

Dancing through the ages in Greece

A comparative study on Bronze Age-, Classical period- and Folk dancing



Master's Thesis in Classical Archaeology

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Abstract

This thesis has dealt with dancing in the Greek Bronze Age from an anthropological perspective. The main question was whether any similarities in dancing in the Bronze Age through to the Classical period could be seen. By using an archaeological material and modern research on dance in the Classical period and on folk dancing in Greece today, the aim was to easier be able to interpret the Bronze Age material and see similarities between the different periods.

The study has shown that later dancing includes running, fast steps, jumps and turns. The dances and styles of the Classical period and the modern folk dances are in that way very similar. Both men and women took part in these dances. The Bronze Age dancing was performed by young women, the style strong and graceful with focus on arm movements and the s-shaped body posture, something that is missing in later dancing.

The conclusion is that there are no similarities between Bronze Age- and Classical period dancing in Greece. The Bronze Age dancing, at least in the art, seems to have disappeared in the period of unrest in the last phase of the Bronze Age.

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Introduction

This subject, dancing in the Greek Bronze Age, came to me when I was rehearsing my own choreography for a dance class in Bollywood dancing, a mix of traditional Indian dance moves and modern dances. I had recently also taken a class in the pre-history of Greece, mainly the Bronze Age, to freshen up my knowledge in this area which otherwise is easily forgotten since most focus in Classical studies lie on the Classical period and the Romans.

When I'm dancing I feel happy, I keep fit and healthy and I feel more feminine, so I started to think about and wonder why and how people could have been dancing during the Greek Bronze Age. It struck me that I had not during my five years of university studies seen or read anything about this. So I decided that this could be a good subject for a master's thesis. After some research I found that someone already had written a dissertation about this, Senta German, but I did not agree with her on some points so I decided to continue and make my own picture of the Bronze Age dancing. I also took the research a bit further by using analogies from modern research on later dancing in Greece to see whether the dancing in the Bronze Age corresponded to the dancing in later periods.

To dance, I believe, is something fundamental in the human history. By studying dance moves, postures, context and on which occasions dance took place I think it can give a deepened picture on a society, since I believe the society and the culture often is reflected in the dance. Therefore these types of art must not be forgotten and I'm happy to contribute to this still fairly limited field of research in the studies of the pre-history in Greece.

Chronological Table

BC	CRETE	CYCLADES	GREECE	EGYPT	
					DYNASTY
3000					II
2800	E M I	E C I	E H I	ARCHAIC	III
2600					IV
2500				OLD KINGDOM	V
2400	E M II	E C II	E H II		VI
2300					
2200					
2100	E M III	E C III	E H III	1st INTER	VII-X
2000					XI
1900	M M I	M C I	M H	MIDDLE KINGDOM	XII
1800	MMII				
1700					2nd INTER
1600	M M III	M C III			
1500	LM I A		L H I	NEW KINGDOM	XVIII
	LM I B		L H II		
1400	LM II				
	LM III A		L H III A		
1300	LM III B		L H III B		
1200	LM III C		L H III C		
1100	DARK AGES				
1000				LATE PERIOD	XXI
900					

Figure 1 Chronological table over the Aegean areas during the Bronze Age.

Maps over the Peloponnese and Crete



Figure 2 Map over the major Bronze Age sites on the Mainland.



Figure 3 Map over Crete and the major palaces and villas during the Bronze Age.

Aim

The aim with this master's thesis is to study dance through the ages, from the Bronze Age through the Classical period and up until the folk dancing of today's Greece, to see if any similarities in steps and styles can be seen. It is not impossible that some dances have survived for such a long time, maybe not in its original form, but slightly changed and developed. Some oral traditions like songs, poetry and stories reaches far back in history so why not dance? Even our Christian traditions and "rituals" have old ancestors from pre-Christian times.

Dance in the Bronze Age is a type of art and phenomenon that has been overlooked by scholars earlier since there is nothing concrete left to find and study of the actual dance since of course it is lost in the same moment it is performed. So far only two works, one dissertation and one article have been written on the subject Bronze Age dancing and both are written by the same author. These were written in 2005 and 2007 by Senta German. When it comes to the Classical period more work on dance has been done since the material is vast and we now have written sources.

By analyzing the frescoes (from the Bronze Age palaces in the Aegean and on the Greek Mainland) and also some minor arts, like signet rings, clay/stone seals, figurines and material such as paintings on vases from the Classical period, I think it is possible to give a better picture of the dancing during the Bronze Age.

My main question is therefore can any similarities in dancing in the Bronze Age through to the Classical period be seen? To reach an answer to the above stated question an identification of typical "dance moves" is needed, a determination of who was dancing and to locate in what situations and environment the dancing took place is another important aspect, again to try to follow the dancing through the history.

Theory and Method

To facilitate finding similarities in the dancing a socio-cultural anthropological approach was applied to see what significance dance has had for past societies and the humans in them and thus give help to see where and what to look for in the chosen material. Ethno-archaeology was also applied, as a part of that, when studying the folk dances in Greece today.

First a frame work was needed to be built up of material believed to be showing dance from the Bronze Age. Some of the material was rather obvious whereas other parts were harder to determine whether it was dance or not. Therefore I also had to make a definition of dance. The material was found by studying literature concerning the Minoans and the various sites of Crete and the Mycenaeans on Mainland Greece, Greek art and the Aegean Bronze Age. The web also came in use when searching for pictorial material.

When the material needed for the study had been collected, the pictorial evidence was analyzed and a description of what can be seen in it was made. A comparative analysis was done with material from the same era (the Bronze Age) but also with what has been written about dance in the Classical period and folk dancing in Greece today.

Although studying and comparing the primary sources, the frescoes, rings and figurines, was the main working method, secondary literature was also used to see what has been written and thought before this study. By studying today's folk dances I hoped better to understand and interpret the Bronze Age material, to maybe see similarities in the movements and thus determine and understand what part of the material is showing dance.

Limitations and Critique

The chosen material for the study comes from Crete, Thera (Santorini) and the major sites on the Peloponnese (Mycenae, Pylos and Tiryns) on Mainland Greece from late Middle Bronze Age (MBA ca 2000-1550 B.C.) to Late Bronze Age (LBA ca 1550-1100 B.C.) (see figure 1) because it is from this period dance is beginning to show in the archaeological record in these areas. Some small “dive ins” into the Classical art and dance have been done to see if they can be of any help in interpreting the Bronze Age material. The Classical period was chosen since very little material from early Iron Age has been found, especially figurative art is missing. Even though all the Bronze Age material is not contemporary and has a width of a couple of hundred years I think the objects can still be studied together since no major differences in style or execution is discernible.

Sadly a lot of the frescoes left are very fragmented and Arthur Evan’s reconstructions cannot really be trusted which can be seen in later reconstructions done. I have tried to study the pieces of the frescoes that are the original. When it comes to the colors I do believe that they can be trusted in the reconstructions since the original colors are still there.

Another problem is that it does not exist that many frescoes that we can positively say contain dance scenes; at this moment three are found. But if we also count the frescoes showing “dance” in processions, like Senta German has, the number grows. I have on the other hand chosen not to include those frescoes in my research because I think they are not good enough to draw any conclusions from. They are either so fragmented that you cannot say much or you cannot define it as dance at all.

Background

The purpose with this chapter is to give the reader information that is useful to understand the material, and to be a help to follow and understand my thoughts in the coming analysis.

First a definition of what dance is and why dance is needed will begin this chapter, then follows: an explanation of the material I will be using for my study, what the material is and how it was used. Further the Minoan cult or religion will be dealt with briefly since a lot of the material seems to have a religious context or character. I will then also go through how we can define age and gender in the material since one of my questions is “who is dancing?”

