

# Euripides *Phoenissae* 1–2 and Sophocles *Electra* 1—Again

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**D**R HASLAM has the great merit of having called attention recently to the testimony of three papyri in which Euripides' *Phoenissae* begins only at line 3.<sup>1</sup> Two papyri so present the beginning of the play. The third is of special importance, for it offers a hypothesis of *Phoenissae* which also suggests that the play began with line 3;<sup>2</sup> it is further possible that the hypothesis is to be attributed to Dicaearchus. These are hard facts, and so it is understandable that Haslam has drawn the conclusion that *Phoenissae* 1–2 are unauthentic.<sup>3</sup> He adduced also a scholion to line 1 (Schwartz I 245.2–5) containing an anecdote which implies the spuriousness of *Phoenissae* 1–2 and also of Sophocles *Electra* 1. In both passages the lines in question may seem redundant and could be omitted without damage to the context. The ancients already considered that the plays of Euripides and Sophocles had lines interpolated by actors, and modern scholars have often agreed.<sup>4</sup>

As for *Electra* 1, Haslam observed that in four other plays of Sophocles, where a person is likewise addressed at the beginning, the apostrophe is always a short one. This is true, but we must not forget that in two plays (*Ajax* and *OT*) superiors (Athena or Oedipus) address inferiors. In *Oedipus Coloneus* Oedipus is only a beggar and therefore addresses his daughter very simply: τέκνου τυφλοῦ γέροντος. At *Antigone* 1 Antigone addresses an equal, her sister. In *Electra*, however, an inferior (the paedagogue) addresses a superior (Orestes) who is the offspring of a renowned race and who at the end of the play will appear to be a victor. In *Philoctetes* two equals appear: but one of them (Odysseus) needs the cooperation of the other (Neoptolemus), and therefore addresses him in a respectful way

<sup>1</sup> *GRBS* 16 (1975) 149–74 (hereafter 'Haslam').

<sup>2</sup> The restitution, made by expert papyrological scholars (see Haslam 141), seems beyond doubt.

<sup>3</sup> The conclusion has been approved by a number of English scholars, cf. Haslam 149 n.1, and now M. L. West, *Gnomon* 50 (1978) 241.

<sup>4</sup> See in general D. L. Page, *Actors' Interpolations in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 1934).

(ἔνθ', ὃ κρατίστου Ἑλλήνων τραφεῖς, Ἀχίλλεως παῖ Νεοπτόλεμε); hence here too we find a circumstantial mode of address.

Haslam (168) further notes two anecdotes in which a female addresses to a male only the second line of *Electra*. Yet it must be admitted that in both anecdotes only the second line is appropriate: the addition of the first would have made each situation ridiculous, for neither the actor Theodorus<sup>5</sup> nor even Demetrius Poliorcetes can be called the son of a king who once commanded a victorious expedition to Troy.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand the apostrophe Ἀγαμέμνονος παῖ is highly complimentary and appropriate for the addressee.

To deal with the lines of *Phoenissae* the external evidence is important, and on this we must focus.<sup>7</sup> The second oration of Julian (at 50d–51d) is crucial: χρυσοκολλήτων ἀρμάτων (cf. *Phoen.* 2) ἀστράπτουσαν αἴγλην.<sup>8</sup> The following arguments need to be taken into account. (a) Julian, as his orations and letters show, was well acquainted with the ancient authors and often uses passages taken from them. (b) He is addressing his nephew, the emperor, and so wishes to make a good and especially a learned impression. (c) It is true that in this tract he takes as his basis Homer, to whom he repeatedly refers. But he intersperses reminiscences of other authors—thus here he alludes to Herodotus 7.40.1.<sup>9</sup> (d) *Phoenissae* was in antiquity one of the most popular plays of Euripides<sup>10</sup> and is quoted in this tract and elsewhere by Julian.<sup>11</sup> So especially the beginning of the play will have been familiar to him. Since Homer was the fare of educated Greeks, the learning of Julian might appear the better if he showed occasionally that Greek tragedy was likewise not unknown to him. The words ἀστράπτουσαν αἴγλην are not to be found in *Phoenissae* 1–3. Julian, however, is an independent author whose diction is not

