THE STUDY OF THE ANCIENT GREEK DANCE
its history, its results, its possibilities and impossibilities

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The ancient Greek dance has been studied since the days it was danced. We still possess some bits and pieces in which Greek scholars of the classical, hellenistic and Roman periods reflect on their own dance tradition. A number of Byzantine authors, mainly lexicographers and commentators, brought together scattered information about the dances of their forebears. An unbroken tradition of scholarship, however, only got under way in Renaissance Europe, ever since Greek expatriates fleeing the Ottoman advance brought their learning and their manuscripts to Italy. It is this tradition, of course by now also quite venerable, that is put central here. In this article I attempt to summarize almost five centuries of scholarly effort, in order to give a bird's eye view, or rather a satellite picture, of a complicated landscape. This should enable us to see the main features all the more clearly. Secondly, I want to point out what seem to me the weak points of this scholarly tradition, and to suggest how to we should progress from where we are standing at the present[1].

First the chronological account. The Renaissance was in large part based on an interest in Greek and Roman culture in its widest sense. The continuing growth of a sense of history in the 15th and 16th century enabled scholars to view many aspects of Antiquity as subjects worthy of study: as Erwin Panofsky has said, one can only truly study, appreciate, or try to revive, imitate or emulate, what is felt to be remote. Amongst these aspects was also the dance, not surprisingly when one considers the comparatively high status of the dance in Renaissance society. One of the first tasks was to collect the source material. The first humanist study in which this was attempted, is Lectionum Antiquarum Libri XVI. an impressive work, fruit of a very wide reading in the classical literature, compiled by Ludovici Ricchieri (also known as Celio Rhodigino or Caelius Rhodiginus), and published in Venice in 1516. In the third book, third and fourth chapter, Ricchieri gives many names of dances with some description and a selection of classical opinions on the dance in general. Soon after Ricchieri's pioneering effort we find Greek dance mentioned everywhere. Authors of the extensive polemical literature on the question whether Christians are allowed to dance (this debate on the permissibility of dancing was of very long standing, but gathered fresh impetus with the Reformation and the diffusion of printing), now took Antiquity into account. Educationalists and philosophers spoke of the beneficial effects of music and dancing and developed theories on the origin and nature of these musical arts, supporting their beliefs with references to the classical authors. All through the 16th century (and beyond), many refer to Ricchieri, to whose name we may add that of the humanist scholar Julius Caesar Scaliger. Part of Scaliger's Poetices Libri. VII. published posthumously in 1561, is devoted to Greek dancing (first book, eighteenth chapter). He mentions a large number of individual dances and finishes with a short defence of dancing. This hodgepodge of information, comparable to Ricchieri's Lectiones and most likely indebted to that work, became the best known book on dance for the next half century, and was imitated of varied upon by several others.

Up to now dance had only been discussed as one subject amongst many. The Dutch classical scholar Joannes Meursius should be given the credit of having produced the first monograph dealing with ancient Greek dances published since late Antiquity: Orchestra, sive de saltationibus veterum. Liber singularis. Leiden 1618[2]. Meursius' material was used by several epigones, without much interesting departures during the 17th century. But it should be noted that the scholarly work of Scaliger and Meursius was popularized by a number of protestant tract writers, who were in fact eager to point out the dangers of the dance, but at the same awakened much interest in the history of the dance.

It was there that material originally put together in a mainly philological context, was first used to support a non-philological argument[3].

If we look back on the period from the early 16th to the late 17th century we see mostly philological-antiquarian activities: as many texts as scholars could lay hands on were brought together and published, and their contents were carefully

rubricated. This was valuable and essential groundwork, but no more: source criticism or attempts to put the material in some interpretative framework were almost completely absent. Though the interest was unmistakably focused on Greece, a true time scale was mostly lacking, and hellenistic and Roman sources were indiscriminately combined with earlier material. The 16th-and 17th-century philologists saw the ancient Greek dance as a primarily religious phenomenon, and as a means of physical education and training, although other uses of the dance, for instance theatrical, were being recognized as such. Despite these emphases the ancient textual material inspired above all theorists working for the stage: thoughts about a cosmic dance, about the 'effects' of music and dance, and about the intimate relationship of poetry, music and dance (Greek mousikè) are ideas shared by all authors and form the basis of the development of ballet and opera. Efforts aiming at a true recreation of Greek dance, that is at a revival of Greek movement patterns, are however conspicuously absent. But not only stage theorists interested themselves in the dances of Antiquity: just as importantly, all discussions of dancing, by philosophers, educationalists, churchmen, and so on, came to include at least some reference to the dances of the ancient world: to know about these dances was obviously expected of the well-educated.

