

VII.—A Lion Among Ladies (Theocritus II, 66–68)

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In *Idyll* II, 66–68, Theocritus speaks of a procession in honor of Artemis, in which at least one basket-bearing maiden takes part, and in which "many animals" move about, "among them a lioness." It is suggested in this paper that, as one or more basket-bearers walk along, a rout of mummers, representing various animals, cavort about them, encircling the more sedate procession; that these animal dancers are maidens also; and that one of them represents a lioness. The ritual as a whole honors Artemis in two of her aspects — as a goddess of fertility and as *potnia thêrôn*. The animal rout is a very old type of ritual. There are evidences of its use, either as a religious rite or as a form of amusement, from Minoan-Mycenaean times down through all subsequent ages to the present.

In the second *Idyll* of Theocritus there is a passage (lines 66–68) of more than ordinary interest. Simaetha, lamenting her lost love, Delphis, tells how she first set eyes upon him at a procession in honor of Artemis. She elaborates upon the procession: "Anaxo, daughter of Eubulus, walked as basket-bearer to the grove of Artemis. At the same time many animals took part in the procession around about her, and among them was a lioness."

Comment upon this passage, and upon the procession which it records, seems in general to reflect scholars' astonishment at the thought of wild beasts, and particularly lions, moving through the streets of a Hellenistic Greek city (whether the locale be Sicily or Rhodes or Cos), and of young women of good family walking calmly in their midst.

The name of the festival involved is unknown, but the ritual is basically of a familiar type — a procession in honor of Artemis, in which basket-bearing maidens take part. In all probability Anaxo was not the only *kanêphoros* on this occasion. A scholiast on the passage tells us (Schol. Theoc. 2.66) that the maidens who carried the baskets engaged in the ritual before marriage. Xenophon of Ephesus (1.2) describes a somewhat similar procession of basket-bearers in a festival in Asia Minor, and says that it was a sort of marriage fair.¹ As it happens, there are animals also in the pro-

¹ One is reminded here of the Easter Monday ritual in modern Megara, when marriageable girls perform in a dignified processional dance while eligible youths look on; and it is said that on the following day suitors present themselves at the homes

cession described by Xenophon of Ephesus — hunting-dogs and horses, led or ridden by young men dressed as huntsmen, to honor Artemis as goddess of the hunt; but there seem to be no lions among them.

The significance of the animals mentioned by Theocritus has been debated long and earnestly. Some scholars have thought that the beasts were a tribute to Artemis as huntress or Mistress of Animals, and that in the procession they were chained, and were led by attendants. Other writers have expressed the opinion that the lioness, at least, was tame. Many have regarded the animals as sacrificial victims — even the lioness! Still others have thought that the animals were merely statues or other effigies, which were solemnly carried in the procession (in the Dionysiac procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus at Alexandria, we recall, there were carried huge effigies of animals, among them lions — Athenaeus 5.201F, 202D). Some of the scholiasts on Theocritus even say that the animals in this particular poem were simply painted pictures.² I believe, however, that there is another and more cogent explanation of the passage.

From earliest times, the lion was associated with divinity. Cook and Evans³ recognized lion-headed daemons, servants of the great mother goddess, in the art of pre-Hellenic Greece and Crete. These scholars concluded that in the prehistoric period there was an actual "lion cult" in Greece, Crete, and Asia Minor. Cook believes that in this cult the worshippers wore lion masks and skins, performed a mimetic lion dance, and were probably called "lions." Most scholars regard the lion as completely foreign to Greece;⁴ but

of the young women who have pleased them in the procession. See Lillian B. Lawler, "The Easter Dances at Megara," *CJ* 23 (1927-8) 7-15. On basket-bearers see David M. Robinson, *Excavations at Olynthus*, 10 (Baltimore, 1941) 16-17, and note 82.

