

THE PROLOGUE OF AESCHYLUS' *PALAMEDES*^{*}

The unknown devotee of Aeschylus who lived at Oxyrhynchos around AD 200, and whose library has added so much to our knowledge of the dramatist's work, also inadvertently left a number of puzzles behind him. This paper attempts to solve one of these, and to explore the implications of the solution for a play about which it is generally thought that very little is known.

We begin with Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 2253 (Aeschylus fr. 223a Mette = 451k Radt), which I reproduce here:

Διὸς μ]ὲν εὐχαῖς πρῶτα πρεσβεύων σέβ[ας
×— ι]κνοῦμαι φέγγ[ος] ἡλίου τὸ γῦν
×— αμ]εῖψαι ξύ[v] τύχαις εὐημέροις
×— υ—×] Ἐλάδος λοχαγέταις,
οἱ ξὺν Με]νέλεω τὴν βίαιον ἀρπαγὴν

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γυναικός ἐκ]πράσσουσι Πρ[ι]αμ[ί]δην Πάριν,
×—U—X]ς εύμενή συνα[λ]λ[α]γήν

1 initium suppl. Vaio, finem Snell 5 suppl. Stark 6 suppl. Snell
7 νείκης βαρετο]ς Lloyd-Jones

Honouring first in my prayers the awesome majesty of Zeus [...] I beseech him that this present light of the sun may change [...] with a good day's fortune [...] for the captains of Greece, [who together with Menelaos are seeking revenge from Paris son of Priam for the violent seizure [of his wife,] a friendly reconciliation [?of their grievous quarrel].

This is clearly the opening of the prologue of a Trojan War play – by which I mean a play whose action was set within the period when the joint Greek expedition against Troy under Agamemnon was in being. It begins with a prayer to Zeus (probably) and the rising Sun (certainly) for the coming day to bring good fortune, and with mention of the “captains of Greece” who are helping Menelaos to take revenge on Paris for the “violent seizure” of Helen. The last words confidently restorable (line 7) are εύμενή συναλλαγήν, and this reference to a “friendly reconciliation” among the Greek leaders¹ makes it highly probable, as Lloyd-Jones (1957, 582–3) saw, that the initial situation involved a quarrel among those leaders, which the speaker will have gone on to describe in the succeeding lines.

Lloyd-Jones and Mette (1959) both tentatively suggested that the play might be *Myrmidons*, the first play of the tetralogy based on the *Iliad*²; this is, however, impossible. We know from an explicit statement in a scholion to Aristophanes’ *Frogs*³, and a slightly less explicit one by Harpokration⁴, that *Myrmidons* began with anapaests addressed to Achilles, almost certainly by the chorus, asking him if he sees the sufferings of the Greeks and accusing him of betraying them:

1) The reconciliation referred to can hardly be a reconciliation with the Trojans, given the preceding two lines where the aim of the expedition is defined not as the recovery of Helen (which might be achievable by peaceful means) but (presumably violent) revenge on Paris for her “violent seizure”.

2) Users of the excellent recent Everyman translation of Aeschylus will find it printed among the fragments of *Myrmidons* (Ewans 1996, 108), though with a note that it is not “certainly assignable to this drama”.

3) Σ Ar. Ran. (τάδε μὲν λεύσσεις, φαίδιμ' Ἀχιλλεῦ): ἔστι δὲ ἀρχὴ αὕτη τῶν Μυρμιδόνων Αἰσχύλου.

4) Harpokration s.v. προπεπωκότες (π 100 Keaney) quotes these anapaests and says they occur ἐν ἀρχῇ τῶν Μυρμιδόνων Αἰσχύλου.

τάδε μὲν λεύσσεις, φαίδιμ' Ἀχιλλεῦ,
δοριλυμάντους Δαναῶν μόχθους,
οὓς σὺ προπίνων εἴσω κλισίας ...
(Aesch. fr. 131)

Do you see this, glorious Achilles, the toils of the Danaans, ravaged by
the spear, whom you are betraying by [sitting] within your shelter?

