ANACREON'S SENSE OF HUMOUR AND THE GREEK LANGUAGE

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EL SENTIDO DEL HUMOR DE ANACREONTE Y LA LENGUA GRIEGA

ABSTRACT: On the basis of an analysis of the relevant terminology and *topoi*, passages of Anacreon which certain critics have misunderstood are explained.

KEY WORDS: Greek lyric poetry, Anacreon, textual criticism.

RESUMEN: Con un análisis del léxico y de los tópicos correspondientes se explican varios pasajes de Anacreonte que algunos estudiosos no han sabido interpretar acertadamente.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lírica griega, Anacreonte, crítica textual.

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In this short, but I hope instructive, paper I shall endeavour to explain certain passages of Anacreon's poetry which the latest editor, Dr. A. Rozokoki[1] and her supervisors have misunderstood. I shall, at the invitation of numerous interested colleagues, dilate with helpful purposes on what I more succinctly wrote in my review of the edition, which is due to appear in *Veleia*. Ancient Greek humour is always elegant, but often *risqué*, as my eminent colleague H. White and I have shown many times, for instance in our study of Sappho's *epithalamium*[2], and Anacreon's humour is no exception to this rule: I shall try to deal with his ribaldry as discreetly as I can.

[1] *Ἀνακρέων* (Ἀθῆναι 2006).

[2] "Aspectos del sentido del humor en la Grecia antigua", *Veleia* 20 (2003) 273-379.

I shall quote from the above mentioned edition published by Dr. Rozokoki, which is the latest and most useful as a diligent *Materialsammlung*, but, I regret to say, defective because Dr. Rozokoki, evidently mistaught by her supervisors whom she thanks on p. 10, has not understood any of the erotic poems by Anacreon, which, as everybody knows, constitute the most important part of his poetic production.

I have long ago demostrated -and my demonstration has been generally accepted by scholars[3]- that Anacreon is, as far as we can see, the creator of the genre called "epigram". The characteristics of this genre have been well illustrated in a famous paper by K. Barwick[4]. An epigram is a short poem which contains a "pointe", i. e. a witticism, a final surprise: mostly -but not always- the "pointe" is at the end of the poem, and it rests on an ambiguity ("Zweideutigkeit", Barwick) which we must penetrate by means of the "logique Cartésienne" -a method which my learned colleague H. White has applied with superb success, as my dear renowned friends, the lamented Herman van Looy and N. Livadaras, have more than once emphasized when praising her publications. As a rule, the witticisms accomplished by Anacreon are erotic: love inebriated by wine is the *Leitmotiv* of his poetry.

Let us now examine fr. 90 Rozokoki:

> κοὐ μοκλὸν ἐν θύρῃσι διξῇσιν βαλών
> ἥσυχος καθεύδει

Dr. Rozokoki comments as follows: "Gentili… ὑποθέτει ὅτι λέγεται γιὰ κάποιον φτωχὺ ποὺ δὲν φοβᾶται τὴν ἐπίσκεψη κλεφτῶν, ἐνῶ σύμφωνα μὲ τὸν Giangrande ὁ ποιητὴς σατιρίζει ἕνα ἀγόρι ποὺ ἐπειδὴ ἔχει μεγαλώσει δὲν τὸ ἐπισκέπτονται πιὰ οἱ ἐραστές, παρ᾽ ὅλο ποὺ ἀφήνει (μάταια) τὴν πόρτα του ξεκλειδώτη". She misunderstands the syntax: καθεύδει is consequent on aoristic οὐ βαλών. She has not understood that, as Gentili conceded orally in Geneva, at the meeting where I explained the problem, my explanation[5] is the correct one, as demonstrated by the emphatic "pointe" placed where it is expected to, i. e. at the end of the passage (ἥσυχος καθεύδει). If the passage satirized, as Gentili surmised, a man who was so poor that he did not fear the visits of thieves, the poem would express a banality and would be inane -in sum, it would not be humorous or satirical, because it is perfectly normal, natural and logical for a poor man not to fear such visits. Moreover, to say that the man left the door unbolted and could in consequence sleep in the silence of the night (ἥσυχος καθεύδει) would be a

[3] Cf. "Βασκανίης ὀλοὸν γένος", *Πλάτων* 50 (1998) 261-269 (263)

[4] "Martial und die Zeitgenössische Rhetorik", *Berichte über die Verhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaft zu Leipzig, Philol.-historischer Klasse* 104.1 (Berlin 1959) 1 ff.

