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A naval official among the gods: Basileia as ταμίαξ ἐς τὰ νεώρια in ARISTOPH. *Av.* 1537-43

Francesco Morosi

As is well known, 5th- and 4th-century Athens regulated every single aspect that had to do with its own fleet, and appointed every year a number of state officials in charge of this vital infrastructure. Many sources – both literary and non-literary – attest to the phenomenon, providing us with a precious insight¹. However, the state of our knowledge is still tantalizingly incomplete at several points. One such case is the ταμίαξ εἰς τὰ νεώρια, one of the many state officials in charge of Athens' dockyards at the Peiraieus, probably with the specific task of collecting, depositing, and recording naval gear². In this paper, I would like to analyse a passage from Aristophanes' *Birds* that has still been disregarded by scholars, and that could be of some help in shedding light on the question.

At a crucial moment in his sacred war against the Olympians, Peisetairos hosts Prometheus, who has come to Cloudcuckooland to deliver vital intelligence on how to defeat Zeus. As the Titan puts it, the key is to marry Basileia: as a matter of fact, Zeus is not alone in running the world, and is flanked by a beautiful maiden. Marrying her means plainly gaining universal power (ARISTOPH. *Av.* 1537-43)³:

I am deeply indebted to some friends for their generous help: Ugo Fantasia, Anna Magnetto, and Emilio Rosamilia have patiently made significant contributions to this paper (and to its own author's knowledge of the field). I am also grateful to the anonymous referees for their useful suggestions.

¹ An accurate outline of the managing and financing of the Athenian fleet can be found in GABRIELSEN 1994, and GABRIELSEN 2008.

² JORDAN 1975, pp. 57-8. On the ταμίαξ ἐς τὰ νεώρια and their tasks, more later (note 25).

³ The text of *Birds* printed here is that by WILSON 2007.

Πε. τίς ἐστιν ἡ Βασίλεια;
 Πρ. καλλίστη κόρη,
 ἥπερ ταμιεύει τὸν κεραυνὸν τοῦ Διὸς
 καὶ τᾶλλ' ἀπαξάπαντα, τὴν εὐβουλίαν,
 τὴν εὐνομίαν, τὴν σωφροσύνην, τὰ νεώρια, 1540
τὴν λοιδορίαν, τὸν κωλακρέτην, τὰ τριώβολα.
 Πε. ἅπαντά γ' ἄρ' αὐτῷ ταμιεύει;
 Πρ. φήμ' ἐγώ.
 ἥν γ' ἥν σὺ παρ' ἐκείνου παραλάβης, πάντ' ἔχεις.

1538 ταμιεύει vett. : κεραμεύει PHC

PE. Who's Sovereignty? PR. She's a most beautiful maiden, who manages the thunderbolt of Zeus and absolutely everything else – wisdom, law and order, good sense, dockyards, mudslinging, paymasters and three-obols. PE. She manages everything for him, doesn't she? PR. That's right: if you receive *her* from his hands, you've got everything.
 (tr. SOMMERSTEIN 1987, modified)

On Basileia as a character much has been said: the Greek term both designating the abstract concept ('Sovereignty', with long final -α) and the holder of sovereignty ('Royal Lady', with short final -α), the character looks like one of Aristophanes' typical personifications of abstract notions, such as Εἰρήνη, 'Peace', or Διαλλαγὴ, 'Reconciliation'⁴. However, in *Birds* the final – α of Βασίλεια is surely short (Av. 1537, 1753): this has led many a scholar to believe that an actual referent should be retraced – Basileia would be another name for an already existing goddess, and not just the personification of a concept⁵. Such a hypothesis is not new to Aristophanic scholarship (one only need to think of Eirene in *Peace*). However, this

⁴ We still owe much of what we know on Aristophanic personifications to Hans-Joachim Newiger's groundbreaking study on metaphors in Aristophanes (NEWIGER 1957).

