

## Bride or Concubine? Iole and Heracles' Motives in the *Trachiniae*

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Heracles' command to Hyllus has been one of the most controversial passages in Sophocles' *Trachiniae* (1219-29):

HP.	τὴν Εὐρυτεΐαν οἶσθα δῆτα παρθένον;	
ΥΛ.	Ἰόλην ἔλεξας, ὡς γ' ἐπεικάζειν ἐμέ.	1220
HP.	ἔγνωσ. τοσοῦτον δὴ σ' ἐπισκήπτω, τέκνον· ταύτην, ἔμοῦ θανόντος, εἴπερ εὐσεβεῖν βούλη, πατρῶων ὀρκίων μεμνημένος, προσθοῦ δάμαρτα, μηδ' ἀπιστήσης πατρί· μηδ' ἄλλος ἀνδρῶν τοῖς ἐμοῖς πλευροῖς ὁμοῦ κλιθεῖσαν αὐτὴν ἀντὶ σοῦ λάβῃ ποτέ, ἀλλ' αὐτός, ὦ παῖ, τοῦτο κήδευσον λέχος. πειθου· τὸ γάρ τοι μέγала πιστεύσαντ' ἐμοὶ σμικροῖς ἀπιστεῖν τὴν πάρος συγχεῖ χάριν.	1225

Heracles: You know the maiden born of Eurytus?

Hyllus: You mean Iole, as I infer.

Heracles: Yes. This is what I enjoin upon you, my child. Take her as wife (προσθοῦ δάμαρτα) when I am dead, if you wish to be pious, remembering the oaths to your father, and do not disobey your father; and let no other man instead of you ever take one who has lain at my side, but do you yourself, my child, make this marriage bond (κήδευσον λέχος). Obey, for though you obey me in great matters, disobeying in small destroys the previous gratitude.

The essay of J. K. MacKinnon, "Heracles' Intention in his Second Request of Hyllus: *Trach.* 1216–51," *CQ* 21 (1971) 33–41, has been influential in the interpretation of this difficult scene, and deservedly so.<sup>1</sup> It makes a valuable contribution in removing false preconceptions about Heracles' motives, especially Bowra's galant "unsuspected trait of tenderness and justice in Heracles," and in underlining Heracles' egotism in requiring

<sup>1</sup> In his note on 1216 ff. M. Davies (ed.), *Sophocles. Trachiniae* (Oxford 1991) calls MacKinnon's article "an important study."

Hyllus to marry Iole.<sup>2</sup> In his view that Heracles intends only concubinage and not marriage for Iole, however, MacKinnon is incorrect; and precisely because this essay has been so influential and has now been endorsed by the most recent commentator on the play, it is important to have some of the counterarguments set forth.<sup>3</sup> A reexamination of this passage, furthermore, will bring out a few points about the precision of Sophocles' language that have been neglected.

MacKinnon himself acknowledges the greatest objection to his view, namely that Hyllus and Iole are to be the founders of the Dorian race; and he responsibly collects the evidence for this strong ancient tradition for their marriage (33). He goes on, however, to dismiss as "a pedantry which is alien at least to that Sophocles whom we possess" (33) the notion that Sophocles could be concerned with following this tradition. This is a purely subjective judgment; and in fact many scholars have pointed out how frequently the endings of Sophocles' extant plays refer to other parts of the literary tradition. The clearest instance is the end of *Philoctetes* (1440–44), with its allusion to the violence of Neoptolemus at the sack of Troy. The end of the *Electra* also refers to the future sufferings of the Atreid house (*El.* 1497–1500). The end of the *Coloneus* foreshadows the civil war between Oedipus' two sons in Thebes and therefore also the events of the *Antigone* (*OC* 1769–72), which have already been hinted at by a major scene in the play (*OC* 1181–1446).<sup>4</sup> A hint at Hyllus and Iole as the future founders of the Dorian race, therefore, is not out of keeping with "that Sophocles whom we possess."

To support his view, MacKinnon must deny the natural meaning of words for "bride" or "wife" throughout the play.<sup>5</sup> The phrase κήδευσον

<sup>2</sup> C. M. Bowra, *Sophoclean Tragedy* (Oxford 1944) 142, criticized by MacKinnon on pp. 33 f., and see also p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> Davies (above, note 1) on 1224 seems to accept MacKinnon's interpretation. His note to προσθού δάμαρτα reads, "on the meaning of this phrase see MacKinnon." Davies acknowledges that *damar* "usually refers to a legitimate wife" but cites Eur. *Tro.* 658 ff. to show that it may be "used of a less formal relationship." MacKinnon's view has also been accepted by M. McCall, "The *Trachiniae*: Structure, Focus, and Heracles," *AJP* 93 (1972) 161 n. 20.

