

## IDEIAS E CRÍTICAS

ORDER IN ANCIENT GREEK DANCE  
RITUALS: THE DANCE OF PAN AND  
THE NYMPHS

*ORDEM NOS RITUAIS DE DANÇA  
GREGOS ANTIGOS: A DANÇA DE PÃ E  
AS NINFAS*

**Peter Yioutsos Nektarios**  
University of Ioannina/ Greece

## ABSTRACT

Dance maintained an important role in antiquity and was believed to be a ritual act that should be treated and performed with the outmost respect, regardless of its severe or ludicrous character. Despite the lack of adequate data, ancient sources now and again provide enough details on dance rituals, so as to be able to recognize and even more reconstruct the structure and order of an ancient performance, the so called “τάξις” of Alcman. The cult of Pan and the Nymphs was deeply connected to dance and music. They were mostly celebrated in outdoor shrines and sacred grottos throughout the Greek countryside. Numerous votive offerings depict the circular dance of these vegetation deities, a dance representation where the researcher can recognize specific roles amongst the participants: the dance leader, the principal dancer, the chain of dancers and the musician. Their position in the dance ensemble was ranked accordingly, however sex, age, appearance, and social status were also determining factors always taken into consideration.

Keywords: Round dance, Dance order, Dance leader, Votive offerings

## RESUMO

*A Dança mantinha um papel importante na Antiguidade e acreditava-se que era um ato ritual que deveria ser tratado e performed com o máximo respeito, independentemente de seu caráter severo ou burlesco. Apesar da falta de informações adequadas, as fontes antigas ainda nos fornecem detalhes suficientes sobre os rituais da dança, os quais nos habilitam a poder reconhecer e reconstruir a estrutura e a ordem de uma performance antiga, como no exemplo da chamada “τάξις” de Alcman. O culto de Pã e das Ninfas era profundamente conectado à dança e à música. Era celebrado principalmente ao ar livre e em grutas sagradas por todo o interior da Grécia. Numerosas oferendas votivas representam a dança circular dessas divindades da vegetação, uma imagem da dança na qual o pesquisador identifica papéis específicos entre os partícipes do ritual: o líder, o principal dançarino, a cadeia de dançarinos e o músico. A posição de cada um no grupo de dança foi classificada propriamente. Porém, sexo, idade, aparência e status social também são fatores determinantes levados em consideração.*

*Palavras-chave: Dança circular, Order na dança, Condução na Dança, Oferendas Votivas*

## INTRODUCTION

Dance played an important role in antiquity, as it was considered an expression of human feelings in all aspects of everyday life. It was a ritual act, through which society achieved contact with natural forces, and at the same time an opportunity for interference of divine will in human affairs. In ancient Greece people participated in various religious festivals and other ceremonies, either to ensure fertility to their crops, or to prepare for war and celebrate victories. They also danced at weddings and funerals, during initiation ceremonies and other rites of passage that marked significant changes in social status such as pregnancy, childbirth, adulthood. These rituals provided protection from lurking dangers and ensured divine support during these difficult transitions. Dance was held in high regard for its educational properties in particular and was believed to be essential for developing a personality (PLATO, **Laws**, VII); along with music, writing and physical exercise, dance was the basis of the educational system and constituted an integral part of social and religious life in Greek antiquity.<sup>1</sup>

As a result, dance was an important ritual event and as such it should be treated and performed with overwhelming respect regardless of its severe or ludicrous character. On his treatise **On Dance** (74-75, 83) Lucian recalls a dancer who exaggerated his movements during his performance, causing the laughter of the spectators and leading the audience to various misunderstandings. He further explains that, in order to be able to perform in a proper manner, the dancers should be perfect in body and soul, as well as clever and witty. Dance was an integral part of religious and social life and all participants ought to be aware of their place and role during the performance.

<sup>1</sup> We find dance prevalent among the Greeks from the earliest times. It is frequently mentioned in the Homeric poems: in the suitors of Penelope delight themselves with music and dancing (**Odyssey** α.152, 421, η.304), Odysseus is entertained at the court of Alcinoo with the exhibitions of very skilful dancers (**Odyssey** η. 265). See also **Odyssey** δ. 17-19, στ. 99 ff, ζ. 248 ff.

Referring to the arrangement of the maidens participating in female choral performances the Spartan poet Alkman uses the word τάξις, which means “order”<sup>2</sup>. Some sort of “order” can be identified in many dance representations already from the prehistoric period (LEVI 1961-62; LAWLER 1962, 12-19; ÅSTROM 1986, 124-125; CAIN 2001; MANDALAKI 2002). Nevertheless, during the Geometric period, a period of high growth of the orchestral art, one can recognize in the depictions of dance scenes on vases basic structural shapes, movements and can even identify some of the participants’ roles. However, the lack of adequate data and written evidence from these early periods, does not allow us to link these performances to a particular religious or ritual context and so most researchers base their conclusions on mere assumptions (TÖLLE 1964; WEGNER 1968; WICKERT MICKNAT 1982). Be that as it may, our information about dance from later sources is on the one hand sufficient to enable us appreciate its role in society, but on the other totally inadequate to form any idea of how these dances were actually performed.<sup>3</sup>

Ancient sources sometimes provide enough details on dance rituals that allow us to recognize and possibly reconstruct their τάξις and structural organisation. In the well known description in the *Iliad* of the spectacular decorative imagery on the shield of Achilles forged by Hephaestus (Σ. 593-606), a particular mixed dance ensemble is described; youths and maidens dance in adjoining lines holding onto one another by the wrists accompanied by two tumbling acrobats in the middle who lead the dance. It is interesting, though, that the poet cares to describe their elaborate clothing and wreaths; the girls were dressed with fine linen dresses and crowned with flower garlands, while the men had their bodies rubbed with oil, wore woven tunics and carried golden daggers on silver straps. Accordingly, the Homeric hymns often describe lesser female deities dancing around a major fertility divinity such as Artemis or Aphrodite, who we might perceive as the leader of their chorus or the principal dancer, moving from the beginning of the dance queue to the center and vice versa; the presence of a dance leader or a principal dancer in a ritual event entails the existence of an order in the orchestral form (**Homeric hymn to Aphrodite** 116-121; **To Artemis** 17-18; SOPHOCLES, **Antigone** 151-153).

Sometimes, by combining information from several sources the researcher may be able to identify roles in a dance ritual and comprehend how the dance was possibly performed. Nonetheless, the researcher must not neglect to be cautious in using information belonging to different periods of time. Such is the case of the γερανός (crane) dance, which Theseus on his return from Crete was said to have performed in Delos, and which was customary in this island as late as the time of Plutarch (Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*; Theseus 21). Pollux in

<sup>2</sup> Alkman, fr. 200 (CALAME 1983, 38-39): “τάς εντάξει χορευούσας παρθένους”. See also Xenophon, *The Ephesian Tale of Anthia* and Habrocomes 1.2.3: “Ἦρχε δὲ τῆς τῶν παρθένων τάξεως Ἀνθία...”, Aelius Aristides, *Orationes* 46.158: “τὸν ναυπηγὸν ὡς εἰς τάξιν τίθησι τὰ ξύλα, τὸν τέκτονα ὡς εἰς τάξιν τοὺς λίθους τὸν χοροποιὸν, τὸν ὀντιναδῆπότε...”

