Some Aspects of the Theban Myth in the Lille Stesichorus

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The new papyrus P.Lilie 76abc consists of five lyric fragments which on the basis of language and especially of meter its editors, though with some reservations, have attributed to Stesichorus.¹ The theme of the fragments is the Theban saga, in particular the fortunes of Oedipus' sons, Eteocles and Polynices. The condition of the text prevents a total understanding of its content. The relation between this new poem and the Eriphyle,² in which Stesichorus presumably treated of the expedition of the Seven against Thebes, is difficult to establish. It is possible that Stesichorus composed more than a single poem on the same mythological theme, or that he developed in two or more parts the fortunes of the house of Oedipus.

Of the new papyrus only one column (76a ii) is preserved more or less intact. It contains a long speech of a female personage (v.32 ὅς φέρ[ό] δίς γνωριμία) addressed in the first part (17 verses) to Teiresias, in the second (14 verses) to her sons Eteocles and Polynices. She refuses to accept the inevitability of the dire prophecies of Teiresias on their destiny (vv.9–10 μακαροίνως δὲ τεάς ἀναξ... μὴ πάως τελεέσσαι) and proposes a means of avoiding their fulfilment (v.26 λυτήρων ἵματι κακοῦ γένοιτο πότῳ[v]): one of the brothers should stay at Thebes and reign, the other should take the family possessions and leave.

Meillier³ has rightly drawn attention to the analogy between the scene preserved by the papyrus and Jocasta's rôle in the Phoenissae of Euripides, though in Euripides' play the mother's mediation occurs when Adrastus' army is already at the walls of Thebes, and the terms of the proposal are different (v.452ff). Meillier identifies the δίς γνωριμία with Jocasta. In fact, however, we cannot say whether she is Jocasta or

³ art.cit. (supra n.1) 328.
rather Euryganeia, the young woman whom according to a less widely followed but very old version of the legend Oedipus had married after Jocasta's death and by whom he had had his four children.

As a matter of fact the ancient sources prior to Euripides are at one in placing Jocasta's (or Epicasta's) suicide immediately after the discovery of the incest and hence long before the dispute between the brothers about the inheritance. In the Odyssey we read (11.271–80):

\[\text{μητέρα τ' Οιδίποδαο ἱδον, καλὴν 'Ἐπικάστην, ἢ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀνυδρείηις νόοι, γηγαμένη ᾧ ὤιεῖ: ὁ δ' ἐν πατέρ' ἐξεναρίζας γημένη· ἀφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέκαν ἀνθρώπωις. ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβῃ πολυνατω ἄλγεα πάσχων Καδμείων ἦναςθεν ὀλοκλὴ διὰ βουλᾶς· ἢ δ' ἐβη εἰς Λίδαο πυλάρταιο κρατεροῖο, ἀφαμένη βρόχον ἀιπτὸν ἀφ' ὠψηλοῖο μελάθρου, ὡς ἀχεῖ εχομένη· τῶι δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιτρ' ὀπίςω πολλὰ μᾶλ', δεκά τε μητρὸς 'Ερινύες ἐκτελέουσιν.}

The scholium on this passage confirms that the suicide followed directly on the discovery of the incest, referring to the authority of Androton (ἡ Ἰοκάστη ἐπιγνοῦσα ὅτι τῶι παιδὶ παρεμήγη ἐκατὴν ἀνήρτησεν...ἡ ἱστορία παρὰ Ἀνδροτίων). This same version of the myth, canonized by Sophocles in Oedipus Rex, is accepted by Apollo­
dorus (Bibl. 3.5.9), who however adds the version according to which Oedipus had his children not by Jocasta but by Euryganeia (ibid. 3.5.8): ἐκεὶ δὲ οἱ γεννηθῆναι τὰ τέκνα φαίνει ἐξ Εὐρυγανείας αὐτῶι τῆς Ὕπέρφαντος.

Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus' marriage to Euryganeia and the birth of the four children are amply narrated and discussed by two scholia to Euripides' Phoenissae. The first of these actually ends: τινὲς δὲ Ἕπεργανείων ἀδελφὴν λέγουσιν εἶναι Ἰοκάστης τῆς μητρὸς Οἰδίποδος. What this last statement shows is the confluence of the two traditions

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5 Schol. Od. 11.271, p.496 Dindorf = Androt. FGrHist 324 F 62.

rather than, as Meillier asserts, "une atténuation de la légende primitive." The tradition concerning Euryganeia is in fact very old, if we should trust the testimony of Pausanias (9.5.10-12): "I don’t believe that (Oedipus) had children by (Jocasta)…They were born to Euryganeia, daughter of Hyperphantus. This is made clear also by the author of the epic they call Oedipodia. Onasias too at Plataea depicted Euryganeia prostrate with grief over the fight between her sons." (ὁδεῖον δὲ καὶ ὁ τὰ ἔπη ποιήσας ὁ Οἰδίποδα ὀνομάζομεν καὶ Ὀνασίας Πλαταιῶν ἔγραψε κατ'ηῆ τὴν Εὐρυγάνειαν ἐπὶ τήμ μάχη τῶν παιδῶν.)\(^8\) Evidently Pausanias was able to read the name of Euryganeia in an inscription of the portrait, or at least he knew of a tradition which identified the female figure with Euryganeia.

Pausanias, then, provides us with two items of information of great importance for the interpretation and understanding of the new fragments of Stesichorus:

(1) a poem as ancient as the Oedipodia presents Euryganeia, not Jocasta, as the mother of Eteocles and Polynices; and

(2) in a fifth century representation this same Euryganeia is alive at the time of the fight between the sons.

In sum, the sources show us a complex of traditions regarding the fortunes of the family of Oedipus. In none of them except Phoenissae, however, does Jocasta live on beyond the discovery of the incest: it is Euryganeia who is still alive at the time of the brothers’ quarrel. From the few verses that the new papyrus gives us we cannot tell which version was accepted by Stesichorus: whether he followed that of the author of the Oedipodia, or whether it was he himself who had Jocasta live on up to the time of the division of Oedipus’ estate, thus anticipating Euripides. The latter hypothesis could be supported by what we know about Stesichorus’ innovativeness in myth (cf. PMG 193, 16: [οὐ]τως δῆ ἐκ[α]νοποίησε τ[ὰς] ἰστορ[η]ς…): the innovation in the new fragments would be comparable with the rehabilitation of Helen, again adopted by Euripides in Helena.

Another interesting aspect of the new text is the arrangement for the division of the estate. The method of the lot, proposed moreover by the mother, is a novel element, foreign to the previously known versions of the myth. Generally attested is the agreement between

\(^7\) art.cit. (supra n.1) 328.

\(^8\) Cf. Paus. 9.4.2: Onasias is mentioned as the painter of a picture in the pronaos of the temple of Athena Areia representing the expedition against Thebes led by Adrastus.
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the two young brothers to rule by alternate years, an agreement motivated by fear of fulfilment of Oedipus’ curse on them. In the proposal made by their mother in Stesichorus, on the other hand, the alternative is between ruling and keeping the paternal treasures—an alternative to be settled by lot (vv.20–24):

\[\text{τὸν μὲν ἔχοντα δόμον \ ναίειν π. [τὸν δ’ \ ἀπίμεν κτέαν}]^{11}
\[\text{καὶ χρυσὸν ἕχοντα φίλου κύμπαντα [πατρὸς κλαρφαλήδων \ δὲ \ ἀν \ πρᾶτος \ λάχη \ ξεκατ Μοιράν.}\]

A solution similar to that evidenced by the new text is found in Hellanicus, who offers, as Meiliër points out, the most instructive comparison. Eteocles offers Polynices the choice between ruling and having part of the treasure to enjoy in exile (ἐὶ βούλοιτο τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχειν ἦ τὸ μέρος τῶν χρημάτων λαβεῖν καὶ ἔτεραν πόλιν οἰκεῖν); and Polynices chooses to take the necklace and robe of Harmonia and go off to Argos. But Meiliër fails to take into account the Supplices of Euripides, which seems to offer a version of the division similar to

