



EURIPIDES, *TROADES* 95–7: IS SOMETHING MISSING?*

ABSTRACT

This paper raises objections to the constitution of these lines in the OCT. The lines are gnomic but they generalize based on an actual sequence of events just described and should contain an allusion to the offence that will cause the Greeks to perish, the outrage against Athena’s temple. This, it is argued, stood in a lacuna best marked after 95. The article has three theses: (1) sacking ‘cities, temples, and tombs’ is implausible because the latter two are parts of the first; (2) plundering tombs refers to nothing in the play, nor was this thought of as an offence against the gods; (3) 96–7 do not refer to the offence that causes the fool’s death but are a description of his success, the destruction of the hated enemy population. That success stands in ironic contrast with his subsequent death.

Keywords: Euripides; textual criticism; lacunae; sacrilege; city sacking; temples; tombs

μῶρος δὲ θνητῶν ὅστις ἐκπορθεῖ πόλεις
ναοὺς τε τύμβους θ’, ἱερὰ τῶν κεκημηκότων
ἐρημῖαι δούς <σφ’> αὐτὸς ὄλεθ’ ὕστερον.

96 ναοὺς δὲ Blomfield (~gB), nulla in fine uersus distinctione. post τύμβους θ’ distinxit Σ 97 <σφ’> Page

What is wrong with the text incorporating the insertion of <σφ’>, which I refer to below as *paradosis-plus-Page*?¹ The three lines are gnomic, but they generalize from a sequence of actual events described in the immediately preceding thirty lines. They ought to reflect all the essential elements of that sequence. The Greeks captured Troy. Subsequently they lost the goodwill of Athena because the lesser Ajax dragged Cassandra from her temple, and the Greeks did not punish his diminution of her τιμή, his forcible removal of her suppliant. Poseidon’s generalization alludes to the sack of Troy. It makes, however, no allusion to the crime of Ajax and the Greek failure to punish it. This, not sacking cities, sealed the fate of the victorious Greeks: see *Ag.* 338–40, discussed below. Something as important as the *cause* of the fool’s perishing can scarcely be left out of the generality. Perhaps there is a lacuna?

If so, the first question is where to mark it. The best candidate, in my judgement, is after πόλεις. The phrase ‘pillages cities, temples, and tombs, shrines of the dead’ is

* I am grateful to James Diggle and Nicholas Lane for helpful comments. I cite text and apparatus from J. Diggle, *Euripidis fabulae* ii (Oxford, 1981).

¹ And what is wrong with Blomfield’s conjecture, mentioned in Diggle’s apparatus? Over the course of four decades I have argued for it, twice in English and once in German: see D. Kovacs, ‘Euripides, *Troades* 95–7: is sacking cities really foolish?’, *CQ* 33 (1983), 334–8; D. Kovacs, ‘ΜΩΡΟΣ ΔΕ ΘΝΗΤΩΝ ΟΣΤΙΣ ΕΚΠΟΡΘΕΙ ΠΟΛΕΙΣ: nochmal zu Euripides, Troerinnen 95–97’, *RhM* 139 (1996), 97–101, and *Euripides: Troades* (Oxford, 2018), ad loc. and Appendix A, pp. 335–42. Blomfield’s conjecture, as noted below, escapes one of the objections to which *paradosis-plus-Page* is liable, but it cannot escape others. I now think that the soundest course is to abandon it.

implausible: cities *include* temples and tombs, so the latter are not really separate items, nor do they stand on the same footing as cities. Furthermore, though pillaging temples involves ἱεροσυλία, that is not the offence that causes the Greeks to die at sea and is irrelevant to the actual situation. Pillaging tombs is even worse: this is not what destroys the Greeks any more than pillaging temples, and it is not even clear that this was ever regarded as an offence against the gods.² Imagine the reaction that a member of Euripides' first audience might have had to *paradosis-plus-Page*: 'What's this about pillaging tombs? We haven't heard a word about that'. In fact there is, apart from the grave of Astyanax, only one other mention of tombs in the play, at 381–2. We will see that this mention coheres perfectly with a different understanding of ναοὺς τε τύμβους θ' ... ἐρημία δούς. So if we manage to separate temples and tombs from 'pillages cities', it is likely to be a step in the right direction.³

Consider the passage after it has undergone reconstructive surgery:

μῶρος δὲ θνητῶν ὅστις ἐκπορθεῖ πόλεις
 <θεοὺς δ' ὑβρίζει· λαμπρὰ νικήσας τότε>
 ναοὺς τε τύμβους θ', ἱερά τῶν κεκμηκότων,
 ἐρημία δούς αὐτοῦ ὠλεθ' ὕστερον.

