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ON THE TWO CRITICAL EDITIONS OF *CAT AND MOUSE WAR* BY THEODOROS PRODROMOS

In 1968 there were two simultaneous editions of *Katomyomachia*.¹ Although forty years have passed, they still have relevance today. However, the differences between them as far as the proper lection of the text is concerned are so dramatic that in several places they create an entirely different meaning.² The present article aspires to present these discrepancies and their causes.

Cat and Mouse War has the form of a drama written in dodecasyllable (modified iambic trimeter)³ in the literary language.⁴ It is not an extensive work – it amounts only to 384 verses, in which it differs from another work by Prodromos, a long romance *Rhodanthe and Dosikles*.⁵

The drama consists of five acts⁶ but it may also be divided into two bigger wholes. The first one is the dialogue between Kreillos and Tyrokleptes which introduces the reader to the problems of the community of mice endangered by the beast „which is called the cat by the human race” (*ἦν κάταν ὠνόμασεν ἀνθρώπων γένος*). In the course of a long discussion the decision about fighting is made. At the same time the first day comes to an end. On the second day we meet both mice for a short time as they make offerings to gods: the comical effect is created by enumerating the whole pantheon (v.204 – 209). Then the second part of the drama opens and we

1 Earlier the basic edition was Rudolf Hercher's in Teubner from 1873. Herbert Hunger, *Der Byzantinische Katz-Mäuse-Krieg*. Graz-Wien-Köln 1968 [Byzantina Vindobonensia 3]; Helmut Ahlborn, *Theodoros Prodromos. Der Katzenmäusekrieg*. Berlin 1968; 1978² [Schriften und Quellen der alten Welt Bd. 22]. Ahlborn's second edition was released without any changes.

2 There are as many as over 40 *lectiones diversae* in 384 verses.

3 P. Maas, *Der byzantinische Zwölfsilber*. „BZ“ 12 (1903), pp. 278-323.

4 Among Prodromos' works there are also texts written in folk language, comp. A. Maiuri, *Una nuova poesia di Teodoro Prodromo in greco volgare*. „BZ” 23 (1914-18), pp. 397-407.

5 Miroslav Marcovich, *Theodori Prodromi De Rhodanthes et Dosiclis Amoribus Libri IX*. Lipsiae 1992.

6 Hunger, *op.cit.*, s. 51.

meet Kreillos' wife (the poet did not mention her name) with a chorus of handmaidens. This part of the poem in which the wife of the mouse king, anxiously awaiting word from the battle field, torn between hope and despair, brings to mind - *toutons proportions gardées* – queen Atossa. The course of the battle is reported in two speeches of the messenger – the first one (v.283 – 306) brings pain: Psicharpax, Kreillos' son, is dead – the other brings joy: the cat is dead because a falling rafter crushed his spine. It is an interesting feature of the drama that both parts correspond with each other. A charming example of such correlations in the text are v.19 – 20 and v.374 – 5. In the first fragment Tyrokleptes is afraid that all mice as the punishment for their impudence (*ἀντίποινον ἀκρατωσύνης*) will receive „the dark place of Hades”: *τὸν σκοτεινὸν Αἰδωνέως τόπον*. In the final part the messenger, describing the cat's death, states with satisfaction: „he fell into the abyss of Hades”: *καὶ πρὸς βάθη πέπτωκεν Ἀιδωνέως*. The roles have reversed: the oppressor met the destiny of the victims.

Cat and Mouse War does not seem to have references to the reality beyond the stage. It lacks any social, political or personal allusions. It constitutes a beautiful reference to *Batrachomyomachia*; its aim is *delectare* of the audience (reader/listener), but also *docere* when an educated recipient realizes a reference to any of the dramas by Euripides, Sophocles, and especially Aischylos or Homer's epics.

The way of presenting of the drama at the Komnens' court is still an open question. Despite the common opinion about the vanishing of the drama in Byzantium, it does not seem appropriate to limit the problem to the constatation: *Lesedrama*.⁷ One should rather consider, based on the text and choreographic guidelines included in it, the nature of the possible recitation in front of the audience.⁸

7 Ahlborn, p. 47.

8 Margaret Alexiou, *Ploys of Performance: Games and Play in the Ptochodromic Poems*. „DOP” 53 (1999), pp. 91-109, is hesitant about giving an unequivocal opinion.

The differences between Ahlborn's and Hunger's editions are of various nature. The easiest to identify are the lections which may be rendered as *lapsus typographi*, e.g.

v. 55 Ahlborn: ἴσημαι instead of corr. Hunger: ἴσημι (same as Ahlborn v. 74 *sic!*)

v. 214 Ahlborn: δεσπότων instead of corr. Hunger: δεσποτῶν

v.215 Ahlborn: πάμφαγον instead of corr. Hunger: παμφάγον

v.344 Ahlborn: πρωτίστα instead of corr. Hunger: πρότιστα

A considerably numerous group consists of *metri causa* conjectures when the editor suggests a different solution from the lection of the manuscript. Ahlborn has a tendency to maintain the lection of the message if it is consistent, whereas Hunger offers corrections more frequently, e.g.:

v. 71 Ahlborn (...) πῶς πρὶν συνιστῶντες τὸν μῦθον

Hunger (...) πῶς τὸν πρὶν συνιστῶντες μῦθον

v. 248 Ahlborn πέπτωκεν ἡμῆ τοῦ γήραος βακτηρία

Hunger πέπτωκεν ἡ μὴ γήραος βακτηρία

The remaining discrepancies result from trusting one of the manuscript's lections or the conjecture of the fragment considered as damaged. In several cases they bring solutions creating an entirely different sense. We will analyze the example of v. 86.

