

ARISTOPHANIC ORACLES

BY

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THESIS

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Abstract

Four out of the eleven extant Aristophanic comedies contain, or refer to, oracles (*Knights, Peace, Birds, Lysistrata*). This thesis aims (a) to discuss Aristophanes' stance toward oracles and oracle-collections; (b) to comment on each oracle in these four plays in chronological order, and to reach conclusions regarding Aristophanes' usage of them while paying close attention to their language. The conclusions reached are that oracles are depicted in a way that takes for granted their political manipulation, that their language is never self-sufficient and authoritative by itself, and that the persuasive force of an oracle depends equally on an interpretation that has to be linked to something easily recognizable by the audience.

Στους γονείς μου

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1. Introduction

Four out of the eleven extant Aristophanic comedies contain, or refer to, oracles (*Knights*, *Peace*, *Birds*, *Lysistrata*). Given that the time-span in which these works were composed covers more than a decade (424 BCE – 411 BCE), the question arises whether Aristophanes follows a certain pattern in the composition of his mock oracles or the function that he assigns to them in the context of each play. After a close examination of the language in which these oracles are cast, it becomes clear that their core consists of elements found in traditional oracles,¹ such as certain oracular structures, the integration of proverbs, and references to the animal kingdom. Since, however, the meter of oracular discourse is the dactylic hexameter, it is unsurprising that features of epic poetry, particularly Homeric, are present almost throughout. In fact, it has been suggested that to a certain extent it is a consistent Aristophanic strategy to contrast oracular discourse with the epic language in such a way that the latter would emerge as the winner of the conflict and, therefore, its superiority over the former would be validated.² Moreover, the work of Herodotus lends itself to being used as a source of oracles upon which Aristophanes draws in his *Knights*. My purpose in the following will be (a) to discuss Aristophanes' stance toward oracles and oracle-collections; and (b) to comment on each oracle in these four plays in chronological order, and to reach

¹ According to Fontenrose (1978) 151, traditional oracles were the ones found in oracle collections and popular narratives or “in short, all oracles never actually spoken at an oracular seat.”

² See Muecke (1998) 263; Platter (2007) 108-42.

conclusions regarding Aristophanes' usage of them while paying close attention to their language. Before proceeding it would be helpful to briefly review what we know about oracle-mongers.

An oracle-monger (χρησολόγος) was an itinerant diviner who had in his possession oracle-collections which were supposed to contain the pronouncements of the god Apollo himself or of a famous diviner of the past such as Bacis or the Sibyl.³ They were considered religious experts whose role was to provide or interpret oracles.⁴ Anxiety about potential fraud inherent in their practice was present even at the time of Herodotus, who relates the story of Onomacritus (7.6.3). Having been appointed to arrange Musaeus' oracles, he was eventually expelled from Athens by Hipparchus when the latter discovered that a forged oracle had been included in the collection.⁵ Later on, when the Peisistratids had been exiled and were now trying to convince Xerxes to invade Greece, they reconciled with Onomacritus and employed him to recite to the Persian king oracles that predicted a successful outcome of the invasion.

Some oracle-mongers gained prominence and became really influential in the fifth century B.C.E. Thucydides informs us about their involvement in the various phases of the Peloponnesian war, the important role they played in convincing the

³ See Fontenrose (1978) 152-54; for Bacis see Olson (1998) 274.

⁴ For the difference between the term χρησολόγος and μάντις, see Argyle (1970) 139. Smith (1979) 142 sides with Fontenrose (1978) 153, who argues that these were "overlapping terms for a speaker of oracles."

⁵ Fontenrose (1978) 157; Muecke (1998) 264. For a connection of the story of Onomacritus to Aristophanes' *Knights*, see Nagy (1990) 173.

Athenians to undertake the Sicilian expedition and the eventual anger of the latter against them after the news about the defeat on Sicily had been announced.⁶ Whether related to their failure in predicting successfully the outcome of the Sicilian expedition or not, the fact remains that oracle-mongers gradually lost their reputation among the more educated Athenians, something that can be seen in the consistency with which they are represented as ἀλαζόνες in ancient comedy.⁷ In fact, Plato's dismissive way of referring to them as ἀγύρται (R. 364b), who try to persuade the wealthy citizens to employ them, is perhaps another indication that their reputation must have reached its lower status in fourth century B.C.E.

⁶ καὶ πολλὰ μὲν λόγια ἐλέγετο, πολλὰ δὲ χρησμολόγοι ἦδον ἔν τε τοῖς μέλλουσι πολεμήσειν καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἄλλαις πόλεσιν 2.8.2; χρησμολόγοι τε ἦδον χρησμούς παντοίους, ὧν ἀκροᾶσθαι ὡς ἕκαστος ὄρμητο, 2.21.3; ὠργίζοντο δὲ καὶ τοῖς χρησμολόγοις τε καὶ μάντεσι καὶ ὀπόσοι τι τότε αὐτοὺς θειάσαντες ἐπήλιπσαν ὡς λήψονται Σικελίαν, 8.1.1. The passage about the Sicilian expedition is discussed by Powell (1979) 15-31.

⁷ Carey (2000) 421; for ἀλαζών see MacDowell (1990) 287-92.

2. Aristophanes and Oracle Collections

It has been suggested that the presentation of oracle-mongers (χρησμολόγοι) in the plays of Aristophanes does not favor them and that, although the playwright is disdainful of oracles that purportedly originated from the legendary prophet Bacis, oracles that were said to be of Pythian origin are met with much respect.⁸ In this chapter I will focus on the political scene in Athens in 424 B.C.E., as depicted in the *Knights*, and aim at highlighting Aristophanes' commentary on the use of collections of oracles by politicians whose aim is to advance their political careers and agendas with disastrous effects for the citizenry. In doing so, I will attempt an evaluation of Aristophanes' stance toward oracle collections and their authority, that is, the issue of whether oracles of Delphic origin are held in greater regard by Aristophanes, compared to others, specifically the oracles attributed to Bacis in this play.

Before discussing the first oracle scene in Aristophanes' *Knights*, some general observations on the play might prove worthwhile. The peculiarity of this play, performed in 424 B.C.E. during the Peloponnesian war, lies in the fact that all the characters who appear on stage perform an additional role besides the one initially assigned to them by their names. Whereas in the rest of Aristophanes' plays we see on stage characters who explicitly represent diviners or oracle-mongers, in *Knights* it is not one particular character who serves this role: the absence of professional oracle- or dream interpreters is filled by literally everyone. Two characters in particular, the Paphlagonian slave and the Sausage-seller, claim to or actually possess books of oracles,

⁸ Smith (1989).

as one would expect of a χρησολόγος. However, interpretation of oracles was among a diviner's duties, and it is based on this that the two slaves who open the play, Demosthenes and Nicias,⁹ as well as Demos can be said to function as diviners as well. Along these lines therefore it seems that we can make some inferences regarding Aristophanes' stance toward this group of "freelance religious expert[s]."¹⁰

We get a glimpse of how the plot of the play will unfold as early on as line 28. Being at a loss as to how to escape from the Paphlagonian's overwhelming power over their master Demos, Nicias urges his fellow-slave, Demosthenes, to utter rhythmically and repeatedly words that end up forming the verb αὐτομολῶμεν while performing a gesture denoting masturbation (21-6).¹¹ Demosthenes takes pleasure in doing what Nicias has suggested with the only objection that he fears the omen (οἰωνόν, 28) that the foreskin of those masturbating retracts (27-8).¹² The word οἰωνός occurs five more times in the Aristophanic corpus.¹³ Its occurrence in the *Clouds* parodies the dithyrambic style,¹⁴ and three out of four instances from *Birds* have the literal meaning

⁹ For the names of the slaves, see Sommerstein (1981) 3 n. 2, and (1980) 46-47.

¹⁰ Flower (2008) 22.

¹¹ The text cited is from Wilson (2007).

¹² The ancient scholia inform us that what Demosthenes really has in mind is that their backs would suffer the same punishment, i.e. they would receive a flogging, should the Athenians perceive that they deserted to the enemy.

¹³ *Birds* 254, 691, 1089, 1394; *Clouds* 337.

¹⁴ Dover (1989) 145.

of the word, 'bird.'¹⁵ Thus, it is only here and in *Birds* 691¹⁶ that Aristophanes uses the word οἰωνός with the meaning of 'omen.' Although one would expect the superstitious Nicias to have been the one making this comment, it is totally in line with the active role that Demosthenes plays at the beginning of the play when he reveals to the Sausage-seller the meaning of the stolen oracle (203-10).

Once Demosthenes drinks the unmixed wine, he conceives of an idea which he attributes to the ἀγαθὸς δαίμων (108): they have to steal the oracles of the Paphlagonian. This is what Nicias does, and Demosthenes' first reaction to reading them is to ask for several more cups of wine, while calling on the name of Bacis (120-23).¹⁷ We are informed that the Paphlagonian was afraid of the oracle that predicted his fall (125-26), but it is not until the appearance of the Sausage-seller that we hear the oracle *verbatim* (197-201). So far, we see Demosthenes at work as an interpreter: the oracle is straightforward (ὁ χρησμὸς ἀντικρυς λέγει 128) about the succession of

¹⁵ Given the context of the scene, there is a possibility that the word also suggests 'phallus.' For evidence in both Greek and Latin that words for certain birds have this meaning as slang terms, see Henderson (1991) 128-29; Adams (1982) 31-3.

¹⁶ Dunbar (1995) 435.

¹⁷ For Bacis as a nickname of Peisistratus, see scholia on *Peace* 1071. As Nagy (1990) 158 remarks, "Peisistratus and the Peisistratidai, by virtue of controlling the acropolis of Athens, thereby controlled the central repository of oracular wisdom."

Demosthenes carries on playing the role of the interpreter, and explains to the Sausage-seller the particulars of the oracle: that essentially he, the Sausage-seller, is destined to overthrow the Paphlagonian and take over his position (202-10). It should be noted that, although the Sausage-seller is picked out by the oracle (and by the playwright) as the one who will overcome the Paphlagonian, he is nevertheless up to this point merely a member of the Athenian citizen body. In other words, he is what each of the constituents of Demos could be in potentiality: initially he does not believe that he can exert any power at all over his fellow-citizens; he is unable to interpret the oracle on his own (202); he is flattered by the oracle in a manner that resembles Demos' infatuation with Sibylla (τὰ μὲν λόγια αἰκάλλει με 210).

Scholars have noted that this oracle is closely connected to the one that the Paphlagonian invokes without citing it, at the parodic recognition scene (1229-52):²⁰ while the former predicts the fall of the leather-monger and the Sausage-seller's victory, in the latter it is the Paphlagonian, the leather-monger himself, who states that he had possession of an oracle that predicted his defeat by a Sausage-seller (1245) and he comes to the bitter conclusion that he has to depart from the (political) scene, since the god's divine decree (θέσφατον 1248) has been fulfilled. The major difference

¹⁹ All *Knights* translations are from Sommerstein (1981).

²⁰ Muecke (1998) 261, suggests that the two oracles should not be considered distinct, even though their content is different. I concur with Smith (1989) 154 who argues in favor of two different oracles. For the recognition scene, see Rau (1967) 170-3.

between the two is that the first one follows the structure of Bacid oracles,²¹ whereas the Paphlagonian claims Pythian authority for the one that had predicted his fall (ἐπεὶ μοι χρησμός ἐστι Πυθικός 1229). Before explaining my view on this point, I would like to turn to the general debate over Aristophanes' stance towards oracles of different authorities.

It has been suggested that Aristophanes' criticism is harsher when directed against oracle-mongers or Bacis, when compared to his attitude toward Delphic oracles.²² This view, however, requires further qualification: Smith argues that Aristophanes directs his criticism against “the collected oracles of the oracle-mongers, and not those announced at oracular shrines.”²³ However true that may be, and there is evidence that it is, one should not jump to the conclusion that Aristophanes shows more respect for oracles that were thought to have originated at Delphi. After all, there were books with collections of oracles in fifth-century Athens whose authority was attributed to the god Apollo himself.²⁴ The readers of these books would certainly not have thought that the oracles contained in them were uttered by the god himself but

²¹ ἀλλ' ὀπίταν ... τότε, see Fontenrose (1978) 167. In *Knights* 123 Demosthenes exclaims “O Bacis” right after he reads the oracle.

²² Smith (1989) 151; Ehrenberg (1951) 260-1; Parker (1985) 302; Muecke (1998) 259.

²³ Smith (1989) 152. He offers the beginning of *Wealth* as an example of Aristophanes' respect for the Delphic authority, and I think he is right in arguing that it would be more convincing if the example did not come from this particular play.

²⁴ In Smith's own words “oracles read from books within the plays [...] are almost invariably presented as manipulative frauds” (1989) 153; Fontenrose (1978) 164.

rather that the oracles came to be known either through Apollo's shrines, including perhaps Delphi, or through legendary prophets whom the god inspired.²⁵ It is more accurate, therefore, to speak of Aristophanes' respect for the practice of consulting an oracle rather than for oracles of allegedly Pythian origin in general.

Moreover, the typology of these two kinds of oracles, i.e. of Bacid and of Pythian origin, cannot be established with certainty by means of their structural elements, and the fact that there were instances where the same oracle could be attributed to both sources does not allow any clear inferences to be drawn regarding Aristophanes' comical treatment of them.²⁶ Some examples might help illustrate this blurring of the boundaries between the two kinds of oracular discourse: in *Knights* 1015-16, the Paphlagonian recites an oracle that according to its opening should be classified as a Bacid oracle:²⁷

“φράζευ, Ἐρεχθεΐδη, λογίων ὁδόν, ἦν σοι Ἀπόλλων
ἴαχεν ἔξ ἀδύτοιο διὰ τριπόδων ἐριτίμων.”

