

ACTUAL AND INTELLECTUAL ARROWSHOTS IN SOPHRON (FR. 50 AND 86 KASSEL–AUSTIN)

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After some notes on the remarkable linguistic difficulties encountered by ancient Athenian readers of Sophron’s text, this article will deal with the textual and interpretative problems posed by two fragments of the mimes that are more significant than it may appear at first sight. It is argued that a verbal form transmitted in fr. 86 K–A, whose correctness has systematically been doubted, is in fact linguistically unassailable and used in the description of an ambush that might be either military or metaphorical. As to fr. 50, once the correct reading of the principal verb has been established, we recover a subtle metaphor used by a character in a mime to criticise those who make hasty speculations about things unknown –something that reveals a sophistication rarely encountered in other fragments, and provides us with a glimpse into the reasons why Sophron’s mimes enjoyed such respect in antiquity.

Introduction

Sophron’s contribution to classical Greek literature and culture is notoriously very difficult to evaluate for a number of reasons and especially because what we are told by a number of ancient authors about the sophistication of his art does not seem to match with the impression that most modern critics gather from his fragments.

There is no doubt that Sophron’s work was much respected, and often highly praised, by a number of ancient scholars. Even if we leave aside the stories of Plato as an enthusiastic admirer and imitator of Sophron, whose authenticity modern scholars have often doubted,¹ his mimes are, for good or ill, mentioned twice by Aristotle as representatives of mimetic art. The first personal names we encounter in the *Poetics* (1447b10) are those of Sophron and his son Xenarchus, whose μῖμοι are linked to vaguely mentioned Σωκρατικοὶ λόγοι, and in a fragment of the *Περὶ ποιητῶν* (72 Rose) Sophron’s λόγοι καὶ μμήσεις are referred to in relation to the Σωκρατικοὶ διάλογοι of a certain Alexamenos of Teos. Both

¹ Most recently Ford (2010) 228–9.

passages have been the object of hefty discussion in modern times, but whatever Aristotle may have thought of these works and their mutual relationship,² the fact remains that both Sophron and the Socratic literature are treated by Aristotle as texts worth of being discussed seriously.

Later on, in the second century BC, the Epicurean Demetrius Lacon discussed one or more mimes from the viewpoint of vocabulary, style and rhetorical figures, as we know from a tantalising papyrus text from Herculaneum (fr. 16 K–A, revised edition in Hordern (2004) 52–3); more or less in the same decades the great scholar Apollodorus of Athens wrote learned commentaries on Sophron’s work (test. 22 K–A); we know of many ancient discussions on whether his mimes were prose or poetry (test. 19 K–A), and they were the object of study and teaching on the part of many grammarians – the father of the Latin poet Statius, for instance (*Silv.* 5. 3, 156 = test. 16 K–A). Clearly it was no second-rate text. Hence Hordern rightly says (2004, 8–9) that ‘Sophron’s mimes were primarily literary in character’ and ‘a long way from those later stage-plays that also go by the name *μῆμος*’.

So far so good; however, when it comes to the fragments, largely transmitted through indirect tradition, we often find ourselves faced with very short texts devoid of any context, in which petty everyday life preoccupations, at times ‘spiced’ with sexual innuendo and scatological references, seem to get the lion’s share. Hordern’s approach (2002, 76) can be regarded as typical: ‘an interest in character-drawing may be indicated by a brief reference in Diogenes Laertius [3.18], but the extant fragments present more evidence for simple coarseness and bawdy humour’. As a matter of fact, old and recent comments have often, consciously or unconsciously, tended to emphasise these ‘low’ features, thus in practice aligning Sophron’s mimes with those later bawdy stage-plays, the distance from which is however emphasised at a theoretical level. Obviously, this is bound to leave a modern reader wondering why on earth so many ancient scholars were so deeply interested in Sophron’s work if it was just a collection of coarse narrations.

Clearly, the fragments with sexual innuendo or description of market items cannot be the whole story. One of the aims of this article is to comment on a couple of fragments that are clearly alien to any form of cheap fun; especially fr. 50 will reveal a different Sophron, and one who may have adopted a sophisticated *castigat ridendo mores* stance more often than it is usually assumed.

There is an aspect of the ancient response to Sophron’s mimes that has never been explored properly: virtually nobody asks questions on the extent to which Sophron’s text was fully intelligible in Athens. In fact, his language was meant for a local audience and referred to Syracusan *Realien* and everyday life, which made a performance of a Syracusan mime in an Athenian theatre a very improbable enterprise; on the other hand the average Athenian reader must have encountered a number of difficulties on perusing a Syracusan text.

For instance, we read (fr. 168 K–A) *μοῖτον ἀντι μοῖτου*, meaning ‘a favour in exchange for another favour’, labelled by our grammatical sources as a Syracusan proverb or stock

2 A perceptive analysis of the problems involved can be found in Ford (2010).

phrase (Hsch. μ 557 μοίτον ἀντί μοίτου· παροιμία Σικελοῖς), μοίτος being cognate with the Latin adjective *mutuus* and certainly borrowed from an Italic language (Beekes (2010) 961 s. v. μοίτος); it must have been unknown to the Attic dialect. Besides, both Sophron's and Epicharmus' fragments frequently mention the Syracusan system of weighs and coins, a λίτρα (Latin *libra*) divided into twelve ὀγκία (*unciae*; fr. 146, 148, 161 K–A; Cassio (2002) 67–8), something completely foreign to a general Attic audience³ and probably familiar only to merchants and money changers, λιτροσκοποί (Soph. fr. 1065 Radt).

Naturally not all the problems of comprehension were equally serious. Fr. 34 K–A τατωμένα τοῦ κιτῶνος, ὁ τόκος νιν ἀλιφθερώκει 'deprived of her chiton, the interest on it has ruined her' (Hordern (2004) 67) shows the perfect of a verb ἀλιφθερώω originally meaning 'shipwreck', unknown to Attic and provided with the -ει ending of the indicative present typical of the Syracusan dialect,⁴ which incidentally entailed an accentual shift: had the verb been in use in Attic the perfect would have been *ἤλιφθέρωκε. In any case, the basic components of the verb (ἄλς and φθείρω) were easily recognisable, and τᾶτάομαι = τητάομαι must have been a verb familiar with the Athenians, although mainly used in poetry.

