

ORIGIN, USE AND RENDERING OF THE ANIMAL HIDE(\*)

ON SOME CLASSICAL VASES

by

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An animal hide was used from prehistoric times up to historic times as a dress in both ancient Egypt and ancient Greece, and of course in other ancient civilizations ( Cf. fig.1 from Yemen ).

In Egypt , though we can see the habit of wearing animal skins , especially that of panthers , by the priests(1) or priestesses(2), as a characteristic dress for them either in religious ceremonies (3) or in festivals , we can also find the wearing of skins by high officials, men, such as the king (4), or even women of a high social rank (5), from the fourth Dynasty onwards.(fig 2,5,7)

It is noteworthy that , among gods Bes, the comic, is always represented as a hideous bearded dwarf dressed in a leopard skin (6).

In Greece (7), the earliest evidence of wearing an animal hide can be traced back to the beginning of LM III period, painted on the Agia Triadha sarcophagus. There are here men and two women, all wearing skins of sacrificed victims, as S. Hood interpretes their dress(8).

So, in Minoan Crete, they knew this habit, only by the end of the 15th cent. B.C. and the beginning of the 14th cent. B.C. due to their contact with the Near East in general, and most probably with Egypt in particular(9). Our evidence for this hypothesis is beyond doubt. Because the earliest appearance of the Kefi in the Egyptian records is usually dated to the middle of the 15th cent. B.C. On the other hand, the total impression of Agia Triadha paintings betrays Egyptian influence.

During the 13th cent. B.C., the Mycenaeans, themselves, imitated the habit, but more closely to the Egyptian prototypes. Three figures are seen wearing animal skins on their shoulders from the wealthy coloured fresco at Pylos(10). Each one is a di-pte-ra-po-ro person, "exercant à Pylos fonctions religieuses malaisées à définir."(11).

But their religious role in the Mycenaean Pylos is recently confirmed in light of a comparative iconographical study with the Cretan and Egyptian prototypes, made by Mrs. 'Εφη Σακελλαράκη (12). She thinks that Egyptian influence on Pylos wall-paintings of these " " can be considered as possible (13).

During the Geometric period, we have not any evidence of wearing or using the animal skins as ritual vestments or dresses. But, through the 8th and the 7th cent. B.C., the period conventionally known as the "Orientaliz-

period", already encounter not human figures wearing any kind of animal skin, just a lot of animal figures, some of them are depicting panthers in stereotyped schemes ( Cf. fig. 3 ) (14).

Nearly about the middle of the 7th cent. B.C. is dated the only authentic Egyptian statue found on a Greek site, from Samos(15), that wears a panther's skin as usual, in ancient Egypt, for a priest's " ritual vestment ". We can imagine importance and the significance of such a discovery in such an important place, that of the Heraion of Samos, during its zenith of power and wide-spread religious fame all over the ancient Greek world of that time.

On the Greek side, during the Archaic and Classical periods, we find so many scenes of human figures wearing animal skins. They mostly represent Herakles wearing his famous 'λεοντή' (16) This 'λεοντή' .i.e., the lion's skin, became one of the most repeated insignia of Herakles' figures, even in later times, since he wears it in a very special way, with his own head springing out from that of the lion's and the lion's fore-paws in a knot-like-form on his chest, while the rest fall down along with the body, either in front of him or behind him (e.g. fig. 8)(17)

The best examples of Herakles drawn on the Athenian black and red figure vases are those of Andokides painter (18), and Berlin painter (19) as well.

Going further in our study, we found out that there were also other figures earlier than that of Herakles, clad in other animal skins. For instance, already

on a sixth century painted vase, well known as "Crater Francois", none of heroes fighting the wild boar of Calydon is referred to as Herakles, the one of the two named as "Μηδαιότυπος" is wearing a lion's skin, with its head falling down. To the right of the same scene, we can distinguish another figure that wears an animal skin. Even here, the name of Herakles does not appear (20).

