

Dancing Little Bears

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*And I must borrow every changing shape
To find expression... Dance, dance
Like a dancing bear
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.
T.S. Eliot, Portrait of a Lady*

Abstract:

This article investigates how female participation in choruses was conceived as a part of the larger project of the education of women in classical Greece. In particular, I claim that choral participation gave women the opportunity to learn how to move and carry themselves, and to shape their bodies through physical exercise. This opportunity for learning takes on particular significance in the context of the relationship between physical movement and personal identity. I show that the training of bodily movement functioned as a kind of proxy for the training of the character and more fundamental personal characteristics, such that moving well becomes an expression of a deeper set of competences.

This paper takes as its major case study the example of the *arkteia*, a ritual in which girls who participated as dancers were famously referred to as “little bears.” The interpretive question of why they were referred in this way has attracted an enormous amount of scholarly attention. Here, I propose a new interpretation. I claim that this choice of terminology reflects the way in which the girls were considered to be in a state of wildness, because they had not yet undergone the civilising training of the *arkteia*. On a more literal level, I suggest that the clumsiness of their movements resembled the movement patterns of bears. In this light, dance education appears as a force that tames simultaneously the clumsiness of these movement patterns, along with the girls’ characters and more fundamental personal characteristics. The ceremony therefore represents a transition from a raw state of nature to one of civilised self-mastery.

1. Introduction

~~Choruses performed at religious festivals were~~ In addition to being a fundamental means of worship, ~~Additionally, they also~~ ~~choruses performed at religious festivals~~ appear to have constituted the basis of *paideia* (παιδεία, —education) for boys and girls ~~since from~~ the archaic ~~to the classical~~ period ~~at least~~.¹ In fact, in the case of women, choral activities seem to have been the main channel through which they received some kind of formal education, and this also during the classical period.² The link that the Greeks made between education and choruses is evident: the content of the poems would establish and teach performers and audiences alike a particular worldview, since choral performances were used to assert the values and narratives of a given community.³ Moreover, the recitation of poems containing mythical stories and gnomic statements contributed to the choreutes’ general knowledge of the world they inhabited, and the depth of their

¹ See Anderson 1966: 1–110. For ancient evidence, see in particular Philolaus of Tarentum fr. 44 B6 and 11 Diels; Damon fr. 37 B4, 6, 7 (Diels); Ar. *Nub.* 961–983; Pl. *Leg.* 672e.

² Cf. Parker 2005: 183: “We have become used to the idea that, for Greek girls, the world of the chorus was a large part of the world of education”. See Calame 1977: 385–420; 1997: 221–244.

³ On choral activity as reflection of civic values, see Kowalzig 2007, esp. 43–55. See also Pl. *Leg.* 887c–e, a passage that is quoted and discussed by Kowalzig 2007: 1–3.

appreciation of the norms of behaviour accepted within the community. The preparation for the performance was the key moment of the learning process.⁴ As Calame puts it: “[b]y reciting the poems composed by their masters the poets, the chorus members learn and internalize a series of myths and rules of behaviour represented by the material taught”.⁵ The educational dimension of the chorus also operated at a metaphorical level. A group of people moving together in unison would offer itself to the audience as a metaphor of a harmonious city: the body of citizenry moves together to make the whole city beautiful and good. In addition, it would teach the performers the pleasure of working together to achieve something larger than themselves.

In a famous passage of *Lysistrata*, the chorus of Athenian women refers to the different steps of their religious upbringing in order to prove how fit they are to give advice to the city, thereby signalling the perceived connection between the rites they have performed and their education. Although the passage should not be taken too literally as it comes from a comedy, an association can nonetheless be made between the women’s religious curriculum and their (self-professed) identity as good Athenian women:

“Citizens of Athens, we begin / by offering the city valuable advice, / and fittingly, for she raised me splendidly as I was living delicately. / As soon as I turned seven I was an Arrephoros; / then when I was ten I was a Grinder for the Foundress; / and wearing my saffron robe, I was a Bear at the Brauronia; / and once, when I was a fair girl, I carried the Basket, / wearing a necklace of dried figs.”⁶

(Chorus leader:) “Don’t I owe it to the city to offer some good advice? Even if I was born a woman, don’t hold it against me if I manage to suggest something better than what we’ve got now.”⁷

However, it seems that none of the religious celebrations mentioned in the passage involves a chorus, or the performance of *mousikē* (μουσική, [poetry sung to music, and set to dance](#)), apart perhaps from the one taking place at the Brauronia.⁸ It is therefore unlikely that the chorus’

⁴ Ingalls 2000: 5.

⁵ Calame 1997: 231.

⁶ Ar. *Lys.* 638–647 (trans. J. Henderson [modified]): ἡμεῖς γάρ, ὧ πάντες ἀστοί, λόγων / κατάρχομεν τῆ πόλει χρησίμων· / εἰκότως, ἐπεὶ χλιδῶσαν ἀγλαῶς ἔθρεψέ με· / ἑπτὰ μὲν ἔτη γεγῶσ’ εὐθὺς ἠρρηφόρου· / εἴτ’ ἀλετρις ἦ δεκέτις οὔσα τάρχηγέτι, / κᾶτ’ ἔχουσα τὸν κροκωτὸν ἄρκτος ἦ Βραυρωνίσις· / κάκνηφόρου ποτ’ οὔσα παῖς καλὴ ἄχου· / ἰσχάδων ὀρμαθόν. Ll. 644–645: MS R transmits καταχέουσα a reading which has been deemed unacceptable because of the asyndeton. MS Γ has κατέχουσα which Bentley offers to read as κᾶτ’ ἔχουσα. This is the version I have adopted here. Wilson prints καὶ χέουσα in the OCT after Stinton 1976. The argument in favour of this emendation is the parallel, first noticed by Sourvinou-Inwood 1971: 339–40-1 found at Aesch. *Ag.* 239, where Iphigenia apparently sheds her *krokotos* before being sacrificed, κρόκου βαφὰς δ’ ἐς πέδον χέουσα (Henderson 1987: 156). Whether the little bears wore or shed their *krokotos* has no particular incidence on my argument. I prefer κᾶτ’ ἔχουσα because the passage seems to refer to the rites in their duration and not to a specific moment in the rite.

⁷ Ar. *Lys.* 648–650 (trans. J. Henderson [modified]): ἄρα προὔφειλω τι χρηστὸν τῆ πόλει παραinéσαι; / εἰ δ’ ἐγὼ γυνὴ πέφυκα, τοῦτο μὴ φθονεῖτέ μοι, / ἦν ἀμείνω γ’ εἰσενέγκω τῶν παρόντων πραγμάτων.

⁸ Although we have good iconographical evidence for choral activity at Brauron, it is impossible to ascertain whether these images depict the little *arktoi* in choruses in particular. See Budelmann/Power 2015: 265–267 who are more optimistic and “assume there was a long-running tradition of female choral song and dance at the Brauronian and Mounichian *arkteia*, whose religious, social, and pedagogical significance would seem to resemble, if not quite rival, those in Alcman’s *Laconia*, where Artemis cults anchored a broad network of girls’ *choreia*”.

suitability to give guidance comes from its poetical education. What is it then that would enable the chorus – seriously or comically – to advise Athens fittingly (εἰκότως)? Their participation in important civic festivals clearly suggests that they belong to the polis and contribute to its life, even though they do not have political rights.⁹ However, it is worth asking whether choral participation had a deeper significance. Upon closer examination, it seems that each of the roles that they fulfilled throughout their childhood and curriculum, as mentioned by the chorus in the passage above, entailed some kind of physical performance (e.g. procession). The culmination came in the transformation of the girl into a *pais kalē* (παῖς καλή).¹⁰ This seems to suggest that mastering one's corporeality by learning how to move and keep the appropriate posture in ritual processions, and shaping one's body through physical exercise, were fundamental aspects of the education of women.

