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EPICHARMUS IN TRIER: A NOTE ON THE MONNUS-MOSAIC

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The rich and growing record of certain or possible Oriental influences on Greco-Roman culture has to be corrected on a small, but significant point of detail. It is to be found in the third-century Monnus-Mosaic in Trier, so called because *Monnus fecit* stands proudly at its center.¹ The outstanding feature of the mosaic are nine octagons, each depicting one of the nine Muses accompanied by a noteworthy human representative of the arts and sciences. The Muses and their human representatives were named in labels. These inscriptions are most conveniently consulted in *CIL* XIII 3710.

In one of the partly extant octagons is the Muse Polymnia and next to her a seated human figure whose name is only partly preserved:]ICAR. For over a hundred years, with one nearly unnoticed exception, scholars have repeated the old suggestion that this is [*Ac*]icar, a restoration which astonishingly transports the legendary Assyrian sage Ahikar of ca. 700 BC to the banks of the Mosel, although he was hardly known by name anywhere in the Greco-Roman world and cannot be regarded as an exponent of the arts and sciences over which the Muses presided.

The restoration was proposed by W. Studemund as “zweifellos sicher” in an article entitled “Zum Mosaik des Monnus,” *Jahrbuch des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* 5 (1890) 1-5. Standard reference works that appeared around the turn of the century bestowed on the suggestion the seeming status of certain fact: *RE* 1.1, col. 1168 *s.n.* ‘Akikaros’ (G. Wissowa, referring to the restoration as “überzeugend”); *CIL* XIII 3710, which gives the restoration *ac*ICAR in the text; and Roscher, *Lexikon* 2.2, *s.v.* ‘Musen’, col. 3287. Since then Studemund’s proposal has been accepted, often with yet further explicit approval, in numerous scholarly discussions.²

To my knowledge, only one scholar to date has had the good sense to reject the restoration [*Ac*]icar and to replace it with a solution that is, in substance, the most fitting possible: [*Ep*]icar(*mus*).³

The suggestion was made by Hermann Koller, “Zur Apotheose auf zwei römischen Mosaiken,” *Zeitschrift für die Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte* 30 (1973) 66-67, an article which unfortunately did not receive the attention that it deserves. Almost none of the scholars mentioned below in note 2 seems to have been aware of it. The only one who was, Dieter Metzler, rejected Koller’s restoration for no valid reason whatsoever (see below, pp. 35-36 with note 16).

