

Pythagoras the Grammar Teacher and Didymon the Adulterer

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The tablet has at some point split horizontally and been carefully mended with dowels. It is certain that the tablet had already been repaired before the present text was written on it, both because the pupil's writing diverges from the horizontal in order to avoid going over the join, and because the vertical line scratched to mark the right-hand margin is continuous across the two rejoined halves, even though they are not quite perfectly aligned. This is testimony to the value placed upon wooden tablets in the schoolroom. A significant number of the school texts found in Egypt are on wood, yet while papyrus was plentiful the country produced very little timber of its own. Hence, once a wooden tablet (known as a λεύκωμα or "whiteboard") had been cut to shape and planed, it could expect to be recycled many times over. The white

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On one side of the tablet the student has conjugated parts of the verb νικάω. On the side which concerns us now, we find a grammatical exercise based on a story about Pythagoras. Here is Kenyon's transcription of the complete text⁵:

- 1 ὁ Πυθαγόρας φιλόσοφος ἀποβάς καὶ γράμματα διδάσκων συνεβού-
λευεν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 2 τοῦ Πυθαγόρου φιλοσόφου ἀποβάντες καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντος
λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται συμβουλευόντος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς
ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 3 τῷ Πυθαγόρᾳ φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντι καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντι ἔδοξεν
συμβουλευσαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 4 τὸν Πυθαγόραν φιλόσοφον ἀποβάντα καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντά
φασιν συμβουλευσαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 5 ὦ Πυθαγόρε φιλόσοφε ἀποβάς καὶ γράμματα διδάσκον σὺ ποτε
συνεβουλεύσατον τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 6 καὶ δὲ οὕτως

³ See R. Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Atlanta 1996), on which I rely for much of my information about school practices and equipment. Our writing tablet is her no. 364, with plate LXI.

⁴ Cribiore, *op. cit.*, classes the hand as a student's, not a teacher's, and in correspondence has reaffirmed and reinforced this judgement.

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- 2 τοῦ Πυθαγόρου φιλοσόφου ἀποβάντες καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντος λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται συνβουλευόντος τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 3 τῷ Πυθαγόρᾳ φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντι καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντι ἔδοξεν ἰσχυρῶς συμβουλεύσαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 4 τὸν Πυθαγόραν φιλόσοφον ἀποβάντα καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντά φασιν συμβουλεύσαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 5 ὦ Πυθάγορε φιλόσοφε ἀποβάς καὶ γράμματα διδάσκον σὺ ποτε συνεβουλεύσατον τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
- 6 καὶ δυνάως

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- 7 τὸν Πυθαγόρα φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντην καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντε
 συνβουλευέτην τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 8 τοῖν Πυθαγόρῳ φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντῳ καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντιν
 λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται συνβουλευόντιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς
 ἐναιμόνων[ν] ἀπέχεσθαι
 9 τοῖν Πυθαγόρῳ φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντῳ καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντιν
 ἔδοξεν συνβουλευέσθαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων[ν] ἀπέχεσθαι
 10 τὸν Πυθαγόρα φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντην καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντε φασιν
 συνβουλευέσθαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 11 ὦ Πυθαγόρα φιλοσόφῳ ἀποβάντην καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντε σφῶ
 ποτε συνβουλευσάτην τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 12 καὶ πληθυντικῶς
 13 οἱ Πυθαγόραι φιλόσοφοι ἀποβάντες καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντες
 συνεβουλεύσθην τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 14 τῶν Πυθαγορῶν φιλοσόφων ἀποβάντων καὶ γράμματα διδάσκόντων
 λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται συνεβουλεύσαντων τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς
 ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 15 τοῖς Πυθαγόραις φιλοσόφοις ἀποβᾶσι καὶ γράμματα διδάσκόντοισι
 ἔδοξεν συνβουλευέσθαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 16 τοὺς Πυθαγόρας φιλοσόφους ἀποβάντας καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντάς
 φασιν συνβουλευέσθαι τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι
 17 ὦ Πυθαγόραι φιλόσοφοι ἀποβάντες καὶ γράμματα διδάσκοντες ὑμεῖς
 ποτε συνβουλεύεσθιν τοῖς ἑαυτοῦ μαθηταῖς ἐναιμόνων ἀπέχεσθαι]