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9 Diod. Sic. 4.65; Apollod. Bibl. 3.6.1.
10 Eur. Phoen. 69ff. On the other hand we read in the scholium to v.71 of the same play (I p.259 Schwartz=Pherecyd. FGrHist 3 f 96) that Polynices was driven out by force (Φερεκόδας γὰρ ἐκβεβλήθη τοῦ Πολυνείκην φησί μετὰ βιῶν). This is the version apparently accepted by Aeschylus (Sept. 637ff, 1049) and by Sophocles (OC 374ff, 1284ff). According to Hyginus (Fab. 67) Oedipus himself left his sons the alternating rule.
11 The use of the word κτέαν is notable. A dative κτέανεσσα is attested in an inscription of the 3rd cent. (IG II 11120, 8), while in the archaic and classical period one finds the form κτέανα 'possessions' (LS s.v. κτέανα; e.g. Hes. Op. 315, Solon 4.12 West; Pind. Ol. 3.42), and the contracted form κτήνα/κτήν (e.g. Her. 29 [I p.157, 8 D.–K.], Hdt. 2.64, Democ. 57 [II p.157, 11 D.–K.], Hippocr. De auct. 52), which F. Bechtel (Die griechischen Dialekte III 311ff) classifies as Ionic, interpreting as 'Nutzvieh'. E. Fraenkel, while accepting this last interpretation for κτήνη at v.129 of Agamemnon, does not exclude the possibility that Aeschylus knew the term as a literary word for 'possessions'; in this sense in fact it is used by Hesiod (fr.200, 9 M.–W.; cf. A. Platt, JPhil 32 [1913] 46). The Lille papyrus attests the new form κτεάνη, which in such a context should indicate the movable goods, animals included, which are to be assigned to whichever of the brothers is to depart (τὸν δ’ ἀπίμεν κτεάνη | καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχοντα), as opposed to the immovable goods (δόμο), which remain for the one who is to stay. Certainly included in the expression κτεάνη καὶ χρυσὸν are the peplos and necklace of Harmonia, the precious and maleficent possessions of the offspring of Cadmus.
12 art.cit. (supra n.1) 327.
13 Schol. Eur. Phoen. 71, 1 p.259 Schwartz=Hellanicus FGrHist 4 f 98. That Polynices took with him into exile the objects of Harmonia is stated also by Apollodorus (Bibl. 3.6.1) and by Diodorus Siculus (4.65.5).
Stesichorus’, or at least different from the traditional one of alternating reigns. At *Supplices* 13ff we read of the Argive matrons who constitute the chorus:

\[ \text{ἀπαιδές εἴσιν, οὐκ ἐπὶ Ἀργεῖων ἀναξ} \\
\text{Ἄδραστος ἡγαγ’, Ὀιδίπου παγκληρίας} \\
\text{μέρος καταχεῖν φυγάδι Πολυνείκει θέλων} \\
\text{γαμβρωί.} \]

“They have lost their children, whom Adrastus king of Argos once led to get for his son-in-law, the exiled Polynices, his share of Oedipus’ inheritance.”

From v.149ff we learn that Adrastus organized the expedition against Thebes to recover Polynices’ χρήματα:

\[ \text{ΘΗ. Ὄ δ’ Ὀιδίπος <παῖς> τίνι τρόπωι Θήβας λιπών;} \\
\text{ΑΔ. Ἀραὶς πατρώαις, μὴ κακίνητον κτάνοι.} \\
\text{ΘΗ. Σοφήν γ’ ἔλεξες τίνῳ ἐκούσιον φυγήν.} \\
\text{ΑΔ. Ἀλλ’ οἱ μένοντες τοὺς ἀπόντας ήδίκουν.} \\
\text{ΘΗ. Οὐ ποῦ οἱ ἄδελφος χρημάτων νοσφίζεται;} \\
\text{ΑΔ. Ταῦτ’ ἑκδικάζων ἥλθον.} \]

While the first of these two passages would not be decisive in itself, since παγκληρία could mean the treasure and the throne together, the second seems clearly to imply that Polynices had the right to reclaim only χρήματα. It seems, then, that Euripides knew of the two traditions and accepted both of them in his plays: that of the alternating reigns in *Phoenissae* and that of Polynices’ renunciation of the throne in *Supplices*.

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