Defining Dance and the Importance of Dancing in Past Societies

Defining Dance

What is dance? To answer this question is not easy. It strongly depends on who you are asking. Depending on culture and background you would be given a lot of different answers on how to define dance. Must it include music? Is it only the rhythmic movements of the body? Or is dance an event that includes much more than this? Some countries even have different words for dance depending on whether it is considered to be ritual or secular. This is seen in Spanish and Italian where *danza* refers to ritual dance and *baile/ballo* refers to secular dancing. This is also the case of Sanskrit in India where *nrta* translates to “pure dance” and *nrtya* into “pantomimic dance”.¹

To most people it might not be so tricky to know what dance is, everyone has their own meaning of what dance is just like we all have strong opinions on what art is. What is art for several million dollars to one person might just be worth nothing to another. The same goes for dance, but as scholars we cannot of course settle with this, a universal definition of dance is needed so we are sure we all mean the same thing when we are discussing, writing and doing research on it. Do we have this? I would say no, but attempts have been made. In Anya Peterson Royce’s book *The anthropology of Dance* two simple but good definitions exist. “...dance results from the body making patterns in time and space.”² This could on the other

¹Peterson Royce 2002, p. 10.

² Peterson Royce 2002, p. 3.

hand also include a lot of other activities so perhaps the next definition is somewhat better: “dance is rhythmic movements done for some purpose transcending utility”.³

A person that writes about dance and more specifically ancient Greek dance and how other authors have written about dance before is F. G. Naerebout. He does not like the concept that “dance transcends utility” that most others writing about dance seem to use. He thinks it is too wide a statement and difficult to “pin down”. He instead likes the definition of Judith Lynne Hanna who also works with anthropology in dance, saying that: “dance is human behavior composed, from the dancer’s perspective, of purposeful, intentionally rhythmical, and culturally patterned sequences of non-verbal body movements other than motor activities, the motion having inherent and aesthetic value.”⁴ Otherwise most scholars tend to argue for the definitions stated above; that the movements are special, rhythmic and patterned or formal and stylized.⁵

Naerebout makes his own definition after having read the ones of other scholars. He brings up six points that he finds essential for what dance are;

1. “Dance is human movement, involving the whole body.”
2. “The body travels, usually within a relatively circumscribed space.”
3. “It is a communal activity with any number of participants...”
4. “The movement is intentional, rhythmized and patterned...”
5. “It has some patterned sound as cue; this sound can be clapping, stamping, singing or sound produced with instruments...”
6. “The movement should be in some way distinguishable from everyday movement, and the performers themselves should consider the movement to be so.”⁶

He also has four points on how to classify or make a typology when we have distinguished something as dance based on the definitions above. What he wants us to look at when trying to classify is:

1. “The number of participants”.
2. “The arrangement of the participants”.
3. “The patterning of the dance” (How they are moving).
4. “General characteristics of the dance” (How much are they travelling, how fast and how much strength and force is used).⁷

³ Peterson Royce 2002, p. 5.

⁴ Hanna 1979, *non vidi*.

⁵ Naerebout 1997, p. 159-161.

⁶ Naerebout 1997, p. 165f.

Can I use these definitions of dance on my own work when I'm not looking at dance that is "alive" but instead frozen both in time and space? It is difficult but I can look for repetitive patterns in the material and also for movements that seem rhythmic and are not connected to a specific everyday life activity. I will also look for movements and gestures that look strange and do not fit into the norm of gestures that we again would connect with everyday life, such as walking, carrying objects, hunting, fighting and so on. More specifically I will look at their arm movements because they seem to have a central role in the Bronze Age dancing. I will also look for what can be swaying hips and bodies with s-shaped figures which is a common feature within dance to protrude the feminine parts of the body, breasts and buttocks.

Of course it is difficult to decide what dance is when we do not have any written sources that we can read and understand concerning dance or any other parts of Minoan life from this time. Perhaps they would not consider the same movements or gestures to be dance at all.

Why Are We Dancing?

Why then is dance so important to us humans? Royce states early in her book that dance has been called the oldest of the arts.⁸ In Lasse Berg's book *Gryning över Kalahari* (Dawn over Kalahari) we find a chapter called "they who are dancing together" which discuss exactly this, dance in the beginning of the human era. He has been among a people called the San-people in Africa where it seems time has stood still. He has witnessed what is called a trance dance where everyone in the group is allowed to participate but only a few can actually reach the trance state. When they do they get filled with a kind of magic and strength that they share with the others in the group in order to heal sickness, chase away bad spirits and strengthen the connections within the group but also with other groups. In the end he writes something that I believe is very true: "They who are dancing together keep together. They who keep together survive easier".⁹

In Royce's book we find some more examples on how dance could have been used earlier. Anthropological observations from Transylvania tell us about dancing men jumping high over crops to make them grow tall. Women too jump over newly planted crops to insure fertility. It also mentions rain dances of Native Americans and how other nature folk uses

⁷ Naerebout 1997, p. 172f.

⁸ Peterson Royce 2002, p. 3.

⁹ Berg 2005, p. 198.

dance to imitate strong animals or other individuals to in that way receive some of their powers.¹⁰

The examples above have all been about dancing connected with rituals and magic, but I would also like to add something from my own experiences of dance. Something that I think is forgotten is that dance can be used to tell a story or be an aid to express your mind and feelings. It also heightens your spirit, calms you down from anxiety and like Berg said, it creates a bond between the participants. Is it a coincidence that people within nations with strong dancing traditions seem a lot more happy and positive? This will be shown in a study below.

Dance does not have to be of ritual character to bestow power, strength and health to the performer. A Greek survey on how traditional dances affect the quality of life of older people show very positive results. The survey took place in Thessaloniki and involved older people in the ages of 60-91 which normally visit special day centers for older where they can chat and watch TV. One group got to take dancing classes and in another the participants continued with their normal activities on the day center. The result shows clearly that the dancers felt increased well-being and anxiety and stress decreased. The dance also had positive effects on the elder's heart rate.¹¹ The well-being can be explained by the endorphin excretion which causes a euphoric sense and reduces depression, anxiety, confusion and negative thinking. The positive psychological effects can also be explained by the concept of flow, which means that a person is focused on one stimulus and loses the sense of time. She/he also forgets personal problems, feels capable and in control and feels harmony with the environment.¹²

To sum up this chapter we can say that how dancing is defined differs from culture to culture and individual to individual. However, scholars of anthropology define dance as "... rhythmic movements done for some purpose transcending utility" and "...dance results from the body making patterns in time and space." We have also seen that dance is important to us in many ways, e.g. to stay healthy, positive and happy without bad spirits, to create strong bonds within a group, to help nature on its way concerning crops and to get the strength and power of imitated animals or ancestors. Dance seems to be a medium to connect with the gods or spirits to receive help in a tough everyday life.

¹⁰ Peterson Royce 2002, p. 20.

¹¹ Mavrovouniotis et al. 2010, p. 214.

¹² Mavrovouniotis *et al.* 2010, p. 215f.

A Background to the Material

Frescoes

Frescoes are wall paintings found mostly from the second palace period, after 1700 B.C, at Knossos and Akrotiri on Thera, but also at Agia Triada, Amnisos, on Melos and the Mainland. Finds from the EM period show that it was in use even then but without motifs, the house walls were painted in red and brown.

The Minoan frescoes are called *fresco secco*, which means the pigments are applied with a binding agent to dry plaster made of a lime-base. The frescoes from the Renaissance are called *buon fresco* and here the pigments are applied on wet plaster without a binding agent. The colors that were used during the Bronze Age were black (carbonaceous shale), white (hydrate of lime), red (hematite), yellow (ochre), blue (silicate of copper) and green (blue and yellow mixed together). The frescoes were also sometimes made in low relief to give a slight three-dimensional effect.¹³

The Minoan frescoes are the first in European art to be made truly naturalistic in a vivid and impressionistic style and mainly two categories of subject are depicted: palace life and natural scenes. Palace life could be processions, court life and religious festivals whereas natural scenes include flowers, plants, many different animals on the ground, beautifully executed birds in the sky and marine life with flying fish and dolphins.¹⁴ The Mycenaean frescoes are more monumental and lack the spontaneous style of the Minoans. They preferred to depict religious processions, war scenes and the hunt.¹⁵

Signet Rings and Clay Seals

Seals were used for four purposes: identification, security, magic and art. For example could chests and jar stoppers be sealed with a cord and stamped clay with their owners mark to show ownership and that the specimen had not been tampered with. Depending on the material, shape and pattern on the seal they could have different magical properties, as amulets and talismans.

