

## THAT HERODEAN DIPTYCH AGAIN

Herodas' *Mimiamb* VII is now generally admitted to be a sequel to VI insofar as Metro is a main character of both and Kerdon, the 'Shoemaker' who gives to VII its title, is a main topic of VI.<sup>1</sup> Controversy remains as to whether the leather 'baubons' (dildoes) which Kerdon makes with consummate skill (VI 68–73) and purveys in secret (VI 63) is also an underlying topic of VII.

Cunningham, in his article of 1964 and in his edition and Commentary of 1971, is in no doubt that 'baubons' are being covertly purveyed in VII.<sup>2</sup> 'This is made quite clear', he states at three points: in Kerdon's gnomic observation (ll.62–3) that women and dogs both 'eat' leathern things: in Kerdon's erotic apostrophe to Metro (ll.108–12); in his injunction to her to come to him for 'crab-shoes' (καρκίνια l.128), with his concluding reflection that a prudent man (Cunningham 'person' since he refers φρονεῖντα, despite its gender, to Metro) 'must stitch the skin coat since it gives good heat' (ll. 128, 129).<sup>3</sup>

Cunningham sees further 'hints elsewhere': in the opening greetings (ll. 1, 2):

(Metro) Kerdon, I'm bringing you these [ladies] to see if you have any worthy work of your hands to show them.

(Kerdon) Metro, not for nothing do I love you (ἐγὼ φιλέω σε); in the reference to Aphroditē at l. 25 (Knox's restoration); scattered among Kerdon's list of available footwear, some items of which are known styles of shoe but others are more dubious: 'smoothies' (λείαι, cf. VI 71–2); 'crab-shoes' (cf. l. 128); κοκκίδες, 'scarlets', which might hint at the κόκκινον βαυβάνα of VI 19. Two further styles, though known from references elsewhere, have suggestive-seeming names taken from the Hellenistic poetesses Nossis and Baukis (ll. 57, 58). Perhaps most decisive are Kerdon's prices, which Cunningham shows to be vastly exaggerated for footwear but intelligible if they refer to Kerdon's under-the-counter line in *de luxe* baubons.

This reading of VII (accepted, among others, by Schmidt<sup>4</sup>) was contradicted by Lawall<sup>5</sup> who claimed to find no trace of baubons in VII: 'women...eat leathern things' (σκύττα) reduces to 'women wear shoes' (and yet σκύτος in Comedy means the φάλλος!); ll. 108–12 imply that Metro has traded sexual favours for a dildo or dildoes in the past, but does not imply that the article is being offered for sale here; there is no ambiguity in any of the styles of shoe listed by Kerdon, nor in ll. 128–9. In the same year (1976), Levin discussed VI and VII in terms of 'An Herondean Diptych'.<sup>6</sup> There the matter has rested.

Knox's restoration at ll. 25, 26 of ἡ Πάφου...μεδέουσ' 'she who rules Paphos', stands at the beginning of a badly torn section of the papyrus, extending to l. 42, yielding the meaning 'May Aphrodite grant you to desire to enjoy...' Kerdon has been emphasizing the superior colours of his wares; the remains show that this theme of colour is pursued, to be followed by the troubles of a poor shoemaker. Colour has

<sup>1</sup> Reinach first questioned this assumption some few years after Kenyon's publication of the papyrus in 1891. The early controversy is outlined in I. C. Cunningham: 'Herodas 6 and 7', *CQN.S.* 14 (1964) p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> I. C. Cunningham: *Herodas 6 and 7*, *CQ N.S.* 14 (1964) and *Herodas: Mimiambi* (Oxford, 1971). Also his Teubner text (Leipzig, 1987 p. 25), with a question mark, *mulieres...calceos (vel baubones?...)* volunt, and reference to (1971).

<sup>3</sup> (1971) p. 192. Repeated in review of Schmidt (see note 9).

<sup>4</sup> V. Schmidt, *Sprachliche Untersuchungen zu Herondas* (Berlin, 1968) p. 125.

<sup>5</sup> G. Lawall: 'Herodas 6 and 7 Reconsidered', *CP* 71 (1976) pp. 165–69.