For now I shall translate fairly literally, leaving the actual meaning of the story to discuss later. First we get the base version, with a nominative subject: “The philosopher Pythagoras, when he had gone away and was teaching letters, used to advise his own pupils to abstain from blooded creatures”. The student then moves into the genitive: “The saying is remembered of the philosopher Pythagoras, when he had gone away [read ἀποβάντος] and was teaching letters, as advising his own pupils to abstain from blooded creatures”. There follows the dative, “It seemed good (ἔδοξεν) to the philosopher Pythagoras...”, the accusative, “They say that the philosopher Pythagoras...”, and even the vocative (5), “O philosopher Pythagoras, when you had gone away and were teaching letters, you once upon a time advised your own pupils to abstain from blooded creatures”. Then in line 6, with the heading καὶ δυνικῶς (misspelt), the student launches into the dual. Thus in line 7 we find “Both the Pythagoras philosophers, when they had both gone away and were both teaching letters, advised his [sic] own pupils to abstain from blooded creatures”. And so on for the oblique cases of the dual, and finally, starting from the heading in line 12, for the entire plural.

I shall come to the nature and purpose of the exercise in a minute. But first we might try to assign the student’s work a grade. It is hard to put it much above a bare pass. Although by the standards of comparable output from Egyptian schoolrooms it may seem high-quality work, by any absolute standard it is not at all distinguished. There are a number of grammatical mistakes, some more venial than others. One is a mere lapsus calami: in line 2, ἀποβάντες for ἀποβάντος; other minor ones include missing augments, and the incorrect vocative of Pythagoras’ name in line 5. A bit worse is the termination of συνεβουλεύσθην in 13, a strange aberration from the correct συνεβούλευσαν. In line 5, the student has also invented a vocative for the present participle, διδάσκον, which is not only a non-existent form to the best of my knowledge but also syntactically strained, since a nominative, not a vocative, would make better sense at this point. In the same line there is worse: συνεβουλεύσατον for what should be συνεβούλευσας. Was the pupil so confused in grammatical matters as to think there must be a vocative form of the second person singular of a verb? This suspicion is confirmed in the last line, containing the vocative plural, where again a form seems to have been invented for the second person plural to accompany a vocative – although this time the precise reading is very hard to decipher (no doubt intentionally!). Almost equally significant is the retention of the singular ἑαυτοῦ in the dual and plural versions, which suggests that the student was not fully in control of the passage’s meaning. Prima facie more shocking again is line 15, with its dative διδάσκόντοισι⁶, although in reality this may simply reflect the fact that in the spoken language by this date the participle had largely settled down to a single, uninflected form, -οντάς⁷, making the inflected dative -ουσι unfamiliar except from literary sources.

In view of the range of errors, it may even be suspected that Greek was not the pupil’s first language⁸. This is always a serious possibility in the ethnically mixed population of Egypt. If nothing more exotic, the pupil may have been a Roman. The mediocre standard of his Greek will prove significant shortly, when we turn to another curious feature, namely the recurrently unorthodox order of the anecdote’s first three words.

⁶ Kenyon notes that in the same line ἀποβᾶσι has been corrected from something longer, which he suggests may have been ἀποβάντοισι.

⁷ B. G. Mandilaras, *The Verb in the Greek Non-literary Papyri* (Athens 1973) 352 ff.

⁸ Criore (op. cit., 93 with n. 176) implicitly draws such an inference, on the basis of the student’s deviant forms for past tenses.

You might think that the pupil has, by way of compensation, at least shown some resourcefulness and linguistic skill in his devices for converting the core anecdote into the oblique cases. Alas, not so. The formulae which he uses for obtaining the oblique forms mechanically follow a rule book. In fact, Egyptian finds have given us at least two schoolbooks of similar date in which these very formulae are listed, as a guide to students carrying out the same exercise⁹. In both cases the only difference, enforced by the content of the story, is that for the verb of saying, εἰπεῖν, our student has used the verb of advising, συμβουλεύειν.

But what is the purpose of the exercise? In particular, what merit is there in declining a personal proper name through the dual and plural, when this means inflicting on it forms of such exotic rarity that no pupil was ever likely to have recourse to them? Yet the survival in two schoolbooks of the same list of formulae, with the verb εἰπεῖν, shows – as we will shortly see confirmed – that this is an exercise which was standardly used on stories about what some named individual said. There is, moreover, one surviving grammatical exercise from Egypt where the names Priam and Hecuba are declined through singular, dual and plural¹⁰. So the Pythagoras version cannot be dismissed as a case of a standard exercise comically misapplied to an inappropriate sample sentence.

In fact, though, we can go much further than that. The exercise on the tablet is a well-documented one, which for at least five centuries was a standard element in the *progymnasmata*, the training which preceded an education in rhetoric proper. The pupil who wrote on our tablet will have been in the second main stage of the educational curriculum. Probably a boy in his early teens, he will have been attending the classes of a γραμματικός or grammar teacher. Our earliest detailed source for this part of the curriculum is Aelius Theon of Alexandria, whose *Progymnasmata* is tentatively dated to the first century AD. The same exercise is briefly described by Quintilian¹¹, so we need have no doubt that it was a standard fixture by the end of the first century AD. It still features in the *Progymnasmata* of Nicolaus of Myra as late as the fifth century AD.

