

Picturing the Dionysiac *Phallophoria*. Performance, Laughter, and Resonance

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1. Introduction

In Antiquity, religious practices shaped the relationships of individuals to the social, material, and intangible world. ‘Works of art’, such as a statue or a hymn were often used to represent and actualise a divine presence.¹ I will exemplify how performances (i.e. social practices that produce specific meaning) influenced such perceptions and enabled a responsive relationship with the divine by employing the combined approaches of resonance and performativity.² The focus will be on the procession of the so-called Dionysia in the Classical period, celebrated annually in many Greek cities.³ Signalling the arrival of Dionysus and the beginning of the festival, it involved a large representation of an erect phallus carved out of wood and is thus known as *phallophoria* (‘bearing-a-phallus’).

To describe and explain its materiality, its layers of meaning, and effects, I relate to the aesthetical framework of performativity developed by Erika Fischer-Lichte.⁴ As she has pointed out, the actions and reactions of actors and audience are interwoven with the materiality and create a unique

1 The literature on this topic is immense. I cite only a few, that concern the bodies and life of the gods and the importance of images to enable social participation. Sissa/Detienne (2000); Bielfeldt (2014); Hölscher (2017); Chaniotis (2017).

2 In the introduction to this volume, 9-30, Gärtner draws attention to the concepts while exploring the dynamics of perception and the effects of ‘works of art’.

3 Dionysia were annual festivals of Dionysus and included theatre competitions. The most famous are the Athenian festivals, the ‘Rural Dionysia’ of the demes and the ‘Great Dionysia’ of the city, which have been studied intensively. See: Cole (1993); Sissa/Detienne (2000), 230-241; Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 67-123, 177-184; Wilson (2018); Csapo/Wilson (2020), esp. 3-19.

4 Fischer-Lichte (2008).

experienceable event. Also, interactive processes (corporeality, spatiality, tonality, and temporality) generate and shape the experience. An analysis based on these parameters can help understand the dynamics of the *phallophoria* and the expected actions and reactions of the participants.

By considering resonant self-world relations, I aim to focus on the anticipated relationships enabled by the *phallophoria*. As posed by Hartmut Rosa, the central questions concern the issue of resonance as an aimed effect of acts of worship and as a quality of ‘works of art’.⁵ To lay out the concept very briefly, resonance is manifested in immediate actions and reactions (affection, self-efficacy, transformation), which establish an intensive experience in the subject and are happening in response to a perceived object. Since the term characterises a responsive relationship between any subject and object, it is possible to exemplify a range of relationships by changing viewpoints. While resonance can be the desired outcome, it cannot be forced (uncontrollability). Still, amplifying contexts of perception, especially religious ones, can allude to such experiences and are encompassed by the term dispositional resonance. Therefore, by exemplifying the performative materiality of the *phallophoria* I aim to approach the circumstances and elements that would very likely amplify specific self-world relations and contribute to a resonant experience.

Whereas both resonance and a performance are individually experienceable and exist only in the presence, they can also be the subject matter of a longer lasting ‘work of art’ such as a song, a play, or an image. The experiences of the *phallophoria* were portrayed by Athenian painters and the playwright Aristophanes. All of them likely attended the Dionysia but produced varied viewpoints. Each highlighted other aspects and portrayed the elements differently. I will reflect on the narratives by identifying the participants, the phallus, and their specific actions. The painters and the playwright surprised their audiences with comical distortions of the procession’s elements and effects. Based on the given narratives, I aim to point to factors relevant to a depiction of resonance: affection, self-efficacy and transformation.

5 He expands on them in his contribution to this volume, 31-43. For a detailed definition of the concept and the terms, see Rosa (2019).

2. Reconstructing the Performance of the phallophoria

I first consider the participants and basic elements to hypothetically approach the materiality of a typical Dionysiac *phallophoria*.⁶ Since the festivities and theatre competitions held in honour of Dionysus were major public events, the heralding procession included the priesthood and various religious personnel as well as the competing citizen choirs, satyr players, and actors. In addition, honoured guests participated in the parade to the theatre, where the festivities took place, such as benefactors of the city, or in Athens the war orphans. Especially, during the 'Great Dionysia', whole communities were on display. When Athens had moved the treasury of the 'Delian League' to the Athena sanctuary at the Acropolis in 454 BCE, the members had to send delegates to pay and display their annual tribute at the *phallophoria*.⁷ Certainly, for all participants, the procession was an opportunity to show off and to be seen and had the potential to be a profound social and religious experience.

Most importantly, the procession included the cult image of the community, which represented Dionysus, and actualised his presence.⁸ Contrary to the statue of the god, which once established, was the same throughout the years, the wooden phallus was made specifically for each occasion.⁹ It

6 The elements of a *phallophoria* have been discussed based on historical sources. Scholars have highlighted the development in different places and focused on the religious, social, and political implications. I have drawn on their reconstructions in my analysis. See Herter (1983b); Cole (1993); Csapo (1997); Bierl (2001); Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 72-73; Csapo/Wilson (2020), 13; 21-22.

7 See Krentz (1993); Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 72.

8 At the 'Great Dionysia' the statue of Dionysus Eleuthereus was first brought to a shrine outside the city. To then celebrate the mythical arrival of the cult in Athens, the procession accompanied it to the theatre. Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 72-73, 99.

