

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

DIONYSIUS CHALCUS *FR. 3 AGAIN**

Abstract: Dionysius Chalcus *fr. 3 West* contains an elaborate metaphor for the cottabus game in which the dining room and the symposiasts are compared to a gymnasium in which young pugilists are training. The author suggests that the visual force of the central part of the metaphor lies in the actual way in which σφαίραι (used as a kind of boxing gloves) were wrapped around the hand and forearm. In the problematic v. 4, ἐκείνον is identified as the symposiarch, and the verse is seen to function as another part of this complex metaphor of the symposium as *agōn*.

ABOUT Dionysius Chalcus, almost all that we know with certainty is that he was an Athenian, born early in the fifth century. This paucity of data notwithstanding, he is one of the most interesting ‘lesser’ elegiac poets, considering the original qualities of his poetry and his privileged position as a testimony to the rise of Classical Athens.¹ The most substantial remnant of his poetry, out of the seven preserved fragments, is the debated *fr. 3 West* (= 2 Gentili-Prato; 3 Diehl). It consists of three elegiac couplets with holodactylic hexameters, containing one of the most elaborate metaphorical images of the symposium transmitted in poetry. I give here West’s text (identical with that of Gentili-Prato), together with E.K. Borthwick’s translation.²

- 1 κότταβον ἐνθάδε σοι τρίτον ἐστάναι οἱ δυσέρωτες
ἡμεῖς προστίθεμεν γυμνασίωι Βρομίου
κώρυκον. οἱ δὲ παρόντες ἐνείρετε χεῖρας ἅπαντες
ἐς σφαίρας κυλίκων· καὶ πρὶν ἐκείνον ἰδεῖν,
5 ὄμματι βηματίσασθε τὸν αἰθέρα τὸν κατὰ κλίνην,
εἰς ὅσον αἰ λάταγες χωρίον ἐκτατέαι.

3 ἐνείρεται A: corr. Musurus || 4 σπεύρας pro σφαίρας O. Jahn 213 | πρὶν ἕκαστον ἰεῖν Dalecampius, πρὶν ἀπ’ οἶνον ἰεῖν Bergk in app., πρὶν ἐκεῖσε δικεῖν Edmonds, alii alia || 5 βηματίσασθε Musurus -σασθε A | ἀέρα v.l. receperunt Bergk, Sartori, Edmonds | κατακλινῆ v.l. recepit Bach (tum et Borthwick) || 6 ἐκτέταται A: corr. Bücheler ἐκτέαται Hermann ἐντατέαι Borthwick

Thirdly we love-sick youths introduce also a cottabus to take its stand for you here in the gymnasium of Bromius, as a punch-ball. All you who are present entwine your fingers in the thongs of the cups (i.e. the cup-handles which serve as thongs); and (?) before fixing your eyes on it (the target), you should measure by pacing with your eyes the air high above the couch, and estimate the area over which the wine-drops are to extend.

It is Borthwick’s merit to have elucidated brilliantly several difficult aspects of this complex metaphor of symposium. In his words: ‘it is an elaborate jest in which a cottabus party is described in vocabulary appropriate to the gymnasium and its pursuits, the dining room itself being called the γυμνάσιον Βρομίου. Instead of Hermes, the god of athleticism, it is Dionysus who is the presiding deity; instead of the punch ball (κώρυκος) which would be prominent in the gymnasium, it is a cottabus-stand which the competitors propose to belabour’ (Borthwick (1964) 49). In this paper I would like to deal with both the realia behind the fragment and its interpretation, aspects that either were not resolved by Borthwick or were obscured by later interpreters. I will start by remarking that since the gymnasium is the source of the metaphor, a better knowledge

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¹ For the few biographical data about the poet, see Garzya (1952). For the innovative character of his poetry, see Miralles (1971) 13-21.

² Borthwick (1964) 49.

of the relevant facts about fifth-century Athenian gymnastics may give us better access to the metaphor's target, the Attic symposium.

