

PETER GROSSARDT, *Stesichoros zwischen kultischer Praxis, mythischer Tradition und eigenem Kunstanspruch. Zur Behandlung des Helenamythos im Werk des Dichters aus Himera (mit einem Anhang zum Motivkomplex von Blendung und Heilung in der internationalen Erzähltradition)*. Leipziger Studien zur Klassischen Philologie 9, Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2012, pp. XIV, + 180. ISBN 978-3-8233-6767-3.

In this monograph, P. Grossardt (Gr.) grapples with the complex and thorny problem of Stesichorus' treatment of Helen. This is a problem that remains difficult to resolve, both because of the many different versions of the myth surrounding the life and action of the Spartan princess as well as because so little of Stesichorus' work survives. Moreover, the later testimony does not help clarify the situation but complicates it even further. As Gr. informs us (VII-IX), it was reading an episode in Leo Tolstoy's well-known novel *War and Peace*, where the Virgin Mary blinds and then restores the sight to a Russian general, that inspired him to research further the similar incident of blinding followed by the restoration of sight that it is claimed happened to the lyric poet Stesichorus (7th/6th century BC). Gr. announces that his study is intended for classical philologists (esp. chaps. 1-7, 1-85) as well as scholars of comparative literature and religion (esp. Anhang, 89-140). Nonetheless, the instructions he gives on p. XIII are not necessary for a specialised readership.

In chap. 1, "Einleitung" (pp. 1-5), the following pertinent questions are posed:

1. How did Stesichorus present his poems to the public?
2. In order to construct the mythical narrative, did the poet follow the Panhellenic epic tradition or did he prefer local versions of the myths, in order to satisfy his various audiences?
3. Did the invention of Helen's phantom originate in a local tradition, which Stesichorus copied?
4. Was the image of Helen as a powerful goddess who blinds and then restores sight dictated by a local tradition, or was the poet the first to give her this power, or is it in fact a post-Stesichorean tradition?

As to the first question, Gr. limits himself to two possibilities (a. with the chorus, b. with the poet as singer and the accompaniment of silent dancers), without probing the subject more deeply. The hypothesis that he formulates – that if the second situation is true, then Stesichorus' poetry must be considered more as a branch of epic than as an example of early lyric

– is not correct. Stesichorus was a choral lyric poet who narrated epic themes in lyric metres. To what extent his long poems could, however, be presented as choral has been thoroughly discussed by myself in the article “Some New Thoughts on Stesichorus’ Geryoneis”, *ZPE* 168, 2009, 10 f.

In order to answer questions 2, 3 and 4, Gr. makes a rough distinction between Panhellenic and local tradition. He presents Helen as a goddess who was worshipped only in Sparta and is concerned as to how far the invention of the phantom and the image of the punisher goddess Helen can have come from a local tradition known within Sparta or, at the most, within the boundaries of Laconia.

To be more precise, in Helen’s case we must not distinguish between a Panhellenic and a local tradition but between the epic and the Doric versions. And this because Helen was worshipped as a goddess not only in Sparta but also in many Doric regions of the wider Greek world (Southern Italy, Sicily, Rhodes, etc). There is even evidence for a sanctuary of Helen in Memphis, Egypt (Hdt. 2.112). The epic tradition that is responsible for the censorious image of the unfaithful Helen is certainly more widespread than the Doric tradition, but I would not describe it as Panhellenic. The Doric audience of the aforementioned regions was very large and we ought not, therefore, underestimate it by describing it as local. The Dorians of Sparta, Rhodes, Himera, Epizephyrian Locri, Matauros, Camarina, Acragas, Taras, Heracleia, etc. would not have tolerated hearing such censorious things about their goddess and therefore pushed for the creation of another version, namely that Helen never went Troy and never betrayed her legal husband for the sake of a young foreigner.

In chap. 2, “Helen und die Geburt der Iphigeneia” (7-11), Gr. ponders as to what extent a local Argive tradition, according to which Iphigenia was the daughter of Helen and Theseus (Paus. 2.22.6, fr. 191 *PMGF*), could have a place in *Helen*. He concludes that poet was able to mix something new in along with the generally accepted mythological material. In this way, Stesichorus could incorporate Iphigenia’s sacrifice in *Helen* from a desire to blacken the heroine even further, presenting her as the cause for the sacrifice of her daughter. According to Gr., *Helen* was performed in Sparta, where there was a significant worship of Artemis Orthia and in whose sanctuary it was said that Theseus abducted the young princess (Hellan. 4 F168a *FGH* = Plut. *Thes.* 31.2, Hyg. *Fab.* 79.1). As such, Gr. himself sees in *Helen* a point of comparison between two local traditions, an Argive and a Spartan tradition. Moreover, Gr. sees a clear contradiction in Stesichorus, as at 191 *PMGF* he portrayed Iphigenia as the daughter of Helen and Theseus whereas at 215 *PMGF* she is the daughter of Agamemnon. Since Gr. believes that it is very possible that the *Oresteia* was also staged at Sparta, he concludes that Stesichorus presented to the same audience Helen as Iphigenia’s mother on one occasion while on another occasion he presented Clytaemestra as her mother.