This leaves no room for an initial expository soliloquy by another character – after the first dozen words of the anapaestic chant, every spectator would know for certain that the situation being portrayed was the great crisis of the *Iliad*. Antonio Garzya was perfectly justified in not even mentioning this papyrus in his recent discussion of the fragments of *Myrmidons* (Garzya 1995).

What play, then, does this prologue belong to? In addition to *Myrmidons*, we know of ten other tragedies by Aeschylus that are ‘Trojan War plays’ as I have defined the term: in alphabetical order, *Hoplōn Krisis*, *Iphigeneia*, *Memnon*, *Nereids*, *Palamedes*, *Philoktetes*, *Phryges*, *Phrygai⁵*, *Psychostasia*, *Threissai*. Some of these can be ruled out at once: there is no remotely plausible reconstruction of *Memnon* or *Philoktetes*⁶ or *Phryges* or *Phrygai* or *Psychostasia* that would make any of them begin with a serious quarrel among the leaders of the Greek army. *Nereids* is also unlikely, since it was set in Achilles’ part of the camp (it was, after all, to him that Thetis and the Nereids came), and Achilles, with Patroklos dead less than a day, would not speak in these measured tones. *Hoplōn Krisis* can be excluded for other reasons: Thetis was a character in the play (fr. 174 is addressed to her), and her role in the Odysseus–Aias quarrel is to cause it by putting up the armour of Achilles for competition: at the beginning of the play, therefore, this had not yet happened and accordingly there was nothing for Odysseus and Aias to

5) For argument that this, not *Phrygai*, is the correct title of this play, that it was distinct from *Phryges*, that it was the third play of a trilogy based on the *Aithiopis* (following *Memnon* and *Psychostasia*), that it included the death (but possibly also the resurrection) of Achilles, and that Aesch. fr. 350 derives from it, see Sommerstein 1996a, 30 n. 10, 56–57, 374–5 (developing a proposal by Gantz 1980, 146–8).

6) It is just conceivable that our fragment could have been spoken, at the beginning of *Philoktetes*, by an Odysseus who, not yet having met Philoktetes, hoped that it might be possible to persuade him to come to Troy without treachery or force; but a prospective reconciliation between Philoktetes on one side, and Odysseus and presumably Agamemnon on the other, would not be aptly described as a reconciliation among “the captains of Greece [who] are seeking revenge from Paris”, since Philoktetes is at present doing nothing of the sort. It is likely, in any case, that Philoktetes himself was the prologue-speaker (cf. Sommerstein 1996b, 281; Σ Ar. Ran. 1383 = Aesch. fr. 249).

quarrel about. Its sequel, *Threissai*, is a possibility, but not a very strong one: the form of the exposition in our fragment, with its expansive description of the enterprise on which the “captains of Greece” are engaged, strongly suggests that the audience have to be told that this is a Trojan War play, which in the second part of a connected trilogy would not be necessary. Rudolf Stark (1954), soon after the publication of the papyrus, suggested it might come from *Iphigeneia*, but this too is not a likely source: at the beginning of an *Iphigeneia* play we would expect any prayer to highlight not any quarrel but the detaining winds, and we might expect also that Artemis would be one of the deities addressed.

We started with eleven plays (including *Myrmidons*), and we have eliminated ten of them. Only *Palamedes* remains. And the objections we have found to assigning our fragment to any other play do not apply in the case of *Palamedes*. No convincing attempt has been made to place *Palamedes* in a connected trilogy⁷. No other information survives from which anything could be deduced about its opening. And it certainly did deal with a quarrel among Greek leaders, though not, alas, one that came to a “friendly reconciliation”. I suggest, therefore, that POxy 2253 can be positively identified as the opening of the prologue of Aeschylus' *Palamedes*.

