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A NOTE ON POSIDIPPUS' PHAROS EPIGRAM (NO. 115 AUSTIN–BASTIANINI)

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θῶς is still a problem in Posidippus *ep.* 115 AB line 7. The epigram celebrates the construction of the lighthouse on Pharos by Sostratos to guide mariners approaching the harbour of Alexandria. Posidippus says that the lighthouse is visible by day from many stades away, a tower 'straight and tall which seems to cut the sky'. After 'by day' the poet continues:

... παννύχιος δὲ θῶς ἐν κύματι ναύτης / ὄψεται ἐκ κορυφῆς πύρ μέγα καίόμενον, 'And all night long swiftly on the billow the sailor will see a great fire burning from the pinnacle'.

At least, that is (approximately) what the copyist wrote, whose work, it must be said, is not conspicuous for its accuracy.¹ One wonders what is the sense of θῶς: is the sailor [sailing] swiftly on the billow? Or does he swiftly see the lighthouse while sailing all night at sea? In the first case one misses a participle for the adverb to modify. In the second, the modifier seems irrelevant to the action 'see'. What difference does it make whether the sailor sees the lighthouse 'quickly' or not? 'Suddenly', or 'all at once' might have some point, but hardly 'quickly'.² On the contrary, a sailor is likely to keep his eye fixed on the saving light so as not to lose his bearings at any point of his entry into the harbour of Alexandria. LSJ s.v. give the sense 'soon' to *Od.* 15.216 (θῶς δ' ἄρα δώμαθ' ἵκανε) and 'soon' might make sense of the Posidippus passage: the sailor sailing all night at sea 'soon' (i.e. from far away) sees the light of the tower. But when we look at the *Odyssey* passage again, we see that the sense is still clearly that of swift movement (such that Telemachos arrives at the dwellings 'quickly' in his carriage). And that 'quickly' is precisely what does not suit ὄψεται in Posidippus.

Weil suggested θέων ἐν κύματι, 'running with the billow', pointing appositely to passages of epic in which ships 'run' (θέω) over the sea.³ The verb does indeed suit the mariner's progress and goes well with παννύχιος, 'all night long'. I feel two principle objections. (1) His further emendation of ἐν to ἐνν is motivated solely by the extraneous sigma which correction to θέων entails; otherwise ἐν is unobjectionable. (2) When one looks at the papyrus θῶς does not appear a likely error in copying θεων. Mistakes usually arise from misunderstandings; why should the copyist have corrupted θεων in this way if it stood in his exemplar?

The conjecture by Gärtner, πονῶν, seems to me a weaker and palaeographically inferior variant of Weil's θέων.⁴ True, the sense is acceptable, 'and the sailor toiling all night long on the billow', but the corruption of πονῶν to θῶς is even less explicable than in the case of θεων.

Recently Schröder has returned to the defence of φῶς, '[will see] a light', an emendation which had in fact been considered already by Weil, but rejected.⁵ Without going into Schröder's arguments in detail, I believe the objections already weighed by Weil still stand: we do not want 'light' this early in the sequence of thought, and, if we introduce it here, the 'great fire' which appears in the next line must be seen as a kind of explicative apposition. We may further object that the thought 'and all night long a light on the billow

¹ For a picture and comments on the quality of the writing see Turner (1987, no. 45). The copyist wrote these lines, in fact, as παννυχειος δε θωος εν κυματι ναυτης / οψεται εκ κορυφης πυρ μεγα καιωμενον.

² As for example ἄφνω in *ep.* 118.18 AB, means that Posidippus wishes to find himself 'suddenly' lying in the agora. Incidentally, unlike these editors, I think 'suddenly lying' means struck down dead; Posidippus wishes to die whilst in mid-poetry reading.

³ Henri Weil, Un papyrus inédit. Nouveaux fragments d'Euripide et d'autres poètes grecs, *Monuments grecs publiés par l'association pour l'encouragement des études grecques*, Paris 1879, 28–32. E.g. *Od.* 3.288; 2.429.

⁴ Th. Gärtner, Kritische Bemerkungen zu Gedichten des Mailänder Epigrammpapyrus und zum "alten Posidipp", *ZPE* 156, 2006, 75–98.

⁵ St. Schröder, Zu Posidipps Pharos-Gedicht und einigen Epigrammen auf dem Mailänder Papyrus, *ZPE* 165, 2008, 33–48.

the sailor/will see' has the unfortunate consequence that it now appears as if the sailor will see the light the whole night long, which is clearly wrong.

