

SHIP OR DRINKING-CUP?

THE MEANING OF *KANTHAROS* IN PHRYNICHUS, 15 KASSEL–
AUSTIN (= ATHEN. XI 474B)

By

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ABSTRACT: It has been argued – against other scholars’ opinion – that the noun *kantharos* in Phrynichus’ fr. 15 K.–A. could simply mean ‘ship’, as Athenaeus assumes while providing (*Deip.* XI 474b) a list of four quotations from comedy where this word is used, as he says, *epi ploiou*. Within the article the textual problem concerning the verb used in v. 2 has also been discussed, and the reading ἔπλησεν has been tentatively proposed.

In the section 473d–474e of Book XI of the *Deipnosophists* Athenaeus remarks on the *kantharos*. His comments are placed within the catalogue of drinking-cups. Under the heading *kantharos* Athenaeus assembles occurrences of this name in the literary sources and much of the material quoted is drawn from comedy. Although the author of the *Deipnosophists* devotes his attention to the drinking-cup here, at the beginning of the entry he says that the term *kantharos* is commonly used for ship (πλοίου ὄνομα κοινόν)¹. In his treatment of *kantharos* he extends the theme and lists four examples from comic sources where the word *kantharos* is used in the sense of ship (ἐπὶ πλοίου)². Although the details of the dramatic contexts of all passages quoted here are now obscure, in the three instances³ the name *kantharos* clearly denotes a ship.⁴ The passage from Phrynichus’ *Comastae* (15 Kassel–Austin), which succeeds the quotation from Sosicrates and precedes

¹ At the end of the entry Athenaeus mentions the third meaning of the *kantharos*, namely a broach worn by women, and points to Antiphanes’ *The Boeotian Woman* (62 K.–A.). On this word’s ambiguity, see Elderkin 1924: 101–103 and Radici Colace 1985.

² MS A omits this phrase.

³ Sosicrates, 2 K.–A.; Nicostratus, 9 K.–A.; Menander, 246 K.–A.

⁴ From among other places in Comedy, not quoted here by Athenaeus, where the noun *kantharos* undoubtedly denotes the ship, Aristophanes’ *Peace* 143 must be mentioned.

citations from plays by Nicostratus and Menander, poses, however, some problems. The two verses quoted here (as printed by Kassel–Austin⁵) are:

εἶτα κεραμεύων ἄν οἴκοι σωφρόνως Χαίρέστρατος
ἐκατὸν <ἄν> τῆς ἡμέρας †ἔκλαιεν† οἴνου κανθάρους.

The editors⁶ of Athenaeus, modern authors⁷ and scholars commenting on Greek playwrights' extant texts⁸ generally agree that the quotation of Phrynichus is incompatible with other items in the list of examples, and that Athenaeus' decision to illustrate the use of the noun *kantharos* in the meaning of ship with Phrynichus' words is to be explained as his misreading of the dramatic context of the play⁹.

Although the accuracy of Athenaeus' quotations and his ways of understanding his originals' point is not verifiable in most of the instances known to us only through the *Deipnosophists*, it would be prudent in diagnosing his choices not to forget that in the case of Greek comedy he builds his text on the scholarly Hellenistic tradition, which gave a detailed analysis of the comic material¹⁰. It seems that in the case of Phrynichus' comedy the mention of Chaerestratus the potter could hardly be considered the decisive argument in support of the assumption that the *kantharos* must mean a drinking-cup here. Moreover, the transmitted text itself presents difficulties and is too insecure at the crucial point for certainty on the interpretation of the passage. The problem of the meaning of the *kantharos* within Phrynichus' fragment as well as the point of the joke made here by the comic poet seems then worth reconsidering.

The text in line 2 is uncertain and the verb which occurs here has been obelised by Kassel and Austin. Marcianus' reading (ἔκλαιεν) gives rise to suspicion and Dindorf restores the Attic form ἔκλαεν; others conjecturally – without a word of palaeographical justification – restore the verb in various ways: Casaubon¹¹

⁵ Kassel, Austin 1989: 402.

