



A Dancer's Trophy

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A DANCER'S TROPHY

In 1871 there was found in a grave of the Dipylon cemetery, just outside the walls of ancient Athens, a broken oenochoe, or wine-jug, which when put together displayed, around the shoulder, a row of incised letters which proved to be the oldest Attic inscription discovered in modern times. The jug aroused tremendous interest, of course, and has been much discussed,¹ but I believe that there are one or two points of significance in connection with it that have not been noted.

Most students now date the vase in the first half of the eighth century. The inscription, retrograde, was cut after the vase was completed, but no one can say with assurance how long afterward. The inscription seems to consist of a dactylic hexameter line followed by a dimeter, and reads: 'Whoever of all the dancers dances most spiritedly (atalotata), let him receive this.' The jug is, then, a prize, in the manner of a modern loving-cup. Whether it was awarded after a formal contest or not, we do not know. Some scholars think it was an important trophy, and carried with it the equivalent of a championship title. Others think it was conferred as a sort of joke, perhaps at a drunken revel; these writers refer to drinking contests like the one hinted at in Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 1001, and point out that the vase in question is not a dignified amphora for oil, such as those awarded to victors at the Panathenaea, but a less pretentious wine-jug. Some writers think that the vase was buried with the owner because it was one of his

most prized possessions; others regard its preservation purely as an accident.

Few writers who have attempted to interpret the jug have considered the possible significance of the painted panel on the neck. (Furtwaengler, indeed, says it is of no particular interest.) Upon the panel, among the usual chevrons and parallel lines, are two figures—a stag, grazing, and, behind it, a conventionalized bird. Both figures are of types familiar on Geometric pottery, and their juxtaposition is not unparalleled. Probably the vase painter meant them to be purely decorative. However, it is a fact that the animals to which nimble dancers are compared in Greek literature are the stag (Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 1318) and the bird (Euripides, *Bacchae* 748, 957–8, 1090–1). Conversely, birds are sometimes spoken of as dancers—cf. the *komos peleion* in Euripides, *Ion* 1197.

Because the trophy is a wine-jug, many scholars have conjectured that the contest which it commemorates was connected with the worship of Dionysus. Oddly enough, in the cult of Dionysus both birds and stag-like animals are of significance. Among the innumerable representations of Dionysiac dances in Greek art we see a characteristic portrayal of a dancer with one or both arms outstretched and twisted into the garment, with a wing-like effect. These 'wing-sleeved' figures seem to suggest that, on occasion, Dionysiac dancers imitated birds.² Also, a *nebris*, or fawn skin, was often worn by dancers in the cult of Dionysus—both men and women, as vase paintings demonstrate clearly, and the fawn is, of course, the young of the stag. Further, a fawn

was sometimes dismembered in early Dionysiac ritual. Farnell³ says that in these cases the animal was considered to be the embodiment of the god himself; and that *nebrizein*, 'to play the fawn,' became a mystic term in Bacchic phraseology.' It has been well established that dancers who wear the skin or mask of an animal identify themselves temporarily with that animal, and frequently with the deity to whom it is sacred. However, the animal represented on our vase is a full-grown stag, not a fawn. And it may be significant that we have no record of a contest among individual dancers in connection with the early worship of Dionysus.

But Dionysus is not the only divinity in whose worship there is an association of birds, stags, dancers, and wine. These elements are all present in the ritual of Artemis as well. There is considerable cumulative evidence for bird dances in the ritual of this divinity.⁴ Also, it is fairly certain that from Mycenaean times down to the Graeco-Roman period⁵ there were stag-masques, dances, or processions in honor of the aboriginal Artemis; and vestiges of these performances seem to have survived into the Middle Ages, in New Year's processions in various parts of Europe.⁶

In particular, at the festival of Artemis Lyaia in Syracuse an elaborate *komos* is attested,⁷ in which the dancers wore stags' horns, and carried around with them a goatskin filled with wine, and a huge loaf of bread upon which were stamped the shapes of various animals. With this *komos* was connected a contest of some sort—probably in singing and dancing; and the winner in the contest 'took the bread of the loser.' Participants in the contest sang a song in which they bade their hearers to 'receive' (*dexai*) good luck; this is an odd echo of the 'let him receive' (*dekan*) on the Dipylon jug. Although the Greek commentators on this *komos* refer it to the fifth century B.C., modern scholars seem to agree in thinking that the ritual stems from primitive times.

Whether such a *komos* was a feature of the ritual of Artemis at Athens or not, we do not know. However, Aristophanes says, in the *Danaides* (frag. 253 K), that in the olden days at

Athens a group of dancers 'in rustic garb' danced 'with all sorts of good things to eat under their arms.' Athenaeus (xiv, 646 e) mentions the use of a cake called the *elaphos*, baked in the shape of a deer, at the Elaphebolia, a spring festival of Artemis, very popular at Athens and in other Greek cities; cakes were often given as prizes or awards to dancers (Athenaeus xiv, 647 c; xv, 668 c, d; Plutarch, *Conv. Probl.* ix, 747 a; Demosthenes, *Cor.* xviii, 260): and our expression 'to take the cake' is parallel in Attic literature (Aristophanes, *Eq.* 277; *Thesmo.* 94).

I believe, then, that the Dipylon jug could have been a prize awarded to a dancer in the Athenian counterpart of the Syracusan stag procession to the aboriginal Artemis, probably at the festival of the Elaphebolia, in the spring. A wine-jug (filled with wine, of course) would be an appropriate award in that cult—in addition to the 'bread of the loser.' Perhaps a plain jug may have been the usual prize. On one occasion, however, the officials may have chosen an oenochoe which was not necessarily new, but which was attractive, and which happened to bear a painted design suggesting at the same time the lightness of the dancer, the *komos* in which the contest took place, and the cult with which it was connected. At any rate, our jug was, so to speak, 'engraved' for presentation to the winner; and so it has come down to us.

