

This is the Death of the Earth: Crisis Narratives in Archilochus and Mnesiepes*

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SUMMARY: The relationship between Archilochus's poetry and the account of his life preserved in the Mnesiepes Inscription is intimate but obscure. Here I present one avenue for elucidating this connection by focusing on two episodes of social breakdown. In the first section I propose a reading of Archilochus fragment 230 in terms of wider patterns of ecological collapse. In the second, I contrast this reading with the episode of impotence visited upon the men of Paros as told by Mnesiepes. By reading these crisis narratives against one another we can better understand Mnesiepes' dynamic authorial role in the Hellenistic reception of the iambic tradition.

IN THE FINAL SECTION OF ELIOT'S "FOUR QUARTETS" FROM WHICH I TAKE my title, the poet speaks of the effects of time that transform past grandeurs into today's dust. The melancholy continues as a chance encounter triggers a recollection that leaves him looking into "the eyes of a compound ghost both intimate and unidentifiable." A similar sense of time's passing confronts readers of Mnesiepes' inscriptional text from third century Paros that narrates Archilochus's career and forges an aetiological connection with the archaic poet. The compound ghost of Archilochus that we meet is doubled as we see the poet both in his own surviving words and in Mnesiepes' *vita*—images that at times seem to reinforce one another and at times to clash. But this ghost is doubly hollow too, since we see it through the gaping interstices of tattered texts.

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In this paper I explore one small piece of this fragmented picture, namely two tales of social and environmental crisis that are associated with Archilochus. The first half offers a hypothetical reconstructed context for Archilochus's fragment 230, which provides a tiny glimpse into a poem about a land parched by drought. I will build my case for an ecological reading by reaching beyond the narrow world of Archilochus into a wider network of allusions drawn from the realms of poetry, historiography, and natural science. One of the results of this part of the project will be a narrative point of contact between the Archilochean fragment and the third century inscription of Mnesiepes. As my subtitle suggests, I propose to read Mnesiepes as a literary author responding to, participating in, and shaping the later Archilochean tradition. With this in mind, the second half of the paper analyzes Mnesiepes' own authorial context between his archaic model and sources and his contemporary world and audience. I will suggest that Mnesiepes, often exsanguinated for the crime of entrusting his words to stone rather than parchment or papyrus, is an active participant in the formation of his community's understanding of and relationship to their poet-hero and that the static medium of his composition should not beguile us into missing complexities of the cultural and literary conversations still audible within his text.

Along this trajectory, my first argument will be that fragment 230 is most plausibly understood as part of a literary pattern that consistently pairs extreme climatic heat and dryness with a broad range of agricultural, medical, and social disasters that result from the blistering effects of the Dog Star. When we combine this trope with ancient mythographical and scientific discussions of this star, a picture emerges of a pestilential season that precipitates plagues and jeopardizes the systemic health of the community. As we move from this reading of fragment 230 in terms of environmental calamity to the story of mass impotence found in the Mnesiepes Inscription, we observe something of the process of selective adaptation at work in the *vita* tradition of Archilochus. Although the two texts are separated by nearly half a millennium, they both position the poet as an intermediary between his audience and the power of the gods. As one of the main points of intersection between human society and the divine, the poet plays a crucial role in understanding upheavals that afflict the community. In composing his third century crisis narrative, Mnesiepes has manipulated the Archilochean tradition in a manner consistent with broader Hellenistic aetiological patterns to produce a text that lays claim to authority over that tradition while adapting it to the needs and tastes of his contemporary audience.

1. ARCHILOCHUS FRAGMENT 230: A POETICS OF DRYNESS

κακήν σφιν Ζεὺς ἔδωκεν αὐονήν
 Zeus sent them a terrible dryness.¹
 fr. 230

Fragment 230 of Archilochus is preserved in the *Etymologicum Genuinum* as proof that (*h*)*auonê* means dryness.² This leaves us with no direct evidence for a narrative or performative context within which to interpret these five words. In this section, I propose that we can situate this orphaned line against a background of other accounts of heaven-sent environmental crises found throughout Greek literature. This reconstructed context will provide: A) a foundation for peering beyond the edges of fragment 230 to realize a more serious threat to the overall health of society than might be imagined in the word “drought” (as Gerber 1999 reasonably translates *hauonê* in his Loeb edition); and B) a point of entry for reassessing the plague motif in the Hellenistic Mnesiepes Inscription, which casts itself as an authoritative account of Archilochus’s career.

In fragment 230, then, we can begin by recognizing the *hauonê* sent by Zeus as a problem having wider consequences than those typically associated with “drought.” John Camp has argued that the fragment alludes to a specific historical episode in the eighth century in which drought led to famine and epidemic. He goes on to argue that the force of this devastating cycle across the archaic Greek world had a major impact on the history of colonization throughout the Mediterranean basin during the archaic period (1979: 407).

Camp’s analysis fits well with ancient sources, which regularly elide differences between plague, drought, and reproductive meltdowns of all sorts (virgin suicides, human or animal infertility, etc.).³ The *locus classicus* for demonstrating how easily such categories can bleed into one another is

¹ Unless otherwise stated, I follow West’s 1971 edition of Archilochus and Gerber’s 1999 translations. Here, the translation is mine.

² Both the accentuation and aspiration of the word are uncertain. In the *LSJ* the word appears as *auonê* (A) from *auos* without any mention of the aspirated form; s.v. *auos* the *LSJ* also lists the Attic *hauos*.

