The Most Ancient "Puzzle Magazines": Miscellanies of Intellectual Games from *Ahiqar* to Aristophanes

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Abstract – Intellectual puzzles have a tendency to intermix and accumulate in miscellaneous collections, as happens in present-day puzzle magazines. This phenomenon may already be observed in old compilations (cf. *Palatine Anthology*, book 14, which draws on earlier sources) and theoretical treatises of antiquity (Clearchus' *On riddles*, Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* book 10). Long before such works, fictional and legendary narratives provided a framework for stringing together multifarious types of mental games. The Near-Eastern *Story of Ahiqar* and the Greek *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* use the old theme of the competition between two great sages as a plot structure to accommodate a veritable anthology of genres of riddles. The Greek legend of Homer and Hesiod may have influenced Aristophanic comedies such as the *Frogs* and the *Wasps*. But while in the East the narrative form of the miscellaneous riddle contest was a fantastic outgrowth of the mixed compilations of wisdom literature, the corresponding Greek narratives were fictionalizations of the multifaceted entertainments of the symposion.

Keywords – Riddles; Riddle Contest; Narrative; Wisdom Literature; Symposion.

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1. The Structure of the Puzzle Magazine

Intellectual games and puzzles have a tendency to intermix and accumulate; they are gathered together in composite anthologies or long miscellaneous collections. Today this is evident in the popular magazines of recreation and mental pastimes, called *puzzle magazines* in English and *riviste di enigmistica* in Italian. These mass-market publications usually assemble between their covers a great variety of different brain-teasers, problems, and mental exercises belonging to many genres. A typical issue may contain, in no particular order:

1) Various kinds of crosswords, which are in fact systems of riddles and enigmatical questions, geometrically spread out in space.

2) Quizzes of encyclopedic or specialized knowledge.

3) Rebuses or "picture-riddles" (*Bilderrätsel*), in which words or concepts are symbolically represented by images. This is a kind of visual enigma; material items or their icons are used as symbols of sounds, terms, or ideas, and are combined together in order to transmit a cryptic message.

4) Cryptograms, anagrams, and other kinds of letter ciphers – for example diagrams concealing hidden words and phrases.

5) Linguistic exercises, such as finding words that begin or end with a particular syllable, or adducing synonyms of a certain term, or making up the longest possible compound words from given units.

6) Optical tests of perceptivity and observation, such as spotting the differences between almost identical images, or putting a series of pictures in the proper logical order, or finding out and associating complementary figures.

7) Games of numbers, from classic arithmetical problems to Japanese sudoku puzzles.

8) Drawing exercises, such as connecting dots with lines or blackening squares in order to reveal a hidden image.

9) Sketches of labyrinths, in which the solver must trace the way out.

10) Chess problems.

11) Sometimes even brief accounts of detective cases may be included. The facts of the case, the circumstances of the crime, the testimonies of the witnesses, and other clues are provided; on the basis of these clues the reader must deduce the guilty person.

Characteristically, the Modern Greek name for this type of magazine is still *griphos*. The same word was used in the Ancient Greek language, throughout antiquity, as a broad and comprehensive term to cover all kinds of mental games and puzzles, from proper riddles,

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charades, and rebuses to memory tests, quizzes of knowledge, and mathematical problems.[1] In the present essay this phenomenon will be termed *the puzzle magazine structure* or *the rivista di enigmistica model*: both these phrases will be used to signify the collection and coexistence of many different genres of intellectual games and exercises within a single textual product, a work of miscellaneous, anthological, or compilative nature.

Some of the playful problems listed in the pages of the popular magazines have a very long ancestry, which can be traced back to ancient times; they were practiced by our distant ancestors in the Classical Graeco-Roman world or in the neighbouring cultures of the Near East. For example, rebuses and "picture-riddles" are proposed in the *History* of Herodotus and in the *Alexander Romance*.[2] Linguistic games of words and syllables were played for amusement in the learned symposia of Classical Athens.[3] Quizzes of knowledge were a staple spiritual exercise in the classrooms, the banquets, and the other social gatherings of Alexandrian scholars[4] and Talmudic rabbis.[5] Arithmetic puzzles were made up by Old Babylonian teachers, Egyptian instructors, and Hellenistic practitioners, and were versified by Greek epigrammatists of the Imperial period.[6] Labyrinths were constructed in Pharaonic Egypt, Minoan Crete, and early Imperial China, and were designed on Mycenaean tablets, Etruscan vases, Greek coins, and Roman mosaics.[7] Other pursuits, such as chess puzzles, detective cases, crosswords, drawing

[1] On the Greek term *griphos* and the wide variety of puzzles covered by it see Ohlert 3-22, 71-79; Schultz 88-90, 106-16; Forster 43-47; Buffière 45-49; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 120-33; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles"; Guichard 285-86; Luz, *Technopaignia* 139-46, 358-59; Monda, "Introduzione" 10-11; Della Bona 169-77; Beta, *Il labirinto* 34-35, 42, 96-97.

[2] See Herodotus 4.131-32: four symbolic items (a bird, a mouse, a frog, and some arrows) are sent by the Scythians to King Darius I, collectively spelling out an allegorical message ("unless the Persians become birds to fly up to heaven, or mice to hide under the earth, or frogs to leap into the lakes, they will not escape the Scythian arrows"). Another version of the story is found in Pherecydes, *FGrHist* 3 F 174; analogous exchanges of symbolic gifts take place in an episode of the *Alexander Romance* (1.36-38) and in a historical anecdote in Athenaeus 8.334a-b (from the historian Phylarchus, *FGrHist* 81 F 1). See West, "The Scythian Ultimatum"; Hollmann 176-85; Konstantakos, "Alexander and Darius." Many other examples of "picture-riddles" are found in ancient texts, both in Graeco-Roman sources (from Herodotus and Aristotle to Plutarch, Sextus Empiricus, Livy, and Valerius Maximus) and in writings of oriental wisdom (Jewish *midrashim*, Sasanian didactic works). See Ohlert 116-22, 134-35; Schultz 106-08; Karadagli 2-3, 72-96; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 91; Konstantakos, *Ἀκίχαρος* I 99-100, 195-96; Beta, *Il labirinto* 290-303, 313-14, 318.

[3] See the description of Greek sympotic games by Clearchus, fr. 63, I and 86 Wehrli (fr. 77 and 102a Taifacos); Wehrli 27-28, 31-32, 75-77; Taifacos 70-71, 88-89, 331; and below, section 2, for discussion.

[4] On the questions and quizzes (*zētēmata*) proposed in the symposia of Alexandrian scholars see Gudeman; Ohlert 72-75; Slater, "Aristophanes"; Cameron, *Callimachus* 95-97; Taub 423-25.

[5] On the tests of various areas of knowledge (Biblical learning, natural history and zoology, ethics, folklore and fable lore, theology, law) posed and answered by Jewish rabbis in the *Talmud* and the midrashic literature see Wünsche, *Die Räthselweisheit* 31-43; Isaacs 121-25; and many stories anthologized in Elkaïm-Sartre and in Bialik and Ravnitzky 201-330, 816-17; cf. Steinsaltz 95-100, 252-55, 269-70. Quizzes of Biblical or natural lore included in the narratives about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba may also reflect playful problems devised by the rabbis and used for instruction or entertainment in school and social occasions. See below, section 3 and notes 74-75.

[6] See Ohlert 145-54; Schultz 113-16; Forster 45-47; Beckby 539-41; Buffière 34-41; Høyrup, "Sub-Scientific Mathematics" 66-87; Høyrup, "Hero" 67-72; Cuomo 70-72, 213-14, 244-46; Asper, "Mathematik" 3-5; Asper, "The Two Cultures" 109-14, 122-24; and below, section 2, on the versified arithmetical problems of the *Palatine Anthology*.

[7] See Matthews 6-53; Heller; Lloyd; Borgeaud; Christinger; Doob 11-91; Uytterhoeven and Blom-Böer; MacGillivray; Santarcangeli 3-24, 37-43, 49-109, 173-87; Zou.

tests, and all the problems that presuppose the printed page, are of course younger, mostly products of the post-Renaissance world of widespread literacy and press circulation.[8]

On the other hand, many of the favourite games of the ancient peoples, which will be examined in the following sections, have fallen into disuse with the passage of time and are now practically abandoned. No-one would indulge today in exchanges of burlesque similes (the so-called *eikasmos* riddles), in riddles of the superlative, or in the proposition and clever countering of impossible tasks (*adynata*), such as are amply set out in ancient Greek and Near-Eastern legends, poems, and wisdom literature. Few of our contemporaries would be equipped to tackle the exercises of Homeric mnemonics, improvisation or supplementation of epic hexameter verses, which are attested for Graeco-Roman symposia and public competitions.[9] The particular genres of intellectual pastimes vary from one age and culture to another. However, the tendency to assemble together diverse forms of puzzles and join them in a miscellaneous collection – this seems to be a perennial practice, which traverses time and flourishes in many different civilizations, since the remotest times of antiquity.

2. Ancient Anthologies and Treatises

The best known and, in terms of form, the most "canonical" Greek collection of riddles is the fourteenth book of the *Palatine Anthology*, which was presumably compiled sometime in the Middle Byzantine period, around the tenth century A.D. Its exact date and manner of formation are a matter of dispute. It has been argued that the core of the fourteenth book was already present in the large assemblage of ancient epigrams prepared by the scholar Constantine Cephalas (end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century A.D.), which afterwards formed the basis of the *Palatine Anthology*. Other experts believe that the book was put together later, by the redactor of the famous Palatine manuscript (*Palatinus gr.* 23, tenth century).[10] In any case, the contents of the collection were doubtless drawn from earlier sources and reached back to materials of very ancient age.[11]

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[8] For an overview of the history and development of these modern mental games see the encyclopedic dictionary of Carlisle 126-31, 159-63, 585-90; cf. Bens 82-102.

[9] See below, sections 2, 3, and 4.

[10] For the former opinion see the forceful argumentation of Cameron, *The Greek Anthology* 97, 134-35, 207-15; cf. Cameron, "Michael Psellus"; Luz, "What Has it Got" 84-85; Kwapisz 148; Beta, *Il labirinto* 84, 137; for the latter view, which is somewhat more diffused, see Beckby 171; Aubreton, "La tradition" 66; Aubreton, "Michel Psellos"; Buffière 32; Maltomini, *Tradizione* 189-95; Monda, "Introduzione" 15; Monda, "Beyond the Boundary" 143.

[11] One of the arithmetical problems of the book is attributed to a certain Socrates (14.1), who is probably identical with the poet of epigrams mentioned by Diogenes Laertius 2.47; others are ascribed to Metrodorus (14.116-46), who may be identified with various figures of the late Hellenistic or the Roman age. Many of the oracles are drawn from Herodotus; others are known from a range of ancient Greek sources, such as the *Lives of Homer*, Mnesiepes' inscription at Paros, Diodorus, Pausanias, Plutarch, Achilles Tatius, Eusebius, the hypotheses of Euripides' tragedies, and ancient scholia. As for the riddles and the related verbal puzzles, a few are attested in ancient Greek authors such as the tragic poet Theodectas (14.40), the historian Asclepiades of Tragilus (14.64), the lyric poet Mesomedes (14.63), or are cited by Athenaeus, Diogenes Laertius, and the hypotheses of Sophoclean and Euripidean tragedies; one (14.101) is attributed to Cleobulus of Lindus, one of the Seven Sages of Archaic Greece, famous as a composer of enigmas (see Diogenes Laertius 1.90-91; cf. Konstantakos, "Amasis" 14-17; Beta, *Il labirinto* 30-31). Most of the riddles are of course anonymous, possibly due to the folk origins of the genre (cf. Kirstein 473; Cameron, "Michael Psellus" 341). But several of them present notable thematic or stylistic parallels with Classical Greek poetic texts (compare e.g. 14.32 and 14.33 with Sophocles,

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This Byzantine riddle book has the characteristics of a medley; it assorts together various different genres of intellectual pastime, without any sign of classification, systematic organization, or explicit division into specialized sections.[12] Almost a third of its 150 items consist of arithmetical problems of computation, mostly on the level of ordinary school mathematics. These problems are based on fractions and simple algebraic operations, but they are expressed with graphic imagery and cast in tolerable elegiac verses. Here is an example (*Palatine Anthology* 14.3, translated by W. R. Paton):

> Cypris thus addressed Love, who was looking downcast: "How, my child, hath sorrow fallen on thee?" And he answered: "The Muses stole and divided among themselves, in different proportions, the apples I was bringing from Helicon, snatching them from my bosom. Clio got the fifth part, and Euterpe the twelfth, but divine Thalia the eighth. Melpomene carried off the twentieth part, and Terpsichore the fourth, and Erato the seventh; Polyhymnia robbed me of thirty apples, and Urania of a hundred and twenty, and Calliope went off with a load of three hundred apples. So I come to thee with lighter hands, bringing these fifty apples that the goddesses left me."[13]

Several tens of puzzles are dependent on the mechanisms of language. There are many genuine and proper riddles, or "riddles in the narrow sense," the kind of problem that is called *indovinello* in Italian and *devinette* in French. The Greeks applied the term *ainigma* (αἴνιγμα) to this type of cryptic linguistic construct, which mainly uses two rhetorical artifices in order to conceal its object: on one hand metaphors and symbolic imagery; on the other hand the conjunction of contradictory terms, which produces baffling paradoxes.[14] For example:

Trachiniae 1159-63; Fontenrose 79-80; Beta, *Il labirinto* 91-92). Overall, there should be no doubt that the majority of the riddles of this book have been ultimately reaped from ancient sources of Classical, Hellenistic, or Roman times, similarly to the other categories of material. See in general Beckby 171-73; Buffière 36-37, 41-42, 44-45; Cameron, "Michael Psellus" 341-49; Cameron, *The Greek Anthology* 122, 135, 211-14; Cameron, *Callimachus* 80-81; Maltomini, *Tradizione* 189-90, 194-95; Monda, "Introduzione" 15; Monda, "Beyond the Boundary" 143; Luz, "What Has It Got" 84-85; Kwapisz 148, 164; Beta, "Poesia enigmistica" 113-15; Beta, *Il labirinto* 15-16, 111, 137, 148-50, 155-56, 170-71.

[12] On the mixed character of the contents cf. Forster 43-47; Buffière 29, 33-50; Lausberg 359-61; Beta, "Poesia enigmistica" 113-20; Cameron, *The Greek Anthology* 135, 208-11, 214; Kirstein 473-74; Luz, "What Has it Got."

[13] The solution is 3360 apples: 672 + 280 + 420 + 168 + 840 + 480 + 30 + 120 + 300 + 50. For more arithmetical problems see *Anth. Pal.* 14.1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 11-13, 48-51, 116-46.

