

SEMONIDES OF AMORGOS, FR. 1.4

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The opening verses of fr. 1 are given as follows in Diehl-Beutler:

*Ω παῖ, τέλος μὲν Ζεὺς ἔχει βαρύκτυπος
πάντων ὅσ' ἐστὶ καὶ τίθησ' ὅκη θέλει.
νόος δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν· ἀλλ' ἐφήμεροι
ἂ δὴ βοτὰ ζώομεν οὐδὲν εἰδότες,
ὅκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός.

The first three verses present no particular difficulties either of text or interpretation, but the beginning of v. 4 is quite a different matter. The manuscripts of Stobaeus record δὴ βροτοὶ ζώομεν (S), αἰδὴ βοτὰ ζώομεν (M), and αἰδὴ βοτὰ ζώομεν (A), a discrepancy which has resulted in at least 15 emendations.¹ The purpose of this paper is to suggest reasons for adopting the text of Diehl-Beutler, i.e. Ahrens' ἂ δὴ and MA's βοτά.

The most important point is the question of choosing between βροτοί and βοτά. There seems to be no doubt that the latter as the much rarer word has a greater probability of being correct. βροτοί, on the other hand, could well be a gloss on ἐφήμεροι, a view which wins support from v. 13, where in A βροτῶν has been inserted in front of θνητῶν; or simply a copyist's error.² In addition βροτοί is rather weak after ἀνθρώποισιν. Several scholars, however, have objected to the appropriateness of βοτά in this context. Björck,³ for example, finds a comparison with cattle strange in a poem whose main

¹ Most of these can be found in the *apparatus critici* of Bergk and Diehl-Beutler.

² It is worth noting that in three passages in Aeschylus' *Eumenides* there are parallel manuscript errors. In 450 and 452, F reads βροτοῦ for βοτοῦ and βροτοῖσι for βοτοῖσι, and in 907 all the manuscripts read βροτῶν for βοτῶν. Cf. also *Supp.* 691 and Paley's plausible conjecture βοτείων for βροτείων in Eur. *Heracl.* 822.

³ G. Björck, "Zu Semonides' Jamben von der Unzulänglichkeit menschlichen Planens," *SO* 15-16 (1936) 86-97. He emends to ἀδέα (with synizesis) βροτοὶ ζώομεν, on the basis of a gloss in Hesychius, ἀδέης· ἀτερπής.

subject is "das vorwitzige Planen und eitle Hoffen auf die Zukunft." Similarly Hense,⁴ in a study overlooked or ignored by Bergk and Diehl, felt that a comparison "mit den Thieren der Weide" was "wenig opportun" here. The appropriateness of *βοτά*, however, surely becomes obvious when we realize that by *βοτά* Semonides is thinking of sheep, that sheep were considered to be extremely stupid, and that as a result a comparison with sheep aptly illustrates the thought of v. 3.

The word *βοτόν* denotes basically any grazing domestic animal, often cattle⁵ and sheep together,⁶ but it is used of sheep alone more frequently than a glance at the entry in *LSJ* would suggest. It occurs most often in Aeschylus, where it denotes grazing animals or animals in general in five passages.⁷ Twice he seems to use it of pigs⁸ and once of sheep (*Agam.* 1415). Sophocles uses it four times in his *Ajax* of cattle and sheep together⁹ and once of sheep alone (*Trach.* 690). In the only occurrences of the word in Euripides (*Hipp.* 75 and *Cyc.* 333) the reference is almost certainly to sheep alone. Aristophanes uses it once of animals in general,¹⁰ and Callimachus once of sheep.¹¹ Finally, in the solitary occurrences of *βότειος* and *βότεος* the reference

⁴ O. Hense, *Kritische Blätter* (Halle 1872) 84–86. He argues that *βοροτοί* was a gloss which at a later time was corrupted or corrected to *βοτά*, and reads *ἐφήμεροι ἐπ' ἡμέρην δὴ ζῶμεν*. I might add here that V. Steffen, *Quaestiones Lyricae* (Poznan 1955) 26 note 16, also argues that neither *βοροτοί* nor *βοτά* was in the original text. "V. 4 gravissime corruptus esse videtur a scribis, qui, cum archetypi lectionem recognoscere non possent, scripserunt ea, quae ipsis visa sunt. Versus ad Mimnermi fr. 2 ita restituendus est, ut scribatur: φύλλοις θ' ὄμοιοι ζῶμεν (vel βοτάνης θ' ὄμοιοι ζῶμεν)."

