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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS

Department of Classics

Female Acrobatics in Context: 5th-4th c. BC

by

Marleigh Anderson

A thesis presented to
The Graduate School
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

May 2019
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List of Abbreviations

*ARV*²= Beazley, J. D. 1963. *Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

BAPD= Beazley Archive of Pottery Online.

CVA= Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum.

IG= Inscriptiones Graecae.

IGD= Trendall, A. D. and Webster, T. B. L. 1971. *Illustrations of Greek Drama*. London: Phaidon Press.

LIMC= Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae.

*PhV*²= Trendall, A. D. 1967. "Phlyax Vases (Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged)." *Bulletin Supplement* (University of London. Institute of Classical Studies): 1-116.

RVAp= Trendall, A. D. and Cambitoglou, A. 1978. *The Red-Figured Vases of Apulia*, vol. I-II. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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Introduction

The ‘meaning’ of a performance is largely determined by its context. This idea became clear to me after years as a dancer performing in drastically different venues—including nursing home lobbies, circus tents, makeshift outdoor festival stages, football fields, and ornate theatres. To me, every performance opportunity felt distinct, especially depending on the audience and the nature of the performance. A few representative comparisons of my experiences at different performance venues will illustrate this point. When I danced for a small group of nursing home residents, I danced simply to bring them joy. I found that I focused on the emotional aspects of my performance rather than the technical ones; I figured that the audience would not care so much if I made a mistake in my movements, but would remember how the performance made them feel. This performance occurred on a volunteer basis, and I was able to mingle with the audience afterwards, during which time I simply wanted to hear their stories and make them smile. My experience dancing in the opening number of a circus-themed fashion show, held in a circus tent, was drastically different. I had been hired for this performance, and the audience members had paid good money for their tickets to the show, so I felt more pressure to execute my routine perfectly. My role at the event was to create a spectacle—to ‘wow’ the audience rather than to connect with them emotionally. This ‘spectacle’ aspect of the performance also included mingling with the patrons of the event while costumed as a circus character: my job was to sell the experience of a night at the big top. Part of my expertise as a dancer was learning how to tailor my performances to the specific venue and audience at hand. All these experiences have suggested to me that performances cannot be severed from their contexts: whether a dancer is

encountered on a street corner or in a theatre makes a difference both in the audience's interaction with the dancer and in the dancer's experience of the event.

This is the personal background that I bring to my study of Greek female acrobatic performances, and it is part of the reason that I find it critical to consider these performances within their contexts. This is not a straightforward task: the textual evidence for female acrobatics in 5th-4th c. Greece is limited and marked by elite bias, while the plethora of visual evidence is often difficult to interpret, especially in terms of performance reality. How might the female acrobat in Xenophon's imaginative symposium, or a female performing acrobatic stunts on a vase, relate to entertainment practices in 'real' life? While working with the limitations of the evidence, I will determine the social function of female acrobats in classical and early Hellenistic society. By assembling both the textual and material sources, I will discuss the variety of spaces in which female acrobatic performances are attested: the symposium, the comic stage, and wonder-shows. Each chapter will center around the evidence for these respective venues, as I attempt to reconstruct the relationship between the audience, acrobat, and performance space. This approach will allow me to achieve my two major goals for this project: to establish (as best as possible) the performance realities of female acrobats in their respective contexts and to determine the way the acrobat functions (especially in relation to the audience) in each context.

Historically, female acrobats have not received much scholarly attention. The first monograph on acrobatics, Waldemar Deonna's *Le symbolisme de l'acrobatie antique*, was not published until 1953. Deonna assembles a wide range of evidence for acrobatics, ultimately making a case for acrobatics as representative of death, linking the image of the tumbling acrobat to the image of a corpse. This is a worthwhile connection, especially considering that many vases

depicting acrobats have been found in graves, but it does not take performance context into account; Greek acrobatics are not attested at funeral games, for example. Nevertheless, anxieties over the possible death of acrobats do occur in the textual sources, and I will later discuss this in relation to the sword-tumbling performance of the female acrobat in Xenophon's *Symposium*. Following Deonna, Todisco 2013 brings together a wide range of material evidence not just for Greek acrobatics, but also for wonder and spectacle in a wide variety of ancient civilizations, including Hittite, Egyptian, Cretan, Etruscan, Greek, and Roman. Todisco catalogues this evidence extensively with useful introductions and charts. Todisco's tables, which give the distributions of literary, epigraphic, and iconographic evidence for different types of spectacle, as well as his descriptions and plates, provide invaluable support to the study of ancient spectacle of all sorts across many cultures and time periods. Todisco's work allows for further analysis of this material. Vickers takes this up in his 2016 dissertation "The Acrobatic Body in Ancient Greek Society," using the theory of socially qualified body movement¹ to demonstrate that Greeks tended to view the male acrobatic body (in sport) as superior and the female acrobatic body (in spectacle) as inferior.² His discussion is broadly sensitive to performance reality, but he does leave room to explore further the performance of the female acrobatic body in its various contexts. If all movement is socially qualified, then a female acrobatic performance will hold nuanced meanings when it occurs in different social contexts, and Vickers does not much distinguish between performances at symposia and on the street, for example.

One of the main reasons for the lack of attention to context in previous studies is that female acrobats are often depicted in a similar pose across these performance contexts. When

¹ Vickers (2016: 1-6 esp.) develops this theory following the "sociological theory that bodies carry social meaning (espoused by Bordieu, Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and many others)" (2016: 4). He operates under the idea that the way someone moves his or her body conveys meaning as to his or her societal status.

² Vickers 2016: 137-233 on female acrobatic wonders, *thaumatopoiia*, sword-tumbling, and potters' wheels is most pertinent to my work here.

discussing iconographic representations of the female acrobatic body, Vickers develops the concept of the ‘generic pose,’ which signifies the handstand pose in which female acrobats are usually depicted on vase paintings, with minor variations: “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 head” (2016: 147-48). Acrobats are depicted in this type of pose on vases from different areas and by different painters. Based on the frequency of this pose across different performance contexts and in different types of acrobatic routines (i.e. on top of potters’ wheels, on top of stools, in between swords, etc.), Vickers argues that the pose is related to ideology about female acrobatic bodies (2016: 148):

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 thaumatopoietic acrobat’s performance; that is to say, it embodies the ideology informing these corporeal wonders.

This iconographic tendency, then, largely serves to identify female acrobats as a certain *class* or *type* of people. This is especially significant when considering female entertainment as a profession. Just because a woman is able to perform acrobatic feats does not mean that she will perform those feats *exclusively*. She will likely work as a dancing-girl (such as the one in Xenophon’s *Symposium*, to be discussed fully in the following chapter) who can offer performances ranging from dance and mime³ to acrobatics and other types of ‘wonders’ (perhaps juggling or hoop-throwing). What, then, is the point of talking about female acrobats when it is unlikely that any one woman worked *only* as an acrobat? Part of the answer lies in the standard depiction of the ‘generic pose’: as Vickers demonstrates, it is clear that female acrobatic bodies carry a specific sociological meaning, suggesting that their performances were viewed as distinct

³ Particularly relevant here is the mimetic routine at the end of Xen. *Symp.* in which the dancing-girl ceases her acrobatic displays and performs as Ariadne.

from other types of female entertainment in some way. The prevalence of the ‘generic pose’ for specifically female acrobatic bodies suggests that we should consider female acrobatics as its own socio-cultural phenomenon, even if women who worked as acrobats could also work in less-specialized capacities, such as dancers.

As a point of contrast, male tumblers are depicted in a variety of forms, and the context of each scene significantly impacts these forms.⁴ In an athletic context, the form of male tumblers suggests dynamic motion, as opposed to the static handstand pose that is so prevalent in depictions of female acrobats. Two Attic black-figure cups dated around 530 BC feature male springboard tumblers (one on each side of each cup) who wear militaristic equipment.⁵ The tumbler’s form varies slightly on each cup, but nevertheless each tumbler is depicted as upside down with his legs tucked, positioned next to a springboard apparatus. This is a more active, airborne position that seems to highlight each tumbler’s physicality in a militaristic and/or athletic context. When men perform seemingly acrobatic feats in a sympotic context, however, they often seem to simply fall into acrobatic poses or contort their bodies in ways that suggest heavy drinking and revelry. For example, intoxicated men dance, drink, and play *auloi* on an Attic black-figure stand dated 520-500 BC.⁶ Two of these figures are in poses that could be considered acrobatic on some level: one symposiast bends backwards in a crab-walk position, balancing on one arm and stretching the other upwards, and another symposiast contorts his body, completely twisting his torso so that he can look at a kylix and one of the *aulos* players. In the context of this vase painting, these poses seem symbolic of drunken play: the figures are not

⁴ This is not intended as an exhaustive discussion of male tumbling, but rather a brief comparison between male and female acrobatic poses. For an excellent discussion of male tumbling, see Vickers 2016: 17-50 on male tumbling in sport and martial dance, 51-78 on male springboard tumbling, and 79-136 on male horseback tumbling.

⁵ Universität Würzburg, Martin von Wagner Museum HA639 (*BAPD* 340243), ca. 530 BC; Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 67.861 (*BAPD* 340249), ca. 530 BC.

⁶ Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum 284 (*BAPD* 351255).

athletes or entertainers, but symposiasts whose revelry has become somewhat out of hand. By contrast, the overwhelming tendency to depict female acrobats in the ‘generic pose,’ even across different performance contexts, seems related to the professionalism of the acrobats—they are hired entertainers rather than drunken partygoers. Further, female acrobats in the ‘generic pose’ seem to form a group, representing one particular type of performer. As Vickers suggests in the quote above (p. 4), the choice of the ‘generic pose’ in depicting nearly all female acrobats can tell us how female acrobatic performances might have been seen.

The status of wonder-making (*thaumatopoiia*) plays a large role in the ideological underpinnings of the ‘generic pose’ and, in turn, the significance of female acrobatics.

Thaumatopoiia in classical Athens was considered an unproductive pursuit, as—in contrast to a dramatic chorus, for example⁷—it usually does not have an obvious civic, didactic, or religious element.⁸ Whether juggling, tumbling, or exhibiting puppets,⁹ the thaumatopoeitic performer offered bodily spectacle for pay, which was seen by the elite as a particular marker of low status. Despite (or perhaps as a result of) its popularity among the masses, Athenian philosophers and orators criticize *thaumatopoiia*. For example, Isocrates likens the exaggerations of sophists to unproductive acts of wonder-making, and his rhetoric reflects elite views on the performances of *thaumatopoiioi* (15.269):

Ἡγοῦμαι γὰρ τὰς μὲν τοιαύτας τερατολογίας ὁμοίας εἶναι ταῖς θαυματοποιαῖς ταῖς οὐδὲν μὲν ὠφελούσαις, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν ἀνοήτων περιστάτοις γιγνομέναις, δεῖν δὲ τοὺς προὔργου τι ποιεῖν βουλομένους καὶ τῶν λόγων τοὺς ματαίους καὶ τῶν πράξεων τὰς μηδὲν πρὸς τὸν βίον φερούσας ἀναιρεῖν ἐξ ἀπασῶν τῶν διατριβῶν.¹⁰

For I consider such marvelous tales to be similar to acts of *thaumatopoiia*—which do not benefit anything but are admired by unintelligent people—and [I consider] it necessary

⁷ See esp. Kurke 2012 on the role of *choreia* in fostering unity through *thauma* and *eros*.

⁸ Vickers 2016: 158-174 extensively focuses on the (low) social value of wonder-making.

⁹ See Vickers 2016: 159 for an extensive list of performances under the umbrella of *thaumatopoiia*.

¹⁰ Ed. Mandilaras 2003. All translations my own.

that those who want to do something useful remove meaningless words and deeds that contribute nothing to life from all of their leisurely pursuits.

Isocrates' comparison captures many of the 'problems' with *thaumatopoiia* more broadly, as seen through an elite lens: wonder-making is not beneficial, it does not make positive contributions to one's life, and it is enjoyed primarily by unintelligent people—people without a νοῦς (τῶν ἀνοήτων). As I will discuss in the following chapter, this anxiety over the civic and intellectual unproductivity of *thaumatopoiia* is an important part of Socrates' analysis of the female acrobatic performances in Xenophon's *Symposium*.

From a philosophical standpoint, *thaumatopoiia* is also criticized for its relationship to trickery and deceit. It is perhaps no surprise that Plato sees these imitative acts as inferior, but he develops these thoughts further by relating *thaumatopoiia* to witchcraft. After giving a few examples of the limitations of visual perception, Plato criticizes scene-painting, *thaumatopoiia*, and other *mēchanai* for manipulating the sense of sight: ὅ δὲ ἡμῶν τῷ παθήματι τῆς φύσεως ἡ σκιαγραφία ἐπιθεμένη γοητείας οὐδὲν ἀπολείπει, καὶ ἡ θαυματοποιία καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ τοιαῦται μηχαναί (“Scene-painting, taking advantage of this property of our nature, does not differ from witchcraft—so too *thaumatopoiia* and many other such artificial tricks,” *Rep.* 602d).¹¹ By this logic, another part of the 'problem' with *thaumatopoiia* is that it tricks the eyes into thinking they are seeing a *thauma*, when in reality it is just a human performer using some artificial contrivance (*mēchanē*) to create an illusion. This criticism of *thaumatopoiia* is perhaps more relevant to tricks such as juggling and pebble-playing than to acrobatics, but there might also have been some 'tricks of the trade' in order to ensure that an acrobatic performance was successful, especially the more dangerous ones such as sword-tumbling.

¹¹ Greek text ed. Slings 2003.

These criticisms of *thaumatopoiia*—that it is an unproductive pursuit which operates by deceit—are related to the disconnect between wonder-making and the *experience* of wonder (*thauma*).¹² As Neer argues in relationship to classical Greek sculpture, “[w]onder, in Greek thinking, characteristically grounds itself in vision” (2010: 58). In this visual conception of wonder, *thaumata* tend to consist of radiant, swiftly-appearing handiworks (often of the gods) that are meant to be seen and processed; according to Neer, the typical responses to these wondrous sights are astonishment, speechlessness, and maybe even an inability to understand.¹³ Part of processing a *thauma* often involves confronting its “doubleness” and “alterity.” Neer explains this concept by positioning *thaumata* in between the act of seeing (‘this,’ “the casting of an eye outward”) and the act of appearing (‘other/that,’ “showing forth to, for, or at someone”), in a passage that is worth quoting at length:¹⁴

As for wonder, it forms a hinge or joint linking the poles of “this” and “that.” The word *thauma*, “wonder,” is itself intermediate between the two. It does not simply name a class of objects, but also a state of mind: in Greek as in English, one wonders at wonders. The word itself shuttles between “here” and “there.” More specifically, the formula *thauma idesthai*, “a wonder to behold for itself and oneself,” is used exclusively to describe crafted works, like the blazing chariot of Hera or the shining armor of Rhesos. These artifacts partake of the radiance of the gods even as they are themselves no more than possessions... [they] have a dual allegiance: radiantly “other,” they are yet possessed by the “this.”

A large part of this conception of wonder is the ability for the mortal viewer (the ‘this’) to participate in the divine (the ‘other/that,’ which appears from the gods). While *thaumata* do not always have to be related to divine appearances, nevertheless this can help explain the negative perception of *thaumatopoiia*: the work of *thaumatopoiioi* is by nature mortal, so it does not inspire the same sort of astonishment as does an experience of the radiant divine. Further, if the

¹² See Vickers 2016: 166-69.

¹³ Neer 2010: 57-62. For the inability to understand, see especially Neer’s discussion of mortal man’s reaction to the figure of Pandora (2010: 58-59).

¹⁴ Neer 2010: 66, drawing on Prier 1989’s conception of sight and appearance in Homer.

‘wonder’ of a female acrobatic performance operates in the space between ‘this’ (the viewer’s act of seeing) and ‘that’ (the acrobat’s act of appearing, i.e. displaying her tricks), then this ‘wonder’ can only be short-lived, impermanent, and markedly mortal. This disconnect between experiences of *thaumata* and experiences of *thaumatopoiia* plays a role in Socrates’ reactions to the female acrobatic performances in Xenophon’s *Symposium*: Socrates is far from astonished or speechless at the acrobat’s *thaumata*, and he (humorously) attempts to turn the fleeting performances into something more ‘useful’ by extracting philosophical topics of conversation for the symposiasts to consider.

While the low social value of *thaumatopoiia* provides one way of understanding the significance of female acrobatics, it is by no means the only way. Female acrobatic performances do not seem to have lived up to the ideal performance aesthetics demanded by elite spectators (although it remains a possibility that this was not a problem for the masses). In light of the close relationship between acrobatics and dance,¹⁵ here I turn to Peponi’s models of spectatorship and the perception of aesthetic values in dance, especially as each relates to *mimēsis*.¹⁶ After discussing spectatorship in Lucian’s *On the Dance* and Libanius’ *On Behalf of the Dancers*, Peponi concludes that part of an ancient viewer’s experience of dance (at least in these admittedly late texts, which are heavily influenced by the hyper-mimetic genre of pantomime) involved navigating the quick succession of imitative forms, which creates a cognitive and hermeneutic challenge (2015: 211):

¹⁵ Acrobatics seem to have been a subset or specialized form of dance. The female acrobat in Xen. *Symp.* is referred to as a “dancing-girl.” There is some evidence for female acrobatic performances accompanied by an *auletris* (the rhythmic hoop-throwing performance in Xen. *Symp.* 2.8; the *auletris* sitting next to a female acrobat on a potter’s wheel on an Apulian Gnathia-style lekythos, fig. 1.7), although the role that music and dance played in acrobatic routines is not entirely clear. Did the acrobat simply perform sequences of tricks, or did she dance in the transitions between them? Did she perform her tricks to complement the music, or did music just help create the general ambiance?

¹⁶ Peponi 2015: 211-15 esp. The three models include: non-mimetic, analogy (the *orchestic imaginary*), and meta-mimetic.

Dance mimesis, then, is far from turning the act of viewing into a facile act of comprehending. If guessing the signified was indeed part of the viewer's enthrallment, it was due to the larger phenomenon that dance offered the utter enrichment of the signifier, the ultimate elaboration on its potential. In other words, the viewer...is not *just* looking for meaning and content; he is electrified by the constant flow of forms and by the challenges these forms pose to his grasp on meaning. Thus understood, mimesis does not strip dance of an aesthetic. Quite the opposite, it turns aesthetic apprehension into a real psychosomatic adventure.

This idea of aesthetic perception suggests that mimetic performances could demand much more from viewers than the simple identification of a certain move or pose with a known character.

This provides one way to understand the mime at the end of Xenophon's *Symposium* (9.3-6), in which the dancing-girl leaves behind her acrobatic skills and acts as Ariadne. While the text does not explicitly call for a "constant flow of forms" in the choreography of the mime, it *does* suggest that many of the spectators react with a "psychosomatic adventure": the passionate love displayed between 'Ariadne' and 'Dionysus' during this performance inspires many of the symposiasts to go home to their wives, which restores the value of the *oikos* and fertility and marks an end to the homosociality of the symposium. In other words, the audience members do not just sit back and enjoy the performance—they actively think about its meanings, make personal connections to those meanings, and physically respond to these meanings as well. The symposiasts do not experience this psychosomatic challenge when watching the dancing-girl's acrobatic feats. Instead, they struggle to connect with the performance, as all the girl really 'imitates' is a hoop.

