

## THE DREAM-ORACLES OF ATHENA, KNIGHTS 1090–95

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Aristophanes' *Knights*, which presents Demos as the head of a household and politicians as his slaves, features a number of contests between the Paphlagonian-Cleon and a Sausage-seller for the favor of Demos. At lines 997 to 1099 the Paphlagonian and Sausage-seller hold a contest to see who has the best oracles about their master's destiny. This particular competition is concluded when each contestant recites his dream-oracle of Athena (1090–95). After hearing these oracles Demos judges the Sausage-seller to be the wiser seer (σοφώτερος). He is about to entrust himself to the latter's stewardship (1096–99), when the Paphlagonian begs for one more opportunity, thus beginning a final food-serving contest (1151–1252).

Considering the pivotal role played by the dream-oracles of Athena and the prominence of the goddess in the food-serving competition,<sup>1</sup> it is surprising how little attention has been paid to them. Sommerstein, for example, focuses on a few selected details without offering an interpretation, and Landfester passes over the oracles, preferring to cite Keil and Pohlenz, who assert that these dreams are an insertion (*Einschub*) or have been interpolated (*eingeschaltet*) into the text by the author himself.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, however, I will argue that the

<sup>1</sup> I began to discuss the prominence of Athena in the competition in my dissertation, "The Epithets of Athena in Aristophanes" (diss. Michigan 1986). In this competition (especially lines 1166–1204), the Paphlagonian tries to enhance the value of his food-gifts to Demos by claiming that they came from Athena herself; but the epithets that he uses to describe the goddess are either bizarre ad hoc creations or rarely attested titles (e.g. Πυλαιμάχος 1172, Φοβεσιστράτη 1177, Γοργολόφα 1181). The Sausage-seller, on the other hand, using the same technique as his rival, outdoes him by linking bigger and better offerings to Athena under traditional and more appropriate epithets (e.g. Ὀβριμοπάτρα 1178, Τριτογενής 1189).

<sup>2</sup> A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Knights* (Warminster 1981) 203; M. Landfester, *Die Ritter des Aristophanes* (Amsterdam 1967) 66; B. Keil, "Über Eupolis Demen und Aristophanes Ritter," *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* (1912) 261n.1; M. Pohlenz, "Aristophanes Ritter," *Nachrichten von der Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen* 5 (1952) 118n.44. Keil regards the oracle-contest as completed at 1089, when the Paphlagonian and Sausage-seller fulfill Demos' wish to hear his favorite oracle about becoming an eagle (1011–13). Keil concludes: "Die beiden Traumorakel zerreißen also den Zusammenhang. Sie sind ein Einschub des Dichters, der einen Einfall nicht bei Seite werfen wollte und ihn nachträglich, daher an ungeeigneter Stelle, unterbrachte. Es ist zwar nicht zu beantworten, aber keineswegs müßig zu fragen, ob er dies noch vor der Aufführung tat oder erst nachher bei der Veröffentlichung." Citing Keil, Pohlenz declares: "Keil vermerkt richtig, dass die beiden Traumorakel 1090–1095 aus dem Zusammenhang herausfallen und wohl

content of the dream-oracles plays an essential role in the contest between the Paphlagonian and the Sausage-seller, and that they prepare for the final defeat and banishment of the inept Paphlagonian and the triumphant rejuvenation of Demos—that is, of Athens—under the stewardship of the Sausage-seller at the end of the play.<sup>3</sup>

Before I turn to the dreams-oracles, a brief review of the Paphlagonian's situation in the contest is helpful. At every turn he has been outdone by his rival. At lines 1086–87, for example, the Paphlagonian foretells that Demos will become an eagle and reign over the whole earth. He then is forced to hear the Sausage-seller top him when he expands his oracle to include not only the whole earth but also the Red Sea and Ecbatana (1088–89).<sup>4</sup> At this point the Paphlagonian introduces the dream-oracle as a last attempt to win Demos to his side. The Paphlagonian hopes to create the impression that Athena regards him as her special favorite, for he implies that Athena has sent him this dream-oracle because she prefers him for the stewardship of Demos' household.<sup>5</sup> We will see, however, that the Athena of his dream is, in fact, peculiar to the Paphlagonian himself and quite unlike the goddess of the city.

Reciting his dream in hexameters (like a χρησμολόγος<sup>6</sup>), the Paphlagonian declares that he saw the goddess pouring “wealth-and-health” (πλουθυγεία) over Demos with a bathman's ladle :

nachträglich vom Dichter eingeschaltet sind, gewiss aber nicht erst nach der Aufführung.”

