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Adam Łukaszewicz

ANTONINUS THE ΚΟΡΥΦΟΣ*
(NOTE ON P. OXY. XLVI 3298.2)

The Syrian Emperor Marcus Aurelius (218-222) left a well-deserved bad memory. Posterity denied him even the name of the Antonines, so that in our days he is remembered as Elagabalus (or, in a more hellenized form, Heliogabalus). Actually, the name belonged to his native Syrian god of Emesa. The Emperor was the high priest of that deity, *sacerdos amplissimus dei invicti Solis Elagabali*¹.

The name of Elagabalus is usually interpreted by modern scholars as a form of the Arabic *ilah ha-gabal* ("the god of the mountain"). Such a name is in fact somewhat restrictive, does not much honour to the bearer, fits ill the aspiration to universality and is even suspect in view of the lack of any really impressive mountain at Emesa². Yet, that explanation lives on in scholarly literature³, although it seems that a derivative of Syriac *gbwl*, "maker" would be a more fitting etymology ("god creator")⁴.

* I wish to record here my debt of gratitude to the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, where this article was written in November 1991.

Although a special volume is intended to commemorate the Late Professor Borkowski, may this article be an informal anticipation of the future homage. The present writer shall always remember Zbigniew Borkowski not only as an outstanding scholar and a brilliant connoisseur of many fields of history but also as a friend who was always ready to discuss problems presented to him. Most of these questions were analyzed in informal conversation which "touched upon everything" and which finally always concentrated itself on papyrology. A remarkable quality of our late friend as a scholar and as a man was his love of truth. He was an enemy of taboos of all kinds. In his inspiring talks he also discussed matters from which scholars often used to shy away.

I wish to dedicate the following lines, written in Princeton, to his memory, as if they were part of an afternoon dialogue on the bank of the Vistula. May they please *manibus suis*.

¹ CIL X 5827, cf. F. Cumont, RE 5 (10), 2220, s.v. *Elagabalus*.

² A hill with an Arab citadel occupying the probable site of the sun temple is not a *gebel*: cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. *Homs*, vol. XIII, Cambridge 1910, p. 648.

³ T. D. Barnes, *Ultimus Antoninorum* in: *Bonner Historia-Augusta Colloquium* 1970, Bonn 1972 ("Antiquitas" 4, 10), p. 60: "The name should originally designate the god of the mountain. Yet Elagabalus is consistently described as a sun god". K. Christ, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis Konstantin*, München 1988, p. 626.

⁴ Already J. Réville in his still valuable *La religion à Rome sous les Sévères*, Paris 1886, 243f. pointed in this direction.

Papyri witness to the *damnatio memoriae* of Elagabalus. In dating clauses of documents the name of the infamous Emperor was replaced with formulas following more or less closely the pattern found in P. Flor. I 56.12–13: τῷ μετὰ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ Ἀντωνίνου αὐτοκρατορείᾳ]ν δ' ἔτει⁵.

However, we also possess more explicit testimonies of the official — and certainly also popular — disapproval of the Emperor, expressed in P. Oxy. XLVI 3299.2: Ἰαννοσίου Ἀντωνίνου μικροῦ or P. Oxy. XXX 2551 verso i.20: Ἀντωνίνου]ς μικρός.

It seems that the abusive tendency reaches its summit in a horoscope written in the second half of the IIIrd century, where the dead Emperor is referred to as "Antoninus the κόρυφος": β (ἔτους) Ἀντωνεῖνου τοῦ κορυφ(ου), P. Oxy. XLVI 3298.i.2. The editor of the papyrus gives an explanation of the word κόρυφος taken from the Liddell–Scott–Jones, *Dictionary*, s.v. (III) and based on *Theoc.* 4.62 *Schol.*: "κόρυφος: Alexandrian word for ὁ ὡς κόρη οἰφώμενος".

