

Χελιδονισμός

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This “Rhodian Swallow Song” is given in an account of Rhodian festival customs. When the swallow returned in spring young men would go from house to house singing this song asking for gifts. For the Greeks the swallow could be a bird of either good or bad omen, though it was also a sign of spring. But μία χελιδὼν ἕαρ οὐ ποιεῖ, “one swallow doesn’t make spring.”

Dialect. This song has a few Doric features: retention of original long alpha where Attic-Ionic has eta (e.g. παλάθαν = παλάθην, τάν = τήν); first person plural conjugation in -μες rather than -μεν. Following poetic practice, the present subjunctive acts much like a future in several lines (12, 14).

Meter. The meter isn’t entirely clear. Lines 1-11 and 17-18 are aeolics (⊔ — — ×) but lines 13-16 and 19-20 are trochaic.

1. ἦλθ', ἦλθε χελιδὼν
2. καλὰς ὥρας ἄγουσα,
3. καλοὺς ἐνιαυτούς,
4. ἐπὶ γαστέρα λευκά,
5. ἐπὶ νῶτα μέλαινα.
6. παλάθαν σὺ προκύκλει
7. ἐκ πίονος οἴκου
8. οἴνου τε δέπαστρον
9. τυροῦ τε κάνυστρον.
10. καὶ πύρνα χελιδὼν
11. καὶ λεκιθίταν

¹ χελιδὼν, -όνος, ἡ swallow (the bird).

² ὥρα, -ας, ἡ time, period; season, climate; hour; moment; right time; fruit, produce.

³ ἐνιαυτός, -οῦ, ὁ year.

⁴ γαστήρ, -έρος, ἡ belly. λευκός, -ή, -όν white, shining. Here λευκά = λευκή.

⁵ νῶτον, -ου, τό back, often plural with singular meaning. μέλας, μέλαινα, μέλαν black, dark.

⁶ παλάθη, -ης, ἡ fruit cake. προ-κυκλέω roll out.

⁷ πίων, πείρα, πίων rich, fat, fertile. οἶκος, -ου, ὁ house, home.

⁸ οἶνος, -ου, ὁ wine. τε and, postpositive. δέπαστρον, -ου, τό goblet, chalice

⁹ τυρός, -ου, ὁ cheese. κάνυστρον, -ου, τό wicker basket.

¹⁰ πύρνον, -ου, τό (wheat) bread

¹¹ λεκιθίτης, -ου, ὁ bread made of lentils or pulses

12. οὐκ ἀπωθεῖται. πότερ' ἀπίωμες, ἢ λαβώμεθα;
13. εἰ μὲν δώσεις· εἰ δὲ μή, οὐκ ἐάσομες·
14. ἢ τὰν θύραν φέρωμες ἢ θοῦπέρθυρον·
15. ἢ τὰν γυναῖκα τὰν ἔσω καθημέναν·
16. μικρὰ μὲν ἔστι, ῥαδίως μιν οἴσομες.
17. ἂν δὲ φέρῃς τι,
18. μέγα δὴ τι φέροιο.
19. ἄνοιγ', ἄνοιγε τὰν θύραν χελιδόνι·
20. οὐ γὰρ γέροντες ἔσμεν, ἀλλὰ παιδία.

Text from Smyth "Greek Melic Poets" p.159, and "The Oxford Book of Greek Verse" §130.

¹⁸Smyth φέροιο Diehl φέροις.

¹²ἀπ-ωθέω *drive off*; middle *keep off, repel, despise*. πότερα ... ἢ ... *either/whether ... or ...* ἄπ-εμι *go away, leave*. Here in the present subjunctive with the Doric -μες for -μεν. λαμβάνω, λήψομαι, ἔλαβον *take, receive*. Here aorist subjunctive.

¹³δίδωμι, δώσω, ἔδωκα *give; allow*. ἐάω, ἐάσω, εἶσα *permit; let alone*. The singers are making vague hints, leaving out the conclusion to the first condition, "if you give us something..., but if you don't, well, we won't allow that."

¹⁴θύρα, -ας, ἡ *door; entrance, gate; palace, court; table, board*. φέρω, οἴσω, ἤνεγκα *carry, bring, bear*. ὑπέρθυρον, -ου, τό *lintel*, here contracted with τό, θοῦπέρ. = τὸ ὑπέρ.

¹⁵γυνή *woman; wife*. ἔσω (= εἰσω) *in(wards); within; between*. κάθ-ημαι *be seated, sit still; stop*.

¹⁶ῥαδίως *easily*. μιν - enclitic 3rd person accusative pronoun, *him, her, it*.

¹⁷ἂν = ἐάν.

¹⁸This is the conclusion of a future conditional, with a wish rather than a simple present, "but if you're going to bring something, bring something *big*."

¹⁹ἀν-όίγω *open, uncover*.

²⁰γέρων, γέροντος, ὁ *old man*. παιδίον, -ου, τό *child, boy or girl*.