¹³ Higgins 1986, p. 94.

¹⁴ Higgins 1986, p. 95-98.

¹⁵ Higgins 1986, p. 98.

In Babylonia and Egypt seals were in use long before the Cretans used it. The Babylonian seals were different from the Egyptian and Cretan ones; they were of cylinder form and rolled onto the clay. In Crete the stamp seals were introduced sometime in the second EM period (2500-2200 B.C) and were made in the form of beads and pendants. Gold signet rings were also used as seals but they seem to be too small to have been worn on the finger so perhaps they were also worn around the neck in a string.¹⁶

During the MM (2000-1550 B.C.) period new shapes were introduced; the lentoid, named after its resemblance to a lentil seed, the amygdaloid with an almond shaped stone, and the flattened cylinder; rectangular with two convex faces. The engravings featured religious scenes, people and animals, architectural facades and hieroglyphics. The talismans seem to have been for purely magical purposes because no imprints from them have been found.¹⁷

In the LM period (1550-1100 B.C.) the lentoid shape is in favor and the artists try to fill up the space with the motifs of religion, the bull-ring and lions attacking. In the end of LM the art declines and the motifs get degraded. When the Minoan art got worse the Mycenaeans stepped up and took its place making beautiful signet rings in gold and bronze, though it is suggested that it was Minoans making the signet rings for the Mycenaeans who now ruled the Aegean.¹⁸

Minoan Cult and Symbols

Since much of the Minoan material, from frescoes to signet rings, contain what is believed to be religious acts and symbols, this chapter will give a brief overview of some signs or symbols to keep an eye out for when studying the material. The aim is to see in what context the dancing took place, religious, profane or both.

The Double Axe

The double axe was used as a sacred weapon of sacrifice. In LM times it had become a common companion to female deities depicted but also as decorative motifs on other materials.¹⁹

¹⁶ Higgins 1986, p. 50.

¹⁷ Higgins 1986, p. 52.

¹⁸ Higgins 1986, p. 180f and 184.

¹⁹ Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1996, p. 78.

The Horns of Consecration

The horns of consecration are so called because of their resemblance with bull horns and the idea probably reaches as far back as to the 7-6th millennia B.C. They are often found at religious structures but also sometimes on walls of large houses and palaces which physical remains have shown. In frescoes they can also be seen to the right of grand entranceways, maybe to indicate the sanctity of the area. Otherwise they are common on altars and shrines.²⁰

Altars

There were many different forms of altars; they could be natural stone slabs or heaps of stones, they could be polygonal or square with the horns of consecration on them, have a horse shoe-shape or be in the form of tripods, made of stone, terracotta and assumedly wood.²¹

Nature Sanctuaries

Sanctuaries have been found in the country side, in caves and on mountaintops. They were visited by pilgrims who made modest to luxurious votive offerings. The fact that peak sanctuaries appeared before the erection of the palaces may indicate that they in the beginning were independent from official religion. Ash layers with animal bones and broken figurines indicate that large bonfires have been lit from time to time, perhaps as a festive event to clear out the old votives and make space for the new to come.²²

Goddesses, Gods and Priesthoods

Discussion has been going on starting with Evans whether the Minoans had one goddess or several. No distinctions can be made from the material if there were several goddesses since she looks like a normal woman, but looking at the cultures surrounding Crete they have a polytheistic world view. The goddess is mainly depicted outdoors in the nature with animals, flowers and trees. As stated above she looks like the Minoan women with their flounced skirts, small jackets and the hair style of a young unmarried woman (see below hair style

²⁰Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1996, p. 79f.

²¹Kontorli-Papadopoulou 1996, p. 85.

²²Marinatos 1993, p. 115 and 118.

figure). She is often seated, receiving gifts and worshipped by the animals and women mostly, with few exceptions within the art, of men adoring her.²³

Not many representations of gods have been found but they do exist. Again it is difficult to know whether it is just one god or several but they are divided into distinct iconographical types; master of animals, hunter with the lion and young god with the staff. The two first categories are young virile men in short hair wearing a codpiece or a kilt and sometimes a peaked cap. The third category resembles the two previously but he has long hair and holds a staff or spear in a gesture of command. He also seems to be the protector of the town and not only resides in the nature. Since the god is often depicted with animals, like the goddess, it is easy to draw parallels to her, but while she is petting or feeding the animals, the god is hunting and controlling them. We can therefore say that the goddess is nourishing the nature but it is the role of the god to control it.²⁴

The tasks of the priestesses were to impersonate the goddess, pour libations, take part in processions, and bring flowers and offerings to the sanctuaries and perhaps also to perform dances. From the art we can see that they took part of the sacrifices but we do not know if they executed the actual killing of the animal. Another one of their tasks seem to have been the making and giving of a dress to the goddess or someone impersonating her.²⁵ They did not have any specific clothes dedicated to their office; women of nobility, priestesses and goddess all wore the flounced skirt with the short jacket, though a skirt or apron of hide seems to have been reserved for the priestesses and the priests. Otherwise it is only the context in which they are depicted or the ornamentation on the dress that can give us a hint of who is who. Ornamentations that would suggest a goddess or priestess are griffins, sphinxes, bucranias (bullheads) and plants such as crocus flowers and lilies.²⁶

The priests took care of the daily administration in the palaces and were in charge of the sacrifices. They are easier distinguished than their priestess counterparts in the way that they have a special long robe, probably of Syrian origin, different hairstyle from other men and sometimes beard. They also impersonated the Young god since they are also depicted as hunters²⁷

²³ Marinatos 1993, p. 162-165.

²⁴ Marinatos 1993, p. 166-174.

²⁵ This sounds very familiar to what happened in Classical times where a himation was brought with a procession and given to the statue impersonating the goddess Athena at Akropolis in Athens. This is a very good example of continuation from Bronze Age to Classical Period.

²⁶ Marinatos 1993, p. 141-145.

²⁷ Marinatos 1993, p. 141-145.

Hair Styles as Age- and Gender Markers

To determine who is dancing we need to know their age and gender and this can be seen by studying the different hairstyles of the women in the frescoes. In the beginning when the frescoes in Akrotiri, Thera, were discovered by Spyridon Marinatos, his first thought to the blue on the heads of the children depicted, was head covers. After closer examination he suggested that it was not head covers but instead that the heads had been shaved with some hair locks left to grow out.

Some years after they had been found in 1967, the frescoes ended up to be the material of Ellen Davis' study in 1986 about hair styles in the Aegean Bronze Age. This resulted in the article "Youth and age in the Thera frescoes".²⁸ She has from the art discovered six different levels of youth and aging. The first stage include young children, both girls and boys, with shaved heads leaving two hair locks, one in the front and one in the back of the head (figure 4, Ill. a and b). In stage two, children are older since they have longer locks. They have also grown new locks on top of the head and one lock at the right side of the head (figure 4, Ill. c-f). The girls in stage three still have the two curls from stage one but the others have been cut off and one have stopped shaving the head so hair is now growing evenly over the head. A double chin is discernible now as well (figure 4, Ill. g). Stage four shows mature women. Their hair has fully grown out and is bound up in elaborate cloths. The curl in the front is cut off and replaced by a knotted loop from the cloth. Obviously they are a bit older than the girls in stage three but they are not so old yet. Their breasts are still high and firm and they have blue stripes painted in the white of their eyes, something that the younger girls also have (figure 4, Ill. h-i).²⁹

Davis suggests that there have been ceremonies connected to the removal or out growing of the hair and entering the next stage. The most important one being the entering into adulthood, this would correspond to stage three when the childhood locks are cut off and the hair is allowed to grow freely.³⁰ The rite of passage in Egypt is believed to have taken place when the children were around ten years of age and it seems also fitting for the Theran children that it happened around puberty. The next important rite of passage connected to cutting the hair must have been the marriage.