“Son of Erechtheus, mark the path of the oracles, which Apollo
cried forth to thee from his sanctum through his precious tripods.”

²⁵ Fontenrose (1979) 164: “That Bakis was Apollo's minister may appear inconsistent with the tradition noticed earlier that Bakis received his inspiration from the nymphs; but probably most Greeks would easily accept both statements.”

²⁶ Smith (1989) 151 n. 49; Fontenrose (1979) 165.

²⁷ See, for example, the beginning of the Bacid oracle in Hdt. 8.20.2; Fontenrose (1978) 170.

Not only is Apollo mentioned in the first line but, even more, the oracle is said to have been given at Delphi. As Fontenrose remarks, it is only the Paphlagonian's answer a few lines earlier that allows us to infer that the oracle is not a Delphic response (οὔμοι μὲν εἶσι Βάκιδος 1003).²⁸

Another peculiar characteristic of Bacid oracles is that they frequently began with ἀλλ' ὅταν (ὀπότε), expressing a forthcoming threat or destruction, and continued with καὶ τότε δῆ, which expressed the prediction of victory. There are, however, four instances of oracles which follow this format and purport to be of Delphic origin.²⁹ It seems then that an oracle could have been composed in this style, and those invoking it could arbitrarily attribute its origin to either authority.³⁰ After all, the beginning of an oracle with ἀλλά or δέ points to the frequency with which the main core of an oracle "was detached from its shell."³¹ Moreover, the claim that Aristophanes attacks mainly oracles contained in books is correct, but, as noticed above, oracle collections could also include oracles of allegedly Pythian origin. The argument, however, that the playwright's criticism against the latter is milder than against oracles

²⁸ Fontenrose (1979) 159.

²⁹ P-W 357 = Fontenrose Q 238; P-W 54 = Fontenrose Q 101; P-W 65 = Fontenrose Q 114; P-W 84 = Fontenrose Q 134; cf. Fontenrose (1979) 166, 169.

³⁰ On the basis of the oral transmission of the oracles Maurizio (1997) 312 remarks: "No oracle in the Delphic tradition can be proven to be such. Nor can oracles which originated from the Pythias in Delphi be easily distinguished from those which did not."

³¹ Parke and Wormell (1956) xxii.

attributed to Bacis or the Sibyl is not sound. To clarify this point, let us return to the question whether the oracle of lines 197-201 discussed above should be identified with the one that is said to be of Pythian origin (1229).

In his discussion of the oracle contest, Smith points out that nearly all the oracles of the Paphlagonian are probably of Bacid origin to judge from their typology, and all appear to have been collected only to be politically manipulated.³² On the other hand, one could also simply ignore those oracles that seemed to be contrary to one's purpose or desires.³³ He then notes the exceptional case of the Pythian oracle that the Paphlagonian claims to have had: "*This* oracle, it turns out, is in every particular the god's own truth, as Paphlagon's wonderfully paratragical responses demonstrate."³⁴ One might be led to believe that we can securely infer that Aristophanes is more respectful towards the Pythian oracles because he proves them valid though the outcome of the plot. Here nevertheless one should bear in mind that it is not only this oracle that predicts successfully the succession of events: the stolen Bacid oracle was also successful in predicting the Paphlagonian's fall.

As such, it seems that independently of their origin oracles are depicted in a way that takes for granted their political manipulation: since one knows what the stylistic conventions of each oracular type are, one can just invent oracles on the spot

³² Smith (1989) 153.

³³ Cf. Hdt. 7.6 where Onomacritus gives his oracles to the Persian king: εἰ μὲν τι ἐνέοι σφάλμα φέρον τῷ βαρβάρῳ, τῶν μὲν ἔλεγε οὐδέν.

³⁴ Smith (1989) 154, emphasis is his.

and adjust them accordingly. Or even more than that: Demosthenes cries out “O Bacis” when he reads the stolen book (123), which means either that Bacis’ name was written in the book or that Demosthenes can deduce the oracle’s origin from its opening words. When, however, he tries to convince the Sausage-seller to become politically active and claim for himself the power to overthrow the Paphlagonian, Demosthenes says that “the oracles and the voice of Pytho are in agreement” (220). Nothing had been said up to this point that would connect the oracle with Pytho. Demosthenes’ rhetoric though gains in force when the authority of an Apolline shrine gets involved.³⁵ Almost identical is the situation in *Wasps* 158-60: in a desperate attempt to persuade his son, Bdelycleon, and the slave Xanthias, Philocleon claims that he had received an oracle from Delphi that he would shrivel up if he let someone (sc. a defendant) off. It is the very fact that Philocleon invents a Pythian one on the spot that Aristophanes wants to highlight: not only an oracle-monger but even an ordinary Athenian citizen could lie and claim to have the god’s authority by his side just to advance his interests.

In conclusion, Aristophanes seems to be aiming his criticism against oracles of allegedly Pythian origin as well. This is not to say that he criticizes or dismisses out of hand the practice of consulting Apollo at his shrine. What is emphasized in all the above instances is that one could never be sure about the origin of a particular oracle, since every type of unscrupulous charlatan, whether oracle- or war-monger, could claim Apollo as his authority and thus convince the citizen body to support a certain policy.

³⁵ Sommerstein (1989) 154.

3. Knights

Since the first oracle that appears in the *Knights* consists of elements that are found in, or refer to, poetry in general, it would be useful to begin the treatment of our subject by analyzing the oracles that share a poetic background. After the two slaves Nicias and Demosthenes steal the oracles the Paphlagonian kept hidden, Demosthenes finds and chants an oracle that predicts the Paphlagonian's fall from power:

Δη. ὅπως; ὁ χρησμὸς ἄντικρυς λέγει
ὥς πρῶτα μὲν στυππειοπώλης γίγνεται,
ὃς πρῶτος ἔξει τῆς πόλεως τὰ πράγματα. 130

Νι. εἷς οὗτος πώλης. τί τούντεϋθεν; λέγε.
Δη. μετὰ τοῦτον αὖθις προβατοπώλης δεύτερος.
Νι. δύο τώδε πώλα. καὶ τί τόνδε χρὴ παθεῖν;
Δη. κρατεῖν, ἕως ἕτερος ἀνὴρ βδελυρότερος
αὐτοῦ γένοιτο· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτ' ἀπόλλυται. 135
ἐπιγίγνεται γὰρ βυρσοπώλης ὁ Παφλαγών,
ἄρπαξ, κεκράκτης, Κυκλοβόρου φωνὴν ἔχων.
Νι. τὸν προβατοπώλην ἦν ἄρ' ἀπολέσθαι χρεῶν
ὑπὸ βυρσοπώλου;
Δη. νὴ Δί'.
Νι. οἴμοι δεῖλαιος.
πόθεν οὖν ἂν ἔτι γένοιτο πώλης εἷς μόνος; 140
Δη. ἔτ' ἔστιν εἷς, ὑπερφυᾶ τέχνην ἔχων.

Ni. εἶπ', ἀντιβολῶ, τίς ἐστίν;

Δη. εἶπω;

Ni. νῆ Δία.

Δη. ἀλλαντοπώλης ἔσθ' ὁ τοῦτον ἐξελῶν.

De. How? the oracle says, in so many words, that to begin with there is to be a hemp-monger, who will be the first to control the affairs of the city.

Ni. That's one "monger". What comes next? Tell us.

De. After him another one again, a sheep-monger.

Ni. That makes two "mongers". What's fated to happen to him?

De. To rule, until there should arise another man more loathsome than he; and after that he perishes. For to succeed him comes a leather-monger, Paphlagon, a robber, a screamer, with a voice like the Cycloborus.

Ni. God help us! If only there would arise from somewhere just one more "monger"!

De. There is still one, a man of an extraordinary profession.

Ni. Tell me, I beg you, who is he?

De. You want me to tell you?

Ni. Please!

De. The man who will expel Paphlagon is a sausage-monger.

It is easy to imagine the reason why Aristophanes chose not to compose an oracle but to have one of his characters describe it instead. As mentioned above, the proper meter of oracular discourse is the dactylic hexameter. In this instance the form of the oracle is sacrificed for the sake of its content: the emphasis is laid on the (nonexistent by itself) word πώλης³⁶ and its compounds, the main point being that those who manage the city's affairs have sold out. Since none of these words fit the dactylic hexameter, the proper medium for an oracle is abandoned so that the comic effect might not be undermined.

There are however a few indications that allow for speculation on the possible format of the oracle. Demosthenes' immediate reaction to his reading of it is to invoke Bacis (123), indicating in this way that he recognizes its Bacid origin. It would not, therefore, be absurd to assume that Aristophanes wants his audience to understand something of the sort "but when X, it is then that Y," according to the commonly found opening "ἀλλ' ὁπότεν ... καὶ τότε δή."³⁷ Moreover, the content of the oracle as explained by Demosthenes points towards an epic background: the succession in power of various "-mongers" calls to mind the Hesiodic five ages and the degeneration of men in *Works and Days* as well as the succession Uranus-Cronus-Zeus in the *Theogony*.³⁸ In

³⁶ Sommerstein (1981) 150.

³⁷ See, for example, *Knights* 197, *Lysistrata* 770; ἀλλ' ὅταν: *Birds* 967. This is what Fontenrose (1978) 170 calls conditioned command or conditioned prediction. For Bacis, see Fontenrose (1978) 159-160, 167-70; Olson (1998) 274.

³⁸ See Bowie (1996) 58-66; Platter (2007) 115; Neil (1901) 23-4. See also Aeschylus *Eum.* 1-8; Eur. *IT* 1259-72.

addition, cognates of the word ἄρπαξ, which is used to describe the Paphlagonian, are consistently present in the play³⁹ but they also bear a connection with the *Odyssey*: the cognate participle ἀναρπάξασα is attached to thunderstorms and winds.⁴⁰ The image of the Paphlagonian as a disturber of the political order (ταραξιππόστρατον 247, βορβοροτάραξι 308) is thus reinforced through its implicit connection to the destructive force of the *Odyssean* storms. Another cognate word, ἀρπάξαντε, is also present in a simile in *Iliad* 13.199, where it is applied to two lions snatching a goat. Although it is impossible to say whether Aristophanes might have also had this passage in mind, it is not at all unlikely since the imagery of the simile is present in other oracles in *Knights*.⁴¹ According to the scholia, the likening of the Paphlagonian's voice to Cycloborus, a violent stream of Athens, is perhaps reminiscent of the *Iliadic* δημοβόρος which is how Achilles characterizes king Agamemnon.⁴²

The oracle predicted that the leather-monger would be defeated by a Sausage-seller. The two slaves do not need to do much searching to find him since he almost immediately enters the stage carrying his kitchen table and completely unaware that he is about to succeed the Paphlagonian to power (150, 160-1). Nicias departs to keep an

³⁹ See, for example, 52, 56, 205, 248, 708. The villainy of the Sausage-seller can also be demonstrated by his becoming an ἄρπαξ later on in the play (he admits it in 778; snatching the Paphlagonian's hare 1200, 1202).

⁴⁰ ἀναρπάξασα θύελλα *Od.* 4.515; 5.419; 20.63; also of Scylla 12.100.

⁴¹ κυνῶν ὑπο καρχαροδόντων *Il.* 13.198 ~ κύνα καρχαροδόντα *Knights* 1017; γαμφηλῆσιν *Il.* 13.200 = *Knights* 198.

⁴² *Il.* 1.231. See also *Works* 38-39: βασιλῆας δωροφάγους.

and to the sellers of tripe the god grants great glory,
sith they prefer not rather to vend sausages.”

Demosthenes’ comment that the oracle is “wrapped in rather complex and crafty riddling language” is totally in line with what one would expect from an oracle.⁴⁴ In terms of structure the usual Bacid opening “ἀλλ’ ὀπίταν ... δὴ τότε” is used. Both the imagery and the content of the oracle though suggest that it should be viewed against the background of *Iliad* 12.200-209, where the Trojans see an eagle falling down, bitten by the snake it holds in its claws.⁴⁵

The effectiveness of the oracle relies on the combination of three factors, namely the allusion to the most widely known literary tradition, which is the Homeric poetry, the culinary imagery, and the ability of the interpreter to offer a plausible connection to the situation at hand. In this instance, all these aim at the Sausage-seller’s political activation. Credit for the success of this plan must go to Demosthenes, since he is the one who manages to make meaning out of the oracle. The Sausage-seller should have no problem in understanding the part of the oracle which deals with garlic

⁴⁴ For parallels where the same words are applied to oracles, see Neil (1901) 33.

⁴⁵ See Bellocchi (2009) 25-6. The word δράκοντα occurs in the same metrical position in both passages. In the Homeric instance we find ὄνυχεσσι instead of γαμφηλῆσι. The combination αἰετὸς ἀγκυλοχίλης is found in the same metrical position in *Odyssey* 19.538. Μέγα κῦδος occurs 17 times in Homer often at the same position (κῦδος ὀπάζει at the end of the line: *Il.* 8.141, 17.566; *Od.* 15.320); see also *Wasps* 15-9. The word σκοροδάλμη appears in Cratinus fr. 143. For κοάλεμος, a synonym of stupidity, see Neil (1901) 33.

brine, tripe-sellers and sausages, but being unable to make the connection between the eagle and the snake he asks Demosthenes to explain the meaning (202). To be sure, it is only due to Demosthenes' interpretative abilities that the word δράκων acquires the meaning "sausage" (206-210). It seems then that the oracle would have been ineffectual by itself and that an extrinsic factor, namely the interpreter, is necessary in order to convince the listener.