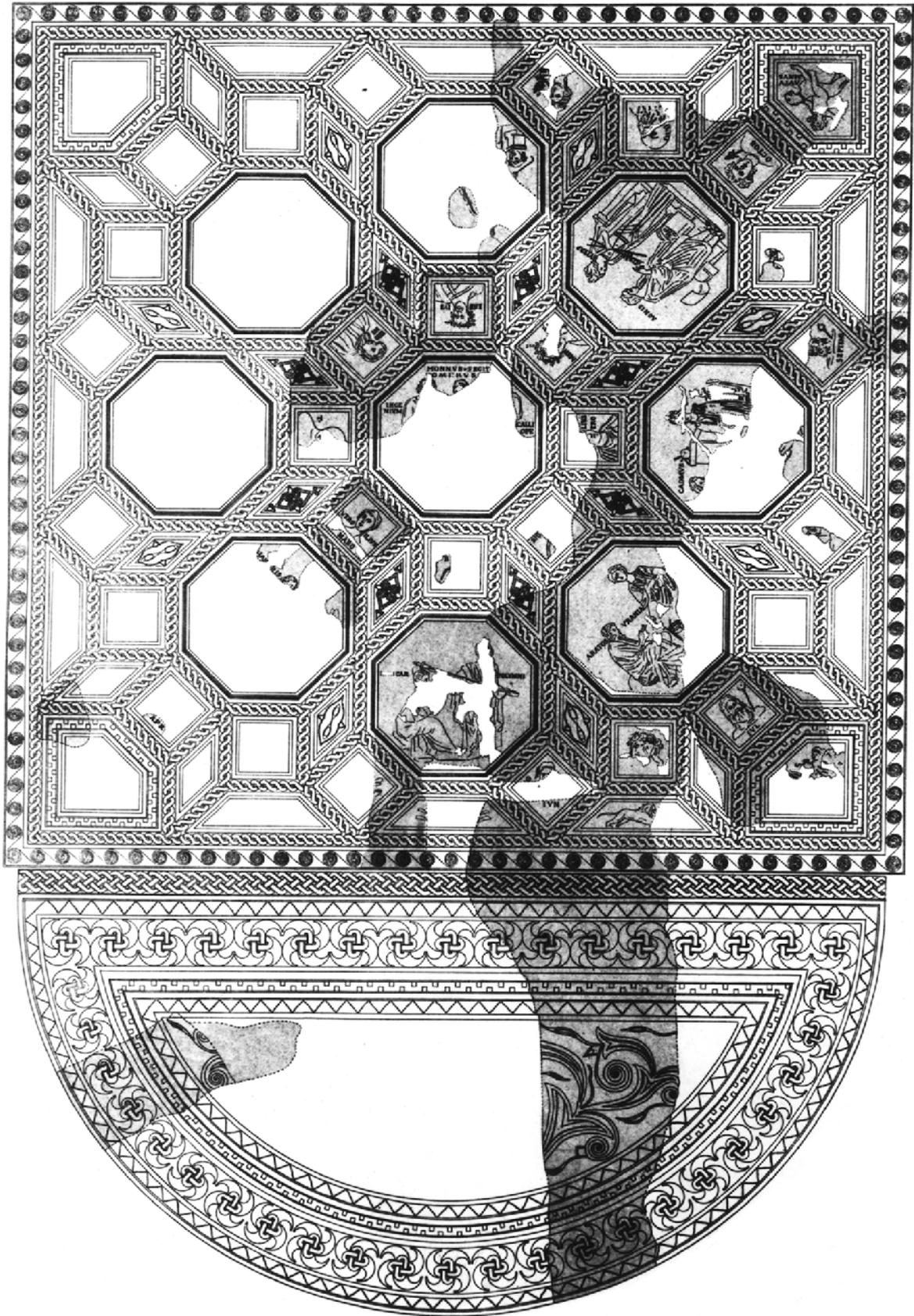
So that readers of this periodical can conveniently judge for themselves the merits of the two proposals, I give a reconstructed drawing⁴ of the Monnus-Mosaic followed by a description of it, including a reproduction of the octagon that has]ICAR and the Muse Polymnia.

¹ The mosaic is best consulted in K. Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken in Deutschland* (Berlin 1959), pp. 41-43 (with plates 42-47).

² Ed. Meyer, *Der Papyrusfund von Elephantine* (Leipzig 1912), pp. 125-126; Th. Nöldecke, *Untersuchungen zum Achiqar-Roman* (Abh. Königl. Gesellsch. Wiss. Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Kl., NF 14.4, Berlin 1913), pp. 20-25; R.H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament* II (Oxford 1913), p. 716 (intr. to *The Story of Ahikar*); H. Diels - W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* II, p. 208 ff. Pseudo-Democritus §68 B 299; A. Hausrath, *Achiqar und Aesop* (Sitzungsab. Heid. Ak. Wiss., Phil.-hist. Kl., 1918.2), p. 19; O. Regenbogen, in *RE Suppl.* VII (1940), *s.v.* ‘Theophrastos’, col. 1541; M. Küchler, *Frühjüdische Weisheitstraditionen* (Göttingen 1979), pp. 352-357; D. Metzler, “Ahiqar in Trier,” *ΘΙΑΣΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΜΟΥΣΩΝ. Studien zu Antike und Christentum. Festschrift J. Fink* (ed. D. Ahrens, Köln/Wien 1984), pp. 97-107; J.M. Lindenberger’s introduction to *Ahiqar* in J.H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* II (London 1985), pp. 491-492; H. Wilsdorf, “Der weise Achikaros bei Demokrit und Theophrast,” *Philologus* 135 (1991) 193; I. Kottsieper’s introduction to his translation of the Elephantine Ahikar-papyrus in *Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments* III.2: *Weisheitstexte* II (edd. G. Burkard, I. Kottsieper *et al.*, Gütersloh 1991), p. 320.

