

# Aeschylus' *Theoroi* or *Isthmiastae*: A Reconsideration

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**I**N THE TWENTIETH CENTURY we have learned much about the Greek satyr play thanks to the discovery and publication of papyri. No less than three satyr plays by Aeschylus are now represented by significant papyrus fragments: *Dictyulci*, *Theoroi* or *Isthmiastae*, and a play of unknown title and subject in which Dike plays a prominent role.<sup>1</sup>

Although *Theoroi* or *Isthmiastae* is represented by at least one major papyrus (*P.Oxy.* XVIII 2162=fr.17 Mette)<sup>2</sup> and may also be represented by a second papyrus fragment, a question considered below, discussion of this play has been markedly hindered by the fact that its subject has not yet been identified.

In *P.Oxy.* 2162 the satyrs hang up portraits of themselves as votive antefixes on Poseidon's temple. Dionysus then appears complaining that the satyrs are deserting him for athletics. Another character then enters bearing "new playthings fresh from the adze and the anvil"—evidently athletic equipment. It would seem that he is encouraging the satyrs to take up athletics (and consequently to forsake Dionysus), and there is reason to think that this individual is himself both an athlete and the ironworker who fashioned the 'new playthings' in question. These conclusions are suggested by the following considerations: (1) at line 94, evidently in return for the satyrs' offer to give him a voyage (we shall return to the problems posed by line 93 in a later context), this interlocutor promises to *ξυνησθμιάζειν*; elsewhere I have argued that the natural interpretation of this promise is 'I shall be your fellow-competitor in the Isthmian games';<sup>3</sup> (2) at line 67 Dionysus grumbles to the satyrs "you think I am nothing at the ironworking art," and it would seem that this is his piqued reaction to an unfavorable

<sup>1</sup> *Leon* is probably represented by *P.Oxy.* XX 2256 frr. 59f and associated minor fragments, and *Prometheus Pyrkaeus* by *P.Oxy.* XX 2245.

<sup>2</sup> For the present discussion the problem of the physical relationship of the parts of this fragment (discussed by Lobel, and by B. Snell at *Gnomon* 25 [1953] 436) is unimportant.

<sup>3</sup> D. F. Sutton, *The Greek Satyr Play* (Meisenheim am Glan 1980) 32.

comparison with this attractive other person who is seducing the satyrs away from the god.

On the basis of these two observations and of a third, to be mentioned subsequently, I have elsewhere proposed the following understanding of the dramatic situation of the play.<sup>4</sup> First, if this interlocutor is not only an ironworker but also an athlete, then suggestions that he may be Hephaestus or Daedalus must be discarded:<sup>5</sup> these figures are not athletes and have no association with athletics. On the other hand, he may well be Heracles, always at home on the satyric stage. In one tradition Heracles is one of the six Idaean Dactyls, famous for their metal-work, and in this same tradition he is represented as the founder of the Olympic games (Paus. 5.7.6–7). Then too, in one mythological tradition Heracles is associated with the Isthmian games. In one version the Argonauts, upon arriving at the Isthmus, sacrificed to Poseidon and dedicated the Argo there; subsequently Heracles left them to found the Olympia (Diod. 4.53.2). But a variant of this held that on that occasion the Argonauts, including Heracles, competed in the Isthmian games ([Dio Chrys.] 37.13–15).

Second, a very salient feature of the *Theoroi* fragment is the number of times travel is mentioned:<sup>6</sup> 21 ὁ[ς γ'] ἐπισχῆσει κελεύθου τοὺς ξένο[υς] φό[βον βλέπων. 24f οὐτούτέρωσ', οὐ, δῆλος ἦσθ' ὁδοιπο[ρῶν. / αὐ[τῆ κ] ἐλευθος ταῦτά μοι προσδείκ[νυται. 27f ἴχνη τε] ταῦτα, καὶ σαφῶς ἠγεῖτό μοι. / ἔγνω—μαχ[ητὰς] δ' ὠ[ιό]μην [ὁ]δῶι πα[ειν. 93 τί δ' [ἀ]ντιποιεῖν [. . . ].ιπλοῦν μου[.]ανδάν[; (τί δ' ἀντιποιεῖν [δόν]τι πλοῦν μουφανδάνει; Lloyd-Jones). 95 ἐμβήσεται;<sup>7</sup> 96 βάδην ἐλ[ά]ις. In view of some or all of these lines, it would appear that travel plays a role in the plot of the play.

Given these considerations, I suggested that perhaps the scene represented by *P.Oxy.* 2162 was not set at the Isthmus, but rather somewhere else: the satyrs are offering votive images to Poseidon in the hope of obtaining a fair voyage to the Isthmus and success in his games; Heracles is urging them to make the voyage, while Dionysus objects; the satyrs offer Heracles a place on their ship

<sup>4</sup> Sutton (*supra* n.3) 33–34.