⁶ Kaibel 1966: 41; Cherubina 2001: 1170, n. 4: "Il frammento sembra però fuori posto in un contesto di citazioni in cui il termine κάνθαρος indica la nave"; Gulick 1995: 92.

⁷ Stephanus 1841: 933: "Κάνθαρος [...] poculi genus [de quo copiose exposuit Athen. 11, p. 473, 474, allatis Phrynichi, Eubuli, Alexidis aliorumque Comicoꝝ locis]".

⁸ Cf. Olson 1998: 96.

⁹ Cf. Arnott's general remarks on Athenaeus' inaccuracy in the interpretation of the dramatic contexts of quoted comic passages, 1996: 53: "...his interpretations of subject matter and dramatic context are frequently unsatisfactory". Arnott's evidence for this opinion are, however, Alexis' fragments only. Cf. *ibid.*, 236 f.

¹⁰ On this problem, see Wilkins 2000: XXI f. Although Athenaeus' reliability cannot be checked in the case of a good number of instances, his dependence on Hellenistic scholarship is undoubtful. Cf. Olson 2006: XV and 2007: 29 f.

¹¹ See Schweighäuser 1804: 122.

suggests εἴλκεν (later accepted also by Dobree¹²), Letronne's correction¹³ is ἔκκεν. Herwerden¹⁴ prefers ἐπλαττεν, whereas Kock¹⁵ proposes ἔλαπτεν. The *lectio* given by MSS as well as conjectures imply that the *kantharoi* mentioned in the passage should be identified as pieces of pottery (large drinking-cups¹⁶) manufactured by Chaerestratus or used by him. Εἴλκεν and ἔλαπτεν, advanced respectively by Casaubon and Kock, make Chaerestratus a drunkard enjoying guzzling an enormous amount of goblets: the mention of a hundred¹⁷ *kantharoi* daily drunk up by him hyperbolically exemplifies his bibulous character¹⁸. A similar interpretation of the possible meaning of the fragment has been recently advanced by John Wilkins¹⁹ who ingeniously suggests ἐκέλσεν or ὄκειλεν and argues that that verb would introduce the nautical metaphor of the symposium²⁰ – a commonplace going back to archaic poetry²¹. Letronne's solution, accepted by Meineke²² but dismissed by Kaibel²³, calls attention to Chaerestratus' overproductivity: having daily fired a hundred earthenware *kantharoi* in the kiln, he could go down in the book of records. Herwerden's ἐπλαττεν produces similar implications. If we follow the *lectio* given by MSS, the preserved fragment is a portion of the description of wretched Chaerestratus the potter who – for reasons unknown to us – desperately cries bitter tears; the strength of his despair is indicated by the mention of a hundred *kantharoi* filled up with his tears²⁴.

¹² Dobree 1832: 332.

¹³ I quote it after Kassel, Austin 1989: 402.

¹⁴ Herwerden 1855: 28.

¹⁵ Kock 1880.

¹⁶ On the shape of the *kantharos*, see Kanowski 1984, s.v. *Kantharos*.

¹⁷ Dobree blows the punch line of the joke exchanging εκατὸν <ἀν> τῆς ἡμέρας for πένθ' ἐκάστης ἡμέρας.

¹⁸ See Schweighäuser 1804: 122, who enumerates scholars' proposals how to understand the joke: "Bonus Chaerestratus [...] plus vini biberat, quam vasculis faciendis lucri fecerat".

¹⁹ He proposed his emendation when commenting (private discussion) on the first draft of my paper. I would like to thank him warmly for the permission to mention his suggestions and for all helpful commentary on my text.

²⁰ It is known also from other comic sources, cf. Xenarchus, fr. 10 K.–A.