² H. L. Ahrens, *Bucolicorum Graecorum Theocriti Bionis Moschi Reliquiae*, 2³ (Lipsiae, 1869) page iii. Other theories mentioned in this paragraph will be found in the following: Martin P. Nilsson, *Griechische Feste* (Leipzig, 1906) 206-7; Otto Keller, *Die Antike Tierwelt*, 1 (Leipzig, 1909) 24-61; Lewis R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, 2 (New York, 1896) 432; Wernicke in *RE* s.v. "Artemis," col. 1344; M. M. Miller, *The Sicilian Idyls of Theocritus* (Boston, 1900) 52; A. S. Way, *Theocritus, Bion, and Moschus* (Cambridge, 1913) 9.

³ A. B. Cook, "Animal Worship in the Mycenaean Age," *JHS* 14 (1894) 103-119, and Figs. 5-9; Id., *Zeus* (Cambridge, 1914-40) 1.704; Arthur J. Evans, "The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult," *JHS* 21 (1901) 101, 117, 166-168, and Figs. 1, 12, 13, 14.

⁴ Eleanor F. Rambo, *Lions in Greek Art* (Bryn Mawr College, 1918) *passim*; Keller, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) 1.35-6; Martin P. Nilsson, *Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (London, 1927) 332-3.

whether there were or were not wild lions in Greece proper, Italy, Sicily, or Crete during that period, certainly the prehistoric inhabitants of those lands had seen lions in Egypt and Asia Minor, and had been deeply impressed by them. Many writers see in Hellenic legends of the transformation of human beings into animals evidence for prehistoric animal cults or totemism.⁵ Among these legends there are some which involve a transformation into a lion — e.g., the story of Atalanta and Hippomenes (Ovid, *Met.* 10.691–704), and the story of the victims of Circe (*Odyssey* 10.212 and 433); cf. also the story of the transformation of Dionysus into a lion (*Hymn. Hom.* 7.44–53).

Other ancient peoples, of course, had "lion cults." Lion-headed deities appear in the art of the Hittites, Persians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Cypriotes, and Egyptians. Among the latter in particular we recall Sakhmet, the lion-headed goddess who personified the destructive power of the sun, and Bast or Bastet, the cat-headed or lion-headed goddess of hunting and animal fertility — both of which divinities were identified with Artemis by the Greeks. It is possible that these two Egyptian goddesses may have had some influence on the prehistoric "lion cult" in Crete and Greece, and on archaic Greek ritual. Certainly in the Hellenistic period, in the days of Theocritus, relations between various Greek cities and Egypt were close and friendly, and there was much influence of the one civilization upon the other. From earliest times the influence of Mesopotamia, also, was great upon Greece; and Mesopotamian lion deities, and deities of the "Master of Animals" and "Mistress of Animals" type had a profound effect upon pre-Greek and Greek religion and thought.⁶

There is from remote antiquity an association of the lion with Artemis.⁷ In the *Iliad* (21.482–4) the goddess is actually called a lion: "Zeus made thee a lion toward women." Although this is

⁵ Cook, "Animal Worship" (above, note 3) 159–160.

⁶ Rambo, *op. cit.* (above, note 4) *passim*; J. W. Crowfoot, "The Lions of Kybele," *JHS* 21 (1901) 118–127; Cook, "Animal Worship" (above, note 3) 115–119 and Figs. 10 and 13; Pierre Demargne, "Le Maître des Animaux sur une Gemme Crétoise du M. M. I," *Mélanges Syriens Offerts à M. René Dussaud* (Paris, 1939) 1.121–7 and Fig. 1; Robinson, *op. cit.* (above, note 1) 30–39, Plate V, and Fig. 6.

