

When Did Greek Dancers Wear Shoes?

This paper surveys evidence of footwear as part of dancers' costumes in archaic and classical Greek musical performances. Modern scholarship on music and dance fails to address the issue of when such performers would wear shoes (Lawler; Mullen; Lonsdale; Naerebout; Bundrick). I will show that dancers were mostly barefoot and only wore shoes on specific occasions.

The attractive visual appearance of dancing (bare) feet was vital for its enjoyment; such was its purpose. Archaic poetry and inscribed archaic prizes for dancers confirm the fact that talented footwork was meant to please spectators (Boegehold; Powell). Looking at (male and female) feet could arouse erotic feelings (Levine).

Multiple written sources describe female dancers as barefoot: their feet are "white," "delicate" and "slender." Other descriptions are more overt: barefoot dancers appear in Greek texts from Aeschylus to Longus. In addition, Lucian's *Peri Orcheseos*, the only extant work on dance, discusses shoes of actors, but implies that dancers' feet are unshod. The Pindaric reference to "fitting the feast-splendid tune to the Doric sandal" (*Ol.* 3.5-6) could be a reference to dancers wearing Laconian footwear — but is open to other interpretations.

In Greek art, most dancers are barefoot (Collumbar; Hughes) but it is not hard to find images of shod dancers (Weege; Prudhommeau). Pickard-Cambridge points out that when monuments do show shod female choral dancers they wear "a loose, soft, undecorated boot, often with a pointed toe" (206). But there is little consistency. An Attic black-figure oinochoe (British Museum B 509) shows a barefoot dancing chorus of men dressed as birds, and two generations later, an Attic red-figure calyx-crater depicts dancing bird chorus members wearing winged shoes (Getty Mus. 82.AE.83). Six members of a boy's tragic chorus

on an Attic red-figure column-krater (Basle Antik. Samm. Lud. BS 415) are barefoot, as are several comic chorus depictions of the 6th century (Berlin F 1697; Green 1994 29). Most dancing satyrs are shown barefoot in vase scenes. All of the chorus members on the Pronomos vase are unshod (Naples 3240).

Although it is difficult to avoid anachronism when discussing dance in classical times (Mullen), and in spite of the difficulty of identifying art scenes that actually portray dance (Naerebout), an examination of iconography that depicts shod dancers allows us to speculate about the significance of the shoes in these dancing scenes. Our study indicates some special roles for shod dancers, sometimes relating to the story associated with the dance (if known). Some examples relate to the occasion of the performance. Although many ecstatic dancing maenads are barefoot (mostly in groups) some are shod (mainly individual dancers), indicating that solo dance performers would don shoes for special performances separate from a chorus. Images from *Magna Graecia* tend to show shod dancers slightly more often, so geographic considerations may play a role. Some sympotic scenes depict soft-shoed dancing men, indicating a possible inside/outside dichotomy, and/or Dionysiac associations.

In the end, we must acknowledge that we cannot always reconcile visual and literary sources, and admit that “there are dangers inherent in using literary sources to interpret Greek vases,” and that often we must interpret iconography on its own terms (Hamilton).

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