Day watch or bay watch? A note on ἡμεροσκόπος (Ar. Lys. 849)

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In this short note I explore the possibility that Lysistrata’s use of the military term ἡμεροσκόπος ‘day watch’ in the introduction to the (in)famous seduction scene between Cinesias and Myrrhine (829-953) is in fact a pun based on a well-documented feature of female speech in 5th-century Attic which must have been easily recognizable as such by the male audience: iotacism. I argue that ἡμεροσκόπος will have been pronounced as ἱμεροσκόπος ‘lust watch’, with a long close front unrounded [iː] instead of a long mid-open front unrounded [εː]. By doing so, the military term, befitting the context of the occupation-plot, is perverted to a sexually charged word befitting the context of the strike-plot.1 The remainder of this note is structured as follows: in §1 I sketch in more detail the military vocabulary associated with the occupation-plot which occasions the use of ἡμεροσκόπος; in §2 I describe the sexual vocabulary associated with the strike-plot which invites the perversion of ἡμεροσκόπος to ἱμεροσκόπος; in §3 I discuss the evidence for iotacism as a feature of female speech and the likelihood that it applies to ἡμεροσκόπος; in §4 I present some conclusions.

1. MILITARY TERMINOLOGY ASSOCIATED WITH THE OCCUPATION-PLOT

The first half of the play is centered on Lysistrata’s first scheme: the seizure of the Acropolis. The vocabulary associated with the occupation-plot is unmistakably military. Lysistrata addresses the old women deployed to occupy the Acropolis as ξύμμαχοι ‘allies’ (456) and uses the military term λόχος ‘company’ to refer to them: καὶ παρ’ ἡμῖν εἰσὶ τέτταρες λόχοι μαχίμων γυναικῶν ἔνδον ἐξοπλισμένων ‘we also have four companies of fully armed combat women inside’ (453-4).2 The verb (κατα-)λαμβάνω ‘occupy’ is used five times in this context: καταληψόμεθα γὰρ τὴν ἀκρόπολιν τήμερον ‘we will seize the citadel today’ (176), ταῖς πρεσβυτάταις γὰρ προστέτακται … θυεῖν δοκούσαις καταλαβεῖν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ‘the elderly women have been ordered … to seize the citadel while pretending to sacrifice’ (177-9), αἱ γὰρ γυναῖκες τὴν ἀκρόπολιν τῆς θεοῦ ἤδη κατειλήφασιν ‘the women have already seized the citadel of the Goddess’ (241-2), γυναῖκας … κατὰ μὲν ἄγιον ἔχειν βρέτας, κατὰ τ’ ἄκροπολιν ἐμὴν λαβεῖν, κλῃθροισί τ’ αὖ καὶ μοχλοῖσι τὰ Προπύλαια πακτοῦν ‘women … hold the sacred image, and seized my citadel, and shut it off with bars and bolts’ (260-5), τὴν Κραναὰν κατέλαβον, ἐφ’ ὅ τε μεγαλόπετρον ἄβατον ἀκρόπολιν, ἱερὸν τέμενος ‘they have seized the citadel of Cranaus, on the mighty rock, the restricted citadel, a holy precinct’ (480-3). When Cinesias approaches the Acropolis, Lysistrata asks who is standing ἐντὸς τῶν φυλακῶν ‘within the perimeter’ (847), “as if the Akropolis were an armed garrison with sentries at its periphery”.3 When Cinesias inquires: σὺ δ’ εἶ τίς ἡκβάλλουσά μ’; ‘who are you to throw me out?’ (849a), Lysistrata replies: ἡμεροσκόπος ‘daytime sentry’ (849b). From the perspective of the occupation-plot, the use of the military term ἡμεροσκόπος, prepared by the preceding phrase ἐντὸς τῶν φυλακῶν, seems therefore entirely appropriate.

