

THE DIPYLON *OINOCHOĒ* AND ANCIENT GREEK DANCE AESTHETICS*

ABSTRACT

This article asks what the graffito incised on the Dipylon *oinochoē* (IG I² 919, eighth century B.C.E.) reveals about the nature of the dance competition that it commemorates. Through a systematic analysis of the evaluative and descriptive meaning of the adjective *ἀπαλός* and its cognates in early Greek epic, it is argued that a narrower definition compared to previous suggestions can be established. The word refers to the carefreeness that is specific to a child or young animal, and its uses typically imply a positive evaluation which is connected not only to the well-being that this carefreeness entails but also to the positive emotion of tenderness and the sentiment of care that it engenders in a perceiver. It is concluded that, when used to specify the criterion by which a dance contest will be adjudicated, the term refers to an aesthetic property that is repeatedly praised in archaic Greek texts in other words: that of dancing with the adorable but short-lived carefree abandon of a child.

Keywords: dance; aesthetics; ‘thick’ concepts; epigraphy; the Dipylon *oinochoē*; carefreeness; tenderness

The Dipylon *oinochoē* (National Archaeological Museum of Athens, inv. 192) was excavated under obscure circumstances in 1871 in the area of Plateia Eleutherias in Athens.¹ This typical Late Geometric wine jug is ascribed to the workshop of the Dipylon Master and dated to c.740–730 B.C.E.² Its fame is chiefly attributable to a graffito incised after firing in the dark band that runs along the shoulders of the vessel (IG I² 919 [excluded from IG I³] = CEG 432). A large part of the bulky literature on this object has been devoted to the final puzzling segment of the inscription,³ which might simply be nonsense.⁴ Leaving this aside here, the first forty-one letters can safely be read as follows:

ἡὸς νῦν ὀρχῆστὸν πάντων ἀταλῶτατα παίζει τὸ τόδε

* I am most grateful to *CQ*'s two anonymous readers for helpful comments. This research was funded by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond.

¹ First published ten years later by S.A. Koumanoudes, ‘Προσθήκη’, *Ἀθηναῖον* 9 (1880), 1–4, inserted with separate pagination after page 52 of the issue. On these digs, see Y. Galanakis, ‘An unpublished stirrup jar from Athens and the 1871–2 private excavations in the outer Kerameikos’, *ABSA* 106 (2011), 167–200.

² J.N. Coldstream, *Greek Geometric Pottery: A Survey of Ten Local Styles and their Chronology* (Exeter, 2008²), 32–3.

³ For an extensive bibliography, see M. Cardin, ‘Oinochoe del Dipylon’, *Axon: Iscrizioni storiche greche* 1 (2017), 19–30.

⁴ See the recent suggestion by N.M. Binek, ‘The Dipylon *oinochoe* graffito: text or decoration?’, *Hesperia* 86 (2017), 423–42.

The inscription indicates that the wine jug served as a trophy for the winner of a dance competition. It probably took place in the late eighth century in Athens, as one may infer from the place of excavation, the origin of the jug, and its Attic Greek inscription (as the contracted form ὄρχῆστῶν, for instance, attests). What can this artefact reveal about the nature of the dancing that it commemorates? I will address this question in four steps. First, I will explain why the answer hinges primarily on our interpretation of a single word in the inscription, namely ἀταλότατα; second, I will examine the meaning of ἀταλός in archaic epic; third, I will situate my interpretation of this word in the context of Greek dance aesthetics. In a final reflexion, I will briefly reconsider the evidential value of the material characteristics of the jug itself.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF ΑΤΑΛΟΣ

The inscription is not merely a written commemoration of a foregone event but a recording, as it were, of an oral proclamation that preceded the dance contest. The thoroughly traditional and formulaic character of the language suggests that we are dealing with a snippet from a bardic song,⁵ and the deictic ‘now’ (v̄n̄) appears to mark a transition from some other activity and the forthcoming event.⁶ For these reasons, we have to imagine a festivity involving a variety of agonistic musico-athletic activities, perhaps similar to the idealized description of King Alcinous’ symposium in the *Odyssey* (8.250–380),⁷ or the succession of different forms of dancing and acrobatics in the third and final dancing scene depicted on the Shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.590–606). On such occasions we can easily imagine a bard at some point announcing that it is *now* time to make way for some new kind of performance. Does the recorded announcement specify what kind of dancing the audience and judge(s) should expect to see next?

Three words in the inscription refer to the performers or the anticipated spectacle: ἀταλότατα, ὄρχῆστῶν and παίζει. Despite many attempts to argue otherwise, the last two words appear to offer no specific information, since we find them used rather neutrally in reference to different varieties of dancing. Calvert Watkins argued that both ὄρχηστής ‘dancer’ and ὄρχις ‘testicle’ derive from the root *h₁erǵh- ‘mount’ and hypothesized that the semantics of ὄρχέομαι developed from denoting sex to erotic dancing to simply dancing. He placed the Dipylon inscription at an intermediate stage in this evolution, suggesting that ὄρχηστής in this context refers specifically to a

⁵ C. Watkins, ‘Syntax and metrics in the Dipylon vase inscription’, in A. Morpurgo Davies and W. Meid (edd.), *Studies in Greek, Italic, and Indo-European Linguistics Offered to Leonard R. Palmer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Innsbruck, 1976), 431–44, at 431–8, demonstrating not only that ‘every word and every morpheme ... is placed according to the canons of epic formulaic and metrical practice’ but also that we find similar relative sentences that serve to announce competitions in Hittite and Vedic texts. Cf. P. Friedländer and H.B. Hoffleit, *Epigrammata: Greek Inscriptions in Verse from the Beginning to the Persian Wars* (Los Angeles, 1948), 55.