<sup>6</sup> D. N. Levin: 'An Herondean Diptych', *Ziva Antika* 26 (1976) 345–55.

already been seen to be a distinctive feature of the κόκκινον βαυβώνα of VI (l. 19). As Cunningham points out (1971), the phallos worn in Comedy was made of red leather 'to appear more real'; scarlet thus evokes erotic desire (ἱκανᾶσθαι ἐπανρέσθαι l. 26). The invocation of Aphroditē, goddess of desire, is echoed in the gibe about Kerdon's being allowed 'to touch the little feet that the Yearnings and Loves touch' (ll. 93, 94). (We may bear in mind the erotic significance found by Freud to attach to the foot.)

Following this section, Kerdon, launching into a sales pitch, orders Pistos to bring out *all* the shoe-boxes for the ladies' inspection (ll. 53–6) and proceeds to an eager (Cunningham shows how the effect of rapidity is produced by metrical resolutions) enumeration of styles. Among those in which Cunningham sees reference to baubons, we may single out 'Nossides' and 'Baukides'. The point about Nossis and Baukis, after whom the shoes are named, is not merely that they are well-known women of the immediate past or even that they have erotic connotations, but that both are known as homosexual lovers. Moreover, their mention recalls the 'Nossis daughter of Erinna' of VI 20, the borrower of Koritto's baubon, whose name would have raised a knowing laugh with Herodas' audience, accustomed to the idea that poetesses were notoriously emancipated women sure to have threateningly deviant sexual proclivities.<sup>7</sup> Nossis, Cunningham notes, 'claimed equality with Sappho', the poetess who gave 'Lesbian' its meaning for after times, while Erinna's verses to Baukis indicate that they were lovers.

On the face of it there may seem no reason beyond a cheap laugh for inserting the names of 'Lesbian' poetesses into both VI and VII, until we remark how allusion to female homosexuality serves to link both poems and is bound up with baubons, instruments not only of solitary gratification but equally of sham *coitus*. What else is the significance of the ἱμαντίσκοι (VI 71), the thongs so praised by Koritto for being made from soft wool instead of the usual leather, and thus contributing to the excellence of design (VI.71–3)? Clearly they attach the baubon to the body of the woman playing a man's part.

Kerdon's 'pitch' climaxes in his urging that the ladies 'Speak whatever the heart of each desires (ἐρᾶι), that you may perceive in what way women and dogs eat (βρώζουσιν) leathern things'. A good part of the controversy has surrounded these lines, which echo a number of proverbial references to 'dogs and leather' in Graeco-Roman literature. Williams<sup>8</sup> wished to distinguish two series of proverbs, one referring to dogs' relish for 'lights' or carcasses, from which they can hardly be separated, and the other to their learning to know through their tethers. Williams takes the latter to be the meaning of VII 62–3 and Cunningham approves,<sup>9</sup> accepting, in effect, that 'women are addicted to dildoes as a dog to gnawing through its tether' gives as good, or better, point as Lawall's 'innocent' interpretation that only an addiction to shoes is intended. Though Cunningham did not need to contradict Williams, yet the point is more clearly made if Kerdon means 'Women are addicted to 'eating' leather-covered baubons as a dog cannot be parted from a carcass'.

However, Williams' distinction of proverbs is unconvincing, for three reasons.

Firstly, βρώζουσιν at l. 63 means 'eat' and not 'gnaw through', which implies an *absence* of eating.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> We might compare 'blue-stockings', or Molière's *Femmes Savantes*.

<sup>8</sup> G. Williams: 'Dogs and Leather', *CR* N.S.9 (1959) pp. 97–100. <sup>9</sup> (1971) p. 34.

<sup>10</sup> English may confuse here. When a dog 'gnaws' a bone, it masticates and may eat some part of it, but if it 'gnaws through' a leather strap, it is assumed simply to pierce and tear the leather with its teeth. While it may be objected that such finer senses of βρώζειν are uncertain, it would be perverse not to accept the obvious meaning of the Greek as we have it, whereby the σκύττα are said to be 'eaten' by both women and dogs.

Secondly, it is unlikely that dogs then, any more than now, were *tethered* with leather straps, but with chains, and mainly because a dog tethered with its lead will strain to break it. *Catenarius* means a watchdog in Latin, as *δέσμιος* appears to in Greek; *catena* normally, at least, means a chain and *δεσμοίδεσμά* (metal) fetters.

