

ON THE SYMBOLISM OF APPORTIONING MEAT IN ARCHAIC GREEK ELEGIAC POETRY

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Φιλόχορος δέ φησιν κρατήσαντας Λακεδαιμονίους
Μεσσηνίων διὰ τὴν Τυρταίου στρατηγίαν ἐν ταῖς
στρατείαις ἔθος ποιήσασθαι, ἂν δειπνοποιήσωνται καὶ
παιωνίσωσιν, ἄδειν καθ' ἓνα <τὰ> Τυρταίου · κρίνειν δὲ
τὸν πολέμαρχον καὶ ἄθλον δίδόναι τῷ νικῶντι κρέας.

Philochorus FGrH 328 F 216
from Athenaeus 14.630 F

Philochorus says that the Spartans, after having defeated the Messenians on account of the leadership of Tyrtaeus, instituted a custom in their military organization: whenever they would prepare dinner and perform paean, they would each take turns singing the poems of Tyrtaeus. The polemarch would serve as judge and award a cut of meat to the winner.

This passage, if its testimony is to be believed, illustrates an ideology basic to the polis, namely, the notion of community through the participation of social equals. The ritual that is being described, the awarding of a cut of meat to the winner of a contest, dramatizes such an ideology. As the studies of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Detienne have shown, the archaic Greek custom of competing for prizes in contests presupposes the communalization of property that is to be apportioned and distributed in a manner that is egalitarian in ideology – but without excluding the option of awarding special privileges (1). Where the prize is a cut of meat, the communalization takes place through the central act that integrates the community, namely, the sacrifice of a victim and the apportioning of its meat (2).

In the passage under consideration, the prize is being awarded for the best performance of the poetry of Tyrtaeus. It is

my contention that the very contents of this poetry are pertinent to the ritual of awarding the cut of meat. The poetry of Tyrtaeus in particular and elegiac poetry in general amount to a formal expression of the ideology of the polis, in that the notion of social order is envisaged as the equitable distribution of communal property among equals. Giovanni Cerri (3) adduces a striking illustration from the elegiac poetry of Theognis, in a passage where the poet condemns the breakdown of the social order:

χρήματα δ' ἀρπάξουσι βίη, κόσμος δ' ἀπόλωλεν,
 δασμὸς δ' οὐκέτ' ἴσος γίνεται ἐς τὸ μέσον

Theognis 677-678

They seize possessions by force, and order [*kosmos*]
 has been destroyed.

There is no longer an equitable distribution
 [*dasmos*] (4), controlled by the community (5).

In the language of elegiac poetry, the *dasmos* 'distribution' is envisaged specifically as the distribution of food at a feast, as we see from Solon's condemnation of the élite for their destroying the social order:

δήμου θ' ἠγεμόνων ἄδικος νόος, οἷσιν ἐτοῖμον
 ὕβριος ἐκ μεγάλης ἄλγεα πολλά παθεῖν.
 οὐ γὰρ ἐπίστανται κατέχειν κόρον οὐδὲ παρούσας
 εὐφροσύνας κοσμεῖν δαιτὸς ἐν ἡσυχίῃ.

Solon 3.7-10 GP

The intent of the leaders of the community (6) is without justice [*dikē*]. What is in store for them is the experiencing of many pains as a result of their great outrage [*hubris*].

For they do not know how to check their satiety or to make order [*kosmos*] for the merriment (7) that goes on in the serenity of the feast [*dais*].

The word *dais* 'feast' is derived from the verb *daiomai*, meaning 'divide, distribute, apportion' (8). The very poem of Solon from which this passage is taken centers on the concept of *Eunomia*, personified as a goddess (Solon fr. 3.32 GP). Like the word *isonomia*, (9) *Eunomia* is derived from the verb *nemō*, meaning 'distribute, apportion' (10). The same word *Eunomia* is reported by Aristotle (*Politics* 5.7 p. 1306b40) and Strabo (8.4.10 p. 362) as the name of a poem by Tyrtaeus concerning the constitution of Sparta (fr. 1a GP).