⁶ See E.A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences* (New Jersey, 1982), 16 and 192–3; G. Danek, ‘Der Nestorbecher von Ischia, epische Zitiertechnik und das Symposion’, *WS* 107 (1994), 29–44, at 41.

⁷ The comparison is often made: Friedländer and Hoffleit (n. 5), 55; H.R. Hommel, ‘Tanzen und spielen’, *Gymnasium* 56 (1949), 201–5; L.H. Jeffery, ‘Greek alphabetic writing’, in J. Boardman and N.G.L. Hammond (edd.), *The Cambridge Ancient History* (Cambridge, 1981), 3.3.819–33, at 831; B.B. Powell, ‘The Dipylon oinochoe inscription and the spread of literacy in 8th century Athens’, *Kadmos* 27 (1988), 65–86, at 76–7.

'lascivious dancer'.⁸ Watkins is not alone in suggesting that we have to envision the same kind of entertainment that we might suppose the dancers repeatedly mentioned in the famous homoerotic Thera inscriptions offered.⁹ However, this etymology is controversial,¹⁰ and in early Greek hexameter poetry the verb ὀρχέομαι and its cognates have no such clear connotations.¹¹ In similar fashion, it has been argued that παίζειι does not refer to dancing at all but rather to the sexual activity of a young beloved.¹² More often it has been argued that the verb needs to be translated 'sport' and that it refers to particularly 'playful' or 'dynamic' dancing.¹³ However, just as with ὀρχηστής, the parallels in early Greek epic do not allow us to limit its meaning to any one particular mode of dancing.¹⁴ παίζω is used about the exuberant acrobatic performance of young men accompanied by music at the aforementioned banquet in the *Odyssey* (8.261) but also, for instance, about a wedding dance in which adult men and women participate (*Od.* 23.146–7). Naturally, these observations cannot rule out that the dancing commemorated on the Dipylon *oinochoē* was indeed playful and/or erotically suggestive, but invoking the use of ὀρχῆστῶν and παίζειι is not sufficient to substantiate such a claim.

2. THE MEANING OF ΑΤΑΛΟΣ

We must focus our attention on the word ἀταλότατα. Without explicitly reflecting on the matter, many scholars have translated the inscription as a claim that the prize belongs to the dancer who performs 'most gracefully' or 'most elegantly'.¹⁵ By their very nature,

⁸ C. Watkins, 'La famille indo-européenne de grec ὄρχης: linguistique, poétique et mythologie', *BSL* 70 (1975), 11–26, at 19.

⁹ Watkins (n. 8), 18–19; cf. Y. Duhoux, 'Observations sur l'oinochoe du Dipylon', *Kadmos* 30 (1991), 153–69, at 162 (who goes on to reject the suggestion); K. Robb, *Literacy and Paideia in Ancient Greece* (New York and Oxford, 1994), 32.

¹⁰ Refuted by R. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 1115–16; D.G. Miller, *Ancient Greek Dialects and Early Authors: Introduction to the Dialect Mixture in Homer, with Notes on Lyric and Herodotus* (Boston and Berlin, 2014), 142.

¹¹ F.G. Naerebout, *Attractive Performances: Ancient Greek Dance: Three Preliminary Studies* (Amsterdam, 1997), 181–2 n. 391; *Lfgre* s.v. ὀρχέομαι.

¹² J. Chadwick, *Lexicographica Graeca: Contributions to the Lexicography of Ancient Greek* (Oxford, 1996), 220, who concludes that the text is a funerary inscription for a dead younger lover.

¹³ See K. Robb, 'The Dipylon prize graffito', *Coranto* 7 (1971), 11–19, at 13–14, arguing that it was a consolation prize to an energetic but unsuccessful young dancer; C. Gallavotti, 'I due incunaboli di Atene e Pitecusa ed altre epigrafi arcaiche', *RAL* 31 (1977), 207–38, at 210: 'che spicca i passi più gagliardi'; Havelock (n. 6), 192–3, arguing that 'grace' or 'beauty' may have been the desired quality in the preceding contest, but that this was a lighter event; Powell (n. 7), 75 n. 30; A. Henrichs, *Warum soll ich denn tanzen? Dionysisches im Chor der griechischen Tragödie* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1996), 32–4.

¹⁴ *Lfgre* s.v. παίζω; Hommel (n. 7), 203–4; Naerebout (n. 11), 280; S.E. Kidd, *Play and Aesthetics in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 2019), 7–9. See also R. Wachter, *Non-Attic Greek Vase Inscriptions* (Oxford, 2001), 50 with the objections raised by Beekes (n. 10), 1143 and Miller (n. 10), 142.

¹⁵ e.g. G. Pfohl, *Griechische Inschriften als Zeugnisse des privaten und öffentlichen Lebens* (München, 1966), 9: 'am anmutigsten tanzt'; G. Annibaldis and O. Vox, 'La più antica iscrizione greca', *Glotta* 54 (1976), 223–8, at 226: 'si esibisce più graziosamente'; M. Guarducci, 'Ancora di epigrafi greche arcaiche', *RAL* 33 (1978), 390–406, at 391, explicitly defending this position against Gallavotti's (n. 13) criticism; Y. Duhoux, *Introduction aux dialectes grecs anciens: Problèmes et méthodes: Recueil de textes traduits* (Louvain and Paris, 1983), 96: 'danse le plus gracieusement'; A. Henrichs, 'Writing religion: inscribed texts, ritual authority, and the religious discourse of the polis', in H. Yunis (ed.), *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 2003), 38–58, at 45: 'performs most gracefully'; P. Filos, 'Dipylon vase inscription',

