

Menander, Epitrepontes 400

ἂν δέ τις λάβῃ μ[ε] τ[ι]
 περιεργασάμενον ἢ λαλήσαντ', ἐκτεμεῖν
 400 διδωμ' ἔμαντοῦ ΓΟΥΣΟΔΟΝΤΑΣ. ἀλλ' οὔτοι
 τις ἐσθ' ὁ προσίων;

In this despondent monologue, Onesimus has admitted that he is a stupid fool in comparison with Habrotonon, and he now determines to mend his ways: no longer will he be a meddler and a babbler. At 400 (Koerte's numbering: it is 359 in Jensen), the papyrus produces a verse that does not scan, with ΓΟΥΣ a *vox nihili* and ὀδόντας rather inappropriate after ἐκτεμεῖν. Many remedies have been tried since 1907, but it is mainly a tale of misplaced ingenuity, as the following discussion will show.

In order to retain ὀδόντας, it is necessary to assume that ΓΟΥΣ is a careless mistake for τοῦς (in itself, plausible enough, although Lefébvre was wrong actually to interpret the traces on the papyrus as τοῦς), and to mend the metre by deleting ἀλλ' (von Arnim, Wilamowitz, Koerte 1910) or by replacing οὔτοι with ὀδι (Wilamowitz, the later editions of Koerte). But this reminds one of the doctor who amputated a healthy arm to cure a poisoned foot¹). There is nothing wrong here with ἀλλ' οὔτοι (for the use of this phrase to announce a new arrival, cf. *Samia* 294); the fault lies in the ampossible collocation ἐκτεμεῖν τοῦς ὀδόντας. Teeth are not "cut away" in ancient Greece; Attic uses ἐκβάλλειν (Solon, 19. 2 Diehl; Eur. *Cycl.* 644) or

1) Cf. W. Schmid, *Philologus*, xcvi 1943, 157. Yet this fault is not so bad as that of failing to recognise a poisoned foot when one sees one. Coppola (*RFIC*, ix *N.S.*, 1931, 253) advances the theory that the papyrus text (with ΓΟΥΣ corrected to τοῦς only) stands as Menander wrote it; that ὀδόντας here is a Menandrian euphemism for ὄρχεις; and that the line's failure to scan is an intentional error on Menander's part; cf. the editions of Wachtler and De Falco, *ad loc.* The ingenuity of these suggestions seems to me misplaced; neither Menander nor any other Attic comedian can be proved to have written one single unmetrical line for such an allegedly humorous purpose; and the only comment that one may legitimately make is to refer the reader to Aristophanes, *Ran.* 1323 ff.

κόπτειν (Ar. Ran. 573) for the method of dental extraction relevant to Onesimus' present monologue²).

Capps, Robert and 'Unus Multorum' suggest that ὀδόντας may have been a joke παρὰ προσδοκίαν; the last-named writes: "the expression ἐκτεμεῖς shows that it was not teeth he was first thinking of, but something different. He begins by bringing his hand lower down, but then thinking better of it he takes it to his mouth and touches his teeth"³). This interpretation is rather forced, ignoring as it does the fact that in ancient comedy *double-entendre* jokes normally depend on phraseology more precise and more meaningful than that of ἐκτεμεῖν τοὺς ὀδόντας. The two relevant types were (1) to replace one word by another of (sometimes) roughly similar sound, which though of unrelated meaning nevertheless produced a new phrase of impeccable precision (e.g., Ar. Ran. 422⁴); and (2) to substitute for the offensive word a suggestive metaphor (e.g., Men. Pk. 232 ff).