9 Although none of them survived, there are references in inscriptions. Decrees set up at the Athenian Acropolis suggest, that more than one phallus was part of the procession since it was old custom for the colonies to send not only a sacrificial victim but a phallus to the 'Great Dionysia' (IG I³ 46, 440-432 BCE; SEG 31.67, 372/71 BCE). Also, a wagon for it is attested (IG II³ 1 889, 278/77 BCE). More is known of the phallus in Hellenistic Delos, where several inscriptions attest to the production. It was annually carved, painted, equipped with wings, and positioned on a wagon for the procession. See Vallois (1922); Cole (1993), 26, 30-31; Csapo/Wilson (2020), 655-658.

was presented as an *agalma*, a gift to Dionysus, that was skilfully carved and painted. Intertwined with and related to the display of the Dionysiac phallus and the staged arrival of Dionysus were obscene songs (*phallika*).¹⁰ They were performed by groups of drunken revellers (*kōmastai*).¹¹ Their songs and routines (i.e. their performance or *kōmos*) were not composed and directed by famous playwrights but were improvised and derived from loose traditions. The Greeks characterised those as *aischrological* – a broad term that referred to sexual and obscene content, unsuited for young eyes and ears.¹²

2.1 The Transformation of Space and Time

An initial sacrifice and the procession transformed the city into a divine space, apt for holding theatre competitions to honour Dionysus. As the lively parade, with all its participants, moved towards the theatre it gathered a crowd. In the case of Athens, the procession passed the Agora and performed at the Altar of the Twelve Gods before they took the Street of the Tripods to the theatre. For the community, these places were important social and political hubs throughout the year. To honour

the victorious *choregos* (i.e. the sponsor of a choir) lavish monuments were erected alongside the street, which displayed their price (a tripod). These reminded the participants of the procession of past performers and plays and some, eager to win, would have hoped that the new monument would relate to them. The *phallophoria* transformed not only the commu-

10 The genre is attested via the text fragment of Semus and a comedy by Aristophanes, discussed below. Cf. Bierl (2001); Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 174-177.

11 As Cristine Sourvinou-Inwood emphasised the *kōmos* started well before the procession, when they gathered to drink and 'prepare' for their march to the theatre. Regarding Athens, the different male clubs (or gangs) which performed at various festivals are mentioned in Demosthenes' speech against Konon (Demosth. 54). See Bierl (2001), 313-314, 316; Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), esp. 78-89; Cohen (2011), 474-477.

12 This was not an exclusive feature of Dionysia but played a role in many rituals. Cf. Rösler (1993); Halliwell (2008); Rosen (2015). Increasingly, imagery has also been connected to this phenomenon. See Kreilinger (2010); Cohen (2011); Wöhner/Hertzer (2019).

nities' space but also time. The city celebrated the end of the profane and the beginning of the sacred. In Classical Athens, the festivities would last for days, interfering with everyday life and inverting social norms. Certainly, the improvised *kōmos* went on, as drunken revellers celebrated in the following nights. The Athenian youth bonded, shared cups of wine, and the experience of performing together.¹³

A short description of the content and dynamics of such songs was recorded by the Delian antiquarian Semus (2nd c. BCE).¹⁴ From the audience's perspective, Semus describes two groups of arriving *kōmastai* and their costumes. First on stage are the *ithyphalloi* ('stiffpricks'), who announce the appearance of Dionysus, whereas the later appearing *phallophoroi* ('phallus-bearer') signal the divine presence with phallus and song. Anton Bierl analysed Semus's text to examine the structural connections between religious rituals and theatre performances.¹⁵ He convincingly showed that the lyrics of the *phallikon* direct and reflect the actions and reactions of performers and the audience. The *kōmastai* had a functional role similar to the choir in a theatre play; commenting, explaining, and thus mediating what was happening on stage, i.e. the arrival of Dionysus.

2.2. The Embodiment of Dionysiac Power and the Divine

During their performance, the *kōmastai* wore costumes to visualise and embody Dionysiac personas or characters. I would presume that their bodily appearances, like their performances, were also influenced by loose

13 To the topography of the Athenian procession route see Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 89-99, 107, 118-120.

14 Since only a few lines of his work on *Paeans* ('hymns') are preserved, it is unclear to which 'Dionysia' he was referring. He surely attended the Delian Dionysia but possibly also the Athenian ones. His account was passed down by Athenaeus, who in 200 CE cited the passage (FGrH 396 F 24 = Ath. 14, 622a-d). Cf. Cole (1993), 32 f.; Csapo/Wilson (2020), 23. For a detailed analysis of the ritual performance see Bierl (2001). I paraphrased the account and cited only the *phallikon*.

15 Bierl (2001), esp. 325-346.

local traditions. In his account, Semus described two sets of attires.¹⁶ The *ithyphalloi* wear masks of drunken men and crowns and are dressed in embroidered chitons, covered by a long mantle. The *phallophoroi* are dressed in heavy cloaks and wear a chaplet of herbs concealed by a thick crown of violets and ivy. Certainly, also other participants of the procession, such as the satyr players, priestesses and priests, basket-bearers, the *choregoi*, and their choirs have dressed for the occasion. Their special attire and the carried attributes or *paraphernalia* often characterised their social and religious status. Wearing floral chaplets and beautifully embroidered clothes, the participants are likely to feel special and somewhat transformed.