In other cases, too, the vocabulary must have been unfamiliar to the Athenians and the morphology perceived differently in Athens and Syracuse. Fr. 124 δειτηνῆσας ὡστίζεται τοῖς τρηματιζόντεσσι 'after dinner he jostles with the τρηματιζόντες' is a case in point. We know from Pollux (9.96) that the Dorians called τρηματίκται the players of a special dice game in which a fixed sum of money was allotted to every pip, in Cunningham's translation (2002, 345) 'the pippers' (not the general 'dicers' as translated by Hordern (2004) 103). At Athens however the same type of game was called πλειστοβολίνδα (Pollux *ibid.*), and in order to understand this Doric term an Athenian reader must have extracted its meaning from the general context of the mime.

As to the -εσσι dative in τρηματιζόντεσσι, it was standard in the Doric dialect of Syracuse⁵ and very widespread in Sicily,⁶ but completely foreign to real spoken Attic; it was well known in Athens from Homer and lyric poetry (and Aristophanic parodies, e.g. Av. 1372 ἀναπέτομαι δὴ πρὸς Ὀλυμπον πετερύγεσσι κούφαις); on the other hand, any Athenian might have bumped into a Thessalian horseman who said χρεμιάτεσσι or παίδεσσι instead of Attic χρήμασι or παισί (Blümel (1982) 250). As it happens in many languages and literatures, the same feature that sounds banal and even substandard in one region may be perceived as learned and pretentious in another one. At Syracuse the -εσσι ending was apparently happily used in the fruit and vegetable market; it probably sounded poetical to some Athenians, but others may have perceived it differently. In conclusion, it seems to me that only very few Athenians would have been able to deal in

3 Cassio (2002) 68 and n. 56, and Cassio (forthcoming).

4 Hordern (2004) 164; Buck (1955) §147, 1.

5 See Cassio (2018); Del Barrio Vega 2021. 'Als sprachecht ist -εσσι auch im Dorischen von Syrakus anzuerkennen' (Willi (2008) 66 n. 58, 129 (5.3.3.2.c))

6 E.g. ἐβραθήσαν ... ἰπέεσσι καὶ πεζοῖς at Entella (Porciani (2001) 25, inscription C3, lines 9–10).

a competent manner with the problems posed by Sophron's world and language; Plato and Aristotle were the exception, not the rule.

In what follows I shall deal with two fragments. I hope to show that a verbal form found in the first one (86 K–A), which is unattested elsewhere and always regarded as problematic, is in fact built according to well-known and perfectly regular word formation rules; the fragment mentions somebody 'shooting from the dark', which might refer either to an actual military event or, metaphorically, to wicked persons who 'hit' the honest ones without being detected.

As to the second one (50 K–A), all editors and commentators were led astray by a superficially attractive but basically wrong conjecture of Wilamowitz's, and once the real meaning is recovered the fragment will open up interesting vistas on the intellectual life of late classical Syracuse.

At the start of each discussion I shall reproduce the fragments as they appear in Kassel and Austin (2001).

Malicious arrows

86 (90)

ὁ δ' ἐκ τῷ σκότειος τοξεύων αἰὲν ἕνα τινα ὄν ζυγαστροφεῖ

Apoll. Dysc. pron., GrGr II 1, 1 p. 96, 15 ἐν ἴσῳ τῶι αὐτῶν παρὰ Συρακουσίοις τίθεται τὸ ὄν. Σώφρων· ὁ --- ζυγ.

τω cod.: del. Bekker; genetivi formam def. Wil., vid. ad fr. 56. ὄν cod.: ὄν (*eorum*) J. F. Reitz ap. M. Maittaire Gr. Ling. Dial. ed. F. G. Sturz (1807) p. 561¹⁰: ὄν (= οὖν) Wil. Kl. Schr. II p. 134¹ (cf. Pind. p. 100¹), Apollonius erravisse arbitratus ζυγαστροφεῖ cod. ('obscurae signif. verbum' Dindorf in ThesGrLing IV p. 43 A; formam tuetur Bechtel p. 282): ζυγοστρ- Bekker: ἄζυγα στρ- Ludwich BphW 22 (1902) 807: ζυγοστοιχεῖ (in fronte aciei *incedit*) Reitz: -στατεῖ vel -μαχεῖ Botzon p. 17

Ael. Aristid. or. 2, 464 L.-B. ἐκ τοῦ † ψόφου (ζόφου cod. V², ψέφους Lobeck) τοξεύοντες κατὰ τὸν Ἀλκαῖον (fr. 437 V.); cf. etiam or. 36, 100 K. ἐν σκότῳ τοξεύοντες

Cunningham translates (2002, 337) 'and he, shooting his arrow in the dark, always . . . some one of them', Hordern (2004, 89) 'though (or since) he shoots in the dark he always . . . one of them'. The ellipses are in the place of a translation of ζυγαστροφεῖ, on which Cunningham (2002, 337) comments: 'the meaning of the verb is quite uncertain, and no proposed correction is any better'.

For a start, it should be noted that a translation 'in the dark' is not ideal since ἐκ σκότειος actually means 'from the dark', which is hardly insignificant for the correct understanding of the text. As a matter of fact, it seems to describe an ambush: somebody

is in hiding somewhere, and shoots arrows under cover of darkness, thus wreaking havoc with others who are unable to see him (see below).

From a dialect viewpoint the most remarkable feature of this fragment is ὄν = αὐτῶν in ἔνα τιὸν ὄν ‘some one of them’. The genitive plural ὄν has nothing to do with the familiar genitive plural of the relative pronoun: it was built on the old accusative (F)ηε, originally reflexive and indifferent to number, later anaphoric and mainly singular ‘him’, ‘her’, the plural meaning being attested in Greek only in isolated cases (Brugman (1876) 11–23; Faulkner (2008) 290 ad *Hom. Hymn. Ven.* 267); it was built according to the proportion Doric ὑμέ: ὑμέων = (F)ῆ: (F)ῆων, and at a later stage ῆων was contracted to ὄν (Schwyzer (1939) 603). The lack of elision between τιὸν and ὄν can be explained from the hiatus left by the dropping of the old initial [w] of the pronoun.⁷ Wilamowitz’s idea (see Kassel and Austin’s apparatus) that Apollonius had misinterpreted Sophron’s Doric ὄν = Attic οὖν is unacceptable to any scholar familiar with Apollonius’ approach to the Greek dialects, so Kassel and Austin were right in leaving the text as it is; moreover, to my mind ‘of them’ is crucial to the meaning of the sentence.

