

More than movement : the use of voice in ancient Greek dance

Usually, the ancient Greek dance was not performed on instrumental music but on vocal music. The sound of the music was important, but the meaning of the words of the song was essential to the transmission of the culture to the younger people. In some cases, the dance was done by adolescents who learned through the song all the myths and the religion of their city. When the dance was not performed by the youngsters, the song played a big part in the preservation of the culture of the city. The people who performed choreographies sang or he only danced while other people sang? The question can be asked for the *hyporchema*, the paean and for the dances of the theatre.

Originally, the *hyporchema* is a fast rhythm music, then it is a dance from Crete performed to Apollo with vocal music (1). So there are two meanings for *hyporchema*: first a quick dance, and second the song on which it was done. But how should we interpret this fact? For Athenaeus, it is a dance with song (2) and he gives the example of pheacian dance on the song of the poet Demodocos (3) and the example of the choreography in *Iliad*, on Achilles' shield (4). As he says, the *hyporchema* is a dance which illustrates the words of the song and he gives the examples of the choreographies in Xenophon's *Anabasis* (5). But in XIV, 631c, Athenaeus says that in the *hyporchema* the chorus dance and sing at the same time. But the historians do not interpret the words of Athenaeus in the same way. For L. Séchan (6), the *hyporchema* was performed by silent dancers and by singers who do not dance, perhaps because it was a very quick dance (7). For G. Prudhommeau, who used the *Peri Orcheseôs* of Lucian, the *hyporchema* is a choreography where the chorus dance and sing at the same time (8). But G. Prudhommeau admits that it is very difficult to dance and sing at the same time (8) and she found a second meaning for the word *hyporchema* : a gesture, which is an illustration of the words of the song (9).

The paean is a song with dance for Apollo, then after it became a song to thank several divinities (10). The rhythm of the paean was very slow, so L. Séchan thought the chorus could at the same time dance and sing (11). But F. Lassere, in his commentary of the *Peri Mousikès* of Plutarch, thinks the chorus does not dance in the Paean (12). S. T. Lonsdale, who studied Athenaeus (13) gives nuances:

"The degree of choreographic movement in conjunction with hymns varied. We know from a late source (drawing in all likelihood on Plato's contemporary, the musicologist Aristoxenus) that hymns were sometimes danced, sometimes not." (14)

We find the same problem in the dances of theatre. In the *Peri Orcheseôs*, Lucian says that formerly the same people danced and sang at the same time but they were out of breath because they were practicing the song and the dance at

the same time (15). So after, they danced but became silent and were accompanied by voices of singers (16) and Lucian, to speak about this fact, used the verb *hupadein* which means “sing on accompaniment”. Lucian writes in the second century AD and the reality, which he describes, is probably true since the Hellenistic period. But what was the situation at the classical period? L. Séchan explains his thought about the tragedy. In the *emmeleia*, the chorus was singing and moving at the same time but in the *hyporchema*, the chorus was divided in two parts, one who was singing and the other who performed the choreography (17). S. Beta thinks we must reflect on the fact that the dancer wore a mask (18). At the Hellenistic period (19) and the roman period the mask of the dancer is a mask for pantomime, that means this mask is not open at the mouth (20). But it was not the same at the classical period, where the mask of the dancer was the same as the mask of the actor, i.e. with an opening for the mouth. So we can think at the classical period, the mask didn't prevent the dancer to sing.

To verify the speech of Séchan and Beta about the dances of the theatre, we tried different experiments of practicing the dance and speaking or singing at the same time with a mask. We tried to dance and crow on the "Complaint of Tecmessa" which is a part of a dithyramb from Timothy of Milet, in the IV century B.C. (21) It is a very slow piece and the movement of the choreography must be very slow to be adapted at the dramatic situation: Tecmessa discovers Ajax after his suicide; she is suffering and she wants to say to Ajax a last time that she loves him. It is not hard to move and to sing at the same time when the song is easy, but this complaint presents a very difficult music for a professional singer: he must give very difficult notes, for example an "f" "sharp" and the mask doesn't help him. If he wants to dance at the same time, he must control very well his voice during the movements of his body, for example when the head is curved back or when the body is bent front. If there is not a perfect coordination of the choreography and the song, the singers cannot give correctly the notes of the music and the famous "f" "sharp". We have already published the conclusions of this experiment (22).

