

Greek Tragedy in Roman Egypt between Text and Performance: P. Phil. Nec. 23v as an Anthology of Actor's Parts*

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In this paper I argue that P. Phil. Nec. 23v stems from a performance context and, more specifically, that it preserves selected lines from *Ino* and *Polyidus* to be memorised by someone playing the parts of Ino and Polyidus in a performance of individual scenes from the respective plays. I believe this interpretation of the papyrus provides a unifying explanation for several peculiarities in both its text and layout. In the first part of my paper I will present several arguments in favour of this interpretation. In the final section I will situate the papyrus so interpreted in its 3rd-century CE context and assess its significance as evidence for the forms of circulation of drama in the High Empire.

1.

The almost intact column two of the papyrus, containing 50 lines from Euripides' *Polyidus*, seems to stem from an exchange between Minos and the eponymous character. The *editio princeps* convincingly assigns ll. 1-7 and 17 to Minos and all the other lines to Polyidus. However, interpreting the text as a continuous sequence poses several difficulties. The most troubling is the surprising lack of connective particles within the two blocks of lines assigned to Polyidus, at points where such particles would be expected if those blocks of lines represented continuous speech throughout.

The edition touches upon this issue in connection with the mysterious forked *paragraphoi* that appear in this column:

* This is a lightly adapted version of the paper I delivered at the conference 'The New Euripides' in June 2024, with the addition of a new section 3 and a partly new section 4. A properly revised version will be published in the volume *The New Euripides* in 2025. I would like to warmly thank John Gibert and Yvona Trnka-Amrhein for inviting me to the conference and for sharing this wonderful discovery and their excellent work on the papyrus in advance of publication.

<Polyidos>

Not at all! It is an unreliable thing and loathes justice. Indeed whoever is set on possessing more neither thinks nor wishes anything just. (20) I would be a fool to transgress the laws of the gods. You're acting with uncontrolled arrogance: your wealth is the cause of that. You're rich, but don't think you understand the rest.

Moreover, it is true that six of the utterances following the forked paragraphos “contain a connective particle,” but some of those particles *need not* be interpreted as connectives within continuous speech, and indeed they are often used as turn-initial particles in tragic dialogue:

1) For οὐκouv (at l. 9), turn-initial location is *the most common*. Out of 101 attestations in the extant plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, which I have located through a string search on the online *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, οὐκouv occurs at the beginning of a new turn in as many as 81 cases, and in 5 of the other cases it follows a question by the same speaker. This means that οὐκouv does not *need* to mark the beginning of a new turn, but that in the vast majority of its occurrences (more than 80%) it does.

2) οὗτοι (37) can also be turn-initial. Of 62 examples in extant tragedies in which it starts a sentence, it is turn initial in 42 cases (and in 4 of the other cases it comes after a question). Again, this means it does not *have* to be turn initial, of course, but it is fully compatible with change of speaker.

3) μέν ... δέ at 41 are part of an internal correlation, not of a connection with the previous sentence, and this means that 41 *can* be the beginning of a new turn. The

use of μέν ... δέ in agreement-plus-disagreement turns is indeed well documented in Euripides.³

4) γάρ (43) is perhaps one of the most common connective particles within continuous speech, but it is also frequently used in dialogue in turn-initial position, and in this position it is very commonly found when, “after one speaker has made a statement (or asked a question which suggests its own answer), another speaker supports their implied assent by a γάρ clause: ‘Yes, for’: ‘No, for’;” and in several cases “the answer is in the form of a question” rhetorical and dissentient.⁴ Simon Goldhill has noticed the high frequency of γάρ in the stichomythia between Creon and Haemon in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, calling it “the node of distortion [...] indicat[ing] the moment where the speaker takes up the assumption of the other and aggressively wraps it into his own world-view.”⁵

5) οὐ δῆτ(α), which we find at 45, is often turn-initial too, and it is rarely found in continuous speech.⁶ One of the cases in which it is found within continuous speech is when it answers a rhetorical question. This would be the case here, but οὐ δῆτα seems to me to work very awkwardly as an answer to 43-44, where the question is introduced by πῶς ... οὐ:

ἄ μὴ γὰρ ἔστιν ὅστις ὄντα βούλεται

³ Cf. e.g. Euripides, *Hippolytus* 317 (Phaedra): χεῖρες **μὲν** ἀγνάι, φρήν **δ'** ἔχει μίαιμά τι. (“My hands are clean, it’s my mind that’s stained!”); *Alc.* 1070-1 (Chorus): ἐγὼ **μὲν** οὐκ ἔχοιμ’ ἄν εὖ λέγειν τύχην/ χρὴ **δ'**, ἥτις ἐστί, καρτερεῖν θεοῦ δόξιν. (“I couldn’t speak well of fate, but one must endure what the god gives, whatever it is.”).

