

JOHN · THEOPHANES PAPA DEMETRIOU

A REINTERPRETATION OF ARCHILOCHOS 53 D

[ΛΕΥΚΗ ΣΕΛΙΔΑ]

The small fragment 53 D from Archilochos' *Τετράμετρα* has become a favorite of the poet's modern readers in the English-speaking world as evidenced by its inclusion in several anthologies¹. The text runs as follows:

ἔα Πάρον καὶ σῦκα κείνα καὶ θαλάσσιον βίον

and has been interpreted as Archilochos' farewell to his island or better as a somewhat derogatory "parting shot" to a place without any resources, a place that had nothing to offer but figs of poor quality and the hard life of the sea.

The precise meaning of the "life of the sea" (*θαλάσσιος βίος*) has been a matter of dispute for some time, and several interpretations have been suggested thus far. W. SCHMID² found in this expression evidence to support his conjecture that at times Archilochos may have tried his hand at *Seehandelsgeschäften*. J. POUILLOUX³ and A. R. BURN have understood the expression to refer to a "seaman's life"⁴. These interpretations have been offered without any explanation as to the reasons which might compel us to understand *θαλάσσιος βίος* in these specific meanings and hence they cannot be considered convincing. A more widely held view is that by *θαλάσσιος βίος* Archilochos meant a fisherman's life. This view is found already in IGNATIUS LIEBEL'S first edition of Archilochos⁵ and has been repeated by several scholars⁶ and notably by M. TREU, who translated it as *das Fischerleben* and presented evidence to support his

1. See, e.g., J. A. MOORE, *Selections from the Greek Elegiac, Iambic, and Lyric Poets*, Cambridge, Mass., 1947, p. 21; D. A. CAMPBELL, *Greek Lyric Poetry; A Selection*., New York 1967, p. 3; D. E. GERBER, *Euterpe: An Anthology*., Amsterdam 1970, p. 3.

2. In SCHMID - STAHLIN, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, I, 1, p. 391.

3. <Archiloque et Thasos: histoire et poésie>, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, 10 (1963), 10 (*Laisse Paros, ses figues et la vie de ses marins*).

4. *The Lyric Age of Greece*, London 1960, p. 164.

5. *Archilochi iambographorum principis reliquiae*, Lipsiae 1812, p. 82: *θαλάσσιος βίος est piscatorum, qui in mari victitant et continuis in undis laboribus et periculis vexantur*.

6. See A. HAUVETTE, *Un poète ionien du VII^e siècle; Archiloque: sa vie et ses poésies*, Paris 1905, p. 272; also F. LASSERE-A. BONNARD, *Archiloque; fragments*, Paris 1958, pp. XV and 34; see also next note.

translation¹. Treu's evidence is to be found in Euripides' fr. 670 NAUCK², where the expression βίος θαλάσσιος occurs again³. Even if one should be willing to disregard the centuries that separate Archilochos from Euripides and which would easily allow a different meaning in each of the two poets, a close reading of the Euripidean fragment shows that the parallel is not compelling. Βίος θαλάσσιος in Euripides' fragment is indeed used with reference to a fisherman's life. Furthermore, there can be no doubt that the expression could be translated the same way, wherever the context made such a translation suitable; the same, however, could be said also of the other translations mentioned thus far. In the Euripidean fragment it is precisely the context that compels us to understand the expression as referring specifically to "a fisherman's life"; βίος θαλάσσιος is not used as a kind of term which would have to convey the same meaning in a different context.

Although the attempts to define the content of θαλάσσιος βίος are constructive and they make us aware of the wide spectrum of possible meanings of that expression, none of the interpretations is so convincing that it would exclude the others. Thus, a broader interpretation of θαλάσσιος βίος seems preferable, such as the one used here ("life of the sea"³) or perhaps the one proposed in the 19th century by F. A. HARTUNG (*das Leben auf der See*)⁴ and essentially adopted by E. R. ADRADOS (*la vida en el mar*)⁵ and G. TARDITI (*la vita sul mare*)⁶.

