

## **Κωλῆ = membrum uirile: ARISTOPHANES' CLOUDS 989 AND 1019 AND TWO APOTROPAIC AMULETS**

In the contest in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, 'Right', addressing 'Wrong'<sup>1</sup>, complains about the present day molly-coddling of boys which makes them grow up as weaklings, incapable of performing traditional athletic feats such as dancing naked wielding a hoplite shield (Ar. *Clouds* 987ff.):

κὺ δὲ τοὺς νῦν εὐθὺς ἐν ἱματίοις διδάσκεις ἐντετυλίχθαι,  
ὥστε μ' ἀπάγγελθε' ὅταν ὀρχεῖσθαι Παναθηναίοις δέον αὐτοὺς  
τὴν ἀσπίδα τῆς κωλῆς προέχων ἀμελῆ τις Τριτογενεΐης.

At the conclusion of his speech, according to the majority of the manuscripts<sup>2</sup>, he tells Pheidippides that, if he listens to Wrong, he will acquire a πυγὴν μικράν along with a κωλῆν μεγάλην and a ψήφισμα μακρόν (Ar. *Clouds* 1019), having informed him earlier that, if he listens to him, he will possess a πυγὴν μεγάλην and a πόσθην μικράν.

From ancient times onwards<sup>3</sup> there has been general agreement among commentators and lexicographers that in this scene κωλῆ means 'penis'. A significant dissentient voice has been that of the most authoritative commentator on the play, K.J. Dover<sup>4</sup>.

Commentators and lexicographers are virtually at one<sup>5</sup> in adducing the al-

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<sup>1</sup> I follow Sir Kenneth Dover's suggestions regarding the nomenclature of ὁ κρείττων λόγος and ὁ ἥττων λόγος.

<sup>2</sup> πυγὴν μικράν, κωλῆν μεγάλην **RV<sup>s</sup>ENΘ<sub>2</sub>**: πυγὴν μεγάλην, κωλῆν μεγάλην **V<sup>1</sup>**: om. **KΘ<sub>1</sub>** (I reproduce Dover's apparatus).

<sup>3</sup> See the ancient scholia 988a, 989a Holwerda: διὰ δὲ τὸ ἀπρεπέες φησι 'προέχοντες τῶν αἰδοίων τὴν ἀσπίδα' (988a **RVEM**), ὡς αὐτῶν τούτου <ἐνεκα> ἐν τῇ πομπῇ ἀσπιδηφορούντων διὰ τὸ ἐπικαλύπτεσθαι τὴν αἰσχύνην.

κωλῆς· νῦν τοῦ **ERs** μακροῦ αἰδοίου **EMRs** (989a).

(Compare also the Thoman-Triclinian scholia 989a, 1018, the anonyma recentiora 988f, 1018b [p. 384 Koster], Tzetzes, 1019a). Of commentators and translators Teuffel, Rogers, and Mastromarco (to name but a few) all follow the scholia: Blaydes was prepared to introduce forms of ψωλή by conjecture in both places.

<sup>4</sup> *Aristophanes. Clouds*, edited with an introduction and commentary by K.J. Dover, Oxford 1968.

<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the word is present in Hippon. fr. 75,1 West (75 Degani) but, since the context is most probably culinary (note ψωμὸ[ν in 1,4 and see Lobel, *The Oxyrhynchus*

leged occurrences in *Clouds* as the only examples of this usage. According to the latest commentator, «probably *kole* lit. ‘ham’ means ‘penis’ both here and in 1018, though this meaning is not attested elsewhere» (Sommerstein on 989) and LSJ give as their second meaning for this word ‘*membrum uirile*’, citing only Ar. *Clouds* 989, 1019. No one discussing this subject appears to have noticed two secure examples of κωλῆ = ‘penis’ in magical apotropaic formulae. κωλῆ is twice to be found on amulets in a sequence of names for things which help avert the evil eye. The first example<sup>6</sup> contains the phrase εὐθεῖα κωλῆ ἀνδρός (for this amulet, first published in «BCH» III [1879] 267, see C. Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets chiefly Greco-Egyptian*, Ann Arbor 1950, 215). In the second amulet BM 56324=SB VI 9125<sup>7</sup> (see C. Bonner, «Hesperia» XX [1951] 335f.: no. 51) the adjective is spelled εθυῖα. In view of the first example, G.P. Shipp (*Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary*, Sydney 1979, 534) cannot be correct in interpreting this as αἰθυῖα: many examples of ε>ευ can be found in the papyri (see F.T. Gignac, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods*, I, *Phonology*, Milano 1977, 228).

