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Abstract

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Comments

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A POETIC INITIATION SCENE IN HIPPONAX?

In a note in *Heph.* 3.1 (= Hipponax Testim. 21 Dg), Choeroboscus relates several etymologies of the term “iambos.” The first is the familiar derivation from the mythical Iambe, the servant of King Celeus of Eleusis, who cheered up the grieving Demeter by mocking her. This story, well known to us from the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (198—211), functioned as an aition of the ritual jesting and abuse practiced at the various festivals of Demeter, and, by extension, of the poetic genre known as the iambos.¹ Choeroboscus’ second etymology, which claims Hipponax as the εὔρετής of the iambos, is much more obscure, and raises many questions:

ἢ ἀπὸ Ἰάμβης τινὸς ἐτέρας, γραός, ἢ Ἰππῶναξ ὁ ἰαμβοποιὸς παρὰ θάλασσαν ἔρια πλουούσῃ συντυχῶν ἤκουσε τῆς σκάφης ἐφαψάμενος, ἐφ’ ἧς ἐπλυεν ἡ γραός, “ἄνθρωπ’, ἀπελθε, τὴν σκάφην ἀνατρέψεις,” καὶ συλλαβῶν τὸ ρηθὲν οὕτως ὠνόμασε τὸ μέτρον. ἄλλοι δὲ περὶ τοῦ χωλιάμβου τὴν ἱστορίαν ταύτην ἀναφέρουσι, γράφοντες τὸ τέλος τοῦ στίχου “τὴν σκάφην ἀνατρέψεις.”²

Although editors usually include this passage in their collections of testimonia about Hipponax, they apparently regard it as fictional, and therefore irrelevant to the Hipponactean corpus. It does not occur before Choeroboscus, though he makes it clear that the story is not original with him (ἄλλοι . . . τὴν ἱστορίαν ταύτην ἀναφέρουσι, 1.18).³ We ought, of course, to be suspicious of ancient testimonia

¹ Choeroboscus says that Iambe spontaneously used the meter that became known as the iambos (τῷ ῥυθμῷ τούτου τοῦ ποδὸς αὐτομάτως χρησαμένη). This detail is not mentioned in the Homeric hymn (and it would obviously be impossible for the hymn to record verbatim anything in the iambic meter). Choeroboscus either made up this part of the story on his own, or preserves another tradition that has Iambe use the iambic meter. On Iambe of the Homeric hymn as an aitiological figure of the iambos, cf. N. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 213–17.

² The third etymology offered is from the verb ἰαμβίζειν (cf. Aristotle *Po.* 1448b32).

³ The few later versions probably derive from Choeroboscus. The story is referred to three times in the scholia to Hephaestion. The fullest version is that quoted above and ascribed to Choeroboscus (testim. 21 Dg); cf. also 21a Dg (Choeroboscus in *Heph.* 5.4 p. 229.10–15 Consbruch) and 21b Dg (Schol. [B] *Heph.* 20.4 pp. 299.17–300.3 Consbruch). For other references to the story see Testim. 21c–d Degani. The 14th C. cod. Palat. 356 offers a slightly different version, on which see n. 10 below.

that claim to offer biographical information about poets. It is well known that ancient commentators, in their zeal to create a coherent image of a poet, often freely extrapolated information from poetic texts, whether by taking poetic narratives at face value or by creating whole fictions out of isolated verses.⁴ In the case of the Choeroboscus passage, since we know that by Hipponax' time the iambos was already a named genre (cf. Archilochus frag. 215W), it is absurd even to consider that the aition accurately describes the invention of the term "iambos." On the other hand, it is perfectly plausible that Hipponax *claimed* somewhere in his poetry to have encountered an Iambe, whom he then represented as the eponymous inspiration of his chosen genre. I believe, in fact, that both the way in which the scholium is related, and what we know of Hipponax' poetry makes this a distinct possibility. I shall argue, therefore, that Choeroboscus may preserve the vestige of an actual Hipponactean narrative in which the poet encountered the mythical Iambe in a scene of poetic initiation.

