

# XI.—*Airein Maschalên* and Associated Orchestic *Schêmata*

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The final paragraph summarizes briefly the findings of this study.

Among the many technical terms connected with the Greek dance which have never been clarified is the one known as *airein maschalên*, "raising the armpit." Presumably a *schêma* or figure, it has been left virtually undiscussed by all modern students of the Greek dance.<sup>1</sup>

Any study of the significance and the use of this vexed term must begin with the lexicographers. Hesychius has two separate lemmata, one *airein maschalên*, the other *maschalên airein*. The former is glossed as follows: οὕτως εἰώθασι λέγειν ἀντὶ τοῦ ὀρχήσασθαι. οἱ δὲ ἀγροικικῶς ὀρχεῖσθαι. The other lemma is apparently treated as an entirely different expression, and is glossed "become drunk," and "drink." A passage from Cratinus is cited, in which "lift the armpit" is a synonym for "be drunk." Hesychius says the expression also denotes "mock with the hands," and cites *Odyssey* 18.99–100, where the suitors "raise their hands" and "die of laughter" over the fight between Odysseus and Irus.

In the sense of "be drunk" or "become drunk," *maschalên airein* was proverbial among the Greeks. Pollux (6.26) uses it to denote "be drunk," and remarks that drunken persons are accustomed to "raise the armpits." He also quotes the passage in the *Odyssey*. Diogenianus,<sup>2</sup> Gregorius Cyprius,<sup>3</sup> and Apostolius<sup>4</sup> all define the expression as "drink" or "be drunk." Zenobius,<sup>5</sup> Photius (s.v.) and Suidas (s.v.) give a similar definition, and add the idea of "mock with the hands." Apostolius, however, like Hesychius, has a second lemma, *airein maschalên*,<sup>6</sup> which he glosses: ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρχου-

<sup>1</sup> See Kurt Latte, "De Saltationibus Graecorum Capita Quinque," *Religionsgesch. Versuche und Vorarbeiten* 13, Heft 3 (1913) 18. Karl Sittl, in *Die Gebärden der Griechen und Römer* (Leipzig, 1890) 224–5, practically equates it with the *kômos*.

<sup>2</sup> *Paroemiographi Graeci*, ed. Leutsch and Schneidewin, 1.275.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 2.79.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 2.517.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* 1.116.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 2.258.

μένων ἀγροίκως. Similarly, Gregorius Cyprius has another lemma, *airein maschalên*. His gloss for it is: ἀντὶ τοῦ εὐωχεῖσθαι· εἴρηται ἀπὸ τῶν ἀγροίκως (ἀγροικικῶς) ὀρχουμένων.<sup>7</sup> Whether εὐωχεῖσθαι is the correct reading here, or whether it is an error for the ὀρχήσασθαι of Hesychius, or *vice versa*, we do not know.

Taking the lexicographical evidence as it stands, we derive from it the following information:

1. *Airein maschalên* and *maschalên airein* are two separate and distinct things.
2. *Airein maschalên* is a synonym for dancing in general.
3. *Airein maschalên* is a synonym for "fun at a feast."
4. *Airein maschalên* is used of rustic dancing.
5. *Maschalên airein* is a gesture used by drinkers or drunken men.
6. *Maschalên airein* is a gesture of mockery, and is accompanied by laughter.

The lifting of the hand high, with accompanying raising of the armpit, to denote surprise, mockery, joy, wonder, or pleasurable excitement, is a well-known gesture of the Greeks.<sup>8</sup> There is no evidence that it was a gesture of the dance, in particular. The one example given by the lexicographers, that of the suitors in the *Odyssey*, certainly has no association with the dance.

The raising of the armpit in connection with drinking is evidently derived from the lifting of a drinking-vessel to the lips. One is reminded here of the English slang phrase, "to bend the elbow," which, like the Greek expression, is used metaphorically to mean "to drink." There seems to be no specific evidence that this gesture had a place in the dance; but the Greek dance was rich in symbolical gestures, and *a priori* we should be inclined to conjecture that a gesture denoting drinking was very probably used in *kômoi* and in other drunken dances. Also, something like it may well have been employed in the drama — as, for instance, to accompany the speech of the actor who played the Attendant, in Euripides' *Alcestis*, 756–7, as he described Heracles' drinking of a cup of unmixed wine. We recall that the gestures used with poetic recitations, both dramatic and lyric, were regarded by the Greeks as dancing (Plato, *Laws* 7.816A; cf. Athenaeus 14.628E).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 1.350; 2.54.

<sup>8</sup> Sittl, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 10 and 13; cf. also Eustathius in *Od.* 18.99.

