Another Look at Female Choruses in Classical Athens

This article revisits the issue of female choruses in Classical Athens and aims to provide an alternative to the common pessimistic view that emphasizes the restriction of female choreia by the gender ideology of the democracy. We agree that Athens did not have the kind of female choral culture that is documented for Sparta or Argos, but a review of the evidence suggests that women did dance regularly both in the city itself and elsewhere in Attica, although not at the ideologically most marked occasions such as the City Dionysia. The latter part of the article turns from actual choruses to their representation in textual and iconographic sources. An important reason why modern scholarship sometimes underestimates the extent of female choreia in Athens, we suggest, is that Athenian sources are often purposefully elusive in their representation of female choruses.

1 INTRODUCTION

Plutarch preserves the following story—a "popular account" as he puts it—about a ruse perpetrated by Solon in his campaign to regain possession of Salamis from the Megarians:

Having sailed to Cape Kolias with Peisistratus and finding there all the women celebrating their traditional festival for Demeter, he sent to Salamis a trustworthy man, who, pretending to be a deserter, told the Megarians to sail to Kolias with him as quickly as possible if they wanted to capture the leading women of Athens. The Megarians were persuaded and sent off armed men. When Solon saw the ship sailing away from the island, he ordered the
women to withdraw and commanded those of the younger men whose beards had not yet grown in to array themselves in the women’s garments, headbands, and sandals and to take up concealed daggers and sport (paizein) and dance (choreuein) by the sea until the enemy disembarked and the ship was under Athenian control. The plan was thus put into effect: the Megarians, lured by the spectacle, put to shore nearby and leapt out upon the women (so they thought), racing against one another, with the result that not one man among them escaped, but all were killed, and the Athenians set sail and immediately took possession of the island.

Plut. Sol. 8.4–6

While there is good reason to doubt the historicity of this anecdote, it nevertheless asks to be read as an accidental allegory of sorts for the problematic fate of female choral performance in Classical Athens.

From the eighth century BC onwards, the iconographical record of Archaic Athens, as of other locales in Archaic Greece, yields numerous images of ensembles of girls or women, often wearing elaborate costume, dancing in an apparently choreographed and synchronized manner, sometimes alongside a cohort of males in a mixed chorus. Reed and string players are routinely shown providing musical accompaniment. While the dancers are not always depicted with open mouths, we can assume that, in some cases at least, we are meant to assume they are singing songs while they dance. The “atmosphere of social and religious festivity” characteristic of many of these scenes suggests that they are set at public festivals, and that, if we do not discount them as purely mythological, the images reflect a historical Athenian practice of female choreia in such contexts. The depiction of tripods in conjunction with women’s and mixed choruses on a late Geometric skyphos may even point towards Athenian women’s involvement in choral competitions.

By the beginning of the fifth century, however, such images largely disappear from Athenian art. Still more remarkable is the scarcity of explicit literary evidence for choruses of women and girls in fifth- and fourth-century Athens. What references we have from both Classical and post-Classical authors tend to be lacking in concrete detail, and none provides any indication of the highly visible, public role of female choruses in Athenian civic life implied by the Archaic iconography. As in Plutarch’s anecdote, where Solon orders the women to leave their customary dancing grounds at Kolias, it is as if Athenian women, sometime around the time of the Cleisthenic reforms, ceded their prominent place in the city’s choral culture to men. As Robert Parker observes, there seems to have been “no female equivalent” to the dominant expressions of that culture under the democracy, “the elaborate competitions, publicly financed, between highly trained choruses of men and boys at the Thargelia and the

1. Langdon 2008: 167; see her pp. 166–74 for wider discussion of female choruses in Attic Geometric and Protoattic art.
Female choreia pervaded the dramatic performances staged at the latter festival, but significantly only through the mimetic filter of male choruses impersonating women or girls singing and dancing. (Solon’s “casting” of the young warriors as a woman’s chorus thus has a hint of the aetiological, figuring him as a dramatic poet or chorēgos and them as dramatic chorus avant la lettre.) In this mediated guise, female choreia served “the male agenda of the democratic city,” as Peter Wilson puts it. By contrast, the “real thing,” which does not seem to have served that agenda, maintained a low profile in Athenian civic life, and is as hard to capture for us today as it was for the Megarians in Plutarch’s anecdote.

In what follows, however, we do not wish to dwell on absence and lack. While we agree with the general view that women and girls had at best a minor part in the public choral culture of Classical Athens in relation to men and boys, we aim to take a more optimistic and constructive approach to the evidence. When considered together and examined in detail, the sources, as frustratingly vague and occlusive as they often are, do reveal the outlines of a fairly vibrant culture of female choreia existing mostly outside of the male-chorus-dominated civic festival performance culture and its institutions. In this “alternative” culture, Athenian women and girls apparently enjoyed an extensive and diverse range of occasions for choral performances, some highly formal and organized, fully meeting the Platonic definition of choreia as a unified composite of dance (orchēsis) and song (oidê) (Laws 654b), and others emphasizing group dance, at various levels of choreographic formality, over song, or at least the kind of complex, artfully composed sung poetry that makes up the bulk of the choral melic familiar to us. Section 2 is concerned with reviewing various performance occasions within Athens as well as in wider Attica and abroad, and reconstructing them as far as the evidence allows. In section 3 and the conclusion, we confront the nature of the evidence itself, by exploring the biases, clichés, and distortions involved in representations of female song-and-dance in Athenian texts, since we believe that, as so often when trying to recover women’s experiences, one needs to confront the ideological tendencies of the—male—source material.

4. Wilson 2000: 42. For the emulation of traditionally female genres of choral song by the tragic chorus, see Swift 2010: chs. 5 and 7.
5. Dance performance with reduced or no simultaneous vocal performance on the part of the dancers might be called orchēsis rather than choreia, but we prefer to use the latter term for any and all performances by a dancing group, whether explicitly called a choros or not, even those during which the group members sing minimally or not at all, leaving the music entirely to an accompanist. For choreia along a spectrum of song and dance combinations, see Peponi 2009: 56–60 and Peponi 2013: 15–16. Olsen 2015 offers compelling arguments for choreia in early Greece as a “paradigm of performance capable of drawing fairly diverse modes of expression into its orbit” (p. 2), including those that would appear to be sub-choral in respect to choreography and/or music. Cf. also Richardson 2011: 15–16 on the various song-and-dance scenarios indicated by the relevant terms μελπω and μολπή. The objective degree of orchestic synchronization and musico-poetic elaboration in female choral performances is often difficult and sometimes impossible to gauge from our sources—a problem we return to several times in what follows.
2A FEMALE CHORUSES AT POLIS FESTIVALS IN ATHENS

As will become obvious, the evidence is wide-ranging as well as difficult. For heuristic purposes, we divide it into four categories, four broadly different types of occasion at which Attic women and girls performed in choruses, and discuss each occasion in turn: (a) polis festivals in Athens; (b) private performances; (c) choruses outside the urban center; and (d) female-only festivals. Such categories are never conceptually tidy—several female-only festivals, like the Thesmophoria, are organized by the polis, for example, and some, like the Brauronia, are also extra-urban; and the distinction of public vs. private is notoriously problematic. Even so, the four categories will be useful in surveying the landscape of female choreia in Athens by allowing us to discuss the prevalence and role of women’s choruses in different contexts.

It is the first of them, polis festivals within Athens, to which the argument from democracy applies most blatantly. The marked state occasion of the City Dionysia, which gave pride of place to several forms of male choreia, allowed no space for female performances. Even dramatic choruses with female identities were enacted by men.

At least in the imagination other festivals could be more inclusive. When the wandering poet in Aristophanes’ Birds haplessly peddles his services he offers the following repertoire: “I have composed songs for your Cloudcuckovilles, many fine dithyrambs (κύκλια) and maiden-songs (παρθένεια) and songs à la Simonides” (917–19). In the world of myth rather than fantasy and in the context of deprivation rather than advertisement, Euripides’ Electra bemoans her inability to attend festivals and deprived of choruses, wistfully characterizing herself as “absent from the sacrifices at the festivals and deprived of choruses” (ἀνέορτος ἱερῶν καὶ χορῶν τητωμένη, 310). Evidently, Aristophanes’ and Euripides’ audience knew that choruses of unmarried girls performed at civic festivals; the hard question is whether this knowledge derives from their experience at home in Athens or whether the reference is to performances elsewhere.6

There are two or three—one might say only two or three—pieces of evidence that point to female choruses at Athenian public festivals, none of them straightforward. One is the end of the third stasimon of Euripides’ Heraclidae. The chorus of old men of Marathon support an appeal to Athena by reminding her of the honors paid to her by Athens:

ἐπεὶ σοι πολύθυτος ἀεὶ
timá kraiñetai oude lá-
θει μηνὸν φθινᾶς ἁμέρα
vénov t’ ádoi χορῶν te molpái.

6. Dunbar 1995 comments on the Birds passage that partheneia “were as a ritual public performance alien to Athens, where maidens (and matrons) did not sing in public, but probably familiar to some from written texts of such songs performed in Dorian communities . . . . There is a pleasant incongruity about ‘maiden-songs’ written for a bird-city.”
For the honour of much sacrifice is always paid to you, and the waning day of the months is not forgotten, or the songs of young men and dances of their choruses. On the windy hill cries of joy resound to the all-night beat of maidens’ feet.

Trans. Allan 2001

Commentators agree that Euripides is referring to the most important festival in the Athenian calendar, the Panathenaia, celebrated in Athena’s honor at the end of the month of Hecatombaion on the “windy hill” that is the Acropolis. The celebrations included a large-scale sacrifice and choreically funded competitions of male cyclic choruses, which Euripides evokes with his χορόν . . . μολπαί.7 We know from an inscriptional decree that they also included a pannychis, and it is this pannychis that the chorus alludes to right at the end.8 According to the chorus, this pannychis was an occasion in the course of which girls danced (παννυχίοις υπό παρθένων . . . ποδών κρότοισιν) and produced some kind of vociferation (ὀλολύγματα . . . ιαχεῖ).9

This is strong evidence for female singing and dancing in the context of a major civic festival. The reason it has not seriously dented the communis opinio on female choruses in Athens is probably to do in part with the vague language (“cries,” “thumping feet”) and in part with the marginal status of these performances (at night, outside the program of agônes, while the male cyclic choruses presumably danced during the day). We shall return to both vagueness and marginality when we discuss matters of representation and bias in section 3. For now we note that there can be little doubt that girls performed at the Panathenaic pannychides, but that it is a matter of judgment whether they did so in properly institutional choruses or in some less organized and prepared fashion.10

7. Cyclic choruses are attested by Lys. 21.2; cf. [Xen.] Ath. Pol. 3.4 (unspecified chorêgia), IG II2 3025a (supplemented νικήσας κυκλίωι χορέω). Euripides may also be alluding to the pyrrhic dances, performed agonistically at the Panathenaia in several age classes and funded like the cyclic choruses through a chorēgos. See further Wilson 2000: 37–40, Shear 2003.

8. IG II2 447.57–59 = GHI 81.31–33 (ca. 335 BC), legislating the administration of the pannychis as one of the provisions in a law and decree on the Little Panathenaia: τοὺς δὲ ἱεροποιοὺς τοὺς διοικοῦντας τῇ Παναθήναια τὰ κατ’ ἐναντίον ποιεῖν τὴν παννυχίαν ὡς καλλίστην τῇ θεώ, “the hieropoioi who administer the annual Panathenaia are to make the all-night celebration as fine as possible for the goddess” (trans. Rhodes and Osborne 2003).

9. At the end of Aeschylus’ Eumenides the women and children escorting the Furies chant ὀλολύξατε νῦν ἐπὶ μολπαίς (1043). Since the procession as a whole evokes the Panathenaic procession, that passage too may recall female choral performance in the context of the festival.

10. See Calame 1997: 130–31 and, more cautiously, Wilson 2000: 41–42 with n.165. A further allusion to these choruses, uncertain in a different way, might be present at Ar. Thesm. 1136, where the chorus addresses Athena as φιλόχορος; see Sommerstein ad loc. But of course the only reason for
The second piece of evidence also comes from Euripides, this time the fragmentary *Erechtheus*, a play centered on Erechtheus’ death and sacrifice of his three daughters, which ensured the successful defense of Athens against the invading army of Eumolpus. In an aetiological *deus ex machina* speech that is partially preserved at the end of a long papyrus fragment, Athena reveals that in return for giving their lives for their city, Erechtheus as well as his daughters receive posthumous cult. Erechtheus is to be worshipped in a temple in the center of the city (the Erechtheion) and his widow Praxithea is to be the first priestess of Athena (Polias). The three sisters will not descend into Hades but will be translated to the sky and known as “divine Hyakinthids,” they are to have a precinct created for them, and they are to be worshipped with annual sacrifices as well as—what matters here—with annual performances by female choruses:

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\text{τοῖς ἐμοῖς ἀστο[ῖς λέγω]}
\]
\[
\text{ἐνιαυσίας σφας μὴ λέλησμι[ένους] χρόνοι}
\]
\[
\text{θυσίας τιμῶν καὶ σφαγῶν βουκτόνων}
\]
\[
\text{κοσμούντας ἵππος παρθένων [χορεῦ]μασίν.}
\]

Eur. fr. 370 *TrGF (Erechtheus)* 77–80

I (instruct) my citizens to honor them—never forgetting over time—with annual sacrifices and slayings of (oxen), adorning these rituals with sacred girls’ choruses.

