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THE GEOGRAPHY OF EURIPIDES'
IPHIGENEIA AMONG THE TAURIANS

It has often been asserted that the geography in *I. T.* is confused.¹ The debate over exactly where Euripides visualised the action of the drama centres on three passages: in all other places the information he supplies is not only internally consistent, but accords with Herodotus' account of the Tauric Chersonese (*Hdt.* 4.99). When Iphigeneia in the prologue finally divulges her whereabouts, she says that Artemis had brought her “ἔς τήνδ' . . . Ταύρων χθόνα” (30). Apollo had been equally explicit in his instruction to Orestes (85). With the exception of the passages to be discussed, there is nothing in the play to imply that Euripides did not imagine it taking place in the peninsula extending from southern Scythia which Herodotus had carefully described. An examination of two of the disputed passages will I hope demonstrate that the supposed problems they present are merely matters of interpretation. If my conclusions about these two passages are accepted, then the third problem can be resolved by a minor textual emendation, long ago suggested, but now completely ignored.

1. *I. T.* 422–38

In the first stasimon the chorus describe, in allusive mythical terms, the route which the newcomers, Orestes and Pylades, must have taken to reach the Tauric Land: but however ornamental the language, the voyage described is actually one of the only three seaways through the Black Sea then navigable.² The chorus have already suggested that the strangers must have passed through “where the dark seas meet” (κυάνεαι κυάνεαι σύνοδοι θαλάσσης 393), that is, the channel from the Propontis into the Black Sea itself, through the “Thracian” Bosphorus (394). In the second strophe, they continue (422–26):

¹Hans Strohm, *Iphigenie im Taurerland* (Munich 1949) ad 124; Helen H. Bacon, *Barbarians in Greek Tragedy* (New Haven 1961) 158.

²M. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (Oxford 1922) 61.

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πῶς τὰς συνδρομάδας πέτρας,
 πῶς Φινειίδας ἰάυ-
 πνουσι ἄκτὰς ἐπέρα-
 σαν παρ' ἄλιον αἰγιαλὸν ἐπ' Ἀμφιτρί-
 τας ῥοθίῳ δραμόντες,³

They visualise their visitors sailing past the Symplegades (422); then they assume that they must next have turned northwards along the coast (παρ' ἄλιον αἰγιαλὸν 425) of Salmydessus in Thrace (Φινειίδας . . . ἄκτὰς 423-24). By his wording in the rhetorical question “πῶς . . . ἐπέρα-/σαν” (423-24) Euripides shows that he was aware of the reputation which this coast had for danger (Aesch. *Pr.* 746; Xen. *An.* 7.5.12). Thence, the chorus imagine, they will have steered in the direction of the island which lay opposite the mouth of the Danube, Leuke or Leuke Akte (435-38):

τὰν πολυόρνιθον ἐπ' αἰ-
 αν, λευκὰν ἄκτάν, Ἀχιλῆ-
 ος, δρόμους καλλισταδίους,
 ἄξεινον κατὰ πόντον;

Here we encounter the first of the alleged problems in the geography of the play. Bacon comments that Euripides “manages to convey the impression that Leuke Akte . . . is Orestes' destination.”⁴ By this stage, of course, the chorus have musically accompanied the strangers at least halfway along their voyage from the Symplegades: that after two strophes and an antistrophe describing this Pontic voyage Euripides diverts their attention elsewhere should not be interpreted as meaning that he believed that the Taurians lived on Leuke. Bacon surely ignores the poetic method in choral lyric by which the tragedians, following Stesichorus, Pindar, and Bacchylides, allowed themselves episodic glimpses into what in epic would be sustained narrative. This ode is not a Periplus of the Black Sea.

From the first stasimon, then, it is clear that Euripides was aware that to reach the Tauric peninsula a ship must pass through the “Thracian” Bosphorus, turn left up the coast of Thrace, and pass the mouth of the Danube. For poetic reasons he chooses not to detail with the remain-

³The text reproduced throughout is that of the new O.C.T., J. Diggle, ed. (Oxford 1981).

