

ARIADNE'S MITRA: A NOTE ON CATULLUS 64.61-4

quem procul ex alga maestis Minois ocellis
 saxea ut effigies bacchantis prospicit, eheu,
 prospicit et magnis curarum fluctuat undis,
 non flavo retinens subtilem vertice mitram...

Among the clothes Ariadne is wearing in this scene is a finely woven headdress which Catullus terms a 'mitra' (1.63). Commentators have defined this mitra variously as a 'scarf' (Ellis, Merrill), a 'cap or bonnet' (Fordyce) and a 'kind of hairnet' (Quinn).

In Greek literature, a 'mitra' is any piece of cloth worn by women in various ways to tie up their hair.¹ While the word came to be used by Latin writers, it seems to have retained its specifically Greek associations. Varro refers to 'mitra' as a Greek word:

mitra et reliqua ferre in capite postea addita cum vocabulis Graecis. (*de Ling. Lat.* 5.130)

Likewise Pliny noted the mitra as one of the distinguishing features of Greek women in the paintings by Polygnotos of Thasos:²

...qui primus mulieres tralucida veste pinxit, capita earum *mitris* versicoloribus operuit.
 (N.H. 35.58)

It is possible therefore that Catullus uses the word simply to give an exotic, Hellenistic flavour to his epyllion.

There is, however, another possible reason for Catullus' use of the term 'mitra' here. In both Greek and Latin literature a mitra is worn by Dionysus and his followers. Pentheus wears one in the *Bacchae* when he disguises himself as a bacchant in order to watch their revels (Eur. *Bacc.* 833, 929, 1115). In Propertius this Bacchic mitra is used to symbolise the divine madness which Dionysus inspires:

cinge caput *mitra*, speciem furabor Iacchi.
 (4.2.31)

In Statius' *Achilleid*, a mitra is listed among the 'Bacchic accessories' which Odysseus brings into Lycomedes' Palace to flush out Achilles:

...quid imbelles thyrsos mercatus et aera
 urbibus in mediis Baccheaque terga *mitrasque*
 huc tuleris varioque asperas nebridas auro
 hisne gravem Priamo Phrygibusque armabis Achillem?
 (*Ach.* 1.714-17)³

In his version of the Ariadne myth, Catullus makes use of traditional Bacchic motifs.⁴ In the scene by the shore there is the comparison of Ariadne with a bacchant. Then at the end of the story Dionysus and his frenzied horde of

¹ E. B. Abrahams, *Greek Dress: A Study of the Costumes Worn in Ancient Greece* (London, 1908), p. 112, fig. 54.

² For examples of Polygnotos' paintings of women see Erika Simon, 'Polygnotan Painting and the Niobid Painter', *AJA* 67 (1963), 43ff.

³ Cf. also Soph. *Oed. Tyr.* 209; Prop. 3.17.29-30, 4.7.61-2; Sen. *Phaed.* 756, *Oed.* 413; Stat. *Theb.* 9.795, *Ach.* 1.617; Val. Fl. *Arg.* 2.271. For the treatment of this motif in art see C. Picard, 'Dionysos Μιτρηφόρος', *Mélanges Gustave Glotz* ii (N.Y., 1972), pp. 707-21.

⁴ For Catullus' treatment of Dionysus and Ariadne see P. Y. Forsyth, 'Catullus: the Mythic Persona', *Latomus* 35 (1976), 555-66, esp. 558ff.; 'Catullus 64: Dionysus Reconsidered', *Stud. Lat. Lit.* ii. 98-105; T. P. Wiseman, 'Catullus' Iacchus and Ariadne', *LCM* 2 (1977), 177-80; 'Catullus Again', *LCM* 3 (1978), 21-2. For a survey on Ariadne and Dionysus in art and literature, see T. B. L. Webster, 'The Myth of Ariadne from Homer to Catullus', *G.&R.* 13 (1966), 22-31.

bacchantes are described coming to claim her (251ff.): Ariadne is to be a real bacchante, not merely like a statue of one. The motif of the bacchantes' frenzy is likewise something that the poet has prepared us for when we are told that Ariadne bears 'indomitos furores' in her heart (52-4). I suggest that Catullus uses the word 'mitra' in a similar manner. Its latent Bacchic association is to be actualised at the end of the story.

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WORDSWORTH ON VIRGIL, *GEORGICS* 4.228-30

When Wordsworth was eighteen he embarked on a series of translations from Virgil's *Georgics*. All that survives of them today is a series of rough drafts and jottings, among which is a short note in which he attempts to resolve the well-known crux at 4.228-30

Suppose we read it thus - 'prius haustu *parcus* aquarum / Ora fove, etc.' - and construe it thus:

First sparingly steep the mouth ('ora') of the hive in water ('haustu...aquarum').

The use of 'fove' in this sense is partly supported by this of Virgil: 'Fovit vulnus *Lymphâ*' [*Aeneid* 12.420].
(*Wordsworth Library MS.6 12r*)¹

A line is drawn across the page, and he tries out another rendering:

Or thus: 'bathe your face sprinkling yourself with draughts of water'. I suppose they imagined some Virtue in water which might repel the bees.
(*Wordsworth Library MS.6 12r*)

In the first jotting Wordsworth emends *sparsus* ('sprinkling') to *parcus* ('sparingly');² in the second, he discards the emendation, returning to *sparsus* and taking *fove* to indicate, as in the *Aeneid*, a direct application of water. It is a testimony to his skill as a Latinist that he has arrived at an interpretation similar to that proposed by F. R. Dale in 1955,³ who also supports his argument with the phrase from *Aeneid* 12.420 'fovīt ea vulnus lymphā'. But where Dale believes that the water is applied to the face to protect it from sparks, Wordsworth regards it as an insect-repellent.

In 1969 L. P. Wilkinson accepted Dale's interpretation,⁴ which still deserves to be taken seriously even though it goes unmentioned by the poem's most recent editor, Richard F. Thomas. Like the eighteenth-century translators against whom Wordsworth was reacting, Thomas prefers, 'first with a draught of water sprinkle and freshen your mouth',⁵ where the beekeeper is urged to rinse his mouth to avoid bad breath (a view which can be supported from Columella 9.14.3).

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¹ The Wordsworthian material in this article is hitherto unpublished, and is taken from notebooks now at the Wordsworth Library, Grasmere. I am grateful to the Chairman and Trustees of the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere, for permission to present it here.

² This may have been suggested by Joseph Warton's translation of *The Georgics*, which Wordsworth was consulting:

When of its sweet the dome thou would'st deprive,
Diffuse warm-spirited water thro' the hive...

(Warton, *Georgics* 4.267-8)

³ F. R. Dale, 'Virgil, *Georgics* iv. 228-30', *CR* 5 (1955), 14-15.

⁴ *The Georgics of Virgil: A Critical Survey* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 266.

⁵ *Virgil: The Georgics I-IV*, ed. Richard F. Thomas (2 vols., Cambridge, 1988), ii. 189.