Conjectures on *Oedipus at Colonus*

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Sophocles, like the honorand of this volume, seems to have suffered no diminution in his creative vigour with the passing of the years. But whereas the scholarship of Marcovich will be protected in the centuries to come by the permanence of the printed word, the text of Sophocles has had the benefit of no such safeguard. In this paper we shall take the play he wrote at around the age of ninety, and see if in a few places we may be able, by conjecture, to restore the pristine clarity of the poet’s words to a text which has been dulled during the centuries of its transmission. In each case the excerpts are taken from the second Teubner edition of 1985.

450–54

\[\text{άλλος τι μη λάξωσι τούδε συμμάχου,}\\ \text{οὐδέ σφιν ἀρχής τήςδε Καδμείας ποτὲ}\\ \text{δὴσις ἤξει· τούτο γένωδα, τήςδὲ τε}\\ \text{μαντεία ἀκούων, συννοών τε τάξ ἐμοῦ}\\ \text{παλαίφαθ’ ἀμοὶ Φοῖβος ἤνυσεν ποτε.}\\ 453 \text{τε τάξ Heath: τά τ’ ἐξ codd.}\\

Heath’s popular conjecture does not meet the main objection which has to be levelled against this passage as it is most commonly printed, namely that we have “from me” where the sense at first sight should be “about me”; hence Rauchenstein’s τάς ἐμοί, an unwelcome duplication of the ἐμοί which is to follow in the next line. The Oxford editors, Lloyd-Jones and Wilson, adopt the hob-nailed boot approach just as they do with the next crux we shall consider, and substitute Heimsoeth’s συννοῶν τε θέσφατα. But I suspect the true answer is already implicit in Mazon’s translation, which Kamerbeek cites at the end of his note ad loc., “et quand je songe en moi-même aux vieilles prophéties.” We should write τε κᾶς ἐμοῦ, with Oedipus adding to the external evidence he has just heard from Ismene the internal evidence of his own knowledge. Kamerbeek points out that Dain’s note and Mazon’s translation are at variance with each other. Dain is correct as against Mazon in identifying these prophecies as the ones “concernant le parricide et l’inceste d’Œdipe.” Only such an interpretation
is easily reconcilable with both ἡνύσεν and ποτε. Oedipus knows, from his own knowledge, that what Apollo predicts will happen.

503–05

Σ. ἀλλ' εἴμ' ἐγὼ τελοῦσα· τὸν τόπον δέ ἐνα
χρῆ στέμμ᾽ ἐφευρεῖν, τοῦτο βουλομαι μαθεῖν.
Χ. τούκειθεν ἄλσος, ὥξενη, τοῦθ᾽...

504 χρῆ στέμμ᾽ Elmsley: χρῆσται μ᾽ vel sim. codd.

Ismene announces her intention of making the sacrifice according to the ritual which has been prescribed by the chorus in the dialogue at 465 ff. “Very well, I shall go and perform the rites; but the place where I must find the offering with which I shall garland them, that I desire to know.” Such is the meaning of the text given above, based on what, from a purely technical point of view, one has to concede is a brilliant emendation by Elmsley. Jebb was not so easily seduced, and retained χρῆσται, translating “but where I am to find the spot”—impossible, since ἐνα is never interrogative. The trouble with Elmsley’s στέμμ᾽ is that even if it could be used for an offering of which a woollen wreath forms only a part, honey and water being the items which the Eumenides will actually consume, the question “Where shall I find all the stuff which you tell me I shall need?” seems strangely literal and prosaic, almost in the manner of Euripides parodying the shortcomings of some myth or other. The Oxford editors show themselves aware of this, and once again march boldly in, this time printing Reiske’s ὑπουργεῖν for ἐφευρεῖν. But far more likely would be ἐφευροῦν, “consecrate,” with τοῦτο adjusted to ταῦτα, an alteration which will also obviate the unpleasant equation τοῦτο = τόπον. A virtually identical corruption has occurred at El. 278: ἔροῦσ᾽ Seyffert for the manuscripts’ εὔροῦσ᾽.

720–21

ἀ πλεῖστ' ἐπαίνοις εὐλογοῦμενον πέδον,
νῦν σὸν τὰ λαμπρὰ ταῦτα δὴ κραίνειν ἐπὶ.