In this chapter I focus on a particular case study of women's education and dance, looking at the *arkteia* ritual which was held in honour of Artemis at Brauron and Mounichia.¹¹ I aim to reassess why the little girls involved in the celebration were called bears. This, in turn, will shed new light on the way in which dance functioned as a means of education in ancient Greece.¹² I believe that considering each of these questions will prove reciprocally illuminating for both. Highlighting the role of dance in religious education provides a new approach to the question of the *arktoi*, while the particular case study of the *arktoi* in turn yields valuable information about how dance was thought to contribute to the development and socialisation of young women. In order to make this connection, I will need to rely upon two crucial concepts that belonged to ancient Greek collective imagination. The first concept is *mimesis* (μίμησις, imitation), which in the analysis of dance concerns the relationship between physical movement and intrinsic or essential characteristics of personal identity. The second is *agriotēs* (ἀγριότης, wildness), including the ways in which it could function as a marker for lack of education or civilisation. I shall argue that the girls were called bears because they resembled 'wild' bears in the clumsiness of their physical movements, and that dance education was conceived as a 'taming' of one's body, a transition from a raw state of nature to civilised self-mastery.

2. The *Arkteia*

⁹ On the question of women's participation in the polis, see Blok 2017 (in particular chapter 4 and 5). As she convincingly demonstrates '[w]omen were excluded from political office, but the vocabulary for citizens at Athens shows symmetrical words for male and female citizens. This evidence implies that in some way both women and men were considered to be citizens, despite women's exclusion from politics.' (p. ix).

¹⁰ See Calame 2002: 47–48.

¹¹ The choice of this ritual is due to the state of our evidence. As Parker 2005: 228 reminds us, this is "the only maturation ritual for young girls that we can to some extent observe from close to, and is one that some and perhaps all our sources claim was undergone by all Attic girls before marriage".

¹² Given that women generally had a more restricted access to education than boys, it is easier in their case to determine the effect that the kinetic dimension of their musical education was meant to have.

2.1 Evidence

Our body of evidence regarding the *arkteia* comes from different sources – literary, iconographical, epigraphical, archaeological – with each type presenting its own set of problems and limitations.¹³ In fact, even if the *arkteia* is the most famous and studied maturation ritual for ancient Greek girls, evidence is nonetheless scarce and very hard to interpret. There is no common consensus on any aspects of the rite, apart perhaps from the fact that it is generally understood as a ritual concerning maturation.¹⁴ Several factors contribute to the current uncertainty. First, the passage in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is corrupt, and has triggered endless debate regarding its exact content and the kind of information it offers.¹⁵ To complicate things further, the extant literary sources contradict each other irreconcilably.¹⁶ Nor do we know precisely the content of the festival programme at the Brauronia, or have a full picture of the different ritual activities in honour of Artemis taking place at the sanctuary in Brauron. It is therefore impossible to tell with any degree of certainty how material evidence might relate to the literary sources. For instance, we are told that girls who participated in the mysteries at Brauron had to 'imitate the bear' for Artemis Brauronia. Does this necessarily mean that the *krateriskoi* which were found on the site actually depict the girls in this guise?¹⁷ Similarly, epigraphical records show that many women dedicated objects to Artemis at Brauron,¹⁸ supposedly to propitiate or thank her, for instance, after the time of their menarche, or after the birth of their child. One cannot prove that these votive offerings were directly linked to our little bears. They may also refer to some quite different aspect of the cult of the goddess which took place in the sanctuary.¹⁹ Artemis, in her function of *kourotrophos* (κουροτρόφος: rearing children),

¹³ For an excellent overview of the whole question of source analysis, see Parker 2005: 228–249.

¹⁴ I use 'rite of maturation' in its weaker sense. Although the *arkteia* probably marked the transition from childhood to adolescence, as we shall see, the concept of 'rite of passage', *stricto sensu*, does not apply, since we cannot identify the threefold schema of 1) rite of separation 2) rite of transition, and 3) rite of integration. See Faraone 2003; Hitch 2015. On the misuse of the term 'rite of passage', see Calame 2013: 87–88.

¹⁵ See note 6 above.

¹⁶ In *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 644–645a, the scholiast explains that the little bears were between 5 and 10 years old (ἐπιλεγόμενα παρθένοι, οὔτε πρεσβύτεραι δέκα ἐτῶν οὔτ' ἐλάττους πέντε), but then, according to *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 644–645c, Artemis ordered that every girl should imitate the bear before her wedding (ἡ δὲ Ἄρτεμις [...] ἐκέλευσε παρθένον πᾶσαν μιμήσασθαι τὴν ἄρκτον πρὸ τοῦ γάμου). The first passage suggests that the girls had to be selected (ἐπιλεγόμενα παρθένοι), while the second one insists on the fact that every girl had to participate in the rite (παρθένον πᾶσαν). Another difficulty concerns the age of the girls. They are meant to be children in the first passage, but in the second passage it seems that the rite has to be performed before their marriage (πρὸ τοῦ γάμου), which would certainly take place later. In this second case, I am inclined to understand that the scholiast means that every girl had to go through this rite in her childhood in order to become marriageable. For a detailed survey and analysis of the literary sources, see Faraone 2003: 51–61.

¹⁷ Kahil (1963; 1965) first established the link between the *krateriskoi* and Artemis, noting that vases of this form are only found in sanctuaries dedicated to the goddess. She then made the hypothesis that some of the images depicted on the vases found at Brauron show the actual *mysterion* of the Brauronia (Kahil 1977: 93).

¹⁸ On the epigraphical record, see Linders 1972 and Cleland 2005. It must be noted that the published lists of women's dedications of clothing to the goddess (IG II² 1514–1530) were found on the Acropolis in Athens (where other Brauronia took place). There are apparently some significant differences between these and the inscribed inventories found at Brauron, which are still unpublished. On the question, see Taylor 2015: 100–101. On the temple of Artemis Brauronia on the Athenian Acropolis, see Rhodes/Dobbins 1979.

¹⁹ In fact, even if we could securely link these pieces of evidence with the Brauronia, it still does not necessarily mean that it should be connected to the *arktoi*. Many events, involving people of different ages, genders, or origins took place during the same festival.

protects girls from childhood to adulthood and women especially during their first pregnancy and labour.²⁰ Even if we consider her worship at Brauron in this capacity alone (i.e. as Artemis *Kourotrophos*), it is likely that various rites were performed at the shrine, and involved actors of a wide age range. Consequently, given the limits of our knowledge, I will distinguish information that directly concerns the little bears from the more general traditions on the religious life at Brauron and the milieu within which the *arkteia* took place.

