

TYLER JO SMITH: *Komast dancers in Archaic Greek Art*. Oxford University Press, Oxford – New York 2010. ISBN 9780199578658. XXX, 357 pp. GBP 107.50.

Some concepts tend to rise above others when one mentions "ancient Greece", and one of them is surely the combination of wine, merrymaking, dance and sex, which all are included in "komos". Yet it is surprising how little we know of *komos* and the dancers we have learnt to call *komastai* (sg. *komastes*). Smith has done an excellent and important job studying in detail the representations of *komos* in sixth-century BC Greek vasepainting. This is not to say that *komos* in visual or written sources would not have been studied earlier, quite the contrary. Smith, however, takes the time to go systematically through the *komos* motives expressed in the human dancing figures shown in blackfigured pottery of the sixth century BC, and, what I think is the crucial point, proceeds with an open mind without fitting the komast dancers to preconceived interpretations of their context and function.

The book is divided into nine chapters. Chapter one, titled "Art, Life, and Performance", serves as an introduction, discussing the research history of the subject, the problems that arise from previous studies as well as the source material itself and taking up the themes of this study. It frames "the topic at hand within the artistic and cultural koine of sixth century Greece", as Smith puts it (p. 5). Chapter nine, "Dance, Drink, and Be Merry", concludes the book. In between, the reader is guided through six regions where the komast dancers are studied in "their appropriate artistic and cultural contexts" (p. 11): Corinth, Athens, Laconia, Boeotia, East Greece and the West. The chapters are followed by tables presenting the major categories discussed in the book: dress and attributes, poses and gestures, and context, all presented according the regions (excluding Corinth, where the reader is referred to Seeberg). Plates showing the most common iconographic variants are included at the end of the book.

Smith discusses an important theme, the relation between the painting the figure and the gesture as shown on a vase and the painter and his world, and rightly reminds the reader that the iconography cannot be taken as a realistic snapshot of an actual dance out of which one could recreate ancient dancing (p. 13). This reminder is needed, since vase paintings are the typical source for those who try to recuperate ancient dances "as they were", i.e. aim at reconstructions and interpret the images as showing real steps, postures and gestures. But the images do not move, we do not know where the movement indicated in the image continues, to what rhythm, with what intensity etc. In this respect, the dance is lost to us, which does not mean that it would be meaningless to study dance at all. On the contrary, there are countless approaches and themes that can be applied to the study of ancient dancing, as, for example, Smith shows in the case of iconographic studies. She concludes the introductory chapter (p. 13): "...we must consider the place of the komast within the visual culture, as well as a vital element of the performance culture of Archaic Greece."

The komast dancer has often been called a padded dancer, a reveller or, in German, Dickbauchtänzer. The dancer is in his typical pose a fatbottomed figure slapping his bottom. This gesture appears throughout regions and decades, and as Smith notes, "this fact alone places the figure in a virtually unique category" (p. 11). She then discusses the alleged eastern origins of these dancers and the tradition in Corinthian vase painting (chapter 2) and goes on to Athens, where one observes interesting scenes that mix mythology and humans and introduce Dionysos into the komast motive (chapters 3 and 4). Laconia is the next stop, where we find komast dancers depicted also on lead fig-

ures (chapter 5). In Boeotia (chapter 6), komasts are the most common human figures in blackfigure vases. The dancers are also often shown in a humorous pose, which may confirm "... the coarse and gluttonous reputation of the Boeotians in antiquity" (p. 151). But in addition there are images that are more serious in mood, which may indicate a processional or sacrificial context (p. 175). Moving away from the Greek mainland, the komasts appear in East Greek vases and other media (chapter 7). The images differ from the mainland tradition as they present strong local variants. Some dancers in Chian images wear earrings, a typical male ornament in the East, some wear turbans as well as wreaths. In Clazomenai, in turn, the dancers have long beards and hair on ponytail. But, "the bottom slapping gesture links the dancers of Ionia to each other, and...to their fellow Greeks elsewhere" (p. 221). The last region under study is the West, in a handful of vases especially from Etruria and from Sicily (chapter 8). Going through the analysis of the pictorial motives in each region mentioned above, I would have enjoyed having the regions mentioned in the plates now the individual vases are provided only with the museum and inventory number. The reader has to go back and forth in the pages when wanting to compare the images according the regions. Smith pulls the strings together in chapter 9. It is noteworthy that while the komast dancer can be identified by his typical pose and gesture in many regions, there are major differences in the contexts, details and attributes, each telling something about the local cultures. This underlines the vital importance of analysing the sources carefully and not to put them all in one basket and claim a "universal Greek komast" in this case.

Although there has been a growing interest among scholars to study ancient dance in the last decades, it is still an area with too little detailed and thorough studies. It is, by the way, one area that has no uptodate basic monograph that would take into account the ancient sources and modern theoretical discussions of dance in general. Smith has, on her part, done a great job by providing a systematic revision and an update of the images on black figure vases. This study also points out many relevant themes and aspects to be dealt with in further studies on ancient dance, such as religion/cult, gender, status, sexuality, just to name a few. Those who know only the very basics about Greek vasepainting and/or about studying dance will find this book an excellent read, a fundamental study of one of the many important features in Archaic Greek culture.

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*Highways, Byways, and Road Systems in the Pre-Modern World.* Edited by S. E. ALCOCK – J. BODEL – R. J. A. TALBERT. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2012. ISBN 978-0-470-67425-3. XX, 289 pp. GBP 85, USD 102.20.

Tracing routes of human movement before paved roads were built is a difficult task: paths or dirt roads are preserved in only particular environments and written sources are also often incapable of answering these questions. This volume edited by Susan Alcock, John Bodel and Richard Talbert is based on papers presented in 2008 in a conference which tackled the problems of studying human movement globally and from a variety of points of view: sociological, religious, economic and logistical, among others. The chronological scope is also very wide ranging from the first millennium B.C.E. to the 20th century C.E.