

## SHORTER NOTES

LICHAS' LYING TALE: SOPHOCLES, *TRACHINIAE* 260 ff.\*

At. vv. 260 ff. of the *Trachiniae*, Lichas professes to explain Heracles' resentment against the city of Eurytus: in spite of their guest-friendship, that monarch had treated the great hero with insult (claiming that his sons surpassed Heracles at archery; addressing Heracles as a mere slave) and injury (the drunken Heracles was thrust out of doors). In retaliation, Heracles murdered Eurytus' son Iphitus and (on being released from the servitude to Omphale which was the penalty for that murder) destroyed the whole city of Eurytus. The story is told with much circumstantial detail. And yet within a hundred lines it is revealed as a fabrication.<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the anonymous messenger, Lichas is compelled to own (472 ff.) that lust for Iole led Heracles to sack Oechalia.

What is the source of this lying tale? Did Sophocles invent it himself, or did he take it over from an earlier treatment? Scholars in general have displayed a lack of interest in this question which I for one find surprising.<sup>2</sup> Of course, given our present state of knowledge, there can be no absolute certainty in the matter. But the issue is interesting in itself, and extremely important as regards the reaction of the audience towards Lichas' deceit.<sup>3</sup> If the contents of that deceit were in fact familiar to them, if they already occurred as the true state of affairs in an earlier account, then the audience too (as well as Deianeira) could be temporarily taken in and all the more surprised to learn the truth. If, on the contrary, the audience could apprehend Lichas' account as an invention by Sophocles, they might be the likelier to interpret it as an invention by Lichas too, and a certain tension would be generated as to when the truth would be discovered. There are analogies in Greek tragedy for either eventuality. The lying tale which is comprehended as such by the audience is in fact familiar from Sophocles' other plays (compare, for instance, the Paedagogus' report of Orestes' death in *El.* 681 ff. or the Merchant's false account in *Phil.* 542 ff.).<sup>4</sup> The misleading narrative that creates and then destroys audience expectation has a counterpart in Aeschylus' *Choeph.* 570 ff., where Orestes envisages himself as encountering and

\* T. C. W. Stinton kindly improved an earlier draft of this article, as did David Bain a later one.

<sup>1</sup> Not a total fabrication: see e.g. Winnington-Ingram, *Sophocles: an interpretation* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 332: 'The basic lie of Lichas is about motives, not about facts. Heracles was thrown out when drunk...; he *did* kill Iphitus and *was* in servitude to Omphale – both traditional features'. There is room for doubt as to the first of these three details, as we shall see. On the second and third see below p. 482 n. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Nothing about it, for instance, in U. Parlavantza-Friedrich's book *Täuschungsszenen in den Tragödien des Sophokles* (Berlin, 1969), which deals with the relevant scene from the *Trachiniae* on pp. 25 ff. (see also the Index s.v. 'Trachinierinnen').

<sup>3</sup> Typical of the failure to take this point are the remarks of G. H. Gellie, *Sophocles: a Reading* (Melbourne, 1972), p. 59: 'It would be very hard to find evidence of Lichas' dissembling in his long narrative speech. He has recited a set of mythical events which belong to Heracles' saga, and they have an authentic ring'. Likewise Parlavantza-Friedrich, sup. cit. [n. 2] pp. 27 f. (cf. pp. 97 f.) is reduced to excogitating a 'Psychologie des Lügens' from the complicated syntax of 262–73 and from such imponderables as the messenger's 'Kostüm und Gestik' (p. 29: against this latter suggestion see Mrs Easterling, *CR* 22 [1972], 21).

<sup>4</sup> For a general survey of these and other scenes of deception in Sophocles see the book by Parlavantza-Friedrich, sup. cit. [n. 2]. If G. Huxley, *GRBS* 8 (1967), 33 f. is right, *Phil.* 445 (Neoptolemus claims to have heard that Thersites still lives) is another dramatically significant lie.

despatching an Aegisthus seated on the throne of Agamemnon. The evidence of pre-Aeschylean vases depicting just such a schema strongly suggests that Aeschylus was here presenting, as a possibility not fulfilled, what an earlier account (most probably Stesichorus' *Oresteia*) represented as a reality.<sup>5</sup>

