

IV.—*Krêtikôs* in the Greek Dance

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The last seventy lines of the *Ecclesiazusae* of Aristophanes radiate happiness and high spirits. Praxagora's serving-maid, entering at line 1112, indulges in some ecstatic praise of the new regime, and then greets as the happiest of mortals Blepyrus, who comes along on his way to dinner. The serving-maid undertakes to lead him, and the little girls, *meirakes*, who are with him, to the dining hall; and she and Blepyrus expansively invite the judges and the rest of the audience to share in the festivities. The chorus (or the coryphaeus) joins in and seconds the invitation, at the same time admonishing the judges to vote for this play. Then (1163-5) the coryphaeus reminds the members of the chorus that it is time for them, too, to hurry off (*ὑπανακινεῖν*) to dinner. She calls for song and dance, and chants the amazing seven-line word made up of the names of fine foods (1169-75). Finally the whole company rushes off in a noisy victory procession, *ὡς ἐπὶ νίκῃ*, endeavoring by the "sympathetic magic" so familiar in Aristophanes (cf., e.g., *Lysistr.* 1291-4; *Acharn.* 1227-34; *Aves* 1763-5; *Pax* 1316-57) to invoke victory for the play.

Within this passage there is one sentence to which I should like to direct particular attention. It follows immediately upon the chorus' statement that it is time to hurry off to dinner. It is worded as follows: *Κρητικῶς οὖν τῷ πόδε|καὶ σὺ κίνει* (1165-6). The manuscripts indicate that the sentence is spoken by a semi-chorus; but some editors and translators (e.g., Bergk,¹ Blaydes, Bruck,

¹ Bibliographical data on editors, translators, and writers on Aristophanes mentioned in this paragraph and elsewhere in this paper are as follows: Theodorus Bergk, *Aristophanis Comoediae* (Lipsiae 1867-72); F. H. M. Blaydes, *Aristophanis Ecclesiazusae* (Halis Saxonum 1881); Id., *Adversaria Critica in Aristophanem* (Halis Saxonum 1899); R. F. P. Bruck, *Aristophanis Comoediae* (Oxford 1810), Vol. 2; Victor Coulon and Hilaire Van Daele, *Aristophane* (Paris 1930); F. W. Hall and W. M. Geldart, *Aristophanis Comoediae* (Oxford 1906-7), Vol. 2; Hubertus Holden, *Aristophanis Comoediae Quae Supersunt* (Cambridge 1868), Vol. 1; J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Ecclesiazusae* (Lugduni Batavorum 1905); Anon., *Aristophanes, The Eleven Comedies*, Black and Gold ed. (New York 1930), Vol. 2; Wm. J. Hickie, *The Comedies of Aristophanes* (London 1853), Vol. 2; W. J. Oates and Eugene O'Neill, Jr., *The Complete Greek*

Holden, Rogers, Black and Gold) assign it to the full chorus or the coryphaeus, others (e.g., Coulon, van Leeuwen, Voss, Oates and O'Neill) to the maid-servant. Somebody replies (1166) τοῦτο δρῶ. Editors and translators give this reply to Blepyrus (e.g., Blaydes, Coulon, Hall and Geldart, van Leeuwen, Holden, Oates and O'Neill, Rogers, Way); to the Despotes = Blepyrus (e.g., Bergk); to the other semi-chorus (e.g., Brunck, Black and Gold; cf. White); to one of the *meirakes* (cf. White); or to the chorus in general (e.g., Voss); and assign the ensuing dance variously to the whole company, to the entire chorus, to a semi-chorus, to Blepyrus, or to the *meirakes*.

The sentence evidently implies dancing, or movement in a rhythmical procession — which to the Greeks would be dancing also. Literally, of course, *krêtikôs* would mean "in the Cretan manner." However, scholars have differed widely as to just what "Move your feet in the Cretan manner" may mean, in an orchestric connotation. In this paper I should like to consider anew the meaning of this sentence, and to determine, if possible, the significance of the work *krêtikôs* when it is used as a technical term in connection with the dance.