[14] See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1458a26-29: "The essence of an enigma consists in describing an existing thing through the combination of impossibilities. This cannot be done by combining together ordinary words, but it is possible by means of metaphor." On the *ainigma* or proper riddle and its linguistic mechanisms see Forster 42-44; Buffière 45-48; Dougherty 33-34; Fabbro 403-04; West, *Indo-European* 364-66; Berra, "Pythagoras' Riddles" 262-63; Monda, "Introduzione" 9-10; Luz, "What Has it Got" 84-91, 95-98; Della Bona 170-72, 174, 178-80; Beta, "Poesia enigmistica" 115-18; Beta, "Oracles and Riddles"; Beta, *Il labirinto* 6-7, 17-19, 31-32, 38-40, 67, 71, 82-87, 101-02, 108-10, 133. For an investigation of the ancient theory of this genre see Cook 349-70; Calboli 25-27, 30-40; for the modern theoretical background see Georges and Dundes; Köngäs Maranda; Green and Pepicello. I am not entirely convinced by the formalistic and gnoseological distinction between *griphos* and *ainigma* which Christine Luz attempts to introduce, based on an idiosyncratic scholion on Lucian, *Vitarum auctio* 14 (p. 126 Rabe; see Luz, *Technopaignia* 144-45 and Luz, "What Has It Got" 97-98).

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I have a brain without a head; I am green and rise from the earth by a long neck. I look like a ball placed on a flute; and if you search inside my flanks, I have there my mother's father. (14.58)
Answer: the artichoke.[15]

A couple of pieces are charades, a type of puzzle in which riddling clues are given about the individual syllables which make up a certain word. On the basis of these clues, the entire word must be guessed:

The whole is an island; first is the mooing of a cow, then the word of a moneylender. (14.16)
Answer: The island of Rhodes, *Rhodos*; *rho* is an approximation to the sound of a cow, *dos* ("give!") is the creditor's standard demand.[16]

There are also several games with letters, in which the solution must be found by inserting or changing one or more letters of a given word:

I am a member of a man; therefore iron cuts me. Take away one letter and the sun sets. (14.35)
Answer: *onyx* (ὄνυξ, the nail). Take away the *o* and it becomes *nyx* (νύξ, the night).[17]

Further, the collection includes quizzes of knowledge about mythology or Homeric poetry:

Seek in the sea the maiden who was once a lion; you will find the mother-in-law of Hecuba the murderess of her children. (14.27)
Answer: Thetis, who turned into a lion in her attempt to escape from Peleus. "Hecuba the children-slayer" is Medea, who was said to have married Achilles in the Islands of the Blessed.

In one night I both attacked the Trojans, and cutting through the tribes of the Pelasgians I conquered them without a spear. Neither Tydeus' son nor Odysseus the sacker of cities had enough strength to drive me, audacious as I am, away from the ships. But by increasing spirit and courage in their breasts, I destroyed the armies of the Argives and of the Phrygians. (14.44)
Answer: Agamemnon's dream in *Iliad* 2.[18]

Finally, there are a few enigmatic puns which exploit equivocal words or multiple syntactic possibilities:

Because of light (φῶς), I lost my light; but a man (φὼς) came by and granted me light, for the sake of his feet. (14.47)
Answer: the lantern. This little poem plays on the identically sounding words φῶς, "light," and φώς, "man."[19]

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[15] For other genuine *ainigmata* of this kind see 14.5, 14, 19, 22, 23, 26, 29, 30, 36, 37, 40-43, 45, 53-57, 60-62, 64, 101, 103, 107, 108, 110, 111.

[16] Cf. 14.24. On the charade see Ohlert 220-25; Buchheit 85-86; Berra, "Le nom propre" 270-71; Luz, "What Has it Got" 93-94; Beta, "Poesia enigmistica" 118-21; Beta, *Il labirinto* 131, 313-17.

[17] See also 14.20, 21, 31, 46, 105, 106. On this kind of game with letters see Ohlert 209-14, 218-19; Schultz 109-10; Buchheit 82-85; Lausberg 360, 380; Berra, "Le nom propre" 270; Luz, "What Has it Got" 88-89, 94-95; Beta, "An Enigmatic Literature" 211, 216-28, 234-38; Beta, "A New Byzantine Riddle"; Beta, "A Challenge to the Reader" 15-28; Beta, *Il labirinto* 128-32, 139-40, 306.

[18] See further 14.18, 25, 31, 32, 38, 52, 59, 63, 109. On such erudite mythological *griphoi* see Ohlert 72-78; Schultz 65-66, 103-06; Berra, "Le nom propre" 267-70; Luz, *Technopaignia* 145-46; Luz, "What Has it Got" 91-93; Beta, "Poesia enigmistica" 118, 124; Beta, *Il labirinto* 88-93, 107-09.

[19] See also 14.28 (probably a play on the various meanings of *onos*, "hake," "a kind of cup," and "upper millstone," although other polysemous words, such as *kantharos* and *lychnos*, have also been proposed);

The collection is completed with numerous oracles, excerpted from ancient historical, biographical and mythographical sources.[20] Technically, these are not games of the intellect, although they could conceivably function in such a way for erudite readers of later times. The oracles are included in the book because of their affinity with the enigmas in form and poetic technique. Oracular prophecy (at least as reflected in ancient myth and legend) was often cast in riddling language and made use of the same figures of style as the genuine riddle, namely metaphor, paradox, ambiguity and equivocation.[21] In this respect, the oracles are riddles which the divinity poses to humans for solution; they may thus be considered as a kind of spiritual game of cosmic and trans-existential dimensions, a game that gods choose to play with men. Sometimes the stakes of this game may be all too serious for the mortals involved in it: failure to solve the divine oracular enigma may lead a man to terrible crimes (e.g. Oedipus) or unbearable misfortunes, to loss of his kingdom (e.g. Croesus), military disaster (e.g. the Siphnians and the Spartans in Herodotus, the Athenians during the Sicilian campaign), or even death (e.g. Heracles, Cambyses, Arcesilaus of Cyrene, or Homer and Hesiod in the biographical legends).[22] The Greek gods have a sense of humour, but their humour often proves to be black for us humans.

The materials of the fourteenth book of the *Palatine Anthology*, as already pointed out, have been drawn from sources of considerable antiquity. The miscellaneous structure itself may also have been inspired by earlier models, i.e. more or less similar medleys of epigrammatic exercises belonging to diverse genres, which were put together in remoter times of the past – in late antiquity, or in the early centuries of the Roman Empire, or even during the Hellenistic age.[23] After all, the same principle of mixture and variety is evident also in the theoretical and literary-historical writings of the ancient Greeks about riddles and kindred intellectual games, which can indeed be traced back to the Hellenistic period.

A well-preserved specimen of such grammatological writings is the final part of the tenth book of Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* (448b-459c), which offers an extensive discussion of *griphoi* in Classical Greek literature and culture. Athenaeus' learned banqueters adduce and describe a vast repertoire of mental puzzles and social games, assembled from poetical, theatrical, and scholarly texts.[24] As in the *Palatine Anthology*, a large share is awarded to regular and proper *ainigmata*:

> There is a feminine being which keeps its babies safe in her bosom; they are voiceless but raise a sonorous cry, both over the waves of the sea and across all the dry land, to reach whichever mortals they wish, and the latter are able to hear it even when they are not there; but their sense

14.39 (an equivoque exploiting the two meanings of *nēsos*, "island" and "type of mantle"); Beckby 532; Buffière 174, 176. On this kind of ambiguity in riddles cf. Ohlert 10-12, 183-85; Schultz 109; Pepicello; Green and Pepicello 194-98; Luz, "What Has it Got" 87-88.

[20] *Anth. Pal.* 14.34, 65-100, 102, 112-15, 148-50; cf. above, note 11.

[21] On the connections between riddles and oracles see most notably Ohlert 135-45; Schultz 69, 97-98, 107-08; Buffière 33, 41-43; Colli 47-48, 378-79, 439; Fontenrose 9, 79-83, 113-14, 123-24, 156; Dougherty; Manetti 14-19, 23-31; Pucci 9-18, 59-60, 102-05, 141-44, 152-65, 193-95; Jedrkiewicz 24-25, 42-43; Struck 170-82; Codecà and Orlandini; Hollmann 94-117; Maurizio 107-17; Naerebout and Beerden; Beta, "Oracles and Riddles"; Beta, *Il labirinto* 14-17, 146-219.

[22] For these exemplary cases see Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus* 787-815; *Trachiniae* 1159-73; Herodotus 1.53-56, 1.66, 1.90-91, 3.57-58, 3.64, 4.163-64; Pausanias 8.11.12; *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* 5, 13-14, 18 West.

[23] In Byzantium there may have been collections of riddles which circulated before and independently of Cephalas and the Palatine Codex; see Beckby 172; Maltomini, *Tradizione* 191-93; Beta, *Il labirinto* 137. On Classical and Hellenistic collections in particular see Kwapisz; cf. Della Bona 176.

[24] On the mixture of puzzle genres in this book cf. Berra, "Le nom propre" 262.

of hearing is deaf. . . . The feminine being is the epistle, and she carries around inside her the letters, as though her babies. These are voiceless but speak to anyone they desire who is far away. Yet if another man happens to be standing near the one who is reading, he will not hear anything. (450e-451b, Antiphanes fr. 194 Kassel-Austin)

There are two sisters; one of them gives birth to the other, and after giving birth, she herself is brought forth by the other one. (451f-452a, Theodectas fr. 4 Snell-Kannicht)[25]

But the list also comprises cryptic questions about mythology:

"I was born in Clearland, and the salt waters have my native country in their embrace; my mother is the daughter of number." Clearland means Delos, which is surrounded by the sea, and the mother is Leto, who was daughter of Koios; the Macedonians call the number *koios*. (455d-e)

Word puzzles based on homonymy:

An age-old riddle, based on logical concepts and most closely associated with the true nature of riddling, is the following: . . . "What is the same in the heavens and on earth and in the sea?" This latter puzzle is based on homonymy; for the bear, the snake, the eagle, and the dog are found in the heavens and on earth and in the sea. (453b)[26]

Tests of memory and recollection of Homeric or other poetic verses which observe particular rules – for instance, verses which begin or end with a given letter (*Buchstabenverse*), or verses whose first and last syllables combine to create an existing word (*Silbenverse*):

To recite a Homeric verse which starts with *alpha* and finishes with the same letter . . . and again iambic verses of the same kind . . . ; Homeric verses beginning and ending with *epsilon* . . . and similar iambic lines . . . ; Homeric verses beginning and ending with *ēta* . . . and iambic lines . . . ; Homeric verses beginning and ending with *iota* . . . or with *sigma* . . . or with *ōmega* . . . ; and also adduce Homeric verses without *sigma* . . . ; and again Homeric verses whose first and last syllable make up a proper name . . . . There are also other Homeric verses, whose first and last syllable together produce the names of utensils . . . ; others whose beginning and end, in combination, make up something edible. . . . (458a-f)[27]

Kennings and long-winded poetic circumlocutions found in high-style epic, dithyrambic, and tragic cantos or in comic parodies of such texts:

The sweat of the oak nurtures me, and the rod that is long like a bush, and the mantle that is spun of Egyptian flax, the fetter catching the beast. (451d-e, Ion of Chios fr. 40 Snell-Kannicht)

(A.) What now? When I want to tell you about the pot, should I say "pot" or the hollow-bodied hull forged by the whirl of the wheel, fashioned of earth, baked under another roof of its mother,

[25] See further Athenaeus 448f (Antiphanes fr. 122 Kassel-Austin), 449d-450e (Alexis fr. 242, Eubulus fr. 106, Antiphanes fr. 192 Kassel-Austin), 451e-f (Theodectas fr. 18 Snell-Kannicht), 452b-d, 453b-c, 456b (Asclepiades of Tragilus, *Tragoidoumena*, *FGrHist* 12 F 7a), 457a-c.

[26] In ancient Greek *arktos* ("bear"), *ophis* ("snake"), *aietos* ("eagle"), and *kyōn* ("dog") are used as names of constellations, animals, and sea creatures. See Ohlert 105-07; Schultz 94; Monda, "Enigmi" 107; Monda, "Beyond the Boundary" 140; Beta, *Il labirinto* 98-99, 112-13, 259; and below, section 4 and note 103.

[27] On such games of poetic memory cf. Ohlert 75-77; Wehrli 76; Collins 132-34; Guichard 286, 288-90; Luz, *Technopaignia* 79-99, 233-34, 365.

and bearing in its womb the stewed milk-nurtured tender-fleshed forms of the new-born flock? (B.) Goodness! You'll be the death of me if you do not say quite intelligibly "a pot of meat." (A.) Right you are! And the flowing curd of the bleating goats, mixed with the streams of the tawny bee, deposited on the ample covering of the maiden daughter of chaste Demeter, luxuriating in innumerable delicate-woven veils, or should I say plainly to you "a cake"? (B.) A cake, this is what I prefer. (A.) And the sweat of the Bromiad fount? (B.) Cut it short and say "wine." (A.) The dewy stream of the Nymphs? (B.) Omit this and say "water." (449b-c, Antiphanes fr. 55 Kassel-Austin)[28]

Enigmatic oracles:

Plato, in his comedy *Adonis*, says that an oracle was given to Cinyras about his son Adonis. These are the words: "Cinyras, king of the Cypriots, the hairy-arsed people, a boy was born to you, the fairest and most admirable of all men. But two divinities will destroy him: a goddess driven with secret rowing strokes, and a god driving." He means Aphrodite and Dionysus, because both of them were in love with Adonis. (456b, Plato Comicus fr. 3 Kassel-Austin)

We also find riddles of the superlative, i.e. questions about an object which possesses a certain quality to the highest degree. This is an age-old kind of puzzle, extremely popular in many ancient civilizations, as well as in the international folk tradition:

Diphilus, in his play *Theseus*, says that three Samian girls were once playing with riddles while drinking at the festival of the Adonia. They propounded the following riddle among themselves: What is the strongest of all? So one of them answered: "Iron," and proved her point by arguing that men can dig and cut everything with iron and generally use it for every purpose. After she was applauded, the second girl took over and claimed that the blacksmith possesses much greater strength: because he, in performing his task, can bend the hardest iron, soften it, and do anything he pleases with it. Finally, the third wench declared that the penis is actually the strongest of all: as she explained, even the blacksmith groans when he is sodomized by it. (451b-c, Diphilus fr. 49 Kassel-Austin)[29]

Further, alphabetic games and puzzles with letters:

Euripides, in his tragedy *Theseus*, composed the speech about alphabet letters. In this play there is an illiterate herdsman who plainly describes an inscription of the name of Theseus, as follows: "I am not knowledgeable in letters, but I shall tell you their shapes, as clear indications. First there is a circle, as though measured by compasses; this has a prominent mark in the middle. The second one has, to begin with, two strokes, and these are kept asunder by another stroke in their middle. The third is like a curl of hair rolled around; the fourth has again one stroke standing up, and three cross-lines are propped against it. The fifth one is not easy to describe: there are two lines which stand apart, and both of them run together into one base. As for the last letter, it is similar to the third one." (454b-c, Euripides fr. 382 Kannicht)

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[28] See also Athenaeus 451c-d (Achaeus fr. 19 Snell-Kannicht), 455e-456a (Antiphanes fr. 51, Anaxandrides fr. 6, Timocles fr. 13 Kassel-Austin), 456c-457a (Chamaeleon fr. 37 Martano, Simonides fr. 69-70 Diehl); Beta, *Il labirinto* 25-29, 47-48, 60. On the riddling language of high-flown (especially dithyrambic) poetry and on its parody in comic drama see Ohlert 192-94; Nesselrath 241-66; Pütz 195-99; Dobrov; LeVen; Monda, "Enigmi" 115-19; Beta, *Il labirinto* 136-37.