A chreia is a one-sentence anecdote about some specific individual recording a *bon mot* or memorable happening. Theon (*Progymnasmata*

II. 96–106 Spengel) explains in some detail how chreiai are used as an educational tool, in fact as an introductory exercise at the very start of the pre-rhetorical training. Pupils can be set a specific range of tasks all involving the manipulation of chreiai. They may be asked, for example, to recite a chreia, to expand a chreia into a full narrative, to reduce a full narrative to a chreia, to cap a chreia with an explanation, and even to criticise or refute a chreia. But especially prominent is the ritual called κλίσις, in which a chreia is declined through all the cases and numbers, using a prescribed set of formulae which differ only marginally from the ones we have already met in the tablet. It is an exercise which Theon illustrates at some length, and without the least sign of embarrassment. Thus in Theon we get just the same kind of bizarre contortions as in the tablet. From the chreia “Isocrates the orator used to say that his gifted pupils were children of gods” we are presented with such bizarre derivatives as the dual “Both Isocrateses, that pair of orators, said that both their talented pupils were a pair of children of gods”.

One sign of the special importance attached to the declension of the chreia is the following. Theon and other *progymnasmata* writers offer a classification of chreiai. The basic division is between the “saying” ones (λογικαί), the “doing” ones (πρακτικάί), and the “mixed” ones which combine a saying and an action. The doing ones are further subdivided into “active” and “passive”. An example of a “saying” chreia is “Isocrates the orator used to say that his gifted pupils were children of gods”, and an active “doing” chreia is “Diogenes the Cynic philosopher, seeing a boy overeating, struck the boy’s paidagogos with his stick”, whereas a passive “doing” chreia ends up describing what befell the subject, not what he or she did (we will be meeting one of these later). Now these distinctions give every impression of having been dictated by the needs of the declension exercise, since the formulae listed have to be specific to the class of chreia selected. For example, the genitive version of a “doing” chreia, if it is active, is “Of X the so-and-so the action has achieved memory (τὸ προχθὲν μνήμης ἔτυχε)...”, while if it is passive you write “Of X the so-and-so what befell him has achieved memory (τὸ συμβὰν μνήμης ἔτυχε)...”. In a “saying” chreia, on the other hand, the genitive form is attained by one of two formulae: if it is an unprompted saying, you write “Of X the so-and-so the dictum has achieved memory (τὸ ῥηθὲν μνήμης ἔτυχε)...”; but if, in accordance with a further subdivision of the “saying” chreiai, it is a response to a question, to an enquiry or to some non-interrogative utterance, it is considered better style to write “Of X the so-and-so the saying is remembered (ὁ λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται)”. To a very large extent, then, the chreiai seem to have been classified with the variants of the

⁹ Kenyon, *op. cit.*, 38; P. J. Parsons, “A school-book from the Sayce Collection”, *ZPE* 6 (1970) 133–49, at pp. 143–4.

¹⁰ No. 372 Criboire.

¹¹ *Inst. or.* I. 9. 5.

declension exercise in mind. This tends to confirm the central importance attached to the exercise.

Looking back to our Egyptian teenager, we can now see grounds for lowering his grade a bit further. Since what Pythagoras said was not a response to something somebody else said, it would have been more correct in the genitive version to use τὸ ῥηθὲν μνήμης ἔτυχε than the phrase he actually opts for, (ὁ) λόγος ἀπομνημονεύεται¹². Also slightly worrying is whether this should count as a “saying” chreia at all. Its main verb συνεβούλευεν might rather be classed as a “doing” verb, so that it would be his deed (πραχθέν), not his saying (λόγος), that had been remembered. But, although the verb συνεβούλευε occurs in other chreiai too (e. g. DL I. 92), even Theon’s rather detailed rules offer no guidance on how to classify it; so no further marks should be deducted.

What exactly is the point of this declension exercise? We are told that some considered it an ideal exercise for pupils making the transition from study of the poets to preparation for rhetoric¹³. I am not at all sure why. Declining a chreia through the oblique cases in the *singular* does of course make sense, since it trains the speaker to introduce chreiai into a discourse with a satisfying range of syntactic *variatio*. And even though the pluralisation of personal proper names is a rarity, there might occasionally be chreiai with authentically plural subjects, whose manipulation could be facilitated by training in the declension of a chreia through the plural. On the other hand, no one in the post-classical era was likely ever to have to call on a dual, other than for purposes of recognition in the reading of classical texts. I find it hard not to get the feeling that, while the other exercises really were meant to help students master the chreia and make it do their bidding in the construction of a rhetorical discourse, the declension exercise goes further than that. It is as if it were designed to show who is boss, not by merely mastering the chreia, but by humiliating it into total submission. The popularity of this particular exercise will owe less to its usefulness than to the pride that could be taken in a display of sheer grammatical virtuosity¹⁴.