Greek literature abounds in references to Cretan dancing. The Minoans seem to have been very fond of, and skillful in, the dance; and indeed the Greeks habitually ascribe to them the actual invention of the dance (Athenaeus 5.181B; Lucian, *Salt.* 8; Strabo 10.4.18 and also 16). Their dances seem to have been characterized by great grace, speed, and virtuosity, and to have held an important place in the Minoan life and religion.²

Interpretations of our sentence up to the present time have fallen, in the main, into three general categories. These suggest, respectively:

1. That the whole thing is a jest, poking fun at the greediness of the Cretans (cf. Black and Gold 2.403, note 1).

There seems little substantiation for this interpretation, and few editors have followed it.

Drama (New York 1938), Vol. 2; Benjamin Bickley Rogers, *The Ecclesiazusae of Aristophanes* (London 1902); Id., *Aristophanes*, Loeb ed. (London and New York 1927), Vol. 3; J. H. Voss, *Aristophanes* (Braunschweig 1821), Vol. 3; A. S. Way, *Aristophanes in English Verse* (London 1927-34), Vol. 2; John W. White, "The 'Stage' in Aristophanes," *HSCP* 2 (1891) 159-205; John W. White, *The Verse of Greek Comedy* (London 1912) 147-9.

²Lillian B. Lawler, "The Dance in Ancient Crete," *Studies Presented to David M. Robinson* (St. Louis 1951) 23-51.

2. That the reference is to meter — “dance in Cretan rhythms” (Blaydes, Way, Oates and O'Neill, Black and Gold).

This interpretation is based on the scholiast's comment on the line: *ῥυθμός ἐστὶ κρητικός*. Similar, and evidently related, is a gloss in Suidas: *Κρητικός· ῥυθμός ἐστὶν οὕτω καλούμενος· Ἀριστοφάνης*, with a reference to this particular line. However, one editor (Black and Gold 2.403, note 1), after adopting the interpretation, says “Nothing is known as to these Cretan rhythms”! Other scholars have taken the rhythm to be the “cretic of Aristoxenus” — i.e., the double trochee or trochaic-cretic. White,³ for instance, interprets *krêtikôs* here as denoting “to the accompaniment of an auletic melody in trochaic rhythm.” If this interpretation of *krêtikôs* be followed, we must assume one of two things: either (1) the person or persons addressed proceed to dance in time to the remaining lines of the play; or (2) there is a momentary break, with an interpolated dance having no accompanying words. If we assume that the dance is performed to the lines of the play, we are in difficulties, for there is considerable variation in the meter of the exodos,⁴ with many meters other than the trochaic-cretic appearing; and White himself (149) remarks that the metrical form of at least a portion of it “cannot now be determined with any approach to certainty.” If, on the other hand, we assume that the dance is interpolated, we admit a temporary slowing of the departure to dinner — a delay which is essentially inconsistent with the strong exhortation to haste in the lines immediately preceding (1163–5), and with the otherwise sweeping crescendo to the climax of the last four lines of the play. The testimony of the scholiast and Suidas need not be too disturbing in this connection; for in technical matters pertaining to the dance both these sources frequently represent late, uncritical, and often confused speculation. In this case they may have been influenced unduly by the *rhythmon* of line 1168.

Even apart from these considerations, it would seem highly unlikely that a speaker urging someone to dance — even a coryphaeus — would specify or dictate the meter to be used. Much more likely would be a designation of a particular type or style of dance, or of the actual dance, figures, or formation to be employed. Among the numerous passages in Aristophanes in which such

³ John W. White, *The Verse of Greek Comedy* (London 1912) 148.

⁴ White (above, note 3) 456; Holden (above, note 1) 1.636. Rogers (1902) protests the “twisting” of the lines “into cretic feet.”

exhortations or directions occur we might cite but two: viz., *Thesm.* 981-2, where the coryphaeus bids the chorus begin a dance of the type known as the *diplê*, in which the dancers form two lines and dance in opposition to one another;⁵ and *Lysis.* 1273-7, in which Lysistrata arranges the chorus in couples, a man and a woman side by side, and bids them dance in that formation. As a parallel from tragedy we might instance Sophocles' *Antigone*, 150-4, in which the coryphaeus calls upon the people of Thebes to take part in an all-night dance of victory.