⁴ Denniston 1954, 73.

⁵ Goldhill 2012, 58.

⁶ Denniston 1954, 76.

—θεῖναι, κακίων πῶς ἂν οὐ γένοιτ' ἀνήρ;

οὐ δῆτ' ἄπαις εἶ...

How would that man not become (or “be”) worse, who wants to make things be that are not? No indeed: You are childless...

οὐ δῆτ(α) is in fact unparalleled as an answer to a πῶς question, let alone a πῶς οὐ one. In this case, the question is “How would a man not become worse because of impossible desires?” and the answer is literally: “No indeed” (that is, *he would not*), which does not seem to be the “correct” answer.

6) The only collocation that would be better suited to continuous speech is, in my view, χωρὶς δὲ τούτων at the beginning of 34. This phrase, unparalleled in tragedy, clearly introduces an additional point, and would feature naturally within continuous speech. However, turn-initial δέ is well documented in tragedy: it can imply a new suggestion, modifying or correcting another speaker’s statement and marking a new step in the discourse.⁷ For example, it can answer a “yes or no” question, or react to a statement, providing a “yes” answer with an additional and mildly corrective point: in this case, χωρὶς δὲ τούτων could mean “yes, but apart from that...”.⁸

To sum up: there are several discontinuities in the text assigned to Polyidus, specifically at the beginning of textual portions that are preceded by forked paragraphoi; moreover, the possible markers of *continuity* in other lines preceded by forked paragraphoi work

⁷ Bonifazi et al. 2016, III.4.1.2

⁸ Cf. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus* 394-5 ἸΚΜΗΝΗ νῦν γὰρ θεοὶ σ' ὀρθοῦσι, πρόσθε δ' ὤλλυσαν./ ΟἴΔΙΠΟΥΣ γέροντα δ' ὀρθοῦν φλαῦρον ὃς νέος πέσῃ. (Ismene: “Yes, for now the gods are lifting you up, though earlier they destroyed you.” Oedipus: “But it is a poor thing to uplift when he is old a man who has fallen when he was young!” [transl. Lloyd-Jones 1994]).

equally well, and sometimes even better, as markers of discontinuity.⁹ On these grounds, it is likely that the text marked by forked paragraphoi in this column is not continuous speech, and that the forked paragraphoi signal each point of discontinuity.

2.

While the lines separated by forked paragraphoi show features that decidedly point to dialogue rather than a continuous *rhexis*, they are obviously not continuous dialogue either. Not only do the turns framed by forked paragraphoi not reply directly to the preceding ones, but they all seem to correspond to one individual worldview, and to be spoken by the same character, likely Polyidus, as the editors have convincingly shown. What I see here then – and this is the main building block of my argument – is *just one side of a dialogue*, the side of Polyidus, and the forked paragraphoi seem to me to mark the missing side of the dialogue, individual utterances by another character or other characters to which Polyidus' lines react.¹⁰ This portion of the papyrus may preserve part of the central scene of confrontation between Minos and Polyidus, which was well known in antiquity and is mentioned in a Platonic epistle.¹¹ While usually believed to have been an *agon*, we have no evidence that this scene was structured as a conventional *agon* rather than, in whole or in part, as a dialogue: we only know it was “una scena di confronto dialettico dal tono non propriamente disteso tra saggio e regnante.”¹²

⁹ Conversely, in the portions which are not marked by forked paragraphoi, the syntactical continuity is clear. In the sections at lines 23-33 and 45-50, for example, connective particles are regularly found where expected (26 εὖ δ' ἴσθ', 29 ἐξῆς δ' ἕκαστος, 31 ο [.] οἰδομῶς τιμῶ(ι)ντο; 49 εἰ γὰρ τυραννίς).

¹⁰ As we learn from the edition, the use of the forked paragraphos to mark missing text is known from a papyrus containing Menander's *Kolax* (P. Oxy. 409+2655 = TM 61505), and so the function that I am positing here is in itself plausible and paralleled.

¹¹ [Plato], *Epistles* 2.310e3-311b6 Moore-Blunt = Euripides, *Polyidus* test. 6 Carrara.

¹² Carrara 2014, 2019. I have looked for possible portions of the missing side among the previously known fragments of *Polyidus*. A two-line fragment known from the indirect tradition would be compatible with a

If what I have argued thus far is true, that the papyrus contains only Polyidus' lines from this (or another) confrontation, the next step is of course to ask why. Text may be missing for various reasons. Unavailability or scribal mistake are of course possible scenarios, but text can also be missing because it is intentionally left out. The reasons for leaving out text, in turn, may be multiple.

