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CERCIDAS, CAELIUS, AND UNSAFE SEX: ΤΥΝΔΑΡΕΟΙΟ ΓΑΜΒΡΟΣ (CERC. FR. 2.28 LIVREA)


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CERCIDAS, CAELIUS, AND UNSAFE SEX: TYNΔΑΡΕΟΙΟΙ ΓΑΜΒΡΟΣ
(CERC. FR. 2.28 LIVREA)

Cercidas fr. 2 Livrea (= 4 Powell) is concerned with attitudes towards sexual gratification. It opens with a contrast, expressed in terms explicitly borrowed from Euripides, between the two ways in which Eros can blow from his cheeks: “if on any mortal his right cheek breathes gently and graciously, that man enjoys calm weather as he steers his ship of love with Persuasion’s moderate rudder. But for those against whom he looses his left cheek, stirring up whirlwinds and voracious gales of desire, their passage is rough and choppy throughout” (lines 4-10). The former kind is then commended: “Is it not better to select the wind that is favourable to us, and, with Moderation’s aid, using the helm of Persuasion, sail a straight course, while our voyage is in Cyprian waters?” (lines 11-14). At this point the papyrus is badly damaged; one can only speculate on the possible significance of what may be a reference to the voyage of Icarus (line 24). When coherent sense is resumed, there is a dire pronouncement: “for all such criminal violence and bestial obsession with women bring disastrous ruin as their fulfilment, and the certain promise of pain and remorse” (lines 24-26). There follows the notorious passage:

\[\text{α} \delta' \varepsilon \gammaορφας 'Αφροδίτα
και το μη[δε]νος μέλειν, ὡτ[ιν]ικα λήμις, ὅκα χρήζηςις,
οῦ φόβος, οὖ παραχά.\]

But Aphrodite of the market-place, ‘feeling anxiety for nothing’, whenever you like, when you need it, no fear, no bother: lay her for an obol and imagine you’re Tyndareus’ son-in-law. (lines 26-9)

The conventional interpretation of these lines has been that they exemplify the calm and sensible approach to sex applauded at the beginning of the poem, and that the poet is advocating in propria persona resort to prostitutes as an acceptable alternative to adultery. This was the view of A.S.Hunt, the first editor of the poem; he wrote, with barely concealed distaste, of “... verses which advocate the simplest and cheapest satisfaction of animal instincts. Cercidas adopts the attitude expected in a follower of Diogenes, who decried marriage (D.L. 6.54, 72) and described love as the occupation of the idle (51) and a painful pursuit of pleasure.”¹ This view has been enormously influential, and is now found in standard works on Cynism² and ancient philosophy in general,³ on Greek⁴ and on Latin

¹ Oxyrhynchus Papyri VIII (1911) 22.
² E.g. D.R.Dudley, A History of Cynicism (London, 1937) 81. I have suggested that users of the English language should conform to the usage of the rest of the world by reviving the impeccably formed noun “Cynism” (instead of the more dubious form “cynicism” with all its misleading associations) to denote the
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literature, since Cercidas’ words have been assimilated to the attitude so memorably enunciated at Horace *serm.* 1.2.119, 125-6:

...parabilem amo uenerem facilemque.

...haec ubi supposuit dextro corpus mihi laeuum
Ilia et Egeria est: do nomen quodlibet illi.

Indeed, some have seen this passage of Cercidas as an actual source for Horace. 6

Enrico Livrea, with whom I am preparing a new text of Cercidas with full commentary, and I have argued that the speaker of these words must be an imaginary interlocutor, into whose mouth C. puts this apparent praise of *Venus parabilis.* Our interpretation depends on recognition of the ironical element in the lines, as well as their inconsistency with the overall message of the poem as a whole. I wish here to examine in detail the last clause of the passage we attribute to the interlocutor (τα[Ê]ταν ὀβολῶ κατακλίνας / Τ[υν]δαρέως δόκει γαμβρός τ[ὁ]πε’ ἡμεν), since I see it as containing layer upon layer of irony, in comparison with which Horace’s words seem plain and straightforward.

Firstly, there is linguistic incongruity: on the evidence of Plato, *Symp.* 203b and Aristophanes, *Lys.* 904 it seems that κατακλίνας is, appropriately in this context and especially after the crudity of ὀβολῶ, a vulgarism (hence my translation "lay"). This gives particular piquancy to its juxtaposition with the resonant name of the ancient hero Tyndareus, above all in the archaic genitive form Τυνδαρέως, which appears at first sight to belong to Homeric epic. But in fact Homer uses only the genitive form Τυνδαρέου, so that Cercidas is being more epic than Homer. This pseudo-Homeric form Τυνδαρέως,

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8 *Od.* 11.298, 24.199; this is also the only form of the genitive actually attested in the Hesiodic corpus (cf. fr. 196.7, 199.8, 204.61 M-W), though Lobel proposed a supplement with the -οιο form at Hes. fr. 23(a) 14 M-W. The -οιο form does occur at A.R. 1.148, 3.517, Moschus, *Ep.Bi.* 78, where as a correctly formed epic genitive it is of course entirely appropriate.
coming so soon after a normal Doric genitive ὀβολοῦ, attracts attention to itself, especially as there is no other example of an -οιο genitive in the extant remains of Cercidas.9

Secondly, the expression ("Tyndareus' son-in-law") is utterly preposterous in this context: a short-term relationship with a prostitute, necessarily limited to the sexual act, is being referred to in the social (and non-sexual) vocabulary appropriate to the permanent state of legitimate matrimony.10 Moreover, we must, I think, concede that however ecstatic the pleasures experienced by the devotee of ἀ εὖ ἀγορᾶκε Ἀφροδίτη may have been, they are unlikely to have included contemplating the social status of a supposed, and very temporary, "father-in-law".

