

The Agon in *Polyidos*

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P. Phil. Nec. 23^v (dated to the third century AD)¹ comprises a thematic collection of scenes from Euripides' *Ino* (37 lines) and *Polyidos* (60 lines), sharing the popular motif of παῖδες ἄωροι, which is also particularly prominent in funerary epigrams of this period.² Notably, the papyrus was discovered in the fill of a child's tomb, though its placement in the fill as such (rather than inside the tomb, close to the deceased) does not necessarily entail that it was placed there intentionally due to its subject matter.³ Both passages involve the repercussions of the untimely death of children in scenes of great dramatic tension: Ino's vaunting of trapping her rival Themisto into killing her own sons unwittingly and Minos' demand to the seer Polyidos to resuscitate his dead son, Glaukos. Indeed, Greek tragedy, especially Euripides, could provide ample material for a collection about παῖδες ἄωροι, to judge from the powerful representation of this motif in *Trojan Women*, *Alexandros* and *Hypsipyle* - to mention but a few such cases.⁴ A good parallel of a thematic anthology that comprises long excerpts of dramatic scenes, as in our papyrus, is the earlier P. Berol. 9772 (second century BC) including a selection of passages on women: a 29-line rhesis from Euripides' *Melanippe Captive* (fr. 494 K.), 21 lines from Phaedra's speech

¹ Edd. Gehad/Gibert/Trnka-Amrhein (2024). For more detail about the agon in *Polyidos* see my chapter in the forthcoming volume on P. Phil. Nec. 23^v.

² See VÉrilhac (1978) I, collecting no less than 116 epigrams on deceased children dated to the second and third century AD.

³ Warmest thanks are due to Brian McGing and Basem Gehad for discussing with me the conditions of the papyrus' discovery and their implications.

⁴ On this motif in *Alexandros* see Collard/Cropp/Gibert (2004) 43-45, 46-48; Karamanou (2017) 15-16, 18-19, 159-60, 173-75. For *Hypsipyle* see Bond (1963) 12-17, 97-118; Collard/Cropp/Gibert (2004) 172-73, 181, 240-49.

in *Hippolytus* (403-23), alongside shorter excerpts from *Protesilaos* (fr. 657 K.) and adesp. com. fr. 1019-20 K.-A.⁵

The new papyrus enriches our knowledge of *Polyidos* (dated on metrical grounds probably after 412 BC ⁶) to a considerable degree. It confirms that Polyidos' objection to Minos' demand to restore Glaukos to life bears the features of an agon, in that it involves the rhetorical contest of two opposing viewpoints, as was earlier suggested by Laura Carrara.⁷ The papyrus preserves parts of the introductory dialogue between Minos and Polyidos (col. i, 39-48 and col. ii, 1-17) and a considerable portion of the latter's rhesis (col. ii, 18-50). Speaker-changes are marked by *paragraphoi*; as observed, a penstroke is occasionally employed to mark passages of possible interest to the scribe, whilst a forked *paragraphos* occurring thirteen times in total seems to aim at signaling instances of discontinuity (omission of lines), as in P. Oxy. 409 + 2655 (Menander's *Kolax*).⁸

This contribution then goes on to explore the structure of this debate, the degree of its formality, its rhetorical sophistication and underlying ideology. It is argued that the debate is articulated upon the polarity between ἀμαθία (ignorance, imprudence) and σοφία (wisdom); Minos orders Polyidos to resuscitate his son by appealing to his royal rule, whilst the seer objects to this oppressive demand, which

⁵ On this anthology cf. Carrara (2009) 182-87 (no. 39). Other examples of thematically arranged collections, such as P. Oxy. 3214 and P. Berol. 9773 (on women) differ from this one, being gnomologies that comprise shorter excerpts (adesp. trag. fr. 695a and b, Anaxandrides fr. inc. 71 K.-A., Euripides *Hippolytus* 664-68, *Protesilaos* fr. 657 K. and Hipponax fr. 68 W.).

⁶ Cropp/Fick (1985) 89. Carrara (2014) 235-44 dates the play between 415 and 409 BC.

⁷ Carrara (2014) 221-22.

⁸ See also the discussion in Gehad/Gibert/Trnka-Amrhein (2024) and Meccariello (in the forthcoming volume on P. Phil. Nec. 23^v).

violates his freedom, warning Minos against transcending human limits and overturning divine ordinances and the order of nature.

Polyidos is generically affiliated with *Cretans*; they both feature Crete as dramatic locale and Minos' clash with a wise character (Polyidos, Daidalos) that represents the violent subjugation of wisdom to autocratic rule. At the same time, the agon in *Polyidos* squares nicely with several later Euripidean formal debates articulated upon the concept of *sophia* and similarly involving a heavy use of antithesis to mirror contemporary preoccupations, such as *Bacchae*, *Palamedes*, and *Antiope*.⁹ As in *Palamedes* (415 BC), Euripides' preoccupation with persecuted wisdom in that period of his dramatic production may conceivably reflect late fifth-century cases of persecuted sophists. *Palamedes*, in particular, has been considered to allude to the recent expulsion of sophists from Athens, such as Protagoras or Diagoras of Melos.¹⁰ Now, even more so, the discovery of further evidence for *Polyidos*, which dates to about the same period, demonstrates Euripides' reiteration of this matter in a sophisticated debate that brings forward the rhetoric of wisdom and its subjugation to despotic rule. This dramatic choice could thus be a springboard for focalizing tensions concerning contemporary intellectuals, raising questions about the impact of *sophia* on the wider community and, in turn, about the relation between intellectual and sociopolitical authority.

References

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⁹ For Euripides' debates on *sophia* see recently Billings (2021) 159-86, 203-22.

¹⁰ All relevant bibliography on this matter has been gathered and discussed in Falchetto (2002) 31, and n. 94, 36-37, 148-49.

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