

A TRUGERANOS FOR SELEUKOS?  
AN ANIMAL NAME AND THE POWER  
OF THE EXOTIC IN PHILEMON,  
NEAIRA FR. 49 K-A\*

Comedy is among the most culturally self-referential literary forms. Jokes frequently depend upon shared values, expectations, and concerns, but, rarely, if ever, do they explicitly divulge the framework in which they operate. This paper examines Athenian cultural assumptions about the power of the exotic through the lens of an unexplained joke from Philemon's *Neaira*. These four lines are our only extant fragment of the Hellenistic comedy which, if the title is any hint, may have been about a courtesan.<sup>1</sup> They owe their survival to the noun τίγρις, whose gender evidently concerned Athenaios' diners (Ath. 13.590a), but their humor hinges on the meaning of another word, τρυγέρανος, which appears only here:

(A.) ὡςπερ Σέλευκος δεῦρ' ἔπεμψε τὴν τίγριν,  
ἦν εἶδομεν ἡμεῖς, τῷ Σελεύκῳ πάλιν ἔδει  
ἡμᾶς τι παρ' ἡμῶν ἀντιπέμψαι θηρίον.  
(B.) τρυγέρανον· οὐ γὰρ γίγνεται τοῦτ' αὐτόθι.

(Philemon, *Neaira* fr. 49 K-A)

A: Just as Seleukos sent a tigress here, which we saw, we ought to have sent him back some wild beast from us in return.

B: How about a trugeranos: for this (beast) isn't found there.

The two speakers appear to be discussing the presentation of a tigress to the Athenians by Seleukos I,<sup>2</sup> who, in turn, had probably acquired it from the Indian ruler

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1) A courtesan named Neaira is the subject of Dem. 59 ("Against Neaira"); in addition to Philemon's play, Timocles fr. 25–26 K-A also seems to have written a *Neaira*.

2) S.D. Olson, *Athenaeus: The Learned Banqueters*. Books 12–13.594b (Cambridge, MA 2010) 408 n. 376; Alexis fr. 207 K-A refers to a tiger (ὁ Σελεύκου τίγρις), which leads C. Habicht, *Athen und die Seleukiden*, *Chiron* 19 (1989) 7 n. 1 to suggest that Seleukos sent a pair.

Chandragupta Maurya.<sup>3</sup> The gift, which is also mentioned in another comic fragment (Alexis fr. 207 K-A), must have been a memorable one; as an exotic natural marvel in Athens, the tigress demonstrated the extent and, implicitly, the power of the Seleucid Empire.<sup>4</sup> The significance of the word *τρυγέρανος*, however, has remained unexplained, and consequently the humor in this passage has fallen flat with modern readers.<sup>5</sup>

Building on a proposal first made by Meineke,<sup>6</sup> I suggest that the *τρυγέρανος* in the punch line (4) is an invented compound of *τρυγών* and *γέρανος*, which conjures a fictive animal, the “turtledove-crane”. Understanding *τρυγέρανος* in this way seems more likely than another proposal, first advanced by Kock, that the word is a nickname.<sup>7</sup> Kock’s interpretation would see the humor come from the surprising substitution of human for animal.<sup>8</sup> But although the term *θηρίον* (“beast”, line 3) may sometimes be metaphorically applied to a human being as a comic insult,<sup>9</sup> the pronoun *τοῦτο* in line 4 suggests that here the speaker has an animal in mind, not a person. If *τρυγέρανος* does indeed refer to a hybrid animal, it might also help us to make sense of the Byzantine lexicographer Hesychios’ enigmatic pronouncement that it is “similar” to a phantom / monster (*φάσματι ἑοικώς*).<sup>10</sup>

It is clear that the word *τρυγέρανος* fits the Greek tendency to name exotic animals – real or imagined – with compounds composed of two more familiar creatures from which they derive their distinctive physical attributes.<sup>11</sup> In his parody of

3) See further P. Kosmin, *Land of the Elephant Kings: Space, Territory, and Ideology in the Seleucid Empire* (Cambridge, MA 2014) 35, 117.

4) See further Kosmin (n. 3 above) 117 with 314 nn. 140–143.

5) Olson (n. 2 above) 408 n. 377: “What the joke is, is impossible to say.” See further Kassel / Austin on Philemon fr. 49 for a discussion of the possibilities.

6) A. Meineke, *Fragmenta comicorum Graecorum* (Berlin 1839–1857) vol. 4, 15–16; *τρυγέρανος* would be a compound derived from *τρυγών* (turtledove) + *γέρανος* (crane) with its first element shortened from *τρυγονο-* to *τρυ(γ)-*. Such shortenings in comic coinages are not uncommon: C. A. Lobeck, *Phrynichi Eclogae nominum et verborum Atticorum* (Leipzig 1820) 669 offers several examples; see also Olson (n. 2 above) 408 n. 377. The ingenious, but unlikely suggestion made by J. Vendryes (in: *Sur un passage du comique Philemon: le tarvos trigaranos en Grèce*, *Revue Celtique* 28 [1907] 123–127) that *τρυγέρανος* is a Greek calque on Gaulish *trigaranus*, an epithet of the divine *Tarvos*, has been refuted by M. Lejeune, *τρυγέρανος*, in: *ἩΔΙΣΤΟΝ ΛΟΓΟΔΕΙΠΝΟΝ*. *Logopédies. Mélanges de philologie et de linguistique grecques offerts à Jean Taillardat* (Paris 1988) 133–135.