The description of the Emperor Antoninus Elagabalus as a "catamite" fits well the image known from Cassius Dio and from the *Vita Antonini Heliogabali* in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*. The idea of κόρυφος as ὁ ὡς κόρη οἰφώμενος implies a misspelled κόροϊφος (from κόρη and οἴφω or οἴφῶ). However, the word κόρυφος occurs in a seemingly innocent context in a papyrus dated by the editors to the second century A.D. A woman writes to her sister: πρὸ μὲν πάντων εὐχόμεαι σε ὑγιαίνειν (-ειν) καὶ τὰ παιδιά σου κα[ι] Πᾶσιν τὸν κόρυφον (P. Tebt. II 414.5–7). The editors of P. Tebt. II 414 seem to overlook a possibility of an "indecent" meaning of the word. They do not, however, indicate any other satisfactory explanation of it. Also the LSJ, s.v., II, avoids any sexual implications, stating that κόρυφος in P. Tebt. II 414 is a "pet name for a child(?)". Dimitrakou explains the same place as "θωπευτικόν, χαϊδευτικὸν ὄνομα παιδός" (*Mega Lexicon*, s.v.). The editor of P. Oxy. XLVI 3298 hesitates to attribute to κόρυφος in P. Tebt. II 414.7 the opprobrious meaning, quoting, however, a different opinion of H. Maehler, *GRBS* 15, 1974, 307, n. 3.

The meaning of κόρυφος = κόροϊφος = ὁ ὡς κόρη οἰφώμενος is not obvious. The structure of this compound seems rather to indicate the opposite — not "one who is subject to sexual treatment normally reserved for κόραι" but more probably "one who copulates with κόραι". And indeed the original entry in the *Scholia in Theocriti Idyll. IV 62* being the basis of the supposed meaning of κόρυφος = "catamite" reads: φίλοιφα· Ἦγουν ὁ φιλῶν τὸ συνουσιάζειν, φιλοσυνουσιαστά. οἰφέειν γὰρ τὸ συνουσιάζειν. οὕτω καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Ἀλεξανδρεῦσι κόροϊφος λέγεται, ὁ κόρη οἰφώμενος. ἢ οἰφέειν τὸ συνουσιάζειν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀπιπεύειν, ἔνθεν καὶ οἰφολις γυνή⁶.

In the *Adnotatio critica in Scholiastas Theocriti* accompanying the edition we read: "κόροϊφος (*sic!*) Vat. 3.5, ut ap. Etymol. p. 531, qui dicit: ἢ τὸν ὡς κόρη οἰφώμενον, τουτέστιν ὀχευόμενον. Ut in nostro loco corrigendum sit ὁ ὡς κόρη οἰφώμενος. Vitium primum notavit Geel et animadvertit mediae formae τοῦ οἰφᾶν s. οἰφέειν nullum usquam esse vestigium."

⁵ For this and other instances see J. R. R e a, P. Oxy. XLVI 3298 introd.

⁶ *Scholia in Theocritum*, ed. Fr. D ü b n e r, Parisiis 1849, p. 36.

Actually the *Etymologicum Magnum* reads *sub κόρσοιφος* (531.2) ἢ τὸν ὡς κόρην οἰφόμενον, τουτέστιν ὀχενόμενον. (among other meanings).

It is on this passage, and on the absence of attested medium forms of οἰφῶ with active meaning, that the modern emendation of the original ὁ κόρην οἰφόμενος in the *Scholia in Theocritum* is based. Still, it is nevertheless quite clear what the scholiast wanted to say: "the Alexandrians call κόροιφος the man who copulates with a virgin". The "corrected" meaning would have no sense *sub φιλοῖφα* which obviously means "somebody who takes pleasure in standard male sexual activities".

Dimitrakou, whose feeling for Greek can be trusted, has no doubts as to the passage under discussion and to the meaning of κόροιφος (κόρη - οἰφῶ) σχολ. ὁ οἰφῶν, ὁ βινῶν, ὁ διαφθεύρων τὰς κόρας Σχολ. Θεόκρ. 4, 62 "οἰφεῖν τὸ συνουσιάζειν. Οὕτω καὶ παρὰ Ἀλεξανδρεῦσιν κόροιφος λέγεται ὁ κόρην οἰφόμενος"⁷.

Thus, to a modern Greek lexicographer, the presence of the erroneous (or just otherwise unattested) medial οἰφόμενος is no hindrance to understanding the whole expression as active.

Thus, for the reasons adduced above, it seems preferable to understand κόρυφος/κόροιφος as ὁ οἰφῶν τὰς κόρας rather than as ὁ ὡς κόρη οἰφόμενος. If we interpret κόρυφος in this way, there is also no difficulty in understanding what was really meant in P. Tebt. II 414.7. The Πᾶσις mentioned in the greeting formula together with a woman and her children is either a child (not an addressee's own) or an adult mocked by the appellation κόρυφος. Sobriquets of that kind and even with exactly the same meaning as οἰφόλης, were not uncommon in traditional rural societies and in some countries could even play the role of family names until in more recent times they were replaced by more decorous ones⁸.

