CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

AESCHYLUS, AGAMEMNON 681–716

The theme of this first part of the Second Stasimon of Agamemnon is the ruination effected by Helen’s sailing to Troy as Paris’ bride, beginning with reflection upon the aptness of her name: τίς ποτ’ ὀνόμαζεν ὃδ’ ἔκ το πᾶν ἔτητύμως …;

Text and metre are tolerably secure in the opening and concluding parts of both strophe (681–98) and antistrophe (699–716), now that we have West’s convincing treatment of the corrupt tradition at 714–15 (hitherto usually obelized). But these corresponding passages in the middle are still in need of further discussion: 2

τὸν δορὶγαμβρὸν ὀμβίνεικῇ θ’ 687
'Ελένεων; ἐπεὶ πρεπόντως 688
ἐλέναυς ἐλανδρὸς ἐλέπτολις ἐκ τῶν ἄβροπηνων 689–90
προκαλυμμάτων ἐπέλευς … 691

~ πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότιμον 705
μέλος ἐκφάτως τίοντας, 706
ὑμέναιον, ὃ τὸτ’ ἐπέρρεπε γαμβροῖν ἀείδειν’ 707–8
μεταμανθάνουσα δ’ ὑμνὸν … 709

Four considerations combine to throw serious doubt upon this vulgate: 3

1. It has not been explained how πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότιμον μέλος ἐκφάτως τίοντας can be understood as πρασσομένα τοὺς τὸ ν’- μ- ἐ-τίοντας. ‘Those who …’ can be expressed by a relative clause or by

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2 Text as West, except that I prefer a colon to his full-stop in 708.

3 Other editions differ only superficially: both Fraenkel and Denniston–Page (also Page, OCT) lineate as ch ia j ch ia – (with overlap at ὀμβίνει-/-κῆ ~ νυμφότι/-μον) and divide 689–90/707–8 at ἐλέ- [πτολικ and ἐπέρ- [πέπε]. The only other variation is that some editors (not Fraenkel) retain ἐλένας, understood as ἐλέναυς.
article + participle; not by participle alone.

2. ὀ ὀ ὀ ὀ ὀ ὀ – (…), supposedly a form of ionic dimeter, is a ‘freak’ (as West concedes, GM 125).

3. West has justly focussed attention on ὑμέναιον as having ‘the appearance of a gloss’, suggesting something like ἄγιαλῶς in place of ὑμέναιον ὃς (ὁς being otherwise suspect, emended by Schütz to ὃς).

4. It may also be significant that the tradition divides 689–90 and 707–8 at … ἐλέπτολις ἐκ … and … ἐπέρρεπεν (sic) γαμ– …

With a lacuna indicated at the relevant place in the antistrophe, a very different-looking arrangement of the text becomes available: 

τὰν δορίγαμβρον ὄμφινεῖ·
κὴ θ' Ἐλένον; ἔπει
πρεπόντως ἑλένας
ἔλανδρος ἐλέπτολις
ἐκ τῶν ἄμπροπήνων
προκαλυμμάτων ἐπλευσε …

~ πρασσομένα τὸ νυμφότι·
μον μέλος ἐκφάτως
tόντας ( ὀ ὀ
− − ) τοῦ ἐπέρρεπεν
γαμβροίσιν αἴδειν·
μεταμανθάνουσα δ' ὑμνον …

We now have, first, an ambivalent sequence beginning with chiα … followed by either dod : dod " (as above) or ch ia ch;5 then two more short cola (self-contained): a telesillean (− − − − − ∥) and a reizianum (− − − − ∥), the latter at once the catalectic correlate of

4 Fraenkel was content to call it an ‘uncommon’ form. Denniston–Page took it unconvincingly as a form of anacreontic with – – – rather than – – – in its second half. The suggested kinship with – – – ‘in an ionic context’ at 748 πομπαὶ Διὸς ξενίου ~ 761 οἶκων γὰρ εὐθυδίκων is no more convincing. 748/761 (a self-contained colon, not synartete with ionics) is simply a form of telesillean (West’s tl’), akin rather to x − − − − − − − − , and associated in its context at least as closely with the following clausular colon − − − − − − − − (ph) as with the preceding ionics. The single ‘other example’ at E. Pho. 1515 is evanescent (Diggle, with Mastronarde, rightly reads τίς ὁρίς ὁρίς ὁρίς ἃ there, with a papyrus and some MSS, not τίς ὁρίς ὁρίς ἃ ὁρίς ἃ).

5 The former lineation is favoured by the symmetrical phrasing (… : − − : − − − | …); − − − − − − − is a very common colon in Aeschylus (whether as dodrans or as dochmius), and for the colon − − − : − − − − − − − cf. especially Sept. 892–3/903–4 (there repeated); for ἔπει at colon-end, cf. Ag. 393. But there may well be a deliberate ambivalence.