

Bird-Dancer and Satyr-Craftsmen on an Attic Vase

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A LATE ARCHAIC black-figure juglet at the University of Chicago, a squat lekythos of unusual shape published briefly thirty years ago,¹ bears a unique and puzzling representation which may be related to the satyr-play and is in any case the earliest depiction of satyr-craftsmen.

Shape, Style and Date

The first publisher noted that the “woman’s garment [as the bird-like figure was interpreted] can hardly belong to the sixth century.” In fact the slapdash style of the two smaller figures recalls late Attic black-figure of the first two decades of the fifth century B.C., to which it should be dated in spite of the somewhat archaizing shape which recalls sixth-century lekythoi but has no exact parallels among them.² The shape of this vase is squat, pearlike, with flowing uninterrupted contours, quite different from the aryballic lekythoi of the first quarter of the fifth century (PLATES 8 and 9).³ The omission of the ground-line is a feature of the Ripe Archaic and Early Free red-figure style, when some painters (like the Berlin Painter and Sotades Painter) tried to free their figures from the conventional vertical and horizontal frames; this style was taken over by painters of small pots in the old black-figure technique, such as the Haimon Painter⁴ and the painter of our vase. The free background makes the figures look less static and more three-dimensional; it is sometimes used in scenes of

¹ F. P. Johnson, “BF Pottery at Chicago,” *AJA* 47 (1943) 395–96, fig.11. For permission to republish the vase I am indebted to the Classical Collection, University of Chicago.

² See the discussion by Johnson, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.1).

³ Ch. Dugas, “Lécythe aryballisque athénien,” *BCH* 70 (1946) 172–78, pl.ix and figs.1ff and further bibl.

⁴ C. H. E. Haspels, *Attic Black-figured Lekythoi* (Paris 1936) 130ff.

dance (e.g. the knuckle-bone vase of the Sotades Painter in London) or ecstatic mood (e.g. the Berlin Painter's citharode in New York). Here it may well have been used intentionally to add freedom to the grouping. The omission of detailed incision in the legs and arms is common in the late Attic black-figure of the first decades of the fifth century.⁵

Iconography

The puzzling scene is lively, full of action, and could hardly be a 'nonsense' decoration. There are five figures on the vase. At right⁶ (PLATE 8) a long-tailed silenus with equine ears sits on a stool, a hammer or axe in his right hand and a club or tree trunk in his left. He turns his head back to observe a smaller semi-crouching figure which is just dropping, or lifting from the floor, something which looks like an athlete's strigil. This figure also has large ears but no tail and wears a short cloak; he is probably a young satyr.⁷ Behind him a standing, draped, horse-eared satyr (PLATE 9, fig.1) extends his arms in a gesture towards the other satyrs, or is exercising. It is impossible to determine whether he was tailed or not because of a large chip from the surface of the vase. The fourth tiny figure on the stool looks like a child-satyr, beardless, with small equine ears. Apparently he held something in the outstretched left hand—again the chipped surface of the vase does not permit further interpretation.

Behind him is the fifth, last figure, with a bird-like face (PLATE 9, fig.2). It has been interpreted as a woman⁸ but with the admission that the black of her strange face and neck was never covered by white paint, as is the rule for female flesh on Attic black-figure vases. Apart from the long garment, which is also quaint, covering arms and hands completely, nothing points to a specific sex. The nearest parallel are the masked dancers from a comic chorus, wrapped in similar cloaks, on a black-figure amphora of the first quarter of the fifth century B.C.

⁵ T. Hadzisteliou Price, " 'To Be or not to Be' on a Black-figure Pelike," *AJA* 75 (1971) 431–34, pls.93 figs.1–3 and 94 figs.6–7 and n.4.

⁶ Johnson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) fig.11a-b.

⁷ Satyrs are sometimes represented without tail: E. Buschor, *Feldmäuse* (SBMünchen 1937.1) *passim*; *idem*, *Satyrtdänze und frühes Drama* (SBMünchen 1943.5) *passim*; see also *infra* and J. E. Harrison, *JHS* 20 (1900) 106 fig.2, for the Paris lekythos with satyr *sphyrokopos*.

