

LARISSA AND PIASUS IN THE *SUDA* LEXICON

Abstract: A number of *Suda* entries (s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) and s.v. Πίασος (Π 1549 Adler), and possibly also s.v. ἔωσεν (E 1909 Adler) rather than s.v. ἔρμα (E 3022 Adler)) deal with the myth of Larissa and her father Piasus, who fell in love with her, raped her, and was murdered by her. The anonymous quotations these entries preserve have been attributed to either Nicolaus of Damascus or Aelian. A linguistic investigation confirms the authorship of the latter.

Keywords: *Suda*, Larissa, Piasus, Nicolaus of Damascus, Aelian

In *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler), the meaning of the adjective ἄθεσμος is clarified through an anonymous quotation that is repeated at *Suda*, s.v. Πίασος (Π 1549 Adler).

Suda, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler). ἄδικα. καὶ ἀθέμιτος, ἄνομος. λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἄθεσμος, ὁ παράνομος. ἠράσθη Πίασος θετταλὸς Λαρίσσης τῆς ἑαυτοῦ θυγατρὸς ἔρωτα ἄθεσμόν τε καὶ δυστυχῆ.

Lawless [things], [meaning] unjust [ones]. Also [*sc.* attested is the masculine nominative singular] ἀθέμιτος, [meaning] unlawful. Also said is ἄθεσμος, [meaning] illegal. ‘Piasus the Thessalian loved Larissa, his own daughter—a love both illegal and unfortunate.’

(trans. by Jennifer Benedict)

The quotation deals with a violent incest story, that of Piasus who fell in love with his own daughter, Larissa, raped her, and was murdered by her. She plunged him into a jar of wine while he was leaning over it, and he died.¹ Carl Müller (*FHG* 3.368, fr. 19) attributed the anonymous quotation to Nicolaus of Damascus, claiming it transmits his actual words (‘quae uti alia multa Suidas ex Nicolao exscripsisse, atque ipsissima ejus verba exhibere videtur’). He did it in the *apparatus* to his own fr. 19 of Nicolaus, which corresponds to F 12 Jacoby.

¹ The main variants about his death figure in Nicolaus of Damascus (*FGrHist/BNJ* 90 F 12) and Strabo (13.3.4). Cf. also Euphorion’s *Apollodorus* (fr. 7 van Groningen), quoted by both Parthenius (*Amat. narr.* 28) and the *scholion* to Apollonius of Rhodes (1.1063, p. 93 Wendel). On the story of Piasus and Larissa, see Yoshida (1965). On the correct and unusual uses of wine jars in the ancient world and its culture, see Gianotti (2024).

Nicolaus of Damascus *FHG* 3.368, fr. 19 = *FGrHist/BNJ* 90 F 12—*Excerpta de insidiis* 7, p. 8, 25 de Boor ὅτι Λάρισα ὑπὸ Πιάσου τοῦ πατρὸς ἐρασθεῖσα² καὶ βιασθεῖσα καὶ βαρέως φέρουσα τὸ πάθος, τῶν τινας οἰκετῶν προσποιησαμένη τὸν πατέρα κεκυφῶτα εἰς πίθον οἴνου ὥσασα ἐπὶ κεφαλῆς ἀπέκτεινεν.

That Larisa, raped by her father Piasus who had fallen in love with her, and stricken by such suffering, obtained the complicity of some slaves and, while her father was bending forward over a jar of wine, she threw him headlong down and killed him. (my translation)

