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Euboulos' Ankylion and the Game of Kottabos

Ralph M. Rosen

University of Pennsylvania, rrosen@sas.upenn.edu

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Euboulos' Ankylion and the Game of Kottabos

Abstract
Euboulos' "Ankylion" is represented by only four fragments (frr. 1-3KA = frr. 1-4 Hunter), all culled from Athenaeus, which tells us nothing about the plot of the play or about the identity of its titular character. R.L. Hunter, in his recent commentary on Eubolus, discusses at length the name "Ankylion" and concludes that it could belong to either (1) a humble and poor man; (2) "a character from folklore notorious for sexual relations with his mother"; or (3) "a wily slave such as those foreshadowed in Aristophanes and familiar from New Comedy". In view of our ignorance of the play's plot, each of these possibilities has an equal claim to our consideration. I believe, however, that the context in which the fragments are embedded in Athenaeus allows us to refine our understanding of the name even further.

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Euboulos’ *Ankylion* and the Game of Kottabos

Euboulos’ *Αγκυλίων is represented by only four fragments (frr. 1–3 KA = frr. 1–4 Hunter), all culled from Athenaeus, which tell us nothing about the plot of the play or about the identity of its titular character. R. L. Hunter, in his recent commentary on Euboulos, discusses at length the name *‘Αγκυλίων* and concludes that it could belong to either (1) a humble and poor man; (2) a character from folklore notorious for sexual relations with his mother; or (3) a wily slave such as those foreshadowed in Aristophanes and familiar from New Comedy. In view of our ignorance of the play’s plot, each of these possibilities has an equal claim to our consideration. I believe, however, that the context in which the fragments are embedded in Athenaeus allows us to refine our understanding of the name even further.

The passage in which Athenaeus quotes Euboulos fr. 1 KA (= 1 + 2 Hunter), occurs towards the end of a discussion (665d–668f) of the game of kottabos, the symposia game popular especially in the fifth and fourth centuries in which participants tossed wine lees at a disc balanced on a rod, or, in another version, at saucers floating in a tub. During this discussion Athenaeus treats of the various forms of the game as well as the special applications of the term κότταβος and κοστάβεια. At 667c he mentions that one expression often applied to the tossing of the kottabos was *‘άπ’ ἀγκύλης*, which referred to the bending of the wrist:

ἀγκύλοντα γὰρ δεὶ σφόδρα τὴν χειρὰ εὐρύθμως πέμπειν τὸν κότταβον, ὡς Δικαίαρχος φήσαι καὶ Πλάτων δ’ ἐν τῷ Διὶ Κακουμένῳ [fr. 47K]...ἐκάλουν δ’ ἀπ’ ἀγκύλης τὴν τοῦ κοστάβου πρόσων διὰ τὸ ἐπαγκύλον τὴν δεξιὰν χειρὰ ἐν τοῖς ἀποκοστάβισμοι.

Athenaeus proceeds to cite Bacchylides’ *Ερωτικοί and Aeschylus’ *Οστολόγοι (for the related adjective ἀγκυλητός):

......ἐνέτε

τὴν ἀπ’ ἀγκύλης ἵσα τοίσας τοῖσ νεανίαις

λευκῶν ἀντεύνασα πῆχου.

(Bacchylides frs. 17 Sn)

2 The argument is based on Aristophanes, *Wasps* 1396–7, where the name seems to be used humorously for its connotations of humble origins.
4 Hunter 86: ‘as a nickname. *Αγκυλίων* might refer to crooked legs or to a crooked spine...or to an aspect of character...; it would be particularly appropriate for a slave, as slaves were often noted from peculiarities of physique.’
5 There were two main forms of the game: (1) the ‘descending kottabos’ (κότταβος κατακτός), where the player aimed his wine drops at a disc (πλαίσιαζε) balanced on top of a rod, trying to dislodge it so that it in turn would strike another disc (μάνης; cf. below, n. 20) with a loud noise; (2) the ‘kottabos with saucers’ (κότταβος δι’ ἄπειραφιῶν) in which one tried to sink saucers floating in a basin by hurling wine drops on them. For a full treatment of the ancient evidence of the game, see K. Sartori *Das Kottabos-Spiel der alten Griechen* (Munich, 1893) [= Sartorii]; cf. also K. Schneider s.v. ‘Kottabos’ in *RE* 11.2 cols. 1528–41, and B. Sparkes, *Kottabos: an Athenian After-Dinner Game*, *Archaeology* 13 (1960), 202–6.
6 For κότταβος as a term for the cup used in the game, cf. Eupolis, *Baptai* fr. 95 KA (Athen. 666d). Euboulos fr. 15 KA (= fr. 16 Hunter = Athen. 666e/f) seems to employ κοστάβειον to mean ‘kottabos stand’ in the game of κότταβος κατακτός; cf. Hunter 109.
This passage recalls another, 782d,⁸ where Athenaeus also locates the expression in Cratinus:⁹

