THE POWER OF APHRODITE: BACCHYLIDES 17,10

BY

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Bacchylides' Seventeenth Dithyramb concerns the conflict between Theseus and Minos on board the ship that carries the fourteen Athenian youths and maidens to Crete. The poet is here following a tradition in which Minos himself comes to Athens to collect (or choose) the victims for the Minotaur (see Jacoby on Hellanicus, FGrHist 323a F 14).

Bacchylides has set this conflict within the framework of the actions and influence of the gods. The wind that falls upon the sail of Minos' ship does so at the instigation of Athena. The dispute between the two heroes concerns divine parentage: Zeus hurls a lightning-bolt as a sign to Minos; Amphitrite receives Theseus in the home of Poseidon and gives him rich gifts. Moreover, in a gnomic passage Theseus sees the actions of the heroes and their conflict in terms of the dispensation of the gods and divine justice (24 ff.). Note especially that he says of direct conflict in line 46 διαμων κρανη. And so it is that the gods preside over the actions of...
the heroes. I stress this point, principally because some recent scholars emphasize the heroes’ actions in themselves with little attention to this larger picture).

The central conflict of the poem arises from the intervention of Aphrodite:

\[ \text{χνίσεν} \text{ τε} \text{ Μίνωι} \text{ κέαρ} \]
\[ \text{ιμεράμπυχος} \text{ θεᾶς} \]
\[ \text{Κύπριδος} \ [\alpha]\gammaά \text{ δώρα.} \ (8-10) \]

These lines are crucial, for they set in motion the series of actions that occupies the rest of the poem: Minos makes advances towards Eriboea, Theseus intervenes, the question of the paternity of the two heroes results. These lines, however, are troubled by a rather stubborn textual problem. Is the word following \[ \text{Κύπριδος} \ [\alpha]\gammaά \] (Blass) or \[ [\alpha]\gammaά \] (Kenyon)? This question is not trivial, for it affects how we view the nature of Cypris’ gifts.

\[ \alpha\gammaά \] is printed in the standard text of Snell-Maehler and was vigorously defended by Gerber. The security of this reading, however, has been called into question recently by Giesekam.

From the apparatus of the Teubner edition it appears that Snell was led to accept \[ \alpha\gammaά \] because of papyrological considerations. On his view, the space before the nu is more compatible with a gamma than with an iota. Giesekam has attacked this position by holding

2) Notably Segal, and Pieper, 395, who speaks simply of his ‘personal conflict’.

3) Gerber’s arguments have been endorsed recently by Ieranò, 161 with n. 22, who does not address the objections of Giesekam. A. P. Burnett, The Art of Bacchylides (Cambridge, Mass. 1985), 16, reproduces and translates the Teubner text without reference to the textual problem. Most recently, Zimmermann offers a defence of \[ \alpha\gammaά \] different from that of Gerber. He sees the \[ \text{Κύπριδος} \ δώρα \] as referring to the beauty of Eriboea; the adjective indicates that she should not be defiled. Accordingly, Minos acts impiously by touching her (cf. \[ \deltaαυν \ οὐκέτι ..., 21 \]). Although ingenious, this reading is unlikely: see n. 17, below.

4) Cf. Scodel, 141 n. 11. Giesekam’s support of \[ \alpha\gammaά \] is consonant with his argument that Minos is portrayed by Bacchylides in this poem in a more sympathetic light than most commentators allow: see Giesekam’s paper in F. Cairns (ed.), Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar, ARCA 2 (1976), 237-252. On his view, Minos is the ‘“reluctant victim of the ‘dread gifts of Aphrodite’” (243). Crucial to Giesekam’s case is the interpretation of lines 86-90: see my discussion in ZPE 82 (1990) 32-34. It should be stressed, moreover, that his case is not undermined by the present discussion: Minos is subject to the power of the goddess, and his actions are thus manipulated.