Beyond this 'failure' of female acrobatics in relation to *mimēsis*, it is striking that the symposiasts do not marvel at the acrobat's impressive physical fitness—which must have included strength, balance, and flexibility—nor do they once call her acrobatic performances beautiful. In this sense, the 'problem' of the female acrobat is also a problem of aesthetics: displays of female physicality seem to have been outside the realm of aesthetic enjoyment (at

least for the elite symposiasts, if not for the masses as well). Following Peponi’s model of non-mimetic aesthetic perception,¹⁷ there is some indication that dance in antiquity could be appreciated simply for its own sake—for the “skillful and intense movement” that dance can require (2015: 213). Significantly, the examples Peponi discusses involve aesthetic appreciation for male dancers (the footwork of the chorus of young Phaeacian men and the ball-throwing routine of Halios and Laodamas, which includes backbends and high leaps). In direct contrast with their treatment of the acrobatic dancing-girl, Xenophon’s Socrates admires the beauty and skill of the male dancer (2.15-16):

ἐκ τούτου ὁ παῖς ὠρχήσατο. καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης εἶπεν· Εἶδες’, ἔφη, ὡς καλὸς <ὁ> παῖς ὢν ὁμῶς σὺν τοῖς σχήμασιν ἔτι καλλίων φαίνεται ἢ ὅταν ἡσυχίαν ἔχη; ...καὶ γὰρ ἄλλο τι προσεενόησα, ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄργον τοῦ σώματος ἐν τῇ ὀρχήσει ἦν, ἀλλ’ ἅμα καὶ τράχηλος καὶ σκέλη καὶ χεῖρες ἐγυμνάζοντο, ὥσπερ χρὴ ὀρχεῖσθαι τὸν μέλλοντα εὐφορώτερον τὸ σῶμα ἔξειν.¹⁸

After this [the dancing-girl’s sword-tumbling performance], the boy danced. And Socrates said: “Did you see,” he said, “how the boy, who is beautiful [already], nevertheless appears still more beautiful with the dance movements than when he keeps still? ...for I also noticed another thing, that no part of his body was idle in the dance, but his neck and legs and hand were exercised at the same time—as it is necessary to dance for someone intending to have a more graceful body.”¹⁹

This contrast between the aesthetic perception of the boy’s dance and the lack of any aesthetic appreciation for the dancing-girl’s acrobatic feats is related to the cultural value of male beauty, athleticism, and virtuosity. In other words, even without thaumatopoeitic or mimetic concerns, the concept of a *female* acrobat—with all of her strength and physicality—poses aesthetic problems for (elite Athenian male) spectators. These problems could be related to ideology about the way that ‘respectable’ women should look and act, even though female acrobats do not fall

¹⁷ Peponi 2015: 212-13, drawing from *Laws* 795e and *Odyssey* 8.260-265 (chorus of young men), 370-376 (Halios and Laodamas’ ball-throwing).

¹⁸ All Greek text of Xen. *Symp.* ed. Marchant 1900.

¹⁹ Socrates goes on to joke about his own experience dancing for bodily exercise. On this passage and Socrates dancing, see Huss 1999. I do not think that the humor of this passage precludes my point about the contrast between the aesthetic appreciation of the boy’s dance and the lack thereof for the dancing-girl’s acrobatic performances.

under this category: tumbling and other acrobatic feats that require immense strength and physicality were outside the scope of acceptable female movement, but there is some indication that these types of feats were celebrated in the context of male sport and athletics.²⁰ In other words, it seems that females moving their bodies in this athletically demanding way would have been seen as especially transgressive and undesirable.

These issues could have affected the perception of female acrobatics in some way no matter the context in which they were encountered. Nevertheless, there would have been a wide range of reactions to female acrobatic performances, especially when they occur in different spaces in front of different audiences. In my thesis, I will draw larger conclusions about the role of the female acrobat across different performance contexts in Greek society by discussing the textual treatment of Xenophon's acrobat alongside relevant vase paintings that give visual clues about the contexts in which acrobatic performances occurred. I organize these discussions by context: my chapters on female acrobats at symposia, on the comic stage, and in street performances will allow a nuanced treatment of the female acrobat that continually keeps performance context at the forefront. While I will show that the low status of *thaumatopoiia* affects the female acrobat's significance across contexts, I will also suggest meanings that are more context-specific: in a symposium, the acrobat can signify the extreme Other (the anti-philosophy) and become a performative servant; in a comedy, the acrobat can signify male fantasies of female sexuality and fertility; in a wonder-show, the acrobat can signify the mass allurements of bodily spectacle. I will conclude by bringing these pieces back together and reconsidering the concepts of wonder and aesthetic perception as they relate to Greek female acrobatics.

²⁰ See brief discussion of male tumblers above (pp. 5-6) and Vickers 2016: 17-136.

Chapter 1: Acrobats at the Symposium

In this chapter, I discuss the most complete textual source for female acrobatics (Xenophon's *Symposium*) alongside material evidence for female acrobats at symposia in order to determine the way that these acrobats function in the sympotic space. The female acrobatic performances in Xenophon's text symbolize the epitome of the anti-elite, though the number of female acrobats who appear in vase paintings demonstrates their popularity as sympotic entertainment. I will demonstrate that the low status of the female acrobatic body in Xenophon's *Symposium* is constructed through bodily objectification (such as when the acrobat bends her body into the shape of her performance prop, a hoop) and through sympotic conversations that call attention to the contrast between the female acrobatic body and those that serve some function in the *oikos* and/or *polis* (such as citizen wives and Athenian soldiers). Socrates' ultimate rejection of the dancing-girl's *acrobatic* performances will solidify these points. I will then show how vase paintings also tend to closely associate the female acrobat with her prop, objectifying the female acrobat in a way that is familiar from Xenophon's *Symposium*. This is especially interesting since painters would not have been part of the elite group represented by the guests at Callias' symposium, and it suggests that painters too might have seen female acrobatic bodies as closely related to objects. I also discuss how the female acrobat functions in the sympotic space, especially in relation to the *krater*: there is tension between the acrobat taking 'center stage' at a symposium while being objectified, Othered, and held up for comparison. The chapter as a whole will suggest what female acrobatic performances might have looked like in a sympotic space, as well as how symposiasts might have responded to them.

1.1 The Function of the Female Acrobat in Xenophon's *Symposium*

In Xenophon's *Symposium*, Callias hosts a dinner party to honor the young Autolyclus, who won the pancratium at the Panathenaic Festival in 422 BC. True to Xenophon's commitment to relate both serious deeds (τὰ μετὰ σπουδῆς πραττόμενα) and playful ones (τὰ ἐν ταῖς παιδιαῖς), Callias' symposium creates a competition between philosophical conversations led by Socrates and physical entertainment provided by the Syracusan's performance troupe. This troupe includes an acrobatic ὀρχηστρίς who juggles hoops, bends backward into a hoop, tumbles through swords, and almost performs on a whirling potter's wheel (until Socrates thwarts the performance). Xenophon's *Symposium*, then, is the fullest textual source for female acrobatics in classical Greece, and it gives us an elite male perspective on the female acrobat and her role in society. How do the symposiasts react to the female acrobat, and how do her performances function in the sympotic space?

In this section, I will argue that the female acrobat functions in Xenophon's text both as a foil to the troupe's other performers, who entertain the symposiasts with music and move their bodies as slightly as possible, and as a foil to the symposiasts themselves, who recline, drink, and converse while encountering the female acrobat as a product for their visual consumption. The hyper-active female acrobatic body—folding itself into a hoop and tumbling through swords—operates in direct contrast to the posing male dancer and the reclining symposiasts. Visually, she is the busiest in the room.

The dichotomy between a true *thauma* and the mimetic act of *thaumatopoiia* marks the treatment of the dancing-girl throughout Xenophon's *Symposium*. Xenophon begins to set the dancing-girl apart from the other performers in his introduction of the Syracusan's entertainment troupe (2.1):

ἔρχεται αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ κῶμον Συρακόσιός τις ἄνθρωπος, ἔχων τε αὐλητρίδα ἀγαθὴν καὶ ὀρχηστρίδα τῶν τὰ θαύματα δυναμένων ποιεῖν, καὶ παῖδα πάνυ γε ὠραῖον καὶ πάνυ καλῶς κιθαρίζοντα καὶ ὀρχούμενον.

A Syracusan came to them for merry-making, having both a good aulos-player and a dancing-girl of the sort able to make wonders, and a boy who was in his bloom of youth and very good at playing the kithara and dancing.

Xenophon uses language that attempts to incorporate the *auletris* and the boy performer into the cultural position of the elite, but he relegates the dancing-girl to the world of *thaumatopoiia*, which (as I discussed in the introduction) had negative connotations for the elite as it was associated with low society.¹ This disparity in the register of each performer's description represents the differences in the discourse surrounding their performances and begins to paint a picture of the female acrobat as the Other among Others. Xenophon gives the *auletris* and the boy dancer/kithara-player positive value descriptors; the *aulos*-player is *agathē*, and the male performer is *ōraios* (beautiful, graceful, well-measured, and/or in the prime of his life). These initial descriptions match each entertainer's role throughout the work; the *auletris* does not serve an especially prominent role, but she plays her *aulos* well, whereas the boy is praised for the harmonious nature of his posing body. By contrast, Xenophon says of the dancing-girl that she is “of the sort able to make wonders” (τῶν τὰ θαύματα δυναμένων ποιεῖν).

A contextualization of classical Athenian views (necessarily, elite male views) on *thaumatopoiia* both provides the necessary framework for this section and suggests that Xenophon's initial description of the dancing-girl would have been read negatively (by an elite male audience), displaying her inferiority in a way that the aulos-player's *agathē* and the boy's *ōraios* do not. The reader would be invited from the beginning to consider the (lack of) socio-political productivity of the female acrobatic body as spectacle. From her very introduction, then,

¹ See Gilhuly 2009: 111 for the observation that Xenophon introduces the troupe with “terms that assimilate them to the aristocratic milieu of the symposium.” My suggestion qualifies this statement; he does this for the *auletris* and the boy, but not for the dancing-girl.

the acrobatic dancing-girl is marginalized and held at a further distance than even her fellow performers. This becomes even more clear immediately following the troupe’s introduction, when the female musician plays the *aulos* and the boy plays the *kithara*, but the dancing-girl does not take part. Socrates praises his host Callias: “You are entertaining us perfectly. For not only did you serve a blameless dinner, but you also provide the most pleasant sights and sounds.”² The dancing-girl’s absence from the performance which receives Socrates’ initial praise signifies the inferiority of the thaumatopoietic performer. As the symposium progresses and Socrates continues to advocate for philosophy as a superior means of entertainment,³ ‘wonder’ is redefined as intellectual prowess and ‘wonder-making’ as intellectual puzzles, in direct contrast to the dancing-girl’s (acrobatic) bodily feats. I will discuss this contrast and the role of *thauma/thaumatopoiia* more fully below, after establishing the details of the acrobat’s performances and discussing their function in the sympotic setting.

Before the dancing-girl’s first performance, Socrates and the symposiasts have been discussing whether the nobility of the soul can be taught, but Socrates proposes to put the debate on hold, because he “see[s] that this dancing-girl is standing nearby and that someone is bringing her hoops.”⁴ This assistant helps her with the props during the performance, as she juggles the hoops in a controlled manner (2.8):

ἐκ τούτου δὴ ἡῦλει 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 ρίπτειν ὕψος ὡς ἐν ῥυθμῷ δέχεσθαι αὐτούς.

² Xen. *Symp.* 2.2: τελέως ἡμᾶς ἐστιᾶς. οὐ γὰρ μόνον δεῖπνον ἄμεμπτον παρέθηκας, ἀλλὰ καὶ θεάματα καὶ ἀκροάματα ἡδίστα παρέχεις.

³ In Xen. *Symp.* 3.2, Socrates explicitly associates philosophical conversation with elite superiority over the low-class performers: Οὗτοι μὲν δὴ, ὃ ἄνδρες, ἱκανοὶ τέρπειν ἡμᾶς φαίνονται ἡμεῖς δὲ τούτων οἶδ’ ὅτι πολὺ βελτίονες οἴομεθα εἶναι: οὐκ αἰσχρὸν οὖν εἰ μὴδ’ ἐπιχειρήσομεν συνόντες ὠφελεῖν τι ἢ εὐφραίνειν ἀλλήλους; (“Indeed these people, O men, appear sufficient to entertain us. But I know that we consider ourselves to be much better than these people: so is it not shameful if we don’t attempt, while we are together, to be of some use or to gladden each other?”)

⁴ Xen. *Symp.* 2.7: ὁρῶ γὰρ ἔγωγε τήνδε τὴν ὀρχηστρίδα ἐφεστηκυῖαν καὶ τροχοὺς τινα αὐτῇ προσφέροντα.

After this, the other girl was playing the *aulos* for her, and someone standing beside the dancing-girl handed the hoops up to her—up to twelve hoops. And she, taking them, was dancing and tossing up the whirling hoops, calculating how great a height it was necessary to throw them so that she could catch them in time [with the music of the *aulos*].

Since Xenophon’s emphasis in this description is on the girl’s use of the hoops, the passage seems at first to define the thaumatopoeitic body rather than the specifically acrobatic body. However, Xenophon tells us later in the text (through Philippus’s mocking performance and Socrates’ criticism of the dancing-girl) that the girl came to resemble the hoops (τροχούς) themselves by performing backbends. When Philippus grotesquely mimics the performances, he attempts to recreate the dancing-girl’s mimicry of the hoops: “and seeing that the girl imitated hoops by bending backwards, he was attempting the same things—to imitate hoops by bending forwards.”⁵ Socrates later recalls this same aspect of the performance (in a passage to which I will return later): “and it is not at all more pleasing to watch the beautiful and youthful twist their bodies and imitate hoops than it is to watch them at rest.”⁶ While each of these passages indicates that the dancing-girl formed her body into a hoop at some point in the evening, Xenophon does not include that detail when initially describing her performances. It is possible that this hoop imitation could occur during the sword-tumbling routine, but I suggest that it is more attractive to place it in conjunction with the hoop-throwing routine. First, both Philippus and Socrates indicate that the girl imitated τροχοί, and the hoops from the juggling performance are also τροχοί (whereas the sword-studded hoop through which she tumbles is a κύκλος).⁷ Further, we know from ἅμα τε ὠρχεῖτο καὶ ἀνερίπτει that the girl was both dancing and throwing the hoops,

⁵ Xen. *Symp.* 2.22: ὅτι δ’ ἡ παῖς εἰς τοῦπισθεν καμπτομένη τροχούς ἐμιμεῖτο, ἐκεῖνος ταῦτα εἰς τὸ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπικύπτων μιμεῖσθαι τροχούς ἐπειρᾶτο.

⁶ Xen. *Symp.* 7.3: οὐδὲ μὴν τό γε διαστρέφοντας τὰ σώματα καὶ τροχούς μιμουμένους ἥδιον ἢ ἡσυχίαν ἔχοντας τοὺς καλοὺς καὶ ὠραίους θεωρεῖν.

⁷ Based on the logic of these passages, it seems likely that *trochoi* are smaller, movable toys while *kukloi* are larger, stationary wheels.

but Xenophon never indicates what the dance portion entails. It seems likely that this first performance includes both juggling the twelve hoops that the assistant gave her and bending backwards to contort her body itself into a hoop. The dancing-girl uses her movements to imitate the routine's featured prop.

If we place the girl's imitative backbends in conjunction with the hoop-juggling performance, we begin to fill in the gaps of her dance routine and we see the way in which the performance further characterizes her as Other. Her performance is defined by throwing objects, and she becomes assimilated into that object. This dehumanizes the dancing-girl as she becomes (even for just a split second) the thirteenth hoop in the performance—an object for play rather than a person in control of her body. The fact that the object of the dancing-girl's imitation is a mere hoop becomes the perfect example of the 'problem' with acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*: the dancer's backbend is an impressive feat, but the 'wonder' it attempts to 'make' is, in the end, only a hoop. This is a temporary mimetic representation of an object, far removed from a true *thauma*.

After a brief break during which Socrates and the other symposiasts discuss the teachability of women, the dancing-girl performs another routine, during which she tumbles through swords. As a death-defying stunt that involves both the threat of peril and the ultimate triumph over it, this seems like it would produce something closer to a true *thauma*, but this spectacle still falls short; the spectators worry about the girl's mortality in a way that further separates 'us' from 'her.' As the dancing-girl tumbles in and out of a sword-studded hoop, part of the 'wonder' she 'makes' is related to the high stakes of failure, but these stakes also create the lingering reminder that the female acrobat is mortal—she is not a god, her 'wonder' does not

come from the gods, and she could easily exhibit this mortality with any wrong step. The partygoers display some anxiety about this possibility (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 μὴ τι πάθῃ, ἡ δὲ θαρρούντως τε καὶ ἀσφαλῶς ταῦτα διεπράττετο.

And after this a hoop was brought in, full of upright swords all around. The dancing-girl was tumbling in and out of the hoop, over the swords—with the result that those watching were afraid she would suffer something. But she was completing these things courageously and safely.

The passive voice of εἰσηνέχθη again suggests that the dancing-girl has an assistant in charge of her props; the assistant figure brings in the sword-studded hoops, and then the dancing-girl starts her routine. The imperfect tenses of ἐκυβίστα, ἐξεκυβίστα, and διεπράττετο suggest that the girl completes these feats over and over again as she continually tumbles in and out of the sword hoop. This is not a quick, one-stunt performance, but a longer routine that requires not only strength and courage but stamina and endurance. The imperfect tense of ἐφοβοῦντο further suggests that the partygoers feared for her safety during the entire performance. The spectators are hooked on her performance, but not for the right reasons; they watch the acrobat continually tumble through swords, all the while truly fearing for her failure instead of celebrating her success—and, of course, reclining on the *klinai* in complete comfort. Socrates later condemns this routine for being too dangerous for a symposium, and this criticism draws out the division between the hyperactive female body that continually risks physical harm and the reclining elite bodies of the symposiasts, who merely hope to enjoy themselves at the symposium. This highlights the inferior nature of the dancing-girl's *thaumata* and further distances the girl from the symposiasts.

After each of these performances, Socrates attempts to extract educational lessons from the dancing-girl's feats: these conversations center on the nature of women, alienating the

dancing-girl both for her gender and for the limited utility of her role in society, defined against both the symposiasts and their wives. At the same time, the playfulness of these conversations suggests that neither Socrates nor his drinking companions are convinced or committed to these lessons. For example, following the hoop-juggling performance, Socrates initiates a conversation that deflects attention from the dancing-girl onto more ‘respectable women’—the symposiasts’ wives (2.9):

καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης εἶπεν· Ἐν πολλοῖς μὲν, ὧ ἄνδρες, καὶ ἄλλοις δῆλον καὶ ἐν οἷς δ’ ἡ παῖς ποιεῖ ὅτι ἡ γυναικεία φύσις οὐδὲν χείρων τῆς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὔσα τυγχάνει, γνώμης δὲ καὶ ἰσχύος δεῖται. ὥστε εἴ τις ὑμῶν γυναῖκα ἔχει, θαρρῶν διδασκέτω ὅ τι βούλοιτ’ ἂν αὐτῇ ἐπισταμένην χρῆσθαι.

And Socrates said, “It is clear in many other things, O men, and in the things which the girl does, that the nature of women does not happen to be any lesser than that of man, but it lacks intelligence and strength—so if any of you has a wife, let him teach with confidence whatever he would want to make use of her knowing.

Socrates’ praise of the performance does not seem like it should be taken at face value; rather, he seems to be reaching to extract a moral from the performance in order to render it useful to his fellow drinkers. Further, he qualifies his ‘praise’ by saying that women still lack intelligence (γνώμης) and strength (ἰσχύος). The dancing-girl has apparently impressed him with her hoop-juggling, but her calculation of the proper height for throwing hoops has not displayed γνώμη and her handling of the many hoops has not displayed ἰσχύς. The only thing that her performance has really displayed to Socrates, for the purposes of this conversation, is that women can be taught. But Socrates quickly turns the conversation away from the dancing-girl and onto the symposiasts’ wives, suggesting that the dancing-girl’s ability to learn should be transferred to the ‘respectable women’ within their sphere. The conversation turns to jokes about the need for Socrates to teach his own wife, who is, in Antisthenes’ words, “the most difficult of wives in

existence—and, I think, even of wives that have been and will be.”⁸ The playful tone throughout this passage suggests that Socrates and Antisthenes are not committed to Socrates’ proposed ‘lesson’ of female equality—and all the while the dancing-girl is alienated both from the symposiasts (in their role as ἄνδρες) and from the realm of women considered respectable in society.

While this first conversation calls attention to the dancing-girl’s marginalized role as an unmarried girl, the conversation continues (sparked by the sword-tumbling performance) to further emphasize the girl’s limited role in the civic sphere. Instead of focusing on the teachability of women more broadly, Socrates after this performance draws conclusions on the teachability of courage, and Antisthenes proposes to move this lesson from the symposium to the *polis* (2.12-13):

καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης καλέσας τὸν Ἀντισθένην εἶπεν· Οὗτοι τοὺς γε θεωμένους τάδε ἀντιλέξιν ἔτι οἶομαι, ὡς οὐχὶ καὶ ἡ ἀνδρεία διδακτόν, ὅποτε αὕτη καίπερ γυνὴ οὕσα οὕτω τολμηρῶς εἰς τὰ ξίφη ἵεται. καὶ ὁ Ἀντισθένης εἶπεν· Ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ τῷδε τῷ Συρακοσίῳ κράτιστον ἐπιδείξαντι τῇ πόλει τὴν ὀρχηστρίδα εἰπεῖν, ἐὰν διδῶσιν αὐτῷ Ἀθηναῖοι χρήματα, ποιήσιν πάντας Ἀθηναίους τολμᾶν ὁμόσε ταῖς λόγχαις ἰέναι;

And Socrates, after calling Antisthenes, said, “I think that those watching will no longer deny these things, not even that courage (‘manliness’) can be taught, since she—despite being a woman—leaps into the swords with such daring.” And Antisthenes said: “So, wouldn’t it be best for this Syracusan, after exhibiting the dancing-girl to the *polis*, to say that—if the Athenians give him money—he will make all the men of Athens dare to go up against spears?”

