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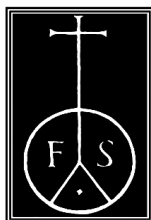
*Collana fondata da Bruno Gentili,
diretta da Paola Bernardini e Carmine Catenacci*

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CHOREUTIKA
PERFORMING
AND THEORISING DANCE
IN ANCIENT GREECE

EDITED BY
LAURA GIANVITTORIO



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4. A DANCE OF DEATH.
EVIDENCE ABOUT A TRAGIC DANCE
OF MOURNING¹

LAURA GIANVITTORIO

In memory of Mrs Elisabetta Profeta

1. A CHOREOGRAPHY OF MOURNING:
TEXTUAL EVIDENCE

Persians 1046 and Seven 854-60

THERE is a curious moment at *Persians* 1046, in the middle of a *kommos*, when Xerxes instructs the chorus to row:²

ἔρεσσ' ἔρεσσε καὶ στέναζ' ἐμὴν χάριν
row, row and groan for my sake.

Since beating the breast and the head is a typical expression of grief, often performed in tragedy on various occasions of mourning,³ the most common suggestion is that ἐρέσσω is a metaphor for “to beat the head or the chest”.⁴ Relying on this, Garvie holds that the verb does not necessarily imply any dance

¹ I owe many thanks to Eric Csapo, Frederick Naerebout, Alan Sommerstein, and Alan Shapiro for their very insightful and helpful remarks on this paper.

² For Aeschylus' plays I follow the text edition of Sommerstein 2008.

³ E.g. Aesch. *Cho.* 23-31; 423-9; *Pers.* 1056; fr. 451h Radt (*TrGF* III); Soph. *Aj.* 310 and 634; *El.* 89 f.; *OC* 1609; Eur. *Alc.* 768; *Suppl.* 772; *Andr.* 825-32; *Tro.* 279 f.; *Or.* 963 (for further examples see Hutchinson 1985, 188). Lonsdale 1993, 242 f. provides for a religious-anthropological interpretation of such gestures; for iconographic analyses see Neumann 1965, 85-9; Ahlberg 1971, 261-7; Catoni 2005, 182 ff.; Jaeggi 2011. Sources record attempts to limit the outspokenness of lamentation: see Shapiro 1991, 630 f.; Lonsdale 1993, 235; Harich-Schwarzbauer 2011, 117 f.; Rutherford 2012, 51 f.

⁴ See *schol. ad loc.* πλῆττε σεαυτόν (Massa Positano 1963, 126); similarly Broadhead 1960, 242 f.; Hutchinson 1985, 188; Belloni 1988, 249; etc.

performance,¹ and some scholars even argue that ἐρέσσω is used here simply due to its assonance with ἀράσσω at v. 1054.²

Such explanations are not quite convincing. It is true that the arm movements performed in rowing resemble in some way the beating of the chest (less so the beating of the head). However, there are no other documented uses of ἐρέσσω as meaning “to beat the chest or the head”, nor are lexemes indicating the beating of the chest and of the head – for example τύπτω, πλήττω, κόπτω / κτύπος, ἀράσσω, δουπέω etc. – usually replaced by any metaphor in other tragic expressions of grief. Furthermore, the context in which ἐρέσσω occurs contains many allusions to seafaring (vv. 950-52, 963-65, 975-77, 1011 f., 1029, 1037, 1075). This all suggests that we should understand ἐρέσσω literally as “to row”, rather than metaphorically as “to beat the chest or the head”.

Another similar use of ἐρέσσω leads us to the same conclusion. At *Seven against Thebes* 855, the chorus says to ἐρέσσειν while performing a dance of mourning (*Sept.* 854-60):

ἀλλὰ γόων, ὦ φίλοι, κατ' οὔρον
 ἐρέσσετ' ἀμφὶ κρατὶ πόμπιμον χεροῖν
 πίτυλον, ὃς αἰὲν δι' Ἀχέροντ' ἀμείβεται,
 ἄνοστον μελάγκροκον
 ναυστολῶν θεωρίδα
 τὰν ἀστιβῆ Παιῶνι, τὰν ἀνάλιον,
 πάνδοκον εἰς ἀφανῆ τε χέρσον.

But friends, upon the wind of lamentation
 row with both hands about your head the regular, escorting stroke
 of oars, which always alternately resonates across the Acheron,
 propelling the water-crossers' sacred ship,
 which is not to return, black-sailed,
 towards the invisible, sunless shores that welcome all,
 on which Apollo Paeon never treads.

¹ Garvie 2009, *ad loc.*: “we cannot exclude the possibility that the verb may, as often [see Garvie on Soph. *Aj.* 251-3], describe more loosely the setting in motion of the lamentation”, though at Soph. *Aj.* 251 ἐρέσσω is used metaphorically, as the *accusativus* ἀπειλάς makes clear (see below).

² On such positions see Belloni 1988, 249, with reference to Eur. *Tro.* 1235-6; see also van Nes 1963, 115.

While in *Persians* the dirge concerns a sea battle, the plot of *Seven* does not offer the slightest reason to allude to seafaring. Yet *Seven* 854-60 also includes repeated seafaring terminology (vv. 854 οὔρον, 856 πίτυλον, 857 μελάγκροκον, 858 ναυστολῶν θεωρίδα, 860 χέρσον) with reference to three different sea voyages. Firstly, there is Charon's rowing across the Acheron towards the Underworld. Secondly, at v. 858 θεωρίς recalls the thirty-oared ship (τριακοντόριον) sent annually from Athens to Delos in order to consult the oracle. And finally, the ritual of the θεωρίς was to commemorate a mythical navigation, that of the ship which carried seven youths and seven maidens to Crete as a sacrifice to the Minotaur.¹

The rowing, oaring, or poling is a *leitmotiv* in both literary and iconographical representations of *psychai* which, with Charon's help, reach Hades through the river, lake or swamp (Acheron, Styx) that separates the world of the living from the underworld.² *Seven* 854-60 makes clear that in tragic mourning the "rowing" (ἑρέσσω) is symbolically and ritually associated with the navigation into the realm of death.³ Thus, the verb is likely to indicate not simply the beating of the chest, but rather a movement within a dance of mourning which is meant to symbolically escort the dead into Hades.⁴

¹ See the ancient sources quoted by Hutchinson 1985, 189 and Sommerstein 2008, 243 n. 130. For a discussion of these lines see also Dawe 1978, 89 f.

² Among the literary representations cf. Eur. *Alc.* 252-7, 361, 439 ff., 458 f.; *HF* 425-34. For coeval iconographic evidence on Charon on white-ground *lekkythoi* see Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 321 ff.

³ Of no relevance to the present discussion is *Ag.* 1617 f., where Aegisthus refers to the chorus as to someone "sitting down there at the oar": there is no dance here, and the naval imagery serves to stress the contrast between the tyrant's power and the subordinated role of the elders.

⁴ Suitable definitions of dance are formulated by Zarifi-Sistovari 2007 as rhythmic body movement performed with artistic purpose, and by Naerebout 1995-96, 25, as rhythmized and patterned human movement, which is in some way intentionally distinct and made distinguishable from everyday movement and has a communicative function. On the theoretical and methodological problems that arise in defining dance see Naerebout 1997, 155 ff.