In addition to the passage from the *Lysistrata* and its scholia, we have several entries by lexicographers commenting either on the verb *arkteusai* (ἀρκεῦσαι) in *Suda*, Harpocration, and *Anecdota Graeca*, or the noun *arkteia* (ἀρκεία) in Hesychios. We find further information under the entry *dekateuein* (δεκατεύειν) in Harpocration,²¹ and in a scholion to the *Iliad*.²² The *testimonia* give no less than five different aetiologies explaining a rite in honour of Artemis in which a bear was somehow involved.²³ The technical terms referring to the religious activity or the occasion in which the girls ‘played the bear’ (ἄρκτος ἢ ἄρκτον μιμεῖσθαι/ἀρκεῦσαι/ἀρκεύεσθαι) are equally multiform and confusing: *heortē* (ἑορτή, festival; *Suda*);²⁴ *mustērion* (μυστήριον, secret rite; *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645a, 645b), *thusia* (θυσία, sacrifice; *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645a), *teletē* (τελετή, initiation; Hesychios s.v. ἀρκεία). The same goes for the aim of the rite performed by the girls (while being bears?): ‘to appease the goddess’ (ἐκμειλισσόμεναι/ἀπομειλισσόμεναι τὴν θεόν; *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645a, *Suda*), ‘to cleanse/be cleansed’ (καθιεροῦν/καθιερωθῆναι; Hesychios s.v. ἀρκεία, Harpocration s.v. ἀρκεῦσαι, *Anecdota Graeca*), ‘to purify from pollution’ (ἀφοσιώσασθαι/ἀφοσιώμεναι; *Anecdota Graeca*), ‘the price paid for the she-bear who was killed’ (τῆς τελευτησάσης ἄρκτου ποιναί; *Suda*). The ‘rite’ apparently also involved looking after the statue of the goddess or the temple (περιέπειν τὸ ἱερόν; *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645c), and wearing a saffron robe (κροκωτὸν ἱμάτιον; *Ar. Lys.* 645, *Suda*, *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645a, 645c).²⁵ These different pieces of

²⁰ See King 1983. The association between Artemis and infants may be post-classical, but the goddess certainly looked after small children already in the classical period (Budin 2015: 75–77).

²¹ We learn, amongst other things that, according to Didymus, Lysias used the verb ἀρκεῦσαι in his speech about Phrynichus’ daughter with the meaning of δεκατεῦσαι (to tithe). Didymus, then, explains the verb δεκατεῦσαι by stating that it means καθιερῶσαι because it was the custom of the Greeks to dedicate the tithe (usually of their booty) to the gods. This piece of information has been used to argue that the *arkteia* was a rite of passage or an initiation (usually pre-nuptial), but this seems to contradict the passage in *Lysistrata* in which the chorus of old women in Aristophanes refer to public celebrations. Interestingly, in the same scholion Harpocration defines δεκατεῦσαι as μυῆσαι. The double meaning of the verb μυέω (1. to initiate into mysteries, 2. to teach, instruct) is probably not fortuitous. It highlights the didactic dimension of these religious phenomena.

²² *Schol. Hom. Il.* 7.772. The scholion to the *Iliad* is only loosely related to the *arkteia* at Brauron. It mentions an aetiology which is similar to the ones we find about the *arkteia*, but it concerns the cult of Artemis at Munychia.

²³ As Scullion 2008: 198 notes, “there is no reason to believe that one of them [the aetiologies] must have been original and authoritative. Evidently, aetiological myth was a true scion of Greek mythology and so anarchically multiform”. He adds: “The whole business of aetiology was perhaps much less official than we sometimes assume, a creation largely of antiquarians and poets that had no authoritative status in cult”. On the various aetiological accounts, see Brelich 1969: 248–249; Sale 1975: 265–285; Osborne 1985: 161–164; Dowden 1989.

²⁴ The Brauronia mentioned by the chorus of old women in *Lysistrata* is a festival (ἑορτή) according to Hesychios (s.v. Βραυρωνίσις).

²⁵ On the reading χέουσα (shedding) instead of ἔχουσα (wearing) at *Ar. Lys.* 644, see note 6. On the κροκωτός, see Brulé 1987: 240–245.

information seem irreconcilable, as they allude to public and secret events of seemingly different duration.²⁶

This observation has led Christopher A. Faraone to argue that the somewhat confusing picture results from the conflation of different activities into one ritual in our sources.²⁷ However, although the hypothesis that the extant sources refer to different religious phenomena connected to the cult of Artemis at Brauron is convincing, it is not necessary to assume a conflation of different activities into one ritual. Rather, the problem may be explained by the apparent, but merely apparent, polysemy of the verb *arkteusai* (ἀρκτηῦσαι) in our sources. On the one hand, we are told that *arkteusai* is synonymous with the verbs *kathierōsai* (καθιερωσαι, to dedicate), *dekateusai* (δεκατεῦσαι, to tithe), and *aphosiōsasthai* (ἀφοσιώσασθαι, to expiate oneself) while on the other hand the scholiasts use this verb to explain the kind of actions performed by those who were serving as bears (αἱ ἀρκτηούμεναι).²⁸ This seems to suggest that 1) girls would have served as bears for a certain length of time, and that their service would have been understood to be a sort of dedication which every girl owed the Artemis, and 2) the girls, while they served Artemis as bears, would have been involved in various activities at the sanctuary. The idea that ‘every’ Athenian girl had to serve Artemis might only be notional. It is rather unlikely that every Athenian family had the necessary resources to have their daughter(s) participate in the Brauronia, since the festival was probably not sponsored by the state. From what may be gathered from Harpocration’s *Lexicon of the Ten Orators* (s.v. ἀρκτηῦσαι), Demosthenes mentions the fact that someone – perhaps Medon, the man he attacks in his speech – did not dedicate a girl (*dekateusai*, which is then said to be a synonym of *arkteusai*), while Lysias, in another speech, seems to have used the fact that a father did not ‘dedicate’ (*arkteusai*) his daughter as an *argumentum ad hominem*. This suggests that the service as one of Artemis’ bears was probably considered a sign of good education, an assumption that is corroborated by the passage in the *Lysistrata*.

It is of course unclear whether the girls stayed at the sanctuary the entire length of their time in service, or whether they were there only sporadically.²⁹ At any rate, we get the impression that young Athenian girls became Artemis’ little bears for an extended period of time. Therefore, given the young age of the girls, it seems highly likely that serving as Artemis’ bears was a formative experience during which girls would develop various skills. For instance, it is possible that they

²⁶ A sacrifice would probably not exceed a few hours, while a festival usually took place over several days. As we shall see, the *arktoi* were probably dedicated to Artemis for the duration of their training, which culminated in the festival itself.

²⁷ Faraone 2003.

²⁸ E.g. *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645c: ἡ δὲ Ἄρτεμις ὀργισθεῖσα ἐκέλευσε παρθένον πᾶσαν μιμήσασθαι τὴν ἄρκτον πρὸ τοῦ γάμου, καὶ περιέπειν τὸ ἱερόν κροκωτὸν ἱμάτιον φοροῦσαν. καὶ τοῦτο ἀρκτηεῦσθαι ἐλέγετο (Artemis, who had been angered, ordered every young girl to imitate the bear before marriage, and to look after the sanctuary, while wearing a saffron robe. It is said that this is the meaning of *arkteuesthai*).

²⁹ Perhaps girls could also be ‘dedicated to Artemis’ only notionally. See Parker 2005: 233–234; Swift 2010: 198–199.

would socialise, learn choral dancing, train their body (by running?), and even perhaps learn how to wear the saffron robe (like an adult) and move in it.

