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## The Acrobatic Body in Ancient Greek Society

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Graduate Program in Classics

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

In this thesis I collate the textual, artistic, and material evidence for acrobatics in sport and spectacle in Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic Greece, and analyze gymnastic performances with regard to their respective socio-cultural contexts. I develop the theoretical perspective that all body movement is socially qualified in order to demonstrate how the extreme manipulations of an acrobatic body carry particular social meaning: in sport, the male acrobatic body approaches superhumanism, and in spectacle the female acrobatic body approaches subhumanism. I argue, on the one hand, that men's tumbling took place at the early Panathenaia festival in Athens, both in martial dances and in competitions featuring springboards and equestrian acrobatics. Artistic representations emphasize a participant's controlled aerialism while he wears armour, and thereby express his prowess as a warrior-athlete. On the other hand, acrobatics was also a kind of spectacular 'wonder-making', and I argue that the abnormal physical alterity shown by women's acrobatic bodies rendered the performer a marginalized and unnatural 'other'. I use two particular feats, namely, tumbling among upright swords and acrobatic stunts on a potter's wheel, as case studies for my argument that the spectacular acrobat embodied her social inferiority. In this thesis I offer the first complete treatment of Greek acrobatics in which careful consideration is given to the relationship between social realities, text, and art. It is also the first to use sociological theories of the body as a method for approaching ancient Greek representations of acrobats' extreme physicality.

## Keywords

Acrobatics, Tumbling, Bodies, Sport, Spectacle, Dance, Performance, Embodiment, Wonder-making, *Thaumato poiia*, Thaumaturgy, Wonder, Xenophon, Gendered Bodies, Ancient Greece.

## Epigraph

She with daring grace did plunge forthwith  
heedless care; and I beyond my wits!  
T'ward the daggers, blades naked bared,  
and all watched rapt for how she fared.

Hands splayed flat upon the ground,  
breadth of space 'tween swords she found;  
with effortless spring upright once more,  
away the death those untouch'd points bore.

Before relief left our chests it froze,  
and then sighs to gasps and chokes arose;  
for backward she bent into the ring,  
and back through the blades her form did fling!

A knotless arch her body seemed;  
lacking spine and frame, I deemed.  
as if of willow her figure bent,  
til sure was I her limbs had rent.

But ever smooth she danced unfailing,  
among the swords with long hair trailing.  
Wonder our minds had thunder struck:  
she lived! We clapped; O blessed luck!

- J. Vickers

## Dedication

To my wife, Christine, and my son, William,  
who make up the better portion of our three-ring family circus.

## Acknowledgments

During the course of the research and writing for this thesis more people than I can recount helped along the way, some in small ways and others tremendously. First and foremost, I offer my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Aara Suksi. From start to finish Aara has been a constant source of support, encouragement, insightful (and indispensable) criticism, and helpful suggestions. This project owes much to her, and I am extremely grateful for her expertise; I cannot thank her enough. My thanks also go to the members of my thesis supervisory committee, Christopher Brown and Charles Stocking. Chris has been, and continues to be, an academic role model and has given much inspiration; Charles has helped in more ways than I can list, but especially for argumentation, and the theoretical perspectives in the first three chapters. Thank you, too, to the members of the examination committee, Robert Barney, Mark Golden, and Bernd Steinbock, who agreed to read and evaluate the project.

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Finally, I thank my friends and family. Of my fellow students at Western, Ashley Fox, Tim Wright, Ben Moser, Ally Dawson, and Mary Deminion all deserve particular acknowledgement for more than I can adequately express. My inlaws have given support and love throughout my entire graduate career. My parents and siblings can never be thanked enough, even if they do not realize the degree to which they actually helped. Finally, my ultimate thanks and acknowledgement go to my wife, Christine (without whose love and encouragement this thesis would not have been written), and my son, William (who was born in the middle of it and reminds me why life is so wonderful). It is to them that I warmly dedicate this project.

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## Abbreviations

For most Greek names, I use the conventional English spelling (e.g. Achilles, Ajax, etc.). I transliterate most Greek words, but sometimes reproduce the original language if it seems warranted; my apologies if some of my choices to use the Greek seem arbitrary. Abbreviations for ancient authors and texts follow the standards for academic discourse in Classics, and/or the standard abbreviations in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (fourth edition). Other abbreviations are listed here.

*CVA*: *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*.

*CEG*: Hansen, P. ed. 1989. *Carmina epigraphica Graeca saeculorum VIII-V a. Chr. n.* Berlin.

*DAA*: Raubitschek, A. E. 1949. *Dedications from the Athenian Acropolis*. Cambridge, MA.

*D-K*: Diels, H. and Kranz, W. 1951. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (6th ed). Berlin.

*FGrH*: Jacoby, F. et al. 1923- *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*. Berlin and Leiden.

*IG*: 1903- *Inscriptiones Graecae*.

*K-A*: Kassel, R. and Austin, C. eds. 1983-98. *Poetae Comici Graeci*. Berlin.

*LSJ*: Liddell, G. H., Scott, R., and Jones, H. S., eds. 1968. *A Greek-English Lexicon* (9th ed. with supplement). Oxford.

*PMG*: Page, D. L. 1963. *Poetae Melici Graeci*. Oxford.

*SEG*: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*. Leiden.

*SH*: Lloyd-Jones, H. and Parsons, P., eds. 1983. *Supplementum Hellenisticum*. Berlin.

## INTRODUCTION

“Anyone with time on their hands and a desire to make a substantial contribution to human knowledge will find few more promising areas of investigation than Greek bring-your-own ‘contribution dinners’, Attic cakes, the ‘second’ dessert table, the consumption of game, gambling, perfumes, flower wreaths, hairstyles, horse-racing, pet birds and all the various entertainments of the symposium, including slapstick, stand-up comedy, and acrobatics.”

-James Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (xix)

### **‘How can my body move?’**

The exploration of the body and its capabilities is part of the lived experience of being human. Acrobatics is one answer to the question ‘how can my body move?’ In that regard it is also a medium of self expression and self discovery, if the body is an expression of the self (as the social theorist Merleau-Ponty put it, “I am my body”).<sup>1</sup> To explore the utter limits of physicality is to explore the place of self in the world – and to offer the world a way to evaluate that self. But the degree to which bodies might refine their acrobatic skills, the ways in which those bodies are manifest in society, and the public institutionalization of events, shows, and circumstances that feature them, are culturally dependant social constructs. Not all persons and places at all times celebrate (or condemn) extraordinary physical achievements, and certainly not in the same ways. Therefore, acrobatics offers not only an investigation of how one’s body can move, but how one can move one’s body in, among, and around a particular social and cultural milieu.

There were acrobatic professionals in ancient Greece. There were acrobats who could contort their bodies, stand on their heads or hands, perform back-flips and somersaults, leap from horses, and dance among upright sword blades. There were acrobats at the Greek equivalent of the modern ‘circus’, and at private parties, and at street-corners; there were also acrobats who performed in athletic competitions, in group dances, and onstage in drama. They were men and women, elite and slaves, athletes and entertainers;

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<sup>1</sup> Merleau-Ponty (1945, 151).

one and all, they operated ‘extreme’ bodies, which challenged physical limitations. The purpose of this thesis is twofold: first, to identify and analyze where and how acrobatic activities occurred in ancient Greece, as either a form of sport or a form of spectacle. No project has yet argued categorically for acrobatics as a variety of athletics or entertainment. My second, and more important goal, is to evaluate the social significance of the performative bodies, with particular attention to the relationship between body and society. In this way, I not only posit an answer to the question ‘how did the Greeks move their bodies?’, but also contribute to our understanding of Greek social history and perceptions of the body.

### **Bodily Semiotics**

αἱ δὲ γυναικεῖοι κινήσεις καὶ θρύψεις καὶ χλιδαὶ κολουστέαι παντελῶς. τὸ γὰρ ἀβροδίαιτον τῆς περὶ τὸν περίπατον κινήσεως καὶ τὸ “σαῦλα βαίνειν”, ὡς φησιν Ἀνακρέων, κομιδῆ ἑταιρικά.

Feminine movements and languishing and luxuries must be altogether curtailed. For delicacy of movement, in the case of walking around and ‘going with swaying steps’, as Anacreon says, is quite like a prostitute. (Clem. Alex. *Paid.* 3. 11. 69 = Anacreon 458 *PMG.*)

The walk that Clement describes is a rolling gait that emphasizes the movement of the backside. It is not exclusive to humans: Semonides likens the same step to how a horse moves (fr. 18: καὶ σαῦλα βαίνων ἵππος ὡς †κορωνίτης), and in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* it is used of the waddle of a tortoise (28: σαῦλα ποσὶν βαίνουσα). However, when the subject is human the connotations tend to be sexual. Anacreon also uses the expression elsewhere to describe the motion of Bacchantes (411 *PMG*: Διονύσου σαῦλαι Βασσαρίδες),<sup>2</sup> and in a highly eroticized epigram in the *Anthology*, a bathing woman similarly rolls her hips and buttocks (Rufinus *AP* 5.60.3-4 = 21 Page).<sup>3</sup> A provocative ‘wagging’ or gyrating of the hips or buttocks was also a notable feature of lewd dances, such as the *kordax* of comedy or the *sikinnis* of satyr plays: e.g. the satyrs in Euripides’

<sup>2</sup> Kapparis (2011, 232) cites a few examples where the word ‘Bassarid’ is used for a prostitute (e.g. Lycophron 771-2 and Suda β 141, among others).

<sup>3</sup> *AP* 5.60.3-4: πυγαὶ δ’ ἀλλήλαις περιηγέες εἰλίσσοντο, | ὕδατος ὑγροτέρῳ χρωτὶ σαλευόμεναι, ‘her curvaceous buttocks rolled with one another, rippling with flesh more fluid than water’; cf. 5.104. See McClure (2003, 120-4) for the ‘hip sway’ and similar movements for *hetaerae* specifically. Alciphron describes a contest among prostitutes that involves shaking the buttocks (4.14.4-5).

*Cyclops* dance σαυλούμενοι (40).<sup>4</sup> But in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, an exchange between Loathecleon and Lovecleon gives the 'hip shaking' a slightly different nuance (1168-73):

{Bδ.} εἶτα πλουσίως  
 ὠδὶ προβὰς τρυφερόν τι διασαλακόνισον.  
 {Φι.} ἰδοῦ. θεῶ τὸ σχῆμα, καὶ σκέψαι μ' ὅτῳ  
 μάλιστ' ἔοικα τὴν βάδισιν τῶν πλουσίων.  
 {Bδ.} ὅτῳ; δοθιῆνι σκόροδον ἡμφιεσμένῳ.  
 {Φι.} καὶ μὴν προθυμοῦμαι γε σαυλοπρωκτιᾶν.

Bd: Next, go walk like the wealthy - just so - with some dainty sashay.

Ph: Voilà! Watch the movement, and consider which rich person's step mine is most like.

Bd: Whose? One who's dressed a blister with garlic.

Ph: Actually, I'm enthused for the swaggering asshole walk.

Here, the comedy of exaggeration is obviously at play, and Lovecleon's rolling gait must have been embellished for laughter. Still, the humour derives not only from his physical performance, but also from the social background on which that performance relies.

σαυλοπρωκτιᾶν likely carries sexual connotations of penetration, and here that 'swaggering asshole walk' is the walk of the rich, who can be specifically identified by a τρυφερός ('dainty') movement.<sup>5</sup> That is to say, if a man walks with this rolling gait that emphasizes (or advertises) the bounce of his derrière, he must be a soft and effeminate man, and (therefore) rich.<sup>6</sup> Clement, too, understands the motion as an effeminate and explicitly sexual one, but associated with *hetaerae*, not the wealthy. In both cases, then, the motion is one that encodes social meaning. It is, so to speak, translated according to a broader semiotic code that operates on a societal level. One is able, theoretically, to identify a person's role and status in society on the basis of how he or she moves his or her body. In other (more famous) words, "the properties and movements of the body are socially qualified".<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that Clement or Aristophanes or anyone else could instantly identify another's social status or role by simple observation of appearance,

<sup>4</sup> For a prime example of the supposed lasciviousness of a hip-rolling walk or dance, see Ar. *Thesm.* 1174 (with Austin and Olson's comments *ad loc.*). On the dance of satyr-play, see Lawler (1964a, 89-91), Seidensticker (2003, 110-17), Shaw (2014, 26-55), Griffith (2015, 42-43).

<sup>5</sup> See LSJ s.v. τρυφερός and Hesychius s.v. σαύλωμα. Macdowell (1971, *ad loc.*) has helpful comments, as do Sommerstein (1983, *ad loc.*) and Biles and Olson (2015, *ad loc.*)

<sup>6</sup> Since, one supposes, wealth leads to luxury, which leads to softness and effeminacy.

<sup>7</sup> Bourdieu (1990, 71).

movement and bearing, as if with some Sherlockian skill, but that the *idea* existed that the movement of an individual's body could represent, characterize, or signify something about that individual and their relationship to the greater social world around them.

I use the case of the 'hip-swaying walk' as an example from Greek culture of corporeal semiotics, which can be specifically associated with social status. The sociological theory that bodies carry social meaning (espoused by Bourdieu, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and many others), is well-known and has been applied as an interpretative model to many subjects in the ancient world. I use the same concept as a general theoretical framework for my thesis on acrobatic bodies in ancient Greece. For all the different acts or stunts, ancient interpretations of the acrobatic body and its phenomenological properties must be socially and culturally conditioned. But how? The acrobatic body is an 'extreme' body; does it thus convey extreme meaning? To what extent can we identify the reality of acrobatic feats that occurred in Greece, much less the significance of movements that are now all but impossible to reconstruct? What even is 'acrobatics' for the Greeks?

As we consider evidence for bodies from ancient Greece, we might become accustomed to seeing static figures in vase paintings, or to reading about bodies that seem to move only in a tableau as we traverse the literature in which they are represented. But the lived, everyday movement of bodies was, of course, an ubiquitous part of life, something so quotidian that it is rarely remarkable. These were not static forms in their time, but dynamic and evocative bodies. Thus a study of the most extreme physical motions and their relationship to the socio-cultural milieu in which they are inextricably bound, those movements we might label 'acrobatic', is so revealing of that milieu because they are *not* ubiquitous. The nature of acrobatics is to push the human form to explore the farthest possibilities of movement. Acrobatics is, practically by definition, an 'extreme' activity, far removed from everyday motion. On this point my analysis of the significance of acrobatic bodies as extreme bodies, and my argument that they reflect and reveal important social values and ideologies of Greek culture, owes much to Paul Bouissac's scholarship on the semiotics of modern circus performances. In a series of influential publications, Bouissac explains how the semiotics of the circus, and circus bodies,

correlate to society and act as a form of ‘multimodal discourse’.<sup>8</sup> I note his influence on my project throughout, but here emphasize a particular model of interpretation. In an account of the execution of ‘actions’ by circus bodies, Bouissac identifies four categories: i) implementation of the possible, ii) non-implementation of the possible, iii) non-implementation of the impossible, iv) implementation of the impossible.<sup>9</sup> The evaluation of an action as belonging to one of these categories (which can apply to all bodies and their actions, not just circus bodies) depends on the goal of the performer, and the perceived quality of his action by a spectator. For example, a clown who attempts an extremely difficult acrobatic feat but fails would execute the ‘non-implementation of the impossible’, and seem to confirm for the spectator that the attempted action is, in fact, ‘impossible’. If an acrobat *did* accomplish that same feat and confound the spectator’s belief, it would be an ‘implementation of the impossible’.<sup>10</sup> This category is the fuel that drives the engine of the extraordinary, which aims to impress an audience by showing them something astonishing.

Whether in Greek sport or spectacle, the acrobatic body proves the degree of its difference by the extent to which it implements the possible or the impossible. In the execution of its actions, the acrobatic body is a temporarily ‘abnormal’ body, whose movement can potentially extend as far as humanly possible from a hypothetical ‘midpoint’ in a spectrum of ‘normal’ motion. At the ends of that spectrum are ‘superhuman’ and ‘subhuman’ movement; both are an evaluation of the manifestation of ‘abnormal’ in or by a body, but polar opposites. But acrobatic motions, no matter how far they explore the question ‘how can my body move’ and approach those poles, are still human movements manifestly made possible in their execution, even if they seem to implement the impossible. Their extremeness, I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, makes them a prime locus for the communication of social meaning; a body in utmost physical expression carries utmost symbolism for the culturally informed observer.

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<sup>8</sup> See especially Bouissac (1976), *idem* (2010), *idem* (2012).

<sup>9</sup> Bouissac (2010, 146).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Bouissac (2010, 146): “circus acrobatics suggest that the competence of the acrobats [in performing feats] so much exceeds the average competence of their audience that it amounts to implementing the impossible”.

This brings me to my overarching arguments for this thesis, guided by the theoretical frame that bodies convey social meaning: the body of the acrobat in Greek sport is represented as verging on the superhuman, and the body of the acrobat in Greek spectacle is represented as verging on the subhuman. The kind of acrobatic ability demonstrated in these two contexts is very different: sport shows an aerial body and stunts that rely primarily on physical strength, while spectacle shows a grounded body, which performs feats highlighting flexibility. At least, as I will argue, this is how the two are *represented* in our sources, and those representations of different acrobatic achievements carry social implications that parallel the different contexts in which they are enacted. The acrobatic body in sport is the body of an elite athlete, presented to an audience as a warrior whose might and physical prowess promise civic benefit and thus confirm his high social status; the acrobatic body in spectacle is the body of an entertainer, typically female, presented as a hired performer, whose pliability and physical contortions are showcased as frivolity and marginalize her as a non-ideal ‘Other’. The perceived superiority and inferiority of acrobatic bodies, abnormal and extreme, are intricately linked with the performer’s position in a hierarchy of social dominance and subordination.

### **Areas of Inquiry**

There is, significantly, a wealth of evidence for acrobatic bodies in the Greek world, particularly from the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Textual references occur in multiple genres, from epic poetry (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 18.603-6 and *Od.* 4.17-19) to historiography (e.g. Hdt. 6.129) to philosophy (e.g. Pl. *Euthyd.* 294e, Xen. *Symp.* 7.2-3); visual evidence takes the form of terracotta statuettes, marble sculptures and especially vase paintings.<sup>11</sup> Many of the acrobats seen in this array of sources are dissimilar, as are their particular forms of acrobatics, but others are strikingly similar. One of the most pressing concerns when approaching such a diverse corpus of material is what to make of these similarities and differences. Why are some acrobats more alike than others? How does any given acrobatic body show its ability? The correct contextualization of source material is vital for answering these questions, and is one of my major goals in this

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<sup>11</sup> For material evidence see now Todisco (2013).

project, since the social and cultural significance of the respective ‘abnormalities’ of acrobats, whether in reality of practice or in representation, depends, at least in part, on performance context. I have attempted to assemble as much of this evidence as is reasonably possible in my study. In some cases it derives from Athens in the Classical period, while in others from elsewhere during the Hellenistic and Roman periods. I focus my arguments on Athenian evidence, in order to situate my study within the larger discourse about bodies and social status, for which Athens is central, but also use the wealth of evidence from Hellenistic South-Italy. I exclude from my study evidence for acrobatics before the late Archaic period (such as bull-leaping in Minoan or Mycenaean culture), and do not cite all instances of acrobatic bodies in Geometric art. I use Etruscan, Roman, and late Hellenistic material only comparatively. Awareness of time and place are critical for my arguments regarding social status and the significance of the acrobatic movements (although it is interesting that in many instances a synoptic view of the collective evidence from these different contexts suggests a degree of cultural similarity). Throughout the thesis, I use both visual and literary evidence for my arguments, as they are available. It is vital to consider them in conjunction for understanding the cultural presence and significance of acrobats and their bodies. I remain cautious about comparing evidence from either group explicitly, as if art illustrates texts, or literature explains art. Instead, I recognize them both as products of the same culture and society, but each with their own functions, effects, agendas, and traditions.

For my study of acrobatic bodies as social bodies, I focus my arguments on acrobats only in the contexts of ancient Greek sport and spectacle. Here it is necessary to clarify a few points of terminology. For his monograph *Sport and Spectacle in the Ancient World*, Donald Kyle’s working definition of ‘sport’ as “public, physical activities, especially those with competitive elements, pursued for victory or the demonstration of excellence” gives a succinct meaning.<sup>12</sup> The notion of ‘competitions’ is worth emphasizing, since events in Greece can be more strictly called ‘athletics’ than ‘sport’; they involve contestation for a prize (*athlon*). I give further regard to some of the differences between ‘sport’ and ‘athletics’, and the place of acrobatics within them, in Chapter One and Two.

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<sup>12</sup> Kyle (2007, 10). Kyle notes that this definition is narrower than the Greek notion of ‘sport’, though, which would also include activities such as hunting, dancing, games, and exercise.



The meaning of ‘spectacle’ deserves more immediate explanation. Spectacle for the ancient Greeks was a broad category, and again Kyle is worth citing: “in Greek, a *thea* or *theoria* (θέα, θεωρία) was a sight, spectacle, viewing, wonder, or something worth seeing, from θεάομαι or θεωρέω, which meant to look at, gaze on, view, to view as spectators”.<sup>13</sup> There are many opportunities for spectatorship in the breadth of that description, and indeed, the Greeks even considered certain athletic and sporting events a kind of ‘spectacle’.<sup>14</sup> In my discussion, however, I focus on a very specific kind and venue of spectacle: the performance genre known as *thaumatopoiia*, ‘wonder-making’. This is the ancient Greek version of the ‘circus’, blended with elements of ‘carnival’, ‘fair’, ‘freak-show’, ‘midway’ and ‘sideshow’. It is a presentation of ‘wonders’, which offers ‘spectacle’ in arguably its most sensational form. I fully elaborate on the significance of *thaumatopoiia* in Chapter Four. Ancient Greek sport and spectacle pair well together: both thrive on the display and viewing of action, accomplished by bodies that strive with will and purpose to showcase the results of rigorous training. They both present, so to speak, ‘professional’ acrobatic bodies, whose physical expertise are made manifest in very different ways, occur in very different contexts, and serve very different purposes. Consequently, they have disparate social meanings. In the following chapters, I identify where and how acrobatics took place within the nexus of sport and spectacle.

Acrobatic actions and movements also happened in other contexts. I discuss choral dance only briefly for its connection to athletic events, although choruses in other contexts (e.g. in drama or musical/artistic competitions) could include acrobatic choreography. I also do not consider at length any of the potentially ‘gymnastic’ motions that are represented as occurring in play or komastic revelry, such as the horseplay of satyrs or the antics performed by drunken symposiasts. There have been several studies already that deal with this topic (though not with respect to acrobatic bodies specifically), and I limit my scope instead to ‘professional’, planned performances in mostly non-theatrical settings, which have received comparatively little scholarly treatment.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Kyle (2007, 10).

<sup>14</sup> Kyle (2007, 10).

<sup>15</sup> For the drunken and acrobatic play of satyrs, see especially Carpenter (1997) and Lissarrague (1990); for komast dancers and symposiasts, see e.g. Smith (2010) and Shaw (2014, 33-46).

A second set of definitions is needed for ‘acrobatics’ and ‘acrobat’, and an account of what I judge to constitute evidence for acrobatic bodies. In modern parlance, acrobatics can be defined as “the practice of performing physically unusual feats with one’s body (sometimes with an apparatus)”.<sup>16</sup> It is the abnormal action of a body, often intimately associated with professional acrobats at circuses and their ‘death-defying’ stunts. But that definition could also apply to gymnastics (i.e. as it occurs in athletic competitions), although gymnastics and acrobatics are typically considered different pursuits: one is sport, the other spectacle. Likewise in ancient Greek, although “physically unusual feats” can occur in different settings, the same basic verb is used regardless of context to denote ‘acrobatic’ actions: κυβιστᾶν. The verb properly means ‘to plunge headlong’ and is used for both bodies and objects.<sup>17</sup> Semantically, it is similar to the English ‘tumble’, which means either gymnastic tumbling or tumbling head over heels. When used in a clear context of willful bodily stunts, the verb does not specify any particular type of acrobatic manoeuvre. While in modern gymnastics and circus a broad range of terms covers numerous actions, each implying an exact and precise movement (tucks, pikes, layouts, handsprings, aerials, round-offs, etc.), there is no such technical vocabulary in Greek. κυβιστᾶν covers any and all acrobatic movements, characterizing them with a head-foremost movement. Acrobatic performers might also ‘twist’ (στρέφειν) ‘bend’ (κάμπτειν) or ‘whirl’ (δινεῖν), but these words, too, lack specific technical meaning.<sup>18</sup>

In short, there is no perfect Greek equivalent for the English word ‘acrobatics’. Neither is there an equivalent for ‘acrobat’. We see instead a distinction in the language between athletic and spectacular acrobatic performers less on the basis of their respective actions than their performance contexts. In sport and some cases of choral dance, the ‘acrobat’ is really a κυβιστητήρ, which is better translated as ‘tumbler’; in spectacle, the ‘acrobat’ is both an ὀρχηστρίς (‘dancing-girl’) and a θαυματοποιός (the generic professional title for a ‘wonder-maker’).<sup>19</sup> Thus in some ways it is inaccurate to speak of ‘acrobats’ in ancient

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<sup>16</sup> McClelland (1996, 3). McClelland claims that through history acrobatics has been “devoid of meaning”, a stance I challenge throughout my study, with respect to ancient Greek acrobatics at least.

<sup>17</sup> LSJ s.v. κυβιστάω

<sup>18</sup> See Naerebout (1997, 282-3) for a vocabulary of such and similar terms in dance. For the particular relationship between these words and acrobatics, see below in Chapter Four.

<sup>19</sup> A *kybisteter* is *not* simply a ‘leaping solo dancer’, as Edwards argues (1991, 23) when he claims that “there is no warrant for thinking they [the *kybisteteres* in Homer’s *Iliad* (18.603-6)] are somersaulting

Greece or ‘acrobatics’, since neither of those terms can apply perfectly. Rather, we should, strictly speaking, refer to ‘acrobatic’ bodies or actions; however, for the sake of clarity and composition I tend to refer to acrobatic athletes as ‘tumblers’ and to their accomplishments as ‘tumbling’, and to spectacular acrobatic entertainers as ‘acrobat’ and their feats ‘acrobatics’.

Given that authors use the verb κυβιστᾶν and its derivatives for actions in both sport and spectacle, I use it, and the action it denotes, as the foundation for my judgement of what bodies are or are not acrobatic (at least for the purposes of the current study). That is to say, if a body is represented in art or text as *inverted* and ‘plunging headlong’, and if that inversion is not accidental (e.g. a trip or stumble, or falling off/from something) or a clear case of a different activity (e.g. diving into water, being thrown in wrestling, or supernatural flight), I consider it to be a potentially acrobatic or tumbling body. Unless it is otherwise obvious that a scene or description involves acrobatics or tumbling, an upside-down body is the *sine qua non* for any assumption or evaluation. On an Apulian plate from The Hague, the woman who stands upright and balances a spinning top on her arm is *not* an ‘acrobat’;<sup>20</sup> when Ares and Hermes dance (παίζουσιν) in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (200-201) there is no indication that their movements are ‘acrobatic’;<sup>21</sup> a Hellenistic bronze statuette of a woman who stands on both feet and gazes slightly upward is *not* an ‘acrobat’, despite the title of a 1925 article by Pierre Couissin, *Statuette de Femme Acrobat du Musée de Rennes*.<sup>22</sup> More examples of mislabelled acrobatics in scholarship could be cited. Needless to say, inaccurate identification skews interpretation of the cultural and social significance of acrobatic bodies. Unlike the performers themselves, a method for classification must remain firmly grounded in the evidence, and we must avoid imaginative reconstructions of *possible* movements, which are not

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tumblers or acrobats”. If nothing else, the meaning of the root verb indicates their movement. The word ἄρνευτήρ, though later glossed as synonymous with *kybisteter* (e.g. Eustathius *comm. Il.* 3.921 on 16.742), has a meaning closer to ‘diver’ in context (Hom. *Il.* 12.385, 16.742, *Od.* 12.413; Herod. 8.42; Arat. *Phaen.* 1.656).

<sup>20</sup> The Hague, Schneider-Herrmann coll.198; *contra* the statement of Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 502) that she is “an acrobat mime dancer”.

<sup>21</sup> *Contra* Lonsdale (1993, 53): “judging from parallel passages in Homer that mention pairs of tumblers (*kubistētēre*), their movements are acrobatic”.

<sup>22</sup> Couissin (1925/6).

represented explicitly.

### **A Brief Methodology for the Analysis of Movement**

I note the date of Couissin's article on the bronze statuette because it derives from a time when scholarship on ancient dance and movement was focused primarily on recreating choreography, even to the point of describing the illustrated movements of dancers in vase paintings as representative of arabesques, pliés, soubresauts, etc.<sup>23</sup> The tendency to reconstructionism was often excessive: the case in point is Couissin's assumption about the 'acrobat' statuette: "l'acrobate ne danse pas, mais elle va danser".<sup>24</sup> For visual material in particular, there are at least two obvious problems with this approach: first, without a conscious methodology, it utilizes static imagery to recreate moving bodies; second, it treats the source material, especially vase paintings, as photographic 'snapshots' of the ancient world, rather than artistic responses and representations of that world. Scholars since have rightly questioned the validity of this method. Frederick Naerebout is outspoken in warning against using images of dance to reconstruct any particular *schemata* and choreography.<sup>25</sup> In presenting his arguments against this practice and suggesting the ultimate futility in reconstructing Greek movement from images, Naerebout claims that "any image ... can give only an inadequate and often ambiguous impression of life and movement. Ancient Greek movement is lost and we have to accept that it is".<sup>26</sup> There is an element of hard truth here that must be extended to literary descriptions of movements, too, for textual evidence is as much a manufactured 'impression of life' as a visual image: we are limited consistently by the fact that these are only representations and manipulations of social realities or arguments about them, all for other authorial or artistic agendas. For social and cultural historians, Truth is ephemeral and elusive, and one could argue, as Naerebout does, that it no longer exists; there is only representation. Fortunately, representation is at least as interesting and valuable as Truth, and while Greek movement may be 'lost' to a certain extent, the

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<sup>23</sup> See especially Emmanuel (1896), and Prudhommeau (1965).

<sup>24</sup> Couissin (1925-6, 132).

<sup>25</sup> Naerebout (1997, 234-40), Naerebout (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Naerebout (1997, 239); emphasis in original. See also Smith (2014, 231-2).

investigation of it is not fruitless. In the case of acrobatic movements, their abnormality makes them even more worthy of study as representations, since their ‘extreme’ qualities render them potent sites for the existence and communication of socio-cultural ideologies. Visual evidence of acrobatic bodies is, therefore, a prime candidate for Naerebout’s suggestion of an alternate methodological approach to ancient imagery: “imagery, whether in conjunction with textual material or in isolation, should be used as source in its own right. In order to avoid the many pitfalls outlined above, I suggest that we have to make a fresh start and inquire after the ‘meaning’ of images, in an anthropological-semiotic sense”.<sup>27</sup> It is this methodology that I apply to my study of the acrobatic body in ancient Greek society and its semiotic importance.

Another important methodological point needs to be stated here: for the most part, the perspectives, evaluations, and representations of acrobatic bodies that are present in the primary material (text or art) are those of the *spectators*, not the performers. The sources I use for my interpretative arguments about the ‘meaning’ of acrobatic bodies in sport and spectacle are primarily made by the group that observes extreme actions. That group is the ‘normal’, and those they represent the ‘abnormal’. Accordingly, the system of values and ideologies that I identify as conveyed by the representations of the acrobatic body are those held and judged by the ‘spectators’, i.e. the creators of the evidence. In almost all cases, they are the ideologies promoted by elite men, which embrace the ‘positive’ almost-superhumanism of athletic tumbling and reject the ‘negative’ almost-subhumanism of spectacular contortions. The perspective of these elite males makes their own social group the standard against which others are held, and evaluated. We must remain aware that authors and artists have their own agendas.

### **Overview of Thesis Contents**

It is a convention among scholars of Greek sport that both tumbling and acrobatics are generally not considered athletics, but sideshows and amusing diversions. In my first three chapters, I rebut that conventional stance and argue that tumbling was indeed

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<sup>27</sup> Naerebout (1997, 240).

present in Greek sport and athletics. I approach the issue from two angles: first, I reconsider in its respective contexts the evidence for male tumblers, in order to determine whether artists and authors associate them with sport or spectacle; second, I apply the theoretical perspective that all body movement is socially qualified to argue that acrobatic athletes staked a claim to high social status through the successful completion of aerial stunts. In Chapter One, I demonstrate that martial dances could include acrobatic choreography. I begin with a case study on the martial dancing featured at the start of Book Six of Xenophon's *Anabasis*, where the tumbling of a mercenary soldier contributes to the overall superiority of the army of the Ten Thousand in a literary construction that has them triumphant through *mousike*, not combat (6.1.1-14). Other military dances could also feature tumbling; I turn next to evidence that links tumbling and the pyrrhic dance, which was among the competitions at the Panathenaia festival in Athens, and conclude that it is probable that in it, too, dancers might integrate acrobatic choreography. In this case, then, acrobatic bodies were present in Greek athletics, as one contributive part of an event. Given that participation in the pyrrhic dances at the festival was limited to Athenian citizens, the physical and social superiority of athletes correspond to, and are expressed through, performed acrobatic movements.

In Chapter Two I analyze artistic evidence for individual male tumblers, who are shown leaping backwards off a 'springboard' apparatus and performing an airborne rotation. I argue that the scenes show neither dance nor spectacle, as typically claimed, but depict an athletic event. Four late 6<sup>th</sup> – early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. vase paintings show springboard tumblers, all of whom wear or carry an assortment of military gear (helmets, greaves, shields, spears, etc); the martial overtones here can be compared to those present in some other athletic events, where physical excellence in connection with militaristic ability signifies a participant's promise for accomplishments in war, and the consequent civic benefit. A key feature of these vase paintings is that they represent the athletic tumbler airborne and inverted; by a comparison with other figures who have control over their own bodies while they 'tumble' in the air, I argue that this depiction emphasizes a level of self-control and power that approaches superhumanism. But the most persuasive evidence for recognizing tumbling as an athletic event is also the most debated: in Chapter Three, I address the issues related to a scene of tumbling on a Panathenaic

amphora, which scholars have alternately classified as sport or spectacle. The inscription on the vessel denotes that it is a ‘jug for the tumbler’, which I take as a self-reference to the amphora as a prize vessel in an athletic event at the Panathenaia. In the image are both a figure on a springboard and a tumbler-warrior on the back of a horse, and I focus on the iconographic significance of the latter. From a comparison to other figures in art depicted upright on horses, and to literary descriptions of men who stand on horses, I determine that equestrian tumbling was not one of the spectacles of *thaumatopoiia*, but is consistently represented as something heroic and martial, and generally associated with men of high social standing. Here again, extreme physicality in sport translates to social supremacy.

By far more common than evidence for athletic tumbling is that for spectacular acrobatics, the focus of Chapter Four. In order to determine the socio-cultural meaning of any given acrobatic entertainer’s performative body, I first establish a methodology for the interpretation of that array of evidence. While others have considered acrobatics as spectacle, none have contextualized it as a variety of *thaumatopoiia*, ‘wonder-making’, which I argue is vital for an analysis of representations of movements and their ‘meanings’. After establishing my method for classifying particular literary references or vase paintings as ‘thaumatopoietic’, I propose that representations of acrobats (particularly those in an identifiable and ideologically rich ‘generic pose’) emphasize the abnormal body as a medium of expression for the values and ideologies pertaining to *thaumatopoiia*. I discuss and analyze the evidence for ‘wonder-making’ at length, and my arguments here that manmade ‘wonders’ are treated in literature as innately inferior to supernatural ‘wonders’ lays the foundation for my further points about the supposedly lesser bodies and statuses of professional acrobatic performers. My arguments regarding the ‘meaning’ of the acrobatic body in spectacle are thus firmly situated in its socio-historical context. As a spectacle of the particular brand of ‘wonder’ evoked in *thaumatopoiia*, the abnormal physical difference shown by the acrobatic body renders the performer a marginalized and unnatural ‘other’.

In Chapter Five, I consider two particular varieties of acrobatic stunt as case studies, namely, tumbling in and amongst upright swords, and feats atop a spinning potter’s

wheel or turntable. In an evaluative analysis, I consider the practical realities of these feats and apply my arguments regarding *thaumatopoiia* and the acrobatic body to assess the social significance of the performative bodies. For both, I bring together for the first time all the textual and artistic evidence, which allows for more nuanced accounts of the activities' practical realities. In sword-tumbling, I argue that in overcoming the peril the acrobat operates as a symbolic body, and enacts a narrative of the triumph of life over death. Despite her skillfulness, however, which evokes wonder from spectators, the acrobat only participates in a staged simulation of a life-death scenario. Xenophon in the *Symposium* explicitly contrasts the comparative value of bravery in warfare with bravery in sword-tumbling, the latter being a commercial transaction (2.11-13). Here, the purpose for which one uses his or her body is intimately connected with social standing; the sword-tumbling acrobat is represented as only risking the threat of swords because she is a hired performer. In my discussion of physical feats performed on potters' wheels, my second case study for thaumatopoietic acrobatics, I show that the acrobat's bodily self-control is moderated in two ways during performance: her motions are restricted to the wheel, and that wheel is spun or controlled by assistants. Although she works at the 'creation of wonders', the acrobat herself is also symbolically objectified as she appropriates a machine normally used for commercial production. This process, which simulates manufacture for the sake of spectacle, is one of 'conspicuous non-production'<sup>28</sup> and so complements the supposed lower value of manmade wonders in contrast with supernatural ones. Thus, the acrobat's objectified and nearly 'subhuman' body is analogous to her social inferiority.

There are far-reaching benefits to the study of acrobatic bodies, since peripheral and 'abnormal' bodies reveal a good deal about the culture and society in which they exist. Acrobatics conveys and reflects communal social values, albeit transmitted now to us through the lens of the individual/group representing them, and its extreme bodies amplify the expression of those values. The significance of their movement is situated in the same ideological system that communicates the 'meaning' of other physical forms and motions. In other words, the ideals or non-ideals that acrobats and tumblers embody

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<sup>28</sup> My sincere thanks to Prof. Randall Pogorzelski for this phrase.



are Greek. As such, they are a fertile field of research for understanding Greek bodily and cultural values in general, which can relate to areas of study well beyond acrobatics (performance, theatre, erotics, athletics, social history, etc.). James Davidson considered Greek acrobatics a ‘promising area of investigation’ for ‘a substantial contribution to human knowledge’;<sup>29</sup> I will not claim to have achieved that lofty goal, but I do hope to have taken the beginning steps toward such a contribution.

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<sup>29</sup> Davidson (1997, xix).

## CHAPTER ONE: Tumbling in Sport and Men's Martial Dance

"Competing in gymnastics is the greatest reminder of being alive as a human being."

-Raj Bhavsar, USA (men's gymnastics team), 2008 Olympic bronze medalist

### 1.1: Introduction

Just as the presentation of 'acrobatic' actions in modern times can occur in a range of settings (consider the gulf between an Olympic floor routine and an erotic pole dance), so too for the Greeks. For the 'acrobat' in Greece we see a fundamental, though sometimes blurred, differentiation between a 'tumbler' (*kybisteter*) and a particular kind of 'wonder-maker' (*thaumatopoiος*) who is skilled in spectacular bodily manipulations (see Introduction). The exploits of both can include elements of dance, and all three of these categories (tumbling, spectacle, dance) can combine in different degrees. In general, spectacular acrobatic displays by women are best characterized by their performed corporeal wonders, and do not take place in competition. Conversely, *kybisteteres* are generally men (though the verbal equivalent can apply to women's actions),<sup>30</sup> whose 'acrobatic' movements, I argue, can take place in choral or gymnic *agones*. This male tumbling would rightly belong to the ancient category of 'sport', as a type of physical activity in which participants exercise their bodies in the nude.<sup>31</sup> However, in certain contexts tumbling also belongs to what more strictly constitutes 'athletics', with respect to the particular sense of *athlon* as prize and contest for a prize. When male tumbling is competitive it can be part of sport, dance, and/or athletics, while still remaining visually spectacular to some degree. Therefore in a manner comparable to almost any other athlete, the competitive tumbler possesses and controls a body that displays masculinity and excellence (*arete*) by means of the successful execution of his activity. As such, he stakes a claim to elevated social status through his movement and the social context of that movement. The tumbling athlete is like a hero.

<sup>30</sup> E.g. the *orchestris*, dancer, in Xenophon's *Symposium* 'tumbles' in and out of a hoop of swords (2.11: ἡ ὀρχηστρίς ἐκυβίστα τε καὶ ἐξεκυβίστα...).

<sup>31</sup> For the potential to consider dance as part of *ta gymnastika* see for example Pl. *Laws* 795d; cf. Xen. *Sym.* 2.17-19; Ath. 14.629c. For Spartan dance and sport see Christesen (2014a, esp. 147-8 on the *Gymnopaideiai*); cf. Ceccarelli (1998, 102-5).

## 1.2: Athletics and Ideology

I begin my discussion of tumbling athletes and the ideologies they embody with an overview of the ideology of Greek athletics more broadly. Ancient athletic competitions were, in effect, a kind of ‘mass media’ display for the transmission and reaffirmation of shared cultural values among different city states at Panhellenic events. Greeks would come from every corner of the Hellenic world to participate in the stephanitic cycle (Olympian, Nemean, Pythian, and Isthmian Games), where the atmosphere of competition and religious festival, strict rules of participation, and even the nature of the events all reinforced their collective culture. Whether a wrestler came from Athens or Croton, for example, he followed the same terms of engagement with his opponent and could only achieve victory as sanctioned by formal convention (i.e. the ‘rules’ of the sport). As Lucian’s *Anacharsis* makes clear, athletics were a point of ‘Greekness’, in which the titular Anacharsis, a foreigner, has trouble finding value or purpose.<sup>32</sup> The athlete himself was also central to the presentation of Greek values; as David Larmour asserts, “the athlete’s body is an ideological focal point where masculinity and power meet. It ‘embodies’ those qualities which are fundamental to the conception of the Greek male citizen in the prevailing cultural structure, such as strength, piety, courage, and honesty”.<sup>33</sup> It was by means of his nudity, displayed in the moment of contest, that a competitor communicated these ideals.<sup>34</sup>

The movement of the athletes’ bodies in their respective events also conveyed a similarly broad or panhellenic message to the numerous spectators at the events, as the competitors struggled to prove their supremacy. Physical dominance and superiority over another individual or group of individuals was the end result for a victor, but the drama of the motion and interplay between athletes while they participated established a narrative of the journey to that result. In the contests, movement had meaning for those who watched

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<sup>32</sup> *Passim*, but Solon’s first response to Anacharsis is particularly illustrative of the idea that sport is something Greek (6): καὶ εἰκότως, ὦ Ανάχαρσι, τοιαῦτά σοι τὰ γινόμενα φαίνεται, ξένα γε ὄντα καὶ πάμπλου τῶν Σκυθικῶν ἔθων ἀπάδοντα, καθάπερ καὶ ὑμῖν πολλὰ εἰκὸς εἶναι μαθήματα καὶ ἐπιτηδεύματα τοῖς Ἕλλησιν ἡμῖν ἀλλόκοτα εἶναι δόξαντα ἄν, εἴ τις ἡμῶν ὥσπερ σὺ νῦν ἐπισταίῃ αὐτοῖς (‘but it is expected, Anacharsis, that the things happening would seem such as this to you, being foreign and entirely different from Scythian customs; and similarly it is likely that many of your lessons and pursuits would seem to us Greeks to be unusual, if one of us were to examine them as you are now’).

<sup>33</sup> Larmour (1999, 137).

<sup>34</sup> See also Christesen (2014b) on the democratizing message of a nude body in sport; cf. Christesen (2012).

from the sidelines. In a very basic way, the shared culture of the spectators meant that all those who watched interpreted or translated the meaning similarly. Speaking in broad terms, we can see this phenomenon in the evidence for the reception of fundamental sporting movements: for instance a distinction in combat sports between the one who is nimble or speedy and the one who is ponderous or slow might translate the former as intelligent or sneaky, the latter as uncultured or stupid, but strong;<sup>35</sup> or in the sign language in combat sports in which raising a finger signalled defeat, a motion of subservience that parallels the gesture of supplication (cf. the kneeling down in combat sports that signalled both defeat and supplication);<sup>36</sup> or finally the backward glance of a leading runner in vase paintings, to show he has outdistanced his opponents.<sup>37</sup> An example could be drawn from almost every sport. For this reason too, sporting contests are sometimes viewed as ‘dramatic’, or (more accurately) with narrative structure, in which two or more ‘protagonists’ strive for dominance.<sup>38</sup> In short, athletic movements tell a story that carries socio-cultural significance for the spectators.

This ‘mass media’ capability of sporting events to broadcast socio-cultural values must have been particularly strong in the tribal events at the Panathenaia. Here the message of success was more specific than at the stephanitic games, since the restriction to Athenian participation only in certain events meant that it was impossible, in effect, for Athens to lose the contest. Regardless of which tribe took home the prize, the spectators could take civic pride in the success of Athens as a whole. The importance of this civic message is indeed reflected in the fact that the Panathenaia unusually offered prizes for more than just first place finishes: second or even sometimes third place finishers also took a reward, and in musical events there might be prizes even for fifth place. In such a setting, the spectators could in theory go home feeling a sense of community, assurance of the superiority of their *polis*, and trust for its continued prosperity. The media display of athletic success, especially in the tribal events, is one that showcases the physical pre-

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<sup>35</sup> E.g. Theoc. *Id.* 22.27-135, Ap. Rh. *Arg.* 2.1-97; cf. Hom. *Il.* 23.710-737, Heliod. 10.31.

<sup>36</sup> On the body language of kneeling in combat sports, see Kratzmüller (2007, 101).

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Paris, Louvre F 277, Athens, NM 533. Cf. Schultz (2007, 60).

<sup>38</sup> Larmour (1999, esp. 134-170).

eminence of Athenian men.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, these events are almost all militaristic contests: the javelin throw on horseback, the *pyrrhiche*, the boat race, etc. A martial overtone is thus bestowed on the ideological meaning of the events: Athenian men not only possess excellence demonstrated through physical prowess, but can exploit their athleticism to positive use in war. The citizens of Athens are warrior-athletes, and Athens is a dominant political and military force.

It is against this background that we must view athletic male tumbling. As will be argued in Chapters Two and Three, male tumbling was likely an event at the early Panathenaia, perhaps a relic of the local festival games before their reformative overhaul in 566/5 B.C. Male tumblers are almost always depicted with some amount of military gear or in a martial context; evidently, their event was comparable to the warlike contests outlined above. This being the case, the message of male tumbling would also be comparable. What sets tumbling apart is how it pushes the boundaries of expectation for normal human movement. A tumbler's quintessential motion, it will be seen, is an airborne rotation of the entire body, similar to the airborne 'tuck' of modern gymnastics (an aerial somersault). This action challenges general conceptions of what is normal for a human body as that body reaches the limit of corporeal achievement and simultaneously stakes a claim to social standing through the semiotics of that movement: a male tumbler is, in the moment of his achievements, something approaching a superhuman.

### **1.3: Somatic Memory and Spectator Experience**

When we watch a body in acrobatic motion today, whether in the context of sport (e.g. gymnastics) or artistic performance (e.g. Cirque du Soleil), our immediate, individual, conscious, 'in the moment' response will probably not be experienced on the socio-cultural level, such as that hypothesized above for Athenians at the Panathenaia. That reaction is applicable to spectators en masse at a broader, social level in terms of a shared set of cultural codes. The experience of the individual spectator while seated in the bleachers or stands is, probably, at first a visceral or bodily one; we gasp, hold our

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<sup>39</sup> On Athenian ideology and the Panathenaia, see Neils (1992), Boegehold (1996), Kyle (1996), Shear (2001), Kyle (2007, 161-6).

breaths, feel anxious in the pit of our stomachs, avert our eyes, get lightheaded, feel our heart beat faster, etc. These are “tangible sensory reactions” in an engaged observer while an acrobat performs, often creating a “bodily tension” that results in release on the successful completion of a feat or routine.<sup>40</sup> This is the picture Peta Tait creates in her study of modern aerial circus acts (trapeze acts).<sup>41</sup> We can recognize the narrative structure that can be superimposed on acrobatic routines in general, as recognized by Paul Bouissac: normal life, obstacle, effort to overcome obstacle, success/failure.<sup>42</sup> The visceral experience of bodily tension dissolves when the ‘obstacle’, that is the acrobatic stunt, is completed. But Tait more fully explains spectator responses from a theoretical standpoint, in a study that offers edifying parallels to acrobatic and tumbling displays in the Greek world.

The level of spectator engagement in ancient acrobatics and tumbling was comparable to what Tait describes for present-day circus audiences. Acrobatics always had a ‘spectacular’ quality to it, and so an attentive and captivated audience is usually implicit. Sometimes we hear of their responses: the tumblers in Homer are part of what makes the crowd feel delighted (*Il.* 18. 604, *Od.* 4.17); the tyrant Cleisthenes is agitated by Hippocleides’ antics (*Hdt.* 6.129); a man who leaps between horses earns stares (*Hom. Il.* 15.679-86); a Mysian soldier tumbles in a dance ὥστε ὄψιν καλὴν φαίνεσθαι, ‘so as to appear a fine/noble sight’ (*Xen. Anab.* 6.1.9). The very fact that acrobatic displays were a variety of *thaumatopoiia*, ‘wonder-making’, implies that the audience watched avidly, as does the condemnation of these feats and stunts as reckless or dangerous (Chapter Four and Five). Vase painters also sometimes show engaged spectators, who tend to demonstrate either concern (Boston 67.861 [side A]), admiration (Paris, Cab. Méd. 243, Boston 67.861 [side B]), or erotic interest (Madrid L 199, Oxford 1945.43, Lipari 927).

The best evidence, though, is found in two of the most elaborate descriptions of acrobatics in ancient literature. In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, the troupe’s performances generally halt the conversation and generate new topics of discussion, and it is clear

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<sup>40</sup> Tait (2005, 142). Of course these responses extend well beyond acrobatic performances. For spectatorship of sport in the ancient world see especially Fagan (2011).

<sup>41</sup> Tait (2005, 141-6).

<sup>42</sup> Bouissac (2012, 47): see also Chapter 5.1.

throughout that the symposiasts are attentive to the performances and responding to them. They praise the initial music and sights (2.2), commend the performers for their skills (e.g. 2.9, 3.2) and one symposiast asserts that they ‘stir Aphrodite’ (3.1: τὴν δ’ Ἀφροδίτην ἐγείρειν). Tellingly, when the dancing girl tumbles in and out of the hoop studded with swords “those watching were afraid that she would get hurt” (2.11: οἱ μὲν θεώμενοι ἐφοβοῦντο μή τι πάθῃ). The symposiasts’ fear is indicative of their engagement, and would have been accompanied with a visceral reaction. Similar spectator engagement is found in the relatively lengthy description of acrobatics in Petronius’ *Satyricon*, from the Roman period. When acrobats perform at Trimalchio’s banquet, the host at least is apparently watching with rapt attention during the show (53.11-13), but all the guests and servants respond with screams as the boy falls, lest their party be spoiled by his death (54.1).<sup>43</sup> Obviously here there is a disidentification with the performer (see below), but nonetheless the requisite interest and physical response to action. Evidently, ancient spectators of acrobatic movements watched with the attentiveness necessary for the application of the theory that Tait lays out for the analysis of the spectator reaction in modern circus performances.

The theoretical framework for Tait’s analysis is grounded in Merleau-Ponty’s concept of ‘experience by experience’.<sup>44</sup> In other words, we the spectators watch a moving body, to some degree, as if *we* were performing, deriving the knowledge or estimation of how to execute the performed actions from our lifetime of past experiences with motility. Tait explains that spectators watching an aerial circus performance (or any living, muscular body) experience a sensory reaction in part because they viscerally ‘receive’ the moving bodies. When observing aerial performance, for example, “a spectator will ‘catch’ the aerial body with his or her senses in mimicry of flying, within a mesh of reversible body-to-body (or -bodies) phenomenology”.<sup>45</sup> This is not a physical ‘catching’ of a body, but a way in which the body “catches movement”, a “perceptual attunement [sic] and

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<sup>43</sup> Petron. 54.1: *non propter hominem tam putidum, cuius etiam cervices fractas libenter vidissent, sed propter malum exitum cenae, ne necesse haberent alienum mortuum plorare*, ‘not for the sake of a man so disgusting, whose neck they would happily have seen broken, but because it would have been a bad end to the dinner if they had needed to lament a stranger’s death’.

<sup>44</sup> A key concept explicitly written in *The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-Ponty (1968, 165)); for the concept see Diprose and Reynolds (2008, 160-1). Tait (2005) cites the phrase at 148.

<sup>45</sup> Tait (2005, 141).

engagement of a whole body that is orientated to others through its pre-existing history of movement, its motility”.<sup>46</sup> That is to say, we perceive muscular bodies with ‘kinesthetic empathy’, or an unconscious recollection of ‘somatic memory’ – how our own body can move or has moved – and apply it to the circumstance at hand.<sup>47</sup> We live *through* the performance, as it were, and there is a resultant communication between the acrobat’s and the spectator’s bodies. That communication often takes the form of “oscillating identification and disidentification with [the moving body’s] cultural identity”.<sup>48</sup> The level of identification will always be fluid, dependent on countless variables. As a general principle, one might postulate that the more the spectator is engaged in the activity, the greater he will identify with the performer’s body. But the extent to which he will engage with specific movements and motions is also dependent on his particular somatic memories, his prior experience in observing a similarly moving body, the way in which the performer moves from one instant to the next, the cultural and semiotic significance of those movements, the actual [dis]similarities in the status of spectator and performer, and many other factors. Furthermore, as Tait points out, a spectator might be equally drawn to intensely and viscerally engage with motions that are unfamiliar and not experienced by him, in which case he would strongly disidentify with the moving body, despite sensory engagement.<sup>49</sup> This activation or deactivation of somatic memory in a spectator has an important influence on that observer’s conscious evaluation of the performer’s action. To revisit the model of action and possibility formed by Bouissac that I outlined in the Introduction, it is in part kinesthetic empathy that determines the appraisal of an action as possible or impossible, and body of the performer as ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’.

There is evidence to suggest that fundamental concepts of the theory of somatic memory existed in the ancient world. Galen, the first writer to really consider musculature, describes the appreciation a person trained in physicality can have for another’s movements. From his experience in that subject, the ‘gymnastic’ man (ὁ γυμναστικός)

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<sup>46</sup> Tait (2005, 149).

<sup>47</sup> For ‘somatic memory’ see also Anderson (1998), whom Tait cites (2005, 146).

<sup>48</sup> Tait (2005, 141). On kinesthetic empathy, see e.g. Reynolds and Reason (2012). For an application of the theory of kinesthetic empathy to Greek choral dance, see Kurke (2012) and Peponi (2009), and further in my Chapter Four.

<sup>49</sup> Tait (2005, 147).



understands actions at a profound level, in a way that others do not (*De sanitate tuenda* 6.155.2-12 Kuehn):

καὶ συλλήβδην εἰπεῖν ἅπαντες ἄνθρωποι τεχνῖται τε καὶ ἄτεχνοι, διὰ τῶν σωμάτων ἐνεργοῦντες, ἀγνοοῦσι τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τὰς δυνάμεις, ὄρχησται ναυτίλοι τέκτονες ἀλιεῖς γεωργοὶ χαλκεῖς οἰκοδόμοι σκυτοτόμοι πάντες ἀπλῶς οἱ ὅτιοῦν πράττοντες. ἀλλ' ὁ γυμναστικός, ἀφ' ὧν εἶπον ὀλίγον ἔμπροσθεν ὀρμώμενος, εἰ καὶ νῦν πρῶτον εἴη θεώμενος ἡντινοῦν ἐνέργειαν, οὐκ ἀγνοήσει τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῆς, οἷον αὐτίκα τῶν ὄρχηστῶν αἱ σύντονοι κινήσεις, ἐν αἷς ἄλλονταί τε μέγιστα καὶ περιδινοῦνται στρεφόμενοι τάχιστα καὶ ὀκλάσαντες ἐξανίστανται καὶ προσσύρουσι καὶ διασύρουσι καὶ διασχίζουσιν ἐπὶ πλεῖστον τὰ σκέλη καὶ ἀπλῶς εἰπεῖν ἐν αἷς ὀξύτατα κινοῦνται, λεπτὸν καὶ μυῶδες καὶ σκληρὸν καὶ πυκνὸν ἔτι τε σύντονον ἀποτελοῦσι τὸ σῶμα.

And to speak comprehensively, all men, both skilled and unskilled, working with their bodies, do not know the effects of their functions; dancers, sailors, carpenters, fishermen, farmers, smiths, builders, cobblers, all who do any work. But the *gymnastikos* man, of those whom I previously mentioned, if now he should first observe any function, will not be ignorant of its effect. Such are the intense movements of dancers, in which they leap mightily and twirl around rapidly, twisting, and crouching down then leap up again, and straighten their legs and draw them apart, then split their legs as far as they can, and, in a word, by all the keenest movements which they make they render their body slender, muscular, hard, compact, and intense.<sup>50</sup>

It is from previous knowledge and experience that *gymnastikos* people are able to recognize movements and their effects on the body. Interestingly, Galen implies that the knowledge could be that gained either from personal experience in motility (i.e. participation in exercise or sport), or from research and study (as by a physician, for example [6.154 Kuehn]). Still, somatic memory appears to be triggered when the *gymnastikos* man observes intense dancing and appreciates, on the basis of his prior experience, the movements in a way that others cannot. Sensory perception is key to Galen's model (θεώμενος ἡντινοῦν ἐνέργειαν), as it is to the modern theory. The passage stands as an example that could apply to a variety of physical actions, encompassing sport and dance, but here the movements verge on the acrobatic and deserve some scrutiny.

<sup>50</sup> Translation following Green (1951, 90-91), with slight modifications.

Galen describes the movements as the ‘intense’ or ‘violent’ motions (σύντοννοι κινήσεις)<sup>51</sup> of dancers, informing us that vigorous acrobatic choreography occurred in Galen’s time.<sup>52</sup> “Leaping mightily” need not be acrobatic, but “swiftly whirling around while twisting” (περιδινοῦνται στρεφόμενοι τάχιστα) is probably less generic. Galen uses the verb περιδινώ elsewhere as an example of acrobatic activity, if one can do it without getting dizzy, in conjunction with using a *peteuron* and walking a tightrope (*Protrepticus* 9.6 = 1.20-21 K). We can compare the use of περιφέρω in Plato *Symp.* 190a to describe tumbling. δινέω is a common verb for the rotations of a tumbler or acrobat (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 18.606, Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.9, Pl. *Euthyd.* 294e), though it can apply to other dancers too (e.g. *Il.* 18.494).<sup>53</sup> στρεφόμενοι is perhaps not just ‘twisting’ in this particular context but something closer to ‘contorting’. Aristotle (*Problems* 5.32) uses ἐκστρέφω for something as tame as rubbing the left leg with one’s right hand, claiming that it is contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν), but Xenophon has διαστρέφω to qualify the contortions involved in the ‘imitation of hoops’ in acrobatic dance (*Symp.* 7.3). Eustathius, too, employs στρεφόμενοι to describe acrobatic dancing (com. *Il.* 18.605 = 4. 267.10 Van der Valk). The representations of the twisted and contorted bodies of sympotic performers on earlier vase paintings may illustrate a movement similar to that indicated by the verb (see Chapter 4.5). Considering that these actions all happen at some speed (τάχιστα), the dancing must be vigorous indeed. The ‘crouching and leaping up again’ (ὀκλάσαντες ἐξανίστανται) is once again not specifically acrobatic on its own. The words suggest any number of possible dance moves, but it is significant that after the Mysian soldier performs his somersaults in the *Anabasis* (6.1.9) his ‘Persian’ dance involves identical crouches and leaps (ὄκλαζε καὶ ἐξανίστατο). The action implied by προσσύρουσι καὶ διασύρουσι, ‘straighten their legs and draw them apart’ is unclear, but presumably

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<sup>51</sup> Green translates σύντοννος as ‘coordinated’. This might be the sense of the word in Libanius’ definition of dance as κίνησις τῶν μελῶν σύντοννος μέτα τινῶν σχημάτων καὶ ῥυθμῶν, ‘a *suntonos* movement of limbs among certain forms and rhythms’ (Lib. *Pro Salt.* LXIV 28, Foerster IV 437); cf. Ceccarelli’s translation of κίνησις σύντοννος as “movimento controllato” (1998, 13). In the Galen passage, however, the sense of σύντοννος is of intensity. For the particular force of σύντοννος in certain contexts of dance and music, see Borthwick (1970, 326-7).

<sup>52</sup> By the Roman period *orchestai* means ‘pantomime dancers’. The pantomime was the quintessential Roman dance style, but with an incredible range in form and meaning, practically able to include any kind of choreography.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. also Aeschines’ (3.167) description of Demosthenes ‘spinning himself about in a circle at the speaker’s podium’ (κύκλῳ περιδιῶν σεαυτὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος), which must be a ‘pirouette’, not any kind of tumble.

involves rapid movement of the legs. The ‘splits’ was a known *schema*, which Pollux tells us was performed in midair (4.105).<sup>54</sup> The acrobatic flair of the passage is summed up with an inclusive reference to any type of ὀξύτατα movement a dancer might perform and Galen finally tells us that all these vigorous motions make a body “lithe, muscular, hard, compact, and intense”. The adjectives provide a rare qualification of the body type of a serious acrobat/ acrobatic dancer, seemingly positive but we should note Galen’s condemnation of acrobatics elsewhere as ματαιοτεχνία ἢ κακοτεχνία, ‘useless craft or bad craft’ (*Protrepticus* 9.6 = 1.20-21 K).

It is no coincidence that Galen has chosen to describe a particularly acrobatic form of dancing in order to make his point. Acrobatics was consistently viewed in the ancient world as an ‘extreme’ type of movement. It pushed the limitations of human bodily expression like nothing else. By citing such motion, Galen is able to make his point about physicality most emphatically; the majority of people would not have the same level of kinesthetic empathy with these movements as a *gymnastikos* man, *viz.*, because of his lifetime of previous experience with exceptional motility. I have emphasized Galen’s discussion due to its specific treatment of acrobatic movement, in spite of its late date relative to my own study. Evidence of somatic memory can also be found in Classical Greek material. In his *Laws*, Plato’s Athenian interlocutor proposes that elders delight in the sport and festivity of youths’ dances ἐπειδὴ τὸ παρ’ ἡμῖν ἡμᾶς ἐλαφρὸν ἐκλείπει νῦν, ὃ ποθοῦντες καὶ ἀσπαζόμενοι τίθεμεν οὕτως ἀγῶνας τοῖς δυναμένοις ἡμᾶς ὅτι μάλιστ’ εἰς τὴν νεότητα μνήμη ἐπεγείρειν (‘since our nimbleness now is leaving us, desiring and welcoming which we thus make contests for those particularly able to rouse us towards youthfulness by means of recollection’). The elders clearly experience spectatorship with somatic memory; their own youthfulness is not only recalled, but awakened; they feel ‘nimble’ once more, not only because they remember their own dancing, but because they identify with the bodies of the performing youths. Plato’s presentation of this phenomenon deserves treatment in its own right and I mention it only briefly here to confirm that the Greeks had a sense of the theory of kinesthetic empathy.

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<sup>54</sup> The ‘splits’ is illustrated on two archaic vases: Athens, NM 536 (CC 571) and one in Basel, Widmer Collection; cf. Hesychius s.v. σχίσμα.

A central tenet of the theory is that the spectator will experience a certain degree of blurred identification with the performer. That is, a spectator not only feels a bodily or visceral reaction to the performed movement, derived from recollection of his past motility, but simultaneously and subconsciously ‘lives through that movement’, as if he were himself the one performing. There is an element of ‘embodiment’ in the perception of movement. As mentioned, the degree of dis/identification is ever fluctuating, and varied among different spectators depending on their individual and personal lifetime of gained experience. However, this does not mean that generic interpretations on broad levels are invalid. Indeed, because motion is laden with cultural meaning, the opposite is in fact true. The systems of kinesthetic empathy and body semiotics are mutually reinforcing. Tait asserts that “a body’s kinetic action...contributes to cultural identity”, but also claims that “the social identity of bodies in action give sensory motion imagery its meaning”.<sup>55</sup> For example, if a Greek wrestler throws his opponent, he is interpreted as someone socially dominant; conversely, because that participant is indeed an elite (as most Greek athletes were), the throw can also *confirm* his social superiority.<sup>56</sup> The two theoretical interpretations of action go hand in hand. What this means for the dis/identification process as an aspect of spectatorship is that the process is unquestionably a socio-cultural transaction. For athletic male tumblers, it cyclically reinforces the semiotic meaning of movement: the tumblers present themselves as warrior-athletes by competing with military accoutrement and performing martial actions, and so the spectators perceive them; the spectators also, to some degree, identify themselves as warrior-athletes. The first process recognizes the positive social meaning in a male tumbler’s actions, while the second extends the positive response to the collective whole. In the context of the Panathenaia festival and its celebration of the city, the spectators see a display of extreme physicality linked with martial prowess, which they interpret as indicative of the man’s ability in war and therefore also their city’s and citizenry’s greatness, if the event was like others in limiting participation to Athenians only. Furthermore, their subsequent civic pride potentially accompanies self-pride, for they have identified with the tumbler’s actions and feel as if they, too, can perform great

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<sup>55</sup> Tait (2005, 146).

<sup>56</sup> As Mary Douglas (2005, 79) puts it, “bodily control is an expression of social control”.

deeds on behalf of the polis. I emphasize here a hypothetical response in Athenian male spectators, but the spectator experience would, of course, be rather different for any women, slaves, children, or foreigners who happen to be watching. For any from these groups, the potential for inter-subjective identification would be mitigated by differences in social standing and previous bodily experiences. Presumably, too, there would be fewer foreigners in the stands at Athenian-only events at the Panathenaia, but any who were present might dis-identify with Athenian athletes simply on account of not being from Athens themselves.

I apply this theory of body phenomenology throughout the chapter as I present and analyze the surviving evidence for male tumbling from the Classical period. Acrobatic choreography could feature in martial dances, the most notable example being in Xenophon's *Anabasis*; I argue that it is here included as part of a choreographic program of martial entertainment, which substitutes for actual combat in the narrative. Next, I consider the possible presence of tumbling in the *pyrrhiche*, the quintessential militaristic dance which was also an event at the Panathenaia festival. In the following two chapters I argue that there was a separate event in tumbling at the Panathenaia. At both the *pyrrhiche* and tumbling events, Athenian spectators might potentially identify with the performers, as outlined above. The combined analysis of movement and meaning reveals that the male tumblers likely earned prestige and stature from their activity.

#### **1.4: Dance in Book Six of Xenophon's *Anabasis***

In Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the Ten Thousand treat Paphlagonian envoys to a veritable Greek symposium, complete with entertainment. The amusements are limited to martial dances, all described in detail by Xenophon and almost entirely performed by various soldiers from within the Greek army itself (6.1.1-13). One of these performances includes virtuoso tumbling. I argue that the sequence of dances is purposefully crafted to create a choreographic narrative wherein dance substitutes for actual battle; the Greek army 'defeats' the Paphlagonians with dance, not war. The result of the dance-battle simulation is a triumph of culture and *mousike* that adds a new dimension to the Ten Thousand's constantly fluctuating status as a quasi-*polis*. We must approach Xenophon's account of

the tumbling first on its own terms, then within this larger interpretative framework. The question is not just how the tumbling happens, or what constitutes tumbling, but how Xenophon uses it in his narrative.

At the start of Book Six of the *Anabasis*, the mercenary army of the Ten Thousand are delayed at Cotyora in Paphlagonia as they struggle to return to Greece. In need of food, some of the army survive by plundering the local area. The Paphlagonians respond with guerrilla-style tactics, harassing the army during the night and even taking prisoners (6.1.1). Soon, the leader of the locals sends ambassadors to the Greek soldiers in order to establish concord, and his envoys are treated to a dinner/symposium (6.1.3: ἐπὶ ξένια δὲ ἐδέχοντο αὐτούς). After libations and paeans, writes Xenophon, some Thracians rise and dance in armour (6.1.5) in accompaniment to the *aulos*, leaping high and using their swords. One eventually ‘strikes’ another in the dance and the stricken man falls with technical skill (τεχνικῶς πῶς). The Paphlagonians cry out in alarm and the fallen Thracian, now stripped of his arms, is carried out by some comrades while the victor sings a war-song. Despite the consternation of the guests, the ‘dead’ dancer was not harmed (6.1.6: ἦν δὲ οὐδὲν πεπονθώς), as Xenophon assures the reader. Next, the Aenianians and Magnesians perform the ‘*karpaia*’, which imitates the confrontation of a farmer and robber through pantomimic choreography.<sup>57</sup> The former sows his field and drives his oxen, fearful of the robber who soon arrives. He picks up his weapons and fights to protect his beasts, but in the end the robber binds the man and leads them all away (6.1.8: καὶ τέλος ὁ ληστής δῆσας τὸν ἄνδρα [καὶ] τὸ ζεῦγος ἀπάγει). ‘Sometimes’ (ἐνίοτε δέ), we are told, the opposite happens, but the phrasing suggests that this is an alternative ending in other renditions of the dance. Next, a Mysian soldier mimes combat first against two opponents, then one. He proceeds to whirl, tumble, and do the ‘Persian’ dance, which involves repeated crouches and leaps (6.1.9-10).<sup>58</sup> After the Mysian, the Mantineans and some other Arcadians, outfitted as finely as possible in their military

<sup>57</sup> There is almost no other evidence for the ‘*karpaia*’ dance; other references derive from this passage in Xenophon: see Ath. 1.15, Hesych. κ 863 (cf. κ 739), Phot. s.v. καρπαία, Suda s.v. καρπαία. See also Ceccarelli (1998, 20 n. 46).

<sup>58</sup> The ‘Persian’ dance might have been similar to the modern Russian Cossack dance. It involved squatting low, and ‘squat’ or ‘crouch’ (ὄκλασμα) was a synonym for it (Pollux 4.100, Σ Ar. *Thesm.* 1175). For this dance see also Xen. *Cyr.* 8.4.12, Ath. 10.434e-f, 10.629d, Ar. *Thesm.* 1175; cf. Heliod. *Aeth.* 4.17 and Autocrates fr. 1 K-A. See also Lawler (1942, 60-61) and Borthwick (2015, 94 and 100).

gear, dance in accompaniment to a martial rhythm just as they would in a religious procession (6.1.11). Xenophon now informs us that the Paphlagonian ambassadors ‘were indignant that all the dances were martial’ (6.1.12: δεινὰ ἐποιοῦντο πάσας τὰς ὀρχήσεις ἐν ὄπλοις εἶναι). In response to their resentment, the Mysian persuades an Arcadian to bring out a dancing girl, who admirably performs a pyrrhic dance after being suitably equipped with a light shield. Everyone applauds, and the Paphlagonians ask whether Greek women fight alongside men. The response is affirmative, and the soldiers claim it is in fact women who routed the King from his camp (6.1.13). With this, the evening’s events come to an end.

The episode is a curious one in the *Anabasis*’ narrative, a rare instance of a cultural event among the Ten Thousand (cf. the athletic contests at 4.8.27). Scholars have noted that the scene differentiates Greek and non-Greek in order to display the former’s supremacy. The jest that concludes the night’s entertainment, namely that Greek women defeated the Persian king, is sometimes seen to epitomize this idea. Michael Flower, for instance, argues that the purpose of the joke is to either make the Paphlagonians afraid or “to serve as a timeless example of how simple it is for Greeks to defeat Persians”, with comic sting.<sup>59</sup> The humour of the age-old joke works on a zero-sum scale for the reader, putting down the Paphlagonians while aggrandizing the Greeks, and invites us to align with the goals and interests of the Ten Thousand. In this way it operates under the theory that communal laughter (here, shared by Greeks and reader) promotes group cohesion at the expense of the object of ridicule.<sup>60</sup> However, it is more than just the joke at the end of the symposium that affects the reader’s experience. As Paola Ceccarelli points out, the humour largely depends on previous emphasis on the Paphlagonians’ rusticity. These gullible country folk are ignorant of the nature of the sophisticated war-dance and, by syllogism, do not know how Greeks actually fight.<sup>61</sup> The cultural contrast between

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<sup>59</sup> Flower (2012, 185-6); cf. Lane Fox (2004, 190-1) for a similar argument.

<sup>60</sup> Freud (1901, 194-200) first outlined the theory, which James Robson (2009, 54), summarizes: “laughing at the same things can help individuals to identify with one another and therefore cohere as a unit (a process which can often involve there being an ‘us’ who are doing the laughing, in contrast to a ‘them’ who are being laughed at)”. For an application of this theory to Old Comedy, see Robson (2009, 51-55) and Henderson (1970, 10-11); cf. Halliwell (2008, 1-50) on Greek laughter in a shame culture and its contribution to divisions of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

<sup>61</sup> Ceccarelli (1998, 20-21). Ceccarelli reduces the acrobatic element of the dance to “spectacle”.

Greeks and Paphlagonians is present throughout the scene, not just at its conclusion.<sup>62</sup>

The entire episode has a programmatic role to play, as do the individual dances.

Xenophon's description here is in fact one of the lengthiest extant accounts of ancient choreography, and provides us with a good idea of the dances' symbolism. In a program of choreographed movement, the Greeks 'defeat' their foes without ever fighting. The mere display of martial ability and *mousike* is enough to intimidate their opponents. The dancing is an *agon* of sorts, and the mercenary dancers are like triumphant warriors on the battlefield, representative of the superiority of the whole army.

In the first dance, the mock battle of the Thracians, Xenophon almost immediately demonstrates that the Paphlagonians are ignorant of martial dance, for they do not understand that the 'defeated' dancer is only feigning death.<sup>63</sup> When they cry out in alarm for him, though, the literary effect is for the reader to associate the Paphlagonians with the vanquished because they empathize with him, as if their partisan in battle had fallen to a superior enemy. At this point the mimetic performance is no longer Thracian versus Thracian, but becomes Greek versus Paphlagonian. We are then told that the victim is despoiled of his arms and carried away as if dead, and we can imagine the ambassadors' distress at this symbolic action. The natives are already aligned with the 'losing' side in the confrontation. The second dance, the mime of the farmer and the robber, can be seen as representing the actual conflict between the Ten Thousand and the Paphlagonians most explicitly. The 'robber' represents the Greek mercenary army who plunders the land, and the 'farmer' represents the Paphlagonians. The premise of the story suggests this correlation, but so too does the language employed. The word 'robber', ληστής (6.1.8), recollects the Greeks' plundering as recorded in the book's opening lines, οἱ δὲ καὶ ληζόμενοι ἐκ τῆς Παφλαγονίας (6.1.1: 'some raided from Paphlagonia'). The struggle over cows (βοῦς) recalls the Greek success in pillaging from the natives, since to begin the symposium the hosts even sacrifice some of these cattle (6.1.4: θύσαντες δὲ τῶν αἰχμαλώτων βοῶν). This reading helps explain the curious ἐνίστε δέ, noted above: in the version of the *karpaia* that the Aenianians and Magnesians dance, the robber is victorious, but on other occasions the opposite is true. Considering the likelihood that the

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<sup>62</sup> For the cultural importance of the dancing episode see also L'Allier (2004).

<sup>63</sup> For weapon dances mimetic of combat, see Wheeler (1982).



*karpaia* was a dance for vegetative fertility, hence its name, it is odd for the one who sows the land to be conquered. We would expect him to protect his crops and animals successfully, and so for the dance to symbolize production, fecundity, and security.<sup>64</sup> And indeed, Xenophon makes sure to inform us that ‘sometimes’ the story told by the dance has the opposite conclusion. Why should he mention the discrepancy? It seems the performance in the *Anabasis* is a variation, perhaps introduced to glorify the cause of the Greek army and emphatically display their triumph over the native Paphlagonians, or even to promote a degree of conciliation between the two by recognizing in the narrative two potential outcomes, if not in the action itself.

The next dance is that of a Mysian soldier, whose imitation of the combat of ‘two men opposed’ is actually mimetic of three, namely the Mysian fighting off two attackers.<sup>65</sup> At another point he mimes facing off against a single foe. The Mysian is apparently victorious in these confrontations, who can be thought to represent the Paphlagonians if we continue the model established in the first two dances.<sup>66</sup> In any case, the end result is a mercenary soldier who remains standing against the odds. He does not show weariness but exuberance and energy, at another point performing a demanding dance with acrobatic virtuosity. The Mysian concludes by performing the ‘Persian’ dance and crashing his shields together percussively. This energetic dance (σύντονος at Pollux 4.100) could apparently be indicative of joy, according to Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (8.4.12), and so perhaps embodies the soldier’s celebrations over his ‘defeated’ foes. The Persian king danced it on occasion, Duris tells us (*FGrH* 76 F5 *ap.* Ath. 10.434e), but apparently so did a hired prostitute at the end of Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* (1175).<sup>67</sup> Perhaps, then, it was a dance broadly associated with the East. At the same

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<sup>64</sup> As often for other weapon-fertility dances, at least in their primitive origins: see Lawler (1964a, 106), Lonsdale (1993, 141), Ceccarelli (1998, 109-113). *The Hymn of the Courtes* provides a good example (*IC* III.2.2.24-30).

<sup>65</sup> Pace Lendle (1995, on 6.1.9/10).

<sup>66</sup> The fact that the two opponents were not even physically represented in the ‘combat’ might refer to the natives’ guerrilla style tactics (6.1.1).

<sup>67</sup> In the *Thesmophoriazusae* it is unclear whether the text refers to *the* ‘Persian’ dance or *a* Persian dance, if indeed to any dance at all; the reference is to Persian flute music (ἐπαναφύσα Περσικόν). The fact that the characteristic ‘crouching’ does not occur suggests it is not *the* ‘Persian’ dance. Furthermore, the performance in the comedy is meant to be sultry, but no other reference to *the* ‘Persian’ gives it this air. Unless there is a joke here, perhaps one that suggests the infamous Persian *habrosune* according to the

time, the performance of it by a member of the Ten Thousand signifies the army's domination in Persian territory to the point that they have subsumed the Eastern cultural *mousike* under their own.<sup>68</sup> It is significant, too, that the other accounts of the 'Persian' dance do *not* mention the element of crashing shields together, nor indeed any weapon at all. Admittedly, we have little evidence to make any certain claims here, but it is possible that Xenophon makes the 'Persian' a martial dance for this particular instance only, or at least capitalizes on an usual variety of it; either of which would rub salt in Paphlagonian wounds. For the mercenary soldier to perform thus in jubilant response to successful combat over an Eastern ethnicity is bravado, if not mockery.

