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A REPEATED ALLUSION TO PINDAR AND THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES IN ANAXILAS' COMIC FRAGMENTS?*

ABSTRACT. Danielewicz Jerzy, A Repeated Allusion to Pindar and the Eleusinian Mysteries in Anaxilas' Comic Fragments? (*Powtarzająca się aluzja do Pindara i misteriów eleuzyńskich we fragmentach komedii Anaksilasa?*)

Anaxilas in fragments 25 and 30 K.-A. deliberately alluded to Pindar's fragment 137 S.-M. and the mystery references it contains, but at the same time completely redesigned the sense of the Pindaric phrase for a strong comic effect.

Keywords: Anaxilas; Pindar; allusive art; parody; jokes

Anaxilas, a comic poet dated to the middle of the 4th century BCE, from whose comedies only forty-three fragments survive, did not hold back from personal satire. One of the objects of his mockery was Ctesias, ridiculed for his unrestrained gluttony.¹ Athenaeus in the tenth book of his *Deipnosophists* (*The Learned Banqueters*), devoted partly to gluttony, cites (pp. 416d-e) short fragments from three comedies by Anaxilas in which this notorious glutton is mentioned: *The Goldsmith* (Χρυσοχόος), *Rich Men* (Πλούσιοι) and *The Graces* (Χάριτες). In two of them, a characteristic phrase appears (in slightly different variants), which so far has received less attention from the interpreters than it deserves.² I quote these fragments in the order adopted by Rudolf Kassel and Colin Austin in their *PCG* edition:³

* I made such a suggestion ten years ago in: Bartol, Danielewicz 2011: 420. In this note, I develop this idea and support it with arguments.

¹ Aelian *VH* 1.27 also writes about the voracity of Ctesias, naming Anaxilas as his source: καὶ Κτησίαν δὲ φησὶ τινα Ἀναξίλας ὁ τῆς κωμωδίας ποιητῆς πολλὰ ἐσθίειν.

² Moreover, attempts were even made to remove the lines containing it because of their mutual similarity, see van Herwerden 1903: 116. Contrast Kann 1909: 54–55 (on Anaxilas) who by no means draws such a conclusion – he treats authorial repetitions as a phenomenon typical of comedy of that period.

³ Kassel, Austin 1991.

Πλούσιοι, fr. 25
 διαρραγήτω χᾶτερος δειπῶν τις εὖ,
 μὴ Κτησίας μόνος, (B.) τί γὰρ σε κωλύει;
 (A.) δείπνου γὰρ οὗτος, ὡς λέγουσιν οἱ σοφοί,
 ἀρχὴν, τελευτὴν δ' ἔμαθεν οὐδεπώποτε

A. Damn any other fellow who eats a good dinner, and not Ctesias alone. B. (*aside*) What, really, is to hinder you from copying him? A. For when it comes to a dinner, he has learned the beginning, as the philosophers say, but has never yet learned the end.

(trans. Charles Burton Gulick)

Χρυσόχοος, fr. 30
 ἤδη σχεδόν τι πάντα σοι πλὴν Κτησίου.
 δείπνου γὰρ οὗτος, ὡς λέγουσιν οἱ σοφοί,
 ἀρχὴν, τελευτὴν δ' οὐκ ἐπίσταται μόνος

By this time you have had about all there is, but not so Ctesias; for he, when it comes to a dinner, understands the beginning, as the philosophers say, but has never yet learned the end.

(trans. Charles Burton Gulick)

In both of the passages, the impossibility of overcoming Ctesias in eating comes to the fore. The exchange of lines by the characters⁴ ends with the conclusion that Ctesias has learned the beginning of the banquet (*archē deipnou*); however – unlike the other participants of the feast – he never knows its end (*teleitē*), i.e. when to stop eating. The context suggests that the two terms have a simple temporal meaning. A hint of possible sophistication is introduced by the interjected phrase ὡς λέγουσιν οἱ σοφοί – provided that we interpret οἱ σοφοί as ‘the philosophers’⁵ and not just ‘wise men’⁶ or ‘the clever people’.⁷ An interesting neutral solution is proposed by Edmonds: ‘in learned phrase’.⁸

In the former case, the philosophical connotations of the term *archē* (the first principle or primordial substance of things)⁹ come into play, which, however, is difficult to match with the sense of the clearly antithetic *teleitē*. This latter term appears in philosophers along with *archē* at most as the third element of the triad: beginning – middle – end that, typically, refers to the scope of God’s sovereignty over all that exists.¹⁰ Although the context of the expression we are talking about seems to preclude such a ‘philosophical’ interpretation, the recipient (now the

⁴In fr. 30 only one of the interlocutors speaks emphasising the uniqueness of Ctesias’ behaviour.

