



UDC 811 14

Βλιμάζων versus κολάζων (*Ep. Arist. 188*)*

Ekaterina A. Druzhinina

St. Petersburg State University,
7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St. Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation;
e.druzhinina@spbu.ru, druzh1978@gmail.com

For citation: Druzhinina E. A. βλιμάζων versus κολάζων (*Ep. Arist. 188*). *Philologia Classica* 2024, 19 (1), 182–187. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2024.112>

This piece explores the difficult expression βλιμάζων ἐπιεικέστερον found in the MSS of the *Letter of Aristeas*, in the section describing how Ptolemy II Philadelphus puts questions to the interpreters he has invited in Alexandria and receives advice to treat his subordinates with kindness and not to impose harsh punishments on them (*Ep. Arist. 188*). According to the most scholars, who have published the *Letter of Aristeas*, including P. Wendland, H. Thackeray, H. Andrews, R. Tramontano, and R. Shutt, the verb βλιμάζω in the answer of the Jewish sage means ‘to chastise’. However, this interpretation is not supported by the actual usage of the verb in ancient Greek. In fact, this word, which is often used in comedy, usually means ‘to grope’ and seems quite out of place coming from the sage. Günther Zuntz pointed out that the verb βλιμάζω is not appropriate and suggested correcting βλιμάζων to κολάζων, which is accepted by A. Pelletier (1962) and is supported in the recent studies on the *Letter* (Wright [2015] and Erto [2012]). The consideration of the correction and the analysis of the word-usage in ancient Greek literature, as well as the examination of the explanations provided by lexicographers, where the verb θλίβω and its derivatives are used as synonyms for βλιμάζω, lead us to the conclusion that Zuntz’s suggestion is not necessary and should be rejected. The reading βλιμάζων, confirmed by the manuscripts, may be retained by supposing that it implies pressure in a broader sense.

Keywords: *Letter of Aristeas*, Ptolemy II Philadelphus, textual criticism, Greek lexicology, vernacular Koine.

In the large part of the *Letter of Aristeas* the 72 Jewish sages, invited by the king Ptolemy II for translating the Hebrew Pentateuch into Greek, take part in so called Symposia, where they give answers to the different questions of the king. According to the author

* The author is grateful to Souren A. Takhtajan for his insightful comments and suggestions regarding the subject of this article.

of the *Letter*, the king paid high tribute to their replies; moreover, in the section 294 he gratefully acknowledges that he has benefitted from their teaching about the kingship. In the section 188 one of the sages, replying to the question about conserving the kingdom unimpaired, gives him advice to be clement with his subordinates and furthermore to punish them more leniently than they deserve (in case they would turn out guilty) in order to lead them to a change of mind. The similar idea is represented also in the sections 191–192 and 207–208, where the king receives the precept to use clemency imitating the manner of God.¹

Due to these parallels, the general sense of the advice in the section 188 seems clear enough, but the text has some difficulties. In the edition of Paul Wendland (1900, 52) the last sentence of the section reads as follows:

Μακροθυμία γὰρ χρώμενος, καὶ βλιμάζων τοὺς ἀξιους ἐπιεικέστερον, καθὼς εἰσιν ἄξιοι, μετατιθεὶς ἐκ τῆς κακίας εἰς μετάνοιαν ἄξεις.

By employing magnanimity and punishing (?)² those who deserve more leniently in accordance with their deserts, you, by ridding them of their wickedness, will lead them to repentance. (Translations are mine — E. D.)

Accepting the reading βλιμάζων, Wendland points out that most manuscripts give a non-existent form βλημάζων, while βλιμάζων, attested only by the second hand of the Codex Barberinus, was independently suggested by Simon Schard, who did not have the Codex Barberinus in his hands when he prepared *Editio Princeps* in 1571. Although Raffaele Tramontano indicates that two later manuscripts of the XVth century have δοκιμάζων (Codex Burneianus 34) and ἐτοιμάζων (Codex Vaticanus 746), the editors (Wendland 1900, 52; Tramontano 1931, 176; Hadas, 1951, 175) and the translators of the *Letter* in the main take βλιμάζων, supposing that it means ‘to punish’ (Thackeray 1904, 37: ‘to punish’; Andrews 1913, 112: ‘inflict mild punishments’; Meissner, 1973: ‘bestrafen’). Michael White translates it “to handle”, referring to the derivation of the word (White, Keddie 2018, 125, n. 119)³. Rowland Shutt interprets the word in the same way, although he mentions in the note that the verb βλιμάζω means ‘to afflict punishment’ (Shutt 1985, 25, n. w2). *LSJ* also gives ad locum the translation “to handle”, but does not support it with any word usage other than the example from the *Letter of Aristaeus*.