In the broader context of the *Knights*, this scene anticipates the forthcoming oracle contest (997-1110) in front of Demos between the Sausage-seller and the Paphlagonian. It is here that the Sausage-seller attends his first lesson in the interpretation of oracles and becomes familiar with the techniques that he will employ later on to win Demos over. At first, his inability to grasp the oracle's meaning and his reliance on an expert resemble Demos' constant dependence on somebody else's interpretation (1021, 1041, 1048, 1059). As Demosthenes is good at picking out an oracle that would appeal to the listener through its imagery, so the Sausage-seller, knowing that Demos would appreciate it, chooses Glanis as the source of his oracles (1004).⁴⁶ He is aware that Demos has a stronger predilection for food and bodily pleasures in general, and this is why he tries to terrify him by calling attention to the Paphlagonian's habit of stealing the people's food and money (1030-34, 1083).⁴⁷ Clearly the Sausage-seller claims Glanis as his source in order to enhance the effectiveness of

⁴⁶ For Bacis and Glanis, see Weinreich (1929).

⁴⁷ Briand (2003) 79 makes the point that the oracles are constantly interpreted on the basis of gluttony, lust, food and sex.

his oracles. He thus establishes a connection between his oracles and Demos' appetite (1004):⁴⁸ from now on his oracles will function at two levels, carrying both the authority inherent in oracular discourse and the equally imposing, yet less elegant, voice of the human instinct. It is certainly one of the most successful plans towards the manipulation of Demos, since he finds Glanis to be the wisest and his oracles better than those of Bacis (1097, 1035). After all, the final fight to win Demos will be based on bribing him with food and other gifts (1100-1106, 1164-1210).

The ineffectiveness of the Paphlagonian's oracles is also related to a technique the Sausage-seller uses against him, that of cutting him off in the middle of a sentence and making comments that undermine his opponent's attempts to persuade Demos. Right before the beginning of the oracle contest each contestant sets out the contents of the oracles he possesses. The Paphlagonian warns Demos that, should he believe the Sausage-seller, he would turn into a leather bottle (μολγὸν γενέσθαι δεῖ σε 963). This is an allusion to an oracle which had been given to Theseus predicting that Athens would always be above the surface of water like a leather bottle.⁴⁹ However, the Paphlagonian means that Demos will be in a wretched state, since the word μολγός was used in

⁴⁸ Note also that Glanis is older than his brother Bacis. In other words, the Sausage-seller is perhaps trying to add more credibility to his oracles by ascribing them to a past more distant than Bacis.

⁴⁹ For μολγός, about which the scholia seem to be at a loss, see Neil (1901) 135; Sommerstein (1981) 195; Plutarch *Thes.* 24: Αἰγείδη Θησεῦ ... ἄσκός γὰρ ἐν οἴδατι ποντοπορεύσεις. The address Αἰγείδη is picked up by the Sausage-seller as an oracle opening at 1067. It is a traditional opening: Fontenrose (1978) 171.

comedy to mean “μοχθηρός.” The reaction of the Sausage-seller is to scare Demos off by substituting ψωλόν for μολγός and leaving the rest of the Paphlagonian’s words almost intact (ψωλὸν γενέσθαι δεῖ σε [i.e. circumcised] μέχρι τοῦ μυρρίνου 964).

This sets the pace for the strategy that the Sausage-seller will follow during the contest, namely using his opponent’s wording, altering it according to the needs of the situation, to ridicule and expose him as a charlatan.⁵⁰ The following two examples will help clearly illustrate this point:

(a) In 965-69 the Sausage-seller proceeds to lay out the table of contents of his oracles, after his opponent has done the same: crowned and wearing an embroidered purple robe Demos will ride a golden chariot and prosecute Smicythes along with her (his) husband for having embezzled gold.⁵¹ Leaving aside the παρὰ προσδοκίαν joke about Smicythes, Demos here is promised the status of an epic warrior or an eastern ruler and clothing that is far more extravagant than the μετρία ἐσθῆς of the democracy described by Thucydides.⁵² Though the language the Sausage-seller uses is not identical to the Paphlagonian’s, he can still be said to follow it closely;⁵³

⁵⁰ The same is Trygaios’ strategy against Hierocles in *Peace* 1111-14.

⁵¹ The joke is nearly incomprehensible without the scholia. See Neil (1901) 136; Sommerstein (1981) 195.

⁵² Thucydides 1.6.4. Neil (1901) 136; Sommerstein (1981) 195; Landfester (1967) 62.

⁵³ Ἐστεφανωμένον 966, στεφάνην 968; λέγουσιν ὡς occurring at the same metrical position 965, 967.

(b) When the Paphlagonian is asked about the content of his oracles he tells Demos that they are *περὶ Ἀθηνῶν, περὶ Πύλου, περὶ σοῦ, περὶ ἐμοῦ, περὶ ἀπάντων πραγμάτων* (1005-6). The Sausage-seller, in answering the same question, retains the phrasing of his opponent's response and improvises altering only bits of it.⁵⁴ He substitutes the word *φακῆς* for *Πύλου*, thus pointing out the Paphlagonian's boastful behavior about his military success and reminding Demos once again that groats, mackerels and lentils are all that matters.

The contest proper, the richest part of the play in terms of oracles, offers another straightforward example of the inability of oracular discourse to persuade when it consists solely of poetic elements. On the other hand, it also proves the influence it can exert on Demos when combined with the force of the human instinct. Each of the two contestants chants his oracles and offers an interpretation to persuade Demos, who reacts like a simpleton. The Sausage-seller critiques his opponent's oracles and counters his interpretations by offering alternative ones. It is more helpful to compare the first two oracles since the second one is virtually a response to the first.

Paphlagonian “*φράζευ, Ἐρχθεῖδη, λογίων ὁδόν, ἦν σοι Ἀπόλλων* 1015

⁵⁴ *περὶ Ἀθηνῶν, περὶ φακῆς, περὶ Λακεδαιμονίων, περὶ σκόμβρων νέων, περὶ τῶν μετρούντων τᾶλφιτ' ἐν ἀγορᾷ κακῶς, περὶ σοῦ, περὶ ἐμοῦ. τὸ πέος οὔτοσι δάκοι* 1007-10.

ἴαχεν ἔξ ἀδύτοιο διὰ τριπόδων ἐριτίμων.

σώζεσθαί σ' ἐκέλευ' ἱερὸν κύνα καρχαροδόντα,

ὃς πρὸ σέθεν χάσκων καὶ ὑπὲρ σοῦ δεινὰ κεκραγῶς

σοὶ μισθὸν ποριεῖ· κἂν μὴ δρᾷ ταῦτ', ἀπολεῖται.

πολλοὶ γὰρ μίσει σφε κατακρώζουσι κολοιοί.” 1020

“Son of Erechtheus, mark the path of the oracles, which Apollo
cried forth to thee from his sanctum through his precious tripods.
He bade thee preserve thy holy jag-toothed dog,
whose maw gapes before thee, who barks fearfully for thee,
who shall provide thee with pay, and, if he doth not so, shall perish,
for many are the jackdaws who in hatred croak against him.”

Sausage-seller “φράζευ, Ἐρεχθεΐδη, κύνα Κέρβερον ἀνδραποδιστήν, 1030

ὃς κέρκῳ σαίνων σ', ὀπότεν δειπνῆς, ἐπιτηρῶν

ἐξέδεταί σου τοῦψον, ὅταν σύ ποι ἄλλοσε χάσκης·

εἰσφοιτῶν τ' εἰς τοῦπτάνιον λήσει σε κυνηδὸν

νύκτωρα τὰς λοπάδας καὶ τὰς νήσους διαλείχων.”

“Son of Erechtheus, beware of the dog Cerberus, the kidnapper,
who when thou dinest will wag his tail ingratiatingly, watch his
opportunity,

and eat up thy main dish, whilst thou perchance starest open-
mouthed in another direction;
and he will go frequently to thy kitchen, and dog-fashion, without
thy being aware,
will by night lick the plates and the islands clean.”

The opening of the first oracle is borrowed from the language of traditional oracles. Although the formula is characteristic of oracles that were ascribed to Bacis, Apollo is clearly stated as the originator of the oracle.⁵⁵ The phrase διὰ τριπόδων ἐριτίμων points to this direction as well, since it is found in the *Hymn to Apollo*.⁵⁶ The connection to Homeric poetry is established by the reference to the sharp-toothed dog.⁵⁷ It seems however that there also is a reference to Pindar: the form Ἐρεχθειδᾶν is

⁵⁵ Herodotus, in his first mention of Bacis, cites an oracle which starts with φράζεο, 8.20.2. For a discussion about this formula see Fontenrose (1978) 170-1.

⁵⁶ *In Apol.* 443. Neil (1901) 141 notices that the verb ἰάχω is not used in Homer for divine voices but suggests that it denotes the Pythia’s shriek coming from the ἄδυτον of the temple. Cf. Bellocchi (2009) 39 who deduces that Aristophanes must have included the *Hymn to Apollo* in his poetic sources and consulted it to write oracles.

⁵⁷ See above n. 41. Cleon had probably tried to establish this nickname for himself. Aristophanes refers to him as καρχαρόδους again in *Wasps* 1031 and *Peace* 754. Neil (1901) 141; Sommerstein (1981) 198. It seems that the idea of a politician being the guard dog of the people was a popular one: Demosthenes *Against Aristogeiton* 1 40; Theophrastus *Characters* 29.4; Plutarch *Demosth.* 23; Landfester (1967) 64.

found in *Isthmian* 2.19, the post-homeric singular form σφε occurs in *Pythian* 5.86 and *Isthmian* 6.74, and the κραγέται κολιοί is found in *Nemean* 3.82.⁵⁸ The second oracle imitates the opening of the first, omitting the allusions to elevated poetry. For the most part it picks up and parodies the idea of the sharp-toothed dog (κύνα, χάσκων, κυνηδόν).

The Paphlagonian's first attempt is rather clever but it includes a feature that will provide the Sausage-seller with a good opportunity to undermine the effect it could have on Demos. First of all, he makes use of an element traditionally found in oracles of Bacis, trying thereby to approach Demos through the commonest form of oracular language. Moreover, the oracle claims divine origin by referring to Apollo as its source and acquires more prestige.⁵⁹ There are flaws however in the way that the Paphlagonian manages the situation: he turns the attention to himself and his role as the protector of Demos, although the latter had expressed his desire to hear an oracle about himself becoming an eagle. Another defect can be detected in the image of the watch-dog with which the Paphlagonian wants to identify himself. Since Demos cannot understand what the relationship between Erectheus and a dog could be,⁶⁰ the Paphlagonian explains that he is the shouting dog that should be taken care of by

⁵⁸ If the Paphlagonian has this passage in mind then he is probably thinking of himself as an eagle (*Nemean* 3.80); Sommerstein (1981) 198. See also Neil (1901) 141. Erectheus was mainly associated to Poseidon. For Erectheus and Erichonius see Burkert (1983) 156.

⁵⁹ See also line εἶπε ... ὁ Φοῖβος 1024. Fontenrose (1978) 159 remarks that "If Kleon had not said that his were oracles of Bakis we would say that this purported to be a Delphic response."

⁶⁰ Dogs and ravens were not allowed on the Acropolis, Neil (1901) 141.

Phoebus' ordinance (1023-24).⁶¹ This is where the Sausage-seller jumps in and readily offers the correct meaning of the oracle (1025-27): the proper interpretation of the oracle was concealed by the Paphlagonian. What the oracle meant instead is that Demos should be aware of the dog that slyly devours his cabbage (1026).⁶² The Paphlagonian is transformed into the watch-dog of the underworld, Cerberus, and enslaves people.⁶³ Demos is impressed by the second interpretation (1035). By thus establishing a connection between Cerberus and the Paphlagonian, the Sausage-seller thwarts his opponent's attempt to identify himself as the protector of the people.

Let us now turn to the Aristophanic oracles which are modeled on oracles that were widely-known at the time and seem to have been based on the work of Herodotus. Given that the Paphlagonian is the first to introduce this type of oracle and that his use of this innovation does not accomplish anything to his ends, it would be tempting to argue that history as a genre fails to persuade, especially when confronted by oracles which combine poetic elements with less elevated expressions or references. An example of this oracular conflict appears in the second round of the contest where the Paphlagonian picks the content of his oracle from another realm: since the Sausage-

⁶¹ The use of the verb ἀπύω makes it clear that the Paphlagonian consciously insists on using a more elevated language. It is fairly common in Pindar, occurring twice in contexts related to Phoebus and the Pythia (*Pythian* 10.4; *Pythian* 5.104)

⁶² Hermann's emendation ἀθάρης (mss. θύρας) seems more reasonable as an anticipation of the Sausage-seller's caricature of his opponent's oracle.

⁶³ Cleon was probably called Cerberus by his opponents, see *Peace* 313 and n. 70 below. He had probably earned a bad reputation for the destruction of Miletus, Neil (1901) 142.

seller proved to be superior in dominating the oracles that contain references to epic poetry, it is not surprising that the Paphlagonian decides to try his power in the relatively new genre of history.

“ἔστι γυνή, τέξει δὲ λέονθ’ ἱεραῖς ἐν Ἀθήναις,
ὃς περὶ τοῦ δήμου πολλοῖς κώνωψι μαχεῖται
ὥς τε περὶ σκύμνοισι βεβηκῶς τὸν σὺ φύλαξαι,
τεῖχος ποιήσας ξύλινον πύργους τε σιδηροῦς.” 1040

“There is a woman shall bear a lion in sacred Athens,
who shall fight with many gnats on behalf of the Demos,
as if he were defending his own whelps: him do thou guard,
making a wooden wall and towers of iron.”