[29] On the riddles of the superlative see Ohlert 107-16; Schultz 101, 110-11; Hess 12-14; Vischer 40-42; Burkert 169-71; Jedrkiewicz 43-46; Hansen 415-24; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 126-28; Konstantakos, "Amasis" 20-22; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 260-61, 275-76; West, *Indo-European* 361-62; Beta, *Il labirinto* 52-53, 61, 102-03.

The Most Ancient "Puzzle Magazines"
Ioannis M. Konstantakos

On the tomb of the sophist Thrasymachus in Chalcedon the following epigram was inscribed: "My name, *theta, rho, alpha, san, ypsilon, mu, alpha, chi, omicron, san*; my homeland was Chalcedon; and my art was wisdom." (454f, anonymous epigram CXXIV Page)[30]

Athenaeus' list also includes types of cryptic speech used not for entertainment but in serious circumstances; for example, Pythagorean precepts (otherwise known as *akousmata* or *symbola*) with allegorical sense, which were used by Pythagoras and his disciples as a means to convey the ethical and cosmological teachings of their school in a secret manner:

"Eat not the heart," meaning to practice resistance to grief. "Poke not the fire with a knife," meaning not to quarrel with an angry man; for anger is fire, and quarrelling is a knife. "Step not over the yoke," meaning to avoid and loath all kinds of greed and seek for equality. "Travel not by the main roads," meaning not to follow the opinion of the many, for every man answers at random, as it happens to please him; but one should go on the straight road, using reason as one's guide. "Sit not on a bushel measure," meaning not to consider only the things of today, but always envisage those of tomorrow. (452d-e)[31]

Mention is also made of codification methods and coded messages sent in war from one allied army to another, so as to transmit important strategic information without risking interception by the enemy. This is one of the most earnest and crucial applications of enigmatic discourse in historical circumstances:

When the Arcadians were besieging Cromnus (a small town situated near Megalopolis), Hippodamus the Laconian, one of the men under siege, addressed the messenger who had come to them from the Lacedaemonians and revealed to him the situation of the besieged in the form of a riddle: "Report to mother that the little woman imprisoned in the temple of Apollo must be liberated within ten days; for if these days pass, she will no longer be capable of liberation." Through this invention he plainly communicated his message. Namely, this figure in the temple of Apollo is a painted image of Famine in the likeness of a woman, next to the god's throne. It thus became clear to all that the besieged men were able to endure only ten days due to the famine. (452a-b, Callisthenes, *FGrHist* 124 F 13)[32]

Apart from these genres, Athenaeus refers to poetic exercises of considerable virtuosity, which recall post-modern literary games, such as those of Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau, and the Oulipo group. Already Archaic lyric poets, such as Lasus of Hermione, are said to have composed odes and hymns in which they avoided the letter *sigma* throughout; these are

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[30] On this kind of letter puzzle see Ohlert 212-18; Schultz 111-12; Harvey 603-04; Xanthakis-Karamanos 100-02; Monda, "Gli indovinelli di Teodette" 39-44; Berra, "Le nom propre" 271; further Stoneman 166-67; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 261; Monda, "Enigmi" 99-103, 121; Bevilacqua and Ricci 130-31. See also Athenaeus 454d-f, citing similar passages (Agathon fr. 4 and Theodectas fr. 6 Snell-Kannicht, Sophocles fr. 121 Radt); and 453c-454a, regarding Callias' *Spectacle of Letters* (*grammatikē theōria*), which involved various shows and plays with letters of the alphabet; cf. Pöhlmann; Rosen, "Comedy and Confusion"; Ruijgh; Smith; Voutyras.

[31] On the enigmatic commandments of the Pythagoreans see Burkert 166-92; Struck 97-107, 192-202; and Berra, "Pythagoras' Riddles," who comments extensively on the affinity of the *akousmata* with riddles. Cf. also Ohlert 109-10, 126-29; Della Bona 179-80; Beta, *Il labirinto* 36-38, 43.

[32] In this case the coded message employs objects and visual symbols and is thus akin to the "picture-riddle"; see above, section 1 and note 2, and cf. Ohlert 120; Beta, *Il labirinto* 301-02. This ancient practice of including codified war messages under the general category of riddles still reverberated in the twentieth century: the famous cipher machines used by the Germans before and during World War II for the production of encrypted military messages were called *Enigma*. Cf. Calboli 21-25.

the oldest examples of the literary artifice now called a *lipogram*, i.e. a constrained literary game of composing extensive texts in which a certain letter of the alphabet is completely absent. Further, a minor Hellenistic author, Castorion of Soli, wrote an iambic hymn to Pan in a form of versification which may be termed *permutative verse*: in every iambic trimeter line of the poem, each metron of the verse coincided with a single word or a semantic unit; in this way, the order of the words or phrase units in every line could be reversed or altered without change of the overall meaning.[33] These are intellectual games of a very demanding and complex nature, artifices of subtle craftsmanship, which can be practiced only by accomplished masters of poetic language. At this level, the playful *paidia* converges with the literary artist's dedicated *spoudē*.[34]

Athenaeus was not the first ancient scholar to bring together so many different varieties of verbal games within a single treatise. One of the main sources for the relevant portion of the *Deipnosophistae* was the work *On Riddles* (*Peri griphōn*, in at least two books) by Clearchus of Soli, a Peripatetic polymath and pupil of Aristotle, who wrote at the beginning of the Hellenistic age.[35] Athenaeus cites Clearchus' work (as well as his related treatise *Peri paroimiōn*, *On Proverbs*) many times and with regard to diverse types of problem, such as sympotic games of memory and poetic citation:

> After the first player has said a hexameter or iambic verse from a certain text, each one in turn must recite the next verse. And if one explicates the gist of a poetic passage, another should answer him with a quotation from another poet, who has spoken on the same subject. Further, each one in turn must cite an iambic verse. In addition, each player must pronounce a metrical verse containing as many syllables as it is prescribed, or as many as are in accordance with the theory of letters and syllables. (fr. 63, I Wehrli, fr. 77 Taifacos, Athenaeus 457e)[36]

Linguistic tests of word search and proficiency:

> Letter riddles, such as to state the name of a fish or a plant beginning with *a*; similarly, when a word is required which has or has not a certain letter, like the so-called "asigmatic riddles." . . . Syllable riddles, such as to say any word of a given metrical scheme which begins with *ba-*, for example *basileus* ("king"), or which ends in -*nax*, like Callianax, or which has *leōn* ("lion") at its leading position, like Leonides, or conversely at its end, like Thrasyleon. Noun riddles, such as to give simple or compound nouns of two syllables, which pertain to the solemn style or, contrariwise, to the humble style; or names without a god, like Cleonymus, or names which contain a god, like Dionysius, and in this case either only one god or more of them, like Hermaphroditus;

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[33] Athenaeus 448d, 454f-455c (from Clearchus fr. 86 and 88 Wehrli, fr. 102a and 114-15 Taifacos, on which see also below, and Heracleides of Pontus fr. 113 Schütrumpf); Lasus 702, 704 Page; Castorion fr. 310 Lloyd-Jones-Parsons. On these elaborate literary games see Ohlert 3-5, 240-41; Privitera 29-32; Wehrli 77; Bing; Clayman 69, 74-75; D'Angour; Brussich 77-80; Porter; Taifacos 365-66; Guichard 286-89; Magnelli; Luz, *Technopaignia* 142-43, 200-11, 223-45, 355-74; Kwapisz 154-64; Bartol; on their affinity with the post-modern experiments of the Oulipo cf. Perec.

[34] Cf. Wehrli 75; Guichard 286; Luz, *Technopaignia* 232-34, 239-40, 244-45.

[35] Concerning Clearchus' treatise, its contents, and its use by Athenaeus, see Ohlert 18-19, 75-78; Wehrli 68-69, 74-78; Rosen, "Comedy and Confusion" 149-51, 159-66; Ruijgh 268-69, 279-86, 329-34; Monda, "Gli indovinelli di Teodette" 34-36; Smith; Porter 2-5; Taifacos xix-xx, xlvi-xlvii, 356-66; Guichard; Luz, *Technopaignia* 139-46, 227-34, 239, 245; Kwapisz 153-54; Beta, "Gli enigmi simposiali" 69-72; Beta, *Il labirinto* 50-51, 58-59, 62-63, 96.

[36] See also Clearchus fr. 90 Wehrli (fr. 107-08 Taifacos, Athenaeus 4a-b): for every food item of the menu, an appropriate verse is cited from Homeric epic or Euripidean tragedy. On this kind of game see Ohlert 77-78; Wehrli 76; Collins 129-32; Taifacos 360-62; Della Bona 175; Beta, "Gli enigmi simposiali" 71-72.

or names beginning with Zeus, like Diocles, or with Hermes, like Hermodorus; or others that end in *-nicus*. (fr. 86 Wehrli, fr. 102a Taifacos, Athenaeus 448c-e)[37]

Quizzes of knowledge concerning various disciplines, from gastronomy to geography, mythology, and Homeric lore:

The people now ask each other which form of sexual posture is most delightful, or which fish has the best flavour, or which one is in its prime, and also which fish is to be eaten *par excellence* after the rising of Arcturus or of the Pleiades or of the Dog-Star. (fr. 63, I Wehrli, fr. 77 Taifacos, Athenaeus 457d)[38]

Similarly, they must tell the name of every leader of the men attacking Troy or every leader of the Trojans. Also, one will tell the name of a city in Asia beginning with a given letter, while the next player must name a city of Europe, and the rest will take turns in finding a Greek or a foreign city, as it is prescribed. (fr. 63, I Wehrli, fr. 77 Taifacos, Athenaeus 457e-f)[39]

Poetic exercises and literary games:

Hence Pindar composed an ode against the letter *sigma*, as though proposing a kind of riddle in lyric composition (fr. 86 Wehrli, fr. 102a Taifacos, Athenaeus 448d). . . . Pindar wrote the following with regard to the ode composed without a *sigma* in it, as though a kind of riddle set forth in lyric composition (to quote the same Clearchus), because many objected to this on account of the impossibility of avoiding the letter *sigma* and of its being disapproved of: "Formerly the song crept along stretched like a rope, and the letter *s* was discredited by men." One might take note of this in answer to those who question the authenticity of the asigmatic ode by Lasus of Hermione, entitled *The Centaurs*. (fr. 88 Wehrli, fr. 115-16 Taifacos, Athenaeus 455b-c)

The poem by Castorion of Soli in honour of Pan, as Clearchus notes, is of this sort: each one of the metrical feet consists of a whole word and is so arranged that all the other feet could either precede it or follow it. . . . Now, in whichever order you place each one of these metrical feet, the metrical structure will not change. For example: *σὲ τὸν βολαῖς νιφοκτύποις δυσχείμερον / νιφοκτύποις σὲ τὸν βολαῖς δυσχείμερον*. In addition, each metrical foot contains eleven letters. It is also possible to compose in a different manner, so that from one verse you may produce more. For example, say: *μέτρον φράσον μοι τῶν ποδῶν μέτρον λαβών / λαβὼν μέτρον μοι τῶν ποδῶν μέτρον φράσον*. (fr. 88 Wehrli, fr. 114 Taifacos, Athenaeus 454f-455b)

And, unavoidably, proper *ainigmata* of popular diffusion:

The riddle of Panarces is of the same kind, as noted by Clearchus in his treatise *On Riddles*: namely, that "a man and not a man hit a bird and not a bird, perched on a wood and not a wood, with a stone and not a stone." The answer to these things is a eunuch, a bat, a fennel, and a pumice. (fr. 94 Wehrli, fr. 111a Taifacos, Athenaeus 452c)[40]

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[37] See also fr. 87 Wehrli, fr. 109 Taifacos, Athenaeus 648f-649a. Cf. Ohlert 76-77; Merkelbach 123-24; Wehrli 76; Rosen, "Comedy and Confusion" 162-64; Taifacos 357-58; Berra, "Le nom propre" 272; Guichard 287-89; Luz, *Technopaignia* 140-42; Beta, "Gli enigmi simposiali" 70-72; Beta, *Il labirinto* 58-59, 62.
[38] On such quizzes of natural history cf. Flashar 298-316, 359-70; Taub; Beta, *Il labirinto* 96, 106; and Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 259-60 with further references.
[39] Cf. above, note 18, and also Cameron, *Callimachus* 82; Collins 131-32; Luz, *Technopaignia* 143.
[40] Cf. Clearchus fr. 95a-b Wehrli (fr. 111b Taifacos, from the Scholia on Plato, *Republic* 479c, and Eustathius on the *Iliad* 713.10ff.), citing a fuller form of the enigma: "There is a riddle that a man and not a man, seeing and not seeing a bird and not a bird, perched and not perched on a wood and not a wood, hit it and hit it not with a stone and not a stone." On this celebrated riddle of Panarces, which was

Clearchus even includes under the category of *griphoi* some mimic performances, which were in essence types of stand-up comedy based on linguistic jokes and equivocal word-play.

> Like Theodectas, as noted by Clearchus, Dromeas of Cos and Aristonymus the cithara-player used to play at riddles, and so did also Cleon, the so-called "flute-mime," who was the best actor of Italian mimes and performed without a mask. . . . He was emulated by Ischomachus the herald, who initially performed his impersonations before people standing around him in a circle; and when he became famous, he changed venue and began to act his mimes among the jongleurs. This is the kind of *griphoi* that they presented: A certain countryman had stuffed himself too much and was suffering. The doctor asked him if he had not eaten to the point of vomiting, but he answered: "Of course not! Only to the point of filling my belly." A beggar woman had a pain in the stomach, and the doctor asked her if perhaps she carried something in her belly (i.e. she was pregnant). "How could this be," she answered, "when I have not eaten for three days now?" (fr. 93 Wehrli, fr. 113 Taifacos, Athenaeus 452e-453a)[41]

These were apparently the earliest forerunners of present-day televised shows and panel games, in which the competitive accomplishment of various exercises, including the solution of riddles and puzzles, becomes similarly a performed act.