All the above are hypotheses without serious foundations, and this is why there are strong objections to them. Indeed, before the author focused his attention on isolated episodes he should have first presented to the reader (even in a few general lines) the contents of *Helen* and the *Palinode*, and explicated as to whether these are two different poems or two parts of the same poem. The reader must wait until chap. 4 and beyond (29 ff.) in order to understand the author's own positions.

Moreover, a visit to Sparta by Stesichorus is purely hypothetical and there is no strong evidence for this; even less so for the combination of a hypothetical stay with productions of *Helen* and the *Oresteia*! Gr. adopts the unsupported hypotheses first formulated by Bowra (*2Gr. Lyr. Poetr.* p. 111) that: "The particular glory which Stesichorus gives to Helen in the *Palinode* was appropriate to Sparta and to almost nowhere else in the Greek world. At Sparta she had her festivals and special duties..." As I have stated previously, in addition to Sparta, Helen and the Dioscuri were greatly worshipped in other Doric regions, and especially in Southern Italy and Sicily. Stesichorus did not need to travel to Sparta in order to produce *Helen* and the *Oresteia*, as in his own homeland he had a ready audience of Dorian colonists who would certainly have been interested in these themes.

As for fr. 191 *PMGF*, I believe it matches better with the *Oresteia* than with *Helen*, as I consider *Helen* to be a purely encomiastic poem (I will expand on my reasons for this in a future study). In the *Oresteia*, Clytaemestra could justifiably argue that she killed Agamemnon in order to seek vengeance for the unjust death of her daughter Iphigenia (cf. Aesch. *Ag.* 1412 ff., Soph. *El.* 528 ff., Eur. *El.* 1018 ff.), while another character (e.g. Electra, cf. Soph. *El.* 558 ff., Eur. *El.* 1060 ff.) could counter this argument by saying that Iphigenia was not her child. As such, there was no specific need which pushed Clytaemestra to the unholy act of killing her husband, aside from her own immoral sexual desire for Aegisthus. In addition to this, in the *Oresteia* it is expected that reproaches will be fired off at the polygamous and destructive Helen.

In 215 *PMGF*, Iphigenia does not appear "ganz konventionell als Tochter von Klytaimestra und Agamemnon", as Gr. hastily observes. The evidence in Philodemus on this particular fragment is as follows: Στη[σίχορο]ς δ' ἐν Ὀρεστεί[α κατ]ακολουθήσας [Ἡσιό]δῳ τὴν Ἀγαμέ[μνονος Ἰ]φιγένειαν εἶ[ναι τῆ]ν Ἐκάτην οὖν [ὄνομαζ]ομένην. The phrase τὴν Ἀγαμέμνονος Ἰφιγένειαν is not a confirmation that Iphigenia appeared in the Stesichorean *Oresteia* actually as the real daughter of Agamemnon; she is described in this way because this is the view that prevailed. Helen also often appears in the literature as the daughter of Tyndareus (cf. the feminine patronymic Τυνδαρίς); yet, Tyndareus was in reality her adoptive father.

In chap. 3, "Aphrodite und die Töchter des Tyndareos in *PMGF* 223" (pp. 13-28), Gr. compares Stesichorus' fr. 223 *PMGF* with Hesiod's fr. 176

M.-W., and correctly concludes that the two fragments come from the same tradition, which can, however, no longer be fully reconstructed. Section 3.1 (pp. 14-6) is well considered and concludes with the interesting observation that Stesichorus was innovating when he presented Aphrodite as punishing Tyndareus through his daughters, because he had once neglected to offer a sacrifice to the goddess, whereas Hesiod portrayed Aphrodite as taking her revenge because she was jealous of the beauty of Tyndareus' daughters.

