances, down to a late period. I think it has not been commented upon that most of these survivals are in mysteries of one

sort or another. This, I believe, is highly significant. If exposed to the full light of day, so to speak, and to the gaze of the populace as a whole, the serious animal dance almost inevitably comes to be laughed at and passes into burlesque; but if protected by the secrecy, seclusion, mystic atmosphere, and rigorous prescription of detail to be found in a mystery cult, it can survive unchanged for centuries.

It is practically certain, then, that the early Greeks had serious animal dances. In like manner, the part played by animal dances in the development of the satyr play and of Old Comedy attests the comic type of animal dance, as well, for prehistoric Greece. Later, vase paintings give corroborative evidence for comic animal dances. We know that the Greeks were people with a keen sense of humor, a buoyant disposition, and notable freedom from restraint. Among such peoples, roistering animal mummeries are developed spontaneously, at an early stage in their culture.

It may seem strange that it is the comic type of animal dance which is mentioned in connection with Apollo and not the serious type. But "comic" dances in honor of Apollo are not unparalleled. We have already noted the inscriptional evidence for a cordax to that divinity, on Amorgos; and the cordax was the dance particularly characteristic of comedy. Also, Callimachus writes in his *Hymn to Delos* (ll. 316-24) of dances which were "invented" by the Delian nymph to furnish "laughter" to the young Apollo. (We note the echo of the *γελαῖ* of Pindar's line.) He refers to dances of sailors, who, with hands held or bound behind their backs, "bit the sacred trunk of the olive tree" on Delos, while someone, probably an attendant of the shrine, beat them with clubs or whips. These dances, evidently very old rituals to ward off evil and to insure safety for ships, seem to have been serious originally; but, as their specific significance was lost with the passing of the years, they came to be regarded as purely amusing. They may have been of Minoan origin. By classical times they had been transferred to the cult of Apollo and were kept up as "funny" dances.<sup>14</sup> Callimachus,

<sup>13</sup> John Sandys, *The Odes of Pindar* (London: Heinemann; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1930), p. 560.

<sup>14</sup> Lillian B. Lawler, "The Dance of the Ancient Mariners," *TAPA*, LXXV (1944), 20-33.

though of the Hellenistic age, probably echoes the opinion of several centuries in diagnosing them as comic dances. However, so far as I know, there is no reference to comic dances to Apollo as early as is the passage in Pindar.

I believe, then, that the tenth Pythian ode is important for the history of the dance, because it attests the presence of comic animal

dances in the cult of Apollo as early as 498 B.C. and in such terms that we may assume their presence for some little while before that date, and also, incidentally, because it contains the earliest reference in Greek literature to comic dances in honor of Apollo.

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### OASIS, OASA

In this note we venture to suggest, although the evidence is meager at most, that, alongside the word *Oasis* in Latin,<sup>1</sup> a variant form *Oasa* existed and was in use, perhaps as early as the beginning of the fifth century.

The indisputable attestation of the manuscripts for two passages in Jerome's *Vita Sancti Hilarionis*, the only place, apparently, where he uses the word, seems to corroborate this. We print the passages from the convenient Migne edition:

Videns etiam ibi se miris honoribus affici, perrexit Alexandriam, inde ad ulteriorem Oasim transiturus (chap. 33 [*Patr. Lat.*, XXIII, 46]).

Egressus ergo de Bruchio, per inuivam solitudinem intravit Oasim (chap. 34 [*ibid.*]).<sup>2</sup>

After examining upward of seventy manuscripts of the *Hilarion*, from the twelfth cen-

<sup>1</sup> *Oasis* goes back through the Greek to Coptic *wah* or *wake* (cf. H. Kees in *RE*, XVII, 1681). In Greek it generally appears as a proper noun. Herodotus (iii. 26) first mentions it, understanding it to be both the name of a city and the name of a region. Procopius (i. 19, 29) and Stephanus of Byzantium (s.v. "Ανωσις, Αβασις, and "Τασις) repeat the statement about a city but are probably doing no more than echoing Herodotus. John Ball (*Egypt and the Classical Geographers* [Cairo, 1942]) states (p. 21): "There can hardly be any doubt that the city of Oasis here referred to [by Herodotus] occupied the site of the modern Kharga, the principal village in the Egyptian oasis of the same name. . . ."

After Herodotus, the word does not occur until the time of Strabo. A good many occurrences of it have been listed for the period of the first to the late third century, all designating particular oases (cf. F. Preisigke, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden*, III [Berlin, 1931], 315, s.v. "Oasis).

<sup>2</sup> All early printed editions of the *Vita Hilarionis*, up to and including that by Erasmus, read *Oasam*, spelled variously, but not *Oasim*.

tury or earlier, which fall into some twelve fairly distinct groups but which, in general, exhibit the characteristic copying by intelligent scribes, we find that they preserve either *Oasam* or a kindred form without exception in both passages.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of a word occurring so rarely in Latin and in the face of the manuscript evidence, we cannot discount the possibility that Jerome, familiar though he probably was with the Greek form "Oasis, may have originally written *Oasam* in the *only two* instances where he used the word, especially since we have no

<sup>3</sup> Variants on the word are the following: *oasa*, *osa*, *osam*, *ossam*, *oosam*, *osaam*, *ouasam*, *hoasam*, *asam*, *asiam*, *oasuum*, *oisuum* (*m2*), *odsam*, *casam*, *oaram*, and *moasa*. In several manuscripts of no particular importance the obvious gloss *eremum* is added, elsewhere it replaces *Oasam*.

The uniformity of the Latin tradition is strongly supported by the early translations of the *Vita*. Thus, the Samos (Greek) version, incomparably the most faithful and reliable authority, ranking alongside the very oldest and best Latin manuscripts, reads in chap. 33 *osav*, and in chap. 34 *osav* (cf. W. A. Oldfather and others, *Studies in the Text Tradition of St. Jerome's Vita Patrum* [Urbana, 1943], pp. 326-27), giving rise to the possibility that "Osa, also, should be considered as a reputable by-form in patristic Greek. A second Greek version presents a limited number of variants, four manuscripts from the tenth and eleventh centuries reading *αβασαν* (with two later recensions, one by Metaphrastes), *αβασσαν*, and *αβασσαν*, all undoubtedly related to the form *abasus* as found in Strabo, e.g., ii. 5. 33 (cf. *Studies*, pp. 380-82).

The Old Slavic reads *anas* or *ause*, and the Coptic, as H. A. Sanders of the University of Michigan informs me, *COYAZC* (edited by F. Rossi, in *Memorie della Reale Accademia delle scienze di Torino*, Ser. 2, XXXVIII [1888], 1-94). Only the Greek version 6, a drastic condensation represented by only a single manuscript from ca. 1200, actually writes "Oasuv, pretty clearly an emendation (cf. *Studies*, p. 415).