The dirges of *Persians* and *Seven* show consistent similarities with one other.¹ Both are choral songs placed at the very end of the oldest surviving tragedies (first staged in 472 B.C. and 467 B.C. respectively).² Both mourn dead warriors and are sung antiphonally: in *Persians*, there is a *kommos* between the chorus and Xerxes, in *Seven* the chorus separates into two semi-choruses, thus switching immediately from choral song to an *amoibaion*.³ Most significant here is that in both dirges the chorus is said to ἐρέσσειν. Moreover, the rowing appears to be performed with a similar dancing rhythm, for it is mentioned within similar metric patterns: lyric passages with a prevalence of iambs,⁴ with ἐρέσσω itself occurring in both cases in an iambic trimeter.⁵

This is not to say that the choreographies danced at the end of *Persians* and of *Seven* looked identical. My point is rather that ἐρέσσω indicates two dance performances that have the same religious meaning (to escort the souls to Hades), the same ritual context (the threnodic end of an early tragedy), distinguishing and somehow rowing-like dance movements, and that they were called the same because they were felt to be of a similar kind.

Paratragic allusions

Evidence of rowing dances is less striking in later tragedy. Curiously, nonetheless, the nautical term πῆλυλος “sweep (of oars)” occurs in Euripides’ *Trojan Women* 1236 as well as *Hippolytus* 1464; in both cases, a *dramatis persona* has just died and chorus and one actor mourn antiphonally, in the last part of the tragedy.

On the other hand, there are some paratragic moments in Aristophanes that point to the existence of a tragic rowing

¹ On structural parallelisms see Popp 1971, 237; Taplin 1977, 170 ff.

² Scholars agree almost unanimously that *Sept.* 1005-78 should be regarded as spurious and thus that the tragedy presumably ended with the choral dirge.

³ Vv. 861-74 are spurious and the *amoibaion* starts at v. 875.

⁴ Popp 1971, 237.

⁵ Also Catullus 4 has iambic trimeters in connection with the rowing.

dance, which are imagined to take place in waterscapes or by watercourses.

In *Frogs*, Aristophanes' most eminently paratragic piece, Dionysus' crossing of the swamp towards the Underworld is staged through a comically revisited rowing dance. Though all iconographic evidence portrays Charon as propelling his boat alone, Aristophanes has him ask his passenger Dionysus for help (*Frogs* 197 ff.). Charon gives him detailed instructions on how to sit by the oar, how to stretch both arms forward and so forth. Dionysus, however, fulfils such orders improperly from start to finish and is scolded for that (202). The god of tragedy insists that he is "unaccustomed to the sea" (ἀθαλάττωτος) and "non-Salaminian" (ἀσαλαμίνιος, 204), then, on Dionysus' request (207), the chorus starts singing as to accompany his rowing movements: there can be little doubt that the lyric dialogue between the frogs and Dionysus was danced by both chorus and actor (209-67). Indeed, Dionysus complains that the rowing movements cause him much sweat and pain. Just like the rowing dances that, following my suggestion, take place in *Persians* and *Seven*, this is also performed during a two-voice song, with Dionysus (like Xerxes) apparently leading the chorus while dancing. This scene suggests that Aristophanes resorts to paratragedy even in staging through the dance the *katabasis* of Dionysus, thus parodying that rowing dance which had been traditionally used in tragedy to represent how dead souls descend into Hades.¹

The paratragic end of *Wasps* (1474-1537) also might allude to the rowing dance, though this evidence is thinner than that of *Frogs*. Lines 1516 ff. do not mention any rowing movements, but this seems to parody a dance which used to end early tragedies and which was imagined to take place in an aquatic context. The dancing farce has traditionally been considered

¹ Eupolis' *Demes* (probably staged 412 B.C.) also dramatized the journey into Hades of a comic hero who brought distinguished dead back from the Underworld on behalf of the city (in this case, it was not poets but statesmen). However, the surviving fragments show no trace of a "rowing dance".

as independent from the rest of *Wasps*;¹ yet, on the contrary, it creates a perfectly balanced *Ringkomposition* by making the comedy end as paratragically as it began.² As noticed with regard to *Seven*, in *Wasps* the imaginary setting also unexpectedly changes into a waterscape by the end of the drama. Three dancers compete on the seashore: they resemble aquatic animals and are sons of that “Crab” (Karkinos), also nicknamed θαλάττιος (1519), who served his city both as a tragedian and an admiral.³

Rossi holds that since the dance patterns are described in recitative passages (and not in lyric ones), the σχήματα could not be performed as a unified dance sequence, that is as continuous movements, but as a pantomime-like sequence of discrete, static positions.⁴ However, it is doubtful that dance would take place only during lyric passages,⁵ for this would imply among other things that at the iambic trimeters of vv. 1500-15 the dancers do not come onto the stage dancing. Moreover, the

¹ Wilamowitz-Moellendorff 1935, 298 f.

² Wright 2013 offers a very insightful and, for our purposes, helpful analysis of the paratragedy in *Wasps*. On the comically solemn language of this passage see Rau 1967, 155 f.

³ On the identity of Karkinos and his sons see MacDowell 1971, 326: “K. [...] was one of the 3 generals commanding an Athenian fleet which made attacks on the Peloponnesian coast in 431 (Thuc. 2. 23. 2 [= TrGF 1, p. 131 T6 Snell], *IG* i² 296. 30-40 [= TrGF 1, p. 131 T5 Snell]). [...] it may possibly have been because of his success as an admiral that he was nicknamed θαλάττιος (1519, Plat. com. 134 [= TrGF 1, p. 130 3c Snell])”. MacDowell’s thesis that it was actually Karkinos’ sons (and not just their characters) who danced for Aristophanes does not convince: see Sommerstein 1983, *ad loc.* Sommerstein also argues on the basis of several allusions to the shortness of Karkinos’ sons (*Wasps* 1513; *Peace* 790; cf. Pherecr. fr. 15 *PCG*) that the dancers had to be young boys.

⁴ Rossi 1978; similarly Catoni 2005, 144 ff.

⁵ Rossi’s theory would also imply that choruses generally entered the orchestra without any dance in anapestic *parodoi*, which seems highly unlikely. If we understand “dance” as any rhythmic body movement performed with artistic purpose (see above, p. 92 n. 4), many kinds of dance can be performed even without lyric metres (as occurs in several Eastern theatrical traditions), so that the possibility of dance during recitative passages in Greek drama should not be excluded. Moreover, at the end of *Wasps*, dance could also be performed *after* the recitative verses during purely instrumental music interludes.

words that introduce the performance, *σχήματος ἀρχή* (1485), imply a dynamic dance movement undergoing change, since a motionless *σχήμα* would have no “beginning” at all.¹ For these reasons, I am convinced that this performance is a dance, and not a series of static positions.