721 σὸν et κραίνειν Nauck: σοι et φαίνειν codd. ἐς L: ἐς τεLL.

The principal difficulty resides in the apparent use of δεῖ with the dative σοι, a use so suspect1 as to lead editors to accept L’s δῆ instead, which in turn necessitates some such further alteration as Nauck’s σὸν. So much for grammar; but what of the tone of the whole? Antigone’s words follow a choral ode in praise of Athens, and her first line clearly indicates that that

1 At Eur. Hipp. 940, the only example that editors can quote from tragedy, the nuance is presumably not “the gods will have to add another land” but “there will be a need for the gods to add another land.”
praise has not been lost on her. If she now follows 720 with a line saying, as Jebb puts it, “now is it for thee to make those bright praises seen in deeds!” she might seem to be casting doubt on the validity of those praises, as if all that talk of an ἕγχεον φόβημα δαίμων (699) were just that, talk. In the absence of some strengthening particle we cannot interpret as “now (and not some hours or days hence) is it for thee...” On the other hand a sentence tacitly acknowledging the truth of the ode of praise, and asking, rather like those praises, “if ever you helped me in the past, help me now,” for another manifestation of Athenian merit, would be ideal. So write νῦν σ’ αὖ τὰ λαμπρὰ ταῦτα δεῖ φαίνειν ἔπη. Nauck’s other emendation, κραίνειν, never strictly necessary, is rendered less necessary still once Athens’s help on this occasion is seen as another item in the series of excellences on which the chorus have just been dwelling.

1224–27

μὴ φόναι τὸν ἀπαντα νη-καὶ λόγον· τὸ δ’, ἐπεὶ φανής,
βήναι κείσ’ ὅποθεν περ ἦ-
κει πολὺ δεύτερον ὡς τάξιστα.

1226 κείσ’ ὅποθεν Blaydes: κάκεθεν ὅθεν KZnZo: κείθεν ὅθεν rel.

The definite article in τὸν ἀπαντα λόγον is hard to justify, and the next Teubner edition will, following Blaydes’s τὸν ἀπαντα, print τινὰ πάντα: not the whole λόγος, but every λόγος, for which the most apt translation might be, in the current term, “scenario.” But the real problem in these lines is the famous crux κείθεν ὅθεν. There is no need to rehearse former discussions. The plain fact is that κείθεν cannot possibly mean “to that place,” and no convincing parallel to the alleged attraction of ending to the following ὅθεν can be found. Blaydes’s κείσ’ ὅποθεν has been the most popular solution to date: “to that place, wherever it is that he has come from.” The precision imparted by περ, “to the very same place,” does not sit well alongside the indefinite ὅποθεν, which cannot be a mere synonym of ὅθεν; and one wonders why the required straightforward “go to that place” should ever have been altered to “go from that place.”

Perfect sense would be given by a smaller change: βήναι κεύθε’ ὅθεν περ ἦκει. Κεύθεα stands in contrast to φανής, the word chosen by Sophocles here in preference to the φανή which a close adherence to the Theognidean model (425 ff.) would have suggested, and which Mähly in fact conjectured. In a way κεύθεα corresponds with the ἀδήλα and κρύπτεται in Ai. 647: φύει τ’ ἄδηλα καὶ φανέντα κρύπτεται. The idea that the life-force not only goes to the Underworld after death but also comes from there at birth is echoed by Plato’s words (Phaedo 70c–d): σκεψιμεθα δὲ συντό τῆιδέ πη, εἴτ’ ἥρα ἐν “Αἰδοὺ εἰσίν αἰ ψυχαὶ τελευτησάντων τῶν ἀνθρώπων εἰτε καὶ οὐ. παλαιός μὲν οὖν ἔστι τις
λόγος οἷς μεμνήμεθα, ὡς εἰσὶν ἐνθένδε ἀφικόμεναι ἐκεῖ, καὶ πάλιν γε δεύτερο ἀφικνοῦνται καὶ γίγνονται ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων... οὕτως δὲν ἀλλάθεν ἡγίσθηνται οἱ ζώντες ἢ ἐκ τῶν τεθνεώτων. My colleague Nicholas Denyer reminds me too of a passage from the Seventh Letter, where soon after mention of “old and holy stories” the word νοστήσαντι, “returning,” is used of the ψυχή of some one in connection with his life ὑπὸ γῆς (335c). If returning, then it is from those hidden depths that the life-force of men arises. The fitness of such a doctrine in Oedipus at Colonus may be judged from the mention of the μεγάλαιν θεαίν at 683 and from 1050 ff. Although there is no reason why the chorus’s reflections here should have anything other than a universal applicability, those reflections are prompted by the special case of Oedipus, and the overtones of the word κεύθεα fit very well with what will in the end prove to be his fate; cf. ἦσκοποι δὲ πλάκες ἐμαρψαν / ἕν ἀφανεί τινι μόροι φερόμενον (1681 f.); ὁ τὸν ἀεὶ κατὰ γὰς σκότον εἰμένος (1701); κοίταν δ’ ἔχει / γέρθεν εὐσκιόστον αἰέν (1706 f.). Compare too Oedipus’s own use of the word κέκευθε at 1523.