In this context of course, since the papyrus is an anthology (combining at least one portion of *Ino* with at least one portion of *Polyidus*), we may in principle surmise that only a selection of lines from the play *Polyidus* was deemed interesting enough to be included in this artefact.

The fact that some of the lines on the papyrus overlap with later anthological passages might be significant, and there is undoubtedly a high density of sententious lines, of a kind that could be palatable for an anthologiser. However, this is not a constant feature of what is preserved in this papyrus.¹³

At any rate, while an anthological selection of sorts cannot be excluded, I believe that the best explanation for what we see in col. ii is that the choice of lines is dictated by the identity of the speaker. With a few exceptions, to which I will return, what we read in column ii is indeed *Polyidus*' side of a dialogue.

I believe this might be related to the heading in column i, Πολυΐδου. As we read in the edition, this papyrus would be unique in preserving a work title in the genitive. While

location within this dialogue. It is Euripides, fr. 634 Kannicht, which most editors assign to Minos: ὅστις νέμει κάλλιστα τὴν αὐτοῦ φύσιν, / οὗτος σοφὸς πέφυκε πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον (“Those who best manage their own nature are wise to their advantage.”). As a (possibly) two-line utterance focusing on *sophia*, it could be placed before or after Polyidus' two-line remark on the same topic, namely ii.11-12 οὕτως ἂν εἶεν οἱ σοφοὶ τῶν μὴ σοφῶν / ἧσσουσ, σὺν ἄτη(ι) γ' εἰ σοφοὶ φανούμεθα (“On terms like these, the wise would be inferior to those without wisdom, if we are going to be wise to our ruin.”). Note the contrast between Minos' σοφὸς πέφυκε πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον and Polyidus' σὺν ἄτη(ι) ... σοφοὶ φανούμεθα. The fact that Polyidus' next utterance is “Don't offer me wealth in exchange for my life: to sell a life is a bad way to earn” (13-14) is compatible with Minos' reference to τὸ συμφέρον.

¹³ See especially ii.15-16 and ii.8.

Stobaeus' anthology does use the bare genitive in several cases, this is unexpected in a papyrus, where the simple genitive (in isolation or not) is normally used for the author of a work, not its title.¹⁴ As a label for extracts from a play, we would rather expect ἐκ + genitive or ἐν + dative, both attested.¹⁵ But "Polyidus" is not just a play title, it is also a character name. I agree with the editors that this cannot be a straightforward speaker designation – that is, the name of the speaking character placed before the relevant line or lines – both because of its position as a general heading, and because of its case (we would expect a nominative). What I believe we have here is the name of the character whose part is contained in the section below. We do not have parallels for this, but if we had to guess how it would be conveyed, we would probably think of τοῦ δεῖνα κομμάτια; and the genitive χοροῦ used in tragic papyri and manuscripts offers an imperfect parallel. Imperfect because it is normally used as a place-holder (so we have χοροῦ or χοροῦ μέλος and similar instead of a choral piece), but still a parallel as it indicates that the genitive, with or (crucially) *without* a noun in the nominative, is used to indicate the name of a character delivering a certain portion – not as a proper speaker designation preceding the relevant line(s), but as a label for those lines. The genitive Πολυΐδου in our papyrus might perform just this function. According to my interpretation, then, the second portion of the papyrus contains Polyidus' part from a scene of the eponymous Euripidean play, and the heading indicates the character, not the play title.

In including just the part of Polyidus, the papyrus would not be isolated. There is one tragic parallel, P. Oxy. 4546, containing a portion of Euripides' *Alcestis* (344-382), dating to the 1st century BCE or CE. Only lines spoken by Admetus are copied, both in the

¹⁴ Cf. Gehad et al. 2024, 1, n. 2, who suggests that "in our papyrus, any potentially missing nominative may refer to the criterion on which the excerpts from *Ino* and *Polyidos* were chosen."

¹⁵ Examples in Gehad et al. 2024, 1, n. 2.

stichomythia with Alcestis starting at l. 374, and in the previous portion, where the papyrus omits a five-line exchange between Alcestis and the Chorus (369-373). Regrettably, the left margin not preserved, and so we will never know if a similar system of forked paragraphoi was used in that papyrus.

The interpretation of the *Alcestis* papyrus as a copy containing just Admetus' part to aid in the rehearsal process was initially met with scepticism. As the first editor, Dirk Obbink, noted: "would not someone using the text to practise Admetus' part need Alcestis' and the chorus' lines for his cue?"¹⁶ Toph Marshall, in reappraising the papyrus as "documentary evidence for the rehearsal of a Greek play in antiquity," explains that "the regularity of stichomythia means that in a performance rehearsed using parts, the speakers do know who will react to their lines and when their next line is coming and so a greater precision and tightness of delivery becomes possible."¹⁷ But – and I will return to this – there might be points in a play in which further guidance might be particularly desirable. This guidance may come from the so-called cues, by which I mean the final portions of the preceding turns, words spoken by another actor, which the actor playing a given role may find helpful to be well aware of, usually to know when to start their turn, or when to perform any movements or other forms of body language that may be prompted by other speakers' lines. This is well known from Renaissance and later theatrical practice.

