

## A chorus for Kybele in a new papyrus from the Red Sea

Heidelberg colleagues Rodney Ast and Julia Lougovaya (AL) have published in a recent *GRBS*<sup>1</sup> a piece of papyrus which contains two fragmentary columns of Greek verse. The writing they date to later first century BC, describing it as “competent, though not particularly elegant.” In it they identify as theme dances for Kybele but make no suggestion as to its literary age or authorship.<sup>2</sup> They tentatively identify the metre, at least of the first column, as “dactylic,” but call the metre of the second column “difficult to ascertain.”<sup>3</sup> They notice *ekthesis* in column two for the last two verses which, together with the “wavy line” before them, probably indicates a change of metre. In fact the verses of the second column (before the *ekthesis*) are recognizably anapaestic; that will help with a possible identification of the genre later.

There is one long main fragment (a), two small snippets (b and c), neither placed with certainty, although the authors suggest that fr. c might be placed to the right of lines 11-13 of column ii. The verso contains a few legible letters, but they have not been connected by the authors with the recto. The first thing to do is establish as much text as possible from the main fragment. In so doing I have sometimes been able to move the discussion on somewhat from the *editio princeps*, and have concentrated on these points. I take their commentary as read. Rodney Ast and Julia Lougovaya also organized a seminar in Heidelberg in summer 2014, at which some of the issues were discussed.

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1. AST, LOUGOVAYA (2015).

2. Apart from the remark on p. 664 that the “vocabulary is rather post-Classical:” which I do not find.

3. On p. 658 they mention that lines 3-4 “look like anapests.”

# 1. TEXT AND SELECT *APPARATUS*

## col. i lyric dactyls

.....]..!  
 .....].  
 .....]  
 .....] διέπουσι  
 5 .....] τάν μογεράν  
 ...].....[..]ας  
 κερνοφόρο[υς] Κυβέλης  
 ἢι πολλάκις ἀμετέρους  
 ὄστλιγγες ἐγύμνασαν  
 10 καὶ ῥαδιναῖς παλάμαις  
 λάλα κύμβαλα  
 πρὸς Φρύγα λωτὸν ἐπλά[γη]

## col. ii probably anapaestic dimeters and monometers

.....]θαν[  
 .....]γαπα[  
 .].[.]κεινο[...][μ[  
 τ]οῦ δ' ὀφθα[λ]μὸν βλ[οσυρόν ~ ~ -  
 5 μάλ' ἐροί τε καλύπτρη[- ~ ~ -  
 φ[ο]βερή τε δρακοντόζ[ων ~ ~ -  
 <...φοβερόν δ' ἔτ' ἐπετ[ρ >  
 δ... στεφανηφό[ρο  
 σε[ίριον] αὐτοῦ  
 10 ἄσθμά τε ν[...][τ[  
 καὶ θαμί[ν...][ηλη[  
 τάττομ[...].αναμ[  
 ταῦτ' ἀν[...].μν[  
 δέξαι β[α]σιλεῦ  
 15 σα[  
 — (diplē)  
 εαντ[.  
 τ[

## col. i

7 Furley: κερνοφορω[.] *uel* κερνοφορο (*in app.*) AL  
 9 Furley: ἐγύμνασα AL

## col. ii

4 τ]οῦδ' *uel* ψευδ- *in. possis:* ]οῦδ' AL  
 8 Furley: στε φασφο.[ AL  
 12 ]ἀναμ[ *leg.* Furley: τανμο AL