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Plutarch, **Banquet Topics**, Lucian, **On Dance**, Athenaeus, **Deipnosophistae**, Pollux, **Onomastikon**, Nonnus, **Dionysiaca**. Phrases and names connected with dance, as well as references to dance occasions occur sporadically in the works of Plato (**Laws**), Xenophon (**Banquet**), Aristotle, Aristophanes and the lyric and tragic poets.

the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD explains that it was a mixed dance performed with various turnings and windings in imitation of the windings of the Cretan labyrinth and that, when the chorus was at rest, it formed a semicircle with leaders at both wings (POLLUX, ONOMASTIKON IV.101). Much later, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD the Greek grammarian Hesychius provides us the information that the dance leader was called γερανούλκος.

### THE DANCE OF PAN AND THE NYMPHS

After the introduction of the Pan's Arcadian worship in Athens and Attica in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, his cult was quickly connected to the Nymphs the vegetation deities who were believed to have dwelled in caves, rivers, forests and groves. Their joint cult was deeply connected to dance and music and they were mostly celebrated in rural sanctuaries and especially grottoes throughout Attica and the rest of the Greek countryside. Numerous votive offerings, mostly reliefs, clay tablets, discs and statuettes, discovered in these shrines, depict the circular dance of the Nymphs, either around the musician (usually on the clay statuettes), or inside a grotto around an altar, while listening to the music played by Pan (mostly on the reliefs). These offerings represent a continuous ritual tradition that lasted for many centuries and despite the different stylistic and thematic additions it preserved its basic characteristics unspoiled (Figs. 1-2, THALLON 1903; ROMAIOS 1905; FEUBEL 1935; EDWARDS 1985; TZOUVARA SOULI 1999).

In the beginning, in order to depict the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan, the craftsmen chose the form of clay statuettes with figurines placed on the perimeter of a discoid base. These schematically rendered figures are represented with extended arms dancing in a circle around a musician, usually a double flute player. Similar clay dance complexes have also been discovered in various sanctuaries dedicated to other deities, such as Hera, Aphrodite or Apollo etc. The clay



Figure 1 Votive relief depicting the dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Mt. Parnitha, Attica, no. 1448, National Archaeological Museum (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ National Archaeological Museum).



Figure 2 Votive statuettes depicting the round dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Charalavi Trypa cave, Leukada, no. 3365, Archaeological Museum of Leukada (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology).

dance complex was a popular dance representation already from the Geometric and especially the Archaic periods and was used as a symbol to denote circularity and the concept of “dance” in general (Fig. 3, STILLWELL 1952, 42 ff. and f,n. 2-10; PASQUIER 1977; TZOUVARA SOULI 1999).<sup>4</sup>

However, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC the dance of the Nymphs and Pan is represented on votive reliefs and follows an iconography which is consolidated quickly and developed especially during the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC (Fig. 4, FEUBEL 1935; FUCHS 1962; EDWARDS 1985). Three Nymphs dressed in beautiful garments are depicted dancing with joined hands around an altar or a rocky mould.<sup>5</sup> They usually follow a dance leader, who is in most cases Hermes, while Pan accompanies the dance ritual with his musical instrument, the syrinx. Sometimes, the river god Acheloos, a prevailing father figure of the Nymphs, or even groups of approaching worshipers, who do not actively participate in the ritual events, appear in the scene. In general, these monumental compositions with their naturalistic grotto-like frame became increasingly popular among worshippers and were offered in sacred caves and rural sanctuaries all over the Greek world (WELLER 1903; ROMAIOU 1905). They also repeat common pictorial standards with slight variations, often influenced by styles and trends of each period. Nonetheless, in some cases they are unique compositions that sprang from the imagination of the artisans who created them (Fig. 5, EDWARDS 1985, 99-109).<sup>6</sup>

Studying only the clay statuettes one might assume that the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan formed a closed circle. Nevertheless, when the dance was depicted in relief the dancing group is represented moving to the right or left in an open circle around some sort of altar.<sup>7</sup> In relief version the balance of the dance form changes dramatically, as the open ring dance acquires a beginning, a middle part and an end, thus the members of the chorus are assigned specific roles and ranked accordingly. Amongst the participants of the dance ritual the viewer can identify the dance leader who leads the dance in an outflanking

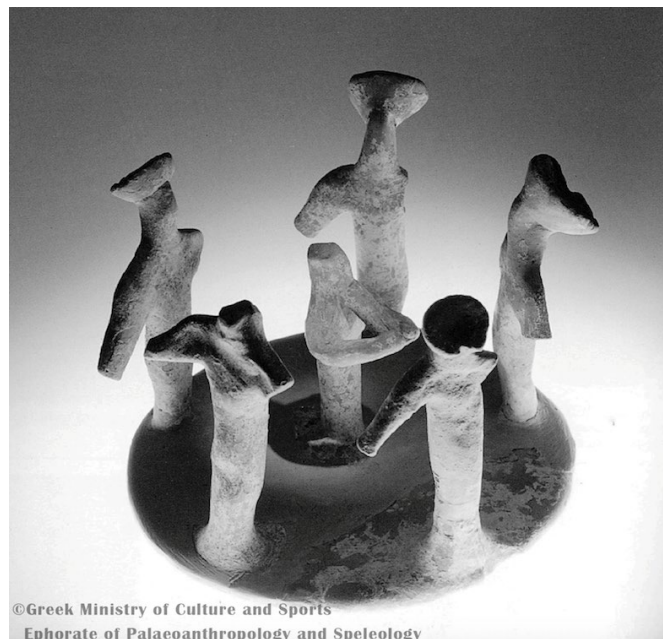


Figure 3 Votive statuettes depicting the round dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Choitrotrypa cave, Leukada, no. 3364, Archaeological Museum of Leukada (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology).



Figure 4 Votive relief depicting the dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Lychnospilia cave on Mt. Parnitha, Attica, no. 1859, National Archaeological Museum (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ National Archaeological Museum).

movement, the chain of female dancers that follows in similar pace and the musician.

### NUMBER, SEX AND AGE OF THE DANCERS

The relationship of female sex to dance can be traced in very early periods (TÖLLE 1964; MANDALAKI 2002; GARFINKEL 2003; GABBAY 2003). Crowhurst (1963, 208) in his research among artifacts from the ancient Greek world dating between 800-350 BC identified eighty-one female dance representations against twenty-eight male ones. Nonetheless, according to Tölle's data numbers are more balanced during the Archaic period, although women's choruses seem to be preponderant. The appropriate terms used for the female members of a dance ritual in antiquity were the words *χορίτις* or *ὄρχηστρίς* (female dancer), that correspond to the words *χορευτής* and *ὄρχηστήρ* respectively, which were used to describe male participants (CALLIMACHUS, **Hymn to Artemis** 13; XENOPHON, **Symposium** II.9; ARISTOPHANES, **Acharnians** 1058; **FROGS** 516, 526; **Nebulae** 983; TÖLLE 1964, 54; CALAME 1997, 20-25).