²¹ Wilkins proposes to translate: "Then at home Chaerestratus the potter used prudently to steer on to the shore a hundred schooners of wine a day". He comments: "Whether the ships landed safely or were wrecked ('run aground', the more likely, cf. Athenaeus 2.37b–e), only the full text of the passage would reveal".

²² Meineke 1839: 486.

²³ Kaibel 1966: 41: "sententiae acumen non perspicio".

²⁴ Gulick (1995: 93) hesitates over the meaning of the *kantharoi*. Friedrich (2000: 33) seems to understand it 'drinking-cup' when translating "Darauf würde wohl Chairestratos zu Hause töpfernd mit Bedacht/ hundert *kantharoi* für Wein am Tag mit Tränen füllen". The same applies to the newest translation by Olson (2009: 301): "Then Chaerestratus, modestly producing pots at home, would be †waiting† 100 *kantharoi* of wine per day".

The point of the joke, based on Letronne's and Herwerden's conjectures, seems to score over its rivals because it directly relates Chaerestratus' doings to his profession, which appears to be an important element in his presentation here (v. 1: κεραιεύων). Other conjectures, although have their merits, depart from the wit played on Chaerestratus' occupation. And the relevance of individuals' occupation to the jokes made of them has been acknowledged as one of the important comic devices in Attic comedy²⁵. Although the general idea of Chaerestratus' being ridiculed here as an overzealous potter, an eager beaver who for some reasons (for money?) produces an infinite number²⁶ of vessels (probably of poor quality) may be defended, the form of the expressions proposed by scholars seems, however, highly unlikely. Verbs such as ἔπλαττεν or ἔκαεν make the adnominal genitive οἴνου objectionable²⁷ and could hardly be assigned to Phrynichus. I suggest that he is perhaps more likely to have written ἔπλησεν οἴνου κανθάρους. This phrase seems to be stylistically more attractive²⁸: the aorist indicative with ἄν²⁹ may have a frequentative sense³⁰ here, implying that Chaerestratus "used to fill up a hundred (= very many) merchant-ships (*kantharoi*) with wine", i.e. used to produce daily so many jars for transporting wine that a hundred (= very many) ships might have been loaded with this cargo. The phrase πιμπλάναι with a substantive designating a thing holding ingredients as a direct object + adnominal genitive denoting the content, attested at Herodotus I 194 (καλάμης πλήσαντες πᾶν τὸ πλοῖον τοῦτο [...] φορτίων πλήσαντες) in the sense of 'loading the cargo onto the ship', argues that it was in use at least in the fifth century BCE. The similar use of the phrase – pertaining not to loading a ship with a cargo but to filling the table with food and drink – occurs also in Homer (*Od.* V 93: τράπεζαν ἀμβροσίης πλήσσασα; XVII 410 f.: πλήσαν [...] πῆρην σίτου καὶ κρείων). Phrynichus seems to employ a kind of metonymy, saying that Chaerestratus filled merchant-ships³¹ (*kantharoi*) with

²⁵ See Sommerstein 1996: 330: "The idols of the market are a group whose significance for comedy has not always been realised. [...] Most of them are leading figures in one or another trade or profession. [...] It is as if each occupation had an acknowledged star figure who was as it were synonymous with the occupation in the public mind". See also *ibid.*, 350 f. The verb κεραιεύειν on which the joke of a certain Cephalus is built has been attested by Aristophanes, *Eccl.* 252 f. See also the scholium *ad loc.* The jesting attitude adopted by Comedy towards the traders and craftsmen is attested by the extant material from comic poets. Cf. Olson's enumeration of the professions mocked in comic plays (2007: 473).

²⁶ For ἑκατόν as a word denoting generally a large number, cf. *Il.* II 448; XIV 181.

²⁷ Cf. Kock (as quoted by Kassel and Austin): "pocula enim multi, vini pocula nemo umquam figulus fecit".

²⁸ The error of the scribe is, however, hard to explain palaeographically.

²⁹ Aptly added by Erfurdt 1812: 467.