## 2. NOTES

### col. i

- 4 διέπουσι, “they govern/frequent” or perhaps dative participle. As AL say, the prefix of the verb is not certain, but δι- suits the traces well. The verb is commonly used in hymnic texts of a god’s frequenting a favourite cult place.
- 5 ]ταν μογεράν, “the unfortunate/tormented one (female).” AL suggest alternatives to the article (ὅταν, ὁπότεαν), but the article in this position is much more likely. The Doric ā is conspicuous.
- 6 ]ας. The penultimate letter is nearly certainly alpha,<sup>4</sup> as it has to be a vowel, and the traces only suit alpha. Before that a long descender, either rho or phi, with perhaps two missing letters inbetween: a word like χορείας would suit.
- 7 κερνοφόρο[υς]. The ending is, to a degree, open (see AL). However, the gap before kappa of Kybele is too wide for just one letter, so an ending -ου agreeing with Kybele is more or less ruled out. I suggest that the ending was -ους, connecting with ἀμετέρους in the following line: “our *kernophoroi*” in the sense “the *kernophoroi* among us” or “we, the *kernophoroi* of Kybele.” AL argue that the *kernophoroi* are probably human servants of Kybele rather than applying to the divinity herself. They adduce much material in support of the connection between the *kernos* in the cult of the *Mater Oreia/Megale*.<sup>5</sup> To this one can add the *synthema* of the Mysteries of Deo and Meter-Attis which contained the words ἐκ τυμπάνου ἔφαγον, ἐκ κυμβάλου ἔπιον, ἐκερνοφόρησα, ὑπὸ τὸν παστὸν ὑπέδυν, “I have eaten from the *tympanon*, I have drunk from the cymbal, I have carried the *kernos*, I have descended into the bridal chamber.”<sup>6</sup> In Nicander *Alexipharmaca* 217 and Hesychius *s.v.* κερνοφόρος the *kernos*-carrying priestess of Rhea is female, but here they must be male if the connection with ἀμετέρους is correct. Roman *galli* (and their Greek equivalent γάλλοι) were clearly male (or castrated males!).<sup>7</sup> Athenaios 14.629d (§27.9) Kaibel refers to the κερνοφόρος as a manic dance (μανιώδης ὄρχησις).
- 9 ὀστλιγγες ἐγύμνασαν. Surely one of the most interesting expressions in this new text. ὀστλιγγες is a rare word, occurring in poetry barely a couple of times; its meaning is defined by ancient lexica as referring to something waving or curly, such as locks of human hair (Callimachus), tendrils of a vine, tongues of flame (Apollonius).<sup>8</sup> I believe it is a “shape” or “visual impression” word, like English “tendrill,” or “tongue,” and could be applied to various concrete instances of the appropriate shape. AL believe the meaning is “I tossed around my curls,” taking ἀμετέρους with ὀστλιγγες. They acknowledge that the disagreement in case ending and gender of these two words is “a problem,” but see no alternative. In fact such a disagreement of endings is unlikely for a native speaker and we must look for a better solution. ὀστλιγγες should be the subject of the sentence; there is a small line above the sigma of the ending of ἐγύμνασαν; it may originally have been longer, extending over the alpha at the end, but have become rubbed. The line, in my opinion, is the common abbreviation in Greek papyri for an omitted nu of an ending.

4. ἄλλες *e.g.* is unlikely.

5. And see GASPARRO (1985), p. 69.

6. Eusebius, *Praeparatio evangelica* 2.3.18; Clemens Alex., *Protrepticus* 2.15.3.

7. For a *gallos* in a Greek novel (Diogenes?) see PARSONS (1971).

8. A.R. 1.1296-1297: Ἡ καὶ ἐς Ἀγνιάδην Τίφυν θόρε, τῷ δὲ οἱ ὅσσε / ὀστλιγγες μαλεροῖο πυρὸς ὡς ἰνδάλλοντο.

If the nu is restored we get an ending -αν which suits the verb: “the ὀστλίγγες have often exercised our bearers of the kernos for Kybele.” What these ὀστλίγγες refer to can, I think, be deduced from cult practice for the Great Mother/Kybele: I suggest they refer to the “tongues” or “tendrils” of the lash used by priests of Meter (Galli) to scourge themselves. Erykios, *Anthologia Graeca* 6.234 refers in line 4 of his epigram to “the whip of strung astragaloi” (καὶ μάστιγιν τὴν πολυστράγαλον), which the *gallus* hangs up together with his *tympana* as a sign of service done.<sup>9</sup> This sense of ὀστλίγγες suits the verb ἐγύμνασαν well, I think: “exercise” in the sense of *askesis*, rigorous endurance in the service of the goddess. The scourging “tests” or “proves” the devotee. Moreover, γυμνάζω has the connotation of “train naked” (LSJ *s.v.* I) and an attested metaphorical sense of “wear out, harass” (LSJ *s.v.* II); both aspects would suit the endurance test of scourging the naked upper body. In the next sequence of lines the poet refers to another defining attribute of the devotee to Meter: the hand cymbals or castanets, which he clashes “with rapid hand-movements” (ῥαδίναις παλάμαις). We can, then, attempt a translation of these lines: “... our *kernos*-bearing devotees of Kybele, in whose service (ἤ) the tongues (of the lash) have often tested [them], and the chattering castanets been struck by their rapid hand-movements.” The use of ἀμετέρους indicates that the speaker of the verses identifies himself (themselves) with the members of Kybele’s cult. It is a remark of Henrichs that Meter is seldom referred to by her name Kybele in cult, this being more the preserve of literary references.<sup>10</sup> These are pointers toward a chorus singing these verses in a literary composition.