Conversely, in his *Kommentar* on *FGrHist* 90 F 12 Jacoby judged ‘unwahrscheinlich’ the hypothesis of a dependence on Nicolaus for the *Suda* entry, pointing out the two different locations of the two versions, namely Larisa Phriconis, near Kyme, for both Strabo 13.3.4 and what he clearly considers the very close version of Nicolaus, and Thessaly for the entry. Recently, Müller’s attribution has been revived by Édith Parmentier-Morin, who included the *Suda* quotation among the fragments of Nicolaus and recorded it as *F 12a, claiming that ‘la citation donnée par cette notice de la *Souda* semble être l’introduction du fragment de Nicolas de Damas’.³ Later on, Parmentier changed her mind and ruled out this attribution in the second, revised edition of Nicolaus’ fragments, where *F 12a is no longer recorded.⁴ By pointing to the illegal and unfortunate nature of this love, so at the incest and the rape, the anonymous quotation does look like an introduction to Piasus and Larissa’s story, but the Byzantine *excerptum* derived from Nicolaus is nonetheless a full narrative that also preserves the summarised ‘prequel’ (explicitly, the incest and the rape) to the more detailed description of the murder. Moreover, the anonymous quotation preserves the adjective *θετταλός* that is absent in Nicolaus’ F 12, so it cannot be drawn from the latter.⁵ A linguistic investigation of the two texts is needed.

The oldest attribution of the *Suda* quotation—and the most widely accepted—is, however, a different one, that of Valckenaer, who ascribed the fragment to Aelian.⁶ Both Rudolf Hercher—in his editions of Aelian from

² ἐρασθέντος αὐτῆς Dindorf.

³ Cf. Parmentier-Morin (1998) 429.

⁴ Parmentier and Barone (2011).

⁵ On the word-for-word dependence of the *Suda* lexicon on the *Excerpta Constantiniana* as regards the historical fragments, cf., *infra*, n. 17.

⁶ Valckenaer is quoted by Bernhardt (1853) 267.

1858⁷ (fr. 216) and 1866⁸ (fr. 195)—and Douglas Domingo-Forasté (fr. 198)⁹ later accepted this identification. Ada Adler welcomed it as well (in the *apparatus* to both *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) and *Suda*, s.v. Πίασος (Π 1549 Adler)) and so did David Whitehead in the *Suda On Line*.¹⁰ In his 1858 edition, Hercher added to the story another, anonymous, quotation from the *Suda*, which he also ascribed with some misgivings ('fortasse') to Aelian, giving it n. 268. Cf. *Suda*, s.v. βρόχος (B 558 Adler) ... ἡ δὲ ὑπὲρ τῆς ἀσεβοῦς μίξεως ἀλλαξαμένη βρόχον ('she, having taken the noose in exchange for sacrilegious intercourse'). Before long, however, Hercher changed his mind, and he did so correctly in my opinion, since there are no clues to link a suicide by noose precisely with Larissa.¹¹ On the other hand, two more *Suda* entries are possibly connected with *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler), so with Piasus and Larissa's story. They are *Suda*, s.v. ἕωσεν (E 1909 Adler) and the more problematical *Suda*, s.v. ἔρμα (E 3022 Adler), which seem to offer the immediate sequel of *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler), so of the story itself, through the punishment of Piasus, here not named.

Suda, s.v. ἕωσεν (E 1909 Adler): ἀπόσατο, ἐνέβαλεν. ἡ δὲ ἐγκύψαντα αὐτὸν εἰς πίθον, ἵνα ἀρύσῃται οἶνον, ἕωσεν ἐς κεφαλὴν καὶ ἀπέπνιξε.

Shoved: pushed off, set upon. 'She shoved his head down while he was leaning into the pot in order to draw off wine and drowned him.'

(trans. by William Hutton, slightly modified by myself)

Suda, s.v. ἔρμα (E 3022 Adler): τοῦ δὲ πίθου ἔρματι περιπεσόντος καὶ συντριβέντος.

Ballast, prop: 'The jar having fallen on a stone and been smashed ...'

(trans. by Catharine Roth)

The two entries have been linked to each other by both Rudolph Hercher (in both the 1858 and the 1866 editions) and Douglas Domingo-Forasté. The

⁷ Hercher (1858) 455.

⁸ Hercher (1866) 257.

⁹ Domingo-Forasté (1994) 102.

¹⁰ *Suda On Line*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) (<http://www.stoa.org/sol/>). See also *Suda On Line*, s.v. Πίασος (Π 1549 Adler).