In addition to the participants, also the statue of Dionysus and the wooden phallus were adorned with chaplets. Especially during the procession these artificially made images provided bodies to encounter (to see, touch, and move) the immaterial divine. At the *phallophoria*, the presence and close proximity of such divine 'embodiments' affected the self-world relations. In Athens, the honour of carrying the statue of Dionysus to the theatre was reserved for the ephebes. Most likely they felt self-efficacy as their participation was viewed as an important step in becoming grown members of the Athenian community. Regarding the appearance of his statues in the different cities, it is important to mention that, unlike most of his fantastical entourage, Dionysus is never depicted as ithyphallic (i.e. having an erect penis).¹⁷ Thus, for Dionysus, the phallus is a separate embodied power, which is closely connected to his gift to mankind: wine. Especially in an erect state, the phallus visualises the main transformative effects of heavy wine consumption: A heightened feeling of one's bodily urges, sexual desires, and a loss of self-control. These features were displayed by the drunken *kōmastai*.¹⁸

16 The costumes often inverted gender norms and had religious subtones. See Csapo (1997), 261-264; Bierl (2001), 319-322; Sourvinou-Inwood (2003), 79-80.

17 While Eric Csapo mentioned this, based on attested phallic names for Dionysus, he argued that the phallus is not only a gift for Dionysus but the god appearing in yet another form. Csapo (1997), 259-261. I follow his conclusion insofar, that the confusion and inversion of the god, his effective powers, and his offerings are inherently Dionysiac characteristics.

18 For similar arguments see Csapo (1997), 260; Sissa/Detienne (2000), 239-241.

2.3. The Transformative Effects of Songs and Laughter

Semus provides only a short example of the much longer performance of obscene songs and improvised mockery addressed to the audience. He cites the starting lines of a *phallikon* as follows:

σοί, Βάκχε, τάνδε μοῦσαν ἀγλαίζομεν,
ἀπλοῦν ῥυθμὸν χέοντες αἰόλῳ μέλει,
καινάν, ἀπαρθένευτον, οὔ τι ταῖς πάρος
κεχρημέναν ὠδαῖσιν, ἀλλ' ἀκήρατον
κατάρχομεν τὸν ὕμνον.

For you, O Bacchus, do we now set forth, this tuneful song, uttering in various melody, this simple rhythm. It is a song unsuited to a virgin, nor are we now addressing you with hymns made long ago, but this our offering is fresh unutter'd praise.¹⁹

The lyrics remind everyone that everything about to happen (including the later performed plays) is meant to be an offering to the powerful god. The obscene songs and the performing *kōmastai* introduce the divine time of the festival but are also meant to entertain Dionysus and the audience. As the lyrics state, their songs, utterances, and dances were new and improvised. By nature, none of those left a record for us to analyse in detail. Certainly, the lyrics made humorous and ambiguous references to social, political, and sexual life and mocked persons based on stereotypes. Semus states, that the *kōmastai* singled out individuals to mimic and make fun of them, thus the audience was not only watching but also the subject matter of the performed jokes and parodies. Their performance directly addressed the gathered audience and created strong emotional responses, that in turn affected the performers.

A certain effect of the obscene and loud *phallophoria* was the shared laughter of all those involved, including ideally Dionysus.²⁰ The presence of the huge phallus amidst costumed *kōmastai* amplified the tendentious

19 PMG 851b. Translation by J.D. Yong. See also Bierl (2001), 325-346.

20 In Antiquity shared laughter had a vital role in different socio-religious venues, especially at the symposium, the comic theatre or specific religious festivals. The subsequent literature is immense, I name only a few. Cf. Halliwell (2008), esp. 1-50; Krelinger (2010); Cohen (2011). Methodologically still a key work is Sigmund Freud's

punchlines of the songs and effects of the performance. Together these ‘works of art’ should provoke sudden outbursts of loud laughter and generate new pleasure by violating social interdictions.²¹ Shared laughter is vital for constructing groups and a common identity. Generated by sexual obscenities, it has a cathartic effect and provides the release of pent-up tensions, worries, and impulses.²² While Semus’ descriptive account was a fruitful source to reflect on the materiality of the performance and the disposition of *resonance*, certain ‘works of art’ provide narratives of a *phallopheoria* and further insight into the conceivable elements of a *resonant* experience.

3. The Performance as a Subject Matter of ‘Works of Art’

The ‘artworks’ discussed in this chapter represent two different visual media: theatre and decorated pottery. Yet, both the play in question and the fine ware were produced and perceived in Athens. All are thus products of the lifestyle and needs of their society. Not unlike theatre plays, the pottery was created to be part of a performative act, aimed at an engagement with an audience: the drinker.²³ The drinker could spin a cup, setting the depicted figures on its outside walls *in motion*. Given a full cup, the tondo images inside were hidden. They emerge only if one has consumed

Witz in which he analysed contemporary humour and jokes to determine the precise elements that provoked laughter and (more speculatively) why, see Freud (1905).

21 Freud (1905), 73-97.

22 Some illustrations of these claims can be met with in ancient literature: a sudden outburst of laughter in reaction to an obscene joke releases the grief of Demeter after the abduction of her daughter (Hom. *Hym.* 2,200-204); all the gods on Olympus burst out laughing ridiculing Hephaistos as he had trapped in his net his naked wife Aphrodite and Ares in flagrante (Hom. *Od.* 8,325-345).