During the 17th century the sense of history kept on growing; and a more interpretative approach was on the increase too, as first seen in the efforts of the religious tract writers. This leads up to the first example of a history of the dance, by Claude-François Ménestrier: Des ballets anciens et modernes selon les règles du théâtre. Lyon 1682. This same work also shows the rising interest in (panto)mime: the notion of dance as imitatio gained ground, while less attention was paid to the older ideas of the cosmic dance, the 'effects' of the dance and what we could summarize as 'the health, sports and acrobatics approach'. For the study of the antique dance and for the performance of contemporary theatrical dance these developments would be of decisive importance. Indeed, from the late 17th century we enter on a new phase: most energy was now spent on discussing (panto)mimic dancing, a new field for both philologists and stage theorists alike. Interest shifted accordingly to Roman, or Graeco-Roman phenomena and to the dances of the theatre. Somewhat paradoxically, but understandably, this move from a rather undifferentiated concept of dance towards a much more restricted view gave rise to a far more critical and interpretative approach. Thus several authors tried to get their historical perspective right; a very important study in this respect is P. -J. Burette's 'Premier et second mémoire pour servir a l'histoire de la danse des anciens', a widely read work[4]. The first mémoire is a specimen of true dance history, with a clear chronological structure and a critical approach, treating Greek dance up to the Roman period. Inevitably, the pantomime sneaks in through the back door and confuses part of the chronology. The second memoir is a survey of Greek dances according to genre: religious, military, theatrical and private. A nice illustration of Burette's critical acumen is his realisation that most of his predecessors, such as Meursius, had accumulated a lot of material on individual dances, but had missed the abstract concept of dance, on which the ancients wrote as much or more.

In the meantime a number of philologists carried on with the purely Greek material, but on the whole the philological tradition seems to lack vigour. At the universities the inheritance of the 17th century was carefully preserved, together with those emendations, additions and refinements resulting from the ongoing work on the textual tradition, and was passed on to the 19th century. Thus a rich heritage was preserved, but nothing of real significance was added, at least as far as this particular field is concerned, where Meursius' Orchestra of 1618 remained the normative study. The stage theorists and those philologists who had an above average interest in the contemporary theatre showed themselves much more energetic. Whatever new theoretical insights they derived from the classical material were immediately put into practice: (panto)mime became a real 'craze'. From the work of the London ballet master-choreographer-theorist John Weaver onwards, early in the century, scholarship and stagecraft remained in permanent contact. Consequently, the forefront of scholarship lost sight of many aspects of ancient Greek dancing, which now tended to be entirely subsumed under the

heading of mimic, theatrical dancing. The writing on the pantomime went on unabated, with works ranging from the technical-philological to the popular-practical[5]. With most authors the dancing of the ancient Greeks, if discussed at all, was completely merged with Graeco-Roman pantomime.

From the middle of the 18th century philology is joined by archaeology as a purveyor of source material. The rising interest in Greek vases, leading to large scale collection and publication, and the discovery and subsequent excavation of Herculaneum and Pompeii, provided scholars and dilettanti with a large amount of 'monuments' portraying the dances of the Greeks and Romans. These 'monuments' obviously influenced what was said about the dance, though not as much as one would expect. Attention remained focused on later periods and on the theatrical, pantomimic dance. (Panto)mime became almost a synonym for dance, especially when at a certain stage the study of dance was incorporated into a more general interest in what we would now call nonverbal communication, exemplified by Diderot's strong interest in 'the language of gesture'. In the comprehensive 'family-tree' of all arts and sciences included in the Encyclopédie. dance is lacking and only pantomime is mentioned, as a subdivision of communication by way of signs[6]. Obviously, much of the archaeological material that became available could not be easily accommodated within this particular tradition, a fact which might at least in part explain the relative disinterest in the rapidly growing corpus of iconographical sources. In the theatres we can see a continuing application of theories derived from ancient sources, while the images offered by archaeology came to influence strongly costuming and general presentation, especially towards the end of the century. Incongruences between different types of source material did not bother theatre makers: they usually felt they were not imitating or striving after authenticity, but emulating by using anything from the classical heritage that they deemed useful.

