

EULIMENE

Vol 25 (2024)

EULIMENE 25 (2024)

ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ
EULIMENE

ΤΟΜΟΣ 25
ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΑΚΗ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ
ΠΕΘΥΜΝΟ 2024

Female acrobats in the Classical world

Anna Alexandropoulou

doi: [10.12681/eul.40585](https://doi.org/10.12681/eul.40585)

Copyright © 2025, Anna Alexandropoulou



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΕ

ΜΕΛΕΤΕΣ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΛΑΣΙΚΗ ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΑ,
ΤΗΝ ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΙΚΗ, ΤΗ ΝΟΜΙΣΜΑΤΙΚΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΠΑΠΥΡΟΛΟΓΙΑ

Τόμος 25
Μεσογειακή Αρχαιολογική Εταιρεία
Ρέθυμνο 2024

ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ
ΜΕΣΟΓΕΙΑΚΗ
ΑΡΧΑΙΟΛΟΓΙΚΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ

Π. Μανουσάκη 5–Β. Χάλη 8
GR 741 00–Ρέθυμνο

Χατζηχρήστου 14
GR 117 42–Αθήνα

ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ–ΕΠΙΜΕΛΕΙΑ ΕΚΔΟΣΗΣ
Δρ. Νίκος Λίτινας (Ρέθυμνο)
Καθ. Μανόλης Ι. Στεφανάκης (Ρόδος)

ΒΟΗΘΟΙ ΕΚΔΟΣΗΣ
Μαρία Αχιολά (Ρόδος)
Δρ. Δήμητρα Τσαγκάρη (Αθήνα)
Δρ. Nicholas Salmon (London)

PUBLISHER
MEDITERRANEAN
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

P. Manousaki 5–V. Chali 8
GR 741 00–Rethymnon

Chatzichristou 14
GR 117 42–Athens

PUBLISHING DIRECTORS, EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Dr. Nikos Litinas (Rethymnon)
Prof. Manolis I. Stefanakis (Rhodes)

ASSISTANTS TO THE EDITORS
Maria Achiola (Rhodes)
Dr. Dimitra Tsangari (Athens)
Dr. Nicholas Salmon (London)

ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ
EULIMENE

2024

Online ISSN: 2945-0357

ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ

Ομ. Καθ. Νίκος Σταμπολίδης (Ρέθυμνο)
Ομ. Καθ. Alan W. Johnston (Λονδίνο)
Καθ. Mariusz Mielczarek (Łódź)
Καθ. Άγγελος Χανιώτης (Princeton)
Καθ. Μανόλης Ι. Στεφανάκης (Ρόδος)
Δρ. Νίκος Λιτinas (Ρέθυμνο)
Καθ. Αναγνώστης Αγελαράκης (Adelphi)
Καθ. Σταύρος Περεντίδης (Αθήνα)
Καθ. François de Callataÿ (Paris)
Καθ. Maria Chiara Monaco (Potenza)
Δρ. Paolo Daniele Scirpo (Αθήνα)
Δρ. Marco Fressura (Rome)
Δρ. Marco Vespa (Fribourg)

ADVISORY EDITORIAL BOARD

Em. Prof. Nikos Stampolidis (Rethymnon)
Em. Prof. Alan W. Johnston (London)
Prof. Mariusz Mielczarek (Łódź)
Prof. Angelos Chaniotis (Princeton)
Prof. Manolis I. Stefanakis (Rhodes)
Dr. Nikos Litinas (Rethymnon)
Prof. Anagnostis Agelarakis (Adelphi)
Prof. Stavros Perentidis (Athens)
Prof. François de Callataÿ (Paris)
Prof. Maria Chiara Monaco (Potenza)
Dr. Paolo Daniele Scirpo (Athens)
Dr. Marco Fressura (Rome)
Dr. Marco Vespa (Fribourg)

Η ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ είναι ένα ελεύθερης πρόσβασης ετήσιο διεθνές επιστημονικό περιοδικό με κριτές που περιλαμβάνει μελέτες στην Κλασική Αρχαιολογία, την Επιγραφική, τη Νομισματική και την Παπυρολογία εστιάζοντας στον Ελληνικό και Ρωμαϊκό κόσμο της Μεσογείου από την Υστερομινωική / Υπομινωική / Μυκηναϊκή εποχή (12ος / 11ος αι. π.Χ.) έως και την Ύστερη Αρχαιότητα (5ος / 6ος αι. μ.Χ.).

Η ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ περιλαμβάνει επίσης μελέτες στην Ανθρωπολογία, Παλαιοδημογραφία, Παλαιοπεριβάλλον, Παλαιοβοτανολογία, Ζωοαρχαιολογία, Αρχαία Οικονομία και Ιστορία των Επιστημών, εφόσον αυτές εμπίπτουν στα προαναφερθέντα γεωγραφικά και χρονικά όρια. Ευρύτερες μελέτες στην Κλασική Φιλολογία και Αρχαία Ιστορία θα γίνονται δεκτές, εφόσον συνδέονται άμεσα με μία από τις παραπάνω επιστήμες.

Παρακαλούνται οι συγγραφείς να λαμβάνουν υπόψη τους τις παρακάτω οδηγίες:

1. Οι εργασίες υποβάλλονται στην Ελληνική, Αγγλική, Γερμανική, Γαλλική ή Ιταλική γλώσσα. Κάθε εργασία πρέπει να συνοδεύεται από μία περίληψη περίπου 250 λέξεων στην ελληνική και την αγγλική γλώσσα.
2. Συνομογραφίες δεκτές σύμφωνα με το *American Journal of Archaeology*, *Numismatic Literature*, J.F. Oates *et al.*, *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets, ASP*.
3. Οι εργασίες υποβάλλονται ηλεκτρονικά στις ακόλουθες διευθύνσεις: litinasn@uoc.gr και stefanakis@aegean.gr. Για περισσότερες λεπτομέρειες βλ. <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/eulimene/about/submissions>.
4. Οι εικόνες υποβάλλονται σε μορφή αρχείου .jpg ή .tiff και σε ανάλυση τουλάχιστον 1,200 dpi (dots per inch) προκειμένου για γραμμικά σχέδια και 400 dpi για εικόνες. Όλα τα εικονογραφικά στοιχεία πρέπει να είναι αριθμημένα σε απλή σειρά.