⁴Bacon (note 1 above) 158. On the meaning of ἐπ' αἶαν, cf. M. Platnauer, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Oxford 1938) ad. loc.

ing itinerary, which involved skirting the coast of the Black Sea which curved north-eastwards to the Chersonese.

2. *I. T.* 123–25

The next alleged problem is also a question of interpretation. In the lines introducing the parodos, Iphigeneia⁵ adjures to keep silent “you who inhabit (ναίοντες) the twin colliding rocks of the inhospitable sea” (123–25):

εὐφαιεῖτ', ὦ
πόντου δισσὰς συγχωρούσας
πέτρας ἀξίνου ναίοντες.

Bacon here succumbs to literalism: “. . . he suggests that the Taurians lived *on* or beside the Symplegades.”⁶ Euripides, of course, is in the first stasimon perfectly clear that the Taurians lived at a considerable distance from the Clashing Rocks; he is exploiting for poetic purposes the intimate connexion in the Greek mind between the Black Sea and the rocks which were thought to mark its entrance. The rocks in the straits of the “Thracian” Bosphorus were so closely associated with the sea beyond that they could be invoked in its place. By a similar kind of metonymy “the Nile” stands for “Egypt” at *Helen* 491 and 671. Euripides also uses ναίω transitively with a central symbol of an extensive area in Athena’s speech at the conclusion of *Ion*. When the goddess describes the four Ionian tribes to whom Ion’s sons will give their names as σκόπελον οἱ ναίουσ' ἐμόν (1578), she does not mean that all the Ionians in Attica live on the Athenian acropolis. This evocation of the Symplegades cannot therefore be used to accuse Euripides of geographical error; in *I. T.* the rocks are the mental, as well as the physical, barrier between darkness and light, the unknown and the known, barbarism and civilisation. Thus when Iphigeneia says that she will ensure that Pylades can escape out from the “dark rocks” (746), it is a symbolic way of promising to see him safely out of the Black Sea into the Greek world.

⁵Diggle attributes 123–25 to Iphigeneia, following a suggestion by O. Taplin in *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 194, n. 3.

⁶Bacon (note 1 above) 158.

3. I. T. 135

The Taurians, then, live neither on Leuke, nor on the Symplegades. So far, nothing has been found in the text inconsistent with a setting on the coast of the Tauric Chersonese, familiar to Euripides' audience from Herodotus. There is, however, a third and more convincing passage cited by those who deny coherent geography to the playwright. This is the chorus' apparent assertion that they have left Europe. When they open the parodos with their address to Artemis, they sing that they are the servants of her priestess, and have come (132–36):

Ἑλλάδος εὐίππου πύργους
καὶ τείχη χόρτων τ' εὐδένδρων
ἐξαλλάξασ' Εὐρώπαν,
πατρώων οἴκων ἔδρας.

The sentiment is exactly what is to be expected: Euripidean choruses in exile tend to reflect yearningly on the homes they have left behind (*Hel.* 1465–78, *Hec.* 475–83). The difficulty is Εὐρώπαν. No Athenian who was influenced by Herodotus' Scythian excursus, as Euripides plainly was,⁷ could conceive that the Taurians lived anywhere *but* in Europe. Further, it is hard to accept that the poet who elsewhere in the same play shows that he is aware not only that the “Thracian” Bosphorus divided Europe from Asia (396–97), but also that the voyager to the Taurians must go north past Thrace and the Danube (422–38), could consider that the chorus had left Europe for anywhere else. Editors have