Is it possible to formulate hypotheses about which tragic dance is parodied here? The tragic style mocked throughout *Wasps* is a fairly old-fashioned one:² the protagonist Philocleon – an old man himself – loves to sing Phrynichus’ dated songs (317-33)³ and continues through silences (741 ff.) that Aristophanes considers as typical for Aeschylus’ characters (*Ran.* 911-20); the chorus, as old as Philocleon, sings what probably is a para-phrynichian song (273-90) and identifies with the Marathon generation; finally, there are explicit references to Thespis (1479) and foremost to Phrynichus (219 f.; 269 f.), who is also mentioned in the introduction to the dancing farce (1490-6).⁴ Considering the general target of *Wasps*’ paratragedy, it is probable that the dancing farce concluding this comedy parodied a choreography that was imagined as being typical of the close of Phrynichian tragedy, roughly coeval with *Persians* and *Seven*; and of course, choral dances concluding old tragedies were usually of mourning. Indeed, as it has been recently suggested, “[n]ot only it is possible that Aristophanes’ jurors have seen the first productions of Phrynichus’ plays, but [...]

¹ The interpretation of *σχήμα* as a motionless dance figure is also jeopardized by uses of *σχηματίζω* as a synonym of *ὀρχέομαι*, *κινέομαι*, *χορεύω*, e.g. *Ar. Pax* 318-36. Cf. *Xen. Symp.* 2, 15 f.: ἐκ τούτου ὁ παῖς ὀρχήσατο. καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης εἶπεν· εἶδετ’, ἔφη, ὡς καλὸς ὁ παῖς ὦν ἡμῶς σὺν τοῖς σχήμασιν ἔτι καλλίων φαίνεται ἢ ὅταν ἡσυχίαν ἔχη; καὶ ὁ Χαρμίδης εἶπεν· ἐπαινοῦντι ἔοικας τὸν ὀρχηστοδιδάσκαλον. On *σχήμα* as implying movement see Peponi in this volume, pp. 229-31.

² Aristophanes keeps the promise of sparing Euripides as the usual scapegoat of his paratragedy, cf. *Vesp.* 61 οὐδ’ αὔθις ἐνασελγαινόμενος Εὐριπίδης.

³ On the identity of Phrynichus see Borthwick 1968, 44 f. Philocleon sings this short monody in spite of his poor voice (*Vesp.* 317 f.): see Vetta 2007.

⁴ *Vesp.* 1490-6 has been related to Phrynichus fr. 17 Sn. (*TrGF* 1): ἔπτηξ’ ἀλέκτωρ δοῦλον ὡς κλίνας πτερόν. On the authenticity of this fragment see Snell 1986, *ad loc.*

they could have also performed in them, as Phrynichus' chorus members".¹ A possible explanation for the abrupt change of the imaginary setting into a waterscape, as well as for the several allusions to the sea and to aquatic animals, would be that the paratragic dance closing *Wasps* parodies the rowing dance of mourning that, according to my assumptions, closes *Persians* and *Seven*, which, by the time of Aristophanes' *Wasps* (422 B.C.) were definitely considered old-fashioned.²

ἑρέσσω as a choreographic indication

The metric similarities of both passages in which ἑρέσσω occurs in *Persians* and *Seven*, the similar location of both choral songs at the very end of each tragedy, their common function of mourning for important military casualties, the shared nautical terminology, the sudden change of the imaginary setting into a waterscape, and finally the paratragic allusions in Aristophanes, all strongly suggest that in both cases ἑρέσσω indicates some kind of rowing dance (not simply the beating of the chest).³

From the textual evidence discussed above it results that the dance indicated by ἑρέσσω was a choral dance of mourning which sought to re-enact symbolically the action of rowing and was typically placed at the end of early tragedies, where the most spectacular choral performances of mourning usually

¹ Nervegna 2014, 170.

² Further evidence of paratragedy in comedy is too scant to provide any relevant information. Ar. fr. 696 *PCG* parodically refers to the choral dances of Aeschylus' *Phrygians*, where Priamus and the chorus certainly mourned Hector: this could have been a suitable situation for a "rowing dance". More generally, for paratragedy in comedy see Silk 1993, 477 n. 2; Griffith 2013, 85 f.

³ Henrichs, 1994-1995 does not include *Pers.* 1046 and *Sept.* 855 in his study of choral dances. Lawler 1944, 31 is the only scholar who ever held (although briefly and without circumstantial arguments) that these passages refer to what she calls a "mariner dance". However, she attaches to this dance an either burlesquing or dignifying character (the possibility of a mourning dance remains out of her consideration) and identifies it, quite imaginatively, with the κελευστήρς-dance (cf. Ath. 14, 629f; Naerebout 1997, 287).

took place. The beating of the chest as well as other gestures of mourning¹ may well be part – maybe even the ritual origin – of such a rowing dance, but the allusion to Charon’s journey (*Sept.* 854-60), the consistent nautical terminology, and the simulation of a waterscape as a dancing space suggest that the similarities with the rowing had to be rather conspicuous. The emphasis several sources place on the mimetic character of ancient dances confirms this hypothesis, for dancers are often said to imitate human or animal actions.² To choose an example from Aeschylus, the dancing σχήματα called σκωπεύματα (Aesch. fr. 79 R. [*TrGF* III]) allegedly imitated “peering” and “searching of the horizon”.³ As such, it is reasonable to assume that the dance designated by ἐρέσσω displayed similarities with the action of rowing.

On these premises, a closer semantic analysis of ἐρέσσω may provide insights into the rowing dance. Chiefly a tragic verb,⁴ ἐρέσσω typically indicates a vigorous motion of the up-

¹ See below for the valediction gesture.

² Xen. *An.* 6, 1, 5-13; Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 747b-c; Ath. 1, 21f-22a as well as 14, 628d and ff., according to whom a good dance always reflects the lyrics of the corresponding song. Weege 1926, 31-136 considers many of the dances he discusses to be mimetic. On the pyrrhic dance as imitating fighting actions see the sources quoted by Zarifi-Sistovari 2007, 229. Of course, there is no evidence that the totality of Greek dance was mimetic (see Ley 2007, 165).

³ Ath. 14, 629f; Poll. 4, 103; Hesych. *Lex.* s.v. σκωπευμάτων (σ 1218) and ὑπόσκοπον χέρα (υ 739). On other (hypothetical) animal dances see Lawler 1939 and 1952; on dance names as describing characteristic movements or attitudes of the dancers see examples in Weege 1926, 31-136; Zarifi-Sistovari 2007, 242. The ancient habit of naming dances after the actions they are supposed to imitate is in striking contrast with some modern practices, as explained by the following anecdote by a contemporary dancer: “William Forsythe names a phrase that he choreographed ‘Tuna’ not because it reminded him of the fish but because we used that phrase to create endless improvisations on, and when cooking, everyone knows that ‘tuna goes with everything’” (from Ch. Ciupke’s and A. Till’s art exhibition: *Undo, redo and repeat. Ein Tanzfonds Erbe Projekt.* Heidelberger Kunstverein, May 17th-August 3rd 2014).

