SOPHOCLES' ELECTRA 495–7

The text of the relevant parts of strophe and antistrophe in L is as follows: –

479 ὑπεστὶ μοι θάρσος ἄδυτνών κλύόσαν ἄρτιώς ὄνειράτων. 495 πρὸ τῶνδε τοῖς μὲ ἔχει 

Emendation of the antistrophe has turned largely upon the question, – could μ’ ἔχει by itself be understood in the sense of θάρσος μ’ ἔχει? To this the answer must surely be, no; and it is this which has led editors (Wilamowitz, followed by Pearson) to substitute θάρσος for μ’ ἔχει, and to completemetrical response by accepting the repeated negative μῆπτος μῆπτοβ’ of Α rec. Others, with some slight MS support, insert ἄνεγες (Ττ) after μ’ ἔχει, keeping the single μῆπτοβ’ of L. (See Jebb's note on 495–498, and app. crit.).

But a serious difficulty arises from the interpretation of the phrase as a whole and ἄνεγες in particular. The alleged sense is: "I am confident that the portent will not come home to them in such a way that they will not find fault with it". παθόντες γὰρ, as the Scholiast says, ψέξουσι τὸ ὀφθέν. That is, when the portent comes to fruition, they will complain of it. This seems acceptable but is not as straightforward as it looks. Why will they complain of the portent when they have suffered? Does it mean that they will then realize that it portended ill and will wish that it had never occurred? But Clytemnestra is already apprehensive, already she is finding fault with the dream (427). Or does it mean that when disaster ensues, they will then complain of the portent as having disappointed them, portending ill instead of good? As if there were any way in which the portent could come to fruition which did not involve disaster for Clytemnestra! This interpretation is tortuous, if not downright impossible dramatically.

Best and easiest sense is obtained by taking ἄνεγες with ἦμιν, as the flow of words in any case would naturally suggest. The sense then is: "I am confident that the portent will come
home to them in such a way as will not be found fault with by us"; that is, the portent will not disappoint us; it will surely bring disaster upon Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, even as we hope and expect. To obtain this sense, however, we must dispense with μίστοθ'; we do not want a negative here at all, much less two of them.

The text should, I believe, be restored as follows: – πρὸ τῶνδε τοι θάρσος/ίσχει μ', ἥδη ποθ' ἡ/μεν ἄγενές πελάν τέρας etc. These three cola are all iambic dimeters, with double syncopation in each of the first two. ἥδη ποθ' ἦ – corresponds to – πνον κλονος – cf. O. T. 651 = 680. The ratio corruptelae involves several separate stages of corruption but they are all easy. μ' ἥδη ποθ' was misread as μίστοθ'; θάρσος fell out because of the same word standing in exactly the same position in the strophe, whereupon Ίσχεί μ' became μ' ἴσχει to avoid hiatus after τοι, and subsequently became μ' ἐχει when θάρσος of the strophe had given rise to θράσος (L ac rec.). Other scholars (e. g. Michaelis and Kvičala, quoted in Jebb's Appendix) have suggested texts without the negative, but their restorations are further from the received text and to that extent less probable1.

It should be noted too, that the phrase ἥδη ποτέ (forthwith, at any moment now) is dramatically valuable. It intensifies the sense of immediacy, of imminent disaster and greatly enhances the Chorus' efforts to encourage Electra. It is wholly in line with the emphatic assertion of the futures which begin both strophe and antistrophe – εἰσεν ἄ Δίκα (475–6); ἡξει ... Ἕρων (488–90), and with the tone of the ode as a whole.

A final remark. If the iambic tripody is a legitimate metrical unit (cf. Trach. 528) we could then read ὑπεστὶ μοι θράσος in the strophe and πρὸ τῶνδε τοι θράσος in the antistrophe. This would at least have the advantage of eliminating one of the steps in the presumptive chain of corruption.

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1) Kapsomenos (Ἱσταμενή Δέξις, Thessalonike 1960, p. 12f. [164f.]) has already suggested ἥδη, but in place of ἡμῖν; he also retains μ' ἐχει in 495 that is, he does not restore θάρσος), and for ἄγενές reads ἀγαλάξ, on the basis of his restoration of Hesych. A 8939, where he reads ἀγαλα ξ πελατ ἄγα-γρα το ποεσται. This last may well be right, but I cannot believe that the Hesychius gloss refers to the passage of Electra under discussion. Kapsomenos' interpretation: chorus se sollicitum esse dicit, ne portentum . . . fali-lat sine strepitu in flagitiorum auctores . . . incidens, does not seem to make good sense in the dramatic context, in the light of the characterization of the Chorus and its relation to Electra.