Walk Like an Egyptian:
Bes and the Iconography of the Greek Satyr

By Jennifer Butterworth, Fall 2012

In a paper presented at a conference on Greek architectural sculpture in 2004, Robin Osborne analyzed the curious fact that satyrs are not found in any major sculptural program, despite their overwhelming popularity in other artistic media.[1] Osborne attributed this to theological constraints, arguing that the satyr's habitual transgression of social norms lacks a mythological narrative context that could make its representation useful as a moral lesson and presentable as a resolvable problem. Osborne contrasted the satyr with the centaur, whose occasional antisocial behaviors can serve a didactic purpose. The centaur's mythological presence included clear social contexts for his misdeeds that could serve as a warning against the disruption of divine order. Unlike centaurs, satyrs were under no implicit social obligation to behave, thus their actions were naturalized as an essential trait of their anarchic nature.[2]

In formulating this argument, Osborne looked at several instances where representations of satyrs occur in sacred architecture, beginning with pedimental fragments from the small temple of Dionysus at Athens.[3] He dismissed this instance as insignificant due to a lack of distinct narrative that might have been resolved by the central scene, and then discussed the presence of satyrs on circular friezes such as one of the drum capitals of the Caryatids at the Siphnian Treasury and the choragic monument of Lysicrates in Athens. In both cases he took the position that this imagery held very little narrative content and was primarily used to illustrate repeated motion with no climax, in effect, functioning as space filler. He went on to discuss briefly a few representations of satyrs in non-sacred public sculpture, and argued that the images worked in these spaces, "where a single symbol is required".[4]

Although Osborne's argument that theological requirements constrained representational strategies in temple design programs is compelling, his assertion that satyrs could not communicate a narrative, and the implicit assumption that this narrative would necessarily be immoral, should be challenged. In his analysis, Osborne ignored the widespread presence of satyr imagery in temple antefixes. According to Marconi, painted terracotta antefixes in the form of satyr heads were used on early temples and in tomb contexts throughout Sicily, particularly in the Greek colonies, in Aetolia at Temple C of Thermon, and in southern Italy at Medma and Taranto.[5] Scholars disagree on the precise dating of these antefixes, but according to Marconi the earliest examples are from the Sanctuary of Apollo at Thermon.[6] Surviving terracotta

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[1] The paper was published in 2009, in *Structure, Image, Ornament: Architectural Sculpture in the Greek World. Proceedings of n International Conference Held at the American School of Classical Studies, 27-28 November 2004*, edited by Peter Schultz and Ralf von den Hoff, Oxford and Oakville: Oxbow Books.

[2] Osborne 2009, 9-11.

[3] Athens NM 3131; bib. Karouzou 1968, 11.

[4] Osborne 2009, 10.

[5] Marconi 2005, 82.

[6] Marconi reviews typologies and chronologies of antefixes in satyr form generated by various scholars, of which none agree precisely on dates. (Marconi 2005).

fragments suggest that at this temple, dating to approximately 630 BCE, frontal molded heads, alternating between female and bearded male faces may have projected above the edges of the raking sima on the façade with lion-headed water spouts on the geison corners (fig. 2). Around 540-530 BCE, Marconi argues, these early forms were substituted with a different antefix with a woman's head wearing a *polos* and a new gutter covering with the face of a male satyr.[7]

Satyrs also appeared during the early sixth century on antefixes from temples throughout Sicily, and slightly later in many parts of Italy. They could be portrayed as frontal heads or in full figure, alone or in the company of female figures who are sometimes described as Maenads and at other times described as Nymphs. The earliest surviving antefixes show only alternating satyr and female heads that presumably function together as parts of the same mythic theme. Ridgway points out that antefixes at Thasos with alternating images of Bellerophon on Pegasus and the Chimaira suggest the mythological story and function in an almost narrative sense.[8] The question of the identification of the satyr and his female companion in these architectural revetments is, thus, important to understanding their architectural placement and the reasons for their use.

