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Author(s): Lillian B. Lawler

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XVII.—The Dance of the *πινακίδες*

LILLIAN B. LAWLER

HUNTER COLLEGE

The dance of the *πινακίδες*, mentioned by Athenaeus and by Pollux, probably denotes a dance accompanied by the clapping together, by the dancer or a spectator or a musician, of two flat pieces of wood, held one in each hand. Such flat clappers are attested in Greek art. They are in common use among primitive peoples in all parts of the world today; and they are portrayed in Egyptian art from the fourth millennium B.C. down to the reign of Hadrian. Dances performed to clappers are uniformly orgiastic; and there is some evidence that our dance was of this type also. It is highly probable that this dance may, originally, have been Egyptian. It may have entered Greece in prehistoric times, with the Egyptian mystery rituals brought in reputedly by Orpheus and the Danaids. Of remote antiquity in Greece, it seems to have fallen into disuse there by the second Christian century.

Of the many obscure terms handed down to us by ancient writers on the Greek dance, perhaps none is so difficult of interpretation as *πινακίς*, *πινακίδες*. Athenaeus (xiv.629f) merely says: *μετ' αὐλῶν δ' ὠρχοῦντο τὴν τοῦ κελουστοῦ καὶ τὴν καλουμένην πινακίδα*. Pollux (iv.103) is frankly puzzled: *τὰς δὲ πινακίδας ὠρχοῦντο οὐκ οἶδα εἶτ' ἐπὶ πινακῶν εἶτε πινακᾶς φέροντες· τὸ γὰρ κερνοφόρον ὄρχηγμα οἶδ' ὅτι λίκνα ἢ ἐσχαρίδας φέροντες· κέρνα δὲ ταῦτα ἐκαλεῖτο*. Hesychius, *s.v.* *πινακίδες*, says, discreetly: *ὄρχησις ποιᾶ*. Renaissance and modern commentators are almost as much in the dark. In fact, Scaliger¹ voices his suspicion that the ancient writers whom he follows knew nothing but the names of many of the dances and the *schemata* which they cite; he does, however, venture the suggestion that the *πινακίδες* dance was one of those set to "numeris dithyrambicis" (column 1535 D), and further that it was named "ab instrumentis" (column 1524 B). Meursius,² quoting Athenaeus and Pollux, translates the name of the dance "tabellam" and "tabellas," and of the thing held or danced upon "tabulas." Musonius³ says of the dance: "Pinacidas autem saltabant, pinaces fortasse ferentes. Nam cernophoros

¹ Julius Caesar Scaliger, "De Comoedia et Tragoedia," in Vol. viii of Jacobus Gronovius' *Thesaurus Graecarum Antiquitatum* (Venice, Typis Bartholomaei Javarina, 1732-37), column 1524 D.

² Johannes Meursius, "Orchestra, sive De Saltationibus Veterum Liber Singularis," in Vol. viii of Gronovius' *Thesaurus* (see note 1), column 1278.

³ Musonius Philosophus, "De Luxu Graecorum," in Vol. viii of Gronovius' *Thesaurus* (see note 1), column 2503 B.

saltatio κέρνα, hoc est craticulas, ferebat." Modern scholars, for the most part, are content to list the dance by name; occasionally one adds a brief suggestion, as, e.g., Weege,⁴ who says that the dance was named for the attributes, "Brettchen," which the dancer carried.

In other connotations the word ἡ *πινακίς* denotes merely "tablet." The simple *πίναξ*, and the diminutives *πινακίδιον* and *πινάκιον*, have, of course, a wide variety of meanings, most of them developing from the idea of a flat piece of wood; among them are "tablet," "writing tablet," "magic tablet," "board," "votive plaque," "ballot," "lot," "dicast's pass," "picture," "list of names," "map," "astronomical chart," "notice board," and "platter" or "dish." The words usually imply a flat rectangular object, apparently, but can denote a flat round one as well.

Let us consider various possibilities with reference to the dance in question. Could the dance of the *πινακίδες* be, for instance, the rhythmic actions of a juggler manipulating plates? Probably not; for juggling of all sorts was certainly very common from early times down to, and later than, the days of Pollux; and it is difficult to understand how the name of so well known a form of juggling would have dropped out completely by his day. Besides, we have nowhere any example of the word *πινακίς* in the specific sense of "plate."