Choeroboscus is usually considered a reliable source for Hipponax.⁵ The verse that he quotes, however, has not found its way into the editions of Hipponax, presumably because it is not directly attributed to the poet, and because it seems to have been composed expressly for its relevance to the aition of the term "iambos." But in fact the great amount of detail in the aition, and its unexplained relevance for the naming of the "iambos," makes it unlikely that a commentator, eager to derive the term "iambos" at all costs from the noted iambographer Hipponax, simply made up both the verse and the elaborate scenario ascribed to it. We are left wondering, for example, why Hipponax is made to meet an old woman? Why is she washing wool by the sea? What motivated Hipponax to approach the woman and to touch her basin? What, moreover, was the poet doing by the sea in the first place? Such questions underscore emphatically that still more detail is missing from the account, which we might more reasonably expect to have originated in a complete poetic narrative rather than in the scholiastic tradition.

⁴ On the Archilochean vita-tradition, for example, cf. M. Lefkowitz, *The Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore 1982) 27–31. On the many absurdities in the vita-tradition of Hipponax, cf. E. Degani *Studi su Ipponatte* (Bari 1984) 20–24.

⁵ Six fragments in Degani's edition (5,8,18,34,45,46) derive solely from Choeroboscus, while another seven (3,73.3,78,105,120,129e,189), drawn from other authors, are corroborated by this scholiast.

Furthermore, what does Iambe's alleged response have to do with the term "iambos"? The scholiast says that when Hipponax heard Iambe's trimeter line ἄνθρωπ', ἀπελθε, τὴν σκάφην ἀνατρέπεις, he named the meter after her. Neither Choeroboscus' account nor the verse itself offer any means of deciding *why* Hipponax would have immortalized Iambe by attaching her name to the meter she uses. Perhaps we are supposed to imagine that Hipponax simply noticed that Iambe spoke in a meter that he too used, and decided to name it after her for no other reason. But this would leave the story with no real point: the commentator would have no reason to quote the line verbatim, and we would be left with a rather obscure aition, since the very act of quoting her leads us to assume that there is some connection between the incident, her retort, and the naming of the meter. While the verse could easily have been part of an iambographic *psogos*, it exhibits, as it stands, none of the direct personal abuse, obscenity, or vehemence that we (and ancient critics) associate with the genre. But since, in the hands of Hipponax, the iambos was a vehicle of vituperation and satire, there can be little doubt that Iambe's verse was supposed to illustrate the "iambic" abusiveness of Hipponax' poetry.⁶ Iambe's quoted verse could easily have been one line of an extended invective against Hipponax, and a few more lines would have made this clear. In such a case, we might imagine that the original author of the scholium had a whole passage in mind when recounting the story of Iambe and Hipponax, but cited only the one line, supposing that his audience would have recourse to a more complete text or would know the poem already.

⁶ Her phrase . . . τὴν σκάφην ἀνατρέπεις, if we imagine it as part of a larger passage in Hipponax, may contain an intentional *double entendre* that is essentially lost to us along with the context. Σκάφη, for example, meant a small boat as well as a basin, and Iambe may be punning on the two meanings (as in Aristophanes *Eq.* 1315). Ἀνατρέπω occurs as part of a common expression of "overturning a ship"; cf. Aeschines *Ctes.* 158.6 (with πλοῖον), Plato *Lg.* 641a (πλοῖα); 906e (ναῦς), D. *Phil.* 3.69.4 (σκάφος); Ar. *V.* 671, τὴν πόλιν ὑμῶν ἀνατρέψω, might suggest that Iambe plays on a "ship of state" metaphor. The σκάφη also became a religious icon from its use in the Panathenaic ritual wherein Athenian metics known as σκαφηφόροι carried offerings to Athena in σκάφαι (cf. Pfister, *RE* 3 A.2, cols. 443–45 s.v. "skaphephoroi"). No explicit connection with any of these associations, of course, is made in Iambe's verse, but the verse does have an enigmatic, almost oracular ring to it, that invites an explanation beyond the purely literal.

This would at any rate account for the insufficiency of the verse by itself as an explanation of the term “iambos.”

What, then, of the identity of Iambe herself? Could a Hipponactean Iambe really have been different from the Eleusinian one, as Choeroboscus claims (ἢ ἀπὸ Ἰάμβης τινὸς ἐτέρας, γραός)? Insofar as the story of Iambe’s abuse of Demeter functioned in antiquity as an aition of the poetic iambos (as Choeroboscus himself notes), and insofar as it is Iambe’s abusiveness that seems to have inspired the Hipponax of the Choeroboscus passage to name his poetry after her, it is unlikely that anyone reading this passage would have considered the Iambe referred to there to be any other than the Eleusinian one. At frag. 48 Dg, moreover, Hipponax seems to show an awareness of Eleusinian ritual (where he mentions the κυκεῶν—a well known Eleusinian sacrament),⁷ which makes it even easier to imagine in Hipponax a narrative concerning the Eleusinian Iambe.⁸ Even if he mentioned an Iambe without specifying that she was the figure of Eleusinian cult, he would doubtless have expected his audience to make such a connection.⁹ If Hipponax did not make such a connection explicit, this alone could account for the fact that the scholium considers the Hipponactean Iambe to be different from the Iambe of myth.¹⁰

⁷ As suggested by A. P. Burnett, *Three Archaic Poets* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983) 99.

