

ΣΚΟΠΠΙΟΣ OR ΣΚΩΡ ΠΕΟΣ? A SEXUAL JOKE
IN ARCHESTRATUS' *HEDYPATHEIA*

The remains of Archestratus of Gela's fourth-century B.C.E. poem, the *Hedypatheia*, exhibit formal connections to a range of genres, but the overall tenor of the poem is, as both recent commentaries indicate, 'parody'.¹ Composed in dactylic hexameter, the 'Life of Luxury' has the style of didactic *epos* but provides a humorous catalogue of food and drink, advising where and when to purchase it, as well as how best to prepare and enjoy it.² The poet passionately extols the sweet life and all its gastronomic pleasures, celebrating a hedonism that stands in sharp contrast to traditional, didactic themes. In his extant fragments, Archestratus never abandons the conceit that his poem is a serious cooking treatise, which inherently complicates interpretation of the work's comic tone. The didactic form conceals multiple layers of comic content, and although scholars have uncovered much of Archestratus' nuanced humour, his subtlety has obscured a particularly obscene stratum of the poem's comic layering. I will show through a close reading of fr. 30 that Archestratus employed metaphorical language and puns to express an amusing and surprisingly graphic sexual joke.

Athenaeus of Naucratis' *Deipnosophistae* is nearly the only extant source for Archestratus' *Hedypatheia*, preserving approximately 334 lines in over sixty fragments. The majority of these verses indicate that Archestratus was particularly passionate about seafood.³ He discusses wine, breads, meats and various *opsa* (e.g. fruits, bulbs, olives and sow's womb),⁴ but no fewer than fifty-six of the remaining fragments (over 90%) mention fish or other sea creatures. As W&H (15) point out, the high proportion of fish in the remains of Archestratus 'may be due to the selection made by Athenaeus, but is probably not, and is a subtle way in which Archestratus can please his audience by taking over the Homeric verse-form and filling it with decidedly un-Homeric fish'.⁵ The juxtaposition of fish and dactylic hexameter is certainly part of the *Hedypatheia*'s overall joke, as is the sheer number of piscine passages, but Archestratus adds a number of layers to the poem's humour. O&S (xxvii) rightly observe, 'the longer fragments often move into more general discussion, sometimes ending with a pithy or humorous remark'.

¹ For a complete discussion of the *Hedypatheia*'s literary background and genre, see S.D. Olsen and A. Sens (hereafter referred to as O&S), *Archestratos of Gela* (Oxford, 2000), xxviii–xliii. Also, see P. Brandt, *Corpusculum Poesis Epicae Graecae Ludibundae* (Leipzig, 1988) 1.114–93; J. Wilkins and S. Hill (hereafter referred to as W&H), *Archestratus: Life of Luxury* (Totnes, 1994), 13–19; and E. Degani, 'On gastronomic poetry I' and 'On gastronomic poetry II', *Alma Mater Studiorum* (Bologna, 1990 and 1991), 51–63 and 164–75. On the *Hedypatheia* as parodic literature, see W&H, 13–19 and O&S, xxxi–xxxvi. Also, cf. O&S, lv–lx, which offers detailed discussion of Archestratus' dialect, language and style. For a more straightforward interpretation of the poem, see A. Dalby, 'Archestratus, where and when?', in J. Wilkins, D. Harvey and M. Dobson (edd.), *Food in Antiquity* (Exeter, 1995), 400–12.

² As fr. 3 (2.4–5 Brandt, *SH* 133, ap. Ath. 7. 278d–e) states, Archestratus has set forth 'where each food <and drink> is best', (ὅπου ἐστὶν ἕκαστον | κάλλιστον βρωτὸν τε <ποτὸν τε>). All numbers and translations of Archestratus, unless otherwise noted, come from O&S.

³ O&S, xxiv–xxviii, provide a useful discussion of the structure and contents of the poem.

⁴ On the nuances of the *opson*, see J. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes* (New York, 1997), 20–6.

⁵ Regarding the lack of fish in Homer, see Davidson (n. 4), 11–20 and M. Heath, 'Do heroes eat fish?', in D. Braund and J. Wilkins, *Athenaeus and His World* (Exeter, 2000), 342–52.