Which of the two interpretations are we to accept here? The only scholar to have seriously considered the matter, Tycho Wilamowitz,<sup>6</sup> concluded that the contents of Lichas' tale derived from a different version used in an earlier poem, and Lloyd-Jones<sup>7</sup> has recently commented on this hypothesis that it 'may quite easily be right'. But in fact several considerations tell against it. In the first place, there is no evidence at all for the existence of this version independently of and prior to the *Trachiniae*. Admittedly, Panyassis frs. 12–14 have been interpreted by V. J. Matthews (in his commentary *ad locc.*)<sup>8</sup> as relating to the second half of Lichas' story, that is to the picture of the drunken Heracles. But in fact, this interpretation is perfectly arbitrary, and it is not difficult to devise (without much thought) an alternative explanation<sup>9</sup> of the 'long-winded injunctions to sobriety at the banquet'<sup>10</sup> that these frs. constitute. Besides, Matthews should not have advanced his hypothesis without reflecting on Fraenkel's observation<sup>11</sup> that 'the Heracles-epic of Panyassis, a contemporary of Aeschylus, had, as far as we can see, no influence at all on Athens and its literature'. A red-figure vase by Euphronius<sup>12</sup> depicting Heracles' strife against the Eurytids has also been interpreted<sup>13</sup> as an independent reflection of the expulsion of a drunken Heracles as in Lichas' account. But again, the interpretation is by no means inevitable. Heracles is naked save for his lion-skin and has no weapons; but this hardly entails that he is inebriated, and he is fighting back soberly enough.

In the second place, it is not too difficult to detect the materials from which Sophocles could have fabricated Lichas' account. Heracles the drunkard was a familiar figure in ancient literature and art<sup>14</sup> and the motif could readily be transferred to the present place. The first part of Lichas' account seems to be a deliberate modification of the tradition found in *Od.* 8. 224 ff., where we are told that Apollo killed Eurytus for challenging him to an archery contest. The motif of the punishment of X for claiming to be superior to Y obviously fits better when Y is a god.<sup>15</sup> Note also that

<sup>5</sup> Cf., for instance, C. Robert, *Bild und Lied* (Philol. Unters. 5 [1881]), p. 179 n. 28; T. Zielinski, *Tragodumenon Libri Tres* (Cracow, 1925), p. 73; R. D. Dawe, *PCPS* 9 (1963), 55 = *Aeschylus* 1 (*Wege der Forschung* 87 [1974]), 237 f. For Euripidean examples of such exploitation of earlier versions of a myth (often to achieve a dramatically effective *suggestio falsi*) see Dodds's note on Eur. *Bacch.* 52, with p. xxxv of his Introduction.

<sup>6</sup> *Die dramatische Technik des Sophokles* (Philol. Unters. 22 [1917]), pp. 108 ff., esp. p. 112.

<sup>7</sup> *CQ* 22 (1972), 222 = *Blood for the Ghosts*, p. 229.

<sup>8</sup> *Panyassis of Halicarnassus: text and commentary* (Mnemos. Suppl. 33, 1974), pp. 76 ff., quoted without due warning by Easterling, *Sophocles, Trachiniae* (Cambridge, 1982), p. 15 n. 25.

<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, M. L. West, *CP* 71 (1976), 173.

<sup>10</sup> To quote Lloyd-Jones, *Gnomon* 48 (1976), 504.

<sup>11</sup> *Aeschylus, Agamemnon*, II (Oxford, 1951), p. 471 n. 3, citing Wilamowitz, *Eur. Her.* 1<sup>2</sup> 67 and *Hell. Dicht.* 1. 100. Fraenkel's remarks are also overlooked by Winnington-Ingram, *sup. cit.* [n. 1], though they reinforce his statement that 'one cannot assume that [Panyassis' epic] was widely known in Athens'.

<sup>12</sup> New York 12. 231. 2: ARV<sup>2</sup> 319. 6 (c. 500). For a full description see G. Richter, *AJA* 20 (1916), 128 f.

<sup>13</sup> C. Robert, *Die gr. Heldensage* 2. 2 (1921), p. 583, followed by Burkert, *Mus. Helv.* 29 (1972), 81 n. 33.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance G. K. Galinsky, *The Heracles Theme* (1972), pp. 81 ff. How Heracles was forcibly expelled after failing to win Iole's hand in the pre-Sophoclean version(s) (see below p. 482 n. 20) we cannot tell, but the proverb *πρὸς δύο οὐδ'* 'Ἡρακλῆς reminds us that inebriation is not the only possible method.