The surviving literary and artistic records make clear that by the time the satyr appears in art, his mythological presence and iconography must have already been well developed, autonomous from Dionysos whose female followers were called Maenads. In the surviving literature, the satyr is first mentioned in a Homeric Myth for Aphrodite, dating to the seventh century BCE, in which they are described as the lovers of the mountain nymphs to whom Aphrodite entrusts her baby.[9] The significant section of this text (Hom. Hymn Aphr. 257-263) reads:

> Nymphs, living in the mountains and wearing low-slung girdles, will raise him
> —Nymphs that live on this great and fertile mountain.
> *They associate neither with mortals nor with immortals*,
> they live for a long time, and they eat immortal food.
> They put on a beautiful song and dance, even by the standards of the immortals.
> They mate with Seilênoi or with the sharp-sighted Argos-killer [Hermes],
> making love in the recesses of lovely caves.[10]

Very little information about the satyrs is conveyed in this passage except for the fact that they are associates of the mountain nymphs, and as such they must be neither mortal nor immortal. Nothing about their physical appearance is specified.

The earliest mention of them using the term satyr is equally non-specific. In a fragment by Strabo who quotes part of Hesiod's sixth century BCE *Catalogue of Women,* they are described

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[7] Marconi 2005, 82.
[8] Ridgway 1999, 58-59.
[9] Silenoi or Silens is the earliest name used to identify the satyrs, but Hedreen points out that later classical writers use the term satyr and that these terms were most likely synonymous throughout the history of their usage (Hedreen1992, 9). Along this line, I will use the term satyr to refer to silens and stayrs throughout this paper.
[10] Homer, Hymn to Aphrodite, Translated by Gregory Nagy, Lines 257-263. Italics mine. http://www.uh.edu/~cldue/texts/aphrodite.html#_ftnref27.

as "the race of lazy good-for-nothing Satyrs."[11] Carpenter argues that these passages indicate that by the sixth century satyrs were associated with mountain nymphs, Aphrodite and Hermes, but not with Dionysos. Furthermore, they are not mentioned in Homer, or in the Homeric Hymn to Dionysos, nor in Euripides' *Bacchae*.[12] Their connection to Dionysos only becomes visible in the scene depicting the Return of Hephaistos on a Black-Figure vessel by Kleitias, c. 565 BCE, known as the Francoise Vase (Figure 1).[13]

The presence of the Satyrs and Nymphs in this and similar scenes documenting the Return of Hephaistos has, to date, been addressed by scholars who have generally understood and analyzed it as depicting the satyrs in the entourage of Dionysus or Hephaistos. The evidence, however, seems to support an alternative interpretation: that the satyrs and nymphs on the Francoise Vase are in the entourage of Hephaistos precisely because this god is returning to reinstate order at Olympos. This interpretation, when fleshed out, adds weight to the arguments of Cornelia Isler-Kerényi, that Near Eastern artistic repertoires during the Orientalizing Period influenced early satyr imagery,[14] and of Furio Jesi,[15] that the physical and symbolic prototype for the Greek satyr is the Egyptian god Bes. This interpretation could also reconcile the diffusionist positions of Isler-Kerényi and Jesi with that of Hedreen, who argues that the development of satyr imagery can only be explained as inspired by living performances that the artists actually observed.[16] Finally, this interpretation might provide a mythological role for the satyr that better explains its presence in sacred architecture.

The Francoise Vase shows two scenes in which Dionysos participates: the Wedding of Peleus and Thetis, and the Return of Hephaistos. In the wedding scene Dionysos appears without an entourage as one of a group of forty guests at the wedding. In two other contemporary vases by Sophilos depicting this wedding scene, he is similarly unaccompanied.[17] In the Return of Hephaistos depiction on this vase, however, Dionysos walks with Hephaistos, who rides an ithyphallic mule, accompanied by figures that Kleitias labels as silens and nymphs. Carpenter points out that many of the earliest depictions of this scene omit Dionysos and sometimes include Aphrodite (Figure 2).[18] It is worth looking at the myth of the Return of Hephaistos to understand this variability and the role of the accompanying nymphs and satyrs.