Apart from the *Νυμφαγέτης*, the “leader of the Nymphs”, and the musician who were both males, all other members of the ring dance were always female. An interesting representative of the New Comedy, *Dyskolos* (the Misanthrope), the only play written by Menander in the 4th century BC that survives almost in its entirety, is performed in and about the sacred cavern of Pan and the Nymphs in Phyle in Attica, where a number of festivities in honour to these deities are been performed in the interior. The ritual dance described in the play seems to be performed only by female participants. Moreover, at the end of the play (950-969) Getas the Slave and Sikon the Cook encourage the misanthropist Knimon to get into the dance, which is possibly an exaggeration by the poet, in an attempt to cause once again the laughter of the audience; the grudge Knimon is forced against his will to enter the dance performed by a group of maidens.

Unfortunately, due to the fragmented state of the data it is extremely frail to define the exact number of dancers who took part in these events or any other ritual in antiquity. Furthermore, the craftsmen followed many con-



**Figure 5** Votive relief depicting the dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Thyreion, no. 59, Archaeological Museum of Thyreion, Western Greece (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Aitolokarnania and Leukada).

**4** According to the archaeologist M. Chatziotou (personal contact) inside caves Frini in Leukada and Paliambela in Vonitsa, Western Greece, there have been unearthed thousands of clay statuettes depicting dance scenes dating from the Archaic to the Hellenistic periods.

**5** In some reliefs the Nymphs are depicted as veiled dancers grasping the edge of the veil of the preceding figure, e.g. no 1445 (from Eleusis), National Archaeological Museum, Andrikou *et al.* 2004, no. 86.

**6** Some of these votive reliefs depict other iconographic themes, such as “the delivery of Dionysus to the Nymphs on Mount Nysa” etc.

ventions in the way they depicted these images, which can sometimes lead the ancient dance researcher to false confusions. As a result, the researcher should be very cautious in recognizing these conventions, in order to interpret these representations and to draw reliable conclusions. Moreover, although the mythological and historical data sometimes refer to dancing groups ranging from two to seventeen members, these cannot be correlated to any dance representations on vases, statuettes or reliefs, as the number of the participants is relevant due to the limited size of the object or the restricted space that was left to be decorated (Fig. 6, TÖLLE 1964, 55-56; CALAME 1997, 21-25).

In representations of the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan, the number of dancing figures varies. That is, in clay statuettes the dominating number is four. Four is actually the smallest ideal number that can be used to create a three-dimensional dance representation around a musician sharing equal spaces among figures. In this case all figurines keep the same analogies in their proportions and the distances to the dancing figures and the musician in the center. In rear cases their number is increased to five or reduced to three. However, it would be wiser if we treat these examples as experimental actions on behalf of the craftsmen, so as to modify the composition, rather than an actual depiction of what the artist saw in reality.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of votive reliefs the number of the participants is usually three and it rarely expands. Nevertheless, there are few exceptions, where Nymphs and Graces are depicted in combination. In these cases their number is raised to five, when the craftsman depicts two Graces and three Nymphs, or to six, when there are two triads of Nymphs and Graces.<sup>9</sup> Number three is maintained and repeated on the clay tablets -common offerings in sacred caves and sanctuaries- mostly during the Hellenistic period (Fig. 7).<sup>10</sup> Finally,



Figure 6 Votive relief depicting the dance of Pan and the Nymphs from cave Vari, Attica, no. 2007, National Archaeological Museum (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ National Archaeological Museum).



Figure 7 Fragment of a votive tablet depicting Nymphs dancing from Asvotripa cave, Leukada, no. 80, Archaeological Museum of Leukada (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology).



on few clay discs from Cephalonia and Ithaca, which date to the same period, the number of the dancing figures is always six (TZOUVARA SOULI 1988-89, Pl. 18a).<sup>11</sup>

Surprisingly, the ancient sources sometimes referred to mythological dance groups with similar number of participants. In the **Homeric hymn to Pythian Apollo** (182-202) the Muses start singing, while hearing the sound of the lyre played by the god, and at the same time the Charites (Graces), the Horai (Hours), Hebe (Youth), Harmonia (Harmony) and Aphrodite are all dancing by holding each other's wrist. Along with Artemis who was the leader of the chorus the number of the participants broadens to ten.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, in a *partheneion* (maiden song) composed by Alkman during the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC (**Hymn to Artemis Orthia**, 96-99) the female dancers are eleven and in the **epithalamium of Helen and Menelaus** (wedding song), described in the eighteenth *Idyll* of Theocritus in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC (XVIII, 1-4), the number grows to twelve.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently three is the smallest number of dancers required to create a ring dance. It is no coincidence that the artisans chose this number to represent in relief the dance of the Nymphs (USENER 1903, 198; BURKERT 1993, 366). Three is a number common to several mythological triads; apart from the trinity of goddesses mentioned in the myth of the Judgment of Paris, there were several groups of female deities and mythical creatures of equal numbers such as the Gorgons, the Graces, the Hours, the Seasons, the Fates etc (LARSON 2001, 262-264, 269-260). It is no coincidence that the iconographies of the above divine triads were similar and often mixed, making it sometimes hard to identify them each time. Reliefs from Kos and Rhodes, where the Nymphs are depicted together with the Graces or the Graces as Nymphs, are informative to the extent of these interactions in iconography (EDWARDS 1986 nos. 98-99).<sup>14</sup>

One of the first examples, where we have guaranteed representation of Nymphs in ancient Greek art, can be located in the so called "Francois Vase", a large Attic volute crater (c. 570 BC) decorated in the black-figure style and signed by Ergotimos and Kleitias. The vase is decorated with over two hundred figures, many with identifying inscriptions and a number of mythological themes, amongst them the Calydonian Boar Hunt, the ambush of Troilus by Achilles, a battle between Lapiths and Centaurs, a chariot race during the funeral games for Patroclus etc; in the scene of the return of Hephaestus to Olympus, the god sits on a mule led to the Olympian gods by Dionysus, followed by a group of three women named Nymphs who are accompanied by Silens. Similarly, on the Sophilos' black-figured Dinos at the British Museum the vase painter depicted a chariot procession of the gods in the Wedding of Peleus and Thetis; between the chariots walk groups of Fates, Graces and Muses who are named *Νύμφες* (Nymphs) and *Νύσαι* (Nysae).<sup>15</sup>

7 E.g. relief no. 705 (Athens), Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Blümel 1966, Abb. 101, no. 1966 (Acropolis, Athens), National Archaeological Museum, Hausmann 1960, Abb. 59. On a clay disc from Cephalonia the Nymphs dance in the perimeter of the disc in an open circle around the musician even though the artist could easily represent a closed circle, f.n. 11.

8 The small number of these variants confirms this scenario. In older Geometric examples with three dancing figurines, the craftsman does not seem to have yet achieved the ideal and harmonious proportion to depict the round dance as in later periods, Courbin 1954, 180, Fig. 41. In some bronze examples from the Archaic period the number is increased to seven, e.g. no. 6236 (Olympia), National Archaeological Museum (9th century BC). The Classical example from the Corycian cave (Fig. 8), where the number of Nymphs is eight, should rather be treated as a rear case.

9 E.g. relief no. 6725, Museo Nazionale di Napoli, Horn 1931, Taf. 7, relief from Kos Island, no ID number, Archaeological Museum of Kos, konstantinopoulos 1970, Fig. 2. On the worship of Graces in different communities, sometimes as a trio and sometimes as a duo, Pausanias IX.35.1-7, Erwin 1958, 159-162.

