

# Another Fragment of Euripides' *Oedipus*

Enrico Emanuele Prodi

**Abstract:** *A recently published gnomological compilation in Syriac allows Eur. fr. 1056 Kannicht to be recognized as a fragment of Euripides' Oedipus.*

**Keywords:** *Euripides, Oedipus, Syriac, florilegia*

Jacob Lollar's recent article in this journal has drawn Classicists' attention to a Syriac saying attributed to Oedipus. It is found in a compilation of Greek philosophical *gnomai* edited by Yury Arzhanov from a thirteenth-century manuscript in Dublin, Trinity College 1505 (§41):<sup>1</sup>

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Oedipus said: “There are no people who have a good fate or a bad fate in marriage. For it becomes either good or bad as soon as a man brings a good or a bad woman into his house.”

It seems to me that it is a rendition of Eur. fr. 1056 Kannicht:<sup>2</sup>

οὐ πάντες οὔτε δυστυχοῦσιν ἐς γάμους  
οὔτ' εὐτυχοῦσιν· συμφορὰ δ' ὅς ἂν τύχῃ  
κακῆς γυναικός, εὐτυχεῖ δ' ἐσθλῆς τυχών

Not all men are unfortunate in marriage, nor all fortunate; but it is disastrous for any who gets a bad wife, while any who gets a good one is fortunate.

<sup>1</sup> Lollar, “Tragic riddles,” 219-220; Arzhanov, *Syriac Sayings*, 238-239. I print Arzhanov's text and translation.

<sup>2</sup> Greek text Kannicht, *Euripides*, II, 1001; translation from Collard and Cropp, *Euripides*, 595.

Beside the misunderstanding of οὐ πάντες, the first sentence is a fairly literal translation, 𐤒𐤍𐤏𐤃 being the usual term for τύχη in the Syriac translation of the Septuagint.<sup>3</sup> The second is somewhat looser, but the sense is recognizably the same.

The source of the Greek fragment is, predictably, Stobaeus, who ascribes it to Euripides without identifying the play (4.22.70). The Syriac gives us a different attribution—and a striking one: Oedipus is not the obvious poster boy for wisdom in matrimonial choices. Where exactly did Stobaeus and the compiler of the Dublin florilegium, or rather his Greek source, find this maxim?

The two sources combine to point us in the right direction: Euripides' *Oedipus*. Several fragments of that tragedy are similarly concerned with marriage and with the qualities expected of wives:<sup>4</sup>

Fr. 543 Kannicht:

μεγάλη τυραννὶς ἀνδρὶ τέκνα καὶ γυνή  
ἴσῃν γὰρ ἀνδρὶ συμφορὰν εἶναι λέγω  
τέκνων θ' ἁμαρτεῖν καὶ πάτρας καὶ χρημάτων  
ἀλόχου τε κεδνῆς, ὥς μόνων τῶν χρημάτων  
ἢ κρεῖσσόν ἐστιν ἀνδρί, σῶφρον' ἢν λάβῃ

(OEDIPUS?) Children and a wife are a great kingdom for a man ... for to lose children and fatherland and wealth is a disaster for a man equal, I say, to losing a good wife, in that his wealth alone ... Truly, it is better for a man, if he gets a virtuous (wife) ...

Fr. 544 Kannicht:

ἄλλως δὲ πάντων δυσμαχώτατον γυνή  
And besides, a woman is the hardest of all things to fight.

Fr. 545 Kannicht:

πᾶσα γὰρ δούλη πέφυκεν ἀνδρὸς ἢ σῶφρων γυνή·  
ἢ δὲ μὴ σῶφρων ἀνοίᾳ τὸν ξυνόνθ' ὑπερφρονεῖ

<sup>3</sup> See Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, I, 649–650 s.v.

<sup>4</sup> Again Greek text from Kannicht, *Euripides*, I, 569–583, and translation from Collard and Cropp, *Euripides*, 9–27 (who translate their own Greek text, whence the occasional discrepancy). Beside Kannicht's detailed apparatus, for notes on the fragments of the *Oedipus* see also H. van Looy in Jouan and van Looy, *Euripide*, 448–458; C. Collard in Collard, Cropp and Gibert, *Euripides Selected*, 114–123.

Every sensible wife is her husband's slave; the wife without sense despises her partner out of folly.

Fr. \*545a Kannicht:

εὖ λέγειν δ', ὅταν τι λέξῃ, χρὴ δοκεῖν, κἄν μὴ λέγῃ,  
καῖκπονεῖν, ἂν τῷ ξυνόντι πρὸς χάριν μέλλῃ †λέγειν.

ἡδὺ δ', ἣν κακὸν πάθῃ τι, συσκυθρωπάζειν πόσει  
ἄλοχον ἐν κοινῷ τε λύπης ἡδονῆς τ' ἔχειν μέρος

σοὶ δ' ἔγωγε καὶ νοσοῦντι συννοσοῦσ' ἀνέξομαι 5  
καὶ κακῶν τῶν σῶν ξυνοίσω, κούδὲν ἔσται μοι πικρόν

οὐδεμίαν ὦνησε κάλλος εἰς πόσιν ξυνάορον  
ἀρετὴ δ' ὦνησε πολλάς· πᾶσα γὰρ †ἀγαθὴ† γυνή,  
ἥτις ἀνδρὶ συντέτηκε, σωφρονεῖν ἐπίσταται.

