

LE SCIENZE DEL PATRIMONIO

CULTURALE *on Air*

Archaeological Approaches to Dance Performance:
Methods and Perspectives

1th and 2nd December, 2021
9.00-13.00 CET

Organiser *Angela Bellia*
Co-organiser *Alfonsina Pagano*

Although over the last decade various scholarly disciplines have devoted increasing attention to **ancient dance**, they have done so by focusing on textual sources. However, in reconstructing features of dance performances, the evidence offered by **material culture** within its archaeological contexts should play a critical role. Considering dance performances in the ancient world, this webinar aims to explore material evidences of dance and highlight the contribution of such evidences to a deeper understanding of the **cultural and social meanings and functions** of dance and ritualised movements within activities of ritual and everyday life, reconstructing the many different ways and contexts in which they were experienced.

This webinar aims to enhance our knowledge of dancing activities which took place in **sacred spaces**, in **private homes and in spaces belonging to public and religious life** by exploring and discussing where ancient peoples experience physical movement events outdoors, and which musical instruments and sound tools accompanied them.

Accordingly, the contributions of the webinar will explore how physical movements act as a dynamic opportunity for exchange and interaction among different communities, and how performative spaces enhance our knowledge of the ways dancers interact with their audiences in those structures. Moreover, it will be analysed how the development of new technologies and tools can enhance the preservation of dance as intangible cultural heritage.

Wednesday, 1st December 2021



9.00-9.10 CET
GREETINGS & WELCOME

Costanza Miliani
DIRECTOR CNR ISPC

DISCUSSANT



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9.15-09.30 CET

INTRODUCTION: FROM ANCIENT MOVEMENTS AND GESTURES TO COMPUTATIONAL CREATIVITY IN DANCING. AN OVERVIEW OF THE MOST RECENT AND CHALLENGING RESEARCH FIELDS IN CHOREOGRAPHIC MODELLING AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

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09.35-09.50 CET

**KINAESTHETIC RHYTHMS: A MATERIAL
ENGAGEMENT APPROACH TO FIGURINE
DANCE PERFORMANCE**

At least 30% of the Iron Age female terracotta figurines from the WT-13 site, which show a small frame drum played with both hands in front of their chests, can be associated with drumming and dancing. By adopting a methodology based on Material Engagement Theory (MET) we focus in this paper on how ancient material culture brings into play dance performance. We use for this purpose one of the site's figurines as a test case. The primary focus is on the imagined acoustic and kinaesthetic components of movement embodied in that figurine. The association with dance and motion is triggered by the figurine's frame drum which implies rhythm and a rhythmical involvement of the body as well, by its hip-belt made of numerous plates which emphasize the hip swaying along to the imagined rhythm, and by its adorned nudity that lends the performance the quality of a ritual act (sacred dance). By contextualizing these elements in the overall kinaesthetic composition, the viewer participated in the visual narrative which sets the ancient

iconography in motion. Finally, our paper tries to reconstruct the constitutive role of terracotta female figurines in ancient ritual dance practices in a particular cultural context in Central Transjordan.

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09.55-10.10 CET

STONE RELIEFS AND THE EVIDENCE OF DANCE IN ANCIENT LYCIA

In Lycia (Southern part of ancient Anatolia), dance performances are attested by visual culture. Depictions of male and female dancers, sometimes accompanied by musicians, can be seen on stone reliefs that adorned tombs (sarcophagi, rock-cut tombs) and Heroa, dated to the 5th and 4th c. BC. During this period, Lycia was still part of the Achaemenid Empire and had contacts with the Greek world as well as with Eastern Mediterranean. Lycian culture is characterised by both an outward-looking attitude to Greek culture and an Anatolian cultural background. Lycian depictions of dancers have to be studied in this cultural context. Another element of this context is the lack of a literary tradition. Thus, the study of dance performance is mainly based on an iconographic approach. The aim of the paper is to analyse the specificity of this sculptured evidence in order to understand the meaning of dance in ancient Lycia.

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10.15-10.30 CET

STATUS, FASHION AND ROLE OF DANCERS AND MUSICIANS IN ANCIENT EGYPT (SELECTED EXAMPLES FROM CAIRO MUSEUM)

Music and dance were highly valued in ancient Egyptian culture, but they were more important than is generally thought: they were integral to creation and communion with the gods and, further, were the human response to the gift of life and all the experiences of the human condition. The role of women in religion was often to provide music and dance for religious ceremonies. Not only priestesses, but also women in general were associated with music. Wives, daughters, and mothers are frequently shown shaking *sistrum* for the deceased in the Eighteenth Dynasty. The heavy smell of incense, the rhythm of the menit-necklace and the *sistrum*, the chanting of the female priestess musicians in the

semi-gloom of the Egyptian temple are sensual experiences which we can only imagine today. The dancers had ancient Egyptian titles, their hair style, decorations, jewelry, clothes, were varied. This paper will discuss dancers and musicians performance and appearance in ancient Egypt through some examples from scenes from tombs, temples, ostraca and artifacts.

