

PARALEIPOMENA TO THE RECONSTRUCTION
OF AESCHYLUS' *LAIŌS*



ABSTRACT: In *Logeion* 6, 2016, 11–29, the author claimed that a number of frs. of P.Oxy. 2256 constitute the Hypothesis and the opening of Aeschylus' *Laiōs*. The titular character is returning to Thebes as king, at the same time introducing the worship of two new deities. It is proposed, in the present article, that the introduction of the two deities must have been advised to the king, prior to the opening of the play, through a divination of the Delphic oracle, which was situated on Laius' way back from Peloponnesus and where Laius must have sought an oracle about the success of his kingship. The same oracle must have advised him that, for keeping the city safe, he should stay childless. In the course of the play, the king makes the decision to marry Jocasta, sister of Creon, while king and Chorus waver between observance or defiance of the oracle. A portent shows up, which is interpreted by Teiresias as indicating the birth of Oedipus, his exposure, survival, and homecoming, and eventually the murder of Laius. Teiresias' prophecy enkindles the denouement of the play, with the Chorus expressing anxiety about the fate of the royal genos but mainly about the city's future.

IN “AESCHYLUS' *LAIŌS*”, *LOGEION* 6, 2016, 11–29, I have suggested that frs. 2, 4, 1 of P.Oxy. 2256 = *TrGF* III, T 58a, F 451v (+ p. 231) constitute the Hypothesis (Title, Didascalia, Hypothesis proper, and Dramatis personae) of Aeschylus' *Laiōs*, while frs. 6 and 8 of the same papyrus (= *TrGF* III, F 451s + 451n), in continuous text, come from the play's prologue that is spoken by Laius. I have also proposed that the dramatic time of the prologue is the point of Laius' entrance into Thebes, when he was returning from exile as a king after the death of Zethus and Amphion. As is clear from the text of the prologue, Laius is at the same time introducing, through their statues, two new deities to Thebes, Artemis Eucleia and

* I availed myself of a fruitful exchange of views with Sotiris Tselikas, to whom I am greatly indebted.

Athena Zosteria, who, in Laius' words, will guarantee wealth, prosperity, and peace for the citizens. The statues of the goddesses must have been set up in reality in the agora at Thebes, as is attested by Sophocles *OT* 158–162 and Pausanias 9.17.1–3. Near the end of that article, I dedicated two paragraphs for proposing a very unsafe rudimentary reconstruction of the play. Second thoughts prompt me now to change and complement some of my initial proposals. To facilitate the reader, I quote the text of the Hypothesis and the verses of the play as they were restored in the *Logeion* article mentioned above, without the app. cr. and the papyrological assistance published there.

ΛΑΪΟΣ]

T 58b R. (P.Oxy. 2256 fr. 2)

= *DID C 4a Sn.*

ΑΙΧΥΛΟ] Υ

- ἐπὶ ἄρχοντος Θεαγ]ενίδου Ὀλ[v]μπιάδος [ο]η[´ ἔτει] α[
ἐνίκᾳ Αἰσχύλ]ος Λαΐωι, Οἰδ[ι]ποδι, Ἐπτ´ ἐπὶ Θήβαίς,
5 Σφιγγὶ σατύ[ροισ].] δεύτερος Ἀριστίας ταῖς τοῦ πα-
τρ[ός] Πρατίνο]ν τραγωιδ[ί]αις. τρι[τ]οῦ [Πο]λυ-
φράσμων] Λυκουργε[λαί] τε[τρ]αλογίαι.