<sup>15</sup> For examples of the motif see e.g. West, *CQ* 29 (1979), 3 n. 5.

we may have an analogous process in *Od.* 21. 27 ff., where we are told that Heracles killed Iphitus though he was a guest in his own house (ξείνον ἐόντα κατέκτανεν ὦι ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, | χρέτλιος, οὐδὲ θεῶν ὅπιν αἰδέσασ' οὐδὲ τράπεζαν, | τὴν ἧν οἱ παρέθηκεν). This motif seems to have been transferred by Sophocles to Iphitus' father and his treatment of Heracles at 262 ff.: αὐτὸν ἐλθόντ' ἐς δόμους ἐφέστιον | ξένον παλαιὸν ὄντα... | (observe its absence from Lichas' description of Iphitus' murder [270 ff.]).

The final and most important consideration is that it is immensely difficult to reconstruct any coherent independent tradition within which the two parts of Lichas' story, the insult and injury against Heracles, could play an intelligent rôle. What would be the point of such an alternative tradition anyway? Its only conceivable purpose is to provide a scheme of events in which Iole is conspicuous by her absence. It would be dangerous to dogmatise as to the exact details of the version(s) with which the audience may be expected to have been familiar. But an archery-contest with Iole as prize must surely have featured in any version known to them: though only attested in late literary sources (usefully assembled by Schwartz, *Scholia Euripidea* 2. 71) it is presupposed by an amphora now in Madrid,<sup>16</sup> and the underlying notion of the bride as a competition-prize is a widespread and primitive folk-tale motif<sup>17</sup> which, scholars generally recognise, must have belonged *ab initio* to the tale of Heracles' sacking of Oechalia. What poet would wish to devise a narrative from which Iole was so conspicuously missing? Sophocles, in order (as scholars<sup>18</sup> have long realised) that a special dramatic effect may be achieved: Iole's rôle is at first concealed, and the truth about it emerges in dribbles (351 ff., 379 ff., 475 ff.). Only within the context that Sophocles has so carefully created does the story fulfil its purpose.

Let me sum up: practically every scholar (including Tycho Wilamowitz)<sup>19</sup> accepts that the dramatic *environment* of Lichas' lying speech is Sophocles' invention. I would argue that the *content* is his invention too.<sup>20</sup> Could the audience be expected to perceive

<sup>16</sup> 10916: ABV 508 = Brommer, *Vasenlisten*<sup>3</sup> 55. A1. The exact interpretation of this work of art is not free from problems (cf. Richter cited above [n. 12], p. 130), but that it does presuppose Iole and the archery-contest seems clear.

<sup>17</sup> Compare the story of Oenomaus and Hippodameia and see in general Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*<sup>2</sup> H 310, 326 1. 2, 335, Nilsson, *Geschichte der gr. Religion* 1<sup>3</sup>. 19 f. etc.

<sup>18</sup> E.g. Tycho Wilamowitz, *sup. cit.* [n. 6], pp. 100 ff., 142 ff.; P. Friedländer, *Herakles (Philol. Unters.* 19 [1907]), p. 65 n. 2, p. 66 n. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Tycho, *sup. cit.* [n. 6], pp. 109 f. assumes that the ἔγκλημα μικρόν (361) which the messenger says Heracles trumped up to justify his attack on Oechalia is to be identified with Lichas' story of Eurytus and his insults and injury to the hero. That is by no means a necessary assumption. I cannot fathom what the same scholar intends when he asserts (p. 112) that the inescapable contradiction between Lichas' account and the true one would be incomprehensible if Sophocles had invented the former.

Nor can I agree with Winnington-Ingram's too dogmatic claim (*sup. cit.* [n. 1], p. 332) that 'Lichas would never have invented so discreditable a story' as Heracles' drunkenness. Deianeira would find it less discreditable than the truth.