⁵Gulick 1996: 387.

⁶Yonge 1854: 656.

⁷Olson 2008: 453.

⁸Edmonds 1959: 345.

⁹Gulick’s (1996) comment on Ath. 10.416e.

¹⁰Cf. Pl. *Leg.* 715e7–716a2: ὁ μὲν δὴ θεός, ὡσπερ καὶ ὁ παλαιὸς λόγος, ἀρχὴν τε καὶ τελευτὴν καὶ μέσα τῶν ὄντων ἀπάντων ἔχων, εὐθεία περαίνει κατὰ φύσιν περιτορευόμενος. A similar triad

reader) is initially a bit confused about the exact sense of *archē*. It becomes clear only after reading / listening to the whole sentence.

Theodor Kock (in his comment on the meaning of οἱ σοφοί in Anaxilas), suggests that we are dealing here with a comically twisted saying propounded by the wise men that people know the beginning of their lives, but do not know the end.¹¹ Giulia Maria Tartaglia, the latest commentator on Anaxilas, does not rule out that it is “a humorous retort perhaps proverbially associated with Ctesias in everyday language”.¹² Kock, regrettably, does not quote any example of such a saying; it is indeed difficult to find one in the surviving Greek texts. Likewise, Giulia Maria Tartaglia gives no examples to support her interesting supposition. Thus, even if their views have an element of probability, a stronger benchmark still needs to be sought.

I assume that in the comic context one can expect not so much a quotation of a phrase as a parody. As is commonly known, it is celebrated sentences that are mostly parodied so that the recipients can easily identify their hypotext.¹³ Therefore, it is tempting to consider the formulae referring to the Eleusinian mysteries that Pindar included in his *Dirges* (fr. 137.2-3 Snell-Maehler) especially since the lexical similarity between them and those used by Anaxilas is striking and may suggest a deliberate imitation on the part of the latter:¹⁴

occurs in the considerations on the whole of a poetic work in Aristotle's *Poetics* 1450b26-7: ὄλον δέ ἐστιν τὸ ἔχον ἀρχὴν καὶ μέσον καὶ τελευτήν.

¹¹ Kock 1884: 272, ad v. 3: οἱ σοφοί *ei sunt, qui hominem initium quidem vitae nosse dicunt, exitum non item.*

¹² Tartaglia 2019: 166: “una battuta umoristica forse associata proverbialmente a Ctesia nel linguaggio corrente”.

¹³ In the case of the ode of Pindar, from which fr. 137 S.-M. comes, the fact that the addressee was probably an Athenian (Hippocrates), could increase its popularity in Athens; cf. Schol. Pind. *Pyth.* 7. 18a. Karl Kerényi (1991: 14), stating that of the poets who speak of the Mysteries, only Pindar tells us something about their content, seems to narrow the group of people capable of recognizing mystery formulae to those who have already undergone initiations: “He speaks in such a way that the initiate could recognize the secret in the words that cloaked it.” I agree that it was easiest for the initiated to decipher Pindar's allusions, but to find a similarity between Pindar and Anaxilas, it was enough to know the poem of the former. Let us add that the secrecy of the rituals to which many authors referred in many works, from a Homeric hymn and a tragedy of Sophocles (fr. 837 Radt) onwards, must have been illusory; see Cannatà Fera 1990: 205–9. Nicholas Richardson (1979: 314), recalls, following Dieterich (*RhM* 48, 1893, 277) that the *makarismos* of verse 480 of the hymn (ὄλβιος ὃς τὰδ' ὄπωπεν ἐπιθονίων ἀνθρώπων) is perhaps parodied in the ‘Socratic mysteries’ at Ar. *Nub.* 463 ff. Interestingly, Cicero, who had been initiated into the mysteries of Eleusis, writes in the spirit of Pindar (*Leg.* 2.36): “Nam mihi cum multa eximia diuinaque uide<a>ntur Athenae tuae peperisse atque in uitam hominum attulisse, tum nihil melius illis mysteriis, quibus ex agresti immanique uita exculti ad humanitatem et mitigati sumus, initiaque, ut appellantur, ita re uera principia uitae cognouimus, neque solum cum laetitia uiuendi rationem accepimus, sed etiam cum spe meliore moriendi.”