aesthetic evaluative terms are notoriously hard to define; however, ‘elegance’ and ‘grace’ usually connote maturity and refinement. For example, two recent, free-association, questionnaire studies conducted in Frankfurt found that their participants associated *Eleganz* with impressions of lightness, fluency, exquisiteness and artful simplicity; when applied to people, it was primarily linked to adults in their third to sixth decades of life. They also found that their participants’ understanding of *Anmut* (‘grace’) was very close to *Eleganz*, but it was regarded as less sober, rigorous, tasteful and expensive.¹⁶ The adjective ἀταλός, on the other hand, is typically applied to young animals or children in the Greek sources. Other suggestions thus include ‘most dynamically’,¹⁷ ‘most softly’, ‘daintily’ or ‘delicately’,¹⁸ or ‘most sweetly’.¹⁹ Is it possible to arrive at a more precise definition of the quality that the word refers to? Leaving aside the difficult question of etymology,²⁰ the standard definitions ‘kindlich, zart’ (*LgfrE*), ‘tender, delicate’ (LSJ) or ‘tender, delicate, youthful’ (F. Montanari’s *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* [Leiden, 2015]) are difficult to accept when we consider what the less ambiguous denominative verbs ἀτάλλω and ἀπιτάλλω reveal about their adjectival base. In Homer and Hesiod, ἀτάλλω denotes the frolicking of animals and children;²¹ in later authors, it can also denote the act of providing care, shelter or nourishment.²² The verb ἀπιτάλλω is also used about caring for an animal or someone else’s child by giving them nourishment or keeping them content with play and affection.²³ P.J. Barber has observed that denominative *-iē/o- verbs based

in G.K. Giannakis (ed.), *Brill Encyclopedia of Ancient Greek Language and Linguistics*, 3 vols. (Leiden and Boston, 2014) 1.499–501, at 500: ‘dances most elegantly’.

¹⁶ W. Menninghaus, V. Wagner, V. Kegel, C.A. Knoop and W. Schlotz, ‘Beauty, elegance, grace, and sexiness compared’, *PLOS One* 14 (2019), e0218728. See also K. Aschenbrenner, *The Concepts of Criticism* (Dordrecht and Boston, 1974), 285 (based on an analysis of the word in Anglophone criticism).

¹⁷ J.W. Day, ‘Poems on stone: the inscribed antecedents of Hellenistic epigram’, in P. Bing and J. Bruss (edd.), *Brill’s Companion to Hellenistic Epigram* (Leiden, 2007), 29–47, at 36.

¹⁸ S. Ferri, ‘Sui vasi greci con epigrafi “acclamatorie”’, *RAL* 13 (1938), 1–87, at 3; R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, 1992), 58; D. Steiner, ‘Sleights of hand: epigraphic capping and the visual enactment of *eris* in early Greek epigrams’, in D. Damon and C. Pieper (edd.), *Eris vs. Aemulatio: Valuing Competition in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden, 2018), 177–207, at 179.

¹⁹ M. Fantuzzi and R. Hunter, *Tradition and Innovation in Hellenistic Poetry* (Cambridge, 2004), 285.

²⁰ Besides the previous inconclusive debate succinctly surveyed by Bernhard Mader in *LgfrE* s.v. ἀταλός, see also F.R. Adrados, *Diccionario Griego-Español* (Madrid, 1991), 3.580: ἀ- + telh₂- ‘to bear’; E.J. Furnée, *Die wichtigsten konsonantischen Erscheinungen des Vorgriechischen* (The Hague, 1972), 88 n. 478 and 262: a Pre-Greek *Lallwort* (support from Beekes [n. 10], 161); however, as Furnée points out, the gloss mentioned in this context (Hsch. α 1432 Latte–Cunningham: ἄζωαί-νεία καὶ ἀπαλαί) might be a corruption of ἀταλαί in *Od.* 11.39.

²¹ About sea creatures: *Il.* 13.27–8; cf. Mosch. 2.1167. About the children of the silver race: Hes. *Op.* 130–1 (cf. Philostr. *Imag.* 2.3). It has been suggested that ἀτάλλω in this case means ‘receive nourishment’ (LSJ s.v. ἀτάλλω; C. Moussy, ‘ἀταλός, ἀτάλλω, ἀπιτάλλω’, in A. Ernout [ed.], *Mélanges de linguistique et de philologie grecques offerts à P. Chantraine* [Paris, 1972], 157–68, at 166). It would follow that ἐτρέφετ’ ἀτάλλων is pleonastic, similar to the formulaic τρέφον ἦδ’ ἀτίταλλον (‘nurtured and nurtured’). See, however, W.J. Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod Works and Days vv. 1–382* (Leiden, 1985), 87–8. About Ajax’s son: Soph. *Aj.* 559 (ambiguous; see n. 35 below).

²² *Hymn. Hom. Merc.* 400; Pind. fr. 214 S.–M.; see also the later [Hdt.] *Vit. Hom.* 14 = [Hom.] *Epigr.* 4.1.

²³ Foddering an animal: *Il.* 5.271, 24.280; *Od.* 14.41, 15.174. Caring for someone else’s child (nourishing, loving and amusing it): *Il.* 14.202 and 14.303, 16.191 (‘loving him as his own’), 24.60; *Od.* 15.449, 18.323 (‘offering playthings to her heart’), 19.353; Hes. *Theog.* 480, fr. 30.30,