⁴ In prose and in comedy we usually find “to push the oar” (ἐλαύνω). On the uses of ἐρέσσω see van Nes 1963, 116; on fragmentary Eur. *Hyps.* fr. 8, 8 = 753c, 14 Kn. (*TrGF* v 2), cf. Kannicht 2004, *ad loc.*

per limbs (arms or wings)¹ which is performed repeatedly, rather uniformly, and not necessarily quickly.² In addition to “to row”, it also means “to agitate” or “to move”, as said for example of birds flapping their wings. In both meanings, ἐρέσσω implies simultaneous movements of both upper limbs.³ Moreover, it is prevalently used with plural subjects⁴ or with collective singular ones: it is not one but several men, birds and so forth that “row” or “flap their wings”.⁵ Thus, ἐρέσσω indicates a fundamentally “choral” movement performed by the whole group as one single body, again and again, and beating to the time: exactly as the oarsmen of a ship. Considering the “rowing dance” within this semantic context, all dancers can be expected to perform the same arm movements synchronically, repeatedly, and rhythmically.

It is quite impossible to know whether it was Aeschylus who first used the “rowing dance” and/or its designation through

¹ For ἐρέσσω as performed with arms e.g. Hom. *Od.* 12, 444 and 14, 351; Soph. *Phil.* 1135; Eur. *Tro.* 1257 f.; with wings e.g. Aesch. *Ag.* 52; Eur. *IT* 288 f.; *Ion* 161; *Anth. Pal.* 7, 202 (Anyte); with feet e.g. Eur. *IA* 139. Metaphorical uses of ἐρέσσω are at Soph. *Ant.* 158 (cf. μῆτιν); *Aj.* 251 (cf. ἀπειλάς); *Phil.* 1135 with reference to the handling of the bow (an activity which involves one outstretched arm and the bending of the other). Accessory movements (e.g. προσπίπτω at Hom. *Od.* 9, 490 and 12, 194; στροφοδινώμαι at Aesch. *Ag.* 51 f.) and directions (e.g. εἰς + *accusativus* at Hom. *Od.* 13, 279 and 15, 497) are seldom specified.

² Quick ships like the triremes owed their high speed (e.g. Xen. *An.* 6, 4, 2; Thuc. 3, 49, 2 ff.) to the number of the rowers, not to a frantic rowing pace. ἐρέσσω can indicate slow movements even with reference to the wings of flying birds, as for the big birds of prey of Aesch. *Ag.* 52.

³ *Contra* Broadhead 1960 on *Pers.* 1046: “first one hand and then the other striking”.

⁴ E.g. Hom. *Il.* 1, 435; 9, 361; *Od.* 9, 73; 9, 490; 12, 194; 13, 279; 15, 497; Aesch. *Sept.* 855; *Ag.* 52; Soph. *Aj.* 251; Eur. *Tro.* 1258.

⁵ E.g. Hom. *Od.* 11, 78 (μετ’ ἐμοῖσ’ ἐτάροισιν); Aesch. *Pers.* 1046 (the subject is the chorus); Eur. *IT* 289 (the subject is one of the Erinyes); *Ion* 161 (the subject is one of the birds). The only classical occurrences I could find of a singular voice of ἐρέσσω as “to row” are Aesch. *Suppl.* 723, though the verb is here passive and the ship (which is the subject) is rowed by many men, and Soph. *Trach.* 561 (which is actually with a negation: Nessus does not row); further singular occurrences mean “to agitate” or “to move hastily”, e.g. Aesch. *Suppl.* 541; Soph. *Phil.* 1135; Eur. *IA* 139.

ἔρέσσω. He may have inherited both from another *chorodidaskalos*, or he could have inherited only the choreography and then re-labelled it through ἔρέσσω to highlight the similarities with the rowing.¹ In any case, later sources record that Aeschylus (and Phrynichus) created a number of σχήματα ὀρχηστικά,² and Aristophanes' praise of their choruses confirms this evidence as reliable. Finally, it is interesting that, as Aeschylus probably plays Xerxes' role, it is the *chorodidaskalos* himself who at *Persians* 1046 performs the rowing dance and instructs the chorus to do the same: this “onstage dance class” is in line with Aeschylus' reputation of personally instructing his own choruses³ as well as with the tradition of poets and *chorodidaskaloi* encouraging the chorus to dance.⁴

¹ It is plausible that Phrynichus' *Phoenician Women*, staged shortly before *Persians* (presumably between 478 and 473 B.C.), concluded with a rowing dance in which the women of the chorus mourned their men. In fact, the dancing farce at the end of *Wasps*, which I suspect to be a parody of the rowing dance (see above), is related *expressis verbis* to Phrynichus. If Phrynichus did close the *Phoenician Women* with a rowing dance of mourning, then Aeschylus would have drawn inspiration from this tragedy not only for the beginning (cf. the *hypothesis*) but also for the end of *Persians*. On this point, I quote from an email of Alan Sommerstein (December 3rd, 2014): “[...] it would be a nice touch if Aeschylus, who famously began *Persians* with a reminiscence of Phrynichus' play(s) on the same subject, ended it with another; especially if, as many believe, Phrynichus had recently died”.

² On Phrynichus see Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 732 f = *TrGF* I, p. 72, T13 Sn.: καίτοι καὶ Φρύνιχος ὁ τῶν τραγωδιῶν ποιητῆς περὶ αὐτοῦ φησὶν ὅτι σχήματα δ' ὀρχηστικὰ τόσα μοι πόρεν, ὅσσ' ἐνὶ πόντῳ κύματα ποιεῖται χεῖματι νύξ ὅλοη. On Aeschylus see Ath. 1, 21d-e, quoted in the next footnote. Catoni 2005, 135 ff. collects and discusses sources on the σχήματα ὀρχηστικά.

³ Ath. 1, 21d-e: “Aeschylus as well not only invented the elegance and dignity of costume that the hierophants and torch-bearers imitate when they dress themselves, but also created many dance-steps (πολλὰ σχήματα ὀρχηστικά) himself and passed them to his choruses (ἀνεδίδου τοῖς χορευταῖς). Chamaeleon, at any rate, says that he was the first to arrange the dances, and that he did not use special trainers, but worked out the dance-steps for his choruses himself and generally took on the entire management of the tragedy (σχηματίσαι τοὺς χορούς ὀρχηστοδιδασκάλους οὐ χρησάμενον, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν τοῖς χοροῖς τὰ σχήματα ποιοῦντα τῶν ὀρχήσεων, καὶ ὅπως πᾶσαν τὴν τῆς τραγωδίας οἰκονομίαν εἰς ἑαυτὸν περιεστᾶν). Most likely, therefore, he acted in his own plays” (transl. Olson 2006).

⁴ Cf. Archil. fr. 120 and 121 W.; Alc. fr. 26 and 29 *PMG*. On the

2. AN IMAGE OF THE DANCE OF DEATH.
ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The Basel Krater

When considering iconographic evidence of theatrical performance, recent scholarship starts from the sound methodological premise that no pictorial record can provide reliable detail about the staging,¹ for “we must not see vase paintings as photographs or films but must appreciate the ‘prevailing conventions’ of the art”.² Unsurprisingly, several attempts to reconstruct ancient dances on the basis of vase paintings, though artistically interesting, have been fairly speculative.³

Here I do not wish to reconstruct any dance on the basis of iconographic evidence. Rather, I hope to match one specific painting, which displays a tragic chorus in dance, with those choral performances that seem most consistent with it. In doing so, my starting point is provided by literary (not archaeological) evidence, namely the tragic and paratragic texts considered above that point to the existence of a rowing dance.