Finally, the Arcadians do indeed perform a celebratory war-dance to conclude the emblematic dancing, one which does not display battle itself but usually occurs in a festive procession for the gods. Presumably, such dances might be performed in thanks for successful campaigns and/or in prayer for victory in the future.<sup>69</sup> Xenophon now mentions that the ambassadors have a strong response to the shows, being indignant/upset (δεινὰ ἐποιοῦντο), even astounded (ἐκπεπληγμένους), that all the dances were done in arms. The jest that follows the slave-girl's *pyrrhiche* adds insult to simulated injury.

I have argued that the evolution of the evening's entertainment substitutes for proper combat and predicts what would have happened if the Paphlagonians had not sued for peace.<sup>70</sup> Every dance in this demonstration plays an important role in a broad choreographic narrative, which expands beyond a single dance to become a sophisticated program. The series of dances, taken together, indicates the performers' martial, physical, and even cultural superiority. Xenophon's comparison in his *Oeconomicus* of the need for *taxis* in both war and choruses seems to be realized (Xen. *Oec.* 8.3-7), as does Socrates' supposed statement, possibly apocryphal from Athenaeus, that 'those who

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Greeks, the prostitute might only be intended to perform a Persian dance, or a generic dance with Persian-style music, given after all that she is dancing to seduce a Scythian (*contra* Σ Ar. *Thesm.* 1175).

<sup>68</sup> Vase paintings show crouching weapon dances, but this does not mean for certain that they are the 'Persian' dance; cf. the 'lowering' (ταπεινωσις) Plato includes as a generic movement in a *pyrrhiche* (*Laws* 815a), where the description he gives is more appropriate to *any* given weapon dance than a pyrrhic specifically. See also Ceccarelli (1998, 71-2).

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Wheeler (1982, 229-30) and Lonsdale (1993, 165).

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Lonsdale (1993, 142) for the suggestion that the dancing in the *Anabasis* is organized by whether it is mimetic or not, a reading that complements my interpretation (first mimetic of battle, then simply celebratory).

honour the gods most finely with choruses are best in war' (fr. 3 West<sup>2</sup> = Ath. 628e). Despite the army's triumph, however, there may be cause to question if the episode is truly a conquest by Greek culture over the East. Anton Bierl claims that at the banquet "all six presentations are staged by people from Greek marginal areas and represent to a certain extent only a marginal Greekness".<sup>71</sup> If this is so, is Hellenism really victorious? First, a correction is needed, as Bierl's statement is not strictly accurate: the Mantineans and Arcadians are hardly marginal (Mantineia is part of Arcadia, the central area of the Peloponnese), nor are the majority of the dances. From a cultural perspective, the Thracians' dance is almost generic, tellingly denied a name, and the Arcadian procession is distinctly Greek. Moreover, rather than concentrating on the individual ethnicity of each dancer it is necessary here to examine the comprehensive effect of their supposed 'marginality'. The result is not the creation of a fractured and disparate group of performers, but a cohesive, panhellenic entity. By emphasizing the shared victory through a variety of regions and types of dances, Xenophon demonstrates a moment of solidarity for the Ten Thousand. As John Ma states without elaboration of this particular point, the dances "are used for a purpose, to entertain but also to intimidate the Paphlagonians by giving an image of the prowess, the diversity but also the unity of the Ten Thousand".<sup>72</sup> The multiplicity of cities represented by the dances denotes a communal victory by the whole army.

The episode of the dancing thus simultaneously responds to the central theme of panhellenism in the *Anabasis* while further developing the concept of the army as an amalgamated unit.<sup>73</sup> The display of cultural *mousike* brings the army close to behaving as a real *polis*. Their 'political' affectations are well noted in scholarship, as for example by Dalby and Hornblower: notably, the army often votes as if it were an assembly, discusses matters in a counsel, possesses a demographic hierarchy, and so on; though as Dalby correctly points out, they are usually more like a city's colonizing expedition than a city

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<sup>71</sup> Bierl (2009, 218 n. 395). Bierl's concern here is with the fertility aspect of dance, not the function of the dances in the *Anabasis*.

<sup>72</sup> Ma (2010, 512). Ma goes on to claim that the dances demonstrate "fencing, light infantry raiding and footwork, hoplitic square-bashing", which overemphasizes the military aspects at the expense of cultural *mousike*.

<sup>73</sup> For panhellenism in the *Anabasis* see Rood (2004) and Flower (2012, 201-2).

itself.<sup>74</sup> But, with the dancing episode and its emphasis on the army's particular brand of exclusively martial *mousike*, Xenophon is able to develop a markedly 'cultural' facet of their society. It is a moment in which we do see the Ten Thousand as closer to a settled polis than a colonizing force.<sup>75</sup> Recent studies on ancient dance emphasize how performances in any given polis echo that city-state's civic ideology through the dance's music, lyrics, and bodily movement.<sup>76</sup> For an ancient example, Plato was well aware of the power of dance and choruses to broadly influence society, and much of his *Laws* is devoted to the strict regulation of appropriate forms of dance in the ideal city. In short, the dances of a polis are a cultural projection of the sociology of that polis. The dancing scene in the *Anabasis* then, is not just a simulated victory for the mercenary army over the Paphlagonians, but a carefully crafted narrative instance in which Xenophon is able to showcase the Greek army as a quasi-polis. Finally, the placement of the dance scene at the start of Book 6 anticipates and balances the possibility later in this book of founding a city at Calpes Limen, ultimately rejected (6.4.1-6), and the question early on in Book 7. (7.1.21-31) of settling at Byzantium. It also plays into the pattern of rising and falling action that characterizes the Ten Thousand's fortunes in the whole work: the optimism at the end of Book 5, when the Greeks overcome significant internal turmoil, continues, but things come crashing down shortly after the dance scene, when the Arcadians and Achaeans will soon mutiny.<sup>77</sup> The cultural triumph of martial *mousike* is evidently short-lived, but stands as a high point in the ongoing ebb and flow of the army as a 'political' entity.

It is within this model that we must consider the Mysian's tumbling. In what way does it relate to the arguments outlined above? It is worth citing the text in full (Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.9-10):

μετὰ τοῦτο Μυσὸς εἰσηλθεν ἐν ἑκατέρᾳ τῇ χειρὶ ἔχων πέλτην, καὶ τοτὲ μὲν ὡς δύο ἀντιπατομένων μιμούμενος ὠρχεῖτο, τοτὲ δὲ ὡς πρὸς ἓνα ἐχρήτο ταῖς

<sup>74</sup> See especially Nussbaum (1967) and Dalby (1992) with bibliography; cf. Hornblower (2004). The army is most obviously like a polis when they vote with a show of hands (3.2.9), and they deliberate in the passage at hand (6.1.3, and 6.1.14).

<sup>75</sup> We might compare the athletic contests in book four (4.8.27-28); see L'Allier (2004, 230-1).

<sup>76</sup> Kowlazig (2007, 1-6); cf. Wilson (2003), Kowlazig (2004), Peponi (2013).

<sup>77</sup> My thanks to Bernd Steinbock for his point that 'Greekness' is also a central element in the ensuing scene in the *Anabasis*, at Sinope.

πέλταις, τότε δ' ἐδινεῖτο καὶ ἐξεκυβίστα ἔχων τὰς πέλτας, ὥστε ὄψιν ἔχων καλὴν φαίνεσθαι. [10] τέλος δὲ τὸ Περσικὸν ὠρχεῖτο κροτῶν τὰς πέλτας καὶ ὠκλαζε καὶ ἐξανίστατο· καὶ ταῦτα πάντα ἐν ῥυθμῷ πρὸς τὸν αὐλὸν ἐποίει.

After this a Mysian entered, holding a small shield in each hand, and at one point he danced while he made an imitation that two men were opposed, then again he used his shields as if against one, and then again he was whirling and tumbling while holding the shields, so as to manifestly possess a fine appearance. [10] Finally he danced ‘the Persian’, clashing the shields as he crouched down and leapt up again. And he did all these things in rhythm, in accompaniment with the flute.

I begin with a focus on the nature of the Mysian’s acrobatic movements. They are, of course, impossible to determine with absolute certainty, though some basic assumptions are fairly reasonable. The text itself, in its literal sense, is unfortunately ambiguous. We are told that the soldier ‘whirled’ or ‘spun around’, ἐδινεῖτο, but with no clue as to how. Perhaps he stood upright and spun in circles like a top, as the verb is used in the acrobatic ‘whirling’ about on a potter’s wheel (Pl. *Euthyd.* 294e), though the body there is likely inverted.<sup>78</sup> Homer’s tumblers also ‘whirl’ (Hom. *Il.* 18.606 and *Od.* 4.19), but so do normal dancers (*Il.* 18.494). To be brief, the verb δινεύω/δινέω can be associated with acrobatics, but does not seem to denote a specific kinetic form or process. More useful for determining movement is the verb ἐκκυβιστάω. The κυβιστ- root indicates a headlong action, evident from the basic sense of ‘headfirst plunge’.<sup>79</sup> The soldier must almost

<sup>78</sup> For stunts on potters’ wheels, see Chapter 5.2.

<sup>79</sup> The semantic force of the verb ἐκκυβιστᾶν presents an interesting linguistic problem. Beazley (1939, 10 n. 26) questioned the presence of the prefix ἐκ- for the Mysian’s tumbling, noting that it “can hardly be otiose: it may either mean ‘out of’ the area in which he has been dancing – his ‘ring’ or ‘pitch’ – and towards the spectators, or ‘out of’ a previous posture; like *exanistasthai* [‘arise from’]” (which occurs shortly thereafter in the passage). With a verb of motion, the prefix ἐκ- most commonly does mean ‘away from’ or ‘out of’ if it acts like its corresponding preposition (unless it carries the meaning ‘completely’, ‘utterly’, *vel. sim.*), in which case it almost always has *some* landmark or trajectory; i.e., the object/thing/place away from which it moves. The verb ἐκκυβιστᾶν occurs without any obvious landmark in Xenophon’s *Anabasis*. The only possible tangible landmarks in the text are the shields, which the soldier cannot tumble away from if he is holding onto them, or the dancing ‘ring’, but there is no reason why tumbling ‘out’ of a supposed choral area – not mentioned at all in the text – should make the Mysian “manifestly possess a fine appearance”. What, then, is the force of ἐκ in the verb used of this athletic performer? There are at least four possibilities: i) the prefix is used to denote completion or intensity, but this would be unlike other instances of the verb, where performers tumble ‘off’ or ‘away’ from *something* (Xen. *Sym.* 2.11; Eur. *Supp.* 692; Plu. *Mor.* 919a6, 937f7; cf. Artem. 1.76); ii) Xenophon has left the landmark, e.g. a springboard, unsaid, which would be a strange omission; iii) the verb can refer to leaving a dance pose, but Beazley’s parallel does not mean coming ‘out of’ a posture, but ‘rising from’ a crouch (ὠκλαζε καὶ ἐξανίστατο); iv) the tumbler performs a ‘back-flip’, with his perceived trajectory as the

certainly perform aerial rotations, such as a tuck or flip, for any feat that requires his hands to touch the ground would be impossible while he holds the shields. A ground-based somersault (a simple ‘front roll’) is scarcely likely to have shown the Mysian ‘to manifestly possess a fine appearance’, a phrase that implies an impressive display of physical mastery. The type of the shields that he holds, the *pelte*, is lighter than a full-sized *aspis* and would facilitate aerial flips.<sup>80</sup> Pragmatically, one shield in either hand would aid in balance, but would also be visually and aesthetically pleasing. I conclude therefore that the soldier, as represented in the text, performed flips in a ‘back tuck’ or back ‘pike’ position in his choreography, executing rotations on the vertical axis while airborne and holding his shields on either side of his body. This precise action is also that illustrated in vase paintings of tumblers, who leap backwards off a springboard (see especially Würzburg HA 639 and discussion in Chapter Two). The motion does not *require* a springboard, being achievable by the human body alone.

In my analysis of the dance program I suggested that the Mysian’s tumbling is nearly celebratory, a boastful display of manliness and martial skill. Not only does the soldier put on a show representative of the most traditional masculine courage (*andreia*), valour in war, he proves that he is not even wearied by his exertions. An extreme motion evidences his readiness for future confrontations, with the implication that he will triumph because of his superior physicality. Such a demonstration is, in effect, both a claim to and commemoration of individual supremacy.<sup>81</sup> We must now re-contextualize the acrobatic action. The tumbling was not the definitive moment of the soldier’s display, of course, but was woven into a more intricate performance, simply being a choreographic element in a rhythmic performance. That the action is associated with

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‘landmark’ and the direction that he faces understood to be ‘forward’ according to spatial interpretation. Thus, moving *backwards* from this trajectory is moving *away from* or *out of* it. In this case, ἐκκυβιστῶν can mean ‘tumble backwards’, where the sense of ‘κυβιστ-’ is still of a ‘plunge’, but with the head moving backwards to the ground, not forward. ἐκ also denotes movement and uses perspective as a landmark in the word ἐκτρέπω, ‘turn from’, though here the movement is generally sideways, not backwards, as also in ἔκνευσις, ‘dodge’. Interestingly, Plato uses this latter word to describe the ‘dodging’ motion of the pyrrhic dance (815a). For landmarks, trajectory, and ways in which Xenophon’s language depends on spatial interpretations, see the introduction of Balode (2011), though she does not discuss ἐκκυβιστῶν directly.

<sup>80</sup> The shields in comparable acrobatic feats on vase paintings are all larger than *peltai*, but there a springboard propels the acrobat: see also von Bothmer (1983, 67). Shields are ‘burdensome’ elsewhere in the *Anabasis* (e.g. 3.4.47, 5.8.23): see Beazley (1939, 10-11).

<sup>81</sup> We might compare the celebratory aerial acrobatics by victorious athletes. The great German striker Miroslav Klose, for instance, was famous for performing a trademark flip after scoring goals.

martial dance is important, for this was traditionally considered one of the most noble of dances by the Greeks, one customary and panhellenic.<sup>82</sup> In this regard, the Mysian's performance as a whole would have several positive connotations.

Military dances, particularly those performed by men, most often occurred in festivals, *agones*, or processions. The banquet setting in the *Anabasis* is peculiar and the difference is not insignificant. At a typical symposium, those who danced were hardly 'high class', but rather hired 'companions' who were also the objects of sexual desire. The dances ranged in form and nature, but could indeed extend to the *pyrrhiche*, the quintessential military dance, as the slave girl performs at the end of the dancing episode in the *Anabasis*. Yet Xenophon presents male dances at this particular symposium in quite a positive light. The status of the performers is of course tantamount: they are soldiers, not slaves or hired entertainers, and so do their actions reflect and reinforce their social identities. What about the acrobatic actions specifically? As I discuss in Chapter Four, the lewd and sensational *thaumatopoiia* of acrobatic hetaerae occurs almost exclusively in sympotic contexts. Would the Mysian's sympotic tumbling thus also be shameful? In short, no. The setting of a banquet does not negate the otherwise positive presentation of the Mysian's tumbling, nor does it imply that male tumblers in general are slavish and unseemly.<sup>83</sup> First of all, the banquet here is not a private symposium held by citizens, but a political, almost public one. At a public banquet in the *Odyssey*, in honour of a wedding, the tumblers that perform may be of high social standing (Hom. *Od.* 4.17-19).<sup>84</sup> The status of the performer as a male soldier, acting presumably of his own free will, like his comrades, is also drastically at odds with the hired prostitute. The style of tumbling that he practices is equally different, as appropriate for his station and rank as sensual

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<sup>82</sup> For martial dance see below. Plato (*Laws* 814e-815a) calls martial dance (all subsumed under the heading 'pyrrhic') a kind for noble and brave souls. For the possible exception of female pyrrhic dancers, notably those at symposia, as ignoble, see the insightful comments in Bierl (2009, 210-15). See also Poursat (1968, 586-615), Delavaud-Roux (1993, 131-153), Lonsdale (1993, 167-8), Goulaki-Voutira (1996).

<sup>83</sup> Delavaud-Roux (1993, 159) claims that "female pyrrhiches, pantomimes, or male acrobatic dances become entertainment at a banquet, mingling with the activities of equilibrists or jugglers", but there is very little evidence beyond the circumstantial instance in the *Anabasis* for male acrobatic dance at symposia, apart from drunken play, until the Roman period. More certain is the acrobatic play of lower class entertainers like dwarves (Todi, Museo Civico 471) or jesters (e.g. Philip in Xenophon's *Symposium* at 2.22), but this is again a very different sort of movement from male tumbling in dance or sport.

<sup>84</sup> See Schäfer (1997, 17) for the argument that the tumblers in Homer are likely aristocrats, on the basis of comparison with the sons of Alkinoos in *Odyssey* 8, who are proficient dancers (but not *kybisteteres*).

exhibitions are for the hetaera. Whereas low-class performers tend to contort their bodies and emphasize flexibility to arouse their audience, the Mysian's aerial revolutions highlight the strength and agility desirable in an effective warrior.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, while his acrobatic dance is a 'sight' (ὄψις), it is qualified as καλή, 'fine', 'good', 'beautiful', 'noble', and furthermore is what makes him 'manifestly possess a fine appearance' (ὥστε ὄψιν ἔχων καλήν φαίνεσθαι).<sup>86</sup>

There is, however, one way in which the Mysian is different from his comrades: although one of the Ten Thousand, he is not, strictly speaking, Greek. Indeed, he is only ever ethnically identified, as 'the Mysian'. On the one hand, I would argue that this corresponds with the message of unity and diversity that Xenophon develops in the dance episode; on the other hand, it has led to the interpretation of him and his dance as 'non-Hellenic' and not representative of Hellenism. Eric Buzzetti has recently offered a very different reading of the Mysian's dance. He claims that the soldier's performance shows that Mysians "are deficient in manliness and martial valor" and subservient to the Persian king, "civilized but unfree".<sup>87</sup> A few statements *contra* seem due, given the importance of the soldier's tumbling for my purposes, and my opposite conclusions. Buzzetti's reading of a lack of manliness and valour is based entirely on the fact that the Mysian soldier holds two shields, categorically 'defensive weapons'. But we are explicitly told that the soldier *does* fight with these, and seems to overcome enemies, as Buzzetti himself notes.<sup>88</sup> He excuses the fact as "a fine example of Xenophon's deadpan humor", for, he wonders, "how do you land blows with a pair of shields?". The 'fine example' of Xenophonic humour is a Procrustean argument indeed. Additionally, scholars have argued that the Greeks *did* use shields offensively: in the succinct words of Hans van

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<sup>85</sup> I suspect that part of the reason behind the difference is that the soldier's tumbling is not a 'death-defying' stunt in the way that, e.g., sword-diving is. The latter's inherent peril is consistently considered reckless and foolhardy by Greek authors, even elsewhere by Xenophon himself (*Mem.* 1.3.10). Sword-diving would hardly be incongruous in the military setting of the *Anabasis*, but martial dances are higher on the hierarchical scale of acceptable performance, and thus more appropriate for the Mysian soldier, as also his fellows. On sword-tumbling, see Chapter 5.1.

<sup>86</sup> The text here is from Hude's 1931 Teubner edition. One family of MSS omits ἔχων in this phrase, which is crucial with φαίνεσθαι for the sense of 'manifestly appear'. Without it, the alternate translation would be 'so as to furnish a fine sight', which praises the tumbling more than the tumbler. Marchant (1904, *ad loc.*) deletes ἔχων from the phrase.

<sup>87</sup> Buzzetti (2014, 224). See also Buzzetti's comments in the introduction to Ambler's (2008) translation of the *Anabasis* (esp. pg 4-5).

<sup>88</sup> Buzzetti (2014, 224 n. 12).



Wees, “the hoplite shield . . . served as something of an offensive weapon”.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, the claim that the Mysians are subservient to Persia is based on a misinterpretation of the actions involved in the ‘Persian’ dance. The verb ὀκλάζω, as used in the context of the performance, does not mean that the Mysian ‘bows the knee’ in submission to the Persian King, but that he squatted down and leapt up again as he danced. The word is practically a technical one here, since an alternative name for the Persian dance was the ὀκλασμα (Pollux 4.100; cf. Σ Ar. *Thesm.* 1175). The choreographic movement was more of a ‘squat’ than a ‘bow’. Furthermore, Xenophon repeatedly tells us in the *Anabasis* that the Mysians are a thorn in the King’s side and offer resistance to the Persians: 1.6.7, 1.9.14, 2.5.13, 3.2.23. There is no submission in the soldier’s dance here and there is no reason to imagine, as Buzzetti conjecturally does, that the other Greeks (or even the Paphlagonians) are “disgusted by his slavish dance and blind to its superior aesthetic merits”.<sup>90</sup> On the contrary, the semiotics of his movement and the role of his dance in the choreographic narrative suggest that he does, in fact, showcase martial and manly virtues in the army’s military culture.

In sum, there is nothing to suggest anything but a positive interpretation for the Mysian’s expertise in the dance. His acrobatic feats in particular are lauded as a fine display. Theories of body phenomenology help explain that evaluation. The execution of back tucks is an impressive physical feat, even more so when holding shields, which the audience/reader recognizes with kinesthetic subjectivity. While some spectators/readers might themselves have experience in tumbling, for most who perceived the back tuck the association would be reduced to a primal, unconscious understanding of how their own bodies can achieve lesser tasks (e.g. jumping, spinning, basic dancing, athletics in general), which in turn elevates their judgement of the soldier’s accomplishments to a higher and more extraordinary level of athleticism.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the inclusion of such a

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<sup>89</sup> Van Wees (2004, 168). I.e. for hard, blunt strikes at an enemy when a blade, etc., is not available, especially in close quarters after opposing infantry charge one another. In the very passage under consideration, the Mysian is said to ‘use his shields as if *against* one [opponent]’, ὡς πρὸς ἓνα ἐχρήτο ταῖς πέλταις.

<sup>90</sup> Buzzetti (2014, 224). Buzzetti’s interpretation here derives from the phrase ἐπι δὲ τοῦτο ἐπιόντες οἱ Μαντινεῖς καὶ ἄλλοι τινὲς τῶν Ἀρκάδων at 6.1.11. He translates ἐπιόντες as “attack”, but in context it means something like ‘comes upon’ or ‘approaches’, viz. as the next performers.

<sup>91</sup> Kinesthetic subjectivity can conceivably occur for *readers*, not just a spectator, in as much as they still interpret the actions based on their own experiences and their socio-cultural milieu.

feat in the choreography of a martial dance places it within one of the most highly respected forms of dance. Finally, the performer himself is certainly not a low status individual, but a free male soldier who willingly exhibits his athletic-artistic skill. His dance, and the tumbling within it, are central to Xenophon's presentation of the entire episode as indicative of the Ten Thousand's military and cultural supremacy.

### 1.5: Acrobatics and the *Pyrrhiche*

The dancing scene from Xenophon's *Anabasis* provides clear evidence that martial dances could include acrobatic choreography. However, it is not easy to categorize or label the Mysian's dance or the tumbling within it. Rather, it gives the impression of being a sort of pantomime at some points, and spontaneous exhibitions at others. Consequently, the question of whether tumbling could feature in other martial dances must be addressed. The proposition that it did seems likely, given the potential for tumbling in other choruses (see Chapter Two), but here I look at the evidence for such choreography specifically in the so-called pyrrhic dance. This is done for a methodological purpose: the *pyrrhiche* was an event at the Panathenaia, and if tumbling were found to be here it would mean that acrobatic actions of some kind existed in an athletic and agonistic context. The symbolism of tumbling in the dance, namely that it represents almost superhuman abilities in a warrior-athlete, would be even more meaningful in this context.<sup>92</sup>

The *pyrrhiche* was the most eminent martial dance and the one about which the most evidence survives.<sup>93</sup> In part, this abundance of evidence is a result of the fact that the term was often used as practically synonymous with 'martial dance' in many sources. In time, the word '*pyrrhiche*' indeed came to mean 'warlike dance' generally, and later even just 'dance'.<sup>94</sup> It is important to remember, though, that the dance would have included varying choreography in different performances. It is more accurate to speak of dancing

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<sup>92</sup> I emphasize the Panathenaia also as the most important of these festivals. There were also Athenian pyrrhic contests at the Tauropolia and the Apatouria: see Ceccarelli (2004, 99-105).

<sup>93</sup> For martial dances see Poursat (1968), Wheeler (1982), Delavaud-Roux (1993), Lonsdale (1993, 137-168), Bierl (2009, 207-18), Lesky (2000), Borthwick (2015, 91-127). Ceccarelli (1998) is still the definitive treatment of the subject.

<sup>94</sup> Csapo and Slater (1995, 433). On the meaning and etymology of '*pyrrhiche*', see Ceccarelli (2002).

‘a pyrrhic’ on a particular occasion and ‘the pyrrhic’ in general, in the same way that we should strictly speaking say one dances ‘a tango’, not ‘*the* tango’. Any given pyrrhic performance in the Classical period probably involved some degree of rhythmic imitation of combat, with musical accompaniment. Plato famously defines the *pyrrhiche* as such in his *Laws* (815a):

τὴν πολεμικὴν [ὄρχησιν] δὴ τούτων, ἄλλην οὐσαν τῆς εἰρηνικῆς, πυρρίχην ἂν τις ὀρθῶς προσαγορεύοι, τὰς τε εὐλαβείας πασῶν πληγῶν καὶ βολῶν ἐκνεύσει καὶ ὑπείξει πάση καὶ ἐκπηδήσει ἐν ὕψει καὶ σὺν ταπεινώσει μιμουμένην, καὶ τὰς ταύταις ἐναντίας, τὰς ἐπὶ τὰ δραστικὰ φερομένας αὐτῶν σχήματα, ἐν τε ταῖς τῶν τόξων βολαῖς καὶ ἀκοντίων καὶ πασῶν πληγῶν μιμήματα ἐπιχειροῦσαν μιμεῖσθαι.

Of these, the warlike dance, being different from the peaceful, one would rightly label a ‘*pyrrhiche*’, which imitates the avoidance of all sorts of blows and bolts by swerving and every kind of dodge and leaping away either into the air or down low. It strives to imitate the things opposite to these too, those which produce enterprising postures, in which there are representations of shots from bows and of spears and of every sort of blow.

*Pyrrhichai* were danced throughout Greece, not limited to any one region. They had particular significance for Athens, as Athena, clad in full armour, was often viewed as a dancer.<sup>95</sup> The *pyrrhiche* was a choral event at the Panathenaia festival, limited to Athenian participants and divided into three separate age categories (boy, youth, man).<sup>96</sup> Funding one of those choruses was not a cheap liturgy, though far less expensive than for the poetic contests at the City Dionysia (Lysias 21.1, 4).<sup>97</sup> Plato claims the dance is ‘of good bodies and souls’, τῶν ἀγαθῶν σωμάτων καὶ ψυχῶν, when done correctly (*Laws* 815a), a sentiment that seems to reflect its generally positive status in Athenian culture. It could be quite active, and is sometimes recognized by scholars as part dance, part sport.<sup>98</sup>

While there is nothing explicitly acrobatic in Plato’s description of a *pyrrhiche*, other textual evidence, albeit from much later sources, suggests that *pyrrhichai* could include

<sup>95</sup> E.g. Pl. *Laws* 796b, *Crat.* 406d-407a, Lucian *Dial. Deor.* 13 (8), among others. For the connection between Athena and armed dances see Borthwick (1970), Ferrari Pinney (1988, 469-474). Ceccarelli (2004, 94 n. 8) enumerates the ancient evidence.

<sup>96</sup> See Ceccarelli (2004, 94-99) for the question of tribal organization for the event.

<sup>97</sup> The speaker of Lys. 21 paid 800 dr. for one chorus at the end of the fifth century, 700 dr. for another; compare the 3000 dr. the same man paid for a tragic chorus (21.1). See Wilson (2000, 37-8) for pyrrhic liturgies.

<sup>98</sup> E.g. Kyle (1992, 95): “it belonged as much to the realm of dance as to that of athletics”. Lonsdale (1993, 140) argues that participants trained for the *pyrrhiche* in the palaestra.

acrobatic choreography. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for instance, readily accepts the tumblers at the famous dancing scene on the shield of Achilles as participants in a pyrrhic dance and likens them to leaders of the *pyrrhiche* in a Roman procession (*Ant. Rom.* 7.72.6-9):

ἡγεῖτο δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον χορὸν εἷς ἀνὴρ, ὃς ἐνεδίδου τοῖς ἄλλοις τὰ τῆς ὀρχήσεως σχήματα, πρῶτος εἰδοφορῶν τὰς πολεμικὰς καὶ συντόνους κινήσεις ἐν τοῖς προκελευσματικοῖς ὡς τὰ πολλὰ ῥυθμοῖς. Ἑλληνικὸν δ' ἄρα καὶ τοῦτ' ἦν ἐν τοῖς πάνυ παλαιὸν ἐπιτήδευμα, ἐνόπιος ὄρχησις ἢ καλουμένη πυρρήχη ...  
δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ τούτου τὴν ἀρχαιότητα ὡς ἐπιχωρίου τοῖς Ἑλλησιν Ὅμηρος πολλαχῆ μὲν καὶ ἄλλη, μάλιστα δ' ἐν ἀσπίδος κατασκευῇ, ἣν Ἀχιλλεῖ δωρήσασθαί φησιν Ἥφαιστον ...  
ἡγεμόνας τε τῆς ὀρχήσεως αὐτῶν τοὺς ἐνδιδόντας τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ προκαταρχομένους εἰσάγων τοιάδε γράφει·

πολλὸς δ' ἱμερόεντα χορὸν περίσταθ' ὄμιλος  
τερπόμενοι· δοιῶ δὲ κυβιστητῆρε κατ' αὐτοὺς  
μολπῆς ἐξάρχοντες ἐδίνεον κατὰ μέσσοις.

One man led each chorus, who gave the figures of the dance to the others, the foremost in representing warlike and intense motions in a mostly proceleusmatic rhythm.<sup>99</sup> And in fact this was Greek, a very old practice among them – that is, the armed dance called the *pyrrhiche* . . .

Homer makes clear the antiquity of this dance as native to the Greeks in many other places, but especially in the elaboration of the shield, which he says Hephaestus presented to Achilles . . .

And introducing the leaders of their dance who gave the rhythm to the others and commenced it, [Homer] writes as follows:

A great crowd stood around the charming dance, delighting in it; and two tumblers among them, leaders of the song, whirled in their midst (*Il.* 18.603-5).<sup>100</sup>

It is immediately apparent that Dionysius is using a broad definition of ‘pyrrhic’ dance, which covers any martial dance. The dancers in the Homeric scene are armed, but this is not a pyrrhic in the classical sense. Dionysius’ understanding of the tumblers makes them the *choregoi* of the weapon dance but presumes that they remain distinct from the rest of the dancers, as indeed Homer presents them. This is probably not the case for what Dionysius conceived for an antiquated Roman procession (likely drawing on experience from his own time), to judge from his statement that the chorus leaders displayed the

<sup>99</sup> Proceleusmatic: four short syllables in a metrical foot.

<sup>100</sup> For the Homeric text, and a potential missing line, see, e.g., Revermann (1998) and Chapter 4.2, below.

*schemata* to the rest of the participants (7.72.6). In other words, while Homer's tumblers are somewhat distinct from the chorus, in Dionysius' Roman *pyrrhiche* the dancers would repeat the *schemata* shown first by the (potentially tumbling) *choregoi*. Nevertheless, the tumblers are not only presented as compatible with a *pyrrhiche*, but in no way detracting from its contentious (ἐναγώνιος) and serious (κατεσπουδασμένη) nature (7.72.10).

Dionysius insists that 'pyrrhic' dancing performed in Rome originated in Greece. In fact, the performances in the Republican and Imperial periods had changed significantly from their Hellenic model.<sup>101</sup> Athenaeus, for example, states that the *pyrrhiche* had become more and more 'Bacchic' over time, devolving from a resplendent display into a lewd exhibition (14.631a-b). Plutarch reports that the dance could even be used as means of executing criminals, who would essentially be butchered as the finale to the performance (*Mor.* 554b). According to Apuleius, in contrast, some performances still retained their original solemnity and choral nature (*Met.* 10.29). The variety of form and function is probably a result of the flexible use of the word 'pyrrhic' to essentially mean 'weapon dance'. The *pyrrhiche* also seems to have taken on some of the imitative qualities of Roman pantomime, although the passage from Xenophon's *Anabasis* shows that martial dance could have mimetic qualities early on. Most notably, the dance was sometimes used to re-enact mythic stories, even those that allowed it to include tumbling in its choreography. Suetonius mentions Greek ephebes performing what he calls 'pyrrhic' dances during Roman games, including an 'Icarus' who fell and spattered the emperor with blood (*Life of Nero* 12.2). That the youth was perhaps an acrobat of one sort or another is possible, considering the nature of the myth. Manetho Astrologus also writes of an acrobatic Icarus (5.145; cf. 3.439-3.445 and 4.278).<sup>102</sup> Perhaps the Germanic sword dance that Tacitus observed, which involved the tossing of swords among youths (*Ger.* 24), also had an acrobatic flair to it, if it can be linked with Varro's recollection of *Germani petauristae* at banquets (*De Vita Populi Romani* 2.85) or Nonius Marcellus' consideration that *petauristae* were traditionally considered nimble dancers (*De*

<sup>101</sup> On the *pyrrhiche* in Rome see Ceccarelli (1998, 147-158).

<sup>102</sup> Cf. also Dio Chrys. 21.9 for the Neronian episode. One can compare the modern Cirque du Soleil show 'Varekai', which features the adventures of Icarus after he falls on an exotic island.

*Compendiosa Doctrina* 56. 31 (= 79L): *petauristae a veteribus dicebantur qui saltibus vel schemis levioribus moverentur*).

The 12<sup>th</sup> century grammarian Stephanus, in his commentary on Aristotle's *Ars Rhetorica*, also links tumbling with pyrrhic dance. He claims there are three different forms of dance: the *sikinnis*, the *kordax*, and the *pyrrhiche*, the last of which he describes as ἡ ἐνόπλιος, ἣ χρῶνται οἱ στρατιῶται κατὰ ξιφῶν καὶ μετὰ ξιφῶν κυβιστῶντες καὶ οἱ ἐν ταῖς γαμηλίαις παιδιᾶς παίζοντες μετὰ σπάθης, 'the armed dance, which soldiers use (they tumble down on swords and with swords) as do those who dance with a broad blade at wedding games' (Steph. *Comm. Ar. Rhet.* 3.81 ad 1408b36). A late source, Stephanus has probably to some degree conflated the nature of the dance with thaumatopoietic sword-diving; no other reference to pyrrhic dancing mentions tumbling κατὰ ξιφῶν. According to Paola Ceccarelli, Stephanus' statement is more suited to *kybistesis* than the weapon dance, though she limits her definition of the former to only sword-diving when the term rightly applies to tumbling generally.<sup>103</sup> Stephanus' exclusion of many other forms of dance certainly does suggest confusion. In particular, he leaves out tragedy's *emmelia*, which completes the canonical trio of dramatic dances along with satyr play's *sikinnis* and comedy's *kordax*. Nevertheless, he might be recalling an ancient tradition of tumbling in war dance and his connection of the *pyrrhiche* with tumbling remains instructive.

Dionysius, Suetonius, and Stephanus are all late sources and present something different from a pyrrhic dance that would have occurred in the Classical period. However, the base of a choregic victory monument for a boys' *pyrrhiche* at the Greater Panathenaia, dated ca. 375 B.C., might bring us closer to acrobatic choreography in classical Athens.<sup>104</sup> The base is regrettably fragmentary, but in what remains three nude performers are carved, one of whom stands on the shoulders of a compatriot. He holds a large shield in his left hand and the right over his head, where the slab breaks off. His supporter is nude and unequipped, but reaches up to grasp his partner by the ankles. Behind the pair another

<sup>103</sup> Ceccarelli (1998, 225-226).

<sup>104</sup> Athens, NM 3854 = *SEG* 23.103. See Poursat (1967, fig. 1-3), Goette (2007, fig. 7), Tzachou-Alexandri (1989, no. 100), Ferrari Pinney (1988, fig. 2), Wilson (2000, fig. 21), Kosmopoulou (2002, no. 23). The inscription, with reconstructions, reads as follows: [ἀνέθηκεν ν]ι [κήσας πυρρι]- | [χιστ]αῖς παίδων χορηγῶν | Παναθήναια τὰ μεγάλα.

youth wields a similar shield and wears a helmet. The figure standing behind is broken at the torso, so it is difficult to judge whether or not he is dancing. If so, it is a restrained dance. There are two pertinent questions to be asked of this victory monument: does it represent pyrrhic choreography, and should the shoulder-stand be considered ‘acrobatic’?

Comparison to the two other surviving monuments for a victory in the *pyrrhiche* suggests the possibility that we are viewing pyrrhic choreography. The famous ‘Atarbos base’ certainly presents victorious pyrrhichists in the midst of a dance, as does the much more fragmentary ‘Xenokles base’.<sup>105</sup> Are we then to suppose that the shoulder-stand monument also shows a chorus in the midst of a performance? The third figure at least *is* probably dancing, for his form is similar to the dancers on the Atarbos and Xenokles bases. The issue lies in the fact that there is no parallel for shoulder-stands in choreography, whether for a *pyrrhiche* or any other dance form, in textual or iconographic sources. There is no known *schema* that corresponds to the shoulder-stand seen here, unless we imagine that Athenaeus’ διποδισμός, ‘two-step’, (14.630a) involved this manoeuvre.<sup>106</sup> Given the lack of comparable evidence, I favour the argument that interprets the shoulder-stand not as dance, but indicative of victory celebration.<sup>107</sup> The famous story of Diagoras of Rhodes’ sons carrying him on their shoulders confirms that a similar action could be part of victory celebration.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, the two youths take “a stance reminiscent of the iconography of Athena Promachos”, as H. R. Goette puts it, the top figure even seeming to hold his spear like the deity.<sup>109</sup> This posture must be symbolic of that particular divine stance and its importance in Panathenaic prize iconography; the same ‘Athena Promachos’ that stands on the reverse of Panathenaic prize amphorae is here reproduced by the two *pyrrhichistai* on their own victory monument. The message is thus partly symbolic: just as it takes multiple members to form the iconic pose, so too was victory itself a ‘team’ effort. It seems, then, that the shoulder-stand is not pyrrhic choreography. The conclusion is perhaps not surprising, since the *pyrrhiche* offered an imitation of battle, according to Plato, in which a pose like this is hardly a serious one.

<sup>105</sup> Atarbos Base: Athens, Acropolis Museum 1338. Xenokles Base: Athens, Acropolis Museum 6465 + 6465a.

<sup>106</sup> Another name for the διποδία; cf. Ar. *Lys.* 1243.

<sup>107</sup> Poursat (1967, 106), Ferrari Pinney (1988, 468), Goette (2007, 124).

<sup>108</sup> Paus. 6.7.3.

<sup>109</sup> Goette (2007, 124).

I now turn to the second question posed above: should this action be considered ‘acrobatic’? From a modern point of view, it certainly could be. Any number of parallels can be drawn, from cheerleading competitions to Catalanian castells to street performers. But if we place it within ancient Greek categories of thought regarding bodily movement, there is little to suggest that an ancient viewer would think the shoulder-stand ‘acrobatic’. In and of itself, the pose would probably not be thaumatopoeitic, to judge by other corporeal *thaumatopoiia*. Neither would it be the action of *kybisteteres*, for whom a ‘headlong’ movement seems to be requisite (see my Introduction), nor dance, as noted. There are only a few parallel ‘acrobatic’ actions from extant Greek evidence. Most acrobatics involve solo performances, not two or more people working in tandem. The exceptions are just different enough that they suggest we are not here dealing with an ‘acrobatic’ pose: a small bronze oinochoe handle from Campania is formed from two human bodies, maybe acrobats, but one is not balanced on the other’s shoulders;<sup>110</sup> a Hellenistic terracotta shows a small boy standing on the forehead of a comedic actor;<sup>111</sup> a late Roman (maybe Parthian) statuette features a man on the shoulders of a large cat;<sup>112</sup> a lost (?) hydria from Naples supposedly illustrated male and female acrobats together, but we do not know how (or if) they interacted.<sup>113</sup> Finally, G. Ahlberg-Cornell suggests that a fragmentary amphora (Athens, NM 810) has ‘stacking’ figures similar to those on a Cretan geometric amphora from Fortetsa (Heraklion Museum), but the supposed ‘acrobatics’ here are surely just a symptom of Geometric artists’ tendency to draw figures in close proximity.<sup>114</sup> In textual sources, the first certain mention of a ‘human pyramid’ does not occur until the Latin writer Claudian (*Pan. XVII on Cons. Manl.* 320ff.), although there is an element of ‘team’ performance in Philostratus’ account of an acrobatic feat in the *Life of Apollonius* (2.28-9). I only know of one textual source

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<sup>110</sup> London, BM Bronze 508, dated 470 B.C.

<sup>111</sup> Neiiendam (1992, front and back cover).

<sup>112</sup> Christies sale 9020, *Antiquities* 18 December 1998, New York.

<sup>113</sup> Old tour guides for the Naples museum mention the vessel, categorizing it as Etruscan or Italo-Greek. The 12<sup>th</sup> edition (1906) of a *Handbook of the Antiquities in the National Museum at Naples*, ed. Neville-Rolfé Esq., cites it as the “Vase of the acrobats, or ‘dei saltimbanchi’. A perfect gem in the highest style of art, representing ten persons of either sex being instructed in acrobatic feats”, from Nola (no. 1209). The French 5<sup>th</sup> edition (1890) of the same handbook claims the acrobats sport over swords (no. 2068: “Dix personnages des deux sexes sont occupés à exécuter des jeux sur des épées”).

<sup>114</sup> Ahlberg-Cornell (1987, 80). Athens, NM 810 is fig. 27a-c; the Cretan amphora (no museum number provided) is fig. 32.



referring to standing upright on another's shoulders, namely, the story of Kedalion riding on the giant Orion's shoulders after he was blinded (Ps. Eratosthenes *Katasterismoi* 32),<sup>115</sup> but the pose here is self-evidently not 'acrobatic'.<sup>116</sup> In art, non-acrobatic shoulder stands can be seen on a black-figure vase fragment in Berlin (F 1723), where two heroes sneak down from the Trojan horse onto the shoulders of their comrades.<sup>117</sup> The artistic motive behind the action here is not dissimilar to the pyrrhic base: standing on another's shoulders gives twice the elevation. Another good comparison for the shoulder-stand pyrrhichists are children propped up or sitting on the shoulders of their elders.<sup>118</sup> The result brings the child up to the same level as adults and lets them meet eye to eye, as if the youth were himself mature and of the same stature. So too on the pyrrhic victory monument is a dancer raised up to the height of Athena. The sculptor has him mimic the Promachos stance and thus make a proud claim on the significance of the victory in the Panathenaic event.

After a survey of the available evidence, the argument for the plausible use of tumbling in a 5<sup>th</sup> century Athenian *pyrrhiche*, as might be performed at a Panathenaia, is threefold: first, that the martial dance of the Mysian in the *Anabasis* included tumbling, secondly that Roman *pyrrhichai* could include tumbling, and thirdly that other choral forms in the Classical period could incorporate it as a *schema*: e.g. a late 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. skyphos from Attica depicts an inverted comic chorus,<sup>119</sup> and Julius Pollux in his *Onomasticon* (4.105) states that Classical tragedies could include *κυβίστησις* 'tumbling', among their

<sup>115</sup> See further Luc. *De Domo* 28, Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.25, Pseudo-Hyginus, *Astronomica* 2.34.

<sup>116</sup> Edmonds (1929, 113) proposed that *μακρὸν ἀνδριάντα παίζειν* (Theophr. *Char.* 27.12) denotes 'prob. [sic] a children's gymnastic feat involving standing on another player's shoulders', but there is no support for this conjecture. The interpretation of the phrase remains open to numerous hypotheses, none of which are convincing: see Diggle (2004, *ad loc.*)

<sup>117</sup> CVA Berlin, Antikenmuseum 7, 17-18 (pl. [3001] 8.5); Beazley (1956, 314, no. 695); Sparkes (1971, pl. 1b); Latacz *et al.* (2008, 396, no. 142).

<sup>118</sup> As in Eur. *Bacc.* 754-6. In art, e.g. a lekythos in Athens (NM 1913) and a Boeotian terracotta at the Getty Museum (F 293); cf. the child lifted above his mother's head on a *chous* in Erlangen (Kunstsammlung der Universität Inv. I 321: see Rühfel (1984, fig. 98)), and a grown satyr lifting a satyr child onto his shoulders (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 98.882: see Boardman (1975, 177)). Compare also dwarfs in a similar pose, especially two terracottas in London (BM 88 and 93: Dasen (1993, pl.78.2 and 77.2; cf. pl. 80.1, 2)). Also comparable are the many depictions of the 'piggyback' game *ephedrismos*, but that is of a different nature and ethos than the pose on the monument base.

<sup>119</sup> Thebes B.E.64.342, ca. 530-500 B.C.: Trendall and Webster (1971, fig. 1.13), Green (1985, fig. 15a-b), Delavaud-Roux (1995, no. 64), Steinhart (2004, pl. 1.1-2).

dance *schemata*.<sup>120</sup> I have also argued elsewhere that the chorus of frogs in Aristophanes' *Frogs* might plausibly feature acrobatic choreography, on the basis of their nature as a comic animal chorus and their apparent self-referentiality (in particular, the claim to 'many-diving limbs/melodies', πολυκολύμβοισι μέλεσιν, at line 245, which could take the form of a tumbling dance).<sup>121</sup> In this light, then, it becomes quite probable, though not conclusive, that a pyrrhic performance in Classical Athens could also have tumbling in its choreography.<sup>122</sup>

If it is correct that pyrrhic choruses sometimes used acrobatic movements in their dance, it means that acrobatics were included, to some degree at least, in festivals and/or choral *agones*, the most notable example being the Panathenaia.<sup>123</sup> Scholars have interpreted the *pyrrhiche* (and other war dances) as an initiatory ritual marking the transition of pubescent epebes into manhood with a display of physical ability, which promises military prowess. The dance acts like a 'rite of passage', whose mythic backgrounds reinforce the cultural values associated with the displayed virtues, and whose festive context underscores the ritual aspect of performance and their social significance.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Lawler (1964b, 82) presumes that the list of 'tragic' *schemata* was really a list of 'dramatic' *schemata*. Dale (1968, 209-10) rejects the possibility of a "somersault" on the tragic stage and suspects that Pollux was drawing on a tradition of local mime. While there is no other extant evidence for tumbling in tragic dance, one might compare the occasional presence of acrobatic choreography in modern ballet, opera, etc. With regard to tumbling in other types of choral dance, the acrobatic play of satyrs seen on vases suggests that it would be apt for satyr plays; cf. the tumbling satyrs in Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* (10.149, 40.242, 43.340).

<sup>121</sup> Vickers (2011).

<sup>122</sup> By the same logic I would expect that dithyrambic *agones* could also feature acrobatic choreography, though there is no positive or negative evidence to this effect.

A Greek vase scene of acrobatics has been erroneously linked with Classical pyrrhic dance. William Smith's 1842 *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities* presents an image that it claims depicts a female acrobat balanced on the head of a male pyrrhicist (s.v. *saltatio*). The image is from a wood engraving by Tischbein of a lost vase from Hamilton's ill-fated collection. Better copies of the engraving show two separate scenes, the top one probably from the upper band of a vase: see Weege (1976, fig. 64) and Beazley (1943, 99.4). There is no link here between the *pyrrhiche* (if that is indeed the bottom scene) and acrobatics, the latter of which has clear sympotic context in the illustration (the woman is pouring wine with her feet, while balanced on her hands). One other extant Classical period vase *may* show an acrobatic weapon dance: Bari B 2797 (Todisco (2013, MGS 3)), dated 450-400 B.C. and from South-Italy, depicts an armed warrior to the left of an unarmed man standing on his hands. The pose is either acrobatic, or shows a vanquished opponent. N.B. that the man is unarmed, that the warrior is not obviously dancing, and that no musician is present.

<sup>123</sup> For weapon dances outside Athens, see Ceccarelli (1998, 99-158).

<sup>124</sup> On the significance of the *pyrrhiche* in particular see Lonsdale (1993, 162-8) and Bierl (2009, 207-18). Ceccarelli (2004, 92 n. 4) correctly notes that the *pyrrhiche* had little practical value for preparing youths for actual combat (despite Athenaeus' testimony that it was part of the training regimen for Spartan boys at 14.630d). With regard to mythic backgrounds and rites of passage, N.B. the aetiology attributing the invention of the pyrrhic dance to Neoptolemus, 'New Fighter', also called Pyrrhus: see Ceccarelli (2002).

Through dance, a man displays his physical and martial abilities and reciprocally acquires validation of his civic worth in the form of applause from an appreciative audience, or even a prize award. A large part of this interpretation relies on the cultural significance of movement. The mimesis of battle in dance is culturally coded to convey the warrior's ethos, combining a representation of combative ability with exact and calculated physicality to create an image that was desirable to the Greeks: that of the infallible warrior-athlete. Acrobatics fits well into this model, for it shows that the scope of the performer's corporeal manipulation goes beyond the level of the average spectator. Acrobatic manoeuvres, as extreme motions that are violent and 'gymnastic', display almost superhuman skill and ability. The context of the performance also guides its semiotic significance and confirms for the audience that the ability to successfully control one's body will carry over to success on the battlefield. Among the most physical and skillful actions possible in the pyrrhic dance, tumbling helps to reinforce the image presumably desired by the dancer, namely, of being a strong and able warrior-athlete, in as much as he was displaying his value to the community in an initiatory ritual.

Ultimately, however, the fact that any acrobatics in martial dances are only choreographic elements in a larger whole somewhat restricts their cultural significance. Their execution is meaningful as it constitutes part of the whole, but is necessarily subsumed by that whole. There is, however, a substantial amount of artistic evidence for male tumbling as an individual and distinct activity, quite separate from dance. In the following two chapters I analyze this evidence and argue that tumbling existed as an event on its own terms.

## CHAPTER TWO: Springboard Tumbling in Greek Athletics

The very probable inclusion of tumbling in choral contests means that it could have been a component of an agonistic pursuit. Indeed, it would then also be part of *gymnastike*, ‘naked physical exercise’ (or ‘sport’, for the Greeks), if we follow Plato’s statement for recommended lessons (*Laws* 795d): τὰ δὲ γυμναστικῆς αὖ δύο, τὸ μὲν ὄρχησις, τὸ δὲ πάλη, ‘and the [lessons] of *gymnastike* again are two: dance, and wrestling’. Here, at least, dance is clearly considered a kind of ‘sport’. Further evidence shows that a different type of tumbling belongs to ‘athletics’ and stricter notions of *gymnastike* which exclude dance. Several Greek vases, all dating between the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to the early 5<sup>th</sup>, present scenes of acrobatic activity. In them, a warrior figure, usually nude apart from helmet and greaves and equipped with spear and shield or sometimes two shields, performs a back somersault after leaping from a ‘springboard’ – typically an inclined piece of wood supported by another piece, but the support is not always shown. The men execute an aerial rotation, though sometimes the performance of the rotation is only evoked by showing a man on, or running toward, the springboard. The military accoutrements the performers wear indicate that the event pictured had martial associations. The prevalence of such imagery suggests that successful execution of the springboard leap exemplified the civic value of the performer and his potential for positive contributions in war. In this way, it finds parallels to the interpretation of athletic events like the *pyrrhiche*, horseback javelin-throw, race in armour, etc., as an initiatory ritual. Here the combination of extreme physical ability with militaristic overtones creates the image of a warrior-athlete. The activity is indeed an ‘athletic’ one; the same springboard that characterizes these scenes is also prominent on an early Panathenaic prize amphora, which I fully discuss in Chapter Three.

A few words on terminology are needed before an analysis of the vases: I have repeatedly termed the apparatus from which a male tumbler leaps a ‘springboard’, despite the fact that it does not operate in the same way as a modern springboard in gymnastic competitions. The device certainly would not have had the same level of elasticity and may have been used more as a ramp of sorts (though still, I think, with some ‘spring’ or ‘bounce’ to help propel a participant). I use the term ‘springboard’ both for the

recollection of modern gymnastics, which provides a helpful if not exact comparison, and for lack of a known Greek term. Some scholars reject the term ‘springboard’ for the equipment shown in the vases and label it instead a *petauron* (or the variant *peteuron*), a Latin term for an acrobatic apparatus, but the application of this word to the early Greek scenes is troublesome.<sup>125</sup> First of all, it is still unclear what the *petauron* actually was in Roman performances. Sometimes it seems to mean something like a teeter-totter (Manil. *Astr.* 5.439, Petron. fr.15, Vindicianus, *Gyn.* 470 Rose), other times a springboard (Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 98.8, Juv. 14.265, Claudian, *Pan.* XVII on Cons. Manl. 320ff., cf. Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 11.115.8), or a platform on a high-rise (Lucil. 1298 [Marx] = Festus 206.32, cf. Petron. 53.11), maybe something akin to a tightrope (Mart. 2.86), or some other inexplicable structure (Mart. 11.21, Plut. *Mor.* 498c).<sup>126</sup> The multiplicity of potential interpretations implies that the *petauron* was a generic term for a piece of circus equipment used in aerial acts. Furthermore, the words *petauron/peteuron*, *petauristes* (‘acrobats’), and *petaurizein* (‘to use the petauron’) are not used in acrobatic contexts until the late 2<sup>nd</sup>- 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C. (Stilo, fr. 28; Philod. *Ars Rhet.* 2, col. XLI = Longo 129; Lucil. 1298 [Marx]; Var. *De Vit. Pop. Rom.* 2.85). It first means ‘bird’s roost’ in Greek (e.g. Ar. fr. 872 K-A; Nic. *Ther.* 197; Theocr. 13.13), though could denote any long flat plank of wood (e.g. Lyc. *Alex.* 884; Polyb. 8.4.8; Hesych. π 2058); the Latin word for acrobats, *petauristes*, thus literally means something like ‘roosters’, who presumably leave their ‘perch’ (the *petauron*) as if flying. Indeed, this is what the Latin etymologists apparently conceived when they (probably incorrectly) traced the word to an amalgamation of the Greek words πρὸς ἀέρα πέταται, ‘one flies toward the air’ (πετ + αερ).<sup>127</sup> Complicating matters is the use of the word *petauron* for a constituent part of a trap (παγίδος), probably the pieces of wood that formed a framework to hold in place a collapsing mechanism (see Suda σ 534, Σ Ar. *Ach.* 687).<sup>128</sup> The word then comes to be used metonymically for the trap as a whole (e.g. the ‘trap’ of Hades in the Septaguint [Proverbs 9:18], sometimes mistranslated later as ‘springboard’). Essential to the earliest

<sup>125</sup> Jannot (1986, 196), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, 169-70), Schäfer (1997, 83 n. 752).

<sup>126</sup> For more on the *petauron* see Blümner (1918, 12-13), Mehl (1930), Jones (1991, 187), Kay (1985) on Martial 11.21.3.

<sup>127</sup> Stilo fr. 28, Nonius Marcellus *De Compendiosa Doctrina* 56. 31 (= 79L). Beekes (2010, 1181) states that there is no good Indo-European etymology for *petauron*, and thus it is probably pre-Greek.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Hesych. π 2054.

semantics of the word *petauron*, however, is that the plank of wood is supported in the air, such as a tree branch would be (cf. Phot. s.v. *petauron*). This sense generally continues in Roman circus performances that involve the apparatus, regardless of form (with the possible exception of Man. *Astr.* 5.439). It could even be part of the show as it rotated and moved above the spectator's heads (Plut. *Mor.* 498c). Importantly, this is *not* true of the springboard used by Greek and Etruscan tumblers. The device here is consistently on the ground, functioning as a stationary tool for a man to exhibit his bodily feats. Finally, the use of the Greek springboard in acrobatic displays seems to cease in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, at least according to extant evidence, not to reappear until the late 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. No certain mention of a 'springboard' of any sort survives in this gap, whether in textual or material sources. The only possible exception is the enigmatic reference to *skleropaiktai* in Athenaeus' summary of a letter by Hippolochus of Macedon (Ath. 4.129d), who might be 'hard players' because they 'sport' with a 'hard' plank (an awkward interpretation; see Chapter 4.4). In short, then, the term *petauron* for the apparatus in the Greek scenes of springboard tumbling is probably anachronistic. Perhaps it had no more specific a name than *σανίς*, 'board', or *πίναξ*, 'plank', *vel. sim.* Let us turn now to the images.

**Würzburg, Martin-von-Wagner-Mus., HA 639:**<sup>129</sup>

A black-banded Attic kylix in Würzburg, dated to ca. 530 B.C., shows figural scenes of individual tumblers on both sides, each of which is framed by prophylactic eyes. The tumblers are drawn so as to be nearly identical, though one is slightly oblique while the other has his body more vertical. The men are inverted, heads nearly touching the ground and legs bent at the knees while they revolve in the air. The elbows are also bent and somewhat tucked into the body. In all, the bodies demonstrate the technical proficiency of the tumblers and the artist of the cup, with good attention to realism and biomechanics. The men both carry a single shield strapped to their left arms. Beazley claimed they held two shields, but this is quite obviously false.<sup>130</sup> The right hands are empty but probably

<sup>129</sup> Langlotz (1932, no. 428, pl. 113), Beazley (1939, fig. 8), Schäfer (1997, pl. 47.1). The vase is often cited as Würzburg 428, with reference to Langlotz's catalogue.

<sup>130</sup> Beazley (1939, 11).

held the spears to the left of the tumblers, discarded in the midst of the leap.<sup>131</sup> The men are helmeted but otherwise nude, though a line across the ankles might imply that greaves are worn.<sup>132</sup> The springboard is shown to the right, though only as an inclined plane without a support bar. Aside from the slight difference in body position of about 45°, the only real variation for the two tumblers is the depiction of the helmet. Both have the slope and closed face of a Corinthian helmet, but one has a large crest covering its top surface while the other lets loose a mane of hair from the back. It is thus clear that we see two *different* men executing extraordinary feats of athleticism, not a lone man in two parts of a single performance. Perhaps the distinction signifies a competition. This reading seems more likely than that the two men perform the same exploit as entertainment, even if we hypothetically consider them part of the same ‘troupe’.<sup>133</sup> An athletic context also makes sense with the socio-cultural significance of a powerful and muscular form in perfect control of its own physicality, particularly when combined with the ideological interpretation of the martial iconography as outlined above.

**Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 67.861:**<sup>134</sup>

An Attic, top-band stemless kylix housed in Boston, dated to ca. 530 B.C., is similar to Würzburg HA 639 in style, vessel type, provenance, and date. The figural scenes, again framed with prophylactic eyes,<sup>135</sup> are also comparable, but have significant differences. A lone tumbler is once more depicted on either side of the cup, inverted and airborne in the midst of executing an aerial back flip from a springboard. The men are practically identical to each other and in more or less the same pose as those on the Würzburg kylix, but drawn with less accuracy with respect to kinetic realism. Their bodies are slightly compact, the legs too far forward, and the right arms thrown haphazardly outward instead

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<sup>131</sup> Langlotz (1932, 80) tentatively identifies them as spears. The tumbler on Bonn 340 holds a spear as he runs toward the springboard (see below).

<sup>132</sup> Pace Langlotz (1932, 80), who claims the ‘hoplites’ are in full armour (“in voller Rüstung”).

<sup>133</sup> Because of the presence of a springboard, the tumblers are also not dancers: see discussion below on the importance of the apparatus as a semiotic marker of an acrobatic activity.

<sup>134</sup> CVA USA 19/Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 2, III H, pl. 106 (940) 1-2-3; Delavaud-Roux (1993, no. 57), Stansbury-O’Donnell (2006, fig. 51).

<sup>135</sup> Delavaud-Roux (1993, 159) claims that the apotropaic eyes tell us that the tumbling occurred within the scope “d’un festin”, but these eyes can appear on vessels (usually kylikes) with a variety of scenes and need not imply a festival or banquet. The apotropaic function of the eyes is matched by the gorgoneion in the cup’s tondo.

of held close to the body. The body position does not suggest a fluid mechanical motion and could result in an injurious landing.<sup>136</sup> However, it might be more prudent to take this not as a comment on the tumblers' abilities, but as a possible result of the artist's unfamiliarity with painting acrobatic feats. The men's corporal compactness supports this theory, for if they were to straighten their forms they would be larger than life. The inverted bodies also give the impression of having been originally drawn right-side up on an upside down vase, with the top band as a guide for their feet.<sup>137</sup>

Both tumblers bear the military equipment that is typical of Greek springboard leapers. In their left hands they each have a shield, albeit held sideways and tucked into the body, unlike other representations of male athletic tumblers, though the shield might be held this way for balance. Greaves, Corinthian helmets (here with identical crests) and breastplates complete the panoply. To the left of each tumbler is a single thin black line. These are probably not discarded or thrown spears,<sup>138</sup> for the lack of any other lines would mean that there is *no* springboard in the scene – an unparalleled circumstance for Greek vase paintings of male tumblers in this particular pose.<sup>139</sup> If the lines *are* springboards, however, they are incorrectly shown to the left when they should be on the right, if the men have done the standard back flip. It is possible that the tumblers are doing a different manoeuvre, but I find it more likely that the artist simply put the springboards on the wrong side. Perhaps the reason for this is the presence of a single spectator to the right of each tumbler, who stands where the apparatus should be. Interestingly, the spectators are markedly dissimilar from each other, in contrast to the uniformity of the athletes themselves. On one side of the kylix, the bystander is a

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<sup>136</sup> In particular, the extended right arms are awkward. Perhaps they are intended to show active motion, or conceivably to 'balance' the tumbler.

<sup>137</sup> An Etruscan vase (Toledo 82.134) depicting a chorus of half men, half dolphins diving into the waves was probably painted similarly: see Csapo (2003, 82-3).

<sup>138</sup> As labeled in the CVA description (CVA Boston 2, pg. 48).

<sup>139</sup> A possible exception is a fragmentary pelike in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (1978.347.2a-h = Beazley (1963, 238.10), *non ipse vidi*), which shows, according to Giroux and von Bothmer in Carpenter (1989, 201), "a man in armour somersaulting over three upright swords". No springboard is mentioned, and the aspect of leaping *over* swords is closer to sympotic sword-diving than anything else; N.B., though, that he is still (apparently) airborne. The date of vase, 500-480 B.C., could relate to a transition in the popularity of different forms of 'acrobatic' displays: see further below.

If the line to the left of the tumbler on the Boston kylix *is* a spear, there are two possible reasons for the lack of a springboard in the picture: either the artist left it out but it was still used in a 'real' performance, of which this is only a representation, or tumbling in martial gear could exist without the springboard, either as part of martial dances or separately.



beardless male wearing a cloak draped over his shoulders. He faces the tumbler and gestures toward him with a fully extended arm, but otherwise appears impassive. His emotionless face is in stark contrast with the excitement of the spectator on the cup's opposite side, who gazes in open-mouthed amazement at the jaw-dropping tumbling display. He wears headgear, perhaps a cap or helmet, but is nude at least from the waist-up (I cannot discern whether or not he is wearing a short garment waist-down).<sup>140</sup> Dangling from his arms are strings with several strange oblong objects, maybe animal pelts.<sup>141</sup> Both arms are widely outstretched and raised to the level of his head, in an animated gesture that might convey astonishment, admiration, shock, surprise, or fear.<sup>142</sup> From their garments (and less so their emotions), I construe this man as a slave or banausic person and his counterpart on the cup a citizen. Who are these men? The relevant CVA lists them both as "assistants",<sup>143</sup> but the term is unhelpfully ambiguous. It is difficult to imagine what 'assistance' they are giving, unless they were meant to be 'spotters', to use a modern term. The citizen could conceivably be a trainer who watches his athlete as trainers commonly do in vase painting, but the slave is certainly not. Perhaps he is a palaestra slave? Unfortunately, any label beyond 'spectator' can only be conjectural.

Allowing for artistic inaccuracies, the 'abnormal' achievements of the tumblers' muscular male bodies convey masculine ideals to a culturally-informed observer. This reading is congruent with the general semiotics of Greek athletic tumblers. On the Boston cup, however, we also see reactions to the typical male performance from spectators of two different social classes and thus are presented with an idea of tumbling's implicit relationship with those classes. According to the arguments of Timothy McNiven, of central importance to understanding how vase paintings present social divisions is

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<sup>140</sup> According to Pipili (2000, 179) in her study on headgear in Greek art, a workman's hat is "an immediately recognizable symbol employed in art to denote the inferior social status of these figures [poor, lower class men in manual occupations] as opposed to respectable citizens".

<sup>141</sup> CVA Boston 2, 48 states that this man, like the spectator on the opposite side, wears a *chlamys*, a kind of short cloak. However, the items or garments are quite clearly different, the slave/banausic man's definitely *not* a *chlamys*.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006, 158): "although the spectator's gesture usually conveys alarm, within the context it can also represent surprise at the feat of the upside-down warrior".

<sup>143</sup> CVA Boston 2, 48.

gesture.<sup>144</sup> By means of body language artists can portray temperance and/or masculine courage (what Greeks in Classical Athens might call *sophrosune* and *andreia*), or the lack of these qualities. Most important of all for McNiven is the identification of behaviour that marks out the proper adult male citizen, or the *kalokagathos*. A moderate or controlled man who possesses temperance and self-control will show more restricted movements at a funeral, for example, than a Greek woman who characteristically pulls at her hair in a sign of mourning.<sup>145</sup> Along this vein of argumentation, the spectators who watch the performances on the Boston kylix and exhibit different gestures also display different levels of self-control and thus social standing.

In a related but much longer study on spectatorship in Greek art, Mark Stansbury-O'Donnell places the man with two outstretched arms on the Boston kylix in the category of "very active spectators" and points out that such a strong emotional response is rare and certainly not ideal.<sup>146</sup> There is a lack of self-control here, and one which in part speaks to the level of spectator engagement and intensity that derives from watching acrobatics. We might compare the fear and enthralled attention given to the dancing girl in Xenophon's *Symposium* (2.11). However, the man's immoderate gesticulations also reinforce the representation of his low social status, revealed through the rest of his iconography. He is not like the Athenian citizen on the reverse, whose face remains impassive and who points with only one arm toward the tumbler. The one-armed gesture is markedly more reserved, and while it too indicates spectator engagement, it is a marker of acclaim or encouragement, not fear or shock.<sup>147</sup> In contrast with the banausic man, then, the citizen male demonstrates more self-control. The former's shock and/or awe from the tumbler's display suggests a social gulf between the two spectators.<sup>148</sup> But implicit in the controlled response of the citizen is the cultural acceptance of the performance and approval of it by the particular social group he represents. The qualities demonstrated by the tumbler (muscular physicality, masculinity, prowess in war) express shared values. Finally, the contrastive gestural responses also help distinguish the social

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<sup>144</sup> McNiven (2000).

<sup>145</sup> McNiven (2000, 72).

<sup>146</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006, 158-9).

<sup>147</sup> Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006) does not discuss this spectator, only the slave. The same gesture of one arm extended is displayed by the crowd watching a tumbler on Paris, Cab. Méd. 243 (see Chapter Three).

<sup>148</sup> Similar to the Paphlagonians' shock at the martial performances in the *Anabasis*: see Chapter One.

class of the tumbler himself. He too must possess self-control, at least in that he can govern his own body and strength to the highly developed level required to perform a back somersault, which in itself depends on considerable training and therefore self-discipline. Here, temperance is united with masculinity in the public display of a strenuous physical feat given martial overtones.<sup>149</sup>

**Bonn, Akademisches Kunstmuseum, 340:**<sup>150</sup>

A black-figure, white ground lekythos from Eretria, attributed to the workshop of the Athena Painter and dated to around 500 B.C., depicts a man in hoplite gear running toward a springboard and *aulos* player.<sup>151</sup> He is fully equipped apart from greaves, wears a crested Attic helmet and a tunic or corselet, and holds a long spear in his right hand, pointed forward. A shield is in his left.<sup>152</sup> He is clearly in dynamic motion, knees bent and only the arch of his left foot touching the ground, while the right foot is lifted upward and set upon the springboard to his right. The apparatus itself is boldly drawn as a prominent structure. The inclined section is at an angle of about 30° and is supported by a thick plank. Beneath the triangular cavity created by the object is another Attic helmet, whose crest is lifted by a projecting stem. To the right the stationary aulete in a flowing garment plays the flute to accompany the event. He is significantly taller than the tumbler. The inscriptions in front and beside the springboard are nonsensical.

The lekythos presents not the actual aerial accomplishments of the tumbler, but the initiation of his dynamic performance. He runs swiftly toward the springboard, military gear held as if charging a foe. Approaching the springboard platform at speed not only offers an impressive visual display, but would probably also allow the athlete to perform a better leap. In terms of the fundamentals of springboard tumbling, the vase verifies that an *aulos* did or could accompany the activity, as in other sports (e.g. the long jump: see

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<sup>149</sup> For Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006, 158), the imagery of spectator and tumbler reminds the viewer of the “importance of warriors performing within civic and religious rituals in Athens”.

<sup>150</sup> Greifenhagen (1935, no. 34, fig. 48 and 50), Beazley (1956, 524.1), Jannot (1986, pl. 4.1), Schäfer (1997, pl. 46.1-2), Hatzivassiliou (2010, no. 697, pl. 19.2-3). Hatzivassiliou’s cursory statement that the springboard apparatus is for a “high jump” is unlikely.

<sup>151</sup> Greifenhagen (1935, 466-7) assigns the lekythos to the Edinburgh Painter.

<sup>152</sup> This athlete is more fully equipped than other tumblers. This could either be due to the artist’s choice to emphasize the martial aspects of the activity, or stands as evidence that springboard tumblers could have varying amounts of gear.

Philost. *Gym.* 35).<sup>153</sup> The principle is that the rhythm of the flute will help the performer's timing, but here its use also relates to the convergence of dance and sport in acrobatics. Despite the artist's choice not to show the acrobatic action itself, the lekythos certainly evokes the action by giving prominence to the springboard. The apparatus, placed in the centre of the picture, unifies the scene and serves an iconic purpose. By this structure alone an ancient viewer would be able to identify the male in hoplite gear as a tumbler, as opposed to a pyrrhic dancer or *hoplitodromos*, and would know precisely the form his performance would take. The man stays grounded and thus the cultural meaning of controlled *aerial* movement as indicative of high social standing is allusive, though still present. In fact, its allusive quality here brings greater emphasis to the ritual significance of the springboard leap as I have argued above, namely, that it is similar to other armed sporting events in marking the transition of a youth to manhood by displaying his physical and militaristic prowess. The tumbler is, as noted, shorter and smaller than the *aulos* player, which perhaps indicates that he is younger too, maybe an *ephebe*. The image therefore captures the moment immediately before the act representative of entering into adulthood (the successful execution of an acrobatic feat). Significant to this reading is the helmet placed underneath the springboard. It has been proposed that the helmet is intended to be the prize for the event,<sup>154</sup> which may be correct and certainly confirms the martial importance of the tumbler's performance, but it is also emblematic of the *ephebe*'s development as a soldier. By no coincidence, in my opinion, this helmet is slightly larger than the one on the tumbler's head, both in its size and with the raised crest. Its comparative scale corroborates the theory that the youth's activity establishes him as a grown man in the eyes of the civic community, for he will now be able to don an adult's war gear.

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<sup>153</sup> An *aulos* accompanies the acrobatics in Xen. *Anab* 6.1.9 and the dance on an Attic skyphos in Thebes (B.E.64.342). An aulete also plays for the male tumbling on Paris, Cab. Méd. 243 and Tampa 86.93; cf. the Etruscan tomb painting from Poggio al Moro (see below). Several vase paintings of female tumbling also include an *aulos* player (e.g. Naples 81398, Madrid L 199, Naples SA 405) and the troupe in Xenophon's *Symposium* includes a flute-girl (2.1, *passim*): see Chapters Four and Five. A terracotta acrobat from Lipari plays a lyre, not a flute (Brea F16), which is likely the object missing from the acrobat's hands in another terracotta in the Louvre (CA 459). Lyre playing also accompanies the Homeric tumblers in their dance (*Il.* 18.605-6; *Od.* 4.17-19).

<sup>154</sup> Greifenhagen (1935, 467) tentatively calls it a "Kampfpfeis".

**Tampa, Mus. Of Art, Joseph Veach Noble Collection 86.93:<sup>155</sup>**

The final definite example of a male springboard leaper in Greek art is the subject of a red-figure Attic skyphos, dated ca. 470 B.C. On one side, a male figure stands on a prominently drawn springboard inclining to the right, mostly nude but with some military gear. He wears a Chalcidian helmet, which has a serrated crest and an image of a deer (?), and carries a shield in either hand. The shield in his right hand, facing the viewer, bears the emblem of a squatting dog. The edge of the shield does not quite cover the tip of the man's penis. His body position is precarious as he bends backwards from the springboard; the knees are bent and the feet flat against the wood, indicating that he should probably not be seen as stationary, but just about to leap. Immediately behind the figure is a bumpy rock. The springboard apparatus is clear and conspicuous. It makes an angle of roughly 45°, its support beam is plainly shown, and it rises to about the same height as the man who uses it. On the opposite side of the skyphos, an *aulos* player is central in the scene. He is fully clothed in a cloak and carries a single flute in either hand. Attached to his head is the *phorbeia*, the device that straps his instruments in place when playing. To his right, a leopard skin flute case hangs suspended. To his left, a potter's wheel is situated on the ground.

With regard to kinetic fundamentals, this vase captures the moment immediately before the leap from the springboard. The pose would be difficult to hold if the man were immobile, though not impossible; regardless, the scene should be read as the instant before the man performs an acrobatic action. He stands rather lower on the springboard's inclined plane than perhaps we might expect in practice, but this is probably for the simple reason of representation in a small field.<sup>156</sup> Just as on other vases, the man's military accoutrement suggests that the completion of a successful tumble should be read as an indication of martial ability. However, the iconographic significance of the device on his shield may be at odds with the ideology of athletic male tumbling. The emblem is a squatting dog, crouched as if defecating. When vase paintings depict elimination it is without doubt stigmatized, despite not being exceptionally rare, especially on black-

<sup>155</sup> Von Bothmer (1961, no. 248, pl. 90), Neils (1992, no. 47), Russell (1994, no. 2), Schäfer (1997, pl. 47.2-3), Pevnick (2014, fig. 6).

<sup>156</sup> Compare the springboard on Paris, Cab. Méd. 243, where the man is at the top of the incline.

figure vases before 500 B.C. Humans shown defecating are examples of shameful and disgusting figures, but perhaps also somewhat amusing ones as well.<sup>157</sup> The humour, though, derives mainly from carnivalesque absurdity where the opposite of acceptable social behaviour becomes comical. A defecating dog implies similar ‘otherness’, paradoxically both amplified and palliated by his being nonhuman. Canine elimination is shown on an Athenian red-figure cup by the Triptolemos Painter, a black-figure Droop cup (Athens, NM 359), and a kylix by the Amasis Painter (Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, 10.651). On the latter two the dogs defecate under the cup’s handles, and have been read as humorous figures, perhaps part of a larger message of satire.<sup>158</sup> This iconography starkly contrasts the positive interpretation posited thus far for male tumbling, if indeed the dog on the shield is defecating. But unlike the other examples, there are *no* feces drawn with the dog on the Tampa skyphos; he merely assumes a squatting position. The lack is significant. Canine imagery on shield devices is not uncommon, and it might be more accurate to align the emblem here with other shields bearing pictures of dogs, although they are normally standing, not squatting. But the dog is not the only odd feature of the scenes on this vase. Scholars have argued that other aspects of the imagery imply that the man here is a performer of spectacular *thaumatopoiia*, not, as I have suggested for other male tumblers, a quasi-hero according to the socio-cultural interpretation of his specific brand of physicality. After addressing these valid concerns, I argue that the scene on this vase is indicative of a transition in the cultural presence of acrobatic actions, once an athletic event and later more associated with *thaumatopoiia*.

Dietrich von Bothmer first proposed that the rock to the left of the springboard could be part of the tumbler’s performance, suggesting that the man leapt from here onto the board.<sup>159</sup> Jennifer Neils is vaguer as to its use, merely stating that it is possibly “another prop in his performance”.<sup>160</sup> If these theories are correct, the leap from the rock to the

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<sup>157</sup> For defecation in vase paintings see Sutton (2000, 191-4); cf. scatological humour in Old Comedy: see Henderson (1975, 187-92).

<sup>158</sup> Pevnick (2014, 156-7). For the cup by the Triptolemos Painter, Pevnick (2014, fig. 1-3, and *passim*). Regarding the iconography of these four eliminating dogs, Pevnick (2014, 156) points out that “it is not clear that all – or even any – of these dogs should be deemed ‘bad’ on account of their defecation.” Indeed, he notes that the two passing waste under the handles of their respective cups are actually out of the way, and thus perhaps ‘good’ dogs.

<sup>159</sup> von Bothmer (1961, 63).

