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ΠΗΛΩΜΑ AND ΚΗΡΩΜΑ: REFINEMENT OF THE GRECO-ROMAN GYMNASIUM

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πήλωμα and κήρωμα: Refinement of the Greco-Roman Gymnasium

πήλωμα seems to occur at most three times in extant Greek literature, twice in the 4th C. grammarian Charisius (*Ars grammatica* 36.4 and 459.53 Barwick) and probably again in the apparent corruption *πεγματα* of the Anonymous Bobiensis (*Gramm. lat.* I 549.17 K.).¹ In all instances, it is the grammarian's gloss for the similarly rare *lutina(e)* in a list of nouns. Thus πήλωμα would remain quite obscure were it not for its transliterated appearance as *pîlômā* in Hebrew and Aramaic texts. The Palestinian textual tradition of Mishna *Shabbath* 22.6 reads *'ên yôrdîn l'pîlômā*, "you shall not go down (on Sabbath) to the πήλωμα," while the Babylonian tradition of the same precept reads *'ên yôrdîn l'kôrdîmā*, "you shall not go down (on Sabbath) to the *kôrdîmā*." (Other Rabbinic texts write *kôrdîmā* as *kôrômā* or *kêrômā*² making even clearer the fact that the Semitic term is borrowed from Greek κήρωμα, a well attested term for the mixture of mud and oil used in ancient wrestling and medical therapy as a salve and exercise surface.)³ Subsequent precepts in this Mishna refer to the use of exercise, scraping, and emetics: as Saul Lieberman pointed out, this section of the Mishna is a discussion of the Jewish laws regarding physical culture on the Sabbath, and thus the context can help us recognize the rare technical term πήλωμα as athletic terminology for a substance much like κήρωμα.⁴

The appearance of these two different terms in the same precept of the Palestinian and Babylonian traditions of the Mishna, as well as later Rabbinic tradition, might indeed suggest that *pîlômā* /πήλωμα and *kôrdîmā* /κήρωμα are synonyms;⁵ certainly for the purpose of warning the observant to keep away from the grime of the palaestra on Sabbath, either term suffices

¹ S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (New York 1942) 94 discusses the appearance of πήλωμα in Charisius; there are more references in *TLL*, s.v. "lutina." On the nature of the Anonymous Bobiensis and its relationship to Charisius, cf. G. Goetz, *RE* (1899) 3.2147-9, W. Christ, *Philologus* 18 (1862) 136-9; L. Jeep, *RhM.* 44 (1889) 40-5.

² On the textual traditions of this Mishna, cf. Lieberman (n.1) 93-4.

³ Concerning the oily nature of κήρωμα, cf. Mart. 4.4.10 and *Hist. Apoll. Tyr* 13. The Greek origins of *kôrdîmā*/*kêrômā* were noted by M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli, and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (London and New York 1903), s.v. *keroma*.

⁴ The seminal discussion of Mishna *Shabbath* 22.6 and the Hellenic custom on which it draws is in S. Lieberman (n.1) 92-7.

⁵ Cf. Lieberman (n.1) 94, who cites Midrash Sechel Tov (12th century): "You may not go down to the *kôrdîmā*, which is the same as *pîlômā*." J. Jüthner, *Jahresb. d. Öster. Arch. Inst.* 18 (1915) 323-330 argued that κήρωμα in palaestra contexts denotes only mud: its color and texture formed a *tertium comparationis* with the fine ointment of that name. This theory founders on Plutarch's enumeration of the needs of the wrestler in *Mor.* 638c, discussed below, and Jüthner himself (p. 339) must allow that there is some difference in the types of mud denoted by πηλός and κήρωμα in Plutarch's list. Cf. further, n. 9, below.

to describe the exercise surface. The rarity and late appearance of πήλωμα suggest that it was formed from πηλόσ by a process of associative analogy to κήρωμα.⁶ But since Greek gymnasium practice, as argued below, shows that πηλόσ and κήρωμα were somewhat different substances with different purposes, the appearance of this athletic term πήλωμα, rather than representing a synonym of κήρωμα, is evidence of formal provision for two *different* types of wet exercise surface, and as such it is noteworthy testimony to the increasing specialization and refinement of Greco-roman hygienics and recreation.

Greek sources are witness to the importance of mud in the training of wrestlers and pankratiasts. In Lucian's *Anacharsis* 1, the Scythian visitor is dumbfounded at the sight of the wrestlers struggling in the mud: οἱ δὲ ἄγχουσι καὶ λυγίζουσι καὶ ἐν τῷ πηλῷ συναναφύρονται κυλινδούμενοι ὡς περὶ κύεσ,⁷ and among the tedious and unsavory habits of athletic trainers, against whom Galen inveighs, is the fact that they spend their lives κυλινδουμένων ἐν κόνει τε καὶ πηλῷ (*Thrasymb.* 37 = 5.878-9 K.). Practice in mud, according to Lucian, *Anach.* 28, increased the strength of the offensive wrestler who had to hold his slippery opponent.