There are also possibilities of explaining κόρυφος in the Tebtunis papyrus without interpreting it as a misspelled κόροιφος: the word may imply the meaning of πᾶν ὑψηλὸν μέρος (Dimitrakou, *s.v.* 2)⁹.

It is equally possible that κόρυφος in the Tebtunis papyrus, especially if it applies to a child, has nothing to do with sexuality. Schmidt's edition of Hesychius gives *s.v.* κόρυφος an entry including "glossas explicationesque de scriptura suspectas": κόρυφος κόρυμβος γυναικείου. οἱ δὲ μᾶλλον τὰ τῶν παιδίων. κορυφάνια (*s.v.* 908)¹⁰. κόρυμβος equal to κρωβύλος (Liddell-Scott-Jones, *s.v.* II) may simply indicate a characteristic hairdress¹¹.

⁷ D. Dimitrakou, *Mega Lexikon tes Hellenikes Glosses*, V, Athenai 1951, *s.v.* κόροιφος.

⁸ Such names live further, if the opprobrious etymology is no longer understood due to language evolution or if the bearers live in a foreign surrounding (e.g. the originally Polish name Pierdolla, encountered in Germany).

⁹ "Penis was used *pars pro toto* by Augustus of Horace (see above, p. 36), who was also small. Small boys are sometimes likened to the penis...": J. N. Adams, *The Latin Sexual Vocabulary*, Baltimore 1991, p. 65, cf. Suet. Vit. Hor. 'praeterea saepe eum inter alios iocos "purissimum pene<m>" et "homuncionem lepidissimum" appellat'; cf. J. Svennung, *Studi in onore di Luigi Castiglioni*, Firenze 1960, II, pp. 973 ff.

¹⁰ Hesychius, ed. M. Schmidt, Jenae 1867.

¹¹ Idem, *s.v.* κρωβύλος, *op. cit.*, 927.

Does the information conveyed by *κόρυφος* = *κόροϊφος* agree with the known facts about the life of Elagabalus?

Herodian echoes the contemporary complaints about his barbaric garb and ornaments "suitable not for men but for women"¹². He also enumerates his marriages and divorces as "making a mockery of human marriage"¹³. A mention of Elagabalus' effeminate sexual conduct is made in Herodian V 6.2 where his pretended love (*προσποιησάμενος ἑρᾶν*) and subsequent marriage to one of Vestal virgins is explained as performed *ἵνα δὴ καὶ τὰ τῶν ἀνδρῶν πράττειν δοκοίη*. Explicit and detailed information about the effeminate behaviour of Elagabalus is found in Cassius Dio LXXX (79) 13–16. However, for Dio, too, Elagabalus' marriages with Vestal virgins remain a major scandalous element of the Emperor's life¹⁴. Dio has also an indignant description of the Emperor's dissolute behaviour with women: *ἔγημε μὲν γὰρ πολλὰς γυναῖκας, καὶ ἔτι πλείοσι μὲν ἄνευ τινὸς νομίμου προσρήσεως συνείργυντο*¹⁵. All this was — in Dio's eyes — done not out of any real need, but for the purpose of imitating the actions of those women during intercourse with his male lovers¹⁶. During the reign of Elagabalus, Dio was in Asia and relied entirely on rumours coming from the capital. Therefore his account of these years, being a reflection of contemporary gossip, must not be taken at face value¹⁷. The alleged homosexual lewdness of the Emperor or "sakrale Prostitution des Kaisers"¹⁸ is almost certainly an exaggeration. On the other hand information concerning Elagabalus' successive marriages is entirely historical (four weddings are attested)¹⁹. It is evident that the Emperor's wedding to the Vestal virgin Aquilia Severa, followed by a marriage to Anicia Faustina and then the second wedding to Aquilia Severa could be considered in Alexandria as a good reason for the abusive appellation *κόρυφος/κόροϊφος* or "virgin-rapist", in fact meaning not more than approximately *οὐφώλης*.

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¹² Hdn V 5.6.

¹³ Hdn V 6.3, cf. E. C. Echols, *Herodian* (transl.), Berkeley 1961, p. 147.

¹⁴ Cassius Dio LXXX (79) 9.

¹⁵ Cassius Dio LXXX (79) 13.1.

¹⁶ Cassius Dio, loc. cit.

¹⁷ F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio*, Oxford 1964, pp. 168–170.

¹⁸ K. Christ, *Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit von Augustus bis zu Konstantin*, München 1988, p. 628.

¹⁹ F. Millar, *Study...*, p. 169, n. 9.