Text and trans. Collard et al. 1995, adjusted

The language is a good deal more explicit than that of the *Heraclidae* ode: an annual festival, organized by the people of Athens, in which girls’ choruses (παρθένων [χορεῦ]μασίν) have an important place and which is almost certain to be celebrated within the city, probably on the Acropolis, and in any case within Attica. 12

However, what is *less* clear is the occasion in question. Which festival in the Athenian calendar is Euripides referring to? While the *Heraclidae* passage is easily matched to the independently attested *pannychis* at the Panathenaia, we have no secure context for the Hyakinthid cult. 13 Rather than assuming a stand-alone Hyakinthia thinking that the reference is to female choruses would be the fact that the chorus of *Thesmophoriazusae* is itself female.

11. Concerning the hint at catasterization, cf. the later mention of the Hyades (v. 107, very fragmentary) and schol. Aratus 172 (p. 166 Martin), according to which Euripides identifies the Erechtheids/Hyakinthids with the Hyades, who are well established as a star cluster. Csapo briefly discusses the issue in the context of his treatment of star choruses, Csapo 2008: 277; and see Sonnino 2010 ad loc. The name Hyakinthids is discussed below, p. 76.

12. The supplement [χορεῦ]μασίν is Austin’s in the editio princeps, which has been universally accepted. The context makes it very hard to find a different word that fits.

13. The historian Philochorus apparently discussed the offerings, but what he wrote has not been preserved (*FGrH* 328 F12). Dem. 60.27 relates the myth, as does Phanodemus *FGrH* 325 F4, who in addition locates the killing of the Erechtheids on the otherwise unknown “Hyakinthos Hill.” See Henrichs 1983 98n.54 and Frame 2009: 449–50n.230 for references to (highly uncertain) attempts to identify that location and hence the site of the Hyakinthid cult.
festival, recent scholars have tended to locate the Hyakinthid cult within the remit of otherwise known festivals. Most of them favor either Panathenaia or Skira, because of their assumed or certain connections with Erechtheus. With a view to female choruses the former suggestion is particularly attractive as it would make Euripides allude in the *Erechtheus* to the same partheneia as in *Heraclidae*: choruses of girls, who during the *pannychides* of the Panathenaia enact their mythical forebears. Like them, the daughters of Erechtheus were unmarried girls, and yet they acted on behalf of their city, a suitable paradigm to celebrate at the pan-Athenian festival. (It is also noteworthy that both passages mention blood-sacrifice, opening up the possibility that the Panathenaic girls’ choruses were temporally, spatially, or otherwise related to the great sacrifice and feast, which itself probably stretched into the evening.)

It hardly needs stressing that this reconstruction is speculative. However, even if it were to be wide off the mark, the fundamental point remains difficult to dispute: unless one assumes that Euripides altogether invented the elaborate aetiology in Athena’s speech, which is possible but unlikely, the *Erechtheus* testifies to the performance of *partheneia* in an Athenian public festival.

These two passages are not enough to challenge the view that Athens had nothing like the culture of public female choruses that is attested for Sparta, Elis, Delos, or Thebes: it did not. What they point to is some limited opportunities for female choruses that were attached to festivals, but probably performed at night, and in any case away from the limelight. Theirs is an ancillary kind of *choreia*.

Nothing survives to indicate who may have performed in these choruses, but exactly because these were probably not marked democratic occasions (we have no evidence of choregic funding, for instance, or of competition), one might hazard the guess that, as is the case for Alcman’s and Pindar’s partheneia and as is the case for the other women involved in the ceremonies of the Panathenaia, they were drawn primarily from aristocratic families.

Before we leave behind public festivals one further text deserves a brief mention. In the *Life of Theseus*, Plutarch quotes a three-word exhortation which, he says, girls of Bottiaea sing while performing a sacrifice: ἰώμεν εἰς Ἀθήνας, “let’s go to Athens” (16.2 = *PMG* 868). Bottiaea, to the west of Chalcidice, is of course nowhere near

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14. Panathenaia: Mikalson 1976: 149–53, Connelly 1996: 76–78, Collard and Cropp 2008: 397. Skira: Robertson 1996: 44–46, Frame 2009: 448–57; cf. Burkert 1983: 148–49. Ekrath 2002: 186–89 is agnostic. In the course of her controversial mythical interpretation of the Parthenon frieze, Connelly further suggests that the girls on the frieze are the ur-choruses established by Athena (p. 68). She does not, however, discuss the absence of choral markers in their representation. Sonnino 2010: 389–90 objects to identifying the female choruses of *Erechtheus* with those of *Heraclidae* on the grounds that the former are explicitly annual (v. 78). However, so is the *pannychis* at the (Little) Panathenaia; see the decree cited in n.8 above.

15. The suggestion of Scullion 1999–2000 that Euripides invented many of his aetiologies has been critiqued by Seaford 2009 and Wright 2005: 357–62.

16. One further candidate for potentially public performance by women’s choruses has been mooted in passing by Stehle 2012: 201. She suggests that the girls who annually process to the shrine of Apollo Delphinios to propitiate him “may have sung en route and/or danced in a chorus when they arrived, although we are not told that.” For this procession see Plut. *Thes.* 18.1.
Attica. What makes the fragment relevant here is a recent suggestion by Ian Rutherford. In the course of a wide-ranging discussion, he raises the possibility that the song related to a theôria from Bottiaea to Athens, and was performed not only in Bottiaea but also in Athens. Little weight can be put on what is an inevitably unprovable hypothesis, but if it were correct, the context of these performances would have to be a public occasion, an occasion in fact of significance beyond Athens. Plutarch adds another layer of possibility to the hazy picture sketched by Euripides as he opens up the possibility that foreign women occasionally performed at Athenian civic festivals, beside their Athenian counterparts. We shall have more to say on both theôria and “internationality” below.

2B FEMALE CHORUSES AT PRIVATE FESTIVITIES

Our other three categories will take us even further away from the limelight than the pannychis at the Panathenaia, and the argument will be that once one has a closer look at those less exposed situations female choruses appear with reasonable frequency. Athens restricted the visibility of female choruses, just as it restricted the visibility of women in public life, but it did not curb female choreia as such. Far from it: there is every reason to believe that where Athenian women participated in celebrations, formal or informal, they also participated in choreia.

At the opposite end of the scale from state-sponsored events sit informal familial festivities (some of them in fact held in conjunction with larger festivals). A fascinating glimpse of female choreia at private celebrations, again in particular pannychides, is yielded by the arch-aristocrat Critias. In a sympotic hexameter piece Critias celebrates the longevous poetry of Anacreon:

τὸν δὲ γυναικείων μελέων πλέξαντα ποτ’ ὁιδάς ἢδον Ἀνακρεόντα Τέως εἰς Ἑλλὰδ’ ἀνήγεν, συμποσίων ἐρέθισμα, γυναικῶν ἡπερότευμα, αυλών ἀντίπαλον, φιλοβάρβιτον, ἡδόν, ἄλυπον. οὐ ποτὲ σου φιλότης γηράσεται οὐδὲ θανεῖται, ἕστ’ ἄν ὑδωρ οἰνωι συμμειγνύμενον κυλίκεσιν παῖς διαπομπεύῃ προπόσεις ἐπιδέξια νομὸν, παννυχίδας θ’ ιερὰς θήλεις χοροῖς ἀμφιέπωσιν, πλάστιγξ θ’ ἤ χαλκοῦ θυγάτηρ ἐπ’ ἀκραιζὶ καθίζῃ κοττάβου ψηλαῖς κορυφαῖς Βρομίου ψακάδεσιν. 8 Gentili-Prato = 1 Gerber

Teos brought to Greece the one who once wove odes with songs of women, sweet Anacreon, stimulus for symposia, seducer of women, opponent of the pipes, lover of the barbitos, sweet, banisher of pain. Never will love of you

grow old or perish, so long as a slave boy carries round water mixed with wine for the cups, dispensing toasts to the right, and female choruses conduct sacred all-night festivities, and the scale-pan, daughter of bronze, sits on the high and lofty top of the kottabos for the drops of Bromios.

Text and trans. Gerber 1999, adapted

Critias’ text (which may or may not be complete) has received attention recently as an indicator of the way Athenian aristocrats under the democracy appropriated Anacreon for their purposes. Arguably, it deserves to be taken just as seriously for the more delicate question of what it tells us about women’s choruses. Strikingly, this is an Athenian text that describes a poet who for part of his career was active in Athens and is here treated as still very much au courant, as a composer not just of symptic pieces but also of songs for “female choruses” (θήλεις χοροί).

The matter has been discussed at length by Benedetto Bravo in his monograph on pannychis and symposion, which tries to establish that there once existed a phenomenon which Dionysius of Halicarnassus says the Romans were right not to adopt from the Greeks: “all-night vigils (διαπαννυχισμοί) of men and women together in the temples” (2.19.2). Critias is one of the major building blocks in this argument for mixed-sex festivities in which symposia and pannychides merge and, what is most important for our purposes here, in which both sexes make music. The context of such festivities, Bravo suggests, would be private and aristocratic celebrations of Dionysus in the context of festivals such as the Anthesteria, and the venues would be temple dining rooms.

Bravo’s interpretation of the Critias piece has met with some cautious endorsement, but its impact on the debate about female choruses in Athens has been limited. The reason, we suggest, is that it is framed too narrowly: specific venue (temple dining rooms), specific festival (Anthesteria), specific god (Dionysus), specific age class (married women). Arguably, Critias is better used as the starting point for thinking in broader terms about privately arranged festivities as a frequent context of female and mixed-sex choreia in Athens.

Two such familial occasions will serve as examples. One is the celebration of the dekatê, the tenth day after birth, on which the child is named. These familial
events, to which only close friends seem to have been invited, are invoked as follows in a comic fragment: 21

εἷν, γυναῖκες· νῦν ὅπως τὴν νύθ’ ὀλὴν
ἐν τῷ δεκάτῳ τοῦ παιδίου χορεύσετε.
θῆσο δὲ νικητήριον τρεῖς ταύνιας
καὶ μῆλα πέντε καὶ φιλήματ’ ἐννέα.

Eubulus fr. 2 K-A

Well then, women. Now dance the whole night through, celebrating the child’s dekatē. As the prize for victory I shall put up three fillets, five apples, and nine kisses.

A group of women, possibly the chorus of the play, are asked to dance (χορεύειν) through the night. There is bound to be a good deal of comic distortion in this request. The notion of a competition with prizes, for example, may be a parody of the competitive choral festivals at which women very much did not perform, or of the equally male kottabos game at the symposion. 22 But given the central place choral dance has in merry-making across Greece, to deny this passage all force as evidence for some form of choral activity in the context of the dekatē celebrations would seem to take skepticism too far. What we should imagine is probably a free-flowing affair, in which men and women drank, sang, and danced in impromptu fashion. Robert Parker puts it well: “At private pannychides the separation between drinking men and dancing women—all under the same roof—was not necessarily large or lasting.” 23

Our second (and better-documented) example is the wedding. From beginning to end, ancient Greek weddings were prime occasions for music-making. There is hardly any aspect of the multi-day wedding celebrations for which music is not attested in one source or other: the preparatory sacrifices, the fetching of the water for the nuptial bath, the procession, the feast, the banter outside the bridal chamber, the day after. In view of the associations of choreia with union and with eroticism, it is unsurprising that this music-making included dancing and singing by women as well as men, together as well as separately. Like the dances of the dekatē, wedding dances will usually have been a far cry from the rehearsed formal choral performances of the City Dionysia, but the insistent use of the term choros in one of our fullest early descriptions of a wedding shows that it would be wrong to say

22. Cf. in particular the prizes in a kottabos game in the context of a pannychis in Callim. fr. 227.5–7 Pf., which include the license to kiss; and Athen. 15.668c–d who quotes both passages, and notes that at some pannychides participants kept themselves awake by dancing. Callimachus may or may not be alluding to Eubulus.
23. Parker 2005: 166n.43.
that they are in an altogether different category: choros appears as many as four times in the ekphrasis of an (again) nighttime wedding procession in the Hesiodic
Shield (272, 277, 280, 284).