⁵ Undoubtedly, some typical features of Athena and Hera contribute to Basileia's characterization (see for instance SOMMERSTEIN 1987, *ad* Av. 1536, 1538, 1633-5). In light of this, scholars have suggested to identify Basileia with either goddess: NEWIGER 1957, pp. 100-2, with Athena; ZANETTO 1987, *ad* Av. 1536, with Hera. Some also suppose that Basileia could refer to the Attic goddess Basile or to Basileia, the protectress of the Bouleuterion (for a critical discussion, see BOWIE 1993, p. 164 note 67).

specific case looks easier to be assessed⁶: Peisetairos evidently does not know a goddess named Basileia, and, as in the case of the Triballoi gods (who were clearly made up by the poet), he has to ask twice for more detailed explanations (Av. 1537, 1542). An even clearer reason for making a case against any identification can be found in the lines quoted above: according to Prometheus' account, Basileia must perform an incongruous number of different tasks, which no existing god or goddess could credibly perform all at once⁷.

These lines, however, are also of great interest for the comic technique employed by the poet, and deserve more attention than they have received so far. The comic core of Prometheus' lines is, in my opinion, the verb used twice to sum up Basileia's tasks: *ταμιεύειν*, 'manage', 'administer' (Av. 1538, 1542). Actually, the manuscript tradition is not unanimous in transmitting the first occurrence of the verb, at line 1538: some of the Triclinian manuscripts (at least P, C, and H)⁸ transmit *κεραμεύει*, 'manufacture', instead of *ταμιεύει*. Among the few editors who print it⁹, Zanetto favours Triclinius' reading as *lectio difficilior*; he also remarks that it would provide both a paronomasia with *κεραυνόν* and a sexual double entendre on penetration (Basileia makes a pot for Zeus' lightning). This latter observation, however, jars with the rection of the verb, which governs the accusative only as a direct object, and not as a final adjunct, as it would be the case here. Moreover, the interpretation of the phrase that

⁶ Except from Zanetto, the most recent commentators (SOMMERSTEIN 1987, *ad Av.* 1536, DUNBAR 1995, *ad Av.* 1537, GRILLI 2007, p. 355 note 423) all agree on not identifying Basileia with any existing goddess.

⁷ Moreover, even if a divine paradigm were to be taken into account for Basileia's characterisation, one could point out that this paradigm would not be the only one to be put in place: as has been rightly observed (EPSTEIN 1981; CRAIK 1987), the scene of Peisetairos' marriage with Basileia bears clear references to the *ἱερὸς γάμος*, the 'sacred wedding' between the wife of the *ἄρχων βασιλεύς* and Dionysus enacted every year at the end of *Anthesteria*.

⁸ In addition to the collations of WHITE, CAREY 1918, see ZANETTO 1987, pp. XLIII-XLVI, and DUNBAR 1995, pp. 26-7, for the *recensio* of these manuscripts. In spite of some minor divergences, all the studies on the Triclinian manuscripts have detected a very close relationship between P (Vaticanus Palatinus 67), C (Parisinus Regius 2717) and H (Holkhamensis 88).

⁹ Brunck in his edition, and Dobree in his *Adversaria* (p. 229).

would follow seems at odds with Aristophanes' typical sexual imagery: *κεραυνός* as a metaphor for the sex organ of men is nowhere else attested in the *corpus*, and pots are not at all common to designate female sex organs, which are instead usually compared to ovens¹⁰.

Above all, we should be careful with the criterion of *lectio difficilior*. As a matter of fact, the verb *ταμיעύειν* is anything but *facilior* in this specific context. On the contrary, it seems extremely meaningful and comically effective. To start with, it recalls an attribute of Zeus himself, who is since Homer known as *ταμίας*, the dispenser, of all things to mortals¹¹. Moreover, *ταμיעύειν* also designates the main task of women in Athenian households – the dispenser. The idea is already to be found in Homer (see for instance HOM. *Il.* 6, 390), but is very common in Athenian 5th- and 4th-century poetry and prose: in his *Oeconomicus*, for instance, Xenophon refers to the *ταμיעύματα*, the ability of running the household, as the main skill a young woman must be taught (e.g. XENOPHON. *Oec.* 3, 15). We find *ταμיעύειν* in Aristophanic drama, as well. Here, *ταμיעύειν* is by far a woman's most important skill, and it will prove crucial to some comedies: in *Lysistrata*, for instance, the protagonist's plan to let the women run the city's treasure is solely based on their expertise in running their respective households (ARISTOPH. *Lys.* 493-5)¹².