²⁸ Davis 1986.

²⁹ If stage three is the step into adulthood, perhaps stage four with cutting off the front lock and binding the hair represent the married woman.

³⁰ Davis 1986, p. 399-401.

Stage five of maturity includes women with their hair fully wrapped up in a cloth, their breasts are larger and fuller and the blue strokes in the eyes are absent. Stage six, the final stage, shows old women with red strokes in their eyes and large saggy breasts.³¹



Figure 4 Diagram of different hair styles found in Minoan frescoes

³¹ Davis 1986, p. 401-404.

Analysis

In this chapter a presentation and discussion of the material will be done. Using a reverse chronology I will start with the folk dances of today and continue with the research that has been done on dance in the Classical period, this to help me in my study of the Bronze Age material which has only been studied once by German. I'm hoping by using analogies to better understand and interpret this material.

Folk Dance in Greece Today

The Greek Folk Dances

In Greece it exist numerous different folk dances both from the Mainland and from the islands. To bring up all would be too comprehensive, so this chapter will focus on some common traits that can be found in the Pan-Hellenic dances, dances which are being performed throughout the entire Greece. Even though the list of different dances is long, the dances are divided into two categories; Syrtos which is a dragging dance (see figure 5) and Pidiktos which is a springing dance. They all have different names generated from regions or place-names, seasonal names like St. Basil for New Year and the Easter dance, names from guilds like Hasapiko, the butchers dance, and the Mihaniko, the divers dance.³²

The dances belonging to the Syrtos-category are believed to be the oldest still existing. This is the chain dances with joint hands dancing in a circle. Dora Stratou believes that the chain or ring dance have originated from dances danced around the altars in antiquity. I myself think they go much further back than that, perhaps to the beginning of dance itself. Studying nature people, is it not chain or ring dances seen on important occasions? May that be as it is, Stratou is right to connect these dances with antiquity since we have depictions of exactly the same movements done today on Byzantine frescoes, vase paintings from antiquity and as will be seen below, clay figurines from the Bronze Age.

³² Stratou 1966, p. 14.



Figure 5 A Syrtos dance from Salamis

A dance believed to have deep roots in the history is the Tsakonikos, danced in southern Peloponnese in Tsakonia. Scholars believe it is the dance known as the Crane in antiquity, danced by Theseus on Delos and mentioned in Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* in which we get to know that they danced in a serpentine way, representing the winding labyrinth at Knossos.³³



Figure 6 The Crane dance. Crater, around 560 B.C. (Archaic)

³³ Stratou 1966, p. 14f.



Figure 7 The Tsakonikos or Crane dance.

Something that many of the dances have in common is the use of the handkerchief. What its purpose may be is not known, some scholars again connect it with the myth of Theseus, that it is the twine used in the labyrinth or Ariadne's veil that she is waving when being abandoned by Theseus on Crete. There is another possible explanation as well, in some areas the handkerchief is being twisted and then wielded like the *krotala* (instrument similar to castanets) in ancient times. The similarities can be seen in vase paintings with dancers using the *krotala*. The handkerchief can also have a more practical function, e.g. to help the dancers, in these cases the men, in various spins and leaps. The role of the women is more modest with eyes down and the handkerchief is here maybe used so that the men and women will not touch.³⁴

The Sousta, a pidiktos dance, is being danced in Crete and the Dodecanese islands, but in northern Greece springing dances are called Sousta as well. Throughout the islands the steps are the same but how they are performed differs, e.g. in Rhodes the dance is heaving up and down with limited springing and on Karpathos it is more heavy and static. In Crete the main dances are the Pendozalis and the Syrtos, both ring dances but the Pendozalis is a war dance

³⁴ Stratou 1966, p. 16-18.

and in it you hold each other on the shoulders whereas in the Syrtos you are holding hands. The third main dance is the Sousta and is danced by couples in a playful and erotic mood.³⁵

In Cyprus, and other parts of Greece, they have the Antikrystos, a dance where the dancers face one another but are only danced either by women or men alone. Even the music and the songs are different depending on if it is women or men dancing. In Cyprus they also have a special dance found nowhere else called the dance of the sickle. It might not even exist anymore since when Stratou wrote her book in 1966 it was only a few old men still performing it. With the sickle in hand they dance like they are harvesting and sometimes it takes the shape of a whip encircling the body. Interesting is that in Sparta, in honor of Artemis as fertility goddess, rituals and contests took place with young men being whipped to bloodshed to prove endurance and hardship. Votive tablets have been found there where the winners are stated and bronze sickles are attached to them. Sickles were used during harvest and so have a clear fertility connection. But it is not only Artemis that is a goddess of fertility, her equivalent is Aphrodite and she is supposedly born in Cyprus where this dance still is carried out.³⁶

It is not only in dance we can see connections with the past. Also in clothes the echoes of the past can be seen. The women's costumes are heavy and covered with jewels, jewels from their dowry, and usually they wear a bust/bodice with thin woven shawls in silk over the bust.³⁷ Further below I'm describing the clothes of the Bronze Age women and the similarities in clothing are there.

Folk Dance in Modern Greek History: A Political Tool

As seen in the background chapter the effects of dancing is of purely positive character to maintain health, please the gods and control the nature, but dance has also been used with a darker agenda. This chapter tells us that dance has been used by the ruling powers to control and create bonds with the people and within the people. Can this also have been an intention during the Bronze Age in the major controlling palaces? We also see that the tradition of soldiers dancing as a way of keeping fit and have control over the body continues from the Classical period until today. Is this seen also in the Bronze Age material?

³⁵ Stratou 1966, p. 21f.

³⁶ Stratou 1966, p. 21f.

³⁷ Stratou 1966, p. 29.

During the dictatorship of Metaxas in the 30's a lot of singers and texts were banned to reinforce the folk traditions and the feeling of nationality. The same was true during the reign of the junta 1967-1974 when some ancient and modern plays were banned because of their political content and many text/song-writers went into exile.

Metaxas, like Hitler, used the traditions of the rural countryside and their festivities to control the people, "a public cultural event" such as New Year and spring- or flower-festivals quickly transformed into "a public political event". His purpose was to preserve the relationship with the glorious past. He often stated to the youth "we must return to those sources from which flowed the springs of Hellenic culture and civilization, clear and pure, and be re-baptized there, and become Hellenes once again". He was going to achieve this by promoting cultural events special for the nation with different local folk dances, music and songs in which the public "spontaneously" took part.³⁸

The dance was also used by the ruling class to create bonds with the people, to keep them happy and give them a feeling of importance when they visited and danced with the common people in the villages. An example on when the persons in charge still dance with the common people takes place during Easter day in the military barracks with the militaries guarding the presidential palace and their families. On this day it has been tradition for the king (until 1967), the president, prime minister and leaders from different parties to join in dance with the militaries and their families. The militaries are well taught in the traditional dances since dance still is part of the military school training just as it was during the Classical era.³⁹

Dance in the Classical Period

This chapter will deal with previous research done on dance from the Classical period in Greece. Two main sources are written sources and images on red figure vases. The aim is to see whether this research and the material can be of help in interpreting the earlier Bronze Age material.

The Study of Dance from Written Sources

Greek words built on the root *orch-* or *chor* tell us they have something to do with dance, like *orcheomai* from *orcheo* "to set moving", and *choros* could be derived from *cheir* "hand" or

³⁸ Loutzaki 2001, p. 127f.