The pantomimic enthusiasm seems to have tired itself out. Indeed, in the early 19th century overall interest in the dances of Antiquity seems to be diminishing, not only on stage but also in the study. It is the dances of contemporary Greece that for some time become very fashionable, now that the Greek War of Independence stirred Europe's imagination. Of course it was tempting to compare these dances to what was known about the dances of ancient Greece. Such comparisons had been made for a very long time, but only intermittently. In the second half of the 18th century, however, there had been a renewed eagerness, stimulated by increased travelling, to confront the sources with the dances of contemporary Greece and Italy. The most famous instance of such comparison are the letters on dancing by P. A. Guys and Mme Chénier from the 1770s, but a systematic perusal of travel literature will undoubtedly reveal more[7].

A new phase opened when a novel, broadly based Altertumswissenschaft came into being[8]. Philology was put on a new footing, and archaeology was more fully integrated into this revitalized study of the textual tradition. The study of the dances of Antiquity partook of this movement, and consequently the view of the subject widened again. Theatrical dancing now came to be seen as only one type of dance, certainly not more important than other types. And although the stress on mimic display remained strong, Greek dances from Homer onwards were again studied as carefully as the pantomimic dancing of the (Graeco) Roman world, and in their own right. In due course, scholars completed their conversion back to the Greek material and with their sense of historical development sharpened, and their ability to see things within a historical framework now fully matured, Roman material was removed from the centre of interest altogether. Pantomime was henceforth to be a separate subject, divorced from the mainstream of 'ancient dance studies'. Only a few of the most important studies can be mentioned here: J.H. Krause's Gymnastik und Agonistik der Hellenen. Leipzig 1841, a work where one can really see a new Altertums-wissenschaft on the subject of dance taking shape. Krause presented and critically discussed a wide range of source material. Importantly, his book is on sports: not since the early 17th century had Greek dances been presented in so obviously a non-theatrical context. Another remarkable work, not unlike Krause, but showing the rapid progress made in both the philological and archaeological field, was L. Grasberger's Erziehung und Unterricht im klassischen Altertum, Würzburg 1864-1880. But however good these studies, scholars working on the dances of Antiquity did not seem to realize that the study of non-Greek dance was coming of age: contemporary dance traditions were now observed in the field by ethnologists, and there was an increasing interest in all of dance history. This opened up many opportunities, but work conceived from truly innovative points of view was at first only seen with some popularizers.

Theatre makers remained for quite some time relatively untouched by the fruits of the new Altertumswissenschaft. but towards the end of the 19th century they suddenly 'go Greek' again. This time they did not content themselves with theories, or with costuming, but aimed at a veritable revival of ancient Greek movement. Part of the scholarly community, the part most in the limelight, got mixed up in these attempts, with Maurice Emmanuel, French musicologist and composer, as the main protagonist. Emmanuel wrote a thèse and a thèse supplementaire on the ancient Greek dance[9]. The Latin thèse is an interesting analysis of the Greek vocabulary associated with dance, one is almost tempted to speak of ethno-semantics avant la lettre: an undervalued book. The thèse supplementaire is a very different work, in which the author rejects nearly all written sources as evidence and concentrates instead on vase painting and sculpture. His basic assumptions are, that the movements depicted in ancient art are identical to the movements of French classical ballet, and that individual images can be combined into analytical series, like stills from a film (just being invented; Emmanuel was much interested in chronophotography). Thus, complete dances can be reconstructed. This extreme reconstructionism of the late 19th century builds on the accomplishments of several decennia of Altertumswissenschaft. especially on the large-scale collecting of iconographic evidence; all the same, it is a step backwards to 18th-century theatrical interests, in the sense that considerations of practical applicability guide research.