<sup>4</sup> This point is well made apropos of the marriage of Iole by P. E. Easterling, "The End of the *Trachiniae*," *ICS* 6 (1981) 69. See also *Ajax* 1171–79 and P. Burian, "Supplication and Hero Cult in Sophocles' *Ajax*," *GRBS* 13 (1972) 151–56. The endlessly discussed question of the relevance of the legend of Heracles' apotheosis to the play is probably the most controversial issue of extra-dramatic mythical references; see, inter alia, H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus*, Sather Classical Lectures 41 (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1971) 126–28; my "Sophocles' *Trachiniae*: Myth, Poetry, and Heroic Values," *YCS* 25 (1976) 138 ff. and my *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles* (Cambridge, MA 1981) 99 ff., with the references there cited; P. E. Easterling (ed.), *Sophocles. Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1982) 9–12, 17–19; P. Holt, "The End of the *Trachiniae* and the Fate of Heracles," *JHS* 109 (1989) 69–80, especially 78 f.; Davies (above, note 1) xix–xxii.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. MacKinnon 37–39 apropos of 428 f., 545 f., 550 f., 857 f., 894 f., 1224, 1227. On *damar* and *gamos* and related terms, see my *Tragedy and Civilization* (previous note) 75 f. and "Time, Oracles, and Marriage in the *Trachiniae*," *Lexis* 9/10 (1992) 71 ff. (the latter forthcoming, in revised form, in my *Sophocles' Tragic World: Divinity, Nature, Society*, Harvard University Press).

λέχος is admittedly somewhat vague, but, as Easterling suggests apropos of *damar* in 1224, the vagueness is probably due to the heroic setting rather than to an allusion to concubinage.<sup>6</sup> MacKinnon is certainly correct to observe that κήδεσον by itself can mean “care for” or “tend,” and that λέχος by itself can mean “concubine.” But his divide-and-conquer approach is inappropriate when the two words are used together; and the meaning “tend” is far from the mark. Sophocles’ other uses of the verb κηδεύειν in the sense of “tend” refer to the loving, intimate care of a close relation, as MacKinnon observes (37, citing *OT* 1323 and *OC* 750), which is certainly not the meaning here, particularly given the object, λέχος.<sup>7</sup>

The phrase κήδεσον λέχος, however, may be more appropriate to the context than has generally been appreciated, for the verb κηδεύειν suggests the formal alliance of marriage, particularly with a view to ties within the family, as numerous parallels from tragedy attest.<sup>8</sup> The noun κήδεσμα, or the poetic plural common in tragedy, κηδεύματα, regularly refers to the bonds of the extended family created by the marriage.<sup>9</sup> Now, MacKinnon objects that the notion of an alliance by marriage cannot be relevant because Iole’s “city is sacked and there can be no strong allies in her kinfolk” (38). But the term is indeed appropriate, first because it reminds us that Iole is no ordinary slave captive but the daughter of a royal house which, though destroyed, has a nobility and dignity worthy of Heracles’ line (note τὴν Εὐρυτείαν . . . παρθένον 1219 and see my comment below on *gennaia* 309), and second because it points up that Hyllus is in fact continuing the family line and indeed (despite his repugnance) has an obligation to do so, even though Heracles emphasizes only obedience to a father and avoidance of a father’s curse. Sophocles can, of course, count on his audience’s knowledge of the importance of this lineage in the mythical tradition, even if Heracles himself has only a dim sense of the future. Even within the play, Heracles, for all his faults, is keenly aware of his extended family ties in this closing movement. When he recognizes the true import of the oracle, his first response is to summon all his sons (κάλει τὸ πᾶν μοι σπέρμα ὠν ὁμαιμόνων 1147, addressed to Hyllus) and his mother, Alcmene (1143–50). Of course there are bitter ironies here, for, as I have pointed out elsewhere, this little scene is a cruel parody of normal marital situations, where Heracles, who has so disrupted the sanctities of marriage in his own house,

<sup>6</sup> See Easterling, *Trachiniae* (above, note 4) on 1224: “Soph. uses δάμαρτα with a vagueness appropriate to the heroic setting, cf. 428 n.”