Pausanius provides a summary of the myth:

"One of the Greek legends is that Hephaistos, when he was born, was thrown down by Hera. In revenge he sent as a gift a golden chair with invisible fetters. When Hera sat down she was held fast and Hephaistos refused to listen to any other of the gods except Dionysos – in him he put the fullest trust – and after making him drunk Dionysos brought him to heaven."[19]

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[11] Hessiod Frag.123; translation in Lissarrague1993, 208.
[12] Carpenter 1986, 79.
[13] Florence 4209; H: 66cm, D: 57cm; bib.
[14] Isler-Kerényi 2004, 7.
[15] Jesi 1962, 263.
[16] Hedreen 1992, 156; Hedreen 2004, 41.
[17] Carpenter 1986, 1. The two Sophilos vases are: London 1971.11-1,1, bib. Williams 1983, 9-34; and Athens, Acr. 587, bib. Beazley 1978, 39.15.
[18] Carpenter 1986, 13.
[19] Carpenter 1986, 14.

Other fragmentary versions include more details: Hera expelled Hephaistos from Olympus because he was lame, he was hidden under the sea by Thetis, Ares tried to bring him back by force but was repelled by fire whereas Dionysos succeeded with wine.[20] Although illustrated on a number of vases, Hedreen points out that none of the principal elements of this myth are depicted in its visual representations.[21]

In a major study of satyr imagery in Attic Black-figure vase painting Hedreen argued that satyr plays were the origins of satyr imagery. He modified this position in a 2004 article to suggest that what is represented in these return scenes is the underlying theme of the myth, the restoration of an imbalance of power amongst the gods, and that these images should be understood as depictions of ritual actions that the artists witnessed during certain Athenian Dionysiac processional festivals that shared this mythic framework.[22] Axel Seeberg had earlier proposed that the prototype for the imagery was a cult procession at Corinth, the point of which was to summon a divine magician to free the deity of the fruitful earth.[23] He analyzed sixth century Corinthian pottery with carnivalesque imagery that includes gods or a god, demons, and satyrs, or humans in padded costumes to resemble satyrs, in the processional train. These padded dancers are never absent in any of these vessels and so must be closely concerned with the myth and rite. Because satyrs have a double affinity with Hephaistos and with Dionysos, Seeberg argues that their primary association is with a ritual connected to fertility magic. He suggests this was a spring festival, possibly the Eukleia identified with Artemis.[24] Although not excluding this possibility, Hedreen argues that this interpretation cannot explain "how the myth came to be concerned with the establishment of a stable balance of power on Olympos, which is a unique event in the history of the cosmos, not an annual one."[25]

If, however, one accepts both Hedreen's proposal that the myth of the return functioned, along with similar rituals, to celebrate a return to balance at Olympos, and Seeberg's suggestion that the celebration in its various manifestations and depictions was connected to fertility ritual, the annual re-enactment and celebration of a one-time event becomes less problematic. Especially when the presence of the satyr is taken into account. Lissarrague analyzes the satyr as a liminal figure, half man, half beast, whose presence signals a "topsy-turvy world" that blurs the distinctions between the human and animal realm. Images of satyrs present them as curious beings who are easily astonished and bedazzled and whose response to artifacts and human situations "suggests a renewal of the world and of culture."[26] The connection of the satyr with an inversion of cultural norms and ideas of renewal suggest that his presence in the return of Hephaistos and other celebrations signals a celebration of regeneration as well as a return to balance.

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[20] Hedreen 1992, 13.
[21] Hedreen 2004, 40.
[22] In his 1992 book Hedreen proposed satyr plays as the primary source of visual imagery for satyrs, he appears to have amended his thinking in the 2004 article and focused on festival spectacle as the source. Hedreen 2004, 40.
[23] Seeberg 1965, 106.
[24] Seeberg 1965, 106-108.
[25] Hedreen 2004, 60 footnote 133.
[26] Lissarrague 1993, 218.