3 Henderson, Lysistrata (n. 1), 175; cf. Sommerstein, Lysistrata (n. 1) 200.
The seduction scene is the first of three episodes in which the ischemic priapic effects of the strike-plot on the Athenian and Spartan men are illustrated in an exceedingly graphic manner, the former being represented by Cinesias (706-80), the latter by the anonymous Spartan herald (980-1013) and both by the Spartan and Athenian delegates (1072-1188). Lysistrata describes the approaching Cinesias to the other women on the Acropolis as follows: ἄνδρα, <ἄνδρ'> ὁρῶ προσιόντα παραπεπληγμένον ‘a man, I see a man coming this way, palsy-stricken, possessed by the secret rites of Aphrodite’ (831-2). Cinesias describes himself as being seized by ὁ σπασμός … χῶ τέτανος ‘spasms and cramps’ (845-6). When Lysistrata asks Cinesias if he is a man (ἀνήρ; 848a), he retorts, “brandishing his phallus” as Henderson suggests in his Loeb edition:4 ἄνηρ δῆτα ‘a man, duh’ (848b). When asked in turn who she is, Lysistrata replies: ἱμεροσκόπος ‘day watch’ (849).

Cinesias is approaching the Propylaea from sanctuary of Demeter Chloe (835). As a ἱμεροσκόπος, Lysistrata is thus well positioned, not just to see him coming, but also to behold the sorry state he is in. Cinesias’ inflated condition was obviously visible to the audience as well, as he was wearing a bigger-than-life comic phallus, like the Spartan herald and the Athenian and Spartan delegates later in the play. It is nevertheless remarkable how often explicit reference is made to the priapic state of the phalli by means of evidential particles such as δῆτα and deictic pronouns, often reinforced by the so-called deictic iota.

Cinesias points ostentatiously at his phallus on at least three occasions: ἄλλα’ ἦ τὸ πέος τόδ’ Ἡρακλῆς ξενίζεται; ‘is this cock here then like Heracles being served?’ (928), ἄλλα’ ἐπῆρται τουτογί ‘well, this one here is already up’ (937), πῶς ταυτηνὶ [sc. ψωλήν] παιδοτροφήσω; ‘how shall I raise this one [sc. hard-on] here?’ (956). The Spartan herald is vividly described by Cinesias as Κονίσαλος (982), an ithyphallic creature associated with Priapus. In what follows, he explicitly emphasizes the visibility of the Spartan’s priapic phallus: κἄπειτα δόρυ δῆθ’ ὑπὸ μάλης ἥκεις ἔχων; ‘and that’s why you’ve come with that spear hidden under your arm, right?’ (985), τί δὴ προβάλλει τὴν χλαμύδ’ ἦ βουβωνιᾶς ὑπὸ τῆς ὁδοῦ; ‘if not, then why are you holding your cloak in front of you? are your groins swollen from your journey?’; τί δ’ ἐστί σοι τοδί; ‘what’s this then you’ve got here?’ (991), χαὔτη 'στὶ σκυτάλη Λακωνική ‘then this here is a Spartan baton as well’ (992), and concludes: ἀλλα’ ἐστικας, ὥ μιρφότατε ‘why, you’ve got a stiffy, you pervert!’ (991). In a similar way, he points at the Spartan delegate’s state of affairs: ὅπο τοῦ δὲ τοιτὶ τὸ κακὸν ὑμῖν ἐνέπεσεν; ‘who caused this evil here to fall upon you?’ (997), who later on confirm its visibility: ὁρῆν γὰρ ἔξεσθ’ ὡς ἔχοντες ἵκομες ‘you can see for yourselves how we’re doing’ (1077).

