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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The uses of stools in classical Athens: *diphrophoroi* in the Parthenon frieze, old comedy, Attic vases and beyond

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Abstract

The following article discusses the significance of a stool carried by persons referred to in ancient Greek sources (from Old Comedy to Plutarch) as *diphrophoroi*. As I argue, the iconography suggests that this piece of furniture was often used by attendants responsible for their mistresses' outfit, make-up and hairstyle. By extension, the most famous representation of two girls with stools on their heads on the east Parthenon frieze can be interpreted as an allusion to the ritual dressing and embellishing of Athena's statue.

Preliminaries

The meaning of the word *diphro-phoros*, in spite of its transparent structure, is far from self-evident. Its first component, the noun *diphros,* can refer to various objects, such as a chariot-board, chariot, litter, stool, or other similar items, most notably, a night-stool (Aristid. *Or.* 49.19).[1] Even more difficult is determining the ways in which carrying a *diphros* was related to the essence of *diphrophoros*. As I argue below, this relationship was less straightforward than it may seem. This is, I believe, the source of all the trouble scholars have with *diphrophoroi*.

In one case (Dinon's fr. 18), the word *diphrophoros* refers to a man who carried a stool that the king of Persia used when dismounting his chariot. All other extant occurrences of this word probably refer to a different cultural phenomenon. This much is evident because most of the *diphrophoroi* we hear

[1] For night-stools, see Olson (2016) 282–4.

of accompanied Greek girls who walked in festival processions. Thus, in the *LSJ* Lexicon, *diphrophoros* is defined as 'carrying a camp-stool; esp. of the female μέτοικοι, who had to carry seats for the use of κανηφόροι', and according to the Montanari Dictionary, it means: 'bearing a seat or stool, usu. for the Kanephorai [sic!]'. These definitions result from a rather slippery consensus regarding the interpretation of several attestations of the word *diphrophoros* in Old Comedy and related texts. It does not, however, take into account the evidence of the visual arts.

From Michaelis (1871) 256 on, some scholars claim that *diphrophoroi* were not merely attendants of mortal females, but that they played an important ritual role. This seems to be indicated by the presence of two girls with stools on their heads depicted on the central slab of the east Parthenon frieze (Fig. 1). This scene is usually taken as an allusion to the ceremony of the peplos which Athenians offered to Athena at the Panathenaia festival. Given that it is hardly conceivable that she received it from the humble servants of *kanephoroi*, it might be concluded that either the meaning of the scene is completely different, or that there was no connection between the *diphrophoroi* and *kanephoroi*. However, as I argue below, there is another possibility. The iconography of Attic vase painting strongly suggests that stools could be taken as an attribute of the attendants of well-born girls, as well as of Athena's dressers. However, the practical purpose of a stool was different from what has usually been assumed. Understanding this purpose will allow us to reconcile the literary passages with the evidence of visual arts. What is more exciting, however, is that it suggests the way in which the allusion to Athena's peplos on the Parthenon frieze was activated.

1. Stools on pots

As I have already argued elsewhere,[2] several passages in ancient literature indicate that for ancient Greeks it was perfectly natural to think that stools were not only meant to be sat upon. Passages in the *Odyssey* (17.86; 17.179; 20.249), in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (5.161–5) and in Herodotus (1.9) suggest that putting one's clothes on a stool or chair was such a common practice that poets and writers simply took it for granted as one of the most obvious ways of dealing with garments after removing them.

This motif is also common in the iconography. There are several thousand extant representations of stools and chairs in ancient Greek art.[3] Quite obviously, many of them are shown with human or divine figures sitting on them. There are, however, surprisingly many images of empty stools and chairs. To be more precise, having analysed the corpus of Attic pottery

[2] Bednarek (forthcoming).

[3] I use the word 'stool' in reference to all seats with legs and without a back (excluding longer pieces of furniture on which one can also lay down, such as beds and couches). They are referred to in ancient Greek texts as *diphroi*. *Oklasias*, a camp-stool, was considered a subcategory of stools. By the word 'chair' I refer to similar seats with backs, usually referred to in ancient sources as *klismoi* and *thronoi*. On these categories, see especially Richter (1926) and Andrianou (2009), who, unfortunately, does not discuss the terminology.

Figure 1. Central part of the east Parthenon frieze (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

Beazley Archive Pottery Database, henceforth (BAPD), I was able to identify about 270 chairs and almost 600 stools on which no one is sitting. In some relatively rare cases, it is clear from the context of the representation that an empty seat is meant to be taken by someone.[4] Otherwise, they seem to fall into several overlapping categories:[5]

1) Relatively early and widely attested are empty stools in the athletic context. The earliest extant specimen is a Siana cup by the Painter of Boston (Fig. 2; from the second quarter of the sixth century BCE, now in Bochum; BAPD 3881) with a group of nude runner and a stool with a bundle of clothes on it. As I have noted in another article,[6] the juxtaposition of naked bodies with unworn clothes seems to be a way of emphasising the athletic nudity of the runners.[7] This theme, with many variations, reappears on a number of vases in varying configurations: stools with or without clothes on them depicted next to the athletes who are fully or partially naked, or who are in the midst of dressing, undressing, washing, anointing, infibulating, exercising, etc. (e.g. Fig. 3).

[4] For example, on the red-figure Attic lekythos with the judgement of Paris (BAPD 10770, now in Copenhagen), the Trojan prince is just about to sit down on the throne, which is shown as empty.

[5] The following discussion does not include empty stools and chairs used in two different (though, probably related) types of religious rituals. There is a small group of images with satyrs carrying chairs for Dionysus, which seems to reflect a ritual whose nature is difficult to determine (see Isler-Kerényi (2015) 135–52). There is also a group of images related to the rite of *thronosis*, which has been a part of some mystery cults (see especially Vollmer (2014)).

[6] Bednarek (2022).

[7] On athletic nudity as a custom and a costume, see Bonfante (1989); McDonnell (1991); Christesen (2002), (2007): 353–9, (2014) 227; Kyle (2007) 85–90.