⁸ As I have argued in “Hipponax 48 Dg. and the Eleusinian *Kykeon*” (*AJP* 108 [1987] 416–27), frag. 48 also seems to show that Hipponax was aware of the aitiological association between the poetic iambos and the Eleusinian Iambe.

⁹ Note that Choeroboscus specifies that Hipponax’ Iambe was a γραός. The Eleusinian Iambe was explicitly made an old woman at Philicus *Hymn to Demeter* (= *Supplementum Hellenisticum* frag. 680) v. 54, and pseudo-Apoll. *Bibl.* 1.5.1. C. Previtalli, in “Filico di Corcira e Callimaco,” (*SFIC* 41 [1969] 13–18) argues that Philicus’ portrait of Iambe is influenced by Callimachus’ Hecale, also an old woman. On several points his argument is persuasive, though it does not seem necessary to regard Iambe’s old age as a Hellenistic innovation.

¹⁰ It is also possible that our hypothetical passage came down in the scholiastic tradition in an incomplete form, perhaps excerpted only for the purpose of the aition. However Hipponax would have depicted his Iambe, it is unlikely that he would have intended his narrative to be taken literally. As we noted above, Hipponax certainly did not invent the term ἴαμβος, and it is absurd to think that he would not have known that the poetry he chose to write already was a distinct genre.

A passage in the XIV C. MS, cod. Pal. 356 (fol. 163^v; a fragment of Isaac Tzetzes’ commentary on Lycophron), offers a slightly different version of Choerobos-

The obscurity of the Choeroboscus scholium can best be explained, I believe, by supposing that it represents an incomplete report of a poetic narrative in Hipponax that included Iambe's (chol-) iambic admonishment quoted by Choeroboscus. It is reasonable, in turn, to conjecture that Hipponax employed such a scene to describe his initiation (possibly in a dream) into iambographic poetics.¹¹ Perhaps it was even intended as a parody of the kind of *Dichterweihe* that we find, for example, in Hesiod *Th.* 22–34.¹² It is true that Iambe is not, strictly speaking, a goddess, and in a scene of poetic initiation we would expect a divinity to appear to a mortal. But her function in a narrative involving Hipponax would be analogous to that of a goddess,¹³ as a figure of myth intimately associated with

cus' aition, which identifies the Iambe of the story as the Eleusinian one (though Hipponax is not named) and also states that the verse quoted is intended as mockery: Ἰάμβης τινός, ἥτις κατὰ τύχην ἐν Ἐλευσίῃ πρώτη τὸ τοῦ ἐξ αὐτομάτου ἐξέφερε τὸν διωθοῦντα πλύνουσαν αὐτὴν καταμωκησαμένη οὕτως ἐπιούσα· ἄ. α. τ. σ. ἀνατρέπεις· [interpunxi] ἔμοι μὲν ἀκαταθύμιος φαίνη. ἔργον δὲ μῶρον ἐκτελεῖς σκάφην τρέπων. Unfortunately, we cannot say whether this passage is a clumsy conflation of the details found in Choeroboscus, or whether it represents a more accurate report of an actual passage in Hipponax. I would like to think that the participle καταμωκησαμένη ('mocking') and the gloss ἔμοι . . . τρέπων indicate that the commentator is explaining a passage of Hipponax that he has in front of him, but I realize that these details could merely be an attempt to explain an unclear account such as we find in Choeroboscus. At any rate, the clarity of this passage shows just how incomplete and unsatisfying the Choeroboscus passage is as an aition.

¹¹ Choeroboscus mentions that some people regarded the story of Hipponax and Iambe as an aition for the *choliambic* meter. This version seems unlikely in view of the fact that there is no explicit motivation in the anecdote for calling the verse choliambic. It is hardly obvious that anyone hearing for the first time a choliambic verse-end would immediately think of the metaphor of lameness, and there seems to be nothing about the Iambe of the story to suggest it to Hipponax. I am inclined to think that the alternative choliambic verse arose from the ancient critical commonplace that Hipponax was the inventor of the choliamb (cf., e.g., Hipponax Testim. 24–27 Degani).

