

# Aristophanes *Knights* 600: Spartan or Athenian Drinking Cup?

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ὥς ὅτ' εἰς τὰς ἵππαγωγούς εἰσεπήδων ἀνδρικῶς,  
πριάμενοι κώθωνας, οἱ δὲ καὶ σκόροδα καὶ κρόμμνα·

IN THE PARABASIS of Aristophanes' *Knights*, the choreutai praise themselves<sup>1</sup> as they recall their adventure at sea (599–610). On this occasion, they bought some sort of drinking cups before sailing away to Corinth (600). This note will discuss the nature of this cup, a κώθων, and why Aristophanes makes his chorus sing of such drinking vessels at this particular point. In this epirrhematic part (595–610), the chorus of Athenian horsemen continue to recite the past of the hippic force in a manner heavily loaded with ideology, turning their praise from their fathers (565) to their steeds (595). All this is done through the use of diegetic space,<sup>2</sup> which is generated through the reciting voice of the chorus (or the coryphaios alone), a voice that is particularly unstable throughout the parabasis, from the voice of 'Aristophanes' and the choral voice to the voice of a speaking horse to a Corinthian crab's utterance in the mouth of Theorus.<sup>3</sup> Visually, however, nothing has

<sup>1</sup> R. M. Harriott, *Aristophanes: Poet and Dramatist* (London 1986) 64; M. L. Lech, "Praise, Past and Ponytails: The Funeral Oration and Democratic Ideology in the Parabasis of Aristophanes' *Knights*" (in preparation).

<sup>2</sup> On diegetic space in comedy see M. Revermann, *Comic Business: Theatricality, Dramatic Technique, and Performance Contexts of Aristophanic Comedy* (Oxford 2006) 109, 126–128, and I. A. Ruffell, *Politics and Anti-Realism in Athenian Old Comedy* (Oxford 2012) 46–47.

<sup>3</sup> For the complexity of the 'voice' in Aristophanes see e.g. G. W. Dobrov, *Figures of Play* (Oxford 2001) 35: "The Aristophanic character ... is entirely on display to the point where the spectators are aware of more about him and the meaning of his words than is the character himself."

changed. The chorus is still dressed as horsemen, and just as the choreutai make-believe to be their fathers, so they make-believe to become their horses. In the second parabasis (1300–1315), they will indeed make-believe to be women and, finally, female triremes.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the diegetic space is visually framed by the chorus of horsemen, and so the audience process this passage with a constant eye to the cavalry for good and evil.<sup>5</sup>

It is quite likely that the κώθων was a simple cup of some sort. This seems to be the common denominator of most of the descriptions of it,<sup>6</sup> but it was nevertheless invested with a strong symbolic meaning.<sup>7</sup> Most scholars tend to look to the description of it by Plato's infamous uncle Critias, who describes it as a soldier's cup from Laconia—a symbol of Spartan simplicity (81 B 34 D.-K.).<sup>8</sup> But does a hoplite cup from Sparta have any relevance in the context of the antepirrheme of *Knights*?<sup>9</sup> Neil,

<sup>4</sup> See C. A. Anderson, "The Gossiping Triremes in Aristophanes' *Knights*, 1300–1315," *CJ* 99 (2003) 1–9.

<sup>5</sup> For discussion and sources on attitudes toward the cavalry see I. Spence, *The Cavalry of Classical Greece* (Oxford 1993) 180–216, esp. 191–210; it may perhaps have been the case as Spence argues "that the climate of opinion was generally favourable to the cavalry" (212). I nonetheless argue that the cavalry is among the objects of satire in this play: M. L. Lech, *The Dance of Fiction: Cognition and Choral Performance in Aristophanes' Knight 247–610* (diss. U. Copenhagen 2011). As a synthesis of Spence's and my own argument, it could be argued that the cavalry is made fun of because of their growing popularity. See D. M. Pritchard, *Sport, Democracy and War in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2013) 134–136, for a splendid discussion of the Athenian view on the cavalry's usefulness and vices. Nonetheless, a playwright of Old Attic comedy would of course focus on the vices of his artistic creations.

<sup>6</sup> For an account of the vessel see B. A. Sparkes, "Illustrating Aristophanes," *JHS* 95 (1975) 122–135, esp. 128–129.

<sup>7</sup> This is not the only cup in *Knights* that needs interpretation, see Ruffel, *Politics and Anti-Realism* 67–68.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. F. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden 2015) s.v. κώθων. A. H. Sommerstein, *The Comedies of Aristophanes II Knights* (Warminster 1981) 176, is more reluctant and sees it as a vessel used for transporting water on a journey.