⁵ By "cattle" I of course mean neat cattle, not all domesticated animals, as was once the practice.

⁶ E.g. *Il.* 18.521, the sole instance of the word in Homer.

⁷ *Supp.* 568, 691, *Agam.* 1169, *Cho.* 753, *Eum.* 907.

⁸ *Eum.* 450 and 452. The reference to a pig is suggested by 283.

⁹ 145, 231, 324, and 453. That both cattle and sheep are included is made clear from 375.

¹⁰ *Clouds* 1427. According to *LSJ* the reference here is to birds, but Dover, in his recent commentary on the play, is surely right in taking it of animals. The word is, however, used once of the ostrich (Oppian, *Hal.* 4.630–31): *τοια δὲ καὶ Λιβύης πτερόεν βοτόν ἀγκυλόδειρον νήπια τεχνάζει*. Did Oppian choose *βοτόν* because the ostrich gives the appearance of grazing, or because by sticking its head in the sand it shows the stupidity of sheep (note *νήπια*), or simply because it was thought to resemble an animal as much as a bird?

¹¹ Fr. 112.5 Pf. The reference to sheep is made clear by a comparison with fr. 2.1 and Hes. *Theog.* 22–23.

in both instances is to sheep (for the latter see the Addenda to *LSJ*). There is consequently no objection to translating *βοτά* in Semonides by "sheep" rather than "cattle," the common rendering of the word here. In fact, with the possible exception of a passage in Alcman,¹² there seems to be no example of the word clearly denoting cattle alone.

When we turn to passages which illustrate the stupidity of sheep, we find that the word generally used is *πρόβατον* (or the diminutive form *προβάτιον*), probably because it is a much commoner word than *βοτόν*.¹³ The comic writers, as might be expected, are our richest sources, Aristophanes providing at least four examples¹⁴ and Cratinus one.¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus* 259A, uses the comparison *ὥσπερ προβάτια* to describe those who sleep δι' ἀργίαν τῆς διανοίας; and Aristotle, *HA* 610B22, says that the ἦθος of sheep is εὐήθες καὶ ἀνόητον. Plutarch, *Fab. Max.* 1, tells us that *προβάτιον* was a name given to Fabius Maximus because as a child he was gentle and slow at learning his lessons; and in Diogenes Laertius 6.47 we find the following statement: τὸν πλούσιον ἀμαθῆ πρόβατον εἶπε χρυσόμαλλον. Finally there are the entries in Macarius 6.8, *μωρότερος προβάτου· ἐπὶ τῶν εὐθῶν καὶ ἀλογίστων*, and the *Suda* s.vv. *προβατίου βίον ζῆν· ἐπὶ τῶν μωρῶν καὶ ἀνοήτων*.¹⁶ The stupidity of sheep, therefore, is amply attested and it is not surprising that we find such a reference in a poet who explained different kinds of women according to their animal origin (fr. 7).

Two further points remain, the reading *ἀ δῆ* and the metrical problem of *ζώομεν*. Ahrens' emendation of the obviously corrupt versions in Stobaeus involves only a slight change, and, provided *βοτά*

¹² Fr. 1.47. The reference is probably to cattle, since the passage is based on Homer's simile (*Il.* 2.480–83) in which Agamemnon is as pre-eminent among the multitude of heroes as a bull among cows. The expression *βοτόν τέλειν* which occurs several times in an inscription from Cyrene is probably rightly explained in the Addenda to *LSJ* as "perh. = *βοῦν* (or *οῦν*) *τέλειον*." Cf. *Il.* 24.34, *βοῶν αἰγῶν τε τελείων*.