¹¹ Cf. Hercher (1858) 455 (*ad fr.* 216): 'Huc fortasse trahendum Aeliani frustum in v. βρόχος servatum'. In the second edition of Aelian, Hercher gave this fragment n. 49 (Hercher (1866) 207) but he referred it to another rape story, not that of Piasus and Larissa: in this story, the violent intercourse is also called ἄθεσμος. See fr. 52h Domingo-Forasté.

former gave them, respectively, n. 314 and n. 256; the latter, n. 254a and n. 254b. Neither of the editors, however, connected them explicitly to the story of Piasus and Larissa, whereas David Whitehead did it implicitly through a reference, in a footnote, to Nicolaus' F 12.¹² De Boor did it only in part, since he deliberately linked only fr. 254a to Piasus' story, so separating its textual destiny from fr. 254b.¹³ In my opinion, this is the most prudent, and best, choice, because—I add—the smashing of the jar could hint at the rescue of the character and so belong to another story.

To return to the anonymous quotations of *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) and *Suda*, s.v. ἔωσεν (E 1909 Adler), Valckenaer's and de Boor's identifications can be verified on the basis of linguistic criteria and of content. The starting point is the recognised principle that the compiler(s) of the *Suda* lexicon read in *Mittelquellen*, and not directly in the original, all the historical sources they quoted (namely, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Diodorus, Nicolaus of Damascus, etc.). In 1912 Carl de Boor identified those *Mittelquellen* with the *Excerpta Constantiniana*: this important result was accepted three years later by J. Becker and then by Ada Adler. The latter also drew up a complete list of the ancient authors, included in the *Excerpta* and transmitted to the *Suda* lexicon.¹⁴ Accordingly, it is in Adler's list that the author(s) of both quotations (*Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) and *Suda*, s.v. ἔωσεν (E 1909 Adler)) must be looked for. A 'suitable' author for this enquiry is of course an (even partially) fragmentary one, who is believed to have dealt with that matter. When the authors who seemingly did not deal with the quite rare myth of Piasus, such as the Christian ones, are excluded, the choice seems limited to Diodorus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Arrian, Aelian's *περὶ προνοίας*, and John of Antioch, all of them appearing in Adler's list. Moreover, Nicolaus of Damascus, who also appears in that list, must be ruled out for content-related reasons, since *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) is not the introduction to his F 12, as we have seen, and *Suda*, s.v. ἔωσεν (E 1909 Adler) does not depend word-for-word on the same F 12.¹⁵ Then, a linguistic analysis of meaningful words or *iuncturae* will help to identify—on the basis of the *usus scribendi* criterion—the anonymous author(s) of the two quotations among the above mentioned five sources (and Nicolaus too will be taken into account, in order to verify his exclusion as a source also

¹² *Suda On Line*, s.v. ἔωσεν (E 1909 Adler) (<http://www.stoa.org/sol/>).

¹³ de Boor (1890) 480.

¹⁴ Cf. de Boor (1912); Becker (1915) 10–16, esp. 13; de Boor (1914–19); Adler (1928–38) I. XVI and XIX–XXI as regards the list; Adler (1931) cols 700–6.

¹⁵ Cf. p. 100 and n. 17 on the word-for-word dependence of the *Suda* entries on the *Excerpta Constantiniana*.

from the linguistic point of view).¹⁶ It must be acknowledged that an *absence* of usage is less striking as a linguistic observation for a fragmentary author like, e.g., Nicolaus or John of Antioch, than it would be in the case of someone like Aelian or Diodorus, where whole books are preserved intact. All the same, Nicolaus' fragments that have been transmitted to us are many (139) and fill 106 pages in Jacoby's edition, and those of John of Antioch are 321 in Roberto's edition, and so both are quite representative of their authors' *usus scribendi*.