Figure 2. Attic Siana cup, attributed to the Painter of Boston, Bochum, BAPD 3881 (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

Figure 3. Attic red-figure calyx-krater, attributed to Euphronios, Capua, BAPD 200063(drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

2) A vast group includes warriors depicted in the act of arming. Stools and chairs shown in such a context may be empty, but there are often clothes or pieces of armour deposited on them (Fig. 4). A variant of this type is provided by departing warriors or ephebes, who leave an empty stool or a stool with clothes on it behind (Fig. 5).
3) Scenes with musicians and dancers, usually but not exclusively female, who perform next to stools and chairs with clothes on them. On some occasions the performer is completely naked, sometimes he or she has

Figure 4. Attic black-figure neck-amphora, BAPD 9031264 (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

Figure 5. Attic red-figure bell-krater, in a manner of the Villa Giulia Painter, Vienna, BAPD 2195 (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

Figure 6. Attic red-figure oinochoe, attributed to the Phiale Painter, Paris, BAPD 214278 (drawing by Nicoletta Candurra)

removed only the cloak. Sometimes an empty seat is clearly meant to suggest that the performance is on the point of commencing, as the performer is clearly meant to deposit his or her garments on it (Fig. 6).

4) Scenes with hetairai and possibly other women shown in situations that in real life were not meant to be seen by men (hence these images may arguably be considered pornographic or voyeuristic): they are depicted while washing, depilating or playing with dildos.[8] Stools and chairs with or without clothes are clearly meant to underline women's full or partial nakedness (e.g. Fig. 7).
5) Erotic scenes that juxtapose naked bodies with clothes on stools and chairs (e.g. Fig. 8). A particularly intriguing variant is represented by the seduction scenes in which empty stools and chairs are sometimes depicted next to dressed figures, as if to suggest further development of the situation.
6) A large category consists of gynaikeion scenes.[9] This partially results from the fact that women very often worked while seated.[10] Thus, the

[8] See Lewis (2002) 101–12 and Sutton (2009) with further references on pp. 270–1.

[9] On the iconography of gynaikeion, see Barringer (1998) 121–37; Lissarague in Veyne, Lissarague, Frontisi-Ducroux (1998) 149–70.

[10] See e.g. Barber (1994); Reuthner (2006). The connection between the sitting posture and women's work was so strong that on some occasions (e.g. BAPD 213987; 216367) a stool with a

Figure 7. Attic red-figure bell-krater, attributed to the Dinos Painter, Cambridge, MA, BAPD 44027 (drawing by Nicoletta Candurra)

gynaikeion is often depicted as thronged by women, some sitting and some not. Next to them there are stools and chairs with objects on them, usually textiles. Some other stools may be completely empty, and it is often unclear whether they are meant to be sat upon, used for some other purpose or simply contribute to the characterisation of the space as a domestic one (e.g. Fig. 9).

7) Given the close connection between the production, maintenance and use of textiles by women in ancient Greece, the scenes of feminine dressing-up may be taken as a subcategory of the former type (number 6 on my list). Indeed, images that combine women who produce textiles or work wool with those who are dressing are quite common. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present article, it is particularly important to underline the existence of a group of images with women who, often in the context of bridal preparations, are being dressed by other women or Erotes. The bride or any other woman who is being attended to is frequently sitting on a stool or a chair. Next to her, there is often a seat with clothes or other items. Sometimes it is empty. On some occasions it is being carried by an

kalathos was depicted on top of a grave stele, clearly bearing an allusion to the identity, status and virtue of the deceased. See Giudice (2015) 127–95.

Figure 8. Attic red-figure cup, attributed to the Triptolemos Painter, Tarquinia, BAPD 203886 (drawing by Nicoletta Candurra)

attendant, or just about to be put down (e.g. Fig. 10). A striking example of a variation on this theme is provided by a red-figure hydria which depicts Andromeda's mock wedding procession, in which slaves carry a stool along with a mirror, jewellery box, unguent flask and the like (BAPD 213802; Fig. 11).[11] The inclusion of the stool in the category of objects related to female toilette may seem quite unexpected to us, but the image under discussion suggests that the painter and – presumably – his audience took its meaning for granted.

In other words, a stool was often only a stool, but in a context evocative of dressing or beautifying women it assumed meanings related to this sphere.

[11] See also BAPD 276098. On this kind of mock bridal procession, see Woodward (1937) 84; Barringer (1998) 118–19.

Figure 9. Attic red-figure stamnos, attributed to the Copenhagen Painter, BAPD 202936 (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

Figure 10. Attic red-figure hydria, attributed to the Kadmos Painter, Athens, BAPD 215724 (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

This observation is of paramount importance for our understanding of the Parthenon frieze, to which I return in section 4. In the following section, however, I examine some literary passages, which, as I argue, contain references to the use of stools in the dressing-up and beautifying process.

Figure 11. Attic red-figure hydria, London, BAPD 213802 (drawing by Adam Chmielewski)

2. *Diphrophoroi* in literary sources

The most informative, and relatively widely discussed, source is the passage in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* 730–7:

> χώρει σὺ δεῦρο, κιναχύρα, καλὴ καλῶς
> τῶν χρημάτων θύραζε πρώτη τῶν ἐμῶν,
> ὅπως ἂν ἐντετριμμένη κανηφορῆις,
> πολλοὺς κάτω δὴ θυλάκους στρέψασ' ἐμούς.
> ποῦ 'σθ' ἡ διφροφόρος; ἡ χύτρα, δεῦρ' ἔξιθι.
> νὴ Δία, μέλαινά[12] γ' †οὐδ' ἂν ει† τὸ φάρμακον

[12] The text is corrupt, but its overall sense remains clear. The pot brought on stage might have been black from scorching. Rogers (1902) comments: 'if the part [of διφροφόρος] could be taken by a slave (which, however, is hardly probable) it might be conjectured that there is an allusion here to Ethiopian slaves, who (some years later at least) were considered very fashionable at Athens. In the *Characters* of Theophrastus, xxi, one example of 'ambition in trifles' is for a man ἐπιμεληθῆναι ὅπως αὐτῶι ὁ ἀκόλουθος Αἰθίοψ ἔσται. According to Jebb (1909) and Ussher (1960), the fashion for

ἔψουσ' ἔτυχες, ὦι Λυσικράτης μελαίνεται.
ἵστω παρ' αὐτήν. δεῦρ' ἴθ', ἡ κομμώτρια.

