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'Αναβαίνειν AND καταβαίνειν AS THEATRICAL TERMS

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The use in certain passages of ἀναβαίνειν, "climb up, mount" (Arist. *Ach.* 732, *Eq.* 149, *Vesp.* 1341), and of καταβαίνειν, "descend from" (Arist. *Eccl.* 1152; Plut. *Dem.* 34.3), has been taken by some as strong evidence for the existence of a raised stage in the fifth-century theatre of Dionysus.[1] Each passage has been both rejected and supported, for various reasons, as evidence of height in the acting area. Yet a brief examination of the arguments will show that the problem remains one of translation; and new definitions for the words may provide a new solution to the question of their implications for the theatre itself.

The raised-stage interpretation of these words was vigorously opposed by J. W. White who, founding his argument on the scholia to *Vesp.* 149, contended that the terms did originally have reference to elevation when the first "actor" got up on a "table" to address the chorus, but that by the fifth century (when there was no longer any elevation of the actors) they had become technical terms for "enter" and "exit," with no sense of height in their theatrical application.[2] This explanation falters when confronted with the fact that the command ἀνάβαινε (ἄμβατε) is addressed in all three passages to persons who have already entered the acting area, and that while καταβαίνειν could mean "exit" at *Eccl.* 1152, it cannot possibly have that sense at Plut. *Dem.* 34.3, where it is actually associated with entering.[3]

[1]It is now generally agreed that Plato *Symp.* 194b refers only to the *proagôn* in the Odeon, and that at *Vesp.* 1514 the meaning is *in certamen descendere,* although the latest proponent of the raised-stage interpretation, P. D. Arnott, *Greek Scenic Conventions* (Oxford 1962; hereafter referred to as *GSC*) 32–34, notes the "theatrical connotation" of the former and the implication of physical descent in the latter.

[2]"The Stage in Aristophanes," *HSCP* 2 (1891) 159–205 (166–67); the "table" is the ἔλεος of Pollux 4.123.

[3]Cf. Arnott, *GSC* 31–34, although his objection to *Eccl.* 1152 is irrelevant, for there is no need to assume that Blepyros exits as soon as the chorus tell him to. C. W. Dearden, *The Stage of Aristophanes* (London 1976) 14, rejects all of the passages as evidence, but for insufficient reasons (e.g., *Eccl.* 1152 refers to the parodos, *Vesp.* 1341 may be given an obscene interpretation, etc.).

These apparently valid objections have caused a certain uneasiness in some opponents of the raised stage, and have resulted in amendments to White's theory: Capps, for example, preferred "come up to, approach" instead of "enter" for ἀνάβαινε, and admitted that for καταβαίνειν, "the whole situation is puzzling."[4] Of those who do admit the implications of height in the words, some try to account for it by postulating an original upward slope of the parodoi, others by suggesting a minor difference in level, perhaps a couple of steps, between the orchestra and the area in front of the *skênê*.[5]

A possible solution, however, that would remove all these discrepancies requires only the assumption that the words were indeed technical theatre terms, which Aristophanes uses to score a comic point by breaking the dramatic illusion, as he so often does with contemporary references and political jibes.[6] Proceeding on this assumption, we find another "technical" usage of these verbs employed in the fifth and fourth centuries by Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Plato: ἀναβαίνειν meaning "to go 'up' inland, away from the coast" and καταβαίνειν meaning "to go 'down' from the interior to the coast."[7] In every case the sea is the point of reference for motion "toward" or "away," and the sense of physically climbing or descending is at most vestigial. This meaning may have been adapted directly to theatrical usage, with the audience as the point of reference; thus ἀναβαίνειν would mean "to move 'up' toward the *skênê*, away from the orchestra" and καταβαίνειν would signify the reverse, "to move 'down' from the *skênê* toward the orchestra," analogous to the

[4]Edward Capps, "The Greek Stage According to the Extant Dramas," *TAPA* 22 (1891) 5–80 (66–68).