I believe that cues are indeed present in P. Phil. Nec. 23v. In col. ii, what I take as cues are the lines I previous called "exceptions," namely, the lines that the editor assigns to Minos (ii.1-7 and ii.17). Notably, none of the lines framed (that is, both preceded and followed) by forked paragraphoi can be assigned to Minos, and all the lines that can be assigned to him are separated from the following by a simple paragraphos, which is used, as

¹⁶ Obbink 2001, 21.

¹⁷ Marshall 2004, 28, 36.

expected, to mark change of speaker. This means that every time the papyrus includes lines spoken by Minos, they are immediately followed by lines of Polyidos, with no intervening gaps.

As Marshall indicates, within a dialogue there can be elements, such as regularity in the exchange, or questions, that make the progression of dialogue easy to follow, almost predictable. But tragic dialogue also has some irregular features to which actors using written parts may need to be alerted. I argue that this is the case with both the rather long turn of Minos at the beginning of col. ii and his one-line turn at ii.17.

Let's start from the latter. First, I would like to propose a slightly different reading, which may be relevant to this discussion. In the text as printed in the *editio princeps*, after Polyidos' first expression of fear of detention and exploitation, Minos asks a question starting with ἀλλ' οὐ:

ii.17-18 *editio princeps*

___<Μι.> ἀλλ' οὐ...της ἢ τυραννὶς ἀσφαλής;

<Πο.> ἤκιςτ' ἄπιςτον χρῆμα καὶ μισεῖ δίκην.

<Minos> But isn't tyranny a safe ...?

<Polyidos> Not at all! It is an unreliable thing and loathes justice.

Judging from the image of the papyrus that the editors have kindly shared with us, the trace after ἀλλ, which the editors describe as “left half of large bowl with possible faint trace of crossbar as of ε or smaller bowl with ink to the right at top of line,” seems to me better compatible with epsilon than omicron. I therefore propose to read line 17 as follows:

⟨Μι.⟩ ἀλλ' ἐγγυητῆς ἢ τυραννὶς ἀσφαλής.¹⁸

<Minos> But tyranny is a safe guarantor.

This would not be a question, but a statement and an objection, of a kind that is often introduced by ἀλλά within rapid-fire dialogue.¹⁹

This line, however we read it, is a one-line turn in between longer turns, coming after several two-line turns; and in my interpretation it is a statement, so it does not even have the question format to serve as a cuing element in performance. Both factors disrupt the regularity and predictability of the dialogue exchange and therefore this line may require to be especially noted by the actor playing Polyidus.

In line with my interpretation of the simple and forked paragraphoi, the other lines assigned to Minos (ii.1-7) constitutes just the ending of a longer speech by the king or of a longer portion of other kind in which Polyidus did not intervene. The forked paragraphos at the top of this section (unusually placed above a line, not below) signals that the speech is incompletely reported, while the simple paragraphos below it marks change of speaker. I argue that only the final portion of a longer set of lines is reported here because only that portion is needed by the actor playing Polyidus. Significantly, this portion begins with an address to Polyidus, which means the actor playing Polyidus may have needed to be particularly aware of this moment, perhaps a moment in which he was needed back in the spotlight. The omission of the initial foot of the first line is compatible with the idea that

¹⁸ The reading of the papyrus would be ἐγγυητης. For ἐγγυητῆς ... ἀσφαλής cf. [Plato], *Alcibiades i* 134e3:

ΣΟΚΡΑΤΗΣ Ἄλλα μὴν οὕτω γε πράττοντας ὑμᾶς ἐθέλω ἐγγυήσασθαι ἢ μὴν εὐδαιμονήσειν. ΑΛΚΙΒΙΑΔΕΣ Ἄσφαλής γὰρ εἶ ἐγγυητῆς. (“SOCRATES: Well now, if you act in this way, I am ready to warrant that you must be happy. ALCIBIADES: And I can rely on your warranty” [transl. Lamb 1927]).