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10.35-10.50 CET

THE UNDERWORLD DANCES IN MOCHE ART: A PRE-COLUMBIAN NARRATIVE OF DANCE AND MUSIC

The Moche occupied the north coast of Peru from approximately 100 B.C to 600 A.D. One of the prominent narratives in Moche discourse is the Underworld Dances, where skeletons dance and play flutes in the afterlife. Morphological and iconographic variations in material cultural representations led me to establish five different subthemes, which indicate chronological and regional idiosyncrasies in the production and distribution of this theme across the valleys occupied by the Moche. I propose a methodological approach based on the convergence of visual semantics and ethnomusicological data, to examine ontological aspects of Moche sound production, such as the roles of flutes in rites of passage to the afterlife.

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10.55-11.10 CET

THE SOUND OF GOLD: CARAMBOLO HOARD AND RITUAL PERFORMANCES IN TARTESO

This paper is focused on the study of a gold ritual set used in the Phoenician sanctuary of El Carambolo, in the Low Guadalquivir (Spain). The research of these objects – Museo Arqueológico de Sevilla- reveals the particular shape of the flower-necklace. It has also been discovered the inclusion of little ceramic balls inside the seven of the eight seals the jewel had. Introducing iconographic analysis and a deep study related with ancient rituals, songs and music, the conference will offer

an archaeological approach to the activities related with the liturgical calendar and the cult of Astarte in Tarteso. In this sense we can highlight the famous puellae gaditanae, dancers from Cádiz, where Melkart temple was the center of the politic and economic tartesian region (Juvenal, Marcial, Plinio, Estrabón). Furthermore, it will be shown a comparative analysis with other Mediterranean sanctuaries where Astarte was adored as Cipro, Sicily, Malta and Pyrgi in West-Central Mediterranean Basin. Primary sources related with Near Eastern divinities and cults will be also included in this analysis focused on archaeological documentation of ancient dance and sounds in ritual contexts.

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11.15-11.30 CET

DANCE IN MINOAN CRETE

Depictions of religious rituals of Minoan Crete (c.3,100-1,200BCE) have often been interpreted as 'ecstatic dance'; but the nature and meaning of the movements, and their relation to sacred spaces, remain under-investigated. This paper considers dance practices in the Early/Middle Minoan periods (c.3,100-1,700BCE) at the mountaintop 'peak sanctuaries' thought to be sites of healing rituals, and the Mesara-type circular tombs used for funerary and other ceremonies. Christine Morris focuses on the range of bodily postures of peak

sanctuary figurines and offers a new analysis of their significance.



Based on fieldwork at the Mesara-type tombs, Lucy Goodison draws on Laban Movement Analysis to investigate dance depicted on contemporary engraved seals. While Christianity has proclaimed for the denial of the body, evidence suggests that in prehistoric Crete bodily movement and dance were used – at a conjunction of special place and time – as specific tools to access interactions with the sacred.

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11.35-11.50 CET

DANCE PERFORMANCES IN DEMETRIAC SANCTUARIES IN CARIA. RELIGIOUS MEANING AND SPACES

As shown by recent publications, it is possible to identify a common line in the organization of Demetriac sanctuaries in Caria. Starting from the evidence of the sanctuary on the southern tip of the promontory of Iasos, we will try to reconstruct a processional path leading to the sanctuary, that included some dance performances. The offerings to Demeter were accompanied, in fact, during the festive celebrations, by ritual actions that also included some specific dances. We will also try to define the existence of a performative space within the sanctuaries of the region: some elements in the cultic paradigm invite us to reflect on the role played by music and dance in the interaction with the Carian communities. Little information can be provided by the coroplastic dossier, where dancing figurines seem to belong to a repertoire widely diffused in the Hellenistic period, which lacked a precise ritual meaning.

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11.55-12.10 CET

TWO IMPORTED DANCES IN THE ATHENIAN DANCESCAPE (5TH – 2ND CENTURIES BCE)

As shown by recent publications, it is possible to identify a common line in the organization of Demetriad sanctuaries in Caria. Starting from the evidence of the sanctuary on the southern tip of the promontory of Iasos, we will try to reconstruct a processional path leading to the sanctuary that included some dance performances. The offerings to Demeter were accompanied, in fact, during the festive celebrations, by ritual actions that also included some specific dances. We will also try to define the existence of a performative space within the sanctuaries of the region: some elements in the cultic paradigm invite us to reflect on the role played by music and dance in the interaction with the Carian communities. Little information can be provided by the coroplastic dossier, where dancing figurines seem to belong to a repertoire widely diffused in the Hellenistic period, which lacked a precise ritual meaning.

