

## Introduction

τί δεῖ με χορεύειν;<sup>\*</sup>

‘We do not know how the ancient Greeks danced. Of the 95,140 combined body movements which have been laboriously calculated to have existed in their dances, we still haven’t the vaguest idea how they looked in action. But we do know some of the reasons why the Greeks danced, and that is perhaps more important than how they danced.’<sup>1</sup>

### 1 Introduction and Book Overview

On one of the four sides of an Attic red-figure astragalos of ca. 470–450 B.C.E. from the workshop of Sotades, a man stands positioned next to a rock-like structure or open-mouthed cave (Fig. 0.1).<sup>2</sup> With one arm raised up high and the other pointing forward, he looks towards a file of three maidens performing a ring dance while directing the girls’ (and external viewer’s) attention to the scene that fills the remaining three sides of the vessel: here ten maidens dance in mid-air, executing a variety of motions and steps (Fig. 0.2). As Gloria Ferrari’s rich reading of the image confirms,<sup>3</sup> the original publisher of the vase correctly identified that ethereal chorus: they are the constellations of the Pleiades and Hyades, both originally maiden collectives then catasterized, who form among the principal archetypal parthenaic choruses in the Greek sources; it was they, according to a scholion to Theocritus (Σ *ad* Theoc. *Id.* 13.25 Wendel), who were the inventors of *choreia* and of the *παννυχίς*, the all-night dance performed under the star-filled sky. As the astragalos painter presents the link between the earth-bound and celestial ensembles, and in accordance with the pointing gesture of the man within the scene, the former are invited to perform following the example of

<sup>\*</sup> ‘Why should I take part in the chorus?’ Henrichs 1994/95 also uses the line sung by the chorus at Soph. *OT* 896 as the title for his article.

<sup>1</sup> Highwater 1996, 42, also cited by Smith 2016, 145.

<sup>2</sup> London, British Museum E 804; ARV<sup>2</sup> 765.20.

<sup>3</sup> Ferrari 2008, 2–5. Ferrari also uses the astragalos as an introduction to the themes of her study. For a very different reading of the vase, see Budelmann and Power 2015, 285.



Fig. 0.1 Attic red-figure astragalos from the workshop of Sotades, ca. 470–450 B.C.E. London, British Museum E 804. Photograph © The Trustees of The British Museum.



Fig. 0.2 Attic red-figure astragalos from the workshop of Sotades, ca. 470–450 B.C.E. Second side. London, British Museum E 804. Photograph © The Trustees of The British Museum.

the dancers up above. Texts that both pre- and postdate the astragalos amply attest to the ubiquity of the notion of the constellations as choral dancers, astral bodies moving in eternal circles in the night sky, and whom mortal choristers cite in their songs while dancing down below.<sup>4</sup>

If maidens-turned-stars offer poets and artists one paradigmatic grouping for their representations of *choreia*, that particular institution of song (*ôidê*) and dance (*orchêsis*) as Plato defines it at *Laws* 654b3–4, then these luminous bodies are only one among a much broader set of choral prototypes apparent in the literary, visual and material record from archaic and early classical Greece and on whom real-world chorus members model or ‘project’ themselves. To sample the poetic evidence, Bacchylides 17 introduces in rapid succession a company of dolphins, Nereids circle-dancing beneath the waves and the seven *parthenoi* whom Theseus escorts to Crete, accompanists to their paeon-singing male counterparts whom the sea echoes with its strain; these several ensembles all appear within what is variously categorized as a paeon or dithyramb performed by an actual troupe of young Ceians on Delos, home to the famed Deliades, exemplary singer-dancers from the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* through Pindar, Euripides and beyond, and who furnish another regularly evoked model-worthy collective. A Nereid, a chorus-leading ship equipped with oars plied rhythmically, the sounding, eddying waves, dolphins, choruses at the Spartan festival of the Hyakinthia, cranes and equine *chorêgoi* moving along a ‘horsey’ path of song through dancing stars populate a single choral song in Euripides’ *Helen* (1451–511), each one of these an assemblage with its own choric antecedents already visible in the lyric and archaic hexameter tradition.

Vase painters from the late eighth century on, offer matching depictions of these and other choral aggregates, using a variety of devices to alert viewers to the role of the phenomena as exemplars for the real-world singer-dancers who share the vessels’ surfaces. In some instances, artists juxtapose choruses of *parthenoi* with water birds positioned in parallel alignments so as to signal affinities between the avian flocks and dancing maidens (Fig. 0.3),<sup>5</sup> or place a choral procession of men advancing in orderly fashion immediately below a company of horses, whose carefully coiffed manes and trappings visually echo those of the marchers on the

<sup>4</sup> For these, see chiefly Miller 1986, Ferrari 2008, Csapo 2008 and the many examples also treated in this study. Throughout the book, I use the term chorister, at the risk of evoking its more religious contemporary associations, interchangeably with ‘choreute’ or ‘chorus member’.