In Classical Athens, too, women sang and danced at weddings, as is demonstrated by the iconography on wedding-related pots. Both lebêtes gamikoi and loutrophoroi—the two shapes standardly used in the context of weddings—occasionally depict women dancing in groups, and despite individual questions of interpretation, collectively make a strong case.24

The case is supported by representations and evocations of female singing and dancing at weddings in several Athenian texts. Euripides in particular treats this subject with some regularity, relegated to the realm of myth.25 An especially interesting example in comedy is the party at the end of Menander’s Dyskolos, set at a shrine of Pan and the Nymphs at the village of Phyle near the Attic-Boeotian border. When Knemon gives permission for the double marriage, arrangements are made for impromptu celebrations, which are announced as follows:

Sostratos We really should have a fantastic drinking party now, Dad, and the women can have a pannychis.

Kallipides Quite the reverse. They’ll be doing the drinking, and we’ll have a pannychis—of that I’m certain. But I’ll go and get things ready for you all.

Menander Dyskolos 856–60; trans. Ireland 1995, adapted

Milking the topos of women’s bibulousness, Sostratos and Kallipides playfully describe an occasion on which the male symposion and the female pannychis are jumbled up. Kallipides is joking, but in the world of the play his is a joke that comes true. The party that ensues is described as follows:

Sikon Someone else was decanting some venerable old vintage into a hollow jar by hand, and mingling it with a Naiad’s rill gave the men all round a toast. Someone else did the same for the ladies—it was like pouring water onto sand—get it? And one of the maids who was the worse for drink shaded the bloom of her youthful face and began the rhythmic beat

24. Note the following four pots, spanning a range of dates and iconographic motifs: (1) Mykonos 970, Attic lebêgamikos (but found on Rheneia) of ca. 470 BC showing a crowded group of female dancers; see Oakley and Sinos 1993: 25 and figs. 54–58. (2) Karlsruhe 67/78, an Attic loutrophoros of ca. 430–420 BC, showing a procession carrying the bride’s bathwater; one woman has krotala in both hands, “suggesting that this procession was an occasion for wedding dances” (ibid. 16, with fig. 17). (3) Athens 12894, stand of an Attic lebêgamikos of 370–360 BC, showing four female dancers in diaphonous chiton; see entry for no. 146 in Kaltas and Shapiro 2008 and Delavaud-Roux 1994: 42–43. (4) Athens 1256, an Attic miniature lebêgamikos of 340–320 BC, showing two female dancers; see no. 145 in Kaltas and Shapiro. For general discussion of the iconography of mousikê at weddings see Oakley and Sinos 1993 index s.vv. “dance,” “music”; Bundrick 2005: 179–92, Delavaud-Roux 1994: 92–99; and with a less strictly iconographic focus Coniades-Tsitsoni 1990, Lambin 1992: 77–104, Lonsdale 1993: 206–33, Kauffmann-Samaras 1996, Oakley 2004, Baltieri 2011.

of a dance (χορεῖον . . . ῥυθμόν)—hesitating and trembling out of embarrassment. Another joined hands with her and danced (καχόρευεν).

Getas (to Knemon) Even if you have been through something dreadful, dance; on your feet—we’ll help you.

Menander Dyskolos 946–54; trans. Ireland 1995, adapted

In the event, Knemon will not dance, but other men will, and so this improvised engagement party does indeed turn out to be one in which both men and women danced and both men and women drank.

There can be no question that a party quite like this ever took place. But as with so much comic fantasy, reality is refracted rather than altogether left behind. Menander gives us a comic distortion of the mixed-sex, choreia-rich, nighttime wedding festivities that we find in the literary and iconographic tradition throughout Greece, and that in some form will have taken place in Athens.

It would seem, then, that at familial occasions, especially perhaps after dark, Athenian women were no more restricted in their choral dancing than women elsewhere. Without having to construct the very specific kind of setting Bravo proposed, one may accept Critias like Menander as more or less closely mirroring reality when he evokes “female choruses” in a context of male, private merry-making. What these choruses looked like, and in particular how formal they were, is anybody’s guess. They will hardly have achieved the strict rank-and-file choreography that the Basle dancers suggest for some male tragic choruses. Yet both Critias and Menander use choral language (χορός, and χορεῖον/χορεύειν, respectively): whatever their formation, these dances are conceptualized as choruses.

In one final broadening out of Bravo’s interpretation, we want to turn attention to the apparently minor question of the age of Critias’ θήλεις χοροί. Bravo used the term γυναίκαι μέλη in the opening line to argue that those are, exclusively, choruses of mature women. This we believe is too narrow. It is too narrow for reality in that both unmarried and married girls will, variously, have joined into private celebrations; unmarried girls certainly appear regularly as performers at weddings. And it is too narrow for Critias specifically in so far as Anacreon is known to have composed partheneia, a fragment of which probably survives in a papyrus scholiion: those partheneia are bound to spring to mind here. Bravo’s counter-argument on the basis of γυναίκαις μέλη is not strong. Not only does γυναίκαις μέλη not have to refer to the same thing as θήλεις χοροί seven lines later (those μέλη could be songs about women rather than by women), but γυναίκες can in fact include parthenoi, in choruses and otherwise. More likely than not, what Critias is doing is singing the praises of Anacreon’s partheneia alongside his sympotic output in what is a song about Anacreon in the round.

26. E.g. Sappho 44.25, Eur. JT 1144.
27. Thus, e.g., Bowra 1961: 304 and Gentili 1958: xxv and 96. For Anacreon’s partheneia, see the testimonia in PMG 500 and the papyrus fragment PMG 501 = 190 Gentili.
28. A particularly relevant example is Thuc. 3.104.5 χορὸν τῶν γυναῖκῶν, in reference to the Delian maidens in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo.
The point bears laboring because its implications go beyond the nuance of a particular expression in Critias and beyond the question of the age of real-life choruses. If, as seems reasonably certain, Critias is indeed alluding to Anacreon’s *partheneia* as the compositions that the “female choruses” keep alive, then he gives us an insight into questions of repertoire and transmission. The bread and butter of ancient communal song, male and female, in Athens and elsewhere, will have been simple, traditional pieces. But as is well known certainly for male genres like epinician and paean, intermingled with this traditional repertoire there will have been famous compositions by big-name composers (which of course themselves soon became traditional). The Critias piece suggests that female choruses too re-performed big-name composers.

Anacreon is one of those canonical composers, one who may even have had the attraction of having composed (some of) his *partheneia* for Athenian choruses in the first place. Another, from further afield, no doubt is Alcman. Recent scholarship has emphasized that Athenians must have had some familiarity with Alcman’s *partheneia*: the Alcmanic tropes at the end of *Lysistrata* and the allusions to *partheneia* in Euripides would not work if audiences had no experience of these songs. The role of written texts should not be underestimated in this process, but once one accepts that in Athens, too, women performed in choruses it becomes obvious that re-performance will have made a major contribution to the pan-Hellenic and indeed Athenian dissemination of female genres like the *partheneia* of Alcman, Pindar, and Anacreon or the wedding songs of Sappho, as much as of epinicians and other male genres for which this has long been the standard view.

An incidental benefit, therefore, of rehabilitating female choruses in Athens is the filling of a gap in our story of the transmission of choral lyric. As far as this section is concerned, our claim is that private festivities of various sorts, especially in aristocratic families like those of Critias and his friends, may well have seen choruses of younger and older women perform, among humbler fare, pieces by the great composers of the past.

2C Athenian choruses outside of Athens: extra-urban cults and *theôria*

With few opportunities to dance in the city, and an ideological and cultural climate not amenable to their dancing openly in civic forums, women and girls found occasion for choral performance outside the city, in Attica and abroad.

First, extra-urban choreia. We have suggestive evidence, material and literary, for girls’ and perhaps too women’s choruses in cults of Artemis at Brauron and Halai Araphenides, neighboring areas on the eastern coast of Attica, and on the hill of

29. See Swift 2010: 186–88, Bierl 2011, and Carey 2011. However, if our argument about re-performance of Anacreon’s *partheneia* is accepted, one may have to be more careful about assuming that all generic partheneion references point to Alcman in particular.
Mounichia, on the coast southwest of Athens. The penteteric Brauronia festival was overseen by officials of the Athenian state in the Classical period and drew enthusiastic celebrants from the city (Ar. Peace 873–76). Its centerpiece was the arkteia, a complex of maturation rites for girls selected to “play the bear (arktos)” for the goddess. The annual festival of Artemis Tauropolia in Halai was administered by the deme, but it attracted female and male participants and spectators from Athens as well. Both sanctuaries were located a considerable distance from the city (nearly 40 kilometers); as Euripides remarks, Halai is at the furthest limits, πρὸς ἐσχάτος ὅροις, of Attica (IT 1450–51). The arkteia was also celebrated at Artemis’ precinct in Mounichia, a site not as distant from Athens, but still peripheral.30 At these further reaches of Attica, connected to yet also at a considerable remove from urban culture, female choruses apparently thrived.

Our evidence for choruses at Brauron and Mounichia is primarily iconographical. Around a dozen of the krateriskos fragments found in the precincts of Artemis show girls, some probably prepubescent, others more mature (and some of these perhaps married women, overseeing the younger ones), engaged in what appears to be collective and choreographed dance.31 These now fragmented dancers were presumably depicted as members of choruses, and the reasonable inference is that the images represent actual choruses that performed during the arkteia.32 The inference is supported by a fragmentary black-figured pyxis recovered at Brauron that shows three women holding hands in a distinctly choral configuration, accompanied by a male aulete (fig. 1), and a fragment of a red-figured pyxis lid depicting a group of torch-bearing women dancing by a seated female aulete (fig. 2).33 These vessels date from around 560 BC and the third quarter of the fifth century, respectively; the krateriskoi date from the later sixth to the later fifth century.34 We can thus assume there was a long-running tradition of female choral song and dance at the Brauronian and Mounichian arkteia, whose religious, social, and pedagogical significance would seem to resemble, if

31. In a catalogue of thirty-two fragments “depicting human activity” in Hamilton 1989, numbers 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, and 30 would appear to represent dance, though some may instead represent a footrace or simple procession.
33. Krateriskos fragments depicting musical and dance performance have been found also on the Athenian Acropolis and at Attic shrines of Artemis besides Brauron and Mounichia, but they probably depict the arkteia as practiced at Brauron and Mounichia rather than at their findspots. Cf. Parker 2005: 233n.70.
34. The visual record ends by the middle of the fourth century, with fragments of a lebês gamikos found at Brauron depicting dancing girls (Brauron Museum 502); see Kahil 1997: 391–404, with figs. 20–21, 28–31. But choral performance at the Brauronia may have figured in the backstory of Menander’s poorly preserved Phasma (see vv. 194–99, 204), as a girls’ chorus at the Tauropolia does in his Epitrepontes. See Bathrellou 2012: 155n.13.
Fig. 1: Brauron, Archaeological Museum of Brauron 527 (A 3), fragmentary Attic black-figured pyxis. Photograph © Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs/Ephorate of Antiquities of East Attika.

Fig. 2: Brauron, Archaeological Museum of Brauron 276 (A 50), fragmentary Attic red-figured pyxis lid. Photograph © Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Education and Religious Affairs/Ephorate of Antiquities of East Attika.
not quite rival, those in Alcman’s Laconia, where Artemis cults anchored a broad network of girls’ choreia.\(^{35}\)

For choral performance at the Tauropolia festival in Halai, our evidence comes by way of Menander’s *Epitrepontes*.\(^{36}\) In this play, as in others (*Samia, Kitharistes*, probably *Phasma*), Menander updates a motif of deep mythopoetic antiquity, the nubile girl snatched or seduced away from her chorus by a lusting man or god, to supply the backstory for the relationship between the couple at the center of the drama.\(^{37}\) The daughter of a well-to-do Athenian family, Pamphile, was raped and made pregnant by her future husband, Charisios, when she wandered off from the *choroi* in which she danced at the Tauropolia (1119–20: ταύτην λαβὼν | χορὸν ἀποσπασθείσαν; cf. 486). As Habrotonon, the harp-playing *hetaira* who has subsequently (and coincidentally) taken up with Charisios, explains to the slave Onesimos, these choruses performed at a *pannychis* of married women (*gynaikes*) and girls (*paides korai*) during the festival. She herself supplied the musical accompaniment for the girls’ dancing on the night Pamphile was raped:

Λβρ. δηλαδὴ
eis τὰς γυναίκας παννυχιζόμενας μόνος
ἐνέ[πεσε: κάμιο]δό γὰρ παρούσῃς ἐγένετο
toiūτην ἔτερον.

Ον. σοῦ παρούσῃς;

Λβρ. πέρυσι, ναί,

Ταυροπο[λίοις: π]αισὶν γὰρ ἕσαλον κόραις,
αὐτὴ θ’ [ὀμοί συ]νέπαιξον. οὐδ’ ἐγὼ τότε,
οὔπω γὰρ, ἀνδρ’ ἠδειν τί ἔστι.

Menander *Epitrepontes* 473–78 (cf. 451–53)

*Habr.* It’s clear that he [stumbled] upon the women while they held their *pannychis*, all by himself. Another such incident occurred when [I] was there.