These few references indicate that the φαλληφόρια of the men is presented as a real φαλλοσκοπία by Aristophanes. Which brings me back to the Lysistrata’s identification of herself to Cinesias as ἱμεροσκόπος, which I believe contains a pun on ἵμερος. This would turn Lysistrata the ‘lust watch’, as of course she should be, the men’s desire for sex being exactly

4 Henderson, Aristophanes (n. 2) 381.
5 The term δόρυ is metaphorically used to refer to a huge erection, cf. J. Henderson, The Maculate Muse. Obscene Language in Attic Comedy (Oxford, 1991) 120; Henderson, Lysistrata (n. 1) 186. On the literal and figurative senses of the phrase δόρυ ὑπὸ μάλης cf. Sommerstein, Lysistrata (n. 1) 205.
6 On the interpretation of Laconian σκυτάλᾱ / Αττικ σκυτάλη cf. Sommerstein, Lysistrata (n. 1) 205-6, who prefers to consider it “a distinctive type of walking-stick with a knobbed or twisted end . . . a much ather false identification of an erect comic phallus with a prominent glans of the type often seen in vase-paintings of satyrs and other ugly males” instead of the “dispatch-stick”, long and wrapped with leather, thus similar to the comic phallos” identified by Henderson, Lysistrata (n. 1) 186 and other editors.
what constitutes the strike-plot, as set out rather explicitly in the prologue (149-54). Ἱμέρος is what Lysistrata bids Aphrodite and Eros to give to the women in order to produce τέτανον ... καὶ ῥοπαλισμοὺς ‘delightful cramps and clubisms’ (551-4).

This is of course reminiscent of that other famous example of ‘sexual manipulation of husbands by wives’.

7 Hera’s seduction of Zeus (Iliad 14.153-353). Just as Lysistrata warns the Athenian and Spartan delegates that they should stop fighting each other, because the Persians are waiting to invade Greece again (1133), Hera wants the Greeks to regain the upper hand in the war against the Trojans. Like Lysistrata, she invokes the help of Aphrodite to give her φιλότητα καὶ ἵμερον ‘love and desire’ (198). Like Cinesias, Zeus is overpowered by the passion and desire provided by Aphrodite: καί με γλυκὸς ἵμερος αἴρει ‘and sweet desire takes hold of me’ (14.328, the conclusion of Zeus’ hilarious catalogue of female conquests, surely the most original way ever to seduce your wife).

From the perspective of the strike-plot, therefore, a pun on ἰμεροσκόπος → ἱμεροσκόπος would fit the context perfectly and perversely well.

3. IOTACISM AS A FEATURE OF FEMALE SPEECH

For ἱμεροσκόπος to contain a pun on ἵμερος, the vowels should be very similar and, indeed, they are: at the time of the production of Lysistrata, <η> represented a long mid-open front unrounded [εː], whereas the <ι> in ἵμερος is a long close front unrounded [iː]. Threatte, discussing orthographic confusion of <η> and <ι>, remarks that it is reasonable to assume that [iː] and [εː] could be confused “by the semi-literate”. Interestingly, Lysistrata contains another example of a pun depending on the confusion of [εː] and [iː], which also relates to the priapism of the men: ἀσκητικόν τό χρῆμα τοῦ νοσήματος ‘a terrible athletic affliction’ (1083-5). It is generally acknowledged that ἀσκητικός puns on ἀσκῑτικός, an otherwise unattested adjective derived from ἀσκῑ́της ‘dropsy’.

9 There is, however, more than the indirect evidence of ἀσκητικός ~ *ἀσκῑτικός to make the case for a pun on ἵμερος in ἱμεροσκόπος.

