

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

THEOGNIS 815–18 AND THE BANQUET OF ATTAGINUS

- 815 βοῦς μοι ἐπὶ γλώσσηι κρατερῶι ποδὶ λάξ ἐπιβαίνων
 816 ἴσχει κωτίλλειν καίπερ ἐπιστάμενον
 817 Κύρν'· ἔμπης δ' ὅτι μοῖρα παθεῖν οὐκ ἔσθ' ὑπαλύξαι.
 818 [ὅττι δὲ μοῖρα παθεῖν, οὔτι δέδοικα παθεῖν.]
 818 excerptoris Stoissantis supplementum puto

The text quoted here is that of M. L. West, with his apparatus criticus for 818.¹ These lines present three difficulties. One is the awkwardness of 818, bracketed by West. The second is the connection between the two couplets: unlike West, most editors and commentators print 815–16 and 817–18 as two separate couplets.² The third difficulty is the situation presupposed by 815–16: van Groningen comments: “On voudrait savoir pourquoi l’auteur est dans l’impossibilité de parler et quelles sont les choses qu’il doit taire.”³ Comparison of 815–16 with a passage in Herodotus provides answers to these questions and sheds some light on the second difficulty, too.⁴

The passage is the one in which Herodotus describes the banquet of Attaginus in Thebes (9. 16), which concludes the brief section on Mardonius’ march from Athens to Thebes.⁵ Attaginus invited Mardonius, fifty of the most illustrious Persians, and a like number of Thebans to a banquet. During the symposium after the meal, a Persian predicted his countrymen’s defeat in the battle that was to take place at Plataea. Asked why he did not tell Mardonius and the other Persian worthies of his premonition, he replied:

1. *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1972), p. 212.

2. T. Hudson-Williams, ed., *The “Elegies” of Theognis* (London, 1910), p. 143; A. Garzya, ed., *Teognide: “Elegie”* (Florence, 1958), p. 102; F. Rodríguez Adrados, ed., *Liricos griegos: Elegiacos y yambografos arcaicos*, vol. 2 (Barcelona, 1959), p. 221; B. A. van Groningen, ed., *Theognis: Le premier livre*, *Verhandelingen der koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen*, afd. Letterkunde, n.s. 72. 1 (Amsterdam, 1966), pp. 312–13; D. Young, ed., *Theognis*² (Leipzig, 1971), p. 50; J. Carrière, ed., *Theognis: Poèmes élégiaques*² (Paris, 1975), p. 103.

3. *Theognis*, p. 312.

4. Mention of Herodotus and Theognis in the same context suggests two problems with which the present note is *not* concerned. (1) Historical references in Theognis to events for which Herodotus is our main source: see E. L. Highbarger, “Theognis and the Persian Wars,” *TAPA* 68 (1937): 88–111; the notes, especially on 773–82, of the commentators cited above in n. 2; and M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus*, *Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte* 14 (Berlin and New York, 1974), pp. 65–67. (2) Influence of Theognis on Herodotus: 815–18 are unlikely to have influenced Herodotus 9. 16; the relation between the two passages is the same as that between 43–52 and Herodotus 3. 82. 3, which share a pattern of thought and a few items of diction traditionally used in its expression.

5. H. R. Immerwahr, *Form and Thought in Herodotus*, APA Monographs 23 (Chapel Hill, 1966), pp. 142–43, 228 (n. 109).

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Ξεῖνε, ὃ τι δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀμήχανον ἀποτρέψαι ἀνθρώπων· οὐδὲ γὰρ πιστὰ λέγουσι ἐθέλει πείθεσθαι οὐδεῖς. ταῦτα δὲ Περσέων συχνοὶ ἐπιστάμενοι ἐπόμεθα ἀναγκαίῃ ἐνδεδεμένοι. ἐχθίστη δὲ ὁδύνη [ἔστι] τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις αὕτη, πολλὰ φρονέοντα μηδενὸς κρατέειν.

A general similarity between the situation of the Persian and that of Theognis is immediately obvious: the impossibility of speaking. The reason for this predicament, furthermore, is the same for both: subjection to another's κράτος. As for Theognis, comparison of the proverb in 815 with the two closest variants (Aesch. *Ag.* 36; Strattis frag. 67 K.) reveals the peculiarity of the Theognidean form: the omission of the epithet μέγας for βοῦς and the addition of the phrase κρατερῶ ποδι λάξ, in which the adjective shows that the silence of Theognis is involuntary, unlike that of the watchman in the *Agamemnon*.⁶ In Herodotus, the Persian's silence is also involuntary and is also owing to powerlessness (μηδενὸς κρατέειν). In both passages, the sense of frustration is increased by the irony that those who know cannot speak (καίπερ ἐπιστάμενον ~ ἐπιστάμενοι), while those who prevent them from speaking do not know.⁷

Against the background of this comparison with Herodotus 9. 16, the main elements of the situation in 815–16 emerge as (a) the speaker's frustrated knowledge, (b) involuntary silence, and (c) powerlessness. There are two other poems in the Theognidea in which some or all of these elements appear (419–20, 667–82): (a) 816 καίπερ ἐπιστάμενον ~ 419 πολλὰ με καὶ συνιέντα παρέρχεται ~ 669 γινώσκοντα παρέρχεται; (b) 815 βοῦς κτλ. ~ 419–20 ὑπ' ἀνάγκης / σιγῶ ~ 669–70 εἰμὶ δ' ἄφωτος / χρημοσύνη; (c) 815–16 (cf. discussion above) ~ 420 γινώσκων ἡμετέρην δύναμιν. Although 667–82 do not contain any reference to powerlessness, poverty is specified as the cause of Theognis' silence. Furthermore, his tacit knowledge is shown, through the metaphor of the ship-of-state, to concern the grim future of his city.