*On.* When you were there?

*Habr.* Last year, yes, at the Tauropolia. I played the harp for some young girls, and I danced [along] myself. For at that time I didn’t yet know what men are like.

As Eftychia Bathrellou puts it, “A quite clear picture thus emerges from Habrotonon’s words: in the *pannychis* of the Tauropolia, unmarried girls, probably of marriageable age, danced in honor of the virgin goddess Artemis.”\(^{38}\)

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36. Another clue: At Eur. *IT* 1456–57, Athena predicts that *brotoi, mortals, will hymn (ὀμνήσουσι) Artemis at the Tauropolia. Euripides probably alludes to a broad menu of musical performance at the festival, female *choria* included. See section 3 for a discussion of the aetiologies at the end of *IT*.


Beyond that, the demographics and organization of the choruses at the Tauropolia as well as in the arkeia remain matters of speculation. While most scholars agree that not “every parthenos” took part in the arkeia, as a scholion to Ar. Lysistrata has it (645c Hangard), debate continues as to whether the girls who were sent to play the bear at Brauron and Mounichia came primarily from aristocratic families or whether the institution, at least in the Classical period, was more socially diverse and inclusive.\textsuperscript{39} While the slim evidence we have, both literary and visual, points in both directions, Robert Parker offers an attractive solution to the deadlock: while all Athenian families were technically free to have their girls undergo the arkeia, only a few actually did so, and these few would have been families of means.\textsuperscript{40} For, although democratically selected religious officials oversaw the Brauronia festival (Aristotle \textit{Ath. Pol.} 54), there was, as far as we can tell, no liturgy to fund the arkeia there, or at Mounichia. (Nothing is known of the festival context of the Mounichian arkteia.) Parents presumably had to foot the bill for their daughters. The financing and training of the choruses would thus have been left to elite families (and presumably to some extent the cultic personnel at the sanctuaries), and it is conceivable that the Brauronian arkeia, at least, remained a bastion of aristocratic choral culture throughout the fifth- and fourth-century democracy, an occasion for daughters of the Athenian elite to enjoy a prestigious “coming out” in the manner of the parthenoi of the aristocracy in other poleis.\textsuperscript{41}

However, even if we do assume that the arkeia had a more practically inclusive character, with girls participating from across the socioeconomic classes of Attica, there remains the significant fact that no choreic system was in place for financing and organizing the female choruses at the Brauronia as there was for male choruses at other state-run festivals.\textsuperscript{42} If the Brauronian rites had been “democratized,” the choreia there nonetheless remained outside the official purview of Athenian democratic performance culture.

The situation at the Tauropolia was probably much the same. Although there is inscriptional evidence, compelling if not completely certain, that the deme of Halai Araphenides had instituted a choreic system for funding boys’ competitions in the armed dance, the pyrrichê, at the festival, there is no such evidence for girls’ choruses at the pannychis. Menander’s \textit{Epitrepontes} points rather to private funding and organization by the families of participating girls.\textsuperscript{43} Further, if Pamphile’s elite status is any reliable reflection of the social reality of Tauropolian choruses, these families would have tended to be wealthy, though we should

\textsuperscript{39} There is a concise overview of the debate in Goff 2004: 181–83.

\textsuperscript{40} Parker 2005: 233–34.

\textsuperscript{41} For “familial chorêgia” of female choruses at Sparta, Thebes, and probably too Aegina and Elis, see Wilson 2000: 280–82 with nn.

\textsuperscript{42} Cf. ibid. 40–41.

\textsuperscript{43} The choral accompanist Habrotonon mentions having been employed by certain women (gynaikes) present at the pannychis (481–82), presumably the mothers of the girls in the chorus. Cf. Arnott 1979: 447.
not entirely rule out participation by girls from more diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.44

Was it the custom for men to watch these choruses perform? In his description of the Tauropolian pannychis, Menander implies that the sexes remained segregated, each restricted to its own activity: the men carouse (504–508) while the women and girls dance; illicit mingling brings the expected consequences when a drunken Charisios, alone, intrudes on the women at their pannychis and rapes Pamphile after she wanders off, also alone, from the female group (486–87). But here we should suspect that dramatic fiction has gotten the upper hand on historical reality. As Parker argues for private pannychides, drinking men and dancing women at the historical Tauropolia probably did not remain completely separate. At the least we could expect that the gathered men openly watched the female choruses perform, even if they did not mingle with the girls at close quarters.45

The presence of torches in the Brauronian iconography might indicate that female choroi performed there at night.46 Men attended the Brauronia, and it seems a reasonable assumption that arrangements at the festival’s pannychis may have been close to those at the Tauropolia: dancing women and carousing men, segregated but by no means entirely separate.47 Even if some parts of the arkteia were conducted entirely out of the sight of men, the choroi of the Brauronia conceivably had a general, gender-mixed audience.48

44. For Pamphile’s characterization as ideal aristocratic chorus leader, see Bathrellou 2012: 171–72. Whether the girls she led were of comparable social status depends on how exactly we take Habrotonon’s claim ἄντι ἃτομον νεῖπαιζον (477). Since the verb παίζειν usually means “dance” in festive contexts, this young woman of non-Athenian and servile status could mean she danced on near-equal footing with the likes of Pamphile. Yet Habrotonon may simply be using νεῖπαιζον to emphasize her following point, that, despite the fact she is now a courtesan, she was still a virgin at the time of the last Tauropolia. That is, she did not actually dance as a chorus member, but since she was present at the dancing (as hired help), supplied the music for it, and, most importantly, was as sexually inexperienced as the dancers, she notionally “danced along” with the others.

45. The iconographical record suggests that only female musicians (such as Habrotonon) accompanied female choruses in Classical Athens. Attic vase paintings of the sixth and seventh centuries, however, routinely show women dancing to music supplied by male musicians. The change is well illustrated by the choral scenes on the two pyxides from Brauron discussed above (figs. 1 and 2): the one from the sixth century has a male aulete, the other, from the later fifth century, a female aulete.


47. Cf. Perlman 1983: 127. Trygaeus and his slave in Aristophanes’ Peace discuss the theoria to Brauron as an opportunity for drunken fun (874), which presumably continued at the festival itself.

48. So ibid. 126–27; Parker 2005: 230–31 leans toward this view as well, if with less certainty. The fact that some (but not all) of the dancing and running girls on the krateriskoi are naked does, however, give pause, since the public display of naked citizen girls would surely violate Classical Athenian norms of decency. (Plato’s vision of semi-naked choruses of male and female youths in the ideal city of the Laws (771e–772a) is part Spartan romance, part utopian fantasy.) One way to explain the naked images is to follow Hamilton 1989: 459–60 in distinguishing a “public penteteric festival from a private, purely female ritual” celebrated at Brauron every year and accordingly conjecture that choruses at the open-attendance Brauronia were clothed, while girls danced nude at the yearly, restricted arkteia. Ferrari 2002: 175 offers an alternative solution to the problem: the nude images represent mythical choruses who once danced at Brauron, while historical participants in the arkteia would have been clothed; cf. n.32 above.
In western Attica, women’s dancing for Demeter and Persephone comes to the fore. According to the testimony of Plutarch that was discussed in the Introduction, female choruses featured in the cult of Demeter Thesmophoros on Cape Kolias, in the deme Halimous. There it is “the leading women (τὰς πρώτας γυναῖκας) of the Athenians” (Sol. 8.4) who celebrate the rites of the goddess, and this suggests that, as at Brauron and Halai, choral culture at Kolias was likely the preserve of the elite.\(^\text{49}\) Plutarch’s testimony concerns the early sixth century, and its anecdotal details are suspect, but there is little reason to doubt that women danced for Demeter at Kolias in the Classical period. In Aristophanes’ Lysistrata, produced in 411 BC, Lysistrata says of her absent female comrades, “If someone had summoned them to a Bacchic rite (baccheion), or to Pan’s shrine, or to Kolias, or to the shrine of Genetyllis, you wouldn’t have been able to get through the throngs of tambourines (tympana)” (1–3).\(^\text{50}\) “Kolias” here almost surely refers to the shrine of Aphrodite Kolias, with whom the twin birth divinities, the Genetyllides, were also worshiped (Ar. Clouds 52, Pausanias 1.1.5). But if Athenian women were still at the end of the fifth century traveling to Kolias to worship Aphrodite—apparently in some musical capacity—it is a reasonable assumption that they also danced there for Demeter.

There is richer evidence for female choruses in connection with the celebration of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Plut. Alc. 34.3, a passage narrating events of the later fifth century BC, refers to χορεύατα that were performed on the Sacred Way from Athens to Eleusis during the procession of Iacchus, in which female initiates traveled alongside males. Choral performance continued to be part of this procession well past Plutarch’s own time. In a decree of ca. 220 AD concerning the ephebic escort of the procession, ephebes are granted permission to “share in the paeans on the road” (IG II² 1078.29–30). Neither Plutarch nor the inscription indicates whether, or in what capacity, girls and women sang and danced en route to Eleusis, and neither can be taken as reliable testimony for practices of the Classical period. Contemporary, though still ambiguous, evidence comes by way of Aristophanes’ Frogs. In the parodos (316–459), which looks to be a comically distorted version of the sacred procession, since the comic chorus enters singing the “Iacchus hymn” (316–20; cf. 399–403), the chorus mentions glimpsing the temporarily exposed breast of a girl who is their συμπαιστρία (411–15). If we take συμπαιστρία to mean “fellow dancer,” then it might suggest that women and girls danced alongside, or in mixed choruses with, male pilgrims. But the word could simply refer to a girl taking part in the festive parade, not one actively engaged in processional choreia.

Less ambiguous is the evidence for Eleusis itself. Pausanias says that at Kallichoron, the “well of fair choruses” located just outside the entrance to the Eleusinian sanctuary, “the women of the Eleusinians first established a choros and

\(^{49}\) Cf. Dillon 2002: 111. The cult of Aphrodite at Kolias is included in a catalogue of typically aristocratic signifiers at Ar. Clouds 52.

\(^{50}\) This translates the MS text ἢ πι Κωλιάδ ἢ ζ Γενετύλλιδος, printed by Henderson 1987. Sommerstein 2007, Wilson in the OCT, and Henderson 2000 adopt Wilamowitz’s εἰς Γενετύλλιδος, yielding “... or to Genetyllis’ shrine at Kolias.”
sang for the goddess.”

51 From allusions in Sophocles’ *Antigone* (1146–53), Euripides’ *Ion* (1074–86), and Aristophanes’ *Frogs* (440–53)—all passages from dramatic choral songs—we gather that girls and women sang and danced at Kallichoron during the *pannychis* that capped the procession of Iacchus.52 These choral performances, separate from the secret initiatory rites and enacted outside the sanctuary itself, may have been open to public viewing by audiences of men and women, the initiated and uninitiated alike, though the literary sources are not entirely clear about this.53 The visual record yields one potential piece of evidence relevant to spectatorship: the pediment of the terracotta pinax dedicated at Eleusis around 370 BC by a woman named Ninnion, which depicts what is very likely a scene from the *pannychis* (fig. 3). In the center, a woman dances to music provided by a female aulete; dancer and musician are flanked by males, a youth on the left, who faces away from the dancing, and an older, bearded man and another youth on the right, both of whom seem to watch the performance.

It is uncertain who exactly danced at Kallichoron. Pausanias’ testimony could be read to indicate that the choruses were traditionally stocked by daughters of old Eleusinian families. Those affiliated to one of the two clans that oversaw the Mysteries, the Eumolpidai, are appealing candidates, since the very name of their ancestor, Eumolpus, bespeaks expertise in *molpê*, choral song and dance.54 But we should not rule out the possibility that initiates traveling from other demes of Attica (and indeed Greece at large) took part as well, though that poses certain logistical questions concerning training and preparation, as choruses typically had to rehearse as a team—one could not simply join in on the spot. We might conjecture the existence of theoric choruses.

51. The Kallichoron well was probably the same as the Partheneion, the Maiden Well, where Demeter in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* first rests upon arriving in Eleusis (99). This name too points to choral dance (by *parthenoi*). See discussion and sources in Richardson 1974: 326–28. For the epithet καλλίχορος in Athenian tragedy, see Henrichs 1996: 51.

52. Cf. Csapo 2008: 267–69. Choruses at Kallichoron may be aetiologized already in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. During Demeter’s epiphany, she tells the Eleusinians to build her temple “above Kallichoron,” where in the future they will ritually propitiate her (270–74); following the epiphany, the women of the house of Celeus “all the night (*παννύχια*) attempted to propitiate the glorious goddess, trembling in fear (*παλλόμεναι*)” (292–93). The verb πάλλω has, in Attic comedy at least, happy choral connotations (Ar. *Lys.* 1304; *Thesm.* 985, where it describes the orchestic leaps of a female chorus for Demeter). These lines could thus be read as a coded reference—like much in the *Hymn*—to Eleusinian ritual activity: mythical fear and awe have been transmuted to choral joy in cult. Cf. Richardson 1974: 256. Tiverios 2008: 128–29 believes that a scene on an Attic black-figured Siana cup from ca. 560–550 BC (London BM 1906, 12–15.1) depicting five women and a nude male youth, wrists linked in choral configuration, may represent dancing at Eleusis. Cf. n.81 below.

