

ARISTOTLE, POETICS 23. 1459A35–37

Abstract: The present article examines the passage at Aristotle, Poetics 23. 1459a35–37. It disproves Nickau’s athetesis of the words from κέρηται to ἐπεισόδιον by examining the Arabic version of the passage and giving an account of αὐτῶν at 23. 1459a35. It further argues that the presence of the catalogue of ships as an example of the term ἐπεισόδιον raises no real problem.

Keywords: Aristotle, Poetics, epeisodion, catalogue of ships

νῦν δ’ ἐν μέρος ἀπολαβῶν ἐπεισοδίοις κέρηται αὐτῶν πολλοῖς, οἷον
 νεῶν καταλόγῳ καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπεισοδίοις [δίς] διαλαμβάνει τὴν ποίησιν.
 (Arist. Poet. 23. 1459a35–37)

δίς om. B: οἷς rec.

The text is quoted from Rudolf Kassel’s Oxford edition.¹ This passage has undergone a thorough discussion by Klaus Nickau.² Following Kassel’s Oxford edition, Nickau accepts the reading of B that omits the problematic δίς. He explains the reading ΔΙΣ in A as dittography, which is probably due to the influence of ΔΙΑ in the following word διαλαμβάνει.³ Nickau further argues for an interpolation of the words from κέρηται to ἐπεισοδίοις on the grounds

1) R. Kassel, *Aristotelis De arte poetica liber. Recognovit brevisque adnotatione critica instruxit Rudolphus Kassel* (Oxford 1965). I also use Kassel’s sigla in the following text. I would like to thank Professor Stephan Schröder (Erlangen) for his critical reading of this paper. My thanks also go to Wei Cheng (Beijing), Lijuan Lin (Beijing) and Wei Wang (Shanghai) for their helpful comments.

2) K. Nickau, *Epeisodion und Episode: zu einem Begriff der aristotelischen Poetik*, MH 23 (1966) 167–171. This passage has also been frequently cited by homerists, who pay no attention to the philological difficulties involved here; see, e. g., W. Kullmann, *Vergangenheit und Zukunft in der Ilias*, *Poetica* 2 (1968) 16; B. Sammons, *The Art and Rhetoric of the Homeric Catalogue* (Oxford / New York 2010) 21–22.

3) Nickau (n. 2) 157 n. 7. Scholars agree that the reading ΔΙΣ in 23. 1459a37 is problematic. While Kassel and recently Tarán and Gutas in their respective editions take these three letters as dittography, editors like Vahlen, Rostagni, Hardy, Fuhrmann, and Halliwell adopt a conjecture stemming from 15th/16th century: replacing Δ with O, the text has οἷς that refers back to ἐπεισοδίοις ... πολλοῖς in the main clause.

that (1) the catalogue of ships mentioned here as an example of the *ἐπεισόδιον* is inconsistent with his own interpretation of the term; (2) this example seems to be incompatible with any acceptable interpretation of the personal pronoun *αὐτῶν* at 23. 1459a35; (3) the Arabic version speaks for the elimination of the words from *κέρηται* to *ἐπεισοδίως*. Nickau's article has been hailed as "[t]he most thorough and comprehensive treatment of the problem" of the term *ἐπεισόδιον* and its cognates in the *Poetics*.⁴ His hypothesis of interpolation has also been accepted by some scholars.⁵

Yet, in his article, Nickau makes clear that his textual decision to remove the words from *κέρηται* to *ἐπεισοδίως* is based mainly on his interpretation of the term *ἐπεισόδιον* so that "die textkritische Entscheidung die bisherige Interpretation unterstützt, nicht umgekehrt".⁶ In this article, by contrast, I first examine the Arabic version of the passage 23. 1459a35–37. Then I attempt to shed some new light on *αὐτῶν* at 23. 1459a35. Finally, I will briefly examine scholarly views on the interpretation of the term *ἐπεισόδιον* and its cognates in the *Poetics*. It will be argued that the presence of the catalogue of ships as an example of the term raises no real problem.

