

The Iconography of Dionysiac Choroi: Dithyramb, Tragedy, and the Basel Krater

Matthew C. Wellenbach

WHEN ONE SEEKS the earliest evidence for Greek tragedy, Aeschylus' poetry is a natural starting point. About tragedy's history before Aeschylus, we know not much more than some playwrights' names and enticing but difficult to verify notices about their careers: Thespis invented tragedy; Pratinas developed satyr-play; Phrynichus introduced female characters (*Suda* s.vv.). Aeschylus is the first tragedian from whom full tragedies survive, all dating to the second quarter of the fifth century. Yet at least one piece of evidence contends for priority over even Aeschylus. This is an Attic red-figure column krater, dated ca. 480 BCE, now on display in Basel (*fig. 1*).¹ One side of the vase shows six young men, arranged in a rectangle of three columns and two rows. In the background is a structure consisting of three steps leading up to a large block, which is adorned with leafy boughs and strands of fabric. Another male figure, bearded and older than the youths, is positioned either behind or on top of this structure so that only his upper half is visible.

The scholarly consensus about this painting maintains that it shows the performance of a tragedy.² The youths represent a

¹ Attic red-figure column krater, ca. 480, Mannerist Style. Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS 415. *CVA* Basel 3, 21–23, pls. 6.3–4, 7.3–5; *BAPD* 260.

² A representative but not exhaustive list: E. Simon, *Die Götter der Griechen* (Munich 1969) 273–276, *Das antike Theater* (Heidelberg 1972) 16–17 (rev. transl. *The Ancient Theatre* [London/New York 1982] 8–9), and *Festivals of*



Figure 1: Attic red-figure column krater, Basel, Antikenmuseum und Sammlung Ludwig BS 415. Photograph by Andreas F. Voegelin, courtesy of museum.

chorus, as several details make clear. There are letters inscribed next to their open mouths, a likely indication that they are singing.³ They also seem to be dancing, processing from right to left across the vase while leaning backwards slightly at the waist, extending their right legs forward, left legs backward, and stretching their arms in front of themselves. They wear nearly identical attire: diadems on their heads, sleeveless tops,

Attica (Madison 1983) 103–104; H. Froning, *Dithyrambos und Vasenmalerei in Athen* (Würzburg 1971) 23–25, and “Masken und Kostüme,” in S. Moraw and E. Nölle (eds.), *Die Geburt des Theaters in der griechischen Antike* (Mainz 2002) 72–73; J. R. Green, “On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens,” *GRBS* 32 (1991) 34–37; E. Csapo and W. J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor 1995) 57; O. Taplin, “The Pictorial Record,” in P. E. Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1997) 70; E. Csapo, *Actors and Icons of the Ancient Theater* (Chichester/Malden 2010) 6–8; R. Wyles, *Costume in Greek Tragedy* (London 2011) 6–8.

³ For the letters, not visible in the reproduction here, see *CVA* Basel 3, 22.

which resemble soldiers' breastplates, and short tunics. If the youths are part of a tragic chorus, then the other figure is likely an actor. Given the prevalence of necromancies in contemporary tragedies, some have proposed that this actor plays a ghost who is being raised from his grave, which is represented by the structure in front of him.⁴ The Basel krater, the earliest evidence for tragedy, thus documents a quintessential tragic scene.

The Basel krater might never have become an emblem of tragedy if not for a decisive shift in its interpretation. The first scholarly treatment of the vase argued that it portrays not tragedy but another type of choral performance dedicated to Dionysus, namely dithyramb. Nonetheless, within two years of this proposal, scholars began to identify the image as a representation of tragedy, and this attribution has persisted. Whereas the Basel krater appears regularly in discussions of tragedy, it is largely absent from work on dithyramb.⁵

In this paper I return to the question of what type of Dionysiac choral performance is depicted on the Basel krater. I begin by rehearsing briefly the vase's history in modern scholarship, and I point to reasons why the debate between dithyramb and tragedy is still unresolved, despite the current consensus. I go on to reclassify the performance shown on the krater by situating the image in the iconographic traditions for representing tragic and dithyrambic performance in Attic vase-painting. This contextualization suggests that the krater por-

⁴ This interpretation was proposed first by S. Karouzou, "Chœur de tragédie sur un lécythe à figures noires," *RA* (1972) 199 n.2, and expanded on by K. Schefold, "Die dichterische Wirklichkeit der bildenden Kunst," *AntW* 5 (1974) 13–14. Previously, scholars had suggested that the structure is an altar and the male figure a statue of Dionysus, before which the chorus performs a dance of mourning. See Simon, *Die Götter* 273–276; Froning, *Dithyrambos* 23–25; Simon accepted the ghost-raising interpretation, *The Ancient Theater* 8–9. On necromancies in tragedy see O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 447–448.

⁵ See n.2 above. By contrast, the krater does not appear in B. Kowalzig and P. Wilson (eds.), *Dithyramb in Context* (Oxford 2013).

trays neither tragedy nor dithyramb, strictly speaking, but mixes the iconographies of both genres. In conclusion, I consider how the krater, with its unique brand of Dionysiac choral performance, can help to reconfigure our broader understanding of the relationship between dithyramb and tragedy.

From dithyramb to tragedy

Margot Schmidt, who was the first scholar to discuss the Basel krater at length, argues that it shows a chorus performing a dithyramb.⁶ First, she establishes that this chorus performs in honor of Dionysus. She then focuses on the choreuts' attire, claiming both that their clothing is appropriate for a cultic performance like dithyramb and that their diadems are a characteristic feature of the genre. She further argues that the chorus should be imagined as circling the structure in the background, in an allusion to dithyramb's traditional circular formation. Finally, she identifies the older male figure as a statue of the god Dionysus Eleutherius, for whom the chorus performs.

At the same time, Schmidt also considers the possibility that the Basel krater portrays tragedy, even though she disagrees with this view. In fact, she lays out the arguments for tragedy before dismissing them in favor of dithyramb (73–74). The most important consideration here is the way in which the choreuts' faces are painted. The choreuts seem to wear masks: their faces are identical, their mouths are open, and their hair is rendered in a way that gives it an artificial appearance. In addition, the choreuts have clearly marked lines that run along the entire side of their faces, from their chins to their hairlines, and these also contribute to the sense that they wear masks. As one scholar has put it, “masks are richly suggested,” and while

⁶ M. Schmidt, “Dionysien,” *AntK* 10 (1967) 70–81. For the few scholars who follow Schmidt see *CVA* Basel 3, 23. As she acknowledges, the vase was published earlier, with an illustration and brief description, in *Masterpieces of Greek Vase Painting, 7th to 5th Century B.C.*, André Emmerich Gallery, New York (April 22 to May 30, 1964), no. 25.

there is no detail that proves beyond doubt that the krater shows a performance with masks, this conclusion is likely.⁷

The masks become essential for determining the type of performance depicted on the Basel krater because it is widely assumed that masks were not worn in dithyrambic performances.⁸ Therefore, if the krater shows a performance by a chorus whose members wear masks, it must show a tragic performance. Precisely this logic—masks signify tragedy and preclude dithyramb—has caused the decisive shift in the interpretation of this image from dithyramb to tragedy. Those who argue that the krater portrays tragedy validate this claim on the basis of the masks apparently worn by the choreuts.⁹

Schmidt deems the entire issue inconsequential. For her, it does not matter whether the choreuts do or do not wear masks. She notes that no ancient source states that dithyramb was performed without masks, and, given this silence, the presence of masks on the Basel krater neither ensures that the performance shown is tragedy nor eliminates dithyramb as a possibility.¹⁰ After declaring her agnosticism concerning the masks' significance, she presents her case for dithyramb. A major component of the argument is the attire of the choreuts, which Schmidt says is consistent with dithyramb. Yet, we possess very little evidence about the clothing worn by dithyrambic choruses, so that two pillars of her argument—the choreuts'

⁷ Quotation from Csapo, *Actors and Icons* 7. See also Taplin, in *Cambridge Companion* 70, and P. Meineck, *Opsis: The Visuality of Greek Drama* (diss. Nottingham 2011) 161–162.