<sup>5</sup> Argos, Argos Archaeological Museum C 229. Both this and all the subsequent examples cited here receive detailed treatment and more extensive documentation in the chapters that follow.



Fig. 0.3 Late Geometric krater from Argos. Argos, Archaeological Museum C 229. Photograph courtesy of the École française d'Athènes à Argos, inv. C 229. Cliché 27381, EFA/Emile Sérafis.

lower register of the vessel (Fig. 4.4).<sup>6</sup> Dolphins, on occasion equipped with feet (complete with the instep that characterizes dancers) gambol, typically in circular formations, to the music of an aulos-playing companion,<sup>7</sup> accompany komast dancers or, transformed by Dionysus from piratical sailors into maritime form, leap about the god's 'choregic' ship as though performing a ring dance.<sup>8</sup> Cranes striking balletic poses decorate the foot of the sixth-century François Vase, visual reminders of the *geranos*, the so-called Crane Dance, performed by Theseus and his 'twice seven' shown on the topmost band of the pot (Figs. 0.4, 0.5).<sup>9</sup> And if the Cyclades derive their name from their circular layout in the sea, then one vase painter anticipates the choral character that they explicitly assume in later poetic sources (Callimachus' *Hymn to Delos* most strikingly): an Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Eretria Painter of ca. 430–420 displays two maenad-like dancers whom the inscriptions name as Delos and Euboea, here shown dancing with the satyr Lemnos and their mother Tethys alongside other nymphs or maenads and silens and satyrs with musical names (Fig. 0.6).<sup>10</sup> The choral motif recurs on the tondo of the cup, where the nymph dancing with a satyr is labelled Choro, choral dance personified (Fig. 0.7).

<sup>6</sup> Formerly Berlin, Antiquarium A 42, with discussion in Ferrari 1987.

<sup>7</sup> Rome, Villa Giulia 64608.

<sup>8</sup> Munich, Antikensammlungen 8729; *ABV* 146.21, 686. For other instances and illustrations, see Csapo 2003, 78–90.

<sup>9</sup> Florence, National Archaeological Museum 4209; *ABV* 76.1, 682.

<sup>10</sup> Warsaw, National Museum 142458; *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 1253, 58.



Fig. 0.4 Black-figure volute krater ('François Vase') signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos, ca. 570 B.C.E. Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 4209. Photograph © Soprintendenza Archeologia della Toscana – Firenze.



Fig. 0.5 Black-figure volute krater ('François Vase') signed by Kleitias and Ergotimos, ca. 570 B.C.E. Florence, Museo Archeologico Etrusco 4209. Detail of Theseus' disembarkation on Crete. Photograph © Soprintendenza Archeologia della Toscana – Firenze.



Fig. 0.6 Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Eretria Painter, ca. 430–420 B.C.E. Exterior. Warsaw, National Museum 142458. Photograph © Ligier Piotr/Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.



Fig. 0.7 Attic red-figure cup attributed to the Eretria Painter, ca. 430–420 B.C.E. Interior. Warsaw, National Museum 142458. Photograph © Ligier Piotr/Muzeum Narodowe w Warszawie.

While recent scholarship has treated several of these archetypes, chiefly stars and dolphins,<sup>11</sup> this book's first half aims to provide a more synoptic,

<sup>11</sup> See, particularly, Csapo 2003 and 2008 and Ferrari 2008; to avoid repeating their insights, I do not devote self-standing chapters to these two models. Weiss 2018 offers a more recent treatment of the theme of *choreia* and some of its paradigms focused on Euripides.

albeit still partial, account of the diverse collectives apparent in the early visual and poetic sources (a more complete ‘catalogue’ would include, among others, monkeys whose malformed bodies and ungainly motions mirror the buttock-slapping padded choruses at symposia and parody the activities performed by those present at the occasion).<sup>12</sup> Beyond simply identifying the heterogeneous and frequently surprising phenomena – whether Gorgons, cauldrons, bovines, ships or the seemingly static column – which, in the Greek imaginary, lay behind and, to some extent, gave form and fashion to the choral ensemble and to its representation by poets, prose-writers and artists in a variety of media, each chapter investigates the reasons prompting a particular selection and observes connections between the varied *comparanda*. Determined at once by the myths and popular lore that supplied these templates with their aitiologies and signal properties, by the rituals and topographies framing them, and by developments in technology, music, song and dance, each one of these model choruses carries its own dense substrate and ‘back history’ and simultaneously responds to the political, social and cultural contexts conditioning its appearance within a particular poem, inscription or visual account and the time and place of that object’s production, performance and viewership.