Είναι υποχρέωση του κάθε συγγραφέα να εξασφαλίζει γραπτή άδεια για την αναπαραγωγή υλικού που έχει δημοσιευτεί αλλού ή είναι αδημοσίευτο.

Η ΕΥΛΙΜΕΝΗ ΣΕΙΡΑ Αυτοτελών Εκδόσεων παρέχεται ως ηλεκτρονική σειρά εκδόσεων ελεύθερης πρόσβασης: <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/eulimene/index>

Συνεργασίες – Πληροφορίες:

Μεσογειακή Αρχαιολογική Εταιρεία

Δρ. Νίκος Λίτινας, Πανεπιστήμιο Κρήτης, Τμήμα Φιλολογίας, Ρέθυμνο – GR 74100 (litinasn@uoc.gr)

Καθ. Μανώλης Ι. Στεφανάκης, Πανεπιστήμιο Αιγαίου, Τμήμα Μεσογειακών Σπουδών: Αρχαιολογία, Γλωσσολογία, Διεθνείς Σχέσεις, Ρόδος – GR 85132 (stefanakis@aegean.gr)

<https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/eulimene/index>

EULIMENE is an open-access annual international peer reviewed academic periodical which hosts studies in Classical Archaeology, Epigraphy, Numismatics, and Papyrology, with particular interest in the Greek and Roman Mediterranean world. The time span covered by EULIMENE runs from the Late Minoan / Sub Minoan / Mycenaean period (12th / 11th c. BC) through to the Late Antiquity (5th / 6th c. AD).

EULIMENE will also welcome studies on Anthropology, Palaiodemography, Palaio-environmental, Botanical and Faunal Archaeology, the Ancient Economy and the History of Science, so long as they conform to the geographical and chronological boundaries noted. Broader studies on Classics or Ancient History will be welcome, though they should be strictly linked with one or more of the areas mentioned above.

It will be very much appreciated if contributors consider the following guidelines:

1. Contributions should be in either of the following languages: Greek, English, German, French or Italian. Each paper should be accompanied by a Greek and an English summary of about 250 words.
2. Accepted abbreviations are those of *American Journal of Archaeology*, *Numismatic Literature*, J.F. Oates *et al.*, *Checklist of Editions of Greek and Latin Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets, ASP*.
3. Please submit your paper to: litinasn@uoc.gr and stefanakis@aegean.gr. For further information see <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/eulimene/about/submissions>.
4. Illustrations are submitted in .jpg or .tiff format of at least 1,200 dpi (dots per inch) for line art and 400 dpi for coloured and halftones (grayscale mode) resolution. All illustrations should be numbered in a single sequence.

It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission to quote or reproduce material which has appeared in another publication or is still unpublished

EULIMENE SERIES of Independent Publications is freely accessible (Open Access): <https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/eulimene/index>

Contributions – Information:

Mediterranean Archaeological Society

Dr. Nikos Litinas, University of Crete, Department of Philology, Rethymnon – GR 74100 (litinasn@uoc.gr)

Prof. Manolis I. Stefanakis, University of the Aegean, Department of Mediterranean Studies: Archaeology, Linguistics, International Relations, Rhodes – GR 85132 (stefanakis@aegean.gr)

<https://ejournals.epublishing.ekt.gr/index.php/eulimene/index>

Περιεχόμενα
EYΛIMENH 25 (2024)

List of Contents
EULIMENE 25 (2024)

Περίληψεις / Summaries / Zusammenfassungen / Sommaires / Riassunti	vii
Ευαγγελία Δήμα, Αρχαιολογικές θέσεις και μνημεία στην Κρεμαστή και το Παραδείσι Ρόδου και η συμβολή ενός νέου υστερορωμαϊκού τάφου στον λόφο του Ασωμάτου στη μνημειακή τοπογραφία της περιοχής.....	1
Anna Alexandropoulou, Female acrobats in the Classical world	31
Stella Drougou, On the occasion of a Hellenistic clay lamp from the ancient city of Aigai, Vergina.....	41
Γεώργιος Κ. Καλλής, Επτά κεραμικοί κλίβανοι από τον νομό Κορινθίας	51
Anagnostis Agelarakis, The Hippocratic Legacy in Cranial Trauma Surgery: from <i>On Head Wounds</i> to Rogerius Frugardi's <i>Chirurgia</i>, and the Semantic Transformation of “Trepanation” in Scholarship	79

**Περίληψεις / Summaries / Zusammenfassungen /
Sommaires / Riassunti**

Ευαγγελία Δήμα, Αρχαιολογικές θέσεις και μνημεία στην Κρεμαστή και το Παραδείσι Ρόδου και η συμβολή ενός νέου υστερορωμαϊκού τάφου στον λόφο του Ασωμάτου στη μνημειακή τοπογραφία της περιοχής, *EYAIMENH* 25 (2024), 1-29.

The article examines the monumental topography (archaeological sites and monuments) of the settlements of Kremasti and Paradisi in Rhodes, as well as the contribution of a late Roman tomb recently found on the eastern slope of the Asomatos hill, which rises between the two settlements. In historical times, this area belonged administratively and geographically to ancient Ialysia, which occupied the northern end of the island and was its most important part.

