An Unnoticed Pun in Hipponax fr. 3a W. = 2 D.

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The word Μηιονιστί in Hipponax (fr. 3a W. = 2 D.) is of particular importance for discussions of the uncertain historical connection between the Maeonians and the Lydians.1 Whereas Homer speaks only of Maeonians (Il. 2.864–6; 3.400–1; 4.141–2; 5.43–4; 10.430–1; 18.290–2), the use of this ethnic by Hipponax is potentially revealing because this author is also aware of Lydian as a separate designation (fr. 42.2 W. = 7.2 D. δία Λυδῶν; 92.1 W. = 95.1 D. ηὔδα δὲ λυδίζουσα· “βασκρολέα”). There are thus two distinct ways to read Hipponax’ use of the word Μηιονιστί. On the one hand, it might be a playful, ironic, or otherwise literary reference to Lydian as Maeonian via Homer, as becomes common among later authors (Posidipp. Ep. 120.1 A.-B.; Verg. Aen. 10.141; Ov. Met. 6.5; Fast. 2.310; Sil. Pun. 5.10; cf. Arist. fr. 76 R. = [Plut.] Vit. Hom. 1.3; Ov. Fast. 2.120). On the other hand, it might reflect a unique moment of precision in marking the identity of non-Greek ethnolinguistic groups on the coast of Asia Minor, afforded by an author distinctly aware of Lydian, Phrygian, and a handful of other Anatolian and Afroasiatic tongues now only partly recognizable.2

This note provides new evidence in favour of the former option; specifically, it argues that Hipponax’ purpose in citing the ethnic is primarily to make a cheap pun, as a way to poke fun at the use of etymology in early Homeric criticism. The fragment in question is a short prayer to Hermes, often connected, by editors since Schneidewin, to another fragment which appears to derive from its immediate narrative context:3

ἔβωσε Μαίης παῖδα, Κυλλήνης πάλμυν·
“Ἐρμῆ κυνάγχα, Μηιονιστὶ Κανδαῦλα,
φωρῶν ἑταῖρε, δεῦρό μοι σκαπερδεῦσαι.”

He called to the son of Maia, the lord of Cyllene:

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1 The ancient sources tend to consider Maeonian an earlier designation for Lydian (e.g. Hdt. 1.7.3; 7.74.1; Diod. Sic. 4.31.5; Plin. HN 5.110), but Strabo indicates that there was some uncertainty as to the historical accuracy of this explanation (Str. 12.8.3), and other identifications exist (Hdt. 7.77.1 Cabalians; cf. Str. 13.4.17), cf. R. S. P. Beekes, The Origin of the Etruscans, Amsterdam 2003, 7–23.


3 F. W. Schneidewin, Delectus poesis Graecorum elegiacae, iambicae, melicae, Göttingen 1838–9, 208. It is probably correct to join the two fragments together, although this does not affect the larger argument of this paper. First-person narration similarly introduces direct speech in frs. 35 W. = 10 D. and 36 W. = 44 D. I accept Meineke’s σκαπερδεῦσαι for MS σκαπαρδεῦσαι without great confidence; the meaning of this verb is discussed at Hawkins (n. 2) 190–4.
“Hermes dogthrottler, Candaules in Maeonian, companion of thieves, come here help me pull.”

(Hipp. frr. 3 + 3a W. = 1 + 2 D.)

Line two of the fragment gives a transparently false etymology for the name Κανδαύλης in the Greek κυνάγχης. Hipponax ascribes the Near Eastern royal title Candaules to Hermes as a divine name, perhaps like the title ‘Lord’ (יִיּ[Adonai], קְבָּרָה, ﴿א-رب辩论)) is used of divinity in the Abrahamic religions. While the structure of the association (adverb in -ιστί linking two proper nouns) is much like we find in equations of Greek and foreign divinities in Herodotus, the replacement of an Olympic divine name with a local royal title is bathetic. Yet ‘Candaules’ is not merely equated with Hermes, but with Hermes in his aspect as dog-throttler, and there is an implicit justification of the Anatolian divine title in the alliteration κυνάγχα … Κανδαῦλα, once the basis for modern reconstructions of the etymology of Κανδαύλης. In other words, Hipponax draws a playful and knowingly false connection between Κανδαύλης and κυνάγχης, an etymological pun whose only difference to those many others we find in Greek literature is its application to a foreign name. To be clear: Hipponax knows nothing of PIE reflexes; it is rather the other way around, that linguists, beginning with Felix Solmsen, were long taken in by Hipponax’ misdirection in this fragment, assuming a verbal jingle to imply a semantic connection.