Socrates continues in the vein of the earlier conversation by noting that the girl displays courage ‘although she is a woman.’ In his analysis, this ability could not have been natural, which is further proof that women can be taught. However, the conversation once again turns from the dancing-girl to those with higher status: Antisthenes suggests that this lesson in courage should be taught to men of Athens who serve in the military. At the same time, Antisthenes does not

⁸ Xen. *Symp.* 2.10: ἀλλὰ χρῆ γυναικὶ τῶν οὐσῶν, οἶμαι δὲ καὶ τῶν γεγεννημένων καὶ τῶν ἐσομένων χαλεπωτάτη.

seem to think that this *polis*-wide exhibition would actually occur, let alone work (as is implied by his suggestion that the Syracusan merely *say* that the performance inspires courage while asking for money, which I will discuss further in the chapter on wonder-shows). This reply is playful and seems to cap Socrates' continued attempts to extrapolate philosophical conversation from these performances. Nevertheless, it suggests that courage is misplaced in the female acrobat, who has transgressed into a male sphere by displaying ἀνδρεία—completing difficult physical feats and striving to overcome swords. The conversation further suggests that her fleeting performance and low social status cannot contribute to the civic sphere unless it could inspire Athenian men to face swords in battle. In this hypothetical sword-tumbling transaction between the Syracusan and the *polis*, the acrobat's role would be to inspire men to have courage in dangers involving spears, but this 'lesson' (if it worked at all) would work less through education and more through comparison, as the onlookers mark the dynamic between themselves and the acrobat, thinking that if she can do it, they can do it.⁹ In other words, the lesson of the dancing-girl would operate more through the shame of in-group and out-group definition than an inherent educational or moral quality of the girl's acrobatic performances.¹⁰

Once the Syracusan manager's performances have served their literary function of developing the contrast between philosophy and entertainment,¹¹ Socrates reveals his true feelings about them (especially those of the acrobat): they are unsatisfactory forms of

⁹ This dynamic is also an important part of elite discourse on wonder-shows: see ch. 3.

¹⁰ See Wohl 2004 on the relationship between Xenophon's *Symposium* and the moral ideal of performance in Plato's *Laws*, which she relates mostly to Socrates' own dancing and the troupe's final performance.

¹¹ Here a brief outline of the competition between dance and philosophy might be useful: Socrates uses the troupe's performances to spark philosophical discussion (2.7-16); Socrates himself dances as a means to achieve symmetry and harmony (2.17-20); Philippus the jester mimics the performances (2.21-23); Socrates offers philosophy as rival entertainment (3.2); the Syracusan ridicules Socrates for thinking too much about unprofitable matters (6.6-8); Socrates criticizes the Syracusan's choice of performances and suggests a new one (7.2-5); Socrates gives a speech favoring homosexual friendship (8.13-41) but the Syracusan responds with a final performance displaying heterosexual *eros* (9.2-7). On the dance of Socrates, see Huss 1999. On the relationship between the Syracusan and Philippus as entertainers, see Gilula 2002. On the bodily performances as springboards for conversation between the symposiasts, see Hobden 2004.

entertainment that do not belong in a symposium. He chooses to reveal these feelings when a potter's wheel is brought out for the dancing-girl to produce more *thaumata*, which results in Socrates' ultimate condemnation of acrobatic *thaumatopoiia* (7.2-3):

ἐπεὶ δ' ἦσεν, εἰσεφέρετο τῇ ὀρχηστρίδι τροχὸς τῶν κεραμεικῶν, ἐφ' οὗ ἔμελλε θαυματουργήσειν. ἔνθα δὴ εἶπεν ὁ Σωκράτης ὦ Συρακόσιε, κινδυνεύω ἐγώ, ὥσπερ σὺ λέγεις, τῷ ὄντι φροντιστῆς εἶναι ἢ νῦν γοῦν σκοπῶ ὅπως ἂν ὁ μὲν παῖς ὅδε ὁ σὸς καὶ ἡ παῖς ἥδε ὡς ῥᾶστα διάγοιεν, ἡμεῖς δ' ἂν μάλιστα εὐφραινοίμεθα θεώμενοι αὐτούς ὅπερ εὖ οἶδα ὅτι καὶ σὺ βούλει. δοκεῖ οὖν μοι τὸ μὲν εἰς μαχαίρας κυβιστῶν κινδύνου ἐπίδειγμα εἶναι, ὃ συμποσίῳ οὐδὲν προσήκει. καὶ μὴν τό γε ἐπὶ τοῦ τροχοῦ ἅμα περιδινουμένου γράφειν τε καὶ ἀναγιγνώσκειν θαῦμα μὲν ἴσως τί ἐστίν, ἡδονὴν δὲ οὐδὲ ταῦτα δύναμαι γνῶναι τίν' ἂν παράσχοι. οὐδὲ μὴν τό γε διαστρέφοντας τὰ σώματα καὶ τροχοὺς μιμουμένους ἥδιον ἢ ἡσυχίαν ἔχοντας τοὺς καλοὺς καὶ ὠραίους θεωρεῖν.

After he sang, a potter's wheel was brought in for the dancing-girl, upon which she was about to make wonders. Then Socrates said, "O Syracusan, I run the risk, as you say, of being a thinker in reality—for now I'm contemplating how this boy of yours and this girl could move as lightly as possible, and we would very much enjoy ourselves watching them (the very thing which I know well that you also want). So it seems to me that to tumble into swords is a display of danger, which is not fitting for a symposium. And what's more, to write and read upon a wheel while it's whirling could perhaps be some wonder, but I can't recognize what enjoyment these things would provide. And it is not at all more pleasing to watch the beautiful and youthful twist their bodies and imitate hoops than it is to watch them at rest.

Here, Socrates identifies the type of behavior and entertainment that is proper for a symposium—which explicitly does not include acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*. He excises the physical from the realm of entertainment; he does not want to see the potter's wheel performance, he finds the dangerous sword-tumbling performance inappropriate for a symposium, and instead he wants a performance with as little movement as possible. Socrates' ideal entertainment, then, could not be more opposite from the acrobatic performances of the dancing-girl throughout the symposium; his conception of non-physical entertainment draws a sharp distinction between intellectual culture and performance culture.

The concept of *thaumata* plays an important part in this distinction: Socrates singles out the acrobat's sword-tumbling performance, calling it a "display of danger" (κινδύνου ἐπίδειγμα)

rather than a display of wonder, and he suggests that intellectual activities such as reading and writing on the whirling potter's wheel might be closer to a *thauma* than acrobatic feats would be. This is the first step of Socrates' push to associate *thaumata* with the mind rather than with the body. He continues to criticize the practice of wonder-making by conceiving of *thaumata* not as acrobatic contortions but as everyday intellectual puzzles (7.4):

καὶ γὰρ δὴ οὐδὲ πάνυ τι σπάνιον τό γε θαυμασίοις ἐντυχεῖν, εἴ τις τούτου δεῖται, ἀλλ' ἕξεστιν αὐτίκα μάλα τὰ παρόντα θαυμάζειν, τί ποτε ὁ μὲν λύχνος διὰ τὸ λαμπρὰν φλόγα ἔχειν φῶς παρέχει, τὸ δὲ χαλκεῖον λαμπρὸν ὄν φῶς μὲν οὐ ποιεῖ, ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ ἄλλα ἐμφαινόμενα παρέχεται· καὶ πῶς τὸ μὲν ἔλαιον ὑγρὸν ὄν αὔξει τὴν φλόγα, τὸ δὲ ὕδωρ, ὅτι ὑγρὸν ἔστι, κατασβέννυσι τὸ πῦρ.

For it is not at all rare to encounter marvels, if one needs this, but it is possible to marvel even presently at the things at hand, [such as] why the lamp provides light through its possession of a bright flame, while the bronze thing, being bright, does not make light, but in it other reflections are displayed—and how olive oil, being wet, increases the flame, while water, because it is wet, puts out the fire.

By Socrates' new conception of wonders and wonder-making, displaying acrobatic wonders (θαυματουργήσειν) on the potter's wheel would not really produce a *thauma*, because the 'wonders' that Socrates gives as examples (the lamp vs. the mirror and olive oil vs. water) are intellectual puzzles based on the natural properties of surrounding objects rather than contrived displays of physicality. Socrates simultaneously reduces the value of wonder-making by noting that it is "not at all rare to encounter marvels" and by finding these marvels within everyday objects that would be present at a symposium, such as lamps and olive oil.¹² In other words, the symposiasts can use their intellect to experience *thaumata*, and they can do this relatively easily by drawing on their immediate surroundings; they do not need the dancing-girl to jump through swords or contort her body in order to experience marvels. By redefining *thaumata* as easily-

¹² See Hobden 2004 on a proposed relationship between the meta-sympotic discourse in this passage and Plutarch's *Table Talks*. Plutarch includes these types of intellectual puzzles in his lists of acceptable sympotic conversations, along with the management of a symposium and its proper entertainment, much like Socrates is doing in this passage.

accessible intellectual feats, Xenophon's Socrates also reinforces the acrobatic body as ultimately futile: *thaumata* are all that the acrobatic body can hope to produce, but according to Socrates it fails even on this count.

Using these distinctions between intellect and physicality, Socrates solidifies the female acrobat's alienation by deciding that the female acrobatic body does not belong at a symposium. The anxiety over the unproductive and noneducational nature of the female acrobatic body, at which Socrates and the symposiasts hinted in their earlier conversations, moves to the forefront in Socrates' rejection. The acrobatic body is so Other to the elite sympotic space that it can no longer be tolerated—the dancing-girl must leave behind acrobatics and *thaumatopoiia* if she hopes to provide successful entertainment. In fact, she accomplishes this in the *Symposium*'s final exhibition by performing mimetically instead of acrobatically, finally achieving a productive result. In this performance, the dancing-girl acts as Ariadne with the boy as Dionysus, and they begin to kiss passionately—so passionately that the partygoers forget they are watching a performance. As the symposiasts are struck by this display of real love, most are inspired to return home to their wives, restoring productive fertility to the *oikos*. This emphasizes the distance between the specifically acrobatic body and the symposiasts—it is only when the dancing-girl ceases to perform *acrobatically* that she can substantially contribute to the group and to the larger community. The mimetic tableau of Ariadne and Dionysus still operates via *mimesis*, but it is now a productive form of *mimesis*. Xenophon's *Symposium* thus ultimately rejects the female acrobatic body: it produces inferior, mortal *thaumata* that end as soon as its performances end, so it cannot achieve positive, lasting effects upon the symposiasts—and much less the *polis*.

While Xenophon's *Symposium* is the best textual source for female acrobatics in the Classical period, it is important to remember that the text is a highly literary composition in which the female acrobat is made to serve aims particular to the text. Xenophon uses her performances both to spark conversation between the symposiasts early on in the party and to represent the competition between the Syracusan (physical performances) and Socrates (philosophical discussion) over what constitutes the best form of entertainment. Within this framework, Socrates eventually denigrates the female acrobatic body: it is inherently at odds with his goals to encourage the pursuit of philosophy and homosexual *philia*. But this is only the elite view of one character in a literary text; Socrates may not think that female acrobatic performances are fitting for a symposium, but Callias chose to hire the Syracusan manager's troupe, and it seems likely that this choice of entertainment was available for sympotic hosts during Xenophon's time. Numerous vase paintings depict female acrobats performing in a sympotic context, and I will now turn to these vases in order to paint a fuller picture regarding the function of female acrobats at symposia.

1.2 Female Acrobats in Sympotic Space: The Material Evidence

Xenophon's Socrates may not think that female acrobatic performances are fitting for a symposium, but vase paintings—mostly from 4th-century Southern Italy—shed light on the popularity of female acrobats as sympotic entertainment. I determine sympotic context through the presence of a combination of the following: *kottabos* stands; ribbons, garlands, and/or beads as wall decorations; sympotic furniture, such as the *kline* and footstool; and sympotic vessels, especially the krater and kantharos. In this section, I will demonstrate the ways in which a female acrobat could interact with the space and the materials of a symposium, arguing that the repeated

association of the acrobat with sympotic props dehumanizes the acrobat into a prop herself, solely for the entertainment of the symposiasts.

It is not a coincidence here that the female acrobat in Xenophon's *Symposium* is part of a Syracusan's entertainment troupe; this type of entertainment seems to have been especially popular in Southern Italy—or at least there was a strong market there for vases with images of female acrobats. Athenian vase painters, by contrast, seem to have preferred to depict acrobatic satyrs or male revelers instead of female performers,¹³ even though we know from Xenophon that female acrobatic performances could be part of the repertoire of a symposium.

Corroborating Xenophon's account, two Athenian vessels from the mid 5th-century also depict female acrobats as part of performance troupes: a *hydria* now in Naples (fig. 1.1),¹⁴ and a *hydria* now in Madrid (fig 1.2).¹⁵ On the Madrid *hydria*, a nude female contorts her body in a backbend, with her hands and feet on the ground. The performer on the Naples *hydria*—also nude and also in a backbend—instead performs atop a sympotic table, with her gaze focused on a *kylix* near her feet. The Madrid performance does not have a clear context, but the sympotic table and *kylix* on the Naples piece suggest that female acrobats performed at symposia in mid 5th-century Athens, setting a precedent for the figure in Xenophon's early-to-mid 4th-century text as well as for the South Italian material tradition, which flourishes around the same time as Xenophon.¹⁶

¹³ For acrobatic satyrs see: Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum 284 (*BAPD* 351255); London, BM E768 (*BAPD* 205309). For acrobatic male revelers see: Malibu, Getty 76.AE.127 (*BAPD* 46460); Paris, Louvre G73 (*BAPD* 200396).

¹⁴ Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 81398 (previously H3232, M1209); *BAPD* 213444; Polygnotos Group, 450-440 BC.

¹⁵ Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11129; *BAPD* 214707; *CVA* Madrid 2 (Spain 2) pls. 6 (89).2, 7 (90).1-3, 440 BC.

¹⁶ My argument here is less applicable if these vases were produced solely for export, which is a possibility. The provenance for the Naples vessel is Nola, Italy; the provenance for the Madrid vessel is unknown.



Fig. 1.1. Female acrobat on sympotic table and female sword-tumbler. Attic red-figure hydria. Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 81398. Photo credit D-DAI-ROM-71.340.



Fig. 1.2. Female acrobat in backbend. Attic red-figure hydria. Madrid, Museo Arqueologico Nacional 11129. Photo by Alberto Rivas Rodríguez. © Ministry of Culture and Sports

Material depictions of female acrobats in a sympotic setting show a range of ways in which the acrobat could relate to the space of the symposium, largely involving the use of sympotic equipment as performance props. The Naples *hydria* (fig. 1.1), with the acrobat performing her backbend on top of a table with a *kylix*, provides a useful example: she uses furniture and objects that are already present within the sympotic space to create her performance. This serves both a practical and symbolic function. As part of a traveling performance troupe, the acrobat and her manager would want to travel with as few bulky props as possible. If they can utilize materials already present within the symposium, then their travel load becomes lighter. However, the re-purposing of sympotic equipment in a performance context could also function symbolically in the eyes of the symposiasts: during the dinner portion of the evening, the same table on which the Naples acrobat performs would have hosted spreads of food, from which the symposiasts ate their dinner. But once they reach the entertainment portion of the evening, the female acrobat replaces the food to become the new object for consumption within the symposium. This creates a visual reminder that the acrobat is intended for consumption, existing to increase the enjoyment of the symposiasts.

Just as the mid 5th-century Athenian *hydria* (fig. 1.1) depicts the female acrobat upon a sympotic table, 4th-century South Italian vases depicting female acrobats in a sympotic context regularly demonstrate the acrobat interacting with sympotic objects—from the *kottabos* stand (figs. 1.8, 1.9) to footstools (figs. 1.3, 1.6) to *kantharoi* and *krateres* (figs. 1.4, 1.5). Part of my ability to establish sympotic context for the acrobatic performance comes from the presence of sympotic paraphernalia, and so it might not seem particularly striking that every vase depicting a female acrobat in a sympotic space shows her interacting to or in conversation with this paraphernalia. But as I hope to show, these interactions between acrobat and object constitute

one of the techniques the artist uses to display the acrobat's social significance. This phenomenon finds a parallel in Xenophon's *Symposium* when the dancing-girl throws hoops (τρόχους... ἀνερίπτει δονουμένους, 2.8) and bends backwards to imitate them (τροχούς ἐμιμεῖτο, 2.22), visually transforming herself into the prop itself in the eyes of the reclining symposiasts.

When performing a handstand atop sympotic furniture, the female acrobat can become an extension of that furniture, further contributing to the symbolic function of acrobat-as-object. On a South Italian lekythos now in a private collection, a female depicted in left side profile performs a variation of a handstand, with her elbows resting upon a footstool (instead of her hands) (fig. 1.3).¹⁷ Her back is arched further than the 'generic pose' demands, to the point where she is able to look directly at her calves. Both the footstool and strings of beaded garlands, which are hanging on the walls in the background, suggest a sympotic context for the performance. The footstool has a round top with three short legs that curve in a concave fashion, creating small 'feet' that rest on the floor. This type of footstool commonly occurs underneath the *kline* in a sympotic context. For example, a 4th-century Apulian calyx krater depicts a reclining man and seated woman on a *kline*, flanked by a female attendant on the left and a satyr on the right; directly underneath the *kline* lies a footstool with three small feet, similar to the footstool on the acrobatic lekythos.¹⁸ In a sympotic setting, the acrobat would simply have to borrow a footstool from one of the symposiasts' *klinai* in order to perform her feats. The acrobat on the lekythos demonstrates the way that the performer can become assimilated to the furniture; her vibrant orange dress with red undertones matches the color of the footstool, and the curve of her back

¹⁷ NFA Classical Auctions Dec. 11 1991, New York. Lot No. 101. 360-340 BC. See Vickers 2016: 152.

¹⁸ Bari, Lagioia collection. *RVAp* I 8/153, pl. 67.3; *PhV*², no. (xvi). On this vessel, other notable *comparanda* for establishing sympotic context include the dog underneath the couch (c.f. Gnathia lekythos in Naples, discussed below) and the ribbon and *tympanon* (c.f. London F232, discussed below) hanging on the wall.

mimics the curve of the footstool's legs.¹⁹ In this depiction, the acrobat is transformed from performing upon a prop to representing the prop itself—similar to the hoop phenomenon in Xenophon's *Symposium*, discussed above. Both Xenophon's text and the South Italian lekythos reveal a tendency to depict the female acrobatic body as skilled in replicating the very objects pertinent to the performance.



Fig. 1.3. Female acrobat on footstool. South Italian lekythos (detail). NFA Classical Auctions Dec. 11 1991, New York. Lot No. 101.

When the props change from pieces of furniture to drinking cups, the acrobat's relationship to the surrounding space changes as well. On a Campanian 4th-century vase that survives only in an engraving (fig. 1.4),²⁰ a female acrobat, nude from the waist up and wearing tight pants, walks over to a *krater* on her hands. Her back is arched and her feet reach toward the *krater*, creating a handstand in the vein of the 'generic pose', but this acrobat holds a ladle between her right toes and a *kantharos* between her left, causing these instruments to hover

¹⁹ A couple of marks near the acrobat's toes make her feet look like those of the footstool, which splay upwards to complete the legs' concave curves. It is unclear to me whether these marks are intentional or a result of later scratches.