¹⁹ Cf. Euripides, *Orestes* 772-773; Euripides, *Phoenician Women* 394-395. For turn-initial ἦκιστα not preceded by a question, cf. Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 522.

these lines have been included in the papyrus not to be spoken but to be registered, to signal to the actor playing Polyidus the point when the key exchange with Minos starts.²⁰

Let's now move from this section of the papyrus to the *Ino* section. Assessing what we read there is much more challenging because very few line beginnings are preserved, so we cannot rely on forked paragraphoi to guide us. However, as the editors have shown, most of the extant lines in this portion can be attributed to Ino. Yet, this section also includes two lyric passages likely sung by Themisto (i.3-4 and i.7-9) and an anapaestic portion likely chanted by the chorus leader (i.16-18). Each of these three portions seems to be followed by a simple paragraphos, which would mark change of speaker.²¹ I argue that this section of the papyrus is a collection of Ino's lines, with the lines of Themisto and the chorus leader serving as cues.

The lines assigned to Themisto may constitute either the entirety or just the ending of two lyric portions probably sung from offstage (i.5 ἐν δόμοις). The particle δέ at the beginning of the second portion (i.6-9) is compatible with the latter option. As for i.3-4, if they constitute just the ending of a longer turn, the turn would end with a gnomic asyndeton, perhaps preceded by the οἰμώγματα of Themisto to which Ino refers immediately after. At any rate, it seems appropriate for the Ino actor to be particularly aware of these lines, both because this is no regular dialogue exchange, and because Themisto is likely offstage, which means there is no physical proximity or interaction.

²⁰ An obvious beginning for that first line (ii.1) would be ἀλλ', ὦ. This supplement becomes perhaps more palatable if we concede that this is not the beginning of a speech. ἀλλά could mark a transition from a previous part of the speech where Minos was not addressing Polyidus specifically (cf. Euripides, *Suppliants* 359); perhaps he was talking to Pasiphae, to whom the last line of col. i seems to be addressed – likely by Polyidus.

²¹ In one case (after i.9) we cannot completely rule out the possibility that we are only seeing the right-hand part of a forked paragraphos instead.

As for the anapaestic section, I am fully convinced, as Gibert and Trnka argue in their forthcoming interpretation piece, that this is a choral portion with a sort of “act-subdividing function,” allowing spectators to “realize that the stage now belongs to Ino.”²² However, this anapaestic system is unusually short; moreover, it starts with a γάρ clause. Turn-initial γάρ is frequent in dialogue, as we have seen, but it is unparalleled in choral anapaestic sections. Conversely, γάρ often introduces the closing (generalising) remark of a longer anapaestic section.²³ The combination of these two features seems to me to suggest that the papyrus contains only the ending of a longer anapaestic system, which is included in this copy just to signal to Ino when her turn starts.

3.

No cue has been securely recognised in any tragic papyrus connected to performance, but something similar has been hypothesised for P. Leiden inv. 510 (DAGM no. 4). This papyrus contains the remains of an amoebaeon between the Chorus and Iphigenia followed by a choral passage from Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Aulis* (ll. 1504-1509 and 784-792, in this order), the second of which is equipped with musical notation. The amoebaeon portion has no musical notation, but the layout, with abundant interlinear space, is the same as in the following, notated choral portion. Pohlmann/West (2001, 20) suspect that these lines “were also furnished with notation, or intended to be,” but Prauscello (2006, 181) suggests an intentional omission of the musical notation from the amoebaeon section, on the assumption that the papyrus could be the score of a soloist who only needed the notation

²² Gibert/Trnka, forthcoming.

²³ See especially Euripides, *Suppliants* 1120-1122: τί γάρ ἄν μείζον τοῦδ’ ἔτι θνητοῖς/ πάθος ἐξεύροις/ ἢ τέκνα θανόντ’ ἐσιδέσθαι; (“For what greater suffering for mortals could you find than seeing one’s children dead?”), which constitutes the ending of a longer anapaestic section which performs a similar function (for a comparison with this passage see also Gibert/Trnka, forthcoming).

for the part he had to perform monodically (the choral portion). Pushing this idea further, one might wonder whether it was only the lines of the Chorus (including those within the amoebaeon section) that required musical notation for the user(s) of the papyrus. Due to the fragmentariness of the artefact, we can only positively conclude that Iphigenia's lines within the amoebaeon lack musical notation (ll. 1505-1509). However, the papyrus has no line break between the Chorus' and Iphigenia's lines in this section.²⁴ If the lost choral lines in the amoebaeon were notated as the following choral portion, the large interlinear spacing of the amoebaeon would be explained, as it too would have required some notation. In this case, Iphigenia's lines would serve merely as cues for the singer(s) of the choral turns.

Four other possible cases should be mentioned here.

1) P. Louvre inv. E 10534 (late 2nd century BCE). This papyrus contains a portion in iambic trimeters from Carcinus' *Medea* which involves three actors impersonating Medea, Jason and perhaps Creon respectively. Only Medea's two turns are set to music. The layout of the other turns, with much smaller interlinear spaces, indicates they were not meant to accommodate musical notation. A scene in which only one character sang and the other two recited is conceivable (note that the setting to music of iambic trimeters is probably indicative of a performance later than Carcinus' time). However, an alternative explanation can be considered, namely, that all three characters sang but this copy was used by the actor playing Medea, who only needed his own music and the words (but not the music) of the other characters for his cue.