πρῶτα μὲν γε τοῦθ' ὑπάρχει· κἄν ἄμορφος ᾗ πόσις, 10  
χρὴ δοκεῖν εὐμορφον εἶναι τῇ γε νοῦν κεκτημένη·  
οὐ γὰρ ὀφθαλμὸς †τὸ κρίνειν ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ νοῦς

[JOCASTA] [7–12] Beauty befits no wife with her husband, but virtue benefits many. Every good wife who has melted in union with her husband knows how to be sensible. For this is the first fundamental: even if a husband is unhandsome, to a wife with sense at all he ought to seem handsome; for it is not the eye that judges (these things), but the mind. [1–6] She must think, whenever he says anything, that he speaks well, even if he does not; and work to achieve whatever she means to work at to please her partner. It is pleasing too, if he experiences some trouble, for a wife to put on a gloomy face with her husband, and to join in sharing his pain and pleasure. You and I: I will endure sharing your guilt as my own, and help to bear your troubles; and nothing will be (too) harsh for me.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This fragment is transmitted (with attribution to Euripides but without a play title) by Clem. Al. *Strom.* 4.20.125–126 as five separate excerpts, in the order retained by Kannicht. They were recognised as belonging to the same context by Valckenaer, *Diatrise*, 243–244; put into what must be the correct order by Musgrave, *Euripidis omnia*, III, 602–603; and attributed to the *Oedipus* by Hermann, *Quaestiones Oedipodeae*, 18–19. Collard and Cropp (like Jouan and van Looy) follow Musgrave's reordering of the lines.

Fr. 546 Kannicht:

πᾶσα γὰρ ἀνδρὸς κακίων ἄλοχος  
 κἄν ὁ κάκιστος  
 γήμη τὴν εὐδοκιμοῦσαν

(CHORUS) Every wife is worse than her husband, even if the worst of men marries one of good repute.

The plot of this *Oedipus* remains obdurately obscure, except that it diverged in important ways from that of *Oedipus Tyrannus*;<sup>6</sup> but it is clear from what survives that Jocasta played a prominent role and that her and Oedipus' marriage was a salient concern, quite separately from—and probably before the discovery of—their incest.

In terms of content, our passage fits nicely alongside the ones just quoted. The Euripidean tic of the *figura etymologica* with good and bad fortune (occurring another 20 times in the corpus) has just turned up again in the newest-published papyrus of the *Oedipus*, *PMich. Occid.* 2 (v. 5, ] δυστυχεῖς τῇ δ' εὐτυχεῖς).<sup>7</sup> The attribution to "Oedipus", rather than to Euripides, in the Dublin florilegium poses no difficulty: §38 of the same collection ascribes *Alc.* 669–72 to "Alcestis" (ⲁⲗⲙⲉⲥⲧⲓⲥ), again with no mention of Euripides. That passage—which in the play is spoken by Admetus, not by Alcestis—should caution against taking it for granted that Oedipus is the speaker here. The Syriac translator must have misunderstood a Greek source that assigned §38 to the play *Alcestis*, and he is likely to have done the same with §41 and the *Oedipus*.<sup>8</sup>

Euripides' *Oedipus* was well known to Greek gnomologies: of the 22 fragments assigned to it in Kannicht's edition, 15 come from

<sup>6</sup> See van Looy in Jouan and van Looy, *Euripide*, 429–444, and Cropp in Collard, Cropp and Gibert, *Euripides Selected*, 107–110, both with earlier bibliography.

<sup>7</sup> *Ed. pr.* Claytor, "Euripides in Kalamazoo" (see 25–26 for comments on v. 5 – but my sense is that δυστυχεῖς and εὐτυχεῖς are verbs, 'you are unfortunate' 'you are fortunate', not adjectives).

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that the compiler of the florilegium represented by the Dublin manuscript must have translated the maxims himself from a Greek source; there may have been further Syriac intermediaries. On the broader phenomenon of Syriac florilegia see Bettio, "Gnomologia siriaci"; Pietruschka, "Gnomologia"; Arzhanov, *Syriac Sayings*, esp. 4–13, 69–114; and (with a focus on patristic compilations) E. Fiori, "Syriac Florilegia," 5–10.

Stobaeus (including three of the five quoted above).<sup>9</sup> As Arzhanov notes, the extract from the *Alcestis* in §38 is also found in Stobaeus.<sup>10</sup> For another fragment from a lost Greek play in our florilegium, see §43, ascribed to ܐܚܝܠܝܫ (perhaps “Achilles”?), which Arzhanov acutely suggests emending into “Alexis”.<sup>11</sup> He is right; the excerpt is a mash-up of fr. 291 and 340.2 Kassel–Austin (both, again, known from Stobaeus).<sup>12</sup> Another case could be §40: the Dublin manuscript’s implicit ascription to the *Alcestis* is wrong, but it still sounds a great deal like Euripides, with its contrast between the smooth-talking but wicked and the virtuous but inarticulate (cf. especially fr. 56 and 928b Kannicht—neither of which, however, quite matches the Syriac text).

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University of Cagliari  
 enricoemanuele.prodi@unica.it  
 ORCID: 0000-0002-1576-7031

<sup>9</sup> Fr. 542 Kannicht (Stob. 3.1.3), 543 (4.22a.1), 544 (4.22g.140), 545 (4.22a.2 and 4.22c.85), 546 (4.22g.187), 547 (1.9.2a), 548 (4.21b.19), 549 (4.41.45), 550 (4.47.4), 551 (3.38.9), 552 (3.7.9), 553 (4.45.6), 554 (4.41.44), 554a (4.5.11), and 555 (1.3.6).

<sup>10</sup> 4.52a.1: Arzhanov, *Syriac Sayings*, 237. For parallels between the Dublin florilegium and Stobaeus see *ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>11</sup> Arzhanov, *Syriac Sayings*, 239 n. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Respectively 4.22g.149 and 4.22g.154 (with no indication of a play title). The second of these extracts is repeated in 4.23.13, with an ascription to Euripides’ *Danae*.

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