⁸ Examples of the assumption are manifold, and represented well by A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals of Athens*² (Oxford 1988) 77: “The dithyrambic chorus, who did not wear masks...”

⁹ Simon, *Die Götter* 273–276; Froning, *Dithyrambos* 23–25.

¹⁰ Schmidt, *AntK* 10 (1967) 73, 75. She also is skeptical that the figures wear masks in the first place. Gould and Lewis, in their addenda to Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 363, remark that “even though there is as yet no clear evidence for masks in dithyramb, the question is perhaps more open than is normally thought,” thus contradicting the statement about dithyramb on 77.

cultic attire and their diadems—are susceptible to the same criticism she directs at those who use the masks as the key to interpreting the image: corroborating ancient testimony is lacking. For instance, when Schmidt appeals to the choreuts' supposed "cultic" attire as proof that they perform dithyramb and not tragedy, she does not explain how dithyramb qualifies as "more strongly cultic" than tragedy, nor how this designation would be manifest in the clothing worn by the performers.¹¹

The other half of Schmidt's argument about the choreuts' appearance, their diadems, does have some supporting evidence, which Schmidt cites. Demosthenes in *Against Meidias* describes the preparations he made for a men's dithyrambic chorus which he sponsored at the Great Dionysia.¹² These preparations included commissioning a goldsmith to make crowns and cloaks embellished with gold.¹³ According to Demosthenes, his opponent Meidias, in his bid to sabotage Demosthenes' liturgy, attempted to destroy these items. Schmidt, connecting the gold crowns mentioned in *Against Meidias* and the choreuts' diadems on the Basel krater, claims that dithyrambic choruses regularly wore such items.¹⁴

Yet there are problems in arguing for a sort of uniform for dithyrambic choruses based on apparent similarities between *Against Meidias* and the Basel krater. First, Demosthenes discusses only the dithyrambic chorus he sponsored at the Great Dionysia of 348, one of twenty dithyrambic choruses that would have performed at that festival, in addition to whatever dithyrambic performances took place at other festivals during the same year.¹⁵ It seems unlikely that this description of a

¹¹ Schmidt, *AntK* 10 (1967) 75.

¹² Dem. 21.15 εἰς Διονύσια, 18 τῷ ἀγωνί τῶν ἀνδρῶν.

¹³ Dem. 21.16 τοὺς στεφάνους τοὺς χρυσοῦς, οὓς ἐποίησάμην ἐγὼ κόσμον τῷ χορῷ, 25 τῶν μὲν ἱματίων καὶ τῶν χρυσῶν στεφάνων.

¹⁴ Schmidt, *AntK* 10 (1967) 75; followed by, e.g., Froning, *Dithyrambos* 24.

¹⁵ Other potential occasions for dithyramb include the Thargelia, the Hephaestea, the Prometheia, and the Panathenaia. See A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy*² (Oxford 1962) 4. Recently,

single dithyrambic chorus in the middle of the fourth century attests to an unvarying practice that extends back to the early fifth century, especially given dithyramb's well-noted penchant for change throughout its long history.¹⁶

Besides the sheer improbability of this scenario, the speech itself is ambiguous about the form and purpose of these crowns. Choruses may have worn different types of headdresses on different occasions during the course of a festival, and it should not be assumed that the items which Demosthenes refers to as "crowns" are the same as the diadems portrayed on the Basel krater.¹⁷ In fact, the speech indicates a few different contexts in which the crowns could have been worn. Demosthenes speaks of the members of all choruses, as well as their sponsoring *choregoi*, wearing crowns over multiple days of the festival (55). He likely includes tragic and comic choruses in this prescription, and a fragment of Duris of Samos, which describes a "gold crown" as "tragic," supports this view.¹⁸ The goldsmith's testimony (22) reveals that Demosthenes and his chorus wore their crowns during the procession, or *pompe*. Even if the testimony is inauthentic, as is now commonly accepted, it may still give evidence, from a later time, that *choregoi* and choreuts appeared together in the *pompe* while wearing matching outfits, including crowns.¹⁹ From these passages, it seems that crowns

scholars have questioned whether the choral performances at these festivals were considered dithyrambs: Kowalzig and Wilson, in *Dithyramb in Context* (Oxford 2013) 16. For dithyramb in the demes see P. Wilson, *The Athenian Institution of the Khoregia* (Cambridge 2000) 305–307.

¹⁶ On dithyramb as a constantly innovating genre see *Dithyramb in Context* passim.

¹⁷ E. Voutiras, "Παίδων χορός," *Egnatia* 3 (1991/2) 39, distinguishes between *stephanoi* worn by choreuts in performance and those brought to the victory celebration.

¹⁸ *FGrHist* 76 F 14 = Ath. 12.535E.

¹⁹ On the testimony as an interpolation: D. M. MacDowell, *Demosthenes: Against Meidias* (Oxford 1990) 245–246, and E. M. Harris, "The *Against Meidias* (Dem. 21)," in M. Canevaro, *The Documents in the Attic Orators* (Oxford 2013) 209, who promises an extended analysis in a future work.

were worn by important participants in the festival but were not exclusive to a chorus' performance, nor even to dithyrambic choruses.

A few other ancient sources, while seeming to provide some hint about the attire worn by dithyrambic choruses, are nevertheless problematic and inconclusive. A fragment of the comic poet Antiphanes laments how a *choregos* can go bankrupt while outfitting his chorus with golden cloaks (fr.202.6, ἰμάτια χρυσᾶ). Because both Antiphanes and Demosthenes mention golden cloaks, the two are frequently paired and taken as confirmation that dithyrambic choruses regularly wore these.²⁰ Yet Antiphanes never specifies what type of chorus this *choregos* sponsors. He could be financing a tragic or a comic chorus rather than a dithyrambic one.

Another often-cited piece of evidence for the dress of dithyrambic choruses is an epigram that has been dated to the early fifth century:²¹

πολλάκι δὴ φυλᾶς Ἀκαμαντίδος ἐν χοροῖσιν ᾠραι
 ἀνωλόλυξαν κισσοφόροις ἐπὶ διθυράμβοις
 αἱ Διονυσιάδες, μίτραισι δὲ καὶ ῥόδων ἀώτοις
 σοφῶν ἀοιδῶν ἐσκίασαν λιπαρὰν ἔθειραν ...

Many times indeed did the Dionysian Seasons shout aloud
 among the choruses of the Akamantid tribe at ivy-bearing
 dithyrambs, and with headbands and the choicest of roses
 they shaded the shining hair of skilled singers ...