Indeed, the two aforementioned criteria—linguistical and of content—do support, for *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler), Aelian's authorship rather than that of either Nicolaus of Damascus or Diodorus of Sicily, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Arrian, or John of Antioch—the only authors well known to the compilers of the *Suda* who could have likely dealt with this myth. Nicolaus—summarised in his own words by the compilers of the *Excerpta Constantiniana*¹⁷—uses once both the adjective δυστυχής and the verb δυστυχέω,¹⁸ and five times the aorist passive of ἐράω, but he never chooses the adjective ἄθεσμος.¹⁹ Diodorus opts once for ἄθεσμος,²⁰ three times for δυστυχής²¹ and six times for δυστυχέω:²² he also selects twenty-eight times the aorist passive of ἐράω.²³ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, who never writes ἄθεσμος, uses δυστυχής five times²⁴ and δυστυχέω once,²⁵ and he chooses the aorist passive of ἐράω four times.²⁶ Arrian never adopts either ἄθεσμος or δυστυχής: he uses δυστυχέω once²⁷ and the aorist passive of ἐράω twice.²⁸ John of Antioch uses ἄθεσμος once,²⁹ δυστυχής never and δυστυχέω only once.³⁰ He also selects

¹⁶ For a broader discussion of these criteria, cf. Favuzzi (2018) and Paradiso (2015). See also Paradiso (2016). For their concrete and fruitful application, see the rich scientific production of Andrea Favuzzi, e.g., Favuzzi (2004), (2008a), (2008b), and (2013).

¹⁷ On the working methods of the compilers of the *Excerpta Constantiniana* and the relationship between the *Excerpta* and the *Suda* lexicon, see Németh (2018).

¹⁸ Nic. Dam. *FGrHist/BNJ* 90 F 143 § 114 and F 68 § 6.

¹⁹ Nic. Dam. *FGrHist/BNJ* 90 FF 12, 18, 21, 44a § 5, and 55.

²⁰ D.S. 1.14.3.

²¹ D.S. 3.13.3; 13.20.3; 31.8.12.

²² D.S. 9.31.1; 13.28.6, 29.3; 14.5.1, 4; 27.17.4.

²³ D.S. 1.51.3; 3.59.6, 64.3, 68.2; 4.13.4, 34.4, 36.4, 54.2, 61.4, 62.2, 69.4, 77.1 and 3, 81.1, 84.4; 5.49.1, 55.4 and 5, 56.3; 6.7.3, 9.1; 10.17.1; 12.24.2; 16.26.6; 17p 1; 19.25.5; 29.2.1; 36.2.2.

²⁴ D.H. *AR* 1.58.2; 8.26.1, 41.4; 9.30.3; *Thuc.* 45.

²⁵ D.H. *Dem.* 1.

²⁶ D.H. *AR* 1.43.1; 13.10.2; *Dem.* 6; *Pomp.* 2.8.

²⁷ Arr. *FGrHist/BNJ* 156 F 76a.

²⁸ Arr. *Anab.* 4.19.5, *FGrHist/BNJ* 156 F 31.

²⁹ John of Antioch, fr. 79b Müller/159, 2 Roberto.

³⁰ John of Antioch, fr. 78 Müller.

three times the aorist passive of ἐράω.³¹ Conversely, Aelian three times writes ἄθεσμος³² (a significant word, since it is a *hapax* in both Diodorus and John of Antioch and is not attested in the other three authors). Aelian also writes δυστυχῆς twelve times³³ and δυστυχέω three times.³⁴ He prefers the aorist passive of ἐράω thirty-four times.³⁵ Above all, he is the only one among the six selected authors who adopts both the *iunctura* ἔρωσ δυστυχῆς³⁶ and the grammatical structure ἐράω + the accusative of ἔρωσ that are found in *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler).³⁷ For all these linguistic features, and especially the last ones, which in my opinion add a new and strong argument to Valckenaer's identification, Aelian is the best candidate to the authorship of the *adespoton* quotation of *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler).

As to the entry *Suda*, s.v. ἕωσεν (E 1909 Adler), allegedly related to the same myth, Nicolaus (who must be ruled out as its source for content-related reasons: *supra*, p. 100) quotes the verb ὠθέω six times (even in Piasus and Larissa's story—F 12);³⁸ he also quotes the phrase ὠθέω ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν once, still in the same incest story.³⁹ However, he never uses either ἐγκύπτω or ἀρύω or ἀποπνίγω. Diodorus chooses ὠθέω eight times,⁴⁰ ἀρύω three times,⁴¹ ἀποπνίγω four times,⁴² but he never opts for ἐγκύπτω. Dionysius writes ὠθέω forty-four

³¹ John of Antioch, fr. 90 Müller/172 Roberto, 187 Müller/280 Roberto, 200 Müller/293, 2 Roberto.