⁸ Johnson, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.1).

in Berlin.⁹ This amphora and an oenochoe in the British Museum¹⁰ with feathered dancers are the earliest extant evidence for choruses of birds. The figure on the Chicago vase should be added to these early examples. The incredibly large beaklike nose, receding forehead, undepicted mouth and long neck can belong only to the mask of a bird-dancer of early comedy, unless they come from a comic chorus of birds without dialogue like the choruses of the Corinthian padded dancers. The cloak in which the figure is wrapped, however, was part of the attire of the comic animal-dancers.¹¹ Its interpretation as a bird-dancer from early comedy, therefore, is the more persuasive.

In the Chicago juglet it thus appears that we have a very early representation of satyric and comic choruses inspired by contemporary performances.¹² Apart from the black-figure vases mentioned above, there are even earlier ones depicting comic choruses of horse, dolphin and ostrich-riders.¹³ There is also concrete literary evidence that animal choruses were commonly used in comedy of the first half of the fifth century B.C. In the 470's and earlier Magnes produced choruses of frogs, birds and gallflies; Krates also staged choruses of birds and beasts around the middle of the fifth century.¹⁴ The earlier

⁹ M. Bieber, *The History of the Greek and Roman Theatre*² (Princeton 1961) 36ff and bibl.

¹⁰ Bieber, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) fig.123; Haspels, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.4) 78ff, 214, no.187, London B509; J. D. Beazley, *ABVP* (Oxford 1956) 473, no.187. See Harald Patzer, *Die Anfänge der griechischen Tragödie* (Wiesbaden 1962) 61ff and bibl. G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses, A Contribution to the History of Attic Comedy* (London 1971) 3ff, esp. Part ii, "Animal Choruses," 73ff, pls. vi-viii. B. Döhle, "Beziehungen zwischen Drama und attischer Vasenmalerei in der 1. Hälfte des 5. Jh. v. Chr." in *Die griechische Vase* (Vorträge auf einer Konferenz in Schwerin, 27-29.x.1966, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Rostock* xvi, 1967) 411-604, pls. 1-30.

¹¹ Sifakis, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.10) ch. ix, "The Performances depicted on Vases. The 'Himatia' of the Chorus," 86-88, 92 and app. 103ff.

¹² The male figures must be satyrs, since the pointed equine ears are not found otherwise in human figures, while there are examples of satyrs without tail; see *supra* n.7. In black-figure vases of this period the human ear is either not denoted, is covered by the hair, or is lower and round; see Bieber, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) fig.124, the fluteplayer in front of the birds.

¹³ Sifakis, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.10) 3ff, pls. i-v. The bird-in-arms depicted alone on a late archaic aryballic lekythos in a private collection, Dugas, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.3), may not come from a particular comic chorus as it lacks both human features and the characteristic himation which could allude to a member of such a chorus. It may well be an imaginative depiction of the name of lark, *κορυδαλλός* 'the bird in helmet', as suggested by Dugas. This vase was brought to my attention by the anonymous referee.

¹⁴ Ar. Eq. 520. A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1968) 83, 106, 119; E. Buschor, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.7); Sifakis, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.10) 76-77.

vases mentioned above point to the existence of animal-choruses already at the end of the sixth century B.C. All three black-figure vases with representations of bird-dancers¹⁵ date from the early decades of the fifth century and reflect either a particular play that the painters saw or the rising popularity of such choruses.¹⁶

The group of the satyr-craftsmen on the Chicago juglet is unique. The first publisher suggested that "in view of the variety of activities in which Silens appear it is not incredible that one of them should be preparing a club, presumably for Herakles; but the meaning of the rest of the scene, if there is any, is difficult to determine." There is no evidence, however, that satyrs ever prepared any kind of armor for Herakles. On a red-figure vase satyrs are trying to carry off the arms from the pyre on which Herakles was burning;¹⁷ in other instances also satyrs tried to steal Herakles' arms but were unsuccessful.¹⁸ Could the objects in the hands of the satyrs be the stolen arms? The hammer or axe is not one of the weapons of Herakles. It is the attribute of a less heroic personality, Hephaistos.

There is a late literary reference which connects the satyrs with Hephaistos and arms: two epigrams of the *Greek Anthology* (xvi 15 and 15A) describe the satyrs as chained and working in the smithy of Hephaistos, where among other things they forged the arms of Achilles.¹⁹ Besides the fact that this myth is not known from earlier

¹⁵ As well as the red-figure juglet with the humorous representation of bird-in-arms, Dugas, *loc.cit.* (*supra* n.3).

