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marzo **2023**

200

Festa!

II

La Rivista di Engramma
200

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Engramma

200

marzo 2023

Festa!

a cura di Anna Ghiraldini, Chiara Velicogna
e Christian Toson

II

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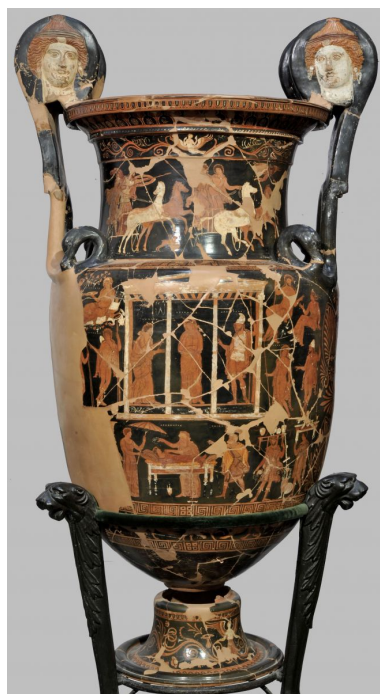
The Naples Hypsipyle crater re-visited

Oliver Taplin

Substantial portions of Euripides' long and variegated tragedy *Hypsipyle* (put on soon after 412) were published in 1908 as *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 852 – enough to occupy some 60 pages in Richard Kannicht's monumental edition. Interpretation and appreciation have, however, been seriously inhibited by uncertainties about the placement of some fragments, and this scholarly tangle has been aggravated by the conventional system of numeration which makes citation absurdly cumbersome. Fortunately Martin Cropp has presented a continuous line numbering, and I gladly follow this (Cropp 2004).[1]

It emerges clearly enough from the papyrus that the prologue and the final scenes were about the reunion of Hypsipyle with her two long-lost sons. She is now a slave at Nemea (in the hills some 20 kms north of Argos), but had once been a princess on Lemnos, where she had borne the sons to Jason when the Argonauts cohabited with the women of the island. They are eventually recognised after participating in the first ever Nemean Games. The construction of Euripides' plot hinges on the simultaneous arrival at Nemea of the great expeditionary force of the "Seven" on their march between Argos and Thebes. The main body of the play between the scenes with the sons, some 1400 lines, told how Hypsipyle was caught up in the establishment of the Games in honour of Opheltes, the infant son of the priest of Zeus at Nemea and his wife Eurydike. Hypsipyle, who had been trafficked and sold by pirates, has become the child's nurse. When she shows the doomed warrior-seer Amphiaraos to the local spring, she put the baby down – with fatal consequences since there was a venomous snake which lurked there. Amphiaraos has to defend Hypsipyle from the child's bereaved mother who demands the nurse's death. He dissuades her by explaining what happened, dwelling on human mortality, and consoling her by undertaking to establish contests in her son's honour, re-naming him Archemoros ("Doom-beginner").

So *Hypsipyle* was a tragedy that combined two stories that both pre-existed Euripides. The institution of the Games, usually attributed to Adrastus, king of Argos and co-ordinator of the



1 | The Hypsipyle crater, Apulian production, attributed to Darius Painter, 330 BC. Kept in the National Archaeological Museum of Naples, from Ruvo di Puglia (inv. n. 81934).

Seven, probably went back to the epic *Thebais*, and is referred to as familiar in Simonides, Pindar, and most fully in Bacchylides 9. There were also much-told stories of how the women of Lemnos killed their husbands, and how they had children with the Argonauts, including Jason and Hypsipyles' son Euneos, named twice in the Iliad as ruler of Lemnos. There is no trace before Euripides, though, of Hypsipyle being separated from her son(s), nor of their being separated from their mother, nor of her exile, let alone being kidnapped by pirates. It is widely accepted that bringing Hypsipyle and her sons together at Nemea was a characteristic invention contrived by Euripides. And Martin Cropp has, in my opinion, argued that so thoroughly that it should be accepted as highly probable[2].