¹⁴ As reminds Silvia Barbantani (2009: 312), Pindar – along with Homer, Hesiod, Menander, and Euripides – belonged to the core authors read and interpreted at schools by the *grammatikoi*

ὄλβιος ὅστις ἰδὼν κείν' εἶσ' ὑπὸ χθόν'·
οἶδε μὲν βίου τελευτάν,
οἶδεν δὲ διόσδοτον ἀρχάν

Blessed is he who sees them [the mysteries] and goes beneath the earth;
he knows the end of life
and knows the Zeus-given beginning. (trans. W.H. Race)

Anaxilas's phrases can be reduced to a three-part scheme, consisting of the noun ἀρχήν, a *verbum cognoscendi* and the noun τελευτήν. They correspond – roughly and in reverse order – to similar elements in Pindar (τελευτάν + οἶδεν + ἀρχάν).¹⁵ For clarity, I present them side by side below:

Anaxilas, fr. 25	ἔμαθεν ἀρχήν, τελευτήν δ' ἔμαθεν οὐδεπόποτε
Anaxilas, fr. 30	ἀρχήν, τελευτήν ... (οὐκ) ἐπίσταται
Pindar, fr. 137	οἶδε ... τελευτάν, οἶδεν ... ἀρχάν

Not surprisingly in the case of a parody, despite the lexical similarities, the distortion of the meaning of the Pindaric words is profound. In Pindar, the whole expression must be understood in a metaphorical key: the two antithetical terms refer to initiation, thanks to which for men the life lived up to then ends and a new one begins. Nor can we see in ἀρχάν simply 'the beginning of life', birth, whereby the object of knowledge would be the extreme terms of life.¹⁶ In Anaxilas, *archē* is no longer *hysteron*, as in the ritual formula quoted by Pindar,¹⁷ and *teleutē* is not *proteron*; they regain their common meaning. Nevertheless, the verbal analogy is striking enough to encourage comparison. From the point of view of the comic parody, attention should also be paid to replacing the Pindaric βίου τελευτάν ... ἀρχάν with δείπνου ... ἀρχήν, τελευτήν. Thus created parallel between the sphere of the sacred and that of the profane is both audacious and funny.¹⁸ Let us add that the syntactically analogous genitives constitute yet another element enhancing the structural similarity of the phrases.

(cf. Sext. Empir. *Math.* 1.58); hence his famous sayings could be widely known in Anaxilas' time. The very fact that Clement of Alexandria quoted this poem of Pindar in his *Stromateis* (probably c. 200–2) suggests that we are dealing with a canon of erudition. As for mystery themes in Greek comedy, they are attested (apart from Aristophanes' *Ranae*) by such titles as *Mystai* (Phrynichus) or *Mystis* (Antiphanes, Philemon, Philippides).

¹⁵In my opinion, the fact that in Anaxilas *teleutē* is accompanied by negation does not weaken, but even strengthens the analogy: in this way the comic poet emphasises the essential violation of the expected pattern.

¹⁶See Cannatà Fera 1990: 207 (note 13): "Non si può neppure vedere in ἀρχάν semplicemente «l'inizio della vita», la nascita, per cui oggetto della conoscenza sarebbero i termini estremi della vita".

¹⁷Cannatà Fera 1990: 209: "[l]a sequenza morte/vita non sia uno *hysteron/proteron*".

¹⁸Poetry from Anaxilas' time parodying the feast, such as the work *Matron* of Pitane, may have paved the way for the iconoclastic association of the mysteries with the feast.

To conclude: The arguments presented above seem to justify the suggestion set out in the title of this note that Anaxilas, in fragments 25 and 30 Kassel-Austin, deliberately alluded to Pindar's fragment 137 Snell-Maehler and the mystery references it contains, but at the same time completely redesigned their sense for a strong comic effect.¹⁹

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Summary

In two fragments of Anaxilas (25 and 30 Kassel-Austin) from, respectively, *Rich Men* and *The Goldsmith*, the notorious glutton Ctesias is mocked by means of a characteristic phrase that seems to allude to Pindar's fr. 137 Snell-Maehler referring to the Eleusinian mysteries. For a strong comic effect, the Pindaric hypotext (probably well-known to the public) is deliberately parodied, so despite the lexical similarities and structural analogy between the phrases, the distortion of the sense of the words is profound.

¹⁹I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer of this note for enriching my thesis with two additional arguments.