Emmanuel's «La danse grecque antique d'après les monuments figurés » was a bestseller. As late as 1916 it was (poorly) translated into English, which translation was reissued in a cheap edition in 1927. Emmanuel's ideas were widely accepted, especially in France, and from the turn of the century reconstructionist programs were boosted by the performances of Isadora Duncan (whom I suggest was herself influenced by Emmanuel). Most important follower of Emmanuel was Louis Séchan, very knowledgable, but completely devoted to reconstructionism[10]. Others produced their own recipes for reviving the dances of the ancient world. The theatre went on 'reviving' for some time, but some where in the late 1930s lost interest almost altogether; since then the gap between the theatre and scholarship, a gap widening since the 1830s but temporarily narrowed around the turn of the century, has been become virtually unbridgeable. Not much mutual inspiration was to be found there, which might not be an altogether wholesome development, even if it helped to avoid excessive bias in one or another direction. We will return to this point below.

Though outright criticism of Emmanuel was rare, there were several scholars who simply ignored Emmanuel's work and all of reconstructionism, and continued along lines set out before. In the early 20th century the study of Greek dance again partook of developments in the wider field of the study of ancient religion and ancient culture: ethnological or anthropological enquiry now became firmly rooted as one of the tools of the Altertumswissenschaftler. The techniques of the Altertumswissenschaft were by then fully developed: with a

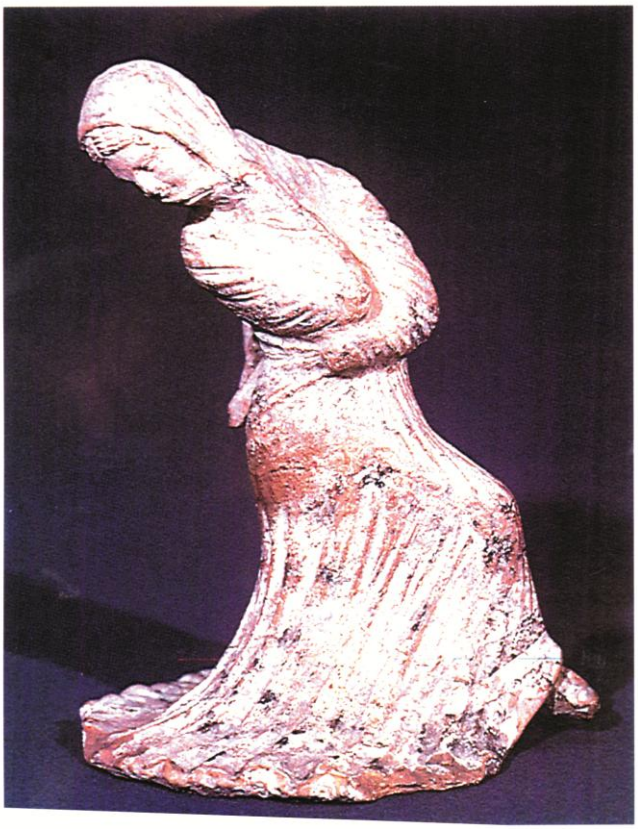
sound philological basis, ongoing study of the archaeological sources, the provision of ever more comparative material together with new theoretical viewpoints, the study of ancient dancing seemed fairly complete. Some scholars made most promising new departures, for instance Kurt Latte, who published in 1913 a major study, De saltationibus graecorum capita quinque. As this book is written in Latin its impact was relatively limited, and has of course become ever more limited since; also on first view the work seem somewhat bloodless and austere. But it actually is an impressive piece of work, because of Latte's remarkably open eye for the results of ethnology and anthropology and the ways in which these could be combined with the study of the classical sources, and because dance is firmly put in the religious context where much of it obviously belongs. This study, whatever criticism one might have (and it is not difficult to find some fault with a book over seventy years old), is one of the best monographs on the dance of ancient Greece written to this day, and still indispensable. Latte deserves to take his place next to Meursius as one of the founding fathers in this field[11].