πείν δὲ θάνατος αἰρόν ἦν ὦδωρ ἔπη.

&al; ἵσον ἵσο μᾶλλον ἀκράτου δύο χράσ

πάνω ἀπ’ ἀγκυλής ἑπονομαζοῦσα < >

ήσαν λάταγας τῷ Κορινθίῳ πέει

(fr. 299KA)

The passages cited by Athenaeus affirm that as early as the fifth century the specialized vocabulary of the kottabos game included references to the ἀγκυλή, either in the phrase ἀπ’ ἀγκυλής¹⁰ (from the bend) or as an adjective describing the toss, ἀγκυλητός.¹¹ I would suggest, therefore, that Ἀγκυλωίων may in fact be a nickname for a character who possesses special expertise at the kottabos game as described in these passages, i.e. one who has shown himself to have a particularly deft tossing hand.¹²

Athenaeus himself does not make any connection between the ἀγκυλή of the kottabos and Euboulos’ Ἀγκυλωίων when he has occasion to quote from this play several pages later, 668d, but he is still concerned there with the general subject of the kottabos, and it seems likely that the citations from Ἀγκυλωίων contained references to κοστάβια:

ἡν δὲ τι καὶ ἄλλο κοσταβίων εἶδος προτιθέμενον ἐν ταῖς παννυχίοις, οὕ μνημονεύει Καλλίμαχος ἐν Παννυχίῳ διὰ τούτων

ὅ δ’ ἀγρυπνήσας [συνεχέσ] μέχρι τῆς κοιλώνης
tον πυραμοῦ, ντα λύφεται, καὶ τὰ κοττ., ἀβεία
cαὶ τῶν παρ’ ὁσσών ἦν θέλει, χων θέλει, ἐφλησε.

[f.r. 227Prf]

⁷ A very troublesome text; Radt diddently prints the MS. reading, though Kaibel’s emendation, ἀγκυλητός κοσσάβους (as object of ἐφιέτο: τοῦ δ’ = ‘capitis’) may be right. For the plethora of other emendations, cf. Radt ad loc. 293.
⁸ 781–4 is a section from the Epitome, traditionally inserted at 466d, following I. Casaubon, Animadversionem in Athenaei Deipnosophistae Libri XV (Leiden, 1600), pp. 492–3.
⁹ Athenaeus cites Cratinus as an example of ἀγκυλή = ‘cup’ (ποτήριον), though in fact Cratinus uses ἀπ’ ἀγκυλής here more as Athenaeus explains it at 667c (= ‘from the bend’, quoted above); cf. Kock’s remarks ad Cratinus fr. 273, and Sartori 94–5.
¹⁰ Note also Anacreon, PMG 415: Σικελῶν κότταβον ἀγκυλή τ’ ὄναξεων.
¹¹ cf. O Jahn, ‘Kottabos auf Vasenbildern’, Philologus 26 (1867), 214, and Sartori’s Appendix V ‘Be bedeutung und Etymologie des Wortes ἀγκυλή’. The iconographical evidence certainly makes it clear that a bent, almost contorted, hand was an important feature of the kottabos; cf., e.g., CVA, Munich, vol. 5, plate 225.2; Berlin, vol. 2, plates 92.2, 95.1.
¹² This is not to say, of course, that the name Ἀγκυλωίων necessarily had an original connection with the kottabos (note its earlier occurrence in Aristophanes, for example [cf. above, n. 3], which offers no indication of its nuance). What is important, however, is the connotation of the name that Euboulos exploited for the purpose of his play.
éγινετο δὲ καὶ πειμάτια τινα ἐν ταῖς παννυχίαις, ἐν αἷς πλείονιός ὄνομ χρόνων διηγύπτων χαρεύοντες· καὶ διωσόμαζετο τὰ πειμάτια τότε χαρίσιοι ἀπὸ τῆς τῶν ἀναιρουμένων χαράς. μεμοίρασε Εὐβοῦλος ἐν 'Ἀγκυλιών λέγων ὅτι·
καὶ γὰρ πάλαι πέττει τὰ νυκτῆρια.