It is instructive to look at the work of Isler-Kerényi and Jesi in this regard. Although disputed by other scholars, Isler-Kerényi identifies proto-satyr images in very early vase painting.[27] The earliest that she identifies is a large proto-attic *krater* from 670-660 BCE with two bearded male figures who seem to be performing a dance beneath one handle of the vessel while a hairy bodied man with a monstrous face appears under the other handle (Figure 3a-b).[28] She argues that the marginal placement of the figure with the large eye, his animal-like appearance, and the aggressive and dancing behaviors of all three figures relate to sixth century Dionysian dancers as well as with the satyrs "who oscillate between myth and reality."[29] A slightly later possible prototype of the satyr occurs on an *aryballos* from Brindisi, dating to c.650 BCE (Figure 4).[30] The ithyphallic figure in the frieze does not have equine ears, a tail, or other animal features, but he assaults a woman who wears a crown and holds a rabbit, attributes that suggest she represents a nymph. These vases were painted during the Orientalizing Period of Greek art and show distinctly Near Eastern motifs such as the winged sphinx, the lion attacking the gazelle or goat, and rosettes. Isler-Kerényi's suggestion of Near Eastern influence on these and other early satyr or satyr prototype scenes, and her psychological/symbolic interpretation of their use in the Greek world, echoes in some ways the work of Jesi.

Jesi argues that the image of Silenos can be connected in formal and symbolic terms with that of the popular Egyptian god Bes.[31] Formally, both are often portrayed frontally, as a human-animal hybrid, with eyebrows furrowed, large open bulging eyes, snub nose, with wide nostrils, animal ears, protruding tongue or open mouth, beard and wavy hair, tails, and often in ithyphallic form. When compared to images of Silenos, or to satyr imagery in general, the visual correspondence can be striking (Figure 5a-b). Jesi does not argue a direct connection with Egypt but traces the movement of Bes to Greece via Phoenicia by appealing to his magical, protective symbolism, arguing that this allowed his imagery to be used throughout the Mediterranean basin. Bes forms can be found on the Megiddo ivories, in Cyprus, Etruria, and many carved gems from Phoenicia or Greece, datable from the beginning of the sixth century BCE to the end of the fifth. Hedreen objects to perspective that bases the origins of the satyr on earlier art or outside influence, as he says that there are no parallels in Near Eastern art for a horse-man hybrid like the satyr, thus rejecting an Egyptian prototype in favor of an origin in masquerade.[32]

While Jesi's argument is formulated around the apotropaic function of Bes, and Isler-Kerényi works from a more generalized stylistic influence, Hedreen's emphasis on performance possibly holds the key to reconciling these positions. Hedreen argues that artists made little distinction between satyrs as mythological figures and actors playing the role of satyrs in satyr play representations, because satyrs were thought of as actors in costumes from the beginning of

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[27] Hedreen and Carpenter do not agree that the images Isler-Kerény uses represent satyrs because they do not have tails and equine ears.
[28] Formerly Berlin 31573 (now lost), bib. Isler-Kerényi 2004, 8-9; Isler-Kerényi 2007, 10.
[29] Isler-Kerényi 2004, 8-9.
[30] Brindisi Inv. 1669, bib. Isler-Kerényi 2004, 9-11; Isler-Kerényi 2007, 11-12.
[31] Jesi 1962, 257-275.
[32] Hedreen 1992, 155.

their representation in art.[33] This argument seems to ignore the question of the origin of the satyr form, even if it came from performance first. In any case, Hedreen's description of the epiphanic processions that are peculiar to Dionysos in Greece is suggestive. Satyrs, or men dressed as satyrs, are often depicted in these scenes in which a statue of the god is processed from its temple to various points in or outside the city and then back again. In some cases the statue is carried on a wheeled boat that Hedreen refers to as a ship-car. These epiphanic processions could include phallic imagery, ritual verbal abuse, role reversals, and genital exposure, along with drunkenness.[34] During this description Hedreen mentions Herodotus' report of an Egyptian festival in which revelers travel by boat shouting mocking abuse, dancing, and exposing their genitals.[35] In spite of Hedreen's refusal to accept any Egyptian influence in the imagery of the satyr, the Greek Dionysiac processions that he describes have parallels in Egyptian ritual, where statues of the gods were routinely processed in sacred boats and accompanied by music and dancing.