The convergence of the two stories is very clearly to be seen on the amazing vase in Naples (Taplin 2007, 211-214, n. 79 and 287, notes 131-140) [Fig. 1]. I am much indebted to the editorial team of *engramma* for providing far better photographs than the one in that book. This huge volute-crater, standing more than 1.4 meters high was pieced together from many broken sherds excavated at Ruvo di Puglia in 1834 (inv. n. 81934); it has been attributed to the prolific Darius Painter, and dated to the 330s. The main mythological composition is nearly all preserved, arranged on three levels with the identities of most of the figures inscribed. At the bottom is the mourning and funeral preparations for Archemoros. The middle level has young heroes: Euneos and Thoas (missing) on the left, Parthenopaios and Kapaneus, two of "the Seven", to the right. And the top level has (from left to right) a missing divinity, Dionysos, Zeus and Nemea. But, taking up the centre of both the middle and top levels, the composition foregrounds an unusual "double size" centrepiece of three humans who stand in a kind of portico: they are identified as Hypsipyle, Eurydike, Amphiaraos.

In *Pots & Plays* I said merely "This is not 'simply the story', but Euripides' dramatisation of the story" (Taplin 2007, 213). I should have emphasised this more, because it is a standard trope of those who wish to divorce all representation of myth in the visual arts from any literary or dramatic telling that the artists have their own autonomous narratives, their own means of telling "the story". But this is a specific story, one created by Euripides in the theatre, and it would not make much sense to a viewer who has no knowledge of the particular tragedy. Furthermore the centrality of the three figures would be inexplicable to someone who had no knowledge at all of the Euripides. Fortunately one of the best preserved passages of the papyrus covers much of this very episode, which proves to be also the centrepiece of the play (lines 800-949 = fr. 757). Hypsipyle has been accused by Eurydike of deliberately killing her son, and she intends to have her put to death, rejecting the slave's eloquent plea in her defence. In desperation Hypsipyle calls out to Amphiaraos to come to defend her since he knows what actually happened to the baby. At the last minute, as she is about to be taken off to execution, he arrives and the three-party scene ensues, as on the vase [Fig. 2]. Hypsipyle waits in suspense; Eurydike has to reach her decision; Amphiaraos makes his great speech (lines 886-943). In the part fully preserved he tells of the snake and the child's death: and then, as the following line-beginnings show, his case included the child's new name, Archemoros, arrangements for his burial, and reference to contests and victory garlands at Nemea.



2 | The Hypsipyle crater, detail: Hypsipyle, Eurydice and Amphiaraus.

While I should have given more emphasis in *Pots & Plays* to the centrality of this scene on both the vase and in Euripides' play, there are two further points that I overlooked, one an absence, the other a presence. First, Adrastus. In all the standard versions of the myth he is the central figure, the leader of the whole expedition and founder of the Games, so it is significant that, while there are the two token representatives of the Seven on the Naples crater, there is no Adrastus. There is no reason to think that he appeared on stage; his name does crop up three times in the papyrus text, but not with any direct involvement. When the chorus first enter they excitedly tell their friend Hypsipyle of the glamorous army that has arrived, naming Adrastus as the one who has summoned the force. Secondly in a scrap of choral ode they recall the famous story of how both Tydeus and Polyneikes turned up as exiles in Argos, fitting an oracle that Adrastus should marry his daughters to two animals that fight. Thirdly when Amphiaras is explaining in his great speech to Eurydike that the child's new name is to be Archemoros, he foretells that the leaders of the Seven shall die at Thebes, with the exception of Adrastus. So far as can be told, then, Adrastus is kept rather at the edge of Euripides' *Hypsipyle*, presumably because the key Argive here is not him but Amphiaras. I suggest that his absence from



3 | The Hypsipyle crater, detail: Zeus and Nemea.

the Naples crater is a reflection of this particular telling of the myth (and, again, not just of “the story”).

So the absence in both the painting and the tragedy is Adrastus: the presence is Nemea. She is personified as a sitting nymph in conversation with Zeus at the top right-hand side, and her name is inscribed [Fig. 3]. While there may (or may not) be many unnamed figures representing localities in Greek vase-paintings, those that are specifically named are few and far between. In such cases the painter probably thought the inscribed name had some significance for the viewer. Since any viewer who knew anything of Opheltes/Archemoros will have known that the location was Nemea, why emphasise this? In *Hypsipyle* Nemea must have been introduced as the setting in the prologue, and probably in Hypsipyle’s initial dialogue with her sons as well, but, whatever was already said there, it is notable how much attention is paid to the topography of Nemea in the surviving fragments.