From the foregoing it becomes evident that there has been no dearth of attempts to clarify the meaning of the last part of the fragment. In most of these attempts one may observe a common starting point that

1. Archilochos, Göttingen 1959, p. 63 and 215; TREU's argument is adopted also by D. E. GERBER, *Euterpe*, p. 24.

2. βίος δὲ πορφυροῦς θαλάσσιος
οὐκ εὐτράπεζος, ἀλλ' ἐπάκτιοι φάναι.
ὄγρὰ δὲ μήτηρ, οὐδ' ἀποσπαστὴς τροφὸς
θάλασσα τήνδ' ἀροῦμεν, ἐκ ταύτης βίος
βρόχοισι καὶ πέδαισιν οἴκαδ' ἔρχεται.

3. So J. M. EDMONDS, *Elegy and Iambus*, vol. 2, London and New York 1931, p. 123, no. 51.

4. *Die griechischen Lyriker*, vol. 5: Archilochos und die dorischen Liederdichter bis auf Pindar, Leipzig 1856, p. 88, no. 27.

5. *Liricos Griegos: elegiacos y yambógrafos arcaicos (siglos VII-V a. C.)*, vol. 1, Barcelona 1956, p. 77.

6. Archilochus, Romae 1968, p. 269. A similar translation ("a life at sea") was suggested also by J. A. K. THOMSON, *Greeks and Barbarians*, London 1921, p. 27.

seems reasonable: Archilochos is bidding farewell to life on Paros —probably his own life there— and *θαλάσσιος βίος* must refer to the profession that he (or the person addressed) practised on Paros. Hence, "seaman", "fisherman", or man of *Seehandelsgeschäften* have been considered implicitly or explicitly by different scholars as the occupations that Archilochos was leaving behind him along with his native island. With respect to the middle part of the fragment, however, there has been no similar controversy among scholars in an attempt to understand in what way it may also portray or allude to the poet's life on Paros; it has been usually taken at face value¹ and interpreted accordingly in a literal way.

The language of the poem, however, suggests another possible, metaphorical interpretation, and actually one that may stand in tandem with the traditional one within the framework of the stylistic device that an ancient critic might have called *καθ' ὑπόνοιαν*².

The key element for our interpretation rests in the mention of figs in the fragment. One may wonder why Archilochos should have chosen that particular fruit for mention in his "farewell" to the island. Such a reference would have been natural, of course, if the fig-tree were found only on Paros, or at least if it were rare elsewhere, and Archilochos was unlikely to find it and its fruit on Thasos or on some other place to which he might be going³. We have no reason, however, to believe that this was the case; the fig-tree was found in abundance over the entire Greek or

1. A notable exception is the view of W. SCHMID (*loc. cit.*, note 2, p. 75 above), who has suggested that the mention of figs in the poem might indicate that Archilochos had tried his hand at agriculture (M. TREU, too, thinks that *σῦκα* are intended as a reference to agriculture [*Archilochos*, p. 215], although he does not connect them with agricultural work by the poet himself). The evidence, however, is entirely too slender to support such an inference. Had agriculture indeed been one of Archilochos' occupations, there should have been many more references and allusions to it in his fragments rather than this single reference to figs which Schmid cites.

2. See Dion. Halic., *Rhet.* IX, 1; see further Io. CHR. TH. ERNESTI, *Lexicon technologiae Graecorum rhetoricae*, Lipsiae 1795, s.v. *ὑπόνοια*; W. B. STANFORD, *Ambiguity in Greek Literature: Studies in Theory and Practise*, Oxford 1939, pp. 18-19.

3. It has been suggested that Archilochos wrote this poem when he left Paros and went to Thasos (see A.R. BURN, *The Lyric Age*, p.164, and D. A. CAMPBELL, *A Selection*, p. 136; also M. TREU, *Archilochos*, p. 215, commentary on 53 D and 54 D, suspects that a contrast between Paros and Thasos may have existed in the poem. With regard to that conjecture, Treu had a precursor in I. LIEBEL, *Archilochi reliquiae*, p. 82, who already in 1812 observed: *Videtur hoc fragmentum pars esse carminis, quo vel se ipse vel alios poeta hortatus est ad relinquendam Parum, et in*

even the Mediterranean world¹. It would have been possible² to accept the reference to figs as a literal one, if Parian figs were known for their poor quality, because in such a case Archilochos might have mentioned them here sarcastically. The view that Parian figs were not good has indeed been maintained, but the presumed evidence for it results from a misunderstanding³. On the contrary, the single bit of evidence that we have from antiquity suggests that they were considered very good⁴. Under these circumstances Archilochos' reference to them remains

Thasum emigrandum). This is an attractive conjecture, but one should bear in mind that it is only a conjecture. Archilochos could have written the poem on any of the seemingly numerous occasions that he left the island. The context in which the fragment is preserved (Athen. III, 76 b-c) tells us nothing concerning the occasion of its composition.

