Peleus and Acastus’ Wife between Nicolaus of Damascus and Aelian

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A set of Suda entries deal with the story of Peleus, Acastus, and the latter’s wife. This story involves the so-called Potiphar’s wife motif, from the wife of Potiphar who tried to seduce unwilling Joseph (Gen 39:7–23). In the same way, the wife of Acastus tempted Peleus who rejected her, so provoking her reaction: in front of her husband, she falsely accused Peleus of having tried to rape her. In revenge, Acastus plotted against Peleus who managed nonetheless to overthrow him. All these Suda entries provide very similar, but not identical, information on the same myth. In particular, they diverge in stating the woman’s name, which is, in two different entries, Atalante and Astydameia. Their sources can be investigated.

The first Suda entry is devoted to Atalante (α 4309 [Adler]):

Ἀταλάντη, Ακάστου γυνή, ἦτις Πηλέως ἐρασθείσα λόγους ὑπὲρ μίξεως εἰσφέρει, ἀναινεσάμενον δὲ δεύσασα, μὴ μεν κατείποι πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα, ὑποφθάσασα αὐτοῦ προσδιαβάλλει τὸν ἄνδρα, ὡς εὐνθηναίαι οἱ θελέντες. ὁ δὲ λόχον ὑφείσας ἐπεβούλευσε Πηλεῖ. καὶ ὁς αἰσθόμενος ἐς πόλεις κατέστη πρὸς αὐτόν, ἐπικαλεσάμενος βοηθοὺς τοὺς τε Τυνδαρίδας καὶ Ἰάσονα, ἐπικαλεσάμενος τοὺς ἐκείνου τῇ Ἀργοῖ γεγονέναι καὶ τὴν Ἱωλκὸν αἱρεῖ καὶ τὴν Ἀκάστου γυναῖκα σφάττει.

Atalante, the wife of Acastus, who fell in love with Peleus and proposed to him to make love to her. As he rejected her, she was afraid he might accuse her to her husband, so she anticipated him and calumniated him to Acastus, claiming he wanted to seduce her. Having laid an ambush, Acastus plotted against Peleus. When the latter realized it, he waged war against Acastus, sending for both the Tyndarids and Jason, who was hostile to Acastus. Peleus, instead, was a friend of Jason since

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they had sailed together on the Argo. Peleus conquered Iolcos and killed Acastus’ wife.

This entry clearly depends on Nicolaus of Damascus FGrHist 90 F 55, abridged by the Byzantine compiler(s) of the Excerpta de virtutibus et vitis, with the exception of the name Ἀταλάντη, which is absent from the Nicolaus fragment:

Two more entries derive in turn from α 4309 rather than directly from Nicolaus F 55:

α 309: Ἀκάστος. ὁ δὲ Ἀκάστος λόγου ύφήσας ἐπέβούλευε τῷ Πηλεί. καὶ ὁς αἰσθόμενος εἰς πόλεμον κατέστη. ζήτει εἰς τῷ Ἀταλάντῃ.

υ 708: ύφέντες ... καὶ αὐθίς: ὁ δὲ Ἀκάστος λόγου ύφεις ἐπεβούλευε τῷ Πηλεί. καὶ ὁς αἰσθόμενος εἰς πόλεμον κατέστη.

Atalante as a name for Acastus’ wife is transmitted only by Suda α 4309. For Jacoby (ad FGrHist 90 F 55), the name itself is a mistake, made by the compiler(s) of the Lexicon, in place of the more widespread Astydameia, also attested in the Suda (ε 2132).

We may add that such a mistake could have been made

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1 On the derivation of Suda α 4309 Ἀταλάντη from Nicolaus F 55 see Adler in apparatus. On the relationship of close, and even mechanical, dependence between the historical lemma of the Suda and the Excerpta Constantiniana see C. de Boor, “Suidas und die Konstantinische Excerptensammlung,” Bz 21 (1912) 381–424, and 23 (1914–1919) 1–127.

easier by the presence, in Peleus’ story, of the better-known Atalante, the Argonaut who wrestled with him at the funeral games for Pelias at Iolcos.