The verb, therefore, is by no means banal or insignificant (so as to allow us to consider it a *lectio facilior*). On the contrary, its choice is fundamental to Basileia's characterization, which is produced by the polysemy of *ταμיעύειν*: Basileia is, at the same time, a divine figure – somewhat related to Zeus, with whom she shares an attribute – and a woman, who manages the Olympus, Zeus' *oikos*, as an Athenian woman would manage her

¹⁰ See for instance ARISTOPH. *Pax* 891-3, with HENDERSON 1991, pp. 142-4, and OLSON 1998, *a.l.*

¹¹ See for instance HOM. *Il.* 4, 84: ἀνθρώπων ταμίης πολέμοιο τέτυκτο. Zeus was considered as the dispenser of both abstract (see e.g. SOPH. fr 590 Radt, 2-4 οὐκ ἔστιν / πλὴν Διὸς οὐδείς τῶν μελλόντων / ταμίας) and real things (e.g. ISOCR. 11, 13 τῶν γὰρ ὀμβρῶν καὶ τῶν αὐχμῶν τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ὁ Ζεὺς ταμίας ἔστιν). For more parallels, see *LSJ*, s.v. ταμίας, 2.

¹² See HENDERSON 1987a, *a.l.*, and SOMMERSTEIN 1990, *a.l.* Compare ARISTOPH. *Ecc.* 210-2 (with USSHER 1973, VETTA 1989, and SOMMERSTEIN 1998, *a.l.*): as *Lysistrata*'s, Praxagora's plan is based on women's skill in *ταμיעύειν*, as well (see *Ecc.* 600). *Ταμיעύειν*, then, is the keyword for domestic and civic administration in Aristophanes: HENDERSON 1987b, p. 124.

husband's *oikos*. Basileia, then, is a two-sided personification, combining – as most Aristophanic personifications – divine and human elements. This is made possible, on a textual level, precisely by ταμיעύν, through its religious, social, and economic meanings.

However, I believe that ταμיעύν bears one more meaning in the passage from *Birds*. To clarify it, one should focus on what Basileia manages, as it emerges from lines 1538–41¹³. According to her double nature, Basileia's agency is double-edged – human and divine – as well. The first items in the list are all typical attributes of Zeus, or of a good king: the lightning is, of course, Zeus' main peculiarity¹⁴; εὐβουλία, 'good judgment', is quite as much a distinctive trait of his (DIOD. SIC. 5, 72, for instance, mentions εὐβουλεύς among Zeus' epithets)¹⁵. Moreover, εὐνομία and, even more so, σωφροσύνη were crucial terms to any discussion on *politeia* in Athens, and were often part of common political propaganda (for instance, oligarchic propaganda: see THUC. 3, 82, 8). Basileia, then, keeps watch on Zeus' typical attributes of father of the gods and good ruler.

The following items, however, have little to do with good government – to say nothing of Zeus. For instance, λοιδορία, 'personal abuse', was a quite widespread method in Athens to run political campaigns¹⁶. The κωλακρέται were Athenian officials serving as financial administrators of the public treasure and as paymasters for many a category of citizens¹⁷.

¹³ For an accurate analysis of the list, see also DUNBAR 1995, *a.l.*

¹⁴ In a famous Aeschylean passage (AESCH. *Eu.* 827–9), keeping Zeus' lightning is Athena's precise task; this, however, does not *per se* entail that the lightning was a permanent attribute of Athena's.

¹⁵ Of course, εὐβουλία can apply to human politics, as well. Moreover, one could recall a passage from Plato's *Protagora*, in which good judgement is said to be useful for both private and civic matters (PL. *Prt.* 318e6–319a1 εὐβουλία περὶ τῶν οἰκείων [...] καὶ περὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως), again associating, as ταμיעύν does, domestic and civic administration.

¹⁶ Personal – and often false – abuse is hardly rare in both ancient comedy and rhetoric: DOVER 1974, pp. 30–3.