It is clearly brought out that this tragedy is not set in a city but close by an isolated temple of Zeus in open countryside; also that the background building is not a royal palace but the house of the priest of this temple. When the chorus first arrive they report that the huge Argi-



4 | The Hysipyle crater, detail: main scene distributed over three registers.

ve army has arrived at the “Nemean meadow” (*leimōn*, implying grassy grazing fields). Then, most importantly, the setting is “mapped” with unusual detail in the following scene when Amphiaraios arrives, namely lines ~ 319-346 = fr. 752h, 10-37. When the chorus first see him approaching they call on Zeus, “god of this grove of Nemea” (and it is called “the grove of Nemea” again later in the play). On entry he complains about how unpleasant it is to travel through empty, sparsely-inhabited countryside without a clear sense of direction. He says how, in such a situation himself, he was glad to see “this house in the meadow sacred to Zeus in Nemean country”. He then asks Hysipyle, “who is this sheep-rearing farmhouse in the territory of Phleious held to belong to?”. She replies that it is the fortunate home of Lykourgos, the man selected from the whole area of Asopia to be the priest of the local cult of Zeus. Phleious was the city nearest west from Nemea, and the area was named from the river Asopus that flowed through it. Amphiaraios then asks where he can find pure running water for libations because the army has churned up the watery patches of ground. She will in due course guide him to the spring where the fatal snake will kill the baby in her care. This whole passage conveys an unusual interest in the detailed lie of the land with an almost cartographic localisation. Euripides also takes trouble to portray Nemea as it was before it became a celebrated cult-site with the fine buildings that it had in his day. It is imagined as an isolated grove and temple in a marshy meadow.

Nemea is given a place on the Naples crater, I suggest, because Nemea is given significant attention in Euripides' play. The painting will have meant more to a viewer who knew the tragedy, possibly through reading but much more likely through having seen it in a theatre. I am not claiming that everyone who saw the vase would have appreciated this connection, especially not in Peucetian Ruvo. But it makes it plausible to suppose that the wealthy elite family who commissioned this expensive art-work knew the play; also that the artist knew and appreciated it [Fig. 4]. Far from it being the case that the actors who played in Magna Graecia and the ceramic artists who painted there operated in what has been called "parallel worlds", they worked with a kind of creative symbiosis.

Notes

[1] The definitive modern text is R. Kannicht, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Vol. 5.2, Göttingen 2004, 736-797. This does, however, maintain the deterrent convention of numbering all tragic papyri by sticking to Nauck's 1889 numeration with the addition of small roman letters. For *Hypsipyle* this means the entire play is organised under fragments 752 to 759 followed by innumerable letters each with their own separate line-numbers. While it is not easy to devise an alternative, I hope that one day there will be a wholesale renumbering of all the tragic fragments. The continuous line-numbering is adopted by Cropp 2008, 250-321. This starts from the occasional marginal indications in the papyrus, and, where the calculations are approximate this is signalled by putting a *tilde* (~) before the line-number.

[2] This is in the valuable and user-friendly text with commentary in Cropp, 2004 169-258. A brief discussion of Euripidean innovation in the myth is to be found there on p. 177-8, with references to his fuller discussion in Csapo, Miller 2003, 129-145. Finally I should add that I am pleased to see another scholar, Chiara Lampugnani, who has recently found the Amphiarao's arrival scene especially interesting (Lampugnani 2019).

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English abstract

An Apulian crater conserved in Naples depicts the myth of Hypsipyle which Euripides dramatizes in his homonymous tragedy. The Darius Painter chooses to represent the sacred precinct of Nemea with his personification: a nymph in conversation with Zeus. The painter gives great importance to Nemea following the same choices of the playwright who offers a detailed description of the locality in an almost cartographic way before it becomes a place of worship and venue for the Nemean games, celebrated in memory of Archemoros, son of Eurydice. Once again the theater and the art of potters seem to operate in creative symbiosis.

keywords | Hypsipyle; Euripides; Greek tragedy; Nemea; Apulian pottery.



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