¹² On this and other passages of poetic initiation, cf. M. L. West, *Theogony* (Oxford 1966) 159–61. The encounter between Archilochus and the Muses on his way to the market, related by the Mnesiepes inscription (Testim. 4 Tarditi), would provide an intriguing example of a humorous initiation scene in archaic poetry, though it remains uncertain whether the story actually occurred in Archilochus' poetry.

¹³ Likewise, the encounter between Simichidas and the goatherd Lycidas in Theocritus VII is generally felt to be a parodistic scene of poetic initiation, where Lycidas, though a mortal in the poem, functions as the initiating divinity. Cf. G. Luck, "Zur Deutung von Theokrits Thalysien," *MH* 23 (1966) 186–89; G. Giangrande,

Demeter, she would remove the poem to a world of fantasy, and as such could easily be invested with powers of inspiration.¹⁴ The tongue lashing that Iambe gives Hipponax may therefore be seen as analogous to the derisive address to a mortal often associated with divine encounters.¹⁵ It would be typical of Hipponax to offer a banal, domestic inversion of an “epic” scene. Elsewhere, he seems to incorporate other characters of myth into narratives involving himself or his targets,¹⁶ and it would not be aberrant for him to depict himself interacting with the mythical Iambe. I would, therefore, include the verse attributed to her among the fragments of Hipponax. While it would certainly belong in a section of *Dubia*, at least there it would receive the consideration it deserves.

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“Théocrite, Simichidas, et les *Thalysies*,” *AC* 37 (1968) 491–533; F. Williams, “A Theophany in Theocritus,” *CQ* n.s. 21 (1971) 137–45; further bibliography in T. Choitz and J. Latacz, “Zum Gegenwärtigen Stand der ‘Thalysien’-Deutung,” *WürzJahr.* (Neue Folge) 7 (1981) 85–95.

¹⁴ In Philicus’ *Hymn to Demeter* (cf. n. 9 above) v.56–62, Iambe is made to speak playfully to the Nymphs and Graces (γελοῖος λόγος, 55), and to advise authoritatively on what to do about the grieving Demeter (. . .μη βάλλετε χόρτον αἰγῶν, || οὐ τόδε πεινῶντι θεῶι [. . .]..κον, ἀλλ’ ἀμβροσία γαστρὸς ἔρεισμα λεπτής. . .). This may reflect a tradition in which Iambe had a much more developed role than that found in the Homeric Hymn to *Demeter*. Hipponax too may have had recourse to such a tradition.

¹⁵ Cf. the Muses’ address to Hesiod, *Th.* 26–28 (with West’s note to Hesiod ad loc. for other examples of derogatory addresses). The aquatic locus of Hipponax’ encounter with Iambe may also be significant. On encounters with divinities at places with water, cf. Richardson (n. 1 above) 189–80. Such encounters usually occur at springs or wells, but cf. Odysseus’ meeting with Nausicaa at the sea shore in *Odyssey* 6, where, as Richardson notes (p. 180), he greets her as a *goddess*. Hipponax often parodies Homer, as, for example, in frags. 126, 48, and 77 Dg (see following note), and his encounter with Iambe washing her wool by the sea might very well have been modeled on the Nausicaa episode (she too, of course, was doing wash by the sea). As P. Bing has suggested to me, the fact that the meeting between Iambe and Hipponax occurs at the sea shore may even reflect the tradition that Iambe was from the Attic seaside deme Halimos (cf. Philicus *Hymn to Demeter* 54, and pseudo-Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.5.1). Pseudo-Apollod. connects Iambe’s mockery of Demeter specifically with the ritual jesting of the Thesmophoria, which may refer to the Thesmophoria at Halimos (a preliminary to the Athenian festival, cf. Richardson [n. 1 above] 214).

¹⁶ E.g., frag. 79.9: Λ’Ερμῆς δ’ ἐς Ἴππώνκτακος ἀκολουθήσας (on which see M. L. West, *Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus* (Berlin/New York 1974) 144. If the supplement is correct at frag. 77.4, βοῦ[παλος, we may have a narrative that includes Bupalus in an Odyssean scene. Cf. E. Lobel, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* 18 (1941) 67f.