An example of such a remark can be noted in fr. 30 (29 Brandt, *SH* 160, ap. Ath. 7. 320f–321a), where Archestratus presents advice on purchasing the scorpion fish when visiting the island city of Thasos:

ἐν δὲ Θάσῳ τὸν σκορπίον ὠνοῦ, ἔαν ᾗ
μὴ μείζων πυγόνος· μεγάλου δ' ἀπὸ χεῖρας ἴαλλε.

Buy the bullhead in Thasos, unless it is bigger than a bare cubit. Keep your hands off the big one.

W&H, being ‘concerned principally with the *content* of the poem’ rather than ‘literary and other aspects’, offer only a short commentary on this fragment.⁶ Citing various modern scholars of Mediterranean seafood, they note the scorpion’s scientific name, the nature of its flesh and its tastiest parts.⁷ O&S (126–7) provide a more philologically detailed, but similarly straightforward, analysis. At the end of their commentary on this passage, they note that Archestratus’ final injunction (ἀπὸ χεῖρας ἴαλλε) is a ‘humorous reversal of a common Homeric formula’. In addition to epic parody, they also detect a witty remark about the bullhead: ‘Since all species of *Scorpaena* have spines capable of delivering a dangerously toxic and painful wound, the injunction to keep one’s hands off the larger specimens may have an additional, humorous point’. Perhaps the obviousness of this advice does add an element of absurdity to the injunction, but these commentators miss an important linguistic joke in these verses: Archestratus’ ‘humorous point’ is not merely rooted in a reference to toxic spines but also in a playfully sophisticated and graphic allusion to anal sex.

Archestratus employs wordplay to exploit the dictional similarities between various offensive and inoffensive words. He introduces the joke with a reference to the scorpion fish, ὁ σκορπίος, which must have sounded to the Greek ear very much like the combination of two primary Greek obscenities σκῶρ and πέος.⁸ The mere lengthening of the omicron to omega would transform the first syllable into the Greek term for ‘shit’ (σκῶρ, gen. σκατός); and with a slight vowel shift from epsilon to iota, the final two syllables would be construed as ‘dick’ or ‘cock’.⁹ The necessary vocalic interchanges are, in fact, attested in various Greek dialects, texts and inscriptions. Omega and omicron, as with all long and short vowels, are switched rather frequently.¹⁰ For example, the fifth-century Athenian tragedian, Achaëus of Eretria, employs an omicron that must by metrical rules be scanned with the value of an omega in fr. 33.4; and even more significantly, in fourth-century *koinê* orthography,

⁶ On W&H’s approach, see p. 9. For their commentary on this passage, see p. 67.

⁷ For more about the scorpion fish, also see: A. Davidson, *Mediterranean Seafood* (London, 1981), 147; A. Palombi and M. Santarelli, *Gli animali commestibili dei mari d’Italia* (Milan, 1961), 142–3; and, in particular, D.W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (Oxford, 1947), 245–6, who provides a scientific discussion of the σκορπίος, as well as ancient observations and passages that mention the fish.

⁸ Note that even the acute accent falls on the antepenult in both words, providing a similar intonation for both words.

⁹ On the meaning and significance of σκῶρ and πέος in ancient Greek, see J. Henderson’s discussion of ‘primary obscenities’ in *The Maculate Muse* (Oxford, 1991), 35–41.

¹⁰ A variety of ancient inscriptions regularly show an omicron in place of an omega; similarly on the Ionic islands the omega is used in place of the omicron. See entries in LSJ under *o* and *ω*. Also, consider the interchangeability in the stem gradation of the present singular forms of *δίδωμι* and its present plural forms (e.g. *δίδομεν*), as well as the interchangeability in the vowel gradation of omicron contract verbs, where the present tense form *δηλώω* becomes *δηλώσω* in the future tense.

