EMPEDOCLES’ FRAGMENT 20 DK: SOME SUGGESTIONS

BY

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It may be assumed that the way in which Empedocles’ fragment 20.1 DK was edited by Diels has left many a reader dissatisfied (cf. notes 8, 9, 10 and 11). However, thanks to the discovery of 53 papyrus fragments of an Empedocles text by Professor A. Martin in the University Library of Strasbourg some light may be dawning. The collection was acquired by the library as long ago as 1905 but had gone unnoticed. Alain Martin made his find public in a lecture given at Strasbourg April 14th 1994. I understand that the publication of all 53 fragments will not take place before the spring of 1996. But photographs of two tiny fragments were circulated by Martin printed on the invitation to his lecture, one of which contains remnants of 20 DK. Another line was made available in the handout distributed to his audience on that memorable occasion. Hopefully, these two texts will help solve one or two textual problems in Empedocles and shed a ray of light on the Empedocles text used by Simplicius.

The opening lines of Empedocles’ fragment 20 DK were edited by Diels¹) in the following form:

τούτο μὲν ἄν βροτέων μελέων ἄριστεκτόν ὅγχον·
ἄλλοτε μὲν Φιλότητι συνερχόμεν’ εἰς ἐν ἄπαντα
γυῖα, τὰ σῶμα λέλογχε, βίου θαλέθοντος ἐν ἀχμῆ.

The papyrus fragment contains the following

[ἈΚΤΟΡΑΜΗ[  
[ΕΛΕΩΝΑΠΙ[  


This is not much, but enough to make it absolutely certain that the words belong to what is our fragment 20 DK. Two things are particularly important. In the first place, eight letters belonging to the line preceding 20 DK as we have it have been added to our knowledge; not all of the first letter is preserved, but there is no question that it is an alpha. In the second place, the papyrus shows that the word ἀριδεῖκετον was part of the Empedocles text long before Simplicius². I have always been unable to bring myself to believe that ἀριδεῖκετον could have been written by Empedocles. The fact that the word has now been found also in the Martin papyrus is no cause for me to change this view. My objections to accepting it are twofold. In the first place, it is a mere epitheton ornans, meaningless and untypical³; and in the second, it leaves both its own line and the next couplet without a grammatical construction⁴.

2) Simplicius appears to have written his commentary on Aristotle’s Physica towards the middle of the sixth century A.D. As to the date of the papyrus, Martin notes “l’écriture invite à situer la copie vers le II° siècle apr. J.-C.”.

3) Witness Plutarch, Quaest. conviv. V 8.2, 683DE, τα δὲ μήλα καθ’ ἕνταν διάνουν ὁ σωφρός [i.e. Ἐμπεδοκλῆς] ὡσπέρ φλουία [80 DK] προσειρήμα, διαποίηθε, καὶ μᾶλλα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου οὐ καλλιγραφίας ἐνεκκ τοῖς εὐπροσωπομάτωτοι τῶν ἐπιθέτων, ἐσπερ ἀνθρώπιν χρωμαί, τα πράγματα γανοῦν εἰσι συντεχνίσατο, ἀλλ’ ἔκαστον σώσις τινός ἡ δυνάμεως δηλωμα ποιοῦτος, οἶον “ἀμφιβούτην χήναν” [148 DK] τὸ τὴν ψυχὴν περιεχόμενον σώματι, καὶ “νεφεληγερέτην” [149 DK] τὸν ἄμα καὶ “πολυαίματον” [150 DK] τὸ ἄμα. I am not sure that there is adequate reason for doubting Plutarch’s judgment. In Empedocles, every epithet serves the aim of expressing an essential fact or property. The adjective ἀριδεῖκετον does not satisfy this rule.

4) Diels took the syntax to be τοῦτο ἀριδεῖκετόν ἐστιν ἄνακ βρωτέων μελέων ὑγκον ‘this is manifest throughout the mass of human limbs’. Although he saved ἀριδεῖκετον from being a mere epitheton ornans, the assumption of such a severe case of catachresis of the Epic word is unacceptable (pace LSJ.), cf. note 11. Furthermore, Diels’s translation in VS. shows that he considered συνεχόμεν(α) the equivalent of συνέχεται. Such, however, will not do to provide the participle with a proper syntactic construction. (As a matter of fact, συνέχεται was conjectured here by J.C. Lüth, Die Struktur des Wirklichen im empedokleischen System, “Über die Natur” (Meisenheim am Glan 1970), 118. However, συνεχομέν(α) εἰς is also in the papyrus.) Therefore, since (1) a finite verb is needed in line 20.1 DK itself, (2) the participial clause of 20.2-3 DK requires a verb of perceiving on which to depend, and (3) ἀριδεῖκετον is the only word in the line to contain a verbal root, an editor would seem to have no option but to present the text as ἐπιδείκνυται ὑγκος. Cf. note 29.