However, Atalante is unlikely to be an error, as is suggested by the fact the compiler(s) of the Suda chose not to correct it afterwards: cf. the internal reference to α 4309 found at α 809: Ἄκαστος· ὁ δὲ Ἄκαστος λόχον ὑφήσας ἐπεβούλευε τῷ Πηλεῖ, καὶ ὃς αἰσθόμενος ἐς πόλεμον κατέστη, ζήτει ἐν τῷ Ἅταλάντῃ. Nor can Atalante be the result of a contamination. In fact, the mechanical dependence of α 4309 on the abridged Nicolaus and the redactional practices of the compiler(s) of the Suda, who obviously made mistakes in the transmission of names but did not add foreign elements to the sources on which they drew, allow us to think that Nicolaus himself chose a different name for the wife of Acastus, specifically the rare Atalante, perfectly in line with his predilection for rarer versions of the myths he dealt with. As we have seen, Suda α 4309 depends on Nicolaus F 55, compiled through the Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiiis. It depends however on a different manuscript than the Turonensis C 980 which uniquely preserves those Excerpta. This lost manu-


4 So T. Büttner-Wobst, Excerpta de virtutibus et vitiiis I (Berlin 1906) XXIX–XXXVIII; see also my “Sadyattes and his Niece: a Note on Suda α 1423 and α 441,” Histos 9 (2015) 111–119, at 113–114, The Turonensis, dated to the eleventh century by Büttner-Wobst (XXXI), and to the mid-tenth century by J. Irigoin, “Pour une étude des centres de copie byzantins (suite),” Scriptorium 13 (1959) 177–209, at 177–181, has been re-dated to the 970s or 980s by A. Németh, “The Imperial Systematisation of the Past in Constantinople: Constantine VII and his Historical Excerpts,” in J. König and G. Woolf (eds.), Encyclopaedism from Antiquity to the Renaissance (Cambridge 2013) 232–258, at 242. The lost MS. must of course date before the Suda, which seems to have
script evidently transmitted Atalante, which does not appear at f.154r line 4 of the Turonensis—either it has fallen out of the text or it has been intentionally omitted by its copyist. Accordingly, the name of Atalante must be restored, in my opinion, at the head of Nicolaus F 55: ὃτι <Ἀταλάντη> ἡ Ἀκάστου γυνὴ Πηλέως ἐφασθείσα ψτλ.

The Lexicon also deals with Peleus’ and Astydameia’s story in ε 2132:

ἐπείρα ... Ἀστυδάμεια ἡράσθη Πηλέως τοῦ Αἰακοῦ, ὁ δὲ ἀναίνεται. ἢ δὲ φοβηθείσα μὴ κατείπῃ αὐτῆς, σοφότερα ἢ ἀληθέστερα λέγει, ὃτι αὐτὴν ἐπείρα ὁ Πηλέως, εἰποῦσα …

Made an attempt … Astydameia fell in love with Peleus, the son of Aeacus, but he rejected her. Fearing he would accuse her, she said things more cunning than true, claiming that Peleus made an attempt on her, and saying …

Also the extremely short κ 1035, κατείπῃ … ἐδεδήλε γὰρ ἡ γυνή, μὴ κατείπῃ αὐτῆς, probably refers to the same protagonists. Gottfried Bernhardy identified both ε 2132 and α 4309 as coming from a source other than Nicolaus (evidently because of the name Ἀταλάντη, apparently alien to the Damascene);5 but it is difficult to deny the identity of α 4309 and Nicolaus F 55. Ada Adler made only an indirect reference to Nicolaus in the apparatus to ε 2132, inviting the reader to compare F 55/Suda α 4309.6 In fact, ε 2132 transmits the same story as α 4309 (and Nicolaus F 55), with some important differences of wording and content—above all the name Astydameia, in place of Atalante, for Acastus’ wife. Hence, we wonder at first whether the two entries (ε 2132 and κ 1035) may be


5 G. Bernhardy, Suidae Lexicon … post Thomam Gaisfordum I (Halle/Braunschweig 1855) 377–378: “Suidas usus est scriptore non inscito, qui profererat ab Nicolai Damasceni historiis etiam in v. Ἀταλάντη expropriis.”


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paraphrases (by the compiler(s) of the Lexicon) of α 4309, since they relate the same subject that it does.