ἡ μὲν] σκηνὴ τοῦ δρά-
ματο]ς ὑπόκειται ἐν

451v R. (P.Oxy. 2256 fr. 4)

- 10 Θήβαις,] ὁ δὲ χο[ρός] συνέστη-
κεν ἐ]κ πολιτῶν γε-
ρόντων]ν. ὁ προλογί-
ζων Λά[ϊ]ος.

p. 231 R. (P.Oxy. 2256 fr. 1)

τὰ π[ρ]όσω[πα τοῦ δράματος
Λά[ϊ]ος

(*deficiunt non plus 6 vers.*)

]·[.]·

451s 6 R. (P.Oxy. 2256 fr. 6)

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·πεπραγμένη·

- 5 ο]υς ἄγω πόλει
ἐπ]ικλήτους βροτοῖς
] μὲν ἢ πέλας

- ν]εμει πόλ[ιν]·
 π]έμπειν μέγα·
 ἐσ]τιν Εὐκλείας θεοῦ·
- 10 αὐτῆ μὲν οὕτω·] δι᾿ αὐτῆ δ' ἦδε τιμία
 δαίμων πόλ[ε]ι[ς] ζωννῦσα μὴ σπείρειν κακ[ά, 451n R. (P.Oxy. 2256 fr. 8)
 ἀλλ' ἠδον]ῆν τὰ τ' ἐστὶν εἰρήνη βροτοῖς.
 ταῦτ' οὖν ἐ]πανῶ τήνδε· τι[μ]αῖ γὰρ πόλιν
 ἐν ἡσ]ύ[χοισ]ι πράγμασιν καθημένην·
- 15 δόμων τ' ἀέξει κάλλος ἐκπαγλού[μ]ερον (5)
 ἄ]μιλλαν ὥστε γειτόνων ὄλβωι κρατεῖν·
 οἱ] δ' αὖ φντεύειν ἠδ[ε] γῆς ἐπ' ἐμπολάς
 θυ]μῶι λέληνται δαῖτας πεπανμέ[νοι
 σάλ]πιγγος, οὐδὲ φρουρί[οις] ἐξαισίω[ς]
- 20 c. 5]π[ι] []αιν[(10)
 κά]τθαν'· εἰ δὲ [

What I failed to realize in the initial article was that a new cult could be instituted in antiquity almost exclusively through divine advice. Kings and other leaders only rarely decided to sanction a new worship without prior religious counsel. Whether in myth or in history, the typical adviser was an oracle, predominantly the Delphic oracle. Therefore, a prerequisite for the introduction of the two deities was a visit to an oracle prior to the new king's entrance into the city. And it is a good fortune, both in myth and in drama, that the Delphic oracle was right on the road of Laius' return from Peloponnesus to Thebes. The new king was, of course, ignorant of what the future held in store for him personally, so the advice he sought from Apollo must have concerned his impending kingship. People used to consult an oracle before starting an enterprise (*μαντεύεσθαι περὶ σωτηρίας*). So, Laius may have asked Apollo the typical question made in similar circumstances: *τίني ἂν θεῶν θύων καὶ εὐχόμενος* shall I secure a successful leadership for my citizens, i.e., *σώσω πόλιν*?¹ The oracle must have advised him to establish the cult to Artemis Euclieia and Athena Zosteria, adding them to the divinities already worshipped in Thebes. The whole group of divinities, together with those added by Laius, not only is listed in the parodos of *Septem* but

1. Cf., e.g., Xen. Anab. 3.1.6 *ἐλθὼν δ' ὁ Ξενοφῶν* (sc. in Delphi) *ἐπήρητο τὸν Ἀπόλλω τίني ἂν θεῶν θύων καὶ εὐχόμενος κάλλιστα καὶ ἄριστα ἔλθοι τὴν ὁδὸν ἣν ἐπινοεῖ καὶ καλῶς πράξας σωθείη*. Also, numerous similar examples in oracular tablets from Dodona: Σ. Δάκκαρης, I. Βοκοτοπούλου, Α. Φ. Χριστίδης, *Τα χρηστήρια ελάσματα τῆς Δωδώνης τῶν ἀνασκαφῶν Δ. Εὐαγγελίδη*, 2 volumes, ed. Σ. Τσέλικας, Athens 2013.

was also represented on Aeschylus' stage by their statues (*Septem* 220 ἄδε πανάγυρις, 251 ξυντέλεια).