Thus if Menander wrote ἐκτεμεῖν, and there is no reason to doubt that he did, he could not also have written τοὺς ὀδόντας. What then were the appendages that Onesimus could have had cut off? Two alternatives are logically possible: τὴν γλώτταν (cf. Herodotus, ix 112; Herondas, vi 41), and τοὺς ὄρχεις. But if Menander had written a metrical equivalent of τὴν γλώτταν (e.g., τὸν λάργυγ', cf. Ar. Ran. 575), why should it have been corrupted to τοὺς ὀδόντας? No reason suggests itself. More probably then the original word was a metrical substitute for τοὺς ὄρχεις; in this case ὀδόντας would be a pedagogic bowdlerisation, as Schmid has convincingly argued⁵). But what was that original word? Schmid (after van Leeuwen) proposed τοὺς νεφρούς, alleging that "kidneys" was an euphemism for ὄρχεις, and citing Ar. Ran. 1279f and Philippides, fr. 5 Kock, as parallel instances. There are two weaknesses in this theory. First, τοὺς νεφρούς would be a genteelism already; what then would have been the point of its removal by some antique Bowdler? Secondly, although τοὺς νεφρούς may plausibly be interpreted as euphemistic in the two comic passages cited, the references there differ from that of the Menander passage. Over Philippides, fr. 5, it seems as if Schmid (as well as the original citer, Athenaeus ix 384 e) misses the point⁶). The only legitimate conclusion to be drawn from the witticism put in Gnathaena's mouth by Philippides is that this *betaera* once intentionally

2) The objection to ἐκτεμεῖν rules out of court the otherwise attractive suggestion that ὀδόντας may be a gloss for τομείς (Croiset) or μύλους (Hense, Sudhaus).

3) In *The Lately Discovered Fragments of Menander*, Oxford 1909, 48. The ἐκτεμεῖς of this author is an incorrect reading.

4) Schmid (after Coppola) makes a not dissimilar point about Ar. Av. 442 ff.

5) *Op. cit.*, 157 f.

6) Mistaken interpretations of this sort are not infrequent in Athenaeus; perhaps a few instances may be collected here. Athenaeus ii 67 d, Aristophanes fr. 688 is no evidence for the excellence of vinegar from Cleonae; at iii 123 f, Alexis fr. 141, 10 (where χιόνα is the object of παρασκευάζομεν, not of πίνειν) is wrongly cited to prove that snow was drunk; at vi 230 b, Athenaeus misinterprets the dramatic background of Alexis fr. 2; at viii 365 d, the use of the word συμβολαί in Alexis fr. 143 has nothing to do with contribution dinners; at ix 367 f, Alexis fr. 86 is no evidence for the use of παροψίς = plate; at ix 373 c d, Cratinus fr. 114 is no evidence for a masculine use of ὄρνις, since φοινικόπτερος is of two terminations.

misnamed some cooked *ὄρχεις* as *νεφροί* for a definite purpose: to turn the embarrassed blushes of the other ladies present into relieved laughter; clearly the existence of this particular witticism is no guarantee that *νεφροί* was a common euphemism for *ὄρχεις* at that time. In *Ran.* 1279f, on the other hand, the reference is merely to having a pain in the lumbar regions, and the positional vagueness of the verb used (*βουβωνιῶ*) makes the euphemism comprehensible. It is doubtful, however, if the same genteelism would have been possible after the much more precise *ἐκτεμεῖν*. In English one may have a pain in 'the loins', but one would not cut them off.

I suggest, accordingly, that Menander may have written *τὰς γονάς*. For the use of *γοναί* = the male genitals, see Hippocrates, *Art.* 45 (Littré iv 194, Jones-Withington iii 290), where Galen defines the Hippocratic usage as follows: *γονάς δὲ εἶρηκε τὰ γεννητὰ μόρια, μήτραν μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν θηλειῶν, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν ἀνδρῶν τὰ σπερματικά τινα καλούμενα* (Commentary on Hippocrates, *Art.*, iii 41, = Kühn xviii A, 543); cf. also Hippocrates, *Mochl.* 1 (Littré iv 342) and *Liqu.* 2 (Littré vi 122). That an Ionic prose usage should turn up in a passage of Menander would be no surprise: after all, the comic poet was writing at the time of the development of the *κοινή* dialect⁷).

If *τὰς γονάς* is right, there are two possible ways of explaining the papyrus corruption. If *ΓΟΥΣ* were merely a slip of the pen for *τοὺς*, we should be presented with a simple example of a bowdlerising interpolation that had removed all traces of the original reading. But is it not also possible that *ΓΟΥΣ* was corrupted from a blurred *ΓΟΝΑΣ*, at a time when the interpolated *τοὺς δδόντας* had not yet driven *τὰς γονάς* completely out of the text?

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7) Cf. Schwyzer, *Gr. Gramm.*, i 128; Blass-Debrunner (translated Funk), *Grammar of New-Testament Greek*, 2; Radermacher, *Koine* (*Wien. Sitzb.*, 224 *Abb.* 5, 1947), 24.