It has been claimed that the epigram, with its description of dithyrambs as ivy-bearing, “presumably means that the singers [of dithyramb] wore ivy.”²² Yet nowhere does the poem indicate that it refers to dithyrambic choruses being crowned with ivy specifically during their performance, as opposed to after

²⁰ Schmidt, *AntK* 10 (1967) 75 n.24. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 77 n.6.

²¹ *Anth.Gr.* 13.28 = Page, *FGE* Antigenes 1.

²² Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Tragedy and Comedy* 16, followed by Page, *FGE* 13.

they perform. The reference may, alternatively, be to the dithyrambic poet or the *choregos*, both of whom are mentioned later in the epigram.²³ While it is possible that dithyrambic choruses when they performed wore golden crowns, or diadems, or expensive cloaks, or headbands entwined with ivy and flowers, the sources reviewed here permit no firm conclusions on this matter.

The performance shown on the Basel krater cannot be identified through appeals to the masks which the choreuts seem to wear or to reconstructions of what constituted normal attire for dithyrambic choruses. In the face of this impasse, another method for classifying this Dionysiac choral performance is needed. By comparing the image to other sixth- and fifth-century vase-paintings of tragic and dithyrambic performance, it will be possible to determine more securely what type of performance appears on the vase.

The iconography of tragedy in the fifth century

Fifth-century vase-paintings that are related to tragic performance are relatively few in number and can be divided roughly into two groups.²⁴ One type of vase-painting shows choruses in the midst of performance, often accompanied by an aulete. Another shows scenes from either before or after performance. The closest thematically to the Basel krater are the paintings that depict a chorus while performing. There are four examples of this scene through the end of the fifth century. The earliest is a black-figure lekythos which shows three men kneeling next to a pillar mounted at its top by a man's head

²³ Poet (*didaskalos*) Antigenes in line 6, *choregos* Hipponikos in line 9.

²⁴ They have received much attention recently. See especially Csapo, *Actors and Icons*, ch. 1. For tragic iconography in the fourth century see O. Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles 2007). I discuss neither the Pronomos Vase nor a few other vases which are contemporary with it and considered 'near the Pronomos Painter'. See O. Taplin and R. Wyles (eds.), *The Pronomos Vase and its Context* (Oxford/New York 2010), with Csapo, "The Context of Choregic Dedications," in *The Pronomos Vase* 110–119, for the other vases.

(the Munich lekythos).²⁵ The image may depict a tragic chorus conjuring someone from a tomb, a scene similar to that on the Basel krater, but this interpretation is not certain.²⁶ A more certain representation of a tragic chorus in performance is found on a fragmentary Attic hydria discovered in Corinth (the Corinth hydria, *fig. 2*).²⁷ The fragments show an aulete who plays his instrument while men dance on either side of a pyre, on which another male figure is being burned. The complete painting likely presented up to nine dancing figures, and since Beazley's publication of the fragments, the scene has been interpreted as the performance of a chorus from a tragedy with a Persian theme.²⁸

The Corinth hydria and the Basel krater articulate choral performance in similar terms. Both show a performance by a chorus of men with another male figure who is set off from the rest of the group. Furthermore, the chorus on each of the vases is unified in its appearance. On the Corinth hydria, the choreuts wear typical Persian attire: trousers (*anaxyrides*), long-sleeved shirts, tops bearing a circle pattern, and pointed caps (*kidareis*).²⁹ Small details distinguish individual choreuts. For instance, the trousers bear different patterns, either circular

²⁵ Attic black-figure lekythos, ca. 550–500, Cock Group. Munich, Antikensammlungen 1871. *ABV* 470.103; *Beazley Addenda*² 117; *BAPD* 330512.

²⁶ Green, *GRBS* 32 (1991) 35–37, tentatively proposes this interpretation. Csapo, *Actors and Icons* 32 n.15, notes reservations.

²⁷ Attic red-figure hydria fragments, ca. 470, Leningrad Painter. Corinth, Archaeological Museum T620 + T1144. *ARV*² 571.74; *Paralipomena* 390; *Beazley Addenda*² 261; *BAPD* 206565.

²⁸ J. D. Beazley, "Hydria-Fragments in Corinth," *Hesperia* 24 (1955) 305–319; recent treatment by M. C. Miller, "In Strange Company: Persians in Early Attic Theater Imagery," *MeditArch* 17 (2004) 165–172.

²⁹ Miller, *MeditArch* 17 (2004) 168, emphasizes how the "characteristic Persian features" on the vase are "slightly unusual" when compared to other representations of Persians in Attic art.



Figure 2: Attic red-figure hydria fragments, Corinth, Archaeological Museum T620 + T1144. Photograph: Ino Ioannidou and Lenio Bartzioti. American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Corinth Excavations.

dots or lozenges. The choreuts on the Basel krater strike a similar balance between uniformity and individuality. They all wear the same type of top but these are decorated differently, with various combinations of palmette symbols and a maeander, which is the flipped L-shape pattern. The top worn by the leftmost choreut bears the unique detail of an image of a running man or satyr.

The Corinth hydria diverges from the Basel krater in the way it arranges its choreuts in the scene. Individual choreuts are scattered around the pyre. The two who are most visible—those whose heads are partly preserved—face each other and dance on either side of the pyre. It is difficult to tell whether they match each other in their posture, but even if they do, the choral unit has been fractured into its constituent members.

Moreover, it is unlikely that the other choreuts, as many as seven, struck the same poses as these two. From the little of the image that is preserved, it seems that the choreuts expressed at least four gestures and that they were arrayed on at least two levels, with some standing and others crouching.³⁰ By contrast, the Basel krater shows a chorus whose members move in lock-step in two single-file lines. They are coordinated in such a way that the front row of choreuts obscures almost completely the second row.

A second example of a vase-painting which depicts a tragic chorus in performance is a recently published fragment from a bell krater (the Kiev fragment).³¹ The single shard shows two choreuts who are dressed as women, a male aulete, and his young, male assistant. The female figures, positioned one on either side of the aulete and his assistant, are identically dressed. They wear long tunics, sleeved shirts, and headbands. Their faces are painted in bright white so as to stand out against the darker skin of the rest of their bodies and signify that they wear masks. Even though only these two choreuts are visible, each has a distinct pose.³² The choreut on the left leans backward slightly with both arms outstretched and bent upward at the elbow. The other choreut keeps his arms at his sides and seems to be moving forward, as if he is stalking around in the dancing area. The Kiev fragment both shares

³⁰ Miller, *MeditArch* 17 (2004) 167.

³¹ Attic red-figure bell krater fragment, ca. 430–420. Kiev, Archaeological Museum of the Academy of Sciences AM 1097/5219. *BAPD* 9020329. First published by Froning, in *Die Geburt des Theaters* 72–73. Discussions in Csapo, *Actors and Icons* 8–9, and D. Braund and E. Hall, “Genre, Role and Performer in Athenian Theatre Iconography: A Masked Tragic Chorus with KALOS and KALE Captions from Olbia,” *JHS* 134 (2014) 1–11.