53. At *Frogs* 445–46, the male chorus leader seems to take leave of his male colleagues by proclaiming, “I will go with the women and girls to where they celebrate a *pannychis* for the goddess, to bring the sacred torch.” Dover 1993: 68 is surely right that these words are full of sexual innuendo, hinting at the “opportunities a female all-night festival affords to an enterprising male,” but this need not mean that men were in reality barred from the Eleusinian *pannychis* (or routinely engaged in sexual opportunism while in attendance). At *Ion* 1074–77, the chorus feels shame at the thought of the uninitiated Ion watching the night dancing at Kallichoron, but given the chorus members’ hostility toward Ion, their feelings should not be taken as indicative of any real-world prohibitions on spectatorship. Cf. Csapo 2008: 269.

54. On the poetry attributed to Eumolpus, see Richardson 1974: 79, 183. At *Cic. De leg. 2.35*, *Iacchus Eumolpidiaeque* are made synonymous with the Eleusinian *sacra nocturna*. 
of sorts to Kallichoron: non-Eleusinian female initiates (and prospective initiates) banded together into choruses in their home communities and (privately) trained in advance of the pilgrimage to Eleusis. Alternatively, we might imagine a core of epichoric Eleusinian choruses performing in a formal capacity at the pannychis, while the women and girls who had made the procession from Athens celebrated too with dance and music, but in a less organized and collective fashion.55

55. There is also the related question of the dancers’ socioeconomic status. We should expect that, in keeping with the egalitarian ethos of the Mysteries, women of all social classes were free to celebrate the pannychis, even slaves and hetairai. (It has been debated whether Ninnion was a wealthy hetaira; cf. Tiverios 2008: 130; Bremmer 2012: 376n.4.) Yet choral performance necessitated temporal and financial resources that might presuppose the leading role of families of means.
Athenian women and perhaps girls too danced in choruses outside of Attica. Peter Wilson has demonstrated that while the choral paean for Apollo was greatly overshadowed in Classical Athens by drama and dithyramb, Athenian elites were drawn to practice Apollonian *mousikê* on theoric missions to Delphi and Delos.\(^{56}\) Similarly, Delphi, and perhaps Delos as well, offered the wives and daughters of the Athenian elite opportunities to dance in prestigious international settings abroad.

For Delos, evidence is highly circumstantial, but nevertheless worthy of consideration. At least as early as the François vase (ca. 570 BC), Athenians were familiar with depictions of (and presumably poetic narratives about) Theseus leading his band of noble Athenian girls and boys, the “twice seven,” in choral dance during the Cretan adventure.\(^{57}\) Was it possible that this mythical mixed chorus was re-enacted by companies of Athenian boys and girls in choral performances on Delos? Perhaps. As Wilson observes, the term used to designate the chorus members sent yearly by the Athenians to Delos, ἠἵθεοι “unwed youths” (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 56.3), “is not necessarily incompatible with a mixed *khoros* of male and female adolescents.”\(^{58}\) Further, in regard to Plato *Phaedo* 58a, where Phaedo identifies the theoric ship bound for Delos in 399 BC as the one “in which Theseus once went to Crete leading those ‘twice seven’ (τοὺς ἃ δίς ἐπτά’ ἐκέινους’), Wilson notes that the phraseology “implies two *khoroi*, or rather, a double *khoros*.”\(^{59}\) Xenophon, however, has Socrates suggest that Athenian theoric choruses, in particular “the one sent to Delos,” embody the unrivaled courage and manliness, euandria, of Athens (Mem. 3.3.12–13). This comment would seem to presuppose one single, all-male chorus, but it is unclear whether he is referring specifically to the Thesean ἠἵθεοι, since there were in fact several different Athenian theoric choruses sent to Delos in the fifth and fourth centuries for different festival occasions.\(^{60}\) Xenophon may well have had in mind the penteteric festival on Delos to which Athens sent a *theôria* (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 54.7).

At Delphi, Athenian female *choroi* dance on firmer ground. Pausanias provides solid information about the Attic Thyiades, women, probably of elite status, who every other year journeyed from Athens to Delphi. This *theôria* was apparently marked throughout by *choreia*: en route to Delphi they stopped periodically to dance; once there, they danced alongside a collegial Delphic *thiasos* of Thyiades


\(^{57}\) Hedreen 2011, especially pp. 503–505.

\(^{58}\) Calame 2009: 175 and Parker 2005: 81, who is more skeptical. At Bacch. 17.43, 93, and perhaps 128—depending on whether we take the *kourai* who raise the *ololugê* in 17.125 to refer to the Athenian maidens (cf. Gerber 1982) or to the Nereids—the boys and girls of Theseus’ mythical band are collectively called ἠἵθεοι.

\(^{59}\) Wilson 2000: 329n.198; cf. Calame 2009: 175 and Parker 2005: 81, who is more skeptical. At Bacch. 17.43, 93, and perhaps 128—depending on whether we take the *kourai* who raise the *ololugê* in 17.125 to refer to the Athenian maidens (cf. Gerber 1982) or to the Nereids—the boys and girls of Theseus’ mythical band are collectively called ἠἵθεοι.

\(^{60}\) Cf. Rutherford 2004: 82–86. The traffic in theoric choruses to Delos from Athens and other cities during the Classical period was considerable indeed: Kowalzig 2007: 56–128. Strabo 10.5.2 mentions maiden choruses sent to Delos by communities on the neighboring Cycladic islands; cf. Calame 1997: 104n.46.
on Mt. Parnassus.\(^61\) (Notably, however, there is no indication that they danced in the city of Athens itself.) The discussion of the Attic Thyiades in Pausanias is prompted by curiosity over the application of the epithet *kallichoros* to the Phocian town of Panopeus at Hom. *Od.* 11.581:

\[\text{τὸ ἔτερον δὲ ὅτως ἐξόνθησαν συμβαλέσθαι πρότερον, ἐφ᾿ ὃτι καλλίχορον τὸν Πανοπέα ἔριμε, πρὶν ἡ ἐδιδάχθην ὑπὸ τὸν παρ᾽ Ἀθηναίους καλουμένων Θυιάδων. αἱ δὲ Θυιάδες γυναῖκες μὲν εἰσιν Ἀττικαί, φοιτῶσαι δὲ ἐς τὸν Παρνασσὸν παρὰ ἐτος αὐτὰ τε καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες Δελφῶν ἄγουσιν ἄργα Διονύσωι. ταῦτας ταῖς Θυιάσι κατὰ τὴν ἐξ Ἀθηνῶν ὁδὸν καὶ ἄλλαχον χοροὺς ἱστάναι καὶ παρὰ τὸς Πανοπεῶς καθέστηκε: καὶ ἡ ἐπίκλησις ἢ ἐς τὸν Πανοπέα Ομήρου ὑποσημαίνειν τῶν Θυιάδων δοκεῖ τὸν χορὸν.}

Pausanias 10.4.3

I was unable to understand the former passage, in which Homer mentions Panopeus “of beautiful choroi,” until I was instructed by the women whom the Athenians call Thyiades. The Thyiades are women of Attica. They and the Delphian women go to Parnassus every other year and celebrate rites for Dionysus. It is traditional for these Thyiades to set up choruses at various places, including Panopeus, along the road from Athens. Homer’s epithet for Panopeus seems to refer to the chorus of the Thyiades.

The image of the Thyiades’ dancing that emerges elsewhere in the literary sources suggests its assimilation to that of mythical *thiasoi* of maenads and bacchants in poetry and art: wild, “mad,” more orgiastic revel than composed *choreia*. The very name Thyiades, derived from *θύειν* “rage, rush forward furiously,” implies the sub-chorality of their dance. Thus Pausanias, in another passage (10.6.4), says that the Thyiades are so called because “they rave (*μαίνονται*) for Dionysus.”\(^62\) But in this passage Pausanias seems careful to report that the Thyiades, at least en route to Parnassus, danced in proper *choroi*: note especially the conventional expression *χοροὺς ἱστάναι*, indicating the formal “setting up” or “establishment” of choruses at customary way stations between Athens and Delphi such as Panopeus rather than improvised revels.\(^63\)

Pausanias’ care in emphasizing the organized choral identity of the Thyiades may be due to the fact that it was they themselves who informed him about their practices and traditions (ἐδιδάχθην ὑπὸ τῶν παρ᾽ Ἀθηναίους καλουμένων Θυιάδων).

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62. Cf. Timotheus *PMG* 778b. At *Ant.* 1151–52, Sophocles imagines Dionysus, figured as Iacchus, leading his Delphic Thyiades in dance at the Eleusinian *pannychis*: “they dance for you, Iacchus the steward, raving all through the night” (αἱ μαίνομενα πάννυχοι | χορεύουσι τὸν ταῦταν Ἰακχον). Cf. Csapo 2008: 267. Here, arguably, the novel setting of the Thyiades’ performance prompts the conflation of their characteristic “raving” (μαίνομενα) with more formal *choreia* (χορεύουσι) typical of Kallichoron.

63. Cf. e.g. Pindar *Paean* 2.99; Eur. *Alc.* 1155.
The Thyiades apparently viewed themselves as a *choros* in a most traditional sense, believing that their performances at Panopeus antedated even Homer and inspired his very poetry. This text is in fact remarkable, because it is the only place where we hear real Athenian women (though not of the Classical period) reflecting on, indeed defining, their own choral activity.\(^{64}\)

### 2D WOMEN DANCING BY/FOR THEMSELVES IN THE CITY

The matter of orchestic formality brings us back to women’s dancing in Athens itself, this time at the city’s female-only festivals and at private gatherings of the orgiastic cults in which women were especially prominent. Did women dance for and with one another in “choreographed *choroi*” at the Thesmophoria and the Adonia, or were their song and dance performances at these festivals rather more loose and improvisatory than was typical for organized *choreia*? What of orgiastic rites, in which rhythmic sound and movement apparently played a major part? Such questions are not easy to answer, since the contemporary sources for these events, primarily comedy, are largely unreliable in the matter of the representation of women’s performance.

The *Lysistrata* is a case in point. In the passage from the beginning of the play that was discussed briefly in section 2c, Lysistrata imagines the dense mobs of tambourine-playing women she would expect to encounter gathering for a Bacchic rite or festivals of Pan and Aphrodite (1–3). While percussion instruments, especially the relatively small, handheld clappers called *krotala*, were not entirely foreign to *choreia*, the emphasis on massed *tympana* would seem to indicate musical performances a good deal less formalized than conventional choral song.\(^{65}\) Later (387–98), the misogynistic Proboulos recalls with horror the disruptive shouts and noisy drumming of women worshiping Sabazius, and the dancing woman (ἡ γυνὴ δ’ ὀρχουμένη, 392) who, while drunkenly celebrating the Adonia on an urban rooftop, lamented Adonis with such clamor that she disrupted the civic business in the Assembly. In a well-known piece of invective that recalls the language of Aristophanes’ Proboulos, Demosthenes paints a grotesque portrait of Aeschines “shouting ‘Euoi Saboi!’ and dancing (ἐπορχοῦμενος) to the chants of ‘Hyes Attes! Hyes Attes!’” as he leads daytime processions of orgiastic *thiasoi* devoted to Sabazius and Attis and composed, we may presume, mostly of women (18.260).\(^{66}\) Demosthenes imagines Aeschines being addressed by the “old hags” in the processions as their *exarchos*, a term traditionally applied to a chorus leader, but which he must employ here with deliberately sarcastic incongruity: the

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66. On this and the *Lysistrata* passage, see Reitzammer 2008, who is sensitive to distortions as well as probable *realia* in these representations.
members of these outlandish thiasoi may sing and dance after a fashion, but they are far from making up a respectable processional choros, and Aeschines is no real chorus leader.

Can any evidentiary value be found in caricatures such as these? We saw in the case of Pausanias’ Thyaiades that Athenian women may have defined their own dancing differently from men, and we have no good reason to doubt that the Thyaiades did indeed dance in a more restrained, “established” choral style than a stereotypically excessive Bacchic one. Yet it must have been the case that a good amount of the music and dance involved in Adonis celebrations and female (or predominantly female) orgiastic cults in Classical Athens was at least somewhat like what the literary caricatures make it out to be: percussive, ecstatic, individualistically expressive rather than collectively ordered, and intended to offer neither delight nor entertainment to an external audience. As such, it would have fallen outside the aesthetic canons of choral performance familiar to most ancient Athenians, men and women.