1568–78

... χθόνιαι θεαί, σῶμα τ’ ἀνικάτου
θηρὸς δὲν ἐν πόλαισι
ταίσι πολυξένοις
εὐνάσθαι κνυξεῖσθαι τ’ ἔξ ἄντρων
ἀδάματον φύλακα παρ’ Ἀἴδαι
λόγος αἰὲν ἔχει·
tόν, ὁ Γὰς παί καὶ
Ταρτάρου, κατεύχομαι
ἐν καθαρῷ βήναι
ὀρμωμένου νερτέρας
τοῦ ξένῳ νεκρῶν πλάκας·
σὲ τοι κυκλήσκο τὸν αἰένυπνον.

1570 ταίσι Bergk: φασὶ codd. || 1574 τὸν Hermann: δὲν codd.

The most valuable service to Sophoclean scholarship in recent years has been the one provided, with the least imaginable publicity, by Dr. van Paassen of Amsterdam: an astonishingly full list of all the conjectures ever put forward on the plays. Yet here, just for once, something of real value has escaped the trawl. It is Blaydes’s λόχον for λόγος in 1573, recorded in his edition of 1859. All that remains to be done is to tidy up some of the peripheral damage which the corruption has brought in its train. But to begin with λόχον itself: Λόγος αἰὲν ἔχει means that there is a perpetual legend to the effect that Cerberus makes his bed and snuffles at the portals of Hades. The perpetuity of the legend is however of minimal importance compared with the constancy of Cerberus’s watch, and the fact that his snuffling emanates from the cave is a pictorial detail which again is of secondary importance compared with the idea that the cave is the place
where he lies in wait, and from which he will, when he feels like it, issue forth. It is not for nothing that the poet has written εξ ἄντρων and not εν ἄντροις; and not for nothing that the eternal nature of Cerberus’s watch is to be countered by τὸν αἰένων (1578).

Blaydes’s emendation confers another great benefit on the text of this antistrophe. Bergk’s τακτοι for φασι in 1570, substituting as it does a mere definite article as if the scribes had found the word baffling, is incredible in itself, and incredible too is the explanation that φασι is a dislodged gloss on the λόγος αἰέν έχει three lines further on. Φασι is sound.

All that remains then in the immediate vicinity is first to alter εχει to εχειν, part of the oratio obliqua introduced by φασι (this in turn will remove any metrical argument for accepting Hermann’s τὸν for ὁν in the next line—though stylistically the emendation remains attractive and the next Teubner text will in fact retain it); and secondly to link εχειν to the two infinitives εσνασθαι and κνυζεσθαι by writing either εξ ἄντρων <τ’> or έκ τ’ ἄντρων.

Finally, and on a separate point, since what the chorus are praying for is that Cerberus will stay in the clear for the traveller to the Underworld, the mildest alteration to the phrase εν καθαρδί βηναί, if alteration is needed, as many editors have insisted it is, would be εν καθαρδί μείναι.

1695–97

ΧΟ. oδ-

τοι κατάμεμπτ’ ἔβητον.

ΑΝ. πόθος <τ’> καὶ κακῶν ἄρ’ γ’ν τις.