- 11 ἁλά κύμβαλα. Cf. Erykios (above) line 5 (appositely quoted by AL).
- 12 ἐπλά[γ]η, “were struck” (˘ – – with Doric α for ἐπλήγῃ), from πλήσσω, but as AL say, some other verb might have stood here; they mention πλαταγέω, παταγέω, παίω, of which the first two do not seem to fit metrically. One might also try something like ἐπάχει, “resounded” (from ἐπηχέω cf. Euripides, *Cyclops* 426; Callistratus, *Statuarum descriptiones* 1 refers to the musical accompaniment of the *aulos* as ἐπήχησις). The letter after pi looks most like lambda, but alpha remains a possibility. After that a minimal trace. In lyrical metres the -πλ- presumably can, but need not, “close” the syllable (which by position here must be short), or “make position,” as one used to say. For the description here, cf. Diogenes, *Semele* fr. 1 (*TrGF I*, 45 F1 Snell):

καίτοι κλύω μὲν Ἀσιάδος μιτρηφόρους  
 Κυβέλης γυναικάς, παῖδας ὀλβίων Φρυγῶν,  
 τυπάνοισι καὶ ῥόμβοισι καὶ χαλκοκτύπων  
 ῥόμβοις βρεμούσας ἀντίχερσι κυμβάλων·  
 ...  
 σοφὴν θεῶν ὕμνωδὸν ἱατρὸν θ' ἄμα<sup>11</sup>.

9. Cf. Apuleius, *Met.* 8.27-28 for scourging of *galli*. Such a scourge with *astragaloi* strung on thongs is illustrated in SHOWERMAN (1901), p. 115 (relief of *archigallus* now in Capitoline Museum). LANE (1996). *AP* 6.51.7-8 (anonymous) refers to the “knives” (φάσγαντα) bloodied in the *gallus*’ service of the Mother; cf. *ibid.* 6.94.5 (Philip of Thessalonica) λυσιφλεβή τε σάγαριν ἀμφιθηγέα “the two-edged knife with which he opened his veins.”
10. HENRICHs (1976), esp. n. 55; first occurrences of Kybele in Attic literature: Aristophanes, *Aves* 877; Euripides, *Bacchae* 79.
11. See CROPP (2019), p. 236-240.

## col. ii

The metre of these lines down to the *ekthesis* is recognizably anapaestic; they will have been dimeters according to usual practice with monometers as *clausulae*, as in line 8 (σεῖριον αὐτοῦ). That the metre has changed is also indicated by reversion to the epic/Ionic eta where the lyrical lines before had Doric alpha. This is particularly noticeable in line 3 καλύπτρη (whatever case this form has) and 4 φοβερή.