[5]J. T. Allen, *The Greek Theater of the Fifth Century before Christ* (Univ. of Calif. Publ. in Class. Philol. 7) 36–38, and A. W. Pickard-Cambridge, *The Theatre of Dionysus in Athens* (Oxford 1946) 69, on the sloping parodoi, and, *contra,* Arnott, *GSC* 29; R. C. Flickinger, *The Greek Theatre and its Drama* (Chicago 1936[4]) 91–92.

[6]For some theatrical references in Aristophanes, see K. J. Dover, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Berkeley 1972) 55–59. Despite the contentions of G. M. Sifakis, *Parabasis and Animal Choruses* (London 1971) 6–11, the term "dramatic illusion" is entirely valid for Greek drama; he ought rather to speak of "*realistic* illusion," for without the "dramatic illusion" drama ceases to be drama and becomes merely a public recitation. Moreover, far from making "no demands on the credulity of the spectators" (p. 11), conventional drama such as the Greek requires the audience to accept unquestioningly a set of artificial conventions largely determined by the poet, whereas the audience of "realistic" drama retains the right to reject the author's slightest deviation from verisimilitude.

[7]A few examples of the numerous instances: "go inland:" Her. 3.140 & 5.100, Thuc. 2.69.2, Xen. *Anab.* 1.1.2 & 1.4.9, Plato *Alc. I* 123b4; "go to the coast:" Her. 1.94 & 5.22, Thuc. 1.93.7 & 2.48.1, Xen. *Anab.* 7.8.26, Plato *Rep.* 327a & *Theaet.* 142a. The usage goes back to Homer, cf. Dorothea Gray, "Houses in the *Odyssey*," *CQ* 5 (1955) 1–12 (4).

modern English stage directions of "upstage" (away from the audience) and "downstage" (toward the audience).

This translation would suit all five passages and eliminate the "enter-exit" problem. It may be objected that although *Eccl.* 1152 is certainly in the context of a break in the dramatic illusion (and Plutarch could of course be using a technical term), the other Aristophanic passages are not, and so the use of a technical term is less likely than the reference to climbing onto the raised stage. But if the verbs were not technical terms, they still would constitute a break of the dramatic illusion, no matter how incongruous it may seem at those places; for none of the passages is in a context in which the alleged stage must represent something (hill, rostrum, etc.), and consequently any reference to climbing onto or descending from such a stage would violate the dramatic illusion just as surely as would the use of a technical term.

The technical sense, rather than "climb" and "descend," would therefore better account for the movements of the characters in the scenes. At *Eq.* 149 the Sausage-seller, who is described as being on the way to market (147), is probably heading toward the orchestra from the parodos; Nicias, standing with Demosthenes before the central door, bids him "move up here" towards the *skênê*.[8] At *Ach.* 732 and *Vesp.* 1341 the girls, as would have been natural, are hanging back or perhaps wandering towards the orchestra, while the men go directly to the center of the *skênê* and then summon them to "move up" to join them.[9] In the *Eccl.* the chorus urge Blepyros to leave, and say they will sing a dinner-song while he "moves down"—but first, a word to the judges. Only after the chorus have addressed the audience and then begun to sing about the dinner, around line 1166, does Blepyros "move down" toward the orchestra to join in the frolicking before the final exit of all persons.[10] And finally, Plutarch (*Dem.* 34.3) is probably using the technical term when he says that Demetrius "moved down" in the theatre like a tragic actor, to address the people—as if

[8]Cf. Rogers' commentary (London 1910) *ad loc.* and R. G. Ussher's commentary (Oxford 1973) on *Eccl.* 1152. Arnott's contention that the καί ("as well") of line 169 shows that the character has already climbed onto something ignores the possibility that καί may be used here with either its emphatic or its diminishing force: "just climb up" (cf. J. D. Denniston, *The Greek Particles* [Oxford 1934²] 293, 316–17, 320–21).