³² Miller, *MeditArch* 17 (2004) 167, suggests that the poses are “perhaps sequential” steps of the same dance. For female dancers portrayed in similar positions see Attic red-figure volute krater, ca. 440, Group of Polygnotos. Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 2897/T128. *ARV*² 1052.25, 1680; *Paralipomena* 444, 442; *Beazley Addenda*² 322; *BAPD* 213655.

features with the other images related to tragedy and has features unique to itself. Like the Corinth hydria, it isolates its choreuts. At the same time, it presents a chorus of female characters, while the Munich lekythos, Corinth hydria, and Basel krater have choruses of male characters. Finally, the Kiev fragment also seems to establish a tension between the uniformity of its chorus as a whole and the individuality of its members. In this aspect, it comes closer to the Corinth hydria, which likewise focuses on the choreuts' positioning and movement, and farther from the Basel krater, which achieves its tension by varying certain details in its choreuts' dress.

The final example of a vase-painting which possibly represents tragic choral performance is on a pelike now in Berlin.³³ On each side of this vase is a single maenad who wears a loose-fitting top and extends an animal haunch in her left hand while holding a sword in her right hand. Next to each maenad stands an aulete who plays his instrument. The vase is usually taken as a representation of a tragic chorus of maenads.³⁴ If it does represent a tragic choral performance, each maenad must function as a synecdoche for the ensemble to which she belongs, for the vase divides completely the members of the chorus from each other, going so far as to repeat the aulete on both sides. Given this arrangement, the vase may also present two images of a solo performance, not a tragedy.³⁵ The Berlin pelike takes the motif of distinguishing individual choreuts from each other to an otherwise unexampled extreme, and in so doing it injects some uncertainty into the identification as a representation of choral performance.

³³ Attic red-figure pelike, ca. 460, Early Mannerist. Berlin, Antikensammlung 3223. *ARV*² 586.47; *Paralipomena* 393; *Beazley Addenda*² 263; *BAPD* 206777.

³⁴ Beazley, *Hesperia* 24 (1955) 312–313.

³⁵ M. Steinhart, *Die Kunst der Nachahmung* (Mainz 2004) 27–28.



Figure 3: Attic red-figure pelike, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 98.883.
 Photograph © 2015 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

The second type of vase-painting connected to tragedy depicts performers, often choreuts, either preparing for performance or relaxing in its aftermath. Called ‘genre-scenes’ by some,³⁶ these paintings, although they turn their attention away from performance *per se*, still reveal much about tragedy with their focus on the peripheral events of performance. A red-

³⁶ Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama* 53.

figure pelike in Boston is representative of the type (*fig. 3*).³⁷ On the left stands a female figure, wearing a long cloak over her body and a wrap in her hair. She extends her right arm up over her head and holds a bolt of fabric in her left hand. Across from this woman is a male figure, who is dressed very similarly to his counterpart: the two match in both their footwear and their long cloaks. In the middle of the two figures, on the ground, there is a head, identical to the head of the female figure. The head is positioned so that it faces the male figure and gazes up at him while he puts on one of his shoes.

It has long been recognized that this scene portrays two members of a chorus of women, likely maenads, preparing for a tragic performance.³⁸ The female figure on the left is not really a woman, but a male performer dressed up as and impersonating a woman. The other figure in the scene prepares to adopt the same dramatic role as his counterpart. Once he finishes applying his footwear, all that will remain for him is to put on his mask, which is shown in the middle between the two figures. Then he and the other maenad will match each other. The mask on the ground divides the image in two and reinforces the contrast between the performer on the right who is still dressing and the performer on the left who has already become a fully embodied character. For now, the two figures inhabit separate spheres and the mask's placement symbolizes its mediating role in the transition from performer to character.

A nearly identical scene occurs on a bell krater in Ferrara, and possibly also on an oinochoe fragment from the Athenian

³⁷ Attic red-figure pelike, ca. 440, Phiale Painter. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, Henry Lillie Pierce Fund, 98.883. *ARV*² 1017.46; *Paralipomena* 440; *BAPD* 214224.

³⁸ L. D. Caskey and J. D. Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston I* (Oxford 1931) 56, suggest "maenads or Thracian women." Since then, most scholars have simply mentioned a chorus of women: Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 182, and Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama* 69. D. Wiles, *Mask and Performance in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 2007) 25, and Wyles, *Costume in Greek Tragedy* 14, specify maenads.

Agora. On the Ferrara krater, a maenad stands on the right, facing a man on the left who holds a mask in his hand.³⁹ As on the Boston pelike, the maenad is a male performer who is dressed up and acting as a character, and the male figure on the left will join the performance once he dons his mask. While very little of the Agora oinochoe remains, what can be determined with certainty is that it depicts a boy who holds a mask and stands among a number of other, taller figures, some of whom wear long tunics.⁴⁰ It is possible that the boy holds the mask for a performer who is preparing for performance.

A consistent feature of these vase-paintings is their choice to represent tragedy through female figures, particularly the maenad. On the Boston pelike there are two maenads. The Ferrara krater shows one maenad certainly and possibly a second, depending on the identification of the dressing male performer; while his costume is consistent with a female role, the gender of his mask is difficult to determine.⁴¹ The mask on the Agora oinochoe belongs to a female character, perhaps a maenad.⁴² Maenads also appear on some of the vases that show tragic choruses performing. The Berlin pelike has a single maenad on each of its sides, and the women on the Kiev fragment may be maenads, although this identification is not secure.⁴³ Other evidence contemporary with these vases suggests that the maenad functioned as a powerful symbol for tragedy. When artists began to represent Tragedy as a personified figure in vase-painting around the middle of the fifth century, they chose to

³⁹ Attic red-figure bell krater, ca. 450. Ferrara, Museo Nazionale di Spina 20299/T173 C VP. *BAPD* 5039.

⁴⁰ Attic red-figure oinochoe fragment, ca. 470–460. Athens, Agora Museum P 11810. *ARV*² 495, 1656; *Paralipomena* 380; *Beazley Addenda*² 250; *BAPD* 205573.

⁴¹ Meineck, *Opsis* 164, claims the mask is for a female character. Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 182: “Certainly a mask for a young man.”

⁴² Pickard-Cambridge, *Dramatic Festivals* 180–181.

⁴³ Froning, in *Die Geburt des Theaters* 73; Wiles, *Mask and Performance* 28; Braund and Hall, *JHS* 134 (2014) 9.

identify the genre as a maenad.⁴⁴ This relationship between the maenad and tragedy extended to other artistic media as well. A sculpture relief from Peiraeus⁴⁵ presents a scene in which three members of a tragic chorus of maenads approach a couch on which Dionysus reclines in the company of another maenad, who is labeled with a name ending in IA, possibly [Τραγωιδί]ία. The Boston pelike, Ferrara krater, Agora oinochoe, Berlin pelike, and Kiev fragment all draw upon and contribute to the maenad's close associations with tragedy. The Basel krater, Corinth hydria, and Munich lekythos, on the other hand, present choruses made up of men, thereby falling outside of the tradition that uses the maenad to symbolize tragedy.

The Basel krater, with its chorus of six young men well coordinated in their identical movement, differentiated only by means of small details in their attire, stands very much as an outlier when compared with fifth-century vase-paintings that are related to tragedy. One tendency among these vases (an admittedly small sample) is for the maenad to represent tragedy, a convention in which the Basel krater does not participate. Even the few examples that do not feature a maenad, or any female figure for that matter, still exhibit differences from the Basel krater, mostly notably in the physical arrangement of the choreuts in the scene. The Corinth hydria, which is closest in style to the Basel krater in that it shows an all-male chorus, presents a less cohesive choral unit than the Basel krater. If the krater portrays a scene from tragedy, it is as exceptional as it is emblematic as a representation of the genre.