[5] Now printed in "Sympotic Literature and Epigram", *L'épigramme grecque* (Genève 1969) 118 ff.

non sequitur if referred to a visit by thieves: thieves operate in τὸ ἡσυχάζον τῆς νυκτός because they need to be neither seen nor heard by the occupant of the house they want to visit: accordingly, if nocturnal thieves had found the door unbolted they would have opened it silently and crept in. On the other hand, the κωμασταί habitually tried to break down noisily the door of young boys they wanted to visit for erotic purposes, and they would have made such noise if they had come to visit with erotic intentions the person satirized in the poem and had found the door bolted: he had left the door unbolted because he hoped that the κωμασταί would come, but they did not come because he was too old to be erotically desirable, and so he sleeps in the silence of the night, his hope having proved vain. In conclusion: the absence of noise (ἥσυχος) as a consequence of the door being left unbolted can only refer to the absence of κωμασταί, not to thieves as visitors. The "logique Cartésienne" -a quality Rozokoki and her supervisors patently lack- has enabled us to comprehend the "pointe" of the fragment.

I shall now examine poem 76 Rozokoki. In a famous poem consisting of 4 lines, Theognis, using a "metáfora ecuestre"[6], describes (ll. 257-260) a girl whose lover does not satisfy her because he is an incompetent *fututor,* "amante" (κακὸν ἡνίοχον). The words κακὸν ἡνίοχον conclude the poem. Anacreon, in his equally famous poem 76 Rozokoki, describes the same girl. In the first 5 lines he says, by means of metaphors, that the metaphorical mare (i. e. the girl) cannot effect a satisfactory copulation, and in the final line he concludes that this is so because her *fututor* is incompetent: δεξιὸν γὰρ ἱπποπείρην οὐχ ἕξεις ἐπεμβάτην. In Theognis, ἡνίοχον denotes a metaphorical "rider", "mounter" (not a charioteer), i. e. a *fututor* (cf. Calderón *ad loc.*). Rozokoki asserts that all the metaphors used by Anacreon are discreet (διακριτικοί), not crudely ambiguous (χυδαῖοι), i. e. not entailing a sexual connotation like Aristophanes' ἀναβῆναι, and that it is doubtful whether the poem is complete. Both her assertions are mistaken. The final metaphor which concludes the poem is crudely explicit as can be. The word ἐπεμβάτην means "mounter" of a horse, and, *sensu obscaeno*, "mounter" (i. e. *fututor*) of a woman. Ἐπεμβάτην, at the end of poem, is just as crudely (i. e. sexually) ambiguous as the compound ἀναβῆναι in Aristophanes, which means "mount a woman" (ἀναβῆναι τὴν γυναῖκα), because compound words containing the notion of βατεῖν can denote, as ἐπεμβάτης here, *fututio*, i. e. the act of "mounting" a woman sexually[7]. The poem, in consequence, is complete, because ἐπεμβάτην, exactly like Theognis' ἡνίοχον, concludes Anacreon's sextet: ambiguity, as I said before, often constitutes the closing "pointe" of a poem. Since the mss. reading οὐχ ἕξ- is not unmetrical

[6] Cf. E. Calderón, *Teognis* (Madrid 2010) 65.

[7] Cf. H. White's demonstration in "A case of Pastoral Humour in Theocritus", *Mus. Phil. Londi*. 7 (1986) 147-149 (148).

(– – = – ⏑ ⏑)[8], we can conclude that the future ἕξεις denotes here certainty, i. e. that the future is "inferential" or "presumptive", the sense being "I am certain that you do not have a competent *fututor*"[9]. The future ἕξεις was trivialized into ἔχεις by Stephanus. Rozokoki and her supervisors have understood nothing of this.

I shall now examine and explain the witty poem 15 Rozokoki:

Σφαίρῃ δηῦτέ πορφυρέῃ
βάλλων χρυσοκόμης Ἔρως
νήνι ποικιλοσαμβάλῳ
συμπαίζειν προκαλεῖται.
Ἡ δ', ἔστιν γὰρ ἀπ᾽εὐκτίτου
Λέσβου, τὴν ἐμὴν κόμην,
λευκὴ γάρ, καταμέμφεται,
πρὸς δ᾽ ἄλλην τινὰ χάσκει.