As is evident, Clearchus' treatise assembled many diverse genres of intellectual pastimes under the broad heading of *griphoi* – as many genres as Athenaeus included in his multi-collective book, if not even more of them. Of course, Clearchus may have been more systematic and orderly in the assortment of his material than the chaotic encyclopedist of Naucratis – although it is impossible to ascertain this on the basis of the scant surviving fragments of his treatise.[42] In any case, it is clear that already in the Peripatetic school, which practically initiated serious and sustained research into the forms of folk wisdom, popular expression and entertainment,[43] the term *griphoi* was used as an umbrella for an enormous range of intellectual games; all these games were perceived as kindred and closely related constructs, as manifestations of the same playful activity of the spirit.

At the dawn of the Hellenistic age, Clearchus essentially invented the structure and composition of the modern puzzle magazine. If he lived today, he could have become a successful publisher in the popular press.

3. Miscellanies of Riddles in Narrative Frame: The *Story of Ahiqar*

Long before Clearchus and the Peripatetic treatises, there was another literary form which served as a frame for the collection of many and multifarious types of mental games: this was

circulating even in the mouths of children (Plato, *Republic* 479b-c), see Benfey 213-16; Ohlert 52-53; Schultz 96-97; West, *Indo-European* 368-70; Taifacos 363; Luz, *Technopaignia* 143-44; Cobetto Ghiggia 94; Beta, "Gli enigmi simposiali" 73; Beta, *Il labirinto* 49-50, 60.

[41] Cf. also fr. 92 Wehrli (fr. 104 Taifacos, Athenaeus 620c) about a certain rhapsode, Simonides of Zacynthus, who recited Archilochus' poems in the theatre, sitting on a stool. Possibly the selected poems were of enigmatic style or of allegorical content (e.g. Archilochus fr. 185 West, which uses an animal parable with symbolic meaning); but the emphasis is on the very act of the public performance of these poems, which is in itself categorized as a form of *griphos*. Cf. Ohlert 14-17; Wehrli 77-78; Taifacos 358-59, 364; Potamiti 136, 151-52.

[42] Cf. Wehrli 75; Rosen, "Comedy and Confusion" 162-63.

[43] On the Peripatetics' interest and researches into the forms of popular lore and wisdom see the extensive discussion of Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος II 251-70, with further references; see also Pfeiffer 83-84; Wehrli 68-78; Kindstrand; Matelli; Maltomini, "Sulla trasmissione" 1-14; Dorandi, "Il Περὶ παροιμιῶν"; Dorandi, "Un'opera di Clearco"; Taifacos xliv-xlvii, 331-66; Tsitsiridis 5-8, 18-19.

narrative, the mythopoeic plot, the narration of a story in the course of which the characters propose or solve a series of puzzles from various genres.[44] More specifically, the old legendary theme of the spiritual contest between great sages (masters of wisdom, poets, sacred kings, or other powerful intellectual figures) provided the best opportunity for a narrative accumulation or an anthology of riddles within a fictional context. The roots of this particular theme can be traced back to the earliest phases of the great literary cultures of the ancient Near East, especially ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. Intellectual competitions, in which the wise opponents exchange riddles of one or the other type, are already described in a Sumerian epic of the late third millennium B.C. (*Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*) and in Egyptian novellas of the second and first millennium (*The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre*, the demotic *Romance of Setne Khaemwaset*, the legendarium of Pharaoh Amasis).[45] However, it was only after the Neo-Assyrian period, roughly from the sixth century B.C. onwards, that this form of narrative started being used in West Asia as a receptacle fit to accommodate miscellaneous puzzles of many different genres.

This happens in the famous *Story of Ahiqar*, a work originally composed in Aramaic, probably in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C., and originating from Northern Mesopotamia. The earliest extant form of this text survives in a very fragmentary state on a papyrus of the fifth century B.C., which was unearthed at Elephantine, in Upper Egypt, among the ruins of a military colony of Jewish mercenaries. Very soon the work became exceedingly popular all over the Near Eastern world and was translated in many local languages. At least since the Hellenistic period, an expanded, more romance-like and adventurous version of the narrative had been developed; this version preserved the same essential storyline as the ancient text of Elephantine, but it included several novelistic amplifications, additional episodes, and graphic details. It was this latter, extended form that influenced the authors of important novelistic texts of the Hellenistic and Imperial age, such as the Biblical *Book of Tobit* and the Greek *Life of Aesop*. Nowadays, the augmented redaction of the tale is known through a great number of translations in various languages of the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The earliest of these are the Syriac and the Armenian recensions, which ultimately go back to Roman times.[46]

The expanded form of *Ahiqar* contains a prolonged riddle contest between two rival monarchs, the king of Assyria and the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Pharaoh challenges his Assyrian

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[44] On the widespread, old, and international tradition of tales about riddling and clever riddle-solvers (*riddle tales* or *Märchen von klugen Rätsellösern*) see the studies of Benfey 164-223; Anderson; De Vries; Goldberg; Bauman.

[45] Stories of the same type also infiltrated into the traditions of ancient Israel (tales about Solomon and his contests with the Queen of Sheba or with Hiram of Tyre), Sasanian Iran (the cycle of legends about Buzurgmihr, the wise vizier of Khusrau I), and ancient India. Concerning all these narratives, and generally the very ancient and international dissemination of this legendary theme, see my own literary-historical contributions: Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος I 65-141; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle"; Konstantakos, "Ὁ Σολομών ἀγωνιστής"; Konstantakos, "Amasis." See also Cosquin 62-68; Benfey 163-205; Chastel 34-37; Krappe; Perry 28-32; La Penna 291-300; Grottanelli, "Aesop in Babylon" 560, 568-69; Grottanelli, "Introduzione" 49-51, 75-79; Goldberg 25-41, 157-72.

[46] On the textual tradition of *Ahiqar*, the history of the text, and its various versions see Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος I 19-36, III 59-85 and Contini, "Introduzione," both with further references. On the formation, narrative material, and diffusion of this work in antiquity see Denis 993-1037; Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος I-III; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche* 1-51; and the many contributions included in Contini and Grottanelli. The Aramaic text of Elephantine is edited and translated in Porten and Yardeni 24-53; see also Lindenberger; Grelot; Contini, "Il testo aramaico"; Niehr; and cf. Kottsieper and Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche* (only the sayings). For the later recensions (Syriac, Armenian, Arabic, Neo-Aramaic, Slavonic, Ethiopic) see Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis; Lidzbarski 1-41; Pennacchietti; Schneider; Lusini. The text of the relevant portion of the Greek *Life of Aesop* (chapters 101-23) can be found in Ferrari 214-41 and Papathomopoulos 200-25.

enemy to an intellectual competition, on condition that the loser will become the winner's vassal and pay annual tribute to the winner's realm. The Assyrian ruler then sends to Egypt his wise vizier, Ahiqar, who successfully responds to all the problems which the Pharaoh propounds to him over a series of days. Thus, in the end, Ahiqar wins the spiritual contest and gains the prize on behalf of his king. This episode of Ahiqar's visit to Egypt and his long confrontation with the Pharaoh functions as a framework for a series of seven different puzzles (all of them "riddles" in the broader sense),[47] which are proposed by the Egyptian sovereign and brilliantly solved by the wise hero.

Initially, the Pharaoh sends a letter to the Assyrian king and proposes him the first problem, by means of which the intellectual battle is inaugurated. This problem belongs to the kind of puzzle that the Greeks called *adynaton*: a physical impossibility, contrary to the laws of nature, which is assigned to the player as a task to fulfil in reality. In this case, the Egyptian king asks his Assyrian opponent to dispatch to Egypt a wise man who will be capable of building a castle in mid-air, between heaven and earth. Ahiqar, the Assyrian monarch's emissary, invalidates the Pharaoh's unrealizable demand with a combination of technical measures and an equally impossible counter-requirement (an *anti-adynaton*). He places little boys on the backs of well-trained eagles and makes the birds rise up in the air; then the boys shout from above for bricks, clay, and building materials, so that they may construct the castle. Naturally, the Pharaoh's people are incapable of carrying all this stuff up to the flying boys. Thus, the responsibility for the failure of fulfilling the *adynaton* is shifted onto the Pharaoh and his entourage.[48] If the castle cannot be built, it is the Egyptians' fault![49]

The Egyptian ruler then sets to Ahiqar a series of "simile riddles" or questions of comparison. This kind of game was keenly played also in Classical Greek symposia, as attested by Aristophanes' *Wasps* 1308-13 (see below, chapter 4) and other ancient sources. The Greeks called the game *eikasmos* or *eikazein* ("make comparisons or similes"). The goal of this jocose pursuit is to find the most suitable comparison for a given object of peculiar appearance or qualities. In essence, the *eikasmos* is a reversed conundrum, a proper *ainigma* turned inside out. In a genuine enigma the baffling metaphorical description of an object is given as a problem, and the solver is called to name the thing itself; conversely, in the *eikazein* the object is proposed as the problem and the addressee is required to find an apt simile for it, i.e. a suitable metaphorical circumlocution.[50]

In the *Story of Ahiqar* the object of the *eikasmos* riddle is the royal court itself. The Pharaoh, accompanied by his courtiers, makes a sequence of appearances before the hero, and each time they are dressed in different fabrics and colours. Every time the king asks Ahiqar: "What am

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[47] Cf. Beta, *Il labirinto* 33-34. For the episodes of the intellectual contest in the later recensions of *Ahiqar* see Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 16-21, 43-50, 78-82, 114-22, 144-55 (Slavonic, Armenian, Syriac, Arabic); Lidzbarski 20-35 (Neo-Aramaic); Pennacchietti 212-19 (Syriac); Schneider 149-52 and Lusini 261-66 (Ethiopic); Ferrari 218-23, 226-41 and Papathomopoulos 202-09, 212-25 (Greek *Life of Aesop*). For exhaustive analysis cf. Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος I 39-53, III 157-260.

[48] See Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 16-19, 43-47, 78-80, 114-17, 120, 144-45, 147-48, 152-53; Lidzbarski 20-26, 31-32; Pennacchietti 212-14, 216-17; Schneider 149-50; Lusini 261-64; Ferrari 218-23, 226-27, 232-33; Papathomopoulos 202-09, 212-13, 216-17.

[49] On the *adynaton*/physical impossibility as a type of puzzle, and on the various ways of solution, see Radermacher, "Motiv" 535-42; Schultz 67-68, 76-77, 110; Hansen 69-75, 97-114, 151-66, 256-57, 471; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 120-26; Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος I 43-45, 49-52, III 227-35.

[50] Cf. the remarks of Cook 360-62 on the relations between riddle and simile. On simile riddles and the *eikasmos* game see Ohlert 64; Kassel; Fraenkel 113-17, 337-38, 408-09; Monaco 12-41, 50-60, 71-90, 94-95, 107-12; De Martino and Vox 1093-1112; Jedrkiewicz 48-49; Pütz 48, 72, 85, 98, 143, 192; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 128-30; Konstantakos, Ἀκίχαρος I 40-41, III 189-227.

I and my noblemen like?" The wise man must find an appropriate simile for the spectacle. For example, the Egyptian monarch is dressed in red, his entourage in bright white, and Ahiqar compares them to the sun and its rays. Or the Pharaoh wears a rich brocade or velvet dress, his courtiers put on garments of various different colours, and the hero likens them to the spring month and its flowers.[51]

The third problem is a different species of *adynaton*, which takes the form not of an unattainable task but of a paradoxical proposition. As the Pharaoh claims, when the Assyrian king's stallion neighs in Nineveh, the mares of Egypt supposedly hear it and suffer a miscarriage. In response, the clever hero catches a cat, a sacred animal for the Egyptians, and gives it a good thrashing. When the people of the land complain for this sacrilege, Ahiqar insists that this particular cat has done him grave wrong: during the previous night it went to Assyria, killed Ahiqar's fine cock, and returned to Egypt again.[52] In this way, the wise man counterbalances the Pharaoh's paradox with an equally absurd statement, based again on an impossibility of space. If the sound of a horse can travel thousands of miles and be heard from Assyria to Egypt, what would prevent a cat from covering the same distance overnight?[53]

The Pharaoh does not give up, though. He continues by propounding a proper *ainigma* about the year and its temporal subdivisions: there is a column in a temple, and on top of the column twelve trees, and each tree carries thirty wheels, and two cables are twined around every wheel, one white and one black. This symbolizes the year with its twelve months, the thirty days of each month, and the succession of luminous day and dark night.[54] Analogous enigmas concerning the year and its parts were popular in all ancient traditions, from the Greek epigrams of Cleobulus to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and the mythology of Iran.[55]

The next puzzle in this lengthy series is an intellectual pitfall, of the type that is usually termed *unanswerable question*: that is, a question which cannot be answered by anyone except the very person who is asking it, because the solution is fully dependent on the asker's own will. The Pharaoh requires Ahiqar to state a thing which the Egyptian king himself and his courtiers have never heard of. The trap is obvious: whatever Ahiqar says, his opponents are perfectly capable of claiming that they have already heard it before – and no one is in a position to check their veracity. The only way to deal with such a sophism is to turn it against the asker himself, so as to trap the trickster into his own cunning.[56] Therefore, Ahiqar writes a fake letter which attests an enormous monetary loan purportedly given by the Assyrian king to Egypt. If the Pharaoh admits that he has heard of this document, he will be obliged to pay back the vast

[51] See Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 19, 47-48, 117-19, 150-51; Lidzbarski 27-29; Pennacchietti 214-16; Schneider 151; Lusini 265-66; Ferrari 228-33; Papathomopoulos 212-17.

[52] See Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 20, 49, 80-81, 120-21, 153-54; Lidzbarski 32-33; Pennacchietti 217; Schneider 151; Lusini 265; Ferrari 232-35; Papathomopoulos 218-19.

[53] On this particular variation of the *adynaton*, the impossible and paradoxical sophism, see Ohlert 12-13, 72; Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 121-22; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* I 45-48, III 235-37.

[54] See Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 20, 49, 81, 121; Lidzbarski 33; Pennacchietti 217-18; Ferrari 234-37; Papathomopoulos 220-21.

[55] On the riddles of the year and their international diffusion since ancient times see the fundamental comparative studies of Aarne 74-178 and Taylor, *English Riddles* 370-73, 411-21. See also Windisch; Ohlert 94-95; Schultz 76, 82; Goldberg 30, 100-02, 161; Konstantakos, "Amasis" 15; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* I 48-49, III 237-46; West, *Indo-European* 370-72; Beta, *Il labirinto* 30-33, 36, 41-43.