Come here, come out beautifully, you beautiful sieve, the first of my goods, like a basket-bearer covered with powder, as you've emptied so many of my bags. Where's the stool-bearer? Come out, pot! By Zeus, you're black, †even if† you've brewed the dye that Lysicrates uses for his hair! Stand beside her. Come here, the embellisher![13]

This passage most probably describes a mock Panathenaic procession involving household utensils instead of human participants.[14] According to virtually all commentators, a *kanephoros*, a beautiful and particularly richly dressed and embellished girl of an elevated status who carries a basket with sacrificial implements,[15] is followed here by two other females: a *diphrophoros* and a *kommotria* ('dresser'). The lines that follow (738–45) mention some other participants of the procession, including: *hydriaphoros* ('water-jug bearer'), *kitharoidos* ('kithara player'), *skaphephoros* ('tray-bearer'), *thallophoroi* ('men with olive-shoots') and a crowd of people with no particular function. In most cases, the text contains a piece of information about the utensil that plays the role of a given participant in the procession. Thus, for example, the *kanephoros* finds her counterpart in a sieve (or bran-sifter), the *diphrophoros* in a pot. This latter vessel is jokingly said to have had something to do with the preparation of a hair-dye for a certain Lysikrates. As Huber (1974) observed, such an alleged role is very close to that of a hairdresser mentioned in line 737. Given that the text does not contain explicit information as to which

black slaves originated in the period after Alexander's conquest of Egypt (see also Diggle (2004) with further references to Roman sources). In the time of Aristophanes, there seems to have been no association between blackness (in terms of colour or race) and slavery (see Snowden (1983)). Yet, a dark complexion could have been associated with someone's non-Athenian origins (Isaac (2004), (2009); Goldenberg (2009)), which seems to make sense, given that *diphrophoroi* were supposed to be metics' daughters (see p.00). However, metics formed a heterogeneous group in terms of their ethnic and racial backgrounds. The majority of them were of Greek origin, whereas a visible minority of metics were of 'barbarian' descent, mostly from places like Lydia, Phoenicia, Syria, Egypt and the Black Sea region (Whitehead (1977) 109–14; Garland (1987) 62–7; Wijma (2014) 27–8). According to Snowden's plausible reconstruction ((1970) 184–5), some 'Ethiopians' could have also lived in Attica, at least from the time of Xerxes' invasion. This is not enough, however, to think that the blackness of the pot was intended as an allusion to some stereotypical racial otherness of metics. Perhaps it may be taken as an allusion to some notorious individual rather than to the whole class.

[13] All translations, unless stated otherwise, are mine.

[14] Blaydes (1881) 734; Van Leeuwen (1905) 734; Ussher (1973) 730–45; Huber (1974) 730–45; Rotroff (1977) 379–82; Sommerstein (1998) 730–45; Vetta and Del Corno (2000) 730–45. It should be emphasised that it is irrelevant for my purposes here if Aristophanes alluded specifically to the Panathenaia or if he had some other, perhaps generic, festival in mind.

[15] On the elevated status of κανηφόρος at the Panathenaia, see Roccos (1995); Lefkovitz (1996) 79–80; Dillon (2002) 37–42; Gebauer (2002) 169–71. As van Straten (1995) 11–12 observes, *kanephoroi* did not necessarily take part in private sacrifices. On the use of cosmetics alluded to in the passage, see Lee (2015) 66–9.

domestic utensil plays the role of *kommotria*,[16] it cannot be excluded that the comic hero thus addresses the same black pot he had previously called *diphrophoros*.[17] In other words, he might have used both nouns as synonyms. It is equally probable, however, that Aristophanes juxtaposed *diphrophoros* and *kommotria*, referring to two different persons (represented on stage by two different objects, only one of which, the pot, is mentioned explicitly) whose functions were similar, but perhaps not the same. Both interpretations might be difficult to accept as long as we fail to notice the iconography, which indicates that stools were often used by women's attendants, along with other beauty items. The seat carried about by such a stylist could become their iconic attribute, similar to the way in which a stool also happens to be associated with modern shoe-shiners.

This finds further confirmation in Plutarch's *On the Fame of the Athenians* (348d–e), in which the author juxtaposes the word *diphrophoros* with *kommotes*, which is almost the same term as *kommotria,* used by Aristophanes in the *Ecclesiazusae*. When describing what he considered a decadence of Attic tragedy, Plutarch used the following simile:

> ἔνθεν μὲν δὴ προσίτωσαν ὑπ' αὐλοῖς καὶ λύραις ποιηταὶ λέγοντες καὶ ἄιδοντες ... καὶ σκευὰς καὶ προσωπεῖα καὶ βωμοὺς καὶ μηχανὰς ἀπὸ σκηνῆς καὶ περιάκτους καὶ τρίποδας ἐπινικίους κομίζοντες· τραγικοὶ δ' αὐτοῖς ὑποκριταὶ καὶ Νικόστρατοι καὶ Καλλιππίδαι καὶ Μυννίσκοι καὶ Θεόδωροι καὶ Πῶλοι συνίτωσαν, ὥσπερ γυναικὸς πολυτελοῦς τῆς τραγωιδίας κομμωταὶ καὶ διφροφόροι, μᾶλλον δ' ὡς ἀγαλμάτων ἐγκαυταὶ καὶ χρυσωταὶ καὶ βαφεῖς παρακολουθοῦντες.
>
> Let the poets come forward speaking and singing to the tune of lyres and auloi ..., let them bring along their attire, masks, altars, rotating stage machinery and victory tripods. Let them be accompanied by tragic actors, those Nicostratoses, Kallipideses, Mynniskoses, Theodoroses and Poloses, tragedy's *diphrophoroi* and dressers (*kommotai*) like those of a lavish woman, or rather like painters, gilders and dyers of sculptures.

This passage contains the word *diphrophoroi*, which is usually interpreted in this context as 'litter bearers', as is made evident by its translations. For example, Babbit (1936) renders the phrase in question as '[those] who robe Tragedy and bear her litter, as though she were some woman of wealth'.[18]

[16] Sommerstein (1998) ad loc. and Vetta and Del Corno (2000) ad loc. suggest that it could be suitably played by a ladle due to its resemblance to a parasol referred to in Ar. *Av.* 1549–52.