The unusual verbal form ζυγαστροφεῖ has always been the main stumbling block to the understanding of this fragment. A compound verb with ζυγόν as first member is obvious, but there is no ancient explanation of its meaning, and its form, too, has raised numerous doubts. Yet is significant that neither Kaibel (1899) nor Kassel and Austin (2001) regarded ζυγαστροφεῖ as corrupt. In practice, they surmised that the form was right without being able to prove it.

Clearly, one would expect a verbal compound with a short [o] as compositional vowel in the first member, and in fact two verbs of this type are attested, ζυγοφορέω and ζυγομαχέω. So the transmitted ζυγαστροφέω has always been regarded as something of a scandal. Bechtel (1923) 282 made the first step forward, suggesting that the verb had a short [a] and was built on the neuter plural ζυγά, much like epic ἀταλάφρονέω. Yet to my mind things stand differently, since a long ā [a:], Att.–Ion. η [ɛ:], is often found as a *Bindevokal* in nominal and verbal compounds and alternates with [o]: e.g. θανατηφόρος ‘death-bringing’ (Aesch. *Cho.* 369) along with θανατοφόρος (Aesch. *Ag.* 1176), διδυμοτόκος and διδυμοτοκέω (Aristot. *Hist. an.* 573b30, 32), διδυμᾶτόκος (Theoc. *Id.* 1.25 etc.) διδυμητόκος (Callim. *Apoll.* 54) and διδυμητοκεῖν (Hecat. *FGHt* 1 F 90⁸). We know from Apollonius Dyscolus that ὀρκιστόμος ‘one who solemnly swears at a sacrifice’ appeared as ὀρκιστόμος in Ionic,⁹ and Timocreon of Rhodes provides us with the Doric version of the verb, ὀρκιστομεῖ (PMG 729.2). In their dislike for ζυγαστροφέω scholars have merrily forgotten Aeschylus’ ζυγηφόρος, fr. 465.1 Radt ὃς εἶχε πᾶλους τέσσαρας ζυγηφόρους ‘four fillies bearing the yoke’, whose Doric version would obviously have been *ζυγαφόρους. LSJ s.v. ζυγηφόρος says that it is a poetical form of ζυγοφόρος, but the

7 More or less as in Homer τὰ ἄ τεύχεα (Il. 18.451), τὰ ἄ ἔργα (double hiatus, *Od.* 9.250, 310, 343; ἄ < *swa). As is well known, initial [w] was most resistant in pronouns because of their reduced phonic body.

8 Probably not Hecataeus’ *ipsissima verba*, but in any case a prose description of Adria’s χάρα (Jacoby).

9 *Adv.* 189.9–10. Schneider Ἴωνες δὲ καὶ τοὺς ὀρκιστόμους ὀρκιστόμους φασί, καὶ τοὺς αἰμοπότας αἰμηπότας.

use of *-ᾱ/-η-* as *Bindevokal* is far from being confined to poetry or poeticised prose: see Schwyzer (1939) 438–9 (note e.g. *ἄχθηφόρος*, *ἄχθηφορέω* in late and Byzantine prose.)¹⁰ For metrical reasons it may have been useful to poets, and in some cases may have been perceived as a poetic device – but in fact it must have been a ‘natural’ feature of the language, probably a rhythmically conditioned one. The system probably originated with nominal compounds that in their turn gave rise to denominal verbs (*διδυμητόκος* → *διδυμητοκέω*, (Ionic) *ὀρκητόμος* → (Doric) *ὀρκιατόμέω*, *ἄχθηφόρος* → *ἄχθηφορέω* etc.)

Thus *ζυγᾶστροφέω* is formally unassailable, and now we can move to a short discussion of its meaning. A *ζυγόν* can be a yoke of a carriage, a beam balance for weighing things, a rank of soldiers in an army, and its polysemy is matched by that of *-στροφός* and of *-στροφέω*, which carry many of well-known literal and metaphorical (mainly pejorative) meanings of *στρέφω*: ‘to turn something about’ (see *ἔδρο-στροφός* ‘one who twists an adversary back in wrestling’, Theoc. Id. 24.111), ‘to cause pain’, ‘to distort’, not differently from the numerous meanings of English ‘twist’; note Aristophanic *γλωττοστροφέω* in a pejorative sense, ‘to twist the tongue’ (*ἄπο γὰρ ὀλοῦμαι μὴ μαθῶν γλωττοστροφεῖν*, Nub. 792) and *βουστρόφον* ... *μύωπα* ‘ox-tormenting gadfly’ (Antiphilus of Byzantium Anth. Pal. 6.95); in first position in the compound *στρεψοδικῆσαι* ‘to twist the right’ (Aristoph. Nub. 434).

Since we have a *τοξότης* shooting from the dark, the likeliest situation, either real or metaphorical, must be that of an ambush in which soldiers are killed without realising where death comes from (see Heliodorus and Psalm 10 below). If we interpret *ζυγόν* as a rank of soldiers, and *στροφέω* with one of its frequent pejorative meanings, *ζυγαστροφέω* can be translated ‘to disrupt a rank of soldiers’.

Note that in our fragment *τινα ὄν* (‘some one of them’) seems to depend not only on *τοξεύων* but also on *ζυγαστροφεῖ*. Compound verbs of this type construed with the accusative are old acquaintances, e.g. *τὸν πάππον γηροτροφεῖν* (Isaeus, Cleon. 39), *ἠνιοστροφεῖν τὸ ἄρμα* (Eur. Phoen. 172 *ὃς ἄρμα λευκὸν ἠνιοστροφεῖ βεβῶς*), *σιτομετρήσαι... τὴν δύναμιν* (Polyb. 15.18: ‘supply a force with provisions’, LSJ s.v.); Aeschylus has an imaginative *οἰακοστροφεῖν τὸν θυμόν* (Pers. 769 *φρένες γὰρ αὐτοῦ θυμὸν οἰακοστροφούν*), and a more audacious combination is attested in Aristophanes *Ran.* 1369 *ἀνδρῶν ποιητῶν τυροπωλῆσαι τέχνην* ‘to sell poetic art by weight like cheese’.

