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PLATO COMICVS: FRAG. *PHAON* II.: A PARODY OF ATTIC RITUAL.

THERE is no fragment of the older Attic Comedy that concerns Greek religion so intimately as this, and none which has been so misinterpreted. It may also claim to have a certain value for our literary judgment of Plato.

The story of Phaon is preserved for us by three authorities, Aelian,¹ Palai-phatos,² and Servius;³ and with few variations and additions all three present it as follows: Phaon was an elderly Lesbian ferryman who transported Aphrodite, disguised as an old woman, across the sea; and she in reward gave him a magic ointment which restored his youth and ensured him the desperate love of all women. I am not concerned here with the handling of the story in other literature, nor with its original significance. We may suspect that it originated as a *ἱερὸς λόγος*. But it is presented to us merely as a piece of folklore, as a theme well suited to the temper of the Middle Attic Comedy. We may suppose that Plato followed a version known to Kratinos,⁴ according to which Aphrodite was the chief lover of Phaon and jealous of guarding him against her rivals. For it is certain, as Meineke has pointed out, that it is Aphrodite who delivers the speech contained in this fragment; in line seven she demands a preliminary sacrifice to herself, under the name *κουροτρόφος*. Only a divinity can demand sacrifice, and *κουροτρόφος* is a familiar epithet of many deities including Aphrodite, and she is the only deity possible in this scene, in which she is trying to keep off the ardent crowd of women from her beloved Phaon, by insisting on long and complicated preliminary rites and sacrifices before their admission to her shrine, where she is keeping him, as she once kept Kinyras.

The text is on the whole well preserved by Athenaeus and only seriously corrupt in line 16. Meineke's comments are occasionally helpful, but his emendations and those he records of older scholars are generally unnecessary and often disastrous: Koch's notes are uncritical and useless. The commentators have suffered from a lack of knowledge of the technique of Greek ritual, from a lack of humour and from a morbid passion for discovering obscenity everywhere: they might have taken as the principle of their textual criticism 'omne obscurum pro obsceno.' They have entirely missed the humour of the passage, and often by pseudo-rational explanation or emendation destroy the point and quaintness of the phrases, chiefly because they have failed to recognize that Aphrodite is speaking as one drunk, and mixes up the ternin-

¹ *Var. Hist.* 12, 18.

² *De Incred.* 49.

³ *Ad Verg. Aen.* 3, 279.

⁴ *Athen.*, p. 69.

ology and technical rules of ritual with a drunkard's recklessness. By taking the passage seriously, the commentators have made it utterly insipid. Only by realizing that it is a drunken parody we may possibly find some amusement in it. But to enjoy a parody one must know the original. It is not only the queer recklessness of her ritualistic demands that proves Aphrodite to be drunk, but the words of Athenaeus which preface this quotation prove it also: he gives it as an illustration of the remarkable behaviour of women under the influence of drink.

And Aphrodite's opening words are surely those of the wine-bibber, although their real significance has been doubted: 'How I have been praying for a long time that your folly might become wine.' The only suggestion, as far as I can find, made by the commentators is that *οἶνον* is put by 'surprise' for *ἔδωρ*, as if in the back of her mind was a phrase like the curse of Menelaos in the *Iliad*: 'May you all become earth and water,' which insinuates 'may you all pass away and come to nought'; but that phrase does not seem to have survived down to the later periods of literature, and would hardly help us here if it had.

I can only see in these opening lines a devout prayer that there might be as much wine at hand as they had of foolishness. 'For in your case the proverb comes true, "the hucksterer has not got an ounce of wit in him."' The tradition of the text may be correct; and yet nothing preserved by the *Paroemiographi Graeci* throws any light on this curious expression. It is possible that *καπήλω* is a drunken mistake for some more pointed word resembling it; but no one has yet suggested a possible word in its place that would make a better proverb.

In line 5 *προτέλεια* gains in force if we give it its special sense of offerings preliminary to a marriage.