³ It is not just that one bad event precipitates another; successfully avoiding any such misfortune can also protect against problems that, to us, seem unrelated. For Galen, the healthy body is able to resist a huge range of ill effects: “Such a body will automatically be endowed with the best humors of all, and will thus be better able to withstand grief, anger, insomnia, worry, rain (*ombroi*), droughts (*aukhmoi*), plagues (*loimoi*), and indeed all causes of disease” (*De optima corporis nostri constitutione*, Kühn 4.743).

Thucydides' account of the Athenian plague, about which I will have more to say below (2.54): The city was debating the exact wording of a portentous old proverb that predicted either *limos*, "famine," or *loimos*, "plague," but the matter could not be resolved definitively, because the two words had precisely the same pronunciation. Dionysius of Halicarnassus offers perhaps the fullest example of this blurring of baleful categories in his description of the plague that hit Rome following Camillus's consulship (13.4):

Under the consuls who succeeded Camillus a pestilence (*nosos loimikê*) visited Rome, caused by a lack of rain and severe droughts (*apo anombrias kai aukhmôn*), which damaged the land devoted to orchards as well as that which was planted with corn, so that they produced scanty and unwholesome harvests for human beings and scanty and poor grazing for livestock. Countless sheep and beasts of burden perished for lack not only of pasturage but also of water; to such an extent did the rivers and other streams fail, at the very season when all live stock suffers most from thirst. As for human beings, a few perished as the result of resorting to food of which they had made no previous test, while nearly all the rest were afflicted with severe maladies that began with small pustules, which broke out on various parts of the skin and ended up in large ulcers resembling cancers, horrid in appearance and causing terrible pain. And there was no remedy for the agony suffered by the victims except continual scratching and tearing of the sores until the tortured flesh laid bare the bones.

Dionysius tells almost the same story in reference to the Pelasgians of Sicily who, from "some divine anger" (*daimoniois tisi kholois*) or "through heavenly misfortunes" (*hypo tôn theiôn symphorôn*) (1.23.1), were ravaged by an environmental crisis (1.23.2–3):

The first cause of the desolation of their cities seemed to be a drought (*aukhmos*) which laid waste the land, when no fruit remained on the trees till it was ripe, but dropped while still green, and none of the seed corn that sent up shoots and flowered stood for the usual period until the ear was ripe, and there was not enough grass for the cattle; and of the waters some were no longer fit to drink, others shrank during the summer, and others were totally dried up. And similar calamities attended the offspring both of cattle and women. For they either aborted or died at birth, some by their death destroying also those that bore them; and if any got safely past the danger of the delivery, they were either maimed or defective or, being injured by some other accident, were not fit to be reared. The rest of the people, also, particularly those in the prime of life, were afflicted with many unusual diseases and uncommon deaths.⁴

⁴ Archilochus fragment 188 presents similar narrative elements to this passage of Diodorus, but the effect is personal and invective: οὐκέ]θ' ὁμῶς θάλλεις ἀπαλὸν χροῶ-κάρφεταμ γὰρ ἤδη / ὄγμος· κακοῦ δὲ γήραος καθαίρει . . .] "No longer does your skin

A more poetic and mythical parallel to Dionysius's historical account appears in Aeschylus's *Eumenides* where the Furies twice describe their retributive power as a *hauona brotois*, "parching plague against men" (333, 346). These dread goddesses wield a power associated with both agriculture and human reproduction: they begin in their traditional role as avengers of murder among blood relatives (210–12), later they threaten to destroy Attica's crops and children (780–87), and they are ultimately reincorporated as guarantors of the fecundity of the fields and human fertility (903–12). As Julia Nelson Hawkins explains: "Pandemic disease, crop blight, famine, and spontaneous abortions were often seen in antiquity as part of the same category of 'plague' and often accompanied one another" (2006: 39).⁵ It was both the environmental reality and the literary habit, then, to understand severe droughts in the ancient Mediterranean world as stressing the ecosystem to such a degree that they jeopardized the health of animals and crops, as well as human beings.

This brief survey shows that ancient sources often glided smoothly between various categories of widespread affliction, all of which can be usefully gathered under the rubric of plague (provided that we set aside our modern notions of plague as something rooted in bacterial contagion). This flexibility in thinking about types of socio-environmental crises becomes relevant for fragment 230 when we combine it with Nelson Hawkins's demonstration that all the famous plague narratives from antiquity more or less explicitly connect the onset of pestilential catastrophes with the rising of the Dog Star accompanied by a hot, dry wind coming out of the South (2006: 50–125).⁶

have the soft bloom that it once had; now your furrow is withered, the . . . of ugly old age is taking its toll . . ." As discussed thoroughly by Brown 1995, the words *karpheiai* . . . *ogmos* literally mean "your furrow has dried up," but *ogmos* also alludes to the female *pudenda*. For more on the image of woman as field, see Dubois 1988. A similar word play may underlie the opening of Herodas's most programmatically iambic poem: *tên de khoiron auonê druptei*, "dryness is ravaging the piglet" (Herod. 8.2). *Khoiros*, "piglet," is standard comic slang for the female *pudenda*. Just as in Archilochus fragment 188, then, Herodas speaks metaphorically of female fertility and sexuality with an image of agricultural desiccation. In Herodas's era, the use of *khoiros* may have evoked thoughts of Attic Old Comedy (e.g. Ar. *Ran.* 337–39), but as is often the case, the comic usage may be connected with older iambic traditions.

⁵ Although J. N. Hawkins's text is primarily focused on explicating the workings of Augustan poetry, she provides a framework for analyzing connections between issues of health and disease in ancient literature. While she does not deal with Archilochus or Mnesiepes, much of my approach to these matters derives from her work.