In fact, at the time that Kleitias painted the Francoise Vase, rituals of regeneration celebrated with human practitioners dressed in bearded masks with animal ears while performing dances had been a regular and recurring part of Egyptian religious life for at least 2000 years. One of the earliest surviving images of Bes from the Egyptian Old Kingdom shows not the god himself, but a priest wearing a Bes mask for a festival performance from the Mortuary Temple of the 5th dynasty king Sahure, who reigned from c.2487–2475 BCE (Figure 6). An 18th dynasty image from the tomb of Kheruef (TT192) shows much the same costume and dancers performing for the festival of rejuvenation of king Amenhotep III around 1355 BCE (Figure 7). On a chair belonging to a daughter of Amenhotep III Bes imagery appears again, in this group of three men dressed as Bes and engaged in musical and dance performance (Figure 8). This last image most likely illustrates the Bes performers in ritual celebration of the return of the Solar Eye goddess, a goddess with whom the daughter and wife of the king are identified in myth and ritual because of her protective and regenerative function.

The Solar Eye, like all Egyptian deities, is multi-layered and complex. She is identified as the solar disk, the eye of the solar deity, and can take the form of any goddess who is identified as a child of the sun. Multiple myths recount the story of the wandering Solar Eye goddess who, for various reasons leaves Egypt and wanders away to the south or the southeast, the home of the sunrise. The remaining gods, particularly the solar deity, cannot function without her protective and stimulating presence, so she must be brought home. Transformed into her raging, dangerous form, however, she must be pacified with beer or wine and lured back home in a drunken state. Her return to Thebes coincides with the heliacal rising of Sirius, signaling the start of the inundation that was celebrated annually with music, drunkenness, and sex during a festival in which Bes imagery featured prominently. This celebration dates to possibly the 13th

[33] Hedreen 1992, 157.
[34] Hedreen 2004, 45-56.
[35] Herodotus 2.60; quoted in Hedreen 2004, 56.

dynasty, approximately 1800-1650 BCE.[36] In most versions of the myth the goddess is identified as Hathor, the Egyptian counterpart of Aphrodite.

Although it celebrates a one-time event in cosmic history, the festival of the Returning Eye was celebrated annually because it was tied to the Nile inundation. The goddess had to be coaxed home in order for the Nile to flood, beginning the agricultural season. The returning Eye celebration shares many elements with the return of Hephaistos: a crisis in heaven arises because of the absence of a deity, the missing deity must be lured home with drink in order to resolve the situation, the homeward journey is attended by dancers and musicians represented as Bes/satyrs or men in these costumes and female dancers. The sexual element in Egyptian festivals for the returning goddess is explicit in later Demotic accounts,[37] but it is still unclear if the erotic aspects of worship were performed publicly or in private or perhaps enacted as a masked performance. In any case, as Depauw and Smith point out, "drunkenness, music, and sexuality are essential elements."[38] It is possibly this celebration that Herodotus described, as reported by Hedreen, above, although Egyptian artistic conventions precluded any dynamic or explicit representation of the activities.[39]