I elucidated the humorous "pointe" of these lines in several papers, which, once again, Rozokoki has not comprehended. The obligatory starting point of our textual analysis is the fact that the girls from Lesbos had the reputation of being *fellatrices*: this fact, that nobody can deny, throws light on Anacreon's words. The poem ends with a final surprise, i. e. a "pointe", which, as usual, is found at the very end, i. e. with the word χάσκει. Anacreon says that he would like, at a banquet, to make love to a Lesbian girl, but she, instead of kissing him, turns away from his head. The poet at first thinks that this is because (γάρ, line 5) she is a precious girl from the refined town of Lesbos, who avoided white-haired, i. e. old customers like him, but then the truth becomes evident to him: the girl, being a *fellatrix*, turns her mouth (χάσκει) not towards his head, but towards "a certain other hair" (ἄλλην τινά), i. e. his pubic hair, as *fellatrices* do[10].

Rozokoki, turning a blind eye to the practices of *fellatrices*, maintains that, since "κόμη προσδιορίζει κυρίως τὰ μαλλιὰ τοῦ κεφαλιοῦ", my explanation and the one offered by Gentili, according to whom the girl directs her mouth γιὰ τὸ ἐφηβαῖο ἑνὸς ἄλλου νεώτερου ἄνδρα, are both impossible. A linguistic analysis of Anacreon's words shows that Rozokoki is totally wrong. First of all, the word κόμη, when preceded by the article, as a rule -as grammar demands- denotes the κόμη used κυρίως, i. e. the κόμη κάτ᾽ ἐξοχήν, the cephalic κόμη (here, τὴν ἐμὴν κόμην: exemples in *Thes.* s. v. κόμη): there did, however, exist some other kinds of

[8] Cf., besides Rossbach, Gentili-Lomiento, *Metrica e ritmica* (Città di Castello 2003) 265 and 115.

[9] On assertive ἕξεις cf. "Texto y lengua de Marco Aurelio Antonino", *Myrtia* 18 (2003) 225-236 (230).

[10] The verb χάσκω has, as I am told by my illustrious colleague G. Chrysafis, retained its erotic sense in modern Greek. Cf. Rozokoki 182, who correctly refutes West's ineptness.

non-cephalic hair which covered other parts of the body: κόμη denotes the beard in Epictetus (cf. *Thes.* s. v. 1776 A), and as far as Anacreon is concerned he certainly had a κομῆτιν κεφαλήν, but no less certainly was κομήτης τὰ αἰδοῖα[11].

Having clarified that Anacreon was κομήτης τὰ αἰδοῖα, we can now add that Rozokoki has not perceived that Gentili's interpretation of Anacreon's words is grammatically impossible: ἄλλην τινά in Greek can only mean "another kinf of hair"[12]. The meaning "la chioma di un altro" can not be expressed in Greek, as Gentili ungrammatically suggests, by ἄλλην τινά: the meaning suggested by Gentili could only be expressed, in Greek, by the so-called *comparatio compendiaria*, i. e. by ἄλλου τινός = "another's", "someone else's". Gentili has of course the merit of having understood my demonstration to the effect that the girl is a *fellatrix.*

Finally, let us examine poem 53:

Πολιοὶ μὲν ἡμὶν ἤδη
κρόταφοι κάρη τε λευκόν,
χαρίεσσα δ' οὐκέτ' ἥβη
πάρα, γηραλέοι δ' ὀδόντες
γλυκεροῦ δ' οὐκέτι πολλὸς
βιότου χρόνος λέλειπται.
Διὰ ταῦτ' ἀνασταλύζω
θαμὰ Τάρταρον δεδοικώς·
Ἀΐδεω γάρ ἐστι δεινὸς
μυχός, ἀργαλέη δ' ἐς αὐτὸν
κάτοδος· καὶ γὰρ ἑτοῖμον
καταβάντι μὴ ἀναβῆναι

I have explained these witty lines in every detail in several papers known to Rozokoki: she asserts that my ἑρμηνεία is ἐσφαλμένη (214). I shall show that it is her ἑρμηνεία that is ἐσφαλμένη, not mine. Since ἀναβαίνω can mean "go up", and since, as everybody knows, nobody who had gone down to Hades could come up again, the critics, whom Rozokoki blindly follows, have taken the words ἑτοῖμον καταβάντι μὴ ἀναβῆναι to mean that Anacreon is frightened of going down to Hades because he will not be able to come up again. Rozokoki (213) maintains that Anacreon is scared of Hades because he φοβᾶται τὸν θάνατον. She has not understood Anacreon's clear Greek words: the poet fears Hades for one precise reason, i. e. because (καὶ γὰρ, line 11), once he has gone there, he can-

[11] For phrases like κομήτης τὰ σκέλη, κομῆτιν κεφαλήν cf. *Thes.* s. v. κομήτης. Cf. LSJ s. v. θρίξ. "hair of head", and "hair of limbs". In Hesychius we read (*Thes.* s. v. κόμη 1776 B) κόμη, αἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς καὶ χωρίων (χωρίων = "parts of the body": the reading χωρίον is meaningless, since κόμη, unlike κώμη, can not signify "place", χωρίον, whereas "part of the body" is attested in Hippocrates, and χωρίων is necessary to fulfil the incomplete statement τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς).