[17] Instructions given to the *diphrophoros*/pot in line 734 (δεῦρ' ἔξιθι) presuppose that the object was still inside the house when the line was spoken. The words addressed to the hairdresser in line 737 (δεῦρ' ἴθι) allow for her to be already outside, perhaps hesitating to step forward. If the *diphrophoros* and the hairdresser were the same person or object, this distinction between two subsequent commands could correspond to the scenic movement of the procession members leaving the house.

[18] Wyttenbach (1796): *tragoediae tanquam sumptuosae mulieris comptores et gestatores* ('dressers and carriers of tragedy like those of a lavish woman'). Frazier and Froidefond (1990): 'ces serviteurs de la tragédie qui la pomponnent et la promènent en litière comme une femme dépensière'.

According to the *TLG* (s.v. διφροφόρος), this passage contains a unique occurrence of the word with the meaning *qui sella lecticaria aliquem gestat* ('who carries someone in a litter'). This does not seem completely impossible, as far as the meaning of a composite word is supposed to result from the combination of its components.[19] However, even though the noun *diphros* is attested in the meaning 'litter' (Dio Cass. 60.2.), there are no other occurrences of *diphrophoros* in the meaning 'litter bearer', nor is there anything in Plutarch's passage to suggest that he had such a category of servants in mind. More likely, it should be understood as being no different from all the other instances in which the word *diphrophoros* is used; it always refers to a person who carries a stool.

Given that a stool could be taken as an attribute characteristic of a person responsible for a woman's look, and that in the phrase ὥσπερ γυναικὸς πολυτελοῦς τῆς τραγωιδίας κομμωταὶ καὶ διφροφόροι *diphrophoroi* stools are juxtaposed with dressers or, more specifically, hairdressers (*kommotai*), it seems reasonable to guess that they belong to a related category.[20] Thus, rather than referring to litter bearers, the word may be connected to the idea that rich and extravagant women in the time of Plutarch were attended to by (and possibly also accompanied in public by) various categories of servants, some of whom might have carried stools, among other beauty items. Thus, the phrase should be roughly translated as 'tragedy's stylists and hairdressers like those of a lavish woman'.[21] In this respect, it is very similar to what can be deduced from Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* discussed above.

The passage in Plutarch is unique, given that (apart from scholia and lexica) it is the only occurrence of the word *diphrophoros* in a post-classical text. It is also the only one in which *diphrophoros* is clearly not associated with a *kanephoros*, which otherwise seems to be a rule.[22]

The idea of connection between *kanephoros* and *diphrophoros* and the subordinate status of the latter finds support in Aristophanes' *Birds* (1549–52), along with the scholia. In this comic passage, Prometheus is paying a visit to the comic hero, Peisetairos. While on stage, he tries to conceal his identity from Zeus, who may be potentially looking down from the sky. Thus, during the conversation, Peisetairos has held a parasol over Prometheus' head, and now he is asked to hand it back:

ΠΡ ἀλλ' ὡς ἂν ἀποτρέχω πάλιν
φέρε τὸ σκιάδειον, ἵνα με κἂν ὁ Ζεὺς ἴδηι
ἄνωθεν, ἀκολουθεῖν δοκῶ κανηφόρωι.
ΠΕΙ καὶ τὸν δίφρον γε διφροφόρει τονδὶ λαβών.

[19] A cognate word, διφροφορέω (*carry in a litter*), is attested as early as Herodotus (3.146).

[20] The phrase that follows (μᾶλλον δ' ὡς ἀγαλμάτων ἐγκαυταὶ καὶ χρυσωταὶ καὶ βαφεῖς παρακολουθοῦντες) contains a list of three kinds of artisans who embellished statues. It seems therefore natural that the phrase in question balanced it with two kinds of attendants who dealt with the female body and wardrobe, rather than mentioning two heterogenic categories – that of dressers and sedan bearers.

[21] An anonymous referee stated that they would rather interpret κομμωταὶ καὶ διφροφόροι as a hendiadys. This is certainly possible and perfectly in line with my argument.

[22] With the exception of Dinon *fr.* 18, in which *diphrophoros* carries a stool for the king of Persia.

Prometheus: Now, so that I can go back there, give me the parasol, so that even if Zeus spots me from above he will think that I'm accompanying a kanephoros.

Peisetairos: And take this stool as well so that you can act as a diphrophoros.[23]

Schol. Ar. *Av.* 1551a:

ταῖς γὰρ κανηφόροις σκιάδειον καὶ δίφρον ἀκολουθεῖ τις ἔχουσα.[24]

Kanephoroi are followed by someone (feminine) with a parasol and a stool.

Sommerstein states in his commentary (1987) that 'the Athenian maidens (*kanēphoroi*) who carried the ritual baskets in processions at the Panathenaea and other festivals were sometimes attended by girls (the daughters of non-citizen families, according to Aelian *VH* 6.1) carrying stools and parasols, presumably in order that *kanēphoroi* should not have to stand in the hot sun during the (often prolonged) sacrificial rites that followed the procession.' Dunbar (1995), clearly in order to match the most commonly accepted reading of the passage in the *Ecclesiazusae* (quoted above), observed that it is not clear 'whether the same metic's daughter would carry both parasol and stool'. Apart from this slight difference between them, both scholars subscribe to an old scholarly tradition. I was able to trace this idea as far back as 1619, when Johannes van Meurs published his *Panathenaea*, in which (on p. 39) he stated that *diphrophoroi* were metics' daughters who carried parasols and stools for *kanephoroi* (*sequebantur virgines has* [*κανηφόρους*] *pedissequae, quae vmbellam* [*sic!*], *et sellam, ferrent* ('these virgins [*kanephoroi*] were followed by servants who carried a parasol and a seat').

The widely accepted notion of the non-citizen status of the *diphrophoroi* is a matter of guesswork; however, there is no way of excluding it.[25] What seems to

[23] The line seems to contain a pun, whose nature is difficult to grasp. According to Kakridis (1974), Peisetairos uttered it while kicking Prometheus' buttocks, given that the word *diphros* might possibly have referred to this sort of slapstick aggression. However, as Zanetto (in Zanetto and Del Corno (2000)) observes, there is no evidence to such effect. More plausibly, Sommerstein (1987) suggested that the comic hero might have handed his night-stool to Prometheus, which finds support in Aristid. *Or.* 49.19 and Poll. *Onom.* 10.45, where the word *diphros* meaning 'night-stool' is attested.