³⁹ Loutzaki 2001, p. 131f.

chortos “enclosure”, so the meaning of *choros* could be either an assembly holding hands (chain dance) or a place for dancing.⁴⁰ Previous attempts to compile words into vocabularies of ancient Greek dance have been done, mainly by Maurice Emmanuel, Carl Sittl and Germaine Prudhommeau.⁴¹ These works are very early, beginning of 20th century, and concern mainly the theatrical dance in ancient Greece, the dance of the *choros*, and the studies have been made by analyzing plays written by ancient authors. They have been strongly criticized by later scholars for being incorrect and speculative, not only by Naerebout but also by Graham Ley in his article *Visions of Greek tragic dancing* where he discusses earlier works on theatrical dancing.⁴² I have chosen not to include these authors in my study based on these premises: that they are early works, that the subject is theatrical dance and that the authors are strongly criticized.

A person that should be mentioned is Lillian Brady Lawler, although also early she has written many articles on the subject of ancient Greek dance. In her article *The dance in ancient Greece* she discusses why the Greeks were dancing but not how. She, like the anthropologists, state that the dance was very old and that it was an important part in rituals e.g. in passage rites and animal dances. She writes that they were used to create spiritual connections with the gods, to send away evil spirits or disease, to ensure fertility both on the field and in the household and to be victorious in war. It was important both for physical and emotional health. Even the soldier’s training was in the form of dance and with it he could express both joy and sorrow. The dance mirrored all events in life.⁴³ It also mirrored the poetry, since the poetry was often interpreted through dance with arms, body and head, when cited. These two, poetry and dance, and music as well were all part of the same Greek concept, *mousiké*; the art of the Muses.⁴⁴

She continues to discuss the linguistic sources and concludes that the only knowledge we have left is names of the dances and the steps. The names are often very descriptive but one has to be careful with etymologies not to give the words or names wrong roots.⁴⁵ Naerebout agrees with Lawlers statement that we have many names and words left for the ancient dances and a lot of those words go back to the two “root-words” in the beginning and many have references to music and festivities but also of the leading of a group of dancers. The words thus tell us that “the movement is often collective and performed to music” and that it can be

⁴⁰ Naerebout 1997, p. 179.

⁴¹ Naerebout 1997, p. 175.

⁴² Ley 2003.

⁴³ Lawler 1947, p. 344.

⁴⁴ Lawler 1947, p. 346.

⁴⁵ Lawler 1947, p. 347.

connected to festivities. Naerebout continues to look for words connected to the two stated above to get to know something about which movements or steps were done. What he found was words like striding, stamping, high kicks, jumps, turns, body bends and swings indicating movements of speed and playfulness but not many tell us about hand- or arm movements. Words telling us about the placement of the participants in rows, lines and circles also exist.⁴⁶

Even though a lot of texts and poetry exist from ancient Greece there is no survival manual of how a specific dance was executed, and perhaps it never existed. In Europe no works of the technicalities of dance were made until the 15th century. This is not the case in India though, here early dance manuals have been found, the oldest called *Natyashastra* of Bharata and dated to somewhere between 2nd century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. These manuals consist of advanced descriptions of positionings and gestures. In the Graeco-Roman world it seems like this type of art was handed down orally from generation to generation instead of being written down in handbooks.⁴⁷

The Study of Dance from Images

Painted pottery is the most important source when it comes to images on ancient Greek dance but we also have reliefs, terracotta figurines and carved gemstones. The question we all ask us though is; “does this portray dance?” Naerebout is critical to earlier works concerning the studies of dance through images because they do not give any criteria to why the authors have decided that this is dance. A problem I myself have encountered and others with me is how to distinguish between dancing and running persons in the images. I thus agree with Naerebout that criteria to follow, in our attempts in studying ancient Greek dance, are needed.⁴⁸

His criteria to determine what is dance take departure in the movement of one raised leg kicking out and the other often bent. This cannot be said to be exclusively for dancers since a lot of people are depicted this way when running or walking, but their legs obey well known conventions. Except for everyday life activities this movement can also be found when looking at athletes. When these individuals are eliminated, by studying the context and small clues in e.g. the dress and ornamentation, what is left Naerebout considers being depictions of dancing individuals.

He moves on to discuss jumping, when both feet are off the ground with bent legs or straight, or doing turns or kicks in the air. Again there is a conflict whether the jumpers are

⁴⁶ Naerebout 1997, p. 179f.

⁴⁷ Naerebout 1997, p. 193-195.

⁴⁸ Naerebout 1997, p. 211-213.

athletes or dancers. To look for musical instruments is of no use here since the athletes exercised to music. What the athletes do have that the dancers do not are weights around their ankles when they are exercising and jumping. When it comes to individuals standing he suggests to again be looking at their legs and feet, individuals with bent legs or people tiptoeing are more likely to be involved in dance since they can be on their way into a jump, doing pirouettes or partial turns, this often indicated by a swirling dress.

Other smaller clues to have in mind and to look for are uncommon dresses or headgears, musical instrument, a chorus singing or individuals performing in unison. It is also very common that the dancers are holding hands in lines or circles, otherwise not much attention is given to the arms and hands since the Classical dancers do not seem to have any characteristic moves or gestures for these. Lastly attention must be given to the body posture, where prominence of the buttocks is common and attention towards it is drawn by touching or slapping.⁴⁹



Figure 8 Attic krater, ca 460 B.C. Florence painter. Symposiasts and a satyr dancing with youths.

⁴⁹ Naerebout 1997, p. 217-224.

Dance in the Bronze Age

This chapter will deal with the material from the Bronze Age that I believe is showing dance. The material consists of frescoes, signet rings and clay figurines. Frescoes not showing dance are also used as a material of comparison. Following is an account of my own observations from the frescoes and minor arts.

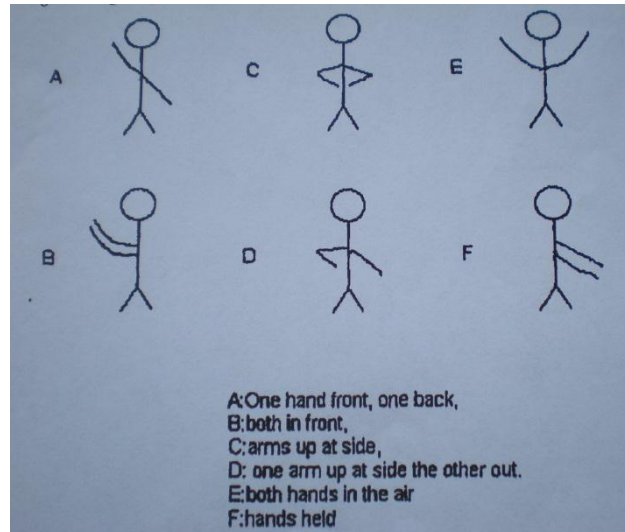


Figure 9 Diagram of different hand gestures during Bronze Age dancing.

Frescoes Containing Dance

The Sacred Grove Fresco, MMIIIB/LMIA

The sacred grove fresco is a miniature fresco found in pieces on a basement floor at Knossos by Arthur Evans. It has been reconstructed and is believed to have had its original placement on a wall in a small room at the north end of the central court and was made sometime between MMIIIB and LMIA.⁵⁰

It is fragmented, but the remains depict a minimum of fourteen women dancing with different moves, but all have in common that at least one arm is raised. They dance at a paved area with paths leading to it and there are three olive trees referred to as a “sacred grove” by Evans.⁵¹ Around the paved area is a large crowd of spectators watching the dance, consisting of mostly men with dark skin but also a lot of women are depicted with white skin. These

⁵⁰ German 2005, p. 117.

