

Three Empedoclean Compounds and Empedocles' Evergreen Authority

It has recently been argued that in the fragments of Empedocles, the dominant paradigm for both cosmological and poetological purposes is that of craft (Iribarren, 2018). The poet-philosopher would thus have expanded and elaborated traditional poetological metaphors, such as those drawn from carpentry, into a unified vision of the cosmos. On the other hand, one finds extravagant claims to the effect that Empedocles' vegetal imagery hints at a mystical teaching growing up inside of you until you realize that "the whole world ... is just buds on the tree that you are" (Kingsley, 2003, 556). This position is supported in part by an interpretation of a solely Empedoclean word: λιπόξυλος, usually translated as "defective," but—to judge from its etymology—meaning more literally "lacking in wood." Empedocles uses the word twice, in urging the reader to pay closer attention if the argument or proof seemed to be "lacking in wood" (fr. 21, 71). But ξύλον, "wood," while sometimes designating live wood, is typically used of wood that has been cut for burning or even already fashioned into something (LSJ s.v.). So it would seem that the most likely interpretation would be in line with an emphasis on Empedocles' craft metaphors (so Wright, 1981, ad loc.). However, there are numerous lines of inquiry that support an emphasis on plants instead—if nothing so emphatic as "the tree that you are." This paper will pursue two of them: first, the use of ξύλον in Empedocles' account of the production of wine (fr. 81), which this paper will argue must have referred to live wood and therefore makes λιπόξυλος more likely to be evocative of a living plant; and second, two other solely Empedoclean compounds: ἐμπεδόκαρπα, "constant-fruited," and ἐμπεδόφυλλον, "constant-leafed" or "evergreen" (fr. 77, 78). According to the authors who preserved them, these words were used by Empedocles when discussing a special sort of tree and ivy, respectively. Despite the loss of context, the obvious play upon his own name, which is not

paralleled by anything related to craft, makes it reasonable to conclude that this author's preference was for a poetics of vegetal authority. And this, of course, has a prominent role in early Greek poetry, as in e.g. the Muses' gift of the laurel wand to Hesiod. So, after considering the significance of those three Empedoclean compounds for the question of the relative priority of craft or plant imagery, this paper will briefly consider how the prior poetological use of plant imagery may have influenced Empedocles' "evergreen" authority.

Bibliography

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