Thirdly, if one envisages a dog with a carcass, it is plain that what the dog eats and what can be tanned into leather may be one and the same, namely skin! Greek and Latin have cognate words for this, the Latin *corium* meaning 'skin, hide, leather' (Lewis and Short) while the Greek *χόριον* is also used for the caul and 'any intestinal membrane' (Liddell and Scott). In the plural, as found in a fragment of Aristophanes and in Cratinus, it means a dish of which the distinguishing feature presumably is membrane: sausages – with 'Freudian' overtones in popular wit.

Williams wants to view Theocritus X 10 and Horace *Satires* ii 5 83 as essentially different from Herodas here. When Horace uses the phrase *canis a corio uncto*, he plainly does refer to eating, *unctus* meaning 'oily', 'fat', 'rich' and hence 'delicious'. Dogs, Horace's proverb is saying, cannot be separated from a succulent membrane (sc. of a new-killed animal).

When Theocritus in his Tenth Idyll makes Milon observe sententiously that it is 'a bad thing for a dog to have a taste of (γεῦσαι) χόριον', implied is 'because the dog is thereafter addicted to it' – whatever 'it' may be – as Boukaios must be to his 'starveling love'.<sup>11</sup> Membrane, besides being susceptible of tanning into leather, is used to wrap and disguise the less sought-after products of slaughter, and the resulting 'appetising' sausage is, as already suggested, a rather obvious image for a 'baubon' with a supple (VI 71) leather skin.

In days when tanning was a home industry, the identity of the edible skin with that which is processed (largely lost sight of in our industrialized age) is patent, and Williams' distinction appears altogether shaky.

Leather objects in VII include the 'skin-coat' (βαίτη) of l. 128.

Schmidt,<sup>12</sup> who accepted that *καρκίνια* is a 'Deckname' for dildo, denied the same role to *βαίτην θάλπουσαν εὔ*. He argued that the γάρ introduces Kerdon's explanation of his rewarding Metro with *καρκίνια*, and that the concluding line means that one should keep in good repair (*flicken*) a coat (i.e. Metro) that warms one. Cunningham persisted in holding *βαίτη* to stand for *βαυβών*, explaining that 'K. indicates to M. that in coming to him for baubons she is showing good sense'.<sup>13</sup> However, even apart from the masculine gender of *φρονεύντα*, 'stitching', *βάπτειν* is appropriate to Kerdon, not to his customer, and is further used in both VI and VII of Kerdon's *making* (not repairing, Schmidt's *flicken*) things.<sup>14</sup> I suggest that 'skin coat' is indeed a 'Deckname' for a leather-'jacketed' dildo and that *βαίτην θάλπουσαν εὔ* is best explained as a *double-entendre*, Cunningham's *θάλπος ἔρωτος* being combined with the wherewithal to keep Kerdon's pot boiling (VII 76) and bring him Metro's sexual favours.

To help us enter into the spirit of the thing, we might recall the old Music Hall number, which derives its humour in good part from its phallic imagery:

'I wish I were a savaloy  
in a shop with electric lights on:  
my inside all stuffed out with meat  
and lovely pink (κόκκινον) skin tights on!'

<sup>11</sup> l. 57, as in A. Rist: *The Poems of Theocritus* (Chapel Hill, 1978) p. 100.

<sup>12</sup> See two English reviews of Schmidt op. cit.: Cunningham's in *CR* N.S.21 (1971) 23–4 and J. Vaio's in *CP* 68 (1973) 312.

<sup>13</sup> (1971) p. 192.

<sup>14</sup> VI 18, 43, 48, 51; VII 89.

Metro's response to Kerdon's long 'spiel' is to ask the price of 'the pair which you held up before'. 'You name a price' is Kerdon's comeback, but he adds oddly, 'If you desire the authentic work of pairs (ζευγέων... τῶληθές ἦν θέλης ἔργον... <You'll name a substantial price>' ll. 70–73), and he goes on in what is clearly an 'aside' to 'mutter' (τονθύριζεις l. 77) a prayer to the appropriate gods (including his patron Κέρδος) for a good 'catch' (βόλον l. 75). Challenged by Metro to name a price, he replies that 'this pair is worth one mina', adding in another odd phrase 'You can look up or down' (ἢ ἄνω σ<τ> ἢ κάτω βλέπειν, l. 80). As Cunningham's discussion of prices makes clear,<sup>15</sup> a mina, worth a hundred drachmai, is more than ten times the price we might expect for even an expensive pair of shoes. But Cunningham has also observed that in VI the women's being disappointed of a second baubon accords with vase paintings showing women with two and particularly with one painting which appears to depict a double use, oral and vaginal.<sup>16</sup> This, as he points out, ties in with *pairs* of shoes in VII. I have already drawn attention to Kerdon's odd phrases used in connection with the demand for a high price. I submit that Herodas' audience understood that 'the authentic work of pairs' refers to 'baubons' and that 'you can look up or down' means, 'whether you look at the shoes I am holding up or at what is in the box below', as well as, perhaps, 'whether you look at the ostensible sale or that for which it is a "front"'. For in some of the boxes brought out by Pistos what the women see are pairs not of shoes but of baubons (or possibly baubons hidden beneath [κάτω] shoes), which accounts for *double-entendre* in his enumeration of styles.