²⁴ The chorus' words μή λίπη and Iphigenia's λαμπαδοῦχος (1504-7) are on the same line in the papyrus (l. 3 of the text).

2) P. Oxy. 4463 (*DAGM* no. 47, 2nd/3rd century CE). This papyrus might contain tragic text, as both the mythological references and the first- and second-person verbs suggest (see West 1998, 90-91). Almost every line is equipped with musical notations, except for two (lines 6 and 9, likely the ending of iambic trimeters), which – as the smaller interlinear space above both suggests – were never meant to receive the notation. The alternation may suggest a sequence of sung and recited lines within the same textual unit, but significantly the recited lines are single lines interspersed among longer sung portions. This is not an impossible arrangement for a dramatic scene, but one wonders whether the recited lines are just the final trimeters of longer passages that are not fully reported, only the final portions being needed as cues for the singing character.

3) P. Oxy. 4467 (*DAGM* no. 58, 3rd century CE). The text in this papyrus – twelve lines nine of which are equipped with musical notation – cannot be securely assigned to any genre. The three lines without notation (ll. 1, 10-11) are compatible with iambic or trochaic metre and might perform a similar function to the one I have posited for the iambic trimeters in P. Oxy. 4463. Since 10-11 are preceded by a vacuum, we might have two distinct songs: 2-9 might represent an individual song preceded by the ending of a recited passage (1), and 12 might be the beginning of a new song also preceded by recited lines (10-11).

4) P. Oxy. 3161 (late 3rd century CE). On the recto (*DAGM* no. 53), this papyrus seems to contain several independent tragic passages – perhaps tragic lamentations – equipped with musical notation. In fr. 2, the remains of what appears to be an indented heading ($\Delta\text{H}[\]$) are followed by anapaests perhaps chanted by a chorus (ll. 12-15).²⁵ The anapaests are preceded and followed by paragraphoi, and the narrow

²⁵ To the left of the first of these anapaestic lines, West reads X° , an abbreviation for $\chi\text{opo}\ddot{\upsilon}$: see

interlinear spaces indicate they were not intended to be equipped with musical notation. After the anapaests, a portion with musical notation starts and breaks off almost immediately due to a physical lacuna. Since the anapaestic section mentions Scyros and Achilles, perhaps as part of the phrase “Achilles’ son,” the heading is likely to be the name Deidamia, either as a play title or as a character name. If this papyrus contains, as it seems, a collection of passages to be sung monodically, the fact that the sung portion of fr. 2, after the heading, is preceded by non-notated choral anapaests framed by paragraphoi may be explained by the need for the singer to be aware of the portion that immediately preceded their own. Incidentally, this papyrus might parallel P. Phil. Nec. 23v not only for the presence of cues, but also for the heading and the use of the paragraphos. However, other interpretations are possible.²⁶

4.

To summarise my argument: I believe that P. Phil. Nec. 23v contains the lines of Ino and those of Polyidus from two scenes of the eponymous Euripidean plays, along with selected cues, in some (perhaps most) cases consisting of only the ending of the previous turn. The approach to cues I reconstruct is selective, but I believe there are plausible explanations for why some cues are included and others are not. The forked paragraphos signals omitted portions, while the simple paragraphos marks change of speaker; the heading is the name of the relevant character.

While of course my interpretation is just one of several possibilities, I believe it has the advantage of providing a unifying explanation for several features of the papyrus that

Pohlmann/West 2001, 178.

²⁶ For other musical papyri in which portions with and without notation alternate, and for possible explanations of this phenomenon, see Martinelli 2009.

require some, including textual discontinuities, the symbols used, the apparent incompleteness of some portions, and the “odd” heading.

Before moving to an assessment of the papyrus’ broader significance, I would like to address two further features.

First, the diagonal lines in the intercolumnium between col. i and ii. According to the editors, they mark cases of anthological overlap, as they occur next to lines that have also been preserved in the indirect tradition (ii.19-20 = Euripides, *Ixion* fr. 425 Kannicht; ii.23-25 = Euripides, *Polyidus* fr. 641 Kannicht; ii.37-40 = Euripides, fr. 979 Kannicht). It is not impossible that this anthological overlap was relevant to performers as well (especially if this was a school performance: see below), but I believe a different explanation of the diagonal strokes could (or perhaps should) be proposed if we accept a performance context.