⁶ The clearest example of this dynamic can be found in Lucretius's explanation of plague (6.1090–1286).

The Dog Star's healthless, parching heat both provides the most likely seasonal context for Archilochus's *kakê haounê* and serves as a conceptual intermediary between the dryness in fragment 230 and the plague narrative composed by Mnesiepes.

The connection between the rising of the Dog Star and a plague blown to the northern Mediterranean by the South wind is inherently and pointedly political in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, as Nelson Hawkins shows, given the importance of Ptolemaic Egypt as the rough geographical provenance of this disease-blowing wind. Yet this political dimension is a late overlay onto a pattern that can be found already in Thucydides' description of the plague at Athens. Although his narrative focuses less on the origins and causes of the plague and more on its destabilizing social impact, nevertheless Thucydides provides a few diagnostic comments that describe the disease as coming north from Ethiopia and Egypt in early summer, the time of the rising of the Dog Star (2.47–48). The surest defense against *khalepê Maira*, as Callimachus refers to the Dog Star's heat in *Aetia* 3 (fr. 75.35) is to be found in the cooling Etesian winds, which blow, according to mythical accounts, only when Zeus is properly propitiated. And as Diodorus Siculus notes, one of the main reasons that the Athenian plague raged so uncontrollably was that the Etesian winds had failed to blow that season (12.58.3–7).

The Hippocratic *Epidemiae* confirms that plagues are most likely when the Dog Star rises without the Etesian winds. Each case study begins with an account of the environmental conditions for the year, and the author regularly notes the rising of the Dog Star and the strength or weakness of the Etesian winds before describing the health of the population. (Ironically, the case studies all derive from Thasos, the very island to which Archilochus unhappily went when he left Paros, a move that may be recalled in Mnesiepes' story of the poet's badly-received performance and the subsequent plague that beset the Parians.) The third example ties together all of the markers that we have been tracking (1.3.7):

About the summer solstice, scanty rains, and great cold until near the season of the Dog Star. After the Dog-days, until the season of Arcturus, the summer hot, great droughts (*kaumata megala*), not in intervals, but continued and severe: no rain; the Etesian winds blew.

In this instance, the presence of the Dog Star and the lack of water are mitigated by the Etesian winds, and, consequently, the results are not terribly dire (the author goes on to note that there was an outbreak of dysentery during the summer, but it did not prove to be fatal). For the doctor, then, the Dog Star and drought go hand-in-hand, and their paired effects on human and

agricultural health are determined in large part by the strength of the Etesian winds.

Turning from scientific writing to poetry informed by popular folk traditions, we find that Hesiod and Alcaeus tell similarly dire stories about the effects of the Dog Star's heat, and their verses provide further possibilities for contextualizing Archilochus fragment 230.⁷ Both poets say that the sweltering conditions make women lustful (Hsd. *Erga* 586: *mokhlotatai*; Alc. 347a.4: *miarôtatai*), again expanding the specific environmental conditions to encompass aspects of human sexuality and fertility.⁸ In the case of the men, the situation is less clear. Hesiod says that the Dog Star makes men *aphaurotatoi* (586); Alcaeus says they become *leptoi* (347a.5). Both words can imply weakness, an understandable result of doing any physical labor at this time of year, but when considered in conjunction with the condition of the women, it is likely that the men have lost their strong virility and are now sexually worn out. This fits well with the elder Pliny's explanation that both passages describe men as *in coitum pigerrimos*, "sexually lethargic" (22.87).

Anne Carson (1999: esp. 81–85) has surveyed a variety of physiological writings that elucidate these poems and has shown that both Hesiod and Alcaeus, in moving from issues of climatology to sexual appetite, express a similar anxiety over female procreative power.⁹ According to Greek medical authors, as the Dog Star's summer heat warms a woman's naturally cold and wet body to a peak of wantonness, the men, who are naturally hot and dry, are overcome and incapable of imposing the usual limitations on female behavior.

The Hippocratic corpus offers corroboration for the physical substratum of this literary trope. *Airs, Waters, Places* states that unless rain or a cooling breeze from the north mitigates the effects of the Dog Star's rising "there is the danger of deaths occurring among the women and children, and especially among the old men; and even those that get better may [relapse]" (10; See *Morb. Sacr.* for a similar comment). *On the Sacred Disease* stresses the

⁷ For the most thorough discussion of the persistent traditions surrounding these texts, see Petropoulos 1994.

⁸ Petropoulos 1994: 82 has argued the heterodox position that, instead of understanding Alcaeus as imitating or copying Hesiod, the two passages "may well be independent manifestations derived from the same stock of thematic material." He also provides an overview of the debate about the relationship between the two poems (17n29).

⁹ Carson 1999: 85 concludes that both poems participate in "a larger conceptual schema, whereby the female is assimilated to the world of raw nature and femininity [is] insistently identified with the wild." Cp. von Staden 1992.

deleterious impact of the South wind on everything from crops, to astral bodies, to the workings of the brain and blood vessels, and even to the structural integrity of jugs of wine or water stored inside (16). The combination of the Dog Star's rising and a hot South wind thus creates something of a perfect storm that undermines the health, fertility, and stability of virtually every element of human society. That this connection between the Dog Star's heat and disease persisted throughout antiquity can be seen in Quintus Smyrnaeus's description of the star as the "disseminator of the worst diseases over mankind" (3.80). In Archilochus fragment 230, then, it is not unreasonable to think of the *kakê hauonê* in terms of the blistering effects of the Dog Star, and the Dog Star's reputation for spurring all manner of disaster suggests that a major socio-environmental breakdown lurks behind the fragment's interrupted narrative.