omicron is regularly used to represent *o*, *ou* and *ω*.¹¹ The shift from epsilon to iota is also rather common in a number of dialects, particularly when it is positioned before an omicron, as it is here.¹² Even without any manipulations in pronunciation, *σκορπίον* sounds enough like *σκῶρ πέον* that Arcestratus' mention of the fish could make a relatively straightforward sexual pun: the scorpion fish was also a 'shitcock', a vulgar turn of phrase that alludes to a penis used for anal intercourse.¹³

In the subsequent verse, Arcestratus helps ensure this reading when he offers guidance on purchasing an appropriately sized scorpion/shitcock. As O&S indicate, a *πυγών* (genitive, *πυγόνος*) 'is the distance from the elbow to the first joint of the fingers and thus for a man of average size slightly less than 45cm'. This measurement, however, shares a particular aural affinity with another common Greek obscenity, *πυγή* (and even more so, the Hipponactean form, *πυγέων*).¹⁴ Although this term has a slightly more gentle tone than both *σκῶρ* and *πέος*, it is equally direct in its meaning, perhaps best translated by 'butt'.¹⁵ With this linguistic joke, Arcestratus completes the allusion to anal sex. He positions innocuous but obscene-sounding words in close proximity, thus communicating rather clearly the passage's implicit obscenity. Not only does he direct his audience to 'buy the bullhead in Thasos, unless it is bigger than a bare cubit', but he also instructs them to 'buy the shitcock in Thasos, unless it is bigger than your butt'. In other words, Arcestratus humorously recommends paying for anal sex but only if the paid-for penis is not too large for the customer's anus. The last half of the second verse conveys the poet's zeal in his instructions: if it is too big, 'keep your hands off it!'¹⁶

¹¹ B. Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge, 1991), 43–4.

¹² On the dialects that transfer epsilon to iota (Lesbian, Thessalian, Boeotian, Cyprian, Cretan, Laconian, Heracleian, Argolic and even Attic), see C.D. Buck, *The Greek Dialects: Grammar, Selected Inscriptions, Glossary* (Chicago, 1955), 21–3.

¹³ As Henderson (n. 9), 193, remarks, 'There are many references to dung in contexts of buggery'. Greek comedy seems to have been particularly interested in 'leading forth' faecal matter as a result of anal intercourse. Aristophanes, for example, employs the verbs *κοπροφορεῖν* (Eq. 295) and *κοπραγωγεῖν* (Lys. 1174) in these contexts. Also cf. the repeatedly used (though obviously much later), Roman phrase *mentulam cacare* ('to shit a cock'). J.N. Adams states in *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary* (Baltimore, 1982), 172: 'There is abundant evidence that the *pedicatus* was considered to *cacare*, or to defile the *mentula* of the *pedicator*'.

¹⁴ At fr. 92.2, Hipponax includes the *hapax legomenon*, *πυγέων*, which is generally interpreted as a straightforward obscenity equivalent to *πυγή*. Within this same fragment, Hipponax also employs wordplay very similar to that of Arcestratus. In addition to *πυγέων*, he repeatedly uses its 'derivatives': verse 2, *πυγιστί*, which M.L. West creatively translates in his *Greek Lyric Poetry* (Oxford, 1999), 121, as 'Arsish', a mock term for a language; and verse 15, *Πυγέλησι*, which West, 144, translates as 'Arsenal' and may be a pun on the Greek town Pygela. On these obscenities and their relationship to *πυγή*, see also Henderson (n. 9), 20.

¹⁵ Although Henderson (n. 9), 201–2 suggests that the term is mostly for the 'butt' or 'rump', he also documents instances where it is used to refer to the anus, particularly in contexts of 'buggering'.