The oracle borrows another opening that is commonly found in traditional oracles, and in this sense the Paphlagonian continues on the same line as previously, the innovative approach being his reference to Herodotus’ *Histories*.⁶⁴ In giving his account of the origins of the Cypselid tyranny in Corinth, Herodotus cites an oracle that predicted the

⁶⁴ For the ἔστι opening see Fontenrose (1978) 172-74. The Paphlagonian claims Apollo as the originator of the oracle in 1042. Although it is possible that these oracles were known in Athens independently of Herodotus, Aristophanes seems to be drawing from the historian’s work. This is implied by the name of the Sausage-seller, Ἀγοράκριτος, which is revealed in 1257 and calls to mind the story of Onomacritus.

birth of Cypselus (5.92b). Likewise, in 6.131 he recounts how Agariste dreamed that she gave birth to a lion, an omen which predicted Pericles' birth.

As Neil has pointed out, the Paphlagonian here takes pride in having been referred to in legendary oracles just like some eminent figures of the past.⁶⁵ However, his tactic is ineffective for two reasons: in drawing attention to his own legendary origin he once again neglects Demos' desire to hear the oracle that predicted Demos' rule as an eagle in the clouds (1013). In fact, the Herodotean oracle referred to probably contains a variation of the 'eagle in the clouds' motif:⁶⁶

Αἰετὸς ἐν πέτρῃσι κύει, τέξει δὲ λέοντα
καρτερὸν ὠμηστήν· πολλῶν δ' ὑπὸ γούνατα λύσει.
Ταῦτά νυν εὔφραζεσθε, Κορίνθιοι, οἱ περὶ καλὴν
Πειρήνην οἰκεῖτε καὶ ὄφρυόεντα Κόρινθον. 5.92b

An eagle conceives on rocks and will bear a lion, who will destroy many men. Take notice of this, Corinthians, [you who dwell around beautiful Peirene and steep Corinth.]⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Neil (1901) 143.

⁶⁶ So Fontenrose (1978) 151.

⁶⁷ For the translation, see Fontenrose (1978) 288. The translation in the brackets is mine.

In addition, the Paphlagonian's endeavor to exploit the authoritative discourse of history is undermined by his own choice of oracles which harks back to epic poetry. As it became clear above, the Sausage-seller proved to be a connoisseur of epic poetry as well as a very skilled opponent in turning the Paphlagonian's attacks to his advantage, whereas Demos was strikingly unable to propose his own interpretation. In other words, the fault in the Paphlagonian's strategy is that he once again directs the fight towards the arena of poetry in which his opponent has already made his mark.

To begin, the reference to the lion immediately recalls the Herodotean oracle cited above with a slight difference: the modifiers *καρτερόν ὠμηστήν* that are present in the historian's work are absent from the Paphlagonian's version. This should be understood as an attempt to exclude the elements of the oracle that could have called to mind epic vocabulary. However, the authority of the Herodotean text is difficult to ignore, and it seems that this text is exactly what Aristophanes wanted to draw attention to.⁶⁸ Thus, the word *ὠμηστής* would have probably sprung into the audience's mind, bearing with it all its epic connotations.⁶⁹ In fact, a parallel from Hesiod shows the unfavorable effect the use of this word would have had: Cerberus is described as an

⁶⁸ References to animals are commonly found in oracles, see Fontenrose (1978) 151. However, the fact that this specific reference is to Herodotus is firmly established by line 1038 (*πολλοῖς* in the same metrical position as *πολλῶν* in the Herodotean oracle) and by the reference to the wooden wall in 1040.

⁶⁹ It is variously applied to lions (Aesch. *Ag.* 827), birds (*Il.* 11.454; Soph. *Ant.* 697), fish (*Il.* 24.82), snakes (Hes. *Th.* 300), even to men (*Il.* 24.207).

eater of raw flesh in the *Theogony*.⁷⁰ This deliberate suppression of the word ὠμηστῆς is an ingenious move on behalf of the Paphlagonian to disconnect his favorite watch-dog image of himself from the criticism he just received about his cruel behavior (1030).

This is not to say however that elements of epic poetry are completely absent from the oracle. The image of the lion which fights to protect its whelps is reminiscent of the lion simile in *Iliad* 18.318-22:⁷¹ the Paphlagonian presents himself as the one who will fight against the other “orators” (κώνωψι) to defend his protégée.⁷² Since Demos is unable to understand even this straightforward parallel, the Paphlagonian proceeds to give him the explanation of the oracle that the god evidently gave (1041-42): Demos must hold on to the Paphlagonian, because he is what Demos has for a lion (ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀντὶ τοῦ λέοντός εἰμί σοι 1043). It is exactly at this point that the entire plan of the Paphlagonian falls apart, since the wording provides a perfect opportunity for another joke which ridicules him by linking him to a contemptible Athenian contemporary (καὶ πῶς μ’ ἐλελήθεις Ἀντιλέων γεγεννημένος; 1044). Thus, the Paphlagonian’s attempt to dissociate himself from the unfavorable way the Sausage-seller had depicted him and to

⁷⁰ Hes. *Th.* 311. It is likely that Aristophanes based his portrait of Cleon onto this Hesiodic parallel: Cerberus is described as having fifty heads and a loud voice (311-12). In *Wasps* 1033-34 Cleon is described as a beast whose head is surrounded by a hundred heads of flatterers, while his voice was “of a torrent that gave birth to destruction.” Cf. *Peace* 313: τὸν κάτωθι Κέρβερον.

⁷¹ See also *Il.* 17.133, 137; *Od.* 20.14.

⁷² For κώνωψι = ῥήτορες, see scholia. Also, for the usage of the article as a pronoun in line 1039, see Willi (2003) 255.

reinforce his conception of himself as the guardian of the people fails on account of Demos' inability to perceive even straightforward metaphors.

So far the Sausage-seller has not offered a counter-interpretation. His intervention at this stage is linked to the last part of his opponent's oracle which has no epic elements and points purely to the famous oracle of the wooden wall which Herodotus relates in 7.141.⁷³ By mentioning this famous incident the Paphlagonian aims at identifying himself with an entire city-state, Athens, when it was under the threat of the Persian invasion, implying at the same time that his political enemies were of barbarian origin. Thus, the Athenian people had to resort to "a wooden wall and iron towers" to preserve him. Yet the Sausage-seller is there to shed light on what he believes to be the true message of the god, which was intentionally hidden by his opponent (1045-47): the one and only wall that is related to wood and iron is the stocks in which the Paphlagonian should be fastened. By offering this interpretation he assumes the role of Themistocles thanks to whom Athens was saved, while he relegates the Paphlagonian to the status of a criminal.⁷⁴ Demos' comment makes it clear that the Sausage-seller has won this round too (1050), and it seems that even recent historical facts must be linked to an ordinary item in order to gain Demos' favor.

Up to this point the Paphlagonian seemed to have the upper hand not because he was successful in persuading his audience but merely because he displayed high self-

⁷³ P-W 95 = Fontenrose Q 147.

⁷⁴ Both the Paphlagonian and the Sausage-seller seem to be in a struggle to identify with the character of Themistocles; see Anderson (1989).

confidence in being the one to start the contest and decide on the subject matter of each round. From now on he will be relying on the only weapon left in his exhausted arsenal, i.e. the recent historical facts as represented by his (sc. Cleon's) success in capturing 292 enemies on the island of Sphacteria.⁷⁵ In fact, he continues the contest not by plainly chanting a new oracle but by introducing it in hexameters:

μη πείθου· φθονεραὶ γὰρ ἐπικρῶζουσι κορῶναι.
“ἄλλ’ ἰέρακα φίλει, μεμνημένος ἐν φρεσίν, ὅς σοι
ἤγαγε συνδήσας Λακεδαιμονίων κορακίνους.” 1053

Believe him not; in envy do crows caw at me.
“Nay, love thou the hawk, and remember him in thy heart,
who brought home to you in bonds the Spartans’ young rave ...
fish.”

The imagery suggests nothing new, since by referring to his enemies as κορῶναι he uses a metaphor that he has used once again in 1020 (κατακρῶζουσι κολοιοί), probably borrowed from Pindar. It is important to remember that, when the Paphlagonian first used this expression, Demos protested against it, since he was unable to make any meaning out of it. Moreover, the diction is again reminiscent of epic poetry.⁷⁶ The

⁷⁵ Thucydides 4.29-36.

⁷⁶ Μεμνημένος is found in the same metrical position 10 times in Homer and 5 times in Hesiod.

innovative part of these three lines is the Paphlagonian's attempt to identify himself as a bird that was sacred to Apollo, and his straightforward reference to his victory against the Spartan hoplites.⁷⁷

Thucydides informs us that Cleon became a laughing stock, when he asked for the leadership of the enterprise in order to capture the Spartans and bring them alive to Athens within a period of twenty days.⁷⁸ It is no wonder then that the Sausage-seller reacts in the exact same way (1054). His hexameter however possibly points not only to the historical fact but also anticipates the drunken Paphlagonian's last oracle.⁷⁹

Κεκροπίδη κακόβουλε, τί τοῦθ' ἤγει μέγα τοῦργον; 1055
καί κε γυνὴ φέροι ἄχθος, ἐπεὶ κεν ἀνὴρ ἀναθείη·
ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν μαχέσαιτο· χέσαιτο γὰρ, εἰ μαχέσαιτο.

“Ill-advised son of Cecrops, why thinkest thou that a great exploit?
Even a woman can carry a load, if a man puts it on her;
but she can't fight; if she fought she'd be taken short!”

⁷⁷ Κορακίνοσ was a small fish and here it is supposed to be a diminutive form of κόραξ, the joke being exactly this absurd meaning. Cf. Neil (1901) 144. As mentioned above it does not seem to be out of context since it was not uncommon to include animals in oracles.

⁷⁸ τοῖς δὲ Ἀθηναίοις ἐνέπεσε μὲν τι καὶ γέλωτος τῆ κουφολογίᾳ αὐτοῦ, 4.28.5.

⁷⁹ Neil (1901) 144.

The Sausage-seller addresses the Athenian people by the title Cecropides that was used for the most part in elevated language, since it was appropriate to use it in the genre of tragedy.⁸⁰ He also reminds them of the myth about their foolishness and inability to make the right decisions, caused by Poseidon when the goddess Athena was preferred to him as the protector of the city.⁸¹ Then he proceeds to attack the Paphlagonian's boast about Pylus by incorporating into his oracle a line from the *Little Iliad*: according to the scholiast, when Odysseus and Ajax were claiming the weapons of the dead Achilles and some Greeks were sent to the enemy city to eavesdrop, line 1056 was what a Trojan maiden said to another, when the latter mentioned that it was Ajax and not Odysseus who had carried the body of Achilles through the battle.⁸² Similarly to the 'wooden wall' mock oracle, where the Sausage-seller implied that the Paphlagonian was of criminal status, here too the Sausage-seller kills two birds with one stone. He likens the Paphlagonian to a woman, thereby lowering his social status, and he implies that the success of the military operation at Pylus had been prepared by Demosthenes, whereas Cleon's only part was to execute an already formed plan.⁸³ We have seen that Demos is, or pretends to be, unable to understand figurative language, and this fact did

⁸⁰ Eur. *Ion* 296, *Phoen.* 855. For its use in comic context see Athen. 2.27.21; Neil (1901) 144.

⁸¹ See scholia 1055 and on *Clouds* 587. Cf. Neil (1901) 144.

⁸² Scholia on *Knights* 1056: “πῶς ἐπεφωνήσω; πῶς οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ἔειπες; / καί κε γυνὴ φέροι ἄχθος, ἐπεὶ κεν ἀνὴρ ἀναθείη, / ἀλλ' οὐκ ἂν μαχέσαιτο.”

⁸³ Cf. 52-4: εἴτ' ἀναρπάσας ὅ τι ἂν τις ἡμῶν σκευάσῃ, τῷ δεσπότη Παφλαγῶν κεχάρισται τοῦτο.

not escape the Sausage-seller's notice.⁸⁴ even if Demos will not comprehend how the parallelism functions, he will at least be affected by the straightforward image of someone who defecates at the possibility of fighting in battle. What the Sausage-seller is attempting here is to link his oracles with an event of ordinary life that would be totally comprehensible to Demos.

Another example of the inability of the recent historical facts to persuade is found in the Paphlagonian's last oracle. Its content is again derived from his recent success at Pylus. However, he never completes the whole oracle because he gets interrupted by Demos:

Πα. ἀλλὰ τόδε φράσσαι, πρὸ Πύλου Πύλον ἦν σοι ἔφραζεν.

“Ἔστι Πύλος πρὸ Πύλοιο-”

Δημ. τί τοῦτο λέγει, πρὸ Πύλοιο;

Αλ. τὰς πυέλους φησὶν καταλήψεσθ' ἐν βαλανείῳ. 1060

Pa. But take note of this, the “Pylos before Pylos” of which the god once told you.

“There is a Pylos before Pylos – “

Dem. What does that mean, “before Pylos”?

⁸⁴ Conversely, it might be the Paphlagonian's language that is meant to be incomprehensible by the masses as a conscious attempt to monopolize oracular and political discourse. See Engle (1983) 52-3.

Sau. He says he's going to pile into the bath-house before you
and seize the tubs.

In fact, the Paphlagonian here tries to link his military achievement in Pylus to a well-known oracle.⁸⁵ His opponent however would never miss a chance to ridicule this attempt by following the same strategy as before: by a slight mispronunciation Pylus is connected to a bathing-tub, an item that Demos would immediately recognize.⁸⁶ Thus, Demos fears that he will remain unwashed and he is persuaded that the Paphlagonian is to be held responsible for this (1061-62).