Following the excavation of these choral archetypes, the book’s second portion reverses the question posed in the earlier chapters. In place of asking what paradigms the Greeks of the archaic and early classical periods looked to when thinking about and depicting *choreia*, the discussions in Chapters 6 through 10 explore how chorality served as a both real and symbolic ‘construction’ which drew on and in turn shaped other areas of communal experience, whether social and religious practices or technological pursuits. To cite just one example of the types of intersections treated here, an anecdote preserved in the Pindaric *Apophtegmata* reports that on his arrival at Delphi the poet was asked what he had come to sacrifice: his succinct response, ‘a paean’.<sup>13</sup> The exchange nicely taps into the affinity between song and dance spectacles and other tributes, among them sacrificial offerings and votive goods, tendered to the gods who were worshipped at the civic and extra-urban sacred sites where choruses typically performed. Also manifesting the chorus-dedication kinship, the parthenaic chorus members of Euripides’ *Phoenissae* compare their choral service to Apollo to that supplied by the precious donations at the sanctuary: ‘I became a handmaiden (λάτρις) to Phoebus, just like his *agal mata*

<sup>12</sup> For these, see Steiner 2016a.

<sup>13</sup> Kurke 2012, 220 also cites the story in her discussion of the chorus as a locus of value.



Fig. 0.8 Karyatid from the Siphnian Treasury, Delphi, ca. 530–525 B.C.E. Delphi, Archaeological Museum. Photograph © Luisa Ricciarini/Bridgeman Images.

fashioned in gold' (220–21); a later passage, in which the chorus styles itself 'the first fruits of the spear' dedicated to Apollo (282), reiterates the singer-dancers' self-alignment with inanimate offerings.

The continuity between females who render song and dance tribute at shrines, votive artefacts and choruses finds fresh expression in architectural innovations visible from the sixth century on: the so-called 'karyatids', marble statues of long-robed women erected at the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi (Fig. 0.8) and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> These figures not only 'serve' by propping up the lintel and making offerings with their outstretched hands,<sup>15</sup> but, as their name suggests, they may have been conceived as permanent stand-ins for the occasional choruses that performed at the sites, themselves reconfigurations of an ordinary choric ensemble: the eponymous

<sup>14</sup> Delphi, Archaeological Museum; many standard treatments suggest that the Knidian Treasury of ca. 550 also originally featured karyatids but, as Marconi 2007, 17 notes, the downdating of the sculptural figures traditionally assigned to the building makes this impossible.

<sup>15</sup> Here I echo Neer 2001, 316, who details this form of structural service.





**Fig. 0.9** The south porch of the Athenian Erechtheion with the six replica karyatids as seen from the south-east, ca. 421–406 B.C.E. London, British Museum 1816, 0610.128 (Greek and Roman Sculpture 407). Photograph Harrieta171/Wikimedia CC BY-SA 3.0.

Karyatids were the maidens who supplied a standing chorus at the cult of Artemis Karyatis in Sparta. Chorality similarly informs the libation-making columnar maidens (who would originally have held phialai in their hands) of the Erechtheion; according to a fragment from Euripides' *Erechtheus* (fr. 370.77–80 K), the girls' self-sacrifice on behalf of their polis received mimetic commemoration and celebration in cult in the shape of choruses performing 'sacred maiden dances', these perhaps revisualized in the six Ionic columns fronting the building (Fig. 0.9)<sup>16</sup> that form two semi-choruses, each one stepping in the opposite direction around the structure. The presence of a maiden chorus in commemorative rites for the daughters of Erechtheus has a 'choral logic' of its own. Catasterized for their service to the city, these Erechtheids became none other than the celestial Hyades visible on the astragalos cited earlier, whose dance the three maidens encircling the fourth-century Acanthus Column in Delphi (Fig. 0.10), according to a revisionary reading, lastingly re-enact.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> London, British Museum 1816, 0610.128 (Greek and Roman Sculpture 407).

<sup>17</sup> Delphi, Archaeological Museum 466, 1423, 4851; for this reading, see Ferrari 2008, 141–47; note too Power 2011, 75 n. 21.



**Fig. 0.10** Fourth-century Acanthus Column from Delphi. Delphi, Archaeological Museum 466, 1423, 4851. Photograph © Luisa Ricciarini/Bridgeman Images.

## 2 Structure and Themes

As this rapid overview and sampling of the book's contents and concerns makes evident, both the diversity of objects and practices and the heterogeneity of the sources gathered here, some written, others painted or worked in stone, wood, metal or cloth,<sup>18</sup> pose major organizational challenges, and ones that I do not claim more than partially to have solved. In the first half of the study, both a loose chronology and the broader taxonomy to which a choral ensemble belongs determine the order of the chapters. Developing the discussion in Chapter 1 of the sequence of

<sup>18</sup> Even the book page can, in post-classical times, become its own *orchestra* or ornamented dancing floor.