¹⁷ At the present state of knowledge, we cannot assess accurately what was the extent of the *kolakretai*'s task: according to the most recent interpretation (SAMONS 2000, pp. 57–70; see also MIGEOTTE 2014, pp. 429–31), they managed the δημόσιον, Athens' public treasure, from which at least the salaries of jurors were taken out. Be that as it may, the mention of κωλακρέται in this passage from *Birds* could also help clarify the question of *Hellenotamiai* and the managing of the *demosion*: since during the 410s the *demosion* could hardly fund

One of these categories were jurors: by around 425 BCE¹⁸, the jurors' fee for a day's attendance in court had been raised to three obols (the τριώβολον mentioned here).

As it was rightly observed, then, this passage employs a classic Aristophanic comic strategy, *bathos*, i.e. a sudden plunge in the tone, incongruously combining high and down-to-earth matters¹⁹: in this specific case, the list of Basileia's tasks moves from noble political values to some of the most unpoetic and ignoble aspects of everyday political administration. This incongruous combination, moreover, is characteristic of gods (and their space) throughout *Birds*: the Olympians and their reign are frequently portrayed in the image of Athens – the gods' dominion over the comic universe is shaped as Athens' ambitions of imperial supremacy in the real world. In particular, this Athens-like portrait has often to do with the maritime nature of the Athenian Empire: to mention only a few cases, Iris, the gods' messenger, is compared to a ship from the Athenian fleet (Av. 1203-4), and as such she is threatened with being rammed (Av. 1255-6); Zeus is described by Prometheus as responsible for free trade in ἐμπόρια, 'markets', by the sea (Av. 1520-4).

Basileia, Zeus' plenipotentiary, is portrayed accordingly: goddess and woman, she both keeps watch on Zeus' god-like attributes and carries out some of the most common tasks of everyday Athenian politics. In light of the maritime portrayal of the gods, it comes as no surprise that we can also find a maritime task among Basileia's many duties. As a matter of fact, Basileia also manages the νεώρια (Av. 1540), which for an Athenian audience recalled unambiguously the dockyards at the Peiraieus, a crucial element to Athens' worldwide influence.

One of the *tabulae curatorum navalium* (IG II² 1622, especially ll. 379-579), dated around 342/1 BCE, lists the debts repaid by Athenian naval

on its own all the expenses made by the polis and it had to draw from the imperial tribute, the *Hellenotamiai* «may have been involved with the *demosion* for some time before 415» (SAMONS 2000, p. 241). The mention of *kolakretai* in relation to the τριώβολον in *Birds*, a text from 414 BCE, should persuade us that up to this moment the *kolakretai* were still involved in the managing of the *demosion*, at least as the jurors' salary was concerned.

¹⁸ According to evidence given by Aristophanes himself: see ARISTOPH. *Eq.* 51, V. 690. On the economics of the Athenian court system, see for instance MARKLE 1985, SCAFURO 2015.

¹⁹ See for instance DUNBAR 1995, *ad* Av. 1539-41. This comic strategy is particularly evident in long lists, as SPYROPOULOS 1974, pp. 130-1 rightly observes.

officials, who probably became indebted to the state as the result of the misappropriation of equipment²⁰. In listing the officials indebted from the tribe of Akamantis²¹, the inscription provides good evidence for the ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια, an official in charge of the dockyards (*IG* II² 1622, ll. 444-54):

Εὐθύμαχος Ε[- -],
 445 ταμίας γενό[μενος]
 ἐς τὰ νεώρια [ἐπὶ Θε]-
 μιστοκλέου[ς ἄρχο(ντος)]
 τῶν σκευῶν, [ῶν]
 ἔλαβε παρὰ [τῶν]
 450 τριηράρχων [καὶ οὐκ]
 εἰσήγενκε γρά[ψας]
 ἐν τῇ στήλῃ,
 ἀργυρίου μὲν ἀπ[ο]-
 δέδω[κ]ε κτλ.

This inscription, much later than *Birds*, seems the only document to bear witness to the existence of the ταμίαι ἐς τὰ νεώρια²². The official mentioned is an Euthymachos, appointed around 347 BCE, under the archonship of Themistokles²³. The inscription also gives some clues as to his job as a ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια: collecting naval equipment²⁴ from trierarchs and recording it on specific stelai (*IG* II² 1622, ll. 451-2 γράψας | ἐν τῇ στήλῃ).

²⁰ SIMONSEN 2008.