That mortal is a fool who sacks cities <but commits outrage against the gods: having won a glorious victory at that time> and having emptied out the temples and tombs, holy places of the dead, he perishes subsequently himself.

I spell out the advantages of this constitution. (1) It makes explicit that in Poseidon's gnomic statement the fool has committed sacrilege and not merely sacked a city. Spelling this out is essential since from city sacking alone it cannot be logically inferred that the fool in question committed sacrilege, and only sacrilege explains his demise. The three lines are general and gnomic, but we need an allusion to the *reason* the Greeks are about to perish by sea, their outraging Athena, who had been their ally up to that point (cf. 69–72, and note ὑβρισθεῖσιν). She reacts not to city sacking (she and Hera are both in favour of sacking Troy) but to the Greeks' blatant disrespect for her and her temple.

(2) We no longer have tombs being pillaged, an action that corresponds to nothing in the play. Apart from the grave of Astyanax, the play's only other mention of tombs, at 381–2, says that Greek tombs in the Troad will have no one to honour them with offerings. What Cassandra says of these Greek tombs, that they will be untended when the Greeks leave, fits well with what Poseidon says about Trojan tombs: once Troy's population has been killed or enslaved, there is no one to make offerings, just as there are no worshippers at the temples.

(3) What 96–7a describe is the emptying out of temples and tombs: see *CGL* s.vv. ἔρημος and ἐρημία, where all the meanings given are privative and refer to emptiness, abandonment, or desolation. The removal of a hated population (as the Trojans were to the Greeks) by killing or enslavement is part of a glorious victory and is not mentioned

² In fact in the whole of classical Greek literature there is no instance where πορθέω or πέρθω or their compounds take 'tombs' as their object. I owe this telling point to Nicholas Lane.

³ Blomfield's conjecture escapes this objection since he does not take 'cities, temples, and tombs' as the object of ἐκπορθεῖ. He also, as far as we can tell, makes ναοὺς δὲ τύμβους θ' ... ἐρημία δούς a description of the city-sacker's *success*, as I do, rather than a part of his offence. (His argument, set forth in *Euripidis opera omnia*, publ. by A. and J.M. Duncan [Glasgow, 1821], 5.611, is laconic: in its entirety it reads 'omnino legendum ναοὺς δέ, subintellecto μὲν post ἐκπορθεῖ').

as an offence against the gods. Someone who has cleared the enemy's temples of worshippers and their graves of those who honour them is a successful man. But such a man is a fool if he commits outrage against the gods and thereby causes his own destruction. That self-destruction is thrown into sharper relief by his earlier success, his destruction of the enemy. Clytaemestra at *Ag.* 338–40 likewise uses the Greeks' success as a foil to their death:

εἰ δ' εὐσεβοῦσι τοὺς πολιισσοῦχους θεοὺς
 τοὺς τῆς ἀλόουσης γῆς θεῶν θ' ἰδρύματα,
 οὐ τᾶν ἐλόοντες αὐθις ἀνθαλοῖεν ἄν.

If they act piously toward the gods of the conquered land, gods who uphold the city, and also the temples of the gods, **they will not, after having captured their prey, be captured in their turn.**

Clytaemestra also makes it clear by her if-clause, as paradosis-plus-Page does not, that sacking cities does not logically entail committing sacrilege. Only by interpreting 96–7 as evidence of the fool's success do we get the piquant juxtaposition of triumph and subsequent death.

This constitution of the text preserves every letter of what is transmitted. It gives the sense that the context requires and does not puzzle the audience by talk of pillaging tombs. It therefore 'saves the phenomena', being consistent with everything we know or can reasonably infer.

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