Just as the fragment brazenly misinterprets the etymological value of the name Κανδαύλης, it also highlights this error by using an antiquated, Homeric ethnic Μηιονιστί, which contains its own folk etymology μὴ Ἰωνιστί or ‘non-Ionian’. This is a way of pointing to bad etymology and to the error inherent in equating divine titles: a Greek epithet does not justify the foreign name; a Greek god cannot be made sense of with a foreign title. There are a number of linguistic and contextual points in favour of this position:

1. Just as the false etymology for Κανδαύλης is signalled by alliteration of the kappa (κυν ~ Καν), so too Hipponax’ etymologizing of the word Μηιονιστί is marked by the echo of Ἑρμη in

4 For Candaules as a royal title, see Hdt. 1.7.2 Κανδαύλης = Μουρσίλος; cf. P.Oxy. 2382; Hdt. 7.98.1 + 8.87.2
Κανδαύλης = father of the King of Kalynda, a city in Caria; Nikolaus of Damascus FGrH 90 fr. 47 Κανδαύλης = Sadyattes II. The name’s recurrence and its pairing with other proper names suggest that it is a title. On the assumption that line one is from the same fragment, the use of a royal title as a divine name picks up πάλμυς, a Lydian loan word for ‘king’ (ἈΠΑΥΤΟΥ), cf. D. Schürr, “Lydisches III: Rund um Lydisch ‘Hund’”, Kadmos 39, 2000, 165–76, at 166–7.
5 Hdt. 2.46.4; 2.156.5; 4.27.1; 4.59.2; cf. 1.131.3; 1.199.3; 2.42.2–5; 2.59.2; 2.144.2; cf. R. Oreshko, “Hipponax and the Linguistic, Ethnic and Cultural Milieu of Western Anatolia. Some Further Notes on Shane Hawkins’ The Language of Hipponax, Bremen, 2013”, Hefteaisos 30, 2013, 79–104, at 94.
6 Bathos is further suggested in the association of divinity with the act of thieving, as noted by Schürr (n. 4) 166–7 and L. Bettarini, Lingua e testo di Ipponatte, Pisa-Rome 2017, 28–32.
7 Hawkins (n. 2) 181.
Both sound effects become considerably more pronounced (Κυλλήνης and Μαιής) if fr. 3 W. = 1 D. is indeed from the immediate context of our fragment, as commonly thought.  

2. The ending -στί is regularly used for ways of speaking that are unexpected. Hipponax would be drawing here not on a deverbal form Ἰωνιστί from Ἰωνίζω, since these forms are paralleled only much later and take second place to Ἰαστί (Pl. Resp. 398e, cf. Pratin. TrGF 1.4 F6) and Ἰάζω (Heraclid. Crit. FGrH 369a fr. 3.2), which in any case refer to musical modes or metres, not speech. Even more decisively, we know the adverb that was used for speaking ‘in Ionian’, and it is Ἰωνικῶς not Ἰωνιστί (Ar. Pax 933 λέγωσ' Ἰωνικῶς “οἴ”). Rather, the adverbial ending -στί is also regularly used, not as a deverbal, but for comic neologisms referring to ways of speaking, e.g. Διαστί ‘speaking like Zeus’, used of Homeric divine names at Dio Chrys. Or. 11.23,11 or πυγιστί ‘in Arsish’, as M. L. West translates it,12 used to introduce the description of a sexualized fertility (?) ritual (Hipp. fr. 92.2 W. = 95.2 D. πυγιστί: “τὸν πυγεῶνα παρ[ ”). This specifically linguistic capacity of adverbs in -στί is also seen in a number of apparently deverbal forms, where the root verb refers not to speech but to behaviour or else does not exist for this period at all (Hdt. 2.46.4 Αἰγυπτιστί; Soph. fr. 462.2 Ἀργολιστί; 827 ἀνθρωπιστί; 473 Σκυθιστί; Crates fr. 24 ἄνδριστί).

3. Hipponax spoke in Ionian dialect, a fact that he may himself have recognized. While an explicit division of Greek into distinct ethnolinguistic groups (Attic, Ionic, Doric, Aeolic) cannot be traced earlier than the third century BCE (Heraclid. Crit. FGrH 369a fr. 3.2), the Greeks’ Eastern neighbours referred to all Greeks as ‘Ionians’ from the earliest periods.13 This usage is regularly redeployed by Greek authors (Aesch. Pers. 178; 771; 1025), to the point of being a primary aspect of the Eastern caricature (Ar. Ach. 104). This is a strong reason ‘Ionian’ would be le mot juste.

4. Altered pronunciation is part and parcel for ancient etymologies, and is especially apparent in false etymologies. Whether we are to imagine that Μηιονιστί recalls μὴ Ἰωνιστί or more likely μὴ Ἰαονιστί (cf. Il. 13.685 Ἰάονες), Plato’s Cratylus offers good parallels for both the equivalence of omega and omicron (410c) and the removal of an excess alpha (399b) in a false etymology. The diphthong Μη might be heard as a synecphonesis, a slurred pronunciation of two otherwise separate syllables, which occurs at a higher-than-average rate in Hipponax, in addition to a more general tendency towards mispronunciation.14