²¹ As the document clarifies, the naval officials are listed in order of tribe. Although the top of col. d is missing, since a Mantias from Thorikos is in all likelihood mentioned right after, we can hypothesize that the tribe involved by our passage is Akamantis.

²² But see JORDAN 1975, p. 58, who, perhaps rightly, submits that we should also take *IG* II² 1631, ll. 374-6 into consideration. The inscription mentions a generic ταμίας, but his office looks quite similar to that of the ταμίαι ἐς τὰ νεώρια, as it is described by *IG* II² 1622: receiving and recording naval equipment (παραλάβει | ἀριθμησάμενος τόν τε ἀριθμὸν τῶν | κωπέων).

²³ PAA 7, 433605. On the inscription, the name was in all likelihood followed by Euthymachos' demotic (starting with Ε-). However, we do not have any other reference to an Euthymachos with a demotic starting with Ε- (or ἐκ) for this period.

²⁴ The text speaks generically of σκεύη (*IG* II² 1622, ll. 448 and 455). Later, however, the *tabula* is more specific in describing the nature of gear collected by the *tamias* (*IG* II² 1622,

The reason why Euthymacos owes a debt to the state is exactly related to this task: he did collect the equipment from the trierarchs, but stands accused of not returning it to the storehouse (and not recording the return on the specific stelai)²⁵. Since the ταμίας for the dockyards must have handled money like the other treasurers, he was in all likelihood a regularly elected official, like the other treasurers²⁶.

Just some ten lines above, the same inscription may be mentioning another ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια. The text, however, is far from certain (*IG II*² 1622, ll. 435-7):

435 [Μ]αντ[ίας Θορίκιος],
 ταμία[ς γενόμε(ενος) εἰς τὰ νεώ]-
 ρια Κα[λλέου ἄρχον(τος)].

435-7 Koehler, Kirchner : ταμία[ς γενόμενος εἰς τὰ νεώ]]ρια Κα[- - ἄρχοντος]
 Boeckh : ταμία[ς γενόμε(ενος) ἐπὶ Χα]]ρι{α}κλ[είδου ἄρχον(τος) vel ταμία[ς
 κρεμ(αστῶν) ἐπὶ Χα]]ρι{α}κλ[είδου e.g. Clark 1990, pp. 48-9

According to the text printed above, Mantias of Thorikos would have been appointed ταμίας for the dockyards around 377 BCE²⁷. This reading, however, was questioned by Michael Clark²⁸, who observed that the restoration usually printed by editors and commentators at ll. 436-7 would exceed the average number of letters (15) in column d: there would be too little room for a 19-letter restoration here. Moreover, as already noticed by August Boeckh, the restoration would dispense with the familiar ἐπί before the archon's name²⁹. Lastly, we may also add that, although

ll. 457ff.): ὑποζώματα, ἱστία, τοπεῖα, ὑποβλήματα, καταβλήματα, παραρρύματα, σχοινία, ἀγκύρας, ταρρόν.

²⁵ SIMONSEN 2008, p. 72 (with note 17).

²⁶ On the ταμίαι ἐς τὰ νεώρια and their tasks, see JORDAN 1975, pp. 57-8. Our evidence, however, is too scanty to allow us to draw more accurate conclusions, especially with reference to their relationship with the other dockyard officials, such as the ἐπιμεληταί, the ταμίαι κρεμαστῶν and the ταμίαι τριηροποικῶν (for a hypothesis, see BOECKH 1840, p. 58).

²⁷ PAA 12, 632545. Possibly to be identified with the Mantias referred to at *IG II*² 1604, ll. 10 and 46 (on which, see CLARK 1990).

²⁸ CLARK 1990, pp. 48-9.

²⁹ BOECKH 1840, p. 381.

abbreviations are frequent in documents such as this³⁰, the shortened form γενόμ- for the aorist participle γενόμενος is hardly ever attested in Attic inscriptions³¹. In light of all this, it seems tempting to follow Clark in questioning the restoration at ll. 436-7³², although his own suggested restorations do not look convincing, either³³. This also means, however, that we cannot be certain whether Mantias actually was ταμίας for the νεώρια or for some other office regarding the fleet, and that he held the office in 377 BCE.