In section 3.2, "Die Identifikation der verschiedenen Personen in PMGF 223" (16-8), Gr. observes two different versions between Stesichorus and the *Cypria* (cf. Procl. *Chrest.* 80 Seve., fr. 1 Bern.) for the outbreak of the Trojan War. I do not personally see a conflict between Aphrodite's bile towards Tyndareus and the judgement of Paris. An insulted and bitter Aphrodite finds the opportunity to get her revenge through the judgement of Paris. Through just one move (i.e. the offering of Helen to Paris) she manages also to get revenge on Tyndareus by making his daughter a bigamist, and she also wins the beauty contest too.

In section 3.3, "Stesichoros und der Kult der Aphrodite in Sparta" (18-26), Gr., inspired by the lexical similarities between *Il.* 9.533 ff. and Stes. fr. 223 *PMGF*, argues that Stesichorus copied the motif of the divinity who has been angered by the neglected sacrifice from the Homeric narrative of the Calydonian boar. As such, Gr. continues, Stesichorus introduced elements from a foreign cult into the local Spartan cult, creating his own cult and mythical world. We do not have enough details in order to be able to accept the above position. The version according to which Tyndareus' bigamous (two or three times over) daughters were in no way responsible for their shame, but instead their forgetful father, who had inspired Aphrodite's rage (the poor man was not completely at fault because he had simply forgotten to make a sacrifice, he didn't avoid doing it on purpose), was the cause, was either a local tradition or one created by Stesichorus, inspired by the common folk belief that the appropriate honour due to each god should be neither forgotten nor neglected (cf. Paus. 8.22.8 f.: punishment of the Stymphalians by Artemis, 8.42.5 ff.: punishment of the Phigalians by Demeter; we should also recall the Euripidean *Hippolytus*). Because the version of the embittered Aphrodite's vengeance coincides with and matches in terms of its content with the case of the Calydonian boar, as it is found in the *Iliad*, then in the second case it can be assumed that Stesichorus retrospectively decided to match his own narrative lexically with that of Homer.

In section 3.4, "Die Frage nach Werkzugehörigkeit von PMGF 223" (26-8), Gr. argues that 223 *PMGF* may originate in only a poem in which Helen was the central character; to this purpose, he suggests *Helen* and rejects the *Oresteia* and the *Iliou Persis*. The fact that 223 *PMGF* talks of the daughters of Tyndareus (Clytaemestra, Timandra, Helen) and not just one daughter (i.e. Helen) undermines the above categorical position.

In chap. 4, “Helena und Menelaos in Stesichoros’ *Helena*” (pp. 29-33), Gr. identifies *Helen* with the Ἑλένης κακηγορία and attributes to the poem the frs. 187-191, 223 and *P. Oxy.* 3876 fr. 35 (following W. Luppe, see *ZPE* 95, 1993, 53-8). Gr. believes that the wedding scene in fr. 187 *PMGF* can be reduced to local Spartan customs that were still alive in the time of Stesichorus. Moreover, the material used to make vessels for washing the feet (i.e. the litharge, cf. fr. 188 *PMGF*) was common in Sparta and the poet was familiar with it from having lived there.

As I have argued in my recent article “Stesichorus’ *Helen* fr. 187 *PMGF*: A New Interpretation”, *RFIC* 141.2 (2013), 257-269, this fragment describes Menelaus’ triumphant entry into Sparta as a bridegroom after the difficult contest in which he brushed aside many fine candidates (cf. fr. 190 *PMGF*). Fr. 187 *PMGF* talks of one person (l. 1 ἄνακτι) at whom fruit, myrtle leaves and floral wreaths are being thrown. This is how they would honour all those who emerged as victors after a contest or labour (cf. Simon. F 10 Poltera, Pind. *Pyth.* 9.123 ff., *Isthm.* 8.66a f., Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 723c, *Suda* π 1054, etc.). Furthermore, there is no evidence for the throwing of leaves, fruit and wreaths at wedding processions in either the literary or the visual arts (cf. Hom. *Il.* 18.490 ff., Hes. *Sc.* 270 ff., Eur. *Alc.* 915 ff., *Hel.* 722 ff., Ch. Papadopoulou-Kanellopoulou, *Ἐρὸ τῆς Νύμφης. Μελανόμορφες Λουτροφόροι*, Athens 1997). In any case, the descriptions at 187 *PMGF* do not depict anything specific that could be characterised as a local custom, but instead portray a Panhellenic custom for bestowing honour on victors. Moreover, objects made of litharge are definitely known to have been used in the ancient Greek world (cf. Arist. *Soph. el.* 164b21 ff.); we also know that litharge was used in the ancient mines at Laurion as a watertight coating for the water tanks.