³ The label, however, did not necessarily end with *r* before the head of the seated figure; see below, p. 36.

⁴ Drawing by E. Eichler, published in F. Hettner, *Antike Denkmäler* I (herausgegeben vom Kaiserlich Deutschen Archäologischen Institut, Berlin 1891), Taf. 47. The photograph of the drawing reproduced here is provided by courtesy of the Landesmuseum Trier through the kind assistance of K. Goethert and J. Hupe.



In the main field, above the decorative semicircular apsis, are six different groups (A-F) of images in the various octagons, squares, pentagons and trapezoids:

(A). The nine Muses, each accompanied by a human representative of the arts and sciences, in nine octagons arranged in a circle of eight octagons surrounding a central one.

Octagon 1 (center). The first line reads MONNVS FECIT. Below it are three standing figures. At the left, personified Ingenium, labeled in two lines as follows: INGE
NIVM

In the middle, Homer, label above his head without an *h*: OMERVS.

At the right, the Muse Calliope, her label: CALLI

OPE

Octagons 2-3 (at 10:30 and 9:00 as on a clock) are not preserved.⁵

Octagon 4 (at 7:30). Only the head of the human figure of Thamyris survives. Above it is the label [T]HAM[Y]RIS. According to *Iliad* 2. 595-600, the Thracian bard Thamyris was punished by the Muses at Dorium: they deprived him of his gift of minstrelsy because he had vaingloriously claimed that he could conquer them in a singing contest. The subject is depicted on a Greek vase of the fifth century BC from the Etruscan city of Spina.⁶ Later writers credited Thamyris with the invention of the Doric mode of harmony (e.g. Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.76.6; Pliny, *HN* 7. 204).

Octagon 5 (at 6:00). Since this is the subject of the present article, here is a reproduction of the octagon (photograph: courtesy of the Landesmuseum Trier).



Left, the seated male figure under consideration. Next to his head, [. .]ICAR (two letters fill the space to the left comfortably). Right, the standing figure of Polymnia, her name abbreviated: POLYMNI.

Octagon 6 (at 4:30). Left, the seated figure of Aratus, with the label ARATOS to the left of his head. Right, Urania with the label VRANIA.

Octagon 7 (at 3:00). Left, the figure of Cadmus with CADMVS written above his head. Right, the Muse with the label C[L]IO. Since she is usually the Muse of history, the human figure may be that of

⁵ The counterclockwise order of octagons 2-9 beginning with octagon 2 at 10:30 is conventionally used so that it corresponds with the counterclockwise order of the twelve month-squares that begins with January at 10:30.

⁶ See H. Koller, *Musik und Dichtung im alten Griechenland* (Bern-München 1963), pp. 39-41 with plates 2-3.

Cadmus of Miletus, son of Pandion, the first writer of history (Pliny, *HN* 7.205; Josephus, *c. Apionem* 1.13) and inventor of Greek prose (*Suda* κ 22; Pliny, *HN* 5.112). Another possible candidate is the earlier, related figure of Phoenician–Theban Cadmus, who imported the Phoenician alphabet to Greece (Herodotus 5.57-60; Diodorus Siculus 5.74.1; Pliny, *HN* 7.192; Tacitus, *Ann.* 11.14), became quite plainly *the* inventor of writing (e.g. Solinus 7.23 *Cadmus litterarum primus repertor*),⁷ and had known the Muses at least from the time when they (together with Apollo and the Graces) came as guests to join the celebration of his marriage to Harmony (Pindar, *Pyth.* 3.90-91; Diodorus Siculus 5.49.1). Lore about the earlier Cadmus influenced that about the latter, and the Monnus-Mosaic might be conflating the two.