1. See H. GAMMS, s.v. *Feige*, *Der kleine Pauly*. Both the fig-tree and its fruit are already mentioned in Homer several times; see, e.g. *Od.* VII, 116 and 121; XI, 590; XXIV, 246 and 341; also XII, 103 (*ἐρινεός*).

2. "Possible", because even so the word *σῦκον* might have been used with a double meaning (see immediately below).

3. Cf. A. BONNARD, in LASSERE-BONNARD, *Archiloque*, p. 34, who translates *σῦκα καὶ βα* as *tristes figues* and in the commentary remarks that Parian figs *ne sont que figues médiocres*. In support of his view Bonnard refers to Eustathios, *Od.* 1828, 11, where the Archilochean mock patronymic *συκοτραγίδης* is mentioned (BERCK⁴, 194), and translates Eustathios' explanation of the gloss: *parce que c'est la nourriture du pauvre*. The way in which Bonnard presents the evidence and the conclusions he draws from it imply that specifically Parian figs were of poor quality and hence *la nourriture du pauvre*. Eustathios' comment, however, does not lead to such a conclusion. Eustathios includes *συκοτραγίδης* in a rather mixed-up list of synonyms, for which he drew on the glossary *Περὶ βλασφημιῶν* of Suetonius (see M. E. MILLER, *Suétone*, ch. *Εἰς προσβύτας*, pp. 423-24, in his *Mélanges de littérature grecque*, Paris 1868; see also J. TAILLARDAT, *Suétone*, Paris 1967, p. 61, and on the relation between Eustathios and Suetonius *ibid.*, pp. 11-26). The exact words of Eustathios are: *...συκοτραγίδης παρὰ Ἱππόνακτι καὶ Ἀρχιλόχῳ, διὰ τὸ εὐτελές... τοῦ βρώματος*. The mention of both Hipponax and Archilochos by Eustathios makes clear that figs in general are meant here—which he calls "a cheap food"—rather than Parian figs alone. Our view is further strengthened by the context in which *συκοτραγίδης* is mentioned in the extant text of Suetonius: it is listed among words suitable for characterizing *γέροντας φειδωλοὺς*. In short, the inference to be drawn from the ancient evidence is that Archilochos did not use *συκοτραγίδης* with reference to Parian figs specifically or even to figs of poor quality in general but rather as a mock patronymic to satirize a miser who satisfied himself with *cheap* food.

4. In Athen. III, 76 b-c, we are told that Parian figs "are as different from those produced elsewhere as the meat of the wild boar is superior to all other pork not wild" (as translated by C. B. GULICK in his 2nd ed. of *Athenaios*, [Loeb], vol. 1, 1951).

puzzling, and it is legitimate to explore the possibility that he may have intended something more than the literal meaning of the word in this poem of adieu.

It is well known that the word *σῦκον* and some related words (e.g., *συκῆ*, *συκολογῶ*) were often used by classical and later authors to convey a sexual meaning; specifically, *σῦκον* was used metaphorically to designate the *membrum muliebre*¹. Through a semantic loan from the Greek, the Latin *figus* also came to acquire the same meaning². Is it possible that the word *σῦκον* had acquired this secondary meaning already at the time of Archilochos? There is good reason to believe that this is indeed the case. There are extremely few occurrences either of *σῦκον* or of related words in the fragments of Archilochos, but at least one instance is very telling. It occurs in Archilochos 15 D:

Συκὴ πετραίη πολλὰς βόσκονσα κορώνας,
ἐθήθη ξείνων δέκτρια Πασιφίλῃ.

The erotic content of the above poem was recognized already in antiquity³, and modern critics⁴ have also interpreted it in the same vein⁵. The

1. See, e.g., Aristophanes, *Pax* 1346 and 1350. For a learned discussion of the subject, see E. ΑΗΝΑΙΟΥ [= X. X. ΧΑΡΙΤΩΝΙΔΟΥ], *Ἀπόρρητα*, Thessaloniki 1935, p. 25. It is interesting to note that the metaphorical meaning of *σῦκον* has survived in Modern Greek.