[56] On the unanswerable question see Konstantakos, "Το αποστομωτικό ερώτημα"; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* I 41-43, III 247-50. Note also a particular species of this genre, in which the solution depends on secret knowledge possessed only by the propounder of the riddle (e.g. Samson's enigma in the book of *Judges* 14.8-18; Rumpelstiltskin's "What is my name?"). See Ohlert 57-60; Abrahams 183-86; Monda, "Introduzione" 10; Luz, "What Has it Got" 83, 98-99; Beta, *Il labirinto* 71-74, 132-33.

amount of money, and will thus lose more than he hopes to gain by winning the riddle contest.[57]

The competition is completed with two more *adynata*: Ahiqar is required to weave five ropes of sand and to sew and stitch together the pieces of a broken millstone.[58] Once again the clever hero responds with appropriate counter-impossibilities, which transfer the onus of the unachievable task to the Pharaoh: he asks for one rope of sand to be brought from the Pharaonic treasury, so as to serve as model for the fabrication of the new ropes; he requires some stone threads, cut from another millstone, so as to stitch and join together the parts of the broken one. These two problems reproduce the type of impossible task already exemplified in the beginning, with the building of the castle in the air. Possibly they did not belong to the authentic form of the riddle contest but were secondary accretions added at a later stage.[59] If this is true, then the original structure of the intellectual competition of *Ahiqar* comprised five riddles, each one representing a different kind of mental test.

The *Story of Ahiqar* thus incorporates a variety of intellectual puzzles into a narrative storyline; it transforms a miscellany of *griphoi* into a plot, a lengthy episode within the protagonist's adventures. In this novelistic context, the mixture of genres is partly due to the necessity of maintaining the interest of the readers and developing suspense. If the author had used only a single problem of a certain kind, the riddle contest would have ended too quickly, and thus the plot would have been deprived of considerable agonistic tension and narrative enthralment.

This is obvious, for example, in the old Egyptian novella known as *The Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre*, which survives on a papyrus of the late thirteenth century B.C. The Hyksos ruler Apophis and his courtiers challenge the enemy Egyptian monarch, Seqenenre of Thebes, with a single provocative problem, a paradoxical sophism quite similar to the second type of *adynaton* in *Ahiqar*: "the noise of the hippopotami in the lagoon of Thebes is heard all the way to the Hyksos capital in the north and disturbs King Apophis' sleep." Seqenenre summons the council of his officials in order to deal with this absurdity.[60] The simple structure of this brief narrative work seems too plain and unsatisfactory by comparison to later and more sophisticated romances.

On the other hand, if the contest of *Ahiqar* were prolonged by accumulating riddles of the exact same kind one after the other, the narrative would run the risk of repetitiveness and dullness. This phenomenon is indeed perceptible in the intellectual competitions incorporated in some oriental epic poems, which are characterized by a slothful narrative flow and monotonous lack of variation. For example, in the age-old Sumerian epic *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta*, from the end of the third millennium B.C., the Sumerian king Enmerkar of Uruk solves

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[57] See Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 49-50, 119-20, 152; Lidzbarski 30-31; Pennacchietti 216; Ferrari 236-39; Papathomopoulos 220-23.

[58] See Conybeare, Harris, and Lewis 20-21, 49-50, 81, 121-22, 154; Lidzbarski 33-34; Pennacchietti 218-19; Schneider 150-51; Lusini 264. Both these problems were known already from antiquity and are widely diffused in the international folk tradition. See Zachariae 55-72, 83-84; De Vries 145-56, 375, 390-92; Hansen 256-57, 471; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* III 188.

[59] This is argued in detail by Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* III 180-87; cf. Contini, "Introduzione" 30-31.

[60] On this text see Gardiner xii, 85-89; Lefebvre 131-36; Brunner-Traut 145-47, 285-86; Simpson 69-71; Maspero 223-28; Bresciani 399-401; cf. Redford 35-39; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* I 107-15. The end of the narrative is lost, and it remains unknown how Seqenenre responded to Apophis' proposition. The Theban king may have conceived a suitable counter-sophism with which to oppose his rival's paradox (as does Ahiqar with the Pharaoh's paradox about the horse's neigh); or he may have taken up arms to confront the provocative Hyksos enemy on the battlefield. In any case, there is no indication that the novella extended to great length and included more intellectual problems.

in succession three *adynata* of the type of the impossible task, which are posed to him by his rival, the ruler of Aratta: to transport grain in fishing nets; to find a sceptre made of no known species of wood, metal, or stone; and to send an emissary that wears no-one of the known colours.[61]

Millennia later, the intellectual confrontations of sages in the vast Persian epic *Shāhnāmeh* by Firdausi display the same repetitive effect. The charismatic young hero Zal is tested by the arch-mages and scholars of King Manuchehr's council, who propound him a sequence of six proper enigmas, all of them regarding physical and cosmological phenomena.[62] Similarly in a subsequent episode of the narrative, set in the court of the Sasanian king Bahram Gur, an ambassador from Byzantium comes to test the wisdom of the Persian sages and sets seven problems to Bahram's high priest; most of them are questions about the definition of abstract notions (what is "the within," "the outside," "the above," "the below," "the infinite," "the vile"). The high priest, after providing satisfactory answers, poses in turn two riddles of the superlative to the Byzantine envoy (what is the most harmful thing and what is the most profitable thing in the world).[63] This type of puzzle is closely akin to the questions about abstract concepts; in ancient traditions these two genres coexist in various contexts, such as the legends of the Seven Sages and the *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* (see below, section 4).

There are also other traditional epic narratives about mythical contests of wisdom, in which the questions posed and solved by the opponents belong to cognate or very similar kinds – from the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* to the Norse *Vafthrudnismal*.[64] All these texts, which come from ages and peoples so wide apart from each other, share this one feature in common: the competitors exchange a series of problems of identical (or quasi-identical) type, which produces a feeling of archaic rigidity in the narrative structure. The creator of *Ahiqar* obviously aimed at a higher level of novelistic sophistication, rising over and above the primitive repetitiousness of archaizing epic or the simple manner of popular storytelling. By diversifying the genres of the mental problems, as well as the methods used for their solution, the narrative of *Ahiqar* manages to create surprise, amusement at the inexhaustible inventiveness of the two opponents, and interest in what may come next.

On the other hand, the miscellaneous contents of the riddle contest may also have been inspired by another age-old and revered Near-Eastern tradition: the didactic compilations of wisdom, the collections of wise sayings and instructions, which were a favourite literary form in Mesopotamia already since the third millennium B.C. These early works, written in Sumerian

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[61] For this epic see Cohen, *Enmerkar*; Jacobsen 275-319; Vanstiphout, *Epics* 49-96; cf. Berlin; Alster, "Epic Tales"; Vanstiphout, "The Matter of Aratta"; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* I 51-52, 68-78.

[62] For example: "There are twelve splendid cypress trees, each one has thirty branches" (the months and their days). "There are two swift horses, one black, one white; they strive, but neither can overtake the other" (night and day). "A group of riders pass by, sometimes they are thirty, sometimes twenty-nine" (the months, which have 29 or 30 days). "There is a meadow with green plants; a man with a scythe comes and cuts the plants down" (time the mower). See Mohl I 259-63; Warner and Warner I 308-11; Davis 97-98.

[63] See Mohl VI 1-9; Warner and Warner VII 5, 101-05; Davis 652-55.

[64] In an episode of the *Mahābhārata* a Yaksa spirit, who is guarding a lake, propounds to the exiled King Yudhisthira a long sequence of many tens of problems, as a condition for allowing him to drink from the water. Almost all of these problems are riddles of the superlative and related questions about general moral and theological concepts; they all reflect typical forms of traditional religious and ethical catechism. See van Buitenen 181, 797-804; Sternbach 23-26; Shulman. In the mythological wisdom poem *Vafthrudnismal* (part of the *Poetic Edda*) the giant Vafthrudnir is tested by the disguised Odin with a series of quizzes, all of which concern mythology and cosmological lore. See Genzmer 36-43; Larrington 39-49; cf. Ohlert 83-84; Konstantakos, "Το αποστομωτικό ερώτημα" 265-68; West, *Indo-European* 362, 364; Maggioni 210-11.

or in Akkadian, were miscellaneous compositions and gathered together all the multifarious genres of wisdom literature. The reader may find in them, accumulated in no particular order, maxims and apophthegms of general value; proverbs and proverbial expressions; exhortations, ethical precepts, and commandments about behaviour; similes and comparisons; paradoxes; jokes and word-plays; priamels and other rhetorical figures; short fables, parables, and anecdotes with a didactic message; and even a few riddles accompanied by their solutions.

Some of these collections were copied and studied until well into the first millennium B.C. Cuneiform tablets bearing copies of their texts were deposited in the library of King Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.) at Nineveh, the great repository of the Mesopotamian literary tradition, at the twilight of the Neo-Assyrian Empire.[65] The compilations were apt to be used as educational texts at scribal schools, especially in the early stages of the curriculum. Their brief and simple entries were suitable for exercises of memorization, spelling, and translation, and also provided a good introduction to grammar and idiom, while at the same time they offered sound moralistic lessons, appropriate for the ethical formation of young pupils.[66]

The same anthological character of the wisdom compilations characterizes later the sapiential books of the Old Testament, such as the *Proverbs*, the *Ecclesiastes*, and the *Wisdom of Solomon*.[67] Above all, it is reflected in the composition of the *Story of Ahiqar* itself. The Aramaic work has the structure of a diptych: it combines a narrative part, the tale of the wise vizier's adventures, with a long series of Ahiqar's maxims, which the hero supposedly wrote down for the instruction of his adopted son. This collection of wisdom, which occupied a considerable portion of the original work, is also of very mixed and variegated contents, as is especially evident in the most pristine form of the text, on the papyrus of Elephantine.[68] The hero's sayings vary in kind and form, reflecting all the wide repertoire of wisdom genres which is familiar from the Mesopotamian compilations, from apophthegms and didactic maxims to

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[65] On the Sumerian wisdom collections and their miscellaneous contents see the main editions and studies of Gordon, "Sumerian Proverbs: 'Collection Four'"; Gordon, "Sumerian Animal Proverbs"; Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs*; Alster, *Proverbs*; Alster, *Wisdom*; Veldhuis; Taylor, "The Sumerian Proverb Collections"; Alster and Oshima; Frahm; cf. Konstantakos, "Οι αρχαιότεροι διδακτικοί μύθοι" 22-61; Konstantakos, "Natura" 33-36. Akkadian compilations of the same mixed character are published and discussed in Lambert 96-109, 213-82; Foster 412-35; Cohen, *Wisdom* 3-19, 81-128, 199-231. Cf. Gordon, "A New Look"; Vanstiphout, "The Use(s) of Genre" 711-13.

[66] Cf. Cohen, *Wisdom* 22-35, 55-77; Woods 107-14; Frahm 176-81.

[67] Cf. von Rad 24-50; Crenshaw 32-41, 67-92, 144-46; Day 62-67.

[68] In the later redactions of *Ahiqar* the mixed character of the wisdom sayings has been mitigated. The single collection of the original work has been divided into two separate sections of didactic discourse, differentiated in terms of their contents and narrative function: one list of precepts and instructions for the education of Ahiqar's adoptive son, placed near the beginning of the narrative; and one sequence of sarcastic fables and parables, which allegorically castigate the young son's ingratitude and treachery, at the end. There is thus a separation of genres, as each one of the two collections specializes in particular forms of wisdom discourse. Still, a degree of generic variety is retained, especially in the series of educational instructions; in many redactions this series, alongside ethical precepts, also includes specimens of other forms (maxims of general truth, similes, parables, *adynata*, proverbs, enumerations and climaxes, riddles of the superlative). Similarly, the final sequence of fables and parables sometimes comprises also a few apophthegms, proverbial expressions, and indignant statements of castigation. See Adrados 299-302; Konstantakos, *Ἀκίχαρος* II 267-69, III 469-80. The mixture of didactic genres was the most salient and emblematic feature of the hero's wisdom in the original *Ahiqar*, and for this reason it was never entirely wiped out. Some trace of it was preserved even in the later recensions and adaptations.

proverbs, from precepts to priamels and enumerations, from similes and riddling questions to fables. No single genre dominates over the others.[69]

The creator of the original *Ahiqar* was writing in the late seventh or early sixth century B.C., during the last phase of the Neo-Assyrian Empire or shortly after its fall. He was clearly well versed in the Mesopotamian traditions of wisdom, which he reworked and incorporated into his own composition. Later, at some point before the Hellenistic period, as noted above, the original text of the work was further developed by another author (or authors), who created the expanded version of the story. It must have been this subsequent author – the inventor of the archetype of the later, more novelistic and extensive redactions – that conceived and shaped also the extended form of the riddle contest between the hero and the Pharaoh, characterized by the mixture of various genres of intellectual puzzles.[70] The source of inspiration for this miscellany of mental problems may have been precisely the mixed and multifarious contents of Ahiqar's collection of wise maxims.

This is indeed the hypothesis I would like to put forward: the author of the later, expanded form of *Ahiqar* used as structural model the assortment of many didactic genres in the protagonist's sayings, as found in the Aramaic version of Elephantine. Following this model, the later author decided to transpose and apply the same miscellaneous structure to the other major manifestation of Ahiqar's wisdom in the course of the narrative – namely, to the hero's exploits in the riddle contest, the supreme test of his spiritual capacities. Thus the idea arose of an intellectual competition which would present a panorama of various kinds of riddle games, from proper enigma to *adynaton* and from *eikasmos* to unanswerable sophism. It was a mythopoeic recreation of the mixed character of the wisdom collections, a projection of their variegated composition onto the level of narrative and fiction. In this way, the augmented *Story of Ahiqar* offered a new and more sophisticated version of the old theme of the riddle contest, recasting it in a more complex structure and a richer range of materials. The "*rivista di enigmistica* model" began in the form of a romance narrating the feats and labours of a great cultural hero, who was able to solve every conceivable puzzle in the world.

The *Story of Ahiqar* exercised an immense influence on posterity, especially in the East, and conditioned the structure of many subsequent narratives about confrontations of wise men. An analogous assortment of multifarious genres of riddles is found in the Jewish legend of the contest between the clever Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah (a leading Israelite sage of the first and second century A.D.) and the wise men of Athens. The story is transmitted in the *Babylonian Talmud* (compiled ca. A.D. 500, treatise *Bekhoroth* 8b-9a) and belongs to an extensive cycle of fictionalized anecdotes about the altercations between Rabbi Joshua and the Roman Emperor Hadrian.

The emperor challenges Joshua to prove that he is superior to the wise men of Athens and can defeat them in argument. The Rabbi travels to Athens, meets the wise men in their school,

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[69] On the collection of Ahiqar's sayings in the version of Elephantine and its miscellaneous contents see Lindenberger 479-92; Greenfield; Watson 72-86; Weigl, "Compositional Strategies" 26-77; Weigl, *Die aramäischen Achikar-Sprüche* 5-6, 12-13, 32-58, 543-636, 691-763; Contini, "Introduzione" 16-21; Contini, "Il testo aramaico" 113-16; Parpola 92-105; Niehr 4-7, 13-18, 21-22; Konstantakos, *Ἀκίχαρος* I 55-62, II 256-66, III 465-540.