Octagon 8 (at 1:30). Left, the figure of Hyagnis, having risen from a chair. His name is spelled AGNIS. Right, the standing figure of the Muse Euterpe holding a pair of flutes. The label to the right of her head is abbreviated EVTERP. Hyagnis was best known as the Phrygian inventor of flute-playing: Ps.–Plutarch, *de Music.* 5 (*Mor.* 1132 f); Aristoxenus, fr. 78 Wehrli (*ap. Athen.* 14.624 b); Marmor Parium, *FGrH* 239 A 10; Dioscorides, *Anth. Pal.* 9.340 (Gow-Page, *Hellenistic Epigrams* 35); Nonnus, *Dion.* 41.371. He was also said to have created the Phrygian mode of harmony: Marmor Parium (*cit.*); Athenaeus (*cit.*); Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 10.6.11, a passage that was copied from, but is now missing in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.76.5. The spelling Ἄγνις for Ὑάγνις is guaranteed by its presence in Eusebius (see Mras' *app. crit.* to the passage of Eusebius and, on the linguistic phenomenon, P. Kretschmer, Ἄγνις, *Glotta* 3 [1912] 156-157).

Octagon 9 (at 12:00) is for the most part obliterated. According to Parlasca, the Muse is Thalia.

(B). Eight busts of famous Greek and Roman authors in eight squares arranged in a circle between the circle of eight octagons and the central octagon. The name of each author stood in an accompanying label. Six can be identified with certainty: Ennius, Hesiod, Livy, Vergil, Cicero and Menander. Most of the names are divided, written both to the left and the right of the heads of the figures. Starting at 12:00⁸ and proceeding counterclockwise, the inscriptions are as follows (the sign © here stands for *caput*):

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. ENN © IVS | 2. ESIO
DVS | 3. T.[LI] © VIVS | 4. VERG © ILIVS
MARO |
| 5. [. .]R © [. . .] | 6. DIO © [. . .] | 7. [TVL] © LIVS
[CIC] © ERO | 8. MEN © AND |

(C). Portraits of the personified Months in a circle of twelve squares. The series began with January at 10:30. Each portrait was accompanied by a label containing the name of the month. Most of the names are abbreviated. Interspersed between the month-squares are squares which depicted masks. The labels of the still extant month-squares are:

4. APR . . 6. IVN 7. IVL 9. SEPTEMB 10. OCTOB 11. [NOVE]MB

(D). Eight squares with depictions of masks interspersed between the month-squares.

(E). Depictions of the twelve signs of the zodiac in twelve trapezoids at the edges of the main field.

(F). Depictions of the personified Four Seasons, each in an irregularly shaped pentagon at a corner of the main field. Only one survives at the upper right. Its label reads AVTVMN.

No certain element in the subject matter of the mosaic was foreign to the classical world in the third century AD. This, of course, is not to deny age-old Oriental influences indirectly at work. Many contemporaries of Monnus will have known about the Oriental origins of Cadmus and of the signs of the

⁷ Other such references in *ThLL Onomasticon* II, col. 9, s.v. 'Cadmus'.

⁸ This is where *CIL* XIII 3710 starts the series rather than at 10:30 with Hesiod (see above, note 5).

zodiac. But such matters had long ago become as inseparable from Western tradition as the imported Greek alphabet itself.

This does not apply to Ahikar, sage and scribe of Senacherib and Esarhaddon, kings of Assyria and Nineveh. We know him chiefly from the various Oriental (Aramaic, demotic Egyptian, Syriac, Arabic, etc.) versions of *The Story of Ahikar*. He is not mentioned in a single ancient Latin source (the questionable case of the Monnus-Mosaic aside). Speakers of Greek hardly knew him by name either. The few exceptions prove the rule. Clement of Alexandria associates a *Stela of Ahikar* with the name of Democritus:

Strom. 1.69.4 (Stählin–Früchtel): Δημόκριτος γὰρ τοὺς Βαβυλωνίους λόγους (προσλαβὼν τοὺς) ἠθικοὺς πεποιήται· λέγεται γὰρ τὴν Ἀκικάρου στήλην ἐρμηνευθεῖσαν τοῖς ἰδίῳι συντάξαι συγγράμμασι κᾶστιν ἐπισημῆσθαι <τὰ> παρ’ αὐτοῦ, “τάδε λέγει Δημόκριτος” γράφοντος. “For Democritus based his own ethical writings on Babylonian ones; for it is said that he added a translation of *The Stela of Ahikar* to his own writings, and this is what one should understand when he writes, ‘This is what Democritus said.’”⁹

