

STESICHOROS' PALINODES:
TWO FURTHER TESTIMONIA
AND SOME COMMENTS

It is proposed to cite two overlooked, interdependent Christian testimonia concerning Stesichoros' two palinodes and to comment briefly on the credibility of this tradition.

I. *The Number of Testimonia*: in 1962, Page published Stesich. fr. 193/16 = *Pap. Oxy.* xxix, fr. 26, col. i, which reads in part: διττὰ γὰρ εἰσι παλινωιδ(ίαι δια)λλάττουσαι, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ μὲν ἀρχή· δεῦρ' αὖτε θεὰ φιλόμολπε, τῆς δὲ χρυσόπτρεε παρθένε, ὡς ἀνέγραφε Χαμαιλέων.

This information is probably derived from Chamaileon's *Περὶ Στησιχόρου* mentioned by Athenaios (14, p. 620 c). Page holds that this papyrus provided the first indication of the existence of two palinodes; he writes (*ad loc.*) "duas esse palinodias ignorabamus". Bowra agrees¹).

In 1966, however, Davison noted the existence of a long known text, which speaks of Stesichoros' recantation in the plural: Στησίχορος δ' αὐτίκα ὕμνους Ἑλένης συντάττει κ.τ.λ. and which scholars had overlooked (*neglexerunt*)²). Unfortunately, his important finding not only did not incite Davison to search for other references, *in the plural*, to Stesichoros' palinodes, but even led him to affirm that "only (*solus*)" Konon used the plural in this connection.

I now propose to cite two interdependent Christian testimonia, which also use the plural in this connection:

(1) *Hippolytos contra haereses* 6,19,3 Wendland: Οὕτως γοῦν τὸν Στησίχορον διὰ τῶν ἐπῶν λοιδορήσαντα αὐτὴν τὰς ὄψεις τυφλωθῆναι· αὐτῆς δὲ, μεταμεληθέντος αὐτοῦ καὶ γράψαντος τὰς παλινωιδίας, ἐν αἷς ὕμνησεν αὐτήν, ἀναβλέψαι.

1) C. M. Bowra, "The Two Palinodes of Stesichorus", *CR* xiii (1963), pp. 245-252. Cp. F. Sisti, *Studi Urbinati* xxxix (1965) 301 ff.

2) Conon, *narr. ap. Phot. Bibl. cod.* 186; J. A. Davison, 'De Helena Stesichori', *Quaderni Urbinati* ii (1966), pp. 80-90.

(2) *Irenaeus, contra haereses* 1.23.2 Migne, 1.16.2 Harvey: Fuisse autem eam (sc. Ennoian) et in illa Helena, propter quam Trojanum contractum est bellum³), quapropter et Stesichorum per carmina maledicentem eam, orbatum oculis: post deinde poenitentem et scribentem eas, quae vocantur, palinodias (*plur.*), in quibus hymnizavit eam, rursus vidisse.

These Christian sources bring to *four* the number of testimonia bearing on the existence of *more than one* Stesichorean palinode.

II. *The Credibility of the Tradition* must be discussed in the light of the finding that Stesichoros was *not the first* to defend Helene. It is striking that the first explicit defense of Helene – though *without* recourse to the *eidolon device* – should have been offered by the Homeric Penelope, who had good reasons for disliking Helene (Hom. *Od.* 23.218–224). Aristarchos athetised these verses on *untenable* (“psychological”) grounds. Unfortunately for Aristarchos, the impugned passage is *psychologically* unexceptionable⁴). Those who wish to athetise these Homeric verses will have to do so on *non-psychological* grounds, which may be hard to find, since these verses appear to have inspired not only Gorg. *fr.* 11 D.-K.⁴ (as noted in Stanford’s edition), and Isocr. *Hel.*, but also E. *Tr.* 919ff.

What Stesichoros does appear to have invented is a manifest retraction and, probably, the recourse to the device of a *durable eidolon*, to rationalize the retraction. Indeed, Stesichoros’ *eidolon* differs from every Homeric *eidolon* in being not only solid but, above all, *durable* and /or in not being a dream apparition. It cannot be linked with the reproach he allegedly (Stesich. *fr.* 193/16 Page) directed at Hesiodos, for the only known Hesiodic reference to an *eidolon* involves the *eidolon* of Iphimede (= Iphigeneia), cp. Hes. *fr.* 23 (a) 11. 17–24 Merkelbach-West. (I am indebted for this reference to Mr Peter Parsons, Christ Church, Oxford.) This finding furnishes what appears to be an important clue, since an *eidolon* is, technically speaking, a *visual* illusion or hallucination.

I therefore now advance a simple medical hypothesis, which accounts both for the tradition of Stesichoros’ *transitory* blind-

³) Here Harvey leaves a space and inserts the passage from Hippolytus *Philos.* 6. 19.