Could *πινακίδες* denote, then, something danced *on*, as Pollux suggests (iv.103)? "Dancing boards" are by no means unknown; and they would probably occur at once, in this connection, to the mind of any student of the dance. In the Andaman, Ceram, Celebes, and Solomon Islands, and in the Hawaiian Islands; in Western Asia; and among certain Indian tribes of California,⁵ dancers stamp rhythmically on a board laid either directly upon the ground or else, for greater resonance, over a small hole. In Mexico the dancing board has become a small movable wooden floor, on which a stamping dance is performed to this day.⁶ Anthropologically there is no reason why the Greeks may not have had

⁴ Fritz Weege, *Der Tanz in der Antike* (Halle/Saale, Niemeyer, 1926), 6.

⁵ Curt Sachs, *Geist und Werden der Musikinstrumente* (Berlin, Reimer, 1929), 39-40; *Id.*, *Die Musikinstrumente Indiens und Indonesiens* (Berlin, Reimer, 1915), 31; Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music* (New York and London, Longmans, Green & Co., 1893), 87, 136.

⁶ Auguste Génin, *Notes sur les danses, la musique, et les chants des Mexicains anciens et modernes* (Paris, Leroux, 1913), 21.

such dancing boards in prehistoric times; but there is no evidence for them either in Greece itself or in lands with which the Greeks came in close contact. Furthermore, the words *πινακίς*, *πινακίδες* would normally imply something small rather than something large; and dancing boards as seen today are usually between three and five feet in length. We must accordingly regard this explanation of *πινακίδες* as possible, but unlikely.

Another interpretation that would occur to the student of the dance, on the analogy of dances in other lands, is that of "clog," "wooden-soled shoe." Such shoes or sandals were known in Greece, especially in Boeotia, where they were worn by farmers. They seem to have been used also by flute-players in the theater, to beat out the time for the chorus; and by an understandable extension there probably developed from them the "footclapper," made of two pieces of board covered with metal, and joined with a hinge. However, wooden-soled shoes are definitely called *κρούπεξαι*, *κρουπέξια*, *κρούπαλα*, *κρούπανα*, *ξύλοπέδαι*, or *ξύλινα ὑποδήματα*, not *πινακίδες*. The use of this type of shoe, and also of heavy nails in the soles, opens up the definite possibility that the Greeks may have developed, in some of their dances, effects similar to those produced in "tap-dancing" today. Noisy but rhythmical stamping of some sort or other is almost always a feature of primitive dances the purpose of which is to promote fertility.

Still another interpretation of *πινακίδες* might be suggested by a dance of East Brazil,⁷ in which the performer balances a block of wood on his shoulder. The essence of this dance, however, is skill in managing a *heavy* block; and this would seem to be a concept somewhat at variance with the meaning of the word *πινακίς*. We must, then, in all probability, seek the true meaning of *πινακίδες* in some other connection.

Among many peoples of the earth, modern as well as ancient, may be found the custom of using two small pieces of wood, usually flat and thin, as clappers or time-beaters.⁸ To this rule the Greeks were no exception.⁹ Held one in each hand, and struck together,

⁷ Max von Böhn, *Der Tanz* (Berlin, Wegweiser Verlag, 1925), 17.

⁸ W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Sacred Dance* (New York, The Macmillan Co., 1923), 7; Curt Sachs, *Handbuch der Musikinstrumentenkunde* (Leipzig, Breitkopf und Härtel, 1920), 1, points out that practically all languages have a word for "clapper."

⁹ See, e.g., the red-figured crater in Munich, illustrated in A. Furtwängler and K. Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei, nach Furtwänglers Tod fortgeführt von Friedrich Hauser* (München, F. Bruckmann, 1909), Serie ii, Taf. 80, 1. Upon it a seated satyr

the pieces of wood are really an extension and intensification of hand-clapping, which, together with foot-stamping, is man's earliest accompaniment to a dance.¹⁰ Thus, they represent the first step towards what we should call a real musical instrument. Wooden clappers of this sort are excellent rhythm-beaters; and, as we should expect, they are seen today particularly among tribesmen in Africa, who have an exceptional feeling for rhythm. They are, however, used by primitive peoples in all parts of the world. They can be seen in Surinam, Brazil, Tahiti, Fiji, Annam, the South Celebes, New Ireland, Hawaii, the Philippines, Tasmania, and among the fast vanishing natives of Australia. They are attested among the American Indians—the Chinook, the Cagaba of the Sierra Nevada, various tribes of Lower California, the Choctaw, and the Haidah of Queen Charlotte Island. Further, they play a large part in the ritual dances and dramas of the more advanced peoples of India, China, Japan, and Cambodia.¹¹