To understand the point and humour of lines 8-10, one must bear in mind the two types of Greek sacrifice, the animal and the cereal or vegetable (including cakes and fruits), and that some special qualities are sometimes demanded of the animal victim and certain special forms sometimes prescribed for the cereal; thus, pregnant animals might be required in sacrifice to Demeter and the earth-goddess, the male entire animal, *ἐνόρχης*, for Poseidon or Zeus or Ares; again the cakes consecrated to Artemis or Hecate might have to be set round with torches, or stamped with a crescent moon, and many such moulds for stamping cakes have come down to us. Here, then, the drunken joke consists in mixing up the two sets of epithets, those appropriate to animals and those appropriate to cereals, so that we get a *πλακοῦς ἐνόρχης*, as we might say 'a bun entire,' and 'a pregnant cake,' *ἄμνλος ἐγκύμων*.

The next clause in this solemn ritual, the sixteen thrushes—*ὀλόκληροι μέλειτι μεμυγμένοι*—aims at the same sort of humorous effect. 'Ὀλόκληροι is a sufficiently ludicrous epithet of thrushes. It has properly a legal social significance, referring to a full citizen who is the independent owner of a lot

of land; but we have no clear example of it in this original sense. We find the word in ritual inscriptions: the priest, whether man or woman, must be *ὑγιής καὶ ὁλόκληρος*—that is, must be thoroughly sound in all parts of the body. It is properly a human term and not so naturally applied to animals—‘sixteen thrushes, good sound birds, mixed up with honey.’ Again the epithet has been jocosely transferred from the cereal offerings: honey cakes were a common and acceptable sacrifice; a honeyed thrush was probably unknown hitherto to gods or men. The same point of humour may be discerned in the next curious item—‘twelve hares, *ἐπισέληνα*.’ None of the commentators find any sense in this; as they have taken every part of the passage *en grand sérieux*, the logic of humorous nonsense offered them no clue. Meineke, anxious for obscene effects, invents the unknown but potentially indecorous word *ἐπισέλινα*.

Επισέληνα is a good word, and Hesychios was right in connecting it with cakes, but wrong in paraphrasing it as *μηνοείδη*, as if the whole cake were made in the shape of the moon. The preposition *ἐπί* shows that the word refers to the practice of stamping the cake with the shape of the moon, so that it might be a suitable offering to Hekate or Selene. No animal was ever so treated, therefore it appeals to Plato, and I think to us, as a good phrase for drunken speech—as ‘a hot cross hare’ instead of ‘a hot cross bun.’

She then proceeds to enumerate simpler and cheaper sacrifices [l. 11 (emended) *ἤδη τὰδ' εὐτελέστατ' ἔστ' ἄκουε δὴ*], and in lines 12-15 we may recognize less humour and more grossness. Certain offerings are prescribed to certain daimones, whose names allude to procreation: three gallons of onions, a liberal allowance, to Orthannes (in the other long fragment of *Phaon* the aphrodisiac quality of onions is emphasized also by Athenaeus, p. 63). We note the careful prescription of measure, which is quite in the style of the solemn ritual inscriptions.

To Konisalos and the Twin Helpers an obscene offering is demanded, which can be interpreted by the help of Aristophanes. We need only note that the *πινακίσκος* might have been suggested by the *πίνακες* that were often hung up as dedications in temples, and that the idea expressed in line 15 is consonant with the purificatory use of torches in Greek ritual, their original intention being to purge the air of daimonic influence.

Line 16 is at once the crux and the most interesting passage of the whole fragment, and was the starting-point of the present paper. We are pulled up short by the astonishing phrase *κυσί τε καὶ κυνηγέταις*; and our difficulty is increased by the corruption of the first words of the line *πύργης τετάρτης*. The first word is meaningless, and some commentators would change both—most of the changes proposed being in the direction of obscenity. It is obvious from their position that the words denote some kind of sacrifice, perhaps humorous, but probably derived from the actual terminology of Greek ritual. This was almost entirely innocent of obscene vocabulary, and we should note that there is no obscenity of actual phrase in any of the terms of sacrifice prescribed in this fragment, for even the *μύρτων πινακίσκος* is only latently