¹⁶ If there is any doubt that Arcestratus would employ such sexual content in his gastronomic treatise, one need only consider the *Hedypatheia*'s reputation in the ancient world. Ancient scholars such as Clearchus, Chrysippus and Justin the Martyr (Arcestr. Testimonia 4, 5, 6 and 9) linked the *Hedypatheia* with an early fourth-century pornographic sex manual by Philaenis of Samos or Leucas. Although this connection may be primarily due to both poems' hedonistic counsel, the link between Arcestratus and Philaenis is so entrenched that it may suggest a relationship based on more than mere hedonism. Even Athenaeus, who preserves nearly all of Arcestratus' sixty-two extant fragments, makes frequent disparaging comments that imply a particularly sexual quality to the *Hedypatheia*. At *Deipnosophistae* 8.335e, he chastises another diner: 'But you, by making frequent mention of this Arcestratus, have filled our drinking party with licentiousness', (*ἀκολασίας*). Similarly, one of Athenaeus' co-symposiasts, Daphnis the

Although the fragmentary nature of the *Hedypatheia* makes it difficult to guarantee that such an interpretation is correct, Archestratus' connection to the comic tradition strengthens the case. Sexual seafood jokes are common in a number of Archaic and Classical Greek comic works, especially in the productions of Archestratus' fellow Syracusans, Epicharmus and Sophron.¹⁷ The *Hedypatheia*'s most direct link, however, appears to be with Plato Comicus' *Phaon*,¹⁸ an Athenian comedy that, according to the scholion on Aristophanes' *Wealth* 179, was staged in 391 B.C.E. The play recounts the myth of the ferryman Phaon, whom Aphrodite presented with a love potion that made him both young and exceptionally handsome.¹⁹ The two significant extant fragments make a variety of outrageous sexual allusions, all of which indicate that the play dealt, at least in part, with the side effects of Aphrodite's unguent.²⁰ Phaon was unable to keep up with the women's sexual demands and was left oversexed and impotent, searching for aphrodisiacs.

Fr. 189 K–A is particularly notable, as it depicts one character (presumably Phaon himself) reading to another from a 'cookbook' (ὀψαρτυσία, 189.4) recently composed in dactylic hexameter by Philoxenus:

(A.) ὀρφῶν αἰολίαν συνόδοντά τε καρχαρίαν τε μὴ τέμνειν, μή σοι νέμεσις θεόθεν καταπνεύσῃ, ἀλλ' ὅλον ὀπτήσας παράθες· πολλὸν γὰρ ἄμεινον. πουλύποδος †πλεκτή δ' ἂν ἐπιλήψῃ† κατὰ καιρόν, ἐφθῇ τῆς ὀπτῆς, ἣν ἦι μείζων, πολὺ κρείττων· ἦν ὅπται δέ δύ' ὦσ', ἐφθῇ κλαίειν ἀγορεύω. τρίγλη δ' οὐκ ἐθέλει νεύρων ἐπύρηνος εἶναι· παρθένου Ἀρτέμιδος γὰρ ἔφυ καὶ στύματα μισεῖ. σκορπίος αὖ (B.) παῖσιέ γε σου τὸν πρωκτὸν ὑπελθών ²¹	15 20
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Ephesian, alludes to Archestratus' gastronomical and sexual appetites, saying that he (3.116f) 'circumnavigated the inhabited world for the sake of his belly and the portions of his anatomy below the belly (ὕπὸ τὴν γαστέρα)'.¹⁷

¹⁷ An obvious example can be found in fr. 25 of Sophron's *Mimoi Gynaikēioi*, where the Syracusan poet uses the term κόγχη (= κόγχος, mussel): ταῖ γὰ μὰν κόγχαι, ὥσπερ αἱ κ' ἐξ ἐνὸς κελεύματος | κεχάναντι ἄμιν πάσαι, τὸ δὲ κρῆς ἐκάστας ἐξέχει ('Indeed, all the mussels, as if at a single command gape open for us, and the flesh of each one appears.'). J. H. Hordern, *Sophron's Mimes: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, 2004), 159, says of this passage, 'Names of different shellfish are frequent slang-terms for the female genitalia', and it is quite clear that the flesh of the mussel, here, refers to the labia minora. See also Henderson (n. 9), 142, who notes that κόγχος is a common comic reference to the female genitalia: 'the cavity (pink or red) of a seashell, used in technical writers for many bodily cavities, is a double entendre meaning "vagina"'. On Epicharmus' sexual seafood, cf. C. Shaw (forthcoming), 'Greek Comedy's "genitalia of the sea"'.¹⁸

¹⁸ O&S, xl, call it 'far and away the closest literary parallel to the *Hedypatheia*'.