²⁰ Tischbein 1791 Taf. 60; Beazley 1943 99.4; Weege 1976 fig. 64. The vase was a part of Sir William Hamilton's collection, but was lost in a 1798 shipwreck.

directly above the krater as if she is about to dip them into it. A single column to the right of the acrobat denotes interior space. At a symposium, with the calyx-krater in the center of the room, this acrobat could fulfill both a performative and a servile role, fetching refills for the symposiasts at the same time as she entertains them with her acrobatic feats.²¹ The female acrobat in this setting performs her low status; she is both a thaumatopoeitic entertainer and a servant for the symposiasts. If the original vessel was a krater, as seems likely since the three figures on each side would require a large vessel,²² then this depiction has strong meta-sympotic potential: the host could station this krater in the middle of the room and arrange for a female entertainer to imitate the performative service seen on the vessel, using the ladle in her right toes to fill the kantharos in her left toes and delivering this wine to the symposiasts whom she was hired to entertain.

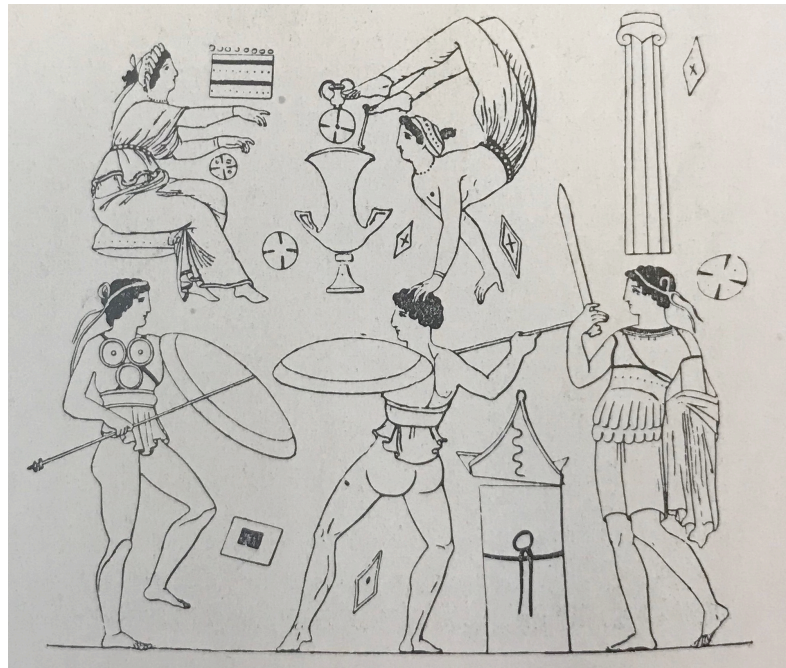


Fig. 1.4. Female acrobat retrieves wine while walking on her hands. Engraving of Campanian vase from Sir William Hamilton's collection. Tischbein 1791.

²¹ For the centrality of the krater, and for its ability to symbolize a full sympotic gathering, see Lissarague 1990: 19-46.

²² Side A (left to right): seated female, acrobat, column; side B: three warrior youths in motion.

Two vessels depict female acrobats performing handstands in a small space in between two objects: on an Apulian calyx-krater (fig. 1.5), the acrobat performs between a krater and a kantharos,²³ and on a Campanian hydria (fig. 1.6), she performs between a footstool and a potter's wheel.²⁴ Each of these vessels suggests ways that the female performer could move through the space and engage with multiple props in her routines. On the calyx-krater, the nude female acrobat faces the kantharos to her right, executing a handstand with her legs splayed upward (instead of bent over, as the 'generic pose' usually entails). It is possible that she could reach for the handles of the kantharos with her toes and bring it over to the krater, in a similar fashion as the servile acrobat on the Campanian vase preserved in the engraving, although this cannot be proven. Nevertheless, if we understand the krater as occupying the central position in the room, then we can also understand this central space, visible from all *klinai*, as the ideal space for entertainment during the symposium. The acrobat in this case moves between objects in the center of the room as a focal point of the entertainment.



Fig. 1.5. Female acrobat in between krater and kantharos. Apulian calyx-krater (detail). Private collection.

²³ Private collection; see van Hoek and Herrmann 2013 pl. 24a. 350-325 BC.

²⁴ London, British Museum 1814,0704.566 (F232); *CVA* Br. Mus. 2 (Great Britain 2) IV E a pl. 8 (88).4; *BAPD* 411078; Foundling Painter, 340-330 BC.

On the Campanian hydria, a female wearing only a short skirt performs a handstand with her hands planted on the ground in between a boxed footstool (to her left) and a potter's wheel (to her right).²⁵ She faces left, and her legs hover over the footstool, as if she could spring up either onto it or past it. There is just enough room between the footstool and the potter's wheel for the acrobat's hands; she has even less space between these objects than the acrobat on the calyx-krater has between the krater and kantharos. Although she does not perform upon either prop in the moment depicted on the vase, their presence indicates that her performance will also include feats atop a potter's wheel and/or footstool; given the positioning of her legs, it seems reasonable to imagine a performance that incorporates the furniture. In each case the acrobat would either have to use these objects as props or perform around them, and either way she is communicating with the sympotic space and the distribution of objects in the *andron*.

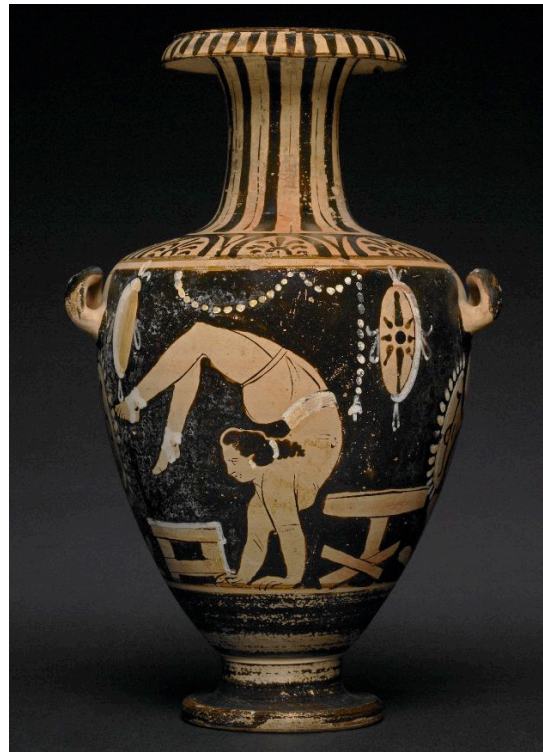


Fig 1.6. Female acrobat in between footstool and potter's wheel. Campanian red-figure hydria. London, The British Museum 1814,0704.566. © The Trustees of the British Museum

²⁵ Beaded garlands and *tympana* hanging on the wall behind the acrobat are suggestive of a sympotic context.

The contrast between the female acrobat and other figures painted on a vessel can further contribute to the Othering of the female performer. On an Apulian Gnathia-style lekythos, now in Naples (fig. 1.7),²⁶ a female acrobat rotates in a handstand atop a potter's wheel, with a seated *auletris* to her left and a dog to her lower right; two garlands hanging on the wall are suggestive of interior, sympotic space. The acrobat performs a routine similar to the one the dancing-girl might have performed on a potter's wheel in Xenophon's *Symposium* had Socrates not thwarted the performance. She staggers her arms, with the left hand planted in front of the right, and she is so contorted in her handstand that her feet can rest on her head, with her calves pressing against the backs of her thighs and buttocks—she has practically folded her body in half. She is nude from the waist up and wearing a short skirt, which contrasts with the fully clothed figure of the *auletris*, who wears a long, sleeved garment which covers her from head to toe. The acrobat, shown in left side profile, looks directly at the *auletris*, and vice versa—the two figures appear to be working together.



Fig. 1.7. Female acrobat on potter's wheel with *auletris*. Apulian Gnathia-style lekythos (detail). Naples, Museo Nazionale, coll. St. Angelo 405.

²⁶ Naples, Museo Nazionale, coll. St. Angelo 405; *CVA* Naples 3 (Italy 24) pl. 70 (1127).4; Hughes 2008 fig. 7. 350-325 BC.

The dynamic between the hyperactive, mostly nude body of the acrobat and the seated, covered body of the *auletris* seems to reflect the dynamic between these figures in Xenophon’s *Symposium*. The Syracusan’s *auletris* explicitly accompanies the dancing-girl’s hoop juggling performance (2.8), and the dancing-girl makes an effort to catch her hoops in the proper rhythm, which suggests a connection between the pace of the female acrobat’s movement and the rhythm prescribed through the *aulos*.²⁷ However, as I have argued above, the dancing-girl is especially looked down upon as a representative of low society—even more so than her fellow performers, despite belonging to the same troupe. The depiction of the *auletris* and acrobat on the Naples lekythos gives a visual representation of the relationship between these two female performers: their performances are related and even interconnected, but the visual register of the *auletris* (seated and clothed) corresponds more to that of a “respectable woman” than that of the acrobat (mostly nude and contorted).²⁸

The contrast is even more pronounced between the elite male as viewer and the female acrobat as spectacle on an Apulian calyx-krater now in Genoa (fig. 1.8).²⁹ This vessel depicts a female acrobat wearing a short dress and performing a handstand near a *kottabos* stand, with an elite male youth standing to her left.³⁰ This is the only extant depiction of a spectator observing a female acrobat; typically, vases depicting female acrobats feature only the performer herself, perhaps with some props such as a small table or potter’s wheel, or occasionally with other

²⁷ Xen. *Symp.* 2.8: ἡ δὲ λαμβάνουσα ἅμα τε ὠρχεῖτο καὶ ἀνερρίπτει δονουμένους συντεκμαιρομένη ὅσον ἔδει ῥιπτεῖν ὕψος ὡς ἐν ῥυθμῷ δέχεσθαι αὐτούς. “And she, taking them, was dancing and tossing up the whirling hoops, calculating how great a height it was necessary to throw them so that she could catch them in time [with the music of the *aulos*].”

²⁸ See Goldman 2015 for a reexamination of the dichotomy between *auletrides* and “respectable women”.

²⁹ Genoa, Museo Civico d’Archeologia Ligure 1142; *BAPD* 9004269; *CVA* Genova 1 (Italy 10) pl. 5 (921).1-3; 4th c. BC (dated 350-320 by Vickers 2016: 153n417). See Vickers 2016: 155 for a discussion of the relationship between the female acrobatic body in motion and the male athletic body at rest on this vase.

³⁰ Vickers 2016: 154 argues that the acrobat is depicted as airborne while still conforming to the demands of the ‘generic pose’; her hands are flexed as if planted on the ground, but they are above the ground line (which is established by the post, the male spectator’s feet, and the *kottabos* stand). Her left foot is depicted in front of the *kottabos* stand, so the positioning of her hands does not suggest that she is simply performing behind the stand.

performers (such as the *auletris* on the Naples lekythos, discussed above). The male youth stands to the left of the *kottabos* stand, holding a walking stick in his left hand with a cloak draped over his left arm. He leans his right elbow upon a post and crosses his right foot over his left, creating the impression of a casual or nonchalant stance. Although holding a cloak, the male is fully nude, and he bares his athletic body at rest as a direct contrast to the female acrobatic body in motion. He towers above her—reaching almost as tall as the *kottabos* stand itself—while the bent legs in the acrobat’s handstand make her figure more compact so she occupies less space.³¹ In addition, the acrobat’s close proximity to the *kottabos* stand closely associates the two as instruments of sympotic entertainment that are intended for the symposiasts’ enjoyment.



Fig. 1.8. Female acrobat by *kottabos* stand with a nude male spectator. Apulian calyx-krater (detail). Genoa, Museo Civico di Archelogia Figure 1142.

The precise relationship between this nude youth and the sympotic acrobat is puzzling; given the sympotic context, we might expect the spectator to be reclining on a *kline*, but the youth stands

³¹ If she were to extend her legs, her frame would be just as tall if not taller than that of the male spectator.

against a post that is suggestive of the *palaestra*.³² His body is athletic, although it is at rest.

Perhaps this is best understood as an imaginative scene that combines multiple frames of action: the athletic male youth (certainly the type of figure who we would expect to attend a symposium; c.f. Autolycus, the young pancratium victor at Callias' symposium in Xenophon) might go to the *palaestra* earlier in the day, and then clean up before attending a symposium in the evening. The artist might have chosen to depict the young symposiast at the *palaestra* in order to highlight his athletic figure. In this case, the youth's erotic gaze, directed at the female acrobat, might foreshadow his treatment of the acrobat later in the evening. Regardless, the juxtaposition of athletic male body at rest with the contorted female body at work—combined with the elite gaze cast down upon the acrobat—reflects a dynamic between the spectator and the performer that is similar to the dynamic between the symposiasts and the dancing-girl in Xenophon's *Symposium*.

The association between a female acrobat and a *kottabos* stand recurs on a Gnathia-style lekythos (fig. 1.9)³³ that is extremely similar to the calyx-krater (fig. 1.8), although the painter of the lekythos has chosen to depict only the female acrobat, without the male spectator.³⁴ This must be partially due to space; in painting on a lekythos rather than a krater, the painter had a much smaller field to work with and had to make decisions about what to cut. There are a few different, but by no means exclusive, ways to understand this choice. First, the fact that the artist decided to cut the male spectator rather than the female acrobat suggests that the acrobat is the

³² There is also a small palmette to the right of the acrobat, which I believe is best understood as purely decorative, although there are parallels for palmettes framing athletic/*palaestra* scenes on 4th c. Athenian vases: red-figure stemless cup fragment, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum G705, *BAPD* 11880; red-figure cup fragment, Mouret Collection (Ensérune), *BAPD* 10680; red-figure stemless cup, Trieste, Museo Storia ed Arte S465, *BAPD* 10334. Given the popularity of palmettes in Greek vase painting, it seems likely that these instances are coincidental and that the palmette on the Apulian calyx-krater is decorative.

³³ St. Petersburg, Hermitage ΓP-4662, 350-320 BC.

³⁴ Vickers 2016: 153 argues that the lekythos was directly inspired by the calyx-krater, but painted by "a lesser hand." In each painting, the female performs a handstand by a *kottabos* stand, wearing a dress with a thin shoulder strap that leaves the chest bare. Gravity pulls the edge of the dress downward and shows part of the buttocks. Each wears ankle bracelets on the right leg and wears her hair in a low bun. A swooping ribbon hangs on the wall to the upper right of each performer, with a palmette decoration to the lower right.

more marketable part of the vessel—the part that catches the buyer’s eye and makes the artwork memorable. Without the female acrobat, the lone male spectator serves little to no purpose; he creates meaning in contrast to the acrobat, primarily by casting his gaze at her. Further, the relationship between the standing male and the acrobat could also represent the relationship between a vessel’s user and the image of the acrobat; perhaps the painter of the Gnathia lekythos did not need to depict the elite male gaze because the potential buyer—and the buyer’s drinking companions—would regularly provide that gaze themselves. Alternatively, the artist’s choice to depict the sympotic scene alone might lend support to my suggestion above that the Apulian calyx krater depicts two related but separable parts of the youthful spectator’s day.



Fig. 1.9. Female acrobat by kottabos stand. Gnathia-style lekythos. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum ΓP-4662. © The State Hermitage Museum.

The recurrence of the female acrobat on these vases indicates that Socrates’ proposed banishment of acrobatics from the symposium does not reflect popular practice. The evidence suggests that female acrobats as sympotic entertainment would have been a fairly recent

phenomenon during the literary date of Callias' symposium (422 BC; c.f. the Naples and Madrid *hydriae*, figs. 1.1 and 1.2, dated 450-440, which are the earliest examples of female acrobatic performers), but that they grew in popularity during Xenophon's time. The number of vases depicting female acrobatic performances as sympotic entertainment in the 4th-century suggests that this was popular practice, especially in South Italy (where there was apparently a larger market for these vases). Xenophon's choice to specify that the acrobat's manager is from Syracuse suggests both that he was aware of the acrobat's popularity in South Italy and that cultural exchange between the two areas might allow a sympotic host on mainland Greece to import these specialty performers as a further display of wealth. Besides Socrates' banishment of female acrobatics, Xenophon seems to have created a literary symposium that draws heavily upon actual practice. Notably, the relationship between the acrobat and the sympotic space in the material record suggests that she is seen as Other, and even dehumanized, similarly to Xenophon's acrobat. These female acrobats are often depicted as an extension of sympotic furniture or props (the *kline*, footstool, and *kottabos* stand), and they occasionally even perform their servile function, as in the case of the acrobat using her toes to hold the ladle and kantharos over the krater. The acrobat's use of these props is simultaneously dehumanizing and entertaining; the more objects included in the performance, the greater the chance that one of the tricks can go wrong, and the greater the enjoyment when the acrobat lands the trick. The symposiasts provides the elite male gaze as the judges of these performance elements—whether there is an actual female acrobat at the party, or whether they are simply evaluating the acrobat depicted on the vase.

1.3 Acrobatic Tableaux as Sympotic Entertainment: A Case Study

Although the dancing-girl in Xenophon's *Symposium* is part of a performance troupe, she exhibits her acrobatic skills only in solo performances. Her final performance includes the dancing-boy, but it utilizes small movements and facial expressions, rather than acrobatic feats, to mimetically represent Ariadne and Dionysus.³⁵ This tendency to depict female acrobatic performances as solo virtuoso acts also recurs throughout the material record. Each vase discussed above features a female acrobat performing alone; she is accompanied by an *auletris* only on the Naples Gnathia lekythos. Given the congruence with Xenophon's account, perhaps this tendency often reflects performance reality for female acrobats at a symposium (instead of using one performer on a vase painting to represent multiple performers).

However, one little-discussed vase stands in contrast to the phenomenon of the solo acrobat, and I will argue that it depicts a scene of a performance troupe, similar to that of Xenophon's Syracusan. To my knowledge, no study has considered what type of performance this vase might depict or how the vase painting might relate to performance reality.³⁶ On a 4th-century Paestan red-figure bell-krater (fig. 1.10), a female acrobat wearing only a short, ruffled skirt performs a handstand atop a potter's wheel, with her hands gripping the edge of the wheel.³⁷ To her right, a satyr crouches with a bent knee and rounded back, turning the potter's wheel by

³⁵ The dancing-girl explicitly sits for most of this performance (Xen. *Symp.* 9.3): ἐκ τούτου πρῶτον μὲν ἡ Ἀριάδνη ὡς νύμφη κεκοσμημένη παρήλθε καὶ ἐκαθέζετο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου. οὐπω δὲ φαινομένου τοῦ Διονύσου ἠύλειτο ὁ βακχεῖος ῥυθμός... εὐθὺς μὲν γὰρ ἡ Ἀριάδνη ἀκούσασα τοιοῦτόν τι ἐποίησεν ὡς πᾶς ἂν ἔγνω ὅτι ἀσμένη ἤκουσε· καὶ ὑπήντησε μὲν οὐ οὐδὲ ἀνέστη, δῆλη δ' ἦν μόλις ἡρεμοῦσα. ("After this, first Ariadne approached outfitted like a bride, and she was sitting on a chair. And although Dionysus was not yet visible, a Bacchic rhythm was played on the aulos... for right away Ariadne, once she heard it, acted such that everyone would know that she heard it happily. And she did not go to meet him, nor did she stand up, but she clearly was keeping still with difficulty.")

³⁶ Todisco 2013 includes this vase in his catalogue (MGS20a), and Vickers 2016: 221-22 briefly discusses the acrobat's pose.

³⁷ Artemide Kunstauktionen, *Antiquities 1* (front cover), Vienna, 8 December 2012. Auction no. A80 (<https://www.artemideauktionen.at/auction/view/117/80>). Todisco 2013 MGS20a, Tav. XIX.

means of a small string.³⁸ To the acrobat's left, a seated female, nude from the waist up but draped in a long skirt, holds out a *phiale*. To the right of the satyr, a standing, winged female also holds out a *phiale* to the left, toward the acrobat. In the upper left hand corner, a winged male reclines on a wavy ground line holding a branch. This figure also holds a *phiale*, but keeps it close to his body instead of extending it outward as the seated female and winged female do.



Fig. 1.10. Female acrobat on potter's wheel in group performance. Paestan red-figure bell-krater. Artemide Kunstauktionen (auction), Vienna, 8th December 2012, no. A80. ©Artemide Kunstauktionen.

Iconographic comparisons indicate that the winged female represents Nike and the winged male represents Eros.³⁹ While Nike and Eros are both flexible figures who can be depicted in a variety of ways, the figures on this vase fit well within their iconographic traditions.

³⁸ See below on Ashmolean 1945.54 (fig. 2.2), a Paestan red figure skyphos which depicts a female acrobat on a potter's wheel turned by a masked comic actor, who similarly crouches and controls it with a string.

³⁹ Todisco 2013: 73 identifies the female as a Nike and the male as 'Eros (?)'