In the course of his explanation, Theon lists many examples of chreiai. Virtually all take the standard form of a single-sentence complete anecdote, beginning “X the so-and-so...”, e. g. “Diogenes the Cynic...”,

¹² For this same criticism, see already Parsons, *op. cit.*, 144 n. 30.

¹³ Nicolaus, *Progymn.* 18. 2 ff. Felten.

¹⁴ For the prestige attached to grammatical attainments, see Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge 1998, forthcoming) chapter 5, “Grammar and the power of language”.

“Isocrates the orator...”, “Plato the philosopher”, “Alexander the king of the Macedonians”, and, in one case, “Pythagoras the philosopher...” So the opening of our chreia must be meant in the same way. The word order there is certainly abnormal – ὁ Πυθαγόρας φιλόσοφος, where Πυθαγόρας ὁ φιλόσοφος would be the regular form. But in view of the standard format used in chreiai, this must be taken as meaning “Pythagoras the philosopher”, and we must resist any temptation to construe the sentence differently¹⁵. Here it is very important to notice that the student originally started by writing the name Πυθαγόρας, and only subsequently went back and added the article ὁ in the left hand margin, where it is in fact so far to the left that it has been written on the sloping edge of the tablet, beyond the flat whitened area. This strengthens the likelihood that the chreia was originally assigned to him with the canonical form of opening, Πυθαγόρας ὁ φιλόσοφος... As for his reordering, the simplest hypothesis for explaining it is that he originally omitted the article by mere error, then added it in the left margin, and thereafter for consistency retained in the oblique cases, the dual and the plural the word order that this had produced in his opening line. In view of what we have seen to be the mediocre standard of his Greek, he may have been totally unaware how unidiomatic the new word-order was¹⁶.

Now at last we can turn to the chreia itself. Why this story? Where did it come from? Is it a genuine testimonium on Pythagoras?

The story is no more likely to contain an actual historical truth than most of the thousand or more other chreiai have come down to us, or for that matter than the great majority of other Pythagoras testimonia, most of them little more than manufactured folklore. But we do need to ask whether, almost equally importantly, the anecdote is evidence of the Pythagorean legend, as this developed among Pythagoreans from the fourth century BC to the fourth century AD. As I remarked earlier,

¹⁵ For example by taking φιλόσοφος ἀποβάς together and translating “Pythagoras, having turned out to be a philosopher...”, even though that would in itself be perfectly possible Greek. I owe to Manfredo Manfredi the observation that it could in principle be construed this way.

¹⁶ The other possibility is that, whether or not so bidden by his teacher, after he had started transcribing the first line he decided to move the definite article to the beginning of the sentence in order to mark out the sequence of cases and numbers down the left-hand side with complete clarity: the layout of the tablet itself tends to give the impression that, after he had finished writing the first line, he mapped out the remaining singular forms by adding the entire sequence τοῦ, τῶ, τόν, ᾧ down the left-hand side (three of these four are followed by an unexpected amount of space), before the remainder of each line was added in.

it does not seem to have been taken into consideration by any modern discussion of the history of Pythagoreanism.

In fact, I have tracked down only one modern source which even discusses the meaning of the chreia. R. F. Hock and E. N. O'Neill¹⁷ offer the following translation: "Pythagoras the philosopher, once he had disembarked and was teaching writings, used to counsel his students to abstain from red meat." They add the following comment:

ἀποβάς is clearly intended to refer to Pythagoras' arrival in Italy. First, Italy is the place with which he is most closely associated. Secondly, although he had "disembarked" in many other places before reaching Italy and Crotona, it had been as one who was acquiring knowledge, not imparting it. He began to teach only after his arrival in Italy. The other expression here which requires comment is γράμματα διδάσκων... It may be that γράμματα here refers to Pythagoras' own writings (which in some traditions he is supposed to have composed). See, for example, Diogenes Laertius 8. 9, where Diogenes makes a connection between Pythagoras' writings and his teaching.