As we know, apart from Herakles, the Greek artist of both Late Archaic and Classical periods also used to represent other gods, such as Dionysos, in the first place and his companions of satyrs, silenoi and maenads wearing animal skins (fig. 6,9). In addition, Artemis is sometimes, but not always, represented dressed in a panther skin(21).

But as it is stated by J. Boardman, Herakles "The hero who dominated the myth repertory of Athenian black figure had a reduced role on the later vase and "The Herakles of red figure is less interesting than he had been in the sixth century"(22). Among the reasons Boardman gave as responsible factors for this change of the classical Greek interest is "a growing preference for the democracy's hero, Theseus, over the tyrants' hero"(23). I would rather say that it is due to the general atmosphere of the classical Greek life in a victorious, free, self-confident society, a society which was strong, active, democratic, rich and at ease, and which had new interests in life.

Consequently, it was very natural to find Dionysiac and satyric scenes more often on the Greek vases by the end of the sixth century onwards, when

Athens started to watch the satyr play with actors dressed as satyrs (24). If we note carefully the characteristics of a satyr or silenos figure, and compare them with those of the Egyptian god Bes, (25) we will find a great similarity between them. One of these similarities, apart from the nakedness, grotesque face, outstanding belly and tail, is the wearing of a panther skin, in general, any kind of animal skins.

As I mentioned in my Ph. D., it is not at all impossible to have such a relationship between Bes and satyr or silenos, since a total of 147 Etruscan statuettes are catalogued from Greek sites and are dated to the Saite period (i.e. 664-525 B.C.) as for the majority of them (26).

Also, it should be noted that the Greek artist chose the funny aspect and the cheerful role of the Egyptian Bes, and created a new figure with new attributes, according to his own taste and imagination on one hand and using the available attributes in his society of that time on the other. From Samos a statuette of Bes, as a musician, on a flute-player's shoulders (dated to the middle of the 7th cent. B.C.) (27), is a very important piece of this clumsy, but comic Bes and the guardian of sleep and both a protector and the guardian of sheep (28).

In late Archaic and Classical Greece, an animal skin was also a dress for the Amazons (cf. fig. 6) and for the Kentauros, (29) and even persons of high social ranks (30). One of the Greek painters, most famous for his figures of Satyrs and Maenads, is Brygos (flourished between 480-470 B.C.), who is usually called "one of the first, one of the only, real children in vase painting" (31). He is really the artist who best rendered the panther skin as normal as it is in nature. (32) (Cf. the original forms of fig. 2, 7)

On one of Brygos white ground cup interiors, we find both the panther figure, completely drawn and the skin of the same animal. (33)

Here is an excellent case for comparison. Brygos, although following traditional lines and features for a panther's figure, did in fact succeed, in so degree, to depict the animal's face as well as the skin's spots. The most surprising element here is that the artist left plain the area of the stomach and very slightly decorated the interior of the behind leg. Also, we can easily note the thickness of the spots on the highest area of the animal's back (Cf. fig. 1). All these are very similar characteristics to the animal itself, viz. Felis Panthera. (34)

A better rendering of the animal's face, also belonging to Brygos, exists on the exterior of the same cup mentioned above. (35) (cf. an Egyptian figure of the panther's skin) (36). Here, as they are in nature, the spots are getting small and thicker on both the neck and the paws. But, in later times, both the scheme of the spots of the animal's hide and its color became unnatural (fig. 10) (37).

As for the use of the animal hide "δραπέ", we can conclude, judging from the scenes themselves on some classical vases, that the ancient Greek vase-painters. The Minoan and the Mycenaean imitated the ancient Egyptian, as a first step, in using the animal skin, whatever was its kind, as a ritual vestment and ceremonial dress. However, in late Archaic and Classical periods, it was us

by a wider group of people, on entirely different occasions, up from Herak skin (viz λεοντή) and the satyr cheerful and joyful behavior to the very important point to be worn by an official rider in an official ceremony of the Athenians during the festival of the a scene which is immortalized on the western side of the Parthenon's frieze. (38) This is the first and unique example, up till now, that comes back to our minds the severe use and honorable wearing, also by the gods θεοὶ, of an animal skin during official occasions in classical Greece, not only by gods ἀθάνατοι or heroes and their companions.