[70] By contrast, in the original form of *Ahiqar*, as represented in the papyrus of Elephantine, the riddle contest must have been very brief and summarily treated. The text may have simply mentioned e.g. that the Pharaoh sent difficult riddles to the Assyrian king, and that Ahiqar successfully solved them, without giving any specific example. Or it may have contained only a single riddle (like the *Quarrel of Apophis and Seqenenre*), proposed by letter and solved by Ahiqar on the spot, without any need for a journey to Egypt. See Meissner, *Das Märchen* 29-31; Contini, "Introduzione" 19-20; Grottanelli, "Introduzione" 65-66, 84-88; Betrò 178, 185-86; Konstantakos, *Ἀκίχαρος* I 143-66.

and engages in a long intellectual *agon* against them. The Athenians pose to him a series of puzzles of diverse kinds: general problems of practical behaviour, which the Rabbi answers with apposite similes and analogies; several *adynata*, both impossible tasks and paradoxical sophisms, which the Jewish sage cleverly opposes with counter-impossibilities to the same effect; trap questions (the kind of puzzle that the Greeks called *apora*, i.e. intricate, tricky problems which set a trap for the solver);[71] and an unanswerable question.[72] Some of the *adynata* and counter-*adynata* of this competition (building a house in the air, sewing up a broken mill-stone, making ropes of bran) are directly imitated from *Ahiqar*. But apart from individual problems, the very layout of the Talmudic legend, the mixture of diverse mental puzzles within the framework of a contest of wits, is doubtless inspired from the model of *Ahiqar*, which set the prime example of this anthological form.[73]

Another related body of traditions, from the same cultural area, are the later Jewish versions of the celebrated contest of wisdom between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. These are narrated in a number of rabbinical commentaries and exegetical interpretations of Biblical texts, dated between the times of the later Roman Empire and the ripe Middle Ages. Unlike the summary narrative of the Bible (1 *Kings* 10.1-13), these posterior works cite a series of specific problems which the queen supposedly proposed to the Hebrew monarch.[74] The particular questions differ from one work to the other, although there is some degree of overlap. Still, the stories have one characteristic in common: the queen's problems are of mixed character and belong to a range of different genres. A few of them are genuine riddles; others are quizzes or tests of Biblical knowledge. There are also questions about matters of natural history

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[71] On the *apora* see Ohlert 5-8, 12-17, 72, 112-14; Schultz 110-11; Anderson 111-242, 283-94; Konstantakos, "Amasis" 19; all these works provide examples.

[72] Problems of practical behaviour: e.g. "If a man lent once money and did not get it back, should he give a loan again?" Answer: "Suppose a man goes into the forest, cuts some branches, but is unable to carry them alone. He will continue cutting branches, until people come to help him." Impossible tasks: e.g. "Build a house in the air"; the Rabbi pronounces God's holy name, rises in the air, and asks for construction materials to be sent up to him. "Transport a well from the fields into the city"; the Rabbi asks for ropes woven of bran flour, in order to bind the well and carry it along. Paradoxical sophisms: e.g. "If salt loses its flavour, with what is it salted?" Answer: "With the afterbirth of a mule." "How do we cut a bed of knives?" Answer: "With the horns of an ass." *Apora*: e.g. "Where is the centre of the earth?" Answer: "Right here; bring cords and measure the distance." "If a chick dies in the egg, where does its spirit go?" Answer: "There, where it came from." Unanswerable question: "Tell us an unbelievable tale." The Rabbi replies with a story about a mule that gave birth to a colt. "But can a mule give birth?," ask the Athenians. "This is indeed unbelievable," says the Rabbi. See Wünsche, *Die Räthselweisheit* 34-39; Wünsche, *Der Babylonische Talmud* 63-66; Goldschmidt 26-28; Elkaïm-Sartre 1295-98; Bialik and Ravnitzky 228-29.

[73] On this Talmudic legend and its dependence on *Ahiqar* see Meissner, "Quellenuntersuchungen" 194-96; Meissner, *Das Märchen* 17-18; Yassif 101-03, 214-15; Konstantakos, *Ἀχίχαρος* II 278, III 181-84. Another intellectual *agon* of the same sage, this time against the people of Alexandria (*Babylonian Talmud*, treatise *Nidda* 69b-71a), also contains a mixed variety of problems: *apora*, thorny points of Biblical lore, and questions of ethical behaviour. See Goldschmidt 946-49; Wünsche, *Der Babylonische Talmud* 192-94; Elkaïm-Sartre 1376-77; Bialik and Ravnitzky 229-30.

[74] The rabbinical works are the *Targum Sheni* to the *Book of Esther* (variously dated between the third or fourth and the thirteenth century A.D.); the *Midrash Mishle*, a commentary on the *Book of Proverbs* (probably between the eighth and the eleventh century A.D.); and the *Midrash ha-Hefez*, compiled in A.D. 1430 on the basis of earlier materials, which consists entirely in a retelling of the meeting between Solomon and the exotic queen. See Wünsche, *Die Räthselweisheit* 15-24; Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Mischle* 2-3; Schechter; Zachariae 104-08; Ginzberg IV 145-49, VI 290-91; Silberman 65-66, 71-76; Lassner 11-17, 161-67; Goldberg 22-24; Stein; Ego 21-25, 76.

and physiology; and difficult tasks of the *adynaton* type.[75] Once again, the miscellaneous contents of the riddle contest in these late Jewish texts may owe something to the distant example of the *Story of Ahiqar*, which became paradigmatic for the spiritual traditions of the Near East in the centuries that followed.

Far beyond Jewish Palestine and the Aramaic world, the "*rivista di enigmistica* model" of *Ahiqar* spread to the Far East, reaching India and China during later antiquity, chiefly through the edifying narratives and parables of Buddhist preachers. The *Mahā-ummagga-jātaka* ("The Birth-Story About the Great Tunnel") is a long religious novella narrating the adventures of the great sage Mahosadha, who was one of the former incarnations of the Buddha.[76] Born as a merchant's son in a town of North-Eastern India, Mahosadha begins as a child prodigy. When he is seven years old, he is tested for his wisdom by King Vedeha and the royal counsellor Senaka, who set him or his fellow-townsmen a long series of nineteen difficult intellectual ordeals. The wonderful Mahosadha finds clever solutions to all these problems thanks to the power of his mind. The series of tests comprises several different kinds of puzzle: courtroom cases, impossible tasks, naturalist or technical problems, and proper riddles.[77] Some of the tasks are again identical with the *adynata* of *Ahiqar*, while others are presumably taken from other sources, such as the "Solomonic" traditions of wise judges or the widespread folklore of clever riddle-solvers.[78] Above all, it is the mixed, anthological structure of the contest of riddles that connects the Buddhist legend with the ultimate Aramaic model.

A similar miscellany of puzzles, placed again in the narrative frame of an intellectual *agon*, is included in another Buddhist book, which survives only in Chinese: the *Tsa pao tsang ching*

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[75] Proper riddles: e.g. "What is the thing that does not move when living, yet moves when its head is cut off?" (the tree and the ship made of its wood). Tests of Biblical knowledge: e.g. "Which land has seen the sun only once?" (the bottom of the Red Sea on the day it was divided by Moses). "Who was he that was born and died not?" (Elijah and the Messiah). Naturalist questions: e.g. "What is that which is produced from the ground, yet man produces it, while its food is of the fruit of the ground?" (a wick). "There are seven that issue and nine that enter; two yield the draught and one drinks" (seven days of menstruation, nine months of pregnancy, two breasts, one baby). Difficult tasks: e.g. the queen places before Solomon two groups of identically dressed persons, and asks him to distinguish the men from the women, or the circumcised from the uncircumcised; she brings in the sawn trunk of a tree and requires Solomon to point out the root and the top. Cf. Konstantakos, "Ο Σολομών αγωνιστής" 236-37; and see Schultz 124 on the relationship with *Ahiqar*. The miscellaneous character is more prominent in the *Midrash Mishle* and the *Midrash ha-Hefez*, which combine together all or most of the aforementioned types of problem. But even the *Targum Sheni*, which only contains three riddles, amalgamates natural history problems with proper enigmas.

[76] The *Jātaka* ("Birth-Stories") are a corpus of 547 narratives of varying length, written in Pāli, the main Indic language of the ancient Buddhist canon. Each one of these stories refers to one of the previous incarnations (*bodhisatta*) of the Buddha (i.e. to a human, animal, or supernatural being in whose form the Buddha's spirit was born into the world) and recounts didactic episodes from this being's life and actions. See Cowell; Norman 77-84; von Hinüber; Appleton.

[77] Courtroom cases: distinguish between the true owner of a cattle herd and a thief, or between a woman's true husband and an adulterer, or between a child's true mother and a kidnapper (the famous problem of Solomon's judgement). Impossible or difficult tasks: e.g. distinguish between the top end and the root end of a wooden rod; distinguish between the severed heads of a man and a woman, or between a male and a female snake; deliver the baby calf of a bull; make a rope of sand; transport a lake or a park. Naturalist and technical problems: e.g. make a hawk drop a piece of flesh it is carrying in its beak; replace the broken thread of a crookedly perforated gem. Proper riddle: e.g. "A bull white all over, with horns on his legs and a hump on his head, which utters his voice at three times unfailingly" (the rooster). See Cowell VI 159-72; Sternbach 27-28. Cf. Zachariae 55-67 and Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* III 182-85, who also remark on the connections with *Ahiqar*.

[78] Cf. Zachariae 57-62, 84-113; and more general bibliography above, note 44.

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("The Storehouse of Sundry Valuables"), a collection of edifying parables translated from a lost Indian original in A.D. 472. In one of the stories a celestial spirit descends to the king's palace and poses a long sequence of tricky questions; if the monarch provides the correct solutions, his realm will enjoy peace; otherwise, the king himself will perish and the kingdom will be thrown into turmoil. The problems propounded are a mixed bag: impossible tasks, riddles of the comparative and the superlative, proper conundrums, most of them adapted so as to convey an uplifting moral or religious message conforming to Buddhist teaching.[79] With this Chinese rendering of an ancient Buddhist tale, the narrative form of the "puzzle magazine structure" reached its furthest point of dissemination in antiquity.

On the other hand, the book of *Ahiqar* also travelled to the West. At the beginning of the Hellenistic age it was translated into Greek in the Peripatetic school under Theophrastus; finally it was incorporated into the *Life of Aesop* and became an extensive episode in the legendary biography of the famous fabulist, which was composed around the first or second century A.D.[80] But already before these Greek writings, there was in the Hellenic tradition another narrative work which included, like *Ahiqar*, a miscellany of various intellectual games within a narrative frame. To this we must now turn our attention.

4. The *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* and Greek Comedy

In its extant form, the celebrated *Contest of Homer and Hesiod* (often cited with the abbreviated Latin title *Certamen*) is explicitly dated in the period of the Antonines, as shown by the reference to "the time of the most divine Emperor Hadrian" in chapter 3 West. However, the core of the work, including the central part of the confrontation between the two great bards, was taken over from a much earlier book, the literary treatise *Mouseion* published by the sophist Alcidamas in the early fourth century B.C.[81] This hypothesis was first formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche, as a brilliant philological insight, and was subsequently proven by the discoveries of papyri.

According to this little pseudo-biographical narrative, the two great epic poets, Homer and Hesiod, meet in Chalcis, in the funeral festival organized in honour of the dead king Amphidamas. There they confront each other in an *agon*, which is judged by a council of local noblemen presided over by Panedes, the dead monarch's brother. The *agon* is supposed to be primarily a competition in poetic skill, intended to determine which one of the two rivals is the greatest bard of Greece. But in fact it turns out to be more generally a contest of wits, in which

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[79] Impossible or difficult tasks: distinguish the mother and the daughter between two identically looking mares; measure the weight of a white elephant; point out the top and the bottom of a perfectly quadrangular piece of sandalwood. Questions of the comparative and the superlative: "Which quantity of water held in a person's two united palms is more precious than the vast sea?" Further, the spirit transforms itself into a skeletal figure and asks: "Who in this world is more famished and emaciated than me?" It becomes a beautiful woman and asks: "What person in the world can equal me in loveliness?" Proper conundrum: "Who is the one called awake when he is asleep and asleep when he is awake?" (a perfect enigmatic paradox). See Chavannes 3-9; Willemen 15-18; Konstantakos, "The Wisdom" 462-64.
[80] On Theophrastus' *Akicharos* and the Peripatetic translation of *Ahiqar* see Wilsdorf; Matelli 429-30, 441-43; Konstantakos, *Ακίχαρος* II 225-70.
[81] On the dating of the *Certamen* and its relation to Alcidamas' *Mouseion* see Kirk; Vogt; Hess 53-66; West, "The Contest"; Renehan; Richardson; Avezzù 84-87; O'Sullivan 63-66, 79-105; West, *Homeric Hymns* 298-300; Rosen, "Aristophanes' *Frogs*" 297-302; Bassino 61-80, 118, 226-27.

the opponents test their overall cleverness and intellectual capacity by devising and answering a variety of *griphoi* and kindred mental puzzles.[82]

Thus, the contest of the two wise men serves again, in practice, as a narrative framework for a medley of different genres of riddle games. Of course, the poetic identity and profession of the opponents do leave a strong trace in the contents of the competition. The puzzles posed, with all their generic diversity and disparate provenance, have been adapted to the processes of epic composition and rhapsodic performance; they refer to the activity of the epic singer, exploit the materials of heroic and mythical poetry, or test the contestants' capacities in versification and poetic extemporization.

In the first and largest part of the competition (ch. 6-11 West), it is standardly Hesiod who propounds the various problems, while Homer solves them. Firstly, Hesiod proposes to his rival a couple of riddles of the superlative (ch. 7): What is the best thing for men? What is the most beautiful thing for mortals? Homer answers both questions with apt hexameter *sententiae*, taken from the *Odyssey* (9.6-11) and from the gnomic verses of Theognis (425, 427), which represent deep-seated convictions of the ancient Hellenic spirit.[83] Then an *adynaton* follows (ch. 8):

> Come now, Muse: of the things that are and will be and were aforetime – no, sing nothing of those, but call to mind another song.

Hesiod practically requires of Homer to sing of something that neither is nor will be nor ever was. This is an impossible task, not unlike those set to Ahiqar, for example the construction of a castle in the air. It also recalls the unanswerable question posed by the Pharaoh in the same oriental story: "Tell us something that we have never heard." But in the *Certamen* the task is specifically drawn from the sphere of song and poetic creation, the main occupation of the contestants.[84] Homer answers with a verse about a race of chariots, drawn by clattering steeds, over the tomb of Zeus – clearly a supreme impossibility in the traditionally-minded world of the ancients, who had not yet read Nietzsche on the death of god.

