Archilochus 196A (West)

“The Cologne Epode”

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The “Cologne Epode” is the longest extant fragment of poetry attributed to Archilochus of Paros. The poem survives on a fragment of papyrus (P. Colon. inv. 7511) that was discovered in the 1960s among the wrappings of an Egyptian mummy (c. first–second century CE) from Abusir el Melek then held at the University of Cologne (Bremer 24). The surviving portion of the poem begins in the middle of a dialogue between an unidentified maiden and the poet, and concludes with a description of their erotic encounter.

Archilochus lived during the middle of the seventh century BCE. He was recognized in antiquity as the first poet after Homer and Hesiod. His poetry, which was written in the Old Ionic dialect, shares many features with his epic predecessors. But Archilochus was the earliest surviving Greek poet to draw inspiration for his poetry almost exclusively from his own life. A rich biographical tradition developed around Archilochus’ life and exploits; but we should remember that many of these details are likely fiction derived from his poems (Lefkowitz 181-82). Archilochus was said to be the son of Telesicles, an important figure on Paros who led an expedition to colonize Thasos (c. 680 BCE). In his poems, Archilochus characterizes himself as a poet and a warrior (e.g. fr. 1), and he was said to have been killed in battle or a brawl by a Naxian named Caldonas, who was subsequently denied entry into the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi for killing “the servant of the Muses” (Galen, Exhortation to Learning 9). Archilochus was revered (and occasionally criticized) in antiquity as the inventor of iambos, the poetry of playful censure and vicious blame. Several poems, including the Cologne Epode, mock Neoboule and members of her family. According to legend, the two were betrothed. When but her father, Lycambes, ended their engagement, a furious Archilochus savaged the family in verse until Lycambes and his daughters hung themselves from the shame. But it is likely that Lycambes (“Mr. Wolfy”) and Neoboule (“Ms. Fickle”) were not real figures from Archilochus’ life, but stock characters from the iambic tradition (West 27).

With its publication in 1974 (Merkelback-West) the Cologne Epode “unleashed a storm of controversy, much of it centered on the description of a sexual act in the final lines” (Gibert 67). Davenport asks whether “these lines of Archilochos [were] sung in barracks, on the march, in village squares, at singing contests?” and whether “they [are] satire or salacity, private or public?” We are left to wonder whether the poem depicts an innocent seduction or a violent act of sexual revenge directed at Neobole and her family? Is it a scene from the iambic tradition? Or from the life of the poet? Scholars have examined the dialogue between the speaker and the girl he seduces in light of contemporary, archaic Greek social norms (see Van Sickle) and the multiple roles of women in archaic Greek society (see Gibert). It provides valuable evidence for Archilochus’ metrical practice (Bremer 51-58) and his composition of dramatic vignettes with multiple characters.

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A Note on the Narrative Structure and Text of the Poem: the first five lines preserve the conclusion of a speech by a maiden, who is usually identified as the sister of Neoboule. The maiden counsels abstinence before marriage and offers Neoboule as a woman who may be sexually available to the male narrator. The male narrator responds in vv. 6–27. After suggesting that there are ways to experience sexual pleasure apart from intercourse, he then proceeds to revile Neoboule as unworthy of his affections. The final eight lines describe the sexual encounter between the maiden and the poet. Unless otherwise indicated, the text follows Campbell 1994.

Meter: 3ia | D | 2ia. This poem is an example of a tristichic epode, in which lines of iambic trimeter alternate with lines that combine a dactylic hemiepes and an iambic dimeter.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{3ia} & \quad \text{3ia} \\
\text{D} & \quad \text{2ia}
\end{align*}
\]

* Note: the fragment begins with the dactylic line.
“pámpan ἀποσχόμενος Ἰσον δὲ τόλμησον ποθεῖν.  ἐὶ δ’ ὅν ἐπείγει καὶ σε θυμός ἰδόει,  ἡ νῦν μέγ’ ἰμείρει τάμον  καλὴ τέρεινα παρθένος. ὁδικῶ δὲ μι[ν]  ἔδω ἁμομον ἐχειν τὴν δὴ σὺ ποῖη̣[σει φιλήν.]”