Formerly, there was a common agreement among scholars that *Laios* should end with the death of the titular character. Despite the individual scenarios or the different arguments, this was actually proposed by the main literature on the point.² To quote only Timothy Gantz (p. 491): 'the drama probably began with Laios setting out from Thebes (for Delphi?) and ended with a messenger speech announcing his demise at a cross-roads'.³ It can now be claimed that both Gantz's beginning and his end are disproved. The beginning is evident from the papyrus. Concerning the end, it would be impossible for Aeschylus to manage the dramatic time of a play which would begin with the entrance of a young unmarried character and would end with his murder many years later by his son who had in the meantime grown up to maturity.

Nonetheless, both the birth and exposure of Oedipus and the murder of Laios are mentioned in *Laios*. The first mention appears in fr. 122 R. (χυτρίζειν): *Sch. V Ar. Vesp.* 289e (ὄν ὅπως ἐγχυτρίεις) ἀπὸ τῶν ἐκτιθεμένων παιδίων ἐν χύτραις· διὸ καὶ Σοφοκλῆς ἀποκτείνει (τὸ ἐκτιθέναι Weil) χυτρίζειν ἔλεγεν ἐν Πριάμῳ (fr. 532) καὶ Αἰσχύλος Λαῖῳ (Λάξω V; corr. Dind.) καὶ Φερεκράτης **: cf. Hsch. χ 851 Hansen - Cunningham χυτρίζειν· ἐν χύτρῳ <ἐκ>τιθέναι (corr. Küster); *Sch. RVE Ar. Ran.* 1190 (ἐξέθεσαν ἐν ὄστράκῳ [sc. Oedipum; fort. ad Aesch. tragoediam *Laios* spectat]) ἐπεὶ ἐν χύτραις ἐξετίθεσαν τὰ παιδιά· διὸ καὶ χυτρίζειν ἔλεγον. It seems that the verb is used in *Ar. Vesp.* in the meaning 'to pot', i.e., to boil up in the pot, a metaphor from cooking, in the general sense 'have done with' (so MacDowell); the *Vespae* passage by no means could mean 'Make sure you expose him in a pot'. However, its initial use in Soph. *Priamos* and Aesch. *Laios* has certainly to do with the manner of exposing unwanted children (Alexander in Sophocles, Oedipus in Aeschylus). The second mention occurs in fr. 122a: *Et. Gen. A Lass.-Livad. a* 970 (ἀπάργματα) 9 ἦν γὰρ τι νόμιμον τοῖς

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2. Carl Robert, *Oidipus: Geschichte eines poetischen Stoffs im griechischen Altertum*, 2 volumes, Berlin 1915 (spec. I 252-283); F. Stoessl, *Die Trilogie des Aischylos*, Baden bei Wien 1937; H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971 (21983); A. J. Podlecki, "Reconstructing an Aeschylean Trilogy", *BICS* 22 (1975) 1-19 (spec. 8-14); G. O. Hutchinson, *Aeschylus Septem contra Thebas*, Oxford 1985, Intr. xxiii f.; Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth. A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, Baltimore 1993.
 3. See also pp. 27-28 of the *Logeion* article mentioned at the beginning of the present article. H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971 (21983), has claimed that the subject of *Laios* was the abduction and rape of Chrysippus and the boy's subsequent suicide, followed by the curse of Pelops.

δολοφονήσασιν ἀφοσιῶσαι τὸν φόνον διὰ τοῦ <τοῦ> δολοφονηθέντος ἀκρω-
τηριασμοῦ. ... 16 ὅτι δὲ καὶ ἐγέοντο τοῦ αἵματος καὶ ἀπέπτνον, Αἰσχύλος
ἐν ταῖς Περραιβίσι (fr. 186a) ἱστορεῖ καὶ ἐν τῷ Λαῖῳ (fr. 122a); πρὸς λέβι-
σιν A, corr. Reitzenstein | περὶ Λαῖῳ A, περὶ del. Reitzenstein. Hutchinson,
p. xix, doubts Reitzenstein's conjecture on the grounds that the described
purification custom "is associated with premeditated murder, not with such
homicide as Oedipus perpetrated". However, in the context of myth and
drama, is there any difference between premeditated murder and murder
predetermined by the god? As for the intrusion of *περὶ*, it is very likely that
it passed before *Λαῖῳ* from a *super lineam* emendation of the manuscript's
πρὸς (λέβισιν) into *Περ(ραιβίσι)*. Fr. 354 R. from Plut. *De Is. et Os.* 20.358
e, ἀποπτύσαι δεῖ καὶ καθήρασθαι στόμα, though in a different meaning, re-
veals the verse whether of *Perrhaebides* or *Laios*.