23 The performative quality of pottery was highlighted by François Lissarrague, Ada Cohen and Corrina Reinhardt. In Athens, the performative act of sharing wine is best exemplified by the privately hosted *symposia*. Their social relevance should not be underestimated, for this was where the elite negotiated values and formed opinions. The men bonded, drank, laughed, made music, discussed philosophical and political matters, and admired beauty, and the host’s tableware. See Lissarrague (1990); Cohen (2011), esp. 482-483; Reinhardt (2019).

the wine. Especially cups had the potential to connect and transform a gathered group. Not only did they contain an intoxicating drink, which could potentially change the mood of the drinkers, but they were meant to be passed around and therefore helped to form a social bond. The same could be said of a play. The shared theatre experience provided a platform for social bonding. The plays' content had the potential to change and interfere with the audience, thus reflecting and transforming social realities and viewpoints.

In his comedies, Aristophanes constantly referred to rituals as points of orientation and connection. But more than once he comically distorts the widely known elements, thus creating a theatrical persiflage that surprises and sometimes disturbs the audience. As did the *kōmastai*, he mocked politics, public persons and stereotypes, using tendentious and obscene language and sexual puns to provoke shared laughter.²⁴ In his comedy *Acharnians* he stages and distorts a *phallophoria*.²⁵ The play was originally performed at the Athenian theatre in 425 BCE at another Dionysiac festival, the *Lenaia*. At that time Athens was involved in the Peloponnesian war against Sparta and her allies. Against the backdrop of a war, Aristophanes confronted his audience with a persiflage of a *phallophoria*, designed to create laughter and signal the desire for a 'divine time' of celebration and peace. But well before playwrights, Athenian painters produced images on this subject.²⁶

The imagery (i.e. the world represented by images) of Athenian fine ware demonstrates a shared system of systematic representational conventions or visual language, which regulated not only which subject was portrayed but also how. Analogous to poets, the artisans used features of identification and different strategies of narration. The resulting images reflected Athenian realities and worldviews. Rituals were a common subject but only a few images show the Dionysiac *phallophoria*, identifiable via the depiction of the phallus and the actions of the surrounding figures. Produced primarily

24 For an English translation of the play, as well as a short commentary and a summary of Aristophanes' life and impact in Classical Athens, see Sommerstein (2002).

25 Ar. *Ach.* 237-301.

26 For examples see Boardman (1991); Kreiling (2010); Wöhner/Hertzner (2019).

in Late Archaic and Early Classical times, they were designed to handle and serve wine. Such drinking ware was part of various festivities and in the different contexts of use, gained various levels of significance. While the find spots mark the end of the active use of the pottery and their transformation into artefacts, we often know nothing about their journeys or purposes and by whom they were once used.²⁷ Nonetheless, complementary to literature, the imagery allows us to approach narratives of the *phallophoria* and potential resonant experiences.

3.1. Phales as a Comical Counterpart of a *Resonant* Experience

The stereotypical farmer Dikaiopolis (*Just City*) is the central character of the play *Acharnians* set in contemporary Athens.²⁸ For the audience in 425 BCE, he represents a familiar face driven by a desire, most likely shared by many. His story expresses a longing for peace and an end to the war. In the opening scene (1-42), Dikaiopolis waits alone at the assembly site on the Pnyx, thinks of his country home and his fields, resents the town life and longs for peacetime. As the assembly begins, none of the speakers talks about peace, but he meets Amphiheus, an immortal descendant of Demeter and Triptolemus. Dikaiopolis sends him away to buy a private treaty with the Spartans (130-133).

Through the lens of self-world relations, the basic components of an experience of *resonance* are the turning points of Dikaiopolis' story. He is driven and affected by a 'thing' outside of his experienceable world. His desire for peace moves him to act and surprisingly, his new divine friend manages to swiftly bring a variety of peace treaties to choose from. He settles for long peace and promises to hold *Dionysia* celebrating this

27 Sometimes via the archaeological record, we can identify the last occasion for staging them. For example, a jug depicting a *kōmastēs* wearing a phallus crest was found scattered in the debris of the Athenian Acropolis. It may have been used in celebrations or was once dedicated to the gods. Others found whole were most likely deposited in graves of Etruscan cities such as Orvieto.

28 The procession scene was extensively studied, cf. Habash (1995), 562-567; Bierl (2001), 350-361; Csapo/Wilson (2020), 19-24. For my analysis, I paraphrase the plot and quote only the phallus song performed by the main character.

achievement (174-203). Moreover, he experiences and expresses self-efficacy through the hastily improvised procession at his home (237-279). His daughter acts as basket-bearer and performs the bloodless sacrifice at the beginning, two slaves are carrying the phallus, and his wife is sent up to the roof as audience, while he takes the central role of a *kōmastēs*. He intones the following *phallikon* as the procession starts to move (263-278).

