The First *Stasimon* of Euripides' *Troades*

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One of the most controversial issues in Aristotle's *Poetics*[*1] is his unfavourable attitude to the way that Euripides uses the chorus. When he maintains 'the chorus should be assumed as one of the actors, stand as a part of the whole, and join in the action, not as in Euripides, but as in Sophocles' (*Poetics* 1456a25–7),[*2], although there is much debate over the precise meaning of his terms, he, at least, seems to declare a preference for Sophocles over Euripides with regard to the degree of choral integration into the overall plot. Directly after (1456a27–30), he proposes and even decries the concept of '*embolima* (sing. *embolimon*)': choral songs as simple interludes without any specific connection to the plot itself. As Jackson (2014) convincingly shows, the word *embolima* is found in this passage of Aristotle for the first time as a noun, and, moreover, for the

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[*1] It notoriously tells us so little about the tragic chorus and its lyric songs that Halliwell (1986) 252 laments that 'the most disappointing fact about the *Poetics*' is 'that it does nothing to enrich for us the significance of lyric poetry in Greek tragedy, and that it may even obstruct, or distract from, the difficult effort now needed to recover this significance'.

[*2] All translations are mine, from the text of Kassel (1965).

first time in the context of the chorus, so further exploration for its more precise significance is required; however, these successive statements of Aristotle have given rise to the idea that there was a 'choral decline' in tragedy in the later fifth and fourth centuries, and that *embolima* were characteristic of Euripidean chorus. This belief, despite the fact that this is not what Aristotle says in the *Poetics*, has proven remarkably stubborn.

Trying to break through the conventional imagination that Euripides, especially in his later years, intended to limit his chorus' role, Phoutrides (1916) provides us concrete figures of the length of choral parts for each three poet; although it seems quite clear that Aeschylus uses the chorus to a greater extent than the other two, it is interesting to see that Sophocles and Euripides show almost no difference in their ratio of lines ascribed to the chorus. Phoutrides' survey proves not only that Aristotle cannot be thinking of the quantity of choral songs when he says he prefers Sophoclean choruses to Euripidean, but also that Euripides did not reduce the part allotted to his chorus. In terms of choral integration into the plot, Phoutrides defends Euripides' style against Aristotle's criticism. He picks up a couple of works as examples of his careful use of the chorus: in the *Ion* and the *Bacchae*, for instance, the chorus members connect themselves to the plot, since they belong to one of the protagonists and have the same interest as them; in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, on the other hand, the local women continue to keep some distance from the suffering young girl just as a group of strangers. The degree of choral interaction with protagonists and integration into the plot, as Phoutrides indicates, depends on their nature as a specific group; as a rule, Euripides clearly did not rob his chorus of their dramatic importance.

A hundred years after Phoutrides, the significance and function of the chorus in tragedy is once more one of the most prominent topics among

researchers of tragedy*3. Swift (2010) analyses choral poetry from the perspective of specific lyric traditions in order to define the identities of the chorus; according to her, some songs seem on the first sight to be unattached to the plot, but actually they are often revealed to be a secret key to understanding the entire work. For instance, she turns down a conventional reading of the second *stasimon* of Euripides' *Heracles*, and discovers a firm connection between it and other two *stasima*. It used to be regarded as an ode without specific relevance to the plot; she, however, convinces us that it, with the first and third *stasima*, composes a praise song for Heracles, deploying images of *epinikion*. In the entire play, moreover, these victory songs ironically function to allude to his downfall, which comes directly after the third *stasimon**4.

