

A GLOSS IN SEMONIDES FR. 7.1 ?

χωρίς γυναικὸς θεὸς ἐποίησεν νόον
τὰ πρῶτα ...

The first word of Semonides' notorious poem on women has long been troublesome¹.

Construe *χωρίς* with *ἐποίησεν* as *non uno modo*, Welcker 1835, 51 told us, and take singular *γυναικός* as a collective: "diversely did the god create women's mind in the beginning"². So too Marg 1938, 7 who however admitted that a "kollektive Ausdrucksweise" such as *γυναικὸς νόος*, "der Weibessinn", is without parallel in earlier *epos*. Tammaro 1993, 219 dismissed the parallel claimed for it by Verdenius 1968, 133-34, οἷσθα γὰρ οἷος θυμὸς ἐνὶ στήθεσσι γυναικός (*Od.* 15.20), which he said differs, as an evidently gnomic assertion, from the "solenne evocazione" of an "historical" event, the god's creation of the female *νόος* in diversity. But the interchange of plurals and singulars is so common in Greek that a collective *γυναικός* = *γυναικῶν* should cause little surprise (cf. Verdenius 1977, 1, citing K.-G. i 86); one might even argue that Hesiod's Pandora, as "representative woman" (Hurwit 1995, 185), created in an even more momentous "historical" event, is herself a collective! But of course the real difficulty here lies, not in *γυναικός*, but in the construing of *χωρίς* with singular *νόον*, a combination which none of the instances of adverbial *χωρίς* adduced by Verdenius truly parallels; Antiphon 5.10, for example, ἀλλὰ *χωρίς* περὶ αὐτῶν ἐκάστου οἱ νόμοι κεῖνται, means that (*plural*) laws are laid down for singularly different offences, and Soph. *OC* 808, *χωρίς* τὸ τ' εἰπεῖν πολλὰ καὶ τὰ καίρια, draws a clear distinction between *two* activities, speaking a lot and speaking appropriately³. There would seem, then, to be no illustrative support for Semonides' *χωρίς* = *non uno modo* with *νόον*, yet that is the reading which remains most popular today. Lloyd-Jones 1975 entertains it, Gerber 1999, 305 accepts it as first choice for his Loeb translation ("the god made diverse the female mind"), and West 1993, 17 translates "God made diverse the ways of womankind". Pellizer-Tedeschi 1990 admit that *χωρίς* = "diversely" agrees well with what follows in the poem, "l'enumerazione dei vari tipi femminili", although they add: "nonostante l'apparente durezza del *χωρίς* unito con il

¹ I print West's text (1972).

² Weckler followed Gesner 1549, 432 (*Mulieris mentem seorsim fecit Deus*) and Grotius 1623, 310 (*non fecit unam feminae mentem Deus*).

³ Welcker himself, after Schaefer 1808, 292, adduced Soph. *OC* 808, and also Aesch. Ag. 1369, τὸ γὰρ τοπάζειν τοῦ σάφ' εἰδέναι διχα (in which a distinction is drawn between *two* verbal nouns, guessing and clearly knowing).

singolare νόον”. We must, then, decide for ourselves, individually, whether or not that *durezza* is tolerable.

A very different reading of χωρίς was proposed by Blomfield 1818, 228, in his commentary on Aesch. Ag. 620 (= 637 in modern editions): *seorsum a viris*, “the god made woman’s mind separately *sc.* from man’s mind”. Lloyd-Jones favours this reading, arguing, against the objection that “from man’s mind” is difficult to supply, that “the poet is a man, and the audience he addresses at the symposium where poems were performed consisted of men” who would have readily understood “separately” as meaning “separately from us”⁴. A more serious objection to this reading, however, is its thematic incongruity with what follows, namely the description of a *variety* of female personalities, in which a contrast with male personalities is not apparent (cf. Pellizer-Tedeschi).

Even less likely than Blomfield’s is a reading which dates back to Buchanan 1567, who translated: *seorsum a femina mentem Deus / creavit*. This old reading was revived by Radermacher 1947, 161, translating “Getrennt vom Weibe schuf ein Gott den Verstand zunächst einmal”, and it has been championed more recently by Trédé 1988. It is a reading not without humour but its focus is surely misdirected; cf. Steinrück 1994, 32: “On s’attendrait plutôt à la création d’une femme sans νόος qu’à celle d’un νόος sans femme”.

Such, in brief, have been the various readings of the line as it appears in the manuscripts. Emendation of γυναικός to γυναικας or γυναικῶν (Koeler 1781) will introduce an explicit plurality, but neither form solves the problem posed by χωρίς + singular νόον⁵, while Ahrens’ γυναικας... νόοι and Meineke’s γυναικας... νόου are syntactically demanding. Let me suggest, with much boldness, that more radical emendation is needed, that the culprit is not γυναικός or νόον but χωρίς. This adverb, I submit, should be recognised as an intrusive marginal gloss on another, original adverb:

ἄλις γυναικὸς θεὸς ἐποίησεν νόον / τὰ πρῶτα

“*in abundance / in plenty* did the god create women’s character in the beginning”. Νόος here will be a “mass-noun” (to use Jespersen’s venerable term) which may stand easily with ἄλις. We may compare, for example, *Il.* 21.319 ἄλις χέραδος περιχεύας, “pouring around shingle in abundance”; Pind. *Pae.* 4.24 μοῖσαν παρέχων ἄλις, “providing poetry in abundance”; Call. *H.* 1.84 ἄλις ὄλβον, “prosperity in abundance”. The glossator saw that an account of different female personalities follows and added χωρίς in the

⁴ Gargiulo 2005, 15, n.1, also thinks that the poem’s masculine, symposiast ethos lends support to Blomfield’s reading. Schear 1984, 44-45 wonders if the poem might be “connected with the marriage of one or some of the symposiasts” (!).

⁵ Tammaro 1993 argues for Koeler’s γυναικας “con νόον accusativo di relazione”.

margin – or above the line – as a clarification: “(in plenty) *and separately*”. This somewhat banal χωρίς then intruded, ousting and replacing ἄλῃς, and leaving the poem with a flat – if not wholly impenetrable – opening assertion⁶.

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ABSTRACT:

This note deals with the much discussed opening statement of Semonides' poem on the different types of female personality.

KEYWORDS: Semonides, iambic poetry, invective, misogyny, textual criticism, glosses.

⁶ Cf. Lloyd-Jones, on the translation “separately from each other”: “As a programmatic statement at the start it seems rather flat”.