obscene, as the word *μύρτων* primarily bore the meaning of myrtle boughs which could be of ritualistic use.¹ Only, the spirit of drunken parody prevails throughout. We should seek then in the terminology of Greek ritual inscriptions, unknown to Meineke and unused by Koch, for our emendation. An inscription from Dittenberger's *Sylloge*,² No. 618, may help us, which prescribes as a state-offering *σπυρῶν τρεῖς τεταρτῆς*, three-quarter loaves or cakes of wheaten meal, and Hesychios gives us *σπυρούς* as an equivalent for *πυρούς*. One might suggest then for our corrupt passage *σπυρῶν τεταρτῆς* (from *τεταρτεύς*) quarters of wheaten cake; the rare and technical word *σπυρῶν* might account for the bungling of the later copyist; and such an offering to dogs would sound quaint enough, and certainly conform to the rule of cheapness, as also do the offerings of a drachma and three obols to other Priapean demons. Money-offerings though rare were not unknown in Greek ritual.²

Finally the drunken parody of reality is maintained to the end: for the hero Keles is to get the skin of the victim and *θυλήματα*, a vague word which may mean sacrificial cakes and which Aristophanes in his description of the sacrifice in the *Peace* associates with the *σπλάγχνα*. The only joke here is in the *δέρμα*, for she forgets that a victim must be offered before there is a skin, and that the skin was never offered but was reserved as a perquisite for the priest or for the state.

So in respect of the sacrifices all is topsy-turvy, in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan. We can now return to the Daimones, leaving aside for a moment the *κύνες* and the *κυνηγέται*. The others are a disreputable fraternity that remind us vividly of some of the Roman *Indigitamenta* in Varro's list. They may be called Functional Daimones, or, in Usener's phrase, 'Sonder-Götter' or 'Augenblick-Götter,' of which type the best attested and clearest example was *μύιαγρος*, the Fly-chaser of Arcadia. I have elsewhere discussed the fallacy of Usener's theory in regard to these.³ Greek polytheism, with its strong sense of personal *θεοί*, bearing marked individuality and of varied moral attributes, did not wholly succeed in purging the air of this non-moral daimonistic animism. 'Lordon' and Kubdaso and Keles may be mere figments of Plato's imagination, invented in keeping with the humour of an impure plot: we know nothing about them except their Priapean significance, which their etymology proves. It is otherwise with Konisalos and Orthannes. The former name is mysterious, and we do not know from what language it is derived; but we know that it designated an ithyphallic daimon of Attica rooted in popular belief. He appears in the humorous passage of Aristophanes *Ekklesiazousai*, where the woman-leader asks the approaching Spartan herald, 'Are you a real man or Konisalos?'⁴ and Strabo speaking of Priapos says that in character 'he is like the Attic Orthannes and Konisalos and Tuchon and such personages.'⁵

It may be said for the credit of the state religion that we have found no

¹ They are mentioned among the offerings to Despoina in the inscription found near Lykosoura (Dittenberger, *Syll.*² 939).

² E.g. Prott-Ziehen, 97, inscription from

Amorgos, money-offering called *πέλανος*.

³ Vide *Anthropological Essays presented to E. B. Tylor*, p. 81.

⁴ L. 982.

⁵ P. 588.

evidence as yet of any public cult in Attica of these crude products of popular animism. But our appreciation of the higher spirit of Hellenism suffers from the discovery of an inscription showing that the state of Imbros in the third century B.C. gave to Orthannes the title of Θεός and consecrated to him a priesthood with a processional and sacrificial service.¹ The men of Imbros were cleruchs of Athens, who may have lapsed into a daimonistic animism at a time when they were suffering from a decay of population; or they may have instituted the cult, as Foucart, who published the inscription, has suggested, because they interpreted the phallic god of the island, the Kabeiric Hermes Imbramos, as their Attic daimon Orthannes.

We need not waste time over the nameless παραστάται δύνον—coupled with Konisalos, doubtless with Priapean significance—except to note that their designation works into the humour of the whole, which is a parody of real religious things; for the epithet παραστάτης was a solemn title both of Herakles and the Dioskouroi as ‘helpful comrades.’