3. That the reference is to a hyporcheme (e.g., Rogers 1902, White, van Leeuwen).

This interpretation involves much that is uncertain and controversial; for it is a fact that, in spite of much careful research and speculation, over the centuries, by scholars of distinction, we are still not too sure of the exact nature, at any given period, of the dance called the hyporcheme.

The Greeks themselves, when writing on the subject, are none too clear. They do agree that the hyporcheme was usually a choral dance. Also, they tell us repeatedly that the hyporcheme was native to Crete (Pseudo-Plutarch, *De Mus.* 9; Athenaeus 5.181B) — but so were many other dances; and *krêtikôs* would not automatically be a synonym for *hyporchêmatikôs*. So far as we can determine, the essential characteristic of the hyporcheme, in pre-Hellenic as well as Hellenic times, was the "acting out" or interpreting, by movement and gesture, on the part of the chorus, of a song sung to flute or cithara (Athenaeus 1.15; 14.628D,E). In other words, the hyporcheme was really a closely-knit combination of instrumental music, song, and the choral dance. In early times the hyporcheme seems to have required two choruses — one to sing and one to dance.⁶ In later times it appears that sometimes one chorus both sang and danced — i.e., gestured rhythmically — at the same time. In all periods writers stress the rapidity and liveliness of the dance — even the fact that it was "sportive" (Athenaeus 1.15; 14.630D; Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.* 9.15.2; *Et. Mag.* 690.47).

In Minoan times, the hyporcheme would seem to have had an important place in the ritual of the Great Mother and her son.

⁵ Lillian B. Lawler, "Diplê, Dipodia, Dipodismos in the Greek Dance," *TAPA* 76 (1945) 59-73.

⁶ Callimachus, *Hymn. Del.* 304-5; Heliodorus 3.2; cf. Lucian, *Salt.* 16; Diehl, "Hyporchema," *RE* 9, esp. 341-2.

In historical times, the Dorian Greeks used it in the cult of Apollo,⁷ sometimes in "tetragonal" choruses (Athenaeus 5.181B); later it comes into the Dionysiac orbit. Occasionally it is spoken of as akin to the Pyrrhic dance (Schol. Pind. *Pyth.* 2.127) — but this statement may have had its origin in the fact that in the Pyrrhic dance the performers "acted out" a form of mimic battle. The hyporcheme is likened to the dance of comedy (Athenaeus 14.630D) — perhaps partly for a similar reason, partly because of its "lively" nature. It is said to have been connected with mythological tales⁸ — again, no doubt, because of its interpretative nature. The author of the *Etymologicum Magnum* (690.47) confuses it with a zodiacal circle dance — probably because of the fact that it, too, was a rapid choral dance of Cretan origin. Several fragments of Greek hyporchemes remain to us (cf., e.g., Athenaeus 14.617c), but they do not solve the problem of the exact nature and course of development of the dance.

All that we can say with assurance is that from first to last the hyporcheme was essentially a lyric with strong musical, orchestric, and mimetic accompaniment.⁹ That being so, any interpretation of the dance in the exodos of the *Ecclesiazusae* as a hyporcheme would seem to be difficult, if not impossible. The concluding lines of the play are obviously written to accompany a processional victory dance, and are not in the nature of lyrics the meaning of which is to be "danced out" in gesture and posture. The alternative — that the dance mentioned in our sentence is an interpolated feature, not mentioned further in the text¹⁰ — is untenable if the dance is a hyporcheme; for, practically by definition, a hyporcheme is a lyric accompanied by an explanatory and interpretative dance.

It seems to me, then, that we must seek further for the meaning of *krêtikôs* in the passage in question. We should, for instance, explore the possibility that "in the Cretan manner" may apply not to an interpolated dance, but to the processional dance which closes the play — the conclusion to which all the lines of verse from 1164 on build up. And if it does apply to that dance, what is its significance? In this connection I believe it is noteworthy that the

⁷ Mary H. Swindler, *Cretan Elements in the Cults and Ritual of Apollo*, Bryn Mawr College Monograph XIII (Bryn Mawr 1913) 54–7, 65.

⁸ Swindler (above, note 7) 54.

⁹ Lawler (above, note 2) 45–6.

¹⁰ White (above, note 3) 147–8.

complete wording of the sentence which we are considering is: "And *you, too*, move your feet in the Cretan manner."