The material evidence found at Brauron ranges from epigraphical records to artefacts such as vases, terracotta statues and votive reliefs. It shows the female focus of Artemis' cult at Brauron and its family-related dimension. For instance, figure 1 is a dedication made by a woman,³⁰ while in figure 2 we see a woman presenting her daughter to Artemis. The objects dedicated typically belong to the female sphere. For instance, *SEG* 55.260 lists different types of clothes offered to the goddess,³¹ and a mirror dedicated by a woman has been found at the site.³² The terracotta and marble statues suggest that children, especially girls before puberty, were involved in some of the religious activities of the sanctuary, as do the famous *krateriskoi*.³³ These vases have been linked by Lilly Kahil to the cult of Artemis because of their unusual form, which is found only in sanctuaries of the goddess, and because the girls are often represented next to an altar holding a palm branch.³⁴ According to Kahil this connection is also implied by the recurring presence of altars and palm trees in the images. Since young girls are represented on the vases performing various activities such as running, dancing in a chorus, marching in procession, she identifies them with the little bears of our literary sources.³⁵ The identification is indeed very likely given the apparent age of the majority of the figures depicted on the *krateriskoi*, which seems to range from child to prepubescent girl,³⁶ thus corroborating the scholiast's claim that the little bears were aged between 5 and 10 years old.³⁷ It must be noted though that some older-looking female figures (see for instance figure 3) are also depicted: ~~these could be adult women (priestesses?) supervising the little girls. at times.~~

This does not mean, however, that the *krateriskoi* are meant to represent the actual *arkteia* festival.³⁸ It is crucial to keep in mind, as argued above, that our sources most likely refer to

³⁰ *SEG* 52.170: Ἀρτέμιδι εὐξαμένη ἀνέθηκεν Ἄριστονίκη Ἀντιφάτους Θοραϊέως γυνή (When she prayed to Artemis, Aristonice, daughter of Antiphates, wife of Thoraieus, dedicated it). On this dedication, see Despinis 2002.

³¹ See Cleland 2005.

³² *SEG* 37.45: Ἥπυλλα ἡ ἐόνετορος ἀνέθηκεν τὰρτέμιδι τεῖ Βραυροῶνι (Hippylla, the daughter of Onetor dedicated it to Artemis from Brauron).

³³ On the *krateriskoi*, see Kahil 1963, 1965, 1977, 1988; Palaiokrassa 1991; Hamilton 1989; Ferrari 2002: 166–181. Marinatos 2002 rejects the idea that the scenes represented on the *krateriskoi* depict the little bears. For a detailed criticism of Hamilton's views, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1990b.

³⁴ In some versions of the account of Artemis' and Apollo's birth, Leto held to a palm-tree while she was in labour (e.g. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 116–20). The accounts do not always mention the palm-tree (e.g. Pindar fr. 33d), at times Artemis is born first on Ortygia (e.g. *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 14–18), but the link between these gods and the tree is well-established in iconography. See Miller 1981; Sourvinou-Inwood 1985.

³⁵ For a detailed list of the different activities represented on the vases, see Hamilton 1989: 450–457.

³⁶ See Parker 2005: 235: “The statement of the scholiast on Aristophanes that the bears came from a broad age-band is confirmed, but the possibility that the band reached up to the age of marriage is disallowed”. The question of the age of the bears is still debated. Bears aged 5–10yo: Deubner 1932: 207; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988: 24; Scanlon 2002: 148; bears older than 10yo: Kahil 1977: 86; Perlman 1983; Marinatos 2003. Many consider “10 as the symbolically charged age on which the rite was focused” (Swift 2010: 199). I do not see any reason to distrust the scholiast on the age of the girls.

³⁷ Some scholars argue that the ‘bears’ were in reality older, mainly to accommodate their conception of the *arkteia* as a pre-marital initiation rite directly leading to marriage. This view largely misinterprets the scarce material as well as textual evidence that we have.

³⁸ By this I mean the ritual that apparently took place every four years at the Brauronia.

different aspects of the cult of Artemis at Brauron. On the one hand, we have terms such as *arkteusai* which seem to refer to the status of the girls (i.e. ‘to play the bear’ that is ‘to be dedicated to Artemis’): but we also have *arktos einai* or *arkton mimeisthai* (ἄρκτος εἶναι or ἄρκτον μιμεῖσθαι) ‘to play the bear’, that is ‘to perform the bear’ at the *arkteia*. In figure 3, little girls interact with (and perhaps are instructed by) apparently female adult figures (priestesses?): it seems that the *krateriskoi* could give us a glimpse of the educational process before the celebration of the *arkteia* festival. Therefore, we should differentiate between a period in which girls (‘dedicated’ as little bears of Artemis) spent time at Brauron and learnt key skills, and the actual *arkteia* festival during which some kind of performance, probably choral,³⁹ took place.

Regardless of the festival’s exact schedule, it seems reasonable to suppose that young girls, between 5 and 10 years old (that is before puberty) could have been involved in the worship of Artemis at Brauron in the capacity of ‘bears’. If their service did indeed last for four years, the girls were ‘dedicated’ to Artemis when they were aged between 5 and 7 years old, and their commitment ended after the celebration of the *arkteia* at the Brauronia when they were between 8 to 10 years old, thereby signalling their transition from childhood to maidenhood. The quadrennial festival may have entailed some kind of choral performance with the girls actually embodying bears, since the use of the verb *mimeisthai* (μιμεῖσθαι, to imitate, to represent) in the expression ‘to play the bear’ (μιμήσασθαι τὴν ἄρκτον, *Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645a, 645c) hints at some performative and physical dimension, while *arkteusai* (ἀρκτηεῦσαι) seems to refer to a state (that of being dedicated to Artemis at Brauron as a bear for a certain duration).

2.2 Why the bear

But why would young girls be called ‘bears’ and made to imitate these animals? The desire to find an answer to this question combined with the appeal of the ‘rite of passage’ paradigm, has led scholars to offer, broadly speaking, two explanations. First, the bear may be understood to symbolise the ‘wild’ nature of women. During the rite, enacting the animal would allow the girls to express their untamed character in a controlled space in order to be domesticated, thereby enabling them to join the ranks of well-to-do Athenian spouses at the end of the period of service. If so, the *arkteia* would be an initiation preparing *parthenoi* (παρθένοι, maidens) for marriage – a conclusion which seems to be corroborated by the scholiasts (at first glance), since they say that it was a ceremony that took place ‘before marriage’ (πρὸ τοῦ γάμου).⁴⁰ As such, many scholars repeatedly

³⁹ See Budelmann/Power 2015: 264–268.

⁴⁰ See, for instance, Calame 1977: 411–420; Cole 1984; Sourvinou-Inwood 1988; Dowden 1989; Calame 1997. Given the stress put on the desirability and marriageability of the παρθένοι in most extant passages referring to their chorus, it seems that choral performances would also provide a platform for young women to be seen by potential husbands (or the family of potential husbands). See also Lonsdale 1993: 180–193.

interpret these rites as a male attempt to exercise control over the female body.⁴¹ However, the sources on girls who had to be bears before marriage do not necessarily imply that the ceremony itself was supposed to prepare a girl for marriage, since it could have been simply an essential part of their education.⁴² The second possible explanation draws on ancient beliefs regarding real bears, such as the promiscuousness of the females or their strong maternal instinct.⁴³ In this case, the she-bear is considered as a role-model for the girls to emulate in order to prepare themselves for marriage.

