

Myrtia, n° 18, 2003, pp. 301-303

NOTES ON THE POETRY OF ERATOSTHENES

HEATHER WHITE

Classics Research Centre (London) *

In this article I shall discuss various fragments of Eratosthenes' *Erigone*. For the convenience of the reader, I shall print Alexandra Rosokoki's text¹.

Fragment 1: μέσον δ' ἔξαύσατο βᾶννον

Dr. Rosokoki explained (p. 79) that the poet is describing the lighting of a fire. Borthwick was puzzled by the meaning of this fragment and suggested that "perhaps one should read in Eratosthenes μέσου δ' ἔξαύσατο βᾶννον". Textual alteration is, however, not warranted. Perfect sense can be made of the transmitted text if we understand that the verb ἔξαύσατο has been used in a causative sense². Thus ἔξαύσατο βᾶννον means "made the oven hot". Note also that the poet has employed the middle³ form of the verb instead of the active.

Fragment 2: καὶ βαθὺν ἀκρήτω πλεύμονα τεγγόμενος

Rosokoki notes (p. 80) that πλεύμονα is an Attic form. I would like to add that Atticisms were regularly employed in epic verse: cf. *MPhL* 9, 1992, p. 52.

* Dirección para correspondencia: Dra. H. White, 30, Bethune Road N16 5BD (England).

¹ Cf. Alexandra Rosokoki, *Die Erigone des Eratosthenes*, Heidelberg 1995. Dr. Rosokoki has produced an excellent edition and commentary of Eratosthenes' fragments. Her discussions of textual and linguistic problems are very learned and well-argued. She also provides the reader with a detailed investigation of Eratosthenes' sources. It should be noted that Dr. Rosokoki is heavily indebted to the fundamentally important work of Prof. R. Merkelbach on Eratosthenes' *Erigone*.

² For the use of verbs in a causative sense, cf. G. Giangrande, *MPhL* 8, p. 75ff. Cf. also *fr.* 6, line 2 where the verb κυμαίνει has a transitive meaning. The wind is said to cause the sea to swell: cf. LSJ, s.v. κυμαίνω (3).

³ Cf. my commentary on Theocritus' *Idyll* 24 (Amsterdam 1979), p. 105.

Fragment 3: μόσχους καὶ χλωράς κλήματος ἐκφυάδας

In her discussion of this line, Rosokoki (p. 82) suggests that since the noun ἐκφυάδας has been given the epithet χλωράς, the noun μόσχους must also have been accompanied by an adjective. I would like to point out, however, that Hellenistic poets were fond of structural *inconcinnitas*⁴. Hence μόσχους may have been employed by the poet without an adjective.

Fragment 4: Ἰκαριοῖ, τόθι πρῶτά περ εἰς τράγον ὠρχήσαντο
περ εἰς τράγον Rosokoki : περιστραγον D

The reader will note that Rosokoki printed her own alteration περ εἰς τράγον in this fragment. In her commentary (p. 85) she notes that “Hiller ... findet keine Erklärung für das σ vor τράγον.” I would like to point out that perfect sense is provided by the ms. reading περιστραγον⁵. The poet is referring here to the *Askoliasmos*. Thus the companions of Icarus are said to have danced round the inflated goatskin “in a crooked manner”. The verb περιορχέομαι has been used in *tnesis*. Cf. Callimachus, *Hymn 3*, line 240 – περὶ πρύλιν ὠρχήσαντο.

Fragment 5: εἰς ὅτε δὴ Θορικοῦ καλὸν ἵκανεν ἔδος

In this fragment the poet mentions Thorikos. I would like to point out that Eratosthenes has employed here the adjective καλός, which was popular in Hellenistic poetry: cf. Theocritus, *Idyll 1*, line 129 σύριγγα καλάν. Cf. also *Myrtia 16*, 2001, p. 342.

Fragment 6: οἶνος θ ὃς πυρὶ ἴσον ἔχει μένος, εὔτ' ἄν ἐς ἄνδρα
ἔλθῃ, κυμαίνει δ' οἶα Λίβυσσαν ἄλλα
βορέης ἢ ἐνότος, τὰ δὲ καὶ κεκρυμμένα φαίνει
βυσσόθεν, ἐκ δ' ἀνδρῶν πάντ' ἐτίναξε νόον.

⁴ Cf. my *Studies in the Poetry of Nicander*, Amsterdam, 1987, p. 97 (note 149) where I point out that “disbalance is a favourite trick of Nicander’s”. Cf. also *MPhL 9*, 1992, p. 50.

⁵ Hesychius notes that στραγός = σκολιός. For the fact that Hesychius preserves many words which are attested in Hellenistic poetry, cf. my *New Essays in Hellenistic Poetry*, Amsterdam, 1985, p. 118, note 5. Similarly καλόν was used as an adverb. The neuter singular was frequently used as an adverb in Hellenistic poetry: cf. D. Kidd, *Aratus, Phaenomena*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 499.

Rosokoki states (p. 88) that the three relative sentences in this fragment “haben den Stil eines Mottos”. She then adds that the verb ἐτίναξε “steht im Aorist”. I would like to suggest that we are faced here with an example of the gnomic aorist⁶. Thus wine is said to remove sense from men.

Fragmenta dubia

(1) ἡδυντῆρες

Rosokoki suggests (p. 90) that the word ἡδυντῆρες (i.e. salt) was employed in a description of a meal by Eratosthenes in his *Erigone*. She explains that salt was used as a seasoning for food. Similarly vinegar⁷ and sesame⁸ were used to season food.

(2) περιπλέγδην κρεμόνεσσι

On p. 94 Rosokoki discusses the forms ἀκρεμών and κρεμών (i.e. branch). According to ancient sources, κρεμών is connected with the verb κρεμάννυμι (“to hang”), whereas ἀκρεμών is connected etymologically with ἄκρος. I would like to suggest that Eratosthenes imagined that in the form ἀκρεμών, ἀ-⁹ was employed with intensifying force. Thus ἀκρεμών means “much hanging” and κρεμών means “hanging”.

⁶ For other examples of the gnomic aorist in Hellenistic poetry, cf. A.S.F. Gow, *Theocritus*, II, Cambridge, 1965, p. 332.

⁷ Cf. LSJ, s.v. ἦδος II: “= ὄξος, vinegar, used as a flavouring”.

⁸ Cf. Hipponax, fr. 17 σησάμοισι φαρμάσσων (“flavouring with sesame”): cf. *Myrtia* 16, 2001, p. 307.

⁹ Cf. my *New Studies in Greek Poetry*, Amsterdam, 1989, p. 134, where I point out that ἀσταγές = πολυσταγές.