<sup>5</sup> On Theodorus, mentioned in the anecdote of Plutarch, see E. Diehl, *RE* 5A (1934) 1808 s.v. “Theodoros 16”; P. Ghiron-Bistagne, *Recherches sur les acteurs dans la Grèce antique* (Paris 1976) 173–76. I do not know whether the two anecdotes are independent of each other; that about Theodorus’ wife is the older and more striking.

<sup>6</sup> Haslam (168 n.60) rightly observes that especially the opening lines of plays were familiar to the public. This familiarity, however, mostly concerns the whole opening passage. See e.g. M. van der Valk, *Eustathii Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes I* (Leiden 1971) xcii: to Eustathius only the opening part (but not only the first line) of Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca* was familiar.

<sup>7</sup> Haslam 156–62; of the testimonies I omit discussion of his v–viii, because they are irrelevant.

<sup>8</sup> Haslam himself considers that the passages might show acquaintance with *Phoen.* 1–2, but, given his thesis, he thinks a connection unlikely.

<sup>9</sup> Rightly cited by Haslam (161); Bidez, adducing Hdt. 3.106, is here less correct.

<sup>10</sup> See e.g. A. Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*<sup>3</sup> (Bern 1971) 144, “das zu den meist gelesenen gehörte.”

<sup>11</sup> See 85c (*Phoen.* 506), 214b (*Phoen.* 469), 228b (*Phoen.* 67).

contemptible. By him the words are applied to the chariot of the emperor, while *Phoenissae* describes a chariot that is directed by the sun, who is characterized by his dazzling light and splendour. Hence one can understand that in using the words *αἴγλη ἀστράπτουσα* Julian was inspired by the famous opening of *Phoenissae* 1–3.

As Haslam observes, Accius' *Phoenissae* imitates *Phoenissae* 3. This is less surprising than it might seem, however, for *Phoenissae* 3 is the very line in which the sun is addressed by name and directly. Thus the imitator can be excused if he takes up at once the line that leads to the heart of the matter. Moreover, when Accius wrote *candido curru*, one is inclined to think that he was inspired by and mindful of *χρυσοκολλήτοισιν δίφροις* of *Phoenissae* 2.<sup>12</sup>

Again, an ostrakon is extant which reflects only *Phoenissae* 3 (Haslam 159). I would argue, however, that the ostrakon does not present an “unsophisticated . . . farrago,” but has in fact a rational basis. The text evokes the Egyptian god Horus-Re as *βασιλεύς* and *ιέραξ*, then presents twice the third line of *Phoenissae*. This I suggest was not caused by the author having an edition in which *Phoenissae* began with line 3, but by the situation itself. The author wished to intimate that Horus, the falcon, is the same as the principal god Re, the sun-god. To this end *Phoenissae* 3 is especially relevant because in it Helios (=Re) is evoked. The author had no need of *Phoenissae* 1–2, which were not relevant to his purpose. One may compare the Dutch national anthem “Het Wilhelmus.” When this hymn is sung in the churches, the congregation usually sings only the first and sixth stanzas: this is no evidence that stanzas 2–5 are unauthentic, only that the first and sixth are considered by the congregations as the most relevant.

