

Lesbia's *Arguta Solea*: Catullus 68.72 and Greek Λιγύς

By FREDERICK E. BRENK, S. J., Rome

The recent article by K. J. McKay, *Λιγύς, λιγυρός* *Glotta* 60 (1982) 235–236, should shed light on a crux in Catullan scholarship, the meaning of *arguta* in Catullus 68. 72. It has generated controversy and great diversity in the translations, while the visual meaning of the word has been mostly ignored. The semantic field of *argutus* similar to that of *λιγύς* must have existed in Latin before the Neoterics, possibly under Greek influence, but not necessarily so. In Catullus 68 where both an audial and visual expectation is present Catullus may be playing with synaesthesia, but in any case the meaning of *λιγύς* given by McKay is essential to understanding Catullus in this context.

The recent article by K. McKay, “*Λιγύς, λιγυρός*”, *Glotta* 60 (1982) 235–236, should shed light on a crux in Catullan scholarship.¹ In his 68th poem the poet describes how his mistress came to him at night like *Laudamia* (*Laodameia*), the beloved, or rather, great lover of *Protesilaos*:

isque domum nobis isque dedit dominae
ad quam communes exerceremus amores
quo mea se molli candida diuva pede
intulit et trito fulgentem in limine plantam
innixa arguta constituit solea.² (68.68–72)

The problem is over what *arguta* means in this context. The commentators have in general taken it to mean that the shoe gave out some sort of noise. So W. Kroll: “*arguta* ‘die knarrende,’ alles was einen Ton von sich gibt, ist *a.* (*arguta serra* Verg. G. 1.143)”.³

K. Quinn; “But did the sandal squeak, or did Lesbia tap the threshold with it (impatiently as a signal)? (*argutus*) denotes any sharp, clear sound) . . .”⁴) In a recent translation F. Della Corte

¹) Prof. Marilyn Skinner has drawn my attention to problems connected with ξουθός at Euripides, *Helen* 1111 where it is used to describe the night-ingle. Scholars are uncertain as to translate it “tawny” or “trilling”, and A. M. Dale, *Euripides. Helen* (Oxford 1966) 137–138, decides on the audial meaning, on the basis—presumably in Greek drama, of its use for the night-ingle, nightingale’s throat, bee, bee wings, eagle, Dioskouroi, and the winds. The phenomenon is not so restricted to Greek as she implies: for example in English we have “vibrant”, “loud”, and “muted”, colors.

²) Text of R. A. B. Mynors, *OCT* (Oxford 1960/1967).

³) *C. Valerius Catullus* (Leipzig and Berlin 1929) 229.

⁴) *Catullus. The Poems* (London 1970) 385.

translates it as *la suola appoggiandosi scricchiolava*.⁵⁾ As frequently in Catullan studies, C. J. Fordyce's intuitions have been good: ". . . *arguta* is probably best taken of sound, the sudden tap of her shoe, but it might refer to shape, 'neat', 'quick-moving'; 'twinkling' is less likely here . . . (It) can be applied to anything that makes a clear impression on the senses"⁶⁾ But in the most recent translation, G. P. Goold translates the lines in question: "and checking her bright foot upon the polished threshold stepped on it with a tap of her sandal".⁷⁾

The word was popular in Augustan poetry, sometimes clearly not denoting a sound, though usually that is the case (*argutumque nemus pinosque loquentis*, Verg *Ecl.* 8.22); *arguta serra* (Verg. *Georg.* 1.143); *argutae aues* (Prop. 1.18.30). In these cases it can be said to describe a sound on an acoustical level high and fine, vs. one on the low dull side. When Vergil (*Georg.* 3.80) speaks of *cervix ardua*, *argutum caput* of a horse, and Cicero (*Leg.* 1.27) of *oculi arguti*, they obviously have something different in mind than sound, but the things described must have an analogous quality. In Ovid *argutos* (*ocellos*), translated in the Loeb as "sparkling" should rather have a quality analogous to the sound. (*Amor.* 3.3.9):

pes erat exiguus—pedis est artissima forma;
longa decensque fuit—longa decensque manet;
argutos habuit—radiant ut sidus ocelli.⁸⁾

If Catullus were transferring the meaning of the Greek *λεγός* to *argutus* in the context of the 68th poem, then according to McKay's analysis, *argutus* would indicate sharpness, fineness, and precision. Applied to a visual level it would indicate "fine-spun", "slender" in his definition, or extending it a bit, "delicate".

Catullus' intention may be in part to sharpen up the impression left by *molli*. Though *arguta* is referred to the *solea* (sandal), it suggests the foot. Catullus seems to focus attention on the foot as he moves from *molli pede* to *fulgentem*, *plantam* to *arguta solea*, and the Ovidian parallel suggests that the foot should be *exiguus*. That the Neoterics occasionally used the Greek meaning of a com-

⁵⁾ *Catullo, Le Poesie* (Rome 1977) 178.

⁶⁾ *Catullus, The Poems* (Oxford 1961) 352.

⁷⁾ *Catullus* (Plymouth 1983) 183.

⁸⁾ G. Showerman, *Ovid. Heroides and Amores* (London 1914) 457. The new Oxford Latin Dictionary, *s.v.* gives "creaking, rattling, snapping", for Cat. 68.72, and "expressive, eloquent", for *argutis ocellis* in Ov. *Amor.* 3.2.83.

parable word is common knowledge. One can think of the notorious *nutricum tenuis* for *mamillarum tenuis* in Catullus 64.18.

Finally, if the word *argutus* in certain contexts has the Greek meaning of *λιγύς*, one can apply it to the various contexts we find in the dictionary: *ocelli* and *manus*—as finely wrought (and thereby expressive); a horse's head as finely wrought (and expressive), a sandal as finely wrought.

If under Greek influence, or independently, a Roman thought of *argutus* as something on the high, fine side, the high fine sounds of birds, saws, and pine trees in the wind would be reflected in shapes as fine and delicate.

The word *argutus* is used by Cicero in a visual context, thus indicating that it was more than a Neoteric invention (Cicero detested the Neoteric style), and that either the Greek *λιγύς* had influenced the Latin context among Greek speaking Romans or that *argutus* in Latin already lent itself to the visual context without influence from the Greek. It seems more likely, though, that especially in a poetic context, the Greek meaning came into play. Given Latin poets' fondness for deliberate ambiguity, we cannot rule out synaesthesia. The context of the poem at this point leads into *arguta* being taken as "delicate" but the usual meaning of the word seems to have described a sound. Catullus can thus take advantage of both the visual and audible aspects⁹).

Inceptive *Quoque* and the Introduction *Medias in res* in Classical and Early Medieval Latin Literature

By BERNARD FRISCHER, Los Angeles

In this article, the existence of a hitherto unnoticed use of the Latin adverb *quoque* at the very beginning of a work of poetry or prose is established (the so-called "inceptive" usage of *quoque*); three main types and five varieties of this usage are distinguished and exemplified; and the results are applied

⁹) F. Della Corte, "Arguta Solea," *Riv. di Fil.* 107 (1979) 30–34, sees the phrase as a reference to Aphrodite — based on Philostratos, *Epist.* 37.11. However, it is most unlikely that the word *ρῥύζω* used by Philostratos means "strideva", see LSJ *s. v.*, and comparison to Aphrodite would disturb the Laodameia parallel. Aphrodite's problem may be a wet sandal.