   As for the first *stasimon* of Euripides' *Troades* (511-567), some modern commentators pay insufficient attention to its integration into, and its function within, the entire play;*5 others*6 introduce its conventional status as *embolimon* so as to declare themselves against it. This traditional view may have emerged because the chorus invokes the Muse completely out of the blue at the very beginning of the *stasimon*, preceded by Hecuba's long lamentation (462-510), in order to create an epic atmosphere. A closer look at some of Hecuba's lines, however, helps us to see the connection between the sudden invocation to Muse and the plot itself. In 469–70 she laments her fate: ὦ θεοί· κακοὺς μὲν ἀνακαλῶ τοὺς συμμάχους, | ὅμως δ᾽ ἔχει τι σχῆμα κικλήσκειν θεούς ('oh gods, I invoke you allies again and

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*3 On the tragic, especially Euripidean chorus, Hose (1990-91) and Mastronarde (2010) are not to be overlooked.

*4 Swift (2010) 121-156, esp. 122.

*5 For instance, Schiassi (1953) and Barlow (1986) only expound its content and language, and fail to assess its value as an exposition of Troy's fall between the first and second episode.

*6 See, e.g., Biehl (1989) 223, Lee (1976) 161, Neitzel (1967) 42ff.

again in vain; but there can still be found something to be said for implor-ing the gods'). At a first glance it seems a simple reproach of the gods who never help Troy and let it fall; but if we continue to read through the next lines, these phrases start to have a role as an introduction to the first *stasimon*. In 472–4 Hecuba declares her desire to 'sing' good fortune she once enjoyed in order to make her misery more vivid. This is the very same method the chorus chooses in the first *stasimon*; they, foreshadow-ing their doomed future with ominous terms studded (δόλιον ἄταν 531, λόχον 533-34, Δαρδανίας ἄταν 535, φονέα 540), depict cheerful scenes of Trojan people welcoming the Horse into the city, mistaking it as an offering to Athena (522-550), so that they can express Troy's downfall more vividly (555-567), and evoke sympathy. Therefore, Hecuba's slightly unreasonable condemnation of the gods and her unnatural declaration to 'sing', which she actually will not do, can be regarded as preparation for the chorus' sudden invocation to Muse and their songs about blessings they had in the past. This allusion in her speech to choral lines which will be sung directly after it prevents our *stasimon* from floating away from the play's plot; it is even quite obvious that the poet attempts to make Hecuba and the chorus correspond with one other, since she represents women of Troy, who used to enjoy their blessed life but now are about to be taken forcibly to Greece as slaves. The chorus cannot just sing an unconnected *embolimon*, but they try to follow their leader, as a group of women who share the origin, gender, and the status as wives and mothers[*7] with Hecuba, in the manner of invoking a god and recalling the past to give us a shocking contrast to their present situation.

Let us examine the *stasimon* more closely, to see how Euripides

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[*7] 'νέατον τεκέων σώματα λεύσσω' (210) and 'ὦ φίλος, ὦ πόσι μοι' (1081) tell us that the chorus consists of married women with children.

constructed it so as to encourage the audience's commitment to the play. First, he introduces an epic atmosphere to the theatre; the opening line is a sung hemiepes with an instance of epic correption as 'ἀμφί μοι Ἴλιον, ὦ' (511),*8 followed by an invocation to Muse in the next line. The verb ἆισον (513–14) also draws our attention with its epic conjugation, as a completion of theme-setting in the first four lines. That is, Euripides intentionally sets up this epic scene*9 to let the chorus sing about Troy and its misfortune creeping up with the Horse. His poetic technique, however, seems to be more apparent in the sentence structure here; at first, the audience, upon hearing 'ἀμφί μοι Ἴλιον, ὦ Μοῦσα' (511–12), would expect a song on the city of Troy itself, which will be overturned very quickly by the phrase 'ὠιδὰν ἐπικήδειον' (513–14). What the chorus is actually about to sing is not Troy, but a funeral song for it. It is in the next few lines that the Horse is referred for the first time; 'τετραβάμονος ἀπήνας' (516) – 'the four-footed vehicle' – is a typically Euripidean metaphor to emphasise its true function as an ambush planned by the Greek army. The hemiepes can again be found in 517–18, where the chorus reveals that they have been captured by the Argives. Their horse is obviously one of the keywords in the context of Trojan downfall; each of 'ἵππον οὐράνια βρέμοντα χρυσεοφάλαρον ἔνοπλον' (519–21), 'πεύκαν οὐρεῖαν', and 'ξεστὸν λόχον' (533–34) denotes it. At one point the chorus describes it as a sacred and pleasing object, but at another a dreadful hiding place for

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*8 All Greek texts are cited from Diggle (1981).

