

TWO OBSCENE EPIGRAMS BY RUFINUS

A.P. 5, 60:

Παρθένος ἀργυρόπεζος ἐλούετο, χρύσεια μαζῶν
χρωτὶ γαλακτοπαγεῖ μῆλα διαινομένη·
πυγαὶ δ' ἀλλήλαις περιηγέες εἰλίσσοντο,
ὔδατος ὑγροτέρῳ χρωτὶ σαλευόμεναι.
τὸν δ' ὑπεροιδαίνοντα κατέσκεπε πεπταμένη χεῖρ
οὐχ ὅλον Εὐρώταν, ἀλλ' ὅσον ἠδύνατο.

Translation by W.R. Paton (*The Greek Anthology*, Loeb edition, London 1969, reprint, vol. 1, page 159):

“The silver-footed maiden was bathing, letting the water fall on the golden apples of her breast, smooth like curdled milk. Her rounded buttocks, their flesh more fluid than water, rolled and tossed as she moved. Her outspread hand covered swelling Eurotas, not the whole but as much as it could.”

This epigram has been discussed in detail by Professor Alan Cameron in an article entitled “Notes on the Erotic Art of Rufinus” (*Greek Roman and Byzantine Studies* 1981, page 179 ff.). Cameron was, however, unable to understand the meaning of lines 1-2 of the epigram. Accordingly, Cameron attempted to rewrite Rufinus’ epigram and suggested that the Spartan river god Eurotas is imagined to be watching the naked girl as she washed herself. According to Cameron, the river god became sexually aroused by the sight of the girl bending over to wash her breasts in his waters. Furthermore, Cameron proposed that χρωτὶ, in line 2, should be altered to χεῖρ. In this way Cameron hoped to eliminate the obscene meaning which previous editors have given to the noun Εὐρώτας in line 6.

I would like to point out that textual alteration is totally unwarranted. Cameron has failed to comprehend that Rufinus is alluding in lines 1-2 to the literary *topos*¹ of the mercenary nature of Aphrodite ἑταῖρα. The girl’s breasts are described as “golden” (χρύσεια) and her feet are said to be “silvery” (ἀργυρόπεζος). Obviously the epithet χρύσεια has been used in a metaphorical sense by the poet. This fact was correctly understood by Dübner who explained that the epithet χρύσεια alludes to χρυσέη Ἀφροδίτη.

Similarly at Antiphanes *frag.* 58 we find a pun concerning a girl’s breasts and the golden apples of the Hesperides; cf. *Mus. Phil. Lond.*, vol. X, page 53. Thus Rufinus alludes to the fact that the girl’s beautiful breasts will cause her lovers to provide her with much money. In other words, the girl’s milky white breasts are metaphorically “golden”.

¹ Cf. *Mus. Phil. Lond.*, vol. IV, page 192 ff.

It should be noted that the girl is described as a παρθένος, in line 1; cf. LSJ s.v. παρθένος 2: “of unmarried women who are not virgins, II. 2.514”. Cf. moreover *A.P.* 12, 7:

Σφιγκτήρ οὐκ ἔστιν παρὰ παρθένῳ, οὐδὲ φίλημα
 ἀπλοῦν, οὐ φυσικὴ χρωτὸς ἐϋπνοίη,
 οὐ λόγος ἠδὺς ἐκεῖνος ὁ πορνικός, οὐδ’ ἀκέραιον
 βλέμμα, διδασκομένη δ’ ἐστὶ κακιότερα.
 Ψυχροῦνται δ’ ὄπιθεν πᾶσαι· τὸ δὲ μείζον ἐκεῖνο,
 οὐκ ἔστιν ποῦ θῆς τὴν χέρα πλαζομένην.

Translation by Paton (*op. cit.*, vol. 4, page 285 ff.):

“In a maid there is no question of a real sphincter nor a simple kiss, no natural nice smell of the skin, nor of that sweet sexy talk or limpid look. Besides, when she’s being taught she’s worse. And they’re all cold behind; but a greater nuisance is this —there’s no place where you can put your wandering hand.”

Cf. moreover *A.P.* 9, 381, 10.

Clearly we are expected to imagine that the girl who is described in this epigram as bathing is a hetaera. She uses her beautiful body in order to extract money from her lovers. Rufinus describes another bathing hetaera at *A.P.* 5, 73:

Δαίμονες, οὐκ ᾔδειν ὅτι λούεται ἡ Κυθήρεια,
 χερσὶ καταυχενίους λυσαμένη πλοκάμους.
 ἰλήκοις, δέσποινα, καὶ ὄμμασιν ἡμετέροισι
 μήποτε μνησίης, θεῖον ἰδοῦσι τύπον.
 νῦν ἔγων· Ῥοδόκλεια, καὶ οὐ Κύπρις. εἶτα τὸ κάλλος
 τοῦτο πόθεν; σύ, δοκῶ, τὴν θεὸν ἐκδέδουκας.

Translation by Paton (*op. cit.*, vol. 1, page 165):

“Ye gods! I knew not that Cytherea was bathing, releasing with her hands her hair to fall upon her neck. Have mercy on me, my queen, and be not wroth with my eyes that have looked on thy immortal form. Now I see! It is Rhodoclea and not Cyprius. Then whence this beauty! Thou, it would seem, hast despoiled the goddess.”