The tragedian Theodectas, as Haslam points out (157), imitated *Phoenissae* 3, and this at the beginning of a play. As Haslam admits, however, this does not prove that the author was unacquainted with lines 1–2. Theodectas no doubt wanted to be a poet of some weight and not a slavish imitator, and may have selected the part that suited him best. I observe that in his two opening lines the words *ποθεινὸν πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις σέλας* constitute his personal contribution. One might argue that this testimony allows, but does not prove or make probable, the authenticity of *Phoenissae* 1–2. I would suggest in fact that if *Phoenissae* 1–2 are omitted, the beginning of the play becomes concise and meagre: I think that precisely because of the solemn

<sup>12</sup> In my opinion Haslam (158) underestimates this point. In noting that Accius did not imitate *Phoen.* 1, Haslam rightly dismisses the explanation of Leo. But it scarcely needs saying that an imitator is not compelled to take up all the details of his model: he has the privilege of adapting what suits him best.

opening of three lines, the passage impressed Theodectas. In this connection we may consider Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* 1-6. Though this passage does not show any direct imitation of *Phoenissae*, scholars have (in my opinion rightly) connected it with its opening part.<sup>13</sup> The two plays are not far removed in date, and Aristophanes liked to parody tragedy. *Phoenissae* 1-3 stress the dazzling splendour of the sun, which finds its way through the highest regions of the heavens. In Aristophanes' lines the lamp, the image of the sun, is exalted in a ridiculous way, for on the contrary it has its humble origin on earth and on the potter's wheel and procures its dazzling light by means of the lamp-nozzle (*μυκτήρ*, 5). In this way, I believe, Aristophanes has tried to parody the solemn beginning of Euripides' play.<sup>14</sup>

Another observation is in order here. It is true that Euripides sometimes begins his plays with one introductory line only.<sup>15</sup> *Phoenissae*, however, belongs to the latest period of the poet, which as is well known is characterized by the application of new devices and in which the pathetic is very prominent, becoming, so to speak, inflated.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the poet exploits in this play a theme (the fate of the house of Oedipus) that was familiar to the Athenian public, and he wishes to unroll this time the whole story and final fate of the members of this family.<sup>17</sup> Precisely because of this intention Euripides presents a solemn beginning of no less than three lines.<sup>18</sup> Because he is going to relate the cause of the evils to come, he describes the sun at length in his opening, and so contrasts the dazzling splendour of the heavens with the multifarious evils that the Labdacids undergo on earth. Admittedly, if with Haslam we delete lines 1-2, the beginning of the play is quite acceptable; but if we retain them the passage, though it seems somewhat inflated, becomes more solemn and imposing, in keeping with the circumstances narrated in the play.

<sup>13</sup> See van Leeuwen, *Aristophanis Ecclesiazusae* (Leiden 1905) 5; R. Ussher, *Aristophanes Ecclesiazusae* (Oxford 1973) 70f.

<sup>14</sup> I disagree on this point with Haslam 169 n.61. The situation seems somewhat complicated, because part of the first line of *Eccl.* is attributed by schol. *Eccl.* 1 to Agathon or Dicaeogenes. Nauck does not present the fragment itself, saying "fortasse inanis ista suspicio" (*TGF* adesp. 50); Snell includes it (*TrGF* 39F10). Nonetheless I think the whole passage of *Eccl.* a parody of the solemn description of the sun in *Phoen.*

<sup>15</sup> E.g. *Andr.* 1, *El.* 1, *Supp.* 1. See *contra* Haslam 169.

<sup>16</sup> So for instance the repetition of the same word (a characteristic of pathos) is frequent in *Phoen.* as well as in *Or.*

<sup>17</sup> One has the impression that in this play the poet has related as much as he could of the myth. In this connection I think with H. Erbse (*Philologus* 110 [1966] 26-34) that also the final part of the play, which has often been rejected, is genuine.

<sup>18</sup> *Ion*, though less ambitious in scope than *Phoen.*, presents at least two introductory lines.