This need not mean, however, that the seemingly uncoordinated group dancing of orgiastic cults—to focus the discussion on these for the time being; we shall return to the Adonia and Thesmophoria below—was perceived to be entirely un-choral. Its participants, as well as its observers (hostile witnesses such as Demosthenes or the Proboulos aside), may well have recognized the implicit affinity of such dancing with choreia proper, since, despite its aesthetically sub-choral appearance, it still expressed, like more organized forms of choreia, the collective identity and intersubjective attunement of the dancing (and worshiping) group. The entrancing pipe-and-percussion music that characteristically induced and accompanied ecstatic dance would only have deepened the latent sense of synchronicity, the feeling shared among the enthusiastic dancers that they were all together purifying themselves and communing with the divine. One might even make the argument that orgiastic cults—and here too we should include the Adonia—appealed to many Athenian women just because their “exotic” rites offered them alternative spaces to experience the musico-kinetic bonding they were denied through lack of access to native institutions of civic choreia, and

67. While we should be wary of viewing the wild orchêsis of mythical maenads (or Bacchic nymphs) in Athenian vase paintings as closely reflecting (or influencing) real women’s ecstatic dancing (though arguments to this effect in Lawler 1927 are still worthy of consideration), the various bending and twisting dance postures struck by members of the mortal, mostly female thiasos (devoted perhaps to Cybele) depicted on a well-known Attic volute krater in Ferrara (Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Spina 2897) perhaps come closer to documentary representation of Athenian women’s dancing in orgiastic cult. Cf. Carpenter 1997: 79; Bundrick 2005: 158–60. It is notable, however, that the ecstatic dance of the bacchai, whether mythical or, in some fashion, real, depicted on red-figured “Lenaia” stamnoi, seems marked by a relative restraint. See Peirce 1998: 70–71, who argues that the dancers are assimilated to the figures of male komasts. Bacchai on earlier black-figured “Lenaia” lekythoi are also depicted moving together with seemingly choric discipline; see e.g. Brussels, Musées Royaux d’Art et d’Histoire A 1311, plates 20a–c in Parker 2005: 307–309.

68. We rely here on the important insights into the conceptual expansiveness of choreia contained in ch. 1 of Olsen 2015, especially her pp. 15–16 on Dionysiac dance as “the best example of the broad and flexible conceptualization of choreia in archaic and classical Greece.” Cf. n.5 above.

The choric aspect of orgiastic dance seems to be acknowledged by Plato, who twice invokes *choreia* in connection with dancing at the Corybantic *teletai*, in which women apparently took a leading role (whether alongside or separately from men we do not know). The frenzied behavior typical of these rites, which aimed at curing psycho-emotional disturbances through homeopathic exposure to intense motion and sound, would hardly suggest Corybantic dancers moved in anything like an organized *choros*. Corybantic cult was in fact a virtual byword for orchestic frenzy.71 However, Plato in the *Euthydemos* has Socrates remark of the enthronement ceremony (*thronôsis*), a preliminary stage of the rites when ministrants danced around a seated initiate, ἐκεῖ *choreia* τίς ἕστι καὶ παιδιά, “there is *choreia* of a sort and playing around” (277d). His language is notably cautious: *choreia* is qualified by τίς, and, though *paizein* traditionally belongs to the lexicon of choral dance, παιδιά might serve in this case as another demoting qualifier.72 But Plato’s very use of *choreia* in his evocation of Corybantic dance is nevertheless telling. This is group dancing—and perhaps also singing, since *choreia* elsewhere for Plato implies song (*Laws* 654b)—that, while not as choreographed (or composed) as *choreia* intended for consumption at a civic festival, nevertheless approximates a recognizable level of choral order.73

*Laws* 790d-e is similarly suggestive. The Athenian Stranger compares mothers who put fussy newborns to sleep through the homeopathic *kinēsis* of constant rocking (ἀεὶ σείνονσαι) and singing “melody of a sort” (τίνα μελωδίαν) to “the women who officiate in the curative rites of the Corybantes” (αἱ περὶ τὰ τῶν Κορυβάντων ἱάματα τελοῦσαι).74 Mothers “charm with the pipe (καταυλοῦσι), as it were, their babies, employing this remedy, a combination of *choreia* and music (μουση), just like the remedies of the wild Bacchic rites.”75 Plato thus describes the rudimentary *kinēsis* performed by mothers, their rocking and melodizing, in the more elaborate terms proper to Corybantic—or rather “Bacchic,” presumably a catch-all here for

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70. Cf. Linforth 1946: 160 on the “perennial human craving for the dance” as a factor in the popularity of the Corybantic rites in Athens, though his comments do not specifically concern Athenian women. For the cathartic pleasure (ἡδονή) brought about by those “sacred melodies” (μουση) that “greatly excite (ἐξεργάζονται) the souls of enthusiasts, see Aristotle *Politics* 8.1342a, presumably referring to women as well as men.

71. See Linforth 1946 for a review of the sources.


73. Dio Chrysostom more straightforwardly than Plato describes a *thronôsis* ceremony as choral: “those performing the rite are accustomed to dance in a circular chorus (κύκλῳ περιφοροῦντα) around the seated initiates” (*Or.* 12.33). But this is not reliable evidence for Classical Athenian practice, nor does Dio make it clear he has Corybantic *thronôsis* specifically in mind. Rouget 1985: 75 thinks Corybantic music was purely instrumental, but there is no definitive proof of this.


75. οἶνον καταυλοῦσι τῶν παιδίων, καθάπερ αἱ τῶν ἐκφρόνων Βακχείων ἱάσεως, ταύτη τῇ τίς κινήσεως ἄμα χορεία καὶ μούση χρώμενα. The emendation αἱ τῶν ἐκφρόνων Βακχείων for MSS ἢ τῶν ἐκφρόνων Βακχείων, recorded already in the Aldine edition of 1513, has been widely accepted. See Linforth 1946: 131–32, on whose interpretation and translation of this passage we depend.
orgiastic rites inducing *katharsis*—ritual performance, that is, *choreia* accompanied by the entrancing music of *auloi*, and perhaps also including song of some kind.

Again, the passage by no means attests to a formal culture of *choreia* in Corybantic cult. In fact, elsewhere in the *Laws* (815c–d), the Athenian Stranger would segregate those forms of “Bacchic *orchêsis*” involving imitations of “Nymphs and Pans and Silens and drunken Satyrs” and performed, like Corybantic dancing, “in purifications and initiatory rites (*teletai)*,” from the official choral culture of Magnesia, in which the moral and civic utility of dance is expressly linked to its musico-somatic order and refinement.\(^76\) But the Stranger’s implicit assumption that Corybantic dance did involve “*choreia* of a sort” nonetheless seems clear enough, and may well reflect a broadly held Athenian consensus, just as the politically and aesthetically “questionable” status (815b) he assigns to orgiastic/Bacchic dancing as a class likely reflects its marginalization in Athens vis-à-vis more officially recognized and orchestically polished varieties of *choreia*.\(^77\)

Moving beyond the relatively esoteric context of the Corybantic and related orgiastic rites, however, we can detect traces of a more polished brand of chorality—trained groups of women singing and dancing in unison to reed or string accompaniment, perhaps in competition—in some comic representations of the higher-profile women’s festivals in Athens, and we might be tempted to suspect that these representations attain to a degree of realism. While the Adonia does seem an unlikely prospect for choral dancing—one frets about roofs caving in under synchronized beating feet—Menander’s *Samia* (39–46) presents a tamer scene of the festival than does *Lysistrata*. The young hero Moschion, describing a *pannychis* of women and girls celebrating the Adonia, says that “they danced”—if ὠρχοῦντες the plural verb could indicate some degree of choral organization (compare the singular ὀρχοῦμενη at Ar. *Lys*. 392). Further, Moschion’s rape of Plangon, one of the girls participating in, and presumably dancing at, the *pannychis*, closely resembles the choral abduction scenario at the Tauropolia described in *Epitrepontes*.\(^78\) The parallelism might imply that Menander (and his audiences) imagined the dancing at this Adonia celebration, at least, as somehow choral. The celebrants’ being “scattered” (ἐσκεδασμένα, 46) across the rooftop and making an uproar (θόρυβος, 44) perhaps speaks against this reading, though here again we might suspect some degree of comic/male bias distorting the picture.\(^79\)

\(^{76}\) Cf. Griffith 2013: 47.

\(^{77}\) Despite Plato’s attempt in the *Laws* to right the gender-imbalanced choral culture of Athens by including women in the state choruses of Magnesia (cf. Folch forthcoming), one suspects that here he retains an Athenian gender bias, and that it was, at least in part, Athenian women’s historically prominent role in orgiastic *orchêsis* of the kind he describes that led him to treat it as a political embarrassment in *Laws*.

\(^{78}\) Cf. Sommerstein 2013: 114.

\(^{79}\) Cf. Parker 2005: 182–83. Moschion’s mention of the “usual *παιδιά* of the festival (*ἰῷρη*)” (41–42) is similarly ambiguous. Habrotonon uses *paizein* of choral dance at *Epitrepontes* 477 (see n.44 above), but in Plato *Euthyd*. 277d, as we saw, it would seem to qualify the strong sense of
There is also an ambiguously suggestive fragment of Cratinus (17 K-A) in which the (unidentified) speaker claims the effeminate poet Gnesippus is hardly worthy of training a chorus “even for the Adonia,” much less the City Dionysia. Does the humor turn on the absurdity of the very idea of formal choruses at the Adonia, or—read more literally—does it attest to their occasional performance there, and even to the possibility of Adonian choral competitions? While the former interpretation seems more probable, we know so little about the actual proceedings of the Adonia that we must acknowledge the latter to be possible.

Choral prospects are considerably better for the Athenian Thesmophoria. As we saw, at Cape Kolias in Halimous, leading women from the city danced in choruses for Demeter Thesmophoros. Why not also during the urban festival? Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae*, set in Athens, contains promising indications that they did. The role of the play’s chorus, women celebrating the Thesmophoria, is itself suggestive, inviting identification between the dramatic chorus singing and dancing in the theater and a women’s ritual chorus at the Thesmophoria. Such identification is explicitly announced by the chorus in lines 947–48: ἄγε νῦν ἡμὲν πάσιμοιν ἀπέρ νόμος ἐνθάδε τασὶ γυναῖξιν, | ὅταν ὅργα σεμνὰ θεαίς ἱερὰς ἱεραὶς ἀνέχομεν, “Come now, let us sport (dance) as is the custom for women in this place, when we faithfully celebrate the holy secret rites of the Two Goddesses at the sacred seasons” (trans. Sommerstein 1994, adapted). The vividly deictic and self-enjoining performative language of these anapestic verses is characteristic of cult hymns; the choral song they introduce (949–1000), as well as its shorter sequel (1136–59), are also marked throughout by such language. Both of these songs likely allude to the hymns that would have been performed—or that Aristophanes and his male audience imagined would be performed—by choruses singing and dancing at the Thesmophoria. 80

The choral mimesis apparently assumed a choreographic dimension as well. The chorus sing:

chorēia. Parker 1996: 162 reads Moschion’s παιδία as a comment on what Athenian men saw as the “frivolity” of the Adonia. In any case, the word suggests a distinction between festive dancing at the Adonian *pannychis* and the threnodic performance of the Adonis song for which the festival was otherwise known (cf. Parker 2005: 284, Dillon 2002: 165). Yet we should probably not entirely dissociate the latter from *chorēia*. The description of the Adonia at Lys. 389–98, set during the daytime while the Assembly meets (390), presents us with a dancing woman noisily lamenting Adonis in a general context of unruly behavior. Disorderly abandon is clearly implied, but it is likely that the Adonis song could be performed in a more formally musical and collectively choreographed fashion, with lamentatory gestures executed in a stylized and aesthetically regimented manner. Plutarch speaks of mock funeral processions for Adonis, in which Athenian women beat their breasts and sang *thrênoi* (*Vit. ALC. 18.3; cf. Nic. 13.7*). Sappho 140V, whatever its own initial mode of performance, indicates at the very least that the Adonis song could have been performed chorally. 80

80. See the detailed discussion in Bierl 2009.
βαίνε καρπαλίμοιν ποδοῖν. ἐπισκοπεῖν δὲ πανταχῇ κυκλούσαν ὁμία χρή χοροῦ κατάστασιν.
Ar. Thesm. 953–58

Get started, get moving, move lightly on your feet into a circle, join hand to hand, set the rhythm of the dance (choreia) in motion, step it with nimble feet! And our choral formation must turn an eye every way and look everywhere.

Text and trans. Sommerstein 1994

While a rectangular formation was likely the default for comic choruses, performative self-injunctions such as these suggest that the chorus of the Thesmophoriazusae assumed the circular, ring formation typical of female cultic choreia, with each dancer holding the wrists of fellow dancers on either side, while singing its stylized Thesmophoric hymns. Aristophanes thus audibly and visibly transforms the theatrical orchestra into the Thesmophorian dancing grounds. The male audience members would not have been permitted to view those grounds in reality, as the chorus reminds them (1150–51), but they must have known they existed, and that women danced there in the round, for this imaginative transformation to have had dramatic force.