The verb βλιμάζω is quite rare: first of all, it is attested in old Attic comedy, where it means ‘to feel, touching something’. Thus, in the *Birds* of Aristophanes it is referred to the buyers who scrutinize birds before purchase (Aristoph. *Aves*, 530: οἱ δ’ ὠνοῦνται βλιμάζοντες). In the fragment of Cratinus, the verb has an obscene connotation, meaning ‘to grope certain parts of a woman’s body’ (Cratin. *fr.* 302, 2 καὶ γὰρ ἐβλίμαζον αὐτήν, ἢ δ’ ἐφρόντιζ’ οὐδὲ ἔν). As synonyms to this verb, lexicographers give ψηλαφᾶν and τιτθολαβεῖν (Phot. *Lex.* s. v., Hesych. *Lex.* s. v., *Etym. Gen.* s. v., *Etym. Gud.*, s. v. etc.), explaining that it refers to the erotic fondling that men make to arouse a woman’s desire (E. g. *Etym. Magn.* s. v.: τοὺς μαστοὺς καταμανθάνειν τῇ ἀφῆ, καὶ ἄπτεσθαι τῶν ἀπορρήτων

¹ On the sources of these ideas see the article: Дружинина Е. А., Тахтаджян С. А. Милосердие царя в *Письме Аристее*. Мнемон. Исследования и публикации по истории Античного мира 2002, 22 (1–2), 57–64 (Druzhinina, Takhtajan 2022).

² The meaning of βλιμάζω is not clear enough and should be discussed further. Meanwhile, we translate it by ‘punishing’ as the most editors of the *Letter* have been interpreting it.

³ Robert Beekes states that the etymology of the word is unexplained (Beekes I 2010, 222).

μελῶν τῶν γυναικείων, καὶ διεγείρειν τὰς ἐπιθυμίας). The fact that this word in Attic Greek belonged to the dirty vocabulary is also confirmed by the way it was used by the Atticist Lucian, who placed it on a par with the verb ἀναφλᾶν (Luc. *Lexiph.* 12. 4).

On the other hand, we have an example from Hippocrates' *Epidemics*, where the verb in question is used almost as a technical term and likely means 'to press', 5. 1. 1:

Ἐν Ἡλίδι, ἡ τοῦ κηρωροῦ γυνή, πυρετὸς εἶχεν αὐτὴν ξυνεχῆς· καὶ φάρμακα πίνουσα, οὐδὲν ὠφελέετο· ἐν δὲ τῇ γαστρὶ κάτωθεν τοῦ ὀμφαλοῦ ἦν σκληρὸν, καὶ ὑψηλότερον τοῦ ἐτέρου, καὶ ὀδύνας παρείχεν ἰσχυράς· τοῦτο ἐβλιμάσθη ἰσχυρῶς τῆσι χερσὶ σὺν ἐλαίῳ, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ἐχώρησεν αἷμά οἱ συχνὸν κάτω, καὶ ἐγένετο ὑγιῆς, καὶ ἐβίω.

In Elis, the permanent fever held the wife of a gardener. Although she drank drugs, she had no benefit from them. On her belly, below the navel, there was a hard area. It was higher than on the other side and caused strong pains. She pressed it down with olive-oil-smearred hands; after that, a lot of blood poured out below and she became healthy and survived.

Wesley D. Smith translates ἐβλιμάσθη with the verb "to manipulate" (Smith 1994, 153), which seems very uncertain. It is clear, that the Greek word describes a medical procedure that leads to recovery. It seems possible to clarify what kind of manipulation was performed. It is likely that the woman applied pressure to the tumor with her hands, which resulted in its removal. Thus, in this testimony, the word is used in a different way: it does not refer to the lewd actions of young men or the checking of birds at the market. Instead, it denotes a sort of medical procedure that involves applying pressure to a sore area.

In the work *Partitiones*, attributed to the grammarian Aelius Herodianus, as well as in the *Lexicon* of Photius, *Etymologicum Gudianum* and *Etymologicum Genuinum* it is indicated that the verb βλιμάζω can also denote the extraction of honey from the comb (Ael. Herod. *Partit.* 6. 7: βλιμάζω, τὸ ἀποστάζω μέλιτος, Phot., s. v.: βλιμάζων· ἀποστάζων τοῦ μέλιτος, *Et. Gen.* s. v., *Et. Gud.* s. v.) and may be translated as 'to press out, to squeeze'. However, it is likely that the explanation has arisen due to the contamination with the verb βλίττω which is directly related to the process of extracting honey.