<sup>7</sup> In Soph. *El.* 1141 κηδεύειν refers to the “care” for a family member in the funeral rites. For the meaning “care for” with intimacy and affection, see also Eur. *Ion* 734, *Or.* 791, 796, 883. This sense is extended to the city (*polis*) in Eur. *IT* 1212 and, ironically, in Soph. *Phaedra*, fr. 683. 4 Radt = 622. 4 Nauck.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Aesch. *PV* 890; Eur. *Hipp.* 634, *Hec.* 1202, *Ion* 47, *Phoen.* 347; see LSJ s.v. II. R. C. Jebb, *Sophocles: The Plays and Fragments*. Part 5, *The Trachiniae* (Cambridge 1892) ad loc. cites Arist. *Pol.* 5. 1307a37.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. Eur. *Med.* 76, 367, 885 (κήδος); cf. Soph. *OT* 86 (κήδεσμα).

takes on the roles both of the father of the groom and the father of the bride, whom he now disposes in marriage.<sup>10</sup>

As MacKinnon and others have observed, Heracles is less concerned with Iole than with his own egotistical possession of one who has "lain at his side" (1225–26).<sup>11</sup> The contrast between ἄλλος ἀνδρῶν in 1225 and αὐτός, ὃ παῖ in 1227, reinforcing ἀντί σοῦ in 1226, makes this emphasis clear. A woman won with so much effort and suffering is to remain within the family, and no "other" is to have her. Heracles' verb λάβῃ also suggests a certain brutality. He envisages Iole as a possession to be handed over between men. This harshness is especially strong if, with most recent editors, we accept Elmsley's emendation, the jussive subjunctive λάβῃ, in place of the manuscripts' optative of a future wish, λάβοι.<sup>12</sup> Yet Heracles' possessiveness need not exclude marriage; marriage is merely the form in which this possessiveness is to be expressed.<sup>13</sup> We must not be influenced by modern notions of marriage. Heracles' handing Iole over to Hyllus in marriage so that "no other man" may "take her" is in keeping with what we have seen of Heracles' view of his own marriage, which includes winning Deianeira (twice) as the prize of a battle (9–28, 497–530, 555–68) and asking his son to hand her over so that he can kill her with his own hands (1064–69). We should recall too that Iole is a secondary matter in Heracles' view. The lighting of his funeral pyre belongs to "the great things," *megala*, and obedience in the matter of Iole to "the small," *smikra* (1228–29). The injunction of marriage, therefore, need not imply a new sensitivity toward Iole, and it certainly expresses a total lack of sensitivity toward Hyllus. The marriage enables Sophocles to take account of the mythical tradition, to recognize the greatness of Heracles as a hero whose line will continue, and at the same time to show him continuing in his harsh and self-centered power, in this respect very much like Ajax. Heracles, as Kamerbeek remarks, is still "one for whom nothing is of any interest except his own glorious deeds, his own excessive desires and his divine descent."<sup>14</sup>

MacKinnon further objects that tragedy offers no clear parallel to a king or noble marrying a captive woman, who is of course a slave. Strictly speaking, this is true. But the *Trachiniae* plays so deliberately and

<sup>10</sup> On the ironies of Heracles' multiple roles here, see my "Time, Oracles, and Marriage" (above, note 5) 75 ff., 83 ff. Iole's situation also resembles that of the *epikleros*, the daughter-heiress in the absence of a son, who is given to the closest male kin upon the death of her father; see "Time, Oracles, and Marriage" 84.

<sup>11</sup> MacKinnon 34, 41.

<sup>12</sup> See Jebb and Easterling's commentaries, ad loc. J. C. Kamerbeek, *The Plays of Sophocles. Part 2, Trachiniae* (Leiden 1959) ad loc. is one of the few recent commentators or editors who would retain λάβοι.

<sup>13</sup> See W. Kraus, "Bemerkungen zum Text und Sinn in den 'Trachinierinnen'," *WS* 99 (1986) 108, apropos of 1225–27: "Das [κῆδευσον λέχος] brauchte nichts anderes zu heißen als 'schließe diese Ehe.' Aber κηδεύειν heißt doch eigentlich 'sich kümmern,' und αὐτός παῖ weniger zu 'heirate' als zu 'nimm dich an'."

<sup>14</sup> See Kamerbeek (above, note 12) on 1225–26 (p. 247).

intricately on inversions of marriage that one cannot safely apply generalizations from such unions elsewhere in tragedy.<sup>15</sup> In fact, Sophocles has gone out of his way to emphasize Iole's special status and her noble bearing (308–13):

O unfortunate one, who are you among these young women? Without a husband, or are you a mother? For by her bearing and stature (*physis*) she has no experience of all these things, but is of noble birth (πρὸς μὲν γὰρ φύσιν / πάντων ἄπειρος τῶνδε, γενναία δέ τις 308–09). Lichas, of what mortal is the stranger born, who her mother, who the father that sired her? Tell me, since in looking on her I pity her most among these (captive women) in so far as she alone also has the capacity to understand (her situation).