On this passage is based Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* 10.4.23 καὶ Δημόκριτος δὲ πρότερον (i.e. before Plato) τοὺς Βαβυλωνίων λόγους ἠθικοὺς πεποιῆσθαι λέγεται. In the text of Clement: ἠθικοὺς L Eus ἰδίους Cobet Ἑλληνικοὺς Diels ἠθικοὺς (ἰδίους) Smend (προσλαβὼν τοὺς) Früchtel.

The name crops up again in a philosophical context in Diogenes Laertius – in his catalogue of the more than 200 works of Theophrastus. At 5.50 he lists Ἀκίχαρος ἁ΄ “*Acicharus*, one book.”¹⁰ The only other Greek references to Ahikar are Biblical, all from LXX Tobit.¹¹ Scholars interested in Ahikar¹² have also adduced a conjecturally altered passage of Strabo, but already in 1913 Nöldeke demonstrated that the conjecture is untenable.¹³

⁹ This refers to a Pseudo-Democritean composition according to Diels and Nöldeke (both cited in note 2); others have taken the passage at face value, most recently Wilsdorf, *cit.* (note 2).

¹⁰ Nöldeke and Studemund regarded the work as falsely ascribed to Theophrastus. Others have considered it genuine.

¹¹ His name is spelled Ἀχιχαρος in LXX Tob. 1.21-22; 2.10; 11.18-19; 14.10, where he is a fairly historical figure, designated as steward, financial minister and keeper of the seal of Esarhaddon.

¹² Meyer, Charles, Charlesworth, Küchler (p. 344, with reservations), and Wilsdorf, all cited in note 2.

¹³ Nöldeke’s objections were approved of a few years later by Hausrath, *cit.* (note 2). Strabo, having just dealt with oracles such as Dodona and Delphi (16.2.38) turns to mantic prophets (μάντιες) at 16.2.39, where he gives the following list: -- καθάπερ καὶ ὁ Τειρεσίας -- τοιοῦτος δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἀμφιάρεως καὶ ὁ Τροφώνιος καὶ ὁ Ὀρφεὺς καὶ ὁ Μουσαῖος καὶ ὁ παρὰ τοῖς Γέταις θεός, τὸ μὲν παλαιὸν Ζάμολις, Πυθαγόρειός τις, καθ’ ἡμᾶς δὲ ὁ τῶ Βυρεβίτα θεσπίζων, Δεκαίνεος· **παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Βοσπορηνοῖς Ἀχαικάρος**, παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Ἰνδοῖς οἱ γυμνοσοφισταί, παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Πέρσαις οἱ Μάγοι καὶ νεκρομάντιες καὶ ἔτι οἱ λεγόμενοι λεκανομάντιες καὶ ὑδρομάντιες, παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Ἀσσυρίοις οἱ Χαλδαῖοι, παρὰ δὲ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις οἱ Τυρρηνικοὶ ὠροσκόποι. Where the manuscripts have Βοσπορηνοῖς or Βοσπορινοῖς (cf. Βοσποριανῶν at 7.4.4; on the various spellings of the ethnic, see Steph. Byz., *Ethn.*, s.v. Βόσπορος [p. 179 Meineke]), two scholars have conjectured Βορσιπηνῶν (Th. Reinach, *Revue des Études Juives* 38 [1899] 13, and Fränkel, *RE* III.1, col. 735, s.v. ‘Borsippa’). This would bring us to Mesopotamia, Borsippa being a town to the south of Babylon, in which case it would seem that the reference is indeed to Oriental Ahikar. But Nöldeke pointed out the numerous weaknesses of the conjecture. I summarize: (A) After the mention of the Thracian Getae, one can hardly doubt the correctness of the transmitted Βοσπορηνοῖς, by which we must understand a people that lived by the Cimmerian Bosphorus. (B) Ahikar as we know him from the Oriental story is not fitting in the list of mantic prophets. (C) It is unlikely that Strabo inserted the entirely obscure Βορσιπηνοῖς in a list which presents otherwise well-known ethnics. (D) He mentions them at 16.8.6, but there they are one of several sects of Chaldaean astrologers (which again hardly suits Ahikar), but then in the present list we would have to assume that the Bosporenoi are different from the Chaldaean priests of the Assyrians. (E) A reference to a Mesopotamian people would be out of place at the supposed point in the list, which first mentions peoples living in the north, then moves to India, and finally proceeds westwards, thus reaching Mesopotamia. Nöldeke concluded that the name of the possibly Scythian prophet or shaman is just accidentally similar to that of Ahikar.