⁵¹ I do not like this name. Sure many depicted Minoan rituals take place in the nature with sacred trees, water springs or mountain peaks but these olive trees do not look very special to me. Not all trees have to be sacred; can they not just be there to give shade to the viewing public?

bystanders are not depicted in much detail in contrary to the dancers, so clearly the focus and aim of the artist is these dancing women. Most of them have one arm raised in front of them and the other either by the waist or down to the side (figure a or d in the diagram), and they seem to be moving their hips making the skirts flow. All except two are looking towards the left. They all wear similar clothes with yellow jackets and the long skirts with the same colors yellow, blue and white. The patterns of the skirts, which are very intricate and beautiful, differ from woman to woman.



Figure 10 Detail of The Sacred grove fresco, Knossos.



Figure 11 The Sacred grove fresco, reconstructed.

It is difficult to tell their age, their bodies seem fully developed but their hair-styles indicate young individuals. As seen their heads are shaved at the sides with long locks on top of the head flowing down. From Davis' research this seems to correspond with stage two.⁵² My guess is therefore that these girls/women dancing could be somewhere between 10 and 14 years of age. Maybe closer to 14 and on their way to enter stage three since their hair locks are really long and breasts are visible.

Sadly many pieces of the fresco are missing so we cannot see why they are dancing or if there is a special occasion. This on the other hand does not stop scholars from making suggestions based on what we know of Minoan cult and the usage of the palaces from archaeological excavations at Knossos and the other Minoan palaces.

Marie-Louise Winbladh writes in her book *Myter och mat i minoernas värld* (Myths and food in the Minoan world) a possible explanation to the palace dances and why it is only women dancing. The palaces are traditionally thought of as being redistributive centers for e.g. grain, oil and wine and thus agriculture and fertility most have been of greatest

⁵² German 2005, p.19.

importance to the Minoans. This is shown by major storage pits which placement interesting enough lies close to the western court where the dancing supposedly took place. It is believed that since the agriculture was so important, harvest festivities must have been connected with it and executed at least twice a year, during spring when the farmers salvaged the harvest and during fall when the seed was redistributed to farmers for sowing. Maybe during these festivities women were dancing to please the goddess so that she would ensure fertility and a good harvest. Another evidence that this could be the case is the “newly” found round platforms NW of the Knossian palace rising around a meter above the ground and are interpreted as dancing platforms, maybe for these harvest festivities again since the resemblance with a threshing floor is striking but the dance platforms are smaller.⁵³

Nature Fresco of Goddess LMIB

The nature fresco with the goddess comes from room 14 of the east wing in the villa of Agia Triada and is dated to LMIB⁵⁴ This fresco is also quite damaged with some parts missing but it shows a beautiful landscape with flowers and other plants and a lot of animals running around, such as goats and something that looks like cats. It could be dogs too but the movements seem to be more those of a cat's. On the other side a woman kneeling can be seen and in the middle a woman dancing.

This is one of the cases when it is difficult to determine whether she is dancing or not. But she clearly makes a strange move; almost like she is bending to make a jump or a turn and her steps seem light and again the hips and skirt are flowing. Sadly I can only draw conclusions from her waist down since the upper body is reconstructed. In the background parts of a construction can be seen and this has probably been a shrine or an altar. Many scholars have identified the women in the Minoan frescoes as goddesses or priestesses but without a motivation to why this should be the case. This is on the other hand not true for this fresco; Maria Shaw has studied the gardens and landscapes in the Minoan frescoes and made an interesting notation to why this woman in the middle could be a goddess. On the left side where the kneeling woman is, the landscape seems cultivated with crocuses and lilies but to the right the landscape is wild with bushes, wildflowers and animals, and in the middle

⁵³ Winbladh 2004, p. 76-78.

⁵⁴ German 2005, p. 116.

stands the dancing goddess bridging between the human's tamed nature and the wild nature of the animals.⁵⁵



Figure 12 Nature fresco of Goddess, reconstructed. Agia Triada.



Figure 13 Detail of what is left on the Nature fresco of goddess.

⁵⁵ Shaw 1993, p. 673.

The Dancing Lady, LMII

The dancing lady-fresco was found at Knossos in the room called “the Queen’s Megaron”. That would be translated into the queen’s quarters,⁵⁶ and it is dated to LMII.⁵⁷ In contrast to the last fresco, here we only have the upper body preserved. What gives away that she is dancing is her arm movements (figure d in the diagram), one to the chest and one stretched out, and her hair is flying as she is probably spinning around. She wears a yellow jacket with blue decorations along the hem and on the short sleeves and under that a white shirt/tunic. This can be a woman of stage three since she has a full head of hair, it is not shaved anymore and it is not bound up in a cloth as it would be for the next stage with the married women. We can also notice a hint of a double chin.



Figure 14 The dancing lady from the Queens Megaron. Knossos.

⁵⁶ This again is a name given by Evans. There is no proof this room belonged to a queen or if the Minoans even had queens. A lot of Evans interpretations seem colored by his own time. As probably mine are colored by my surroundings and norms, though I try to be aware of this and see beyond it.

⁵⁷ German 2005, p 117.

Frescoes which may Contain Dance

Below an alternative interpretation of two frescoes will be given. I want to be clear that this is my idea and that I have no evidence to support it, but as you will see the current interpretations do not have that either. As mentioned in the introduction I exercise and perform Bollywood dance which is a mix of traditional Indian steps and more modern styles. What I will present below came to me when I was dancing this dance and some steps seemed very familiar. A common feature in the Indian Classical dance are women singing and dancing about getting “ready”. They are putting on jewelry and showing them off, singing what they sound like as they clash together and so on. This I thought was interesting since I had during my work with this paper come across two frescoes that I had at first not included. But what they had in common was the theme “jewelries”. They were about women showing off their jewelries.

The first fresco “**The ladies in blue**”, a natural size fresco from MMIII, is described by Evans as three ladies sitting down discussing their jewelries.⁵⁸ How he knows that they are sitting down and what they are discussing I do not know since the fresco is so fragmented only parts of their torsos can be seen,⁵⁹ anything below and above that is missing. What can be seen are hands by their collars touching or showing their necklaces.



Figure 15 Reconstruction of the ladies in blue. Only a few fragments remain of the original fresco. Knossos.

⁵⁸ Evans 1921, p. 547.

⁵⁹ And is talking about your jewelry so typically feminine that it has to be painted on the wall?

The second fresco is called “**The lady of Mycenae**”, LHIII B, and here a very bejeweled older woman can be seen, holding up yet another necklace in her right hand and with her left making a gesture towards it. The gesture is light and she seems almost swaying like in dance.



Figure 16 The lady of Mycenae.

Can Ancient Greek dance be compared with traditional Indian dance, despite the distance in time and Space? Well the Indian dance steps goes very far back, and we know this because on old Indian temples we can see exactly those steps that we are doing today. The Indian temples are of course not so old as to be in the same era as the Minoans but since the steps and moves are incorporated in the temples and they are very common they must have been around for a while before that too.

The Minoans and Mycenaeans were part of the long-distance trade routes going as far as to India, and as we know not only things can be traded but also new ideas, religion, fashion and perhaps even dance. Do I have any proof of this? No of course not, but my point being, Evan’s old interpretations do not hold up and there is an interesting similarity between these frescoes and the traditional Indian moves. It is not only the jewelry theme but also the hand movements which are very light and feminine and the posture of the bodies seen in the dance material; the s-shaped posture of the body is common both in ancient Greece and in India.

Signet Rings, Seal Stones and Clay Seals

This chapter will deal with dance represented on small objects. Dance depicted on seal stones, signet rings and the impressions in clay that these made. This group of material is vast and it is difficult to tell when it is dance, or processions, and what are just random gestures. They are small and at times unclear in their execution. What they all seem to have in common though, is their religious appearance. The movements are often bold on the verge to ecstatic, flowers and plants are a common feature and are being held by the participants. In the background altars or shrines can be discerned. They differ a lot from the frescoes where the dance seems to take place at the palace (except for the nature fresco). The dancers and the other women in the palace seem more pulled together and full of poise and grace. They have an audience whereas the next category seems to be dancing for themselves and whatever deity they are trying to please. Suggestions have been made that these women were drugged.⁶⁰ As seen below terracotta figurines have been found portraying women with hats or diadems with poppies and from poppies you get opium. From this vast material I have chosen four objects that I think clearly shows what I have mentioned above and I have tried to exclude what I believe are processions.