7) Th. Kock, *Comicorum atticorum fragmenta* (Leipzig 1880–1888) vol. 2, Philemon fr. 47.

8) As a nickname, *τρυγέρανος* should be interpreted as a “speaking name”. On the use of such names in Aristophanic comedy, see N. Kanavou, *Aristophanes’ Comedy of Names: A Study of Speaking Names in Aristophanes* (Berlin 2011).

9) E. g. Ar. *Eccl.* 1104, Eq. 273, Lys. 468, 1014, Nub. 184, Plut. 439, Vesp. 448; Philemon fr. 96.2 K-A. C. Corbel-Morana, *Le bestiaire d’Aristophane* (Paris 2012) 98–170 discusses the use of animals (including the generic term *θηρίον*) in comic invective.

10) Hes. 1540. On the basis of his analysis of *τρυγέρανος* as a “turtle-dove crane”, Meineke (n. 6 above) emends *φάσματι* to *φάττηι* (wood pigeon).

11) See further K. M. Coleman, *Martial: Liber spectaculorum*. Text, Translation, and Commentary (Oxford 2006) 110: “When encountering exotic fauna for

Aeschylean style, for instance, Aristophanes emphasized the great poet's penchant for inventing hybrid animals in precisely this way. Athenian audiences were treated to such verbal delights as: γρυπαίετος ("griffin-eagle"; Ar. Ran. 929 = Aeschylus fr. 422 Radt); ἵππαλεκτρῶν ("horse-rooster"; Ar. Ran. 932, cf. Aeschylus, Myrmidons fr. 134 Radt); and τραγέλαφος ("goat-stag"; Ar. Ran. 937 = Aeschylus fr. 444 Radt).<sup>12</sup> The γρυπαίετος and the ἵππαλεκτρῶν are singled out at Ar. Ran. 928–938 for their Aeschylean obscurity, but they are clearly memorable and evocative compounds, especially if Dionysos' reaction is typical of Athenian audiences: "I have sometimes lain awake at night for a long time wondering what kind of bird the tawny ἵππαλεκτρῶν is."<sup>13</sup> In the same passage, Euripides dismisses the ἵππαλεκτρῶν and the τραγέλαφος as the stuff of "Persian tapestries" (τὰ παραπετάματα τὰ Μηδικά, Ar. Ran. 938), marking these imagined hybrid creatures as exotic and non-Greek. Such compound names are not limited to Aeschylean flights of verbal fantasy; in the Hellenistic and Roman periods they become particularly common for describing exotic animals encountered in Africa: στρουθοκάμηλος ("swan-camel" = "ostrich"),<sup>14</sup> χοιροπίθηκος ("hog-monkey" = "river-hog" [?]),<sup>15</sup> κροκοδιλοπάρδαλις ("crocodile-leopard" = "Nile monitor"),<sup>16</sup> and καμηλοπάρδαλις ("camelopard" = "giraffe").<sup>17</sup> Once we rec-

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the first time, the Greeks and Romans naturally used familiar domestic animals as their frame of reference; frequently the domestic nomenclature is combined with an epithet designating the area with which the animal was popularly associated."

12) K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes. Frogs* (Oxford 1993) 309 notes that although the τραγέλαφος is also treated as an "artist's invention" at Pl. R. 488a, it made it into lists of exotic animals at D. S. 2.51.2 and Plin. HN 8.120 (possibly to describe a wild goat or antelope). By the Byzantine period, the τραγέλαφος was once again thought to be fiction; it became an example of a φαντασία for Joannes Damascenus and Michael Psellus. On the τραγέλαφος, see further G. Sillitti, *Tragelaphos: storia di una metafora e di un problema* (Napoli 1980).

13) ἤδη ποτ' ἐν μακρῷ χρόνῳ νυκτὸς διηγρύπνησα τὸν ξουθὸν ἵππαλεκτρῶνα ζητῶν τίς ἐστιν ὄρνις, Ar. Ran. 931–932. The ἵππαλεκτρῶν is well-attested in Greek art until about 480 BCE (see LIMC V 427–432 [Williams]), when "it virtually disappeared from the artistic repertoire" (432). Dionysos' confusion about the nature of the ἵππαλεκτρῶν may reflect the dearth of contemporary representations.

14) First attested at Pseudo-Hippokrates, *Περὶ διαφορῶν καὶ παντοίων τροφῶν* p. 480 Delatte.