In a famous passage in Plato’s Cratylus, Socrates asserts that, in his time, elderly people and even more so women were more conservative in their speech, with particular reference to the confusion of <η> and <ι> (418b9-c6):

οἶσθα ὅτι οἱ παλαιοὶ οἱ ἡμέτεροι τῷ ἰῶτα καὶ τῷ δέλτα εὖ μάλα ἐχρῶντο, καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα αἵ γυναῖκες, αἵπερ μάλιστα τὴν ἀρχαίαν φωνὴν σῴζουσι. νῦν δὲ ἀντὶ μὲν τοῦ ἰῶτα ἢ ἢ ἕτα μεταστρέφουσιν, αντὶ δὲ τοῦ δέλτα ζῆτα, ὡς δὴ μεγαλοπρεπέστερα ὄντα. [...] οἷον οἱ μὲν ἀρχαιότατοι «ἱμέραν» τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκάλουν, οἱ δὲ «ἑμέραν», οἱ δὲ νῦν «ἡμέραν».

‘You know that our elderly used the iota and the delta very well, and above all the women, who most of all preserve the old pronunciation. But nowadays they change <ι> into either <ει> or <η>, and <δ> into <ζ>, because they think they sound rather magnificent [...] For example, the elderly used to call the day ἱμέρα, others ἑμέρα, but the people of our day say ἡμέρα’.  

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7 Henderson, Lysistrata (n. 1) 178.
9 Cf. Henderson, Lysistrata (n. 1) 193; Sommerstein, Lysistrata (n. 8) 210. J. van Leeuwen, Aristophanis Lysistrata (Leiden, 1903) 148, sees a similar word play (verborum eiusmodi ludus) in ὀπῆς ~ ὀπίαν at Wasps 352-3 (cf. LSJ s.v. ὀπίας; A.H. Sommerstein, Wasps [Warminster, 1973] 178), but the pun cannot depend on the possible confusion of [εː] and [iː], as the <ι> of ὀπίαν is short.
Clearly, the example quoted by Socrates is of particular interest for our purposes. From a historical point of view, his assertion does not make any sense, as ἡμέρα is obviously related to Doric ἀμέρα and ultimately to Arcadian ἂμαρ, Ionic ἦμαρ (Homer), Mycenaean a-mo-ra-ma /āmor-āmar/ ‘day after day’, from Proto-Greek *āmṛ, so the variant ἱμέρα could never have preceded ἡμέρα. Quite obviously, the opposite is true: Proto-Greek [a:] → Ionic-Attic [e:] would soon change to [i:] “in the dialect of the majority of the Attic population in the period 400-340” according to Teodorsson.\(^\text{10}\) Threatte, on the other hand, contends that confusion of <η> and <ι> is “exceedingly rare in Attic inscriptions before ca. 150 AD”, which he takes as evidence of “η pronounced as i [i:] (by this time spelled as I or EI)”.\(^\text{11}\) This fits well with Teodorsson’s other conclusion with regard to the pronunciation of <η> in the first half of the fourth century BC: “However, the evidence of a close equality is also very strong, which shows that this was the pronunciation of a considerable part of the population”.\(^\text{12}\)

These conclusions may seem contradictory, but Duhoux offers a tentative and, indeed, tempting, explanation: Teodorsson describes the sociolect of “la masse non cultivée”, Threatte the sociolect of “l’élite cultivée”,\(^\text{13}\) which explains, at least in part, their different conclusions as far as the chronology of the sound change [e:] → [i:] is concerned. The key word is, of course, variation - but how to interpret the attested variation in terms of high and low prestige? And, more importantly, how does this tie in with Socrates’ characterization of female speech as being more μεγαλοπρεπής - surely the Greek equivalent of the modern sociolinguistic variable ‘high’?

In his magnificent study of the ‘languages’ of Aristophanes, Willi discusses a famous Aristophanic fragment (fr. 706):\(^\text{14}\)

διάλεκτον ἔχοντα μέσην πόλεως
οὐκ ἀστείαν υποθηλυτέραν
οὔτ’ ἀνελευτέραν ὑπαγροικότεραν.

‘whose speech is the average style of the polis,
neither urbane and slightly female,
nor vulgar and somewhat boorish.’