Each figure is often depicted holding a *phiale*, and Nike is nearly always depicted wearing a *peplos*.⁴⁰ Our Nike's *peplos* has a swirling trim across the hem that resembles ocean waves; on an Attic red-figure pelike now in London, dated 430-410 BC, a Nike wears a *peplos* with a nearly identical hem.⁴¹ It is worth noting that the scene on this pelike also occurs in a performance context: two female *aulos* players stand on a platform playing double *auloi* with headgear, flanked by the Nike with an ocean-wave hem to the left, who holds two *phialai*, and by another Nike to the right, who holds a sash painted using white slip. While our Nike holds only one *phiale*, in each case she holds the vessel outward with extended arms (as is common). For contrast, Iris, another popular winged female, typically holds a *kerykeion* and is therefore an unlikely choice for this figure.

I would like to suggest that the acrobat, satyr, and seated female are part of a performance troupe, similar to the one in Xenophon's *Symposium*, and that this vase depicts a scene from a group mimetic tableau. The imagined presence of mythological figures further characterizes the performance: Eros' presence suggests that the performance included erotic content or themes related to love, and Nike's presence suggests that the performance was successful or well-favored. Both the adornment and the configuration of the figures supports this reading of the vase. The acrobat, satyr, and seated female each wear a similar diadem, while Nike and Eros do not. Further, the diadem-adorned heads of all three figures align in one horizontal row, which makes it seem like these figures are somehow connected. Perhaps this diadem would have been part of the troupe's costume during the performance. As I mentioned earlier, Eros is separated from the scene by a ground line, and Nike seems to be a part of his world: the two figures look

⁴⁰ For Nike holding *phiale*, see *LIMC* VI Nike nos. 96, 97, 99, 100, 107, 108, 202, 277, 290, 307, 350, 356, and 371. For Eros holding *phiale*, see *LIMC* III Eros nos. 116, 163, 193, 270, 313, 327, 443, and 457-483 ('Eros tenant une phiale,' with relevant subsection 'Eros tenant phiale et couronne'). The editor notes that this iconographic tradition was especially popular in Italy, and particularly Apulia, in the second half of the fourth century BC.

⁴¹ British Museum 1910,0615.1; *ARV*² 1123, 2; *LIMC* VI no. 350.

over their shoulders directly at each other, and their wings are visually congruent. The painter's decision to keep Nike in red-figure, rather than painting her white like the other women, further suggests that she operates in the mythological realm, in which case it is standard practice not to paint goddesses white.

Visual cues on the krater suggest that this successful, erotic performance occurs within the context of a symposium. A ribbon hangs over the acrobat from the top middle of the krater, which is suggestive of interior (and specifically sympotic) space. This ribbon largely consists of two thick strands, with thin strands descending from their ends; ribbons of this type commonly occur along with garlands or beads to signify the setting of a symposium. This particular kind of ribbon hangs off of the kottabos stand (a clear sympotic marker) in fig. 1.8 and hangs on the wall in figs. 1.7 and 1.9, each discussed above.

I have suggested that the scene on this krater provides a visual comparison to the Syracusan's entertainment troupe in Xenophon's *Symposium*. Perhaps the female acrobat, as well as the other figures, would have performed solo acts throughout the evening and then come together for this group performance. The content of the performance is unclear, other than the strong possibility of erotic themes. But there does seem to be more going on here than just a solo act with an attendant: why would the figure turning the wheel dress up as a satyr otherwise? While the mimetic function of the female acrobat on the potter's wheel is unclear, the acrobat in this scene is important, and even central, to the performance troupe. This vase suggests that dancing-girls could utilize their acrobatic skills in group mimes that might have had more of a lasting impact on symposiasts than virtuoso acts would have. If a large part of the 'problem' with female acrobatics stems from the short-lived 'wonder' that they attempt to create and the inferiority of the objects they imitate (for example, a hoop), then perhaps the female acrobat's

role in a group mime could offer some sort of solution. In this type of performance, the female acrobat would use *mimēsis* to play an identifiable role, rather than to bend into a hoop. Depending on the mythological content of the mime, viewers might feel more connected to the gods, or they might react in a similar way as Xenophon's symposiasts reacted to the mime of Ariadne and Dionysus (especially given the presence of Eros). While these possibilities are speculative rather than conclusive, the depiction of a female acrobat as part of a group performance with mythological figures suggests that the acrobat was not confined to solo acts at symposia and could perhaps create a more lasting 'wonder.'

Chapter 2: Acrobats on the Comic Stage

I have discussed representations of female acrobats as sympotic entertainment both in South Italy (4th c. South Italian vases; Syracusan manager of Xenophon's performance troupe) and, to a somewhat lesser extent, in Athens (Xenophon's *Symposium*, Naples and Madrid *hydriae*). I have shown how the textual and material evidence for female acrobats at the symposium often assimilates the acrobat with a performance prop, dehumanizing the performer as an object for consumption. In this chapter, I will discuss the position of the female acrobatic body in Greek comedy. This might seem odd given the accepted view that female roles in Greek comedy were played by men in female costumes. However, I will use the female acrobats on two comedic vases—a Paestan red-figure calyx krater now in Lipari (fig. 2.1),¹ and a Paestan red-figure skyphos now in Oxford (fig. 2.2)²—to argue that female specialty entertainers appearing on the comic stage are at least a strong possibility. I will discuss the possibilities for the performance reality of these scenes as well as the visual relationship between the acrobatic body and the theatrical space. Despite the lack of textual evidence for female acrobats in Greek comedy, I will then turn to the role of two specialty performers in Aristophanes—Dardanis in *Wasps* and Elaphion in *Thesmophoriazusae*—to argue that female acrobats such as those on the Paestan vessels would have played similar roles. Using the textual and material evidence as a guide, I will argue that females could perform onstage in special circumstances—one of those special circumstances being the use of a female acrobat.

¹ Lipari, Museo Archaeologico 927. *PhV*² 80 (74); *IGD* IV, 11. Att. to Asteas Painter, ca. 350 BC.

² Oxford, Ashmolean 1945.54. *PhV*² 96 (90); *BAPD* 425002. ca. 325-300 BC.



Fig. 2.1. Female acrobat on stage with two comic actors and Dionysus. Paestan calyx-krater. Lipari, Museo Archeologico 927.



Fig. 2.2. Female acrobat on potter's wheel with comic actor. Paestan skyphos. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1945.54.

Before examining the material evidence, it will be useful to briefly discuss the role of vase paintings in determining the relationship between South Italian and Attic comedy. The two

Paestan vessels depicting female acrobats in comedy are part of the corpus of ‘phlyax’ vases. These vases were originally thought to depict local, subliterate comic farces, denoted by the term ‘phlyax’,³ until scholars such as Webster, Csapo, Taplin, and Green demonstrated that some of the vases reflect Athenian, and specifically Aristophanic, comedy.⁴ As Csapo 1986 demonstrated, the scene on an Apulian bell-krater (Würzburg H5697, ca. 370 BC) directly represents a scene from Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* (produced 411 BC) in which Euripides’ in-law holds a wineskin-baby hostage over an altar, in a parody of Euripides’ *Telephus*. While it is significant that an Aristophanic comedy is attested on an Apulian vase around 40 years from the play’s original production, it does not mean that all South-Italian comic vases depict Attic or Aristophanic comedy. It is now generally accepted that the comedic performances depicted on these vases represent a developed form of comedy that at least interacts with Attic plays and sometimes directly reflects Middle Comedy as performed in Athens and throughout the Greek world.

While the impact that these associations have on the performance reality of the two acrobatic ‘phlyax’ vases remains uncertain, there are a few likely options: they could depict scenes from an Athenian comedy re-performed in the Greek West (in which case the practice of featuring a real female acrobat on stage could either be taken from the original Athenian

³ Heydemann 1886 first dated these vases to 300 BC and later, connecting them to Rhinthon and a type of local comedy called ‘phlyax.’ Trendall 1936 used stylistic components of these vase paintings to date them between 400-320 BC, which suggests a connection with the final stages of Old Comedy and the development of Middle Comedy rather than New Comedy and Rhinthon. The name ‘phlyax’ is still occasionally used to refer to this corpus of vases, even though they are no longer believed to depict phlyax plays.

⁴ Hughes 2006: 45n26 gives a brief outline of the controversy over the costumes on ‘phlyax’ vases, with Webster 1948, 1953-54, 1954, 1955, 1957 arguing that they are connected to Attic comedy while Pickard-Cambridge 1949 and Beare 1954, 1957, 1959 argue against him. Csapo 1986, after demonstrating the connections between a ‘phlyax’ bell-krater (Würzburg H5697) and the plot of Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*, gives a convincing list of evidence that ‘phlyax’ vases are closely connected with Attic comedy. Taplin 1993 further pushes for the dissociation of ‘phlyax’ vases from local ‘phlyax’ farces or from any notion of underdeveloped, provincial, and crude theatre. Green 1994: 65 explicitly connects the vases with Athenian models: “There can nowadays be no doubt that most of them [i.e. the ‘so-called phlyax vases’] show Athenian comedy.” However, Dearden 2012 pushes back on the assumption that all ‘phlyax’ vases reflect Athenian comedy, pointing out that only a small portion of the vases can clearly be linked to Athenian comedy.

performance or could reflect a particular staging choice of the South Italian production), or they could depict scenes from a locally produced comedy that interacts with or exhibits features of Athenian comedy. It seems likely that cultural exchange between Attica and South Italy—regions with especially strong performance cultures—would have encouraged innovation, as different performance practices and genres blend together.⁵ Particularly relevant here is the genre of mime: although the mime’s generic distinctions are difficult to pin down and appear to have been quite fluid,⁶ it is widely accepted that women played female roles. Further, mime seems to have been closely connected to Magna Graecia and Sicily: the Syracusan Sophron (ca. 430 BC) wrote mimes inspired by everyday life, and these mimes in turn gained popularity at Athens. As discussed, the manager who exhibits a mime in Xenophon’s *Symposium* is Syracusan as well. In both of these instances, it seems important that the mime originates from a Syracusan but is performed or known in Athens. The bell-krater (fig. 1.10) that depicts a female acrobat in a group mime (as I have argued above) is Paestan, and the two vases depicting female acrobats with comic actors are Paestan as well (figs. 2.1-2.2). Perhaps mime actresses were popular in Paestum, and a blending of genres between mime and comedy could allow women to appear on the comic stage. And yet, the Paestan comic vases also display Attic elements, as the costumes and masks are typical of Attic comedy.⁷ While we cannot know with certainty the context in which female acrobats appeared on the comic stage, cultural exchange and generic blending seem to be important factors. Throughout this chapter, I will try to remain sensitive to these various performance possibilities.

⁵ For performance culture in the Greek West, see Morgan 2012.

⁶ For the (oftentimes fluid) characteristics of mime as a genre, see Maxwell 1993: 1-96. For the difficulties in distinguishing mime from pantomime, see Wiseman 2008.

⁷ Masks are generally believed not to have been used in mime, although this is debated: see Maxwell 1993: 8.

2.1 Visual Evidence for Female Acrobats on the Comic Stage

Two Paestan vessels (figs. 2.1, 2.2) depict female acrobats performing onstage with masked comic actors. On the red-figure calyx krater in Lipari, a nude female (center) performs a handstand on a small table or footstool, observed by a seated Dionysus (left), two comic actors wearing male masks (right), and two comic actors wearing *hetaira* masks (above, in windows). The scene occurs on a stage with a curtain underneath it, likely concealing the columns used to support the stage.⁸ The female acrobat balances in the ‘generic pose’, with her face looking toward Dionysus’ lap. She is fully nude and painted white, indicating that this is a female performer rather than a male acting as a female. The two comic actors have varying reactions to the acrobat’s performance. The actor standing closest to the acrobat crouches down with his hands resting on his bent knees, looking intently at the acrobat’s navel. This actor is not standing on the ground level of the stage, but on an object with a flat top; Dearden 1995: 83 suggests that this is the base of a potter’s wheel, and that the actor is watching the acrobat so intently because he is trying to learn her tricks, which he could then perform on the wheel. The white hair and white beard on this actor’s mask suggest that he is playing an old man, adding much comedic potential to a scene like the one imagined by Dearden, although the contents of the scene cannot be confirmed. The other actor is slightly younger, and he stands directly on the stage with one foot nonchalantly crossed over the other and his hand on his hip: he does not appear to be very impressed by the performance.

The presence of Dionysus complicates my argument that this vase demonstrates a real female performing on the comic stage. The seated Dionysus figure suggests that at least some aspect of this scene is imaginative. Taplin 1993: 33-34 categorizes this vase among other Paestan

⁸ See *IGD IV*, 11 for this vase and *IGD IV*, 14 for a calyx krater signed by Asteas on which the same type of stage stretches across the frame, supported by five Doric columns underneath.

vases that show general Dionysiac scenes, rather than a particular scene from a play, although he notes that this vase is the one exception to the general rule that stages do not occur on the Dionysiac vases. By comparing Dionysiac scenes on Paestan vases *without* a comic actor, Taplin determines that “the actor, when he is there, is simply part of the general Dionysiac ambience” (1993: 34).⁹ However, I think the presence of the stage is too important an objection; Taplin goes on to argue that the stage is the “most explicitly theatrical” feature on the Paestan vases (1993: 35-36). The configuration of the two actors also seems to suggest identification with a particular moment in a play; as discussed above, they are both reacting to the acrobat’s performance. It seems unlikely to me that a painter would completely make up a scene (including details such as the relationships between characters) and depict that scene on a stage simply in order to create a general Dionysiac atmosphere. Why can we not imagine that the performance was such a success that the artist envisions Dionysus showing up, or even playing the *aulos* in accompaniment? Hughes 2008: 13 makes the imaginative suggestion that “the viewer is to suppose that he played an accompaniment until the girl sprang into her handstand, whereupon he dropped his *aulos* to his lap, and clapped his right hand to his head in a conventional gesture of dismay.” Whether or not we are supposed to imagine this narrative, the idea of Dionysus’ accompaniment seems to be an attractive option.¹⁰ The acrobat’s head looks straight at the *aulos* on Dionysus’ lap, perhaps suggesting a connection between her performance and *mousike*.¹¹ Dearden suggests that the role of Dionysus “is presumably to emphasize both the theatrical setting as well as the link with

⁹ Marshall 2000: 15-18 categorizes the ‘phlyax’ vases similarly to Taplin and agrees with the interpretation that the scene is imaginative due to Dionysus’ presence.

¹⁰ Note that the *auletris* in Xen. *Symp.* 2.8 accompanies the dancing-girl on the *aulos* during her hoop-throwing performance. It could even be possible that an aulete dressed as Dionysus to accompany the comic performance, although the vase painting does not have to be so photographic.

¹¹ C.f. the female acrobat on a potter’s wheel who looks directly at the *aulos* of a seated *auletris* on the Apulian Gnathia lekythos discussed above (Naples, Museo Nazionale, coll. St. Angelo 405).

wine” (1995: 83). I do not believe that this prohibits the painter from showing a scene from an actual comedic performance, even if the figure of Dionysus is imagined.

The scene on the skyphos in Oxford is significantly pared down: it features only an acrobat on a potter’s wheel and a comic actor who acts as an assistant by turning the wheel (on which, see below). The acrobat is nude from the waist up and wears tight shorts, as well as decorative elements such as bracelets, a headband, and cross-body beading. The artist includes additional shading in the acrobat’s pubic region; Marshall 2000: 19 suggests that the acrobat wears shorts “through which her pubic hair can be seen (or on top of which has been painted female genitalia).” While she is not painted white, she still stands out as being a real female in a comic performance, both through the presence of small breasts and pubic hair and through the juxtaposition of her semi-nude, unpadded figure with that of the padded actor.¹² The acrobat balances in a handstand with her hands gripping the outer edges of a potter’s wheel. Her head is lifted, and she looks directly at the comic actor, who squats down while holding a string that is wrapped around the base of the potter’s wheel, acting as an assistant who keeps the wheel spinning during the acrobat’s performance.¹³ The smaller space of the skyphos as compared to the calyx krater means that the artist is less concerned with performance reality: no stage is depicted, although the presence of a masked comic actor confirms the comedic performance context.¹⁴ Further, it seems clear that the acrobat on the skyphos is distinct from the acrobat on the Lipari krater. While artistic variance could be at play here, the women are depicted with

¹² There are small traces of white paint on the acrobat’s feet. It is possible that she was originally painted white, with the color fading over time, but it seems more likely that the paint indicated some sort of footwear. The acrobat’s decorative elements (headband, bracelets) are painted white; perhaps the artist did not paint the acrobat’s body so that he could include these details. The nude, all-white acrobat on the Lipari krater is not depicted with any adornments.

¹³ See Marshall 2000: 17 for the suggestion that the actor “is steadying the device to make the acrobat’s feat somewhat easier” rather than simply keeping the wheel turning.

¹⁴ In addition, a comic mask of an old woman can faintly be seen above the actor; Marshall 2000: 16 suggests that the actor playing the acrobat’s ‘assistant’ appears in the old woman mask at another point in the play. He links this to the artist’s attempt to “depict accurately elements of Athenian dramaturgy” even in the South Italian performance.

different facial structures, different hair colors, and different costumes, and they perform on different props.¹⁵ This leaves open the possibility that multiple 4th c. comedies—whether originally performed in Athens and brought to South Italy, or originating in South Italy itself—featured female acrobats who could appear onstage.

While we cannot know the nature of these performances with certainty, it is telling that the artist depicts both of these acrobats on the comic stage as real females who are nude or scantily clad.¹⁶ It might be easy to imagine a comedic scene in which a padded male actor is dressed as a popular female acrobat and struggles to perform her skills.¹⁷ But how might a scene of this sort be depicted on a vase? If the artist is remembering an actual comedic performance, and if the humor of the acrobatic scene in this performance depends on an outlandishly padded male who attempts the acrobatic feats typical of dancing-girls, then the artist would probably choose to represent a male actor in nude costume rather than a nude female.¹⁸ In other words, the ‘point’ of the scene that the artist would likely remember and represent would be the ridiculous attempts of a padded male actor to perform as an acrobat. The image of a padded male attempting handstands on a rotating potter’s wheel, for example, seems like it would be humorous enough to stand out in the artist’s mind when he goes to paint. Therefore, even with the potential for artistic license, it seems likely that the presence of real female performers on the Lipari krater and Oxford skyphos stems from comedic scenes in which a female acrobatic entertainer performed onstage—whether this is indicative of Attic comedy or a (re)production in

¹⁵ See also Hughes 1997: 240-41 on the “geographical scattering” of vases and figurines depicting female acrobats. Hughes takes this to suggest that women traveled around working as acrobats during this time period, which is consistent with my arguments.

¹⁶ For female entertainers on the comic stage, see Hughes 2008. See also Hughes 1997 for the argument that a female named Konnakis, who dances in the nude carrying a torch in front of double doors on a mid-4th c. Gnathia krater, appears on the comic stage.

¹⁷ For example, Dearden 1995: 84 suggests that the seductive dancing scene between Elaphion and the Scythian guard in *Th.* “seems to demand a grotesque performance by a male dressed as a female,” although he also acknowledges other interpretations.

¹⁸ See Taaffe 1993: 5-10 on visual representations of male actors in female roles.

South Italy. The acrobat could have even been part of a travelling performance troupe—similar to the one in Xenophon’s *Symposium*—and played this same role in multiple cities. The ‘costumes’ of the female acrobats on these two Paestan vessels certainly fit within the standard working wear of professional female acrobats: on the vases I discussed in the previous chapter, three acrobats are fully nude,¹⁹ and four are nude from the waist up.²⁰ This suggests that the female acrobats on the comic stage should be understood as professional entertainers brought in to play special roles; perhaps the acrobats who had gained fame through the sympotic circuit or wonder-shows (see the following chapter) would have been recruited for a traveling comedic performance troupe as well.

The presence of the comic actor as an assistant on the Oxford skyphos can give us a hint of the performance realities of this acrobatic scene. The only other extant depiction of an ‘assistant’ figure is the satyr on the Artemide Kunstauktionen bell-krater that I discussed in the previous chapter (fig. 1.10); other acrobats atop potter’s wheels are not depicted with an assistant. Since it is unlikely that the acrobat could turn the wheel herself, this suggests that the assistant is often superfluous to an artistic depiction—the acrobat is the compelling part of the vase, and those who have seen this sort of performance would simply recognize that an assistant is often utilized.²¹ The artist’s choice to depict the comic assistant on the Oxford skyphos, then, suggests that this role was important or memorable within the play. It seems relevant that each extant assistant doubles as a performer playing a role: the satyr is part of the mythological

¹⁹ Private collection, van Hoek and Herrmann 2013 pl. 24a; Madrid, Museo Arqueologico Nacional 11129 (*BAPD* #214707); Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 81398 (*BAPD* # 213444).