10 E.g. clay tablets nos. 65, 75-76, 78, 80, Archaeological Museum of Leukada (Figs. 7, 9-10, all unpublished).

11 Clay disc no. 1803, Archaeological museum of Argostoli, Clay disc, no ID number, Archaeological Collection of Stavros, Ithaca (unpublished).

12 The **Homeric hymn to Aphrodite** (119) mentions a dance of many maidens, "πολλὰ δὲ νύμφαι καὶ παρθένοι".

13 Later sources refer to the existence of dance groups embedded in various

The fact that the Nymphs are always with few exceptions depicted as triad is probably justified by the iconographic type of the Judgment of Paris. According to the legend during a banquet held by the Gods in celebration of the marriage of Peleus and Thetis, three goddesses -Hera, Athena and Aphrodite- claimed Eris' golden apple, which bore the inscription "for the fairest one" (*καλλίστη*). Zeus was reluctant to favour any and declared that Paris, a mortal, known for his fairness, would judge their cases (*Iliad* Ω. 25-30). In vase paintings Hermes leads the three candidates on Mount Ida, to the son of Priamus, who tries to escape out of fear. According to Harrison, the iconography sometimes expels the form of the Trojan hero and is limited to imaging the three deities and their leader. She further concludes that the type of Hermes leading the divine trinity precedes the iconography of the Judgment of Paris, a hypothesis not yet accepted by the scientific world. Nonetheless, the similarity of the two iconographic types is impressive (Harrison 1986, 196-219; Larson 2001, 260-261).

Reports from ancient sources are not sufficient enough to lead us to any conclusion and as a result the issue of the number of the participants in the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan remains obscure. Even though in the *Dyskolos* Menander does not specify the number of the dancers inside the cave, Alkiphron in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD describes in one of his letters of Athenian courtesans (*Epistulae Rusticae* IV) a private ritual to honour the Nymphs and Pan, where the participants are only four women: Simmichi the flute girl, Plaggon the dancer who performs around the makeshift altar and two more heterae who are attending the scene without actively participating in the events, Petali and Melissa,. Despite its rather late date, the text provides evidence that a ritual dance to honour these deities could be performed by a minimum number of members, but this at no case excludes more numerous dancing groups.

It is impossible to draw any conclusions about the dancer's age only considering the clay statuettes, as these figurines are in most cases too abstract to recognize, whether they are young females or humans of a more mature age. Even in the cases where a representation provides more details of the dancers' appearance, as in the dance group from Corycian cave in Delphi, the mode of imaging is conventional to such an extent that it does not reveal much about their actual age (Fig. 8).<sup>16</sup> In any case, on votive reliefs the details depicted are enough to allow the viewer to identify the figures as young girls. Nonetheless, the degree of juvenility is not an easy one to determine.

cults, the *θίασοι* (troupes), where the numbers of their members ranges from seven to sixteen, Pausanias, V.16.5 (the Sixteen Maidens of Elis), Apollonius of Perga, fr. 37 in Heiberg 1891-93, 124 (nine Nymphs), Pausanias X.4.3 (the Thyiads from Attica). Brinkman (1925, 128, f.n. 64) states that despite some references on greater numbers of dancers "...treffen wir auf den Denkmälern aber auch kleinere Reigen, zumeist von drei oder vier Personen."

**14** Flavius Philostratus (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD) in the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (iv.21.73) mentions theatrical dances that were performed during the Dionysia at Athens where: "τά μέν ὡς ὠρας, τά δέ ὡς νύμφας, τά δέ ὡς Βάκχας πρᾶττουσιν."

**15** Volute crater no. 4209, Firenze, Museo Archeologico Etrusco, Dinos no. 1971.1101, British Archaeological Museum.



**Figure 8** Votive statuettes depicting the round dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Corycian cave, Delphi, no. 16678, Archaeological Museum of Delphi (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Antiquities of Fokida).

Key features that could allow the researcher to recognize the age of the dancers despite all conventions are their height, the size of their breasts and their body proportions. Moreover, it is interesting that in reliefs, where the Nymphs are depicted dancing, the craftsmen chose a youthful body type, not very robust with relatively small breasts (Fig. 9).<sup>17</sup> These are not the “*budding breasts*” of young females, according to the classification by Sourvinou Inwood (1988, 83) of feminine body types we see on votive reliefs from the sanctuary of Artemis Vravronia in eastern Attica during the Classical period, but they could hardly be attributed to a mature woman. To their followers these were the Nymphs — young women probably close to the age of marriage — but the data do not allow us to be absolutely sure.<sup>18</sup>

Youthfulness and puberty are directly related to dance and divine dancing groups, which operated in human consciousness as archetypes for the performance of their dance rituals and as “blueprints” for the representations in art as well (BURKERT 1993, 229). “*The frequent appearance of divine prototypes of dance in literary genres... can be explained by the belief that in a festival context choral performances were human manifestations of divine models*” (LONSDALE 1993, 73-74). However, Lonsdale underlines that we should be cautious, because these mythological images are not accurate representations of real dances, but idealized poetic images. These frequent correlations in the ancient sources of divine female choruses around Artemis and Aphrodite “*define ideal qualities inherent in the choral dances of young women: grace (charis), beauty and erotic charm (Aphrodite), youthfulness (Hebe), and rhythmic harmony (Harmonia) — qualities that bring order and pleasure to the dance and its audience.*” (**Homeric hymn to Artemis** 11-15; **To Pythian Apollo** 182-199; **PLATO, Laws** 815c; on the functioning of mythological images as divine archetypes of actual dance rituals in antiquity, LONSDALE 1993, 17, 52, 58 ff).

With the phrase “*κύκλιοι χοροί παρθένιοι*” in Euripides’ *Helen* (1312), the concept of circularity in dance is correlated to female puberty. In a second semantic level these representations are not mere depictions of ring dances but circular dances of young women who are close to puberty.<sup>19</sup> Calame has already differentiated the term *παρθένος* (virgin) from virginity, concluding that the



**Figure 9** Fragment of a votive tablet depicting Nymphs dancing from Asvotripa cave, Leukada, no. 78, Archaeological Museum of Leukada (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology).

**16** No. 16678 (Corycian cave, Delphi), Archaeological Museum of Delphi.

**17** Nos. 2009, 2009 (Vari cave, Attica), National Archaeological Museum, Thallon 1903, Pl. IV-V, no. 515, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen, Riis 1974, 127, Fig. 4.

**18** Sometimes differences can be observed in the height of some figures as in reliefs no. 3875 from Rapendosa, Attica, National Archaeological Museum, Fuchs 1962, Beil. 65:1, no. 710 (Piraeus), Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Blümel 1966, Abb. 130, no. 86 (Asia Minor), Hofmuseum, Vienna, Fuchs 1962, Beil. 62:2. These are probably the result of the different dancing positions of the figures or more likely the sculptor’s efforts to depict a ring dance in a two dimensional surface

word probably referred to women before marriage. Furthermore, he recognized three dancing groups of different age; *παῖδες* (children), *κόραι*, *παρθένοι*, *νεανίδες*, *νύμφαι* (young women) and *γυναῖκες* (women). The most common term used is *παρθένοι*, which he believes is probably related to the age the dancers ought to have (Calame 1997, 27-29). Homer preserved the appropriate term for them; male and female dancers should be *ἡλικες*, which can be best translated as “of the same age” (PINDAR, **Pythionicus** III 17 ff.; ALKMAN, fr. 10b in Page 1962, 15; ARISTOPHANES, **Thesmophoriazousai** 1029; EURIPIDES, **Iphigenia in Tauris** 1143-1146). In the play *Dyskolos* (950-951) the description of the girl who prepares to enter the dance is characteristic:

“...καί τις βρεχεῖσα προσπόλων εὐήλικος προσώπου  
ἄνθος κατεσκιασμένη...”