Our direct knowledge of this play (or rather, I should now say, of the rest of this play) comes from three ‘book’ fragments – only one of which is explicitly ascribed to *Palamedes* – and one other reference. Three of these four pieces of evidence (frs. 181a, 182, 182a) seem all to relate to one and the same speech by Palamedes himself, in which he recounted, in language closely imitated decades later by the author of *Prometheus Bound*⁸, his services to the Greek army and to humanity generally (invention of arithme-

7) I know of two suggestions. Zieliński (1925, 250) proposed a trilogy *Telephos-Iphigeneia-Palamedes*, on the ground that these were the only known Aeschylean plays based on the *Kypria*; but such a trilogy would have little internal coherence and would sunder the highly probable link between *Telephos* and *Mysoi* (on which see Sommerstein 1996a, 63–64). Mette (1963, 99–108) suggested a trilogy comprising *Palamedes*, *Philoktetes*, and (as first play) an unattested *Ten(n)es* inferred from two mentions of the people of Tenedos in a papyrus fragment (Aesch. fr. 451o); but he offered no evidence to show that the stories of these three plays could have formed a single πρᾶξις. See also note 22 below.

8) In addition to the evidence of fr. 182a, fr. 181a is paralleled by Prom. 449–450 (τὸν μακρὸν βίον ἔφυρον εἰκῇ πάντα) and 459–460 (ἀριθμόν, ἔξοχον σοφισμάτων, ἔξηντρον αὐτοῖς). I take *Prometheus Bound* to have been composed and produced in the late 430s (Bees 1993), probably by Euphorion and very possibly in 431 when he won first prize (Hyp. Eur. Med.; see Sommerstein 1996a, 321–7, esp. 326 n. 14).

tic, organization of the army in brigades and companies, fixing of mealtimes, possibly discovery of the astronomical season-calendar), most likely in defending himself against an accusation:

fr. 181a (ΠΑΛΑΜΗΔΗΣ)
 ἔπειτα πάσης Ἑλλάδος καὶ ξυμμάχων
 βίον διώκησ' ὄντα πρὸν πεφυρμένον
 θηρσίν θ' ὅμιον· πρῶτα μὲν τὸν πάνσοφον
 ἀριθμὸν τῷρηκ' ἔξοχον σοφισμάτων

Palamedes: Then I organized the life of all the Greeks and their allies, which previously had been confused and beastlike. First of all, I invented the ingenious art of arithmetic, outstanding among intellectual contrivances.

fr. 182 (ΠΑΛΑΜΗΔΗΣ)
 καὶ ταξιάρχας χάκατοντάρχας στρατῷ
 ἔταξα, σῖτον δ' εἰδέναι διώρισα,
 ἄριστα, δεῖπνα δόρπα θ' αἰρεῖσθαι τρίτα

1 χάκ. στρατῷ Schweighaeuser : καὶ στρατάρχας καὶ ἑκατοντάρχας
 codd. Athenaei

Palamedes: And I appointed brigade and company commanders for the army, and I taught them to distinguish their meals, to take breakfast, dinner and thirdly supper.

fr. 182a, Σ Aesch. Prom. 457 (vel 458 vel 459): τούτων (Μ: ταύτην rell.) τὴν εὑρεσίν καὶ Παλαμήδῃ προσῆψεν

[at 457 Prometheus begins a long enumeration of the discoveries he has made for mankind's benefit; 457–8 refers to astronomy and the seasons, 459–461 to number and writing].

He [i.e. Aeschylus] has also ascribed the discovery of these things [or this discovery] to Palamedes.

In the fourth (fr. 181) someone asks τίνος κατέκτας ἔνεκα παῖδ' ἐμὸν βλάβης; ("For what crime did you [singular] kill my son?"); the speaker is evidently Palamedes' father, Nauplius, who in all accounts arrives at Troy after his son's death, the addressee most probably Odysseus. An acute analysis of the later mythographic accounts by Ruth Scodel⁹ led her to the conclusion that Aeschylus

9) Scodel 1980, 43–61, esp. 49–52. Σ Eur. Or. 432 gives the following account: "... Palamedes went to Troy and performed very great services to the Greek army. When they were starving at Aulis, and there was resentment and conflict over the distribution of food, in the first place he taught them Phoenician writing and in this

was the source of the story as told in a scholion to Euripides' *Orestes*, in which Agamemnon, Odysseus and Diomedes together plot against Palamedes (from jealousy of his fame), accuse him of treason, have his tent searched, and find there a quantity of Trojan gold and a letter in Phrygian; whether or not Scodel is right about this, we can be confident that there was an intrigue and an accusation and that, as in all versions of the Palamedes story, Odysseus was a central figure¹⁰.

