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RESEÑAS

Zoa Alonso Fernández y Sarah Olsen (ed.). *Imprints of Dance in Ancient Greece and Rome.* Madrid: UAM Ediciones, 2024, 311 pp.

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The volume under review is the main output of IDA (*Improntas de Danza Antigua: Textos, Cuerpos, Imágenes, Movimiento*), a research project directed by Zoa Alonso Fernández and funded by the BBVA Foundation and the Spanish Society of Classical Studies. Eight scholars analyze the imprints of dance in written and material sources from the 8th century BCE to the 5th century CE to illustrate the role of dance in ancient Greece and Rome. The authors are Zoa Alonso Fernández, Rosa Andújar, Lauren Curtis, Laura Gianvittorio-Ungar, Carolyn Laferrière, Sarah Olsen, Karin Schlapbach, and Naomi Weiss.

An overview by Alonso Fernández and Olsen highlights the potential and problems of the available sources for researching ancient Greek and Roman dance (pp. 1-8). Later, the authors present the type of dances known by the ancient Greeks and Romans (pp. 8-15) and contexts for choreographic practices (pp. 15-28). The final section (pp. 28-44) introduces the book's main chapters.

Drawing on her broader interest in the intersections between Classics and Race, Andújar uses Chapter 1, "Geography", to argue that an approach to dance as a "site of racialization" (p. 47) sheds new light on how Greek and Roman people perceived dance. She explores the perception of foreign dances in Athens and Rome (pp. 49-61), the interconnections between dance and military conquest (pp. 61-67), and how ancient dancers synthesized multiple identities, illustrating the ever-changing borders of the ancient Greek and Roman worlds (pp. 68-79). As Curtis demonstrates in Chapter 2, "Space", many spaces in the vast Greek and Roman geography were prone to hosting dances: theaters (pp. 81-87), streets (pp. 87-91), natural spaces (pp. 91-95), private homes (pp. 95-98), and meeting places (pp. 98-108).

Olsen shows that dance was used to construct human bodies in Antiquity in Chapter 3, "Body". Greek and Roman dancers could reinforce their gender, racial, or social identity (pp. 109-119) or become other beings (pp. 119-136) through dance. In Chapter 4, "Audience", Weiss argues that dances shaped the emotions of ancient audiences. People imitated (pp. 139-144) and responded to dances with pleasure, wonder, or desire (pp. 144-150). Dances also affected the emotions of external audiences (pp. 150-158).

The next two chapters reflect on the methods and tools of ancient dances. Alonso Fernández uses Chapter 5, "Movement", to analyze the concepts of movement/time and stillness in Greek and Roman dance. Kinetic movements underpinned many texts (pp. 166-175), an idea explored with the description of a synchronized swimming performance in Martial's *Liber Spectaculorum* 30 [26] (pp. 175-182). Alonso Fernández later studies the notion of stillness in the material record,

based on similarities between the performers of Martial's spectacle and pantomime dancers (pp. 182-198). As shown by Schlapbach in Chapter 6, "Objects", many tools contributed to the impact of ancient dances: balls, hoops, wheels, and shields (pp. 201-209), props, musical instruments, and swords/daggers (pp. 215-223).

Gianvittorio-Ungar uses Chapter 7, "Politics" (pp. 229-255), to show how dances in Antiquity were instrumentalized to actively and passively challenge power hierarchies (pp. 234-245). For this reason, some people in ancient Greece and Rome attempted to prevent undesirable bodily movements, as suggested by Plato (*Laws*, 664-665 and *Republic*, 424b-c) and Livy's account of the *Senatus Consultum de Bacchanalibus* (pp. 246-250).

Regular readers of this journal may particularly identify with the approaches of Laferière's chapter "Gods", as she is trained as an art historian, unlike the previous authors, whose expertise pertains to Classical Philology. In the last chapter of this volume, Laferrière shows us that ancient gods often engaged in dance. Myths show gods creating dances and dances creating the universe (pp. 260-265). Gods responded to and performed dances at any time and place, and some were prone to dance (pp. 265-272). If gods could approach humans through dance, humans also became closer to deities by performing dances mimicking their movements (pp. 272-288). The volume concludes with an index of ancient texts and another for proper names and technical terms.

By bringing together and discussing numerous sources, the authors demonstrate the essential role of dance in the ancient Greek and Roman world, highlighting the pervasive impact of ancient dancers in shaping and interconnecting divine bodies and spaces. This volume also shows that, similar to other cultures (e.g., pre-modern India),[1] ancient Greek and Roman societies did not draw as sharp a distinction between dance, music, and theater as is seen in today's Western society. Thus, the authors extend a pertinent invitation to the scholarly community to interconnect these performative arts. However, as dance is inseparable from music, there exists at least one instance where music could have been more prominently featured in this volume: the comment on the *hydraulis* in the mosaic at Noheda (Spain). While it is described on p. 97 as "an organ so large it is operated by three individuals," there are depictions of smaller *hydraulis* with various individuals operating the pistons and valves that fill the chamber of this organ with air, similar to what is depicted in the Noheda mosaic.[2] The reason the *hydraulis* had to be operated and played by various individuals was its mechanism, not its size.