The archaeological research in both settlements commenced with the Italian excavations during the interwar period, while subsequently, after the incorporation of the Dodecanese to Greece, the extensive rescue research was undertaken by the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese. In this context, a chamber tomb was discovered, which despite its modest findings, constitutes a substantial contribution to the monumental topography of the region characterized for the most part by fertile plains that favored habitation from a very early age. The traces of its ancient inhabitants, lost in the depths of history, are identified in the abundant movable finds from the settlements of Kremasti and Paradisi, the architectural remains, the craft workshops and agricultural establishments, as well as the necropoleis scattered throughout the area of Ialysia.

Anna Alexandropoulou, Female acrobats in the Classical world, *EYAIMENH* 25 (2024), 31-39.

Οι εικονιστικές σκηνές αγγείων από την Αθήνα και τη Νότια Ιταλία, καθώς και ένα σύνολο κοροπλαστικών παραδειγμάτων από τη Λέσβο και τις Λιπάρες νήσους μεταξύ άλλων, συμβάλλουν στην εξέταση και την ερμηνεία του ρόλου των γυμνών ακροβάτιδων στην κλασική κοινωνία. Μολονότι η παραδοσιακή σχέση τους με τα συμπόσια και τον κόσμο των εταίρων είναι αδιαμφισβήτητη, οι εικονιστικές σκηνές της αττικής και κατω-ιταλιώτικης αγγειογραφίας, καθώς και οι αρχαίες πηγές, παρέχουν ενδείξεις για την εμφάνιση των γυμνών ακροβάτιδων και σε λατρευτικά πλαίσια, όπως για παράδειγμα στον τελετουργικό χορό *καλαθίσκο*. Δεν αποκλείεται να συνιστούν μία τελετουργική δραστηριότητα που σχετίζεται με τελετές ενηλικίωσης, δεδομένου ότι οι ακροβάτιδες, εκτός φυσικά από Διονυσιακές σκηνές, εμφανίζονται σε σκηνές που συνδέονται κυρίως με την Άρτεμη και τον Απόλλωνα.

Vases from Athens and South Italy, and statuettes from Lesbos and the Lipari islands among others, form a rich material for the examination and interpretation of the role of naked female acrobats in classical society. Their traditional connection with *symposia* and the world of *hetairai* has largely remained undisputed. A new interpretation is also possible based on the examination of figured scenes on Attic and Italian red-figure vases and literary sources. These offer evidence for the appearance of female naked acrobats in cultic contexts which include other known ceremonial acts such as the *kalathiskos* dance. Female acrobats appear in scenes chiefly connected with Artemis, Apollo and Dionysus. Therefore, we may assume that besides their evident connection with the world of spectacle, they may also form a special ritual activity related to the passage to adulthood.

Stella Drougou, On the occasion of a Hellenistic clay lamp from the ancient city of Aigai, Vergina, *EYΛIMENH* 25 (2024), 41-50.

Το θραύσμα ενός ελληνιστικού πήλινου λύχνου με αξιοπρόσεκτη φυτική διακόσμηση στην ανάγλυφη λαβή του, εύρημα των τελευταίων χρόνων στον ανασκαφικό τομέα «αγρός Τσακιρίδη» στη Βεργίνα, αποτελεί την αφορμή για ορισμένες παρατηρήσεις ως προς τα διακοσμητικά θέματα της μικροτεχνίας – και όχι μόνο – στην απερχόμενη ελληνιστική περίοδο. Αξίζει να σημειωθεί ότι ο ανασκαφικός τομέας «αγρός Τσακιρίδη» γειτνιάζει με το ανεσκαμμένο Μητρώο στην αρχαία πόλη των Αιγών (Βεργίνα), στα ΒΔ αυτού. Στον υπό έρευνα ακόμη χώρο έχουν αποκαλυφθεί κυρίως τα οικοδομικά λείψανα εργαστηριακών εγκαταστάσεων καθώς και χαρακτηριστικά κινητά ευρήματα, κατάλοιπα βιοτεχνικών προϊόντων.

The fragment of a Hellenistic clay lamp with a remarkable relief handle, a recent find from the excavational sector “Tsakiridis field” in Vergina, gave rise to some observations on the decorative motives of Hellenistic handcrafts products. It is noteworthy, that the site “Tsakiridis field” lies in the vicinity of the excavated Metroon in the ancient city of Aigai (Vergina), where remains of workshops as well as other finds, products of their workmanship, are significantly substantiated.

Γεώργιος Κ. Καλλής, Επτά κλίβανοι από τον νομό Κορινθίας, *EYΛIMENH* 25 (2024), 51-78.

The subject of this essay are the ceramic kilns that were identified and investigated in the region of Corinth. Two kilns were excavated in the area of ancient Sikyon and date back to the Hellenistic era and five kilns were discovered at Kamari of the municipality of Xylokastro, dated to the Roman period. In addition to the structural and functional elements of the kilns, the ceramic finds resulting from the excavation are also examined. The study of these humble monuments is a useful tool for reconstructing the social and economic organization of the ceramic workshop during antiquity and contributes to the promotion of the kilns’ research in the region of the Peloponnese.

Anagnostis Agelarakis, The Hippocratic Legacy in Cranial Trauma Surgery: from *On Head Wounds* to Rogerius Frugardi's *Chirurgia*, and the Semantic Transformation of "Trepanation" in Scholarship, *EYAIMENH* 25 (2024), 79-93.