Seal Impression from Agia Triada, LMIB⁶¹



Figure 17 Seal impression, Agia Triada. Two priestesses?

This seal impression, from either a ring or a seal stone, shows two women striking an identical pose making their bodies into s-shaped figures, holding their left arms raised in front of their faces and their right arms out and down behind them (a in the diagram). On their heads they wear a tall headdress that I have not seen on any of the frescoes I have gone

⁶⁰ Winbladh 2004, p. 92.

⁶¹ German 2005, p. 115.

through during this work. What is interesting is that on this impression there are no flowers or structures present like on the other rings and the women seem as strong and graceful as the women from the sacred grove fresco. No frenzy or ecstatic dancing, just two composed women.

Gold Ring from Isopata, LMIIIA



Figure 18 Gold ring, Isopata.

They are dressed like the women in the palace frescoes and even here you can see that their skirts are different with different patterns. They are dancing out in the open with plants around them and they are swaying with their hips and their arm movements correspond with those of German's diagram (a, b and e).

This ring comes from grave 1 in the Isopata cemetery near Knossos.⁶² It shows four women and a small figure in the back, possibly a descending goddess. The age of the women is hard to determine, their hair styles would indicate young women, stage two according to Davis' diagram, but their bodies, I think, are those of mature women with large breasts and wide hips.⁶³

They are dressed like the women in the palace

Gold Ring from Aidonia (1), LHIIIA



Figure 19 Gold ring, Aidonia (1)

This ring comes from a Mycenaean cemetery at Aidonia close to Nemea.⁶⁴ Here three women are visible to the left on a paved area and an altar with a tree to the right. The women all make different moves but again they correspond to the diagram of

⁶² German 2005, p. 20.

⁶³ Of course this could perhaps be an ideal and not showing real women.

⁶⁴ German 2005, p. 116.

existing dance steps (a, e). In their hands they are holding objects, possibly branches or flowers.

Gold Ring from Aidonia (2), LHIIIA



Figure 20 Gold ring, Aidonia (2)

Just as the previous ring, this ring is also found at Aidonia and in the same shaft.⁶⁵ Three young women or girls are portrayed on a paved area in front of what could be a palace structure. That they are young can be seen from

their shaved heads with a few long locks on top of

their heads and their bodies do not seem to have developed a woman's full figure yet. They each have a pose of their own, but all are found in the diagram (d,a, and a version of d), this telling us that they are dancing.

Clay Figurines

This chapter will deal with dance in the form of clay figurines. The first figurines brought up are definitely showing a dance scene but the second category represented by the Poppy goddess can be discussed whether it is dance or not. As will be seen there are some indications telling us that it could be the case of a dancing goddess or priestess.

Ring Dance Figurines, LMIII

At Block Delta at Palaikastro on Crete these small clay figurines were found. They are dated to LMIII⁶⁶ and are showing three women holding hands and dancing in a circle with a fourth woman playing the lyre. Their hair is bound up in a knot in the back of the head and we can see they are wearing the characteristic jacket and big flouncy skirt. The one playing the lyre is

⁶⁵ German 2005, p. 116.

⁶⁶ German 2005, p. 117.

wearing a bead necklace and all of them seem to wear animal hides over their skirts indicating priestesses or women taking part in a sacrificial event.



Figure 21 Clay figurines in ring dance with lyre player, Palaikastro.

The Poppy Goddess, LMIII

In LMIII these types of figurines were popular both in private and public sanctuaries or shrines on Crete. They all have their hands raised and diadems in their hair with different symbols such as horns of consecration and birds. This specific specimen comes from Gazi west of Knossos and scholars debate if it is a goddess or a priestess. What made me believe that they are dancing and even swirling is Winbladh's arguments, the raised arms to keep balance and the skirt blowing out from the wind beneath it. The poppies on her head are also interesting since we have above seen dancers in some kind of trance or ecstatic dance which could have been caused by drugs. This is just one interpretation; another is that these figurines are adorants.⁶⁷

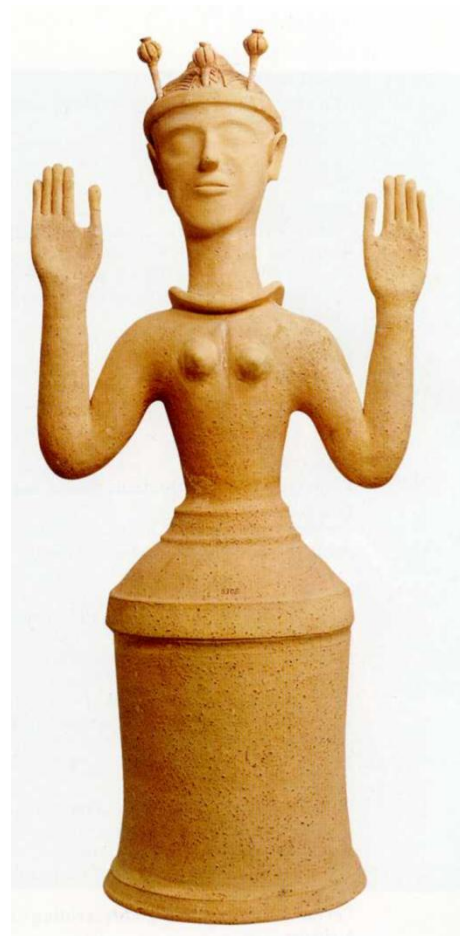


Figure 22 The poppy goddess, Gazi.

Description of other Frescoes for Comparison

This chapter will look at some frescoes that are showing women in other situations than in dance. This is to see whether the women that have been identified as dancing look the same as women engaged in other activities, or if they are wearing special clothing. Different clothing would, to me, indicate that something special was happening, perhaps of a ritualistic nature or celebrations of some sort. It can also indicate that these women came from different strata in the society, both gender- and status wise. I have chosen frescoes both from Knossos and from Akrotiri on Thera (Santorini), and I have chosen frescoes with women showing them in full or

⁶⁷ Winbladh 2004, p. 92-93.

nearly full body. It exists a lot of frescoes with women from the BA but many of them are so fragmented that not much can really be said about them. Below follows an account of four frescoes, one from Knossos and three from Akrotiri, showing women.

The Grandstand Fresco, MMIIIB/LMIA



Figure 23 The grand stand fresco, Knossos.

The grandstand fresco was found fallen on the basement floor in a small room at the north end of the central court in the palace of Knossos. It is dated to MMIIIB/LMIA.⁶⁸ This is perhaps not an everyday life scene since it shows a big gathering of people, both men and women, inside the palace watching something that is sadly lost to us. Most people are standing, but in the middle of the painting we see women sitting down together and talking. From their hair styles it seems it is mostly mature women but also some younger women with partly shaved heads and longer curls. They are wearing the long flouncy skirts in different colors and patterns and the jacket/bodice also in different colors. Most of the jackets are blue but some are also yellow and red. These are also the colors used for the skirts. In the back, on the staircase, we see three full bodied women and fragments of a fourth standing. They have the same type of clothes as the seated women but somewhat simpler in color and patterns.

⁶⁸ German 2005, p. 116.

The Saffron Gatherers, LMIA



Figure 24 The saffron gatherers, Akrotiri.

This fresco comes from Akrotiri on Thera and was found on the first floor of the house Xeste 3 and is 2.44x2.66 meters.⁶⁹ It is dated to LMIA and shows two women, one older and one younger, picking crocuses. The older is in charge of the basket and seems to be telling the younger what to do. They are very nicely dressed, again with the big skirts with many colors and patterns and the short tight jackets. The younger girl's clothes seem more elaborate than that of the older woman with more and expensive colors such as the red jacket and different colors on the skirt. She also wears earrings and bracelets. The woman on the other hand has a more simple dress but with many necklaces around her neck instead.