¹⁶ The satyrizing literary animal chorus has an interesting early Indo-European predecessor in the Frog-Song of the *Rigveda* 7.103, which is devoted to the description and praise of the frogs: N. N. Law, *Age of the Rigveda* (Calcutta 1965) 37ff. The hymn has been interpreted by some scholars as a satire of the priests and the elaborate ceremonies of the Brāhmins. The poet compares the croaking of the frogs with the chants of the priests exhilarated by Soma, and with the clamor of pupils at school repeating the words of their teacher. M. Müller found it curious that these animals "should have been chosen by the Vedic satirist to represent the priests, which by the earliest satirist of Greece were selected as the representatives of the Homeric heroes."

¹⁷ E. Romagnoli, *Nel regno di Dioniso (Studi sul teatro comico greco)*, Bologna 1923) 161 and *ills.*, *Satiri alla Caccia*.

¹⁸ Also in other instances the satyrs tried to steal the arms of Herakles but were unsuccessful: F. Brommer, *Satyrs Spiele² (Bilder griech. Vasen)*, Berlin 1959) 29ff; J. D. Beazley, *Paralipomena* (Oxford 1971) 248; S. Karouzou, «*Ηρακλής Σατυρικός*,» *BCH* 60 (1936) 152–57, pls. 17–19, esp. p.156 for a possible early satyr-play, or otherwise a legend about the attempted—but unsuccessful—theft of the arms of Herakles.

¹⁹ W. R. Paton, ed. *Greek Anthology V* (LCL 1926) 167 (from *Anthologia Palatina*, ed. F. Jacobs [Leipzig 1814] Adesp. 412, 413); H. Beckby, ed. *Anthologia Graeca IV* (Munich 1958); A. C. Pearson, *The Fragments of Sophocles II* (Oxford 1917) 136 and discussion.

literature, according to extant evidence, the satyrs represented on the vase are not chained and toiling but are cheerful and move about freely. The only weapon in the scene is the club, which does not belong to the armor of Achilles; if he had intended to represent the making of the arms of Achilles, the artist would have made it clearer by depicting a shield. Nevertheless the epigrams most probably echo some old tradition which connected the satyrs with craftsmanship and Hephaistos. According to the legend used by Sophokles in the satyric *Ichneutai*, the satyrs were promised by Apollo gold and manumission if they discovered his stolen cattle; the legend was probably much earlier than Sophokles. One might suggest that the satyrs on the vase are about to work the gold they received from Apollo. In that case, however, the club would remain unexplained, and there would still be the questions of where, how and why.

The earliest specific literary reference to satyrs with hammers is the title of the lost satyr-play of Sophokles, *Pandora* or *Sphyrokopoi*.²⁰ Pearson noted that "The title indicates that the satyrs in the play appeared as Hammerers, and we must infer that they acted as assistants in the workshop of Hephaestus, while he was engaged in shaping Pandora." As further evidence for the employment of satyrs by Hephaistos he gives the commentary of Proklos to Hesiod, *Opera et Dies* 94, and the epigrams mentioned above. Robert,²¹ however, suggested that the satyr-chorus were not smiths helping with the forging of Pandora (who, according to the tradition, was made of clay), but clod-breakers helping to free Pandora from the earth.²² The play of Sophokles, therefore, is not helpful for the interpretation of the scene of the Chicago juglet; although the myth is much earlier than Sophokles, the implication of the title *Hammerers* remains unclear.²³

Young beardless satyrs appear on vases already in the first quarter of the fifth century under the influence of the satyr-plays;²⁴ such must be the two smaller figures on the Chicago juglet. Hephaistos is not

²⁰ A. Nauck, *TrGrFr*² nos. 441–45.

²¹ C. Robert, "Pandora," *Hermes* 49 (1914) 17–38.

²² Pearson, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.19) II.137, and n.7 *supra*.

²³ The only representation known to me of a chorus of satyrs holding hammers and dancing to the accompaniment of a long-robed fluteplayer appears on a red-figure volutekrater in Ferrara, later than the Chicago vase and contemporary with Sophokles: Bieber, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.9) fig.16. The satyrs here, however, are not working metal in a workshop but only brandishing their hammers; Brommer, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 49, 52, fig.49.