The *dais* 'feast' that is described by Solon as being disrupted because of *hubris* 'outrage' is to be envisaged specifically as an

occasion for the distribution of meat, as we see from the following condemnation of *hubris* in the elegiac poetry of Theognis:

δειμαίνω μὴ τήνδε πόλιν Πολυπαΐδη ὕβρις
ἢ περ Κενταύρους ὠμοφάγους ὀλέσῃ

Theognis 541-542

I fear, son of Polypaas, that *hubris* will destroy this polis
the same *hubris* that destroyed the Centaurs, eaters of raw meat (11).

In the *Odyssey* (21.295-304), the leader of the suitors, Antinoos himself, retells a myth about the disruption of a feast by the Centaur Eurytion - a disruption that precipitated the battle of the Centaurs and Lapiths. This retelling entails an irony unintended by Antinoos, since the suitors themselves violate all the norms of a *dais* 'feast', an activity that conventionally centers on the ritual core of the sacrifice of a victim and the distribution of its meat (12).

Thus the evidence of elegiac poetry, as supplemented by that of epic poetry, implies a coherent picture of *dikē* 'justice' in terms of an orderly apportioning of meat at a feast that centers on a correctly executed sacrifice; conversely, *hubris* 'outrage' is represented as the disruption and perversion of this process (13). Given that the poems of Tyrtaeus, one of which is even called *Eunomia* (as we have seen), are representative of the function of elegiac poetry as an expression of the polis, the performance of this poet is ideologically suited to the ritual reported by Philochorus, namely, the awarding of a cut of meat to the one who gives the best performance.

It therefore call into question the opinions expressed on this matter by Felix Jacoby, who thought that the practice reported by Philochorus cannot be dated further back than the early fourth century B.C. (14). Jacoby argued *ex silentio* that, in the fifth century B.C. and in the first decade of the fourth, there was nothing known about Tyrtaeus in Sparta (15). According to Jacoby, the references to Tyrtaeus by the likes of Philochorus (FGrH 328 F 215, 216; second half of the fourth century B.C., first half of the third), the orator Lysias (*Against Leocrates* 106-107), and Plato himself (*Laws* 629b) are based on an Athenian transmission of Tyrtaeus, as supposedly evidenced by the tradition that the poet himself was a native Athenian (16).

But this is to misunderstand the accretive nature of myths

about poets and their poetry: even if we concede that the detail about the Athenian provenance of Tyrtaeus reflects an anachronistic elaboration, it does not follow that the other details of the Tyrtaeus story as reported by Athenian sources are likewise anachronistic (17). Moreover, there is reason to doubt the notion that the story of an Athenian Tyrtaeus is necessarily an Athenian tradition. There is evidence to suggest that the stories about the foreign provenances of Sparta's poets are not foreign but native Spartan traditions, suited to the overall ideology of the polis (18). Besides, it is a common traditional theme that the culture-hero of a given polis is really a foreigner or at least one who introduces his cultural boon from a foreign source (19).

In the case of stories about cultural boons introduced from foreign sources, there is an interesting example in the elegiac poetry of Theognis: here the poet's model of social cohesion is the foundation not of his native Megara but of Thebes (Theognis 15-18), which is the city where the poet represents his own tomb, in the mode of an epigram:

Αἴθων μὲν γένος εἰμί, πόλιν δ' εὐτειχέα Θήβην
οἰκῶ, πατρῶας γῆς ἀπερυσκόμενος.

Theognis 1209-1210

I am *Aithōn* by birth, and I have an abode in
well-walled Thebes,
since I have been exiled from my native land (20).

That the poet here pictures himself as already dead becomes clear from the verses that immediately follow: after some further cryptic words that are beyond the scope of this inquiry (1211-1213), Theognis reiterates that he is an exile (1213-1214), and then he indicates overtly that his abode is next to the Plain of Lethe (1215-1216) (21).