Now that it has been established that, at one stage in the history of the Greek language, κωλῆ did have the meaning postulated for it in Aristophanes, it remains to attempt to decide how the word should be interpreted in this scene. Dover does not even entertain the possibility that it might mean ‘penis’ in the first passage: «κωλῆ is the haunch of animal or man (cf. 1019n., Eup. 47 [*PCG* 54]), often mentioned in connexion with the partition of meat after a sacrifice (cf. *Pl.* 1128, Ameips. 7.2). If a man is physically weak, he cannot dance for long holding a heavy shield with his fore-arm at right-angles to his chest or moving it quickly up and down: his arm flops and the shield covers his side from shoulder to knee. The exaggeration ‘holding it in front of his haunch’ is typical drill-sergeant’s language» (p. 219).

In his note on 1019 the possibility is entertained, but firmly rejected: «The idea that κωλῆ can = ‘penis’ – i.e. that a straightforward term for one part of the body can denote a different part<sup>8</sup>, in a context to which the straightforward meaning is highly relevant – is not attractive [...]. The use of words meaning ‘tail’ for ‘penis’ is different, because we do not have tails» (p. 223). With regard to the second passage it is hard to disagree with Dover’s diagnosis of the textual prob-

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*Papyri* XVIII 67f.), there is no justification for suggesting that it was used there in a sexual sense as does J. Henderson, *The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Comedy*, New Haven and London 1975, 20 (cf. Degani<sup>2</sup> 229).

<sup>6</sup> It runs ἵππος μοῖλος εἶβις εὐθεῖα κωλῆ ἀνδρός <>τρουθοκάμηλος Ἀπόλλω.

<sup>7</sup> This runs ἵππος, μῦλος, εἶβις, ἐθυῖα κωλῆ ἀνδρός, τρουθ/οκάμηλος Ἀπόλλω, the rest being unintelligible.

<sup>8</sup> Transfer of meaning between adjacent body parts is a common enough linguistic phenomenon (cf. Fr. *cuisse* from Latin *coxa*).

lems: «Apart from AKΘ<sub>1</sub> [...] the MSS. say 'small buttocks, a large' ('small' V) 'κωλῆ'. But this will not do; the underdeveloped man has a small haunch [...]; we do not want μικράν twice in the same kolon; and we miss either a reference to the penis or a surprise substitute». Dover's solution is to read κωλῆν μικράν, ψήφισμα μακρόν, ψήφισμα μακρόν supplying the surprise substitute.

One might argue against Dover that, since it is established that κωλῆ can mean 'penis', half of his objection to the text falls: there is a reference to the penis already there. But ψήφισμα μακρόν is then redundant and the balance with 1014 (πυγὴν μεγάλην, πόσθην μικράν) is lost<sup>9</sup>.

In his review of Dover's edition, C. Austin («CR» n.s. XX [1970] 20) offers a less drastic solution to the problem. He would read πυγὴν μικράν, {κωλῆν μεγάλην} ψήφισμα μακρόν, regarding κωλῆν μεγάλην as a gloss<sup>10</sup>. If this is correct (it produces a perfect balance with 1014), it would constitute further evidence that, at some stage, it was possible for κωλῆ to connote 'penis'. If the ancient scholion to 989, κωλῆς· νῦν τοῦ μακροῦ αἰδοίου, could be taken to mean «<then, in Aristophanes' time, 'haunch'>, now the μακρόν αἰδοῖον», it would lend support, to Austin's suggestion that κωλῆν might have been a word employed by a glossator. The commentator would be saying that κωλῆ by his time had acquired a secondary, sexual meaning (the meaning in fact to be found in our amulets which, although undated, are presumably fairly late). This, however, is the least likely of three possible interpretations of the note. As Nigel Wilson points out to me, the expression is more likely to mean «<We would> now <say> μακρόν αἰδοῖον» or «in the present passage κωλῆ means μακρόν αἰδοῖον»<sup>11</sup>. I think that, in the context, the second interpretation is preferable. There seems to be more point in writing a note drawing attention to a special use of the word than in offering so emphatically a common euphemism glossing the word.