But, on the other hand, we will note a new use, never recorded before the Archaic and Classical periods. On some vases, we can see the animal skins, either the skins of panthers or those of goats or whatever else, as covers for the stools. (39)

As we have seen, the rendering of the animal skins by the painters of ancient Greece and Egypt and their figural drawings were different. This is due to their different aims and methods which belong to an entirely different tradition in two different, from the point of natural circumstances, countries, having, undoubtedly, two different ways of thinking and criteria of individuality for any work of art.

The Greek painter, as the Greek sculptor of the Archaic period, though he knew foreign models and artistic elements, proved that he was at free, never bound to any specific motives known before from abroad, hence came his creativeness and variations, and not merely imitation.

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## NOTES:

- (<sup>a</sup>) Thanks to a work visit to Yemen in 1991/1992 as a Lecturer at Sanaa University, where I had the opportunity to see, for the first time, a complete small statue in the National Museum of an ancient sheban king called "Maadi Karob", dated to the 7 cent. B.C. (see fig. 1), who wears a leopard skin on his shoulders. This was really the impulse of this paper searching for the prototypes even for the well-known ancient Greek examples.
- (1) See, for example, *Almawsuah Alhisriah* (in Arabic, i.e. The Egyptian Encyclopedia), Vol. I, Part 1, Fig. 270. And *Staatliche Sammlung Ägyptischer Kunst* (München 1976), Kat. 98 AS 23.
- (2) Cf. Birch, *The Ancient Egyptians*.
- (3) Cf. C. Aldred, *Egyptian Art* (London 1930), 231. fig. 185
- (4) Cf. H. Carter, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen* (Great Britain 1972), 95: a wall painting in this tomb showing Ay "Opening the King's mouth".
- (5) See, e.g., Aldred, *op.cit.*, 67, fig. 27
- (6) For a recent study of similarities between Bes and the Greek Silenoi or Satyroi in the light of the discovered Bes statuettes and amulets on Greek sites of the 1st millenium BC see the Ph. D. dissertation of M. Elsaadani, *Αἱ Ἑλληνο-Αἰγυπτιακαὶ Σχέσεις ἐπὶ τὸ φῶς τῶν Αἰγυπτιακῶν καὶ Αἰγυπτιαζόντων πλαστικῶν ἔργων ἐκ τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ χώρου · 945-325 π.Χ.* Ἀθήναι, 1982, 169-173.
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- ' 7 The ancient Greeks used many kinds of animal skins *δοροῖ* as those such of  
 "οιγίς , αλωπεκή , ἀρνακίς , βοή , ελαφή , λεοντή , .  
 ..Μεγ. Ελ. Ἐγκυκλοπαίδεια ,  
 21(1933), 875) and gave them some nouns, as "διφθέρα"  
 (among the Sicelians),
- (8) See, e.g. S. Hood, *The Minoans, Crete in the Bronze Age*(London 1971), 224,pl. 59-60. And of the same author ,  
*The Arts in Prehistoric Greece*(The Pelican History of Art, 1978), 70-1 fig. 53,54. Also for a more detailed study of the  
 skins that the figures wear, see E.  
 (Athens 1971). 159, fig. 65a, B, and 177, fig. 75.
- (9) For a general bibliography of the prehistoric Graeco-Egyptian relation  
 , see Elszadani , *op.cit.*, 29-30 . But for a very detailed and recent study  
 of these relations up to the 7th cent. B.C., see W. Heick, *E*  
*Beziehungen-Ägyptens und Vorderasiens zur-Ägais bis in 7 Jahrhundert*  
 . Chr.(Darmstadt 1979). (Erträge der Forschung Band 120).
- (10) M.Lang, *The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia , II*  
 : *The Frescoes* (Princeton 1969), pl. Nr. 58 Hnws. 54 Hnws.
- (11) j.p. Olivier , "Etude d'un nom de metier mycenesien: δι-πτε-ρα-ρο-το." AC 28, 1959, 185.
- (12) Ἐφη Σαπουνά - Σακελλαράκη , Συμβολή στην μελέτη  
 τῶν τοιχογραφιῶν τῆς πύλου , Α' Πραγματεῖα τοῦ Γ'  
 Διεθνoῦς κρητο λογικοῦ Συνεδρίου  
 (Athens 1973) , 295-302.
- (13) *Ibid.*, 301
- (14) See, e.g. Σέμνη καρούζου , Ἀγγεῖα τοῦ Ἀναγόροδοτος ( Athens 1963) pls. 55,69,70,72-73., And M. T  
 βέριος, *Ολυδός καὶ τὸ ἔργο του* (Athens 1976) pls, 6;  
 a,b, 23; b, footnote 449, Also , see J. Boardman , *Athenian*  
*Black Figure Vases* (Thames and Hudson 1974) , Rep. 1978 ,  
 fig. 68,72,120,129.