The so-called Basel krater (FIG. 1) is a red figure krater dated no later than 480 B.C.⁴ and nearly unanimously considered to

problematic identification of the first person with the author see Rösler 1985, and for updated literature Rawles 2011, 146-8; in the same volume, Kavoulaki 2011, 365-90 gives a survey of chorus leadership.

¹ See Naerebout 1995-96, 27-37; 1997, 151-4 and 209-53, and once again in this volume. On the “philodramatic” *vs* “iconocentric” interpretations of pictorial records see Goldhill 1989 (quite polemically); Giuliani 1996, 71-5; Liapis-Panayotakis-Harrison 2013, 11-3.

² Ley 2007, 154 (on photography see also 162 f.). On the problematic nature of vase paintings for the reconstruction of choral dance performances see Lonsdale 1993, 9-16; Naerebout 1997, 209-53; on the Basel krater in particular see Powers 2014, 50 f.

³ Ley 2007, 150-67 offers a circumstantial review of scholarly approaches to Greek dance; Smith 2010 focuses on what could be called the “artistic research” by Duncan and Lawler. In addition to ancient writing, visual representations, and metre, Zarifi-Sistovari 2007, 233 also considers comparisons with contemporary dance cultures as useful evidence for restoring ancient dance.

⁴ For earlier dates see Green 1994, 17 f. (490 B.C.); Csapo 2010, 6 f.



FIG. 1. Red-figure krater: BS 415, side A. Ca. 480 B.C. (©Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, photo: Andreas F. Voegelin).



FIG. 1A. Detail of BS 415 (©Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, photo: Rudolf Habegger).

represent a tragic, pre-Sophoclean semi-chorus (though the six dancers might indicate a larger group as *pars pro toto*).¹ There are very good reasons for holding this position. First of all, the extension of the chin-line indicates that the dancers wear a mask, a feature of dramatic choruses only, and not, for example, of the dithyrambic. Moreover, the mask, costume, and general attitude of the dancers, as well as the presence of a funerary *sema*, suggest a tragic situation. Thus, this appears quite clearly to be a tragic chorus. What tragic dance, then, is being performed here?

Most scholars believe that the Basel krater represents a necromantic ritual. Accordingly, the dancers are regarded as raising the ghost of some dead hero from the funerary *sema*, in a similar way to the chorus summoning Darius' *psyche* in *Persians*.² Admittedly, this cannot actually be the chorus of *Persians*: and this not only because of the slightly earlier date of the krater (ca. 480 B.C., although vase dating is not an exact science), but primarily due to the appearance of both the actor, who does not wear anything similar to the extravagant, head-to-toe orientalising costume mentioned at *Persians* 659-61,³ and the chorus, which consists of vigorous, long haired youths dressed in military fashion rather than the old, feeble counsellors who remain in the comfort of the royal palace. Most scholars believe that the krater represents another, unspecified tragic necromancy.⁴

(500 to 490 B.C.); Hart 2010, 29 provides the essential bibliography on this vase.

¹ E.g. Green 1991, 15-50; 1994; Lonsdale 1993, 256 f.; Miller 2004, 165-172; Taplin 2007, 29 (whereas Taplin 1997, 70 was still cautious: "[...] tragedy is likely, though not finally certain"); Hart 2010, 29. *Contra* Wiles 1997, 94 n. 45, who argues for a pyrrhic dance, and Wellenbach 2015. On the dancers' costumes see Wyles 2011, 6 f.

² For alternative interpretations, which are quite rare, see Wiles 2007, 19 f. and the contributions quoted by Garvie 2009, 259.

³ On the standard attributes of Persians in Attic art see Miller 2004.

⁴ Simon 1983, 104; Green 1991, 34-37 and 1994, 18; Henrichs 1996, 51; Taplin 2007, 29; Csapo-Slater 1994, 57; Csapo 2010, 7; Hart 2010, 29.

A dance of mourning?

This interpretation is certainly reasonable. To begin with, there are some iconographic peculiarities that are difficult to explain. For example, the tall rectangular structure on top of a three-stepped base, usually interpreted as a somehow odd funerary monument, might also be the altar which, reportedly, used to be located in the orchestra: such an altar might have been used as a stage prop, and in the case of the Basel krater it would serve as a funerary monument.¹ In any case, the ribbons and branches spilling out of this grave-like structure do not look like the *taeniae* that are wrapped around funerary *stelai* on most vases.²

We know very little concerning tragic conventions for the appearance of ghosts,³ so that the figure on the left cannot be identified as a ghost on the basis of staging considerations.⁴ However, performers of necromantic rituals are usually said to beat the earth with their hands (Hom. *Il.* 9, 568 f.; Aesch. *Pers.* 683;⁵ Eur. *Tro.* 1305 f.);⁶ movements of this sort can be seen on a black-figured *lekythos* of the early fifth century B.C. (FIG. 2), which shows a (maybe tragic) chorus of men as kneeling by

¹ On the altar and its possible uses as a stage prop in Classical theatre see Poe 1989; Merker 2016.

² E.g. Pfanner 1977.

³ In extant tragedy, ghosts appear at Aesch. *Pers.* 681; *Eum.* 94; Eur. *Hec.* 1. On Darius' epiphany, which has often been connected to the Basel krater, see Taplin 1977, 116-9 and 365-7; Garvie 2009, xlix-liii.

⁴ Bardel 2005. The only certain tragic ghost in Greek vase painting is labelled as "ghost of Aietes" (Apulian krater, Munich 3296); even the staging of his appearance, either on a rock or on a smoke column, is controversial: see Trendall-Webster 1971, 110; Bardel 2005, 100 f.; Taplin 2007, 256 f.

⁵ On this problematic verse see Broadhead 1960, 173.

⁶ See Garvie 2009, 277. Paratragic statements are not documentary records, but it is nonetheless interesting that Ar. *Ran.* 1028 f. also speaks of clapping hands: ἐχάρην γοῦν, ἤνιξ' ἤκουσα περὶ Δαρείου τεθνεώτος, ἢ ὁ χορὸς δ' εὐθύς τῷ χεῖρ' ὠδὲ συγκρούσας εἶπεν ἰαυοῦ. The passage which suits this description best is *Pers.* 673 ff., where the chorus expresses sorrow for Darius' death and utters the most "barbaric" among the (not too many) exclamations of the necromantic song: αἰαῖ αἰαῖ.

a funerary stele, raising one hand to tear the hair in a well-known gesture of grief and stretching the other to the ground.¹ In contrast, the dancers of the Basel krater raise both arms to head height, holding them outstretched and parallel to one other.

The only comparable, although not identical, choral gesture of which I am aware is that of male choruses performing the valediction.² On such occasions, men pay homage to the dead during the *prothesis* or the *ekphora*, standing or walking in one or two parallel rows and raising the right arm, with the palm of the hand facing the corpse

(FIG. 3):³ this is probably the very gesture Orestes regrets not to have made at Aesch. *Cho.* 9.⁴ But similarities with the valediction would suggest mourning, not necromantic, situations.



FIG. 2. Black-figure *lekythos*: Munich 1871 inv. 6025, early fifth century B.C. (©Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München, photo: Renate Kühling).