In practice the compound verb includes *two* concepts whose meaning impacts on a third one contained in a noun in the accusative, thus creating a complex combination that a modern language is obliged to render either with a long periphrasis or, more often, in a drastically simplified way (e.g. *ἠνιοστροφεῖν* is translated as ‘to drive’ in LSJ s.v.; *γηροτροφεῖν τὸν πάππον* can be translated ‘to support the grandfather’, but it more precisely means ‘to support the grandfather in his old age’). The military meaning of *ζυγαστροφεῖν τινα* is likely to have been ‘to push somebody out of the ranks’, and more

¹⁰ Only *ἄχθηφόρος* in classical prose, Hdt. 7.187 etc.

generally ‘to disable someone’, more vividly translatable into French and Italian with ‘mettre hors de combat’, ‘mettere fuori combattimento’.

To conclude: ζυγᾶστροφεῖ had a long [a:] as *Bindevokal*, which remained untouched in a Doric environment, and is formally unobjectionable. The text, ὁ δ' ἐκ τῶ σκότειος τοξεύων αἰὲν ἕνα τινὰ ὦν ζυγᾶστροφεῖ, should remain as it is in Kassel and Austin (2001), who wisely did not accept any of the corrections proposed in the past for ζυγᾶστροφεῖ. However, both Horden's and Cunningham's translations ought to be seriously modified: not only because a plausible meaning of the verb can easily be arrived at, but also because ἐκ τῶ σκότειος means ‘from the dark’ and not ‘in the dark’, and αἰὲν here does not mean ‘always’ but ‘each time, as e.g. in Herodotus ὁ αἰεὶ βασιλεύων ‘the king for the time being’. So the fragment means:

and he, shooting arrows from the dark, each time pushes somebody of them out of the ranks.

Note that with ζυγᾶστροφεῖ the final part of the fragment takes on a distinctly iambic rhythm, and one should not exclude the possibility, as Olga Tribulato pointed out to me, that the form with a compositional *-ā-* was chosen precisely for achieving a ‘poetic’ effect. Here, however, we are approaching the uncertain ground of Sophron's rhythmical prose (Horden (2004) 15–16), and given the fragmentary state of Sophron's text definitive judgements will always be difficult to arrive at.

As I said, the fragment seems to describe someone hiding in the dark who shoots at people who cannot see him, something similar to what we read in Heliodorus' *Aethiopia* (5.32.4): the brave Charikleia, herself unseen (αὐτὴ οὐχ ὁραμένη), shoots from the ship at the pirates on the mainland, who in total disarray are doomed to die one after another.¹¹

As a matter of fact, an unexpected parallel to this fragment is found in the Bible, and one that is significant for two reasons – it describes a shooting in/from the dark which is at the same time deliberate and metaphorical (Ps 10.2 = Heb 11.2; Septuagint version, no variants):

ἰδοὺ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἐνέτειναν τόξον, ἠτοίμασαν βέλη εἰς φαρέτραν τοῦ κατατοξεύσαι ἐν σκοτομήνῃ (‘on a moonless night’) τοὺς εὐθεῖς τῆ καρδίᾳ.

Deliberate: the shooting takes place ἐν σκοτομήνῃ but the archers are not impeded by darkness and know well the group of people they are shooting at. Noticeably, the original Hebrew לָחַץ-לַחֹץ is usually correctly rendered ‘in the dark’ in many English translations,¹²

11 Heliod. *Aeth.* 5.32 ἡ δὲ ὡς συνεπρωγάτα τὸν πόλεμον εἶδεν ἀπὸ τῆς νεῶς ἐτόξευεν εὐσκοπὰ τε καὶ μόνου τοῦ Θεαγένου φειδόμενα. καὶ ἔβαλλεν οὐ καθ' ἐν τῆς μάχης μέρος, ἀλλ' ὄντινα πρῶτον ἴδοι τοῦτον ἀνήλισκεν, αὐτὴ μὲν οὐχ ὁραμένη ἀλλὰ ῥαδίως πρὸς τὴν πυρκαϊᾶν τοὺς ἐναντίους καταπτεύουσα ... ἕως τῶν ἄλλων πεσόντων μόνος ὁ Θεαγένης ὑπελείφθη.

12 E.g. ‘the wicked bend the bow, they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart’ in the NRSV.

yet the more logical one, ‘from the dark’ (or ‘from the shadows’), is often found¹³ and in fact had already been chosen in late antiquity by Apollinaris of Laodicea for his poetic metaphor of this Psalm: ὀφρηνῆθεν ‘from the dark’¹⁴ – interestingly, exactly the meaning required for Sophron’s ἐκ τῷ σκότειος.

Metaphorical: the wicked ‘shoot’ at the upright in heart. The metaphorical use of τοξεύειν is hardly a surprise (there is an old and famous instance in Soph. Ant. 1033–4 πάντες ὥστε τοξόται σκοποῦ | τοξεύετ’ ἀνδρὸς τοῦδε), but the two passages quoted by Kassel and Austin (2001) (from Aelius Aristides’ *Contra Platonem pro rhetorica* and *Aegyptius*) are not real parallels, because both describe ineffectual people ‘shooting’ haphazardly in the dark to no avail,¹⁵ while Sophron’s text implies (like Heliodorus and Psalm 10) the deliberate choice of darkness to escape from being detected, as well as the targeting of a specific group of people, ἓνα τινὰ ὧν ‘one of them’. Already Kaibel had realised that the passage of the *Aegyptius* had a different meaning from the one required by Sophron’s text,¹⁶ and both passages are no real parallels to our fragment.

In conclusion, Sophron’s text probably described an actual ambush, but a metaphor for an organised group of persons constantly the butt of venomous attacks carried by an undetectable individual cannot be excluded.