From now on the Sasauge-seller will be free to fully demonstrate his skills in oracle interpretation. The following oracle is the second to last to appear in the contest scene, and proves the persuasive force the oracular language gains when combined with apt interpretation as well as with traditional expressions found in proverbs, poetry, and myth:

“Αἰγεῖδη, φράσσαι κυναλώπεκα, μή σε δολώση, 1067
λαίθαργον, ταχύπουν, δολίαν κερδῶ, πολύιδριν”

⁸⁵ The scholiast gives the oracle in its entirety: “ἔστι Πύλος πρὸ Πύλοιο, Πύλος γε μὲν ἔστι καὶ ἄλλη.” See Neil (1901) 145 for details and parodies.

⁸⁶ “Puns on πύελος and Πύλος, as in 55, were no doubt common enough at the time, and used to cheapen Cleon’s campaign down to the triviality given here”, Neil (1901) 145.

“Son of Aegeus, beware of the fox-dog, lest he beguile thee,
the treacherous, the swift-footed, the crafty Reynard, the
resourceful.”

The opening follows the same ‘beware’ formula of the Bacid oracles. This time though the Athenian people are addressed as the descendants of Aegeus. The oracle borrows elements from the fables of Aesop. This peculiar fox-dog, κυναλώπεκα, including a reference to the traditional image of cunningness, the fox, is probably another attack on the watch-dog image which the Paphlagonian tried to establish for himself.

Moreover, it is not surprising that epic elements are present throughout: μή σε δολώση is not found in epic poetry in this form but μή σε λάθησι is found in *Odyssey* 12. 220. The metrically equivalent μή σ’ άπατήση, more in line with the Homeric poems,⁸⁷ could have been used here but the form δολωθείς which appears in *Theogony* 494 is preferred.⁸⁸ The word λαίθαργος, as the scholia inform us, is used for dogs which approach secretly in order to bite. This ‘quaint word’ is perceived as a conscious attempt to sound more Hesiodic and hence more oracular.⁸⁹ Also, there might be a connection to tragedy here,

⁸⁷ Bellocchi (2009) 35; Cf. *Il.* 9.344; *Knights* 1081; *Peace* 1099.

⁸⁸ See also Pindar 1.92: μή δολωθῆς, ὦ φίλε, κέρδεσιν εὐτραπέλοις. Bellocchi (2009) 37 argues that this word suggests a relation among Hesiod, Pindar and the oracular world, represented by Aristophanes, similar to what Ahrens imagines to explain dialectal particularities common to the two Boeotian poets.

⁸⁹ Neil (1901) 146. He is probably correct in believing that by λαίθαργος there is an indirect reference to Cleon (λάθαργος ‘a bit of leather’).

since the proverb “σαίνουσα δάκνεις καὶ κύων λαίθαργος εἶ” quoted by the scholiast is attributed to Sophocles.⁹⁰ Finally, a parallel for κερδῶ as a fox can be found in Pindar *Pyth.* 2.78, κερδοῖ, if Huschke’s emendation of κέρδει is correct.

In what follows the Sausage-seller interprets the oracle in a manner which resembles in its absurdity Demosthenes’ interpretation of the oracle he found in the Paphlagonian’s belongings in lines 197-201. The discussion begins when Demos (1069), in answering the Sausage-seller’s question about the meaning of the oracle, is positive that the reference is to Philostratus, a brothel-keeper who is referred to again in *Lysistrata* 957. The Sausage-seller however corrects him and draws his attention to what Loxias’ true warning was about: the Athenians should not grant the Paphlagonian the swift ships that he asks for in order to collect the taxes from the allies who are late tax payers (1070-72).⁹¹ A couple of legitimate questions arise from Demos’ part, since he is unable to understand what the relation between a trireme and this fox-dog could be and how the ‘fox’ was added to the ‘dog’ (1073, 1075). In his explanation the Sausage-seller makes a logical leap claiming that triremes are similar to dogs because they are both swift and foxes are similar to soldiers because the latter, when on triremes for an operation, would usually disembark on the coast and plunder the small farms. He goes straight to the point and chants an oracle that warns Demos about the Paphlagonian and explains how the crew of the Athenian navy will get their money. Finally, in

⁹⁰ Fr. 885 Radt; Neil (1901) 146.

⁹¹ See also 312-13: ὅστις ἡμῖν τὰς Ἀθήνας ἐκκεκώφωκας βοῶν κάπὸ τῶν πετρῶν θυννοσκοπῶν. For an unsuccessful outcome of such operations, see Thucydides 2.69, 3.19; Neil (1901) 146.

reassuring Demos that the crew will get their money he borrows the language that Cleon used in his statement prior to the Sphacteria expedition (1079).

Apart from the oracles that the two contestants claim to possess in lines 1086-89, the following oracle is the last that the audience gets to hear *verbatim*. It is another attack in Hesiodic style against the Paphlagonian's bad management and embezzlement of public funds:

“ἀλλ’ ἔτι τόνδ’ ἐπάκουσον, ὃν εἶπέ σοι ἐξαλέασθαι 1080
χρησμὸν Λητοῖδης Κυλλήνην, μή σε δολώση.”

“But hearken also to this, the oracle wherein the son of Leto
bade thee shun the Twisted Harbor, lest it beguile thee.”

As it often happens in this play, the oracle purports to have originated from Apollo himself. The linguistic elements point once again towards Hesiodic poetry: apart from the association of the μή σε δολώση formula with Hesiod which has been discussed above, the form ἐξαλέασθαι is also found several times at the same metrical position in *Works and Days*;⁹² the form Λητοῖδης is found in the *Shield* and in fragment 51 M-W.⁹³

⁹² *Works and Days* 105, 736a, 758; the form ὑπεξαλέασθαι is found in *Il.* 15.180.

⁹³ Though there is no parallel from the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, this epithet of Apollo appears seven times in the *Hymn to Hermes*.

The attack against the Paphlagonian is latent in the word play between Κυλλήνη, either the mountain of Arcadia or the dock of Elis,⁹⁴ and the adjective κυλλός; the Paphlagonian is depicted as a beggar who holds forth his crooked hand to catch alms, an expression fitting politicians prone to bribery (ἔμβαλε κυλλῆ 1083).⁹⁵ At this point, however, the Paphlagonian protests against the proposed interpretation and directs the criticism toward Diopeithes, an Athenian conservative who gained notoriety for his involvement in Anaxagoras' prosecution (1085).⁹⁶ The underlying connection is that Diopeithes had a crippled hand. According to the scholia, Diopeithes was also associated with Nicias but the most important information about him relevant to the Paphlagonian's interpretation is that he was considered an expert in oracles and that he played a significant role in the circulation of forged oracles. By referring to him at this point, the Paphlagonian wants to refute the charges brought against himself in the Sausage-seller's last oracle. However, by choosing to direct the attention of the audience to a notorious oracle expert, all he accomplishes in the end is to sabotage his own plans, since he exposes one of his colleagues to comic ridicule and thus allows for the possibility of the same thing happening to himself.

The meter of the next four lines (1086-9) is still hexameter but the contestants only refer to oracles without actually chanting them. One notices the same structure:

⁹⁴ Despite the scholia, Sommerstein (1981) 202 is positive that the reference is to Elis. Neil (1901) 147 suspects that there is an allusion to Cleon's activities in Arcadia.

⁹⁵ Sommerstein (1981) 202. See also Smith (1989) 142 n.11.

⁹⁶ See Neil (1901) 147; Sommerstein (1981) 202. It seems that Diopeithes was a regular target of comic abuse, cf. *Wasps* 380; *Birds* 988.

the Paphlagonian makes use of an oracle which is superseded by that of the Sausage-seller, while at the same time the latter manages to connect the content of the oracle to something that Demos will easily comprehend. Following his attempt to divert Demos' attention from his own mismanagement of public funds, the Paphlagonian finally decides to act in accordance with Demos' desires by mentioning that one of the oracles he possesses predicts that Demos would become an eagle and rule over the entire world (1086-87). In fact, Demos stated in line 1013 that he takes special pleasure in hearing that he will become an eagle in the clouds. The oracle is not cited in its entirety but the scholia give the full reference:⁹⁷

εὐδαιμον πολίεθρον Ἀθηναίης ἀγελείης,
πολλὰ ἰδὸν καὶ πολλὰ παθὸν καὶ πολλὰ μογῆσαν
αἰετὸς ἐν νεφέλῃσι γενήσεται ἥματα πάντα

Blessed city of Athena that have seen and suffered much,
you will become an eagle in the clouds for all days.⁹⁸

Aristophanes referred again to this oracle in *Birds* 979 and the lost *Banqueters*.⁹⁹ The opening verse follows a pattern, commonly found in traditional oracles, where a city or

⁹⁷ On *Knights* 1013.

⁹⁸ For the translation, see Fontenrose (1978) 150.

⁹⁹ Neil (1901) 140.

its people or an individual is addressed as blessed or fortunate. Similarly, the phrase “eagle in the clouds” of which Demos is particularly fond does not stray far from what one would expect to find in a traditional oracle. In fact, as Fontenrose remarks, it seems to have been an alteration of an oracle found in Herodotus which then became proverbial.¹⁰⁰

Demos heard this oracle many times before, probably with his mouth gaping open in amazement (62, 1263). Knowing what would please Demos the Paphlagonian should be at an advantage. He does not however begin the contest with this oracle and he saves it for use as his final move (αἰετὸς ὡς γίγνεται καὶ πάσης γῆς βασιλεύσεις 1087). This strategy, combined with his opponent’s quick reflexes, will prove to be a fatal mistake. The Sausage-seller knows where to lay the emphasis and takes it one step further: his oracle predicts that, while eating cakes, Demos will rule all the way to the Indian Ocean and that he will judge cases in one of the wealthiest places on earth at that time, Ecbatana (1088-89).¹⁰¹ The language of the Sausage-seller is powerful and effective mainly because it directs Demos’ attention to down-to-earth pleasures. At the

¹⁰⁰ Herodotus 5.92.b.3: αἰετὸς ἐν πέτρῃσι κύει, τέξει δὲ λέοντα; Plutarch *Dem.* 19.1: αἰετὸς ἐν νεφέεσσι. Fontenrose (1978) 151, 171-2, is probably right in arguing that the oracle was not a Pythian one. Neil (1901) 140 seems to consider it of Bacid origin. See also Parke and Wormell (1956) 53-4; Landfester (1967) 64; Zenobios 2.50: εἴρηται δὲ ἐπὶ τῶν δυσάλωτων παρόσον ὁ αἰετὸς ἐν νεφέλαις ὧν οὐχ ἀλίσκεται.

¹⁰¹ Sommerstein (1981) 203 remarks that with this claim, namely that he possesses an oracle which predicts the rule of the Athenians over the Persians, the Sausage-seller “overtops the wildest flights of fancy of contemporary demagogues.”

same time, the Sausage-seller appropriates what the Paphlagonian had earlier maintained in his oracles, namely that Demos would rule on every land crowned with roses (965).

It is up to this line that oracles were chanted. In what follows, the meter continues in hexameters and the two contestants compete in dream divination by relating the dreams they had seen concerning the goddess Athena (1090-95).¹⁰² The Paphlagonian goes first and relates how he saw the goddess pouring wealth and health on Demos with a bath ladle (1090-91): in his attempt to persuade Demos the Paphlagonian has adopted the Sausage-seller's strategy of including in his oracles something that Demos would easily understand. As for the Sausage-seller's reply, it is clearly structured on the Paphlagonian's dream and is an attempt to surpass it by referring to a strange appearance of the goddess:

νή Δία καὶ γὰρ ἐγώ· καί μουδόκει ἡ θεὸς αὐτῇ
ἐκ πόλεως ἐλθεῖν καὶ γλαῦξ αὐτῇ ἴπικαθῆσθαι·
εἶτα κατασπένδειν κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς ἀρυβάλλω
ἀμβροσίαν κατὰ σοῦ, κατὰ τούτου δὲ σκοροδάμην. 1095

So have I, I declare; and I saw our Goddess herself come out of the
Acropolis, an owl perched on her helmet;
then with a decanter she poured over your head

¹⁰² These lines are treated by Anderson (1991) and Lauriola (2006). For ancient comedy and dream interpretation, see Reckford (1987) 219-32.

a libation of ambrosia, and over *his* one of garlic-brine.

The peculiarity of the image of Athena coming down from the Acropolis with an owl on her lies in that, as far as we know, the bird sacred to Athena was never depicted on the Parthenon.¹⁰³ Apart from this, ἀρύταινα is replaced by ἀρύβαλλος, a word of similar meaning from the realm of the ordinary items with which Demos would have been familiar. This time the goddess is described as pouring ambrosia on the top of Demos' head and garlic brine on the Paphlagonian. The fact that the word σκοροδάμην is in the same metrical position as in line 199, where the Sausage-seller first hears of the oracle that predicts his rise to power, perhaps foreshadows the same successful outcome, namely that Demos will be persuaded by the Sausage-seller as easily as Demosthenes convinced the latter.

In conclusion, the repetition of certain patterns in the *Knights* allows the following inferences concerning Aristophanes' use of oracles. Since Demos is incapable of comprehending figurative language and metaphors, the persuasive force of the oracle itself is ineffectual. Oracles consisting of poetic elements prove to be unsuccessful, when not combined by an effective interpretation. Likewise, appeal to history as a genre or reference to contemporary historical facts is equally unable to convince ordinary people. Thus, poetry and history as means of persuasion are effective only when combined with culinary imagery and the interpreter can offer an

¹⁰³ Neil (1901) 148.

interpretation that connects them to items of ordinary life, which Demos can easily understand.