The comparison with Herodotus 9. 16 thus brings out elements in 815–16 that are consistent with a predicament of the poet expressed elsewhere in the Theognidea. Van Groningen's questions concerning this couplet can now be answered. Theognis is silent because of his powerlessness, the result of his poverty; and the matters about which he is silent are political.

Though κωτίλλειν (816) sometimes refers to deception,⁸ it can also refer to unrestrained talk of various kinds at a symposium.⁹ Comparison with 667–82, where the symposium is the venue in which Theognis is unable to proclaim his

6. For discussion of the proverb, see E. Fraenkel, ed., *Aeschylus: "Agamemnon,"* vol. 2 (Oxford, 1978), pp. 23–24.

7. The phrase καίπερ ἐπιστάμενον in Theognis may have been suggested by, but is a new adaptation of, *Il.* 19. 80, where Agamemnon appeals to the assembled Danaans not to interrupt him, χαλεπὸν γάρ, ἐπισταμένῳ περ ἔόντι. In Theognis (cf. 510, 676), as in Homer, ἐπιστάμενος can be an adjective. J. van Leeuwen, ed., *"Ilias," cum prolegomenis, notis criticis, commentariis exegeticis*, part 2 (Leiden, 1913), p. 688, comments on 19. 80: "At participii indole exuta ἐπιστάμενος verum adiectivum est factum . . . et suum sibi adverbium habet ἐπισταμένως"; for the adverb, see Theog. 772, and cf. LSJ⁹, s.v. ἐπισταμαι IV. Καίπερ ἐπιστάμενον at Theog. 816 governs neither κωτίλλειν nor some object understood; in Hdt. 9. 16, however, ἐπιστάμενος is participial and has an object.

8. Theog. 363, 852; Hes. *Op.* 374; cf. Solon 34. 3 W.: some members of the demos thought that Solon's mild words (κωτίλλοντα λειώς) concealed a harsher purpose.

9. Theog. 488; cf. 295 and context; Phocylides frag. 14 D.¹.

knowledge of the city's future,¹⁰ suggests that in 815–16, too, the setting is the symposium. (This is another respect in which Theognis' situation resembles that of the Persian in Herodotus 9. 16.) In Theognis' Megara, the fundamental political institution is the symposium: here the traditional values of the ἀγαθοί are handed down to the next generation;¹¹ here φιλία, the basic political relationship, is expressed and tested.¹² If Theognis cannot express himself freely (κωτίλλειν) at the symposium, he must either use political riddles (681) or silently await his fate, which will presumably also be the fate of the other ἀγαθοί—to wit, the collapse of their regime.

The Herodotean passage also suggests that 815–16 and 817–18 form a single poem. The Persian is resigned and fatalistic. He begins the description of his predicament by saying that “it is impossible for a mortal to avert that which is fated by the god to happen.” As R. W. Macan remarked, “The Persian not only speaks good Greek but has drunk deeply—at the wells of Greek wisdom.”¹³ Theognis ends the description of his predicament (815–16) with a similar proverb: “All the same, it is not possible to escape that which one is fated to suffer” (817). The Herodotean passage shows that this fatalism is appropriate to the context of enforced silence and powerlessness.¹⁴ Lines 815–16 and 817 of Theognis go together, and the second of the difficulties in this passage is thus partly removed.¹⁵ West's printing of 815–17 as one poem is correct.

What of the first difficulty, the awkwardness of 818? It is difficult to like its style and to concur with van Groningen that the triple repetition of παθεῖν in 817–18 gives the couplet “une force exceptionnelle.”¹⁶ As a judgment on the style of 818, West's brackets make sense. Nevertheless, there is nothing in the composition of the line that could not be coeval with that of 815–17. The first half of the line is a repetition from the preceding line. As for οὔτι δέδοικα, this form of the verb occurs three times in the Theognidea (39, 507, 780), and *Iliad* 17. 240 has οὔτι . . . δέδια. The decision on the line's authenticity depends, I think, completely on the world view that it assumes. If West is right,¹⁷ the line is Stoic and late. If, on the other hand, the line is only saying, “If I know that I *must* endure a thing, I can look forward to it without flinching,”¹⁸ it could be coeval with 815–17.¹⁹

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10. With συνών in 668, cf. frag. adesp. 27. 5 W. and context; Ar. *Vesp.* 1209, 1222, 1256 and context (Bdelucleon instructs his father in proper comportment at a symposium).

11. See D. Levine, “Symposium and the Polis,” in *Theognis of Megara: Poetry and the Polis*, ed. T. J. Figueira and G. Nagy (Baltimore and London, 1985), pp. 176–96.

12. See W. Donlan, “Pistos Philos Hetairos,” in *Theognis of Megara*, pp. 223–44.

13. *Herodotus: The Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth Books* (London, 1908), p. 622.

14. This fatalism is not expressed in 419–20 and 667–70, which (*pace* van Groningen) are otherwise close parallels to 815–18.

15. In any case, the first and third words of 817 show that 817–18 cannot be an independent couplet: see van Groningen, *Theognis*, p. 313.

16. *Ibid.*

17. In *Studies in Greek Elegy*, p. 159, he states: “818 implies a different and considerably later (Stoic) idea. . . . This seems to be one of those cases where an excerpt which did not end tidily at the end of a pentameter was filled out by the editor.”

18. Hudson-Williams, “*Elegies*,” p. 227.

19. I am grateful to the Editor and to an anonymous referee for expert advice.