As far as we can understand relying on the extant evidence, the verb βλιμάζω has two basic meanings in classical Greek: (1) to 'feel up' birds or women in a lewd sense and (2) 'to press down' in neutral sense. Thus, there is not a single instance where this verb would mean 'to punish', as most translators of the *Letter of Aristeas* interpret it in the section 188. There are also no examples demonstrating that the verb can mean 'to treat with', as it is stated in *LSJ* and in the recent study of the *Letter* by Michael White (White, Keddie 2018, 125).

Nevertheless, the context of the passage leaves no doubt that it is punishment that is at issue here. Recognizing the lexical discrepancy, Tramontano suggested that this verb, which meant primarily 'to grope' or 'to squeeze', was a kind of euphemism for striking and hence punishment (Tramontano 1931, 177).

Günther Zuntz, on the contrary, argued that the verb was completely inappropriate in style and meaning and corrected βλιμάζων to κολάζων (Zuntz 1958, 242), supposing that the form βλιμάζων appeared in the text because of a scribe's error. The emendation of Zuntz has been accepted by André Pelletier (Pelletier 1962, 190), Benjamin Wright III (Wright 2015, 337) and Maurizio Erto, who has not even included the entry βλιμάζω in his *Lexicon* of the *Letter of Aristeas* (Erto 2012, 24). Zuntz also corrected ἀξίουσ to αἰτίους,

guessing, that ἄξιους was a copyist's error due to the second ἄξιοι after καθώς⁴ and favoured the long-standing correction of Moritz Schmidt (Schmidt 1869, 286), who had conjectured ἦ before καθώς, believing that ἐπιεικέστερον needs comparative conjunction, missing in the manuscripts.⁵

Thus in the edition of Pelletier the phrase reads as follows (Pelletier 1962, 190):

κολάζων τοὺς **αἰτίους** ἐπιεικέστερον, ἦ καθὼς εἰσιν ἄξιοι, μετατιθεῖς ἐκ τῆς κακίας εἰς μετάνοιαν ἄξεις.

By punishing the guilty more leniently than they deserve, you will make them repent by ridding them of their wickedness.

At first glance, the verb κολάζω seems to be the most suitable here: it is noteworthy that in the section 208, where the king also receives advice not to impose harsh punishments on people, the same verb is used (*Ep. Arist.* 208: ὅθεν οὔτε εὐκόπως δεῖ κολάζειν, οὔτε αἰκίας περιβάλλειν).

On the one hand, the correction appears to be reasonable, because κολάζω fits the context and has a parallel in another part of the text (*Ep. Arist.* 208), while βλιμάζω comes from a different style and does not match the overall tone of the section. On the other hand, it is still unclear, how, during the process of textual transmission, the common and suitable term κολάζων has been replaced with βλιμάζων, which seems inappropriate both in style and in meaning.

However, we should keep in mind that in the Greek prose, particularly in the work called *Epidemics*, the verb appears in its literal meaning, i. e. 'to press'. This evidence seems to be quite significant for understanding the meaning of βλιμάζω in the *Letter of Aristeas* and should be considered as a parallel example. In both cases the verb is used with the adverb: in *Epidemics* we have ἐβλιμάσθη ἰσχυρῶς, in the *Letter* — βλιμάζων ἐπιεικέστερον.

If the word in question could mean 'to press' in a literal sense, as it does in the book of *Epidemics*, we can assume that it also could mean 'to press' in a figurative sense. Thus, if in *Epidemics* βλιμάζω ἰσχυρῶς implies the physical squeezing of a tumor, in the *Letter of Aristeas* βλιμάζων ἐπιεικέστερον τοὺς ἄξιους may be interpreted metaphorically as 'pressing the guilty more gently, than they deserve'. In the *Lexicon of the Ten Orators* of Valerius Harpocration βλιμάζειν is defined as ταῖς χερσὶ διαθλίβειν (probably in view of the Hippocrates' passage), while Photius also gives the verb ἐκθλίβω among the synonyms for βλιμάζω. Θλίβω and its derivatives are not attested in the *Letter of Aristeas*, but are quite frequent in Classical and Hellenistic Greek as well as in Greek Bible and Jewish writers. The overall number of instances is over 4000. The general overview of how the verb was used shows that, although there are a few examples from famous authors like Xenophon, Plato, and Aristophanes, the most evidence comes from Hellenistic writers who wrote in the literary form of Koine. Moreover, this verb occurs quite often in the Septuagint and in the New Testament, where it means both 'to crush' literally (e. g. NT *Ev. Marc.* 3:9; 5:24, 31; *Ev. Luc.* 8:45) and, what is more often in the Septuagint, 'to suppress or torment' figura-

⁴ Moritz Schmidt had already suspected this correction, but he did not include it in the text, nor did any other editors of the *Letter* accept it (Schmidt 1869, 286).

