

POLYBIUS 16.3.8: *ΑΝΑΣΤΕΙΡΟΣ*

In his account of the great naval battle in 201 B.C. off Chios between the fleet of Philip II and the combined fleets of Pergamum and Rhodes, Polybius notes a curious exchange of ram blows that took place at one point:

*Δεινοκράτης μὲν πρὸς ὀκτῆρην συμπεσὼν αὐτὸς μὲν ἔξαλον ἔλαβε τὴν πληγὴν, ἀναστείρου τῆς νεὸς οὐσης, τὴν δὲ τῶν πολεμίων πρῶσας ναῦν ὑπὸ τὰ *βίαχα τὸ μὲν πρῶτον οὐκ ἐδύνατο χωρισθῆναι, καίπερ πολλάκις ἐπιβαλόμενος πρύμναν κρούειν κτλ.*

Dinocrates, who was one of the commanders on the Pergamene side, attacked a Macedonian *oktêrês* and, it would appear, struck it with his ram below the waterline; τὰ βίαχα is unattested elsewhere and its precise meaning is obscure, but the phrase ὑπὸ τὰ βίαχα in this context clearly refers to a part of the *oktêrês*' hull that was immersed in water.¹ In the process his own ship was hit; the blow that it took landed above the waterline because the *oktêrês* that delivered it was a 'vessel that was *anasteiros*', a word also unattested elsewhere. For well over a century there has been universal agreement that it means 'with a high prow'.²

A war galley's ram jutted forth from the prow at the waterline. Thus, unless other factors intervened, whatever damage it inflicted upon an enemy craft was at the waterline, and this was the case whether the prow to which it was affixed was low or high. The prow of the *oktêrês* involved in the clash Polybius describes might have towered above the water but, all things being equal, its ram would have struck Dinocrates' hull at the waterline. Thus, despite the consensus of current opinion, *anasteiros* cannot mean 'with a high prow'. It must have a sense that will supply the factor which intervened to keep the ram stroke from landing where it normally would have.

As it happens, the proper meaning of the word was offered over three centuries ago by Marcus Meibom in a lengthy analysis of the passage we are discussing in his *De fabrica triremium liber*, an analysis which Schweighaeuser summarized with approval in his multi-volume edition of Polybius.³ Meibom correctly saw that *anasteiros* is to be connected with *στεῖρα*, the term for that part of the prow which cleaves the water,⁴ the cutwater in nautical jargon; thus a ship that is *anasteiros* is one 'with its *steira* up', i.e. a ship elevated at the bows.⁵ Now, on a war galley the *steira* happens to be the very point where the ram is affixed; it follows, then, that any galley 'with its *steira* up' when it attacked would inevitably ram an opponent above the waterline. The effect would be just the opposite of that achieved by the Rhodian commanders who, as Polybius later relates (16.4.12), succeeded in hitting their opponents below the waterline 'by depressing their hulls at the bows' (*ἐμπρωρρα τὰ σκάφη ποιοῦντες*).

Why did the Macedonian *oktêrês* have its bows raised? Meibom offers two

¹ Casaubon rendered the phrase 'infra aquam' in his edition of 1610, and this has been the meaning given it by almost all translators and commentators since.

² 'grâce à la construction du vaisseau ennemi, dont l'éperon était fort élevé', trans. F. Bouchot (Paris, 1847); 'the enemy's ship had its prow built high', trans. E. Shuckburgh (London, 1889); 'as she was very high in the prow', trans. W. Paton (Loeb, 1926); 'with a high prow', LSJ, s.v. (1940); 'deren Bug hoch emporragte', trans. H. Drexler (Zürich, 1963); 'being high in the prow', F. Walbank, *A Historical Commentary on Polybius*, note *ad loc.* (Oxford, 1967); 'car la proue du navire adverse était fort haute', trans. D. Roussel (Paris, 1970).