<sup>9</sup> Critias' work is probably a decade or two later than the *Knights*, see D. Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indian-

following Athenaeus' account,<sup>10</sup> connected the Laconian cup with the sea through a famous passage of Archilochus (fr.4.6–9 West):

ἀλλ' ἄγε σὺν κώλιθωνι θοῆς διὰ σέλματα νηὸς  
 φοῖτα καὶ κοίλιων πώματ' ἄφελκε κάδων,  
 ἄγρει δ' οἶνον ἐρυθρὸν ἀπὸ τρυγός· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡμεῖς  
 νηφέμεν ἐν φυλακῇ τῆδε δυνησόμεθα.

But come, make many a trip with a cup through the thwarts of the swift ship, pull off the covers of the hollow casks, and draw the red wine from the lees; we won't be able to stay sober on this watch.<sup>11</sup>

Neil does not venture to go beyond the martial frame of Critias' explanation. But as William Slater persuasively has shown, the symposiac/Dionysiac imagery is so closely connected to the imagery of the sea that “[t]hose poems of Archilochus apparently written at sea are no more likely to have been written at sea than paraclausithyra on doorsteps, but they would make sense if one spliced the mainbrace in one's own triclinium [sc. at a symposium], while claiming the sea as dramatic background.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, Archilochus is employing a conceptual metaphor DRINKING IS SAILING<sup>13</sup> suitably structur-

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apolis 2002) 108–111. I follow the pragmatic theory of fictionality proposed by R. Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality: Narrative Theory and the Idea of Fiction* (Columbus 2007), esp. 13–37: “The horizon of the reader's encounter with a fiction is determined not by what it is possible to infer, but by what is *worth* inferring. The reader will not pursue inferential reasoning beyond the point at which it ceases to seem relevant to the particulars of the narrative, in a specific context of interpretation” (18; my italics).

<sup>10</sup> R. A. Neil, *The Knights of Aristophanes* (Cambridge 1901) 90.

<sup>11</sup> Transl. D. E. Gerber, *Greek Iambic Poetry* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1999) 80.

<sup>12</sup> W. J. Slater, “Symposium at Sea,” *HSCP* (1976) 161–180, at 168. See also M. I. Davies, “Sailing, Rowing and Sporting in One's Cup on the Wine-Dark Sea,” in *Athens Comes of Age: From Solon to Salamis* (Princeton 1978) 72–95; F. Lissarrague, *The Aesthetics of the Greek Banquet* (Princeton 1990) 107–122.

<sup>13</sup> See G. Lakoff and M. Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago 1980). On metaphors in Aristophanes' humor see Ruffell, *Politics and Anti-Realism*

ing his symposiac poetry, and consequently the κώθων has nothing to do in the hands of a sailor (whether enacted by a horse or horseman or a chorus), any more than an oar in a cavalryman's hand (Ar. *Eq.* 546).<sup>14</sup> The Archilochean cup, however, stresses the role of the cup in symposiac settings of Archaic Greece, a meaning that influenced its symbolic and ideological meaning in fifth-century Athens. James Davidson argues convincingly that the κώθων “may have started as a military cup, but it seems to have found its way into the symposium at an early date,” and that it “comes to stand par excellence for deep drinking at Athens.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, in his splendid dictionary, Montanari ought to expand his description of the cup as a Spartan military cup with the extended meaning as symposiac vessel.

For ancient discussions of the κώθων in a Spartan context are regularly framed by Critias' text whether Critias was right or wrong,<sup>16</sup> whereas all other passages on a κώθων refer to drinking in some manner, to the extent that κώθων may in fact be used as metonymic for heavy drinking.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, in the context of fifth-century Athens, a κώθων had specific connotations, as is clearly shown by Athenaeus' collection of evi-

60–101.

<sup>14</sup> See M. L. Lech “The Knights' Eleven Oars: In Praise of Phormio? Aristophanes' *Knights* 546–7,” *CJ* 105 (2009) 19–26.

<sup>15</sup> J. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens*. (New York 1997) 66–67. On κώθων, Ath. 483B–C; cf. 433B, φίλοινοσ δ' ἐστὶν ὁ πρὸσ οἶνον ἔτοιμοσ, φιλοπότῃσ δὲ ὁ πρὸσ πότουσ, κωθωνιστῃσ δὲ ὁ μέχρι μέθῃσ.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Plut. *Lyc.* 9.4; Ath. 483B–C, who however clearly sees the cup in a festive context, see below. Xenophon mentions the cup in a Persian context with no martial connotation, *Cyr.* 1.2.8. I have found no occurrence of the κῶθων as a Spartan cup outside of references to Critias.