The criteria for joining a female dance ensemble in antiquity demanded by the participants to present grace, elegance and physical beauty. In the **Homeric hymn to Aphrodite** (119) the female dancers taking part in a festival of song and dance in honour of Artemis are described as *ἀλφεισίβοιαι* that is “maidens worth many cattle as bride-price”. Similarly, in the **Homeric hymn to Aphrodite of Cyprus** (12-14) the gold-filleted (*χρυσάμπυκες*) Hours are described wearing golden necklaces (*ῥομοῖσι χρυσέουσιν*), whenever they go to their father's house on Mount Olympus to join the lovely dances of the gods. Also, in the **Homeric hymn to Earth the Mother of All** (13-15) virgin maidens with flower-laden bands are described playing and skipping merrily over the soft flowers of the fields. Consequently, the grooming of women was necessary for participating in these dancing events, in an attempt to enhance feminine beauty and highlight its features. It is no coincidence that in many caves of the Nymphs and Pan jewellery was discovered, which were probably votive offerings by female followers (KING 1903, 334; ROMAIOS 1906, 88-78, Fig. 1-3, PAPADIMITRIOU 1958, 21, Fig. 21). Similar jewellery is likely to have been worn by the young females who danced in honour of these deities. The tendency of the craftsmen to adorn the dancing Nymphs with rich attire and fashionable hairstyles agree with the sources, which often praise the beauty of the dancers who participated in similar events (*Iliad* Γ. 390-394; *Odyssey* ζ. 155-159; ALKMAN, **Hymn to Artemis Orthia** 64-69; EURIPIDES, **Trojan Women** 338; XENOPHON, **The Ephesian Tale of Anthia and Habrocomes** 1.2.2-8; ATHANASAKI 2009, 65).<sup>20</sup>

## THE DANCE LEADER

There are several terms in antiquity for the dance leader: *χορηγός*, *ἀρχέχορος*, *χοροστάτης*, *χοροποιός*, *χοροδέκτης*, *προορηγηστήρ* and others (ALKMAN, **Hymn to Artemis Orthia**

and a sense of perspective in the illustrated ritual. However, no differences in height can be observed on the clay statuettes whatsoever.

**19** In the ancient sources the terms usually chosen to refer to the dancers or dancers in these rituals are: *παρθένοι*, *κοῦροι*, *ἡῖθεοι*, *παῖς* etc, Homer, *Iliad* Σ. 494, 567, 593, *Odyssey* θ. 262, Menander, **Dyskolos** 34. The only exception is in *Odyssey* (ψ.147), where in the description of the dance that took place after the murder of the suitors the poet mentions *ἄνδρες* and *γυναῖκες* (men and women). Young women more easily involved in celebrations, as they had fewer obligations than the married ones and before they lose their virginity in marriage young girls offered themselves and their services to the city's gods. Virginity seems to have been a prerequisite for the participation in these public events. On the other hand, it was not suitable at least for an Athenian wife to participate in these events, Dillon 2002, 37, 71.

**20** Reports on facial grooming have not survived; however, we should not exclude the possibility.

40-45, 84-87; SOPHOCLES, *Ajax* 694-701; EURIPIDES, *Trojan Women* 151; ARISTOPHANES, *Lysistrata* 1314-1315; LUCIAN, *On Dance* 276; HESYCHIUS, *χορηγός*; CALAME 1997, 43-48, 259).<sup>21</sup> In the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan the leader of the dance is usually a male figure, Hermes, sometimes Pan and in seldom cases a Satyr (Fig. 10, Aelius Aristides, *Orations*; Larson 2001, 96, f.n. 17).<sup>22</sup> The ancient sources have preserved the name of the dance leader; he is called *Nymphagetis*, which means “the one who leads the Nymphs”.<sup>23</sup>

The same terms are often used to describe the one who dances at the beginning of the dance resulting sometimes in the confusion between these two roles. The person who dances at the beginning of the dance ensemble is the principal dancer; he is the first in line, in a way “dragging” the dance, a role that is characterised due to its position. On the other hand, the dance leader is not just the first in line, but he has increased responsibilities; it is he who leads, directs and coordinates the members of the dancing group. In this case the *Nymphagetis* is a male figure, but the possibility that this role could be ascribed to females cannot be excluded (WEBSTER 1970, 15; CALAME 1997, 43-78, 49). Moreover, the principal dancer may sometimes be identified with the dance leader, but they could also both coexist in the same dance ritual (TÖLLE 1964, 64).<sup>24</sup>

According to Calame, there are two iconographic types of the dance leader that can be recognized through ancient sources and dance representations: a dance led by a *choregos* who is dancing and a dance led by a *choregos* who is carrying a musical instrument (ALKMAN, fr. 10b in Page 1962, 82; LUCIAN, *On Dance* 275; CALAME 1983, 107). Interesting is the description in Pindar’s *Nemeanics* (V 23-26) of Apollo playing his lyre in the middle (*ἐν μέσῳ*) of the chorus of the Muses, who are singing, and who is in this way directing (*ἀγέτω*) the ritual event.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, in the **Homeric hymn to Apollo** (3-5) the god is described as a sweet-tongued minstrel who holds his high-pitched lyre and always sings both first and last. As a result, the musician can sometimes serve as a dance leader of a dance ritual, but in the majority of the cases these roles were ascribed to two different persons (TÖLLE 1964, 64, no. 1 Taf. 1, 2).



**Figure 10** Fragment of a votive tablet depicting Satyrs playing music and leading the dance of the Nymphs from Asvotrypa cave, Leukada, no. 65, Archaeological Museum of Leukada (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology).

<sup>21</sup> Equivalent to the *χορηγός*, the dance leader, is the *ἐξάρχων* of the Dithyramb, Archilochus, fr. 120 (West 1971-1972), LONSDALE 1993, 89. The term *ἐξάρχων* is sometimes used to describe the leading role of Artemis in the dances of the Muses and Graces, **Hymn to Artemis** 15-18.

<sup>22</sup> See also reliefs with Hermes as a dance leader: no. 709 (Athens), Staatliche Museen, Berlin, BLÜMEL 1966, Abb. 123, 124, relief in Dr J. Druey Collection, Riehen, Isler 1981, no. 173, no. 1448, National Archaeological Museum, Fuchs 1962, Beil. 65:2 and reliefs with Pan as a dance leader: no. 1445 (Eleusis), National Archaeological Museum, Andrikou *et al.* 2004, no. 86.