Φαλῆς ἑταῖρε Βακχίου
ξύγκωμε νυκτοπεριπλάνητε
μοιχὲ παιδεραστά,
ἔκτω σ' ἔτει προσεῖπον ἐς
τὸν δῆμον ἐλθὼν ἄσμενος,
σπονδὰς ποιησάμενος ἑμαντῶ,
πραγμάτων τε καὶ μαχῶν
καὶ Λαμάχων ἀπαλλαγείς.
πολλῶ γάρ ἐσθ' ἥδιον, ὦ Φαλῆς Φαλῆς,
κλέπτουσιν εὐρόνθ' ὠρικὴν ὕληφόρον
τὴν Στρυμοδώρου Θρατταν ἐκ τοῦ Φελλέως
μέσσην λαβόντ' ἄραντα καταβαλόντα
καταγιγαρτίσ' ὦ
Φαλῆς Φαλῆς.
ἐὰν μεθ' ἡμῶν ξυμπίης, ἐκ κραιπάλης
ἔωθεν εἰρήνης ροφήσει τρύβλιον:

Phales, companion of Bacchus, fellow reveller, night-wanderer, seducer, boy lover, after six years, I greet you as I gladly come to my deme, with a truce made for myself, freed from troubles and battles and Lamachuses. Yes, it's much more pleasant Phales, Phales. To catch a budding girl wood-carrier as she's thieving – Strymodoros' Thracian slave from the rocky land – grab her waist, lift her up, throw her down and take her cherry. Phales, Phales, if you drink with us, after the bout at dawn you will drain a cup of peace; and my shield will be hung by the hearth.²⁹

The song is addressed to Phales, whose specific name is a hapax but could refer to a Dionysiac character or entity.³⁰ In my opinion, Phales may as well be a skilfully invented mock-god, since his name is a clear reference to the phallus carried in the procession. Hence, the amusing Athenian

29 Translation by Csapo/Wilson (2020), 20-21.

30 Hans Herter identified Phales (and the image of the phallus) as an old god of the 'Rural Dionysia'. He argued that the god cannot be an invention of Aristophanes because in that case, the audience would not have understood it as a parody of the phallus songs. Herter (1983a), 1667.

dedicated his song not to Dionysus but to the material offering (*agalma*). Consequently, the lyrics may distort the audience's perspective: via the song, the *agalma* for Dionysus is transformed and enlivened and becomes Phales, a companion of the god and reveller of the night.³¹

The *phallikon* also signals the transformation of Dikaiopolis' world relations, from being a soldier in war into being a farmer, who merely conquers the neighbour's slave. For Dikaiopolis, who rather prefers the lustrous country life to the raging war, Phales (the enlivened phallus) acts as the divine guarantor and mediator of that wish. Furthermore, Phales is invited to the celebrations, and by sharing a cup to seal the desired peace. But Dikaiopolis' *phallophoria* is unexpectedly disrupted and ends prematurely (280-301). An angry mob of farmers and charcoal burners from Acharnae arrives, who oppose his plan. He is not able to maintain peaceful self-world relations but is faced with shared anger. With this outcome, Aristophanes highlighted the uncontrollability of the desired peace, the Athenian people, and subsequently, the ritual designed to establish a sacred time and divine presence. In his humorous narration of the *phallophoria*, Aristophanes employed distortions, and surprises. He vividly pictures a relationship between the *kōmastēs* (Dikaiopolis) and the phallus (Phales). On stage, the offering to Dionysus is transformed into his companion, with whom one can share a cup of peace. The connection between *kōmastai* and phallus and the transformative power of the *phallophoria* was expressed and narrated in different ways by the Athenian painters a few generations before.

3.2. Questions of Size and Effects of the Phallus

The earliest images of a *phallophoria* can be found on a drinking cup (Fig. 1) made around 560 BCE.³² Eric Csapo has discussed the imagery in great

31 Also, Eric Csapo and Peter Wilson interpret Phales as the personified phallus. Csapo/Wilson (2020), 23.

32 BAPD 547; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/2D2A3E6F-E695-4F7E-9977-FEE5A52E7C49>.

detail and linked one side to the procession of the 'Rural *Dionysia*' and the other to the 'Great *Dionysia*'.³³



Fig. 1. A phallophoria. Museo Archeologico, Nazionale, Florence Inv. 3897. With permission of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Firenze (Direzione regionale Musei della Toscana).

The painter depicted the same scene in two juxtaposing versions. The linking elements are the long phallus poles and the group of men carrying them on their shoulders. The heavy objects are each decorated with woollen tufts and supported by a wooden frame. The men carrying them can be identified as groups of *kōmastai* or *phallophoroi*. However, there are differences in the appearance and actions of the two groups. On one side six ithyphallic men are carrying the frame, with a man at each end

33 Cf. Csapo (1997), 265-279; Kreilinger (2010), 79, 81; Wöhner/Hertzer (2019), 130-131, 149 fig. Kat. 8.

holding on and rocking it. Astride the frame, a huge, hairy satyr is stooping forward to hold on to the phallus with both hands. He is ridden by a smaller figure like a jockey. The *kōmastai* on the other side are missing the erect penises and the additional performers. A huge pot-bellied man with a beard takes the place of the satyr. He holds the phallus like a rudder. Although the painter proverbially depicted a *phallophoria*, i.e. the phallus and its bearers, the resulting images are enriched with the fantastic. The central phallus is staged as a huge object, but each has a fantastic element, blurring the boundaries of artificial and actual: a painted eye to gaze back at the viewer. The larger-than-life figures on top have been addressed by Csapo as puppets.³⁴ However, nothing in the image suggests that they are inanimate, or artificially made. In the narrative of the image, they are as alive as the other depicted figures and their size can be seen as a reference to their importance.