³⁰ For the iterative use of aorist with ἄν denoting customary action see Kühner 1898: 211. See also Goodwin 1998: 56 (§ 162), 86 (§ 246). Cf. *Ar. Pl.* 982 f.: ἀργυρίου δραχμᾶς ἄν ἦτησ' εἴκοσι.

³¹ For the ship *kantharos*, see Torr 1964: 107 and Casson 1971: 343.

wine. He substituted containers (jars for transporting wine) for content itself³² (wine), intending the phrase to mean: “he loaded a hundred ships with jars filled with wine”. The strong hyperbolic colouring of jokes made by Attic playwrights belongs to the domain of comic stylistics³³. Pherecrates’ nautical hyperbole (1 K.–A.) could be a good comparison in this place, since it explores the same idea which has been used by Phrynichus in building the metaphor³⁴. Here Phrynichus’ hyperbolic imagery is comicized not only through the ambiguous ἑκατόν (on the one hand it can be understood as the pedantic – though unrealistic – concretisation of the number of merchant-ships³⁵, on the other – as vaguely denoting a huge quantity of them³⁶), but also through the sarcastic and ironic³⁷ σωφρόνως, which – by seemingly exposing Chaerestratus’ moderation in making pottery – cleverly emphasises his enthusiasm for dizzying pace of work.

In view of what has been said above, it seems safe to assume that Athenaeus’ way of understanding Phrynichus’ use of the word *kantharos* (in the meaning of ship) – though it did not satisfy many scholars – is evidently right. Moreover, if I am correct in suggesting that in the passage in question Chaerestratus is an object of ridicule because of his unacceptable and absurdly deviant massive production of jars for transporting wine by sea or river, the point of the joke concerning Chaerestratus, one of the *Phrynichokomodomenoi*, does not appear unclear³⁸, although the serious distortion of the text will ever prevent us from forming a definitive judgment on this matter.

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³² Cf. Xen. *Hell.* I 1, 35: πλοῖα πολλὰ σίτου. See also Krüger, Cooper 1998: 186 (§ 47.8.4).

³³ Cf. e.g. hyperbolic illustration of the effects of heroes’ abandoning themselves to homosexual pleasures (Eubulus, 80 K.–A.), or that of dangers of meeting fishmongers (Antiphanes, 16 K.–A.). Cf. also the end of the cook’s monologue in Archedicus, 2. K.–A. (a one-time action of the clever cook guarantees continuity of his hiring), or the comic descriptions of a utopian abundance of eating (Telesicles, 1 K.–A., Pherecrates, 113 K.–A.).

³⁴ (A): ἐγὼ κατεσθίω μόλις τῆς ἡμέρας
πένθ’ ἡμιμέδιμν’, ἐὰν βιάζωμαι. (B): μόλις;
ὡς ὀλιγόσιτος ἦσθ’ ἄρ. ὅς κατεσθίω
τῆς ἡμέρας μακρὰς τριήρους σιτία.

³⁵ We do not know what the carrying capacity of the *kantharos* was. But even if we accept for it the lower limit established by Casson (1956: 234) for the ships of the smallest size (what seems impossible since Nicostratus, 9 K.–A. calls the *kantharos* εἰκόσορος, which usually refers to a large merchant-ships, see Torr 1964: 107 and Casson 1971: 343; cf. also Pherecrates, 152 K.–A., who suggests the considerable size of ships transporting wine) as 80 tons (3000 talents), it emerges that the mention of a hundred *kantharoi* loaded with containers made by one man within a day must have been intended to produce a distinct hyperbolic effect.

³⁶ As in Ar. *Pax* 756: ἑκατόν [...] κεφαλαὶ κολάκων.

³⁷ Cf. Cherubina 2001: 1170, n. 4: “‘sobriamente’ ha chiaro senso ironico”. See also Gulick 1995: 93.

³⁸ As Harvey 2000: 98 assumes.

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