Nickau claims that the words from *κέρηται* to *ἐπεισοδίως* are only "in der (stammatisch gesehen) einen Hälfte der Textzeugen, nämlich in *Ξ* überliefert" whereas the Arabic translation of the passage points to a shorter version in which these nine words do not exist.⁷ This claim does not do justice to the textual evidence. It is clear that the Arabic translation "has everything until *ἐπεισοδίως* (*al-madāhīl*) in 59a35, and then it clearly resumes with *οἱ δ' ἄλλοι* in 59a37. But after *ἐπεισοδίως*, it also adds one clause which

4) R. Friedrich, ΕΠΕΙΣΟΔΙΟΝ in Drama and Epic. A Neglected and Misunderstood Term of Aristotle's *Poetics*, *Hermes* 111 (1983) 36. Cf. also S. Koster, Antike Epos theorien (Wiesbaden 1970) 64; M. Fuhrmann, Einführung in die antike Dichtungstheorie (Darmstadt 1973) 44; R. Meijering, Literary and Rhetorical Theories in Greek Scholia (Groningen 1987) 167–168; A. Köhnken, Terminologische Probleme in der *Poetik* des Aristoteles, *Hermes* 118 (1990) 136–149; R. Gleis, Aristoteles auf dem Parnass. Zu einem Problem im 8. Kapitel der *Poetik*, *Hermes* 122 (1994) 157–158. For a polemic view against Nickau's interpretation in general see M. Heath, Unity in Greek Poetics (Oxford 1989) 49–52.

5) E. g. Meijering (n. 4) 167; Köhnken (n. 4) 145–146.

6) Nickau (n. 2) 168 n. 35. Koster (n. 4) 64 with n. 73 and Friedrich (n. 4) 48 with n. 28 speak against Nickau's athetesis without disproving his arguments.

7) Nickau (n. 2) 168.

is not obviously the translation of any of the intervening words”.⁸ According to the analysis of Gutas, the Arabic version *wa-huwa mā lladī yafʿalu l-insānu* (“and it is that which a man does”) is to be understood as referring to κέχρηται αὐτοῦ,⁹ while Margoliouth links it to διαλαμβάνει τὴν ποιήσιν by conjecturing *yufaṣṣilu l-in-šāda* (“he divided the recitation into sections”) for the transmitted phrase *yafʿalu l-insānu*.¹⁰ The latter view has its difficulties from the perspective of Arabic philology: “The problem is, though, that the word *inšād* for ποιήσις is completely unattested in this translation. In all the numerous passages where the word ποιήσις occurs in this work, it is always translated either as *šīʿr* ‘poetry,’ or as *in-šād šināʿat aš-šīʿr*, ‘the art of poetry,’ never as *inšād*. And it is difficult to imagine that in this particular passage, in this treatise about this very word, the Syriac or Arabic translator would have changed his usual practice.”¹¹ Hence Nickau’s textual claim is based on a doubtful conjecture made by Margoliouth. Even if we accept Margoliouth’s conjecture, it does not necessarily speak for the originality of the shorter version which Nickau argued for, since the lacuna in the Arabic translation could be simply due to a homoioteleuton, from after ἐπεισοδίοις at 23. 1459a35 to ἐπεισοδίοις at 23. 1459a36.¹² Owing to the uncertainties involved in the translation, it suggests itself to leave aside the ambiguous evidence of the Arabic version and to concentrate on the transmitted Greek text.

It has long been noted that it is not clear what the personal pronoun αὐτῶν in 23. 1459a35 refers to.¹³ I shall suggest that at 23. 1459a35 αὐτῶν serves as reference to all of the incidents that occur during the time of the Trojan War. Scholars have come to sim-

8) L. Tarán / D. Gutas, Aristotle Poetics. Editio Maior of the Greek Text with Historical Introductions and Philological Commentaries (Leiden 2012) 448–449.