I further suggest that the audience was familiar with the idea of shoes as a 'front' for baubons, that it was a standard joke that women bought the one at the same time as the other and concealed in the same boxes – rather as contraceptives used to be slipped in with the change by barbers, following the question – which became a standard joke in comedy turns – 'Something for the weekend, sir?' The comparison is not frivolous. The present pair of *Mimiamboi* testify to the enduring phenomenon of sexual shame evinced in the discretion with which all such items are discussed (VI) and purveyed (VII) in ancient as well as modern times. And any who these days still find Herodas' topic and the widespread practice to which it testifies distasteful might reflect on the small difference, from one feminist viewpoint, between a *membrum virile* enclosed in a sheath and a dildo such as Kerdon makes.

Mimiamb VII's underlying topic further clarifies the role of the woman by the door, stigmatized by Kerdon as having a laugh like a horse's whinny (ll. 122, 123). Why is she by the door and why is she giggling (κιχλίζουσα)? Surely because she has happened into the shop and while waiting to be served has perceived what is going on. Kerdon takes advantage to offer her 'this' (τοῦδε) for seven Darics (one hundred and forty drachmae). τοῦδε could be taken to imply τοῦ ζεύγους (cf. ll. 79–80), were it not that he has previously offered three 'pairs' for this price (ll. 105–6), evidently as a bargain (though it is still four or five times what we might expect for shoes). Metrically there is no reason why τοῦτων or τῶνδε should not be used here (cf. l. 106). I suggest that τοῦδε is deliberately ambiguous, allowing τοῦ βαυβώνος to be understood. Indeed, Kerdon's language is so insulting, and even suggestive,<sup>17</sup> that one is tempted to suppose that he here finally (cf. ll. 110–12) breaks the bonds of that propriety which Koritto invoked at VI 80, brandishing one of the secreted objects in the direction of the giggler.

<sup>15</sup> (1971) pp. 175–6.

<sup>16</sup> (1964) p. 34 n. 2 & 5.

<sup>17</sup> Cunningham (1971 p. 192) cites Clement of Alexandria for κιχλισμός as γέλως πορνικός.

That *Mimiamb* VII is in subject as well as in identity of characters the sequel to VI is already prefigured in the title *ιδιάζουσαι* or *Women on their Own* – for even if the titles of the *Mimiamboi* did not originate with their author, they convey an early sense of their import. When ‘on their own’, and keeping even their slave-girls at a proper distance (ll. 15–17), Koritto and Metro talk unreservedly. Koritto is made to emphasize the point in apology for her plain speaking on the indelicate subject of men’s capacities and parts (*τὰ βαλλία*): ‘for we are on our own’ (ll. 69, 70).

The counterpart to the *ιδιάζουσαι* is the look at women in a *public* venue. Kerdon did not possess a shop in VI, and so evaded the notice of tax-collectors (VI 64); this is why Metro did not know of him (VI 48ff.). By VII she has consolidated a relationship with him and he has come up in the world (VII 83, 84), doubtless helped by her patronage and the success of his line in baubons. In public the women expect of their ‘Shoemaker’ the discretion invoked by Koritto at VI 80. But ancient shoemakers are almost proverbial for bad breeding and appearances are threatened, as at Kerdon’s impassioned outburst (ll. 107–12), which disregards Metro’s hasty attempt – probably by an expressive look – to keep him publicly in place (l. 107).

It is the keeping up appearances which lends most of its piquancy to VII, in contrast to the frankness displayed in VI. As ever, it is vital to try to enter into the expectations of the audience. Learned and literary Herodas may be, with pretensions beyond the common Mime, but even the sophisticated are not entertained by erudite allusion alone. Music Hall-style humour also is enjoyed by the ‘chattering classes’ – as Herodas clearly knew.

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