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Ath. 477E τοῦ κῶθωνοσ εὖ μάλα προβεβηκότοσ, 547D περὶ συμβολικοῦ κῶθωνοσ; Machon fr.18.442 ἐπὶ κῶθωνα; Plut. *Pyrr.* 14.6 κῶθων, ᾧ μακάριε, καθημερινὸσ ἔσται, *Ant.* 4.3 μεγαλαυχία καὶ σκῶμμα καὶ κῶθων ἐμφανῆσ. This meaning seems, from the small sample of evidence available, to be a Hellenistic usage rather than Classical.

dence (483C), which is firmly placed in Peloponnese contexts of celebration and conviviality, not war and military equipment. Importantly, Athenaeus says that Archilochus talks as if the κώθων was the typical drinking vessel, the κύλιξ, and extends his list with no other passage than ours from *Knights* (483D). He furthermore cites Theopompus Com. (fr.55: on a bibulous woman, as a soldier?)<sup>18</sup> and a passage on drinking from Heniochus (fr.1: clearly in a symposiac setting). And in the description that follows, Athenaeus is clearly thinking of a κώθων as a drinking vessel. Sparkes stated that the two passages in Aristophanes (*Eq.* 600 and *Peace* 1094) where the κώθων appears are “military contexts.”<sup>19</sup> However, in *Peace* the cup is named specifically in a peace context, where the annoying Hierocles tries to get a free drink. What then of the passage in *Knights*?

I believe that what constitutes the humour of this passage is not that the κώθων is a soldier’s (a Spartan) cup, as is the common conclusion, but that our fragments from Greek comedy (and Archilochus) clearly show that it was a vessel for drinking and as such a metonymy of the symposium, and so we ought to rethink this passage. The choreutai enact their own steeds, who in turn act as if they were the horsemen boarding the transport ships,<sup>20</sup> and they are so to speak taking the symposia with them on campaign. The saying goes that “not every man sails to Corinth” (Ar. fr.928)—because of the high prices of the prostitutes there, we may assume; and in Cantharus (fr.10) “having breakfast at the Isthmus” seems to refer to cunnilingus. Moreover, in a fragment of Apollodorus Carystius, a character discussing the good life dreams that during peace the cavalry would go to Corinth and celebrate for ten straight days (fr. 5.15–22):

<sup>18</sup> In Aristophanes women are notoriously bibulous (e.g. *Lys.* 207, *Eccl.* 132–133).

<sup>19</sup> *JHS* 95 (1975) 128.

<sup>20</sup> The sexual double entendres of this passage are beyond the scope of this article.

οὐ τοῦτο τὸ ζῆν ἐστὶ τὸν καλούμενον  
 θεῶν ἀληθῶς βίον. ὅσῳ δ' ἡδίονα  
 τὰ πράγματ' ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἦν ἂν ἢ τὰ νῦν,  
 εἰ μεταβαλόντες τὸν βίον διήγομεν·  
 πίνειν Ἀθηναίους ἅπαντας τοὺς μέχρι  
 ἑτῶν τριάκοντ', ἐξιέναι τοὺς ἰππέας  
 ἐπὶ κῶμον εἰς Κόρινθον ἡμέρας δέκα,  
 στεφάνους ἔχοντας καὶ μύρον πρὸ ἡμέρας.

This existence is not what is truly called the life of the gods. How much more pleasant things would be in our cities than they are now, if we changed the life we lead: all Athenians under thirty, drink! Cavalry march out to Corinth before daybreak for a ten-day party, wearing garlands and myrrh!<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, in a comedy of Antiphanes, likewise called *Knights* (fr.108), the cavalymen of Athens(?) are shown to be more concerned with enjoying themselves than fighting battles:

{A.} πῶς οὖν διαιτώμεσθα; {B.} τὸ μὲν ἐφίππιον  
 στρῶμ' ἐστὶν ἡμῖν, ὁ δὲ καλὸς πῖλος κάδος,  
 ψυκτήρ· τί βούλει; πάντ', Ἀμαλθείας κέρασ.

A: So how are we going to live? B: The saddle-cloth is what we'll lie on; the nice helmet's our wine-jar or our *psuktēr* [a wine cooler]. What do you want? We've got everything—Amaltheia's horn.

And (fr.109)

τῶν δ' ἄκοντίων  
 συνδοῦντες ὀρθὰ τρία λυχναίῳ χρώμεθα.

We tie three of our javelin-shafts together, stand them up, and use them as a *luchneion* [lampstand].<sup>22</sup>

The reference to the horn of Amaltheia, the goat from whose horn flowed whatever its possessor wished, sheds some light on the public perception of the character of the cavalry class.