Not only was Ahikar extremely obscure, none of the sources mentioned above associates him in the slightest way with the domains of the Muses.

More compelling than any of these negative arguments against the restoration of *[Ac]icar* is the fact that Koller's suggestion of *[Ep]icar(mus)* provides a figure than which a more fitting cannot be found. For Plato, Epicharmus stood in relationship to comedy as Homer did to tragedy. He says of the two great masters in *Theaet.* 152 e: - - - τῶν ποιητῶν οἱ ἄκροι τῆς ποιήσεως ἑκατέρας, κωμωδίας μὲν Ἐπίχαρμος, τραγωδίας δὲ Ὅμηρος. Epicharmus was often styled quite simply as *the* inventor of comedy. So Theocritus, *Epigr.* 18 (*AP IX 600*), 1-6:

Ἄ τε φωνὰ Δώριος χώνηρ ὁ τὰν κωμωδίαν
εὐρῶν Ἐπίχαρμος.
ὦ Βάκχε, χάλκεόν νιν ἀντ' ἀλαθινοῦ
τὴν ὦδ' ἀνέθηκαν
τοὶ Κυρακούσσαις ἐνίδρυνται, πελωρίττα πόλει,
οἱ ἄνδρα πολίταν.

Gow's translation: "Dorian is the speech and Dorian too the man—Epicharmus the inventor of Comedy. In thy honour, Bacchus, since he was their fellow-townsmen, the folk that dwell in the splendid city of Syracuse have set him here, in bronze, not flesh and blood." Cf. also *Suda* ε 2766 Ἐπίχαρμος - - - ὅς εἶρε τὴν κωμωδίαν ἐν Κυρακούσσαις; Solinus 5. 13 *hic* (i.e. in Sicilia) *primum inventa comoedia*; Isidorus, *Orig.* 14. 6. 33 *in ea insula primum est inventa comoedia*.

It may also be noted that Epicharmus was said to have added a few letters to the originally Phoenician alphabet. There is variance as to which letters and how many: HΩ: *Suda* ε 2766 marg. (mss. IVM); ΠΨ: Hyginus, *Fab.* 277; ΦΧ: Pliny, *HN* 7.192 Schilling (with Lenormant: ΘΧ *E*² *vett.* ΩΖ *F*²); the aspirates and Z: Schol. Dion. Thr., *Gr. Gr.* I 3, p. 185, 6; ΖΧΨ: Schol. Dion. Thr., *Gr. Gr.* I 3, p. 320, 26. The tradition that associates Epicharmus with the alphabet might be significant for the mosaic, if Cadmus (Octagon 7) is supposed to be the Cadmus who imported the Phoenician alphabet.

Koller cautiously proposed an additional, iconographic interpretation of Epicharmus in the mosaic. The Muse Polymnia standing next to him is holding a rod. As one might term the rod a *κωνών*, it might allude to a work entitled *Κωνών* that was falsely ascribed to Epicharmus (Athenaeus 14.648 d). Latin Pseudepicharmea may have been in circulation. Epicharmus was probably best known to Latin-speakers, after all, from Ennius' *Epicharmus*, which apparently was based on a Pseudepicharmean *Περὶ φύσεως*.