on adjectives with a *theme* argument (for example ποικίλος ‘variegated’) have a factitive relation to the adjective (ποικίλλω ‘to variegate’), whereas verbs formed in the same way from adjectives with an *agent* or *experiencer* argument (for example κωτίλος ‘persuasive’) have a predicative relation to their base (κωτίλλω ‘to persuade’).²⁴ If we suppose that ἀτάλλω follows this pattern, it cannot have been formed from an adjective carrying the *theme* meaning ‘tender, delicate, youthful’, since the resulting verb would have been factitive: ‘to make someone tender, delicate, youthful’. ἀταλός must have had the *experiencer* meaning ‘carefree, untroubled’ or the *agent* meaning ‘playful’ in order to produce ἀτάλλω ‘to frolic’. The fact that ἀτάλλω can also mean ‘to take care of’ should probably not be explained as deriving from ἀταλός carrying the otherwise unattested *agent* meaning ‘caring’, since it is unlikely that the semantics of the base adjective was realized in two different ways in the denominative verb.²⁵ It is much more plausible that this is the result of later confusion of ἀτάλλω with ἀτιτάλλω. The latter verb was originally formed by reduplication from the former in order to make ἀτάλλω ‘to be carefree’ factitive: ‘to make someone carefree’, that is, to sustain that creature’s carefree existence and take care of it (*ἀτατάλλω with analogical -ι- or ἀ-τι-τάλλω if it was analysed as a compound ἀ-τάλλω).²⁶ We might compare the formation to τι-θή-νη ‘nurse’ and γαλα-θη-νός ‘milk sucking’ from θήσθαι ‘to suck’. The verb ἀτιτάλλω gained currency (sixteen occurrences in Homer and Hesiod) and in turn eventually influenced the much rarer ἀτάλλω (only two occurrences in Homer and Hesiod, both in the sense ‘frolic’).²⁷

Let us consider the extent to which the interpretation ‘carefree’ fits attestations of the word ἀταλός down through the Classical era.²⁸

1. In the famous meeting of Hector and Andromache in the *Iliad* (6.400–1), Astyanax is called ἀταλάφρων, a regressive formation from the formulaic ἀταλά φρονέων, perhaps influenced by ταλάφρων (*Il.* 13.300).²⁹ The phrase is immediately followed up by ‘just a child’ (νήπιον αὐτως) and ‘beloved, like a beautiful star’ (Ἐκτορίδην ἀγαπητὸν ἀλίγκιον ἀστέρι καλῶ). Hector ‘smiles in silence’ (μεῖδιησεν ... σιωπῇ) when he looks upon him. We are supposed to apprehend Astyanax’s life as something precious and adorable, and hence as ‘grievable’,³⁰ but we are also encouraged to perceive these qualities in the light of the child’s impending destruction: we know that his parents’ worst fears (*Il.* 6.447–9, 24.725–45) about the boy’s future will inevitably be realized. When Andromache later laments her husband’s death, she contrasts the child’s future

165.5 M.–W.; *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 115; *Hymn. Hom.* 26.4; Pind. *Nem.* 3.58; Theoc. *Id.* 17.58. Caring for one’s own child: *Od.* 11.250; Hes. fr. 31.3; Anac. 60.6 G.; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1731; Mosch. 2.11. Caring for an old man: *Hymn. Hom. Ven.* 231 (Dawn giving Tithonus ambrosia and beautiful clothes). Indulging someone with trickery: Hipponax, fr. 129a W. Indulging a divinity with sacrifice: Theoc. *Id.* 15.111.

²⁴ P.J. Barber, *Stevens’ Law and the History of Semivowel Syllabicity in Indo-European and Ancient Greek* (Oxford, 2013), 302–17.

²⁵ Cf. Barber (n. 24), 313–14.

²⁶ Cf. A. Willi, *Origins of the Greek Verb* (Cambridge, 2018), 158 n. 70; cf. Gallavotti (n. 13), 210.

²⁷ For the influence of ἀτιτάλλω on ἀτάλλω, see A. Debrunner, ‘Zu den konsonantischen io-Präsentien im Griechischen’, *IF* 21 (1907), 13–98, at 90.

²⁸ I exclude Hes. fr. 85, which is too fragmentary.

²⁹ This explanation should be contrasted with the suggestion that ἀταλός resulted from an erroneous analysis of this verse by M. Leumann, ‘ἀταλός’, *Glotta* 15 (1972), 153–5 and *Homerische Wörter* (Basel, 1950), 139–41, rejected by e.g. P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque* (Paris, 1968), 132 and *LfgreE* s.v. ἀταλός.

³⁰ Cf. J. Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London, 2009), 14–16.

misery with the previous carefree existence as an infant that we are witnessing here (*Il.* 22.500–5):

Ἀστυάναξ, ὃς πρὶν μὲν ἐοῦ ἐπὶ γούνασι πατρὸς
 μυελὸν οἶον ἔδεσκε καὶ οἴων πίονα δημόν·
 αὐτὰρ ὄθ' ὕπνος ἔλοι, παύσαιτό τε νηπιαχεύων,
 εὐδέσκ' ἐν λέκτροισιν ἐν ἀγκαλίδεσσι τιθήνης
 εὐνῆ ἔνι μαλακῇ θαλέων ἐμπλησάμενος κῆρ·
 νῦν δ' ἄν πολλὰ πάθησι φίλου ἀπὸ πατρὸς ἁμαρτῶν

Astyanax, who in days before, on the knees of his father,
 used to eat only the marrow or the fat flesh of sheep.
 And when sleep caught him and he was done with his childish games,
 he would go to sleep in a bed, in the arms of his nurse, in a soft
 bed, with his heart given all its fill of abundance.
 Now, with his dear father gone, he has much to suffer.

For the moment the child is nurtured, amused, cared for and protected, blissfully oblivious of the dangers he is facing.³¹ An interpretation of ἀταλὰ φρονέων as ‘carefree in his mind’ would certainly fit the context.