- 4 τῷ δ' ὀφθα[λ]μὸν βλ[ο]συρόν. ὀφθαλμὸν looks certain to me, despite AL's concern that the hole in the papyrus may be wider than just lambda. At line beginning τοῦ δ' looks plausible, although other readings are possible (τοῦδ' for one). One might consider joining the letters into [ψ]ευδόφθαλμον, which is not attested, but multitudes of ψευδ- compounds are. At line end beta followed by traces can be read: βλοσυρόν, "fierce, shaggy," would suit an eye in context, and metrically. Cf. *Iliad* 11.36-37 (shield of Agamemnon) τῇ δ' ἐπὶ μὲν Γοργῶ βλοσυρῶπις ἔστεφάνωτο / δεινὸν δερκομένη, περὶ δὲ Δεῖμός τε Φόβος τε. βληχρός, "soft, weak," seems less suitable among all the other words describing a fearsome appearance.
- 5 μαλεροί τε καλύπτρη [. μαλεροί, "fierce, wild," looks more likely than any other of the -ερός adjectives discussed by AL. In first position part of mu can be seen; alpha-lambda look likely before εροι. καλύπτρη, "veil, covering," is certain, but the case ending is open. One expects a female figure to wear a καλύπτρη, "veil," in Greek; but the meaning could be metaphorical (cf. Aeschylus, *Choephoroi* 811: δνοφερὰ καλύπτρα, "dark veil of night"). καλύπτρη might refer to another type of covering, for example, the mouth covering fierce teeth (μαλεροὶ ὀδόντες *vel sim.*).
- 6 δρακοντόζ[ων]-. The papyrus has an acute accent above the second omikron, indicating that further syllables of the word followed. Cf. apart from the instance in LSJ, *PGM* IV 1405 πυριδρακοντόζωνε παῖ, "girt with fiery serpents" (said of Persephone). The meaning must be "girt with serpents." AL find such an adornment attributed to Hekate (cf. Sophocles, *Rhizotomoi*, fr. 535 Radt), Gorgons and Maenads, to which Artemis can be added (Michael Psellus 19.178 Duffy σπειροδρακοντόζωνον). If nominative, φοβερή at line beginning seems to point unequivocally to a female figure who is "snake-girt."
- 7 ἔτ' ἐπετ[ρ]. This line as a whole has been inserted later, either as a variant to the preceding line (note repetition of a form of φοβερός) or as an additional element. If the letters are correctly read and the metre is anapaestic, a consonant (rho probably) must have followed ἐπετ[ρ] to make position. Perhaps a form of πετρόω, petrify (in conjunction with the Gorgon), e.g. ἐπέτρωσας.
- 8 στεφανηφό[ρο]. First editors read here φασσοφ[ρ] but the traces after first phi suit a form of στεφανηφόρος, "crown bearing," better. Before phi they had also read σπε. Euripides, *Bacchae* 531 has στεφανηφόρους θιάσους referring to the chorus of bakchai. Similarly in Bacchylides, *Dith.* 5.51 Dionysos is (probably) said to have "crown-bearing followers:" Διόνυσον [...] καὶ χορῶν στεφαν[αφόρων ἀνακτα.] Perhaps a neuter noun followed with σεῖριον in the following line: a destructive, gleaming [something] twirled (or "was twined") round? At line beginning delta can be discerned in first position but something is written over it, and the traces after it are very indistinct. The word(s) must have consisted of two long syllables. Something like δεινή might be possible.
- 9 σεῖριον adj. "hot, scorching, destructive," cf. σεῖριαι νᾶες Timotheus, *Persians* 192 (*PMG* 791.179), either with a neuter noun in the previous line or with ἄσθμα in the next

line: “hot/ scorching breath,” note *σειριόεις*, “scorching.” The line is an anapaestic monometer, as commonly found as “*clausula*” among dimeter sequences. AL suggest the reading *σειριοκάυτου*, “scorched by the dog-star,” which is a possibility.

11-13 AL consider the possibility that fr. c fitted in the latter part of these lines. However it does not seem possible to say how much space intervened.

11 *καὶ θαμι*[ν. *θαμινός*, crowded, close-set, often appears in the neuter plural *θαμινά* as an adverb = quick, close-set, frequent (*Hh. Hermes* 44 *θαμινὰ μέριμναι*, Pindar, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Callimachus, Nicander). In Pindar *Pa.* 6.16 *θαμινά* refers to the rapid dancing steps of girls’ choruses at Delphi.

Behind *ληλη* we might guess a form of *ἀνηλής* (*ἀνηλεής*), “pitiless, without mercy,” fitting the surrounding description of a terrifying monster.