3 THE REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHORUSES IN ATHENIAN TEXTS

Once one steps away from the high-profile civic festivals where male choreia dominates, one finds female choruses with considerable frequency and in a range of scenarios. This, we argue, is the overarching conclusion one has to draw from the material discussed in the earlier sections. If one considers the fundamental place choral dance had in Greek life, such a conclusion should not be surprising. The reason it nevertheless runs against mainstream views lies of course in the nature of the evidence. Almost each of the sources we discussed can be interpreted differently, and our case is to a degree cumulative: even if the significance of some individual texts (and images) that we adduced is challenged, there are too many to discard them all.

The time has come to address the issue of the evidence head on in a dedicated section. The aim is partly to strengthen our case for widespread female choral activity by defending our use of what is often thin evidence. We shall try to demonstrate that Athenian texts are consistently elusive in their treatment of female choruses.

81. Cf. Csapo 2008: 281–83. Dancing for Demeter and Persephone at Kallichoron was circular: Ar. Frogs 440–41, with Csapo 269n.31. Ashmole 1946 argues that the dancing women shown clasping hands on a cup from ca. 560 BC represent a Thesmophoric chorus; the naked youth who brings up the rear is in his view the pais amphithalês whose presence on the third day of the festival, Kalligeneia, is attested in literary sources. Cf. n.52 above.
The reasons are a matter of speculation (and we shall offer some considerations below), but the systematic tendency is, we believe, beyond doubt, and justifies our piecing together of a puzzle from very small pieces. The evidence is sparse not simply because female choruses are sparse but because they leave few traces.

Closely related is a second aim. As we look at the elusive tendencies in our record, we bring into view questions of representation. Because the thorny question of how much women actually danced in Athens has dominated the debate, the equally interesting question of how their dancing is imagined in literary texts has received less attention. The representation of female choruses in Athens deserves its own dedicated study; this section tries to provide an initial sketch.

The thread of elusiveness has run through the whole of section 2. The etiology of the “twice seven” of the Phaedo, the various distorted female choruses in comedy: they all cause frustration by leaving much unsaid. A particularly good example is the Heraclidae passage from section 2a (pp. 47–8), in which the pairing with the male choruses highlights representational strategies for female dancing. Not only are the women’s performances evoked by feet and sounds alone; in addition, they are sub-choral compared to their male peers. The young men are performing what are evidently choruses, νέων τ’ ἀοιδαὶ χορὸν τε μολπαί, while the parthenoi produce ὀλολύγματα. The youths sing, while the girls “stamp” the ground and their cries “resound” (ἰαχεῖν). The verb ἱαχεῖν can certainly be used of musical performance, and ποδῶν κρότοισιν indicates dance, but it is clear that Euripides presents the performance of the parthenoi as less musical and less formal than that of their male colleagues.

We met sub-choral representations of female dancing elsewhere. At a linguistic level, it is notable that the term choros, while not systematically avoided, is not on the whole favored in descriptions of female group performance. Nowhere near half our passages use the terms χωρός, χορεῖα, χορεύειν, etc. And at a conceptual level, we saw the characterization of female performing groups as unruly and noisy, especially but not only at the women-only festivals. In fact, as discussed above, in several of the passages we just listed, the label choros does not prevent the depiction of a performance that is informal, unchoreographed, or even wild—or vice versa. A particularly good example is Sophocles’ as well as Pausanias’ treatment of the Thyiaides (pp. 65–7). Both authors refer to the women as a choros yet also as maddened. Similarly, Plato (pp. 69–70) uses choral language for Corybantic dances while making it clear that he regards them as several notches down from a properly structured civic chorus.

Again and again it is impossible to disentangle representation and reality with confidence. Parker concludes his discussion of female choruses in Athens as follows: “All Athenian girls danced, no doubt. But, except for the minority who served as arktoi, there was perhaps no organized world of the chorus.”

82 Parker 2005: 183.
broadly we, or our ancient sources, define “chorus.” But discrepancies like those in the characterization of the Thyiades, or between otherwise symmetrical male and female performers in the *Heracleidae* passage, give one confidence that what one is dealing with is not *just* realities but also matters of representation and conceptualization.

Representation as something less than fully choral is the most important but not the only tendency that makes female choruses elusive in our Athenian sources. Another is their characterization as *somehow foreign and in particular Spartan*. As is often pointed out, Athenians associated female choruses with Sparta, an association that is probably fed both by genuine knowledge of the prominent role girls’ and women’s choruses played in Laconian festivals and by Sparta’s reputation in Athens as a society which imposed fewer restrictions on female modes of expression and behavior.\(^{83}\) The Alcman-like song at the end of *Lysistrata* is sung by a Spartan and teems with Spartan references (1296–1315).\(^{84}\) Similarly, the setting is Sparta when the chorus of *Helen*, in a stanza that is something like the tragic equivalent of the *Lysistrata* passage, imagines how Helen will meet the daughters of Leukippos, “after a long time joining them in their choruses or in the *kômoi* of Hyakinthos for nighttime merrymaking” (χρόνωι ξυνελθοῦσα χοροῖς ἢ κόμοις Ὅαικρίνθου νύχιον ἔχωροσῶν, 1468–70).\(^{85}\)

Interestingly, some texts go beyond imagining female choruses as far away, and cast Athens’ own female choruses as foreign in one way or other. Athena’s *deus ex machina* speech in *Iphigenia in Tauris* is unusually rich in aetiologies, even by Euripides’ own standards. Much of the detail is at odds with what we otherwise know about the rituals, or in any case uncorroborated, and it is likely that Euripides is blending traditional material with new inventions and interpretations.\(^{86}\) This is certainly the case with what we will now argue is an *aition* for Artemis’ female Attic choruses. After some ten lines on the Tauropolia rites which are to be instituted by Orestes and are etymologically related to the Taurians, she turns to *Iphigenia* and to Brauron:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{σὲ δ’ ἀμφὶ σεμνὰς, Ἰῃγένεια, λείμακας} \\
\text{Βραυρωνίας δὲὶ τῆδε κλημὸδουχεῖν θεῖαν} \\
\text{οὐ καὶ τεθάνη καταθανοῦσα, καὶ πέπλων} \\
\text{ἄγαλμα σοι θήσουσι εὐτήνους ύπας,} \\
\text{ἀς ἂν γυναίκες ἐν τόκοις ψυχορραγεῖς} \\
\text{λίπωσ’ ἐν ὀίκοις, τάσει δ’ ἐκπέμπειν χθονὸς}
\end{align*}
\]

84. Cf. n.29 above.
85. On this passage see Mumaghan 2013: 167–68; for a broader discussion of musical imagery in the play, including the evocation of Spartan dance-rituals, see Weiss forthcoming: ch. 4.
Ἑλληνίδας γυναῖκας ἐξεφίεμαι γνώμης δικαίας οὐνεκ’.

Eur. IT 1462–69

You, Iphigenia, are to serve the goddess as key-keeper in the holy meadows of Brauron. There you will also be buried when you die, and people will dedicate to you the fine-textured woven clothes which women who have given up their lives in childbirth leave in their homes. And I instruct you to bring these women of Greece out of this country because of their righteous judgment.

Trans. Cropp 2000

 Appropriately in a play about Iphigenia, top billing goes to Iphigenia’s own future cult, but the women of the chorus, who served her in the land of the Taurians, are not forgotten. They are to be released from captivity and to return to Greece, Athena stipulates. In the process, she helps herself to a heavy dose of the vagueness that customarily enshrouds female choruses. She does not make it clear whom she is addressing: Iphigeneia seems most likely, since she has been addressed immediately before, but some scholars opt for Orestes, who is addressed in the lines that follow, or even Thoas. More important for our purposes, the destination of the chorus is also left unspecified, a lack of specificity that has led to a debate over whether they are returning to their respective homes in various parts of Greece or are following Iphigenia to Brauron. 87

More than many, this aetiology relies on allusion, but an aetiology it clearly is. For Athenian audiences, parthenic choruses at Brauron and the Tauropolia were a reality. It is hard to see how that reality would not shape their response to a statement about the future in Greece of a chorus of unmarried women (παρθένων, 130) which follows hard on the heels of a passage about cult at Brauron. Everything else in the context is aetiological, and everything else in the context is about Attica. The chorus is a chorus in the service of Artemis, and the priestess of Artemis who has been their leader is installed as a cult figure at Brauron, conveyed there by her brother who himself will be the founder of cult at Halai. In the most circumstantial of ways, Euripides provides an unmistakable reference to contemporary female choreia at Brauron and perhaps Halai.

This is yet another passage, then, in which otherwise well-documented Athenian female choruses are talked about elusively. At the same time, it is a passage in which what we know are Athenian female choruses are made half-foreign by

87. For details of the debate, see Cropp 2000: 60 and ad loc. and Kyriakou 2006 ad loc. For a combination of reasons some editors print a lacuna after οὐνεκ’. Among recent editors see Cropp, Kovacs in the Loeb, and Sansone 1981 (Sansone placing the lacuna before γνώμης). Diggle in the OCT and Kyriakou 2006 consider the text complete. The matter is relevant here only in so far as our argument suggests that the vagueness about the chorus’ future itself is not a reason for positing a lacuna. (Cropp loc. cit. suggests the lacuna contained clarification of the chorus’ future; by contrast Kovacs 2000: 22–23 suggests the lost text justified the reference to righteous judgment.)
being given a non-Athenian ancestry. As far as IT is concerned, the first females to dance at Artemis’ Attic festivals came from abroad. Where, precisely, Euripides has them born is debated. According to the opening song, they “left the ramparts and towers of horse-rich Greece, and Europe with its lushly wooded pastures, site of our ancestral home” (Ἑλλάδος εὐίππου πύργου καὶ τείχη χόρτων τ’ εὐδένδρων ἔξωλλάξας’ Ἐυρώπαιον, πατρώων οἴκων ἔδρας, 132–36). “Greece” is in line with Athena’s equally unspecific Ἑλληνίδας γυναῖκας, but Ἐυρώταν has sometimes been emended to Ἐυρώταν, which would add the chorus of IT to the long list of girls’ choruses from Sparta. Either gives good sense, and the difference for our argument is minimal. What matters here is not whether the women come from Greece in general or Sparta in particular, but that one or two of the most important occasions for female choruses in Athens are given a non-Athenian aetiology. Even at Brauron (and possibly at the Tauropolia), the practice of female choreia has a touch of the foreign when pulled into the public world of the City Dionysia.

This attion for Attic Artemisian choruses is not otherwise known and likely to owe something to Euripidean creativity, but it fits the wider pattern we are tracing. A further instance of that pattern, we suggest, is the name “Hyakinthids” that the daughters of Erechtheus are given after death in the Erechtheus passage discussed above (pp. 49–50). This name must have sounded distinctly foreign. Hyakinthos was a major Laconian cult hero; the Hyankinthia, celebrated at his tomb at Amyklai, were one of the chief festivals in the Spartan calendar and of a sufficiently international reputation for Euripides to mention them as the occasion for the kômoi in which Helen will participate (above, p. 74). Religious historians have suggested various ways of accounting for the Erechtheids’ alternative name, some of which posit a preexisting Athenian Hyakinthid cult to which the Erechtheids were attached, possibly to make it more Athenian and possibly only in the second half of the fifth century, but whatever the rationale and the historical process that turned the Erechtheids into Hyakinthids, one cannot get around the Spartan associations of the name, especially so in the context of the notoriously Spartan practice of female choreia. Athena’s declaration, moreover, that the new name should be known “across Greece” (καθ’ Ἑλλάδα, 73) will have drawn attention to its non-Athenian dimension. The upshot of all this is that the girls’ choruses who performed in honor of course the chorus of IT are older than the girls at Brauron. At 1144 they reminisce about how, before their captivity, they sang in choruses at home as parthenoi. However, although called γυναῖκες, they are not married, and in their opening song, which establishes their identity, they describe themselves as participating in parthenic processions here in captivity (ὅσιον πόδα παρθένιον…πέμπω, 130–31; the continuation of this passage is cited in the main text). The age of females at Brauron is uncertain also in another pre-historic account: at Hdt. 6.138 the Pelasgians abduct τὰς Ἀθηναίων γυναῖκας from the festival at Brauron.

88. Thus most recently Diggle, following Hall 1987: 430–33. Cropp, Sansone, Kovacs, and Kyriakou keep the MS text.

90. Parthenoi were at the center of the procession from Sparta to Amyklai on the second day. See Polycr. FGrH 588 F1 = Athen. 4.139d–f; Calame 1997: 174–85; Pettersson 1992: 38–41.

91. See most recently Sourvinou-Inwood 2011: 105–108, with references to earlier contributions to the debate.
of the Erechtheids, at the Panathenaia or elsewhere, bore a Spartan-sounding cult name.