While fragment 230 does not include the Dog Star by name, another Archilochean passage provides a possible connection. Plutarch quotes fragment 107 and makes clear that Archilochus's words refer to the desiccation of corpses: ἔλλομαι, πολλοὺς μὲν αὐτῶν Σείριος καθαναεῖ / ὅξυς ἐλλάμπων. (many of them (sc. corpses), I expect, will be dried up by the Dog Star's fierce rays). The main verb in this passage, *kathauainô*, "parch," is a compound form of *hauainô* or *auainô*, "dry out," and represents the verbal equivalent of the *kakê hauonê* in fragment 230, and, in the case of fragment 107, the searing heat is explicitly connected with the Dog Star. Hesiod records an effect of the Dog Star that is similar to that mentioned by Archilochus in fragment 107 (Sc. 151–53):

τῶν καὶ ψυχὰι μὲν χθόνα δύνουσ' Ἄιδος εἴσω
αὐτῶν, ὅστέα δέ σφι περὶ ῥινοῖο σαπίσης
Σειρίου ἀζαλέοιο κελαινῇ πύθεται αἶη.

Their souls went beneath the ground to Hades,
but with the skin rotting around them under
scorching Sirius (i.e. the Dog Star) their bones decay on the dark earth.

Thus, we can see that variations on the connection between pestilential, dry heat and the Dog Star are found across genres and periods of Greek literature. The heaven-sent *kakê hauonê* in fragment 230 fits ideally into this complex of summer heat under the Dog Star, the absence of the Etesian winds, and the threat of a plague-like environmental crisis.

Furthermore, this connection between the Dog Star and the *hau-* family of words (explicit in fragment 107 and possible in fragment 230) may be much more than coincidental or even purely astrological. In Semonides 7, for example, the woman created from a dog is said to have a constant and

annoying “howling,” *auonê* (7.20).¹⁰ The *LSJ* lists this as the only example under the lemma *auonê* (B), “cry,” from *auô*. It surely cannot be a coincidence that (*h*)*auonê* (A) means a dryness that can reasonably be associated with the Dog Star, while *auonê* (B) refers to a sound made by a dog. Some ancient lexicons seem to have considered this to be a case of a single word with two seemingly unrelated definitions. Thus, the *Etymologicum Magnum s.v. auonê* provides all three of the following words as definitions: *kraugê*, “shouting,” *aukhmos*, “drought,” and *xêrasia*, “dessication.”

The Byzantine grammarian Theognostus may well point toward the mythical explanation for this combination of meanings when, in a list of nouns that exemplify the same accentuation pattern, he places *auonê* (either “dryness” or “howling”) immediately after Erigone (*De Orthographia* 695.3). Both possible definitions of *auonê* are intimately linked with Erigone’s mythology.¹¹ Erigone was the daughter of Icarius, an ambassador of Dionysus who introduced wine to Attica. Because the strange new drink seemed to be poisoning everyone who partook of it, the locals killed Icarius and disposed of the body. Icarius’s dog, Maera, came to Erigone howling (*ululans*, Hyg., *Poet. Astr.* 2.4.4.3 and *Fab.* 130.3.1) and led her to her father’s grave where she hanged herself from the tree and where the dog expired as well.¹² All three characters were then taken up to the heavens: Erigone became Virgo, Icarius became Bootes, and, most importantly for our interest in the word (*h*)*auonê*, Icarius’s dog Maera became the Dog Star.

Two sequels to these mythical events tie together the themes that I am exploring in relation to fragment 230. In Attica, virgin girls began to follow Erigone to the noose, a suicidal epidemic that is recalled in the *aiôra*, “swing,”

¹⁰ Aeschylus’s Furies, who threaten to send a *hauona* at *Eum.* 333 and 346, are also described earlier in the play as dogs barking as they chase their prey (131–32). Thus, their *hauona* could convey the terror of both drought-induced plague and the baying of Hellhounds in pursuit.

¹¹ For the story of Erigone we greatly lament the loss of Eratosthenes’ poem, described by “Longinus” as a “thoroughly faultless poem” (*Subl.* 33.5), in which Erigone plays the title role. The tale is most easily accessed now in Hyginus, *Poet. astr.* 2.4 and *Fab.* 130, Apollonius *Argon.* 2.506–30, and Nonnus *D.* 47.1–264. The most recent survey of Eratosthenes’ *Erigone* and its relation to Nonnus’s version is Rosokoki 1995. Still of great value is Solmsen 1947.

¹² In Nonnus’s version it is not Maera but the ghost of Icarius that comes to Erigone. It has long been argued that in this detail Hyginus is following Eratosthenes’ narrative, an idea that goes back to Maass 1883. Although there are no firm grounds for supporting such speculations, it is at least possible that Hyginus’s *ululans* is a Latin translation of a word related to *auonê* that was used in Eratosthenes poem.

ritual of the Athenian Anthesteria.¹³ Meanwhile, the murderers of Icarius had fled to Ceos where a plague arose under the vengeful heat of Maera, now the Dog Star. This crisis was alleviated only when Aristaeus, the son of Apollo and priest of Zeus Icmaeus, persuaded the god to send the cooling Etesian winds, a story told in the third book of Callimachus's *Aetia*. In this tale, then, we have an explanation for the connection between a dog's voice, *auonê* (s.v. *LSJB*), and the drying heat, (*h*)*auonê* (s.v. *LSJA*), that can trigger a communal disaster associated with Zeus.