<sup>160</sup> Neils (1992, 176).

springboard (or conceivably from the springboard onto the rock) would instantaneously change the nature of the tumbling, making it more ‘spectacular’ and dangerous, an incredible stunt rather than an athletic activity.<sup>161</sup> The use of props for male tumbling is limited to the springboard device alone, which is a specific apparatus for the activity; it would be uncharacteristic to incorporate a rock into the performance as a platform from which to jump. Exploiting items to make an acrobatic performance more impressive is generally reserved either for male play at symposia, where objects become balancing toys and unorthodox platforms, or for ‘professional’ entertainment.<sup>162</sup> No other male springboard tumbler uses a prop like the rock.<sup>163</sup> However, a standard prop for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, the potter’s wheel, is also depicted on this skyphos. Here, von Bothmer’s reading of the vase is worth citing: “perhaps the two scenes are connected and are parts of an elaborate acrobatic feat. The performer jumps from a rock to a springboard, turns a somersault, and finally lands on a turntable which spins him around”.<sup>164</sup> There is no doubt that the two scenes are connected. The combined image of a springboard on one side of the vase and a potter’s wheel on the other give the scenes undeniable acrobatic context.<sup>165</sup> But are we really to think that the man will perform on the potter’s wheel, a device whose use is in all other instances a hallmark of wonder-making at symposia and elsewhere? The only other contemporary reference to a man performing acrobatics on a potter’s wheel is in Plato’s *Euthydemus*, where it is mentioned as an example of extreme and incredible behaviour (294e).<sup>166</sup>

At first consideration, and if we take the skyphos in isolation, it does indeed seem that we are invited to extrapolate the tumbler’s performance to the potter’s wheel. In this case it would mean either that upper class men *could* legitimately perform on a potter’s wheel,

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<sup>161</sup> Cf. Kyle’s (1992, 96) claim that springboard tumbling, as shown on this vase and Paris, Cab. Méd. 243, is not sport, but “miscellaneous displays and diversions associated with festivals or victory celebrations”.

<sup>162</sup> See Chapter 4.4.

<sup>163</sup> The only exception is the ramp on Paris, Cab. Méd. 243, but it is not a spectacular prop here; the ramp is merely a tool for the *kybisteter* to jump onto the horses’ rumps.

<sup>164</sup> von Bothmer (1961, 64); cf. Russell (1994, 15) for the suggestion that the aulete will play on the potter’s wheel, for which there is no parallel.

<sup>165</sup> Other activities on a potter’s wheel are possible (e.g. dancing, balancing, spinning: see London, BM E387, and Galerie Fischer May 21, 1941, no. 68, pl. 6), but given the acrobatic context for the tumbler it is probable that the wheel here is meant to evoke acrobatics as well.

<sup>166</sup> Perhaps also in Σ Ar. *Ach.* 851, where it would be an insult: see Dearden (1995, 82 n. 6). See also Chapter 5.2.

or that the man here (and perhaps by implication even other male tumblers) is not an athlete or an upper class citizen, but a spectacular, ‘side-show’ performer, as others have interpreted him.<sup>167</sup> Given the derogatory tone in *Euthydemus* to the prospect of a man on a potter’s wheel (even acknowledging its much later date than the pot in question) and the lack of other examples, I judge it unlikely that it was culturally acceptable behaviour for a citizen male to perform on a wheel. At the end of the fifth century, at least, when potter’s wheels are first mentioned in connection with acrobatic displays (apart from this vase itself), such feats are associated with low status social identities.<sup>168</sup> It is conceivable that in the years around 470 B.C., to which this vase is dated, a citizen might have performed a socially acceptable display on the device, which would later be appropriated by spectacular contortionists and dancers, but the case is unconvincing. The physical act of holding a stationary and exhibitionistic position on a rotating wheel, maybe even if equipped in military gear, would not highlight the upper-class masculine ethos. Perhaps the best comparison is to Hippocleides, whose inverted antics on a table cost him a marriage alliance (Hdt. 6.129). As to the possibility that the man here does indeed belong to the lower class category of ‘marvel markers’, *thaumatopoiioi*, arguments can only be speculative; however, there is no evidence that acrobatic *thaumatopoiia* included springboard leaps.<sup>169</sup> This is not to say that male tumbling does not have a spectacular element,<sup>170</sup> but it simply does not appear to have been a variety of ‘wonder-making’.

The key to reading this vase, I argue, is in recognizing the extent to which the two scenes on it are related. Von Bothmer’s proposition that they are both “parts of an elaborate acrobatic feat” goes too far. They both evoke acrobatic activity, indeed, but a *different*

<sup>167</sup> E.g. Kyle (1992, 96), Neils (1992, 176; but cf. Neils (2007, 48)), Pevnick (2014, 158); cf. Beazley (1939, 11). Schäfer (1997, 83) also thinks the man will perform on the wheel but gives him elevated status.

<sup>168</sup> Dearden (1995, 82) wonders “whether the connection between potters’ wheels and acrobats is already a commonplace for the poet of the *Iliad*”, due to the close proximity of respective references in Book 18 (600 and 605).

<sup>169</sup> The first extant reference to a male acrobat or tumbler as a *thaumatopoiios* is by Musonius Rufus (*Discourse* 7.6), then Maximus of Tyre (*Diss.* 29.3) and later Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 7.11.66.3). Democritus fr. D92 (Taylor) = D-K 68 B 228 mentions οἱ ὀρχησταὶ οἱ ἐς τὰς μαχαίρας ὀρούοντες, ‘[male] dancers who rush towards swords’. This is indeed thaumatopoietic, but N.B. that the men are called ‘dancers’, that they do not ‘tumble’, and that the requisite acrobatic bodily feats are very different from springboard leaps. See further in Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>170</sup> E.g.: a rider leaping between galloping horses earns stares from a crowd (*Il.* 15.682: πολέες τέ ἐθηήσαντο); in Plato’s *Meno*, Themistocles’ son stands upright on horseback and ‘works many other marvels’ (93d: πολλὰ καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἠργάζετο); in Philostratus the Younger’s *Imagines*, the tumblers depicted on the Shield of Achilles lead others to wonder (ἄγειν μοι σαφῶς αὐτοὺς ἐς τὸ θαῦμα δοκοῦσιν).



sort of activity. On the one side of the skyphos, a man tumbles from a springboard in a ritualized athletic contest; on the other side, an *aulos* player and potter's wheel conjure the image of a feminine show at a symposium. Both scenes involve acrobats, but not the same acrobat. The non-figural objects in the illustrations suggest this reading. The rock to the left of the warrior-tumbler on the springboard is *not* a prop, as others have suggested, but an indication of an outdoor setting. That springboard leaps occurred outside is confirmed by the imagery on other vases - such as spectators, a grandstand, trees - and of course by simple logistics; the vast majority of Greek buildings would not have room for the activity. In contrast, the hanging flute case on the reverse is a marker of either a palaestra scene, in which objects like the athlete's strigil and aryballos routinely hang from a peg put in a 'wall' behind them, or an otherwise indoor locale, such as a symposium. The presence of the potter's wheel corroborates the theory that we have here an indoor setting, not a palaestra or gymnasium.<sup>171</sup> The object belongs inside, and so we should recognize that this half of the vessel illustrates an indoor setting. The skyphos therefore presents a dichotomy of outdoor/indoor, masculine/feminine, upper class/lower class acrobatics, despite the fact that no *thaumatopios* is explicitly present.<sup>172</sup>

Despite the defence outlined above for reading the man's tumbling as indicative of positive socio-cultural virtues, like other male tumblers, there remains the presence of the squatting dog on the man's shield. As stated above, *if* the animal is to be understood as defecating, the image mars the otherwise positive representation of the warrior-athlete. The date of the vase may help offer an explanation. Placed at about 470 B.C., the mixed iconography on the skyphos seems to reflect a period of transition in the cultural presence and reception of acrobatics and tumbling. It is simultaneously the latest extant example of springboard tumbling and the earliest evocation of stunts on a potter's wheel.

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<sup>171</sup> The only contemporary representation of outdoor acrobatic performance on a potter's wheel is the subject of a phlyax vase, but it is an exception because it represents a stage show (Oxford 1945.43; cf. Lipari 927). My points here are *contra* Schäfer (1997, 83), who reads the two sides of the Tampa vase very closely. He argues that the rock and flute bag together indicate a public space for performance and that the potter's wheel is therefore also outdoors ("nach dem Zeugnis des frühklassischen Vasenbildes wird die Töpferscheibe zunächst in der öffentlichen Sphäre verwendet"). This nonetheless does not lead astray his main argument on these topics, namely, that some originally public entertainments sometime later became more or less exclusive to private symposia.

<sup>172</sup> For the shift in acrobatic activity from public, outdoor venues to private, indoor ones, see also Schäfer (1997, 83).

Representations of athletic male tumblers virtually disappear from the artistic and historical record thereafter, while the first evidence for professional female acrobats and contortionists begins around 450 B.C. and proceeds to dominate extant evidence for acrobatics.<sup>173</sup> A lacuna of sorts is possible, of course, but I suspect that the public presence of acrobatics changed. Tumbling would still have a place in dance, such as the Mysian soldier's in the *Anabasis*, but truly 'athletic' feats in activities like springboard leaps were replaced with death-defying spectacle designed for wonder-shows and often stigmatized by monetary exchange for the entertainment.<sup>174</sup> No longer, then, did masculine tumbling convey its previous ideals.

The Greek vases described above are the most certain examples of male tumbling as a potentially 'athletic' activity, aside from the infamous Panathenaic amphora which I shall discuss at length in the next chapter. Before I turn to the thorny problems presented by this vessel, two more potential instances of tumbling must be treated briefly. The first is a fragmentary oinochoe, which Beazley assumed depicted an acrobat's dance, and the second is the multiple possible or actual representations of springboards in Etruscan contexts.

**Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, 1966.877:**<sup>175</sup>

A fragmentary, Attic red-figure oinochoe in Oxford, dated 420-400 B.C., shows a sympotic scene.<sup>176</sup> Several garlanded guests recline on couches and regard a nude female figure. She holds two shields, one in either hand, and has a crested helmet upon her head, but tilted backwards to rest on her crown without actually being worn. Much of her body

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<sup>173</sup> The earliest extant vases showing female acrobats are Naples 81398 (= H3232) and Madrid L 199 (=11129), both dated ca. 475-425 B.C. Cf. also a fragmentary cup (New York, Met.1978.347.2a-h) that apparently shows a man leaping over swords, but no springboard: see note 139 above.

<sup>174</sup> On the exchange of money for 4<sup>th</sup> century acrobatic shows: Xen. *Sym.* 2.2, 2.13, 4.55; Plut. *Mor.* 1047f6 with 1048c1; Mus. Ruf. *Discourse 7*; cf. Theophr. *Char.* 6.4; Arist. *Oec.* 1346b21. See further in Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>175</sup> Beazley (1939, fig. 7), Ashmolean Museum (1967, no. 333, pl. 47), Poursat (1968, no. 55), Delavaud-Roux (1993, no. 56), Schäfer (1997, pl. 40.2). Also listed by Ceccarelli (1998, 248) as an example of a "danze acrobatiche in armi".

<sup>176</sup> Beazley (1939, 8-9) labels it an oinochoe in the shape of a chous.

from the legs down is missing, but it is clear from the tip of a foot that she is standing upright on the ground. Her form is taut and alert, arms and shields tucked close to the torso, and elbows bent. An oil jar hangs on a pole behind her. One symposiast raises a hand to gesture in her direction and, like the other symposiasts, gazes at the woman. Two others lift their cups in the familiar pose for playing *kottabos*.

There are no obvious acrobatics in this scene and I do not think that any should be interpolated. Beazley, however, influentially argues that because the nude female is holding two shields, her potential movement should be connected to the choreographic features of the Mysian soldier's dance in the *Anabasis* and/or to the revolutions illustrated on several of the springboard vases listed above.<sup>177</sup> On account of the fact that martial dancers (and surely the girl here is an *orchestris*) do not normally hold two shields, Beazley assumes that it characterizes a specifically acrobatic form of martial dance, although he admits that "the girl's act must have been much more limited" than, for example, the Mysian's.<sup>178</sup> Others seize the hypothesis and accept it without question. J.-C. Poursat, for example, even treats the two-shielded acrobatic dance as categorical: the "danse des deux boucliers".<sup>179</sup> The assumption that the acrobatic leap from a springboard, or even acrobatic choreography, is epitomized by holding a shield in either hand is false. The tumblers on Würzburg HA 639, Boston 67.861, and Bonn 340 all have a single shield (despite Beazley's assertion that there are two shields on the Würzburg kylix), and tumblers in choruses need not have weapons of any sort (e.g. Thebes B.E.64.342). There is no compelling reason to think that the girl on this fragmentary oinochoe will tumble. Extant evidence presents a shield-burdened back flip as a male warrior-athlete's pursuit; no woman is ever shown performing an aerial rotation. It is more logical here to hypothesize potential similarities in the girl's dance with other aspects of the Mysian's performance, though any number of choreographic movements are possible. If the girl *is* an acrobat and we simply do not see the 'acrobatic' aspect of her performance, the artist's

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<sup>177</sup> Beazley (1939, 9-11).

<sup>178</sup> Beazley (1939, 11).

<sup>179</sup> Poursat (1968, 609). After his citation of the Mysian's dance in *Anabasis*, Poursat states "c'était donc là un divertissement de banquet, qui comprenait une part d'acrobatie, et la vase cité nous montre que cette danse, ainsi que la pyrrhique, pouvait être exécutée par une danseuse". Delavaud-Roux (1993, 159) likewise claims that the Xenophontic passage "peut être directement rapprochée" to Ashmolean 1966.877, but rightly notes that other dances could also include acrobatic choreography. See also Schäfer (1997, 82) for the suggestion that the girl here will perform comparably to the tumbling on Paris, Cab. Méd. 243.

decision to draw her grounded, not airborne, is integral to interpretation of the vessel. Athletic male tumblers are either depicted at the climax of action or in dynamic motion just before it begins; the girl here is standing completely still, and so does not evoke the same active vigour.

**London, British Museum, B73:**<sup>180</sup>

Tumblers and acrobats occur not infrequently in Etruscan art. The most common examples are small bronze figurines, whose naked, arched bodies, both male and female, serve as the handles for cista lids.<sup>181</sup> Tumblers and acrobats also feature in Etruscan wall-paintings, sculpture, and pottery. Among the latter, one depicts a youth leaping from the familiar springboard and so deserves further mention here as comparative evidence. The British Museum holds a small black-figure kyathos, dated to somewhere between 520 and 500 B.C. and originally categorized by H. B. Walters as Etruscan.<sup>182</sup> On one side, it depicts a seated figure with a staff or walking stick (perhaps Dionysus?), a dancing or striding satyr, what may be a maenad, and another dancing satyr. These four figures belong in a group, neatly placed together on one side of the cup and displaying unity in that they represent a religious or mythic sphere. The other side of the cup presents a wrestling match and umpire, framed on either side by a tumbler. I begin with the tumbler on the far right of the scene: he is male and naked, standing on his head with hands used for support and legs held quite straight. The pose is dissimilar to depictions of handstands on Greek vases, where the legs are almost *always* bent: for women, the legs are usually brought over the head (indeed, not a single female acrobat doing a handstand has perfectly straight legs), while for male symposiasts enjoying in revelry the legs are generally bent or crooked in some fashion. For Etruscan vases and statuettes too, bent legs or an arched body are typical.<sup>183</sup> Here, the tumbler's straightness appears to imply sportive masculinity, in that it is a product of power and firmness, carefully controlled

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<sup>180</sup> Walters (1893, 37).

<sup>181</sup> E.g. St. Petersburg, Hermitage B 734; London, BM 2009.5018.15; London, BM Bronze 741; Rhode Island, RISD Museum 85.107.1; New York, Met. 22.84.3a; New York, Met. 19.193: see further Davies (1971, 150 n. 14).

<sup>182</sup> Walters (1893, 37). The kyathos is also known as a one-handed kantharos.

<sup>183</sup> For example, a beautiful early vase, dated ca. 670 B.C., with several acrobat-dancers (Würzburg ZA 66: see Martelli and Simon 1988); cf. the arched bodies used for cista handles.

and moderated.<sup>184</sup> Curiously, the tumbler is balanced not on the ground but on a flat elevated surface placed next to a similar, higher surface. Beside them is a branch or tree, indicating a continuation of the outdoor setting of the wrestling bout. The identification of the object on which the tumbler balances is difficult. It might be a box or stool, a tree stump, a flat rock, a platform, the base of a monument, or even tiered seating.

To the left of the handstand figure is a cloaked umpire with two *rhabdoi* ('sticks' used to chastise rule-breakers), who watches over a pair of nude bearded wrestlers. Beside them, closest to the obverse scene, is a naked man whom Walters describes as "standing on his head".<sup>185</sup> Upon inspection of the vase in person, however, I observed that he is *not* standing on his head, but is clearly shown in mid air, with head, hands, and the rest of the body above the ground. In fact, he has just performed a back somersault or flip from the inclined plane shown to his left, drawn as a tall triangle. This is the same 'springboard' apparatus seen on the Greek vessels, though here it is almost an abstract representation of the normal device. While the vase painting is of course a portrayal, not a photograph, the manner in which the two tumblers *frame* a wrestling contest invites us to interpret the activities in conjunction, suggesting that they were meaningfully related in some way.<sup>186</sup> Perhaps they even co-existed at a shared locale, maybe a festival that included sporting events (which might reflect the religious imagery on the cup's opposite side), or, given the cup's Etruscan origins, a funerary context. Even though we do not know the setting for the scene, we can say that the artist envisioned it occurring outdoors, probably at the same venue as the wrestling match.

In terms of understanding the role of tumbling in Greek sport, the scene on this kyathos presents a valuable comparison. Walters originally listed the cup as an "Etruscan imitator"; it is certainly possible that the lively scenes were inspired by Greek culture, but the intensely complicated relationship between Greek and Etruscan wares and markets means that the extent of 'imitation', if imitation it is, can only be speculated. More useful

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<sup>184</sup> For the Greeks, at least, straightness is frequently a positive quality: see especially Pl. *Laws* 815b in the context of dance.

<sup>185</sup> Walters (1893, 73).

<sup>186</sup> Lucian uses the word *kybistesis* to describe the action of wrestlers rolling and grappling in the dirt (*Anach.* 16.39, 18.23; cf. Philost. *Gym.* 50 and 36). Vase paintings that show a man thrown in a wrestling bout capture the notion of this sort of 'tumbling'. I thank Prof. Mark Golden for the point that wrestlers might train to tumble properly in order to avoid injury.

to consider is the fact that the airborne tumbler has leapt from a springboard. While the Etruscan tumbler does not have the military equipment that is present on the Greek vases, he quite clearly does the same basic activity of a springboard leap. The similarity in how the springboards are used in both the Etruscan and Greek scenes may hint that there were same or similar contexts for the activity in either culture. It must remain only a cross-cultural comparison, but the curious juxtaposition of wrestlers and tumblers on the Etruscan cup deserves serious consideration. Intriguingly, this is not the only place in Etruscan art where we find the springboard.

### **Etruscan Springboards:**

At the site of Poggio al Moro near Chiusi, dated from 475 to 450 B.C.,<sup>187</sup> richly decorated paintings once lined the walls of a tomb, unfortunately lost since being unearthed and preserved only by copies of early illustrations. The scenes are of festive and sporting pursuits such as boxing, wrestling, hippic contests, and numerous other events.

Immediately next to four runners preparing to set out from a starting line, watched by an umpire, are a springboard and tumbler. Viewing left to right, the apparatus is first; it is much smaller than the Greek examples and the abstract triangle on the British Museum's kyathos, barely coming to hip level. The incline of the plank angles sharply and is supported by a piece of knobbly wood. Very different from all other representations of a tumbler's leap, the participant here has projected in front of the springboard as if it were a ramp. He accordingly executes a frontward revolution (or, less likely, has almost completed a backward one, but this would be a more awkward manoeuvre). The tumbler, who appears to be a youth, has bent knees and keeps his legs close together. His arms are straight and held between his legs. The effect, combined with the slight bend of the head, is a body position rather like the modern 'front tuck'. The boy's feet press against the limits of the mural's upper border. Directly beneath the airborne youth is a bearded *aulos* player, looking upward while crouched on the ground and raising a hand as if to support (or 'spot') the tumbler should he fall. He no longer plays the flutes clutched in his other hand, which might imply that they were only useful for the timing of the run toward the

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<sup>187</sup> Jüthner (1965, pl. 19), Jannot (1986, pl. 1).

springboard, not the leap itself. To his right, an expressionless spectator looks on, one hand raised in the familiar gesture of acclaim.

Almost identical springboard tumbling is present on another Etruscan relief which is also from the area around Chiusi, now in Basel.<sup>188</sup> On one of the relief's four faces, amidst other athletic and festive activities, the sculptor has shown an airborne youth who has leapt from a springboard. The apparatus is clearly shown, with the typical inclined plane and support beam. The tumbler is horizontal in midair and he hugs his legs in the 'tuck' position, with his knees brought up to his chin. Unlike the similar tumbler from Poggio al Moro, this one has his back to the ground, face upwards. In terms of realistic presentation, he is apparently reversed from left to right if he has leapt from the springboard, unless he is doing a half-twist in the air (i.e. a rotation on the horizontal axis as well as vertical). As on the tomb painting, this tumbler has also leapt off and away from the springboard, not backwards from it as in the Greek scenes. This may have been a more 'Etruscan' way of using the board as a ramp of sorts, but note that the tumbler on the Etruscan kyathos in the British Museum has probably also leapt backwards, like the Greeks. Crouched in front of the base of the springboard and gripping the point where the two planks meet is a spotter, over whose head the tumbler sails. To the left of the springboard is a thickset man with hands outstretched, whose status and role is enigmatic.<sup>189</sup>

While these two Etruscan springboard tumblers from the area around Chiusi offer noteworthy comparisons to Greek representations of the activity, the nature of the relationship is unfortunately indeterminable. Are these, as Walters thought of the kyathos, 'imitators' of Greek custom? Was Etruscan tumbling inspired *by* the Greeks, or did it inspire them? According to the arguments of J.-R. Jannot, it was from the Greeks that the Etruscans originally appropriated the activity, though from festive contexts, not, as I

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<sup>188</sup> Galerie Herbert A. Cahn, Basel. Face B. First published in Thuillier (1997, pl. 2).

<sup>189</sup> Thuillier (1997, 250) proposes that he is a trainer present to "récupérer" the tumbler (i.e. his 'spotter'); I think it more likely that the crouching figure would be the spotter, if indeed any is present. Thuillier (*ibid.*) suggests that the crouching figure climbs the vertical post that supports the inclined springboard plank.

argue, athletic ones.<sup>190</sup> He also presents the convincing argument that such tumbling eventually became *part* of Etruscan culture, existing as a pursuit in its own right and not merely as a conscious recollection of Greek practices. The same argument is true for any sort of ‘Greek’ sport in Etruscan culture.<sup>191</sup> While this conclusion is convincing, Jannot’s identification of a springboard (‘tremplin’) in particular sculptural reliefs is less persuasive.<sup>192</sup> He claims that four other structures similar to the ‘tremplin’ occur in the iconography from Chiusi’s reliefs, identifying them from their distinctly triangular shape.<sup>193</sup> However, there is very little ‘acrobatic’ context for the reliefs, other than the flute player standing near a supposed ‘tremplin’. Certainly no tumbler is present with any, though admittedly most of the sculptures are fragmentary. The objects *do* look similar to the springboards seen elsewhere, but without participants we cannot say for certain. The best that can be said is that they *might* be the same apparatus, and if this is the case we have an assortment of Etruscan springboards to match the Greek collection. However, the curious absence of any indication of the tumblers themselves is arresting. To me, this would suggest a rather different socio-cultural importance for the activity, as we might anyway expect. For the Greeks, the consistent illustration of the body reflects the significance of corporeal achievements in an atmosphere of contest; for the Etruscans, an *evocation* of bodily action may reflect notions of corporeal ephemerality – appropriately, perhaps, given that Etruscan games occurred in funereal contexts.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Jannot (1986, 197): “Non codifiées, non reconnues, non intégrées dans l’éthique grecque de l’agon, les acrobaties n’en existent pas moins sur les franges du stade ou la palestre et si elles n’ont pas de place dans les jeux, elles en ont une dans le spectacle et dans la fête.”

<sup>191</sup> See Bevagna (2014) for Etruscan sport, particularly her comment (inspired by Thuillier 1997 and 1985) that “we need not interpret everything in the Etruscan iconographic evidence for sport by reference to the relevant Greek material.” (396).

<sup>192</sup> Jannot (1986, 195-6) uses the term ‘tremplin’ but insists that the apparatus was more of a ramp than springboard.

<sup>193</sup> Palermo 8386 (= Jannot 1984, C II 33), Palermo 8400 (= Jannot 1984, C III 5), Berlin 1228 (= Jannot 1984, C III 11), Florence 5588 (= Jannot, 1984 D II 5): in Jannot 1986, his plates 2.1-2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, respectively.

<sup>194</sup> Cf. Jannot (1984, 355-6) and Jannot (1986, 197). A fragmentary stone relief base of a cippus in Palermo (Mus. Naz. no. 5, Casuccini Collection, ca. 475 B.C.; Briguet (1986, 110, IV-21)) also shows an Etruscan acrobat, but only the legs of his upside-down body are preserved. No springboard is visible. Likewise there is no springboard for the acrobat on a mid 6<sup>th</sup> century revetment placque from Acquarossa (Viterbo, Mus. Arch. Naz.; Haynes (2000, fig. 121)). Presumably he is a dancer at the banquet surrounding him, but perhaps one of low station, for his penis is shown dangling almost comically while he is upside down.



### The ‘Springboard’ and Athletic *Agones*

The ‘acrobatic’ manoeuvres that are executed by springboard leapers are ‘sport’ and ‘athletics’, performed at *agones* and manifestly different from the thaumatopoietic contortions performed by female entertainers. There, the women tend to exhibit an inward-oriented, or introverted, dance, which relies on graceful flexibility and is characterized most prominently by bending the body back onto or over itself.

Importantly, artistic representations of female acrobats do not show them inverted while *airborne*.<sup>195</sup> Different also is the acrobatic play of party-goers and satyrs, for whom acts of balance and erratic or awkward movements are typical. The feats of the tumbler, in contrast, emphasize the man’s physical strength and dependence on individual ability to push the boundaries of normal limitations. The explosive violence of his movements results in a conquest over corporeal restrictions and makes a display that becomes almost macho exhibitionism. A tumbler showcases his *andreia* both in bodily achievement and by laying claim to martial skill.<sup>196</sup> In sum, this masculine tumbling highlights athletic virtues that are at odds with displays of non-sportive acrobatics.

Often, the springboard activity in the vase scenes has been linked with the Mysian’s dance in the *Anabasis*, and martial dance in general.<sup>197</sup> However, this interpretation does not give sufficient credit to the springboard, whose prominence is central to images where it is clearly meant to be understood by the viewer as a distinguishing and identifiable apparatus. I argue that it indicates a distinctive and recognizable activity, perhaps related to martial dances but not exclusively choral in form, function, or nature. The springboard that is shown on these vases is not an everyday object merely appropriated for use in an acrobatic feat, such as a potter’s wheel, whose semiotics do not normally connote spectacular purpose. Rather, it is a specifically acrobatic tool, designed

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<sup>195</sup> The exception that proves the rule is the acrobat on Genoa 1142: see Chapter Four.

<sup>196</sup> For *andreia* (‘manliness’, among other meanings) see Rosen and Sluiter (2003), esp. the contribution by van Nijf (263-286) for the link with athletics.

<sup>197</sup> For the association of the springboard leap with martial dance, especially the Mysian’s dance in *Anabasis*, see especially Beazley (1939, 10-12), von Bothmer (1983, 67), Delavaud-Roux (1993, 158-9), Schäfer (1997, 82). Ceccarelli (1998, 248-9) categorizes several of the following vases under the heading “danze acrobatiche in armi”.

and employed almost exclusively for athletic male tumbling.<sup>198</sup> It is thus also iconographic of the activity, a symbol that evokes the event. We might compare the modern trapeze, which is simultaneously a property of the circus and emblematic of it. The Greek springboard is a similarly representative object, and illustration of it in vase paintings indicates we are viewing a particular incident. Its peculiarity to scenes of male tumbling legitimizes these acrobatics as an idiosyncratic activity.<sup>199</sup> Springboard scenes are not dance scenes.

What context, then, are we to understand for the springboard leaps? Some have proposed that the vase paintings could illustrate an athletic event of some kind,<sup>200</sup> a theory that Donald Kyle summarily dismisses: “there is no reason to drop the usual view that the depictions of acrobatics...merely indicate miscellaneous displays and diversions associated with festivals or victory celebrations”.<sup>201</sup> As ‘reason to drop the usual view’, I adduce once more the very probable existence of acrobatic manoeuvres in pyrrhic contests, the militaristic iconography used for tumblers, and the cultural significance of the physicality of their bodily achievements. Furthermore, there is also the parallel example of the Etruscan scenes, with their clear juxtaposition of tumbling and more traditional athletics. The springboard vases might, then, show an athletic event; but if so, what event? Previous suggestions have included the *euandria*, *hoplitodromos*, *apobates*, or the *pyrrhiche*. Given the importance of the springboard and the fact that this same apparatus is present on a Panathenaic prize amphora (see Chapter Three), I argue that the activity of male tumbling constituted its own event. That is, the tumbling scenes do not ‘belong’ to any known sporting event, but are an athletic contest in their own right, albeit

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<sup>198</sup> There is an exception: on a vase by the Phiale painter, a woman carding wool uses as a footstool a structure identical to the athletic springboard, except in miniature (Palermo, Fondazione Mormino, 788; Oakley (1990, no. 154.3, pl. 132c)). Footstools in textile production come in varying shapes and sizes: compare the lumpy *lambda* shaped object on New York, Met. 06.1117: Richter and Hall (1936, pl. 96), Lewis (2002, fig. 2.3) or the conjoined incline planes with a specific support for the foot on a cup by Douris, a structure which must have been designed as a foot rest (Berlin, Staatliche Museen 2289; Boardman (1975, no. 293)), and the more common small wedge or flat footstool. Many scenes of women seated for textile work do not show footstools at all: see Lewis (2002, 62-5), Sutton (2004, 333-7), Bunker (2008). The structural similarity of some footstools to the springboard probably derives from similarity of purpose (i.e. to support or prop up the feet) and does not detract from the semiotics of the latter in the scenes discussed above.

<sup>199</sup> On the importance of acrobatic tools as semiotic markers, see Bouissac (2010, 34-5).

<sup>200</sup> In connection with the Panathenaic amphora showing acrobatics: see further below.

<sup>201</sup> Kyle (1992, 96).

one that soon ceased.

## Conclusion

In the course of Chapter One and Two I have attempted to synthesize a careful reading of both text and art with considerations of the socio-cultural meanings of the bodies represented in those media. In martial dances, such as the pyrrhic, the execution of ‘acrobatic’ actions can be incorporated into choreography as an example of extreme physical capability. Through that statement of physicality, a claim is made that the participant has been, is, or will be, a good warrior. Social value is asserted by means of a tumbling display. The full implications of this interpretation of movement are evidenced in Xenophon’s *Anabasis*, where the Mysian’s tumbling is part of a larger narrative of dance that demonstrates the cultural and military superiority of the Ten Thousand. In his action there is meaning, which Xenophon makes sure to emphasize: prowess in these dances equates to prowess in war. The same message is delivered in the springboard leaps as illustrated on several Archaic and Classical Greek vases. Here, the springboard indicates that we are viewing an activity distinctive from dance, recognizable from its identifying apparatus. The same device is present in a scene on a Panathenaic prize vessel (Chapter Three), and so we are likely viewing representations of an athletic event.

In the introduction to this chapter, I described ancient sport as a form of ‘mass media’ for the transmission and preservation of Greek cultural values. Tumbling is located within that framework as an event that promotes ideals of masculinity by combining its specific physicality with the promise of martial ability. The result is an event that glorifies the ‘warrior-athlete’. For spectators, especially at the Panathenaia, the message of the event is also a civic one, for it suggests that the citizens of Athens are/will be dominant in war and therefore dominate Greece’s political playing field also. By pushing the limits of human bodily achievement, the city’s tumblers promote the idea that her citizens are almost ‘supermen’. The theory of kinesthetic empathy suggests that the somatic memories of Athenian spectators will be triggered as they watch the event, causing them to identify with the tumblers to varying degrees. In this way they feel as if they, too, are/will be beneficial warriors for their city. Here, however, we come to the crux of the

matter. What particularly sets male athletic tumbling apart from other forms of acrobatic action, and indeed what seems to partly define it, is its reliance on controlled aerial manoeuvres. This is the feature that would most confound the muscular sympathy of spectators and be at odds with their own experiences. If a spectator draws on his own experience with motility to approach a situation, relying on somatic memory, to what extent would he identify with the extreme movements of tumbling?

In fact, it is precisely the inexperience of the average spectator with controlled aerial rotations that renders them so impressive. Knowledge of motility informs the viewer that this action is unusually difficult, requiring copious training and skill, and is beyond the capability of the untrained person. The successful execution of the extraordinary action by a tumbler is something that approaches ‘superhuman’ ability. The two most important factors here are that a) the body is airborne, and b) it is perfectly controlled. If we briefly compare the inverted forms of the springboard leapers in art with other representations of upside-down and airborne bodies, we find that self-control of the body is quite rare, especially for mortals. Usually, when the body is upside down in art it reveals that the inverted figure is subject to another’s power in some way or another. One of the key points regarding the way in which we read these bodies must revolve around freedom: freedom of physical expression, of movement, and of control. To begin with an example from athletics, consider any of the many wrestling scenes that show one combatant throwing his opponent to the ground.<sup>202</sup> The meaning here is quite the opposite from tumbling: it shows an inverted body that is dominated by another, no longer in control of itself. Philostratus makes the issue of control for an inverted wrestler explicit, writing of small-stature competitors that *πολλὰ τῶν ἀπόρων τε καὶ δυσπαλαίστων διαφεύγουσιν ἐπιστηριζόμενοι τῇ κεφαλῇ, καθάπερ βάσει*, ‘they escape many of the hopelessly difficult wrestling holds when they are supported by their heads, just as if their feet.’ (*Gym.* 36). Normally those who are upside down are at the mercy of their opponent. To take another (sometimes athletic) example, the fall from a chariot is indicative of a loss of control and ultimate failure (e.g. the tomb painting from Poggio al Moro cited above).<sup>203</sup> The lack of

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<sup>202</sup> Good examples are Paris, Cab. Méd. 523, Florence, Museo Archeologico 3893, and Athens, NM AIG 2548 (bronze): see also Patrucco (1972, figs. 125-148).

<sup>203</sup> Cf. Christie’s sale catalogue 8.7.1992, 41, no. 112.

control for an inverted body, fallen from a chariot, is well elaborated by Sophocles in his fictional account of Orestes' chariot crash (752-5): φορούμενος πρὸς οὐδας, ἄλλοτ' οὐρανῶ σκέλη προφαίνων, ἔστε νιν διφρηλάται . . . ἔλυσαν, 'at one moment tossed to the ground, at another displaying his legs to the sky, until the charioteers released him' (cf. also Callim. fr. 195.29). As Orestes' body bounces violently off the ground it is thrown upside down into the air, in strong contrast to his previous 'uprightness', emphatically repeated in line 742 (ὠρθοῦθ' ὁ τλήμων ὀρθὸς ἐξ ὀρθῶν δίφρων). Now, Orestes has no control over his airborne inversion. Indeed, it is the other charioteers who eventually release his body. Comparable is the message evinced in scenes of combat, where prone or headlong bodies are dead, wounded, or vanquished. In fact, among mortal pursuits the only other self-controlled inverted and airborne body is that of a diver who willingly plummets into water (e.g. the Tomb of the diver from Paestum, or London, BM E466), and we should note here Plato's praise of the courage such men possess (*Protagoras* 350a).

The bodily action represented in any of these scenarios could be described as 'tumbling': wrestlers 'tumble' in the dirt (*Anach.* 16.39, 18.23; cf. Philost. *Gym.* 50.10),<sup>204</sup> stricken warriors 'tumble' from their chariots (*locus classicus*: Hom. *Il.* 16.745-50; cf. Eur. *Supp.* 692) or in battle generally (e.g. Eur. *Phoen.* 1151), and divers, dolphins, and fish 'tumble' into the waves.<sup>205</sup> Evidently, the bodily movement involved in tumbling was understood on similar terms regardless of its context, at least as an isolated physical motion (i.e. a headlong plunge). The specific differences in its semantic meaning are whether or not the fall (and potential rotation of the body) occurs by choice and whether or not it is controlled. What defines a 'professional' *kybisteter*, i.e. a trained male competitive athlete, is that his tumbles are carefully regulated and are not subject to the will or power of another person, or even chance. His motion is his own. As such, it is representative of

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<sup>204</sup> Wrestlers also 'dash their foreheads together like rams', according to Lucian (*Anach.* 1: τὰ μέτωπα συναράττουσιν ὥσπερ οἱ κριοί), reminiscent of the etymologies linking the headlong battering of rams (ἀρνειοί) to tumblers or divers (ἀρνευτήρες): Σ Arat. 653.5, Σ Hom. *Il.* 12.385, Σ Hom. *Od.* 12.413, Ap. *Lex. Hom.* s.v. ἀρνευτήρι.

<sup>205</sup> E.g.: Hom. *Il.* 21.254, Moschus *Eur.* 117, Oppian *Hal.* 2.586, 5.484, *Cyn.* 4.263, Ael. Arist. *Or.* 17.15.

his standing as a ‘liberated’, *eleutheros*, individual.<sup>206</sup> In some instances, the dichotomy of dominance and dominated, or of freedom/control and their lack, is justified by simple common sense. In a wrestling match, for example, the duality is inescapable, for one competitor will be the winner, one the loser. The reductionist model is implicit in the contest. In applying this model to other circumstances, however, such as tumbling ‘head over heels’, matters become more complex. There is no ‘contest’ here, unless it is one against gravity and human limitations, no simple division between someone dominating and someone dominated. For agonistic tumblers, for whom there is by definition a contest, there is a display of (usually) a lone human form in a performative action, one that must be compared to every other action a human can make to gain its symbolism. In short, interpretation of meaning relies on the relationship of the movement to the socio-cultural milieu.

Vase paintings of *erotes* provide an illuminating comparison for the meaning of coordinated aerialism in art. They are often seen upright, but also horizontal or even upside down.<sup>207</sup> It is of course on their own accord that *erotes* fly or hover. Their actions would amount to an ‘implementation of the impossible’ under Bouissac’s model, were they not divine figures (cf. Introduction) But it is by that very divinity that we must interpret the semiotics of their flight. It is their celestial nature that permits the *erotes*’ extraordinary movement. The flawless command of an aerial body would thus seem to connote divine qualities. And yet with Greek male tumbling we remain very much in the ‘real world’ of athletic competition. A *kybisteter* commands his own body as he ‘flies’ through the air, but his flight will always be short. I have stated that his accomplishments *approach* superhumanism and reach the limit of human achievement, but they always stay within that limit. The execution of a backward rotation after leaping from a springboard would impress an audience, but not overwhelm them. The action is an implementation of the possible, not of the impossible, and likewise the claim on superhuman ability is symbolic, not actual.

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<sup>206</sup> Note also, in contrast, how the Syracusan dance master in Xenophon’s *Symposium* robs his troupe of any bodily or expressive freedom when he claims that they are but his ‘marionettes’ (4.55: τὰ ἐμὰ νευρόσπαστα). See further in Chapter Four and Five.

<sup>207</sup> E.g. New York, private collection = von Bothmer (1961, no. 258, pl. 95).

In sum, the semiotics of a male tumbler's body in athletic competition indicates a figure not dominated, as many other inverted forms, but the opposite: that is, *eleutheros*. His movement demonstrates corporeal strength and extraordinary physicality, but also utter self-control over that strength. The simulated 'flight' of his aerial rotation verges on presenting a divine ability. As he competes to prove his supremacy in a gymnastic event that consciously associates itself with military aptitude, a tumbler thus presents himself as both an ideal warrior-athlete and social superior. But a relevant question must follow on the heels of this analysis: if tumbling was a legitimate means for an athlete to showcase embodied positive social ideals, as in other sports, why was the activity so uncommon? There are only a handful of depictions of springboard leaps in art, and not a single textual reference, compared to the vast array of evidence for other athletic events. Furthermore, the evidence that does survive is all localized to the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., strongly suggesting that the event, especially as it may have existed at the Panathenaia, soon vanished. A further look into the evidence for tumbling at the Athenian festival is necessary before an answer can be posed.

## CHAPTER THREE: Horseback Tumbling in Greek Athletics

### 3.1: Introduction

The source of greatest controversy for the presence of acrobatics at athletic contests is not any one of the vases listed above, nor even the sum total of their testimony, but an infamous Panathenaic amphora found at the necropolis at Camiros on Rhodes and now housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. On the vessel, described in full detail below, a man on horseback is praised by the crowd watching him. An inscription, supposedly the voice of the people, labels him a *kybisteter*, a tumbler. The scene has initiated considerable debate among scholars: could tumbling actually have taken place at the athletic games of the Greater Panathenaia? Is this a legitimate prize vessel, or a so-called ‘pseudo-Panathenaic amphora’? If tumbling did occur among the events of the games, the participants would not be vulgar entertainers, but citizens; can we reconcile that fact with the thaumatopoeitic acrobatic performances that occurred at symposia? Finally, why might there be an event in tumbling at the Panathenaia, but at no other athletic festival in Greece? Of these questions the last question is most easily hypothesized. The Panathenaia did include several unorthodox events, such as the boat race or *euandria* contest, which did not exist at any other of the major athletic festivals, though sometimes at other smaller, minor games.<sup>208</sup> Some of the peculiarities may have been a result of the festival’s early existence as a local event, and some of the specifically Attic events were perhaps among those included in the local festival before it was reformed in 566/5 in a conscious effort to aggrandize the city and attract visitors from other *poleis*. As its reformers tried to appeal to a wider audience, the games of the Panathenaia were modelled after the more popular festivals, especially the circuit of the crown games. This meant that familiar and established athletic events were included in the roster. It is only after 566 that Panathenaic prize amphorae were produced as specific awards for victory, and from their inception we can generally see the events and

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<sup>208</sup> For the boat race at Athens and elsewhere, see Kyle (1987, 194) and Newby (2005, 179-88). For the *euandria* at Athens and elsewhere, see Crowther (2004, 335). For other ‘Athenian’ contests at the Panathenaia, see Kyle (1987, 32-39) and Kyle (1992, 94-97).



iconography of the new festival illustrated on them.<sup>209</sup> However, neither a reformation nor new prize vessels showing athletic contests conclusively mean that no sporting *agones* occurred earlier.<sup>210</sup> Events from the earlier festival may well have carried over to the renovated one, including some of those in which participation after the reforms was limited to Athenian citizens only, such as the *pyrrhiche* and *apobates*. These both have a martial character, which might reflect a pre-reformation existence in military displays or games.<sup>211</sup> Another of these early events may have been tumbling, though it was apparently not very long-lived at the Greater Panathenaia. In any case, martial tumbling as only an honorific *display* for Athena, not a contest, would likely have fit the ideology of the pre-Panathenaic festival, at least according to the little we know about it, in that it could have been performed in honour of the goddess before the eyes of the community; this could hypothetically explain its origins and inclusion in the *agones* post 566.

The debated questions of whether tumbling was an athletic event at the Panathenaia, and if the Panathenaic amphora in Paris commemorates victory in that event, guide my arguments in this chapter. To begin, I closely examine the Panathenaic amphora for its iconography, inscription, and the relevance of its scene to ancient tumbling as an actual practice. I argue that it does indeed show a Panathenaic athletic contest, and that it is the individual prize for the *agon* in question. The event may have been one restricted to Athenian citizens, like the other martial contests, with which its ideology can be connected. I then analyze other examples in art and text of figures performing or standing upright on horseback. Here again, the movement and motions of their bodies are represented in such a way as to showcase the riders' heroic qualities, but it is rare to identify any other equestrian acrobats or tumblers. I conclude from my analytic survey

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<sup>209</sup> On early Panathenaic prize amphorae, see Moore (1999), Marx (2003), Neils (2007, 46-50), and Popkin (2012).

<sup>210</sup> Kyle (1996, 116) argues that “athletic games at the Panathenaia prior to 566 cannot be proven, and processions and military displays seem more likely”, though later admits they might have been expanded into the festival (*ibid.*). Earlier, the prospect of games seemed “likely” (1987, 22) and “not unreasonable or unappealing” (*ibid.* 23), but lacked sufficiently conclusive evidence. Elsewhere (2007, 164), he concedes that the *pyrrhiche* was included in both the Greater and Lesser Panathenaia “probably from at least 566”; this could also be excused as part military display, part honorific dance for Athena. For the festival prior to 566, see also Davison (1958, 24-26) and Robertson (1985).

<sup>211</sup> This is only a possibility, since other than being very likely candidates for events or activities before 566 there is no certain proof that they were. For the *pyrrhiche* finding potential early roots, see Ceccarelli (2004, 93); for the *apobates*, see Schultz (2007, 60-6), Neils and Schultz (2012, 203); cf. Robertson (1996, 56-8) on the early roots of both.

that in representations a tumbler on horseback, just as a springboard tumbler, approaches superhuman ability in his physical prowess. In combination with the aristocratic symbolism of horsemanship, and the heroized portrayal of militaristic ability, his somatic superiority translates into social superiority.

### 3.2: Paris, Cab. Méd. (Bib. Nat.) 243:<sup>212</sup>

A black-figure amphora of Panathenaic shape, housed in Paris and dated ca. 550-530 B.C, depicts a busy and curious scene. To the left it shows a crowd on a grandstand, who watch a tumbler on horseback, himself accompanied by a flutist, while several more men are occupied in other tasks to the right. The grandstand has three levels. On each sits an adult bearded male, all of whom are clad in cloaks of slightly varying styles. On the top level there also stands a nude boy directly behind the mature spectator. All four observe the scene to the right and lift their arms in response to the performance; the men extend their right arms forward and point toward the tumbler with open hands, in a gesture of acclaim. They hold their left hands in the same position, slightly extended and with hands open, but keep them closer to their bodies. The boy uses a similar gesture, but his right arm is angled downward and his left is held fully extended just above his head.<sup>213</sup> The figures' iconography suggests restrained excitement: they gesture animatedly, but remain seated with impassive features. The boy may not exhibit the same moderation as a full adult in that he is standing, but this also serves the artistic purpose of bringing him to the same height as the seated adult to his right.<sup>214</sup> Coming from the mouth of the bottommost spectator are words in representation of speech: ΚΑΛΟΣΤΟΙΚΥΒΙΣΤΕΙΤΟΙ, 'a jug/vessel for the tumbler'. Presumably this is the sentiment of a fuller crowd, of which

<sup>212</sup> The bibliography for this vase is extensive, and I cite here only some works: CVA Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 2 (France 10), pl. 88, 1-4 & 89, 1-2; Beazley (1939, fig. 9), Jannot (1986, pl. 4.2), Reed (1987, fig. 1), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, KA 1, pl. 41.1-2), Halm-Tisserant (1996, pl. 1), Schäfer (1997, pl. 46.3), Lesky (2000, 79-81, abb. 16 = Gr. 49), Bentz (2001, no. 275), Lissarrague (2001, fig. 62-3), Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006, pl. 7), Neils (2007, fig. 6); Brandt (2010, fig. 4a-b), Todisco (2013, G 31), Hollinshead (2015, 13-14).

<sup>213</sup> These gestures of commendation from a grandstand audience are similar to those seen on a famous dinos fragment by Sophilos (Athens NM 15499) and an Attic 'Tyrrhenian' amphora (Florence 3773); for these grandstands see Hollinshead (2015, 10-11), and for the gesture Stansbury-O'Donnell (2006, 17-18).

<sup>214</sup> For spatial concerns regarding these figures, see Halm-Tisserant (1996, 40-42). Hollinshead (2015, 15) also proposes that the standing youth here might be evidence that the upper seats in bleachers were "a cheap spot for agile spectators of lower status".

the four here are representative, or alternatively only the expression of the man in the bottommost row.<sup>215</sup>

An aulete stands to the immediate right of the grandstand. He wears a patterned cloak and plays the double flute with both hands, the *phorbeia* strapped to his head. Just in front of him on the ground rests a strange, trapezoidal object almost like a ramp, whose front face is just barely curved. It comes to about thigh-height on the *aulos* player and appears to be the object that has facilitated the tumbler's leap onto the back of the horses, but there is nothing to confirm this inference. It is distinct from springboards, but it does make performative sense to use such an item to help the tumbler ascend onto the horses. It would also give the tumbler the small boost necessary to incorporate an acrobatic feat into his mounting, perhaps to start his 'routine', but imagining what feat, if indeed any, can be little more than conjecture. Neils proposes instead that the ramp is not part of the act at all, but rather a "barrier" between audience and action.<sup>216</sup> This is possible, but does not satisfactorily explain why the aulete is on the wrong side of the structure, nor why the supposed barrier should be sloped. Furthermore, there are no comparable barriers separating grandstand crowds from the chariot races on a dinos fragment by Sophilos (Athens NM 15499, dated ca. 570 B.C.) or on an Attic 'Tyrrhenian' amphora (Florence 3773).<sup>217</sup>

Moving to the right, we now come to the focus of the scene, the tumbler, at whom everyone stares. He either balances on the rump of one of the two horses, or perhaps on both at once. The animals move in perfect unison. The man's left foot just touches the back of the horse(s), while his right leg is extended behind him. He is nude, but wears greaves and a crested helmet, and carries a shield in either hand. The shields have a pattern of concentric swirls, probably meant to visually impress as they rotate with the tumbler. The man's head is turned back toward the crowd. A visual connection is thus established, which may reflect the importance of spectatorship for the event. The tumbler is smaller than most of the figures on the vase, but as others have noted, this is due to

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<sup>215</sup> This reading might suggest that he is the judge of the contest: see below on subjective judging.

<sup>216</sup> Neils (2007, 48).

<sup>217</sup> The latter separates the crowd from the race with a column, but since the horses' legs cross over this it is best explained as a *terma* in the race, not a barrier.

issues of space not significance.<sup>218</sup> To judge from the warrior-athlete's current pose, it is impossible to ascertain what sort of 'acrobatic' feats will characterize his performance. All that can be said with any degree of certainty is that his display will probably include headlong rotations, likely aerial ones. This would justify the identification of the man as *kybisteter*, a word that implies headlong motion (see Introduction) and furthermore would also conform to the representations of male tumbling evidenced by the springboard vases. We might suspect that the tumbler will perform something like a modern equestrian vaulting technique, wherein one can balance with the hands upside down on the back (or saddle) of the horse, but given that the tumbler's hands here are burdened with two shields (again like many springboard leapers; cf. Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.9) his action is almost certainly aerial.<sup>219</sup>

Controlling the two horses is another nude male, who looks back to the tumbler. He sits on the horse in the foreground, but clearly governs both animals. Only his right leg is visible as it hangs down over one horse's flank, not uncommon in scenes where a rider controls multiple horses.<sup>220</sup> The man's left arm and hand are likewise not illustrated, but his right holds a (or both?) horse's reins. The man has impassive features and wears a fillet around his brow. He has apparently done well to control the horses for the tumbler, for the animals step in unison with sure movements. Their front legs demonstrate more restraint than that seen in images of galloping horses, and their gait is probably a walk. The height at which they raise their left legs may indicate that the steps are exaggerated for greater visual effect, as is often done in modern equestrian performances, since the movement is not a natural one.

Crouching directly beneath the horses is another nude male figure. Like the tumbler, he is somewhat smaller than the other men, perhaps again due only to the space available to the artist. He holds an axe with both hands, having used it to churn up the ground for the

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<sup>218</sup> Lissarrague (2001, 77) argues that the tumbler is small "not because his role is minor but because the pictorial space is not set out in a homogenous and proportional manner": see also Beazley (1939, 11) for the point that the tumbler is small "only because there is not much room for him". For a spatial reading of Paris 243, and a comparison with other miniature figures in archaic art, see Halm-Tisserant (1996, 42-5). Cf. also Neils (2007, 48) for the suggestion that the tumbler is "in the background".

<sup>219</sup> Still, it is interesting that the man is *not* shown upside down here, or in the midst of any kind of athletic tumble at all. Rather, the scene only *evokes* acrobatic action, both through the presence of a springboard (see below) and the appellation in the inscription.

<sup>220</sup> For numerous examples of a single rider governing overlapping horses see Alföldi (1967, 13-20).

*skamma*, the ‘pit’ used for wrestling or jumping in athletic contexts. On the vase, the rough shading of black paint on the ground in front of the man represents the result of his efforts. The figure does not look to the task at hand, but gazes in the direction of the tumbler. As the scene is painted, he would be awkwardly under the horses during the action, but this applies a ‘photographic’ reading to the illustration. Rather, his preparation of the *skamma*, which necessarily must happen before the action of an event, relies on a synchronic presentation of diachronic activities. The gaze the man directs at the tumbler does not mean that he watches the performance in ‘real-time’, but serves the artistic purposes of unifying the scene by giving visual prominence to the *kybisteter*. On the far right, a final nude male figure rests poised on a wooden apparatus that looks identical to the springboards discussed above. It consists of a tall vertical plank with an inclined plank that rests on its right side and meets at about three fifths from the bottom. Near the juxtaposition of the two planks would be the feet of the youth, but the horses stride in front of the structure and block the view of his legs from the knees down. His legs are bent almost at a right angle from the knees. The arms are fully extended and slightly raised, so that they approach the level of his face. Both hands reach toward the wooden pole, though it is unclear whether or not he grips the wood. His body is at a slight angle away from the pole, and he looks in the direction of the activity to his left.

The imagery on the reverse of the vessel is pertinent. A statuesque Athena stands in the center of the scene, a fairly typical rendition of the early Panathenaic Athena.<sup>221</sup> She wears an ornately patterned dress and crested helmet, and carries in her right hand a large shield with the emblem of a tripod. She raises her right arm over her head and wields a spear, as if ready to strike. The goddess is orientated to the left, and seems to stride forward. To either side of the divinity stand nude males a fraction of her size, probably mortal worshippers. Their brows are filleted and they wave long, leafy branches in either

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<sup>221</sup> See Marx (2003) for Athena on early Panathenaic prize amphorae. The term ‘Panathenaic Athena’ is the most appropriate for Athena as she is shown on the Panathenaic prize amphorae, in an iconography that incorporates elements of her Promachos, Pallas, and Polias facets. As Popkin (2012, 216) argues, the Panathenaic Athena stands as a general symbol in its own right. See also Ferrari Pinney (1988, 465) and Neils (1992, 36-7).

hand.<sup>222</sup> Framing the scene are two simple columns, one on either side, atop each of which there sit cauldrons, either *lebetes* or *dinoi*.<sup>223</sup>

As noted above, the unorthodox imagery on this Panathenaic amphora, particularly the sportive scene, has initiated considerable discussion among scholars. Even the basic question of the actual nature of the activity has been a controversial one. The interpretation that the armoured figure on horseback performs a weapon dance, perhaps a *pyrrhiche*, is popular, but it does not address the relevance of the other people and items to the scene - especially the springboard.<sup>224</sup> As I argue in the previous section, this apparatus should be considered to be a marker of an activity distinct from dancing. Other readings of the scene are less plausible. Despite the deliberate identification of the main figure as a *kybisteter*, some have argued that the scene is not one of tumbling. Alan Shapiro, for example, tentatively proposes that the vase might show something like the *apobates* race, though admittedly an unconventional representation of it.<sup>225</sup> However, while modern writers often describe the *apobates*' characteristic leaps on and off a moving chariot as 'acrobatic', no ancient testimony uses a comparable term.<sup>226</sup> More fundamentally, the painting here lacks the necessary chariot. Jenifer Neils, in contrast, denies the scene unity and argues that it shows various different events in one broad panorama. She calls the man on horseback a "hoplite/gymnast", but thinks him "in the background and most enigmatic" and proposes that "he may be doing a dance to the tune

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<sup>222</sup> Technically *thallophoroi*, 'carriers of olive shoots', but here only in veneration of Athena (as Brandt (2010, 104)), not as representative of the *thallophoroi* in the Panathenaic procession, who were old men, at least in the Classical period: Xen. *Symp.* 4.17, Ar. *Vesp.* 544 with scholia.

<sup>223</sup> Usually referred to as *lebetes*, but Brandt (2010, 104) and Hamilton (1996, 156 n. 3) call them *dinoi*. The distinction is irrelevant for my current purposes.

<sup>224</sup> Ceccarelli (1998, 249), Lesky (2000, 80), Lesky (2004, 316), Brandt (2010, 104). Lesky (2004, 314) puts under the umbrella of 'weapon dance' any rhythmic movement while holding weapons, in accompaniment with music, but in this case that definition subsumes too much into the category of dance. The *aulos* was a common accompaniment for sport, in which the movements could still be described as 'rhythmic': see Raschke (1985). Here again, though, we see how ancient tumbling and acrobats operate in a gray zone that converges dance, sport, and spectacle.

<sup>225</sup> Shapiro (1992, 200 n. 26).

<sup>226</sup> The fullest ancient description is in the *Erotic Essay* attributed to Demosthenes (61.23-9), wherein he describes the contest as τὸ σεμνότατον καὶ κάλλιστον τῶν ἀγωνισμάτων ('the most august and fine of contests'), involving φιλοπονία ('laborious practice') and furnishing a ἡδίστην θέαν, ('a most pleasurable sight'). Doubtless the *apobates* was spectacularly athletic, but it was not 'acrobatic' by either modern or ancient standards. For the *apobates* contest in art, see Schultz (2007), Neils and Schultz (2012). Still useful for textual evidence is Crowther (2004, 345-8), with bibliographical references.

of the *aulos* or taking part in the *hoplitodromos* with two shields”.<sup>227</sup> It is *possible* that the man standing on the rump of the horse(s) performs a martial dance, perhaps in some manner similar to Bellerophon on the back of Pegasus in Pindar’s *Olympian* 13.85-6 (see further below), but there is no other precedent for this sort of dance, nor is it likely that the scene in general denotes dancing. Furthermore, if we imagine that the athlete *is* in the background, a pyrrhic dancer oddly represented in midair, we impose a panoramic view of the activity on the vase, wherein the horses have no association with the individual on their backs but are part of a completely separate horse race. To me, this requires an awkward reading of the vase; it is more natural to see unity in the imagery, particularly given that the gaze of every figure is directed at the man with two shields. Neils’ other proposition, that the man competes in the *hoplitodromos*, can be likewise refuted; and in any case, runners in the *hoplitodromos* carry a single shield, not two.<sup>228</sup> Furthermore, neither Neils’ suggestions nor Shapiro’s satisfactorily explain the appellation *kybisteter* that is voiced by the crowd. Theoretically, tumbling could occur in the *apobates* or *hoplitodromos*, though only in the sense of ‘falling head over heels’, not ‘executing a precise and controlled headlong movement’. This would not lead to the specific designation of the man as a tumbler, nor would he be likely to be commemorated for such a lapse in athletic skill. A dancer could be a *kybisteter* (as at Hom. *Od.* 4.17-19; cf. Suda κ 2600), but as stated above, this is not a scene of dance. In an earlier study, Shapiro did note the importance of the label *kybisteter* in the amphora’s inscription, and suggested that it “may tell us what the event was called”, i.e. *kybistesisis*.<sup>229</sup> There is no other ancient testimony to corroborate the proposal (no generic term for ‘tumbling’ is used to denote an athletic event), but the conjecture is feasible.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>227</sup> Neils (2007, 48); cf. Neils (1992, 176) where the tumbler is seen as an acrobat at a festive sideshow.

<sup>228</sup> The only possible exception is an amphora in the collection of Nicholas S. Zoullas, previously of the Hunt collection in Fort Worth, but even here the scene has been interpreted as a selection of shields before the race, not the event itself: Neils (1992, no. 46).

<sup>229</sup> Shapiro (1989, 33); cf. Kotsidu (1991, 95-6): “die Inschrift verdeutlicht, dass es sich um den Agon der *κυβίστησις* handelt, der nach Aussage schriftlicher Quellen einen Teil agonistischer Festprogramme bilden konnte”, but none of *textual* sources actually promote ‘tumbling’ as an official activity of the games (for her citation of Pl. *Rep.* 7.154b, read 514b); rather, they speak of *thaumata*, and not in the context of the Panathenaia. On the inscription IG I<sup>3</sup> 757 (= DAA no. 322 = CEG 253 = IG I<sup>2</sup> 658), which Kotsidu also cites, see Chapter 4.3.

<sup>230</sup> Compare Lucian’s use of the word *kybistesisis* for ‘tumbings’ in wrestling (*Anach.* 16.39, 18.23) and Plutarch’s almost generic labelling of the sympotic performance in Xenophon’s *Symposium* as *kybistesisis*

The most contentious interpretation of the vase painting is that it shows the contest known as the *euandria*. We know little for certain about the nature of this team event other than that it probably qualified beauty, size, and displays of athleticism or strength all under the heading ‘manliness’.<sup>231</sup> Naturally, due to our limited knowledge of the event, suggestions on its character have been wide ranging. The idea that the Panathenaic vessel might illustrate some feature of the event was first proposed by J.A. Davison in a note, though he also admitted its improbability.<sup>232</sup> The suggestion was almost notoriously taken up by Nancy Reed, who included two other Panathenaic vessels in her search for iconographic representation of the *euandria* (Madrid 10901 and New York, Zoullas Collection). These other two amphorae feature armed hoplites, like Paris 243, but they are not tumblers.<sup>233</sup> Her conclusion that “the event...involved some demonstrations of skill with two shields and in armed combat”, whether acrobatic demonstrations or not, is conjectural, and has been routinely rejected by sport historians.<sup>234</sup> Donald Kyle, for example, emphatically denies that acrobatics had any place in Panathenaic events, but claims that they belonged to the jovial amusements that were doubtless part of the larger festival.<sup>235</sup> Stephen Miller also rejects the hypothesis, claiming that there is no evidence of competition in the scene on Paris 243, but that it “conjures up images of a circus”.<sup>236</sup> Alan Boegehold is more equitable, pointing out that there is simply no way to prove or disprove the theory given our current dearth of evidence. However, he does note that the

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(*Mor.* 401c); cf. also Suda κ 2600: κυβιστητία, ἡ ὄρχησις (‘tumbling, a dance’). Blümner (1918, 34 n. 39) thinks that the use of the word in *Anacharsis* “als Turnerkunststück in den Gymnasien angeführt”, but it is a ‘head-over-heels’ tumble here, not anything like the German Turner gymnastic exercises.

<sup>231</sup> For the *euandria*, the best analysis and collection of evidence is still Crowther (2004, 333-339 with 349); cf. Neils (1994, 154-9) and Boegehold (1996).

<sup>232</sup> Davison (1958, 26 n. 4).

<sup>233</sup> Reed (1987, 59-64). Madrid 10901 appears to illustrate a *hoplomachia*, a one-on-one fight with weapons and armour (even though we do not have corroborating evidence that this was an event at the Panathenaia), while the Zoullas amphora probably depicts preparation for the *hoplitodromos* (given the device on one of the shields of a man running with a shield).

<sup>234</sup> Reed (1987, 62). N.B. that Reed also reproduces some of Davison’s caution about Paris 243: “the amphora is listed by Davison who states that while it cannot be proven to be an illustration of the *euandria*, nonetheless there is a degree of probability that it is” (60).

<sup>235</sup> Kyle (1992, 96).

<sup>236</sup> Miller (2004, 167). *Contra* this view, see below.



*euandria* was a team event, but the vase seems to show a single competitor - though he concedes that this could be due to artistic representation.<sup>237</sup>

Corollary to the debate regarding what the vase actually depicts is the question of whether the activity existed as an actual event at the Panathenaic games, or was more peripherally related to the festival as a ‘miscellaneous display and diversion’, to use Kyle’s phrase.<sup>238</sup> Not the first to argue this point, but certainly one of the most influential, was Beazley, in an argument which tried to link performance with two shields with a distinct kind of acrobatic dance. His supposition that the vase showed “not one of the official events at the games, but a sideshow” deserves further consideration.<sup>239</sup> As I argue in Chapter Four, acrobatic displays were undoubtedly part of the repertoire of some street performers and at organized *thaumata* performances, a potential variety of those ‘marvel-making’ feats viewed ἐν θαύμασιν, ‘at the wonder shows’. These were indeed ‘sideshows’, but they featured a very different sort of bodily acrobatics than the tumbling evidenced on the Panathenaic amphora, as I will demonstrate. Furthermore, the prospect that we are viewing a ‘sideshow’ does not answer to the persistent and prevalent prize imagery and iconography on the amphora, the sum total of which strongly suggests an athletic context. There are numerous reasons to consider the vessel an ‘official’ prize vase, and the event it shows a legitimate *agon*. This is not a ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaic as it is often labeled, one of those amphorae of Panathenaic shape created and marketed for some other purpose than as an athletic prize, usually smaller than the ‘official’ versions, without the normal inscription, and/or offering slight stylistic differences.<sup>240</sup> Now, it is true that Paris 243 *does* exhibit variations from what would become the later paradigm for Panathenaic prize amphorae. Typically, after the prize amphorae become more or less standardized in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, the vases depict on one side the event in which victory was achieved and which the amphora itself commemorates, and on the opposite

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<sup>237</sup> Boegehold (1996, 100). *Passim*, Boegehold argues that the *euandria* was a choral contest. Hamilton (1996, 139) furthermore points out that the prize for the *euandria* was shields (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 60.3) or a bull worth 100 drachmae (IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311, line 75), not olive oil. For the question of whether Paris 243 commemorates a team or individual event, see below.

<sup>238</sup> Kyle (1992, 96).

<sup>239</sup> Beazley (1939, 11).

<sup>240</sup> On ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaic amphorae in general, see Bentz (2001).

side a statuesque Athena between two columns.<sup>241</sup> Alongside the left column generally runs the inscription ‘TON AΘENEΘEN AΘΛON’, ‘[one] of the prizes from Athens’, to memorialize the victory and advertise the city, and perhaps legitimize the amphora as a prize vessel in some way. On both columns there usually stands a rooster. Paris 243, in contrast, substitutes the characteristic inscription for a unique one on the opposite face, features *lebetes* on the columns instead of roosters, and adds worshippers to frame Athena.<sup>242</sup> It is, furthermore, only about 42 cm in height, well below the 60-65 cm average for ‘official’ prize amphorae. The sum of these would seem to mark Paris 243 as a categorical ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaic prize amphora, but in fact none of these points, singly or together, prove that it was not a prize amphora.

First of all, Paris 243 dates among the earliest known Panathenaic vases (550-530 B.C.) from the burgeoning years of the reformed festival, when iconography had not yet become normalized. As others have observed, it is not at all uncommon for early prize amphorae to deviate from the later standards.<sup>243</sup> Even if amphorae do show some stylistic divergences, they can still be considered ‘authentic’. In general, scholars label an amphora a ‘Panathenaic prize amphora’, i.e. not ‘pseudo’, depending on the inscription, the amphora’s height, and its date (and to a lesser extent its iconography, which becomes more important from the 5<sup>th</sup> century onward). As a rule of thumb, an authentic prize amphora bears the inscription TON AΘENEΘEN AΘΛON and falls in the range of 60-69 cm in height, with these guidelines being stricter beginning in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. Richard Hamilton stresses the importance of chronology in the equation, stating that “early Panathenaics are often uninscribed; late ones are always inscribed”, but for Donald Kyle “the inscription is the *sine qua non* of official prize vases”.<sup>244</sup> Height is also of consequence, for it is generally true that uninscribed vases are also less than 60 cm tall

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<sup>241</sup> Hamilton (1996, 142) suggests that the amphorae might not show the respective events for which they were won, but that “a victor...was liable to get a mixture of illustrations”; *contra* Popkin (2012, 210 n. 11).

<sup>242</sup> For the iconography and symbolism of early prize vases, see Popkin (2012). For the prize imagery on Paris 243 in particular, see Webster (1972, 78), Shapiro (1989, 33), Shapiro (1992, 56), Schäfer (1997, 82), Lissarrague (2001, 76-77), and Neils (2007, 48).

<sup>243</sup> Lissarrague (2001, 77) and Neils (2007, 48); cf. Hamilton (1996, 138). Circa 540 B.C. is a good guess as to the date for the canonical iconography settling into place, but N.B. that this is still circa: Popkin (2012, 211, n. 16) calls circa 540 “a time of experimentation in the iconography of Panathenaic amphoras”. Tiverios (2007, 5) puts the standardization of features slightly later, at 530-525 B.C.

<sup>244</sup> Hamilton (1996, 138), Kyle (2007, 156).

(usually 38-45 cm).<sup>245</sup> In theory, this model works harmoniously with the pragmatic function of the prize amphorae, traditionally thought to hold the olive oil that was the valuable take-away for an athlete successful at the games. When sources refer to victors winning ‘amphorae of olive oil’, they presumably mean these official Panathenaic prize vases of regulated height. Under this model, a ‘pseudo’-Panathenaic may show a scene that *relates* to the great Athenian festival, maybe a gymnastic or choral *agon* (or other non-agonistic scenes), but is not in fact “a prize from Athens”. Hypotheses as to their function include potential use as marketable goods, special commissions for victory, or to hold in ‘branded’ amphorae excess olive oil made for the games.<sup>246</sup>

I use the phrases ‘rule of thumb’, and ‘guideline’ above quite purposefully, for there are so many exceptions as to make it impossible for these parameters to be strictly adhered to, and even as guidelines they need re-evaluation. We do not yet, I think, correctly understand the relationship of Panathenaic prize amphorae and ‘pseudo’ prize vessels to the Great festival or indeed to each other. There are numerous inscribed amphorae that are less than 60 cm, which are consistently acknowledged as problematic;<sup>247</sup> on the other hand, there are also multiple *uninscribed* vases that *are* 60-65 cm and show no other stylistic variations that would suggest status as ‘pseudo’.<sup>248</sup> No convincing case has yet been made to explain these deviations.<sup>249</sup> Furthermore, the longstanding view that all the

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<sup>245</sup> Hamilton (1992, 131-3). See Bentz (2001, 113) for considerations of height.

<sup>246</sup> Market: Valavanis (1987, 469 n. 9), Kotsidu (1991, 92); Neils (1992, 44) with the reason that “the vast majority” come from Etruria; cf. Langridge-Noti (2001, 77): “the majority of which are found on the Athenian Acropolis”. For geographical considerations of vases dating 550-475, see now the Appendix in Bentz (2001), with his helpful map showing find spots (116). Many ‘pseudos’ come from Athens, many from Etruria and Italy, many others elsewhere, and a good many have unknown provenance. Special commissions (especially for use in sympotic contexts): Webster (1972 159-60), Shapiro (1989, 32), Bentz (2001, 116-7); cf. Brandt (2010, 97) for the incredible suggestion that “some [pseudo- amphorae] may also have been produced for or ordered by participants *who did not win a prize*” (my emphasis), which is strikingly at odds with Greek athletic ideology.

Excess oil: Neils (1992, 44). There presumably would have been little surplus after the Persian invasion of Attica in 480 B.C. and destruction of olive trees, which corresponds to the decrease in ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaics; cf. Langridge-Noti (2001, 77) that there was at times not enough oil for victors: see also Themelis (2007, 29) for variances in olive oil production.

For a summary of possible functions for ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaics, see Bentz (2001, 116-17).

<sup>247</sup> According to Hamilton (1996, 138) there are “twenty or so inscribed Panathenaics that are under 60cm”.

<sup>248</sup> Hamilton (1996, 157 n. 7) provides a list of thirteen, which should be considered with Neils (1992, 198 n. 90). See also Bentz (2001, 113-4).

<sup>249</sup> Vos (1981, 43) proposes historical conditions for undersized, inscribed vases (see also Langridge-Noti (2001, 77)), but Hamilton (1996, 156 n. 5) makes convincing points against this explanation. Bentz (1998, 33 and 37-9) points out that the anomalies generally derive from the years of the Peloponnesian War, when

olive oil won by a victor was bestowed in the ‘official’ Panathenaic prize amphorae has recently been disproved by various scholars. That is to say, when the famous inscription recording Panathenaic prizes (IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311) denotes, to take an arbitrary example, “60 amphorae of oil” to the winner of the men’s pentathlon, that winner would *not* receive sixty Panathenaic prize amphorae, but 60 measures of olive oil contained in other amphorae of standard capacity. Petros Themelis makes the point that “the great range of sizes and thus of capacity indicates that it is quite impossible for [Panathenaic prize amphorae] to have been used as standard measures of olive oil,”<sup>250</sup> and Elizabeth Langridge-Noti makes the complementary observation that “the differing numerical graffiti on the vases clearly indicate that the ancients realized that the amphorae did not adhere tightly to an ‘official’ standard”.<sup>251</sup> If Panathenaic prize amphora did not represent a standard unit of measure, they could not fairly represent the victors’ allotments of olive-oil. Themelis also considers it “improbable” that there would have been produced from 560-100 B.C. a total of 138,000 prize amphorae, and emphasizes the fact that we only know of several hundred prize amphorae or fragments.<sup>252</sup> Accidents of transmission can of course happen, but it is hard to excuse this vast difference as an accident. Finally, he notes that modern testing has shown that “some Panathenaic amphoras in the Kerameikos Museum and the J. Paul Getty Museum seem never to have been filled with oil”, which definitively proves that not every one of the supposed ‘official’ Panathenaic prize amphorae was the valuable reward it was once thought to be, or even contained that award.<sup>253</sup> That at least some of the ‘official’ vases did contain olive oil, though, is demonstrated by a few lines in Pindar’s tenth *Nemean*: ἀδεῖαί γε μὲν ἀμβολάδαν | ἐν τελεταῖς δις Ἀθαναίων νιν ὀμφαί | κόμασαν· γαῖα δὲ καθείσα πυρὶ καρπὸς ἐλαίας |

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olive oil production would be limited; perhaps the Athenians limited the oil given to victors, too, in order that they might actually hold the games at all: see also Shapiro (2014, 227). Tiverios (1974, 142-5) argues that full-sized, uninscribed vases might be workshop prototypes, and more recently restates his case (2007, 17). Moore (1986, 13 n. 4) thinks they might be excess ceramic production; cf. Neils (1992, 46). Most compelling to my mind is Neils’ suggestion (1992, 46): “might these undersized but inscribed vases have held the official oil for either the boy victors or the second-place winners?”, but this still does not account for all the deviations, nor does it satisfactorily explain why most undersized vases are uninscribed.

<sup>250</sup> Themelis (2007, 25).

<sup>251</sup> Langridge-Noti (2001, 76 n. 11). She also makes a similar point to Themelis regarding sizes: “The fluctuation in size (and in volume) even within a single category indicates that inscribed vases were not official measures” (25). *Contra* Neils (1992, 40).

<sup>252</sup> Themelis (2007, 27-8); *contra* Tiverios (2007, 15-16).

<sup>253</sup> Themelis (2007, 27); cf. Eschbach 2007, 95: “Panathenaic amphorae (at least since the late 6<sup>th</sup> century) – and not only those from the Kerameikos – never carried olive oil and were not produced for this purpose”.

ἔμολεν Ἥρας τὸν εὐάνορα λαὸν ἐν ἀγγέων ἔρκεσιν παμποικίλοις (34-6: “yet as an overture, twice in the Athenians’ rites pleasant voices celebrated him. And with earth baked by fire the fruit of the olive came to the well-manned host of Hera in richly decorated encasings of vases”).<sup>254</sup> Here, the ‘richly decorated encasings of vases’ must be the Panathenaic prize amphorae as we recognize them now. It would seem, then, that a victor received maybe one (or several, but not many) Panathenaic prize amphora as commemoration for his victory, but the true substance of his value prize was primarily held in other amphorae. From this conclusion it follows, then, that the traditional categorization of some Panathenaic-shaped amphorae as ‘official’ and some as ‘pseudo’ must be reconsidered. The importance given to height, in particular, must be tempered by the fact that the prize amphorae were neither official measures nor the exclusive container for an athlete’s olive oil. The prize inscription, it is true, had to have held special significance, but the view that it was the ‘*sine qua non*’ should also be tempered, given the facts that a) early prize vases might be uninscribed, b) these were not the exclusive containers of olive oil, which was the true ‘prize from Athens’, not the ceramics the oil came in,<sup>255</sup> and c) we do not know what function the uninscribed, so-called ‘pseudo’ vases *actually* served. The guidelines and trends noted above for the relationship between inscription, size, iconography, and date are valid only to a certain degree, and cannot be taken as *definitive* proof with regard to the status of an amphora as a prize vessel, or with regard to the connection between its imagery and the Panathenaic festival. Langridge-Noti wisely warns “that our assumption that ‘prize’ vases need to be full-size as well as inscribed is in need of some modification”.<sup>256</sup>

To return to Paris 243, the fact that it is shorter than the ‘official’ vases and carries both an anomalous inscription and iconography can be explained in part by its early date and in part by the uncertain status, in any case, of ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaics. Moreover, contrary to evidencing itself as unassociated with the sporting *agones* at the festival, Paris 243 deliberately declares that it is a legitimate prize vessel. The context of the vase is strongly ‘athletic’, at least in the sense of the word *athlon* as prize. The shape of the vessel itself

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<sup>254</sup> Translation following Race (1997b).

<sup>255</sup> Themelis (2007, 27).

<sup>256</sup> Langridge-Noti (2001, 77).

promotes this, of course, but so do the Athena on the reverse of the vase and the columns between which she stands, both regular features of canonical prize amphorae. Furthermore, as Jenifer Neils points out, the *lebetes* on the columns and the tripod on Athena's shield are strongly reminiscent of the tradition of prizes won in athletic contests.<sup>257</sup> Therefore despite the fact that they are different from the later standard imagery (roosters on the columns, various shield devices), that difference actually traditionalizes the context of victory that the vessel evokes. Moreover, the two youths framing Athena and brandishing branches are yet another evocation of victory and prizes. The branches they bear should be taken as olive branches, a potent symbol both of the oil that was awarded to the victors and the goddess for whom the sacred games were held. Advertising prizes in this way on the Panathenaic amphorae publicizes the wealth of the games and the city, and thereby works to attract athletic competitors while promoting the city of Athens itself – all important goals for the early years of the Panathenaia.<sup>258</sup> Most significant of all, though, is the inscription on the front of Paris 243, in which the crowd calls for the awarding of a jug to the tumbler (*kados toi kybisteitōi*), memorializing public approval for the acrobatic performance. Practically by definition, the event in question is therefore an 'athletic' activity. It is conceivable that a crowd might shout for a prize to be given to a 'sideshow' tumbler, but considering that the vessel here is a Panathenaic amphora it is far more likely that the scene shows a legitimate event at the athletic games at the Athenian festival. It is only fairly recently, however, that the phrase has been correctly read and translated with any consistency, and its significance recognized. Although the first word of the inscription stands as '*kados*', it has been frequently misread as *kalos*, an error long repeated. This has led to translations such as 'bravo for the tumbler',<sup>259</sup> or 'good for the tumbler',<sup>260</sup> or even "the equilibrists are beautiful",<sup>261</sup> a mistranslation that treats the first word as if this were a *kalos* inscription – as indeed some

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<sup>257</sup> Neils (2007, 48).