¹ On this *lekythos* see Green 1991, 35 f.; Costantini 2005, 191; and Bardel 2005, 105 f., who also outlines different interpretations.

² Also Henrichs 1996, 54 shares this view.

³ Further iconographic examples of valediction are: a black-figure *phormiskos* (Athens, Kerameikos 691, see Shapiro 1991, 636 fig. 7), a black-figure plaque (Metropolitan Museum of Art 54.11.15, see Shapiro 1991, 638 fig. 11), and a *loutrophoros* dated ca. 450 B.C. (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania 30.4.1, see Oakley 1997, pl. 25). On the valediction gesture see Neumann 1965, 86; Simon 1983, 103; Shapiro 1991, 635; and most recently Taylor 2014, 7 n. 16.

⁴ Cf. Eur. *Alc.* 768; *Suppl.* 772.



FIG. 3. Black-figure cup (side B): Athens, Kerameikos 1687
(©Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens).

Furthermore, necromantic rituals in Greek tragedy are usually performed by both the chorus and the actor(s). More precisely, it is the actor who performs the ritual with the assistance of the chorus. For example, in *Persians* Atossa pours the libations and attends the choral necromantic song (vv. 623-80),¹ and in *Choephoroi* Orestes and Electra address their father by his tomb assisted by the chorus (vv. 306-509).² The Basel krater, however, has the chorus as the only performer of a necromantic ritual, with one actor playing the role of ghost but without a second actor to carry out the ritual. Had the tragedy been staged with two actors, then it would be an unusual dramatization of necromancy. Nor is there any trace of stage

¹ Further tragic necromancies which require the presence of an actor to perform the ritual are Soph. *El.* 51 f., *OC* 469-83, *Polyxena* fr. 523; Eur. *Hec.* 112-5, *IT* 159-66. In Aeschylus' *Psychagogoi* the chorus gives instructions to Odysseus, who will eventually perform the ritual (see Bardel 2005, 85; Garvie 2009, 258; *contra* Taplin 1997, 70 n. 2, according to whom it is the chorus that summons the ghost). On tragic necromancy see Taplin 1977, 447; Jouan 1981; and Green 1994. Green's assessment that, in tragedy, necromancy was "an almost traditional motif by 472 B.C." (*ibid.* 18) goes too far: we do not know whether Phrynichus staged such a scene in *Phoenician Women*, and the only evidence earlier than *Persians* is provided by *Psychagogoi*.

² See Garvie 2009, 259 f. on the similarities of both Aeschylean necromancies and their differences with the Homeric versions.

props relating to libations (cf. *Pers.* 609-24) or other offerings as one would expect in necromantic scenes, such as flowers and olive-tree garlands (as at *Pers.* 614-6); hair (as at Aesch. *Cho.* 7; Soph. *El.* 451); or incense.¹ In short, the artist does not specifically signalise this tragic scene as a necromantic one.

The poorly preserved inscriptions on the Basel krater must also be considered in this connection (FIG. 1A).² Some hardly visible strings of letters emerge from the open mouths, thus implying the singing of both the dancers (according to the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*: E, IE, AOOIO) and the actor (ΦΕ . ΣΕΟ).³ Once more, the circumstance that both actor and chorus are singing does not point to a necromantic ritual, but to a *kommos*, i.e. a *mourning* song performed by both actor and chorus.⁴ Indeed, some of the letters can be interpreted as common tragic exclamations of grief (ἐ, ἰέ, and φε[ῦ]),⁵ which

¹ Bardel 2005, 109 f.

² Many thanks to Esaù Dozio, curator of the Classical Collection of the *Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig*, and to photographer Rudolf Habegger, who kindly provided me with newly taken images of these letters; unfortunately, these remain hardly visible even with the use of double polarized and ultraviolet light.

³ Slehoferova 1988, 22: “Der Bärtige scheint auf den Gesang der Jünglinge zu antworten [Vor seinem offenen Mund erkennt man in schwachen Spuren die Buchstaben ΦΕ . ΣΕΟ, unter den Armen des ersten Paares, den Körpern entlang (rückläufig): AOOIO (?); außerdem ein oder zwei Buchstaben (rückläufig) von den Mündern der Tänzerpaare (erstes und drittes Paar: E, mittleres Paar: IE)]”, cf. *ibid.* fig. 3. It is intriguing to relate the puzzling string of letters AOOIO (faintly visible in fig. 1A), placed along the bodies of the “rowing dancers”, to the calls shouted by the trireme-swain, who kept the rowers pulling in rhythm by calling ΟΠ ΟΠ (see Ar. *Av.* 1395; *Ran.* 180, 206-8) and through their response (Eur. *Hel.* 1575 f.). In this volume, even Csapo p. 140 considers how oarsmen used to sing refrains to a boatswain.

⁴ Arist. *Poet.* 1452b 24 f. As a matter of fact, *gooi* and *threnoi* are reported to be sung antiphonally, i.e. by two voices responding to each other, as early as Homer: see *Od.* 24, 58-64 (Μοῦσαι . . . ἀμειβόμεναι) and *Il.* 24, 720-76, which shows the alternate mourning of chorus and *solo* singers (Andromache, Hecuba, and Helena). On geometric vase painting that points to antiphonal mourning see Ahlberg 1971, 266.

⁵ As another example of vase painting with inscribed grief exclamations from the represented dirge, see a black-figure *phormiskos* displaying a valediction and the words ΟΙΜΟΙΟ ΘΥΓΑ[ΤΗΡ] (Athens, Kerameikos 691: see Shapiro 1991, 636 fig. 7).

again would be more consistent with a dirge than with a necromantic ritual.¹

Of course, the relationship between the theatrical performance and its representation on vases is a notoriously complex one, and pot-painters should not be expected to represent things in exactly the same way they were showed at the theatre.² Even so, it is interesting that two macroscopic features of the choreography as represented by the Basel krater can be related to the rowing dance: the dancing movements and the spatial arrangement of the dancers.

To begin with, the bearing of the dancers resembles those of sweep rowers, the similarity being most striking with the parallel, outstretched arms that move simultaneously and raise to the height of the head (FIG. 4; cf. *Ar. Ran.* 201: *προβαλεῖ τὸ χεῖρε κάκτενεῖς*).³ The painter shaped this quite peculiar arm position with special accuracy, so much so that we can see signs of corrections in the arms of the dancers.⁴ Such an arm posture is consistent with a re-enactment of the rowing, and would thus conform to our notion of the mimetic nature of other ancient dances (see above).⁵ The striding pose of the dancers' legs is also consistent with the rowing dance: as this

¹ Dirges contain more interjections of grief than necromantic scenes, as one can see by comparing, in *Persians*, the final *kommos* with the necromantic *stasimon*.

² Green 1991.