²⁰ Tischbein 1791 Taf. 60; Naples, Museo Nazionale, coll. St. Angelo 405; London, British Museum F232; Artemide Kunstauktionen (auction), Vienna, 8th December 2012 *Antiquities* 1: front cover of catalogue, no. A80.

²¹ In Xen. *Symp.* 7.2, someone brings out the potter’s wheel for the dancing-girl’s performance, which almost certainly would have included acrobatic feats. Since Socrates thwarts the performance, it is not certain whether the person who brought out the wheel would have stayed in the performance space and functioned as an assistant, but it is a possibility. In the dancing-girl’s earlier hoop-throwing performance (Xen. *Symp.* 2.8), an unnamed helper stands by to hand the girl hoops.

tableau, and the comic actor is, of course, part of the play. Perhaps the artist depicts these figures, rather than other assistants, because they play identifiable and memorable roles within each type of performance. In the case of the Paestan skyphos, the positioning of the comic assistant might give a small clue about the scene. The satyr on the bell krater hunches over with one foot in front of the other, which seems like a sufficiently stable stance for turning the potter's wheel. The comic actor on the skyphos, however, sits in a low squat; his feet are planted right next to each other, his spine creates a straight diagonal, and his heavily-padded buttocks sit backwards. In addition to requiring a difficult quadriceps and gluteus workout, this position seems disadvantageous for turning a potter's wheel: with all of his weight back in his heels, it would be easy for the actor to fall backwards—especially with the unequal weight distribution created by the actor's extra padding. The force of the wheel's motion could easily knock the actor off balance in this precarious stance. Without more parallels, and given the fact that this is an artistic representation, it is difficult to know whether this was a common stance for an acrobat's assistant or simply reflects artistic license. However, given the context of a comedic performance, perhaps the actor could function as a bad assistant who constantly fumbles with the acrobat's performance, which could add to the comedic effect of the scene.

As a final note, before I discuss the treatment of the female body in Aristophanic comedy, it will be useful to discuss the visual relationship between the female acrobatic body on the Paestan vases and the comic space. On the Lipari krater, the footstool is painted in the same white color as the female acrobat, whereas the other pieces of furniture and equipment (the chair and the potential base of a potter's wheel) are brown. This is a significant choice on behalf of the artist, and it reflects the iconographic tendency to assimilate the female acrobatic body with the prop on which she performs—a phenomenon that is familiar from the sympotic examples that I

discussed in the previous chapter. Instead of being painted white, as discussed above, the acrobat on the Oxford skyphos is brown, along with the potter's wheel that she grips with her hands, although this reflects red-figure technique rather than the ideology of acrobat-prop assimilation. Nevertheless, the relationship between the female acrobatic body on the comic stage and her performance prop suggests that the female acrobat in a comedic performance still tends to be seen as an extension of the furniture on which she performs. While this specific relationship between the color of the prop and the color of the body would not have occurred during the actual performance, this iconographic tendency suggests that the painter and/or the client ideologically assimilates the female performer with objects and props. As the only real female body on the stage, it is easy to imagine how the acrobat could have been objectified by the audience. This conception of the relationship between the female performer's body and objects fits well with the textual evidence that I will now discuss—especially in the example of Dardanis in *Wasps*, whose private parts are likened to parts of a torch.

2.2 Female Specialty performers and Bodily Spectacle in Aristophanic Comedy

As I have been discussing, the acrobats on these two vases are not masked actors or chorus members but real women, and they fit nicely into the role of the specialty performer—a common trope from the final scenes of many Aristophanic plays. While the surviving evidence does not feature specifically acrobatic specialty performers, nevertheless figures such as Dardanis and the sons of Carcinus in *Wasps* (1342-81; 1501-37) and Elaphion and Teredon in *Thesmophoriazusae* (1172-1232) create performative spectacles at the end of each play that might provide useful parallels for acrobatic female virtuoso performers in either South Italian or Attic comedy. Dardanis (an *auletris*) and Elaphion (a dancing-girl) can provide especially useful

parallels for the role of the female acrobat on the comic stage, since they are both female specialty performers. In *Wasps*, Dardanis plays the *aulos* at a symposium, from which Philocleon abducts her during his *komos* (1342-81). In *Thesmophoriazusae*, Elaphion gives the Scythian archer a lap dance in order to distract him so that Euripides' in-law can escape, and Teredon accompanies the seductive performance on the *aulos* (1172-1232). While it remains unclear whether Dardanis and Elaphion were played by female performers or males in costume, in what follows I operate under the assumption that female performers in these mute roles were at least a strong possibility.²²

Arguments against Elaphion and Dardanis as female are usually predicated upon the assumption that females did not appear on the theatrical stage whatsoever.²³ In light of the vases discussed above, however, this assumption does not seem sound; at least in South Italian performances, which have been shown to have a direct link to Attic comedy, females can appear onstage as specialty performers, and this leaves open the possibility that figures such as Dardanis and Elaphion were played by actual females—perhaps even well-known, popular entertainers. Furthermore, the humor in the scenes with Dardanis and Elaphion do not depend on these figures being played by males acting grotesquely; the foolishness of both Philocleon in *Wasps* and the Scythian archer in *Th.* create plenty of humor on their own, as will become clear below.²⁴ While keeping these concerns in mind, I will focus on the textual treatment of Dardanis and Elaphion,

²² In relation to the possibility for female performance in *Th.*, Sandbach 1977: 28 suggests that Elaphion was played by a naked slave-girl. Zweig 1992, based on the role of mute nude females (including Elaphion) in Aristophanes and modern theories of pornography, makes a compelling argument for the use of real female entertainers. Hughes 2008: 20-22 also argues that the scene makes most sense if Elaphion is a real female. Marshall 2000: 20 gives a useful list of scenes in Aristophanic comedy that could potentially be performed by a female entertainer, although he rightfully acknowledges that these scenes need not have all been performed in the same way. See also Hughes 2012: 201-214 on comedy and women, esp. the section on mute women (211-214).

²³ See Hughes 2008: 1-4 for a discussion of the scholarly treatment of female performers in comedy. He concludes: "...we ought to say we have *no direct proof* that women took part; there is only a massive absence of evidence, an historical vacuum. The exclusion of women cannot 'go without saying', because negative evidence is, at best, circumstantial" (4).

²⁴ See Zweig 1992: 79 for the similar point that Dardanis and Elaphion "unmistakably hold Philocleon and the Archer up for mockery."

specifically in relation to their bodies. I will argue that Aristophanes' focus on the physical aspects and private parts of these female entertainers—and his tendency to liken them to objects—creates a paradigm for the sort of way that the female acrobats on the Paestan vases might have been treated in their respective comedies.

Toward the end of both *Wasps* (1342-81) and *Thesmophoriazusae* (1172-90), characters explicitly call attention to the private parts of female entertainers. Trickery is involved in each scene: Philocleon in *Wasps* has just stolen the *auletris* Dardanis from a symposium, and he attempts to hide her from Bdelycleon by likening the parts of her body to a torch, while Euripides in *Thesmophoriazusae* uses the seductive dance of Elaphion to distract the Scythian guard and rescue his in-law. Part of the humor in the exchange between Philocleon and Bdelycleon stems from the disjunction between the parts of the torch and Dardanis' body parts: when Philocleon tells his son that Dardanis is really just a torch (which he previously asked her to hold), Bdelycleon asks “but what is this dark thing, the one in the middle of it?” (*V.* 1374).²⁵ In relation to Dardanis' body, this would refer to the genital region, with the dark spot likely understood as pubic hair;²⁶ Philocleon explains this as the pitch coming out of the burning torch. Bdelycleon then asks about Dardanis' buttocks (*πρωκτός*),²⁷ which Philocleon explains simply as a branch on the torch that sticks outward (*V.* 1376-7).²⁸ This is even more ridiculous than the pitch explanation—what torch would have a branch sticking outward, and how could a branch

²⁵ “τί δὲ τὸ μέλαν τοῦτ' ἐστὶν αὐτῆς τοῦν μέσῳ;” All Greek text of Aristophanes Ed. Wilson 2007.

²⁶ This is also how Biles and Olsen 2015: 480 understand the reference.

²⁷ Biles and Olsen 2015: 480 note that *πρωκτός* here refers to the buttocks as a whole rather than the butthole specifically, citing *Lys.* 1148 as a parallel (“ἀλλ' ὁ πρωκτὸς ἄφατον ὡς καλός”; the Spartan delegate says this about Reconciliation. See n. 31 below).

²⁸ “Βδ: ὁ δ' ὀπισθεν οὐχὶ πρωκτὸς ἐστὶν οὐτοσί; Φι: ὄζος μὲν οὖν τῆς δαδὸς οὗτος ἐξέχει.” Biles and Olsen 2015: 480 summarize ὄζος as “the budding point where one branch emerges from another or from the trunk.”

even come close to resembling buttocks?²⁹—and Bdelycleon begins to take Dardanis away from his father. This failed attempt at beguilement creates humor through the private parts of the female body, pointing out Dardanis’ nudity, which was likely her ‘working wear’ at the symposium.³⁰ The Scythian archer’s treatment of Elaphion in *Thesmophoriazusae* provides a simpler example: when Euripides tells Elaphion to sit on the Scythian’s lap, the guard comments on her breasts (οἶμ’ ὡς στέρπιπο τὸ τιττί’, ὥσπερ γογγυλί: “Whoa, what firm titties, like a turnip,” *Th.* 1185) and her buttocks (καλό γε τὸ πυγή: “That rump is great,” *Th.* 1187), calling out parts of the female body like Philocleon and Bdelycleon did with Dardanis. This tendency to call attention to genitals and private parts is typical of Aristophanic humor, especially regarding a *hetaira* or female entertainer.³¹

In addition to male characters verbally calling attention to parts of Elaphion’s and Dardanis’ bodies, both entertainers are expected to perform sexual favors, particularly in a sympotic setting. Philocleon reminds Dardanis that he took her away from the symposium right as she would have been expected to provide sexual favors to the guests (ὄρᾳς ἐγὼ σ’ ὡς δεξιῶς ὑφειλόμην / μέλλουσαν ἤδη λεςβιεῖν τοὺς ξυμπότας),³² but instead of setting her free from this ‘requirement’, he wants her to return the favor by having sex with him, even though he has moved from strictly sympotic space to his own *komos*: ὧν οὖνεκ’ ἀπόδος τῷ πέει τῶδι χάριν (“because of which, return the favor to this dick,” *V.* 1347). Thus, even though the symposium

²⁹ Biles and Olsen 2015: 480 deduce the meaning that Dardanis’ buttocks stick out “like a knot from a piece of wood,” although they note that the comparison does not work perfectly and that Philocleon is “talking nonsense in any case.”

³⁰ If a real *auletris* appeared onstage as Dardanis, she might have worn shorts or tights depicting pubic hair rather than appearing fully in the nude.

³¹ *Lys.* 1114-88 provides a parallel for Bdelycleon’s treatment of Dardanis, as the Athenian and Spartan delegates euphemistically liken Reconciliation’s private parts to physical places. In *Ach.* 1198-99, when Dicaeopolis returns from a symposium with two females from the party, he uses language similar to the Scythian archer’s: ἀτταταῖ / ἀτταταῖ, / τῶν τιθίων, ὡς σκληρὰ καὶ κυδώνια (“Ah ah, those tits—how sturdy and quince-like”).

³² “You see how I skillfully snatched you away / when you were just about to blow the symposiasts.” (*V.* 1345-46). See Biles and Olsen 2015: 473 for the implications of oral sex associated with λεςβιεῖν.

occurs offstage, we learn that the female entertainer would have been expected to engage in sexual acts with the symposiasts (at least, in Philocleon’s perception of the events). Although this is a dramatic representation, it is likely that sexual expectations were placed upon sympotic entertainers during at least some symposia, and it also seems likely that this expectation would have been part of the comedic treatment of female acrobats such as those on the Paestan calyx-krater and skyphos. In *Th.*, Elaphion is treated similarly, although in this case the potential of being compelled to perform sexual acts is realized. Euripides acts as a procurer by giving Elaphion to the Scythian archer to have sex with offstage (*Th.* 1190-95):

Τοξότης: οὐκὶ πιλήσι πρώτᾳ με;
Εὐριπίδης: πάνυ γε φίλησον αὐτόν.
Το.: ὃ ὃ παπαπαπαῖ,
ὡς γλυκερὸ τὸ γλῶσσ’, ὥσπερ Ἀττικὸς μέλις.
τί οὐ κατεύδει παρ’ ἐμέ;
Ευ.: χαῖρε, τοξότα,
οὐ γὰρ γένοιτ’ ἂν τοῦτο.
Το.: ναίκι γράδιον,
ἐμοὶ κάρισσον σὺ τοῦτο.
Ευ.: δώσεις οὖν δραχμὴν;
Το.: ναί, ναί, δῶσι.

Archer: Won’t she kiss me first?
Euripides: Sure, kiss him.
Ar.: Ooh ooh ooh, wowza, what a sweet tongue, like Attic honey. Why won’t you sleep with me?
Eu.: See ya, archer, for this thing won’t happen.
Ar.: Wait, little old lady. Grant this favor to me.
Eu.: Will you give a drachma?
Ar.: Yes, certainly I will.

The Scythian does not have the money and exchanges his quiver instead, but the dramatization of bartering between Euripides and the Scythian for sex with Elaphion remains striking. Of course, this had been Euripides’ plan all along; he needed to get the guard to leave with Elaphion in order to rescue his in-law. Nevertheless, this treatment of Elaphion—combined with the detail

that she is about to go dance for a group of men³³—represents standard treatment of the female entertainer in Aristophanic comedy.

These mute roles stand out from female characters with speaking parts. Speaking female characters usually either display common stereotypes (such as the women celebrating the Thesmophoria) or take on more masculine roles (such as *Lysistrata*), for which they have license partially because their lines are really spoken by men.³⁴ In *Th.* specifically, sexualized bodily spectacle is not at the forefront of Aristophanes' representation of the other female characters (besides Elaphion) who were undoubtedly played by male actors. Instead, In-Law's time among the women at the festival largely confirms some of the popular stereotypes that the women condemn Euripides for propagating, such as the stereotype of women as wine-crazed and sex-crazed. For example, the scene between Mica and In-Law in which In-Law reenacts Euripides' *Telephus* by 'sacrificing' Mica's 'baby'—who turns out to be a mere wineskin—satirizes women for being wine-obsessed to the point of feeling real distress at the thought of losing wine from a wineskin (*Th.* 689-764). The male actor can exaggerate these comic female stereotypes. In *Lys.*—a play largely consisting of sexualized spectacles—*Lysistrata* and Calonice demonstrate their transgression of traditional gender roles by objectifying other women (including Lampito, the Boeotian girl, and the Corinthian girl: *Lys.* 78-92). They act much like Philocleon and the Scythian archer, commenting on Lampito's breasts: ὡς δὴ καλὸν τὸ χρῆμα τῶν τιθῶν ἔχεις ("What a great heap of tits you have," *Lys.* 83). The difference is that Lampito, a 'respectable' woman (and a Spartan woman) who is undoubtedly played by a male actor, gets to respond to her objectification: ἄπερ ἰαρεῖόν τοί μ' ὑποψαλάσσετε ("You're handling me like an animal for

³³ Ev.: ἡ παῖς ἔμελλε προμελετᾶν ὃ τοξότα. / ὀρχησομένη γὰρ ἔρχεθ' ὡς ἄνδρας τινάς. ("The girl is about to practice, O archer. For she is about to go to some men to dance.") *Th.* 1177-78.

³⁴ Taaffe 1993: 71 concludes in relation to *Lysistrata*'s character: "In the world of theater, the male-actor-as-female-character has served to disturb the illusion of 'woman' on stage, to remind us that what appears to be female is an imitation and that the admirable qualities of the main character are in fact part of an authentic male interior."

sacrifice,” *Lys.* 84). Being a Spartan woman affords Lampito some agency to make this objection, but part of her agency also comes from the fact that the line is really spoken by a male actor. By contrast, there is no indication that mute figures such as Dardanis and Elaphion show any sort of agency; they are at the complete liberty of whatever the male characters (Philocleon, Bdelycleon, Euripides, and the Scythian archer) direct them to do. The recurring hypersexualized treatment of the female specialty performer stands out in this context.

In this section, I have given some representative examples of the female body as a sexualized spectacle in Aristophanic comedy. Dardanis and Elaphion arouse spectators internal to the play (Philocleon and the Scythian archer, respectively) who verbally objectify the girls’ private parts and either desire or receive sexual favors from them. The actions of this internal audience could in turn direct the response of the external audience—especially as elite male theatre-goers recall their own experiences with *auletrides* and dancing-girls at dinner parties. Both of these instances, then, are tied up with Dardanis and Elaphion’s status as female specialty performers—an *auletris* and an *orchēstris*, respectively. The women do not have speaking roles; they perform their respective occupations on stage in silence, and this leaves open the possibility that they could be played by real female specialty performers. Therefore, Dardanis and Elaphion—female entertainers with special skills whose performances are attested at symposia—provide the best parallels for female acrobats on the comic stage, as preserved through the Lipari krater and Oxford skyphos (figs. 2.1-2.2). Whether female acrobats were featured in Athenian or South Italian productions, it seems likely that these acrobats would have been part of a sexualized spectacle, contributing to the bodily objectification that I have discussed in both the literary and visual sources for female acrobats.

Chapter 3: Acrobats in Wonder-shows

Of all the venues for acrobatic performances I have discussed so far, street performances are the most elusive. And yet, this is most likely the context in which the masses would have encountered female acrobats. While it is possible to imagine more informal street performances, the semi-public venue of a wonder-show emerges from our literary sources, often referred to by ἐν (τοῖς) θαύμασι. In this chapter, I will first demonstrate how the Syracusan manager in Xenophon's *Symposium* can make money by exhibiting his performance troupe in wonder-shows. I will discuss this evidence alongside other evidence for the monetary costs of attending wonder-shows and the financial profits of wonder-making. I will then assemble the textual evidence for wonder-shows in order to evaluate the range of performances they could exhibit as well as the types of audience members who might have attended. Finally, I will discuss visual representations of female acrobats who engage in multiple forms of *thaumatopoiia* at once, which makes them especially likely candidates for performers at wonder-shows. Despite the severe limitations of the evidence, I hope to present as complete a picture as possible of what female acrobatic performances in wonder-shows might have entailed, including the economic and social components of these performances.

3.1 Xenophon's Syracusan and the Earning Potential of Wonder-shows

In the *Symposium*, Xenophon indicates that the Syracusan's performance management goes beyond sympotic spaces into public wonder-shows and street performances that would have drawn a much larger audience. Xenophon first tells us that the Syracusan makes money through wonder-shows that feature the female acrobat, auletris, and male kithara-player/dancer: ταῦτα δὲ

καὶ ἐπιδεικνὺς ὡς ἐν θαύματι ἀργύριον ἐλάμβανεν (2.1).¹ After the acrobat’s sword tumbling performance, which suggests to the symposiasts that manliness (ἀνδρεία) can be taught, Antisthenes makes a joke about the utility of displaying such a performance to the city—and the monetary gain that it would bring the Syracusan (2.13):

καὶ ὁ Ἀντισθένης εἶπεν· Ἄρ’ οὖν καὶ τῷδε τῷ Συρακοσίῳ κράτιστον ἐπιδείξαντι τῇ πόλει τὴν ὀρχηστρίδα εἰπεῖν, ἐὰν διδῶσιν αὐτῷ Ἀθηναῖοι χρήματα, ποιήσῃεν πάντας Ἀθηναίους τολμᾶν ὁμόσε ταῖς λόγχαις ἰέναι;

And Antisthenes said: “So, wouldn’t it be best for this Syracusan, after exhibiting the dancing-girl to the *polis*, to say that—if the Athenians give him money—he will make all the men of Athens dare to go up against spears?”

