

ALCMAN'S FOUR SEASONS

ώρας δ' ἔσηκε τρεῖς, θέρος
καὶ χειῖμα κώπώραν τρίταν
καὶ τέτρατον τὸ φῆρ κτλ.

The unusual way in which the seasons are here (at the start of fr. 20) numbered has long been recognised – e.g. “Alcman hesitates between the old notion of three seasons and the new notion of four, but he goes his own way by making the doubtful season not autumn but spring” (1). However, the phenomenon can be more precisely categorised if we set as its background the customary and conventional Greek mode of enumerating the items in a list. Since Alcman is our earliest source to presuppose a quartet of seasons (2) the investigation will have some wider interest over and above the understanding of a single fragment of this poet.

In his fascinating study of Indo-European words for numbers, Ernst Risch (3) points out that their variation between cardinals (like ‘ten’) and ordinals (like ‘tenth’) produces an effect rather different from that found in modern arithmetic. Ordinals do not so much serve to number an item within a larger list; they rather – in keeping with their Old Indian name *purana* (“*vollmachend*”) – mark in one way or another the end of that list. Following in the footsteps of Wackernagel (4) Risch cites numerous instances from the Indo-European languages. Within Greek, a typical instance is supplied by *Il.* 14.117 (“Ἀγριος ἡδὲ Μέλας, τρίτατος δ’ ἦν ἱππότα Οἰνεύς”) where the modern tendency would be to say “first Agrius, second Melas, third Oeneus”. See also *Il.* 12.95 (ὕϊε δὺω Πριάμοιο τρίτος δ’ ἦν Ἄσσιος

(1) Bowra, *Greek Lyric Poetry*, Oxford 1961², p. 69.

(2) See Richardson's note on *H. H. Dem.* 399 ff. (Oxford 1974, p. 284) and Hopkinson on Callimachus' *Hymn to Demeter* 122 f. (Cambridge 1984, p. 174 f.).

(3) *Das indogermanische Wort für hundert*, “IF” 67, 1962, 136 ff. = *Kleine Schriften* 684 ff.

(4) In particular *Vorlesungen über Syntax* 2.112 ff., 135 ff.

ἥρως), 15.187f. (τρῆϊς γάρ τ' ἐκ Κρόνου εἰμὲν ἀδελφοί, οὓς τέκετο 'Ρέα | Ζεὺς καὶ ἐγώ, τρίτατος δ' 'Αἴδης κτλ.) and the other instances cited by Risch. In the majority of these cases there is a specific shift from cardinal to ordinal numeration. Similarly in passages where there is no listing as such. Thus in *Il.* 2.313 = 327 we have (of the portent of the snake and sparrows) ὀκτώ, ἀτὰρ μήτηρ ἐνάτη ἦν, ἣ τέκε τέκνα and in *Od.* 9.335 τέσσαρες, ἀντὰρ ἐγὼ πέμπτος μετὰ τοῖσιν ἐλέγμην. Here again the ordinal that closes the list marks that item as in some sense the most important or climactic. For in the last example it is inconceivable that Odysseus was literally chosen last when the question arose as to who should assault the Cyclops: rather, as the leader he is the most significant. And in the Iliadic instance the mother of the sparrows (though, as a matter of fact, devoured last by the snake) is more important than her chicklings since she symbolises the penultimate year of the Trojan war.

Alcman's passage too manifests a switch from cardinal to ordinals and the latter ordinal (τέτρατον τὸ φῆρ) ends the list not because the poet supposes spring is chronologically the last of the four seasons but because it is the one which interests him most and of which he wishes to speak (ὅκα | σάλλει μὲν, ἐσθίην δ' ἄδαν οὐκ ἔστι). The arrangement has something of the effect of a priamel (5). What sets our verses apart from those cited above, however, is the presence of an earlier ordinal (κῶπῶραν τρίταν). Strictly speaking, this seems otiose: in view of the Homeric passages (and others) cited by Risch, the statement "there are four seasons" would adequately be conveyed by cardinal (τρῆϊς) followed by ordinal (τέτρατον). The complication introduced by κῶπῶραν τρίταν looks like a deliberate device to emphasise still further the following mention of spring: one is reminded of the archaic literary device of "correcting in one's stride" (6) whereby a statement is made and then immediately modified in a way that stresses the modification (7). In an artificial but effective manner Alcman

(5) Especially as defined by West (on Hes. *Op.* 435-6: Oxford 1978, p. 269): "the figure in which a series of three (occasionally more) paratactic statements of a similar form serves to emphasise the last". For genuine priamels in Alcman see W. H. Race, *The Classical Priamel from Homer to Boethius*, "Mnemos." Suppl. 74, 1982, 54 ff. That in fr. 16 is rhetorically very similar to the effect of our passage.

(6) Cf. R. Lattimore, "AJP" 68, 1946, 171 f. on Solon's (and Pindar's) habit of "dealing with a thought which he himself has expressed and sees immediately he must reject or modify. Pindar, instead of cancelling the passage in question and starting over again, leaves it standing and proceeds from it without reworking" (cf. p. 172 n. 3). See further Macleod on *Il.* 24.498 (dealing with "the pattern of exposition in which flat statement is followed by qualification") and cf. Mrs. Easterling, "PCPS" 20, 1974, 42 f.

(7) A particularly charming and effective example is Sappho fr. 105A where it is said

glances at the alternative system of three seasons but then climactically (8) rejects it in favour of a year of four (9) seasons.

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of an apple λελάθοντο δὲ μαλοδρόπῃες· ἰοὺ μὲν ἐκλελάθοντ', ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.

(8) Hence Campbell's observation *ad loc.* (*Greek Lyric Poetry*, London 1967, p. 217) "spring is grudgingly introduced", seems to me to give the wrong impression.

(9) There is, of course, an illogicality of sorts in saying "there are three seasons... and a fourth", but it is an illogicality of precisely the sort that is impossible to avoid when dealing with numbers that vary from cardinal to ordinal in the way discussed. Compare "fourth... but the fifth" in *Od.* 9.335 etc. and more generally see Wackernagel *sup. cit.* (n.4).