The major problem with both interpretations, however, is that the Brauronian little bears were prepubescent children.⁴⁴ Even if one decides to distrust the information given by the scholiasts and dismiss the iconographic evidence entirely – by claiming, for instance, the impossibility of determining whether the young girls depicted on the *krateriskoi* represent the little *arktoi*, it is clear that the chorus of old Athenian women in the passage from *Lysistrata* is talking about the different ceremonies the women took part in between the age of seven and ten – i.e. before they became *paides kalai* (παίδες καλαί), beautiful and good girls. As Stephanie L. Budin notes, “the girls [...] were aged five to ten, and thus both too old and too young for initiations – they are too old for any rituals such as the Athenian *Khoes*, where three-year-old boys had their first sip of wine; and too young for menstrual or marital rituals”.⁴⁵ If that is indeed the case, what function could the *arkteia* serve?

In my opinion, the *arktoi* were called bears because children go through a long developmental phase during which their physicality is somewhat clumsy. This clumsiness is especially visible when the children try to perform complex movements demanding coordination, movements which are typical of dance.⁴⁶ Our little *arktoi* would be likened to bears because of their physicality, and perhaps also because of their appearance (small children often have a little tummy, proportionally short legs, long torso, and a big head). [The pictures of 'dancing' bear cubs in the wild \(figure 4\) offer a striking example of this resemblance. The small bears look astonishingly similar to young children playing or dancing.](#)⁴⁷ – Following the same line of thought, maidens (that is, pubescent girls) are often compared in Greek literature to deer or fillies, especially when they

⁴¹ “A girl’s upbringing is represented as the ‘taming’ or the ‘breaking in’ of a filly, and marriage is the end of this process” (King 1983: 79). Through the participation to such rites “the alien female body is brought under male, cultural, control” (Sourvinou-Inwood 1988: 29). On animal metaphors in erotic and wedding poetry, see Wasdin 2018: 115–138.

⁴² See Sourvinou-Inwood 1990a: 50–51.

⁴³ Arist. *Hist. an.* 579a18–25; Ael. *NA* 2.19. See Cole 1984: 241; Perlman 1989; Lonsdale 1993: 182.

⁴⁴ The question has been debated extensively, but I believe that Sourvinou-Inwood 1988: 39–67, in her detailed analysis of extant evidence, has convincingly established that the bears were aged between 5 and 10 years old, as the scholiast writes: ἐπιλεγόμενοι παρθένοι, οὔτε πρεσβύτεραι δέκα ἐτῶν οὔτ’ ἐλάττους πέντε (*Schol. Ar. Lys.* 645).

⁴⁵ Budin 2015: 80.

⁴⁶ See, for instance, this video of young girls learning ballet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=leu7JhFn8M0> [accessed 20th January 2020].

⁴⁷ [It was taken in 2013 by Valtteri Mulkahainen in Finland.](#)

⁴⁸ [Figure 4 is a picture of 'dancing' bear cubs in the wild looking strikingly anthropomorphic. It was taken in 2013 by Valtteri Mulkahainen in Finland.](#)

dance, because their lightness and nimbleness would recall the movements of these animals.⁴⁹ The long, thin legs of young adolescents due to a spurt of growth could also call to mind these animals.

This hypothesis gains some strength if we consider two features of ancient Greek life in particular: a) ancient Greek attitudes towards dance as having a fundamentally educative purpose; b) ancient Greek notions of wildness, especially of animals. Two points follow: the *arkteia* probably had an educational dimension too, and wildness was the result of a lack of musical education.

3. Dance as education

The young age of the *arktoi* invites us to reflect further on the educational dimension of the training that the girls must have undertaken in order to be involved in the *arkteia*. It may not be a coincidence that the period of time within which the girls became bears (5–7 years old) corresponds to the time when most children start school around the world today. The *pyrrhichē* (πυρρίχη) offers an interesting point of comparison: according to Athenaeus, in Sparta everyone started to learn this dance from the age of five.⁵⁰ Although it is impossible to ascertain what exactly participating in the *arkteia* involved, at least we know that its final phase entailed some kind of public performance involving dance, suggested by the use of the verb *mimeisthai* in the scholia. In order to understand fully the role played by dance in education, it is necessary to understand ancient dance as a practice that encoded certain assumptions quite different from those of modern and contemporary dance.

Ancient dance was primarily understood as a mimetic medium in antiquity. For instance, in a famous passage from the *Poetics*, Aristotle explains:

“Rhythm on its own, without melody, is used by the art of dancers (since they too, through rhythms translated into movements, create mimesis of character, emotions, and actions)”.⁵¹

If we are to grasp fully the implications of the Stagirite’s statement – that dance imitates characters, emotions, and actions, it is crucial to emphasize that dance was understood mainly in terms of embodiment rather than of choreography. As Paul Woodruff argues, “the center of gravity of the word’s [mimesis] many uses outside philosophy appears to be following examples – doing what other people properly do”.⁵² This means that, in the context of dance, one has to impersonate a character, an emotion, or an action in order to represent it. This analysis is corroborated by the meaning of *schēma* (σχῆμα) in the context of dance, a noun deriving from the verb *schein* (σχεῖν), which can be used with an adverb to express a state. It refers to characterisation through movement

⁴⁹ For fawns or deer, see, for instance, Bacchyl. 13.86–92, Aesch. *Eum.* 111–113, Eur. *Bacch.* 862–876, Eur. *El.* 860–861; Ar. *Lys.* 1318–1319; Theoc. *Id.* 8.88–91. For fillies: Alcm. PMG 1; Ar. *Lys.* 1307–1309.

⁵⁰ Ath. 631a.

⁵¹ Arist. *Poet.* 1447a 25–27 (trans. S. Halliwell): αὐτῷ δὲ τῷ ῥυθμῷ χωρὶς ἁρμονίας ἢ τῶν ὀρχηστῶν (καὶ γὰρ οὗτοι διὰ τῶν σχηματιζομένων ῥυθμῶν μιμοῦνται καὶ ἦθη καὶ πάθη καὶ πράξεις).

⁵² Woodruff 2015: 329.

and posture, and is used when the disposition of one's body, whether still or in movement, represents something identifiable (character, emotion, or action).⁵³

The capacity of the body to be read as a meaningful medium is central to appreciate the key function of dance in the education of children, especially in a culture that conflated in one single word the beauty and the good, *to kallos* (τὸ κάλλος). This idea is neatly exemplified in the following passage from Plato's *Laws*, in which the Athenian is discussing "good posture and tunes in relation to song and dance" [in the context of education](#):⁵⁴ ~~in the context of education:~~

"Well then, however shall we define goodness of posture or of tune? Come, consider: when a manly soul is beset by troubles, and a cowardly soul by troubles identical and equal, are the postures and utterances that result in the two cases similar?"⁵⁵

