

S. R. SLINGS

BACCHYLIDES XVIII 41–42

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 80 (1990) 9–10

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

BACCHYLIDES XVIII 41-42

ἦ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὀρμᾶι,
 δίκαια ἀδίκουειν ὄφρα μήσεται;

The papyrus has no accent over the initial particle: we are at liberty to choose between ἦ and ἦ̂, and thereby between a question and a statement. All editions known to me opt for the latter, presumably on the grounds (1) that the chorus' fear has disappeared (so explicitly Taccone: "non ha ucciso se non i mostri i quali di morte erano ben meritevoli: l'eccitazione e il timore, che spirano dalla prima strofa, sono quindi scomparsi nella terza"), (2) that the statement "surely a god sends him" fits in with the previous qualifications ἰσχυρόν τε καὶ ἄλκιμον ὧδε καὶ θρασύν ὅς τ(ο)κούτων ἀνδρῶν κρατερόν χθένος ἔχεν;

I think this accentuation does not do justice to Bacchylides' very careful manner of constructing the alternating strophes. Every reader will have noticed the correspondences Ἄθανᾶν (1) / Αθάνας (60) and τελείται (30) / τελείται (45). But within the corresponding ῥήσεις of the chorus and of Aegeus there are more far-reaching parallelisms. The king's first speech is a catalogue of the mysterious aggressor's achievements; although the list is in direct speech, its information derives from the report of a κᾶρυξ (17). His second speech is likewise a list: the chorus' question (which had taken up the entire third strophe) is answered briefly in 46, after which (this time in indirect speech, depending from 47 λέγει throughout) we get a catalogue of the aggressor's armour (sword, spears, helmet), clothes (χιτῶν, χλαμύς) and physical appearance (eyes, age, warlike behaviour). Both catalogues end with statements expressing deep concern (30 ταῦτα δέδοιχ' ὅπαι τελείται; 60 διζήσθαι δὲ φιλαγλάους Ἄθνας).

The two strophes of the chorus are similarly parallel in structure. Both begin with a general question (3 τί νέον ἔκλαγε κτέ; 31 τίνα ... πόθεν ... τίνα τε). In the first strophe, three alternative questions follow: 5-7 Is the leader of an army attacking our borders?; 8-10 Are robbers stealing our flocks?; 11 Or what else is worrying you? It should be noted that the three alternatives are presented by means of sentence- and period-initial ἦ (5), ἦ̂ (8), ἦ̂ (11; there is no accent on any of the three particles in the papyrus).

In the second strophe of the chorus, the general request for information (31-32) is likewise filled in by the chorus with three alternatives: 33-34 Does he come with an army?; 33-41 Does he come with only a few companions?; 41-42 Is he sent by a god? (in which case previous speculations become irrelevant). There is an interfering strain of thought which makes its first appearance in the second alternative (the Unknown One must be very brave and strong indeed to conquer all these monsters if his company is small) and continues into the third (but perhaps he has conquered these monsters as a servant of divine retribution: monsters can't expect to get away with their monstrosity all the time, 44-45). In this strophe,

the syntactic elements that mark the three questions are not precisely the same ones as in the first (Bacchylides is too good a poet for that), but their similarity is close enough: 33 $\pi\acute{o}\tau\epsilon\rho\alpha$ (beginning of period), 35 $\tilde{\eta}$ (ditto; no accent in papyrus), 41 $\tilde{\eta}$ (second word of new period).

The King's two strophes are packed with information, the chorus' pair is necessarily verbose: this is the consequence of the pseudo-dramatic parallel strophic structure chosen by Bacchylides. One is strongly reminded here of tragic stichomythia: form dictates content even when there is not a lot of content. It is precisely the primacy of form that supports my proposal. And this note was not written primarily to correct an accent and a punctuation sign, but to draw attention to this formal aspect of the poem.