This hypothesis, which cannot be properly evaluated for the shorter κ 1035, must however be excluded for the longer ε 2132. The latter transmits in fact a different name, Astydamia, not Atalante of the supposedly paraphrased text. Still, ε 2132 ἐπείρα certainly develops the woman’s speech, as it adds a second verbum dicendi, εἶποῦσα, after σοφώτερα ἡ ἀληθεύτερα λέγει, ὃτι αὐτὴν ἐπείρα ὁ Πηλεύς which already exhausted the story as it was related in α 4309. Cf. α 4309 Ἀταλάντη, Ἀκάστου γυνὴ, ἥτις Πηλέως ἐρασθεῖσα λόγους ὑπὲρ μίξεως εἰσφέρει, ἀναινεύμενον δὲ δείσασα, μὴ μιν κατείποι πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα, ὑποφθάσασα αὐτὸν προσδιαβάλλει τὸν ἄνδρα, ὡς εὐνηθῆναι οἱ ἐθελῶντα. The text of ε 2132—so the speech of Acastus’ wife—is suddenly cut off after εἶποῦσα but clearly it should retain a reference to her refusal of Peleus’ alleged attempt at seduction, probably expressed through direct speech. That refusal, only implicit in α 4309, was possibly explicit in the source of ε 2132 which probably developed this motif. Unlike quotations, paraphrases are unlikely to be suddenly cut off. Above all, paraphrases are unlikely to retain the development of a motif, nor do they introduce an oratio recta which is not attested in the supposed paraphrased lemma. So, α 4309 (on Atalante) and ε 2132 (on Astydamia) must depend on two different sources and ε 2132 should be derived from a source different from Nicolaus of Damascus, who is beyond any doubt the compiled source of α 4309.

One more Suda entry deals with Peleus’ story, ε 1373: ἐνθύμιον … καὶ δὴ τὰ πραξάθεντα ἐθετὸν ἐνθύμιον καὶ γενόμενος τῶν Μυρμιδόνων ἐγκρατῆς παραλύει τὸν Ἀκάστον τῆς ἀρχῆς, “(Something) taken to heart … ‘And he took the deeds to heart and when he gained control of the Myrmidons, he removed Acastus from sovereignty’.” Thomas Gaisford linked this lemma to Peleus’ story (“Referenda haec videntur ad historiam Pelei”). Gottfried Bernhardt agreed with him and attributed

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the quotation to Nicolaus (“Recte: sunt autem verba Nicolai Damasceni; cf. v. Ἀκαστος”). Indeed, some linguistic features figure in Nicolaus: ἐνθύμιος is attested in F 66 §26; ἐγκρατής γενέσθαι in F 53; παραλύω in both F 127 §15 and F 130 §§45 and 80. Once more, however, this entry, which deals with the same matter as α 4309, Peleus’ overthrow of Acastus’ power, cannot be a mere paraphrase of it. There, in fact, Peleus declares war on Acastus after realising that Acastus was plotting against him. He does not do it before assuring the alliance of Jason and the Tyndarids. Suda ε 1373 relates instead a different moment of the defeat of Acastus, or reports the same moment in a different way. It keeps an obscure hint to τὰ προχθέντα and an allusion to the military control of the Myrmidons, obtained by Peleus. Of course, ε 1373 cannot be a paraphrase of α 4309.

According to a more rational hypothesis, both ε 2132 and ε 1373 depend not on Nicolaus but on a different source, whereas κ 1035 could be a short paraphrase of either α 4309 or ε 2132. That seems proved by the different name for Acastus’ wife and also by the differences of wording and content between the two (ε 2132 and ε 1373) and the Nicolaean α 4309. The second source on Peleus, Acastus, and his wife can be investigated. Our guide must be the recognized principle that the compiler(s) of the Suda did not read and quote directly all the sources they cited. In particular, they cited most of the historical or myth-historical sources through Mittelquellen. In 1912 C. de Boor argued that the historical lemmata which are not derived from lexica and scholia depend on the Excerpta Constantiniana: this important result was accepted three years later by J. Becker and then by Ada Adler, who also drew up a list of the authors transmitted through the Excerpta to the Suda.8

7 Bernhardy, Suidae Lexicon I (Halle/Braunschweig 1853) 265–266. Bernhardy translated “Ille vero quod acciderat ominis loco duxit, Myrmidoni- busque subactis Acastum regno exuit.”