9) Tarán / Gutas (n. 8) 448: “The Arabic reads the pronoun in the singular.”

10) D. Margoliouth, *Analecta Orientalia ad Poeticam Aristotelem* (London 1887) 66 with notes c and d; J. Tkatsch, *Die arabische Übersetzung der Poetik des Aristoteles und die Grundlage der Kritik des griechischen Textes. II. Band* (Wien / Leipzig 1932) 81.

11) Tarán / Gutas (n. 8) 449.

12) Tarán / Gutas (n. 8) 449. But cf. Kassel (n. 1) 39, ad loc., “om. Ar., quod ad homoeot. referre dubito”.

13) For a useful survey, see J. Vahlen, *Beiträge zu Aristoteles Poetik*, III. Band (Wien 1867) 328; Nickau (n. 2) 158 with n. 17, who offers a more extensive bibliography on the subject; D. W. Lucas, *Aristotle Poetics* (Oxford 1968) 217.

ilar conclusions. On the one hand, Bywater and Sykutris understand αὐτῶν as τῶν ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ πραγμάτων.¹⁴ On the other hand, Rostagni takes this personal pronoun to mean τῶν (ἄλλων) μερῶν “delle altre parti” of the war.¹⁵ The weakness of Rostagni’s interpretation lies in the fact that for the reader it is difficult to conceive of αὐτῶν as related to the remaining parts of the war; by contrast, the connection between αὐτῶν and the events during the war is at hand, since in the preceding part of the same sentence Aristotle is talking about Homer’s decision to isolate only one part of the war (ἐν μέρος ἀπολαβῶν 23. 1459a35). Referring wrongly to Rostagni in support of his view, Else considers αὐτῶν implying τῶν (ἄλλων) μερῶν so that μέρη of the war themselves are used as ἐπεισόδια.¹⁶ But Else’s interpretation does not really explain the genitive αὐτῶν in relation to the preceding ἐπεισοδίοις, and the ἐπεισόδια used by Homer can hardly be μέρη of the war, as far as we are informed from chapter 23.

In the following I would like to substantiate the suggestion of Bywater and Sykutris. More precisely, I should suggest that αὐτῶν at 23. 1459a35 substitutes a phrase like ἀπάντων ὅσα ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ συνέβη: the participial phrase ἐν μέρος ἀπολαβῶν implies a whole, which does make easier the reference back to ἐπεισοδίοις through the personal pronoun αὐτῶν. My interpretation is mainly based on two parallel passages. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle identifies two failure sources used by poets who attempt to compose a unitary plot of poetry: while in chapter 8 the emphasis is laid on the single-person (ἀπαντα ὅσα αὐτῷ συνέβη 8. 1451a24), in chapter 23 the unity of time (ἐνὸς χρόνου, ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ συνέβη 23. 1459a23) is highlighted.¹⁷ These two issues are closely interrelated in chapter 23. For Aristotle sets Homer and the other Cyclic poets in

14) I. Bywater, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry (Oxford 1909) 307; J. Sykutris, Περὶ Ποιητικῆς (Athens 1937) ad. loc.

15) See A. Rostagni, Aristotele Poetica, Introduzione, testo e commento di Augusto Rostagni (Turin 1945) 142: “E appunto dalle altre parti della guerra Omero ricava gli *episodi* (con cui ‘diversifica’ (διαλαμβάνει) il racconto dell’ira di Achille: questi *episodi* sono quindi anche μέρη o residui di μέρη.”

16) G. F. Else, Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument (Cambridge MA 1957) 584 with n. 39, understands that Homer “has used many of them [sc. αὐτῶν] as episodes”.