[9]It is unlikely at *Ach.* 732 that the Megarian speaks before entering the acting area, as Dearden (above, note 3) would have it, since he would then have to drag the sack with the two girls into the acting area. There is no reason to assume with Arnott (*GSC* 33–34) that the girl of *Vesp.* 1341 is the flute-player for the performance.

[10]Cf. Ussher's supposition (above, note 8) that the meaning is "down to the agora (where the feast is being held) from the theatre sited on the hillside."

an actor might be expected to come forward some way from the *skênê* to deliver an important speech.[11]

The same theatrical sense of καταβαίνειν is probably also employed by Aristophanes at *Ach.* 409–11. Cephisophon has said that Euripides is writing a tragedy ἔνδον ἀναβάδην (399); when the poet says he is too busy to come out, Dicaeopolis urges him to come out on the *ekkyklêma,* to which he finally assents (409–11):

Eur. ἀλλ' ἐκκυκλήσομαι· καταβαίνειν δ' οὐ σχολή.
Dic. Εὐριπίδη, Eur. τί λέλακας; Dic. ἀναβάδην ποιεῖς, ἐξὸν καταβάδην; οὐκ ἐτὸς χωλοὺς ποιεῖς.

Euripides' refusal to "descend" has led some commentators to postulate a two-storey *ekkyklêma,* or to suggest that the entire scene took place on the roof of the *skênê.*[12] But the use of the technical term would be especially apt here, where the joke is already on technical theatrical matters. Thus Euripides is saying that he will "eccycle" instead of coming out of the door, but that he does not have time to "move downstage" as an actor and take any serious part in the performance of the play. This joke seems to culminate with a pun on ἀναβάδην, which must mean "with the feet up" on a couch or footstool (in the manner of the very languid and effete Sardanapalus, Dio Chr. 62.6, Ath. 12.528), and on the possibly invented parallel adverb καταβάδην. The sense of Dicaeopolis' sarcasm is: "so, you sit around composing with your feet up, lazily, when you could 'move down' into the action? No wonder you turn out cripples!" There may well be a reference here to the earlier practice of poets' performing in their own plays, a practice which Sophocles is said to have abandoned eventually (because of his voice, *Vita Soph.* 4) and which Euripides presumably never even took up.

The two verbs naturally continued to have the literal, non-technical meanings of "climb" and "descend" when not used in the specific theatrical or geographical contexts. It may be argued that concurrent development of such specialized terminology is unlikely to occur in an early period of the history of the theatre, particularly in a comparatively primitive theatre technology. A similar development, however, may be found in the verb παραβαίνειν, which still had a physical sense of direction, as seen in the use of the word to indicate a dance-step at *Vesp.* 1529 (στρόβει, παράβαινε κύκλῳ). It also acquired both a metaphorical meaning of "transgress" and

[11] Flickinger (above, note 5) 101–103 also plausibly suggests that Plutarch has "modernized" the scene as if it occurred in the theatre of his own day.

[12] For the former cf. Rogers' comments (above, note 8) *ad loc.,* and Arnott, *GSC* 83–84; for the latter, Pickard-Cambridge (above, note 5) 103; against both, Dearden (above, note 3) 55–57.

a theatrical meaning of "move far forward" in order to address the audience.[13] The precise direction implied by the παρα- is not certain, but the sense of "forward" probably comes from the notion of "step right up to, alongside, the audience" and is to be contrasted with καταβαίνειν, "move in the general direction of the audience," in the same way as "come forward to the footlights" contrasts with "move downstage."

In light of such a parallel it is not unreasonable to assume that ἀναβαίνειν and καταβαίνειν were also considered technical terms in the context of the fifth-century theatre. If we adopt the proposed translations in the disputed passages, there is no longer any justification for citing the verbs as evidence for the existence of a raised stage in the fifth century, just as our terms "upstage" and "downstage" have never implied that the modern stage is so tilted as to form a slope which the actors must scale.

[13]See Sifakis (above, note 6) 61–66 on the meaning of the verb, although he does not consider *Vesp.* 1529.