2. See N. GALLI DE' PARATESI, *Semantica dell'eufemismo*, Torino 1964, p. 89; see also G. SCARPAT, <Il fico e le sue foglie nella tradizione classica e christiana>, *Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani*, vol. 2, Brescia 1969, pp. 885-86. In several romance languages the word fig has retained its sexual meaning; see C. BATTISTI - G. ALESSIO, *Dizionario etimologico italiano*, Firenze 1952, s.v. *fica*; G. KOERTING, *Lateinisch-romanisches Wörterbuch*², Paderborn 1901, s.v. *figus*, -um; also E. ΑΗΝΑΙΟΥ, *Ἀπόρρητα*, p. 25.

3. See Athen. XIII, 594 b-d.

4. See, e.g., F. A. HARTUNG, *Die griechischen Lyriker*, vol. 5, p. 86, no. 21; E. ΑΗΝΑΙΟΥ, *Ἀπόρρητα*, p. 25; E. RIESS, <Comment and Conjecture in Ancient Poetry>, *CW*, 63 (1943), 178; V. BUCHHEIT, <Feigensymbolik im antiken Epigramm>, *Rh.M.*, 103 (1960), 204-10; K. J. DOVER, <The Poetry of Archilochos>, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, 10 (1963), 185, note 1.

5. A striking parallel to this poem in Modern Greek oral tradition has passed unnoticed. In several parts of Greece one finds the proverb

τὰ καλὰ τὰ σῦκα ἢ κουρούνα τὰ τρώει.

The proverb may be used in various contexts, but it is considered especially apt in situations where a beautiful woman marries an unbecoming man. I have heard the proverb on the island of Symi in the Dodecanese, and its meaning was kindly explained to me by a local resident and scion of an old family of the island Mr. K. PHAR-

word *σῦκον* recurs also in a new fragment preserved on the Inscription of Mnesiepes found by N. M. KONTOLEON in the expression *σῦκα μελ[ιχρὰ]* (E₁, col. III, 34). M. TREU has already suggested that the expression indicates the *αἰδοῖον γυναικεῖον*¹, and his view is strengthened by a later parallel, which he does not mention although it offers support also to his restoration of the phrase. In *Anth. Gr.* VI, 191, a certain Leonidas offers to Kypris *μελιχρὰ σῦκα*².

It is important also to recall here that language which would appear to us as obscene was used in ancient poetry even before the time of Archilochos³, and that our poet became notorious in antiquity for his use of it⁴. Even the extant, scanty remains of his poetry provide a rich variety of references to the *membrum muliebre*, the *membrum virile*, and to related activities⁵; one may easily find both direct and oblique

ΜΑΚΡΙΔΙΣ. The proverb is also listed by X. I. ΠΑΠΑΧΡΙΣΤΟΔΟΥΛΟΥ, <Λαογραφικά Σύμμεικτα Ρόδου>, *Λαογραφία*, 20 (1962), 136, in the form

τὸ καλὸς σῦκον ἢ κουρούνα τὸ τρώει.

In his comments on the proverb Παπαχριστοδούλου remarks that it is «ἐν[χρ(ηστος)] στὰ συνοικέσια, ὅταν μιὰ καλὴ κόρη δὲν βρῇ ἐκεῖνον ποῦ τῆς ταιριάζει».

1. Archilochos, p. 209.

2. Incidentally, the precedent in Archilochos is not noted either in H. BECKBY'S edition of the *Anthologia Graeca*² (vol. I, p. 556).

3. See the sound observations of D. PAGE, <Archilochos and the Oral Tradition>, *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique*, 10 (1963), 161.