These themes are strikingly analogous to what we find in the story of Lycurgus: the Spartan lawgiver is said to have introduced his laws from a foreign source, in this case, Crete (Herodotus 1.65.4; Plutarch *Lycurgus* 4.1), which is where he returns in self-imposed exile and starves himself to death in order to make these laws permanent (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 29.8, 31; Ephorus FGrH 70 F 175, from Aelian VH 13.23) (22). The theme of Lycurgus' death by hunger brings us back to the name *Aithōn* assumed by Theognis as an exile speaking from his tomb. The adjective *aithōn* can mean 'burning [with hunger]' and is used as an epithet for characters known for their ravenous hunger, such as Erysikhthon

(Hesiod fr. 43 MW) (23). Odysseus himself assumes the name *Aithōn* (*Od.* 19.183), and he does so in a context of assuming the stance of a would-be poet (*Od.* 19.203, in conjunction with 14.124f and 7.215-221). Jesper Svenbro has ably shown that this poet-like stance of Odysseus is symbolized by the concept of the *gastēr* 'belly' (as at *Od.* 7.216): hunger can impel a man to use ambiguous discourse in order to ingratiate himself with his audience - and thus feed his *gastēr* (24). But this ambiguous discourse of the poet, the technical word for which is *ainos* (as at *Od.* 14.508), is not just a negative concept. It can also be a positive social force: when the disguised king Odysseus is begging for food at the feasts of the impious suitors, he is actually speaking not only in the mode of an *ainos* (25) but also in the role of an exponent of *dikē* 'justice' (26). The role of Aesop, master of the *ainos* in both the general sense and in the specific sense of 'fable' (27), is analogous: he uses this discourse to indicate cryptically what is right and wrong (28), and we must keep in mind that the *aition* 'cause' of his death was that he ridiculed the ritualized greed of a Delphic rite where meat is being apportioned in a disorderly and frenzied manner (Pap.Oxy. 1800) (29). In the praise-poetry of Pindar, the technical word for which is likewise *ainos* (in the testimony of the poetry itself) (30), the concept of the *gastēr* can again be seen as a positive social force (*Isthmian* 1.49).

In elegiac poetry as well, we have seen that the poet as exponent of *dikē* 'justice' associates the social order of the polis with the orderly apportioning of meat at a feast. At the beginning of this presentation, we observed this association in the negative context of the poet's condemning the behavior of the élite, as when Solon compares their acts to the disruption of a feast or when Theognis compares the perpetrators of disruption to unruly Centaurs. There is also an important positive context in the description by Theognis of the foundation of Thebes by Kadmos, which is celebrated by the poet as the inauguration of his own poetry (15-18) (31): the actual occasion for the foundation was a feast, featuring an egalitarian distribution of food (Nonnus *Dionysiaka* 5.30-32) (32).

To sum up: the Spartan ritual practice involving the award of a cut of meat as reported by Philochorus is perfectly in accord with the ideology of the archaic polis as expressed in the elegiac poetry of Tyrtaeus. To perform the poetry of an exponent of *dikē* 'justice' is perfectly in accord with the prize of meat that is awarded to the winning performer.

Notes

1. J.-P. Vernant, *Mythe et pensée chez les Grecs* (Paris 1965; reissued 1974ff, with new pagination), I, 171-229, esp. pp. 179-182; M. Detienne, *Les maîtres de vérité dans la Grèce archaïque*² (Paris 1973), 82-99.

2. M. Detienne and J.-P. Vernant, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris 1979), in particular the article by Detienne, "Pratiques culinaires et esprit de sacrifice", pp. 10, 23-24; also the article by Detienne and J. Svenbro, "Les loups au festin ou la cité impossible", pp. 219-222. To repeat, the apportioning and distribution of meat, though conducted in an egalitarian manner, does not exclude the option of awarding special privileges. See also J. Svenbro, "A Mégara Hyblaea: le corps géomètre", *Annales ESC* 37 (1982), 953-964, esp. pp. 954-955. Cf. N. Loraux, "La cité comme cuisine et comme partage", *Annales ESC* 36 (1981), 616-617.

3. G. Cerri, "Isos dasmos come equivalente di isonomia nella silloge tognidea", *Quaderni Urbinati* 8 (1969), 97-104.

4. The *isos* 'equal, equitable' of *isos dasmos* refers to the *virtual* equality of the participants; cf. Detienne (n. 1) 96.

5. I follow the paraphrase of Cerri p. 103: *es to meson* 'directed at the center' refers to the communalization of possessions that are marked for orderly distribution by the community. I refer the reader to Cerri's able survey of parallel passages.

6. I disagree with M.L. West, *Studies in Greek elegy and iambus* (Berlin 1974) 68, that the expression *dēmou hēgemonēs* 'leaders of the *dēmos*' (as here and at Solon fr. 8.1 GP) means 'popular leaders', i.e., champions of democracy. On *dēmos* in the sense of 'community', see W. Donlan, "Changes and shifts in the meaning of *dēmos*", *La parola del passato* 135 (1970), 381-395.