17) On this theme see esp. V. Goldschmidt, Temps physique et temps tragique chez Aristotele: commentaire sur le quatrième livre de la physique (10–14) et sur la poétique (Paris 1982).

stark contrast (θεσπέσιος ἄν φανείη Ὅμηρος παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους 23. 1459a30–31): while Homer did not recount the Trojan War as a whole, though it has beginning and end (23. 1459a30–32), but rather chose only one part and used many other incidents as ἐπεισ-όδια in order to arrange the materials around a unitary plot (cf. περὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν οἷαν λέγομεν τὴν Ὀδύσσειαν συνέστησεν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἰλιάδα 8. 1451a28–29), the other poets (cf. παρὰ τοὺς ἄλλους 23. 1459a31) wrongly composed their epics around one person or one period of time so that the plot became πολυμερῆ (οἱ δ' ἄλλοι περὶ ἕνα ποιῶσι καὶ περὶ ἕνα χρόνον καὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν πολυμερῆ, οἷον ὁ τὰ Κύπρια ποιήσας καὶ τὴν μικρὰν Ἰλιάδα 23. 1459a37–1459b2; cf. also 23. 1459b2–7). One notes that the word πολυμερῆ takes up and contrasts with Homer's choice ἐν μέρος ἀπολαβῶν in 23. 1459a35.¹⁸

My interpretation of αὐτῶν at 23. 1459a35 squares well with the fact that in the same chapter the relative pronoun ὧν at 23. 1459a24 signifies all of the incidents occurring during the time period of a whole incident; for it clearly refers back to ὅσα ἐν τούτῳ (sc. τῷ χρόνῳ) συνέβη at 23. 1459a23. Just like the *Odyssey* is not a biography of one hero, the *Iliad* is not a chronicle of one incident (the Trojan War) (cf. Ὀδύσσειαν γὰρ ποιῶν οὐκ ἐποίησεν ἅπαντα ὅσα αὐτῷ συνέβη . . . ὧν οὐδὲν θατέρου γενομένου ἀναγκαῖον ἦν ἢ εἰκὸς θατέρον γενέσθαι, ἀλλὰ περὶ μίαν πρᾶξιν οἷαν λέγομεν τὴν Ὀδύσσειαν συνέστησεν, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὴν Ἰλιάδα 8. 1451a24–29).¹⁹ Whereas the *Iliad* focuses on a section of the war in the tenth year (the wrath of Achilles), the catalogue of ships, being an ἐπεισόδιον inserted into the poem, alludes to the departure of the Greeks and thus the beginning of the war (cf. μὴ δὲ τὸν πόλεμον καίπερ ἔχοντα ἀρχὴν καὶ τέλος ἐπιχειρήσαι ποιεῖν ὅλον 23. 1459a31–32).²⁰

18) This point has already been emphasized by Heath (n.4) 50. Cf. also M. Fantuzzi, *The Aesthetics of Sequentiality and its Discontents*, in: M. Fantuzzi / C. Tsagalis (edd.), *The Greek Epic Cycle and its Ancient Reception* (Cambridge 2015) 405–429, 412–414.

19) My interpretation can be further supported by K. Nickau, *Einiges oder Eines: zu Stoff und Struktur der Dichtung in Aristoteles' Poetik* c. 8, 1451a25, RhM 146 (2003) 144, who makes a strong case that the relative pronoun ὧν in 8. 1451a27 refers back to ἅπαντα ὅσα αὐτῷ συνέβη in 8. 1451a25; see already N. van der Ben, *Aristotle's Poetics*, ch. 8. A Reaction, *Mnemosyne* 40 (1987) 144 with n. 6.