The two mentions consolidated the view that when *Laios* began, Oedi-
pus must have already been born. However, how can the papyrus evidence
be reconciled with these confusing mentions of Oedipus? The stratagem
used in tragedy for bridging the gap between present action and future
events is, of course, divination, whether oracular responses from official or-
acles like Delphi or prophecies from private prophets like Teiresias or both.
Apollo's oracular response has clearly preceded the opening of the play.
However, apart from advising Laius to introduce two new cults, the or-
acle must have also stated that the king would keep the city safe if he stayed
childless till his death. This second portion of the oracle, which is obviously
the one closely linked with the tragic aspect of the story, is referred to in
Septem 748–49 by the words *θνάισκοντα γέννας ἄτερ σῴζειν πόλιν*.

The oracle is preceded in the *Septem* by the statement *Ἀπόλλωνος ...*
τρὶς εἰπόντος, which some interpret as implying three separate warnings,
whether in the same visit or in three successive visits to Delphi. The re-
petition would convey either the god's forbearance and fatherly interest
(‘the god advised him again and again’; Sch. ad loc. *τὸ φιλόανθρωπον τοῦ*
θεοῦ ἐμφαίνεται διὰ τοῦ <τρὶς>), or Laius' growing impatience. I believe
that things are simpler. The visit to Delphi can well be the single one made
before Laius' first entrance as a king into Thebes and dramatically posited
before the prologue of the play. However, the oracle must have had a triple
structure, as was possibly the case with formal oracles given to officehold-
ers such as kings and archons. It seems that the triple repetition conferred
solemnity and irrevocability. See the Delphic oracle given to Mnesiepes
about the founding of the Archilochus temenos in Paros (Paros, 3rd c. BC,
SEG 15. 517, A, col. II, 1–15). We notice there a triple repetition of the

phrase *Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν* (lines 1, 8, 14), each time followed by Apollo's advices: (a) *Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν ἐν τῷ τεμένει, ὃ κατασκευάζει, ἰδρυσσάμενῳ βωμὸν καὶ θύοντι ἐπὶ τούτῳ Μούσαις καὶ Απόλλωνι Μουσαγέται καὶ Μνημοσύνη· θύειν δὲ καὶ καλλιερεῖν Διὶ Ὑπερδεξίῳ, Ἀθάναι Ὑπερδεξίαι, Ποσειδῶνι Ἀσφαλείῳ, Ἡρακλεῖ, Ἀρτέμιδι Εὐκλείῳ. Πυθῶδε τῷ Απόλλωνι σωτήρια πέμπειν.* (b) *Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν ἐν τῷ τεμένει, ὃ κατασκευάζει, ἰδρυσσάμενῳ βωμὸν καὶ θύοντι ἐπὶ τούτῳ Διονύσῳ καὶ Νύμφαις καὶ Ὀραις· θύειν δὲ καὶ καλλιερεῖν Απόλλωνι Προστατηρίῳ, Ποσειδῶνι Ἀσφαλείῳ, Ἡρακλεῖ. Πυθῶδε τῷ Απόλλωνι σωτήρια πέμπειν.* (c) *Μνησιέπει ὁ θεὸς ἔχρησε λῶιον καὶ ἄμεινον εἶμεν τιμῶντι Ἀρχίλοχον τὸμ ποιητὰν καθ' ἃ ἐπινοεῖ.* Note that all the Olympian gods are supplied with a distinctive epithet. Interesting is the inclusion of Artemis Eucleia. Though numerous oracles are found in inscriptions, most of them occur in reported speech, since the officials responsible for setting up the inscription were interested in the oracle's essence but not in its wording, so that the possible original triple structure is lost. However, a similar triple oracle, also concerning the introduction of worships and sacrifices, survived in an inscription, unfortunately in desperate condition, in a Scythia Minor Greek colony (Kallatis, 2nd c. BC, *IScM* III 48 B): (a) ends in line a 3, (b) a 4–b 7, (c) b 8–11, each item being preceded by *ὑπὲρ* + genitive of the sector the introduced gods were supposed to protect (e.g., b 8 *ὑπὲρ τᾶς λε[ιτουργίας πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς* (?)) and ending in *Ἀπόλλωνι σωτήρια πέμπειν*. A fourth item (b 12) may be a recapitulatory [*ὑπὲρ τῶ[νδε* (?)]. A second contemporary Kallatis inscription (*IScM* III 49) preserves also the same oracle, possibly in triple structure, but its end is truncated.