We must now grapple with ‘the dogs and the dog-leaders.’ All we get from the old commentators is wanton emendation and unnecessary suggestions of obscenity. It is no use hunting for figurative uses of ‘dog’ in Greek authors. In certain passages and at certain times, a harlot might be called a dog, and so might a Bacche or a Fury or Klytemnestra. But sacrificial language is not poetical, and sacrifices were not offered—even in a parody—to ordinary mortals. There is something honest in Meineke’s confession of ignorance, ‘credo aliud quid latere;’ for when he wrote there was really nothing else to say. But since 1885 the ‘aliud quid’ has been staring us in the face, and the light that it throws on this passage would have penetrated our intelligence long ago, only that the fragment of Plato was treated by the few that handled it with too great reverence and without any sense of humour,² and also that our philologists cannot yet be induced to pay due attention to Greek inscriptions and Greek religion. An inscription was found in 1885 near Zea in the Peiraeus, and published in the *Ephemeris Archaeologike*³ of that year, prescribing the preliminary sacrifices that should be performed before visiting the temple of Asklepios in the Peiraeus. The Eleusinian priest who set up the inscription enacts that three cakes shall be offered respectively to Maleatas, Apollo, Hermes, Iaso, Akeso and Panakeia; three cakes ‘to the dogs,’ and three to the ‘dog-leaders’ (κυνηγέταις). Now we know of no daimoniatic beings who could possibly be called ‘dogs’ in this context, and we must interpret the words as referring to real sacred dogs such as we know were kept in the temple at Epidauros and were often inspired by the god to effect his cures. These, then, must have been also maintained, for a time at least, in the temple of the Peiraeus. But the κυνηγέται could not conceivably be the human and mortal keepers of the dogs; for at no period of Greek

¹ B.C.H. 1883, p. 166.

² This is notably the case in the commentary on the inscription in Prott-Ziehen, *Leges Sacratae*, 71. The Editors honestly try to interpret the

two documents together, but go laboriously astray.

³ 1885, p. 85; also in C.I.A. 1657, and Dittenberger *Sylloge*², 631.

paganism could the human guardians or officials of a temple receive 'a sacrifice.' The 'dog-guardians' must therefore be imagined as heroic beings belonging to the circle of Asklepios, such as Machaon or Podaleirios. A sacrifice to them causes no difficulty. What shocks us is that Athenians of the fourth century should be ordered to pay sacrifice—a definite act of worship—to temple dogs by an Eleusinian priest in a public ritual law.

Now here we have the astonishing coincidence of the collocation of *κυσί* and *κυνηγέταις* in two documents, the one a formal hieratic inscription, the other a fragment of a wild comedy, and nowhere else in the whole of Greek literature; in the former it has a serious and explicable purport, in the latter it appears as unintelligible nonsense. Surely there is an artful connexion to be assumed between the two documents which explains and justifies the nonsense. My theory, then, is that Plato was deliberately parodying the solemn grotesque phrase of the Eleusinian priest, who had perpetrated under Epidaurian influences a piece of religious savagery that shocked the more enlightened Athenians and perhaps had already provoked criticisms. The parody would be eminently topical, eminently in the style of Gilbert and Sullivan; and the parody may well extend beyond this actual phrase that puzzles us most; just as the Eleusinian priest ordains a monotonous list of offerings not only to high and known divinities, but to a number of functional daimones, of whom probably the Athenian public heard now for the first time, Iaso Akeso Panakeia, and reaches his climax with his dogs and dog-wardens, all as part of a *προθυσία*, so the quick-witted comedian in his *ἱερὸς νόμος* rolls out his list of unfamiliar and newly-created functional daimones, and crowns the list with his 'dogs and dog-wardens,' that have no function here except to mock that sacerdotal silliness in the Peiraeus. This theory, of course, assumes that the inscription had already been set up in the Peiraeus, and had attracted much public notice and comment before Plato's comedy was performed; it would also be the better for my view if we could believe that the first event only preceded the second by a short space of time, so that the topical joke would have all the bloom of freshness.

On general grounds Meineke's view will commend itself to those familiar with the history of Attic Comedy, that the *Phaon* belongs to the latest period of Plato's career. It has evidently the characteristics of the Middle Comedy, being a non-political mythologic burlesque without chorus. Though contemporary with Eupolis and Aristophanes, Plato was living and producing comedies at least as late as 390 B.C.¹ Also, if we accept Meineke's most probable emendation of a statement by the Scholiast on Aristophanes *Plut.* 179,² we gain an exact date for the production of the *Phaon*, viz. 391 B.C.