The work of Latte and the passages on the dance in the studies on Greek religion and drama by his older contemporaries Jane Ellen Harrison and William Ridgeway were very promising. However, things grounded to a halt, and much of the work in the subsequent half century can hardly be called innovative, even if it often is sound scholarship refining the work of previous centuries. The

reasons for this are difficult to ascertain: at least part of an explication must lie in the specializations within classical studies becoming progressively more isolated from each other and the Altertumswissenschaft as a whole from other disciplines. Indicative of this isolation is that scholars writing on the dance who are no Altertumswissenschaftler themselves tend to bypass Antiquity altogether, a new development, impossible in an 18th- or even a 19th-century study on the dance. Symptomatic is Curt Sachs, Eine Weltgeschichte des Tanzes. Berlin 1933, where Greece is disposed of in a mere 6 uninformative pages out of 300. Even the work of Lillian B. Lawler, the most authoritative voice in the field of the study of the dance of ancient Greece in the 1940s and 50s, and author of some fifty articles and three monographs, cannot be described as progressive. Lawler is excellent in analyzing the work of her predecessors, but less happy in suggesting new venues for interpretation. But it should be stressed that her somewhat slim volume The dance in ancient Greece. though not satisfactory in all respects, is as yet the best synthesis dealing with the dance of ancient Greece: it can be recommended for all general purposes[12].

Of course there were exceptions to the general lack of innovation noticed above: Eric Dodds, in a famous article on maenadism, showed how much comparative material can contribute towards the interpretation of classical texts[13]. And in 1951 E. Roos surprised with a very thorough study, Die tragische Orchestik im Zerrbild der altattischen Komödie, a bulky book purporting to be an analysis of the dance performed by the character Philokleon in the exodos of Aristophanes' Sfèkes, but in fact ranging far and wide. Roos is digressive, verbose, sometimes improbable, misspends much of his undoubtedly considerable energy on intractable issues, and is weak on archaeological sources. Still, because of his extreme thoroughness and generally careful reasoning, Roos can take its place in the gallery of honour next to Meursius, Latte and Lawler. It is indicative of forty years of change since Roos's study appeared, that one feels both overawed by his learning and surprised by the apparent lack of purpose pervading the work. Also there are trailblazing studies like the book on initiatory practices by Henri Jeanmaire, Couroi et courètes. Essai sur l'éducation spartiate et sur les rites de l'adolescence dans l'Antiquité hellénique, Lille 1939, wherein dance is one of the subjects discussed. But all these exceptions do little to change the overall impression of stolid conservatism. For really stimulating developments one should look to the work by scholars active in anthropology and in folklore, alas but little interested in ancient societies. They kept pushing ahead, a process already reaching a high point in 1928, in E. E. Evans-Pritchard's most remarkable article 'The dance'[14]. This study of the place of the dance in African society and its function and disfunction now first appeared over sixty years ago, but is as fresh as if it was written only yesterday. Beryl De Zoete, in her Dance and drama in Bali, London 1938, discussed dance in a quire remarkable way, as a social phenomenon with a distinct place in human life. And so on. I have never seen any of these studies quoted in books or articles on the dancing of Antiquity.

Which were the main issues tackled in the period between Latte and the end of Lawler's career? On first view there is a bit of everything. Indeed, the field had rapidly become fragmented, partaking of the increasing specialization, characteristic of the whole of classical studies. All-round studies of the dance in ancient Greece did virtually disappear, Lawler's synthesis excepted. There is a growing number of archaeological studies, often dealing with a single artifact or group of artifacts, and of articles and even monographs dealing with one isolated dance phenomenon, for instance the hotly debated geranos-dance of Delos. Still, we can distinguish some focal points. First, we find much attention being paid to the religious aspects of the dance. This is relegated to second position when from the late 1930s there is an amazing upsurge of the interest in theatrical dancing. But still most scholars payed at least lip-service to the idea that all or nearly all dancing in ancient Greece had a religious background; especially ecstatic dancing got relatively much attention. We can also ascertain what is completely lacking: pantomime (although in popular literature the idea of every Greek dance as 'mimodrama' persisted) and gymnastics and sports, all studied as subjects in their own right of course, but no longer linked to the dance.