20) Similarly, Else (n. 16) 585, argues: “if the poet was to incorporate many other ‘parts’ into his structure he must take them from other (alleged) times during

To sum up: two of Nickau's arguments for removing the transmitted words *κέχρηται αὐτῶν πολλοῖς, οἷον νεῶν καταλόγῳ καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπεισοδίοις* are proved invalid: the Arabic version does not support the claim he made; comparing the close parallels in the *Poetics*, the personal pronoun *αὐτῶν* in 23. 1459a35 makes sense in light of the catalogue of ships as example of the term *ἐπεισόδιον*. One question remains: is the presence of the catalogue of ships in 23. 1459a35–37 incompatible with Aristotle's use of the term elsewhere in the *Poetics*?

Different views on the interpretation of the term *ἐπεισόδιον* and its cognates (*ἐπεισοδιοῦν, ἐπεισοδιώδης*) in the *Poetics* have been suggested.²¹ Generally agreeing that the term can be used in a purely technical sense as “the whole section between the whole choral odes” (12. 1452b16–21 where the term *ἐπεισόδιον* is defined as one of the six quantitative elements of tragedy),²² scholars have taken basically four different positions:²³ (1) the traditional and dominating view that the term *ἐπεισόδιον* “seems to mean everywhere in the *Poetics* a non-essential added scene, an ‘episode’ in a special sense”²⁴; (2) Nickau's extremely functional interpretation that *ἐπεισόδια* are “Glieder der Haupthandlung”, “sinnvoll gliedernde Szenen”, and “Einzelszenen mit Handlungsfunktion”;²⁵

the war. [...] many of the episodes, especially in the early books – e. g., the Catalogue of Ships, the *Teichoskopia*, the duel between Paris and Menelaus, the Marshalling of the Host in book 4 – are such as would naturally come at the beginning of hostilities.” Cf. also Lukas (n. 13) 217; Kullmann (n. 2) 17–19.

21) Cf. S. Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle* (Chapel Hill 1987) 259 n. 10: “The term *episodion* and its cognates have caused unnecessary anguish among interpreters, who sometimes appear to forget that Greek words, even in Ar.'s hands, were not surgical instruments but belonged to a living language.”

22) In at least two other places (4. 1449a28; 18. 1456a31) *ἐπεισόδιον* is used in this meaning (9. 1451b33 is uncertain). Cf. O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 470–476; R. Janko, *Aristotle on Comedy* (London 1984) 233–241; Heath (n. 4) 49; Halliwell (n. 21) 259 n. 10; Köhnken (n. 4) 137 with n. 44; Friedrich (n. 4) 34. On the problematic status of chapter 12, see Else (n. 16) 360 with n. 1; Lucas (n. 13) 135–136; Halliwell (n. 21) 32 n. 47.

23) See esp. Köhnken (n. 4) 136–137. My classification below is slightly different from his.

24) Else (n. 16) 326 n. 85; cf. also Lucas (n. 13) 180, who defines the term *ἐπεισόδιον* as “a more or less coherent section of a play or epic which is inessential and may be entirely superfluous”.

25) This view has been anticipated by A. H. Gilbert, *The word ΕΠΕΙΣΟΔΙΟΝ in Aristotle's Poetics*, *AJPh* 70 (1949) 56–64 and H. House, *Aristotle's Poetics. A Course in Eight Lectures* (London 1967) 55.

(3) basically agreeing with Nickau, Friedrich differentiates the epic ἐπεισόδιον from the dramatic one, suggesting “an analogous difference between the epic and the dramatic *epeisodion* in terms of οἰκειότης: as epic mimesis is ἥττον μίᾳ than dramatic mimesis, so the epic ἐπεισόδιον is ἥττον οἰκεῖον than its dramatic counterpart”²⁶; (4) Köhnken argues that ἐπεισόδια per se are neither “non-essential added scenes” (against Else) nor “sinnvoll gliedernde Szenen” (against Nickau); nor are ἐπεισόδια used in different meanings for drama and epic (against Friedrich), but can mean “generell die (= alle) Sprechszenen der dramatischen Handlung”.²⁷