In the case of most of the peoples cited, it is a spectator or a musician, not the dancer, who claps the pieces of wood together. Among some of them, however, the dancer himself carries two flat sticks or small blocks, and strikes them one against the other as he dances. A particularly graceful dance of this sort, with "whirling bodies" and much "skillful rattle" of the pieces of wood, is reported from Ceylon.¹² Sometimes we come upon a complicated performance, such as one in Annam, in which the dancer holds four pieces of wood—one in each hand, one by the toes of each foot—and dances in a sitting posture, striking the sticks together in various combinations.¹³

is depicted holding in his hand two knobbed-end sticks, which he is raising to strike together. Before him a heavily cloaked woman dances, apparently turning on her own axis as she moves forward. A second satyr is either dancing or sneaking away.

¹⁰ Curt Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (New York, W. W. Norton Co., 1937), 177–178; von Böhn, *op. cit.* (see note 7), 10; H. G. Farmer, "Ancient Egyptian Instruments of Music," *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* VI (Glasgow, Blackie & Son, 1929–1933), 31.

¹¹ Geoffrey Gorer, *Africa Dances* (London, Faber & Faber, 1935), 305; Curt Sachs, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 7, 14, 16, 41; *Id.*, *Musikinstrumente Indiens* (see note 5), 13, 14; Wallaschek, *op. cit.* (see note 5), 8, 30, 88, 109; Hubert H. Bancroft, *The Native Races of the Pacific States of North America* (San Francisco, The History Co., 1886), 1.170, 243; 416 and note 175; William Ridgeway, *Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races* (Cambridge, University Press, 1915), 205, 264, 301.

¹² Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (see note 10), 121.

¹³ Sachs, *Musikinstrumente Indiens* (see note 5), 23.

Variants of this primitive instrument are the longer sticks or flat wands used as time-beaters by many races;¹⁴ also, the large, round plate-clappers of wood seen in India today, and even in European orchestras of two centuries or so ago.¹⁵

Dances accompanied by the striking of wood on wood go back to an almost unfathomable antiquity. They precede the development of real musical instruments; and even some complicated instruments are unbelievably ancient. Indeed, one distinguished student of the history of music¹⁶ regards the development of rhythm-beating sticks as Neolithic.

I am inclined to believe, then, that when ancient Greek writers speak of the dance of the *πινακίδες*, they are referring to a dance of great antiquity, accompanied by a characteristic clapping together of small pieces of wood, held by spectators, by musicians, or by the dancers themselves. As time went on, the strains of the flute were apparently added to the clapping of wood (Athenaeus xiv.629f). It must have been from the first a dance of some cult significance,¹⁷ but its original nature may have been modified considerably during the course of the centuries.

It is entirely possible that such a dance may have been genuinely Greek, an independent development by the Greeks themselves. This might be suggested by the fact that other peoples in all parts of the world have developed similar dances, apparently spontaneously. It is also quite possible that it may have been borrowed from Egypt, or at least that there may have been some Egyptian influence upon it in its initial stages. The use of clapping devices of one sort or another is highly characteristic of Egyptian civilization, from an early period until the time of the Roman empire. In fact, hand-clapping, or clapping of some sort, was regarded by the Egyptians as essential to music.¹⁸ On Egyptian vases from as early as the fourth millennium B.C.¹⁹ there is seen a form of clapper,

¹⁴ Sachs, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 14, 41.

¹⁵ Sachs, *Musikinstrumente Indiens* (see note 5), 16; *Id.*, *Handbuch* (see note 8), 5.

¹⁶ Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (see note 10), 123. See also Weege, *op. cit.* (note 4), 13; Wallaschek, *op. cit.* (note 5), 80–81.

¹⁷ On the red-fired crater mentioned above (see note 9) it appears in a Dionysiac setting.

¹⁸ Adolf Erman, *Aegypten und aegyptisches Leben im Altertum. Neu bearbeitet von Hermann Ranke* (Tübingen, J. C. B. Mohr, 1923), 284.