³² Ael. *VH* 12.20; fr. 49 Hercher/52d Domingo-Forasté and 186 Hercher/189 Domingo-Forasté. Here and in the following notes, I have ruled out all the quotations of Aelian that have only been included via *Quellenforschung* in the editions of both Hercher and Domingo-Forasté but are not accompanied by the explicit mention of Aelian's authorship.

³³ Ael. *NA* 2.50 (*bis*); 3.47; 7.19; 13.10 (*bis*); 14.25; fr. 43 Hercher/46b Domingo-Forasté, 50 Hercher/53i Domingo-Forasté, 69 Hercher/72 Domingo-Forasté (*bis*; the fragment is *adespoton*: however, Aelian's authorship is confirmed by both *Suda*, s.v. ἀτεγκτος ἄνθρωπος (A 4329 Adler) and *Suda*, s.v. ἀτέραμνον (A 4343 Adler), which quote a section of the same text and mention Aelian), 117 Hercher/120 Domingo-Forasté.

³⁴ Ael. *VH* 2.29; *NA* 5.6 and 8.3.

³⁵ Ael. *NA* 1.6 (*bis*); 4.9, 58 (*bis*); 5.29; 6.15, 17; 7.15; 8.10 (*quater*); 9.21; 12.34 (*bis*); 14.28; 15.23; *VH* 1.15; 2.4; 7.1; 8.9 (*bis*); 9.39 (*quater*); 10.2, 18 (*bis*); 12.63 (*bis*); 13.1, 5.

³⁶ Ael. fr. 69 Hercher/72 Domingo-Forasté δυστυχῆ τὸν ἔρωτα (the fragment is *adespoton*: on Aelian's authorship, cf. however, n. 33, *supra*). None of the five authors (Nicolaus, Diodorus, Dionysius, Arrian, and John of Antioch) uses the *syntagma* ἔρωσ ἄθεσμος.

³⁷ Ael. *NA* 6.15 (*bis*) ἐρᾶ δελφίς ἔρωτα δριμύτατον and ἐρασθῆναι δελφίνα ἔρωτα παραπλήσιον; *VH* 2.12 ἦρα δὲ ἔρωτα ἕτερον.

³⁸ Nic. Dam. *FGrHist/BNJ* 90 F 1d (*ter*), F 12, F 66 § 18, F 130 § 23.81.

³⁹ In F 66 § 33, Nicolaus varies and opts for ὠσεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὸν βόθρον κάτω.

⁴⁰ D.S. 3.40.5; 13.88.2; 14.73.4; 17.20.3, 45.5; 19.42.5; 20.88.5; 34/35.2.14.

⁴¹ D.S. 1.3.8; 2.12.1, 2.

⁴² D.S. 3.57.5; 4.10.1, 11.4; 25.15.1.

times⁴³ and even ὠθέω ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν once;⁴⁴ he also adopts ἀρύω once,⁴⁵ but he never uses ἀποπνίγω or ἐγκύπτω. Arrian uses ὠθέω fourteen times,⁴⁶ ἀρύω twice,⁴⁷ ἀποπνίγω once,⁴⁸ and ἐγκύπτω never. John of Antioch never writes ἐγκύπτω or ἀρύω: however, he chooses ἀποπνίγω four times⁴⁹ and ὠθέω six times.⁵⁰ Thus, none of them uses the verb ἐγκύπτω. Aelian, who uses ὠθέω thirty-six times, above all selects the phrase ὠθέω εἰς (or ἐπὶ) κεφαλὴν at *NA* 9.8, 12.22, and in fr. 69 Hercher/72 Domingo-Forasté.⁵¹ Among the selected authors, he is the only one to use the rarer ὠθέω εἰς κεφαλὴν (*NA* 9.8) and he is the only one to use it in the whole of extant Greek literature, along with the *Suda* entry, and this is a very meaningful feature. He also chooses ἐγκύπτω once and, again, he is the only one among the six selected authors to do that.⁵² Aelian also writes the verb ἀρύω twelve times,⁵³ also associated with ὠθέω in *NA* 9.34, and uses ἀποπνίγω fifteen times.⁵⁴ Thus, the anonymous quotation transmitted through *Suda*, s.v. ἔωσεν (E 1909 Adler), which relates the same story as Nicolaus but is not Nicolaus, may be ascribed to Aelian as well, as the linguistic features persuasively suggest again.