Στην ιστορία της ιατρικής, η Ιπποκρατική πραγματεία *Περί Των Εν Κεφαλῇ Τρωμάτων* αποτελεί την αρχαιότερη γραπτή πηγή της χειρουργικής αντιμετώπισης καταγμάτων κρανίου λόγω τραυματισμού. Πολλές σύγχρονες επιστημονικές δημοσιεύσεις αναφέρονται στις Ιπποκρατικές κρανιο-χειρουργικές μεθόδους, υπογραμμίζοντας τη σημασία τους στην ιστορία της ιατρικής. Συχνά συγκρίνουν τις Ιπποκρατικές πρακτικές με αρχαιο-παθολογικές περιπτώσεις κρανιο-χειρουργικών επεμβάσεων σε διαφορετικές περιόδους και περιοχές από τη Νεολιθική Εποχή και εφεξής. Ωστόσο, ορισμένα σχόλια που διατυπώνονται εκ των υστέρων, μετά από δύο και πλέον χιλιετίες, είναι ανακριβή ή ελλιπή. Σπανίως δε, αποδίδονται στον Ιπποκράτη εικασίες για ελλείψεις στη μεθοδολογία ή στις εμπειρικές του γνώσεις και δεξιότητες, βασισμένες ενδεχομένως σε ατελή μελέτη ή παρερμηνεία της πρωτογενούς ιστορικής πηγής, αλλά και σε ό,τι αφορά στον όρο «τρυπανισμός», που υιοθετήθηκε τον 19ο αιώνα και περιλαμβάνει κάθε άνοιγμα στο κρανίο μέσω χειρουργικής επέμβασης.

Το άρθρο διερευνά πτυχές της Ιπποκρατικής πραγματείας, εστιάζοντας στις χειρουργικές διαδικασίες, τις τεχνικές και τα εργαλεία που χρησιμοποιήθηκαν, με παράθεση αποσπασμάτων αρχαίων κειμένων. Επιπλέον, προσφέρει μια διαχρονική ανάλυση από τον 5ο αι. π.Χ. έως την Αναγέννηση, αναδεικνύοντας τη σημασία της Ιπποκρατικής κληρονομιάς και καταδεικνύοντας τις επιστημονικές ανακρίβειες που προκύπτουν από την ελλιπή μελέτη του θέματος και την καθολική χρήση του όρου «τρυπανισμός» στη σύγχρονη αρχαιο-ανθρωπολογική βιβλιογραφία.

The Hippocratic treatise *On Head Wounds* (*Περί Των Εν Κεφαλῇ Τρωμάτων*) stands as the earliest recorded account of surgical techniques for cranial fractures resulting from trauma. Its descriptions of surgical procedures, tools, and methodologies have been widely referenced in modern medical and archaeological scholarship. Researchers frequently compare these Hippocratic practices with evidence of cranial surgery observed across various historical and cultural contexts, from prehistoric times through antiquity. Despite its historical importance, interpretations of the treatise are sometimes shaped by modern assumptions rather than a faithful reading of the original text. Certain retrospective analyses, written more than two millennia later, present incomplete or inaccurate assessments, often due to misinterpretations of the primary source. These studies occasionally attribute deficiencies in surgical methodology or empirical knowledge to Hippocrates himself. Additionally, the 19th-century introduction of the term *trepanation*—which has come to encompass all surgically induced cranial openings—has contributed to a generalized and often misleading classification of ancient surgical practices.

This article revisits the surgical concepts outlined in *On Head Wounds*, focusing on operative techniques, instrumentation, and textual evidence. It also examines the evolving interpretation of these procedures from antiquity to the Renaissance, emphasizing the need for greater precision in discussing Hippocratic contributions and the impact of terminological imprecision on archaeo-anthropological discourse.

FEMALE ACROBATS IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

In red-figure vase painting, images of girls playing various games involving sleight of hand¹ coexist with images of nude female acrobats and jugglers. The ancient name for those who performed acrobatics is *kybisteter* (κυβιστητήρ) and describes the person who stands on the ground supported on their head and hands². The word is first known from the Homeric epics³, while the first iconographic evidence of a *kybisteter* in historic times dates to the late 8th c. BC⁴. The best-known written testimony for female acrobats comes from Xenophon⁵, who describes the remarkable skills of a professional female dancer at an Athenian *symposion*. In addition to juggling tricks, she could also perform fearless acrobatics inside a circle consisting of upright swords and balance herself on a turning wheel, while simultaneously reading and writing.

This paper discusses the iconography of female acrobats in the 5th and 4th c. BC⁶, in an attempt to summarize the various interpretations proposed to date. A catalogue, at the end of the paper, lists 25 examples of performers depicted in vase painting and terracotta figurines of the classical period, under discussion here. Written sources are also employed to provide a fuller understanding of this iconographic subject.

The earliest images of women in similar acrobatics appear in the 5th c. BC (cat. nos 1-4). The interest in pictorial representations of female acrobats during this period accompanies a shift in the repertoire of Attic vase painting of the Classical age from mythological and military scenes to scenes of daily life and public cult life. In the case of vases 1-4 catalogued below, hydrias 3 and 4 comprise the most valuable source of information for an iconographic and interpretative approach to the subject.

On hydria no. 3, a nude girl is performing acrobatics to the accompaniment of a flute, as two other nude girls dance and play the *krotala*. They are being watched by a young, beardless male wearing a himation and leaning on a walking stick, and a woman dressed in chiton and himation. The scene (or the composition) concludes on the right side with a stool on which the girls' clothing has been left. Above, there is a miniature abstract depiction of a temple consisting of three colonettes and an architrave⁷.

¹ Neils and Oakley 2003, 272-273.

² Pedrizet 1921, 157; Schäfer 1997, 15-18.

³ Hom. *Od.* 4, 15-19.

⁴ Schäfer 1997, 15, pl. 1, 2. For acrobats in prehistoric times and art, Schneider-Herrmann 1982, 502, n. 14; Laser 1987, 72-75; Iversen 2014. For the identification of a prehistoric human skeleton with an acrobat see Oates *et al.* 2008.