Now the writing of the inscription of the Peiraeus bears evident traces of

¹ The quotation from his play in Plutarch *Præc. reipubl. ger.*, p. 801 B, proves this—vide Meineke, p. 161.

² ἐμφαίνει δὲ καὶ Πλάτων· ἐν τῷ Φαίδρῳ (emend

Φάων) ἑπτακαίδεκάτῳ ἔπει ὁσπερὶν διδάχθῆντι ὡς ἐπὶ Φιλοκλέους ὡς μηκέτι οὐσίας αὐτῆς (i.e. Λαίδας). The Φαῖδρος is an unlikely title, and there is no mention of it in the list given by Suidas.

the style of the first decade of the fourth century; so that the theory that its publication was fairly recent at the time when the *Phaon* was produced agrees with all the facts that are at our command. We know that the love of parody was strong in the older Attic Comedy and was a dominant characteristic of the Middle. We need not then be surprised at this example, unique as it is, of the parody of a *ἱερὸς νόμος*. It was well for the religion that this quaint rule of sacrifice to the dogs and the dog-leaders should not pass unchallenged. And it may be that the humour of the comedian helped to abolish it; at any rate, we hear no more of it from this time onwards.

In other ways, we may surmise, the passage that we are considering may have expressed a serious religious feeling in the poet's mind. He, like his older contemporaries, Aristophanes and Eupolis, may have viewed with suspicion and dislike the introduction of new cults; and the cult of Asklepios, harmless and beneficial as it was, was still at this date an innovation. And we discern that Aristophanes in the *Plutus* treats it with much humour and scant respect, though he does not take any gross liberty with the dignified figure of the kindly physician god. We have another example of the invasion of a strange cult towards the close of the fifth century in the Cypriote Adonis rites, which in the religious emotion they excited were more alien than those of Asklepios to the older Attic temperament; nor did these escape the satyric shafts of Aristophanes, nor of Plato also, as it appears from the fragment of his *Adonis*.

From another point of view we may discover a half-serious motive in our fragment. The comedian may be venting his feelings against the growing tendency at Athens towards the multiplication of sacrifices, a feeling which seems also to have inspired his comedy the *Εοπραί*, as also the play called *Φιλοθύτης* by his contemporary Metagenes. At the same time the quaint list of divinities that are proclaimed in the ritual law of the *Phaon* suggests that he may be girding at the extravagant devotion of women to obscure daimonistic powers, especially those of procreation, whom sane and economic citizens were content to ignore. A voice from much later literature, from the *Erotes* of Lucian, seems to re-echo the sentiment we may attribute here to Plato: 'Each and every god is a burden on the married couples, and the wretched men do not even know their very names, the Koliades, the Genetyllides . . . secret initiation—rites and "suspect" mysteries from which men are excluded—and (why should we mince matters?) mere corruption of the soul.' Lucian had taken his jibe at the Koliades and Genetyllides directly from Aristophanes.¹

One last reflection is pertinent here. Aphrodite, one of the great deities of Greece, is here introduced on the stage speaking as one drunk, unless we are deceived by Athenaeus and misled in our interpretation of the parody. This is a serious matter. We do not find any exact parallel in Aristophanes; he could take any liberties with Herakles the genial hero, with Hermes the lackey of the gods, with Dionysos who as the patron-deity of comedy might enjoy being

¹ *Clouds*, 52.

treated *en bon camarade*, but he refrained as far as we know from representing the High Gods in degrading or ridiculous positions. The poets of the Middle Comedy, whose subjects were so often a travesty of the old myths, may have gone further than he in irreverence. The title of Plato's play—the Zeus *κακούμενος*—suggests that the Supreme God himself was by no means sacrosanct. It may be also that some of the travesties of myths found on vases of Magna Graecia, which are the products of a very vulgar sentiment, have been inspired by the Middle Comedy. The license of the Attic stage might then be regarded as one of the causes contributory to the decay of Greek polytheism. On the other hand, a warning is necessary against the over-rapid conclusions of some scholars, who considerably antedate that decay and forget how a popular religion of long tradition can tolerate the wildest irreverence of a carnival. But however we may judge the larger question, we must admit that this fragment of the *Phaon* is unique among the débris of Attic Comedy.

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