⁷Much of the historian's language in his discussion of the Taurians' customs (*Hdt.* 4.103) reappears in poetic disguise in the tragedy. The temple of Artemis, which in Herodotus is on a cliff-top, is situated immediately by the sea in the play (1196). Herodotus describes how the Taurians dealt with their sacrificial victims: their bodies were pushed over the cliff on which the temple stood (τὸ σῶμα ἀπὸ τοῦ κρηνοῦ ὠθέουσι κάτω) while their heads were impaled (τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν ἀνασταυροῦσι). These twin practices surely suggested to Euripides the punishment for the Greek miscreants planned by Thoas (1429–30):

λαβόντες αὐτοῦς ἢ κατὰ στύφλου πέτρας
ρίψωμεν ἢ σκόλοφι πηξωμεν δέμας;

But most of all, the wording of Herodotus' statement that the Taurians sacrificed shipwrecked sailors and Greeks (τοὺς τε ναυηγούς καὶ τοὺς ἄν λάβωσι Ἑλλήνων) informs many lines in the play where this gruesome custom is discussed (e.g., 72, 276–78, 775–76). The coincidence of material and language is too great for it to be supposed that Euripides was not enormously indebted to the historian's account of the Taurians, even if he was not his main source.

produced baffling justifications of the MSS: England commented “The Greeks did not consider the north coast of the Euxine as part of Europe.”⁸ All the ancient evidence, however, contradicts England’s statement. The traditional boundary between the continents of Europe and Asia had always been the two Bosphoruses, Lake Maeotis, and the rivers Tanais or Phasis (Hecataeus I *FGrHist* 195). Hecataeus’ Scythian material was all attributed by Stephanus of Byzantium to his Εὐρώπη (F. 184–90). Herodotus chose the Phasis as the eastern boundary, but this in no way altered the continental attribution of Scythia and the Tauric peninsula (*Hdt.* 4.45). The author of the Hippocratic treatise περὶ ἀέρων ὑδάτων τόπων was explicit that the Scythians were the paradigmatic Europeans (*Aër.* 12), and that Lake Maeotis was the boundary between the two continents (*ibid.* 13). In Euripides’ own genre, whoever composed *Prometheus Bound* had no doubts that the “Cimmerian” Bosphorus divided the two continents, which indicates that the Tauric Chersonese must have been thought of as *especially* European, since it constituted one half of the traditional boundary (Aesch. *Pr.* 729–35).⁹ In the first half of the fourth century, Xenophon used “Europe” *exclusively* of the Scythians’ domain: “In Europe the Scythians rule, the Maeotians are ruled” (*Mem.* 2.1.10). All the ancient authorities are therefore unanimous that the north coast of the Black Sea was European.

It is not enough to say, in defence of the MSS, that Euripides and his audience had no mental grasp of geography and were unused to maps. The Athenians had been sailing to the Black Sea for at least a hundred and fifty years before the production of *I. T.*, and in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* it is Strepsiades’ ignorance of geography, when a map is produced, which raises a laugh (*Nu.* 206–17). Nor is it sufficient, with Bacon, to cite *I. T.* 179–80 (. . . ὕμνων τ’/Ἀσιητῶν σοι βάρβαρον ὄχλῳ) as evidence that the play was set in Asia.¹⁰ It is the Greek chorus which delivers these lines, and the epithet “Asiatic” in musical contexts, especially laments, is widely attested.¹¹

Another Euripidean passage gives the clue as to what has happened in the MSS. In *Andromache*, the chorus are singing of how Pe-

⁸E. B. England, *The Iphigenia Among the Tauri of Euripides* (London 1893) ad loc.

⁹Cf. M. Griffith, *Prometheus Bound* (Cambridge 1983) ad 734–35.

¹⁰Bacon (note 1 above) 9.

¹¹E.g., Eur. *Cyc.* 443; *Erechtheus* fr. 370 Nauck.

leus helped Heracles to raze Troy, and, in common with him, brought fame home again to Greece (*Andr.* 800–801):

κοινὰν τὰν εὐκλειαν ἔχοντ'
Εὐρώπαν ἀφικέσθαι.