¹⁹ Farmer, *loc. cit.* (see note 10); Curt Sachs, "Altägyptische Musikinstrumente," *Der Alte Orient*, 21. Jahrgang, Heft 3/4 (Leipzig, J. C. Hinrichs, 1920), 2, and Abb. 2; *Id.*, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 15, 141.

used as accompaniment to a dance. In fifth-dynasty representations (in the third millennium B.C.) we find flat sticks being beaten as an accompaniment to a rhythmical treading of grapes;²⁰ and later the same sticks furnish accompaniment to dances.²¹ Flat discs of wood are often beaten; and in folk dances two small pieces of wood are used.²² By the time of the New Empire a variety of sticks and wands is in use; and they soon become indispensable adjuncts to the ritual of most major deities.²³ Some scholars even see in the staff dances at modern Egyptian weddings a survival of ancient cult dances in which sticks were beaten.²⁴ Sticks were employed in Egyptian cults in Rome down to late times. On a marble sarcophagus of the period of Hadrian, now in the Museo Nazionale in Rome, a dance is depicted which forms part of an Egyptian ritual;²⁵ and in accompaniment to the dance two male performers beat staves together in the ancient manner. Whether the Greek version of the dance lasted so long as this under the name of *πινακίδες* is very doubtful; for if it had it is unlikely that Pollux, writing in the time of Commodus, would have been so puzzled concerning the exact nature of the dance. Like so many other very old Greek dances, it may virtually have ceased to exist in the sophisticated days of the pantomime.

In Greek legends there are persistent references to contact between the Greeks and the Egyptians at a remote prehistoric period. Noteworthy among the legends are those of the Danaids and of Orpheus. In both of these cases we have mention of orgiastic mysteries. According to one account (Herodotus II.171), the Danaids brought certain mysteries of the Egyptian women to the women of the Pelasgi. When the Dorians invaded Greece the Pelasgi were driven out in large numbers; but those in Arcadia remained, and the Arcadian women retained the mysteries of the Danaids. Later they taught them to other women, and the mysteries became the rites of Demeter Thesmophoros. Similarly, Orpheus is said to have journeyed to Egypt, to have been initiated

²⁰ Sachs, "Altägyptische Musikinstrumente" (see note 19), 1, and Abb. 1; Erman, *op. cit.* (see note 18), 280.

²¹ Weege, *op. cit.* (see note 4), 19, 22.

²² Sachs, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 15; Erman, *op. cit.* (see note 18), 280.

²³ Farmer, *loc. cit.* (see note 10); Curt Sachs, *Musik des Altertums* (Breslau, Hirt, 1924), 15; *Id.*, *Musikinstrumente Indiens* (see note 5), 13.

²⁴ Cf. Weege, *op. cit.* (see note 4), 22.

²⁵ Weege, *op. cit.* (see note 4), Abb. 19, p. 21.

into some of the Egyptian mysteries, and to have brought the ceremonies from Egypt to Greece; he became, in fact, the traditional "inventor" of the Greek orgiastic mystery dance.²⁶ Without subjecting tradition to too close analysis, we may yet see in the Orpheus and Danaid stories some indication that there was definite borrowing of certain forms of the Egyptian dance in the earliest days of Hellenic occupation of the Greek peninsula, and perhaps in pre-Hellenic times as well. A connection with Crete is possible, but doubtful; for although there seems to be definite Cario-Cretan influence upon various orgiastic dances of the Greeks of Asia Minor and of Greece proper, yet there seems to be no evidence for wooden clappers in Cretan dances.

Among dance forms borrowed from Egypt, there may well have been a dance of the *πινακίδες*. In the first place, the legends definitely mention *orgiastic* dances; and dances accompanied by persistent and prolonged clapping are frequently of the orgiastic type, sometimes even to the extent of producing a sort of hypnosis in dancers or spectators.²⁷ The Egyptian dance pictured on the Roman sarcophagus mentioned above (cited in note 25) is distinctly orgiastic; and on a red-figured vase showing a dance to clappers in Greek times (see note 9), the whirling steps of the dancer, taken with the Dionysiac setting in general, are certainly not inconsistent with an orgiastic dance. As it happens, the dance of the *κερνοφόρος*, which Pollux rightly or wrongly associates with the dance of the *πινακίδες*, is listed by Athenaeus (xiv.629 e) among the *μανιώδεις ὀρχήσεις*. In the second place, some of the dances used in mystery rituals might properly be of an apotropaic nature. Art representations show that the Egyptians beat flat pieces of wood to frighten birds.²⁸ By an easy extension, the Egyptians may have used the same device to drive away evil spirits, demons, or ghosts—and, as a matter of fact, it is frequently so used by various tribes today.²⁹ The clashing of metal on metal for this purpose is, of course, common; in antiquity it appears particularly in connection with

²⁶ Diod. Sic. i.23, 69, 92, 96; iv.25; v.75; Lucian *De Salt.* 15.

