

Women Only: Rites of Demeter and Kore in Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6.

In this paper, I explore multiple references to the rites of Demeter and Kore in Herodas' *Mimiamb* 6 and argue that these references play important role in the Hellenistic discussion about the genesis and development of iambic poetry. *Mimiamb* 6 "Friendly or Private Conversation" is a part of the Hellenistic collection of *Mimiambi*, the hybrid genre featuring together iamboi and mime. *Mimiamb* 6 depicts a dialogue between two women, Koritto and Metro. Metro visits Koritto in her house in order to find out about the fate of a dildo (*baubon*) that Koritto purchased some time ago and passed to somebody else. Some scholars [Stern 1979] have already underlined several references to the Eleusinian mysteries in *Mimiamb* 6, specifically a close consonance of characters' names with Kore and Meter as well as of the *baubon*, the object in question, with an Orphic equivalent of Iambe [Olender 1990]. Recent scholarship on *Mimiamb* 6 lacks substantial discussion of this problem, and I fill this gap with a new reading of this poem. In my paper, I not only supplement evidence discovered earlier but also propose a possible explanation of why these references are included in the text of *Mimiamb* 6 and how they function in relation to Herodas' poetics.

There is a complex of narrative strategies and motives embedded in the subtext of the poem that refers to rites Demeter and Kore, specifically to the Eleusinian mysteries, Thesmophoria and Haloa. In the first part of my paper, I analyze these motives and narrative elements on three levels: myth (motif of visiting, anonymity, the state of loss and search), mysterial practices (atmosphere of secrecy, rites of initiation, *arreta*, *aischrologia*, *anasyrma*) and objects (votive, body parts). In the second part, I focus on the Alexandrian context of the *Mimiamb* 6 and its connections with religious practices of Hellenistic Egypt [Perpillou-Thomas 1993; Parca 2007], specifically with the goddess Hathor, who was actively worshipped during Ptolemaic rule and was employed to promote an official image of

Berenice II [Llewellyn-Jones, Winder 2016]. In the third part of my analysis, I link *Mimiamb* 6 with other poems in the collection that have references to or depiction of mystery cults or other religious practices, such as “The Descent of Mises” in *Mimiamb* 1 and the Dionysiac *thiasos* in *Mimiamb* 8, and demonstrate that mysterical and religious context is one of the significant connecting elements in the collection.

My analysis of *Mimiamb* 6 clarifies several important features of Herodas’ poetics and supplements a discussion on performative features of *Mimiambi* [Mastromarco 1984, 95-96; Hunter 1993, 200-201; Kutzko 2006]. First, Herodas’ close attention to the Eleusinian mysteries and the Thesmophoria in this poem is evidence in favor of Alexandria as a place of the production of *Mimiambi* and suggests an Alexandrian audience. Second, the interplay between visible-invisible, emphasis on visual perception and gesture in the juxtaposition of Iambe/Baubo signifies a close connection between Herodas’ *Mimiambi* and performance practices. I conclude that, by implicitly referring to the *aition* of iambic poetry from Eleusinian Iambe and choosing women’s conversation and women-only *mise-en-scène* as a frame, Herodas challenges the Aristotelian conception of iambos as a male-dominated poetic form [Rotstein 2010, 147] and places his work in opposition to other works of Hellenistic iambic poetry, such as *Iambi* of Phoenix and Callimachus’ *Book of Iambi*.

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