[fr. 1]

ἐθ’ ἐξής φησιν·
ἐξεπήδησον ἢ ἄρτιως πέπτουσα τὸν χαρίσιον

[fr. 2]

ὅτι δὲ καὶ φίλημα ἦν ἀδέλφων ἐξής λέγει ὁ Εὐβοῦλος·
εἶν γυναῖκες· νῦν ὅπως τὴν νύχθ’ ὄλην
ἐν τῇ δεκάτῃ τοῦ παιδίου χαρεύσατε·
θῆσαι δὲ νυκτήριον τρεῖς ταῖσας
καὶ μῆλα πέντε καὶ φίλημα ἐννέα.

[fr. 3]

Callimachus, of course, in the first citation of the passage quoted above, seems to use κοσταβεία as a general term for prizes given at night-festivals rather than those offered at the kottabos game proper. Apparently – although the connection of thought is far from precise – it is to illustrate this use of the term (κοσταβεία = χαρίσια) that Athenaeus is induced to cite Euboulos.13 Yet in spite of the ambiguity of the passage, the fragments cited from Euboulos’ 'Ἀγκυλιών certainly indicate a scene or scenes of elaborate festivity14 and sympotic competitions, or at least preparations for such activity. A context such as this is eminently appropriate for a game of kottabos, and it seems likely that Athenaeus was drawn to these passages in the first place because they included at least a mention of the game and its prizes.15

Ameipsias composed in the fifth century a play entitled Ἀποκοσταβιζώντες and, although we are unable to reconstruct its plot, it is clear from the title that the chorus

13 Strictly speaking, the ‘πυραμοῦντα’ in the Callimachus quotation above (fr. 227Pf) reminds Athenaeus of Euboulos’ ‘cakes’ (ἐγινετο δὲ καὶ πειματια τινα ἐν ταις παννυχιαις). But Athenaeus’ larger subject remains the κοσταβεία, a type of ‘victory-prize’, and it seems that he cites Euboulos’ χαρίσιοι as a species of κοσταβεία. He clearly implies, after all, that Euboulos referred to χαρίσιοι as νυκτήρια (‘victory-prizes’, fr. 1 quoted above). It is, nevertheless, rather bold of Jahn, art. cit. (n. 11), 215 n. 67, to cite these frs. as examples of the κοσταβεία = prizes offered at the kottabos game. Even Pfeiffer ad Call. fr. 227.7 implies as much. It is intriguing, however, that according to Σ Aristoph. Peace 1242, Pherecrates makes mention of the κοσταβος κατακτος in a play entitled Παννυχις (elsewhere referred to with the double title Ἰπιος Ἡ Παννυχις, cf. Athen. 612a).

14 Fr. 1, ‘She (?) has been baking victory cakes for a long time’, sounds as if it is a response to someone marveling at a cornucopia of delicacies. Note also that the prizes mentioned for the Παννυχις were among those offered for the kottabos: cakes and kisses. For comestibles cf. Athenaeus 667d: ὁλοί δὲ ἀπίστευκεν τί ποιέωμεν τινὲς κοσταβοὺς προείρηκε μὲν καὶ ὁ 'Ἀτριφάνης [fr. 55.2–3 K]; the verse is incomplete at Athenaeus 667b] ὥσ πάρ ἔστι καὶ πειματια καὶ προηγήματα; for kisses cf. Sophocles, Salmoneus fr. 537 Rudd, Plato Comices, fr. 46.5 K.