*9 This feature, i.e. a lyric song with epic signals and terms can be said to have common elements, e.g., with Sappho fr. 44, in which the poet depicts the arrival of newly-wedded Hector and Andromache in Troy in Homeric manner, but in melic form. According to Page (1955), although Sappho uses traditional language, her portrait is not drawn from the conventional Homeric world, but from contemporary life; this attempt, too, might successfully let the audience be absorbed in the poem. See now Spelman (2017).

their enemy. This oscillation reflects the Trojan people's sudden fall from their initial happiness at finding an offering to Athena, to their capture and enslavement at the hands of the men emerging from it. Line 530 concludes the strophe referring to the people's 'ἄτη', by which they would not see through the beautifully-decorated Horse. In the first half of the antistrophe (531–43), this ἄτη urges Phrygian people to drag it into the city-gate, and maidens to dance and sing in celebration of Athena and her deceptive offering. This contrast between a counterfeit delight and the Horse's true colours is heavily ironical for the external audience, with their extensive knowledge of Trojan war myth, and also for the chorus themselves, who, having already experienced the disaster caused by the Horse, narrate a moment of ignorant rejoicing. A series of light-related words reinforces the ironical tone; 'παμφαές', 'σέλας' (548), 'πυρός', and 'αἴγλαν' (549) are exaggeratedly placed in succession, reflecting the poet's intention to foreshadow the destruction of the city by fire.[*10] In the epode (551–67) the chorus recall that moment of realisation, when they were dancing in the temple of Artemis while the city was sacked. The chiastic structure of destruction-celebration in the antistrophe and celebration-destruction in the epode emphasises the simultaneity of fortune and misfortune which conquers Troy.

   What we must pay attention to as a final point is the remarkable repetition of some words in different situations, which seem to be central to describe Troy's fate and characteristic to this stasimon. μέλος (515) in the strophe represents a song about the sack of Troy, while μέλεα (545) in the antistrophe stands for songs of celebration by maidens. Again, ἄταν (530) alludes to the destruction hidden in the Horse; ἄταν (535), modified by

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[*10] In the prologue (7), Poseidon portrays Troy burnt into ashes; it is, of course, a result of the attack by Greek army, which will happen directly after these fire-centred lines.

Δαρδανίας, starts to have a concrete meaning. By being called a λόχον (534), the sacred offering to Athena turns out to be an ambush-place of the Greek; from the λόχου (560), armed men finally spring out. We hear βοάν (547), voice of maidens who cheerfully sing for a gift; βοὰ (556), as a cry of people attacked by Argives, echoes in the city. Besides these instances above, Euripides employs a number of same words to narrate the scene gradually and explicitly: πύλαις (521) ~ πύλας (532); πόνων (524) ~ πόνωι (542); κόραι (526) ~ κόραν (554), κόρας (561); ἕδρανα (539) ~ ἕδρας (557); πατρίδι (540-1) ~ πατρίδι (567); παρθένοι (545) ~ παρθένον (552); ἔμελπον (547) ~ ἐμελπόμαν (554). Reading through the song with keen attention on these words and their repetition, we can appreciate how carefully Euripides built up this first *stasimon* in the *Troades* to present a scene of destruction to the audience and to remind them of the universal inseparability of good fortune from bad. It is clear from the exploration above that these choral lines can never be perceived as an *embolimon*, a simple interlude without concrete connection to the plot by the audience; it is a medium, through which the poet tries to draw the audience into his drama.

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