- (15) For an exact chronology of this statue and other bronzes as well, see Elsaidani, *op.cit.*, 5-1, Kat. Nr. 100, and 110.
- (16) For a good iconographical reference. see R. Flacaliere -P. Devunbez. *Herakles, Images, Images et Recits* (1966). And F. Brommer, *Herakles* (1953).
- (17) For a general review of Herakles' character and role in the scenes of myth on the Athenian black figure vases, v. J. Boardman, *op.cit.*, 221-225
- (18) E.g., v. Boardman, *op.cit.*, fig. 162-166 And his other book, *Athenian Red figure Vases; The Archaic Period* (Thames and Hudson London 1975), 17, fig. 8-9.
- (19) E.g., v. Boardman, *op.cit.*, 94-95 fig. 145, 146:1, 149, 156
- (20) *Ιστορία του Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους*, Β, Ἀρχαϊκός Ἑλληνισμός (Athens 1971). 150-151. And for other heroes and gods, see M.T. Ibe/rioj, *op.cit.*, PL. 86: a, 90 b, where we see Hermes clad an animal's hide, in the same way as Herakles wears it.
- (21) Boardman, *Athenian Red Figure Vases*, fig. 14,1.
- (22) *Ibid.*, 228
- (23) *Ibid.*, 226-227
- (24) *Ibid.*, 234
- (25) Cf. Elsaidani, *op.cit.*, pl. XXXII, especially figures 1-4, And for a statuette of Bes wearing a leopard skin, v., e.g., *Nea Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology*, SN. Bes, 26 ff.
- (26) Elsaidani *op.cit.*, 101, 169-173
- (27) Elsaidani, *op.cit.*, 170-172 pl. XXXII 1-4
- (28) *Lexicon der Agyptologie*, I (1975), 720-722
- (29) I. Charbonneau, J-R., Martin-F. Villard, (*Classical Greek Art* (Thames and Hudson, London-New York 1972), 147, fig. 159.
- (30) E.g., v. *Ιστορία του Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους*, Γ 1, Ἀθήναι (Athens 1972) 133; a horseman wearing an animal skin from the western side of Parthenon frieze.
- (31) Boardman, *Athenian Red figure Vases* 135