⁵ Xen. *Symp.* 2, 7-8, 11; 7, 2-3; Schäfer 1997, 79.

⁶ For a brief examination of the topic, Scholz 2003. For a more detailed catalogue see Hughes 2008, 23-27. For male acrobats on an Etruscan relief dated 480-470 BC, see Thuiller 1997.

⁷ Vazaki 2003, 54, n. 339. In contrast, Warden (2004, 123) identifies it as a window.

On hydria no. 4, there are depicted from left to right two young girls practising the basket dance. Their dance is accompanied by the music of a flute being played by an *auletris* seated on a *diphros*. On the left, a woman is holding out a *cithara* to the dancer, as a young man leaning on a walking stick watches the dance.

Next is a depiction of a young girl with a shield, helmet, and spear dancing the *pyrrichios* as a young woman wearing a chiton and cloak plays the *krotala*. Next to her, a girl is performing an acrobatic “bridge” on a table with a kylix in front of her. The scene concludes with a nude dancing girl, jumping in front of upright swords to the music of a flute being played by an *auletris* dressed in chiton and himation.

The prevailing view⁸ is that the scenes on both hydrias depict courtesans practising various dances for the entertainment of men at symposia and wine-drinking parties. Three fundamental arguments support this interpretation: the first concerns the identification of the young man in both scenes with someone interested in hiring the courtesans (*hetairai*); the second relies on the girls’ nudity, which is interpreted as a negative characteristic, since until the late 5th c. BC only courtesans were depicted nude in ancient Greek art⁹; the third argument adopted by those maintaining that these are scenes from the life of courtesans is based on the absence of written sources to document that daring acrobatic dances accompanied religious rituals and/or ancient mysteries.

Recently, however, Vazaki¹⁰ has maintained, using detailed arguments, that the iconography on the hydrias is to be identified as training places for initiation rites¹¹. Vazaki notes that the young man does not hold the characteristic pouch containing the fee for the courtesans’ services in accordance with the iconographic type. On the contrary, he is extending his hand in a typical gesture which distinguishes teachers and trainers in the iconography of Attic red-figure vase painting. It is therefore probable that the figure of the young male does not come from the world of courtesans, but rather represents a master or assistant trainer who is guiding and advising the young dancers with his gestures¹².

In archaic and classical Greek art, apart from its erotic function in scenes with naked dancers and prostitutes, female nudity also denotes the vulnerable and defenceless, as when the semi-nude Lapith women are attacked by Centaurs, or when the nude Cassandra is removed by force from the Palladion during the sack of Troy¹³. However, in addition to specific narrative contexts that required female nudity such as bathing scenes¹⁴, young unmarried girls taking part in religious celebrations and initiation rites into adulthood and marriage, were also shown nude in ancient Greek art.

The male presence on the two hydrias prevents any attempt to identify the scenes with transitional rituals for the girls since all the males in the community were excluded from such activities. The stool with the clothes left on it indicates that the scenes are unfolding in an interior space identified as a place for the girls’ training.

⁸ Schäfer 1997, 78; Scholz 2003, 99; Warden 2004, 123-124.

⁹ Vazaki 2003, 55.

¹⁰ Vazaki 2003, 54-63.

¹¹ Other scholars have also supported this interpretation, Matheson 1995, 286.

¹² Vazaki 2003, 54, 58.

¹³ Vazaki 2003, 55, n. 348.

¹⁴ Sutton 2009; Kreilinger 2007.

Furthermore, the abstract miniature depiction of a temple in the upper part of the scene on the hydria no. 3 cannot be interpreted as evidence of the sacredness of the place where the scene is taking place. However, it may indicate the celebratory character of the event for which the practising girls are preparing¹⁵.

The presence of a man near the nude girls who are training certainly prompts consideration of its interpretation. However, in this case, nudity according to Vazaki¹⁶ is being employed to highlight the girls' well-exercised, athletic bodies and not to stress their sexuality. The decoupling of nudity from its erotic function is also confirmed by the comparison of the girls' adolescent bodies and the fully-formed female body of the courtesan-juggler on vase no. 1.

In a different reading, the girls' nudity is used to demonstrate certain concepts such as youth, beauty, and virtue. Nudity is thus defined as a form of "athletic dress" in which the well-toned adolescent body –the *par excellence* trait of youth– is extolled. By interpreting the girls' nudity on the two hydrias (nos 3-4) as only apparent, something not corresponding to reality but rather allusive, one can also reconcile the presence of the young man; he may be identified as a member of the family, e.g., a brother, or a trainer watching the girls train and making his suggestions¹⁷.

Based on iconographic evidence, the basket dance was among the religious dances performed during celebrations, chiefly those in honour of Artemis and Aphrodite¹⁸. There is no iconographic or literary evidence for the performance of this dance by courtesans at symposia on mainland Greece¹⁹.

On the contrary, there are countless iconographic sources for the performance of the *pyrrichios* by courtesans at symposia. Wearing a helmet and loincloth and holding a shield and spear, they imitated the movements of warriors during battle. Until recently it was maintained that *pyrrichios* dancers appeared only at symposia. However, this view has now been revised, based on pictorial sources that also link the *pyrriche* with young girls' initiation rites into adulthood²⁰. A characteristic pictorial example documenting this new interpretation is the scene on a pyxis in Naples²¹ in which a *pyrrichistria* is performing in front of an altar at the sanctuary of Artemis.

Finally, according to the literary sources, the sword dance was performed by professional female dancers (*orchestrides*) only at symposia. The mere absence of written sources attesting to the performance of acrobatic dances at ritual events does not necessarily lead to the girl with the sword's identification as a professional dancer. Moreover, the evidence for the performance of the *pyrrichios* in a cult context is pictorial, not written. The exclusively ritual character of the basket dance, which was dedicated either to Aphrodite as the patron goddess of newlywed women or to Artemis as the main deity of virgins, also prohibits interpretation of the scene as a lesson for courtesans at a dance school.