[24] In what follows, the scholiast quotes two further passages from comedy: Hermippus' *Theoi* (fr. 25) and Nicophon's *Enkheirogastores* (fr. 7). Both are quite difficult because of textual problems, and none of them, at least in the form in which they are preserved, offer anything new regarding the role of *diphrophoros*. On these passages, see Pellegrino (2013) 43–5; Comentale (2017) 111–16.

[25] *Pace* Furtwängler (1893) 187, who called it 'eine moderne Fabel'. According to Harpocration (Keaney Σ 21, citing Demetrius of Phaleron and Theophrastus) metic men at processions would carry trays whereas their daughters carried hydriae and parasols. As Wilamowitz (1887) 220 observed, it is tempting to think that all these implements had a ritual meaning. However, Aelian (*VH* 6.1) explicitly states that metic women carried parasols for citizen women and metic girls for citizen girls. Combined with Ar. *Av.* 1549–52 and its scholia, these passages suggest that the *diphrophoroi*, who followed citizen girls with a stool and a parasol, were metic girls. See especially Wijma (2014) 49–51 with further references.

be contrary to the evidence is the idea that stools carried by *diphrophoroi* were meant to be sat upon for mere comfort. As the iconography combined with the passage in the *Ecclesiazusae* and in Plutarch may suggest, the stool after which the *diphrophoros* was named was emblematic of her function as the stylist of a *kanephoros* or some other female. The stool could be used at various moments of the feast when the dress, make-up, or hairstyle of the girl required attention. Otherwise, the servant's presence would serve symbolic purposes as a means of displaying the status of the *kanephoros*' family. The suggestion made by modern commentators, who claim that the stool was merely carried for the comfort of the *kanephoros*, is thus problematic. An additional point against this suggestion is that if the stool were used merely to seat the *kanephoros,* she would simply be less visible to other participants of the feast, when in fact her visibility seems to have been of paramount importance as a display of status.

3. Parthenon frieze

As I already mentioned, Michaelis (1871) 256 suggested that the word *diphrophoroi* could also refer to two girls represented on the east Parthenon frieze.[26] This part of the relief is located on the central slab, in the middle of the composition, just above the entrance to the temple. It depicts five human-sized (smaller than gods)[27] figures, oddly located in the middle of the assembly of gods (Fig. 1). On the viewer's right a bearded man in a priestly robe is folding or unfolding a large piece of cloth,[28] assisted by the smaller figure of a child.[29] To the viewer's left stands a woman, presumably a priestess,[30] engaged in some sort of interaction with two girls, both of whom are carrying some objects on their heads. One of the girls also holds something in her hand. Unfortunately, this part of the frieze is severely damaged and it is difficult to determine the nature of this object. Most probably it is a footstool.[31] What seems to be almost beyond doubt, however, is that the objects on the heads of the girls are stools.[32] This suggests that it would be correct to call them *diphrophoroi*.

[26] The bibliography on the Parthenon frieze is vast. This results from the uniqueness of its artistic design and iconography which, combined with the scarcity of reliable written sources and imperfect state of preservation of the frieze, leaves much space for discussion and speculation. It has been addressed at book length by, among others, Brommer (1977), Neils (2001) and Fehr (2011). For the most recent bibliography, see Meyer (2017) 99–107; Shear (2021) 344–50.

[27] For the size of the figures, see e.g. Neils (2001) 161.

[28] Among more recent scholars the prevailing opinion seems to be that the man is folding the piece of cloth. See Neils (2001) 67–8; Nagy (1978) 138; Smith (1910) 53.

[29] There is no consensus regarding the gender of the child (see Neils (2001) 168–71) or whether the man is receiving the object, handing it to the child, or is merely assisted by them (see e.g. Waldstein (1885) 20–1).

[30] For the discussion, see Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 294.

[31] Petersen (1873) 247; Boardman (1977) 41; (1999) 307–9; Meyer (2017) 238. Quite recently, Simon (1983) 67 suggested that it may be an incense box, which does not seem very plausible.

[32] See Michaelis (1871) 256, with references to previous discussion; Boardman (1999) 309–12; Meyer (2017) 236–7 with further bibliography in notes 1880 and 1886.

As mentioned above, from the passage in the *Ecclesiazusae* scholars deduced that *diphrophoroi* took part in Panathenaic processions. From 1789 onwards, when Stuart and Revett published their *Antiquities of Athens*, it has been largely accepted that the frieze depicts some events of a Panathenaic procession.[33] By combining these pieces of information, Furtwängler (1893) 186–90 concluded that *diphrophoroi* played such an important ritual role in the Panathenaia that they deserved their place in the most conspicuous part of the frieze.[34] According to him, the girls would carry stools that were used by gods in the ritual *theoxenia*, rather than by the mortal *kanephoroi*.

To a certain degree following Furtwängler, most scholars who write about the Parthenon frieze state at some point that it would be tempting to call the girls with stools on their heads *diphrophoroi*. Almost all of them, however, immediately reject this interpretation,[35] given that from the passage in the *Birds* – together with its scholia, as well as, less directly, from the *Ecclesiazusae* – it can be deduced that the role of *diphrophoroi* was that of accompanying (*akolouthein*) *kanephoroi*. Admittedly, as far as the logic is concerned, it does not preclude that humble servants of mortal girls also played a particularly conspicuous ritual role. However, this would be quite unusual, especially in the context of a polis cult, and even more so if *diphrophoroi* were indeed of non-citizen birth.[36]

Several scholars tried to bypass these problems by offering an unconventional reading of the material briefly discussed above. For example, Schäfer (1987) 194–9 suggested that the notion of the subordinate role of *diphrophoroi* may result from the misunderstanding of a joke that Aristophanes allegedly made in the *Birds* (1549–52) where the playwright, in a topsy-turvy fashion, presented them as attendants of *kanephoroi*. Such a joke, however, would have been particularly flat and difficult to grasp at the same time.[37]

Some other scholars, rather than enquiring into the relationship between the comic *diphrophoroi* and the girls on the frieze, focused on alternative uses of stools. Given the context of the festival, of which a central part consisted of offering Athena a new peplos, it is quite natural to suspect that the central part of it inserted in the middle of the gods' assembly, which depicts

[33] See the new edition: Stuart and Revett (2008). For a brief discussion of some alternative theories, see Boardman (1984).