¹⁹ Plato seems to draw on the version of the myth preserved in Servius' commentary on Virgil (*Aeneid* 3.279): [Phaon] qui cum esset navicularius, solitus a Lesbo in continentem proximos quosque mercede transvehere, Venerem mutatam in anuis formam gratis transvexit: quapropter ab ea donatus unguenti alabastro cum se in dies inditum ungueret, feminas in sui amorem trahebat ('When Phaon was a ferryman, he was accustomed to transport his neighbours from Lesbos to the mainland for a fee, but he carried Venus once for free, though she had changed her form to that of an old woman. For this, she gave him an alabaster jar of ointment, and when he put it on and anointed himself every day, he drew women into loving him.').²⁰

²⁰ For the fullest treatment of this play and the sexual jokes found in fr. 188 and 189 K–A, see R. Rosen, 'Plato Comicus and the evolution of Greek Comedy', in G.W. Dobrov, *Beyond Aristophanes* (Atlanta, 1995), 131–7, esp. 131–2.

²¹ In verse 22, I emend Kassel–Austin's text, which proposes σκόρπιος rather than σκορπίος. I see no reason for K–A's choice to accent the antepenult. S.D. Olson, *Broken Laughter* (Oxford, 2007), G4, similarly diverges from K–A.

(A.) Don't cut up the perch, the trout, the bream,
 the saw-tooth, unless you want heaven's wrath to breathe down on you, 15
 but cook it up, and serve it up whole; that's much better.
 If you tenderize the tentacle of the octopus at just the right moment,
 it is far better boiled than baked, at least if it's a large one.
 But if two are baked, then to hell with the boiled one.
 The red mullet doesn't usually help tense up the 'nerve', 20
 since that fish really comes from the virgin goddess Artemis
 and hates hard-ons.
 And now the scorpion... (B.) ... might sneak up and sting you
 right in the asshole!²²

In this fragment, Plato parodies a certain cooking treatise by Philoxenus, but the precise identity of the work and its author is unclear. Athenaeus (1.5b) claims that Philoxenus of Leucas composed a dactylo-epitrite poem entitled *Deipnon* ('The Dinner Party'), which seems the most likely source for Plato's parody. However, Athenaeus confuses this poet with Philoxenus of Cythera, an approximately contemporaneous dithyrambographer who worked in the court of Dionysius I and was a noted gourmand.²³ The extent of Plato's parody is also unknown: the verses may be an actual quote from a hexameter poem; they may be a completely fabricated lampoon (as O&S [xlii] put it, 'the sort of thing the notorious glutton Philoxenus *would* write if he *did* write in epic verse'); or they may represent a humorously adapted work of prose or poetry into dactylic hexameter. Regardless of these uncertainties, however, it is clear that speaker A reads Philoxenus' cooking treatise to find foods with aphrodisiac qualities.

In fact, Rosen (n. 20), 135 has argued that 'the focus of the scene in Plato's fr. 189 K.-A. is not so much on parodying Philoxenus as on the humorous lucubrations about achieving an erect phallus'. Reading from the book, speaker A notes that bulbs (βολβοί) help 'straighten out a man's cock' (189.9–10) and that the red mullet (τρίγλη) 'doesn't usually help tense up the "nerve"' (189.20). Rosen, however, misses a similarly sexual joke in the final verse. As speaker A continues his reading of aphrodisiac foodstuffs and is about to discuss the scorpion fish, speaker B interjects, 'it might come up from behind and sting you in the asshole!', ([A.] σκορπίος αὖ [B.] παῖσειέ γε σου τὸν πρωκτὸν ὑπελθών). I would argue that Plato, like Archestratus, employs a pun based on the aural similarity of σκορπίος to σκῶρ and πέος. This reading of the scorpion fish corresponds well with the twenty preceding verses, as well as with the sexually charged content of the play in general. Speaker A mentions the scorpion, and it is misconstrued by speaker B as a penis used for anal intercourse, so he offers a comic double entendre as a warning: 'not only will the scorpion sting you, but the "shitcock" will sting you in the asshole'. Plato's use of πρωκτός is even more suggestive of anal sex than Archestratus' πυγή, since it refers not merely to the 'rump' but to the anus itself; and the verb παῖειν is rather frequently used in Greek comedy as a metaphor for sexual intercourse.²⁴ Both poets make virtually the same joke, which

²² Translation R. Rosen (n. 20), 135.