Be that as it may, we have at least one clear reading at ll. 445-6, and one certain mention of the official known as ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια. In my view, it is very tempting to see in l. 1540 of *Birds* another explicit reference to such an official, when Prometheus explains that Basileia ταμιεύει [...] τὰ νεώρια: the verb ταμιεύει recalls an epithet of Zeus', but then, *para prosdokian*, it also recalls a public office in Athens. The typical Aristophanic *bathos*, then, is not completely uncalled for: the plunge from the divine dimension to the Athenian perspective is produced by the polysemy of ταμιεύειν, which works as a connection between divine and human tasks, between Zeus and Athenian officials, through the mention of the ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια. The following nouns related to Athens' public life (τὴν λοιδορίαν, τὸν κωλακρέτην, τὰ τριώβολα) can be quoted because of the presence of the word νεώρια, which allows for the incongruous combination of god-like attributes and political references, by activating the second – political – meaning of ταμιεύειν. The reference

³⁰ THREATTE 1980, p. 100.

³¹ Emilio Rosamilia (oral communication) suggests that we may also think of omitting straightaway the verb γίγνεσθαι, as the text of the inscription does, e.g., at col. d ll. 479-81. This would give for l. 435 a text such as ταμία[ς εἰς τὰ νεώ-], which would fit into the average number of letters of column d. However, this hypothesis still does not solve the problem of the absence of ἐπί before the archon's name.

³² Maybe, it is also worth pointing out that Mantias' and Euthymachos' cases are quite different: the latter seems to have actually falsified a public register (as noted by GABRIELSEN 1993, esp. pp. 178-9, and PÉBARTHE 2006, pp. 276-7), while the former is only quoted for a debt repaid by a third party. The precise mention of the office held, then, would look more appropriate for Euthymachos than for Mantias.

³³ See the apparatus above. In either case, we should be ready to emend l. 437 in order to fit the name of the archon, and to accept a shortened form not attested in Attic inscriptions at l. 436 (either γενομ for γενόμενος or κρεμ for κρεμαστών). At the present state, then, I would be extremely cautious about the right reading (and the right date) of ll. 436-7.

to the Athenian nature of Basileia is therefore made more explicit, and comically effective: Basileia does not generically keep watch on Athens' dockyards, but is described as an Athenian official, a ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια.

If this is correct, then this passage from *Birds* is a far older reference to the office of ταμίας ἐς τὰ νεώρια than those taken into consideration so far, and allows us to date this office back to at least 414 BCE³⁴.

Moreover, Aristophanes does not limit himself to the *calembour* at ll. 1538-41, but adds a last remark by Peisetairos. As a matter of fact, the strange combination of divine and Athenian duties causes his astonishment, making him utter (ARISTOPH. *Av.* 1542): ἅπαντά γ' ἄρ' αὐτῷ ταμיעύει; The use of the particles γ' ἄρα is telling³⁵: when it recurs in interjections or questions in Aristophanes, it usually emphasises the preceding word³⁶. In this case, Peisetairos wants to emphasise ἅπαντα: his amazement focuses on Basileia managing *everything* on Zeus' behalf, even the most practical elements of Athenian politics. Perhaps, it is not even necessary to interpret the sentence as an «incredulous question» (Dunbar); an interjection could work, as well: «She really looks after everything for him!». If the audience had not got yet the wordplay with ταμיעύειν and its polysemy, the protagonist clarifies it once and for all: Basileia ταμיעύει, manages, everything, including the νεώρια, the dockyards – and she does so as an actual Athenian: holding a public office.

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³⁴ As is well known, *Birds* was performed at the City Dionysia in 414, under the archonship of Charias (*Av. Hypoth.* I Wilson 8-10, II Wilson 38-9). For Koumanoudis's patent emendation to the text of the *hypothesis*, see DUNBAR 1995, p. 1 note 1.

³⁵ For a discussion, see DUNBAR 1995, *a.l.*

³⁶ According to one of the most common functions of γε: DENNISTON 1934, pp. 114 ss. See e.g. *Av.* 1446 (λόγοισι γ' ἄρα καὶ πετεροῦνται; 'Is it really words that make them fly?'); *V.* 217 (νῆ τὸν Δί', ὅψέ γ' ἄρ' ἀνεστήκασιν νῦν, 'Yes, by Zeus, they got up really late').

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