¹⁵ Vazaki 2003, 54.

¹⁶ Vazaki 2003, 58.

¹⁷ Vazaki 2003, 58.

¹⁸ Vazaki 2003, 61 n. 379; Βιβλιοδέτης 2006.

¹⁹ Vazaki 2003, 61.

²⁰ Vazaki 2003, 61, n. 382; Andrikou *et al.* 2004, 239.

²¹ Vazaki 2003, 155, n. 907.

In this context, the acrobatic exercises and sword dance could be possibly linked with the untamed nature of virgins and viewed as particularly demanding ritual practices by members of the cult community²².

The meagre number of representations of female acrobats on the fifth c. BC red-figured vases disappeared in the following century. Their absence is justified by the changing repertoire of Attic vases, which were now destined for new markets along the shores of the Black Sea.

It appears, however, that the figure of the acrobat also attracted Greek coroplasts, though to a limited degree judging from the very few preserved examples. The best known is the figurine no. 5 from a grave in Chalcis, which depicts the acrobat inside a circle of sharp objects identified as swords. In contrast, there is no reference in the bibliography to figurine no. 7, while examples nos 8 and 9 from the same tomb in Mytilene have recently been published²³. Nothing is known, however, about their excavation context or accompanying finds.

In contrast to the 4th c. BC, when Athenian painters were indifferent to the representation of acrobats on their vases, South Italian vase painters showed a notable preference for this subject. Red-figure vases and Gnathian ware were decorated with images of acrobats exhibiting various formidable skills. All these vases date between 370 and 330 BC.

The red-figure Campanian hydria no. 10 is one of the earliest examples. The *kybisteter* is depicted between a box and a turning wheel –apparently, these objects were necessary for her art– and two *tympana* and a ribbon hang in the upper part of the scene.

The contrast between the multi-figure narrative scenes of the two hydrias (nos 3-4) in the previous century and the isolated figures in South Italian vase painting is highlighted by the two Apulian plates (nos 11-12), both works of the same painter. One depicts an acrobat somersaulting over an upright sword. The other shows a mime dancer simultaneously balancing a wheel on her right arm²⁴.

The vases nos 13-14, which belong to the class of “Gnathian ware”, are also decorated with images of an acrobat. On skyphos no. 13, the *kybisteter* holds a small ball in her raised hand, while the one on pelike no. 14 is preparing to shoot an arrow from the bow she holds with her feet.

Instead of solitary acrobat figures, the following group of vases (nos 15-17) is characterized by binary compositions. In one case (no. 15), the acrobat is represented balancing on her hands on a rotating wheel²⁵. Her acrobatic feats are accompanied by the sounds of a flute being played by a seated *aulitris*. In another case (no. 16), the *kybisteter*, who is wearing a white loincloth, is performing her acrobatics in front of a nude youth leaning on a pillar. In a third case (no. 17), the *kybisteter* appears with another dancer who is swirling, her hands clasped above her head.

²² Vazaki 2003, 61.

²³ See also another example in Winter 1903 II, 160, 1, from Thebes.

²⁴ For a similar object in an attic scene which is difficult to interpret, Paul-Zinserling 1994, 118-120, pl. 66,1. The possibility that this was a scene of the women’s quarters (*gynaikonitis*) should not be ruled out. For comparable examples of girls performing juggling tricks see above n. 1.

²⁵ For a detailed catalogue of performances of acrobats on the potter’s wheel see Pulitani *et al.* 2017.

The next group of South Italian vases featuring scenes of acrobats consists of two examples from Paestum (nos 18-19). Here, the acrobats appear alongside comic-burlesque actors from Italian popular theatre, the so-called *Phlyax* actors. The main subject of *Phlyax* paintings must have been the parodying not only of myths as these were in circulation in the local tradition, but also in the form they had assumed in the works of the tragedians²⁶.

On skyphos no. 18, the *phlyax* is using a rope to turn the wheel on which the acrobat is supporting herself on her hands. On the krater no. 19, Dionysus is shown seated, and two *phlyakes* are watching the acrobat performing her feats on a table. Two actors looking through windows in the upper part of the scene also turn their gaze towards her.

Images of female acrobats on South Italian pottery confirm their traditional connection with symposia and their accompaniments, i.e., songs, singers, flute-girls, and dancers. Images like that of the acrobat turning somersaults on a kalyx krater (no. 20) come from the world of symposiasts. The mast used for the game of *kottabos*²⁷ (no. 16) also refers to symposia, while garlands of branches and fillets are interpreted as indirect references²⁸.

Acrobatic stunts, however, were not only performed for the pleasure of men at symposia; they also formed part of other celebrations. The preparation of the bride, as the representation on the obverse of krater no. 17 is interpreted, was also celebrated with acrobatic dances, as depicted on the reverse of this vase. Here one may wonder whether the two dancers were professionals or whether they belonged to the bride's circle.

Finally, the two *phlyax* vases (nos 18-19) confirm the close connection of acrobats with the world of the theatre and public spectacles. Touring with theatrical companies, these Italian female performers arrived at distant destinations, displaying on stage their marvellous skills to viewers.

The acrobatic art in South Italy, however, was not only a spectacle. Epigraphic and pictorial sources document the participation of acrobats in worship activities and confirm the religious significance of acrobatic shows. Choragic inscriptions of the 3rd c. BC²⁹ mention that Italian magicians, among them two women, arrived on Delos to participate in religious celebrations on the island in honour of Apollo.