A subtle παροιμία

Sophron’s text was full of images, traditional sayings, proverbs proper and idioms; in Greek παροιμία was often used as an overarching term for all these concepts. [Demetr.] *De elocutione* §156 says that almost all the Greek παροιμιαί could be found in Sophron’s mimes, σχεδόν τε πάσας ἐκ τῶν δραμάτων αὐτοῦ τὰς παροιμίας ἐκλέξει ἐστίν (note the word δράμα used for the mimes); in some cases it is far from clear whether Sophron just made use of current popular sayings or invented them. In 1887 Leopold Cohn published a number of Greek proverbs from a composite manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, *Supplément grec* 676.¹⁷ Some of them were completely new, others were old acquaintances; interestingly, in some cases the text of the Paris manuscript provides us with the names of the authors of previously well-known but authorless proverbs. Fortunately, Sophron’s name surfaced in three cases, now fr. 50, 129, 152 K–A. All of

13 E.g. ‘to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart’ in the Holman Christian Standard Bible, online at: www.bible.com/bible/72/PSA.11.HCSB.

14 Apollin. Laodic. *Metaphr.* Psalm 2.10.4–5 τόξα κακοῖ τανύουσι, βέλεμνα δ’ ἔθεντο φαρῆτρι, | ἰθύνουσι ὀφρηνῆθεν ὀστεῦσαι μεμαῶτες.

15 Aelius Aristides, *Contra Platonem pro rhetorica* 2.464 Lenz–Behr εἰ δὲ τινες καὶ ἄλλοι παραβοῶντες ῥητορικὴν ψέγουσι, μᾶλλον δὲ τονθορῶντες ἐκ τοῦ ψόφου τοξεύοντες κατὰ Ἀλκαῖον (fr. 437 V.), ὧν οὐδὲ τὰ ὀνόματα ἀγαγεῖν ῥάδιον εἰς λόγον ... τοσοῦτον μοι πρὸς τούτους ἄποκεκριθῶ etc.; *Aegyptius*, Or. 36.100 Keil ἐμοὶ δὲ δοκοῦσιν ἅπαντες οὗτοι ... τοσοῦτον ἀπέχειν τοῦ τάληθῆ λέγειν ὥστε καὶ συνειδότες αὐτῶν οἱ πλείους ὅτι ψεύδονται φιλονεικεῖν πρὸς ἃ ὑπέθεντο, εἰθ’ ὥσπερ ἐν σκότῳ τοξεύοντες ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν διαμαρτάνειν.

16 Kaibel (1899) 169 on his fr. 90: ‘alio sensu ἐν σκότῳ τοξεύειν dixit Aristides in Aeg.’

17 The section of the MS containing the proverbs (fols. 41r–57v) goes back to the thirteenth/fourteenth century AD (Giuseppe Ucciardello, oral communication).

them have received less attention that they actually deserve, and in what follows a new interpretation of fr. 50 is presented – a text far more intriguing than is usually recognised.

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ΚΟΝΤΩΙ ΜΗΛΑΦΩΝ ΑΥΤὸ ΤΥΨΕΙΣ

Prov. cod. Par. suppl. 676 apud Cohn CPG Suppl. I p. 82 nr. 94 κοντ[ῶι μηλαφῶις]· κατὰ τῶν τὰ ἄθλια τελέως τεκμαιρομένων (cf. Phot. κ 305 = Sud. κ 652). ὡσπερεὶ λέγοι τις· κοντὸν κ[α]θ[εῖς] δι' α[ὐτοῦ] ψηλαφῶις. Σώφρων ἐν Προμυθίῳ· κοντῶι ---- τύψης. ἔοικε δὲ διαφ[έρειν] τὸ ψηλαφῶν τοῦ μηλαφῶν, ἦτοι ὅτι τὸ μὲν τὸ δι' ἑτέρου ἄπτεσθαι, τὸ δὲ ψηλαφῶν [] ἐστὶ ταῖς χερσὶ θιγεῖν

κοντ[ῶι μηλαφῶις] suppl. Cohn κ[α]θ[εῖς] δι' α[ὐτοῦ] suppl. Crusius CPG Suppl. V p. 56 διαφ[έρειν] suppl. Cohn τυψεῖς Wil. Kl. Schr. IV p. 51 (a. 1899): τύψης cod.

Hesych. μ 1184 = Phot. μ 386 μηλαφῆσαι· ψηλαφῆσαι, cf. Eust. in Od. p. 1394, 31 αὐτὸ ἐπάταξεν obscœne fr. adesp. 465

This fragment belonged to a mime entitled Προμύθιον (Hordern (2004) 172–3), probably meaning ‘preparatory speech’. Wilamowitz (1962, 161 = *Hermes* 37, 1902, 325) linked this title (rightly to my mind) to the name and activity of a προμυθίκτρια, the (Doric) Sicilian name of the woman who arranged marriages, a matchmaker (Attic προμνήστρια). In his opinion προμύθιον meant ‘Vorspruch’, the talk which serves to prepare the ground for a marriage arrangement; he added: ‘solch ein “Vorspruch” war gewiss ein gutes Sujet für einen weiblichen Mimos’. Kassel and Austin’s objection (2001, 215) that μηλαφῶν (this fragment) is a masculine participle is groundless, since a προμυθίκτρια must perforce at some point speak to the prospective husband of a girl.

This fragment has escaped Kaibel (1899) although it had been published for the first time many years before (Cohn (1887), reprinted in CPG Suppl. 1). It is based on a metaphor whose meaning must have been clear to a Syracusan reader (or audience), but still needed a detailed explanation. This we find in our text, a remarkably clear and helpful one and apparently much indebted to the commentary of Apollodorus of Athens. It is made up of five small sections, which should be laid out in an orderly way for the sake of clarity:

- (i) is the proverb, κοντ[ῶι μηλαφῶις]· meaning ‘you probe with a pole’ (supplemented by Cohn; μηλαφῶις may have been replaced by ψηλαφῶις at some point, see below);
- (ii) κατὰ τῶν τὰ ἄθλια τελέως τεκμαιρομένων describes those to whom the proverb has applicable: persons who make groundless conjectures about things that are far from clear;
- (iii) ὡσπερεὶ λέγοι τις· κοντὸν κ[α]θ[εῖς] δι' α[ὐτοῦ] ψηλαφῶις offers a paraphrase of this extremely condensed proverb, ‘as if somebody said: having dropped a pole you probe with it’;