A preliminary caveat: I am not convinced that the second oblique stroke is placed next to line 23, which is the first line of fr. 641. The stroke is placed in between the two forked paragraphoi that frame line 22 (ἀκόλασθ’ ὑβρίζεις ὦ[v] ὁ πλοῦτος αἴτιος), and so it seems unlikely that it is meant to mark the textual portion that follows the second of these paragraphoi. As for its function, it remains elusive. A similar sign, although in a different position, can be observed in P. Oxy. 413, which is unanimously considered a performance script. This 2nd cent. CE artefact contains the *Charition* mime on the front and the *Adulteress* mime on the back. On the latter side, which might contain only the parts of the archimima playing the adulteress, diagonal lines are placed in between different turns, and they are believed to mark (depending on the overall interpretation) either the omission of intervening parts or stage movements. Oblique marks within individual lines are also found in P. Oxy. 3533, containing Menander’s *Epitrepontes*. It has been suggested that they might “aid reading aloud or dramatic delivery”²⁷ and “signal pause and, one may suggest, the

²⁷ Turner 1983, 42.

gesture which went with it too.”²⁸ Notwithstanding their different, marginal position, the diagonal strokes in P. Phil. Nec. 23v might also indicate particular movements and gestures – perhaps in connection with especially negative or threatening remarks against Minos.

The other feature of our Philadelphia papyrus that I would like to address is the sign that the editors describe as “a distinctive interlinear mark that consists of a line sloping slightly up as it moves to the right”, and which “appears three, possibly four times (ii.26, ii.30, and ii.50, possibly i.26).”²⁹ The editors are “hesitant to assign an intention,” although they suggest that “in one case the line seems to indicate a place where the correct form of a word was in doubt (ii.50).” In my view, these signs might simply be acute accents. As the other diacritical marks in this papyrus (apostrophe: i.6, i.7, i.22, i.29, ii.12, ii.15, ii.18, ii.26, ii.36, ii.37; circumflex accent: ii.16; smooth breathing: ii.49), these acute accents would have a disambiguating function, which is particularly important in oral performance (although it could be indicative of other uses as well).

5.

I would like to conclude with a few remarks on the wider implications of interpreting this papyrus as a collection of actor’s parts to be used by a performer.

As a written artefact connected to a performance, this papyrus would join just a handful of other witnesses. Only five Euripidean papyri (out of about 150) show signs of performance use: besides the *Alcestis* papyrus (P. Oxy. 4546), these are two musical papyri of *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Orestes*, both Ptolemaic (the aforementioned P. Leiden inv. 510 and P. Vindob. G 2315), and two papyri of *Ino* and *Cresphontes* containing algebraic speaker notations, both from 3rd-century CE Oxyrhynchus (P. Oxy. 5131; P. Oxy. 2458). The *Iphigenia*

²⁸ Nervegna 2013, 238.

²⁹ Gehad et al. 2024, 3.

papyrus might point to a musical performance of lyric extracts, whereas the *Ino* and *Cresphontes* fragments seem to come from full copies of the respective plays (not enough of the *Orestes* papyrus is preserved to determine whether it was an anthology or a complete copy).

While artefacts traceable to performance contexts are uncommon, the enduring popularity of theatrical performances in the High Empire is well documented by inscriptional and literary evidence. Roman Egypt is no exception. The *Technitai* of Dionysus are still mentioned in papyri of the late 3rd century CE, and several Egyptian towns and cities had a theatre, including Philadelphia.

But our papyrus would not simply be a witness to a performance; since it does not contain either *Ino* or *Polyidus* in their entirety, it would be a witness to a performance of extracts, probably individual scenes. As such, this papyrus would play a key role in the long debate about the very existence of what we may term “extract theatre” – the theory, originating in the 19th century and developed in the 1970s by Bruno Gentili, that posits that at least from the 3rd century BCE actor companies used old drama freely, “whether by the selection and combination of scenes drawn from one or more tragedies, or by setting to music parts composed in metres which in the classical theatre were intended for simple declamation (iambic trimeters) or recitative (anapaests).”³⁰ Gentili saw these practices behind Latin playwrights’ techniques of adaptation of Greek models, both the so-called “contamination” and the transformation of recited parts into cantica.

Gentili identified a number of anthologies on papyrus that he believed to be connected to this type of performance. However, in a tour de force against this idea, Sebastiana Nervegna has argued that several of these anthological papyri do not constitute evidence of theatrical practice, and has concluded that “if old drama was ever fragmented before a

³⁰ Gentili 1979, 30-31. See Nervegna 2007, 24-25 for a full doxography.

public audience, the evidence points only to revivals of tragedy without its choruses and adaptations by musicians and singers.”³¹