- (32) E.g., N.D. Hoffmeister, Zoo, Animals (New York Golden Press), 47
- (33) Boardman, op.cit., fig. 218
- (34) E.g., v. Μεγάλη "Ελληνική" Εγκυκλοπαίδεια, ηολ. 19,535  
 " Πάνθηρ " where we read the following "καὶ κατάλευκον κατὰ τὴν κοιλίαν" And  
 "ὅτινες ἀπαντῶσι πολυπληθέστεροι κατὰ τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸν τρῶχλον"
- (35) Boardman, op.cit., fig. 256
- (36) Davies, N. M., Egyptian Tomb Paintings (Faber Gallery of Oriental Arts, 1956), pl. 3; Nubians bringing tribute Brit. Museum No. 922 (1420-1411) B.C).
- (37) According to their series,  
 v. Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους Γ2, 320 (465 B.C) 364, (end of the 5th cent. B.C. ), 902(2nd half of the 4th cent. B.C)
- (38) Cf. footnote 30.
- (39) E.g., v. Boardman, op.cit., 256, fig. 50.2 And  
 "Ἱστορία τοῦ Ἑλληνικοῦ Ἔθνους, Γ 2, 416 .
- (40) Elsaadani, op.cit., especially 117-188

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- 3) Nea Larousse Encyclopaedia of Mythology
- 4) Lexicon der Agyptologie , Germany.
- 5) Alnawsuah Almisriah , ( the Egyptian Encyclopaedia  
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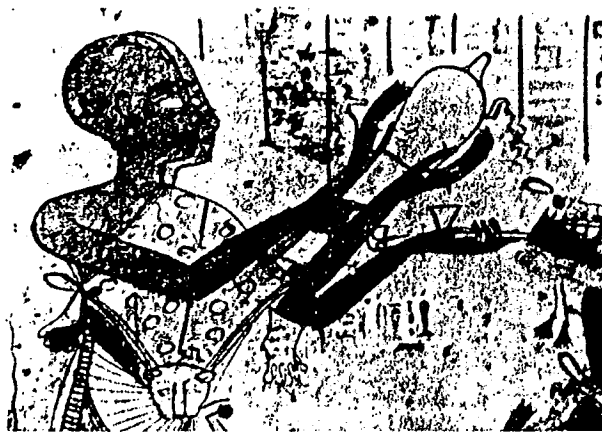
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- 17) Hood, S., The Minoans : Crete in the Bronze Age, London 1971.
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**Fig.(1):**

A bronze statuette ( about 1,00 Cm. Hight ) of Maadi Kareb , a Sheban prince or priest. Dated to the 7th cent. B.C. National Museum of Sanaa, Yemen.

**Fig.(2):**



Priests wearing leopard skin. Tomb wall-painting. Dated to the New Kingdom. Thebes, Egypt.



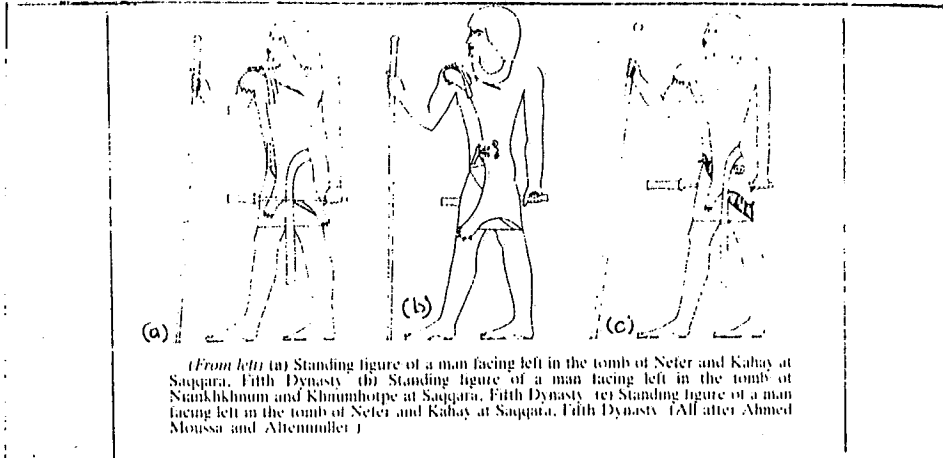
**Fig.(3) :**

A Corinthian small vase, dated to the 6th cent. B.C.