15 The paragraph that immediately follows the quotation of Euboulos, fr. 2KA (= fr. 3 Hunter), at 668d/e, certainly reads as if Athenaeus had had the game of kottabos on his mind the whole time: ὁλοί δὲ ἀποφυδαστὰ παρὰ τοῖς Σικελιναῖοις ὁ κοσταβος δὴν ἐκ τοῦ καὶ οἰκήματα ἐπιτίθεται τῇ παιδίᾳ κατασκευάζομαι. We cannot even be sure that the prizes mentioned in fr. 3 apply specifically to the night-dancing of the first two verses. They might easily refer to something (e.g. a kottabos competition) mentioned earlier, and taken up again after a charge to the γυναίκες (the chorus perhaps, cf. Hunter 87) to continue their dancing through the night. This would be even more likely if Hunter is right to suggest (87–8, with ZPE 36 [1979], 35 n. 62) that this fragment is an example from Middle Comedy of the technique, common in New Comedy, ‘whereby a character enters the stage speaking back into the house from which he or she emerges’.
consisted of a band of kottabos-revellers. Only five fragments of the play are extant, but at least four suggest in one way or another scenes of festivity. It was, of course, common practice in Old Comedy for the chorus to call attention at some point to their special attributes or activities, and it is not unreasonable to assume that in Ameipias’ Ἀποκοσταβίζωντες the chorus described the kottabos game, which in some fashion had become their trademark. Fr. 2 K, at any rate, indicates clearly that a game of κότταβος δι’ ἄξιβάφων was played during the course of the play:

ἡ Μανία, φέρ’ ἄξιβάφα καὶ κανάριος
καὶ τὸν ποδανιπτήρ’ ἔγχεασα θύδατος.

Ameipias’ play demonstrates that kottabos-playing could form an appropriate premise for a play of Old Comedy and that the technical details of the game would be readily known to the audience. If, therefore, Euboulos’ Ἀγκυλῶν was intended to evoke an aspect of the kottabos (which was still as popular during the fourth century as it was in the fifth), such a reference is unlikely to have been lost on the audience.

In fr. 2 K from Ameipias’ play, cited above, the name Μανία may even be deployed specifically for its relevance to the kottabos, along the lines that I have suggested for Euboulos’ Ἀγκυλῶν. For, although the name Μανία seems to have been a formation analogous to Μάνης, the generic name frequently applied to a foreign slave in Old Comedy, it happens that one of the parts of the κότταβος κατακτος was known as the μάνης. The precise nature of this part of the apparatus is in dispute, but its function is clear: the object of the game was to dislodge the disc (the πλάστιγξ) on top of a rod so that it fell onto the μάνης with a loud noise. The connection between the slave-name Μάνης and the μάνης of the kottabos was explicitly made in antiquity, as Antiphanes, fr. 55.10–13 K attests (= Athenaeus 667a), a passage in which one character explains to another the details of the game:

Α. ἢν τύχη μόνον
αὐτῆς, ἐπὶ τὸν μάνην πεσαίται καὶ ψάφος
ἔσται πάνιν πολίς. Β. πρὸς θεῶν, τῷ κότταβῳ
πρόσεσί τι καὶ Μάνης τὸς ὑστερος οἰκέτης;

16 At Ach. 523–37 Aristophanes has Dikaiopolis trace the beginning of the Peloponnesian War to a band of drunken kottabos revellers (μεθυσοκότταβοι, 525), who allegedly abducted a prostitute from Megara. It would not be surprising if this theme actually served as the plot of Ameipias’ Ἀποκοσταβίζωντες. Ameipias’ play cannot be dated, though the stories of a rivalry between him and Aristophanes were famous; cf. Aristophanes, Frogs 12–14, vita Aristoph. XXVIII.8–10, XXIXa.10–12, XXXIIIb.8 in W. Koster, Scholia in Aristophanem t.1a (Groningen, 1975), and F. Meineke, Fragmenta Comicorum Graecorum (Berlin, 1839), i.199.