In line 1165, the coryphaeus, bidding the chorus hasten to dinner, uses the word *ὑπανακινεῖν*,¹¹ in which we might particularly note the *ana*. Two lines below we encounter some corruption of the text, and probably a lacuna;¹² but even so, it is evident that the coryphaeus includes the *meirakes* in the invitation to dance, and bids them mark the rhythm *τοῖν σκελίσκουν* — "with the whole leg." In line 1179 the members of the chorus cry *αἵρεσθ' ἄνω* as they leave the orchestra in lively procession. Quite evidently the group is to go out dancing rapidly and spiritedly, with definite lifting of the leg on each step. The whole passage is often compared to the exodos of *Vespae* (1474–1537). Although the two exodoi are by no means parallel — the passage in the *Vespae* being actually a burlesque of tragic dances — yet there is much lifting of the legs high in the concluding dances of the earlier play.

There has come down to us some evidence that a marked lifting of the leg, with the back straight and the head held high, may have been a feature of processional dances among the Minoan Cretans. In the Homeric Hymn (III) to the Pythian Apollo, 514–23, in the famous account of Apollo's journey to Delphi at the head of a band of Cretans, the noble Minoans march spiritedly, singing the paean, as Apollo himself plays the cithara. The whole atmosphere of the account is Cretan; and the god, leading the Cretan procession, moves along *καλὰ καὶ ὕψι βιβάς* (516) — "stepping high and featly," as the Loeb editor renders the phrase.¹³ The words *ὕψι βιβάς* are applied also to the proudly striding Othryoneus, in *Iliad* 13.371.

Considerable light has been shed upon the exact nature of this movement, *ὕψι βαίνειν*, by the reliefs on the famous "Harvester vase," found at Hagia Triada, in Crete.¹⁴ Here a group of men, apparently harvesters, carrying flails, swing along four abreast, in step, their knees raised high at every stride. Their backs are straight, their shoulders are thrown back, their heads are held

¹¹ F. H. M. Blaydes, *Spicilegium Aristophaneum* (Halis Saxonum 1902) 31, prefers the emendation *ὑπαποκινεῖν*.

¹² Coulon, van Leeuwen (above, note 1) and others have suggested emendations.

¹³ H. G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns* (New York and London 1914) *ad loc.*

¹⁴ Sir Arthur Evans, *Palace of Minos* (London 1921–35) 2, Part 1, Pl. xvii.

high, and some of them are singing, their mouths open wide. Behind the leader — an elderly man in a heavy garment — are three cloaked figures which seem to be singing girls. These, too, lift their legs high, keeping in step. A musician with a metal rattle or sistrum, and a crouching dancer among the “marchers,” complete the attestation of the scene as a processional dance. Although the vase is broken, the proud and vigorous “high stepping” of the dancers is clearly visible. One thinks a little of the Prussian “goose-step” as one looks at it; but in the Cretan figures the raised knee is always bent.

We should, then, I believe, admit of the possibility that in our passage the word *krêtikôs* may refer to the proud, high-stepping gait otherwise designated as *ὑψηλὸν βαίνειν* — or, more probably, to an exaggeration or burlesque of that gait.

We have already noted the fact that in the passage following our sentence there is some corruption of the text, and probably a lacuna. As the text stands, the chorus says (1167–8):

*καὶ τάσδε νῦν λαγαράς
τοῖν σκελίσκουν τὸν ῥυθμόν.*

The sentence is incomplete, but the reference is clearly to the *meirakes*. The adjective *lagaros* seems to mean originally “with lean flanks,” “thin,” “agile.” It probably does not refer, as some editors have thought, to the fact that the girls are hungry! It is a temptation to see in it a remote memory of the wasp-waisted figure of the Minoan Cretans! However that may be, the word *lagaras*, together with the reference in the following line to the use of the whole leg in the beating out of the rhythm, implies a dance of considerable agility and vigor. We know that the Cretans associated acrobatics with dancing; and their art abounds in representations of tumblers and acrobats. The Greeks attributed to them the “invention” of both tumbling and dancing (Athenaeus 5.181A,B). We know also that the use of tumbling and acrobatic dances as entertainment at festivals and dinners was a heritage from Crete (Athenaeus 5.180F). Quite evidently the spirited dance of the *Ecclesiastusae* is to verge upon the acrobatic, as legs are flung up and the tempo is accelerated (cf. line 1177); and we get a hint of *acroamata* to come — acrobatic and orchestric entertainment at future dinners under Praxagora’s regime. Oddly enough, the

verb ἀκροάομαι is used in lines 1175–6, but apparently with no overtones of banquet entertainment.