Since Borthwick's article, no one has doubted that the agonistic σφαῖραι of v. 4 are the well-known implement for pugilists. Two problems still remain concerning this question: what exactly the σφαῖραι were, and which of their features evoked the image employed by the poet, who compares them with the sympotic κύλικες. We must remember that in κότταβος, the sympotic game *par excellence*, the player introduces his forefinger into one of the cup's ansae, raises the cup over his head, and tries with a twist of the wrist to toss the last drops from the cup against a target placed in the midst of the players in the hall.³

Borthwick did not succeed in identifying the σφαῖραι correctly, and he gave in his article an unsatisfactory interpretation of the motivation for the image, which is central to the construction of the whole metaphor. He explicitly identifies the σφαῖραι with the well-known ἰμάντες, the ox-hide thongs that pugilists would wind around fingers, hands and forearms as protection before fighting. To sustain this identification, Borthwick offers no argument (he adduces Pl. *Leg.* 830b, Philostr. *Gymn.* 10, Eust. 1324.19, which will be considered later) but he adduces the authority of E.N. Gardiner (1955) and H. Frère (1940) to support it. Those authors, however, have a completely different view from Borthwick's on the subject, and even disagree with each other.⁴

For the identification of the form of the ἰμάντες we have the precious testimony of Philostratus, corroborated by many vases from the sixth and fifth centuries:⁵

ὄπλιστο δὲ ἡ ἀρχαία πυγμὴ τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον· ἐς στρόφιον οἱ τέτταρες τῶν δακτύλων ἐνεβίβαζοντο, καὶ ὑπερέβαλλον τοῦ στροφίου τοσοῦτον, ὅσον εἰ συναγόιντο πρὸς εἶναι, ξυνείχοντο δὲ ὑπὸ σειρᾶς, ἣν καθάπερ ἔρεισμα ἐβέβληντο ἐκ τοῦ πήχεος, νυνὶ δὲ αὖ...

The old style of boxing match used the following kind of an outfit: the four fingers were thrust into a band and they projected out so far as to form a fist when clenched, and they were held together by a strap which ran down the forearm as a support. But nowadays... (Philostr. *Gymn.* 10, tr. Robinson 215).

It was Frère who shed more light on the controversial subject of the form, function and origin of the boxing σφαῖραι, but perhaps his arguments should be revised in view of precisely this poem. Frère (who was unaware of this text) stated the fact that the σφαῖραι provided greater protection than the simple ἰμάντες, and consequently were an appropriate item of equipment for pugilistic training. He proposed that σφαῖραι and ἰμάντες must have had a different nature: 'Gants d'entraînement, les σφαῖραι ne devaient pas seulement différer des ἰμάντες par leur forme, mais encore par leur nature' (p. 151), and proposed to identify the σφαῖραι with the kind of true boxing gloves that can be seen in some late representations. But, we may argue, if the σφαῖραι are real gloves, similar to those used 'à la boxe française dans nos gymnases', the image of the symposiast who introduces his forefinger through the handles of the κύλιξ cannot be derived from the movement of the athlete who passes his fingers through the loop of the ἰμάντες. The late date of the representations also argues against such an identification, presented as problematic by Frère himself.

³ It is generally acknowledged that the kind of κότταβος here alluded to is the one known as κατακτός. For the game of κότταβος, see Mazzarino (1939); Schneider, *RE* 11.1528-41 s.v. 'Kottabos'; and the excellent résumé with modern bibliography in Olson's commentary to *Ar. Pax* 343-4.

⁴ Gardiner (1910) (of which Gardiner (1955) 197ff., quoted by Borthwick, is a résumé) accepts Jüthner's identification of the σφαῖραι with another, more dangerous kind of boxing gloves, predecessors of the Roman *caestus*. Such gloves, they argue, would have appeared

around the beginning of the fourth century BC, but would be attested only in later authors; see Jüthner (1896) 75-6, 82-4. The error of such an argument, which derives from a misinterpretation of Pl. *Leg.* 830b-e, was exposed by Frère. See Poliakoff (1986) 92-3 for a summary of the almost unbelievably large number of authors who, before and after Frère (1940), misunderstood the text of Pl. *Leg.* 830b.

