ARISTOPHANES, *BIRDS* 65: THE LIBYAN BIRD

Euelpides and Peisthetaerus have just left Athens, looking for a better place to settle.
Frightened by the arrival of Tereus' servant, they introduce themselves as birds.
Peisthetaerus says that he is 'Fearfowl, a Libyan bird':

$$\text{'}Υποδεδιὼς \ ἔγωγε, \ Λιβυκὸν \ ὄρνεον. \quad (v. \ 65)^1$$

Ancient and modern critics think that, with such a name, the poet wants to allude to
a distant and unknown place, where strange animals live, to bewilder the servant:
Libya, in fact, was renowned for her strange creatures.[2] So Euelpides adds that he
is a 'Phasian bird', that is, a 'pheasant', using a polysemous name referring to the
pheasant and to the river Phasis, also in Colchis. This is a reasonable interpretation,
arguing that the two birds' names are inspired by the extreme boundaries of the
Greek world, the Eastern and Southern barbaric areas.

As a political comedy *Birds* reflects contemporary circumstances:[3] it was staged at
the Dionysia of 414. Thucydides 6.88.6 says that in winter 415/14 the Athenians sent a
trireme to Carthage asking for help. He does not record the Carthaginians' answer, but
it is clear that the Libyan city refused to comply with the Athenian request.

Perhaps the Spartans too played the same card the following year, when Gylippus
moved to Selinus from Libya, accompanied by Cyrenean ships. He coasted from
Cyrene as far as Neapolis, a town which should be identified with Nabeul, not with
Leptis Magna, because this identification fits better with the Thucydidean account of
the length of the crossing to Selinus (two days and one night). Neapolis-Nabeul is
called an *emporion* of the Carthaginians, and lies in the region named Emporia.[4] The
Spartans could sail the Carthaginean sea quietly, perhaps looking for the alliance
denied to the Athenians.

We can thus think that 'Libyan bird' conceals Carthage, and that the name Fearfowl
is just a comic allusion to the refusal of an alliance with Athens, probably caused by
the fear of Spartan power.

The fear-theme is then extended to the pheasant too ($ἐπικεχοδώς$, v. 68), using the
joke of the river and the bird, alluding to that area where Colchis is, that is, Pontus,[5]
which Aristophanes had already identified with the Eastern boundary of the

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[1] Translation by A. H. Sommerstein, *Birds* (Warminster, 1987).

[2] Sommerstein (n. 1), 204; N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes. Birds* (Oxford, 1995), 156–7.

[3] See e.g. J. Dalfen, 'Politik und Utopie in den Vögeln des Aristophanes (zur Ar., Vögeln
451–638)', *BIFG* 2 (1975), 268–85; B. R. Katz, 'The Birds of Aristophanes and Politics',
Athenaeum 54 (1976), 353–81; G. Mastromarco, 'Le mura di Temistocle e le mura di Nubi-
cucculia', *QS* 6 (1977), 41–50; B. Chiavarino, 'Oikisate mian polin', in *Plous eis Sikelian*
(Alessandria, 1992), 81–97; M. Vickers, 'Alcibiades on stage: Aristophanes' *Birds*', *Historia* 38
(1989), 267–99; ibid., 'Alcibiades at Sparta: Aristophanes' *Birds*', *CQ* 45 (1995), 339–54.

[4] Thuc. 7.50.1–2. For Neapolis-Nabeul cf. A. W. Gomme, A. Andrews, K. J. Dover, *A
Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, 4 (Oxford, 1970), 428; for Leptis Magna see I. Malkin,
'Territorialisation mythologique: les 'autels des Philènes' en Cyrénaïque', *DHA* 16 (1990),
219–29.

[5] This is the region of the Little Syrte; cf. Pol. 1.82.6, 3.23.2, 31.21.1; Liv. 29.25.12, 34.62.3; A.
Bresson, 'Les cités grecque et leur emporia', in *L' Emporion* (Paris, 1993), 163–231, particularly
206–7.

Athenian empire, at the opposite end from the Western one, that is, the Carthaginian dominion (*Wasps* 700).[6]

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[6] Prof. C. Collard suggested to me that 'ὑποδεδιώς and ἐπικεχοδώς are, surely deliberately, syllabic and rhythmic equivalents, and show assonance . . . one might argue that here it draws attention to the implication of the names as well as to the excremental joke'. I agree.

On the boundaries of Athenian empire in Aristophanes cf. A. Coppola, *Archaiologhìa e propaganda* (Roma, 1995), 73. Another suggested allusion to Carthage in Aristophanes is in V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes* (Oxford, 1951), 121, n. 1.

AESCHYLUS VS. EURIPIDES: A TEXTUAL PROBLEM AT *FROGS* 818–19

ἔσται δ' ἱππολόφων τε λόγων κορυθαίολα νείκη
σχινδαλάμων τε παραξόνια σμιλεύματά τ' ἔργων
φωτὸς ἀμυνομένου φρενοτέκτονος ἀνδρὸς
ῥήμαθ' ἱπποβάμονα.

(Aristophanes, *Ranae* 818–21)

The literary contest of the two tragedians in *Frogs* is introduced by four stanzas redolent of Homeric combat, with their predominantly dactylic metre and a number of high-flown epic words. I am surprised that several editors prefer the reading ὑψιλόφων at 818, as ἱππόλοφος surely has a resonance of ἱπποκορυστής of *Iliad* 2.1, etc. The readings and sense, however, of both halves of 819 have long been controversial. As Dover suggested in his 1993 edition (accepted more recently by Sommerstein) the MSS 'linch-pins of splinters' is less satisfactory than his proposed transposition to 'splintering of linch-pins' (σχινδάλαμοί τε παραξονίων), which suggests a recollection of the dangers of chariot accidents or collisions, as in the funeral games of *Il.* 23.[1] But the following expression 'shavings of deeds' is even more puzzling, and highly improbable, and Heiberg's emendation to σμιλευματοεργοῦ, agreeing with φωτός (Euripides), is preferred by Stanford among others, though doubted by Dover.

I should like to refer to a twice-occurring line of *Il.* 13.131, 16.215,

ἀσπὶς ἄρ' ἀσπίδ' ἔρειδε, κόρυς κόρυν, ἀνέρα δ' ἀνήρ.

Here we find shield matched with shield, helmet with helmet, and man with man; and looking, with these juxtapositions in mind, at the *Frogs* passage, we find the helmets opposed (κορυθαίολα νείκη) and also the men (φωτός–ἀνδρός), but not the shields, although surely what one defends oneself with (ἀμυνομένου, 320) in battle is above all one's shield. Hence I would draw attention to a word appropriate to

[1] Cf. also the description in Xen. *Cyr.* 7.1.32 of chariot wheels 'leaping out' from their sockets in a battle melée.