- (iv) quotes Sophron ἐν Προμυθίῳ· κοντῷ μηλαφῶν αὐτὸ τυπεῖς, where τυπεῖς was conjectured by Wilamowitz in 1899¹⁸ in the place of τύψης of the manuscript. With this conjecture the fragment literally means: ‘you’ll strike it by probing it with a pole’. As a matter of fact, both Hordern’s and Cunningham’s translations are remarkably imprecise: Cunningham (2002) 325: ‘hitting with a pole, you’ll strike it’; Hordern (2004) 75: ‘prodding with the pole you’ll strike it.’ As we shall see in detail below, μηλαφῶν means neither ‘hit’ nor ‘prod’, but ‘touch with a probe’.
- (v) is a long lexicographical note: ἔοικε δὲ διαφ[έρειν] τὸ ψηλαφῶν τοῦ μηλαφῶν, ἦτοι ὅτι τὸ μὲν τὸ δι’ ἐτέρου ἄπτεσθαι, τὸ δὲ ψηλαφῶν [] ἐστι ταῖς χερσὶ θιγεῖν. Here we are told that the proper meaning of μηλαφῶν was to touch something with an object, while ψηλαφῶν meant to touch something with the hands. Emphasising the difference was by no means otiose, since, as we shall presently see, μηλαφῶν soon became obsolete and was replaced by the less precise, but more widespread, ψηλαφῶν.

Let us start with a problem in section (ii), κατὰ τῶν τὰ ἄδῃα τελέως τεκμαιρομένων. Especially in Hellenistic and later times τεκμαίρεσθαι is well attested with the meaning ‘to conjecture’, ‘to suppose’, without mention of the ground for the supposition,¹⁹ and does not pose any problem. But τελέως τεκμαίρεσθαι ‘to conjecture completely’ sounded unconvincing to me, so I checked the manuscript; there in the place of τελέως we read a word beginning with tau but ending in -χέως with *chi* (Fig. 1). The presence of a *chi* is extremely clear and was confirmed to me by Giuseppe Ucciardello.

The most obvious choice seems to be ταχέως; the proverb applied to those who made hasty conjectures on things that were far from clear. Note that κατὰ τῶν is translated ‘of those’ by Cunningham and Hordern, but might well mean ‘against those – a well-known meaning of κατὰ + genitive (e.g. Isocrates, Κατὰ τῶν σοφιστῶν etc.). As a matter of fact, the group of people to which the proverb applies is as a rule introduced by ἐπί, so the proverb may in fact have been used κατὰ, i.e. against, those who made hasty conjectures.

Now let us move to Sophron’s own words, κοντῷ μηλαφῶν αὐτὸ τυπεῖς. What do they mean? What are we to do with such translations as ‘hitting with a pole, you’ll strike it’? Sophron’s fragment gave rise to a proverb applicable to people who made hasty conjectures about unknown things. What can this mental activity have in common with dropping a pole and hitting something somewhere?²⁰

18 A Lese Frucht in *Hermes* 34 (1899) 209 = Wilamowitz (1962) 51.

19 E.g. Plut. *Comp. Pericles et Fabii Maximi* 2.3 δεῖ... τεκμαίρεσθαι περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος ὀρθῶς τὸν ἀγαθὸν στρατηγὸν ‘a good general must make suppositions about the future in a correct way’; App. B *Civ.* 2.117 Ἀντώνιος τε τὴν οἰκίαν ὠχύρου, τεκμαιρόμενος συνεπιβουλεύεσθαι τῷ Καίσαρι ‘Antony fortified his house, surmising that the conspiracy was against him as well as Caesar’, etc.

20 I quote Hordern’s and Cunningham’s translations in full: (1) Hordern (2004) 75: ‘Prodding with the pole you’ll strike it. (Proverb collection) [you prod with a p]ole: of those who arrive at a final conclusion on the basis of unknown facts. Just as one might say: “pushing the pole right through it you’re feeling about”. Sophron in Promythion: “prodding... strike it”. Apparently ψηλαφῶ is different from μηλαφῶ: the first means to reach

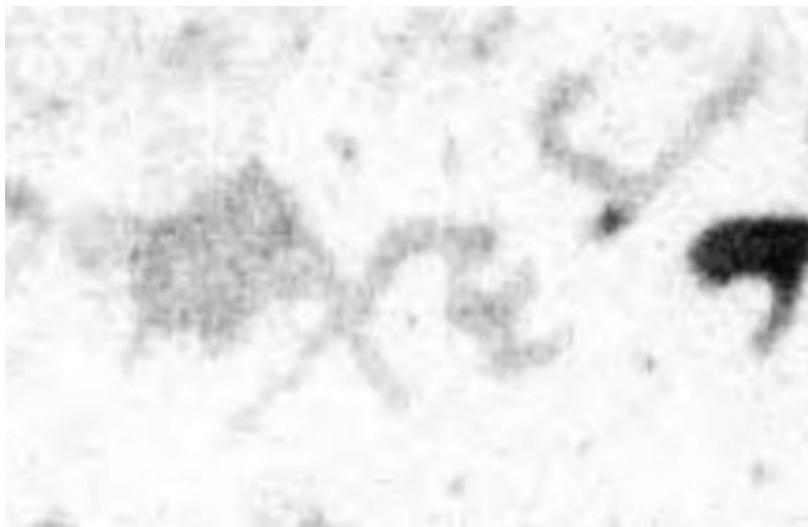


Figure 1. Paris. Gr. Suppl. 676 fol. 52r

Hordern (2004) 172 says that in this fragment ‘a sexual interpretation is perhaps not out of the question but is hardly required, and is not the sense our source implies’. This is certainly right, but no explanation is offered for the sense our source implies.

To my mind this is one of the most interesting, and most ill-fated, of Sophron’s fragments. If we want to discover what Sophron really meant we would do well to examine in detail the meaning of the two central lexical items, *κοντός* and *μηλαφάω*.