<sup>3</sup> Support for the view argued here, that the dream oracles are not insertions, could be found in line 809: “Α σὺ γινώσκων τόνδ' [sc. Demos] ἐξαπατᾷς καὶ ὄνειροπολεῖς περὶ αὐτοῦ, which either anticipates the appearance of the oracles or at the very least suggests that Cleon used similar oracles in actuality; probably both.

<sup>4</sup> Here as well, the Sausage-seller expropriates his rival's imagery while making it more conventional. By adding the Red Sea, the Sausage-seller evokes a traditional formula, “land and sea,” and by referring to Ecbatana he simultaneously extends the promise and makes it more tangible by evoking the real Persian Empire (whose demands for earth and water were presumably taken as a claim of rule over land and sea, Hdt. 6.48 and 7.133. Cf. also Artabanus' admonition to Xerxes that land and sea will be his enemies in conquering Greece, Hdt. 7.49).

<sup>5</sup> For general discussions of dreams and divination, see A. Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination dans l'antiquité I* (Paris 1879) 277–329; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley 1951) 103–11, 117–21; J. D. Mikalson, *Athenian Popular Religion* (Chapel Hill 1983) 39–49. On Aristophanes' treatment of dreams as a means of divination, see N. D. Smith, “Diviners and Divination in Aristophanic Comedy,” *CA* 8 (1989) 140–58, with further references and bibliography.

<sup>6</sup> The Paphlagonian sings his oracles (61 “Αττει δὲ χρησμούς [cf. also 809 ὄνειροπολεῖς and 818 χρησμοφδῶν]), and even claims that they come from the legendary seer Bacis (1003). For bibliography on Bacis, with references to collections of his oracles, see A. S. Pease on Cicero's *De Divinatione* 1.18.34; for his popularity at Athens, especially during the Persian and Peloponnesian wars, see W. K. Pritchett, *The Greek State at War III* (Berkeley 1979) 318–21. The Sausage-seller, on the other hand, claims priority for his oracles because they come from a fictitious elder brother of Bacis, named Glanis (1004). On the name Glanis (sheat-fish), see O. Weinrich, “Die Seher Bakis und Glanis, ein Witz des Aristophanes,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 27 (1929) 57–60.

‘Ἄλλ’ ἐγὼ εἶδον ὄναρ, καὶ μοῦδόκει ἡ θεὸς αὐτὴ  
τοῦ δήμου καταχεῖν ἀρυταίνην πλουθυγίαν. (1090–91)

But I saw a dream: and the goddess herself appeared to me  
pouring over Demos wealth-and-health with a bath-ladle.<sup>7</sup>

The bountiful ἀρύταινα with which Athena showers Demos is a bathman’s ladle. The ἀρύταινα was apparently capacious; according to Theophrastus (*Char.* 9.8), one ladleful held enough water to douse the bather, and in a fragment of Aristophanes we read of a bathman whose ladles are apparently large enough to be used to push his customers around (βαλανεύς δ’ ὥθει ταῖς ἀρυταίναϊς, fr. 450, *PCG* III<sup>2</sup>).<sup>8</sup> The expectation of a great profusion of gifts is further intensified by the last word of the dream-oracle, πλουθυγίαν, an Aristophanic coinage repeated in *Wasps* and *Birds*, which denotes an abundance of blessings of every kind.<sup>9</sup> The bathman’s ladle, however, absurdly casts Athena in the role of a bath-attendant; the bath-attendant’s disreputable character, unsavory associates, and extremely low status were regularly the target of comic poets.<sup>10</sup> The Paphlagonian’s vision of Athena should be recalled when we reflect on his final banishment at the end of the play. He will “sell sausages alone at the city gates”, “drink used bath-water”, and hold shouting matches with “prostitutes and bathmen” (1398–1403).<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Paphlagonian’s dream-oracle, in fact, prepares for his final fate, by associating him with baths.

<sup>7</sup> The text cited is the Budé edition of V. Coulon, *Aristophane I* (Paris 1923). Translations of Aristophanes are adapted from Sommerstein’s commentary (above, note 2). Here I prefer to translate τοῦ δήμου as Demos, the stage character, and not the Athenian assembly; cf. H.-J. Newiger, *Metapher und Allegorie*, *Zetemeta* 16 (München 1957) 41.

<sup>8</sup> Sommerstein (above, note 2) 203; R. Ginouvès, *Balaneutikè: recherches sur le bain dans l’antiquité grecque* (Paris 1962) 213–14. For the comic tone of ἀρύταινα, cf. also Antiphanes 25: ἐὰν δὲ τοῦργαστήριον ποιῇτε περιβόητον, / κατασκεδῶ, νῆ τὴν φίλην Δήμητρα, τὴν μεγίστην / ἀρύταιναν ὑμῶν ἐκ μέσου βάψασα τοῦ λέβητος / ζέοντος ὕδατος· εἰ δὲ μή, μηδέποθ’ ὕδωρ πίοιμι / ἐλευθέριον.