The rapid cluster of symposiac vessels and military food is in itself a humorous movement made by Aristophanes, but he takes the joke further, by making the chorus make some of the

<sup>21</sup> Transl. J. Rusten, *The Birth of Comedy* (Baltimore 2011) 688.

<sup>22</sup> Transl. S. D. Olson, *Athenaeus* V (Cambridge [Mass.] 2009) 459, VIII (2012) 197.

cavalrymen buy ordinary, non-luxurious food, garlic and onions, for their provisions as well, which at least in the comedies represented war fodder for the soldiers: onions especially become a metonymy for war,<sup>23</sup> while garlic is connected with cockfighting and symbolises eagerness for war.<sup>24</sup> However warlike these vegetables are, they are nevertheless framed by the drinking cup and its symbolism, and I believe that even the Greek of the passage reveals a break in the sentence. Neil proposes that οἱ δὲ answers a suppressed οἱ μὲν,<sup>25</sup> but there is no reason for this, and I hold that what we have here is a strong adversative (as in *Clouds* 396)<sup>26</sup> between the cavalrymen (as a group), who buy symposiac cups, and the ones (some of the cavalrymen or someone else, e.g. the rowers) who buy provisions. This strong adversative οἱ δὲ plays a significant role, assuming that the first καί is likely to be adverbial,<sup>27</sup> and thus there are perhaps three ways of translating the contrast:

They jumped manfully into the horse carriers having bought wine bottles (*kōthōnes*), but others *also* bought garlic and onions.

But it could also be

They jumped manfully into the horse carriers having bought wine bottles (*kōthōnes*), but others *even* bought garlic and onions.

It could even be read

They jumped manfully into the horse carriers having bought wine bottles (*kōthōnes*), but others (not the horses) also bought garlic and onions.

In all circumstances, the choral self-praise has been turned into mockery. In the first translation, and the third, the break in the sentence is generated through the almost apologetic tone “others also bought garlic and onions” as if the chorus were

<sup>23</sup> E.g. *Ach.* 550, 1099–1102; *Pax* 1129.

<sup>24</sup> E.g. *Eq.* 492–493, *Ach.* 165–166. Note that in *Eq.* 600 we have cups as one part of a tricolon of metonymies.

<sup>25</sup> *The Knights* 90.

<sup>26</sup> J. van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Nubes* (Leiden 1898) 73.

<sup>27</sup> O. J. Todd, *Index Aristophaneus* (Cambridge 1932) 112–113.

going to war, with only a symposium in mind as implied by their drinking cups; or as two different groups, the drinking horses and the rest of the crew, who know the purpose of the journey. The second translation is even more degrading as it implies that the chorus is completely blind to its own faults; buying drinking equipment for a symposium, while actually going to war, making themselves ironic butts for the paradox of war and symposia, so manifestly employed in the *Acharnians*, especially at 1141–1149. Regardless of these options, the chorus of horsemen are in a fix generated by their own self-praise in the epirrheme: thus, the drinking cups bought by the chorus frame the sentence with the general assumptions about the choral horsemen, young men fit for a party rather than for war.<sup>28</sup> The cup, the κώθων in our passage, alludes to a symposiac trip by boat, a deep drinking adventure, κωθωνισμός. Aristophanes thus creates a humorous tension in this passage that undermines the chorus' praise of themselves: what were they in fact doing in wealthy Corinth?<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> It thus seems likely that there was a common belief that the leading members of the society relaxed while the lower stratum did all the hard work (*Ach.* 162–163, *Eq.* 784–785), and this passage is no different. The chorus through their embodied (visually and metaphorically) as horses are having a party in Corinth, while the “real” army—probably those who eat onions (*Pax* 1127–1129)—is doing all the hard work.

<sup>29</sup> On Corinthian pleasures see Davidson, *Courtesans* 92, 116; J. B. Salmon, *Wealthy Corinth* (Oxford 1984) 398–400; D. Hamel, *Trying Neaira* (New Haven 2003) 3–28. The mention of a fable, the eating of crabs, and Theorus (schol. *Eq.* 608a explains his doings there ὡς μοιχὸς δὲ κωμωδεῖται ὁ Θέωρος καὶ ἰχθυοφάγος καὶ πονηρός. περὶ Κόρινθον οὖν διέτριβεν, ἕως διὰ τὰς ἐκεῖ πόρνας) all point in the direction of symposia rather than war. Neil, *The Knights* 91, argues against the known Theorus, but in *Vesp.* 1220 (not mentioned by Neil) a Theorus is showed at a symposium, just as here. This, I believe, is the well-known Theorus; see also N. Kanavou, *Aristophanes' Comedy of Names: A Study of Speaking Names in Aristophanes* (Berlin 2011) 33–35.