Saffron was used as a dye, medicine and perfume and was collected from the stamens of the crocus flower. As seen many of the women depicted has a yellow saffron color on their clothes and in ancient Greece this color was a symbol of supremacy and wealth.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ <http://www.therafoundation.org/wallpaintingexhibition/saffron-gatheres/wallpainting>.

⁷⁰ <http://www.therafoundation.org/wallpaintingexhibition/saffron-gatheres/wallpainting>.

Young Priestess, LMIA



This fresco was found in room 5 of the West house and is 1.51x0.35 meters. It shows a girl carrying a lit fire-box to which she adds incense. She wears a beautiful blue checkered jacket and on top of that, a saffron colored robe with a blue rim.⁷¹ This way of dressing with the robe differs from the women above. Perhaps it is winter and cold or maybe the scholars have actually gotten it right this time, that she is a young priestess and they are dressing this way.

Figure 25 Young priestess, Akrotiri.

The Adorants, LMIA

Also from Xeste 3 and the “Lustral basin” comes this fresco of three women in differing ages. It measures 1.43x3.91 meters and shows three women in different postures. The one to the left is kneeling and wears a transparent jacket of high quality and beautiful jewelries such as a big necklace and earrings. In her hand she’s holding another necklace. The woman in the middle seems to have hurt her leg and is holding it with one arm and the other hand she holds to her face. In Egypt “hand to the face” is used to depict lament.⁷² Her clothes are also of high quality. To the right stands a girl, her head shaved with long locks in the back and one shorter in front. The girl’s clothes are of the same style and quality as those of the women.



Figure 26 The adorants, Akrotiri.

⁷¹ <http://www.therafoundation.org/wallpaintingexhibition/young-priestess/wallpainting>.

⁷² <http://www.therafoundation.org/wallpaintingexhibition/adorants/wallpainting>.

Result

To reach a conclusion to the main question “can any similarities in dancing in the Bronze Age through to the Classical period be seen?” we first need to discuss the result of following questions below; Who is dancing? How are they dancing? In what situations do we find dance?

Who is dancing?

In the folk dances and the Classical dances both men and women take active part. In folk dancing it was the people in the poor country side and the soldiers who were preserving the traditions and the local dances. However the ruling elite encouraged them by taking part in the dancing to create bonds and stop eventual uprisings against them. In the Classical period dancing does not seem to be so controlled, even though also here the soldiers had dancing as part of their training. Dancing was also used as entertainment in this period. In the theater the chorus was both singing and dancing to enhance what was happening on stage, and I’m sure it took place in the symposium with skilled hetaerae even though this paper has not included pictorial evidence of that.

In the Bronze Age however, what we see is exclusively young, unmarried (?) women or girls dancing. Judging by their dresses and jewelries it is clear that it is individuals from the upper stratum of society. This does not mean that poor people did not dance, but of course in a palace milieu or a big villa this will not be shown in the art. I’m sure the villagers also danced during festivities, like Hanna said “dancing is human” so why would they not? Sadly we do not have any archaeological records of this from either art or written material. From the material we see that it is both “normal” women dancing, the priestesses and perhaps even the goddess herself seen in the nature fresco. There are no men or soldiers taking part in the dancing.

How are they dancing?

The folk dances and the Classical dances again show striking similarities both in style and steps. The ring dance seems very popular in both eras with striding steps. The steps in the dances when you are not linked to another person are full of speed, jumps and turns for the

men in both folk and Classical dancing, whereas the women in the folk dances are slightly more modest and the Classical women try to protrude their feminine parts like their buttocks. Focus from both eras seems to lie on the foot work, the arms and hands do not seem important.

In the Bronze Age material we also have the ring dance but the similarities seem to stop there. The palace dancers are full of grace and poise. In contrast to the other two periods where focus was on the feet, the Bronze Age dancers seem to use their entire body, feet, hips, arms and heads are all part of the dancing. The Bronze Age women did on the other hand also have a wild side, seen when they are dancing to either please or elicit the goddess. If this is caused by going into trance by their own or with help from drugs we can only speculate but since poppies evidently were used, the use of other drugs that make you more frantic is not impossible. Why the palace dancers in the sacred grove fresco did not dance in this way we can also only speculate in. If the scene we are seeing is a dance in a rite of passage for girls becoming women instead of a harvest fertility dance, then maybe the controlled and gracious dance was a symbol of becoming a real adult woman and to leave child play behind.

In what situations do we find dance?

What all periods have in common is that dance is practiced during festivities, rites and holidays, but whereas the dancing in modern and Classical times took place in the public the dance of the Bronze Age was confined to the palaces and the shrines in the nature. Can this be a sign that the dance and the dancers were controlled by the ruling elite? If the sacred grove-fresco is showing a rite of passage and many girls are doing it at the same time then this I think is also a sign of the palace controlling the girls and the dance in the end.

Conclusions

The main question for this thesis was “can any similarities in dancing in the Bronze Age through to the Classical period be seen?” and the answer is surprisingly “No”. If we do not count the ring dance, which does exist through all ages but which I do not believe to be typical for Greece, then the styles of the Bronze Age and those of Classical period and traditional dances of today are very different.

The style in the Bronze Age is serious, gracious and pantomimic or ecstatic with focus on the entire body, but even here the moves seem strong and gracious. They were dancing in groups or by themselves and sometimes together in a ring dance. In the Classical period material we see the opposite; the dances consist of high jumps and stamping. They are fast and focus is on the foot work and not on e.g. hands and arms as in the Bronze Age, they are happy and playful, almost with a comical feeling. What is interesting is that the Classical period dances seem to have survived until today. The style and steps are very similar as seen in the pictorial material. The dance of the Bronze Age has much more in common in style with the Classical Indian dances, which also are strong and gracious. The focus is on the entire body and especially *mudras*, which are hand movements, are important. With my notation on the jewelry theme the list of similarities grows even longer.

After the final destruction of the palaces on Crete and on the Mainland by the sea people the dance of the Bronze Age disappeared, at least in the art, and was perhaps replaced with dances from the new invading people both on Crete and on the Mainland. What is clear after having done this thesis is that there was a big shift concerning the dances after the final destruction of the palaces and the entering of the Classical Period and that the new dances survived into present day.

Summary

This thesis has dealt with dancing in the Greek Bronze Age from an anthropological perspective. The main question was “can any similarities in dancing in the Bronze Age through to the Classical period be seen?” By using archaeological material and modern research on dance in the Classical period and on folk dancing in Greece today, I was hoping to easier be able to interpret the Bronze Age material and see similarities between the different periods. The material from the Bronze Age consisted of frescoes, signet rings and clay figurines from mainly Crete but also the Greek Mainland. By comparing this material with modern research on later dancing interesting results and conclusions were reached.

The study has shown that later dancing includes running, fast steps, jumps and turns. The dances and styles of the Classical period and the modern folk dances are very similar. Both men and women took part. The Bronze Age dancing was performed by young women and it is strong and graceful in style with focus on arm movements and the s-shaped body posture, something that is missing in later dancing. Ring dances exist like in later periods but are not considered to be a strong evidence of continuation since this dance form is so fundamental in the history of dancing that it is hard to connect specifically to Greece.

The conclusion is that there are no similarities between Bronze Age- and Classical period dancing in Greece. The Bronze Age dancing, at least in the art, seems to have disappeared when Greece got invaded in the end of the Bronze Age by the Sea people. All the palaces got destroyed, the Mycenaeans fled inlands and where the Minoans went is not clear. Their dancing resembles the traditional Indian dancing in style a lot, much more than the later dances in Greece.

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Electronic Resources

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