¹³ I can find no reference to the stupidity of cattle. Although it is true that *πρόβατα* can denote cattle or cattle and sheep together, this seems not to be true of Attic prose or comedy (cf. *LSJ*).

¹⁴ *Wasps* 32, *Knights* 264, *Clouds* 1201–3, and *Plutus* 922. On the last passage Tzetzes comments: *κτηνώδους καὶ ἀνοήτου ζωῆν λέγεις*.

¹⁵ Fr. 43 Kock, *ὁ δ' ἡλίθιος ὥσπερ πρόβατον βῆ βῆ λέγων βαδίζει*.

¹⁶ For examples in Latin cf. Plaut. *Bacch.* 1121–48, *Pers.* 172–74; Prop. 2.16.8, *et stolidum pleno vellere carpe pecus*; Phaedrus 29 Zander (575 Perry); and Major on Juvenal 10.50.

is accepted, it seems inconceivable that anything else could have been written. The rarity of the expression may have contributed to its corruption.¹⁷ In ζώομεν οὐ-, the reading of all the manuscripts, we have the only example of a choriamb in the second metron of an iambic trimeter. Although it is tempting to emend to ζώωμεν,¹⁸ especially if in v. 17 the last word is rightly corrected from ζώειν to ζόειν,¹⁹ a choriamb in the first metron occurs several times,²⁰ and Wilamowitz may well be justified in accepting the anomaly.²¹

¹⁷ The only other example of ἀ δῆ in the sense of οἷα δῆ is Soph. *Ajax* 1042-43, καὶ τὰχ' ἂν κακοῖς γελῶν ἀ δῆ κακοῦργος ἐξίκοιτ' ἀνὴρ. Jebb notes that in Nic. *Alex.* 215 we find ἀ without δῆ. Denniston, *GP* 219, includes the passages from Semonides and Sophocles among those where δῆ has a "depreciatory or sceptical colour."

¹⁸ For the diectasis see P. Chantraine, *Grammaire Homérique* 1 (Paris 1958³) 80. T. W. Allen, "Adversaria," *RPh* 3rd s., 8 (1934) 238, and Edmonds in the Loeb edition read ᾗ δῆ βοτὰ ζώωμεν.

¹⁹ The form in ζόω seems not to be attested again until *Anth. Pal.* 13.21.7 (ἐζοεν), but ζόη for ζωή is not uncommon in early authors, and ἐπιπειθείη in v. 6 does not appear again before Porphyrius in the third century A.D.

²⁰ For examples see P. Maas, *Greek Metre* (Oxford 1962) 67-68.

²¹ *Sappho und Simonides* (Berlin 1913) 271. Emendations such as Bergk's αἰεὶ ζώωμεν or Ahrens' ζώουσιν are too drastic to win much confidence. A choriamb in the second metron of a choliambic occurs in a recently discovered fragment of Hipponax. The anomaly is removed by M. L. West, *Maia* 20 (1968) 198, who is followed by W. de Sousa Medeiros, *Hipponactea* (Coimbra 1969) 36, but perhaps the text should be left unchanged.

For an excellent interpretation of the poem as a whole see R. Laurenti, "Pessimismo e non pessimismo nella poesia di Semonide l' Amorgino," *Sophia* 32 (1964) 83-100. On v. 4 he comments (84 note 8): "la lezione ἀ δῆ βοτὰ è da mantenersi, giacchè sotto-linea il contrasto tra l' uomo che come bestia vive dell' attimo, incapace quindi di vedere e prevedere bene e male, e la divinità che invece non è legata a tale imperfetta visione." For numerous parallels to the general thought of the opening lines see H. Fränkel, "Man's 'Ephemeros' Nature According to Pindar and Others," *TAPA* 77 (1946) 131-45.