Here, when the Athenian talks about 'a beautiful *schēma*' (τὸ καλὸν σχῆμα), he is assuming a beautiful *schēma* as necessarily good or a good *schēma* as necessarily beautiful. This conception is deeply embedded in Greek language, for instance, in coinages such as *eukosmia* (εὐκοσμία, orderly behaviour, good conduct, decency) or *euschēmōn* (εὐσχήμεων, graceful, respectable) of which the meaning – both physical and moral – can denote the goodness of body and soul. Dance would not only help children to learn mastering of the body: it would also contribute to the shaping of it. The positive effect dance has on the body is observed by the Socrates of Xenophon's *Symposium* (17–18) who explains how dance harmoniously shapes the body, since it keeps it in good proportions unlike sports such as running or wrestling. The context is obviously that of male beauty, but it may also apply to women. For instance, it is striking that women are repeatedly celebrated for their delicate ankles in literature, a physical feature enhanced by dance training.⁵⁶

The importance of the corporeal dimension of *mousikē*, and thus of dance, is also stressed by Aristides. His work heavily relies on Aristonexus, and perhaps some other earlier sources, and as such offers precious insights on archaic and classical theorising of music and dance.⁵⁷ Here he explains how dance was believed to have an intrinsic educative purpose:

"Only music teaches both by words and by images of actions, and through agents that are not static or fixed in a single pattern, but are alive, and alter their form and their movement fittingly (naturally? literally?) according to everything which is reported. This is clear both from the dances of the

⁵³ On the question of mimetic dance and embodiment, see Bocksberger forthcoming. On the interpretation of *διὰ τῶν σχηματιζομένων ῥυθμῶν*, see Peponi 2017.

⁵⁴ Pl. *Leg.* 654e (trans. R.G. Bury [modified]): σχῆμά τε καλὸν καὶ μέλος κατ' ὄδῃν καὶ ὄρχησιν.

⁵⁵ Pl. *Leg.* 655 (trans. R.G. Bury): Εἶεν· ἴτί δὲ δὴ τὸ καλὸν χρῆ φάναι σχῆμα ἢ μέλος εἶναί ποτε; φέρε, ἀνδρικῆς ψυχῆς ἐν πόνοις ἐχομένης καὶ δειλῆς τοῖς αὐτοῖς τε καὶ ἴσοις ἄρ' ὅμοια τὰ τε σχήματα καὶ τὰ φθέγματα ζυμβαίνει γίγνεσθαι;

⁵⁶ Cf. epithets such as ἀβρόσφυρος, with delicate ankles; εὐσφυρος, with beautiful ankles; εὐταρσος, of delicate ankles; τανύσφυρος, with long taper ankles; χλιδανόσφυρος, with delicate ankles.

⁵⁷ On Aristides as a source for early music theory, see Barker 1982.

choruses of ancient times, whose teacher was the science of rhythm, and also from what has been written by most authors about performing.”⁵⁸

Aristides particularly emphasises the educative value of dance by singling out *mousikē* as the one discipline that ‘teaches both by word and by living images of actions’ (λόγῳ καὶ πράξεων εἰκόσι παιδεύει). He also highlights the mimetic nature of the movements by using the word *eikōn* (εἰκῶν –, likeness, living image) and explaining that form and movement need to change according to what is recounted. Interestingly, he specifically refers to the example of the orchestric element of ancient choruses to prove his point.

Two implications can be derived from what we have noted so far about ancient dance. First, the way one moved was perceived to reflect the kind of person one was. Second, good deportment must, therefore, have been a very effective social marker, and consequently dance an important skill to impart to young children.

4. The uneducated as wild animal paradigm

But what does this have to do with our little bears? Certain pieces of ancient evidence hint at the habit of comparing an uneducated person, someone who has not been trained in *mousikē*, to a wild animal. For instance, in the following passage from Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates discusses the case of someone who spends much effort on physical training (*gymnastikē*, γυμναστική) while neglecting *mousikē* and *philosophia* (φιλοσοφία):

“Such a person indeed gets to hate argument, I think, and lacks refinement. In discussion he no longer uses any kind of persuasion, but carries out all his business with brute force like a wild animal and lives in ignorance and is clumsy without elegance or grace.”⁵⁹

He stresses the faults of the uneducated man as both intellectual and physical. A lack of dance training makes him most *skaios* (σκαίος, clumsy), *arruthmos* (ἄρρυθμος, ill-proportioned), and *acharistos* (ἀχάριστος, ungracious). To be uncivilised is to be like a wild animal, and poor deportment is the unmistakable sign for someone being *agrius* (ἄγριος, savage). The same idea is found in Polybius, where the historian explains how the people from Kynaithea, in Arkadia, started to neglect *paideia* – especially musical education (ἢ πρὸς μουσικήν), and as a consequence became savage:

⁵⁸ Aristid. Quint. 2.4 (trans. O.V. Bychkov/A. Sheppard [modified]): μόνη δὲ μουσική καὶ λόγῳ καὶ πράξεων εἰκόσι παιδεύει, οὐ δι’ ἀκινήτων οὐδὲ ἐφ’ ἐνὸς σχήματος πεπηγότων ἀλλὰ δι’ ἐμψύχων, ἃ καθ’ ἕκαστον <τῶν> ἀπαγγελλομένων ἐς τὸ οἰκεῖον τὴν τε μορφήν καὶ τὴν κίνησιν μεθίστησιν. δῆλα δὲ ταῦτα κάκ τῆς τῶν παλαιῶν χορῶν ὀρχήσεως, ἧς διδάσκαλος ἡ ῥυθμική, κάκ τῶν περὶ ὑποκρίσεως τοῖς πολλοῖς συγγεγραμμένων.

⁵⁹ Pl. *Resp.* 3.411e (trans. C. Emlyn-Jones/W. Preddy): Μισόλογος δὴ οἶμαι ὁ τοιοῦτος γίνεταί καὶ ἄμουσος, καὶ πειθοῖ μὲν διὰ λόγων οὐδὲν ἔτι χρῆται, βία δὲ καὶ ἀγριότητι ὡσπερ θηρίον πρὸς πάντα διαπράττεται, καὶ ἐν ἀμαθίᾳ καὶ σκαιότητι μετὰ ἀρρυθμίας τε καὶ ἀχαριστίας ζῆ.

“I have said so much on this subject firstly in order that the character of the Arcadian nation should not suffer for the crimes of one city, and secondly to deter any other Arcadians from beginning to neglect music under the impression that its extensive practice in Arcadia serves no necessary purpose. I also spoke for the sake of the Cynaethans themselves, in order that, if Heaven ever grant them better fortune, they may humanize themselves by turning their attention to education and especially to music; for by no other means can they hope to free themselves from that savagery which overtook them at this time.”⁶⁰

This illustrates very well the equation of the concepts of taming and educating (or civilising, cultivating) made in Ancient Greek, concepts which are quite distinct for us. This overlap can be noticed when examining the lexical fields of the antonyms *agrios* and *hēmeros* (ἡμερος, tame). Both words can be applied to nature, animals, and men to describe the contrast between the cultivated and the uncultivated, the wild and the tamed, the uncivilised and the civilised. Needless to say that, in the case of human beings, *mousikē* (i.e. dance, music, and poetry) plays a fundamental role in transforming the *agrios* into the *hēmeros*. The motif of music taming animals (as in the case of Orpheus) is widespread in mythology, and it should probably be linked to the notion of *mousikē* as a civilising force.⁶¹ It has the power to civilise even the most ferocious beasts. In this regard, a passage from a choral ode in Euripides’ *Alcestis* is telling:

“Under his [Apollo’s] shepherd care, in joy at his songs, were also spotted lynxes, and there came, leaving the vale of Othrys, a pride of tawny lions, and the dappled fawn stepping beyond the tall fir trees with its light foot danced to your lyre-playing, Apollo, rejoicing in its joyful melody.”⁶²

The effect of Apollo’s music goes far beyond attracting and calming ferocious animals.⁶³ Under its influence, the fawn even starts engaging in choral dancing [χόρευσε], thereby showing how the civilising power of *mousikē* humanises the beasts. They become active participants in *mousikē*.