Old images of a new dithyramb

Because the Basel krater cannot be classified unreservedly as a representation of tragic performance, it is instructive to

⁴⁴ E. Hall, "Tragedy Personified," in C. Kraus et al. (eds.), *Visualizing the Tragic: Drama, Myth, and Ritual in Greek Art and Literature* (Oxford 2007) 221–256.

⁴⁵ Pentelic marble relief, ca. 400. Athens, National Museum 1500. On the identifications of the relief's figures see Csapo, in *The Pronomos Vase* 94–96.

consider its relationship to representations of dithyrambic performance, especially in light of Schmidt's claim that the vase portrays dithyramb. Nearly two dozen vases, dated ca. 560 to ca. 470, have been connected to dithyramb.⁴⁶ Each depicts a group of male figures who are dressed similarly to each other and arranged with a high degree of regimentation, so as to suggest that they perform as a chorus. On a number of examples, an aulete appears. Many of the choruses sit mounted atop various animals, most frequently dolphins, but also ostriches and horses. Some are dressed as birds, bulls, and soldiers. There are also stilt walkers, men standing on their heads, and other figures who have eluded identification.

These vases have been connected with dithyramb only recently, as for a long time most scholars claimed that the images represent a proto-comic performance which developed later into the formal genre of Attic Old Comedy.⁴⁷ This idea arose for two reasons. First, the images seem to portray an inherently humorous and ridiculous subject matter—men on horseback, riding ostriches, walking on stilts, balancing on their heads, etc.—and, second, some of the images, in particular those of men riding horses and men dressed as birds, presage precisely the choruses of Aristophanes' *Knights* and *Birds*.

Eric Csapo and Jeffrey Rusten have recently proposed that these vase-paintings represent dithyrambic performance, and, while debate will inevitably persist, their conclusions are gaining acceptance.⁴⁸ Csapo first made a connection between

⁴⁶ J. R. Green, "A Representation of the *Birds* of Aristophanes," in *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum II* (Malibu 1985) 95–118, collected and interpreted most of them, with two additions in Green, *GRBS* 32 (1991) 22 n.19.

⁴⁷ G. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London 1971); Green, in *Greek Vases II* 95–118; and K. S. Rothwell, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy: A Study of Animal Choruses* (Cambridge 2007).

⁴⁸ See G. Hedreen, "The Semantics of Processional Dithyramb: Pindar's Second Dithyramb and Archaic Athenian Vase-Painting," in *Dithyramb in Context* 180–181, and B. Kowalzig, "Dancing Dolphins on the Wine-Dark Sea: Dithyramb and Social Change in the Archaic Mediterranean," in

dithyramb and the vases that portray riders mounted on dolphins. He documents the tendency in Greek art, literature, myth, and cult for dolphins to be prototypical Dionysiac dancers and concludes that these vases draw on the cultural matrix of Dionysus, choral dancing, and dolphins in order to portray dithyrambic performance.⁴⁹

Rusten extended these conclusions to the vases that portray riders on mounts other than dolphins. He interprets all the rider-vases as evidence for a neglected strand of dithyrambic performance that featured non-serious subject matter and humorous elements. For further evidence of this humorous version of dithyramb, he adduces the tradition about the semi-mythical, sixth-century poet Susarion, who is recorded on the Marmor Parium as the inventor of Attic comedy.⁵⁰ Susarion's name is strikingly similar to Arion's, another semi-mythical figure who was celebrated as either the creator or reformer of dithyramb and was saved from drowning by dolphins (Hdt. 1.23–24). Rusten proposes that if Arion and his career suggest a connection between dithyramb and dolphin-riders, then Susarion, with his modification of Arion's name, does the same for dithyramb and riders of other animals. Moreover, Rusten points out that designating Susarion as a composer of dithyrambs instead of comedies makes better sense of his traditional date sometime in the sixth century, for comedy as a genre is not attested in Athens until the early fifth century, but there is evidence for dithyramb much earlier.⁵¹

Dithyramb in Context 35. Steinhart, *Die Kunst der Nachahmung*, offers alternative interpretations for many of the vase-paintings.

⁴⁹ E. Csapo, "The Dolphins of Dionysus," in E. Csapo and M. Miller (eds.), *Poetry, Theory, Praxis: The Social Life of Myth, Word and Image in Ancient Greece. Essays in Honour of William J. Slater* (Oxford 2003) 69–98, esp. 86–90 on the dolphin-rider vases.

⁵⁰ *FGrHist* 239 A.39 = Susarion test. 1 *PCG*.

⁵¹ J. Rusten, "Who 'Invented' Comedy?: The Ancient Candidates for the Origins of Comedy and the Visual Evidence," *AJP* 127 (2006) 37–66, esp. 42–54 on Susarion and the rider-vases.

More recently still, Csapo has classified all of these vase-paintings—the dolphin-riders, the riders on other mounts, and the figures not riding anything but dressed as birds and other beings—as representations of dithyrambic performance, and he has offered a new account of Dionysiac choral performance in sixth- and fifth-century Athens. He identifies the type of performance to which these vases refer as one variety of a broader category of Dionysiac choral performance, which can be designated by the all-encompassing term *komos*. The vases under consideration here, with performers wearing the outfits of animal riders, beasts, and other creatures, present *komoi* in trappings that are suggestive of dithyramb. Other vases show dancers with phalluses, a different variety of *komos*. This visual evidence suggests that at least two types of *komoi* were practiced in connection with the Great Dionysia in the latter part of the sixth century and into the fifth: dithyrambic *komoi* and phallic *komoi*.⁵²

Csapo and Rusten make a convincing case that these vase-paintings portray dithyrambic performances. In contrast to previous treatments of this material, these scholars do not attempt to create a clearly defined trajectory that links two distantly separated points—the vases and later Attic comedy. Instead, they study the vases in their immediate contexts in the late sixth and early fifth centuries. They also allow the visual evidence to guide their theories, rather than treat it as a source that corroborates what otherwise can be gleaned from textual testimony, which is often of a rather late date.⁵³ In the interpretations of Csapo and Rusten, the dithyrambic performances portrayed on the vases still have an influential role in the early

⁵² E. Csapo, “Comedy and the *Pompe*: Dionysiac Genre-Crossing,” in E. Bakola et al. (eds.), *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres* (Cambridge 2013) 40–80, esp. 64 ff.

⁵³ Csapo, in *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres* 64, describes his conclusions as “more strictly evidence-based.” See also the opening comments by Rusten in his review of M. Steinhart, *Die Kunst der Nachahmung*, in *BMCR* 2005.09.51.

history of Attic comedy, but the murky and imprecise designation ‘proto-comedy’ can be shed for a more specific identification as dithyramb. In addition, the relationship between the dithyrambic performances represented on the vases and later Attic comedy is not marked by exclusivity. These dithyrambic performances likely contributed to the development of other Dionysiac choral performances in the fifth century besides comedy, and Attic comedy arose under the influence of choral performances other than the dithyrambs depicted by the paintings.