<sup>5</sup> Previous important discussions of the contents of the play, which perforce revolve around the question of the identity of this speaker, are E. Lobel at *P.Oxy.* XX p.167; Snell (*supra* n.2, also *Hermes* 84 [1956] 12f); H. Lloyd-Jones, LCL *Aeschylus*<sup>2</sup> II 542–49; N. Chourmouziades, *Σατυρικά* (Athens 1974) 50–56 and 195 n.128 with references; Sutton (*supra* n.2); and Viktor Steffen, *De Graecorum fabulis satyricis* (Wroclaw 1979) 18.

<sup>6</sup> Unless otherwise noted, restorations are those printed by Mette.

<sup>7</sup> R. G. Ussher at *Phoenix* 31 (1977) 298 suggests that this word means 'enter into the contest' (glossing Pl. *Phdr.* 252E ἐὰν οὖν μὴ . . . ἐμβεβῶσι τῷ ἐπιτηδεύματι); given the surrounding context, this interpretation is unconvincing.

in return for his promise to be a fellow-competitor; then they contemptuously say to Dionysus “but you, sir, may walk!”

Furthermore, since there is precedent for a change of scene in a satyr play (Sophocles’ *Achilleos Erastae* on the showing of *P.Oxy.* XX 2257 fr. 1), I suggested that *P.Oxy.* XX 2250, attributed to *Theoroi* by Bruno Snell,<sup>8</sup> in which the chorus greets a king with a request to be received kindly and (by Snell’s reconstruction of line 8) containing an expression of enthusiasm for athletics, represented a later portion of the play in which the chorus appears at the Isthmus and greets the presiding king: especially since there is no reason for thinking that the play dealt with Sisyphus’ foundation of the Isthmian games, this king might be Creon (who gave the games for the Argonauts) rather than Sisyphus.

Such was the proposed interpretation of *Theoroi* published in 1980 but written somewhat earlier. In the period intervening since the writing of that argument, two developments have occurred that make obligatory a reconsideration of this theory.

First, the attribution of *P.Oxy.* 2250 to *Theoroi* has been subjected to sharp criticism by Oliver Taplin.<sup>9</sup> Any interpretation of *Theoroi* that presumes the attribution of *P.Oxy.* 2250 to that play is therefore questionable, and the theory that the play contained a shift of scene is untenable.

Second, William Rostocker and Elizabeth R. Gebhard have published results of the excavation of a metal foundry within the precincts of the temple of Poseidon at Isthmia.<sup>10</sup> Although they draw no comparison with *Theoroi*, the relevance of this discovery to the interpretation of the play is obvious (the literary allusion to the archaeological discovery may also prove useful); their concluding remark (361) is worth stressing:

Before and after the great festivals itinerant craftsmen carrying simple tools could have worked at the sanctuaries, supplying votives for the temples and commemorative statues of the victors.

The authors do not dwell on another possible function of such foundries (for they suggest that a foundry existed at the site of each of the four panhellenic games—a fact that would go a long

<sup>8</sup> *Supra* n.2.

<sup>9</sup> Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 420. By the way, Taplin’s assignment of *P.Colon.* inv. 263 to Sophocles’ *Satyrs at Taenarum* is unlikely (448 n.2); with far greater probability this papyrus has been associated with the tragedy *Peirithous* of Critias or more probably Euripides: see *P.Colon.* I 2.

<sup>10</sup> “The Sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia: Techniques of Metal Manufacture,” *Hesperia* 49 (1980) 347–63.

way towards explaining the association of the ironworking Heracles with the foundation of the Olympic games): manufacture of items such as javelin-heads and jumping-weights employed in the games themselves. This latter consideration is relevant to our investigation insofar as it is likelier that the newly-wrought 'play-things' produced in *Theoroi*, which scare the satyrs, are some manner of athletic paraphernalia than, say, shackles.<sup>11</sup>

In view of these recent developments, the interpretation of *Theoroi* I advanced previously surely requires modification. There is no reason to retract the suggestion that the ironworking athlete is Heracles, or that the games in question are those described by Ps.-Dio. But the setting of the play is clearly the sanctuary of Poseidon at Isthmia and its attendant foundry. The references to travel enumerated above require reassessment.

In a recent discussion of *Theoroi* Viktor Steffen has written:<sup>12</sup>

Certum tamen est fabulam in Isthmo ad Neptuni aedes actam esse. Huc convenerunt satyri, qui ludis Isthmiis interfuerant, ut Neptuno, ludorum patrono, imagines suas pro victoria, quam peperissent, dono darent.

This appraisal is interesting but, like much in Steffen's book, unsubstantiated by appeal to textual evidence. Even if it is not quite clear that at the time represented by our fragment the games are now over, nor if it is certain why the satyrs make their offerings at Poseidon's temple, the valuable feature of Steffen's suggestion is the implication that these references to travel refer not to the voyage to the Isthmus but rather to the return home: Heracles has encouraged the satyrs to leave Dionysus and practise athletics; they are now speaking of departing the Isthmus as traveling-companions, to Dionysus' mortification.

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<sup>11</sup> So Taplin (*supra* n.9) 421f after K. Reinhardt at *Hermes* 85 (1957) 10 = *Tradition und Geist* (Göttingen 1960) 177. The sight of javelins might provoke the satyrs' fright.

<sup>12</sup> *Supra* n.5.