way made possible a fair and unobjectionable distribution [and he also taught them other new skills]. Jealous because of this, the group of [οἱ περὶ] Agamemnon, Odysseus and Diomedes contrived against him a scheme of this kind: they took prisoner a Phrygian who was conveying gold to Sarpedon, and compelled him to write in Phrygian script what purported to be a treasonable letter to Palamedes from Priam. They then killed the prisoner, bribed a slave of Palamedes to place the letter under Palamedes' bed together with the Trojan money, and themselves came forward to denounce the hero as a traitor and demand that his tent be searched. The letter and the money were found, and Palamedes was put to death by stoning. When Nauplios heard of this, he came to Troy to secure justice for the murder of his son. The Greeks, however, slighted him out of loyalty to their chieftains, and he sailed off to his native land. [Later] when he learned that the Greeks were on their way home, he went to Euboea, waited for a storm, and lit beacons on the capes of Euboea . . . ”

10) Other versions are discussed by Scodel (as above, note 9) and by Gantz 1993, 603–7; the main ones are in the *Kypria* (fr. 30 Bernabé = 20 Davies), Apoll. Epit. 3.8, Hyginus, Fab. 105, Servius on Aen. 2.81 and Dictys 2.15. In the first and last of these there is no accusation of treason, Palamedes being privately murdered by Odysseus and Diomedes (by quite different methods, neither well suited for tragic presentation). Since Servius has Odysseus pretending to support Palamedes, as someone does in Soph. fr. 479 (hardly Nauplios who made a similar speech in quite another play, Soph. fr. 432), Scodel takes him to be following Sophocles; and since in Euripides Odysseus appears to have denounced Palamedes before Agamemnon (Eur. fr. 580), implying probably but not certainly that Agamemnon is not involved in the plot, she finds Euripides' version of the story in Hyginus where, as in Servius, Odysseus acts alone. If so, all three dramatists had the same basic story of an accusation of treason ‘proved’ by the finding of gold in or near Palamedes' tent and also of an incriminating letter, and resulting in his death by stoning. Both Sophocles and Euripides modified Aeschylus' plot to concentrate the guilt on Odysseus, magnify his ingenuity and duplicity, and complicate the action by having the evidence against him produced in two stages, so that the first piece of evidence appears inconclusive (the letter, it can be argued, might be a forgery; the gold might come from an innocent source) until confirmed by the second. In Sophocles the letter was found first, Odysseus then, pretending to be on Palamedes' side, demanded a search of his tent which (he said) would prove Palamedes innocent, and on this being carried out the gold was discovered; in Euripides, contrariwise, the gold was found first (after the camp had been temporarily moved on Odysseus' suggestion) and the letter came to light afterwards. Euripides also brings into the story an apparently new character, Palamedes' brother Oiax, who is (presumably) kept in detention at Troy to prevent him from informing his father of Palamedes' death, but sends him the news by writing it on oar-blades and casting them into the sea (Ar. Thesm. 768–784 with scholia).

If our fragment was the opening of the play, then it began at a stage of the story when the dispute between Palamedes and his enemy or enemies had become public – in other words, the accusation of treason had been made – but it was still possible to hope for a peaceful resolution of it. That is to say, the hatching of the plot, whether by Odysseus alone or in conjunction with one or more others, was part of the ‘prehistory’ of the play, not of its action¹¹; that the play should start in the middle of the story, rather than at its beginning, is consistent with the evidence that it continued beyond the execution of Palamedes to include scenes involving Nauplios. If, like all the mythographic accounts likely to derive from tragic sources, Aeschylus’ version involved a search in which planted evidence was discovered, it is thus likely to have begun at a moment when the search had been ordered but its results were not yet known.