[34] On the importance of the position of the slab, see Waldstein (1885) 244; Nagy (1978) 137; Neils (2004) 57; Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 265; Fehr (2011) 106. Neils (2001) 67 turns attention to the exceptional length of the marble slab on which the central scene was sculpted, which indicates that the design of the whole composition might have begun from this piece.

[35] To give just a few examples: Mommsen (1898) 114; Deubner (1932) 31–2 no. 14; Parke (1977) 44; Simon (1983) 63; Maurizio (1998) 302; Neils (2001) 168, 186; Shear (2001) 1.138; Dillon (2002) 38; Parker (2005) 258; Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 301; Larson (2016) 145. Those few scholars (Smith (1910) 53; Collignon (1914) 188; Elderkin (1936) 98; Hurwit (2004) 224–36; Thompson (1956) 289–90; Rotroff (1977); DeVries (1994)) who allow for the possibility that the girls on the frieze are *diphrophoroi* do not engage closely with the literary evidence. See also the tremendously helpful table in Berger and Gisler-Huwiler (1996) 172–4.

[36] *Pace* Wijma (2014) 49–51, who argues (perhaps not compellingly) that *diphrophoroi* carried only parasols for the comfort of the *kanephoroi*, whereas the stools could have had a ritual function.

[37] For the polemics against Schäfer, see Vollmer (2014) 293.

human-size figures handling textiles, was related to this rite. However, due the complete indifference of the gods – and especially of Athena, who literally turns her back on it – this scene hardly seems to represent the moment in which she receives the gift.[38] This fact has made scholars search for alternative interpretations. Some of them suggested radically different readings of the material, according to which the myths and/or rituals alluded to on the Parthenon frieze had nothing to do with Athena's peplos.[39] According to a more common and more moderate approach, the relief in question does not show the moment in which the peplos was handed to Athena, but rather alludes to it in some way. For example, Hill in 1894 suggested that the scene might have been that of taking away the old peplos of the goddess for storage while the new one was being carried for her in the procession. The presence of the old garment would have been enough to suggest the existence of the new peplos even though it was not shown to the viewers on the frieze.[40] Von Heintze (1993) went one step further. She observed that old garments belonging to Athena and being brought away for storage might have been depicted as deposited on top of the stools carried by the girls shown on the central slab. The fact that not only a peplos but also some other garments were used could explain why more than one stool was needed.[41] Therefore, according to von Heintze, what had been usually interpreted as cushions on the stools might have represented folded clothes, especially when originally covered with paint.[42] This interpretation finds some support in some of the ancient images, which show that textiles were often deposited and sometimes carried on stools.[43] This, however, does not take due account of what can be really seen on the frieze. Even though the area of the frieze where the objects deposited on stools are depicted is damaged, comparison with artistic representations of folded clothes on the one hand, and of cushions on the other, leaves hardly any doubt that what was shown on the Parthenon frieze belongs to the latter category.[44]

Yet, as a result of the analysis of the iconography presented above, an empty stool — with or without a cushion — is precisely what an Athenian of the Classical period would probably associate with the handling of clothes, dressing, undressing, attending to one's hairstyle, make-up and jewellery. What would a person familiar with the gynaikeion iconography, but not necessarily with the Athenian festival, gather from the central slab of the Parthenon frieze? There is a girl with a stool and a footstool. Clearly someone is about to

[38] On the meaning of this gift, see among others Jenkins (1994) 39–40; Neils (1996) 185; Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 292, 305.

[39] Especially Connelly (1996); (2014); Fehr (2011) 104–11; Vollmer (2014) 415–50.

[40] See also Robertson (1963) 56; Robertson and Frantz (1975) 11; Nagy (1978).

[41] On the various types of clothes of Athena Polias, see Mansfield (1989) 144–9.

[42] A similar point was made, and subsequently defended, by Connelly (1996) 63–4; (2014) 177. See also Schäfer (1987) 210 and Michaelis (1871) 256.

[43] The example most often cited is the black-figure Attic amphora by Exekias, Museo Gregoriano Etrusco, Vatican Museums 344 (BAPD 310395).

[44] See especially Boardman (1999) 312–13 with superb reproductions.

sit down. Otherwise, there would be no need for the footstool.[45] There is another girl with a stool and no footstool. This could mean that another person is supposed to sit down on it. The presence of one footstool only may suggest that one of the two persons is shorter than the other. This might evoke, in turn, a male-female couple.[46] However, the presence of the clothes being handled in the immediate context activates another set of meanings less related to sitting, for example, at a table, as to the toilette scenes. The empty stool is clearly meant to be used by an attendant while dressing or attending to the make-up or hairstyle of the person seated on the other stool, who would have her legs supported on the footstool.

Someone who knew that the frieze reflected the festival at which Athena (the goddess shown as sitting next to the textile-handling scene) received a new peplos would probably recognise the allusion to it encoded in the 'preparation for dressing' scene on the central slab. What we do not know, however, is what a person profoundly familiar with all the ritual details would think. The crucial element that we are missing is how exactly the goddess received the peplos. What further complicates the issue is that, at least in a certain period of the historical development of the festival, there were two kinds of peploi: the Great Panathenaia probably featured a much bigger peplos than did the Lesser Panathenaia. This larger peplos, at least in the Roman period, was sizeable enough to be used as the sail of the processional ship.[47] It is not clear whether both kinds of peploi were meant to be draped around the goddess' statue. The larger one could have been simply too big, provided that the statue in question was that of Athena Polias. Thus, the peplos could have been displayed in some other way: for example, hung on the temple wall.[48] Alternatively, the large peplos could be used for robing the statue of Athena Parthenos, while the smaller one could dress Athena Polias.[49] Briefly speaking, on the basis of the current evidence, we are confined to conjecture regarding the number and size of the peploi that were in use in the period when the frieze was executed.