4. Peace

Out of all the oracle scenes contained in the comedies of Aristophanes it is only in *Peace* 1052-1126 that Aristophanes presented on stage a real historical figure, Hierocles, an oracle-monger who was active in fifth-century Athens. His appearance on stage is introduced by the slave in 1043-44, after a warm-up mention of another professional diviner, Stilbides, in 1031; he is identified by Trygaeus straightaway as an ἀλαζών (1045) and as coming from Oreus. In fact, Aristophanes must have found in Hierocles the perfect example to illustrate the corruptness of the diviners and their suspicious role in the continuation of war and their engagement with the affairs of the city. As one of the most prominent chresmologues in Athens, Hierocles was designated by the state to supervise the sacrifices ordained by an oracle for a treaty between Athens and Chalcis in 446/445 after the suppression of the Euboian revolt by Pericles.¹⁰⁴ It has been suggested that as a reward for his services he received a piece of land in Hestiaia, a part of the north Euboian coast which was later called Oreus, after its inhabitants had been expelled in retaliation for having killed the crew of a captured Athenian ship.¹⁰⁵ Regardless of whether this is true or not, it would be reasonable to assume that those who opposed him and suspected his actions, one of whom apparently was Aristophanes, spread this sort of rumor. Moreover, the scholia suggest that his

¹⁰⁴ IG I² 39.63-66. For Hierocles in general, see Olson (1998) 268-69; Sommerstein (1985) 183; Fontenrose (1978) 155-56. He is mentioned in Eupolis fr. 212: Ἱερόκλεες, βέλτιστε χρησμοδῶν ἄναξ; scholia on *Peace* 1046.

¹⁰⁵ Tod (1933) 85. For the sources see Olson (1998) 269.

identification as Ἱεροκλῆς οὐξ Ὀρεοῦ is an attempt by Trygaeus to lower his status to non-citizen.¹⁰⁶ However, the reference to his dining at the Prytaneion in 1084 makes it clear that this must be perceived either as a misinterpretation by the scholiast or traditional comic invective.¹⁰⁷

The dominant theme in the following scene is the persistent, yet eventually unsuccessful, attempt of Hierocles to dissuade Trygaeus from making a pact with the enemy by resorting to the authority of oracular discourse and claiming that peace opposes the natural order of things. The oracle that he chants is consistently disrupted by Trygaeus' comments, which are in the form of either complete or partial hexameter lines. In the latter case they serve the purpose of interrupting the oracle-monger and filling in the missing parts of the meter. As it will be shown below, Trygaeus' interjections aim at ridiculing the oracle and for the most part consist of curses (1063, 1068-69). Only when Hierocles asks him about the oracle according to which they perform the sacrifice, Trygaeus refers to Homer as his authority for having made peace. The other strategy Trygaeus employs, resembling the one the Sausage-seller follows in the *Knights*, is to use Hierocles' own oracles against him.

Trygaeus and the slave are initially unsure whether Hierocles' purpose is to obstruct the newly attained peace or solely to get his share of the sacrifice (1049-50). Though at first it seems that Hierocles has come with the intention of observing the proper performance of the ritual and, consequently, getting a reward for his

¹⁰⁶ On *Peace* 1047.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Olson (1998) 269, 277.

experienced directions (1056), nevertheless, as soon as he is informed that Peace is the receiver of the sacrifice, he takes a manifestly obstructionist stance. At the same time he switches to hexameters and proceeds to chant an oracle (1063).¹⁰⁸ The language is laden with epic and, in general, poetic vocabulary as well as direct quotations of proverbs, with a plethora of references to the animal kingdom.¹⁰⁹ Since the oracle is interrupted in more than one part, it would be helpful to look at the oracle itself without the ridicule and protestations of Trygaeus:

ὦ μελεοὶ θνητοὶ καὶ νήπιοι –	1063
οἵτινες ἀφραδίησι θεῶν νόον οὐκ αἴοντες	1064
συνθήκας πεποίησθ' ἄνδρες χαροποῖσι πιθήκοις –	1065
καὶ κέπφοι τρήρωνες ἄλωπεκιδεῦσι πέπεισθε,	1067
ῶν δόλιαι ψυχαί, δόλιαι φρένες.	1068
εἰ γὰρ μὴ νύμφαι γε θεαὶ Βάκιν ἔξαπάτασκον,	1070
μηδὲ Βάκις θνητούς, μηδ' αὖ νύμφαι Βάκιν αὐτὸν –	1071
οὔπω θέσφατον ἦν Εἰρήνης δέσμ' ἀναλῦσαι,	1073
ἀλλὰ τό γε πρότερον –	1074
οὐ γάρ πω τοῦτ' ἐστὶ φίλον μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν,	1075
φυλόπιδος λῆξαι, πρὶν κεν λύκος οἶν ὑμεναιοῖ.	1076a
ἔως ἢ σφονδύλη φεύγουσα πονηρότατον βδεῖ,	1077

¹⁰⁸ Olson (1998) 269-70.

¹⁰⁹ For proverbs in oracles see Fontenrose (1978) 83-7.

κώδίνων Ἀκαλανθὶς ἐπειγομένη τυφλὰ τίκτει,	1078
τουτάκις οὐπω χρῆν τὴν εἰρήνην πεποιῆσθαι.	1079
οὔποτε ποιήσεις τὸν καρκίνον ὀρθὰ βαδίζειν.	1083
οὐδέποτ' ἂν θείης λείον τὸν τρηχὺν ἐχῖνον.	1086

“O mortals pitiful and foolish –
 men who in senselessness know not the mind of the gods,
 you have struck a pact with glaring-eyed monkeys –
 and like the tremulous pigeons give credence to fox cubs,
 whose hearts are wily, and wily their minds.
 If the Nymphs divine did not play Bacis false,
 nor Bacis mortals, nor yet the Nymphs Bacis himself –
 ‘twere yet not ordained that the fetters of Peace be loosened,
 for this must first happen –
 for it is not yet agreeable to the blessed gods,
 to leave off the din of battle ere the wolf beds down with the lamb.
 So long as the bombardier beetle in flight farts most foully,
 and the bitch too eager for labor brings forth blind pups,
 so long were it not yet meet for peace to be sanctioned.
 Never shall you manage to make the crab walk straight.
 Never shall you manage to smooth the spine of the hedgehog.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ All *Peace* translations are from Henderson (1998).

The oracle begins with a salutation to the wretched mortals, the first part of which (ὦ μελεοί) is commonly found in the oracles of Bacis and Sibyl, only to be straightforwardly interrupted by Trygaeus with a curse (ἐς κεφαλὴν σοί 1063).¹¹¹ A result clause follows which explains the direct address and consists of epic vocabulary.¹¹² The mortals acted in opposition to the plan of the gods by making a peace treaty with ‘glaring-eyed monkeys.’ This is the first in a series of references to the animal kingdom in which Trygaeus, as it seems, takes particular pleasure, since the adjective χαροπός would certainly be ill-suited to a monkey (ἦσθην χαροποῖσι πιθήκοις 1066).¹¹³ As the scholia suggest, the word here is used to denote the Spartans, pointing

¹¹¹ Fontenrose (1978) 155, 171. Cf. Hdt. 7.140.5, who relates the oracle the Pythia gave to the Athenians in 480 BC. This opening is usually followed by a question and a warning that the gods are offended. For a brief description of the structure of the oracle, see Olson (1998) 272. Bellocchi (2009) 30, notes that the meaning ‘wretched’ for μελεός is common in tragedy but in a sense foreign to Homer’s ‘useless, vain.’

¹¹² See, e.g. θνητοί: *Od.* 24.64 (only in this instance nominative plural); *Il.* 20.266; νήπιοι: *Il.* 17.497; 18.311; *Od.* 1.8; αἰόντες; *Il.* 11.532; *Od.* 10.118 (cf. Pindar *Pyth.* 12.10); ἀφραδίησι is common in Homer (e.g. *Il.* 10.350; *Od.* 9.361) and it is found in the same metrical position in the chronologically later Delphic oracle P-W 408 = Fontenrose L 100.

¹¹³ Olson (1998) 50 prints πεπόησθ’ to fit the hexameter. However, I believe that Bellocchi (2009) 30 is right in arguing that the short prosody of ποιέω is typically Attic and foreign to epic hexameters (cf. Soph. *Aj.* 1155; Eur. *Heracl.* 335; *Elec.* 689). Συνθήκας is also foreign to epic poetry

out their alleged treachery.¹¹⁴ This is not the only case where an epic adjective is taken out of its original context to be applied to another word: τρήρων, an epithet which always accompanies doves in Homer, is here modifying κέπφος. Hierocles' intention is to demoralize those seeking peace by identifying them with a sea-bird which, apart from being described by the standard Homeric epithet for a cowardly animal, had also become a symbol of foolishness.¹¹⁵ The fox-cubs, another animal symbolic of treachery, are another reference to the treacherous behavior of the Spartans.¹¹⁶

In the next lines Hierocles asserts his mantic authority (1070-71), and proceeds to the core of his argument, namely that the loosening of Peace's bonds has not been ordained by the gods (1073).¹¹⁷ However, he is interrupted once again before finishing

(Cf. Aesch. *Choeph.* 555). In epic poetry the word χαροπός is usually applied to lions, see Olson (1998) 272.

¹¹⁴ On *Peace* 1065. See also Sommerstein (1985) 185; Olson (1998) 272-73.

¹¹⁵ Sommerstein (1985) 185; Olson (1998) 112, 273.

¹¹⁶ See Olson (1998) 173 for references. Concerning the form ἀλωπεκιδεύς, he provides the parallels κορωνιδεύς (Cratin. fr. 190) and γαλιδεύς (Cratin. fr. 291). This line is a blend of typical Attic language, epic and comic vocabulary. For line 1068, see Olson's wonderful translation: "whose unconscious and conscious thoughts alike are marked by treachery." Cf. Eur. *Andr.* 446: Σπάρτης ἔνοικοι, δόλια βουλευτήρια.

¹¹⁷ For the Homeric omission of the temporal augment in iterative verbs, see Olson (1998) 174. Θέσφατον appears in the same metrical position in *Il.* 8.477; *Od.* 4.561; 10.473. The compound ἐξαναλῦσαι occupies the end of the hexameter in *Il.* 16.442; 22.180. Bellocchi (2009) 39 observes

up his line which would probably be a precedent condition of the kind that we see in line 1076. Trygaeus is either not heeding the oracle because he is absorbed in the sacrifice or his purpose is to confuse Hierocles and finish up the hexameter in a less elegant way.¹¹⁸ Without being distracted, Hierocles rephrases the interrupted precedent condition in epic vocabulary and follows the formula “X will not happen, until Y happens,” where Y is an impossible fact: the blessed gods would not be pleased by the ceasing of warfare, before a wolf marries a sheep.¹¹⁹ Hierocles’ point, that peace will never be pleasing to the gods, is countered by Trygaeus, who calls him a cursed one (1076b).

The message of the oracle, namely that Trygaeus ought not to have made peace with the enemies, is stated again after two enigmatic references to the animal world which bear resemblances to well-known proverbs of the time (1077-79): Hierocles’ point is probably that a danger sometimes proves to be most harmful when it seems to

that δεσμά appears as a collective noun only in the Homeric Hymns but not in Homer (*In Apol.* 129; *In Herm.* 157).

¹¹⁸ Sommerstein (1985) 184.

¹¹⁹ Οὐ γάρ πω is commonly an opening for an epic hexameter, *Il.* 1.154; 3.442; *Od.* 4.141; 6. 160; *In Apol.* 226. Μακάρεσσι θεοῖς is a standard Hesiodic formula, *Theog.* 128; *Works* 139; *Shield* 476. Φυλόπιδος at the same metrical position, *Il.* 13.635; 16.208. As Olson (1998) 275 notes, the construction πρίν κεν + subjunctive is not Homeric but occurs in Delphic oracle Q71 Fontenrose = P-W 18; cf. Bellocchi (2009) 27. The Attic form οἶν is used instead of the epic ὄϊν. The impossible condition is present in other oracles as well, see e.g. P-W 54 = Fontenrose Q 101.

recede, and that acting in haste can have ruinous consequences.¹²⁰ In terms of language, if we except *τουτάκις* in 1079 which appears in other oracles and is a poetic word,¹²¹ the elevated diction of epic is abandoned for the unpolished image of a beetle which makes its way out of perilous situations by farting (1077).¹²² Additionally, the proverbial tradition is present in the image of *Acalanthis*, who gives birth to blind offspring in her eagerness for birthpangs:¹²³ the dog of the proverb, which gives birth to blind puppies when in haste, has been unexpectedly replaced by the reference to *Acalanthis*. Finally and after stating once more the reason why peace should not be sought, Hierocles turns again to the alleged treachery of the Spartans by citing two more proverbs: as it is impossible to make a crab walk straight or to smooth the spikes of a hedgehog, so, by implication, it is no less possible to deal with an honest Spartan. His suggestions are

¹²⁰ The obscurity is intentional and is meant to parody oracular style, see scholia on *Peace* 1077. For the interpretation see Olson (1998) 275.

¹²¹ See Bellocchi (2009) 37; Olson (1998) 275; cf. P-W 254 = Fontenrose Q 204.

¹²² The identification of *σφονδύλη* is still uncertain, see Olson (1998) 275. Hesychius' gloss that in Attic it can mean 'weasel' led Borthwick (1968) 138 to argue that the word was perhaps "applied in colloquial Attic to that creature whose familiarity as a house-pet cannot have perfumed the atmosphere of fifth-century Athenian houses."