We come now to the expression *airein maschalên*, attested, among other things, as a synonym for dancing in general, for "fun at a feast," for rustic dancing. In the effort to shed some light on the nature of the figure, we might well turn to archaeological evidence. Are there; for instance, ceramic or other representations of dancing figures which show a marked lifting of the armpit? If so, have they any significance for our problem?

Here we are rewarded with rich treasure. Greek vases, particularly black-figured ware from Athens and from Corinth, abound in representations of reveling dancers who raise one or both arms sharply so as to "lift the armpit." Almost invariably the elbow is bent at an acute angle, and the hand is close to the dancer's ribs, flanks, or hips. The hand is usually flat. Sometimes the palm is turned away from the body, but more often it is definitely towards the body, and indeed gives the effect of slapping.

One fine example is furnished by a black-figured Corinthian phiale from the Sabouroff collection.<sup>9</sup> Here five men wearing short, lightly-padded chitons engage in a spirited dance. Four of the five raise one arm sharply, lifting the armpit. In each case the hand is close to the flanks or the hips. Pickard-Cambridge<sup>10</sup> cites this vase, along with several others, as an example of the performances of actors and dancers in padded costumes who, from early times, in the cities of the Peloponnesus and in the Graeco-Italian colonies, burlesqued mythological stories. He sees in such dances, and in the somewhat similar performances of the *phlyakes*, in the Dorian colonies of Southern Italy and Sicily, a strong influence upon the Attic poets of the Old Comedy.

From a different part of the Greek world, Boeotia, comes a sixth-century black-figured cantharus now in Munich.<sup>11</sup> The vase portrays a rollicking *kômos* which Buschor calls a forerunner of the later procession of satyrs. Two of the figures here represented raise the armpit sharply; the hand in each case is close to the hips.

A late sixth-century Attic scyphus in the Metropolitan Museum (41.162.68), black-figured, with parts in white and purple, shows women as well as men using the gesture in the dance. On the

<sup>9</sup> Adolf Furtwängler, *La Collection Sabouroff* (Berlin, 1883-7) 1, Pl. 48, 1; A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford, 1927) Fig. 36, facing page 266.

<sup>10</sup> *Op. cit.* 266-7.

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Buschor, *Griechische Vasenmalerei* (Munich, 1914) 123, and Fig. 89; Lillian B. Lawler, "The Maenads," *MAAR* 6 (1927) Pl. 13, Fig. 4.

vase, four nude women, painted in white (undoubtedly courtesans), and four nude men dance with abandon. All eight figures lift the armpit, the women even more sharply than the men. In the case of the women, the suggestion of slapping is very marked.

Not all the representations of a raised armpit, however, are on black-figured ware. One of the finest examples which we possess is shown on an early red-figured psykter now in the Louvre.<sup>12</sup> There five young men dance joyously to the music of a flute, played by a sixth youth. Of the five, three lift the armpits very markedly, the other two somewhat less sharply. One dancer lifts both arms at the same time. In the case of four of the figures, the palms are flat against the body, usually at the level of the chest, in two cases below the chest. It looks very much as if the dancers are slapping their own chests or flanks, in time to the music. One dancer seems to slap his stomach. All of the dancers hop, leap, or kick spiritedly.

These four examples may be taken as typical of the hundreds of Greek ceramic representations in which dancing figures "lift the armpit."<sup>13</sup> Each of the four is definitely komastic. The gesture appears also with great frequency in representations of Dionysiac dancing, which is, of course, closely related to the *kômos*. Here Maenads, or their human counterparts, dancers garbed as Maenads, display the gesture as frequently as do male figures.

It is interesting that not only Greek art, but that of the Etruscans as well, shows representations of dancers who "lift the armpit" sharply. In the famous Tomba del Triclinio at Tarquinia, in the spirited dance at the funeral feast, portrayed on the East Wall,<sup>14</sup> one female dancer and one male dancer show the gesture with the right arm, the hand in each case being turned away from the body. The left arm of both dancers is drawn up and back. Also, in the Tomba delle Leonesse,<sup>15</sup> a woman dancer displays the gesture with the left arm.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Emmanuel, *Essai sur l'Orchestique Grecque* (Paris, 1895) Pl. I, a and b.

<sup>13</sup> For other examples see Buschor, *op. cit.* (above, note 11), Fig. 96, page 135; Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.* (above, note 9), Fig. 40, page 267; also, in the Metropolitan Museum, vases numbered 31.11.11, 24.97.95, 17.230.5, 41.162.184, 12.198.2, 14.136, 12.234.4, 22.139.22, 41.162.32, 21.88.82, etc.