While this is a humorous passage, it presupposes that exhibiting the dancing-girl’s sword-tumbling routine to the *polis* is at least a possibility for the Syracusan, and it links this exhibition with money-making. The Syracusan seems to know how to exploit this earning potential. When each symposiast takes turns telling everyone the source of their high spirits, the Syracusan says that his are senseless people who attend his performances and give him money (4.55):

Ἀλλὰ μὰ Δί’, ἔφη, οὐκ ἐπὶ τούτῳ μέγα φρονῶ. Ἀλλ’ ἐπὶ τῷ μῆν; Ἐπὶ νῆ Δία τοῖς ἄφροσιν. οὗτοι γὰρ τὰ ἐμὰ νευρόσπαστα θεώμενοι τρέφουσί με.

“But by Zeus,” he [the Syracusan] said, “I do not take pride in this [his ability to sleep with the boy in his troupe every night without corrupting him].” [Socrates:] “But by what, then?” “Senseless people, by Zeus. For these people support me by watching my puppets.”

The driving factor of each of these instances is the Syracusan’s ability to make a career out of taking money in exchange for performances. In a sympotic culture that values reciprocity and gift exchange over monetary payment, the fact that the Syracusan takes money (ἀργύριον, 2.1; χρήματα, 2.13) for these performances highlights the non-elite nature of the whole enterprise. It

¹ “And [the Syracusan] made money by displaying these things [i.e. the performances of the acrobat, auletris, and boy] as in a wonder-show.” See Huss 1997: 43-44 for a discussion of the difficulties with the phrase ὡς ἐν θαύματι and a convincing argument that the text should be understood as ὡς ἐν θαύμασι (the technical term for performances at a fair). Vickers 2016: 162-63 suggests that these wonder-shows were popular performance venues for *thaumatopoiia* such as acrobatic feats.

is not surprising that Antisthenes subtly ridicules the Syracusan's pursuit of money (2.13) given the elite context of the symposium and of Xenophon's literary text. And yet, the Syracusan is able to make a living by charging money for these performances. He might not be elite, but he does know how to manipulate the masses (beyond the symposium) into giving him money by displaying acts that will 'wow' them, such as the acrobatic performances of the dancing-girl. Among the masses, then, female acrobatic performances must have been popular enough to provide the Syracusan with an adequate living. Many of these performance opportunities likely consisted of street performances which were open to the general public—as long as they could pay the admission fee.

While the monetary transactions for some street performances likely occurred on a more informal scale, payment for wonder-shows (such as those from which the Syracusan makes money) seems to have been more standardized. Theophrastus in *Characters* 6.4 mentions both a coin-based (οἱ χαλκοί) and a ticket-based system (τὰ σύμβολα) for wonder-shows that the “man who has lost all sense” (ὁ ἀπονενοημένος) exploits: καὶ ἐν θαύμασι δὲ τοὺς χαλκοῦς ἐκλέγειν καθ' ἕκαστον περιῶν καὶ μάχεσθαι τούτων τοῖς τὸ σύμβολον φέρουσι καὶ προῖκα θεωρεῖν ἀξιοῦσι (“And going around to each person in wonder-shows, he levies/demands bronze coins and fights with those who carry a ticket and think they can watch at no cost”).² Diggle 2004: 54 convincingly argues that those carrying the ticket (τοῖς τὸ σύμβολον φέρουσι) and those thinking they can watch at no cost (προῖκα θεωρεῖν ἀξιοῦσι) should be understood as the same group of people. The general picture seems to be that monetary payment for attending wonder-shows could be collected on the spot or exchanged for a ticket beforehand. The “man who has lost all

² Text from Diggle 2004: 82. See his pp. 250-265 for commentary on this character sketch. I follow Diggle's interpretation of ὁ ἀπονενοημένος as “man who has lost all sense.” Diggle's translation of this passage (p. 83) is similarly illuminating: “He will go round the audience at fairs and ask everyone for their entrance fee and argue with ticket-holders who claim there is nothing to pay.”

sense” exploits this by trying to get those with a ticket to pay again; this might have happened with some frequency, but need not to have been the norm (Theophrastus does not imply that the “man who has lost all sense” was successful in this ruse). Either way, it is easy to see how a figure such as the Syracusan who was in charge of the wonder-show could have made a living from this enterprise.

Other sources make a similar connection between wonder-workers, public spaces, and economic gain. In the *Oeconomica*, Aristotle gives examples of the ways that statesmen have replenished their treasuries in the past. He tells us that the people of Byzantium decided to tax wonder-workers (θαυματοποιοί), among others, one-third of their profit (1346b20-24):

...τούς τε τόπους τοὺς ἀγοραίους, ἐν οἷς ἐπώλει τίς τι· καὶ τῆς θαλάττης τὴν ἀλιείαν, καὶ τὴν τῶν ἄλῶν ἀλατοπωλίαν, τῶν τ' ἐργαζομένων θαυματοποιῶν καὶ μάντεων καὶ φαρμακοπωλῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τοιουτοτρόπων... τὸ τρίτον δὲ μέρος τοῦ ἐργαζομένου ἀποτελεῖν ἔταξαν.³

And [they claimed] the market areas, in which people sell things; and the fishing of the sea, and the vending of salts, and of the [money] earned (i.e. profits) of wonder-makers and seers and charm-sellers and others of such kind... and they ordered [them] to pay the third share of the [money] being earned.

Even though this example occurs in Byzantium during the unidentified past, nevertheless this passage suggests the large earning potential of wonder-making performances such as a female acrobat's. The context suggests that these wonder-makers worked in a public marketplace (τούς τε τόπους τοὺς ἀγοραίους) and that their performances were for sale (ἐν οἷς ἐπώλει τίς τι). The wonder-makers are grouped with seers (μάντεις) and charm-sellers (φαρμακοπῶλαι); we can imagine these people frequenting the marketplace, trying to entice passers-by into paying for their services. The Byzantine statesmen, recognizing that these endeavors bring in revenue, decided to tax them. It seems likely that wonder-making performances, including female acrobatics, would have similarly brought in a large revenue in cities throughout Attica and

³ Ed. Armstrong and Tredennick 1935.

Magna Graecia, if not throughout the Greek world. This earning potential would have been attractive to manager figures such as Xenophon's Syracusan.

3.2 Textual Evidence for Wonder-shows: Acts and Audiences

The textual evidence for 5th and 4th c. Greek wonder-shows ranges from orators (Isocrates) to philosophers (Aristotle, Theophrastus). Perhaps not surprisingly, the textual treatment of wonder-shows is marked by elite bias: these authors tend to look down upon the events as inferior and unproductive enterprises. Nevertheless, careful consideration of this evidence can still help to create a picture of what wonder-shows might have been like and what types of performances they might have included. On a basic level, the fact that these orators and philosophers mention wonder-shows at all suggests that they were popular forms of entertainment with which many Greeks would have been familiar. For the elites who denigrated these types of performances, wonder-shows probably seemed like a mark of low culture. But for the crowds attending the shows, the acts displayed seem to have been wildly entertaining.

The earliest possible attestation for wonder-shows, an Athenian inscription dated 500-480 BC, suggests that there could have been a competitive element to displays of wonder. On a marble pillar, Philon dedicates a small tripod that he won "in the wonders":

τόνδε Φίλον ἀνέθεκεν
Ἀθηναίαι τριποδίσκον
θαύμασι νικέσας
ἰς πόλιν ἡἄρεσίῳ.⁴

Philon, son of Aresias, dedicated this small tripod to Athena on the Acropolis after winning in the wonders.

⁴ *IG* I³ 757; Raubitschek 1949 no. 322. See Austin 1939 for a photograph of the inscription.

It is unclear whether θαύμασι refers specifically to “wonder-shows” (as a condensed form of ἐν [τοῖς] θαύμασι, which is the regular way of referring to wonder-shows in the examples discussed above) or “wonders” performed in a different context.⁵ Alternatively, Vickers 2016: 161 notes that it could refer to a different *agon* that Philon won “in a wondrous way.” The variety of meanings of *thaumata* makes it difficult to determine what type of competition this would have entailed.⁶ Many scholars have doubted whether this inscription could refer to competitive *thaumata* at all.⁷ There is a later textual parallel for competitive *thaumata* in Plato’s *Laws* (658a-d), although it is part of a thought-experiment: in order to prove the point that the best educated men should judge performative competitions, the Athenian stranger imagines a competition between rhapsody, kitharody, tragedy, comedy, and *thaumata*—but he dismisses *thaumata* as the type of performance that would win if mere children were the judges. Vickers 2016: 161 notes that *thaumata* represent the only genre listed that is not known to have an official *agon*. Perhaps the imaginative portion of the Athenian stranger’s hypothetical contest is *not* the idea of competitive *thaumata*, but rather the idea that citizens would judge between different *genres* of performance, pitting *thaumata* against tragedies instead of against other *thaumata*. When taken with Philon’s inscription, this passage suggests that competitive *thaumata* in some capacity (whether as an official *agon* or simply as a type of street performance) are at least a possibility in classical Athens. Even if θαύμασι in this inscription does not refer to a wonder-show, these public displays of competitive wonders could be precursors to wonder-shows.

⁵ Webster 1972: 78 connects this inscription with “trick-dancing” and locates the performance at the Panathenaea.

⁶ It is for this reason that Wilson 2000: 368n63 does not discuss this inscription as a potential early example of choral performance; c.f. Themelis 2007: 30 in n. 7 below.

⁷ Raubitschek 1949: 345 notes that “it is hard to imagine...that such a contest (i.e. a contest of *thaumata*) was officially established at Athens, and moreover, that it was honored by the prize of a tripod.” Themelis 2007: 30 suggests that this inscription refers to a choregic contest in the Panathenaea, noting that Panathenaic amphoras include musical scenes as early as the 6th-c. BC.

In elite thinking about thaumatopoeitic performances, the rhetoric of performers transcending their nature seems to have been popular. When the dancing-girl in Xenophon’s *Symposium* performs her sword-tumbling routine, Socrates takes this as a lesson that virtues such as courage can be taught, since he believes that the girl cannot be courageous enough to face the swords by nature.⁸ In this mode of thinking, the sheer ability of the dancing-girl to display courage in her performance represents a triumph over an inferior nature. As quoted above, Antisthenes takes this one step further by suggesting that the Syracusan put on this sword-tumbling performance for the city to give the men of Athens the courage to face swords as well. While Antisthenes’ suggestion should be understood humorously, it reflects the tendency of elite discourse to attempt to extract a moral from performances—otherwise, the performance is seen as fleeting and insignificant. In his moral oration *Antidosis*, Isocrates engages in the same type of discourse about the exhibition of lions in wonder-shows (15.213-14):

Ὅ δὲ πάντων δεινότατον, ὅτι καθ’ ἕκαστον τὸν ἐνιαυτὸν θεωροῦντες ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι τοὺς μὲν λέοντας πραότερον διακειμένους πρὸς τοὺς θεραπεύοντας ἢ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔνιοι πρὸς τοὺς εὖ ποιοῦντας, τὰς δ’ ἄρκτους καλινδουμένας καὶ παλαιούσας καὶ μιμουμένας τὰς ἡμετέρας ἐπιστήμας, οὐδ’ ἐκ τούτων δύνανται γινῶναι τὴν παιδείαν καὶ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν, ὅσην ἔχει δύναμιν, οὐδ’ ὅτι ταῦτα πολὺ ἂν θᾶπτον τὴν ἡμετέραν φύσιν ἢ τὴν ἐκείνων ὠφελήσειεν· ὥστ’ ἀπορῶ πότερον ἂν τις δικαιότερον θαυμάσειε τὰς πραότητας τὰς τοῖς χαλεπωτάτοις τῶν θηρίων ἐγγιγνομένας ἢ τὰς ἀγριότητας [τὰς] ἐν ταῖς ψυχαῖς τῶν τοιούτων ἀνθρώπων ἐνούσας.⁹

And the strangest thing of all—that, throughout each year, those watching the lions in the wonder-shows, [the lions] who are more gently disposed toward those attending them than some people are toward those treating them well, and [watching] the bears, who roll about and wrestle and imitate our skills, are not able to discern from these things how much power education and diligent care have, nor [are they able to discern] that these things could benefit our nature much more quickly than theirs (i.e. the animals). Because of this, I am at a loss as to whether it is more fitting for one to marvel at the gentleness

⁸ Xen. *Symp.* 2.12: καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης καλέσας τὸν Ἀντισθένην εἶπεν· Οὐτοὶ τοὺς γε θεωμένους τάδε ἀντιλέξιν ἔτι οἶομαι, ὡς οὐχὶ καὶ ἡ ἀνδρεία διδακτόν, ὅποτε αὐτὴ καίπερ γυνὴ οὔσα οὔτω τολμηρῶς εἰς τὰ ξίφη ἵεται. (“And Socrates, after calling Antisthenes, said, ‘I think that those watching will no longer deny these things, not even that courage [‘manliness’] can be taught, since she—despite being a woman—leaps into the swords with such daring.’”)

⁹ Ed. Mandilaras 2003.

appearing in the most difficult of beasts, or at the savageness existing in the souls of men such as these.

Isocrates' complaint operates similarly to Xenophon and Antisthenes' conversation in the *Symposium*. The impact of this passage depends on the beastly nature of the lions and bears on display: the lions act more mildly (*πραότερον*) than some people do, the bears imitate human skills by wrestling, and both of these things are noteworthy since the animals should be inhuman by nature. This operates similarly to Socrates' treatment of the dancing-girl after her sword-tumbling performance, although the rhetoric is more striking when used of another human: the performances of the lions, bears, and dancing-girl all demonstrate that certain virtues and skills are teachable even to those of inferior nature. Both Isocrates and Xenophon's Socrates think that if lions/bears and dancing-girls, respectively, can transcend their natures, then the audience should at least be able to recognize the power of education and training. Annoyed that the masses do not seem to understand the power of *paideia*, Isocrates ends this passage with a sort of pun on the concept of wonder-shows: maybe one should wonder (*θαυμάσειε*) at the savageness of the audience members' souls more than the gentle behavior of the lions and bears. It is clear that Isocrates does not think highly of people who attend wonder-shows. This passage gives some indication of the types of performances that could have been expected at wonder-shows (including displays of trained animals), and how elite men, at least, might have thought about them.

Other sources for wonder-shows also tend to criticize those who attend them. As seen in the previous example, Isocrates uses the triumph of the lions and bears over their own nature to further criticize those who attend wonder-shows for not taking away the proper lessons from the performance. From Isocrates' point of view, the audience should be able to use critical thinking to extract a moral from the performance, making it worthwhile; and yet, they miss the important

lesson about the role of education. A fragment of Aristotle, quoted in Athenaeus,¹⁰ gives further indication as to how the elite might have criticized a group of people who attend wonder-shows:

δημηγοροῦντες ἐν τοῖς ὄχλοις κατατρίβουσιν ὅλην τὴν ἡμέραν ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἐκ τοῦ Φάσιδος ἢ Βορυσθένους καταπλέοντας, ἀνεγνωκότες οὐδὲν πλὴν εἰ τὸ Φιλοξένου Δεῖπνον οὐχ ὅλον.¹¹

Making speeches among the crowds, they waste the whole day in the wonder-shows and among those who sailed from the Phasis or the Borysthenes, having read nothing except the *Dinner* of Philoxenos, [and] not [even] the whole of it.

The fragmentary state of this passage makes it difficult to know the full effect of Aristotle's criticism, but it is still possible to take away some idea of how Aristotle might have considered the type of person who attended wonder-shows. First, the group of people that Aristotle is criticizing seems both to be a part of the crowd at wonder-shows and to exploit that crowd; they spend the whole day at the shows (ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι) giving speeches among the masses (δημηγοροῦντες ἐν τοῖς ὄχλοις). Aristotle further suggests that they are not of great learning: they have only read part of Philoxenus' *Dinner* (a sort of cookbook in verse, which apparently featured many fish-dishes),¹² which suggests that they do not fit well into the learned world of the elite. While the full effect of this passage cannot be determined, it at least seems clear that Aristotle is criticizing those who attend wonder-shows.

The qualities of ostentatiousness and lack of learning recur in Theophrastus' characterization of the "late-learner" (Ὀψιμαθής), who is described as spending time at wonder-shows.¹³ In addition to other activities that are too youthful for the late-learner's age, such as participating in torch races (27.4) and wrestling contests (27.6), this type of person "stays for

¹⁰ Athenaeus (1.6d) does not indicate the title of the work that this fragment comes from. He quotes Aristotle's fragment during a discussion about Philoxenus, saying that some call Philoxenus a fish-lover (φίλιχθον) but "Aristotle simply calls him a dinner-lover, [Aristotle] who also writes these things somewhere" (Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ φιλόδειπνον ἀπλῶς, ὃς καὶ γράφει που ταῦτα). Rose 1966 groups this fragment (fr. 83) under the dialogue Περὶ Δικαιοσύνης, although this is conjectural.

¹¹ Ed. Rose 1966 fr. 83 (= Gigon fr. 793).

¹² Athenaeus quotes from the *Dinner* in 1.5b-f.

¹³ *Characters* 27.7. See Diggle 2004: 477-86 for commentary on this character sketch.

three or four rounds in the wonder-shows, thoroughly learning the songs” (καὶ ἐν τοῖς θαύμασι τρία ἢ τέτταρα πληρώματα ὑπομένειν τὰ ἄσματα ἐκμανθάνων).¹⁴ This picture of the wonder-shows is slightly inconsistent with the one I have been discussing so far. Many of the late-learner’s activities in this characterization (such as the torch races, for example) would be perfectly acceptable pursuits for young men; the late-learner’s flaw is that he pursues these activities at a time of life when it is no longer acceptable, which comes off as ostentatious, as Diggle argues (2004: 477). Could this have held true for attendance at wonder-shows? As discussed previously, Isocrates complains that those who attend wonder-shows do not take it as a learning opportunity, but Theophrastus’ character sketch suggests that youths could use these shows as a venue for learning some type of songs. So, while Theophrastus places a negative character type in the audience of wonder-shows, the sketch as a whole leaves open the possibility that attending wonder-shows could have been more commonplace, and even potentially acceptable, for much younger viewers.

Finally, Athenaeus gives some indication that wonder-shows were more a formal venue for street performances. He tells the story of a mime-actor who graduated from performances ‘in the circles’ to performances in wonder-shows (10.452f):

τούτου δὲ καὶ Ἰσχόμαχος ὁ κῆρυξ ἐγένετο ζηλωτής, ὃς ἐν τοῖς κύκλοις ἐποιεῖτο τὰς μιμήσεις· ὡς δ’ εὐδοκίμει, μεταβάς ἐν τοῖς θαύμασιν ὑπεκρίνετο μίμους.¹⁵

And Ischomachos the herald became his [Cleon’s, an Italian actor’s] follower, who performed mimes in the *kykloi*,¹⁶ but when he became popular, having made a change he acted out mimes in wonder-shows.

While Ischomachos seems to be performing these mimes in an Italian context at an unknown time, this progression of venues stands to reason and might have also been the case in Greek

¹⁴ Text from Diggle 2004: 144.

¹⁵ Ed. Kaibel 1961.

¹⁶ *Kykloi* are spaces in the market where food, goods, and slaves were sold. The name probably refers to the circular arrangement of vendors. See Wycherley 1957: 188-90 for testimonia.

cities such as Athens or those in Magna Graecia.¹⁷ Performers might start out by displaying their special talents informally to crowds in the marketplace; if they gain popularity, they might attract the attention of a manager who could lead them to larger venues such as wonder-shows. This suggests that wonder-shows had more formal venues or were more standardized than street performances.

So far, I have considered the textual evidence for wonder-shows; while this evidence spans multiple genres and time periods, I hope to have offered as full a treatment as possible of what the economic and social components of these shows would have been like. The Syracusan's involvement in wonder-shows in Xen. *Symp.* and the association of female acrobatics with *thaumatopoiia* both suggest that the masses would have encountered these acrobats at wonder-shows. This adds another dimension to the function of the acrobatic dancing-girl in Xenophon's *Symposium*: the host, Callias, has the means to take a type of performance known from the public realm and make it private, which is a further marker of his elite status.

3.3 Female Acrobats at Wonder-shows: Visual Suggestions

As the literary evidence suggests, wonder-shows could include many different kinds of acts, from animal displays to mimes to acrobatic performances. While Xenophon's *Symposium* is the only textual attestation for female acrobats at wonder-shows, material evidence gives more indication of what these performances might have looked like. In this section, I will discuss a few representative depictions of female acrobats that would fit well within the context of wonder-shows as reconstructed above.

