Asius and the Samians’ Hairstyle

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Athenaeus, discussing the usages of the various Ionians, has occasion to cite some verses of the poet Asius (525 E–F):


In this article I shall support a change in the verses of Asius quoted above which was first proposed by A. F. Naeke in 1817 and occurred independently to me as I read the transmitted text. Naeke said little in favour of his conjecture and, though adopted by Kinkel, it has in general been ignored by later scholars. The change seems to me to be entirely necessary and it is time that the case for it was put.

C. M. Bowra, in his full discussion of the Asius fragment, translates it as follows:

1 Choerii Samii quae supersunt collegit et illustravit . . . A. F. Naekius (Leipzig 1817) 75: “Mox quo referatur autóv, vel quod aliquanto melius iudico, autév, non dubium est, instaurato, ut a me factum est, versus ordine. Qui quod perturbatus fuerit, non mirum in fragmento poetae antiquissimi, et ipsa antiquitate obscurati. Τον παλαιὸν Βασιλ. Κασαβόνου, τον Κάιβελ τον Κόμην τον Φρυγό στράτων, κακομυθώμεν. Τα τα το Ασίον ἔπι οὐτέως ἔχοντα:


3 E.g. M. Bieber, RE 11 (1922) 1455 s.v. “Korymbe”; F. Jacoby, FGrHist 76E60; Gomme (infra n.6); Bowra (infra n.4); Huxley (infra n.9); the most recent editors of Athenaeus, Kaibel (Teubner, 1890) and Gulick (LCL, 1933).

In the same way, when they had combed their hair, they used to march to the precinct of Hera, wrapped closely in fine clothing, and filled the floor of the wide earth with their snowy garments. On them were golden fastenings like cicadas; their hair, in golden bands, was tossed by the wind, and about their arms were bracelets finely wrought... a warrior under his shield.

Apart from the half-obliterated last verse, the chief problem is in verse 4. τέττις of ‘ornament’, ‘fastening’ vel sim., is elsewhere used only in connection with hair; and κορύμβαι seems definitely to be related to κόρυμβος and κροβύλος, words that denote a kind of hairstyle. But since εἰς αὐτῶν, ‘on them’, could not refer to the Samians’ hair, mentioned in the following verse, and golden κορύμβαι can hardly refer to a hairstyle, and a hairstyle could hardly be compared with cicadas, Bowra takes αὐτῶν as referring to χιτώσις and κορύμβαι as denoting ornaments or fastenings on the Samians’ garments. As the text stands, Bowra is certainly right that αὐτῶν would have to refer to the garments, and he is also right that golden κορύμβαι ‘like cicadas’ can hardly denote hairstyles. But his attachment of κορύμβαι to dress, which ignores the constant association of τέττις with hair and with κροβύλος and κόρυμβος in contexts in which hairstyle is in question, is far from secure. His citations from Etym.Magn. 311 (ἐγκόμωμα: διάμος τῶν χειρίδων, ὑλεῖα παρ’ Ἀθηναίοις ὁδοιποιοί. ὑπὸ δὲ ἄλλων κοσύμβη) and Hesychius (κορυμβάι: περιδρόμων δι’ ὄν συσπάται γυργάθος καὶ κεκρύμβος καὶ διαμοί) cannot be regarded either as connecting κορύμβη—a cognate of κοσύμβη and κορυμβάς, both fastenings of sorts—specially with χιτώνες or as excluding a possible association of it with hair. But the Hesychius entry is, as we shall see, probably of significance for the interpretation of the Asius fragment.

Before presenting the solution I favour to the problem in Asius’ verses, it is necessary to consider G. L. Huxley’s recent attempt to interpret them. He translates them as follows:

5 LSJ s.v. τέττις I.2; E. Schuppe, RE 2 5 (1934) 1111–13 s.n. “Tettix.”
6 See A. W. Gomme, A Historical Commentary on Thucydid 1 (Oxford 1945) 101ff (on Thuc. 1.6.3).
7 πλοκάμως in v. 1 is of course too remote to be referred to here.
8 See Gomme (supra n.6) 102f.
9 Greek Epic Poetry from Eumelos to Panyassis (London 1969) 96. Cf. Gulick’s translation (LCL): “And they, even so, where’er they had combed their locks, would hie them to the precinct of Hera, swathed in beautiful vestments, with snowy tunics that swept the floor of wide earth; and golden head-pieces surmounted them, like cicadas; their tresses waved in
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Even so they used to walk, whene’er they had combed their locks, to the precinct of Hera, swathed in fair garments; with snowy tunics they swept the floor of the broad earth; and golden brooches like cicadas surmounted their topknots as their hair in its golden bands waved in the breeze; and delicately wrought bracelets encircled their arms... a warrior sheltered beneath his shield.

‘Swept’ is hardly right for εἴχων (lit. ‘occupied’, ‘covered’) as against Bowra’s ‘filled’. The inclusion of both ‘brooches’ and ‘topknots’ seems to be an impossible attempt to combine Bowra’s interpretation of κορύμβαι with the older view; a word denoting hair for αὐτὸν is, as the text stands, impossible, and in any case ‘topknots’ cannot be right: it is clear from verse 5 and from the words that introduce the Asius fragment in Athenaeus/Duris (κατεκτενισμένοι τὰς κόμας ἐπὶ τὸ μετάφρανον καὶ τοὺς ὀμοὺς) that the Samians’ hair was not done up in topknots. Huxley’s suggestion that “the writer [Asius] is perhaps not so much looking far back in time as looking at an event in Samos from elsewhere and describing his countrymen... for foreigners” is hard to reconcile with the imperfects φοίτεσκον, εἴχων, ἡωρεύντ’, ἦσαν, and the temporal ὁπως... κτενίσαντο, all clearly referring to a repeated event in the past.