Τοσαυτ’ ἐφόνει· τὴν δ’ ἐγὼ ἀνταμε[βομην].

“Ἀμφἰμεδοῦς θύγατερ, ἐσθλῆς τε καὶ [μακαρτάτης] γυναικός, ἴὑν γῆ κατ’ εὐρώεσσα ἐξεια, τ’ ἔρψεις εἰς θεής πολλὰ νέοισιν ἀνδράσιν παρέξ τὸ θείου χρήμα· τὸν χις ἀρκέσει[ν].”

ταῦτα δ’ ἐπ’ ἰσχυρίας εἶθετ’ ἄν μελανθῆ τι μοι γένυς.
έγώ τε καὶ σὺ σῦν θεός βουλεύσομεν. 12

[πε]ῖσομαι ὃς με κέλευσαι: πολλόν μ᾽ ἐξοπλώνει πόθος. 13

θρηγκοῦ δ᾽ ἐνισχθεὶ καὶ πολέμων ὑποψ[θάνει] 14

μὴ τι μέγαπρε, φύλη - σχῆσω γὰρ ἐς ποι[φόρους] 15

κήπους. τὸ δὴ νῦν γνώθι· Νεοβουλί[ν] μὲν ἄν 16

ἄλλος ἀνήρ ἐχέτω· αἰαί, πέπειρα δ[η] πέλει, 17

ἀν[θός] δ᾽ ἀπερρήμακε παρθενή[ψε] 18

καὶ [α] χάρις ἣ πρὶν ἐπήν· κόρον γάρ οὐ κ[ατέσχε πώ,] 19

[ήβ]ης δὲ μέτρ' ἔφηνε μανιόλας γυνή· 20

ἐς] κόρακας ἀπεφέ: μὴ τοῦτ' ἐφείτ' ἄν[αξ θεόν] 21

ὅπ[λος] ἐγώ γυναῖκα τοιάντιν ἔχουν 22

γεί[τ]οσι χάρμε' ἐσομαι: πολλὸν σὲ βουλο[μαῖ πάρος]. 23

12 έγώ τε καὶ σὺ the complete subject of βουλεύσομεν, "I and you." σῦν + dat. with. θεός οὗ τὸ god; here, likely generic, rather than in reference to a specific deity. βουλέω 1. pl. fut. indic. act. to plan.

13 πείθω 1. sing. fut. mid. indic. to persuade; in the mid. to obey. ὃς + indic. introduces substantive clause explaining what will be obeyed. κελεύω 2. sing. pres. indic. mid. to command. πολλῶν adv. a lot μ᾽ = me. ἐποτρύνω 3. sing. pres. indic. act. to incite; to rouse. πόθος ὁν ὁ a desire for what is absent or lost; a longing.

14 θρηγκός οὗ τοῦ top of a wall; cornice; here, euphemism for breasts. ἐνερθε + gen. below; beneath. πύλη ἃς τόν (Ion.) gate; here, euphemism for the female sexual organ. ὑποφθάνω 3. sing. pres. act. indic. hasten before.

15 μεγαρός 2. sing. pres. imperat. act. to withhold; to begrudge. τι indefin. pron. at all; anything. ἔχω 1. sing. fut. act. indic.; a metaphor drawn from sailing or horsemanship, to guide, to land, to turn. ποιφρός ὁν τοὺς grass-bearing.

16 κῆπος ὁν τοὺς garden, here euphemistically. γηγνώσκω 2. sing. aor. imperat. act. to know; to perceive. Νεοβουλίη ἃς τήν a female proper name; the former fiancée of the poet.

17 ἰλλος η ο ὁ other. ἔχω 3. sing. pres. imperat. act. "to have for a wife." αἰαί exclamation of lament. πέπειραι α ὁν η (over) ripe, as in too old. πέλω 3. sing. pres. indic. act. to be; to become.

18 ἰλλός οὐς τὸ nom. flower; bloom. ἀπορρέω 3. sing. perf. indic. act. fall away; decline; perish. παρθένους ὁν τὸ nom. of or belonging to a maiden.