⁵ See, for example, Munich 2305 (= *ARV* 182.4; sixth century BC); Boston 01.8021 (= *ARV* 212.2; c. 500 BC); London BM E39 (= *ARV* 430.29; 480-450 BC).

Dealing with the shape of ancient boxing gloves three decades later, Patrucco made a fair presentation of the *status quaestionis*, but without understanding *Pl. Leg.* 830b, and without paying attention to *Plut. Mor.* 80B (see n.8), Dionysius' poem and Frère's article, he mistakenly identified again ἰμάντες with σφαίραι, and supposed them to be a kind of 'glove' exclusively of the Hellenistic age.⁶

More recently, P. Angeli Bernardini has come back to this verse and to the interpretation given by Borthwick, whom she criticizes for having taken as belonging to the fifth century a description of the σφαίραι that corresponds to a more evolved type not attested in the abundant iconography of vases until the middle of the fourth century.⁷ Sharing Patrucco's view of the evolution of the ἰμάντες (p. 129), but trying to make it compatible with our poem, she argues that the σφαίραι here mentioned were the older kind of ἰμάντες, implying that they had in reality a tubular section that, wrapped around the hand and forearm, would give it an aspect 'vagamente sferico'. The basis for the metaphor would then be the optical effect 'della cordicella di cuoio avvolta alla base delle dita', which would correspond to the effect of the symposiast's finger inside the kylix handle. To visualize this optical effect she proposes to compare two images from two contemporary red-figure vases: the young athlete who is rolling the ἰμάντες 'sotto gli occhi dell'istruttore' in London BM E78 (= *ARV* 401.3, 1651; 500-450 BC, *PLATE* 8a) and the hetaira who is about to make the cottabus shot in Leningrad 644 (Euphronius; *ARV* 16.15, 1619).

I still think that the gesture of introducing one's fingers through the thong's knot gives a much more satisfactory basis for the image of the poem than merely the 'optical effect' allegedly produced by the strip of hide that is wound round the fingers, and explains better ἐνείρετε in v. 3. A knot, in any case, would be the necessary start for the placement of any boxing glove made of thongs. But there is another factor which, in my opinion, determines the evocative power of this image and makes the entire metaphor more forceful. In order to be able to appreciate it, it is necessary to explain briefly the exact nature of the σφαίραι.

It is wrong, as we saw, to make σφαίραι synonymous with ἰμάντες, as first Borthwick and then Patrucco and Bernardini did. The ancient literary authors who mention them explicitly differentiate them, and from their evidence we can at least conclude that the σφαίραι were a kind of protection more appropriate for training than the simple ἰμάντες.⁸ Moreover, we have considerable iconographic documentation bearing witness to the use, during the sixth and fifth centuries, of thongs (and never full gloves) for boxing, in competition as well as in training. In my opinion, we must conclude that the σφαίραι and ἰμάντες differed in the way that ox-hide thongs (and occasionally some other soft material like wool, which when tied with the thongs would serve to soften the blow) were wound around the hand, and/or the number or length of such thongs; I also think that the most natural inference is that the σφαίραι, offering more protection, would also require a larger number of thongs and more wraps around the hand. That would not only give more protection to the boxer who was using them, but also (especially if something

⁶ Patrucco (1972) 231-46, esp. 244-5.

⁷ Angeli Bernardini (1989) 128.

⁸ The main evidence is the passage of Plato's *Laws* where the author describes the kind of exercises that must be practised in the well-governed state:

Suppose we had been rearing boxers or pancratiasts or competitors in any similar branch of athletics, should we have gone straight into the contest without previously engaging in daily combat with someone? If we were boxers, for a great many days before the contest we should have been learning how to fight, [830b] and working hard, practising in mimicry all those methods we meant to employ on the day we should be fighting for victory, and imitating the real

thing as nearly as possible: thus, we should don padded gloves instead of proper ring-gloves (ἀντὶ ἰμάντων σφαίρας ἂν περιεδοῦμεθα), so as to get the best possible practice in giving blows and dodging them? (*Pl. Leg.* 830a-b, tr. R.G. Bury).