<sup>258</sup> For the ideological statement that informs the iconography on the Panathenaic prize amphorae, namely, that Athens and her citizens excel in greatness, prestige, and wealth, see: Kyle (1987, 32-9), Neils (1994), Kyle (1996), Popkin (2012, 224-32).

<sup>259</sup> Neils (1992, 176); cf. Neils (1994, 156 with n. 24, and 2007, 48) and Schäfer (1997, 82): "Ein Bravo dem, der sich kopfüber überschlagen kann!"

<sup>260</sup> Shapiro (1989, 33).

<sup>261</sup> Brandt (2010, 104). The plural translation is incorrect, as is the term 'equilibrist' for *kybisteteres*; there is no indication that *kybisteteres* engaged in acts of balance (that sort of feat was performed by tightropewalkers and the like, who were *schoinobatai*, *kalobatai*, etc., not 'tumblers').

have erroneously labeled it.<sup>262</sup> The first word is also sometimes interpreted as *καλῶς*, which would mean something like ‘well done by the tumbler’.<sup>263</sup>

It must be stressed that the third letter of the inscription is *not* a lambda, but a delta. The alphabetic chart of Greek letter shapes in Henry Immerwahr’s *Attic Script* has no comparable form of a lambda, but indeed comparable forms of delta.<sup>264</sup> The misreading of this letter has contributed greatly to the subsequent misreading of the vase as representative of a sideshow, not an event. The reading *kalos* preserves the positive response of the spectators, but more or less denies the tumbler status as a Panathenaic victor by denying him his prize, since I contend that the inscription is in fact self-referential; the *kados* is the Panathenaic amphora itself, the prize for the event in question. The word *kados* is often used of a wine jar or water jar as well as earthenware cooking pots, and it, like its diminutive *kadiskos*, is used of ‘voting urns’ in Aristophanes’ *Birds* (1032), but Plato uses it in a sense almost of ‘container’ when he explains the successive whorls of the universe fitting into one another *καθάπερ οἱ κάδοι οἱ εἰς ἀλλήλους ἀρμόττοντες* (*Republic* 616d5: ‘just like *kadoi* fit into one another’).<sup>265</sup> *Kados* is, in general, a broadly applicable term for “any sort of amphora-like vessel”, as Amyx concluded.<sup>266</sup> The near synonymy of *kados* and *amphora* is especially seen in a painted inscription on a late 6<sup>th</sup> century black-figure Type A amphora reading ΚΑΛΟΣΗΟΚΑΔΟΣ, also a self-reference to the pot itself.<sup>267</sup> The fact that a Panathenaic amphora is labelled a *kados* is therefore in no way problematic, for this usage is within

<sup>262</sup> Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 504), Reed (1987, 60).

<sup>263</sup> Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 504), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, 169). It was first (?) proposed by Kretschmer (1894, 88) and also emended to such by the CVA, although here it lists ‘KALOS’ in the transcription. The change from short to long is understandable, and also corrects the grammatically awkward *kalos toi kubisteitōi*. Still, no correction is necessary if we keep a delta instead of a lambda.

<sup>264</sup> Immerwahr (1990, xxii-xxiii); cf. Beazley (1939, 11 n. 32): “the third letter *may* be meant for a lamda [sic], but it would an Ionic lamda, very rare on Attic vases at this time” (emphasis Beazley’s), and Panathenaic amphorae only adopted Ionic script in lieu of Attic after 403 B.C.: see Neils (1992, 40). Webster (1972, 70) claimed the inscription was “not quite clear”, but opted for *kalos*.

<sup>265</sup> See LSJ s.v. *κάδος*, Amyx (1958, 185-6), Sparkes (1975, 127-8), Vuono and Krauskopf (2007, *passim*, esp. 55-6 for textual references). For domestic *kadoi* see Sparkes and Talcott (1970, 201-3).

<sup>266</sup> Amyx (1958, 186 and n. 3). See also Sparkes (1975, 128) for the similar conclusion that “*kados* is then a fairly general word that takes its specific meaning from the context”. The definitive treatment of *kadoi* is now Vuono and Krauskopf (2007).

<sup>267</sup> *Ars Antiqua Auktion* IV (1962) 31, no. 131, pl. 44; Lazzarini (1973/4, no. 32, pl. 75.1-3).

the semantic scope of the word.<sup>268</sup> There is furthermore precedent for vessels with self-referential inscriptions claiming themselves as prizes in some kind of competition. The obvious example is the Panathenaic prize amphorae themselves, with the reading ‘a prize from Athens’. An early Geometric vase (late 8<sup>th</sup> century), the so-called ‘Dipyron oinochoe’, is evidently the reward for some form of dance contest, according to its inscription (ὄς νῦν ὀρχηστῶν πάντων ἀταλώτατα παίζει τοῦ τόδε κλ[.]μιν[...], ‘whom of all the current dancers sports most spritely, his is this [vessel?]’), though the formality of the challenge is uncertain.<sup>269</sup> A 6<sup>th</sup> century Corinthian aryballos also seems to refer to itself as a prize in dance.<sup>270</sup> Numerous other examples exist for sport and athletics.<sup>271</sup> In

<sup>268</sup> An inscriptional epigram, preserved in the *Anthology* and attributed to Simonides, has been understood by some to link *kadoi* and Panathenaic amphorae (*Anth. Pal.* 13.19 = Page XLIII). The poem records the athletic achievements of one Nicolaidas throughout the Greek world, including at Athens (lines 3-4): καὶ Παναθηναίοις στεφάνους λάβε πέντ' ἐπ' ἀέθλοισι | ἐξήκοντα †ἀμφοφορεῖς† ἐλαίου· (‘at the Panathenaia he took crowns, five times in the contests [i.e. in the pentathlon?], [and] sixty amphorae of olive oil’) The fourth line is ammetrical, and Page dagggers ἀμφοφορεῖς, defending ἐξήκοντα as in keeping with what we know about the numbers of Panathenaic prize vessels recorded in IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311 for boys and youths (somewhat cyclically, this passage has been used to help restore the text of the inscription for prizes given to men: see Shear (2003, 95)). Various emendations have been offered (see for instance Page (1981, *ad loc.*) and Ebert (1972, no. 26)), including that of Blinkenberg (1929), who substitutes κάδους for ἀμφοφορεῖς, proposing that the latter is an intrusive gloss. In defence of his choice, he cites a fragment of the Atthidographer Philochorus (*FGrHist* 328 F 187= 301 Harding), preserved by Pollux (10.71), which asserts that *amphora* and *kados* can be used synonymously – basically true, as stated above (but note the subsequent statement in Pollux, citing Epicharmos in *Philokline*, where *amphora* and *kados* are differentiated). The point would remain mostly a textual problem for the epigram – though with not inconsiderable ramifications for the reconstruction of IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311 if the word ἐξήκοντα is the source of trouble – were the emendation *kadous* not invoked by Michalis Tiverios (2007, 15) as specific evidence that “the word *kados* is also employed as a measure of fluid, equal to that of an amphora”. Tiverios does note, though, that the *kadoi* of oil “must mean ‘60 amphoras of oil’” (15). In response to Tiverios see Johnston (2007, 101): “there is no substantial evidence that ‘κάδος’ was ever used as a measure”, although he seems to accept that Panathenaic amphorae could be called *kadoi* according to Greek semantics. For the relationship of the epigram with athletics see especially Maróti (1991).

<sup>269</sup> IG I<sup>2</sup> 919 = CEG 432; Athens, NM 192 (2074). The text here is after that used recently by Sider (2010, 549 n. 31). From the large bibliography on the oinochoe, see in particular Langdon (1975) regarding the many variant readings of the inscription (of which the general sense remains the same), as well as Powell (1988) and Robb (1994, 23-41) for its relationship to literacy. Kyle (1996, 115) claims, probably correctly, that “this was an *ad hoc* prize”. The supposition in Tzachou-Alexandri (1989, 306, no. 194) that the dance was related to ball-playing is untenable.

<sup>270</sup> Πολυτερπός. Πυρρῆας προχορευόμενος αὐτοῦ δέ φοι ὄλλα (‘Polyterpos [the flute player]. Pyrrhias leading the dance and his is the olpe’): Corinth C-54-1 = CEG 452; Wachter (2001, 44-47, no. COR 17)). The inscription here is again after Sider (2010, 549 n. 31). See also Boegehold (1965, 260) for the reading “αὐτῷ Δεφοῖ <μ>ὄλλα” ‘here a dance for Devo’ (a cult for Demeter), but in either case we are apparently dealing with a contest.

<sup>271</sup> See for example Kyle (1996, 115, 130 n. 61, and 135 n. 95) for several cases. Neils (1992, 195 n. 1) cites an Attic kylix with an inscription naming it the prize for a contest in a girls’ wool-working contest: New York, Met. 44.11.1; see Milne (1945). Obviously this sort of ‘*athlon*’ is very different from the Panathenaic amphorae, despite being strictly ‘athletic’, and proves that non-gymnastic contests could still have awards. This should not be taken as a comparandum for Paris 243 as a prize for a ‘sideshow’,



the end, the inscription on Paris 243 explicitly states that a prize *is* awarded to the victorious participant, strong testimony to the existence of tumbling as a formal event at the early Panathenaia. Some have suggested that the vessel was in fact a special commission by the victor, who chose to immortalize his triumph with unique and personal touches.<sup>272</sup> Because the vessel was found in the necropolis at Camiros on Rhodes, Webster even proposes that this victor was a Rhodian who visited the Panathenaia in the early days after its reform.<sup>273</sup> If true, this would reveal the early success of the festival in its attempts to attract foreign competitors, but it would also mean that the event in question was not one of those competitions restricted to Athenian participants. But there are also a myriad other ways that the amphora might have ended up in Rhodes, and Panathenaics, both ‘pseudo’ and ‘official’, have been found widely dispersed.<sup>274</sup>

In part the interpretive problems associated with Paris 243 and its scene of tumbling arise from presuppositions of what rightly constitutes ‘athletics’ and the ways in which the amphora challenges that preconceived framework. It is true that acrobats in the Greek world were mostly thaumatopoeitic performers, at least from the Classical period onward; to have acrobatics as a legitimate contest at the illustrious Panathenaia might seem incredible from this perspective. But I stress again here the important differences in form and style that create variant types of acrobatic or tumbling activities. It is only in sportive contexts that we see male tumblers executing aerial rotations, wherein the corporeal achievements of the performer emphasize masculine virtues of dominance, martial *andreia*, etc. There is no reason to suppose that the tumbler on Paris 243 will contort his body, or dive among swords, or perform any of the motions and manoeuvres that characterize sympotic acrobatics or *thaumatopoiia*. On the contrary, he will almost certainly accomplish ‘gymnastic’ feats that display a level of physical prowess which, as the vase already shows, garner social acclamation. The strongest possibility here is that

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however, for the vases belong to very different contexts. N.B. also another ‘pseudo-’ Panathenaic with a specific inscription for its victor, London, BM B144.

<sup>272</sup> Webster (1972, 78), and later also Shapiro (1989, 33).

<sup>273</sup> Webster (1972, 78).

<sup>274</sup> See Bentz (2001, Appendix 1) for ‘pseudo-’ amphorae, and Bentz (1998, Appendix) for ‘official’ amphorae.

the vessel shows an authentic event, and is part of the prize for that event (one amphora out of [or separate from] an unknown total amount of oil/amphorae).

The question of what event the amphora actually commemorates remains to be definitively answered. I am inclined to believe that it is, in fact, a currently unknown event, perhaps something called *kybistesis*, *vel sim*. On the most basic level, it does not appear to be any other event we can label with the possible exception of the *euandria*, as stated above, though this entails a serious corollary that the *euandria* either a) evolved over time, or b) was not ‘standardized’, but allowed room for variation and ingenuity by the performers as they showed their ‘manliness’, much in the same way that choral contests permitted and even encouraged differences in choreography.<sup>275</sup> Why the corollary? Simply because the *euandria* existed long after 470 B.C., when records of male tumblers in Greece disappear. More likely than being a part of the *euandria*, tumbling could have been part of a separate and distinct event in the budding years of the Panathenaia, albeit one which was soon dropped from the itinerary of competitions.

With regard to the various activities shown on the amphora, Stephen Miller claims that “the atmosphere conjures up images of a circus, where different stunts go on at the same time”.<sup>276</sup> But there is little evidence that the display of multiple and simultaneous routines at something like a ‘circus’, as sometimes occurs in modern spectacle productions, was a Greek practice. Greek *thaumatopoiia* shows are generally characterized in the literary record by an association with a particularly skilled individual.<sup>277</sup> Even when a troupe is involved, as in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, there is usually a clear ‘main attraction’ at any given time, as the troupe progresses through successive acts.<sup>278</sup> Rather than interpret the different actions on this vase as concurrent, I read them as two distinct aspects of an event, tumbling on horseback and leaping from the springboard, given synchronic presentation on the vase for the sake of art and unity. Central to my reading of the vase

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<sup>275</sup> Considering that the prize for the *euandria* seems to have changed over time (see note above), the format of the competition may have changed also.

<sup>276</sup> Miller (2004, 167).

<sup>277</sup> See the discussion of *thaumatopoiia* in Chapter Four

<sup>278</sup> A notable exception is at Dio Chrys. 20.9-10, where a *thauroma* is displayed simultaneously among other spectacles and attractions in a hippodrome. At Ath. 4.129d ithyphallic dancers, *skleropaiktai*, and nude, ‘marvel-making’ women enter a wedding banquet together, but the impression is of a condensed list of performers who do not necessarily entertain simultaneously.

and its athletic scene is the due recognition of the activity of the other men on Paris 243, in addition to the *kybisteter*. In particular, the action of the man on the far right confirms the acrobatic context of the event: he is none other than a springboard leaper, poised on the same apparatus discussed at length above.

The springboard leaper and the crouching man with the pickaxe, the two men to the far right in the scene, should be considered together. The crouching figure prepares, as stated, a *skamma*, used both for combat sports and to cushion the landing of a jumper in the *halma* (long jump). Here it must also be for a jumper, either the tumbler on horseback if he leaps off the animals, or the youth on the springboard to the right of the scene. I know of no parallel use of the word *skamma* as a technical term for either. The only other connections between the *skamma* and tumbling are in Lucian's *Anacharsis* and Philostratus' *Gymnasticus*, when wrestlers 'tumble' in the dirt (Luc. *Anach.* 16.39, 18.23; Philost. *Gym.* 50; cf. 36). To judge by its close proximity with the wooden apparatus and despite being on the wrong side of it, I am inclined to believe that the pit should be associated with the springboard leap. It is logical that the landing of such a jump should be softened, particularly given the momentum required to achieve an aerial revolution. We might compare the mats employed for some events in modern professional gymnastics competitions (bars, vault, etc). Regardless of which figure actually uses it, the *skamma*, as an iconographic symbol on pottery, indicates an athletic context; its presence on the Panathenaic amphora is yet another marker that the tumbling occurs in a sportive atmosphere.<sup>279</sup>

I have asserted that the man to the farthest right in the scene stands upon a 'springboard'. The shape of the structure, the acrobatic context of the scene denoted by the inscription, and the body position of the figure on it leave little doubt in my mind as to its identity. It must be the same apparatus used by tumblers in other visual depictions. Nevertheless,

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<sup>279</sup> Cf. the proposal of Hollinshead (2015, 15) that the figure with the pickaxe is helping to build another *ikria* (grandstand), the framework of which she suggests might be the wooden planks at the right (i.e. the springboard). She acknowledges that he may be churning up ground, as for jumping scenes, "however, his tool is shorter and thicker than other picks", and adds (175 n. 59) that "picks in images of jumping and the pentathlon are consistently represented with a head that is a long slender arc, as opposed to the shorter axe-like head of this implement". The point is novel and accurate, but we do see a similarly shaped implement on a fragment in Frankfurt (Inv. No. Li 554 = CVA Frankfurt am Main 2, [Germany 30] Taf. 84.4), where a pentathlete hurls a discus. Hollinshead does also accept that there is a good case for the figure on the incline planks of wood being a springboard leaper (ibid).

some scholars deny that the structure is a springboard, or any sort of ‘gymnastic’ equipment. Greifenhagen, for example, suggests that the boy on it is merely a horse-hand who watches an *agon*, like the other with the pickaxe, having climbed up a “Stange oder Leiter”.<sup>280</sup> The figure cannot be a competitor, according to Greifenhagen, because he lacks the armour and weapons that springboard leapers carry in other vase paintings. I would make the counter-point that rather than indicate the boy is not a *kybisteter*, his nudity simply suggests that tumblers could sometimes compete naked, as was usual for athletes. We might compare the naked tumblers on the Etruscan kyathos and the tomb painting from Poggio al Moro (neither of which Greifenhagen mentions). Still, the most important visual identifier here for the boy’s activity is not his equipment or lack thereof, but both the apparatus on which he stands and his body position. His bent knees and straight arms, depicted as if being swung for momentum, clearly denote inceptive motion for a leap backwards.<sup>281</sup> Despite the general posture, the idea that the boy has climbed up some sort of pole or scaffolding to watch the performance is common. Blümner calls the structure to the far right “ein Gerüst, an dem ein junger Mann hinaufklettert”,<sup>282</sup> similar to Lesky’s reading of the figure as “ein Klettergerüst”.<sup>283</sup> Lissarrague similarly does not identify the apparatus on Paris 243 as a springboard, but rather a “sort of mast”, though he includes it as “without doubt part of the accessories of the event”.<sup>284</sup> Perhaps the balancing feat he conceives is similar to that imagined by Brandt, who claims that the individual with the pickaxe “seems to fasten a two-legged pole, from which the other hangs”.<sup>285</sup> Neils recognizes that the wooden structure is for sport, but she describes the action as “some sort of pole-vaulting”, which is in fact an activity unknown in Greek

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<sup>280</sup> Greifenhagen (1935, 467 with n. 2).

<sup>281</sup> The springboard tumbler on Tampa 86.93, discussed above, exhibits a similar bending of the knees; cf. a bronze statuette in New York (Met. 08.258.11) whose bent knees and outstretched arms could mean he is a diver, jumper, or runner at the starting line: see Gardiner (1930, pl. 64). Young (1926) thought the statuette was a tumbler performing a back handspring. It is comparable in position to the athlete illustrated on Leipzig T 642, either a jumper or a runner at the line: see Finley and Pleket (1976, fig. 16). A bending of the knees is also visible for the women on Paris Louvre F 203 and Rome, Museo di Villa Giulia 106463, but the action of a diver is similar to that of a tumbler (see Introduction). In any case, the pose of the youth on the springboard on Paris 243 clearly indicates that he is on the verge of (likely backward and aerial) motion.

<sup>282</sup> Blümner (1918, 11).

<sup>283</sup> Lesky (2000, 79 n. 328), with a specific denial that the apparatus is a ‘petauron’.

<sup>284</sup> Lissarrague (2001, 77). This is a translation of the author’s 1999 French original, which I have not been able to consult; presumably “a sort of mast” is a faithful translation.

<sup>285</sup> Brandt (2010, 104).

athletics.<sup>286</sup> Beazley takes a somewhat agnostic stance, claiming that the boy on the wooden framework either “is another turn, not necessarily concurrent with the tumbler, or possibly...he is climbing to get a good view of the performance”. With the latter suggestion he references an Etruscan vase in the British Museum as comparandum, on which various sportive (perhaps better described as ‘festive’) activities take place.<sup>287</sup> Among them, between flutists and a boy holding an adult’s hand, is a youth who has climbed about three fifths up a slender pole. He grips it tightly with his knees and appears to be still ascending as he reaches his hands upward to hold the stick. It should be duly noted, however, that he climbs a single shaft, not a triangular incline as on Paris 243, and furthermore that the respective positions of his body and the youth’s on the Panathenaic amphora are very different. The latter does not cleave his limbs to the upright plank as the boy on London B 64, but appears poised to jump, as stated.

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<sup>286</sup> Neils (2007, 48). There is scant ancient testimony for ‘pole-vaulting’, i.e. fixing a long pole in the ground to propel oneself into the air. All that survives is much later than the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. (Xen. *Hipp.* 7.1 is not a proper pole-vault). In an anonymous Roman-era poem in the *Anthology*, a man uses a pole to escape an animal in the arena (*Anth. Pal.* 9.533): κοντόν ἀνὴρ κατέπηξε, δέμας δ’ εἰς ἀέρα ρίψας | ἰδνώθη προκάρηνος, ἀνεγρομένοιο δ’ ὕπερθεν | θηρὸς ὑπερκατέβαινεν εὐστρέπτοισι πόδεσσιν | οὐδὲ λάβεν· λαοὶ δὲ μέγ’ ἴαχον· ἔκφυγε δ’ ἀνὴρ. (A man stuck fast his spear, and throwing his body into the air he bent over double headlong, and he stepped down over the riled beast from above with nimble feet. It did not catch him. The crowd gave a great roar and the man escaped). Despite the use of a κοντός here, this does not seem to have been part of the repertoire of the *kontopaiktes*, the acrobatic ‘pole-player’, whom sources (all late) claim balanced a pole in some way, such as on the forehead: Julian, *Epigram* 3 = *Anth. Append. Prob. et Aen.* 22,17; J. Chrys. *Hom. ad pop. Ant.* 19.4 (49.196 Migne), *Hom. in Hebr.* 16.4 (63.127 Migne); cf. also Martial 5.12. A second century A.D. inscription from Delphi records citizenship given to an acrobat, whose expertise including pole-playing: Delph.3(1).226 = SIG<sup>3</sup> II, 847. More pole-vaulting over an animal, similar to that in the *Anthology*, is humorously described by Ovid, of Nestor (*Met.* 8.365-8), and even Athena propels herself off the ground with a spear (*ibid.* 2.785-6). The activity as spectacle is well illustrated on the A.D. 506 consular diptych of Areobindus (St. Petersburg, Hermitage W-12); cf. also Todisco (2013, Mr 24), and the pole-less somersault over a bear (?) on a 3-4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Athenian lamp: Athenian Agora Lamp L 1092; Perlzweig (1963, no. 54).

<sup>287</sup> London, BM B64: Beazley (1939, 12). The pole-climbing is also taken as acrobatic by Thuillier (1997, 250). I am unsure if the boy should be considered an ‘acrobat’, for it is unclear what he is actually doing. Pole-climbing is certainly considered acrobatic later, for often a child would climb up the beam balanced by the *kontopaiktes* (see above). At the start of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses* (1.4), a boy climbs up the spear that a sword-swallower has down his throat, and Epictetus mentions ‘φοίνικα ἰστάνειν’, ‘to stand palms’, as a kind of *thaumatopoiia*, along with tightrope walking and embracing statues, which has been interpreted as setting up palms so as to climb them; cf. Borthwick (2015, 321-2) for the suggestion that the phrase means ‘to do a handstand’. Galen (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 9.2.29 de Lacy) states that *thaumatopoiioi* teach their students to walk a tightrope and scramble up an upright pole (ἐπὶ λεπτοῦ σχοινίου διδάξῃ, πρὸς ξύλον δὲ ὄρθιον ἀναρριχᾶσθαι, καθάπερ οἱ θαυματοποιοὶ διδάσκουσι τοὺς μαθητάς), and makes it an example on the furthest end of the spectrum from Olympic training.

Others do identify the apparatus as a springboard, noting the similarities it shares with other representations in Greek and Etruscan art.<sup>288</sup> The triangular form, with its inclined plank as the sturdy base for a jumper, can scarcely be anything else in the context of an acrobatic performance. The image of the apparatus, recognizable as a distinct piece of gymnastic equipment, conveys semiotic meaning: the man who successfully achieves a backward aerial rotation after leaping from it demonstrates his physical prowess and thus claims civic and social value. Such is the message implicit in other representations of the activity, discussed above. The ideology is particularly applicable here in the context of a Panathenaic *agon*, where an athlete is socially recognized and validated for his achievements by fellow citizens, if indeed it is an event limited to Athenian participation. The realization that this is indeed the same type of springboard we see in other vase paintings, and that the man who stands poised upon it will perform similar physical feats as the airborne tumblers there, has important connotations for the scene at hand. If there are *two* tumblers shown on the amphora, are they part of a ‘team’ event, or are these competing athletes?

Before answering this question, I turn to the other two men who are part of the action, and who work together to exhibit the tumbling on horseback. The man with two shields has long been the focal point for discussions. He is the central figure at whom everyone’s gaze is directed and to whom the ‘voice’ of the audience refers. The military equipment he bears evokes the same semiotic interpretation discussed above in the context of springboard tumblers, namely, that the completion of impressive physical motions, tied to a martial context, connotes the performer’s beneficial abilities for his city in war. Here, however, a new dimension is added to the earlier discussion of similar athletes, for this *kybisteter* performs not from a springboard, but on horseback. It is important to clarify the manner in which these horses participate in the event at hand. Their use appears slightly different from most modern circus routines involving horses, where equine acts usually belong to one of two different groups: either ‘liberty acts’, in which the trained horses are controlled at a distance, or ‘riding acts’, in which the trainer/rider performs various stunts or feats while riding and controlling the horse. In both of these categories,

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<sup>288</sup> Jannot (1984, 356 n. 206), Jannot (1986, 197), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, 169-70), Neils (1994, 156), Schäfer (1997, 82), Hollinshead (2015, 15); cf. Neils (2007, 48).

the demonstration of human control over the animals is central to the acts and encodes messages of human domination over the animal kingdom, the sophisticated triumph of culture over nature, and social power.<sup>289</sup> The scene on the amphora encodes similar meaning, but adds the particular symbolism of the horse in Greek culture. Hippic events in Greek sport generally carried connotations of the wealthy upper class, as it was only the elite who could afford to own and train the animals. The horses in the scene are symbols of power and affluence, qualities which are then transferred to the tumbler himself, since it is he who displays dominance over the animals by performing upon them. Presumably, he also owns the horses.<sup>290</sup> With regard to the type of performance, the event showcases a ‘riding act’ in which the horses themselves are not the main object of focus. The event is only barely an equestrian one. They are given prominence by the painter in terms of size, but their movements are restrained and carefully controlled, kept in perfect time with a slow and exaggerated walk. The effect gives further emphasis to the cultural dominance of the tumbler on their rumps, but in practical terms also allows him to execute his manoeuvres with greater ease than if the animals were running. Furthermore, given the martial context evoked by the man’s accoutrements, the horses in the image also acquire militaristic connotations. The implicit suggestion is that they could also be mounts used for warfare, and therefore that such total control over their use, even if it is an appropriated use for sport, implies supremacy on the battlefield.

On Paris 243, there is no evidence that the man who governs the horses will perform any acrobatic action. His role is quite clearly limited to managing the animals with care and precision while the armoured tumbler performs. The status of the man is questionable. Is he no more than a slave, like the jockeys who typically ride horses in hippic *agones*? Or is he part of a ‘team’ in the competition, a member whose observable skill with the horses helps achieve victory? His representation in the imagery certainly does not suggest the former. First of all, it is important that he is not diminutive, although relative size does

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<sup>289</sup> Bouissac (2010, 55-69, esp. 69).

<sup>290</sup> The tumbler is the athlete who wins the *kados*, so the horses are almost certainly his. In other equestrian contests the owner of the horses is the victor; cf. especially at the Panathenaia the *apobates* and the mounted javelin throw, where, unusually, the owners of the horses were also the competitors.

not seem to be as important an issue for a vase on which the victor is small.<sup>291</sup> Secondly, there may be an indication of victory in his posturing, as he gazes backwards over his shoulder. As Peter Schultz says of the same pose in depictions of the *apobates* race, “this particular iconographic device...is consistently used in apobates imagery to designate the winner of the event”, albeit it is the runner who looks backward in those scenes, not the chariot driver.<sup>292</sup> Here, the horseman is obviously also looking back at the tumbler, but the athlete too looks backward towards the crowd. It is in part this iconography that led Neils to suppose that the tumbler and horseman ride “as if performing a victory lap”.<sup>293</sup> Finally, the horseman wears around his head a fillet painted in red. It is quite possible that the ribbon is merely decorative, but it may also be an item commemorative of victory in the contest, as a typical part of the victory ceremony in athletic contests was, of course, the binding of a ribbon or fillet around the brow. If indeed a marker of success, this would imply that the man is part of a victorious ‘team’, the skilled horseman who governs the animals while his partner tumbles on their back. Nevertheless, the man is probably not to be understood as an athlete. That status belongs to the tumbler, whose dynamic and culturally symbolic actions have garnered him the *individual* prize of the *kados*. In the famous ca. 390 B.C. inscription IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311 listing Panathenaic prizes, team *athla* are always rewards such as bulls for sacrifice, various quantities of drachmae, and/or free meals. Panathenaic amphorae are only granted to solo victors.<sup>294</sup> In view of the fact that the inscription on Paris 243 must be self-referential, the vessel, presumably along with other amphorae containing olive oil, must be the individual prize for the tumbler, not one shared with the horseman. How then does the rider fit into the presentation of agonistic success?

The *apobates* contest, for which more evidence survives than for competitive tumbling, provides a good comparison to the situation here. Many of the details are in doubt, but the basic structure of the event consisted of a chariot driver controlling vehicle and horses

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<sup>291</sup> Indeed, he would easily be the largest human figure on the vase, although this has probably much to do with the relative size of the horses.

<sup>292</sup> Schultz (2007, 60). It is common for the leading runner in a race to look backward in art.

<sup>293</sup> Neils (2007, 48). I find it unlikely that they perform a victory lap; the image is more easily understood as during competition, particularly as it combines the music of the aulete with obvious motion by the tumbler.

<sup>294</sup> See Shear (2003).



while an armoured athlete alternatively rode in the car and jumped out to run behind it.<sup>295</sup> As on Paris 243, a skilled horseman is necessary, even integral, to success in the event, and yet it is the runner who is the true athlete. He is the recipient of the individual prize for the event; as far as we know, the charioteer himself received nothing.<sup>296</sup> This mirrors the iconographic representation of the apobatic charioteer in art, for as a general rule he is clothed instead of ‘wearing the uniform’ of athletic nudity, which makes quite clear that he does not practice literal *gymnastike*.<sup>297</sup> Still, the charioteer in this event was not a low status member of society, as other jockeys and charioteers often were.<sup>298</sup> A textual reference to the race actually makes Erichthonius the legendary founder of the event and first charioteer, whose runner, Peter Schultz argues, was none other than Athena herself.<sup>299</sup> But even quite apart from legendary aetiologies, real-life apobatic charioteers at the Panathenaia were not low-status. Demosthenes records that the *apobates* at the Panathenaia was restricted to Athenian citizens (61.23-4):

συνειδῶς τοίνυν τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἀθλημάτων καὶ δούλους καὶ ξένους μετέχοντας, τοῦ δ’ ἀποβαίνειν μόνοις μὲν τοῖς πολίταις ἐξουσίαν οὔσαν, ἐφιεμένους δὲ τοῦς βελτίστους οὔτως ἐπὶ τοῦτον τὸν ἀγῶν’ ὄρησας

Knowing, therefore, that slaves and foreigners are participants in the other events, but that license for the *apobates* is given to citizens alone and the best strive for it, thus you pursued that contest.

<sup>295</sup> For the *apobates* see: Patrucco (1972, 382-4), Kyle (1987, 188-9), Reed (1990), Crowther (2004, 345-348 and 350), Schultz (2007), Neils and Schultz (2012).

<sup>296</sup> The event is not preserved on IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311. For other inscriptions, mostly lacking prizes, see Crowther (2004, 345-8 n. 6, 8, and 15); Crowther (2004, 347 n. 12) asserts that “only one person, presumably the *apobates*, received the prize”, and provides a citation of an individual winner, Phocus son of Phocion: Plut. *Phok.* 20.1; cf. Kyle (1987, 213 A70). To this add also the solo winner (it seems) commemorated on a relief sculpture in Athens, Agora S399: see Kyle (1987, 205 A37) with bibliography. Gallis (1988, 227) suggests on the basis of an inscription regarding the Eleutheria games at Larissa in Thessaly (IG IX.2 527, 8-11) that the charioteer also won a prize, but the separate lines here refer to two events (four horse *apobates* and two horse), not two prizes for one event; cf. IG III<sup>2</sup> 2314 and 2316: see Tracy (1991, 139-141), Neils and Schultz (2012, 196 n. 10). That the *apobates* at the Panathenaia only had one victor is implied by the fact that Panathenaic amphora were given as the prize: e.g. Malibu, Getty Museum 79.AE.147 and numbers 80, 83, and 86 in Schultz (2007). At best, perhaps the charioteer received some compensation for his services from a victorious athlete, but this would be an honorarium of sorts, not a prize.

<sup>297</sup> Schultz (2007); cf. Crowther (2004, 357), who describes the *apobates* as a “team race of a different kind where there were only two contestants per team”.

<sup>298</sup> For the status of charioteers and jockeys see especially Golden (2008, 6-39) and Nicholson (2005).

<sup>299</sup> Ps-Eratosthenes *Katasterismoi* 13, citing a lost Euripidean play: see Schultz (2007, 59-60). As Schultz puts it, Erichthonius, as mythologized founder of the race, could be “subordinate” to no one else, a choice of phrasing that reflects the status of the driver as subordinate in importance to the apobatic runner. On Erectheus/Erichthonius and the *apobates*, see also Neils and Schultz (2012, 201-2).

That the restriction extended to *both* runner and driver is likely, given the point of contrast with how slaves and foreigners participate in other events.<sup>300</sup> Given the nature of the *apobates*, its archaizing (and Homeric) military qualities likely also elevated the status of the charioteer. In the end, though, even if he is not a lowly figure, the driver is not an ‘athlete’. He does not ‘win’ at Athens, and can only loosely be considered part of a winning ‘team’. The prize is an individual one for the armoured runner, and for him alone is the victory.<sup>301</sup>

So too is the case on the Panathenaic amphora in Paris and its tumbling contest. The individual *kybisteter* is the one who accrues praise, not the horseman. We might point out that the horseman here is nude while the apobatic drivers, in contrast, are always clothed, but despite being *gymnos* the rider performs no gymnastics. Too much weight cannot be given to his nudity in any case, since in the only other depiction of horseback tumbling the rider is clothed (I discuss the vase in detail below). If, then, the horseman on Paris 243 is *not* an ‘athlete’, strictly speaking, it implies that the scene in question is not a team event but an individual contest. This also makes good sense of the *kados*, the Panathenaic amphora itself, as (part of) the individual prize for the event.<sup>302</sup> The tumbler who stands poised on the springboard to the far right is therefore also not part of the ‘team’, but a competitor whose losing fate is sealed; losers are uncommon in Greek art, but not nonexistent.<sup>303</sup> I note that there is no cooperative or team element to the tumbling shown on the vase, as is also generally the case for other accounts or depictions of athletic male tumbling. Perhaps both the horseback tumbler and the springboard leaper are meant to be

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<sup>300</sup> Crowther (2004, 249) took this passage as evidence that slaves competed in gymnastic events at the Panathenaia, but later changed his view (279). Golden (1998, 3; restated at 2008, 44-6), points out that the reference to slaves probably only alludes to slave jockeys and charioteers in other equestrian events, not gymnastic ones.

<sup>301</sup> For the status of the charioteer and jockey in equestrian events, and the repression of their contributions to victory (to a greater degree than other figures, such as trainers and coaches), see Nicholson (2005, *passim*, esp. 40-1 for the *apobates*). See also Golden (2008, 6-39) and Mann (2014, 278-9) on these marginalized figures.

<sup>302</sup> Unless *each* team member received amphorae, which has no parallels, or unless an individual won a special prize *separate* from the team award, as Miller (2004, 142) argues was the case in the torch race (in explanation of IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311, 88-9). However, the two entries on IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311 probably stand for two contests, one with an individual runner and one operating as a relay; it seems from external evidence that torch relays were more popular throughout Greece: see further Kyle (1987, 190-3) and Bentz (2007) with references.

<sup>303</sup> The worshippers framing Athena on the opposite side of the vase are likewise not co-victors, as suggested by Lesky (2000, 81); cf. also Brandt (2010, 104): “could they be thanking her for victory?” On the significance of the two figures, see my comments above.

representative of the same Athenian tribe, but then again we are faced with the fact that the *kados* is awarded to a lone victor. A final point on the nature of the event shown on Paris 243: because the vase shows two distinct forms of tumbling I infer that competitors either had a choice of what type of acrobatic activity they chose to display, a rare thing in Greek sport, or that they had to compete in different acrobatic activities (as in the pentathlon, for example).<sup>304</sup> In either case, the athletes would apparently have been judged subjectively, since neither horseback nor springboard tumbling are particularly quantifiable (unless an acrobatic jump was measured for distance). Subjective judging is also a rare occurrence in Greek sport, but one that must have been the case at some of the other Panathenaic events, such as the *pyrrhiche*, the *euandria*, and the *anthippasia*, or events like the *eutaxia* and *euexia* at other venues.<sup>305</sup>

The closest parallels to the *agon* depicted on Paris 243 are the tribal events at the Panathenaia and Theseia festival in Athens that combine martial and physical accomplishments. The most notable are the *pyrrhiche*, the horseback javelin throw, the *anthippasia*, the *euoplia*, and perhaps the *euandria*.<sup>306</sup> All of these contests, with the possible exception of the *pyrrhiche*, were organized by Attic tribe and limited to Athenian participation if included at the Panathenaia.<sup>307</sup> Tumbling shares the militaristic aspects of these events, at least, and restricted participation to Athenians post-566 is plausible, especially if it existed at the city's festival before 566/5. The ideology of the event also parallels the other martial, tribal contests. All of the iconography on Paris 243 draws associations either with the military (holding shields, perfectly controlled horses), sport (tumbling, the springboard, the *skamma*) or otherwise upper-class spheres (horses indicate wealth, athletic pursuits are generally the prerogative of the upper classes, especially in the Archaic period), all of which culminate in the persistent reminders of victory in the competition. The martial overtones associated with male tumbling also

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<sup>304</sup> It is interesting to note that while the victorious tumbler here is a horseback tumbler, the majority of evidence for male tumbling is for springboards, though there are too few examples of either to draw conclusions from this disparity.

<sup>305</sup> On the *eutaxia* and *euexia*, see Crowther (2004, 336-44). One may compare choral contests and musical contests, which were also judged subjectively.

<sup>306</sup> Perhaps also the *eutaxia*, which was organized by tribe (IG II<sup>2</sup> 417) and must have been militaristic, but may not have been part of any athletic festival at Athens: see Crowther (2004, 344).

<sup>307</sup> For the debate regarding the organization of the *pyrrhiche*, see above.

reinforce group cohesion in the civic community, as the Athenian crowd celebrates the physical-military expertise of its shared citizenry.

Indeed, there is much in the imagery on this prize vessel to suggest that the crowd was deeply engaged in the performance. The spectator reaction to the scene obviously betrays their interest, markedly conveyed with the gesture of acclaim and the inscription, which, as François Lissarrague observes, “visually joins” the crowd to the tumbler and “conveys their enthusiasm”.<sup>308</sup> His further comments are worth quoting in full: “this collective and playful dimension is an integral part of the pleasure of the games...The public stirs and participates in the spectacle by encouraging the competitors”. The ‘participation’ of the audience within the performance must be both emotional and visceral, according to the theories of body phenomenology and ‘experiencing by experience’, discussed in Chapter One. Spectators perceive muscular bodies with an unconscious recollection of somatic memory – how their own bodies can move or have moved – and apply it to the circumstance at hand. They live through the performance, so to speak, and there is an aspect of communication between the acrobat’s and the spectator’s bodies, although the degree to which any given spectator will identify with the performer is always in flux. On the Panathenaic amphora, the spectators are clearly at a high level of engagement and so identification. As Lissarrague says, they seem to ‘participate’ in the performance. As the tumblers evoke the idealized and idolized warrior-athlete, they initiate a shared emotion in the closed community of the spectators by which those spectators also feel that they are or could be warrior-athletes (to varying degrees). At the Panathenaia, the intensity of the collective emotion might hypothetically increase, particularly if the event is exclusive to Athenian citizens, because it is already part of a celebration of the community. For an Athenian spectator, a sense of a shared civic identity could be part of the result of experiencing the festival and its games. This is true for any of the *agones* at the venue, not just tumbling, and it would have been an ideological *raison d’être* for the reformed Panathenaia. Furthermore, while the tumbling athletes represent the glorious achievements of the whole polis, both in terms of physical accomplishments and the prospect of continued success in war, this also extends to the mastery and dominance of

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<sup>308</sup> Lissarrague (2001, 76-7).

her people. An individual spectator could, theoretically, watch the victory of an Athenian tumbler with a sense of pride, patriotism, and self-satisfaction from blended self/identification with the athlete representing his city. This interpretative hypothesis is congruent with the theory that the event in which Greek tumblers participate is a sort of rite of passage, marking the transition of an *ephebe* into adulthood. The youth of the city present their physical and martial abilities and thus stake a claim to civic-social worth. I have discussed this theory above with regard to weapon dance and springboard leaping, and there is every reason to extend it to horseback tumbling as well (particularly given the presence of a springboard on the Panathenaic amphora).<sup>309</sup>

### 3.3: ‘Acrobatic’ Horseback Feats

In addition to Paris 243, there are several other artistic or textual references to tumblers and acrobats performing on horseback. Some have more in common with the prize amphora than others, but all demonstrate a similar convergence of spectacle and physicality. Interestingly, almost all the extant Greek examples feature elite male participants. Furthermore, almost all are linked in some way with warfare, whether by means of martial iconography, allusion, or overt statement. These two points follow the theory outlined above that horseback tumbling was seen as indicative of dominant masculinity and military aptitude. There is nothing else that explicitly ties the activity to an athletic *agon*, as the prize amphora does, but the allusions to sport do find some parallels with other Panathenaic events; on the other hand, there is also no evidence that ties equestrian performances to circus-like ‘side-shows’ or *thaumatopoiia*.

I know of only one other vase that depicts a shield-bearing tumbler on the back of two horses: an Attic black-figure neck amphora dated 550-500 B.C., auctioned to a private

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<sup>309</sup> Brandt (2010, 97) proposes that the event shown on the amphora does indeed reflect “a Panathenaic ritual, in which the yearly Panathenaic festival is regarded as a rite of passage for young males to become fully grown up citizens with all their responsibilities and duties”. While I agree with the emphasis on ritual, there is no evidence that tumbling, in particular, happened at the annual ‘Lesser’ Panathenaia (as, for example, the *pyrrhiche* and probably the torch-race). Tracy (2007) convincingly argues that very few athletic contests occurred at the ‘Lesser’ Panathenaia, at least in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries.

collection.<sup>310</sup> On one side of the amphora there is a leave-taking scene, which would be relatively unexceptional were it not for the tumbler. To the far left stands an old man wearing a cloak, his head bowed, holding a walking stick in one hand and raising the other in what seems a gesture of farewell. To his immediate right is a pair of horses, who support on their rumps a fairly small man holding two shields and wearing greaves. His posture is akin to the labelled *kybisteter* on Paris 243, though he is positioned as if striding to the right, not left, and both feet are on the horses' backs. The similitude between the athlete on the Panathenaic amphora and the figure here, in terms of posture, equipment, and placement on the back of two horses, implies that the latter is also a tumbler. The animals are controlled by a clothed individual who rides one of them. Like the horseman on the Panathenaic vase he is slightly larger than life, but this does not seem to be a marker of importance. Unlike his counterpart on Paris 243, though, the figure here has his head bowed and does not look back at the tumbler. Below the horses is a dog, whose head is also downcast. The horses are restrained in their movements, each one barely lifting a front leg off the ground. Again, I note the contrast with Paris 243, on which the horses step forward with legs raised high, though still only at a walk. To the far right of the scene there stands a beardless 'departing warrior'. He wears standard hoplite gear and looks back to the scene from which he departs, but part of his face is blocked, somewhat oddly, by a horse's nose. The reverse of the vase shows Heracles battling with two Amazons.

The amphora's iconography accords with many of the 5<sup>th</sup> century standards for scenes of warrior departure, as Susan Matheson outlines them in her study of the motif, though it dates to the previous century.<sup>311</sup> The old man who gestures farewell, the presence of a dog and horse, and the sorrowful atmosphere are all typical. Here the downcast and gloomy atmosphere, which is conveyed by bowed heads and the restrained action of the horses, reflects the emotional reality of what must have been a difficult moment for

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<sup>310</sup> Galerie Gunter Puhze sale catalogue 12 (1997), no. 192; Royal Athena sale catalogue 12 (Jan 2001), no. 185; *Minerva: International Review of Ancient Art and Archaeology* 11.1 (Jan/Feb 2000), inside back cover; Beazley Archive Online 20467. The date range above is taken from the Beazley Archive. *Minerva* 11.1 records a date of 510 B.C., a height of 31cm, and attributes the vase painting to a follower of the Antimenes Painter.

<sup>311</sup> Matheson (2005).

families.<sup>312</sup> The hoplite leaves his family and community and thereby demonstrates his willingness to fight for his city. A militaristic setting matches the Amazonomachy on the opposite side of the amphora, if this is not simply a mythologizing scene. According to this reading, the tumbler on the horses would at first seem rather out of place, for there is no reason why such an athlete would be present for a domestic departure scene. Neither would there be reason to see him as a ‘sideshow’ performer. However, Matheson makes the point that departure scenes sometimes allude to sporting *agones*, particularly militaristic ones such as the *pyrrhiche* and *hoplitodromos*.<sup>313</sup> The tumbler here might follow that pattern. But it is also possible that the shield-carrying tumbler symbolizes the hoplite’s athletic accomplishments in his civic life in a particularly idiosyncratic evocation. Indeed, Matheson argues for the importance of the individual in departure scenes, and the connection of the vase itself to that individual.<sup>314</sup> In this way, the vase painting makes a very personal claim for the warrior/tumbler’s success and status, in the same way as, for example, commemorative epigrams or inscriptions recall athletic achievements. The best possibility for the site of the warrior’s previous success in tumbling is Athens, since the Panathenaic amphora in Paris is the best comparable depiction of horseback tumbling. The provenance of the neck amphora is unknown, but its production style is Attic. The martial frameworks for the event and the vase in general are mutually reinforcing: the act of horseback tumbling displays military promise, and the leave-taking displays a willingness to sacrifice body and self for public gain. By presenting the two together, the artist illustrates the connected ideologies of the athletic event and civic duty in warfare. In sum, the scene on the vase memorializes a young man for his contributions to the city in the persona of warrior-athlete, a highly valued status.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> Matheson (2005, 32-3) emphasizes the importance of the gaze for conveying this *pathos*, but here a horse obstructs the warrior’s face.

<sup>313</sup> Matheson (2005, 31); particularly for scenes not of warriors departing for battle, as here, but of *ephebes* in training.

<sup>314</sup> Matheson (2005, 33)

<sup>315</sup> It is quite possible that the vase commemorates a deceased warrior, not simply one departing for battle. In this case the tumbler might suggest funeral games of some kind, but it would be an awkward, almost blunt, representation in the scene, and there are furthermore no contemporary parallels outside Etruria of tumbling performances in funereal contexts, with or without horses; *pace* Deonna (1953) and *contra* Hood’s (1974) reading of acrobatics related to death cult, for which see below. For more on acrobatics and death, see Chapter 5.1. Rather than suggest funeral games here, the tumbler could memorialize an athletic

The same association of ‘acrobatic’ horseback feats with militaristic skill that both the neck amphora and the Panathenaic amphora advertise is rendered particularly vivid in a Homeric passage. In book 15 of the *Iliad*, Ajax leaps from prow to prow of successive ships, which Homer assimilates to a man leaping between four running horses (15.679-86):

ὥς δ' ὅτ' ἀνήρ ἵπποισι κελητίζειν ἐὺ εἰδώς,  
 ὅς τ' ἐπεὶ ἐκ πολέων πίσυρας συναίρεται ἵππους,  
 σεύας ἐκ πεδίοιο μέγα προτὶ ἄστυ δίηται  
 λαοφόρον καθ' ὁδόν· πολέες τέ ἐθηήσαντο  
 ἀνέρες ἠδὲ γυναῖκες· ὃ δ' ἔμπεδον ἀσφαλὲς αἰεὶ  
 θρόσκων ἄλλοτ' ἐπ' ἄλλον ἀμείβεται, οἳ δὲ πέτονται·  
 ὥς Αἴας ἐπὶ πολλὰ θοάων ἵκρια νηῶν  
 φοῖτα μακρὰ βιβάζ· . . .

And as a man who well knows to ride upon horses, who then yokes together four horses from many and rushing them from plain to great city he drives along a thoroughfare; many stare at him, both men and women, but he with surefootedness, ever unerring, leaps from one to another in turn, while they fly. So Ajax kept making long strides upon the many decks of the speedy ships . . .

The ‘man who knows well to ride horses’ does not perform in an athletic, agonistic, or even strictly speaking martial context, although Ajax certainly belongs to the last category. The Homeric simile simply uses the comparison to elaborate the hero’s action as something even more spectacular. Just as transporting a few horses from country to town would be unexciting on its own, so too would Ajax’s long strides be if he remained pacing on a single ship. His movement between multiple decks, expressed via the spectacular riding in the simile, gives impressive dynamism to his exceptional movement.

Let us first consider the circumstance and action of the simile in isolation, apart from the comparison with Ajax. To begin, the status of the horseman is unstated; Homer does not tell us to what class he belongs, his age, why he is leading horses, whether he owns the animals, etc. All we know is that he is a man with particular knowledge.<sup>316</sup> Fränkel thinks the man a retainer, who works on a stud farm and rides each horse in turn either to ‘show

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victory while the hoplite was alive; in this case the vase imagery would operate similarly to those many idealizations of the deceased that depict them in an athletic prime; see Oakley (2004, 169-171).

<sup>316</sup> On Homeric similes involving skill and knowledge see Ready (2011, 131). The phrase ἐὺ εἰδώς is formulaic; see Fagan (2001, 137-8).



off' or to avoid tiring out any single horse (although pragmatism hardly seems a priority here).<sup>317</sup> The man must be showing off, or simply having fun, unless he is, as Patricia Fagan suggests, a professional performer. Fagan speculates potential connections with Minoan bull-leaping, but if there is any legacy here from that earlier acrobatic practice it is a diluted and shadowy remnant.<sup>318</sup> A crowd is certainly present in the simile, as if for an organized performance, but its presence does not preclude other reasons for the horseman's actions, and (strictly speaking) he would be unlikely to weary the animals by 'rushing and driving them from the plain' if a performance was imminent. Likewise, while the Homeric poet may have conceived of a retainer from a stud farm, there is nothing to prove this in the text. It is true that the epic heroes rarely use horses, but that does not mean that an ἀνήρ ἵπποισι κελητίζειν ἐὺ εἰδώς must immediately be excluded from their social group (cf. Hector, 'tamer of horses' (*Il.* 24.804: ἵππόδαμος).<sup>319</sup> In fact, the closest textual parallel in the Homeric epics is of the shipwrecked Odysseus in book five of the *Odyssey*, who rides a broken timber like a horse (5.371: ἀμφ' ἐνὶ δούρατι βαῖνε, κέληθ' ὡς ἵππον ἐλαύνων), but Odysseus and Diomedes also ride in book 10 of the *Iliad* (10.499, 10.513, 10.529).<sup>320</sup> Furthermore, horses were certainly symbols of wealth and status in the Archaic period (and earlier), and probably should be considered such in the simile.<sup>321</sup> There is, in short, little reason to follow Fränkel's proposition of a 'stud farm', no sign of which is present in the text. This then leaves us with a man who has the requisite skill to govern horses and has access to more than four of them. *Perhaps* he is another's 'retainer', but he may also be a member of the wealthy elite himself. But in the end we should not look too carefully for any realistic reason and purpose for the horseman in the simile, since the simile is a constructed representation, not a reality, and does not reflect actuality of practice.

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<sup>317</sup> Fränkel (1921, 79), supported by Wiesner (1968, 110).

<sup>318</sup> Fagan (2001, 143 n. 15).

<sup>319</sup> Aristarchus thought riding was unheroic: see Janko (1992 at 15.679-84).

<sup>320</sup> Hainsworth (1993 at 10.498) covers the controversy over whether Odysseus and Diomedes ride the horses, or drive them with chariots. Geometric art clearly shows interest in riders and riding, even if Homer is reticent on the topic. For a few examples of scholarship from many, see Wiesner (1968), Maul-Mandelartz (1990); Greenhalgh (1973) is classic for horses and chariots in Homer. Note also that the *keles* race was added to the Olympic Games in 648 B.C., an apparent result of the popularity of horseback riding in the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>321</sup> For horses as status symbols in the epic, see especially the chariot race at Patroclus' funeral games, and N.B. that Achilles can communicate with his horses. Fagan (2001) deals with horses in similes in particular, with a whole chapter on the simile at hand (135-173).

A handful of examples in Geometric art of figures standing on horseback corroborate the view that the man in the *Iliad* simile is not low status. A fine, flat-bottomed Attic cup in Los Angeles, dated 740-720 B.C., illustrates in its interior frieze a series of four horses with riders, alternated with four helmeted warriors carrying two spears each and a Dipylon shield.<sup>322</sup> On each of the horses a rider stands upright and holds reins in one hand. The image is reminiscent of the Iliadic scene, but here we view four horsemen with four horses instead of one who jumps between them. The replication may be purposeful, or simply an example of Geometric art's tendency to repetition. The vase has been interpreted as an 'acrobatic' equestrian performance, something like a military tattoo, and as a cultic scene with deities standing on the animals.<sup>323</sup> The latter reading derives from comparisons with near-Eastern iconography, in which divine figures are sometimes represented on symbolic creatures.<sup>324</sup> A Geometric bronze disc from the sanctuary of Athena Alea at Tegea may show such a deity in a Greek context: on it, a female figure stands on an animal (a horse?) with at least one arm extended (the other is broken away) and bent upright at the elbow, holding a small object in her hand (perhaps a flower or pomegranate). A large bird stands to the right of the horse. The posing of the woman's upraised arms, the symbolic object in her hand, and the presence of the bird all suggest that the figure is divine.<sup>325</sup> A similar pose is found on an ornamental panel from a bronze tripod leg from Olympia (B 1665). The panel shows a figure standing upright on a horse, arms held out from the body and bent upright at the elbow, raised overhead. Like the Tegea disc, it has been argued that the image imitates Eastern artistic iconography in the depiction of a divine being.<sup>326</sup> In contrast to these two 'standing riders', there is no

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<sup>322</sup> Los Angeles, County Museum of Art, the Hans Cohn Collection, 1992.152.2.; Hood (1974), Ahlberg-Cornell (1987, 78), Rombos (1988, no. 228), Thomas and Oldknow (1991), Langdon (1993, no. 10).

<sup>323</sup> Acrobatic performance: Rombos (1988, 169); military exercise: Ahlberg-Cornell (1987, 78); cult: Hood (1974). Hood (1974, 99) claims that "much as it may be disappointing to admit it, I doubt that such circus-type riders are known in Greece".

<sup>324</sup> Later adaptation of this motif can be seen in Roman art, particularly in the portrayals of Jupiter Dolichenus standing on a bull and Juno Dolichena standing on a deer.

<sup>325</sup> Dugas (1921, 384-5, fig. 45), Schweitzer (1971, fig. 105), Langdon (1993, 64-6).

<sup>326</sup> Maass (1978 no. 117a), Coldstream (2006, fig. 108a). Influence of Eastern iconography for a deity: Schweitzer (1971, 178), Carter (1972, 49-50), Hood (1974, 99-100), Langdon (1993, 64), Coldstream (2003, 336); cf. Ahlberg-Cornell (1987, 79) that it is an "exercise with horse". I wonder, with Rombos (1988, 170), if the panel on the tripod leg is symbolic of victory in an equestrian contest at early Olympia. The parallel iconography to the Panathenaic prize amphora is intriguing, though of course it by no means definitively indicates that the (possible) victory at Olympia was for a contest in horseback tumbling. Furthermore, early tripod dedications here do not necessarily relate to athletics. Coldstream (2003, 336)

compelling reason to see divine aspects in the illustration of the horsemen on the Los Angeles cup. Most importantly, the men do not raise their arms skyward but each holds his horses' reins, a point of realism and necessity that belies reading them as deities.<sup>327</sup> Better comparisons for the horsemen's poses here are the *Iliad* simile, Bellerophon riding Pegasus in Pindar's *Thirteenth Olympian* after the invention of the bridle (*P. Ol.* 13.85-86: see below), and the later Attic amphorae discussed above. The inclusion of Dipylon warriors matches the martial tenor for upright horseback riding that is present in all these instances. A bronze bow fibula from Thisbe, dated by Schweitzer to ca. 700 B.C., also shows an armed warrior standing on his horse, but the two other figures here – one dead soldier on the ground and one archer aiming at the horseman – clearly denote a scene of Archaic warfare.<sup>328</sup> Finally, mention should also be made of two early depictions of the Trojan horse, namely, a well-known Mykonos relief pithos and a Corinthian aryballos in Paris, on both of which soldiers stand atop the wooden horse.<sup>329</sup> Obviously this is not a realistic representation, but the depiction of armed warriors standing on a horse nonetheless finds parallels in my discussion. In brief, those few human figures in Geometric art that stand on horses all possess elite social status, whether they are associated with divinities or associated with the military. As Langdon states in summary of some of these artistic examples, “as a breeder and trainer of horses, the Geometric period aristocrat embodies a new kind of ‘Master of Animals’”.<sup>330</sup> So too should we perhaps envision the man in the *Iliadic* simile.

What exactly is the nature of the man's movement in the Homeric simile? His ‘trick-riding’ is not the same type of horseback tumbling illustrated on the Panathenaic amphora. There we see a *kybisteter* performing in the particular context of an athletic event. The nature of the tumbling remains speculative, but almost without doubt included headlong, aerial revolutions of some kind, to judge by comparison with the springboard vases and the meaning of the root *κυβιστ-*. The man in the Homeric simile does *not*

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thinks that the figure on the horse flourishes a spear, but the ‘spear’ appears to be the upper border for the panel, as Rombos observes (1988, 169 n. 13).

<sup>327</sup> Cf. Langdon (1993, 66): “the Los Angeles cup... includes no symbolism that compels us to look beyond the everyday world for explanation”, but she goes on to say that their standing “need not signify acrobatic stunts”.

<sup>328</sup> Berlin, Staatliche Museen 8396: Schweitzer (1971, 212, fig. 124).

<sup>329</sup> Mykonos, Mykonos Museum 2240, ca. 670 B.C.; Paris, Cab. Méd. 186.

<sup>330</sup> Langdon (1993, 66).

perform any flips, nor does Ajax as he leaps from prow to prow of the ships, nor do any of the horsemen standing upright in Geometric art. The figures in art all stand poised on motionless horses. The scenes are generally static, leaving us to imagine any potential dynamism. Even on the Los Angeles cup, the Dipylon warriors also stand stock still; the most that might be said here is that the reins of every horse are taut, giving more life to the scene than if they were slack. None, I think, would merit the appellation ‘tumbler’ (*kybisteter*) from a Greek perspective. Elsewhere in the *Iliad*, certainly, the *κυβιστ-* root shows headlong motion: Cebriones is mockingly likened to a tumbling diver because he has fallen head over heels in death (16.742-50) and fish and eels tumble as they plunge hither and thither in water (21.353-5). The skilled horseman in the *Iliad*, in contrast, remains upright and surefooted as he animatedly jumps from the back of one horse to the back of another as the four gallop at breakneck speed (οἱ δὲ πέτονται), carefully balancing as he stands upon them. Despite the use of the word ‘*κελητίζειν*’ for ‘riding’, he cannot be sitting on the horses if he leaps between them in the manner that Ajax strides over ship decks. While the adverb *ἔμπεδον* means ‘steady’, ‘with surety’ and the like, it is not irrelevant that its literal meaning is ‘on one’s feet’. The horseman also does not, as Janko rightly asserts, dismount, run on the ground, and jump onto another horse again.<sup>331</sup> There is no exact parallel to his action among extant Greek evidence; no known event or ritual involved this activity, though competitions in the *apobates*, *anabates*, *aphippodroma*, and horseback tumbling are comparable. The *apobates*, as mentioned above, involved leaping from a chariot, but in the *anabates* and *aphippodroma* the athlete dismounted his moving horse, ran beside it for a time, and mounted again.<sup>332</sup> Only in horseback tumbling was there movement between multiple horses (probably), without dismounting. In the sport of bull-wrestling (*taurotheria* or *taurokathapsia*), competitors also leapt from a galloping horse onto another animal, but that animal was the bull they then subdued; the vivid description by Heliodorus makes it clear that there was scarcely any ‘unerring surefootedness’ here, or more than one climactic leap (10.30).<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>331</sup> Janko (1992, at 15.679-84).

<sup>332</sup> For the *anabates*, see Alföldi (1967) and Schauenberg (2007/8). For the *aphippodroma* at games at Larissa in Thessaly, see Gallis (1988, 220-21). Considering how similar their format and iconography, I wonder if ‘*aphippodroma*’ was simply a regional term for the *anabates* race.

<sup>333</sup> For the event in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Thessaly and elsewhere, see Gallis (1988, 221-5). The Roman *desultor* event also involved leaps in, among, and between horses; a mosaic in the Palazzo Farnese in Rome

Nevertheless, we should not look too hard for realistic parallels from the simile, for here we have something even more extraordinary. It is best interpreted as simply a ‘fantastic’ set of movements designed to articulate Ajax’s physical power and heroic qualities, for the horse-leaping feat is something virtually impossible in reality, and made possible only when envisioned. The perfect surety of the rider’s movement is denoted in the phrase ἔμπεδον ἀσφαλῆς αἰεὶ, and highlights his physical superiority as it presents his accomplishments as effortless. Surefootedness is elsewhere invaluable for acrobatics: note the verbal similarity with the description of the *orchestris* in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, as she tumbles over swords ἀσφαλῶς, ‘unerringly’ (2.11), and the limited space for footsteps in sword-dancing, as mentioned by Democritus (fr. D92 (Taylor) = D-K 68 B 228):

οἱ τῶν φειδωλῶν παῖδες ἀμαθέες γινόμενοι, ὥσπερ οἱ ὀρχησται οἱ ἐς τὰς μαχαίρας ὀρούοντες, ἦν ἐνὸς μούνου <μῆ> τύχῳσι καταφερόμενοι, ἐνθα δεῖ τοὺς πόδας ἐρεῖσαι, ἀπόλλυνται· χαλεπὸν δὲ τυχεῖν ἐνός, τὸ γὰρ ἴχνιον μούνον λέλειπται τῶν ποδῶν· οὕτω δὲ καὶ οὗτοι, ἦν ἀμάρτωσι τοῦ πατρικοῦ τύπου τοῦ ἐπιμελέος καὶ φειδωλοῦ, φιλέουσι διαφθεῖρεσθαι.

When the children of misers are ignorant, they are just like dancers who rush towards swords: if they do not happen to put their feet down in the one lone place where they need to fix them, they are ruined. And it is difficult to get the one spot, for only room for a footprint is available. So also those ones, if they miss out on their father’s careful and frugal model, are wont to be ruined.

This ‘unerring’ bodily awareness is necessary, but also reveals consummate skill.<sup>334</sup> The requisite physicality in the horseman’s act still makes it something sportive, but it is more spectacular than athletic; both men and women stare in amazement at a feat (πολλέες τέ ἐθηήσαντο ἄνδρες ἢ δὲ γυναῖκες), which, in context, seems to be executed for no reason other than to garner public acclaim and recognition. The text capitalizes on the spectacular aspect of leaping between four galloping horses by using the verb θεάομαι, which is typical for spectatorship but also cognate with θαῦμα, ‘wonder’. In short, while these leaps on horseback are not athletic tumbling, they certainly demonstrate physicality and spectacle. The scene outside the simile is still martial, of course, which flavours the reading of the simile and the meaning of movement. By likening Ajax’s progress between

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from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century A.D. may show this activity, which is of particular interest here because it depicts men standing upright on galloping horses: see Todisco (2013, I 13, fig. 42).

<sup>334</sup> Cf. also the ‘compact steps’ of the *aithrobates* in Manetho Astrologus (4.277-8 ἴχνεσσιν...πηκτοῖσι).

ships to the horseback leaps, the poet accentuates the hero's physical abilities and causes them to verge on the impossible.<sup>335</sup> The simile thereby contributes to the larger-than-life persona of the hero and his imposing presence in the war. At the same time, it inherently associates bodily capability with military aptitude and makes extreme or incredible motion a heroic property. Ajax is here characterized by his *need* for movement as an outlet for emotion (15.674-5: οὐδ' ἄρ' ἔτ' Αἴαντι μεγαλήτορι ἦνδανε θυμῷ ἐστάμεν ἔνθά περ ἄλλοι ἀφέστασαν υἷες Ἀχαιῶν), as he observes his fellow Greeks reduced by their collective fear of Hector into a state of inactivity (15.655-66). The Homeric poet makes the stupendous, quasi-acrobatic leaping a heroic action that opposes and challenges the mass inertia of the Achaeans, and thus exemplifies bravery and galvanizing courage. As elsewhere in myth and epic, remarkable physicality serves to distinguish the Hero from the normal man.<sup>336</sup>

While the spectacular horseback leaps are not in themselves 'sport', it is useful to consider the Homeric, and heroic, scene with the representation of the athletic event showcased on Paris 243. There too a man is upright on multiple horses and is likened to a warrior who evidences his bodily control and proficiency, in an event that melds horsemanship and tumbling with militaristic values. The Iliadic passage certainly resonates with the Panathenaic contest and its similar exhibition of 'unerring surefootedness'. The tumbler reflects the generic conceptualization of a 'hero' as he approaches superhuman deeds. According to the theories of kinesthetic empathy, somatic memory, and body semiotics discussed previously, a spectator will thus also identify himself as 'heroic' to some degree as he cognitively and viscerally participates in the performance of motion. The warrior's *ethos* for standing upright on a horse is confirmed by Geometric art, and one wonders if there is an important link between the realistic 8<sup>th</sup> century scene on the Attic cup in Los Angeles and the 6<sup>th</sup> century Panathenaic event.<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> Janko (1992 at 15.679-84) notes that the Homeric poet also further highlights the swiftness conveyed in the simile by giving the ships the usual epithet 'speedy', θοάων (685), even though they are stationary when Ajax strides across them.

<sup>336</sup> Fagan (2001, 135-173) demonstrates how the simile "recharacterizes Aias, traditionally a great static defensive warrior, as a marshaller of men through the idea of control of the great heroic animal, the horse" (ii).

<sup>337</sup> The Los Angeles cup dates from 740-720 B.C., and the Panathenaic amphora from 550-500 B.C. The time elapsed (170 to 240 years) is not insignificant, but a relationship between the equestrian activities shown is possible.

Another poetic reference to a hero's performance on horseback corroborates the martial tenor for such displays. In Pindar's *Thirteenth Olympian*, the poet relates how Bellerophon tames Pegasus after Athena gives him the newly invented bridle (13.63-86). He captures the winged horse, ἀναβαίς δ' εὐθύς ἐνόπλια χαλκωθεὶς ἔπαιζεν, 'and having mounted he immediately danced an armoured dance, clad in bronze' (86). The phrase produces subsequent questions: did Bellerophon actually perform an action *on* horseback? What was that action? Why did it follow the successful taming of Pegasus? There is some vagueness in the Greek as to whether or not the dancing actually took place on Pegasus' back, depending on how we construe εὐθύς, 'immediately'. Pindar is often so condensed that the phrase could simply mean that Bellerophon first mounted, then immediately [got down and] danced, his dismounting being implied by the fact that one does not typically dance on a horse. Alternatively, εὐθύς could mean that Bellerophon really did perform his subsequent action *at once*, without waiting to dismount the horse. This is, I think, the most natural way to read the phrase. Finally, εὐθύς could be taken closely with ἀναβαίς, meaning that Bellerophon mounted Pegasus immediately, strictly *because* he now had use of a bridle, but in this case it still reads as though he ἐνόπλια ἔπαιζεν while mounted.

What was this performance, potentially conducted on horseback? The phrase ἐνόπλια ἔπαιζεν, sometimes rendered as some variant of "began to make sport in warfare", is hardly descriptive.<sup>338</sup> However, in this instance the verb παίζειν likely has the quite common meaning 'dance'.<sup>339</sup> ἐνόπλιος literally means 'armoured', but as the LSJ notes, its more frequent sense is "with or without ῥυθμός . . . 'martial' rhythm".<sup>340</sup> Accordingly, I have translated 'danced an armoured dance', which is also what a scholiast to the line glosses as a possible reading (Σ *ad* 123b: ἢ ἐνόπλιον ὄρχησιν ἐποιεῖτο). Still, there is nothing in the Greek to suggest what *kind* of martial dance this was. The choreographic possibilities are virtually endless. There is no 'typical' war-dance that was specifically

<sup>338</sup> The quoted translation is from Race (1997a); cf. Lattimore (1947, 40): "he made weapon play"; Swanson (1974, 55): "paraded"; Nisetich (1980, 146): "rode him in manoeuvres of war"; Burnett (2010, 59): "made play with his weapons".

<sup>339</sup> See LSJ s.v. παίζω; see also Bierl (2009, 68 n. 180) for a list of citations.

<sup>340</sup> LSJ s.v. ἐνόπλιος.

equestrian and thus apt for comparison.<sup>341</sup> One of the better parallels to an armoured performance on horseback is equestrian tumbling, especially considering the comparable use of tumbling in martial dances, like the Mysian's in the *Anabasis*.<sup>342</sup> J. R. Brandt even explicitly links the Pindaric passage with the Panathenaic vase in Paris. He states that “it is not unreasonable to suggest that Bellerophon's war play was commemorated in a special rite of passage game performed by the young Corinthian ephebs [sic]” at the Hellotia festival for Athena in Corinth, and tentatively questions if Paris 243 refers to a “similar kind of rite of passage game” at the Panathenaic festival.<sup>343</sup> However, this is not to say that Bellerophon actually tumbles on Pegasus' back. Indeed, nothing in the Greek suggests this interpretation. Bellerophon's performance could simply be, and indeed is presented as, a generic weapon dance. Furthermore, there is nothing in the text to imply that he is standing upright on the winged horse. The Greeks recognized ‘dance’ in a variety of movements, as Athenaeus observed (1.21a: ἔταπτον γὰρ τὸ ὀρχεῖσθαι ἐπὶ τοῦ κινεῖσθαι καὶ ἐρεθίζεσθαι, ‘they assigned the word ‘dance’ for moving and being stimulated’); one could indeed dance without using the feet. At the beginning of the final mimetic show in Xenophon's *Symposium*, for instance, ‘Ariadne’ sits on a chair (9.3: ἐκαθέζετο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου), but her subsequent actions, before she proceeds to stand, still cause the spectators to praise the dancing teacher (ἠγάσθησαν τὸν ὀρχηστοδιδάσκαλον). Evidently, she can dance even while seated.<sup>344</sup> To perform ἐνόπλια while sedentary is also conceivable, though again not as natural as dancing on foot.

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<sup>341</sup> Does ἐνόπλια ἔπαιζεν here include Pegasus, or just Bellerophon? Some equestrian ‘war exercises’, such as the *anthippasia* (and later the *lusus Troiae*), have a distinctly terpsichorean feel to them. Still, it is probably indicative that Xenophon, the best source for the *anthippasia*, calls it an ἐπίδειξις, ‘display’, not a dance (*Hipparch.* 3.10). Horses *could* dance if trained to do so (Ath. 12.520d-f), and human choruses could have horse-like dancers (notably in Alcman's first *Partheneion*, but especially too in comedy: see *Knights*, and a vase with a knight/horse chorus in Berlin (F 1697)), and Plato recognized dance in the movement of *all* animals (*Laws* 2.653e). For the Pindaric passage and weapon dance, see Ceccarelli (1998, 228).

<sup>342</sup> Procopius' account of a mounted ‘dance’ (*De Bellis* 8.31.19-21) is closer textually (19: καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπερφυεῖ ὀχούμενος ἵππῳ παιδιὰν ἐν μεταίχμιῳ ἔπαιζε τὴν ἐνόπλιον ἐπισταμένως, ‘and he himself, mounted upon a monstrous horse, expertly made sport with the weapon game, between the armies’), but in the description which follows the feats seem closer to Cleophantus' ‘marvellous feats on horseback’ (Pl. *Meno* 93d: see below) than a dance. In Procopius' passage, the rider is apparently sitting, not standing. I do not link it directly with Bellerophon's dance due to its much later date of the 6<sup>th</sup> century A.D.

<sup>343</sup> Brandt (2010, 106).

<sup>344</sup> χειρονομία, ‘gesticulation’, specifically used gestures as the main form of a hand-dance; those gestures do not require standing (though could still incorporate a moving body). Certain dance *schemata* did not necessitate much body movement or a standing posture: e.g. σκώψ, the ‘peering’ *schema*, which imitated a lookout “twisting...the neck and peering under the flat of the hand”: Borthwick (2015, 106).



Regardless of the form that the martial dance takes, it demonstrates the interpretative themes discussed throughout this chapter: successful performance of a weapon dance combines physical ability with implicit military skill to showcase the heroic. Here the (possibly) horseback dance also shows the instantaneous and total civilization/dominance over horses that comes with the use of the bridle, as if Pegasus is εὐθύς trained to the extent that Bellerophon can dance upon/with him. In context, the weapon dance is also an appropriate votive offering to honour Athena for her gift of the bridle. Not only was she the source for this innovation, she was also the supposed inventor of the pyrrhic dance in some aetiologies.<sup>345</sup> As in the Homeric simile of Ajax and the horse leaper, there is nothing explicitly ‘acrobatic’ in Bellerophon’s movement, but the poetic presence of a hero executing an equestrian martial performance provides an important parallel to the tumbling event at the Panathenaic festival and helps reveal the social attitude to such or similar displays.

There are a few artistic representations of potential ‘acrobats’ on horses apart from those discussed above. All from mid-late 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Italy, none is a *kybisteter*, but they are either ‘trick riders’ who drive or ride their horse unconventionally, or abnormal depictions of *anabatai*. Due to their distance in time and space from 6<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century Athens and a limited potential relationship to an early Panathenaic event, I consider them only briefly as comparanda. A Lucanian red-figure amphora of Panathenaic type, dated by Trendall to the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and the name vase for the so-called ‘Acrobat Painter’, shows a nude youth riding with his knees on a galloping horse.<sup>346</sup> He holds its mane with his right hand, balancing himself with the outstretched left, and keeps an upright frame. The horse has reins and bridle. A very similar scene is illustrated on an amphora in Copenhagen, also Lucanian red-figure of Panathenaic shape and dated to the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>347</sup> There are some gaps in the restoration of its fragments, but we see a nude male on a somewhat diminutive horse, which lifts only its front right

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<sup>345</sup> Paus. 2.4.1 reports that Athena herself tamed Pegasus, not Bellerophon. For the significance of the bridle to the ode, see esp. Hubbard (1986), Nicholson (2005, 202-4), Boeke (2007, 150-3). For pyrrhic aetiologies, see Ceccarelli (2004, 91-4).

<sup>346</sup> Turin 4482. *CVA* Torino I G, pl. 6.6; Trendall (1967a, no. 891, pl. 71.1), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, no. KA 2). Schauenburg (2007/8, 6).

<sup>347</sup> Copenhagen inv. Chr. VIII 4. Trendall (1967a, no. 815, pl. 70.3), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, no. KA 3), Schauenburg (2007/8, 6).

leg in a stately walk. The man balances on the animal's back on bended knee, braced with his left knee and right foot on the horse. He carries a shield in his left hand and what could be a spear in his right. Unfortunately, the fragment showing his torso and face is missing. The scene is framed with palmettes and flora, and a decorative (?) ribbon hangs in the background. In addition to these vases, two engraved Etruscan scarab rings also show men riding on horses with their knees.<sup>348</sup> The pair are quite similar, showing a single man on a lone horse, balanced on his knees and leaning forward over a stationary animal. They both grip the manes of the horses, but one (Rome 69915) holds a whip in his free hand. As on the Lucanian vessels, neither man appears to be performing much of any stunt on his horse besides keeping balance on his knees instead of sitting.

As a whole, these representations might have more to do with local Italian sport or spectacle than Greek athletics, particularly given their contemporaneity. The context of the scenes is unclear, and could illustrate anything from a thaumatopoeitic 'circus'-style performance to more structured agonistic activity, which may or may not have the Panathenaic tumbling event as its heritage. The images appear to me to be rather more closely related to *anabates* iconography than anything else, but it is not the normal pose of sliding off the animal.<sup>349</sup> Presumably, a rider would not use his knees to dismount either, since using the knees to aid in mounting was ill-advised (Xen. *Hipp.* 7.2: καὶ μηδὲ τὸ γόνυ ἐπὶ τὴν ῥάχιν τοῦ ἵππου τιθέτω). One may also balance on an animal's back with the knees without participating in anything sportive, though; on a pair of lebetes Silens kneel on mules, and on a kantharos in Kiel an Eros kneels on a running deer.<sup>350</sup> Still, the general combination here of the figures' nudity and the use of the horse, as well as the martial imagery on Copenhagen inv. Chr. VIII 4 specifically, do suggest that the activity was something more elaborate than pure amusement. As in the heroic examples, there is nothing in the images to suggest that the men will or have tumbled, apart from

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<sup>348</sup> Rome, Mus. Naz. Rom. Nr. 69915 = Zazoff (1968, no. 275, pl. 51.275); London, BM Gem 821 = 1772,0315.313.

<sup>349</sup> Schauenburg (2007/8). Schauenburg thinks the two Lucanian vases specifically should be linked with acrobatics, not the *anabates*, as an example not of sport but "Schaulust". He claims (6) that "die Anabaten und Desultores erinnern an Akrobaten, stehen aber auch mit militärischer Tradition in Zusammenhang. Für die rein der Schaulust dienenden, mit Pferden verbundenen akrobatischen Kunststücke gilt dies nicht"; this separates male horseback tumbling from the military context that is almost ubiquitous in its representations.