Another experiment consists in dancing and speaking at the same time with a mask on some dactylics hexmeters from Nonnos of Panopolis (23) illustrating a war between a lion and some maenads. It is easier to speak and dance at the same time than sing and dance. There is never the risk of making a false note but the sound of the voice can change with the positions of the body (stand up, on the knees, bent forward, curved back, in torsion) and this experiment confirmed the theory of Annie Bélis about the opposition between the treble voice of the maenads and the bass sound of the phrygian aulos (24). But even speaking instead of singing, the movements of the Maenads cause a respiration problem. To be less out of breath it is possible to inspire on metrical pauses, for example on the bucolic pause which is situated between the fourth

and fifth feet of a dactylic hexameter when it exists. The performance will be harder with the song. The edition of the conclusions of this experiment is in progress (25).

A third experiment was done on the archilochians verses of the end of the Wasps of Aristophanes (v. 1518-1537). This work, which was done in collaboration with Philippe Brunet, focused on speech and song and consisted in performing the piece where the chorus dance and sing at the same time while Philocleon tried to beat karkinos and his son at the dance. For this experiment, we tried to give a voice to the karkinoi and to move at the same time with a mask. The dance is very short, so it is possible to perform it. Because this experiment is possible, we are sure it wasn't difficult to dance and sing the part of the chorus, who was practicing really these two things at the same time, but with movement easier than the karkinoi. The conclusion of this third experiment will be publish soon (26).

All these experiments give us the feeling that in archaic and classical periods, the dancer could use his voice, not only in the ritual performances, but also in the theatrical performances. In the Hellenistic period, the things became different because of the introduction of more professional dancers and actors in the greek theatre and gradually, the chorus was probably divided in two parts: one who was moving, and the other who was singing. But maybe in the ritual chorus, the people went on dancing and singing at the same time.

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(1) The TLG gives 68 occurrences of the word hyporchema and the words of the same family. For the cretan origin of the hyporchema, see Athenaeus, V, 10, 19 (Kaibel, 1890) = V, 181b) ; *Deipnosophistae, Epitome*, vol. II, 1, p. 61, 18, Peppink, 1939), Eustathius, *Commentarii as homeri Odysseam*, I, 296, 27 ; Georgius Choeroboscus, *Scholia in Hephaestionem*, 218, 14 ; *Scholia in Pindarum, Ode P2*, scholion, 127, line 16

(2) Athenaeus, I, 15d

(3) *Odyssey*, VIII, 262

(4) *Iliad.*, XVIII, 569ss.

(5) Xenophon, *Anabasis*, VI, I, 5

(6) L. SECHAN, *La danse grecque antique*, De Boccard, Paris, p. 117

(7) On the rhythm on the *hyporchema*, the hellenists do not agree. For Th. REINACH, *la musique grecque antique*, Paris, 1926, p. 85, and P. CECCARELLI, *La pirrica nell'antichità greco-romana. Studi sulla danza armata*, Pisa/Roma, 1998, p. 178, it is a cretic or peonic rhythm, that can be translated in musical terms in 5/8 bars. For A. MACHIN, "Sur le troisième stasimon d'Œdipe-Roi", *REG*, 1989, p. 192-201, the rhythm is iambic, that gives in music 6/8 bars.

(8) G. PRUDHOMMEAU, *La danse grecque antique*, CNRS, Paris, p. 315, § 1091.

(9) G. PRUDHOMMEAU, *Op. cit.*, p. 316, § 193. She use Athenaeus, I, 15e and Plutarch, *Moralia*, 748b

(10) The TLG gives 853 occurrences of the word « paeon » and his family in a musical meaning. A large part of these occurrences speak about the song in the paeon but a little part only make an association between song and dance in paeon.

(11) L. SECHAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 118

(12) Plutarque, *De la musique*, texte, traduction et commentaire précédé d'une étude sur l'éducation musicale dans la Grèce antique, par F. LASSERE, Bibliotheca Helvetica Romana, Urs Graf-Verlag, Olten & Lausanne, 1954, p. 160.

(13) Athenaeus, XIV, 631D

(14) S. T. Lonsdale, *Dance and Ritual Play in Greek Religion*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, London and Baltimore, 1993, p. 27. On Aristoxenus, see A. Bélis,

(15) Lucian, *On the Dance*, 30.

(16) *Ibid.*

(17) L. SECHAN, *Op. cit.*, p. 191.

(18) Luciano, *La danza*, a cura di Simone Beta, traduzione di Marina Nordera, con testo a fronte, Marsilio, Venezia, 1992, p. 122, n. 52. . Beta says that the pantomime did not sing and wore a shorter mask, but the dancer-actor, in the tragedy and the comedy, was able to sing and to dance at the same time. But we do not agree when S. Beta says "Queste notizie sembrano confermare che l'uso delle maschere nel teatro greco aveva anche una funzione acustica, amplificando la voce dell' attore come un moderno microfono (ma vedi il recente U. Albini, *Nel nome di Dionisio*, Garzanti, 1991, p. 75ss." S. Beta thinks

probably of the words of Aulu-Gellius, *The attic nights*, V, 7, 2, but J.-C. MORETTI, *Théâtre et société en Grèce antique*, Le livre de Poche, Librairie générale française, 2001 p. 143, do not agree with Aulu-Gellius. Moretti explains the opening of the mouth of the mask wasn't a megaphone, and he remembers that was proved by several experiences.