The main confusion in the interpretation of this text derived from the belief that the σφαίρομαχία alluded to in *Pl. Leg.* 830e used the same kind of σφαίραι mentioned here. The most reasonable conclusion is that reached by Poliakoff (1986) 93-5, who explains the latter implement as 'the tip of a weapon'. Plutarch also distinguishes explicitly σφαίραι from ἰμάντες: ὥσπερ ἰμάντας ἢ σφαίρας ἐπιδοῦμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους (*Plut. Mor.* 80B).

soft was introduced) to the opponent, if the rolling process were done in the appropriate way. It would also constitute a heavier implement, an additional advantage for training, since that would create a condition for training that was more difficult than the real fight: this was an exchange of blows mainly directed against the face until one of the pugilists surrendered, without there being a time limit, and therefore the ability to hold the arms up would be essential for victory. All of this fits perfectly with Plato's text, so often misinterpreted. On the other hand, the extra number of turns would give the 'glove' a more rounded aspect, probably determining the name received by the σφαῖραι.⁹

It has been calculated, using an estimate that might turn out to be too conservative, that the boxing ἰμάντες would measure no less than 3-4 m in length, and probably more.¹⁰ To prepare the σφαῖραι, as we have said, more thongs would be required, or larger ones. Sixth- and fifth-century vases offer abundant illustration of the large bundle of ἰμάντες and the long and tedious process of wrapping it.¹¹ It is easy to understand the extreme care necessary in this process, since an inappropriate placement of the thongs (deliberately or negligently) could result in serious harm to the opponent or even the user himself. It is therefore natural that the *paidotribes*' functions included ensuring the correct placement of the thongs.¹² We witness this arrangement in the paintings of the youths who, with an expression of undisguised boredom, are winding the ἰμάντες under the watchful supervision of the *paidotribes*. Sometimes the athletes appear sitting, especially if the coach is not too near, in a gesture not very different from that of the symposiast who reclines in his *kline* to make the cottabus shot. To wrap the σφαῖραι with the same minute care would naturally take more time; however, when the training was not against an opponent but in front of a κώρυκος, some precautions intended to prevent harm to the opponent as a result of the poor placement of the thongs could be safely ignored. In such conditions, the young athlete would accelerate the process by the simple method of putting his hand above his head and turning it so that the thong would wind around the hand sharply and quickly; and if this was in fact the case, I think that we have at last discovered the main visual image that gave the poet the metaphor of the cottabus/boxing.

The presence of τρίτον and σοι in the first line of the fragment transmitted by Athenaeus, along with other factors that do not need to be mentioned here, shows that the first verse of our fragment cannot have been the first verse of the elegy from which it is cited. We can now ask ourselves if we can say something else about the placement of this fragment within the whole poem. Combat sports were placed towards the end of the agonistic contests (boxing matches were held on the fourth day of the Olympic games), and τρίτον in the first verse could mean that the κότταβος match is the third one that the assistants at the Bromius gymnasium are to execute, or the third agonistic image. Three is also the number of the mixings that should be made during symposia, according to the well-known passage from Eubulus (put in the mouth of Dionysus himself): τρεῖς γὰρ μόνους κρατήρας ἐγκεραννύω || τοῖς εὖ φρονούσι (Eubul. *fr.* 93 K.-A. = 94

⁹ Scholars have always thought that the gloves had to have a round appearance as a necessary prerequisite. Although this is *a priori* very probable, it is by no means obligatory for the name to come from the shape of the object. Pl. *Leg.* 830e is probably the first evidence of a round-shaped implement, necessarily older, called σφαῖρα, pegged at the sharp end of the spear to prevent the weapon from causing harm during training (see previous note). It is possible that the name of the 'safer gloves' came from a metaphorical extension of the *function* of this kind of ball, and not necessarily, or only, from its shape.

¹⁰ The thongs would be about 3 cm thick and 1.5 cm. in width, according to Jüthner (1896) 80. As for their length, 'from the vase paintings they appear to be ten or

twelve feet long, and the number of windings represented require at least that length' (Gardiner (1910) 403), but I find it naïve to accept that the painters tried to represent *exactly* the number of thongs used – an almost impossible task for vase painters if that was considerably larger, as I think.