⁷ Cook, *Zeus* (above, note 3) 2.406, 457, 1227; Heinrich Brunn, *Griechische Kunstgeschichte* (München, 1893) 1.122–4 and Fig. 84; Nilsson, *Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (above, note 4) 400, 435–8. Professor David M. Robinson writes me: "In the recently discovered Minoan deposit found in the temple of Artemis at Delos are ivory plaques with lions fighting griffins, and a seal decorated with a lion."

clearly figurative, of Artemis as a goddess who sends sudden death, there is no doubt but that the lion was always one of the animals sacred to Artemis, in her capacity as Mistress of Animals and descendant of the great pre-Hellenic nature goddess. Also, there are relics of totemistic rituals throughout the cult of Artemis.⁸ Artemis was worshipped in the form of a lioness in Ambracia, and a statue of a lioness stood before her temple in Thebes (Pausanias 9.17.2). On the island of Corcyra, at the site of a shrine of Artemis as "Mistress of Animals," there was found a large deposit of terra cotta statuettes of the divinity, all of the archaic period; many of the figurines portray the goddess as accompanied by a lion or lioness, or holding one of these animals by the hind leg.⁹

On the Acropolis at Athens there was an archaic bronze statue of a lioness — tongueless, incidentally — of which many stories were told in classical times. According to the commonly accepted tale (Pausanias 1.23.1–2; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 34.72; 7.87), it represented a woman named Leaina, the sweetheart of one of the Tyrannicides, who refused to inform against her lover, and who was put to death by Hippias for her stubborn silence. Scholars have been inclined to doubt the connection of the statue with Leaina, and to express the belief that the story was invented by a later age to explain the presence of the statue on the Acropolis. Most of these scholars regard the statue as a votive offering, but do not agree upon the divinity to which it was sacred. It has not, I think, been pointed out that it might well have been an offering to Artemis Brauronia, near whose sanctuary it stood. The lack of a tongue in an archaic bronze statue would not be significant, although it might seem so to the Athenians of a later age.

In the *Helen* of Euripides there is a passage (375–383) which is of great interest in connection with our problem. Helen, lamenting the fact that it has been her lot to bring sorrow and death to both Trojans and Greeks, speaks of women who were turned into animals because of their beauty. She mentions Callisto and the daughter of Merops. Ancient mythographers agree that it was a bear into which Artemis transformed Callisto — yet line 379 of the *Helen* implies a transformation into a lioness — *σχῆμα λεαίνης*. "How much happier was thy fate," exclaims Helen, apparently

⁸ Farnell, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) 4.432–6.

⁹ Henri Lechat, "Terres cuites de Corcyre," *BCH* 15 (1891) 1–72 and Plates i–vii.

addressing Callisto, "than that of my mother!" Helen says further that Artemis turned the daughter of Merops into a deer, and "danced her out of" her choral group. Euripides is practically unique among Greek writers in this version of the story of the daughter of Merops; he may indeed have invented the transformation.

There has been much discussion of the passage, and much suggested emendation.¹⁰ Some scholars even think that the words "form of a lioness" refer to Artemis herself, and not to a mortal woman. It seems to me that there is a lacuna in the passage, as it stands; and that several of the loves of Zeus may have been mentioned originally. Among them would have been Callisto, whom Artemis changed into a bear; some other woman whom, according to Euripides, Artemis changed into a lioness; the daughter of Merops whom, again according to Euripides, Artemis changed into a deer; and, on the other hand, Leda, who was not changed into an animal, but who lived to grieve over the fate of her daughter, Helen. Bear, lioness, deer — here we have the animals most commonly associated with Artemis as Mistress of Animals, *potnia thêrôn*.

We have incontestable evidence that in Athens, even in the fifth century, there were very old bear dances in honor of Artemis Brauronia.¹¹ It is likely that these bear "dances" were in reality not formal dances, but rather exhibitions of animal mummery. Such mummery, with or without masks, seems to have been very common around the Mediterranean, in prehistoric and early classical times: and it seems regularly to have been thought of and called dancing.¹² As we should expect, this ritualistic mummery was associated with divinities of animal life. Evidently the dancers identified themselves with the animal which they impersonated, and hoped thereby to acquire for themselves not only the favor of the deity, but also some of the physical and temperamental char-

¹⁰ Gilbert Murray, *Euripidis Fabulae*, 3 (Oxford, 1913), note on line 379 of the *Helen*; Edward P. Coleridge, *The Plays of Euripides*, 1 (London, 1906) 332; Émile Personneaux, *Théâtre d'Euripide*, 1 (Paris, 1875) 265; F. A. Paley, *Euripides, with an English Commentary*, 2 (London, 1874) 149; T. A. Buckley, *The Tragedies of Euripides*, 2 (New York, 1857) 208-9; Anon., *Euripidou Hapanta*, 6 (Glasgow, 1821) 470; Michael Wodhull, *The Nineteen Tragedies and Fragments of Euripides*, 3 (London, 1809) 21.