<sup>350</sup> Lebetes: Trendall (1983, 101, 278 b, c, pl. 20.2, 4), Schauenburg (1993, 246, abb. 50). Kantharos: Kiel B 563; Schauenberg (1993, fig. 1).

comparisons with Paris 243 and the neck amphora in a private collection. I also note that these ‘trick-riders’ are both horseman and performer in one, like those on the Geometric Los Angeles cup, dissimilar from the athletes on the Panathenaic vase and the neck amphora who compete while another controls the horses. The possibilities of bodily movement are thus more limited, but would still rely on the semiotics of human mastery over an animal and youthful vigour/skill to keep balance on it. The specific context of spectacle or sport would finalize the symbolic significance of the movement and encode it with socio-cultural value.

Before returning to the probability of an event in tumbling at the Panathenaia in Classical Athens, I must treat a final vase painting that has been repeatedly but erroneously linked with the tumbling on Paris 243. On one side of an Attic black-figure kylix, dated ca. 540-530 B.C. and attributed to the Amasis Painter, Poseidon stands among numerous warriors; on the other side four horses are prepared in stables.<sup>351</sup> Over the backs of two of the horses stride a pair of miniature men: an archer in ‘Eastern’ garb and a nude male who grips the capital of one of the stable’s columns and braces a foot against its pillar. Unsurprisingly, some have labelled these two figures tumblers, like the *kybisteter* on the Panathenaic amphora.<sup>352</sup> Maul-Mandelartz even goes so far as to claim that the kylix attests “dass Akrobatik am Pferd den attischen Bürgern geläufig war”.<sup>353</sup> There are several points against identifying these two as athletic tumblers, or even acrobatic entertainers. Most importantly, this interpretation requires that we view the painting as something like a photograph, wherein the figures more or less reflect reality. Let us follow this line of thought for a moment: the scene takes place inside a stable while horses are being harnessed, but indoor performance of horseback tumbling would be logistically problematic if not nonsensical in practice, particularly whilst horsehands work with the animals. It would also make little practical sense to perform without an appropriate audience, despite Maul-Mandelartz’s suggestion that they are practicing for their own performance to happen after a hippic contest (it is still illogical to rehearse indoors). Rather, we should avoid reading the imagery here as photographic and

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<sup>351</sup> New York, Met. 1989.281.62: Hoffmann (1964, no. 24), Simon (1976, 84-5), von Bothmer (1985, no. 60), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, 171), Moore (2004, 40).

<sup>352</sup> Hoffmann (1964, no. 24), Maul-Mandelartz (1990, 171).

<sup>353</sup> Maul-Mandelartz (1990, 171).

consequently supposing acrobatic performance simply because two figures stand on horseback. Others have argued that this is an illustration of the stables of Poseidon as described in *Iliad* 13.17ff. (cf. the deity on the reverse), not real life,<sup>354</sup> and so these would not be athletes – extremely unlikely in any case with one dressed as an Eastern archer, quite contradictory to the semiotic message of the Greek, nude athlete-warrior. Nor are they involved in a spectacular thaumatopoietic performance: everyone else in the scene ignores them with the possible exception of the horses, who might be jittery at their presence.<sup>355</sup> A compelling identification of the two curious figures is that they are abstract personifications (such as Deimos and Phobos) who cause anxiety in the horses before battle.<sup>356</sup> While not without its own issues, this neatly explains why the two are conspicuously diminutive and why they are present in a stable. It also works with the reading of the scene as dependent on mythic epic narrative. In short, the figures are *not* tumblers, and the scene is not a photographic transcription of reality. It does reveal, though, along with the Corinthian pinax in the note above, that simply standing on the back of a horse does not equate to immediate glorification of physical prowess, at least in art.<sup>357</sup>

A final reference to performance of extraordinary acts while unconventionally balanced on horseback brings us back to the athletic *agones* at the Panathenaia. During Plato's

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<sup>354</sup> E.g. von Bothmer (1985, 219), Moore (2004, 40); cf. Charbonneau et al. (1971, 88) that it is a “riding-school scene” with “a curious atmosphere of unreality”.

<sup>355</sup> Jittery: Hoffmann (1964, no. 24). Von Bothmer (1985, 217) suggests that two of the horse hands notice the figures, but they seem only to lift their heads and hands in order to soothe the animals.

<sup>356</sup> Simon (1976, 84-5), on the basis of the argument that the scene shows not Poseidon's stables, but the arming of Ares. I find the case for Poseidon stronger: see von Bothmer (1985, 219). Better than Deimos and Phobos might be the interpretation that these are Taraxippoi: see Hoffmann (1964, no. 24). Another supposed Taraxippos has been identified on a 6<sup>th</sup> century Corinthian pinax, where a tiny clothed man stands on the back of a horse and holds his grotesquely large phallus: Roscher (1884, 99-100), Pernice (1898, 78), Howie (1991, 77). Given that he holds his phallus, this character is almost certainly represented as socially low, but since the horse shows no sign of being startled the figure might not, in fact, be a Taraxippos. A better example is on an inscribed Etruscan oinochoe, where a monkey-like being sits crouched behind a rider: Howie (1991, 85, fig. 6). The figure seems to embody Horace's much later evocation of Cura, as Roscher (1884, 99) notes: ‘post equitem sedet atra Cura’ (*Odes* 3.40: ‘dark Care sits behind the rider’). The Corinthian pinax is the best extant example of which I am aware that *might* show a horseback acrobat more closely associated with ‘sideshows’ than athletics or war, if it is not a *daimon*.

<sup>357</sup> There is an isolated element of playfulness on the vase: a monkey tries to escape his metope as it runs in a band across the top of the kylix's obverse, and an archer in the adjacent metope aims his bow at the creature. The Amasis Painter could be showing similar ‘play’ with the figures on horseback, as if they parallel the metope pair: see von Bothmer (1985, 219) and Moore (2004, 40). This does not mean they are acrobats, but it reveals aspects of whimsical, not athletic, motion.

*Meno*, Socrates questions the teachability of virtue (*arete*) with the interlocutor Anytus, and wonders, if it is teachable, who can successfully teach it. He proposes that sophists are able, at which Anytus disagrees vehemently (91c). After a brief defence for his case, Socrates asks Anytus to provide an alternative: who, then, can teach virtue? Practically any of the Athenian elite, is the response, would be better than the sophists (92e: ὅτω γὰρ ἂν ἐντύχη Ἀθηναίων τῶν καλῶν κάγαθῶν, οὐδεὶς ἔστιν ὃς οὐ βελτίω αὐτὸν ποιήσει ἢ οἱ σοφισταί, ἅνπερ ἐθέλη πείθεσθαι). Furthermore, those *kaloï kagathoi*, we are soon informed, must have learned their virtue from the earlier generation (93a). Socrates then brings up the case of Themistocles. He was a good man, who would have tried to teach virtue if it were possible to do so, especially to his son, would he not? (93c-d):

Ἄλλ', οἶει, οὐκ ἂν ἐβουλήθη ἄλλους τέ τινας καλοὺς κάγαθοὺς γενέσθαι, μάλιστα δέ που τὸν υἱὸν τὸν αὐτοῦ; ἢ οἶει αὐτὸν φθονεῖν αὐτῷ καὶ ἐξεπίτηδες οὐ παραδιδόναι τὴν ἀρετὴν ἣν αὐτὸς ἀγαθὸς ἦν; ἢ οὐκ ἀκήκοας ὅτι Θεμιστοκλῆς Κλεόφαντον τὸν υἱὸν ἰππέα μὲν ἐδιδάξατο ἀγαθόν; ἐπέμενε γοῦν ἐπὶ τῶν ἵππων ὀρθὸς ἐστηκώς, καὶ ἠκόντιζεν ἀπὸ τῶν ἵππων ὀρθός, καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἠργάζετο, ἃ ἐκεῖνος αὐτὸν ἐπαιδεύσατο καὶ ἐποίησε σοφόν, ὅσα διδασκάλων ἀγαθῶν εἶχετο·

But do you think that he would not have wished for other people to become *kaloï kagathoi*, especially, I suppose, his own son? Or do you think that he begrudged him and purposely did not hand over the virtue with respect to which he was a good man? Or have you not heard that Themistocles had his son Cleophantus taught to be a good horseman? Indeed, he could stay in place on horses while standing upright, and throw javelins from the horses while upright, and work many other marvels; for which pursuits that man educated him and made him skillful, in as many things from good teachers as he could.

Despite his education, Socrates alleges, Cleophantus did not attain the same degree of virtue as his father: ὡς Κλεόφαντος ὁ Θεμιστοκλέους ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς καὶ σοφὸς ἐγένετο ἅπερ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ, ἤδη τοῦ ἀκήκοας ἢ νεωτέρου ἢ πρεσβυτέρου; (93e: have you ever heard from anyone either young or old that Cleophantus, son of Themistocles, was a man good and skilled in such ways as his father?). “Certainly not”, replies Anytus (οὐ δῆτα). Socrates finally asks whether we believe that Themistocles wanted to train his son in horsemanship, but to make him no better than his neighbours in the particular skill that he *himself* possessed, if *arete* were in fact teachable (93e: Ἄρ' οὖν ταῦτα μὲν οἰόμεθα βούλεσθαι αὐτὸν τὸν αὐτοῦ υἱὸν παιδεῦσαι, ἣν δὲ αὐτὸς σοφίαν ἦν σοφός, οὐδὲν τῶν γειτόνων βελτίω ποιῆσαι, εἶπερ ἦν γε διδασκτὸν ἢ ἀρετή;). “Probably not, by Zeus” (Ἴσως

μὰ Δί' οὖ). Plato's Socrates then gives further historical examples of sons who excelled in liberal arts and athletics, but nevertheless did not show the same virtue as their fathers.

Socrates provides Cleophantus' skill in horsemanship as an example of something that might be considered part of an education that paves the path to *arete* and to becoming *kaloï kagathoi*. It did not, though, impart to him the same *sophia* that his father had, which Socrates and Anytus presume is the sort of virtue that Themistocles would have wanted to pass on. Currently it is left undefined. Later in the dialogue Plato clarifies that the *arete* is Themistocles' ability as a politician specifically (99b, where it is defined as εὐδοξία, 'good reputation'), just as he is invoked in *Gorgias* (503c) and the Platonic *Theages* (126a). The other historical fathers (Aristeides, Pericles, and Thucydides) who did not impart *arete* to their sons are likewise statesmen. The subsequent conclusion that the *arete* of *kaloï kagathoi*, is not, in fact, teachable is thus in reference to political *arete*, which we discover cannot be taught because it is not a form of knowledge (cf. again 99b). In the context of the anecdote, Cleophantus is denied any *arete* at all, but that point relies on a reversion of expectation, for his education *is* the type that the upper-class would give to their children. What seems ostensibly to be training that leads to elite *arete* ends up not being the right sort of virtue at all – or at least, not the optimal sort of virtue, which must be the kind that a parent would want to become manifest in their child (so Socrates argues). Cleophantus' undeniable skill is in physical achievements, not politics. So too are the sons of Pericles noted for their horsemanship and education in *mousike* and sporting contests (94b), and the sons of the aristocrat Thucydides (not the historian) for their consummate ability in wrestling (94c).<sup>358</sup> For Socrates' point here, athletic *arete* is insufficient and inferior to political *arete*. Still, it must be pointed out that even he acknowledges that there is nothing *base* in these sorts of accomplishments (93d, in reference to Cleophantus: οὐκ ἂν ἄρα τὴν γε φύσιν τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ ἠτιάσαι' ἂν τις εἶναι κακὴν, 'so no one, at least, would allege that his son had a bad nature'). Furthermore, Anytus judges Socrates' assessment of elite education in *arete* to be practically slanderous (94e). Clearly, this challenge to the status quo of elite education was

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<sup>358</sup> The education of Lysimachus, son of Aristeides, is not specified; cf. Pl. *Laches* 179c ff.

contentious, and meant to be provocative. Cleophantus' horsemanship is thus an example of what would *seem* to be *arete* to many, but does not fit Socrates' ideal of it.<sup>359</sup>

What of the particular acts that Cleophantus performs as horseman? We are told that “he could stay in place on horses while standing upright, and throw javelins from the horses while upright, and work many other wonders” (93d). The throwing of a javelin from horseback could be a martial image or a hunting one, but it also brings to mind the event at the Panathenaia, where a rider threw his spear at a target. This contest gave ephebes a chance to display martial ability and validate their civic worth – an appropriate education, then, for the son of an elite politician.<sup>360</sup> Given that the further examples in *Meno* mention athletics and not virtuous accomplishments in war or hunting, the context of sport is likely. This furthermore corresponds to the distinction that Socrates makes between elite education and the potential for political *arete*. If indeed a reference to the Panathenaic event, though, a chronological problem arises. It is unknown when precisely Cleophantus was born, but he likely would have been educated somewhere between 490-470 B.C.; from extant evidence, however, it seems that the contest in horseback javelin was not introduced to the Greater Panathenaia until somewhere between the middle to end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>361</sup> Perhaps we might take the passage as evidence for a precursor to the event, if not to push back the date for its inception. In any case, vase paintings always show *seated* horsemen; standing *upright* on the horse is not typical for this contest.<sup>362</sup> Socrates in fact stresses the point that Cleophantus is able to stand upright on the animals, using the word ὀρθός twice. Clearly, the pose is unusual and particularly remarkable. That stories about it circulated to Plato's time, but without any connotations of notoriety (93d, above), suggest it retained that impressive air. In short, whether it is related directly to the horseback javelin throw or not, Socrates presents Cleophantus' ability to stand upright on a horse as an extremely honed skill, and one that the reader might associate with sport, warfare, and the elite.

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<sup>359</sup> Cf. Bluck (1961, 38-9).

<sup>360</sup> The horseback javelin throw was not one of the more important contests: its victors took a mere five amphorae of oil (and one amphora for second place: see IG II<sup>2</sup> 2311, 80), which was far less than for other events. Still, it was an official *agon*.

<sup>361</sup> Kyle (1987, 186-7), Kyle (1992, 90 and 206 n. 96).

<sup>362</sup> E.g.: Athens NM, 1631: Tzachou-Alexandri (1989, 95); London, BM 1903.2-17.1: Tzachou-Alexandri (1989, 96), Neils (1992, fig. 60); Berlin, Staatliche Museen 3980.

Cleophantus' skill has obvious affinities with the horseback tumbling on the Panathenaic amphora in Paris, the Homeric simile, and even the Pindaric account of Bellerophon's weapon dance. The best parallel, though, for standing upright on a horse while holding a weapon is an artistic one, namely, the warrior on the Geometric bronze fibula from Thisbe (see above), who stands on his horse with spear and shield in hand. We might also compare the standing horsemen on the Geometric Los Angeles cup, who are accompanied by Dipylon warriors though not equipped with weapons themselves. Much closer in time to the historical Cleophantus (and *Meno*) are the depictions of the warrior-tumblers on the Panathenaic amphora and Attic neck amphora, the former dated 550-530, the latter 550-500. Neither *kybisteter* carries a spear, it is true, but on the springboard vase in Bonn (340) the tumbler carries one and those on Würzburg HA 639 have apparently thrown theirs. More important is that the tumblers on the 6<sup>th</sup> century amphorae are depicted standing upright on their horses, like Themistocles' son. This is not to say that Cleophantus is remembered for being a tumbler, but the similarities are striking. Furthermore, these resemblances also support the positive interpretations outlined above for the semiotics of horseback tumbling. Standing upright on a horse was even considered appropriate for the education of an illustrious Athenian elite, carrying no connotations of baseness, and may have had associations with a known event at the Panathenaia festival (javelin throw from horseback). This skilled act of horsemanship, at least, was a sign of prowess and status.

Finally, there remains the last clause of Socrates' recollection of Cleophantus' ability: καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ καὶ θαυμαστὰ ἤργαζετο, 'and he also worked many other wonders'. The word θαυμαστά, 'wondrous things', could apply to any range of acts, and is practically used here as an all-encompassing, almost generic, term. Cleophantus was taught how to perform all sorts of feats and exhibitions of skill on horseback, it would seem. But despite being a fairly basic word on its own, the combination of the word *thaumasta* with a verb of 'doing' forms a phrase that recalls the word *thaumatopoiia*, and more specifically its synonym, the less common *thaumatourgia*. As I discuss in Chapter Four, these words denote the performance or enactment of *thaumata*, spectacular 'wonders' of a wide variety. They might take place as street performances, at 'fairs' or 'sideshows', in the theatres, as itinerant entertainment, or as private shows. The performers had, in the



Classical period onward, a low social standing. In the *Meno*, Plato does not mean that Cleophantus was educated in this kind of performance. He uses the adjective *thaumasta* instead of the noun *thaumata*, an important distinction, and nowhere implies that the horseback riding occurred *en thaumasi*. Still, the juxtaposition with the verb ‘work’ should at the least influence our interpretation of what Plato means here, especially given how it approaches the technical sense of the word *thaumatourgia* in the context of Cleophantus’ bodily feats. Elsewhere in Plato the two words in conjunction are used of ‘superhuman’ or extraordinary abilities and actions.<sup>363</sup> Is it possible, given the phrasing, that Socrates is being ironic about Cleophantus’ supposed *arete*? If so, Anytus certainly does not pick up on it; moreover, Socratic irony would seem to undercut the philosopher’s point here. Socrates’ argument depends on Cleophantus *actually* possessing *arete*, but in horsemanship, not politics. His training has been the sort that *should* result in ‘excellence’, but does not. Furthermore, as Donald Kyle asserts, Greek sport was itself a kind of ‘spectacle’,<sup>364</sup> and other athletic achievements were ‘wondrous’: for example, Bacchylides claims a discus thrower displayed a ‘wondrous body’, θαυμαστὸν δέμας, to a crowd of spectators (9.31), Pindar reports that a wrestler had a ‘wondrous appearance’, θαυμαστός...φάνη, at an athletic festival (*Ol.* 9.96), and later Lucian in his *Anacharsis* describes ‘sitting in the middle of spectators watching the excellences of men, the beauty of their bodies, their wondrous condition, their tremendous experience, their

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<sup>363</sup> At Pl. *Symp* 182e, Pausanias states that a beloved’s θαυμαστὰ ἔργα bring praise if done for his lover, but if done for another purpose they are reproachable. His subsequent examples (supplicating, entreating, swearing oaths, sleeping on doorsteps, and, importantly, willing submission to slavery) are not *thaumatopoiia*, but a passage from Xenophon’s *Symposium*, which may be in response to this, elaborates on the things one would do for a lover (including ‘leaping through fire’, and thus drawing on the model of wonder-making: 4.14-16: see discussion in Chapter 5.1); cf. Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.9-12., and the comparison here of erotic passion with the spider’s bite (1.3.12), which corresponds to how Alcibiades describes his feelings for Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium* as like a snake’s bite (218a), and to which Socrates is immune (snake-charming is wonder-making: see a 4<sup>th</sup> century vase in Taranto = Todisco (2013, MGS 21, pl. 19)). The sort of θαυμαστὰ ἔργα that Plato’s Pausanias mentions can, for Xenophon at least, extend to *thaumatopoiia*. Later in Plato’s *Symposium*, when Alcibiades stresses Socrates’ wondrous qualities, such as the ability to never get drunk and to endure frost and cold unconcernedly, the *thaum-* root is used repeatedly (216c, 217a, 219c, 220a, 220b [θαυμάσια εἰργάζετο]; cf. also 221e). Here, Socrates is nearly presented as a kind of ‘wonder-maker’, one whose endurance is framed as superhuman. We might consider his ability to endure cold as both an inversion of the thaumatopoietic ability to endure/control heat or flames (e.g. Xen. *Mem.* 1.3.9-10, *Symp.* 4.16, Ael. *Ep.* 16, Manil. *Astr.* 5.439, Petron. 53.11, Luc. *Fug.* 1, Ath. 1.19e, 4.129d; J. Chrys. *de Sanct. Dros. Mar.* 50, 688.37; cf. Pausanias 6.8.4) and also, therefore, a parallel to his ability to withstand sexual eros (unlike Critoboulus, above). Cf. Pl. *Symp.*, 213d and *Apol.* 35a, at both of which the phrasing for θαυμαστὰ ἔργα does not imply ‘wonder-making’ as a technical term.

<sup>364</sup> Kyle (2007, 10).

unconquerable might, their daring and aspiration and unconquered determination and indescribable zeal for victory (12).<sup>365</sup> In the *Meno*, we see how another sporting act, namely, standing ‘acrobatically’ on horseback, can also have spectacular qualities, even though it is not θαυματοποιία. Masculine tumbling incorporates elements of spectacle, dance, and sport, but the distinction between *kybisteteres* and *thaumatopoiioi* remains.<sup>366</sup> In part this is due to the semiotics of the performance of a physically dominating body, coupled with the symbolism of the items or creatures involved in the feat, and the context of performance. Usually the items are military equipment, which illustrate the clear social division between warrior-athletes and ignoble entertainers, but in Cleophantus’ case (and as was apparently the case at the Panathenaia) the use of a horse also places his activity in the realm of the elite and aristocratic ideology.

In sum, then, Plato presents the execution of remarkable physical actions while simultaneously standing upright on a horse as something both impressive and elite. The anecdote finds similarities with the horseback javelin throw from the Panathenaic Games, but also with the event in horseback tumbling. Rather than connote a poor nature, the ability to perform demanding feats while upright on a horse is a notable accomplishment associated with a special education for an aristocratic Athenian.

### 3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I argue that the Panathenaic amphora in Paris is in fact a prize amphora from the games, the individual reward for victory in an athletic event in tumbling, which it also depicts. The event may have been present only in the early years of the festival, but apparently featured both tumbling from a springboard and tumbling feats on horseback. Both carried martial overtones as they used military gear to create the ethos of a warrior-athlete for the performer. The victorious performer gained prestige and social

<sup>365</sup> καθεζόμενος...ἐν μέσοις τοῖς θεαταῖς βλέποισ ἀρετὰς ἀνδρῶν καὶ κάλλη σωμάτων καὶ εὐεξίας θαυμαστάς καὶ ἐμπειρίας δεινὰς καὶ ἰσχὺν ἄμαχον καὶ τόλμαν καὶ φιλοτιμίαν καὶ γνώμας ἀητήτους καὶ σπουδὴν ἄλεκτον ὑπὲρ τῆς νίκης.

<sup>366</sup> Webster (1972, 78) linked a metrical dedication found on the Acropolis, dated ca. 500 B.C., to the Panathenaic tumbling vase as potentially representative of an event: τόνδε Φίλον ἀνέθεκεν | Ἀθηναῖαι τριποδίσκον, / θαύμασι νικέσας | ἰς πόλιν ἡἄρεσίο (IG I<sup>3</sup> 757 = DAA no. 322 = CEG 253). If the conjecture is valid, we have further evidence for tumbling in an agonistic context. On this inscription, see Chapter Four.

standing for the successful execution of extreme and aerial physical actions, as the demonstration of his ability suggested martial virtue as well as athletic excellence. The symbolic use of the horse in the act also lent an aristocratic and elite significance to the tumbling, as it is presented in both text and artistic iconography. The aristocratic ideology of wealth, and from this a subsequent social dominance, is brought to the fore in the display that combines mastery over the horse with extreme physicality. The semiotics of the tumblers' movements confirms the social superiority of the athlete: the controlled aerial manoeuvres of springboard tumblers are represented as a nearly superhuman effort, for the disciplined self-control of the inverted, mid-air tumbler directly contrasts with other airborne bodies, who, if human, are almost always dominated, not dominating. Controlled aerialists are usually divinities, such as *erotes*. Similarly, impressive actions while standing on a horse (acrobatic or not) are generally used to showcase heroic or otherwise prodigious capabilities: the hero Ajax is likened to a horse-leaper; Bellerophon may dance in armour on Pegasus; Geometric art glorifies warriors standing on horses. The actions of a hero in a story often realize an 'implementation of the impossible', to use Paul Bouissac's phrase, at least for the scope of normal mortals. Ajax's jumps, for example, are rendered extraordinary by being made well beyond the ability of a 'normal' person, and Bellerophon's taming of the winged horse of course belongs to the realm of fantasy. In art, too, the iconographic representation of a being standing upright on a horse has been interpreted through the lens of Eastern artistic practice as a means of signifying a deity. Even in real life, Cleopantus' equestrian 'wonders' are remembered for many years for the elite physicality that they publicize.

I hope to have shown that Archaic and Classical evidence speaks overwhelmingly against equestrian tumbling as a circus-style 'side-show'. In the reality of tumbling performances, both those on horseback and those from a springboard, a symbolic claim is made to heroic ability through the combination of manifest physical superiority and semiotic markers such as military apparel or 'heroic nudity'. In their performance, with its domination of the individual body over gravity and normal limitations, and its display of masculine strength and martial prowess, *kybisteteres* approach the boundaries of mortal achievement. They also implement what is impossible for most, and in so doing approach the level of superhuman.

The perspective of tumblers as verging on superhumans is well demonstrated in a passage from Plato's *Symposium*. In Aristophanes' mythologizing speech on love in the dialogue, he describes pre-humans as owning two sets of four limbs, joined as they were to their lovers, both symmetrical halves possessing arms and legs. These beings not only had an odd shape, but a peculiar method of movement, too (190a4-8):

ἐπορεύετο δὲ καὶ ὀρθὸν ὥσπερ νῦν, ὁποτέρωσε βουληθείη· καὶ ὅποτε ταχὺ ὀρμήσειεν θεῖν, ὥσπερ οἱ κυβιστῶντες καὶ εἰς ὀρθὸν τὰ σκέλη περιφερόμενοι κυβιστῶσι κύκλῳ, ὁκτὼ τότε οὔσι τοῖς μέλεσιν ἀπερειδόμενοι ταχὺ ἐφέροντο κύκλῳ.

It travelled upright, just as now, in whichever of the two ways it wished. And whenever they set out to run quickly, just like those who tumble, carrying their legs around into a straight position [i.e. upright] they tumbled in a circle, and being supported by the eight limbs they had at that time they were borne swiftly in a circle.

The physical actions of these creatures are carefully described both to assimilate and differentiate them from those of normal humans. Because both of its halves have legs, the proto-human is able to progress forward or backward, whether slowly walking or moving hastily. The speedy motion that is ὥσπερ οἱ κυβιστῶντες could be either something like a series of cartwheels or a succession of handsprings. I find the latter more likely for several reasons. First, the creatures' bodies, as they are portrayed in the text, are more readily adapted to handsprings than cartwheels, particularly as a means of travelling in either direction. Still, they are fantastic beings and the 'reality' of their physical nature can hardly be grounds for determining the 'reality' of their movements. Better to consider is the comparison to tumblers contemporary with Plato. There are no certain extant examples in art that illustrate a cartwheel, and all the possibilities could in fact be a different sort of acrobatic manoeuvre.<sup>367</sup> Unfortunately, there is also no technical terminology in texts to denote specific manoeuvres, whether cartwheels or otherwise: the only possible exception here is an inscription from the late Roman Imperial period recording that one M. Ulpius Kallinikos first completed 55 κύκλοι in the theatre of Dionysus, but although κύκλοι has been translated as 'cartwheels', that sense finds no

<sup>367</sup> E.g.: Würzburg ZA 66, Bari B 2797. The usual caveat, that vase paintings are artistic representations or interpretations, not photographic evidence, still applies, of course. Even so, the proportional difference between possible images of cartwheels versus handsprings is telling.

parallels.<sup>368</sup> In contrast, representations in art of what might be handsprings are practically ubiquitous. Finally, a ‘handspring’ better fits the potential sense of the verb *κυβιστᾶν* as a headlong ‘dive’, as into water. A series of handsprings, not cartwheels, should probably be conceived for the Aristophanic myth of proto-humans, and their tumbling counterparts in Plato’s time.

The determination that Aristophanes’ mythic beings probably travel via handsprings is not a moot point, for this sort of tumbling is much more demanding and impressive than a series of cartwheels, and emphasizes both the supernatural qualities of the proto-humans and the subsequent skill of the tumblers in Plato’s time to which they are likened. That great speed is achieved by these handsprings is made clear by the phrase *καὶ ὁπότε ταχὺ ὀρμήσειεν θεῖν*, but of course the beings are not actually ‘running’, despite the use of the verb *θεῖν*. This word usually does mean to run with the legs in syncopated progression (as, for example, a sprinter), but as the LSJ notes, it is also used, for instance, of a spinning potter’s wheel (Hom. *Il.* 18.601) and a rolling stone (Hom. *Il.* 13.141), both of which have rotations or revolutions similar to the rotational movement displayed in handsprings.<sup>369</sup> We might compare here a piece of modern gymnastic terminology, where a succession of actions in a floor routine is called a ‘tumbling run’. This speed in turn relies on extraordinary strength and bodily physicality. The exceptional movement of Aristophanes’ creatures is the epitome of the great might and power they possess (190b5: *ἦν οὖν τὴν ἰσχὺν δεινὰ καὶ τὴν ῥώμην*), which in turn is the basis of their hubristic challenge against the gods (190b8) and the source of the concern as voiced by Zeus (190c8). The proto-humans’ supernatural strength is made manifest in the tale in their casual ability to tumble expertly. And yet despite the comic touch to the mythology (it is Aristophanes’ speech, after all) and the joke from Zeus that if humans continue to misbehave he will cut them once more so that they hop on one foot, in their full capacity and original form the proto-humans are indeed ‘supermen’ even though strikingly ‘other’ from mortals (although in being human ancestors their otherness is also tempered with a

<sup>368</sup> SEG XXIX 807. The sense of *κύκλοι* here must be of circular dances: see LSJ s.v. *κύκλος*, especially the comparison there with Ar. *Ran.* 445. Similarly, Sanno the *κυκλίστρια* in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. inscription IG II<sup>2</sup> 12583 is a ‘cyclic chorus dancer’, not a ‘tumbler’, *contra* Lefkowitz and Fant (2005, no. 304).

<sup>369</sup> LSJ s.v. *θεῖω*.

degree of sameness). The same superhuman strength and power that they exhibit in tumbling must then be similar to that displayed by human tumblers, albeit necessarily to a lesser degree. This positive representation of the ability to tumble well is congruent with the interpretation of athletic male tumbling for which I have argued in this chapter.<sup>370</sup>

Among Greek athletes, it is not just tumblers, of course, who exhibit a degree of heroic superhumanism. Athletes and sporting stars were routinely likened to heroes, with regard to their bodies, their agonistic achievements, their slightly detached societal position from the everyday person, etc. As David Larmour writes in a comparison of athletes and heroes, "...with their bodies in top physical condition, [athletes] must have seemed almost superhuman. The association of athletic achievements with the feats of heroes, combined with the natural charisma which many athletes probably demonstrated, must have given many a victor a heroic aura".<sup>371</sup> These heroic qualities are manifest in statues and sculptures of athletes, in vase paintings, in Homer's account of funeral games of Patroclus, in epinician poetry, and so on. The heroic aspects I have identified for the representation of tumblers only aligns them with the general ethos of Greek athletes.<sup>372</sup> At this point, I must return to the question posed at the end of the previous section: if, like other sports, athletic male tumbling so demonstrated positive social and cultural ideals of dominance, self-control, and masculinity to the point that art and text represent its participants as practically heroic superhumans, why, then, was it not more popular?

It is unfortunately impossible to definitively answer this question, for there are many possible factors that could have influenced the apparent lack of protracted interest in male competitive tumbling as an early sport. Tumbling and acrobatics certainly remained popular as elements of dance and spectacle, but there is no definite evidence for their

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<sup>370</sup> Here, of course, we do not have springboard leapers or horseback tumblers. The proto-humans and the text's οἱ κυβιστῶντες are not aerialists; they execute their skills on the ground. The aerialism of agonistic tumblers adds another kind of 'superhuman' quality. N.B. also that we have a substantive participle here, not the noun (although the noun can be used of both aerial *or* grounded tumblers, as the κυβιστητῆρες in Homer (*Il.* 18.605 and *Od.* 4.18).

<sup>371</sup> Larmour (1999, 56-7).

<sup>372</sup> For heroic athletes and athletic heroes see Larmour (1999, 56-63), Bentz and Mann (2001), Miller (2004, 160-5), Lunt (2010), Nicholson (2015, 21-78).

existence as events in Greece at any athletic festival outside Athens.<sup>373</sup> If the conjecture is correct that it was a remnant from an Athenian festival before the reformed Panathenaia in 566/5, perhaps it simply did not have sufficient appeal to non-Athenians to disseminate and thrive. Others may have thought competitive tumbling a novelty of physical proficiency, but not a sport worth pursuing as an athlete, particularly since there were no contests in it outside of Athens. Better, maybe, to focus on the more traditional athletic events. The fact that tumbling apparently had to be judged subjectively may also have been a significant factor; with no method of directly and decisively competing against an opponent, tumbling was dissimilar to almost all other Greek sporting events. Even at the Panathenaia in Athens, though, where subjective judging and unorthodox events *did* occur (sometimes together), tumbling had a fairly short existence as an *agon*. Here, I bring up again the point that the disappearance in art of athletic male tumblers and springboard leapers coincides with the rise of representations of female ‘marvel-makers’ in sympotic contexts. The two latest extant vases with male tumblers are the Tampa skyphos (86.93) and a fragmentary pelike in New York (Met. 1978.347.2a-h), both dating to the first quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> century at the latest, and both seeming to combine athletic and thaumatopoeitic iconography; the former shows a springboard leaper on one side and a potter’s wheel with aulete on the other, the latter “a man in armour somersaulting over three upright swords”.<sup>374</sup> In contrast, the earliest Greek vases showing acrobatic hetaerae, Naples 81398 and Madrid L 199, both date from somewhere between 475 B.C. and 425 B.C. The decline and rise must be related to one another, particularly given the blended imagery on Tampa 86.93 and New York 1978.347.2a-h, but that relationship is unfortunately nebulous.

In short, there are a good many possible reasons why, from about 475 B.C. onward, if men *are* doing acrobatics or tumbling it is not in an athletic or sporting context unless it

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<sup>373</sup> Tumbling and acrobatics were popular pursuits in Etruria, however (see above). In the Greco-Roman world, an imperial period inscription refers to agonistic victories: SEG XXVII 266 = Gounaropoulou and Chatzopoulou (1993 no. 402), from about 200 A.D. Beroea, mentions a [(σ)κα]λοβάτης εἶτ’ ὀξυβάτης who was crowned in competitions; on this inscription see Slater (2002, 324-5).

<sup>374</sup> Carpenter (1989, 201). Without having seen the fragments, I cannot confirm the man’s actions and questions remain: e.g. what sort of ‘somersault’ does he accomplish? Are the swords arranged like those in sword-diving? What kind of armour does he wear, and how much? Is anyone else present in the scene? Can we contextualize the tumbler’s activity?

is part of a choral *agon*. The various possibilities outlined above may have all contributed to some degree to the lack of popularity. It is, in the end, another athletic contest about which we know fairly little, similar to others in that it never seemed to catch on or approach the status of the traditional events. A list of sports and games can be enumerated as comparanda, which had competitions but never gained the reputation or esteem of the 'big events' (e.g. *taurokathapsia*, *thyreamachia*, *lithobolos*, *eutaxia*, *philoponia*, etc.). These contests may be obscure, but they still existed, and obviously held significance for the participants and audience. A modern comparison may actually be the most useful for understanding the place of competitive tumbling, and other 'unpopular' events, in the world of ancient Greek sport. Today too, some sports will likely never achieve the popular status of those that have their own established Leagues and Federations, such as baseball, basketball, hockey, or the global favourite, football/soccer. Nevertheless, while some will hardly recognize them, they have competitions, tournaments, and dedicated fans and players. The intense Brazilian game of footvolley, for example, which combines elements of football/soccer and volleyball, will be an obscure name to many, as will be kabbadi, a prominent contact sport in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and surrounding regions. In North America, lacrosse still has less of a reputation than one might expect of Canada's official national sport, and even though tug-of-war was actually an event in the modern Olympics (1900-1920), it did not remain so for long. Dozens more examples of this sort could be mentioned, but the best parallel might be modern tumbling itself. Gymnastics is a far less popular pursuit among men and boys in North America than many other sports, especially the major team sports. A similar status quo seems to have been the case in ancient Greece. Equestrian vaulting, too, was an Olympic event for a short period of time only, in Antwerp in 1920, though demonstrated at the Games in 1984 and 1996. In any case, a comparative lack of popularity for any of these sports does not negate their socio-cultural importance, especially when considered in isolation. Footvolley, kabbadi, lacrosse, and even tug-of-war all promote their own ideals of competition, physicality, and excellence in success, and consequent social evaluations of these ideals when put into focus with the 'big picture' of sport and society; so too do the extant representations of competitive male tumbling at the Panathenaia in Athens possess their own rich cultural symbolism, evoked



by the moving and manipulated human body in a nexus of sport, spectacle, and corporality.

## CHAPTER FOUR: The ‘Wonders’ of the Acrobatic Body

“The circus employs, amplifies, and makes into spectacle those resources available to it.”

-Paul Bouissac, *Semiotics at the Circus* (2010), 68.

### 4.1: Introduction

In the previous three chapters I have argued that tumbling was a feature of athletic contests in Athens, both as a choreographic component of martial dances and as an event in its own right. In the latter case in particular, where the competition is characterized by aerial leaps from a springboard or on/from a horse, the athletic male body is revealed as physically superior and its social dominance is asserted through association of that prowess with martial skill. The male tumbler showcases extreme movement, far from any theoretical midpoint on a spectrum of ‘normal’ human motion; he is represented as if he approaches superhuman achievement. The extreme body acts as a prime locus for the communication of social meaning, and here somatic superiority translates into, and mutually reinforces, social superiority. In stark contrast is the female acrobatic body as it is displayed in ancient Greek spectacle, which is my focus in the remaining chapters. I concentrate specifically on the popular, sub-literary, para-theatrical entertainment genre known as θαυματοποιία, ‘wonder-making’, and those displays related peripherally to it, which offer oddities, curiosities, and spectacles of interest and amazement in a broad sense; it is something like our fair, sideshow, or circus (details below). As in sport, the acrobatic body in this genre of spectacle is an extreme one, likewise far from the middle of the spectrum of ‘normal’. The human form and its potential for corporeal self-exploration is pushed to its utter limits. But the manifestation of the body’s acrobatic abilities and the ways in which it proves itself to be ‘abnormal’ are rather different from those demonstrated in athletics. The nature of the performative body adapts to context, and the consequent representations of acrobatic movement are consistent with, and can be interpreted according to, ‘the rules of the genre’. A modern comparison here provides a useful perspective: we might accurately describe both a gymnastic floor routine at the Olympics and a set-piece from *Cirque du Soleil* as ‘acrobatic’, but the ways in which the performers display their respective abilities are patently different, as are the contexts.

Both have capable bodies and achieve actions that unite physicality with an ethos of viewership, but the genres of sport and spectacle promote different manifestations of those bodily capabilities to match the settings.

In the following two chapters I argue that in the spectacle shows associated with the fantastic world of *thaumatopoiia* the acrobat does not possess or show a high status body in the eyes of the community, like the male athlete at the Panathenaia, but one that is a marginalized oddity available for purchase as entertainment. The acrobat is certainly physically adept in displays, but in artistic and textual representations the emphasis is less on skill than on strangeness. Bodies here challenge and surpass the conception of ‘normal’ movement by attempting postures and motions that surprise, amaze, arouse, and/or disturb precisely because they are so removed from quotidian motility. They are strikingly ‘other’, so extreme as to be unnaturally ‘freakish’ and to initiate stupefied wonder. As ‘other’, they are outcast and characterized as inferior to ‘normal’, and represented as verging on the subhuman. The extreme accomplishments of the body are once again a prime site for socio-cultural meaning: in wonder-making, the acrobat’s display of a supposedly subhuman body translates, and corresponds, to social inferiority as a hired entertainer.

Here it is worth noting again a point that I bring forward in the outline of my methodology in the Introduction: that the perspectives in Classical Athenian literature on the social ‘meaning’ of acrobatic movement primarily derive from elite men. It is in the service of their set of values that they make judgements on the wonder-making acrobat. A prime example is Xenophon’s use of acrobatic spectacle in his *Symposium* (on which I focus at several points in the following two chapters) as a literary foil to the philosophical teachings of Socrates. The performances become “philosophy in motion”, which promote a philosophy of the body that advocates carnal *eros* in rivalry with the Socratic discourse’s championing of spiritual *eros*.<sup>375</sup> The troupe is constantly in competition with Socrates for the attention of the symposiasts, presented by Xenophon so as to respond to certain philosophical points and initiate discussion.<sup>376</sup> The acrobat is, here, a literary

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<sup>375</sup> Quote from Wohl (2004, 344); cf. Wiles (2000) for the contest of philosophies.

<sup>376</sup> Wiles (2000, 112), Garelli-Francois (2002), Hobden (2004, 122-5), Baragwanath (2012, 632-44).

construct. In some ways, then, the distinction between a ‘positive’ evaluation of the accomplishments of an athletic tumbler, who is closer to the authors’ own social group, and a ‘negative’ evaluation of the actions of a hired female performer is hardly a surprise. But the extent to which the primary sources reflect broader socio-cultural ideologies, which were shared by different groups, is generally indeterminable.

I have asserted above that thaumatopoeitic acrobats become ‘other’ through their extraordinary movements; I develop my arguments more fully later in this chapter, but a brief explanation of my use of the concept of ‘otherness’ is necessary here. ‘Otherness’ results from a polarization of two groups, ‘us’ and ‘them’, which are dissimilar from one another in any number of ways. Typically, the perspective of an ‘us’ group defines the ‘otherness’ of a ‘them’ group through a contrast with its own norms. The construction of ‘otherness’ is a result of discursive processes, by which ‘others’ are devalued, discriminated against, and marginalized, as a result of simplistic stereotyping.<sup>377</sup> In Athenian art and literature, ‘others’ are any who are not from the (idealized) group of free, citizen males: e.g foreigners, slaves, women, distorted or disfigured people, monsters, etc.<sup>378</sup> In their representation of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, Athenian authors tend to take the perspective of the ‘us’ group. They write from the point of view of spectators, for whom the performative body of the acrobat becomes ‘other’ as it makes manifest its ‘abnormality’ in the context of wonder-making, since *thaumatopoiia* practically challenges normalcy and thrives on the spectacle of wondrous difference (see Chapter 4.4). Contrast athletic tumblers, who belong to the same ‘us’ group as elite Athenian authors/spectators, and so are represented as epitomizing that group’s social values. In short, the female thaumatopoeitic acrobat is seen to perform her ‘otherness’.

I begin my arguments in this chapter with a critical evaluation of the ‘thaumatopoeitic’ acrobat in text and art, and a methodology for considering depictions to be of spectacle. I then identify the existence of a ‘generic pose’ for thaumatopoeitic acrobats in art, which I argue is an ideological representation. That ideology is informed by the broad cultural significance of *thaumatopoiia* as a genre of spectacular entertainment. After an overview

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<sup>377</sup> Staszak (2008, 43).

<sup>378</sup> For constructions of the ‘other’ in Athenian discourse, see in general Cohen (2002); for the concept as outlined above, see especially pages 3-12.

and analysis of wonder-making I demonstrate how the acrobatic body in both art and text can be represented as the physical embodiment of *thaumatopoiia*. In Chapter Five, I apply my arguments to a pair of case-studies on the corporeal semiotics of acrobats in spectacle: tumbling among swords, and bodily feats on a potter's wheel.

#### 4.2: The Acrobatic Body as Spectacle

Compared to the few illustrations and references to athletic tumbling, there is a relative abundance of material for spectacular acrobatics, although it is disparate in time, place, genre, and medium. How can we effectively approach and assess that material? Scholarship on this evidence and its relationship to Greek culture has likewise been wide-ranging, but for the most part has been the subject of short, focused studies; there have been only two monographs on ancient acrobats: Waldemar Deonna's 1953 *Le Symbolisme de l'Acrobatie Antique*, which I consider below in my discussion on sword-tumbling, and Luigi Todisco's 2013 *Prodezze e Prodiggi nel Mondo Antico*, which features more evidence for acrobatics than any project since Deonna's. Todisco includes an effective overview of the material evidence for these *prodigi*, but there is an opportunity for more extensive analysis. Apart from Deonna and Todisco, many scholars make convincing arguments to relate certain pieces of evidence for spectacular acrobatics to particular (often well-established) performance contexts: acrobatic shows as entertainment at symposia, for example,<sup>379</sup> or at rituals or festivals,<sup>380</sup> or onstage as a form of specialized dance in drama.<sup>381</sup> Primary evidence does indeed indicate that spectacular bodily feats were performed in all the enumerated settings, among others, and for the most part these studies are persuasive in showing how highly-trained specialist entertainers could ply their trade in various places.<sup>382</sup> But even though some associate the

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<sup>379</sup> Schäfer (1997), Scholz (2003). Others pay particular attention to the performances in Xenophon's *Symposium*: Wiles (2000), Gilula (2002), Andrisano (2003), Hobden (2004), Wohl (2004), Gilhuly (2009, 98-139), Baragwanath (2012).

<sup>380</sup> Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 503), Bielman (2002, 205-12), Loman (2004, 69), cf. Lewis (2002, 31).

<sup>381</sup> Dearden (1995), Hughes (2008), Vickers (2011), Hughes (2012, 210-14), Walin (2012, 117-25). With regard to the depiction of acrobats on two 'phlyax vases' (see below), Marshall (2000, 18-20) makes the specific point that acrobatic feats are usually 'non-theatrical' but especially sympotic, and asserts the need to reconcile the presence of similar acrobatics in both of these performance contexts as a methodological necessity.

<sup>382</sup> Other contexts for performance: acrobatic 'training' (e.g. Madrid L199 and Naples 81398), public 'wonder shows' (Xen. *Symp.* 2.2: see more below), and market places and street corners (e.g. Ath. 10.452f).

performance of acrobatics in these respective contexts with *thaumatopoiia*, there is still work to be done in relating the various pieces of evidence to one another, and to a larger meaningful whole. There has been no study yet that adopts a broader perspective and considers the interrelationships between the evidence for the different performances, emphasizing the importance of the entertainment genre they all essentially portray.<sup>383</sup> My approach complements these earlier studies by relating the shared material to a larger whole: I argue that the evidence for acrobatic spectacle in Greece, even as particular sources show diverse contexts, is first and foremost representative of a variety of *thaumatopoiia*. In a practical sense, I consider thaumatopoietic acrobatics virtually a ‘genre’ of ancient Greek acrobatics, in contrast with tumbling in athletics, choral dance, or Dionysiac play (such as performed by satyrs or drunken symposiasts). The way in which the thaumatopoietic acrobat makes manifest her extreme physicality, as I will outline below, is particular to the performance context of wonder-making spectacle, in which she strives with virtuosic display to create θαῦμα (wonder) for spectators.

I use the adjective ‘thaumatopoietic’ to qualify this category of acrobatics in an attempt to give an appropriate label to a kind of *thaumatopoiia*, and so facilitate my discussion.<sup>384</sup>

Acrobatics are often presented in literature as θαύματα, ‘wonders’ or ‘marvels’. Properly, the ‘wonder’ here derives from but one of the many different activities that fall under the umbrella terms θαυματοποιία and (less often) θαυματουργία (‘wonder working’). I stress the importance of distinguishing between ‘wonder-making’ and other ‘wonders’ or things generically ‘wondrous’ or ‘wonderful’ (e.g. θαυμαστά, θαυμάσια, etc.), and outline below the basic differences in how authors represent mortal ‘wonder-making’ and (the inherently superior) supernatural or divine wonder. I should point out that I use the adjective thaumatopoietic with the sense of ‘pertaining to *thaumatopoiia*’, which applies both to cases that are explicit ‘wonder-making’, and those that recall or invoke a relationship to it (as, for example, a routine in rhythmic gymnastics can be called ‘balletic’, even though it is not ballet). The assessment of different sources as evidence

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<sup>383</sup> Todisco (2013, 13-29) identifies Greek and Roman ‘*prodezze e prodigi*’ as *thaumatopoiia*, but summarizes evidence more than he comments on its social significance.

<sup>384</sup> Strictly speaking, the Greek adjectival form is θαυματοποιικός, -ή, -όν (seen e.g. at Pl. *Soph.* 224a and 268d, where Plato uses it with respect to wonder-making in general). My thanks to Prof. Aara Suksi for coining ‘thaumatopoietic’.

for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics is foundational to my project to re-contextualize the subjects of that source material within the appropriate milieu, as context dictates the terms for interpreting the socially qualified meaning of movement. The socio-cultural significance of *thaumatopoiia* informs both the representation of acrobatics in those sources, and its relevance. Artistic images in particular operate as ideological focal points. Like all Greek art, they are less reflections of reality than interpretation of practice. That basic fact helps explain why images of acrobatic spectacle are often remarkably similar: there is a striking consistency in vase paintings for the bodies of thaumatopoeitic acrobats, from both Hellenistic Magna Graecia and Athens, in that they often exhibit the same pose (a handstand with curving back, and legs bent). This ‘generic pose’, I will argue, signifies the acrobatic form as the embodiment of *thaumatopoiia*, with its celebration of oddities, and thus also evokes the negative responses to human wonder-making that dominate references in Athenian texts.

My methods for attributing textual or visual evidence to the category ‘thaumatopoeitic acrobatics’ are complementary. For texts, classification is often simpler, since in many cases the context is explicitly stated. As noted above, several authors call acrobatic performances wonders or wonder-making (e.g. Xen. *Symp.* 2.2, 7.2-3; Ath. 4.129d; Mus. Ruf. *Discourse* 7.6; Epict. 3.12.1 ff.; Max. Tyr. *Diss.* 29.3; cf. Matro fr. 1.120-1 *ap.* Ath. 4.134d-7c = *SH* 534). But here critical assessment is needed, since many things might be ‘spectacular’ but not necessarily spectacle; Themistocles’ son Cleophantus, for example, could achieve ‘many wondrous things’ standing upright on a horse (Pl. *Meno* 93d), but his actions are better linked with sport, not *thaumatopoiia* (see Chapter Three). In such cases, comparative evidence to the same or similar feats in known thaumatopoeitic contexts (if any) helps establish the sense. When Aristotle in his *Eudemian Ethics* mentions *orchestrides* (female dancers) who balance in handstands (1246a31-5 = 8.1.1), he presumably refers to dancers like the one featured in Xenophon’s *Symposium* who performs acrobatics as part of the evening’s hired entertainment. In fact, Xenophon’s introduction for his acrobat should be our paradigm: she is ‘one of those dancing-girls who can do wonders’ (*Symp.* 2.2: ὀρχηστρίδα τῶν τὰ θαύματα δυναμένων ποιεῖν). Notably, she is not called a *kybisteter* like the athlete on the Panathenaic prize amphora, nor is that word ever used to denote thaumatopoeitic acrobats in the Classical and

Hellenistic periods.<sup>385</sup> They are *thaumatopoiioi* or *thaumatourgoi* and *orchestrides*, who do indeed tumble (the verb *kubistan* is used), but could conceivably perform other choreography, too, and so they merit a different title than simply ‘tumbler’ (cf. ‘wonder-working women’, θαυματουργοὶ γυναῖκες, at the wedding feast of Caranus of Macedon, summarized at Ath. 4.129d). In other words, professional acrobatic wonder-makers are also dancers, and their performance is a hybrid of *thaumatopoiia* and dance. But as *thaumatopoiioi*, the distinguishing characteristic of their performance is how it relates to a wider context of spectacular and marvellous entertainment.

Lacking explicit labels and terms in visual evidence, we need a methodology for the categorization of vase paintings or statuettes as depictions of thaumatopoeitic entertainment. A process of elimination is useful for determining that a scene does not represent professional wonder-making as a genre of spectacle, but something else: e.g. an athletic event that is *not* a sideshow (see chapters 1-3); an acrobatic satyr, komast-dancer, or symposiast who poses and balances with his fellows not for performance but in inebriated play (e.g. Athens NM 536, Athens NM 1432, Paris Louvre G 73, Toronto 919.5.140);<sup>386</sup> a group of inverted dancers in a theatrical chorus (Thebes B.E.64.342).<sup>387</sup> But there are also more constructive approaches for evaluating a scene as thaumatopoeitic. A simple rule of thumb is that depictions of individual female acrobats,

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<sup>385</sup> The first certain (extant) use of the word κυβιστητήρ for ‘thaumatopoeitic acrobat’ is in the phrase κυβιστητήρες ὀλέθρου in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* (39.338), where it is used metaphorically; cf. Tzetzes *ad Plut.* 1036. The word is rare in any case; the best examples are the inscription on the Panathenaic amphora in Paris (Cab. Méd. 243) and the tumblers in Homer (*Il.* 18.604-6, *Od.* 4.17-19, who either ‘lead a song’ (μολπῆς ἐξάρχοντες) or dance ‘with the song leading’ (ἐξάρχοντος), depending on a textual crux: see e.g. Revermann (1998) and West (2001, 250-2) for good treatments of the problem. In either case, they are simultaneously distinct from the chorus and participants who contribute to it, and so should be considered liminal choral dancers, not virtuoso wonder-makers. If they are indeed *choregoi*, their consummate bodily skill, performed in a public communal setting where it is associated with both ritual and civic leadership, epitomizes the union of bodily and social values, especially since chorus leaders in Archaic poetry “lead by virtue of high status and position”, as Kurke asserts (2012, 227).

<sup>386</sup> For the drunken and acrobatic play of satyrs, see especially Carpenter (1997) and Lissarrague (1990); for komast dancers and symposiasts, see e.g. Sutton (2000), Smith (2010) and Shaw (2014, 33-46). In short, representations portray drunken guests and wild satyrs as a kind of immoderate Other; contrast thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, where the bodies are not Other due lack of self-restraint or *sophrosune*, but are purposefully contorted.

<sup>387</sup> Thebes B.E.64.342: Attic black-figure skyphos, ca. 530-510 B.C.; Trendall and Webster (1971, fig. 1.13), Green (1985, fig. 15a-b), Delavaud-Roux (1995, 125-6, no. 64), Steinhart (2004, Taf. 1.1,2).



their bodies inverted or contorted, show virtuosic and thaumatopoeitic entertainment.<sup>388</sup> Comparisons with texts can often confirm that classification; if, for instance, the acrobats perform their physical feats among upright swords or on the surface of potters' wheels the images are thaumatopoeitic, since authors consider both of those stunts to be *thaumatopoiia* (see Chapter Five). Iconography that emphasizes the spectacular can also contribute to the 'wondrous' quality of images. Take for example the acrobat's clothing: artists usually show female acrobats nude or topless, frequently with either small shorts (a *perizoma*?) or long skirts that billow over their bodies and suggest motion.<sup>389</sup> Alan Hughes claims that "nudity was practical working wear for an acrobat, as it was for men in the *palaistra*", but there are too many exceptions to support his generalization.<sup>390</sup> Furthermore, as I point out below in several of my descriptions of vase paintings, many acrobats are depicted wearing dangling or restrictive jewelry, which would seem to negate the idea of an artistic consideration for practical working wear. Hughes himself notes that successful control of long skirts might be part of the spectacle, which is a convincing reading of the ways that artists accentuate clothing (or lack thereof).<sup>391</sup> Moreover, similarities and differences in clothing do not depend on context (e.g. symposia, ritual, 'training school', etc.), which could suggest a degree of artistic license. In this case the acrobat's dress is not necessarily a realistic version of what any given artist might have seen, but part of an ideological representation. Clothing contributes to the construction of ideologies pertaining to the body, and here the emphasis is simultaneously on the visual spectacle of the (sometimes scantily) clad body and its marvellous achievements.<sup>392</sup> In other words, the clothing is part of the show.<sup>393</sup>

An especially popular setting in vase paintings for thaumatopoeitic acrobats, whether they are clothed or not, is symposia, denoted with iconographic markers like drinking

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<sup>388</sup> The distinction between 'contortionism' and 'acrobatics' is a modern one, but I use the term as a descriptive comparison; in Greek texts, hypermobility is part of the same mixture of *thaumatopoiia* and dance as less intense acrobatics.

<sup>389</sup> See Todisco (2013) and Deonna (1953). For the idea that the *perizoma* is characteristic garb for acrobats, see Kossatz-Deissmann (1982, 75-8).

<sup>390</sup> Hughes (2008, 15).

<sup>391</sup> Hughes (2008, 15).

<sup>392</sup> For Greek clothing, ideology, and identity, see Lee (2015).

<sup>393</sup> For a balance between the practical functionality of acrobats' tight-fitting clothes and the ideological significance of dress, cf. Bouissac (2012, 170-80).

vessels (e.g. Naples 81398) and *kottabos* stands (e.g. Genoa 1142, St. Petersburg ΓΡ-4662), and perhaps ribbons or garlands (e.g. London BM F 232, Sydney NM 95.16).<sup>394</sup> Here again we see evidence for performances that are both dance and wonder-making, as noted above. But it is not only women whom artists illustrate providing thaumatopoeitic dance at symposia. An example of wondrous acrobatic spectacle is shown in the tondo of an Attic cup, ca. 420 B.C., which depicts two naked dwarves on a table: one crawls toward a kylix, the other performs a headstand.<sup>395</sup> His body is orientated toward the viewer in a frontal perspective and his legs are haphazard in the air. On that basis scholars have likened his stunt to Herodotus' account of Hippocleides' infamous sympotic dancing, for the finale of which, we are told, he balanced on his head and gesticulated with his legs (Hdt. 6.129).<sup>396</sup> Hippocleides, however, is not a professional entertainer (hence the effect of the story is to emphasize his transgressive behaviour), and his actions have more to do with drunken dance and play than wonder-making.<sup>397</sup> The dwarves, on the other hand, are more likely to be sympotic entertainers (thus the table), and they bridge the gap between representations of men in revelry and of women displaying acrobatic entertainment; both dwarves and women are marginalized 'other'.<sup>398</sup> It is no coincidence that the artist has represented the body of the inverted dwarf from a different perspective than the 'generic pose' for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics (see below), and with his legs at odd angles. The scene is perhaps reminiscent of

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<sup>394</sup> Partial clothing and/or nudity sexualize performers (Neils (2000, 208); not with respect to acrobats), but do not confirm that the performers are prostitutes, nor that the scene is sympotic (on the sexualization of acrobats see further below). Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 503) proposes that the presence of ivy in some scenes is iconographic for a Dionysiac ritual as the setting, distinct from symposia.

<sup>395</sup> Todi, Museo Civico 471: Dasen (1993, pl. G20), Delavaud-Roux (1995, no. 48), Catoni (2005, fig. 1).

<sup>396</sup> See Dasen (1993, 224); cf. Kurke (2011, 422 n. 61).

<sup>397</sup> There is a large bibliography for Hippocleides' stunt: see recently Lavelle (2014) with references.

<sup>398</sup> For dwarves as entertainers at symposia, see Dasen (1993, 230-3). The dwarf illustrated on the Todi cup is a rare example from the Classical period of a male acrobat as entertainer. The earliest instance is on a terracotta in Taranto (52190), dated to the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., showing "un personaggio maschile negroide nudo" on the top of a Doric column: Todisco (2013, MGS 44). Representations of male thaumatopoeitic acrobats are more common by the early Roman period. A particular type of short statuette, originating in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C., takes the form of a male acrobat with African features, clad in a *perizoma*: see Kent-Hill (1977). The bronze figurines balance on their hands with arms extended, similar to the pose sculpted for a famous marble at the British Museum, where a nude acrobat is poised on the back of a crocodile: London, BM Sculpture 1768; cf. his counterpart at the Palazzo Massimo Museum in Rome, Inv 40809. Recently, a group of six similar terracottas from Thmuis have been discovered, dating somewhere between the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. and the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., which adopt the same pose: see Bennett (2014). Male spectacle performers are more popular in Roman literature than Greek (e.g. Manil. 5.439, Petron. 47.9, 53.11ff., Juv. 14.265, etc.).

*thaumatopoiia* as a brand of entertainment, but it does not show a perfected *thauma*.<sup>399</sup>

Regardless, while men are represented in art executing acrobatic motions in other contexts than those associated with wonder-making (sport, drunken play, choral dance), women are not. I know of no certain artistic example of a female acrobat engaged in athletics or choral dance, and, given that women did not attend symposia except as slaves or in a capacity as the evening's hired entertainment, any female acrobats who participate in inebriated play with symposiasts are almost certainly meant to be performers.<sup>400</sup>

In the generality that depictions of female acrobats likely represent them as spectacular entertainers, we can already see a way in which the performance of the thaumatopoietic body reveals that body's social subordination. The dynamics of viewership, by which the performer acts *for* the spectator, enacts a power hierarchy, as does the exchange of money for performance. The social implications for the performance are already evident, as is the marginalization of thaumatopoietic acrobats. The question of acrobats' and dancers' sexual status is fraught, but the women, as hired entertainers who were possibly, but not always, prostitutes (and possibly, but not always, slaves), in most cases would have had a significantly lower status than the men who observed them, especially at symposia.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> We might compare how clowns at modern circuses sometimes attempt acrobatics but fail: see Bouissac (1976, 44-7); cf. Philip's failure at acrobatics in Xenophon's *Symposium* (2.22).

<sup>400</sup> E.g. the four nude women on an Attic phiale (Munich 8991), whom Eva Keuls labels "naked hetaeraï" [sic] (1993, 171) performing "a kind of acrobatic performance" (1993, 168); cf. Peschel (1987, 191): "den tanzenden und akrobatische Kunststücke vorführenden Hetären"). Two of the women are poised on their hands while kicking back a single foot, a pose which is barely 'acrobatic' by ancient Greek (or modern) standards. A possible exception outside art of non-thaumatopoietic female acrobats is if the choral dance of Aleman's supposed 'Κολυμβῶσαι' ('Diving Women') included tumbling. If the title reflects choral self-referentiality, the choreography of 'diving' could have been shown with acrobatic manoeuvres (from a similarity of the body in action, but also given the synonymous terms (see Herodian *Partitiones* 73.13 and Hesychius κ 2272 for 'dive' and 'tumble' as synonyms). Given the lack of evidence for the lost book, the point is conjectural. For the topic of the lost book, see Huxley (1964) and Davison (1968); cf. Calame (1983, xxiv). Neils (2012, 158) compares vase scenes of women diving with the elusive title.

<sup>401</sup> According to K. Kapparis (2011, 239-40) the association between *orchestrides* and prostitution is absolute: "*orchestris*: dancer. The scholiast of Aristophanes defines this term as 'dancing *pornai*' (Σ *Ach.* 1093 [πόρναι ὀρχούμεναι]), leaving no room for doubt that ancient female dancers were for the most part specialized prostitutes; the numerous references to dancers in comedy, sympotic literature, and other literary genres confirms this". Kapparis' totalizing statement requires serious re-evaluation. A survey of just some sources from Athenian literature shows that *orchestrides* cannot by any means be labelled as 'for the most part specialized prostitutes'. At the most, we can say that the *orchestris* is very often sexualized or eroticized, and some dancers might both perform and have sex with symposiasts. But the *orchestrides* in Plato's *Laws*, for instance, who are recommended as teachers for girls, are *not* prostitutes (813b; cf. *Protagoras* 347c-d). Nor is there good reason to think the dancers listed among sympotic delights in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* (1089-94) are prostitutes, given that *pornai* are listed separately (unless the lines have been transposed and the two should be in apposition: see Olson (2002, *ad loc.*) The women who come

The sexualization of the thaumatopoeitic acrobat can also be seen in art, where depicted nudity or semi-nudity contributes to the representation of the performer as socially inferior. A method for the classification of evidence is a first step, but my categorization of material as representative of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics involves more than remarking simply that many depictions feature women as spectacular entertainers. Vital for setting a frame of reference for the communication of cultural values or ideologies is the interconnection between performance context and the performative body. How does the thaumatopoeitic context influence, correspond to, or otherwise integrate with the representation of the acrobatic body?

### 4.3: The ‘Generic Pose’

Thaumatopoeitic acrobatics was evidently popular, at least to judge from the number of extant vase paintings and references or allusions in text. Significantly, the considerable majority of artistic representations depict bodies in more or less the same pose, with only slight variations. For lack of a better term I call this the ‘generic pose’. There are too many examples to describe every instance, but a nonspecific summary is possible here: the acrobat is shown from a side profile, balanced on the hands or forearms, with both legs bent at the knees and kept close together as the acrobat carries them above/over the

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on later in the play (1198ff.) are ‘dancers’ in the *dramatis personae*, but although they are sexualized on stage, there is no allusion to venal sex. *Orchestraides* in *Frogs* are also sexualized (513-16, 519-520; cf. 410-15), but when Dionysus imagines his slave Xanthias in bed with one his description is a fantastic supposition (541-6b). In *Ecclesiazusae*, in contrast, the dancers are again sexualized but there is no suggestion that they are prostitutes or will provide sexual services, unless the loose restrictions regarding sex in the comedy’s imaginary society are enough to imply this. In a fragment of Crates’ *Samians* the *orchestraides* perform no sex act, but are definitely sexualized (fr. 34 K-A: ἔπαιξαν γυναῖκες ἅτ’ ὀρχηστρίδες καλαί, | ἐπὶ κοχωνῶν τὰς τρίχας καθεμέναι, ‘so women sported, beautiful dancing-girls, hair let down to their crotches’). In other cases, female dancers are clearly represented as prostitutes: an *orchestris* mentioned in *Clouds* is shortly after called a ‘little whore’ πορνίδιον (996-7); the dancer Elaphium at the end of *Thesmophoriazusae* apparently has venal sex with the Scythian archer (off stage: 1210-11); in his *Breezes*, Metagenes uses the words ‘*orchestraides*’ and ‘*hetaerae*’ in apposition (fr. 4 K-A: ‘ὄμῃν ὀρχηστρίδας εἶπον ἑταίρας ὠραίας πρότερον, ‘I told you before about the beautiful dancing-girl *hetaerae*’). To be duly here noted is the genre at hand (aside from Plato’s *Laws*). Comedy thrives on distortion, and Old Comedy in particular tends to over-sexualize its subject material; cf. Goldman (2015) and Starr (1978) on the sexualization of ‘flute-girls’ and their ambiguous relationship with prostitution. There is less evidence that links ‘wonder-makers’ with prostitution. A line from Matro of Pitane’s *Epic Parody* (fr. 1.120 = *SH* 534) reads πόρναι δ’ εἰσηλθόν, κοῦραι δύο θαυματοποιοί, ‘whores came in, two wonder-making girls’, where either the point is that they are wonder-makers *and* prostitutes (i.e. that they will have sex with the guests after performing), or it is playful reference to their exceptional sexual skill and ‘wondrous’ sexual ability. On this line see Olson and Sens (1999, *ad loc.*); cf. the naked sword-tumblers at Ath. 4.129 d (= S-T 6 in Chapter Five).

head. The variations are in limb position and degrees of flexibility (especially the arch of the back), but this basic model of bodily representation is fairly regular (though by no means an absolute rule). Of the approximately forty visual and material representations of thaumatopoeitic acrobats that I have assembled from the Classical and Hellenistic Greek world, including Magna Graecia, roughly three-quarters of them are in the generic pose.<sup>402</sup> The consistency in the imagery suggests that we are dealing with an artistic expression of bodies representative of ideological focal points, not necessarily reflections of ‘realistic’ practice. Certainly an acrobat *could* execute this pose, and maybe even did so frequently, but the moving form would also achieve many others. The generic pose reflects its significance for the sociological interpretation of the thaumatopoeitic acrobat’s performance; that is to say, it embodies the ideology informing these corporeal wonders. This acrobatic body is inverted and twisted upon or over itself, yet balanced and graceful, either dynamic or static but always displayed. Importantly, it is not airborne as the male athletic tumbler, but, as a rule, grounded.<sup>403</sup> Above all, I will argue, it is represented as abnormal and odd. In these generic depictions, the body of the thaumatopoeitic acrobat is most similar to others of its own kind; that is, it is a type of body that is only like itself.

I develop my argument with a closer look at just a few instances of the generic pose in vase paintings, before a more comprehensive analysis of *thaumatopoiia* and its socio-cultural significance. My selections here are only somewhat arbitrary, since I use examples that feature different performance contexts (drama, dance, symposia), different spatial limitations (free space for movement, or restricted to a stool/table), and different clothing. Regardless of these distinctions, artists illustrate the acrobatic body with conspicuous regularity. Neither does it appear to matter what stunt the acrobat performs. The generic pose is employed for representations of all acrobatic *thaumata*, which I discuss over the course of this chapter and the next, including: sword-tumbling, feats on the potter’s wheel, dextrous manipulations, and other miscellaneous displays or dances. Even in depictions of veritable contortionists we might still see the generic pose, though

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<sup>402</sup>The most useful collection of images and catalogue information is now Todisco (2013); in particular, see the acrobats listed at MGS 8 through 50 (pl. 18-23). I do not base my reading of the ideological significance of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics on the material in this collection alone (nor the identification of a ‘usual pose’, for which evidence occurs elsewhere), but cite Todisco’s work as a practical assemblage of much of the evidence that I also use for my arguments.

<sup>403</sup> For the exception that proves the rule (Genoa 1142), see below.

intensified in some way as a particularly extreme expression of the acrobatic body. The variety of scenes and contexts in which the generic pose occurs demonstrates its efficacy as an iconographic representation of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, not snapshots of the body in practice.

On a fairly well-known ‘phlyax vase’ from Paestum, a calyx-krater dating ca. 360-350 B.C. and attributed to Asteas, a female acrobat assumes the generic pose atop a short stool.<sup>404</sup> White paint marks her as nude, but for anklets and bracelets. Two male comic actors stand to her right in the scene. One crouches forward and stares intently toward her midriff, his mask accentuating his interest. He himself stands on a small platform, which Dearden suggests might be a potter’s wheel without its pivotal base, and so potentially indicative that the character is learning a stunt from the acrobat.<sup>405</sup> The second actor stands nonchalantly with his legs crossed and one hand on his hip, looking up at a window, not the acrobat.<sup>406</sup> In this window and its pair to the left are two more actors, whose white-painted faces are in contrast to the palely nude body of the acrobat: a sign that the latter is an actual woman, not a man in costume.<sup>407</sup> From the left of the acrobat Dionysus sits and observes, one hand raised to his head and an *aulos* in his lap. Beneath the entire scene is a dotted line with a folded textile below it, which delineates an elevated stage. The clear iconographic markers of a stage performance (stage, masks, windows, costumes) have led scholars to conclude that the scene on this so-called phlyax vase is theatrical, perhaps an accurate portrayal of a comedy, and that the acrobat is present as a featured specialist performer, comparable to others (such as the *orchestris* Elaphium at *Thesmophoriazusae* 1174ff., Euripides’ ‘Muse’ at *Frogs* 1306ff., Carcinus’ sons at *Wasps* 1500ff., or the unnamed female performer from Eupolis’ *Maricas*,

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<sup>404</sup> Lipari 927. Among an extensive bibliography see e.g.: Bieber (1961, fig. 535), Trendall (1967b, no. 80), Neiiendam (1992, fig. 4), Dearden (1995, fig. 1b), Hughes (2008, fig. 8), Compton-Engle (2015, fig. 16).

<sup>405</sup> Dearden (1995, 83). Hence the character’s interest, but surely a carnal fascination is mixed with ‘wonder’ (hence the nudity of the acrobat). Walin (2012, 117) describes the scene as “intensely pornographic” and argues directly *contra* Hughes’ (2008, 12) claim that the comic actor “registers astonishment rather than lust”.

<sup>406</sup> Neiiendam (1992, 24) interprets his pose as indicative of “indifference”. More likely is that he observes the windows above the scene (and those women represented at them) in the role of a (relaxed/lazy) ‘lookout’, charged with guard duty while the other actor watches the acrobat.

<sup>407</sup> See now Compton-Engle (2015, 35-6).

referenced at *Clouds* 553-6, who danced the lascivious *kordax*).<sup>408</sup> If this is a scene from a real comedy, the calyx-krater evidences the possibility for thaumatopoeitic action onstage. But despite the rare case of an acrobat in a theatrical production (only illustrated once elsewhere, on another ‘phlyax’ pot now in the Ashmolean [Oxford 1945.43]; see below in my section on potter’s wheel stunts) and the probability that the painting reflects the real production of an actual comedy, the artist uses not an uncommon pose for the performer, as we might expect for an apparently ‘realistic’ image, but the generic one. The ‘meaning’ of her abnormal body, then, emphatically depicted as the focal point for spectatorship, does not alter because it occurs in a theatrical setting. Its significance is as the embodiment of the acrobat’s *thaumatopoiia*.

As a specialist performer onstage, the acrobat is probably both *thaumatopoiios* and *orchestris*. However, her ‘dance’, whatever form it might have taken in reality, is restricted in the image to the space of a small stool.<sup>409</sup> In other scenes of thaumatopoeitic acrobatic dance, artists depict the inverted body in the same position, even if more space for choreographic exploration is (apparently) available. Practical considerations for the space available for movement are irrelevant in representations of the generic pose. On a late 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. lekythos in Taranto, for instance, a lone female acrobat balances on

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<sup>408</sup> Dearden (1995), Hughes (2008), and Walin (2012, 117-25) convincingly argue for the reality of specialized acrobatic performers on stage. Marshall (2000) argues that another ‘phlyax vase’ with an acrobat (Oxford 1945.43: see Chapter 5.2) represents an actual stage performance, but that Lipari 927 does not. Instead, he judges the scene a symbolic or imaginative one, given that Dionysus is present on stage (18). However, *pace* Marshall here and Taplin’s (1993, 30-4) case that performance images with Dionysus tend to signify only drama in general, Lipari 927 appears to combine symbolic elements with ‘real’ action. Taplin (1993, 34) himself noted that if not for Dionysus’ presence, the scene would surely denote a specific play, and suggested that perhaps it marks a transition between generic and particular representations of comedy. More recently, Compton-Engle (2015, 35-6) points out that Paestan material, like the calyx-krater, is “furthest removed from Attic stage practice”, and that while the scene here *could* show an actual comedy, we cannot say for certain, since i) vases are non-photographic, and ii) on account of temporal and geographic distance from performance in Athens. Maclachlan (2012, 351) does not believe the vase shows an Attic scene, but wonders whether “a Sicilian troupe such as this [from Xenophon’s *Symposium* could] have inspired an actual comic performance in southern Italy?”, and tentatively suggests that “perhaps the painter only imagined this theatrical scene”. Considering the substantial amount of evidence for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, including the potential that they can be showcased onstage, there is no reason to dismiss the scene here as imagination, nor indeed a local modification given to an Athenian comedy; acrobatic entertainment existed in both regions, with close cultural contact between the two (see my further comments below).

<sup>409</sup> As is the case for performances on the surface of a potter’s wheel: see further in Chapter 5.2 on the significance of spatial restrictions. Stunts on tables or stools are also illustrated on an Attic hydria (Naples 81398), an Attic cup (Todi 471), a fragment of a Cabirion vase (Athens, NM 10530: see Bedigan (2012, no. 126); cf. Hdt. 6.129).

the ground on her fingertips and forearms (a handstand variant), having brought her legs over her head but only slightly arching her back.<sup>410</sup> Topless, she wears gold bracelets and a long yellow dress from the waist down, which has the effect of elongating her body. But as it billows above her it also gives at least an impression of motion, suggesting that the acrobat's dance could be a more dynamic one than if it were limited to a stool or table. A portrayal of acrobatics on a Campanian bell-krater again features the generic pose in thaumatopoeitic dance.<sup>411</sup> Here, the inverted acrobat bends one leg at the knee so that it hangs above her head, while keeping the other unbent but curved, so that it extends forward, high in front of her. She wears a skin-tight 'leotard' of sorts, a belt at the waist, a hair piece, and jewelry. Juxtaposed with the acrobat is an upright dancer in a long dress, who bends her torso sideways toward the ground while clasping her hands over her head, forming a pose reminiscent of a modern diver. Alan Hughes thus interprets the two figures as representative of the consecutive stages of a somersault,<sup>412</sup> but regardless of the problematic issue of continuous narrative here, the 'diving' gesture is not necessarily acrobatic, being present in other dance scenes.<sup>413</sup> The non-spectacular dancer confirms the general context of the scene as one of dance and performance, although there are no other certain iconographic markers for the performance setting (e.g. symposium, theatre, ritual, etc.).<sup>414</sup> Moreover, the juxtaposition of the two dancers presents an evocative contrast of 'normal' and 'abnormal' bodies in dance and emphasizes the degree of difference between them. The acrobat is thereby represented as even more extraordinary than if she were alone, and her generic pose serves as an iconographic mark of her

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<sup>410</sup> Taranto 143496; ca. 330-320 B.C.: Hughes (2008, fig. 9), Andrisano (2010, fig. 2).

<sup>411</sup> Los Angeles, County Museum, Hearst Collection 50.9.45; ca. 330-310 B.C., attributed to the Rhomboid Group; Hughes (2008, fig. 6).

<sup>412</sup> Hughes (2008, 10).

<sup>413</sup> Several examples are illustrated at Weege (1976, abb. 150-156); cf. also Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.499 and 95.30.

<sup>414</sup> The reverse of the vase shows two *erotes*, who frame a woman and aid her with her garments while she holds either a spindle or a mirror. Their presence suggests an 'erotized' context for the dressing woman, and perhaps for the dancers on the front. Most of the iconography (rhomboids and circles) in the front scene is 'filler', the possible exceptions being a small bird (a dove?) and above it, just touching the acrobat's dangling foot, a circular object with two supports jutting out (a drum? a basket? a ribbon?). Hanging from that circle is a sinuous white coil, which does not appear to be a ribbon but more closely resembles a small snake; if so, two animals are present beside the acrobat. If this is correct, it confirms the context as thaumatopoeitic, and reveals the acrobat as a wonder-maker with more than one area of expertise: snake handling was also a form of *thaumatopoiia*. The LSJ conjectures ὀφιοπαίκτης as 'snake charmer' (see the brief note at Dickie (2001, 599 n. 6)), but more certain is the depiction of a satyr as a snake-charmer on a 4<sup>th</sup> century oinochoe in Taranto: see Todisco (2013, MGS 21, pl. 19).



spectacular wonder-making that contrasts with her partner's less remarkable choreography.