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11 An extremely likely conjecture by L. Rhodoman(n)us for MS Ἰαστί, a word which has just previously been used, and which makes no sense in context.
12 M. L. West, Greek Lyric Poetry, Oxford 1993, 121.
5. This is by no means the only example of pseudo-etymologizing in Hipponax: in fact, Hipponax is a sucker for the cheap pun. The best-known example is the speaking name of Hipponax’ arch-rival Βούπαλος or ‘Bull-dick’. What is peculiar about this speaking name is that it seems also to have been the real name of an historical individual; like a found object, the name Βούπαλος is repurposed by Hipponax, who places it in contexts which help elicit the name’s lewd potential (frr. 12.2; 15 W. = 20.2; 18 D.). A variety of ready-made Anatolian place names and ethnic designations are reconfigured along similar lines, including frr. 12.1 W. = 20.1 D. Ἐρυθραίων (< ἐρυθρός of the glans of the penis), 47.2 W. = 51.2 D. Φλουήσιον (< φλουάζω?), and 92.15 W. = 95.15 D. Πνεύματισσ (πνεύματισσ < πνεύματισσ). As in much Greek literature, the proper name is a notable site of play in Hipponax; distinctive is this author’s willingness to reinvent the sense of foreign proper names from his local environment using Greek, and specifically rude and coarse innuendo.

6. Finally, the pun should be connected to the budding Homeric scholarship of the final quarter of the sixth century. The ethnic Maeonian is already treated as a typically Homeric archaism in this period, as is indicated by the word’s presence in the Homeric Hymn to Apollo (179). Homer scholars of this period make use of folk etymologies from the blind Chian’s work, most notably Theagenes of Rheidium’s repurposing of Homer’s equivalence of Hera with ‘air’ (Il. 21.6–7 ηέρα δ’ Ηρη; cf. Pl. Cra. 404b–c τὸν άέρα δὲ Ἡραν) in his allegorical reading of the warring Olympians as natural elements (DK 8A2 = Schol. Il. 20.67b). In this respect, it may be significant that a pun on the negative prefix μή is so central to Homer’s Odyssey, where Odysseus’ use of the pronoun Οὖτις as a proper name not only leads to the confusion of a blinded Polyphemus’ neighbours, as they equate the name with μή τις (Od. 9.364–7), but also specifically recalls that

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16 Rosen (n. 15) 31–2.

17 Rosen (n. 15) 35–7.


20 Rosen (n. 15) 36 n. 24.

21 There are likely to be further ethnographic puns of which lack of context renders us unaware, like perhaps frr. 1 W. = 17 D. Κλαζομένιον (< κλάζειν?), 2 W. = 4a D. Κοραξικόν (< κοράσιον?), or 2a W. = 4b D. Σινδικόν (< σύνδικος?, cf. Pind. Pyth. 1.2). The proper name Κίκων (4 W. = 3 D.) may also be an ethnic in disguise (Hawkins [n. 2] 134). After West, “The Invention of Homer”, CQ 49.2, 1999, 364–82, at 377–9.


23 The date of this work is contested, but has a terminus ante quem of the late sixth century (N. Richardson, Three Homeric Hymns: To Apollo, Hermes and Aphrodite, Cambridge 2010, 13–14; cf. Schol. Pind. Nem. 2.1c = Hippostr. FGrH 568 fr. 5 with M. L. West, “Cynaethus’ Hymn to Apollo”, CQ 25.2, 1975, 161–70, at 165–6).

24 Negative particles are also found in the speaking name of the Trojan elder Οὐκαλέγων (Il. 3.148), and (at a later date) in wordplay with the name Meeda (D. Konstan, “Medea: A Hint of Divinity”, CW 101.1, 2007, 93–4).
Odysseus is πολύμητις (Il. 1.311; Od. 21.274; Ar. Vesp. 351). Hipponax’ familiarity with the Odyssey is reflected in an extended parody of the Phaeacian episode (frr. 75–7 W./D.), and widespread knowledge of Odysseus’ self-naming pun in particular may be suggested by an allusion to it in a sixth-century inscription at Abu Simbel.

In sum, our most economical explanation for Hipponax’ use of the ethnic Μηιονιστί is that it is a mock etymology aping early Homeric etymological criticism. Long before Hellenistic scholarship made fun of Homeric coinages by playfully ‘discovering’ new names out of particles in their poetic inheritance, Hipponax gives us conscious misreadings of the words ‘Candaules’ and ‘Maionian’. With Plato, the possibility of a false etymology is only ever suggested in connection with the derivation of a foreign word from a Greek one (Cra. 409d–e), and it is a curious coincidence that the example Plato gives is the very word (κύων) by which Hipponax waggishly reinterprets Κανδαύλης (410a). In emphasizing a problematic correspondence between a foreign name and a Greek one, Hipponax sets up a second interpretative gaffe for overdiscerning readers, who like early Homerists are tempted to search out hidden layers of meaning.

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28 Posidippus apud Aristarchus SH 701 τὸν Ἰήσουν ~ Il. 11.101 Ἰήσου; Hermesianax fr. 7.21–6 Ἡοἶν – e.g. Hes. fr. 23a.3 M.-W. ἢ οἷαι; Mart. 1.50 Taratalla ~ Il. 1.465 τ’ ἅρα τ’ ἄλλα; cf. Schol. Il. 5.60a (Ariston).