¹¹ Toledo 1961.26 (= *ARV* 1648.36 bis; 500-450 BC), Paris CA 4200 (= *ARV* 418.26; 500-450 BC), Malibu 81.AE.217 (525-475 BC); see also Dartmouth C 970.35 (= *ARV* 117.6, 1577; 525-475 BC), Philadelphia MS 2444 (= *ARV* 1596, 344.64; 500-450 BC).

¹² For the identification of the figure of the trainer as the *paidotribes*, see Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 42.3; Fougères, *Dar.-Sag.* s.v. 'paidotribes'; Beck (1964) 129-40.

Kock). Whatever the real force of this τρίτον, any sensible interpretation of this fragment should account for the possibility that at least some of the elements in the play of images were introduced in that part of the poem that does not survive. If the clear allusion to the expectation of an erotic reward was the point of departure for a new agonistic metaphor (κότταβος was the favourite game for erotic entertainment), we cannot tell.¹³

The last three verses are no less problematic than the ones already considered. Borthwick wrote of them: ‘The following words καὶ πρὶν ἐκεῖνον ἰδεῖν are puzzling, and perhaps corrupt: the only possible meaning is that which I have set in my translation, with ἐκεῖνον = the κότταβον–κώρυκον target.’ This interpretation has been followed by all the commentators since Borthwick, even though it produces a scarcely credible sequence of thought: it is difficult to imagine another human activity where *seeing* plays a more important role for its execution than the precise act of quickly measuring distances in space, but on this view of the lines the poet is telling the players to measure space *before* watching, and to do it with sight!¹⁴ A better solution can perhaps be found, if we bear in mind the point that the first line of the fragment is not the beginning of the elegy, and if we fully exploit the iconographic evidence previously mentioned, which is our best testimony for athletic education in contemporary Athens.

Early and mid fifth-century Attic vases frequently portray a feature of the young Athenian’s physical training: the organized exercise of groups of athletes attended by the *paidotribes* (and sometimes his subordinates). The coach seems to have had to move from one youth to another in order to inspect the individual exercises, or request that they wait in the appropriate place.¹⁵ The actual situation of the youths of our verses, preparing themselves for the exercise, is illustrated by a series of vases depicting a scene parallel to the coach-boxer scene mentioned earlier (n.11). The precise attitude of the *paidotribes* in this new series of drawings is worth noting, as it is surely a conventional representation of a common situation in the gymnasium: the body of the coach is now facing towards the youth, who appears again rolling his ἰμάντες, but *at the same time* the *paidotribes* has his head turned in the opposite direction, to watch a simultaneous bout (cf. London BM E39 (= *ARV* 430.29, 1653; 480-450 BC), PLATE 8b) or another athlete (cf. Munich 2305 (= *ARV* 182.4, 1631; 525-475 BC)); in a third example, there is no context, leaving the spectator of the vase to recognize the scene (cf. London BM E78 (= *ARV* 401.3; 500-450 BC), PLATE 8a). In this situation, if the coach wants a new athlete to start performing the exercise, he must turn his head to him to give some conventional signal, perhaps based on eye contact. But who indicates to the symposiasts that it is their turn for shooting at the κότταβος? A comparable function to that of the *paidotribes* at the gymnasium is adopted during a symposium by the symposiarch, who is in charge of and governs its functioning.¹⁶ In my opinion, the symposiarch must be the referent of ἐκεῖνον in the target of our metaphor (the *paidotribes* of its source: a new couple in the metaphorical image of the gymnasium/symposium), and obviously ἐκεῖνον is to be understood as the subject, not the object, of the infinitive: ‘and before he looks at us, measure with sight...’¹⁷ The poet is telling the players that before the symposiarch looks

¹³ This is not, of course, the only possible explanation. The poet may be saying that he is going to introduce a new theme in the elegy.

¹⁴ Several scholars have despaired of the transmitted text and resorted to emendation, such as Dalecampius’ ‘ιειν’ for ‘ιδειν’, a verb employed for throwing in the cottabus game, but further, more radical text manipulation is still needed (see the *app. crit.*).