³ Little can be said about the movement speed, though comparatively slow movements would correspond to our general understanding of the solemnity of tragic dance (e.g. Anonymus *Περὶ τραγωδίας* 11 [Perusino 1993]: *σεμνὸν ἦν καὶ μεγαλοπρεπὲς καὶ μεγάλας ἔχον τὰς μεταξύ τῶν κινήσεων ἡρεμίας*); our notion of *ἐμμέλεια*, however, is based on scant and not always descriptive sources (see Bierl 2001, 102 f.; Ley 2007, 158 f.). Common sense suggests what Lucian, *Salt.* 30 confirms: at length, tragic dances could not be as quick as to cause breathlessness, as singing performance would have been compromised. Furthermore, *ἑρέσσω* (cf. Aesch. *Pers.* 1046 and *Sept.* 855) does not necessarily imply quickness (see above, p. 99 n. 2).

⁴ Slehoferova 1988, 22: "Die erhobenen Arme der hinteren Gestalten haben ursprünglich bis in den oberen Bildrahmen gereicht. Nachträglich korrigierte der Maler die Armhaltung, wobei er nur die Arme abgedeckt, einige Finger aber stehengelassen hat".

⁵ *Contra* Sampatakakis 2011, 109, who with regard to the Basel krater dancers speaks of "anti-realist gesturalisation".

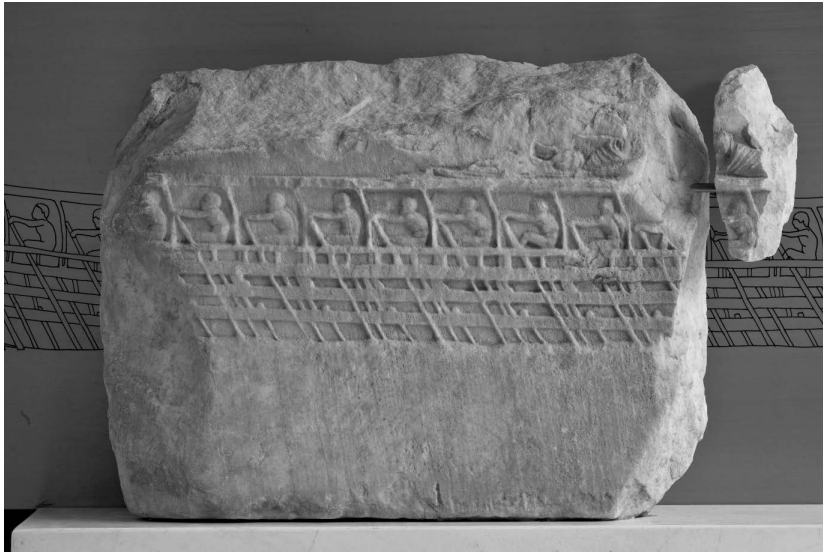


FIG. 4. Lenormant Relief: Athens, Acropolis Museum 1339. Ca. 410 B.C. (©Acropolis Museum, photo: Socratis Mavrommatis).

is supposed to be performed at the *exodos* of early tragedies, the chorus might well have exited the orchestra while dancing it.¹ This motion is confirmed by *Persians* 1038 where Xerxes, still acting as a chorus leader, instructs the dancers to go towards the palace: since vv. 1038 and 1046 – where ἐρέσσω occurs – are both the first verse of matching *strophe* and *antistrophe*, they might show similar dancing patterns.²

Turning to the position of the dancers in the orchestra, Pollux (4, 108-9) claims that tragic choruses were composed of three ranks (ζυγά) of five dancers each or by five columns (στοῖχοι) of three dancers each – which is the same –, resulting in a total of fifteen dancers.³ As Aristotle's *Poetics* tells us,

¹ But generally speaking Zarifi-Sistovari 2007, 231 f. is right in pointing out that funerary dances do not necessarily imply feet movements.

² Most scholars hold that during *strophe* and *antistrophe* the same dancing movements were performed in opposite directions; on different views see Ley 2007, 167-73.

³ Such a square formation resembles that of a phalanx; ancient sources indeed noted the similarities between dance (not only the *pyrrhike*) and military movements (Ath. 14, 628e-f).

the fifteen dancer chorus was Sophocles' invention while Aeschylus still had twelve dancers: it may therefore be inferred that pre-Sophoclean choruses were arranged into three ranks of four dancers each. Pollux's information about the arrangement of dramatic choruses in ζυγά and στοίχοι is basically confirmed by two pieces of evidence concerning early drama:¹ a papyrus fragment from Aeschylus' satyr play *Θεωροί*, which apparently refers to a satyric chorus as forming two rows,² and the Basel krater itself. It is, however, very hard to believe that this formation would be kept without variations for different tragic dances and throughout their whole duration.³ In all likelihood Pollux describes a basic starting arrangement from which different ὀρχηστικά σχήματα were performed and which was recomposed over and over again.

As virtually no other vase-painting from the fifth century displays what can be positively identified as a tragic chorus in performance, we can gain little insight into choreographic trends specific to tragedy.⁴ Nevertheless, the comparison of the Basel krater with other iconographic evidence of non-tragic choruses in performance reveals that synchronized movements are comparatively rare and parallel rows of dancers quite unique. Not only most dancing satyrs, maenads, brides, and komasts, but also a number of dancing dramatic choruses from satyr plays and comedies are represented as performing different movements – that is, dancing non-synchronously – in what appears to be a more or less scattered order.⁵ Even

¹ Yet Wiles 1997, 89 and others express their misgivings on Pollux' reliability. More generally on the questionability of late sources about theatre see Taplin 1977, 434 ff.

² Aesch. fr. 78c 38 R. (*TrGF* III): διστοίχω[ν] (see Radt 1985, *ad loc.*: “in fine χορῶν? Lobel probabiliter ‘fortasse chorus satyrorum διστοιχος orchesteram inibat, ut τριστοιχος chorus tragoediae dici potuit’”). Cf. Hom. *Il.* 18, 602 ἄλλοτε δ' αὖ θρέξασκον ἐπὶ στίχας ἀλλήλοισι; Alcman 33 *PMG* καὶ Ἀλκμάν ὁμοστοίχους ἐκάλεσε τὰς ἐν τάξει χορευούσας παρθένους.

³ See Di Benedetto-Medda 2002², 235; Wiles 2000, 134 f.; Foley 2003, 9 f.; and Csapo in the present volume, p. 119.

⁴ See Taplin 1997, 69 and 2007, 29.

⁵ Felber-Kovacs, 2015 and the literature they quote have recently used the metaphor of the swarm to describe such choruses as collective, apparently non-hierarchical formations in movement.

when, as in some apparently comic choruses, the dancers move synchronically and in aligned order, they form one single line rather than the parallel lines of the Basel krater.¹ Thus, although according to Pollux parallel rows were typical for dramatic dances of all genres, and in spite of the many vases that display comic and satiric choruses, parallel rows of dancers are seldom recorded.² Apparently, the painter considered

¹ For example: a chorus of four dancers with piper (hydria ca. 560 B.C., formerly Henning Throne Holst's collection), a chorus, possibly dramatic, consisting of four trios (Siana cup, ca. 560 B.C., Amsterdam, A. Pierson Museum 3356), a chorus of five stilt-walkers (amphora 550-525 B.C., Christchurch University of Canterbury 41/57), one chorus of six hoplites riding dolphins and another of six youths riding ostriches (on both sides of a *skyphos* 520-510 B.C., Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 10.18), a possible dithyrambic chorus riding dolphins (*psykter* 520-510 B.C., New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1989.281.69), a probable comic chorus of three knight-costumed and three horse-costumed dancers (Antikensammlung Berlin F1697), and a chorus of two bird-costumed dancers (oinochoe ca. 480 B.C., London, British Museum 1842.0728.787). On these vases see Trendall-Webster 1971, 15-28 (who however consider them as "pre-dramatic"); Green 1991; Hart 2010. Two fourth century reliefs representing comic choruses as dancing in a line are preserved at the Athens Agora Museum (S1025 and S1586) and have been analysed by Csapo 2010, 13 f. (as well as during the talk he gave at the conference "Greek Theatre beyond the Canon", Vienna, 13-14 November 2015).

