

POSIDIPPUS ANT. PALATINA XII. 98

Perhaps the most obscure epigram by Posidippus is Anth. Pal. XII. 98 :

*Τὸν Μουσῶν τέτιγα πόθος δήσας ἐπ' ἀκάνθαις
κοιμίζειν ἐθέλει, πῦρ ὑπὸ πλευρὰ βάλῶν
ἢ δὲ πρὶν ἐν βύβλοις πεπονημένη + ἄλλα θερίζει +
ψυχῇ, ἀνηροῦ δαίμονι μεμφομένη.*

The text in the Palatine Anthology is clearly corrupt in l. 3, and no satisfactory emendation of the passage, as indeed no satisfactory interpretation of the whole epigram, has yet been given. Since Schott printed in «Posidippi epigrammata collecta et illustrata» (Berlin Diss. 1905) nr. 15 the emendation of Wilamowitz *ἄθλια τρίζει* subsequent editors have accepted it, and the gist of the epigram has been taken to be : «Love seeks to draw the poet away from his literary activities, but the anguish thus caused is so great that he pours out his suffering in new poems» (cf. Geffcken, Griech. Epigr. nr. 260).

There are, however, two problems which must be cleared up if we wish to understand this obscure poem: A) what is the meaning of *δήσας ἐπ' ἀκάνθαις*, and B) was the poet in this poem finally victorious over love, or did he succumb to its power?

A) *δήσας ἐπ' ἀκάνθαις* has always been taken as describing a form of torture inflicted by love upon the poet. But, in spite of Plato, Rep. 616a *ἐπ' ἀσπαλάθων κάμπειν*, which has been cited to support this view, it remains surprising that love should try «to lull the cicada to sleep» on a bed of thorns! Here love (desire) is clearly trying to silence (*κοιμίζειν ἐθέλει*) the cicada of the Muses (=the singing poet), and this it does by tying him to thorns. It seems to me that Posidippus misunderstood the greek proverb *ἀκάνθιος τέτιξ* (Zenob. I, 51: Diogen. 149), used of a silent person (cf. Liddell - Scott *τέτιξ* 4). The origin of the proverb goes back to the cicadae of the city Acanthus, which were said to be mute (cf. Steph. Byz. v. "Ακανθος; Welcker, Rh. Museum III, 1835, p. 428, traced the first use of this proverb in Greek literature to Simonides of Amorgos). But the word *ἀκάνθιος* was not only used in the sense: «of the city of Acanthus», but also in the sense of *ἀκάνθινος* = belonging to, or nes-

ting in thorns (cf. Croenert, Passow Griech. Worterb. v. ἀκάνθιος). And it is this second meaning of the word in the proverb ἀκάνθιος τέτιξ that Posidippus must have had in mind when he wrote these lines. The same confusion is also evident in Suidas v. ἀρέτας and v. τέφρα, Hesychius v. ἀκανθίας and Etym. Magnum 45, 11 ἀκανθίς, ἀκάνθιος. I suggest, therefore, that δήσος ἐπ' ἀκάνθαις means that love, by tying the cicada of the Muses (= the singing cicada) on thorns, tries to turn it into an ἀκάνθιος τέτιξ, a silent cicada.

B) As regards the second problem, I believe the poet is here victorious over love, and not as has been commonly thought finally defeated by it and complaining against his fate.

Posidippus tells us elsewhere (Anth. Pal. XII. 120) that only the «philosopher» can oppose love successfully, and he can only achieve this sober (ἄχοι δὲ νήφω τὸν παραταξόμενον πρὸς σε λογισμὸν ἔχω; cf. also Opsimathes Γνωμαί, Lipsiae 1884, p. 26 φιλοσοφῶντος λογισμοῦ βέλος Ἐφροδίσιον οὐχ ἄπιεται). Ἡ . . . ἐν βύβλοις πεπονημένη . . . ψυχὴ is certainly the soul of the philosopher (Posidippus is the only Alexandrian epigrammatist, in whose writings traces of Stoic philosophy appear, cf. Anth. Pal. V. 134; XII. 120 and Wilamowitz, Hell. Dichtung, I, pp. 148f.), and rather exceptionally for Alexandrian erotic poetry no wine is mentioned here. So the poet is in this epigram both a philosopher and sober, and he should scorn the bonds of love which tie him to thorns, in order to turn him into a silent cicada. I therefore propose in line 3 the emendation ἄμμ' ἀθερίζει = looks down upon the bond. The corruption of ΑΜΜΑΘΕΡΙΖΕΙ into ΑΛΛΑΘΕΡΙΖΕΙ is palaeographically easy to explain. The poet introduces here a subtle play of words, for ἄμμα in Alexandrian poetry can mean both the actual bond (cf. Herodas Mimiambi Ἄδηλα 62, Crusius) and the bond of love (cf. Anyte, Ath. Pal. VII, 492. 5).

I would, therefore, translate the epigram: Love, having tied the cicada of the Muses on thorns, is trying to silence him (i. e. to turn him into a real ἀκάνθιος τέτιξ) and sets fire beneath his sides (i. e. tortures him by doing so). But the soul, which for long has been trained in books (i. e. the soul of the philosopher), spurns the bonds, and complains against the troublesome god.

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