

FREDERICK WILLIAMS

NOTES ON P. OXY. 3723

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 75 (1988) 57–58

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

NOTES ON P.OXY. 3723

I should like to offer a few observations on this intriguing and tantalizingly fragmentary elegy which has recently been published by P.J.Parsons in the Oxyrhynchus series (vol. 54, London, 1987, pp.58-64).

Lines 4-10 allude to Apollo's love for Hyacinthus. This is one of a series of mythological exempla which apparently have the common theme of a god's love for a boy. References to Apollo's attributes of tripod (4), shrine (5) and oracle (στόματι 6; ? some case of χρησμός 7) seem reasonably certain. Parsons suggests two possible ways in which Apollo's oracle and his love for Hyacinthus may have been connected: "(i) 'The great god who speaks through the oracle of Delphi... humbles himself to Hyacinthus' or (ii) 'The great god no longer speaks through the oracle of Delphi ... but goes off to Sparta and courts Hyacinthus.'" Another possible connection is suggested by Ovid, Met. 1.491 (the context is Apollo's hopeless love for Daphne):

quodque cupit, sperat, suaque illum oracula fallunt.

Ovid in that passage plays with the paradox that Apollo's various powers are of no avail to himself:

"certa quidem nostra est, nostra tamen una sagitta
certior, in uacuo quae uulnera pectore fecit.
inuentum medicina meum est, opiferque per orbem
dicor, et herbarum subiecta potentia nobis:
ei mihi, quod nullis amor est sanabilis herbis,
nec prosunt domino, quae praesunt omnibus, artes!" (519-24)

(The same motif recurs in Ovid's version of the Hyacinthus episode:

nil prosunt artes; erat inmedicabile uulnus. (Met. 10. 189).)

Such a pathetic paradox would not be out of keeping with the elegist's style: in lines 1-2 there seems to be a piquant contrast between fire and water; in 11-16 Dionysus, the conqueror of India, succumbs to the charms of an Indian boy; lines 17-22 juxtapose Heracles the lionslayer and Heracles the lover of Hylas, and in 20 love is seen as yet another of his labours.

Apollo's inability, despite his prophetic powers, to foresee the tragic outcome of his love for Hyacinthus would suggest that the general theme of the elegy may have been "Gods too, for all their divine properties, suffer in love."

Line 10 *παρὰ ποτὶ θῆχ'* 'Υακίνθου: the feet are not necessarily Hyacinthus', and the genitive could be governed by a word in line 11. The lost beginning of the line may well have contained a geographical reference (cf. 11 *Τμώλοιο τε πέζαν*, 12 *Κιθαίρωνος*

δρυμοχόρου) such as Τηϋέτοιο: for the expression, cf. Pindar, Nem. 4.54 Παλίου δὲ πὰρ ποδί.

Line 21 If the puzzling form δαθείς is to be seen as a part of *δώ - and it is difficult to imagine what other verb it could belong to - it may be an extreme and inelegant instance of the kind of analogical extension of this defective verb that I discussed in my note on Callimachus, h.Ap. 46.

The Queen's University of Belfast

Frederick Williams