5. Παίζουσα ἢ παῖς παιδεύεται⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Polyb. 4.21 (trans. W.R. Paton): Ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡμῖν εἰρήσθω χάριν τοῦ μὴ διὰ μίαν πόλιν τὸ κοινὸν ἦθος διαβάλλεσθαι τῶν Ἀρκάδων, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τοῦ μὴ νομίσαντας ἐνίους τῶν κατοικούντων τὴν Ἀρκαδίαν περιουσίας χάριν τὰ κατὰ μουσικὴν ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἀσκεῖσθαι παρ’ αὐτοῖς ὀλιγωρεῖν ἐγχειρῆσαι τούτου τοῦ μέρους, ἔτι δὲ καὶ Κυναίθων ἔνεκα, ἵν’ ἂν ποτ’ αὐτοῖς ὁ θεὸς εὔδῃ, τραπέντες πρὸς παιδείαν ἡμερῶσιν αὐτούς, καὶ μάλιστα ταύτης πρὸς μουσικὴν· οὕτως γὰρ μόνως ἂν λήξαιεν τῆς τότε περὶ αὐτοὺς γενομένης ἀγριότητος.

⁶¹ Music can also lull animals to sleep, as in the case of the eagle of Zeus in Pind. *Pyth.* 1.6–10, but this is a slightly different action than that of taming.

⁶² Eur. *Alc.* 579–587 (trans. D. Kovacs): σὺν δ’ ἐποιμαίνοντο χαρᾶ μελέων βαλῖαι τε λύγκες, / ἔβα δὲ λιποῦσ’ Ὀθρυος νάπαν λεόντων / ἀδαφινὸς ἴλα· / χόρευσε δ’ ἀμφὶ σὰν κιθάραν, / Φοῖβε, ποικιλόθριξ / νεβρὸς ὑψηκόμων πέραν / βαίνουσ’ ἐλατᾶν σφυρῶ κούφω, / χαίρουσ’ εὐφρονη μολπᾶ.

⁶³ Cf. Scheer in this volume.

⁶⁴ *Paizousa hē pais paideuetai* (the girl is educated by dancing). The title of this section is a pun based on the fact that the words girl (*hē pais*), *paideuein* (to educate), and *paizein* (to dance) come from the same root, as explained in the main body of the text.

The Greek understanding of *mousikē* as possessing the power to transform the *agrioi* into the *hēmeros* is a clue that offers insight into how little girls could be likened to bears in Artemis' cult at Brauron. If the capacity to dance in a chorus is a sign of culture, then it seems reasonable to consider little girls who have not yet been educated – especially not in choral dancing – as comparable to wild animals. In fact, the etymological relationship shared between the words *pais* (παῖς, child), *paideuein* (παιδεύειν, to educate), and *paizein* (παίζειν, to dance, to play) underscores the intuitive connection which was drawn in archaic and classical Greek culture between the education of children and dance.⁶⁵ This connection makes sense if we bear in mind the concept of ancient dance as mimetic, and of mimetic dance as to be understood in terms of impersonation or embodiment. Accordingly, the imitation of certain *ēthē* (ἦθη, characters) as well as *pathē* (πάθη, emotions and experiences) fostering gracefulness and respectability (*euschēmosunē*, *eukosmia*) would have been central elements of children' dance education.⁶⁶ This included harmonious carriage and good deportment of the body, the external signs of *to kalon* (τὸ καλόν, the good, the beautiful).

We may, for instance, be catching a glimpse of the importance of dance education in the upbringing of a girl in the following lines attributed to Sappho by Plutarch:

“And Sappho addressed a young girl not yet ripe for marriage:

You seemed to me a small child without grace.”⁶⁷

It is interesting to note, in light of the excerpt from Plato's *Republic* already discussed above, that Sappho calls the girl who is not yet ready for marriage *acharis* (ἄχαρις, without charm; disagreeable), an adjective equivalent to *acharistos* (ἀχάριστος, ungracious), the word used by Socrates to qualify the man who lacks training in *mousikē*. The two texts are of course widely separated in time and place of composition,⁶⁸ but it is tempting to see a parallel and suggest that the dialogue between Sappho and the girl is focusing on the fact that the child appears to be moving like one who has not yet been taught how to dance.

When we think of the young age of the little girls in Brauron, their casting as bears is perhaps not as strange as it seems at first glance. Young children can be quite clumsy or ungainly

⁶⁵ Interestingly, the inscription on the Dipylon vase states that the vessel should be given to whom ἀταλώτατα παίζει. Although the meaning of the adjective ἀταλός is difficult to establish in this context, it is clear that it is a word usually used to refer to children (cf. Chantraine 1968–1980, s.v. ἀταλός).

⁶⁶ This aspect is central to the educational programme put forward in Plato's *Laws*, but it is difficult to ascertain what Plato's models are in the real world (Parker 2005: 183).

⁶⁷ Plut. *Mor. Amat.* 751d (trans. E.L. Minar/F.H. Sandbach/W.C. Helmbold [modified]): καὶ τὴν οὐπω γάμων ἔχουσαν ὦραν ἢ Σαπφῶ προσαγορευούσα φησὶν, ὅτι / σμίκρα μοι πάις ἔμμεν ἐφαίνεο κᾶχαρις.

⁶⁸ On the similarities and differences between Plato's musical agenda in the *Laws* and archaic Greek practices, see Calame 2013.

when they move, so that this innate quality of their movement at the start of their choral education, whatever movement they perform, would make them naturally look like little bears.⁶⁹ Bears are animals that lend themselves particularly well to anthropomorphism since they can walk on two legs. [Judging from the pictures of standing bear cubs on figure 4, the claim is self-evident.](#)⁷⁰ According to the fourth-century CE medical writer Adamantius, who claims his work as based on Aristotle’s system of physiognomy through the intermediary of the second-century CE sophist Polemon of Laodike,⁷¹ bears were thought to be inherently clumsy:

“The greatest and more obvious signs when it comes to distinguishing the overall appearance are those which are similar to what is masculine or feminine or even to one of the other animals. For each character of each animal is apparent and resembles its appearance. For example, the character of a lion is spirited and brave and such is its appearance, and the character of a leopard is elegant and irascible and cunning and treacherous, cowardly as well as bold, and its shape shows resemblance to these traits. The character of the bear is savage-thinking, deceitful, and clumsy. And the particular character of the other animals is apparent in the same way.”⁷²

In addition to its apparently indisputable clumsiness, the bear is also considered to be *ōmōphrōn* (ὠμόφρων, savage-thinking), a striking choice of word, given that the adjective *ōmos* (ὠμός, raw) implies, like the word *agrios*, a lack of culture.⁷³ This excerpt is most interesting for another reason. In this passage Adamantius frames the similarities between animals and humans in terms of *ēthos*,⁷⁴ an internal property made manifest by one’s body and demeanour which is something that the dancer, through his art, is able to reproduce by imitation.⁷⁵ Admittedly, this passage is rather late, but, since it is supposed to be based on Aristotle’s work, we may infer that the inherent concept of movement – in terms of *mimesis* – remained stable throughout antiquity.