2. In the harvest scene depicted on the Shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.568–72), the phrase ἀταλὰ φρονέοντες is applied to young adults carrying grapes and—in the same or in the next image—dancing around a child singing a dirge ‘with a delicate voice’, beating the ground and following the rhythm with shouts and capering. Here too the context emphasizes freedom from cares: we should recall that the scene belongs to the peaceful images on the Shield that contrast with the city at war (*Il.* 18.509–40), the lion attacking cattle (*Il.* 18.579–86) and, of course, the theme of the *Iliad* in general. Just like the joy of the king in the preceding harvest scene (*Il.* 18.557), the description of the children as ἀταλὰ φρονέοντες could mean that they are ‘care-free in their minds’, neglecting their mortality and the painful realities that human life can involve.
3. In Aeneas’ account of his lineage in the *Iliad* (20.223), King Erichthonius’ mares take delight in their foals, which are described as ἀταλαί (ἵπποι ... θήλειαι, πάλοισιν ἀγαλλόμεναι ἀταλήσι); next we are told that the North Wind desired and covered the mothers. The interpretation that the foals are ‘carefree’, skipping around their mothers in playful glee, is at least possible. Note that the quality is presented as something pleasing to the mothers of the foals and that impending rape adds an element of danger.
4. In the *Nekyia* (*Od.* 11.39–40), the spirits from Erebus that flock around Odysseus include ‘brides, and young unmarried men, and much-enduring (πολύτλητοι) elders, | virgins, ἀταλαί, with hearts new to sorrow’ (νεοπενθέα θυμὸν ἔχουσαι). The pairing of παρθενικαὶ ἀταλαί with πολύτλητοι γέροντες suggests that both kinds of death and afterlife are piteous in their own way: old men arrive in Hades after long lives filled with hardship, whereas virgins come to this grim place ‘carefree’, their hearts forever unaccustomed to the grief they must now eternally sustain.

³¹ On this theme, see L. Pratt, ‘Play, pathos, and precocity: the three “p”s of Greek literary childhood’, in J. Evans-Grubbs and T. Parkin (edd.), *Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Oxford, 2013), 227–45, at 232–5.

5. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (24), Hecate is still a child, ἀταλά φρονέουσα, when she hears the screams of Persephone being abducted. There appears to be a contrast between her previous carefree life and the sudden calamity that she witnesses.
6. In Hesiod's *Theogony* (989), Phaethon is still a child, ἀταλά φρονέων, when he is abducted by Aphrodite. There appears to be a contrast between his previous carefree spirit and his abduction.
7. In a Pindaric ode (*Nem.* 7.90–2) the poet hopes: 'If a god supports this [*sc.* the value of benevolent neighbours], in you, Subduer of Giants [Heracles], Sogenes might wish to live with good fortune in the well-built sacred street of his ancestors, fostering, to his father's benefit, an ἀταλός spirit' (εἰ δ' αὐτὸ καὶ θεὸς ἀνέχοι, | ἐν τίν κ' ἐθέλοι, Γίγαντας ὃς ἐδάμασας, εὐτυχῶς | ναίειν πατρὶ Σαυγένης ἀταλὸν ἀμφέπων | θυμὸν προγόνων εὐκτήμονα ζαθέαν ἄγυιαν). Sogenes should pray to his neighbour Heracles to grant him a continued life free from cares in his home. Note also that this state of carefreeness is explicitly something pleasing to his father.³²
8. Euripides (*El.* 699) describes Atreus' golden lamb as ἀταλά when it is lured away from its mother by Pan, provided that we accept Page's emendation (ἀταλάν [-ᾶς MSS] ὑπὸ ματέρως ... ἄρνα). Otherwise, it refers to the mother. In either case there could be a contrast between previous carefreeness and impending doom or loss.³³

Among the Hellenistic attestations we find one potential counterexample that needs to be addressed. Erinna (3 G.–P. = *Anth. Pal.* 6.352) praises a lifelike portrait of a maiden and declares that the hands of the painter must have been ἀταλαί. It seems unlikely that the point is that the hands were capable of 'carefree' or 'insouciant' artistry, but rather that they were particularly suitable for the task of depicting a virgin: they were 'soft' or 'delicate' (implicitly commenting on the poet's own literary 'finesse').³⁴ However, this departure might be explained by the learned analysis of ἀταλός as formed from ἀπαλός 'soft', first attested in Chrysippus (fragment missing in von Arnim, but see *Etymologicum Gudianum* 224.17–18 de Stefani: ὁ δὲ Χρῦσιππος: "ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀπαλοῦ γέγονε κατὰ τροπὴν τοῦ -π- εἰς -τ-") and Apollodorus of Athens (Apollonius, *Homeric Lexicon* 47.1–2).³⁵ The competing ancient etymology, ἄ- + *τλάω 'not enduring' (first attested in Philoxenus, fr. 183 Theodoridis, but suggested already by example 4 and perhaps by attestation 1 above), is more compatible with the interpretation advanced here.

The recurring emphasis on carefreeness in the face of death or violence can also be seen in certain instances of ἀτάλλω. Hesiod uses the verb in relation to the protracted childhood of members of the silver race before their short, brutal adult lives as warriors:

³² It is not necessary (*pace* LSJ s.v. ἀταλός) to interpret this as a special use of ἀταλός with the dative, 'subject, amenable to somebody'. I am suggesting that the point is not necessarily filial piety (*pace* C. Carey, *A Commentary on Five Odes of Pindar* [Salem, 1981], 174) but being delightfully carefree.

³³ For later examples similarly uniting sweetness and doom, see Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.460; Mosch. *Europa* 77–9; Statilius Flaccus 4 G.–P. = *Anth. Pal.* 7.542; Oppian, *Halieutica* 4.632, 5.527; *IG* XII(8) 600 (second century C.E.); Quint. Smyrn. 7.340, 13.122, 13.323.

³⁴ See I. Männlein-Robert, 'Epigrams on art: voice and voicelessness in Hellenistic epigram', in P. Bing and J.S. Bruss (edd.), *Brill's Companion to Hellenistic Epigram: Down to Philip* (Leiden, 2007), 251–71, at 255–6.