²⁴ Brommer, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.18) 38ff.

present here, but the objects held by the satyrs indicate that they are engaged in some craft. They are properly dressed and not in their usual exuberant nudity; none of them is dancing.

The earliest literary document with some allusions to the connection of satyrs with craftsmanship and Hephaistos is Aischylos' satyr-play *Isthmiastai*.²⁵ Since Aischylos started producing at the beginning of the fifth century, it is likely that this vase is contemporary with the performance of the *Isthmiastai*. In the new fragments of the play²⁶ the satyrs are addressed by somebody (apparently Dionysos) who accuses them of, among other things, wearing clothes, boasting and telling him that he is no good in iron-work and that he is like a woman. He also accuses them of getting "hateful new instruments"; not only that, but instead of dancing they behave like athletes of the Isthmian games. It seems to me that the satyrs' reproach against Dionysos for lacking knowledge of iron-work implies their own dexterity in it, since otherwise the reproach would apply also to them. Their *ὄργανα ἔχθιστα πάντων τῶ[ν]* --- (lines 69–70) for which the former accuses them are smith's implements. Also at line 77, "you will cry without smoke" hints at the smithy's fire. Further on (lines 85ff) a newcomer, identified by Lloyd-Jones as Hephaistos,²⁷ says that he brings them play-things newly made with hammer and adze "because they like learning these things." It seems that the new *ἀθύρματα* are as likely to be craftsmen's implements as javelins. The satyrs have taken up two different occupations instead of the dance: craftsmanship and *ἰσθμιάζειν*, 'behaving like crowned athletes at the Isthmia'. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that the two following fragmentary lines include the word *σφυρα*, edited as *σφυρὰ* but which could be *σφῦρα* 'hammer'. Next the satyrs admire a likeness of them brought by the 'Skilful One', apparently Hephaistos. One wonders why the satyrs would practice craftsmanship if they were intending to enter the Isthmian Games. The reason could very well be to furnish themselves with certain athletic accessories which otherwise they could not have. On the Chicago juglet the satyrs appear respectable and clothed, as accused by Dionysos. The second young satyr is apparently lifting

²⁵ *Aeschylus*, ed. H. Lloyd-Jones (LCL 1963) II.406 and Appendix by H. Lloyd-Jones, 541ff. I am indebted to Professor Lloyd-Jones for a useful discussion in an early stage; the views expressed here are my own.

²⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.25) 552f.

²⁷ See *supra* n.25.

a scraper, and the third could be performing some exercise. The first silenus is hammering something like a Heracleian club, the symbol of the Greek hero *par excellence*. Since Herakles was also an athlete and the founder of the first games, this may well be a comic allusion. Otherwise there is no evidence that they ever made weapons for him; the only explanation would be that they are making the club for themselves. One of the contests in the games is the footrace in full armor. The club was the hero's most important weapon.

The vase may have been inspired by the performance of *Isthmiastai*, but the play is too fragmentary to permit any certainty. The juglet does, however, seem to have been inspired by dramatic performances rather than by myths. The last figure on the vase hints at one of the early bird-choruses known through both literary and iconographic evidence; it may well have been inspired by a comedy that followed the satyr-play *Isthmiastai*.

Another interpretation of the single bird-figure could be deduced from a line of a fragment of *Isthmiastai*²⁸ which refers to old *σκωπεύματα* (from *σκώψ*, a kind of dance). Athenaeus, at 9.45 p.391A, notes that the dance called *σκώψ*, 'the screech-owl dance', got its name from the variety displayed by the bird. Thus, the bird-figure might be an allusion to these old dances mentioned in *Isthmiastai*. In this play Dionysos, who reproaches the satyrs, mentions preparations of choruses by him and scolds them for not being dedicated to their own trade, dancing. On the vase the old trade of the satyrs, the choruses or *σκωπεύματα*, and their new arts, craftsmanship and preparation for the games, are depicted side by side. This scene is the earliest explicit evidence for satyr-craftsmen.

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²⁸ *Op.cit.* (*supra* n.25) 407, fr.40(79).

PRICE PLATE 8



SQUAT LEKYTHOS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Classical Collection, Warren-Tarbell 23

(Photograph by T. H. Price)

PLATE 9 PRICE



Figure 1. SILEN AND SATYR-CRAFTSMEN



Figure 2. RIDD-DANCER AND SATYR-CRAFTSMEN