There is no strong evidence that the full myth of Erigone as outlined above existed prior to Eratosthenes' treatment. In fact, Rudolph Pfeiffer (1922: 112) suggested that the conjoining of the Attic myth of Icarius and the tale of Aristaeus averting the plague on Ceos was an invention of Eratosthenes. There is little value, then, in speculating about the relationship between fragment 230 and this full-blown treatment of the mythology surrounding the Dog Star. Yet one further point of connection may be relevant. In a section that compares technically skilled poets with those who are truly transcendent, "Longinus" pairs Eratosthenes' *Erigone* with Archilochus (33.5):

Ἐρατοσθένης ἐν τῇ Ἠριγόνῃ (διὰ πάντων γὰρ ἀμώμητον τὸ ποιημάτιον)
 Ἀρχιλόχου πολλὰ καὶ ἀνοικονόμητα παρασύροντος, κάκεινης τῆς ἐκβολῆς
 τοῦ δαιμονίου πνεύματος ἦν ὑπὸ νόμον τάξαι δύσκολον, ἄρα δὴ μείζων
 ποιητής;

Is Eratosthenes in his *Erigone* (for this is a thoroughly faultless poem) a greater poet than Archilochus with his abundant, uncontrolled flood and that bursting forth of the divine spirit, so hard to bring under the rule of law?

This statement is surrounded by similarly paired preferences for Homer over Apollonius, Pindar over Bacchylides, and Sophocles over Ion of Chios. In all of these other examples it seems quite clear that we have straight-forward comparisons within genres: epic and epic, epinician and epinician, tragedy and tragedy. In the case of Eratosthenes and Archilochus, however, a different dynamic seems to be operative. In his comments on this passage, D. A. Russell explains: "The comparisons go by genres, and for this purpose elegy and iambic count as one" (1964: 159). This comment strikes me as facile, and, in light of the other pairings, I suspect one of two more plausible scenarios. On the one hand, "Longinus" might have Archilochus's elegiac poems in mind. This would create a very neat basis for evaluation with Eratosthenes, but it

¹³ On the *aiora*, see Johnston, 1999: 219–24. Nilsson 1915 is still important as well. For interesting cross-cultural insights about the *aiora*, see Marinatos 1968. C.p. Burkert 1985: 241.

would be surprising for anyone of the post-classical period to use Archilochus as an exemplar of anything other than strong abuse. Alternatively, there is at least the possibility that in this instance, “Longinus” is comparing not similar genres, but similar content. This would make sense in light of the fact that he mentions Eratosthenes’ *Erigone* rather than his entire poetic corpus.¹⁴ It could be then, that fragments such as 230 and 107 derive from an Archilochean poem known to “Longinus” that treated some of the same themes, such as the Dog Star and drought-induced social crisis, covered by Eratosthenes.

Such a suggestion is enticing, unprovable, and perhaps excessively reductive. Yet even without pressing the “Longinus” connection, it seems clear that Archilochus was working with some of the traditional lore surrounding the Dog Star that Eratosthenes expanded and brought together. Since *Erigone* was the product of Hellenistic interest in aetiologies, then Eratosthenes’ poem merely represents a late stage in the cultural accretion of plots, names, and local traditions. If a Hellenistic poet did, as Pfeiffer suggested, invent a connection between the Dog Star, which was already known by the name Maera, and the dog of Icarius, then surely the pieces were already in place long before that era of poetic erudition. The Hippocratic corpus regularly connects the Dog Star with dire health epidemics, and the early poetic tradition as witnessed by Hesiod, Alcaeus, and Archilochus fragment 107 supports the idea that the intense heat of the season of the Dog Star stresses the normal working of human society. From all this, then, it seems reasonable to conclude that in fragment 230 Archilochus’s reference to Zeus sending a *kakê hauonê* quite likely refers to a devastating season of drought of the sort that was regularly known to sap men’s sexual potency, to threaten crops and livestock, and to create a situation ripe for the outbreak of disease.

2. MNESIEPES: THEME AND VARIATION

If fragment 230 has left us a spare hint of a large-scale, multi-faceted crisis, as I have suggested above, it becomes tempting to link this narrative in some way with the other community-wide health scare in the Archilochean tradition: Mnesiepes’ account of the Parian men of Archilochus’s day suffering a bout of impotence.¹⁵ The rough outline of the surviving narrative shows that

¹⁴ In the other comparisons, “Longinus” specifies that Homer is evaluated against Apollonius’s *Argonautica* and that Ion, who famously wrote in a wide range of genres, is judged against Sophocles on the basis of tragedy (*en tragôidiai*). The only pair to receive no limiting criteria are Pindar and Bacchylides.

¹⁵ The most recent scholar to discuss the Mnesiepes Inscription in detail is Clay 2004: 10–26. Clay also prints the most updated text of the inscription (17–18).

Mnesiepes has described events that took place when Archilochus, foretold by Apollo to be a renowned poet, gave his first performance of Dionysiac poetry at a festival on Paros. His verses were deemed to be *iambikôteron*, “too iambic,” (E₁ III.38) by some segment of the audience. He was then punished, and as a result of this judgment the local men became impotent (*astheneis eis ta aidioia*, E₁ III.43–4). The situation was resolved only when the people reversed their decision and accepted Archilochus and his poetry upon the recommendation of Delphic Apollo. Although both the archaic poem and the Hellenistic inscription are bedeviled by problems (fragment 230 appears without any useful context, and the inscription is highly fragmentary), and although the documents were produced several hundred years apart, nevertheless it is striking to find even this slim evidence for two divinely sent plagues associated with the small body of information surrounding Archilochus.