The presence of Dionysus on krater no. 19 underscores the connection with his cult. According to Hughes, Dionysos claps his right hand to his head in a conventional gesture of dismay³⁰. The representation on vase no. 12 with a mime dancer-acrobat in front of an altar with two eggs, an indication of some Dionysian mystery rite in which she is taking part, also recalls Dionysian worship³¹.

²⁶ Taplin 1993; Dearden 1995.

²⁷ For the game of *Kottabos* see Visconti 2013-14; Attia and Delahaye 2021.

²⁸ Scholz 2003, 100.

²⁹ *IG* XI 2, 110, 113, 115; Pedrizet 1921, 157-158.

³⁰ Hughes 2008, 13.

³¹ Schneider-Herrmann 1982, 503. Contra to the identification with an altar, Paul-Zinserling 1994, 119.

The presentation of figurative sources for female acrobats concludes with the figurines found in the fourth c. BC tombs in Taras (nos 21-23) and Lipari (nos 24-25)³². Figurine no. 21 was found in a female grave along with a miniature theatrical mask, which permits a connection with the world of theatre³³, a connection Bernabò Brea accepted without hesitation for the figurines from Lipari (nos 24-25) too. In contrast to Scholz³⁴, who maintained that the acrobatic art came from South Italy due to the large number of South Italian examples, one should not underestimate the fact that the earliest evidence, both figural³⁵ and written³⁶, appeared in the Greek region.

To sum up, the iconography of the *kybisteter* in Classical art attests to a range of impressive skills including the dance with swords, shooting arrows from a bow with the feet, and the performance of acrobatics while simultaneously drinking wine. Young girls dedicated acrobatic dances to Artemis. By contrast, examination of the pictorial and literary sources has shown that professional acrobats who belonged to the world of symposia and spectacles performed their acrobatic stunts in honour of deities like Dionysus and Apollo.

Catalogue

1. Krater, St Petersburg 634: Scholz 2003, no. 1.
2. Kylix, St Petersburg B. 1535 A: Scholz 2003, no. 2.
3. Hydria, Madrid 11129: Scholz 2003, no. 4; Warden 2004, 123-124, no. 27; Hughes 2008, 10, fig. 5.
4. Hydria, Naples 3232: Scholz 2003, no. 6; Matheson 1995, 286, pl. 14; Βιβλιοδέτης 2006, 186, n. 35; Schäfer 2002, 294-295, no. 183.
5. Terracotta statuette, Athens 13605: Scholz 2003, 101, n. 8; Vazaki 2003, 62, n. 386; Schäfer 2002, 294, no. 184.
6. Terracotta statuette, Paris CA 459: Scholz 2003, 101, n. 9.
7. Terracotta statuette, C. Lecuyer coll.: Lenormant 1882, pl. O.
8. Terracotta statuette, Mytilene 912 a: Αχειλαρά 2006, 216, no. 107.
9. Terracotta statuette, Mytilene 912 b: Αχειλαρά 2006, 217, no. 108.
10. Hydria, Brit. Mus. F 232: Scholz 2003, no. 12.
11. Plate, Hague, Schneider-Herrmann coll. 201: Scholz 2003, no. 19; Dearden 1995, 82, n. 7.
12. Plate, Hague, Schneider-Herrmann coll. 198: Scholz 2003, no. 20; Paul-Zinserling 1994, 119, pl. 66,2; Kleine 2005, 158, no. UV47.
13. Skyphos, Madrid 11554: Scholz 2003, no. 18.
14. Pelike, Berlin 3444: Scholz 2003, no. 13, pl. 18, 1; Cleland *et al.* 2007, 145, fig. 34.

³² For two further Italian figurines, Scholz 2003, 101, n. 11.

³³ Contra, Graepler 1997, 234 who connects them with the symposium.

³⁴ Scholz 2003, 101.

³⁵ For vases with depictions of acrobats in Greece before the 5th c. BC, Schneider-Herrmann 1982, 504; Boardman 1974, fig. 184; Payne 1931, 117, fig. 42. See also above n. 5.

³⁶ Herod. VI, 129.

15. Lekythos, Naples SA 405: Scholz 2003, no. 16, pl. 18,2; Hughes 2008, 12, fig. 7; Pulitani *et al.* 2017, 44, fig. 4.
16. Krater, Geneva 1142: Scholz 2003, no. 10.
17. Krater, Los Angeles 50.9.45: Scholz 2003, no. 21; Hughes 2008, 11, fig. 6.
18. Skyphos, Oxford 1945.43: Scholz 2003, no. 15; Dearden 1995, 83, pl. 1a.
19. Krater, Lipari 927: Scholz 2003, no. 11; Dearden 1995, 83, pl. 1b; Hughes 2008, 13, fig. 8; Conventi *et al.* 2020, 124, fig. 1a-b.
20. Krater, Once Hamilton coll.: Scholz 2003, no. 23.
21. Terracotta statuette, Tarent 4090: Scholz 2003, 101, n. 10.
22. Terracotta Statuette, Tarent 50323: Scholz 2003, 101, n. 10.
23. Terracotta statuette, Tarent 4059: Graepler 1997, 234, n. 275.
24. Terracotta statuette, Lipari 749k: Graepler 1997, 234, n. 277; Bernabó Brea 2001, 142, fig. 194.
25. Terracotta statuette, Lipari 749j: Graepler 1997, 234, n. 277; Bernabó Brea 2001, 142, fig. 195.