³ *Polybii...historiarum quidquid superest*. Recensuit...J. Schweighaeuser (Leipzig, 1789–95), vii.241–2. Meibom's book, published originally in Amsterdam in 1671, was reprinted in J. G. Graevius, *Thesaurus antiquitatum romanarum* (Leyden, 1694–9; Venice, 1732–7), xii. 553–680 (in the Venice edition); the discussion of 16.3.8 is on pp. 670–4.

⁴ Cf. L. Casson, *Ships and Seaman'ship in the Ancient world*² (Princeton, 1986), p. 221.

⁵ In Meibom's words (Graevius xii.672), 'extra aquam elatum'.

possibilities.⁶ For one, accident, the movement of waves, may have played a part: perhaps the sea was rough at the time – or even if calm, it would have been roiled by the manoeuvring of dozens and dozens of ships and the flailing of thousands of oars – and the prow of the Macedonian galley rose up on one wave at the very moment when the prow of Dinocrates' sank down on another. Or it may have been the result of movement of the personnel on deck, which would have a marked effect on the trim of such slender light ships as war galleys. The marines on the *oktêrês* may have run aft to confront a threat at the stern, thereby causing the vessel to rise at the bows, and Dinocrates, seizing the opportunity, launched his attack, at the same time sending the marines on his own ship all the way forward to depress the bows.⁷ Unfortunately he struck so hard that his ram struck in the enemy's hull and he could not break loose.

Thus the passage is to be translated:

In an attack on an *oktêrês*, Dinocrates' galley received a blow above the waterline, since the opposing vessel had its bows elevated, but struck the enemy ship below [the waterline?]; at first he was unable to break free despite repeated attempts to back water, etc.

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⁶ In Graevius xii.671–2.

⁷ For the shifting of men fore and aft to raise or depress bow or stern, see Dio Cassius 12 (Zonaras 8.16.4), a description of a Roman attack on Hippo in 247 B.C.: the Roman fleet, trapped in the harbour when the locals stretched chains across the mouth, 'escaped thanks to skill and luck. The vessels quickly headed directly toward the chains, and when their rams were just about to get caught on these, those on deck shifted their position to the stern; the bows, lightened in this way, cleared the chains. Then, when they rushed back to the prow, the sterns of the vessels were elevated.'

PLAUTUS, *PSEUDOLUS* 189: GRAIN-MOUNTAINS AND CATTLE-FODDER

Ballio. principio, Hedylium, tecum ago, quae amica es frumentariis,
quibu' cunctis montes maxumi frumenti acerui sunt domi: 189
fac sis delatum huc mihi frumentum.

(W. M. Lindsay's *OCT*)

In the most recent edition of this play (Bristol Classical Press, 1987) M. M. Willcock places an obelus before *montes* with the comment '*montes* and *acerui* get in each other's way'. But in view of its metaphorical use elsewhere in Plautus (e.g. *Aul.* 701, *Mil.* 1065, *Mos.* 352), *prima facie* suspicion does not fall on *montes*.

At *Cas.* 126 *post autem ruri nisi tu aceruom ederis/aut quasi lumbricus terram* etc., *aceruom* is open to objection because it lacks further definition: 'a heap' of what? Hence, among other suggestions, Lambinus' *aut eruom*, 'either vetch'. Here *acerui* is objectionable because it is superfluous. After the hyperbolic metaphor *montes* its prosaic literalness does not make stylistic sense. It has all the air of an intrusive gloss. Acidalius thought it was, and so did Leo. But if it is, what it has displaced is beyond recovery, and a past participle passive is as good an unfounded guess as any: hence Ritschl's *sunt structi*, Bergk's *aggesti sunt* and Bothe's *aceruati*.

Scribes are, however, capable of more subtle errors than merely supposing that marginal or suprascript variants, intended as explanations, are in fact corrections. A transcriber, forced by *frumenti* to extract from *montes* its literal meaning *acerui*, could write what was in his mind, if his mind's eye saw what he was thinking, i.e. if the