THE DEFINITIONS OF ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΟΣ AND ΑΡΘΡΟΝ
IN ARISTOTLE, POETICS CH. 20

BY

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I456 b38 σύνδεσμος δέ ἐστιν φωνή ἄσημος ἢ οὕτε
I457 a 1 κωλύει οὕτε ποιεῖ φωνήν μιᾶν σημαντικήν ἐκ πλειώνων
φωνῶν περικυκλια συντίθεσθαι καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄκρων καὶ ἐπὶ
tοῦ μέσου ἥν μὴ ἀρμότεε ἐν ἄρχῃ λόγου τιθέναι καθ' αὐτήν,
οἷον μὲν ἦτοι δὲ. ἡ φωνὴ ἄσημος ἢ ἐκ πλειώνων μὲν φω-
νῶν μιᾶς σημαντικῶν δὲ ποιεῖν πέρακεν μιᾶν σημαν-
tικήν φωνῆν. ἄφθον δ' ἐστὶ φωνή ἄσημος ἢ λόγου ἄρχῃ
ἢ τέλος ἢ διορισμὸν δηλοῖ. οἷον τὸ ἁμφὶ καὶ τὸ περὶ καὶ
tὰ ἄλλα. ἡ φωνὴ ἄσημος ἢ οὕτε κωλύει οὕτε ποιεῖ φωνήν
μιᾶν σημαντικῆν ἐκ πλειώνων φωνῶν περικυκλια τίθεσθαι
καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄκρων καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ μέσου.

"Corrupta et confusa" is the verdict of Kassel, the most recent
editor of the Poetics (OCT 1965), whose text I have printed here.
Other editors have been more eloquent in their despair, notably
Gudeman (Aristoteles Poetik, 1934, ad loc.), who speaks of an
"undurchdringlicher Nebel, der die Erörterung des σύνδεσμος und
ἀρθρον umhüllt" and goes on to recommend the ars nesciendi as the
best approach. This paper is an attempt to show that the situation
is not as hopeless as that. Out of the (admittedly meagre) evidence
we have of the earliest stages of Greek grammatical theory, a
framework can be constructed into which the present passage fits
reasonably well. Needless to say, many of the points I shall make
are derived from earlier contributions to the subject; to discuss
these fully, however, would take another paper of this size 1).

1) I give here a list of the proposed emendations of the passage which are
known to me: J. Vahlen in his edition of the Poetics (1885) and in Beiträge
zu Aristoteles' Poetik (19652), 109-117 and 284-290 (where see references to
It is essential, to my mind, to recognize from the start that the text as given above, which in the main is that of the ms. A, is the result of a conflation of two versions: a short and faulty one, due to haplography, and a full one. The short and faulty one is the version of the ms. B. It runs from b 38 to a 3 (ἐπὶ τοῦ μέσου) and results from a copyist’s eye having leapt from φωνῆ ἀσημίς (b 38) to φωνῆ ἀσημίς (a 8). Accordingly, the full version is that of A, minus the words ἡ οὖτε (b 38) . . . ἐπὶ τοῦ μέσου (a 3). One can explain the conflation in A in various ways, the easiest of which is perhaps to assume that Ξ, the proximate ancestor of A and B (see Kassel’s stemma on p. xii), had the short version of B, but with the correct version in the margin or otherwise added to it, which Π noticed 2).

The seclusion of b 38 - a 3 has been proposed first by Margoliouth in his edition of 1911. It is not only palaeographically relatively simple, but it yields a clearly articulated text with parallel definitions of σύνδεσμος and ἀρθρον. Moreover, it obviates the awful collocation of περικυκλία συνθεσθαι καὶ ἐπὶ τὼν ἄχρων καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ μέσου and ἢ μὴ ἀρμόττει ἐν ἄρχῃ λόγῳ τιθέναι καθ’ αὐτήν, which no one has been able to explain away 3).

earlier literature); I. Bywater (ed. 1909); D. S. Margoliouth (ed. 1911); A. Rostagni (ed. 1927); M. Pohlenz in NGG III 6 (1939), 151 ff., repr. in Kleine Schriften I, 48 ff.; C. Gallavotti, Parola del Passato 9 (1954), 241 ff.; A. Pagliaro in Nuovi Saggi di critica semantica (Messina-Firenze 1956), 79 ff.; A. von Fragstein in Die Diairese bei Aristoteles (Amsterdam 1967), ch. 1; G. Morpurgo-Tagliabue, in Linguistica e stilistica di Aristotele (Roma 1967), 41 ff.

2) For completeness’ sake, I add Tkatsch’s translation of the Arabic version: coniunctio autem est vox composita non indicata velut ‘quidem’ et ‘nonne’. Etenim quod auditur ex iis est non indicatum, compositum e vocibus multis, quae quidem sunt indicantes vocem verbi unam compositam non indicatam. Articulis autem est vox composita non indicata aut initium orationis aut finem eius aut discremen indicans, velut ‘fe <mi>’ aut ‘propter’ aut ‘sed’. Et dicitur vox composita non indicata, quae non prohibet neque facit vocem unam indicatam, cuius negotium (est) ut componatur et vocibus multis et in principiis et in medio. Gallavotti has a full discussion of it. It will be seen that the first definition of σύνδεσμος is left out altogether; for the rest it does not seem very helpful.

3) Bywater brackets καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄχρων καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ μέσου, but the resulting phrase φωνῆ μὲν συμπεριφέρει ἐκ πλεύνων φωνῶν περικυκλία συνθεσθαι does not make sense. B’s περικυκλία must be right.