15) First attested at Arist. hist. an. 2.11, 503a19. P. G. P. Meyboom, *The Nile Mosaic of Palestrina: Early Evidence of Egyptian Religion in Italy* (Leiden 1995) 125–126 argues that, if the identification of the χοιροπίθηκος with a Sudanese river-hog is correct, it would likely be a later addition to Aristotle's text given limited Greek knowledge of the Sudan in the fourth century BCE.

16) First attested at IG XIV, 1302 q.

17) First attested at Agatharchides, § 72 ed. Müller. Representations of the χοιροπίθηκος, κροκοδιλοπάρδαλις, and καμηλοπάρδαλις appear on the Palestrina Nile Mosaic, which reflects both their exoticism and their associations with Egypt and Ethiopia. See IG XIV 1302 for a list of animal names on the mosaic; Meyboom (n. 15 above) 20–42 offers a detailed description of the artifact and its animals. Other compound animal names are preserved on the Artemidoros papyrus (V3: χέρουδροι πανθηροκροκόδειλο[ι] "amphibious panthercrocodile"; V8: χηνάλωπιξ "goose-fox" = "Egyptian goose").

ognize τρυγέρανος as a name invented to fit Greek naming patterns for exotic, hybrid animals and their names, the joke becomes clearer. Speaker B's punch line, "this isn't found there", is a humorous understatement: a τρυγέρανος exists nowhere, and he implies that the only exotic animals "found" in Athens are imaginary.

I suggest that Philemon's joke on Greek faunal nomenclature goes even further. If we understand a τρυγέρανος as an invented animal, the passage also draws on Athenian anxieties about their status in the face of the Seleucid empire.<sup>18</sup> The tigress is emblematic of the wide reach of Seleukos' power and the exotica over which he has control. In the logic of ancient gift exchange, his donation should be reciprocated with an equivalent gift.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, these are precisely the assumptions under which Speaker A operates, when he suggests that they ought to have sent some wild animal (θηρίον) back in return (πάλιν ... ἀντιπέμψαι). The need for reciprocity is emphasized twice, first in the adverb πάλιν and again in the prefix ἀντι-. The problem for these two speakers is that there is nothing so exotic as a tiger in Athens, and their only solution is to invent an exotic animal, the turtledove-crane, on the basis of Greek naming conventions.

But, what would a τρυγέρανος look like? Greek faunal compounds are also highly visually-suggestive, and they imply that the exotic animals they describe are hybrids derived from the constituent elements of their names.<sup>20</sup> The relationship between name and appearance can be seen in ancient descriptions of the camelopard (giraffe), which depict it as a hybrid animal (e.g., *diversum* ... *genus*, Hor. Epist. 2.1.195), an improbable but real combination of a camel's body and the exuberant spots of a leopard.<sup>21</sup> In the case of the τρυγέρανος, its name implies a laughably awkward and paradoxical combination of a majestic, warlike crane<sup>22</sup> with a small, chatty dove.<sup>23</sup> If the Seleucids are a tiger, the Athenians become a bumbling, ugly duckling neither warlike nor eloquent, neither graceful nor powerful.

I suggest that in the awkward turtledove-crane lurks a much more serious nexus of cultural anxieties. By definition, the flora and fauna of Athens represent the

18) See further Kosmin (n. 3 above) 117, who emphasizes the opposition of "here" (δεῦρο) and "there" (αὐτόθι) in the passage.

19) Marcel Mauss' classic work on gift exchange emphasized the reciprocal nature of gift giving; each gift comes with an obligation (M. Mauss, *Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* [Paris 1925]). Although elements of Mauss' theory have been criticized, its emphasis on reciprocity has been widely accepted.

20) Thus Arist. gen. animal. 746b7–13 writes that Libya's exotic species can be explained by frequent interbreeding: "because of the scarcity of water, all different species meet at the few places which have springs and interbreed" (διὰ γὰρ τὴν σπάνιν τοῦ ὕδατος ἀπαντῶντα πάντα πρὸς ὀλίγους τόπους τοὺς ἔχονταςνάματα μίγνυσθαι καὶ τὰ μὴ ὁμογενῆ).

21) See also D. S. 2.51.1; Var. Ling. 5.100; Plin. HN 8.69; Paus. 9.21.2; Cass. Dio 43.23; Heliod. 10.27.

22) The battle of the Pygmies and the cranes is a traditional theme in Greek literature and art, beginning with Hom. Il. 3.3–6; see further Pygmaioi LIMC VII 594–601 (Dasen) and V. Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece* (Oxford 1993) 175–178, 180–183, 186–188.

23) For the diminutive size of the τρυγών, see: Arist. hist. an. 5.13, 544b7; Arist. fr. 347 Rose<sup>3</sup>; for its chattiness, see: Alexis Thr. fr. 96 K-A, Menander Plokios fr. 309 K-A.

familiar center of the Hellenic world; nothing in the center can compete with the exoticism of the periphery and the lure of the unknown. Paradoxically, Athens' traditional centrality leaves it at a disadvantage in this competitive world of Hellenistic gift exchange, which privileges the exotic, the novel, and the unknown. In their quest to rival Seleukos and his tiger, the Athenians were driven to imagine the absurd.

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