



Aeschylus and the Mysteries: A Suggestion

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AESCHYLUS AND THE MYSTERIES: A SUGGESTION

In 1977 ANNA CALDERONE published a Sicelot *skyphos* recently excavated from the region of the Acropolis of Gela¹. This vase is datable to the second half of the fourth century B. C. and is identified as the work of a member of the school of the Lentini Painter. One side shows a satyr conversing with a maenad. On the other, Heracles and Papa Silenus stand by an altar with a stele and votive *pinakes* in the background. Heracles, wearing a lion-skin but youthful and beardless, is about to make a libation. Silenus makes ready to sacrifice a piglet.

CALDERONE demonstrates that a chthonic sacrifice is being shown. As she points out, piglets were sacrificed by Eleusinian initiates²; pigs were also sacrificed to Demeter and Persephone in connection with the Thesmophoria³. The presence of *pinakes* is characteristic of chthonic shrines⁴.

Since Silenus is wearing a stage-costume, this sacrificial scene presumably takes its inspiration from an episode of a satyr play. CALDERONE makes the attractive suggestion that the play in question is Sophocles' satyric *ἐπι Ταυνάρῳ σάτυροι* (otherwise cited as the *Ἐπιταυνάριοι*, which may or may not be the same play as Sophocles' 'Heracles Satyricus')⁵.

She bases this suggestion on what is now cited as Soph. fr. 198a RADT, τοιγάρ τιώδητ' φυλάξαι χοῖρον ὥστε δεσμίαν.

This suggestion is plausible (although it fails to explain why the vase-painter chose to represent Heracles as so youthful). This play by Sophocles is the only known satyr play to place Heracles in a chthonic situation: its subject was presumably the final labor of that hero, as he is supposed to have descended to the Underworld in order to fetch Cerberus by way of a cave at Taenarum (Eur. H. 23; Ps.-Apollodorus 'Library' 2,122 – 126). One might readily imagine that this play could have contained a pig-sacrifice: Heracles (so we might suppose) undergoes a burlesque initiation in order to become prepared for his adventures in the Underworld⁶. Magical ceremonies and other forms of magical transaction, after all, are familiar satyric fare

¹ A. CALDERONE, *Echi del teatro satiresco sofocleo su uno SKYPHOS proveniente da Gela*, ArchCl 29:2 (1977) 267 – 276 [n. b. – this fascicle bears the copyright date 1980].

² *Ib.* 271 f.

³ Jane HARRISON, *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*³ (Cambridge 1922) 121 – 125; M. DETIENNE and J. P. VERNANT, *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec* (Paris 1979) 192 f.

⁴ So CALDERONE, *op. cit.* 272.

⁵ Cf. Stefan RADT, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Göttingen 1978) 4.231 with reff.

⁶ For the value of this sort of initiation as preparation for the Underworld cf. most recently SUSAN GUETTEL COLE, *New Evidence for the Mysteries of Dionysus*, GRBS 21 (1980) 223 – 238.

(compare, for example, the resurrection ceremony in Python's 'Agen' and the rejuvenation scene in Aeschylus' presumptively satyric '[Dionysou] Trophoi')⁷.

So let us provisionally accept CALDERONE's excellent proposal that this Gela vase reflects a scene of Sophocles' 'Satyrs on Taenarum' and the consequence that in the course of the play Heracles sacrificed to Demeter⁸, either to gain admittance to the Underworld or as part of an initiation designed to prepare him for this adventure. Granted this conclusion, a couple of further suggestions deserve to be thrown out.

First, there exists one reference (fr. 327 a RADT) to Sophocles' 'Cerberus' and it is not difficult to consider this a reference to the 'Satyrs on Taenarum'. We have however seen that no similar certainty exists in the case of the 'Heracles Satyricus'. But this is fr. 225 RADT, belonging to that play:

... συνέλεγον τὰ ξύλα, ὡς ἐκκαυμάτων
μῆ μοι μεταξὺ προσδεήσῃν ...

Pollux (10, 110 [2.223, 8 BETHE]) quotes these line with the comment προσθετέον δὲ τῷ μαγεῖρω καὶ ξύλα καύσιμα καὶ κληματίδας καὶ ἐκκαύματα. Two interpretations of this fragment are possible. Other satyr plays, such as Ion of Chios' 'Omphale' and Euripides' 'Syleus', made comic capital of Heracles' gluttony; Sophocles may always have done the same in a purely secular setting. But we should remember, first, that a sacrificial priest could be called a μάγειρος⁹, and also that there is evidence that the celebrants cooked and ate sacrificial pigs in connection with the Thesmophoria both at Athens and Delos¹⁰. So it is at least possible that fr. 225 RADT represents the same scene as fr. 198 a RADT and consequently that 'Satyrs on Taenarum' and 'Heracles Satyricus' indeed were the same play.