17 Fr. 1 K presents an exchange between two people, the one of whom had been following the other for food ‘like a mullet’ (a fish proverbial for hunger): ... ἔγω δ’ ἵνα σεπάσσωμαι ἐἰς τὴν ἄγοραν ἔργων λαβεῖν. Β. ἦττον γ’ ἀν οὖν ἐνησίς καθάπερ κεστρεὺς ἀκολουθήσεις ἐμοί; fr. 2 K (on which cf. below) gives an order for setting up the κότταβος δι’ ἄξιβάφων; fr. 3 K mentions the purchase of cosmetics: δυνα ἄθλολα ἄχυρα καὶ ψυμφώνα; fr. 4 K apparently has Dionysus speaking of the mixing of wine: ἔγω δ’ ἐν ἰώνας πάσαν ύμιν εἰμὶ πέντε καὶ δύο; and fr. 5 K mentions a kind of baked bread, κλιβανίτης ἄρτος.

18 Especially, though not only, in the parodos; cf. Wasps 403–7, with 420; Clouds 275–90, 375–94; Frogs 209–68.


20 C. Boehm, de Cottabo (Bonn, 1893), p. 27 held that the μάνης referred to a basin (Athenaeus 667ε λεκάνην ὑποκείμενην) or disc which surrounded the kottabos-shaft. H. Hayley, ‘The κότταβος κατακτός in the Light of Recent Investigations’, HSCP 5 (1894), 79–82 argues that it was a statuette representative of a slave Μανίς sitting in a basin at the base of the shaft. Sparkes, art. cit. (n. 5), 205–6 is probably correct to argue that the μάνης was a central disc that broke the fall of the πλάστιγξ.
In view of the comic poets’ well-known fondness for nomina significantia, it seems highly probable that Ameipsias’ Mavía, applied to a servant who is ordered to set up the apparatus for the kottabos, was employed humorously as a figura etymologica for one of the pieces associated with the game.  

If my suggestion for ‘Αγκυλίων is correct, we have a similarly comic name formation derived from one of the technical terms of the kottabos. As such, the name could readily belong to that class of slave names, discussed by Hunter, which reflect a particular aspect of character or field of expertise. Indeed, as Hunter argues, the parallels from New and Roman Comedy of characters whose names fall into this category do suggest strongly that ‘Αγκυλίων was in fact a ‘wily slave’ rather than a traditional figure from folklore. Informed speculation about the plot of the play is still next to impossible, but if the name ‘Αγκυλίων was employed specifically for its comic association with the kottabos, it seems probable that such a character would have been involved in orchestrating sympotic, perhaps unruly, festivities.

University of Pennsylvania

RALPH M. ROSEN

21 Sartori 31 n. 3 seems to have been on the verge of making just such a suggestion, but merely notes that the name appears in Ameipsias’ play. It is true that Mavía is ordered in fr. 2 K to set up the κότταβος δι’ ἀφθιμάδων, which did not apparently use a μάνης, but in a play with a chorus of kottabos revellers, we may feel certain that fr. 2 does not represent the only scene in which the kottabos was portrayed or discussed. The κότταβος κατακτός no doubt appeared elsewhere in the play, at which point a servant named Mavía would have her full comic effect, and probably occasioned several pointed jokes. Naturally the humour inherent in her name in such a context would remain operative throughout the play. An Aristophanic example of an otherwise unobtrusive or historical name made to serve as a pun in a specific context can be seen in the manipulation of the name Ἀλμαχός at Ach. 269, 1071 and Peace 304.

22 A possible translation would be ‘Bend-y’ or ‘Bendy-boy’.

23 Hunter 86; Hunter cites incorrectly M. Lambertz, Die griechischen Sklavennamen (Vienna, 1907), who discusses this category of slave names in part II, pp. 7–11. We even find a slave called Κότταβος in a second-century B.C. manumission decree from Thera (IG xii.3 1302).

24 Cf. Hunter 86.

25 The name also serves as the title for one of Alexis’ plays, from which one fragment survives (= Diog. Laert. 3.27), and may have been applied to a stock figure of Middle and New Comedy. The relative chronology of the two plays, however, is impossible to determine.