The speaker of the prologue will have been an influential figure not involved in the plot – ignorant, indeed, of the fact that there was a plot, and supposing the accusation against Palamedes to have been honestly though maybe mistakenly made. Paul Maas¹², assuming the fragment came from *Myrmidons*, suggested that the speaker was Kalchas, and even in *Palamedes* this might well be so: line 4 is most naturally taken to imply that the speaker is not himself one of the “captains of Greece” – though obviously deeply concerned for their welfare – and a religious personage would be an appropriate figure to utter the opening prayer in language very close to that with which another representative of Apollo opens *Eumenides*. There may, however, be other possibilities too; one that comes to mind is Nestor¹³. The speaker must in any case have believed in, and hoped for proof of, Palamedes’ innocence, for only if his innocence was established could a “friendly reconciliation” be possible.

Someone must have brought news of the outcome of the search; this could well be a chorus of soldiers. In the Euripides scholiast’s version of the story, Nauplios’ protests about the death of his son are slighted by the army out of loyalty to its leaders; if Scodel is right to believe that this is the Aeschylean version, then

11) This removes, by the way, one possible objection to Scodel’s reconstruction of the Aeschylean version of the conspiracy, that it involves too many characters for what was probably a two-actor play.

12) Ap. Lloyd-Jones 1957, 583.

13) Who famously tries to reconcile Achilles and Agamemnon in Il. 1.247–284 and 9.92–113.

the army as a collectivity must have been represented in the play, and only the chorus can have represented it.

The 'discovery' of the incriminating evidence will have been followed by some form of trial or its equivalent; the chorus would form a convenient jury. Palamedes will have defended himself in the speech of which extracts survive, pointing (as defendants in the Athenian courts so often did) to the services he had rendered to the community; one of the three plotters (if there were three) must have spoken for the prosecution, most likely Odysseus who is normally Palamedes' chief enemy and who is traditionally a crafty and persuasive speaker¹⁴.

All the mythographic accounts likely to be based on tragedy¹⁵ agree that Palamedes was stoned. Stoning is a public punishment, and the army – that is, the chorus – are the appropriate persons to inflict it¹⁶; so it seems that, as in *Eumenides* and Sophocles' *Aias*, we must posit a departure and return by the chorus. It is possible that Nauplios arrived while they were off stage, enabling him (like Menelaos in Euripides' *Helen*) to deliver a virtual second prologue; but this would in effect bring him to Troy at the very moment of his son's death, which has no mythographic support, so it is perhaps more likely that Aeschylus found some other way of filling the interval¹⁷. Then the chorus will have returned, and (with a foreshortening of time paralleled in *Persians*, *Agamemnon* and *Eumenides*) Nauplios then arrived to denounce the murderers of his son, only, it seems, to be rebuffed by the army. We cannot tell how the play ended, but Nauplios ought surely to have vowed to avenge himself both on the army as a whole and on the individuals primarily responsible: the *Orestes* scholia refer to the famous story of the deceptive beacons on Cape

14) A suggestion will be made presently as to how the other two conspirators may have been brought into the play.

15) See note 10 above.

16) Cf. Ag. 1615–6 where the chorus, representing the people of Argos, threaten Aigisthos with δημορριφεῖς ... λευσίμους ἄράς; Seven 199 λευστῆρα δῆμου ... μόρον; Aesch. fr. 132c.1; and especially Eur. Or. where the Argive people hold an assembly for the trial of Orestes and Electra, the penalty in case of conviction to be death by stoning (Or. 48–50, 440–2, 536, 612–4) at the Argive people's own hands (ὑπ' ὀστῶν 442, 536, 746) – though as it turns out the assembly decides to allow them the alternative of suicide.

17) One possibility would be a scene between Odysseus and, say, Agamemnon, revealing to the audience the latter's complicity in the plot. The third conspirator, Diomedes, might be present but silent during this scene, or might be merely referred to as a confederate by the other two in his absence.

