

Lillian B. Lawler

Ladles, Tubs, and The Greek Dance

There is in Athenaeus, IV, 157, a *ἀπαξ λεγόμενον* which has furnished some trouble to readers and editors. The passage in question mentions the entrance of two courtesans, Melissa and Nicion. Athenaeus calls Nicion a «dog-fly», *κυνάμνια*, and Melissa a *ψ. θεατροτορύνη*. It is the letter epithet to which I should like to direct attention in this note

The epithets are evidently bestowed in jest, and they have been translated in similar vien by various editors. Gulick, for instance, renders *θεατροτορύνη* as «stage-thumper», and comments to the effect that the reference is to Melissa's clumsy dancing.¹ Yonge² renders two word «spoon of the theater» without comment. The new Liddell-Scott Greek lexicon, s. u., translates the epithet as «stage-pounder».

A *τορύνη* is a ladle (Aristophanes, *Birds*, 78,79). The word is related to *τορύνω*, *τορυνάω* «stir», as of liquids in a pot. There are in the technical terminology of the Greek dance a great many words of similar significance. Recently³ I discussed the dance known as the *ίγδη*, *ίγδης* or *ίγδισμα*, the «grinding, pounding» or «mortar» dance, the names of which are derived from * *ιγδίζω*. This was a dance of a lascivious nature, common to courtesans. In it the performer rotated the hips and jerked the body in a manner reminiscent of motion of a pestle being used to grind food in a trough or mortar. Often coupled with this dance is a figure called the *λύγισμα*, *λυγισμός*, *λυγιστικόν*, or *λυγίζειν*,⁴ «writing, twisting, as a willow wand».

Another dance or figure sometimes performed by women of low repute is called *μακτήρ* (Hesychius, s.u.) or *μακτρισιμός*. The name is derived from *μάκτρα*, a «kneading-trough, tub». (Cf. Aristophanes, *Frogs*, 1159.) But the figure is by no means a «folk dance» using «work rhythms», as some present-day writers on the history of the dance have remarked innocently! Nor is there any kinship with our idiom in «tub-thumping.» Pollux (IV, 101) specifically groups the *μακτρισιμός* with the *ιγδης* and other dances of a lewd nature-notably the *απόκινος* and *απόσεισις*- and says it was characterized by a swaying rotation of the hips.

We might note here a passage in the *Metamorphoses of Apuleius* (II, 117), in which the girl Fotis, stirring a pot on the fire, and attracting a young man's attention at the same time, sways her shoulders and hips rhythmically: "...illud cibarium vasculum floridis palmulis rotabat in circulum; et in orbis flexibus crebra succutiens, et simul membra sua leniter illubricans, lumbis sensim vibrantibus, spinam mobilem quatiens placide, decenter undabat." (Cf. *Priapea XVIII*, ed. Buecheler.).

¹ Charles Burton Gulick, *Athenaeus, the Deipnosophists* (Harvard University Press, 1927- 41), II, p. 215

² C. D. Yonge, *The deipnosophists, or Banquet of the Learned* (Bohn, 1853-4), I, p. 253

³ "A 'Mortar' Dance" *C.J.*, XLIII (1947-48), p. 34

⁴ Suidas, s. *υυ.ίγδη, ίγδισμα*; Schol. Aristoph. *Wasps* 1487; *Et. Mag.*, 8. v. *ζύδη*.

I should like to suggest, then, that the epithet in Athenaeus should not be translated «stage-thumper». There is implicit in the epithet no reference to clumsiness on the part of the dancer. Rather, the skilled dancer Melissa, with her lewd contortions, resembles a ladle «stirring» something in a pot. There may also be a *double entendre* in the word—some metaphorical connotation of «stirring up» the spectators (*θέατρον*) with the wantonness of the dancer's movements. The dance implied might or might not be performed in an actual theater. I should translate the epithet *θεατροτορόνη* either as «skilled in the stirring-dance of the theater», or as «stirrer-up of the spectators».

Closely associated with the dances which we have been considering is, I believe, another dance, usually classed as one of the «unknowns». In Hesychius appears a lemma *δρίτη*, universally emended to *δροίτη*, and glossed *πέλος, σκάφη* and «a kind of dance». The word *δροίτη* denotes a wooden tub, bath-tub, cradle.

Similarly, *πέλος* is a trough, vat, tub, bath-tub. One of Hesychius' glosses of the word *μακτήρ*, which we have already noted as the name of a lewd dance, is *πυελίς*—certainly to be emended *πέλος*. The word *σκάφη* denotes a tub, bowl, trough, kneading-trough, boat. Pollux (X, 102, 114) lists *μάκτρα* and *σκάφη* together as cooking and baking utensils. It is evident that all these words from a cluster, as it were, of terms denoting wooden utensils of one sort or another, in each of which, under certain conditions, a ladle or pestle may be used with a revolving, stirring motion. Accordingly, it seems clear that we may see in *δροίτη*, when it is the name of a dance, another example of the *ίγδη-μακτρισμός* group, in which the characteristic motion is a rhythmical and voluptuous rotation of the hips, suggestive of «stirring» or «grinding.»