<sup>20</sup> As for the rest of Lichas' story – Heracles' revenge upon Iphitus and the consequent year's servitude to Omphale –, the former is mentioned at *Od.* 21. 27 ff. and Pherecydes *FgrHist* 3 F 82, and the latter at vv. 69 ff. (cf. 248 ff.) of the *Trachiniae* itself. The two details cannot, therefore, be intended to be perceived as invention on Lichas' part, and we are absolved from considering in the present place the theory of Tycho Wilamowitz ([*sup. cit.* n. 6], pp. 101 ff. and 108 ff.) followed by Burkert ([*sup. cit.* n. 13], p. 81 n. 31) that Sophocles was the first to link the two details to the story of Oechalia's sack. For reasons independent of the issue considered in this article I find this theory unlikely: certainly the audience would have grasped more clearly the boundaries of Lichas' deceit if they recognised the other two details' connection with Oechalia's sack from an earlier account.

this? That is a separate issue, and (since scholars for their part have failed to perceive the invention) a sensitive one. The general issue of a given audience's knowledge of the myths in Greek tragedy is still too controversial for a decisive answer to be possible here, though the manner in which the present play's prologue allusively refers to Eurystheus (35), Ceyx (40) and Omphale (69 f.) without naming them, suggests considerable awareness. The fact that in the case of the lying tales of the *Electra* and *Philoctetes* (above p. 480) the audience is clearly told that the narrators intend a deception might be taken as implying that some warning is a prerequisite, and for reasons of dramatic technique such an explicit warning is out of the question in the *Trachiniae*.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, given that, in one scholar's words, 'Iole ist von Anfang an und stets nur der Anlass für Herakles' Tod',<sup>22</sup> that Iole featured in Creophylus of Samos' *Oechalias Halosis*,<sup>23</sup> and that Iole and the sack of her city are immediately followed by Heracles' reception on Olympus as early as [Hes.] fr. 229 MW,<sup>24</sup> it does not seem impossible (even if it cannot be proved) that several of the audience would be surprised, and even suspicious, at Iole's convenient absence from Lichas' narrative.

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<sup>21</sup> But Heracles' liaison with Omphale has already been hinted at (69 f.), and this *might* have led the audience to expect a like mention of his passion for Iole.

<sup>22</sup> Burkert [sup. cit. n. 13], p. 84. According to *Σ Od.* 21. 22 (cf. Eustath. 1899. 38) Homer was unaware of Heracles' passion for Iole, an Aristarchean dogma which we are not obliged to accept (cf. Severyns, *Le Cycle Épique dans l'école d'Aristarque* [1928], p. 192).

<sup>23</sup> Fr. 1 of this poem is usually interpreted as an address by Heracles to Iole, and Callimachus epigr. 6 Pf. is a more explicit testimony to her importance in that epic.

<sup>24</sup> A forthcoming study of the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* by M. L. West confirms that the final stages of this work are the product of an *Attic* poet.

### THUCYDIDES AND THE PLAGUE: A FURTHER FOOTNOTE

In their paper about the Plague of Athens<sup>1</sup> Dr Wylie and Mr Stubbs have made so many appreciative comments on our own article on the same subject<sup>2</sup> that it may seem ungrateful to find fault with their conclusions in any way. Since, however, silence on our part might be taken to indicate that they had fully converted us to their point of view, we feel obliged to offer the following observations.

The authors put forward two new suggestions for the identity of the Plague: leptospirosis and tularaemia. We venture to oppose the suggestion that the Plague was leptospirosis with some trepidation, having in mind that Dr Wylie has an international reputation for his excellent work on the pathogenesis of this disease.<sup>3</sup> We feel, however, that there are serious difficulties in accepting this diagnosis.

First, there is the fact (mentioned by W. and S.) that jaundice is a prominent symptom in many cases of leptospirosis.<sup>4</sup> Thucydides does not mention anything that could plausibly be construed as meaning that sufferers from the Plague were often jaundiced. The fact that death from leptospirosis is much more often due to renal than

<sup>1</sup> J. A. H. Wylie and H. W. Stubbs, 'The Plague of Athens 430–428 B.C.: Epidemic and Epizootic', *CQ* n.s. 33 (1983), 6–11, henceforth W. and S. We assume that the exclusion by the title of the later brief recurrence is without significance.

<sup>2</sup> 'Thucydides and the Plague of Athens', *CQ* n.s. 29 (1979), 282–300.

<sup>3</sup> 'Relative importance of the renal and hepatic lesions in experimental leptospirosis icterohaemorrhagica', *J. Path. Bact.* 58 (1946), 351–65.

<sup>4</sup> In the U.K. about half of the diagnosed leptospiral infections produce jaundice. Topley and Wilson's *Principles of Bacteriology, Virology and Immunity*, 6th edition (1975), Vol. 2, p. 2230.