

## Antigone's Creon and the Ephebic Oath

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Some three years ago, in *Sophocles and Alcibiades*, I discussed the historical background to the *Antigone*, suggesting that a plot that takes an unburied corpse as its starting point was a reflection of events that took place at the end of the Athenians' Samian campaign of 440-439 BC, when enemy prisoners were allegedly crucified, clubbed to death and left unburied on Pericles' orders (Vickers 2008, 13-33). It was suggested that the play was a means by which Sophocles might have distanced himself from events in which he was implicated as a fellow-general, but of which he disapproved. Following K. Frey and W. Calder III<sup>1</sup> it was argued that the play is the tragedy of Creon, who has the largest part, and who is on the stage for the greater part of the play. Creon, moreover, shares many characteristics with Pericles — too many, it would seem, for the similarities to be coincidental.<sup>2</sup>

I accepted the arguments of R.G. Lewis for a date for *Antigone* of 438 BC.<sup>3</sup> Creon's idiosyncrasies of speech echo those of Thucydides' Pericles, not least the way in which Creon's first speech (162-210) with its obtrusive references to himself and his personal opinions (with nine occurrences of ἐγώ, ἐμός and the like), is paralleled by Pericles' second Thucydidean speech (where ἐγώ, ἐμόν and ἐμοί occur twelve times between them). Creon's harsh metaphors too, 'drawn from coinage and metalworking, from military organization and warfare, from the commanding and steering of a ship, and from the breaking and yoking of animals',<sup>4</sup> have much in common with Pericles' striking use of metaphor, such as his comparison of Boeotians to 'holmoaks that batter their limbs against one another' (Arist. *Rh.* 1407a).

Creon's frequent use of words such as φρονεῖν ('to be resolute'), νοῦς ('mind'), δίκη ('justice') and their cognates resonate with Periclean associations. The *testimonia* are full of references to Pericles' φρόνημα (his 'resolve');<sup>5</sup> Νοῦς ('Mind') was central to the thought of his favourite philosopher, Anaxagoras (Plut. *Them.* 2.5); and δικαιοσύνη ('honesty', 'incorruptibility') was a virtue for which Pericles was later renowned, and which is said to have been one of the pillars of his public conduct (Plut. *Per.* 2.5).<sup>6</sup> Another frequent word in *Antigone* is μηχανή and its cognates and compounds (79, 90, 92, 175, 349, 363, 364); if Pericles is in the frame, these expressions would be allusions to his novel skill with siege-engines (μηχαναί), recently seen to good effect at Samos (Plut. *Per.* 27.3).

A propensity to silence is another characteristic that Creon and Pericles have in

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<sup>1</sup> Frey 1878; Calder 1968, 390.

<sup>2</sup> Vickers 2008, 13-33.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis 1988; cf. Tyrrell and Bennett 1998, 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> Griffith 1999, 36.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Plut. *Per.* 5.1, 8.1, 10.7, 17.4, 31.1, 36.8, 39.1; Stadter 1989, 75

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Stadter 1989, xxx, xxxvi-xxxvii, 187, 192-3, 244-5, 289, 292.

common. Silence in public was apparently a typical feature of Pericles' behaviour: he quietly endured criticism (πρῶτος καὶ σιωπῆ; Plut. *Per.* 34.1) and obloquy (σιωπῆ; *ibid.* 5.2). If Creon is on the stage for most of the play, as has been suggested, there will be long periods when he is silent. He is thus a 'silent, menacing presence' at 582-625,<sup>7</sup> and it is likely that he remains silent on stage during the Chorus' hymn to Eros and Aphrodite.<sup>8</sup> Creon actually states, 'I would not be silent (σιωπήσαιμι) if I saw ruin rather than safety (σωτηρία) coming to the citizens' (185-6). Σωτηρία, of course, well reflects a Periclean policy that attracted criticism in public debate as well as satire on the comic stage (Plut. *Per.* 33.7-8). Creon's 'coldness'<sup>9</sup> might moreover be compared with the 'bleakness' with which Thucydides' Pericles consoled the relatives of the dead in the Funeral Speech.<sup>10</sup> Pericles was in fact something of a cold fish: witness Ion of Chios, who knew Pericles and was less than impressed with his lack of social graces: 'Pericles was overbearing and insolent in conversation, and his pride had in it a great deal of contempt for others' (Plut. *Per.* 5.3), a characterization that closely corresponds to the Creon of *Antigone*.