⁵ Although Wendland did not accept Schmidt's correction in his text, he appreciated it in the apparatus (Wendland 1900a, 52). Moreover, in his translation, he also adhered to this correction (Wendland 1900b, 20). Thackeray also supported the emendation (Thackeray 1904, 37, n. 1). However, Pelletier mistakenly notes in the apparatus that the inclusion of ἦ before καθὼς is a suggestion by Zuntz (Pelletier 1962, 190).

tively (e. g. 2 *Thess.* 1:6, 7; 2 *Cor.* 7:5 1 *Tim.* 5:10; LXX *Psalms*. passim, *Jud.* 10:9; 1 *Reg.* 30:6; 2 *Esdr.* 14:5 et al.). Since it is generally accepted that the language of the *Letter of Aristeas* is closest to the literary Koine (e. g. Meecham 1935, 311–312), it is puzzling why the *Letter* lacks the verb θλίβω, which was definitely typical for Koine Greek as well as for the Greek Bible. Instead, in section 188, there is the rather unusual word βλιμάζω, finding no parallel in the Hellenistic literature to which the *Letter of Aristeas* is closest.

The answer to this question can be found in the testimony of Valerius Harpocration, who points out a peculiar use of the verb κλιμάζω (scil. νόμους) as παρακλίνω by Dinarchus and suspecting an error in the transmission of Dinarchus' text, proposes to correct κλιμάζη to βλιμάζη, remarking in passing, that βλιμάζω is a near synonym of θλίβω and βιάζω (Harpocr. *Lexic. in dec. orat.*, s. v. κλιμάζη):

Δειναρχος ἐν τῷ ἐπιγραφομένῳ Συνηγορία Αἰσχίνῃ κατὰ Δεινίου· <ὅταν οὖν ἀπολογούμενος κλιμάζῃ καὶ παράγῃ τοὺς νόμους> ἀντὶ τοῦ παρακλίνῃ καὶ παρατρέπῃ· μήποτε δὲ δεῖ γράφειν βλιμάζῃ, ἵν' ἢ οἶον θλίβῃ καὶ βιάζῃται.

Dinarchus in the speech titled 'Supporting Speech for Aischines Against Deinias': "thus, whenever, in defense, one bends (κλιμάζῃ) and deflects the laws", for 'turns aside' and 'diverts'. Perhaps,⁶ one should write βλιμάζῃ ('squeezes') so that it would mean 'pushes' and 'rapes'.

Although the phrase βλιμάζειν τοὺς νόμους seems odd and has no parallels, the very fact that Valerius Harpocration, who lived in Alexandria a few centuries later than the author of the *Letter*, admitted such a possibility, shows at least that in his days the verb could be used in figurative sense, and maybe, as it is not found in literary Koine, belonged to the vernacular Greek of Alexandria. However it may be, in view of this evidence we can argue, first, that the word βλιμάζω is a close synonym for θλίβω, and, second, that it can be used not only literally (as in *Epidemics*), but also figuratively.

To sum up, Zuntz's proposed correction of βλιμάζων to κολάζων is not necessary. The MSS reading can be defended by considering βλιμάζων as a more general term for suppression. The expression βλιμάζων ἐπιεικέστερον should then be explained as 'pressing more gently', which does not contradict either the usage of the verb in Greek or the overall context of the passage.

References

- Andrews H. T. (transl.) The Letter of Aristeas. In: R. H. Charles (ed.). *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, 83–122.
- Beekes R. *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*. Leiden — Boston, Brill, 2010.
- Druzhinina E. A., Takhtajan S. A. Mercy of the king in the *Letter of Aristeas*. *Mnemon. Investigations and Publications on the History of the Ancient World* 2022, 22 (1–2), 57–64 (in Russian).
- Erto M. (ed.) *Lexicon in Aristotele ad Philocratem epistulam*. Hildesheim — Zürich — New York, Olms — Weidmann, 2012.
- Hadas M. (ed., transl.) *Aristeas to Philocrates*. New York, Harper & Brothers, 1951.
- Meecham H. G. *The Letter of Aristeas; a Linguistic Study with Special References to the Greek Bible*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1935.
- Pelletier A. (ed., transl.) *Lettre d'Aristée à Philocrate*. Paris, Les éditions du Cerf, 1962.