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12.15-13.00 CET

Questions & Conclusions

Alfonsina Pagano

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Thursday 2nd December, 2021



9.30-09.45 CET
INTRODUCTION

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09.50-10.05 CET

**DANCE IN HALLSTATT CULTURE: FROM
ICONOGRAPHY TO CHOREOGRAPHY – AN
EXPERIMENT**

Movements, dance and sound are rarely discussed in the Early Iron Age in Central Europe (800–400 BCE). Pictorial sources give hints to dance movements of women and men. Dance attracts people visually and by sounds, created by the persons' movements. In Hallstatt Culture,



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sounding jewellery has been used as personal ornaments, especially of rich women. We aimed to solve the following research questions: How can the depicted dance positions be developed and performed? How can they be combined into a choreography? Which interplays between rattling pendants and bells can be observed at the dance?

For observations we choreographed a dance and recorded it on a video. The sounds create acoustic fields, influence the environment and the listening habits. Upper class women had their personal acoustic code, which is also studied in context with depictions of movement on contemporary vessel decorations and with idiophones from the Hallstatt area.



10.10-10.25 CET

FROM THE SILENCE OF THE IMAGE TO THE WORD OF THE GESTURE: THE CHIRONOMY IN THE ETRUSCAN DANCE

Dance images from antiquity, which are captured in paintings, vases and other artifacts, may appear silent and frozen in time. On the contrary, they have a great deal to say. One of the most explicit means of communication from the past lies in "the art of the gesture". It is within this context that I wish to examine the Etruscan Dance, with particular emphasis on the position of the dancers' hands ("chironomy"). By starting with a series of particularly significant images, I aim to decipher the complexity of their communicative structure. The art of the gesture is a universal language, but simultaneously, a unique reflection on an individual society. Furthermore, it is also intriguing to analyze the Etruscan Dance from an aesthetical and philosophical point of view. In order to do so, we must first alter our perceptual parameters.

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10.30-10.45 CET

DANCE AWAY DEATH - MATERIAL EVIDENCE FOR DANCE IN ANCIENT EGYPT FROM THE EARLIEST TIMES TO THE END OF THE NEW KINGDOM (6500-1000 BC)

Dance and ritual have been closely connected in ancient Egypt since the earliest times. The first evidence for dance appears in rock paintings in the Cave of the Beast (6500–4400 calBC). About 3100 BC, dancing women appeared on the mace head of King Scorpion II. From later

times, several depictions in temples and tombs show the performance of dance in the context of rituals, as for example in the mastaba of Debeheni from the middle of the 3rd millennium BC, in which the whole ritual including dance and singing is depicted. However, it is noteworthy that no musical instruments appear at this very significant intersection between life and death.

This lecture will focus on the following questions: In which context do the earliest depictions appear? When do we find evidence for dance in temples and tombs? Who were the dancers in these settings? Which movements appear in which contexts? Is there a change in the course of time?

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10.50-11.05 CET

ENACTING DANGER: ACROBATIC PERFORMANCE IN THE BRONZE AGE NEAR EAST

Acrobatics explores the limits of physical ability and offers a distinctive vantage point from which to observe ancient attitudes towards movement and the body. In this paper I examine the art historical and textual evidence for acrobatic performance in Bronze Age Anatolia and Mesopotamia. I first suggest new interpretations of several key objects

by establishing a connection between textual references to professional acrobats and the visual depiction of acrobatics. More specifically, I argue that these objects depict a particular type of acrobatic movement in

which the acrobats tumble over upright swords. Drawing on a theoretical framework grounded in a semiotics of the body, performance theory, and embodiment, I then consider the broader context and implications of this particular form of extreme and explicitly dangerous bodily performance.

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11.10-11.25 CET
**ARCHAEO-CHOREOLOGY: A
TRANSDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE**

How to do Archaeology from the perspective of a dancing body? Is it possible? Having these questions as guidance for our meeting, we propose an epistemological discussion on the development of Archaeo-choreological thought, based on the work of Valerie Preston-Dunlop. Bringing together the fields of Archaeology and Dance in a transdisciplinary perspective, we seek to create a discourse that

applies the methodologies and theories of both areas, establishing synergy without methodological fractionation or hierarchy of knowledge. Having the representations of dance movements at the Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram - Tamil Nadu / India we intend to present a comparative analysis of the materiality of the panels with the immateriality of the classical Indian dances performed nowadays, observing the material and immaterial relations in the construction of an ancestral identity discourse and reflecting the social role of dance art for Indian society.

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11.30-12.00 CET
Questions & Conclusions

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