There are many more ways in which the two figures run in parallel, and I have discussed most of them in *Sophocles and Alcibiades*. Pericles' meanness and incorruptibility is matched by Creon's mean-mindedness and suspicion that others might be interested only in monetary gain. Pericles' well-attested philosophical interests are alluded to by the 'pseudo-sophistic analysis of the senses'<sup>11</sup> in Creon's interview with the Guard, who also stands as a representative of the kind of people who formed Pericles' constituency. Creon makes invidious allusions that can only be taken as references to Pericles' reputation as "King of the Satyrs", much given to love-making. Creon appears to share Pericles' cruelty, and his tendency to brevity and repetition. The latter best exemplified in φεῦ φεῦ, ἰὼ πόνοι βροτῶν δύσπονοι ('woe, woe for the toilsome toils of men'; 1276). Πόνος ('toil' [= blood, sweat and tears]), was apparently such a prominent feature of Pericles' oratory that Thucydides artfully packs his last speech with a series of references to πόνος (Thuc. 2.62.1, 2.62.3, 2.63.1, 2.64.3, 2.64.6).

Creon is described as στρατηγός in line 8, very much in keeping with a Periclean characterization, for Pericles held the position of general more frequently than any other Athenian before or after (indeed in most years since 448/7).<sup>12</sup> Creon's entry from the field at 155, probably in armour,<sup>13</sup> will have presented the opportunity to show him helmeted in the manner familiar from Pericles' portraits.<sup>14</sup>

### The Ephebic Oath

There is one important parallel between Creon and Pericles that I overlooked, however. This is the use that Sophocles makes of the ephebic oath, sworn by young men aged

<sup>7</sup> Brown 1987, 172.

<sup>8</sup> Griffith 1999, 255.

<sup>9</sup> Brown 1987, 146.

<sup>10</sup> *HCT* 2.143 (on Thuc. 2.45.2).

<sup>11</sup> Goldhill 2006, 90.

<sup>12</sup> Develin 1989, 81-93.

<sup>13</sup> Calder 1968, 393; 2005, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Richter 1965, 1.102-4, figs 429-43.

eighteen as they began their two years' service in the *ephebeia*, a cadet force whose members acted as a kind of frontier police. The oath itself survives in literary quotations and in a fourth-century BC inscription found in 1938 that appears to be itself 'a reliable copy of [an] archaic Athenian civic oath'.<sup>15</sup>

The cards in the game that now follows were first dealt by P. Siewert in a seminal article published in 1977. All that now needs to be done is to deal them in a different order, and draw appropriate conclusions. Siewert's concern was to tackle once and for all the view once forcefully expressed by Wilamowitz that the *ephebeia* did not exist at all before 335 BC.<sup>16</sup> He did this in part by isolating some indubitably archaic features of the inscription, and in part by citing allusions to the oath in fifth-century literature that make it clear that it was part of the everyday scene.

### Sophocles *Antigone* 661-673

Siewert finds three allusions to the ephebic oath in Creon's speech to his son Haemon in which he refuses to allow him to marry Antigone. In an aside on civic disorder, Creon states:

καὶ τοῦτον ἂν τὸν ἄνδρα θαρσοῖην ἐγὼ  
καλῶς μὲν ἄρχειν, εὖ δ' ἂν ἄρχεσθαι θέλειν,  
δορός τ' ἂν ἐν χειμῶνι προστεταγμένον  
μένειν δίκαιον κάγαθὸν παραστάτην. (668-671)

I should feel sure that one who thus obeys would  
be a good ruler no less than a good subject, and in  
the storm of spears would stand his ground where  
he was set, loyal and dauntless at his comrade's side.

Παραστάτης (671), as Jebb (who only knew the literary version) recognised,<sup>17</sup> would have reminded an Athenian audience of the line in the oath declaring that οὐδέ λείψω τὸν παραστάτην ὅπου ἂν σ<τ>ο>ιχήσω: 'I will not desert the comrade beside me wherever I shall be stationed in the battle-line' (7).