Indeed, the evidence for musical performances of tragic extracts is solid, and it might include the aforementioned *Iphigenia papyrus*. Similarly, revivals of old tragedies without choral songs are documented by Dio Chrysostom (*oration* 19.5) and confirmed by epigraphic records. However, Nervegna is only willing to concede that extracts had a role in musical performances, not in dramatic ones, and believes that tragedies without choral portions would be full plays without stasima, not individual scenes. Yet, the Dio passage clearly refers not to full tragedies but to parts (μέρη), which seems to me to suggest performance of individual scenes:³²

τὰ μὲν τῆς κομωδίας ἅπαντα, τῆς δὲ τραγωδίας τὰ μὲν ἰσχυρά, ὡς ἔοικε,
μένει· λέγω δὲ τὰ ἰαμβεῖα, καὶ τούτων μέρη διεξίασιν ἐν τοῖς θεάτροις· τὰ δὲ
μαλακώτερα ἐξερρήκε, τὰ περὶ τὰ μέλη.

Of comedy everything remains, while of tragedy, it seems, just the strong parts: I mean the iambics, and portions of them are delivered in the theatres, whereas the more delicate parts have disappeared, the lyric ones.

Also, Nervegna’s scepticism may perhaps have some weight in connections with public theatrical performances (although this is certainly not warranted by the Dio passage), but it does not apply to other more casual contexts where performances might have taken place – such as the dining room and the classroom.

Indeed, when we think of imperial authors enjoying tragedy, we probably picture Dio Chrysostom sitting in the sun and reading *Philoctetes* plays (*oration* 52), but intellectuals of

³¹ Nervegna 2007, 41.

³² On the performance of just “climatic scenes” see especially Plut. *Crass.* 33.3-6; Kelly 1979; Dihle 1983.

the time also enjoyed *akroamata* at banquets, which could include drama. And when we think of tragedy in the schoolroom, we probably think of pupils copying tragic lines to practice writing, but recitation of tragedy and other poetry is a likely and partly documented activity too. Perhaps the best illustration is an epigram of Callimachus, in which a mask of Dionysus yawns at the repetition of tragic lines by school pupils, a mask that has been dedicated – clearly in the classroom – by a certain Simus.³³ This seems to presuppose the student’s victory in some sort of dramatic competition, according to Petrides “a school recital of tragic extracts.”³⁴ Writing much later, in 4th-century Antioch, Libanius mentions a class in which he ponders “who would be the appropriate actor for the plays” (τίς ἂν ὑποκριτῆς πρέπων γένοιτο τοῖς δράμασι) among his students.³⁵ What Libanius envisions may be taken as a performance (Libanius calls it *anagnosis*, “reading”) in which a single student recites all parts,³⁶ but the word ὑποκριτῆς might also indicate the *main* actor in a performance involving more than one voice.³⁷

I believe a school context should also be considered for the aforementioned *Alcestis* papyrus containing only Admetus’ parts. The first editor of the papyrus described the hand as “unsteady” and “betray[ing] a certain insecurity,” but he did not identify it as a school hand.³⁸ To me, this identification seems plausible. The handwriting meets the criteria developed by Raffaella Cribiore for the so-called “evolving hand,” which she describes as a hand that shows a “clumsy and uneven look” and “difficulty in maintaining an alignment”

³³ Callimachus, *Epigram* 48 Pfeiffer.

³⁴ Petrides 2009, 495.

³⁵ Libanius, *Epistles* 190.2 Norman.

³⁶ Cf. Cribiore 2001, 227: “he had to read and act the text for the rest of the students.”

³⁷ According to a usage first documented for the Hellenistic period: see Kotlińska-Toma 2015, 248.

³⁸ Obbink 2001, 19.

while being “moderately fluent and proceed[ing] at a good pace.”³⁹ Can P. Oxy. 4546 point to a school performance then? Much uncertainty remains, but a fascinating parallel is offered by one of the few examples of actors’ parts from Early Modern Britain. They have been labelled “University parts” and were produced for single performances at Christ Church, Oxford in the 1620s. They are four parts from four different plays (in English and Latin) preserved consecutively in a book.⁴⁰ Incidentally, they are all equipped with cue-lines and preceded by a heading with the relevant character’s name.⁴¹

Back to 3rd-century CE Philadelphia, in which context exactly our papyrus should be placed is unclear, although the gnomic density of the selected scenes would fit perfectly in a school context. Be that as it may, I believe this artefact can, and should, be used to breathe new life into the extract theory. On a more sombre note, if this is an actor’s copy of sorts, it might be less faithful to Euripides’ original text than we would like.

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³⁹ Cribiore 1996, 112. A student user has been posited by Nervegna 2013, 237-238 for the aforementioned P. Oxy. 3533 (containing Menander’s *Epitrepontes*).

⁴⁰ Houghton Library, MS Thr 10.1.

⁴¹ On this manuscript and other examples of Renaissance manuscripts with cues see especially Palfrey/Stern 2007.

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