

98th Anniversary Meeting of CAMWS–Southern Session

Hawthorne Inn and Conference Center, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, USA, October 2018.

‘Trojans’ and ‘Phrygians’ in Greek Tragedy: Synonyms?

Milena Anfosso

Strabo (14, 3, 3) first accused the tragic poets of assimilating to the Phrygians all the inhabitants of northwestern Anatolia, especially the Trojans. Although originally identified as two allied but independent peoples (Hom. *Il.* 2, 862–863), and speaking two languages perceived as different (HH 5, 111–115), Phrygians and Trojans are considered interchangeable in Greek tragedy. The synonymous usage of two originally distinct ethnonyms, ‘Phrygians’ and ‘Trojans’, represents a major innovation.

According to *scholia A ad Il.* 2, 862 (I 348 Erbse = fr. 446 Radt) and BCE *ad Il.* 2, 862 (I 349 Erbse), Aeschylus should be considered responsible for this lexical confusion. This would have happened in a lost tragedy from the beginning of the 5th century BC entitled *Phrygians* or *Ransom of Hector* (Φρύγες ἢ Ἑκτορος λύτρα, fr. 263–272 Radt = 242–259 Mette), inspired by Hom. *Il.* 24, in which Aeschylus introduced a chorus of Phrygians accompanying the Trojan King Priam when he retrieved Hector’s body from Achilles.

The aim of this contribution is to exonerate Aeschylus, at least partially. First, I will review the iconographic data connected to Aeschylus’ tragedy, focusing on the figure of Priam. Then, I will analyze the occurrences of the ethnonym ‘Phrygians’ in the tragic corpus, from Aeschylus to Euripides, in order to distinguish when it is used in the proper sense and when as a synonym for ‘Trojans’. On the basis of this analysis it is possible to state that in Aeschylus (early 5th century BC) there is no evidence for the usage of ‘Phrygians’ as a synonym for ‘Trojans’; in Sophocles (mid-5th century BC) there is sporadic usage of this kind (3 occurrences), in parallel with the partial Persianization of Priam in iconography beginning in 440 BC (Miller 1995); in Euripides (late 5th century BC) this usage increases exponentially (101 occurrences) and is well-established, in parallel with the total Persianization of Priam in iconography beginning in 400 BC (Miller 1995).

Moreover, the aforementioned *scholia* are the only ones that explicitly identify Aeschylus as responsible for the equation between Phrygians and Trojans. All the other *scholia* that comment on it, i.e. A *ad Il.* 3, 184 (= I 392 Erbse), T *ad Il.* 10, 431 (= III 92 Erbse), BCE *ad Il.* 10, 431 (= III 92 Erbse), AT *ad Il.* 20, 216–217 (= V 35 Erbse), A *ad Il.* 24, 545 (= V 610 Erbse), highlight the fact that this should be attributed to more recent poets (νεώτεροι), but Aeschylus is not named at all.

It is more likely that the confusion took place at the *reception* stage of the tragedy, in line with the cultural climate following the Second Persian War (480–479 BC). After the victory, the Greeks identified the Persians with the Trojans: both were Asian and both deserved to be defeated by the

Greeks because of their *hybris* (Lenfant 2004). The privileged contexts for such an operation were iconography and literature. Aeschylus' tragedy *Phrygians* is set in Troy, focuses on the most painful moment of the war for the Trojans, and features King Priam among its protagonists, but with a chorus of Phrygian slaves, not Trojan citizens. This juxtaposition could easily cause a cognitive short-circuit in the audience. Moreover, the Trojans as a people no longer existed at the end of the 5th century BC, but the Phrygians did, and they were part of the Persian empire from 546 BC onward. The capital of the satrapy of Hellespontine Phrygia, Daskyleion, was geographically close to the ruins of ancient Troy.

Therefore, with a procedure definable as *synecdochic* (i.e. a part for the whole), and simultaneously *active on different temporal axes* (i.e. the ancestral time of the Trojan War, re-actualized by the tragedy of Aeschylus, and the present time, after the Persian Wars), the ethnonym 'Phrygians' of the title of Aeschylus' tragedy came to evoke in the Greeks' minds an entirely Trojan tragic subject and a people that synchronically was part of the Persian Empire, identified with Troy. This cognitive blending led to the synonymous usage of 'Phrygians' and 'Trojans' in a system where Aeschylus' tragedy was one element, but not the only determining one.

References:

Erbse, Helmut. 1969-1988. *Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*. 5 vols. Berlin.

Lenfant, Dominique. 2004. "L'amalgame entre les Perses et les Troyens chez les Grecs de l'époque classique". *Historia y mito. El pasado legendario como fuente de autoridad* (eds. J. M. Candau Morón, F. J. Gonzalez Ponce, G. Cruz Andreotti). Málaga. 77–96.

Mette, Hans Joachim. 1959. *Die Fragmente der Tragödien des Aischylos*. Berlin.

Miller, Margaret C. 1995. "Priam, King of Troy". *The Ages of Homer. A Tribute to Emily Townsend Vermeule* (eds. J. B. Carter, S. P. Morris). Austin. 449–465.

Radt, Stefan Lorenz. 1985. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta. Aeschylus*. Göttingen.