Gr.’s observation that 190 *PMGF* had a Panhellenic scope is correct and his conclusion that Stesichorus used a Panhellenic tradition for the canvas of *Helen* but would also, here and there, throw in a few local colours when describing marriage scenes, is interesting. It’s a shame, however, that the two surviving fragments of the poem do not indicate any such thing.

On p. 32, Gr. is incorrect in believing that Taras was the only Spartan colony in Magna Graecia. We can mention the Epizephyrian Locri who, according to Paus. 3.3.1, were a Spartan colony; moreover, they were described as the “Sparta of the West”, as the socio-economic conditions of the city were reminiscent of those in Sparta, their dialect was closely related to that of Sparta’s and there is a pronounced Spartan influence in a number of their artistic products (see D. Musti, *Le tavole di Locri* p. 9, J. M. Redfield, *The Locrian Maidens* 251 ff.). The Dioscuri were honoured in Epizephyrian Locri, thanks to this Spartan influence, and their cult reached its peak following the battle of Sagra (cf. Strabo 6.1.10, Dio. Sic. 8.32; the battle is dated to between 550 BC and 510 BC).

In chap. 5, “Helena in der *Iliupersis* und in den *Nostoi*” (35–42), Gr., as far as the content of *Helen* is concerned, outlines a biography of the heroine with the following stages: youth, capture by Theseus, birth of Iphigenia, marriage with Menelaus, wrath of Aphrodite, perhaps also capture by Paris. The remaining events of her life were memorialised, according to Gr., in the *Sack of Troy* and *Homecomings*. He even claims that the description ξανθὴ Ἑλένη was an innovation by Sappho (cf. fr. 23.5 V.), which Stesichorus and Ibycus adopted (S 151.5 *PMGF*). Of interest is Gr.’s observation of the similarities between the Stesichorean *Helen* and the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, in which a king’s wife is also abducted, an enemy city falls and the woman is reclaimed once more, after having had her wifely faithfulness and purity tested. Further discussion and explanation of these similarities is, however, needed.

In chap. 6, “Stesichoros und Helena in der *Palinodie*” (43–77), Gr. discusses the subject of the blinding, in particular from where the poet copied this motif and what function he gave it in his poem.

In section 6.1, “Der Inhalt der *Palinodie* und die literarische Polemik in *PMGF* 192” (44–8), Gr. attributes Stesichorus’ phrase οὐδ’ ἔβας (fr. 192.2 *PMGF*) to Homer (*Il.* 24.766) and Sappho (fr. 16.9 V. ἔβα ’ς Τροίαν πλέοισα), and concludes that, although Stesichorus is utilising the two poets, he is also consciously seeking a contrast with the representatives of the Panhellenic tradition (not only with epic but also with lyric poets). The attribution to Homer is correct but with Sappho I have my doubts as we do not know enough about the lives and periods of composition of either Sappho or Stesichorus. In any case, if Stesichorus sought a conscious contrast with other poets aside from Homer and Hesiod, then shouldn’t he have declared this and named them in the *Palinode*?

In section 6.2, “Das Blendungsmotiv in der *Palinodie* und die verschiedenen Versionen der Geschichte von der Heilung des Stesichoros” (48–57), Gr. expresses the belief that in the *Palinode* Stesichorus discussed a real blinding and its cure. He investigates which of the versions – Plato’s (*Phaedr.* 243a), Conon’s (*fab.* 18), Pausanias’ (3.19.12–13) or the *Suda* (σ 1095) – can be traced to the Stesichorean poem. He correctly judges Pausanias’ narrative to be a local history of Croton or Locri that must have been created after the battle of Sagra. With the arguments that divine dreams are a common motif in epic and that Stesichorus copied the appearance of Helen in the dreams of Homer (*Isocr. Hel.* 65, *Vita Romana* 5), Gr. concludes that the version in the *Suda* goes as far back as the *Palinode*.