7. On the programmatic connotations of *euphrosunē* 'merriment' as the occasion for poetry at a feast, see G. Nagy, *The best of the Achaeans: concepts of the hero in archaic Greek poetry* (Baltimore 1979) 19, 92 and n7, 236 and n5.

8. See Nagy (n7) 127-128 *et passim*, with bibliography.

9. For documentation and bibliography, see Cerri (n3) 103-104.

10. For an illuminating note on the meaning of *eunomia* in Solon (fr. 3.32 GP) and in Aristotle (*Politics* 4.6.3 p. 1294a4-7), see Svenbro, "Mégara" (n2) 962n27, who also discusses *ibid.* the differences in political nuance between *eunomia* and *isonomia*.

11. Cf. Apollodorus 2.5.4: the Centaur Pholos offers roast meat to his guest Herakles, while he himself eats his own portions of meat raw (αὐτὸς δὲ ὀμοῖς ἐχρήτο). Cf. also Theognis 54, with an implied description of debased aristocrats in language that suits the Cyclopes (see *Odyssey* 9.215); discussion by G. Nagy, "Poet and tyrant: Theognidea 39-52, 1081-1082b", *Classical Antiquity* 2 (1983 = *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 14) 85n10.

12. On the suitors' violation of social norms through violation of the *dais* 'feast', see S. Saïd, "Les crimes des prétendants, la maison d'Ulysse et les festins de l'Odyssee", *Études de Littérature Ancienne* (Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, Paris 1979) 9-49.

13. Aesop *Fable* 348 Perry, about the Wolf as Lawgiver and the Ass, is comparable to the story in Herodotus 3.142-143, where Maiandrios, successor to

the tyrant Polycrates of Samos, declares to the assembly of citizens that he will place his political power *es to meson* 'under the control of the community', proclaiming *isonomia* (3.142.3). As Detienne and Svenbro point out ("Loups", [n2] 220-221, 230), both the wolf as lawgiver and the tyrant commit the same perversion of the principles of community: just as the wolf as lawgiver reserves portions of meat for himself *before* the procedure of placing all seized meat *es to meson* (348.4), so also Maiandrios reserves special privileges for himself *before* placing his political power *es to meson*. On the wolf as the symbolic antithesis of the Law, see the bibliography assembled by Detienne and Svenbro in the article cited at n2; also O.M. Davidson, "Dolon and Rhesus in the *Iliad*", *Quaderni Urbinati* 30 (1979), 61-66 and C. Grottanelli, "Relazione", *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 2 (1981), 55-67, esp. p. 56. On the possible etymology of *Lukourgos* (= Lycurgus), lawgiver of the Spartans, as 'he who wards off the wolf', see W. Burkert, *Structure and history in Greek mythology and ritual* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1979) 165-166n24.

14. FGrH IIIb vol. 1 pp. 583-584 and IIIb vol. 2 pp. 479-480. See also Jacoby, "Studien zu den älteren griechischen Elegiekern", *Hermes* 53 (1918), 1-44, esp. pp. 1-12.

15. *Ibid.* Jacoby thought that Herodotus did not know of the poetry of Tyrtaeus, on the grounds that there is no mention of him in the discussion of how Sparta achieved *eunomia* in Herodotus 1.65-66. I should point out, though, that what Herodotus says leaves room for the possibility that he did indeed know of Tyrtaeus. Herodotus rejects a version of the Lycurgus story according to which the lawgiver got his laws from the Delphic Oracle, preferring a version that he attributes to the contemporary Spartans themselves, to the effect that Lycurgus got his laws from Crete. In my opinion, this version leaves room for the notion that both Lycurgus and Tyrtaeus made contributions to the constitution of Sparta - Lycurgus with laws from Crete and Tyrtaeus with laws from the Delphic Oracle (see Tyrtaeus fr. 1b GP).

16. *Ibid.* References to the Athenian provenance of Tyrtaeus: Philochorus FGrH 328 F 215 and Callisthenes FGrH 124 F 24 from Strabo 8.4.10 p. 362.