Here the context clearly requires Εὐρώπαν but all the MSS except L, and the second hand in V, read Εὐρώταν. The paleographical difference between the two words, which is only the discrepancy between π and τ, explains the mistake in both plays.¹²

As long ago as 1694 Joshua Barnes suggested, in his spectacular edition of Euripides, that at *I. T.* 135 Εὐρώπαν be altered to Εὐρώταν.¹³ Few editors, however, have incorporated it into their texts: the most recent I can find is Paley's edition of 1880.¹⁴ Prinz and Wecklein printed the MSS reading, but saw the problem, because they suggested "ἐξαλλάξασα θεράπναν/. . ."¹⁵ Gilbert Murray remarked in his O.C.T. that these lines were "vix sani," but printed the MSS reading.¹⁶ Platnauer apparently failed to grasp the point of Barnes' suggestion, for he dismisses it as "worse than needless. Why should all the chorus come from Sparta?"¹⁷ Strohm, Parmentier and Grégoire, Sansone, and Diggle all ignore the anomaly and print Εὐρώπαν.¹⁸

There is, in fact, no reason at all why the chorus should not have come from near the Eurotas. Their enthusiasm for Artemis' Delian birthplace does not make them necessarily νησιωτικάι.¹⁹ We learn nothing of their background except that they are Greeks (132), that their town was plundered by enemies, and that they were enslaved (1108–12). Laconia and Argos, whose horses were famous from Homeric times (cf. ἀπ' Ἄργεος ἵπποβότοιο *Iliad* 2.287 etc.) are perhaps suggested by Ἑλλάδος εὐίππου (132). In defence of the MSS, Strohm comments on χόρτων τ' εὐδένδρων (*I. T.* 134) that Europe was thought to be more fertile than Asia; but this goes against the ancient

¹²Exactly the same mistake was also made at *Rhesus* 29, where εὐρώτας was read instead of Εὐρώπας, mother of Sarpedon.

¹³Joshua Barnes, *Euripidis Quae Extant Omnia* (Cambridge 1694).

¹⁴F. A. Paley, *Euripides*² III (London 1880).

¹⁵R. Prinz and N. Wecklein, *Euripidis Fabulae* II Pars I (Leipzig 1898) (Wecklein).

¹⁶G. Murray, *Euripidis Fabulae*³ II (Oxford 1913).

¹⁷Platnauer (note 4 above) ad 133.

¹⁸Parmentier and Grégoire, *Euripide* IV (Paris 1959) (Budé); D. Sansone, *Iphigenia in Tauris* (Leipzig 1981) (Teubner). Weil also printed the MSS reading, but he did record Barnes' suggestion in his app. crit. (*Iphigénie en Tauride*³ [Paris 1907]).

¹⁹Cf. Platnauer (note 4 above) ad 1098.

consensus (cf. *Aēr.* 12). On the other hand, the vegetation around the Eurotas was famous, indeed frequently celebrated elsewhere by Euripides himself (*Hel.* 210–11, 349–50; *I.A.* 179).

It is possible that the corruption has crept in from the similar passage in the first strophe of the first stasimon, where the chorus describe the gadfly which pursued Io as (396–97)

Ἀσιήτιδα γαῖαν
Εὐρώπας διαμείψας

and then go on to ask who the Greek arrivals can be (398–40):

τίνες ποτ' ἄρα τὸν εὐυδρον δονακόχλοον
λιπόντες Εὐρώταν. . . .

Unlike the chorus, Io and her gadfly did of course cross from Europe to Asia. Like the chorus, Orestes and Pylades did leave Greece: the chorus here suggest that the young men have left, as they themselves had, the Eurotas. Perhaps two successive choral odes opening with remarkably similar material and wording led to scribal confusion, causing a minute mistake of which the exact reverse is testified elsewhere in the Euripidean MSS. Furthermore, a revival of Barnes' neglected emendation restores consistency and accuracy to the play's setting in the Tauric Chersonese.

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