<sup>14</sup> Prentice Duell, "The Tomba del Triclinio at Tarquinia," *MAAR* 6 (1927) 1-66, and especially Pl. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Frederik Poulsen, *Etruscan Tomb Paintings*, translated by Ingeborg Andersen (Oxford, 1922) Fig. 13, facing page 20.

Although the dance of the Etruscans was distinct from that of the Greeks, and had its own individual character, certainly it showed some Greek influence. Commentators upon the Etruscan dances represented on tomb paintings have pointed out frequently that such dances show a great deal of abandon and even frenzy, and that they give evidence of "free indulgence in wine."<sup>16</sup> They are often connected with a feast; and it has been conjectured that they were performed by courtesans hired for the occasion.<sup>17</sup>

And now what light, if any, does the archaeological evidence throw upon the words of the lexicographers?

It establishes, first of all, that there really was, in certain dances, a gesture or figure which might be described as "lifting the armpit."

Also, as we scrutinize the numerous representations of the *schêma*, we come inevitably to the conclusion that they are not symbolical representations of drinking, of lifting a drinking vessel to the lips. Nor is there any evidence that they are gestures of mockery. We may, then, with some degree of assurance, conclude that the lexicographers are correct in separating *maschalên airein* and *airein maschalên*, that two separate gestures are involved, and that *airein maschalên* is the one customarily associated with the dance.

Similarly, the ceramic evidence tends to corroborate the lexicographers' statement that the gesture was, among other things, characteristic of "rustic" — *ἀγροίκως*, *ἀγροικικῶς* — dancing. One might be tempted to associate this statement with spontaneous dancing at the rural Dionysia. Whether this be a reasonable association or not, certainly the connotation of rough, noisy horse-play, as at rural festivals, is very evident on all of the vases which show the gesture of the lifted armpit. Violent kicks, leaps, and hops abound, and frequently the opened mouth of the dancer suggests loud singing or shouting. It may be significant, in view of the lack of restraint in the dances so portrayed, that most of the representations antedate the fifth century.

As for the lexicographers' association of the figure with "fun at a feast," that, too, is probably essentially correct. Many of the vase paintings depicting the lifting of the armpit in the dance are unmistakably komastic; and *kômoi* regularly "ended in feast-

<sup>16</sup> Poulsen, *op. cit.* 16-19.

<sup>17</sup> Poulsen, *op. cit.* 36.

ing,"<sup>18</sup> or were the aftermath of a feast.<sup>19</sup> The representations in which courtesans play a part undoubtedly qualify as "fun at a feast." Also, among the Etruscans, the figure certainly seems to have had a part in dances at funeral feasts.

One statement of Hesychius does not lend itself to archaeological confirmation; this is his definition of *airein maschalên* as an alternative for the general term *ὀρχήσασθαι*. The usage may point simply to the fact that the figure was very popular — and the frequency with which it appears upon vase paintings would indicate that this was indeed so. Or it may be that so distinctive a figure, if used frequently in the rough-and-tumble komastic dances of the early period, may have lent its name to revel dances in general, and then to spontaneous dancing as a whole. The use of the name of a distinctive figure or movement for the name of a dance as a whole is a common phenomenon — e.g., "fox trot," "Schuhplättler," *ἰγὼν*.<sup>19a</sup> However, the gloss in Hesychius may be merely the record of a jocose or slangy broadening of *airein maschalên* into a generic term, after the manner of our own expression "pick up your feet."

We have noted the frequency with which, in the Greek vase paintings, a dancer with lifted armpit has his hand held flat against his own body — particularly at the level of the chest or of the hips — in a manner suggestive of slapping. The use of slapping is very common in the Greek dance.<sup>20</sup> It had a place in the dramatic dance — tragic, comic, and satyric<sup>21</sup> — as well as in komastic dances and in the uncouth cavorting and horseplay of popular festivals. It is portrayed on many vase paintings, particularly those of the sixth century, and in many connotations. Sometimes the dancer mischievously slaps a companion, but usually he slaps his own chest, flanks, or buttocks.

Slapping dances are found today, among many peoples. The Schuhplättler of Bavaria is one distinctive example — a lively, rollicking dance of men, in which the feet and legs are slapped in rhythm, with complicated and fascinating movements of the arms. Other slapping dances are seen in New Zealand, Samoa, and elsewhere around the Pacific. The underlying and original significance

<sup>18</sup> Pickard-Cambridge, *op. cit.* (above, note 9) 310.

<sup>19</sup> Lamer in *RE* s.v. "Kômos."

<sup>19a</sup> Lillian B. Lawler, "A 'Mortar' Dance," *CJ* 43 (1947-8) 34.