The Basel krater has thus far not claimed a place in this reappraisal of dithyrambic performance, even though it possesses numerous credentials which argue for its inclusion in the group of dithyrambic images. The vases analyzed by Csapo and Rusten present choruses of men who wear elaborate costumes and move in a straight line with a high degree of regimentation and uniformity.⁵⁴ This definition could be used to describe the Basel krater, suggesting that it too depicts dithyrambic performance. In regard to costume, the chorus on the krater finds many parallels among the choruses on the dithyrambic vases.⁵⁵ Many of these dithyrambic choruses wear gear that is suitable

⁵⁴ E. Csapo, *The Dionysian Parade and the Poetics of Plenitude* (London 2013) 17–18, provides a similar list of defining attributes, although he does not mention that the choruses consist invariably of men.

⁵⁵ Two vases, outside of this group of dithyrambic vases, show choreuts who are dressed almost identically to the choreuts on the Basel krater: Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 490–480, Pan Painter. St. Petersburg, Hermitage B 201. *ARV*² 555.95; *Paralipomena* 387, 388; *Beazley Addenda*² 258; *BAPD* 206338; and Attic red-figure chous fragment, ca. 450–400, Manner of the Meidias Painter. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 10.206. *ARV*² 1323.37; *Beazley Addenda*² 364 *BAPD* 220590. Given the similarity in the choreuts’ appearance on the hydria and Basel krater, it is often assumed that the vases show choreuts from the same type of performance, usually understood to be tragedy. See J. R. Green, “Oral Tragedies? A Question from St. Petersburg,” *QUCC* 51 (1995) 77–86. But the chous fragment clearly alludes to dithyramb, given the victory tripod which the partly visible choreut clutches; see Csapo, in *The Pronomos Vase* 129, no. 24.

for soldiers, something which the chorus on the Basel krater does as well.⁵⁶ A particularly close parallel to the krater is found on a dithyrambic vase with stilt walkers.⁵⁷ These choreuts wear decorated tops that look like breastplates, short tunics, and elongated caps, matching the choreuts on the Basel krater in every detail except that they wear caps instead of diadems.

Another feature that unites the Basel krater with the images of dithyramb is the way in which all these vase-paintings balance the unity of the choral unit and the individuality of its members. On the dithyrambic vases, this tension is achieved primarily through attention to the choreuts' attire. For instance, a chorus of knights all wear identical breastplates and tunics, but a different shape crowns each of their helmets (Berlin Knights, *fig. 4*);⁵⁸ the members of one of the choruses of dolphin-riders replicate each other precisely save for different emblems on their shields;⁵⁹ and the chorus of stilt walkers all wear tops that are of the same general style, but with different patterns. These images suggest that an important consideration in depicting dithyrambic performance is using the choreuts' attire to create a cohesive choral unit made up of members who can be differentiated from each other, primarily through details in their clothing. The Basel krater achieves the same effect with its choreuts who all wear attire that is of the same general type, but which features individual differences.

⁵⁶ For the focus on soldiers see Rusten, *AJP* 127 (2006) 51; Rothwell, *Nature, Culture, and the Origins of Greek Comedy* 244 n.230; Kowalzig, in *Dithyramb in Context* 37 ff.

⁵⁷ Attic black-figure amphora, ca. 540–530, Swing Painter. Christchurch, Univ. of Canterbury, James Logie Memorial Collection 41/57. *Paralipomena* 134.31bis; *Beazley Addenda*² 81; *BAPD* 340567.

⁵⁸ Attic black-figure amphora, ca. 540–530, Painter of Berlin 1686. Berlin, Antikensammlung F 1697. *ABV* 297.17; *Paralipomena* 128; *Beazley Addenda*² 78; *BAPD* 320396.

⁵⁹ Attic red-figure psykter, ca. 510, Oltos Painter. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1989.281.69. *ARV*² 1622.7bis; *Paralipomena* 326; *Beazley Addenda*² 163; *BAPD* 275024.

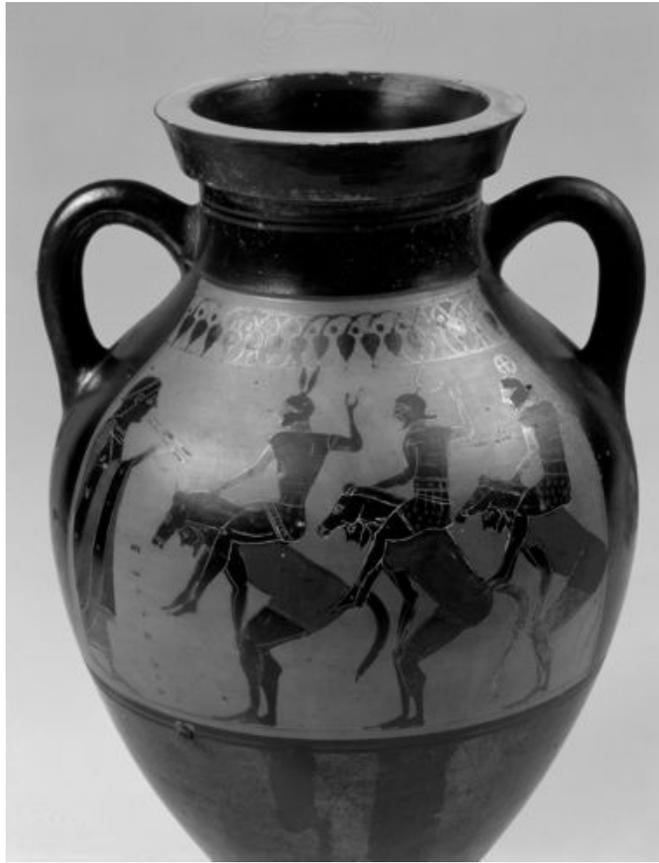


Figure 4: Attic black-figure amphora, Berlin, Antikensammlung F 1697.
 Photograph: bpk, Berlin/Antikensammlung/Jürgen Liepe/
 Art Resource, NY.

The Basel krater matches the dithyrambic vases in the way it articulates its chorus' movement and dance. All the choreuts face left, with right leg thrust forward, left leg backward, and arms extended and upraised in front of their bodies. They give the impression that they move across the surface of the vase in a procession. This sense of movement is evident on the dithyrambic vases, where the choreuts are always oriented in one direction so that it appears that they process from one side of

the vase to its opposite.⁶⁰ The posture of the Basel krater's choreuts also is consistent with these representations of dithyrambic performance. On any one dithyrambic vase, the choreuts are in identical poses, thereby giving the impression that they are engaged in the same moment of the same dance. For instance, on a black-figure oinochoe with two men dressed as cocks, the choreuts both move from right to left while stretching out their arms on either side of their body and turning their heads to the side.⁶¹ The choreuts on the Basel krater all dance in the exact same way with the exact same posture. Such regularity is not apparent on the vases of tragic performance, where, in fact, the Corinth hydria and Kiev fragment present choreuts in different positions.

The Basel krater and the vases analyzed by Csapo and Rusten draw on the same conventions to present dithyrambic performance as an event conducted by men who are dressed in matching but not identical costumes, and who dance with a high degree of order while moving in a procession. Nonetheless, the Basel krater stands apart from the images of dithyrambic performance in a few of its details, and these, in speaking against dithyramb as the correct identification of the image, bring out the singularity of the krater as a representation of Dionysiac choral performance.