This is not a bad try. Nor on the other hand does it carry much conviction. If ἀποβάς meant "having disembarked", it could be so understood only in a context where Pythagoras is already known to be on shipboard. In a continuous narrative that would be fine. But chreiai are not mere decontextualised quotations; they are, above all else, self-contained. Nor is it at all plausible that the reference to γράμματα draws on the tradition that Pythagoras wrote treatises; if there were such a reference, we would at least expect the definite article, and more probably the standard term συγγράμματα than the simple γράμματα (a rare usage, cf. SE M I. 48). Nor does either word, used in this sense, make a very plausible object for the verb διδάσκειν. I think we can do better than this.

First, it is hardly necessary to point out that γράμματα διδάσκειν has an absolutely standard meaning, "to teach grammar", or, more generally, "to be a school-teacher". I find it hard to doubt that the grammar-teacher who set our student the chreia exercise was fully aware of this allusion to his own profession. The opening part of the chreia, then, means quite simply that Pythagoras the philosopher went off (from his philosophical school, one assumes) and became a schoolteacher, or more specifically a grammar-teacher. It then continues that, in this new life, he used to advise his pupils to practise vegetarianism.

But where could this fit into the biographical tradition? Advising his pupils – his philosophy pupils, that is – to practise vegetarianism is a standard biographical report about Pythagoras, and a central part of the legend. But the story of him switching to grammar-teaching is entirely unparallelled. Nor for that matter does it sound as reverential a story as one expects of the Pythagorean hagiography: schoolteaching was a rather lowly profession in the ancient world. Another oddity is the use of "blooded" for "ensouled" with regard to Pythagorean vegetarianism. The standard expression in the Pythagoras biographies is ἐμψύχων ἀπέχεσθαι, "to abstain from ensouled creatures", and the variant "to abstain from blooded creatures" seems unique to this chreia. How are we to explain these oddities?

The crucial thing to notice, I think, is that in ἐναίμων ἀπέχεσθαι the adjective ἐναίμων (-ονος) is a hapax legomenon, whose unique occurrence is in the Hippocratic treatise *On the nature of bones* (c. 19. IX p. 194. 22 Littré). There however it refers, not to "blooded" creatures, but to "blood-bearing" veins (ἐναίμονες sc. φλέβες). Everywhere else the term is not ἐναίμων, third declension, but ἐναίμος, second declension.

Now the medical lexicographers, starting with the pupils of the great Alexandrian physician Herophilus in the third century BC, wrote numerous handbooks of Hippocratic Greek¹⁸. Our main surviving specimen of the genre is the first-century AD Hippocratic lexicon of Erotian. Erotian can reel off a long list of his own predecessors in the genre, both doctors and grammarians. We learn from him that, among many other concerns, Hippocratic lexicography was interested in collecting Hippocratic hapax legomena¹⁹. Moreover, *On the nature of bones* is one treatise which the lexicographers definitely covered, since Erotian quotes a citation of it from the first-generation Herophilean Bacchius²⁰. Hence it is in principle likely that the Hippocratic lexicographers noticed and commented on the hapax legomenon ἐναίμονες.

This leads me to my suggestion about the origin of the Pythagoras chreia. The unique form ἐναίμονες will have been identified by the lexicographers as an irregular one, which should be avoided in favour of the standard ἐναίμοι. If Pythagoras had been a grammar teacher, they may have quipped, he would have advised his pupils to "abstain

¹⁷ *The Chreia in Ancient Rhetoric I* (Atlanta 1986) 335–6.

¹⁸ See H. von Staden, *Herophilus* (Cambridge 1989), part II "The Herophileans".

¹⁹ Erotian, *Gloss.* p. 8. 13 Nachmanson.

²⁰ Bacchius fr. 38 von Staden (*op. cit.*, 497) = Erotian e. 39, p. 38 Nachmanson.

from ἐναίμονες". This then became the anecdote on our writing tablet, which I would now translate as follows: "Pythagoras the philosopher went off and became a grammar teacher, and used to advise his pupils to abstain from ἐναίμονες" (i. e. from the word ἐναίμονες)²¹.

That is my suggestion for the origin of the chreia. It is a grammarians' in-house joke. But I can see at least four possible objections. (1) I have myself remarked that a chreia must be self-contained. Yet this one, thus interpreted, certainly needs some explaining. (2) If it is a joke from Hippocratic lexicography, could it still count as a chreia at all, as it has to do if it is to be chosen for the exercise of declining a chreia? (3) Did ancient grammarians make jokes, or even have a sense of humour? (As opposed to the countless jokes about them, that is.) (4) Can we allow the expression ἐναίμωνων ἀπέχεσθαι, "abstain from blooded creatures", to mean "abstain from the word ἐναίμονες"? This is a violation of the use-mention distinction – that is, in this case, the distinction between mentioning the word ἐναίμονες, which is what the chreia means to do if I am right, and actually using the word, as it in fact does. The standard Greek formula for mentioning the word without using it would here be τοῦ ἐναίμονος ἀπέχεσθαι. That would have made the meaning clear, but also of course ruined the joke. The problem that faces us, however, is the converse one: could the simple ἐναίμωνων ἀπέχεσθαι have been recognised by a Greek reader as referring to abstention from the word, not from the things²²?