Naturally, the triple structure is not mentioned by Aeschylus in *Septem* for enriching the oracle with a historical detail. It is stressed for denouncing Laius, who in spite of the triple repetition was careless about the warning, and acted against the god's will. Of course, it is a different thing if, in parallel, the *τρὶς* repetition is poetically exploited by Aeschylus for highlighting the third generation which will experience the fulfillment of the oracle, as if each item of the oracle stood for one of the generations.

A first remark about the wording of the oracle (*θνάσκοντα γέννας ἄτερ σῶζειν πόλιν*) is that it is absolutely clear, just as the first portion about the new cults must have also been. As Tucker *ad loc.* remarks, without knowing, of course, the first portion of the oracle, Apollo "is not the Loxias, the Riddler, in this instance". Yet, the two fragments of *Laios* cited above patently exhibit the characteristics of riddling oracular

language: abstruse words (*χυτρίζειν for ἐκτιθέναι or ἐκτιθέναι ἐν ὄστράκῳ*, i.e., killing an unwanted baby by exposing it inside a pot in the wilderness), arcane expressions (*ἀποπτύσαι καὶ καθήρασθαι στόμα for ἀφοσιῶσαι τὸν φόνον*), obscure but not incomprehensible. As Gilbert Murray notes in another case: *obscuritas sermonis prophetam decet*.⁴ Then, it is very likely that these fragments were not included in the original oracle, but in a subsequent prophecy, possibly by Teiresias.⁵

Laius' prologue started with a mention of the visit to Delphi, but the oracle itself must not have been directly reported. Following the optimistic prologue and the promising expectations, it is expected that the elders of the chorus, in the first stasimon, should share the king's good hopes. Possibly, right after that, the king reports the second part of the oracle. However, this second part must have raised questions both to the king himself and the elders, since they would be unable to comprehend how a successful king could preserve the city safe, if he was supposed to cut off the line of the dynasty and thus exterminate the very kingship he was initiating. It is worth noticing that, unlike Eur. *Phoen.* 18–20 (*μὴ σπεῖρε τέκνων ἄλοκα δαιμόνων βίαι· | εἰ γὰρ τεκνώσεις παῖδ', ἀποκτενεῖ σ' ὁ φύς, | καὶ πᾶς σὸς οἶκος βήσεται δι' αἵματος*) and the fake oracles that accompany the hypotheses of Soph. *OT* and Eur. *Phoen.*, the oracle, as is quoted in the *Septem* does not mention a murder of Laius by his own son.