¹²³ The proverb alluded to here is *ἡ κύων σπεύδουσα τυφλὰ τίκτει*, scholia on *Pax* 1078. The line has caused many problems, for which see Olson (1998) 274. Borthwick (1968) 137 argues persuasively for the emendation of *χή κώδων* to *κώδίνων*, while at the same time he traces a connection to the story of a maiden called *Acalanthis*.

but to the oracle monger no one passed a gleaming goblet!

Although Trygaeus maintains that his response contains an oracle uttered by Homer, he obviously cites not an oracle but a compilation of Homeric lines: the formulas and the vocabulary of Homeric poetry are used with almost no changes.¹²⁵ Trygaeus describes a Homeric feast in which no one gives a gleaming mug to the oracle-monger, in other words the latter is not allowed to participate.¹²⁶ It has been suggested that the oracles of Bacis and the Homeric poems belonged to the same genre “situated at opposite ends of a continuum,” and that one of the strategies followed in public debates “was to pit oracular authorities against each other, Homer or the Delphic oracle, say, against Bacis or the Sibyl.”¹²⁷ Be that as it may, I would like to propose a different interpretation which lays the emphasis not so much on the Aristophanic usage of Homeric poetry as an effective means of countering an argument, which was based on oracular authority, but rather on the playwright’s implicit comment on the process of oracle composition.

¹²⁵ See Olson (1998) 278 for an exhaustive commentary on the origin of the lines.

¹²⁶ “1090-1 encapsulates the action of *Peace* as a whole up to this point; 1092-4 amount to a programme for the rest of the scene (1126)”, Olson (1998) 278.

¹²⁷ Muecke (1998) 263, 264 respectively. Her claim that “in early Greece poets were prophets, their works repositories of traditional wisdom,” probably based on Nagy (1990), is answered by Flower (2008) 22, who argues that “there was no stage in Greek society in which the poet (*aoidos*) and the seer (*mantis*) were undifferentiated” on the basis of the distinction between poets and prophets which is present already in Homer.

who lusts for the horror of warfare among his own people.”

The lines are identical to Nestor’s words in *Il.* 9.63-4 where he takes the middle position between Agamemnon’s suggestion to abandon the war and depart without seizing Troy and Diomedes’ indignant statement that, even if the rest should flee to mainland Greece, he and Sthenelus would avoid disgrace and would fight until they capture Troy. Nestor aims at calming down the younger man and making him think about “the immediate requirements of the situation.”¹³⁰ At first sight, one would assume that by assigning these words to Nestor, Homer dismisses war out of hand. However, in the Homeric passage the old hero proposes that Agamemnon prepare an evening meal for the elders so that they will take some time to ponder whether they should flee (9.65-78). In the council that follows, Nestor puts forth his plan to send an embassy with gifts on behalf of Agamemnon for the appeasement of Achilles (9.96-113, 163-72). His role therefore is not to promote peace but, on the contrary, to set the *Iliadic* plot in motion by suggesting an idea that will lead to the reinvolvement of Achilles in war. Thus, the lines cited by Trygaeus were merely a device to calm Diomedes down and are not as supportive of peace as they might seem to be when taken out of their original context.

The purpose of this Homeric digression is to lay bare the techniques used by oracle-mongers by transferring and applying them to epic poetry. By offering an example of how Homeric poetry could be distorted and interpreted so as to present

¹³⁰ Hainsworth (1993) 66.

φράζο μὴ followed by the subjunctive, as well as in the phrase δόλω φρένας ἔξαπατήσας.¹³³ The image of the black kite that threatens to deceive the mind of the recipient of the oracle is left unfinished when Trygaeus abruptly interrupts Hierocles to address his slave: the oracle just uttered poses a threat to the offals, the implication being that Hierocles would act as a black kite and attack the offerings.

Hierocles now alters his stance, stops chanting oracles though still speaking in hexameters and tries to partake in the libation in order to get a share of the victim as if he were the priest overseeing the ceremony (1105, 1109). However, his new, conciliatory tone is countered by Trygaeus' repetition and parody of his own previous utterances (πρίν κεν λύκος οἶν ὑμεναίοι 1112, οὐ γὰρ ποιήσεις λείον τὸν τρηχὺν ἐχθίνον 1114). Finally, in response to Hierocles' protest that he was not given part of the offals, Trygaeus tells him to eat his Sibyl (1116) and after disparagingly calling him a 'Bacis' and kicking him off the stage, he calls him a raven that came from Oreus (1119, 1125).¹³⁴ Thus, Hierocles' image of the black kite, originally meant to describe the treachery of the Spartans, is transformed into a raven and it used against him to reveal that his true

¹³² See above n. 27. For a Delphic oracle that shares this beginning see P-W 112 = Fontenrose Q 163 with Fontenrose (1978) 170-1.

¹³³ See *Il.* 16.446; 22.358; for δόλω φρένας ἔξαπατήσας at the same metrical position see *Theog.* 889.

¹³⁴ Hierocles is called a raven not only because he resembles one in his attempt to steal the offerings but also because ravens were sometimes associated with Apollo's prophetic abilities, see Olson (1998) 283.

motives for interrupting the sacrifice were imposed by human instincts: the objection to the cessation of war is eliminated once the chance appears to satisfy his appetite.

As it should be clear by now, the oracle-mongers are presented both as possessing oracles relevant to the situation at hand and as inventing oracles on the spot. In this process of producing *ad hoc* oracles they employ all sorts of different strategies, the most conspicuous being the use of certain epic formulas and vocabulary that fit their purpose. The resulting product is a pastiche of diversified elements, molded with the audience's expectation in mind and aiming at a desired political end, whether it be continuation of war, as in *Peace*, or monopoly of political power, as in *Knights*. The very choice of a feast scene to represent Homeric poetry as a whole is a telling example of the potential dangers (or, depending on the perspective, benefits) that lie in the separation of individual lines from their original context and their application to the situation at hand. In fact, the same anxiety was present in the uncertainty whether the words of an oracle were the god's own truth or they had been altered by the one who reported the oracle.

5. Birds

The last extended scene featuring an oracle-monger is *Birds* 959-91, where Peisetairos prepares a sacrifice but he is interrupted by a succession of five experts who enter the stage in the hope of enjoying some of the benefits from the newly founded Cloud-cuckoo-land. Though the identification of the first as an oracle-monger cannot be made with certainty, he is no doubt represented as a typical ἀλαζών. If Muecke's intuitive suggestion is correct, namely that there is a latent allusion to the foundation of Thurii in 444/443 B.C.E., then it is possible that there might be a connection with Lampon, who played an eminent role in the establishment of the colony as the chief leader of the θουριομάντις.¹³⁵ Given that oracles and oracle-mongers played a significant part in persuading the public to undertake the Sicilian expedition, there is no need to pursue this point any further but it will suffice to consider this character a representative of the entire group of oracle-mongers.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Muecke (1998) 265-66, Fontenrose (1978) 156. Lampon is directly referred to in line 521 (Λάμπων δ' ὄμνυσ' ἔτι καὶ νυνὶ τὸν χῆν', ὅταν ἐξάπατᾷ τι) and, along with Diopieithes, in line 988. The scholia on *Clouds* 332 inform us that Lampon chanted many oracles about the colony. Cf. Plutarch *Pericles* 6.2, where Lampon is involved in the interpretation of an omen in favor of Pericles.

¹³⁶ For the role of the oracle-mongers in the preparations for the expedition, see how the Athenians received the news of the disastrous outcome: ὠργίζοντο δὲ καὶ τοῖς χρησμολόγοις τε καὶ μάντεσι καὶ ὅποσοι τι τότε αὐτοὺς θειάσαντες ἐπήλπισαν ὡς λήψονται Σικελίαν, Thucydides 8.1.1. The seer Stilbides, mentioned in *Peace* 1031, was involved in the expedition. Cf. Powell (1979) 19.

The driving force behind the oracle-monger's appearance on stage is simply to take advantage of the situation and partake of the entrails. In *Peace* Hierocles ended up changing his opposing attitude in order to simply satisfy his appetite and greed. Likewise, in *Knights* an appeal to human instincts proved to be an effective means of persuading Demos to hand power over to the Sausage-seller. The peculiarity of the scene in *Birds* lies in the fact that the oracle-monger does not oppose the foundation of the new city, something that would herald a new era of peace and a cessation of hostilities. Instead, he informs Peisetairos about the conditions that must be fulfilled in accordance with a Bacid oracle that speaks straightforwardly about Cloud-cuckoo-land (962-63). Before the actual chanting of the oracle, Peisetairos poses a legitimate question which betrays a deep anxiety over the suspicious role of oracle-mongers and constitutes a subtle criticism of the practice of chanting oracles *post eventum* (964-65): if the oracle pre-existed the foundation of the city, then why did the oracle-monger not utter it before? The same implication is present in the justification the oracle-monger proposes, namely that he had been restrained by the god (965). The response is received with a tint of irony (ἀλλ' οὐδὲν οἶον 966), allowing the audience to infer that it must have been the perfect, and perhaps, commonest excuse for an oracle that was presented after the event.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Sommerstein (1987) 261. Dunbar (1995) 543 suggests that the audience might have called Socrates and his divine sign to mind. I find this probable, since Socrates is again referred to in lines 1282 and 1555.

The oracle begins with the traditional Bacid opening ἀλλ' ὅταν, followed by an impossible event described in imagery borrowed from the realm of proverbs.

Χρ. “ἀλλ' ὅταν οἰκήσωσι λύκοι πολιαί τε κορῶναι
ἐν ταύτῳ τὸ μεταξύ Κορίνθου καὶ Σικυῶνος-”

Πε. τί οὖν προσήκει δῆτ' ἐμοὶ Κορινθίων;

Χρ. ἠνίξαθ' ὁ Βάκις τοῦτο πρὸς τὸν ἀέρα. 970

“πρῶτον Πανδώρα θῦσαι λευκότριχα κριόν·
ὃς δέ κ' ἐμῶν ἐπέων ἔλθη πρώτιστα προφήτης,
τῷ δόμεν ἱμάτιον καθαρὸν καὶ καινὰ πέδιλα-”

Πε. ἔνεστι καὶ τὰ πέδιλα;

Χρ. λαβὲ τὸ βυβλίον.

“καὶ φιάλην δοῦναι, καὶ σπλάγχνων χειρ' ἐνιπλήσαι.” 975

Πε. καὶ σπλάγχνα διδόν' ἔνεστι;

Χρ. λαβὲ τὸ βυβλίον.

“κἂν μὲν, θέσπιε κοῦρε, ποιῆς ταῦθ' ὡς ἐπιτέλλω,
αἰετὸς ἐν νεφέλῃσι γενήσεται· αἱ δε κε μὴ δῶς,
οὐκ ἔσει οὐ τρυγῶν, οὐ λάϊος, οὐ δρυκολάπτῃς.”

Πε. καὶ ταῦτ' ἔνεστ' ἐνταύθα;

Χρ. λαβὲ τὸ βυβλίον. 980

Ch. “Nay when wolves and grey crows shall together have their abode
in the place twixt Corinth and Sicyon-”

Pe. But what have I got to do with any Corinthians?

Ch. By that enigma Bacis meant the sky.

“first sacrifice to Pandora a ram with white fleece,
and whosoever arrives first as expounder of my words,
to him give a spotless cloak and fresh sandals–”

Pe. Are sandals really in there?

Ch. Here’s the book.

“and give him the chalice, and fill up his hands with innards–”

Pe. Giving innards is in there too?

Ch. Here’s the book.

“and if, inspired youth, you carry out the orders I give you,
you shall become an eagle midst the clouds; but if you give not,
you shall be not a turtledove, not a rock thrush, not a woodpecker.”

Pe. That’s in there too?

Or. Here’s the book.¹³⁸

The strangeness of the image lies in the impossibility of wolves and crows dwelling together, which is perhaps represented by the misapplication of the epithet *πολιός*, usually modifying wolves in Homer, to crows.¹³⁹ In the context of the play the wolves

¹³⁸ All *Birds* translations are from Henderson (2000).

¹³⁹ Sommerstein (1987) 262 argues for “a double impossibility, since there are no steel-grey crows and crows could never live together with wolves”; see however Dunbar (1995) 545

are an allegory for people like Peisetairos and the crows represent the rest of the birds.¹⁴⁰ The next line contains a second ἀδύνατον which is again derived from proverbial lore: the place that is to be inhabited by wolves and crows is the space between Corinth and Sicyon. The phrase seems to have been a roundabout way of saying “nowhere” since Corinth and Sicyon were neighboring territories and there was no land between them. It is a slightly modified version of a Delphic oracle of c. 710 B.C.E., concerning the foundation of Tarentum.¹⁴¹ According to another story, Apollo gave a similar response to Aesop when he asked how he could become rich.¹⁴² Since Peisetairos is unable to understand the involvement of the Corinthians in the context, the oracle-monger explains to him that the reference is to a city that was founded between the earth and the sky.

The oracle-monger reveals the main core of the oracle which does not include instructions on how to achieve the newly founded city’s welfare but recommends a

“πολιαί, however, is not part of the impossibility, for the Greek crow is the Hooded Crow [...] of N. and W. Europe.”

¹⁴⁰ Dunbar (1995) 545.

¹⁴¹ P-W 46 = Fontenrose Q 34 = Diod. Sic. 8.21.3: καλόν τοι τὸ μεταξὺ Κορίνθου καὶ Σικυῶνος ἄλλ’ οὐκ οἰκήσεις οὐδ’ εἰ παγχάλκεος εἶης. Sommerstein (1987) 262 is positive that the function of this line is to add a further impossibility in the oracle. Dunbar (1995) 545 accepts this view but entertains the possibility that the phrase “must have meant not a logically impossible ‘settling nowhere’ but an impracticable ‘settling on land already occupied by others’.”