The next test consists in a species of tricky paradox or sophism: the so-called *amphiboloi gnōmai* or "ambivalent propositions," that is, a number of nonsensical verses proposed for completion (ch. 9). Hesiod begins each time by delivering a hexameter verse that sounds absurd or nonsensical, because it entails a logical contradiction or combines incompatible concepts. Homer must then improvise a second hexameter, which completes and restores good sense to Hesiod's illogical statement; this is usually achieved by adducing new elements which alter the syntactic relations between the contradictory terms of the first verse and make them refer to different objects. For example:

> HESIOD: This man's father is brave and cowardly –
> HOMER: – is his mother, because war is a hard task for all women.

> HESIOD: So they were feasting all day with no food –
> HOMER: – of their own; but it was provided by Agamemnon, the lord of men.

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[82] On the affinity between the poetic tests of the *Certamen* and riddles in the broader sense (*griphoi*) see Rohde 103-04; Busse 113-18; Ohlert 35-47; Hess 3-7, 10-26; West, "The Contest" 439-43; Heldmann 55-58, 76-84; Erbse 309-12; Cavalli 92-105; Graziosi 62-70; Collins 7, 184-85; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 269-71; Della Bona 177; Bassino 19-25, 156-88; cf. West, *Indo-European* 72-74, 362; Beta, *Il labirinto* 11-12, 96.

[83] Cf. Wilamowitz 401-02; Heldmann 77-78; O'Sullivan 80-83; Graziosi 62-63; Bassino 157-62.

[84] Cf. Hess 14-15; West, "The Contest" 442; Heldmann 78-81; O'Sullivan 83-85; Cavalli 92-94; Graziosi 63; Collins 186-87; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 270; Bassino 25, 162-63.

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This is a genuine game of poetic improvisation and resembles, to some extent, the sympotic competitions in citing Homeric or iambic verses, as described by Clearchus.[85] On the other hand, the game is also akin to the folk genre of the *adynaton*, especially the form of the perplexing paradoxical statement, like the Pharaoh's riddle in *Ahiqar* about the neigh heard from Assyria to Egypt.[86]

The series of riddles continues with a mythological quiz (ch. 10): how many Achaeans went to Troy with the army of Agamemnon and Menelaus? Homer answers this with an arithmetical problem, similar to those found later in the *Palatine Anthology*:[87]

> There were fifty hearths of fire, and in each hearth fifty spits, and on each one of them fifty pieces of meat; and around every slice of meat there were thrice three hundred Achaeans.

Finally (ch. 11), Hesiod returns to a potpourri of riddles of the superlative: What is the finest and what is the worst for mortals? What is the best way for governing cities? What is the best thing to pray to the gods for? What is the best thing that grows in the smallest space? These superlative riddles are joined with another, kindred type of puzzle: questions about general concepts, which look like popular versions of the Socratic or sophistic enquiries into the definition of abstract notions. What is the meaning of justice and bravery? What is the sign of wisdom? What can be considered trustworthy? What is it that humans call happiness? In the Hellenic tradition such questions were often interchanged with other types of *griphoi* in sympotic games and other social gatherings.[88]

Up to this point, Homer has responded to all of Hesiod's challenges with notable success. He is greatly applauded by the Greek audience of the festival. However, the *agon* is not yet over. There follows a second, shorter part, a kind of final coda, in which the terms of the competition change. An ultimate test is now imposed by the arbiter of the *agon*, Panedes, who requires that each one of the poets recite the best portion from his own poetic oeuvre (ch. 12). Thus, the competition comes full circle with another specimen of riddle of the superlative, adapted again to the poetic identity of the contestants.[89] Homer sings a forceful description of a battle between the Achaeans and the Trojans, taken from *Iliad* 13 (vv. 126-33 and 339-44). Hesiod, on the other hand, delivers a passage from his *Works and Days* (383-92), which consists in a series of precepts about farm work, reaping, ploughing, and sowing. By virtue of this praise of peaceful agricultural life and toil, the poet of Ascra is awarded the victory by Panedes (ch. 13).

This Greek biographical romance presents a plotline full of intellectual puzzles, which are as rich and diversified as those of the oriental *Ahiqar*. The life story of the two great poets is, in this respect, the Hellenic equivalent of the adventures of the Mesopotamian wise vizier.

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[85] Clearchus fr. 63, I Wehrli, fr. 77 Taifacos. Cf. Busse 116-17; Rohde 103; Hess 12; Beta, *Il labirinto* 96; and see above, section 2 and note 36. West, *Indo-European* 73-74 cites analogous games from Classical Indian sources and Irish saga.

[86] Cf. Cavalli 92, 96-97; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 270. Generally on this game see Kirk 156-57; Hess 4-6; West, "The Contest" 440-41; Heldmann 81-83; O'Sullivan 85-86; Graziosi 64-67; Collins 185-91; Bassino 164-77.

[87] Cf. Schultz 114; Hess 15-17; Bassino 177; and on the pair of problems see Graziosi 67-68; Beta, *Il labirinto* 11-12, 22.

[88] On this type of problem see Konstantakos, "Amasis" 22-23; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 258-59, 276-77; Della Bona 174-76; Beta, "Gli enigmi simposiali" 75-78; Beta, *Il labirinto* 51-53. On the connections with the notional enquiries of the sophists cf. O'Sullivan 87-95; Bassino 180-87.

[89] Cf. Hess 6-7; Rohde 103; Cavalli 92, 98; Rosen, "Aristophanes' *Frogs*" 308; Graziosi 70; Konstantakos, "Aesop and Riddles" 270.

Both in Greece and in West Asia, the motley "puzzle magazine structure" emerged for the first time in narrative form, shortly after the middle of the first millennium B.C.

It is a debated question whether the story *per se* of the contest of Homer and Hesiod was circulating already before Alcidamas, at least in oral tradition, as a folk legend. A couplet of verses from one of the games of the *Certamen*, the nonsensical propositions (ch. 9), are cited in Aristophanes' *Peace* 1282-83. There are also some significant parallels between the *Certamen* and the early Greek epic traditions. On this basis, it has been argued that the storyline represented in the *Certamen*, with the competition of the poets and its assortment of riddle-like ordeals, was an old biographical tradition already formed by the fifth century B.C., perhaps a product of the rhapsodes of the Archaic age.[90]

If so, this legendary contest tale may have influenced the poetic *agones* staged in some plays of Old Comedy, such as the competition of Homer and Archilochus in Cratinus' *Archilochoi*, the contest of the singing boys at the finale of the *Peace*, and above all the great literary duel between Aeschylus and Euripides in the *Frogs*.[91] This latter episode, in particular, like the *Certamen* of Homer and Hesiod, concentrates on ordeals of poetic skill and ingenuity, which aim at testing the two competitors' craftsmanship and accomplishment as literary artists. And like the *Certamen* again, the Aristophanic contest includes exercises which reflect well-known riddle games, familiar from the social amusements of Classical Athens.[92]

A characteristic case is the weighing of tragic verses on the scales, one of the most hilarious phases of the competition (1365-1410). This test is inspired by a particular kind of *griphoi*, which were based on an escalating pattern. Such games were often played in the Attic symposion, as attested by Clearchus and comedy.[93] According to the rules, each player must pronounce a stronger item (e.g. a more powerful element or a longer poetic verse) than the opponent who has spoken before him. Similarly, in the weighing scene of the *Frogs* each one of the contesting tragedians must adduce a "heavier" tragic verse than his rival, that is, a verse that mentions heavier things. The verse that proves to be "heaviest," when weighed on the scales, wins the game.[94] In the Aristophanic scene, this kind of confrontation is repeated three times, and every time Aeschylus' enunciation proves to be weightier than that of his opponent, because it literally speaks of heavier objects or concepts.[95]

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[90] See Busse; Rohde 42, 103-04; Wilamowitz 404-06; Kirk 150, 153-57; Vogt 219-21; Hess; Richardson 1-5; Avezzù 84-85; Heldmann 9-10, 15-20, 53-86; O'Sullivan 80-81, 85, 96-98; Cavalli 90-92; Compton-Engle 327-28; Graziosi 58-60, 69-70; Rosen, "Aristophanes' *Frogs*" 297-300; Bassino 118-19, 166-67. Against this view see West, "The Contest" 433, 438-43; Erbse 311-15.

[91] On the relation between the story of the *Certamen* and these poetic contests of comedy see Busse 114-16; Dornseiff 136-37; Hess 20-24; Richardson 2-3; Heldmann 59-63, 85; Cavalli 90-105; Compton-Engle; Graziosi 60, 65-66; Collins 184-85; Rosen, "Aristophanes' *Frogs*"; Ornaghi, "Omero" 219-20; Hall 344-49; Bakola 66-74; Bassino 166-67.

[92] See Radermacher, *Aristophanes' "Frösche"* 29-30; Heldmann 58-59, 63, 85; Cavalli 92-105; Lada-Richards 143-46; Konstantakos, "Η αβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα."

[93] Clearchus fr. 63, I Wehrli, fr. 77 Taifacos, cf. Athenaeus 457e-458d; Diphilus fr. 49 Kassel-Austin; see the texts cited above, in section 2.

[94] On the weighing scene of the *Frogs* as a *griphos* see Konstantakos, "Η αβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα" 317-27; cf. Cavalli 98-99. In general, regarding riddle-games based on an escalating pattern and climactic progress see examples and discussion in Konstantakos, "Trial by Riddle" 132-33; Konstantakos, "Alexander and Darius" 142-47; cf. Hansen 417-23; Beta, *Il labirinto* 102-03.

[95] Euripides speaks of Argo that sails fast, as though flying ("Would that the vessel Argo had never flown between"; *Medea* 1); but Aeschylus counters him with an entire river and the surrounding pasturelands ("O river Spercheius and haunts of the grazing herds"; fr. 249 Radt). Euripides invokes Peithō, the fickle goddess of persuasion ("Peithō has no other temple than the word"; fr. 170.1 Kannicht); but Aeschylus cites death, the heaviest of evils ("Death is the only god that desires no gifts"; fr. 161.1 Radt).

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In another side-splitting scene (1198-1247), Euripides recites every time the first part of a verse from the prologue of one of his own tragedies; Aeschylus then interrupts him and fills up the line with the nonsensical phrase *lēkythion apōlesen* (ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν, "he lost his little oil bottle"), which metrically and syntactically fits with the Euripidean passage, although it completely destroys its logical coherence and transforms it into a ridiculous piece of inanity. This is essentially a game of capping and recalls the *amphiboloi gnōmai* of the *Certamen* (ch. 9), as well as Clearchus' familiar games of poetic supplementation.[96] But this time the model of the legendary epic confrontation is turned upside-down: Homer supplemented Hesiod's self-contradictory hexameters in order to give them acceptable sense; Aeschylus, conversely, fills up Euripides' lines in such a way as to turn them into complete nonsense.

In the last stage of the *agon*, Dionysus (like Panedes, the arbiter of the *Certamen*) proposes to the two rivals a more general topic concerning the welfare and salvation of Athens:

> Whichever of you two is going to counsel something good (*chrēston*) for the city, I think I will take him back with me. (1420-21)

> But now let each one of you give me one more suggestion for the city, whatever you consider salutary (*sotērian*). (1435-36)

Dionysus' enquiries are tantamount to a riddle of the superlative. Even though the adjectives used by the god are in the positive degree (what is good, what is salutary for the city), it is evident that the correct answers ought to possess the required qualities to the utmost, just like the objects of a superlative question. Aeschylus and Euripides are called to state what would be good *par excellence* and would ensure the greatest possible benefit for the *polis*, under the present dire circumstances. In essence, Dionysus is asking the two poets what is the best and most salutary thing for the city of Athens.[97] The structure of the ordeal is not different from other well-known riddle contests of ancient fiction, in which two or three rivals take turns in answering the same superlative question.[98]

But it is not only Dionysus, the arbiter, who adopts the formulation and tropes of riddling in this last phase of the *agon*. In their answers to the god's civic enquiry, both Aeschylus and Euripides make use of staple techniques of the genuine enigma, such as allegory, paradox, and contradiction. Aeschylus describes Alcibiades, the magnificent but redoubtable and dangerous leader, with an ambiguous animal metaphor (1431-32):[99]

Finally, Euripides describes a heavy iron weapon ("He took in his right hand an iron-weighted staff"; fr. 531 Kannicht); but Aeschylus overcomes him by accumulating chariots and corpses ("Chariot upon a chariot, dead man upon dead man"; fr. 38.1 Radt).

[96] Cf. Wilamowitz 402; Dornseiff 137; Radermacher, *Aristophanes' "Frösche"* 311; Hess 21-22; Cavalli 99-103; Collins 34, 39, 86, 184-85; Pütz 192; Konstantakos, "Η αβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα" 327-31.

[97] Cf. Radermacher, *Aristophanes' "Frösche"* 336-39; Hess 22-23; Cavalli 98, 104; Lada-Richards 146; Rosen, "Aristophanes' *Frogs*" 307-08, 314-15; Konstantakos, "Η αβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα" 331-34.

[98] See e.g. the saucy game played by the three wenches in Diphilus fr. 49 ("What is the strongest thing?"); the similar competition between Darius' bodyguards in 1 *Esdras* 3-4 (again "What is strongest?"); the final poetic confrontation of Homer and Hesiod (*Certamen* 12, "Which is the best part of your poems?"); the debate between Thales and the Ethiopian king in Plutarch's *Banquet of the Seven Sages* 152e-153d ("What is the oldest thing?," "What is the greatest?," "What is the wisest?," "What is the most beautiful?," "What is the commonest?," "What is the most beneficial?," "What is the most harmful?"); and the *agon* of the Iranian high priest and the Byzantine ambassador in the *Shāhnāmeh* (see above, section 3).

[99] On Aeschylus' riddle-like simile see Radermacher, *Aristophanes' "Frösche"* 339-41; Hubbard 215; Dover 13; Sommerstein, *Frogs* 286; Cavalli 104-05; Konstantakos, "Η αβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα" 334.

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Do not rear a lion's cub inside the city; but if you do rear it and it attains full growth, then serve its will!

This is a standard technique of the classic *ainigma*, in which the object is often hidden behind animal imagery, symbols and allegories taken from the world of the beasts.[100] On the other hand, both poets, when putting forward their views on the salvation of the city, exploit the other fundamental mechanism of the proper riddle: the paradoxical conjunction of contradictory and incompatible elements. This is Euripides' proposition for the solution of Athens' problems (1443-44):

When we regard as trustworthy (*pista*) what is now untrusted (*apista*), and as untrustworthy (*apista*) what is now trusted (*pista*).

Aeschylus' recommendation is equally paradoxical (1463-65):

When they regard the enemy's land (*tēn tōn polemiōn*) as their own (*spheteran*), and their own land (*tēn spheteran*) as the enemy's (*tōn polemiōn*), and their fleet as their wealth (*poron*), and their wealth (*poron*) as non-wealth (*aporian*).