¹¹ Aristophanes, *Lys.* 645 and schol. *ad loc.*; Suidas, s.v. *arktos*; Euripides, frag. 767 Nauck; Hesychius, s.v. *Braurôniais*; Eustathius, on *Iliad*, page 331.26; Bekker, *Anecd.* I, 444; Harpocration, s.v. *arkteusai*.

¹² Lillian B. Lawler, "Two Notes on the Greek Dance: I, The Fox," *AJPh* 69 (1948) 87-90; also, "Pindar and Some Animal Dances," *CPh* 41 (1946) 155-159.

acteristics of the sacred animal. The Athenian bear mummery was performed by maidens between the ages of five and ten years, wearing shaggy yellow costumes suggestive of bears' hides. We are told that maidens of good family regularly performed this ritual before marriage. The maidens (*parthenoi*) were actually called "bears," as Artemis herself was called both a maiden (*Parthenos* — Euripides, *Hipp.* 17; Pausanias 3.18.4) and a bear (*arktos* — Bekker, *Anecd.* I, 444). Incidentally, in the cult of Artemis Brauronia we also find basket-bearing maidens (Schol. *Iliad.* 1.594).

In like manner, there is evidence for deer or stag mummery. On the island of Cyprus there were found terra cotta figurines of the early archaic period, depicting masked, stag-headed dancers, one of whom is shown in the act of removing his or her mask, and another of whom holds the mask in the left hand.¹³ These dancers wear a "rough fur or sheepskin garment." Also, we have literary evidence for stag mummery in the cult of Artemis. Among the scholia on Theocritus¹⁴ there is a lengthy presentation of various theories of the origin of pastoral poetry; and the theory which is designated the "true account" derives bucolic verse from a rustic *kômos* at Syracuse in honor of Artemis Lyaia. In this procession, singers and dancers wearing "stags' horns on their heads" carried skins of wine and huge loaves of bread stamped with the figures of animals of various sorts, and took part in some form of contest (apparently in singing and dancing), the winner in which "took the bread of the loser." Stag or deer mummery of this general type survived in New Year's processions and revels in Western Europe down to a late date.¹⁵

There can be no doubt that there was also lion mummery and dancing in the various Greek lands. Lion-headed dancers, both male and female, are seen in art, from the Minoan-Mycenaean period down to the Hellenistic age. We have already noted (above, note 3) the many representations in Cretan and Mycenaean art of figures which have been interpreted as masked, skin-clad lion dancers. Particularly significant in the archaic Greek period is a black-figured amphora upon which is painted a male figure wearing a lion mask, footgear suggesting the feet of a lion, and a horse's

¹³ John L. Myres, *Handbook of the Cesnola Collection of Antiquities from Cyprus* (New York, 1914) 151, Nos. 1030 and 1031.

¹⁴ Ahrens, *op. cit.* (above, note 2) 2.5 in Proll. to Theocritus.

¹⁵ Lillian B. Lawler, "A Dancer's Trophy," *CW* 41 (Nov. 17, 1947) 50-52.

tail attached to a *subligaculum*.¹⁶ The figure bends its knees in rapid motion, in the archaic "running" attitude, and is obviously a dancer. Equally interesting for our discussion, I believe, is an archaic figurine of lead, found in the shrine of Artemis Orthia in Sparta.¹⁷ It depicts a female dancer in the same archaic "running" attitude, and wearing a large mask. Although details are not too clear, the mask obviously represents the head of an animal — either a lion or a bear, probably the former. Artemis Orthia, of course, is definitely a "Mistress of Animals"; and to her are dedicated many images of animals, especially lions.¹⁸