Then, how could the play close, if we are to expect a length of the dramatic time commensurate with both Aristotle's descriptions and our observation, at the end of which a *περιπέτεια* also in Aristotle's sense would come up, a new unexpected event, that is, that would reverse the course of the play? After excluding the possibility that the play ends with Laius' murder, the only reversal I can imagine consists in the substantial change of the atmosphere, as it would be reflected in the choral parts, where the initial euphoria would now turn to concerns and anxiety about the future of the royal family. But what could that unexpected event be? Already Carl Robert, p. 278, had noticed that the story narrated in Hyginus *fab.* 67, <Laius> *in prodigiis ostendebatur mortem ei adesse de nati manu*, which is included like foreign body among Sophoclean and Euripidean stuff in the mythographer, could well pass for Aeschylean. However, unaware of the papyrus, Robert connected the portents and their prophetic interpretation

4. App. cr. on *PV* v. 860, in his Aeschylus edition.

5. For Aeschylus' utilization of oracular language see my "Oracles and Etymologies or When Aeschylus Goes to Extremes", *Trends in Classics* 5 (2013) 49–73.

with Laius' last hours. The king rushed to Cithaeron to check whether the exposure in a pot had been accomplished or not (but wasn't it too late after so many years?), and on the way came across Oedipus. In any case, the new evidence demonstrates that the portents must have shown up right after the king's initial entrance into Thebes and his first concerns about the meaning of Apollon's oracle.

In the *Septem*, it is clear that the prime issue of the play is the dilemma between city and genos, and there can be no doubt that the same issue would be prominent also in the second play of the trilogy, *Oidipous*. In the opening of the first play of the Theban trilogy, the genos does not exist yet, since Laius is unmarried. But the question of his marriage with Jocasta, the sister of Creon, the leading Theban magistrate, must have been raised early in the play. Laius must remain puzzling over the interpretation of the Delphic oracle and concerned about obedience to it or not. He did not have many options. He could either abide by the will of the god and thus stay unmarried or marry and stay childless or violate the oracle altogether. The trilemma must have been discussed between the king and the Chorus, but the schema of the conflict would be completed if there existed a character who would support defying Apollo's advice on the part of Laius. This character can only be Creon, brother of Jocasta and mediator for her marriage to the king.

The elders of the Chorus have already experienced at least one reign, that of the brothers Zethos and Amphion, which had a tragic end with the harsh punishment by Apollo and Artemis of their whole families. However, I believe that the elders would be rather concerned with the repercussions a possible disobedience of the king to the oracle would have for the entire Theban population. Such a process would already constitute a political issue. A temporary resolution may have been reached: that of marrying Jocasta but avoiding begetting children. It must be then that a Messenger brought news about the omen, which in turn called for its interpretation by Teiresias. Whether the plural *in prodigiis* and the imperfect *ostendebatur* of Hyginus imply that repeated alarming portents had been observed, one cannot say. Also, the nature of the omen or the omens is unknown. One is reminded of the portent of the eagles and the pregnant hare in the parodos of the *Agamemnon* (108 ff.) or the one of the eagle and the hawk in Atossa's speech in the *Persai* (201 ff.), which were interpreted, the first by Calchas, the *κεδνὸς στρατόμαντις* of the Trojan war, the second by the leader of the Chorus elders serving as *θυμόμαντις*. If I am referring only to portents with birds of prey, it is because

Teiresias is introduced in the *Septem*, 24 ff., as *οἰωνῶν βοτήρ, | ἐν ᾧσὶ νόμων καὶ φρεσὶν πυρὸς δίχα | χρηστηρίους ὄρνιθας ἀψευδεῖ τέχνηι*. Here, the interpretation of Teiresias must have specified that there will be a son of the king, who, even if he be exposed in order to die (fr. 122: *χυτρίζειν*), will survive and come to murder his father (fr. 122a). Whether Teiresias' speech referred also to the curse of Pelops as the starting point of the dreadful situation that enveloped the whole royal genos of Thebes is unknown, but is distinctly possible.

Apparently, Teiresias' revelation constitutes the denouement of the play. The Theban elders of the chorus must sing the exodos with apprehension about the fate of the royal genos but mainly about the city's future. I doubt that the play could close with the basic issue left pending because of a possible irresolution of the king. Apollo will reappear after three generations in the *Septem* (801–02) *Οἰδίπουν γένει | κραινῶν παλαιὰς Λαῖου δυσβολίας*. The mention of the 'old ill-counsels of Laius' is not a mere reference to the myth. The audience must be reminded of the end of the first play's plot, where these decisions had been taken by the king onstage.

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