The parallel themes and elements of the returning goddess celebrations and Return of Hephaistos myth and imagery suggest a connection between Bes and the Greek Satyrs that is strengthened by the strong formal similarities in representations of the two. There is a little more evidence from classical literature that can be advanced to further support this identification, concerning the satyr's geographical location in myth. In his earlier work Hedreen suggested that the satyrs are only represented with Dionysos in scenes that take place on the island of Naxos, because this was one of the places that satyrs inhabited.[40] Plutarch, writing several centuries later, reported that satyrs lived in Egypt in the region around Chemmis.[41] Another Greek historian writing in the first century BCE, Diodorus Siculus, stated that when Osiris was in Ethiopia, the Satyr people were brought to him and were said to be hairy, good dancers, and skilled in "every kind of relaxation and pastime."[42] Flavius Philostratus, a late second – early third century CE historian related a story about a ghost of a satyr who was tormenting women in a village just south of the Nile cataracts. The situation was resolved by a man named Apollonius who tricked the satyr into drinking wine and was then able to make peace.[43] While the historical accuracy of these classical accounts is questionable, they suggest a mytho-historical connection between satyrs and Egypt, suggesting the possibility of a borrowing of their iconography from the Egyptian god Bes.

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[36] Darnell 1995, 47.
[37] For example, in the Demotic Ostraca Faculteit Letteren (K. U. Leuven) dem. 1-2 the speaker exhorts his listeners to drink, eat, and make love before the goddess; (Depauw and Smith 2004, 75).
[38] Depauw and Smith 2004, 92.
[39] It is possible that the much-disputed subject matter of Papyrus Turin 55001, the so-called "erotic papyrus," provides an Egyptian version of the sexual aspect of the Returning Goddess celebration, as interpreted by Kessler 1988, 171-196.
[40] Hedreen 1992, 5.
[41] Plutarch, Morelia: Isis and Osiris. 5:13.D. published in Vol. V of the Loeb Classical Library edition, 1936.
[42] Diodorus Siculus. Library of History: Book 1, lines 4 and 5.
[43] Philostratos, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, Book 6.27. Translated by F.C. Conybeare

In addition to his association with the returning Solar Eye and rituals of renewal, Bes also possessed powerful magic to protect children and women in childbirth. His images were worn in Egypt as amulets in full figure frontally or in profile, as well as in frontal head form. Although there was only one Bes, his image could be depicted as multiple identical individuals, as on the chair of Sit-Amun, above, or painted on walls in private homes (Figure 9). In the Late Period Bes began to be used architecturally in column capitals and he appears frequently in votive imagery. The variety of uses of the imagery as well as the widespread use of Bes masks and performances in festivals and ritual dances would have been visible for any visitor to Egypt.

When the roles of Bes and Bes performers in Egyptian myth and ritual are considered, Hedreen's argument that Greek satyr imagery could only have develop from masked performances associated with Dionysiac processions might be reconciled with theories that suggest an Egyptian influence on this iconography. Although the ancient Greeks would have recognized Bes as a foreign god and would not have confused him with a satyr, the parallels in their roles are significant. The early literary connection of satyrs with Aphrodite echoes the strong association of Bes with Hathor in Egypt, in that both sets of deities are linked to the protection of children and the restoration of order in heaven. The earliest satyr depictions on vases and temple antefixes emphasize his association with nymphs who appear as crowned female heads. These frontal faces likely had an apotropaic function, as described by Osborne and Marconi, but their deployment together along temple eaves also potentially suggests a richer mythological history that would reinforce their protective potential. The satyr's later depiction with Maenads clearly refers to Dionysus and may have communicated that god's epiphany at a temple, or indicated the transformational boundaries of the temple itself. In either case, the rich mythological role of the satyrs, echoing some aspects of the ritual roles of Bes in Egypt, suggests a much more complicated reading in temple architecture than Osborne is willing to allow.