³⁵ In later texts the word is clearly used as an equivalent of ἀπαλός in Oppian, *Cynegetica* 2.163 (the jaws of a bison are ἀταλά) and Greg. Naz. in Migne, *PG* 37.975.4 (about musical notes).

‘A child would be nurtured for a hundred years at the side of his cherished mother, leading a carefree existence (ἀτάλλων) in his own house, a great baby’ (ἀλλ’ ἑκατὸν μὲν παῖς ἔτεα παρὰ μητέρι κεδνῇ | ἐτρέφεται ἀτάλλων μέγα νήπιος ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, Hes. *Op.* 130–1). A similar use is found in Sophocles’ *Ajax*, where the hero addresses his son Eurysaces, clearly commenting on Hector and Astyanax in attestation 1 above. The father claims to be envious of his son who cannot perceive the present calamity, ‘because the happiest life is lived while one understands nothing, before one learns delight or pain’ (554–5). Thus he advises the child: ‘nourish (βόσκου) your young soul on gentle breezes in your carefreeness (ἀτάλλων), a delight to your mother here’ (558–9).³⁶

Translators and lexicographers sometimes use the word ‘innocent’ to translate ἀταλός.³⁷ ‘Innocent’ is a so-called ‘thick’ concept, that is, a concept that expresses a union of fact and value.³⁸ More specifically, ‘innocent’ often represents a ‘thick’ ethical concept, denoting the positive quality of being free from moral wrong or evil (*OED* s.v. ‘innocent’ 1). However, the word can also be used in a morally neutral sense to represent a ‘thick’ affective concept, about the ‘unsuspecting nature of a child or one ignorant of the world; ... hence, artless, naïve, ingenuous’ (*OED* s.v. 3). This is probably as close as we can get if we need to use one single English adjective to render ἀταλός, which lacks obvious connotations of guiltlessness, except from in some instances where Christian authors use it.³⁹ The descriptive dimension of the ‘thick’ concept ἀταλός involves a blissful freedom from cares that is specific to a pampered and protected child; its evaluative dimension is grounded in a capacity to elicit positive attachment emotions, such as tenderness in response to immaturity, dependence and need.⁴⁰ The *Kindchenschema*—certain physical juvenile features such as large eyes, bulging craniums and retreating chins—is universally sufficient to elicit such responses.⁴¹ But immaturity can also be manifested by clothes, actions, gaits, language mistakes, naïve ideas, and so on, which we might call ‘sweet’, ‘cute’, ‘adorable’, and so on. To be ἀταλός is thus to be *sweetly* carefree precisely because one needs a caregiver.

We should also try to explain why there is a touch of doom in so many of the examples mentioned above. The pathos of these scenes can be compared to that evoked by the recurring motifs of ‘youth and beauty brought low’ and ‘pathetic ignorance’ in connection to the death of minor characters in the *Iliad*.⁴² Much like the word νήπιος,⁴³ ἀταλός tends to be used by epic poets in order to emphasize a poignant joining of tenderness with compassion and a pathos of transience. The carefree existence of

³⁶ For this punctuation and interpretation, see P.J. Finglass, *Sophocles Ajax* (Cambridge, 2011), 300; cf. schol. rec. *Soph. Aj.* 559. For this and further examples of the blissful ignorance of children, Pratt (n. 31), 232–3.

³⁷ See Adrados (n. 20), s.v. ἀταλός; F. Montanari (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden, 2015), s.v. ἀταλός.

³⁸ See B. Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Abingdon, 2006²) on ‘thick’ concepts.

³⁹ Clem. Al. *Paed.* 1.5.19.4, where ἀταλός and its cognates are used about Christians as opposed to the ‘crooked’ and ‘hard-hearted’ pagans; *Anth. Pal.* 1.119.10, the introduction to Eudocia’s Homeric Cento (about the children killed by Herodes).

⁴⁰ For this definition of tenderness, see C.D. Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (Oxford, 2011), 35; D.A. Lishner, C.D. Batson and E. Huss, ‘Tenderness and sympathy: distinct empathic emotions elicited by different forms of need’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 37 (2011), 614–25.

⁴¹ See K. Lorenz, ‘Die angeborenen Formen möglicher Erfahrung’, *Zeitschrift für Tierpsychologie* 5 (1943), 235–409.

⁴² See J. Griffin, ‘Homeric pathos and objectivity’, *CQ* 26 (1976), 161–87, at 176–9 and 181–3.

⁴³ Examples in S. Edmunds, *Homeric Nēpios* (New York, 1990), 60–97.

infants is blissful and sweet; however, unlike the everlasting carefree existence of the gods (*Il.* 24.526), it is by definition ephemeral.

3. HOW TO DANCE ΑΤΑΛΩΤΑΤΑ

Like Eris' mythical apple pledged 'to the most beautiful' (καλλίστη), the singer who announced our dancing competition in eighth-century Athens specified the criterion by which the judges were to assess the competing performers in this context: the quality of dancing ἀταλότηα. The only example besides the Dipylon *oinochoē* where the word ἀταλός is used in connection to dancing is the harvest scene on Achilles' Shield (*Il.* 18.568–72). Admittedly, the adjective is not used to modify the dancing itself in this context, but the phrase ἀταλά φρονέοντες denotes the sweetly carefree spirit of boys and girls as they carry grapes in baskets before proceeding to dancing; yet it is not unreasonable to think that the whole image is a manifestation of the quality under consideration. The children beat the ground in unison and follow the music, 'capering on their feet' (ποσὶ σκαίροντες), a verb otherwise used about the frolicking of calves when their mothers return from pasture (*Od.* 10.410–14) or about the joyful dancing of maidens (εὐφροني θυμῷ παίζουσαι σκαίρουσι, *Hymn. Hom.* 30.15). The dance appears to be executed in a manner that suggests exultation and immaturity.