12 *τάττομ*[ AL read *ταῦτα* but I think the first tau of double-tau -ττ- is more satisfactory than AL’s upsilon; moreover, the grave accent over alpha tells more in favour of this reading. The omikron is small and indistinct and then one sees the left half of what could well be mu. Forms which suggest themselves are *ταττόμεθα* or *τάττομαι*. The space between the right edge of the main fragment and the small fragment which AL think went here, is thought by them to have been enough for two or three letters. If *τάττομαι* (assuming *scriptio plena*) is right, we would have one of those self-referential addresses in Greek choruses: “I am ordained (to do something),” or the plural “we...” if *ταττόμεθ’* is right (but the metre becomes more difficult). After that we might supplement a form of *ἀναμινῆσκω*, perhaps *ἀναμνήσαι* (“remind, recall”) or (less likely) *ἀναμνησθῆναι* (“recall to mind”). An *e.g.* supplement might run: *ταττόμ[εθα] τ’ ἀναμ[νήσαι*, with *ταῦτα*, “these things” being an object.

14 *δέξαι β[α]σ[ι]λεῦ*. AL consider *δέξαι*, *βασίλεια*, commenting: “possibly the plea was directed to a queenly goddess...cf. Menander, *Theophoroumene* 40.”

15 *σα*.[ AL suggest that “a request for protection” may be discernible here, following *δέξαι* in the previous line (“receive”). They compare Callimachus, *Epigrammata* 33.2 *ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν δέξαι, πότνια, τὴν δὲ σάω*. *σάω* would not fit here metrically.

16 *εἰ[ν]τ*.[ The beginning of (probably) iambic trimeters is marked by *ekthesis* in lines 16 and 17. At line beginning we might read *ἐὰν τ*.[ marking the beginning of a conditional clause, but the traces are quite indistinct.

### 3. GENRE

It seems that the fragment starts with a passage in lyric dactyls, moves on to anapaestic (probably) dimeters, before ending with two line beginnings of longer lines. At least the beginning of the first is consistent with iambs. This constellation of metres is reminiscent of a tragic chorus with anapaests as bridging element between the lyrics and the iambic trimeters. Such a pattern is common in Euripides, *e.g.* the parodos of *Andromache* (117-146). The dialect forms are partly consistent with such an arrangement with Doric *ā* in the first section, whilst *η* in the second part is Ionic rather than Attic.

The subject of the first column is fairly clearly *choreia*, choral music and dance, performed, but perhaps not exclusively, in the service of Kybele or the Great Mother. We hear of a cult utensil, the *kernos*, which is often associated with her cult; we hear of music

typical of that, too, the κύμβαλα (castanets) and Phrygian music played on the *aulos*. If my interpretation of line 9 is correct, we hear also of the flagellation of priests of Meter mentioned in other sources. The performers of the *choreia* seem to be masculine, despite hands playing the castanets, which are described as ῥαδίναις; these either belong to other, female, participants, or the meaning is more that of fast-moving, nimble, rather than soft, which might be thought of as a feminine attribute. But perhaps the reference is to Meter's eunuch followers, whose hands might be ῥαδίναι compared to the average man's.<sup>12</sup>

Continuous sense cannot be obtained for column ii. What is visible is a series of more or less threatening features: an eye which may be fierce, menacing (βλοσυρόν); something (plural) which is also fierce (reading μαλεροί) in connection with a veil (καλύπτρα). Then something (female) which is frightening (φοβερή) and perhaps "girt with serpents" (δρακοντόζωνος); then an inserted line with a repetition of φοβερόν, now neuter instead of feminine. Then a reference to στεφανηφό[ρο, "crown-bearing" before a reference to "his destructive breath" if we connect σείριον αὐτοῦ ἄσθμα. Finally "frequent" something (θαμιν-). The collective impression from this miscellany is that of a threatening creature, but it seems hard to make a connection between this cluster of attributes and the kernos-bearers of Kybele before.

A passage from a dithyramb of Pindar may help us make the leap. In the work entitled "Descent of Herakles or Kerberos" written for the Thebans, Pindar describes the celebration of Meter's rites among gods. He describes the torchlit (αἰθομένα δαῖς) procession to Meter to the loud accompaniment of drums (τυπάνων) and castanets (κρόταλα), the stentorous breathing (ἐρίγδουποι στοναχαί) of the Naiads, together with their wild cries (μανία τ' ἀλαλαί) and tossing head movements (ρίψαύχενι σὺν κλόνωι). Pindar says Zeus' "almighty thunderbolt" breathes its fire, and the "strong aegis of Pallas sounds with the shrieks of countless serpents" (ἀλκᾶεσσά τε Παλλάδος αἰγίς / μυρίων φθογγάζεται κλαγγαῖς δρακόντων). Pindar goes on to relate how Artemis follows along on a chariot pulled by a team of lions "in the wild Bakchic rites" while the god (Dionysos) is charmed by "dancing herds of wild animals."<sup>13</sup>