If the audience were indeed familiar with the oath, they will have recognised in Creon's words

ἄλλ' ὃν πόλις στήσειε, τοῦδε χρῆ κλύειν  
καὶ σμικρὰ καὶ δίκαια καὶ τάναντία. (666-667)

Whomsoever the city may appoint, that man must be obeyed,  
in little things, in just things and unjust.

a perverted allusion to the oath's καὶ εὐηκοήσω τῶν ἀεὶ κραινότων ἐμφρόνως ('And I will obey those who for the time being hold sway reasonably': 11-12). As Siewert notes, 'there was no question for the Athenian audience but that Creon's demands for civic

<sup>15</sup> Siewert 1977, 104, 109-11; all translations from the inscription are Siewert's.

<sup>16</sup> Wilamowitz 1893, 1.191-4

<sup>17</sup> Jebb 1900, 127

obedience were unjust. In view of their oath he could not be considered as a man representing the principles of a *polis* or of their own democracy' (p. 106). Not only does Sophocles' phraseology recall the terms of the ephebic oath, but also plays on Periclean themes: *σμικρά* relates to the linguistic peculiarity that caused Thucydides to put such expressions as *περὶ βραχέως* ('for a small matter'), *διὰ μικρόν* ('for a trifle'), *ἐπὶ βραχείᾳ ... προφάσει* ('on [no] small plea') and *τὸ ... βραχύ* ('the small matter'), into his Pericles' mouth all within a few lines of each other in the *Histories* (Thuc. 1.140.4-141.1), presumably because it was a Periclean mannerism.<sup>18</sup> And *δίκαια* is a word laden with Periclean allusion: Pericles was known as the "Olympian", *δίκη* ('justice') was a concept closely linked with Zeus,<sup>19</sup> and *δικαιοσύνη* was, as we have seen, part of the *persona* that Pericles adopted.

Siewert's third comparison is between Creon's words:

ὅστις δ' ὑπερβᾶς ἢ νόμους βιάζεται,  
ἢ τοῦπιτάσσειν τοῖς κρατύνουσιν νοεῖ,  
οὐκ ἔστ' ἐπαίνου τοῦτον ἐξ ἐμοῦ τυχεῖν. (663-665)

But if anyone transgresses, and does violence  
to the laws, or thinks to dictate to his rulers,  
such a one can win no praise from me.

and the references to the laws in the oath: *καὶ εὐηκοήσω τῶν ἀεὶ κραινόντων ἐμφρόνως καὶ τῶν θεσμῶν* ('And I will obey those who for the time being hold sway reasonably and the established laws': 11-12). It is thus clear that Sophocles has imbued this passage with allusions to the traditional oath.

## Thucydides

These are not the only allusions to the ephebic oath that Siewert finds in fifth-century literature. He finds two more in Thucydides, and what is especially relevant in the present context, they are both in Periclean speeches. The first comes in the speech before the outbreak of war: 'We must defend ourselves (*ἀμύνεσθαι*) against our enemies in every way ... and must endeavour to hand down our empire undiminished to posterity (*μὴ ἐλάσσω παραδοῦναι*)' (Thuc. 1.40.3-6). This is a clear echo of the words of the oath: *ἀμυνῶ δὲ καὶ ὑπὲρ ἱερῶν καὶ ὀσίων καὶ οὐκ ἐλάττω παραδώσω τὴν πατρίδα* ('I will defend our sacred and public institutions and I will not hand over (to the descendents) the fatherland smaller': 8-10). Apart from the similarities, there is a significant difference as Siewert notes. It is no longer *τὴν πατρίδα* ('the fatherland') that is to be protected, but *αὐτά*, 'that which our Fathers ... advanced ... to the present state' or in other words, the Athenian empire. The wording has been altered to fit a current rhetorical need.

The second Thucydidean allusion detected by Siewert comes in the Funeral Speech at 2.37.3: *τῶν τε αἰεὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντων ἀκροάσει καὶ τῶν νόμων* ('we render

<sup>18</sup> See further Vickers 2008, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Lloyd-Jones 1983; Ostwald 1986, 143-4.

obedience to those in authority and to the laws') — 'almost a word-for-word paraphrase of lines 11 f. of the oath: ἐὺηκοήσω (=ἀκροάσει) τῶν ἀεὶ κραινόντων (=τῶν τε αἰεὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντων) ἐμφρόνως καὶ τῶν θεσμῶν (=τῶν νόμων)'.<sup>20</sup> (Thucydides has replaced archaic expressions with modern, but otherwise the sense is the same. Thucydides goes to great lengths accurately to characterize the way individuals spoke,<sup>21</sup> and appears to have known that the ephebic oath had particular Periclean associations. He almost certainly used the character of Creon, in part at least, as a model for Pericles.