Conventionally, the satyr and the pot-bellied dancer are figures used in scenes depicting the Dionysiac realm and Dionysiac festivities. But in this instance, the painter chose to blow them out of proportion and stage them as phallus riders. The satyr (being a wild mount himself) is used to exemplify the obscene ambience of the procession and affects the actions and bodies of the *kōmastai*, who accompany the satyr. They are depicted in a state of sexual arousal and three are 'out of line'. Two men show counterproductive behaviour by interfering with the movement of the group. Another one has climbed the satyr. Contrary to the obscene behaviour displayed on one side, the performance depicted on the other side seems tame. All *kōmastai* are in order, and nobody blocks their way. The huge dancer, a reference to the various dancing performers and actors of the *Dionysia*, steers the phallus and its bearers forward. I argue that the images on both sides seen back-to-back, exemplify the transformative power of the *phallophoria*. Via turning the cup, the *kōmos* moves and for the drinker, the ambience changes from tame to obscene and back again.

34 Csapo (1997), 269-277.

3.3. On Costumes and Roles of the *Kōmastai*

Years later, a few painters depicted costumed male figures who engage in a performance, which includes staff-like *phalloi*, often equipped with an eye on top. Such a performer is shown on fragments of an *oinochoe* (wine-jug) found at the Athenian Acropolis.³⁵ An adolescent man draped in a long garment is wearing a phallus crest on his head and carrying a phallus staff. Since he is depicted moving, he probably was part of a processional *kōmos*.³⁶ A similar group of bearded performers dressed in long robes was depicted on a cup (Fig. 2) made in the mid-5th century BCE.³⁷

35 National Museum, Athens 2.702 (490–480 BCE); BAPD 202154; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/0E5D430A-6254-4B42-B7D7-BAA696004B86>, see Padgett (2017), 110–111 fig. 5.

36 Herbert Hoffmann illustrates the fragment in his chapter devoted to another Dionysiac festival, the *Anthesteria*, though he does not clarify why he draws this particular connection. Hoffmann (1997), 55–60. Similar figures can be found on another cup found in Orvieto (Museo Civico, Orvieto 45; BAPD 211338; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/902D09FF-0177-4A80-8631-7F4C502CE937>). The images show bearded men in long, ornate robes dancing and holding onto phallus staffs. In addition, the painter pictured a divine audience for their *kōmos*. Dionysus is prominently staged among his brothers Heracles, Hermes and probably Apollon. The group of male gods is almost statue-like lined up to be present at the performance and take no action of their own.

37 BAPD 212189; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/68CBE65C-7B80-41EE-98B3-2332BD3E4FF9>.



Fig. 2. Kōmastai and the advent of Dionysus. J.P. Getty Villa Museum, Malibu 86.AE.296. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

A decorated phallus staff decorated with an eye is propped up in the background, while the *kōmastai* are talking and moving.³⁸ Their performance signals the arrival of Dionysus, which is shown inside the cup.³⁹ After the drinker has emptied the wine, the image of a bearded god appears. Striding along he wears a short chiton and cloak. In his right hand, he carries a *thyrsus*. At his feet, one can read an inscription, ΕΣΑΤΙΚ. As Erika Simon has suggested, the Athenian viewer could well have interpreted the letters as ἐς Ἀτ[τ]ικ[ήν] ('to Attica'), which would fit the advent or epiphany of Dionysus in Athens.⁴⁰ In both examples, the painters have decided to depict the phallus as a relatively small attribute, which glances at the *kōmastai*. Their costumes conveyed social status and their religious role. A youth proudly wearing a phallus crest and others who are performing in female clothes, emphasise self-efficacy and the social value of the *kōmastai*.

I would like to point out another type of performer, who also participated in the *Dionysia* and the heralding processions. The figures depicted on a fragmentary amphora (Fig. 3) painted around 480 BCE can by their costume be understood as satyr players, but they are equipped with unusual accoutrements.⁴¹ The larger fragment shows an ithyphallic youth holding a shield with a suspended panther's skin. A winged phallus is flying from behind the shield. The smaller fragments display similar figures. Unlike the one-eyed phallus staff, able only to watch, the winged phallus is pictured as an enlivened creature, which moves in tune with the satyr player. The painter depicted the phallus not as an object of a procession or an attribute of a performance, but as a fantastic companion of the Dionysiac mock warriors.⁴² Through their ithyphallic costume and armament, they are ex-

38 Karl Kachler identified them as a choir of a comedy. Kachler (1991), 55 fig. 34b.

39 John Beazley addressed him as Zeus, but, in light of the phallus on the outside, one could just as well interpret the god as Dionysus. Beazley (1963), 837.10. Contra Erika Simon in: Münzen und Medaillen AG (1980), 50 pl. 45, 103.

40 Münzen und Medaillen AG (1980), 50.

41 BAPD 43663; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/724633F8-EB62-4BF2-B74C-794F73CB4261>. See Boardman (1992), 233 no. 25; Hölscher (2014), 174-175; Wöhner/Hertzer (2019), 148 Kat. 7.

42 Similarly, some vase painters depicted satyrs who hold a long spear-like phallus as an element of surprise and fantastic weapon rather than a ritual object. In the Dionysiac

emphasing the transformative power of *Dionysia*. A young man is changed into a satyr warrior and an obscene object into a swiftly flying escort.