8 De Boor, BZ 21 (1912) 381–424; J. Becker, De Suidae Excerptis historicis (diss. Bonn 1915) 10–16, esp. 13; de Boor, BZ 23 (1914–1919) 1–127; Adler,
Accordingly, for the source of ε 2132 and ε 1373 we have to look among those transmitted by the Excerpta and appearing in this list. A ‘useful’ author for our inquiry is of course a fragmentary one who is supposed to have dealt with such a matter. Apart from the fully transmitted authors and those who seemingly did not treat the myth of Peleus and Acastus, the choice seems limited to Aelian’s Περὶ προνοίας and John of Antioch, both appearing in Adler’s list as well known to the compiler(s) of the Lexicon through the abridgments of the Excerpta Constantiniana.9 Other fragmentary authors who appear in the list, such as the Christian ones, may be ruled out as it is difficult to suppose they would have dealt with such a myth.10

According to Adler’s criteria, the two most ‘useful’ candidates as the sources of both ε 2132 and ε 1373 could only be Aelian and John of Antioch, not Diodorus, who only reports (in his preserved corpus) a tradition that, after Acastus’ death, Thessalus was his legitimate successor at Iolcos and gave his name to the Thessalians.11 We can narrow the field further by taking into account the linguistic features of the two lemmas. A linguistic analysis suggests that the aorist passive participle of φοβέω,12 the comparative of ἀληθής, 13 πειράω14 (all of them in

9 Both Aelian and John of Antioch dealt with Peleus: Ael. NA 2.18 and Jo. Ant. fr.40 Roberto.
10 For a broader discussion of these criteria see my “A New Fragment for Nicolaus of Damascus? A Note on Suda α 1272,” Histos 9 (2015) 67–75.
11 Diod. 4.55.2 (where he makes a preliminary announcement of his intention to deal with other traditions on the origins of the Thessalians’ name) and the fragmentary 7.7 (7 fr.5 quater Cohen-Skalli), where he likely fulfilled that announcement. For a different tradition on Peleus see Diod. 4.72.6. On Peleus see also R. Vollkommer, “Peleus,” LIMC 7.1 (1994) 251–269.
12 Ael. NA 7.23 and 30; VH 3.43, 10.2; Jo. Ant. fr.121 Müller/204 Roberto (with μῆ), 133 M./215.1 R. (with μῆ), 136 M./216 R., 40 R., 321 R.
13 Ael. NA 11.10; Jo. Ant. fr.2 M./R. and 72 M./150.1 R.
and also τὰ πραχθέντα,\textsuperscript{15} γίγνομαι ἐγκρατής,\textsuperscript{16} and παραλύω τῆς ὀρχῆς\textsuperscript{17} (all in Suda ε 1373) are attested in both authors. However, the aorist passive of ἔραω, the verbs ἀναίνομαι and κατεῖπον, and the comparative adjective σοφότερος (ε 2132) are never attested in John of Antioch, nor are ἐνθύμοι or ἐνθυμέμοιαι (ε 1373). All of them are attested instead in Aelian, even though the significance of that is blunted somewhat by the fact that the preserved corpus of Aelian is much larger than that of John of Antioch.

The aorist passive of ἔραω is found nineteen times in Aelian;\textsuperscript{18} ἀναίνομαι four times (\textit{NA} 8.27, 15.19, 16.5 and 9), κατεῖπον twice (\textit{NA} 7.10 and 15), the comparative σοφότερος eleven times, and ἐνθύμοι at least once.\textsuperscript{20}

Accordingly, we can conclude that the compiler(s) of the Suda depend(s) on two sources\textsuperscript{21} for the story of Peleus and Acastus’ wife: one is Nicolaus of Damascus, who transmits the name of Atalante (α 4309, from Nicolaus \textit{F} 55; see also α 809 and ν 708, derived from α 4309). The other, anonymous, source relates
the story with slight differences of wording and content and knows only the name Astydameia. To this source we may attribute at least ε 2132 ἐπείρα, on Peleus and Astydameia, and ε 1373 ἐνθύμιον, on the overthrow of Acastus. This anonymous source can be identified as Aelian. The compilers’ dependence on two (or even more) different sources concerning the same subject will cause no surprise: it also happens, for instance, at σ 515, where the story of Sthenboea is related using both John of Antioch, fr.21, and Nicolaus of Damascus, F 9.22

22 A further question is of course whether Aelian depended on Nicolaus about the myth of Peleus: there are striking similarities in the treatment of the attempt at seduction by Acastus’ wife, but the reaction of Peleus to the plot of Acastus is differently related in the two.

It is a pleasure to thank my readers for very helpful comments. Of course, responsibility for the arguments herein expressed is mine and only mine.

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