(a) *κοντός* is a pole, useful for a number of different purposes. In a city like Syracuse, with two ports and a large fleet, the mention of *κοντοί* would immediately have called to mind the long poles, well known to every sailor, with which every ship was equipped, especially useful for pushing away enemy ships or exploring the seabed²¹ (*κοντοί* are attested dozens of times in Attic inscriptions registering naval equipment, e.g. IG II².1628 [κ]οντούς ἐν νεωρίοις παρελάβομεν). A *κοντωτόν* was a ship propelled by a punt-pole, a punt. The Greek for dropping a pole into something was *κοντὸν καθεῖναι*, attested in Herodotus (4.195 ἐς αὐτήν [sc. λίμνην] κοντὸν κατειῖσι), precisely the same verb we

through another thing, but *μηλαφάω* [] means to touch with the hands’; (2) Cunningham (2002) 325: ‘Hitting with a pole, you’ll strike it. Proverb collection: “you hit with a pole, of those who bear witness completely to what is unclear, as if one were to say, having dropped a pole you hit by means of it. Sophron in the Promythion ...”

21 Thuc. 2 84 καὶ ναῦς τε νηὶ προσέπιπτε καὶ τοῖς κοντοῖς διεωθοῦντο ‘ship dashed against ship, and they kept pushing one another away with long poles’; Arr. *Indica* 41 οἱ ... κοντοὶ κατὰ τοῦ πηλοῦ δύνοντες ‘as the punt-poles sank into the mud’ (tr. P. A. Brunt); Poll. *Onom.* 1.121 κοντοῖς ἀπεωθοῦντο καὶ διήγον ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων τὰ σκάφη ‘they repelled the ships and pushed them away from each other by means of poles’.

encounter in section (iii), the explanation of our fragment: κοντὸν καθεὶς δι' αὐτοῦ ψηλαφᾶς.

(b) The second lexical item is *μηλαφᾶν*. This is an extremely rare medical term, attested only in lexicographers and in this fragment, and it is crucial to the understanding of the fragment. The meaning is clear: 'to probe' (LSJ 1940: s. v.), namely to examine or treat parts of the human body by means of a probe, *μήλη* in Greek;²² a much more frequent verb was *μηλοῦν*, hence *μηλωτῖς*, used alongside *μήλη* in imperial times (Erotianus s.v. *μήλην· οὕτω* [sc. Hippocrates] *καλεῖ τὴν μηλωτίδα*).

In order to reach a full understanding of this text it is necessary to dwell a bit on specialised ancient terminology. The use of *μηλαί/μηλωτίδες* was ubiquitous in the classical world – many of them have come down to us and are kept in archaeological museums: they were inserted – the typical verb being *καθεῖναι* 'to let down' (Hsch. μ 1207 *μηλώσαι· τὸ τὴν μήλην καθεῖναι ποῦ*) – in diseased parts of the human body with the aim of exploring them or smearing them with some medicament (*Suda* μ 940 *μήλη, ἐργαλεῖον, δι' οὗ χρίεται τι καὶ ὑπαλείφεται*); not surprisingly, an old and frequent variant of *μήλη* or *μηλωτῖς* was *ὑπάλειπτρον*, literally 'anointer' (again Erotianus s.v. *μήλην· . . . ἦν γὰρ ἡμεῖς μήλην καλοῦμεν, αὐτὸς [Hippocrates] ὑπάλειπτρον καλεῖ*); the verb refers to eye diseases in the Aristophanic metaphor (Ach. 1029) *ὑπάλειψον εἰρήνην με τῷφθαλμῷ ταχύ*.

At some point *μηλαφᾶω* was replaced by the more common *ψηλαφᾶω*, which properly meant 'palpate with the hands', and *μηλόω* was a frequent synonym, see e.g. *Etymologicum Gudianum* p. 391 *μήλη ἰατρικὴ, δι' ἧς ψηλαφᾶται τὰ πονούμενα· μηλοῦν γὰρ τὸ ψηλαφᾶν λέγεται*. This is why in section (iii) *ψηλαφᾶω* is used to render Sophron's *μηλαφᾶω*; and I suspect that, at least from a certain point onwards, the proverb circulated in fact as *κοντῷ ψηλαφᾶς*, not *κοντῷ μηλαφᾶς* as supplemented by Cohn.

The use of a probe naturally required remarkable competence and great accuracy on the part of the doctors;²³ operating with a *μήλη* was such a delicate affair that *μηλόω* came to be used in the sense 'to examine carefully', not far from the meaning of the English verb 'to probe'. This meaning is not attested in Greek literature proper but is found in one of Cicero's letters to Atticus (12.51.2) *id autem utrum illi sentiant ane simulent tu intelleges . . . τοῦτο δὲ μηλώση* ('this is a question you will probe').

At this point we can already get a significant glimpse of the figurative language of the fragment and its meaning. The words *κοντῷ μηλαφᾶν* describe somebody who is speaking, or behaving, like a doctor who explores, or treats, a part of the human body by using not a probe, but a ship's pole;²⁴ in other words, outside the metaphor, one who approaches an extremely delicate problem in a very crude way.

22 A compounded verb *ὑπομηλαφᾶω* is also attested in lexicographers.

23 Hippoc. Nat. mul. 37 (use of *μήλη* to dilate an uterus) *ὁκόταν ὀδε ἐξη, λούειν χρὴ αὐτὴν [sc. τὴν μήτηρ] πολλῶ καὶ θερμῶ, καὶ περιτῆν· ὅταν δὲ νεόλουτος ἢ νεοπυρήτος ἢ, τὴν μήλην καθεὶς ἀναστομοῦ*.

24 As E. Dettori pointed out to me, *κοντῷ μηλαφᾶν* arises from a combination of three concepts (*μήλη*, *ἄπτω*, *κοντός*) that reminds one of the *ἄρμα ἠνιοστροφεῖν* type (*ἄρμα*, *ἠνία*, *στρέφω*) discussed above, with the difference that *κοντῷ* expresses the means by which the action is performed, not its object.