The examples above from Hesiod and Alcaeus, which both strongly imply that the Dog Star saps male sexual potency, suggest that the *hauonê* in fragment 230 can profitably be compared with Mnesiepes’ tale of sexual impotence. But a critical difference between the two texts lies in the area of divine involvement. In fragment 230 the onus is unquestionably on Zeus, which is logical since he is both a rain god, and, as Zeus Icmaeus, he is also the moderator of the Dog Star’s parching heat as first attested in Callimachus’s *Aetia* (fr. 75) and Apollonius (*Argonautica* 2.522). In the Mnesiepes Inscription, however, Apollo and Dionysus seem to share responsibility for the disastrous turn of events. Apollo first sets up Archilochus’s performance by foretelling his fame as a poet and later provides the advice that leads to the resolution of the Parian crisis. Archilochus himself knew of Apollo’s destructive side—not surprisingly given the god’s role in controlling the plague in the opening scenes of the *Iliad*—and he even provides a punning etymology for his name in fragment 26:¹⁶

ὦναξ Ἄπολλον, καὶ σὺ τοὺς μὲν αἰτίους
πήμαινε καὶ σφας ὅλλυ’ ὥσπερ ὀλλύεις,
ἡμέας δὲ...

Lord Apollo, crush the guilty
and destroy them as is your wont,
but as for us . . .¹⁷

¹⁶ Clay 2004: 24–26 offers further discussion of the connection between Apollo and Archilochus. Of particular interest, he notes that “Apollo . . . is an important agent in the spread of the cults of the poet *heroes*,” such as Orpheus, Homer, Hesiod, Aesop and Pindar (24–25).

¹⁷ Archilochus also seems to associate himself with Apollo in fragment 121 where he claims (or has some other character claim) to lead a Lesbian paean. My translation.

Dionysus, meanwhile, also plays a prominent role in the portion of the inscription that describes the plague, especially since Archilochus seems to have been introducing Dionysiac poetry to Paros for the first time, much as Icarius introduced Dionysus's wine to Attica. Dionysus is named two or perhaps three times in the relevant portion of the text.¹⁸ Mnesiepes quotes Archilochus fragment 251:

ὁ Διόνυσος τ[
οὐλὰς ΤΥΑΖ[
ῥμφακες α[
σῦκα μελ[
Οἰφολίωι ἐρ[

Dionysus...
barley groats...
unripe grapes...
figs...
The Fucker ...¹⁹

Most editors also reasonably restore the name Dionysus from the letters ΔION (E₁ III.55); the least likely instance of the name is in Parke's (1958) highly speculative reconstruction of the Delphic pronouncement (E₁ III.49), which has been omitted from Clay's (2004) text.²⁰ As with the example of Apollo, Mnesiepes surely knew that Dionysus had played a part in Archilochus's own poetry, as witnessed in fragment 120:

ὥς Διωνύσοι' ἄνακτος καλὸν ἐξάρξαι μέλος
οἶδα διθύραμβον οἶνῳ συγκεραυνωθείς φρένας.

For I know how to take the lead in the dithyramb,
The lovely song of lord Dionysus, my wits thunderstruck with wine.

¹⁸ See Clay 2004: 16–23 for the relationship between Archilochus and Dionysus.

¹⁹ I here print Clay's text and follow his translation. Gerber's Loeb follows West in printing οὐλαστιαζ[in the second line without translation. Tarditi prints οὐλὰς . . . (fr. 219); Kontoleon 1952 in the first published edition of the text printed οὐλὰς τυαζ.

²⁰ Here is Parke's restoration of E₁ III.47–50, which Gerber prints. I follow Gerber's translation with slight modifications: Τίπτε δίκαις ἀν[όμοις κεκρημένοι ἡδὲ βίηφι / ἤλθετε πρὸς Π[υθῶ λοιοῦ λύσιν αἰτήσαντες; / οὐκ ἔστιν πρὶν [Βάκχον ἀμείλιχον ἐξιλάσασθαι, / εἰς ὃ κεν Ἀρχ[ιλ[οχον Μουσῶν θεράποντα τίητε (Why have you [who use illegal] judgments [and / force] come to Pytho to ask for a release from the / pestilence]? It is not possible [to appease harsh Bacchus] / until [you honor] Archilochus [servant of the Muses]).

Clay even suggests that “Mnesiepes or a representative of the tradition he is recording might well have concluded from this opening that Archilochus initiated the dithyramb in Paros” (2004: 21). This interpretation casts Mnesiepes’ Archilochus as a Parian version of Icarius—both are emissaries of Dionysus, both are rejected after introducing celebrations of the god, and both ultimately receive a reward for their service. The importance of this connection is not so much in the exact narrative details but rather in the authorial impulse that saw Mnesiepes, Callimachus, Apollonius, and Eratosthenes compose roughly contemporary accounts of schematically similar Dionysiac plots. This realization starts to bring Mnesiepes into the larger literary trends of his day beyond what is typically acknowledged.

It would appear then that the divine mechanism active in the Mnesiepes Inscription’s story of crisis on Paros closely parallels that found in mythical narratives such as the story of Erigone and Icarius discussed above. In both accounts, we find a pattern of initial local resistance to Dionysus that is reversed by information gained from Delphic Apollo.²¹ The two gods work in tandem to bring and later avert disaster as a lesson to humans. Ultimately, we cannot (and quite likely should not even try to) do more than note their joint responsibility for the plague.