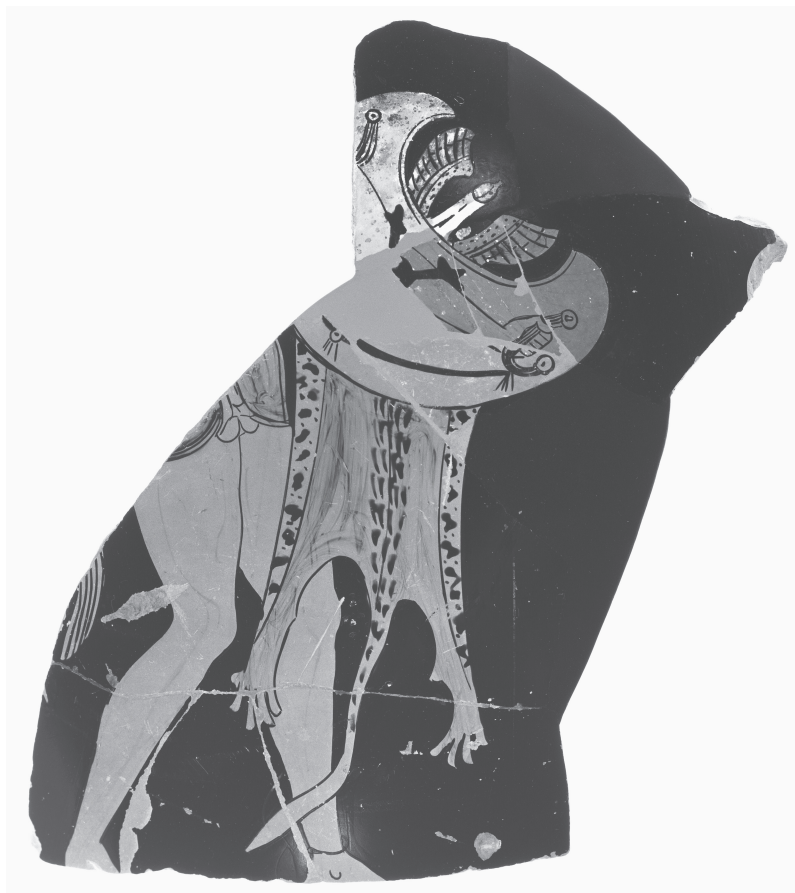


Fig. 3. *Satyr-players and the winged phallus*. J.P. Getty Villa Museum, Malibu 86.AE.190.6. Digital image courtesy of Getty's Open Content Program.

realm, the phallus was again transformed into an appropriate attire for the fighting satyr. Wöhner/Hertzer (2019), 129.

3.4. Fantastical Transformations: The Phallus Bird and the Satyrs

Around 500 BCE the painter of a cup (Fig. 4) combined the phallus with the body of a huge bird.⁴³ Thus, showing the transformation of the phallus into a truly enlivened participant of the *phallophoria*.⁴⁴ Not only has the phallus an eye and wings but strong claws and a back to ride on. The companions of the pictured procession are equally fantastic. The ithyphallic satyrs roll and revel and instead of being carried, the phallus bird acts as a mount. Complementing the procession, the other side shows a festive scene likewise connected to the celebrations of Athenian *Dionysia*. A group of young males are shown drinking and dancing, thus evoking the ephebic choirs and *kōmoi*. The painter did not depict their obscene performances or costumes but focused on their status as young citizens and their state of drunken celebration. As the late François Lissarrague pointed out, in the tondo the painter reminds of another ritual of the *Dionysia*, namely the competitive *askōlismos* (wineskin-riding), that was performed by the drunken youth. But in the image inside the cup, a bearded satyr takes on the game and manages to keep his cup from spilling over while balancing on a greasy wineskin.⁴⁵

43 BAPD 203253 <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/8DA95530-9601-4554-8206-343F3A1227DA>. See Lissarrague (1990), 39 f., 67-76; Boardman (1992), 231 Nr. 14; Wöhner/Hertzer (2019), 164-165 Kat. 37.

44 To the phenomenon of enlivenment, see: Hölscher (2014); Wöhner/Hertzer (2019).

45 Lissarrague (1990), 67-76.



Fig. 4. *The phallus bird amid satyrs*. Musées Royaux, Brussels A 723. CC BY-RMAH. © ImageStudio Royal Museums of Art and History, Brussels.

The images on the cup highlight lively moments of *Dionysia* by combining dramatic movement with absurd and comic bodies. Dionysos may not be depicted, but his transformative power is manifested by the enlivenment of the phallus into a huge bird able to carry a satyr. The conventional Dionysiac *thiasos*, pictured on many vessels, is distorted and transformed into a specific event: the *phallophoria*. Instead of mocking, the painter decided to stage other performances of the *kōmastai* on the cup: drinking, dancing and wineskin-riding. They refer to the divine time of the festival, which was an important occasion for the youth to show off and celebrate together.

3.5. A Different View on the Phallus and the Mocked Audience

So far, the painters focused on male performers and used the phallus as a 'sign' to specify the occasion and convey the *phallophoria*. Yet, the painters created different narratives by transforming the body and 'roles' of the phallus.