Next, there is a body of ancient evidence (Aristotle, E. N. 3, 2 p. 1111 a 10 with an interesting Scholium ad loc.; Aelian, V. H. 5, 19, and Clement of Alexandria, Strom. II p. 461) that Aeschylus repeatedly revealed the secrets of the mysteries and was all but lynched for his efforts. The most informative of these sources, the Scholium on Aristotle, states that Aeschylus revealed the secrets of the mysteries in the five plays 'Toxotides', 'Priestesses', 'Sisyphus Petrocylistes', 'Iphigeneia', and 'Oedipus'. For want of evidence, modern scholarship has never quite known what to make of this information¹¹. The new Gela skyphos, however, may cast the first real light on this question.

At 'Deipnosophistae' 9, 17 p 375 E Athenaeus gives three fragments of Aeschylus, registered as frs. 616–618 METTE (from the context it is by no means certain that these fragments are quoted from the same scene of a single play):

⁷ D. F. SUTTON, *The Greek Satyr Play* (Meisenheim am Glan 1980) 34 and 75–81.

⁸ Pigs were especially sacred to that goddess: DETIENNE-VERNANT, *op. cit.* 15 with reff.

⁹ DETIENNE-VERNANT, *ib.* 17.

¹⁰ DETIENNE-VERNANT, *ib.* 192f. The cooking and eating of pigs at the Attic Thesmophoria mentioned by various Scholia on Aristophanes, *Frogs* 338 (mis-cited as 388 by DETIENNE-VERNANT) must be distinct from the ritual burial and exhumation of pigs described by a Scholium on Lucian, *dial. metr.* 2.1 quoted and discussed by HARRISON, *loc. cit.* See further L. R. FARNELL, *The Cults of the Greek City-States* (repr. Chicago 1971) 8.88–91.

¹¹ Discussed by (e.g.) E. LOBECK, *Aglaophemus* (Königsberg 1829) 77ff. and G. MURRAY, *Aeschylus* (Oxford 1940) 151f.

- fr. 616 M. ἐγὼ δὲ χοῖρον καὶ μάλ' εὐθιλούμενον
τόνδ' ἐν νοτοῦντι κριβάνῳ θήσω. τί γὰρ
ᾄψον γένοιτ' ἂν ἀνδρὶ τοῦδε βέλτιον;
- fr. 617 M. λευκός, τί δ' οὐχί, καὶ καλῶς ἠφευμένος
ὁ χοῖρος· ἔψου, μηδὲ λυπηθῆς πυρί
- fr. 618 M. θύσας δὲ χοῖρον τόνδε τῆς αὐτῆς ὕος,
ἢ πολλά γ' ἐν δόμοισιν εἴργασται κακά,
δονοῦσα καὶ τρέπουσα τύρβ' ἄνω κάτω.

Since these three fragments appear jocular and display such frank interest in eating, some authorities (including VIKTOR STEFFEN in his collection of satyric fragments)¹² have thought that these are fragments of one or more satyr plays. E. A. J. AHRENS wished to assign fr. 616 to the satyric 'Circe' and fr. 617 and 618 to the satyric 'Kerykes'; J. HARTUNG attributed all three to the satyr play 'Prometheus (Pyrkaeus) Satyricus'¹³. Nobody, as far as I know, has proposed attributing any of these fragments to the 'Sisyphus Petrocylistes'. But if we attributed at least fr. 618 to that play, and consequently were to think that it contained a scene of pig-sacrifice similar to that shown on the Gela skyphos, then at least as far as one of the five plays cited by the Scholium on Aristotle goes, we would be in a position to understand what was meant by »revealing the secrets of the mysteries«: Aeschylus represented onstage the kind of pig-sacrifice associated with the Thesmophoria and the Eleusinian Mysteries, perhaps in a highly comical way. In so doing, he may conceivably have shocked and offended the sensibilities of an audience not yet accustomed to theatrical burlesque of religious rites (a later age, more inured to the ways of satyr play and Old Comedy, doubtless accepted such burlesque, such as that in Aristophanes' 'Frogs', with greater toleration).

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¹² Satyrographorum Graecorum Fragmenta (Poznan 1952) where they are registered as Aesch. frr. 75 – 77.

¹³ So one learns from H. W. SMYTH, Loeb Aeschylus II² 483 (bibliographical references not provided).

THE FULL AMBIGUITY OF SOPH. OT 955 – 956

Ἰοκάστη· ἐκ τῆς Κορίνθου, πατέρα τὸν σὸν ἀγγελῶν
ὡς οὐκέτ' ὄντα Πόλυβον, ἀλλ' ὀλωλότα.

It was not until 1970 that an explicit comment was made about the ambiguity of this couplet. As Oedipus steps from the palace to receive the messenger, Jocasta gleefully tells her husband: »He is here from Corinth, with the news that your father Polybus is no longer, but has died.« In his Prentice