<sup>9</sup> *Ve.* 677; *Av.* 731. The range of benefits connected to the word is reflected most fully in *Wasps*, where Bdelycleon declares that the allies give as bribes to corrupt politicians (676–77) “pickle jars, wine, rugs, cheese, honey, sesame, pillows, libation-bowls, fine clothes, crowns, necklaces, drinking-cups, and wealth-and-health.” Though *Wasps* was performed two years after the *Knights* in 422 B.C., we may reasonably suppose the corrupt Paphlagonian to be precisely the kind of venal politician Bdelycleon has in mind; see *Eq.* 438, 801–2, 834–35, 930–33 (cf. also 326, 361, 973–76, 1033–34, 1070–72, 1408).

<sup>10</sup> E.g., *Ar. Eq.* 1403, *Ba.* 710, *Pl.* 955–56 (cf. also *Pl. R.* 1.344D); and see the discussion in Ginouvès (above, note 8) 212, with further references.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the Paphlagonian’s oracle about his own demise (1245–46), which foretells that his successor will have once sold sausages not in the agora, but at the city gates (ἐπὶ ταῖς πόλαις). For lines 1245–47 as evidence of “commercial activity going on elsewhere than in the Agora,” see G. de St Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972) 268–69. Banishment to the city gates (πόλαι) suggests a play on Pylos; thus the Paphlagonian’s many boasts about his victory at Pylos (for example at 355, 702, 846) may look forward to his final fate.

In reply, the Sausage-seller himself adduces Athena in a comic dream-oracle, but presents a much more effective picture of Athena than his rival. The Athena who appears in the Sausage-seller's vision counters the bizarre vision of his rival with a more normal and recognizable one. He reports that he too saw the goddess, but in his vision she came down from the Acropolis with her owl. She poured a libation (κατασπένδειν) of ambrosia over Demos with an ἀρύβαλλος, but over the Paphlagonian she poured one of garlic-brine, σκοροδάμη. Repeating the phrase καὶ μούδοκει ἡ θεὸς αὐτῇ (as if in a singing contest), the Sausage-seller declares:

Νῆ Δία καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ· καὶ μούδοκει ἡ θεὸς αὐτῇ  
ἐκ πόλεως ἔλθειν καὶ γλαῦξ αὐτῇ 'πικαθῆσθαι·  
εἶτα κατασπένδειν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀρυβάλλω  
ἀμβροσίαν κατὰ σοῦ, κατὰ τούτου δὲ σκοροδάμην.  
(1092-95)

By Zeus, so did I: and the goddess herself appeared to me  
coming out of the Acropolis and her owl settled on her;<sup>12</sup>  
then she poured down on your head with an aryballos  
a libation of ambrosia, and down on his one of garlic-brine.

The ἀρύβαλλος, like the ἀρύταινα, is associated with baths. The ἀρύταινα, however, is associated with the bath water itself, the ἀρύβαλλος with the perfumed water applied after the bath (here ambrosia for Demos).<sup>13</sup> In both dreams Athena remains a bath-attendant, but the Sausage-seller's Athena comes from the Acropolis to pour a libation of immortality on Demos. Indeed, the vividness of the image is intensified by the use of the compound κατασπένδειν, and the three repetitions of the preposition κατὰ, all of which emphasize the downward flow of the liquid.<sup>14</sup>

This action of Athena's is entirely in keeping with the means by which deities bestow immortality on favored mortals. Ambrosia possesses divine powers of renewal and strength. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, the goddess repeatedly anoints Demophoon with ambrosia so that he might grow like a god (237), and in Pindar, *Pythia* 9.63, the Seasons and Earth confer immortality on

<sup>12</sup> The meaning of ἐπικαθῆσθαι is clear enough, but its interpretation in this passage is ambiguous. Some commentators hold the view that the bird is settled on Athena's helmet; e.g., Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Birds* (Warminster 1987) 230, with further references. I, on the other hand, believe the bird could equally settle itself on or in her hand; for discussion of the owl resting on or in Athena's hand, see M. Groothand, "The Owl on Athena's Hand," *BABesch* 43 (1968) 35-51; for examples, see the catalogue in *LIMC* II pt. 1, 976, and II pt. II, particularly nos. 187 and 206, which depict the owl nestled in her left hand.