Athenian female choruses, we have seen, are elusive in Athenian texts and images. They are only hinted at, are denied proper choral status, are noisy or foreign. Their marginalization in actuality is not just matched but exaggerated by partial visibility in the way they are represented. Interestingly, this concealment is itself foregrounded in a third and final recurring theme that may be traced in the textual as well as visual record of Classical Athens: the representation of female choruses as elusive (and thus all the more enticing) objects of men’s erotic fascination.92

The best-known case is *Thesmophoriazusae*, an entire play centered on men spying on women and their ritual practices, but variations on the topos occur frequently. Menander, we saw, employs the traditional theme of abduction from the chorus as a plot device in several works, and the same motif appears in various “historical” anecdotes. *Bacchae*, too, plays on the motif of the male voyeur who illicitly observes female choruses. Throughout the play, Dionysus’ cult and the women’s activity on the mountain are characterized in choral terms (21, 63, 190, 195, 205, 207, 220, 324, 482, 511, 1143), and are represented on stage by the chorus of Eastern bacchants. Both messenger speeches picture scenes of men secretly watching this activity. The first messenger and his fellow herdsmen observe the women’s dances, described in choral as well as sub-choral language (677–730, *choros* at 680, 682), and the second messenger reports Agave’s exhortation when she spots the spying Pentheus: “Come, standing round in a circle take hold of the stem, maenads, so that we may capture the mounted animal and prevent him from disclosing the god’s secret *choroi*” (1106–1109, trans. Seaford 1996).

Such fantasizing was not limited to texts, but also seems to inform one of the very few fifth-century images of female choral performance that appear on Attic vessels not explicitly connected to weddings or the *arkteia*. The image in question, depicted on an early Classical *astragalos*, renders female *choreia* as something at once erotic, exotic, and altogether alien to mundane Athenian experience (fig. 4). A group of young women, some wearing *sakkoi*, headdresses associated with prostitutes and the East, others transparent chitons that clearly reveal their breasts, appear to levitate above the ground, “dancing on air.”93 The diminutive, emaciated man directing this aerial dance, almost surely not an Athenian citizen, possibly not even Greek, adds a further element of curiosity to this strange and titillating choral fantasy, one perhaps not so far removed from actual Athenian perceptions of female chorality.94

Yet again, such representations blend fact and fiction. On the one hand, it stands to reason that concealment bred fascination. The more female choruses were

92. It is worth noting, of course, that spectatorship of boys’ dancing could likewise present an opportunity for lechery: *Ar. Clouds* 988–89.

93. Hoffmann 1997: 108, who notes the resemblance of the dancers to *hetaira*.

94. For various interpretations of the scene and its figures, see ibid. 110–12 and Ferrari 2008: 2–6.
Fig. 4a and b: London, British Museum E 804, red-figured astragalos, attributed to the Sotades Painter. Photograph © The Trustees of the British Museum.
marginalized, restricted, and hidden away, the more they will have become objects of prurient interest. At the same time, it is obvious that women’s choruses did not always perform in seclusion. In fact, with the exception of female-only festivals, it is likely that they did so very rarely. A good case can be made for (legitimate) male presence at Brauron and the Tauropolia. Representations of erotic fascination with female choreia are thus grounded in reality but are imaginative responses rather than faithful transcriptions.

4 CONCLUSION

This brings us to the end. By way of coda, we offer brief thoughts on two aspects of the subject that we have so far only touched on. One is causes. Why did Athens push female choruses away from the public limelight, and why did Athenian texts (and images) further compound their elusiveness through the manner in which they represented them? Neither question permits of certain answers, certainly not in a few pages, but they are too important to be ignored altogether.

Peter Wilson and Eva Stehle explain the marginalization of female choreia as a product of the particular regimes of gender characteristic of Athenian democratic ideology.95 The choregic system of the democracy focused economic resources and attention on male choruses to the exclusion of female ones. Women’s public lives were more restricted than in earlier centuries, and this restrictiveness extended to civic choreia, which was intimately bound up with the practice and ideology of (exclusively male) citizenship in the Athenian polis. As Stehle puts it, “The democracy had the effect of suppressing women’s public appearances because democratic ideology was inimical to women’s self-presentation as representatives of the community.”

A further explanation for the sidelining of female choreia in Classical Athens—one not exclusive of, but rather complementing the restriction of women’s public activity by the democracy—may be found in its traditionally aristocratic associations, at home and abroad. There is general agreement that the more high-profile and elaborate female choruses in Archaic Greek cities such as Sparta and Thebes were drawn from aristocratic families with the means to fund their training and production, and that choral performance by women and girls, beyond any immediate religious and pedagogical functions it might have had, was a conspicuous public expression of the socioeconomic preeminence, cultural prestige, and political leadership of the dancers’ husbands and fathers. Choral dancing was not necessarily a prerogative of the elite, but costly display at public festivals after weeks of rehearsal almost certainly was.

95. Stehle 1997: 117–18 (from where the quotation is taken); cf. 60; Wilson 2000: 40–42.
Archaic Athens is unlikely to have been much different in this. Female choreia, at least of the more elaborate and public variety, was presumably an incidental victim, if not a direct target, of the democratic reforms of Cleisthenes, which sought to reduce aristocratic influence over the polis, and of his tribal restructuring of the Athenian citizen body, in which the dithyrambic competitions of men and boys played such a major organizational role. The competitive desires of the aristocratic elite for public recognition were put in service to the state, through the institution of leitourgical dithyrambic and dramatic chorégia. In this democratized, semi-professionalized, and accordingly masculinized choral culture, female choreia would have lost much of its previous allure as a means for elite families to display their prestige, and indeed, as the fifth century wore on, it may have been increasingly viewed by the dēmos as an aristocratic affront, politically suspicious, even anti-democratic. 96 (The close association of parthenic choruses with Sparta would only have played into this view.)

Wealthy families of course continued to advertise their prestige in the democratic city by displaying wives and daughters in prominent positions in state religion. 97 And music, as the iconographical record amply demonstrates, continued to play an important role in the domestic paideia and leisure time of Athenian girls and women. 98 In this general context, we can make sense of the persistence of female choreia at private urban gatherings and female-only festivals, and at sanctuaries on the Attic margins and abroad—under the demotic radar, as it were. At these sites, we saw, it was largely cultivated by the Athenian elite, for whom it must still have held some social and cultural value, despite, and in some cases perhaps just because of, its having been devalued by the dēmos.

Such a class-based account of what happened to actual female choreia in Athens may with some justice be expanded to apply to the way female choreia was represented. Our Athenian texts were written by and for men, and many of them were performed at the very occasions at which the democracy celebrated itself. They are part of the ideological system that encouraged the exclusion of

96. Nagy 1994–1995: 46–47 and Wilson 2000: 13–14 detect in “Old Oligarch” Constitution of the Athenians 1.13 (“the dēmos has done away with those who participate in athletics here and practice mousikê (τὴν μουσικὴν ἐπιτηδεύοντας), because it does not consider it to be worthy”) a reference to popular hostility to aristocratic choral performance concomitant with the rise of the democratizing chorégia the text explicitly criticizes. If so, the “Old Oligarch” presumably has aristocratic male choruses foremost in mind—the masculine participle indicates as much—but perhaps female choreia is implicit as well. One could also compare the Solonian laws on funerary mourning, which may have been aimed as much at limiting aristocratic display as inhibiting women’s public performance of lament. See Blok 2006: 197–99 for a summary of recent views (though she attributes religious rather than sociopolitical motives to the laws).

97. Dillon 2002: 212 speaks of the “static roles” played by aristocratic girls in Athenian religion—and, we would add, silent roles—their public appearance being characterized by the movement of stately procession rather than choral dance and song.

98. See Bundrick 2005: 92–102; Voutira 1991. A particularly complex case are “dancing-school scenes,” depicted on a number of fifth-century pots, which have been variously interpreted as education for citizen girls and training of prostitutes; see Lewis 2002: 29–33.
these choruses from public life, and it stands to reason that they replicate the
class and gender biases of this ideology by giving limited visibility to choruses.
In support, it is worth noting that three of the very few pieces of evidence that
buck the trend and unequivocally represent female Athenian choruses stand
outside the system. One is the hexameter piece by the ultra-aristocrat Critias. It
is tempting to explain his celebration of Anacreon’s “pre-democratic” girls’
choruses as another of the countercultural provocations for which he is known:
the one thing one can be sure about with Critias is that he will not be expressing
views sanctioned by the democracy. 99 Secondly, there is Pausanias’ (post-classical)
report of what the Thyiad performers told him—a (purported) women’s view. And
something similar applies, thirdly, to the krateriskoi and pyxides from Brauron and
the lebêtes gamikoi and loutrophoroi, which give us unusually clear evidence for
female choruses, arguably because they are not produced for consumption in the
same kind of public context as the largely more mediated, allusive, or incidental repre-
sentations in Attic drama.

Our second afterthought concerns Athenian exceptionality. This article has
shared a basic assumption of earlier scholarship on the topic of female choruses:
what limitations there were on female choreia in Athens mark Athens out as different.
Elsewhere, experts agree, female choruses flourished more or less unchecked. We
have no intention to mount a fundamental challenge to this view, but it is worth noting
that attention to the various ways in which Athens hid away its female choruses—in
reality and representation—has brought into view certain continuities with practices
elsewhere.

Above all, female choruses appear to be creatures of the night throughout Greece.
Particularly well known is the case of Alcman’s Louvre partheneion, which has
suggested a pre-dawn setting to most of it interpreters. Torches are standard in
representations of weddings. The Theban Pindar, possibly with reference to mystery
cult, sings of “the Mother, to whom, along with Pan, the maidens often sing before
my door at night” (Pyth. 3.77–79) and opens Pyth. 11 with a nighttime setting for
female song. Already Hesiod’s Muses, the ur-chorus of women, descend from Helicon
wrapped in nocturnal mist (Th. 9–10).

The motif of abduction from the chorus treated so richly by Menander is by no
means Athenian in origin. In the Iliad, Hermes sleeps with Polymele after watching
her dance (16.179–92), and in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, Hades abducts
Persephone who “sports” with her female companions (παίζομεν, 425). The topos
appears in several Spartan stories, including the abduction of Helen by Theseus,
and examples could be multiplied. 100 When Athenian men pruriently treated female

99. See n.18 above for Critias’ anti-democratic ideology. As Folch forthcoming shows, the insti-
tution of female choreia is an important item in the critique of democracy in Plato’s Laws, which
“offers not only a rejection of Athenian choral practice, but the restoration of an archaic model of aris-
tocratic song culture, in which chorality operates as a public forum for women’s performance of self.”
choruses as occasions for male intrusion into a female world, they were developing a long-standing theme.

A further point of continuity with choral cultures beyond Athens may lie behind the handling of this theme in Athenian texts. Elsewhere, the irresistible allure of mythical and legendary “prima ballerinas” found a rationalized real-world correlate in the institutionalized display of choral performance by young women before young men for the purpose of matchmaking and, ultimately, communal reproduction. There is (late) testimony, for instance, that on Ceos and in Sparta parthenoi sang and danced on certain occasions before an audience of potential suitors.\(^{101}\)

While there is no explicit evidence for any arrangement like this in Athens, it is conceivable that the images of sexual transgression in the literary (and largely comic) representations may well mask the reality of Athenian female choral performance as a supervised, controlled opportunity for matchmaking, especially among the daughters and sons of the social elite. After all, Menander’s sensationalistic choral abduction scenarios uniformly have a more prosaic result: marriage and the birth of legitimate citizens. While it is unlikely that young Athenians of the upper classes would normally have assaulted citizen girls such as Pamphile as they celebrated the Tauropolitan pannychis, a real-life Charisios, like his peers in other poleis, may well have first glimpsed his future wife as she danced in a chorus on such an occasion.\(^{102}\)

The assumption of Athenian exceptionality is fundamentally unassailable but requires careful circumscription on both sides. Not only did Attic women, too, dance in a broad range of settings, but even in so far as they were shunted out of the limelight they still have something in common with their peers elsewhere. Female choreia in Athens is not a topic for clear-cut conclusions, but (we would like to think) all the more fascinating for it.

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102. Cf. the relevant remarks in Bathrellou 2012: 177–78. Bundrick 2005: 183 offers a complementary interpretation of the name vase of the Villa Giulia Painter, a calyx krater from ca. 460 BC (Rome, VG 909), that depicts a chorus of ten young women and a female aulos player: the image may have been “intended for a sympotic audience of marriageable young men, showing them the kinds of citizen girls they would be destined to wed.” A similar intention and viewing context could be mooted for the parthenic choros depicted dancing at an altar on a white-ground phiale of ca. 450–440 BC (Boston, MFA 65.908). As Ferrari 2002: 43 notes, this chorus performs—on what occasion we do not know—in a space surrounded by a walled enclosure, and so presumably obscured from public view; the wool basket (kalathos) placed by the altar may underline both the concealed domesticity of the scene as well as the nubile allure of the dancers. Cf. Bundrick 2005: 181; Lissarrague 1992: 184.
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