⁴) G. Devereux, ‘Penelope’s Charakter’, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, xxvi (1957), pp. 378–386 (= [in modern Greek] in: *Platon* i (1958) pp. 3–9).

ness *and* for his having written *two* palinodes, in order to recover his sight. It is sufficient to assume that Stesichoros had had attacks of *hysterical blindness*, which he attributed to Helene's vengeance and attempted to cure by making amends to Helene. His writing *palinodes* may therefore be viewed as *ritual* attempts at self-healing. The fact that in an archaic society, such as Stesichorean Greece, attempts of ritual selfhealing tend to be *temporarily* successful, but usually end in *relapses* – requiring further attempts at self-healing – was demonstrated elsewhere in some detail⁵).

It should be noted, at least in passing, that whereas some of the many relevant texts speak of a retraction (*palinodia*), others – imitating perhaps both Gorgias and Isokrates – speak of an *enkomion* of Helene. Perhaps Stesichoros “cured” his *first* attack of hysterical blindness by *retracting* his earlier accusations and his *second* attack by writing a *praise* of Helene – but that is as it may be. The Irenaeus text certainly considers the praising of Helene (*hymnizavit*) as part of the *palinodes*.

Though neither Platon, nor the Christian authors who record the edifying tale of Stesichoros' recantation and recovery mention it, there is a genuine possibility that, presumably for organic reasons, Stesichoros may have become *permanently* blind in old age. This hypothesis was suggested to me by a careful examination of the well known Himera coin, believed to reproduce Stesichoros' famous statue which, according to Cic. *Verr.* 2.2. (35). 87, represented him well: “senilis, incurva, cum libro, summo ut artificio”. A thorough analysis of Stesichoros' facial expression and body posture⁶) suggests to me that he is represented as blind. The fact that he does not look at the book he holds, but stares *blankly* into space, also tends to confirm this impression, though I readily admit that I cannot offhand recall a Greek sculpture representing anyone as *reading* a book.

This observation does not conclusively prove that the old Stesichoros *had* become blind. But it does indicate that his statue

5) G. Devereux, ‘The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides’ *Bacchae*’, *J. H. S.* xc (1970), pp. 35–48. Cp. also the case of Thormod, cited by Bergk, *PLG* 4, pars iii, note on p. 215.

6) On the need to analyse the body postures represented on Greek monuments with meticulous attention to *objective* criteria, cp. G. Devereux, ‘The Exploitation of Ambiguity in Pindaros *O.* 1. 37’, *Rhein. Mus.* cix (1966), pp. 289–298.

(and/or the coin) *so represented* him. Moreover, since senile blindness is usually irreversible, the tale of Stesichoros' recovery *cannot* pertain to his *senile* blindness; it can pertain only to *earlier* attacks of (reversible) *hysterical* blindness. His permanent senile blindness was, for obvious reasons, *not* mentioned by the purveyors of edifying tales: it would have destroyed the hearer's faith in the usefulness of "repentance".

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AESCHYLUS PROMETHEUS VINCTUS

425-435

†μόνον δὴ πρόσθεν ἄλλον ἐν πόνοις δαμέντ' ἀκαμαντοδέτοις Τιτᾶνα λύμαις εἰσιδόμεν, θεὸν Ἄτλανθ', ὃς αἰὲν ὑπέροχον σθένος κραταῖον ... οὐράνιον τε πόλον νώτοις ὑποστενάζει.†	425 430
βοᾷ δὲ πόντιος κλύδων ξυμπίντων, στένει βυθός, κελαινός [δ ³] Ἄιδος ὑποβρέμει μυχὸς γᾶς, παγαί θ' ἄγροῦτων ποταμῶν στένουσιν ἄλγος οἰκτρόν.	435

425 δὴ] δ^η O^c, fort. O^{ac} fuit δεῖ ἄλλον] ita MCO^{ac}P²o ἄλλον QKBH
ΔYaN 426 ἀκαμαντοδέτοις] ἀδαμαντοδέτοις CI^{ac}, corr. I² 428 ὑπέροχον]
ita HB ὑπέροχον fere codd. 430 ὑποστενάζει] ita B^{ac} et rell. ὑποστενάζει
B^{1pc} 432 βυθός] βαθός MH βόθός V 433 θ' seclisut Lachmann

The text given is that of Murray* (OCT 2nd. ed., 1955); the apparatus criticus is selected from the collation of Dawe (*The Collation and Investigation of the Manuscripts of Aeschylus*, CUP 1964, pp. 215-16), to whose work the reader is referred for a

*Although the author was unfortunately unable to make use of Page's 1972 OCT, the reader will see that Page still describes vv. 425-430 as *desperati*.