19 χάρις τος ἢ favor; grace; loveliness. ἦ rel. pron. πρίν adv. before. ἐπειμί 3. sing. impf. act. indic. to be on; to remain. κόρος ὁν τὸν satiety; enough. κατέχει 3. sing. imperf. act. indic. πῶ particle, usually with a negative up to this time; yet; at all.

20 ἰῆμ ης τῆς youth; young girl. μέτρου ὁ τά measure; restraint; standard. φαινώ 3. sing. aor. act. indic. to bring to light; to exhibit. μανιόλας οὐ ἡ raving; frenzied.

21 κόραξ ακος τοῖς ravens or carrion-crows. ἔς κόρακας ἀπέχει "go to hell!" as though said to Neoboule. ἐφίμη 3. sing. aor. opt. act. to send against; to command; the reading ἐφείττε was suggested by Marcovich. ἄνας ἀνακτος ὁ lord, Zeus.

22 ὅπως conj. + part. in order that. ἔχω ὁ part. pres. act.

23 γείτχον ονος τοῖς neighbors. χάρμα ματος, τὸ acc. joy; delight; (malignant) pleasure. εἰμὶ 1. sing. fut. mid. ind. πάρος adv. in preference; instead.
μὲν γὰρ οὖν ἄπιστος οὖν διπλῶς. 24

ή δὲ μάλ᾽ ὀξυτέρη, πολλοὺς δὲ ποιήτα[ι φίλους]. 25

δέδουσ᾽ ὅποις μὴ τυφλὰ κάλλιτημερα 26

σπερνηθεὶς ἐπεικόμενος τῶς ὀσπερ ἢ κ’ ὑσταν τέκω." 27

tοσ’ ἐφόνημεν παρθένον δ᾿ ἐν ἀνθίζει[σιν] 28

τηλεθάσσει λαβὼν ἐξίκλινα: μαλθακὴ δὲν μὴν 29

χλαίνῃ καλύψας, αὐχέν’ ἀγκάλης ἐχὼν 30

δείματι παυ[σ]μέθην τῶς ὀστύ νέβρ[ο]ν εἰλόμην 31

μαζ' ὑπερείμεν θεριώς ἐφηκάμην 32

ἑπὶρ ἐφίγνου νέον ἤβης ἐπήλυσις χρόν. 33

ἀπαν τές σώμα καλὸν ἀμφαφώμενος 34

λευκὸν ἀφήκα μένος, ἔπιστα ἐπισιᾶ[ον] τριχός. 35

24 ἄπιστος οὐν ή not to be trusted; faithless. διπλῶς η οὐν ή deceitful; treacherous; double-minded.

25 ἡ δὲ... δὲ establishes a strong contrast between the maiden and Neoboule. μάλ᾽ = μάλα adv. very; exceedingly.

26 δέδουσ 3. sing. perf. act. indic. to be afraid; to fear; δέδουσ = δέδουκε. ὅποις conj. introducing fear clause.


28 φινεόω 1. sing. imperf. act. indic. to speak. ἐν + dat. in. ἄνθος οὐς τοίς.

29 τηλεθαίσσει τοίς (Ion.) part. pres. act. to flourish; to bloom. λαμβανὼν ὅ part. aor. act. to take; to seize;

30 διπλὸς ἡ ὅν τά acc. blind; dark; hidden. κάλλιτήμερα = καὶ ἀλιτήριος οὖν τά untimely;

31 ήπερ conj. in the same way as; where. φαίνοι 3. sing. aor. ind. act. to reveal. ἔπιστα ἐπισιᾶς οὐς ἦ

32 ἄπας αὰν τό acc. whole; all; entire. σώμα ματιῶ τό body. ἀμφαφώ ὅ part. pres. mid. to touch; to feel all around.

33 λευκὸς ή οὖν τό acc. light; white. ἀφίμη 1. sing. perf. ind. act. to let loose; to discharge; to exhaust.

34 λέυκος οὐς τὸ might; force. ξανθὸς ή ὅν τῆς yellow; golden. ἐπισιᾶς ὅ + gen. part. pres. act. to touch lightly. θριχὸς τριχὸς τῆς hair.
Bibliography