[45] Thus Meyer (2017) 238; Boardman (1999) 308, 13, 21.

[46] Interestingly, on Athenian funerary reliefs, women on stools (but not chairs) are almost always represented with their feet on footstools; men almost always without footstools. This rule does not apply to the case of the gods' assembly on the Parthenon frieze, where none of the divinities is shown with a footstool.

[47] Reuthner (2006) 312–13 claims that the processional ship at the Panathenaia was a relatively late invention, not attested before the Hellenistic period. According to Shear (2021) 131–4, it was not introduced before the second century CE; however, this is based entirely on the lack of straightforward evidence from earlier periods.

[48] Thus Mansfield (1989) 2–50. As far as I can tell, the majority of scholars (an exception being Aleshire and Lambert 2003: 72, where Mansfield's theory is simply called not compelling) agree with the general statement that there were two kinds of peploi and disagree when it comes to details. For example, according to Shear (2001) 97–103, 174–86; (2021) 99–103, both peploi were designed as robes for Athena; however the introduction of the annual peplos, offered at the Lesser Panathenaia, was a later innovation dating from a period after 140 BCE. For the most recent bibliography, see also Brøns (2017) 365–92.

[49] Thus Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 267–8.

It is also impossible to tell whether the statue (or statues) was dressed already at the Panathenaia. It seems more likely that the goddess received the gift more or less in the way described in the *Iliad* (6.271–3, 302–4), where the new robe was simply deposited on the statue's lap.[50] The actual act of dressing might have been reserved for another occasion, most likely the *Plynteria* and/or *Kallynteria*.[51] This may be deduced from the notion that the undressing of the statue was a highly inauspicious act,[52] and therefore probably not suitable as a part of the joyful polis festival. For similar reasons, the goddess' toilette was probably not a good subject for representation in the place of her official cult. This may explain why it was alluded to rather than depicted. Yet, for an ancient Athenian familiar with the gynaikeion iconography, the way in which the central slab of the Parthenon frieze alludes to it would probably be taken as quite straightforward and unambiguous.

Unfortunately, it seems impossible to ascertain the identity of the girls with stools represented on the Parthenon frieze. The way in which they are juxtaposed on the frieze with the woman, who is almost certainly the priestess of Athena, strongly suggests that they could be considered her assistants. Most scholars quite plausibly claim that they may be the *arrephoroi*.[53] What makes this identification particularly attractive is that *arrhephoroi* were involved in the production of Athena's peplos.[54] There are no sources that claim explicitly that they also dressed the statue(s), but it cannot be excluded that they did. There is, however, some firm textual data regarding members of the genos Praxiergidai, who were supposed to dress the 'old statue of Athena' (Hsch. π 3205) at the Plynteria (Plut. *Alc*. 34.1). Also, the so-called *loutrides* or *plyntrides* were mentioned by Hesychius (λ 1277) and Photius (λ 408; with a reference to Aristophanes (fr. 849 K.-A.)) as two girls who attended to the statue of Athena. As Parker (1996) 307 observes, it is very likely that they were recruited from the Praxiergidai; however, this is not stated in the ancient texts. We also

[50] Thus Simon (1983) 66. On the relationship between gods and their statues, see Bremmer (2013); Pirenne-Delforge (2010); Mylonopoulos (2010) with further bibliography.

[51] On the Plynteria, see e.g. Mansfield (1989) 371–9; Brulé (1987) 105–10; Robertson (1996) 48–52; (2004) 96–102; Parker (1996) 307–8; (2005) 478–9. The name of the festival suggests that at least some of Athena's clothes were washed on that day, which does not exclude the possibility that she was dressed in the new peplos. Such a view was expressed by Shapiro (1989) 30; Neils (1996) 186, (2004) 58; Hurwit (1999) 333 no. 63. The opposite view: e.g. Parke (1977) 153; Robertson (1996) 49. Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 307–11 devoted much space to the argument that the statue was dressed in the new peplos on the Panathenaia rather than on the Plynteria; however, she supported this claim mostly on (otherwise interesting) speculation. The sources do not actually allow for a more confident statement than that of Parker (2005) 478 'the relation between this ritual [scil. the Plynteria] and the presentation of a new peplos at the Greater Panathenaea is unclear'.

[52] X. HG 1.4.12; Plut. *Alc*. 34.2. On the female nakedness, see Lee (2015) 182–90.

[53] Simon (1983) 67; Wesenberg (1990) 158–64; Harrison (1996) 205; Neils (2001) 168, (2003) 159; Dillon (2002) 45–8; Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 298–306.

[54] Ancient girls and women worked the wool and wove while sitting (on the distinction between these two activities, see Mansfield (1989) 279; Parker (2005) 227). Thus, it would be tempting to think that the stools the girls carry were meant to allude to this part of their ritual role. However, from the fact that on the frieze there are two stools and one footstool only, it can be deduced that these pieces of furniture are not supposed to be used by girls for sitting.

hear of an assistant to the priestess of Athena, called *kommo*[55] or *kosmo*,[56] responsible for Athena's adornment.[57] Even more shadowy remain the so-called *kataniptes* (*Etym. Magn.*: s.v.), who 'washed off the dirt collecting under Athena's peplos'. All the above persons were involved in one way or another in the process of dressing, adorning, or cleaning Athena's statue and its clothes. What further complicates the situation is that some of the above-mentioned categories may overlap. Thus, even on the assumption that the girls with stools on the Parthenon frieze represented something we know from the textual sources (which itself cannot be taken for granted), the field for speculation remains wide.

In spite of these difficulties, the iconographic data presented above – as well as the position of the representation on the central slab of the frieze above the temple entrance, and in the middle of the assembly of gods – permit some confidence regarding the message transmitted by this image. It is clear that the relief reflects the girls' paradoxically prestigious role of humble servants and dressers of Athena and/or her statues. As Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 305 emphasised, they acted on behalf of the whole city, ensuring that the gift from the community was received by the goddess in order to win her favourable disposition.