In Hesychius there is a gloss which has given rise to much speculation, but which is, I believe, capable of easy clarification in the light of what has been said. The gloss is: λέων τὸ θηρίον. καὶ παρθένος . . . We have seen that the lexicographers equate *arktos* and *parthenos* in connection with the bear dances to the Brauronian Artemis, and that the maiden dancers in that cult were known as "bears"; so, in like manner, I believe that Hesychius (or his source) is here thinking of a maiden votary of Artemis who engages in a lion dance, wearing an animal mask or disguise. The fact that *leôn* is used, not *leaina*, is not significant; for in the epic poems *leôn* is epicene, and it is, in fact, the very word that is applied to Artemis in the passage of the *Iliad* which we have already cited (21.483). In a very ancient cult, terminology is normally conservative.

A lion dance is specifically mentioned in Pollux and Athenaeus, two of our very best Greek authorities on the dance. The former designates it as a form of "terrifying dance" (4.103) — cf. the "terror" inspired in the Egyptians by the lion headdresses of their rulers (Diodorus 1.61). Athenaeus includes it in a list of "funny" dances (14.629F). Elsewhere¹⁹ I have pointed out that an animal dance can be both "terrifying" and "funny" when it includes much roaring and lunging at the spectators. I have also shown²⁰ that ritual animal dances originally solemn and serious have a tendency (unless they are protected by the secrecy of a mystery cult) to become amusing, as a people becomes more and more sophis-

¹⁶ Cook, "Animal Worship" (above, note 3) 117 and Fig. 12.

¹⁷ R. M. Dawkins, "Excavations at Sparta, 1906," *ABSA* 12 (1905-6) 323-4 and Fig. 3, K.

¹⁸ R. M. Dawkins, "The Sanctuary of Artemis Orthia at Sparta," *Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, Supplementary Papers*, No. 5 (1929) 402.

¹⁹ Lillian B. Lawler, "Orchêsis Phobera," *AJPh* 67 (1946) 67-70.

²⁰ "Pindar and Some Animal Dances" (above, note 12).

ticated, and to degenerate into a form of entertainment. In the days of Athenaeus and Pollux, the late second and early third centuries of the Christian era, the lion dance was evidently performed for entertainment, presumably in the theater or at carnival-like festivals.

In addition to these specific references to lion dances, there are in Greek literature, I believe, certain passages, some of them hitherto unnoticed in this connection, which point to mummeries involving lions. The earliest of these is the account of Circe and her victims, as given in the *Odyssey* (10.212–219; 239–240). Around her dwelling are wolves, lions, and swine who had once been men; they “wag their long tails,” and are kept in order with a magic wand and with “sweet song” (10.221, 254, 389). An early Attic cylix, black-figured, now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts,²¹ portrays Circe in the act of stirring her magic potion, and, to right and left of her, men with beasts’ heads; of the latter, one has the head of a lion. Circe was certainly a lesser deity of the “Mistress of Animals” type; in one passage in the *Odyssey* (10.549) she is called *potnia Kirkê* — a title suggestive, at least, of *potnia thêrôn*. The story as told in the epic may well be an imaginative and poetic record of primitive animal mummeries in the cult of a lesser divinity of animal life.

In a fragment of a dithyramb of Pindar’s (Loeb edition, page 560), there is a significant passage: “Lightly comes the lonely-roaming Artemis, who has yoked in Bacchic revel-dances the race of fierce lions for Bromius; and he is delighted, too, by dancing herds of animals.” Surely there is here a hint of real ritual animal dances, in the cults of Artemis and Dionysus. Incidentally, ritual similarities between these two cults have often been noticed.²²

In the *Alcestis* of Euripides there is a choral ode of great interest (575–585). The chorus sing of how in former days Apollo sojourned with Admetus, served as a shepherd, and at pastoral festivals evoked beautiful strains from the *syrinx* and the *kithara*. “And in joy at thy songs,” they continue, addressing Apollo, “even spotted lynxes herded with the flocks; and the blood-flecked troop

²¹ Stephen B. Luce, “A Polyphemus Cylix in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston,” *AJA* 17 (1913) 1–31, and Fig. 1; Ernst Buschor, *Greek Vase Painting* (London, 1921) Plate L, Fig. 92, facing page 100.

