

Phrynichus fr. 30*θηλάζει*

“She suckles”

This tiny fragment is cited by Antiatticist p. 99,14, whose purpose is to call attention to the current transitive verb form of *θηλάζω*, which he glosses as ἀντὶ τοῦ δίδωσι *θηλήν* (“instead of giving one’s breast [sc. to suck]”). Antiatticist’s concern here is to highlight the difference between the earlier Attic meaning/usage of the verb *θηλάζω* as invariably transitive, from apparently the later usage of the same verb within the Koine as both transitive (of the mother/nurse: to give one’s breast to suckle) and intransitive (of the child: “to suckle from the breast”). Phrynichus’ interpretation is sustained by Photius’ relevant remark (Σ 156): *θηλάζειν· τὸ τρέφειν τῷ γάλακτι· οἱ ἀρχαῖοι πάντες οὕτως, μάλιστα οἱ Ἴωνες* (“to suck: to feed with milk; in this sense everywhere in antiquity, but mostly in Ionic”). It is striking though and worth mentioning at this point that Phrynichus’ present fragment constitutes the earliest surviving occurrence of the verb *θηλάζω* within the entire corpus of the ancient Greek literature. So probably Antiatticist was knowingly referring to the ones of the earliest employments of the word.

Content-wise, despite consisting of just a single word, this fragment might point to a possible plot element; i.e. that the play involved a new-born baby, which was being nursed by either its mother or a wetnurse. The baby may be a relative of the recluse (child / grandchild / nephew); its birth – possibly occurring during the play – may have constituted some form of leverage in persuading the recluse to abandon his ascetic lifestyle. Could this be an early antecedent to Menander’s and New Comedy’s much-loved theme of exposed babies, babies of unknown parentage, etc.? We definitely cannot rule out this possibility.