Since the Second World War scholarly production has been steadily increasing. Most of this production, also post-Lawler, has brought little or no new

departures. Looking back on the past twenty five years the strong archaeological bias of dance studies during much of the 1960s and 1970s is very notable, with what seems to be a return to other types of evidence (though the iconography is hardly ever absent) in the 1980s. Thus there is at least one issue on which nearly all authors, not only those from an archaeological background, seem to agree: the unwritten evidence should be included. One hopes that this agreement stems from conviction, and not from a mere despondency about the written sources. As far as special subjects singled out for discussion are concerned, we can see that the renewed interest in theatrical dancing has been prolonged. Outside the theatrical sphere interest seems to centre on a specific number of choral dances, especially the pyrrhic, girls' choruses of an initiatory type, and the geranos, though this last mentioned dance attracted somewhat less attention than before. The geranos might have become a scary subject because of its link with labyrinth studies, which seem to hold a rare attraction for pseudo-scholarship. Ecstatic dances, much in favour before 1965, have receded from view, despite the fact that many interesting publications on ecstatic dancing saw the light outside the field of ancient history. In France the reconstructionist work of Emmanuel and Séchan was kept alive by Germaine Prudhommeau, who in 1965 published her La danse grecque antique, in two impressive volumes, the revised trade edition of her 1955 Paris thesis. Prudhommeau's work is a kind of remake of Emmanuel: the assumptions guiding her research are exactly those already mentioned speaking of the work of Emmanuel. Prudhommeau's study is a very ambitious undertaking; alas, even apart from the question whether the basic assumptions are at all defendable, it is marred by very many shortcomings which render it valueless. The impact of this French reconstructionism on scholarship in general has been on the whole negligible, because it worked in relative isolation from other fields of scholarship, and because of inherent problems to which I will return below. Outside the community of specialists reconstructionism is however still a force to be reckoned with (which also shows how isolated scholars have become). Non-specialists are open to every outside influence, and obviously find ideas of revival appealing.

Much of recent research is still along traditional lines, usually sound, but somewhat unimaginative and very specialist, even down to bordering on the esoteric. It is mainly restricted to collecting and systematizing parts of the evidence, or to analyzing and interpreting individual items of iconography or individual texts. Most work is indeed very small-scale: the main trend is still towards specialization, one might also say towards a progressive narrowing of the field of vision. Once in a while the bibliography has something innovative to offer: slowly the social sciences, again led by anthropology, seem to revitalize the study of the Greek dance (and to provide fresh stimuli to the whole field of classical studies). We find some authors asking (relatively) new questions and using new approaches: Claude Calame is here the prime example. Calame's Les choeurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaique, Rome 1977, is the most important

work, to date, of the post-war years, with the possible exception of the work of Roos (which however can hardly be compared to Calame, being so utterly different in approach). Les choeurs has both a wider and a narrower contents than the title suggests: on the one hand much is said about choral dancing in general, not merely about girls' choruses; on the other hand the work is a giant commentary on Alkman's partheneia (the second of the two volumes indeed concentrates on those poems only). Calame has a fresh view to offer: he brings anthropology and some semiotic and structuralist ideas to bear upon the Greek material, and deals with several new or forgotten subjects, above all with the dance as part of initiation ritual, with full attention paid to sexual aspects. Sexuality and the dance is a combination that had not really been out in the open so clearly since early this century (only this time without the smugness).

Nobody has carried on where Calame stopped, or even repeated (parts of) what Calame has done, at least on an appreciable scale. That is a pity, especially since Calame was only a first step. Thus, Calame has not bothered to look at the new dance scholarship of the 1960s and 70s, indeed, there is not a single modern work on the dance mentioned in his extensive bibliography[15]. Some articles or passages in books only dealing indirectly with the dance, published in the 1980s or early 1990s show, or rather, give tantalising glimpses of the good, imaginative writing on the dances of the ancient world that one might expect in the context of contemporary scholarship. But even here there is as yet hardly a sign of a fertilizing influence that could come from dance research outside classical studies.