6. The civilizing dimension of Artemis

⁶⁹ Imitating or embodying animals in a chorus seems to have been quite usual, especially in comedies. As Rocconi 2017: 182 notes, “[...] dance (sometimes even though not accompanied by vocal songs and performed by soloists) was [...] used to imitate all kinds of animals and animal movements”. According to Ath. 14.629–630 and Poll. 4.102, dances imitating animals (be it an owl or a lion, for instance) were called *morphasmoi* (μορφασμοί, animal dances).

⁷⁰ [Should we add the ref again?](#)

⁷¹ Adamantius 1.1.

⁷² Polemon of Laodike 2.2 (trans. I. Repath): Τὰ δὲ μέγιστα τῆς διακρίσεως τῆς ἐπιπρεπείας / καὶ φανερώτατα τὸ τῶ ἄρρени εὐκότος ἢ τῶ θήλει καὶ / τῶν ζώων τῶν ἄλλων. ἕκαστα γὰρ ἦθη τῶν θηρίων / ἐκάστου καταφανῆ ἐστὶ τοῖς εἶδεσιν ἦθεσι τοῖς ἐκείνοις † / ἕκαστα εὐκότα, οἷον λέοντος ἦθος θυμικὸν καὶ ἄλκι/μον καὶ τὸ εἶδος τοιοῦτον, παρδάλεως δὲ <ἦθος> / ἄβρὸν καὶ ὀργίλον καὶ λοχητικὸν καὶ ἐπίβουλον, δειλὸν / ἅμα καὶ θρασύ, καὶ ἡ μορφή τούτοις εὐοικεν· ἄρκος δὲ / ὠμόφρων, δολία, σκαία. καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις δὲ ζώοις κατὰ / τὰ αὐτὰ ἐπιφαίνεται τὸ οἰκεῖον ἦθος.

⁷³ C.f. Chantraine 1968–1980, s.v. ὠμός.

⁷⁴ For some methodological considerations about animal metaphors based on affordance, see Franco 2014: 166–169.

⁷⁵ See Bocksberger forthcoming.

As we have seen, several ancient authors, such as Plato or Polybius, compare the man (or woman in our case) who is not trained in *mousikē* to a wild animal. This idea might come from the preparation of festivals such as the Brauronia in which mastering one's body would be part of becoming a self-controlled adult, and thus an important aspect of education. In each of the extant aetiologies for the *arkteia*, the bear gets killed. This suggests that perhaps at the end of the ritual the girls stopped being seen as bears because they had learnt to comport themselves and were able to move according to the standards of society, thereby becoming or being one step closer to becoming a marriageable young girl. In the various aetiologies given in the scholia to explain the rite, this would be reflected by the presence of a tamed (*hēmeros*) bear. *Hēmeros* is a particularly interesting choice of an adjective given that it means 'cultivated' when applied to plants and 'civilised or gentle' when applied to humans. Artemis is even called herself *Hēmera* ('Ἡμέρα, which I would be inclined to translate as 'the tamer', with an active meaning) in a cult linked to Lusoi in Arkadia.⁷⁶ We also find the epithet *Hēmerē* (Callim. *Hymn* 3.236) or *Hēmerasia* (Paus.8.18.8).⁷⁷ In both cases, the aetiology for the cult is linked to her 'taming' young girls.⁷⁸ The passage in Callimachus is most striking, as we are told that she is called *Hēmerē* 'because she took from the girls their wild spirit' (Callim. *Hymn* 3.236: οὐνεκα θυμὸν ἀπ' ἄγριον εἴλεο παίδων). Therefore, it seems reasonable to posit that Artemis might be called the 'tamer' because of the civilising dimension of her cult which would involve the teaching and learning of choral dancing. This interpretation finds support in Chantraine (s.v. ἥμερος), as he states that the lexical field of *hēmeros* and its derivatives is truly distinct from that of *damnēmi* (δάμνημι, to tame, to break in, to subdue, to conquer).⁷⁹

7. Conclusion

In view of my arguments regarding the civilising dimension of Artemis, her connection to choral dancing,⁸⁰ and the crucial role of dance in ancient education, I suggest that the festival of the *arkteia* was the culmination of a period of time in the life of a young girl during which she learnt mastery over her own body while serving as Artemis' bear. During this time, probably the four-year interval between each Brauronia, the *arktos* would come sporadically to the sanctuary in order to train in choral dancing. Her training might have involved racing,⁸¹ attending to the sanctuary, and perhaps

⁷⁶ IG 5(2).398.

⁷⁷ In the passage, Pausanias seems to link the epithet Ἡμερασία to the pacifying action Artemis had once on the daughters of Proetus. In his aetiological account, he explains how the goddess healed them of their madness.

⁷⁸ The epithet Ἡμέρα is also found in Bacchylides (10.39), but it is left unexplained in the poem.

⁷⁹ Chantraine 1968–1980, s.v. ἥμερος: 'Le sens de tous ces mots [i.e. ἥμερος and its derivatives] est franchement différent de celui de δάμνημι et ses dérivés, qui signifient « réduire, soumettre, dompter ».'

⁸⁰ Artemis is very often linked to choral dancing in literature. For instance, in Callim. *Hymn*. 3.13–17, still a child, the goddess asks her father Zeus to grant her the privilege of having sixty Oceanids as *choritides* (χοριτίδες, female choral dancers). The *choros Artemidos* (χορός Ἀρτέμιδος, chorus of Artemis) seems to be an early Greek hexametric formula (Hom. *Iliad* 16.182; *Hymn Aphrod.* 117), while a scholiast explains, in Σ in *Iliadem* 20.39a2, that 'Apollo and Artemis are masters of the chorus' (ὁ δὲ Φοῖβος καὶ Ἄρτεμις χορῶν δεσπόζουσι).

even learning how to wear gracefully the *krokotos*.⁸² The festival of the Brauronia would mark the end of her childhood and the beginning of her adolescence. My interpretation places its emphasis on the role that dance education played in the contemporary socio-cultural milieu, in which it was standard practice for girls to participate in choral dancing at a young age. I argue that the girls were likened to bears because of the clumsiness of their untrained movements, prior to their dance education, compared here to the ‘wild’ movements of animals. The device of the bear, then, signifies the girls’ position in their transition from the ‘wildness’ of childhood to a condition of civilised adulthood. Previous scholars have tended to read these phenomena as representing the taming of young girls by a patriarchal society. My interpretation, by contrast, emphasises that the girls themselves learnt how to master their bodies through the discipline of choral dancing. I read these phenomena as empowering, rather than oppressive, and thus this interpretation returns agency to the girls by thinking of their training as the acquisition of a new capacity, rather than the loss of some more ‘natural’ condition. This explanation highlights the significance of dance in archaic and classical choral education, and more generally it shows one way in which dance played a fundamentally important pedagogical role in Athenian society.

⁸¹ The *krateriskoi* show evidence of running activities, but it is, of course, uncertain whether the figures represented on them are the *arktoi*.

⁸² See Σ in *Lysistratam* 645 in which the scholiast says that Artemis ordered every Athenian girl ‘to attend to the sanctuary (or her statue) and wear the *krokotos*’ (περιέπειν τὸ ἱερόν κροκωτὸν ἱμάτιον φοροῦσαν).

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