Indeed, these passages employ a peculiar form of contradictory phraseology, which is characteristic of the style of genuine enigmas. The paradox is highlighted and emphasized through repetition. Many forms of the same word or of synonymous words are accumulated within the brief text of the riddle; some of these forms are affirmative, others negative, and all of them are combined into antithetical couples, thus creating a dense network of contrasts and contradictions, which baffles the listener. Note, for example, in the Aristophanic specimens cited above, the complex interplay of *pista – apista* ("trusted – untrusted," "trustworthy – untrustworthy"), *spheteran – tōn polemiōn* ("their own – their enemy's"), and *poron – aporian* ("wealth – non-wealth"). The same effect is found in many classic *ainigmata*.[101]

In the *Frogs*, therefore, exactly as in the *Certamen*, the mental and linguistic puzzles incorporated into the poetic contest of wits belong to a range of different genres. In the Aristophanic comedy all these riddle games are concentrated within one important episode, the *agon* between the two great tragedians – and more specifically its final, iambic section (1119-1478), which focuses on the particular parts and techniques of tragic composition, after the two contestants have debated more generally on the nature and function of poetry in the epirrhematic contest. Another Aristophanic play, the *Wasps*, displays an analogous variety of playful enigmatic puzzles. This time, however, the *griphoi* are not gathered in one and the same episode but are spread in several different scenes and function as a *Leitmotiv* that runs through the plot.

The first riddle is posed at the very beginning of the play, setting the tone for the small anthology of games that will follow. Two comic slaves are standing watch outside the house, in order to guard the obsessed old hero, Philocleon, and keep him away from the law-courts which he passionately adores. To pass the time, they tell each other their dreams, and in this context one of them parodies a popular conundrum, a word-puzzle based on homonymy and well-known from Athenaeus' collection (453b): "What is the same in the heavens and on earth

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[100] See e.g. *Palatine Anthology* 14.19, 30, 43; Cleobulina fr. 3 West; Pseudo-Simonides' riddle in Athenaeus 456c-e; Konstantakos, *A Commentary* 202.

[101] See e.g. *Palatine Anthology* 14.22, 32, 33, 38, 40-42, 108, 110; Antiphanes fr. 192.7-19 Kassel-Austin; Theodectas fr. 4 Snell-Kannicht; Ohlert 10-11; Konstantakos, *A Commentary* 198; Konstantakos, "Η αβάσταχτη ελαφρότητα" 335-36. On the enigmatic character of Aeschylus' and Euripides' statements cf. Heldmann 85; Hubbard 215; Sommerstein, *Frogs* 290; Lada-Richards 146.

and in the sea?" The answer is the bear, the snake, the eagle, and the dog, because each one of these words, apart from signifying a terrestrial animal, is also used for a species of fish (respectively a type of crab, a sea snake, the eagle ray, and the dog-fish) and for a constellation in the sky (the Ursa Major, the Draco, the Aquila, and Sirius the "Dog Star").[102]

The slave paraphrases this familiar *ainigma* (20-23) in order to satirize a contemporary public figure of Athens, a close collaborator of the demagogue Cleon: the orator and politician Cleonymus, who became notorious as a coward and deserter and was regularly satirized in comedy for having thrown away his shield in order to flee from battle.[103]

> SOSIAS: Cleonymus, then, is no different from a riddle.
> XANTHIAS: How so?
> SOSIAS: A man will propound it to his drinking companions in the symposion, saying that "the same creature has thrown away its shield on earth and in the heavens and in the sea."

The next game takes place in the second part of the plot, after the parabasis, when Bdelycleon tries to coach his grumpy father Philocleon in the savoir vivre of the elegant symposion. For this purpose, the two characters rehearse on stage another practice of sympotic entertainment (1222-48). The young son pretends to be taking part in an upper-class dinner party; he assumes the persona of one of the guests and sings the beginning of a traditional convivial song (a *skolion*), of the kind that was habitually performed in the cultivated symposia of fifth-century Athens. In accordance with sympotic etiquette, the next symposiast should then take up and complete the song by chanting the following lines.[104] The entire exchange resembled the sympotic games described by Clearchus, in which one of the guests begins by reciting a verse from a hexameter or iambic poem, and the next one is required to supply the following verse of the same text (see above, section 2).

However, in the occasion made up by Bdelycleon the circumstances are special. The participants in the imaginary symposion are the demagogue Cleon, the most prominent leader of radical democracy in Athens at that time, and his associates, the politician Theorus and other men of the same faction. According to Bdelycleon's fiction, it is they who begin and put forward, each one in turn, the first lines of the songs. Each time, therefore, the old man, instead of properly continuing with the original lines of the proposed *skolion*, improvises outrageous verses of his own, which taunt the singer of the first lines for his political faults and misdemeanours (1224-30, 1236-47):

> BDELYCLEON: Now, suppose I am Cleon. I start by singing the song of Harmodius, and you will take it up. "Never was such a fellow born in Athens –"
> PHILOCLEON: "– no, not so great a thief nor such a scoundrel!"
> BDELYCLEON: Is this what you are planning to do? You will be shouted to death! He will say that he will annihilate you and destroy you and drive you out of this land.
> . . . .

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[102] See above, section 2 and note 26.

[103] On Aristophanes' parody of the riddle see Pütz 202-03; Potamiti 152-53; Monda, "Enigmi" 106-07; Monda, "Beyond the Boundary" 139-41; Beta, *Il labirinto* 97-98, 178, 258-60; Biles and Olson 88-89. For the comic satire against Cleonymus see mainly Storey and Ornaghi, "Un bersaglio."

[104] See Reitzenstein 24-29; Kloss 95-96; Slater, *Spectator Politics* 103, 274-75; Collins 85-86, 89-92, 99-102, 106-09; Biles and Olson 440. Vetta 128-29, 155 and Colesanti argue for a somewhat different arrangement: the second guest does not continue the first one's *skolion* but offers another, separate *skolion* to match the first song. Given that, as is evident from the Aristophanic scene, the pieces sung by the first and the second symposiast are thematically (and sometimes also metrically) coherent and compatible, I see no great difference, even with this theory, in terms of the structure of the game.

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> BDELYCLEON: What about when Theorus, reclining at Cleon's feet, takes hold of Cleon's right hand and sings: "Recall, my friend, the tale of Admetus / and cherish men of worth." What drinking song will you say to him?
> PHILOCLEON: Something like this: "There is no way to play the fox / nor be a friend to both sides."
> BDELYCLEON: After him Aeschines son of Blowhard will take up, a wise and cultivated man, and then he will sing: "Property and livelihood / for Cleitagora and for me / among the men of Thessaly –"
> PHILOCLEON: "– we had our fill of bragging, you and I!"

Philocleon thus supplements the words of the traditional *skolia* in such a way as to turn them into satires against corrupt politicians of the time, mocking their frauds, embezzlement, opportunism, and arrogance.[105] As a result, the competition in sympotic songs ends up resembling the *amphiboloi gnomai* of the *Certamen* and the *lekythion* scene of the *Frogs*, which are similarly based on the ingenious or humorous supplementation of given poetic passages.[106]

The third and last game is described in the finale. Philocleon has gone to an actual symposion and has created havoc with his uncouth behaviour. A slave now comes on stage, like a messenger, and reports what has happened. It is noteworthy that the men mentioned as guests of the party are again political figures of Athenian public life, such as the coterie of Phrynichus son of Stratonides, a prominent statesman and prosecutor in the law-courts, clearly an adherent of radical democracy at that time (although later he would participate in the oligarchic coup of 411 B.C.). One of the pastimes practised in this symposion is the game of *eikazein*. Philocleon and the other guests exchange burlesque similes, comparing each other to ridiculous creatures (1308-13).[107] Philocleon's opponent in the game is a certain Lysistratus, presumably Lysistratus of Cholargus, a regular frequenter of the Agora and a favourite target of the comic poets, who was doubtless also engaged in political activity:[108]

> Then Lysistratus, when he saw Philocleon, made a comparison: "You, old fellow, you are like a Phrygian *nouveau riche*, or like a he-ass that has run off to a bran-heap." And he, in return, shouted out and compared Lysistratus to a locust that has shed the fig-leaves of its cloak, and to the tragedian Sthenelus shorn of his stage props.

In the *Certamen* the riddling problems have been thematically and morphologically adjusted to the bardic profession and the poetic preoccupations of the two competitors. In the *Wasps* the dramatic anthology of intellectual games is also given a specific orientation, though of a different kind: in this case the puzzles and their solutions are absorbed into the satirical and political programme of the Aristophanic drama; they are subjugated to the poetics of *onomasti kōmōidein*, the ridicule of public figures and statesmen. All the games of the comedy are so designed as to turn into lampoons against contemporary politicians – chiefly men of the radical demagogic faction of Cleon and his collaborators (Cleonymus, Theorus), who are the main targets of criticism in all the early Aristophanic plays.

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[105] On this Aristophanic song-game and its political implications see MacDowell 290-93; Vetta; Sommerstein, *Wasps* 227-30; Colesanti; Kloss 95-102; Slater, *Spectator Politics* 102-04, 274-75; Collins 67, 99-110; Biles and Olson 439-45.

[106] Cf. Pütz 192; Colesanti 243.

[107] On the *eikasmos* riddles of the *Wasps* cf. Fraenkel 115-16, 337-38; MacDowell 304-05; Sommerstein, *Wasps* 236; Bowie 368; Pütz 85, 98, 143, 192; Biles and Olson 464-66.

[108] On Lysistratus and the other political figures of this symposion see MacDowell 238, 296-97, 302-03; Sommerstein, *Wasps* 206, 232, 235-36; Biles and Olson 327-28, 451-52, 461-62.

5. Greek and Near-Eastern Narratives: Parallels and Polygenesis

As transpires from the foregoing discussion, the narrative version of what has been termed *the puzzle magazine structure* – namely, the incorporation of a miscellaneous series of riddle games into a plot – was a recurrent feature in Classical Greek fiction, attested in old legends, novelistic biographies, and comic theatre. Could this Greek tradition have been inspired or influenced from the exploitation of the same narrative trope in the *Story of Ahiqar*?

Admittedly, this does not seem very likely, because there is no tangible indication that the narrative of *Ahiqar*, including the prolonged and diversified riddle contest, was known in the Greek world in the fifth or early fourth century B.C., before the translation made by Theophrastus' circle in the early Hellenistic age. A late and apocryphal tradition, according to which Democritus had translated an inscription of Ahiqar's sayings (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.15.69.4, Pseudo-Democritus 68 B 299 Diels-Kranz), seems hardly creditable. As for the attempts of certain scholars to detect motifs from the oriental vizier's story in Aristophanic plays, these have been too far-fetched.[109] Rather, we should look to another prominent source of inspiration for the Greek fictions of anthological riddle contests: namely, the entertainment and pastimes of the symposion.

Throughout its history, the Hellenic symposion has provided a milieu for multifarious forms of amusement, from convivial *skolia* and lyric poetry to erotic pantomimes, from actors reciting dramatic monologues of their repertoire to board games and storytelling. Among all these divertissements, the Greek banqueters also indulged in intellectual puzzles and *griphoi*, which were similarly characterized by great variety.[110] Clearchus, in his treatise on *griphoi*, allocated a range of mental games in the sympotic environment, from tests of memory and linguistic skill to quizzes of knowledge and verse capping. Comic poets adduce further types of puzzle in the same context, such as proper enigmas, games of *eikasmos*, and riddles of the superlative. The Greeks were a temperamental people that got easily bored. No single pastime could keep them satisfied for long. They were bound to try a whole lot of playful distractions, so as to pass the time delightfully in their social gatherings.

The Greek fictional works, from the *Certamen* to the plots of comedy, reflect in a narrative form precisely this medley of intellectual games that would have been enjoyed in the milieu of the symposion.[111] The riddle contests of Hellenic mythopoeia are transcriptions of the sympotic savoir vivre in terms of storytelling. This is corroborated by another important difference between *Ahiqar* and the Greek narratives. All the intellectual games of the *Certamen*, as well as their reproductions in the *Frogs* and the *Wasps*, can be played inside a room, within the precincts of the sympotic *andrōn*. They are fully dependent on literary learning, control of mind and memory, and the mechanisms of language. They only presuppose a small group of refined and well-educated men situated around a communal social space and willing to share their intellectual skills in playful emulation with each other.

This does not apply to the problems of *Ahiqar*, the solution of which is in most cases impossible to confine within a closed domestic space. To counter *adynata* such as the castle in the air and the horse neigh heard from Assyria to Egypt, Ahiqar needs to spread his activity outdoors, to use human assistants, animals, and trained birds, and even to construct an

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[109] See Fales and Konstantakos, *Ἀκίχαρος* II 17-166, who refute the theories of Luzzatto, "Grecia e Vicino Oriente" and Luzzatto, "Ancora sulla 'Storia di Ahiqar.'"

[110] On *griphoi* and related intellectual games as recreations in the symposion see most notably Ohlert 20-21, 49-51, 60-82; Bowie 366-70; Cameron, *Callimachus* 80-84, 95-97; Collins 63-72, 84-134; Pütz 192-212; Potamiti 136-43, 146-50; Della Bona 172-80; Beta, "Riddling at Table"; Beta, "Gli enigmi simposiali"; Beta, *Il labirinto* 40, 44-67, 96-115.

[111] Many scholars point out the sympotic affinities of the intellectual tests of the *Certamen*: see Busse 116-18; Hess 10-17; West, "The Contest" 440; Erbse 311-12; Cavalli 104; Graziosi 62; Bassino 157.

elaborate technical apparatus for the supposed building of the castle. The simile riddles and the unanswerable question involve the Pharaoh's entire entourage, all the courtiers and councillors that surround and support the monarch; the setting of these problems is the monumental hall of the throne, not the moderate private chamber of a civilized dinner-party. These are not sympotic games but novelistic fantasies.

The narrative form of the miscellaneous riddle contest – that is, the earliest antecedent of the "*rivista di enigmistica* model" with its mixture of various puzzles – was invented in ancient Greece and West Asia more or less simultaneously and independently, on the basis of different local traditions. In the Near East the narrative anthology of Ahiqar's *griphoi* was a fantastic offshoot of the miscellaneous collections of didactic literature; the bookish medley of wisdom genres was transplanted to the old legend of the confrontation between two masters of wisdom. The Greek stories, on the other hand, were fictionalizations of the multifaceted entertainments of the symposion. The Mesopotamian narrator pored over his learned written scrolls; the Greek one recounted, in the guise of a parable, the live delights of the convivial feast. The two cultures arrived at the same literary creation from different ways; but both of them are connected by the pure pleasure of intellectual play.

It is the same pleasure that also connects us with those remote ancestors, every time we pick up a *rivista di enigmistica* in order to fill in a crossword, answer a quiz, disentangle a labyrinth, or solve another one of its multifarious mental puzzles.

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