4. Conclusions

What is clear from the material gathered above is that the word *diphrophoros* was used in reference to persons (usually, if not always, females)[58] who would appear in public and private spaces with a stool they carried on their head. Quite unexpectedly, the stool was not carried for the comfort of the person[59] to whom a *diphrophoros* attended, or, at least, it was not only for this purpose. The crucial part of her function consisted of attending to her mistress'

[55] *AB* I 273: ἡ κοσμοῦσα τὸ ἕδος τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἱέρεια.

[56] Harp. s.v. τραπεζοφόρος: αὕτη τε καὶ ἡ κοσμὼ συνδιέπουσι πάντα τῇι τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς ἱερείαι.

[57] Although from the linguistic point of view the relationship between two forms so similar to one another as κομμώ and κοσμώ may be a little more complex than it seems (Solmsen (1901) 501–7; Frisk (1960) s.v.; Chantraine (1968) s.v.; Beekes (2010) s.v.), there can be little doubt that the two words referred to the same sacred function, because it is hard to imagine that at the Athenian Acropolis there were two different officials that bore almost the same title and whose roles overlapped. On this rather obscure figure, see Conomis (1961) 118–19; Georgoudi (2003) 200; Sourvinou-Inwood (2011) 264. See also Harrison (1889); Waldstein (1890); Murray (1903): 102; Mantis (1990): 80. Robertson (2004) 96 suggested that the girls on the East frieze can be identified as κοσμώ and τραπεζώ; however, there is nothing to confirm this.

[58] The only exceptions are provided by Cratinus' fragment 32, in which a male plays the role of a *diphrophoros*. This may result from the comic convention, and two vases with Andromeda (BAPD 213802 discussed above and BAPD 276098) with black youths carrying stools. These images are hardly representative of Greek real-life conventions, given that a gender-role reversal may be taken as an index of exoticism. There are thus no unambiguous instances of male *diphrophoroi* that can be taken as typical for Greek customs.

[59] In Cratinus' fragment 32 Lycurgus as a *diphrophoros* seems to be following males, whereas the pot in Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae* 735–6 is said to have made cosmetics for Lysistrates. Both instances are hardly relevant, given that they may reflect the comic convention rather than reality.

dress, make-up, jewellery and hairstyle. The stool to which *diphrophoroi* owed their name was instrumental to their activities in a way similar to that of a modern shoe-shiner's stool. This latter item may be taken as an iconic attribute of the whole profession. At the same time, however, letting customers sit on a stool is not the essence of a shoe-shiner's work. By the same token, a stool might have been so characteristic for a certain class of ancient Greek stylists that they could be named after it, perhaps with a humorous intention.

The word *diphrophoros* appears primarily in Old Comedy,[60] in the majority of, if not in all, cases in reference to a girl who followed *kanephoros* in a Panathenaic or some other procession.[61] Apart from this, it is attested in lexica and scholia that always quote from comedy or are likely to depend on comic passages.[62] The only exception is provided by Plutarch (348d–e), who makes it clear that his *diphrophoros* is not the attendant of a *kanephoros*. Instead, the lavish woman she follows is probably supposed to be a figure known to Plutarch and his readers from their contemporary world. This does not necessarily mean that the word itself was in common use in the time of Plutarch. Given that its occurrences are otherwise restricted to a very short period (late fifth- and early fourth-century BCE), to one particular dialect (Attic) and to one literary genre (comedy), Plutarch might have consciously or unconsciously used it as a bookish word.[63] It is interesting to note that in spite of there being some differences, the context in which Plutarch uses the word seems to be similar to that in the comedy (at least as far as the passage in the *Ecclesiazusae* is concerned), as he clearly takes being followed by *diphrophoroi* as an index of women's vanity.

More common and more long-lived than the word is the iconographic motif of a female attendant with a stool. However, its particular popularity in the gynaikeion scenes and the most famous occurrence in the Parthenon frieze fall roughly in the same period when the word *diphrophoros* was in use in comedy. It would be tempting to think that the girls on its central slab were called *diphrophoroi*, given that this is what they clearly are: female beauty attendants with stools as an attribute of their role. It has to be borne in mind, however, that this word is never attested in reference to them. Almost certainly, as may

[60] The most likely candidate for the oldest attestation is Hermippus' fragment 25 of *Gods*, dated to 429 by Wilamowitz (1873) 140, without, however, any certainty (see Comentale (2017) 104–5). Next comes Cratinus' fragment 32 of *Deliades*, a comedy that most likely was produced after 426/5 (see Bianchi (2016) 149).

[61] It is unclear whom a *diphrophoros* is supposed to follow in Cratinus' fr. 32 (see Bianchi (2016) ad loc.). Apart from this, according to Photius (δ 672) and the Suda (δ 1295) Strattis (fr. 7) was supposed to use the word *diphrophoros*, but the context is not specified. This attestation may be the latest one, but it cannot be dated with any precision (Strattis was a younger contemporary of Aristophanes). The last datable attestation is that in the *Ecclesiazusae* (391 BCE). A case apart is an attestation of a homonymous word *diphrophoros* in Dinon's fragment 18, in which it refers to a servant who carried a stool that the king of Persia used when dismounting his chariot.

[62] Apart from the comic passages, *diphrophoroi* are mentioned in the scholia to Aristophanes (Ar. *Eccl.* 734; Ar. *Av.* 1551); (7) Suda δ 1294 (=Phot. δ 672), δ 1295; Hsch. δ 200. Only this latter source (διφροφόροι· αἱ ταῖς κανηφόροις εἵποντο, δίφρους ἐπιφερόμεναι) does not contain a reference to a comedy. This is hardly meaningful, given how laconic it is.

[63] On Plutarch's Atticism, see Jażdżewska (2019).

be deduced from its proliferation in comedy and absence from other genres, it was not a technical term or official title. It is likely, however, that the iconography of the Parthenon frieze inspired this comic invention. At any rate, the visual evidence indicates that the contexts in which attendants with stools were seen were not limited to processions. On the contrary, as can be deduced from the iconography, they played an important role in the domestic sphere as well as in the secret or half-secret services that girls paid to Athena. It may be a matter of a conservative, chauvinist or anti-elitist bias – which is otherwise typical for the Attic Old Comedy – that made comic poets turn their attention to the fact that some girls and/or women were occasionally seen in public followed by their *diphrophoroi*, which could be interpreted as an excessive means of displaying the status of their family.

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