To sum up, on the basis of linguistic elements and of content, the attribution to Aelian of the *adespoton* fragment quoted in *Suda*, s.v. ἀθέμιστα (A 714 Adler) seems to be confirmed, since Aelian is the source, well known to the

⁴³ D.H. *AR* 1.87.2; 2.42.4, 53.2, 56.3; 3.19.5, 20.4, 21.7, 25.5, 32.5, 53.4; 4.53.3, 67.2; 5.15.3, 16.3; 6.12.2 and 3, 33.2, 92.4, 93.2; 7.11.3, 36.3 (ἐπὶ κεφαλὴν ὠθεῖσθαι); 8.18.4, 20.2 (*bis*), 85.2; 9.11.5, 25.2, 28.1, 31.1, 48.3, 57.7, 67.2, 70.2; 10.14.2, 16.7, 20.3, 38.4, 41.4 (*bis*), 55.3; 11.23.5, 32.1; *Comp.* 16, 20.

⁴⁴ D.H. *AR* 7.36.3.

⁴⁵ D.H. *AR* 2.69.2.

⁴⁶ Arr. *Anab.* 1.2.6, 8.5 (*bis*); 2.27.1, 2; 4.26.6; 5.15.6; 6.9.4 (*bis*), 10.4; *Ind.* 13.8; *Alan.* 30; *FGrH/BNJ* 156 F 12 and F 119a.

⁴⁷ Arr. *Anab.* 7.11.8; *Ind.* 26.5.

⁴⁸ Arr. *Cyn.* 14.3.

⁴⁹ John of Antioch, fr. 39 Roberto, 121 Müller/204 Roberto, 186 Müller/279 Roberto, 202 Müller/294 Roberto.

⁵⁰ John of Antioch, fr. 91 Müller/174.1 Roberto, 146 Müller/224 Roberto, *Fragmentum ineditum*, *Oratio* 4, I.168 Lampros/145.2 Roberto, fr. 82, 306, and 308 Roberto.

⁵¹ ὠθέω: cf. Ael. *VH* 3.44; *NA* 1.4, 5, 8, 22, 40; 2.8 (*bis*), 48; 4.1; 5.49, 52; 7.21 (*bis*); 8.9 (*bis*); 9.1, 8, 34, 61; 10.16, 34; 11.22; 12.12, 18, 22, 30; 13.17, 19, 20; 14.26; 15.5, 18; fr. 5 Hercher/Domingo-Forasté, 39 Hercher/42a Domingo-Forasté (Aelian's authorship is established by the repetition of textual sections ascribed to him through *Suda*, s.v. προτένης (Π 2870 Adler) and *Suda*, s.v. φάτνη (Φ 132 Adler)), 69 Hercher (*bis*)/72 Domingo-Forasté. As to Aelian's authorship of the latter, cf., *supra*, n. 33.

⁵² Ael. *NA* 2.48.

⁵³ Ael. *VH* 1.32 (*bis*), 13.22, 23; *NA* 2.11; 5.23, 49; 9.34, 64; 10.24; 14.16; 17.47.

⁵⁴ Ael. *NA* 1.29; 2.29; 3.22; 5.33; 6.14, 64; 8.13, 16, 24; 9.19 (*bis*); 14.8; 16.34; 17.43, 47.

compilers of the lexicon, who best matches all the linguistic features of the anonymous quotation. The *Suda* entry s.v. *ἔωσεν* (E 1909 Adler), which clearly preserves the sequel of the myth, can also be ascribed to Aelian.

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