A few technical details pertaining to Koller's restoration may now be treated briefly. The absence of *h* in *[Ep]icar(mus)* is of no moment in a mosaic that has sloppy *Omerus* (octagon 1) and *Esiodus* (author-square 2).¹⁴ By comparison, the spelling *Epicarmus*, which probably reflected the pronunciation of the name even by educated speakers of Latin, will do in good society, as numerous manuscripts show.¹⁵

Closer attention should be paid to the supposed abbreviation. Koller assumed with previous scholars that the label ended at *r* directly before the head of the seated figure: hence his *-(mus)*. It is on the basis of this alone – the missing *m* that is part of the root of the name – that Metzler rejected the restoration.¹⁶

¹⁴ On the absence of *h* in inscriptions from Trier and environs, cf. *CIL* XIII.5 (Indices), p. 174 under 'h *omissa*', especially 2.1 under 'c *pro* ch'; further literature in Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, p. 41 note 4.

¹⁵ See the *app. critt.* to Cicero, *Tusc.* I.8; Macrobius, *Sat.* 5.20.5; Pliny, *HN* 7.192; [Sergius], *Gramm. Lat.* IV, p. 531, 21.

¹⁶ Metzler, *loc. cit.*, p. 99 note 4: "Der Versuch H. Kollers... scheitert daran, daß für das sinnvollerweise zu fordernde M hinter ICAR, also . . . icarm, kein Platz ist, zumal dort die Umgrenzungslinie der Buchstaben in der Steinsetzung eindeutig

Metzler regarded this as an exception in the mosaic, whereby he failed to notice two things: (a) in general, the mosaic-maker's only criterion for dividing or abbreviating names was the space available after the pictorial elements had been completed; (b) in specific, author-square 8 abbreviates *Menand(er)* or *Menand(rus)*, omitting the *r* that is part of the root. Admittedly, it would be preferable if at least the *m* had been there, and perhaps it really was. The label might have continued to the right of Epicharmus's head, where there is space probably for 3 and certainly for 2 letters before the figure of the Muse. This possibility is suggested by the author-squares, most of which divide names before and after the heads of the figures. So while *[Ep]icar(mus)* remains possible, preference may be given to *[Ep]icar © [mus]* or *[Ep]icar © [mu(s)]*.

It may finally be noted that the mosaic probably indeed evidences a fairly recent arrival from that part of the world which spoke Semitic languages, but it is not to be found in the subject matter depicted. It is rather the mosaic-maker himself or his forebears. The name *Monnus* is hardly Greek or Latin in origin. Scholars have compared it to *Μόννος*, which was especially common in Mesopotamian Edessa.¹⁷ Other have suggested that it is African;¹⁸ cf. *CIL VIII Suppl. 5.1 (Index)*, p. 101, *s.nn. Monn--*, *Monna*, *Monnius*, *Monnosus*. According to Parlasca, however, the stylistic features of the mosaic do not point to Africa.

Nöldeke and, following him, Metzler sought to account for the presence of Ahikar with the Muses by the hypothesis that the mosaic was conceived of by a Syrian named Monnus who was familiar with the *Story of Ahikar*. But the anomaly no longer exists, and so the explanation is not needed. We are left with a craftsman, probably of Semitic extraction, who worked in third-century Trier. There is nothing surprising about this, and the subject matter of the Greco-Roman mosaic that he was commissioned to make contains no surprises either.

Köln

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die Schrift beendet. Auch die übrigen erhaltenen Beischriften zeigen am Monnus-Mosaik nur sinnvolle Abkürzungen wie Wegfall der Endungen und des H- oder Hy- am Wortanfang, nie aber ein Abbrechen in der Namenswurzel selbst."

¹⁷ So already Nöldeke and, following him, Metzler. See now L. Robert, *Noms indigènes dans l'Asie-Mineure gréco-romaine* (Paris 1963), pp. 362-365; J.K. Stark, *Personal Names in Palmyrene Inscriptions* (Oxford 1971), p. 96 *s.nn. M'N* and *M'NW*.

¹⁸ See Parlasca, *Die römischen Mosaiken*, p. 41 note 5.