In the absence of further instances in which the word ἀταλός is used about dancing, we must ask whether the 'thick' concept that it represents—sweet carefreeness—is expressed by other means in contexts where dance performances are applauded for manifesting this aesthetic property. Such examples can indeed be found. In the old-new Sappho (58b V., extended by the new papyrus) the poet addresses a group of 'children' in a musical context and reflects on the process of aging:

] ποτ' [ἔ]οντα χροά γήρας ἦδη
λεῦκαι δ' ἐγ]ένοντο τρίχες ἐκ μελαίναν,
βάρυς δέ μ' ὁ θυμός πεπόηται, γόνα δ' οὐ φέροισι,
τὰ δὴ ποτα λαίμηρ' ἔον ὄρχησθ' ἴσα νεβρίοισι

My body, which used to be ... old age has now | ... and my hair has turned from black [into bright white]. | My heart has been made heavy, my knees do not carry, | those which once were nimble to dance like [the knees of] fawns.

The poet is no longer soft, her colour no longer vibrant, and her mental organ (θυμός) has grown heavy. This weight hinders her from dancing with the same kind of appeal that the girls she is addressing can achieve: with knees like those of a baby deer.⁴⁴ The common property of the *comparatum* and the *comparandum* is not merely speed or agility—a grown-up deer would have served that purpose—but clearly also a naïve and joyous spirit, still not checked by the psychological 'weight' of old age. Note also that the value of this charming *naïveté* is amplified by a poignant emphasis on its ephemeral nature: I am old, all mortals grow old, young Tithonus was abducted from this world by a goddess because of his youthful beauty, but he too grew old in a most pitiable way. In this respect too, the fawn-dancer simile is reminiscent of scenes where epic poets use the word ἀταλός.

⁴⁴ J. Méndez Dosuna, 'Knees and fawns in the new Sappho', *Mnemosyne* 61 (2008), 108–14.

In the Late Archaic era, we find bounding fawns depicted together with dancing and *aulos*-playing girls on a *kratēriskos* from the Acropolis (510–500 B.C.E.).⁴⁵ In the Classical period, fawn-dancer and deer-dancer similes are well attested. In his ode for an Aeginetan's pankration victory in Nemea 485 or 483 B.C.E., Bacchylides (*Nem.* 13.86–92) conjures up the image of another artist singing Aegina's praise: 'some high and proud girl sings in praise of your [might], often leaping lightly on her feet, as a carefree fawn towards the flowery [banks], with her illustrious near-dwelling [companions]' (τό γε σὸν [κράτος ὑμ]νεῖ | καὶ τις ὕψαυχῆς κόβρα ... | πόδεσσι ταρφέως | ἤϋτε νεβρὸς ἀπεν[θή]ς | ἀνθεμόεντας ἐπ['] ὄχθους | κοῦφα σὺν ἀγχιδὸ[ο]ις | θρώ<ι>σκουσ' ἀγακλειτα[ῖς] ἐταίρα[ις].) The imagined young female performer singing Aegina's praise is compared to a fawn, and again not only because of her agility but explicitly because of her freedom from sorrows (the fawn is ἀπενθή), a quality unavailable to a more mature artist. A slightly darker emphasis on the precarious nature of this vulnerable charm is found in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where the chorus expresses their longing to dance, to move their feet and toss their heads towards the sky like a fawn as it rejoices after escaping the hunter.⁴⁶ The triumphant joy of the prey animal—a triumph of escape rather than conquest—is emphatically impermanent, involving a neglect of the danger one has evaded and a joy unchecked by dismal awareness of one's fragility or by the anxiety about similar dangers in the future.

The fawn-dancer simile and the way in which it combines sweetness and precariousness may suggest that this quality in a dance had an erotic appeal. Archilochus (196a.42–50 W.; cf. Anac. 28 G.) compares a reluctant girl to a trembling fawn as the man holds her neck and grasps her breasts. Milder and more aristocratic is the image of maiden dancers as fillies (Alcm. *PMG* 1 and Ar. *Lys.* 1307–9); they are not prey, but still destined to be tamed by a rider, and hence can also serve as an image of marriage or erotic conquest (Anac. 78 G.).⁴⁷ However, it should be stressed that this aspect is never developed in the fawn-dancer similes.⁴⁸

A philosophical reflection on manifestations of youthfulness in dance found in Plato's *Laws* should be mentioned here. In order to illustrate why some people might get the (in his view, mistaken) idea that aesthetic value is grounded in pleasure rather than in virtue, the Athenian Stranger asks (*Leg.* 2.657d):

ἄρ' οὖν οὐχ ἡμῶν οἱ μὲν νέοι αὐτοὶ χοροῦν ἐτοιμοί, τὸ δὲ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἡμῶν ἐκείνους αὐθροῦντες διάγειν ἡγούμεθα πρεπόντως, χαίροντες τῇ ἐκείνων παιδιᾷ τε καὶ ἑορτάσει, ἐπειδὴ τὸ παρ' ἡμῖν ἡμᾶς ἐλαφρὸν ἐκλείπει νῦν, ὃ ποθοῦντες καὶ ἀσπαζόμενοι τίθεμεν οὕτως ἀνάνας τοῖς δυναμένοις ἡμᾶς ὅτι μάλιστ' εἰς τὴν νεότητα μνήμη ἐπεγείρειν;

Is it not the case that the young among us are capable of participating in choral performance, while those of us who are elders think the proper way to conduct ourselves is as their audience, taking pleasure in their dancing and revelry, now that we are abandoned by our own lightness, which we long for and cling to and therefore arrange competitions for those who are most able to excite us to juvenescence through memory?

⁴⁵ L. Kahil, 'Le "Cratéristique" d'Artémis et le Brauronion de l'Acropole', *Hesperia* 50 (1981), 253–63, at 255–6.

