

Perversions of Sustenance in Euripides' *Troades*

Euripides composed the *Troades* for the City Dionysia in 415 BCE, which gives rise to much scholarship about possible connections with events in the Peloponnesian War. The overall function of myth in Greek tragedy, the relatively few direct references to Athens in the Trojan War and the extant parts of Euripides' trilogy (cf. Scodel 1980), and the narrow window between the destruction of Melos and Euripides' production schedule (van Erp Taalman Kip, 1987) all make a direct comparison between the play and current events unlikely. However, there are enough parallels from the period, particularly the Athenian destruction of other Greek cities (see Goff, 2009), to consider the broader political and social fallout from the war in the context of the play. Water, wine, food, and transportation (mostly involving ships) are all disrupted from their peacetime functions, both on and off stage.

One relevant passage is the choral lament from 197-229, in which the Trojan women express their wish for the best of the options in Greece as a "pitiable slave" (206). Echoing the list of communities given by Poseidon in the prologue, they typically couch these venues in agricultural terms, including "the eddies of the Eurotas," (i.e., Sparta, at 210), which they reject. These are not simply choral periphrases. For the Athenian audience, several of these locales are associated with agriculture and related functions. Corinth, "watered by the Peirene" (210), sent out colonies after food shortages (Garnsey, 1988), but in doing so leveraged their strategic location to foster alliances as a *metropolis*. Meanwhile Thessaly, "the sacred land fed by Peneius, which the chorus describe as "teeming with blossoming and fruitful bounty" (216-17 ὄλβω βριθεῖν... εὐθαλεῖ τ' εὐκαρπ<ε>ία), was known for its grain surplus, although it frequently suffered shortfalls (Garnsey). Sicily, home of Mount Aetna (220), was both a threat and a target

during the Athenian expedition because, unlike the Athenians, they did not have to import grain (Thucydides VI.20.4, discussed in Kallet, 2002).

This brings us to the “rich city of Theseus,” Athens (219). Its increasing dependence on imported grain may be suggested in Athena’s inclusion of Euboea (84) in destruction of the Greek fleet in the prologue to the play. Euboea was not an important part of the Trojan story, but it was the main source of imported grain for Athens in this period (Moreno, 2007) as well as a locus for shipwrecks, and a discreet parallelism in topic helps tie the prologue to the remainder of the play (cf. Dunn, 1996, and Goff, 2009). In any case, the themes of sustenance and travel are intertwined and increasingly disrupted as the drama proceeds. After Talthybius takes Astyanax to his doom, the chorus sings of Telamon, ruler of “bee-nurturing” Salamis and Athena’s first olive shoot (798-802). The scene immediately shifts to the Greeks sacking Troy at the spot where Heracles avenged Laomedon’s ingratitude, rendering void Zeus’s compensation for that other “Phrygian boy,” Ganymede, accomplishing the “loveliest servitude” (824 *καλλίσταν λατρείαν*) of filling the golden chalices. Despite the promise of bounty for all, Laomedon’s behavior means destruction even for the innocent (Wohl, 2015), just as much as Paris’s “insult to hospitality” (866 *ξεναπάτης*). The lament goes down to the seashore (830; see Craik, 1990 and Dué, 2006 *inter alios* re broader maritime implications of Euripides’ sexual imagery). As Cassandra’s prophecy reminds us about the fate of Odysseus’s men (435-444), food-related impieties will only continue. Argumentation and Sophistic rhetoric help no one. Echoing language used earlier to describe Thessalian abundance, Menelaus, responding to Hecuba about transportation to Troy, fat-shames Helen (1050 *μείζον βριθος ἢ πάροιθ’ ἔχει*;) after she has pleaded for her life, with implications of “Phrygian” excess. In so doing he incorporates her perceived lack of *gravitas* in argument. Once again, sustenance becomes an index of what

women have lost at Troy. When the audience remembers the common thread of sea water in the prologue, it also is an index of what could be lost for Greece elsewhere.

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