First, this chorus is arranged in a rectangle consisting of two rows of three choreuts each. Two of the dithyrambic vases may hint at a rectangular formation: on a skyphos with six dolphin-riders, there is a slight overlap between the third and fourth

⁶⁰ Although dithyramb was associated especially with circular choreography, many scholars now posit that it at one time featured linear processions, as seen on these vases. See A. D'Angour, "How the Dithyramb Got Its Shape," *CQ* 47 (1997) 331–351. Csapo, in *Poetry, Theory, Praxis* 87–89, suggests that a number of the vases depict circular dances. Hedreen, in *Dithyramb in Context* 178–187, expresses sensible reservations about this conclusion.

⁶¹ Attic black-figure oinochoe, ca. 480, Gela Painter. London, British Museum B 509. *ABV* 473; *Paralipomena* 214; *BAPD* 330555.

choreuts, suggesting two rows of three; and a cup, also with dolphin-riders, may show two rows of four choreuts.⁶² If these vases allude to a rectangle, they do so much more subtly than the Basel krater, as the formations on these vases are best characterized as linear, not rectangular. The Basel krater's rectangular formation finds no exact parallel among the vases showing dithyrambic performance, nor among any of the fifth-century tragic vases, which never present their choreuts in a rectangular formation. Two of them, the Corinth hydria and Kiev fragment, show no discernible formation, and the Munich lekythos shows three choreuts kneeling in a single line. While choruses in rectangular formations are found on some sculptural reliefs, these are from the fourth century and depict comic choruses.⁶³ Another fourth-century relief, which is thought to show dithyrambic performance, divides its chorus into two groups, but does not arrange them in a rectangle.⁶⁴ The Basel krater remains unique as an early representation of a dithyrambic or tragic chorus performing in rectangular formation.⁶⁵

⁶² Attic black-figure skyphos, ca. 500–490, Heron Group. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 20.18; *BAPD* 4090. Attic black-figure cup, ca. 490–480, near the Theseus Painter. Paris, Louvre CA 1924. *Paralipomena* 259; *Beazley Addenda*² 130; *BAPD* 351585. On the grouping in rows see E. Bielefeld, "Ein Delphinreiter-Chor," *JdI* 61/2 (1946/7) 48.

⁶³ Csapo, in *The Pronomos Vase* 86.

⁶⁴ Pentelic marble relief, ca. 320, Atarbos base: Acropolis Museum 1338; *IG* II² 3025. It is also questionable whether it depicts a dithyrambic chorus, in light of the most likely restorations, "circular chorus" or "chorus of men," phrases which could be applied to choral performances besides dithyramb. On the restorations see J. L. Shear, "Atarbos' Base and the Panathenaia," *JHS* 123 (2003) 164–180; A. Makres, "The Atarbos Base from the Akropolis of Athens Revisited," in A. Themom and N. Papazarkadas (eds.), *Attika Epigraphika* (Athens 2009) 225–46. On the names used in official records to refer to dithyramb see P. Ceccarelli, "Circular Choruses and the Dithyramb in the Classical and Hellenistic Period: A Problem of Definition," in *Dithyramb in Context* 153–170.

⁶⁵ Rectangular formations are traditionally associated with drama; Csapo and Slater, *Context of Ancient Drama* 353, collect various ancient notices. Both H. Foley, "Choral Identity in Greek Tragedy," *CP* 98 (2003) 9–10, and E.

A second feature that distinguishes the Basel krater from the dithyrambic vases is the presence of the additional male figure and structure in the background. On the dithyrambic vases, no extraneous details, save for the occasional aulete, compete with the chorus for the viewer's attention. To find a parallel for the Basel krater's background, one must turn to the images related to tragedy. For instance, the Munich lekythos, in addition to showing three choreuts, also shows a pillar with a bust and what seem to be cloaks, which are suspended over the heads of the choreuts. The Corinth hydria adds a pyre and a male figure to its choral performance. These additional features define a setting and a narrative context for the chorus' performance.⁶⁶ The chorus on the Munich lekythos perform in a location where there would be a pillar-statue and where they could hang their cloaks, so perhaps in a sanctuary; and the chorus on the Corinth hydria must be imagined as lamenting the immolation of their leader in some outdoor area.

The Basel krater too creates a setting and narrative context for its choral performance, with the male figure and structure in the background commonly identified as a ghost and tomb.⁶⁷

Csapo, "Star Choruses: Eleusis, Orphism and New Musical Imagery and Dance," in M. Revermann and P. Wilson (eds.), *Performance, Iconography, Reception* (Oxford 2008) 281–284, caution against assuming that dramatic dancing invariably featured rectangular formations. In addition, a vase, which is thought to portray dithyramb, presents fourteen pairs of choreuts, arranged in two rows, with one choreut standing beside his companion: Attic red-figure cup, ca. 480–470, Triptolemos Painter. Paris, Louvre G 138. *ARV*² 365.61; *Beazley Addenda*² 223; *BAPD* 203853. See Hedreen, in *Dithyramb in Context* 183.

⁶⁶ Csapo, in *Greek Comedy and the Discourse of Genres* 66–67, argues that this interest in setting and narrative context arose in response to the construction of the Theater of Dionysus in the late sixth century.

⁶⁷ See n.4 above. Another possibility is that the figure is the dithyrambic *exarchos*, a role well attested in the history of the genre (Archil. fr.120 W.; Arist. *Poet.* 1449a9–11). On the *exarchos* in vase-painting see E. Csapo, "The Iconography of the *Exarchos*," *MeditArch* 19/20 (2006/7) 55–65. The figure on the Basel krater meets three of Csapo's four criteria for being an *exarchos*; he fails only to gesture at the chorus as if he is conducting them.

This would seem to argue for a representation of tragic performance. Regardless of this interpretation's validity, the krater differs from representations of tragedy in the extent to which it foregrounds its non-choral features. The Corinth hydria and Munich lekythos place their indications of setting and narrative context in the center of their paintings. The Basel krater, on the other hand, restricts its indications of setting and narrative to the side, allowing the chorus to maintain the central position. This focus on the choral unit is consistent with the dithyrambic vases, which do not add details that intrude on the chorus' performance. The Basel krater mixes some elements that are associated with tragedy with others that are associated with dithyramb, thus defying simple categorization and evoking both genres simultaneously.

The intersections of Dionysiac performance

One approach to this iconographic amalgam could be to try to parse the Basel krater's elements and assign them to either tragedy or dithyramb. In this spirit, we could say that the krater inherits from the iconography of dithyramb its choice to present a chorus of men who are dressed like soldiers and process in linear formations, while it also helps inaugurate a new iconographic tradition, one related to tragedy, by developing a background setting and narrative context. But to break the image into parts is to overlook its unique brand of Dionysiac choral performance. By overlaying tragic and dithyrambic imagery with one another, the Basel krater prompts us to consider the intersections, rather than the divergences, of Dionysiac choral performance.