NOTES

¹ A. Furtwaengler, *Zwei Thongefaesse aus Athen*, in *Ath. Mittheil.*, Vol. 6 (1881), 106–118 and Tafel III; F. Studniczka, *Die Aelteste Attische Inschrift*, in *Ath. Mittheil.*, Vol. 18 (1893), 225–230 and Tafel X; F. Poulsen, *Die Dipylongraeber und die Dipylonvasen*, 106–107 (Leipzig, 1905); B. Schweitzer, *Untersuchungen zur Chronologie und Geschichte der geometrischen Stile im Griechenland*, in *Ath. Mittheil.*, Vol. 43 (1918), 141–142; C. W. Blegen, *Inscriptions on Geometric Pottery from Hymettos*, in *AJA*, Vol. 37 (1934), 27; B. L. Ullman, *Early Greek Alphabets*, in *Classical Studies Presented to Edward Capps*, 333–334 (Princeton, 1936).

² Lillian B. Lawler, *The Dance of the Holy Birds*, in *CJ*, Vol. 37 (1942), 360–361.

³ Lewis R. Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, Vol. 5, 166 (New York, 1896).

⁴ Lawler, *op. cit.* (see note 2), 351–361.

⁵ A. B. Cook, *Animal Worship in the Mycenaean Age*, in *JHS*, Vol. 14 (1894), 133–138; Farnell, *op. cit.* (see note 3), Vol. 2, 427–433; Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll, *RE*, s.v.

Tierdaemonen, *passim*; A. Furtwaengler, *Die antiken Gemmen* (Leipzig and Berlin, 1900), Vol. 1, Taf. 18.

⁶ L. Radermacher, *Beitraege zur Volkskunde aus dem Gebiet der Antike*, in Akad. der Wissensch. in Wien, Phil.-histor. Kl., Sitzungsber. 187 (1918), 106-125.

⁷ H. L. Ahrens, *Bucolicorum Graecorum Theocriti Bionis Moschi reliquiae*, Vol. 2, 5 (Leipzig, 1855-59), in Proll. to Theocritus; Diomedes, *G.L.* iii, 486 (Keil); Probus, in *Verg. Ecl.* II, 26 (Keil); M. P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste*, 199-207 (Leipzig, 1906); L. Radermacher, *Beitraege zur Volkskunde aus dem Gebiet der Antike*, in Akad. der Wissensch. in Wien, Phil.-histor. Kl., Sitzungsber., Bd. 187 (1918), 106-125; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy*, 244-251 (Oxford, 1927). Cf. Euripides, *Helen* 381-383.

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THE SURVIVAL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Rome, we are often told, achieved a triple conquest of the world, by arms, by law, and by the Church. She thus won a threefold immortality, for though the lands conquered by her arms yielded one by one to newer governments during the thousand years after the real decline of her territorial power set in, the Roman Law, the Church, and the concept of the Empire continued to be living forces in the mediaeval and modern world.

During the two centuries after Constantine's decision to ally the Christian God with the Roman Empire, the Empire and Rome itself were transformed in the service of the Church as it spread throughout the Mediterranean world, in preparation for its later extension far beyond the former limits of the Empire. In the third century the Christians had been on the defensive, trying to demonstrate their right to share in the preservation of the hardpressed power of the state. One of their great leaders, Tertullian argued thus:

We too pray for the emperors and their ministers,
for the civil authority, for the security of our age,
for the world's peace, and for the delay of the end.

A century later, the pagan statesmen of the eternal city were on the defensive, and Symmachus in his great speech urged that the altar of Victory be kept in the senatehouse, despite Christian attacks on that pagan cult, basing his

plea on the Roman concept of 'One World', and the equal validity of all honest means of solving the divine riddle of the Universe. His attempt failed, but it helped to arouse among his Christian antagonists, as Prudentius' poetic reply, *Contra Symmachum*, clearly shows, a stronger sense of patriotism. This, like many other incidents, illustrates the extent to which Christian Roman statesmen and other writers were adopting the traditions of pagan Rome. Though the shrines of Saints Peter and Paul were greater in the eyes of Christian visitors to Rome than the palaces of the Caesars, educated Christians continued to read Vergil, and to fix their concepts of secular society on the ancient basis. A characteristic picture of the Roman power and its decline is presented by the poem *De Romae Ruinis* written in 1106 by Hildebert, Bishop of Le Mans:

Matchless art thou, O Rome, though almost totally ruined,

How great thou wast in thy prime, thy ruins show;
Long age has destroyed thy glory, and Caesar's palace
And the gods' temples lie fallen low on the ground.

That work, that mighty work, has fallen, at which
Araxes

Trembled while still it stood, and now is grieved at
its fall,

Which the swords of kings, the provident care of the
Senate,

The very gods themselves willed should be head of the
world . . .

Over its building labored the eager care of our fathers,
Welcoming strangers, helped in the task by the waves
and the site.

Marble and builders and wealth came from the east
and the west,

The hills of Rome itself supplied the walls.

Generals lavished their treasure, the fates their favor,
Artisans gave their skill, the world its gold.

The city has fallen, of which, if I try to say anything
worthy,

I can say this alone, 'It has been Rome.'

Yet not the passage of years, nor fire nor the sword
Has proved able fully to blot out its glory.

The care of men was able to build Rome so great
That the care of the gods was not able to break it
down.

Bring together your wealth, bring new marble, and
the favor of the gods,

Let the hands of artisans labor long at their new task;
No siege engines can batter down the walls that now
stand,