Having set out the grounds for comparing the narratives of social upheaval in fragment 230 and the Mnesiepes Inscription, we can now ask a simplistic, but perhaps useful, question: do fragment 230 and the Mnesiepes Inscription refer to two crises or one? Mnesiepes was intimately familiar with Archilochus’s poetry, and he styles himself as an expert on the poet’s life, but he is also composing a seamless biographical narrative of a sort that is unlikely to have been undertaken by Archilochus himself. Any attempt to resolve these matters with certitude is impossible; I do, however, believe that even limiting the debate to a set of unanswerable questions can be helpful. In particular, by setting even the bare outlines of these calamitous narratives next to each other, we are reminded of the creative process that lies behind Mnesiepes’ text. I will close by fleshing out two possibilities for understanding the relationship between these texts.

On the one hand, we can imagine that Mnesiepes’ tale of crisis on Paros has nothing to do with fragment 230. From this perspective, we are free to wonder whether he was referring to some other event that he knew from a lost bit of Archilochus’s poetry, or if this catastrophic tale had been inserted

²¹ To these two tales we can add the myth of Thracian Lycurgus, the general plot of Euripides’ *Bacchae* and the story of the introduction of Dionysus Eleutherius into Athens that is preserved in the *scholia* to Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*, 243.

into the *vita* tradition somewhere in the intervening years (or perhaps even created by Mnesiepes himself). If he knew of multiple Archilochean stories that followed the rough outline of the plague motifs discussed in the previous section, then Mnesiepes made an editorial decision to focus on one rather than the other. On either evaluation, we are reminded that the inscription is no passive receptacle of Archilochean lore but the product of an active process of composition that was meaningful for Mnesiepes and his fellow Archilochists.²²

On the other hand, we can explore the possibility that what we have in Mnesiepes' inscriptional record refers to the same event recounted in the poem that we now know only from fragment 230. In this case, we must ask, first and foremost, how Zeus's role has been transferred to Apollo and Dionysus. If such a switch has taken place, the explanation can surely be found in the different contexts—both generic and social—of the two passages. Even without the reading of fragment 230 that I have set out above, Archilochus's poem falls under the heading of direct narrations of natural events controlled by the gods. We can see precisely the same pattern in fragment 122 in which a speaker is amazed at the power of Father Zeus who has turned day into night. Whether he is creating a drought or an eclipse, Zeus is a distant god who is knowable indirectly by the physical results of his power; and in both cases the poetry articulates that divine power for an audience while at the same time claiming a vatic role for the poet himself. Moreover, given the importance of Apollo and Dionysus in creating inspired poetry, it is not surprising that Archilochus's Zeus remains aloof while the poet celebrates Apollo's paean (fr. 121) and Dionysus's dithyramb (fr. 120).

The narration of Mnesiepes' story is quite different from fragment 230, because the former is fundamentally aetiological while the latter is more straightforwardly naturalistic. In Mnesiepes' text we do not find seemingly random events, such as a drought or an eclipse, explained by the power of an unseen god; rather, we see divinities actively involved in shaping the world

²²The idea of reception as a process of adaptation of the iambic tradition relevant to the contemporary community has been profitably discussed recently by Marcaccini 2001: 62–93 and Rotstein: 2007. Marcaccini argues that Delphi promoted Archilochus in the fifth century in connection with the colonization of Thasos; Rotstein, dealing with Critias's negative views on the iambic poet, suggests that this fourth-century condemnation "is best understood as an invective against a poet of the past for what he represents *in the present*" (140, Rotstein's emphasis). Such approaches are, of course, familiar from reception theory in general: e.g. Wetmore 2003, speaking of African-American reception of Greek drama, writes that "all adaptation of Greek tragedy is about the culture that adapted it, not about the Greeks" (4).

and dramatizing present day realities in terms of fixed and knowable events in the past. In addition to the two Delphic oracles already mentioned, Mnesiepes includes three other divine pronouncements by Apollo as well as an encounter between the young Archilochus and the Muses (similar to other episodes of poetic initiation associated with the lives of Hesiod, Aesop, Pindar, Sophocles, et al.) Zeus most often operates from afar, either in his role as sky god, or through deputies such as Hesiod's kings ("Kings are from Zeus," *Erga* 96), or heroes like Herakles; Apollo and Dionysus, on the other hand, frequently interact directly in human affairs and are present at the institution of new rites and traditions. Thus, Archilochus's poem makes manifest the invisible hand of Zeus and its terrifying intrusion into our world, but we find no aetiology in its deference to the supreme and diffuse power of Zeus; Mnesiepes' tale, however, uses its pair of gods to legitimate and explain a familiar and traditional part of life on Paros, namely the cult of Archilochus in his sacred precinct.

This distinction between Zeus's indirect involvement and the more personal roles of Apollo and Dionysus, both of whom Marcel Detienne describes as gods of epiphanies, can be observed in sources contemporary to Mnesiepes.²³ Callimachus provides the best example of this, particularly because after the prologue his *Aetia* begins with a detail of Parian cult that also has connections with plague narratives: He explains that the Parians sacrifice to the Graces without garlands or music, because King Minos was making a sacrifice to these goddesses when he received the news that his son Androgeus had been murdered at Athens. The king did not interrupt the sacrifice, but he did remove his garland and silence the musicians. When Minos did not receive immediate recompense for the death of his son, he attacked the city and prayed to Zeus asking that the city suffer drought (*aukhmos*) and famine (*limos*, Diod. Sic. 4.61.1). This plague was only lifted when the city agreed to institute the grim tribute of boys and girls. Callimachus and Mnesiepes show a similar interest in explaining traditional cult on Paros.