Not surprisingly, in the highly competitive world of ancient medicine and physical education, mud was not a simple matter, and the proportions of dust, oil, and water were serious issues. κήρωμα, which mixed all three, generally appears to have been more popular than plain mud for ground wrestling: the oil benefited the skin, and since ancient medical theory perceived dust as cooling and oil as warming agents, a proper mixture was also considered highly beneficial to the body as a whole.⁸ Accordingly, κήρωμα also had an important role in the ancient treatment of some diseases. Pliny *NH* 28.51 describes its use in easing stiffened joints; Caelius Aurelius, *tard. pass.* 2.1.34 prescribes it for paralysis and in 4.7.102 for some colon dysfunctions. Given these widespread uses, it is quite natural that in Caelius Aurelius, *salut. praec.* 35 (= *Anecl.* 2.199 Rose), *ceroma* is the general term for the exercise surface, and the physician stresses the importance of having a pliant, non-abrasive mixture: "*qui locus exercitii utilis est? ... aequali et molli ceromate stratus... inaequali avel duracero mata contundunt supra colluctantes et rasuras corpora efficiunt.*" But despite *ceroma's* popularity, plain mud never completely lost its place: the clearest witness to this is Plutarch, who is quite specific in listing three dis-

⁶ One would normally expect a noun in -ωμα formed in Classical and post-Classical Greek to be "das Ergebnis der Handlung" (A. Debrunner, *Griechische Wortbildungslehre* [Heidelberg 1917] 157), cf. also P. Chantraine, *La formation des noms en Grec ancien* (Paris 1933) 181-190, esp. 188. This gives no sense for κήρωμα and πήλωμα: rather the extant evidence for the two words suggests an earlier substantive κήρωμα (a doublet, it seems, of κηρωτή, which is attested already in *Ar. Ach.* 1176) and a later word πήλωμα formed by analogy of the sort described by Debrunner, 9. On such -ωμα substantives without apparent verbal origins, cf. further E. Fraenkel, *Griechische Denominativa* (Göttingen 1906) 225-6.

⁷ Cf. also Philostratos, *Gymn.* 53

⁸ Cf., e.g., Philostr. *Gymn.* 42 and *Vict.* 2.65 (6.582 L.) in the Hippocratic corpus: κόνις μὲν ψυχρόν, ἔλαιον δὲ θερμόν... ἡ δὲ κόνις ἐν τῷ θέρει ἀξιμώτερον, ψύχουσα γὰρ τὸ σῶμα οὐκ ἔξ ἐκ ὑπερβολῆς ἐκθερμαίνεται. Medical texts sometimes prescribed oiling the skin when it was covered with dust, cf. *Vict.* 3.76 (6.620 L.), Galen, *de san. tuend.* 5.3 = 6.328 K., or making such a mixture as a salve, Philostr. *Gymn.* 52. L. Robert, *Hellenica* 13 (Paris 1965) 167-170 has noted how the term κηρωματίτης evolved from the title of gymnasium master to a medical therapist in late antiquity.

tinct surfaces for the athlete exercising in the palaestra—dust, mud, and κήρωμα: κεκλήσθαι γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς πάλης τὴν παλαίτραν οὐχ ὅτι πρεσβύτατόν ἐστι τῶν ἄλλων, ἀλλ' ὅτι μόνον τῶν τῆς ἀγωνίας εἰδῶν πηλοῦ καὶ κονίτρας καὶ κηρώματος τυγχάνει δεόμενον (*Quaest. Conv.* 2.4 = *Mor.* 638 c). One can only assume that athletes were quite particular about the viscosity of their practice surfaces for the different exercises, and for medical purposes, the mud also plays a role of its own, distinct from *ceroma*: note, for example, that Pliny's prescription for stiff joints (*NH* 28.51) calls for ointment "ex ceromate permixta caeno". Clearly the substances are not interchangeable.⁹ Plutarch, apparently did not know the term πήλωμα, though he did know the difference between πηλός and κήρωμα, but already by the late 2nd century, when the Mishna was first codified, Roman Palestine knew this term.

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⁹ It may also have been a consideration for less prosperous establishments that κήρωμα was expensive, as the proverb which Jerome cites records: "*oleum perdit et impensas qui bovem mittit ad ceroma* (*ep.* 57.12 [*Pl* 22.578]);, and gymnasium officials may have been anxious to spare it when possible. Jüthner (n. 5), citing this passage, claimed that ancient authors would not have been silent if there was such a "Verschwendung" as a *ceroma* pit for wrestlers. The argument from silence is of itself not convincing: moreover, Jerome's image of sending a cow to the *ceroma* suggests rather a large area, not a flask of ointment.