Fig. 5. *An absurd distortion of the phallopephoria. Antikensammlungen, Munich NI 8934. © Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek München, photo by Renate Kühling.*

A late 5th c. BCE miniature skyphos (Fig. 5) was noticeably designed to express comic absurdity by changing up the ‘role’ of the phallus.⁴⁶ The image is only a few centimetres in height but shows two images in great detail. On one side, a winged phallus is depicted as statue-like in front of a sacrificial table with a mixing vessel. The scene is reminiscent of the numerous vase paintings that stage a herm as a cult recipient through an altar.⁴⁷ However,

46 BAPD 4691; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/E91D0E0B-0B51-488E-92F0-2F2E8E5319A8>. See Boardman (1992), 229 Nr. 8; Wöhner/Hertzner (2019), 151 Kat. 10. Because of the miniature format, the beaker is not made for regular (human) wine consumption. These vessels are intended for a religious consecration or as a funerary gift. Still, they are reminiscent of the act of drinking through their design.

47 Such a scene is shown on a lekythos, Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe 85.1; BAPD 208122; <https://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/record/8494F4D1-E5AD-4C3D-871A-D43077EA0467>.

on its 'head' the phallus balances an offering basket. Hence, the painter staged the *agalma* of Dionysus as an absurd basket-bearer. The large eye and the subtle action of the phallus blur the boundaries between a perceived object (the phallus) and a subject (the basket-bearer) of a *phallophoria*. The opposite side shows a caricature of a naked, female dwarf.⁴⁸ She is adorned with a wreath of branches and holds a *skyphos* in her hands. Instead of male performers or ephebes, the painter decided to stage a small ridiculous woman. With her oversized cup, she is simply depicted facing the wine vessel and the phallus and can be viewed as reminiscent of the stereotypical audience. Moreover, while she is not a performer, her deformed body can be understood as a 'visual joke'. She is therefore an implicit reference to the obscene mockery of the *phallophoria*. As part of the audience, she watches and as a subject of laughter, she is affected and becomes part of the obscene performance.

4. Conclusion

A hypothetical reconstruction of a *phallophoria* within the framework of performativity required focusing on two interactive groups, one acting and the other observing. The *kōmastai*, who enforced and accompanied the arrival of Dionysus can be identified as the central actors. Since it was a public event, the whole gathered community must be pictured as their audience. The main purpose of a *phallophoria* was to enable the participation of Dionysus in the following festivities. In essence, the community aimed for a responsive relationship with the god and staged 'works of art' (the statue of Dionysus, the phallus, and the *phallika*) to establish that communication. Based on the categories suggested by Fischer-Lichte I have briefly reflected on the main elements (space, time, bodies, and voices), which shaped the individual and collective experiences and could act as

48 Leonie Huf recently discussed the distortion of the female body that can be linked with stereotypes. Huf (2021), 205-207. While Nadja Wöhner and Julia Hertzner argue for a Dionysiac reading, intriguingly, the reduced scene is also reminiscent of the 'Lenaia vases' and can equally be picturing women festivals in honour of Demeter, which also featured aischrological mockery. Wöhner/Hertzner (2019), 131, 133-135.

stimuli to provoke strong affection and emotions during the event. With the evidence of Semus' account and the detailed analysis made by Anton Bierl, I have pictured the *phallophoria* as a profound experience, that ideally enabled *resonant* relationships not only between the participants, but also between them and the god. The lively parade, laughter, and cheers from the audience created a powerful and amplifying ambience. Since Aristophanes and Athenian vase painters recounted these experiences, an analysis of their 'works of art' allowed me to focus on the pictured dynamics and effects and to explore the expressed self-world relations.

In his comedy, Aristophanes portrayed a quest for resonance, which concerns not only the main character Dikaiopolis but likely also the contemporary audience. On stage, the stereotypical Athenian miraculously managed to obtain a truce with the Spartans. Feeling self-empowered, he arranged a *phallophoria* to publicly show his responsive relationship with 'peace'. Here, the phallus and the obscene song play a vital role. They mark the end of the war and actualize peacetime. Phales provides a 'body' to interact with and to mediate Dikaiopolis' desire. His *kōmos* is an expression of his state of *resonance* with peace and country life. For the Athenian audience of the comedy, the experiences of the comical character certainly offered many points of connection, shared laughter, and immersion.

Similarly entertaining for an Athenian was the fine ware. The elaborate imagery stimulated conversations and surprised with clever pictorial jokes and distortions. For drinkers and especially for *kōmastai*, the images of the *phallophoria* could potentially trigger memories of past experiences and attached emotions. Along with the cups, they passed anecdotes and shared laughter. The Athenian painters referred to the profound experience in different ways, highlighting elements of affection, self-efficacy, and transformation. Some have focused on the co-presence of the phallus and various groups of *kōmastai*, picturing their transformed and costumed bodies and their actions. One painter also staged the arrival of Dionysus as an effect of the *kōmos* (depicted on the walls) and the act of emptying the cup, as the image only appears when the wine is fully consumed. However, as a miniature beaker shows, also the role of the audience and the subject matter of the *kōmastēs'* crude jokes were of interest. Naturally, in all the images of a *phallophoria*, the phallus is needed to specify the event. However, the pain-

ters produced different viewpoints on this vital element. The depictions of the phallus vary in size and also its 'role' changes in the images. The phallus can be carried by the *kōmastai*, watch their performance, act as a fantastic mount, or as a basket-bearer in the procession. Similar to Aristophanes the painters emphasised the transformative and mediating aspect of the phallus and blurred the boundaries between an artificial object and an enlivened participant. Song and object, unsuited to a virgin, not only facilitate the arrival of Dionysus but also enable potential *resonant* relationships between all the participants: the *kōmastai*, in our case the Athenian community, and the immaterial divine.

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