The content of v. 81 – 87. Kreillos and Tyrokleptes are discussing the odds in their fight with the cat. Kreillos is describing his dream in which he saw Zeus who gave him strength needed for victory, and he looked exactly like Tyroleichos – the mouse sage. Then Tyrokleptes asks (v. 86):

Ahlborn: πῶς δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἄλλων ὠράθη σοι τῶν χρόνων.⁹

9 Codex M.

„Why didn't he appear in front of you any other time?”

Hunger: *πῶς δ' οὐκ ἐπάρχων ὥράθη σοι τῶν θρόνων.*¹⁰

„Why didn't he appear in front of you as the throne-holder?”

Both versions reflect Tyrokleptes' scepticism concerning the vision of Zeus in the form of a mouse. Kreillos' absurd answer only reinforces the doubts:

Ahlborn/Hunger: *ἐμαῖς ἀπειλαῖς ὥράθη πτοιαλέος.*

„He appeared for fear of my threats.”

Who is this ally god who helps in fear of the asking one? What is the advantage of having such an ally? The interlocutor does not notice this contradiction and seems satisfied of the answer. At this moment another contradiction appears: this time it concerns Tyrokleptes' character. Since the one who asked a wise question accepts the answer full of foolish pride. The parody of these two verses (v. 86 – 87) relates to both interlocutors. There remains the problem with the proper version of the question, i.e. determining if the conjecture of the lection of Codex M was indispensable.¹¹ It appears that the logic of the answer is more parallel to the version of the manuscript: *Why did the god appear just now* – Tyrokleptes seems to ask between the lines – *Because he got afraid of me* – Kreillos' answer is. This exchange has its internal logic – though in fact it rather reflects the state of mind of both mice. If we accept Hercher-Hunger's conjecture, the situation is changed. The very question is understandable, it seems to result from the course of the conversation (v. 84 – 85):

Tyrokleptes: „Who did he resemble? Tell me that, too.”

Kreillos: „Tyroleichos, the old sage.”

Then astonished Tyrokleptes asks why the ruler of gods assumed the shape of a mouse, the last animal that could be associated with the power of Zeus. Let us notice, however, that the answer does not sound: *He appeared in this way because he was afraid of my threats*. One can-

¹⁰ Hercher, followed by Hunger.

not infer from it that it was fear that caused such an appearance of the deity and not another; it only states the very fact of the appearance of the god, explaining it in such a preposterous manner.

One of the examples of a conjecture, despite a different lection of the manuscript is the name of one of the mouse commanders killed by the cat (v. 289 – 291). Ahlborn, following the lection of the manuscript, gives: *Κωλυκοκλόπος* („Ham Thief”), whereas Hunger adopts Hercher's correction here into *Κολλικοκλόπος* („Bread Thief”), but he does not justify it in app.cr. We may only add that there is the expression *κολλικοφάγος* („Bread-devourer”)¹² in the comedy. Hunger emphasizes¹³ that *Κολλικοκλόπος* is the equivalent of the hero from *Batrachomyomachia* named *Μεριδόρπαξ*, „Crumb-snatcher” (v. 260), similarly to appearing in both works *Ψιχάρπαξ* (*Kat.*, v. 246; 294; 332, *Batr.*, v. 24; 27; 105; 234). However, this argumentation justifies the name conveyed by the manuscript tradition. Prodromos' *Κωλυκοκλόπος* would have its original in the mouse named *Πτερνοστρώκτης*, „Ham Glutton” (*Batr.*, v. 29). We face a situation here in which a conjecture does not seem necessary and Ahlborn, who generally follows Hercher's text, was right to reject it this time.

Both editions are of German translation. Ahlborn translates in prose, while Hunger uses verse. Both solutions have their advantages and shortcomings. Prose allowed for a greater agreement with the original and care for detail. Hunger's choice helps the reader not acquainted with Greek to sense the original sound, though at the expense of the similarity to the original. It could sometimes seem that *licentia poetica* goes too far:

v. 77 *δέδοικα καὶ νῦν, μὴ θάνωμεν τῷ μόθῳ.*

Hunger: „Wir kommen um im Kampf, fürcht' ich, auch jetzt!”

Ahlborn: „Ich fürchte, daß wir nun auch in der Schlacht sterben”

11 Ahlborn accepted the lection of M because other codices are damaged in this place.

12 Aristoph., *Acharn.* 872 et scholia ad loc.

13 *Op.cit.*, p. 40.

Thus, Ahlborn's translation is closer to the original, although unfortunately it lost a very strong emotional negation $\mu\eta$: „Now I am also afraid that we could die in a battle.”

Only single examples of lections whose difference results from various factors have been cited here. The above outline of the problems connected with reading *Cat and Mouse War* indicates the necessity for further studies on the tradition of the manuscript as well as the remaining literary output of Prodromos.¹⁴

14 Prodromos' poetry was studied by the outstanding Polish scholar Leon Sternbach: *Spicilegium Prodromeum*, in: „Rozprawy Akademii Umiejętności. Wydział Filologiczny” 39. Ser. II: vol. 24 (1904), pp. 336-368.