²³ Throughout 1.5b–7a of the *Deipnosophistae*, Athenaeus seems to switch back and forth somewhat indiscriminately between the two Philoxeni, even adding a third (of Eryxis) to the confusion. For a helpful explanation of the various Philoxeni, see J. Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef* (Oxford, 2000), 341–50; on Philoxenus' *Deipnon*, in particular, see 350–4.

²⁴ Henderson (n. 9), 71.

can almost certainly be attributed to Arcestratus' knowledge of either Plato's *Phaon* or Philoxenus' cookbook.²⁵

Elsewhere, in fact, there are significant similarities between Plato's parody and the *Hedypatheia*.²⁶ In verse 15 above, Plato's character reads from Philoxenus' cookbook, μή σοι νέμεσις θεόθεν καταπνεύσῃ ('lest nemesis breathe down upon you from the gods'). Arcestratus fr. 16.3–4 offers a near verbatim admonition for those readers who do not obey his cooking tips: μή σοι νέμεσις καταπνεύσῃ | ... ἀπ' ἀθανάτων ('lest nemesis breathe down upon you from the immortals'). Arcestratus and Plato even use the exact same phrase (ὄλον ὀπτήσας παράθες) at 13.4 and 189.16, respectively, when advising to 'bake whole and serve'. Both authors also refer to sea foods as 'children of the sea'; Plato/Philoxenus calls them τέκνα θαλάσσης at 189.11 and Arcestratus at 50.3 uses the synonymous τέκνα πόντου. Lastly, Arcestratus employs the phrase ἐνέπω κλαίειν μακρά ('I say go to hell') at 39.3 in reference to a particular type of fish, and nearly the same expression can be found of a different seafood in verse 19 of Plato's parody, κλαίειν ἀγορεύω ('I say go to hell').

Most scholars believe that these intertexts reveal Arcestratus' intimate knowledge not of Plato's *Phaon* but of Philoxenus' poem.²⁷ Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that both poets drew separately from the same hexameter source, since the only overlap between them is within the verses attributed to Philoxenus. The coincidence of the scorpion joke, however, may suggest a more linear relationship between the *Phaon* and the *Hedypatheia*.²⁸ If the text of Plato's comedy is correct, and a second speaker interrupts speaker A, the reference to anal sex is most likely original to Plato, not Philoxenus. Regardless of the original source, however, Arcestratus and Plato/Philoxenus effectively make the same joke about anal intercourse, exploiting the linguistic similarity between σκορπίος and the obscenities σκῶρ and πέος. Plato, as a poet of comedy, completes the pun with the explicit obscenity πρωκτός; Arcestratus, however, as a poet of parody, relies on more subtle wordplay, using πυγών as a pun for πυγή. In order for the *Hedypatheia* to work as parodic literature, it must maintain its generic pretence and always seem like a cookbook, even when it offers a graphic sexual joke. The allusive nature of this comic style has obscured Arcestratus' scorpion joke, but its discovery helps further reveal the complex layering of humour in Arcestratus' *Hedypatheia*.

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²⁵ Wilkins (n. 23), 349 states confidently: 'Unless we date the [*Hedypatheia*] to before 391, then either Arcestratus has imitated Plato's parody or a common hexameter source has been imitated by both of them'.

²⁶ For discussion of the *Hedypatheia*'s relationship to Plato's *Phaon*, see O&S xxxix–xliii and Wilkins (n. 23), 349.

²⁷ Cf. Brandt (n. 1), 125–7. O&S (xliii) concur: 'given the specific verbal similarities between the two works, the simplest conclusion would seem to be that Philoxenus' work was known to Arcestratus and served as a literary model for his poem'. Wilkins (n. 23), 349, cautiously avoids drawing any specific conclusions.

²⁸ Arcestratus may, in fact, have known both poets' works.