All four objections find rather satisfying answers in the text of Theon. Specifically, help comes from another chreia, which can be seen as the joker in Theon's own pack (and the pun on "joker" is intended). Theon several times quotes as an example the following chreia²³:

Διδύμων²⁴ ὁ αὐλητὴς ἀλοῦς ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐκρεμάσθη.
Didymon the aulos-player, caught committing adultery, was hung by the name.

²¹ For a parallel joke about a celebrity who, forced to become a schoolteacher, carried on in his old habits, cf. Cic. *Tusc.* III. 27: Dionysius the tyrant, expelled from Syracuse, went to Corinth to become a schoolteacher, so addicted was he to wielding power.

²² On the problem whether the neuter article may ever be legitimately omitted in such cases, cf. V. Bers, *Speech in speech: studies in incorporated 'oratio recta' in Attic drama and oratory* (Lanham, MD 1997) 56.

²³ E. g. Theon, *Prog.* 102. 34–5.

²⁴ Διδύμων is his name in DL VI. 51 and 68 (see below); most MSS of Theon have Δίδυμος, but for the evidence supporting restoration of the obviously superior

What does this mean? Theon, in describing the students' exercise which consisted in criticising chreiai, lists this particular chreia as one which deserves to be criticised, for its obscurity (104. 22–3). Nevertheless, he himself elsewhere uses the very same chreia to illustrate the declension exercise. That already deals with my first objection: a chreia which was acknowledged to be obscure *could*, on occasion, be used as material for the declension exercise.

What does the obscure Didymon story actually mean? The explanation is that διδύμοι can mean "testicles". Being hung "by the name" means that Didymon was hung by the testicles, ἐκ διδύμων.

There is one other version of this chreia extant, recorded by Diogenes Laertius (VI. 51) among the innumerable chreiai about Diogenes the Cynic:

Diogenes, hearing that Didymon the adulterer had been arrested, said "He deserves to be hung by the name".

This is actually a rather better version, since as far as I am aware being hung by the testicles was never an actual punishment for adultery anywhere in the ancient world. Hence it is more appropriate for someone in the chreia to comment that the adulterer *deserves* this punishment than for the chreia itself to record that he received it. This, then, may well be the original form of the chreia. Like all chreiai, it will have been designed for attachment to the name of some celebrity. The reduced version quoted by Theon, in which Didymon himself replaces Diogenes as subject, seems to be accounted for by the need, for the sake of completeness, to include an example of a "doing" chreia which was *passive* in content, describing not what someone did but what happened to him. The Didymon story is, at any rate, Theon's only proffered example of a passive chreia²⁵.

From its association with Diogenes we cannot infer anything about the original date of the chreia. Chreiai continued to be manufactured throughout the Hellenistic era²⁶, to satisfy an apparently insatiable market for anthologies of them. What is more, a chreia could readily travel from one historical figure to another, and Diogenes the Cynic in particular

termination -ων see Hock and O'Neill, *op. cit.*, 88 ap. crit. Didymon is, incidentally, so rare a name in antiquity (I have so far tracked down only two instances, both in Rhodes) as to be almost certainly invented for the purposes of the chreia.

²⁵ Theon, *Prog.* 99. 2–4 Spengel.

²⁶ Cf. J. F. Kindstrand, "Diogenes Laertius and the 'Chreia' tradition", *Elenchos* 7 (1986) 217–43.

proved to be a magnet to whom stories of slightly scandalous witticisms would stick, much as in another age happened to Maurice Bowra. There is therefore not even any particular reason to assume that Diogenes was the original subject of this chreia.

At all events, one reason for doubting a very early origin for this chreia, in either of its two forms, is that the use of δίδυμοι for “testicles” is post-classical, its earliest firmly datable literary occurrence being in a Philodemus epigram (*AP.* V 125. 6) from the first century BC. But an occurrence certainly no later than this, and probably two centuries older, is to be found in the Septuagint, translating an injunction of Moses at Deuteronomy 25. 11 – a fact which suggests that, at least in the (probably) third-century BC Alexandrian context in which Deuteronomy was translated, δίδυμοι was fashionable as a serious term for “testicles”, and not a scurrilous, colloquial or jocular usage.