Dover's explanation (quoted above) of 989 is more than adequate and is certainly superior to that of P. Thielscher<sup>12</sup> who, like the ancient commentators, introducing the idea of shame at nakedness which is irrelevant to this context and, in any case, a concept alien to Athenian public festivals, misses the point of Right's argument. «Die Scham vor der Göttin ihn eigentlich daran abhalten sollte, das Glied sich aufrichten zu lassen. Das geschieht aber trotz der Göttin, und dann muss er das Glied mit dem Schilde verdecken, den er eigentlich so tief nicht halten sollte».

<sup>9</sup> Despite this Sommerstein accepts all three expressions.

<sup>10</sup> «The interpolator probably wanted something to correspond directly with πόσθην μικράν and (misled perhaps by l. 989) thought that κωλῆν could stand for πόσθην». The most recent editor of the play, G. Mastromarco, accepts Austin's suggestion (*Aristofane*, I, Torino 1983, 89).

<sup>11</sup> That is to say «κωλῆ can have other meanings». In Tzetzes' comment on 1019 (1019a) νῦν is also used but there it refers back to 1014: ἦν εἶπε πόσθην, νῦν κωλῆν [*sic*] λέγει.

<sup>12</sup> «PhW» LVII (1937) 255f., quoted with approval by Henderson 129 n. 115.

Nevertheless, if κωλῆ did, in certain contexts<sup>13</sup>, suggest ‘penis’ to an Athenian audience, the passage would still have a point, the point Dover wishes it to have, but with added (sexual) connotations. We do not *need* a sexual meaning for the word, but that does not constitute proof of the absence of such a meaning. One might add that it is characteristic of Right to show an interest in male *genitalia*<sup>14</sup>.

Like many such problems regarding the sexual vocabulary of Old Comedy, this one is ultimately frustrating<sup>15</sup>. It seems to me to be impossible to determine with any certainty whether or not Aristophanes used κωλῆ in the same way as the users of the magic amulets. I think it possible that he did so in 989, but am inclined to follow Austin’s suggestion regarding 1019 and eliminate κωλῆν from the text. If Aristophanes meant κωλῆ to be understood as ‘penis’ when he used the word in 989, light is shed on the use of the cult title Κωλιάς in *Clouds* 52 and *Lys.* 2<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Dover’s objection, expressed in his note on 989 (quoted above), can be countered. κωλῆ may be less than a «straightforward term for one part of the [human] body». The word κωλῆ was specifically associated with offerings of meat and an Athenian audience might well think of this meaning before they thought of the anatomical one, particularly since the vast majority of occurrences of the word in comedy are with this meaning. In the Eupolis fragment cited by Dover, where the reference is undoubtedly to part of the human anatomy, the word used is, in fact, κωλήν not κωλῆ. κωλῆ does not occur in the Hippocratic corpus (κωλήν occurs just once). For the metaphor involved in κωλῆ = ‘penis’, compare the use of κρέας for the male organ. Henderson translates κωλῆ by ‘meatbone’ (20).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. 973. See Dover, *o.c.* LXIV. Admittedly, elsewhere his interest is specifically in boys’ genitals.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. my remarks in «CQ» n.s. XXXV (1985) 31f., 32 n. 8 on the difficulty of proving or disproving the existence of sexual innuendo in any given passage of Aristophanes.

<sup>16</sup> See Henderson, *o.c.* 73,129. He appears to have abandoned this interpretation: in his *Lysistrata*-commentary, his note on *Lys.* 2 makes no mention of the possible suggestive nature of Κωλιάς.