¹⁵ Training by groups is also attested in Pl. *Plt.* 294d-e, and cf. Beck (1964) 135-6.

¹⁶ On the functions of the symposiarch, see *Eleg. Aesp.* 27.3-10 West (= 12 Gentili-Prato):

χρῆ δ’, ὅταν εἰς τοιοῦτο συνέλωμεν φίλοι ἄνδρες ἢ

πρᾶγμα, γελᾶν παίζειν χρησαμένους ἀρετῆι, ἢ ἴδεσθαί τε συνόντας, ἐς ἀλλήλους τε φ[λ]υαρεῖν ἢ καὶ σκάπτειν τοιαῦθ’ οἷα γέλωτα φέρειν. ἢ ἡ δὲ σπουδὴ ἐπέσθα, ἀκούωμέν [τε λ]εγόντων ἢ ἐν μέρει· ἢ δ’ ἀρετῆ συμποσίου πέλεται. ἢ τοῦ δὲ ποταρχόντος πειθώμεθα· ταῦτα γὰρ ἐστὶν ἢ ἔργ’ ἀνδρῶν ἀγαθῶν, εὐλογίαν τε φέρειν.

The ‘king’ of the symposium is given various names: βασιλεύς, πρύτανις, etc. Cf. Pellizer (1990) 178 n.7.

¹⁷ The use of ἰδεῖν/ὄραν absolute with the meaning ‘look at’, even suggesting the movement of the head, is found in Homer and Classical Attic, e.g. ὄρᾳ πάλιν, ‘he looks over his shoulder’ (*Soph. Phil.* 935); cf. Archil. 105.1 West, and further Solon 8.7-8 for βλέπω and ὄραν

at any of them to indicate their turn for the shot, they must carefully measure visually the space between them and the target, since their success depends on such preparations – something, we may suppose, that would be of great importance to the *δυσέρωτες* who hope to attract the favours of the winner. On this occasion, it is the *eromenoi* who play *κότταβος*, and would-be *erastai* who look on; among this older group of *δυσέρωτες* is the poet himself.

A final clarification may be in order. Explaining the meaning of verses 5-6, Borthwick writes (p. 50): ‘The analogy with boxing, however, seems now to be finished, since *βηματίζεσθαι* is used in pacing out an area or distance, and would naturally refer in a gymnastic context to the preparation of the ground for a throw (e.g. of discus or javelin), or alternatively to the measurement of a throw which has been made.’ Although the acceptability of a metaphorical image does not depend upon an exact match between every one of the comparanda, there does need to be a high degree of consistency, which would disappear if, in the midst of the play of correspondences, one of the images ended abruptly to give way to another, very different one. Measuring the distance between the boxer and his opponent (or the *κώρυκος*) before throwing a blow is an indispensable part of boxing (cf. *μέτρα* in Philostr. *Gymn.* 14). I think it preferable to suppose that the poet simply made use of another term from the pugilistic vocabulary to conclude his image, without any need to imagine that a new metaphorical play is opening up.

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used as synonyms in elegy. Word order also favours this interpretation, cf. *ἀλλὰ φυλάττου καὶ πρὶν ἐκεῖνον προσκεῖσθαί σοι πρότερον σὺ τοὺς δελφίνας μετεωρίζου* (Ar. *Eq.* 761-2); Isoc. *Paneg.* (Or. 4) 141; Dem. *De cor.* 30; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 2.61.3. For sim-

ilar constructions with the pronoun as subject, see also Hdt. 8.144; Xen. *Cyr.* 3.1.19; Lys. 30.3; Pl. *Soph.* 261a; Philox. *Gramm. fr.* 18; Plut. *Oth.* 6.5, *Thes.* 14.3 = Philoch. *FGrHist* 328 F 109; and Soph. *fr.* 502 Radt, with Cassio’s comments in Cassio (1980) 260.



(a) Young athlete rolling ἱμάντες while *paidotribes* looks away
London BM E78 = *ARV* 401.3, 1651 (photograph: British Museum)



(b) Young athlete rolling ἱμάντες while *paidotribes* watches a simultaneous bout
London BM E39 = *ARV* 430.29, 1653 (photograph: British Museum)