What unifies the vase-paintings analyzed in this article is their insistence that to perform in a chorus for Dionysus entails abandoning one's identity and assuming a new one.⁶⁸ These

⁶⁸ On vase-paintings of the two other Dionysiac choral performances not treated here, see for comedy Csapo, *Actors and Icons* ch.1, esp. 9–12 and 23–24, and for satyr-play G. Hedreen, "Myths and Ritual in Athenian Vase-Paintings of Silens," in E. Csapo and M. Miller (eds.), *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond* (Cambridge 2007) 150–195, esp. 151–160.

vases present Dionysiac choral performance as an event undertaken by a variety of types of characters: knights, ostrich-riders, dolphin-riders, stilt walkers, birds, bulls, minotaurs, soldiers, Persians, men, women, and maenads. The images focus to a great extent on the characters of the performance. This is the case especially on the vases related to dithyramb, many of which have acquired modern shorthand titles, such as the Berlin Knights, Christchurch Stilt walkers, and Oltos' Dolphin-riders, based on the different characters portrayed. The vases related to tragedy likewise present Dionysiac choral performance as an activity that required performers to assume a new identity as a type of character. The tragic vases offer a less diverse slate of characters than the dithyrambic vases, but they nonetheless show performances by different characters, including Persians and maenads.

Some of the vases portray with a high degree of specificity and realism how Dionysiac choral performers came to embody characters in their performance. A black-figure hydria, which depicts dithyrambic performance, shows bearded male figures who wear long dresses, belted high above the waist, and head-dresses with ear-like protrusions (*fig. 5*).⁶⁹ This combination of attributes has led to descriptions of the figures as “part-horse, part-female beings” and “nymph-satyrs.”⁷⁰ Regardless of the identification of these creatures, the image is important because the artist has chosen to paint a scene in which human, male performers unquestionably dress up in costume so as to impersonate a type of character in performance. This artist has indicated how Dionysiac choral performers became characters in performance, namely, by the use of costume. Many of the other vases obscure these details, instead focusing on the char-

⁶⁹ Attic black-figure hydria, ca. 550, manner of Lydos. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1988.11.3. *BAPD* 12278.

⁷⁰ Identifications from Hedreen, in *Dithyramb in Context* 179, and H. A. G. Brijder, *Siana Cups II The Heidelberg Painter* (Amsterdam 1991) 403. On the vase in general see M. B. Moore, “Hoplites, Horses and a Comic Chorus,” *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 41 (2006) 33–57.



Figure 5: Attic black-figure hydria,
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1988.11.3.
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Source: Art Resource, NY.

acters at the expense of the performers. This is the case for the Corinth hydria, which does not advertise how its Persians would be embodied and enacted by performers. On this vase, it is difficult to distinguish between what details belong to the actual performance and what may belong to the invention of the painter.

The interest in depicting realistic performance extends beyond the single example of this black-figure hydria.⁷¹ The Kiev fragment shows with striking realism the male performers'

⁷¹ Csapo, *Actors and Icons*, ch. 1, articulates the concept of “theater-realism” in regard to tragedy and comedy. Predecessors of this idea can be found in Beazley, *Hesperia* 24 (1955) 305–319, and Green, *GRBS* 32 (1991) 15–50.

female masks, which are painted in white. On the vase with the Berlin Knights (*fig. 4*), the riders' steeds are not really horses, but men who wear bodysuits and horse-heads so that they look like horses, and, by extension, the riders themselves must not be actual knights, but performers who impersonate knights.⁷² The genre-scenes related to tragedy make a virtue of depicting the realities of performance. They regularly pair one performer who wears his costume, embodying fully his character for performance, with another who has not yet transformed into a character, but will shortly, once he finishes putting on all of the components of his costume. The genre-scenes make explicit what is implicit in the scenes showing performance. They equate Dionysiac performance with the impersonation of a character and reveal how costumes allow the performer to transform into a character.

The Basel krater falls within this model of representing Dionysiac choral performance. It shows choreuts who impersonate a type of character, in this case soldiers. It also depicts their performance with realistic detail.⁷³ The choreuts are hardly actual soldiers. They wear diadems instead of helmets, they carry no weapons, and their tops are not breastplates, but sleeveless shirts frilled at the bottom and decorated in order to look like breastplates. Furthermore, the choreuts seems to wear masks, an unquestionable realistic detail of performance.

All of this is to say that dithyrambic and tragic performance, as depicted on these vases, is uniformly and inherently mimetic. Both tragedy and dithyramb require their performers to adopt new identities as characters when they perform. This claim contradicts a long tradition about the relationship between dithyramb, tragedy, and mimesis. It is common, in both ancient and modern discussions, to assert that dithyramb is not mimetic, whereas tragedy and the other dramatic genres are, and to segregate dithyramb from its Dionysiac congeners pre-

⁷² Hedreen, in *Dithyramb in Context* 179.

⁷³ On the Basel krater's realism see Csapo, *Actors and Icons* 6–8.

cisely because of its supposed lack of mimesis.⁷⁴ Although there is ancient evidence about mimesis, including impersonation, in dithyramb, these notices are usually taken to document a late development, one associated especially with the era of New Music and credited to the influence of mimetic genres like tragedy.⁷⁵ On most formulations, mimesis has no natural or authentic place in dithyramb.

The vases related to dithyramb suggest otherwise. They present mimesis as an integral component of dithyrambic performance as much as a century before the advent of New Music. Whatever other changes dithyramb underwent throughout its history, especially over the course of the fifth century, it seems that mimesis belonged to the genre from a relatively early date. The Basel krater and the images showing dithyrambic performance, in combination with the vases related to tragedy, urge a revised history of Dionysiac choral performance. Instead of being divisible between a mimetic variety, exemplified by the dramatic genres of tragedy, comedy, and satyr-play, on the one hand, and a non-mimetic variety, represented by dithyramb,

⁷⁴ From antiquity, see Plato, *Resp.* 394B–C. Among recent discussions, B. Seidensticker, “Dithyramb, Comedy, and Satyr-Play,” in J. Gregory (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Malden 2005) 38: “Dithyramb is fundamentally different from the three other Dionysiac genres because it is not (or only minimally) dramatic and mimetic, but rather lyric and narrative ... The members of the chorus wore neither masks nor costumes, as they did in the performances of tragedy and comedy, but festive robes and wreaths.” On the relationship between mimesis and dithyramb in the writings of Plato and Aristotle see now A.-E. Peponi, “Dithyramb in Greek Thought,” in *Dithyramb in Context* 353–367.

⁷⁵ See especially B. Zimmermann, *Dithyrambos: Geschichte einer Gattung* (Göttingen 1992) 127–128, who characterizes the rise of mimetic effects in New Music as a degenerating influence on dithyramb. Even the recent, important work that takes a more sympathetic view of New Music still considers mimesis a late addition to dithyrambic performance. See E. Csapo, “The Politics of New Music,” in P. Murray and P. Wilson (eds.), *Music and the Muses* (Oxford 2004) 207–248, esp. 213 ff.; P. A. LeVen, *The Many-Headed Muse: Tradition and Innovation in Late Classical Greek Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge 2014) 189–193.

on the other, all performance for Dionysus falls under the rubric of mimesis. This is a perhaps unsurprising conclusion about choral performances conducted in honor of a god who appears in Aristophanes' *Frogs* dressed up as and impersonating someone else, and in Euripides' *Bacchae* directing others to do the same, but it is still a far cry from the usual assumptions about dithyrambic performance, which prompt declarations about solemn performers bedecked in long, luxuriant robes and crowned with wreaths of ivy.⁷⁶

October, 2014

Department of Classics
Brown University
Providence, RI 02912
Matthew_Wellenbach@brown.edu

⁷⁶ I thank the editorial board and anonymous reader for *GRBS* for their helpful suggestions in improving this article. I also express my gratitude to Johanna Hanink, Guy Hedreen, and Mitchell Parks for reading and commenting on earlier drafts.