Thirdly, the reader must ask the question how desirable is the status of son-in-law of Tyndareus, even (perhaps especially) in sexual terms. Commentators have too readily assumed that Τυνδάρεοιοι γαμβρῶ is simply a periphrasis for Menelaus, the husband of Helen. But notoriously Tyndareus had more than one daughter.11 One of them, Phylonoe, need not concern us, since she suffered apotheosis as a virgin.12 The other three were Timandra, Clytaemestra, and Helen, none of whom is an obvious paradigm of conventional marital bliss. Both Hesiod (fr. 176 M-W)13 and Stesichorus (fr. 223 Page) recount the story that Tyndareus when sacrificing to the gods neglected Aphrodite, who avenged herself by causing his daughters to be διγάμου καὶ τριγάμου καὶ λειψάνδρους: hence Timandra left her husband Echemus for Phyleus, and her sisters Clytaemestra and Helen embarked on their own better-publicized careers of spectacular adultery. No wonder that for Ovid too being Tyndareus' son-in-law was far from being an unmixed blessing: one of the curses in his Ibis is

tam quoque di faciant possis gaudere fideli coniuge quam Talai Tyndareique gener. (353-4)14

The phrase Τυνδάρεοιοι γαμβρῶ could therefore convey a reference to a union with any of Tyndareus' adulterous daughters, not just with Helen. In such a sexual context, one might still feel, even after granting the irony in the use of γαμβρῶ, that Helen was the most appropriate of the three women. However it is precisely in a sexual context that we encounter a phrase which offers a striking parallel to Cercidas' words, quadrantaria Clytemnestra, the expression applied by Caelius Rufus to Clodia:15 quadrantaria

9 Livrea ad loc. rightly compares the ironical effect of Horace's mock-epic phrase fortissima Tyndaridarum in the colloquial context of serm. 1.1.100.
10 In English terms, the Commercial Union is being advertized as if it were the Legal & General.
12 Apollodorus 3.10.6; cf. Hesiod fr. 23(a) 10-12 M-W.
14 Talaus' son-in-law was of course Amphaiarus, whose death was brought about by the treachery of his wife Eriphyle.
reproduces the unflattering ὀβολόω κατακλίνας, while Ceytemnestra echoes the mock-heroic allusion of Τυνδάρεως γαμβρός. Caelius' insult had a double point, Clodia's promiscuity, which led one of her lovers to hint that she was no better than a common prostitute, and the widespread belief that she had poisoned her husband.

The same kind of double reference is surely present here in Cercidas' pointed expression. While the advocate of "Aphrodite of the market-place" may appear to be commending the purchase of sexual enjoyment supposedly without complications, his phrase Τυνδάρεως γαμβρός, which seems at first sight to represent the climax of his case, has, because of its ambiguity, a sinister connotation which undermines his message, and clearly points to the baleful consequences of the course of action he is advocating. Indeed, it exemplifies the gnomic reflection which preceded his intervention:

πάν γὰρ τὸ βιοτὸνήπον καὶ προκοβηθηλυμαν[ἐε] φέρει ταναβιλαπίτλειαν καὶ μεταμελλοδύναν.

("All such criminal violence and bestial obsession with women bring disastrous ruin as their fulfilment, and the certain promise of pain and remorse.")

Moreover, the formation of the neologism μεταμελλοδύναν parallels the forceful ambiguity of Τυνδάρεως γαμβρός. Its middle element μελλ-, as Livrea observes, "ricorda scherosamente la terminologia matrimoniale e sessuale, cf. μελλέποις, μελλόποις, μελλόγαμβρος, μελλόγαμος, μελλόνυμφος etc." Such terms belong, like γαμβρός, to the sphere of settled and legitimate family life.

Even the interpretation of the phrase Τυνδάρεως γαμβρός as referring (whether partially or primarily) to Menelaus contains yet a further irony, so far unnoticed by commentators. The speaker (whatever his identity) is commending extra-marital means of achieving sexual satisfaction. Yet, as no less a person than Aristotle observed, Homer represents Menelaus alone of all the Greek heroes as abstaining from sexual activity throughout the Trojan War:

θαυμάσαι δ’ ἀν τὶς ὁδοιαμόν τῆς ᾿Ιλιάδος ὁμήρου ἐποίησε Μενέλαοι συγκοιμομένην παλλακίδα, πάσι δοὺς γυναίκας. κοιμῶνται γοῦν παρ’ αὐτῶι καὶ οἱ γέροντες μετὰ γυναικῶι, Νέτωρ καὶ Φοίνιξ... ἐοίκεν οὖν ὁ Σπαρτιάτης αἰδεῖθαι

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16 I am not of course suggesting that Caelius was quoting Cercidas, rather that Cercidas' allusion, if not its precise form, is recognizably appropriate as a forceful jibe in an actual context of sexual immorality compounded with violence.

17 Cf. Plutarch, Cicero 29.4 (quoted by Austin): Κλωδίων ... Κουαδραντίαν ἐκάλον, ὀτι τῶν ἑρακτῶν τις αὐτῆι χαλκοὺς ἐμβαλὼν εἰς βαλάντιον ως ἀργυρίον εἰσέπεμψε· τὸ δὲ λεπτότατον τοῦ χαλκοῦ νομίσματος κουαδράντιν ἐκάλον.
In conclusion: the phrase Τυνδαρέως γομπρός is pointedly ambiguous and ironical, and serves not to support but to subvert the apparent recommendation of ἀ δ᾽ ἐξ ἀγορᾶς Ἀφροδίτῃ.

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18 Fr. 144 Rose = Athen. 13.556d (where Gulick chides Aristotle for nodding in the case of Phoenix and forgetting Iliad 9.658-68).