Deianeira's characterization of her rival-to-be here as *gennaia* is a brilliant Sophoclean touch that serves many functions. It obviously arouses pity for Iole, shows Deianeira's generosity, and prepares for the irony of her much less generous response when she discovers the true meaning of Iole's presence. But it may also look ahead to Iole's marriage with Hyllus at the end of the play. Iole is presented as definitely bridal material. In commanding Hyllus to marry her at the end, moreover, Heracles introduces her as "the girl born of Eurytus" (τὴν Εὐρυτεῖαν παρθένον 1219), thereby emphasizing both her marriageable status as a *parthenos* and her noble birth as the daughter of a royal house.

There are multiple ironies in Deianeira's emphasis on Iole's nubile status. Iole will not "marry" the man for whom she was intended, i.e., Heracles. There is a further level of irony for Deianeira, for the scene of her receiving Iole is an echo of the scene of Clytaemnestra confronting Cassandra in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.<sup>16</sup> In the play's massive reversals of marriage rituals, however, this scene also places her in the role of the mother of the groom welcoming the new bride into the house. Heracles had intended Iole as a sort of second "bride" for himself, but in the course of events he turns her into the bride of his son. Thus, in marrying her to Hyllus at the end, he also makes Deianeira, posthumously, and with still crueler irony, the mother of the groom after all.

There are other reasons why Iole's slave status is not a serious barrier to legitimate marriage with Hyllus. Although Tecmessa in *Ajax* is never formally married to Ajax, it is clear that she has the respect of his family and the protection of Teucer, who also defends the dignity of his own birth

<sup>15</sup> On the inversions of marriage in *Trach.*, see R. Seaford, "Wedding Ritual and Textual Criticism in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis*," *Hermes* 114 (1986) 50–59 and "The Tragic Wedding," *JHS* 97 (1987) 106–30, especially 119–22; Segal, "Time, Oracles, and Marriage" (above, note 5) 63–92 *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> On the echo and its ramifications, see Segal, "Greek Myth as a Semiotic and Structural System and the Problem of Tragedy" (1983), in *Interpreting Greek Tragedy: Myth, Poetry, Text* (Ithaca, NY 1986) 48–74, especially 57 f.; also Seaford, "Tragic Wedding" (previous note) 127 f.

from a mother won in battle as a spear-prize (1299–1307). Polyxena, in Euripides' *Hecuba*, is acutely aware and ashamed of her servile status as a possession of her captor; but even this bleak play insists on her dignity, tragic though it is. Andromache, in her homonymous Euripidean play, likewise comes off as more dignified and nobler than the free, legitimate wife, Hermione. Whereas Euripides, however, dramatizes the ever-present degradation of the enslaved captive woman (especially in the *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women*), Sophocles (without denying her misery) keeps her nobility in the foreground.

For Iole's marriage to Hyllus there was the Homeric precedent of Patroclus' intention of making Briseis the "wedded wife" of Achilles (*Il.* 19. 297–99; cf. 9. 335 f.). MacKinnon cites the former passage, but attempts unconvincingly to explain it away (40 f.). His argumentation is circular: Iole, as a spear-captive, is a slave and so "there would surely need to be some clear indication in the passage that she is henceforth to be Hyllus' wife. This is impossible to find" (38). But in order to prove this "impossibility" he has to deny the natural meanings of προσθού δάμαρτα and κήδευσον λέχος in 1224–27.

MacKinnon inadvertently destroys the basis for his position when he observes in the following paragraph (38 f.) that Hyllus would inherit Iole anyway in the normal course of events, as he is heir to all of his father's possessions. Why then should Heracles make a point of Hyllus' taking her as a concubine? MacKinnon's answer is that Hyllus would feel repugnance at cohabiting with the woman who caused his father's death and so "will eject her from his house" (39). But it requires a far-fetched and unjustified supplementing of Sophocles' text to make Hyllus think so far in advance; and it is out of keeping with Heracles' character to have him so attuned to Hyllus' sensibilities.<sup>17</sup> And even were this the reason, why would Sophocles lay so much stress on words that naturally evoke marriage? If keeping Iole in the house were Heracles' only concern, there would be other ways of conveying that idea without the use of such maritally colored terms. That Heracles is actually commanding marriage is a much more economical explanation, and more in keeping with the mythical tradition and the vocabulary for marriage in the rest of the play.

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<sup>17</sup> Contrast, for example, the explicitness about the delicacy of taking in a woman at the end of Euripides' *Alceste*, where Euripides' Heracles, despite his little game, still acknowledges Admetus' reluctance (e.g. 1082 ff.).