Here is another difficult appearance of βαίνω, and again the right answer may have been found by Blaydes in his edition of 1859: έτλητον, a conjecture repeated by Mähly in 1868. This at any rate would approach the sense rightly implied by Jebb’s translation: “Ye have so fared that ye should not repine.” However the purpose of the present note is not to extol the merits of Blaydes, but to warn against excessive reliance being placed on the supplement <τοί> after πόθος, the conjecture of Hartung accepted by Jebb, Pearson, and the current Oxford text. Kamerbeek gives it the more cautious welcome of “not unsatisfactory.” It appears however from the list of tragic examples given by Denniston on page 555 of his Greek Particles that although τὰρα is frequent, τοί and ἄρα divisim does not occur.

What of the tone of Antigone’s reply? Should she be echoing the τοί in the chorus’s οὐτοί? It is at least possible that to their words, which amount to “you haven’t done so badly, you know,” she replies with a more direct counter, “on the other hand . . . ,” i.e. <δ’ αὐ>.

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Oedipus at Colonus contains 1779 lines. The average length of the other plays is 1427. It is at least possible that some of the disparity originates from interpolation by people who wished to develop yet further the political, patriotic, and religious aspects of the play. To reduce OC to the Sophoclean average would require the deletion of 352 lines—a prospect to daunt even the boldest critic. But we may make a more modest start by looking at two more passages, this time printed, to assist clarity, from the third, not second, Teubner edition.

1018–35

| KP. | τί δήτ' ἀμαυρώσει φοτι προστάσσεσις ποιεῖν; |
| TH. | ὄδυν κατάρχειν τῆς ἐκεῖ, πομπὸν δὲ μοι χωρεῖν, ἵνα, εἰ μὲν ἐν τόποις τοῦτο δ' ἢ χεῖς τὰς παῖδας ἡμῖν, αὐτὸς ἐνδείξεις ἔμοι. |
| | ................................................................................................................................. 1020 |
| | εἰ δ' ἐγκρατείς φεύγουσιν, οὔδὲν δεὶ πονεῖν· |
| | ἄλλοι γὰρ οἱ σπεύδοντες, οὐς οὐ μὴ ποτὲ χώρας φυγόντες τῆς ἡμείς ἐπεύξονται θεοὺς. |
| | ἄλλ' ἐξυψιθηκοῦν· γνώθι δ' ὡς ἐχον ἔχει. |
| | [καὶ σ' εἴλε θηρῶνθ' ἡ τύχη· τὰ γὰρ δόλωι τῶι μὴ δικαίωι κτήματ' οὐχι σώζεται. |
| | καὶ καὶ ἄλλοι ἔξεις εἰς τὸδ' ὡς ἰδιαίτερα σε οὐ ψιλὸν οὐδ' ἄσκευον ἔσσεσθαι ὑπὲριν ἐκοντα τόλμης τῆς περεπτώσεως ταύτην, |
| | ἄλλ' ἐσθ' ὅτι σὺ πιστὸς ὅν ἐδρα τάδε. |
| | ἄ δει μ' ἀθρήσκαι, μηδὲ τίνες τίνων τόλμης ποιῆσαι φωτὸς ἀοἴθενετέραν. |
| | νοεῖς τι τούτων, ἢ μάτην τὰ νῦν τέ σοι δοκεῖ λελέχθαι χῶτε ταῦτ' ἐμπεσάν.] |


The apparatus given above is abbreviated, and we may skim rapidly through the early part of our passage, full of difficulties though it is. Heath's δὲ μοι is accepted to avoid the inelegance of πομπὸν δὲ μὲ (or δ' ἐμέ) as a paratactic expression of a subordinate thought, exceedingly harsh following τί προστάσσεσις ποιεῖν; In 1021 ἐνδείξεις is the proper compound for "putting the finger on" some one: ἔκδειξεῖς would mean "display." Thereafter a lacuna is suggested by two things: First, we need a brief statement of what Theseus will do if he does find the kidnappers in situ; second, ἐγκρατείς can scarcely mean "the people holding them captive" even with Housman's dubious addition of the article, οὐκρατεῖς. But it can stand very well as "having power over them" as opposed to
“surrendering power over them,” part of the sense of the putative lacuna. As for 1023, the apparatus speaks for itself.