The association of ἀστεία and υποθηλυτέρα (διάλεκτος) ties in very well with Socrates’ use of the word μεγαλοπρεπής. It suggests that Athenian elite women of the late fifth century were the avant-garde of socially prestigious innovations,\(^\text{15}\) in line with recent sociolinguistic research.\(^\text{16}\) Duhoux believes the women constituted “la minorité cultivée” and takes into consideration the evidence from the unpublished slates found in Plato’s Academy written by schoolboys belonging to the Athenian elite.\(^\text{17}\) These plates contain many examples of confusion between <η> and <ι>, e.g. ΑΘΙΝΑ, ΑΡΙΣ, ΔΙΜΟΣΘΕΝΙΣ. Threatte, dating them to the end of the fifth century, explains these as a consequence of “the boys’ incomplete mastery of the alphabet”.\(^\text{18}\) Duhoux, on the other hand, dating them to the

\(^{11}\) Threatte, *Grammar* (n. 6) 165-6.
\(^{17}\) Duhoux, ‘Vocalisme’ (n. 11) 189-91; cf. Teodorsson, *Phonemic System* (n. 8) 277 n. 272 .
\(^{18}\) Threatte, *Grammar* (n. 6) 165.
second half of the fifth century with excavator Stavropoulos, considers them as early evidence for iotacism in Athens in this period. Following Teodorsson, he concludes that the boys must have learned the iotacistic pronunciation from their mothers at home.

This is entirely in line with Teodorsson’s interpretation of the quoted passage from Cratylus: “the only possible interpretation is that there actually existed more than one pronunciation at the same time, and that the narrow quality [e:] or [i:] must have existed in the dialect of a part of the Attic population for a considerable length of time when Plato wrote his Cratylus.” He points at Socrates’ repeated use of οἶσθα “to indicate reality” and adds: “very few, if any, documents in our corpus […] can have been written by women, and that the dialect of that half of the population cannot be studied by means of graphic material at all”. For this reason, Teodorsson takes the evidence from the quoted passage from Cratylus very seriously: the iotacistic pronunciation of <η> as [i:] by women is not conservative, but innovative, and the conservative pronunciation as [e:] “was practised by educated people and taught at school”. Duhoux notes that the “réaction anti-itaciste” is clearly reflected in Socrates use of ὁι δὲ νῦν «ἡμέραν» ‘but the people of our day say ἡμέρα’ (418c6), which would agree well with the dating of the schoolboys’ ioticism to the second half of the fifth century.

At the end of his lucid article Duhoux wonders: “On peut, bien entendu, se demander pourquoi Aristophane, si prompt à la macquerie, n’a pas utilisé ces différences de prononciation comme matériel comique […] les variétés subdialectales de l’attique ne faisaient peut-être pas partie des matières dont on riait à Athènes: on pouvait trouver amusante la prononciation des étrangers, Grecs ou Barbares; pas celle de ses concitoyens”. I believe ἡμεροσκόπος is a perfect example of a pun which exploits the well-known iotacistic pronunciation of <η> as [i:] by Athenian elite women. It is surely no coincidence that Socrates, in one of his many notorious folk etymologies in Cratylus, explains the ‘old’ pronunciation of ἡμέρα as ἱμέρα with reference to, indeed, ἱμερος (418c8-d2):

οἶσθα οὖν ὅτι μόνον τοῦτο δηλοῖ τὸ ἀρχαῖον ὄνομα τὴν διάνοιαν τοῦ θεμένου; ὅτι γὰρ ἁσμένοις τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ ἱμείρουσιν ἐκ τοῦ σκότους τὸ φῶς ἐγίνετο, ταύτη ἱμέρος ἱμείροις αὐτήν ἔνδειξε.

‘You know, of course, that only the ancient word reveals the intention of the name-giver? That is, because the light comes out of the darkness to the joy of the people who long (ἱμείρουσιν) for it, therefore they called it ἱμέρα.’