This book reassesses the role of dance in Antiquity using an innovative methodology that integrates traditional Greek and Roman Philological and Material Studies with Dance Studies. As Alonso Fernández clearly shows on pp. 164-165, this combination avoids the pitfalls of conventional approaches to ancient dance, which aimed at reconstructing ancient choreographies, paving the way for other approaches, such as the backgrounds of ancient Greek and Roman dancers. However, those from Ancient Studies who encounter Dance Studies through this book for the first time might have benefited from a methodological chapter, not necessarily authored by a Classicist, to introduce the field.[3]

Moreover, Dance Studies allow the authors to propose cross-cultural approaches that elucidate the ancient Greek and Roman evidence. There are allusions, among others, to dances in Pre-Hispanic America (pp. 62-63), Arbeau's *Orchésographie* (p. 164), the 19th-century artistic representations of the Byzantine empress (and dancer) Theodora (pp. 231-230), British South Asian dancers (p. 71), or *Celui qui tombe*, a 2014 production by Yoann Bourgeois (pp. 212-213). Etruscans are mentioned throughout the volume (pp. 3-4, 12-13, 18, 66-67, 91, 249 n. 51), but I wanted to see connections with dance practices in the other cultures of the Ancient World. For instance, a long

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1 Lewis Rowell, *Music and Musical Thought in Early India* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 9-16.

2 Jean Perrot, *L'orgue de ses origines hellénistiques à la fin du XIIIe siècle: étude historique et archéologique* (Paris: Picard, 1965), plates iii: figures 1-2, vi, viii: figure 2, and ix: figures 3, 5, 7-8.

3 Something comparable to Martine Clouzot, "Méthodologies: le statut du musicien dans l'Occident medieval (XIIIe-XVe siècle)," in *Le statut du musicien dans la Méditerranée ancienne: Égypte, Mésopotamie, Grèce, Rome: actes de la table ronde internationale tennue à Lyon, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, les 4 et 5 juillet 2008*, ed. by Sybille Emerit, 1-14 (Cairo: IFAO, 2013).

tradition of monographic studies[4] would have enabled the authors to establish connections with dance practices in the Ancient Near East. These might have reinforced, for instance, the analyses of the Syrian-like (*Surisca*) dancer in Pseudo-Virgilian *Copa* (e.g., pp. 113-116).

As someone with a background in Ancient Near Eastern Studies, I see great potential in the depictions of acrobatic dancers performing a handstand on a stool in the krater from Lipari and the *kotyle* from Paestum in figures 28 and 36. They shed light on the Sumerian expression ^{ĝeš}šu$_2$-a suḫ$_3$-saḫ$_4$ and the Akkadian *littu riqdu*, both meaning "dance stool." These terms have not caught scholarly attention, as they are only documented in cuneiform lexical texts, the earliest of which dates to the early second millennium BCE: the text cited in Assyriology as CM 22, pl. 36-37: obverse vii 11'.[5] There are no depictions of Mesopotamian dancers using chairs. Even so, these ancient Greek depictions might help to identify ^{ĝeš}šu$_2$-a suḫ$_3$-saḫ$_4$ and *littu riqdu* with stools (^{ĝeš}šu$_2$-a / *littu*) for dances (suḫ$_3$-saḫ$_4$ / *riqdu*) in ancient Mesopotamia. Performers could move around the stools: suḫ$_3$-saḫ$_4$ is an onomatopoeia and designates the noise of the running feet elsewhere in Sumerian literature.[6] However, it cannot be determined if they also performed acrobatics on the stools. I thank the authors for bringing these depictions to my attention.

As the absence of concluding remarks in this volume may suggest, research on ancient dance is far from complete. This innovative and informative book will be a useful starting point for studying dance in Antiquity in the future.

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4 E.g., Stefano de Martino, *La Danza nella Cultura Ittita* (Florence: Elite, 1989), and the special issue of *Near Eastern Archaeology* 66, no. 3 (2003) entitled *Dance in the Ancient World*.

5 *DCCLT Project*, https://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/dcclt/P247864/html, accessed April 26, 2025.

6 Pascal Attinger, *Glossaire sumérien-français principalement des textes littéraires paléobabyloniens. Deuxième édition, revue et augmentee* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2023), 1478.