CHAPTER SEVEN

ION THE WINEMAN: THE MANIPULATION OF MYTH

GUY OLDING

Introduction

In this essay I examine Ion’s mythological writing. This will cast light on the nature of the genre, Ion’s place in Greek literary tradition and on his own social and political allegiances. The fragments of his mythography can provide considerable—if inferential—illumination on the beliefs and objects of Chios, a significant, if secondary, state in the Greek world. I aim to provide an outline of Ion’s method of allusion and explicate the manipulations—if that is not too strong a word—of meaning that we shall witness in his work.

It need hardly be said that Greeks did not regard their myths and traditions simply as fairy-stories and fictions. Nor were they quite the same as history. Their veritable antiquity and fabulous elements did not necessarily discredit them, but instead rendered them, perhaps, ‘hyper-real’. They provided the cultural and psychological basis for cultural and ethnic identity, customs and political and social arrangements. They are often used to suggest the existence of relationships or to assert specific political claims, a well-attested feature of Greek cultural production.

I shall not deal with the fragments of Ion’s tragedies, which are better treated in the context of their genre. Of greatest significance is his prose work, the Foundation of Chios (Chiou Kìsis), which is represented in three fragments. Pausanias provides a lengthy paraphrase (98 Leurini = FGrH 392 F1 = Paus. 7.4.8–10) and short fragments are preserved in the Etymologicum Orionis (97 Leurini = FGrH 392 F3 = Etym. Or. s.v. λόγγη) and Athenaeus (99 Leurini = FGrH 392 F2 = Ath. 426e).1 Also

1 von Blumenthal counts Aelian’s memorable description of a monstrous serpent on Chios (HA 16.39) as a fragment of Ion’s Foundation (17 von Blumenthal); Leurini lists it among “doubtful” fragments (128* Leurini); Jacoby calls it “anonymous” (FGrH 395 F1). von Blumenthal’s suggestion that it could belong to Hellanicus of Lesbos (who also
significant is a fragment of Ion’s elegiac verse that Plutarch cites in his Life of Theseus (96* Leurini = 29 West = Thes. 20.2). This is not strictly comparable to the Foundation, as it comes from a different work, in a different genre, produced on a different occasion and presumably with a different intent. However, being a relative clause, it was probably an incidental remark and can therefore be assumed to conform to Ion’s general views about Chios’ legendary past. Indeed, there is a view that 96* Leurini belongs to the Foundation anyway (though I reject this). These fragments seem to relate Chios’ traditions with a view to enhancing her position in the Greek world. Chios’ position as second-ranked power did not stop her citizens from thinking big. One particularly interesting thread is the view it presents of Athens. This has a number of aspects: the attitude of a significant minor player towards a political, military and cultural heavyweight; towards the political structure that connected the two in the fifth century, the Delian League; towards her fellow allies. Moreover, this relationship had a personal dimension. Ion’s friendship with the famous Athenian statesman and general Cimon is well known. It is in this last context that I shall, in the final part of this chapter, consider the significance of a possible reference to Ion by Thucydides (T14 Leurini = FGrH 392 T7 = Thuc. 8.38.3). It seems that Ion employed mythological allusion outside the literary field to describe his own personal relationships.

wrote a Chios Ktisis: FGrH 4 F71) does not exhaust the possibilities. I omit it because its subject matter is fantastic, not mythical.

5 Jacoby (1947a) 5.

6 To identify 96* Leurini = 29 West = Plut. Thes. 20.2 as belonging to the Foundation requires that the whole work be poetic, which seems at odds with the evidence that (1) the one surviving direct quotation is prose (97 Leurini = FGrH 392 F3 = Etym. Or. s.v. λόγγη). This can be made metrical by emendation (Cerri 1977), but the same could be said of many samples of Greek prose: see Dover (1986) 32. (2) Where the Foundation appears in lists of Ion’s works, it is located with other prose works; (3) Pausanias refers to it as a συγγραφή (98 Leurini = FGrH 392 F1 = Paus. 7.4.8; Jacoby 1947a: 5). While there are a few cases where συγγραφή refers to poetry (see Leurini 2000a ad loc.), it is more commonly used of prose works (references in LSJ s.v.); moreover, the συγγραφεύς is often contrasted to the ποιητής (cf. Pl. Phdr. 235c; Dem. 60.9; Dion. Thrax Gram. 1; Strabo 14.1.35). Dougherty (1994) debunks the notion that a genre of foundation poetry with particular characteristics ever existed—widely assumed since Schmid (1947).