17. From the standpoint of literary history as well, one can argue against Jacoby's notion that there was a lacuna in the transmission of Tyrtaeus in the fifth century. There is reason to believe that the poetry of Tyrtaeus - and all archaic elegiac poetry, for that matter - was being continually recomposed in the process of transmission through performance (see Nagy [n11] 87-91, esp. p. 90n31). The factor of continual recomposition would account for the anachronistic accretions of given passages and testimonia.

18. Note the parallelisms of themes in the testimonia about the foreign proveniences of archaic Sparta's poets, as collected by J. Fontenrose, *The Delphic oracle: its responses and operations, with a catalogue of responses* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978), Q 18 (Tyrtaeus), Q 53 (Terpander), and Q 54 (Thaletas); cf. also Q 118. For the testimonia on these and other poets of Sparta, including Alcman, see C. Calame, *Les chœurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque II: Alcman* (Rome 1977) 34-36. As Calame emphasizes (p. 35), the poetry of all these poets is integral to the ritual complex of Spartan festivals (cf. A. Brelich, *Paidés e Parthenoi* [Rome 1969] 186ff). I would argue, therefore, that such traditions as those about the Lydian provenance of Alcman (PMG 13a; also PMG 1 Schol. B, Velleius Paterculus 1.18.2, Aelian *VH* 12.50) must be correlated with the fact that there were Spartan rituals that centered on Lydian themes, such

as the *tōn Ludōn pompē* 'Procession of the Lydians' mentioned in Plutarch *Aristides* 17.10 in connection with the cult of Artemis Orthia. We may compare an event known as the "Dance of the Lydian Maidens", at a festival of Artemis at Ephesus (Autocrates fr. 1 Kock, from Aelian *NA* 12.9 and Aristophanes *Clouds* 599f; see the discussion of Calame, *Les choeurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque I: Morphologie, fonction religieuse et sociale* [Rome 1977] 178-185). In this case, it seems clear to me that the term "Lydian Maidens" in fact designates a ritual role played by the local girls of Ephesus.

19. For a brief survey of examples, see F. Pfister, *Der Reliquienkult im Altertum I* (Giessen 1909) 130-133: "Verehrung des fremden Heros wegen seiner Verdienste".

20. For an analysis of this passage, see G. Nagy, "Theognis of Megara: the poet as seer, pilot, and revenant", *Arethusa* 15 (1982), 109-128. Note especially the parallel usages of *oikeō* 'I have an abode' in this passage of Theognis (1210) and in Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 27, 28, 92, 627, 637. In the article just cited, I argue that *oikeō* in such contexts refers to the establishing of a corpse in a sacred precinct for the purposes of hero-cult. On historical evidence for the cultural debt of pre-Dorian Megara to Thebes, see K. Hanell, *Megarische Studien* (Lund 1934), 95-97.

21. On the *topos* of the poet who speaks as one who is already dead, with further discussion of Theognis 1209-1210 and related passages, see Nagy (n20). On the *topos* of the poet's poetry as his own *sēma* 'tomb', see Nagy, "*Sēma* and *Noēsis*: some illustrations", *Arethusa* 16 (1983), 35-55, esp. p. 54n55. In this connection, we may note that elegiac poetry, as represented by the likes of Theognis and Tyrtaeus, is a reflex of the poetic traditions of lamentation as removed from the tribal context and as appropriated and reshaped by the polis. On this subject, I refer to a forthcoming article by Lowell Edmunds.

22. Cf. A. Szegedy-Maszák, "Legends of the Greek lawgivers", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 19 (1978), 199-209, esp. p. 208.

23. For further elaboration, see Nagy (n20) 123.

24. J. Svenbro, *La parole e le marbre: aux origines de la poésie grecque* (Lund 1976), 50-59.

25. For documentation, see Nagy (n7), 231-242.

26. *Ibid.* On Odysseus as the just king, see esp. *Od.* 19.109-114.

27. Nagy (n7) 239n2.

28. Nagy (n7) 281-284.

29. Nagy (n7) 284-288.

30. Nagy (n7) 222-223, following Detienne (n1) 21.

31. I elaborate on this notion in an article forthcoming in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*.

32. See the discussion of J. Svenbro, "La découpe du poème: notes sur les origines sacrificielles de la poésie grecque", *Poétique* (1984), 215-232.