<sup>20</sup> Lillian B. Lawler, "Flat Hand in the Greek Dance," *CO* 19 (1942) 58-60; Heinz Schnabel, *Kordax* (Munich, 1910) 27-8.

<sup>21</sup> Athenaeus 14.630A; cf. Schnabel, *op. cit.* 27-8.

of such dances would seem to be a ritual beating, to induce fertility, to drive out evil or sin, or merely to work off excess energy.<sup>22</sup> A remote survival of a primitive slapping dance is sometimes seen even in the dances of the modern theater and screen.

The Greeks apply several different names to the slapping figure in the dance. Pollux (4.105) and Athenaeus (14.630A) speak of it as *cheir kataprênês*, "hand flat down," a term often used in Greek literature, and particularly in the epic (*Iliad* 15.113-4, 397-8; 16.792; *Odyssey* 13.164, 198-9), to denote ordinary slapping or smiting, not in a dancing context. In the dance, *cheir kataprênês* seems to imply the slapping of any part of the body. Another word applied to a slapping figure is *rhathapygizôn*; this appears in *Knights* 796 in a metaphorical sense, and is explained by the scholiasts as denoting a striking of the buttocks with flat hand (*πλατεία τῇ χειρί*) or with the sole of the foot, for comic effect. In the passage in the *Knights* the word is used of the slapping of another person; but the general context of the scholiasts' comments would not exclude the slapping of the dancer himself. Suidas calls the figure *rhothopygizôn*; he defines it similarly (s.v.), and adds that it involved noise — *rhothon*. A dance figure called variously *hekateris*, *hekaterides*, and *hekaterrein* is mentioned by Athenaeus (14.630A) in the same sentence with *cheir kataprênês*; and the figure is explained by Hesychius (s.v. *hekaterrein*) as leaping and striking the buttocks with the feet, first one and then the other. However, the same figure is said by Pollux (4.102) to have been noteworthy for skillful movements of the hands. The underlying significance of the *hekaterides* would seem to be a regular *alternation*, of slaps or blows or touchings, whether of the hands or of the feet. A more frequently used term for the *kicking* of the buttocks is *bibasis* (Pollux 4.102).

In the spirited *exodos* of the *Wasps* of Aristophanes, in a burlesque of tragic dancing characterized by whirling, leaping, and high kicking, the Chorus says (1529) to one of the "specialty dancers," γάστρισον σεαυτόν. The Venetian Scholiast on the passage explains the command as follows: πλῆξον σεαυτόν εἰς τὴν γαστέρα, ὁ ποιοῦσι πηδῶντες. This explanation has misled several editors and translators, who have interpreted the command, rather startlingly, as "Kick yourself in the stomach!" Rogers, for example,<sup>23</sup> rendered

<sup>22</sup> Lillian B. Lawler, "Beating Motifs in the Greek Dance," *CO* 21 (1944) 59-61; Curt Sachs, *World History of the Dance* (New York, 1937) 28, 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> *Aristophanes*, with the English Translation of Benjamin Bickley Rogers (Loeb Classical Library) 1.549.

the line: "Hit your stomach with your heel!" Certainly this is not the scholiast's meaning. "Strike yourself on the stomach," he says, interpreting the passage, "— a thing which [dancers] do while leaping." If we look again at the Louvre psycter<sup>24</sup> already mentioned, we shall see this very phenomenon. The dancers are engaged in a rough, lively komastic dance, with much leaping, kicking, and cavorting (cf. *Wasps* 1487–1530); and the dancer on the right strikes his own stomach, apparently in time to the music.

Accordingly, it seems clear that *airein maschalên* is often associated in the dance with various slapping *schêmata*. This would be entirely natural, of course, in the case of a figure involving a lifting of the armpit. The association of two or more distinctive *schêmata* is familiar in the dance—as, e.g., in animal dances, in funeral dances, etc. Since slapping figures are common in the dance of comedy, *airein maschalên* very probably had a place in comedy also.

*Airein maschalên*, then, would seem to be a figure which appears among the Greeks in rough-and-tumble cavorting, in burlesques, in komastic dances, in Dionysiac routs, and in the dance of Old Comedy. An understanding of it clarifies such passages as line 1529 of the *Wasps* of Aristophanes. Among the Etruscans, it appears in spirited funeral dances. It was used by both men and women dancers. It was a raising of the armpit, with the elbow sharply angled. It was often accompanied with violent leaping and kicking, and with a slapping of the dancer's chest, stomach, or buttocks. Among the Greeks, it appears to have been used chiefly in uncouth and noisy dances; but it was very popular, and it is frequently represented in ceramic art.

<sup>24</sup> See Emmanuel, *loc. cit.* (above, note 12).