THREE NOTES ON THE "ACHARNIANS"

BY

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(1) 341-7. Dicaeopolis's ruse with the λάφιος has succeeded in persuading the Acharnians to drop the stones from their hands, and they are now prevailed upon to demonstrate that they have no others concealed in their cloaks. The word play ἐκαθευταί—σειμίνον—σειστός—ἀνασείσειν is a familiar puzzle, most recently discussed by K. J. Dover 1), who thinks that the πρίβων is called σειστός, a word used in Hellenistic and Byzantine Greek of ‘a pendant’, because “the chorus gyrate and make their cloaks, held by a fastening at the neck, fly out and come to rest hanging down, in front or behind, like useless pendants”. But granted this visual effect, and assuming this use of σειστός in 425 B.C., I cannot say that I find much point in the chorus making such a remark.

I propose that the visual joke turned upon the very point suggested by the text of 343-4, that, as the chorus twirled around, some concealed stones did fly out from the folds of their cloaks, and that the verbal joke on σειστός alludes to the vocabulary of dice-throwing, the stones flying from the πρίβων suggesting the casting of dice from the dice-box (φιμός, κηθίς, κημός, etc.). Aeschines (I 59) mentions among the equipment of a gaming-house ἀστραγάλους τε τινας διασείστους καὶ φιμοὺς καὶ κυβευτικὰ ἄτερα ὅργανα, and Harpocrate (s.v. διασείστους), referring also to Menander (423 Κ.), glosses ἐοίκοις ὁνομάσθαι παρὰ τὸ κινεῖσθαι καὶ διασείσθαι πρότερον, εὐτα βάλλεσθαι, ἐν’ ἀκκοχόργητοι μᾶλλον ὅσι 2). I suspect that ἕδε γε (346) does not even refer to πρίβων as generally supposed: the

2) Cf. Poll. VII 203, X 150. What was the distinctive feature of dice so named is not clear. Aeschines schol. ad loc. has the strange explanation that silver or bronze κῶδινες were attached to the ἀστράγαλοι. This does not seem very probable, but one might compare the metaphorical use of διασείσας καὶ διακόσινιάς in Plut. Mor. 704d. See RE, Lusoria tabula, col. 1966.
chorus leader appeals to Dicaeopolis to put down his βέλος, just as ὁδε γε (sc. λίθος) is shaken out of the fold of his cloak ἀκα τῇ στροφῇ, like a στεστός dice. 1) Στρέφω itself is a possible verb for the casting of dice, e.g. in the game of τρόπα (Poll. IX 103, and Hsch. τρόπα· εἶδος παιδίας, καθ’ ἣν στρέφουσι τοὺς ἀστραγάλους εἰς τὸ ἐτερον μέρος), and λιθίδα 2) might even be used as a type of dice (Poll. IX 126 τὰ δὲ πεντάλθηκα, ἦτοι λιθίδαι ἡ ψήφοι ἡ ἀστράγαλοι πέντε ἀνεφρύττοντο, κτλ.). That σεῖω can be used not only of the preliminary shaking of something to be thrown, but also its ultimate ejection is shown by a passage in Ael. N.A. VII 13 τὰ μὲν οὖν πρῶτα ἔβαλλεν αὐτὸν (sc. τὸν κόνια) λιθίους ... τὰ δὲ τελευταία ὑποσεῖον 3) ἄρτους τε καὶ μάζας, where the verb is equivalent to ὑπορρίπτω in Plb. XXIX 8,3, Plut. Ευμ. 17, etc.

The use of ἀναρρίπτω in the Pollux passage just cited may help to elucidate the continuation of the dicing joke in Ach. 347 4): although I have not found ἀνασεῖω in a dicing context 5), ἀναρρίπτω is virtually the technical term, and as such is a commonplace in metaphor or proverb (LSJ, s.v. II, and cf. Sud. s.v. ἀνέρριπτοι κύβος, Phot. κύδωνον ἀναρρίψαι λέγουσι μεταφράστες ἀπὸ τῶν κύδων. Ar. himself uses the expression in fr. 673) 6). It is generally agreed that ἀνασεῖω-

1) It is conceivable that ‘stone’ is to be supplied also in 344, a point which could be made clear only by stage directions: ἐκσφεσται χαμέζ’ [one stone shoots from his cloak]—οὐχ ὃς σεῖομενον; [another stone follows], the action being part of a vigorous, whirling dance. It is worth remarking that dancing and stone-throwing are apparently combined in the puzzling line of Vesp. 1491 (schol. ἐξείς, λίθους δηλονότι, δρομόμενος.)


3) Perhaps ὑποσεῖε: but I see no reason to alter, with Hemsterhuys, to πρόσειον ‘dangled before’. One would not readily so approach an angry Greek dog. Plutarch’s version of the story (Mor. 969 f) has προβάλλω.

4) I cannot agree with van Leeuwen that Dobree’s πάντως ἀνάσεων τῆς βοῆς is palmary.

5) Used in an Attic inscr. of 352-1 B.C. (I.G. 2.104a35) of shaking a hydria in which tin plates have been deposited—a similar action to that of shaking a dice-box. It may be noted also that ἐξερέζα 341 is used by Ar. elsewhere only once (Vesp. 993) of pouring out ψῆφοι from the κάδος (cf. Crat. fr. 14,8).

6) So also ἀναξάλλακτωι (Aesch. Sept. 1028), and ἀνέναι (Ar. Nub. 956, which Taillardat [R.E.G. 64, 1951, 4-8] shows conclusively to be a dicing metaphor, comparing Plat. Com. fr. 153, Sud. s.v. ἀνείναι κόμβον, etc.).

As the Suda from an unknown source gives ἐπιστήσαι κύδωνον, this may reasonably be added, by analogy, to the evidence for σεῖω compounds used