(19) As said C. Vendries and V. Péché, *Musiques et spectacles dans la Rome antique et dans l'Occident romain*, éditions Errance, Paris, 2001, p. 21, the pantomime in Greece and Minor Asia is practiced since the first century B.C.

(20) First, the actors performed with a white facial make-up then, the tragic poet Thespis created the mask, cf. *Souda*, sv. **Qevspi**. It was first masks in linen with plaster, with openings for the eyes and the mouth, cf. P. GHIRON-BISTAGNE, "les demi-masques", *Revue archéologique*, 2, 1970, 253-282, cf. p. 253 et *Recherches sur les acteurs dans la Grèce antique*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1976, p. 139. Later, the masks are made in rags with stucco (which are joined in mould, then after the classical period, the opening of the mouth becomes bigger, cf. P. GHIRON-BISTAGNE, *Op. cit.* et *Gigaku. Dionysies nippones ou les avatars de Dionysos sur de la soie*, Groupe interdisciplinaire de Théâtre antique, Montpellier, 1994, p. 99. O. NAVARRE, *Dionysos*, Paris, 1895, p. 146, thinks in very rare cases, the mask could be in wood with plaster. Phrynichos should be the creator of women's masks, cf. *Souda* sv. **Fruvnico**. Then, Aeschyleus created painted and frightening masks, cf. *Souda*, sv. **Aijscuvlo**. For J.-C. MORETTI, *Théâtre et société dans la Grèce antique. Une archéologie des pratiques théâtrales*, Le livre de Poche, 2001, p. 142-143, who used the iconography, the more ancient masks covered only the face, then after they covered also the skull. The masks can be kept on the head with a lace. The masks can also be suspended or somebody can hold them in the hand. We must add that there are masks without opening for the mouth : these are the masks of the pantomime at the Hellenistic and Roman period, cf. P. GHIRON-BISTAGNE, *Gigaku. Dionysies nippones ou les avatars de Dionysos sur de la soie*, Groupe interdisciplinaire de Théâtre antique, Montpellier, 1994, p. 99. On the masks and the costumes see also MORETTI, *Op. cit.* p. 141, n. 1 ; PICKARD-CAMBRIDGE, *DFA*, p. 177-231 ; TL. B. WEBSTER, *Monuments illustrating Old and Middle Comedy*, 3e éd. rev. par J. R. GREEN, *Bics Supplement*, 39, London, 1978 ; S. ZOUBAKI, "**qeatrikav prosweiva tou Eqnikouv Arcailogikouv mouvseiou**", *AD*, 42, 1987, A (1994), p. 35-66.

(21) This lament is written on the Berlin Papyrus 6870. For the attribution to Timothy of Milet, see A. BELIS, "Un Ajax et deux Timothée", *REG*, 1998, 1, p. 74-100. To hear a record of this complaint, see the CD *musiques de l'Antiquité grecque. De la pierre au son. Ancient Greek Music*, ensemble Kérylos, sous la direction d'Annie Bélis.

(22) M. H. DELAVAUD-ROUX, "Gestuelle du deuil et danses funéraires", *Musiques et danses antiques . Rencontre thématique du Groupe d'Etude sur les cultures anciennes (GRECA), Université de Nantes, 10 février 1996, Revue Belge de Philologie et d'histoire*, 80, 2002, p. 199-220.

(23) Nonnos of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca*, XVIII, 182-191.

(24) A. BELIS, "Musique et transe dans le cortège dionysiaque", *Transe et Théâtre : actes de la table-ronde internationale (Montpellier 3-5 mars 1988), Cahiers du GITA*, n° 4, Décembre 1988, pp. 10-29, cf. pp. 19-20.

(25) M. H. DELAVAUD-ROUX, "Communiquer avec Dionysos : la danse des Ménades à travers l'iconographie des vases grecs", *Gestuelles, Attitudes, Regards : l'expression des corps dans l'imagerie attique. Colloque du RUOA*, 2004 (sous presse).

(26) "Reconstitution de la danse du *karkinós* (Aristophane, *Guêpes*, 1518-1537)", *Actes du colloque international "Ressources et activités maritimes des peuples de l'Antiquité"*, Université du Littoral-Côte d'Opale, Boulogne-sur-mer, 12-14 mai 2005 (sous presse).