Callimachus's *Hymn to Zeus* speaks of the god's birth story in a manner that reiterates his distant power. As George McLennan (1977: 50) has shown, an explanation for Arcadia's climate is contained in Callimachus's choice of the word *azênis* (20), which alludes to the region's dryness (*aza*) prior to the arrival of Zeus (*a-zên* sounds quite a bit like "without Zeus").²⁴ And Susan

²³ Detienne 1989: 5 calls Apollo a "god of epiphanies," and says that "Dionysos was in essence the god who comes: he appears, he manifests himself, he makes his presence known. He was an itinerant epiphany."

²⁴ This example has been discussed by more recent scholars as well, e.g., Depew 1993: 75–76; Stephens 2003: 96–102.

Stephens argues that even Callimachus's most human depiction of Zeus, that of the helpless infant whose supernatural powers receive scant mention, is part of a strategy "in preparation for the identification of Zeus with 'our king' [Ptolemy] as the poem continues" (2003: 105). Apollo, on the other hand, stands at the head of the Hellenistic aetiological tradition through the image of him dictating to Callimachus in the prologue of the *Aetia*. In Callimachus's *Hymn to Apollo*, moreover, Claude Calame can discuss how "Apollo himself . . . takes control of the colonizing operations [in Cyrene]" (1993: 38–39), and Albert Henrichs speaks of a narrative that is "packed with action" (1993: 133). As for Dionysus, his presence in the human realm as wine, together with the many stories of his epiphanies, describe an intimate divinity who, in contradistinction to Zeus, almost never works at a distance—whether for good or for ill. Beyond this, Dionysus played a central role in the construction of Ptolemaic royal identity and the relationship between the Lagids and their Macedonian predecessors (Revermann 1999/2000: 96–102).²⁵ The supreme god of the sky, then, offers the perfect means of articulating the parching dryness that Archilochus describes in fragment 230, but the "younger" gods, Apollo and Dionysus, allow Mnesiepes to describe a divine origin for contemporary religious praxis on Paros.

Mnesiepes has either changed an Archilochian crisis narrative by transferring heavenly responsibility from Zeus to Apollo and Dionysus, or he has created or accepted a story that diverges from what he found in Archilochus's poetry itself. Moreover, while fragment 230 gives no indication that its narrative has any close connection with the poet's life, Mnesiepes may also have grafted onto Archilochus's *vita* a plague story that was originally part of a poem that had little or nothing to do with Archilochus's own account (even from a straight-forward, historicizing perspective). His decision to record the tale of community-wide impotence on Paros can, thus, be situated in the moment of the inscription's composition. For all of Zeus's power he was

²⁵ Dionysiac cults were common throughout the Aegean during the Hellenistic era, and the connection between the Ptolemies and these cults might repay closer scrutiny. For example, an inscription from Thera records the initiation into the local Dionysiac cult of a representative from the Ptolemaic court together with his entire family (IG, XII, 3, Suppl. 129, OGI 735). More shadowy but also more intriguing, Ptolemy Philopator published an edict, dated to the last quarter of the third century and therefore roughly contemporary with Mnesiepes' text, instructing all practitioners of Dionysiac initiations within the kingdom to report to Alexandria where they were to indicate from whom, for three generations back, they had received initiation (BGU 1211). Might Mnesiepes' text, which establishes a Parian pedigree for Dionysiac worship that comes directly from the local poet and hero, be part of a larger regional interest in the background of contemporary Dionysiac practice? On Philopator's decree, see most recently Zuntz 1963.

not a frequent player in many contemporary foundational stories; Dionysus and Apollo, on the other hand, were central to a wide range of narratives that combined health crises (broadly understood) and the institution of cult.²⁶ In the great age of Alexandrian aetiological writing the inscription's narrative serves the needs of a community interested in identifying itself with a turning point in its patron's life. The inscription that commemorates the establishment of a contemporary cult to Archilochus gains current relevance by recounting Archilochus's own tumultuous role in the introduction of the cult of Dionysus into the archaic Parian community. Whether or not this tale played a part in Archilochus's own verses is, ultimately, irrelevant; what is important is that it functions diachronically to model Mnesiepes' community on the legendary life of Archilochus while synchronically fitting into a diffuse group of stories about problematic introductions of Dionysiac cult and the prominent role of Delphic Apollo in such narratives.

3. CONCLUSION

Fragment 230 does not give us many hints about the secrets it conceals, and none of my comments are immune to criticism. But if progress is to be made with such scraps we must look beyond the texts for associations, allusions, and networks of meaning that can help us construct plausible interpretations. Situating the *kakê hauonê* of fragment 230 in the wider context of ancient commentary on the nature and cause of plagues offers us the opportunity both to imagine and debate a probable narrative context for this otherwise largely ignored fragment and, perhaps more importantly, to speculate on the dynamic and creative relationship between Mnesiepes' Hellenistic inscription and the Archilochean tradition to which it lays claim.

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²⁶ For Dionysus, the most obvious example can be found in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Clay surveys the evidence for other examples of this pattern in a wide range of historical and literary contexts. For Apollo, the most important Hellenistic example is his role in Callimachus's *Aetia* and his connections with the poet's rejuvenation. Already in the *Iliad*, however, Apollo is the god who sends plague and drives it away.

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