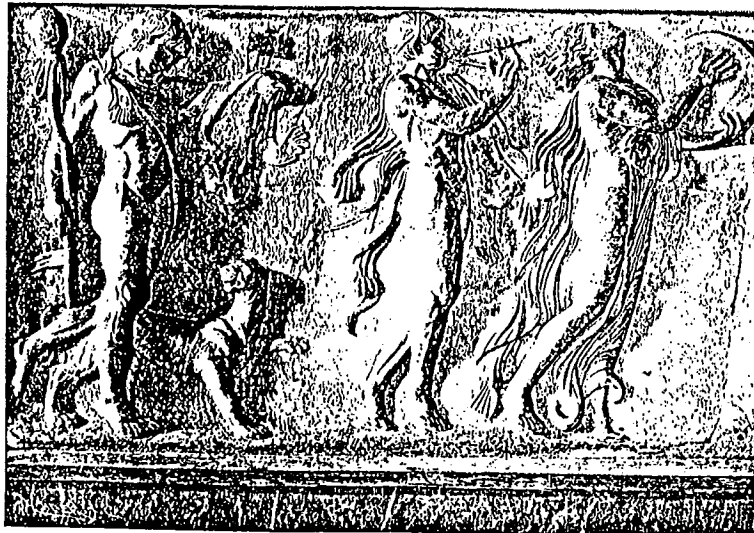
**Fig.(4) :**

A Red-figure-Vase (Krater), dated to the 4th cent. B.C.





**Fig.(5):** Egyptian drawings of officials wearing leopard skins in a very stereotypical way. Dated to the 5th cent. B.C.



**Fig.(6):** A Greek rendering for a remote Egyptian custom of the leopard skin or other animal hide. Here, worn by the god Dionysus and his followers. From Herculaneum, Naples, National Museum.

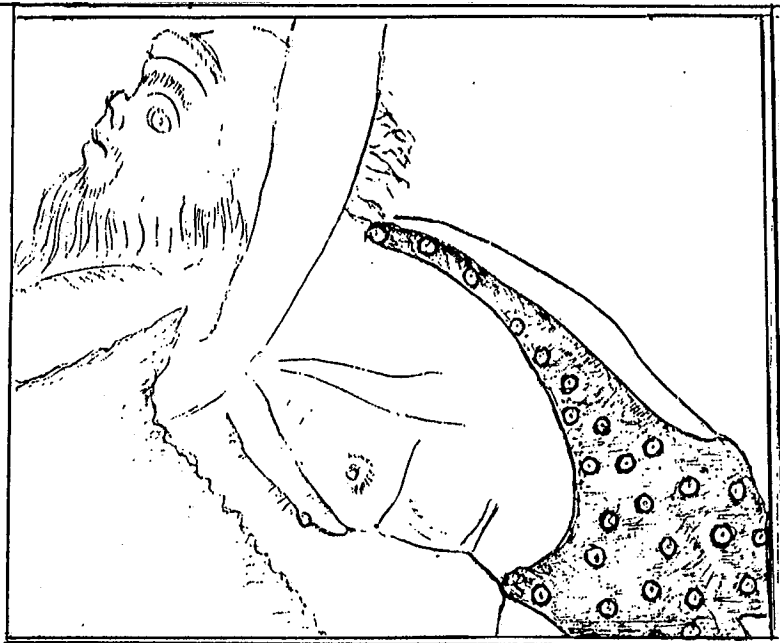




**Fig.(7):** A scene of a stela of Neferet I abet, dated to the 4th Dynasty. Museum of Louvre, Paris .

**Fig.(8):** A scene of the frieze of the Siphnian treasure at Delphoi. Dated to the 6th cent. B.C. It depicts " Gigantomachia ". Herakles and Artemis wear lion skins.





**Fig.(9):** A fragment of a white Kylix, dated to 465 B.C. Made by the painter " Pistozenos ". A satyr wears a leopard skin. Taras National Museum, Italy.

**Fig.(10):**

A scene of a satyric drama on a white-on-Red vase, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 4th cent. B.C. Silynos wears a very simple piece of leopard skin.. Neapolis National Museum, Italy.