<sup>23</sup> *Νυμφαγέτης* or *Νυμφηγέτης*, is a term frequently referred to Apollo. See the

According to Crowhurst's classification of dance images from Greek Archaic and Classical antiquity 1/3 of the dance leaders with musical instruments are men usually located either in the center or at the beginning of the dance, while in cases where the dance is a procession, they are placed mostly at the beginning (Crowhurst in Calame 1997, 66, 73). On the other hand, when the dance leader is not a musician, they are depicted either at the beginning of the dance ensemble leading the dancing pace of the rest of the orchestral group, either in the middle or at the end. However, when the ring dance forms an open circle the *choregos* functions independently from the chain of dancers; he has freedom of movement, changing at will the rotating movement of the ritual creating new shapes, such as the spiral or the helix, and can move in space performing sometimes acrobatic movements (HOMER, *Iliad* Σ. 605-606; *Odyssey* δ. 18; LUCIAN, *On Dance* 276; TÖLLE 1964, 63-64; WEGNER 1968, 52; CALAME 1997, 68). Depending on his options the *choregos* leads the dancers to new paths, which do not always favor the repeatability and stability of the closed type dance forms, and as a result the circulating movement of the ritual gains a new dynamic, that is it evolves and thus the dance is renewed (TÖLLE 1964, 64; LANGE 1977, 85; PANAGIOTOPOULOU 1994, 14).

The selection criteria for leading a dancing performance in antiquity were gender, physical beauty and stature (LUCIAN, *On Dance* 276; Lonsdale 1993, 58). Indicatively, in the *Hymn to Pythian Apollo* (197-199) the leader of the chorus is Artemis, who can be recognized by her natural beauty, high prestige, as she is a prominent figure among the goddesses, and by her tall stature, as she can be easily distinguished from the rest of the dancing group.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the age of the dance leader varies; he can be either old or young (CALAME 1997, 53-58, 64). But more often the *choregos* and the rest of the dance members are almost of the same age or as described by Calame (1997, 72-73) "about to reach the status of an adult". Similarly, in the votive reliefs dedicated to Pan and the Nymphs Hermes *Nymphagetis* is represented always as youthful beardless male, almost at the same age as the Nymphs.

Hermes is always represented dancing with wide strides grabbing with his left hand the principal dancer, while with his right he holds the caduceus. Sometimes the role is undertaken by the goat-legged god Pan, who, as attested by an inscription from Epidaurus, he is also a leader of the Nymphs, a *Nymphagetis* (IG IV 1<sup>2</sup>, 129/ 31 BC: Πᾶνα τόν Νυμφαγέταν; ERWIN 1958, 157).<sup>27</sup> When Pan is depicted in votive reliefs as a *choregos*, he is usually playing the syrinx, a type that reminds us the type of the piper god at the head of a dancing procession. In this case the craftsman probably wanted to highlight the role of the Arcadian god as a musician rather than as a dance leader. By the

relief from Thasos Island dedicated to Apollo *Nymphagetis* and the Nymphs, no. Ma 696, Musée National du Louvre, early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Larson 2001, 170.

**24** Henrichs (1996, 40-41) believed that the *Vortänzer* corresponds to the principal dancer of a chorus in tragedy, the *Haupttänzer*, but differs in the fact that the later's role is more complex, as his role includes besides dancing and singing and the participation in the interactive parts of the play.

**25** See also *Pythionicus* I (1-4) which refers to the existence of an introductory part before the execution of the dance, where the god gave the rhythm to the dancing group. In Callimachus, *Hymn to Delos* (300-301) the island Delos is compared to the dance leader who is surrounded by the dancers.

**26** The selection criteria of the dance leader and the principal dancer in the ancient sources are almost identical. See below f.n. 30.

**27** See also the votive relief no. 2975, New Acropolis Museum, with a dedicatory inscription that may be referring to Pan or Apollo as *Nymphagetis*:

-----ΑΝΥΦΑΓΕΤΙΟ-----  
 -----Α[Κ]ΛΥΤΙΟΣ-----  
 -----ΟΛΛΩΝΙΟΣ-----

[----- Πᾶν';] α Νυμφαγέτιο[ν-----]

[-----]α [Κ]λύτιος [-----]

[----- Απ]όλλωνιώς [ἐπηγγείλατο]

and Sophocles, *Ajax* 694-701, where the dance of the Salaminians seamen calls Pan to appear and lead them in their dance. In the *Homeric hymn to Pan* (19-25), the god often encountered in the afternoon with the nymphs to dance and sing.

end of the Hellenistic period, a time when the so called “neoattic” reliefs flourish in the Roman markets, the theme is crystallised in the iconographic type known as the Round dance of the Nymphs and Pan, where the goat-god functions mostly as a *Nymphagetis* rather than as a musician.<sup>28</sup>

The choice of Hermes as a dance leader is not accidental and certainly not a result of his relationship with Pan. There is a much deeper reason associated with particular features of the god, and moreover with his capacity to become guide in human transitional periods. He is the god of transitions from one state to the next, “*the guide across boundaries*” (LEMPESI 1985, 155-162, Pl. 52-53; MARINATOS 2003, 138, Fig. 7.5, 7.6). His name is connected to the word *ἔρμα*, which means a “pile of stones”. Burchett correlates the word with piles of stones that were placed near field or land boundaries. Similarly, the hermaic steles define boundaries between public and private domains, which belong to the god’s realm and are connected to his “*boundary crossing feature*” (BURKERT 1979, 39-41; MARINATOS 2003, 141). We cannot exclude the possibility of some form of primitive animistic belief to spirits that dwell inside these stone piles and may be connected to the ancient Minoan worship of pillars (Lempesi 1985, 160, 172, Pl. 53; Willets in Marinatos 2003, 135, f.n. 53).<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, his name was probably associated with stone piles or stelai that were erected to define burials, hence the relationship of the god to the world of the dead and their journey in the Other World. It is no coincidence that he is the god who guides souls in their difficult journey to the Underworld (*Psychopompos*); he is recognized as a chthonic deity, the assistance of which was necessary for carrying out such dangerous passages. In some cases he could also act as a guide leading to the opposite direction, e.g. as guide of Persephone from the Underworld to the world of the living (KARUSU 1961, 91-106, BEIL. 59).

On various metal votive plaques discovered at the extra-urban sanctuary of Hermes Kedrites and Aphrodite in Kato Syme, Viannou, located on the slope of Dikte mountain in Crete, the figure of the god is represented with two different iconographic types: a beardless-juvenile Hermes and a mature-bearded one. These two different ages of the god reveal his intermediary role between adolescence and mature adulthood, a guide across boundaries. On a black figured amphora attributed to Amasis painter (c. 640 BC) a beardless Hermes is depicted leading a young man in front of bearded Dionysus, a scene that could be interpreted as the god leading the young to the new realm of the symposium, which belongs to the adult world (Marinatos 2003, 146, Fig. 7.8, 154). Accordingly, in the **Homeric hymn to Aphrodite** (117-121) the goddess narrates Anchises how the god Hermes snatched her from the virgin

<sup>28</sup> No. 1590, Belgrade National Museum, Belgrade, Gibic 1958, Pl. XIX, no. 712, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Könliche Museen 1891, no. 712, no. 1921.161, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Havelock 1964, Pl. 20, Fig. 14. no. MA 962, Museo Alinari, Musée National du Louvre, Paris, HAVELOCK 1964, Pl. 21, Fig. 15.