⁶ The word μήποτε, attested in Harpocration's *Lexicon* 36 times, always introduces the explanation, which he proposes. Thus, it means here 'perhaps' (see *LSJ*, s. v. I, 3).

- Schmidt M. Der Brief des Aristeas an Philokrates. In: A. Merx (Hg.). *Archiv für wissenschaftliche Erforschung des Alten Testaments*. 1. Bd. Halle, Verlag des Buchhandlung des Weisenhauses, 1869, 242–312.
- Shutt R. (transl.) The Letter of Aristeas. In: J. H. Charlesworth (ed.). *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Vol. 2. New York, Doubleday, 1985, 7–34.
- Smith Wesley D. (ed., transl.) *Hippocrates*. Vol. 7. Cambridge Massachussets — London, Harvard University Press, 1994.
- Thackeray H. St. J. (transl.) *The Letter of Aristeas*. London, Macmillan, 1904.
- Tramontano R. (ed., transl.) *La Lettera di Aristeo a Filocrate: Introduzione, testo versione e commento*. Naples, Ufficio succursale della civiltà cattolica in Napoli, 1931.
- Wendland P. (ed.) *Aristeae ad Philocratem epistula cum ceteris de origine versionis LXX interpretum testimoniis*. Leipzig, B. G. Teubner, 1900.
- Wendland P. (transl.) Aristeasbrief. In: E. Kautsch (Hg.). *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*. Bd. 2. Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1900, 1–31.
- White M. L., Keddie A. G. (ed., transl.) *Jewish Fictional Letters from Hellenistic Egypt. The Epistle of Aristeas and Related Literature*. Atlanta, SBL Press, 2018.
- Wright III B. G. *The Letter of Aristeas. 'Aristeas to Philocrates' or 'On the Translation of the Law of the Jews'*. Berlin — Boston, Walter de Gruyter, 2015.
- Zuntz G. Zum Aristeas Text. *Philologus* 1958, 102, 240–246.

βλιμάζων versus κολάζων (*Ep. Arist. 188*)

Екатерина Андреевна Дружинина

Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет,
Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9;
e.druzhinina@spbu.ru, druzh1978@gmail.com

Для цитирования: Druzhinina E. A. βλιμάζων versus κολάζων (*Ep. Arist. 188*). *Philologia Classica* 2024, 19 (1), 182–187. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2024.112>

Статья посвящена необычному выражению βλιμάζων ἐπιεικέστερον, засвидетельствованному в рукописях той части «Письма Аристея», где Птолемей II Филадельф, задавая приглашенным в Александрию толковникам различные вопросы, получает от одного из них совет обращаться со своими подчиненными мягко и не подвергать их суровым наказаниям (*Ep. Arist. 188*). По мнению большинства издателей «Письма» (П. Вендланд, Г. Теккерей, Г. Эндрюз, Р. Трамонтано, Р. Шатт), глагол βλιμάζω в ответе еврейского мудреца означает «наказывать», что не подтверждается словоупотреблением этого глагола в древнегреческом языке. Действительно эта лексема, характерная для языка комедии, чаще всего означает «ощупывать» и в устах мудреца представляется совершенно не подходящей. Указывая на неуместность использования глагола βλιμάζω в данном контексте, Пюнтер Цунц предложил исправление βλιμάζων на κολάζων, принятое в издании А. Пелтье (1962) и поддержанное в новейших работах по «Письму Аристея» (Б. Райт [2015] и М. Эрто [2012]). Оценивая данную эмендацию, а также анализируя примеры употребления глагола βλιμάζω в древнегреческой литературе V–IV вв. до н. э. (Aristoph. *Av.* 530, Cratin. *fr.* 302, 2, Нипросс. *Epidem.* 5. 1. 1) и объяснения лексикографов, в которых в качестве синонима для βλιμάζω является глагол θλίβω и его производные, мы приходим к выводу, что конъектура Цунца является неоправданной, а рукописное чтение βλιμάζων в интересующем нас пассаже «Письма» может подразумевать давление в широком смысле.

Ключевые слова: Письмо Аристея, Птолемей II Филадельф, критика текста, греческая лексикология, койне.

Received: 02.03.2024

Accepted: 16.06.2024