<sup>13</sup> On the contrasting functions of these two vessels, see Ginouvès (above, note 8) 214n.1.

<sup>14</sup> J. Casabona, *Recherches sur le vocabulaire des sacrifices en grec* (Aix-en-Provence 1966) 252, understands the compound κατασπένδειν to express the idea of contact. In support of this interpretation he cites this passage in Aristophanes, and two passages in Euripides' *Orestes*, 1187 and 1239. The visual image in the Aristophanes passage seems to me to gain its strength from the repetition of κατὰ. The examples from Euripides seem much less powerful; in 1239 in particular the use of κατασπένδειν is so weak as to be interpreted metaphorically.

Aristaeus by feeding him on ambrosia and nectar.<sup>15</sup> One might also mention here an example from the visual arts, the Etruscan relief from Pyrgi, dated 480–70, that depicts Athena herself bringing ambrosia in a small vase to pour over the head of her favorite Tydeus.<sup>16</sup>

Athena's libation of ambrosia for Demos anticipates his miraculous reappearance at the Propylaea of the Acropolis at the end of the play, when he is rejuvenated and restored to the strength and vigor of his Marathon days. Indeed, this rejuvenation of Demos and the renewal of Athens are explicitly linked when the Sausage-seller proclaims to the chorus :

Ὅψεσθε δέ· καὶ γὰρ ἀνοιγνυμένων νόφος ἤδη τῶν  
 προπυλαίων·  
 Ἄλλ' ὀλοῦξάτε φαينوμέναισιν ταῖς ἀρχαίαισιν Ἀθήναις  
 καὶ θαυμασταῖς καὶ πολύμνοις, ἵν' ὁ κλεινὸς Δῆμος ἐνοικεῖ.  
 (1326–28)

And you shall see; for now there's the sound of the Propylaea  
 opening;  
 but cry aloud for joy at the appearance of the Athens of old,  
 both wondrous and much-hymned, where renowned Demos dwells.

This connection between the Sausage-seller's dream and its eventual fulfillment at the end of the play is strengthened by the association of the ambrosia with particularly pleasing odors. Hera, for example, anoints herself with ambrosial oil to enhance her seductive charms in the *Iliad* (14.170–77),<sup>17</sup> but the fragrance of ambrosia is also connected to peace. Dicaeopolis describes the thirty-years truce in *Acharnians* as "smelling of ambrosia and nectar" (196).<sup>18</sup> Hence, the Sausage-seller will tell the chorus that the rejuvenated Demos "is smelling not of mussel-shells but of peace libations, and he is anointed with myrrh" (1332).

<sup>15</sup> For the bestowal of immortality by means of ambrosia, see also Hes. fr. 23(a). 21–23 (Artemis makes Iphimede immortal by pouring ambrosia over her head); Theocr. 15.106–8 (Aphrodite immortalizes Berenike by anointing her with ambrosia); A.R. 4.871, copying *h. Hom.* 2.237 (Thetis tries to make Achilleus immortal). Cf. also N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 238–39, with further references; F. Graf, "Milch, Honig und Wein," *Perennitas, Studi in onore di A. Brelich* (Rome 1981) 209–21.

<sup>16</sup> Rome, Museo Nazionale di Villa Giulia. The relief, which depicts an episode, or two episodes, in the war of the Seven against Thebes, shows Athena about to pour her gift of immortality over Tydeus. But she is so horrified to see him cannibalize the corpse of his enemy Melanippus that she withdraws the gift. For discussion of the episodes shown on the relief, see I. Krauskopf, *Der thebanische Sagenkreis* (Mainz 1974) 43–45; O. Brendel, *Etruscan Art* (New York 1978) 234–37. For the dating of the Pyrgi relief to 480–70 B.C., see M. Torelli, *L'arte degli Etruschi* (Rome 1985) 131–32, with further references at 340. Detailed photographs of the Pyrgi relief can be found in Sprenger, Bartoloni, Hirmer, *The Etruscans*, trans. R. Wolf (New York 1983) pls. 179–81.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of ambrosia as a perfumed unguent, see S. Lilja, *The Treatment of Odors in the Poetry of Antiquity*, *Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum* 49 (Helsinki 1972) 58–59, and *passim*. For divine fragrances in general, see E. Lohmeyer, *Vom Göttlichen Wohlgeruch*, *Sitzungsbereichte der Heidelberger Akademie* 9 (Heidelberg 1919).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Taillardat, *Les Images d'Aristophane* (Paris 1962) 653.