<sup>29</sup> It is noteworthy that god leads the dance of Nymphs around makeshift altar consisting of rough stones. For the possible pre-Hellenic origin of Hermes and his relationship with the stone piles christopoulos 1985, 115-116, 132.

dances in honor of the goddess Artemis and led her up on the mountains; the messenger of the gods becomes the leader who guides the young female from puberty, symbolised by the dance of the virgins, to adulthood.

On the other hand, the role of Pan as a dance leader is again reasonable; he is the god of shepherds, whose main preoccupation is the safe guidance of the herd from the dangers lurking in nature. He is also some sort of chthonic deity, in accordance to Hermes; on the myth of the abduction of Persephone, associated with her mother's efforts, Demeter, to seek her. The legend claims that at Figaleia in Peloponnesus there was a cave dedicated to black Demeter (*μελαίνα Δήμητρα*), where the god met the goddess hiding in anger for the abduction and rape of her daughter, causing famine and lack of goods on the earth. Then, Zeus was informed by the Arcadian god and sent the Fates to calm her down and persuade her to ease her fury (PAUSANIAS VIII.42.1-3; BORGEAUD 1988, 144-145).

It is evident that these gods become mediators in transitional situations, where the balance of power has shifted. In such phases, the one who is experiencing the transition is in a special psychological situation full of uncertainty. As a result during the age of puberty or shortly before marriage, the individual is less strong, sometimes confused and prone to lurking risks. The same thing occurs in a more metaphysical level, as soon as the soul begins its dangerous journey to the underworld; Pan with his father Hermes act as intermediaries, in order to achieve a smooth transition from one state to another and to restore the coveted equilibrium (BORGEAUD 1988, 145).

### THE PRINCIPAL DANCER

In votive reliefs after the dance leader, follows the principal dancer who is positioned at the beginning of the dance chain. At first sight the iconographies of all dancers seem to be almost identical. There is relative uniformity in their appearance and any differences observed in gestures and in their drapery are probably due to the efforts of the craftsman to vary the composition. Undoubtedly, the strong differentiation of the first dancer from the rest would probably loosen the cohesion of the divine dancing triad and disrupt the balance of the relief composition (Fig. 11).



Figure 11 Votive relief depicting the dance of Pan and the Nymphs from Piraeus, no. 1447, National Archaeological Museum (©Greek Ministry of Culture and Sports/ National Archaeological Museum).



Sometimes, the ancient Greek texts provide references to dance scenes that describe the principal dancer. One of the oldest can be found in the sixth rhapsody of the **Odyssey** (ζ. 100-109), where the poet narrates the story of the encounter of Nausicaa, the daughter of Alcinoos, to the hero Odysseus; Nausicaa and her handmaidens go to the sea-shore to wash clothes. While at the beach the maidens engage in a game of ball, which includes singing and dancing. The noise rouses the hero who has been washed ashore. Odysseus emerges completely naked, scaring the servants away, and begs Nausicaa for aid. In his description of the ball game the poet compares the dance of the maidens to the dance of the Nymphs as well as the daughter of the king of the Phaeacians to Artemis.

Another description of a similar divine dancing archetype can be found in the **Homeric hymn to Artemis** (13-18), where the goddess visits the house of her brother Apollo in Delphi and there she leads the dance of the Muses and Graces. Analogous is the description of a dancing scene in a *partheneion* by Alkman (**Hymn to Artemis Orthia** 57), where the leader of the chorus is called *Ἀγησιχόρα*, a name that translates as “the one that leads the dance”. As pointed out by Lonsdale (1993, 199), the role of principal dancer acts in this case as a substitute or even a personalization of divine archetypes, which in this case were Artemis and Aphrodite, who were well known principal dancers of the round dances of the Nymphs and Graces.

What were the prerequisites to become a principal dancer or even a chorus leader in antiquity? A woman had to possess several characteristics that would rightfully assign her such a role: beauty, natural gifts, noble birth and dancing skills. Lonsdale (1993, 232) is not exaggerating when he states that “*being like the goddess means becoming the first dancer*”. In the **Hymn to Artemis Orthia** (44, 51-59, 96-98) Alkman becomes more specific; the chorus leader Agisichora is described as a glorious dance leader (*κλενὰ χοραγός*), radiantly outstanding, with golden locks of hair and a silver look on her face. The poet also refers to her excellent rhythm and melodic singing voice and is compared to a well built, prize-winner horse, with thundering hooves.

Moreover, the local origin and social status of a maiden in antiquity were factors seriously taken into consideration for the selection of the position of the principal dancer. Something similar is implied in the description of Nausicaa’s ball game at the beach in the **Odyssey** (ζ. 100-109); the principal dancer in none other than the daughter of the king of the Phaeacians. Accordingly, in the “the **epithalamium of Helen and Menelaus**” the dance participants are twelve of the most beautiful maidens of Laconia crowned with fresh flowering wreaths, while their principal dancer is Helen of Troy, who is described as golden Helen (*χρυσέα*

*Ἐλένα*), and as maid of beauty and grace (*καλά... χαρίεσσα κόρα*, THEOCRITUS, **Idylls** XVIII, 2-4, 28, 38).<sup>30</sup> Finally, the same model is reflected in the myths of women abducted from female choruses; the victim is mostly a young maiden of outstanding beauty and social status. So in the myth of Anchises narrated in the **Homeric hymn to Aphrodite** (117-120) the god Hermes snatched the goddess from the chorus of Nymphs and marriageable maidens, who certainly as goddess would stand out from the rest not only for her beauty, but also because of her divine stature (see also EURIPIDES, **Trojan Women** 148-152, 325-328, 332-339; LUCIAN, **On Dance**, 8; PLUTARCH, **Parallel Lives: Theseus** 31.1-3).<sup>31</sup>

### THE LAST DANCER

The last member of the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan can be easily recognised, not only due to her position, but also from her characteristic hand gestures (the released hand resting on the hip or chest etc, Fig. 6). Surprisingly, on a votive relief from Naples the last dancer, who is named the island of Tilos, is distinguished from the rest dancing figures, as she is represented in the form of a small child (no. 6725, Museo Nazionale di Napoli, Horn 1931, Taf. 7). Something similar is depicted on the so-called "relief of the Aglaurides maidens" discovered on the Acropolis, where three dancing women (Nymphs or Aglaurides, the daughters of Kekrops), holding each other's wrist, follow a double flute player (Hermes), while the last woman grasps by the wrist hand a nude boy (Erichthonios?, no. 702, New Acropolis Museum, Svoronos 1911, 447; NEUMANN 1979, Taf. 14a). These are the only examples in relief that depict the last dancer in a young age something, which could imply that the position of the last dancer could also be reserved for the youngest of all participants, as it well happens in Greek folklore dances these days.

A much different composition is depicted on a votive relief from Megara (Despinis 2010, Fig. 52); here the second Nymph is represented as the last one who rests her left hand on her hip, while a third dancer is located between Hermes and the first Nymph. It has not yet been identified, whether this is the first or the last Nymph, but she is represented as a veiled dancer who is spinning. Perhaps this innovation was an attempt by the craftsman to become more innovative in depicting this particular dance move. Homer's description in the **Iliad** (Σ. 605-606) of rotating figures (*κωβιστητήρες*) in the centre of the dance may justify the sculptor's choice (TÖLLE 1964, 63).