[12] Cf. LSJ, s. v. τις "joined with adjectives".

not ἀναβῆναι. Now, why should Anacreon be afraid of remaining in Hades (Τάρταρον δεδοικώς) and not coming up? In post-Homeric times, the life of the dead in Hades was the opposite of fearsome. The "logique Cartésienne" tells us irrefutably that Anacreon could not possibly fear Hades, because, as any handbook of Greek mythology will tell Dr. Rozokoki and her supervisors, the dead could pleasantly continue, in Hades, to do what they had enjoyed doing on earth: to quote two examples relating to professionals, a doctor in *A.P.* 11.281 could continue to successfully exercise his profession in the nether world[13], and the poet Eutychides in A.P. 11.333 happily continued to recite in Hades his poetry, which he had enjoyed reciting "zu lebzeiten" on earth[14].

As regards Anacreon in Hades, it was generally assumed, in antiquity, that one could not make love after death. Since Anacreon had been, in life, an exceptionally active *amator*, many variations, in poetry, were written as to whether he could continue to make love after death. These variations have been very instructively illustrated by my colleague H. White[15]: I shall mention a few of them here. According to one such variation (*A.P.* 7.29: cf. White, 68), both Anacreon and Smerdies, in Hades, sleep the sleep of the dead and consequently can not indulge in any amatory activity; in *A.P.* 7.30 (cf. White, 64, 69) the opposite is said: although as a rule death quenched any amatory power, "*not even* death" (οὐδ' Ἀίδης) had extinguished Anacreon's erotic fire (i. e. Anacreon was an exception to the said rule), although he could only sing about Bathyllus, but not make love to him; the author of *A.P.* 7.27[16] expresses the wish that even in Hades (ἐν μακάρεσσι), where love-making was not possible, Anacreon may still be able to make love because the grace of the gods will allow him to be an exception to the rule. Finally, at *A.P.* 7.25[17] we are told that Anacreon, once arrived in Hades, complained (βαρύνεται) about one thing only, i. e. because he could not make love. In this epigram, Anacreon makes exactly the same complaint that he makes in his poem 53. The two poems patently allude to each other (*A.P.* 7.25 is ascribed to Simonides): Anacreon βαρύνεται for one reason only in the epigram, and is δεδοικώς in his poem 53 for the very same reason: his ἀναβῆναι means "making love". Conclusion: the "logique Cartésienne", which never is ἐσφαλμένη, has enabled us to understand Anacreon's humour. The ambiguous ἀναβῆναι, skilfully placed, as usual in the case of "pointes", at the end of the poem, is felicitous: at first the reader thinks that Anacreon fears Hades because he will not be able to "go

[13] Cf. what I have written in "Un epigrama satírico mal entendido", J.-M. Nieto Ibáñez (coord.), *Lógos Hellenikós. Homenaje al Profesor Gaspar Morocho Gayo* (Universidad de León 2003) I, 267-269.

[14] Cf. Barwick, *art.cit*. 29.

[15] *New Essays in Hellenistic Poetry* (Amsterdam 1985) 60 ff.

[16] On all this cf. White, *op. cit*. 66, 61 f.

[17] Cf. White, *op. cit*. 65 f.

up" from there, i. e. not be able to leave the nether world, but then it dawns upon the reader that the sole thing about Hades which the great *amator* dreaded was not his having to remain there (*A.P.* 7.25.5ff.: οὐχ ὅτι λείπων ἠέλιον Λήθης ἐνθάδ' ἔκυρσε δόμων), but the fact that he could not make love down there (ἀλλ' ὅτι κ. τ. λ. : *A.P.* 7.25.7ff.)[18].

I am left with the impression that Dr. Rozokoki's supervisors do not know Greek adequately.

[18] In the light of the precise *Unterweltsituation* as evidenced by epigrams, Anacreon's predicament in Hades as described in *A.P.* 7.25 is clear. He is lonely (μοῦνος) because he alone, as an exception to the rule, amongst the dead who can not make love, is still capable of making love. Those who died took with themselves to Hades, if they could, what they thought they would need in the nether world (Eutychides "bringe seine Oden mit": Barwick, *ibid.*), but Anacreon could not bring down to Hades with him Smerdies and Bathyllus (λέλοιπε), and therefore he is vexed (βαρύνεται).