What we need is a solution which will restore sense to the line and offer a plausible explanation for problematic $\theta\omega\omega\varsigma$. In view of the fact that the writer of the papyrus sometimes confuses consonants such as tau/delta (line 6 $\sigma\tau$) and kappa/chi (line 4 $\nu\alpha\lambda\omicron\kappa\omicron\varsigma$)⁶ I wonder whether we might seek the source of corruption in the initial theta. If this was meant to be tau one might look for another adverb such as $\tau\omicron\langle\rho\rangle\omega\varsigma$,⁷ 'clearly', 'penetratingly' which would suit $\delta\psi\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ well: the sailor sees through the darkness of night the fire burning on the pinnacle of the lighthouse 'clearly', its light piercing the darkness like a penetrating ray. Moreover, when we consider the ancient theory of vision, that the eye sends out a ray of 'light' to the perceived object (rather than vice versa), the sense of $\tau\omicron\rho\omega\varsigma$, 'piercingly', as if the eye were performing a feat, also suits. It is true that the vast majority of instances of $\tau\omicron\rho\omega\varsigma$ apply to auditory signals:⁸ to speak or indicate something clearly, and, conversely, to hear or perceive something clearly. But $\tau\omicron\rho\omega\varsigma$ is frequently glossed by the lexicographers as = $\alpha\phi\omega\varsigma$,⁹ and one instance in Euripides(?) *Rhesus* clearly applies to vision. The chorus, casting around in the darkness of night for the perpetrators of the murder of King Rhesos say: $\kappa\alpha\tau' \epsilon\upsilon\phi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\eta\nu / \acute{\alpha}\mu\beta\lambda\acute{\omega}\pi\epsilon\varsigma \acute{\alpha}\nu\gamma\alpha\iota \kappa\omicron\upsilon\acute{\iota} \varsigma\epsilon \gamma\iota\gamma\nu\acute{\omicron}\kappa\omega \tau\omicron\rho\omega\varsigma$, 'at night the rays of my vision are dimmed and I cannot perceive you clearly' (736–7). It is the darkness which makes the perception difficult. In the Posidippus epigram the point would be precisely that in the darkness of night at sea the lighthouse was brilliantly visible from a good distance and the mariner could see its beacon clearly. Its light pierced the darkness just as a loud auditory signal is clearly perceived by the ear (the usual semantic field of $\tau\omicron\rho\omega\varsigma$).

Does the corruption (if it is such) seem plausible? In view of the numerous orthographic errors in this papyrus (no. 116 AB is even worse), one might wonder whether the scribe was writing inaccurately from memory or copying incompetently from a book. Obbink believes the mistakes are typical of a 'beginner or bilingual writer copying from a book'.¹⁰ In particular he explains the 'phonetic errors', such as that which I assume here, involving a confusion of tau and theta, as 'caused by misremembering what a copyist has read'. The scribe who wrote the collection of literary excerpts of which the two epigrams by Posidippus are a part, was in fact the orphaned son of a Macedonian mercenary who copied the selected pieces as a writing exercise in the Serapeum of Memphis some time before 161 BC.¹¹ The bad writing does not seem to stem from speed or hastiness, but rather to be the painfully executed 'claw' of someone not used to writing much. Perhaps the scribe genuinely 'misremembered' $\theta\omega\omega\varsigma$ without thinking too carefully about sense. Or perhaps – as I prefer to think – he was not overly pedantic in his distinction of *tenuis* and *aspirata* and simply miscopied $\tau\omicron\rho\omega\varsigma$, leaving out rho to make a proper word once he had written $\theta\omicron$ -.

References

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⁶ As well as many vowels and diphthongs in this epigram and no. 116 A–B.

⁷ Or, less suitably, $\tau\omicron\mu\omega\varsigma$.

⁸ A search in *TLG* turns up 72 instances.

⁹ E.g. Eustathius *Comm. in Il.* vol. 1 p. 279 line 24.

¹⁰ D. Obbink, *New Old Posidippus and Old New Posidippus*, in: K. Gutzwiller (ed.), *The New Posidippus. A Hellenistic Poetry Book*, Oxford 2005, 107.

¹¹ See Obbink (above n. 10), 105 and 107. The papyrus roll in question is P. Louvre 7172 ('P. Firmin-Didot').