Now the proposal I support. We should, as we have seen, expect ornaments or fastenings called, or compared with, ἑττιγες to be for the hair and this expectation is strongly reinforced when we find that word in association with a close linguistic relative of κόρυμβος/κροβύλος, even when that relative cannot have quite the same sense as those words (see infra n.13); and in this context, where hair is so prominently mentioned, there seems to me to be no likelihood that κορύμβαι and ἑττιγες are not to be connected somehow with hair. As the text stands, however, this connection is disrupted. The solution is to change the text, by transposing verses 4 and 5:

οἱ δ’ αὖτως φοίτεσκον ὁπως πλοκάμους κτενίσαντο
 εἰς Ἡρας τέμνονς, πεπυκασμένοι εἴμασι καλοῖς;
 χιονοῦσι ξιτῶσι πέδων χθονός εὐρέος εἴχων

the breeze mid their golden bands, and bracelets wrought with cunning circled their arms... a warrior sheltered beneath his shield.” The original appearance of ‘swept’ here may have had little enough to do with εἶχων (which both Gulick and Huxley print); cf. the information in Schweighäuser’s Animadversiones VI (Strasbourg 1804) 404: “Tertium versum latine sic reddiderat Dalecpius: terraeque late niveis tunicis solum radebant: quasi legisset εἰρό δεσαυρον, ut monuit Jacobs, Exerc. Crit. T. I pag. 121.”

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χαίται δ' ἦσσεοιν' ἀνέμω χρυσέοις ἐνὶ δεσμοῖς, χρυσεῖα δὲ κορύμβαι ἐπ' αὐτῶν τέττιγες ὡς·
κοιλίκλεοι δὲ χλιδώνες ἃρ' ἄμφι βραχίοσιν ἦσαν,

In the same way, when they had combed their locks, they would go into Hera's precinct, wrapped closely in beautiful garments: with snow-white tunics they filled the floor of the broad earth; their manes of hair waved in the wind in golden bands, and on them were golden clasps (?) like cicadas; and around their arms were finely wrought bracelets . . . a warrior under his shield.

Verses 3, 4, and 5 all begin with the letter χ; a scribe omitted either verse 4 or 5, thinking he had already written this verse beginning with χ, and then added it in the margin; a later scribe wrote it back into the text in the wrong place.

It is not clear exactly what kind of hairstyle is described. The hair was long (see the words that introduce the verses, quoted above) and it waved in the wind (v. 4 of my text),10 but at the same time it was ἐνὶ δεσμοῖς, and Athenaeus tells us that the Samian practice described in the verses was also attested by the byword βαδίζειν (εἰς) Ἦραῖον ἐμπελεγμένον. It seems very probable that the Samians had some of their hair flowing down free at the back (κατακτέσιμοι τὰς κόμας ἐπί τὸ μετάφρενον καὶ τοὺς ὁμοῦς) and the rest bound, perhaps in plaits (ἐμπελεγμένον). Compare the statuettes (one of them of ca 600 B.C. from the Heraeum) mentioned by Bowra,11 and the description in Xenophon of Ephesus (1.2.6) of Antheia’s hair as she leads a procession of maidsens at the Ionian festival of another goddess, Artemis: κόμη ξανθή, ἢ πολλῇ καθειμένῃ, ὀλίγη πεπλεγμένη, πρὸς τὴν τῶν ἀνέμων φορᾶν κινομένη. In the Gallus relief referred to by Gow and Page in their discussion of Anth.Pal. 6.219.3–4, the four thin plaits one can see, two on either side of the face, hardly contain all of the Gallus’ hair; the rest should perhaps be thought of as flowing free at the back.12 The bound hair in Asius was in golden δεσμοῖς. The κορύμ-
betai will have been ornamental fastenings\textsuperscript{13} on the de
desmoi, and ep' avtow will probably refer not generally to the hair but specifically
to the desmoi. This is supported by the words Bowra cites from
Hesychius: koruphbas periDrmoi d' dnv syxpatai gyrgathos kai
kekruptalo kai desmoi. Not only is korupb-as—perhaps even a
synonym of korupmbh—a kind of fastening, but it is used somehow
to fasten desmoi, and is moreover associated with kekruptalo,
which often means ‘hair-net’ and occurs (in pl. of a single hair­

Though the evidence does not allow quite confident statements
about the exact nature of the hairstyle, or the desmoi, or the korup­
betai, it seems certain that verse 4 of the transmitted text has to do
with hair and that the transposition I favour is necessary. It is
worth making the stylistic observation that in the new text the
repetition xrupteoi . . . /xrupteiai de . . . gives a pleasing rhetorical
effect, whereas the repetition of ‘golden’ in the transmitted text is
somewhat awkward.

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\textsuperscript{13} With the difference in meaning that this involves between the closely related korupbocos
(hairstyle) and korupmbh (ornamental fastening on hairstyle) compare e.g. the two related
meanings of the one form epflipkion, ‘a fashion of plaiting womens’ hair’ (LSJ s.v. 1) and
‘hair-clasp’ (2). On the use of gold to ornament the hair see Bowra (supra n.4) 396–97
(127–28 of reprint).