⁴⁶ Eur. *Bacch.* 862–76. Cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 111–13. On joy, relief, triumph and dancing like a fawn, see also Eur. *El.* 860–1; Ar. *Lys.* 1318–19; Theoc. *Id.* 8.88–91. On actual fawns dancing, see Eur. *Alc.* 585–7.

⁴⁷ See K. Wasdin, *Eros at Dusk: Ancient Wedding and Love Poetry* (Oxford, 2018), 108–37.

⁴⁸ See D. Cairns, *Bacchylides: Five Epinician Odes (3, 5, 9, 11 and 13)* (Cambridge, 2010), 304.

The point of the counterexample is understandable within the larger context. The Athenian Stranger goes on to observe that ‘all young creatures have a fiery nature’ (*Leg.* 2.664e), that they are unable to sit still or keep quiet but scream and leap about as though they were ‘mad’ and dancing in playful glee. Among all the animals, only human beings have received the gift of rhythm and harmony from the gods, and it is through the long process of musical education that their voices and movement will eventually attain order (*Leg.* 2.672c–d). However, there are certain qualities—such as playful revelry (παιδιᾶ τε καὶ ἑορτάσει), lightness (τὸ ἐλαφρόν) and juvenescence (νεότης)—that can only be enjoyed if perceived in performers who are in fact closer to this natural starting point of music and gymnastics, which we share with all animals; in performers who have less art and skill but more simplicity and youth. Plato suggests that we take vicarious pleasure—not the highest kind of pleasure but a worthwhile pleasure none the less—in displays of sheer youth because we have all had and lost this quality. It is a nostalgic but also a revivifying experience.

It is natural to ask at the end of this section to what extent texts from the early sixth to the late fourth centuries which lack the lexeme ἀταλός can shed light on the dance contest commemorated by our late eighth-century inscription. My answer is that I invoke them merely to illustrate what this ‘thick’ affective concept could plausibly mean when uniquely employed to denote an aesthetic ideal within the realm of dancing in a Greek archaic context. In epic, ἀταλός denotes the sweet carefreeness of children. Extending it to a dance performance suggests a capacity to move one’s body in a manner expressive of naïve rejoicing and lacking in mature composure. The winner of this competition, we might suppose, had to dance in a way more spontaneous than restrained, more agile than firm and solemn. This was not the aim of all choral performances. It must be contrasted with the well-trained ‘flashing feet’ (μαρμαρυγὰς ποδῶν) and the display of dazzling acrobatics on Scheria (*Od.* 8.263–5, 8.370–84). It must also be contrasted with the stately ‘blameless’ adult wedding dance (ἀμύμονος ὀρχηθμοῖο) on Ithaca (*Od.* 23.145). It was a less wonderous and less dignified, more adorable kind of performance. I have also suggested that the appropriate affective response to such a display of childish carefreeness might have had a bittersweet tone. In epic, ἀταλός is almost always used in situations charged with dark forebodings. Of course, there is no reason to think that a dance performance perceived as ἀταλός had any such connotations of doom. However, the frequent use of the short-lived joy of a prey animal, the fawn, as an image of the dancer moving with the carefree abandon of a child in later Archaic and Classical sources might offer some clue about the particular aesthetic value ascribed to this kind of performance, namely that it resided partly in its power to elicit not only tenderness but also poignant reflections and emotions in response to the fragility and impermanence of that carefreeness. However, this is admittedly not hinted at in the verse inscribed on the jug.

4. THE TROPHY

So far, we have considered the words of the inscription as a fragment of living oral poetry in its original function as an announcement, as a piece of preparatory dance criticism that articulated the main criterion of judgement and perhaps invited the audience to identify and savour the sweet carefreeness embodied by the performance. The jug itself was probably not produced for this specific occasion, but it was still regarded as an appropriate trophy for the winner of the contest. Lillian Lawler called attention to the

depiction of a bird and grazing deer in the panel on its neck,⁴⁹ which is not uncommon but found on a series of similar *oinochoai* from the Dipylon Master's workshop.⁵⁰ Lawler conjectured that an object with this motif was chosen since it called to mind both the 'lightness of the dancer' and the '*komos* in which the contest took place', arguing that this event was the Athenian spring festival for Artemis Elaphebolos (Deer-shooter), which might have involved stag processions.⁵¹ It has also been argued that the slightly undulating series of thin, spidery letters running around the vessel were engraved with the particular dance movements in mind.⁵² Although I feel less confident both to pin down the exact festival⁵³ and to find choreographic clues in the layout and shapes of the inscribed letters, it is conceivable that this popular small vessel with its round body and slender neck, decorated with a single vulnerable prey animal, was seen as a suitable prize for this particular contest. In the end, the boy who won the heart of the judges with his adorable capering on that day probably died young, since the jug is in good condition, and was buried with this keepsake of the impermanence of all childish delights.

*Uppsala University and the Swedish Collegium
for Advanced Study*

ERIC CULLHED
eric.cullhed@lingfil.uu.se

⁴⁹ L.B. Lawler, 'A dancer's trophy', *The Classical Weekly* 41 (1947), 50–2.

⁵⁰ T. Rombos, 'The iconography of Attic Late Geometric II pottery' (Diss., University of London, 1987), 55–6.

⁵¹ Lawler (n. 49), 52.

⁵² J. Carruesco, 'Choral performance and geometric patterns in epic poetry and iconographic representations', in V. Cazzato and A. Lardinois (edd.), *The Look of Lyric: Greek Song and the Visual* (Leiden and Boston, 2016), 69–107, at 84–6; Steiner (n. 18), 189.

⁵³ Many have since suggested that a private symposium is a more likely venue: e.g. Robb (n. 9), 38 n. 16, citing private conversation with E. Havelock.