This evidence from the Septuagint fits rather neatly with a further item of information. Galen reports the same employment of δίδυμοι, for what the mainstream medical tradition always called ὄρχεις, as an idiosyncratic usage of the doctor Herophilus (fr. 109 von Staden), an enormously influential figure in third-century BC Alexandria²⁷. Whether Herophilus’ introduction of δίδυμοι to medical terminology merely reflected a local Alexandrian usage, or actually created that usage, must be a matter for speculation. But that he was making a serious contribution to medical jargon is confirmed by the fact that, even if the actual term did not catch on in later medical usage, it did leave its imprint by fathering the further term “epididymis” (used by Galen), for the adjunct of the testicle still today known by that name.

There is, then, at least a fair chance that the original inspiration of this anecdote lies once again in medical lexicography. As I have said, many Herophileans wrote handbooks to Hippocratic terminology. What is more, in some cases these handbooks are reported as comparing Herophilus’ own usage with Hippocratic usage (fr. 267 a, cf. 268 von Staden). There is therefore good reason to guess that the Didymon chreia arose as another grammarian’s joke, springing from the tradition of medical lexicography. And if so we would have, in answer to my second difficulty, confirmation that the chreiai used in the declension exercise could indeed include anecdotes based on jokes about medical lexicography. The further fact that in the original version of the chreia

²⁷ Here Herophilus is using the term for the female “testicles”, namely the ovaries. But there is no reason to doubt that he, like others, used a single term for both the male and the female varieties.

Didymon seems to have been a doctor²⁸ may be a trace of this same origin: who could be a more appropriate butt for a witticism about medical terminology than a doctor?

We do now at any rate have a probable answer to my third question. Yes: off duty, it seems that grammarians really did enjoy the occasional joke, even though they ruthlessly excluded any hint of humour from their formal grammatical treatises. And, returning to our school tablet, if an Egyptian grammar-teacher, in setting his pupils moral chreiai as the basis for the standard declension exercise, occasionally indulged himself by smuggling in one which was a vehicle for an in-house grammatical joke, rather than the usual *bon mot*, that need not altogether surprise us.

What about my final listed problem, concerning violation of the use-mention distinction? Satisfyingly, the Didymon story contains a parallel violation. While the Pythagoras story seems to refer to the thing in place of the name (“abstain from blooded creatures” means “abstain from the word ‘ἐνοίμους’” – i. e. use in place of mention), similarly, though conversely, the Didymon story refers to the name in place of the thing: he “was hung by the name” (i. e. mention in place of use). This admittedly stretched usage (no pun intended) thus seems to be an established part of the same grammarians’ game. It appears, then, that some grammarians enjoyed consciously playing such use-mention games.

Jokes of this kind are certainly well attested in the ancient collections of sophisms. For example (*DL* VII. 187), one standard sophism is designed to show that you have a big mouth: “If you utter something, it goes through your mouth; but you utter a waggon [ἄμαξαν δὲ λαλεῖς: note the case]; therefore a waggon [ἄμαξα nominative] goes through your mouth”. Clement (*Strom.* VIII. 9. 26. 5) knows a version where what goes through your mouth is a house. Seneca (*Ep.* 48. 6) quotes with palpable contempt another sophism from the same family: “Mouse is a syllable. A mouse eats cheese. Therefore a syllable eats cheese”.

These examples belong primarily to the discipline of dialectic rather than to that of grammar. But also among the many jokes about grammarians which have survived there is at least one which trades similarly on the use-mention distinction. An epigram of Palladas (fourth century AD) consoles a donkey who has just become the property of a

²⁸ *DL* VI. 68: Didymon the adulterer was treating (ἰατρῶντα) a girl’s eye ailment, and Diogenes said “Mind that in treating the maiden’s eye you don’t corrupt the κόρη (‘pupil’, but also ‘girl’)”.

grammarian (*Anth. Pal.* XI. 383). Alluding to the grammarians' regular citation of the Homeric κριτή, used in place of κριθή, "barley", to exemplify the device of *apokope*, Palladas points out to the beast that grammarians offer "endless barley"²⁹.

As well as being an epigrammatist, Palladas was an Alexandrian schoolteacher. Following in the same tradition as both the original author of the Pythagoras chreia and the grammar teacher who set it as a school exercise, he too proves to be a γραμματικός prepared to indulge in linguistic jokes about the practices of his own profession.

I conclude, then, that the Pythagoras anecdote originated as a joke from medical lexicography; and, sadly, that it is not a genuine testimonium on Pythagoras, or even on the Pythagorean tradition. Scholars have, it turns out, been quite right to ignore this anecdote in constructing their histories of Pythagoreanism. But I doubt if they can be said to have ignored it for the right reasons, or even to have known that it was available for them to ignore.