The sweet and divine fragrance of Demos' bath, in turn, contrasts with the stench of the garlic-drenched Paphlagonian. The garlic-brine, σκοροδάλμη, like the mussel-shells, evokes foul and offensive odors,<sup>19</sup> and recalls the oracle in the prologue about the Paphlagonian's defeat (197–201), which foretells that when the Paphlagonian is overthrown, "the garlic-brine of Paphlagonians shall perish" (δὴ τότε Παφλαγόνων μὲν ἀπόλλυται ἡ σκοροδάλμη, 199).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the Sausage-seller's dream-oracle of Athena pouring a libation of garlic-brine over the head of the Paphlagonian takes on an even greater validity, as it reveals that Athena will have a hand in its final fulfillment through her clear preference for the one contestant over the other.

The presence of Athena's owl in the Sausage-seller's vision is yet another sign of the goddess's favor. The owl is Athena's special bird and was thought to be a harbinger of victory. Plutarch (*Them.* 12.1) reports that the victory of Themistocles at Salamis was signaled by the appearance of this bird on the rigging of his ship.<sup>21</sup> The allusions to Themistocles in the *Knights* are too numerous to discuss in this paper,<sup>22</sup> but one could certainly regard the appearance of Themistocles' bird in the Sausage-seller's dream as an indication that he too will be victorious. In addition, it is likely that the image of Athena pouring a liquid while holding an owl was a stock scene in vase painting. The best example is by the Douris Painter, who depicts the goddess holding her owl in her left hand and a jug in her right, as she pours wine for her favorite Heracles.<sup>23</sup> In short, the image of Athena called forth in the Sausage-seller's dream is comic, but, with its comic features, it also combines traditional elements of the

<sup>19</sup> For the pungent smell of garlic and its by-products, see Lilja (above, note 17) 221–23, and *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> This is the only other reference to garlic-brine in the play. Garlic and its by-products are also closely connected with fierce and bellicose natures (cf. e.g., *Eq.* 946; *Ach.* 166, 526, and see Taillardat [above, note 18] 378). Thus the Paphlagonian comically receives a bath befitting his own nature.

<sup>21</sup> For other examples of the owl as a portent of victory, especially for the Athenians, see D.S. 20.11.3–4, Bekker *Anecd.* 1.232–33; Sch. *Ve.* 1086; Hsch. s.v. γλαῦξ. The Paphlagonian's mention of "wealth" may also provide an opportunity for the Sausage-seller to play on the association of the owl with Athenian coinage (cf. *Av.* 1106). Thus, on a secondary level, the Sausage-seller's Athena would provide Demos with real wealth; that the ἀρύβαλλος was commonly used to denote purses (βαλλάντια) would further heighten the humor. For the similarity in shape between the ἀρύβαλλος and the βαλλάντιον, see *Ath.* 11.783 F, with Kock's commentary on *Knights* 1094.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. 810–19, 884–86 (cf. also 763–66, 1039–40). For the Paphlagonian's many attempts to identify himself as a new and better Themistocles, see L. Edmunds, *Cleon, Knights, and Aristophanes' Politics* (Lanham, Md. 1987) 40–41, 46–47, 72; C. Anderson, "Themistocles and Cleon in Aristophanes' *Knights*: 763ff.," *AJP* 110 (1989) 10–16.

<sup>23</sup> München, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, 2648; *LIMC* vol. II, pt. 2, no. 187; Beazley *ARV*<sup>2</sup> 441.185; E. Simon, *Die Götter der Griechen* (München 1969) 207, pl. 192 (480–70 B.C.). This is the only example I know of that depicts Athena pouring a liquid from a vase and holding her owl in her hand. For examples of Athena with her owl settled on or in her hand, see *LIMC* II pt. I, 976; II pt. 2, nos. 202–6. For examples of Athena pouring a liquid for a favored hero or god, see *LIMC* II pt. 2, nos. 181, 182, 184 (Heracles), 186 (Zeus).

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goddess that render it recognizable and familiar to Aristophanes' audience, and hence to Demos.

In summary, these dream-oracles are significant in the contest for the stewardship of Demos. They reflect the characters of the dreamers and their notions of Athena. The Paphlagonian shows that his view of Athena is self-serving and peripheral when he turns the goddess into a kind of bath-attendant. By presenting this bizarre image, he gives the Sausage-seller an opportunity to exploit and develop the image along more traditional lines. The Sausage-seller's vision of Athena reflects not an unbalanced, idiosyncratic view, but rather an established view of the goddess. Retaining her traditional tutelary position, she descends from the Acropolis to immortalize Demos and to scorn the Paphlagonian. Thus, one can see that, far from being an insertion, the contest of the dream-oracles is related to the larger themes and concerns of the play and contributes to the overall victory of the Sausage-seller.