Column i of our papyrus places us in the context of *choreia* for Meter. Assuming column ii goes on to elaborate on this theme by describing a similar celebration of Meter's rites as that described by Pindar's dithyramb, we can try to place isolated elements within

12. Cf. Aeschylus, *Edonians* fr. 60 Radt: τίς ποτ' ἔσθ' ὁ μουσόμεντις... ἄλλος ἀβροβάτης, "who on earth is this musical prophet, another (? effeminate) who walks with delicate tread;" *AP* 6.51.3: θήλυς Ἀλεξίς... ἄνθετο.
13. Pind. *Dith.* 2.1-23 Snell-Maehler: Κ]ΑΤΑ[ΒΑΣΙΣ] ΗΡΑΚΛΕΟΥ[Σ] Η ΚΕΡΒΕΡΟΣ ΘΗΒΑΙΟΙΣ / Α' Π. ριν μὲν ἔρπε σχοινοτένεια τ' αἰοιδᾶ / διθυράμβων / καὶ τὸ σῆ.ν κίβδηλον ἀνθρώποισιν ἀπὸ στομάτων, / διαπέπ[τ]α[νται] [ / κλοισι νέαι [ ε]ιδότες / οἷαν Βρομίου [τελε]τάν / καὶ παρὰ σκά[πτ]ον Διὸς Οὐρανίδα / ἐν μεγάροις ἴστα.ντι. σεμνᾶ μὲν κατάρχει / Ματέρι πᾶρ μ.εγ.ἀλα ῥόμβοι τυπάνων, / ἐν δὲ κέχ. ἰλαδ[εν] κρόταλ' αἰθομένα τε / δαῖς ὑπὸ ξαν.θα.ἰσι πεύκαις / ἐν δὲ Ναϊδων ἐρίγδουποι στοναχαί / μανία τ' ἀλαλ.αί, τ' ὀρίνεται ρίψαύχενι / σὺν κλόνω. / ἐν δ' ὁ παγκρατῆς κεραυνὸς ἀμπνέων / πῦρ κεκίνη[ται τό τ'] Ἐγυαλίου / ἔγχος, ἀλκᾶεσσά [τ]ε Παλλάδο[ς] αἰγίς / μυρίων φθογγάζεται κλαγγαῖς δρακόντων. / ῥίμφα δ' εἰσὶν Ἀρτεμις οἰοπολᾶς ζεύ- / ξαισ' ἐν ὀργαῖς / Βακχίαις φύλον λεόντων ἀ[ / ὁ δὲ κηλεῖται χορευοίσαισι κα[ὶ] θη- / ρῶν ἀγέλαις.



this frame. In particular I hazard the guess that the subject of lines 2-3 (perhaps 2-4) is the *aegis* of Athena with its typical *gorgoneion* and surrounded by a border of serpents (Fig. 1). This would connect with the “threatening eye” probably mentioned in line 2 and with line 4 in which a feminine object (φοβερή) is juxtaposed with δρακοντόζωνος. Perhaps αἰγίς is the missing noun here. καλύπτρη[ is likely to refer to the veil of Kybele, a known feature of her iconography.<sup>14</sup> In lines 7-8 the ἄσθμα, heavy breathing, might be connected with the στοναχαί of the Naiads mentioned by Pindar; the glimpse of θαμν- in line 9 might relate to the rapid head movements of the dancers, or their footwork, as in Pindar *Pa.* 6.16. Although the individual points in this reconstruction are speculative, the general point that our papyrus is still describing the wild and ebullient procession for Meter in column ii seems to me reasonable.

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Fig. 1. Toledo 1963.26, Attic black figure calyx krater, c. 520-515 B.C.  
Athena wearing her *aegis*, with its snake-fringe and gorgon head. Photograph by Maria Daniels,  
courtesy of the Toledo Museum of Art.

14. VERMASEREN (1977-1989), *passim*.