¹⁴² εἰ το μέσον κτήσαιο Κορίνθου καὶ Σικυῶνος, scholia on *Birds* 968 = Athen. 219A (“Aesop or someone else”) = Suda εἰ 337; see Fontenrose (1978) 154-55.

course of action that would benefit him. The first action proposed by the oracle, namely the sacrifice to Pandora, serves as a prelude to the gifts that the oracle-monger expects to get.¹⁴³ Then the motif of the first comer is introduced:¹⁴⁴ Peisetairos should give a clean cloth and a pair of new sandals to the first prophet he comes across. The language echoes some poetic and Homeric constructions: the construction ὃς δέ κε followed by the subjunctive is commonly found in the beginning of Homeric lines,¹⁴⁵ while the epic

¹⁴³ Pandora was sometimes identified with Rhea or with Earth. Since she was a female chthonic deity, the sacrifice that would most befit her would be of a female and black victim, Sommerstein (1987) 262; Dunbar (1995) 546-47 offers evidence for male victims offered to female deities.

¹⁴⁴ Dunbar (1995) 547. Cf. *Ar. Pl.* 40-3; *E. Ion* 534-8. For a brief discussion of the motif, see Fontenrose (1978) 15-6. In his discussion of the appearance of the same motif in the *Wealth*, Smith (1989) 152 claims that “this is a uniquely Delphic style of response, belonging to a famous genre of Delphic oracles.” This seems to undermine his argument that “crooked oracle-mongers could not depend upon it [the Delphic oracle] to provide a good source of tools for their trade”, since in the *Birds* scene the oracle-monger attributes an allegedly Delphic feature to his Bacid oracle.

¹⁴⁵ *Il.* 17.229; 19.167; 23.857. See Bellocchi (2009) 28. The same construction followed by ἔλθῃ is found in the beginning of an oracle in Herodotus 4.159.3 = P-W 42 = Fontenrose Q 50; cf. Dunbar (1995) 547.

demonstrative τῷ is used as a pronoun rather than an article and καλὰ πέδιλα is a Homeric verse ending formula.¹⁴⁶

The interruption of the oracle by Peisetairos exemplifies a technique that has been used again both in the *Knights* and the *Peace*, that of countering a character by using the exact words he had previously spoken.¹⁴⁷ Peisetairos is curious to know whether the reference to the sandals is indeed part of the oracle, and the response he gets is to take the book with the oracle collection itself. Thus, the existence of the written word appears as the unshakable argument that this particular oracle was not an *ad hoc* composition.¹⁴⁸ However, the phrase λαβὲ τὸ βιβλίον will be repeated whenever Peisetairos has a suspicion that the oracle-monger is making additions to the original text of the oracle. It will also be used later on by Peisetairos himself against the oracle-monger.

The last part of the oracle gives the results Peisetairos' decision will entail, positive or negative according to whether he will comply or not. The second course of

¹⁴⁶ For example, *Il.* 2.44; 10.22; 14.186. See also the comments of Bellocchi (2009) 28, 31 and Dunbar (1995) 547. The jussive infinitive θῦσαι is reminiscent of lines of the parabasis which include Hesiodic parallels: *Birds* 710 σπείρειν ≈ *Works* 391, 463. The epic form δόμεν appears again in 930 and in *Lysistrata* 1163 and is found six times in Pindar, cf. Dunbar (1995) 534. For a jussive infinitive which, like δόμεν here, follows the ἀλλ' ὅταν opening, see Herodotus 1.55.2 = P-W 54 = Fontenrose Q 101.

¹⁴⁷ For this scene, see Collins (2004) 39-41.

¹⁴⁸ Muecke (1998) 264 n. 31: "Prof. A. C. Cassio pointed out the irony of such an appeal to the written word as irrefutable proof of truth in a world where interpolation was frequent."

action described in the oracle once again reveals the self-seeking motives of the oracle-monger: the oracular authority, i.e. Bacis, orders Peisetairos to give a libation bowl to the oracle-monger and fill his hands with offals.¹⁴⁹ In other words, the oracle-monger wants to persuade Peisetairos so that he could parasitically participate in the sacrificial feast. Along the same line, he uses another perhaps epic formula, “god-inspired youth,” to induce Peisetairus to yield to Bacis’ prophecy and become “an eagle in the clouds.” The phrase θέσπιε κοῦρε is strangely addressed to a man of Peisetairus’ age, though it is to be understood as a device to flatter him and cajole him into admitting the oracle-monger to the sacrificial feast.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, the excerpt from an oracle that must have become proverbial around 424 B.C.E., that of Athens becoming an eagle in the clouds, is presented as the reward Peisetairus will get, should he follow the directions of the oracle. Finally, the last line gives the results of refusal, namely that Peisetairus will be punished by not even gaining the opportunity to turn into a bird smaller than the eagle.

Peisetairus counters the oracle-monger with an oracle which he has in a book hidden under his garment and which he claims to have gotten from Apollo.¹⁵¹ The

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Trygaeus’ Homeric oracle (1094) in which no one gives a bowl to the oracle-monger.

¹⁵⁰ Apart from this passage, the word θέσπιος is found only once more in Hesiod fr. 310 = Clemens *Srom.* 1.6.36.2; cf. *Birds* 1095 θεσπέσιος; Sommerstein (1987) 262; Dunbar (1995) 548; Bellocchi (2009) 35. The phrase ὡς ἐπιτέλλω is found in the same metrical position in *Il.* 2.10; 9.369.

¹⁵¹ See Sommerstein (1987) 263. Although Peisetairus does not name a specific shrine, he probably refers to Delphi, Dunbar (1995) 549.

language of the oracle is for the most part Attic, and picks up many points raised by the oracle-monger:¹⁵²

Πε. οὐδὲν ἄρ' ὅμοιός ἐσθ' ὁ χρησμὸς τουτῶι, 981

ὄν ἐγὼ παρὰ τὰπόλλωνος ἐξεγραψάμην·

“αὐτὰρ ἐπὴν ἄκλητος ἰὼν ἄνθρωπος ἀλαζῶν

λυπῆι θύοντας καὶ σπλαγχνεύειν ἐπιθυμῆι,

δὴ τότε χρὴ τύπτειν αὐτὸν πλευρῶν τὸ μεταξὺ-” 985

Χρ. οὐδὲν λέγειν οἴμαί σε.

Πε. λαβὲ τὸ βιβλίον

“καὶ φείδου μηδὲν μηδ' αἰετοῦ ἐν νεφέλησιν,

μήτ' ἦν Λάμπων ἢ μήτ' ἦν ὁ μέγας Διοπέιθης.”

Χρ. καὶ ταῦτ' ἔνεστ' ἔνταῦθα;

Πε. λαβὲ τὸ βιβλίον.

Pe. Well now, your oracle doesn't match this one at all,

an oracle I personally wrote down from Apollo:

“Yea when a charlatan type who arrives uninvited

vexes the sacrificers and desires a share of the innards,

then must you smite him in the place twixt the ribs-”

Ch. You must be kidding.

Pe. Here's the book.

¹⁵² Dunbar (1995) 549.

“and spare not even an eagle midst the clouds,
not if he be Lampon nor yet the great Diopeithes.”

Ch. That’s in there too?

Pe. Here’s the book.

The traditional Bacid opening ἀλλ’ ὅταν, usually introducing a precedent condition, is answered by Peisetairus’ αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν which is a common opening of Homeric lines.¹⁵³ As Hierocles is called ἀλαζών in *Peace* 1069, the oracle-monger is consistently described as an impostor. Except for the δὴ τότε construction which follows the traditional Bacid structure and was omitted in the previous oracle, Peisetairus’ oracle is modeled on the one the oracle-monger just chanted: σπλαγχνεύειν picks up καὶ σπλάγχνων χεῖρ’ ἐνιπλήσσει in line 975, whereas the land between Corinth and Sicyon has been transformed to a striking between the ribs; the oracle-monger’s remonstrance that Peisetairus is talking nonsense is met with exactly the same words and gesture that the former had previously used to convince the latter; likewise, the phrase about the eagle

¹⁵³ *Il.* 15.147; 16.453; 24.155; *Od.* 1.293; 3.45. Fontenrose (1978) 154 might be misleading since the claim “Peisthetairos’ Apolline oracle counters [the mock oracle of Bacis] with the equivalent *autar epēn*” may lead one to believe that αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν was an opening of Delphic oracles. Dunbar (1995) 549 is correct in arguing that “Peis[etairos]’ version of opening ‘But when’, [...] is not attested for oracles.” However, αὐτὰρ alone is attested in four oracles: P–W 216 = Fontenrose Q 7; P–W 406 = Fontenrose L 99; P–W 473 = Fontenrose H 69; P–W 515 = Fontenrose F 11. According to Willi (2003) 261, 267, the particle αὐτὰρ is used for a stylistic end, while ἐπὶν is an archaism.

in the sky is picked up in 987, where Apollo bids Peisetairus not to spare the eagle in the clouds even if he is Lampon or the great Diopieithes.

The method followed in the oracle composition in the *Birds* bears a close resemblance to the way oracles are presented in the rest of the plays. In the central pattern that reemerges we can observe the manipulation of epic and proverbial language to assert authority, the parody of this authority, and its subsequent failure to convince. Finally, the representation of the oracle-monger suggests that even a seemingly supportive χρησμολόγος operates from selfish ulterior motives.

ἐξ ἱεροῦ ναοῖο χελιδόνες, οὐκέτι δόξει

775

ὄρνεον καταπυγωνέστερον εἶναι.”

Ly. Yea, when the swallows hole up in a single home,
fleeing the hoopoes and leaving the phallus alone,
then are their problems solved, and high-thundering Zeus
shall reverse what’s up and what’s down –

Wo. You mean we’ll be lying on top?

Ly. But if the swallows begin to argue and fly away
down from the citadel holy, all will say,
no bird more disgustingly horny lives today!¹⁵⁶

A few exceptions aside, this oracle is for the most part cast in the Attic dialect. Although the traditional opening with ἀλλ’ ὅπταν points to a Bacic or Sibylline origin, there is no explicit reference to mantic authority. The image of the swallow fleeing the hoopoe is borrowed from the traditional myth of Tereus and stands as an allegory of the women’s gathering on the Acropolis and their sexual abstinence.¹⁵⁷ As mentioned above, the reference to animals was a common practice in oracles, perhaps going hand in hand with elements borrowed from proverbial lore. In this instance however the

¹⁵⁶ Translation is from Henderson (2000).

¹⁵⁷ Aristophanes included Tereus as a character in the *Birds* and Sophocles had staged a play under this title.

words signifying animals are also to be understood in their slang meaning.¹⁵⁸

Traditional elements are also present in the image of Zeus turning the natural order of the world upside down, although there is no exact parallel for the language after the caesura in line 772.¹⁵⁹ Finally, poetic elements are not totally absent from the oracle, since ἔξ ἱεροῦ ναοῖο (775) points in the direction of epic and lyric poetry.¹⁶⁰

Lysistrata's oracle is a telling example of the power oracular discourse could exert on the citizenry. Undoubtedly, it has to be considered an *ad hoc* composition which achieves the purpose of convincing the audience and advancing the interests of the politician. It is striking that the oracle is interrupted only once, in line 773, by a woman who comically perceives the metaphor about Zeus turning the world topsy-turvy to have sexual connotations. In a certain sense, a parallel can be drawn between the character of this play and the *Knights*: Lysistrata displays the same demagogic characteristics as the Paphlagonian and the Sausage-seller, whereas the women of this particular scene are as gullible as Demos. Thus, Aristophanes' comment seems to imply

¹⁵⁸ See Henderson (1987) 168 and (1991) 128-9; χελιδών is a slang term for the female genitals; περύγεσσι can probably mean 'phallos,' and thus there might be a sexual pun in the word ἀνάπτομαι 'grab something.' For καταπύγων, see Henderson (1987) 84.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Theognis 843-4; Hdt. 3.3.

¹⁶⁰ Bellocchi (2009) 38 traces a possible connection with choral lyric and argues that the intention is to evoke an Aeolic and Doric line on the basis of the genitive in -οῖο. Cf. Hesiod *Theog.* 788 ἔξ ἱεροῦ ποταμοῖο. According to Willi (2003) 242, the Attic declension (νεώς) is abandoned for the sake of stylistic conventions.

the inescapable conclusion that oracular discourse is manipulated by all the parts that comprise the political spectrum, whether that is peace or war-mongers.

7. Conclusions

My analysis of the Aristophanic oracles allows some inferences to be drawn concerning the main questions posed at the beginning of this study. The claim that Aristophanes' criticism is harsher when directed against oracles of Bacid rather than of Pythian origin cannot be made with certainty due to the vague boundaries in their typology. However, the example from *Lysistrata* supports the conclusion that oracle composition and interpretation are consistently met with suspicion and are intertwined with demagoguery and its effects, whether beneficial or disastrous, on the citizenry. In fact, the uncertainty concerning the origin of each oracle shows that Delphic oracles could have been manipulated or made up by self-seeking oracle-mongers. As such they are not excluded from Aristophanes' criticism. Moreover, the close examination of the Aristophanic oracles shows that they follow a certain pattern which is exemplified in all scenes that include mock oracles. The oracle-mongers are presented as possessing oracles pertaining to the situation at hand and as producing oracles composed on the spot to match a desired political end. However, the language of an oracle is never self-sufficient and authoritative by itself, even when consisting of widely known poetic, historic or proverbial elements. Its persuasive force depends equally on an interpretation that, in order to be effective, has to be linked to something easily recognizable by the audience such as bodily pleasures or items of daily life.

8. Bibliography

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