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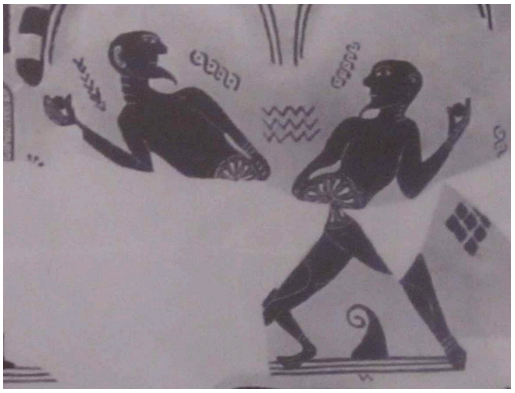
Figures

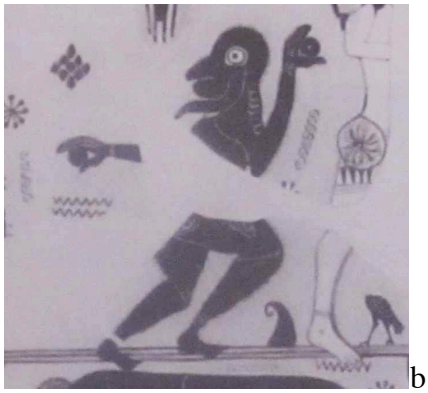
Figure 1. Detail of Florence 4209, Wedding Scene.

Photo by: Photograph: M. Tiverios, Elliniki Techni
Source: Classical Art Research Center and the Beazley Archive
www.beazley.ox.ac.uk/tools/pottery/painters/keypieces/blackfigure/francois.htm

Figure 2. Athens, National Museum 664, Aphrodite Behind Hephaistos.
Source: Isler-Kerényi 2007, Figure13.



a.



b.

Figure 3a-b. Formerly Berlin 31573, Protoattic krater, Men and Proto-satyr.
Source: Isler-Kerényi 2007, Figures 4 and 5.

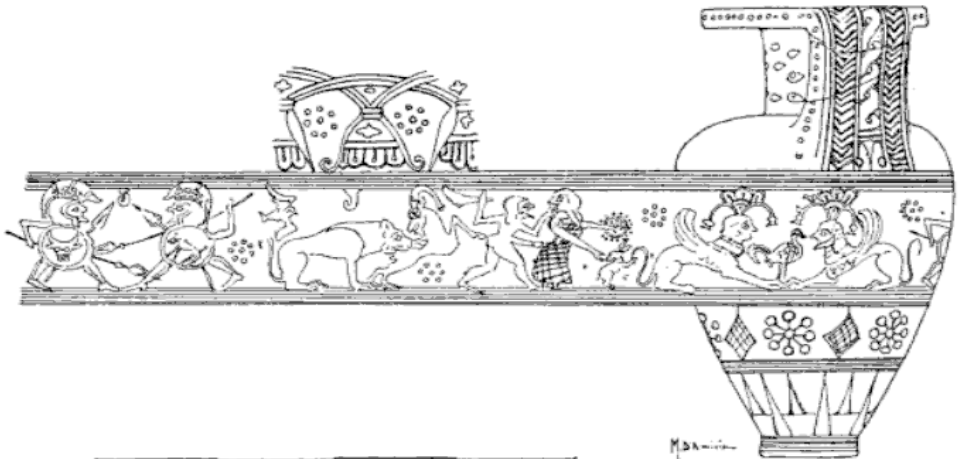


Figure 4. Brindisi 1669, Protocorinthian aryballos with Proto-satyr Attacking Nymph. Source: Isler-Kerényi 2007, Figure 7.

a.

Figure 5a. Museo Archeologico Regionale di Gela, 8294, Satyr Antefix. Source: Cleveland Museum of Art, http://www.clevelandart.org/exhibcef/mg/html/5954601.html.

b.

Figure 5b. Louvre E 10929, Bes. Photo by: H. Lewandowski. Source: Louvre Museum, http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/vase-form-god-bes.

Figure 6. Masked Bes Dancer from the Mortuary Temple of Sahure.
Source: Borchardt 1913, 22.
Figure 7. Masked Bes Dancers from the Tomb of Kheruef.
Source: Epigraphic Survey 1980, Plate 40.

Figure 8. Drawing from the Chair of Sat-Amun.
Source: Eaton-Krauss 1989, Plate 9, image 2.

Figure 9. Wall Painting from Main Street House 3, Amarna, with Dancing Bes Figures.
Source: Kemp 1979, 48.