² The only choral performances which resemble that of the Basel krater dancers are a fragment of a choragic relief from the fourth century B.C. (Agora S2098: see Csapo 2014, 101) and the male groups that, while attending funerary rituals, perform the valediction gesture synchronically and in two parallel lines (cf. above, p. 105 and fig. 3). Thus, several remarkable features, while being unusual for most choruses as they are represented in vase paintings, are shared by the valediction-performers and by the "rowing dancers" of the Basel krater: the similarity of the arm(s) movements, the synchronism, the arrangement into two parallel rows, and the funerary context. Indeed, both groups were thought to escort the dead during their final journey: those at the *ekphora* towards the grave, the others by symbolically rowing towards Hades (cf. *Sept.* 854-60). The idea of a choreographic adaptation of the valediction-gesture into the choreography represented on the Basel krater provides a possible explanation for these similarities. In fact, funeral dances could absorb ritual gestures of lamentation into their choreographic vocabulary (see Ahlberg 1971, 266, who refers mostly to gestures of beating the head), and valediction in particular was also performed by male choruses while singing – and probably dancing – dirges. E.g. fig. 3 shows two

this formation as a hallmark of the dance he wanted the vase owners to recognise.

To sum up, all elements considered above suggest a mourning performance.¹ In addition to this, there is the quite obvious fact that, in tragedy, death is far more frequent than (temporary) resurrection. For these reasons, I believe that the actor on the left is not arising from (*anabasis*) the tomb, but either descending into it (*katabasis*) or just standing behind it. A dignified character is about to die or to be put to death and everything is ready for the farewell; he has already veiled his head, and the tomb has been duly adorned.² At this highly dramatic point the actor sings a *kommos* with the chorus in order to mourn his own fate, as other dying tragic protagonists do (for example Soph. *Ant.* 806-82; Eur. *Alc.* 244-79). While in later tragedy, in which *metabolai* and *peripeteiai* abound, the plot is not necessarily over with the death of the main character, in early tragedy, which is comparatively “actionless”, little else could possibly happen after such an event.³ Therefore, in a tragedy as early as that represented on the Basel krater, the *kommos* about the protagonist’s imminent death took place, in all likelihood, at the end of the drama, just as the “rowing dance” of mourning designated through ἐρέσω was performed at the end of *Persians* and *Seven*.

Following the arguments outlined above, attempts to identify the tragedy represented by the Basel krater should focus on a tragedy with a male protagonist who dies still black-bearded, and therefore comparatively young – apparently without reporting serious injuries in the upper half of the body – deserving high honours at the moment of his death (and maybe

male semi-choruses that, as usual in threnodic performances, mourn by singing antiphonally: the men in the front row have their mouths shut, whereas those in the rear row are singing (cf. Lonsdale 1993, 246 f.). On the black figure *phormiskos* (Athens, Kerameikos 691) showing performers of the valediction gesture as well as the dirge-like exclamation ΟΙΜΟΙΟ ΘΥΓΑ[THP] see above, p. 107 n. 5.

¹ See also Csapo (forthcoming).

² The *taeniae* do not imply that the dead person has been buried under this tomb for some time now: in fact, it is not even clear whether they were meant to honour the dead or the funerary monuments (see Pfanner 1977, 7).

³ See Gianvittorio (forthcoming).

afterwards), and with a chorus of twelve youths, maybe warriors, which during the final *kommos* about the protagonist's fate probably performed that dance of mourning to which Aeschylus refers by ἐρέσω.

In short, my hypothesis is that the Basel krater displays a *kommos* from the final part of an early tragedy and the related choral dance of mourning. This choreography seems to fit the rowing dance with which both *Persians* and *Seven* ended: as in an early “dance of death”, the dancing chorus symbolically escorts the soul of the dying in his last journey across the Acheron.¹ As far as grief is concerned, the rowing dance motif here assumed suits a mourning situation better than a necromantic one, because in literature and iconography the rowing is a *Leitmotiv* connected with the *katabasis*, i.e. the journey of souls to Hades,² and not to their *anabasis* back to the upper world.³

CONCLUSIONS

This paper focuses on a dance of mourning that, supposedly, was performed in both the oldest surviving tragedies, i.e. *Persians* and *Seven*. It links to each other dance performances that, while being set up in different plays, different years, by

¹ Though Lonsdale 1993, 234-60 and I metaphorically refer to Greek dances of mourning as “dances of death”, in art history this concept (cf. also *danse macabre*) indicates the allegoric motif, which was popular throughout Europe during and after the Middle Ages, of the personified, dancing Death (within the extensive literature on the subject, Gertsman 2010 offers one of the newest and most convincing contributions).

² On white-ground *lekythoi* representing Charon see Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 321 ff.; Oakley 2004, 88-144.

³ Curiously, the circumstance that Charon rows to return a soul from the underworld is never explicitly mentioned in resurrection scenes (cf. Eur. *Alc.* 1139 ff., *HF* 514 ff.), not even those featuring necromantic rituals taking place near or referring to netherworld waters: e.g. Hdt. 5, 92, where the ghost of Melissa is summoned by the Acheron; Aesch. fr. 273 and 274 R. (*TrGF* III) from the *Psychagogoi*, settled by the infernal lake; *Pers.* 669, Στυγία ... ἀχλύς; Soph. *Polyxena* fr. 523 R. (*TrGF* IV) with the mention of λίμνη (see Sourvinou-Inwood 1995, 307 f.). In Eur. *Alc.* 112, the fleet mentioned in connection with the rescuing of Alcestis from the death refers to the consultation of distant oracles (see *schol. ad loc.*; Dale 1954, 62; Parker 2007, 78).

different choruses and probably even in a different fashion, seem to be very similar as far as their ritual meaning and performance context are concerned: for both these dances enact the symbolical journey of the souls to Hades and take place at the threnodic end of an early tragedy. Though we cannot say to which degree the two dances looked similar, they were close enough that both could be referred to through the rowing imagery: in both cases, ἐρέσσω is likely to refer to distinguishing dance movements. To some degree, thus, these dances had to show significant “family resemblances”. Moreover, the paper offers a new analysis of the Basel krater, which represents an early tragic semi-chorus which dances by the funerary *sema* of an unidentified figure. Traces of lettering at the mouths of both actor and dancers indicate that they sing together, which, combined with the funerary context, suggests the performance of a *kommos*, and therefore a mourning rather than a necromantic ritual. The dancers arrangement and their arms movements suggest that the Basel krater may display an early tragic dance of mourning similar to that one to which Aeschylus refers by ἐρέσσω.

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