But this is not the whole story. Sophron's words do not end with *μηλαφῶν*. In Kassel and Austin's edition they are followed by *αὐτὸ τυψεῖς*, the Doric future indicative of *τύπτειν*, 'to strike' ('you'll strike it', both Hordern (2004) 75 and Cunningham (2002) 325). However, as I said, *τυψεῖς* is a conjecture of Wilamowitz's; the Paris manuscript has *τύψης*. Although Wilamowitz presented his conjecture in a very concise way ('αὐτὸ τυψεῖς: τύψης cod.' and nothing more), the reasons for the change are fairly clear: a subjunctive seems completely out of place in the fragment, especially since the explanation in section (iii) has *δι' αὐτοῦ ψηλαφῶς*, an indicative present.

Kassel and Austin, who accept *τυπεῖς*, cannot help but grab the opportunity for a sexual interpretation by quoting a comic fragment, *fr. adesp.* 465 = [Lucian] *Amores* 53 *εἶτ' ἄπο μηρῶν προοιμισσάμενος κατὰ τὸν κωμικὸν αὐτὸ ἐπάταξεν*. This is unfortunately typical for editors and commentators of what is left of Sophron's mimes: sexual innuendo as a lifebelt when the fragments are difficult to understand. There is no sexual innuendo here. Note that *τυψεῖς* is far from ideal since it is a future: we would expect it to be explained with a future *ψηλαφήσεις*, not *ψηλαφῶς*.

Fortunately, the real solution is close at hand because the text is sound as it stands. The transmitted *τύψης* is right, except that it should be split into two, namely *τὸ ψῆς*, *τὸ* being the second person singular pronoun in Doric, and *ψῆς* the second person indicative of *ψῆω* (frequently also *ψάω*)²⁵ 'you rub', 'you wipe'. This explains why the *interpretamentum* is in the present, *ψηλαφῶς*, since *ψῆς* is in the present tense.

ψηῖν/ψῶν (a very close relative of *ψήχειν* 'to stroke' and *ψαύειν* 'to touch')²⁶ is the verb to which we owe the word 'palimpsest'. It is very uncommon in non-compounded form (Hipponax 19.2 West *ἔψησε . . . ἄσκαρίζοντα*; Soph. *Trach.* 678 (*πόκος*) *ψη* 'dissolves', an extremely rare intransitive usage, *Ar. Rhod.* 3.831 *αὐσταλέας δ' ἔψησε*²⁷ *παρηίδας*), but compounds are frequently encountered (e. g. *ἀποψάω*, *περιψάω*, *ἀναψάω*, *διαψάω*): as a rule they describe actions implying caressing, touching or wiping in a gentle way – precisely the contrary of the *τύπτειν* conjectured by Wilamowitz; e.g. *Ar. Eq.* 909 *ιδού, δέχου κέρκον λαγῶ τῷφθαλμίδιῳ περιψῆν*, 'a hare's tail to wipe away the watery fluid' in Demos' eyes; *Plut. Thest.* 22 *καὶ μέλι ἐν κοτύλῃ καὶ ἔλαιον ἀναψήσασθαι* ('Eiresione) brings us honey in pots and oil to rub off from the body'.²⁸

In these last cases and other ones a liquid of one or the other type is involved, see also *schol. ad Soph. Trach.* 678 (the tuft of sheep's wool) *ψη· κατατίκεται . . . καὶ ῥεῖ καὶ διαλύεται*;²⁹ and probably Sophron's image was based on that of a doctor

25 *ψῆς* is the correct Doric second person indicative present of both *ψῆω* and *ψάω*; if from *ψάω*, *ψῆς* shows the typical second person Doric contraction, like *νικῆς* < *νικάω*.

26 Note Oribasius, *Collectiones medicae* 10. 23 *τῷ δὲ πυρῆνι τῆς μήλης οὐ ψαυστέον τοῦ ὀφθαλμοῦ*.

27 All MSS; v.l. *ἔψηχε* in *Etymologicum genuinum* α 1412, accepted in the text by H. Fraenkel.

28 Add *Ctesias FGtH* 688 F 45 (47) *ῥέουσι δὲ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐλαίου σταγόνες, ἃς ἐρίφ ἀναψῶντες ἄπο τοῦ δένδρου ἀποπιέζουσιν* (oil from a special Indian tree wiped up with a tuft of wool); *Alciphron, Epistulae* 7.8 *τὸν ἰδρῶτα ἀποψῶμενος*; *Dioscorides Pedanus Euphorista* 1.7 *διαψωμένον τῶν μυκτῆρων*.

29 Hence an English translation 'melt away' is preferable to the one found in LJS s.v. *ψάω* II 'crumble away, vanish, disappear'.

spreading/applying a salve by means of a probe (μῆλη/ὑπόλειπτρον) inserted in a diseased part of the body; remember that καθεῖναι was the verb used for both probes and poles (see above).

As a consequence, the fragment should be restored as:

κοντῶ μῆλαφῶν αὐτό τὸ ψῆς

you wipe/touch it (αὐτό) by using a pole as a probe.

In short, one of the characters in Sophron's mime said to somebody else: 'when you touch upon that point (αὐτό), you resemble a doctor who would explore a sensitive part of the body with a pole instead of a probe'; at a non-metaphorical level, 'you approach a delicate and complicated problem in a superficial manner'. We obviously have no idea about the specific αὐτό that was the object of the conversation, but the explanation κατὰ τῶν τὰ ἄδηλα ταχέως τεκμαιρομένων provides us at least with a general frame: Sophron's image must have been used *against* (the probable meaning of κατὰ + genitive) somebody who provided rough and ready explanations of problems that needed time and attention to be solved properly. It would be amusing, and significant, if the words were pronounced by Wilamowitz's προμουθικτρια to a hardly intellectually brilliant prospective husband of a girl . . . But obviously we shall never know.

Once understood correctly, this fragment in a way appears to have a wider significance than its text. It gives us a glimpse of something rarely encountered in Sophron's fragments, a criticism of widespread mental habits, in this case of hasty conclusions blithely arrived at by someone on the subject of things obscure to everybody. It is possible that in the mimes similar types of criticism of social or individual behaviour were more frequent than we think, and this helps us understand at least one of the reasons why Plato was so interested in Sophron's work. I feel certain that if we had at least *one* complete comedy of Epicharmus, and *one* complete mime of Sophron, a good many pages in our histories of Greek literature would need to be rewritten completely.

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