Bibliography

- Andrikou, E., A. Goulaki-Voutira, C. Lanara and Z. Papadopoulou (eds) 2004. *Gifts of the Muses. Echoes of Music and Dance from Ancient Greece*. Athens: Hellenic Ministry of Culture.
- Attia, A. and A. Delahaye 2021. "Vertiges du banquet: jeux d'habileté et d'équilibre au symposion", *Kentron. Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde antique* 36, 29-66, <http://journals.openedition.org/kentron/4415> (last accessed 4-12-2024).
- Bernabó Brea, L. 2001. *Maschere e personaggi del teatro Greco nelle terracotte liparesi*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Boardman, J. 1974. *Athenian Black Figure Vases*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Cleland, L., G. Davies and L. Llewellyn-Jones (eds) 2007. *Greek and Roman Dress from A to Z*. London and New-York: Routledge.
- Conventi, A., K. D'Ignoti, L. Lazzarini and E. Tesser 2020. "Archaeometrical investigations of the materials and techniques of two red figured kraters by the Painter of Louvre K 240", *Technè* 49, 124-133, <https://doi.org/10.4000/techne.6237> (last accessed 4-12-2024).
- Dearden, C.W. 1995. "Pots, tumblers and phlyax vases", in A. Griffiths (ed.), *Stage directions. Essays in ancient drama in honour of E.W. Handley* (BICS Suppl. 66). London: Institute of Classical Studies, 81-86.
- Graepler, D. 1997. *Tonfiguren im Grab*. München: Biering & Brinkmann.
- Hughes, A. 2008. "AI DIONYSIAZUSAI: Women in Greek Theatre", *BICS* 51, 1-27.
- Iversen, R. 2014. "Bronze Age acrobats: Denmark, Egypt, Crete", *World Archaeology* 46.2, 242-255.
- Kleine, B. 2005. *Bilder tanzender Frauen in frühgriechischer und klassischer Zeit*. Rahden/Westf.: Marie Leidorf.
- Kreilinger, U. 2007. *Anständige Nacktheit*. Rahden/Westf.: Leidorf.
- Laser, S. 1987. *Sport und Spiel. Archaeologia Homerica*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

- Lenormant, F. 1882. *Collection Camille Lecuyer: Terres cuites antiques trouvées en Grèce et en Asie-Mineure I*. Paris: Rollin et Feuarent.
- Matheson, S.B. 1995. *Polygnotos and Vase Painting I Classical Athens*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Neils, J. and J.H. Oakley 2003. *Coming of Age in ancient Greece. Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Oates, J., Th. Molleson and A. Soltysiak 2008. "Equids and an acrobat: closure rituals at Tell Brak", *Antiquity* 82, 390-400.
- Paul-Zinserling, V. 1994. *Der Jena-Maler und sein Kreis*. Mainz: von Zabern.
- Payne, H. 1931. *Necrocorinthia. A study of Corinthian art in the archaic period*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Pedrizet, P. 1921. *Les terres cuites grecques d'Égypte de la collection Fouquet*. Nancy, Paris, Strasbourg: Berger-Levrault.
- Pulitani, G., I. Caldana, R. Busato, F. Schiavon, G. Conti, E. Rampazzo and M. Vidale 2017. "Performances of (and on) the Greek Potter's Wheels: An experimental Project", *EIDOLA* 14, 35-56.
- Schäfer, A. 1997. *Unterhaltung beim griechischen Symposion*. Mainz: von Zabern.
- Schäfer, A. 2002. "Alte Werke, neue Bilder: Das Trinkgelage klassischer Zeit in Athen", in W.D. Heilmeyer (ed.), *Die griechische Klassik. Idee oder Wirklichkeit, Catalogue of the exhibition*. Berlin-Bonn, Mainz: von Zabern, 285-295.
- Schneider-Herrmann, G. 1982. "Two Apulian female acrobats", in M.L. Gualandi, L. Massei and S. Settis (eds), *APARXAI. Nuove ricerche e studi sulla Magna Grecia e la Sicilia antica in onore di Paolo Enrico Arias*. Pisa: Giardini, 501-504.
- Scholz, B. 2003. "Akrobattinnen in Attika und Unteritalien", in B. Schmaltz and M. Söldner (eds), *Griechische Keramik im kulturellen Kontext. Akten des Internationalen Vasen-Symposions in Kiel vom 24.-28.9.2001*. Münster: Scriptorium, 99-101.
- Sutton, R.F. Jr. 2009. "Female Bathers and the Emergence of the Female Nude in Greek Art", in C. Kosso and A. Scott (eds), *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 61-86.
- Taplin, O. 1993. *Comic Angels: and other approaches to Greek drama through vase-paintings*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Thuiller, J.P. 1997. "Un relief archaïque inédit de Chiusi", *RA* 97.2, 243-260.
- Vazaki, A. 2003. *Mousike Gyne. Die musisch-literarische Erziehung und Bildung von Frauen im Athen der klassischen Zeit*. Möhnesee: Bibliopolis.
- Visconti, G. 2013-14. "Il gioco del Kottabos oltre I confine del simposio. Un'analisi attraverso la ceramica italiota, tra ceramica attica ed etrusca", *Ostraka XXII/XXIII*, 235-253.
- Warden, P.G. 2004. *Greek Vase Painting. Form, Figure and Narrative. Treasures of the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid*. Dallas: SMU Press.
- Winter, F. 1903. *Die Typen der figürlichen Terrakotten I-II*. Berlin-Stuttgart: Verlag von W. Spemann.

- Αχειλαρά, Λ. 2006. *Η κοροπλαστική της Λέσβου*. Μυτιλήνη: Υπουργείο Πολιτισμού, Κ'Εφορεία Προϊστορικών και Κλασικών Αρχαιοτήτων.
- Βιβλιοδέτης, Ε.Π. 2006. «Saltantes Lacaenae σε θραύσματα αττικού ερυθρόμορφου κρατήρα του 4ου αιώνα π.Χ.», *ΑΔ* 56 (2001) Μελέτες, 181-190.

Dr Anna Alexandropoulou

Ephorate of Antiquities of Pireaus and Islands