4. The fundamental work on the subject is by A. VON BLUMENTHAL, *Die Schätzung des Archilochos im Altertume*, Stuttgart 1927, who has conveniently collected and discussed critically the ancient evidence. BLUMENTHAL, *ibid.*, p. 54, note 107, cites a passage from Eusebios' *Praeparatio ev.* V, 32 f, which he traces back to Oinomaos of Gadara; here both Archilochos' language and his attitude towards women are severely criticized: ...'Αρχίλοχον, ἄνδρα παντοίας κατὰ γυναικῶν αἰσχρορρημοσύνης καὶ ἀρεητολογίας, ὃς οὐδ' ἀκούσαι τις ἀνὴρ σάφερσιν ἐπομνησκειν ἄν, ἐν τοῖς οἰκείοις ποιήμασι κεχρημένον. Kritias, too, (apud Ael., *Var. hist.* X, 13 = fr. 44 in DIELS-KRANZ⁶, vol. 2, p. 396) thinks of Archilochos as *λάγνος* on the basis of the latter's poetry, while Choricus Gazaeus (XXXII, 38) thinks of our poet as follows: 'Αρχίλοχον γὰρ οὐδὲ παραβάλλει δῖος ἑτέρῳ μηδὲν εἰς ἔννοιάν τε καὶ λέξιν ἐσχάτης ἀκοσμίας ἐκλελοιπότα. The *αἰσχροπέες* of Archilochos is also mentioned in the *Suda* (A 4112, ed. A. ADLER) and his *ἀκόλαστον* by Plutarch, *Cat. min.* VII, 2 = 762e.

5. See, e.g., fr. 156 BECK⁴: ἀηδονίς...τὸ τῆς γυναικὸς αἰδοῖον παρ' Ἀρχιλόχῳ. On the above fragment see also Hesych. (ed. K. LATTE), s.v. ἀηδονίς, and Latte's comments on <ἀηδονιδες> in the *apparatus*; see also the edition of the fragment in M.L. WEST, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci*, vol. I, Oxford 1971, p. 94, no. 263. See also fr. 171 BECK⁴ ἀπαλὸν κέρας; fr. 34 D ἄλλ' ἀπερρώγασι (μοι Cobet) μύκω τένοντες = *sed fracti sunt (mihi) nervi mentulae* in TREU'S translation (*Archilochos*, p. 35); for the *membrum virile* also σάθη in fragments 41 D and 102 D. Note also the words for a prosti-

(*πονηρῶς εἰρημένα*)¹ pertinent references in the poet's fragments. Moreover, obscene and abusive references to women were not alien to Archilochos²; this comes as no surprise, especially in view of the poet's well known bitterness over his failure in love. Thus, it would be quite normal for Archilochos' practise and style to have included a *πονηρῶς εἰρημένον* in his farewell to Paros.

In fragment 53D the poet is thinking of the dominant experiences of his life on the island: *θαλάσσιος βίος*, in whatever form, would clearly fit this framework, and there is nothing strange in his having included women as well. That women should have been included through a *καθ' ὑπόνοιαν* reference to the *membrum muliebre* fits well with what we know of the poet's usage, style, the rather contemptuous tone of the poem³, and his own experiences in life.

tute in fr. 184 BERGK⁴: *παχεῖα, δῆμος, ἐργάτις, μυσάχνη*. Note also Archilochos' use of the verb *βινέω* (*P. Oxy.* 2313, fr. 21) and the bold language of fragments 72 D, 102 D, and 142 BERGK⁴.

1. See Athen. III, 122 b: *Κηφισόδωρος γοῦν ὁ Ἰσοκράτους τοῦ ῥήτορος μαθητής... λέγει ὅτι εἴροι τις ἂν ὑπὸ τῶν... ποιητῶν... πονηρῶς εἰρημένα, οἷα παρὰ μὲν Ἀρχιλόχῳ τὸ πάντ' ἀνδρ' ἀποσκολύπτειν...*

2. See, e.g., F. LASSERE-A. BONNARD, *Archiloque*, fr. 235; Plutarch, too, takes notice τῶν ὑπ' Ἀρχιλόχου πρὸς τὰς γυναῖκας ἀπρεπῶς καὶ ἀκολάστως εἰρημένων (*De curios.* 520 α-β). See also notes 4 and 5 on p. 80 above.

3. The initial word of the fragment (*ἔα*) is usually translated "leave", but stronger expressions have also been suggested; thus, THOMSON (*Greeks and Barbarians*, p. 27) translates it "damn". Thomson's translation may be supported by other instances where the imperative of *ἔλω* is used with a contemptuous, disrespectful, or even spiteful connotation as in *Il.* 11, 346 (*τούσδε... ἔα φθινύθην*), or in some passages where the well known expression *ἔἴην χαίρειν* occurs (see *LSJ*⁵, s.v. *χαίρω* IV, 2).