Artists, then, make use of the generic pose for different kinds and styles of dance, whether the performer's opportunities for movement are restricted in space or free, as a semiotic indicator of abnormality. The setting for the performance likewise has little to do with the representation of the generic pose in visual evidence. In addition to the illustration of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics on stage (Lipari 927 and Oxford 1945.43) and in miscellaneous contexts (Taranto 143496 and Los Angeles 50.9.45), many scenes are of symposia (cf. Xen *Symp.*, Matro fr. 1.120-1 *ap.* Ath. 4.134d-7c = *SH* 534, and Hippolochus of Macedon *ap.* Ath. 4.129d). An acrobat on a mid 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. South-Italian lekythos from a private collection, for example, who performs the generic pose atop a stool, is surrounded by hanging ribbons, garlands, and other sympotic paraphernalia.<sup>415</sup> She is more fully clothed than many other acrobats, wearing diaphanous orange garments, which cover from her neck to calves and are cinched with a red belt. As was the case on the Taranto lekythos, the way the cloth billows above her suggests movement, despite the fact that she appears balanced on her hands on the small area of the stool. The artist has accentuated the generic pose for the acrobat to the point that she practically performs an act of contortionism: her back is exceptionally arched, and her legs are brought in front of her face so that she stares at her own calves. A sympotic context is equally plain on a recently published Apulian calyx-krater from a private collection.<sup>416</sup> Here, a nude female acrobat balances on her hands between a kantharos and a calyx-krater, the latter probably a self-reference to the vase itself, both of which mark the setting as a symposium. Although the artist has depicted the acrobat in the generic pose, her shoulders are unusually hunched and her neck is thrown back, so that she looks upward. This modified posture and the loose strands of hair flying above the acrobat's head give an impression of vigorous and ongoing motion. Once again, we see how the generic pose has little to do with setting or choreographic practicalities; it is a symbolic

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<sup>415</sup> NFA Classical Auctions Dec. 11 1991, New York. Lot No. 101; ca. 360-40 B.C.: Todisco (2013, MGS 19).

<sup>416</sup> Private collection; ca. 350-325 B.C.: van Hoek and Herrmann (2013, pl. 24a).

representation, not a realistic one, which the artist here adapts, but does not significantly alter, in order to suggest dynamism.

A final, more extended case study of the depiction of the generic pose for thaumatopoeitic acrobats in visual evidence reveals how it operates as an ideological representation, wherein the extreme physical form is a focal point for the presence and expression of manmade wonders. Two acrobats, one illustrated on an Apulian calyx-krater now in Genoa and another on an Apulian lekythos in St. Petersburg, are exceptionally similar.<sup>417</sup> Both are in the generic pose, arms and torsos straight, and legs bent at the knees overhead. They each wear what looks like a modern ‘leotard’ or ‘tank top’, with bangles around their ankles and their hair done up in a bun. On the calyx-krater the garment does not cover the acrobat’s breasts; neither would it on the lekythos, but they are not shown. The two images are so alike that I suspect the calyx-krater was the direct inspiration for the lekythos. They do not seem to be the product of the same artist, and the latter is certainly by a lesser hand. Even with the generic pose there are variations in art with respect to the details, such as the placement of the hands, the exact curve of the back, the angle of the legs, the performer’s clothes, etc. Here, the two acrobats are virtually identical. Furthermore, the paraphernalia surrounding them is also conspicuously similar. Above both performers hangs a ribbon, frequently seen in South-Italian art but here the two ribbons have nearly the same undulation and are in nearly the same position in the scene (on the lekythos, though, the ribbon has tassels on either end). In front of both acrobats there is a *kottabos* stand, from which another ribbon flutters on the calyx-krater. The presence of a *kottabos* stand is unparalleled in other artistic representations of acrobatics, and no text mentions *kottabos* and acrobatics in conjunction. I do not think that the women should be understood as ready to play *kottabos* with their feet, as Hughes suggests, since they do not hold kylikes with their

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<sup>417</sup> Genoa, Museo Civico, 1142; ca. 350-320 B.C. (my dating): CVA Genoa 1, IV.D.R.4-5, pl. (921) 5.1-3; Zschietzschmann (1960, fig. 183), Beazley Archive Online 9004269 (dated 400-300 B.C.). St. Petersburg, Hermitage ΓP-4662; ca. 350-320 B.C.: Stephani (1869, no. 1579); = St. Petersburg B 1729 at Hughes (2008, 10 n. 33).

toes.<sup>418</sup> Rather, the stand is a semiotic marker that the context for the performance is a symposium.

There is one other notable difference between the two images. On the calyx-krater in Genoa, the acrobat is illustrated *above* the ground-line that is three times established: by the *kottabos* stand, a male youth leaning on a post (to whom I return shortly), and a piece of decorative flora. There is no mistaking the floor here, and unless the artist made the striking error of raising the acrobat significantly from that line, she is, apparently, presented as airborne. This representation of a thaumatopoeitic acrobat in the air is exceptional; there is no other extant example in Greek art. Practically speaking, a female acrobat could be completely airborne many times during the course of a performance, but that is less relevant here than the ideological point the representation is making. As I have argued in the preceding chapters, aerial dominance is associated with athletic male tumbling and springboard leaps, conveying a masculine physicality that verges on the superhuman. On the calyx-krater, the body of the female performer conveys a different meaning. Instead of clearly illustrating the acrobatic body expertly rotating through the air in conquest over gravity, like the warrior-athletes' 'back tucks' on Boston 67.861 or Würzburg HA 639 (cf. London BM B 73), the artist has drawn the most common pose for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics: a handstand with the legs bent or curved. It is only by comparison with the other figures and objects in the scene, which establish the ground-line, that we can interpret the performer as an aerial acrobat, since otherwise the figure is conventional. Genoa 1142 is the 'exception that proves the rule'. Despite the fact that the artist has represented a female acrobat in the air, he has presented her body as many other 'grounded' performers. Indeed, her form is generic to the point that it is copied on the St. Petersburg lekythos for a simple handstand, where the acrobat and *kottabos* stand share the ground-line. The scene on Genoa 1142 thus shows how the generic pose normalizes an acrobat's abnormality and how at odds that pose is with the values conveyed through aerialism in athletic tumbling. The representation does not evoke the same 'superhuman' qualities, but still emphasizes the physicality of the acrobat's 'wonders' that mark her as

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<sup>418</sup> Hughes (2008, 10).

Other, through the contrast of her abnormal body and a spectator's more ordinary physical experience.

To the left of the *kottabos* stand on the calyx-krater is a nude male youth, nonchalantly leaning with his arm on a post. He watches the acrobat and stands with one leg crossed in front of the other (one foot resting on the toes), giving an air of indifference. A cloak is draped over his left shoulder to hang beside his body, leaving his muscular chest bare, and he holds in his left hand the walking stick of a citizen. The body of this 'idealized' nude youth stands in evocative difference from the physicality of the acrobatic form that he observes. While the acrobat is depicted in the midst of a spectacular physical manoeuvre, a corporeal *thauma* that displays the potential of the human body for extreme movement, the youth is conspicuously inactive. On the one hand, this stark contrast of bodies visually emphasizes the exertions of the acrobat and stresses the spectacular quality of her performance; on the other hand, it also enacts a social gulf between the two figures. The youth looks down at the acrobat (despite her elevation in the scene), perhaps suggestive of his dominance (cf. the comic actor on Lipari 927, who crouches to watch). Presumably, the acrobat performs *for* the youth, whether at a symposia (hence the *kottabos* stand) or elsewhere. If so, the scene juxtaposes ideologies of body movement for different social classes as they come together. The entertainer inverts her body and accomplishes poses and motions that render her figure wondrous and abnormal; on the other hand, the male youth stands at ease over her, his idealized body an athletic one (hence the post, iconic of the palaestra) but currently effortless in observation. On the calyx-krater we can thus see the link between thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, the generic pose, and social inferiority.

In sum, the generic pose in visual evidence of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, which features performers balanced on their hands or forearms with their backs arched and legs dangling overhead, remains markedly consistent despite changes in the acrobat's clothing, the site of display, and the amount of space seemingly available for the feat. Perhaps most telling of all, the generic pose is employed by different artists in different workshops, and even

by those working in other media: terracotta statuettes also exhibit the same postures.<sup>419</sup> The prevalence of this acrobatic pose indicates the bodies are not ‘realistic’, but ideologically-charged representations. The ideology, I argue, depends on the socio-cultural significance of wonder-making spectacles; visual media practically normalize the wondrous abnormalities. But why does the extreme body of the thaumatopoeitic acrobat connote negative abnormalities? If they evoke *thauma*, cannot this ‘wonder’ be a positive aesthetic value and/or response? In fact, what matters less than that acrobatic bodies possess physical ability, at least with respect to the representations of them in Greek art and literature, is the way in which that ability is made manifest, and its performance context. In the section below, I examine the context of thaumatopoeitic spectacle, and its contribution to the negative perspectives on professional acrobatic entertainers.

Before I turn to this topic, a few points need to be made. First, that bodies in the generic pose are not the only ones in visual media (or texts) whose socially qualified meaning relates to *thaumatopoiia*. It is not, in other words, the only thaumatopoeitic pose, even though it is the most common one. There are many representations of acrobats in other positions, which also portray marvellous abnormality and so embody the ideologies pertaining to thaumatopoiia as genre of spectacular entertainment. The prevalence of the generic pose does not imply an exclusive situation (i.e. that it shows *thauma* and the others do not), but rather the consistency of it is indicative of its importance for the embodiment of meaning. Later in this chapter I discuss a few examples of acrobats not in the generic pose, who also demonstrate an extreme Otherness that verges on the subhuman and translates to social inferiority.

My second point deserves more immediate consideration. Even from the few selections of vase paintings I have included here, it will be apparent that a substantial amount of the extant material evidence for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics comes from Magna Graecia in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.<sup>420</sup> There was evidently a cultural preference for acrobatic wonder-making in the area during the late Classical and early Hellenistic periods. I do not think

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<sup>419</sup> E.g. Taranto 4090 and 4059: see de Juliis and Loiacono (1985, 361) and Hughes (2008, fig. 4); Athens, NM 13605; Paris, Louvre CA 459.

<sup>420</sup> See the excellent charts at Todisco (2013, 116-23) for the relationships between geography and chronology. For acrobatics in South-Italian vase paintings, see Scholz (2003), Hughes (2008, 8-15), and Todisco (2013, MGS 1-52).

there is sufficient evidence to explain its popularity, though I might point out that acts of performance and spectacle in general (such as drama) are common in 4<sup>th</sup> century South-Italian art.<sup>421</sup> Whatever the reason, justification is required for considering Italian art with Athenian art and texts, some of which was produced a century or more prior. Foremost, I would draw attention to the fact that the ‘generic pose’ is first represented in earlier art from Athens. On an Attic hydria by Polygnotos, for instance (ca. 440), a contortionist balances upside down on her forearms on a table and drinks from a kylix in front of her.<sup>422</sup> Her body is in a more physically intense version of the generic pose (her feet hang so low in front of her as to touch the surface of the table), but the basic form is the same. On a well-known Attic psykter by Douris (500-470 B.C.), a satyr is likewise poised in the generic pose to drink from a stationary kylix.<sup>423</sup> He balances on the left forearm and right hand, and other satyrs cavort in drunken horseplay around him (another apparently preparing to ‘dive’ into a drink, as well). Outside of Athenian vase painting, a later terracotta acrobat from Chalkis (320-280 B.C.) is also sculpted into the generic pose, balanced on her forearms in the middle of a circle of swords (see section on sword-tumbling).<sup>424</sup>

Although representation of the generic pose in visual media proliferated in Magna Graecia, its existence outside of Southern Italy could suggest some degree of cultural continuity. The comparable iconography is surely important, but there are also other reasons to correlate thaumatopoietic acrobatics in these cultural contexts. In particular, the fact that the generic pose is depicted on two of the so-called phlyax vases offers a compelling case to associate its significance in Southern Italy and Athens. The arguments that these two vases specifically were inspired by actual performances are persuasive (like the arguments for the ‘phlyax vases’ in general), and if true show a connection between the artistic representations of thaumatopoietic acrobatics from Magna Graecia and their existence in Athens in the Classical period. Like the ‘phlyax’ scenes, the images of acrobats on the South-Italian vases have strong parallels with evidence and culture

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<sup>421</sup> Recent considerations can be found in Boshier (2012), with bibliography.

<sup>422</sup> Naples 81398 = H3232: further discussed in Chapter 5.1

<sup>423</sup> London, BM E768. An extensive bibliography is available online at the Beazley Archive Online (vase 205309). This is the earliest example of what would become the usual pose, uniquely presented in a scene of Dionysiac play, not *thaumatopoiia*.

<sup>424</sup> Athens, NM 13605.

from Classical Athens, quite apart from artistic comparisons. The vase paintings reflect a tradition of *thaumatopoiia*, which existed in both regions and time periods (and indeed, around the Classical and Hellenistic Greek world). Like Attic drama, it was also a genre of performance that fostered cross-cultural interactions between Magna Graecia and Athens: the paradigm is a troupe of performers in Xenophon's *Symposium*, who are managed (or owned) by a Syracusan (2.2). But the reality that thaumatopoeitic entertainers in general were itinerant was common enough to be a standard trope (e.g. Pl. *Soph.* 224a, Isoc. 15.213, and reflected in the meaning of ὁ πλάνοϛ as 'vagabond entertainer'; see further in the next section). Nevertheless, putting aside the question of how much shared 'Greekness' there is, first and foremost the Italian material should be considered evidence for local practice and culture, and Athenian material for Athenian culture. Throughout this chapter and the next, especially in the remaining sections where I examine Athenian literature on *thaumatopoiia*, I try to remain conscious of the need to treat art and text on their own terms, before any cross-cultural or cross-media comparisons.

#### **4.4: *Thaumatopoiia***

From my overview of the 'generic pose', an obvious question remains: if bodies have socially qualified meaning, what does this stunning regularity mean? The answer lies in understanding the context for performance as 'wonder-making'. The ideologically-informed representations offer, I propose, the embodiment of *thaumatopoiia*. Here I take some time to step back from my focus on acrobatics, and explain the significance of wonder-making as genre of popular, sub-literary, para-theatrical entertainment. Research on this sort of entertainment has traditionally been marginal in scholarship, and my discussion highlights its cultural significance.<sup>425</sup> My overview and analysis therefore have implications beyond the practice and meaning of acrobatics. *Thaumatopoiia* was the Greek version of 'circus' spectacle, to match the Roman penchant for arena shows; from a close study of it we can not only gain a better understanding of an often overlooked Greek practice, but also see a prelude for the much more popular (in scholarship) topic of

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<sup>425</sup> For *thaumatopoiia* in general, Blümner (1918) and Robert (1969, I.434-7) are still central despite their age. More recent but less detailed are Jones (1991), Olson and Sens (1999 on Matro fr. 1.120-1), Dickie (2001), Linderski (2003), and Todisco (2013).

circuses, spectacles and thaumaturgy in the Roman period. Here, I contextualize my arguments for the differences between acrobatics in sport and spectacle in Greece by highlighting the significance of *thaumatopoiia* as a cultural phenomenon. I apply a critical analysis of the fundamental disparity in literature between supernatural or miraculous *thauma*, ‘wonder’, especially as present in Archaic poetry, and mortal *thaumatopoiia*, as an interpretative framework for explaining the persistent criticisms of wonder-making. This provides the frame of reference I use in the subsequent section and chapter for evaluating representations of the ‘abnormal’ actions and bodies attributed to thaumatopoietic acrobats, as well as ancient criticisms of them. The innate inferiority of wonder-making affects the reputation of its practitioners, and their social status. The basic set of differences between ‘wonder’ and ‘wonder-making’ is not, of course, the only thing that contributes to the low status of thaumatopoietic entertainers; nor is my method of approach here the only means of evaluating the cultural significance of *thaumatopoiia*, but it provides a useful means of interpreting representations of acrobatic bodies.

*Thaumatopoiia* includes an assortment of activities and performances, including: acrobatics of numerous sorts, puppetry (e.g. Pl. *Rep.* 7.514b, *Laws* 644d, 804b; Ath. 19e), juggling (e.g. Xen. *Symp.* 2.8), types of song or dance (e.g. Pl. *Laws* 669e-670a; Theophr. *Char.* 27.7), mimicry or parody (e.g. Dio. Sic. 20.63.2; Ath. 1.19d, 19f, 10.452f), riddle-making (Ath. 10.452f), conjuring and illusions (e.g. Ath. 19e; cf. Pl. *Soph.* 235a-b), manipulation of fire (e.g. Ath. 19e, 129d), sword-swallowing (e.g. Plut. *Lyc.* 19.2; Apul. 1.4),<sup>426</sup> clowning or buffoonery (Ath. 20a-b), trained animals (e.g. Isoc. 15.213, Plut. *Mor.* 992a), *automata* and *mechanemata* (e.g. Arist. *Gen. An.* 741b, 743b; Dio. Sic. 34/35.34.1; Hero, *Autom.* 1.7), tightrope walking (e.g. Gal. *Protrep.* 9.6; Manil. 5.650-5; Epict. 3.12.1; Juv. 3.77), pole-climbing or balancing (e.g. Gal. *De Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 9.2.29; Mart. 5.12), prestidigitation (e.g. Lys. fr. 57 Carey; Eudoxus fr. 1 K-A), feats of strength (Mart. 5.12; Sen. *De Ira* 2.12.5), etc. The words θαυματοποιία and θαυματουργία are used both as generic terms or with reference to any given act. So too can the noun θαυματοποιός/-ουργός refer to either a generic ‘entertainer in wonders’ or to

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<sup>426</sup> The same anecdote is found at Plut. *Mor.* 191e and 216c.



the individual skilled in a particular activity (or several of them), just as other professional titles (artisan, athlete, merchant, etc.). Most often, authors do not use the word to denote a practitioner with a single specialty, but with the more general sense. The phrase τὰ θαύματα, the ‘wonders’ that these *thaumatopoiioi* ‘make’ or ‘work’, operates similarly and carries a broad meaning inclusive of any given act or several at once. It is important not to limit the scope of these ‘wonders’ and their practitioners’ profession (and so misconstrue them), by simply translating ‘puppetry’, ‘magic’, ‘conjuring’, *vel sim.*, when the lack of context promotes genericity. Similarly vague are the related occupational words γελωτοποιός (laughter-maker), πλάνος (itinerant entertainer), ἠθολόγος (impersonator), προδείκτης (exhibitionist), and even μῦμος, which are often associated with *thaumatopoiioi* and sometimes conflated with them.<sup>427</sup> The exact natures of their respective entertainments are hazy, and blur with one another, no doubt in part because a given entertainer could have various routines, acts, or skills in his or her repertoire. Into the Hellenistic period, more specific terminology does develop for particular thaumatopoietic professions.<sup>428</sup> Often a word takes the form ‘object-of-speciality’ + ‘-παίκτης’: e.g. ‘ψηφοπαίκτης’, ‘pebble-player’.<sup>429</sup> Presumably, the

<sup>427</sup> The terms are especially conflated in Athenaeus (1.19d-20b and 14.615e ff.); cf. Dickie (2001, 602). προδείκτης is a hapax at Diod. Sic. 34/35.34.1 (though that passage is cited elsewhere), but cf. Myrtilon the δευκτηριάς at Polybius 14.11.2 (*ap. Ath.* 13.576f). For mime in particular see, e.g.: Slater (2002), Lada-Richards (2004b), Slater (2005), Webb (2008), and Panayotakis (2014, 378-396) with bibliography.

<sup>428</sup> The morphology is already seen in the word ‘ψηφοπαικτεῖν’, ‘to play with pebbles’, in Lysias fr. 57 Carey, but other words proliferate later.

<sup>429</sup> The exceptions to the morphology of ‘object’ + ‘-παίκτης’, where the suffix could mean something closer to ‘dancer’, are ισχυροπαίκτης, ‘strong-player/dancer’, φιλοπαίκτης ‘lover of play/dancing’, or just παίκτης, ‘player/dancer’; perhaps also ὀψιοπαίκτης: see Dickie (2001, 599 n. 6). For all these words, see Blümner (1918), Robert (1969, II.894-5), Dickie (2001), and Linderski (2003).

The reference to σκληροπαῖκται by Hippolochus of Macedon (*ap. Ath.* 4.129d = S-T 6 in Chapter 5.1) is a hapax: εἰσηλθόν ἰθύφαλλοι καὶ σκληροπαῖκται καὶ τινες καὶ θαυματουργοὶ γυναικες, ‘ithyphallic dancers came in, and ‘hard-players’ and some wonder-working women...’ The LSJ translation of ‘clown’ only guesses at the meaning. A variant reading preserves σκληροπέκται, but the difference is inconsequential, as is (ultimately) the variant σκιροπαῖκται, of which the first half also means ‘hard’. Perhaps one was a gloss of the other, or a scribal error to produce a synonym instead of copying the word itself. Blümner (1918, 45 n. 133) thinks the word is an error, and recommends emendation to *psephopaiktes*. But we should consider the possibility that *sklero-* is not an intrusive gloss; if so, what sort of display could constitute ‘hard-playing’, juxtaposed between *ithyphalloi* and acrobatic wonder-workers? If denoting ‘object of speciality’, *sklero-* describes something tactilely ‘hard’, not ‘difficult’; perhaps something like the sticks that children balance on a finger (e.g. Neils and Oakley (2003, no. 80))? Or, more likely in my opinion, does the prefix refer to a kind of movement that is ‘rigid’? Compare *ischuropaiktes*, which characterizes a performance through action, not item (used at Vet. Val. 1.1.39 and IG 14.1535 = Delph.3(1).216). If this is the case, it is the body that is made ‘hard’, or the bodily movement as expressed in, perhaps, dance (or that the movement is ‘difficult’). But the *-paiktes* root denotes both ‘play’ and ‘dance’ together, in a show of manipulative control; *ischuropaiktia* is (presumably) a spectacle that showcases the manipulation of bodily strength, then

performer makes a thaumatic show of possessing utmost control over the object of his speciality or otherwise integrating it into a dance or stunt.<sup>430</sup> The *psephopaiktes* for instance, accomplished feats of illusion and prestidigitation with a pebble (or pebbles).<sup>431</sup>

The earliest extant author to use the θαυματοπ- root is Plato, who mentions ‘wonder-making’ multiple times throughout his works. He never explains it as a novel term, but takes his readers’ understanding for granted. From here on, the word occurs with relative frequency in many genres, a testament to its cultural prominence and popularity. But *thaumatopoiia* as a phenomenon antedates Plato by almost a century, if not more. In an enigmatic inscription from the Athenian Acropolis, dated 500 B.C., a certain Philip dedicates a tripod, ‘victorious in wonders’ θαύμασι νικέσας (IG I<sup>3</sup> 757 = DAA no. 322 = CEG 253). It is not clear whether the victory was for a thaumatopoietic agon or if the inscription means that Philip won another contest (perhaps an athletic or choregic victory) ‘in a wondrous way’, ‘with wondrous [chance]’, etc.<sup>432</sup> Chronologically, the next potential evidence for any supposed contest for *thaumata* is not until Plato’s *Laws*, when the Athenian speaker hypothesizes an unrestricted *agon* in which some participants might compete against comedy, tragedy, and rhapsody with ‘wonders’ (658c ff.). This is not outright evidence that contests in *thaumata* occurred, of course, but it might be a telling point that every other genre the speaker lists *did* have official *agones*. In comparison, the earliest certain scenes of thaumatopoietic acrobatics in art date to the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century (Naples 81398 and Madrid L 199); identifications of earlier ‘circus’ scenes are contentious.<sup>433</sup> But while evidence for wonder-making truly begins in the Classical

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*skleropaiktia* should be a spectacle that showcases the manipulation of bodily rigidity. Perhaps it shows rigid bodies in acrobatic dance, such as seen in modern performances where one partner in a routine will keep their figure as ‘hard’ as possible and support another in odd and interesting ways, to display their hyper-muscular physicality.

<sup>430</sup> A good modern parallel is a routine in rhythmic gymnastics that uses a ball, hoop, or ribbon as an apparatus, which must be twirled or rolled around the body and/or limbs as the competitor completes a physical performance designed to emphasize manipulation of the item.

<sup>431</sup> For the ‘pebble player’, also referred to as ψηφοκλέπτης, ψηφάς, ψηφολόγος, and perhaps ψηφιστής, see Dickie (2001) and Linderski (2003).

<sup>432</sup> Austin (1939) includes a photo of the inscription. Webster (1972, 78) suggests it commemorates an uncommon event in ‘trick-dancing’ at the Panathenaia, and Podlecki (1981, 99) proposes that it is for a choregic victory, as does Themelis (2007, 30); Wilson (2000, 368 n. 63) remains agnostic. Rice and Stambaugh (2009, 114) translate as “having won by a surprise”.

<sup>433</sup> Ahlberg-Cornell’s (1987) readings of ‘circus’ scenes in Geometric painting can almost all be explained as dance: see Boardman (1990) in particular for a refutation of the former’s suggestion that a fragment from a Late Geometric skyphos from Eretria (late 8<sup>th</sup> century) shows “a unique document of circus property and

period, it is nevertheless probable that travelling entertainers and itinerant marvel shows existed in Greece's early history (to say nothing of street performers and showmen, who are ubiquitous in cities but usually remain sub-literary).<sup>434</sup> I would point out that even in Homer, singers are counted with seers, doctors, and builders as travelling professionals (*Od.* 17.382-6), and there are feats that compare with later 'wonders' (e.g. the tumblers at *Il.* 18.604-6 and *Od.* 4.17-19). In any case, the origins of *thaumatopoiia* are a topic for a later discussion. Suffice to say for now that it is clear that wonder-making was already an established cultural phenomenon by Plato's time, and probably began in the very early 5<sup>th</sup> century if not sooner. This provides an important frame of reference for *thaumatopoiia* to compare with the presentation of *thauma* in earlier poetry.

Θαυματοποιία might occur at a number of venues. A common site of display was ἐν θαύμασι or ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι 'at the wonders', i.e., the wonder-shows, exhibitions open to the public at a cost, where one might find any number of different marvels and specialties (*Xen. Symp.* 2.1; *Theophr. Char.* 6.4, 27.7; *Isoc.* 15.213; *Arist. fr.* 793 Gigon (= fr. 63 Rose) *ap. Ath.* 1.6d; *Ath.* 10.452f).<sup>435</sup> Modern comparisons abound: circuses, sideshows, carnivals, freak-shows, fairs, etc., but these terms bring too much contextual 'baggage' from our own cultures to be appropriate verbal or cultural translations of the Greek phrase. Later we hear also of street-performers who try to earn their living from generous bystanders, which surely must have been the case in Greek cities like Athens, too (*Sen. De Ben.* 6.11.2; *Apul.* 1.4; *Dio Chrys.* 20.10; cf. *Luc. Mort Per.* 21). One even graduated from street performances ἐν τοῖς κύκλοις to those ἐν τοῖς θαύμασιν on account of his skill (*Ath.* 10.452f), which demonstrates a logical hierarchy of performance venues.<sup>436</sup> Other *thaumatopoiioi* also performed in the theatres, but whether as a convenient (and unofficial?) venue, or at the 'wonder shows', or a festival – or even as part of a dramatic performance – is indeterminable (*Plut. Lyc.* 19.2; *Ath.* 1.19e-20a; cf. Σ *Aeschin.*

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an acrobat using it" (quote from Ahlberg-Cornell, 80). I do not include here 'wondrous' imagery from Mycenaean or Minoan art, such as tumblers or bull-leapers.

<sup>434</sup> Blümner (1918, 3-5).

<sup>435</sup> On the phrase see Huss (1997, 43-44) and Diggle (2004 on *Theophr. Char.* 6.4 and 27.7). The phrase ἐν τοῖς θαύμασιν (e.g. *Xen. Hipparch.* 1.26), which does not mean 'wonder shows' but 'at the sights', is subtly different (and less specific).

<sup>436</sup> Cf. *Petron.* 47.9 for performances *in circulis*, and *Servius ad Aen.* 10.894 for *cernuli in ludis*, which, *Servius* attests, Varro thought performed *in ludis theatralibus*.

3.167).<sup>437</sup> *Thaumatopoiia* did take place as peripheral displays at festivals and rituals, either officially among other ἐπιδείξεις ‘in honour of the gods’ (see below), or opportunistically, because festivals attracted crowds and money (Dio Chrys. 8.9; Lucian *Mort. Per.* 21).<sup>438</sup> There was also the chance to enlist wonder-makers for private functions, like weddings, banquets, or symposia (Xen. *Symp.*; Matro fr. 1.120-121 *ap.* Ath. 4.137c = *SH* 534; Ath. 129d; Chares *FGrH* 125 F 4 *ap.* Ath. 12.538e), and according to Plutarch others might travel with armies to amuse the soldiers (Plut. *Cleom.* 12.3). Traveling performers, either with armies, in troupes, or as individuals, were something of a trope, but certain people or groups might stay in cities for extended, potentially permanent, duration.<sup>439</sup> For the most part, these *thaumatopoiioi* were not high status figures in society. Some might have been slaves who had received highly specialized training and served as part of a troupe for a single owner (e.g. Xen. *Symp.*; cf. Pl. *Soph.* 224a), but other troupes might consist of free men and women (Arist. *Prob.* 18.6 = 917a; Ath. 1.19d-20b; Galen *De Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 9.2.30 [de Lacy]).<sup>440</sup> Street performers were certainly among the lower social ranks, but those who participated in religious exhibitions would have held (or thereby gained) a higher status. Certain individuals might gain enough fame to become minor celebrities, to judge from a list of famous entertainers in Athenaeus (1.19d-20b), but this would be rare.

In general, our (Athenian) sources denigrate *thaumatopoiioi* and *thaumatopoiia* for numerous reasons. I focus here on general criticisms for the profession and practice, not the specific activities or specialists (e.g. prestidigitators being swindlers, or mendicant priests being quacks). In the final book of the *Republic* (601d ff.), Plato writes that ‘the

<sup>437</sup> Cf. Theophr. *Char.* 27.7 for a potential ‘stage’ that is not necessarily theatrical (as Tzetzes *ad Plut.* 1037). For the theatre and/or stage as a venue for performances, see Dickie (2001, 602). On the presence of specialized performers, including acrobats, in drama (esp. comedy) see Dearden (1995), Marshall (2000), Hughes (2008), and Walin (2012, 117-25). It is possible that other thaumatopoietic specialties could occur onstage as well.

<sup>438</sup> On these displays and performers: Ghiron-Bistagne (1976), Stephanis (1988), Chaniotis (1990), van Lieferringe (2000), Bielman (2002, 210-15).

<sup>439</sup> For the travelling trope, see Blümner (1918). It is epitomized at Pl. *Soph.* 224a (ἐκ πόλεως ἐκάστοτε εἰς πόλιν ἔνθεν μὲν ὠνηθεῖσαν, ἐτέρωσε δὲ ἀγομένην καὶ πιπρασκομένην, ‘always from city to city, bought in one place and taken elsewhere and sold as export’), and of course in the word πλάνοϋς. Isocrates mentions a yearly (ἐνιαυτός) ‘wonder-show’ at Athens (15.213).

<sup>440</sup> For the specialized training given to slaves in order that they might be entertainers, see Davidson (2006, 39-40) on musicians in general (not wonder-workers specifically). Scenes of ‘training schools’ for acrobatics are present on Naples 81398 and Madrid L199; on these see Lewis (2002, 29-33), Beaumont (2012, 149), Kennedy (2014, 93 n. 58).

imitator’ (ὁ μιμητής) does not have knowledge of what he copies, and the result will be something removed from truth, which can take advantage of sensory confusion and the human faculty for reason. ‘So illusionist painting’, he writes, ‘by exploiting our natural shortcoming, is nothing short of wizardry, just as wonder-making [θαυματοποιία] and many other such devices’ (10.602d: ὅ δὲ ἡμῶν τῷ παθήματι τῆς φύσεως ἢ σκιαγραφία ἐπιθεμένη γοητείας οὐδὲν ἀπολείπει, καὶ ἢ θαυματοποιία καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ τοιαῦται μηχαναί).<sup>441</sup> *Thaumatopoiia* is an example of imitation, something deceptive, exploitative, and ultimately paltry (φαύλη: 10.603b).<sup>442</sup> Likewise in the philosopher’s *Sophist*, the titular sophist is one whose ability is (sarcastically?) a θαῦμα (233a). A ‘wizard’ (γόης) and imitator (μιμητής), whose business is amusement (παιδιά) and his skills illusion and mimicry, ‘he is someone of the race of wonder-makers’, τοῦ γένους εἶναι τοῦ τῶν θαυματοποιῶν τις εἷς (235b).<sup>443</sup> Orators also associate dissimulating and convoluted language with marvel-making, which looks impressive but proves empty or fictitious. Isocrates complains that young rhetoricians who enjoy eristic wordplay that is in no way useful (10.7: οἱ μὴδὲ πρὸς ἔν χρησιμοι τυγχάνουσιν ὄντες) but is in fact just falsehood (10.8: τὸ ψευδολογεῖν) “in all matters continue to be inclined towards extravagances and marvel-makings” (10.7: ἐπὶ γὰρ ἀπάντων τῶν πραγμάτων πρὸς τὰς περιττότητας καὶ τὰς θαυματοποιίας οὕτω διακείμενοι διατελοῦσι). This sort of ‘excessive-talking’ (περιττολογία),<sup>444</sup> we hear in the *Antidosis*, is akin to wonder-makings, “which are in no way beneficial but have crowds of fools around” (15.269: ταῖς οὐδὲν μὲν ὠφελούσαις ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἀνοήτων περιστάτοις γιγνομέναις). If one wishes to do something worthwhile, he must stop wasting time with pointless pursuits (15.269). Isocrates voices a similar disapproval in his *Panathenaicus*, too, criticising the fact that Agamemnon is denied his due reputation “on account of those who are fonder of wonder-makings than beneficial deeds, and falsehoods than truth” (12.78: διὰ τοὺς μᾶλλον ἀγαπῶντας τὰς θαυματοποιίας τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν καὶ τὰς ψευδολογίας τῆς ἀληθείας). Aeschines uses the same metaphor of immoderate and excessively wonder-making

<sup>441</sup> Trans. Emlyn-Jones and Preddy (2014), slightly modified.

<sup>442</sup> Compare the deception and sensory confusion in the *Republic*’s parable of the cave, where the shadow puppets are *thaumata* [made from *thaumatopoiia*] (Pl. *Rep.* 7.514b).

<sup>443</sup> Particularly phantasms and illusions, as the concluding lines in the dialogue show (268c-d).

<sup>444</sup> Or the variant *τερατολογία*, ‘prodigious speech’ (cf. Isoc. 15.285): see Too (2008, *ad loc.*).

rhetoric to criticize Demosthenes and demean his arguments, asking “are they phrases or wonders?” (3.166-7: *ρήματα ἢ θαύματα*;

In these examples *thaumatopoiia* tends to be something excessive and/or strange, which is also how Plato frames it in a reference in *Laws*. Disparaging of music where rhythm, gesture, and tune are disharmonious and jumbled, and features such as excessive speed or animal noises characterize the use of the *aulos* or *kithara* without dance and song, the Athenian speaker claims that the playing of either instrument unaccompanied “is some un-musicality or wonder-working” (2.670a: *τις ἀμουσία καὶ θαυματουργία*). To play without song or dance jumbles music, making it unintelligible and utterly rustic (*πολλῆς ἀγρουκίας μεστὸν πᾶν*). The perspective that links unintelligence or ignorance with wonder-making is common (cf. Isocrates *Antidosis*, above). In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, the Syracusan asserts that he takes the most pride ‘by Zeus, in those fools who watch my marionettes and maintain me’ (4.55: *ἐπὶ νῆ Δία τοῖς ἄφροσιν. οὗτοι γὰρ τὰ ἐμὰ νευρόσπαστα θεώμενοι τρέφουσί με*).<sup>445</sup> In Theophrastus’ *Characters*, it is the ‘senseless’ man (*ὁ δὲ ἀπονενοημένος*) who collects bronze coins from those watching *ἐν θαύμασι*, and fights the ones with tickets or who expect to watch for free (6.4), and the ‘slow-learner’ (*ὁ δὲ ὀψιμαθής*) who remains for three or four renditions of a show as he completely learns the songs (27.7).<sup>446</sup> When Plato’s Athenian in *Laws* hypothesizes an unrestricted *agon* for all types of contests (gymnastic, musical, or equestrian), evaluated solely on the degree to which they are found pleasurable, he supposes that the youngest children would declare *ta thaumata* victorious (658b-c).<sup>447</sup> Not just puppetry but any or all of those wonders created by *thaumatopoiia*, these *thaumata* are presented as simplistic and juvenile attractions. No doubt the general association between wonder-making and ignorance is, in part, that the ‘wonders’ more easily deceive fools who lack the perspicacity to evaluate critically (and so comprehend) the ‘trick’. Finally, there is the basic criticism that thaumatopoietic practitioners are licentious and base, practically a stock type of reprobate character. In Demosthenes’ *Second Olynthiac*, the orator uses

<sup>445</sup> Not actual marionettes, presumably, but metaphorically for his troupe of performers at the symposium.

<sup>446</sup> 6.4: *καὶ ἐν θαύμασι δὲ τοὺς χαλκοῦς ἐκλέγειν καθ’ ἕκαστον περιῶν καὶ μάχεσθαι τούτων τοῖς τὸ σύμβολον φέρουσι καὶ προῖκα θεωρεῖν ἀξιοῦσι.*

27.7: *καὶ ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι τρία ἢ τέτταρα πληρώματα ὑπομένειν τὰ ἄσματα ἐκμανθάνων.*

<sup>447</sup> The older children would elect comedy, while educated men, women, and the general populace would champion tragedy, and the elderly rhapsodic recitals.

*thaumatopoiioi* as the benchmark against whom those even more unprincipled (*ἀσελγεστέρους*) are compared (2.19).<sup>448</sup> One of the Aristotelian *Problems* actually questions why anyone would choose to spend time with paltry (*φάυλοις*) pursuits and be, for example, a wonder-maker, mime, or syrinx player rather than an astronomer or orator (18.6 = 917a). Perhaps, the author muses, because they do not trust themselves to do what is most serious (*τὰ σπουδαιότατα*), or because they devote themselves to something they can excel in. But after being accustomed to that choice, ‘he is not still able to discern what is best, for his perception has been corrupted by the poor selections’ (*οὐδὲ κρίνειν ἔτι δύνανται τὰ βελτίω· διέφθαρται γὰρ ἡ διάνοια διὰ φαύλας προαιρέσεις*). In later periods, the cast-typing of marvel-makers as base becomes a commonplace, as does disapproval for spending time in their company (e.g.: Diod. Sic. 34/35.34.1; Plut. *Anton.* 21.3; Strabo 1.2.5, 2.3.5).

An analysis of the distinction between *thaumatopoiia* as a human-made marvel for the purpose of entertainment and *thauma* in a loftier sense as a supernatural marvel provides a methodology and interpretative framework for interpreting the overall critical reception of *thaumatopoiia* in literature. In his account of wonder in relationship to Archaic and Classical sculpture, Richard Neer argues that a *thauma* in Archaic Greek thought is often auto-luminescent, perhaps (but not always) connected with the divine, astounding for its remarkable speed, ability, or craftsmanship, and something which ultimately induces for the beholder a mental pause, perhaps manifested in speechlessness, stupefaction, or contemplation.<sup>449</sup> A pair of his examples are particularly illustrative: Achilles’ shield, for instance, is a *thauma* crafted by Hephaestus that, according to the Hesiodic description, gives off its own light (*Shield* 139-145) and Fear in its center is ‘unspeakable’ (144: οὐ τι φατειός).<sup>450</sup> Then again, in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (399-421) Apollo is/causes

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<sup>448</sup> καὶ γὰρ οὐς ἐνθένδε πάντες ἀπήλουν ὡς πολλὴ τῶν θαυματοποιῶν ἀσελγεστέρους ὄντας, Καλλίαν ἐκεῖνον τὸν δημόσιον καὶ τοιοῦτους ἀνθρώπους, μίμους γελοίων καὶ ποιητὰς αἰσχρῶν ἁσμάτων, ὧν εἰς τοὺς συνόντας ποιοῦσιν ἕνεκα τοῦ γελασθῆναι, τούτους ἀγαπᾷ καὶ περὶ αὐτὸν ἔχει. ‘For all of those who were driven off from here for being more unprincipled by far than wonder-makers (that Callias the city official and such men, mimes of absurdities and poets of shameful songs, who act at the expense of their fellows for the sake of a laugh), such men he is fond of and has around him’.

<sup>449</sup> Neer (2010, 57-69). For good introductions to the significance and role of *θαῦμα* in Greek thought see e.g.: Mette (1961), Llewelyn (1988), Prier (1989), and Nightingale (2004, 253 ff.). Hunzinger (2015) offers an indispensable overview.

<sup>450</sup> Neer (2010, 59).

*thauma*, too (415), when he takes the form of a dolphin and suddenly leaps aboard a ship, causing stunned speechlessness among the sailors (404), who wish to see firsthand if he will return to the ocean (and so if ‘normalcy’ will be restored; 415-17).<sup>451</sup> In both cases, *thauma* is a supernatural phenomenon that defies rational explanation. The formulaic phrase θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι, ‘a wonder to behold’, which emphasizes the importance of visuality for wonders, is employed for circumstances, actions, and objects that elicit this astonished response. Furthermore, Neer, following the arguments of R. A. Prier, stresses the importance of ‘doubleness’ for *thaumata*, in that they act as a ‘hinge’ between presence and absence, or ‘this’ and ‘that’.<sup>452</sup> They offer a fleeting glance at a hermeneutic conduit between two poles (e.g. the sudden epiphany of the god Apollo in the world). Neer summarizes that “from Homer to the fourth century, the quintessential wonder is a spectacle of radiance, speed, and radical alterity. Each of these characteristics is in fact a variant of the basic quality of all θαύματα, which is twofoldness, doubleness, ‘multifariously entangled confusion’”.<sup>453</sup> In many instances, that doubleness is manifest in the presence and absence of supernatural qualities or even divinities themselves. In early Greek poetry, then, *thaumata* can offer astounding connections between mortal and supernatural as profound instances of perception that link ordinary and extraordinary. Pandora is an excellent final example, but one more complicated than others. She both is a wonder and arouses wonder for gods and men (Hes. *Th.* 588: θαῦμα δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοῦς θνητούς τ' ἀνθρώπους) as a product of uncanny crafting which unites immortal and mortal poles, but she also demonstrates the potential for nuanced responses to different *thaumata* in Archaic poetry. Indeed, Christine Hunzinger argues that there are two polarized responses to Greek wonder: “positive admiration, which does not diminish when the novelty of the phenomenon ceases to astonish, and the astonishment that sometimes borders on feelings of revulsion and scandal”.<sup>454</sup> The former reaction is one that ‘accepts’ the *thauma* as genuine; the latter reaction arises from a spectator’s natural suspicion at the extraordinary wonder’s ability to confound, and so potentially deceive; Pandora bridges the gap as both a ‘real’ and ‘deceptive’ wonder (see further in Chapter

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<sup>451</sup> Neer (2010, 61-2).

<sup>452</sup> Neer (2010, 66-7), Prier (1989); see also Hunzinger (2015, 424). Prier (1989, 94): “not all *thaumata* are...clearly balanced between the ‘this’ and the ‘that’”.

<sup>453</sup> Neer (2010, 66).

<sup>454</sup> Hunzinger (2015, 423).



5.2).<sup>455</sup> As such, she offers a parallel to the ‘tricks’ displayed in *thaumatopoiia*, which are also duplicitous. ‘Deception’ later becomes a more central aspect of *thauma*, which as a word evolves and loses some of specificity and importance in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and particularly by the 4<sup>th</sup> to become “trivial through overuse”, and rational explanations are sought to explain ‘wondrous’ events or happenings in the mortal world.<sup>456</sup>

Leslie Kurke’s account of *thauma* as a factor contributing to the social value of Archaic choral dance, which builds on Neer’s analysis of wonder, offers a useful approach for understanding the condemnation of *thaumatopoiia* (particularly acrobatics with its choreographic elements). Kurke argues that in Archaic poetry and culture, perfect *choreia* (group song-dance) exhibits and possesses value through the presentation of ordered and beautiful bodies, which stir *thauma* (and *eros*) for spectators.<sup>457</sup> When dancers are likened to moving statues, divine *thaumata* and *agalmata*, wonder is rendered through the “fantasmic assimilation of moving bodies to objects of precious art or uncanny crafting”.<sup>458</sup> The idea that human forms can be the gods’ *thaumata* is one later pronounced somewhat famously by Plato in his *Laws*. Here the imagery is clearly of puppetry, a kind of *thaumatopoiia*: the gods pull at our sinews, and our passions (τὰ πάθη) drag us in opposite directions (644d ff. and 804b).<sup>459</sup> In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, in contrast, the entertainers are called ‘marionettes’, τὰ νευρόσπαστα, under the control of the Syracusan impresario (4.55). Here we see a distinction between a supernatural *thauma* and mortal *thaumatopoiia* or *thaumatourgia*, through Kurke’s emphasis on the importance of craft and value. In the *Laws*, one of the puppet strings is a ‘leading [cord] of rationality, golden and holy, called the public law of the city’ (645a: τὴν τοῦ λογισμοῦ ἀγωγὴν χρυσοῦν καὶ ἱεράν, τῆς πόλεως κοινὸν νόμον ἐπικαλουμένην), which, to use Neer and Prier’s terminology, acts as the main phenomenological link between ‘this’, mortal

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<sup>455</sup> See especially Hunzinger (2015, 428-33).

<sup>456</sup> Neer (2010, 68). A specific example that Neer cites for this trivialization is Plato’s use of the word *thaumata* for puppets, but puppets are among *thaumatopoiia*, which I argue is fundamentally different from ‘wonder’ in any case. Nevertheless, Neer’s point is demonstrated by other examples, such as Herodotus’ use of *thauma* as something closer to θεᾶ ἄξια, ‘things worth seeing’; on wonder in Herodotus, see Munson (2001).

<sup>457</sup> Kurke (2012).

<sup>458</sup> Kurke (2012, 230).

<sup>459</sup> Cf. Philo *On the Account of the World’s Creation Given by Moses* 40 and *On Abraham* 16. On the connection between puppetry, dance, wonder and Plato’s *Laws*, see Kurke (2013).

experience, and ‘that’, the gods’ will. It is the cord that represents the interface between self and community, and because it has the potential to vanquish the other private cords, it acts as the means by which one can overcome individual passions in order to uphold the collective social order (645b-c). In the *Symposium*, on the other hand, the human ‘puppets’ are denied any rational thought in the slave-master’s bold assertion that his troupe lacks physical autonomy. There is no opportunity for the so-called puppet to have an active role in social interactions. Furthermore, when the gods inspire a moving *thauma*, like the dancers *qua* statues or by means of the ‘golden cord of rationality’, there is an emphasis on high value objects or material; when the troupe is denied autonomy, they are comparatively cheap, not perfect and enthused like *daidala agalmata*, but dehumanized and lifeless marionettes.<sup>460</sup> This body, then, both is and produces *thauma*, but a more diluted version than supernatural wonder, and controlled by a mortal. It is not spontaneous, or uncannily wrought, or even willfully created. Puppetry, as *thaumatopoiia*, gives only an imitation of infused life, while the statue-dancers or rational human puppets are *truly* enthused *thaumata*. With respect to the application of the word ‘*thauma*’ to puppets, Richard Neer argues that “though the uncanny vitality of the marionette has a clear affinity with the vivid effect of statuary, the word has become trivial through overuse”,<sup>461</sup> but the differences between puppets and living statues as wonders is, rather, one that demonstrates the differences between supernatural *thaumata* and human-made *thaumatopoiia*; as inspired statues are to puppets, so divine *thauma* is to *thaumatopoiia*. The difference accords to valuations of sculpture versus puppets, ‘high’ art versus ‘low’ art, and ‘genuine’ versus ‘counterfeit’.

The low value of wonder-making in the ‘economy of *thauma*’ is highlighted in the very words themselves: they are *production* and *work* (-ποιία and -ουργία), accomplished by human bodies in motion. *Thaumatopoiia* is a manufactured commodity, and the display of wonders becomes a commercial transaction. Indeed, Plato himself explicitly calls its importer/seller a merchant, ἔμπορος, in a discussion of types of exchange, and commodities for bodies and souls (*Sophist* 224a). Amusement is the business he buys and sells, for diversion or seriousness (τὰ μὲν παραμυθίας, τὰ δὲ καὶ σπουδῆς χάριν ἀχθέντα

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<sup>460</sup> Cf. Neer (2010, 68).

<sup>461</sup> Neer (2010, 68).

καὶ πωλούμενα). Elsewhere, too, wonder-making is presented as a commercial transaction or commodity (Theoph. *Char.* 6.4, Xen. *Symp.* 2.1, Arist. *Oec.* 2.2 = 1346b).<sup>462</sup> The low value of the marvels from *thaumatopoiōi* in the economy of *thauma* is compounded by the immediate consumption during the act of performance (and consequent lack of enduring worth) of something that is called (or calls itself) *labour*. It is, consistently, presented as a waste. In the Aristotelian *Problems* the author gives wonder-making as an example of a ‘cheap’ pursuit (18.6 = 917a), like Plato in the *Republic* (10.603b), and elsewhere Aristotle himself writes of those who ‘waste away the whole day at the wonder-shows’ (fr. 793 Gigon = fr. 63 Rose): κατατρίβουσιν ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι). *Thaumatopoiia* is, in fact, a spectacle of ‘conspicuous non-production’, which imitates manufacture (hence its name) but labours only for the sake of marvelling at that process of labour, not for any material product. The resulting ‘commodity’ is only *thauma*, but a *thauma* that is cast as counterfeit and imitative of supernatural wonder, not a ‘real’ marvel in and of itself. I claim here that *thaumatopoiia* offers a commodity because it ‘makes’ or ‘works’ at something, but one might well object that uncanny crafting also produces wonders through work. There are two important points of difference here: first, that divinely crafted *thaumata* are usually presented not in terms of purchase, but gift-giving, exchange or ownership (e.g. Pandora and her accoutrements, Achilles’ shield, or the chariot prepared by Athena, Hera, and Hebe at *Il.* 5.720-32), and second, that they are made by immortals and so are infinitely more valuable. Particularly important here, too, with respect to value, is the implicit or explicit *purpose* informing the creation of a wonder. Other *thaumata*, too, are human-made and exhausted in the moment of performance, such as great deeds and choral dance, but there can be much social worth in them, as Kurke explains for the latter in particular. They might be judged beneficial for a wider community, such as Jason’s feat of strength in plowing the fields with Aietes’ fire-breathing oxen (at which Aietes wonders, ἀγασθεῖς: Pin. *Pyth.* 4.234-8), or worship of a deity in ritual dance for the sake of the collective. *Thaumatopoiia*, on the other hand, is criticized as idle and frivolous. Isocrates in the *Encomium of Helen* associates pointless arguments, ‘in no way useful’ with

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<sup>462</sup> Cf. Vet. Val. 1.1.39 (listing various performers who make a living from displays but wander and have no settled life) and Manetho 4.448-9 (on *psephopaktai* who make a living from the crowd).

*thaumatopoiia* (10.7), and in his *Antidosis* wonder-making is an example of meaningless things that bring nothing to life (15.269: τὰς μηδὲν πρὸς τὸν βίον φερούσας).

*Thaumatopoiioi* are degenerate characters in a community, not contributive ones (Dem. 2.19; Arist. *Problems* 18.6 = 917a; Diod. Sic. 34/35.34.1; Plut. *Anton.* 21.3; Strabo 1.2.5, 2.3.5), and the driving ‘purpose’ for their production of wonders is, typically, the business of it. The case in point is Xenophon’s Syracusan: in response to the question of what he takes most pride in, to which many of the other symposiasts have already given answers that touch on civic benefits (justice, politics, education), he asserts that it is in those fools who maintain him (4.55: ἐπὶ νῆ Δία τοῖς ἄφροσιν. οὗτοι γὰρ τὰ ἐμὰ νευρόσπαστα θεώμενοι τρέφουσί με). He does not contribute to society, but consumes its resources.

So arise the numerous condemnations against wonder-making, all shades of the fundamental differences between *thauma* and *thaumatopoiia*. In its mortal and commoditized production of ‘wonders’, *thaumatopoiia* offers an imitation of supernatural wonder, inherently inferior and accordingly with lesser value, its practitioners imposters or imitators. Rather than spontaneously inspire stupefaction or speechlessness for all spectators as a psychological result of the intimate ‘hinge’ that a *thauma* presents between ‘this’ and ‘that’, noted above, *thaumatopoiia* can only strive for that effect with deceptive tricks, epitomizing the potential of all wonder to act as a vehicle for “deceitful illusion” and “false seduction”.<sup>463</sup> *Thaumatopoiia* does not challenge the intellect, but preys on foolishness and ignorance. It has no automatic luminescence or radiant brilliance, which reveal its divine essence, but is lacklustre. It is not something rare and precious or of any intrinsic value, but a cheap business and an idle frivolity. Paradoxically, the labour of ‘marvel-production’ is in fact one of non-production, which exists for the spectacle of the labour itself. It is not supernatural, but mortal, and the

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<sup>463</sup> Hunzinger (2015, 431). Supernatural wonders can also be perplexing, because as they assimilate the ‘here’ and ‘there’ they initiate confusion, which can leave one unsure or in doubt. But in this case, to tweak Hunzinger’s arguments, any potential ‘deception’ is a byproduct of the experience; in *thaumatopoiia*, on the other hand, it is a driving mechanism.

labour of low status mortals at that. Like the puppets in Plato's allegory of the cave, θαυματοποιία gives but a shadow of supernatural θαῦμα.<sup>464</sup>

The exponents of this negative interpretation of wonder-making are, for the most part, Athenian philosophers and orators, and the set of values and ideologies are theirs. To what degree they advocate common public opinion is open to debate. Here we are limited by the nature of the source material. In the least, we should allow for different points of view among different individuals, cities and places. We might compare the constant criticisms of Athenian New Music in our evidence, especially Comedy, but the obvious popularity that it enjoyed.<sup>465</sup> Another perspective recognizes *thaumatopoiia* as a grand human accomplishment. As Page duBois writes of ancient magicians and conjurers, they were, “from the perspective of high culture, charlatans or sorcerers; from another perspective, persons of extraordinary gifts or powers”.<sup>466</sup> It is not at all uncommon for so-called ‘high culture’, i.e. learned, verbal, or cerebral discourses, to deride ‘low culture’ as bodily, performative, sub-literary, and (thus) vulgar.<sup>467</sup> Wonder-making was clearly popular, and not localized to any particular time or place. The philosophers might shake their heads at those ‘fools’ who took pleasure in the shows, but there were certainly a good many of them.<sup>468</sup> Multiple sources emphasize the crowds who watch (e.g. Isoc. 15.269; Theophr. *Char.* 6.4; Arist. fr. 793 Gigon = fr. 63 Rose; Diod. Sic. 20.63.2; cf. Ter. *Hec.* 34-5), and while Theophrastus reports that the price of admission was only a few bronze coins (*Char.* 6.4), wonder-making made enough money in early Hellenistic Byzantium, at least, that the city could tax from *thaumatopoiioi* a third of their profits (Arist. *Oec.* 2.2 = 1346b). Athenaeus reports that next to a statue of Aeschylus the Athenians erected one of the entertainer Eurycleides, a testament to his popularity or

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<sup>464</sup> Pace Hunzinger (2015, 432-3): the examples that she provides from Plato of wonder as ‘stupid amazement’ are all examples that depend on the difference between *thauma* and *thaumatopoiia* (Hunzinger considers *thaumatopoiia* a sort of subfield of *thauma*). They are not all examples that illustrate the range of meaning and response for supernatural θαῦμα.

<sup>465</sup> A prime example is the infamous Cinesias, ridiculed in old comedy (e.g. Ar. *Av.* 1372-1409; Pherecr. fr. 155.8-13 K-A) and by authors like Lysias (fr. 195-6 Carey) and Plato (*Grg.* 501e), but who still trained a victorious chorus (IG II<sup>2</sup> 3028).

<sup>466</sup> duBois (2010, 61).

<sup>467</sup> Lada-Richards (2004a, 62-71).

<sup>468</sup> The troupe in Xenophon's *Symposium* at first gives pleasure (2.2-3, 2.15, 3.1-2), even if Socrates later denies it (7.2-4); cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1460a17: τὸ δὲ θαυμαστὸν ἡδύ, ‘the wondrous is pleasurable’. For pleasure in later spectacles, e.g. Sen. *Ep.* 45.8, Petron. 53.12, Juv. 14.265.

prestige (Ath. 1.19e).<sup>469</sup> There was also a statue of the ψηφοπαίκτης (pebble-player) Theodorus in Hestiaea/Oreos (Ath. 1.19b). Wonder-making was also a recurrent activity in religious festivals on Hellenistic Delos for several decades, to judge by a number of choregic inscriptions (IG XI.2 110.34 [268 B.C.]; 112.22 [ca. 264 B.C.]; 113.28 [263 B.C.]; 115.25 [259 B.C.]; 120.47 [236 B.C.]; 129.11 [192 B.C.]). Here, the wonder-makers are among ‘those who made a display for the god’ (οἶδε τῶι θεῶι ἐπεδείξαντο), some multiple times at the same festival. In IG XI.2 110, 112, and 113 the performer is a woman, one Cleopatra, but despite some claims that her gender is unusual for wonder-makers, there does not seem to be considerable gender segregation in *thaumatopoiia*.<sup>470</sup> Of the entertainers enumerated in IG XI.2 115, the male *thaumatopoiios* Serdon the Roman is listed next to the female Aristion. Although the evidence is fragmentary, in both IG XI.2 120 and 129 it seems to be just men who perform (120: Noumenios son of Lysimachus, and Thras[-; 129: just Philokles). Another Delian inscription, however, dating almost a century later to 169 B.C., also records both male and female *thaumatopoiioi* among the entertainers (SEG XLIV 680 = IG XI.2, 133.78-9: Ζ[ω]ῖ[λος], | Ἀρτεμῶ, Ἀρτεμ[ίδ]ωρο[ς], Ἀπο]λλώ[νιος].<sup>471</sup> The abundance of inscriptional material from Delos might suggest that there was a special connection between wonder-makers and the island, but I suspect we see here just a prime example of their potential presence as men and women in Hellenic festive or ritual contexts. In addition to the wonder-shows at Athens and Byzantium, noted above, there is indication for widespread performances: textual evidence for practice in Rhegium (Ath. 1.19f), Syracuse (Xen. *Symp.* 2.1), and India (Chares *FGrH* 125 F 4 *ap.* Ath. 12.538e), the trope that such performers or troupes

<sup>469</sup> Otherwise unknown and probably nothing to do with Eurycles the ‘ventriloquist’ at Ar. *Vesp.* 1019 and Pl. *Soph.* 252c. Athenaeus does not specify Eurycleides’ area of expertise, but in the enumeration of entertainers he follows immediately after the puppeteer (νευροσπάστης) Potheinus, to whom the Athenians apparently granted the right to perform in the Theatre of Dionysus (Ath. 1.19e).

<sup>470</sup> *Contra* Loman (2004, 121-2 with 121 n. 126) and Bielman (2002, 212). There is more evidence for female thaumatopoietic acrobats than male, but this does not mean that any given female *thaumatopoiios* was an acrobat (as Bielman argues is the case for Cleopatra). We simply cannot say what sort of wonders this Cleopatra performed; *contra* Loman (2004, 121) that she is likely a magician or conjurer.

<sup>471</sup> Immediately after there is record also of an ὀρχηστής, νευροσπά[σται] (81), an unknown name or profession ending – σίων, and a ῥωμαῖστής (82). This reflects the developing technical language for professional wonder-makers, and thus the greater specificity of their skills (dancer, puppeteer, unknown, and ‘strongman’ or ‘performer of Roman things’), but there remains a vague sense to the ‘wonders’ of the generic *thaumatopoiioi*. For the disputed meaning of the word ῥωμαῖστής, see Ferri (2008); despite Ferri’s points, I take the meaning of ῥωμαῖστής as ‘strongman’ (as the LSJ Supplement and which Ferri says is ‘safest’), whose feats may or may not have included acrobatics.

are often itinerant, and the diverse geographical range for material evidence, which spans the Mediterranean region. That being said, regional specialities and preferences for certain varieties of *thaumata* do seem to have existed (such as acrobatics in Magna Graecia). In all of the Delian inscriptions, though, *thaumatopoiioi* are just another kind of performer, like the musicians, poets, dramatists, dancers, etc., among whom their names are found. The same sort of programme of entertainment might have been part of the festivities at any number of Greek sites. In cases like these, *thaumatopoiia* can be understood as a branch of μουσική (music/art), as indeed Plato at one point classifies it (*Soph.* 224a). Surely wonder-making in these contexts would challenge the uncompromising view of it espoused in Athenian literature. But to what degree? And how does this positive presence affect my argument that thaumatopoietic acrobats are represented as verging on the subhuman?

The religious and generally positive overtones for *thaumatopoiia* as a festive display of *mousike* ‘for the god’ are rather at odds with the negative views of it outlined above. In part, this reflects different perspectives on wonder-makers in Greek culture, but the discrepancy is also intimately connected with the semantic evolution of the word *thauma* after the Archaic period to include, among other things, ‘sights to see’ or ‘oddities’.<sup>472</sup> Herodotean ‘wonders’, for example, are those of the strange and the unusual, remarkable for their difference but not necessarily momentous.<sup>473</sup> For the so-called paradoxographers in the Hellenistic period, *thaumata* are exotic: oddities of place, flora and fauna, construction, or ethnographic generalities, such as a whirlpool in Cilicia where drowned animals return to life (Ps-Arist. *Peri Thaum.* 29), a rock with invisible fire (ibid. 36), a statue of a golden bull that calls to hunters (ibid. 175), or the ‘fact’ that Ligurian women do not experience trials and tribulations from pregnancy or childbirth (91).<sup>474</sup> For the most part, these *thaumata* do not include the astounding physical actions or deeds of an individual.<sup>475</sup> They all belong to the category ‘strange but true’, but the truthfulness of second-hand accounts or hearsay is sometimes questioned by an author, in an assertion of

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<sup>472</sup> Neer (2010, 68).

<sup>473</sup> See Munson (2001) and Priestley (2014, 51-108).

<sup>474</sup> The most famous examples are of course the ‘seven wonders of the world’. On the paradoxographers see Schepens and Delcroix (1996); texts are collected in Giannini (1966). For the relationship between Herodotean and Hellenistic ‘wonders’, see Priestley (2014, 51-108, esp. 51-4).

<sup>475</sup> Priestley (2014, 79).

his efforts towards veracity and so credibility.<sup>476</sup> The oddities are notable for their difference, but as ‘curiosities’ that can inspire critical assessment of the ‘weird’.<sup>477</sup> Such *thaumata* are, in short, things strikingly unusual. *Thaumatopoiia*, including acrobatics, is entangled somewhere amongst the ‘sights to see’ and Archaic *thauma*. On the one hand acrobatic wonder-making is spectacle, but on the other it does result in *thauma* (though a wonder innately inferior to that created or inspired by the supernatural). The human wonder-maker produces something abnormal, but the oddity can only pale in comparison to ideal *thauma*. It becomes merely weird, or even ‘freakish’, little more than a curious sight to see.<sup>478</sup>

#### 4.5: Embodied *Thaumatopoiia*

Performance context guides the interpretation of bodies and actions, setting the cultural parameters by which they acquire and evoke semiotic ‘meaning’. It is in the performance context of *thaumatopoiia* that I situate acrobatics as spectacle, and its variety of bodily achievements which are so different from the gymnastic manoeuvres in athletic contests. Acrobatic bodies here are just as ‘extreme’ and far from normal as in sport, but explore and exhibit their physical abilities in different ways. When a spectator viewed a ‘wonder show’, not necessarily an acrobatic one, they observed a performance that attempted to blend reality and fantasy, where the performers aimed to challenge and suspend the rational rules of the physical universe for a time, and initiate an implementation of the impossible. But in general in Athenian discourse, *thaumatopoiioi* earn criticism, not praise, for those efforts at creating the incredible. For the acrobat, certainly her ‘abnormal’ movements are wondrous, but they are still mortal accomplishments. Thus on the one hand the thaumatopoietic acrobat expresses via her body utmost human physicality (especially notable in representations of the generic pose, which normalize the

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<sup>476</sup> Schepens and Delcroix (1996, 382-9).

<sup>477</sup> Cf. the claims of Plato and Aristotle that wonder begets philosophy (Pl. *Theaet.* 155d, Arist. *Met.* 1.982b; cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1371a31).

<sup>478</sup> The belief that the *thaumatopoiios* makes or does something supernatural (or that he fails to do so) endures well into late antiquity. Later writers adopt the language of spectacle to describe the miracles of God, Christ, and their worldly disciples, whom they explicitly compare to *thaumatopoiioi* (e.g.: Philo *de Plant.* 2.1.4; Gregory of Nyssa *Sermo in Sanctum Romanum* 96.476.51; Athanasius *Contra Gentes* 44.17). The stress is that *these* wonders, at least, are profoundly real.



abnormality), but on the other hand, that same acrobat concurrently embodies an inferiority, since her ‘wonder’ is only a human one, not supernatural. Or, to frame it from a slightly different perspective, the thaumatopoeitic acrobat enacts the inferiority associated with wonder-making, since she performs actions presented as surreal, but in that very performance proves their reality.

The representation of the acrobatic body in art and text as removed from everyday motion and postures corresponds to its status as an artificial wonder. Supernatural *thaumata* result in astonished awe; here, amazement derives from the corporeal alterity of the supposedly ‘abnormal’ performer from the perspective of the ‘normal’ spectator. To revisit Leslie Kurke’s interpretative model of *choreia*, we can compare the group experience of ritualized choral dance, where the performance affirms communal values and where those who participate and watch are representative of that community, with the experience of watching socially inferior wonder-makers.<sup>479</sup> Kurke argues for kinesthetic empathy between spectators and dancers, which she calls “inter-subjective identification”; i.e. that spectators will experience a blurring sense of identification with the performers as they watch, as if they themselves were the ones dancing.<sup>480</sup> The theory is based on the concepts of somatic memory and Merleau-Ponty’s ‘experience by experience’.<sup>481</sup> That is, an engaged observer will watch a moving body on the basis of their own personal experiences in motility, and ‘live through’ the performance, as it were, cognitively and viscerally reacting to the observed motion as if s/he her/himself were the one moving (see Chapter One for further explanation of this theory).

Kinesthetic empathy with all acrobatic bodies can be limited because, as ‘extreme’ bodies, they might not readily trigger sympathetic somatic memory. Acrobatic

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<sup>479</sup> On the communal qualities of dance, see the useful summary in Kowlazig (2007, 1-6); cf. Vesterinen (1997), Wilson (2003), Kowlazig (2004), Peponi (2013, *passim*, esp. the contributions by Calame (2013, 87-108) and Kowlazig (2013, 171-211)). The introduction to Kowlazig and Wilson (2013) provides a useful overview.

<sup>480</sup> Kurke (2012, 224-6). With her model Kurke responds directly to Peponi (2009, 62), who describes a field of attraction between performers and spectators, so that the latter ultimately identify with the former; e.g. Peponi (2009, 67): choral poetry can offer “a system of intense reciprocity, where choral performance, on the one hand, and spectatorship, on the other, are conceptualized not only as interactive but as essentially mutually empathetic”, so that the performers are a representation of the audience and the audience are “virtual performers”.

<sup>481</sup> See Chapter One.

movements have the potential to confound the spectator's previous experience with, and (sub-)conscious understanding of, motility; this is true for both athletic tumbling and thaumatopoeitic stunts. But in contrast to the possibility that observers of tumbling might experience inter-subjective identification with the athletes, I contend that the majority of spectators of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics would be more likely to experience *disidentification* with the performers. But how can kinesthetic empathy with acrobatic bodies promote identification in one context, and disidentification in another? In part, the difference relates to the respective acrobatics in sport and spectacle, and the potential for the elite male spectator in either circumstance to have comparable somatic memory on which to draw. Athletic tumbling, as I have argued in the first three chapters, is a kind of extreme 'gymnastics', and finds some similarities with the bodily motion used in other sports (such as 'falls' in wrestling);<sup>482</sup> this contributes to the possibility that someone with bodily experience in athletics might viscerally identify with a tumbler. In contrast, thaumatopoeitic acrobatics present bodies as odd or 'unnatural' (see Arist. *EE* 8.1, below), often characterized by extreme flexibility, and the spectator reaction might hypothetically be some variety of 'the body should not be able to move that way'.<sup>483</sup> For tumbling, the response was apparently something closer to 'the body *should* be able to move that way', given the probability that it constituted an event at the Panathenaia. Tumbling displays the acme of socially-approved movement, in that it demonstrates the physical excellence in war and sport of individuals from the socially dominant group. This brings up a second point for the issue of dis/identification with extreme bodies: the level of dis/identification depends on the respective social backgrounds of the spectator and performer.<sup>484</sup> In that regard, an elite Athenian citizen observing the acrobatic action of another elite citizen would be more likely to experience inter-subjective identification than if that same spectator were to observe a female slave or foreigner perform thaumatopoeitic acrobatics. The latter pair's divergent socio-cultural status encourages disidentification. Nevertheless, that disidentification does not negate engagement. As Peta Tait points out, "spectators might be attracted to athletic movement that is physically familiar, whether it is sport or dance or aerial movement. Conversely, they might be

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<sup>482</sup> Cf. Lucian *Anacharsis* 16.39 and 18.23.

<sup>483</sup> Cf. Handelman (1991) on contortionism in modern circus and sociology.

<sup>484</sup> Tait (2005, 141).

bodily drawn to watch unfamiliar extremes.”<sup>485</sup> That is to say, the exoticism of an acrobatic wonder might intensify a spectator’s visceral engagement, even though (in fact, *because*) it remains unfamiliar and thus ‘wondrous’. Indeed, it is in their extraordinary qualities that acrobatic feats *are* wonders, distanced from the everyday. In the end, just as ritual *choreia* projects “the affirmation of proper communal (civic) order as part of a proper, hierarchized cosmic order”, as Kurke argues,<sup>486</sup> so too does thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, and extreme corporeal wonders are put firmly near the bottom of the hierarchy.

In *thaumatopoiia*, then, the temporary unfamiliar extreme of the acrobatic body promotes a distancing of bodies and identities in the performer-spectator relationship. Disidentification helps establish the acrobat’s extraordinary difference. Stymied kinesthetic empathy between (elite) spectator and (hired) performer therefore contributes to the construction of the acrobat as ‘other’, by creating a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (or here, ‘us’ and ‘her’). The difference that separates the groups – here a difference between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ bodies – is also a point of emphasis in the primary material. In many cases, the direct juxtaposition of the acrobat’s abnormality with another’s normal body (whether spectator or another performer) draws attention to the degree of difference and the former’s wondrous qualities (cf. the acrobat in the generic pose next to an idealized youth on the lekythos in Genoa [1142] and the ‘phlyax’ scene of an acrobat in the generic pose among comic actors on Lipari 927). The business of *thaumatopoiia* is to make a spectacle of that difference by showcasing highly refined abilities. Like modern circus, the enterprise is an all or nothing affair, “perfection or nihilism”.<sup>487</sup> Exact motions are a requisite for success. If precision falters, the creation of ‘wonder’ fails, and the performance instead results in the ‘non-implementation of the impossible’, which affirms its normalcy (the opposite to the fuel that drives *thaumatopoiia*).<sup>488</sup> The acrobat’s supposed abnormality must therefore be as perfect and absolute as possible during performance in order to produce the greatest degree of

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<sup>485</sup> Tait (2005, 147).

<sup>486</sup> Kurke (2012, 231).

<sup>487</sup> Handelman (1991, 213) for quote and concept.

<sup>488</sup> Bouissac (2010, 146).

wonder; the apparent utter transformation of her body to ‘otherness’ confirms the extent of the acrobat’s difference from spectators.

In the criticisms about wonder-making, such refined skills are acknowledged as impressive, but generally represented as frivolous; once more we see the point of view of proponents of a privileged ‘high’ culture, who deride things sub-literary as vulgar ‘low’ culture’.<sup>489</sup> Spectators who admire the feats and try to imitate them, for instance, are cast in a negative light: in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, the guests treat as a joke Socrates’ pronouncement that he wishes to learn dancing from the Syracusan impresario (2.16-17), and in Theophrastus’ *Characters*, it is the slow-learner (ὀψιμαθής) who “at the wonder-shows waits around for three or four completions, learning the songs thoroughly” (27.7: καὶ ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι τρία ἢ τέτταρα πληρώματα ὑπομένειν τὰ ἄσματα ἐκμανθάνων), among other juvenile pursuits inappropriate to his age.<sup>490</sup> Criticisms of learning wonder-making were not directed at just the admiring spectator, but also the professionals. Galen voices disapproval for a man with prime natural physicality who does not use it to its fullest potential: “so if one took a man thus by nature and taught him to traverse a tightrope and to clamber up a straight plank, just as wonder-makers teach their students, not only would he not take Olympic victory, but he would never be seen as swifter than a random person.” (*De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 9.2.30 [de Lacy]).<sup>491</sup> Likewise, in the Aristotelian *Problems*, the author questions why someone would choose to devote their time to learning such a lowly pursuit as wonder-making, even as he recognizes that one might become proficient at it (18.6 =917a). In the *Oeconomicus*, Ischomachus comments on his methods for instilling obedience in slaves, and compares it with training animals. He makes the point that “even puppies, although by far inferior to mankind in mind and speech, all the same learn to run around and tumble and many other things...” (καὶ τὰ κυνίδια δὲ πολὺ τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τῆ γνώμη καὶ τῆ γλώττη ὑποδεέστερα ὄντα

<sup>489</sup> Cf. Lada-Richards (2004a, 62-71).

<sup>490</sup> Cf. Diodorus Siculus (34/35.34.1), who later wrote contemptuously about Antiochus Cyzicenus’ passion for *thaumatopoiia*, which included learning how to operate puppets and other devices, and included this instruction among other ignominious qualities and practices unsuitable for a king (βασιλείας ἀλλοτριώτατα).

<sup>491</sup> ὡς ἐάν γέ τις παραλαβὼν τὸν οὕτως πεφυκότα μεταβαίνειν μὲν ἐπὶ λεπτοῦ σχοινίου διδάξει, πρὸς ξύλον δὲ ὄρθιον ἀναρριχᾶσθαι, καθάπερ οἱ θαυματοποιοὶ διδάσκουσι τοὺς μαθητάς, οὐ μόνον οὐκ ἂν [ἔλοιτο νίκη] Ὀλυμπιονίκης, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ τῶν ἐπιτυχόντων ἀνθρώπων ὠκύτερος ἂν ποτε ὀφθεῖη.

ὅμως καὶ περιτρέχειν καὶ κυβιστῶν καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ μανθάνει).<sup>492</sup> The image of trained command over a tumbling form is reminiscent of the Syracusan's statement that his troupe members are his 'marionettes' (4.55). As he puts it they do not possess the autonomy to execute what they have been 'taught', since, it seems, their experience is less like 'education' than 'training'.<sup>493</sup>

For Aristotle in his *Eudemian Ethics*, the bodily skill that acrobats possess is exemplary for 'unnatural' uses of the body, and a paradigm for the purposeful misuse of knowledge (Arist. *EE* 8.1.1 = 1246a25-36).<sup>494</sup>

ἀπορήσειε δ' ἂν τις εἰ ἔστιν ἐκάστῳ χρήσασθαι καὶ ἐφ' ὃ πέφυκε καὶ ἄλλως...κατὰ δὲ καὶ ἐπιστήμη· καὶ γὰρ ἀληθῶς καὶ ἀμαρτεῖν, οἷον ὅταν ἐκὼν μὴ ὀρθῶς γράψῃ, ὡς ἀγνοῖα δὴ νῦν χρῆσθαι, ὡσπερ μεταστρέψας τὴν χεῖρα· καὶ τῷ ποδί ποτε ὡς χειρὶ καὶ ταύτῃ ὡς ποδί χρῶνται <αἰ> ὀρχηστρίδες.

One might raise the question if it is possible to use any certain thing according to its natural function and otherwise...and so it is for the use of knowledge. For one can use it truly or one can do wrong: for instance when someone does not write correctly on purpose, he then makes use of knowledge as ignorance, just as one twists the hand; and sometimes dancing girls use their foot as a hand and their

<sup>492</sup> Although animal performances were a variety of wonder-making, the sense of 'tumble' here is probably not thaumatopoeitic, but closer to 'roll over'.

<sup>493</sup> On the business of training slaves in performance specialties, see Davidson (2006, 39-40). Athenaeus makes the distinction between training and education clear, opining that by the Hellenistic period "the Greeks...put much more value in banausic crafts than those inventions born from education" (τὰς γὰρ βαναύσους τέχνας Ἕλληνας ὕστερον περὶ πλείστου μᾶλλον ἐποιοῦντο ἢ τὰς κατὰ παιδείαν γινομένας ἐπινοίας), his prime example being that a statue of a prestidigitator was erected in a city in Euboea. The question of training, teaching, and learning *thaumatopoiia* relates to discourse in the Roman period on what constitutes *techne*. Philodemus is the first to make the explicit point that acrobatics (specifically using the *peteuron* and leaping among swords) is *not techne*, under his model of it at least, since they lack a set of guiding principles. Instead, they are 'skill or observation or practice' (ἐμπειρίαν μὲν καὶ παρατήρησιν καὶ ἄσκησιν), no more a 'craft' than carrying wood, thieving, commerce, or hunting (*Rh. 2 Pherc.* 1674 col. XL.24 - XLI.32 = Longo 127-129). Galen (*Protrepticus* 9.6 = K1.20-21) later uses acrobatics as a prime example of an activity that is not a *techne*, but rather a *mataiotechne* (useless art) or *kakotechne* (bad art), because 'its aim is not useful for life' (οὐκ ἔστι τὸ τέλος βιωφελές). See König (2005, 1-6).