In sections 6.3, “Das Motiv der Blendung und Heilung als traditionelles Erzählmotiv” (57–9), and 6.4, “Verschiedene göttliche Hüterinnen der menschlichen Augen und die Frage nach ihrer Beziehung zu Helena und Stesichoros” (59–68), Gr. moves away from the subject as he wonders which goddess at the time of Stesichorus protected human sight and had the power to

blind and heal mortals. Gr. follows the wrong path here, seeking this goddess amongst Athena, Demeter and Isis, concluding that Isis is the most likely model from which Stesichorus borrows to give Helen the ability to blind and heal human sight. He should have considered the etymology of the name Ἑλένη much earlier and have incorporated the views of N. Laneres ('L'Harpax de Therapne ou le *Digamma* d'Hélène', Actes du Ve Congrès International de Dialectologie Grecque [Athènes 28-30 Septembre 2006], in: *Meletemata* 52, 237-269) and M. West (*Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford 2007, 137, 230 f.), who attributes to Helen the name 'mistress of sunlight'. Indeed, the association of Helen with the Hindu Dawn goddess (*Ushas*) and Selene shows a close relationship between her being and light. We should recall that Helen was worshipped in Rhodes, where Helios was the patron god (for further details, see A. Rozokoki in *QUCC* 98, 2011, 63 f.).

The models for the goddess Helen were the Hindu Dawn goddess and, to an extent, the eastern great goddess Istar/Astarte (and not Isis). The Anatolian model for the Dioscuri has been located in the Ásvins, whose powers included restoring sight to the blind. The Spartan trio of the Dioscuri + Helen corresponds to the Indian trio of Ásvins + Dawn goddess; this is the same motif: a goddess of light and her two male companions (brothers, friends or lovers). Moreover, the intervention of the twins in order to save the female figure (mother, sister) from her captor, or to defend or rehabilitate her honour and reputation is a motif in many Indo-European mythologies. The Dioscuri punished the captor Theseus; they would also have punished Paris, if they were still alive. This is why Helen looks for them and wonders why she cannot see them amongst the Achaean warriors in Troy (*Il.* 3.236 ff.). The version presented by Horace (*Ep.* 17.42-44), that the Dioscuri punished the blaspheming poet for the sake of their sister, then, after he had repented, healed him, may be much closer to Stesichorus (for further details, see A. Rozokoki, *QUCC* 98 [2011], 38 f., 65 f.).

Gr.'s line of thinking (p. 66) – that because in the Hellenistic and Roman period Isis was the primary goddess who protected human sight and therefore we must also look for her in the time of Stesichorus (7th/6th century BC) – is wrong. In the Hellenistic and Roman eras, the cult of Isis merged abilities that had not previously belonged to her. In ancient Egypt, Isis was the eye of the sun god Re, but there is no evidence that an ability relating to human sight was attributed to her. When her son Horus, seeking vengeance for his father's death, fights with the evil Seth and loses an eye, it is not Isis who restores it to him but Thoth!

In chap. 6.5, "Die Motivreihe von Blendung und Heilung als indogermanisches Erbgut?" (pp. 69-73), the observation that the cult of Helen has Indo-European elements and that Stesichorus could find the motif of the blinding in either Anatolian, Greek or Western Mediterranean traditions, is correct. We can also accept the conclusion in section 6.6, "Folgerungen" (pp.

73-7), according to which, in order to compose the *Palinode*, Stesichorus mixed and adapted material from the Panhellenic and local traditions and, of course, also added his own elements through his poetic talent.

In chap. 7, “Schluss” (79-85), Gr. recaps the main positions that he has developed in the previous chapters.

The second part of the study includes an appendix in which Gr. traces the sources of various medieval and later narratives (religious, literary, etc.), which contain miracles of blinding and restoration of sight (such as the Russian general in *War and Peace*, Orthodox monks on Mt Athos, the blinding of Thormod in an old Icelandic myth, and other Irish and English tales of saintly miracles; see “Anhang: Der Motivkomplex von Blendung und Heilung in der internationalen Erzähltradition”, 87-140). Wherever the Virgin Mary appears healing the blind, the roots must be sought in Isis, Gr. tells us. This scholar assumes that healing through a vision in a dream may have been known in Egypt between 760-340 BC and that the blinding of Stesichorus and Hermon (cf. *IG* 4²122) stems directly from the cult of Isis. According to Gr., Isis was the most prominent goddess with the power to blind and heal out of all the divinities of the Near East (see p. 134 ff.).

The bibliography (141-66) is exceptionally rich and covers a wide range of fields: ancient Egyptian, Greek, Latin, ecclesiastical, Hindu, Icelandic and other texts. The study is rounded off with three indices: a. Names and Subjects, b. Passages Cited, and c. Iconography (167-80).

With a poem very little of which survives, and where the burden falls on later, non-complementary evidence, we must be very careful when attempting to discern what the poet may have borrowed from various myths (Eastern, Panhellenic, local), how he chose and adapted this material and even if he invented new details. Distinguishing the different levels cannot be done roughly: we must be aware that amongst the roughly-determined levels there are intermediary strata that may be recognised after much careful and meticulous examination.

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