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19 Duhoux, ‘Vocalisme’ (n. 11) 190.
20 Teodorsson, Phonemic System (n. 8) 277 n. 272.
21 Duhoux, ‘Vocalisme’ (n. 11) 195.
22 Teodorsson, Phonemic System (n. 8) 264, cf. 277.
23 Teodorsson, Phonemic System (n. 8) 264 n. 254 & n. 255.
24 Teodorsson, Phonemic System (n. 8) 277.
25 Duhoux, ‘Vocalisme’ (n. 11) 192.
26 Duhoux, ‘Vocalisme’ (n. 11) 195.
27 It should be noted, however, that the only other example of a pun based on iotacism is ἀσκητικός (1083). This agrees with Socrates’ observation that iotacism was characteristic of women and old people, but not with Willi’s conclusion that women were the avant-garde of socially prestigious innovations (n. 13). Unless of course ἀσκητικός was uttered by the women’s and not by the men’s leader, as the two semi-choruses are united into a single chorus at this point, but this seems highly unlikely.
28 Rejecting, as he does, the alternative etymology (Crat. 418d4-6): νῦν δὲ γε τετραγῳδῆμενον οὖδ’ ἂν κατανοήσαις ὅ τι βούλετα τῇ ἡμέρᾳ οὐδὲ ἡ ἡμέρα ἡ ἡμέρα ποιεῖ, διὰ ταῦτα ὁνομάσθη αὐτὴν οὕτως ‘but now, of course, it is all dressed up and you wouldn’t know what ἡμέρα wants to convey. And yet think that since the day makes things gentle (ἡμέρα), it was called that way because of that.’ It should be added that this alternative etymology was, for other reasons, entertained at Timaios 45b4-6.
The repetition of ὅτι indicates that Socrates assumes that Hermogenes knows (οἶσθα, 418c8) this popular etymology, probably because it was around in circles of educated Athenian men at that time. If this assumption is correct, it makes the pun on ἵμερος in ἡμεροσκόπος even more likely.

4. CONCLUSION

In this short note I have argued that the military term ἡμεροσκόπος ‘day watch’ at Lysistrata 849 is in fact a pun on the sexually charged word ἱμεροσκόπος ‘lust watch’. It is used by Lysistrata at the turning point of the transition from the occupation-plot (254-705) to the strike-plot (706-1013): ἡμεροσκόπος fits the military context of the former perfectly well, ἱμεροσκόπος the sexual context of the latter. The evidence for the iotacistic pronunciation of <η> as [i:] instead of [ε:] as a feature of female speech is obviously scanty and indirect, but nevertheless significant. Socrates testimony, in particular, is extremely relevant, as it indicates that Athenian men were aware of this pronunciation particularity and suggests that educated men even knew about the folk etymology of ἡμέρα as being related to ἵμερος. The predominantly male audience29 would not have missed this feature of female speech – a feature, indeed, that Duhoux believed was missing altogether from Aristophanes’ ‘women comedies’. In light of the numerous characteristics of female speech in Aristophanes uncovered in recent scholarship,30 it would have been a missed opportunity not to make use of this particular one. Aristophanes was of course an extremely creative punster and would not miss an opportunity if he had one, or better: if he could create one.31 And we should not forget what Henderson reminded us of with reference to Aristophanes’ audience: ‘The Greeks’ great interest in the significance of words and enjoyment in revealing unexpected connections among them made them much more enthusiastic punsters than we are”.32

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31 To quote just one other example of a pun on a military term perverted into a sexually charged word or, rather, name: Όρσιλόχος (725), a nom parlant which I have explained elsewhere as meaning ‘exciter of (female) troops’ rather than ‘inciter of troops’, cf. M. Janse, ‘εἰς Ὀρσιλόχου (Ar. Lys. 725)’, *Mnemosyne* 64 (2011) 629-631; M. Janse & D. Praet, ‘Orsilochus, the Perfect Adulterer’, *Glotta* 88 (2012) 166-173.