Position (1) mentioned above has been convincingly rejected by Nickau. Nickau argues that the extremely negative connotation of the term is strictly restricted to the adjective ἐπεισοδιώδης in 9. 1451b33–34 (τῶν δὲ ἀπλῶν μύθων καὶ πράξεων αἱ ἐπεισοδιώδεις εἰσὶν χεῖρισται); the term is attested not only in the *Poetics* but also in the *Metaphysics* (Λ 10. 1076a1; N 3. 1090b19).²⁸ Even this negative judgment has less to do with the ἐπεισόδιον itself, but rather with the arrangement of different parts within a plot.²⁹ However, Nickau’s “polemic fixation on the views he criticizes makes him define the *epeisodion* in rigidly functional terms identifying the essential with the strictly functional”.³⁰ In other words, he over-emphasizes the functional nature of the ἐπεισόδιον by ascribing “Handlungsfunktion” and “Eigentümlichkeit” to the term per se. The passage in 17. 1455b13–23 suffices to illustrate the problem. As argued by Köhnken: “Wenn aber Aristoteles *fordern* muß, die *Epeisodia* sollten οἰκεῖα sein, dann kann der Begriff *Epeisodion* für sich genommen noch nicht die Merkmale ‘Handlungsfunktion’ und ‘Eigentümlichkeit’ aufweisen (wie Nickau meint). Erst aus der spezifizierenden Forderung folgt die positive Wertung.”³¹

26) See esp. Friedrich (n. 4) 51.

27) Köhnken (n. 4) 137 and 148.

28) On this theme see also T. B. L. Webster, *Fourth Century Tragedy and the Poetics*, *Hermes* 82 (1954) 307; M. Finkelberg, *Aristotle and Episodic Tragedy*, *G&R* 53 (2006) 60–65.

29) Nickau (n. 2) 165–166 and Heath (n. 4) 49, who argues that the passage 9. 1451b33–34 “criticizes ‘episodic’ plots, that is, defective plots which fail to satisfy the requirement of causal connectedness”.

30) Friedrich (n. 4) 36.

31) Köhnken (n. 4) 143; see also Friedrich (n. 4) 41, who points out that the postulate of οἰκειότης (ὅπως δὲ ἔσται οἰκεῖα τὰ ἐπεισόδια 17. 1455b13) “presupposes the digressive element in the *epeisodion*; for why should Aristotle expressly

Köhnken is certainly right to take the technical definition of the ἐπεισόδιον (12. 1452b16–21) as the basic meaning of the term. He believes that the use of the term is strictly confined to “die (= alle) Sprechszenen der dramatischen Handlung”. Therefore he is forced to remove the only example of the term pertaining to the epic poems from the text, since the catalogue of ships speaks clearly against his interpretation. But that is no good reason to take the words κέχρηται αὐτῶν πολλοῖς, οἷον νεῶν καταλόγῳ καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπεισοδίοις as a textual intrusion. It will be better to agree with Halliwell, who holds the basic sense of the ἐπεισόδιον to be “a ‘dramatic scene’ or portion of a play”:³² this originally technical term can be easily extended and metaphorically used to mean any more or less coherent section of a play or epic.³² The term is per se neutral on behalf of its narrative / dramatic function.

Being Aristotle’s only example of the term ἐπεισόδιον from the epics, the catalogue of ships drives home how Homer uses ἐπεισόδια that belong to the materials of the Trojan War (ἐπεισοδίοις κέχρηται αὐτῶν [sc. ἅπαντων ὅσα ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ συνέβη] πολλοῖς 23. 1459a35–36) to conjure up a whole picture of the event despite his focusing on only one part of it (ἐν μέρει ἀπολαβόν 23. 1459a35).

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postulate its οἰκειότης, if it were a priori an integral part of the plot? If it were, its οἰκειότης would be a matter-of-course”. Cf. also Goldschmidt (n. 17) 306–307 with n. 74; Halliwell (n. 21) 259 n. 10.

32) Halliwell (n. 21) 259 n. 10.