But what of the rest? In skeletal form the speech develops as follows: (1) Lead the way. (2) <I shall deal with the villains if I find them still there.> Others will, if they have fled with the girls in their power. (3) Lead the way, and recognise that the game is up. (4) Fortune has caught you, the hunter. (5) Gains made by trickery are not permanent. (6) You will have no one else for this purpose. (7) I make this remark because I’m sure you would not have attempted this enterprise alone. (8) Which is something I must consider, and not make the city weaker than one man. (9) Do you think I am bluffing, either now or then?

This is an astonishing farrago. At first all is well, for the repetition of (1) in (3) “lead the way” can be accepted as increasing the sense of urgency; and with our proposed lacuna (3) will in any case stand further from (1) than it does at present. (4) Why fortune? The idea has minimal relevance to the story told. (5) Why trickery? Creon was acting not by trickery but by force. (6) What purpose? (7) The idea that Creon could not have been acting alone does not need to be spelled out now: It has already been taken for granted in ἐγκρατεῖς above. (8) A total non sequitur. “I have to bear your numbers in mind, and not make this city weaker than a single individual.” (9) Rodomontade, of only the sketchiest relevance.

The only clean solution to all these problems, which are problems not of textual corruption but of thought, is excision.

1139–49

ΟΗ. ὑφ’ εἰ τι μήκος τῶν λόγων ἔθου πλέον, τέκνοις τερεθείς τοῖσδε, θαυμάσας ἔχω, 1140
ὑδ’ εἰ πρὸ τοῦμοῦ προολαβεῖς τὰ τῶνδ’ ἐπι. [βάρος γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδέν ἐκ τούτων ἔχει] 1145
οὐ γὰρ λόγοις τὸν βίον σπουδάζομεν λαμπρὸν ποιέσθαι μᾶλλον ἣ τοῖς δραμένοις. [δείκνυμι δ’ ὅν γὰρ ὁμοσ’ σύκ ἐγενευσάμην οὐδέν σε, πρέσβυ’ τάσσε γὰρ πάρεμ’ ἄγων ζώσας, ἀκραίφνεις τῶν κατηπειλημένων.] χῶπως μὲν ὁγὼν ἡρῆθη, τί δει μάτην κομπείν, ἐ’ γ’ εἰσχι καὐτός ἐκ τούτων ἡμών;

1141 οὕτ’ Elmsley || 1142 del. Lazarewicz || 1148 οὖν οὕτος codd.: corr. Heath || vv. 1148 sq. ante v. 1143 trai. Tournier

“Es scheint mir undenkbar, dass dieser nüchterne und unpassende Vers [1142] von Sophokles herrühre” commented Nauck, and the verse was condemned by Mekler too. If we look for more specific arguments, βάρος seems too strong a word for the context, whether taken as anger or depression of spirits. The correct emotional tone has already been given by θαυμάσας ἔχω. Secondly, the reference of τούτων after τῶνδε in the
preceding line is none too clear. Would Theseus really count Oedipus's address to his children and their words to him as two separate things, justifying a plural? Alternatively, would he, in his dismissal of βόρος, really treat it as something which might have emanated from, or be caused by the children? But very likely the interpolator did mean τοῦτον to refer to the children; cf. ἐκ τοῦτον at 1149, which unquestionably does so refer. He may also have thought that the γὰρ sentence (1143) had to explain θαυμάσσως ἔχω, and that to introduce it something stronger than surprise was required. But the sentence can very well be taken as developing the idea inherent in τοῦμο; indeed one might go so far as to say that the choice of τοῦμό in preference to something more obvious meaning “what I have to say myself” is best explained on precisely those lines.

But, as with the previous passage discussed, what follows is a non sequitur, or at any rate a vix sequitur. What Theseus should be doing is citing some previous episode to throw light on the present case: “I give you evidence to prove that I am not the man to win glory by self-praise, hence I shall not be doing it now.” If Theseus uses the present case as proof, his argument becomes transparently circular, quite apart from the fact that having said he will not use λόγοι to glorify himself he immediately does precisely that. There is also a technical argument, by no means conclusive, but carrying some weight, to support the idea that 1145–47 are intrusive. The καί concealed in χάπως (1148) gives a perfect connection with 1144 as we pass immediately from the general τοῖς δρωμένοις to the specifics of the recent struggle. If 1148 had been intended to follow 1147, ὡς δὲ would have been the likelier mode of progression.