Cameron was, as I have already mentioned, puzzled by the fact that the poet alludes in line 6 to the girl’s *pudenda muliebria*. This is not in fact unusual in a Greek erotic epigram. For the meaning of Εὐρώτας cf. LSJ s.v. For other obscene references in Rufinus cf. my *New Essays in Hellenistic Poetry*, Amsterdam 1985, page 38 ff. Cf. also G. Giangrande, *Scr. Min. Alex.*, vol. 2, p. 368. Finally it should be noted that Rufinus has repeated the noun χρωτί in lines 2 and 4. For other cases of repetition in Greek epigrams cf. G. Giangrande, *Scripta Minora Alexandrina*, Amsterdam 1981, vol. 2, page 313. *A.P.* 5, 61:

Τῇ κυανοβλεφάρῳ παίζων κόνδακα Φιλίππη,
 ἐξ αὐτῆς κραδίης ἠδὺ γελᾶν ἐπόουν·
 “Δώδεκά σοι βέβληκα, καὶ αὔριον ἄλλα βαλῶ σοι,
 ἢ πλέον, ἢ ἐπάλιν δώδεκ’ ἐπιστάμενος.”
 εἶτα κελευομένη τ’ ἦλθεν· γελάσας δὲ πρὸς αὐτήν·
 “Ἔθε σε καὶ νύκτωρ ἐρχομένην ἐκάλουν.”

Translation by Paton (*op. cit.*, vol. 1, page 159):

“Playing at *Condax* with dark-eyed Philippa I made her laugh sweetly with all her heart. ‘I have thrown you’ I said ‘twelve, and to-morrow I will throw you another twelve or even more, as I know how.’ Then when she was told she came, and laughing I said to her ‘I wish I had called you at night too when you were coming.’”

This epigram has also been discussed by Professor Cameron. He noted² that according to previous editors Rufinus means to say that he had made love³ to Philippa “twelve times” in succession (δώδεκα, line 3). Cameron rejects this interpretation of the epigram which he argues is “crude, feeble, and implausible”. He considered that if Philippa had just made love “twelve times in a row” she would not have laughed at Rufinus’ joke.

Once again Cameron has completely misunderstood the nature of the Greek erotic epigram. As is already well known⁴, Greek poets frequently boasted of their ability to make love many times in succession. This *topos* appears also in Latin poetry: cf. Catullus 32, 8. For the meaning of δώδεκα (“twelve times”) cf. Lapp, *De Callimachi tropis et figuris*, page 148 and *Quad. Urbinati* 1979, page 113.

Rufinus orders the hetaera⁵ Philippa to return on the next day so that they can make love twelve times again. When she returns the poet says that he wishes that he had summoned her to come at night too. He means that they could have spent the night as well as the day making love together. For the literary *topos* according to which the whole night could be spent making love, cf. Propertius 2, 22, 21-28:

*sed tibi si exiles videor tenuatus in artus
falleris: haud umquam est culta labore Venus.
percontere licet: saepe est experta puella
officium tota nocte valere meum.
Iuppiter Alcmenae geminas requieverat Arctos,
et caelum noctu bis sine rege fuit;
nec tamen idcirco languens ad fulmina venit:
nullus amor vires eripit ipse suas.*

Translation by H.E. Butler (Loeb edition, London 1962, reprint, page 125):

“But if to thee my limbs seem shrunk and thin, thou errest; it has ne’er been a hardship to me to serve Venus. ‘Tis a lawful question; often a girl has found my passion could outlast the hours of night. Jove for Alcmena’s sake made the stars of the Bear to slumber two nights long, and heaven twice was kingless through the dark; yet he was not therefore faint when he returned to the thunderbolt. Never doth love exhaust its own strength.”

Cf. also *Quaderni Urbinati* 1979, page 109 f.

² *Op. cit.*, page 184.

³ Cf. LSJ, s.v. κόνδαξ; «metaph., παίζων κόνδακα, of sexual intercourse, AP 5.60 (Rufin.)» Cf. also F. Jacobs, *Animadversiones in Epigrammata Anthologiae Graecae*, Leipzig 1801, tom. X, page 158, who explained that κόνδαξ alludes to πάσσαλος, i.e., *membrum virile*.

⁴ Cf. Gow-Page, *The Garland of Philip*, Cambridge 1968, vol. 2, page 399. Cf. also Jacobs, *Animadversiones*, tom. X, page 158, quoting Ovid, *Amores* III, 7, 26.

⁵ The lemma states that Philippa is a hetaera: εἰς Φιλίππην τὴν ἑταίραν.

CONCLUSION

I hope that it is clear to the reader that Cameron's attempt to bowdlerise the poetry of Rufinus is not convincing. Both *A.P.* 5, 60 and 5, 61 describe hetaerae and both contain obvious obscene double meanings. Cameron has made a similarly unsuccessful attempt to bowdlerise the epigrams of Asclepiades; cf. *Habis* 1998, where I review *Callimachus And His Critics* (Princeton 1995).

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