²⁷ Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (see note 10), 178; Bernard S. Mason, *Drums, Tomtoms, and Rattles* (New York, A. S. Barnes, 1938), 15–16; Gorer, *op. cit.* (see note 11), 305; Wallaschek, *op. cit.* (see note 5), 106, 117. For a strong effect of rhythmic hand-clapping on modern Europeans see Wallaschek, 14.

²⁸ Sachs, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 15, 142.

²⁹ James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (12 vols.; London, Macmillan and Co., 1914), x.261–262, 264–274.

Dionysus, Cybele, and the Curetes. In the third place, mystery rituals, especially those of women, are often concerned with fertility. Among primitive peoples noisemakers are regularly thought of as having considerable magic power in general, and especially great potency in religious rituals.³⁰ From this concept it is but a short step to the idea of potency in inducing fertility. The use of clappers at the Egyptian vintage celebration is regarded by many authors as an instance of fertility magic.³¹ Here, of course, we are reminded of the innumerable uses, among peoples over all the world, and in all ages, of beating and striking to induce fertility in a person, an animal, or the land.

We can only speculate, however, on the actual nature of the Greek dance of the *πινακίδες*. It was probably a real dance, not merely a *schema*; for Athenaeus (xiv.629f) carefully sets it apart from his list of *schemata*. It seems to have been performed by either men or women. Movements involved might vary from simple, monotonous beating by a seated 'dancer' (we must not forget that a Greek thought of any rhythmic motion as 'dancing,' and often danced while sitting still), to figures immensely complicated, whirling, dizzy, orgiastic, with either the dancer himself or someone else doing the clapping. If we may judge from the Egyptian art representations, one *schema* may have been a rapid 'turning in place,' with the dancer's arms making a circle over his or her head.³² There might even have been an acrobatic form of the dance, similar to that of modern Annam. Throughout, the distinctive characteristic must have been merely the beating of the wooden blocks or sticks.

If this is a true estimate of the nature of the dance, we now have unexpected light upon the reason why Athenaeus couples in one sentence the dances of the *πινακίδες* and the *κελευστής*; for since the *κελευστής* was the person who gave to oarsmen the signal for pulling together, a dance based upon his activities would also involve a marked beating of time. It is interesting to note that the signals given by the *κελευστής* may even have included clapping of some sort.³³

³⁰ Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (see note 10), 178.

³¹ Sachs, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 16.

³² Sachs, "Altägyptische Musikinstrumente" (see note 19), Abb. 2.

³³ Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *R.E.*, s.v. "Keleustes," signed "Assmann."

In conclusion, we should notice one important factor which may have been effective in the virtual disappearance of the dance of the *πινακίδες*. From early times in Egypt,³⁴ and from at least the fifth century in Greece,³⁵ castanets or *κρόταλα* of various sorts were well known. These seem to have originated in Asia, in the clapping together in one hand of two mussel-shells;³⁶ but they soon were fashioned of a variety of materials, including wood. At this point the *κρόταλα* and the *πινακίδες* had much in common. The essential difference, however, between castanets and our pieces of wood is the fact that of the former two are clapped in one hand, while it takes two hands to clap a pair of the latter. If both hands operate castanets, the sound is doubled. This apparently was regarded as a highly desirable arrangement. In Greece of the classical period (though not in contemporary Egypt), castanets must have already begun to crowd out the older clappers; and it seems that today the only trace of the Greek clappers remains in the literary and archaeological record of the dance of the *πινακίδες*.³⁷

³⁴ Erman, *op. cit.* (see note 18), 283, 286; Sachs, *Geist und Werden* (see note 5), 195; Farmer, *loc. cit.* (see note 10). They were often used with flutes as accompaniment to dances; see Herodotus II.60.

³⁵ Pindar, *frag.* 48 (Loeb), 79 b (Bergk).

³⁶ Bancroft, *op. cit.* (see note 11), I.201; Sachs, *Handbuch* (see note 8), 7.

³⁷ I am indebted to Dr. E. S. McCartney for valuable criticisms and suggestions on this paper.