AKKO

Ancient Greek folklore included an impressive list of female monsters and bogeys—Akko, Alphito, Empousa, Gello, Karko, Lamia, Medusa, Mormo, Phaia, Skylla, Sphinx, Sybaris, the Seirenes and Graiai. But two names on this standard list should be removed. Akko and Alphito are not bogeys.

The name Alphito is known only from a single reference in Plutarch (cited below) where she is linked with Akko. About Akko, however, there is a rather full scholiastic and lexical tradition, which unanimously reports her to have been a character on the comic stage, an absurdly foolish woman, whose name became proverbial for scatterbrained stupidity. Amphis wrote a whole play around her (2:236 Kock) and Hermippus used her in his Ἀθηνᾶς Γοναί (1:224–27 K.). Three incidents from these plays, or perhaps from the folklore on which they drew, are recorded: Akko chatted with her mirror as if it were another person,[1] she hit a peg with a sponge (instead of a hammer?),[2] and she dressed herself in a half-woven piece of cloth from the loom.[3] A parallel notion of pretended stupidity seems to have entered the lexical tradition mainly from the prominent use of the word by Plato at *Gorgias* 497A to denote Gorgias' pretending not to follow the argument—playing "Akko."[4] In erotic contexts the word and its cognates show an adapted sense of coy reluctance.[5]

Over against this broad and unanimous tradition stands a single passage, Plutarch *De stoicorum repugnantiis* 1040B, which has been repeatedly misread as implying that Akko (and Alphito) were hobgoblins.[6] I paraphrase the context: "Chrysippus criticizes Plato for allowing fear of the gods to count as a deterrent from injustice. The arguments based on punishments sent by the gods are ambiguous and contradictory—ὡς οὐδὲν διαφέροντα τῆς Ἀκκοῦς καὶ τῆς Ἀλφιτοῦς δι' ὧν τὰ παιδάρια τοῦ κακοσχολεῖν αἱ γυναῖκες ἀνείργουσιν, no better than the stories of Akko and Alphito which women use to rouse their kiddies from idleness." There is no external evidence to support the interpretation that these stories are about bogeys named Akko and Alphito, much less that the names refer (as the

1. Plut. *Prov. Alex.* 65; Suet. Περὶ βλασφ. 194 Taillardat; Zenob. 1. 53; Diogenianus 2. 4; schol. Plat. *Gorg.* 497A; *Et. Mag.*, p. 49 Gaisford; *Suda*, s.v. Ἀκκιζόμενος.

2. *Suda*, s.v. Ἀκκιζόμενος.

3. Suet. Περὶ βλασφ. 194 T.; schol. Plat. *Gorg.* 497A.

4. Hsch., s.v. ἀκκίζειν; *Et. Mag.*, p. 49 G.; schol. Plat. *Gorg.* 497A.

5. LSJ, s.v. ἀκκίζομαι; Achilles Tatius 6. 20. 2; Alciphron 3. 5. 2, 4. 10. 1, 4. 13. 15. The essential meaning in these contexts—wanting but pretending not to want—is the same as the commercial sense of ἀκκίζεσθαι: a person pretends indifference to a transaction in order to conceal his or her profit motive—Philemon (2:479 Kock), a prostitute holding out for more money; Chariton 1. 14. 15, a slave-trader "reluctantly" accepting payment; Pind. frag. 192 Bowra, men who publicly profess disgust at the carcass of a horse but return in secret to skin it. The Pindar fragment raises the insoluble question of which came first, Ἀκκώ or ἀκκίζεσθαι, i.e., the folklore-comedy figure or her characteristic attitude. The Pindar fragment might also suggest that *pretending* (stupidity or indifference) is the oldest core of meaning and hence that Akko on the stage was not a genuine moron but a clever shirker.

6. E.g., *RE* 1 (1894): 1171; *Der kleine Pauly*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart, 1964), p. 218; LSJ, s.v.; H. Cherniss, *Plutarch's "Moralia,"* vol. 13, part 2 (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1976), p. 469; E. Smith's translation in W. W. Goodwin's complete edition of the *Moralia* (Boston, 1870), p. 386. The standard Latin translation in Xylander and Wyttenbach is ambiguous but seems to imply the bogey interpretation ("quarum formidine puerulos mulieres a malo otio deterrent"). Amyot's note gets Akko right ("une vieille femme, dont la bêtise et la simplicité avoient fourni le sujet de beaucoup de contes"); that should have been enough, but current authorities are infected with the mistake. Further references to such authorities are cited by H. Herter, "Böse Dämonen im frühgriechischen Volksglauben," *Kleine Schriften* (Munich, 1975), p. 50, n. 24.

context suggests) to punishing gods. But there is abundant evidence that Akko at least was a bad example of laziness, a figure who must have been the object of divine punishment rather than the subject. Children are roused from foolish daydreaming or time-wasting (*κακοσχολεῖν*) by stories of what happened to certain bad boys and girls who did not mind their tasks. This interpretation matches Hesychius' entry for *ἀκκός· παράμωρος, λέγεται δὲ παιδίοις ὡς μωροῖς*. I conclude then that the Akko of nursery lore is the same as the Akko of comedy.

We have just enough evidence to go a step further and suggest a plausible reconstruction of such a story and even to identify the punishing god implied in Chrysippus' allusion. Hermippus' comedy *Offspring of Athena* featured Akko, a woman who was foolish about housework—weaving, handling a peg, wasting time with her mirror (1:224–27 K.). The plural title suggests that the play contained portrayals of several housewives or maidens who like Akko were domestically inefficient. The title *Offspring of Athena* may be read as an ironic collective term, something like the phrase "daughters of Eve," indicating an essential fallibility and inferiority in women. This reconstruction puts Hermippus' comedy in the same camp as Semonides' catalog of women whose folly and vileness is measured by their deviation from the ideal standard of the bee-woman, the perfect housekeeper. If this suggestion is correct, then the punishing god who made Akko regret her foolishness and inefficiency ought to be Athena.[7]

Hermippus' play seems to be the earliest of the group with titles of the form *Offspring of X*, where *X* is a familiar god or gods.[8] None of their fragments allows much of a plot reconstruction. Perhaps they too, as I am suggesting for Hermippus, were not mythological burlesques dealing with the literal offspring of a god but humorous presentations of mortals who exemplified or perverted the works and nature of a god.

The stories which Chrysippus says were told to children were probably intended more for entertainment than to frighten—unless we have an unkind notion of the attitude of Greek women to their children—but they certainly included a moral: stick to your work or Athena will punish you too, just as she punished silly Akko and Alphito. We can agree with Chrysippus that this is not a very persuasive argument, but it is one more likely (given the evidence) to have been used than "Akko will get you." From our standpoint both Akko the foolish woman and Akko the bogeywoman are negative images of women, but it is worth setting the record straight about which was actually used.

JOHN J. WINKLER
Stanford University

7. Wilamowitz, "Observationes criticae in comoediam atticam," *Hermes* 7 (1873): 141, suggested that foolish Akko might have challenged Athena to a weaving contest, like Arachne, but he drew no conclusion about her punishment or about her use as a bogey.

8. Nicophon (1:775 Kock), Polyzelus (1:789, 791), Antiphanes (2:33), Anaxandrides (2:139), Araros (2:217), Philiscus (2:443). The divinities in question are Aphrodite, Ares, Dionysus, the Muses, Pan, Artemis and Apollo, Zeus, Hermes-and-Aphrodite (Hermaphrodites?).