Thus I do not accept the spuriousness of these opening lines of Euripides and Sophocles. The hard facts offered by the three papyri cannot be refuted; but other considerations have their weight. If I am right, the testimony of the papyri and even that attributed to Dicaearchus are wrong. As for the papyri, those of Homer and also of Plato have shown that now and again lines have been wrongly omitted or interpolated. The testimony of the hypothesis (*P.Oxy.* 2455) is particularly vexing, especially as it may derive from Dicaearchus. Consider however the hypothesis of *Rhesus* (Schwartz II 324.10ff). Here Dicaearchus is quoted for a version of the prologue<sup>19</sup> that does not occur in our mss. The question is of special interest. In our mss. *Rhesus* begins with words of the chorus (1–10); the hypothesis however mentioned two other prologues, in both of which the speaker must be an actor and not the chorus. I am convinced that the prologue transmitted by our mss. is the authentic one.<sup>20</sup> If in fact *Rhesus* is an early play of Euripides, we can understand that, as Aeschylus usually did, Euripides opened his play with words spoken by the chorus. In most of his extant plays, however, Euripides opens with an exposition of the principal facts, delivered by one of the actors. It is understandable that in later times there was a desire to streamline *Rhesus* in the same fashion and that two false prologues came to be composed in which the usual Euripidean method was applied. One of these false prologues was presented by Dicaearchus and apparently in the list of hypotheses that he offered of Euripides' plays.<sup>21</sup> We are thus confronted with a false version of a prologue which was nevertheless accepted and adduced by Dicaearchus as the true one. This interpretation finds support in another fact. Aristophanes of Byzantium, one of the foremost Alexandrian scholars, accepted and followed for Aristophanes *Frogs* 151–54 a version which was not the authentic one.<sup>22</sup> On the strength of these observations and of the evidence gained by Dr Haslam's in-

<sup>19</sup> Schwartz (in the apparatus) claims a lacuna here. I am convinced that he is mistaken: the iambic line that follows (*νῦν εὐσέληνον κτλ.*) is the very line that Dicaearchus adduced.

<sup>20</sup> I note here that I accept *Rhesus* as a work of Euripides. If this is correct, it is I think the oldest tragedy of Euripides that has come down to us.

<sup>21</sup> Compare the report of the *Phoen.* hypothesis which we owe to the work of Dr Haslam (see 150f). In it the name of the play was apparently mentioned together with the first line. In the same way in the hypothesis of *Rhesus* Dicaearchus cited only the first line; he seems to have added then the words *καὶ τ.έ.* (these last two letters a correction offered by Wilamowitz). Hence we can understand that the other lines of this hypothesis that had existed are unknown to us: the source of the scholion on Euripides followed Dicaearchus closely and therefore could not cite the remaining part of this hypothesis.

<sup>22</sup> See schol. *Ran.* 153 and the observations I hope to present in *AntClass.*

vestigations, I am inclined to think that in antiquity sometimes editions occurred in which the text had been handled more freely and in which for instance lines were omitted.

We turn finally to the scholion on *Phoenissae* 1 (Schwartz I 245. 2–5, Haslam 162f): here the ominous particle *μή* occurs twice, asserting the absence rather than the presence of the opening lines of *Phoenissae* and *Electra*. Editors had deleted *μή*, but Haslam justly adduces the received text in support of his case. The following points may be urged, however. (a) The scholion, which invokes *παλαιὰ δόξα*, shows that even if the lines in question are unauthentic, they were already known in Alexandrian times or even earlier. So it is surprising that—apart from this scholion—Eustathius (if we follow Haslam) would be the first witness to the disputed lines and that even Eustathius would have his doubts. (b) The story is an anecdote, one of several concerning the relations between the two tragic poets. Our version—the scholion—is to be dated not earlier than the early Empire.<sup>23</sup> It is scarcely an overstatement that the tradition of anecdotes is an especially slippery one. So it is by no means impossible that the original version did not contain the negative (*μή* or *οὐ*). But even if the scholion preserves the original version, I must yet think that a false witness is being adduced in defence of a lost cause.

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<sup>23</sup> This appears from the use of *μή* rather than *οὐ*; see also Haslam 162f n.48. It is obvious that the older version—if there was one—must have used *οὐ*.