Several vase paintings depict female acrobats in the 'generic' handstand pose who incorporate other props associated with *thaumatopoiia*, such as pebbles, bows/arrows, and

¹⁷ See Vickers 2016: 162-63 on the "logical hierarchy of performance venues" in this passage.

swords, into their routines.¹⁸ Since female acrobatic performances on their own are already associated with *thaumatopoiia* (as I discussed in the introduction), they could occur at wonder-shows even without other props, but these examples with multiple forms of wonder-working seem especially pertinent to the idea of a wonder-show.



Fig. 3.1. Female acrobat holds pebble. Apulian skyphos. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11.554.

On an Apulian skyphos (fig. 3.1),¹⁹ a fully-clothed female performs a variation of the ‘generic’ handstand pose in which she balances on her right forearm and holds out a small object with her left hand, which Vickers 2016: 183-4 convincingly argues is a pebble.²⁰ Pebble-players were known to deceive the audience, perhaps by creating tricks with their pebbles, including hiding some in their mouths to create the illusion that they disappeared.²¹ A female acrobat who could perform these pebble tricks while handstanding, contorting, or flipping would be right at home in a wonder-show.

¹⁸ See Vickers 2016: 159-61 for a list of performances associated with *thaumatopoiia*.

¹⁹ Apulian skyphos, Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional 11.554, 360-340 BC; see Leroux 1912 no. 596, pl. LIV. See Dickie 2001 for the relationship between wonder-working, pebble-players, and mime.

²⁰ Laurel wreaths are incised (not painted) around the sides and top of the skyphos, framing the acrobat; this might suggest an agonistic context, but it could also be purely decorative.

²¹ See Dickie 2001: 600-601.

On a Gnathia-style pelike (fig. 3.2),²² a female acrobat who is nude from the waist up holds a bow and arrow between her toes and contorts her lower body so that her toes hang past her head in a variation of the ‘generic pose’ (her torso and forearms rest on the ground). Her ability to shoot the bow and arrow while contorting her body would be an impressive act to feature in a wonder-show, and she might gain even more attention for incorporating weaponry as a female. In light of the relationship between the female acrobatic body and performance props, which I have discussed in each of the chapters above, it is worth noting that the acrobat’s short skirt is decorated with four small circles, each one containing two perpendicular lines that mimic those of the arrow and the bow’s rod. Since this is not a common decoration, it seems like the artist’s conscious choice to link the female acrobat with her prop through visual imitation.

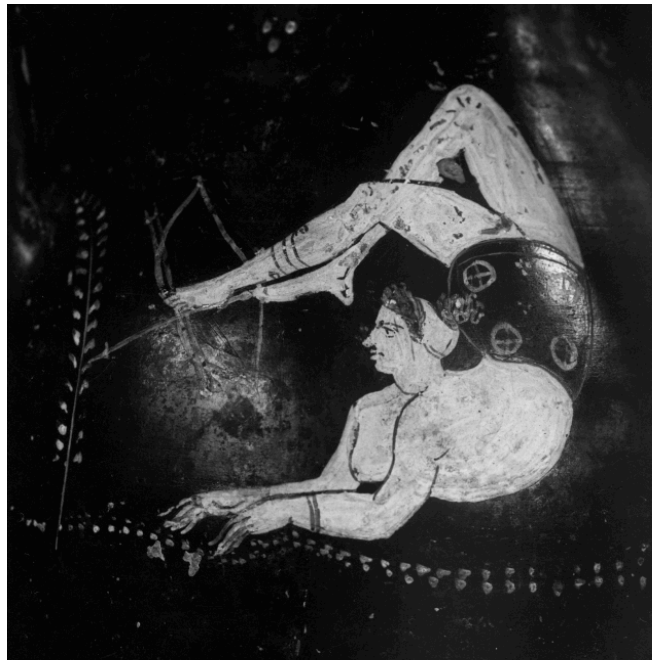


Fig. 3.2. Female acrobat strings bow and arrow with legs. Gnathia-style pelike (detail). Berlin, Staatliche Museen F 3444. © Antikensammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz.

Perhaps the guests in Xenophon’s *Symposium* would have been familiar with the dancing-girl’s sword-tumbling performance from wonder-shows, especially since Xenophon tells

²² Gnathia-style pelike, Berlin, Staatliche Museen F 3444, 4th c. BC, see Bieber 1961 fig. 579b.

us that the Syracusan makes money by exhibiting these performances in wonder-shows (2.1, discussed above).²³ Female acrobats are depicted tumbling over swords in four instances (figs. 3.3-3.6), whether handstanding over the middle sword in a row of three (fig. 3.3),²⁴ contorting her body in half over the middle sword in a row of three (fig. 3.4),²⁵ handstanding in between two swords (fig. 3.5),²⁶ or handstanding above the point of one sword (fig. 3.6).²⁷ Although these paintings are not photographic, the proximity between the acrobat and the swords is striking: on the Apulian bell krater (fig. 3.5), the acrobat's head is dangerously close to the sword in front of her, and on the Apulian plate (fig. 3.6), the acrobat's foot hovers right above the point of the sword, which makes it look like the acrobat would land her trick on top of the sword rather than past it. Perhaps each painter depicted sword-tumbling in this way due to limited space on the vessel, or perhaps the precarious relationship between acrobat and sword reflects each painter's own perception of sword-tumbling as especially dangerous. While these visual representations might not be reflective of actual performance practice, the ever-present danger of the sword would certainly make the performer's acrobatic feats even more impressive, and it is not difficult to imagine how this might excite a mass audience.

These types of performances would be fitting for wonder-shows, as reconstructed above. Perhaps this is the setting in which potters and painters would have encountered female acrobats and maybe even have been inspired to lend their wheels for performances. Maybe citizen women and slave women alike would have been able to attend wonder-shows, and it is interesting to consider how their reactions to female acrobats might have differed from the elite male

²³ See Vickers 2016: 192-217 on sword-tumbling performances, including text and translation of all literary evidence for sword-tumbling.

²⁴ Campanian lekythos, Naples, Museo Nazionale H2854, 350-300 BC; Davies 1971 pl. 47.2.

²⁵ Gnathia-style squat lekythos, Berlin, Staatliche Museen F3489, 340-330 BC; Bieber 1961 fig. 579a; Davies 1971 pl. 47.5; see also Vickers 2016: 200.

²⁶ Apulian bell krater, Geneva, Fiorella Cottier-Angeli collection (private), 340-330 BC; see Vickers 2016: 200.

²⁷ Apulian red-figure plate, The Hague, Schneider-Herrmann private collection 201, 330-325 BC; *RVAp*² 21/46 (p. 609, pl. 234,1).

perspectives that have been handed down to us. This is the setting about which we know the least, but it is also the setting in which there likely would have been the greatest variety of reactions to and opinions about the female acrobat. She certainly entertained the audience well enough to draw masses of crowds—enough to support the Syracusan manager in Xenophon’s *Symposium*. Perhaps it was in wonder-shows where she successfully used her acrobatic skills to inspire the audience with ‘wonder.’



Fig 3.3. Female acrobat between three swords. Campanian lekythos (detail). Naples, Museo Nazionale H2854. Photo credit D-DAI-ROM-71.331.



Fig. 3.4. Female acrobat bends in half over three swords. Gnathia-style squat lekythos (detail). Berlin, Staatliche Museen F 3489.



Fig. 3.5. Female acrobat between two swords. Apulian bell krater. Geneva, Fiorella Cottier-Angeli collection (private).



Fig. 3.6. Female acrobat over one sword. Apulian plate. The Hague, Schneider-Herrmann private collection 201.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have demonstrated the different ways that female acrobats function in different contexts, from the symposium to the comic stage to wonder-shows, and I have attempted to establish the ‘realities’ of female acrobatic performance in each space. Since female acrobats were considered wonder-makers, my introduction largely focused on the low social value of wonder-making. I also discussed aesthetics, perception, and the role of the spectator, suggesting that female acrobatic performances seemingly did not have the right aesthetic for (elite) viewers. Issues of wonder-making and aesthetic perception could have affected how an ancient audience viewed female acrobatic performances across all performance contexts.

In chapter one (“Acrobats at the Symposium”), I argued that the female acrobat in Xenophon’s *Symposium* functions both as a foil to the troupe’s other performers, because the female acrobat seems to be associated with the lowest status of the three, and as a foil to the symposiasts, who watch her performance with critical eyes. I showed how the dancing-girl is only successful when she stops dancing acrobatically and instead performs a mime, using only her facial expressions and very small movements. In other words, she is successful when she imitates Ariadne, but not when she imitates a hoop (her performance prop). I then compared the role of the female acrobat in Xenophon with that on vases. The two mediums paint similar pictures of the realities of female acrobatic performance (in that they tend to depict the female acrobat as a solo, virtuoso performer) and of the acrobat’s function (in that they tend to assimilate the acrobat with her prop). I suggested that the acrobat performs her low status in the sympotic space. I ended the chapter by arguing that a little-discussed vase painting (fig. 1.10)

represents a group mythological tableau, and I suggested that this type of role for a female acrobat might have been seen by a sympotic viewer as more ‘useful’ or ‘productive.’

In chapter two (“Acrobats on the Comic Stage”), I discussed the evidence for female acrobats as specialty performers in Greek comedy. First, I briefly outlined the history of scholarship on ‘phlyax’ vases, which have now been linked with Attic comedy (based on the costumes and masks) and even with Aristophanic comedy specifically (based on the identification of a painted scene with the plot of *Thesmophoriazusae*). I suggested that these connections at least leave open the possibility that the female acrobats on these comic vases have some relationship with Attic comedy, despite the common opinion that women did not perform on the theatrical stage in Athens. I then discussed the two vases that feature female acrobats on the comic stage (figs. 2.1, 2.2), with special attention to details on each vase that can give us clues about the role of the acrobat in a comic performance. Finally, I turned to the treatment of female entertainers in Aristophanic comedy—Dardanis in *Wasps* and Elaphion in *Thesmophoriazusae*—to show how Aristophanes uses each specialty performer to create sexualized spectacles by explicitly calling out parts of their bodies and even staging a scene of prostitution (between the Scythian archer and Elaphion). Based on these comparisons, I suggested that female acrobats on the comic stage likely would have been part of a sexualized spectacle as well.

In chapter three (“Acrobats in Wonder-shows”), I attempted to reconstruct the venue in which most of the masses likely would have been exposed to female acrobatic performances. I used the Syracusan manager in Xenophon’s *Symposium* to suggest that wonder-shows were a profitable enterprise for those who managed wonder-makers. I discussed the textual evidence for the types of acts displayed at wonder-shows and the audience that attended them—evidence

which tends to criticize this audience for being unintelligent and unproductive. This criticism from elite sources suggests to me simply that these shows drew large crowds of the masses. There could be some tension here, in that the masses only encounter female acrobats in the public realm, while the elite have the means to take these public performances and make them private (such as Callias does in his symposium). I ended my chapter on wonder-shows by discussing vase paintings that depict acrobats displaying multiple forms of *thaumatopoiia*, such as pebble-playing, bow and arrow-stringing, and sword-tumbling, and I suggested that these types of performances would fit especially well in the context of wonder-shows.

There would have been some overlap between the routines displayed at each venue: sword-tumbling, for example, is attested at the symposium but also makes sense in wonder-shows, and acrobatic feats on potter's wheels are attested in both a sympotic and comic context. This is probably related to management practices and the nature of specialization: someone who manages a traveling performance troupe that includes a female acrobat, such as the Syracusan in Xenophon's *Symposium*, would want to gain as much money and as many benefits as possible from this troupe, so he will either seek out or create performance opportunities for the female acrobat in a wide variety of venues. As previously discussed, the Syracusan displays his troupe's performances both at a symposium and in wonder-shows. It is also possible that playwrights would have to contact a figure such as the Syracusan if they wanted to include a female acrobat in their comedies, although this can only be speculative. But even if the same acrobat performs the same tricks, other aspects of the performance such as different settings (public/private, indoor/outdoor, dining floor/stage) and different audiences (elite/non-elite, male/female, small/large, etc.) will significantly impact the experience, both for the acrobat and for the

viewers. A performance for an intimate group of society's elite must have felt different than a widely attended performance for the masses.

A discussion of the way the potter's wheel can function in these different contexts will reinforce these points. Potters' wheels are perhaps an odd choice as props for an acrobatic performance: they would have been cumbersome to transport from place to place, and it is not likely that they would have been readily available in any of the three performance contexts, as opposed to the stools and cups used in acrobatic performances at symposia. The quick, whirling motion of the wheel would have provided even the most skilled acrobats with a strength and balance challenge, adding to the thaumatopoeitic spectacle. Beyond the challenges that potters' wheels would bring to a performance, however, they also add a symbolic element to the performance, transforming the acrobat into a 'vessel' being produced on the wheel. These wheels, of course, are intrinsically related to the production of pottery—the production of the very vases on which many of these performances are attested. The relationship between potter's wheel, acrobat, and vessel can hold a unique significance in each performance context. At a symposium, the guests recline on *klinai* while holding and drinking from cups that would have been produced on a potter's wheel—cups that are often an important part of elite identity formation, especially when painted with images that the symposiasts can either identify with or define themselves against. As they hold these cups, they can watch the acrobat whirl around on the wheel in the same way that the clay would have been thrown to create those very cups. The acrobat is assimilated into object and vessel in a way that is unique to the sympotic experience. These associations might vary in the context of a comic performance: perhaps the circular whirling of the wheel on the comic stage would invite comparisons with the circular choruses

who could also perform on that very stage. This association is attested as early as Homer, in comparison with the dancers on Achilles' shield (*Il.* 18.599-601):

οἱ δ' ὅτε μὲν θρέξασκον ἐπισταμένοισι πόδεσσι
ῥεῖα μάλ', ὡς ὅτε τις τροχὸν ἄρμενον ἐν παλάμησιν
ἐζόμενος κεραμεὺς πειρήσεται, αἶ κε θέησιν.¹

And now and then they were running very easily with skillful feet, as when a potter, sitting, tests whether a wheel that is fitted in his hands will run.

The context of a theatrical performance might readily invite comparisons between circular choruses and the acrobat's whirling feats. While the relationship between pottery and wonder-shows is unclear, perhaps a wonder-show would have provided the context in which potters and painters themselves were most likely to see female acrobatic performances. This could in turn inform the way that potters and/or painters represent the female acrobat in a space that these artisans likely would not have had access to, such as a symposium. It seems likely that potters and performers interacted and collaborated to some extent; otherwise, female acrobats probably would not have had access to potters' wheels, which seem to have been kept almost exclusively in potters' workshops. Perhaps a Syracusan performance troupe would have had special connections among Sicilian or South Italian potters working in Athens. These associations necessarily involve a degree of speculation, but I hope to have demonstrated the enriched understanding that results from considering female acrobatic performances in each of their various performance contexts.

Returning to concerns of female acrobatic wonder-making, I will conclude by considering how the myth of Pandora's creation can help us better understand the function of female acrobats on potters' wheels. The relationship between the potter's wheel and the female acrobatic body as clay calls to mind the 'original' clay female body of Pandora, and this

¹ Ed. Allen and Monro 1920.

comparison helps to illuminate some of the problems with female acrobatic *thaumatopoiia*.²

Hesiod describes Pandora's creation out of clay and all of the *thaumata* associated with it—good and bad (*Th.* 571-89):³

γαίης γὰρ σύμπλασσε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις
παρθένῳ αἰδοίῃ ἵκελον Κρονίδεω διὰ βουλᾶς·
ζῶσε δὲ καὶ κόσμησε θεὰ γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη
ἀργυφῆ ἐσθῆτι· κατὰ κρηθὲν δὲ καλύπτρην
δαιδαλέην χεῖρεςσι κατέσχεθε, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι·
ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ στεφάνους νεοθηλέας, ἄνθεα ποίης,
ἱμερτοῦς περίθηκε καρῆατι Παλλᾶς Ἀθήνη·
ἀμφὶ δὲ οἱ στεφάνην χρυσῆν κεφαλῆφιν ἔθηκε,
τὴν αὐτὸς ποίησε περικλυτὸς Ἀμφιγυήεις
ἀσκήσας παλάμησι, χαριζόμενος Διὶ πατρί.
τῇ δ' ἐνὶ δαίδαλα πολλὰ τετεύχατο, θαῦμα ἰδέσθαι,
κνώδαλ' ὅσ' ἠπειρος δεινὰ τρέφει ἠδὲ θάλασσα·
τῶν ὅ γε πόλλ' ἐνέθηκε, χάρις δ' ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄητο,
θαυμάσια, ζωῶσιν εἰκότα φωνήεσσιν.
αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ τεῦξε καλὸν κακὸν ἀντ' ἀγαθοῖο,
ἐξάγαγ' ἐνθά περ ἄλλοι ἔσαν θεοὶ ἠδ' ἄνθρωποι,
κόσμῳ ἀγαλλομένην γλαυκώπιδος Ὀβριμοπάτρης·
θαῦμα δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς θνητοὺς τ' ἀνθρώπους,
ὡς εἶδον δόλον αἰπὺν, ἀμήχανον ἀνθρώποισιν.

For the famous lame one fashioned from earth (i.e. clay) the guise of a venerable maiden, through the plots of the son of Cronos. And the gleaming-eyed goddess Athena girded and adorned her with silver-shining clothing, and with her hands she set an embroidered veil on her head—a *wonder to see*. And around her head Pallas Athena placed desirous fresh garlands—blossoms of the field. And around her head she placed a golden crown, which the famous lame one made himself, having worked it with his hands, gratifying father Zeus. And many cunningly wrought things were formed on the crown—a *wonder to see*—the terrible beasts that the land and sea nourish, he put many of them on [the crown], and favor was breathing onto all of them—*wondrous*, similar to animals capable of speech. But when he wrought the beautiful evil in return for the good (i.e. fire), he led her out to the place where the other gods and men were, as she was glorified in the adornment of the gleaming-eyed daughter of a mighty father. And *wonder* held both the immortal gods and the mortal men when they saw the utter trick, *unmanageable for the men* (emphases my own).

² Hephaestus molds the Pandora figurine (σύμπλασσε, l. 571) rather than producing it on a wheel, but the idea of the female body as clay to be worked and molded seems relevant here nonetheless.

³ Ed. Most 2018.

‘Wonder’ recurs again and again in this account of Pandora’s creation, especially related to the gleamingly wrought adornments at the hands of Hephaestus and Athena. In relation to the wonders of Pandora’s crown, Neer 2010: 58 demonstrates the role of ‘doubleness,’ which is a common trait in accounts of *thaumata*: the crown is a wonder (*thauma*) itself covered in wonders (*thaumasia*), which are wonderful because the crafted beasts are assimilated into living beings. I would argue that this ‘doubleness’ extends to Pandora: she too is a crafted work, made by Hephaestus to resemble a living being, that is both covered in *thaumata* (the veil and crown) and creates a *thauma* for gods and men. But Pandora’s ‘doubleness’ does not stop there: she is a καλὸν κακὸν—a beautiful evil—who appears beautiful on the outside but is really an “utter trick” (δόλον αἰπύν). This negative duplicity colors the ‘wonder’ experienced by gods and men at the sight of Pandora: by the end of this passage, ‘wonders’ have slipped from gleamingly intricate objects inspired by the gods to utter illusions and tricks, which men do not know how to navigate.

The problematic ‘doubleness’ of the wonder resulting from Pandora’s creation out of clay can shed further light on the thaumatopoietic experience of female acrobatic performances, especially those on potter’s wheels. As the female acrobat rotates on the wheel and fashions her body into different forms and shapes, her body is directly assimilated into clay. It is important to note that there is no extant evidence for male performances on potters’ wheels; there is a possibility that the comic actor on the Paestan calyx krater (fig 2.1) is crouching on the base of a potter’s wheel and trying to learn the female acrobat’s tricks,⁴ but if this were the case then it would be the (comic) exception that proves the rule. Performances atop potters’ wheels seem to have been exclusively in the realm of female entertainment, which encourages further

⁴ As suggested by Dearden 1995: 83 and discussed in chapter three.

comparisons with the creation of Pandora. As it whirls around on a potter's wheel, the female acrobatic body creates 'wonders' that are markedly double: like Pandora, it is both human and object. It might look pretty to some, but it is also associated with trickery and deceit: the 'wonder' that it 'makes' is inherently problematic. The female acrobat becomes a new Pandora who molds *herself* into contorted forms—rather than being molded by the gods—for audiences who are largely aware that they are watching a human trick. It is left up to the audience either to reject it, or to 'marvel' anyway.

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