And now for a closing thought. So closely do the profiles of the Pythagoras chreia and the Didymon chreia match, that one might hazard the guess that in the pool of chreiai for pre-rhetorical exercises they were treated as a linked pair. Since the Didymon one, being already found in Theon of Alexandria, is probably not datable later than the first century AD, we might tentatively infer a similar *terminus ante quem* for the Pythagoras one, even though its actual attestation, in our writing tablet, belongs to the fourth century. Now a curious coincidence presents itself. The one available parallel for the expression "abstain from blooded creatures" is found in the writings of Theon's Alexandrian contemporary Philo. In *De vita contemplativa* (73)³⁰, Philo's description of an ascetic diet includes: water rather than wine, and "a table pure of blooded creatures (τράπεζα καθαρὰ τῶν ἐναιμάτων), on which bread is the nourishment and salt the garnish". Since bread is the only nourishment, it is clear that "pure of ἐναίμα" does not mean that only kosher meat is served, or for that matter that no red meat is served, but rather that no meat at all is on the table. This is in fact confirmed by

²⁹ See Ineke Sluiter, *Ancient Grammar in Context* (Amsterdam 1990) 36, and, for a full survey of ancient ridicule of grammarians, her article "Perversa subtilitas: de kwade roep van de grammaticus", *Lampas* 21 (1988) 41–65.

³⁰ I owe this reference to Alessandro Linguisti's preparatory work for an edition of the Pythagoras testimonium (to appear in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini* vol. I***), where he also makes the interesting suggestion that the term may reflect Philo's Judaeo-Christian context.

Philo's usage elsewhere³¹. Thus in Theon's own immediate Alexandrian context, although nowhere else that I know of, the expression "abstain from blooded creatures" was immediately recognised as a description of vegetarianism. Without that recognition, the joke underlying the chreia would have had even less chance of being understood.

In the apparent use of local parlance, we can perhaps begin to glimpse why this particular chreia about Pythagoras the grammar teacher has been lost to our mainstream literary traditions, and has survived uniquely through an exercise which, some three centuries later, was set as a routine class assignment by an Egyptian grammar-teacher³².

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В статье детально обосновывается, почему происходящая из Египта деревянная табличка со школьными упражнениями, в которой упомянут Пифагор и его наставления, не может рассматриваться ни как свидетельство об учении последнего, ни как след развития легендарной традиции о нем. Текст таблички говорит о том, что, перестав заниматься философией и обратившись к преподаванию словесности, Пифагор учил воздерживаться от "кровоавой" пищи (ἐναίμων). Фраза повторена учеником, греческий язык для которого едва ли был родным, 17 раз с использова-

³¹ Esp. *De spec. leg.* I. 255, ἡ δ' ἀπαρχὴ πρέπουσα ἱερεῦσιν ἀπ' οὐδενὸς τῶν ἐναιμάτων, ἀλλ' ἀπὸ τοῦ καθαρωτάτου τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης τροφῆς. As far as I have been able to establish from the *TLG*, in later antiquity the term is used this way only by writers directly echoing the passage from Philo, *Vit. cont.*: Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* II. 17. 22, and Sozomenus, *Hist. eccl.* I. 12. 10, in the latter of which, uniquely, the actual expression ἐναίμων ἀπέχεσθαι occurs.

³² I am grateful to a number of people who commented on a version of this paper which was read to the Cambridge papyrological seminar "Reputations in tatters" Easter Term 1998; to Colin Austin, David Blank, James Clackson, Sarah Clackson, Janet Fairweather, David Fowler, Eric Handley, Teresa Morgan and the editorial committee of the *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini* for helpful suggestions on individual points; and to Ineke Sluiter for very constructive comments and suggestions on a subsequent draft. A shorter version of this paper is appearing in *Papiri filosofici: miscellanea di studi II* (Accademia toscana di scienze e lettere "La Colombaria", Florence 1998).

нием имени Пифагора во всех возможных числах и падежах и с соответствующими изменениями синтаксиса всего предложения. Очевидно, перед нами упражнение, которое рекомендовалось авторами риторических учебников для подготовительного курса, и в нем, как часто бывало, использована хрия – короткий анекдот о знаменитом человеке. Наша хрия содержит игру слов: Пифагор запрещает уже не употребление в пищу мяса, но, как и подобает грамматике, употребление формы ἐνσῆμων вместо более обычного ἐνσῆμος. Редкое слово указывает, возможно, на связь хрии с александрийской лексикографией, зафиксировавшей встречающееся в “Гиппократовом корпусе” ἐνσῆμων как отступление от нормы. Как показывает анекдот, посвященный некоему прелюбодее Дидиму, грамматики порой позволяли себе шутки над собственной профессией, и из собрания хрий такие истории попадали в школьную практику. Вероятно, подобный путь проделала и хрия о Пифагоре.