Kaphereus, which caused the destruction of most of the Greek fleet on its way home, but Aeschylus may also have referred to at least one of Nauplios' other revenge actions known to the tradition – his inducing the wives of Greek leaders (Agamemnon and Diomedes among them) to have adulterous affairs¹⁸, and his provoking the suicide of Odysseus' mother by sending her false news of his death¹⁹.

And so the play that began with Zeus, the sun, good fortune, the punishment of Paris for a violent seizure, and the hope of a friendly reconciliation, ends with a feud that will spell death for most of the Greek army, by nocturnal treachery, in revenge for an equally treacherous murder. As so often in Aeschylus, *quid-
quid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi*²⁰: and all, maybe, because they couldn't stand for Palamedes being more honoured than they were. Whether Aeschylus expected his audience to draw connections with jealousies, hostilities and accusations among leaders nearer home²¹, possessing little over one per cent of his text it would be irresponsible to guess²².

18) Lykophron 1093–5 with scholia; Apoll. Epit. 6.9, mentioning the wives of Agamemnon, Diomedes, and Idomeneus. That this idea featured in Aeschylus may be supported by the fact that Apollodorus juxtaposes it with the information that Agamemnon had been involved in the plot against Palamedes, and that the army had refused satisfaction to Nauplios out of goodwill towards Agamemnon (*χαριζομένων τῷ βασιλεῖ Ἀγαμένοντι*): both these points agree with the *Orestes* scholion (which speaks of the Greeks as slighting Nauplios *πρὸς τὸ κε-
χαριτμένον τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν*, contrary to the claim of Scodel 1980, 52 that there is “no verbal resemblance” between the scholiast's and Apollodorus' versions of this part of the story), and neither was mentioned in the account of the conspiracy itself in Apoll. Epit. 3.8.

19) Σ Od. 11.197,202.

20) Cf. Sommerstein 1996a, 418–421.

21) For possible political subtexts in surviving plays of Aeschylus, see especially Podlecki 1966 and Sommerstein 1996a, 391–421.

22) I have not here considered the issue of whether *Palamedes* may have been part of a connected series of plays. Of the other ten known Trojan War plays by Aeschylus, eight are probably in any case assignable to such series (see Sommerstein 1996a, 56–57) in which no place is available for *Palamedes*: this leaves *Iphigeneia* and *Philoctetes* as its only possible partners among these plays, and both have been suggested, separately, in the past (see note 7 above). The pairing *Iphigeneia-Palamedes* might help to account for the prominent role apparently played by Agamemnon in the Aeschylean version of the Palamedes story (paralleled only in Dictys 2.15): both the sacrifice of Iphigeneia and the execution of Palamedes resulted from schemes of deception in which Agamemnon was involved, and both, it seems, were presented as partial causes of Agamemnon's subsequent murder by Klytaimnestra. Odysseus too is likely to have figured prominently in *Iphigeneia*, as he did in Sophocles' play of the same name (Soph. fr. 305) and (offstage) in

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Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (107, 524–533, 1362–6); in several other sources it is he who goes, alone or with a companion, from Aulis to Argos/Mycenae to fetch Iphigeneia (Eur. IT 24–25; Apoll. Epit. 3.22; Hyginus, Fab. 98). On the other hand, the opening lines of *Palamedes* tell against the supposition that another related play preceded it as *Iphigeneia* would have had to do (see p. 121). In *Philoktetes* Odysseus is known to have been a central character (Dio Chrys. Or. 52), and it is likely enough, though there is no explicit evidence, that, as in Sophocles (Phil. 1243–58, 1294, cf. 1391), he made it plain that he was acting as the agent of Agamemnon and the army as a whole. But either an *Iphigeneia-Palamedes* or a *Palamedes-Philoktetes* sequence (let alone a trilogy comprising all three) would be a sequence more like the so-called Trojan trilogy of Euripides than like any attested trilogy of Aeschylus: it would be enacting not, as Aeschylus elsewhere does, successive episodes of one story linked by a single causal chain, but two or three distinct stories taken from the same cycle of legend and involving some of the same characters in similar roles. Probably, therefore, all three of these plays were written for productions which, like that of 472, comprised four independent dramas.