### THE MUSICIAN

During the Archaic period dance representations accompanied by a musician who is playing a wind instrument were rare compared to those who are playing

**30 The Ephesian Tale of Anthia and Habrocomes** written by Xenophon of Ephesus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD describes a festival in honour of Artemis and the dance of the virgins that took place there. Extensive is the description of the principal dancer, Anthia, whose had a noble status and her beauty was exquisite (1.2.2-8). The author mentions also her young age (14 years old) and various other features such as her radiant eyes, blond hair and ornate garments, that highlight her outstanding beauty. See also Lonsdale 1993, 209-210.

**31** Apart from women there were also male principal dancers. In the Hymn from the sanctuary of the Dictaean Zeus in Palaikastro, Crete (2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, based an earlier text probably from the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) the god is mentioned not by name but as the son of Cronus and Rhea who is describes as the *Μέγιστος Κούρος*, the Greatest Kouros, the most prominent of all Kouretes, a brilliant and powerful, leader of demons (1-4), Bosanquet 1908-1909, Murray 1908-1909.

the lyre, but later on their appearance expands in iconography (CALAME 1997, 68). So as to represent the round dance of the Nymphs and Pan the ancient craftsmen initially chose the familiar type of the clay dance complex, in which the figurines move around a piper standing in the center. In the depiction of the figure of the piper the main attribute is the double flute, which the figure holds in its mouth with both hands (Figs. 2-3).<sup>32</sup>

By the time the cult of Pan was associated with that of the Nymphs in Attica after the Persian Wars, the role of the musician was always assigned to male figures. As a result, the former type of the musician playing the double flute was replaced by a piper playing the syrinx. Thus, on votive reliefs, clay tablets or discs, the musician is always a male figure, being either the goat-legged god or a male piper or a Satyr with a double flute (see reliefs in THALLON 1903; ROMAIOS 1905; FEUBEL 1935; EDWARDS 1985). The most common representation is that of Pan, who is usually depicted sitting on a rocky mould near the edge the relief with cross linked legs playing the syrinx, rarely in an upright or lying position, while in some examples he is the dance leader, the *Nymphagetis* god (Figs. 1, 6).<sup>33</sup> However, a report in *Dyskolos* (432-434, 880) of a female piper reveals that, although the surviving representations of dance show a preference to display male musicians, there were also female musicians who participated in the ritual events.<sup>34</sup>

Assuming that these dance representations reflect actual ring dances in worship of Pan and the Nymphs, which were held in sacred caves and shrines, the arising question is whether they danced around the musician or around the altar; in other words, what was the position of the musician in relation to the other members of the ritual event?<sup>35</sup> The placement of the musician in the center the dance was an old custom and there are several reports of the Homeric era on bards (*ραψωδοί*) and musicians sitting in the middle (HESIOD, **Shield of Heracles** 278; PINDAR, **Nemeonicus** V 23-25; TÖLLE 1964, 66; WEGNER 1968, 41; CALAME 1997, 36, 38). During a feast held by Alcinoos in his palace to honour his guest Odysseus (**Odyssey** θ. 262), an interesting song and dance ritual is described; servants leveled a place for the dance, and marked out a fair wide ring, then a blind bard, Demodocus, sat in the middle (*ἐς μέσον*), and soon after he started playing his clear-toned lyre (*φόρμιγγα λήγειαν*) young boys (*κοῦροι*) started to dance around him.

This old tradition is well attested on clay statuettes, votive tablets and discs, where the musician is always depicted standing in the center of the ring dance. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the word *σύριγγις* (syrinx) does not refer only to Pan's musical instrument, but it was also used to describe the axis of a wagon wheel (AESCHYLUS, **Seven against Thebes** 205; SOPHOCLES,

**32** While studying vase paintings and representations of dance scenes in clay statuettes Calame (1997, 67, 73) concluded that the musician of a blow instrument in a female dancing ritual can be either male or female. Indeed, the piper in clay statuettes is easily recognized by his position or hand movements but in most cases his sex remains undetermined. The only example where the piper is a definite male figure has been found inside the Corycian cave, no. 16678, Archaeological Museum of Delphi, Pasquier 1977, 365-387 (Fig. 8).

**33** The figure of the musician with a double flute reappears on clay tablets and discs from the Hellenistic period, see above f.n.s. 10-11. On the replacement of the double flute by the syrinx, HALDANE 1966, 104.

**34** A female flute player is also mentioned by Alkiphron, **Epistulae Rusticae** IV, 11 (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD).

**35** A parameter that the researcher should take into consideration is the special organization of every area of worship.

**Elektra** 721; EURIPIDES, **Hippolytus** 1234). This information in connection to the clay statuettes discovered in the Corycian cave on Mount Parnassus, whose base has the form of a wheel, leads us to the conclusion that the position of the musician was probably in the center of the dance, near the altar of the gods (Fig. 8).

On the other hand, on votive reliefs the musician is placed at the side, near the edge of the relief. Despite that, it cannot be excluded, that the choice of representing a round dance event in a line was due to technical limitations imposed by the two-dimensional surface. Undoubtedly, a factor which certainly contributed to the choice of the location of the musician during a ritual performance was the spatial formation of each place of worship. Pan and the Nymphs were worshiped not only in sanctuaries and caves but also in the countryside away from urban centers. The musician would probably have moved in space depending on the configuration of the sacred area and the evolution of dance performance; sometimes they would stand in the center of the dance in order to be heard and to inspire the dancers. However, it should be mentioned that at occasions they could move in space either ahead of the dancing chain or at the end or even more outside the circle.<sup>36</sup>

To sum up, dance in antiquity was present both in mythology and religion. It accompanied ancient ceremonies, spiritual gatherings and social events; in other words it was an integral part in most manifestations of religious and social life. Dance was not only time for leisure and fun, but also a way to honour the gods, bring good fortune and bless the crops along with celebration. There was a profound belief in ancient communities that the art of *orchesis* reflected divine dance prototypes, some of which are described in various myths and legends of women abducted by men from female choruses or of gods playing music in the middle of a dance and presiding over divine dances.

The joint cult of Pan and the Nymphs was deeply connected to music, dance and their rituals, performed inside sacred caves and rural shrines in the Greek countryside, demanded joyful celebrations and loud noisemaking as reflected on the votive offerings discovered inside many of these sanctuaries. These dance rituals needed to be executed in proper order, Alkman's *τάξις*, and there were certain rules that the faithful were expected to follow, in order make contact with the divine and please the gods. All participants ought to know their "ought to be" position in every dance ritual and, thus, perform accordingly. The combination of order, dance, rhythm and music would then lead to the performance of a harmonious ritual, which would, eventually, bring in a lot towards the desired result.

**36** Something similar has been assumed for the LM IIIA clay dance group from Palaikastro Crete, no. 3903, Archaeological Museum of Iraklion, where the position of the musician was not fixed, as there are no traces of breaks or cracks at its base to suggest its annexation on a firm base with the dancers. This freedom in the placement of a figurine of the musician in relation to the rest of the dance group was probably deliberate, Mandalaki 2002, 12 ff, pl. 22a. On an epigram attributed to Plato in **Anthologia Palatina** (fr. 16) the Nymphs are mentioned dancing around Pan (*πέριξ*), but it is not specified whether he is in the center of the dance circle or near it.

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