²² Cf. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy, and Comedy* (Oxford, 1927) 248.

of lions came stepping, leaving the dell of Othrys. And around thy lyre, Phoebus, danced (χόρευσε) the dapple-skinned fawn, coming from over against the tall-tressed pines — danced with light ankle, rejoicing in thy merry song." It is entirely possible that this is not merely a case of fine poetic imagery, but that it contains a reminiscence of prehistoric animal dances or mummary in honor of Apollo — evidently the mummary referred to in Pindar's tenth Pythian Ode, 34–36.²³ The particular animals mentioned, we note, are the lynx, the lion, and the fawn. As I have pointed out elsewhere,²⁴ references to animals as following or dancing after or around a great musician, usually Orpheus (Euripides, *Bacch.* 561–564; Pausanias 9.30.3–4) or Apollo, are probably poetized memories of ritual animal mummary.

I have long thought that there may be a hint of ritual animal dances in the 14th Homeric Hymn to the Mother of the Gods. "To her are pleasing," says the unknown poet, "the sound of *krotala* and *tympana*, and the *bromos* of flutes, and the outcry of wolves and fierce-eyed lions, and echoing mountains, and wooded haunts." The close juxtaposition here of musical instruments which accompany a dance, and the howling of animals, might imply a wild dance or mummary, in an outdoor setting, by votaries disguised as animals, and uttering cries imitative of those animals. The fact that wild lions are not found in Greece in the historical period may confirm the conjecture that dancers are here indicated; although, of course, there is always the possibility that the poet is referring to Asia Minor, where lions were to be found in the wild state, even down to classical times — or that the poet is merely using his imagination! We may recall the savage lion, roaring and twisting its neck, which a Greek poet says had "taught itself the dance of Rhea" (*Anth. Pal.* 6.218). And it was the Phrygian Rhea who turned Atalanta and Hippomenes into lions (Ovid, *Met.* 10.691–704; Servius, *ad Aen.* 3.113).

It will be noted that ritualistic animal mummary takes two forms — viz., one in which all the participants portray the same type of animal, and another, a sort of rout, in which various animals are imitated by the several dancers. An outstanding Greek portrayal of the latter type is the procession depicted on the piece of

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lowe'en mummary.²⁸ In post-classical Greece and Rome, we come upon secret rites in the cult of Mithras which were known as *leontika*; and in them we find certain dignified participants, called "lions" and "lionesses,"²⁹ roaring, leaping about, and otherwise comporting themselves as sacred animals. As the Roman empire drew to its close, pagan dancing and dancers fell more and more under the ban of the Christian church. In particular, professional dancers, finding it increasingly difficult to make a living in the Christian cities, scattered over the countryside; and their successors ultimately became the strolling entertainers of the Middle Ages. It seems fairly certain that these fugitives took with them some forms of the ancient animal dances; for animal masks are common among medieval mummers.³⁰ From medieval mummers to Shakespearean actors is a direct development. And so the considerate Lion of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act V, Scene i), who reassures the feminine members of his audience, may be actually an artistic descendant of performers in pagan rituals and totemistic cults of bygone millennia, and even, indirectly, of our ancient Greek "lion among ladies."

²⁸ For modern folk festivals in Thrace, Thessaly, and Skyros which preserve the ancient wearing of animal disguises, see R. M. Dawkins, "The Modern Carnival in Thrace and the Cult of Dionysus," *JHS* 26 (1906) 191-206; and William Ridgeway, *The Origin of Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1910) 16-24.

²⁹ Porphyrius, *De Abstinent.* 4.16; Ps.-Augustinus, *Quaest. vet. et novi Test.* 94.

³⁰ E. K. Chambers, *The Mediaeval Stage*, 1 (Oxford, 1903) Chapter I and frontispiece.