<sup>494</sup> The text is from Walzer and Mingay's 1991 Oxford Classical Text. On the textual problems in 8.1, see Walzer and Mingay (1991, *ad loc.*), in addition to Jackson (1913) and Moraux (1971). What exactly is being 'twisted around' is a particular concern here. Moraux (1971, 258) suggests [ὡσπερ] μεταστρέψας τὴν χεῖρα < ὡσπερ > καὶ τῷ ποδί..., which makes it something's 'use' that is inverted, not a body or body part. Jackson (1913, 175) prints ὡσπερ μεταστρέψασ<a> τὴν χεῖρα καὶ <τὸν πόδα>..., which would make the *orchestrides* those who 'twist around': 'just as dancing girls twist around the hand and foot'. This makes good sense with the following line as an explanation for the image of contortion; cf. in the Aristotelian *Problems* (5.32), where twisting the body in order to rub the left leg with one's right hand is a 'contortion' (τριψις ἐξεστραμμένως γίνεται). The *stroph-* root is also used elsewhere for contortionism (see below).

hand as a foot.

That is to say, when one balances on their hands and uses the feet in a ‘dextrous’ manner, there is a misuse of the body with respect to what is ‘natural’. A contortion is a distortion of natural functions (1246a: ἐκάστω χρήσασθαι καὶ ἐφ’ ὃ πέφυκε καὶ ἄλλως).<sup>495</sup> Thus the inverted acrobat physically manifests the inversion of natural methods, and so is an embodiment of abnormal ‘wrong’. But while the actions are unnatural, they prove the performers are exploiting bodily knowledge and capability, since to move in such a way is to do a purposeful wrong (ἁμαρτεῖν), similar to incorrectly writing a word; the correct method is known, but ignored.<sup>496</sup> The incorrect and unnatural bodily knowledge Aristotle mentions is, so to speak, a perfected ‘ignorance’ (ἄγνοια).<sup>497</sup> Their perfect skill shows their degree of difference. Significant to the social qualification of the movement is, therefore, agency; the acrobats choose to ‘misuse’ their bodies.<sup>498</sup>

These exemplary *orchestrides* are also *thaumatopoioidi*, who, like the dancer ‘able to perform wonders’ in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (2.2), also balance upside down on their hands. That particular description is in fact very similar to what we see in images of the generic pose, though of course neither illustrates or describes the other precisely. The somewhat convoluted phrase ‘they use their foot as a hand and their hand as a foot’ could perhaps mean that the dancers use their feet to produce the *schemata* (‘postures’) and/or rhythms of dance, normally created with the hands and arms (as Hippocleides’ *cheironomia* ‘gesticulating’ or ‘hand dances’ at Herodotus 6.129).<sup>499</sup> But it could also be a more specific reference to proficiency with the feet and toes for the manipulation and

<sup>495</sup> In the Aristotelian *Problems* (5.32), twisting the body to rub the left leg with the opposite hand is also ‘contrary to nature’ (παρὰ φύσιν).

<sup>496</sup> Flannery (2013, 209).

<sup>497</sup> Compare the necessary precision implied in Democritus’ description of a thaumatopoietic dance among swords, for instance, where a false step means disaster (fr. D92 (Taylor) = S-T 5 in Chapter 5.1).

<sup>498</sup> Lucretius uses a similar expression for a distortion of knowledge, invoking the image of a man placing his feet on his own head (4.469-72); cf. Epictetus 3.12.1 ff., that *thaumatopoiia* is παρὰ φύσιν, ‘contrary to nature’ and Simplicius *Comm. ad. Arist. De Caelo* 7.419.36 = 188b25, that ‘there are movements not natural but artificial, such as tumbling instead of walking (οὐκ αὐτοφυεῖς αἱ κινήσεις, ἀλλ’ ἐπιτεχνηταί, ὡς τὸ ἀντὶ τοῦ βαδίζειν κυβιστᾶν).

<sup>499</sup> There is also a diverse range of potential choreography for their ‘hands used as feet’. Feet are used in dance as the literal ‘basis’ for almost every movement, from stomps to kicks, twirls, leaps, and so on. Aristotle’s inverted dancers might perform handstands, or walk on their hands, or maybe produce livelier motions such as handsprings, cartwheels, etc. The vagueness in the phrase lends itself to any number of choreographic and corporeal possibilities.

handling of objects, for which there are also artistic parallels. On an Egnatian pelike in Berlin, for example, a topless contortionist balances on her forearms in the generic pose. She is unique in extant representations for using her feet and toes to draw back an arrow from a bow. One foot holds the bow in place and keeps two extra arrows, while the other draws back a third arrow that is nocked for firing. Her head is raised so that she looks calmly in the direction toward which she aims. The image of the stunt shows a spectacular difference from the normal way to draw a bow, but it is not necessarily artistic fantasy: modern contortionists have accomplished the same stunt.<sup>500</sup> Another example of ‘dextrous feet’ occurs in an engraving by Wilhelm Tischbein of a Campanian vase from the lost collection of Sir William Hamilton.<sup>501</sup> The illustration features a topless acrobat balanced in the generic pose, but with her arms spread as if to give an impression that she is using them to walk toward a large calyx-krater immediately in front of her. The performer’s back and legs are curved so that her feet hang over her head. In the toes of her left foot the acrobat holds what appears to be a kantharos, and in the toes of her right the handle of a ladle, which she is dipping into the krater.<sup>502</sup> To the far left in the engraving is a fully clothed woman seated on a cushion, who gestures with both arms toward the scene in front of her. Unless the engraving distorts the relationship of the two figures (certainly possible, given the inaccuracies present in other examples by Tischbein), the juxtaposition emphasizes the difference between the abnormal body of the thaumatopoeitic performer and the normal body of a spectator.<sup>503</sup> Significantly, the acrobat is topless and the seated woman fully dressed, which suggests the former is socially inferior. For the dextrous displays in these two South-Italian scenes, the ethos of the act celebrates faultless manipulations, which, if they are like other *thaumatopoiia*, push at the boundaries of credibility until the feats become marvellous. Nevertheless, the

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<sup>500</sup> For example, the contortionist Lilia Stepanova performed this stunt on the first season of the television show “America’s Got Talent” (June-August 2006).

<sup>501</sup> Tischbein (1791, Taf. 60); ca. 325-300 B.C.: Beazley (1943, 99.4), Weege (1976, fig. 64), Todisco (2013, MGS 36, fig. 38). Much of Hamilton’s collection was lost in a shipwreck in 1798, but some earlier engravings were made: see Woodford (2001).

<sup>502</sup> Like the scene of a contortionist on the Attic hydria in Naples (81398), who drinks upside down from a kylix, or the satyric revelry on the Douris psykter (London BM E 768), here, too, the consumption of wine is combined with acrobatic performance.

<sup>503</sup> On Tischbein’s errors see Woodford (2001).

acrobats in both cases still enact the inferiority of wonder-making, in so much as they capitalize on a subversion of normal human action.

There are negative social connotations for those who make a living from displays of exceptionally refined ‘work’ *qua* spectacle (cf. Xen. *Symp.* 4.55). Their social inferiority corresponds to a perceived somatic inferiority, guided by the cultural parameters established by the context of *thaumatopoiia*. Take the scene on an Apulian skyphos, dated 360-340 B.C.: a fully clothed female acrobat is depicted with her body in the generic pose, balanced in a handstand with her back bent and her legs curled over the top of her head, so that one foot rests just above her hair.<sup>504</sup> Making a border around the left, top, and right of the scene are leafy branches, from which hang ribbons. What makes the image particularly interesting is that the acrobat is shown poised on only her right hand, lifting up her left in front of her. Between her index finger and thumb she holds a very small sphere, hardly bigger than a marble or a pebble. Alan Hughes wonders if she will juggle with it, but I would contend that the dexterity suggested in the scene is subtly different.<sup>505</sup> The girl does not hold multiple balls to toss, as in other images of juggling, but a single very small object, more like a pebble.<sup>506</sup> I propose that the artist here has represented two different kinds of thaumatopoietic performances in conjunction: the girl is at once an acrobat/dancer and a *ψηφοπαίκτης*, a ‘pebble player’. M. W. Dickie summarizes this professional title as referring to “someone who tricks spectators, by sleight of hand, into believing that they are seeing what they are not seeing”, by means of using pebbles for tricks characterized by “deception and trickery”.<sup>507</sup> The activity confounds and confuses the spectator, and so creates ‘wonder’.<sup>508</sup> A later, alternate name for the performer, ‘pebble-stealer’ (*ψηφοκλέπτης* at Ath. 1.19), provides a good sense of the necessary prestidigitation but also the cultural implications for someone so skilled at controlling objects with their hands. But the idea that the manipulation of pebbles was a dishonest trick is already present from the earliest attestation of the stem *ψηφοπαικτ-* in

<sup>504</sup> Madrid 11.554: Leroux (1912, no. 596, pl. LIV), Todisco (2013, MGS 17). According to Leroux, “sur le revers du vase, un sujet obscène, qui est une falsification moderne”.

<sup>505</sup> Hughes (2008, 10).

<sup>506</sup> For scenes of juggling, see Neils and Oakley (2003, no. 81) and Todisco (2013).

<sup>507</sup> Dickie (2001, 600).

<sup>508</sup> Roman evidence for the observer’s response to pebble manipulation indicates that there was considerable mistrust for those illusions (e.g. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 2.39, Vet. Val. 1.1.39, Artem. *Oneir.* 3.55, Alciph. 3.20).



Greek: Lysias fr. 57 Carey (*ap.* Pollux 7.200) reads ψηφοπαικτοῦσι τὸ δίκαιον, ‘they act as pebble-manipulators with respect to justice’, giving a sense that unites an earlier concept of fraudulent voting with pebbles (e.g. Soph. *Ajax* 1135, Pin. *Nem.* 8.26-7) and the later wonder-making as a sideshow trick (e.g. Eudoxus Com. fr. 1 K-A, Ath. 1.19d). There is mistrust for this perfected dexterity as a deception, as if it shows that the one who is so skilled has the potential to use their ability for personal gain and/or immoral purpose.<sup>509</sup> That attitude can be contextualized within the larger discourse of criticism for *thaumatopoiioi*: according to Plato in the *Republic*, for instance, wonder-makers capitalize on exploitative deception (10.602d), and in Demosthenes’ *Second Olynthiac* they ‘act at the expense of their fellows for the sake of a laugh’ (2.19: εἰς τοὺς συνόντας ποιοῦσιν ἔνεκα τοῦ γελασθῆναι). The scene on the Apulian skyphos, then, with its combined representation of ‘pebble-player’ and acrobat, twice showcases perfect technical skill to amaze spectators, and unites the thaumatopoietic ‘otherness’ of an abnormal body with the *thauma* initiated by illusion and deception in prestidigitation. Aside from the apparently sympotic context for both the feat (to judge from the flora and ribbons) and the vessel itself (as a skyphos, used as a wine cup), which make it likely that the woman is represented as an entertainer at a symposium, there is little else in the pot’s iconography to convey the artist’s attitude to the acrobat and her body; however, the negative assessment in literature of both pebble-stealing and thaumatopoietic acrobatics should influence our reading of the vessel.

Representations, in sum, recognize the thaumatopoietic acrobat’s prodigious skill, but frame it negatively. Constant is a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’, where the latter is deemed socially inferior. In part, kinesthetic empathy explains the process by which the acrobat is judged ‘other’ for her physical abilities, since the average spectator is likely to lack sympathetic somatic memory and so disidentifies with the performative body. This accounts in part for the ‘stupefaction’ that results from both acrobatic *thaumatopoiia* and its *thauma*. But also central to the phenomenon of wonders, according to Neer’s and Prier’s formulation, is the quality of ‘doubleness’, particularly manifest in the swift interchange between the presence and absence of the wonder, or as it mediates

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<sup>509</sup> Cf. Artemidorus’ statement that dreams of being a pebble-player indicate gain from cheating and guile (3.55).

between ‘this’ and ‘that’ (See further in Chapter 4.4). For thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, the doubleness is evident in the shift of the body between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. The performer begins as/with a ‘regular’ body that becomes marvellous for a short period of time before reverting to normalcy once more.<sup>510</sup> Or, to use Paul Bouissac’s terminology for modern circus, the acrobat shifts between ‘possible’ and ‘impossible’ actions.<sup>511</sup> The rapidity and fluidity of the impossible motions, so highly specialized, might even seem a replacement of natural movement, as if *this* were ordinary mobility.<sup>512</sup> It is also important to note here that textual accounts of thaumatopoeitic acrobatics rarely emphasize that it is a ‘trick’ per se, like conjuring or illusions, but rather that it confounds potentially preconceived notions of the limitations to human physicality.<sup>513</sup> Moreover, as the acrobatic body displays its doubleness it proves that it is *not*, in and of itself, a permanent *thauma*. Like other wonder-makers, the acrobat only produces wonders in or for performance. A θαυματοποιός is not a τέρας in the sense of ‘prodigy’ or ‘monster’, as, for example, someone born with a physical defect or deformity might be labelled. In modern contexts such people have been features of ‘freak shows’ (e.g. dwarves, the ‘Elephant man’, a ‘bearded lady’, conjoined twins, etc.), but while there was apparently a market for permanently unusual bodies at certain points in the ancient world, their physical permanence is at odds with the ‘double’ nature of an acrobatic act as a creative

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<sup>510</sup> Cf. Handelman (1991, 219).

<sup>511</sup> Bouissac (2010, 146).

<sup>512</sup> One might compare modern contortionist feats in which the fluid movement of the body through various postures emphasizes the effect of ease and effortlessness (cf. Xen. *Symp.* 2.11: ἡ δὲ θαρρύντως τε καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ταῦτα διεπράττετο, ‘she accomplished these things confidently and unerringly).

<sup>513</sup> The most notable example is in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (294e), but even there the disbelief is not that an acrobatic feat can exist, but that an old man could perform it. See further in Chapter 5.

*thauma*.<sup>514</sup> These are momentary marvels, not so-called ‘monstrosities’, and are willfully created, not spontaneous occurrences.<sup>515</sup>

In some instances, representations in art and text even portray the thaumatopoietic acrobat as so ‘other’ as to be dehumanized during performance.<sup>516</sup> She is likened through her bodily contortions to an object, such as a hoop (Xen. *Symp.* 2.22, discussed below). Here is another expression of the ‘doubleness’ inherent in *thaumatopoiia*, since to render the body in imitation of a hoop is to simultaneously present the (temporary) destruction of self and the (temporary) creation of an alternate self. That is to say, there is, as Don Handelman puts it, a “holistic totality” to a contortionist act, where the performer is practically defined by her contortions: the manipulations both destroy her body and create it.<sup>517</sup> I emphasize here the temporary nature of this process of dehumanization in acrobatic *thaumatopoiia* (as in modern circus), since in practice the body transitions from normal to abnormal to normal again, which effectively produces a narrative progression (see further in the section on sword-tumbling at Chapter 5.1). However, should the objectified acrobatic body be represented in isolation (such as in static visual evidence like vase paintings), there is at best an allusion to an eventual restoration of the human self. Instead, the representation offers only an image of self-destruction as a symbol of

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<sup>514</sup> Plut. *Mor.* 520c describes a ‘monster market’ (τεράτων ἀγορά) at which one may observe those ‘with half legs or weasely arms or three eyes or ostrich heads’ (τοὺς ἀκνήμιους καὶ τοὺς γαλεάγκωνας καὶ τοὺς τριοφθάλμους καὶ τοὺς στρουθοκεφάλους). Hansen (1996, 150) wonders whether the ‘market’ was for buying and selling, or simply a chance to see the monstrosities for a fee: see also Felton (2012, 128-30). Ps.- Longinus (*On the Sublime* 44.5) and Aristotle (*Prob.* 10.12 = 892a) both speak of the willful incarceration of dwarfs or Pygmies in small cages, in order to stunt growth, which Weiler (2002, 23) suggests might be associated both with Plutarch’s monster-market as well as the ἀγορὰ Κερκώπων in Athens (Suda α 301 s.v. Ἀγορὰ Κερκώπων; Hesychius α 705 s.v. Ἀγορὰ Κερκώπων; Diogenes Laertius 9.114) According to Eustathius, however, the market was not for slaves, but stolen goods (*comm. Od.* 1.77.23: ἔνθα τὰ κλοπιμαῖα ἐπωλοῦντο).

<sup>515</sup> In the Roman period, the word τέρας (and its derivatives) become much more associated with wonder-making (a few examples: Lucian *The Dream* 4; Apollon. *Mirab.* 6; Suda τ 331: τερατοσκόπος), but in the Classical period there is little that links *thaumatopoiioi* and permanent *terata*. Notable exceptions are dwarfish entertainers: e.g. the acrobatic dwarfs at a symposium illustrated on a cup from Todi (Museo Civico 471): see further Dasen (1993, G20) and Catoni (2005, 155).

<sup>516</sup> Compare Cicero’s remarks in *De Finibus* that acrobatics ‘dehumanizes’ a person: “again there is also a certain form of bodily activity which keeps the motions and postures in harmony with nature; and any error in these, due to distortion or deformity or abnormality of movement or posture,—for example, if a man were to walk on his hands, or backwards instead of forwards,—would make a man appear alienated from himself, as if he had stripped off his proper humanity and hated his own nature” (*est autem etiam actio quaedam corporis quae motus et status naturae congruentes tenet; in quibus si peccetur distortionem et depravationem quadam ac motu statu deformi, ut si aut manibus ingrediatur quis aut non ante sed retro, fugere plane se ipse et hominem exuens ex homine naturam odisse videatur.*): trans. Rackham (1914).

<sup>517</sup> Handelman (1991, 214).

the performative doubleness. A body made ‘other’ in wondrous spectacle is still human, but one that appears to temporarily displace its humanity.<sup>518</sup>

One of the most evocative instances of this dehumanizing objectification of acrobats I have mentioned several times already: when the Syracusan impresario in Xenophon’s *Symposium* calls his troupe his ‘marionettes’ (4.55). Their sub-humanity (and inferior social status) could hardly be more clearly stated. But already earlier in the dialogue, the acrobat is likened to an object, when Philip the laughter-maker produces a burlesque of her earlier performance: while ‘the girl imitated hoops by bending backwards’ (2.22: εἰς τοῦπισθεν καμπτομένη τροχούς ἐμιμῆτο), Philip tries to do the same by bending over forwards (ἐκεῖνος ταῦτα εἰς τὸ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπικύπτων μιμῆσθαι τροχούς ἐπειρᾶτο).<sup>519</sup> Significantly, Philip only *attempts* to render his body into the shape of a hoop. πειράω suggests that he was not successful, or at least not *as* successful, although in practice bending forward is less difficult than bending backward. In his limited ability at ‘normal’ (or at least non-thaumato-poietic) movement, Philip’s failure highlights the acrobat’s achievement. His action is the ‘non-implementation of the possible’, hers the wondrous ‘implementation of the impossible’. The description of these actions in the dialogue serves a particular purpose: they follow immediately after Socrates’ claims for the benefits of dance, which, really, are allegorical for the benefits of his philosophical teachings on spiritual *eros*) and are subsequently undermined both by Philip’s parody and the recollection of the acrobat’s ‘carnal philosophy’.<sup>520</sup> Here, the construction of the acrobat as ‘other’ relates to (and contributes to) philosophical discourse.

The language used in the passage for that extreme motion is relatively descriptive: the acrobat has bent or turned her body backward over itself (εἰς τοῦπισθεν καμπτομένη).

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<sup>518</sup> Cf. Handelman’s (1991, 213) claim that circus bodies, as ‘symbolic types’, “close themselves off as a separate world within the ring”, where there exists a complete synthesis of body and identity so that for the spectators “metaphor is annihilated”. But this can only be true in a static image; in practice the ‘barrier’ between ring and reality is a permeable and impossible construct, and the change from normal to abnormal motion guides interpretation of the body’s wondrous qualities. That the body imitates a hoop, to use the Greek example, is not an ‘annihilated’ metaphor, but an operative one. Handelman (1991, 219) himself later acknowledges a narrative model to circus performances.

<sup>519</sup> The contortions are the example of ‘the girl’s dance’ (2.22: ἡ τῆς παιδὸς ὄρχησις) in Philip’s parody, and are therefore categorically dance as well as wonder (cf. 2.2).

<sup>520</sup> For the allegory of Socrates’ dance, see Huss (1999a); for the contest of philosophies, see Wiles (2000) and Wohl (2004).

Through that action the human figure is altered to the point that it can be compared to an object, but, importantly, this is only an imitation. A ‘true’ supernatural *thauma*, on the other hand, can metamorphose bodies and objects completely and/or permanently (e.g. Apollo as a dolphin in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, or the dragon’s teeth sown by Cadmus that turn into Spartoi, or Daphne turned into a laurel tree). Later in the *Symposium*, Socrates recalls the contortions with the same ‘imitation of hoops’ (τροχούς μιμουμένουσ), but adds the phrase διαστρέφοντας τὰ σώματα to qualify the contorted body. The prefix δια- strengthens the sense of the root verb and probably denotes movement apart, but nothing in the word conveys precise notions of bodily form or figure. Aristotle uses the same στρεφ- root in the *Eudemian Ethics*, and it is perhaps also this sort of ‘contorting’ that Galen refers to when he includes among the ‘intense’ movements of dancers those in which ‘they whirl about, στρεφόμενοι very fast’ (περιδινοῦνται στρεφόμενοι τάχιστα).<sup>521</sup> ‘Bending’ is also the word perhaps used by the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. scholar Apollodorus to describe an acrobatic body. The Suda interestingly preserves the tradition that Apollodorus derived the word κύβος, ‘die’, ‘from the bent-ness, since they said that tumbling is being made a cube, by bending onto the head’ (Suda κ 2602: ἀπὸ τῆς κυφότητος: τὸ γὰρ ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν κάμψαντα κυβισθῆναι κυβιστῆσαι ἔλεγον).<sup>522</sup> To Apollodorus, at least, the typical bodily shape in acrobatics and tumbling was a cube, not a hoop, but it is still characterized by a curvature (κυφότητος) and bending (κάμψαντα) so extreme as to make the body comparable with an object.<sup>523</sup> In short, excessive ‘bending’, ‘twisting’, ‘turning’ and ‘contorting’ of the

<sup>521</sup> He goes on to include other motions that verge on the acrobatic: see further Chapter 1; cf. Galen *Method of Medicine* (52K) for the phrase ἄνω καὶ κάτω στρέφονται (‘they twist to and fro’) as a bodily metaphor for dissembling speech. Eustathius also uses the participle στρεφόμενοι to describe the actions of Homer’s tumblers in his comments on the description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, but while their tumbling dance is acrobatic, it probably does not involve the sort of contortionism implied in Xenophon. Words connoting suppleness or flexibility do not always refer to contortionism, even in the context of dance: see Naerebout (1997, 282-3).

<sup>522</sup> Elsewhere, however, the Suda defines tumbling as ‘throwing [oneself] onto the head’ (κυβιστῶν κυρίως τὸ ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν ῥιπτεῖν), and links it with the etymology of the Eastern goddess Cybele (Cybele), for she drives men mad to the point that they act thus (Suda κ 2594); cf. Servius’ comment that priests of Cybele tumble (*comm. Aen.* 3.111: *alii [legunt] Cybele ἀπὸ τοῦ κυβιστῶν τὴν κεφαλὴν, id est a capitis rotatione, quod proprium est eius sacerdotum*).

<sup>523</sup> A few later descriptions of contortionism provide interesting parallels with earlier texts. Maximus of Tyre refers to ‘those displaying wonders, debilitating and contorting their bodies’ (*Diss.* 29.3: οἱ τὰ θαύματα ἐπιδεικνύμενοι, ἐκκλώμενοί τε καὶ στρεβλούμενοι τὰ σώματα), where the participle στρεβλούμενοι parallels the στρεφ- root words, but gives a more violent sense. In this context ἐκκλώμενοί likely refers to the supreme flexibility demonstrated in contortionism, and represents the hypermobility as a

body, in addition to inversion, effectively contribute to representations of the thaumatopoietic acrobat as an abnormal ‘other’.<sup>524</sup>

In visual evidence, too, depictions of acrobatic bodies show extraordinary bends or twists. We might even see the corporeal ‘imitation of a hoop’ in some instances of the generic pose, given the extent that artists emphasize the arch of backs and legs, but only as parallels to the metaphor Xenophon uses, not illustrations of it. A Tanagra figurine in Barcelona, for example, balances upside down on her forearms, back and midriff curved so that her legs can hang in front of her head in an extension (or perhaps distension) of the generic acrobatic pose.<sup>525</sup> Her feet do not quite reach her hands at ground level, but the sinuous curve of her back, hips, and legs forms a relatively circular body.<sup>526</sup> On an Attic hydria in Naples (81398), mentioned above, a naked acrobat is drawn in the same way, balanced on the top of a table. The way that the artist has drawn her limbs almost directly parallel to the legs of the table, and the top of her inverted body horizontal (from knees to midriff), makes her more similar, at least geometrically, to the furniture on which she balances than to the other human figures in the scene. Other postures than the generic pose also render thaumatopoietic acrobats with more or less circular bodies. On a

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literal ‘breaking’ of body parts. Modern feats of hypermobility illuminate how this point of view might arise, especially those featuring purposeful dislocation of limbs, bones, etc. On the other hand, modern acts of hypermobility can give the opposite impression, i.e. that the body moves so flexibly that it is ‘boneless’; this is the image that Apuleius conveys in his description of a young contortionist street performer, who ‘with tortuous twists unfolded a muscleless and boneless dance’ (*flexibus tortuosis enervam et exossam saltationem explicat*) around the shaft of spear that a sword-swallower held in his throat (*Met.* 1.4). The contorted body is so twisted that it is subsequently compared to the snake coiled around Asclepius’ staff (*ibid.*). Similar to the suppleness and flexibility that characterize such contortionist *thaumatopoiia* is the *λυγυρῶν αἰσχρὰ λύσις μελέων* (‘shameful/ugly loosening of pliant limbs’) that acrobats (here ἀρνευτήρες) perform according to Gregory of Nazianzus in his *Carmina Moralia* (904.2). In a few short lines from Claudian’s *Against Eutropius* (2.354-64), gathered chieftains debate the finest spectacle entertainers. It is questioned which boy makes the best revolution with their limbs (359-60: *vibrata puer vertigine molli membra rotet*) who can sweep the marble floor with their hair (360: *verrat quis marmora crine supino*), and who can most twist his side into a knotless arch (361: *enodes laterum detorqueat arcus*). Finally, in his *Homiliae to the People of Antioch* (19, 196d-197b), John Chrysostom writes of a youth whose limbs are softened (*καταμαλάττειν*) and twisted (*λγίζειν*), and who strives to bend (*κάμπτειν*) his entire body into the precise manner of a wheel (*ἀκρίβειαν τροχοῦ δίκην*) and to contort (*στρέφεισθαι*) upon the ground.<sup>524</sup> My chief identification for the acrobat remains inversion, not bending, since other movements involve twists and bends. For the generally negative tone for bodily metaphors of bending and twisting, see Worman (2009).

<sup>525</sup> *Bellas Musas – Terracotas de la Antigua Grecia*, June 1<sup>st</sup> to July 15<sup>th</sup>, J Bagot Gallery, Consell de Cent, Barcelona. Ref: 20141815 (<http://www.jbagot.com/obra/contortionist>, accessed July 29, 2015).

<sup>526</sup> Another terracotta (Taranto 52190) is molded into the same pose, but balanced on the stomach at the top of a Doric column and capital = Todisco (2013, MGS 44, pl. 22). Todisco (2013, 76) claims that the figure is “un personaggio maschile negroide nudo” and lists a tentative date of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. If the date is correct, this is the oldest example of a male thaumatopoietic acrobat.

red-figure Apulian pelike in Palermo, for instance, a young girl performs a gymnastic stunt next to a large hoop.<sup>527</sup> She balances on her hands and arches her body so that her legs hang in the air in front of her, above the ground-line delineated by her hands. The representation is similar to the generic pose, but shows her arched back, its curve not as acute, extended much farther forward (and practically giving a sense of dynamic movement). This acrobat is fully clothed, her garments billowing above her thighs as in other depictions, and she wears a coiled bracelet on both her left arm and left leg. Above her in the scene is a tympanum and to the left a hoop, just out of reach of her right foot.<sup>528</sup> The manipulation of hoops could be part of an acrobatic routine (cf. Xen. *Symp.* 2.8 and Artem. *Oneir.* 1.76), and that fact could explain its appearance here. But artistically, it also unifies person and thing through synonymy of shape. The presence of a hoop next to the acrobat is a cogent reminder that her body is rendered in ‘imitation’ of one, and that she is the performative embodiment of that circular object.

My final example of a dehumanized thaumatopoeitic acrobat is on a 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Campanian bell-krater in Sydney.<sup>529</sup> She wears a *perizoma*, leafy crown, jewelry around her wrists and ankles, and either a garland or band, which crosses between her bare breasts. Her body is arched into a semicircle, similar in most respects to a basic backbend or ‘bridge’, such as that illustrated on a mid 5<sup>th</sup> century Attic hydria in Madrid.<sup>530</sup> Here, as on the bell-krater, the acrobat keeps her hands and feet flat on the ground while arching the back upwards. What makes the pose on the krater remarkable is the position of the head and neck, which are underneath the body and orientated towards the legs (cf. Naples 81398 and Palermo 742). This is not a simple bend of the back, but a complete inversion of the body. Even more striking is the impression that the acrobat is walking in this position; the artist has clearly drawn a separation between each leg and each arm, as if to show the syncopated progression of limbs in the manner of a quadruped, but the

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<sup>527</sup> Palermo, Mormino Museum 742; ca. 350-340 B.C., in the manner of the Berkeley painter: Trendall and Cambitoglou (1978, 270, no. 68), Giudice, Tusa and Tusa (1992, no. H3, fig. 256).

<sup>528</sup> On the opposite side of the pelike a fully clothed woman stands holding her *chiton* and *himation* with her left hand, and clutches a single ball in her upraised right. Hughes (2010, 280 n. 36) labels both figures “jugglers, with ball and hoops”.

<sup>529</sup> Sydney, Nicholson Museum, Geddes Collection; ca. 335-315 B.C., attributed to the Danaid Painter.

<sup>530</sup> Madrid L 199 = 11129; ca. 440 B.C.: Beazley (1963, 1112/2, no. 1703), Romera (1973, fig. 32) Hughes (2008, fig. 5), Todisco (2013, G 98).

placement of the head makes the bearing insectile.<sup>531</sup> The contortionist stunt is not just an abnormal body, but an abnormal movement, reminiscent of Aristotle's mention of using the hands as feet (*EE* 8.1.1). As a four-legged creature, then, the acrobat is represented as enacting a moment of sub-humanity and performing an ostensible transformation of her body into an inhuman 'other'.

#### 4.6: Synopsis

The acrobatic body in spectacle is an extreme body, conspicuously abnormal, as in sport, and in both art and literature the emphasis is on its extraordinary difference. But the *kind* of acrobatic ability that the *thaumatopoiios* exhibits is as opposite to the male athletic tumbler as the respective social statuses of the performers. It thrives on the spectacle of its difference to create wonder, and temporarily initiates comparisons that translate the body into something less than human (e.g. a 'hoop') to explain its abnormality. As a result of this process of 'othering', the acrobat's objectified body approaches subhuman status. "The circus employs, amplifies, and makes into spectacle those resources available to it";<sup>532</sup> the same was true of Greek wonder-making, whose cultural presence sets the strictures for interpretation of the bodies and actions it features. The significance of the thaumatopoietic body depends on that cultural milieu in which it exists and operates, since body 'meaning' is inseparable from society. The spectacles of wonder-making were displays removed from the ordinary and remarkable for their oddness, but intrinsically of lesser value and status than 'true' wonder. In acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*, that oddness is the body in motion. The human form itself is amplified and spectacularized through its movement. In Athenian literature, there is little social value granted to wonder-making in general; accordingly its practitioners have low social status, but they also *perform* their low status. In the following chapter, I look at two case studies of specific acrobatic stunts to see how in performance and representation the thaumatopoietic body demonstrates its supposedly subhuman qualities and social inferiority.

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<sup>531</sup> The depiction of an acrobatic body on the sard scarab of a 4<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. Etruscan gold finger ring, now in the British Museum (1872,0604.23, Finger Ring 325, Gem 896), is probably the closest extant parallel, although it seems that here the body is both confined to the medium while filling it as completely as possible: see Zazoff (1968, no. 272, pl. 51.272).

<sup>532</sup> Bouissac (2010, 68).



## CHAPTER FIVE: SWORD-TUMBLING AND POTTERS' WHEELS

### 5.1: Sword-Tumbling

I argue in Chapter Four that the body of the thaumatopoeitic acrobat is represented as wondrous yet inferior, extraordinarily different from the 'normal' body of the spectator. In what ways do representations change when the semiotics of performance props are integrated with body semiotics? There is, for instance, abundant evidence for tumbling in and amongst upright swords in spectacular shows. The practice was apparently fairly widespread: evidence for it occurs in art and text from 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, in vase paintings from Hellenistic Magna Graecia, and in texts throughout the Roman period. How does the represented 'meaning' of movement in this stunt relate to the ideologies of the acrobatic body seen elsewhere? How do tumbles among swords contribute to the construction of the thaumatopoeitic acrobat as 'other'?

I begin this section with text and translation for all extant references to sword-tumbling in order to facilitate my later discussion. There has been no previous work of scholarship that adduces all the evidence for sword-tumbling, and a comprehensive perspective is vital for establishing the practical realities, which in turn influence the supposed 'meaning' of the act. For my initial focus on determining the pragmatics of performance I integrate an overview of artistic depictions with the literary evidence. The varied representations, disparate in time, place, and medium, are all products of their own social and cultural contexts, but still feature striking regularities in terms of language and bodily action. Tantalizing to interpretation of movement, too, is performance context. Previous scholarly arguments on sword-tumbling have not considered it as a type of wonder-making, but the socio-cultural significance of *thaumatopoiia* influences representations of the 'death-defying' stunt in every case and I analyze the feat using as a frame of reference the differences between supernatural, idealized *thauma* and mortal *thaumatopoiia*. Recognition that the performance is part of a commercial transaction as a commoditized spectacle designed for visual consumption allows for a more nuanced understanding of the criticisms leveled against it. Although the thaumatopoeitic acrobat displays a

triumphant narrative of overcoming deadly obstacles, which seems to make manifest the capabilities of her body, authors condemn the act for its staged and imitative peril.

**S-T 1. Xenophon *Symposium* 2.11:**

μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο κύκλος εἰσηνέχθη περίμεστος ξιφῶν ὀρθῶν. εἰς οὖν ταῦτα ἡ ὀρχηστρίς ἐκυβίστα τε καὶ ἐξεκυβίστα ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν. ὥστε οἱ μὲν θεώμενοι ἐφοβοῦντο μή τι πάθῃ, ἡ δὲ θαρροῦντως τε καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ταῦτα διεπράττετο.

After this a hoop was introduced, full all around with upright swords. The dancing girl kept tumbling into these and out again over them, so that those watching were afraid lest she suffer some harm, but she accomplished these things confidently and unerringly.

**S-T 2. Xenophon *Symposium* 7.2:**

δοκεῖ οὖν μοι τὸ μὲν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῶν κινδύνου ἐπίδειγμα εἶναι, ὃ συμποσίῳ οὐδὲν προσήκει.

Tumbling into swords, then, seems to me to be a display of danger, which is in no way befitting a symposium.

**S-T 3. Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.3.9-10:**

Εἰπέ μοι, ἔφη, ὃ Ξενοφῶν, οὐ σὺ Κριτόβουλον ἐνόμιζες εἶναι τῶν σωφρονικῶν ἀνθρώπων μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν θρασέων καὶ τῶν προνοητικῶν μᾶλλον ἢ τῶν ἀνοήτων τε καὶ ῥιψοκινδύνων;

Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ἔφη ὁ Ξενοφῶν.

Νῦν τοίνυν νόμιζε αὐτὸν θερμουργότατον εἶναι καὶ λεωργότατον· οὗτος κἂν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστήσῃε κἂν εἰς πῦρ ἄλοιτο.

Καὶ τί δή, ἔφη ὁ Ξενοφῶν, ἰδὼν ποιοῦντα τοιαῦτα κατέγνωκας αὐτοῦ;

Οὐ γὰρ οὗτος, ἔφη, ἐτόλμησε τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδου υἱὸν φιλεῖν, ὄντα εὐπροσωπότατον καὶ ὠραιότατον;

“Tell me, Xenophon”, he said, “Did you not reckon Critoboulus a temperate sort of man rather than brash, and with forethought rather than senseless and reckless?”

“Absolutely,” Xenophon replied.

“Well then, now consider him to be very hotheaded and impetuous. That man would even tumble into swords and leap into fire!”

“Why then,” said Xenophon, “what sorts of things have you seen him doing, to have disapproved of him?”

“Did he not,” he answered, “dare to kiss Alcibiades’ son, who is gorgeous and in his youthful prime?”

**S-T 4. Plato *Euthydemus* 294d-e**

ὁ γὰρ Κτήσιππος πάνυ ἀπαρακαλύπτως οὐδὲν ὅτι οὐκ ἠρώτα τελευτῶν, καὶ τὰ αἰσχιστα, εἰ ἐπισταίσθην· τὼ δὲ ἀνδρειότατα ὁμόσε ἤτην τοῖς ἐρωτήμασιν, ὁμολογοῦντες εἰδέναι, ὥσπερ οἱ κάπροι οἱ πρὸς τὴν πληγὴν ὁμόσε ὠθοῦμενοι, ὥστ' ἔγωγε καὶ αὐτός, ὦ Κρίτων, ὑπ' ἀπιστίας ἠναγκάσθην τελευτῶν ἐρέσθαι [τὸν Εὐθύδημον] εἰ καὶ ὀρχεῖσθαι ἐπίσταιτο ὁ Διονυσόδωρος·

ὁ δέ, Πάνυ, ἔφη.

Οὐ δῆπου, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, καὶ ἐς μαχαίρας γε κυβιστῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τροχοῦ δινεῖσθαι τηλικούτος ὢν, οὕτω πόρρω σοφίας ἤκεις;

Οὐδέν, ἔφη, ὅτι οὔ.

In the end, there was nothing which Ctesippus did not ask quite overtly if the pair knew, even the most shameful things. And the two were very bold in face of the questions, agreeing, just as boars forced to meet a blow, that they had the knowledge, so that even I myself, Crito, felt compelled by disbelief to finally ask [Euthydemus] if Dionysodorus also knew how to dance.

“Of course,” he said.

“But surely,” I said, “you have not come to such a degree of skill that you can even tumble into swords and be whirled upon a wheel, at your age?”

“There is nothing,” he said, “that I cannot do.”

**S-T 5. Democritus fr. D92 (Taylor) = D-K 68 B 228:**

οἱ τῶν φειδωλῶν παῖδες ἀμαθέες γινόμενοι, ὥσπερ οἱ ὀρχησται οἱ ἐς τὰς μαχαίρας ὀρούοντες, ἦν ἐνὸς μούνου <μῆ> τύχῳσι καταφερόμενοι, ἐνθα δεῖ τοὺς πόδας ἐρεῖσαι, ἀπόλλυνται· χαλεπὸν δὲ τυχεῖν ἐνός, τὸ γὰρ ἴχνιον μούνον λέλλειπται τῶν ποδῶν· οὕτω δὲ καὶ οὗτοι, ἦν ἀμάρτωσι τοῦ πατρικοῦ τύπου τοῦ ἐπιμελέος καὶ φειδωλοῦ, φιλέουσι διαφθεῖρεσθαι.

When the children of misers are ignorant, they are just like dancers who rush towards swords: if they do <not> happen to put their feet down in the one lone place where they need to fix them, they are ruined. And it is difficult to get the one spot, for only room for a footprint is available. So also those ones, if they miss out on their father's careful and frugal model, are wont to be ruined.

**S-T 6. Hippolochus of Macedon *ap. Ath.* 4.129d:**

ἡσυχίας δὲ γενομένης ἐπεισβάλλουσιν ἡμῖν οἱ κἂν τοῖς Χύτροις τοῖς Ἀθήνησι λειτουργήσαντες. μεθ' οὓς εἰσηλθόν ἰθύφαλλοι καὶ σκληροπαῖκται καὶ τινες καὶ θαυματουργοὶ γυναῖκες εἰς ξίφη κυβιστῶσαι καὶ πῦρ ἐκ τοῦ στόματος ἐκριπίζουσαι γυμναί.

When it got quiet, those who perform duties at the Festival of Pots in Athens assailed us. Next came in ithyphallic dancers and *skleropaiktai* [‘hard-players’], and also some marvel-working women who tumbled into swords and blew fire from their mouths – naked!

**S-T 7. Philodemus *Rh. 2 Pherc.* 1674 col. XL.24 – XLI.32 = Longo 127-129:<sup>533</sup>**

τὰς δ' ἐπιτυχίας καὶ ἀπ[ο-  
 τυ[χίας ἐ]μ[π]ειρίαν μὲν  
 κα[ὶ πα]ρατ[ή]ρησιν καὶ ἄ-  
 σκησιν]καὶ [π]ᾶν τὸ τ[ο]ιοῦ-  
 το προ]σαγορεύομεν, τέ-  
 χνη]ν δ' οὐδαμῶς . . .

καὶ τοῦ καλο[ῦ] παρα-  
 τ]ετήρηκεν, π[ῶ]ς ἑαυ-  
 τὸν στῆσαι δεῖ καὶ πῶς [κι-  
 ν]εῖ[σθ]αι καὶ ποῦ τ[ὸν π]όδα  
 θεῖναι καὶ ποῖ σ[υ]νεπι-  
 νεύειν, [ἄ]μ[α] παρατε[τ]ή-  
 ρηκε, τίνα μόνον, καὶ  
 μόνος το[ῦ]ργον π[ο]ιεῖ καὶ  
 δι[ὰ] παντός· μέ[θ]οδ[ον]  
 δὲ καὶ στοιχειώδη [τινὰ  
 παρά]δοσιν διὰ πλ[ειό-  
 νων δι[ή]κου]σαν ὥσπερ  
 γραμματιστής, ὥσπερ μο[υ-  
 σικός, οὐκ ἔχει. τὸ δ' [ὄ]μ[οι-  
 ον καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν π[ε]τ[α]υ[ρι-  
 ζομένων καὶ τὰς μαχαί-  
 ρας ὑπεραλλομένων [ἔ]τυ-  
 χε· κᾶν τούτους δὲ ἔχειν  
 τέχνην ἐγβιάζη[τ]αί τις,  
 ἀλλ' οὐ[χ]ὶ τὸν συνδ[έ]τη[ν]  
 κακίω [εἶναι] τῶν ξ[ύλων ἢ  
 φακ[έ]λ[ων] καὶ βαστάζο[ν]-  
 τα καὶ [τὸν] ἐπιτευκ[τι-  
 κ[ῶ]ς κ[λέπ]τοντα καὶ ψευ-  
 δόμενον καὶ τὸν ἔμ[π]ο-  
 ρον τὸν ἀγαθὸν καὶ τὸν  
 κυν[ηγ]έτην καὶ πά[ν]τας  
 τοὺς παραπλησίους.

<sup>533</sup> Translation by Chandler (2006), slightly modified.

As for “hit-and-miss” activities, we term them “skill” or “observation” or “practice”, and all that sort of thing, but on no account “art”, [because we assert] that that which has these things all the time is the same thing as art, but [not according] to differences too...

*three lines too fragmentary*

...and of the beautiful, he has observed how he must position himself, and how he must walk, and where he must put his foot, and in what direction he must gesture, but he has observed only certain details, and alone accomplishes the task and on every occasion. But he does not possess method and a certain transmission of elementary (precepts) which pervades the majority of cases, as the grammarian and the musician do.

The same kind of thing goes for those who use the *petauron* and who leap over swords. And even if someone insists that these possess art, he will not say that the man who binds sticks together is worse, nor the man who lifts (heavy loads), nor the man who steals and lies successfully, or the good merchant, or the hunter, and all people like these.

### **S-T 8. Musonius Rufus *Discourse* 7.6**

ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν ἄρα θαυματοποιοὶ δύσκολα οὕτως ὑφίστανται πράγματα καὶ τὴν ζωὴν παραβάλλοντα τὴν ἑαυτῶν, οἱ μὲν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῶντες, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ κάλων μετέωροι βαδίζοντες, οἱ δ' ὥσπερ ὄρνεα πετόμενοι διὰ τοῦ ἀέρος, ὧν τὸ σφάλμα θάνατός ἐστιν. καὶ ταῦτα

πάντα δρῶσι μικροῦ χάριν μισθοῦ· ἡμεῖς δ' οὐκ ἀνεξόμεθα ταλαιπωρεῖν ὑπὲρ εὐδαιμονίας ὅλης;

But wonder-makers undertake such difficult tasks and risk their own lives, some tumbling into swords, others walking in midair on ropes, and others flying through the air like birds – for which failure is death. And they do all these things for the sake of meagre pay. But will we, on the other hand, not bear up to endure hardship for utter happiness?

### **S-T 9. Philostratus *Life of Apollonius* 7.13.1:**

Ἦττηθεὶς δ' ὁ Δάμις τῶν τοῦ Δημητρίου λόγων “ἀλλὰ σύ γε” ἔφη “φίλος ἀνδρὶ παρὼν γένοιο ἂν ἀγαθόν τι τούτῳ μέγα, ἐμοῦ γὰρ σμικρὸς λόγος, εἰ συμβουλευοίμι αὐτῷ μὴ κυβιστᾶν ἐς ὀρθὰ ξίφη, μηδ' ἀναρριπτεῖν πρὸς τυραννίδα, ἧς οὐ χαλεπωτέρα ἐνομίσθη.

Yielding to Demetrius’ arguments, Damis said, “Well, if you are present with the man as a friend, it would be some great good for him. For there is little account of me, if I should counsel to him not to tumble into upright swords, or not to make a throw toward tyranny, than which nothing is considered more difficult.”

**S-T 10. Artemidorus *Oneirocritica* 1.76:**

τὸ δὲ πυρριχίζειν τὸ αὐτὸ τῷ ὀρχεῖσθαι σημαίνει. τροχοπαικτεῖν δὲ ἢ μαχαίραις περιδινεῖσθαι ἢ ἐκκυβιστᾶν τοῖς μὲν ἔθος ἔχουσιν οὐ πονηρόν, τοῖς δὲ λοιποῖς εἰς ἔσχατον ἐλάσαι κίνδυνον προσημαίνει. τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ καλοπαίζοντα ἰδεῖν προαγορεύει.

Performing a *pyrrhiche* signifies the same thing as dancing. To play with hoops or to whirl around with swords or to tumble backwards<sup>534</sup> is not a grievous thing for those to whom this is customary, but for the rest it announces that they are driving towards the utmost peril. Seeing rope-players (tightrope walkers?) designates the same thing.

**S-T 11. Aelian *Rustic Letters* 16:<sup>535</sup>**

τί γάρ με διαφθεῖραι γλίχῃ, τί δὲ σπεύδεις ἀπολέσαι με εἰς ἐστίασιν καὶ θοίην παρακαλῶν; ... σὺ δέ μοι καὶ αὐλητρίδας προσεῖεις καὶ ῥόδας, ὧ καταγέλαστε. ἐπὶ μὲν δὴ τούτοις κᾶν ὦμοῦ πασαίμην σου. καλὰ δέ σου κᾶκεῖνα, ὀρχήσασθαι καὶ ὀμιλῆσαι κόρη θερμότατα. σὺ μὲν μοι δοκεῖς κᾶν εἰς πῦρ ἀλέσθαι κᾶν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῆσαι, ἐμοὶ δὲ μήτε θύων εἷς φίλος μήτε ἄλλως.

Why do you strive to ruin me? Why are you set to destroy me, inviting me to a banquet and feast? ... You brandish flute girls and songs at me, you preposterous man. Under these circumstances I could eat you raw. Those things of yours are also lovely, to dance and have a sultry get-together with a girl. You seem to me likely even to leap into fire or tumble into swords, but may you be no friend of mine, neither with sacrifices nor otherwise.

**S-T 12. Libanius *Letters* 1411.2:**

οὔτε γὰρ τὸν καιρὸν ἀγνοεῖ καὶ λογισμῷ πανταχοῦ χρῆται μᾶλλον ἢ τόλμῃ τὸν τε σὸν ἐπιστάμενος θυμὸν οὐδ' εἰ σφόδρα ἡλίθιος ἦν, οὕτως ἂν εἰς μαχαίρας ἐκυβίστησεν.

For he is not ignorant of the right moment, and he uses calculation in every case rather than daring. And knowing your heart/courage (even if he were not very foolish), so would he tumble into swords.

**S-T 13. John Chrysostom *Ad Eos Qui Scandalizati Sunt* 23.3:**

Οὐ γὰρ οὕτω τότε μὴ ἐνοχλουμένη πάντας ἐπαίδευσεν ὡς νῦν τὴν οἰκουμένην διδάσκει καρτερεῖν, ἐγκρατεῦεσθαι, φέρειν πειρασμούς, ὑπομονὴν ἐπιδείκνυσθαι, καταφρονεῖν τῶν βιωτικῶν, μηδὲν ἡγεῖσθαι πλοῦτον, καταγελᾶν τιμῆς, ὑπερορᾶν θανάτου, καταφρονεῖν ζωῆς, πατρίδα παρορᾶν, οἰκείους, φίλους, συγγενεῖς, πρὸς σφαγὰς

<sup>534</sup> For the meaning ‘tumble backwards’ for ἐκκυβιστᾶν, see Chapter One.

<sup>535</sup> For textual issues, none of which drastically alter the sense of the passage for my current arguments, see Benner and Fobes (1949, *ad loc.*).

ἀποδύεσθαι παντοδαπάς, κατὰ ξιφῶν κυβιστᾶν, τὰ λαμπρὰ ἅπαντα τοῦ παρόντος βίου, τιμὰς λέγω καὶ δόξας καὶ δυναστείαν καὶ τρυφήν, τῶν ἡρινῶν ἀνθῶν εὐτελέστερα εἶναι νομίζειν.

For perhaps, not being such a trouble then, she instructed everyone as she is now teaching the whole world: to be steadfast, to exercise self-control, to endure trials, to display endurance, to look down on lively things, not to accrue wealth, to mock honour, to disdain death, to look down on life, to disregard the fatherland, family, friends, kinsmen, to strip down for every sort of slaughter, to tumble down onto swords, and to consider all the illustrious things of the life at hand - I mean honours and reputations and dominance and luxuriousness – to be more paltry than spring blooms.

**S-T 14. John Chrysostom *De Sancta Droside Martyre* 50.688:**

Καὶ καθάπερ οἱ μεμνηότες οὐδὲν τῶν ὀρωμένων βλέπουσιν ὡς ἔστιν, ἀλλὰ κἂν ξίφος ἠκονημένον ἴδωσι, κυβιστῶσιν εὐκόλως, κἂν πυρὰν, κἂν βάραθρον, κἂν κρημνὸν, κἂν πέλαγος, κἂν ὀτιοῦν ἕτερον, ἀδεῶς κατὰ πάντων ἑαυτοὺς ἀφιᾶσιν.

For just as those driven mad do not see, of the things beheld, how it is, but even if they look upon a sharpened sword they tumble readily, and if a fire, or pit, or cliff, or the sea, or any other thing at all, fearlessly they cast themselves down onto everything.

**S-T 15. Clement of Alexandria *Stromata* 7.11.66.3:**

ἐπεὶ καὶ τοὺς παῖδας λεγέτω τις ἀνδρείους ἀγνοία τῶν δεινῶν ὑφισταμένους τὰ φοβερὰ (ἄπτονται γοῦν οὗτοι καὶ πυρός), καὶ τὰ θηρία τὰ ὁμόσε ταῖς λόγχαις πορευόμενα ἀλόγως ὄντα ἀνδρεῖα ἐνάρετα λεγόντων. τάχα δ' οὕτως καὶ τοὺς θαυματοποιούς ἀνδρείους φήσουσιν εἰς τὰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῶντας ἐξ ἐμπειρίας τινὸς κακοτεχνοῦντας ἐπὶ λυπρῷ τῷ μισθῷ.

Then let someone say that children are brave, who by their ignorance of dangers undertake fearful things (indeed, they even touch fire), or let them claim that beasts are bold and daring, which without reckoning rush forth to face the spears. And perhaps they thus say that marvel-makers are brave, who tumble into swords from a certain experience of using base arts for meagre payment.

**S-T 16. Gregorius Nyssenus *Sermo in Sanctum Romanum* 96.476**

Οὐ μήρυνθον λεπτὴν διαθέουσιν οἱ θαυματοποιοὶ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, οὐδὲ ξίφεσιν ἐπικυβιστῶντες γυμνοῖς τέχνη τὰς πληγὰς διαφεύγουσι, ἀλλ' ἀντὶ μὲν σχοινίου τὴν στενὴν καὶ ἀμφίκρημον τῆς εὐσεβείας ὁδὸν ἀσαλεύτῳ βήματι διατρέγουσι.

Christ's marvel-makers do not run across a thin cord, nor tumbling upon bare swords do they avoid with [their] art the blows, but instead of a rope they traverse the narrow and precipitous path of reverence.

**S-T 17. Stephanus *Comm. Ar. Rhet.* 3.81 ad 1408b36:**

ἡ ἐνόπλιος, ἣ χρῶνται οἱ στρατιῶται κατὰ ξιφῶν καὶ μετὰ ξιφῶν κυβιστῶντες καὶ οἱ ἐν ταῖς γαμηλίοις παιδιαῖς παίζοντες μετὰ σπάθης

. . . the armed dance, which soldiers use (they tumble down on swords and with swords) as do those who dance with a broad blade at wedding games.

Xenophon describes sword-tumbling succinctly in his *Symposium*, and his sketch is a good starting point for considering its practical realities (S-T 1). Here the swords are fastened to a hoop or wheel (κύκλος), which keeps them firmly upright and demarcates the area into and out of which the *orchestris* (dancer) must tumble. The fact that the sword-studded circle is a prop fashioned before the performance, not an impromptu creation or item appropriated for a stunt (as, e.g., a stool or cup), suggests a certain level of professionalism. No other textual account of sword-tumbling mentions the configuration of the blades. It is possible that they were sometimes arranged otherwise, such as in a line, or that only a single or few swords were used. A fragment from Democritus, for instance, does not require the reading that the blades are arranged in a circle, but it does testify to the closeness of the blades and the performer's necessary precision (S-T 5). This corresponds to Xenophon's adjective *perimestos*, 'all around' for the swords in the hoop. Compactly arranged sword blades make performative sense: they intensify the danger, and thus the impressive spectacle of the feat. The only other evidence for a circular arrangement of the blades is an early Hellenistic terracotta statuette from Chalkis, now in Athens.<sup>536</sup> The sculpted woman, nude with traces of white paint remaining, balances inverted in the generic pose on her forearms not her hands, back arched and legs dangling overhead. She performs in the middle of a discernible hoop, which is studded at intervals with small triangles (some now broken away) representing blades. Other artistic representations of sword-tumbling illustrate the blades standing upright in a line, perhaps (but not certainly) for the simple reason that they lack a three-dimensional perspective. The line could be merely an abstraction of the hoop of

<sup>536</sup> Athens, NM 13605; ca. 320-280 B.C.: Davies (1971, pl. 47.4, with bibliography at 151 n. 17), van den Hoek and Herrmann (2013, fig. 2); N.B. it is not a 'half-circle of swords' as van den Hoek and Herrmann (2013, 183) assert, but a full circle.



swords, and the few blades could signify many. On a red-figure Attic hydria by Polygnotos, from Nola, a nude woman runs upright toward a line of three swords while a clothed *auletris* (flutist) plays in accompaniment.<sup>537</sup> There is nothing in the posture of the runner herself to mark her as an acrobat, but the presence of a contortionist drinking from a kylix to the immediate left of the flutist confirms that the scene is acrobatic. The acrobat on a Gnathian squat lekythos from Ruvo also performs among three swords in a row, but she stands on her feet between the first and second, and arches backward almost in half to reach her hands down in front of the third blade.<sup>538</sup> The woman appears topless but wears billowing skirts over her tight-fitted leggings, and her long hair hangs down between the weapons.<sup>539</sup> Three swords also stand in a line on a lekythos from Avella, where a female acrobat clothed only in a *perizoma* balances in the generic pose and lifts her legs directly over the blade in front of her.<sup>540</sup> That pose is mirrored by the woman on an Apulian bell-krater in a private collection in Geneva, although this acrobat performs between just two swords, one of which is ominously close to her head.<sup>541</sup> She too is topless, but wears billowing skirts, bracelets, and a jewelled hairband. On an Apulian plate in The Hague, a similarly clad acrobat executes the stunt with the familiar generic pose, but one of her feet hovers just barely above the lone sword in the depiction.<sup>542</sup> Finally, a fragmentary Italian terracotta takes the form of an acrobat balanced on her (?)

<sup>537</sup> Naples 81398 = H3232; ca. 450-440 B.C. For a sample of bibliography for this well known vase, see e.g.: Beazley (1963, 1032, no. 61), Poursat (1968, no. 46, fig. 50), Beazley (1971, 442), Davies (1971, pl. 47.1, 3), Carpenter (1989, 318), Matheson (1995, P 67, pl. 14 A-D), Schäfer (1997, pl. 43.1-2), Bundrick (2005, fig. 55), van den Hoek and Herrmann (2013, fig. 1a). Lewis (2002, 31) dates the vase from 440-430, Németh (2005, 70) to 430, while the Beazley Archive Online dates it broadly to 475-425 (vase no. 213444, with some further bibliography). The date 450-440 is from Matheson (1995, P 67).

<sup>538</sup> Berlin, Staatliche Museen F 3489; ca. 340-330 B.C.: Bieber (1961, fig. 579b), Davies (1971, pl. 47.5, with bibliography at 151 n. 17), Schneider-Herrmann (1982, pl. 141.3), van den Hoek and Herrmann (2013, fig. 3).

<sup>539</sup> The acrobat's clothing is paralleled elsewhere, but she is rare for being illustrated with her hair hanging down to the ground (cf. St. Petersburg, Hermitage B 1691, Taranto 143496, and Crates fr. 34) and for a pose other than the 'usual'.

<sup>540</sup> Naples H 2854; ca. 350-300 B.C. Weege (1976, fig. 177), Davies (1971, pl. 47.2), Schneider-Herrmann (1982, pl. 141.1-2), Pecoraro (1994, 168, fig. 7), Todisco (2013, MGS 41).

<sup>541</sup> Geneva, Fiorella Cottier-Angeli Collection; ca. 340-330 B.C., by a painter of the Chevrons group: Aellen et al. (1986, 199-201), Németh (2005, 50), Todisco (2013, MGS 29).

<sup>542</sup> The Hague, priv. coll. Schneider-Herrmann 201; ca. 330-325 B.C.: Trendall and Cambitoglou (1978, pl. 234.1), Schneider-Herrmann (1982, pl. 140.1), Todisco (2013, MGS 31). Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 502) connects this plate with another depicting a woman spinning a top on her arm, which he calls "an acrobat mime dancer" (The Hague, priv. coll. Schneider-Herrmann 198), but this latter example is no acrobat. She stands upright, and there is nothing to connect her ability to spin a top with acrobats; cf. a similarly mislabelled 'acrobat' who spins a top in the scene on St. Petersburg B 485: see State Hermitage Museum (2005, no. 45).

forearms and gripping what looks to be a sword in either hand.<sup>543</sup> This is unlike all other depictions of sword-tumbling, and could represent a different sort of acrobatic feat. Aside from this anomaly, the artistic evidence for sword-tumbling is conspicuously regular, despite differences in time and place: nude or semi-nude acrobats, mostly depicted in the generic pose, traverse through or among bared swords with their extraordinary form of motion.<sup>544</sup>

The relatively consistent representation of sword-tumbling in the artistic sources is matched in texts by the regularity of phrasing for these acrobatic *thaumata*. Almost all authors use the verb κυβιστᾶν, ‘to tumble’ to qualify the motion, which implies that a headlong plunge was virtually requisite for the stunt. In addition to the first reference in *Symposium* (S-T 1), Xenophon recalls the entertainment later in that work with a similar expression (S-T 2: τὸ μὲν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστᾶν). Nearly this precise phrase is found also in his *Memorabilia* (S-T 3: κἄν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστήσειε), as well as in Plato’s *Euthydemus* (S-T 4: ἐς μαχαίρας γε κυβιστᾶν), Musonius Rufus’ *Seventh Discourse* (S-T 8: οἱ μὲν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῶντες), Aelian’s *Rustic Letters* (S-T 11: εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστήσαι), Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* (S-T 15: εἰς τὰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῶντας) and Libanius’ *Letters* (S-T 12: ἄν εἰς μαχαίρας ἐκυβίστησεν). The variant ξίφη for μαχαίρας in this formulaic phrasing occurs in Athenaeus’ summary of a letter by Hippolochus of Macedon (S-T 6: θαυματουργοὶ γυναῖκες εἰς ξίφη κυβιστῶσαι) and Philostratus’ *Life of Apollonius* (S-T 9: μὴ κυβιστᾶν ἐς ὀρθὰ ξίφη), where the swords are also said to stand point up (a few more instances of the variant ξίφη are noted below). In each of these cases the reference is presumably to an activity similar to that showcased in the *Symposium*, although that passage is unique in recording tumbles in *and* out of the hoop (S-T 1: εἰς οὖν ταῦτα ἢ ὀρχηστρίδες ἐκυβίστα τε καὶ ἐξεκυβίστα ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν). There are a few instances, however, where authors do not describe the action as ‘tumbling’, nor the participants as ‘acrobats’ or ‘wonder-makers’. In the Democritus fragment, ‘dancers rush to the swords’ (S-T 5: οἱ ὀρχησταὶ οἱ ἐς τὰς μαχαίρας ὀρούοντες), and the noun

<sup>543</sup> Berlin, Staatliche Museen 7863; 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.: Deonna (1953, fig. 53), Davies (1971, 151 n. 17); Todisco (2013, MGS 50).

<sup>544</sup> A male-sword tumbler is apparently shown on pelike fragments in the Metropolitan Museum (1978.347.2a-h = Beazley (1963, 238.10)), which shows, according to Giroux and Bothmer in Carpenter (1989, 201), “a man in armour somersaulting over three upright swords”. See my discussion of male tumblers in chapters 1-3.

gives as vague a suggestion of action as the fairly nondescript ὀρούειν. In Artemidorus, the participants ‘whirl about with swords’, but while that action itself might not involve acrobatics, the context of dance and circus is clear (S-T 10: μαχαίραις περιδινεῖσθαι ἢ ἐκκυβιστᾶν...).<sup>545</sup> Similarly, when Philodemus mentions sword-tumbling, he writes of ‘leaping over’ the weapons, but here, too, the context is of acrobatics (S-T 7: καὶ τῶν π[ε]τ[α]υ[ρι]-ζομένων καὶ τὰς μαχαίρας ὑπεραλλομένων...). As a final point with regard to formulaic phrasing and verbal echoes, I note that almost every reference to sword-tumbling performances uses the preposition εἰς / ἐς, with a few exceptions. Xenophon has ἐξ- and ὑπέρ, and Philodemus just ὑπέρ-. Ps-Plutarch includes κατὰ μαχαίρων κυβιστᾶς (‘should you tumble down/against swords’) in a ‘list of impossible things’ (ἐκλογή περὶ τῶν ἀδυνάτων line 49),<sup>546</sup> similar to John Chrysostom’s κατὰ ξιφῶν κυβιστᾶν (S-T 13) and the grammarian Stephanus’ confusion or conflation of acrobats and pyrrhic dancers as οἱ στρατιῶται κατὰ ξιφῶν καὶ μετὰ ξιφῶν κυβιστῶντες (S-T 17).<sup>547</sup> Gregory of Nyssa is unique in his use of the rare compound ἐπικυβιστῶντες for the activity, but his emphasis that the blades are bared (S-T 16: ξίφεσιν... γυμνοῖς), accords with other accounts or representations of sword-tumbling.<sup>548</sup>

What can we infer from the more or less regular phrasing? From this diachronic overview it is evident that the act of sword-tumbling, from a spectator’s point of view at least, had as its *raison d’être* throughout antiquity an acrobatic movement into/toward bared upright blades. As a cross-cultural comparison, the Roman material is a beneficial parallel for understanding the Greek practice, since the actual procedures of the stunt remained, to judge by the phrasing of it at least, more or less unchanged. The language emphasizes the action rather than its potential completion, as do artistic representations. The focus is on

<sup>545</sup> It is possible that the ‘whirling about with swords’ should be taken closely with Artemidorus’ mention of the performance of the pyrrhic weapon dance, but given that it is sandwiched between τροχοπαικτεῖν (‘to play with a hoop’) and ἐκκυβιστᾶν (‘to tumble [backwards]’), it perhaps has more to do with ‘circus’ shows than dance. A potential candidate is the activity of the ὀπλοπαικτῆς/ ὀπλοπεκτῆς (‘weapon player’) who specializes in the thumatoepoietic manipulation of weapons (e.g. Vett.Val.74.13; cf. Tacitus *Ger.* 24: see Robert (1969, 424) for brief comments).

<sup>546</sup> Ps.-Plutarch’s inclusion of ‘tumbling down/against swords’ in a list of things *truly* impossible (e.g. shooting a star with an arrow, making a statue laugh) is puzzling.

<sup>547</sup> Cf. Aelian *De Nat. An.* 5.54.30, where apes ‘tumble down’ (κατεκυβίστησαν) on the corpse of a leopard with ‘a mocking dance appropriate to apes’ (κατεκυβίστησαν καὶ κατορχήσαντο κέρτομόν τινα καὶ πιθήκοις πρέπουσαν ὄρχησιν).

<sup>548</sup> Prepositions are practically the rule; the exception is John Chrysostom in S-T 14: κἄν ξίφος ἠκονημένον ἴδωσι, κυβιστῶσιν εὐκόλως.

the acrobatics *in progress*, and as a dangerous stunt there is nothing to imply its eventual fulfillment or imminent failure. We can compare the semantics of the modern phrase ‘death-defying’, typical for a circus context, which implies success. The emphasis on acrobatic action in progress might connote any number of actual gymnastic movements (e.g. a handspring, a walkover, a cartwheel, etc.). The verb *kubistan* is nonspecific, and the generic pose in art, being conventional, offers little clue. Different performers and performances no doubt featured different bodily *thaumata* and techniques, though apparently almost always a ‘tumble’ of some kind; textual references to any other movement are atypical (Democritus, Philodemus; cf. Artemidorus). In any case, it is likely that sword-tumbling involved multiple advances among/over the swords, as the imperfect tenses in the *Symposium* suggest (S-T 1: ἐκυβίστα τε καὶ ἐξεκυβίστα). A performer might have attempted the stunt quickly or slowly: the acrobat on the Attic hydria (Naples 81398) apparently approaches at a run, and Democritus’ dancers ‘rush’ toward the blades (S-T 5).<sup>549</sup> Completing the feat rapidly might emphasize the performer’s outstanding proficiency in producing *thaumata* and make them all the more impressive. In contrast, two artistic examples depict sword-tumbling acrobats balanced on their forearms (Athens NM 13605 and Berlin 7863), which probably represent less dynamic and (potentially) more exhibitionistic motion. Such a style might take time to exaggerate the oddity of the body’s movement.

Sword-tumbling was intimately connected with dance. Xenophon, for instance, consistently refers to the sympotic entertainer in his dialogue as an *orchestris*. In the Democritus fragment *orchestai* step among swords, and although the philosopher uses the phrase ἐς τὰς μαχαίρας, ‘towards swords’, it is surely significant that they place their *feet* among the blades, not their hands. These (male) dancers may not be acrobats at all.<sup>550</sup> In the *Euthydemus*, the incredulous question whether Dionysodorus even knows how to

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<sup>549</sup> In the *Memorabilia* passage (S-T 3), the superlative hotheadedness and rashness exhibited by the one who tumbles upon swords could imply speed in performance, too.

<sup>550</sup> In which case we have a version of the same stunt that features (only?) dance, not acrobatics, since surely Democritus refers to a similar activity. It was apparently still a dangerous spectacle, and might still be considered within the realm of *thaumatopoiia*. It should be noted, too, that Democritus was supposedly well traveled and we do not know where he may have witnessed this particular version of the stunt. Davies (1971, 151) suggests that sword-tumbling as a practice (quite apart from Democritus’ reference) “came to Greece and Italy from the East”, but simply because evidence for Hittite acrobatics (which he adduces) predates the Greek evidence does not necessarily indicate cultural transmission.

tumble into swords and spin on a wheel immediately follows the confirmation that he can dance, as if modifying it.<sup>551</sup> A few centuries later, Artemidorus' interpretation of dreams about acrobatic feats follows his response to those about dancing, and precedes his assessment of dreams featuring singing and music.<sup>552</sup> To return to Classical Athens, the Polygnotos hydria shows a flute-player accompanying the performance, contributing to its rhythmic aspects and adding another dimension to the experience, while also helping to keep time for the performer. Illustrations of different feats also feature musicians, and it is possible that musical accompaniment for acrobatic performance was frequent. Considering this musical presence, and that acrobatic manoeuvres could be included in choreography generally, it is no surprise that sword-tumbling was connected with dance. Certainly if we follow a definition of dance as something along the lines of 'rhythmic and/or harmonious motion in accompaniment to music', which is admittedly broad, we can place sword-tumbling, and indeed all thaumatopoietic acrobatics, under that umbrella. However, even though it is a form of dance, it is not *just* dance, since there is no doubt that sword-tumbling was *thaumatopoiia*. The performer in Xenophon is 'one of those able to make wonders,' (2.1: τῶν τὰ θαύματα δυναμένων ποιεῖν), and Socrates at length contemplates the nature of her performed marvels (7.2-5). Hippolochus of Macedon calls the naked, fire-breathing, sword-tumblers θαυματουργοὶ γυναῖκες, 'wonder-working women'. According to the much later testimony of Musonius Rufus, Clement of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa, sword-tumblers continued to be considered *thaumatopoiioi* in the Roman Empire. In sum, then, representations of sword-tumbling in art and text demonstrate that the activity realized a convergence of dance, spectacular wonder-making, and physicality.

So much for the practicalities of sword-tumbling as a form of spectacular Greek entertainment; I now contextualize the accounts and representations of it with respect to the phenomenon of *thaumatopoiia* and the cultural significance of the performative bodies. As mentioned, standard imagery and verbal formulae suggest, more or less, continuity of practice for sword-tumbling in Greek and Roman culture. However, the

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<sup>551</sup> Hawtrey (1981 on 294d7ff.) hypothesizes that the passage implies sympotic dance.

<sup>552</sup> Philodemus' passing reference to acrobats may follow on the heels of a reference to a dancer (as Hubbell (1920, 277)), or perhaps to an actor or orator (as Chandler (2006, 98)).

resonance of the performative bodies with social or cultural values and ideologies depends on the respective contexts: whether Greek or Roman, what time and place within those cultural categories, whether represented in art or literature, what medium or genre, etc. Xenophon and Plato, the two Classical Athenian authors who mention sword-tumbling, present it as a dangerous and extreme pursuit associated with youth, foolishness, and *thaumatopoiia*, whose practitioners complete their tasks with nonchalance (S-T 1 through 4; cf. S-T 5 and 6). In 4<sup>th</sup> century South-Italian art, a thaumatopoietic body in the generic acrobatic pose confronts multiple swords, and capitalizes on its extraordinary form and idiosyncratic motion to avoid them. The female acrobats are sexualized and spectacularized through their partial nudity, but that nudity also emphasizes the danger they face by exposing their bare skin to the weapons (as on Naples 81398 from Athens). In all these contexts, it is the body in the act of *thaumatopoiia* that overcomes a dangerous obstacle. The acrobatic tumbling in and amongst the sword blades (or the feats of balance on the forearms) combine the exhibition of a performer's highly specialized physical abilities with the additional risk of death. If the acrobat's superlative ability fails, her performance becomes similar to a suicide in the familiar mode of falling upon a weapon (as Davies argued with respect to artistic representation of Ajax' suicide: see discussion below).<sup>553</sup> There is no room for error (N.B. the emphasis on the closeness of the blades in art and Democritus' fragment S-T 5), and no doubt accidents happened in reality.<sup>554</sup> We might compare fatal accidents in modern circus shows, whose possibility adds to the suspense of the performance. The circus is not 'safe', and because of the peril spectators watch more intently. They might become emotionally invested in the performance and so viscerally connect with the performative body through the experience of kinesthetic empathy and/or somatic memory, 'living through' the performer.<sup>555</sup>

The sources recognize the potential danger in sword-tumbling from the perspective of bodily experiences. In Plato's *Euthydemus* (S-T 4), the acknowledgment of the great skill

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<sup>553</sup> Davies (1971).

<sup>554</sup> We hear of acrobatic accidents in the Roman period (e.g. Petron. 54.1, Suet. *Life of Nero* 12.2), but not in the Greek period. On the failure of Philip the 'laughter-maker' in Xenophon's *Symposium* to perform acrobatically (2.22), see Chapter 4.5.

<sup>555</sup> See Bouissac (2012, 47) on the modern phenomena of spectatorship and audience responses at the circus. For a discussion of kinesthetic empathy, see also in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4.5.

required in sword-tumbling, even if it is there an example of a trivial pursuit, presupposes the difficulty of the activity.<sup>556</sup> But Xenophon's *Symposium* provides an especially rich example of spectator engagement with thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, when the guests watch the dancer travel in and out of the hoop of swords with rapt attention, and fear that she may suffer harm (S-T 1). Spectator engagement here promotes a more profound inter-subjective experience with the thaumatopoeitic body. As they 'live through' the performance and performative body, the spectators' tension is increased, since they potentially identify (to some extent) with a body that could suffer harm. At the same time, as they behold the impressive physicality, which is possibly beyond their own capabilities, their identification might be stymied sooner rather than later. In the process of the thaumatopoeitic body's manifestation of its 'doubleness', in which it transforms from a 'normal' to 'abnormal' body (or from possible movement to that previously conceived as near impossible), inter-subjective identification soon dissolves. If a spectator 'experiences by experience', so to speak, evaluating and responding to observed movement on the basis of his/her own bodily experiences, a lifetime of motility will foster appreciation for the difficulty of the acrobatic act even as it might promote the realization that the spectator him/herself cannot move with such a degree of skill as to avoid the sword points. Importantly, a spectator may thus simultaneously engage with the performance while still experiencing a *disidentification* with the body of the acrobat. Engagement is a prerequisite for both identification and disidentification. In part, it is the dissonance between the spectators' ordinary and the acrobat's extraordinary motility, which is itself often shown as flawless and exact (as in the *Symposium*), that contributes to the *thauma*. The sword-tumbler uses a wondrous motion to display an implementation of the impossible. If the spectator disidentifies with the body in action to the degree that I suggest in Chapter Four, namely, that the point of difference makes the performer 'other' from his perspective, it is then by the virtue of being 'other' that she is able to succeed. The phrasing used for the act emphasizes ongoing action, as I argue above, with results left uncertain, but the context of a professional wonder-making show might lead a spectator to anticipate accomplishment of the seemingly impossible. The danger is real

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<sup>556</sup> Here it is an example subsequent to the statement that the dialogue's sophist brothers know τὰ αἰσχίστα ('the most shameful things').

here, since without it this particular spectacle would lose potency, but it is a staged danger undertaken by a highly trained professional. The interrelated question of whether the act was *truly* a realization of the impossible (or a ‘real’ *thauma*) or just a refined human skill, relates to the criticism of *thaumatopoiia* in general as imitative.

The language of sword-tumbling focuses on the action in performance, and although the formulaic expressions stress the inherent risk, they are ultimately ambiguous with respect to outcome. However, in almost every instance in the Classical and Hellenistic texts I cite, there is either a strong implication of success for the sword-tumbler or the actual realization of it.<sup>557</sup> We see instances in which the professional entertainer does prevail as a spectator in reality might anticipate. What sword-tumbling thus enacts, I argue, is a narrative pattern in which a protagonist overcomes lethal obstacles. These acrobatics embody a triumph of life over death. Artistic representations evoke a similar narrative, since the images depict acrobats in a stylized moment of ongoing success, even as, like the texts, they showcase the action in progress.<sup>558</sup> My perspective here is fundamentally different from the most influential treatment of Greek acrobatics in scholarship, namely, that argued by Waldemar Deonna in his 1953 *Le Symbolisme de l’Acrobatie Antique*. Deonna proposes that ancient Greek acrobatics were, in essence, funereal and evocative of death. His case depends largely on a comparison between representations of the acrobatic body and that of a corpse, which is sometimes grotesquely twisted, arched, bent, or contorted.<sup>559</sup> Mark Davies follows the premise and connects the body imagery of sword-tumbling with that of suicide by falling on a sword, arguing that a bronze statuette of Ajax from Etruria is acrobatic in form (Basel, Antikenmuseum, Kä 531).<sup>560</sup> Deonna’s and Davies’ case for associating acrobatics and death is valid to a certain degree, since the verb ‘tumble’ can be used of those who fall head over heels in death (e.g. Hom. *Il.* 16.742-50); however, this meaning is distinct from the verb’s ‘sportive’ sense in its

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<sup>557</sup> The exception is the fragment by Democritus, who is the only one to actually consider, not just worry about, failure. I outline Roman concerns for failure at the end of this section.

<sup>558</sup> Naples 81398 is the exception, since it shows the moments before the act, not yet among the swords.

<sup>559</sup> Deonna (1953, *passim*) especially in a section subtitled “Sens funéraire de l’acrobatie aux épées” (92-95). Van Hoorn (1957) was critical of Deonna’s thesis.

<sup>560</sup> Davies (1971, *passim*, esp. 153). Davies (1971, 153) emphasizes the importance of the phrase *κυβιστητῆρες ὀλέθρου* (‘tumblers of death’), but this phrase does not occur earlier than Nonnus (39.338). The link between acrobatics and death is also accepted by Hood (1974) and Schneider-Herrmann (1982, 502).



semantic range. Both meanings connote headlong movement, but the difference pivots around the question of physical self-control: whether the tumble is done on purpose and (possibly) effectively, or not (see also my points on this distinction in Chapter Two).<sup>561</sup> Furthermore, the generic pose of balancing on the hands and carrying the legs overhead, which is by far the most common artistic representation of acrobatics, is only vaguely similar to the poses illustrated for corpses. It is more regular and composed, even though distinctly ‘other’ in its body type and movement. With respect to Davies’ specific case of suicide by sword, certainly the symbolism of the upright blade in sword-tumbling *recalls* this method of death, but only with regard to the threat that the sword poses.<sup>562</sup> Moreover, the most indicative association of sword-tumbling and death by falling onto a blade in Greek literature has an agenda: the sarcastic point to the ‘laughter-maker’ Philip’s mocking suggestion in Xenophon’s *Symposium* that the politician Peisander learn to sword-tumble (2.14) is that he would perish on the blades, not learn courage. The idea that the physical process of tumbling (i.e., not with swords or professionally) can be a method of suicide does not appear until Appian’s *Bellum Civile*; specifically, tumbling onto one’s neck (2.14.98: ἐς τράχηλον κυβιστῆσαι). The essence of sword-tumbling, to avoid the risk by marvellous means, delivers an opposite message of life and success to that conveyed by suicide on a blade.