### Aeschylus *Persae* 956-962

It is not simply that the instances cited so far 'presuppose a general familiarity with the oath in Periclean Athens';<sup>22</sup> there is something else at work, something specifically Periclean. This becomes apparent when we consider Siewert's last example of allusions to the ephebic oath. These occur in Aeschylus' *Persae*, at the point where the chorus question Xerxes on his return from Salamis. Ποῦ δέ σοι παραστάται; 'Where are those who stood by thy side?' they ask (956) as they list the names of departed Persians. Ὀλοοῦς ἀπέλειπον: 'I left them, cast forth in death ...' comes the reply (962). As Siewert observes, this is reminiscent of the oath's οὐδὲ λείψω τὸν παραστάτην ('I will not desert the comrade beside me'), strongly implying that the Persian king is represented as a deserter from his comrades. Worse, the following lines (965-6) state in effect 'Xerxes has left his dead comrades unburied'.<sup>23</sup>

What has this to do with Pericles? For a start, he was the *chorēgos* when *Persae* was performed in 472.<sup>24</sup> We can only guess at the reasons why Aeschylus made an allusion to the oath; perhaps he was making an allusive compliment. We know nothing of Pericles' own service in the *ephebeia*, which will have occurred only a few years before 472, but it was presumably meritorious. All we know of the youthful Pericles' military exploits is that 'fearing lest he be ostracized, he took no part in politics, but was a brave and stalwart soldier who did not shun danger' (Plut. *Per.* 7.2). This is in contrast to his later reputation for caution, but that was to be far in the future so far as the events of the early 430s are concerned and so irrelevant here.

The tradition that Aeschylus' plays were subsequently revived — even in Syracuse — is fraught with problems,<sup>25</sup> but the parodying of *Persae* by Eupolis (*PCG* 207)<sup>26</sup> and perhaps by Aristophanes,<sup>27</sup> encourages the view that it was well-known in the later fifth century. Whether this was thanks to repeat performances, or recitation at symposia<sup>28</sup> is, however, open to question. Pericles himself did not attend symposia on principle (Plut. *Per.* 7.55-6), whereas Sophocles certainly did (e.g. Plut. *Per.* 8.7; Ion Chius *P* 392 F 6, ap. Ath. 13.603e-604e). Sophocles' allusions to the ephebic oath, and the manner in

<sup>20</sup> Siewert 1977, 105.

<sup>21</sup> E.g. Tompkins 1972; 1993; Vickers 2008, 115-52.

<sup>22</sup> Siewert 1977, 107.

<sup>23</sup> Siewert 1977, 107.

<sup>24</sup> Broadhead 1960, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Biles 2006.

<sup>26</sup> Storey 2003, 206, 329.

<sup>27</sup> Vickers 1997, 63-7.

<sup>28</sup> Lai 1997; Biles 2006-7, 24.

which they are couched, might be best understood in the context of his distancing himself from Pericles' campaign. Sophocles was still being associated with the Samian excesses centuries later (Strab. 14.1.18). If Creon's lines on standing steadfast next to one's comrade at *Antigone* 668-671 indeed allude to the ephebic oath, they also evoke Xerxes' behaviour at Salamis. It would be to charge Sophocles with an uncharacteristic degree of insensitivity if this were not the case.

For the Samian leaders were, as Ionians, in a sense the Athenians' παραστάται. At the funeral ceremony for Athenians fallen at Samos, Cimon's sister Elpinice is supposed to have said to Pericles: 'A fine exploit and one worthy of garlands, Pericles, to lose many of our brave fellow-citizens, not fighting with Phoenicians or Medes, as my brother Cimon did, but subduing our allies and our kith and kin' (Plut. *Per.* 28.4). Pericles' Samian victories 'wonderfully flattered his vanity' (θαυμαστόν δέ τι καὶ μέγα φρονῆσαι; *ibid.*); he claimed that since he had successfully besieged Samos in eighteen months his victory outranked the Greek achievement at Troy, which had taken ten years to achieve. If Sophocles did intend to diminish Pericles' reputation, an implicit equation between on the one hand his leaving the Samian prisoners unburied with Xerxes' leaving his comrades unburied on the other was a highly effective means of achieving his end. What was perhaps a gentle compliment on Aeschylus' part has become a barbed insult in Sophocles' hands.

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