

Some Aspects of the Theban Myth in the Lille Stesichorus

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THE NEW PAPYRUS *P.Lille 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 ὡς φάτ[ο] δῖα γυνά) 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 μαντοσύνας δὲ τεὰς ἄναξ... | μὴ πάσας τελέσσαι) and proposes a means of avoiding their fulfilment (v.26 λυτήριον ὑμῖ κακοῦ γένοιτο πότμο[ν]): 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 δῖα γυνά with Jocasta. In fact, however, we cannot say whether she is Jocasta or

¹ G. Ancher, B. Boyaval, C. Meillier, *Etudes sur l'Égypte et le Soudan anciens* (Cahier de Recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Égyptologie de Lille 4, 1976) 255ff.

² Cf. Page, *SLG* fr.148–50 and *PMG* fr.194.

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)⁴ 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):

μητέρα τ' Οἰδιπόδαο ἴδον, καλήν Ἐπικάστην,
ἢ μέγα ἔργον ἔρεξεν ἀιδρείησι νόοιο,
γημαμένη ὦι υἱεῖ· ὁ δ' ὄν πατέρ' ἐξενάριζα
γῆμεν· ἄφαρ δ' ἀνάπυστα θεοὶ θέσαν ἀνθρώποιον.
ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν ἐν Θήβηι πολυηράτῳ ἄλγεα πάσχω
Καδμείων ἦνασσε θεῶν ὀλοὰς διὰ βουλὰς·
ἢ δ' ἔβη εἰς Αἴδαο πυλάρταο κρατεροῖο,
ἀψαμένη βρόχον αἰπὺν ἀφ' ὑψηλοῖο μελάθρου,
ὦι ἄχεῖ ἄχομένη· τῷ δ' ἄλγεα κάλλιπ' ὀπίσσω
πολλὰ μάλ', ὄσσα τε μητρὸς Ἐρινύες ἐκτελέουσιν.

The scholium on this passage confirms that the suicide followed directly on the discovery of the incest, referring to the authority of Androtion (ἢ Ἰοκάστη ἐπιγνοῦσα ὅτι τῷ παιδί παρεμίγη ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησεν... ἢ ἱστορία παρὰ Ἀνδροτίωνι).⁵ This same version of the myth, canonized by Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex*, is accepted by Apollodorus (*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): εἰς δὲ οἱ γεννηθῆναι τὰ τέκνα φακὶν ἐξ Εὐρυγανείας αὐτῷ τῆς Ὑπέρφαντος.

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*.⁶ The first of these actually ends: τινὲς δὲ Εὐρυγάνειαν ἀδελφὴν λέγουσιν εἶναι Ἰοκάστης τῆς μητρὸς Οἰδίποδος. What this last statement shows is the confluence of the two traditions

⁴ Schol. *Od.* 11.271, p.495 Dindorf: Ἐπικάστην] παρὰ τοῖς τραγικοῖς Ἰοκάστην. Cf. schol. *Eur. Phoen.* 12, I p.249 Schwartz; Hesychius s.v. καλήν τ' Ἐπικάστην (K436 Latte); *vid.* Roscher, *Lex.* III 700 s.v. Oidipus.

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

⁶ Schol. *Phoen.* 53, I p.257 Schwartz = Pherecyd. *FGrHist* 3 F 95; schol. *Phoen.* 1760, I p.414 Schwartz = Peis. *FGrHist* 16 F 10.

rather than, as Meillier asserts,⁷ “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.” (δηλοῖ δὲ καὶ ὁ τὰ ἔπη ποιήσας ἃ Οἰδιπόδια ὀνομάζουσι· καὶ Ὀνασίας Πλαταιᾶσιν ἔγραψε κατηφῆ τὴν Εὐρυγάνειαν ἐπὶ τῇ μάχῃ τῶν παίδων.)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: [οὔ]τως δὲ ἐκ[α]νοποίησε τ[ὰς] ἱστορ[ί]ας . . .): 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.

the two young brothers to rule by alternate years,⁹ an agreement motivated by fear of fulfilment of Oedipus' curse on them.¹⁰ 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):

τὸν μὲν ἔχοντα δόμους ναίειν π.[
 τὸν δ' ἀπίμεν κτεάνη¹¹
 καὶ χρυσὸν ἔχοντα φίλου κύμπαντα [πατρὸς
 κλαροπαληδὸν ὅς ἂν
 πρῶτος λάχηι ἕκατι Μοιρᾶν.

A solution similar to that evidenced by the new text is found in Hellanicus, who offers, as Meillier points out,¹² the most instructive comparison. Eteocles offers Polynices the choice between ruling and having part of the treasure to enjoy in exile (εἰ βούλοιο τὴν βασιλείαν ἔχειν ἢ τὸ μέρος τῶν χρημάτων λαβεῖν καὶ ἑτέραν πόλιν οἰκεῖν); and Polynices chooses to take the necklace and robe of Harmonia and go off to Argos.¹³ But Meillier fails to take into account the *Supplices* of Euripides, which seems to offer a version of the division similar to

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 (Φερεκύδης γὰρ ἐκβεβλήσθαι τὸν Πολυνείκην φησι μετὰ βίας). 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 κτεάνη is notable. A dative κτεάνεσσιν is attested in an inscription of the 3rd cent. (*IG* II^a 11120, 8), while in the archaic and classical period one finds the form κτέανα 'possessions' (LSJ *s.v.* κτέανον; e.g. Hes. *Op.* 315, Solon 4.12 West, Pind. *Ol.* 3.42), and the contracted form κτήνεα/κτήνη (e.g. Heracl. 29 [I p.157, 8 D.-K.], Hdt. 2.64, Democr. 57 [II p.157, 11 D.-K.], Hippocr. *De affect.* 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 (δόμους), which remain for the one who is to stay. Certainly included in the expression κτεάνη καὶ χρυσὸν are the *perlos* 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, I 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:

ἄπαιδές εἰσιν, οὐς ποτ' Ἀργείων ἄναξ
 Ἄδραστος ἤγαγ', Οἰδίπου παγκληρίας
 μέρος κατασχεῖν φυγάδι Πολυνείκει θέλων
 γαμβρῶι.

"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*:

ΘΗ. Ὁ δ' Οἰδίπου <παῖς> τίνι τρόπῳ Θήβας λιπών;
 ΑΔ. Ἀραῖς πατρώιας, μὴ κασίγνητον κτάνοι.
 ΘΗ. Σοφὴν γ' ἔλεξας τήνδ' ἐκούσιον φυγὴν.
 ΑΔ. Ἄλλ' οἱ μένοντες τοὺς ἀπόντας ἠδίκουν.
 ΘΗ. Οὐ πού σφ' ἀδελφὸς χρημάτων νοσφίζεται;
 ΑΔ. Ταῦτ' ἐκδικάζων ἦλθον.

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*.