If we accept this interpretation of the passage in hand, the continuity of thought would be something as follows: The coryphaeus approves the maid-servant's and Blepyrus' invitation to the audience to accompany them to dinner, and urges the judges to give the victory to the play (1151–62). Then she realizes that it is time for the chorus, too, to leave at once for dinner, and she bids her colleagues to hasten (1163–5). To Blepyrus she addresses the sentence, "And you, too, move your feet in the Cretan manner" (1165–6), saying, in effect, "If you want to come with us, you, too, must use the spirited, high-stepping gait of the Cretans, which we are going to use." Blepyrus replies that he will do so (1166). The coryphaeus then includes the *meirakes* in her admonition, with the words, "And these agile girls, too, must mark the rhythm with the whole leg" (1167–8) — which is another way of saying the same thing. She does not mention the maid-servant specifically (nor the *meirakes* either, for that matter); but as the maid-servant has said expressly (1137–8) that Praxagora has commanded her to bring Blepyrus and the *meirakes* with her (cf. συλλαβοῦσαν, 1137), we may assume that the coryphaeus includes her in her injunction. Thus the whole company is committed to the dance "in the Cretan manner," which turns out to be the recessional from the orchestra.

To some of my readers it may seem incredible that a dance of the late fifth or early fourth century would retain any features of the dance of the Minoan Cretans; but it appears to be indisputable that throughout their whole history the Greeks did use in their dances various steps, figures, formations, and motifs which stemmed ultimately from prehistoric Crete. In fact, the historian of the Greek dance, tracing origins of various dances and figures, is led back repeatedly to the Minoan culture.¹⁵ The influence of the Cretan dance upon that of the Greeks was tremendous; and the more the subject is studied in modern times, the greater that influence is seen to be. Thus in ascribing the invention of the dance to the Cretans, the Greek was accurate, from his own view-

¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Lawler, "The Dance in Ancient Crete" (above, note 2); "The Geranos Dance," *TAPA* 77 (1946) 112–30; "The Dance of the Ancient Mariners," *TAPA* 75 (1944) 20–33; "Dancing with the Elbows," *CJ* 38 (1942) 161–3; "Ichthyes Choreutai," *CP* 36 (1941) 142–55; "The Dance of the Holy Birds," *CJ* 37 (1942) 351–61; "The Lily' in the Dance," *AJP* 65 (1944) 75–80.

point. The dances of the Cretans — brilliant, colorful, spectacular — seem to have impressed enormously the peoples of the mainland in late Minoan times; to have been imitated by them; and to have been transmitted, to some extent at least, down through the Mycenaean period and the turbulent sub-Mycenaean era to the great days of the Hellenic civilization. The Greeks, as we know, habitually adapted, absorbed, and developed various features of other cultures which pleased them. In the classical period, the Cretans had an old tradition that much of the Greek religion was ultimately of Cretan origin.¹⁶ They were undoubtedly correct. And the dance, of course, was a phase of ancient religion.

In summary, then, I should like to suggest the possibility that the word *krêtikôs*, as a technical term in the dance, refers to a spirited "high-stepping" gait like that mentioned in the Homeric Hymn to the Pythian Apollo, and portrayed on the "Harvester vase"; that in the exodos of the *Ecclesiazusae* the "high stepping" is probably exaggerated or burlesqued; that it is performed by the whole group — chorus, *meirakes*, Blepyrus, and the maid-servant — not as an interpolated dance, but in the processional victory dance itself with which the play closes; and that the processional dance increases in exuberance until it reaches a climax in the last four lines, with a vigorous upflinging of the legs that is suggestive in some respects of the concluding lines of the *Vespae*.

¹⁶ Karl Hoeck, *Kreta* (Göttingen 1823–29) 3.143.