While Deonna certainly finds some similarities between the acrobat and the corpse, he devalues two important criteria. First, the context of any given acrobatic performance, which is quintessential to the significance of a body’s movement viz. social interpretations, must be taken into account. There are many places and genres in which Greek acrobatics takes place, but none of them are particularly funereal, even if the acts

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<sup>561</sup> Deonna (1953, 93) also cites the verb ὑπερκυβιστᾶν, used only once by Polybius (28.6.6), as indicative of a connection between the semantics of ‘tumble’ in gymnastics and ‘tumble’ in a dangerous fall; cf. the LSJ definition for ὑπερκυβιστᾶν as ‘plunge headlong into danger’. The meaning of the verb in Polybius may be, rather, something like ‘tumble on behalf of’ or ‘for the sake of’, with regard to those Greeks who do not desire to act against the Romans. There is no sense of ‘plunge into danger’ here, but that some Greeks go to extraordinary lengths to ingratiate themselves with the Romans by public action (τοὺς δ’ ὑπερκυβιστῶντας καὶ διὰ τῶν κοινῶν πραγμάτων ἰδίαν χάριν ἀποτιθεμένους παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις). We might compare the sense of the metaphor in Lucian’s *Death of Peregrinus* (8), where ‘old men are all but tumbling in public for the sake of contemptible notoriety’ (ἄνδρας γέροντας δοξαρίου καταπτώστου ἔνεκα μονονουχί κυβιστῶντας ἐν τῷ μέσῳ). Here, tumbling is an example of an extreme and excessive action performed for the sake of something else; so too, perhaps, is the sense of ὑπερκυβιστᾶν in Polybius.

<sup>562</sup> Cf. Aellen et al. (1986, 99). However, Davies point that the specific statuette of Ajax is ‘acrobatic’ is convincing.

themselves are potentially deadly.<sup>563</sup> Indeed, Greek acrobatics most often take place at lively occasions: for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics in particular, the setting can range from a private party to a public ‘wonder-show’ to a religious festival. Secondly, we must consider not just the representations of acrobatic acts in isolation as painted images, but the performances themselves; that is, the full process of a body’s acrobatic movement, of which we have but static, symbolic images that are not necessarily even indicative of actual practice. But the staticity does not preclude an analysis of the moving body, if only in a very basic sense. It is of course impossible to reconstruct exact choreography for thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, but we do know that successful sword-tumbling involved movement in *and* away from the blades.<sup>564</sup> The point is simple, but not superficial. For the body that falls in death, the ‘tumble’ is its final movement, but for the body of the acrobatic performer the tumble is survived and life continues. Remaining aware of sword-tumbling in practice allows us to recognize a sequential narrative in the activity, performed via the moving physical form and given interpretive meaning by the spectators. Such a narrative model for movements is familiar: Greek dance, for instance, could certainly portray a story, whether a verbal accompaniment expressed it or not, and in combat sport a narrative interpretation might conceive of participants as duelling antagonists.<sup>565</sup> The comparatively simple act of sword-tumbling follows a basic story pattern: a protagonist is faced with difficult obstacles, which she must overcome lest she perish. She is especially qualified to face them with her extraordinary yet abnormal abilities. As she proceeds to encounter the dangers, uncertainty over her fate leads to tension among the spectators, but that tension dissolves with her eventual triumph.<sup>566</sup> The narrative is hardly complex, since the acrobat’s performance is fundamentally just a series of actions, which exist solely to impress spectators. Other forms of acrobatic

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<sup>563</sup> See Deonna’s (1953, 105-108) subsection “l’acrobatic funéraire, Dionysos et les festins” for the attempt to reconcile the thesis of ‘funerary’ acrobatics with its presence at symposia.

<sup>564</sup> Cf. Naerebout (1997, 234-40) and, for methodology, my statements in the Introduction.

<sup>565</sup> Dance: e.g. Xen. *Anab.* 6.1.7-8, Xen. *Symp.* 9.2-7. On the capability of Greek dance to express meaning, see for example Vesterinen (1997), Kowalzig (2004), and Peponi (2013); cf. Thomas (2003) on modern dance and sociology. Narrative in sport is further discussed in Chapter One. My thanks to Prof. Aara Suksi for the point that combative contests at funerary games promote a similar narrative to sword-tumbling, wherein the participants mimic life-or-death warfare, but all survive.

<sup>566</sup> My arguments for the interpretation of a narrative model in Greek acrobatic performances owe much to Bouissac’s (2012) discussions of the “multimodal discourse” of circus acts: see esp. page 47; cf. Bouissac (2010, 36).

*thaumatopoiia* might be seen to operate with a similar sequence of action, though usually with a smaller element of danger. The performative body is the focal point, as the acrobat pushes the boundaries of pre-conceived notions of possibility.

The act of sword-tumbling did impress spectators. But if it was an exciting triumph over the threat of death, why are our sources routinely critical of the practice? In the *Symposium* it is ‘in no way befitting a symposium’ (S-T 2); in the *Memorabilia* it is characteristic of rashness (S-T 3); in the *Euthydemus* it is an example of extreme and excessive behaviour. On the one hand, the authors of all the sources I list at the outset of this chapter write from the point of view of the elite male spectator. As I state in the Introduction and in Chapter Four, the judgements, assessments, and criticisms of sword-tumbling all come with an agenda. Plato and Xenophon, for instance, are dismissive of the entertainment of ‘low’ culture in lieu of the ‘high’ culture of philosophical discourse; take Socrates’ claim in the *Protagoras* (347c-d) that philosophers can amuse themselves with discussion at symposia, and do not need hired entertainers. In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, even if the dialogue is more ‘down to earth’ than Plato’s of the same name, the acrobatic performances represent a ‘philosophy’ directly opposed to Socrates’ teachings, and consequently he is critical of them.<sup>567</sup> In Plato’s *Euthydemus*, the negative tone for sword-tumbling pertains to the mockery directed at a pair of sophist brothers. Literary context and the ideologies any given author promotes in his work influence representations of acrobatics. On the other hand, there is value in examining those representations as reflections of a larger social reality, and drawing connections between them. Therefore as a way of approaching the disapproval voiced against those who undertake the risk of sword-tumbling, I situate the practice within the larger discourse of censure for wonder-making in general as imitative and a cheap business. As she demonstrates her narrative of success in seemingly ‘impossible’ ways, the acrobat simultaneously makes wonder. The transition of her thaumatopoietic body through a sequence of ‘normal-abnormal-normal’ corresponds with the narrative, since it is in the manifestation of worked *thauma* that the acrobat reveals her body’s ‘doubleness’. Elsewhere, the quality of ‘doubleness’ in wonder-making is met with criticism, since it is

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<sup>567</sup> Wiles (2000), Wohl (2004).

seen as a ‘duplicitous’ falseness and a moment of deception (e.g. Pl. *Rep.* 7.514b, 10.601d, *Soph.* 235b, Isoc. 10.8, 12.78). The ‘deception’ of sword-tumbling is in part manifest in the transitions of a performative body, as in all thaumatopoeitic acrobatics, but also in that the feat offers merely a staged ‘imitation’ of the genuine life-death scenario of encountering swords. It imitates the circumstance, that is, even though the danger *is* very real (hence the criticism for the risks). This is therefore unlike the ‘illusion’ of fatal danger in other performance contexts, such as when a tragic actor seems to kill or harm himself onstage. Sword-tumbling uses ‘real’ danger in the context of a professional and choreographed performance, and so as it plays with the threat of death it devalues, in that very play, the participant’s readiness to face danger. Indeed, as I argue above, a spectator might anticipate success, given the context of a professional show. But the sword here is no longer the warrior’s weapon, or the hero’s means of suicide. It is part of a piece of circus property in a studded hoop or line of swords constructed specifically for the professional display. The blade is rendered a semiotic mark of danger and so, like the acrobat’s body, is another resource employed, amplified, and made into spectacle for a Greek wonder-show.

What matters, according to Xenophon’s *Symposium*, is why one encounters dangerous blades. In the dialogue, sword-tumbling for the sake of a commercial transaction is contrasted with engaging the spears in battle. The simulation subverts the traditional values of bravery in war and a willingness to face the spears on behalf of one’s city, for the hazard in sword-tumbling is not encountered for any communal benefit but for profit as part of the business of wonder-making, which earns money by offering the display of danger as entertainment (Xen. *Symp* 2.1: ταῦτα δὲ καὶ ἐπιδεικνὺς ὡς ἐν θαύμασι ἀργύριον ἐλάμβανεν, ‘[the Syracusan] made money displaying these ones as at the wonder-shows’; cf. Musonius Rufus’ later complaint in S-T 8 and Clement in S-T 15). Immediately following the description of the activity (S-T 1), Socrates claims it proves that *andreia* (‘courage’ but literally ‘manliness’) is teachable, since it appears that the acrobat has learned the quality “despite being a woman” (2.12: καίπερ γυνὴ οὖσα). To this, Antisthenes responds (2.13): ‘so then, wouldn’t it be best for the Syracusan here to display the dancer to the city and say that if the Athenians pay him, he will make all Athenians dare to meet the spears? (ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ τῷδε τῷ Συρακοσίῳ κράτιστον

ἐπιδείξαντι τῇ πόλει τὴν ὀρχηστρίδα εἰπεῖν, ἐὰν διδῶσιν αὐτῷ Ἀθηναῖοι χρήματα, ποιήσειν πάντας Ἀθηναίους τολμᾶν ὁμόσε ταῖς λόγχαις ἰέναι;). The laugh-maker Philip's subsequent suggestion that a politician learn to sword tumble, a jocular and sarcastic comment, undermines any philosophic point. As Xenophon puts it, the requisite skill for sword-tumbling – something taught, not innate, and with monetary value – is far afield from the *andreia* required for warfare. This 'wonder' strives to replicate the danger of battle, but ultimately cheapens it to an amusement. In the economy of *thauma*, confrontation with danger is commoditized. Criticism elsewhere for *thaumatopoiia* as lacking in communal benefit provides an interesting parallel for the censure here and later in the dialogue when Socrates admits that sword-tumbling is a 'display of danger' (S-T 2: κινδύνου ἐπίδειγμα) unfit for a symposium. Isocrates, for example, complains in the *Antidosis* that wonder-making is not at all beneficial (15.269: ταῖς θαυματοποιίαις ταῖς οὐδὲν μὲν ὠφελούσαις), and one wishing to do something serviceable (προϋργου) must give up pointless activities. In the *Panathenaicus*, he makes a similar criticism when he reprimands those 'fonder of wonder-makings than good deeds' (12.78: τοὺς μᾶλλον ἀγαπῶντας τὰς θαυματοποιίας τῶν εὐεργεσιῶν). In the Aristotelian *Problems*, on the other hand, the author muses over why anyone would choose to be a wonder-maker, participating in cheap pursuits (φάυλοις) rather than a serious profession, such as an astronomer or orator (18.6 = 917a). In all three cases, *thaumatopoiia* is an inferior choice to something with more cultural and civic benefit. It is not seen to improve society, despite being a popular form of entertainment. The moralizing stance of the authors is not surprising, given that in context they all promote the values of their own elite social group.

The acrobat embodies cultural ideologies as she successfully circumnavigates the blades with a form that temporarily becomes so 'other' as to produce *thauma* (see Chapter Four). The passage in the *Symposium* suggests that the sword-tumbler *is* brave, but in a way dissimilar from a soldier. In battle, an important component of virtue, of course, is the ideal of withstanding enemy weapons or dying in the attempt. In sword-tumbling, the performer goes to wondrous lengths to physically avoid the blades. This is also far from the masculine ideology exhibited in athletic tumbling, where the participants don armour and wield spears in a show of martial and physical prowess at a civic festival. Sword-

tumblers do not display the standard military virtue of conquest, or even of enduring enemy attacks, but rather showcase evasion. In short, the successful sword-tumbling acrobat embodies flexible non-resistance, and because the risk she undertakes is part of a spectacular business, the triumph of her body's wondrous 'otherness' is interpreted as pointless frivolity.

The reference in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* to fire-leaping in conjunction with sword-tumbling develops these points. When Socrates mentions sword-tumbling he links it with leaping into fire and kissing an attractive boy by the common elements of risk and a readiness to encounter danger. The three are exempla for very hotheaded (θερμουργότατον) and impetuous (λεωργότατον) actions, characteristic of senseless (ἀνοήτων) and reckless men (ῥιψοκινδύνων), of whom the philosopher disapproves (S-T 3). The mention of fire-leaping here might simply be to offer an example of a supremely foolhardy act, which one should know well enough to avoid.<sup>568</sup> The phrase 'to go through fire' is common as a hyperbolic promise to do something on behalf of another (Ar. *Lys.* 133-5, Xen. *Oec.* 21.7; cf. Soph. *Ant.* 264-5). This certainly seems to be the sense of the expression in Xenophon's *Symposium* at least, where, in a passage that corresponds to the *Memorabilia*, the same Critoboulus criticized by Socrates in the latter elaborates on the things one would do for a lover. He eulogizes his beloved, Cleinias, and claims that he would even travel through fire along with him (4.16: ἐγὼ γοῦν μετὰ Κλεινίου καὶ διὰ πυρὸς ἰοίην).<sup>569</sup> But leaping into fire, not travelling through it, might also be a form of suicide, as epitomized in the myth of Heracles' self-immolation.<sup>570</sup> If this is the sense of fire-leaping in the *Memorabilia*, the passage assimilates the experience of a kiss and the onset of passion with being physically burned, not an uncommon metaphor for love (cf. especially Xen. *Cyr.* 5.1.16). As the other 'reckless' activity then, sword-tumbling might be considered similar to leaping into fire as a way of risking great personal injury

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<sup>568</sup> As Németh (2005, 68) puts it, sword-tumbling is used "as a synonym of audacity that does not make sense".

<sup>569</sup> Danzig (2005, 345) notes that the imagery here is martial, with Critoboulus' dedication like the devotion of soldiers for their general: the risk is willingly undertaken and presumably surpassed, to the glory of both the soldiers and their leader; cf. Pl. *Symp.* 178d-179b. Critoboulus' beloved in the *Memorabilia* is "Alcibiades' son", not Cleinias; for the issue, see Nails (2002, 117-19).

<sup>570</sup> Pausanias claims that 'leaping into fire' is evidence of madness, not courage, and provides an anecdote where it is really the method of suicide for Timanthes of Cleonae, Olympic victor in the pancratium in 456 B.C.(6.8.4), whose self-immolation evokes comparisons with Heracles: see Nicholson (2015, 26).

wherein *failure* is implied, not success as I argue above, even to the point that the reference might evoke the method of suicide by falling directly on the blades, à la Ajax and others. With respect to erotic desire, we might understand the ‘piercing’ of the blade as like the sting of Eros’ arrows.<sup>571</sup> By this reading, both fire-leaping and sword-tumbling in the *Memorabilia* connote familiar forms of self-harm. However, the phrase εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστήσσειε (‘he would tumble onto swords’) in the passage is certainly a reference to acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*, not suicide; might the force behind Socrates’ mention of fire-leaping here rely on its status as another variety of wonder-making, not, as it is usually taken, the typical expression of ‘going through fire’? The manipulation of fire was certainly a speciality of some roughly contemporary wonder-makers: Hippolochus’ sword-tumbling women breath fire (S-T 6), Athenaeus recounts a manipulator of fire among other early *thaumatopoiioi* (1.19e), and Theophrastus tells of those who can extinguish lamps with their mouths, not get burned by hot spits, and walk through fire or embers (*De Igne* 57). In the Roman period we see instances of flaming hoops in acrobatic acts (e.g. Manil. *Astr.* 5.439-42, Petron. 53.11) and leaping into a fire is explicitly termed ‘wonder-making’ by Lucian (*Mort. Per.* 21, *Fug.* 1), though with an ironic overtone; the true ‘wonder’ would be surviving the fire, but it turns out to be suicide.<sup>572</sup>

In these thaumatopoeitic fire tricks, the participant demonstrates mastery over the flames, which equates to human acculturation and the conquest of civilization over nature, but it is a mastery that takes its semiotic meaning from the inherent danger that fire represents. If the reference in the *Memorabilia* is understood as a potential allusion to a form of

<sup>571</sup> As indeed the text may state explicitly, if it is not an intrusive gloss as Dindorf suspected (1.3.13): ἴσως δὲ καὶ οἱ Ἔρωτες τοξόται διὰ τοῦτο καλοῦνται, ὅτι καὶ πρόσωθεν οἱ καλοὶ τιτρώσκουσιν, ‘perhaps also Erotes are called ‘archers’ for this reason, because beautiful people inflict a wound even from afar’: see Huss (1999b *ad loc.*) The concept of Eros as an archer is long established in visual evidence, at least: the earliest known instance is on a red-figure lekythos attributed to the Brygos Painter (ca. 490-480) in the Kimbell Art Museum (1984.16), where a winged Eros draws back a bow.

<sup>572</sup> We might also compare the ritual ‘fire walking’ by priests of the Italian Hirpi Sorani cult in at least the 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. (if not earlier), who trod and/or jump barefoot over hot embers and/or fire in a religious ceremony (Verg. *Aen.* 11.784-8; Strabo 5.226; Pliny *Nat.* 7.19; Sil. It. 175-83; Solinus 2.26). On the Hirpi Sorani see Rissanen (2012). While their fire-walking is not *thaumatopoiia* per se, it certainly draws on the context of thaumatopoeitic spectacles. Strabo in particular calls it a θαυμαστήν ἱεροποιάν (‘wondrous festival’) that people flocked to see. Some authors try to rationalize why the feet do not get injured, but only Varro attributes the cause to mortal methods (Serv. *ad Aen.* 11.787, citing Varro; cf. Theophr. *de Igne* 58, that the fire is smothered: see Coutant (1954)). The manipulation of fire in *thaumatopoiia* becomes a ‘parlour trick’ that trivializes ritual to spectacular display.

*thaumatopoiia*, not just reckless self-endangerment, it provides an interesting nuance for the presence of sword-tumbling in the same passage. Although ready participation in each activity is inherently foolhardy, the dangers are not absolute. Just as a trained wonder-maker can indeed master fire or traverse a hoop of swords, so can Critoboulus conquer the perils of love, or more specifically, the peril of yielding to erotic desire. Socrates prescribes a one-year exile to recover from love's keen sting (*Mem.* 1.3.13). Just as in the *Symposium*, with its juxtaposition of *thaumatopoiia* and philosophic discourse, here too Xenophon's Socrates promotes the message that although overcoming physical desires can be as tricky as acrobatics or as hazardous as fire-leaping, it is doable. Moreover, Socrates implicitly compares both pursuits to acting in a 'slavish' manner when he assimilates them to the response to erotic desire. The one who cedes to the pleasure of a kiss, yielding to their bodily impulses, will forthwith become more slavish than free (1.3.11: ἄρ' οὐκ ἂν αὐτίκα μάλα δοῦλος μὲν εἶναι ἀντ' ἐλευθέρου).<sup>573</sup> At this point, self-control is lost. To leap into fire and to tumble among swords are akin to this lack of freedom: the same sort of man who performs these stunts is also the sort who would kiss a boy.<sup>574</sup> It is as if such reckless actions would not be performed if the would-be participants were in complete control of themselves.<sup>575</sup> In reality, thaumatopoeitic acrobats could either be slaves or low-status professionals, but in either case the commoditization of the display, particularly its low value, presupposes a hierarchical structure in which the performer is subject to another's power (even if just 'purchasing power').<sup>576</sup> Moreover, in sword-tumbling specifically, the pliant body does not convey an

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<sup>573</sup> For Aelian as well, sword-tumbling, leaping into fire, and erotics are assimilated (S-T 11), though with only a possible allusion to slavery if the sympotic entertainers he mentions are understood as slaves. Németh's (2005, 69-70) suggestion that the letter, written as if from the character Cnemon of Menander's *Dyskolos* [or Lucian's *Timon*: see Rosenmeyer (2006, 132)], could be evidence that lost lines from the play contained a reference to sword-tumbling acrobatics is tendentious.

<sup>574</sup> Cf. Xen. *Symp.* 4.14; Cyr. 5.1.14-16; Pl. *Symp.* 184c.

<sup>575</sup> Cf. John Chrysostom's (S-T 14) statement that it is madmen who tumble fearlessly onto swords, fire, or other dangers, and Clement of Alexandria's (S-T 15) comment that when children touch fire it is not bravery but ignorance; so too sword-tumbling acrobats are not truly courageous. Van den Hoek and Herrmann (2013, 195) argue that it is surprising to see scorn from Clement and that it is a "personal perspective" of acrobats here, since "by and large earlier presentations were relatively positive. They implied admiration for the hard-won, if misplaced skill of these performers." Rather, we can see Clement continue a long-standing tradition of criticism for acrobats and wonder-makers alike. Classical representations recognize the thaumatopoeitic acrobat's skill, but they rarely imply admiration.

<sup>576</sup> She shows self-control in the form of perfect technical skill, to be sure, but that very skill is available for hire: see Cohen (2006, *passim*, esp. 99) for elitist disapproval of supervised labour as 'slavish', including prostitution (in which some thaumatopoeitic acrobats, at least, were engaged: see also Chapter 4.2).



ideology of dominance, but evasion, communicating a multimodal message through performance semiotics that corresponds to and cyclically reinforces the acrobat's low or un-liberated status. The acrobat becomes 'other' seemingly in order to escape a situation where she must encounter risks, primarily for the sake of the spectator's transient pleasure. In this way Xenophon's Syracusan is able to call his troupe of entertainers human 'marionettes', depriving them of bodily self-control even as he asserts his social power over them (*Symp.* 4.55).

Evidence for sword-tumbling from the Roman period serves as almost an epilogue, and the differences here are worth outlining briefly as cultural comparanda. After the Hellenistic period, acrobatic dancers still practiced sword-tumbling, and authors continued to criticize it. The traditions of acrobatic *thaumatopoiia* and its influence as a cultural phenomenon endure, but it also comes to acquire a subtly different meaning. In several instances, the phrase 'to tumble onto swords' seems to have a proverbial sense, where it exemplifies foolishly entering into a dangerous situation that will likely result in death (e.g.: Philostratus in S-T 9, Libanius in S-T 12, and John Chrysostom in S-T 13 and 14).<sup>577</sup> There is now a shift in expectations, from an anticipated outcome of success to a greater awareness of potential failure. The change echoes an altered perception of acrobatic acts that recognizes them as more deadly in the culture of the Roman circus and its glorification of lethal spectacles than in professional Greek wonder-shows. Thus Artemidorus considers dreams of acrobatics a sign of great peril (S-T 10), and Musonius Rufus deems acrobatics a matter of life and death (S-T 8).<sup>578</sup> Perspectives of Roman sword-tumbling are evidently more fatalistic. This accords with the Roman view of acrobatics seen elsewhere, which acknowledges an element of chance and/or fate in the outcome.<sup>579</sup> For the epitome of this point of view one need look no further than the style

<sup>577</sup> The sense of 'tumble' here is probably not for suicide by sword, but as in an acrobatic act. I know of only late instances where the verb 'tumble' is used, without any context of acrobatics, for 'plummeting into [unspecified] trouble' as opposed to 'tumble because of trouble' (such as tripping or crashing a vehicle): Suda κ 2602; Nic. Greg. *Hist. Rom.* 2.1120.21, 3.216.5, 3.521.12; cf. *Anth. Pal.* 9.578.

<sup>578</sup> van den Hoek and Herrmann (2013, 189) claim that Musonius "speaks of their [acrobatic] performances with admiration" and that his "tone is positive"; however, this is only true to a point. The passage is meant to exhort enduring hardship with an example of *even* the most difficult of tasks, done for a comparatively more disreputable purpose (making money is emphasized) than achieving a life of virtue.

<sup>579</sup> E.g. Plutarch speaks of the '*petaurismos* of chance' (*Mor.* 498c: τὸν τῆς τύχης πεταυρισμὸν), and Seneca of 'the *petauri* from which human affairs are thrown', with regard to the unpredictability of mortal fortunes (*Ep.* 98.8: *petauri, quo humana iactantur*); for the *petauron* as circus apparatus see Chapter Two.

of Roman dice cast not in the shape of cubes, but squatting human figures with pips etched or coloured on their sides, front, back, and head.<sup>580</sup> The figural dice are not necessarily in any acrobatic pose, at least while they are squatting, but as they roll they tumble head over heels in an elegant semiotic connection between the tumbling dice and the tumbler.<sup>581</sup> The fortunes of the ‘tumbler-die’ are entirely up to chance.

In sum, the aim of sword-tumbling throughout antiquity was to navigate gracefully and harmlessly through the blades, with headlong motions to increase tension and promote amazement. Here, the ‘meaning’ of the act and the acrobat’s physicality are made doubly rich through a combination of the semiotics of body and props. Key characteristics in Greek literature and art are an emphasis on the inherent danger and the thaumatopoeitic acrobat overcoming that danger in a narrative of success. One way of analyzing the stunt and criticisms of it is to consider it with respect to the disapproval voiced in general for *thaumatopoiia*. According to representations, sword-tumbling falsely ‘imitates’ the dangers of warfare, and the body is one that goes to extreme lengths to avoid weapons, not wield or confront them. But her performed ability, so highly specialized, emphasizes her bodily abnormality compared to the spectators. In its wondrous difference and success at tumbling over swords, the body proves the degree to which its difference can become manifest, and so it becomes ‘other’. The risk is furthermore undertaken not for civic benefit, as the ideal for soldiers facing blades in battle, but as a business of spectacle for the sake of spectacle; consequently, the acrobat has an inferior social standing, and indeed her supposed lack of self-control for taking the risk is associated with an unliberated status.

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For the proverbial danger of ‘walking a tightrope’, see for example Epict. 3.12.1, Luc. *Rhet. Prae.* 9, and Juv. 14.265.

<sup>580</sup> E.g. London, BM, 1851.0813.125, BM 1975.1103.1, BM 1980.0401.1, and BM 1980.0401.2 (which were on display in 1991 in the exhibit ‘Board Games around the World’ [G88]).

<sup>581</sup> Dice are usually said to be ‘tossed’ (e.g. ἐρρίφθω κύβος or ἀνερρίφθω κύβος), not to ‘tumble’, but the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. scholar Apollodorus suggested that κύβος was etymologically linked with κυβιστᾶν. However, he makes the connection on the basis of similarities in shape, not movement or fickle fortune (Suda κ 2602; Eustathius twice considers a similar etymology: at *Comm. Il.* 3.921 on *Il.* 16.744-50 and *Comm. Od.* 1.27-8 on *Od.* 1.107).

## 5.2: Acrobatic Feats on the Potter's Wheel

The rich imagery and meaning conveyed in representations of sword-tumbling rely in part on the combination of an acrobatic body and a 'prop', and how the performer integrates that prop with her display. Just as bodies are socially qualified, so too are items; in modern circus shows, to take a relevant example, a piece of acrobatic apparatus is a tool that is iconographic of an action or event. Consider for instance the trapeze, which Paul Bouissac argues comes alive in the spectator's mind on account of its semiotics, even when hanging still, since that observer realizes and knows its use.<sup>582</sup> But spectacles can also thrive on the subversion of 'proper' use, and so impress or amaze precisely because an expectation is confounded: for example in *thaumatopoiia*, bears who imitate people (Isoc. 15.213), automata that come alive (Arist. *Gen. An.* 734b and 741b), or manipulators of various objects (such as 'pole-players', 'pebble players', etc).<sup>583</sup> That subversion is certainly at play in sword-tumbling, but more so in the performance of acrobatic feats on the top of a spinning potter's wheel: the broad, flat, circular piece of wood used in ceramic production to spin the clay for shaping. This tool is highly symbolic as an icon for ceramic production, and the 'meaning' of the acrobat's motions on it depends on the thaumatopoietic subversion of that iconography. In this section, I analyze the representation of potter's wheel stunts with due recognition for the symbolism of the wheel, and its appropriated use for an act of *thaumatopoiia*.

As for sword-tumbling, my first concern is to determine accurately the pragmatics of the stunt, though here I limit my evidence to representations from the Classical and early Hellenistic periods. Scholars have previously discussed the nature of the stunt, but never before on the basis of all extant evidence, some of which has only recently been published.<sup>584</sup> I draw primarily on artistic examples, which far outnumber the lone textual references from Xenophon and Plato. Representations of this act show a performer, who would apparently exhibit different acrobatic poses or movements throughout her routine, balanced on the surface of a potter's wheel. The acrobat could maintain or alter her pose

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<sup>582</sup> Bouissac (2010, 34-5).

<sup>583</sup> See further in Chapter Four; cf. Bouissac (1976, 8): "some of the cultural elements are combined differently in the system of the circus than in the corresponding everyday instances. The rules of compatibility are transformed and often even inverted".

<sup>584</sup> Dearden (1995), Marshall (2000).

while an assistant spun the wheel for her, creating a three-dimensional, rotational display of thaumatopoeitic physicality. After practical considerations, I once again draw on my earlier arguments regarding the differences between wonder-making and supernatural *thauma* as the foundation for my discussion, though here I stress different aspects than in the previous section on sword-tumbling. I argue that representations of the performance of acrobatic feats on a spinning potter's wheel showcase the 'otherness' of the abnormal body as socially inferior in a spectacle for visual consumption, as in sword-tumbling (and thaumatopoeitic acrobatics in general), but here I emphasize the ways in which the acrobat has only partial self-control despite her bodily skill and is rendered subhuman through figurative objectification. In a subversion simultaneously of the process of 'uncanny crafting' for supernatural *thauma* and ceramic manufacture, the acrobat and her wonder-making appropriate a basic tool of production for a spectacle of conspicuous non-production.

My starting point is once again Xenophon's *Symposium*, where no actual performance on the potter's wheel takes place, but rather an allusion to the sort of feats that might have happened had Socrates not forestalled them (7.2-3):

ἐπεὶ δ' ἦσαν, εἰσεφέρετο τῇ ὀρχηστρίδι τροχὸς τῶν κεραμεικῶν, ἐφ' οὗ ἔμελλε θαυματουργήσειν. ἔνθα δὲ εἶπεν ὁ Σωκράτης . . . καὶ μὴν τό γε ἐπὶ τοῦ τροχοῦ ἅμα περιδινουμένου γράφειν τε καὶ ἀναγιγνώσκειν θαῦμα μὲν ἴσως τί ἐστίν, ἡδονὴν δὲ οὐδὲ ταῦτα δύναμαι γινῶναι τίν' ἂν παράσχοι.

After they sang a potter's wheel was brought in for the dancing girl, upon which she was going to work marvels. But here Socrates spoke . . . "Indeed, writing and reading upon a wheel while spinning around is perhaps something marvellous, but I cannot discern what pleasure even this might provide".

The unrealized stunt was going to be a kind of *thaumatourgia*, 'wonder-working', and the short discussion of wonders that follows confirms that exhibits on the potter's wheel could be considered *thaumata*. Socrates claims that the wonders are to be reading and writing, which would be unparalleled in our extant evidence for *thaumatopoiia* on potter's wheels,<sup>585</sup> but his assumptive statement is part of the dialogue's contest of

<sup>585</sup> Or, at least, it is a comparatively rare trick to perform. Gilula (2002, 211) takes the statement at face value as proof that wheel-spun literacy was a "common part of acrobats' repertoire". The only other possible reference to composition while spinning on a wheel is a pair of scholiast's comments that Cratinus, a poet of Old Comedy, wrote thus, as Dearden (1995, 82 n. 6) points out: Σ Ar. *Ach.* 851a: <ὁ τροχὸς ἄγαν

opposing philosophies and may not reflect actual practice.<sup>586</sup> The only other certain textual reference to performance on the wheel is from Plato's *Euthydemus*, in connection with sword-tumbling (294d-e = S-T 4). In response to the claim that the sophist Dionysodorus can dance, Socrates asks in disbelief if he has even attained such a degree of skill so as to tumble among swords or be whirled upon a wheel at an advanced age ('yes', is the reply). Here, being spun on the wheel is an extreme example of the kinds of activities/dances unlikely and inappropriate for old men to know, something trivial, childish, and denoting "farcical vulgarity".<sup>587</sup> Scholars note the dialogue's generally comedic tone, and Ann Michelini argues that its use of humour to make philosophic points extends to a presentation of the sophist brothers as something like wonder-makers, whose claim to skill or knowledge is only pretence; the assertion here that they know two actual kinds of *thaumatopoiia* confirms that characterization.<sup>588</sup> But despite the negative attitudes towards the thaumatopoeitic wheel spinning, there are no constructive hints regarding the practice of it. In fact, there is not even any indication that the spinning will involve *thaumata*, whether acrobatic or not.<sup>589</sup> Even in the *Symposium*, the text does not

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τὴν μουσικὴν: > ὡς ἐπὶ τροχοῦ ποιῶντος αὐτοῦ ποιήματα, 'he was too swift with respect to his music': as he composed poetry upon a wheel. Σ Ar. *Ach.* 851b: μελοποιὸς καὶ μηχανικὸς γὰρ ἦν καὶ ποιῶν ἐπὶ τροχοῦ μηχανήματα, 'for he was a poet and 'mechanic', making his devices upon a wheel'. The latter reference could suggest *thaumatopoiia*, since 'contrivances' might be wonders (cf. Pl. *Rep.* 10.602d and Arist. *Gen. An.* 741b), but both comments may have more to do with the punishment of criminals 'on the wheel' (e.g. Hdt. 2.89, Ar. *Pax* 452, and the mythological example of Ixion; cf. *Ran.* 620). Compare Philostratus (= [Lucian]) *Nero* 7, where it is said that Nero stirs laughter for dancing in imitation of his superiors, when he holds his breath, nods his head around, stands on tiptoe with his feet apart and 'bends over backward just as those upon the wheel' ἀνακλώμενος ὡσπερ οἱ ἐπὶ τοῦ τροχοῦ): the image could be either of prisoners or acrobats.

<sup>586</sup> For the contest, see Wiles (2000) and Wohl (2004). On the forestalled potter's wheel stunt in particular, Gilhuly (2009, 129) proposes that Socrates stops it because it is "completely un-engaging", and elsewhere claims that acrobatics (in general, not just in the dialogue) are "marvelous yet meaningless" (99). As I argue in Chapter 4.5 and 5.1, spectators do indeed engage viscerally with acrobatics, even if they disidentify with the performance.

<sup>587</sup> Quotation from Hawtrey (1981, 147, on 294d7ff.). He further argues that "whatever the precise details...it is clear that all three [namely, dance, sword-tumbling, and wheel feats] were commonly practiced not by free men but by slaves at symposia for the entertainment of their betters. They are not intended as anything that a gentleman could be proud of". See also Michelini (2000, 520) for the sophists' participation in trivial and juvenile pursuits.

<sup>588</sup> Michelini (2000, 517-18).

<sup>589</sup> Hawtrey (1981, 148, on 294e3) summarizes a few early suggestions for the nature of the act, including: that the *trochos* in question is not a potter's wheel at all but a reference to the imitation of 'hoops' (cf. Xen. *Symp.* 2.22), that reading and writing will take place (cf. Xen. *Symp.* 7.3), or that "even staying seated on the wheel might be sufficiently marvelous". Spinning is naturally associated with Greek dance in general but also with acrobatics specifically. Galen uses the verb περιδινέω in his *Protrepticus* as an example of acrobatics, if one can do it without getting dizzy (9.6 = K1.20-21) and again in *De Sanitate Tuenda* (6.155 Kuehn) for acrobatic dancing. Artemidorus also uses the verb in connection with sword-diving (S-T 10).

imply that the stunt would have been acrobatic: we are only told that the dancer ‘was going to work marvels’ (ἔμελλε θαυματουργήσειν), a phrase that could cover any number of thaumatopoietic displays. But she has already proven herself an able juggler (2.7), sword-tumbler (2.11), and contortionist (2.22), and it is probable that similar bodily wonders were to take place on the wheel. In any case, Xenophon and Plato use much the same language to refer to the activity: Xenophon the phrase ἐπὶ τοῦ τροχοῦ...περιδινομένου, ‘upon the spinning wheel’ and Plato ἐπὶ τροχοῦ δινεῖσθαι, ‘to be spun upon the wheel’. It is significant that the word ‘tumble’ is not used. The definitive element to the show was evidently the rotation of the wheel and balancing on it while it spun.

Art provides better evidence for thaumatopoietic feats on potters’ wheels, most of which are unambiguously acrobatic. The number of examples also suggests that the stunt was perhaps more popular as a sympotic diversion than the brief references in the philosophers might imply, since there are roughly a dozen extant representations of the activity.<sup>590</sup> The earliest is on an Attic red-figure skyphos, dated ca. 470 B.C., which depicts on one side an athletic tumbler standing poised on a springboard, and on the other an *aulos* player beside a potter’s wheel.<sup>591</sup> The tumbler establishes a clear context of acrobatics that links the two sides of the vessel. This vase, along with the references in Plato and Xenophon, make it clear that potter’s wheel feats were known in Athens, but the majority of artistic examples derive from South-Italy in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods; evidently, there was a local preference for the practice. Artists often show the generic pose, with the acrobat balanced in a handstand on top of the flat elevated surface of the wheel. This is the pose on a red-figure Apulian lekythos in St. Petersburg, for example, where the topless acrobat, wearing a garland and billowing skirts, curves her body over itself to the point that she is able to look directly at her own calves as she raises her head.<sup>592</sup> The acrobat on a Paestan red-figure bell-krater, who wears only a short skirt and a headdress, adopts nearly the same posture, but she looks

<sup>590</sup> Dearden (1995, 82) suggests that the use of potter’s wheel in acrobatic performance “was apparently common”, judging from how it is referenced in passing in the *Euthydemus* and (to a lesser extent) in Xenophon’s *Symposium*; cf. Gilula (2002, 211).

<sup>591</sup> Tampa 86.93. I discuss its importance at length in Chapter Two in connection with athletic springboard leaps.

<sup>592</sup> St. Petersburg B 4234; ca. 375-325 B.C.: State Hermitage Museum (2005, no. 43).

down instead of up and her legs show more bend at the knee.<sup>593</sup> The generic pose does not always depict a body smoothly curved: on a well known ‘phlyax vase’ in Oxford, a Paestan red-figure skyphos, the topless acrobat’s back is straight and her knees are bent while she does a handstand,<sup>594</sup> and on an Apulian Gnathia lekythos now in Naples a contortionist has actually managed to fold herself in half and put her feet flat on top of her head.<sup>595</sup> Equally impressive is the contortionist on an Apulian skyphos in Sydney, clad in a *strophion*, skirt, and much jewelry, who balances on her hands and bends her torso around to the point that her legs pass over her head to rest on her shoulders, with her feet hanging below her face.<sup>596</sup> The curved necks of the waterfowl that (uniquely) sit to either side of her on the wheel parallel the sinuous posture of her body.<sup>597</sup> A terracotta figurine from Canosa, on the other hand, does not show the generic acrobatic pose.<sup>598</sup> instead, the acrobat, wearing only an Eastern style cap, performs an acute backbend on the wheel, balancing upside down with both hands and the tip of her left foot touching the platform.<sup>599</sup>

Two sculpted acrobats do not balance on their hands atop the wheel at all, but in a striking variant of the generic pose rest on their upper arms. One, a terracotta from Lipari moulded as a veritable contortionist, shows the common arching of the legs over the head, but the performer’s extraordinary act of balance on her upper arms leaves her hands

<sup>593</sup> Artemide Kunstauktionen, Vienna, Sacher Hotel, 8<sup>th</sup> December 2012 *Antiquities* 1: front cover of catalogue, no. A80. Dated “circa 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.”

<sup>594</sup> Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1945.43; ca. 350-325 B.C. Among a large bibliography, see for example Trendall (1967b, no. 96), Trendall (1987, 2/33, pl. 24f), Dearden (1995, fig. 1a), Marshall (2000), Compton-Engle (2015, fig. 15).

<sup>595</sup> Naples, Museo Nazionale, coll. St. Angelo 405; ca. 350-325 B.C.: CVA Naples 3, pl. 70.4; Hughes (2008, fig. 7) identifies it as Napoli 509.

<sup>596</sup> Sydney, Nicholson Museum 95.16; ca. 325-310 B.C., related to the Woman-Eros Painter: CVA Australia 1 (Sydney, the Nicholson Museum: *The Red Figure Pottery of Apulia*), 64, pl. 84-85. Green (2003, no. 43).

<sup>597</sup> Both Green (2003, 79) and Hughes (2008, 10) point out that the reason for the birds is unclear. Perhaps they are swans, and so represent either music or Aphrodite and erotic appeal, but animal acts are sometimes part of wonder-shows (e.g. lions and bears at Isoc. 15.213). Birds and female acrobats are twice more related: a small bird (a dove?) is shown next to an acrobatic dancer on a late 4<sup>th</sup> century bell-krater in Los Angeles (County Museum, Hearst 50.9.45), and Matro of Pitane compares two ‘wonder-working *pornai*’ with ‘swift-footed birds’ (fr. 1.121 = *SH* 534: ποδώκεας ὄρνιθας) in a Homeric parody.

<sup>598</sup> Royal Athena Galleries, ER1516C; dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Traces of white paint remain. According to the Royal Athena online listing, the terracotta is from the “ex collection of Baron v. d. E., Belgium, acquired in the 1950s; American private collection, acquired from Royal-Athena in September 2002” ([www.royalathena.com/PAGES/GreekCatalog/Terracotta/ER1516C.html](http://www.royalathena.com/PAGES/GreekCatalog/Terracotta/ER1516C.html), accessed February 21, 2016).

<sup>599</sup> A potter’s wheel is also painted beside an acrobat on a Campanian hydria in London (BM F 232).

free to play a lyre.<sup>600</sup> Alan Hughes claims that she “rolls over while playing a *kithara* with one hand and one foot”, but it is clear that she plays with both hands.<sup>601</sup> A terracotta figurine possibly from Tarentum, now in the Louvre, also balances on her upper arms on a potter’s wheel.<sup>602</sup> Her hands and arms are arranged almost identically to the Lipari figurine, and although whatever item she held is now missing, it is possible that she also once played a lyre.<sup>603</sup> These figurines offer two rare examples that combine non-bodily musical performance with bodily acrobatics, whether on a potter’s wheel or otherwise.<sup>604</sup> But while it is rare for an acrobat to play an instrument, a musical backdrop for acrobatics in general is not uncommon, as on the lekythos in Naples (SA 405), cited above, where an *aulos* player provides accompaniment for the feats.<sup>605</sup> That the performance can incorporate music is not surprising, since acrobatic wonder-makers were also dancers (*Symp.* 7.2; cf. Pl. *Euthyd.* 294d and see further in Chapter 4.2). But the flute player here is peripheral to the act. She is not considered a *thaumatopios*, even though she contributes to the process.

Also somewhat peripheral, though to a lesser extent, are the acrobat’s assistants, who spin the wheel. Such helpers must have been fairly typical for the act in practice but they are not always present in representations. Neither Xenophon nor Plato mentions them, although the former does write that the wheel was ‘brought in for the dancer’ (εἰσεφέρειτο τῇ ὀρχηστρίδι τροχὸς τῶν κεραμεικῶν), and perhaps the one who carried it would have spun it.<sup>606</sup> Extant art only depicts assistants twice, namely, a satyr on the Paestan bell-

<sup>600</sup> Brea (1981, fig. 192, F16 = Inv. 749 K). Dearden (1995, 83-4) notes that it is typical for terracottas to be moulded on a small platform like a ‘bobbin’, but that this example (and the similar Inv. 749 I, a seated juggler) is balanced on an elevated platform. The Canosa figurine is also on a platform.

<sup>601</sup> Hughes (2008, 10).

<sup>602</sup> Paris, Louvre CA 459; late 4<sup>th</sup> - early 3<sup>rd</sup> century: Davies (1971, 151 n. 17), Mollard-Besques (1963, pl. 20.2), Scholz (2003, 100), Todisco (2013, G 126).

<sup>603</sup> The missing object might instead have been one that characterizes a dextrous display, such as the pebbles that a *psephopaiktes* uses, the ball for a *sphairopaiktes*, etc. Then again, perhaps it was something for ‘reading and writing’ on the wheel (Xen. *Symp.* 7.3).

<sup>604</sup> The mixture would theoretically increase the spectacular appeal of the performance, as it distorts the normal method of playing an instrument into an oddity. Two other representations of figures on potter’s wheels do not show them using it as a platform for acrobatics at all: a terracotta figurine features a seated juggler (Brea (1981 F17= Inv. 749 I)) and on an Attic pelike in London (BM E 387) two satyrs spin around like on a carousel (where perhaps ‘turntable’ is more accurate than ‘potter’s wheel’).

<sup>605</sup> Music and wonder-making are also linked in Plato’s *Laws*, where the Athenian claims that playing the *aulos* or *kithara* without dance and song is *amouisia* and *thaumatourgia* (cf. Pl. *Soph.* 224a for *thaumatopoiia* as *mousike*).

<sup>606</sup> Compare the attendant to the dancer at Xen. *Symp.* 2.8, who hands hoops to her to juggle.



krater from the 2012 Artemide Kunstauktion, and a comic actor on the ‘phlyax vase’ in Oxford. Both figures use the same means to cause the wheel’s rotations: they pull on a piece of rope or string, which on the Oxford vase is wound about the base of the elevated wheel and on the Paestan bell-krater is just touching the surface of it. Toph Marshall suggests that the assistant on the ‘phlyax vase’ uses the string like a ‘spotter’, to steady the wheel and keep it balanced by impeding its rotation with friction.<sup>607</sup> It is also possible that he uses it like something of a ripcord, just as one might use cords to send a toy top spinning.<sup>608</sup> This could account for the different placement of the string on the Paestan bell-krater, where it is not wound about the wheel, but almost seems to have been pulled (though this would require more artistic realism than we might expect the vase to exhibit). In any case, although potter’s wheels were usually spun with the hands in actual ceramic production,<sup>609</sup> the use of the rope here allows assistants to control it from a safe distance, whether that control means steadying the platform, governing its speed, or starting its revolutions. Without an assistant to control the wheel, especially if they initiate the spin, the point of a rotating platform is lost. By its very design, then, the performance requires control over the motion of the acrobat. On the whole, these assistants are tangential to the *thaumatopoiia*: they are catalysts for the creation of wonders, but not themselves the creators. The performance is always represented as a virtuosic display, where the focus is the acrobat herself as she revolves before the spectators.

Marshall convincingly argues that the presence of the cord and assistants on the Oxford vase reflects a conscious effort toward accuracy and realism, and so that the artist conceived of a genuine performance of an acrobatic stunt on stage.<sup>610</sup> His case that the skyphos emphasizes realism is part of his larger argument that its scene demonstrates an “Athenian play being produced with Athenian stage conventions” and so is another of the

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<sup>607</sup> Marshall (2000, 16-17); cf. Dearden (1995, 83): “he is controlling the speed of the wheel”.

<sup>608</sup> Neils and Oakley (2003, no. 77, 270) maintain that to spin the most common kind of ancient Greek top, “one struck it with a whip”. But that striking only occurred *after* one initiated the spinning by wrapping the loose end(s) of the whip around the top (hence its grooves) and giving a hard pull: see Miller (2004, 169).

<sup>609</sup> Dearden (1995, 82).

<sup>610</sup> Marshall (2000, 17).

so-called ‘phlyax vases’ that in fact shows an Attic drama re-performed in Italy.<sup>611</sup> This vase is not the only one showing an acrobat in a ‘phlyax’ scene, as Marshall notes; on a Paestan calyx-krater in Lipari (927), a naked acrobat performs the generic pose on a table, in what is a very clear dramatic scene complete with stage, windows in the *skene* building, and comic costumes (see Chapter 4.3). Considering the similarities shared between the Italian and Athenian evidence for bodily *thaumata* on the spinning potter’s wheel, especially the ‘phlyax’ vase, there may be some basic correspondences in the socio-cultural significance of the acrobatic body in these two regions.

In any case, Athenian criticisms against the nature of *thaumatopoiia* in general pertain to the practice of potter’s wheel stunts in Athens itself. With regard to the social and cultural significance of it, then, especially the performative body, I contextualize feats on the wheel as a kind of wonder-making. Marshall correctly points out that the presence of the assistant in the ‘phlyax’ scene is a sign of ‘realism’, but it is not the only one: the artist has also depicted the acrobat gripping the sides of the potter’s wheel. That same subtle detail is on the Paestan bell-krater, similarly accurate for having an assistant and cord, and on the Apulian lekythos in St. Petersburg (B 4234), which lacks an image of an assistant. The gripping of the wheel would aid stability as it rotates, and the art here probably reflects actual practice. In the context of *thaumatopoiia*, this pragmatic awareness underscores the fact that the display is human wonder-making. It hints toward the revelation of the ‘trick’ by showing how it is accomplished, and so is a moment of ‘real’ that is juxtaposed with the ‘wondrous’. To that effect, it reflects the quality of ‘doubleness’ that is the central feature of all acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*, namely, the bodily transition between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ motion that produces *thauma* even as it makes the performer ‘other’ (cf. Chapter 4.5). Whether or not an artist shows an acrobat holding the edge of the wheel, the most frequent representation of her body is in the generic pose.<sup>612</sup> Here in particular we can see how that pose is only representative of an acrobat’s thaumatopoeitic body, not ‘photographic’ of it, since artists use it with little

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<sup>611</sup> Marshall (2000, 13). For the argument that this particular ‘phlyax’ vase and the calyx-krater Lipari 927 reflect stage practice for Athenian comedies, see also Dearden (1995), Hughes (2008, 11-13), Walin (2012, 117), and my Chapter 4.3.

<sup>612</sup> The exceptions are the backbend exhibited by the Canosa figure, and the two terracottas poised on their upper arms in a variant of the usual pose, with the back still arched and legs brought overhead: Brea (1981, fig. 192, F16 = Inv. 749 K) and Louvre CA 459, both mentioned above.

regard to the type of act displayed or how much space would be available for movement. For the performer on the potter's wheel, a practical consideration is that there are considerable limitations to her mobility, since, by its very nature, the display is restricted to the small space of the wheel. The acrobat can move her legs and/or back while on the spinning platform or perhaps even transition between different poses, but in general cannot move as freely as she might for other tricks and dances.<sup>613</sup> The artists' use of the generic pose for acrobatic acts on the potter's wheel, regardless of these practical differences, indicates that the body in performance here conveys the same 'meaning' as in other acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*: i.e., it makes wonder for spectators through its abnormality and 'otherness', embodying by its handstand an 'inversion' of normal (cf. Chapter 4). Here in particular, though, it is the thaumatopoietic body as Spectacle, rotated on the spot for three-dimensional viewership. The wheel dramatically exhibits the body as it spins around, and flaunts every visible angle in turn. Significantly, that body is spun and controlled by assistants, even as they are catalysts to the creation of wonder; the acrobat does not move from the platform, but *is* moved, by her attendants and the wheel itself. She controls her body with her skill, but is nevertheless not in complete control. The same issue of self-control is reflected in Xenophon and Plato; neither uses active constructions when they refer to the stunt, but the middle περιδινουμένου (referring to the wheel itself) and passive δινεῖσθαι, respectively. This explains why in those contexts it is unclear whether the performance alluded to is an acrobatic one. 'Tumbling' does not define it (though it was apparently its notable feature), but rather 'being spun'.

Ancient critics condemn *thaumatopoiia* in general as a pointless activity, as I argue in Chapter Four. The production of marvels, is, paradoxically, a business of non-production, which Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle (proponents of 'high' culture) all characterize as cheap or worthless, and a waste of time (Pl. *Rep.* 10.603b, Isoc. 15.269, Arist. fr. 793 Gigon = fr. 63 Rose; cf. Arist. *Prob.* 18.6 = 917a). One of the reasons, I propose, for the negative representation of feats on a potter's wheel is because it exemplifies 'thaumatopoietic acrobatics' (non-) realization of this lack of production. The potter's wheel, a basic tool of productivity and material fabrication, is transformed into the site of

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<sup>613</sup> The hoop or line of swords that demarcates the sword-tumblers area of performance is also restrictive, but offers more opportunity for movement.

frivolous display and becomes an apparatus for marvellous nonmaterial creation. The ephemeral performance of an acrobatic wonder replaces lasting and useful ceramic craft, which emphasizes its spectacular (mis)use in a process of conspicuous non-production. Here, like in modern circus, “the [everyday] rules of compatibility are transformed and . . . even inverted” in Greek *thaumatopoiia*.<sup>614</sup> In the circus-esque context of ancient Greek wonder making, the normal rules of daily life are altered; the practice exists to make a show of distorting reality and inverting normalcy. It ‘labours’ only for the sake of the sight of the labour itself, and is seen to have no lasting benefit. Compare, for example, the efforts exerted in athletics or ritualized choral dance, which also result in ‘immaterial’ non-production but are generally seen as advantageous for the community: choral dance because it honours the gods, who look favourably upon the entire community, athletics because it brings glory to the entire *polis*, which is represented by its athlete at competitions.<sup>615</sup>

For acrobatic feats on the potter’s wheel, the repurposing of the wheel underscores the low value of the performed wonders as a commodity. The potter’s wheel itself can be seen as a potent cultural symbol of creation, economy, and development, in that it represents the progress from raw material to refined product. But while perhaps iconic of human sophistication, it also produced a fairly common item. Ceramics had a range of potential costs, but in general were a relatively inexpensive commodity.<sup>616</sup> But in its appropriated use for acrobatics, the potter’s wheel does not even make low cost merchandise, because it makes nothing material at all. Instead, the wheel’s ‘product’ is the human body made only symbolically as ‘the object’ spun on it.<sup>617</sup> As Kate Gilhuly describes the process with respect to Xenophon’s *Symposium*, “the girl enacts the process by which she is objectified, becoming the vessel that depicts her presence at a

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<sup>614</sup> Bouissac (1976, 8).

<sup>615</sup> Some of the rare criticisms laid against Greek athletes also include claims that sport gives no communal benefit: e.g. Eur. *Antiope* fr. 201 Kannicht = 20 Kambitsis and *Autolykus* fr. 282 Kannicht: see also Papakonstantinou (2012, 1661-4).

<sup>616</sup> See Gill and Vickers (1994) on the low costs of vases. Sparkes (1991, 129) points out that costs fluctuate, that their value relates to overall standards of living, that they depend on time and place, that they differ for quality of pot and decoration, and are in general difficult to determine and interpret. Still, in his chart of pot prices at Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, costs range from less than an obol (1/6 of a drachma) to at most 18 obols (3 drachmas) depending on the vessel.

<sup>617</sup> The terracotta figurines of acrobats on potters’ wheels evoke a self-referential connection between performance and objectified performer.

symposium. She is the material of her own representation...”<sup>618</sup> But what the acrobat herself makes or works with her body, namely, *thauma*, is also a commodity in part through syllogism with the typical use of the wheel for ceramic production: what is spun is the result of a process of manufacture, whether pottery or wondrous body. Therefore, just as the acrobat controls her body yet is controlled by the spinning wheel, in the performance as a whole there is dual agency for a twofold production. She is simultaneously the object of creation, passively spun, and the thaumaturge, who will herself labour at mortal wonders with the efforts of her body. She is product and producer, maker of wonder and made a wonder, and as such demonstrates another facet of the ‘doubleness’ inherent to *thaumata* (cf. Chapter 4.4 and 4.5).

As an economic transaction, the acrobat’s stunts on the potter’s wheel are also part of the business of *thaumatopoiia*. Textual evidence shows that spectators paid to see thaumatopoietic stunts (e.g. Theophr. *Char.* 6.4, Arist. *Oec.* 2.2 = 1346b), including those executed on the wheel (Xen. *Symp.* 2.1-2). In the economy of *thauma*, as I argue in Chapter Four, critics condemn these fabricated wonders as cheap, false, and uninspired compared to the earlier model of divine *thaumata*. There, I also highlight that there are fundamental disparities between *daidala* (‘cunning works’) as wonders made by means of ‘uncanny crafting’, and the production of wonders in *thaumatopoiia* as mortal work. The latter can only ever be imitative of the former, and so inherently lesser in status and value. With regard to thaumatopoietic acrobatics on the potter’s wheel, we need look no further for this contrast than to Hesiod’s stories of Pandora’s creation. In the economy of wonders we see a gulf of valuation between Pandora, fashioned as a product of uncanny crafting, and the acrobat *qua* wondrous product on the potter’s wheel. Superficially, the two are comparable: the acrobat is akin to a ceramic object, and Pandora is moulded by Hephaestus out of earth (*Th.* 571, *WD.* 61). In the *Theogony*, the veil crafted for her by Athena is a θαῦμα ιδέσθαι, a wonder to behold (574-5), as is the golden headband with its intricate designs made by Hephaestus (581), but Pandora herself also initiates wonder among mortals and immortals alike: θαῦμα δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοῦς θνητούς τ' ἀνθρώπους | ὡς εἶδον δόλον αἰπύν, ἀμήχανον ἀνθρώποισιν (588-9, ‘and wonder held

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<sup>618</sup> Gilhuly (2009, 129).

both immortal gods and mortal men when they saw the sheer trick, overwhelming to mankind'). As a clay-wrought being infused by the gods with life and *made human*, she causes/is a *thauma*.<sup>619</sup> The marvellous acrobat on the potter's wheel, whose laboured bodily contortions *dehumanize* her as an objectified 'other', produces an opposite wonder. The different means by which the two achieve these ends (that is, the ways they are/initiate *thauma*) emphasizes their disparity. *Thaumatopoiioi* are not permanent *thaumata*; they make them. The acrobat's wonders only last for the duration of her act. Pandora is a wonder to her ontological core. But like *thaumatopoiia*, broadly espoused by Athenian authors as false trickery, divine or ideal *thauma* can also deceive, and even though Pandora is an ontological *thauma* she is certainly not 'credible'. In fact she is infamously deceptive, 'a sheer trick, overwhelming to mankind' (*Th.* 589). But her deceitful qualities are coexistent with her wondrous ones, not dependent on them.<sup>620</sup> In other words, this is not the familiar 'smoke and mirrors' of *thaumatopoiia*. Pandora remains a *thauma* both to those who are deceived *and* to those who are privy to the deception. She is a wonder to mortals and gods alike, even though the latter are aware that she is a *dolos*. Even when the trick is 'revealed' there is wonder, since Pandora is not an imitation of a 'real' *thauma*, even though she is an 'imitation' of a maiden. Compare the phrasing in Euripides' *Alcestis*, when Admetos responds to Alcestis' returned presence (1123-25): ὦ θεοί, τί λέξω; θαῦμ' ἀνέλπιστον τόδε· γυναῖκα λεύσσω τήνδ' ἐμὴν ἐτητύμως, ἢ κέρτομός μ' ἐκ θεοῦ τις ἐκπλήσσει χαρά; 'O gods, what shall I say? This is an unexpected wonder. Do I truly gaze at my wife here, or does some beguiling delight from a god astound me?' That is to say, should the *thauma* be revealed as falsely deceptive, it would no longer be wondrous. Pandora, in contrast, is still a *thauma* even in the revelation of the deception. *Thaumatopoiia*, we are told on the other hand, is enjoyed by fools and children (Pl. *Laws* 658b-c; Xen. *Symp.* 4.55; Theophr. *Char.* 6.4, 27.7), but its revelation proves its basis in reality as something mortal. When the wise see through its illusions and explain the phenomenon, showing it as false imitation, wonder

<sup>619</sup> For Pandora as a wonder, with respect to my arguments on the Greek representation of divine *thauma* and mortal *thaumatopoiia*, see in particular Neer (2010, 58-9).

<sup>620</sup> She is 'too good to be true', so to speak, and as a καλὸν κακόν (evil good) her external characteristics are at odds with her internal nature (cf. *WD* 67: κύνεόν τε νόον καὶ ἐπίκλοπον ἦθος 'a doglike mind and thievish nature').

dissipates.<sup>621</sup> Thus Epimetheus is the deity who does *not* see through the wondrous ‘trick’ that is Pandora, since he is ‘Afterthought’ and lacks perspicacity. Finally, the permanence of her wondrous qualities relates to Pandora’s immeasurable lasting (albeit negative) value. Conceived by Zeus in vengeful justice, she is presented by Hesiod as part of a process of reciprocal exchange in which her innate negative value balances the supreme positive value of fire as a technology for humans.<sup>622</sup>

In sum, the differences between the Hesiodic account of Pandora as a clay-wrought wonder and representations of acrobatic wonders on the potter’s wheel emphasize the latter’s much lower status. A similar inferiority characterizes many aspects of the acrobat’s performance. Artistic representations of the feat typically feature an inverted body in the generic pose, but the exhibition necessarily limited the body’s potential movement to the area of the wheel itself. She is in only partial control of her body, while controlled by the wheel itself and limited to its surface. I argue that this stunt’s restrictive nature over the body moderates the acrobat’s ability to exert self-control in the process of making wonder. In its confinement, her abnormal body is kept aloof from the spectators that marvel at its otherness, and she is objectified for those spectators even as she is revealed from all angles to them and so laid bare for their visual consumption. To that effect, as she performs her abnormal corporeal ‘otherness’ on the confined space of the spinning wheel, the acrobat is represented as simultaneously the active producer of wonder and a passive, subhuman product, as if in ceramic crafting. She is herself assimilated to a commodity, even as she labours to work a commoditized wonder. The extreme body of the thaumatopoietic acrobat in this spectacular stunt is rich with semiotic ‘meaning’ in representations, where her somatic inferiority corresponds with a social inferiority.

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<sup>621</sup> So does Plato’s Socrates encourage people not to fall prey to the illusive wonder-making of sophistry: Pl. *Soph.* 235c; cf. Pl. *Rep.* 10.602b-d and Arist. *Prob.* 18.6. Compare also Seneca’s later claim to derive pleasure in being fooled by a prestidigitator (Sen. *Ep.* 45.8).

<sup>622</sup> From an extensive bibliography, see e.g. Zeitlin (1995), Wohl (1998, *passim* on connections between women and commerce, but esp. chapter 4, n. 50 on Pandora and economics), Steiner (2002, 188-9), Lyons (2012, esp. 42-4).

### 5.3: Conclusions

A few points deserve to be stressed here, and some potential questions that may arise. Some of these bodies hardly seem ‘subhuman’ when we look at them; there are poses and postures that are not very ‘extreme’, and in reality would not even be that hard to do: e.g., some depictions of the generic pose show positions fairly basic in modern yoga. How are these examples of bodies less than human? Secondly, if these (or other more ‘extreme’ examples) *are* impressive feats, which show a prodigious skill that most people do not possess, why are they not ‘superhuman’? To take the second question, the answer has two parts: first, context is tantamount for the representation and ‘meaning’ of acts. Wonder-making is designed to elicit amazement from oddities, which in turn are marginalized. What matters more than how the body moves, strictly speaking, is the cultural backdrop that informs the significance of its movements. The modern acrobatic body again gives a useful comparison: many of the same poses that occur in yoga can also be used in, say, a *cirque* performance, but the attendant cultural meaning is different. This brings me to the second half of my answer: even if a body’s movement is impressive, or even if it is *not* that impressive, since it is indeed true that certain representations will extenuate the degree of an acrobat’s bodily ‘abnormality’ more than others, this is not to say that the possessor of the body *is* subhuman; rather, that they are *represented* as *verging on* the subhuman in ideologically charged imagery or texts. The acrobat is *not* physically inferior (far from it), but her motions are so inextricably associated with an inferior social status so as to contribute to and confirm that status, in a cyclic construction.

The performative body of the acrobat pushes the limits of corporal ability as individuals provide answers to the question ‘how can my body move?’ But whatever actions the body truly accomplished in acrobatic *thaumatopoiia* (i.e. in reality of practice), are lost. Because acrobatic dances were sub-literary, there is not even an accompanying text with which we might visualize the moving body according to principles of self-reference (as in choral dance). Only stylized and refracted representations or filtered impressions of performances survive. Importantly, it is not only the real-life acrobats and tumblers, whether in spectacle or sport, who seek to explore the limitations of human movement, but also the creators of those representations. As one may ask ‘what can my body do’, a



painter, sculptor, author, etc. may ask ‘what can *I make* a body do?’ On the one hand, artists can use their media to challenge preconceived notions of what is possible for bodies. There is an aesthetic and artistic challenge in bending the rules of ‘normal’ bodies, and so to create a form that is or approaches ‘other’. On the other hand, the authors who mention acrobatic *thaumata* provide a representation just as much as artists. The acrobatic body is a literary construct in these instances, and not necessarily ‘real’. A prime example occurs in a scene from Xenophon’s *Symposium*. Following the introduction of the troupe, the first display offered by the *orchestris* (the same dancer who later tumbles among swords and is prevented from exhibiting wonders on the potter’s wheel) is to juggle twelve hoops while dancing (2.8):

ἐκ τούτου δὴ ἠΰλει μὲν αὐτῇ ἡ ἑτέρα, παρεστηκῶς δέ τις τῇ ὀρχηστρίδι ἀνεδίδου τοὺς τροχοὺς μέχρι δώδεκα. ἡ δὲ λαμβάνουσα ἅμα τε ὠρχεῖτο καὶ ἀνερρίπτει δονουμένους συντεκμαιρομένη ὅσον ἔδει ριπτεῖν ὕψος ὡς ἐν ῥυθμῷ δέχεσθαι αὐτούς.

Then the other girl played the *aulos* for her, and someone standing near handed over hoops to the dancer, up to a dozen. And taking them she danced while she also kept tossing them whirling, calculating precisely how high she needed to throw as to catch them in rhythm.

The performance is certainly *thaumatopoiia*, being the first feat by a dancer who is ‘one of those able to make wonders’ (2.1), but the number of hoops thrown and the extended duration of the performance (to judge by the imperfect tenses in the passage) suggest that the act is presented as something particularly wondrous indeed. In fact, it challenges modern world records, and would potentially far surpass them. The current Guinness Record for an individual juggling hoops is held by Anthony Gatto, who in 2006 tossed eleven rings for seventeen catches – and not while dancing at the same time.<sup>623</sup> The scene that Xenophon creates passes into the realm of fantasy, though only barely past plausibility (and Greek readers would have no *Guinness Book of World Records* at hand to settle disagreements over whether the dancer’s feat was possible). What the acrobat does here, which is true for any representation of an acrobat, is what the author makes her do.

<sup>623</sup> Compare the record for 9 hoops, at 235 catches. *Guinness Book of World Records* 2015 “Most Rings Juggled” (<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/most-rings-juggled>, accessed February 2016).

To what extent any given representation of a body in motion shows a 'reality' is rarely an easy question. But authors and artists both rely on their audience's awareness of a shared cultural reality to make their respective performers act and do, and as such offer a semiotic tapestry of socio-cultural meaning. At the center of it all is the acrobatic body, portrayed in the perfect execution of intense movement and therefore a body intensely symbolic. It displays a form astonishing and attractive, but cast in negative terms; a body that overcomes adversity in a narrative of life over death, but only in a staged 'imitation'; a figure that may 'create wonders', but which are inferior to supernatural *thauma*. There is undeniable physicality in the performed actions, but these acrobatics are not part of athletics. In thaumatopoeitic performances, spectacular physicality is stunt, not sport. But while this acrobat is a highly skilled individual, she nevertheless possesses low status, and her appeal derives from somatic exoticism. That exoticism marks her as 'other', and her stunts are castigated as reckless, pointless, and verging on the subhuman.

## Conclusion

Acrobatics is one answer to the question ‘how can my body move?’ It is an extreme expression of physicality, far from any central point of ‘normal’ on a hypothetical spectrum, and one that holds potent meaning. All bodies act as sites for the manifestation, expression, and communication of social values and ideologies; the phenomenological properties of the body are always culturally conditioned. In my project, I have identified two contexts for the performance of acrobatic bodies in ancient Greece. Acrobats participated in sport as tumblers at the Panathenaia, leaping from springboards and tumbling on horseback, and also as wonder-makers in the spectacles of *thaumatopoiia*, either in acrobatic dance, tumbling among swords, or spinning on a potter’s wheel. In all, the human body achieves extreme motility, but of two different sorts. In sport, aerial rotations best characterized by physical strength; in spectacle, flexibility to the point of hypermobility. Performers in both contexts showcase their respective abnormal physicality and supreme bodily control by ‘implementing the impossible’. I have also argued for interpretation of those acrobatic bodies through the theoretical lens of body semiotics, in order to explain their social meaning. High status warrior athletes demonstrate their physical and martial prowess, and low status entertainers are seen to exhibit an ‘unnatural’ somatic ‘otherness’. The one is represented as a socially dominant body verging on the superhuman, the other as a socially subordinate body verging on the subhuman.

This study is the first to distinguish fully between acrobatic bodies in sport and spectacle in Greece, and to recontextualize acrobatics in its socio-cultural milieu. I develop the arguments of earlier scholars on the ways in which athletics can promote and uphold social values by analyzing how tumblers participate in the communication of civic ideologies. For example, I align the competition of springboard leaping with the aspects of initiatory ritual that inform the martial contests at the Panathenaia and mark the physical and military prowess of a young citizen. I also respond to scholarly arguments that identify heroic qualities in athletes: the equestrian tumbling depicted on a Panathenaic prize amphora, for instance, advocates those same qualities and thus contributes to the construction of the athletic tumbler as a quasi-hero. Greek spectacle,

too, could operate as a mass media display of cultural ideology. Here I build upon the work of earlier scholars that considers acrobatics as a potential display in theatre and symposia and analyze it as a variety of the entertainment genre known as wonder-making. I use in particular Richard Neer's and Leslie Kurke's arguments on the nature and value of *thauma*, wonder, to differentiate *thaumatopoiia* from supernatural *thauma*.

With respect to both sport and spectacle, my study is also the first to use sociological theories of the body as a method for approaching representations of acrobats' extreme physicality. I apply the model of kinesthetic empathy as a means of hypothesizing an element of the performer-spectator interrelationship and the extent to which the observer of an acrobatic body might identify or disidentify with it. The theoretical concept that human movement is socially qualified is fundamental for my thesis. My approach expands on an area of analysis, namely, human movement, that can apply elsewhere in the fields of performance and athletics: e.g. the experience of spectatorship at the theatre and the ways in which an audience member might dis/identify with a character in a tragedy vs. a comedy vs. a satyr play, and the effect that dis/identification has on their response and experience of the drama; or the experience of spectatorship for different athletic events and the different 'meaning' of movement in, say, the pentathlon vs. a chariot race. There is also an opportunity to use a similar methodology to evaluate the evidence for acrobatic bodies in other contexts in Greece, which I have touched on but not discussed fully (in choral dance, for example, or in drunken play at symposia), or to use the conclusions I reach for more focused arguments on the ways in which a given author or artist utilizes acrobatic bodies (such as Xenophon in the *Symposium*). One might also conduct a study on the presence and significance of acrobatics in Roman culture, or the evolution and heritage of Greek spectacle in Rome, where extreme bodies in arena shows were popular, but performed and displayed a different meaning than in Greek culture.

But the implications of my study on acrobatics, and the bodily ideologies it connotes, extend to human movement in general in Greece, and contribute to the ongoing discourse in scholarship on the intersections of body and society, and embodied cultural values. Here it is worth outlining some of the ways that the social presence of acrobatic bodies

corresponds to the social presence of non-acrobatic bodies in other contexts and representations. For both sport and spectacle, primary evidence highlights the abnormal physical ability of the acrobat or tumbler; that is to say, they both exhibit utmost bodily control as they perform their different styles of acrobatics. I have brought attention throughout to the emphasis in our sources on that control. ‘Self-control’ is a basic bodily virtue in ancient Greek thought, for more than just acrobats. To have *enkrateia*, for instance, is to self-govern the body, to be in charge of it, and to have power and control over it; to have *sophrosune* is to be moderate, temperate, and in full possession of self.<sup>624</sup> The significance of self-control relies in part on the ‘meaning’ of a body in society, since “bodily control is an expression of social control”.<sup>625</sup> It follows that tumblers and acrobats, with their exhibition of utter control and physical skill, would convey a high degree of social control, although we have seen that the opposite is true for the latter. But the social meaning of ‘self-control’ needs contextualization as a representation that relies on the politics of movement. What matters is how and why any given body is understood by others to *use* their bodily-control, and here female thaumatopoietic acrobats are judged (especially by high status men) for performing that skill for hire as a pointless frivolity. Their ‘control’ is subjected to those who pay them. Compare the athletic tumbler, whose controlled aerialism in the context of civic athletics is performed, by all accounts, willingly, and emblemizes future military/political success. Here the social dynamic is practically of exchange, whereas in spectacle it is of purchase. Thus an analysis on the manifestation of bodily virtues in acrobatic bodies confirms a truism that applies to discourse about the Greek body in general: ‘self-control’ is framed as a privilege of the social elite, since all others are subject to that group’s social control.

Acrobatics was always marginal in Greek society, even in the contexts of sport and spectacle where other events and activities were far more popular. But it was nonetheless a part and product of that society, with potent significance despite (or because of) that

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<sup>624</sup> *Enkrateia* was particularly important for Socrates and his followers: see e.g. Bobonich and Destrée (2007). Later, Foucault would use the term as one of the chief qualifications for sexual bodies and social bodies. For a recent consideration of bodies in control, or not, see Osborne (2011).

<sup>625</sup> Douglas (2005, 79).

marginalization. It was certainly not, as one scholar claims, “marvelous yet meaningless”;<sup>626</sup> rather, acrobatics was marvellously meaningful. It offers us a glimpse at what was considered amazing, fantastic, and impressive in ancient Greece, and adds a splash of colour and verve to our retrospective panorama of an all too often monochromatic Greek world.

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<sup>626</sup> Gilhuly (2009, 99).

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## Curriculum Vitae

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### EDUCATION

**Ph.D. University of Western Ontario, 2011-2016**

Thesis: *The Acrobatic Body in Ancient Greek Society*

Supervisor: Aara Suksi. Examination Committee: Robert Barney, Christopher Brown,  
Mark Golden, Bernd Steinbock

Special Field: Athletics and Dance in Greek Literature

**M.A. University of Western Ontario, 2009-2011**

Thesis: *Tumbling in Choral Dance: Aristophanes' Frogs*

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**B.A. University of Manitoba, 2004-2007**

### EMPLOYMENT

**Instructor/Crake Doctoral Fellow in Classics, Mount Allison University, 2015-16**

Women in Antiquity, 2016

The Body in Ancient Greek Culture, 2015

**Instructor: University of Western Ontario, 2013-14**

Intermediate Greek

**Teaching Assistant: University of Western Ontario, 2009-15**

Introduction to Classical Civilization, 2014-15

Greek and Latin Elements in English, 2013

Technology and Engineering in the Ancient World, 2012

Ancient Greek Warfare, 2012

Classical Mythology, 2011

Ancient Greek Science, 2011

Daily Life in Greece and Rome, 2010

Sport and Recreation in the Ancient World, 2009-2010

**Research Assistant: University of Western Ontario, 2013**

for Professor Bernd Steinbock

**Research Assistant: University of Manitoba, 2006-7**

for Professor Lea Stirling (2007)

for Professor Mark Lawall (2006)

## PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

### **Articles in Submission**

“The Presence of Tumbling in Ancient Greek Athletics”, forthcoming with *Nikephoros* (approx. 7700 words)

### **Papers Presented**

“The Acrobatic Body in Ancient Greek Sport and Spectacle”, at Memorial University of Newfoundland, March 2016: St. John’s, NL (invited talk).

“The Cultural Triumph of Martial Dance in Xenophon’s *Anabasis* 6.1.1-14”, at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, March 2016: Williamsburg, VA (paper read *in absentia* due to illness).

“Sport and Society in Canada and Ancient Greece”, at Mount Allison University, January 2016: Sackville, NB (co-organizer and panelist).

“Acrobatics, Eros, and Philosophy in Xenophon’s *Symposium*”, at the Annual Meeting of the Atlantic Classical Association, October 2015: Halifax, NS.

“Make Dance, Not War: *Anabasis* 6.1.1-14”, at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Canada, May 2015: Toronto, ON (also presented for the Department of Classical Studies Research Forum, UWO, May 2015).

“Head over Heels for Philosophy: Acrobatic Performance in Xenophon’s *Symposium*”, at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, March 2015: Boulder, CO (also presented for the Department of Classical Studies Research Forum, UWO, March 2015).

“The Presence of Tumbling in Ancient Greek Athletics”, at *Sport in der Antike*, June 2014: Karl-Franzens-Universität, Graz, Austria (also presented for the Department of Classical Studies Research Forum, UWO, June 2014).

“Reading Between the Lions: *Thesmophoriazusae* 514-16”, at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, March 2014: Waco, TX.

“Aristophanes’ Tumbling Frogs”, at the Annual Meeting of the Classical Association of Canada, May 2012: London, ON.

## GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS

### **External**

Crake Doctoral Fellowship, Mount Allison University, 2015-2016

SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, 2013-2015

Ontario Graduate Scholarship 2013-2014 (declined)

Ontario Graduate Scholarship, 2011-2012, 2012-2013

Award for Outstanding Accomplishment in Classical Studies from CAMWS, 2013



**Internal**

Graduate Thesis Research Award, University of Western Ontario, 2014  
Harp Wiley Travelling Fellowship, University of Western Ontario, 2014  
Mary Routledge Fellowship, University of Western Ontario, 2013  
Chisholm Prize, University of Manitoba, St. John's College, 2006  
Lila May Guest Hugill Scholarship, University of Manitoba, 2006  
Hart Scholarship, University of Manitoba, 2005

**SERVICE AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

Student-Professor Liaison at "Sports, Society, and Culture: Revisiting the Past, Understanding the Present", Symposium held by the International Olympic Academy and the Center for Hellenic Studies, July 2014: Olympia, Greece.